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LAMENT AND HOPE IN *LUDLUL BĒL NĒMEQI*

Anthony P. SooHoo, SJ

Abstract

Ludlul bēl nēmeqi has been described as wisdom literature and has been compared to the theodicy in the book of Job. Šubši-mešrê-Šakkan, the protagonist, voices his despair for his misfortune and praises Marduk for his restoration. This article addresses how hope is communicated to the imagined audience in *Ludlul* in response to the capriciousness of the deity. Moreover, lament, which is addressed to an emotional community, is construed as an act of hope and an expression of resilience, engendering empathy and solidarity in both human and divine audiences. The composition reflects the concerns and interests of cultic specialists, whose expertise and learning made them important figures during the Kassite period, even as it also hints at the cooperation and competition between the *āšipu* and the *kalû* in the Assyrian royal court of the first millennium BCE. Although hope is a cross-cultural phenomenon, it activates sociocultural values, beliefs, and practices, fostering resilience while ancient Mesopotamians confronted the uncertainty and suffering that are part of reality.

Ludlul bēl nēmeqi a été décrit comme une littérature de sagesse et a été comparé à la théodicée du Livre de Job. Šubši-mešrê-Šakkan, le protagoniste, exprime son désespoir face à son malheur et loue Marduk pour son rétablissement. Cette étude aborde la manière dont l'espoir est communiqué au public imaginé dans *Ludlul* en réponse au caractère capricieux de la divinité. En outre, la lamentation, qui s'adresse à une communauté émotionnelle, est interprétée comme un acte d'espoir et l'expression de la résilience, engendrant l'empathie et la solidarité dans les auditoires humains et divins. La composition reflète les préoccupations et les intérêts des spécialistes du culte, dont l'expertise et l'érudition ont fait d'eux des personnages importants de la période kassite, tout en laissant entrevoir la coopération et la concurrence entre les *āšipu* et les *kalû* au sein de la cour royale assyrienne du premier millénaire avant notre ère. Bien que l'espoir soit un phénomène interculturel, il active les valeurs, les croyances et les pratiques socioculturelles, favorisant la résilience alors que les anciens Mésopotamiens étaient confrontés à l'incertitude et à la souffrance qui font partie de la réalité.

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Introduction

The word "hope," from Old English *hopa* and its verbal form *hopian,* is attested as early as the tenth century CE (Klein 2003, 352). According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*,[1] its meaning includes a sense of expectation, with or without the implication of desire, as well as trust or confidence, to varying degrees, that something will occur. Finally, hope is distinguished from optimism because the latter includes an evaluation of certitude and a perception of control (Bruininks and Malle 2005). Thus, one can be hopeful in a dire situation where there is no assurance of a successful outcome or any sense of agency, whereas optimism involves greater certitude and perceived control.

Undoubtedly, Christian theological views have influenced hope's different shades of meaning. Among ancient Greek writers, there was ambivalence regarding ἐλπίς (*elpis*) because false hope, due to insufficient

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[1] https://www.oed.com/dictionary/hope_n1?tab=factsheet#1253664 (accessed May 21, 2023).

knowledge or unreal expectations, could mislead, while hope itself, which creates confidence, could result in courage.[2] Hesiod's version of the story of Pandora embodies this ambiguity because only hope stays in her jar after every misfortune is released into the world (*Opera et dies*, 53–105). It is unclear why hope remains: is it so that it could be accessible to humans, or is it meant to be kept from them? Early and medieval Christian writers, on the other hand, viewed hope as a theological virtue, intimately connected with faith and love, which comes from God and is ordered toward the good.[3] While hope has a rational dimension, it is also associated with the passions and has an emotional aspect. Ancient

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[2] For the Greek philosophical conceptions of hope, see Gravlee 2020. Plato has both negative and positive assessments of hope. On the one hand, he recounts a myth of how the divinities bestow upon human beings confidence, fear, and gullible hope, which are called "mindless advisers" (*Timaeus* 69b). On the other hand, Socrates calls hopes "pleasures of anticipation" in his debate with Protarch, and Plato suggests a link between hope and human agency since thoughts about what we enjoy, which are future-oriented, are distinct from what actually will happen (*Philebus* 39e3). In the *Apologia* and the *Phaedo*, Socrates insists that hope for the afterlife is rational (*Phaedo* 66e–67c; *Apologia* 29a–b). Aristotle connects hopefulness with confidence as well as fear, depending on a person's sense of the future, whether it is full of possibility or closed, and this moves one to decide and act, especially in those who are high-minded or "great-souled" (*megalopsychia*) (*Nichomachean Ethics* 3.6–3.8; *Rhetoric* 2.5, 2.12).

[3] For the Pauline understanding of hope, see Webber and Kok 2020, and for Thomas Aquinas's reformulation of Aristotle's concept of hope, see Pinsent 2020. For Paul and Augustine of Hippo, hope anticipates what has not been realized (Rom 8:24). While hope may require a "leap of faith," it also can lead to perseverance and genuineness (δοκιμή, *dokimē*) (Rom 4:18; 5:3–5). For Augustine, hope is distinct from but intimately connected with faith and love. Hope, which is directed toward the good of the person who has it, is future-oriented, while faith can also be related to the past (*Enchiridion de Fide, Spe, et Caritate* II.7; XXX.114). Aquinas argues that hope is both a passion and a theological virtue. As such, it has a teleological aspect since it is concerned with a person's ultimate happiness, which is found in union with God. Since hope involves knowledge of the possible, it leads to rational agency, but ignorance and drunkenness may also result in false hope. As a theological virtue, hope is a habit of the will that is perfected by God's grace (*Summa Theologiae* I–II, q. 40; II–II, qq. 17–22).

Mesopotamians understood hope differently because their notions of divine and human nature did not share the same assumptions and conceptual framework as those of the Greek and Christian thinkers and because they did not deal with the topic systematically.

Modern research on hope falls into two main camps. Some treat hope, which is accompanied by a change in mental state, as an emotion in response to goal outcomes and as a coping process (Lazarus 1999). Other approaches, such as C. S. Snyder's (1989, 2002) hope theory, highlight its cognitive processes (agency thinking and pathways thinking) and goal-oriented nature. More recent scholarship has not only emphasized hope's rational qualities in achieving desired outcomes but also its affective nature as a strong motivator in the face of uncertainty (Cairns 2022, 44). Finally, while the relationship between hope and resilience—the various strategies people employ to "bounce back" from negative situations and adapt to new circumstances—continues to be debated, the two are closely related because both involve motivation, aspiration, and actualization (agency).[4]

Certainly, hope is connected to the emotional, rational, and physical since the human person is more complex than Cartesian dualism suggests. Moreover, hope has both an individual and a social dimension because it draws upon and is comprehensible only in light of common values and beliefs. Finally, hope has a temporal aspect because it often expresses a desire and confidence for something not yet attained. We employ diverse images and metaphorical language to characterize hope because it is amorphous and unruly. Since despair and suffering are part of the human condition, it is reasonable to assume that ancient societies and cultures devised a common response to this reality. Like emotions, hope is a contested category, culturally conditioned, and varying over time. This makes it doubly challenging to study in the ancient world because there are no informants who can clarify and be questioned. As a result, we must resort to analogical thinking and an approximate translation of terms and concepts. Yet, we should not let the perfect be the enemy of the good since we can still discern conceptual boundaries,

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[4] Ryff and Singer 2003; Bonanno 2004; Southwick et al. 2014.

fuzzy though they may be, that allow us to recognize differences and similarities across cultures, both ancient and modern.

Ludlul bēl nēmeqi is a well-attested work, which has been reconstructed as having five tablets with 120 lines each, usually couplets, in Standard Babylonian.[5] Its manuscripts come from the first millennium BCE, but it was probably composed earlier during the Kassite period, based on internal evidence such as the names mentioned and similarities with medical and exorcistic compositions from that era. Since the ruler Nazimarutaš is mentioned in the text, the earliest possible dating is the thirteenth century BCE, but that does not preclude later reworking of the composition or archaism involving the appropriation of this Kassite king as a literary figure to connect the poem with "the stream of tradition." For example, Tzvi Abusch and Sara Milstein (2021) have argued that the hymnic prologue (I 1–42) is a later addition influenced by the *šuila*-prayers and that it reflects a development in the understanding of Marduk's supremacy, which subsumes even that of the personal gods, the city god, and the human king (cf. I 15–16, 25–28; Abusch 2020, 224).[6] However, the existence of a Ugaritic composition

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[5] Based on the evidence from the commentary on *Ludlul*, Oshima (2014, 6) was the first to argue that the poem consisted of five tablets.

[6] For Abusch and Milstein, the earlier version of *Ludlul* without the hymnic prologue, therefore, is comparable to the so-called "Dialogue between a Man and His God" (AO 4462), dated to the Old Babylonian period. Although both compositions have similar content and themes, the style is quite different since, in *Ludlul*, Marduk never speaks directly and his agency is mediated through ominous signs and cultic figures, while the Dialogue includes the god's affirming response to the speaker's argument for the reversal of his fate (cf. Foster 2005, 150, ll. 58–67). While Abusch's diachronic explanation has merit, given the limited number of texts he cites as evidence and the difficulty in precisely dating compositions and their complex editorial histories, it cannot be ruled out that the differences may reflect the diversity of theological views about Marduk in any given period. For example, "The Literary Prayer to Marduk," which has a similar dualistic portrayal of the god, is in the Old Babylonian script but may be a Middle Babylonian text with archaizing tendencies (Foster 2005, 611 n. 1). Finally, in any formal analysis, there is disagreement. Abusch and Milstein include I 1–42 in the hymnic prologue based on content, whereas this study treats the *inclusio* with the two precatives (*ludlul* and *lušalmid*) in I 1 and I 39–40 as its boundaries.

(RS 25.460) with similar themes, imagery, and language, also dated to the thirteenth century BCE but probably written down in the late Old Babylonian period or afterward, demonstrates that the theological reflection on human suffering addressed in *Ludlul* was already being discussed among scholars in an earlier era and was also an issue of interest to other scribal elites outside of Mesopotamia.[7] The shape and format of *Ludlul*'s tablets indicate that some (about one-third) were copies for and by students. Moreover, the colophons of tablets of *Ludlul* from Sultantepe, dated to the late eighth to seventh century BCE and belonging to Qurdi-Nergal and his family, are poorly written and mention numerous *šamallu* (*seḫrūtu*), "(junior) apprentice scribes" (Lenzi 2023, 39). Thus, the composition was part of the scribal curriculum, and the *mukallimtu*-type commentary (K.3291) copied in the Neo-Assyrian period demonstrates this text's enduring cultural importance.[8]

In the twelfth century BCE, Assyrian kings imported Babylonian scholarly knowledge and scribes engaged in a process of standardization, preserving texts but also transforming them as they copied, commented upon, and adapted "the stream of tradition" in their sociocultural milieux and for their own ideological purposes (Veldhuis 2012). *Ludlul*'s style and content shaped and encoded the perspectives of the ritual specialists attached to the royal court.[9] It contained their speculation and advertised their scholarly secret knowledge and skills, allowing them to gain social capital.[10] The style—the rare words and

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[7] While RS 25.460 (= *Ugaritica* 5, no. 162) is roughly contemporaneous with *Ludlul*, it has linguistic and orthographic features that suggest a dating to the seventeenth century or later. Nevertheless, the relationship between the two compositions is unclear, and there is no undisputed proof yet that the Ugaritic text is a direct precursor of *Ludlul* (Y. Cohen 2013, 172; Oshima and Anthonioz 2023, 36).

[8] Annus and Lenzi 2010, xvi–xviii; Lenzi 2023, 346–49.

[9] In literary works, form and content often work together to convey meaning (Greenstein 2016, 459).

[10] Lenzi employs and adapts Pierre Bourdieu's idea of capital in his discussion of the secret knowledge of Mesopotamian cult specialists: "Distinction, prestige, and power can only be acquired, however, if the broader society knows something about a group's secret knowledge, if only that the group claims to possess it. In

specialized terminology, paronomasia, lists, parallelism, and interpretation of Sumerograms—is evidence of this erudite milieu. Moreover, the symbiotic relationship between the aural and visual registers of cuneiform allowed meaning to be generated and communicated.[11]

In *Ludlul*, the protagonist's personal experience of lamenting in the face of divine abandonment and suffering teaches others how to hope in an emotional community, revealing important Mesopotamian norms, values, and beliefs that underlie and legitimize its social structures.[12] Lament activates hope and the constellation of emotions related to it, as it seeks to repair ruptures in both human and divine relationships. In doing so, it appeals to distinct types of authority to offer reasons for hope and fosters resilience when confronting the messiness and disappointments of reality. This article argues that *Ludlul*'s style and content communicate the theological perspective and interests of an emotional community that included the cultic specialists like the *āšipu*, *kalû*, and *bārû*, who were cooperating and competing in the Assyrian royal court and for whom this text was so culturally important. While it has been demonstrated that the poem was "composed in the cultural milieu that saw the compilation of the Diagnostic Handbook and the systematization of the *āšipūtu*" (Beaulieu 2007, 13), in the next two sections I will argue that the following theological concepts from *kalûtu* literature, enumerated by Uri Gabbay (2014b, 10, 21–29) in his study of Emesal prayers, also appear in *Ludlul* and offer the audience reasons for hope: the dual aspects of the divine *persona* linked to a binary

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other words, for secret knowledge to become symbolic capital for its possessors it must be advertised: while largely concealing its actual content, the existence of secret knowledge must be revealed through various discursive means" (2013, 18).

[11] Greenstein 2016, 470; Noegel 2021, 321–22.

[12] According to Barbara Rosenwein, emotional communities, modeled after textual communities, are "groups in which people adhere to the same norms of emotional expression and value—or devalue—the same or related emotions" (2006, 2, 24–29). Multiple emotional communities can exist at any given time, and cultural actors can move between them. They consist of people who "have a common stake, interests, values, and goals." Like Bourdieu's (1977, 86) "habitus," they have internalized norms that determine how people think, act, and feel in the various social networks they inhabit.

system of divination that understands the deity's manifestation in two stages; a concept of guilt/negligence; lament leading to the pacification of the deity's heart; and the portrayal of the enemy as the agent of divine anger.[13] Since lament is such a prominent feature, in the article's final part I will identify other features in *Ludlul* that hint at the *kalû*'s inferior status and yet reflect the gradual integration of *kalûtu* into Assyrian scholarly circles in the first millennium BCE.

Reasons for Hope

Ludlul's hymnic prologue expresses the deity's dual *persona* using contrasts such as night and day, violent storm and pleasant breeze, the brute force of Marduk's hand and the gentleness of his palm, his frowning and attentiveness, his overbearing punishment and maternal aspect, his beating and healing, his imputing guilt and absolving of it, and his imposing demons and expelling them with incantations (I 1–28). The preponderance of merisms (style) communicates the theological message (content) regarding the deity's nature (Noegel 2016, 615). Furthermore, the composition employs similar imagery from *kalûtu* literature and also shares many characteristics with "The Literary Prayer to Marduk," whose colophon identifies it as an *unnīnu/unninnu*, "lament, supplication."[14] These include the deity's manifestation compared to the dawn

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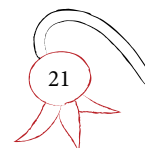
[13] The balaĝ, eršema, eršaḫuĝa, and šuila are the four genres of Emesal prayers performed by the gala/*kalû* priest to appease the god's heart and are often accompanied by musical instruments.

