

Erra Ishum

# HISTORICAL NARRATIVES AND ISHUM

iginal and challenging compositions in violence: its onset, course, and conse-  
zed and feared as potentially the most  
inate even the order ordained by the  
he hopes and accomplishments of civi-  
duk, who may have lived in the eighth  
ered the consequences of violence and  
ciety that had cast off restraints and so  
tells, people understand the nature of  
ol and overwhelm all, they can hope to  
most salient aspect of this text is its high  
author to experiment, and the complex-

, plays a major role in this poem. He is  
e knows Erra's plans even before Erra  
norous, scholarly diction; there is never  
et is troubled that there could be disorder  
Marduk himself.

poetry, most of it direct speech. Ishum,  
the beginning and plays a crucial role  
s subordinate to Erra. The device, well  
ng the exploits of a hero from the stand-  
tested here for the first time. While some  
e long passage (see Tablet II Pericope C2,  
itions. This represents, in modern critical  
ad the narrated, discourse and event. Such  
of self-narrative by a deity in Mesopota-  
V.31). Perhaps the same tradition is refur-  
his own cult statue (Tablet I lines 149ff.).  
rduk himself of destruction done to Baby-  
of Erra's actions are narrated also in the  
t III Pericope C, lines 58ff.).

1; see, for example, Cagni, *Epopoea*, 37-45; von Soden, 59.

The diction of this text seems strange, or at least idiosyncratic, to some modern readers. They regard this as indicative of an author untutored in the finer points of Akkadian poetics. One might equally consider it a determined effort to refurbish a rich inventory of inherited expressions to lend them greater force, to do such violence, so to speak, to traditional usage as to command attention.

## Tablet I

(Narrator invokes Marduk, chief deity of Babylon, and Ishum, vanguard and companion of Erra. Erra is restless and breaks into a soliloquy. He is anxious to fight and campaign, but hesitates through natural inertia. Speaking of himself in the third person, Erra says that what he needs to stir him to action is Ishum's encouragement [i 9].)

- O king of all inhabited lands, creator of the wo[rld],  
O Hendursagga,<sup>1</sup> firstborn of Enlil [       ],  
Holder of the "sublime scepter,"<sup>2</sup>  
          herdsman of the people of this land,  
          shepherd [of humankind],  
O Ishum, "zealous slaughterer,"<sup>3</sup>  
          whose hands are suited to brandish fierce weapons,  
And to make his sharp spear flash, Erra, warrior of the gods,  
          was restless in his dwelling,  
His heart urged him to do battle! (5)  
Says he to his weapons, "Smear yourselves with deadly venom!"  
To the Seven, warriors unrivalled,  
          "Let your weapons be girded!"  
He even says to you, "I will take to the field!"<sup>4</sup>  
"You are the torch, they will see your light,  
"You are the vanguard, the gods will [       ], (10)

1. Another name for Ishum.  
2. Translation of Hendursagga (Cagni, *Epopoea*, 138-139; Edzard, RLA 4, 325).  
3. A learned Sumerian etymologizing of Ishum's name (W. G. Lambert, AfO 18 [1957/58], 400).  
4. It is not clear who speaks lines 9-20. Erra may be describing himself, or the narrator may be speaking of Erra. As interpreted here, the narrative statement is that Erra is restless (5-9), while Erra's speech to Ishum, showing both inclination and disinclination to stir, includes the entire passage 9-20. A different reading is offered by Machinist, JAOS 103 (1983), 222-223 (earlier by Hroch, BiOr 30 [1973], 5), whereby Ishum is the subject of 1.6-14 and Erra is addressed in 9-14. The reverse of the reading adopted here. Although in some respects this is an attractive possibility, it seems excluded by 9a, for the "you" there, so far as I can see, must be Ishum (so also Edzard, Cagni, and others).

"You are the stanchion, [zealous] slaughterer!  
 "(So) up, Erra, from laying waste the land  
 "How cheerful your mood will be and joyful your heart.  
 "Erra's limbs are slug[gish],  
     like those of a mortal lacking sleep,  
 "He says to himself, 'Shall I get up or go to sleep?'  
 "He says to his weapons, 'Stay in the corners!'  
 "To the Seven, warriors unrivalled,  
     'Go back to your dwellings!'  
 "Until you rouse him, he will sleep in his bedroom,  
 "He will dally with Mami his mate."

(15)

(20)

(*With a second invocation, now of Ishum, the narrator introduces the terrible Seven, who stand ready to massacre the people of the land.*)

O Engidudu "who patrols at night," "ever guiding the noble,"<sup>1</sup>  
 Who ever guides young men and women in safety,  
 making light as day,

The Seven, warriors unrivalled, their divine nature is different,  
 Their origins are strange, they are terrifying,  
 Whoever sees them is numbed with fear.

(25)

Their breath is death,

People are too frightened to approach it!

Yet Ishum is the door, bolted before [them].<sup>2</sup>

When Anu, king of the gods, sowed his seed in the earth,  
 She bore him seven gods, he called them the "Seven."

(30)

They stood before him, that he ordain their destinies.

He summoned the first to give his instructions,

"Wherever you go and spread terror, have no equal."

He said to the second, "Burn like fire, scorch like flame."

He c[ommanded] the third, "Look like a lion,

let him who sees you be paralyzed with fear."

He said to the fourth, "Let a mountain collapse

when you present your fierce arms."

(35)

1. "Patrols at night" is a literal translation of the Sumerian epithet; "ever-guiding" is a learned wordplay on the same epithet (as shown by Tinney, N.A.B.U. 1989/3).

2. Variant: "it."

To the fifth he said, "Blast like the wind,  
 scan the circumference of the earth."

The sixth he enjoined, "Go out everywhere (like the deluge)  
 and spare no one."

The seventh he charged with viperous venom,  
 "Slay whatever lives."

After Anu had ordained destinies for all of the Seven,

He gave those very ones to Erra, warrior of the gods,

(saying), "Let them go beside you."

(40)

"When the clamor of human habitations  
 becomes noisome to you,

"And you resolve to wreak destruction,

"To massacre the people of this land and fell the livestock,

"Let these be your fierce weaponry, let them go beside you."

(*The Seven offer the encouragement that Erra needs. In a rousing call to arms, they extol the heroic excitement of the campaign, the honor, prestige, and gratification it brings. The Seven claim vaguely that they are not respected enough, that others are growing more important than they. They bring up the old charge [see II.36] that humans make too much noise for the gods to sleep, although this was not the cause Erra had given for his own lack of sleep. The Seven claim further that there are too many wild animals on the loose. Their final claim, no doubt the most important one, is that they are bored and out of training.*)

These are the ones who are in a fury,

holding their weapons aloft,

(45)

They are saying to Erra, "Up, do your duty!

"Why have you been sitting in the city like a feeble old man,

"Why sitting at home like a helpless child?

"Shall we eat woman food, like non-combatants?

"Have we turned timorous and trembling, as if we can't fight? (50)

"Going to the field for the young and vigorous

is like to a very feast,

"(But) the noble who stays in the city can never eat enough.

"His people will hold him in low esteem,

he will command no respect,

"How could he threaten a campaigner?

"However well developed is the strength of the city dweller, (55)

"How could he possibly best a campaigner?

