

The Fifty names of Marduk

What we find in the list of the names of Marduk, head of the Mesopotamian divine pantheon, as listed in the *Enuma Elish* ('When on High'), is the name of each aspect of Marduk followed by a short description of the powers and properties which each name represents. Taken together, these descriptions of the aspects of Marduk provide a catalogue of divine qualities, and consequently, since the duty of the Mesopotamian king is to emulate the qualities of the gods, also provide a catalogue of the qualities required in the king. It isn't necessary to review all of the names for the purpose of this study - the first ten are reviewed, plus some later names in the list, and the colophon. The translation of the text is by E.A Speiser, from his: *Enuma Elish, The Fifty Names of Marduk*, (Tablet VIb – VII).

What I'm interested in here is the underlying rationale for this collection of names, properties and attributes. It is well known that the divine pantheon in Mesopotamia was subject to local politics and changes in rulership and cultural hegemony, and I am not challenging that at all. However it was possible for properties and attributes to be reassigned, and transferred to other deities. And they were so reassigned. I'm interested in the properties and attributes of Marduk as they appear in the *Enuma Elish*, and what can be understood of the process by which the list was generated.

Samuel Noah Kramer commented, with some puzzlement, on a Sumerian list of disparate things which were white, which I referred to earlier. Why would you want to create such a list? It is hard for us to imagine why anyone would want to create a list of things which share a meaningless and wholly accidental property, such as being white.

But this is to look at the question from our own point of view, within the categories of our understanding. The list comes from another context, and needs to be understood within that context. Otherwise it can make no sense to us. We are already familiar with biblical notions of purity in terms of (for example) lambs 'without blemish.' Things which were pure were often painted white in antiquity, or dressed with white stone, in order to shine in the sunlight. White was the principal colour of purity. So things which were white could be regarded as pure objects (white linen, white chalk, white gypsum, ivory, etc.). Purity of course cannot be regarded as an accidental property in the Aristotelian sense, even if within the Mesopotamian context, purity can be added or taken away. Purity is an abstraction, an abstract property, which refers to the sacredness of a thing. And if things which have the property of whiteness are regarded as indicators of sacredness, then it clearly makes some kind of sense for a list of white things to be assembled - or at least we can start to imagine why such a list might be created. Such a list would perhaps have been an exercise in putting together a sequence of images, all of which reference the concept of purity, echoing in a mundane and secular way, the purity of the ultimate ground of Being from which they draw their reality.

We find the same process going on with the list of properties and attributes in the Fifty Names of Marduk. Things which are similar are being collected together. These properties and attributes are divine in nature. What is divine is whole, and what is whole participates in other things which

possess wholeness and totality, which is the logic behind how one thing can stand in for another, as we see represented in this list.

The relevant passage of the *Enuma Elish* begins by announcing 'Let us proclaim his fifty names.... He whose ways are glorious, whose deeds are likewise.' The first name is of course Marduk. His first description identifies him as An, the Sumerian king of the gods, and describes An as his father, who 'called him from his birth...'. This refers to the fact that Marduk was not present in the first chaotic creation, before reason and order was imposed. So we are told that he is An, who is also his divine father. He is not presented as an aspect of An, except in genealogical terms. He is actually the god An.

His ways are described: Marduk is he

Who provides grazing and drinking places, enriches their stalls,
Who with the flood-storm, his weapon, vanquished the detractors,
(And) who the gods, his fathers, rescued from distress.
Truly, the Son of the Sun, most radiant of gods is he.
In his brilliant light may they walk forever!
On the people he brought forth, endowed with life,

There is a short gap in the text, and the description of his ways continues:

The service of the gods he imposed that these may have ease.
Creation, destruction, deliverance, grace-
Shall be by his command. They shall look up to him!

Marduk therefore has the attributes understood to be necessary for kingship, and also has the property of the power to ensure that the requirements of mankind are met. Another of his functions is to provide support for the gods, for their comfort and well-being. One of the ways in which man can be cajoled into serving the gods is through his divine prerogative – his power to command creation, destruction, deliverance, and the bestowing of divine favour. Awe is the desired response in man. These are abstract concepts, in the proper sense of being concepts apart from specified and concrete instances. The list is a list of abstractions.