[14] For a description and examples of the diverse types of imagery in the Emesal prayers, see Gabbay 2014b, 29–33. The only type not explicitly mentioned in *Ludlul* is the description of divine concealment with reference to the god's body. However, Marduk's anger is characterized by the disappearance, departure, or inattention of the person's protective god and goddess in I 15–16, 45–46 and II 4–5, 112–13. The colophon of "The Literary Prayer to Marduk" has: IṢ(?) [...] *ilum* ᵈAMAR.UTU(ᵈ*Marduk*) // *rišīšu r*[*ē*]*mu nakruṭuana* ÌR-*ka*(*waradka*) // *unninni ša* ᵈAMAR.UTU(ᵈ*Marduk*) // *mušna*[*mmir*] *gimir šamê*, "[...] the god Marduk // Have mercy on him; show pity to your servant. // The lament to Marduk // The one who makes bright all the heavens" (Oshima 2011, 170–71).

while his absence is likened to the obscuring of the sun or moon (e.g., I 2–4; I 119–120; II 120; IV 71); the god's destructive power described as natural phenomena (e.g., storm or flood in I 5–7); and animal imagery characterizing the sufferer or the deity's disposition (e.g., protagonist as moaning dove in I 107; Marduk as overbearing wild bull and motherly cow in I 17–20).

This conception of divine nature results in the unpredictability of reality because the god can change moods abruptly, resulting in the individual's harm or prosperity.[15] Marduk is free to act in determining destinies, and no other deity can know his ways even though he comprehends theirs:

I 29 The Lord, he sees (*ibarri*) everything in the heart of the gods (ŠÀ-*bi* DINGIR.MEŠ),

I 30 But no one a[mong] the gods know his way.

I 31 Marduk, he sees (*ibarri*) everything in the heart of the gods (ŠÀ-*bi* DINGIR.MEŠ),

I 32 But no god can learn his counsel (*ṭēnšu*).

I 33 As heavy as is his hand (*ana kī kabtat* ŠU-*su*), his heart (ŠÀ-*ba-šú*) is merciful.

I 34 As murderous as are his weapons (GIŠ.TUKUL.MEŠ-*šú*), his intention (*kabattašu* = "his liver, mood") is life-sustaining.

I 35 Without his consent (*lā* ŠÀ-*ba-šú* = "without his heart"), who could assuage his striking?

I 36 Apart from his intention (*kabtatišu*), who could stay his hands (ŠU.2-*su*)?[16]

Marduk is supreme because he, not the personal gods, assigns destinies, a role he already assumes in *Enūma eliš* II 153–62 (Lambert 2013, 73). The ambiguous language contributes to Marduk's dual *persona*.

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[15] A similar understanding is found in the Babylonian "Literary Prayer to Marduk," which characterizes the god as unique and as one who punishes but who is also benevolent and merciful, expressing the hope that he indeed hears supplicants' entreaties (cf. Oshima 2011, 159–61, esp. ll. 9–12, 25–36).

[16] This article follows the numbering of the lines for *Ludlul* in Lenzi 2023, unless otherwise indicated. Differences in translation will also be noted and explained.

Since *kabtu* can mean either "honored, venerable" or "heavy" and *qātu* can denote "care, control, power," *Ludlul* I 33 can also be read as: "As honored / venerable as is his hand, his heart is merciful" (Noegel 2016, 618).[17] Furthermore, there is homonymic paronomasia involving *kabattu*, "liver," which hints at Marduk's changeable mood because of the polyvalence of *kabtu* to which it is implicitly compared.[18] Finally, the contrast between the differently shaped Sumerograms, ŠU-*su* (𒋗 with predominantly horizontal lines) for *qāssu*, "his hand," and ŠÀ-*ba-šú* (𒊮𒁀𒋙 with vertical lines) for *libbašu*, "his heart," demonstrates how form reinforces content, namely, that the god's disposition (his heart) determines how his hand is directed toward the individual.[19] These themes, also found in *kalûtu* literature, reappear at the composition's end, when the protagonist recounts how he brightened the gods' mood (*kabattašun*) and made their hearts (*libbašun*) rejoice in V 60–61 and with the wish that his personal god and goddess might honor him (*likabbissu* in V 115, 117).

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[17] The association of *kabtu* with Marduk is not accidental since it appears in theophoric names such as Kabti-ilāni-Marduk ("Marduk, the [Most] Honored of the Gods"), the famous Babylonian scribe who claims to have recorded the *Epic of Erra* after a dream (V 42–44). In "A Prayer to Marduk and Personal Gods" (IVR², 59/2), which has several similarities with *Ludlul* in content and language and which the supplicant identifies as an *unnīnu/unninnu* ("lament, supplication" in ll. 45″, 46″, and 49″), the petitioner likewise requests to be entrusted to Marduk's favorable hands: *ana* ᵈAMAR.UTU(ᵈ*Marduk*) *rēmēni ana* SIG₅-*tim*(*damiqtim*) *ana* ŠU.MIN(*qātīn*) SIG₅.MEŠ(*damqātim*) *piqdanni*, "To merciful Marduk, to the goodness, to the favorable hands, entrust me!" (Oshima 2011, 290–91).

[18] Homonymic paronomasia involves words that sound alike but that are derived from different roots (Noegel 2021, 261–62). For example, line 18 of "Sargon, King of Battle" has wordplay involving *kiššatu*, "universe, totality," and *kiššūtu*, "authority, exercise of power, strength": [LUGAL.G]I-*en* LUGAL (*šar*) ŠÚ (*kiššati*) *šum-<šu> ni-iz-kùr u-ur-ri-da-nu ni-ma-aḫ-ḫa-ra ki-iš-šu-ti ú-ul qar-ra-da-nu*, "We swore by the name [Sar]gon, king of the universe; we went down (and) we are facing exercise of power (but) we are not heroes."

[19] Scribes considered the shape of signs in their choice of orthography. In the King's Prism of Sennacherib, KUR.U₂, read as *šadû*, "mountain," appears in i 10 while underneath in the following line U₂.KUR, for the syllabograms *ú-šat* in the verb *ú-šat-li-ma-an-ni-ma*, "he granted to me," is used (Noegel 2021, 54).

One wonders whether the confluence of Sumerograms in I 29–36 is intentional, since they all are ways of rendering Marduk's name. In I 29 and I 31, Marduk sees (*ibarri*) everything in the heart of the gods, which alludes to *Enūma eliš* VII 35, where Marduk is known as ᵈŠÀ.ZU, explained as "the one who knew the heart of the gods, who saw (*ibarrû*) the reins," since the first Sumerogram ŠÀ is equated with *libbu*, "heart," and ZU renders *idû*, "to know."[20] In the manuscripts from Kalḫu, Nineveh, and Sippar (MS_Kal I.Q; MS_Nin I.L; MS_Sip I.F), I 29 and I 31 have ᵈMEŠ instead of just DINGIR (found in MS_Bab I.B), which recalls ᵈMES, a spelling of Marduk's name attested in the Kassite period, like ᵈŠÀ.ZU.[21] In I 34, GIŠ.TUKUL (*kakku*) can also be read as GIŠ.KU, which differs from ᵈKU, a spelling for Marduk's name from the first millennium, by the placement of just one horizontal stroke (cf. GIŠ: 𒄑; DINGIR: 𒀭). Once again, the scribal author demonstrates his virtuosity by peppering the passage about Marduk with various learned writings of the deity's name and by playing with the signs in its orthography. *Ludlul*'s scholarly erudition has both a visual and aural-oral dimension, since, in a passage about Marduk's knowledge, a reader familiar with the polysemy of cuneiform signs would recognize how the text reveals and hides the deity's name and identity.

Terminology involving manticism also appears throughout the passage, indicating the overlap in scholarly knowledge and practice. The binary divinatory system corresponds to the dual nature of the divinity. The verb *barû* is employed in divination and designates the discipline and the specialists who interpret omens (*bārûtu, bārû*). While the "hand (ŠU) of DN," which appears in medical diagnostic texts as well as terrestrial omens, is a feature on the liver that can indicate a bad omen,

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[20] A similar learned etymology is found in an epithet in an incantation invoking ᵈŠÀ.ZU (IP 6: BMS 13b): [ÉN *b*]*e-lum* ᵈ*šà-zu mu-de-e* Š[À-*bi* DINGIR.MEŠ?] AN-*e u* KI-*ti*, "[Incantation]: The lord, Šazu, the one who knows the hea[rts of the gods] of the heavens and the earth" (Oshima 2011, 366–67, l. 1).

[21] For the orthographies for Marduk's name, see Sommerfeld 1982, 7–9. For MES and MEŠ, see Noegel 2021, 271 n. 390.

Marduk's heart (ŠÀ) can be full of mercy.[22] Similarly, just as the weapon (GIŠ.TUKUL = *kakku*) can be Marduk's instrument of punishment, it can also be a sign in *omina* for the loss or return of divine favor.[23] The gods communicate one's destiny through polyvalent signs, both cuneiform and natural, motivating an individual to alter their behavior in order to regain divine favor.

Humans, also with free will, can act, intentionally or otherwise, in ways that please or anger the gods. When Marduk punishes, he does so justly because his wisdom allows him to know the heart of gods and humans. There is reason for hope, however, because while the god can impose his plan (*ṭēmu*) as he pleases, it is still discernible, and he can be persuaded to change his mood (*kabattašu*). Since the signs in *omina* are cryptic and yet imbued with divine authority, the specialists who interpret them have an important and influential social role because their pronouncements have an "aura of factuality," to borrow a phrase from Clifford Geertz (1966), elevating them from the subjective to the supernatural.

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[22] The "hand of Marduk" (*qāt Marduk*) also refers to a type of disease affecting the chest or causing a headache and paralysis (Scurlock and Andersen 2005, 459–60; Heeßel 2007a, 120–30; 2018, 135–48; Oshima 2014, 175).

[23] On a tablet (K.6292: 21′–24′) entitled *Multābiltu* in the extispicy series from the first millennium BCE, "the hand of Marduk" (ŠU ^{d}AMAR.UTU) is a portent in the liver that signals the loss of divine favor (Koch 2005, 157). Another feature observed in extispicy is called GIŠ.TUKUL = *kakku*, "the weapon," which, depending on its configuration, could augur a propitious or unfortunate fate as this omen from the Kassite period (CBS 13517: rev 34–35 = Lutz 1918, 90, 92–93) demonstrates:

> 34 *i-na* UGU MÀŠ GIŠ.TUKUL *iš-tu* ZAG *a-na* GÙB *te-bi* MUR *lā ta-líl*
> 35 GIŠ.TUKUL ^{d}EN.LÍL GAR GÙB SAGŠU MUR *ša-miṭ as-ku-pa-at* ŠU. SI MUR MURUB$_4$ ZAG DU$_8$-*at*

> 34 On top of the "increase," the weapon (GIŠ.TUKUL) rises from right to left; the lung is not stiff (?);
> 35 The "weapon (GIŠ.TUKUL) of Enlil" is present; the left (side) of the "turban" of the lung is worn away / sunken (?); the "threshold" of the middle "finger" of the lung is split on the right.

Nonetheless, the gods assign a fate that is conditional and not absolute, so that their intervention consists of two phases in which signs (*omina*) revealing intent are followed by divine manifestation, which can have positive or negative consequences.[24] The end of Tablet I and the beginning of Tablet II subtly raise the problem of suffering that is inherent in this understanding, which is not exclusive to *kalûtu* literature, by recounting how the protagonist's hopes are dashed. His speech is identified as lamentation for the first time (*gerrānu* in I 105 and *qubīya* in I 108) in Tablet I, which concludes with the densest language and imagery describing his emotions and hope:

> I 119 *tušāma ina urri iššira damiqtum*
> I 120 *arḫu innammaru inammira* ᵈUTU-*ši* (ᵈ*šamšī*)

> I 119 Perhaps good fortune will be favorable (lit., "come straight") to me at daybreak,
> I 120 When the new moon / first of the month begins to shine, perhaps my sun will shine on me.

Namāru/*nawāru*, "to shine," is found in "The Literary Prayer to Marduk" to enjoin the god to intervene for the supplicant: "Brighten for him" (*nummiršūma*) (Lambert 1959–1960, 59, l. 156).[25] A similar

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[24] Rochberg 1982, 1999, 2004, 2010; Gabbay 2014b, 22–23. In *kalûtu* literature, the first phase involves a divine utterance (Emesal: e-ne-èg̃) declaring the intent to appear and what will happen. The second is the manifestation itself, which depends on the god's disposition toward the individual. While the divine utterance through signs is variable, the manifestation is inevitable.

[25] For line 156, Lambert has: *nu-um-m*[*ir-šú* x x (x)] *pi-qid-su i-liš ba-ni-šú*, "Cause [him] to beam [...], entrust him to the god who fashioned him." Oshima, based on the different copies, reads the line as: *nu-um-mir-šu-ma šal-meš pi-qid-su i-liš ba-ni-šú*, "Enlighten him and as a whole entrust him to the (personal) god who created him" (2011, 154, 166–67). Noegel (2016, 632 n. 132), on the other hand, restores a different word after the imperative, but he does not give any reason for his choice and his translation: *nummiršu* [*ešâtišu*], "lightens (a man's) troubles." The subsequent line in "The Literary Prayer to Marduk" makes clear the connection between the deity's illuminating presence and the rebirth of the sufferer: *bulliṭ* ÌR(*arad*)-*ka lina*ʾ*id qurdīka*, "Let your servant live (lit., give birth to your servant) so that he might praise your heroic acts" (Oshima 2011, 166–67, l. 157).

26

request using the same verb occurs in an incantation invoking Marduk: "Illumine my confusion; clear up my troubles" (*ešâtīya nummer ˈdal-ḫāˈtīya zukki*) (Oshima 2011, 348–49, ll. 20–21).[26] Moreover, through his epithets, "the one who illumines the night" (*munammir mūši*) and "the one who illumines the darkness" (*munammir iklēt*), Marduk is associated with the moon god, Sîn.[27]

There is assonance in I 120 because *innammaru* and *inammira*, which precede the Sumerogram ᵈUTU, are similar to Marduk's name, which is usually written as ᵈAMAR.UTU and pronounced Marutu(k) in Akkadian.[28] Through bilingual paronomasia, the speaker's plaintive words, which hide elements of the god's name in the two verbs, express his longing for the return of Marduk's favor.[29] The speech parallels the

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[26] Similar language is found in a prayer to Šamaš in K.3927, which has instead *eklētīya nummir dalḫātīya zukki*, "Illumine my darkness; clear up my troubles" (Haupt 1881, 75, rev 3; Borger 1967, 9: 93).

