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The *nubāttu* of Marduk

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Abstract

This article explores the Akkadian term *nubāttu*, typically translated "nighttime" or "overnight stay," and its evolving meaning as a ceremony or festival day throughout cuneiform literature. Although hemerological texts typically understand *nubāttu* as a regular festival day in the Babylonian cultic calendar, typically connected with the god Marduk, its meaning and ritual significance vary widely throughout the rest of the cuneiform corpus. It first appears in rituals performed *ad hoc* for local royalty in Ebla and Mari, where it takes the form of a divine encampment. A similar nuance is attested in Babylonian rituals from the first millennium BCE, where *nubāttu* is attested as an overnight encampment made for lengthy divine processions. In apotropaic anti-witchcraft texts like *Maqlû*, *nubāttu* instead refers to an auspicious date in the calendar, and Marduk is identified as its owner or brother. Finally, the Babylonian national epic *Enūma eliš* reinterprets *nubāttu* as a symbolic name for Babylon and its New Year's Festival. The evolving meaning and theological significance of *nubāttu* reflects broader trends in Babylonian religion, which saw the elevation of Marduk to supremacy over the pantheon, and the centralization of the cult around Babylon.

Key-words: Babylon; *Enūma eliš*; Marduk; Cultic calendar; Anti-witchcraft

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El *nubāttu* de Marduk

Resumen

Este artículo explora el término acadio *nubāttu*, traducido típicamente como «noche» o «pernoctación», y su significado evolutivo como ceremonia o día festivo a lo largo de la literatura cuneiforme. Si bien los textos hemerológicos suelen entender *nubāttu* como un día festivo ordinario en el calendario cultual babilónico, generalmente relacionado con el dios Marduk, su significado y trascendencia ritual varían ampliamente en el resto del corpus cuneiforme. Aparece por primera vez en los textos que describen rituales *ad hoc* para la realeza local de Ebla y Mari, en los que designa un campamento para los dioses. Un sentido similar se atestigua en los textos rituales babilónicos del primer milenio a.n.e., donde *nubāttu* designa un campamento nocturno destinado a las procesiones divinas de larga duración. En cambio, en los textos apotropaicos de anti-brujería como *Maqlû*, *nubāttu* alude a una fecha auspiciosa en el calendario dominada o hermanada con Marduk. Finalmente, *Enūma eliš* reinterpreta *nubāttu* como un nombre simbólico de Babilonia y su Festival de Año Nuevo. La evolución del significado y la importancia teológica de *nubāttu* refleja tendencias más amplias en la religión babilónica, que presenció el ascenso de Marduk a la supremacía del panteón y la centralización del culto desde Babilonia.

Palabras clave: Babilonia; *Enūma eliš*; Marduk; Calendario de culto; Anti-brujería

Introduction: Marduk and his *nubāttu*

The Chicago Assyrian Dictionary assigns three definitions to *nubattu*: 1) evening, evening time; 2) bivouac, overnight stay; and 3) eve of feast, evening ceremonies[1]. This term, normalized in more recent literature as *nubāttu*[2],

[1] CAD N/II 307a–8b, s.v. *nubattu* A. The term also appears in Old Assyrian texts as *nabāttu*. Most of the examples cited in the third definition of *nubattu* belong to the Babylonian hemerology tradition, citations of said hemerologies in Assyrian royal inscriptions, or from apotropaic rituals. The rest of the examples, taken from Neo-Assyrian documents, can safely be understood to mean "evening, evening time" without referring to a specific ritual. Cf. AHw 799b–800a, s.v. *nubattu(m)*, especially mng 5, "Nachtruheort" and mng. 6, "Vorabend eines Festes, Vorfeier, Vigilie," with additional examples in eSAD.