- "However toothsome city bread,  
it holds nothing to the campfire loaf,  
"However sweet fine beer,  
it holds nothing to water from a skin,  
"The terraced palace holds nothing  
to the [wayside] sleeping spot!  
"Be off to the field, warrior Erra, make your weapons clatter,  
"Make loud your battle cry that all around they quake,  
"Let the Igigi-gods hear and extol your name,  
"Let the Anunna-gods hear and flinch at the mention of you,  
"Let (all) the gods hear and bend for your yoke,  
"Let sovereigns hear and fall prostrate before you,  
"Let countries hear and bring you their tribute,  
"Let the lowly hear and [per]ish of their own accord,  
"Let the mighty hear and his strength diminish,  
"Let lofty mountains hear and their peaks crumble,  
"Let the surfing sea hear and convulse,  
wiping out (her) in[crease]!  
"Let the stalk be yanked from the tough thicket,  
"Let reeds of the impenetrable morass be shorn off,  
"Let men turn cowards and their clamor subside,  
"Let beasts tremble and return to clay,  
"Let the gods your ancestors see and praise your valor!  
"Warrior Erra, why do you neglect the field for the city?  
"The very beasts and creatures hold us in contempt!  
"O warrior Erra, we will tell you,  
though what we say be offensive to you!  
"Ere the whole land outgrows us,  
"You must surely hear our words!  
"Do a kindly deed for the gods of hell,  
who delight in deathly stillness,  
"The Anunna-gods cannot fall asleep  
for the clamor of humankind.  
"Beasts are overrunning the meadows, life of the land,  
"The farmer sobs bitterly for his [field].  
"Lion and wolf are felling the livestock,  
"The shepherd, who cannot sleep day or night  
for the sake of his flocks, is calling upon you.

- "We too, who know the mountain passes,  
we have [forgotten] how to go,  
"Cobwebs are spun over our field gear,  
"Our fine bow resists and is too strong for us,  
"The tip of our sharp arrow is bent out of true,  
"Our blade is corroded for want of a slaughter!"

*(Erra brightens at this and asks Ishum why he does not proceed at once. Ishum remonstrates, saying that violence and destruction are evil. Erra, thoroughly aroused, launches into a self-praise. He is the bravest. If people do not respect the gods enough, and the others are too pusillanimous to do anything about it, he will remedy matters. Since the supposed lack of respect for him must be contrary to Marduk's wishes, Erra will cause Marduk to forsake his dwelling and thus bring about the punishment humankind deserves.)*

- The warrior Erra heard them,  
What the Seven said pleased him like finest oil.  
He made ready to speak and said to [Ish]um,  
"Why, having heard, did you sit by silent?  
"Lead the way, let me begin the campaign!  
"[ ] the Seven, warriors without rival,  
"Make my fierce weapons<sup>1</sup> march at my side,  
"But you be the vanguard and rear guard."  
When Ishum heard what he said,  
He felt pity and said [to the war]rior Erra,<sup>2</sup>  
"O lord Erra, why have you pl[otted evil] against the gods?  
"You have remorselessly plotted evil,  
to lay waste the lands and decimate [the people]."  
Erra [made ready to s]peak and said,  
To Ishum his vanguard he said [these words],  
"Keep quiet, Ishum, listen to what I say.  
"As concerns the people of the inhabited world,  
whom you would spare,  
"O vanguard of the gods, wise Ishum,  
whose counsel is always for the best,  
"I am the wild bull of heaven, I am the lion on earth,

1. That is, the Seven.  
2. Variant: "He made ready to speak, [say]ing [to the warrior Erra]."

- "I am king in the land, I am the fiercest among the gods, (110)  
 "I am warrior among the Igigi-gods,  
 mighty one among the Anunna-gods!  
 "I am the smiter of beasts,  
 battering ram against the mountain,  
 "[I am] the blaze in the reed thicket,  
 the broad blade against the rushes,  
 "I am banner for the march, (115)  
 "I blast like the wind, I thunder like the storm,  
 "Like the sun, I scan the circumference of the world.  
 "I am the wild ram striding forth in the steppe,  
 "I invade the range and take up my dwelling in the fold.  
 "All the gods are afraid of a fight, (120)  
 "So the people of this land are contemptuous!  
 "As for me, since they do not fear my name,  
 "And have disregarded Marduk's command,  
 so he may act according to his wishes,<sup>1</sup>  
 "I will make Marduk angry, stir him from his dwelling,  
 and lay waste the people!"

(*Erra repairs to Esagila and asks Marduk why his image is besmirched. In a sonorous speech [see General Introduction, p. 15 note 1] Marduk, having, in his omniscience, seen Erra's intent, recounts what transpired last time he forsook his dwelling: the universe went topsy-turvy, living creatures were nearly wiped out by the ensuing catastrophe. When Marduk found that his cult statue had been sullied, he caused it to be rebuilt by sublime craftsmen who were later dismissed, never to return. Marduk waxes lyrical in praise of his own cult statue and the wonderful tree from which it was fashioned. The present image of Marduk, divinely created, could never be duplicated.*)

- The warrior Erra set out for Shuanna,<sup>2</sup>  
 city of the king of the gods,  
 He entered Esagila, palace of heaven and earth,  
 and stood before him. (125)  
 He made ready to speak, saying to the king of the gods,

1. Variant: "they act." As taken here, Erra will motivate Marduk to act as he really wanted to anyway, but had hesitated to for the reasons he gives in lines 132ff.  
 2. Babylon.

- "Why has your precious image,<sup>1</sup> symbol of your lordship,  
 which was full of splendor as the stars of heaven,  
 lost its brilliance?"  
 "Your lordly diadem, which made the inner sanctum shine  
 like the outside tower,<sup>3</sup> (why is it) dimmed?"  
 The king of the gods made ready to speak, saying  
 To Erra, warrior of the gods, these words, (130)  
 "O warrior Erra,  
 concerning that deed you said you would do,<sup>4</sup>  
 "Once long ago indeed I grew angry,  
 indeed I left my dwelling, and caused the deluge!<sup>5</sup>  
 "When I left my dwelling,  
 the regulation of heaven and earth disintegrated:  
 "The shaking of heaven meant:  
 the positions of the heavenly bodies changed,  
 nor did I restore them.  
 "The quaking of netherworld meant:  
 the yield of the furrow diminished,<sup>6</sup>  
 being thereafter difficult to exploit. (135)  
 "The regulation of heaven and earth disintegrating meant:  
 underground water diminished, high water receded.  
 When I looked again, it was a struggle to get enough.  
 "Productivity of living offspring declined, nor did I renew it,  
 "Such that, were I a plowman,  
 I (could) hold (all) seed in my hand.  
 "I built (another) house and settled therein.<sup>7</sup>

1. The Akkadian word here translated as "precious image" (Bottéro, *Annuaire* 1977/78, 152 note 35 = *Mythes*, 266; cf. W. G. Lambert, *AfO* 18 [1957/8], 399) can be understood also as "attire" or "fittings."  
 2. Translation uncertain; perhaps, with Cagni, *Epopea*, 183: "became dirty."  
 3. Literally, "which made Ehalanki shine like Etemenanki," meaning that the inner shrine shone as brightly as if in open daylight (differently Streck, *AOAT* 264 [1999], 85).  
 4. That is, line 123.  
 5. "Deluge" may be used here metaphorically for "catastrophe," as the consequence was low, not excessive, water (Tablet IV lines 46ff.) and no other Mesopotamian tradition associates Marduk with the deluge. However, a flood is implied in line 171 below.  
 6. Obscure. I take this to mean that the furrow could no longer be reliably "levied" for its "yield," that is, expected to give of its increase to the gatherer.  
 7. Perhaps a reference to (re)construction of Esagila after the deluge, or to a special building where his image was refurbished.

