

WARRIOR, LOVER, QUEEN, MOTHER:
THE GODDESS IŠTAR AND HER RELATIONSHIP WITH HUMANITY

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ABSTRACT

The goddess Ištar is a complex and varied figure within ancient Near Eastern culture. Despite having been the subject of much modern scholarship, Ištar's contradictory nature is poorly understood. The goddess is examined in general works on Mesopotamia, such as Oppenheim's *Ancient Mesopotamia, Portrait of a Dead Civilisation* and Bottéro's *Religions in Ancient Mesopotamia*, though often not in any great detail. Few shorter articles have looked more closely at Ištar's nature and diversity, notably *Inanna- Ištar as Paradox and a Coincidence of Opposites* by Rikvah Harris. Thorkild Jacobsen also addressed the theme of Ištar as a figure of variety in his general work, *Treasures of Darkness*. This study attempts to bridge the gap in current scholarship found between textual translation and criticism, and discussion on the nature of the goddess. Existing discussions such as those found in the work of Jacobsen and Harris include textual evidence, but rarely extensive textual commentary. This study examines Ištar through three important hymns and prayers, the corpus of Assyrian oracle texts and a poem known as *Agushaya*. These texts provide insight into how Ištar was viewed by the people who worshipped her and the

relationship between goddess and devotees. Consideration is given to recurring themes within the texts as well as the wider body of literature referring to Ištar.

The purpose of this study is to contribute to the understanding of the multi-faceted character of the goddess, through examining her depiction in different types of texts. By juxtaposing examples from a variety of genres in a previously untried fashion, Ištar's diversity is illustrated fully and can be acknowledged as central to her identity.

Dedication

Dedicated to my mother, Maggi, for her unfailing patience and support through my
academic adventures.

And to Alastair, for the full stops.

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INTRODUCTION

Mesopotamian religion is something that is challenging to define. 'Mesopotamia' spans several cultures, a large geographical area and a correspondingly large time span. Whilst there are striking similarities between the religions of the region, with many of them sharing a common mythological heritage, there are also distinct differences. In his authoritative work, *Ancient Mesopotamia: Portrait of a Dead Civilisation*, Oppenheim argues that a history of Mesopotamian religion should not be written.¹ The rationale behind this statement is that the sources are complex and cannot be fully understood across the cultural and chronological barriers. Despite this assertion, Oppenheim provides a full account of known religious practises and beliefs in Mesopotamia. This work has been taken as a point of orientation for basic information contained within this introduction. As there is no room to include a general chronological and cultural framework in the present study, the reader is directed also to Jean Bottéro's work, *Religion in Ancient Mesopotamia*, for more general information. Livingstone asserts that presenting a full history of

¹ Oppenheim 1964: 172

religion is challenging, yet some understanding can be gained by arranging texts and events in chronological order.² This is a valid assertion. A chronological arrangement enables scholars to track changes and form an impression of the development of Mesopotamian religion through different time periods.

While focusing on certain aspects of Assyrian culture and religion, some reference will also be made to Babylonian and Sumerian sources. One of the common threads throughout these cultures is how people viewed and interacted with their gods. Mesopotamian gods were very dissimilar to the Judeo-Christian God of modern times. They were not 'better' than humans. They had many of humanity's traits and flaws, just on a much bigger scale. They were often arranged into familial groups, with a spousal couple, sometimes a child and a vizier who ran their 'household'. Worshipped in purpose-built temples, they were thought to inhabit cult statues. The temples were viewed as the gods' private houses and were run by a priesthood who dressed and fed the deities in the form of their cult statues on a daily basis.

The mythology is centred on the gods and their dealings with each other, and

² Livingstone 1999: 131

with humanity. These myths show how people viewed their gods and give scholars a basis for discerning the nature and character of the pantheon. Texts such as prayers, hymns and even building inscriptions assist in that discernment. Oracles and letters purportedly from gods enable us to see the relationship from both sides.³ This work is concerned with examining the goddess Ištar through her relationship with humanity, using primarily texts written to her and oracles from her. Some mythological texts will also be referred to. This study aims to contribute to the understanding Ištar's diverse nature, through examining her depiction in different types of texts. By juxtaposing examples from a variety of genres in a previously untried fashion, Ištar's diversity is illustrated fully and can be acknowledged as central to her identity.

There is no definitive, substantial publication dealing with the syncretism of Ištar or her diverse nature. Many scholars have commented on her multifaceted character but relatively few have attempted to explain or interpret her often contradictory nature. Groneberg, for example, has listed Ištar's attributes but

³ Examples of these letters can be found in *State Archives of Assyria, Vol. III*, 108-115, translated and edited by Livingstone

neglected to conduct any substantial interpretation.⁴ She itemises the various areas of Ištar's control and comments that the lack of order or system within this list is striking, but again seems to offer little in the way of possible explanation.⁵ Oppenheim's brief examination of Ištar seems to focus on her more well-known aspects such as her relationship with the kings.⁶ He does also mention in passing the difficulties in categorising Ištar and the 'dichotomy of her nature', but offers no actual explanation of these issues.⁷ Jacobsen deals with the goddess in slightly more detail but as this work is, as with Oppenheim, a more introductory publication this is perhaps unsurprising. Jacobsen remarks on the Mesopotamian's ability to take such contradictory characteristics and unify them in one deity.⁸ He ends his discussion of Ištar by calling her 'all woman and of infinite variety', suggesting perhaps that her dominion encompasses a wide range of existence rather than simply war and sexual love.⁹ Harris' article explores her as a paradox¹⁰. Ištar is viewed as a goddess who

⁴ Groneberg 1997: 124

⁵ Groneberg 1997: 124

⁶ Oppenheim 1964: 205

⁷ Oppenheim 1964: 197

⁸ Jacobsen 1976: 141

⁹ Jacobsen 1976: 143

¹⁰ Harris 1991: 263

embodied and therefore transcended polarities and contradictions and Harris asserts that this led to the goddess defining and protecting the norms and structure of Mesopotamian civilisation.¹¹

The scholarship surrounding the Ištar at Arbela, Aššur and Nineveh concentrates mainly on cataloguing and commenting on different references to the goddess from ancient sources. Barton collected mentions of Ištar of Arbela, Nineveh and Aššur by various Assyrian kings in his article, *The Semitic Ištar Cult*, in 1893.¹² Beckman gives a survey of the references to Ištar of Nineveh from a variety of contexts, including Hurrian and Assyrian sources.¹³ Parpola's interpretation of Ištar, principally Ištar of Arbela, is largely based on the Assyrian prophecies collected and translated in volume IX of the *State Archives of Assyria*.¹⁴ As well as collecting and commenting on references to Ištar, scholars have also tried to explain and interpret the sources. Barton makes some interpretive comments and states that the power of Assyria was attributed to Aššur and Ištar and categorises the 'religious concepts' of

¹¹ Harris 1991: 263

¹² Barton 1893: 132-149, 156-163

¹³ Beckman 1998: 1-4, 6-7

¹⁴ Parpola 1997

Ištar of Nineveh based on her epithets.¹⁵ The previous scholarship on the multiple Ištars of Nineveh, Arbela and Aššur will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 1, below.

Chapter One aims to provide an overview of Ištar, including a brief description of her offices, a discussion of her different forms and her perceived relationship with the Assyrian kings. Chapter Two discusses a text known as *Agushaya*, a poem which deals with the theme of Ištar as a deity of discord and warfare. This has been included as it is an interesting mix of a hymn of praise, an aetiology and a mythological narrative. It also successfully illustrates Ištar's associations with warfare, which was one of her primary associations. Chapter Three provides a commentary to three of the most important hymns and prayers to Ištar. This includes discussion of literary features where applicable and considers what these texts reveal about the nature of Ištar and her relationship with humanity. These have been selected as they are good example of the genre and show how Ištar's worshippers communicated with their goddess. Chapter Four examines a corpus of texts known as Assyrian oracles, specifically in the light of claims by Simo Parpola as to the apparently monotheistic

¹⁵ Barton 1983: 154

tendencies of Assyrian religion.¹⁶ These oracles are included as they provide a counter-point to the hymns and prayers in Chapter Three. The hymns and prayers were humans talking to Ištar, whereas the oracles were viewed as Ištar talking to her human worshippers. An enquiry into the writers of the oracles is made to see what conclusions can be drawn about these individuals. All Assyrian prophecy texts referred to in this work have been translated and edited by S. Parpola in *State Archives of Assyrian IX*. These will be referenced using their museum registration number.

This study follows the standard Assyriological methodology. Where appropriate, the most recent textual translations available are used, in conjunction with reviews, discussion and comments from relevant academics, as well as the writer's own theories. Where possible, dates for the reigns of the kings mentioned have been provided. With the exception of Adad-Nirari and Sargon of Akkad, these have been obtained from Cambridge Histories Online.

In conclusion, Mesopotamian religion is a challenging field of study and is most easily viewed through the textual record. The previous study of Ištar has

¹⁶ These can be found in the introduction to *The State Archives of Assyria, Volume IX, Assyrian Prophecies*.

touched on her diverse and contradictory nature and this study aims to further the discussion by examining the goddess through analysis several texts from different genres. The following chapter will provide the reader with a brief overview of the goddess including the problem of multiple Ištar, her relationship with Assyrian kings and how Sargon of Akkad and his daughter, Enheduanna, related to the goddess.

CHAPTER ONE

IŠTAR: AN OVERVIEW

1. 1 Ištar: a profile

Ištar is one of the most written about goddesses of the Mesopotamian pantheon, in both contemporary academic literature and in ancient times. The amount of textual evidence that is to, about, or viewed as authored by her, surpasses that relating to any other deity. Due to her popularity and importance in ancient times, a substantial amount of modern scholarship also focuses on her. It is well-known that Ištar was commonly identified in ancient Mesopotamia with the Sumerian goddess Inanna and that her astral manifestation was as the planet Venus. Her relationship to the West Semitic Astarte and the Southern Arabian god 'Athtar is much less well.¹⁷

The association with the male 'Athtar and other evidence suggests a fluidity with regard to Ištar's gender, referred to by Harris as her 'well-attested psychological and more rarely evidenced physiological androgyny'.¹⁸ Harris views this as Ištar

¹⁷ Ringgren 1973: 59; Black and Green 1992: 109

¹⁸ Harris 1991: 268, Ringgren 1973: 59

transcending the mortal gender boundary by exhibiting and embracing male and female traits.¹⁹ This is shown in a variety of texts which are both explicit and implicit with regards to Ištar's subversion of the genders. In several texts she exhibits traditionally male characteristics, including sexual aggression and involvement in war.²⁰ Ištar also identifies herself to be male occasionally and in a Sumerian incantation text she declares 'I am a woman, (but) verily I am an exuberant man'.²¹ Ištar of Nineveh was worshipped in a bearded form, despite being female otherwise and a hymn to Ištar under the name Nanâ reads 'I have a beard in Babylon, still I am Nanâ'.²² It is interesting to note the different forms Ištar takes in terms of her gender. The bearded Ištar of Nineveh was clearly viewed as a bearded female deity rather than as being male.²³ Similarly, when she declares herself to be both male and female she exhibits qualities of both genders. Bahrani argues that rather than being a hermaphrodite, Ištar's 'masculine' qualities are a result of her feminine characteristics

¹⁹ Harris 1991: 268

²⁰ *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, VI, 5-20, trans. George; K 4310, i, 18, ii, 2-7, trans. Parpola

²¹ *Širnamšub of Nanna*, 17, trans. Cohen

²² Leick 2001: 243; *Sumerian-Akkadian Hymn of Nanâ*, 4, trans. Reiner

²³ *Širnamšub of Nanna*, 17, trans. Cohen

of sexuality and beauty being exhibited to destructive extremes.²⁴ It is her beauty rather than her masculine violence which leads men to destruction, through making them lose their masculinity.²⁵ This does explain some aspects of Ištar's violence, especially that which occurs between Ištar and her male lovers, but it does not explain why the Assyrian kings would want her at their side in battle or why Ištar is associated with war rather than social violence. It is possibly an over complicated explanation of the goddess' attributes and is certainly not one which is offered in any significant way through the primary textual sources. Ištar is very deliberately described as an armed war goddess who physically takes part in combat, rather than a temptress who removes men's masculinity.²⁶

While Ištar came to absorb various other attributes, her major aspects were as goddess of love and war.²⁷ She is the one goddess who gained power through being neither mother nor consort, despite having both a husband and children in various myths.²⁸ Ištar and Inanna share key attributes, including associations with rain, war

²⁴ Bahrani 2001: 153

²⁵ Bahrani 2001: 153

²⁶ K 4310 I 2-8

²⁷ Black and Green 1998: 109; Saggs 1965: 191, 192

²⁸ Oppenheim 1964: 197; Bahrani 2001: 148; Westenholz 2007: 339

and the morning and evening star.²⁹ She was also syncretised with the Hurrian goddess Šawuška and was also referred to as Mullissu in her capacity as the wife of Aššur³⁰. A number of other, lesser goddesses also came to be identified with Ištar, possibly because of her popularity.³¹ As Ištar would have been widely known and it is possible that similarities, such as her association with love and war, between Ištar and local goddesses led to them being identified as the same entity. Bottéro states that despite the syncretisation, Ištar remained ultimately the 'celestial Courtesan'.³² As a goddess she became so popular and widely-known that her name entered the language as a designation for 'goddess'.³³ Her relationship with the rest of the pantheon is similarly complex and she is referred to as the daughter of An, Nanna as well as Enlil in various traditions.³⁴

Ištar's challenging nature has been commented on by several scholars. She was a goddess of paradox, representative of order and disorder, a goddess of infinite

²⁹ Jacobsen 1976: 140

³⁰ Beckman 1998: 1; Nissinen 2001: 191

³¹ Ringgren 1973: 61

³² Bottéro 1992: 216

³³ Bottéro 1992: 216; Vanstiphout 1984: 225

³⁴ Vanstiphout 1984: 225-226

variety.³⁵ Vanstiphout asserts that she does not have a recognisable function or domain, in contrast with some of the pantheon.³⁶ He uses comparisons with other gods, such as Utu, who is responsible for justice, and Nisaba, who is associated with scribes, literacy and education.³⁷ He argues that whilst Ištar is linked with a variety of things, these are presented as being personal traits, such as her argumentative nature.³⁸ There is some merit to this argument as Ištar seems to have been associated with more things than some other gods, but there is more validity in the response that her personal domains could easily be sexual love and warfare. Her contradictory natures of goddess of love and of war have been explained as being linked through the creation and destruction of life, as Ištar is present for both.³⁹ This is a simplistic connection and does not take into account the whole complexity of the figure of Ištar. She was more than the goddess of creation and destruction and her contradictory variety is central to her whole being. Despite her disparate traits, the

³⁵ Harris 1991: 263; Jacobsen 1976: 141

³⁶ Vanstiphout 1984: 226

³⁷ Vanstiphout 1984: 226

³⁸ Vanstiphout 1984: 226-227

³⁹ Saggs 1962: 333

myths surrounding Ištar create a believable, cohesive personality.⁴⁰

Ištar is portrayed as a sexually confident young woman who is used to getting her own way.⁴¹ She is perhaps best known from the myth *Ištar's Descent to the Underworld* where she journeys to the underworld ruled by Ereshkigal. Her subsequent imprisonment leads to the disappearance of sexual acts from the world above and eventually Ereshkigal is tricked into releasing her by the god Ea.⁴² She is the wife of Dumuzi, the shepherd and vegetation god, who takes her place upon her escape from the underworld and whose disappearance for a portion of the year is seen as explanation for the seasons.⁴³

1.2 The Multiple Ištars

Three major Ištar deities are referred to in several sources, each defined as being associated with one of the three Assyrian metropolis cult centres. These were Ištar of Arbela, Ištar Aššuritu (Ištar of Aššur) and Ištar of Nineveh. There has been some debate in the past as to whether these were just manifestations of a single

⁴⁰ Jacobsen 1976: 141

⁴¹ *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, VI. 80-84, 96-100

⁴² *Ištar's Descent*, 90-100, trans. Foster

⁴³ Kramer 1969: 107; Jacobsen 1976: 61

goddess or were separate entities. The view of current scholarship is that they were separate goddesses who shared a name and some characteristics. Ringgren and Saggs both compare these different goddesses under a single name to the existence of 'local madonnas' in the Roman Catholic church.⁴⁴ These are not comparable situations as the Ištar were more delineated than the local madonnas. The Ištar figures were also seen to interact with each other in a very specific way, as can be seen from a hymn to Ištar of Nineveh and Ištar of Arbela, reportedly by Aššurbanipal (668-635 BCE), in which the two goddesses played complementary roles in forming Aššurbanipal as king.⁴⁵

Beckman focuses specifically on Ištar of Nineveh and her Hurrian roots and discusses some of the less important Ištar forms.⁴⁶ These Ištar are local varieties found in the Boğazköy archives and are designated by their towns of origin.⁴⁷ He concludes that they are 'hypostases of a single divine archetype'.⁴⁸ Beckman refers to the Ištar of Arbela, Nineveh and Aššur as separate beings, with Ištar of Aššur

⁴⁴ Ringgren 1973: 59; Saggs 1962: 333

⁴⁵ Porter 2004: 41

⁴⁶ Beckman 1998: 3

⁴⁷ Beckman 1998: 3-4

⁴⁸ Beckman 1998: 4

colouring the nature of the other two.⁴⁹ Why the three main Ištar are distinct goddesses whilst the lesser Ištar are aspects of Ištar of Nineveh is not adequately explained. Beckman describes the lesser Ištar as having both distinct and common characteristics.⁵⁰ As this is true of the three major goddesses also, Beckman's assertion remains unexplained.

