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STUDIES IN LITERATURE FROM THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

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REST AND VIOLENCE IN THE POEM OF ERRA

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THE POEM[1] ABOUT THE GOD ERRA MUST CLEARLY BE RECKONED ONE OF THE MAJOR TEXTS of Mesopotamian religious literature, whether gauged by its content and literary artistry or by the evidence of its ancient popularity. Not less than thirty-six copies were recovered from at least five sites of the first millennium B.C.—a larger number, as L. Cagni points out, than even the copies known to the Gilgameš Epic from the same period.[2] Despite its importance, the Erra poem has generally been neglected in modern writing about Mesopotamian religion and the religions of the ancient Near East. Part of the reason has been its textual condition, for although work on the poem has proceeded for over one hundred years, ever since George Smith published portions of it in 1875,[3] only in the last decade or so have enough lines been recovered for intelligible editions to appear in Italian, French, and English.[4]

But another part of the reason for Erra's forlorn status has been its critical evaluation, for much of the debate over this poem has been rather narrowly invested either in particular philological skirmishes or in the issue of date and historical setting. The latter, to be sure, commands no little attention, since the poem, perhaps unique among the major works of Mesopotamian religious literature, appears to be a transparent "mythologization" of a specific historical event or period. This point is nowhere better illustrated than in Tablet IV:3, where, to describe how Erra caused a civil war and destruction in Babylon, the poet claims: *i-lu-ut-ka tu-šá-an-ni-ma tam-ta-šal a-meliš*, "You changed out of your divinity and made yourself like a man."[5]

Unfortunately, all the efforts to find a date and setting have not created a full consensus.[6] Most are agreed that the Erra poem is of first millennium B.C. origin and probably the work of a Babylonian. But the historical episode or period underlying has yet to be settled on.[7] Some see it as a rather specific event: thus, von Soden, who looks to certain disturbances in Uruk in 765–763 B.C.[8] Others, like Lambert and Bottéro, tend toward a broader and longer process, particularly the Aramaean and Sutean incursions into Mesopotamia around the beginning of the millennium.[9]

Abbreviations follow W. von Soden, *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch*, 1965–81 (= *AHw*) and/or R. Borger, *Handbuch der Keilschriftliteratur*, I–III, 1967–75.

[1] Tentatively, I prefer to use the general term "poem" for this composition rather than something more specific, because while it is possible to agree on the text as poetry, it is difficult to identify it fully by such foreign labels as "myth" or, worse, "epic," as have been urged in the past. Cf. L. Cagni's similar position in his recent *The Poem of Erra* [*SANE*, 1/3], 1977, 13 and my review in *JAOS* 101 (1981), 402–3. Some thoughts on literary connections are offered at the end of the present study.

[2] Cagni, *Poem* (n.1), 5. The five sites are Assur, Babylon, Nineveh, Sultantepe, and Ur; but there may be others, as the provenance of all the tablets is not known. For a listing of the extant sources of the poem, see L. Cagni, *L'Epopea di Erra* [Studi Semitici 34], 1969, 13–23, 50–4, and B. Hruška, *ArOr.* 42 (1974), 355–8.

[3] George Smith, *The Chaldean Account of Genesis*, 1875, 123–36, where it is entitled "The Exploits of Lubara." For bibliography and a history of research on the poem, see Cagni, *Epopea* (n.2), 9–10, 13–23, and *idem, Poem* (n.1), 5–6.

[4] *Italian*: Cagni, *Epopea* (n.2); *French*: R. Labat, in R. Labat, *et al., Les religions du Proche-Orient asiatique*, 1970, 114–37, and J. Bottéro, *Annuaire de l'École pratique des hautes études, IV. section*, 110 (1977–78), 107–64; *English*: Cagni, *Poem* (n.1).

[5] Cagni, *Epopea* (n.2), 104. Cf. also the broken IIB 27 on p. 84. In the remainder of this study, the text of the poem is quoted and numbered according to the edition in Cagni's *Epopea*.

[6] For a survey of opinions, see Cagni, *Epopea* (n.2), 37–45; *idem, Poem* (n.1), 20–1, to which should be added Bottéro, *Annuaire* (n.4), 140–7.

[7] The confuson over this is reflected in Cagni's recent *Poem* (n.1). See my review in *JAOS* 101 (1981), 402.

[8] W. von Soden, *UF* 3 (1971), 253–63.

[9] W. G. Lambert, *AfO* 18 (1957–58), 396–8, 400; Bottéro, *Annuaire* (n.4), 140–7.