"As to my precious image,  
which had been struck by the deluge  
that its appearance was sullied,

(140)

"I commanded fire to make my features shine  
and cleanse my apparel.

"When it had shined my precious image  
and completed the task,

"I donned my lordly diadem and returned.

"Haughty\* were my features, terrifying my glare!

"The survivors of the deluge ~~saw what was done~~.<sup>1</sup>

"Shall I raise my weapon and destroy the rest?"<sup>1</sup>

"I sent those craftsmen<sup>2</sup> down to the depths,

I ordered them not to come up.

"I removed the wood and gemstone<sup>3</sup>  
and showed no one where.

"Now then, warrior Erra,

as concerns that deed you said you would do,

"Where is the wood, flesh of the gods,

suitable for the lord of the uni[verse],

"The sacred tree, splendid stripling,<sup>4</sup> perfect for lordship,

"Whose roots thrust down a hundred leagues  
through the waters of the vast ocean to the depths of hell,

"Whose crown brushed [Anu's] heaven on high?

"Where is the clear gemstone that I reserved for [ ]?

"Where is Ninildum,  
great carpenter of my supreme divinity,

(155)

"Wielder of the glittering hatchet, who knows that tool,

"Who makes [it] shine like the day  
and puts it in subjection at my feet?

"Where is Kusigbanda, fashioner of god and man,

whose hands are consecrated?

1. Variant: "Did you raise your weapon and destroy the re[st]?"

2. The divine craftsmen, or sages, who refurbished Marduk's image after it was damaged in the catastrophe.

3. The original depends upon a wordplay on *mēšu* (a tree) and *elmēšu* (a gemstone). The meaning is that the specific materials used to make the image are no longer to be had. The entire passage implies that the statue of Marduk dated to earliest time and could not be reproduced because it was not made by human hands.

4. A Sumero-Akkadian wordplay on *mēšu* (a tree) and Sumerian *mes* "young man."

"Where is Ninagal, wielder of the upper and lower millstone,<sup>1</sup>

"Who grinds up hard copper like hide  
and who forges to[ols]?"

(160)

"Where are the choice stones, created by the vast sea,  
to ornament my diadem?

"Where are the seven [sal]ges of the depths, those sacred fish,  
who, like Ea their lord, are perfect in sublime wisdom,  
the ones who cleansed my person?"

*(Erra's reply is lost, but he may offer to produce suitable materials for refurbishing the statue. Marduk then asks who will ward off the forces of evil and chaos while he is being refurbished and is thereby non-combatant. Erra offers to reign in his stead. Marduk assents, forsakes his dwelling for repairs, and the universe is thrown into confusion.)*

The warrior Erra [hea]rd him ... [ ].

He made ready to speak, saying to noble Marduk,

"[ craftsmen ],

"[ tree ],

"Clear gemstone [from] its [pl]ace shall I bring up."

When Marduk heard this,

He made ready to speak, saying to the [warrior] Erra:

"(When) I rise [from] my dwelling,

the regulation [of heaven and earth] will disintegrate,

"The [waters] will rise and sweep over the land,

"Bright [day will turn] to dar[k]ness,

"[Wh]irlwind will rise and the stars of heaven will be [ ],

"[I]ll winds will blow  
and the eyesight of living creatures [will be darkened?],

"Demons will rise up and seize [ ],

"[They will ...] the unarmed one who confronts them!

"The gods of hell will rise up and smite down living creatures.

"Who will keep them at bay  
till I gird on my weaponry (once more)?"

When Erra heard this,

He made ready to speak, saying to noble Marduk,

"O noble Marduk, while you enter that house,

(180)

1. Variant: "the perfect] ... tool."

2. The special building where the cult image is refurbished.

fire cleanses your apparel and you return to your place,  
 "For that time I will govern and keep strong  
 the regulation of heaven and earth,

"I will go up to heaven and issue instructions to the Igigi-gods,  
 "I will go down to the depths

and keep the Anunna-gods in order.

"I will dispatch the wild demons to the netherworld,

"I will brandish my fierce weaponry against them.

"I will truss the wings of the ill wind like a bird's.

"At that house you shall enter, O noble Marduk,

"I will station Anu and Enlil to the right and left, like bulls."<sup>1</sup>

Noble Marduk heard him,

The words that Erra spoke pleased him.

## Tablet II

(*Marduk leaves his palace, disaster ensues.*)

Pericope A + B

He arose from his dwelling, an inaccessible place,

He set out for the dwelling of the Anunna-gods.

He entered that house and sto[od before them].

Shamash looked upon him

and let his protective radiance fall ...,

The moon looked elsewhere,

and did not [leave?] the netherworld.

Ill winds rose and the bright daylight was turned to gloom.

The clamor of the peoples throughout the land [was stilled].

The Igigi-gods were terrified and went up to h[ell],

The Anunna-gods were [frightened

and [went down] to the pit [of hell],

[ ] the entire circumference [ ]

[ ] in the dust.

[ ] let us see."

[ ] its doors.

[ ] like the stars of heaven,

1. The imagery seems to be of the great winged bulls, such as stood at the entrances to certain Assyrian palaces.

(gap)

(*The gods convene to discuss the situation. Ea, intent upon restoring Marduk to his place, reasons that, even though the original sublime craftsmen cannot return, Marduk authorized reproductions of them to be made that are endowed with wondrous powers by Ea at Marduk's command. The repairs are proceeding well. Erra, while standing guard at the house where the work is being done lest harm approach, is taking the opportunity to usurp Marduk's power by keeping everyone away from him. So vainglorious is Erra's shouting that Ea resolves to see him humbled.*)

"The diadem [ ]

"His heart [ ]

"The governor's<sup>1</sup> [ ]

"The awe-inspiring radiance of [his] divine splendor [ ]

his days [ ]

"[ ] like rain,

"[Let] Ea in the depths [ ] his springs,

"Let Shamash see ... [ ] and let the people [ ]

"Let Sin behold, and at his sign let him [ ] to the land.

"Concerning that work, Ea [ ] is expert(?)." (20)

"The warrior Erra became very angry,

"Why, because of foam on the w[aters],<sup>2</sup>

the ... of humankind,

"Which I myself created to bring offerings to the Anunna-gods,

"Did noble Marduk give up, not at the appointed time?

"He plotted to lay waste the lands and destroy their people!"

Ea the king considered and said these words,

"Even now that noble Marduk has arisen (from his dwelling),

he did not command those craftsmen to c[ome up].

"How can images of them, which I made among humankind,

"Approach his sublime divinity, where no god has access?

"He himself gave those same (human) craftsmen

great discretion and authority,

"He gave them wisdom and perfect dexterity. (35)

1. Here possibly Erra, as temporary viceroy for Marduk, as opposed to the human governor who appears later in the poem.

2. In Tablet IV line 68, foam is used as a metaphor for the human race destroyed by the flood. Here it may refer to something transitory: why did Marduk sacrifice the human race for a passing whim (as it seemed to the speaker), and give the human beings over to Erra, when they were essential for feeding and maintaining the gods?