[2] E.g. in Streck 2017; Suchard 2023.

is conventionally taken as a substantivized form of the verb *bâtu* "to stay overnight, to spend the night". It is first attested in Ebla with orthography *nu-ba-tum* in bilingual vocabulary texts and *nu-ba-du* in ritual texts. Such texts equate nubāttu with the Sumerogram (GIŠ).UB.U_8.MUNUS, which can be interpreted literally in Sumerian as a small pen (ub) for sheep (u_8 munus) but contextually seems to refer to an encampment. The translation of this early nuance as a physical camp and not a period of time is supported by the appearance of the logogram in a sequence of wooden objects (ARET 12 337: xii 22). Although the term has yet to be located in Old Akkadian records, the dissimilation of the expected **m*- prefix into an initial *n* suggests that it was loaned into Eblaite from an early Akkadian dialect[3].

More recently, Michael P. Streck has identified this term as having a *muPRāSt* form, which is rather typical of times of the day (e.g., *munāttu(m)* "dawn", *muštērtu(m)* "morning")[4]. Streck translates the temporal sense of *nubāttu(m)* literally as "time when one sets up the (overnight) camp." This nuance is well attested in Old Babylonian sources, including the Mari letters, as well as Standard Babylonian literary texts and Assyrian sources from all periods. However, it disappeared from use in Babylonia by the first millennium, and Neo- and Late Babylonian sources instead utilize the terms *līlâtu* ("evening, night") or *šimētān* (from Old Babylonian *šiwītu(m)*, "time of taking up quarters") to describe the evening time[5]. In Neo- and Late Babylonian documents from Sippar, the term *nubāttu* (pl. *nubattātu*) was also utilized in a topographic context, where it seems to refer to urban gardens (Jursa 1995: 70–71; cf. CAD N/II 308a–9a, s.v. *nubattu* B.).

This article will focus on the third and most nebulous definition of *nubāttu* in the Chicago Assyrian Dictionary, pertaining to its supposed use in the cultic calendar, and the ways it has been interpreted. Despite conventional translations of this term as "eve (of feast)", "evening ceremonies", "vigil", and so forth, it is never explicitly defined in Akkadian

[3]In MEE 4 1–7 + 16–18 (VE 487b), xiv 8–9: GIŠ.UB.U_8.MUNUS = *nu-ba-tum*. On the origins of the term, see Kogan and Krebernik 2021: 735, 846, 934, with citations of earlier literature.

[4]Streck 2017: 584 and passim, with specific remarks in 603; 2022: sec. 2.248.a, 5.98.b. See also Wasserman 2003: 64–69; Kogan and Krebernik 2020: 116; Suchard 2023: 8.

[5]Note that *šimētān* (*ši-mi-tan*) is explained as a synonym for *nubāttu* (*nu-bat-tú*) in the Akkadian synonym list an = *šamû* (1:365). See for instance in LTBA 2, 2 = KAL 11 185: r iii 12. On this list, see Veldhuis 2014: §6.3.1.4. The ordering of the words suggests that *nubāttu* was used more commonly than *šimētān* at the time of its writing, as it is presented in the right column a gloss to explain *šimētān* in the left.

sources. The attachment of this "ritual" *nubāttu* to Marduk and the gods of his circle has also been acknowledged, but never fully explored, considering that it scarcely appears in their standard repertoires.

This article will review previous discussions of the ritual nuances of *nubāttu*, and the ways they depart from how the term *nubāttu* was typically used in the Akkadian language. Drawing on contemporary studies of canonicity and hermeneutics in cuneiform culture, it will then survey the appearances of this ritual *nubāttu* throughout cuneiform literature and interrogate whether the term is used with any consistency from one corpus to the next. Ultimately, it will demonstrate that the meaning of this term varies wildly according to the textual sources and literary genres it appears in, as does the nature of its relationship with Marduk. The following sources will be considered:

- Hemerology compilations, and references to their schematics in other textual genres.
- Descriptions of Babylonian rituals.
- Offering lists from Ebla and Mari.
- Apotropaic and anti-witchcraft literature (*Maqlû* and *ušburrudû* incantations).
- *Enūma eliš*.

Since the current definition of this "ritual" *nubāttu* uses its appearance in Babylonian hemerology texts as is chief basis, it will first discuss how this definition came to be, where it finds consistency within the textual corpus, and where the consistency begins to fray. It will then discuss other attestations throughout the textual record, and how the ways the term is used seems to differ in each, culminating in its novel interpretation in *Enūma eliš*. An effort will be made to distinguish the use of the term *nubāttu* as a name of a ritualized period from its more general applications as a name for the evening time or as an overnight encampment. As such, adverbial phrases like *ina nubātti u šēri* "in evening and morning" will not be considered as instances of ritualized periods that were given the name "*nubāttu*"[6].

