Gösta Gabriel

Enūma eliš: Weg zu einer globalen Weltordnung

Orientalische Religionen in der Antike 12

Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014. Pp. xxii + 524. Cloth. €129.00. ISBN 9783161528729.

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The purpose of this book is to take a comprehensive look at the Babylonian Creation Epic (Enuma Elish) from two complementary perspectives: (1) a "*textimmanent*" perspective focused on the internal linguistics of this "exceptionally long Babylonian poem," directing attention to intertextual concerns "only at particularly decisive and fruitful points"; and (2) an external "*kulturimmanent*" perspective consciously "abstaining from modern academic theory" in order to focus more intentionally on "select criteria sanctioned (*erlauben*) by the text itself" (7). Unfortunately, the book contains no transcription, transliteration, or translation of the Enuma Elish text, nor are there photographs of the tablets themselves. For all these things the author refers the reader to Lambert's recently published critical edition (*Babylonian Creation Myths* [Eisenbrauns, 2013]).

The body of the work is carefully structured, dividing neatly into several well-written chapters. Chapter 1 lays out Gabriel's goals, presumptions, methods, and anticipated conclusions. Chapter 2 engages questions about Enuma Elish's "pragmatic extrarelational dimension," briefly discussing the archaeological profiles recorded at every dig where Enuma Elish fragments have come to light, as well as nagging questions about the extent to which "priestly secrecy" in the Marduk cult plays a role in its composition and dissemination (an issue more thoroughly examined by A. Lenzi's Brandeis dissertation, *Secrecy and the Gods (*SAAS 19, 2008).

Chapter 3 lays out and briefly explains the criteria used to outline the contents of this "canonical text distributed over seven tablets" (107). Aware and appreciative of the structural analyses of Jacobsen, Vanstiphout, and Kämmerer/Metzler, Gabriel here duly posts his own:

Prologue (1.1–6)
Noise versus Peace (1.7–78)
Marduk's Birth and Preeminence (1.79–104)
Escalation of Conflict (1.105–162)
Plight of the Anšar Gods (2.1–126)
Marduk as Savior (2.127–162)
Kaka's Commission (3.1–28)
Marduk's First Elevation (3.129–4.34)
Marduk's Struggle and Battle with Tiamat (4.35–134)
Creation of the World (4.135–5.76)
Marduk's Second Elevation (and Second Name) (5.77–116)
Creation Continued: Humankind, (Re)Ordering of the Gods, Babylon (5.117–6.69)
Final Confirmations (6.70–120)
Marduk's 50+2 Names (6.121–7.144)
Epilogue (7.145–162)

Chapter 4 brilliantly discusses the doubling of *conflict* (Ea-Apsu // Marduk-Tiamat) and *construction* motifs (construction of universe // construction of Babylon) and their contribution to the socioliterary impact of Enuma Elish. Recognizing that he is not the first to observe this doubling (see Oppenheim, Vanstiphout, Frahm, Wilcke, Jacobsen, Hurowitz, George, Katz), Gabriel nevertheless fleshes out its implications within the following chiastic structure (Enuma Elish 1.7–6.69):

Obliteration of the gods by primordial chaos
    Tiamat's weaponry preparation
        Exaltation of Kingu
            Desperation of the gods for leadership
        Exaltation of Marduk
    Marduk's weaponry preparation
Obliteration of primordial chaos by one god

Chapter 5 is a word study—perhaps the book's most important contribution—undertaken to define more precisely what Jean Bottero calls "le terme le plus fort et le plus riche et significatif" (*La plus vieille religion. En Mésopotamie* [Paris, 1998], 189): the Akkadian term *šīmtu* ("destiny"). Sometimes it appears in *status constructus*, as in the phrase *šīmat*