- "They have made (his) precious image radiant,  
even finer than before."  
"Warrior Erra has stationed himself before him,  
night and day without ceasing,  
"Besetting the house for making radiant the precious image  
for the sovereignty of the king, and saying,  
'Don't come near the work!  
'[He who dr]aws near it—  
I will cut short his life and prolong his death agony.'"  
(40)
- "[ ] let him hasten at the work,  
"[ ] has no equal.  
"[ ] Erra was speaking like a mortal,  
"[ ] trying to rival the noble one,  
"[ ] may he be humbled."  
[The images of the craftsmen] made his precious image radiant, (45)  
[ ] ...  
[They set the ...] at his door(?),  
[ ] king Shamash girds it on,  
[ ] he reoccupied his dwelling,  
[ ] brilliance was reestablished.  
[All the gods ] were gathered,  
Erra [ ] noble Marduk,  
"Noble Marduk, [ ]  
"Godlike, you [ ]  
"Small to great, [ ]  
[ ] Erra ... [ ]  
[ ] ... his uproar was terrifying,  
"[ ] ... the image,  
"[ ] of your [lord]ship are raised up and establi[shed]."  
(60)

(The repairs successfully completed, Marduk has returned to his dwelling [line 49]. In a fragmentary passage, Marduk addresses the gods and orders them all to return to their dwellings. The gods are alarmed by astral omens that presage Erra's dominance.)

The king of the gods [made ready] to speak and said,  
"[ ] and went up to heaven."  
[ ] he commanded, "Return to your dwellings!"  
[ ] ... his sign,

- "[ ] upon your face,  
"[ ] their peoples.  
"[ ] you did not turn back."  
[He heard him], ... said [to the k]ing of the gods,  
"The word of Marduk [ ] of the day."  
He said to him [ ]  
"Come now, [ ]  
"To destroy the lands [why did you plot?]."  
Erra heard him [ ]  
...  
He entered [ ]  
Anu heard in heaven [ ]  
He bowed his lofty head [ ]  
Antu, mother of the gods, was aghast [ ]  
She entered [her] cham[ber].  
Enlil' s [ ]  
(65)
- (70)
- (75)
- (gap)
- Pericope C1
- [ ] father of the gods [ ]  
[ ] Enlil [ ]  
Among the beasts, all of them [ ]  
Erra among all the gods [ ]  
Among the stars of heaven the Fox Star<sup>1</sup> [ ]  
Was shining bright and its radiance [ ] for him,  
The stars of all the gods were dazzling [ ]  
Because they were angry with each other  
and noble Marduk [ ] put [ ]  
"The star of Erra is shining bright  
and is radiant: ... of warfare.  
"His awe-inspiring brilliance will ...  
and all people will perish(?).  
" ... the dazzling stars of heaven in his time are [dimmed?].  
" ... the ant, does it not rise [ ]?  
"Among the beasts, their image of their star is the fox,  
"Endowed with strength, a raging(?) lion [ ]  
(10')
- (5')
- (10')
- (15')

1. Star associated with "the mighty one, Erra" (Al-Rawi and Black, *Iraq* 51 [1989], 112).

"Enlil is the father of [ ], he has [ ]."

(Even Ishtar, goddess of war, tries to calm Erra.)

Innina replied in the assembly of the gods [ ],  
[ ] her words to Anu and Dagan [ ].

"Keep quiet, all of you, go into your chambers,

"Cover your lips, do not smell the incense,

"Do not debate noble Marduk's words, do not plead [ ]

"Until the days are drawn to a close,

the [appointed time] passed,

"The word Marduk speaks is like a mountain where ...,

he does not change (it) nor [ ]."

(gap)

Pericope C2

Ishtar went, they entered the ...,

She pled with Erra, but he would not agree.

Ishum made ready to speak, saying (these) words to Ishtar,

"I have ... that of heaven over what is not of heaven,

"Erra is angry and will heed no one,

"Let him come to rest in the mountains, and I(?) ...

the seed of the people that you spoke about to [ ],

"The sublime son of Enlil will not go on campaign

without Ishum the vanguard before [him?]."

(30')

(35')

(Erra is furious. All he has done is to perform guard duty, and now has been sent home, his services no longer required, without a campaign. This is because he is the most valiant god—no evil rises to oppose him. This he fails to perceive, but, in his blind rage, he resolves to fight his war anyway, to show Marduk and Ea that he is not to be taken so lightly. Erra's self-praise turns into a self-narrative. This passage is unusual in Akkadian and has been subjected to varying interpretations. In favor of that offered here, note that first-person narrative is nearly always past or future, hardly ever renderable as present and in progress. Since, as Cagni has shown [Epoëa, 208–209], the passage cannot logically refer to the future, and since the past is difficult for grammatical reasons, we have here a present, first-person narrative, one of Kabiti-ilani-Marduk's most interesting experiments.)

He was sitting in the Emeslam,<sup>1</sup> taking up his dwelling.  
He thought to himself what had been done,<sup>2</sup>  
His heart being stung, it could give him no answer,  
But he asked it what it would have him do.<sup>3</sup>  
"Lead the way, let me begin the campaign!"  
"The days are drawn to a close, the appointed time has passed.

(40')

"I give the command

and despoil the sun of his protective radiance,

"By night I muffle the face of the moon.

"I say to the thunderstorm,

"Hold back [your] young bulls!

"Brush aside the clouds, cut off sn[ow and rain]!"

(45')

"I will make Marduk and Ea mindful!

"[He] who waxed great in days of plenty,

they bury him on a day of drought,

"He who came by water, [they take him back] on a dusty road.

"I say to the king of the gods,

"Take your place in E[sagila],

"They must do what you commanded,

they must carry out your or[der].

(50')

"The people of this land cry out to you,

but do not accept their entreaties!"

"I obliterate [the land?] and reckon it for ruins,

"I lay waste cities and turn them into open spaces,

"I wreck mountains and fello[ ] their wildlife,

(55')

"I convulse the sea and destroy its increase,

"I bring the stillness of death upon swamp and thicket,

burning like fire,

"I fell humankind, I leave no living creatures,

"Not one do I retain, [nor any?] for seed to [ ] the land.

"I spare no livestock nor any living creatures,

1. Temple of Erra at Cutha.

2. That is, the successful completion of Marduk's repairs and his being packed off home again, needed no longer.

3. Obscure. As read here, Erra is furious at what he regards as high-handed treatment, and, consulting only his own wounded feelings, decides to go on a rampage. The lines imply that he debated with his "self," but took guidance from his heart (= emotions) alone. One may also understand (with Bottéro), "He (Ishum) asked him (Erra) his orders."



