

Spirit in *Atrahasis*

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Abstract: *Atrahasis* is the protagonist of an 18th-century BC Akkadian epic found in various versions on clay tablets. It has many parallels with the biblical account of creation in Genesis. This paper will closely examine the meaning and usage of spirit in *Atrahasis*. The point is that spirit in *Atrahasis* plays a vital role in the creation account of human beings and the spirit performs a bridging role in the overarching narrative of rebellion, creation, and flood.

Key Words: *Atrahasis*; Creation Account; Spirit (etemmu); Noise; Rebellion; Flood

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1. Introduction

Atrahasis is the protagonist of an 18th-century BC Akkadian epic comprised in various versions on clay tablets. It is one literary form of Sumero-Babylonian traditions about the creation and the early history of man. ^[1] The *Atrahasis* epic was comprised of three main tablets, included both were a creation myth and a flood account. The story is one of three surviving Babylonian deluge stories. Until 1965 about one fifth of the epic was known, now four fifths of the whole story has been restored. ^[2] The first tablet contains the most important single witness to Babylonian speculation on the origins and nature of the creation of man. ^[3] It is remarkable to note that “spirit” occurs four times in it, ^[4] there is only one article that solely discussed the role of spirit in *Atrahasis*. ^[5] In light of this, it is of great importance to study the role of spirit in the creation of human beings in

[1] W. G. Lambert and Alan Millard, *Atra-Hasis: The Babylonian Story of the Flood* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1999), 1.

[2] A. R. Millard, “A New Babylonian ‘Genesis’ Story”, in Hess, Richard S., and David Toshio Tsumura ed., “*I Studied Inscriptions from before the Flood.*” *Ancient Near Eastern, Literary and Linguistic Approaches to Genesis 1-11* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 115.

[3] William L. Moran, Ronald S. Hendel (ed.), *The Most Magic Word: Essays on Babylonian and Biblical Literature* (Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 2002), 75.

[4] line 215, 217, 228, 230.

[5] Tzvi Abusch, “Ghost and God: Some Observations on a Babylonian Understanding of Human Nature.” *Studies in the History of Religion* (1998): 363-383.

Atrahasis. This paper focuses on studying the meaning and usage of spirit in Atrahasis. The point is that spirit in Atrahasis plays a vital role in the creation account of human beings and the spirit performs a bridging role in the overarching narrative of rebellion, creation and flood.

2. The Double Creation of Human beings

It is highly significant that Atrahasis has two successive parallel accounts of the creation of man.^[6] Kikawada suggests that it is a literary convention in the Ancient Near East to telling the story of the origin of humankind in a doublet; the first part of the story of the creation of humankind in more general and abstract terms, while the second part of the story depicts it in more specific and concrete terms.^[7] The two creation accounts of human beings are found in the tablet I of Atrahasis. Kikawada divides the two creation accounts in this as follows:

Atrahasis 11—351

1—4 Introduction; A long time ago, “When the gods were man...”

5—245 Part I : The First Creation of Mankind (General)

5—6 The Anunnaki make the Igigi work; division of labour

7—38 Work of gods; administrative and labour classes

39—69 Complaint of the Igigi against Enlil; the Igigi call for a war

70—83 Enlil is frightened; Nusku tries to calm him

84—100 Anu and Enki are summoned together with the Anunnaki

101—185? Anu advises Enlil to find out the cause for the uproar, but the Igigi make themselves responsible collectively for the rebellion because of the excessive workload

186? —191 Anu gives a solution to the problem, that is, to ask Belet-ili/Mami/The Mother-womb to create offspring (li-gim[?]ma[?]—a)

192—234 Marni with the help of Enki creates mankind (lullu) from the flesh and blood of a slain god, mixed with clay

235—243 Marni completes her task and imposes labour on man

244—245 Gods rejoice

246—248 Transition; Marni is praised; her name is called Bélet—kala-ili

249—351 Part II : The Second Creation of Mankind in Seven Pairs; Marriage, Procreation and Work (Specific)

249—271? Enki and Marni come to the house of destiny to create seven pairs of people by snipping off clay

272? —276 Marriage is instituted (text broken badly)

277—282 The ten-month gestation period is established by Marni

283—295 Marni performs midwifery and childbirth is perfected

[6] Isaac M. Kikawada, “The Double Creation of Mankind in *Enki and Ninmah*, *Atrahasis I* 1-351, and *Genesis* 1-2.” in Hess, Richard S., and David Toshio Tsumura ed., “*I Studied Inscriptions from before the Flood.*” *Ancient Near Eastern, Literary and Linguistic Approaches to Genesis* 1 11 (Winona Lake; Eisenbrauns, 1994): 170

[7] *Ibid.*, 169.