He is also being identified with the sun god Shamash. 'Truly, the Son of the Sun, most radiant of gods is he. In his brilliant light may they walk forever!' The son and the father are conflated. So Marduk

has all the attributes of the Sumerian king of Heaven, An, and of the sun god Shamash, the god of justice. The greatness of Marduk is due to the fact he has these attributes, and to the extent that he is both of these gods. In terms of the creation of the rational world however, he is presented as a son.

The second name of Marduk is given as Marukka, and is described as the god who is creator of all, and who gladdens the heart of the nameless Anunnaki, and appeases them. Marutukku is the third name of Marduk, and is described as 'the refuge of the land,' and the protection of its people. He is the focus of the people's praise. This clearly represents the importance of there being space available in the universe for man to live, and in which the land provides support for man, as an analogue of man's support for the gods.

So Marduk, as Marukka, is also the creator of all. The Annunaki, as the text says, are nameless. This has always seemed rather mysterious in the past. But once divinity is understood in terms of definition of powers and attributes, then it is logical to assume that there are other undefined divinities, and these deserve respect until they are called forth by Marduk. The third name follows on immediately, and clarifies the role of the second name of Marduk. Marutukku is the 'refuge of the land.' The creator of the all is responsible for precisely that, and 'the all' is more than just the world of the finite in which mankind lives. So Marutukku is the totality of the 'refuge of the land.'

The fourth name is Barashakushu: '...Wide is his heart, warm his sympathy.' The fifth is Lucaldimmfrankia whose name the gods proclaimed in their divine assembly. His commands are described as being 'exalted above the gods, his fathers.' In fact he is described as 'lord of all the gods of heaven and earth,' and 'the king at whose discipline the gods above and below are in mourning.'

The width of the king's heart and the warmth of his sympathy are important aspects of kingship, divine or otherwise, and these properties of Barashakushu follow naturally the name of the god who is the totality of the 'refuge of the land.' The fifth name, Lucaldimmfrankia, is he whose 'commands are exalted above the gods', who are also described as 'his fathers.' The universe in which this kind of arrangement is understood to have reality necessarily seems very strange to us. Marduk, is the 'lord of all the gods of heaven and earth', though these include his fathers. He has this status because the gods supposedly proclaimed the name Lucaldimmfrankia in the divine assembly of the totality of gods. In effect this status was called into existence: the reality of the 'lord of all the gods' was conceived to be necessary. Marduk is being shown to embrace all of rational reality, and to contain it. And he is responsible for good order in that reality.

Number six is Nari-Lugaldimmnkia. The name is of him 'who we have called the monitor of the gods; who in heaven and on earth finds for us retreats in trouble.' This aspect of Marduk refers to the power which creates divine images and holy places, and consequently who also 'allots stations to the Igigi and Annunaki.' He is in effect a guarantor of the divine order in the world, and 'at his name the gods shall tremble and quake in retreat'. We need to remember that this list of the ways and

powers of Marduk is found in a creation myth, and that the Assyrians and Babylonians had a strong sense of the tight relationship between the nature and powers of the gods, and the act of creation.

The seventh name of Marduk is Asarludu. 'Asarludu is that name of his which Anu, his father, proclaimed for him.' He is described as the true 'light of the gods,' and 'the mighty leader, who, as the protecting deities of gods and land, in fierce single combat saved our retreats in distress.'

Note that this name indicates a plurality of gods. This may indicate that his qualities are not the property of him alone, and that these properties can be transferred to, or can be properties of, other gods. There is quite a lot of transference of qualities and properties going on in Mesopotamian myths – those qualities and properties which are described as *mes* (the Sumerian term), as already mentioned, can be put on and taken off, and also stored away. So it would not be surprising if such an important god also had another name. The next line in the text tells that 'Asaruludu, secondly, they (the gods) have named.' His second name is Namtillaku, 'the god who maintains life,' and the eighth name in the list. He is the god who restored the lost gods, as though his own creation; the lord who revives the dead gods by his pure incantation.' Again we must remember the context in which this list of names appears: certain aspects of Marduk have a key role in the New Year Festival, and in the creation of the world. That creation was double, not single, and the power to revive or create gods was understood to be vital in order that a divine order would prevail both in Heaven and on Earth. [i](#)

We are told that the third name of Asaruludu was Namru, [ii](#) the ninth name of Marduk. He is 'the shining god who illumines our ways,' and

Three each of his names have Anshar, Lahmu, and Lahamu proclaimed;

Unto the gods, their sons, they did utter them:

"We have proclaimed three each of his names.