Whatever the case, it would seem obvious that the question of date and setting must not eclipse—as in fact it often has—a prior issue, the understanding of the poem on its own terms: how it is structured, what are its leading motifs, and what purpose(s) it is to serve. It is this internal analysis on which the present paper will center.

We begin with the content and character of the Erra poem as a whole. The text is in five tablets, of which I, IV, and V are essentially complete, while II and III are largely broken, surviving, respectively, in three and four fragments each. These tablets contain 642 lines of text, about 532 of which are well preserved or restorable. As for the original length of the complete poem, if we assume that Tablets II and III were designed to approximate the lengths of I (192) and IV (151)—V being much shorter (61), but since it is the last tablet, it may not be indicative of the lengths of the others—then the original number of lines was in the range of 750, as Cagni has supposed.[10] Thus, at present roughly 70% of the composition—532 of 750 lines—is available in a full or nearly full form.

Together these lines yield a reasonably detailed story. After an invocation, we are introduced to the god Erra, who, sleeping wearily in his chamber with his consort Mami, is aroused by his counselor, Išum, and his sidekicks, the personified weapons known as the Sibitti, and urged to go to war, and so to exercise that ability for which he is famous (*I 1-91*). A dialogue follows between Erra and Išum, in which the latter, seeing how violent Erra has suddenly become, tries to hold him back, but to no avail (*I 92-123*). For Erra plans war and destruction on a global scale, and to accomplish that, he must get his superior, Marduk, out of his way. He does this by reminding Marduk that the latter's insignia and attire of office need cleaning and refurbishing, a task for which Marduk will need to vacate his throne of authority. Marduk agrees to this and to the further suggestion of Erra that Erra occupy the throne in Marduk's absence, since, as Erra claims ironically, without someone in the seat, the cosmic order will dissolve back into chaos (*I 124-191*).

Once Marduk has gone and despite apparent objections by other gods (*IIA 1-10, IIB 1-55*), Erra resolves on war. Tablets II and III are taken up with a further long dialogue between our hero and Išum, in which the former expounds his plans, with ever-increasing vehemence, and the latter tries, again unsuccessfully, to dissuade him (*IIC 1-47, IIIA 1-35, IIIB, IIIC 1-74*). Išum concedes the debate at the end of Tablet III by affirming that Erra now holds the top position in heaven (*IIID 1-15*).

The result is that Erra finally goes to battle. The arena for this battle, as Išum describes it in another long speech, is Babylonia and its major cities, Babylon, Sippar, Uruk, Dūr-Kurigalzu, and Dēr. So destructive is the work that the whole society is turned topsy-turvy, and, as Išum accuses, righteous and unrighteous are killed alike. Indeed, the destruction reaches to heaven itself, with Erra voicing his desire to hold on permanently to Marduk's supreme seat (*IV 1-127*).

The conclusion of Išum's speech ends this part of the war, and Erra seems at least partially appeased. He himself now begins to speak, ordering Išum to complete the war by destroying Babylonia's enemies, especially those (= the Suteans) around Mt. Ḫeḫe; and this Išum carries out (*IV 128-150*).

With this act, full appeasement now settles on Erra. He certifies his change of mood and mind by a personal confession of his unrestrained rage before an assembly of all the gods, to which Išum responds (*V 1-19*). Erra then leaves Marduk's seat to return to his own in Emeslam, commanding that Babylon be restored (*V 20-38*). The text concludes with praise of the protagonists and details of the poem's authorship and transmission, as well as of its importance to gods and men (*V 39-61*).

The preceding summary should make clear that the central issue of our poem is the nature of the god Erra. On the one hand, he appears as a warrior, gone berserk in his rage and destruction. On the other, he is someone overcome by sleep, content to do nothing else but loll in his bedchamber, with the most strenuous efforts required to arouse him. This contrast is highlighted already in the introduction (*I 1-22*), in the complex relationship presented there between Erra and Išum. Indeed, so intertwined are their personalities that modern commentators have had great difficulty identifying the lines of the introduction belonging to each.[11] A close look, however, suggests that Išum is the addressee of the hymnic invocation in I 1-5, principally because he is named explicitly as the subject of lines 4-5 and thus must also govern lines 1-3, since 1-4 constitute a substitution parallelism familiar from

[10] Cagni, *Epopea* (n.2), 26; *idem, Poem* (n.1), 5.