- (60') "I dispatch the soldier from one city against another,  
 "Neither son nor father has a care for the other's well-being,  
 "Mother p[lots evil] against daughter with a leer.  
 "I let [yokels into] the abodes of gods,  
     where harm must not approach,  
 "I settle the miscreant in the nobleman's dwelling.  
 (65') "I let outlandish beasts into the shrines,  
 "I block access to any city where they appear,  
 "I send down beasts of the highlands,  
 "Wherever they set foot,  
     they bring the stillness of death to the thoroughfares,  
 "I cause beasts of the steppe not to stay in the steppe,  
     but to traverse the city street.  
 (70') "I make omens unfavorable,  
     I turn holy places into foraging grounds,  
 "I let the demon "Upholder-of-Evil"  
     into the dwellings of the gods,  
     where no evil should go,  
 "I devastate the king's palace [ ] and turn it into a ruin,  
 "I cut off the clamor of [humankind] in [dwellings]  
     and rob them of happiness,  
 (75') "As [ I ] orchards like fire ...  
 "I let evil enter [ ]

## Tablet III

(*Erra's speech continues, as he glories in the horrors of war, anarchy, and privation. There follows a gap in the text.*)

## Pericope A

- (1) "[ ] heeds no one,  
 "What he(?) reasoned [ ]  
 "Lions [ ]  
 "[ ]  
 (5) "I make [ ] go toward [ ]  
 "I confiscate [... their] households and cut short their lives,  
 "I as[sassinate] the righteous man who intercedes,  
 "I set the wicked cutthroat in the highest rank.

- "I estrange people's hearts so father listens not to son,  
 "And daughter cavils spitefully to mother.  
 (10) "I make their utterances evil, they forget their gods,  
 "They speak gross blasphemy to their goddesses.  
 "I stir up the [rob]ber and so cut off travel absolutely,  
 "People rifle one another's belongings in the heart of the city.  
 (15) "Lion and wolf fell the livestock.  
 "I aggravate [ ] and she cuts off birth-giving,  
 "I deprive the nurse of the wail of toddler and infant.  
 "I banish\* the work song of harvest home from the fields,  
 "Shepherd and herdsman forget their field shelters.  
 "I cut the clothes from the bodies of men,  
     the young man I parade naked through the city street,  
 (20) "The young man without clothes I send down to hell.<sup>1</sup>  
 "The ordinary fellow has not so much as a sheep  
     to offer up for his life,  
 "For the nobleman's divination lambs are few and precious.  
 "The patient yearns for a bit of roast to offer for his recovery,  
 (25) "It does him no good, so he gets up and walks till he dies.  
 "I incapacitate the nobleman's mount like [ ] ,  
 "I cut [ ]

(*fragmentary lines, then gap*)

(*Pericope B too fragmentary for translation*)

(*The deed spoken and done, Ishum is remonstrating that Enlil has forsaken his city. Erra, in a frenzy, cries for more, and, having done enough himself, lets loose the Seven. Ishum, distressed at Erra's "over-kill," demands the reason for it.*)

## Pericope C

- (*Ishum is speaking, restored from IV 33-39*)  
 "The stro[ng ]  
 (1) "Like the blo[od ]  
 " [You homed their weaponry upon] the people

<sup>1</sup> Captives in war were sometimes paraded naked. Furthermore, the dead enter the netherworld naked; thus the people in the upper world are little better than dead.

- under special protection, [sacred to Anu and Dagan],<sup>1</sup>  
 "You [made] their blood course  
 like [ditchwater in the city streets],  
 "You [opened their] arteries (5)  
 [and let the watercourses bear (their) blood away].  
 "Enlil [cried], 'Woel' [his heart was hardened],  
 "[He ] from his dwelling.  
 "An irrever[sible] curse rose to his lips,  
 "He swore that [he would not drink from the watercourses],  
 "He was revol[ted by] their blood (10)  
 [and] would not enter [Ekur]."  
 Erra said these words to Ishum his vanguard,  
 "The Seven, warrior[s] unrivalled ]  
 "For all of them [ ]  
 "Which no[ble ]  
 "O [my] vanguard, [ ] (15)  
 "Who can speak [ ]  
 "Who can [ ] like fire  
 "Who can [ ] before [ ]  
 "Who can [ ] like [ ]  
 "Who [ ]  
 "Who can [ ] Erra?  
 "The face of a [evening] lion [ ]\* (20)  
 "In the rage of [ ] heart [ ]?  
 "Lead the way, [let me begin the campaign]!  
 "[Muster?] the Seven, warriors unrivalled,  
 "[Make] (them), fierce weaponry, [go at my side],  
 "And do [you] be [my] vanguard and [rear guard]."  
 When Ishum heard this [speech] of his,  
 He felt pity and sa[ic]d to himself?),  
 "Alas for my people, victims of Erra's fury [ ], (30)  
 "Whom the warrior Nergal [overwhelmed]  
 like the storm of battle [against] the demons,  
 "As if to kill that conquered god, his arms lose no tension,

1. Certain Mesopotamian cities were exempt from military service, taxes, or other obligations to the crown, and Erra has violated their charters. While Cagni and others have interpreted this passage to mean that Erra armed the citizenry, it could also mean that they were exposed to the effects of weaponry. In favor of Cagni's view, however, see Tablet IV lines 6-10.

- "As if to snare wicked Anzu, [his net] is spread!"<sup>1</sup>  
 Ishum made ready to speak,  
 Saying to warrior Erra these words,  
 "Why have you plotted evil against god and man?  
 "And why have you remorselessly plotted evil (35)  
 against the people of this land?"

(Erra replies exultantly that men are too stupid to understand the ways of the gods, so why take their part? Furthermore, Marduk did forsake his dwelling, so the world cannot be as it was before; that would be a denial of Marduk's centrality. Now Ishum narrates Erra's violent course in the second person, a literary experiment building upon the preceding. There follows a gap in the text.)

- Erra made ready to speak,  
 Saying to Ishum his vanguard these words,  
 "You (who) know the reasoning of the Igigi-gods,  
 the counsel of the Anunna-gods, (40)  
 "Would you give guidance to the people of this land  
 and try to make them understand?  
 "Why are you, indeed, talking like a know-nothing?  
 "You are advising me as if you knew not Marduk's command!  
 "The king of the gods has risen from his dwelling!  
 "What of all lands has endured?  
 "He removed his lordly diadem: (45)  
 "King and prince [ ] forget their duties.  
 "He has undone his girdle:  
 "The bond of god and man is undone,  
 impossible to tighten it again.  
 "Fierce fire made his precious image glow like the day  
 and heightened his protective splendor,  
 "His right hand grasped the mace, his enormous weapon. (50)  
 "Noble Marduk's glare is terrifying!  
 "As for me, what you said to me [ ],

1. That is, Erra is ready for even the most formidable encounter. Bottéro (*Annuaire* 1977/78, 126 note 16) suggests that the conquered god is Qingu (see *Epic of Creation*, III.17). For Anzu, see III.23.

2. That is, why would one privy to the minds of the gods bother with any attempt to make humans understand them?

- "O vanguard of the gods, wise [Ishum,  
whose counsels are sound],  
"Why, just now, [did you such a] speech?  
"Marduk's command is not [satisfactory to you]?"  
Ishum made ready to speak, saying to [the warrior Erra],  
"O warrior Erra ... [ ]  
"Humankind ... [ ]  
"The livestock [ ]  
"Swamps and reedbanks [ ]  
"Now then, what you said, w[arrior] Erra,  
"One stood forth and you [ ] seven,  
"You killed seven and did not let go a single one,  
"Take away the livestock [ ] ...  
"O Erra, when you strike with your weapons,  
"Mountains to[tr]er, the sea [con]vulses,  
"Such a flash of [your] stan[chion], they look east,  
[as if to] see the sun [rise]!  
"The palace [ ]

(gap of unknown length)

(Ishum continues: Erra has taken over the universe, even Marduk's sanctuary.  
How can he now say that no one respects him?)