Like us, do you utter his names!" and joyfully the gods did heed their command,

As in Ubshukinna their exchanged counsels:

"Of the heroic son, our avenger,

Of our supporter we will exalt the name!"

They sat down in their Assembly to fashion destinies,

All of them uttering his names in the sanctuary.

The seventh, eighth and ninth names, Asarludu, Namtillaku and Namru represent different aspects of something which was understood to be a common attribute of divinity, but which required to be differentiated, defined, and each of the differentiations given a separate name. As we have seen, Asarludu is described as the true 'light of the gods,' and 'the mighty leader, who, as the protecting

deities of gods and land, in fierce single combat saved our retreats in distress.' Namtillaku is 'the god who maintains life,' and is 'the god who restored the lost gods, as though his own creation; the lord who revives the dead gods by his pure incantation.' And Namru is 'the shining god who illumines our ways.'

So we have 'the true light of the gods,' 'the god who restored the lost gods and who revives the dead gods by his pure incantation,' and 'the shining god who illumines our ways.' Decoding this a little, the true light of the gods is necessary in order to find things, including lost and dead gods who need to be revived, and a god whose special excellence is to shine 'illumines our ways'. This tripartite divinity in principle has as its core function the acquisition of knowledge, and the creation of gods through incantation, which are both forms of the pursuit of divinity in the Mesopotamian context. What is most interesting about this section of the list is that neither the 'true light of the gods,' or the god who 'illumines our ways' is identified in any way with the sun god Shamash. Earlier in the text we saw Marduk identified with Shamash,

the Son of the Sun, most radiant of gods is he.

In his brilliant light may they walk forever!

So this 'true light of the gods' refers to some other light, and not visible light at all. I suggest it is a light of the mind or soul, of the kind referred to by Plato, which facilitated the recognition of objects and forms held in the mind. That one of the aspects of this tripartite god has the function of reviving lost and dead gods, which are also forms, both on earth and in heaven, is indicative that something rather peculiar and arcane is being referenced in the description.

The whole list of names is an assemblage of properties and attributes of the divine Marduk. But here it is clear that part of the assemblage has been subdivided. What we are looking at is not just an assemblage of things which have a relation to one another, but also a separation of things which appear to be similar. This is the process known in Greek philosophy as collection and division, which is the essence of the idea of dialectic. The list is an exercise in collection and division. Plato said that philosophy was very old among the Greeks, and this means that the practice of collection and division was very old also. But it was not a formal practice known only to the Greeks, and we have an instance of it here, in the Enuma Elish. We can almost imagine the collegiate discussion that took place, in splitting the perfection represented by Asarludu into three, and assigning different perfections to each.

We now pass on to the seventh tablet of the Enuma Elish. The tenth name is Asaru, who is described as the 'bestower of cultivation, who established *water* levels; Creator of grain and herbs, who causes vegetation to sprout .' In some sense this is a much less abstract power than those earlier in the list, but this is the power of generation in space and time. This power was widely understood to be the prerogative and responsibility of the king in the ancient world, and why his connection with the divine was so important. It was not something which was left to chance.

Number thirteen is Tutu, who effects the restoration of the gods. He is also known as Hel, but Hel is not listed among the fifty gods in the way the further names of Tutu are. There are some lines missing, after which the tablet says that Tutu purifies the shrines of the gods, and creates the spells that pacify the gods. Tutu is supreme in the Assembly of the gods, and no god is his equal. We are told that number 14 is also Tutu by another name: Ziukkinna, who is described as the 'life' of the host of the gods, who established 'for the gods the holy heavens; who keeps a hold on their ways, determines their courses .' We are also told that 'he shall not be forgotten by the beclouded.'

