Some Notes on *enūma eliš*

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The text commonly known as the Babylonian Poem of Creation has attracted scholarly attention since it was first translated in the late nineteenth century, although critical editions have appeared only recently. In 2014 there was published a lengthy study on *enūma eliš* that presents a number of original approaches to the ancient composition. This new book is the subject of the following notes.

The last decade or so has witnessed a substantial increase in the number of books dealing with *enūma eliš*. This is most evident when compared with the century that passed since George Smith's (1876) first translation of "The Chaldean Account of Genesis." This prolific period starts with the publication of Philippe Talon's (2005) volume containing an introduction, cuneiform text, transliteration, French translation, sign list, and glossary, for the series *State Archives of Assyria Cuneiform Texts*. It was followed by Thomas Kämmerer and Kai Metzler's (2012) study in German that presents a convenient score of the Akkadian text. Wilfred Lambert's (2013) much awaited edition and analysis appeared later, some forty-seven years after he and Simon Parker presented a composite autograph copy (1966). In 2014 Lluís Feliu Mateu and Adelina Millet Albà released a Spanish translation, which, like Lambert's, includes other Babylonian "creation myths." These recent renderings of *enūma eliš* have enhanced our understanding of the Akkadian composition and become particularly relevant in view of the lack of previous treatments of the totality of all extant manuscripts. In this context, Gösta Gabriel's *Enūma eliš—Weg zu einer globalen Weltordnung* stands as an original contribution that, unlike its most recent predecessors, does not include transliterations or translations.

The author mentions that, although there exists a copious literature on this piece, previous studies are either selective or general. He therefore aims at undertaking the first overall interpretation of *enūma eliš* in order to analyze the work by means of an interdisciplinary dialogue. The first chapter is devoted to research questions and methodological concerns; the second deals with the clay tablet manuscripts. The linear structure is the subject of chapter three, and non-linear compositional elements are scrutinized in chapter four. The next chapter focuses on the key lexeme *šīmtu* in relation to its text-immanent function and in connection with the concepts of name and naming. Issues pertaining to royal rise and succession are discussed in chapter six; chapter seven explores the problem of legitimation of kingship. Chapter eight offers a synthesis of the topics discussed throughout the book, and the final chapter situates the results in the context of broader research questions.

The work is accompanied by a list of those passages (transcriptions and translations) discussed in the text, and by two tables that present the text witnesses. The tables include the following columns: abbreviations in Lambert's *Babylonian Creation Myths*, extended abbreviations, paleography, provenance / tablet type, museum / excavation number; autograph copy or photo, manuscript length, and abbreviations in Kämmerer and Metzler's *Das*

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babylonische Weltschöpfungsepos Enūma eliš. The first table is arranged according to the cuneiform tablets and the second according to their provenance. The book is well organized and displays a systematic progression in the analysis of topics. The exposition is clear, and the tables and figures are helpful for a cursory look at some of the points discussed.

The author considers two approaches: one is text-immanent (with limited intertextual references) and the other is culture-immanent or emic (p. 7). The pragmatic extra-relational and the semantic text-immanent dimensions of the composition are also investigated (pp. 13–16). There is a careful consideration regarding the use and translation of certain concepts and denominations. Thus, it is pointed out that scholars usually resort to titles such as "Babylonian Creation Epic" or "Babylonian Genesis"; however, since the creation of the world is only one of the means for Marduk's rise to the head of the pantheon, Gabriel prefers instead to refer to the composition by its incipit, *enūma eliš*, or by what he calls its self-designation, i.e., *Lied auf Marduk,* "The Song of Marduk," after the expression *zamāru ša Marūtuk* that appears towards the end of the text (VII 161). The use of the term "chaos" to characterize the female character Tiāmtu[1] and her allies is avoided because that concept was borrowed from the Greek cultural tradition and because a monarchical order prevails from the beginning. Similar reservations apply to the translation "fate" for the lexeme *šīmtu*, which is rendered by the German neologism *Festsprechung*. Another culturally loaded term that is similarly avoided is "priest," which is replaced by the phrase "religious expert." In view of these concerns for semantic subtleties and culturally determined notions, it is surprising that elsewhere Marduk is compared to a Roman dictator (pp. 317 and 334) and characterized as such (p. 338).