Porter uses grammatical evidence from a hymn written for Aššurbanipal to show that it differentiates between Ištar of Arbela and Ištar of Nineveh as separate goddesses.⁵¹ She does make the point that whilst this shows Aššurbanipal saw the goddesses as distinct from each other, this does not mean that it was a more widely-held belief. We know little about the religion of the 'common' person and are unable to discern whether they would share the king's beliefs, or even how much they would adhere to the state religion. It is possible that the educated members of society such as priests and members of court would share more in the king's beliefs. The king was the high priest of Assyria and for him to express a religious view at odds with the

⁴⁹ Beckman 1998: 7

⁵⁰ Beckman 1998: 4

⁵¹ In line 3, the verb 'have' is written in the feminine plural form and following praises use plural pronominal suffixes (Porter 2004: 41).

views and beliefs of society may not have been common.⁵² The two goddesses are seen as different deities, responsible for different kinds of assistance throughout Aššurbanipal's reign. Ištar of Nineveh is responsible for placing the king on the throne, while Ištar of Arbela provided unspecified assistance. Lambert uses the same hymn to see the goddesses as distinct beings and references a fragmentary text from another king who refers to Ištar of Arbela and Ištar of Nineveh as different entities.⁵³

Prism B of Esarhaddon (680-668 BCE) also shows an understanding of the separate natures of Ištar of Nineveh and Ištar of Arbela. When listing gods who favour him, Esarhaddon refers to 'the Ištar of Nineveh' and 'the Ištar of Arbela'.⁵⁴ As a minimum of three kings referred to two different goddesses, both named as Ištar, it can be assumed that these goddesses were viewed, by the Akkadian elite, at least, as different goddesses rather than manifestations of a central Ištar figure.

⁵² Holloway 2002: 73; Engnell 1967: 31

⁵³ Lambert 2004: 35

⁵⁴ Prism B, I, 1-20, trans. Luckenbill

1.3 Ištar and the King

Ištar and the Assyrian kings were seen to have a special relationship.⁵⁵ Kings describe themselves as being loved by Ištar and credit her for their ascension to the throne.⁵⁶ In a hymn, she is responsible for the long life of a king and the success of his reign.⁵⁷ In *The Sargon Birth Legend*, Sargon of Akkad (2334-2279 BCE) states that 'While I was a gardener, Ištar granted me (her) love, and for four and [...] years I exercised kingship'.⁵⁸ Whilst this text is agreed to be inscribed during the Old Babylonian period, between 1700 and 1600 BCE and may not accurately reflect the tradition within Sargon's lifetime, they may have been copied from tablets which were contemporary with Sargon's rule. Even if this is not the case, they contain some small accuracy in the case of Ištar as there are so many other sources linking the Sargon and Ištar which were contemporary.⁵⁹ Sargon is not reported as declaring 'Ištar made me king!', but the statements of her love for Sargon and his elevation to kingship are too close together to not imply cause and effect. Sargon is portrayed as justifying his

⁵⁵ Lambert 2004: 37

⁵⁶ Oppenheim 1964: 205

⁵⁷ *Hymn to Ištar*, trans. Stephens

⁵⁸ Dates for the reign of Sargon found in Chavalas 2006: 18; *The Sargon Birth Legend*, 12-13, trans. Morgan

⁵⁹ Morgan 2006: 22

rule through divine election as he was not born into the royal family.⁶⁰ He is not the only king to have portrayed himself as being loved by Ištar, or being singled out by her as suitable to rule. Aššurnâširpal II (883-859 BCE) also says that she singled him out and desired that he rule.⁶¹ Esarhaddon lists Ištar of Nineveh and Ištar of Arbela as two deities who decided he should be king.⁶² Esarhaddon's mother states in a building inscription, contemporary with his rule and therefore an accurate example of how the king was portrayed, that '[Ištar of Nineveh, Ištar of Arbela] were pleased (and) they happily put Esarhaddon, (my) son, my offspring, on the throne of his father'.⁶³ In a hymn contemporary to his rule, Aššurbanipal calls himself 'creation of Aššur and Ištar' and Ištar is credited with making him king.⁶⁴ Prophets also portrayed their kings as beloved of Ištar. Prophecy texts directed at the king speak of Ištar loving or owning the king.⁶⁵ As these texts were inscribed during the reign of the king they are addressed to, they can reliably show us how the relationship between the king and Ištar was perceived and illustrated.

⁶⁰ Ringgren 1973: 100-101

⁶¹ *Aššurnâširpal II's Prayer to Ištar*, 21-30, trans. von Soden

⁶² *Nin A.*, trans. Melville 2006: 353

⁶³ *Building Inscription of Naqia/Zakutu*, trans. Melville 2006: 358-359

⁶⁴ *The Rassam Cylinder*, I, 1-10 trans. Luckenbill

⁶⁵ K 4310, iv, 22-25, v, 8-9

Ringgren points out that whilst Sargon may have needed to legitimise his claim to the throne, Aššurnâširpal II and other kings who were sons of a king did not.⁶⁶ He says that this means that divine election was more important than royal birth.⁶⁷ It is clear that divine election was important, but it is unlikely to be more important than royal birth. Assyrian kings emphasise their birthright as well as their divine election. Adad-nirari (1327-1274 BCE) names his father, his grandfather and his great-grandfather in a text which lists his virtues as a king.⁶⁸ Esarhaddon states that his father named him as his heir and refers to the 'kingship of my father's house'.⁶⁹ Aššurbanipal refers to Esarhaddon as 'my father, my creator' directly after stating how Ištar chose him as king. In the same text, written around 639 BCE,⁷⁰ he mentions Sennacherib (704-681 BCE) as 'the father of my father'.⁷¹ As can be seen from these examples, divine election was important for legitimising one's claim to the throne, but so was emphasising birthright and royal family line. Sargon's propaganda, even when known through later sources, may have stressed his relationship with

⁶⁶ Ringgren 1973: 101

⁶⁷ Ringgren 1973: 10

⁶⁸ Dates for Adad-nirari's reign found in Chavalas 2006: 140; A.0.76.1 18, 25, 27 trans. Grayson

⁶⁹ *Nin A*, trans. Melville 2006: 353

⁷⁰ Melville 2006: 360

⁷¹ *The Rassam Cylinder*, I, 20-51

Ištar, but other kings with a legitimate claim to the throne spoke of their relationship with her side-by-side with their family lines.

Jacobsen suggests that the emphasis placed by the kings on this mother-son relationship and the sense of absolute trust the kings placed in Ištar shows an 'unflinching piety'.⁷² This raises an important point. It is possible that the relationship with Ištar was manufactured to uphold the king and the monarchy. It is key, however, to not view the Assyrian religion with too cynical an eye. Not every source which speaks of a close relationship between the king and Ištar was propaganda. These texts were how the people and their king connected with their gods. The Assyrian kings believed that they had a truly special relationship with Ištar and that she had a significant influence over their lives. It is short-sighted to dismiss ancient expressions of belief as less valid than modern expressions.

Parpola suggests that by referring to themselves as sons of Ištar they were laying claim to being more than just human and that they would have been viewed as somehow semi-divine.⁷³ This seems somewhat unlikely. A close relationship between the king and the gods is well-attested. The king being regarded as somehow divine is

⁷² Jacobsen1976: 237

⁷³ Parpola 1997: XL

less so. The king may have divine origins as he was chosen and formed by the gods but that does not make him a divine being.⁷⁴

Ištar's maternal relationship to the kings is a recurring theme in many texts.⁷⁵ In the *Dialogue Between Aššurbanipal and Nabû*, Nabû describes Ištar of Nineveh as having suckled Aššurbanipal when he was a child.⁷⁶ This tradition can be seen in the prophecy texts, with Ištar describing how she carries the crown prince like a nurse, as well as suckling him and playing with him.⁷⁷ Ištar also refers to Aššurbanipal as 'my calf, whom I (have) rear(ed)', which is in keeping with the image of her as a wild cow.⁷⁸ The word which Parpola translates as 'calf', 'mūru', can also be translated as a 'foal' but still casts the king as the child of Ištar.⁷⁹ Aššurbanipal states that he did not have a human mother or father, but 'grew up on my goddess' knees'.⁸⁰ He refers to Ištar of Nineveh as 'the mother who bore me', whilst Ištar of Arbela is 'my creator'.⁸¹ Aššurbanipal seems to want to show a connection between him and these two Ištar

⁷⁴ Engnell 1967: 16; Gadd 1945: 48

⁷⁵ Harris 1991: 269

⁷⁶ *Dialogue Between Aššurbanipal and Nabû*, r.7-8, trans. Livingstone

⁷⁷ K 883, r.7-11

⁷⁸ K 883, r11; Porter 2004: 42; Lapinkivi 2004: 129

⁷⁹ Oppenheim and Reiner 1977: 229

⁸⁰ *Hymn to the Ištar of Nineveh and Arbela*, 13, trans. Livingstone

⁸¹ *Hymn to the Ištar of Nineveh and Arbela*, r.14-16

deities. Aššurbanipal clearly claims support from more than a single Ištar, showing that he at least acknowledged more than one Ištar. Crediting the Ištar with his existence and position of king shows a close connection that he feels exists or wishes to give the impression of existing. Other kings also make use of this imagery. In a prophecy addressed to Esarhaddon, Ištar refers to herself as the king's midwife and wet-nurse.⁸² This is not the same maternal imagery that has been seen in sources relating to Aššurbanipal, but Ištar shows a similar concern for his early years. In the same prophecy, Ištar calls Esarhaddon 'son of Mul[lissu]'.⁸³ This again emphasises the personal relationship between Ištar and Esarhaddon.

It is apparent that the relationship between Ištar and the king was envisioned as a close, loving one. It is unlikely to just be a tool to strengthen a king's claim to the throne. The king appears to have used it to continually connect himself with the gods. This perpetuated the idea of the divinely-chosen and inspired ruler and it reinforced his position as the people's representative before the gods.⁸⁴

As goddess of warfare, it is natural that Ištar was also considered to assist

⁸² K 4310, iii, 15-18

⁸³ K 4310, iv, 5

⁸⁴ Ringgren 1973: 105

'her' king with his military endeavours. The king carries out attacks and military activities on behalf of the gods; in a text detailing Shalmaneser III's (858-824 BCE) campaign to Urařu, the king states that he is 'campaigning for Ařur'.⁸⁵ Iřtar, sometimes in conjunction with other gods, gives the king victory.⁸⁶ Her role in battle is referred to in a variety of inscriptions and texts and the link between Iřtar and victory is visible in the prophecy texts. Iřtar declares that she will 'deliver up the enemy of the king of Assyria for slaughter' and 'finish off' the king's enemies'.⁸⁷ The majority of the prophecies contain some allusion to Iřtar's military prowess being used for the benefit of the king, either to protect him or to attack his enemies.⁸⁸ Other texts contain similar declarations. In his hymn to the Iřtars of Nineveh and Arbela, Ařurbanipal states that the 'strength and might' of the goddesses conquered enemy territories, not his own.⁸⁹ This is another way in which the Assyrian kings justified their rule and the expansion of their kingdom. If campaigns are carried out on behalf of the gods, the military activity must be just and correct. As the head representative

⁸⁵ Ringgren 1973: 102; *Shalmaneser III's campaign to Urařu*, 19, trans. Livingstone

⁸⁶ Oppenheim 1964: 197

⁸⁷ K 4310, i 18-19, iv, 7-10

⁸⁸ K 4310, i, 18, 30-35; K 6259, 7, 9

⁸⁹ *Hymn to the Iřtars of Nineveh and Arbela*, r. 4-6

of the gods, his actions must be according to their will and any successful actions will be represented as having both the gods' blessing and assistance.

1.4 Ištar, Sargon of Akkad and Enheduanna

Hallo and van Dijk attribute Sargon's emphasis on Ištar to a campaign to justify a reputedly illegitimate rule and consolidate his rule over a new and expanding empire.⁹⁰ It would be amiss of scholars to assume that this was the only reason for his interest in the goddess and it is equally plausible that he felt genuine piety toward Ištar played a part. Sargon of Akkad gained hegemony over an area that had traditionally been made up of independent city-states.⁹¹ As part of assimilating these territories into his rule he made his daughter, Enheduanna, the high priestess of Nanâ at Ur.⁹² Sargon was only able to do this because he had power over Ur and by doing so he showed his power over the city in an obvious and non-aggressive way. Again, personal feelings should not be totally disregarded in explaining this act. It is possible that pride in his daughter, or fatherly affection, led Sargon to honour Enheduanna by giving her this position. This also meant that there was an official

⁹⁰ Hallo and van Dijk 1968: 7

⁹¹ Hallo and van Dijk 1968: 7

⁹² Hallo and van Dijk 1968: 7

royal presence in the city and showed that Sargon intended to respect the city's religious institutions.⁹³ Hallo and van Dijk make the point that by adapting the 'existing cultic and dynastic institutions' to meet his own purpose, Sargon was consciously trying to change the casual alliance between Sumer and Akkad into an imperial system.⁹⁴ That Enheduanna is credited with writing several hymns to Ištar under the goddess' Sumerian name of Inanna can be no co-incidence. Enheduanna's hymns of praise to Ištar may have been part of his propaganda. De Shong Meador asserts that Enheduanna's work was a promotion of her own views, though this seems unlikely.⁹⁵ As a princess and high priestess, Enheduanna would have had some autonomy but it is difficult to conceive that her father and king would have left her to her own devices.⁹⁶ De Shong Meador has no compunction in saying that Enheduanna's temple hymns and not her hymns to Ištar are likely to have been politically motivated as they link the temples of Sumer with those of Akkad, creating an image of cohesion and unity.⁹⁷ It seems illogical to view the hymns to Ištar as

⁹³ Roux 1992: 153

⁹⁴ Hallo and van Dijk 1968: 9

⁹⁵ De Shong Meador 2000: 51

⁹⁶ Stol 1995: 140

⁹⁷ De Shong Meador 2000: 71; Hallo and van Dijk 1968: 10

separate from the propaganda. It seems more likely that, as a woman who was raised in the royal household, she followed her father's example and formed a special relationship with Ištar. This would mean that her literary devotions to Ištar may have been both propaganda to assist Sargon as well as genuine hymns of praise to her goddess. There is no reason why the texts can't have been intended to fulfil multiple purposes as Enheduanna would have had multiple motivations as priestess, princess and devotee of Ištar.

Hallo and van Dijk take the connection further and suggest that Ištar came to prominence as a result of Sargon's rule.⁹⁸ They argue that the changing status of Mesopotamian deities was often directly linked to the popularity of their priests and cults, so if a cult was popular with the king then the deity to which the cult belonged would similarly rise in status.⁹⁹ This is a legitimate suggestion. As the cult of a deity became more popular and influential, it is likely that the role that deity played in the pantheon would become more significant. It has long been understood that Marduk's rise to prominence in the second millennium BC was linked to the rising importance

⁹⁸ Hallo and van Dijk 1968: 6

⁹⁹ Hallo and van Dijk 1968: 6

of his city, Babylon.¹⁰⁰ Sargon seems to have taken Ištar's involvement in his life very seriously. His assertion that he came to power due to winning Ištar's love has been mentioned and Hallo and van Dijk take this to mean that his influence at the court of Kiš was due to an association with a Sumerian priestess of Inanna.¹⁰¹ That his mother was a priestess is asserted in *The Sargon Birth Legend*, and *The Sumerian King List* describes his father as a gardener or a date-grower, though neither of these texts are contemporary with Sargon's reign.¹⁰² Although these are later texts, they may have been copied from older tablets or been based on an oral tradition from Sargon's reign and therefore be accurate evidence for Sargon's propaganda. If they were wholly the creation of scribes, they illustrate how later society envisioned Sargon and show a lasting connection in the Assyrian culture between Ištar and the king.

As there are two mythological stories concerning the relationship between Ištar and a gardener, this potentially inferred that Sargon was the son of Ištar through

¹⁰⁰ Lambert 1964: 3; Oshima 2007: 348

¹⁰¹ Hallo and van Dijk 1968: 6

¹⁰² *The Sumerian King List*, 32, trans. Jacobsen

one of her priestesses.¹⁰³ Installing Enheduanna, a devotee of Ištar, as high priestess would have made Sargon the son and father of different priestesses of Ištar. With such close ties, 'real' or imagined for the sake of propaganda, it would be unsurprising if Ištar's importance increased as a result of Sargon's reign.