[27] CT 24, pl. 50, BM 47406, l. 8; Linssen 2004, 220, 229, l. 315; Noegel 2016, 632 n. 133.

[28] For the pronunciation of Marduk, see Sommerfeld 1982, 8–9; Lambert 2013, 161–63. The phonetic writing in the Old Babylonian lexical list, *Diri* VII, suggests that the correct pronunciation is probably *mar-ru-tu-u₄* because *ù* is given as a value for UD but not ug/uk in *Proto-Ea* from Nippur. In the Late Babylonian period, the form of the deity's name was Marūduk, which is confirmed by the foreign transliterations (Heb., Mərôḏāḵ; Gk., Μαρωδαχ). Donald Wiseman describes I 120 as "sound play" (1980, 107). Scott Noegel identifies it as homoeopropheron, the repetition of the initial sounds of words. Another example is from Nusku's speech rousing the sleepy Enlil in *Atra-ḫasīs* I 93: *bēlī bīnū būnuka*, "My lord, the sons are your nobility." This literary device also occurs in *Gilgameš* I 18, 86 and I 192, 195 as well as the *Hymn to Shamash* (ll. 178–81) (Noegel 2016, 632 n. 132; 2021, 242–43).

[29] Wordplay involving homonyms and near-homonyms across languages is known as "bilingual paronomasia" (Noegel 2021, 270–71). In *Enūma eliš* I 101–2, the Sumerian writing of Marduk's name AMAR.UTU is reinterpreted in Akkadian using the noun *māru* and the logogram UTU for *šamšu*:

> I 101 *ma-ri-ú-tu ma-ri-ú-tu*
> Mari-utu, Mari-utu,

> I 102 *ma-ri* ᵈUTU-*ši* ᵈUTU-*ši šá* DINGIR.DINGIR
> The son, the sun(-god), the sun(-god) of the gods!

27

imagery of the new moon, which is the least visible lunar phase. Just as the obscured moon's appearance becomes fuller during the month, the speaker hopes that Marduk, compared to the sun emerging at dawn, will become more benevolently disposed. The metaphorical language involving the gradual appearance of astronomical bodies emphasizes not the instantaneous change of fortune but the gradual process of its change. At this point in the narrative, however, Marduk's presence remains hidden from the protagonist (and the audience). Moreover, the final lines of Tablet II subvert the expression of hope because *namāru* is employed again, showing how the protagonist's situation has worsened when he recounts the brightening of the countenance and mood of his adversaries (cf. *immerū* in II 117 and *innammaru inammira* in I 120) (Lenzi 2023, 132). Nonetheless, the wordplay and metaphorical language foreshadows Marduk's eventual intervention, which is revealed through the same scribal erudition in V 69–74.

The end of the narrative shows how convincing and effective the protagonist's experience has been as a didactic and rhetorical strategy, since Babylon's citizens praise the greatness of Marduk after witnessing his redemption:[30]

> V 69 The <citizens> of Babylon saw (*īmurūma*) how he (Marduk) revived [hi]s [servant?],
> V 70 Every one of their mouths extolled [his] greatness, saying:[31]

Another example comes from the *Epic of Erra* I 150–52, since Akkadian *mēsu*, recalling the Sumerogram MES, which means "young man," anticipates *eṭlu* appearing later in the sentence. Finally, line 92 of *The Poor Man of Nippur* has: NU.BÀN.DA *ana šúm-ʾu-ud ma-ka-li-šú* ŠUM-*uḫ* UDU.AS₄.[LUM], "The overseer slaughtered a *pasil*[*lu*]-sheep to in[cre]ase his meal." Here, bilingual paronomasia involves the Akkadian infinitive *šumʾud*, "to increase," and the Sumerograms ŠUM (= *ṭabāḫu*, "to slaughter") and UDU (= *immeru*, "sheep").

[30] A similar theme is found in line 67″ of "A Prayer to Marduk and Personal Gods" (IVR², 59/2): UN.MEŠ(*nišū*) URU-MU(*ālīya*) *lišēpâ qurdīka*, "May the people of my city proclaim your heroism" (Oshima 2011, 290–91).

[31] For V 70, Oshima reads: *pa-a-tu* DÙ(*kal*)-*ši-na ú-šá-pa-a nar-bé-e-*[*šú-nu*], "(the people from) the whole districts (of the city) proclaimed [their] greatness" (2014, 110–111). Like Lambert, he interprets *pa-a-tu* as a form of *pāṭu*, "boundary,

V 71   "Who thought he would again see the light of his sun?
(lit., "Who would have spoken of the seeing of his sun [*amār*
ᵈUTU-*ši-šú*]?")

V 72   Who imagined he would again stroll along his street? (lit., "In whose
heart did the passing through of his street happen?")

V 73   Who but Marduk (ᵈAMAR.UTU) could restore him from death?

V 74   Which goddess but Zarpānītu could give him his life?"

Once again, Marduk's name (ᵈAMAR.UTU) is connected with seeing
the sun and, thus, divine justice, through another instance of bilin-
gual paronomasia involving *amāru* and the Sumerogram ᵈUTU in line
71.[32] This theme also occurs in IV p, when the protagonist reiterates
the composition's didactic purpose, but instead of the earlier precatives
(*ludlul* in I 1; *lušalmidma* and *litbal* in I 39–40) he uses *līmur*, which
is from *amāru*, as he encourages the one who is negligent of Esaĝil
to see his example (lit., "to see from my hand"). The shift to the visual
emphasizes the concrete change in the protagonist's situation, demon-
strating to his audience the possibility of hope fulfilled. Although there
might be uncertainty regarding when the gods might alter their atti-
tude, the audience is encouraged to trust that the religious system is
indeed dependable.

At the end of Tablet I, the protagonist expresses a cyclical conception
of fate, described as *adannu*, "allotted time," in II 1, in which the gods
determine anew one's destiny at the beginning of each day, month, or

district," and restores the third person masculine plural pronominal suffix on the
final word of the line, referring to both Marduk and Zarpānītu (Lambert 1960,
58–59).

[32] Found also in the list of Marduk's names in *Enūma eliš* (VI 121 – VII 142),
this technique of scholarly "speculative interpretation," possible because of the
Sumero-Akkadian bilingual environment and the homophony of cuneiform
signs, allowed scribes to explore the latent meaning encoded in the writing of
sacred names. The various parts of a name could be associated with Akkadian
words to generate sophisticated learned interpretations to express conceptions
of divinity, to praise and glorify gods, and to communicate ideological-political
viewpoints (Bennett 2021, 53–58).

year.[33] However, an oversimplistic version of this theological position, which could conceive of the god's will in a somewhat deterministic fashion, is rejected because the next tablet begins by noting that a year has passed, that "evil was everywhere," that the protagonist's "bad luck was increasing," and that he "could not find prosperity" (II 1–3). His situation deteriorates, since Tablet II focuses on his bodily disintegration, leaving him helpless and on the brink of death but innocent of wrongdoing (II 115–20).[34] While Tablet I concludes with an expression of hope, Tablet II ends with death and darkness for the protagonist and those closely associated with him (II 119–20). Again, paronomasia may signal this reversal since the final word in II 120 is *īrim*, which comes

[33] For *adannu*, see Heeßel 2010, 163–75; Oshima 2014, 221; Lenzi 2023, 112, 231. The word appears again in II 111 when the protagonist recounts how the *barû* is unable to give the duration (*adanna*) of his sickness, confirming that it refers to the period of time before or after the gods determine an individual's destiny. The cyclical conception of fate appears in Iddin-Dagan A, 20–33, 169–80, where the new moon and near year are associated with the determination of destinies:

> When standing in the heavens she [Inana] is the good wild cow of An, on earth she instills respect; she is the lady of all the lands … She takes her seat on the great dais with An; she determines the fates in her Land with Enlil. Monthly, at the new moon, the gods of the Land gather around her so that the divine powers are perfected. The great Anuna gods, having bowed before them, stand there with prayers and supplications and utter prayers on behalf of all the lands. My lady decrees judgments in due order for the Land … When the black-headed people have assembled in the palace, the house that advises the Land, the neck-stock of all the foreign countries, the house of the river of ordeal, a dais is set up for Ninegala. The divine king stays there with her. At the New Year, on the day of the rites, in order for her to determine the fate of all the countries, so that during the day (?) the faithful servants can be inspected, so that on the day of the disappearance of the moon the divine powers can be perfected, a bed is set up for my lady. (Black et al. 2010, 263, 267)

Similarly, during the *akītu* festival, the gods gather in assembly with Marduk as their king and determine destinies anew (Steinkeller 2017). Furthermore, Janice Polonsky (2006) has argued that at childbirth the sun god gathers with the divine assembly at sunrise to determine an individual's destiny.

[34] The only time others recognize the sufferer's innocence occurs in his hyperbolic statement, made at the brink of the grave, in II 116: "My entire land said about me, 'How wronged he is!'"

from *arāmu*, "to cover."[35] Only the position of the last two consonants of this root differs from *amāru*, "to see" (ʾrm vs. ʾmr), which appears in I 120. While the protagonist voices hope at the close of Tablet I, he conveys his resignation that the sun is hidden even from those close to him by the time Tablet II concludes.

In a later passage, the protagonist paints an even grimmer picture because he describes himself as one "who descended to the netherworld" and "turned into a ghost" (V 32–33).[36] After he passes through the Utu-e-a Gate, associated with dawn and a return from the grave, his restoration is imagined as rebirth accompanied by the determining of his destiny (V 40–53).[37] Unless the protagonist emphasizes the dire reality of his suffering, he would offer only false hope. Thus, only at the protagonist's nadir does Marduk, who "is able to restore from the grave" (V 75), intervene, making the reversal all the more amazing.[38]

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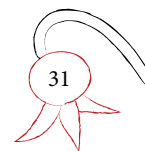
[35] Instead of *īrim*, Lenzi (2023, 133, 216–17), however, argues that MS II.I_Nin, rev 23' and MS II.N_Huz, rev 48, which both end with *i*-LAGAB, should be interpreted as *īkil*, from the verb *ekēlu*, "to be(come) dark." He argues that the manuscript from Aššur (MS II.L_Aš, rev ii' 4') was written by a young scribal apprentice, that it has the spelling i-ri-im due to a mistaken reading of the sign KIL for RIM, and that the former should be considered a true semantic variant. On the other hand, if the interpretation involving the paronomasia is correct, it would suggest that LAGAB should be read as *-rim* instead of *-kil*. A possible compromise solution may be that the scribe chose the ambiguous LAGAB, which could allow for both readings, but it still does not solve the grammatical issue regarding the subject of *īrim*.

[36] The Mesopotamian conception is that the self survives physical death, an idea that is expressed in the account of the creation of human beings from the mixing of clay with the blood of the immortal god in *Atra-ḫasīs* I 208–17 (Scurlock 2016, 77–78). In *Ludlul*, the grave refers to this wretched and uncertain *post-mortem* state of existence and is described as the ending of life, being sent down to the netherworld, departing as a ghost, being meat for an *asakku* demon, or being a corpse (V 31–36).

[37] The Sumerian phrase ki-ᵈutu-è-a designates the mythological location of the rising sun, which is also where destinies are determined at birth and at the beginning of each new day (Polonsky 2000, 89–99; 2006, 297–311).

[38] A similar idea is expressed in "The Prayer to Marduk," whose incipit is *bēlum apkal igigî adallala siqarka*, "O Lord, the sage of the Igigi-gods, I shall praise your

Moreover, the text here portrays the protagonist as a liminal figure, like the *kalû*, who is able to move from death to new life through divine favor.[39]

Even though the protagonist has little doubt that Marduk can save him, it is the timing that is uncertain. Only the god can decide when he will intervene, but when he does, he acts decisively. As the protagonist is about to be engulfed by the deathly forces of chaos, on the

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name," and which is dated to the first millennium BCE but which was probably composed in the Kassite period. Its introduction is similar to that of *Ludlul* and has features found in the genres called *zamāru*, "song," or *šēru*, "chant." However, line 40″ identifies the composition as an *unninnu*, like *Ludlul*. In this prayer, the supplicant praises Marduk for restoring his life from the grave, which is characterized as sleep:

> 1′ You are the one who brings back speech at the great gate of destiny,
> 2′ The one who brings back the one who slumbers (i.e., the dead) from the inside of the grave,
> 3′ The one who enlightens the female mourners whose lamentations are bitter,
> 4′ Lift him up, who moaned like a crow (GIM BURU$_5$?)!
> . . .
> 9′ Raise the one who slumbers in the midst of Erkalla from the presence of Ereškigal,
> 10′ Me, whom they pushed to the edge of death,
> 11′ Like (to) the sleeper of the Great Abode in his sleep,
> 12′ You have returned goodness to him (the sleeper) whose rationality was shaken. (Oshima 2011, 246–47)

Several themes in this prayer are similar to those in *Ludlul*: (1) the association of restoration from the grave with the determining of a new destiny at the gate (cf. V 40–53); (2) the supplicant's muteness in the face of slander (cf. I 69–72); (3) mourning rites performed prematurely for the supplicant (cf. II 114–15); (4) the supplicant's moaning compared to that of a bird (cf. I 107). In this literary prayer, the supplicant's moaning is likened to a crow (GIM BURU$_5$?), but Oshima notes that the reading is uncertain since the signs seem to be RI BUR in line 4′ (Oshima 2011, 262). He suggests that the scribe miscopied RI BUR for BURU$_5$, *āribu*, "crow, eagle." Normally, one would expect *summu*, "dove, pigeon," which is found in the onomatopoeic sentence in *Ludlul* I 107 (*kīma summi adammuma gimir ūmīya*, "Like a dove I would moan all my days"), expressing the sufferer's sorry state.

[39] For the *kalû* as a liminal figure who bridges the human and divine spheres and who can cross from the realm of the living to the netherworld, see Shehata 2009, 88–93; Gabbay 2014b, 78–79.

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verge of losing his very humanity since he has become ghost-like and demon-like, Bēl/Marduk rescues him. The gradual development of the plot, with its unfulfilled hope and then sudden divine intervention at the last possible moment, is part of the rhetorical strategy that highlights Marduk's power and celebrates his deeds. It urges patience and reminds the audience to never give up hope because there is always the possibility of reversal as long as there is life. It also contextualizes the inability of the specialists in helping the protagonist since their "failure" is not a glitch in the religious system but an inherent part of the binary nature of divination, corresponding to the dual nature of the divine *persona* (Lenzi 2023, 222–40, 279–99).[40] Signs are polyvalent and can be confusing because the divine will is conditional, yet, paradoxically, a person's destiny is also definitively determined (e.g., a king is destined to rule, but his success or failure is contingent on the divine disposition at any given moment).

