

# THE MELAMMU PROJECT

<http://www.aakkl.helsinki.fi/melammu/>



## *“Enūma Eliš and the Transmission of Babylonian Cosmology to the West”*

PHILIPPE TALON

### *Published in Melammu Symposia 2:*

R. M. Whiting (ed.),

*Mythology and Mythologies.*

*Methodological Approaches to Intercultural Influences.*

*Proceedings of the Second Annual Symposium of the Assyrian and Babylonian Intellectual Heritage Project. Held in Paris, France, October 4-7, 1999* (Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project 2001), pp. 265-77.

Publisher: <http://www.helsinki.fi/science/saa/>

---

This article was downloaded from the website of the Melammu Project:

<http://www.aakkl.helsinki.fi/melammu/>

The Melammu Project investigates the continuity, transformation and diffusion of Mesopotamian culture throughout the ancient world. A central objective of the project is to create an electronic database collecting the relevant textual, art-historical, archaeological, ethnographic and linguistic evidence, which is available on the website, alongside bibliographies of relevant themes. In addition, the project organizes symposia focusing on different aspects of cultural continuity and evolution in the ancient world.

The Digital Library available at the website of the Melammu Project contains articles from the *Melammu Symposia* volumes, as well as related essays. All downloads at this website are freely available for personal, non-commercial use. Commercial use is strictly prohibited. For inquiries, please contact [melammu-db@helsinki.fi](mailto:melammu-db@helsinki.fi).

PHILIPPE TALON Brussels

## *Enūma Eliš* and the Transmission of Babylonian Cosmology to the West\*

**M**y interest in the remarkable text known to us as *Enūma Eliš* (Ee) began more than ten years ago, probably in the same way as it is for many Assyriologists. It has been translated so many times that it seems easy to have a look at it and, furthermore, the cuneiform text prepared by Lambert gives wonderful teaching opportunities.

In 1987, however, H. Vanstiphout published a short note in NABU<sup>1</sup> in which he proposed a reinterpretation of the first eight verses of Tablet I which rather profoundly changed my views on the text. Vanstiphout read the first eight verses in two four-verse units, which looked to me as quite ingenious since it gave the text a much richer sense. I had the rather simple idea then to extend this proposal to the rest of the poem and I began to examine tablet I with this in mind. It came as a real surprise to see that the four-verse units really worked most of the time. When clearly, for syntactical or semantic reasons, this system did not work, it seemed clear to me that we were looking at special cases, stanzas which had a very special meaning and were thus emphasized by a simple break in the rhythm.

Another idea came out of this reading, which I published in 1992 in a Festschrift<sup>2</sup> honoring an eminent Egyptologist teaching

in Brussels and Köln universities, Philippe Derchain. Unfortunately, this paper did not really find its way into Assyriological circles and is not widely known. I'll take this opportunity to bring this matter to light again and expand it into the topic of this symposium.

Verses 1 to 108 of Tablet I are concerned first with the description of the primordial world and then the appearance of the main gods, ending with Ea. But Apsû and Tiamat are disturbed by the noise of the younger gods. Apsû then decides to destroy the gods and goes to Tiamat with this proposal. It is remarkable to note that the first break in the four-lines rhythm appears with lines 45-46, when Tiamat refuses to participate in the killing of her creation:<sup>3</sup>

Why then should we destroy what we have created?

Yes, their actions are worrisky, but let us still remain patient!

Apsû then turns to Mummu and both of them decide to go on anyway. Ea hears about their plans and, while the gods are despairing, he immediately acts. His magic arts easily overwhelm Apsû and Mummu and Ea kills the former. He then proceeds to establish Apsû as his dwelling and this is where his wife Damkina will give birth to

\* I wish to express my gratitude to my wife, Michèle Broze, who contributed a lot to this paper and helped me in finding and understanding many Classical references.

<sup>1</sup> NABU 87/95. Abbreviations are given according to the *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary*.

<sup>2</sup> "Le premier épisode de l'*Enūma Eliš*," in M. Broze -

R.M. Whiting (ed.)  
*MELAMMU SYMPOSIA II* (Helsinki 2001)  
ISBN 951-45-9049-X

Ph. Talon (eds), *L'Atelier de l'Orfèvre. Mélanges offerts à Philippe Derchain*, *Lettres Orientales* 2 (Leuven, 1992), 131-46.

<sup>3</sup> Ee I 45-46, *mi-na-a ni-i-nu šá ni-ib-nu-ú nu-uš-ḫal-laq-ma | al-kât-su-nu lu šum-ru-šat i ni-iš-du-ud ta-biš*.

Marduk. The birth of Marduk is emphasized by a shout and this is where the second break of rhythm appears (lines 101-102):<sup>4</sup>

Mari'utu, Mari'utu!  
Son of the Sun, Sun of the Gods!

With a well-known play on the name of Marduk, commonly written <sup>d</sup>AMAR.UTU “young bull of the Sun.” When this is done, the universe is again at peace. But Anu gives Marduk the Four Winds to play with and this prepares the rest of the story (line 108):<sup>5</sup>

He brought the tide in existence, it was going to disturb Tiamat...

With this wonderful use of a verb in the imperfect (*udallah*) ends the first part, the deeds of Ea. It is nothing more than a first episode in which every element of the main story is already present. It is a kind of rehearsal of the epic fight between Marduk and Tiamat, but here the protagonists are Apsû and Ea. Everything Ea has accomplished will be later accomplished by Marduk, on a grander scale. Apsû and Mummu announce Tiamat and Kingu and they are vanquished in the same way, by magic. Ea has created his dwelling with the body of Apsû as Marduk will create the intelligible world with the body of Tiamat, the exact correspondance of the Apsû being the Ešarra. The deeds of Ea are thus a prefiguration of the great deeds of Marduk, who will receive as his last name the name of his father in Tablet VII.

Since the topic of this paper is to examine the cosmological views of the Babylonians

and their transfer to the West, I shall now come back to the opening lines of our poem. The first two stanzas, that is the first eight verses have been unanimously interpreted as representing the undifferentiated chaos of the origins:<sup>6</sup>

When above the sky was not named  
and below the earth had no name,  
Apsû was the first, their ancestor,  
*the creator was Tiamat*, mother of them all.

They had mingled their waters together,  
the pastures were not agglomerated, the  
canebrakes were not extended,  
when the gods – none had yet appeared –  
had been given no name, the destinies were  
not yet fixed.