1.5 Conclusion

Ištar was a powerful, multi-faceted goddess who is thought to be a syncretised divinity encompassing several deities, including the Sumerian Inanna. Her challenging and diverse nature is the subject of scholarly debate, not least because of she occasionally self-identifies as a male. Primarily the goddess of sexual love and warfare, Ištar features heavily in the mythology of Mesopotamia. She was worshipped in three main forms at Nineveh, Arbela and Aššur. Although these goddesses share many of the same attributes, there is evidence that they were viewed as distinct and not as different versions of the same goddess. The relationship between these Ištar deities remains unclear, though Aššurbanipal portrays the Ištars of Nineveh and Arbela as having complimentary roles in his

¹⁰³ *The Sargon Birth Legend*, 12, trans. Morgan; *The Sumerian King List*, 32, trans. Jacobsen; Hallo and van Dijk 1968: 6

creation.¹⁰⁴ Several kings of Assyria had a special connection with her, something which may have been initiated by Sargon of Akkad with the assistance of his daughter, Enheduanna, in the propaganda surrounding his rise to power. Ištar was viewed variously as a maternal figure that raised the king, one of the deities responsible for his place on the throne and the king's military champion. The relationship between the kings and Ištar probably had some element of tradition and political motivation, but it is still likely that the Assyrian kings believed they were favoured by the goddess they put their trust in.

The following chapter contains a textual analysis and discussion of the *Agushaya* poem. The poem's chief concern is with Ištar's associations with warfare and strife. It is analysed in three sections; praise, narrative and ending.

¹⁰⁴ *Hymn to the Ištars of Nineveh and Arbela*, r.14-16

CHAPTER TWO

THE *AGUSHAYA* POEM*2.1 Textual Background*

This poem combines a hymn of praise to Ištar, an aetiology and a mythological narrative. It bears similarities to the Mesopotamian flood story, *Atrahasis*, and shares concepts with *Enki and the World Order* and the Babylonian creation myth, *Enuma Eliš*. There is also an element that was potentially taken from *Inanna's Descent to the Underworld*. The narrative details how Ištar's warlike tendencies encroach on Ea's dwelling, making the god angry.¹⁰⁵ Ea reacts by creating a double of Ištar and naming it 'Šaltu', which translates as 'discord'.¹⁰⁶ Ištar is furious when the two meet and requests that he destroy Šaltu. Ea complies and in an attempt to appease Ištar he establishes a 'whirling dance' in her honour, which Foster suggests is an aetiology for the mock-battles that were held in honour of Ištar.¹⁰⁷ It is possible that Ea's creation of the 'whirling dance' is a direct reference to a cultic dance or mock.

Agushaya contains themes and actions with direct parallels to other

¹⁰⁵ *Agushaya*, I iv-v trans. Foster

¹⁰⁶ Foster 1996: 96

¹⁰⁷ *Agushaya*, II vii 15-16; Foster 1996: 105

mythological texts. Ištar's clamour for battle and Ea's subsequent aggravation are similar to the opening of the *Enuma Eliš*. The text opens with a description of Apsu, the father of the gods, plotting to destroy his children as the noise they make stops him from sleeping.¹⁰⁸ The narrative of the story within *Agushaya* opens in the same way, with a god attempting to stop a younger deity from encroaching into his personal space. Ea's position in each text also presents the reader with an interesting role inversion. In *Enuma Eliš*, Ea is the rowdy offspring and in *Agushaya*, Ea is the aggravated father-figure who wishes to subdue a violent and clamorous youngster.¹⁰⁹ This similarity would have been noticed by people familiar with both texts and they may have gained amusement from the fact that Ea uses his predilection for trickery in his roles as both elder and younger god. This theme is similar to one in *Atrahasis*, where the gods decide to destroy humanity as they are too numerous and noisy.¹¹⁰ *Atrahasis* shows the gods' reaction to negative aspects, whereas *Agushaya* shows how the gods react to another deity's negative tendencies. The gods are as aggravated by the intrusion of other deities as they are by humanity's intrusion.

¹⁰⁸ *Enuma Eliš*, I 36-40, trans. Foster

¹⁰⁹ *Enuma Eliš*, I 65-70; *Agushaya*, I iv 19-22

¹¹⁰ *Atrahasis*, II 90, trans. Foster

There is also a parallel between *Agushaya* and *Enki and the World Order*. In *Agushaya*, Şaltu is 'strife' personified. In *Enki and the World Order*, Enki, the Sumerian version of Ea, gives the gods control over certain areas of life. Enkimdu is given farming as his domain and Kulla is named as god of the brick moulds but Inanna/Ištar is left out.¹¹¹ When Inanna complains, Enki tells her that she tangles straight threads and destroys what should not be destroyed.¹¹² As Şaltu is strife, so Ištar is responsible for causing discord.

Another shared aspect is the use of a deity's bodily fluids. It appears to have been an important aspect of the creation of life. In *Atrahasis*, man is created through mixing clay with the flesh and blood of a slain god.¹¹³ Ea uses dirt from his fingernails and spittle to create Şaltu in *Agushaya* and in *Inanna's Descent to the Underworld*, Enki creates two creatures from the dirt under his fingernails.¹¹⁴ There is a sense of irony in the juxtaposition between the two narratives. In *Inanna's Descent*, Enki creates two creatures to save Inanna from 'death' in the underworld. Enki makes

¹¹¹ *Enki and the World Order*, 325, 340, 388 trans. Black

¹¹² *Enki and the World Order*, 442, 447

¹¹³ *Atrahasis*, I 215-220

¹¹⁴ *Agushaya*, I v 26; *Inanna's Descent to the Underworld*, 215-220 trans. Jacobsen; Groneberg 1997:

them with the express purpose of saving his daughter¹¹⁵. In *Agushaya*, the creation, Şaltu, is made to be used against Ištar. They are made in the same way but for opposite purposes. In both cases, Ea/Enki gives his creations specific instructions as to what their purpose is. The instructions Şaltu is given are an altered echo of the instructions the creatures in *Inanna's Descent* are given. The creatures in *Inanna's Descent* are instructed to gain the favour of Ereshkigal by sympathising with her pain.¹¹⁶ In keeping with her name, Şaltu is to antagonise Ištar as much as she can. Ea tells her to '...show no respect to her, answer her never a word to ease her feelings'.¹¹⁷ This is a direct contradiction to the instructions he gives the creatures in *Inanna's Descent*. This contrast may have been picked up by the reader or the audience. It would remind the audience of less antagonistic meetings between the god and goddess, whilst the wider cultural knowledge of their relationship would evoke a fuller sense of their relationship.

¹¹⁵ In the Sumerian tradition, Enki is Inanna's father. She is also given An or the moon god, Nanna as a father, depending on the local tradition.

¹¹⁶ *Inanna's Descent*, 225-242

¹¹⁷ *Agushaya*, I vi 42-45

2.2 Textual Analysis

Agushaya is split into ten numbered sections, which may have been related to the poem's performance.¹¹⁸ Foster suggests that it may have been sung, dramatised or recited in a certain way, although he gives no reason for this supposition.¹¹⁹ The material may have been linked to the cult of Ištar and could provide an aetiology for a cultic dance in honour of Ištar.¹²⁰ If the poem was connected with the cult of Ištar it may have been recited as a precursor to this dance. There are large chunks of text missing so some of the narrative must be reconstructed. The remaining text makes this an easy job and Foster provides a logical summary based on his translation.¹²¹ The antiphons provide a commentary outside of the narrative, which may have served to give the audience an explanation of the character's actions.¹²²

The verses can be grouped into three sections based on the contents and themes of the lines. The first section is comprised of tablet I, verse i-iii and is dedicated to praising Ištar as a war goddess. The second section is tablet I, verse iv-II vii and is the majority of the poem. It is the main narrative and the section which

¹¹⁸ Foster 1996: 96

¹¹⁹ Foster 1996: 96-97

¹²⁰ Foster 1996: 96; Leick 1991: 97

¹²¹ Foster 1996: 97

¹²² Foster 1996: 97

tells the story of the poem. It includes the institution of the 'whirling dance' and information about when the poem was written.¹²³ The final section is tablet II, verse viii and its antiphon which gives a brief overview of the narrative and an elegant end to the poem. Each section will be discussed below.

A full translation of this text can be found in Appendix I.

2.3 Section One: Praise of Ištar

The tone of the poem is established within this section and it sets the scene for Ea's creation of Şaltu. The actual reason, Ištar's encroachment on Ea's space, is not given until the second section but the first section describes Ištar's personality in such a way that her transgression is not a surprise to the audience.

2.3.1 Tablet I, Verse i

The main aim of the scribe is clearly set out in line 1, 'Let me praise the greatest one, the warrior among the gods'. This is the opening line of the poem and the desire to 'praise the greatest one' shows the audience that this poem is dedicated to the praise of Ištar. The entirety of section one follows this aim. The importance of Ištar as warrior in this poem is also made clear in line 1. It is the first of her roles to be

¹²³ *Agushaya*, II vii 15-17

mentioned and it figures prominently in the rest of the verse and the poem as a whole. Ištar is referred to as ‘the warrior of the gods’ twice in the first verse, leaving the audience in no doubt as to what aspect of her the author is revering. Line 2 names her as Ningal’s daughter. This creates a link between Ištar and the rest of the pantheon and by naming her lineage the poet gives further backing to Ištar’s power as a goddess.¹²⁴ Ištar is not named directly until line 3, which is a repetition of line 1, again emphasising her status as a warrior. Lines 4-5 are general praise of Ištar and line 6 refers to her aspect of warrior goddess. Both statements made in line 6 refer to Ištar’s state of being, rather than what she is like when physically present during warfare. By saying that ‘She is always in battle, cunning is her str[atagem]’, the putative author is making a comment on Ištar’s interactions with others. She is not only present in war, she also makes conflict when she is in contact with others and is cunning in her dealings. This can be seen from the body of mythology which relates to Ištar. In *Inanna’s Descent to the Underworld*, her attempt to seize power in the underworld unsurprisingly causes strife with her sister Ereshkigal.¹²⁵ Ištar’s sole appearance in *The Epic of Gilgamesh* results in an argument between Ištar and

¹²⁴ Groneberg 1997: 64

¹²⁵ *Inanna’s Descent to the Underworld*, 115

Gilgamesh, started by Gilgamesh's rejection of the goddess, and eventually the death of his closest companion.¹²⁶ She steals the *mes* from Enki, defeats the mountain Ebih in battle because it will not submit to her and forces her husband to take her place in the underworld.¹²⁷ Her interactions with others, except her sexual exploits and her apparent affection toward the king, are rarely framed in a friendly, open way.

2.3.2 Tablet I, Verse ii

The second verse expands the praise into Ištar's authority over other deities and humanity. Line 1 is another reference to Ištar's prowess in warfare. Ištar's actions in battle were referred to as a dance and by saying that 'she dances around gods and kings' the author is saying that she is superior in battle to gods and kings, those who may be viewed as more manly than a goddess. Her 'manliness' is an indication of her skill at the male art of warfare. Foster classes lines 2-3 as the antiphon for the previous lines and they provide a good summary.¹²⁸ Ištar is hailed as a superior goddess and the putative author has expressed his intention to praise her.

¹²⁶ *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, VII

¹²⁷ *Inanna and Enki*, F 1-18, trans. Black; *Inanna and Ebih*, 131-151, trans. Cunningham; *Inanna's Descent to the Underworld*, 330-340

¹²⁸ Foster 1996: 97

One might expect for an antiphon to refer to warfare, which is so crucial to this text, but it has been so forcefully presented to the audience previously that it is possible the scholar did not see the need to provide another reminder. Lines 4-7 contain general praise of her power. She is not only presented as goddess of warfare, but 'she holds...all divine authority' and it is hers to dispense as she sees fit. She controls the destiny of all peoples and even goddesses listen to her commands. The scholar makes sure that the audience does not see Ištar simply as a deity of battle, but as a powerful and wide-ranging goddess.

2.3.3 Tablet 1, Verse iii

Verse iii deals solely with Ištar's association with war and the scholar makes use of the 'battle as dance' simile in an interesting and innovative way, by describing Ištar and human warriors as opponents in a dance. The simile in line 1, 'Young men are hacked off as if for spear poles', is somewhat cryptic and Foster offers the explanation that the young men are 'cut down to size'.¹²⁹ It is unclear whether he means literally or metaphorically cut down, but one reading is that they are 'cut down' in the service of Ištar in battle. He also gives alternative translation of 'vie with each

¹²⁹ Foster 1996: 98

other, like spears' but appears less convinced by that suggestion.¹³⁰ Lines 2-3 are marked as an antiphon and the scholar draws the audience's attention to remind them of the poem's main themes: Ištār's superiority and her warlike tendencies. Lines 4-6 make use of the 'battle as dance' analogy mentioned previously. Line 4 states that Ištār is celebrated in 'the melee', which, when taken with the second half of the sentence, suggests that the celebration of Ištār is found in the physical act of battle. Lines 5-6 are more enigmatic and Foster suggests that they may combine words for dancing and fighting, but that it is unclear.¹³¹ Line 5 may compare dancing partners and fighting opponents. Ištār 'comes to grips with heroes', meaning that she comes up against them in battle but she takes '...none by the hand'. The last part of the sentence appears to make the distinction between partners and opponents. Ištār and the heroes are not dancing together as a combined unit; they are fighting against each other in conflict. Line 6 continues this idea. Only the most valorous is worthy of dancing *with* her rather than fighting *against* her. 'Leading off' seems to be a term connected with dancing and if Ištār is 'leading off *with*' someone then the inference is that she is supporting the 'most valorous'. Lines 7-9 are an almost identical repetition

¹³⁰ Foster 1996: 98

¹³¹ Foster 1996: 98

of lines 4-6. Repetition is a well-known feature in Akkadian literature and whilst Cooper is sceptical of the technique's literary merit, when used sparingly it can serve as a useful tool for enhancing a specific idea.¹³² In this text, the repetition serves to highlight the metaphor of battle as dance whilst keeping the concept of warfare at the forefront of the audience's mind. Repetition is also useful in performance, and it is possible that this poem would have been performed to an audience. The final lines make the point that Ištar was allocated this area of life. Her obsession with battle and her talent for creating strife are not just things she is personally interested in. Ištar was given these areas, they were shown to her 'as [her] portion' by Ea, the god who objects to her encroachment.

2.4 Section Two: The Narrative

The middle section of the poem is the longest in length and narrates the story. Ištar's frenzy intrudes on Ea and he creates Šaltu as her counterpart. Šaltu is sent to confront Ištar, who is furious about this and demands that Ea remove her, which he does. The 'whirling dance' is then created and Ištar is appeased. Any potential mythological or cultic reason behind this dispute is unknown, outside of Ištar

¹³² Cooper 1977: 510

aggravating Ea through her desire for battle.¹³³

2.4.1 Tablet I, Verse iv

This verse clearly sets out the problem which Ea has with Ištar, but it also speaks in defence of the fearsome goddess. Lines 1-6 list everything that 'he', either Ea or Anu, has given to her which includes 'uncanny frightfulness', 'ghastliness' and 'valour'.¹³⁴ This male figure is attributed with giving Ištar all of these qualities.

Lines 7-8 describe how these features affected Ištar and how she 'felt' what she had been given. The fact that she is the recipient of these things causes her to scheme battle. This clear link between being given unrequested qualities and feeling the need to act on them suggests that Ištar is not entirely to blame for frightening Ea with her noise and fearsomeness. Groneberg notes a similarity between these lines and a section of the mythological text *Inanna and Enki*, in which Inanna tricks Enki into giving her the *me*, which were powers possessed by the gods which ensured that civilised life could take place.¹³⁵ In both texts Inanna is described as being given these qualities or domains of power as if they were well deserved gifts. As Enki gives her each *me* he says 'I will give them to holy Inanna' and Inanna receives *mes*

¹³³ Groneberg 1997: 66

¹³⁴ Foster 1996: 98

¹³⁵ Groneberg 1997: 66-67

including ‘...heroism, power, wickedness...’.¹³⁶ This language is similar to that used in lines 2 and 3; Ištar is ‘given’ ‘...bravery, fame, and might’.

Despite the suggestion that Ištar is justified in her actions, it is her that Ea becomes angry with. Line 9 describes either Ištar's presence within or close to Ea's dwelling. Lines 10-11 show exactly what she has done to frighten him so much. Not only can her 'terror' be found in Ea's dwelling, she is a fearsome sight and makes a sound to match her appearance. Ea clearly decides that something must be done about her and lines 14-16 are remnants of Ea's address to the gods, presumably trying to persuade them to help him.

2.4.2 *Tablet I, Verse v*

In the lines lost between verse iv and verse v, Ea appears to have proposed that the gods create a rival for Ištar. The verse opens by describing what the rival should be like. Šaltu is Ištar's lust for battle personified as she is to contain Ištar's rage and strength. Her physical similarity to Ištar is not mentioned at this stage suggesting that it is of secondary importance. Lines 5 and 6 could seem misplaced but Foster assures us that being hairy was a sign of strength.¹³⁷ In lines 7-10 Ea lists

¹³⁶ *Inanna and Enki*, D 1-5

¹³⁷ Foster 1996: 99

qualities that are important for a warrior to possess, including strength, endurance and rage. Line 10 relates directly to verse iv, lines 10 and 1, in which Ištar is compared to a bull and her noise frightens Ea. As Ištar is clamorous, so too must Šaltu be aurally terrifying.

Lines 11-14 show that the gods are not powerful enough to do as Ea suggests and tells him he must do it himself. This calls to mind a similar passage in myth in which Nintu says that creating man is Enki's work.¹³⁸ Ea creates Šaltu using the dirt from his fingernails and spittle in a method very similar to his creation in *Inanna's Descent to the Underworld*.

Lines 20-21 are the antiphon and help to show what the missing text may have contained. They explain that Šaltu is being made to 'fight with Ištar', which has not been mentioned in the surviving texts and so it is likely that Ea explained his plan and Šaltu's purpose in the missing lines.