The protagonist's authoritative personal experience serves as an object lesson in hope for those who might be unaware or negligent. In *Ludlul*, there are only oblique references to the deity in the middle section (i.e., "His hand was so heavy" in III 1-4), which contains the protagonist's lament (I 43 – III 8), but after the process of healing and reintegration has been initiated with the dreams, Marduk's name appears repeatedly in the text.[41] Reprising the *kabtu*-theme, the beginning of Tablet III describes Marduk's heavy hand against the sufferer:

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[40] Yoram Cohen (2013, 173) makes a similar argument and contends that the protagonist is expressing his disappointment that the god has not manifested himself or sent any signs through divination. Daniel Schwemer (2010, 492–98), on the other hand, suggests that bewitchment is the reason for the specialists' failure, resulting in the sufferer's inability to determine the cause of the loss of divine favor and to act accordingly to remedy the situation. For the different types of ritual failure and strategies to deal with them, see Ambos 2007.

[41] After the hymnic prologue, the first time the deity's name is mentioned is when Ur-Nintinugga of Babylon announces that "Marduk sent me" (III 43). From then onward, the god's name is invoked several times, recounting his merciful intervention, in the final tablet (V 13, 15, 16, 28, 34, 52, 73, 75, 82, 104). Even though the deity is not explicitly named in the middle section (I 43 – III 8), the context makes it clear that Marduk is behind the protagonist's suffering.
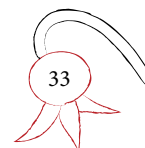
III 1 His hand (ŠU-*su*) was so heavy *(kabtat)* I could not bear it.
III 2 My dread of him was [ov]erwhelming, I / it. . .
III 3 His furious [pun]ishment was [. . .] flood,
III 4 Whose advance was [aggres]sive², it [. . .].

If Alan Lenzi's placement of line p from K.3291, assigned to Section C at the end of Tablet IV, is correct, the hand (ŠU = *qātu*) theme reappears but it emphasizes the protagonist's role as teacher:

IV p Let the one who was negligent (*egû*) of Esag̃il learn from my example (*ina* ŠU-*ia līmur*, "see by my hand").[42]

Divine anger is expressed using the image of the deity's hand striking the individual and is compared to a flood, resulting in the protagonist's fear, while wisdom is available from the hand of the one who perseveres and is resilient.[43] Singling out those who are negligent (*egû*) toward Esag̃il, Marduk's temple in Babylon, he invites the audience to learn from his example of enduring suffering, patiently waiting, and remaining faithful to his duties and responsibilities.[44]

Both *Ludlul* and *kalûtu* literature have a similar understanding of human guilt and negligence. In II 10–22, the protagonist compares his situation to that of someone who has not been attentive to his or her obligations to the gods. However, he rejects the idea that a person's outward appearance or success is an indication of divine favor because even in his suffering he has done everything required of him and more

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[42] K.3291 is part of a single-column tablet from Nineveh containing a commentary on *Ludlul*, which serves as a textual witness. Lenzi (2023, 87) follows Oshima (2014, 105), who identifies the line as belonging to Section C.6″ at the end of Tablet IV. Similarly, in eBL's edition of *Ludlul*, Aino Hätinen (2023) places the line (called j+6) toward the end of Tablet IV.

[43] In an incantation invoking Marduk (KAR 242: rev 15'–21'), Šazu is implored to hold the hand (of the supplicant) in (his) difficulties (ᵈSÀ.ZU *ina dannāti qātka liṣbat*) (Oshima 2011, 414, l. 6).

[44] Similarly, at the end of *Enūma eliš*, a leading figure is encouraged to expound upon Marduk's fifty names and a father is urged to teach them to his son because, "if one is not negligent (*lā iggīma*) to Marduk," his or her land will flourish and the person will prosper (VII 149–50).

(II 23–32). Although he has been rejected by society, he continues to care for his land and people while showing proper respect for royal authority.[45] One might deserve divine punishment even if an act is unintentional or if the person is unaware of the offense. Prosperity can lead to pride and neglect of the gods, whereas suffering can engender respect for them and awareness of the limits of human knowledge and effort. Since the protagonist moves from a notional understanding of the human–divine relationship to one grounded in actual experience (II 48), he can teach with authority.[46] Moreover, due to his tragic experience, he finds solace in maintaining religious and cultural norms as well as in the cultic specialists who activate them through their rituals, because they provide orientation amid the unpredictability of the divine will.

Ludlul highlights the initial inability of certain cult specialists in diagnosing and helping the protagonist, situating the lamentation that occurs in response.[47] This failure, however, does not lead to a rejection of the religious system but a reaffirmation of Marduk's sovereignty. Three times, the text mentions the diviner (*bārû*), the inquirer (*šāʾilu*), the exorcist (*āšipu/mašma(š)šu*) (I 52; II 6–9, 108–11). Appearing after the hymnic prologue, the first instance is part of the parallel structure of Tablet I involving the theme with *ūmu* in I 41 and I 105 and the loss of

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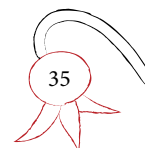
[45] Oshima sees *Ludlul* as an expression of pro-Marduk theology in a polemic against the pan-Mesopotamian religious policy of the Kassite kings (2014, 70–71), but II 27–32 contradicts his argument since the protagonist delights in the king's prayer and fanfare, praises the king in the same way as he does the gods, and teaches people to fear the palace.

[46] The beginning of II 48 is poorly preserved. Wolfram von Soden (1990, 123 n. 48a) and Benjamin Foster (2005, 399) suggest *uš-ta-a*[*d-din*ⁱ], "I have ponde[red] these things." Oshima (2014, 88–89) proposes *uš-ta-ra*² for "I am accustomed (lit., "instructed") to these things" while Lenzi (2023, 72–73, 123) leaves it untranslated. Nonetheless, the final part of the sentence has *qerebšina lā altand*[*a*], "I have not learned/understood their meaning."

[47] The motif of the failure of the specialists occurs in other *kalûtu* literature. Lenzi mentions a bilingual eršaḫuĝa (IVR 22, no. 2: 6'–19'), a sapiential composition from Ugarit (RS 25.460 = *Ugaritica* 5, no. 162: 1'–8'), and Sumerian laments (2023, 290–91 n. 16).

features associated with personhood paired with effects of that diminishment in I 42–48 and I 106–18:

	I 1–40	Hymnic prologue bounded by precatives in ll. 1 and 39–40
A	I 41	From the day (*ūmi*) Bel punished me. . .
B	I 42–48	Personal consequences of divine abandonment: dignity (*bāltī*), masculine features (*dūtī*), characteristic manner (*simtī*), protection (*tarāni*) removed
C	I 49–104	Social consequences of divine abandonment
A′	I 105	The day (*ūmu*) was sighing, the night lamentation . . .
B′	I 106–18	Personal consequences of divine abandonment: tears (five times), darkened countenance (*pānīya*), pale flesh (*sīrīya*), trembling heart (*libbīya*), confusion, and discord
	I 119–20	Protagonist's expression of hope: perhaps good fortune will return

The center of the tablet, which focuses on the social consequences of the protagonist's abandonment by the gods, begins with his recounting of how he receives unfavorable omens daily and how neither the *bārû* nor *šāʾilu* are able to determine his fated path (*alaktī ul parsat*) (I 51–52), which leads to his emotional, psychological, and physical distress expressed in tears, pallor, trembling, and confusion.[48] Lament is his only recourse.

The second time the failure of the specialists is mentioned is in an *inclusio* consisting of the beginning and end of Tablet II, which is again accompanied by the theme of divine abandonment:

|		
A	II 1–5	Change in time leading to increase of protagonist's misery (ll. 1–3) and abandonment by personal god and goddess (*ilu* and *ištaru* in ll. 4–5)
B	II 6–9	Failure of specialists (*bāru*, *šāʾilu*, and *āšipu*)
C	II 10–48	Protagonist's insistence that he is innocent
C′	II 49–107	Protagonist's guilt/negligence indicated by misfortune and maladies attacking specific parts of his body

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48 *Alaktī ul parsat* (I.52) is translated as "My condition cannot / could not be determined (by means of divination)," by Schwemer (2010, 494), which is similar to Lenzi's figurative reading: "My situation could not be decided" (2023, 67, 104–5).

B′ II 108–11 Failure of specialists (*mašma(š)šu* and *bāru* in ll. 108–9 and
āšipu and *bāru* in ll. 110–11)

A′ II 112–20 Abandonment by personal god and goddess (*ilu* and *ištaru* in
ll. 112–13) and protagonist at point of death (ll. 114–20)

While the quatrain in II 6–9 begins with the *bāru* and ends with the
āšipu, that in II 108–11 varies because it starts by using different writings
for "exorcist" (*mašma(š)šu* and *āšipu*) in each doublet, which concludes
with the *bāru*. It, however, lacks the *šāʾilu* in the earlier quatrain. The
theme involving the failure of the specialists surrounds the main theo-
logical problem of the poem, expressed in the protagonist's insistence
on his innocence and the evidence of his guilt or negligence, namely,
the maladies inscribed on his body, which act, like omens, as visible
signs of divine displeasure (cf. Lenzi 2023, 241–78). Since only the gods
know whether a person is truly culpable, the specialists are ineffective
until the deities have changed their disposition and revealed their de-
cision. While Tablet I ends with lamenting, this section highlights the
protagonist's blamelessness and proper behavior despite the god's disfa-
vor, which reframes his suffering.[49]

The three dreams, occurring when the sufferer is near death (III 5–8),
follow the two-stage process of theophanies in *kalûtu* literature because
Marduk states his intent before he manifests his power and restores the
protagonist.[50] These mantic experiences are unprovoked, underscoring

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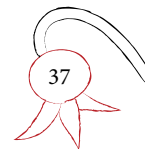
[49] Abusch and Milstein (2021, 127) include all of Tablet II as part of the extensive
lament (I 43 – III 8) in *Ludlul*'s middle section.

[50] There are different interpretations of the dreams' figures. Beate Pongratz-Leisten
(2010, 150–54) interprets them as messengers of four authoritative figures, Bēltīya,
Laluralimma, Ištar, and Marduk, preparing the way for the reconciliation between
the protagonist and the deity and conveying the hopeful message that suffering
is transitory. Lenzi (2012, 60–62), on the other hand, argues that the male and
female figures signal the return of the individual's protective deities, while the
ramku priest and the *āšipu* priest represent the experts who were part of the ritual
system that has failed the sufferer. His reading contends "that the lamentation and
doubt that may have arisen due to ritual failure would have done so among ritual
participants and not the ritual specialists themselves. *Ludlul* would have assured
the ritual participants that there was hope even when the experts failed. This hope,
although extraordinary when it came, should not be understood as undermining

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their supernatural origin and confirming their authenticity and reliability. The narrative gradually progresses from the announcement of the return of divine favor to the protagonist's purification by the *ramku* priest to assurance in the well-known "fear not" formula to the initiation of the healing process by Marduk's bandage at the hands of the *āšipu* priest.[51] The process involving the four figures mirrors the plot development, signaling the reversal of misfortune and return of Marduk's benevolence.

No temporal indication is provided for the first vision, which happens while the protagonist is in a liminal state, as he is both dreaming and awake (III 8), but the rest all occur at night. The protagonist's liminality parallels the ambiguity of the first and third figures, which are described anthropomorphically but also with divine features. The dreams encourage the sufferer and his audience, reinforcing the idea that divine communication is possible because the gods, though mysterious, are not so completely different from humans as to be inapproachable. In contrast, the experience with the human priests is reassuringly straightforward. The unnamed *ramku* priest sent by Laluralimma, the *āšipu* priest, has a purificatory function.[52] Ur-Nintinugga, meaning

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the normal ritual system, as it indicates that even in an extraordinary circumstance of divine intervention the official system would be employed" (2012, 62).

[51] For other examples of the "fear not" formula, see Nissinen 2019.

[52] BM 32574 (CCP 1.3: rev 5 // STC 1 216–17 = CCP 7.2.u93: rev 1′–2′) interprets the name Laluralimma as "Sweet is the lap of Enlil" (Oshima 2014, 279 n. 519; Lenzi 2015b; De Ridder 2023, 183–84). An individual with the same name is attested in Kassite Babylonia for an officer from Nippur, and contemporary documents indicate that he did not hold cultic office. While Laluralimma's correspondence with a certain Martuku (who seems to have been confused with ᵈAMAR.UTU whose name was pronounced as Marutu or Marutuk as early as the Old Babylonian period) may hint at why the former appears in *Ludlul*, the evidence creates problems for dating him to the reign of Nazimurutaš or later (De Ridder 2023, 186–91). Finally, Laluralimma appears in the list of characters from scribally self-reflective literature in the so-called *Name Book* (VR 44 = K.4426 + Rm 617), which probably originated in the Middle Babylonian period and is preserved in copies from the Neo-Assyrian period (Cooley 2022, 232). While the reason for the placement of Ur-Nintinugga on the list is clear because it is grouped

"The servant of Nintinugga," plays a therapeutic role, which is not surprising since his name's theophoric element refers to a goddess of healing and the netherworld, known as *Bēlet muballiṭat mītī* ("The lady who makes the dead to live"), who is associated with the application of bandages.[53] The narrative identifies him as a *mašma(š)šu* priest from Babylon, Marduk's city, before he announces that the god has sent him (III 40–43).[54]

Finally, the increasing physical proximity between the protagonist and the various figures parallels the gradual restoration of the human–divine relationship. The approach of the deity is a typical feature in Mesopotamian oneiromancy for describing the central event during

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with two other names whose Akkadian equivalents begin with ᵐLÚ, the scribe's logic for the location of Laluralimma's name is not readily apparent:

9 ᵐur-ᵈnin-tin-ug₅-ga	ᵐLÚ-ᵈgu-la
10 ᵐhu-me-me	ᵐLÚ-ᵈgu-la
11 ᵐaš-gan-ᵈᵘdu₇	ᵐLÚ-ᵈpap-sukkal

Furthermore, the Akkadian name associated with both Ur-Nintinugga and Humeme is ᵐLÚ-ᵈgu-la, "Man of Gula." All the names prior to Ur-Nintinugga have ᵈAMAR.UTU as the theophoric element in the Akkadian equivalent.

[53] Nintinugga is also associated with Gula, the goddess of medicine and healing (Edzard 1998–2001, 506; Beaulieu 2007, 9). The name Ur-Nintinugga appears in a colophon on a tablet that deals with the treatment of an illness called "seizure-of-the-mountain fever" (BM 64526 = CBT 6/2, 127) (Stadhouders 2018, 168). This scribe is said have copied the text from an original authored by Ur-Nanna, who is a scholar (*ummānu*) and *mašma(š)šu* from Babylon, whom Lambert (1962, 76 n. 16) dates to the Old Babylonian instead of the Kassite period.