#### Pericope D

- Ishum made ready to speak, saying to the warrior Erra,  
"O [war]rior Erra, you hold the leadline of heaven,  
"You are master of all the earth, lord in the land!  
"You convulse the sea, obliterate mountains,  
"You rule over humans and herd beasts.  
"The primeval sanctuaries<sup>1</sup> are in your hands,  
"You control Shuanna and command Esagila.  
"You have gathered to yourself all authority,  
the gods revere you,  
"The Igigi-gods stand in awe of you,  
the Anunna-gods are in dread of you.  
"When you set forth counsel, even Anu heeds you,

1. Text: Esharra (Temple of Enlil at Nippur); Eengura (Temple of Ea at Eridu).

- "Even Enlil agrees with you. Aside from you, is there opposition?  
"Except for you, is there battle?  
"The armor of strife is yours alone!  
"But you have said to yourself, 'They hold me in contempt.'" (15)

#### Tablet IV

(Ishum's speech continues, one of the longest in Akkadian literature. He narrates the horrors and destruction of civil war, refers to atrocities committed in Babylon by an invading army, and, in lines 36ff. quotes Marduk's moving lament for his city. In 45–49 Ishum goes on to quote Marduk's own description of the appalling conditions there. Ishum then describes events at Sippar, where the city walls are destroyed, and at Uruk, overrun by the barbarous Suteans. This fierce nomadic people even went so far as to interfere with the cult devotees of Ishtar, whose practices may have been abhorrent to the poet. In 63–64 Dur-Kurigalzu is referred to, and in 65ff. Ishtar of Der curses his city. It is not clear where Ishum's speech ends, but the poem continues with a passionate portrayal of indiscriminate violence. In 113ff. Ishum points out that even with decimation of the populace Erra is not satisfied; he must ruin the guidance of the land, its government and sanctuaries, even that of Marduk himself.)

- "O warrior Erra, you are the one  
who feared not noble Marduk's name!<sup>1</sup>  
"You have undone Dimkurkurra, "the bond of the world,"<sup>2</sup>  
the city of the king of the gods.  
"You changed your divine nature  
and made yourself like a mortal,<sup>3</sup>  
"You girded on your weaponry and entered Babylon.  
"Inside Babylon you spoke like a rabble-rouser(?),  
as if to take over the city,  
"The citizenry of Babylon, like reeds in a thicket,  
had no one in charge, so they rallied around you:  
"He who knew nothing of weapons—his sword was drawn,  
"He who knew nothing of archery—his bow was taut,<sup>4</sup>

1. That is, granting that Erra is supreme, by virtue of Marduk's command, his continued fighting is tantamount to sin, since it would seem to admit of opposition, an apparent denial of Marduk's supremacy.

2. Babylon.

3. That is, by ravaging sanctuaries?

4. Literally: "He who knew nothing of the *tīpānu*-bow, his bow was nocked."

- "He who knew nothing of fighting—set to the fray,  
 "He who knew nothing of wings—flew off like a bird.<sup>1</sup> (10)  
 "The cripple could surpass the fleet of foot,  
 the weakling could overpower the strong.  
 "They give voice to gross insolence against the governor  
 who provides for their holy places,  
 "With their own hands they blockaded the gate of Babylon,  
 their lifeline,  
 "They have torched the sanctuaries of Babylon  
 like marauders of the land,  
 "You, the vanguard, took their lead! (15)  
 "You aimed your shaft at the innermost wall,  
 'Woe! My heart!' it exclaims,  
 "You flung the seat of Muhra, its gatekeeper,  
 into the blood of young men and girls,  
 "The inhabitants of Babylon themselves—  
 they the bird, you the decoy—  
 "You snared in a net, caught and killed them, warrior Erra!<sup>2</sup>  
 "You quit the city and have gone out to the outskirts, (20)  
 "You took on a lion's face and have entered the palace.  
 "When the troops saw you, they girded on their weapons,  
 "The heart of the governor, avenger of Babylon, turned to fury.  
 "He issued orders to his army to plunder,  
 as if plundering enemies,  
 "He incited the commander to atrocities, (25)  
 'You, my man, for that city I am sending you to,  
 'Fear no god, respect no man!  
 'Do young and old alike to death!  
 'Spare no one, not even the baby sucking milk!  
 'You shall plunder the accumulated wealth of Babylon!' (30)  
 "The royal troops drew up and have invaded the city,  
 "With flashing shafts and outstretched blades,  
 "You homed their weapons upon those under special protection,  
 sacred to Anu and Dagan.

1. The reference seems to be to precipitous flight in the face of danger (Tsevat, RA 81 [1987], 184).  
 2. For a suggestion that this refers to a rebellion that Erra first instigated the Babylonians to foment, then cruelly suppressed himself in Marduk's name, see Vanstiphout, N.A.B.U. 1996/54, following Bottéro, *Mythologie*, 715.

- "You made their blood course like ditchwater in the city streets,  
 "You opened their arteries  
 and let the watercourses bear their blood away. (35)  
 "When the great lord Marduk saw that,  
 he cried 'Woe!' and his heart was hardened,  
 "An irreversible curse rose to his lips.  
 "He swore that he would not drink from the watercourses,  
 "He was revolted by their blood and would not enter Esagila,  
 'Alas for Babylon,  
 whose crown I fashioned luxuriant as a palm's,  
 but which the wind has scorched! (40)  
 'Alas for Babylon,  
 that I had laden with seed, like an evergreen,  
 but of whose delights  
 I could not have what I hoped for!  
 'Alas for Babylon,  
 that I tended like a thriving orchard,  
 but whose fruit I could not taste!  
 'Alas for Babylon,  
 that I suspended like a gemstone seal  
 on the neck of the sky!  
 'Alas for Babylon,  
 that I clasped in my hand like the tablet of destinies,  
 not handing it over to anyone else!' (45)  
 "[And this too has] noble Marduk said:  
 '[ ] from former days [ ]  
 'Let one quit the wharf:  
 he shall cross at two cubit's depth of water on foot,<sup>1</sup>  
 'Let one go down sixty fathoms in a well,  
 not one man shall keep himself alive (on the water),  
 'Let them (still have to) punt the fishing boat  
 a hundred leagues out in the open sea!'

1. The sense may be that there will be so little water at the city docks that one can walk across the riverbed, starting at the pier, and the water will scarcely reach to one's waist (von Soden *apud* Cagni, *Epoëa*, 229). Cutting off of water could also be a military maneuver; see B. Meissner, *Babylonien und Assyrien* (Heidelberg, 1920), 1: 108–109.