The remainder of the verse describes Šaltu. The verse opened with a description of how Ea *wanted* her to be and closes with a description of how she actually *is*. This gives symmetry to the verse as a whole and also keeps reminding the audience that Šaltu has been created as a rival for Ištar and is therefore very

¹³⁸ *Atrahasis*. I 195-200; Groneberg 1997: 67

similar to her. Once again, Şaltu's physical features are almost entirely eclipsed by her creation as a warrior. She is not described in traditionally feminine terms. Her form is not pleasing to look at, it is discord. She is not small, dainty or attractive but 'monstrous' and her flesh and hair, two things which could be described in attractive ways are likened to 'battle' and 'melee'. The scholar does not want the audience to forget why Şaltu was created.

2.4.3 Tablet I, Verse vi

Lines 1-6 describe Şaltu in terms that are also applicable to Iştar, continuing in the same vein as the end of verse v. She is fierce, as Iştar is shown to be through her warlike actions in verses iii and iv. Şaltu raises a clamour as Iştar does in verse iv and she wears combat like clothing as Iştar wears '...radiance, ghastliness, valour'.¹³⁹ Ea tells Şaltu that she is to do what he tells her and describes Iştar as being 'strange and cunning'.¹⁴⁰ He gives her detailed instructions as to her purpose. These revolve around his main aim, humiliating Iştar. He makes it clear in line 2 that all of Şaltu's power was given to her by him which parallels verse iv in which an unspecified male figure gives Iştar a variety of attributes. This further highlights the similarities between

¹³⁹ *Agushaya*, I iv 6

¹⁴⁰ *Agushaya*, I vi 24

Ištar and Šaltu and makes it obvious that Šaltu is an equal match for her. Ea encourages Šaltu in lines 26, 30 and 31 to be rude to Ištar by saying exactly what she wants to, with no concern for her feelings. In line 29 he tells her that she is equal to Ištar as she is made entirely of Ea's power. This whole section not only serves to give Šaltu confidence in her abilities but shows the audience exactly what Ea is trying to achieve through the creation of Šaltu. These actions will not only humiliate Ištar, they will also make her very angry.

2.4.4 Tablet I, Verses vii and viii

This verse opens with the antiphon for the previous section of text, which again makes it clear that Ea is the source of Šaltu's power:

2 While Ea, in the midst of the depths, gives her might.

The scholar is at pains to emphasise that Šaltu alone does not have power or strength. She is a match for Ištar because Ea created her and because the strength of the god is supporting her. In contrast, Ištar may have been given '...bravery, fame and might', but it is made clear that this is because she deserves them and '...all of them are her due'.¹⁴¹ As if his previous instructions were insufficient, Ea goads Šaltu to ensure she acts as he wants.

¹⁴¹ *Agushaya*, I iv 1-10

Ea makes certain that Šaltu will go confront Ištār and not ‘avoid her’, as line 10 states. By praising Ištār so volubly Ea makes Šaltu jealous.¹⁴² In line 15, Ea is so obvious in his intentions that it is surprising Šaltu does not realise what he is doing. Foster notes that the full meaning of line 15 is obscure, but suggests that it means that Šaltu cannot succeed in her challenge to Ištār.¹⁴³ Whatever the full meaning, when placed at the end of such an extravagant passage of praise the purpose is clearly to make Šaltu try and prove Ea wrong.

In verse viii Ea continues to tell Šaltu why she cannot possibly beat Ištār, and Šaltu becomes angry. Ea has made his creation angry and eager to show that she is capable of humiliating Ištār and therefore fulfilling her purpose. Clearly Ea has not given Šaltu Ištār’s shrewdness or artfulness as his trick, which seems obvious to the audience, apparently goes unnoticed.

2.4.5 Tablet II, Verse i

There is a considerable amount of material lost in between tablet I and tablet II. Foster hypothesises that in this lost text Ištār becomes aware of Šaltu’s unfriendly intentions and orders her messenger to investigate her new enemy (Foster 1996:

¹⁴² Foster 1977: 80

¹⁴³ Foster 1996: 102

96). Tablet II opens with Ištar instructing Ninshubur to find out about Şaltu. As in any well-planned battle, Ištar is trying to learn as much about her opponent as she can. By understanding Şaltu's behaviour, Ištar can try to find a weakness or a way of besting her rival. Ninshubur finds Şaltu and reports back to Ištar. Line 12, 'He looked twice when he s[a]w the exceedingly great one!', appears to mean that Şaltu is so similar to Ištar that Ninshubur at first mistakes her for the goddess and must look twice to see that it is actually Şaltu. In lines 15-21 Ninshubur recounts his observations on Şaltu to Ištar, being careful not to mention of her physical appearance or the similarities between the two.¹⁴⁴ Foster translates the speech as being distorted due to his fear, presumably of his mistress' reaction when she finally sees Şaltu.¹⁴⁵ If this poem was to be read aloud or dramatized, then giving clues as to how it was to be read would assist in making the story more engaging for the audience. Ninshubur gives an accurate description of Şaltu's aggression and lust for battle, again using language similar to that used to describe Ištar previously. Line 15 describes Şaltu as being 'bizarre', which is similar to Ea's description of Ištar as 'strange and cunning' in tablet I, verse vi. In line 18, Şaltu cries for battle and in tablet

¹⁴⁴ Foster 1996: 96

¹⁴⁵ Foster 1996: 103

I, verse iv Ištar schemes for battle in her heart.

2.4.6 Tablet II, Verse ii

Ištar's response to Ninshubur's description of Şaltu is, unsurprisingly, a parallel to Şaltu's response to Ea's description of Ištar. She becomes angry at this threat to her supremacy and prepares herself to confront Şaltu. Lines 3 and 4 are a slightly altered repetition of lines 1 and 2. The remainder of the verse continues to describe Ištar's response. By telling the audience that Ištar 'grinds up her enemies' in line 5, the scholar removes any doubt from the audience's mind as to which entity will triumph in their confrontation. The declaration of her often victorious state gives no hint that Ištar might fail and reminds the audience that Ištar is never bested in battle. Şaltu may be created in the image of Ištar, but that does not mean she is a threat to her. Lines 6-7 once again refer to her aggressive tendencies. She 'turns not back', she does not retreat in battle and 'like a young man' she is brave and skilled in battle. Ištar is derisive in her assessment of Şaltu's might in line 9, giving some amusement to the audience because as Ištar's double, Şaltu presumably has the same signs of might as Ištar. While the opening of the entire poem declares that its purpose is to praise Ištar, lines like this very slyly make light of how seriously Ištar

seems to take herself and her own abilities. It is not an outright criticism of Ištar, but it does suggest that she is not as spectacular as she thinks she is.

2.4.7 Tablet II, Verse vi

There is a large amount of text missing between verses ii and what Foster chooses to label as verse vi. There is little evidence of what events this text covered but verse vi opens with Ištar asking Ea why he created Şaltu, and in verse vii Ištar asks Ea to return Şaltu to where she came from. In the missing lines it must have become apparent to Ištar exactly who is responsible for Şaltu. Lines 4 and 7 show that Ištar's aggravation stems from two problems. The first is that Şaltu was created specifically to be set against Ištar. The second is that by creating Şaltu, Ea has transgressed on Ištar's uniqueness. Line 7 is one of the issues Ištar has with Şaltu's creation and is rooted in the idea that there cannot be more than one Ištar. She is unique within the pantheon as a goddess whose identity comes from being neither wife nor mother, despite having both a husband and children. Her power instead stems from her individuality. If another goddess felt free to act as Ištar did then she would lose all potency. The existence of Şaltu as another goddess who can challenge Ištar's individuality challenges the goddess' identity and place within the

pantheon. The multiple Ištar's do not seem to present the same threat to one another.

2.4.8 Tablet II, Verse vii

This verse contains Ištar's request to have Şaltu removed and Ea's response, including the instigation of the 'whirling dance' to celebrate Ištar. Ištar requests that Ea does something about Şaltu, as he was responsible for creating her and Ea gives a reply that requires some interpretation. Line 5 tells Ištar that it was her own fault that Ea created Şaltu, but the second part of the line appears to mean that she has caused Ea delight in being finished with her previous attitude. Line 4 is interpreted by Foster as Ea saying that Şaltu will disappear, or has disappeared because Ištar changed her attitude.¹⁴⁶ It is possible that by asking Ea instead of threatening him, Ištar has shown enough of a change in attitude to justify Şaltu's disappearance. As soon as Ištar asked for Şaltu to leave, she disappeared. As the embodiment of Ištar's aggression, Şaltu is reabsorbed into the goddess' character once Ištar has demonstrated self-control and restraint enough to control her own discord.

The rest of the verse is the establishment of the whirling dance and a few lines referring to when the poem was written. In line 6, Ea appears to backtrack slightly and say that Şaltu was created so that people would know about Ea and Ištar, after

¹⁴⁶ Foster 1996: 96

having said that he was forced to create her to try and contend with the goddess. Foster says that Ea created Şaltu to show Iştar what she looks like.¹⁴⁷ This does not match up with what Ea is telling Iştar. An alternative interpretation is that Ea is attempting to make it seem as though Şaltu had a dual purpose; to help Ea get Iştar to quieten down and to give future people help in remembering the gods through this dance. Ea is attempting to calm Iştar down by telling giving her a yearly festival. He points out what great numbers of people are dancing to her honour in a further attempt at mollification. Iştar is silent for the remainder of the poem, and so must be assumed was suitably flattered through the creation of the festival.

2.5 The Ending

In the final verse the scholar's voice resumes its commentary and an antiphon is provided to end his praise. The poem closes as it opened, with a declaration of Iştar's praise and lines referring to her might and glory. A brief overview of the narrative is given and the scholar reminds the audience of Şaltu's might. The scholar seems to leave it ambiguous as to whether he is referring to himself or Ea on several

¹⁴⁷ Foster 1996: 96

occasions, leaving the audience to guess who is speaking this last section.¹⁴⁸ The last two lines of the poem are an antiphon which calls into question whether the 'her' mentioned in lines 7 and 8 is Şaltu or Iştar. At first glance, line 7 seems to be grouped with the text referring to line 3, in which case it is Şaltu who is being talked about. Line 8 could potentially follow on from this section of text, which would mean that only the final line refers to Iştar. This is complicated by the fact that both lines could be seen to be talking about Iştar also. Given the ambiguity, and the similarities between Iştar and Şaltu that have been pointed out consistently though the entire text it would make more sense for these to be talking about them both. Şaltu is a personification of Iştar's battle lust and therefore could be seen as an aspect of the goddess who has been given a form. By leaving these lines ambiguous, the scholar can praise both figures at the same time and yet be praising Iştar overall. If that is the case, then Ea/the scholar has made all the people aware of the might of Iştar and the might of her battle aspect in Şaltu, they have glorified both and given both fame that they are worthy of.

¹⁴⁸ Foster 1996: 105

2.6 Conclusion

The *Agushaya* poem bears several similarities to other Mesopotamian myths, including the opening of *Enuma Eliš*; a main theme of *Atrahasis*; Ištar as strife from *Enki and the World Order* and the creation of creatures from clay in *Inanna's Descent to the Underworld*. The text opens with a section of praise to Ištar, which makes it clear that this is a poem about Ištar as a war goddess and instigator of conflict. The narrative section of the poem tells the story of the creation of Šaltu, the reasons for her creation and Ištar's reaction to her, Šaltu is a parallel to Ištar and the goddess sees Šaltu as a threat to her supremacy, potentially because Ištar's power is derived from being unique within the pantheon and Šaltu's presence means that Ištar is no longer unique. The narrative section of *Agushaya* ends with a possibly aetiological explanation for a dance in praise of Ištar. The poem ends with praise that ambiguously could refer to Ištar, Šaltu, or both.

The following chapter contains an analysis and interpretation of three major hymns and prayers to Ištar. *A Syncretistic Hymn to Ištar* is both a hymn of praise and a list of god's names, which syncretises Ištar with other deities. *The Great Prayer to Ištar* is a more traditional prayer which requests assistance from the goddess and

appears to focus on Ištar as a judge and ruler. *Aššurbanipal's Hymn to the Ištars of Nineveh and Arbela* is a hymn in which the two Ištar are discussed as separate beings and are credited with the creation of Aššurbanipal as king.

CHAPTER THREE

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF THE
MAJOR HYMNS AND PRAYERS TO IŠTAR*3.1 A Syncretistic Hymn to Ištar**3.1.1 Textual Introduction*

A Syncretistic Hymn to Ištar, translated by Lambert (2003), appears to be a scholar's attempt to bring coherence to the Mesopotamian pantheon. Written around 363 BCE, it lists names and attributes of Ištar in the form of a hymn of praise, whilst simultaneously associating her with other deities in a syncretistic effort. Lambert observes that the text appears to be both a hymn of praise and a list of god's names.¹⁴⁹ The structure of the hymn shows this to be a valid observation. The tone of the hymn is reverent; Ištar is 'honourable, the most proud of goddesses' and 'the queen of the totality of everything'.¹⁵⁰ Her attributes are listed alongside the names of other goddesses, as well as one god, whom the scribe amalgamates with Ištar.

Generally speaking, each line opens with either the name of a goddess, an

¹⁴⁹ Lambert 2003: 26

¹⁵⁰ *A Syncretistic Hymn to Ištar*, 10, 20

epithet of Ištar, or a description of or reference to one of her attributes. Sometimes a specific Ištar, such as Ištar of Akkad, is referred to and the Ištar is non-specific. Eighteen lines in the prayer do not open with a reference to any specific goddess. It is assumed that the reader can infer what goddess the scribe is discussing by how she is described and by the fact that Ištar is referred to on a number of other occasions. Lines 16 and 17 both syncretise Guše'a with Ištar, but Ištar is not mentioned by name. It is clear from the description that it refers to Ištar. Both lines give a description of a goddess and then the name 'Guše'a'.

16 the heroine who does not retreat in the conflict of unsheathed
 weapons - Guše'a.

17 at whose battle cries the wall of the mountain buckles for her, and the
 mountain stone melts for her – Guše'a.

The epithets used to describe the goddess clearly refer to Ištar. It is therefore irrelevant that she is not mentioned by name as her identity can be discerned through the description, as well as through the explicit references in the rest of the text.

3.1.2 Textual Composition

Whilst lines 16-17 seem to be linked in their composition, Lambert suggests that lines 15-16 were composed as a couplet as both relate to actual fighting.¹⁵¹ An alternative theory is that lines 13-17 were composed as a verse, comprising of two couplet pairs in lines 13-4, and 16-17 and a 'bridge' line, line 15.

- 13 Goddess of bow, arrow and quiver, who dances in battle like a
tornado - Ištar of Akkad,
- 14 Inninna, a strong shield, who stands erect when confronted with the
battle-line - Ištar of Akkad.
- 15 Lofty arms, at the shooting of whose savage arrow the mountains are
not covered – Šimaliya,
- 16 The heroine who does not retreat in the conflict of unsheathed
weapons - Guše'a,
- 17 At whose battle cries the wall of the mountain buckles for her, and
the mountain stone melts for her – Guše'a,

The lines in this verse refer to more tangible aspects of warfare, which can be related back to the mortal experience of combat. The couplet of lines 13-14 mention physical tools used in warfare, as does line 15. Lines 16 and 17 refer to actions taken during a battle, namely the unsheathing of weapons and warriors giving battle cries.

¹⁵¹ Lambert 2003: 27

These mortal experiences are made grander and more divine in order to be suited to Ištar. Ištar does not merely carry a shield in line 14, she *is* a shield. Her battle cries do not just frighten the enemy, the very mountains quake at her shout.¹⁵² The first couplet of this verse is imitated by the second. Both couplets open with a reference to offensive aspects of warfare. In line 13, Ištar is the goddess who dances in battle and in line 16 she is the heroine who does not retreat in battle, the inference being that she advances towards her enemies. Each couplet also has a goddess that is syncretised with Ištar, Ištar of Akkad or Guše'a. Line 14 is an anomaly within the verse as it is the only one which names a goddess at the beginning of the line.

This verse structure also occurs earlier in the text. Lines 4-8 have a similar format, with two sets of couplets and a bridging line. The theme of this verse is Ištar's astral aspect, which can be seen from the language used.