The punctilious presentation of the provenance and possible dating of the extant tablets in the second chapter is useful for understanding the *Sitz im Leben* of *enūma eliš* within the ancient Near East, and particularly its relation to the social and religious environment. According to the author, the temporal distribution of the extant manuscripts possibly covers a period from *ca.* 750–400 B.C., or even from *ca.* 1000–100 B.C., according to other interpretations. The oldest textual witnesses available originate from Aššur and Kalḫu, which is unexpected for a decidedly Babylonian text, whereas the youngest exemplars may come from Uruk and Sippar. Tablets of known provenance were found in four different temples (at Kalḫu, Mê-Turnat, Sippar, and Uruk) and in a palace. In Assyrian territory, and possibly in Babylonia, they also appeared in private houses, mostly residential and training centers of religious experts. Gabriel emphasizes that no complete set of the seven tablets was found at any of the sites, a fact that needs further interpretation.

The study of the epilogue (VII 145–62 or 164), the late evidence for the recitation during the *akītu*-Festival, the consideration of secret knowledge colophons in connection with *enūma eliš,* and the implied relations and affinities between Marduk and the king serve to clarify the transmission and functioning of the text in various religious, political, and cultural settings. The author explains that the human audience mentioned in the epilogue is limited to the priesthood of Marduk and to the king. The lack of older textual witnesses from Babylonia would support the interpretation that the text belonged to the body of secret knowledge (*argumentum ex silentio*). Gabriel hypothesizes that the Assyrian handling of the text, especially under Sennacherib, aimed at reinterpreting the work in favor of the god Aššur and at using it for programmatic religious purposes, which in turn allowed the text to reach a broader audience. Therefore, the subsequent Babylonian dissemination of *enūma eliš* could

1. The reading Tiāmtu instead of Tiāmat that Gabriel adopts was proposed by R. Borger (2008: 272). The name was kept as Tiāmat in Lambert's (2013) edition. I find Borger's argument for this rather convincing.

have been either a Babylonian reaction against the Assyrian reinterpretation or the result of the already lost exclusivity.

Gabriel characterizes *enūma eliš* as a canonical text distributed over seven tablets (p. 107) amounting to a total of 1094 lines. He follows Lambert's (2013: 132) restoration and rendering of VII 161–62: *i-n*[*a-an-n*]*a-am-ma za-ma-ru ša* ᵈ*marūtuk* / [*ša*] *ti*-[*amat i*]*k-mu-ma il-qu-u šar-ru-ti*, "Here is now the song of Marduk, [Who] defeated Tiāmat and took kingship," and argues that line 162 reflects the core of the composition. Therefore, it is not Marduk's creation of the world that is at the center of the work but rather his victory over Tiāmtu and his kingship (p. 110). This is a most important point and is fundamental for understanding the text. However, I suggest that Marduk's victory over Tiāmtu is indeed important, although not central.

The meticulous analysis of the linear structure is based on five criteria: 1) physical criteria (beginning and end of the tablets), 2) grammatical criteria (morphology of verbal forms and markers), 3) lexical-semantic criteria (word field, lexemic recurrence), 4) narrative criteria (focus: actor, place, time, purpose; style: narrator, direct speech, list-like passages; summary line), 5) stylistic criteria (parallelism, chiasm, etc.). The application of these criteria has elicited some interesting results (for the complete list of examples see pp. 179–81). For instance, the change from one tablet to another is related to structural marks (p. 130). Thus the caesura between I 162 and II 1 indicates a shift of focus to the Anšar gods, and the transition between II 162 and III 1 signals a change of perspective away from Marduk and towards Kaka (p.138). The shift between fientive and stative verbal forms can mark a division, and so can the switch between indicative and modal forms. The stylistic criterion confirms that two verses constructed in a chiasm or in parallel can frame a passage.[2]

The analysis of the non-linear construction of *enūma eliš* emphasizes the importance of the parallel structure, which according to the author extends from I 7 to VI 69 and includes more than three-quarters of the text. Table 14 (p. 196) provides a schematic presentation of this parallel structure. It includes five themes: I) creation of the gods, II) destruction of the primeval being and the resulting plotting of theocide, III) countermeasures of the Anšar-gods, IV) creation of the world, and V) establishment of a divine abode. Within this huge parallel structure the author identifies a ring situated in parts (II) and (III):

A. Plan of destruction of the gods by primeval beings,
  B. Arming of Tiāmtu,
    C. Rise of Kingu,
      D. Despair of the gods;
    C′. Rise of Marduk,
  B′. Arming of Marduk,
A′. Destruction of a primeval being by a god.

The second ring within the parallel structure that the author identifies deals with the establishment of Babylon as an abode (V 117–56 and VI 45–66) (p. 200). He also mentions a ring that includes the creation of humankind and the ordering of the gods (VI 1–10 and VI 33–44) (p. 203). I would go further than Gabriel and argue that the entire composition is a ring encompassing lexical and thematic parallelisms, as can be seen in the following chart.