[6]For example, certain gods in the Assyrian *tākultu* rituals (e.g., SAA 20 40: iv 10) are invoked *ina ūme šērti nubātte* "daily, in the morning and evening". Though Babylonian gods like Marduk and Zarpanītu were incorporated into these rituals (e.g., SAA 20 40: iii 22–23), we cannot ascertain whether the term *nubāttu* was ever used as a description of the ritual itself, instead of just the time of the ritual.

1 The *nubāttu* in the hemerology tradition and its interpretations

Scholarly discussions of *nubāttu*(*m*) as a name for an evening ceremony have typically drawn on its manifestations in ritual-incantations and hemerology texts. Its first entry into modern scholarship is in George Smith's translation of Ashurbanipal's Prism A inscription, which refers to the 3rd day of Abu (V) as a *nubāttu* of Marduk[7]. In his commentary (1871: 325–27), Smith draws from hemerology texts in the British Museum that had not yet been published to characterize the *nubāttu* as a sacred day of Marduk, which supposedly fell on the third, seventh, and sixteenth days of every month.

As knowledge of the Babylonian hemerology traditions developed, the *nubāttu* day began to feature in discussions on the origins of the biblical sabbath. Morris Jastrow (1898: 330–32) understood *nubāttu* as a logographic variant of the term *šabattu*—more widely attested as *šapattu*—which Babylonian texts typically applied to the 15th day of the month[8]. In turn, he noted that the lexical text now identified as *Malku* = *šarru* equated *šabattu* with the phrase *ūm nūḫ libbi* "day of calming the heart", a term typically known from lamentation traditions[9]. Using this circuitous connection, Jastrow believed the *nubāttum* or *šabattum* to have functioned as a sub-monthly day of atonement and as an unfavorable day in the Babylonian cultic calendar. Though he acknowledged that such days did not occur once every seven days, he maintained that this morose *nubāttum-šabattum* day was a progenitor of the sabbath and its restrictions on labor.

While Jastrow's proposal prompted excitement from theologians, it was quickly challenged by Assyriologists. Theophile James Meek (1914: 203), who still perceived the roots of the sabbath in Babylonian hemerology practices, acknowledged that "there is as yet no evidence anywhere that *šabattu* was applied to any day other than the 15th, and to assign this term to other days… is the purest assumption and is based upon a preconceived idea as to what the Sabbath was. Neither is there any evidence that the terms *šabattu* and *nubāttu* have any connection with each other". As such,

[7]Most recent edition in RINAP 5/1 11: ix 11 (discussed below).

[8]See recent overview of the Babylonian *šapattu*(*m*) and its supposed association with the sabbath in Geller 2011.

[9]*Malku* = *šarru* III 158: *u$_4$-um nu-uḫ lìb-bi* = *šá-pat-tum* (var. *šá-ba-tú*). See CAD Š/I 449b, s.v. *šapattu* lexical section, and edition in Hrůša 2010: 84–85.

the Babylonian *nubāttu* left mainstream discourse on the development of biblical religion. It should be noted that the usage of *nubāttu* in *Enūma eliš* has not previously been commented upon, according to my knowledge. The most relevant lines of the poem, found towards the end of the fifth tablet and the beginning of the sixth, were not restored to the body of the text until W.G. Lambert's critical edition in 2013. Thus, they were entirely exempt from the *nubāttu-šabattu* ordeal.