- 4 Ištar, who is covered with radiance, enveloped with awe as with a storm – Ninlil of Hursagkamma,
- 5 Inninna, torch which flares up for all habitations from the distant heaven -Dilbat,
- 6 Heroic goddess, who gives off bright flames on the royal dais of Anu

¹⁵² *A Syncretistic Hymn*, 17

– Ištar of Uruk,

7 Prostitute who exercises control right and left, and bars the land like
a bolt the Wagon star,

8 Ninsik[il]la, whose net surrounds the sphere of the people wherever
the wind blows – the Wagon star,

Line 4 is problematic in this interpretation as it contains no explicit acknowledgement of Ištar as a star. The 'radiance' that Ištar is covered with and the awe that envelops her suggests the divine glow that was thought to emanate from deities.¹⁵³ This glow is reminiscent of the light emitted by stars and links it with lines 5-8. Line 5 conveys the same sense as line 4 with a reference to Ištar as a torch in the heavens, clearly depicting her as a star. This is emphasised by the introduction of the name 'Dilbat', another name for the Ištar star, at the end of the line.¹⁵⁴ The astral association can be seen clearly in the second couplet, where Ištar is referred to as 'the Wagon star'. Reiner asserts that in the celestial omen texts at least the Wagon Star was associated with the Ištar star.¹⁵⁵ It has also been suggested that Ištar's association with prostitution was linked somehow to her astral aspect, as prostitutes

¹⁵³ *A Syncretistic Hymn* 4; Rochberg 2009: 49

¹⁵⁴ *A Syncretistic Hymn* 5; Lambert 2003: 27; Langdon 1914: 179

¹⁵⁵ Reiner 1995: 3; Reiner 1985: 594; The Wagon Star is known by the modern name of 'Ursa Major'.

and the Ištar star were both visible in the evenings.¹⁵⁶ It is hard to gauge the accuracy of this statement as Jacobsen offers no explanation as to how we know the working hours of Mesopotamian prostitutes. If this was an accurate suggestion, it would further link the description of Ištar as a prostitute with the later designation of her as 'the Wagon Star' in line 7. The Sumerian name for the god Anu, 'An', literally translates as 'sky', so 'the royal dais of Anu' in line six is probably a reference to heaven or the sky.¹⁵⁷ This would make the goddess 'who gives off bright flames' Ištar in her astral form. Line 8 syncretises the goddess Ninsikilla with Ištar through association with the Wagon star, pairing it with line 7.

3.1.3 Aspects of Ištar

A systematic consideration of Ištar's attributes and epithets within this hymn reveals elements that the original scholar considered to be most important. Unsurprisingly, her association with war and battle is one of the most popular associations and appears in eight of the thirty-nine lines.¹⁵⁸ Ištar of Akkad is associated with Ištar's warlike attributes four out of the five times she is mentioned

¹⁵⁶ Jacobsen 1976: 141

¹⁵⁷ Reiner 1995: 5

¹⁵⁸ *A Syncretistic Hymn*, 11, 13-17, 25, 30

and is clearly closely related with the aspect of Ištar as goddess of war.¹⁵⁹ It is interesting to note that three of these lines focus on the more aggressive side of Ištar.¹⁶⁰ Clearly, Ištar of Akkad was associated more with Ištar's capacity as an aggressor than a defender. The imagery employed by the scribe in relation to Ištar of Akkad is also intriguing. Instead of the more usual image of Ištar as a lion, in two instances the scribe describes her as being a viper and as making the land submit as if it were a snake.¹⁶¹ By describing Ištar as a 'viper crammed with poison' the scribe evokes a very different idea of her to the more common image of Ištar as a lion in battle. Both references to Guše'a are also related to Ištar's warlike attributes. Line 17, which refers to Ištar's battle cry, is potentially alluding to the myth of Ištar's battle with Mt. Ebih, in which she defeated the mountain and sliced a portion off the summit.¹⁶²

Ištar's involvement in control and justice is attested also in eight lines, making it of as much concern to the scribe as her involvement with battle.¹⁶³ Lines 1-3 open the hymn with references that suggest Ištar is viewed as having supremacy over the other gods, making it clear that this is in part a hymn of praise. Ištar's 'decision is not

¹⁵⁹ *A Syncretistic Hymn*, 11, 13-14, 25

¹⁶⁰ *A Syncretistic Hymn*, 11, 13, 25

¹⁶¹ *A Syncretistic Hymn*, 11, 25

¹⁶² *Inanna and Ebih*, 131-151

¹⁶³ *A Syncretistic Hymn*, 1-3, 7-8, 20-21, 35

rejected', she 'controls all the decrees' and 'is established by the totality of the ordinances'.¹⁶⁴ The scribe wishes to make the point that Ištar's position among the gods was established by the divine ordinances, the *me* and that this sets her in a position apart from the rest of the pantheon.¹⁶⁵ The *me* included things such as carpentry, wisdom and control over fire.¹⁶⁶ The fact that she alone controls all of the decrees and that whatever decisions she makes, presumably with regards to the decrees she controls, are not rejected by the other gods implies her superiority.¹⁶⁷ This theme is continued in line 7 where Ištar is referred to as exercising 'control right and left', repeating the idea that she has supreme authority. Line 8 is less straightforward but does still refer to the control Ištar possesses. The 'sphere of the people' is possibly meant to encompass everything within the mortal realm, linking it to the *me* and showing that Ištar has influence on or control over everything in human society.¹⁶⁸ Line 20 gives the most unequivocal declaration of her control over the world as it states that she is 'queen of the totality of everything, mistress of all judgements'. That this line then goes on to syncretise her with Ereshkigal, Ištar's

¹⁶⁴ *A Syncretistic Hymn*, 1-3

¹⁶⁵ *A Syncretistic Hymn*, 2

¹⁶⁶ *Inanna and Enki*, D, 10, 14, 16

¹⁶⁷ *A Syncretistic Hymn*, 1, 3

¹⁶⁸ *A Syncretistic Hymn*, 8

sister and queen of the underworld, is very deliberate and shows Ištar as ruling the underworld.¹⁶⁹ Line 21 calls Ištar 'the noose of heaven and netherworld', again implying that she has control not only over the underworld but the heavens as well. It also refers to Ištar as 'mistress of the Igigi', a collective term for the gods of heaven showing that the scholar is portraying her as having some control over other gods.¹⁷⁰ Line 35 further enforces the idea presented in lines 1-3 that Ištar is supreme above the other gods. Not only are her decisions upheld, but no god will transgress her rules.¹⁷¹ Within this hymn, Ištar is systematically associated with and given power over four main areas: the universe, the heavens, earth and the underworld, as well as over humans and gods. Lines 4-8, which relate to Ištar's astral aspect, imply that she has control over the heavens. Lines 20 and 21 give her dominion of the underworld and line 8 appears to deal specifically with control over the earth and human society. Lines 1, 3 and 35 do not necessarily give her control over the other gods but they do show that she is superior to them and line 21 implies actual control.

Ištar is described in line 3 as being both Enlil and Ninlil. Given that Enlil and Ninlil were a married pair this is somewhat unusual and even more unusual is Ištar's

¹⁶⁹ *A Syncretistic Hymn*, 20

¹⁷⁰ *A Syncretistic Hymn*, 21; Black and Green 1992: 106

¹⁷¹ *A Syncretistic Hymn*, 3, 35

direct syncretisation with a male deity, Enlil. The association with Ninlil can be understood as helping to promote Ištar by amalgamating her with as many goddesses as possible. This too can explain why such a wide variety of female deities are shown within the hymn as the same as Ištar.¹⁷² The syncretism with Enlil is problematic. Ištar is sometimes described as being bearded but this can be explained as by the fact that the Ištar star has a beard and may be an astronomical reference.¹⁷³ To be directly connected with a male deity is clearly more of an allusion to Ištar's masculine aspects than any astral association. As has been previously discussed, Ištar embodied two traditionally male aspects, war and sexual love. Due to some of her masculine personality traits it is unsurprising that she should sometimes be viewed as having masculine physical features also. At the same time, the beard could also have been an outward declaration of authority. As the Ancient Near East was a society where men held the greatest authority, a masculine appearance could have denoted that same masculine authority. As stated previously, possessing an abundance of hair was a sign of strength and the importance of facial hair as a sign of masculinity can be seen in the Assyrian palace reliefs from Nineveh

¹⁷² Lambert 2003: 27

¹⁷³ Lambert 2003: 25; Rochberg 1996: 481

in which male figures have elaborate beards.¹⁷⁴ By referring to Ištar as being bearded, the scholars could be borrowing one of the outward signs of male authority to give Ištar that same power. This is also excellent evidence for the view of Ištar as somehow crossing the gender boundary and being viewed as both male and female at the same time. By stating that 'she is Enlil, she is Ninlil', a married pair, the scholar could be stating that masculinity and femininity are combined within Ištar's entity. This is a reference to Ištar's unique, gender-crossing character and should not be read as an attempt by Assyrian scholars to form a monotheistic practise out of a religion that was polytheistic to its core. As a single being, Ištar is both male and female.

¹⁷⁴ *Lahmu* spirit and Aššurbanipal hunting lions, reliefs at Aššurbanipal's palace in Nineveh, Collins 2008: 106, 119

3.2 *The Great Prayer to Ištar*

3.2.1 *Textual Introduction*

The Great Prayer to Ištar is known from three texts and is thought to have been originally composed sometime around the middle of the second millennium BCE.¹⁷⁵ These are STC II, a text which is written in Late-Babylonian script, KUB XXXVII 36, 37, a Babylonian text from Boğazköy, and KUB XXXI 142, which is in Hittite. Güterbock and Reiner transliterated and translated all three texts in *The Great Prayer to Ištar and Its Two Versions from Boğazköy*, although the present study is restricted to the Neo-Babylonian and Akkadian translations.¹⁷⁶ In contrast to *A Syncretistic Prayer to Ištar* this appears to be a prayer requesting assistance and follows a more traditional format. It opens with the Sumerogram 'ÉN', indicating that this is an incantation text. The first line, 'I implore you, Lady of ladies, goddess of goddesses' makes it clear that whomever is reciting this text is requesting help of some kind.¹⁷⁷ The bulk of the following text praises Ištar and seems to focus greatly on her capacity as ruler and maker of decisions. The section of text from lines

¹⁷⁵ Güterbock and Reiner 1967: 256

¹⁷⁶ Güterbock and Reiner 1967

¹⁷⁷ *The Great Prayer to Ištar*, STC II 1, KUB XXXVII 36+37 5

27/24¹⁷⁸ to 30/27 requests Ištar's mercy and addresses her different attributes. Then follows more praise and lines 40/6' to the end once again requests the return of her favour to the supplicant.

3.2.2 *The Other Names of Ištar*

There are three lines in which the names of other goddesses are invoked in the place of Ištar. The first instance is in line 3/7 where the goddess is referred to as Irnini in STC II and Inanna in KUB XXXVII 36+37. Ištar's identification with Inanna is well-documented and needs no further discussion here.¹⁷⁹ Her association with Irnini is somewhat less common and Jacobsen suggests that Ištar as Irnini is the personification of victory.¹⁸⁰ As this name is used in a line which declares Ištar's superiority over the Igigi, this association would not be out of place. If Ištar is superior over the Igigi, then it could be said that she is victorious in her superiority and using a name which refers to victory invokes that implication. The name Guše'a is also used instead of Ištar.¹⁸¹ It is parallel to the references to Guše'a in *The Syncretistic Prayer*

¹⁷⁸ When referring to *The Great Prayer of Ištar*, the first line number will relate to text STC II and the second will relate to KUB XXXVII 36+37, eg line 3/7 means line 3 in STC II and line 7 in KUB XXXVII 36+37. Numbers follow Güterbock and Reiner's translation (1967).

¹⁷⁹ Leick 1991: 96; Black and Green 1992: 108

¹⁸⁰ Jacobsen 1963: 476

¹⁸¹ *The Great Prayer*, 12/15

as the name is used in conjunction with Ištar's aspect as goddess of war. The line suggests an aggressive rather than defensive characteristic, describing her as being 'draped in battle, clothed in chilling fear'. It is worth remarking that this line uses traditionally feminine features of clothing and appearance to highlight distinctly masculine traits. The third name used in the place of Ištar is Irninitu and is used in *The Great Prayer* when the supplicant wishes for her heart to be appeased.¹⁸² This name is used in conjunction with a reference to her heart as 'a raging lion'. This is an unsurprising comparison as Ištar was often referred to as, and associated with, lions.¹⁸³

3.2.3 Ištar's Justice

This prayer stresses Ištar's capacity as judge and ruler. Seven of the lines refer to Ištar being responsible for just decisions or for making rules.¹⁸⁴ When read in conjunction with the sections that request mercy from Ištar, it can be seen that the supplicant is emphasising these attributes to persuade her to take pity on him and end whatever difficulties he is having. It is parallel to reminding someone of how generous they are in order to benefit from said generosity. By reminding Ištar that

¹⁸² *The Great Prayer*, 15/8'

¹⁸³ Black and Green 1992: 119

¹⁸⁴ *The Great Prayer*, 7/11b, 13/15b, 25, 26, 38/4', 39/5', 41/7'

she has control over judgement and underlining her apparent tendency towards mercy, the petitioner is trying to encourage her to exercise these qualities in his favour. These reminders of mercy and judgement are spaced between general praise to Ištar and praise focused on her position of ruler over men or the gods. As in *A Syncretistic Hymn*, it is made clear that Ištar has a position of superiority. She is referred to as 'Queen of all habitations', and 'the gods shake and the Anunnaku tremble' at the mention of her name.¹⁸⁵ The prayer states that the highest three gods, Anu, Enlil and Ea placed her above the other gods, though presumably they did not place her above themselves.¹⁸⁶ The themes of Ištar's superiority, judgement and mercy are closely intertwined within this prayer. It is likely that this was a deliberate attempt by the scribe to not only 'persuade' Ištar to grant the supplicant's request, but to prove that she has the authority to do so. Line 18/19 shows a kind of pedigree for her position of superiority. The three great gods, Anu, Enlil and Ea gave her this power and so it cannot be questioned by anyone. By emphasising her position of power over men and the other gods the prayer makes it clear that if Ištar wishes to have mercy, nothing can prevent her from doing so. This opens the way for her to do

¹⁸⁵ *The Great Prayer*, 2/6, 21/21

¹⁸⁶ *The Great Prayer*, 18/19

as requested.

As has been previously stated, the prayer contains sections of praise as well as requests for mercy. The first section of requests comes directly after lines extolling Ištar as a deity involved with justice and judgement. The lines preceding the requests read:

- 25 You give decisions for all mankind in justice and equity,
 26 You look with favour upon the mistreated and the oppressed (and)
 daily give them true judgement.

This is an excellent example of the phenomenon discussed earlier whereby Ištar is apparently reminded of her power. This reminder seems to be intended to persuade Ištar to assist the supplicant. The language emphasises the rarely attested merciful aspect of Ištar's nature which reinforces the request.

- 27/24 Have mercy, Lady of heaven and earth, who shepherds mankind,
 28/25 Have mercy, Lady of Holy Eanna, the pure treasury,
 29/26 Have mercy, My Lady! Your feet do not tire, your legs are quick to
 run,
 30/27 Have mercy, Lady of battle and of all close fight.

The repetition of the words 'have mercy' serve to highlight the request. The epithets which follow relate to Ištar's status as ruler of both heaven and earth, her

main temple and her status as the war goddess. At first glance it is surprising that her other main concern, that of sexual love, is not mentioned as it is a powerful and more obvious aspect than her placement within the pantheon. Being queen of heaven and earth and goddess of war may have carried more authority than being goddess of love and so the supplicant is appealing to the most powerful aspects of her that he can. Line 28/25 helps to remind Ištar about her obligations to humanity and specifically to the speaker of the prayer. By mentioning the Eanna temple, the speaker brings to mind the sacrifices and worship Ištar receives from humans and is prompted to 'have mercy', either out of a sense of obligation or out of a desire to ensure the sacrifices and worship continue.

The last section of the prayer is another plea for mercy and for Ištar to intercede on behalf of the supplicant. As with lines 27/24 to 30/27, the lines leading up to this request are intended to persuade Ištar to help.

- 39/5' Goddess of men, Ištar of women, whose counsel no one can find out,
 40/6' Wherever you look with favour, the dying gets well, the sick gets up,
 41/7' The unjustly treated becomes prosperous, when he can behold you.

Line 39/5' makes it clear that Ištar's importance is equal to both men and women; she is a goddess to both genders. The use of her name as a determinative

for 'goddess' has been discussed before but it is interesting that this line includes both 'Ištar' and 'ilat', side by side. This could be for literary reasons. It is, after all, more interesting to use a variety of words when referring to a single entity than to use the same word repeatedly. Lines 40/6' and 41/7' return to the theme of Ištar's mercy and beneficial acts towards mankind. The return of this theme, which is present from line 40/7' up until the close of the prayer, keeps the supplicant's request for help at the forefront of the text. The fact that the prayer closes with a section comprised mainly of requests rather than praise makes it clear that this text serves a purpose other than the glorification of Ištar.

The final section of the Neo-Babylonian version and the penultimate section of the text from Boğazköy contain the only mention of why the supplicant is suffering. In traditional Mesopotamian style, it is assumed that the suffering man is having difficulties because he has inadvertently offended or upset Ištar.

51/8' O Irninitu, may your heart, a raging lion, be appeased,

52/8'b May your mood, an angered wild bull, relent.

53/9'b May your propitious eyes be upon me,

11' [may my angry god and goddess be reconciled] with me, my prayer(?)

[...]

59/12' Until then, My Lady, will fools and weaklings overtake me?

Lines 51/8' and 52/8'b shows that the supplicant feels that he has angered Ištar and she is the cause of his misfortune. If he successfully appeases her then he will be successful again. The last line of the section, 59/12' could hint at what hardships he has suffered. If this is a personal reference rather than a stock phrase it could be that he was being surpassed in either business or his personal life by individuals he regarded as 'fools and weaklings'.