These two stanzas are full of riddles and difficulties. First of all, the occurrence of *ammatu* (var. *abbatu*) in verse 2 instead of the expected *eršetu* “earth” is not easy to interpret. The word is attested only here, in a lexical text<sup>7</sup> and in the Theodicy. It is worth noting that in this text, it appears in a comparison where the sufferer is called<sup>8</sup> “Palm tree, tree of wealth, my precious brother, endowed with all wisdom, jewel of [gold], you are as stable as the earth (*am-ma-tiš*), but the plan of the gods is remote.” The ancient commentary of line 58 gives the interpretation *am-ma-tiš*: ‘GIM<sup>1</sup> er-še-tú “*ammatis* means ‘like the earth.’” One could thus readily accept that this rare term was taken by the Babylonians themselves as a synonym for earth.

Then comes the tricky part: Apsû and Tiamat are mentioned as being respectively “ancestor” and “begetter” of “all of them” (*-šunu*). There is no indication to the beings

<sup>4</sup> Ee I 101-102, *ma-ri-ú-tu ma-ri-ú-tu | ma-ri* <sup>d</sup>UTU-ši <sup>d</sup>UTU-ši šá DINGIR.DINGIR.

<sup>5</sup> Ee I 108, *ú-šab-ši a-ga-am-ma ú-dal-làh ti-amat*.

<sup>6</sup> Ee I 1-8: *e-nu-ma e-liš la na-bu-ú šá-ma-mu | šap-liš am-ma-tum* (var. *ab-ba-tum*) *šu-ma la zak-rat* | ZU.AB-ma *reš-tu-ú za-ru-šu-un | mu-um-mu ti-amat mu-al-li-da-at gim-ri-šú-un* || A.MEŠ-šú-nu *iš-te-niš i-ḫi-qu-ú-ma | gi-*

*pa-ra la ki-iš-šu-ru šu-ša-a la še-<sup>2</sup>u-ú | e-nu-ma* DINGIR.DINGIR *la šu-pu-u ma-na-ma | šu-ma la zuk-ku-ru ši-ma-tú la ši-i-mu*.

<sup>7</sup> Malku I 51 where it is equated with *dannatu* (CAD A/2, 75a).

<sup>8</sup> BWL, p. 74-75, line 58 *gi-na-ta-ma am-ma-tiš ni-si mi-lik i-lim*.

referred to by the pronoun *šunu*. The translators have all considered that the pronoun here meant “the gods,” and this could be helped by the fact that the only other occurrence of the term *zārû* “progenitor, father, ancestor”<sup>9</sup> in *Enūma Eliš* is in line I 29 “It was then that Apsû, ancestor of the great gods,<sup>10</sup> called Mummu, his messenger.” The use of the verbs *zarû* for Apsû and *alādu* for Tiamat also hints that Apsû is masculine and Tiamat feminine.

What now about the term *mummu* at the beginning of line 4? Most of the modern authors see this word as an epithet of Tiamat, translating, for example, “maker Tiamat,”<sup>11</sup> “matrix-Tiamat,”<sup>12</sup> “Mère(?) -Tiamat.”<sup>13</sup> Their comments show that, most of the time, *mummu* is taken as a synonym, or even a mistake, for the usual word *ummu* “mother.” We will see that the appearance of the term here has led Damascius to postulate a triad in the first stage of the Babylonian cosmology. But we will return to this later.

The word *mummu* is probably not a mistake for *ummu*, since it appears elsewhere at least once as an epithet of Tiamat (*mu-um Ti-amat*).<sup>14</sup> It is otherwise attributed to Ea as the creator: *mummu bān kala* “creator of

everything,”<sup>15</sup> *mummu bān binūtu* “creator of all creatures,”<sup>16</sup> *mummu bān šamê u eršeti* “creator of heaven and earth”<sup>17</sup> (which is also said of Marduk in Ee VII 86 in the exegesis of the name Zulum). It is, remarkably, once used to qualify Ištar: *mummu bān parši u šuluḫḫi* “creator of the rites and purification ceremonies.”<sup>18</sup>

On the other hand, *mummu* is also used to designate a school or a workshop, abode of Nabû and Tašmētu,<sup>19</sup> and, in the expression “house of M/mummu” (*bīt mummu/i*), it is a workshop used to make and repair ritual objects.<sup>20</sup>

Elsewhere in *Enūma Eliš*, Mummu appears as a god, written with the divine determinative, playing the role of Apsû’s vizier.<sup>21</sup> His name is equated with Ilabrat and Papsukkal<sup>22</sup> and it also appears in two successive series of names: Bēlet-ili Bēlet-māti Anšar Kišar Enmešarra Dumuzi Lugaldukuga Anu Kinga Mummu u Bēlili | Kinga Mummu Apsû u Allatu.<sup>23</sup>

What is the status of Mummu/*mummu* here? The parallels with the epithet of Ea suggests that it is a title of Tiamat. Nevertheless it is always used elsewhere *after* the name of the god and usually followed by an explanatory note “creator of...” (*bān*). Here

<sup>9</sup> CAD s.v. *zārû* 1.

<sup>10</sup> *i-nu-šu* ZU.AB *za-ri* DINGIR.DINGIR *ra-bi-ù-tim*

<sup>11</sup> S. Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia*, Oxford University Press, (Oxford - New York, 1991) p. 233.

<sup>12</sup> B.R. Foster, *From Distant Days* (Bethesda, 1995), p. 11.

<sup>13</sup> J. Bottéro - S.N. Kramer, *Lorsque les dieux faisaient l’homme* (Paris, 1989), p. 604.

<sup>14</sup> In a hymn to Nanaya, BA 5 664:15.

<sup>15</sup> Iraq 15, 123:19 and VAS 1 37 iii 5 (kudurru of Mero-dachbaladan II)

<sup>16</sup> PSBA 20 158:14

<sup>17</sup> LKA 77 i 29ff.

<sup>18</sup> Loretz-Mayer, *Šu-ila*, p. 15 (BMS 5+:17).

<sup>19</sup> See in general CAD M/2 197ff.

<sup>20</sup> CAD M/2 p. 198. Note also the appearance of the word in the Anzu myth: *mu-um-mu qašti ana qišātiki* (cited CAD M/2, 198b and translated there “(return) frame of the bow, to your forest”). The use of *mummu* to designate the “frame” of the bow could as well mean “idea” or “concept,” thus implying that *mummu* does not mean “cre-

ator,” but something more like “that which inspires creation.”