[11] Cf. a representative sampling of opinions in Cagni, *Epopea* (n.2), 135 ff. to which one could add, *inter alia*, B. Hruška, *BiOr.* 30 (1973), 5 and C. Wilcke, *ZA* 67 (1977), 191-8.

hymnic invocations going back to third millennium B.C. Sumerian literature.[12] Likewise, as Hruška has supposed,[13] Išum should be the third person subject of I 6–14, and Erra the second person addressee there (I 9–14), whom Išum encourages to battle as he does the Sibitti (I 7–8). For when Erra himself is identified as subject in the following I 15–18, his intent is exactly the opposite of the subject of I 6–14, namely to *discourage* the Sibitti and others from battle. In I 19–20 Išum returns as the addressee, this time of the poet, and he remains as such in I 21–22. I 21–22, in fact, being a sequence of invocatory epithets, parallels the opening lines I 1–5, where Išum, as we have seen, is also the poet's addressee; and the two thus form an *inclusio* to the entire introduction.

Once the lines of the introduction are assigned in this way, the contrasts become clear. Erra, although we are told that he is supposed to be warlike (I 13–14, 19)—and he becomes so later—here appears slothful and unresponsive to the call for war. His weariness, in fact, is so great that he cannot even sleep properly (I 15); and he is so negligent in watching over his surroundings that, as a following section informs us (I 83–86), the land falls prey to depredation and disaster. Išum, on the other hand, although portions of the *inclusio* describe him as caring and peaceful (I 3, 21–22)—qualities that will predominate later in the poem, with the seeming exception of the campaign in IV 139–150—is largely pictured as bellicose, goading Erra and the Sibitti to war (I 4–14). The two protagonists, thus, appear in the introduction as exactly the reverse of each other and of what they are each to become; and this double reversal is underscored by the fact that in I 10–11, Išum addresses Erra by the very epithets with which he himself is otherwise labelled or associated (*dipāru* in I 10: cf. I 21–22 for Išum;[14] *ṭābiḫ*[*u*] in I 12: cf. I 4 for Išum; *ālik maḫrimma* in I 11: cf. I 99, 105, 108; IIIC [11], 15, 39, 54; IV 137; V 13, 46 for Išum, though note for Erra again in IV 15).[15]

The rest of the poem continues to explore the Erra-Išum relationship. Thus, Erra, initially in a state of ineffectual weariness, becomes increasingly violent until, beyond control, he is portrayed destroying Babylonia, after which he is calmed by the restoration of the country. In this respect, he is only expanding on a similar pattern evidenced, not coincidentally, by the same Marduk whom he tries to supplant (cf. I 130–178). Conversely, Išum, having first called for violence, increasingly urges calm to offset Erra's growing violence. Ironically, to do this, his own speech must become more and more impassioned, culminating in his own campaign of violence, at Erra's behest, against Babylonia's enemies. Once the campaign is over, however, the way is clear for Išum's return to peaceful calm, matching that of Erra. We observe, then, in the poem two intersecting cycles for Erra and Išum, built on the tension of rest and violence. At the beginning, both gods are apart: Erra in rest and Išum in violence, but with intimations of the reverse. Subsequently, they crisscross: Erra moves to violence, Išum to calm tinged by violence. At the end of the poem, they meet in harmony, in a new state of rest, as signified by their mention together in the concluding section of praise (V 39–41). The effect of all this is to emphasize the intertwined nature of their personalities—something apparent even from the etymologies of their names[16]—or more precisely, it is to show the

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^{D}*I-šum ṭa-bi-ḫu na-a*$^{\supset}$*-du šá ana*
$^{\lceil}$*na-še-e*^{GIŠ}*kakkē*$^{MEŠ\rceil}$*-šú ez-zu-ti*
qātā^{II}*-šú as-ma*
ù ana šub-ruq ul-me-šú še-ru-ti
^{D}*Èr-ra qar-rad ilāni*^{MEŠ}*i-nu-šú*
ina šub-ti

Išum, famed slaughterer, whose
hands are fit to wield his fierce weapons
And to make his sharp lances flash like
lightning—Erra, the hero of the gods (in the process)
being shaken up in (his) dwelling.

Here, as Cagni has seen (*Epopea* [n.2], 59, 141 *ad* 5), *qātā*^{II} *-šú as-ma* is a pivot phrase (cf. W. G. E. Watson, *ZAW* 88 [1976], 239–53), governing the parallel expressions *ana . . . ez-zu-ti* and *ana . . . še-ru-ti*. Significantly, there is no smooth connection to the following clause, which introduces Erra, ^{D}*Èr-ra . . . šub-ti*. The connection is, rather, abrupt, almost anacoluthic, thus emphasizing the contrast between the two gods.