3.3 Aššurbanipal's Hymn to the Ištars of Nineveh and Arbela

3.3.1 Textual Composition

This hymn is written as if it was a composition of the Assyrian king, Aššurbanipal. It gives praise to Ištar of Nineveh and Ištar of Arbela. In the text it is quite clear that the two goddesses are intended to be viewed as distinct beings, rather than a manifestation of the same deity.¹⁸⁷ They are named separately in the first two lines of the hymn, alongside an instruction to 'exalt and glorify' Ištar of Nineveh and 'magnify and praise' Ištar of Arbela.¹⁸⁸ The author could have easily

¹⁸⁷ Porter 2004: 41

¹⁸⁸ *Hymn to the Ištars of Nineveh and Arbela*, 1-2, trans. Livingstone

written 'magnify and praise the Lady of Nineveh and Arbela' if they were intended to be viewed as a single goddess, but the two are deliberately named in a manner which delineates one from the other. This is not the goddess of Nineveh and Arbela which is being referred to, it is the goddess of Nineveh and the goddess of Arbela. This distinction continues throughout the hymn. The goddesses are frequently referred to as 'they' and verbs are used in the feminine plural forms.¹⁸⁹ Again, this shows that two beings are being discussed rather than two aspects of one goddess.

3.3.2 Textual Analysis

This hymn differs from the previous texts as it is not dominated by praise or supplication. Instead, it contains limited direct praise and a description of the goddesses' great works through the medium of Aššurbanipal's reign. It opens with a somewhat traditional declaration of the goddesses' superiority over the other gods.¹⁹⁰

This makes one of the purposes of the hymn clear, to glorify Ištar of Nineveh and Ištar of Arbela. The prayer continues by referring to their cult centres, which then leads neatly to what is apparently a reference to the prophecies and oracles that

¹⁸⁹ *Hymn to the Ištars of Nineveh and Arbela*, 4, 6, 16, 18

¹⁹⁰ *Hymn to the Ištars of Nineveh and Arbela*, 3

issued from the cult centres of Ištar.¹⁹¹ Lines 6 and 7 read 'A word from their lips is blazing fire! Their utterances are valid for ever!'¹⁹² A substantial body of oracular texts were written in the cult centres of Ištar, typically in her temple at Arbela.¹⁹³ These were thought to be literally the words of Ištar which she delivered through the prophet or prophetess for the benefit of the king. By talking about the 'word' of the Ištar that are 'valid for ever', the text is referring to the words Ištar uttered in oracles. As king, Aššurbanipal received oracles addressed directly to him from Ištar and would have seen them as instructions or advice on his rule. As words of a goddess, naturally they would be 'valid for ever'. This is not only a reflection of the way in which the Assyrian royal family interacted with the cult of Ištar, it is an example of an almost invincible security measure for the king. If he acted in a way that was based on the 'word of Ištar', he could not only be sure that he was doing what his goddess desired, he could use it to mitigate against any discontent from the people in relation to his actions. Unsuccessful action could be blamed on an unclear oracle, rather than the incompetence of the king.

Following the opening lines is a section which introduces the speaker as

¹⁹¹ *Hymn to the Ištar of Nineveh and Arbela*, 5-7

¹⁹² *Hymn to the Ištar of Nineveh and Arbela*, 6-7

¹⁹³ K 4310, ii 9, 40, v 24, vi 31

Aššurbanipal and sets the tone for the rest of the hymn.¹⁹⁴ The following lines of the hymn stress the relationship between the goddesses and the king, which is foreshadowed in lines 8-12. Aššurbanipal refers to himself as 'offspring of Nineveh' and 'product of Emashmash and Egashankalamma'.¹⁹⁵ The link created by calling himself the son of Nineveh is somewhat self-explanatory and lines 9 and 10 emphasise this link as Emashmash and Egashankalamma refer to the temples of Ištar in Nineveh and Arbela.¹⁹⁶ By calling himself a product of those temples, Aššurbanipal links himself to both the goddesses and their cult of worship in Assyria. The remainder of the hymn is focused mainly on reinforcing Aššurbanipal's connection with the goddesses in a way which is primarily concerned with his position as king, as well as his reign. The hymn generally follows the chronology of Aššurbanipal's life, though the line concerning his birth occurs at the very end of the hymn in line 14.¹⁹⁷ This chronology begins with line 13.

¹⁹⁴ *Hymn to the Ištars of Nineveh and Arbela*, 8-12

¹⁹⁵ *Hymn to the Ištars of Nineveh and Arbela*, 8-10

¹⁹⁶ Porter 2004: 41

¹⁹⁷ *Hymn to the Ištars of Nineveh and Arbela*, 14

- 13 - 15 I knew no father or mother, I grew up in the lap of my goddesses.
As a child the great gods guided me, going with me on their right
and the left.
- 16-17 They established at my side a good genie and a good angel,
assigned my life to guardians of well-being and health.

The section deals with the king's early life. The statement that he 'knew no father or mother' is figurative. As the familial line was crucial in the Assyrian dynastic tradition, it is highly unlikely that Aššurbanipal did not know who his parents were. Instead, this statement is intended to reinforce the closeness of the relationship between the Ištar and the king. Lines 15-17 make it clear that Ištar of Nineveh and Ištar of Arbela are not the only deities who wish for Aššurbanipal to succeed as a king. 'The great gods' seems to refer to the Mesopotamian pantheon and clearly implies that all of the gods guided Aššurbanipal in his early life.¹⁹⁸ Lines 16 and 17 appear to still relate to Aššurbanipal's childhood. As a child, the king would have needed divine assistance in terms of health and protection, if for no other reason than because of high child mortality rates. In order to give their favoured prince the best chance of becoming king, it makes sense for the goddesses to give

¹⁹⁸ *Hymn to the Ištar of Nineveh and Arbela*, 15

Aššurbanipal a genie, an angel and guardians of well-being and health.¹⁹⁹ The presence of this divine assistance again refers to Aššurbanipal's claim that he was favoured by the goddesses.

The second section appears to refer to Aššurbanipal's life and rule. Lines 18 and 19 talk about how the goddesses set Aššurbanipal above all other kings by glorifying his stature, fortifying his strength and spreading his fame 'over all rulers'.²⁰⁰ The fact that these lines mention strength and other rulers makes it clear that the hymn is no longer referring to Aššurbanipal's childhood. He is being discussed in comparison to other rulers rather than princes and strength in battle was a key attribute of Assyrian kings. The lines which follow have a military orientation that is unsurprising in a hymn to the Ištar of Nineveh and Arbela.

20-22 [All enem]ies heard (of me), [all] the recalcitrant lands, which did not submit to the kings, my fathers, and did not bring [tribute and] gifts before them, trembled with fear.

23 [I am] Aššurbanipal , the creation of the hands of the great gods.

24 [...] god[esses...] greatly

(Break)

r.2 [...]... their command

¹⁹⁹ *Hymn to the Ištar of Nineveh and Arbela*, 16-17

²⁰⁰ *Hymn to the Ištar of Nineveh and Arbela*, 18-19

3 [...] their words.

4-6 Not [with] my [own strength], not with the strength of my bow, but with the power [...] and] strength of my goddesses, I made the lands disobedient to me submit to the yoke of Aššur.

This section opens with a statement of Aššurbanipal's power as king. His declaration that lands which did not submit to his forefathers trembled in front of him portrays Aššurbanipal as a king superior to his predecessors.²⁰¹ Despite seeming like a statement of Aššurbanipal's own superiority, it is actually used to praise the Ištar. Lines 23-6 attribute Aššurbanipal's position directly to the gods and the Ištar of Nineveh and Arbela. In line 23, Aššurbanipal describes himself as 'the creation of the hands of the great gods'. This appears directly after his statement of superiority over his ancestors and therefore creates a link between his own power and the intentions of the 'great gods'.²⁰² The inference of this line is that Aššurbanipal is only superior to the kings before him because he is the creation of the gods. This theme is further elaborated on through the rest of the section. Aššurbanipal states directly that this power is not due to his own actions but that it was 'the power and strength' of the goddesses which subdued

²⁰¹ *Hymn to the Ištar of Nineveh and Arbela, 20-22*

²⁰² *Hymn to the Ištar of Nineveh and Arbela, 23*

the lands which resisted Assyrian rule.²⁰³ Lines 7-9 build on the image of other rulers in a position of subservience to Aššurbanipal. They are described as bringing presents in line 7, directly contrasting how they acted in lines 20-22 where the point is made that they 'did not bring [tribute and] gifts'.²⁰⁴ Lines r.9-r.11 further emphasise Aššurbanipal's status and therefore the power of the goddesses. The lands which he has subdued are imagined as being in a position of supplication, kissing Aššurbanipal's feet and seeking peace with him.²⁰⁵ By emphasising how much they are trying to please him, Aššurbanipal shows how powerful and fearsome the goddesses have made him.

The last section contains praise directed at Aššurbanipal, final references to the Ištars of Nineveh and Arbela and an assurance that Aššurbanipal's rule was decreed by the goddesses. Lines r.11 to r.13 again proclaim the favour the gods have for Aššurbanipal by stating that he 'calms the heart of the gods'.²⁰⁶ As king, it was Aššurbanipal's duty to keep the gods happy and to mediate between the gods and his people. The hymn has already stated that Aššurbanipal was king because he was chosen by the gods and by referring to the performance of an action that only the king could perform, the idea of being king through divine will is reinforced. Line r.15 states

²⁰³ *Hymn to the Ištars of Nineveh and Arbela*, 4-6

²⁰⁴ *Hymn to the Ištars of Nineveh and Arbela*, 20-22, r.7

²⁰⁵ *Hymn to the Ištars of Nineveh and Arbela*, r.9-11

²⁰⁶ *Hymn to the Ištars of Nineveh and Arbela*, r.12

that 'the great gods' gave Aššurbanipal confidence, presumably in battle, and blessed his weapons.²⁰⁷ This again attributes Aššurbanipal's success in battle to the gods rather than his own military prowess.

Lines r.14 to r.16 recall the lines referring to Aššurbanipal's childhood as they call Ištar of Nineveh his 'mother' and to Ištar of Arbela his 'creator'. This links to lines 13 and 14 where Aššurbanipal declares that he 'knew no mother or father' and 'grew up in the lap of my [his] goddesses'. The hymn closes with a final assertion that the goddesses chose Aššurbanipal as king, simultaneously showing the goddesses' relationship with the king and giving divine legitimacy to his rule.²⁰⁸

3.4 Conclusion

A Syncretistic Hymn to Ištar is both a hymn of praise to Ištar and a list of god's names, in which the general Ištar and specific Ištars are referred to and described. Several sections appear to have been written in a verse form, in which two couplet pairs are linked by a 'bridge' line. The hymn glorifies Ištar attributes, with war and battle being the most prominent, and syncretises her with other gods and goddesses. *The Great Prayer to Ištar* has a more traditional form and appears to be a prayer requesting

²⁰⁷ *Hymn to the Ištars of Nineveh and Arbela*, 1290, r.15

²⁰⁸ *Hymn to the Ištars of Nineveh and Arbela*, r.17 -18

assistance from the goddess. There is a distinct emphasis on Ištar as judge and ruler, which is appropriate for a prayer requesting mercy, especially as the plaintiff feels he has upset the goddess. *Aššurbanipal's Hymn to the Ištars of Nineveh and Arbela* shows the goddesses of Nineveh and Arbela as two distinct beings, rather than aspects of a single deity. In contrast with the previous texts, it is not dominated by praise but stresses the relationship between the two Ištars and the king and follows the chronology of the king's life.

The final chapter refutes a theory of an eminent Assyriologist, Simo Parpola, who argued that the nature of Ištar and Assyrian religion could be linked with Christian tradition; specifically that Assyrian religion was monotheistic. If this theory had been accepted it would have revolutionised the whole discipline, thus it remains an important argument despite the theory having been rejected. This chapter also uses the corpus of Assyrian oracles to explore how Ištar's worshippers felt she related to them. These oracles were thought to be relayed directly from the goddess to her prophets and show what mortals felt Ištar said to them.

CHAPTER FOUR

IŠTAR IN ASSYRIAN PROPHECY

4.1 The Question of Assyrian Monotheism

The corpus of Assyrian prophecy has been extensively discussed by Simo Parpola in his contribution to the *State Archives of Assyria*, based on a new edition and translation of known texts. He uses it to attempt to explain the nature of Ištar, specifically in relation to Christian theology. He claims that Ištar can be equated to the Holy Spirit of Christianity and that when she speaks to the king through the prophecies she is '*Aššur revealed in his mother aspect*'.²⁰⁹ Parpola attempts to support his theories by interpreting various prophecies in the *State Archives of Assyria Vol. IX* as revealing similarities to Christian theology and beliefs. These interpretations will be examined in detail, alongside the original prophecies later in this text. As an eminent Assyriologist, Parpola could have overturned all accepted theories and ideas about Assyrian religion as a whole, as well as the understanding of Ištar. His ideas were not accepted by the wider academic community and there

²⁰⁹ Parpola 1997: XXVI, original emphasis

have been some scathing reviews from Cooper and Kwasman in particular.²¹⁰ Cooper accuses Parpola of using ‘arguments that are often circular and flawed’ and of treating his ideas as ‘doctrine more than theory’.²¹¹ Kwasman makes a similar criticism, stating that Parpola tries to force the prophecies to support his theory rather than altering his theory based on the evidence.²¹² The most damning assessment Cooper makes of Parpola’s theories is that he has a strong personal stake in the origin of “Christian beliefs”.²¹³ There is currently no scholarship examining Parpola’s claims in the light of the Assyrian prophecies and Biblical passages he uses as evidence.

4.1.1 Examining the Evidence

The following passage is one of the key pieces of evidence in Parpola’s theory of Assyrian monotheism.

K 4310 column II

16 Fear not, Esarhaddon!

17 I am Bel. (Even as) I speak to you, I watch over the beams of your heart.

²¹⁰ Cooper 2000; Kwasman 2001

²¹¹ Cooper 2000: 430

²¹² Kwasman 2001: 228

²¹³ Cooper 2000: 442

- 20 When your mother gave birth to you, sixty great gods stood with me
and protected you. Sin was at your right side, Šamaš at your left;
- 25 sixty great gods were standing around you and girded your loins.
- 27 Do not trust in man. Lift up your eyes, look to me! I am Ištar of
Arbela; I reconciled Aššur with you. When you were small, I took you
with me. Do not fear; praise me!
- 34 What enemy has attacked you while I remained silent? The future
shall be like the past. I am Nabû, lord of the stylus. Praise me!
- 40 By the mouth of the woman Bayâ, 'son' of Arbela.

Parpola uses this prophecy to link the Assyrian and Christian religious traditions. He states that the reader 'cannot help being reminded of the Holy Trinity of Christianity', mainly because of the three deities named as speakers within the text.²¹⁴ In fact, the reader has to struggle to make this apparently obvious connection. Parpola's assertion seems to be based on the assumption that the deity speaking through the prophecy remains the same throughout. A much more natural explanation would be that that it is merely a case of multiple deities speaking through a single prophecy. Cooper suggests this explanation and also suggests that Ištar was speaking in the name of the other gods.²¹⁵ Kwasman offers the explanation that each

²¹⁴ Parpola 1997: XVIII

²¹⁵ Cooper 2000: 439

deity within the oracle is linked to different stages in Esarhaddon's life.²¹⁶ This is entirely plausible; each deity within the oracle can be very clearly linked to a specific time period. Bel speaks of Esarhaddon's birth, Ištar of Arbela refers to his childhood and Nabû appears to be talking about his adult life. The deities could also be talking exclusively about his birth and childhood. These alternative explanations are more viable than Parpola's claim that this is an example of three deities being shown as 'different hypostases of one indivisible Divine Being'.²¹⁷

It could be argued that there is some small link to Christian tradition. There are various examples in the Old Testament of the Christian Bible of people being told to trust only in God and not to put their trust in other men. Psalm 146 reads 'Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man' and Micah chapter 7 verse 5 reads 'Do not trust a neighbour, put no confidence in a friend'.²¹⁸ These are two references of a recurring theme. These echo a similar theme in K 4310 II where Ištar of Arbela says to Esarhaddon 'Do not trust in man. Lift up your eyes, look to me!'.²¹⁹ It is possible that this common theme shows some small continuity of tradition. Equally, it could

²¹⁶ Kwasman 2001: 228

²¹⁷ Parpola 1997: XVIII

²¹⁸ Psalm 146.3; Micah 7.5

²¹⁹ K 4310, II 27

merely be a similarity that has occurred due to cultural views of gods. If humanity views their deities as all-knowing and all-encompassing, it makes sense for said deities to encourage their followers to trust only them. Other humans can never offer the same protection or assistance for the simple fact that they are not divine.

In discussing these prophecies, Parpola refers to several biblical passages to establish more similarities between these and the Assyrian prophecies. These are minor similarities that may hint at a continued tradition but are not the compelling pieces of evidence that Parpola presents them as. He states that in Isaiah 45, the Judeo-Christian God gives a similar self-presentation and a similar demonstration of power in support of his chosen one.²²⁰ Both deities present themselves as being powerful. Aššur proclaims 'Let them see (it) and praise me, (knowing) that I am Aššur, lord of the gods', whilst in Isaiah 45, God continually declares his status as Lord; 'And there is no God apart from me, a righteous God and a Saviour; there is none but me'.²²¹ The supreme deity of the Assyrians and the only deity of the Judeo-Christians both present themselves as being mighty and all-powerful. Surely this is not a surprising thing? One might expect similar self-presentation in comparable

²²⁰ Parpola 1997: XIX; Isaiah 45

²²¹ K 2401, 22-26; Isaiah 45.21-22

prophecies from other cultures. Gods at the head of polytheistic cultures and monotheistic deities will present themselves as superior to all others because that is their nature. Likewise, the show of power in both texts is entirely unsurprising. Deities will be seen as using their power to protect their 'chosen ruler', especially if this ruler has been having problems claiming their throne as Esarhaddon had. This is both a method of legitimising one's rule and of portraying the gods as righteous and concerned with the 'proper' way of ruling. If the rule of a king was seen as being divinely ordained, then it was necessary to show that the gods wanted the 'right' person to rule to ensure that divine ordination continued to be accepted by the people of the kingdom.