The contemporary understanding of how the *nubāttu* period functioned within Mesopotamian religion stems from Benno Landsberger's (1915: 108–113) dissertation research and resulting monograph on the Babylonian and Assyrian cultic calendars. Landsberger's reconstruction of the calendar relied primarily on hemerological texts known from Ashurbanipal's library, such that Jastrow had previously discussed. Principal of these was the hemerological series *Inbu bēl arḫi* or "Fruit (i.e., the full moon), Lord of the Month," which is only known from Neo-Assyrian Nineveh[10]. In this series, the 3rd, 7th, and 16th days of every month are identified as the *nubāttu* of the god Marduk. The day after each attestation of this *nubāttu* of Marduk (i.e., the 4th, 8th, and 17th days of every month) is identified as the day of the *eššēšu*-festival (UD ÈŠ.ÈŠ) of the god Nabû.

Franz Xaver Steinmetzer (1909, 14) had previously interpreted the *nubāttu*-day as a pre-celebration of the *eššēšu*-festival, drawing a parallel with Hebrew **ערב שבת** ("evening of the Sabbath") and Aramaic **ערובתא** ("evening (of the Sabbath)" or "Friday"). Landsberger (1915: 108) found this explanation plausible. Noting the association between these two festival days and the gods of Marduk's circle, he suggested that the three monthly *nubāttu-eššēšu* cycles could be understood as local celebrations in Babylon. However, he also noted that personal names featuring *nubāttu* and *eššēšu* as elements appeared in documents outside of Babylon as well, citing this as evidence that the ceremony may have had some popular characteristics[11].

[10]Landsberger 1915: 101, "Unsere wichtigste Quelle ist die Serie INBU *bēl arḫim*, ein Königsritual für das ganze Jahr, in 15 Tafeln, für je einen Monat, von denen uns eine Anzahl in mehr oder minder fragmentarischer Weise erhalten ist. Die Serie war, da sich niemals zu ein und demselben Monat gehörige Duplikate finden, nur in einem Exemplar in der Bibliothek Asurbanipals vorhanden". See most recent edition of *Inbu bēl arḫi* in Livingstone 2013: 199–248 with corrections in Marti 2014: 181–96. Further fragments noted in Jiménez 2016: 201, n. 26.

[11]Landsberger 1915: 109, "Da sonst Marduk und Nebo in der *Inbu-* Serie nicht vorkommen, so kann man diese drei Gruppen von je zwei Tagen auch als die spezifischen monatlichen Lokalfeiern von Babylon definieren, obgleich sie nicht allein in

Indeed, the name Arad-nubātti is attested in sources from Kassite Nippur and its vicinity[12], while the name (W)arad-eššēši(m) is known in Late Old and Middle Babylonian sources[13]. Landsberger's conclusions on the *nubāttu* are cited as the chief basis for its use as an evening ceremony in the Chicago Assyrian Dictionary (N/2 308b, s.v. *nubattu* 3).

Landsberger's heavy reliance on *Inbu bēl arḫi* as a source for the Babylonian cultic calendar—despite the fact that no manuscripts of this series are known from outside of Nineveh—is notable in light of modern debates on the role of Ashurbanipal's tablet collections in modern reconstructions of Babylonian traditions (see Robson 2019: 10–48). Still, Alasdair Livingstone has shown that the sketch of the Babylonian cultic calendar laid out in *Inbu bēl arḫi* is consistent with other hemerologies and related texts known from Assyrian sources: the *Offering Bread Hemerology* (also called the *Hemerology of Assur*), a cultic calendar of Tukultī-Ninurta I found in a private collection, and a *lipšur* litany known from Kalḫu (CTN 4 110)[14]. Extrapolating from Livingstone's (2013: 249–257) comparative table into our own (Table 1), we find that each of these four texts apportion out the *nubāttu* and *eššēšu* days of the calendar to members of Marduk's circle:

der Reichshauptstadt als Monatsfeiern begangen wurden. Mit Recht betont Ungnad… daß das Vorkommen von *nubattu* und *eššešu* als Bildungselement von Eigennamen auf eine gewisse Volkstümlichkeit dieser Tage schließen läßt". Here he cites Ungnad's (1909: 118) observation, of the personal names Warad-eššēšim, Arad-nubatti, and similar (W)arad-names invoking the 9th, 19th, and 20th days of the month. Thus, Ungnad suggests: Da ausser dem 9., 19. und 20. Tage sowie den Festen eššêšum und nubattum andere Tage nicht erwähnt werden, dürften diese die Hauptfesttage des Volkes gewesen sein". On (W)arad-nubatti and other personal names bearing names of festivals and times of the year, see Kikuchi 2024: 41.