<sup>21</sup> Ee I 30, 31, 47, 53, 66 (var. <sup>d</sup>), 70 (var. <sup>d</sup>), 72 (var. <sup>d</sup>), 118, VII 86 (said of Marduk, see above). I 48 seems to use the name as a substantive without determinative: (<sup>d</sup>*mu-um-mu*) *suk-kal-lum la ma-gi-ru mi-lik mu-um-mi-šu* “(Mummu answers to Ea) and of an unfavorable vizier was the counsel of his *mummu*.”

<sup>22</sup> J. Nougayrol, “Textes et documents figurés,” RA 41, 1947, p. 23-53; AO 17626 (and duplicate, TCL 6, 47), p. 30:3. This text is a list of god names (with equations) ending with the note PAB 7 DINGIR.DINGIR DINGIR.MEŠ *ki-[ši]t-tum* (var. 7<sup>d</sup>EN.LÍL.MEŠ *ki-šit-ti*) šá IGI.2.MEŠ-ŠU-*nu ina ŠA MEZE ZABAR GAR-nu* “Total: 7 gods, captured gods, whose eyes are put into a bronze *manzû*-drum.”

<sup>23</sup> RA 41, 1947, p. 37:25f, last section of a list of gods receiving *merdûtu*-offerings. This last section unfortunately does not have an explanatory note. Cf also the broken commentary DT 184, published by W.G. Lambert, JCS 10, 1956, p. 100, mentioning *ti-amat* (II. 8, 13) and <sup>d</sup>*mu-um-mu* (I. 14).

we would have to assume that it is emphasized and put before the name of Tiamat (“the creator” *par excellence*). Another possibility, reflected in my translation is to take the sentence as a non-verbal clause “the creator was Tiamat” with Tiamat as predicate.

One could also include in the discussion the meaning of the term *mummu*. The translation “Creator” is clearly influenced by the various expressions which accompany it in the above mentioned epithets. We will see later on that Damascius calls it *ton noèton kosmon* “the intelligible world” and Simo Parpola has argued<sup>24</sup> that it is the equivalent of the Sefira *Daat* “the world’s consciousness.” Speaking strictly from an Assyriological point of view, the attestations of the word and their uses suggest that it has something to do with knowledge or understanding of ritual and cultic objects or practice. Could we see it as the ability to elaborate concepts and to thus to create them? As such it could be seen as a qualifier of Tiamat as well as an independent entity. The question must remain open for the time being.

Next come the mention of the mingling of the waters and the unfinished state of the pastures and the canebrakes. These verses clearly depict the unfinished and undifferentiated state of the universe. Again we have the annoying use of the possessive pronoun *šunu*, but here most commentators will agree that it refers to Apsû and Tiamat, seen as the principles of sweet and salt water not yet separated. One has the visual impression of the South Iraqi marshes where land, river and sea mingle together in a chaotic environment, and it is perhaps this image that the poet had in mind.

The last two lines of the introduction come back to the absence of the gods who

have not yet appeared and have still not been named. “The destinies were not fixed” is then to be understood as a depiction of a silent and immobile universe without any rules or awareness.

Structurally, lines 7-8 are an echo to lines 1-2, with the repetition of *enūma* “when.” But if it is the case, we should equally understand lines 5-6 as an echo to the mention of Apsû and Mummu-Tiamat. Lines 5-6 would then depict the original unity of the two (or three) first entities and *not* the undifferentiation of the universe (which does not exist yet).

From this situation “are created” (*ibbanû*) two pairs of beings: Laḥmu-Laḥamu and Anšar-Kišar. The expression used does not refer to a genealogical process in the human sense of the word. The two pairs of gods are created in the passive, they “come to existence” without any external means mentioned. We then have the first mention of time in line 13 “they lengthened the days, added the years.”<sup>25</sup> It is only after this that, at last, a real action intervenes: Anšar is said to “reflect” (*umaššil*) his son Anu, and Anu himself begets (*ālid*) Ea/Nudimmud as his “reflection” or “image” (*tamšilašu*). We have here the first use of punctual verb-forms denoting a definite moment in time. With a four-line verse describing the exceptional wisdom and strength of Ea/Nudimmud, the first section is closed. The narrative will now switch to the destabilization caused by the noise of the gods and the anger of Apsû. It is perhaps worth noting that Ea will only be called by this name (Ea) later, in line 60 (!), when he decides to take measures against Apsû and Mummu.

The text of *Enūma Eliš* was widely known in the learned circles of Babylonia and Assyria, as the number of copies found

<sup>24</sup> “The Assyrian Tree of Life: Tracing the Origins of Jewish Monotheism and Greek Philosophy,” JNES 52

(1993), p. 161-208 (especially note 110, p. 191).

<sup>25</sup> I 13 *ur-ri-ku UD.MEŠ uš-ši-bu MU.MEŠ*.

in various sites of Mesopotamia shows. It was not only copied in Assyria, but also used as a reference work in other literary texts. Elnathan Weissert has demonstrated that the annalistic account of the campaigns of Sennacherib made extensive allusions to our text.<sup>26</sup> In that way, the battles of the king could achieve a mythical dimension. *Enūma Eliš* was sufficiently known in academic circles that the allusions could be easily understood by all members of the Assyrian elite.

In other Assyrian scholarly works, the poem is alluded to, either by a typical use of words, extracts or by its name. It is the case, for example, in Marduk's Ordeal, with comments such as "it is said in *Enūma Eliš*: When heaven and earth were not created, Aššur came into being"<sup>27</sup> or "*Enūma Eliš*, which is recited and chanted in front of Bēl in Nisan, concerns his imprisonment."<sup>28</sup> The recitation of the poem during the *Akitu* Festival in Nisan (on the 4th day) is also attested in the *Akitu* ritual<sup>29</sup> itself, with the additional precision that the tiara of Anu and the throne of Enlil had to remain covered during the recitation.