2. This is particularly well accomplished with the verses that frame the creation of the world from Tiāmtu's halves. Thus, IV 138. *mišlušša* ***iškunamma*** *šamāmī* ***uṣṣallil***, V 62. [*mišlušša*(?)] ***uṣṣallila*** *erṣeti* ***uktinna***, "On (one) half of her he set up heaven and placed it as a cover. [On (the other) half of her] he placed earth as a cover and established it firmly," where parallelism and chiasm are both semantic and syntactic (see Seri 2012: 23).

VII.162. . . . *ilqû* ***šarrūti***
. . . he took kingship

	No names (antithetic parallelism) ↓	50 names (antithetic parallelism) ↑	
1	I.1. *lā* ***nabû*** *šamāmū* no name was given to heaven I.2. *ammatu* ***šuma*** *lā zakrat* the earth was not called by name I.4. *mummu* ***Tiāmtu*** *muallidat gimrišun* Creatress Tiāmtu was she who bore them all I.8. ***šuma*** *lā zukkurū* ***šīmāte*** *lā šīmū* (the gods) were not called by name, they were not given destinies	VII.162. [*ša*] ***Tiāmtu*** *ikmūma ilqû* ***šarrūti*** (Marduk) who defeated Tiāmtu and took kingship VII.144. ***ḫanšā šumēšu imbû*** They (the great gods) called his 50 names	13
2	I.101. ***mārī utu*** (syll.=*šamši*) *mārī utu* The son, the sun, the son, the sun I.102. ***mārī šamšī*** (utu-*ši*) ***šamšī ša*** *ilī* the son, the sun, the sun of the gods	VI.127. *lū* ***māru šamšī ša ilī*** *nebû šūma* He is indeed the son, the sun of the gods, he is the brightest	12
3	I.104. *pulḫātu* ***ḫaššā****ssina elīšunu kamrā* Fifty dreads were heaped upon him	VI. 121. *i nimbēma* ***ḫaššā*** *šumēšu* Let us pronounce his 50 names	11
4	**I.126–II.2. Tiāmtu gets ready for battle** II.2. ***tāḫāza iktaṣar*** *ana ilī niprīšu* She prepared for battle against the gods, her (own) offspring	**IV.35–IV.65. Marduk gets ready for battle** IV.65. ***iḫṭēma*** *bēlu* ***qabluš*** *tâwati ibarri* The Lord **drew near**, he was observing the **battle** of Tiāmtu's interior	10
5	II.150. ***Tiāmtu šupšiḫ*** *ina têka ellu* Appease Tiāmtu with your pure spell (Anšar to Marduk)	IV.31. ***alik****ma ša* ***Tiāmtu*** *napšatuš* ***puruʾma*** "Go, cut off the life of Tiāmtu!"	9
6	III.138. *ana Marduk mutīr gimillīšunu* ***išīmū*** *šīmta* To Marduk their avenger they ordained destiny	IV.29. ***uṣṣibūšu*** *ḫaṭṭa kussâ u palâ* They gave him in addition scepter, throne and staff IV.30. ***iddinūšu*** *kak lā maḫra dāʾipu zayyārī* They gave him an irresistible weapon that vanquishes enemies	8

7 ↘ IV.28. *iḫdû ikrubū Mardukma* ***šarru***
They rejoiced and hailed: "Marduk is king!" ↗

This is a preliminary schema and still needs fine-tuning, but it shows that the most important point of the composition, namely, Marduk's proclamation as king of the gods, is the turning point of the ring (see Douglas 2007: 36). The relevance of this event is recaptured in VII 162, where it is stated that Marduk took kingship (*šarrūtu*). Kingship, therefore, is more important than the victory over Tiāmtu. That the complete *enūma eliš* is a ring fits well with the proven fact that a ring composition usually contains smaller rings. I will discuss this more extensively elsewhere.

A valuable contribution of Gabriel is his study of the concept *šīmtu* and of names and name giving. They are important notions, he states, because they appear throughout the text. *Šīmtu* is the third most common noun in the work (35 attestations) and the composition ends with the 50+2 names of Marduk. It is explained that *šīmtu* derives from the verbal root *šiāmu* and means "that which is established" (p. 250). It is a declarative act that creates a reality. It entails a declarative, intentional, and unilateral divine act of speech. This is one of the divine prerogatives that Marduk requests from the gods (II 160), and the episode dealing with the creation and destruction of the constellation has to be understood as a demonstration of the *šīmtu* power (*Festsprechungsmacht*). Marduk can now destroy and re-create by his mere word (p. 262). The author distinguishes between the proposition that is spoken (*Festsprechung*), the action (*Festsprechungsakt*), and the competence to make a determination (*Festsprechungsmacht*). Following Lambert, he maintains that naming acts as a vehicle to transfer power. In addition, naming can work like *šīmtu*. Such is the case when Ea gives his own name to Marduk (p. 298). The explicit links between *šīmtu* and naming are also apparent in the three names granted to Marduk's bow and in his own 50+2 names (p. 312).