[12]CAD N/II 308, s.v. *nubattu* A mng. 3. Note especially Arad-nubatti, the mayor (*ḫazannu*) of Dūr-Enlilē (Levavi 2017: 94-96).

[13]E.g., Warad-eššēšim in the Old Babylonian letter AbB 12 122 (BM 97501): 15, 19; Arad-eššēši in the Middle Babylonian letter PBS 1/2, 27 + 57 (CBS 4749 + 12526): r 2 (edition in Zimmermann 2023: 199).

[14]More recently, Enrique Jiménez (2016: 197–204) has disputed the characterization of *Inbu bēl arḫi* and the *Offering Bread Hemerology* as "canonical." Rather, he has argued that these "hemerological compilations" were composed *ad hoc* from various pieces of preexisting material. Jiménez and Selim Adalı (2015) have also shown that *Inbu bēl arḫi* adapts every line of the Prostration Hemerology—a text where, I should note, the terms *eššēšu* and *nubāttu* are absent. Still, if these texts were compiled from preexisting materials, then we may ask what these materials were, and what schematics informed them.

	Tukulti-Ninurta I Calendar	**Lipšur Litany (CTN 4 110)**	**Offering Bread Hemerology**	***Inbu bēl arḫi***
Day 3 (*nubāttu*)	Marduk	Marduk	Marduk	Marduk Zarpanītu
Day 4 (*eššēšu*)	Nabû	Nabû	Nabû	Nabû Marduk
Day 7 (*nubāttu*)	Marduk	"Ea *gave*(?) to Marduk"	Ea	[Marduk] Zarpanītu
Day 8 (*eššēšu*)	Nabû	Nabû	Dingirmaḫ	Nabû
Day 16 (*nubāttu*)	Marduk	Marduk	[...]	Marduk Zarpanītu
Day 17 (*eššēšu*)	Nabû	Nabû	*No deity assigned*	Nabû Marduk

Table 1: The *nubāttu* and *eššēšu* days of Babylonian and Assyrian hemerologies.

As we can see, the *nubāttu* and *eššēšu*-days are assigned with remarkable consistency: the *nubāttu* days are typically assigned to Marduk (and also to Zarpanītu in *Inbu bēl arḫi*), and the *eššēšu* days to Nabû (and also to Marduk in *Inbu bēl arḫi*). The *Offering Bread Hemerology* assigns the *nubāttu* and *eššēšu* of days 7 and 8 to Ea and Dingirmaḫ/Bēlet-ilī, who are still within the circle of Marduk. Given this relative uniformity, Livingstone (2013: 250) understood the above hemerologies as reflections of the "actual Babylonian monthly calendar, which had already spread from Babylonia to Assyria in Middle Assyrian times and which become standard in both regions in the first millennium BCE".

The different linguistic origins of the terms *nubāttu* and *eššēšu* suggest that they were not introduced at the same time. The term èš-èš (perhaps "shrines") first appears as a name of a festival in documents from the Ur III period, typically falling on the 1st, 7th, and 15th days of the month. Ur III and Isin-Larsa-era texts from Ur and Nippur add an extra èš-èš festival on the 25th day of the month. Although these festivals were presumably connected with phases of the moon, they were also celebrated for deities who were not immediately affiliated with the lunar cult. In some instances, the èš-èš festival was preceded by a nocturnal celebration, which perhaps formed the basis of the *nubāttu*-day in the later hemerology tradition. In the lunar cult at Ur, for example, the sacrifices preceding the èš-èš festival received the title of ki-^{d}suen or "position of the moon." The sacrifices preceding the èš-èš festival of Enlil and Ninlil were called gu_4/udu gi_6-kam, "ox/sheep of the night"[15]. The *nubāttu*-day in the later cultic calendars must have been

[15]On the *eššēšu* and its relationship with the *nubāttu*, see CAD E 373b, s.v. *eššešu* discussion section; Livingstone 1986: 38–40; Sallaberger 1993: 49–58; Cole 1994: 238;

a later addition or evolution of this tradition. Since the term is never found in Sumerian-language sources, we may tentatively attribute its introduction to the cultic calendar to the Late Old Babylonian period, after the decline of Sumerian as a spoken language. I am not aware of any other term in the Akkadian lexicon that denoted a regular period of time as well as a specific calendrical day or religious ceremony.