Parpola states that the collection of oracles that make up K 2401²²² blend the identities of Aššur and Ištar in an 'unexpected and absolutely baffling way'. The main proof of this claim is that four of the oracles are identified as being spoken by Ištar, whilst the fifth seems to be Aššur's personal response to a plea by Esarhaddon. Parpola argues that oracle 3.3 is the centre of the "covenant tablet of Aššur"²²³ and therefore is the essence of this covenant. For Parpola, the fact that Ištar concludes

²²² An extract of this prophecy can be found in Appendix II.

²²³This is how Parpola refers to K 2401 within his commentary

the covenant between the gods and Esarhaddon implies, 'unquestionably', that Ištar and Aššur were seen as identical by the prophet.²²⁴ Lines 12-15 of the oracle make it clear that the "covenant of Aššur" was brokered by Ištar and it is referred to as being between Ištar and her 'fathers and brothers'.²²⁵ It does not follow that Ištar and Aššur were viewed as being identical. In oracle 3.3, Aššur speaks of how he heard Esarhaddon's cry and slaughtered his enemies.²²⁶ There is no mention of a future promise to continue to defend the king, though the idea is present throughout K 2401. This collection of oracles could be examples of how the gods have helped Esarhaddon in the past, for example Aššur's assistance in 3.3 and Ištar's assistance in 3.5 in conjunction with a covenant between the gods generally and Ištar on behalf of Esarhaddon. As previously discussed, Ištar was seen as having a special relationship with the royal family. It is therefore logical that she would be the deity to intercede with the wider pantheon on behalf of her king. It is possible that Aššur was viewed as one of the 'fathers' which Ištar makes the covenant with, rather than the two deities were viewed as one being. If this was the case then Parpola's later query

²²⁴ Parpola 1997: XX

²²⁵ K 2401, II 35

²²⁶ K 2401, II 14, 22

of how two gods can appear as identical and distinct in one text is irrelevant.²²⁷ They do not appear here as identical beings, so the question is removed. This also means that Parpola's later argument on the Assyrian concept of God needs extensive rethinking.²²⁸

Parpola also states, with no clarification or further explanation, that oracle 3.3 'powerfully recalls' Psalm 18. The two share the same theme of a deity, either Aššur or the Judeo-Christian God, being successfully appealed to for assistance by a mortal worshipper.²²⁹ Both deities rain hailstones and fire upon the enemies of their supplicant.²³⁰ There the similarities appear to end. I doubt very much that any scholar would agree that this particular oracle 'powerfully recalls' Psalm 18. There are certain similarities but no more so than one would expect from a prophecy involving a mortal cry for help and a vengeful deity.

²²⁷ Parpola 1997: XX

²²⁸ Parpola 1997: XXI-XXVI

²²⁹ K 2401, II 10-14; Psalm 18.6-7

²³⁰ K 2401, II 14-22; Psalm 18.12

4.2 Characters of Prophecy

Each of these prophecies was written by a real person for a very specific purpose. It is not always possible to discern a clear purpose or personality from ancient texts, however nine of the prophecies discussed by Parpola were written by four prophets, making specific details easier to identify. Through these prophecies we can identify personal areas of interest on the part of the prophet as well as common themes running through the prophecies as a corpus. These two areas will be fairly well intertwined and may be hard to separate. It may not be possible to identify whether a specific general theme, such as the safety of the king, is of widespread personal interest to the prophets or if they were merely following a formula. An attempt shall be made to identify these formulaic themes as distinct from the personal concerns of the individual prophets, though this may not always be possible.

Dunnaša-amur, one of these four prophets, will not be examined as one of her two prophecies only remains in a fragmentary form.

4.2.1 *Sinqiša-amur of Arbela*

From reading her prophecies²³¹, it is clear that Sinqiša-amur is very concerned with the safety of the king and his rule. In both prophecies she talks about putting enemies in neck-stocks and having vassals bring tribute to Esarhaddon.²³² If we assume that the deity speaking in K 12033 is also Ištar, then some general statements can be made about the tone of these prophecies. It seems likely that the deity in K 12033 is Ištar. Sinqiša-amur explicitly names Ištar of Arbela in K 4310 as the speaker to Esarhaddon, which makes it likely that the speaker in K 12033 is Ištar of Arbela as it is also addressed to Esarhaddon. The close relationship with Esarhaddon that the speaker refers to makes this possibility even more likely. The speaker is referred to as Esarhaddon's 'father and mother' and professes a kind of ownership and protection of the king.²³³ This is in line with how many of the other prophecies refer to the relationship between Esarhaddon and Ištar. A prophet discussed later, La-Dagil-Ili writes of Ištar referring to herself as 'a winged bird ov[er its *young*]' in relation to Esarhaddon.²³⁴ In a prophecy from Urkittu-Šarrat, Ištar calls

²³¹ Prophecies by Sinqiša-amur can be found in Appendix III.

²³² K 4310, ii 2-8; K 12033, iii 21-26

²³³ K 12033, 26, 29-35

²³⁴ K 12033, ii 6-11

Esarhaddon 'my king' and in a prophecy by an unknown prophet, Ištar declares that she was Esarhaddon's midwife and wet-nurse.²³⁵

By emphasising this closeness between Esarhaddon and Ištar, Sinqiša-amur makes it clear that Ištar favours Esarhaddon and his rule. This emphasis on the relationship between king and goddess, when combined with the theme of protecting the king and slaughtering his enemies could reflect a general concern amongst the population of the stability for Esarhaddon's rule. An unstable rule would have led to possible revolts or invasions which would have affected the lives of ordinary people. A stable rule meant that life would have continued as normal and would have been far preferable. It may also be a reflection of the acceptable way to write prophecies. Alternatively, Sinqiša-amur may have simply believed that she was a mouthpiece of an Ištar who supported Esarhaddon. Other oracles which mention Ištar defeating the king's enemies include K 4310, and five other prophecies in the K 12033 collection.²³⁶ It is important to note that whilst the theme of vanquishing the king's enemies is prolific, these prophecies were all written about Esarhaddon so it is possible that the conflict that occurred at the start of his reign coloured many of the

²³⁵ K 12033, ii 32; K 4310, iii 15-23

²³⁶ K 4310, i 18, ii 2-8; K 12033, i 10-12, 22

prophecies addressed to him.

4.2.2 Bayâ, son of Arbela

Bayâ²³⁷ is more concerned with emphasising Esarhaddon's support from the gods as a wider group than just Ištar. Ištar is mentioned by name only once, in K 4310 and even that mention is in the wider context of a prophecy from two other named deities. This could be because Bayâ as an individual may have felt less of a personal connection to Ištar than some of the other prophetesses. It may also have been that Bayâ thought that Esarhaddon would benefit more from the support of the one hundred and twenty gods that are envisioned as surrounding him than the very enthusiastic support of Ištar that is shown in other prophecies.²³⁸

Parpola also notes the similarities in terms of the theme of 'sixty gods' and the phrase 'the future shall be like the past', which occur in both oracles.²³⁹ This phrase could allude to potential dynastic expectations of Esarhaddon and his successors. In this context, the future imitating the past appears to refer to the care the gods have taken over Esarhaddon's safety and the stability of his rule, which would, presumably, be extended to the rule of his descendants.

²³⁷ Please see Appendix IV for prophecies by Bayâ of Arbela.

²³⁸ K 4310, i 4-28, iii 7-V 10

²³⁹ K 4310, ii 34-40; K 12033, 26-30

4.2.3 *La-Dagil-Ili*

Out of the three prophets examined, *La-Dagil-Ili*²⁴⁰ is most concerned with illustrating Ištar's personal concern with the king. Esarhaddon's personal safety, as opposed to the safety of his rule, is mentioned in both of these oracles. Ištar declares that she will 'sniff out' Esarhaddon's enemies within his palace, which can be linked to the fear of Esarhaddon being poisoned.²⁴¹ If there are enemies within the palace then fear for the king's safety becomes even more heightened as the identity of these individuals may not be known, making it easier for them to harm the king through covert means. Ištar's declared 'presence' within the palace shows a more personal dimension to the protection of the goddess than some of the more formulaic statements of defeating enemies on the battlefield, for example the defeat of enemies found in K 4310, I 4-18.

In connection with Esarhaddon's personal safety, *La-Dagil-Ili* also mentions in both prophecies the safety of his family, in terms of the rule of his descendants. Ištar reassures Esarhaddon that his 'son and grandson' will rule after him.²⁴² This theme of stability of the ruling family occurs throughout the prophecies, including in the

²⁴⁰ Please see Appendix V for prophecies by *La-Dagil-Ili*.

²⁴¹ K 12033, ii 6-11; K 4310, vi 19-31

²⁴² K 12033, ii 11-15; K 4310, vi 19-31

prophecies authored by Bayâ. Whilst La-Dagil-Ili expresses it in a particular way, it is obviously a concern for more than this one prophet and as such could be considered a more general theme rather than being of specific personal interest.

The collection of prophecies in 'The Covenant of Aššur' is also attributable to La-Dagil-Ili. Again, this further emphasises Ištar's relationship with Esarhaddon. Ištar makes an agreement with the gods on behalf of Esarhaddon.²⁴³ As well as protecting Esarhaddon from enemies within his own palace, Ištar is effectively protecting him from the future ill-will of the gods. Enemies within Esarhaddon's palace are again mentioned and Ištar makes it clear that they will be or have been punished.²⁴⁴ One further common theme between this prophecy and the rest of La-Dagil-Ili's is the idea of Ištar rebuking Esarhaddon for a lack of faith. In both K 2401 and K 4310 Ištar gently upbraids Esarhaddon for apparently doubting her support and in K 2401 she reminds him more vigorously that he has neglected her cult, despite the assistance she has given him.²⁴⁵ This displeasure aimed at the king is somewhat unusual in the prophecy texts as they are often more protective in nature. Therefore it is possible that La-Dagil-Ili was working to a personal agenda for the good of the cult of Ištar. He

²⁴³ K 2401, ii 33-iii 15

²⁴⁴ K 2401, iv 22-30

²⁴⁵ K 2401, 18-31; K 4310, 3-12

reminds the king of the good Ištar and her cult has done for him and uses the displeasure of Ištar as a means of furthering her cult.

4.3 Conclusion

Parpola's claims of Assyrian monotheism, whilst daring and new, have been roundly rejected by the academic community, in no small part due to his lack of evidence and excessive assumptions. Despite having been criticised, few reviews have looked at the evidence he cited in much detail and this work has attempted to go over the majority of the evidence with a critical eye. Several of the oracles in the corpus were authored by three specific prophets. The personal concerns, or the concerns that they felt Ištar had, can be deduced from recurring themes within their oracles. Sinqiša-amur reports oracles that are concerned with the safety of the king, Esarhaddon, and the stability of his rule. Bayâ emphasises the support the gods as a group have for Esarhaddon, rather than just Ištar and La-Dagil-Ili's oracles show an Ištar more closely concerned about the king than either of the other two. The main concern in these oracles is for the personal safety of the king, rather than his rule. The final section of this study concludes the work and highlights the most important elements out of those previously discussed.

CONCLUSION

This investigation has demonstrated the complexity of Ištar through examination of a variety of ancient sources. She seems to have played a role in almost every aspect of life, though the most prominent ones remain those of sexual love and war. The sheer scale of textual sources that are directly connected with her make it clear that she was both a popular and important goddess. Her extensive role in mythology attests a wide-spread popularity and the texts which connect her with the royal family show her political importance. Her close relationship with the king means that her cult would have been a powerful force that would have had a significant influence over the king and the rule of the empire, as can be seen from the amount of oracular instruction that the king received from Ištar's priesthood.

By juxtaposing these texts in a way which has not occurred previously, Ištar's diversity can be recognised as an overriding theme, which the people of Mesopotamia were well aware of. The use of these texts allows us to see recurring patterns which have been previously overlooked, as has been explored above.

Agushaya shows just how central strife was to Ištar's personality. It emphasises that Ištar is not just the goddess of war. She creates disorder and

conflict on a personal level as is manifestly recognised in *Enki and the World Order* and this can be seen through her antagonistic relationship with the other deities, including Ea. The poem may end with Ištar calming down but her creation of discord is still central to the poem. Šaltu may disappear, but as the embodiment of Ištar's discord, Šaltu has not been unmade but reabsorbed into Ištar's character. The goddess has merely learnt some self-restraint. Her essential character has not changed, as can be seen from her continued portrayals in the mythology as a hostile figure.

Agushaya also shows that the gods' interactions with each other are far from smooth. They are not calm and peaceful; they fight with each other and become impatient in exactly the same way that humans relate to one another. *Agushaya* also stands alone from the other texts examined in this work as it is the only one which actually mocks Ištar. She is feared, adored and praised in the rest of the sources and *Agushaya* has a less-than-reverent attitude. It is not overly obvious, but aspects such as Ištar's derisive comments about Šaltu, an entity who is similar enough to Ištar to be mistaken for her, show that this text takes her less seriously than the hymns,

prayers and prophecies.²⁴⁶

The hymns and prayers examined in Chapter Three exemplify some of the more usual ways in which people interacted with their gods. They show clear attempts at syncretisation, not only in *A Syncretistic Prayer to Ištar*. This makes it clear that syncretisation is not a modern concept or an attempt to clarify ancient confusion by modern scholars, but something which interested ancient society.

A Syncretistic Hymn shows an attempt to organise the view of Ištar and the Mesopotamian pantheon in a very unequivocal fashion, using a large number of other names and goddesses. The structure includes what seems to be a verse structure with couplets linked thematically. The majority of lines refer to her links with battle but her astral form is also widely referred to. Unusually, Ištar is referred to as both Ninlil and Enlil, apparently as a reference to her liminal gender. She is also portrayed as being superior to the other gods, an unsurprising assertion in a hymn dedicated to her. Ištar is systematically and comprehensively linked to all major areas of life, those being the universe (seen in her astral form), the heavens (superiority over the gods), the earth (concern with human affairs) and the underworld (syncretism with Ereshkigal). She is shown as being engaged with all aspects of life,

²⁴⁶*Agushaya*, II ii 9

both human and divine.

The Great Prayer to Ištar requests assistance from Ištar. Such prayers are a well-known form of communication to the gods. The speaker of the prayer attempts to persuade Ištar to help him through flattering her. This also has some small syncretistic effort and shows that syncretising Ištar with other deities was not an uncommon practise. The prayer has a different purpose to *A Syncretistic Hymn*, but it still uses multiple names for Ištar. These include the name 'Guše'a', which is used for associations with war, as it is in *A Syncretistic Hymn*. Clearly, specific names could be used for Ištar based on the capacity she appeared in. A strong theme running through the text is that of Ištar as a merciful deity. This is linked to her capacity as ruler which can be seen in other texts, including *A Syncretistic Hymn* but Ištar is placed in a position of judgement, instead of just ruler. This is a somewhat unusual placement and is linked strongly to the purpose of the prayer.

The *Hymn to the Ištar of Nineveh and Arbela* shows that at least one king viewed the Ištar of Nineveh and Arbela as separate goddesses, with distinct actions. The hymn shows a clear link between the life of Aššurbanipal and the goddesses. In contrast to *The Great Prayer*, this text is voiced by a named royal, rather than an

unnamed, unremarked individual. The focus is placed almost as much on Aššurbanipal and his deeds, even though they are glorifying the goddesses, as it is on the Ištar. The two previous texts all but exclude the individual in favour of celebrating the goddess. In *The Great Prayer* the addressee is in the background of the text whilst in *A Syncretistic Hymn* the addressee is not mentioned. The *Hymn to the Ištar of Nineveh and Arbela* shows the king engaging the major aspects of his life with Ištar. There are common themes with the previous hymns, namely rulership, the goddesses' superiority and war but there is a major difference in how Ištar is portrayed. In this hymn and within the prophecy texts, Ištar is portrayed as a maternal figure. The depiction of Ištar as a patroness is apparently restricted to the king and the protective streak is somewhat out of character with her representation in other sources.

The prophecies in Chapter Four have been used by Parpola to produce some fascinating theories. Unfortunately, his theories are not backed up suitably by the evidence he provides from the texts, despite his assertions to the contrary. There is some small argument to be made for a continuity of tradition between Assyrian religion and Christianity, but to argue that Assyrian religion was both monotheistic

and a forerunner of Christianity is simply not viable. His arguments have failed to convince other academics and where alternative explanations have been offered they appear to be more credible and obviously plausible than Parpola's theories.