ᵈMarūtuk ("destiny of Marduk," Enuma Elish 6.96). Sometimes, as in the section describing Marduk's first elevation, it appears in refrains such as "unequalled is 'your destiny'" (*šī-mat-ka*, 4.4, 6). Sometimes it adorns dramatic turning-points in the plot, as when the gods "decree a destiny … for Marduk" (*a-na ᵈmarūtuk … i-ši-mu šim-ta*, 3.138), that is, when the great gods finally accept his demand for the authority to "decree destinies" (*ši-ma-ta lu-šim-ma*, 2.160) before plunging into battle on their behalf (in each of these passages the use of *šīmtu* + its derivative verb, *šiāmu*). Distinguishing between *Festsprechung* ("conferred word of destiny"), *Festsprechungsakt* ("conferred act of destiny") and *Festsprechungsmacht* ("conferred power of destiny"), Gabriel condenses what he sees in Enuma Elish via the following formula: "Festsprechungsmacht bedeutet die Fahigkeit und Befugnis, durch das Wort etwas fur Dritte dauerhaft festzulegen" ("The power to confer destiny denotes the capability and authority to establish permanence for a third party through a particular word," 260). In other words, Marduk does not conquer or create anything until or unless he is authorized to do so by the "words of destiny" issued from an authoritative source to which he legally submits himself. Only after conquering Tiamat does he take charge of the *tuppi šīmāti* ("Tablet of Destinies") and assumes royal authority. The chapter ends with a fascinatingly insightful discussion of each of Marduk's 50 (+2) names (Enuma Elish 6.121–7.144).

Chapter 6 (re)engages the old debate initiated by Frankfort and Jacobsen as to whether Marduk's political status prior to the declaration of his kingship reflects the existence of a "primitive democracy" in ancient Mesopotamia. Laying out the pros and cons, Gabriel nevertheless rejects this hypothesis, arguing instead that the "kingdom from the beginning on … is presented via the 'lordship concept' [*Herrschaftskonzept*] and represented (from a political perspective) less as a system (democracy evolving into monarchy) and more in terms of that lord's personality" (317). Distinguishing (1) between "legality" and "legitimation," and (2) between *ontic* (genealogical constitution and character of the king) and *fientic* "legitimation" (heroic, glorious deeds done by and for the king), chapter 7 concludes that Marduk's ontic character and fientic accomplishments fulfill all the necessary requirements of a "legal covenant" (*Vertragsrecht*) and that at root this reflects the primacy of a "lordship ideology" designed to define explicitly what distinguishes a good king from a bad one (see also C. D. Evans, "Naram-Sin and Jeroboam: The Archetypal *Unheilsherrscher* in Mesopotamian and Biblical Historiography," In *Scripture in Context II* [ed. W. Hallo et al; Winona Lake, 1983], 99–109). The conclusion explains that establishing and maintaining the *pax Mardukiana* involves several stages: insufficient claim to inheriting the throne > the need for a wider grounding > self-submission to legal, physical, and spiritual criteria to assess suitability > "legitimation."

While not as groundbreaking as W. Sommerfeld's *Der Aufstieg Marduks* (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1982) or as brilliantly comprehensive as W. G. Lambert's *Babylonian Creation Myths* (Winona Lake, 2013), this book nevertheless insightfully addresses how the greatest of all Mesopotamian "songs" (*zamāru*, Enuma Elish 7.161) reflects the structure, character, and raison d'être of monarchy as the "way to global world-order" (the book's subtitle). Future revision, however, might consider revisiting the following two areas of concern. First, the linguistic argument upon which everything stands here, since it requires such constant, intense engagement with the Akkadian text of Enuma Elish, would be much more effective were a copy of the text included. Reviewers lodged the same critique against my dissertation (*The Balaam Traditions* [Scholars Press, 1990]), so the problems involved in making this happen as well as the irony of this critique itself hardly go unnoticed. Yet, providing readers access to the text would go a long way toward improving the quality, accessibility, and effectiveness of this otherwise outstanding monograph.

Second, this book hardly terminates the Mesopotamian democracy debate; at most it simply reiterates why the Enuma Elish poet feels so strong a need to highlight and emphasize the attractiveness of monarchy as a political institution. Here and there Gabriel makes reference to V. Bartash's important new study of the "assembly" (puḫru), but not seriously enough its conclusions, that "in Mesopotamia the origin of the king's authority is closely connected with the assembly. Enuma Elish describes twice how the pretender is approved—primarily as an extraordinary leader of the community and afterwards as an eternal king. The election of the military leader (LUGAL) is originally conditioned by an external threat, but conversion to despotism occurs later—after the end of the creation of the universe, when LUGAL surpasses the political influence of the assembly" ("Puḫru: Assembly as a Political Institution in Enūma eliš," in *Language in the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the 53e Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale* [Winona Lake, 2010], 1106).

Quibbles aside, this monograph comes highly recommended to anyone interested in ancient Near Eastern lordship ideology generally and/or Enuma Elish specifically.