The Neo-Assyrians certainly studied and commented *Enūma Eliš*. There are also copies of the myth in which the scholars of Nineveh changed the name of Marduk and replaced it by the name of Aššur.<sup>30</sup> This was not simply a matter of writing Aššur instead of Marduk, but the whole genealogy of Marduk was thus lifted on a higher level, replacing Anšar and Kišar by Aššur and Mullisu, Laḥmu and Laḥamu by Ea and Damkina,

and finally Apsû and Tiamat by Anu and Antu (or Ištar).<sup>31</sup> It was probably this procedure which gave birth to a series of curious allusions in mystical texts to the death of Anu and the depiction of this god as an evil entity. It explains also the equations between Tiamat and Ištar or Antu.<sup>32</sup> It is in this perspective that one has to take into account the possibility to read *Enūma Eliš* with the Assyrian Tree of Life diagram in mind. Even if such was perhaps *not* the case at the time of its composition, it is nevertheless plausible that the scholars of Nineveh read it with a comparable model in mind. The fact that the number of gods mentioned in the first section (lines 1-16) is nine (if one takes the *mummu* into account) could not have escaped them:

Apsû		Tiamat
	mummu	
Laḥmu		Laḥamu
Anšar		Kišar
	Anu	
	Ea	

One should also note that in this perspective the place of *mummu* is that of Ištar and that the *god* Mummu in *Enūma Eliš* assumes the role of Apsû's lover, replacing Tiamat when they plan their destruction. The possible androgyny of Mummu is another link with Ištar. The role of Mummu in *Enūma eliš* is one of destabilization, and most of the myths involving Ištar present her in a quite similar aspect. Ištar and Mummu both destabilize a situation which Ea will later on reorganize.

<sup>26</sup> E. Weissert, "Creating a Political Climate: Literary Allusions to *Enūma Eliš* in Sennacherib's Account of the Battle of Halule," 39ème Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale (1997), 191-202.

<sup>27</sup> SAA 3 34:54 = 35:45: *šū-ú ina šà e-nu-ma e-liš iq-<sup>1</sup>ti-bi<sup>1</sup> ki-i AN-e KI.TIM la ib-ba-nu-ni AN.ŠAR it-[tab-šī]*.

<sup>28</sup> SAA 3 34:34 = 35:28: *e-nu-ma e-liš ša da-bi-ib-u-ni ina IGI<sup>d</sup>EN ina ITL.BARAG i-za-mur-ú-šū-ni ina UGU ša*

*ša-bit-u-ni [šū-ú]*.

<sup>29</sup> F. Thureau-Dangin, *Rituels accadiens*, p. 136, 280-84.

<sup>30</sup> Cf W.G. Lambert, "The Assyrian Recension of *Enūma Eliš*," 39ème Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale (1997), 77-79.

<sup>31</sup> See my forthcoming paper "Esoteric Lore in Neo-Assyrian Tradition."

<sup>32</sup> SAA 3 39 = KAR 307.

Another possibility of interpreting the opening lines of *Enūma Eliš* within the model of the Assyrian Tree of Life is to read the first two lines as metaphors for the two opposing points of the diagram. “Above” then represents the first *Sefira*, Anu, i.e. the sky, and “below” means the last one, Nergal, clearly associated with the earth. The opening lines can then be understood as a statement that the flow of emanation has not yet begun, and the first section describes the coming into being of the universe. But this interpretation needs more evidence.<sup>33</sup>

There is another passage which might perhaps be linked with the Tree diagram. In tablet VI, after Marduk has created the world and assigned stations to all the gods, there is a feast. The great gods, being fifty, take place with the seven gods of destinies. Marduk shows them his weapon, the Bow, and Anu kisses it, declaring “this is really my daughter.”<sup>34</sup> It is well-known that the Bow represents Ištar, especially as her stellar incarnation.<sup>35</sup> Thus the seven gods of destinies, in front of Marduk, assign the place of Ištar as the daughter of Anu, bringing their number to nine and the diagram to completion.

*Enūma Eliš* continued to be studied and copied down to Seleucid times, as is shown by the fact that some manuscripts were found in the Sippar library, for example. It is at this stage that the first attested case of transfer into another language of our myth occurs. At the beginning of the third century BC, a priest of Bēl, named Berossus, wrote a book on Mesopotamian traditions in

Greek, called *Babyloniaka*. Unfortunately, this book is lost and only fragments survive in the works of other ancient authors, in this case mainly Eusebius of Cesarea.<sup>36</sup> Eusebius himself wrote in the beginning of the fourth century AD, and his citation of Berossus is only an abridgment of the accounts of Polyhistor and Abydenus. From what we know, Berossus was of Chaldaean origin and, after leaving Babylon, taught Chaldaean astrology on the island of Cos. He was also said to be an “interpreter,” i.e. a “prophet” of Bēl.<sup>37</sup>

His depiction of Babylonian cosmology is presented in Book I of the *Babyloniaka*. The fragments which came down to us are relatively different from the account of *Enūma Eliš*, at least in the beginning. They evoke much more the famous Seleucid text published by Van Dijk in 1962<sup>38</sup> which gives the list of the antediluvian kings and their *apkallū*. Berossus thus says that in the first year Oannes, a being half-man half-fish, came out of the Persian Gulf and brought knowledge and civilization to the people of Mesopotamia. This Oannes has been recognized in the figure of U’anna, the *apkallu* or mythical scholar of the first antediluvian king, Ayalu. U’anna is also known in some texts under the name of Adapa.<sup>39</sup> According to Berossus, Oannes revealed the mystery of origins to man. One should remember here that the *Enūma Eliš* is also said to be a revelation (*taklimtu*), but does not give the name of the speaker. Thus in lines VII 157-158, it is said:<sup>40</sup>

<sup>33</sup> See the remarks of S. Parpola, “Tree of Life,” p. 190ff.

<sup>34</sup> Ee VI 87: GIŠ.BAN *it-ta-šiq šī-i lu-ú DUMU.MUNUS* (var. *mar-ti*).

<sup>35</sup> E. Reiner, *Astral Magic in Babylonia* (Philadelphia, 1995), p. 88.

<sup>36</sup> For a translation of all extant passages, see S.M. Burstein, *The babyloniaca of Berossus*, (Malibu, 1978).

<sup>37</sup> Burstein, p. 15 and n. 19. The Latin verb *interpretari* is the equivalent of the Greek *hermeneuein*, which evokes

the god Hermes. Oannes-Adapa, on the other hand, is the exact parallel of Hermes Trismegistos, the one who transmits knowledge.

<sup>38</sup> W.20030,7: UVB 18, p. 44ff.