296—304 Mami is praised for instituting marriage and childbirth. Nine days of rejoicing is decreed and Mami's other name, Istar, is now changed to Ishara

305—351 The people begin to labour for gods; "With picks and spades they built the shrines. They built the big canal banks. For food for the people, for the sustenance of the gods"^[8]

Kikawada's division of the first creation account of human beings is in line 5-245 and the second creation account is line in 249—351. According to Kikawada's list, in both accounts, the two processes of the creation clay is recorded as the same element in the creation of human beings.^[9] Both accounts make the same point that humankind was created of clay and destined to perform work.^[10] Moreover, Millard claims that "the underlying idea of the Atrahasis' Epic and other Babylonian Creation stories is that man was made to free the gods from the toil of ordering the earth to produce their food."^[11] There is no doubt that both accounts have some similarities, however, there are also some differences. One difference is that the creation account two focuses on fertility and sexuality in marriage. The human race does not start with a human being in abstract as in the first creation account. The account begins with seven pairs, giving the humans the possibility to multiply seven times faster.^[12] Another difference that Kikawada misses in his list in the first creation account is the element of "spirit" (etemmu),^[13] which is uniquely recorded as an important element in the creation of the human beings.^[14] Therefore, it is necessary to take a closer look at the first creation account in order to understand the different elements involved in the creation process of human beings.

3. Spirit in Creation Account One

In the first creation account, the main section is in lines-192-148, which constitute a thematic and structural unit, they are concerned with the first stage of the creation of humanity. They begin with the request that the gods give birth to a goddess to form man, and they end with the gods renaming her as the "mistress of all the gods" in gratitude to what she had done.^[15] It is helpful to refer to Moran's diagram of this section:

[8] Isaac M. Kikawada, "The Double Creation of Mankind in *Enki and Ninmah*, *Atrahasis* I 1-351, and *Genesis* 1-2." in Hess, Richard S., and David Toshio Tsumura ed., "I Studied Inscriptions from before the Flood." *Ancient Near Eastern, Literary and Linguistic Approaches to Genesis* 1 11 (Winona Lake; Eisenbrauns, 1994):172.

[9] Line 226 "Nintu Mixed clay", Line 256 "she nipped off fourteen pieces of clay"

[10] Isaac M. Kikawada, "The Double Creation of Mankind in *Enki and Ninmah*, *Atrahasis* I 1-351, and *Genesis* 1-2." in Hess, Richard S., and David Toshio Tsumura ed., "I Studied Inscriptions from before the Flood." *Ancient Near Eastern, Literary and Linguistic Approaches to Genesis* 1 11 (Winona Lake; Eisenbrauns, 1994):170.

[11] A. R. Millard, "a New Babylonian 'Genesis' Story", in Hess, Richard S., and David Toshio Tsumura ed., "I Studied Inscriptions from before the Flood." *Ancient Near Eastern, Literary and Linguistic Approaches to Genesis* 1 11 (Winona Lake; Eisenbrauns, 1994):119.

[12] Helge S. Kvanvig, *Primeval History; Babylonian, Biblical, and Enochic; an Intertextual Reading* (Leiden; Brill, 2011.), 29.

[13] Lambert and Millard also comments that "to this traditional concept the author of *Atra-Hasis* has added one item, which occurs in a passage (I. 208-30) full of perplexing phrases. It was a common Mesopotamian view that man had a spirit that survived death, which could, if not properly buried and supplied with offerings, trouble the living. It is this spirit (Bab. etemmu) that the author is explaining in addition to the usual material aspects of life. No other surviving creation account from Sumerians or Babylonians attempts to explain this." see W. G. Lambert and Alan Millard, *Atra-Hasis; The Babylonian Story of the Flood* (Winona Lake; Eisenbrauns, 1999), 22.

[14] lines 215, 217, 228, 230.

