

DEITIES AND DEMONS

to the objects and areas for which they stand. One instance of an important personification for the entire period of ancient Egyptian history is Maat, the goddess of order in the world and in life; Hapi, god of floodwaters, is another.

The variety of themes is striking. Numerous objects and abstractions connected in the broadest sense to human nourishment could be personified, and so two beer jugs became Menquet and Tenemit, goddesses of beer who were responsible for brewing. They were often depicted in processions of people bearing offerings in the Greco-Roman period. They were accompanied in these processions by other personifications such as Neper, the god of grain, Aqyt (bread), and Hab (fishing and bird catching), to name a few. From this type of personification, it was only a small step to personifying the geographical areas that supplied different kinds of food; thus we find various denominations for fields, canals, and rivers personified in the same processions.

There are also depictions of geographical processions, which in terms of iconography and location (in the lowest register in the temples) are hardly distinguishable from the processions of gift bearers. They include long rows of personifications of the regions of Egypt, frequently divided into four main groups; they are shown in geographical order from south to north, offering products typical of their region to the temple or the main god of the temple. Furthermore, individual toponyms could themselves become objects of veneration; examples include the two personifications of the region on the western bank of the Nile at Thebes: Meresger (She Who Loves Silence) and Cheftethernebes (She Who Faces Her Lord) (a reference to Karnak). An example from a later date is the personification of the Temple of Isis in Dendara, who is shown being honored by the king, just like Hathor or Isis, in a ritual scene on the outer wall of both the *pronaos* and *naos* of the temple of Hathor there.

Still other personifications are derived from the area of religion or the royal palace, as when two whips or the king's beard are portrayed as divine beings. A last important group consists of personifications of abstract concepts, such as the goddess Maat. Other important divinities in this category are Hu, the god of divine utterance, Sia, god of knowledge, and Heka, god of magic, who was venerated as a child-god in the Greco-Roman era at the temple in Esna.

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Mesopotamia

Deities, demons, and personified concepts cannot be assessed without reference to the symbolic and social wholes in which they function. The theoretical perspective can be outlined as follows: religion projects an image of purpose on whatever is beyond human control; the cosmos is the imaginary complement of boundless reality, which it models and explains; gods identify is-

lands of intent, permanent cosmic consciences shaped after their mortal designers and therefore reassuringly communicative; ritual gives form to shared beliefs and commits the individual to the group; myth specifies the essentially ambiguous ritual order and thus may adapt traditional forms to a changing environment. Mesopotamian religion, deities and demons included, is not a monolithic whole, but a social tool changing in step with an increasingly more complex and hierarchical society. From prehistory to the end of the cuneiform tradition, six stages of development can be discerned, defined basically according to the religious justification of power relations and rulership, the variable factor:

1. Prehistoric stage (ca. 4500–3500 BCE). Society is organized into small agricultural villages with little internal or regional stratification; day-to-day behavior is regulated by “rules of tradition” (ME); decision making is structured by the family, focused on an ancestor cult. The myth of the marriage of (father) Heaven (An) and (mother) Earth (Ki) may belong to this early period and affords a mechanism for human and nonhuman fertility; a pantheon of deified cosmic elements (Moon, Sun, Venus) can be assumed, while certain animals were viewed as manifestations of the divine. The cosmos was thought to be regulated by the same type of traditional rules (ME) as society; occasional mishap was imputed to the *azag* demon (infringement of a taboo); and compromised purity was restored by magical means (ablution with holy water).

2. Eridu stage (ca. 3500–2500 BCE). The villages grow into cities, and leadership is no longer based solely on family relations. The gods of nature expand their power to become city gods, anthropomorphic heads of state holding court with spouses and servants in the city's main temple: Inanna (Lady of Heaven) (Venus) in Uruk, UTU (Sun) in Larsa, Nanna (Heavenly Lord) (Moon) in Ur, Enlil (Lord Ether) in Nippur, Ninhursag (Lady of the Wooded Hills) (Mother-goddess) in Kish, to mention the most important. Enki (Lord of the Earth), the god of water and white magic, is seated in Eridu, which has become a “national” religious center, the touchstone of correct behavior (ME), and probably the authority behind the complementary assignment of gods to cities. The actual human ruler derives his right to rule from his relation to the city god: in Uruk he is “married” to Inanna, and as her husband he supervises her dominions, the city, and its inhabitants; elsewhere the ruler is the deity's son or chief tenant (*ensig*).