The pairing of the *nubāttu* and *eššēšu* days within the cultic calendar is known elsewhere from the Babylonian literary tradition, though without immediate reference to Marduk and Nabû. For instance, an incantation of *Šurpu* tersely acknowledges *nubāttu* and *eššēšu* as discrete days of the cultic calendar[16]. Likewise, a *kudurru* inscription of Marduk-apla-iddina II invokes "[the *eš*]*šēšu* and *nub*[*āttu*]" alongside the regular offerings performed at the Ezida temple of Borsippa[17]. There is also the case of a pamphlet known only from Late Babylonian Uruk, which criticizes unpopular cultic reforms attributed to the controversial former king Nabû-šuma-iškun. It states that this king had "held back (the statue of Nabû) in Babylon and turned the *nubāttu* and *eššēšu*-day into a single day"[18], as opposed to leaving it as two discrete days.

The *nubāttu-eššēšu* pairing, as well as their respective connections with Marduk and Nabû, also has a limited footprint in Babylonian scribal literature. The explanatory sign list *Aa*, known already from the Old Babylonian period, acknowledges that the sign AB (ÈŠ) can represent either the *eššēšu* festival or the *eššēšu* of Nabû. It also lists the terms *arḫu* ("new moon day, first of the month"), *eššēšu*, and *nubāttu* as readings of the sign EZEM, usually read in Akkadian as *isinnu* ("festival")[19]. In short, it acknowledges some of the schematics known from Babylonian hemerologies, including the occurrence of *nubāttu* as a cultic festival day.

Linssen 2004: 45–51; Krul 2018: 125–28; Kikuchi 2024: 58–60.

[16] *Šurpu* 9: 37–38, "day, month, and year; evening (*nu-bat-ti*), festival-day (UD ÈŠ.ÈŠ), day seven, day fifteen, day nineteen, day twenty, day twenty-five, day of the vanishing of the moon (*ūm bubbuli*), day of the washing ritual (*ūm rimki*), evil day (*ūm lemni*), day thirty" (Simons 2019: 36, 50). The position of the *nubattu* and *eššēšu* days before seventh day may suggest identification with the seventh day, as day of the vanishing of the moon, day of the washing ritual, evil day, and thirtieth day of the month were generally equated with each other (see below).

[17] BM 40006: r 5, [*i-na* UD] ÈŠ.ÈŠ *nu-b*[*at-tú*] (Paulus 2014: 707).

[18] SpTU III 58 (RIMB 2 B.6.14.1): ii 9–10, ^{d}AG *ina* TIN.TIR^{ki} *ik-le-e-ma nu-bat-tu$_4$* / *ù* UD ÈŠ.[È]Š *a-na* 1-*en u$_4$-me ú-tir*. See comments in Cole 1994: 238; Glassner 2004: 302; Zadok 2017.

[19] *Aa* IV/3: 95–96; *Aa* VIII/2: 16–19. See CAD E 371b, s.v. *eššešu* lexical section. On the sign list *Aa*, see Veldhuis 2014, §4.1.3.2.

The only other known texts that associated the *nubāttu* and *eššēšu* with Marduk and Nabû, respectively, are original Assyrian compositions. One can be found in a hymnic prayer from Ḫuzirina (STT 2, 340: 16–17), which proclaims unique blessings for an anonymous Assyrian king for each of the thirty days of the calendrical month. While the hemerologies proclaim three *nubāttu* days and three *eššēšu* days per month, the prayer only acknowledges the 16th day as the *nubāttu* of Marduk and the 17th as the *eššēšu* of Nabû. The royal inscriptions of Sargon II, Esarhaddon, and Ashurbanipal also describe monumental actions that they supposedly performed during *nubāttu* days of Marduk and *eššēšu* days of Nabû, which they believed to be fortuitous[20]. The other designated cultic days in the hemerologies, with their respective patron deities, are curiously absent from their inscriptions.