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[12] Cf. Cagni, *Poem* (n.1), 27:n.1. In addition, the use of Ḫendursaĝa as an epithet for the addressee in I 2 makes good sense if the latter is Išum: see the discussion in Cagni, *Epopea* (n.2), 138–40.

[13] Hruška, *BiOr.* 30 (1973), 5.

[14] See Cagni, *Epopea* (n.2), 136, 142; Hruška *BiOr.* 30 (1973), 5 and n. 24.

[15] One may also note that in the very first lines where Erra and Išum are juxtaposed, I 4–5, they are sharply contrasted, the bellicosity of Išum discomfiting the weary Erra:

[16] That is, if we follow J. J. M. Roberts, *JCS* 24 (1971), 11–6 and *The Earliest Semitic Pantheon* 1972, 21–9, 84:

importance of Išum in defining the range of Erra's behavior.

The cycles of rest and violence we have been discussing in overview are elaborated at a more detailed level by the treatment of several key word clusters.[17] On the "violence" side are the words for (1) "anger" or "fury" (*agāgu* and its derivatives *aggu* and *uggatu*; *ezēzu* and its derivative *ezzu*; *galātu*; *râbu*[18]; *sabāsu*); (2) "noise" (*ḫubūru; ikkillu; rigmu*); (3) "arousal" (*dekû*; *tebû*);[19] and (4) "destruction" or "punishment" (various words, particularly *šipṭu*). Opposing these are the "rest" group: (1) "rest" (*nâḫu* in G) or "appeasement" (*nâḫu* in D); (2) "utter silence" (*šaḫrartu*); (3) "sleep" (*dalpu; salālu; šittu*) or "weariness" (*anḫu*); and (4) "justice" or "governing order" (*šipṭu*).

Within each group alone the interaction of the words is evident at a number of points. Thus, for "rest," we find Erra beset by "weariness," yet not able fully to "sleep" (I 15–16). Or there are the Anunnaki gods, who love "utter silence" and the "sleep" that goes with it (I 81–82). In the "violence" category, when Erra or another character "arises" or is "aroused," it is regularly to carry out "destruction" of some kind (I 13, 132, 170–173; IV 62, 64, 136). Note, for example, the pun in I 45–46, where the Sibitti, whose weapons are already "raised" (*te-bu-ú*) for battle, cry to Erra to "arise" (*te-bi*) and join them. "Arousal," in turn, is accompanied by or creates "anger" (I 45–46, 123, 132; IIIC 50–51; IV 61–62), which leads directly to war and "destruction" (I 132; IIC 10; IIIA 16, C 23; IV 23, 61–62; V 7, 40, 57–58; cf. also the *kakkū ezzūtu* in I 4, 35, 44, 98, 186; IIIC 26). And "arousal" itself can be brought on by talk of "destruction" (I 13–14) or by the "noise" of humans, who then have to be "destroyed" (I 41–42, 73; IIC 45; IIIA 17–18; IV 68).

The two word groups also, of course, are set in opposition to each other in the poem. So Išum is praised as the one who "appeased" Erra of the "wrath" that had caused "destruction" (IIC 5–6 (?);[20] V 19, 40–41). It is the "noise" of men which prevents the Anunnaki from their "utter silence" and "sleep" (I 81–82). When Marduk "rose" from his seat of authority, the "governing order" dissolved or threatened to do so into chaotic "devastation" (I 136, 170–171). And Erra, being "weary" and fitfully "sleepful," does not know whether to "arise" (I 15–16), until Išum and the Sibitti come to "arouse" him (I 19, 45–46).

Finally, the poem contains a number of instances where the words jump groups, so to speak, to play ironically against one another. Thus, at one moment, Išum can be found telling Erra that despite all the "killing" and "devastation" you have wrought, *ù na-ḫa-am-ma ul ta-nu-uḫ* "You could find no rest at all!" (IV 112; cf. IV 87–111).[21] "Destructive fury," in other words, does not simply oppose "rest," it can also bring it about, by the cleansing exhaustion it creates. And while at the moment of Išum's remarks, this has not yet worked for Erra, by the end of the poem, we know that it has. The relationship of "rest" to "destruction" is played on in several other ironic ways as well. We learn of the citizens of Dūr-Kurigalzu who did not "rest" in their lamentation over their temple, which an enemy, "aroused" by Erra, had "destroyed" (IV 63–64). And there is the man who built a house to "sleep" in daily and to "sleep" in when dead—a death unexpectedly hastened by the "devastation" of Erra (IV 99–103). "Noise" also is the subject of ironic play. Thus, the Sibitti urge Erra to go on the warpath and:

> . . . *tu-ruk*$^{[GIŠ]}$*kakkē*^{MEŠ}*-[k]a*
> *ri-gim-ka dun-nin-ma* . . .
> . . . . . .
> *nišī*^{MEŠ}*lip-la-ḫa-ma lit-qu-na ḫu-bur-ši*[*n*]
> . . . Make your weapons resound,
> Raise a loud noise . . .
> . . . . . .
> (That) people may be afraid,
> and their noise be tamed.
> (I 60–61, 73)[22]

In short, the "noise" of Erra's "destructiveness" aims to control the "noise" of men (cf. IIC 45; IIIA 17–18).[23] Lastly, there is the "*šipṭu* (= "governing order")

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n.157, Erra means "scorched earth," while Išum means "fire." This, of course, disregards the "midrashic" play on the etymology of Išum in the poem as "famed slaughterer" (I 4; cf. Lambert, *AfO* 18 [1957–58], 400).

[17] For the occurrences of these words in the poem, see the glossary in Cagni, *Epopea* (n.2), 261 ff., to which must be added (1) *agāgu*-IIC 5 (restored: cf. Cagni, *Poem* [n.1], 40, 41:n.73), and (2) *dalpu*-I 15. *dekû* is given by Cagni, incorrectly for the occurrences cited, as *dakû*.

[18] Of the occurrences in the poem, that in I 134 seems irrelevant here.

[19] Only the occurrences in G and Š, not in D, seem relevant.

[20] See Cagni, *Poem* (n.1), 40, 41:nn. 73–74.

[21] Cagni, *Epopea* (n.2), 112–6.

[22] *Ibid.*, 64.

[23] The play here is found in other Mesopotamian religious literature as well. For example, in the Old Babylonian edition

of heaven and earth," which, as we have observed, dissolves if Marduk leaves his seat (I 132, 170). So when Erra promises, in taking Marduk's place, that he will keep this *šiptu* strong (I 182), we are treated to the patent irony that Erra does indeed maintain *šiptu*—but the *šiptu* of "destruction," as is made explicit later (IV 76–77; V 53,58).

In sum, the interplay of the two groups of words we have been examining reflects the interplay of the rest and violence they represent. The point is that rest and violence are not discrete concepts or forces; they interpenetrate. Where, the poem is saying, there is rest among the gods or on earth, there will also or soon be violence, the two revolving together in a ceaseless cycle. But the matter does not stop here. For rest and violence are only part of the larger tension between inactivity and activity in the universe. In itself that tension is morally neutral, or more properly, it can exhibit, at least to men, both beneficial and deleterious sides. Thus, activity is necessary for the universe to function. But too much activity brings on violence and potential chaos. Likewise, a certain inactivity, if understood as peacefulness and calm, helps to insure a balanced and just order. But too much inactivity is the equivalent of paralysis and death, and invites violent activity to fill the void it has left.

In various ways our poem is aware of this duality. "Noise," for example, can refer to the normal activity that undergirds human life (IIC 45; IIIA 17–18; IV 68); but it also can describe Erra's destructive wrath that aims to wipe this noise and life out (I 73; cf. IIC 45; IIIA 17–18; IV 68).[24] "Weariness," as we have seen, is the paralyzing inactivity that afflicts Erra at the beginning (I 15–20), encouraging depredation in the land which he should be guarding (I 83–91). But "rest" at the end is a positive state, signaling the exhaustion of Erra's fury and a new sense of order and human concern that the god had earlier lacked (V 6–15). Finally, there is the destructive activity of Erra, which once engaged loses all proportion as it breaks the established (Babylonian) world, both of gods and of men (IV 104–127; V 6–15). Balancing this, however, is Išum's campaign, against the very enemies Erra had used in Babylonia's destruction (IV 139–150). What is significant here is that though Išum leads that attack, it is Erra who decides to order it (IV 137–138). The campaign thus marks the necessary step before a full return to order and appeasement of Erra, which in the poem follows immediately (V 1–38).