<sup>39</sup> See Picchioni, *Il poemetto di Adapa* (Budapest, 1981), p. 85ff; Ph. Talon, “Le mythe d’Adapa,” *SEL* 7, 1990, 43-57.

<sup>40</sup> *tak-lim-ti maḥ-ru-ú id-bu-bu pa-nu-uš-šú | iš-tur-ma iš-ta-kan ana šī-mé-e ar-ku-ti.*

The Revelation, the First One recited it before him,  
he wrote it and placed it at the disposal  
of future generations.

And also in lines VII 145-146 :<sup>41</sup>

Let them (the 50 names of Marduk) be remembered,  
let the First One comment upon them,  
let the wise and the scholar meditate on them  
together.

The “First One” mentioned in *Enūma Eliš* is probably Oannes-Adapa,<sup>42</sup> who was credited with the authorship of literary works,<sup>43</sup> and this tradition was taken up by Berossus.<sup>44</sup>

At the beginning, he writes, there was a time “when everything was darkness and water”,<sup>45</sup> which corresponds with the opening lines of *Enūma Eliš*. But then Berossus goes on to explain that many strange creatures came to life in these waters. Most of these creatures are curiously marked by a binary aspect: two wings, two faces, two heads, two sets of sexual organs. It is only after this episode that Berossus introduces Tiamat: “A woman named Omorka ruled over these creatures. In Chaldaean her name was *Thalath* which translated into Greek means *Thalassa* (sea).” The name *Thalath* is probably a corruption of an original *Thauthe* (as found in Damascius), under the

influence of the word-play with the Greek word for “sea” *Thalassa*.<sup>46</sup> As for the name Omorka, it has been proposed that it was a corruption of the expression *ummu Ħubur* “Mother Ħubur,” designating Tiamat in *Enūma Eliš*.<sup>47</sup>

After this simple statement, Berossus goes on to describe the creation of the universe by Bēl and gives no account of the conflict between Marduk and Tiamat. Two versions of the creation are given, both of them mentioning the division of Tiamat into heaven and earth, as is done in *Enūma Eliš*. In one version, Berossus explicitly says that Bēl cut the “woman” in two. In the other, it is “darkness” which is divided.

The account of Berossus is thus concise in the extreme concerning the cosmological opening of the Babylonian myth. He seems more interested in the Revelation of Oannes and the creation of the planets and the stars, as could be expected from an Chaldaean astrologer.

After Berossus, we have seen that Babylonian cosmology had been treated by several Greek authors, like Polyhistor and Abydenus, but these works are now lost. We have to go down to the end of the 5th century and the beginning of the 6th to find one last echo of *Enūma Eliš*. Damascius,<sup>48</sup> born in Damascus around 460 and raised in Alexandria, made an extensive visit to the great

<sup>41</sup> *li-iš-šab-tū-ma maḥ-ru-u li-kal-lim | en-qu mu-du-u miṭ-ḥa-riš lim-tal-ku.*

<sup>42</sup> The parallelism between the first episode and the main body of *Enūma Eliš* authorizes an intriguing hypothesis: In the main myth, Marduk defeats Tiamat and Kingu. With Tiamat, Marduk creates the world and, afterwards, proceeds to create man with the blood of Kingu. In the first episode, Ea kills Apsū and puts the leash on Mummu. We are told that he used Apsū to create his new dwelling, but nothing is said about the fate of Mummu. If the parallelism between both situations is applied, we would expect Mummu to be killed in order to create a servant of Ea, which is exactly the way in which Adapa is described in the Adapa Myth.

<sup>43</sup> W.G. Lambert, *JCS* 16, 1962, p. 62, line 11 [*šá u<sub>2</sub>-anna a-da]-pà ina pi-i-šú iš-tu-ru* “[that Oannes-Adapa wrote under his dictation.”

<sup>44</sup> It is also attested in other Hellenistic works, e.g. in the fragments of Chaeremon, an Egyptian priest of the first century AD, see P.W. Van der Horst, *Chaeremon, Egyptian Priest and Stoic Philosopher*, Etudes préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l’empire romain, vol. 101, (Leiden, 1984). Two fragments preserved by Psellus mention Oannes/Ioannes, clothed in a fish-skin, descendant or son of Hermes and Apollo (p. 11 and 27).

<sup>45</sup> I use the translation given by Burstein, *Babyloniaca*.

<sup>46</sup> See Burstein, p. 14 n. 15.

<sup>47</sup> The opinion of Komoróczy cited by Burstein, p. 14 note 14, has to be abandoned: *e-ma-ru-uk-ka* in line Ee II 134 (not II 101) is for *amārukka*, derived from the verb *amāru* “to see” and has nothing to do with the flood.

<sup>48</sup> See L. Couloubaritsis, *Histoire de la philosophie ancienne et médiévale*, (Paris, 1998), p. 802-803.



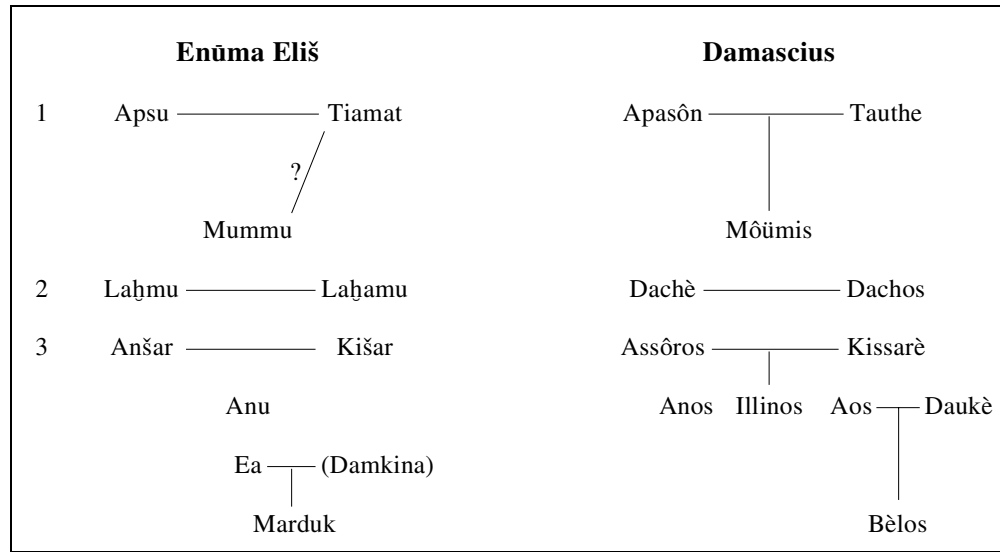


Fig. 1. The cosmological scheme of *Enūma Eliš* and its reflection in the writings of Damascius (6th century AD)

philosophical centres of Syria<sup>49</sup> before going to Athens where he eventually became director of the Platonic School. When the School was closed in 529, Damascius and his disciples left Greece for Syria and Persia. It is believed that he ended his life in Harrân where a Neo-Platonic School functioned until the 10th century.<sup>50</sup>