[15] William L. Moran, Ronald S. Hendel (ed.), *The Most Magic Word: Essays on Babylonian and Biblical Literature* (Washington, DC; Catholic Biblical Association of America, 2002), 75.

	narrative	192—193
A gods	speech	194—197
	narrative	198—199
B birth-goddess	speech	200—203
	narrative	204—205
	speech	206—217
C Enki	narrative	218—230
	narrative	231—236
	speech	237—243
B' birth-goddess	narrative	244—245
A' gods	speech	246—248 ^[16]

Importantly from the above structure, the creation account of human beings displays the literary feature of the intermingling of narrative and speech. The process of the creation of human beings is carried out with the narrative and the speeches of gods. The narrative of lines 192—193: they summoned and asked the goddess, the midwife of the gods, wise Mami. This narrative of the scene is a one of divine council, in which the gods make the decision to creating human beings.^[17] In so doing, the stage is set for the creation of human beings in the following lines.

It is easy to identify the main emphasis of this unit. Also, the concentric structure gives formal expression to the pivotal importance of Enki's speech (lines 206—217) on the nature of human beings.^[18] In this creation account, continued is the Sumerian tradition of forming man from clay, adding to the material the blood and spirit or “ghost” (*eṭemmu*) of a god.^[19] It is this “spirit” that the author is explaining in addition to the usual material aspects of life.^[20]

The question is what is the “spirit” (*eṭemmu*)? What does it mean in the creation account of human beings? In order to answer these questions, one needs to go to the texts and contexts to understand the meaning and usage of this word.

In order to gain a good understanding of the whole creation account, it is better to examine the portion of lines 206-217^[21].

206 On the first, seventh, and fifteenth day of the month

[16] William L. Moran, Ronald S. Hendel (ed.), *The Most Magic Word: Essays on Babylonian and Biblical Literature* (Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 2002), 76.

[17] The idea of “divine council” is a common concept in the Ancient Near Eastern world, see Mark J. Boda, J. Gordon McConville, *Dictionary of the Old Testament Prophets* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2012), 162.

[18] William L. Moran, Ronald S. Hendel (ed.), *The Most Magic Word: Essays on Babylonian and Biblical Literature* (Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 2002), 76.

[19] Richard J. Clifford, *Creation Accounts in the Ancient Near East and in the Bible* (Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1994), 79.

[20] W. G. Lambert and Alan Millard, *Atra-Ḫasis: The Babylonian Story of the Flood* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1999), 22.

[21] the text is from Lambert and Millard, 58-59.

207 I will make a purifying bath
 208 Let one god be slaughtered
 209 so that all the gods may be cleansed in a dipping
 210 From his flesh and blood
 211 Let Nintu mix clay
 212 That god and man
 213 May be thoroughly mixed in the clay
 214 So that we may hear the drum for the rest of time
 215 Let there be a spirit (*e ĩmmu*) from the god's flesh.
 216 Let it proclaim living as its sign
 217 So that this be not forgotten let there be a spirit(*e ĩmmu*).

This is Enki's speech addressed to the divine council, with the detailed procedure for creating human beings. Lines 221-234 in the narrative form a depiction of the actual creation procedure, echoing the creating command by Enki.^[22] This literary feature of speech and narrative is a remarkable mark of creating human beings. The narrative is the actual forming of the human beings, almost in the same parallel with the command of Enki. In the creation account, "spirit" (*e ĩmmu*) occurs at lines 215, 217, 228, and 230. The usage of "spirit" (*e ĩmmu*) occurs in lines 215 and 217 in Enki's speech and the rest two usages occurs in lines 228 and 230 in the form of the narrative of the actual process of creating human beings.

This text states that the man is created from the mixing of clay, the blood and flesh of a slain god,^[23] with the third element of spirit (*e ĩmmu*). The spirit, is it from god or from man? Lambert suggests that the spirit is man's, he remarks that "it was a common Mesopotamian view that man had a spirit that survived death, which could, if not properly buried and supplied with offerings, trouble the living"^[24] However, in reference to the context, both in lines 215 and 228, all claim that "spirit from the god's flesh," and the fact that dead gods in Mesopotamia survived as ghosts is attested to.^[25] Thus, the spirit in this account is not from man, but from the slain god.^[26]

It is also of great significance to notice that after the god is slaughtered, the first step in creating man is to mix the clay with the flesh and blood from god (lines 210, 225), and the second step is to let there be a spirit from the god's flesh (line 215-228). After these two steps, the man is proclaimed living and this signifies with emphasis of the role of the spirit, "so that there be not forgotten let there be a spirit" (lines 217 and 230).