[54] However, a letter from the Kassite period associates an individual named Ur-Nintinugga with Nippur, while a *kudurru* from Babylon (BBSt 3) identifies him as a diviner (*bārû*) and dates him to the reign of Meli-Shippak II (Meli-Šiḫu). These differences suggest that either there were multiple individuals with the name Ur-Nintinugga or that *Ludlul*'s reference to the same person is a later addition (De Ridder 2023: 184–85). *Ludlul* III 39 mentions someone performing divination at night, which may connect him with the Ur-Nintinugga mentioned on the *kudurru*. *Ludlul* III 42, which identifies Ur-Nintinugga as a *mašma(š)šu*-priest, may refer to another individual or may have been a scribal creation for literary purposes (i.e., to mention as many specialists as possible in the restoration process).

the divine encounter and communication (Zgoll 2014, 301–2).[55] In the first dream in *Ludul*, the male figure, clad in *melammu*, "radiance," and *puluḫtu*, "fear," stands towering over the awestruck sufferer (III 12–13), while, in the third vision, the young woman, beautiful and divine in appearance, enters and sits down beside him (III 30–34). The former provokes fear and awe, while the latter offers deliverance and encourages. This enigmatic encounter with the male and female figures with divine characteristics marks the shift in Marduk's disposition from anger to mercy, from confused signs to a change in destiny. Subsequently, the human specialists perform ritual acts such as lustration, an incantation for life, rubbing the protagonist's body, divination, and applying a bandage—the text lists the expertise of the gamut of cultic professionals involved in the protagonist's restoration and thus reaffirms their important role in mediating with the divine world.[56] The emphasis on physical touch also signals the reversal of divine and human alienation. Moreover, since the first time the sufferer's name is mentioned is in the final dream, Šubši-mešrê-Šakkan's identity is restored in addition to his health and social standing.

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[55] Other examples include Ninĝirsu approaching the head of the sleeping E-anatum to announce Ĝirsu's victory over Umma as well as the same city god stepping toward Gudea's head and touching him, after the king has lain down in the temple precinct as part of the incubation process (RIME 1.9.3.1: vi 25–32; RIME 3/1.1.7.CylA: ix 5–6). Similarly, in his royal annals, Ashurbanipal reports that a dream interpreter has a vision in which Ištar appears to the Assyrian king, embracing and protecting him before she goes off to battle Teumman (RINAP 5/1, Ashurbanipal 4: v 1"–28"). In the dreams, the deity stands (Sum.: gub; Akk.: *izuzzu*) over or by the protagonist. Likewise, in *Ludlul* III 13, the mysterious first figure, a towering young man, stands over (*ittaziz elīya*) the sufferer.

[56] The *mašma(š)šu/āšipu* priest who brings the bandage (*ṣi[mda]*) (III 41–46) recalls the prologue, where Marduk's bandages calm and revive the (doomed) fate (*pašḫū ṣindūšu uballaṭū namtara*, I 22) and the god releases him from liability and guilt (*ina ūm iširtīšu uptaṭṭarū eʾiltu u annu*, I 24). The theme involving the bandage and three of the four verbs from I 22–24 reappear in V 1–2, when the protagonist attributes his restoration to Marduk: "My [lord cal]med me ([*up*]*aššiḫanni*). // My [lord] bandaged me (*uṣammidanni*). // My [lord] released me (*upaṭṭiranni*) (from affliction), // My [lord] revived me (*uballiṭanni*)." *Ṣimdu/ṣindu* is etymologically related to the fourth verb, *uṣammidanni*.

As part of the narrative's rhetorical strategy, the visions appeal to the supernatural and to the authority of tradition in their presentation of the sufferer's experience as paradigmatic and prescriptive. The audience is provided hope and reminded that the religious system does indeed work. However, there is never a clear and detailed account of how the god heals. The healing scene instead commences abruptly with a divine message revealed to "my (the sufferer's) people" (III 47–50). Moreover, the healing is imagined as a public event, announced to others by another favorable sign, a snake (MUŠ = *ṣerru* in III 49), which reinforces the subjective experience with divine authority.[57]

A change in narrative style signals a new reality, since the laconic account of the protagonist's healing is contrasted with the thoroughness of the description of his body. Most of the language at the end of Tablet III, recounting Marduk's actions, is figurative and evocative, using similes to describe the process, which includes a list of the various parts of the body healed (III 68ff.), paralleling the physical ailments afflicting the sufferer in Tablet II. This style, which recalls the lexical lists, activates the audience's imagination and invites it to fill in the gaps of knowledge and ponder possibilities.[58] It makes accessible the mysterious nature of the deity by speaking about the unknown using common, relatable images. Moreover, the list of the parts of the body projects a

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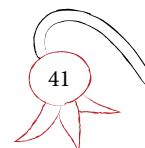
[57] Snakes appear in *namburbi* rituals and divinatory texts (Tablets 22–26 of *Šumma ālu ina mēlê šakin* contain about 500 omens involving snakes) to indicate an inauspicious fate (cf. Heeßel 2007b, 33–67). There may also be paronomasia because the Akkadian for "snake" (*ṣerru/ṣēru*) is homophonous with a word meaning "adversary, enemy" (*ṣerru*) (CAD Ṣ, 137–38, 148–50). Marduk's changed disposition is signaled by the snake (or adversary) that perhaps slithers away, as is proposed by Foster's (2005, 403) translation, following Von Soden's (1990, 128 n. 48b) restoration of *i*[*t-taš-lal*] at the end of III 49 (Lenzi 2023, 142). Another possibility is that the snake represents Ningišzida, who, as a chthonic deity, is associated with Gilgameš.

[58] The salient feature of metaphors is that they express "abstract concepts in more tangible forms to make them more accessible cognitively. Metaphors may thus provide insights into unknown or nonphysical subjects or things, perhaps extending or creating knowledge and enabling its communication" (Coolidge and Overmann 2012, 209).

sense of comprehensiveness and scholarly competence. It emphasizes Marduk's power over all the forces of chaos that cause disease and his ability to heal the whole self as well as the role of the specialists whose secret knowledge is required for the process.

As a result of this reversal, the narrator encourages a more universal appreciation of the god: "As many [peo]ple as there are, praise Marduk!" (V 82). The change in style to third person narratorial speech parallels the shift from the protagonist's subjective experience to a more objective perspective. It is not just the sufferer's personal experience that is authoritative. The confirmation of his testimony by others demonstrates that it is dependable. That divine intervention, even in the direst of circumstances, is possible and recognizable by others is a reason for hope. This appeal to personal experience presupposes an emotional community that is receptive to the sufferer's message because it shares similar sociocultural values and beliefs about the divine. Hope is socially constructed and experienced in the context of community.

Lament as Act of Hope

Throughout the narrative, the protagonist's lamentation models for the audience the appropriate attitude and behavior to have and to show amid profound suffering. Lament has been identified as one of the most important modes of human–divine interaction in ancient Mesopotamia (Delnero 2020, 32). The phenomenon of lamenting needs to be distinguished from the ancient compositions called "lament." Often, there is a difference between emic conceptions of genres and the etic categories that are employed by modern scholars. Moreover, ancient designations frequently had "fuzzy" boundaries, and categories overlapped. For instance, *Ludlul* employs *unnīnu/unninnu* (III 53), *gerrānu* (I 105), and *qubû* (I 108) to describe the protagonist's lamentation, but it also uses *tanittu*, "praise" in V 120 to characterize the work, whose prologue begins with a glorification of Marduk. Several other compositions similar to *Ludlul*, involving the praise of Marduk and in which the speaker's lamenting is recorded, are called *unnīnu/unninnu* or its variant, *utnēnu/*

utninnu.[59] Takayoshi Oshima (2011, 219) also thinks that the "Prayer to Marduk," whose incipit is *bēlum apkal igigî adallala siqarka* and that is designated as an *unninnu* in line 40″, is the Akkadian *šuʾillakku* with the same name attested in the ritual instruction for the Late Babylonian *akītu* festival in Esaǧil for the month of Kislīmu.[60] Compositions designated by the ancient genre *unnīnu/unninnu* are also identified as bilingual Sumero-Akkadian eršaḫuǧa.[61] However, according to the *kalûtu* catalogue from Nineveh (IVR², 53+), the eršaḫuǧa, whose focus is on the individual, is not associated with *kalûtu*, whereas balaǧs, eršemas, ritual eršemas, and šuilas, usually involving lamenting over a city or temple, belong in this category (Gabbay 2014b, 5, 9).[62] On the other

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[59] The protagonist in the "Dialogue between a Man and His God" (AO 4462) describes his speech as *unnēn ardīka* in line 68 (Lambert 1987, 194–95). "A Prayer to Marduk and Personal Gods" (IVR², 59/2) is identified as an *unnīnu* in lines 45″, 46″, and 49″ (Oshima 2011, 288–89). An incantation-prayer to Marduk (KAR 26 obv 11 – rev 6) is designated as both *unnīnu* and *teslītu* in line 23 (Oshima 2011, 404–5). Finally, a lament to Marduk by Nabû-šuma-ukīn (BM 40475) is called an *utninnu* in line 80 (Oshima 2011, 322–23).

[60] The ritual was published in Çağirgan and Lambert 1991–1993 and line 77 of Obv II mentions the *šuʾillakku* entitled *bēlum* ABGAL(*apkal*) ᵈ*igigî* (96).

[61] For example, Stefan Maul's bilingual Eršaḫuǧa 31 begins with me-e umun-mu-ra šìr("SAR")-re-eš ga-an-na-an-dug₄ // *anāku ana bēlīya ṣirḫa luqbīšu*, "Let me lament a dirge to my lord" (1988, 184–185, ll. 1–2). In lines 16–17, the speaker specifies his supplication as *unnīnu* (ŠÀ.NE.ŠA₄): ˻gú-zu nigin-na-ni-íb šà-ne-ša₄˼-˹mu˼ š°u te-g°á-[ab˷ // [ ] [*ki˷ šādka suḫ<ḫi>ramma unnīnīya li˹qe˼*, "Turn your neck toward me (Akk.: and) accept my lament." Other bilingual texts that are identified as both *eršaḫuǧa* and *unnīnu* include Maul's Eršaḫuǧa 40a–42: 8′; Eršaḫuǧa 59: obv 4′–5′; Eršaḫuǧa 77: obv 1–2; IVR² 29** n. 5: obv 11′–12′; IVR² 10 = K.2811: rev 5–6 (Maul 1988, 218, 222, 239, 242, 268–69, 307–8, 309–10).

[62] Gabbay delimits the category of "Emesal prayers" to all genres belonging to the gala/*kalû* that come from the Old Babylonian period and the first millennium BCE. *Kalûtu*, in contrast, is a subset of Emesal prayers. I propose another subdivision, *kalûtu*-like literature, which was composed in Akkadian but was modeled after Sumerian texts (e.g., eršaḫuǧa or šuila). This category would include the compositions designated as *unnīnu/unninnu*, like *Ludlul*, as well as those identified as the Akkadian *šuʾillakku* and would have been performed by the *āšipu*, *kalû*, or an individual.
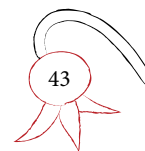
hand, the *kalû* was primarily responsible for performing balaĝs, eršemas, eršaḫuĝa, and šuilas even though the king could also recite the eršaḫuĝa in his presence (Gabbay 2014b, 10). Although evidence has not yet been discovered as definitive proof, the content of the *eršaḫuĝa* suggests that it could have been performed by or in the presence of individuals (Gabbay 2014b, 63, n. 2).[63] As a genre, the *unnīnu/unninnu* was a complex and multidimensional composition, which incorporated and adapted other types of texts, which drew from both Sumerian and Akkadian sources, and which changed over time. Lamenting as a multifaceted ritual activity involved different languages, genres, and a range of individuals, including the *āšipu* and the *kalû*, since they recited the Sumerian Emesal šuila and the Akkadian *šuʾillakku*.

Lamenting has multiple functions that make it an act of hope.[64] First, lamenting, often accompanied by tears in *Ludlul*, expresses emotions associated with suffering. It forms a bridge so that interior experiences of pain, grief, or loss can be manifested in an acceptable public manner. In the context of lamenting, tears, which presuppose an emotional bond of empathy, let others know that something is wrong and are a cry for help. Instead of demystifying lamenting and treating it as divine manipulation, we ought to understand it as a sociocultural, religious strategy—an appropriate way of relating to the gods, other humans, and the world that reflects positive adaptation and fosters resilience.[65] It reflects the ancient understanding of the cosmos and is a coping strategy in response to humanity's plight in it.[66] Thus, hope is part of a worldview

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[63] If the protagonist's *unnīnu* in *Ludlul* is, in fact, also an eršaḫuĝa, this might explain why the *kalû* is not mentioned in the text.

[64] Understanding what rituals do requires addressing why people engage in ritual in the first place. Just as there are various motives for the latter, rituals can have multiple functions that may not always be consistent from the etic perspective. Thus, it is necessary to distinguish a ritual's intentions from its effects and functions. (Grimes 2014, 297–302).

[65] Cf. Löhnert 2011; Bosworth 2019, 1–37. Löhnert treats lamenting as manipulation, whereas Bosworth sees it as a positive adaptation.

[66] An incantation whose incipit is *šiptu qarrādu* ᵈ*Marduk ša ezēssu abūbu* (BMS 11) recognizes humanity's vulnerability when it describes a situation similar to what *Ludlul*'s protagonist faces: "Speaking (by a prayer) but not being heard

shared by emotional communities, involving not just feelings and expectations but a cognitive and practical orientation regarding reality, which reveals the Mesopotamian sense of self in an "enchanted" world.[67]

The audience for Mesopotamian lament is twofold. On the one hand, it is directed to the divine because it appeals to their affect and sense of justice.[68] Only after his healing does the protagonist burn fragrant incense (*qutrinna ṭābūti*) before the gods; present offerings, gifts, and heaped-up donations (*erba ṭaʾti igisê etandūte*); sacrifice fattened bulls (*lê marê*) and prime sheep (*šapṭi*); and libate *kurunnu* beer and pure wine (*karāna ellu*) (V 55–58).[69] Moreover, he anoints with sesame oil, ghee, and abundant grain the door jamb, bolt, and bar of the cella's doors; libates beer made from red-gold grain; and sprinkles fragrant conifer oil on them (V 62–66).[70] The purpose of the libation and the

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makes me sleepless // Invoking but not being answered humiliates me" (ll. 3–4). Afterward, there is a reflection on the human condition:

> 8 Mankind, as many as they were called by the name (i.e., exist),
> 9 Who (among them) could understand his own sin?
>
> 10 Who could not be remiss? Which one could not transgress?
> 11 [Who c]ould understand the god's behaviour?
>
> 12 Let me be careful so that I will commit no transgression.
> 13 Always let me seek the shrines of he[al]th.
>
> 14 Thus, they (mankind) were commanded always to bear curses by the gods,
> 15 The hand of the gods is for men to bear. (Oshima 2011, 349)

Since human beings were created to serve, they must submit to the gods' decisions when destinies are determined. Humanity's only recourse is to lament when divine favor is lost and suffering results therefrom.

[67] Max Weber characterizes the premodern world as "a great enchanted garden" (1971, 270; *Entzauberung*) that becomes demystified by the advent of scientific reasoning. The ancient Mesopotamians were no less reasonable than modern human beings. They just reasoned differently about the world and the way it functioned.

[68] *Ludlul* has a more nuanced conception of the human–divine relationship than the more transactional one found in *Atra-ḫasīs* or *Enūma eliš*, where humans are merely a labor force, supplying the gods' needs so that they can have rest.