2 The inconsistencies of the hemerological *nubāttu*-day

We may question to what extent the cultic *nubāttu* and *eššēšu* festivals were actually observed in the Assyrian heartland outside the hemerological tradition. In a revealing letter to Esarhaddon (SAA 10 52: 13–17), the court astrologer Balasî describes the favorable qualities of the fourth day of the month, an *eššēšu* day of Nabû according to the hemerologies. He uses wordplay to explain its properties:

[20]Sargon II claimed to have made the first bricks of Dūr-Šarrukīn on a favorable *eššēšu* day in the month of Simanu (III) (RINAP 2 8: 32; 9: 50), identified with Nabû (RINAP 2 43: 59). Esarhaddon's Nineveh E inscription claims that the invasion of Egypt was launched "on the third day (of the month), the *nubāttu* [of the king of the gods, Marduk?], the festival of Erua-Zarpanītu." (RINAP 4 8: ii' 2'–3'). This is absent from his other accounts of the invasion of Egypt. Likewise, Esarhaddon claimed to have entered Nineveh after putting his brothers to flight on the eighth day of Addaru (XII), an *eššēšu*-festival of Nabû (RINAP 4 1: i 87). He also identified himself as an observer of the *eššēšu*-festival in the abstract sense in several other inscriptions (RINAP 4 18: 12'; 48: 40; 49: 8'). Ashurbanipal claimed that the expedition against Abī-Yateʾ of Qedar was launched in the month of Abu (V), "on the third day, the *nubāttu* of the king of the gods, Marduk." (RINAP 5/1 11: ix 11; RINAP 5/2 194: iv 12), The seventh day of Ayyāru (II) is identified as the *nubāttu* of a god, likely Marduk again, in his fragmentary Aššur C inscription (RINAP 4 1015: r v 10), perhaps relating to the renovation of the statues of Marduk and his retinue. A fragmentary tablet describing his renovation of a temple in Sippar, likely Ebabbar, mentions significant work done on the *eššēšu*-festival of the eighth day (RINAP 5/2 231: r 7').

> UD 4.KÁM UD-*mu* GI[BIL]
> *ni-qab-ba-áš iš-še-i*[*š*]
> UD-*mu eš-šu ki*-i SAG.DU ITI
> *e-pe-eš ṭa-a-ba*
>
> "We call the fourth day a 'new day' (*ūmu ešše*). The *ešše*, (or) the 'new day', is similar in quality to the beginning of the month. It is favorable."

Within this letter, the assignment of the term *ešše* to the fourth day of the month seems to be a matter of hemerological convention, rather than temple practice. It is possible that the *ešše* festival was never actually introduced into the Assyrian ritual calendar, and that it was unknown in Assyria outside of the hemerological traditions received from Babylonia. We may contrast another letter from the period (SAA 10 352: r 17), which mentions rituals of the *ešše* day being performed in Babylonia for the Lady of Akkad. Whenever the term *nubāttu* does occur in ritual texts known from the Neo-Assyrian period, it is generally used to accompany *šērtu* "morning." The two terms can be safely translated as "evening" and "morning" in reference to the daily offerings to the gods, hearkening back to the earlier meaning of *nubāttu* as a synonym for the nighttime[21].

Curiously, the cultic days of *nubāttu* and *ešše* do not appear as the possessions of Marduk and Nabû in hymns and prayers. As an illuminating example, the downtrodden narrator of *Ludlul bēl nēmeqi* seems to be aware of the *ešše* only: he laments that he had become treated like someone who had "abandoned the day of the deity and neglected the *ešše*"[22] after Marduk had become angry with him, with no visible fealty towards the corresponding *nubāttu*. Moreover, a closer look at archival evidence casts doubts upon the supposed uniformity of the Babylonian cultic calendar, as the dates of cultic festivals attested in individual temple archives do not follow the schematics that the hemerologies described. In an offering list from Kassite Nippur (CBS 10616: r 12, 16), we find that *ešše*-festivals fell on the 1st and 18th days of the month of Araḫsamnu (VIII) (Tenney 2016: 176). These dates do not correspond with the days of the *ešše*-festivals in the hemerology texts, and they are not preceded by *nubāttu*-days. Likewise, temple archives of Late Babylonian Uruk and Borsippa show that *ešše*