Having argued that the spirit is from god, then it is necessary to examine what kind of god it is. In line 208, "Let one god (*ilam isten*) be slaughtered," the key term is "one god" (*ilam isten*), which

[22] lines 206-207 is in parallel with line lines 221-222, lines 208-209 is in parallel with lines 223-224, lines 210-211 is in parallel with lines 225-226, lines 214-215 is in parallel with lines 227-228, 216-217 is in parallel with 229-230.

[23] Tzvi Abusch, "Ghost and god: Some Observations on a Babylonian Understanding of Human Nature.", 366.

[24] Lambert, 22.

[25] kvanvig points out that "we notice in KAR 4, Atrahasis, and Enuma Elish that the gods are slaughtered. They are not killed in the sense that their existence is ended. The gods will continue to live on in the body and mind of the new human being", see Helge S. Kvanvig, *Primeval History: Babylonian, Biblical, and Enochic: an Intertextual Reading*, 49.

[26] William L. Moran, Ronald S. Hendel (ed.), *The Most Magic Word: Essays on Babylonian and Biblical Literature*, 82-83.

is a difficult phrase. [27] Moran suggests that it should be boldly translated as “the leader-god”. [28] Kvanvig remarks that “the god slaughtered, out of whose flesh and blood human was created is the leading god in the rebellion of the Igigu”. [29] However he does not give an explanation of why this one god is identified as the leading god in the rebellion. In contrast, Moran gives a convincing reason that the one god whom at Enki’s advice puts the gods put to death is the leader god, for this explains why he is characterized as “who had personality” (*sa isu tema*), and later have been slaughtered “together with his personality” (*qadu temisu*), it could fit the rebel leader for his characteristic of having *temu*, which is most easily understood of the part he played in the rebellion. *Temu* carries the meaning of having schemed to overthrow Enlil, and it is this scheme that this god comes to his death. [30] Oden also supports the idea that this *etemmu* belonged originally to the slain rebel god, and that is placed within humans to remind them of their status and of the dangers of rebelling against the senior gods. [31] The spirit (*etemmu*) is from the flesh of the rebel god, and is of great significance in our understanding of the creation account of human beings in *Atrahasis*.

Furthermore, there are also some word plays in this creation account that express the deep thought of the author in regards to the composition of this epic. The slaughtered god is identified as the god who had “personality” (*temu*) (line 223). For the *temu*, Kvanvig translates it as “planning capacity,” [32] Jacobsen suggests it as “idea,” [33] and Kensky renders it as “sense”. [34] This author agrees with Oden that given the term’s use in other literature it indicates “intelligence” or “plan”, and the fact that the rebel god, who clearly led the rebellion and who presumably plotted its course, is identified by his possession of this attribute suggest as translation of ability/capacity to plan/scheme. [35]

The *temu* is a word play with *etemmu*, Abusch recognizes a word play here that the god who possess *temu* is on the one hand, and the Babylonian word *etemmu* “spirit” on the other. This word play implicitly treats *etemmu* as having been formed from the slaughtered god that humankind possesses the spirit of and survives after death in the form of that spirit. [36] Oden is more accurately arguing that with the very creation of humans in this Epic comes an indication of the tension, which inevitably leads to rebellion. Humans are created with the “spirit” (*etemmu*) of the leader god, which is a reminder to them of the consequences of rebellion. Although, they are also created with that god’s “scheming” (*tĕmu*) nature. It is difficult not to see in the play between *etemmu* and *tĕmu* a pun, and it is equally not difficult to see in this pun a presage of the remainder of the Epic. [37] In the

[27] William L. Moran, Ronald S. Hendel (ed.), *The Most Magic Word: Essays on Babylonian and Biblical Literature*, 80.

[28] *Ibid.*, 80.

[29] Helge S. Kvanvig, *Primeval History: Babylonian, Biblical, and Enochic: an Intertextual Reading*, 45.

[30] William L. Moran, Ronald S. Hendel (ed.), *The Most Magic Word: Essays on Babylonian and Biblical Literature*, 81.

[31] Robert A. Oden, Jr., “Divine Aspirations in Atrahasis and in Genesis 1-11”, *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 93. 2 (1981): 202.

[32] Helge S. Kvanvig, 44.