Damascius is a representative of Neoplatonic thought and wrote several books, including commentaries to Plato’s works. In his *Treatise of the First Principles*, one of the major last works of Greek philosophy, he discusses at length the relations between the One and the World, or the One and the All.<sup>51</sup> His position is largely influenced by the commentaries of Proclus (beginning of the 5th cent.) and by the Chaldaean Oracles, a collection of prophetic revelations originating from Syria and dating from the

middle of the 3rd century.<sup>52</sup> These Oracles are considered today as the “Bible” of the Neoplatonic philosophers.<sup>53</sup> I shall come back to this later.

Explaining the various approaches to the qualities of the One, Damascius passes in review the Orphic tradition and the opinions of Oriental theologies, mainly the Babylonians, the Magés, the Phoenicians and the Egyptians. Of the Babylonians he writes:<sup>54</sup>

Among the Barbarians, the Babylonians seem to be silent on the unique principle of the all and pose two principles, Tauthe and Apasôn, considering Apasôn as the husband of Tauthe, whom they call mother of the gods. From Apasôn and Tauthe has been engendered, they say, an only child, Mōūimis, who is, I think, the intelligible world produced from the two principles. Then , from

<sup>49</sup> See M. Tardieu, *Les paysages reliques. Routes et haltes syriennes d’Isidore à Simplicius* (Leuven, 1990); P. Chuvin, *Chronique des derniers païens* (Paris, 1991).

<sup>50</sup> See Chuvin, *Chronique* and T.M. Green, *The City of the Moon God. Religious Traditions of Harran* (Leiden, 1992).

<sup>51</sup> A recent edition can be found in L.G. Westerink - J. Combès, *Damascius. Traité des Premiers Principes*, Les Belles Lettres (Paris, 1991).

<sup>52</sup> Edition: E. des Places, *Oracles Chaldaïques avec un*

*choix de commentaires anciens*, Les Belles Lettres, 3rd ed. (Paris, 1996); R. Majercik, *The Chaldaean Oracles: Text, Translation and Commentary* (Leiden, 1989).

<sup>53</sup> P. Athanassiadi, “The Chaldaean Oracles: Theology and Theurgy,” in P. Athanassiadi - M. Frede (eds.), *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford, 1999), 149-84; especially p; 152 n. 15.

<sup>54</sup> Damascius, p. 165 and commentary on p. 234-36. It is possible, but not certain, that his source on this passage is Eudaemus of Rhodos.

the same, another generation proceeded, Dachè and Dachos. then, from the same, a third one again, Kissarè and Assôros, from whom were born three gods, Anos, Illinos and Aos. Finally, from Aos and Daukè, a son was born, Bèlos, who, they say, is the demiurge.

The names Damascius uses are easily converted to their Babylonian counterparts, even if some manuscript mistakes have occurred. Tauthe and Apasôn are Tiamat and Apsû; Mômîmis has to be Mummu. Dachè and Dachos must be Laḥmu and Laḥamu, with the easily explained mistake of the Greek letters Lambda and Delta. Kissarè and Assôros are Kišar and Anšar (or more exactly Aššur). Anos, Illinos and Aos will then be Anu, Enlil and Ea, and, finally, Bèlos is Marduk, the demiurge, son of Aos (Ea) and Daukè (Damkina). We thus have the figure seen on the facing page (Fig. 1).

Damascius, or his source (which could be Eudaemus of Rhodos, but this is not certain), is very well informed. His presentation closely follows the opening lines of *Enūma Eliš*, even going into details. There are, though, some slight discrepancies: First of all, he describes Mummu as the child (*paida*) of Apsû and Tiamat. We have seen that the status of this Mummu in the opening lines of the Babylonian myth is very difficult to ascertain. Even here, Damascius seems to give him a special role, not counting him among the three generations and adding a personal interpretation. The two next pairs of gods are here described as generations proceeding from the first, whereas *Enūma Eliš* only marks them as “being created” (*ibbanû*). Finally Anšar and Kišar are said to produce three gods, whereas our myth only speaks of Ea in this place.

It is remarkable to note that the triad of Anu, Enlil and Ea appears as such in *Enūma Eliš* at the very end of Tablet IV when Marduk has created the Ešarra and placed therein the sanctuaries of these three gods.

Furthermore, Damascius says that the Babylonians are silent on the first principle of the universe, the One, which he implicitly considers to be removed from the first three generations. Damascius writes elsewhere:<sup>55</sup> “As for Epimenides, Eudaemus says that he supposed two first principles, Air and Night, after having honoured, by silence of course, the unique principle which precedes both....” This shows that when Damascius speaks about silence, he does not mean the absence of the concept itself, but the fact that the first principle is unknowable. In this respect it is interesting to note the mention in Gnostic thought of a companion to the first unnamable principle, who is called Silence, and with whom the First One created the Intellect.<sup>56</sup>

Being largely influenced by Proclus, whom he considers as one of the wisest theologians, and the Chaldaean Oracles, it is also remarkable that Damascius presents to us a series of three dual generations, dyads. The theology of the Oracles, as we will see, is completely organized around three successive triads. Nevertheless, Damascius has to introduce a third component in his first generation, that is Mummu, whom he then considers as being the intelligible world (*ton noèton kosmon*), linked with the *nous*, that is the Intellect which conceives before creation or action actually occurs. In Semitic terms this would be the “heart” (*libbu*), siege of thought and emotion. This could well correspond to the placement of the term *mummu* immediately before the name of Tiamat in Ee I 4.

<sup>55</sup> Damascius., p. 164.