3. Nippur stage (ca. 2500–1500 BCE). The religious and political regimen developed in the south (Sumer) allows only city-states, while in the tribal north (Akkad) an inheritable regional kingship prevails with wider aspirations. Halfway through the 3rd millennium a northern king, Emenbaragesi of Kish, gives Nippur a privileged national position by calling his new Enlil temple there Urunanum (It Is Indeed the City), and by the Akkad period (2334–2154 BCE) Nippur is correspond-



Cylinder seal of the Akkadian period portraying gods fighting among themselves.
Metropolitan Museum of Art,
Anonymous Loan, 1992.
(L.1992.23.4)

ingly the seat or the divine council, a cosmic capital from where Enlil appoints one of the city gods, who in his turn appoints a king to rule the nation (dynasties of Akkad, Ur, Isin, Larsa, and Babylon). Concomitantly a new concept of cosmic order takes shape, in which the unchangeable “rules of tradition” can be overruled by the “decisions” (NAMTAR) of Enlil, a reconfiguration of cosmic power that reflects the growing ambitions of the national king. During this period the original Sumerian names of the gods are replaced by their Akkadian counterparts: Inanna by Ishtar, UTU by Shamash, Nanna by Suen (later Sin), Ninhursag by Mami, Enki by Ea. Gods (such as Enlil) without counterparts in the Akkadian pantheon retain their ancient names.

4. Babylonian stage (ca. 1500–1000 BCE). During its First Dynasty, Babylon becomes the uncontested capital of the nation. The prevailing political situation has its theological foundation in a reworked creation myth, the *Enuma Elish*, which makes Babylon’s city god Marduk independent of the decisions of Enlil and uncontested ruler of the universe. The remoteness and inscrutability of divine rule leave a spiritual vacuum in which alternative forms of religion give humanity guidance; magic and divination are on the rise, and their practitioners are the sages who compose the wisdom literature.

5. Asshur stage and second Babylonian stage (ca. 1000 BCE). Like the Assyrian and Babylonian kings, the head of the pantheon (Marduk = Assyrian Assur) claims universal power over humankind and nature, a virtual monotheism that is limited only by the pressure of tradition and the local cults of the ancient city gods. The official pantheon consists of a handful of deities, who in learned texts may be represented as aspects of the supreme deity.

The main trend in the development of the pantheon is a shift from many deified phenomena to a few divine rulers over the same phenomena and a concomitant shift in the way that divine power is manifested. The most primitive (and longest lasting) notion is that of an awe-inspiring sheen that radiates from a phenomenon

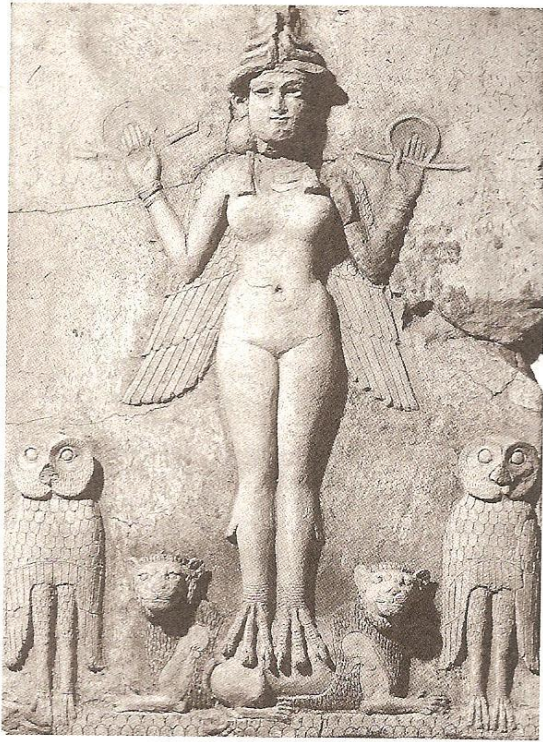
and reveals it as divine. Related concepts are those of the day on which the god reveals himself and, more anthropomorphically based, of his throne, his weapon, or his word; most of these can be personified and function as minor gods in the deity’s court: viziers, messengers, executioners. Wise gods such as Ea and Marduk may use their knowledge of spells to operate the universe.

Our major sources of information about the pantheon are lists of gods, the earliest of which date to the second half of the 3rd millennium. Some of these are scholarly products, others are related to the cult (litanies or records of offerings). Most of the myths, hymns, and prayers are related to cult as well, but are hard to date or situate because of their literary transmission, which divorces them from any certain context. Royal inscriptions may cite any number of gods and have the advantage of being firmly dated, but have the disadvantage of being biased in favor of centralistic views. The impression of confusion that prevails in the sources is due mainly to their covering a long time scale, their haphazard updating, and an unknown degree of inexplicit reinterpretation.