- "As for Sippar, the primeval city,  
through which the lord of the world  
did not allow the deluge to pass,  
because it was precious to him,  
(50)  
"You destroyed her ramparts against the will of Shamash,  
and threw down her fortifications.  
"As for Uruk, the dwelling of Anu and Ishtar,  
the city of courtesans, harlots, and prostitutes (for the cult),  
"Whom Ishtar deprived of husbands  
and reckoned as her own(?),<sup>1</sup>  
"There Sutean nomads, men and women,  
bandy war whoops!<sup>2</sup>  
(55)  
"They turned out the actors and singers (of) Eanna,  
"Whose manhood Ishtar changed to womanhood  
to strike awe into the people,  
"The wielders of daggers and razors,  
vintner's shears and flint knives,  
"Who take part in abominable acts  
for the entertainment of Ishtar,<sup>3</sup>  
(60)  
"A haughty, remorseless governor you placed over them.  
"He harassed them and interfered with their rites.  
"Ishtar was angered, she flew into a rage against Uruk,  
"She stirred up the enemy and swept clean the country,  
like granules on the water's face.  
"The dweller in Parsa had no respite from lamenting  
the destroyed Eugal-sanctuary.<sup>4</sup>  
"The enemy you roused has no desire to stop.  
"Ishtar responded thus:  
(65)  
"You turned the city Der<sup>5</sup> into a wasteland,  
"You fractured her populace like reeds,

1. With Bottéro; otherwise, "left to their own authority" (Diakonoff *apud* Cagni, *Poem*, 52-53).  
2. The Suteans, from the point of view of the Mesopotamian city dweller, were marauding nomadic people; see M. Heltzer, *The Suteans* (Naples, 1981).  
3. The cult of Ishtar was associated with prostitution, both male and female (lines 52, 56), and, perhaps, self-mutilation (57). See also IV.2b and p. 595 note 4.  
4. Parsa (see Nafsh, RA 77 [1983], 169-174) is to be identified with Dur-Kurigalzu, a large city northwest of Babylon; Eugal was the temple of Enlil there.  
5. Important Mesopotamian city near present-day Badra, near the Iranian frontier.

- "You extinguished their clamor  
like the (dying hiss of) foam on the water's face!  
"And as for me, you did not spare me but gave me over  
to the Sutean nomads!  
(70)  
"For the sake of my city Der,  
"I will judge no disputed truth,  
nor make any ruling for the land,  
"I will give no guidance nor aid in understanding.  
"Men forsook truth and took up violence,  
"They abandoned justice and were plotting wickedness.  
"Against (but) one country I raised up seven winds."<sup>1</sup>  
(75)  
"He who did not die in battle will die in the epidemic,  
"He who did not die in the epidemic,  
the enemy will plunder him,  
"He whom the enemy has not pl[undered],  
the bandit will murder him,  
"He whom the bandit did not murder,  
the king's weapon will vanquish him,  
"He whom the king's weapon did not vanquish,  
the prince will slay him,  
(80)  
"He whom the prince did not slay,  
a thunderstorm will wash him away,  
"He whom the thunderstorm did not wash away,  
the sun will parch him,\*  
"He who has gone out in the world,  
the wind will sweep him away,  
"He who has gone into his home,<sup>1</sup> a demon will strike him,  
"He who has gone up to a high place will perish of thirst,  
(85)  
"He who has gone down to a low place  
will perish in the waters!  
"You have obliterated high and low place alike.  
"The man in charge of the city says to his mother,<sup>2</sup>  
(90)  
"If only I had stuck in your womb the day you bore me,  
"If only our lives had come to an end,

1. See p. 906 note 2.

2. As the text stands, it is difficult to decide who speaks what lines; the reading offered here is only a suggestion.

'If only we had died together,  
'For you gave me a city whose walls are destroyed!  
'Its people are the beasts,

their god is he who hunts them down.

'He it is whose net is tight-meshed:  
they could not draw married men out of it  
but they died a violent death.'<sup>\*</sup>

"He who begot a son, saying,

"This is my son,

"When I have reared him he will requite my pains,"

"I will put that son to death, his father must bury him,

"Afterward I will put that father to death,  
but he will have none to bury him."<sup>1</sup>

"He who built a house, saying

"This is my home,"<sup>2</sup>

"I built it for myself, I shall spend my leisure in it,

"On the day fate claims me, I shall fall asleep inside,"

"I will put him to death and wreck his home,

"Afterward, though it be wreckage(?),

I will give it to another.'

"O warrior Erra, you have put the righteous person to death,

"You have put the unrighteous person to death,

"He who sinned against you, you put him to death,

"He who did not sin against you, you put him to death,

"The high priest, assiduous with divine offerings,  
you put to death,

"The functionary who served the king you put to death,

"The old men in the anterooms\* you put to death,

"The young girls in their bedrooms you put to death,

"Even then you found no appeasement whatsoever!

"Even then you told yourself, "They hold me in contempt!"

"Even then you said to yourself, O warrior Erra,

(95)

(100)

(105)

(110)

'I will strike down the mighty, I will terrorize the weak,  
'I will kill the commander, I will scatter the troops,  
'I will wreck the temple's sacred chamber,

the rampart's battlement,

the pride of the city I will destroy!

"I will tear out the mooring pole so the ship drifts away,

"I will smash the rudder so she cannot reach the shore,

"I will pluck out the mast, I will rip out the rigging.

"I will make breasts go dry so babies cannot thrive,

"I will block up springs so that even little channels  
can bring no life-sustaining water.

"I will make hell shake and heaven tremble,

"I will make the planets shed their splendor,

I will wrench out the stars from the sky,

"I will hack the tree's roots

so its branches cannot burgeon,

"I will wreck the wall's foundation so its top tumbles,

"I will approach the dwelling of the king of the gods,  
that no direction be forthcoming!"

(125)

*(Erra is gratified that the extent of his power is recognized; he has at last won his respect. He decrees that the rabble of the world should fight on; at length Babylon shall rule what is left. Erra then allows Ishum to campaign against a mountain that is apparently the homeland of the Suteans, the human arch-villains of the narrative. Erra has destroyed most of the world, but Ishum now puts violence to useful purpose.)*

The warrior Erra heard him,

The speech that Ishum made pleased him like finest oil.

Thus spoke the warrior Erra,

"The Sealand the Sealand,<sup>1</sup> Subartu Subartu, Assyrian Assyrian,

"Elamite Elamite, Kassite Kassite,

"Sutean Sutean, Gutian Gutian,

"Lullubaeen Lullubaeen, land land, city city,

"House house, man man, brother brother

must not spare (one another), let them kill each other! (135)

(130)

1. The first person here and in lines 102-103 quotes Erra.

2. The word translated here as "home" means "storehouse," but has also been interpreted as "tomb" (J. Westenholz, *Studies Cagni*, 1181-1201).

1. This and the following list the countries surrounding Babylonia to the south, north, east, and west, partly in contemporaneous, partly in archaizing terms. "Akkadian" in 136 refers to an unnamed Babylonian king whose victories are here "prophesied."

"Then, afterward, let the Akkadian arise to slay them all,  
to rule them,<sup>1</sup> every one."

The warrior Erra said these words to Ishum his vanguard,  
"Go, Ishum, the matter you spoke of,<sup>2</sup> do as you wish."

Ishum set out for the mountain Sharshar,<sup>3</sup>

The Seven, warriors unrivalled, fell in behind him.

When the warriors reached the mountain Sharshar,

He raised his hand and destroyed the mountain,

He reckoned the mountain Sharshar as level ground.

He cut away the trunks of the cedar forest,

The thicket looked as if the deluge<sup>4</sup> had passed over,

He laid waste cities and turned them into open spaces,

He obliterated mountains and slew their wildlife,

He convulsed the sea and destroyed its increase,

He brought the stillness of death upon swamp and thicket,  
burning like fire,

He cursed the beasts and returned them to clay.