If, then, activity and inactivity have their "bad" and "good" sides, as it were, and if these not only alternate separately, but revolve together in a cycle, the problem for men is how to deal with this. Or in terms of Erra, upon whom the problem focuses in the poem, how is the god "appeased" when he reveals his "violent" side, and how is he then enlisted on behalf of human beings? If once he has reached a state of beneficial "rest," as he has at the end of the poem, is there any guarantee that activity will not resume, and when it does, that it will not be his violent activity, which not only devastates human beings, but cracks the very boundaries of the cosmos?

The poem, it would appear, is designed to deal with this problem; and it does so in the first instance by laying out, as we have discussed, the contours of Erra's character, that is, the parameters of his cycle, and the involvement in it of others, particularly Išum. What is important about this explication is that it is done primarily through speeches, not third person descriptions. Speeches, in fact, occupy over three-quarters of the extant text,[25] and usually appear as dialogues between Erra and another character: Išum especially, but also the Sibitti and Marduk. Thus, less time is spent describing Erra's actual destructions than expounding, in a long series of dialogues in tablets I, II, and III, his plans for destruction and the attempt to turn these back. And even when the destruction is presented, it is in a long speech by Išum in tablet IV, which creates the impression that the action is taking place off stage, so to speak. Finally, Erra himself only comes completely to "rest" when he confirms this in a *mea culpa* at the beginning of tablet V (1–15), with a response by Išum (16–19). The

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of Atraḫasīs, the flood Enlil sends against humans to stop their "noise" (*rigmu*/*ḫubūru*) is itself called *rigmu* (III iii 20 [?], 23 and cf. III ii 50, iii 15, in W. G. Lambert and A. R. Millard, *Atra-ḫasīs: The Babylonian Story of the Flood*, 1969. Cf. W. L. Moran, *Biblica* 52 (1971), 57:n.3; 58).

[24] Examples like these undermine the old attempt, codified in G. Pettinato, *Or.* NS 37 (1968), 165–200, to interpret "noise," especially when it pertains to humans, as meaning "sin," viz., sins against the gods. "Noise" stands, rather, for "activity" whether of humans or of gods, and can be beneficial or excessive depending on the practioners and the audience. Any connotation of "sin," therefore, is secondary, not primary. Further discussion, which would take in also analogous usages of "noise" in such texts as Enūma Eliš and Atraḫasīs (see n.23), must await another occasion.

[25] Based on the fact that of the 642 lines of the poem preserved in one form or another, about 505 are connected with speeches.

speeches, thus, lend the poem a certain introspective quality, entirely appropriate to the goal of "appeasing" the violent Erra.

Indeed, it is the power of language itself which is the constitutive element of the Erra poem, and the conscious emphasis on this reaches its most explicit expression in the conclusion (V 39–61). There the focus is no longer either the divine protagonists or even the human compiler of the text (*ka-ṣir kam-mì-šú* in V 42), it is the text itself. And it is upon this text that the burden of stopping and transmuting the rest/violence cycle is thrown. As the final lines proclaim, the very remembering and reciting of the "song" (*zamāru* in V 49, 59)[26]—not merely by men, but by the gods as well—is what will provide the needed defense against a repetition of Erra's violent behavior (V 49–61).

The poem of Erra, thus, may be understood, in conception and execution, as a kind of incantation—that form of literature where, one might argue, the power of language is most explicitly recognized and celebrated, and put to use, as here, both to expose a problem of potentially cosmic dimensions to its source and to offer a means for its resolution or neutralization.[27] Consequently, we should not be surprised that at least one copy of the complete text of our poem and several copies of tablet V alone have come to us in *amulet* form.[28] The physical form of the amulet, however, is only an outward sign of the deeper, fundamental character of the poem itself,[29] and it is that which we have tried here to discern.[30]

[26] This word may have generic significance here and in other texts, but precise conclusions must await a comprehensive study of its usage.

[27] One recalls a text like "The Worm and the Toothache"—hardly so exceptional as sometimes thought—where the "myth," "incantation," and "ritual" sections all work together to explain and "solve" the problem at hand.

[28] The tablet with the complete text is *KAR* 169. For a brief survey of the evidence, see Hruška, *ArOr.* 42 (1974), 356–7.

[29] See also Hruška, *ArOr.* 42 (1974), 357.

[30] It should be emphasized that the purpose of this paper has not been to cover all aspects of the Erra poem, but to focus on one thematic complex of central importance in it. Thus, other themes like the making of the divine image have been ignored. Equally, the presence of our theme in other Mesopotamian texts has not been systematically noted. That, hopefully, will come on another occasion.