This is a part of the list which looks a little chaotic. We've already encountered a restorer of the gods, and the god who is supreme in the assembly of the gods. So this looks like the kind of reduplication which might be found in an old document which has been subject to many changes, not all of them showing an appreciation of the implications of the changes. Here it seems that the epithets have come apart from original god names and have at some point been reassigned. This probably represents the consequences of political and cultural changes over many years, which were mentioned at the beginning of this chapter.

Tutu has a third name: Ziku, and Ziku is responsible for establishing holiness. Interestingly among his attributes we are told that he produces 'riches and treasures', and 'establishes abundance.' And, 'Ziku has turned all our wants to plenty.' So we have here a description of a god who is responsible for the establishment of holiness, who also bestows abundance and plenitude. One is the image of the other, in that they both draw from the idea of totality.

The fourth name of Tutu (number 16 in the list) is known as Agaku, and we are told the people should magnify him as 'The lord of the holy charm, who revives the dead', and who had mercy on the vanquished gods, who removed the yoke imposed on them, and 'who, to redeem them, created mankind.' Agaku is merciful, and has the power to grant life.

The fifth manifestation of Tutu is Tuku, 'whose holy spell their mouths shall murmur, who with his holy charm has uprooted all the evil ones.'

It is clear from these descriptions that the processes by which the gods are created are conceived of in the same terms as the creation of mankind, as well the revival of the dead.

In listing several different manifestations of Tutu as gods in the list of fifty names, it is clear that a classification of attributes is involved, and each of the manifestations of Tutu represents a separable but related facet. Once again, we are seeing division within a collection of things which appear to be similar, or the same. Each of the attributes associated with the five other names of Tutu is seen as of a piece in nature – only the expression differs. Thus Tutu purifies the shrines, and is supreme in the assembly of the gods. He also creates the spells which 'pacify' the gods, in the sense of controlling their wrath. As Ziukunna, he is the life of the host of the gods, and he who established the heavens

for the gods and controls their behaviour. In his third manifestation, Ziku, he is responsible for establishing holiness and abundance. As Agaku, he is the 'lord of the holy charm, who revives the dead', and who created mankind to redeem the vanquished gods. In his fifth manifestation, Tuku, his 'holy spell' both the gods and men 'their mouths shall murmur'.

The section of the *Enuma Elish* relating to the Fifty Names concludes with the following colophon, which grades the levels of what can be understood from the list. The wise and the knowing can discuss them, the others can either recite and learn them, or at least have heard the names. But the main function of the colophon is to emphasise the importance of the names for the fertility and the prosperity of the land, and that all earthly existence is dependent on Marduk as the 'Enlil of the gods', who established and maintained the divine order:

Let them be kept (in mind) and let the leader explain them.

Let the wise and the knowing discuss (them) together.

Let the father recite (them) and impart to his son.

Let the ears of shepherd and herdsman be opened.

Let him rejoice in Marduk, the Enlil of the gods,

That his land may be fertile and that

he may prosper.

Firm in his order, his command unalterable,

The utterance of his mouth no god shall change.

When he looks he does not turn away his neck;

When he is angry, no god can withstand his wrath. Vast is his mind, broad his sympathy;

Sinner and transgressor will be confounded before him.

The teaching which the leader has voiced in his presence.

The Fifty Names of Marduk does not describe the complete nature of Marduk, or Kingship. Whereas in theory an endless chain of images might be compiled to lead to the nature of the divine and back again, it was realized early on that it was possible to formalize a limited set of images and their relationships to one another, which would have the benefit of focusing the supplicant more precisely on the object being held in the mind. That is what this list of properties and attributes represents. Since it is impossible for the human supplicant to completely behold divinity, the working materials are always and necessarily a limited subset of images and concepts. The idea of the limited subset will be picked up again in a later chapter.

i Divinities can be lost, because their divine qualities are no longer appreciated or understood.

ii Heidel tells us that ‘the poets are here apparently playing on the Sumerian term *shuba*, which is equated with the Babylonian words *ebbu*, *ellu*, and *namru*, all of which mean ‘bright’. In his translation he represents ‘*Namru*’ with ‘*Namshub*.’