(140)

(145)

(150)

#### Tablet V

*(Erra, in a last boast, addresses the gods. He praises Ishum and points out, not without pride, that in his rage and valor he, Erra, had made the blunder of attacking the leadership of the universe as well as its subjects. Were it not for Ishum's timely intervention, who knows where Erra's terrible strength might have led him? Ishum rejoins that this is all very well, but would Erra please calm himself now that his point has been made?)*

After Erra was calmed and took up his own abode,

All the gods were gazing at his face,

All the Igigi-gods and Anunna-gods stood in awe.

Erra made ready to speak, saying to all the gods,

"Quiet, all of you, learn what I have to say.

"No doubt I intended evil in the bygone lapse,

(1)

(5)

1. Variant: "let him cast them."

2. If there was a referent for this speech, it is now missing in one of the gaps in the poem.

3. Perhaps Jebel Bishri, plausibly argued by Cagni, *Epoëa*, 33-34 and 242-243 to be a reference to the homeland of the Suteans; see p. 562 notes 5 and 7.

4. Text: Hanish. (For the reading of the line I follow Cagni, *Epoëa*, 244-245).

"I was angry and wanted to lay waste the people.

"Like a hireling, I took the lead ram from the flock,

"Like one who did not plant an orchard,

I was quick to cut it down,

"Like a scorcher of the earth,

I slew indiscriminately good and evil.

"One would not snatch a carcass

from the jaws of a ravening lion,

"So too no one can reason where one is in a frenzy.

"Were it not for Ishum my vanguard,

what might have happened?

"Where would your provider be, where your high priest?

"Where your food offering? You would smell no incense."

Ishum made ready to speak,

saying to the warrior Erra these words,

"Quiet, warrior, hear what I have to say,

"No doubt this is true, now, calm down, let us serve you!

"At a time you are angry, where is he who can face you?"

(10)

(15)

*(Erra returns to his home and pronounces a blessing upon Babylon, that she will at last prevail over her enemies and wax rich on the tribute of her foes throughout the world.)*

When Erra heard this, his face beamed,

Like radiant daylight his features glowed.

He entered Emeslam and took up his abode,

He called Ishum to tell him the sign,

To give him instructions

concerning the scattered peoples of Akkad,

"Let the people of the country, who had dwindled,

become numerous again,

"Let short and tall alike traverse its paths,

"May weak Akkadian fell mighty Sutean,

"May one drive off seven like sheep.

"You shall make his cities into ruins

and his highlands into open ground,

"You shall take massive booty from them

(and put it) in Shuanna,

"You shall reconcile the angry gods with their own abodes,

(20)

(25)

(30)

- "You shall make gods of livestock  
and grain descend (once more) to the land,  
"You shall make mountain deliver its yield, sea its produce,  
"You shall make the ruined fields deliver produce.  
"Let the governors of all cities haul their massive tribute  
into Shuanna,  
(35)  
"Let the tops of the [ru]ined temples come up  
like the rising sun,  
"Let Tigris and Euphrates bring abundant water,  
"Let the governors of all cities make the provider  
for Esagila and Babylon their lord."\*

*Erra's speech melds into that of the narrator. The poet introduces himself by name, and explains that the text, or "sign" of the god, was approved by Erra himself after it was revealed to the author in a half-waking state. Having become a sign, the text acquires prophylactic powers.)*

Praise to the great lord Nergal<sup>1</sup> and warrior Ishum  
for years without number!

- How it came to pass that Erra grew angry and set out to lay  
waste the lands and destroy their peoples,  
But Ishum his counsellor calmed him and left a remnant,  
The composer of its text was Kabti-ilani-Marduk,  
of the family Dabibi.  
(40)

He revealed it at night, and, just as he (the god?)  
had discoursed it while he (K.) was coming awake,\*  
he (K.) omitted nothing at all,  
Nor one line did he add.

- When Erra heard it he approved,  
What pertained to Ishum his vanguard satisfied him.  
All the gods praised his sign.<sup>2</sup>  
Then the warrior Erra spoke thus,  
"In the sanctuary of the god who honors this poem,  
may abundance accumulate,  
"But let the one who neglects it never smell incense.  
"Let the king who extols my name rule the world,  
(45)  
(50)

1. Erra is here equated with the god Nergal (see III.20 and III.46).  
2. This poem. See above, General Introduction, D.1.

- "Let the prince who discourses the praise of my valor  
have no rival,  
"Let the singer who chants (it) not die from pestilence,  
"But his performance be pleasing to king and prince.  
"The scribe who masters it  
shall be spared in the enemy country  
and honored in his own land,  
(55)  
"In the sanctum of the learned,  
where they shall constantly invoke my name,  
I shall grant them understanding.  
"The house in which this tablet is placed,  
though Erra be angry and the Seven be murderous,  
"The sword of pestilence shall not approach it,  
safety abides upon it.  
"Let this poem stand forever, let it endure till eternity,  
"Let all lands hear it and praise my valor,  
(60)  
"Let all inhabitants witness and extol my name."

*Text:* L. Cagni, *Das Erra-Epos, Keilschrifttexte, Studia Pohl 5* (Rome, 1970); W. G. Lambert, AFO 27 (1980), 76–81; Saggis, AFO 33 (1986), 29; Al-Rawi and Black, *Iraq 51* (1989), 112–113, pl. XX.  
*Edition:* L. Cagni, *L'Épopée d'Erra, Studi Semitici 34* (Naples, 1966). This contains a detailed commentary that is essential for close study of the text. Tablet II has been edited by Al-Rawi and Black, *Iraq 51* (1989), 111–122.

*Translation:* L. Cagni, *The Poem of Erra*, SANE 1/3 (1977), with additions and modifications to his former commentary; J. Bottéro, *Annuaire 1977–78*, 107–164 = *Mythes*, 221–278; *Mythologie*, 680–727; Dalley, *Myths*, 282–315; G. W. Müller, *TUAT III/4*, 781–801.

*Literature:* In addition to the works cited in Cagni, 1977, and the essay by Bottéro, there is a discussion by Edzard, "Irri (Erra)-Epos," *RLA 5*, 166–170 with bibliography through 1977, and P. Machinist, "Rest and Violence in the Poem of Erra," *JAOS 103* (1983), 221–226.

\**Notes to Text:* (I 144) I follow Cagni, *Poem*, 90 and others; see Lambert, *JSS 27* (1982), 283 vs. AHw 1383a. (III A.17) Reading *našū š* (with Bottéro). (III C.22) Schramm, *OrNS 40* (1971), 271. (IV 47) For lines 47–49 see Vansinphout, *N.A.B.U. 1987/69*. (IV 82) Text *itabbal* "be carried off," though one expects a form of *bi* "dry out." (IV 93–94) With Streck, *AOAT 264* (1999), 137. (IV 110) Beaulieu, *ZA 82* (1992), 102–103. (V 38) For discussion of this difficult line, see Cagni, *Épopée*, 253. The interpretation of *lililiu* (variant: *šubēl*) as derived from *bēlu*, used here, was suggested by Brinkman, *AnOr 43*, 285 note 1852. (V 43) Deller-Meyer, *OrNS 53* (1984), 121–122.