The prophecies show an exceptionally close link between the cult of Ištar and the royal family. There seems to have been near-continual communication between the two and Ištar's support and advice was obviously valued by the Assyrian kings. The characters of the prophets and prophetesses show some discrete, as well as general concerns and it can be seen that these were real individuals who served both the cult of Ištar as well as the best interests of the king. The interests of the prophets serve as a filter through which we view the relationship between goddess and king. The vested interest the prophets would have had for showing Ištar's concern for the king must be taken into account when reading these texts, but it must be understood that these prophecies truly were viewed by both prophets and king as communication from Ištar. A close relationship between Ištar and the king would have benefitted the cult, and therefore the prophets, greatly, but this does not mean that oracles were made-up to benefit the cult of Ištar.

The variety of texts examined shows recurring themes in the communication

between Ištar and humanity. As discussed above, she was revered under a variety of names which are sometimes directly connected with specific incarnations. Whilst the majority of references to her involve strife of some kind, she is associated widely with her astral incarnation, as well as being viewed as a ruler in a variety of settings. It has been demonstrated that the image of Ištar as a motherly figure was reserved for the royal family, specifically for the king. This comes through strongly in both the *Hymn to the Ištars of Nineveh and Arbela* as well as in the prophecy texts. Ištar does not seem to have been viewed as a mother by any other individuals.

Ištar's complexity has been shown above. Her involvement in so many aspects of life and her contradictory nature is borne out in the textual evidence. She is both goddess of order and disorder, of love and war and of men and women. This multiple dichotomy was central to her status and power.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1, The *Agushaya* Poem

Tablet I

i

- 1 Let me praise the greatest one, the warrior among the gods,
 2 The daughter of Ningal's might and fame let me extol!
 3(5)²⁴⁷ Ištar, the greatest one, the warrior among the gods,
 4 The daughter of Ningal, let me tell of her might!
 5(10) Her grandeur is manifest, her ways hard to fathom,
 6 She is always in battle, cunning is her str[atagem].

(several lines lost)

ii

- 1(1) She dances around gods and kings in her manliness.
 2 She is the preeminent of goddesses,
 3(5) The praises of Ištar let me sing!
 4 She holds in her grasp all divine authority,
 5 She bestows it wherever she wills.
 6(10) Ištar holds in her grasp the leadline of the peoples,
 7 Her goddesses h[eed] her [command].

(several lines lost)

²⁴⁷ Line numbers within brackets refer to the line numbers given in Foster 1996. These will be used for in-text references in the form (*Agushaya ...*). Line numbers outside brackets are used for textual analysis in the present work.

iii

- 1(1) Young men are hacked off as if for spear poles.
 2 There is a certain hero, she is unique,
 3(5) Ištār is surpassing, she knows how to smite down.
 4 Her celebration is the melee, staging the dance of battle:
 5 She comes to grips with heroes, taking none by the hang,
 6(10) She leads off with the most valorous.
 7 Ištār celebration is the melee, staging the dance of battle:
 8 She comes to grips with heroes, taking none by the hand,
 9 She leads off with the most valorous.
 10(15) Frenzy in battle, pas[sion] in strife,
 11 Were shown forth as [her] portion.

(twenty-six lines lost)

iv

- 1(1) The royal sceptre, the throne, the tiara,
 2 Are given to her, all of them are her due,
 3 He gave her bravery, fame, and might,
 4(5) He surrounded her in abundance with lightning bolts flashing.
 5 Once again he added to her uncanny frightfulness,
 6 He had made her wear awesome radiance, ghastliness, valour –
 7(10) As for her, she felt that valour,
 8 In her heart she schemed battle,
 9 In the dwelling of the leader, Ea, look out for her terror!

- 10(15) She is more fearsome than a bull, her clamour like its raging,
 11 In her might she set forth, turning not a hair,
 12(20) At her uproar, Ea, the wise god, became afraid,
 13 Ea became enraged with her.
 14 “Hear [me, Great Gods!...]
 15 “Ištar is wary []
 16(25) “[].”

(several lines lost)

v

- 1 “She []
 2 “Let her be trusty [], let her have muscle,
 3(5) “Let her raise riot, be always ready to fight.
 4 “Let her be fierce,
 5 “Let her hair [be ex]traordinary,
 6 “More [luxu]riant than an orchard.
 7 “Let her be strong of frame,
 8(10) “Let her complain, she must be strong,
 9 “Let her gasp for breath, she shall not tire,
 10 “Let her not hold back her cry day nor night, let her rage!”
 11(15) (The gods) assembled, debated, they could not do it.
 12 They replied these words to the leader Ea,
 13 “You are the one suited to do this thing.
 14(20) “Who else could bring about what you cannot?”

- 15 He heeded the words they answered him,
 16 Ea the wise scraped out seven times
 17(25) The dirt of his nails,
 18 He took spittle(?) in his hand,
 19 Ea the wise has created Şaltu.
 20(30) God Ea has straightaway set to his task,
 21 He is making Şaltu that she fight with Iştar!
 22(35) She is powerful in her form, monstrous in her proportions,
 23 She is artful as none could rival, she is a fighter.
 24(40) Discord is her form, monstrous are her proportions,
 25 She is artful as none could rival, she is a fighter.
 26 Her flesh is battle, the melee her hair.

vi

(several lines lost)

- 1 She is surpassing []
 2 She is fierce []
 3(5) She has extraordinary strength []
 4 Şaltu is girded with combat for clothes,
 5 Her clamour is born of a deluge,
 6(10) She is strange, terrifying for behold!
 7 Raging, she takes her stand in the midst of the depths,
 8 The words that come from her mouth go around about her.
 9 Ea the lord made ready to speak,

- 10(15) To her, to Şaltu, whom he created, he says,
11 “Keep quiet, listen,
12 “Pay heed to what I say, hear my orders,
13(20) “What I tell you, do!
14 “There is a certain goddess,
15 “Whose greatness is surpassing, beyond all goddesses,
16 “Strange and cunning is her (handi)wo[rk].
17(25) “[Her name] is Irnina, she is [mighty] in mail,
18 “The supreme lady, the capable one, daughter of Ningal.
19(30) “I have created you to humiliate her:
20 “In my cleverness I gave you your stature, valour and might in abundance.
21(35) “Now be off, go off to her private quarters!
22 “You should be girded with awful splendour.
23 “Bring her out, ‘You there!’
24 “She will rush out(?) to you, she will speak to you,
25(40) “She will demand: ‘Now then, woman, explain your behaviour!’
26 “But you, though she be furious, show no respect to her,
27(45) “Answer her never a word to ease her feelings.
28 “What advantage shall she have of you?
29 “You are the creature of my power!
30 “Speak out proudly what is on your tongue,
31 “And as much again before her.”

vii

- 1 ...has Şaltu taken her stand
- 2 While Ea, in the midst of the depths, gives her might.
- 3 So the Extraordinary of Form dispatched Şaltu,
- 4 Drove her to insults, contempt, and Calumny,
- 5(10) Ea the wise, whose reasoning is extraordinary,
- 6 Goes on to put yet a word (right) to her feelings.
- 7 The sign of Iřtar the queen he gives her,
- 8(15) "It is Iřtar, indeed, she is braver than all other goddesses!"
- 9 He makes her know her grandeur, he well described to her that prideful
- self,
- 10 This lest she avoid her later.
- 11(20) "She is the divine princess, her commands are mighty,
- 12 "She is the mistress whose(?) way none has barred.

(gap, traces only)

- 13 "...she is surpassing
- 14 "...she is unique in herself.
- 15 "She is grander than you are, stir no step abroad!"

viii

(gap)

- 1 "Her [fury] and anger, like the welling-up of the sea, will overcome you,
- 2 "Your speech will ...,
- 3(24) [Inscrutable] are the ways of the capable mistress of the people!"

- 4 Şaltu flew into a rage, her face altered horribly,
 5 She turned, and she was lordly(?),
 6 [] like a fugitive,
 7 [] ... truth
 8 [] ...
 9 [] ... did not know.

Tablet II

i

- 1(1) “Come now []
 2 “Give a command []
 3 “Pepeare []
 4(5) “In this way(?) [] the signs of her strength,
 5 “Find out all about her, learn of her haunts,
 6 “Bring me her signs, recount to me her behaviour.”
 7(10) The giver of orders, the tried-and-true Ninshubur,
 8 Wise, strong, []
 9 ... he[ro],
 10 He went out to the [de]pth(?),
 11(15) He went along to [] to face her,
 12 He looked twice when he s[a]w the exceedingly great one!
 13 He feel silent, ...
 14 He examined her form:
 15(20) “She is b-bizarre in her actions,

- 16 “She b-behaves unreasoningly...,
 17 “In her form she is [m-mighty],
 18 “She is adorned with a-awesomeness,
 19(25) “I-in her onslaught she is t-terrible,
 20 “She is [mur[derous, bullying, vicious,
 21 “Has the young man and the maid ...
 22 “[] clamour.”
 22 So did she learn her sign.

li

(gap)

- 1 Angrily the most capable of the gods, the all-powerful, tool (the sign),
 2 Proudly in her might, fiercely she drew herself up.
 3(15) The warrior Ištar, the most capable of the gods, the all-powerful,
 4 Proudly in her might, fiercely she drew herself up!
 5(20) In her greatness she grinds up her enemies,
 6 She turns not back, she is the greatest among goddesses,
 7 She is ..., like a young man!
 8(25) She says a word, proudly she speaks,
 9 “These are the signs of her might!?”

(iii, iv, v?)

(large gap)

vi?

- 1(1) Agu[shaya]

- 2 The Capable [Lady,]
 3 To Ea [did say,]
 4(5) “Why did you create [Şaltu?] against me,
 5 “Who is [] of mouth,
 6 “... []
 7 “The da[ughter of Ningal] is unique,

(fragmentary lines, then gap)

vii

- 1(1) “You made [her] enormity,
 2 “Şaltu has set [her] cla[mour] against me.
 3 “Let her return to her lair!”
 4(5) Ea made ready to speak and said to Agushaya, hero of the gods,
 5 “As soon as you said it, then I certainly did it.
 6(10) “You were driving me to it and cause delight at your having done with this.
 7 “The reason Şaltu was made and created is
 8 “That people of future days might know about us.
 9(15) “Let it be yearly,
 10 “Let a whirling dance be established among the feast days of the year.
 11 “Look about at all the people!
 12 “Let them dance in the street,
 13(20) “Hear their clamour!
 14 “See for yourself the intelligent things they do,
 15 “Learn (now) their motivation.

- 16 “As for the king who heard (from me?)
 17(25) “This song, your praise, the sign of your valour,
 18 “Hammurabi, in whose reign
 19 “This song, this my praise of you(?), was made,
 20 “May he be granted life forever!”

viii

(gap)

- 1 Let me praise Ištar, queen of the gods,
 2 Agushaya’s might, as the Capable Lady [],
 3(15) (As for) rapacious(?)Šaltu, strange of splendour,
 4 Whom Ea the leader created,
 5 The signs of her might I/he
 6 Made all of the people hear,
 7(20) I/He have made fair her glorification.
 8 I/He gave her fame worth of her.
 9 The lioness Ištar quieted, her heart was appeased.

Translated by B. R. Foster, found in *Before the Muses: An Anthology of Akkadian Literature*, 2005.

Appendix II, An extract of K 2401, 'The Covenant of Aššur'

K 2401

Column II

- 10 Now then, these traitors provoked you, had you banished, and surrounded you; but you opened your mouth (and cried): "Hear me, O Aššur!"
- 14 I heard your cry. I issued forth as a fiery glow from the gate of heaven, to hurl down fire and have it devour them.
- 18 You were standing in their midst, so I removed them from your presence. I drove them up the mountain and rained (hail)stones and fire of heaven upon them.
- 22 I slaughtered your enemies and filled the river with their blood. Let them see (it) and praise me, (knowing) that I am Aššur, lord of the gods.
- 26 This is the well-being (placed) before the Image.
- 27 This covenant tablet of Aššur enters the king's presence on a *cushion*. Fragrant oil is sprinkled, sacrifices are made, incense is burnt, and they read it out in the king's presence.
- 33 The word of Ištar of Arbela to Esarhaddon, king of Assyria:
- 35 Come, gods, my fathers and brothers, [enter] the cove[nant.....]

(Break)

Column III

- 2 [She *placed*] a slice...on the [ter]race and gave them water from a cooler to drink. She filled a flagon of one seah with water from the cooler and gave it to them with the words:

- 7 “In your hearts you say, ‘Ištar is slight,’ and you will go to your cities and districts, eat (your) bread and forget this covenant.
- 12 “(But when) you drink from this water, you will remember me and keep this covenant which I have made on behalf of Esarhaddon.”

Translated by S. Parpola, found in *The State Archives of Assyria, Volume IX, Assyrian Prophecies*, 1997

Appendix III, The Prophecies of Sinqiša-amur of Arbela

K 4310

Column I

30 King of Assyria, have no fear! I will deliver up the enemy of the king of Assyria for slaughter. [I will] keep you safe and [*make*] you [*great in*] your Palace of Succession.

36 I am the Gr[*eat Lady*. I am Ištar o]f Arbela

38 [.....] from *his* midst

(*break*)

Column II

2 What [.....] I would not have heard you? [The enemies...] in neckst[ocks, [the vassals] under tribu[te]; I defea[ted] your enemy in a single [*encounter*].

8 I have given you faith, I do not sit (idle)!

9 By the mouth of the woman Sinqiša-amur of Arbela.

K 12033 + 82-5-22, 527

Column III

19 Esarhaddon, have no fear! I will put Assyria in order and reconcile the angry gods with Assyria.

21 I will pull away the *cover* of your enemies and shed the blood of my king's enemies. I will protect my king; I will bring enemies in neckstocks and vassals with tribute before his feet.

26 I am your father and mother. I raised you between my wings; I will see your

success.

29 Have no fear, Esarhaddon! I will place you between my arm and forearm. In
woe I will vanquish the enemies of my king. I will put Assyria in order, I will
put the kin[gdom of] heaven in order. [...]

35 [t]he sunri[se.....]

36 [the sunse]t [.....]

(break)

Appendix IV, The Prophecies of Bayâ, son of Arbela

K 4310

Column II

- 16 Fear not, Esarhaddon!
- 17 I am Bel. (Even as) I speak to you, I watch over the beams of your heart.
- 20 When your mother gave birth to you, sixty great gods stood with me and protected you. Sin was at your right side, Šamaš at your left;
- 25 Sixty great gods were standing around you and girded your loins.
- 27 Do not trust in man. Lift up your eyes, look to me! I am Ištar of Arbela; I reconciled Aššur with you. When you were small, I took you with me. Do not fear; praise me!
- 34 What enemy has attacked you while I remained silent? The future shall be like the past. I am Nabû, lord of the stylus. Praise me!
- 40 By the mouth of the woman Bayâ, 'son' of Arbela.

K 12033 (unpub.) + 82-5-22, 527

Column I

- 15 [Have no fe]ar, Esarhaddon!
- 16 [Like a] skilled pilot [I will st]eer [the ship] into a good port. [The fu]ture [shall] be like the past; [I will go] around you and protect you.
- 20 [The watch over] the lands is very strong. [Sixty gods are standing at] my [right side], sixty gods at my left.

- 22 Esarhaddon, king of Assyria! I will vanquish yo[ur enemies].
- 24 [.....] I am their lord.
- 25 [.....from] my hand they have received
- 26 [.....] strengthened me
- 27 [.....] Esarhaddon
- 28 [.....]s of the heavens
- 29 [.....] old age
- 30 [.....] I will make him go
- 31 [.....] I will consolidate
- 32 [.....I will l]ight
- 33 [.....the w]ell-being of [Esarhadd]on
- 34 [.....] I will [...].
- 35 [From the mouth of Bay] â of Arbela.

Appendix V, The Prophecies of La-Dagil-Ili

K 4310

Column VI

- 1 [I am the Lady of Arb]ela.
- 3 [O Esarhaddon, whos]e bosom [Ištar] of Arbela has filled with favour! Could you not rely on the previous utterance which I spoke to you? Now you can rely on this later one too.
- 13 Praise me! When daylight declines, let them hold torches! Praise me before them!
- 19 I will banish trembling from my palace. You shall eat safe food and drink safe water, and you shall be safe in your palace. Your son and grandson shall rule as kings on the lap of Ninurta.
- 31 By the mouth of La-Dagil-Ili of Arbela

K 12033

Column I

- 36 [I am the La]dy of Arbela. [Esarhaddon, king of] Assyria, [fear not!]

(break)

Column II

- 1 [*I will annihilate*] whatever enemies you [have]. *As for* [you, stay] in your palace; I will [reconcile] Assyrian with you. I will protect [you] by day and by dawn and [consolidate] your crown.
- 6 Like a winged bird ov[er its *young*] I will twitter over you and go in circles

around you. Like a beautiful (*lion*) cub I will run about in your palace and sniff out your enemies.

11 I will keep you safe in your palace; I will make you overcome anxiety and trembling. Your son and grandson shall rule as kings before Ninurta.

15 I will abolish the frontiers of all the lands and give them to you.

17 Mankind is deceitful; I am one who says and does. I will sniff out, catch and give you the 'noisy daughter'.

21 As for you, praise me! Gather into your innards these words of mine from Arbela:

24 The gods of Esaggil languish in the 'steppe' of mixed evil. Quickly let two burnt offerings be sent out to their presence, and let them go and announce your well-being!

28 From the mouth of La-Dagil-Ili of Arbela.

All prophecy texts were translated by S. Parpola and found in *The State Archives of Assyria, Volume IX, Assyrian Prophecies*, 1997.

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