<sup>56</sup> This is mentioned in Ireneus, *Against the Heresies*, I, 1, 1-2 (text translated in *Nag Hammadi. Textes gnos-*

*tiques aux origines du christianisme*, Supplement au Cahier Evangile 58 (Paris, 1987), p. 142).

Môūimis is presented not as a “son,” but as a “child,” which is neuter in meaning, and with an ending *-is* which *could* suggest a feminine entity. In *Enūma Eliš*, the status of the “divine” Mummu, the vizier of Apsû, is rather ambiguous and we *could* read some lines as meaning that he took the place of Tiamat in Apsû’s heart. This, we have seen, could be an interesting link with Ištar.

The presence of *Môūimis* in the Greek text of Damascius is nevertheless difficult to explain. Where did this author find this name? Appearing as it does immediately after Apsû and Tiamat, it is necessary for Damascius (or for his source) to have known the *Akkadian* text of *Enūma eliš*. We have no knowledge of a Greek translation of the Babylonian myth. Did the source of Damascius still know how to read cuneiform? Even the orthography of the Greek word is interesting, since it suggests a reading *mu’umm(u)* instead of *mumm(u)* (cf. n. 14 above).

In fact, the main aim of Damascius in this book is to show that every approach comes to a unique principle: there is a transcendent One, completely removed from the intelligible world, and this is the unifying principle of all theologies. The emanations and fragmentation of the divine powers only start at a lower stage. The Babylonians also took part, he says, in this conception, even if they do not speak about it as such.

This unifying principle, the One, is at the centre of the doctrine of the Chaldaean Oracles.<sup>57</sup> The revelation of these Oracles is attributed to a Syrian, Julian the Theurgist, in the 3rd century AD. They were written down by his father, Julian the Chaldaean and became one of the main reference of Neoplatonic philosophers. Only fragments

are known today, transmitted through the books of principally Syrian authors, such as Porphyry, Iamblichus, Proclus and Damascius.

In his commentary to Plato’s *Parmenides*, Proclus, speaking of the Chaldaean Oracles, has this interesting note:<sup>58</sup>

There are many, saying a variety of other things, but they all try to direct the thought of the soul towards the One. The gods, knowing what concerns them, tend upwards towards the One by means of the One in themselves. And this precisely is their theological teaching: through the voice of the true theologians [i.e. the Chaldaean Oracles] they have handed down to us this hint regarding the first principle. They call it by a name of their own, ‘Ad,’ which is their word for ‘one’; so it is translated by people who know their language. And they duplicate it in order to name the demiurgic intellect of the world, which they call ‘Adad, worthy of all praise.’ They do not say that it comes immediately next to the One, but only that it is comparable to the One by way of proportion: for as that intellect is to the intelligible, so the One is to the whole invisible world, and for that reason the latter is simply called ‘Ad,’ but the other which duplicates it is called ‘Adad.’

What we have here is an exegesis on the name of Adad, head of the pantheon in many Syrian cities where he is commonly called Bēl, the demiurge, as meaning “one-one,” thus equating him with the Twice-Beyond, the creator of the intelligible world (*dis epekeina*). The One-Beyond (*apax epekeina*), the unknowable first principle, can then be deduced as being ‘Ad,’ that is “One” in Syriac. Adad is linked with the Assyrians in an interesting note of Macrobius<sup>59</sup> (beginning of the 5th cent.), saying:

<sup>57</sup> For the edition, see above, and cf. P. Athanassiadi, “The Chaldaean Oracles: Theology and Theurgy,” in P. Athanassiadi - M. Frede (eds.), *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 149-84.

<sup>58</sup> R. Klibansky - C. Labowky, *Plato Latinus*, vol. III (London, 1953), p. 59-61 and commentary p. 95.

<sup>59</sup> Macrobius, *Saturnalia* I 23, 17; cf. Klibansky - Labowky, *Plato Latinus*, p. 95.

Learn what the Assyrians thought about the power of the sun. To the god they worship as the highest and greatest (*summum maximumque*) they gave the name Adad. The interpretation of his name means “one one.”

Let us remember at this point that Adad, or more exactly the variant Addu, is one of the fifty names given to Marduk,<sup>60</sup> the creator of the world, in *Enūma Eliš*, and that the link between Marduk and the sun is explicit in the interpretation of his name as *māri Utu*, son of the Sun (Ee I 101-102). On the other hand, one of the frequent graphies of the name of Aššur is <sup>d</sup>AŠ, literally “the Divine One” or even simply AŠ “the One.”<sup>61</sup>

The importance of the names is not to be understressed. One of the preserved Chaldaean Oracles<sup>62</sup> says: “Never change the Barbarian names” and in his commentary Psellus (in the 11th century) adds<sup>63</sup> “This means: there are among the peoples names given by God, which have a particular power in the rites. Do not transpose them in Greek.”<sup>64</sup> A god may also have more than one name, even if this seems to introduce a difficult element of confusion, at least for us. We can think, for example, of Marduk, who is equated with Aššur and thus named in many texts (especially Assyrian texts written for a Babylonian audience). He then assumes either the aspect of the One himself or the aspect of only an emanation of the One. The same occurs when Aššur replaces Marduk in the Assyrian version of *Enūma Eliš*. This can become confusing. On

this subject, I would like to cite a note of Damascius about Zeus:<sup>65</sup> “Effectively, the Twice-Beyond (i.e. the demiurge) is completely in all (the gods); if he is called himself Zeus and if one of the particular sources which are inside him is also called Zeus, in the same way as another is called Helios and another Athena, (...), then in this way if there is a certain source called source of Zeus, homonymous with the universal source, this one will also produce a particular series from itself.” This is of course rather convoluted, but it shows that, in the opinion of Damascius, there is no ambiguity between the source of emanation and one of the emanations, even if they are called by the same name.<sup>66</sup> It also shows that the three members of the triad may be called by the same or different names. This brings to mind the various aspects that the winged sun of Aššur can assume in Assyrian iconography: the winged sun alone or containing one or three persons (one of them being female).

I have already mentioned Psellus, a high official in the Byzantine court in the 11th century. Psellus knew the Chaldaean Oracles and the various commentaries written on them throughout the centuries, especially the one by Proclus. He wrote his own commentary and is one of the main sources of our knowledge of the oracles. He also wrote different presentations or explanations of the Chaldaean doctrine. All these texts are quite remarkable and the links they

<sup>60</sup> Ee VII 119.