[33] Thorkild Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness: A History of Mesopotamian Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976.), 118.

[34] Tikva Frymer-Kensky, “The Atrahasis Epic and Its Significance for Our Understanding of Genesis 1-9.” *The Biblical Archaeologist* (1977): 149.

[35] Robert A. Oden, Jr., 202.

[36] Tzvi Abusch, 369.

[37] Robert A. Oden, Jr., 203.

creation account, the created human beings inherit the characteristics of *temu* and *etemmu* the slaughtered god.

This author argues that it is because of the element of *etemmu* in creation of human beings that envisages the flood narrative in the Epic. In lines 217 and 230, both emphasizes that with the help of the “spirit” (*etemmu*), there will be no forgetting, the spirit is to keep refreshing the memory of the dead god.^[38] We go back to the rebel scene, one line reads “[The lamentation was] heavy, [we could] hear the ‘noise’ (*rigmu*)”(line 179). Their rebelling and complaining is described as “noise” (*rigmu*). *Rigmu* is transferred from the *Igigu* to humankind in the creation^[39] after the creation of the human beings, Mami address the gods that “you raised a cry (*rigmu*) for mankind” (line 242),^[40] It is not surprising that after the creation of human beings and letting them do the work, Enlil heard their “noise”(*rigmu*) (lines 356) could not sleep because of “noise”(*rigmu*) (line 358), and eventually he sent the flood to wipe out the human beings. Kvanvig points out that *Rimgu* occurs 23 times in the text and appears in all sections of the poem:

The initial assignment of the responsibilities for the universe.

The rebellion of the *Igigu*

The divine assembly and the creation of humans

The disasters sent by the gods

Deliberations in the divine assembly before the flood

The flood itself

Divine reactions during the flood.^[41]

The variety of *rigmu* is intended and contributes to the narrative’s ironic quality.^[42] In one sense *rigmu* is the thematic word running throughout the whole epic.

It is because of the “spirit” (*etemmu*) that keeps the memory of the past and presages the flood narrative, and which bridges the two “noise” (*rigmu*), namely the rebellion and the flood narrative. Potentially, there may be even be a world play of in the creation of human beings with the two elements of “blood”(*damu*) and “spirit” (*etemmu*)^[43] with “noise” (*rigmu*), With this word play, it would strengthen the connection to this rebel-creation-flood meta narrative.

4. Conclusion

Atrahasis adopts the literary device of double creation accounts of human beings. In the first creation account, the “spirit” (*etemmu*) from god is a vital element in the creation of human beings. This account features the speech of Enki, it follows the pattern of speech and narrative in the process of creation of human beings (lines 206-217).

[38] Moran, 83.

[39] Helge S. Kvanvig, 77.

[40] This is Lambert’s translation, see Lambert, 69, perhaps a better rendering is by Kvanvig, “you have cast off(?) the noise upon humankind” see, Kvanvig, 45.

[41] Helge S. Kvanvig, 76.

[42] *Ibid.*, 77.

[43] Abusch notices the word play of “blood”(*damu*) and “spirit” (*etemmu*) see, Abusch, 368.

The “spirit” (*etemmu*) occurs four times in the first creation account. “Spirit” (*etemmu*) signifies the importance and reality of passing the planning schemes from the dead god to the created human beings. This emphasizes that created human beings carry on the character of the rebellious leader god. Also, noted is the “noise” that they made in the rebellion. This is also passed on to human beings as the function of the spirit is to refresh of the past and envisages the flood narrative that the “noise” that the created human beings make.

In summation, “spirit” (*etemmu*) functions as the bridging point in the overarching narrative of rebellion, creation and the flood narrative.

中文题目:

《阿特拉哈西斯》中的灵观

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摘要:《阿特拉哈西斯》是公元前十八世纪阿卡德史诗对大洪水记载中的一个, 保存在零碎的泥板中。《阿特拉哈西斯》与《创世纪》的记载有很多平行相对应的地方。本文对《阿特拉哈西斯》中的灵观进行详细地探讨和挖掘。本文的论点是《阿特拉哈西斯》的灵观在其对造人的记述中发挥了重要作用, 灵在叛逆-创造和大洪水的叙事中起着桥梁作用。

关键词:《阿特拉哈西斯》; 创造记述; 灵 (*etemmu*); 噪音; 叛逆; 大洪水