[69] Oshima (2014, 330–31) identifies the *erbu*, *ṭāʾtu*, and *igisû* as *ex-votos* and notes a similar pattern of offerings in "The Literary Prayer to Marduk."

[70] Evidence that these rituals are connected with the pacification of the god's heart comes from "The Literary Prayer to Marduk," which has similar offerings
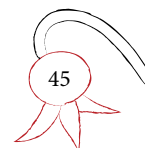
meal is to brighten the gods' mood (*kabattašun ušpardi*) and make their heart rejoice (*libbašun ušāliṣ*) (V 60–61) after his lamenting and tears have drawn their attention to his plight (I 105–16). Moreover, in "The *Unninnu*-prayer of Nābû-šuma-ukīn" (BM 40474), from the Neo-Babylonian period, lamenting and weeping indicate genuine helplessness because Marduk knows and sees through the "scheming" (*nikiltu*) of the wicked but has mercy on the powerless and lowly whose only recourse is the deity.[71] In *Ludlul*, prayer and lament, despite being a struggle (*kīma ṣaltum puḫpuḫḫû suppûya*, I 116), maintain and reaffirm the relationship between the petitioner and the divine, which is necessary for human flourishing. Through tears and supplication, lamenting expresses fidelity toward and dependence on one's deity.

The gods, however, are not the only audience, since lamenting is a social act observable by others. It conveys to the public the sufferer's sense of alienation but is also a critique of this abandonment by his community, colleagues, and kin. In Tablet I, he describes the consequences of his abandonment by the gods and the subsequent social death he experiences as he is rejected by different groups of people (I 41–90).[72] The sufferer inhabits a topsy-turvy world, where the gods help

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and whose incipit, *bēlum šēzuzu linūḫ libbu*[*k*], "O Lord, fierce one, may [your] heart be calmed," clearly states its purpose (cf. Oshima 2011, 158–59, ll. 1–4).

[71] The genre designated as *unninnu* is attested already in the Old Babylonian period, as BM 78278 (an exemplar of "The Literary Prayer to Marduk") demonstrates (Oshima 2011, 138). Similarly, the beginning of Nābû-šuma-ukīn's prayer highlights the god's dual aspect since "(only) Marduk among the gods frustrates the deeds of the wicked" and "makes the wind carry off the schemes (*niklāti*) of humankind" (Lenzi 2024, ll. 1–2) but "has mercy on the weak (and) the powerlessness" (ll. 13). Instead, Irving Finkel (1999, 331; Oshima 2011, 324) has *šāru*, "wind," as the subject of either a D-stem of *šapālu* or an Š-stem of *abālu*. The schemer is distinguished from the authentic supplicant, described as "abandoned," "tired," or "lowly" (*nāsû, anḫu, dunnamû*) in lines 22 and 31, by his weeping. Despite being imprisoned and overwhelmed by this scheming, the supplicant turns to Marduk to seek help (ll. 31–79).

[72] Since personhood in ancient Mesopotamia includes an individual's relationships and roles, death is more than just a physical phenomenon and involves a disruption of these human–divine social networks (Králová 2015; Borgstrom 2017).

his calumniators while death comes to those who are merciful to him. Enacting divine punishment, other human beings, normally benevolent and supportive, are transformed into the agents of divine wrath, another theme found in the *kalûtu* literature.[73] Unable to defend himself or rely on his abilities, he is constantly undermined, excluded, and treated as if he were an outsider (I 95–104). In despair and alone, he cries out in protest:

> I 98   *ul arši ālik idī gāmelu ul āmur*
> I 98   I had no one walking at my side, I did not see anyone who shows mercy.

Lamenting addresses both individual and social concerns. Just as suffering is never a private matter but a social phenomenon, lament spurs reflection about human relations and what needs to be changed.[74] In this case, the protagonist complains about the lack of solidarity and the disruption of social order accompanying his suffering. By highlighting what should not be, his lament is prescriptive because it is a plea for empathy and justice.

This points to a second function of lamenting as an act of hope. It expresses a desire for a better future: one laments about what one wants changed. The social reintegration of the protagonist is recounted laconically. Tablet IV briefly mentions Marduk's treatment of the sufferer's persecutors (IV 5–17). The protagonist's rescue is framed as an act of re-creation when Marduk thwarts the forces of disorder, which are

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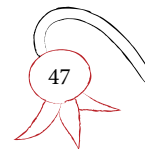
[73] For the enemy as the means of divine destruction in the Emesal prayers, see Gabbay 2014b, 26. Noegel (2016, 621–34) argues that *Ludlul*'s ambiguous language contributes to this characterization of Marduk as the one who unleashes demonic forces against the sufferer when he recounts the king's rejection and the plotting of the seven courtiers, portrayed like the *Sebittu* in I 55–69.

[74] A similar sentiment is expressed at the end of "The *Unninnu*-prayer of Nābû-šuma-ukīn," a lament whose recitation is meant to release the suffering of the supplicant and, thus, glorify Marduk. Its other purpose is raising social awareness: "The work of the weary, exhausted, Nābû-šuma-ukīn, son of Nebuchadnezzar, [king of Babylon(?)]. May they (i.e., the people and the land) come to understand (lit., see) all these afflictions!" (Lenzi 2024, rev 37–38).

represented by the image of the pit and the Ḫubur River. This renewed intimacy between the individual and his deity, emphasized by the clasping of their hands (IV 9), also results in vengeance against the sufferer's tormentors. When divine anger is directed against the sufferer, Marduk afflicts the latter, who goes about with head bowed down in shame, but when divine favor is restored, the god now raises his head (IV 11), strikes his enemies, and turns their own weapons against them. Just as the protagonist is convinced that the gods can change their disposition, even though the timing is uncertain, he now reminds the audience to place its hope in divine justice, which, though incomprehensible to human beings, will ultimately prevail. Lamenting, often accompanied by tears, enhances his credibility and authoritativeness, making the poem's protagonist a model for navigating suffering.[75]

Although the protagonist laments his abandonment by family, betrayal by friends, and machination by colleagues, implicit in his lamenting is his confidence and trust that the deity does indeed hear his complaint and can change his destiny. As an act of hope, it also occurs in the context of an emotional community. The concept of divine justice presupposes shared cultural values, norms, and expectations that can be activated and reinforced by lament. Nonetheless, as a form of social protest, lament needs to be circumspect, since its purpose is to engender empathy from the deity and the community for the sufferer rather than increase alienation by assigning blame.[76] The one who laments is hopeful that others, both divine and human, will recognize that he or she has been treated unjustly and will be moved to mercy, compassion, and solidarity with the sufferer instead of rejection and abandonment. Lament is not just a personal appeal but is addressed to our common humanity and aspirations. Finally, since laments are composed after the fact, they have a didactic and sapiential quality, encouraging the posi-

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[75] Tears, which involve the sharing of emotion and can engender trust by an expression of vulnerability, have an impact on credibility. See Calhoun et al. 1981, 17–21; Bollingmo et al. 2008, 29–40; Hackett et al. 2008, 323–34; Vingerhoets 2013, 123.

[76] Just as false tears can lead to distrust or anger, insincere or unjustified lamenting can result in further estrangement (Bosworth 2019, 31–35).

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tive adaptation necessary for resilience by reminding communities that life's crises are passing and renewal is possible.[77] They model hope in the face of uncertainty.

Ludlul's Emotional Community

While much of *Ludlul*'s content and style have features reflecting the concerns of both the *kalû* and *āšipu* due to the overlapping of their disciplines, the following evidence more specifically points to the influence of *kalûtu*. First, there is an analogous structure between *Ludlul* and the Emesal prayers, since the latter conclude with a series of precatives in the heart pacification unit, which contains a litany of deities.[78] Likewise, the end of *Ludlul* switches to the narrator's speech with precatives, expressing the desire for Šubši-mešrê-Šakkan's release from sin, for his being honored by the gods and king, and for his rest and "happiness of heart" (V 105–19). These are all consequences of the pacification of Marduk's angry heart. While *Ludlul* does not have a litany of deities, Marduk's consort, Zarpānītu, is mentioned several times toward the end of Tablet V (ll. 29, 53, 74, 76, 104) as well as other divine beings (*šēdu*, *lamassu*, and *angubbû* in V 59). Finally, the last line of many balaĝs have a prayer referring to the brickwork (še-eb) of a temple.[79]

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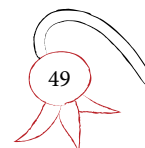
[77] Resilience in communities involves, among other things, strong social networks and support structures, a positive outlook, a sense of purpose, flexibility, and adaptability (Buikstra et al. 2010). By articulating common ideals, values, and beliefs, *Ludlul* promotes resilience and social bonds based on empathy, as the protagonist offers his own experience as an example of the appropriate way to behave in moments of crisis.

[78] The only exception is the eršemas, which lack the heart pacification unit (Gabbay 2014b, 33–35).

[79] There is disagreement over the meaning of the balaĝ's final line (šùd-dè še-eb TN(-ta) ki NE-en-gi₄-gi₄). Mark Cohen interprets it as a prayer for the restoration of the temple: "A supplication that the brickwork of the ... temple should be restored" (1998, 29). Anne Löhnert, on the other hand, proposes that it should be understood as a subscript referring to the deity's return to his cella: "This prayer— for the one returning the god from the brickwork of TN into his place" (2009,

Similarly, in *Ludlul* V 59–61 the protagonist brightens the mood and causes the heart of "the brickwork of Esaǧil" (*libit Esagil*) to rejoice.

Šubši-mešrê-Šakkan's comportment also corresponds to the ritual actions performed by the *kalû*. Although he is not described playing any instruments associated with *kalûtu*, his lamenting (*gerrānu*, *qubîya*) is compared to singing (*zammāriš*, I 108), which may allude to the *kalû*'s musical responsibilities.[80] Moreover, the final two broken lines mention Šubši-mešrê-Šakkan praising Marduk, and they employ the noun *zamāru* to describe this song:

> V 119 [. . .] *zamār*[*u*. . .] *Šubši-mešrê-Šakkan*
> V 120 *idlula dalī*[*līka* . . . *t*]*anittaka ṭābat*

> V 119 [. . .] the son[g. . .] Šubši-mešrê-Šakkan,
> V 120 He sang [your] [prai[ses. . .], your [p]raise is sweet.[81]

Furthermore, earlier he offers prayers and supplications (*suppû* and *teslītu* in I 115–16, II 23, V 54; *šigû* prayer in IV 14′–15′; *tēmēqu* in V 54), which are part of *kalûtu*. The *šigû*, originally an exclamation,

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25–29). Gabbay connects the line with the pacification of the deity's heart: "May the prayer cause the heart not to turn (away) from the brickwork of TN" or "May the prayer (coming) from the brickwork of TN turn the heart" (2014b, 35).

[80] Gabbay (2014b, 81) illustrates the musical aspect of the *kalû*'s work by citing the following passage from a balaǧ, whose Akkadian translation shows that singing (*zamāru*) was part of this specialist's ritual repertoire:

> The gala sings a song for him ([*kalû zam*]*āru izammu*[*ru*]),
> The gala sings a song of lordship for him,
> The [gala] (sings) a song with the balaǧ for (him),
> He (plays) the holy ùb and the holy li-li-ìs (for him),
> He (plays) the šem, me-zé, and holy balaǧ (for him).

[81] Oshima reconstructs the lines as: [...] × *za-ma-a-r*[*u*ʾ (×)] × ᵐ*šub-ši-meš-ra-a-*ᵈ*šakkán* // *id-lu-la dà-lí-*[*lí-ka ... t*]*a-nit-ta-ka ṭa-bat*, "[...] a praise song [(.)]. Šubši-mešrâ-Šakkan // (has) extolled [your (Marduk's)] glo[ry ...] your [p]raise is gratifying" (2014, 112–13). Hätinen (2023) has: [*nišū*ʾ (...)] *i*]*na*ʾ *zamā*[*ri š*]*a šubši-mešrê-šakkan* || *idlulā dalīlī*[*šu*ʾ] // [...] *tanittaka ṭābat*, "[The people ...] through the song of Šubši-mešrê-Šakkan, they praised [him], // [O Marduk, pr]aising you is sweet." Although the final sign is reconstructed, all three interpretations agree that the noun should be *zamāru* and that it refers to the protagonist (cf. Lenzi 2023, 183).

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neutralized potential offenses against the gods (CAD Š/2, 413–14).[82] *Tēmēqu*, which is a cognate of the noun *nēmequ*, "wisdom," refers to a prayer that persuades the deities and that is often accompanied by gestures of humility or the raising of the arms and hands, like the šuila (CAD T, 334–35). While the Emesal šuila involves the *kalû*, the *āšipu* also performed the Akkadian *šuʾillakku* in the first millennium.[83] In a Hellenistic bilingual text, *teslītu* appears in the context of pacifying the heart of a god.[84] In ritual texts, the balaĝ is designated as *taqribtu/takribtu* (ÉR), which is often paired with *teslītu* and is used with the verb *zamāru*, "to sing," to denote the performance of both the *kalû* and *āšipu* (Gabbay 2014b, 6, 155–56).[85]

Actions associated with the *kalû* include prostration (*šukênu*) before or after the performance of Emesal prayers and beating the chest while

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[82] The *šigû* of the first millennium BCE were often associated with the king (Van der Toorn 1985, 119). However, the instructions in the rituals indicate that the *kalû* directed the king in the recitation. Moreover, when the king was not present, the prayers were said by the *kalû* over the fringe of the king's cloak as a substitute (Gabbay 2014b, 173–74 n. 173).

[83] The chief exorcist, Marduk-šakin-šumi, reports to the Assyrian king that he has performed three *šuʾillakku* by the riverbank but that the *āšipu* must avoid performing this type of prayer on inauspicious days (SAA 10 240: 5, 20–22).

[84] SBH 58, no. 30: rev 13–14 has: [x x x SI]SKUR.SISKUR.RA.TA ŠÀ.BI BÍ.IN.SED. DÈ = *ina* x x-*t*]*um u teslītim libbašu unâḫ*, "By [the intercession] and prayer, he (or: I) will calm his heart" (Maul 1988, 166, 168). Using slightly different terminology, a bilingual Sumero-Akkadian ritual (AO 6461) expresses the same sentiment: BAR.ZU ḪÉ.EN.ŠED₇.DA.ZU.ŠÈ UN DA.MA.AL A.RA.ZU DÈ.RA.AB.B[A] = *ana šupšuḫ kabattika* UN.MEŠ*(nišē) dadmē teslīt liqbûk*[*a*], "May the people of (all) inhabited regions address their invocation to you to appease your mind!" (RAcc 109: rev 7–8; Linssen 2004, 197–98, ll. 7–8).