Rise to power and succession to kingship are narrowly connected with Marduk's ascent to rule over the gods. Unlike previous interpretations posing that the monarchical institution developed in the work and that it replaced a form of primitive democracy (e.g., Frankfort 1969: 235, Jacobsen 1976: 183–90, Bartash 2010), Gabriel explains that kingship existed from an early time and that Apsû was the first ruler of the gods. Apsû's murder was a regicide that caused a schism (Anšar-gods vs. Tiāmtu-gods) and a succession problem. The dowager Tiāmtu appointed her new husband as king of the gods (pp. 321–22). On the other side, Anšar was the new ruler and thus Lahmu and Lahamu were skipped from the succession line. From the vocabulary and the course of action of the work, the author concludes that Anšar ascended to kingship of the gods and was Apsû's successor.

Then the various steps of Marduk's ascent are presented. The initial rise of Marduk is compared to the appointment of a Roman dictator, whose prerogatives were limited to the fulfilment of a mission, because Anšar was still king of the gods. The second rise occurs after Marduk has defeated Tiāmtu and has been acknowledged as king. This would correspond with the classic Mesopotamian installation of a ruler reconstructed by Zafira Ben-Barak (1980) (p. 344). The third rise occurs after Anu has decreed destiny for Marduk's bow, when the assembly of the gods exalted Marduk's *šīmtu*, did obeisance, took an oath, and confirmed him as lord of the gods of heaven and earth. It is only now that he replaces Anšar, the old ruler of the gods. The assignment of the fifty names closes this process because it represents a move toward henotheism through name giving; therefore, no other god can possibly take the place of Marduk (p. 352).

The question of Marduk's legitimation is examined from two perspectives: the ontic legitimation (*ontische Legitimierung*), which includes his ancestry and physical and mental characteristics, and the fientic legitimation (*fientische Legitimierung*), i.e., the deeds of Marduk and the deeds for Marduk (p. 357). His activities after he defeated Tiāmtu resulted in the establishment of *Pax Mardukiana,* achieved through a series of measures such as the prevention of possible conflicts, the ending of violence, the maintenance of happiness among the king's subjects to prevent revolts, the acceptance and reintegration of the surviving defeated gods to avoid rivalry, and the establishment of legal regulations to guarantee a peaceful coexistence (pp. 372–73). The global order thus attained (hence the book's title) is synonymous with eternal peace. Marduk is creator and ruler of this order.

Since Marduk's rise to power was not just the result of his deeds but also the consequence of the cooperation of other gods who bestowed kingship upon him and voluntarily submitted to him once he was victorious, Gabriel compares *enūma eliš* to Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan*

(1651). He is well aware of the many differences between the two pieces, but sees relevant coincidences, as for instance that both works are intended to legitimize regimes. Thus, the combination of voluntary submission of the gods and the establishment of a permanent legal system guaranteed by Marduk recalls, according to the author, the approach that Hobbes developed in his *Leviathan.* As interesting as the similitudes might be, I am not entirely convinced that this comparison is fruitful. However, the aim of this analogy becomes clearer when the author explains the political component of *enūma eliš.* It includes a parallelism between the idea of kingship of the gods and the socio-political concept of kingship, a resemblance between Marduk and the king, and also the claim of Babylonian hegemony. The ultimate political concept then is that the ideal kingship is (con)centrated and centralized, stable and stabilizing (p. 383). Consequently, such royal power should be exerted by an absolute ruler who is situated above global order and sits at the cosmic center of the world (p. 385). *Enūma eliš*, then, leads people to visualize the *Pax Mardukiana* as an ideal of global order (p. 412). At points, the author seems to interpret the text as if it were a historical document and one wonders whether ambiguity and inconsistency as literary devices are considered at all.

Gösta Gabriel has provided us with a well-written and thought-provoking book on one of the most important Babylonian literary works. Through an archaeological and linguistic survey he explores the socio-political and religious settings of the text and shows the close ties among scribal training, secret knowledge, Marduk priesthood, Assyrian uses of the composition, and the intricacies of Babylonian politics and religion. His close reading has allowed him to reveal certain structural features such as rings and horizontal and vertical sections of the text. Close reading is also at the core of his lexemic approach. Through his reflections on anthropology, philosophy, and political theory G. Gabriel has tried to disentangle the political and religious meanings from an ancient text that eludes any modern genre taxonomy.

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