Cosmic order. Explanation in Mesopotamia is not logical deduction from principles, but historical derivation from origins; cosmogony accordingly is the proper method to set out the divine order imposed on the universe. Besides the myth of the marriage of heaven and earth, Mesopotamia produced two subsequent cosmogonies, the second a thoroughly reworked version of the first.

In the earlier cosmogony the first principle is a primeval ocean, Namnam (Creatrix), the “mother who gave birth to [unseparated] Heaven-Earth.” Inside Heaven-Earth a latent cosmos comes into being, the Enki and Ninki (Lords and Ladies Earth), who produce the (lord and lady) Dukug (Holy Mound), from which, subsequently, Enlil is born. By his very nature Enlil (Lord Ether) separates Heaven and Earth and establishes the known cosmos; at the same time, the frayed edge around the lowlands comes into being in the form of

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Winged female with bird talons, perhaps the goddess Inanna, the underworld aspect of Ishtar, or perhaps the demoness Lilith (Lilith). Babylonian, 1800–1750 BCE. British Museum. *The Art Archive/Eileen Tweedy*

Enlil's sister and wife, the Lady of the Wooded Hills (Ninhursag). The only struggle that takes place is the one that establishes Enlil's rule (*namtar*) over the mechanical cosmos of the ME, represented by Enlil's ancestor Enmeshara (Lord of all ME).

The basic source for this mythological scheme is a (variable) list of "fathers and mothers of Enlil" that functioned in an ancestor rite for the gods in the month Dukug (Akkadian Tashritu [beginning]). A close variant is the Egyptian cosmogony with a primeval ocean (Nawnaw, Nun), a primeval mound (*beriben*), and a separation of Heaven and Earth by Air (Shu).

The later cosmogony is given form in a highly regarded mythological poem, *Enuma Elish*. The first element is a cosmic ocean containing female saltwater (Tiamat [Sea]), male sweetwater (Apsu), and a creative principle Kummu. After a series of generations the cosmic gods are born: Anu (Heaven), his son Ea, and his son Marduk. The older gods (i.e., the latent, sleeping universe) object to the noise (liveliness) of the younger gods and try to destroy them. Marduk, the champion of the younger gods, defeats Tiamat in a cosmic battle and is rewarded by his peers with everlasting cosmic rulership. He separates Heaven and Earth by splitting Tiamat's body, then installs the heavenly bodies and

fixes their functions. In accordance with the general trend, the cosmos in this view does not *come* into being by the birth of the gods that represent the phenomena, but is *brought* into being by the conscious act of a creator whose power extends over the phenomena.

After the cosmos is finished, the "dead" or "bound" gods of the latent protocosmos remain as divine but inactive elements of the contemporary world (Tiamat, saltwater; Apsu, sweetwater; and Enmeshara, Lord of all ME); this scheme is current also in Egypt and Anatolia. Remarkably, Mesopotamian cosmogony lacks an underworld of the dead. Ereshkigal (Queen of the Big Earth) and her son Ninazu (Lord Healer) belong to a group of chthonic gods concerned with growth and decay; the "big earth" that they rule is the ground underfoot, where dead bodies decompose. At least in one view, the souls of the dead travel through the desert to a cosmic river in the west, opposite of which lies their final destination, the Big City, ruled by Nergal (Lord of the Big City). In the 2nd millennium, Ereshkigal becomes Nergal's wife, while their domain was an underworld of the dead (this reformulation may be due to western influence).

Since the cosmogonies depend on sexual reproduction, the resulting cosmos is one big family, the relative importance of its parts being determined by family relationships. In practice, the political importance of a deity may interfere with his or her cosmological relevance, so that the actual genealogies are highly variable.

A human's spiritual being is a composite whole. Aspects of personality are represented by deified external souls, someone's aggressiveness by the male *udug*, his receptivity by the female *lamař; teř* (Akkadian *bařtu* [shame]) denotes one's social presence. The same supernatural qualities are ascribed to buildings (temples) and even to the nation. The contribution of someone's DINGIR (Akkadian *ilu*) is essential, a divine life force that emanates as health, prosperity, and offspring and as such guarantees the continuity of the family. After death a part of the soul turns into a zombielike ghost. A family cult takes care of its demand for food, water, and being remembered.