[85] Gabbay (2014b, 6–7) argues that ÉR should be read as *takribtu*, coming from *karābu*, "prayer," instead of *qerēbu*, "to approach, to present (an offering or sacrifice)." A Middle Assyrian lexical list (MAOG 03/3, 47–55) supports his interpretation since the spelling *ka-ra-bu* appears in *Diri* II: obv i 5. Nonetheless, what an ÉR designates is not clear since it could be just a balaĝ or a balaĝ with its accompanying eršema. Moreover, in *Diri* II: obv i 1–10, AMAR×ŠE.AMAR×ŠE is equated with *teslītu*, *tēmēqu*, *suppû*, and *karābu*, which suggests that they were perceived as one category.
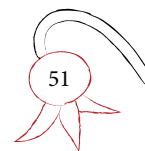
crying out, "Alas!" (*ūʾa*) (Gabbay 2014b, 172–73). In *Ludlul* II 14, the protagonist mentions that he is treated negatively, as if he were "one who did not humble himself" and who "was not seen bowing down" (*appi lā enû šukenni lā amru*) when, in fact, he had been attentive to the divine. Although there is no explicit mention of laceration or chest-beating in the poem, the protagonist states that Marduk lifts his cries of "Alas!" and "Woe!" (*ūʾa ayya*) like the fog, turning them away like an evil curse (III 78–79). Moreover, he characterizes Marduk's wrath as a barbed beating that pierces the body (*zaqtā niṭâtūšu usaḫḫalā zumra*, I 21), but this does not indicate any type of self-laceration.[86]

The setting of the protagonist's prayers and offerings also has similarities with that of the Emesal prayers. After his healing, Šubši-mešrê-Šakkan goes to Esaĝil and passes through various gates, making entreaties (*suppê*) and supplications (*tēmēqi*) before each of them (V 54). Only then does he make sacrifices and libations, and offer incense in front of Marduk's cella.[87] In addition to the recitation or singing of Emesal prayers, the *kalû* likewise executes *niqû* offerings, libations, and cultic acts involving cedar incense or purification as well as participates in funerary activities (Gabbay 2014b, 70–71, 79). Moreover, this choreography corresponds to the performance of Emesal prayers in static situations in the temple area in the first millennium BCE. At this time, balaĝs and their related eršemas, connected with the regular daily and monthly cult and performed before the seated image of the god who was served a meal in the temple, became disassociated with annual cult processions, especially the *akītu* festival. Instead, a new genre, the

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[86] Later, in II 100–1, he describes being beaten by his tormentors' whip "full of thorns" and being pricked by the goad "covered with spikes." Gabbay (2014b, 173) believes that self-laceration may have been part of the rituals for the gala in the third millennium BCE, but there is no evidence for it in the first millennium.

[87] The door jamb, bolt, and bar ([*sippu ši*]*garri mēdil dalāti*) in V 62 are all features of the cella. Cf. AO 6460 = RAcc 119:10, *sip-pi*.MEŠ *ša* KÁ*(bāb)* É*(bit) papāḫa* ᴳᴵˢIG.MEŠ*(dalāti) u* KÁ.MEŠ*(bābāni)*, "the door jamb of the cella gate, the doors, and the gates" (CAD S, 302b; Linssen 2004, 245, 247, line 10) and CBS9 = PBS 15 79 i 59, GIŠ *me-di-lu dalāti* ... *ša bāb papāḫi ḫurāṣa ḫuṣṣâ ušalbiš*, "I/he covered the bar of the door ... the gate of the cella, with shining gold" (Legrain 1923, 273; CAD M/2, 3a).

šuʾillakku, developed and was employed during processions and circumambulations. Balaĝs and eršemas for Marduk and Nabû are not attested in the Old Babylonian period but appear in the first millennium, reflecting their cult's increased prominence. These new compositions adapted older material, changing names and epithets to fit Marduk and Babylon (Gabbay 2014b, 287–88).

Finally, the timing of Šubši-mešrê-Šakkan's lamenting and praying corresponds with the *kalû*'s role as a mediator between the human and divine realms. The singing of Emesal lamentations in the first millennium BCE occurs with events associated with the deity's disappearance from the temple. These include the renovation of temples, the excavation or maintenance of watercourses, the repair of statues and the *mīs pî* ritual, eclipses, processions, and the preparation of cultic instruments such as the *lilissu* drum as well as the daily cult performed on fixed days of every month (Löhnert 2008, 427). Similarly, Šubši-mešrê-Šakkan laments when he experiences the god's absence and expresses his hope that Marduk's attitude might change with the dawn and the new moon (I 119–20). After he is restored, he prays before the Utu-e-a Gate (V 40–41, 46), associated with sunrise and the determining of destinies.

While this evidence does not conclusively demonstrate that Šubši-mešrê-Šakkan was meant to be portrayed as a *kalû*, the absence of any explicit critique of this type of cult specialist is notable in *Ludlul* and requires explanation. Although features of *kalûtu* are described in the narrative, the word itself never appears. This is not unique to *Ludlul*, since the *kalû* and *kalûtu* are missing in the sapiential composition from Ugarit (*Ugaritica* 5, no. 162: 1'–8'), which has an Old Babylonian antecedent in a bilingual Sumero-Akkadian eršaḫuĝa to Marduk (IVR 22, no. 2: 6'–19') and in a therapeutic text (BAM 316: iii 12'–16').[88] The

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[88] Among the experts (*ummânū*) who are unable to comprehend the divine intentions, *Ugaritica* 5 mentions the diviner (*bārû*) (ll. 3' and 6') and the interpreter (*šāʾilu*) (l. 6') (Y. Cohen 2013, 166–67). Likewise, IVR 22 cites only the *bārû* (l. 9'), *šāʾilu* (l. 11'), and *āšipu* (l. 15') (Lenzi 2023, 290–91). BAM 316 refers to the *bārû* and *šāʾilu* in line 12' (Abusch 1987, 27–28). Finally, Oshima (2014, 190–91, l. 26) cites a letter-prayer of Sîn-iddinam recounting how no physician (*azu*) can heal the illness that has befallen the king.

motif also appears in an incantation against witchcraft (KAR 26: obv 11 – rev 6):

> 13 Without you [Marduk], Šamaš, the judge, will place neither perfect "loops" nor well-placed lungs inside of sheep (i.e., Šamaš will give no favorable signs through divination).
>
> 14 Without you, no diviner will set his hands aright.
> Without you, no exorcist will stretch his hands over sick people.
>
> 15 Without you, no exorcist, ecstatic-priest, or snake charmer will walk in the street.
>
> 16 Without you, no one will be saved in (his) consternation and adversity.
> Without you, neither orphan nor widow will be protected.[89]

Marduk's agency is necessary in the work of the diviner (ᴸᵁ́ḪAL = *bārû*), exorcist (ᴸᵁ́KA.PIRÌG = *āšipu*), and other specialists (*eššebû*, MUŠ.LAḪ₄ = *mušlaḫḫu*) because he determines destinies and is, thus, responsible for the well-being of all people. While the *kalû* worked in conjunction with the *āšipu*, the former had a secondary role in the therapeutic process since *kalûtu* did not rely directly on divine agency but was based on the human ability to attract the deity's attention and persuade the god to act. The *āšipu*'s work, on the other hand, depended on the deity's disposition toward the individual. If the god or goddess was angry, the judgment would be negative and the ritual would fail until the divine heart was appeased.

While Lenzi's argument that one of *Ludlul*'s purposes is to serve as damage control for cult specialists may be true (2012; 2023, 281), I would also add that the text reflects the competition and collaboration among these scholars. Evidence for this rivalry and cooperation among Assyrian scholars is found in letters and in their personal libraries.[90] Through the erudite speculation in *Ludlul*, manifesting itself not

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[89] Oshima 2011, 404–5.

[90] Lenzi 2008a, 71; 2015c, 176–78; Parpola 1983, 8–10; 1993, xxi–xxiv; Stol 1991, 62. The personal libraries contain texts from fields outside of the specialized discipline of their owners. Moreover, royal scholars worked in close cooperation and were organized into professional teams to protect the king and prevent him from straying from the path decreed by the gods.

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only in the different theological viewpoints and practices expressed, but also in the paronomasia, which is based on homonymy and the polysemy of cuneiform signs, the narrative *persona* of Šubši-mešrê-Šakkan is portrayed as someone intimately familiar with this scholarly milieu, giving him the social capital, legitimacy, and prestige that comes with this secret knowledge (*nēmequ*). While he himself might not be a *kalû*, through tearful lamenting his behavior is held up as exemplary, and he teaches those who are negligent how to navigate and persevere through suffering. Finally, like the *kalû*, he is a liminal figure, whose experience of suffering, described as dying and becoming a ghost (V 30–41), and being restored from the netherworld by Marduk, attests to the god's dual *persona* and power to save.

The concerns of the cult specialists might explain why the protagonist is identified by the rare name Šubši-mešrê-Šakkan, while all the other characters (i.e., Laluralimma and Ur-Nintinugga) are associated with Marduk.[91] The occurrences of his name are concentrated at the end of the poem, like that of Marduk, often in the context of scholarly speculation and homonymic paronomasia.[92] Appearing three times in the poem (III 44; V 111, 119), the theonym is usually written in the Babylonian and Assyrian manuscripts (MS A$_{Bab}$, rev ii' 11', 19'; MS V.F$_{Aš}$, rev 16a') with

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[91] Šubši-mešrê-Šakkan is attested as a "governor of the land" (^{LÚ}GAR KUR) in a legal document from Ur in the sixteenth year of the Kassite ruler Nazimurutaš (Gurney 1986, 190). A text from Nippur (PBS II/2 20 31) records the distribution of grain in Nazimurutaš's fourth year to Šubši-mešrê-Šakkan's messenger, while his name appears in another composition (K.9952) (Lambert 1960, 296; 1995, 33; Oshima 2014, 465–69). Consequently, Jacob de Ridder (2023, 182–83) concludes that Šubši-mešre-Šakkan is based on a historical figure. Nevertheless, the literary *persona* from the poem must be distinguished from the individual attested in these administrative documents, and the former provides information about the worldview and concerns of the ancient scholars for whom this composition was so important (Lenzi 2023, 7–9).

[92] After the prologue, Marduk is never explicitly invoked, but his name remains hidden in the text until Šubši-mešrê-Šakkan is mentioned for the first time in III 43–44.

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the Sumerogram ᵈGÌR.[93] As a literary character, Šubši-mešrê-Šakkan is portrayed as an influential, learned, and well-off citizen of Babylon situated in the royal court (cf. I 50–104; II 23–32). His initial prosperity and success are signaled by his name, which means "Create wealth, O Šakkan," but which also hints at his travails since Šakkan is associated with the netherworld and Gilgameš, whose experience of death and suffering leads to greater wisdom.[94] Furthermore, *mešru*, the second element of the name, is often paired with *dumqu*, "favor," which is what drives the plot, since its withdrawal leads to the protagonist's suffering and loss of identity (cf. I 41–48, especially *šēd dumqi* in I 45) (Lenzi 2023, 342–44).

The name of *Ludlul*'s protagonist may also be linked to the secret lore of the cultic specialists (*ummânu*) through the flood story in the *Epic of Gilgameš* and the tradition of the sages (*apkallu*) through learned speculation. According to Andrew George (2009, 13), Šakkan is connected with Ea and may even be identified with him through their mutual association with groundwater and the deified Mt. Šaršar (Jebel al-Bishri).[95] The *kalûtu* literature, like *āšipūtu*, is attributed to Ea, and

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[93] One Babylonian manuscript (MS V.B_{Bab}) has a fragmentary sign, perhaps -*m*[*a*], at the end of the name (Mayer 2014, 280; Lenzi 2023, 183).

[94] For Šakkan, see Lambert 2013, 513–23. In line 20 of the version of "The Death of Gilgameš" from Nippur, the hero sets out audience gifts for ᵈSU.MU.GÁN! (ms: DAG), which is another Sumerian writing for the god's name (ETCSL edition 2001). An incantation to ᵈGÌR (K.2537 = AMT 52 1) also portrays him as a god of the underworld since his heart is bound to the *ṣēru* and his hands are filled with the dust of death (Ebeling 1931, 27; eBL edition, ll. 10–11, https://www.ebl.lmu.de/fragmentarium/K.2537 [accessed June 10, 2024]). Finally, in the *Epic of Gilgameš* VII 202, Enkidu recounts that, in the House of Dust, he sees Šakkan seated with Etana and Ereškigal along with the scribe of the netherworld, Bēlet-ṣēri (George 2003, 644–45).

[95] In Litke's (1998, 138) edition of An = *Anum* III, line 198 equates Šakkan (Akk. Sumuqan) with Ea, the god of wisdom associated with the Apsû, but he has misread e₂-a for u₂-a. In the most recent edition of the god list, the editors Andrew George and Manfred Krebernick point out this mistake and correct it (Lambert and Winters 2023, 148–49). Nonetheless, in An = *Anum* III: 197–99, Šakkan is equated with the following:

colophons from Ashurbanipal's "temple library" tablets identify it as "the wisdom of Ea ... appropriate for the appeasement of the hearts of the great gods."[96] Thus, the protagonist's name hints at the role of the cultic specialists, whose wisdom comes from Ea, which creates not just wealth but also divine favor.

In the prologue, Marduk is identified as "the lord of wisdom" (*bēl nēmeqi* in I 1), which is an epithet also given to Ea, who fathered him in the Apsû, according to *Enūma eliš* I 81–84.[97] This close relationship between these two deities associated with wisdom might also be a reason for Šubši-mešrê-Šakkan's theonym, since Martu (Akk.: *Amurrû*) is syncretized with Sumuqan in the god lists:[98]

197[d.min]ú-kú	\<MIN\>	
198[d.min]ú-a	\<MIN\>	
199[d.min]a	\<MIN\>	

Lambert (2013, 520–21) interprets ú-a by the equivalences *rîtu* ("pasture") and *mašqītu* ("watering place") and understands a as *reḫû* ("to pour out, to procreate"), but it could also be read just as *mû*, "water." A Late Babylonian commentary from Kutha has the association [d]40: *mu-ú*, also identifying Ea with water (Akk.: *mû*; Sum.: a) (Cooley 2022, 236 n. 60). Furthermore, in An = *Anum* II: 158, Ea is also equated with IDIM (*nagbu*, "groundwater") (Lambert and Winters 2023, 116). Finally, Enki/Ea's connection with the western uplands of Syria also link him with Šakkan since both are associated with Jebel al-Bishri (cf. Ea as [d]šár.[šá-ar-MIN]šár in An = *Anum* II: 163 and Šakkan of the Suteans as [d]šár.šár in An = *Anu ša amēli*: 104), which is known for its freshwater springs and which is identified as [d]šár.šár in the god lists (George 2009, 13–14). Although there may not be a direct identification of Šakkan with Ea in the god lists, a sophisticated reader would have noticed the connection between these two deities through their association with groundwater and the west. This Syrian depiction of Ea as a divine herdsman differs from his traditional Babylonian portrayal.

[96] Lambert 1962, 64; Gabbay 2014a, 128–29. Moreover, Enki is the one who fashions the gala-tur and the kurĝara from the dirt under his fingernail and sends them to the netherworld to free Inana (*Descent of Inana*, 217–25).

[97] For instance, RINAP 4, Esarhaddon 48: 4: [d]*Ea eršu* (EN)*bēl nēmeqi bānû nabnīt pātiq kullat mimma šumšu*, "the god Ea, the wise, lord of wisdom, creator of (all) creatures, the one who fashions everything, whatever its name."