<sup>61</sup> See Parpola, *Tree of Life*, p. 206.

<sup>62</sup> Fr. 150, des Places, p. 103.

<sup>63</sup> des Places, p. 169-70.

<sup>64</sup> The same idea is present in Iamblichus' *De Mysteriis* VII 4 (ed. E. des Places, *Jamblique. Les Mystères d'Égypte* (Paris, 1989), p. 192-93):

But why do we prefer the Barbarians' signs to those of our respective languages? There is in fact a mystical reason. As the gods have taught us that the whole language of the sacred peoples, like the Assyrians and the Egyptians, is apt to the sacred rites, we believe we must address to the gods in the language that is con-

natural to them the formulas which we choose, and since this type of language is primitive or very ancient – the more so that those who taught the first names of the gods have transmitted them to us while mingling them to their own language, thought to be proper and adapted to those names –, we keep until now the law of tradition, intangible and unchanging.

<sup>65</sup> Westerink-Combès, p. 37.

<sup>66</sup> It appears that in such a structure, the second takes the attributes of the first and the third takes those of the two precedent ones. The One's unity in fact diminishes with its growing qualification.

seem to establish between the oracles and Assyrian religion are many. This subject is beyond the scope of this paper so I shall only give some examples worthy, I think, of attention. But a lot of work has still to be done in this area.

The Chaldaean doctrine does not directly reflect Mesopotamian cosmology in itself, but is rather like an echo. Fragment 7 of the Oracles says:<sup>67</sup> “Because the Father created everything in perfection and gave it to the second Intellect, whom you call the first, all of you, human race.” On which Psellus comments: “After having worked the whole creation, the first Father of the Triad gave it to the Intellect, the one that the human race, ignorant of the preeminence of the Father, calls the first God.” Psellus, being of Christian faith, is here linking the Oracle with his own doctrine and he adds: “Because in the book of Moses, the Father gives the Son the idea of the production of creatures, and the Son becomes the artisan of creation.” This agrees with the role of Marduk in the Babylonian myth if we see him as the Demiurge, the Twice-Beyond who created the universe, distinct from Aššur/Marduk, the One from which the other gods emanate in the diagram elaborated by S. Parpola. It also agrees well with *Enūma Eliš*, if we understand the Father as Ea and the son, the Creator, as Marduk. It is Ea who advises his son and gives him the plan, the idea, leading to his victory over Tiamat. Later, at the end of the myth, Marduk eventually assumes the name of his Father, Ea, and thus all of his powers.

The Sefirotic model proposed by S. Parpola is almost directly described by Psellus

in his comments on the Chaldaean Oracles or on Chaldaean doctrine. It is worth noting that one of these explanations uses the word Assyrian instead of Chaldaean.<sup>68</sup>

Psellus writes:<sup>69</sup>

In the definition of the Chaldaeans, Hekate occupies an exactly intermediate order and assumes the role of the centre relative to all the powers. And to her right they put the source of the souls, and to her left the source of the virtues.

This could precisely describe the position of Ištar in the Assyrian Tree of Life diagram.<sup>70</sup> The whole diagram, with its series of triads, is described by Psellus in these terms:<sup>71</sup>

After the One, they (the Assyrians) affirm the paternal abyss, filled with three triads, each of which has first a Father, then, in the middle, a Power, and then, thirdly, an Intellect, which closes the triad on itself ... They think Hekate is the source of the angels, the demons, the souls and the natures. And they often make the soul descent into the world, for multiple causes: either by loss of the wings, or by a fatherly will in order to ornate the world.”

I could multiply the examples, but I think this will be enough to show the interest of the commentaries of Psellus on our subject in general.<sup>72</sup>

To conclude, I would say that Babylonian cosmology certainly was known by Western philosophers and scholars in the first millennium A.D. They certainly had a good source, probably other than Berossus, at their disposal, which was close to the original, at least concerning the Akkadian

<sup>67</sup> des Places p. 68; Psellus' commentary, p. 178.

<sup>68</sup> des Places, p. 194-95.

<sup>69</sup> des Places, p. 173.

<sup>70</sup> Parpola, SAA 9, p. XXXI and note 105.

<sup>71</sup> des Places, p. 194.

<sup>72</sup> Psellus also knew of Oannes, through the works of the

Egyptian priest Chaeremon, cf P.W. Van der Horst, *Chaeremon*, p. 11 (fgt. 2) and p. 27 (fgt. 16D), see above. Here Oannes also appears as Ioannes, and traces his ancestry to Hermes and Apollo. The use of the form Ioannes could perhaps be linked with the important figure of Johannes in Mandaic texts.

names and expressions involved.<sup>73</sup> Because of their Syrian origin, the Chaldaean Oracles were a primary means of transmitting Oriental ideas into Western philosophies. But these Western philosophies, especially Neoplatonism, were in search of a universal doctrine and were deliberately interpreting everything they found to justify their system. There is thus a risk of transposing wrongly their conceptions or interpretations of Oriental themes back to the original Mesopotamian religion and thought. One should also not ignore the fact that Neoplatonism took over many Egyptian ideas and this is particularly true of the Orphaic doctrine. Many concepts now recognized in Assyrian esoterism are also present in Egypt. It is not always easy to separate both origins. The whole process is always threatened by the risk of Pan-Assyrianism.

Nevertheless, the Greeks themselves attributed many concepts to the Assyrians and

many Western philosophers were in fact of Syrian origin or education. It should thus not come as a surprise to find these concepts used and rephrased. They give us a whole new perspective with which to examine the Mesopotamian texts.

It is no wonder that many pagan scholars came to Syria and especially to Harrān to discuss with men versed in Chaldaean lore. I think that Harrān is one of the main links between the ancient East and Western philosophical movements. One should perhaps remember that the Assyrians fell back on this city after the fall of Nineveh and that Harrān was the last Assyrian capital. From there we can trace a link to Constantinople through Proclus, Damascius and Psellus. And from there we could envision a link to the first Kabbalistic texts. Through all these reinterpretations and commentaries, it is in my opinion quite possible that something of the original Mesopotamian concept of the divine left its mark in the Western mind.

---

<sup>73</sup> See, in this context, M.J. Geller, "The Last Wedge," *ZA* 87, 1997, 43-95. It is difficult to imagine the re-inter-

pretation of *Enūma Eliš* by Damascius without some knowledge of the Akkadian original.