In accordance with the general trend, the external souls, especially the *ilu*, develop into personal gods who monitor the moral conduct of their private subject and if necessary abandon him or her. Since without personal gods life is virtually impossible, the threat of abandonment keeps the individual on the track of righteous behavior and integrates him or her with the religious and political regimen. The central divine government operates in a similar way: it may emanate minor gods (angels) to implement its decisions and punish misconduct, or it may simply leave the nation to its fate. Humans have a choice, but they must suffer the consequences.

Not all suffering is the consequence of human misconduct and lawful divine retaliation. The protocosmos and the mountains, the periphery where divine rule is in doubt, produce the nameless evil *udug*, lawless bastard

gods without cults, who may overrun the nation, in which they have no stake. The baby-killing demoness Lamashtu can be called their sister; she is thrown out of heaven because of her evil intentions. In the Iron Age (and in Jewish magic) the baby-killing demoness is confounded with Ardat Lili (or Lilitu), the Maiden of the Wind (later understood as She of the Night), a succubus who seduces mortal men; to become such a ghost is the fate of women who die before fulfilling their destiny of love and childbirth. The presumed wicked intentions of unidentified others are personified in the quasidemonic Evil Eye, Enemy, and Witch.

BIBL.: J. Bottéro, *Mesopotamia: Writing, Reasoning, and the Gods* (University of Chicago Press, 1992 [orig. 1987]). T. Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness: A History of Mesopotamian Religion* (Yale University Press, 1976). F.A.M.W.

Syria-Canaan

The deities of Syria-Canaan appear to have originated as manifestations of nature; however, Bronze and Iron Age texts and inscriptions in the region present urbanized adaptations of the divine realm. Although the only



Ivory carving of a goddess, perhaps an Aegean goddess of wild beasts, 14th–13th century BCE. Found near Ras Shamra (Ugarit), Syria. Louvre. *Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, New York*

extensive narrative mythology comes from Ugarit, the Greek essay *On the Syrian Goddess* (ascribed to Lucian), fragments of Philo of Byblos incorporated into the *Preparation for the Gospel* by Eusebius, and the Hebrew Bible provide secondary material. Mesopotamian influence on the pantheon is clear throughout the region; Egyptian influence is most marked along the Mediterranean. The rural and agricultural origins of most deities reflect communities dependent on the fertility of plants and animals; urban populaces conceive of these deities on a royal model with a familial-bureaucratic notion of the governance of the cosmos. In representations, these deities were portrayed as human, sometimes with such symbols of divinity as bovine horns or astral images.

In mythology, a divine pair reigned in heaven over both divine and human realms. For some Syro-Canaanites this couple was El and Asherah, responsible for establishing and maintaining order through a hierarchy understood to extend through all levels of divine and human social structures. Immediately under them, a very active level of deities vied for power among themselves and for the favor of their parents. Beneath these squabbling gods and goddesses were deities who were very gifted in highly specialized areas, but who lacked the leeway allowed their superiors. At the bottom of the divine realm were the messenger-gods, essentially slaves on the divine level.

Demons and deities appear often to have been one and the same, dependent upon whether one was on their good or bad side. Chthonic deities such as Mot, Molech, and Resheph were considered demonic forces of death and disease, but also could be worshiped as useful deities: for example, Resheph as warrior and metallurgist. Amulets and incantations reflect fear of demons' activities in human and animal illnesses, childbirth, warfare, and general bad luck or evil.

The pantheons of the various peoples living in Syria-Canaan shared many deities, but maintained local identities as well. Gods of minor importance in most pantheons could be major, or even patron, deities in others; Chemosh was patron of Moab, but was peripheral elsewhere. Fights among peoples, seasons, weather, and abnormal occurrences of all kinds were described as conflicts among the various deities.

El and Asherah, who had their separate residences, provided the final venue of appeal for deities and humans. El did not actively participate in the direct governance of the world, but would intervene if the second tier of gods let order collapse. Asherah selected her children for

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was Memphis. She is usually shown with the head of a lion and is the goddess of disease, which she can both spread through her messengers and cure.

Seth. Son of Geb and Nut and a member of the ennead of Heliopolis. Seth murders his brother, Osiris, but is later defeated by Horus, the son and legitimate successor of Osiris. In addition Seth plays a positive role as the god of war in the New Kingdom. In the underworld he defeats Apopis, the serpent-shaped opponent of the sun-god.