[98] Litke 1998, 217, 236; Lambert and Winters 2023, 222–23, 250.

An = *Anu* VI: 230	ᵈKU.SUD.NUN.KU.TU = ᵈmar-tu
An = *Anu ša amēli*: 102	ᵈmar-tu = ᵈsumuqan *šá su-ti-i*

The spelling of Martu's name is similar to ᵈAMAR.UTU, the Sumerian rendering of Marduk's. Moreover, the first sign in Martu's name involves the Sumerogram MAR, which is equivalent to the Akkadian *marru*, "spade," the symbol for Marduk. MÁR, a homophone of MAR, also has the value AMAR, while TU has a homophone (TÚ), which can be read UTU. Thus, these equivalences would result in AMAR.UTU, the Sumerian spelling of Marduk's name. Furthermore, the first part of ᵈKU.SUD.NUN.KU.TU might have reminded the scribe of ᵈKU, which is a spelling of Marduk's name in the first millennium.[99] Finally, An (= *Anum* III 197) equates Šakkan with ú-kú, and the fourth line in a fragment from Ashurbanipal's library (K.7722+9244) likewise identifies the god as ᵈnin-ú-kú (Lambert 2013, 519–20). Thus, Šakkan is called "lord of the beasts" (ú-kú = *umāmu*), which may associate him with Aššur reimagined as Marduk since that word is used to describe Tiamat's monstrous brood.[100] Like the paronomasia involving the designation of the gates in *Ludlul* V 42–53, the scribes may have been engaging in some type of scholarly speculative etymology or playful association of signs in Šubši-mešrê-Šakkan's name to foreshadow his fate (cf. Lenzi

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[99] For examples of ᵈKU as the spelling of Marduk's name, see Sommerfeld 1982, 7; Borger 2010, 425.

[100] Interestingly, *umāmu* is also used to describe Tiāmat's monsters in Sennacherib's inscription recounting the building of the *akītu* house on whose bronze gate is depicted the battle between Aššur, riding with ᵈMartu (Akk.: *Amurrû*) in a chariot, and the forces of chaos (*umāmānu ša Tiāmat* in RINAP 3/2, Sennacherib 160: 14). In An = *Anum* II, 292–93, Martu/*Amurrû* assumes an analogous role for Enki since the former is identified as "the great *ensi* of the Apsû" (ᵈen₅.gal.abzu) and Enki's "supreme ensi" (ᵈen₅.si.maḫ) (George 2009, 13). In the formulation by Sennacherib's scribes, Enki, who was Marduk's father, has been replaced by Aššur, and Martu was made his chariot-driver. As a result of Šakkan's identity as "lord of the beasts" (ᵈnin-ú-kú), the literary persona of Šubši-mešrê-Šakkan might have assumed new meaning after Sennacherib's scribes reimagined Marduk's role as the one who defeated Tiāmat's monsters and attributed it to Aššur after the destruction of Babylon.

2015a).[101] While Lenzi is correct in arguing that the story would read differently if the protagonist's name had Marduk as the theonym, the choice of Šakkan may have been more inclusive because Ea was considered the source of wisdom for both the *kalû* and *āšipu*.[102] While they had different roles, both are necessary in Šubši-mešrê-Šakkan's healing and restoration.

Both the incantation against witchcraft (KAR 26) and *Ludlul* highlight the connection between Marduk and *āšipūtu* and other disciplines except *kalûtu*. This reflects the *āšipu*'s growing prominence, beginning perhaps in the Old Babylonian period and continuing in the Kassite period, with its transmission and "systematization" of "the stream of tradition" from Babylonia to Assyria, as well as during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar I, when Babylon's principal deity assumed a more exalted and universal status as creator and king of the gods.[103] The *āšipu*'s rise in status paralleled Marduk's ascent during the second millennium BCE.

By the first millennium, the *āšipu* and *kalû* were the two main cultic specialists. Like the former, the *kalû* often acquired knowledge outside his field of expertise. In *Ludlul*, divination, medicine, astronomy are well represented in the author's references to terminology and procedures from these disciplines. Nonetheless, the *kalû*'s status was considered inferior to the *āšipu*'s in both Babylonia and Assyria (Radner 2009,

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[101] Another example of this sophisticated scholarly speculation based on writing by a Babylonian *kalû*, also involving the name of Šakkan/*Sumuqan*, associated with Ea, may occur in two tablets from Nineveh (81-2-4, 202 = CT 38, 25 and K.2848 = 3R, 52, 3) (Gabbay 2014a, 125).

[102] Lenzi (2023, 341–42) argues that if *Ludlul*'s protagonist had a theophoric name with Marduk, then the audience's empathy for the character would be different and he might be perceived as disingenuous or derelict, and as a result the poem would lose its poignancy.

[103] While there was cultural and institutional continuity between the Kassite period and the Second Dynasty of Isin, there was also a shift in religious sensibilities with Marduk's elevation, which had implications regarding human kingship (Lambert 1964). In the first millennium, the Sargonid rulers harnessed and adapted this ideology to express and reinforce their imperial ambitions, especially in dealing with their troublesome Babylonian neighbors.

222–23). This might explain why the *kalû* is never mentioned explicitly in *Ludlul* but aspects of *kalûtu* appear in the protagonist's story, and those in the know would have been aware of it. Beginning in the Middle Assyrian period and culminating in the Sargonid period, *kalûtu* was imported into Assyria and incorporated into the cult as it became more involved in Babylonian political affairs (Gabbay 2014a, 140). While *Ludlul*'s inclusion in the more advanced stages of scribal education, devoted to *āšipūtu*, in the Neo-Babylonian curriculum highlights the *āšipu*'s higher status, care must be taken to avoid anachronism since this specialist's gradual rise involved cooperation and competition with the *kalû*, which had already started occurring in earlier periods (suggested by the *kalû*'s absence in *Ugaritica* 5 and other Old Babylonian rituals) and continuing into the first millennium, as this article's reading between the lines of the poem suggests.[104] Its incorporation of features of *kalûtu* and portrayal of the lamenting protagonist recognizes the *kalû*'s vital role in conjunction with the *āšipu* in his process of healing and restoration by Marduk.

In particular, Babylonian cultic experts who had been brought to the Assyrian court during the Sargonid dynasty's attempt to deal with Babylonia might have found solace and hope in Šubši-mešrê-Šakkan's plight since they, too, had lost status and influence. While Sargon II resorted to pro-Babylonian policies to win the support of the elites and priests of his southern neighbors, some Assyrians, including members of the royal family, were not as sympathetic (Frahm 2017, 183). His successor, Sennacherib, destroyed Babylon in 689 BCE. Assyrian scholars justified this act by composing a cultic commentary that portrays Marduk as a criminal who is imprisoned during the *akītu* festival (SAA 3 34, 35) and by revising *Enūma eliš* so that Aššur replaces Marduk as the supreme deity.[105] After his father's death, Esarhaddon tried to strike

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[104] For *Ludlul*'s role in the second stage of scribal education, see Gesche 2000, 172–98, 814.

[105] Aššur's name is written AN.ŠÁR on a bead from the reign of Tukulti-Ninurta I, and Aššur is equated with this primordial deity during the reign of Sargon II, probably due to the phonetic similarity between their names. However, it is Sennacherib who renovates a *bīt akīti* where a statue of Aššur-Anšar is established

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a balance, rebuilding Babylon while also supporting the cult of Aššur in the Assyrian capital. Moreover, his inscriptions attribute the destruction of Babylon not to Sennacherib but to the sins of the Babylonians and their abandonment by Marduk (Machinist 1984–1985, 357). Under Ashurbanipal, the statue of Marduk was finally returned to Esağil, but Babylon was sacked during Šamaš-šuma-ukīn's rebellion, which resulted in tablets and cultic personnel again being sent to Assyria. *Ludlul*, originally a composition from the Kassite period, which was edited sometime in the first millennium BCE to include a hymnic prologue that highlights Marduk's absolute power, presents the theological perspective of the Babylonian *kalû* and *āšipu*, who had to make sense of the uncertainty in their lives due to the tense relation between Assyria and Babylonia. Pessimistic Mesopotamian literature like *Ludlul* was a response to the Assyrian attempts to elevate the god Aššur formalized during Sennacherib's reign, whose destruction of Babylonia would have been interpreted as a consequence of Marduk's anger and abandonment.[106] Like Šubši-mešrê-Šakkan, these Babylonian experts placed their hope in Marduk, but they also had to navigate the tenuous situation in which they found themselves in the aftermath of Babylon's destruction. Additionally, they had to contend with the sociopolitical dynamics of the Assyrian royal court, which, during Esarhaddon's reign, consisted of a small contingent of scholars who yielded great power and influence and a much larger group that vied to become part of this inner circle (Jones 2023, 327–28).[107] By incorporating literary figures based on in-

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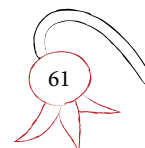
and dust from the destroyed city of Babylon is placed; the gates of this building have a depiction of Aššur-Anšar as the hero in the battle against chaos recounted in *Enūma eliš* (Tadmor 1958a, 159–60; 1958b, 82; Machinist 1984–1985, 355–56).

[106] Ann Weaver (2004) has shown how literature, including the version of the destruction of Babylon in the Babylonian inscriptions, "The Sin of Sargon," and Esarhaddon's AsBbA inscription, was employed during his reign to reimagine the role of Sennacherib and to cast Esarhaddon as a dutiful son fulfilling the plans of his pious father. The various texts are evidence for "the political-theological conversation written by and for priest and scribes" (2004, 65) during Esarhaddon's reconceptualization of political history.

[107] Lorenzo Verderame (2014, 725–26) analyzes the content of the correspondence between the king and his scholars during the reigns of Esarhaddon and

dividuals who had acquired reputations for their learnedness or who were associated with Marduk, the composition highlights the role of Babylonian specialists in the healing of the protagonist, demonstrating how indispensable these cultic experts were to the religious and political system, especially during the reign of Esarhaddon, when those who were "negligent of Esaĝil" (*Ludlul* IV p) adopted a more conciliatory policy toward Babylon and her chief deity.

Šubši-mešrê-Šakkan's story, which includes his initial lamenting over the suspicion and harsh treatment he experiences from both the king and officials (I 55–84) but which ends with a rapprochement with Nazimurutaš, the Kassite ruler whom he served (V 117), would resonate, in general, with the cult specialists in the royal court but perhaps especially with the *kalû*, who began as an outsider and eventually gained social capital as his expertise became part of an emotional community:

> V 117 [*ilšu … ištart*]*ašu* (*šarrašu*) *likabbi*[*tūšu*]
> V 117 [… .and his god …] may his [goddes]s (and his king) treat [him]
>   with honor …[108]

Ashurbanipal to demonstrate that different factions existed in the royal court. The purge in response to the plot at the end of Esarhaddon's reign resulted in the emergence of a new generation of *ummânū*, who adopted a new style of relating to the king. Christopher Jones (2023, 336, 347), on the other hand, approaches the same corpus through the use of social network analysis. His research indicates that the status of scholars in the inner circle during the reign of Ashurbanipal declined to a level similar to that of the larger out-group under Esarhaddon. This loss of influence is interpreted as a political phenomenon in which Ashurbanipal attempted to curtail the power of these elites.

[108] Oshima has a different reading for V 117: [*il*(DINGIR)-*šú li-na-ad-su* ᵈ*iš*]*tar* (1]5)-*šú li-kab-bit-su*, "May his (Šubši-mešrê-Šakkan's) personal god praise him (Marduk)], may his personal goddess honour him" (2014, 112–13). Hätinen (2023), instead, has a break at the beginning of the line and treats the precative as singular, with *šarrašu* as its subject: [...] … || *šarrašu likabbissu*, "[...], may his king honor him" (cf. Lenzi 2023, 183). She bases her reading of the line on a Babylonian manuscript (BM 34650 = MS V.B_Bab, rev 11'), where a partially preserved [LUGA]L-*šú* is restored. Lenzi (2023, 183) differs, as he does not think that this manuscript or those in the Babylonian script mention the king in V 117 because the precative is singular (*li-kab-bi-su* in MS V.B_Bab, rev 11' and

Šubši-mešrê-Šakkan was an ideal candidate for presenting their world-view and concerns since he was a relatively blank slate not explicitly associated with any group of cultic specialists, but his name connected him to Ea and Marduk through Šakkan.[109] Just as the story would have been understood differently if his name had Marduk as the theophoric element, the failure of the specialists would have conveyed another message if Šubši-mešrê-Šakkan had been explicitly identified as an *āšipu* or *kalû*. What was most important was that he was attested during the reign of Nazimurutaš, a Kassite king remembered in the first millennium as being a patron of scholars (Young 2022, 89–91). Furthermore, Šubši-mešrê-Šakkan's insistence that he continued to support the king and teach common people to fear the palace, even when he was rejected by the court (II 27–32), but was eventually honored by the king would signal his loyalty and royal recognition. There is a pun based on homophony in II 32, since the word for "common people" (*ummānu*) sounds like *ummânu/ummiānu*, which designates the royal court's most accomplished ritual experts. This would indeed be a hopeful message

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[*li-ka*]*b-bit-su* in MS V.A$_{Bab}$, rev ii' 17') and the subject is just the protagonist's personal goddess (*ištartašu*). However, in the manuscript from Aššur (MS V.F$_{Aš}$, rev 13'), he believes there are two subjects (*ištartašu* and *šarrašu*) of the restored plural *li-kab-bi-*[*tu-šú*], whereas Hätinen instead proposes *li-kab-b*[*i-is-su*] for the verb.

[109] Scribes could have multiple reasons, not always obvious to modern scholars, for choosing a figure to be an ancestor or to attribute authorship for a literary work. It is unclear why Sîn-lēqi-unninni was named as the copyist of the *Epic of Gilgameš* despite the fact that a list of kings and scholars from the first millennium indicates that he was a legendary figure. Even though Sîn-lēqi-unninni was a *mašma(š)šu*, who is thought to have lived between 1300 and 1000 BCE, he was considered the esteemed ancestor of several families of *kalû* priests in Uruk in the Neo-Babylonian, Achaemenid, and Seleucid periods. Besides being known as "the *ummânu* of Gilgameš," his name, "Sîn is the one who accepts my lament," may have been why he was associated with the *kalû*, since it has the word *unninnu* (Lenzi 2008b, 140–42, l. 12; Fink 2013, 87–88). With the collapse of royal patronage in the mid and late first millennium, which shifted scribal activity from the palace and temple to the private sphere, there was a change in the status of the cultic specialists, whose work focused less on protecting kingship and more on preserving Mesopotamian culture.

for both the *kalû* and *āšipu* as well as other scribes, copying and commenting upon *Ludlul bēl nēmeqi*, whose discourse both concealed and advertised the secret knowledge of these cultic specialists jockeying for prestige and power.

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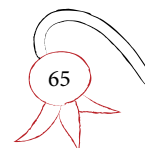
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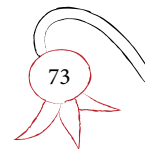
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