Thoth. Moon-god. Thoth's two sacred animals are the ibis and the baboon. He was the god of wisdom and writing, who also functioned as the messenger of the gods. The Greeks therefore identified him with Hermes. His chief center of worship was Hermopolis in Middle Egypt.

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An (Akkadian Anum). Heaven, the god who presides, in name, over the divine assembly. An was at home in Uruk, but was not its city god.

Assur. City god of Asshur, in origin nothing more than the deified rock on which his city was built. To give Assur the status he deserved as god of a mighty city, the Assyrians identified him at first with Enlil and later with Marduk.

Enki (Akkadian Ea). Lord of the Earth (Akkadian "the Living One"). Enki presided over an underground domain called *abzu* (Akkadian *apsûm*), the source of sweet waters and the home of supernatural beings such as *lahamu* ("the Hairy One"). In the earliest cosmogony his mother Namma represents the primeval cosmic waters from which everything came forth; in 1st-millennium cosmogony she is replaced by Tiamat (Sea).

Enlil. Lord Ether, the god who organized the world after creation and in fact dominated the divine assembly that met in his city, Nippur. Enlil's son Ninurta (Lord of the Arable Earth) colonized the land and freed it from the forces of evil. In Girsu, Ninurta's name is Ningirsu (Lord of Girsu).

Ereshkigal. Lady of the Big Earth and mistress of the city of the dead in the netherworld. Ereshkigal's husband is the death- and war-god Nergal.

Inanna (Akkadian Ishtar). Venus, the morning and evening star. Daughter of the moon-god and sister of the sun-god, Inanna was responsible for love and war.

Ishkur (Akkadian Adad). Storm-god. Ishkur's wife is the naked goddess Shala.

Marduk. City god of Babylon, important only after the rise of his city to political power. As creator and cosmic ruler, Marduk replaced Enlil and Ninurta in the mythology of the 1st millennium.

Nanna (Akkadian Sin). Moon-god, son of Enlil, and responsible for the division of time. Nanna was at home in Ur.

Ninazu. Lord Healer, a chthonic snake-god responsible for the death and regeneration of plant life. Ninazu is at home in Eshnunna.

Ninhursag. Lady of the Hills, sister of Enlil, and, in early sources, also his wife. Ninhursag is the mother-goddess, who, together with Enki, created human-kind. In Akkadian she is known as Belet-ili (Mistress of the Gods) and as Mami (Mama).

Ninisina. Lady of Isin, goddess of healing, and at home at Isin.

UTU (Akkadian Shamsh). Sun-god and son of Nanna (the moon-god). UTU was the god of justice and at home in two cities, Larsa and Sippar.

SYRIA-CANAAN

Anat. Goddess of war in Ugarit and Egypt. Anat is daughter of El and Asherah, as well as sister/consort of Baal (Hadad) in the Ugaritic myths.

Asherah. Ruling goddess found throughout Syria-Canaan. Asherah is the mother of the deities and consort of El in the Ugaritic myths, where she plays an active role in sustaining order in the world.

Baal. See Hadad.

Chemosh. Patron deity of Moab. Although a deity from early times in the pantheons in Syria, Chemosh's function is debated, usually between a god of military victory and one of the underworld.

Dagan. Widely worshiped god of grain. Dagan was the patron deity of humans, but appears throughout the Syrian and Canaanite cults.

El. West Semitic word for "god" and the ultimate object of appeal. Consort of Asherah in the Ugaritic myths, El is presented as a willful and manipulable father of the deities.

Hadad. Storm-god and patron deity of Aram and Ugarit. Known in many West Semitic pantheons simply as Baal (Lord), Hadad was a central and popular character in the Ugaritic myths, where he appears as a boastful, virile, and somewhat thickheaded deity.

Horon. Demon or deity associated with curses and serpent cures. Horon appears to have had authority over lesser demons, as petitions to him seek aid in fending off misfortune.

Mot. God of death. The personification of death is presented in the Ugaritic narratives as ruler of the netherworld, insatiably consuming the living, and as a favorite of his father El.

Resheph. Highly popular god of the netherworld. Throughout Syria, Canaan, and Egypt, Resheph was honored and feared as guardian of the underworld, warrior in battle, and bringer of disease.

Shemesh. Sun-god, in Ugarit appearing as the goddess Shapshu. The sun serves in Ugaritic myths as both messenger for the deity El and as deliverer of divine judgment.

Yamm. God (or demon) of the sea. In Ugaritic mythol-