[21] Cf. Driel 1969: 156–57; Linssen 2004: 56–58.
[22] *Ludlul*.II 16: *ib-ṭi-lu* u_4-*mu* DINGIR *i-še-ṭú eš-še-ši* (Oshima 2014: 86).

festivals were locally observed on two consecutive days, essentially as a double festival. While these two-day *eššēšu* festivals are reminiscent of the expected *nubāttu-eššēšu* schematic, their dates do not correspond with the dates given in the hemerologies. Instead, they appear to occur in five- and seven-day intervals throughout the month, on days 1–2, 7–8, 14–15, 19–20, and 24–25[23]. Since Borsippa was central to Babylonian religion, its departure from the schematics laid out in the hemerology texts throws the relationship between the hemerologies and the cultic calendars of Babylonia into question, as well as the notion that the cultic calendars of the entire nation had been standardized.

I have also not been able to find a single instance in southern Mesopotamian archival sources from any period, in which *nubāttu* is attested as a ritual or ritual holiday[24]. Instead, sources from first-millennium Uruk, Babylon, Sippar, and Borsippa make reference to a nocturnal vigil called *bayātu*. This vigil, which is also derived from the verb *bâtu*, began after the final offerings of the day and continued until the following dawn. It is typically listed alongside other cultic festivals, including the *eššēšu*. In texts from Uruk and Babylon, *bayātu*-vigils (usually in the plural form *bayātānu*) typically appear after *eššēšu*-festivals, suggesting that the *bayātu* did not function as a pre-*eššēšu* festival as the *nubāttu* supposedly did. Indeed, these vigils do not seem to have been performed any more than once per month, exclusively as events within larger ritual cycles and not as festival days in their own right[25].

Finally, it should be noted that the first-millennium Akkadian synonym list *Malku = šarru*, previously seen in the *nubāttu/šabattu* debacle, does

[23]Waerzeggers 2010: 139–40. See also Linssen 2004: 45–46. The celebration of *eššēšu*-days is also referenced in tablet 23 of the Late Babylonian series called *Ancient Sumerian*, which concerns the celebrations of the fourth day of Nisannu (DT 114: v 6'). See edition and commentary in Debourse 2022, 117–123; and Debourse and Gabbay 2024 on this series.

[24]Dominique Charpin (2007: 165) tentatively restores [*nu*]-*ba-at-ti-ia* in the Larsa "Ritual" Tablet from the Bible Lands Museum Jerusalem (BLMJ 3127: ix 58), noting the presence of the *nubāttum* nocturnal ritual in Mari. If this restoration is correct, then it would have signified the night of the 24th day of Šabāṭu (XI). However, the apparent first-person possessive suffix is difficult to reconcile with the rest of the text. In the original publication of the ritual (Westenholz and Westenholz 2006, 36), [...]-*ba-at-ti-ia* is instead taken as a personal name, perhaps belonging to a cultic specialist.

[25]See AHw 97, s.v. *bajjātu*; CAD B 34, s.v. *bajātu*; Linssen 2004: 56–57; Waerzeggers 2010: 139 with n. 622; and especially the overview, with comprehensive list of documented examples, in Krul 2018: 120–25.

not seem to recognize *nubāttu* as a distinct day in the cultic calendar. In *Malku = šarru* 3: 153–55, *nubāttu* is listed as one of several synonyms for *bubbulu* (literally "flood"), the ominous day of the new moon, along with *ūm kispi* "day of the funerary offering" and *ūm idirti* "day of darkness (or: of misfortune)"[26]. This interpretation may suggest that the *nubāttu* was no longer widely understood as a distinct day of the regular cultic calendar, but was instead interpreted in line with more mainstream ritual programs concerning the new moon.

The inconsistencies surrounding the *nubāttu* as a ritualized period suggests that its form and function changed over time, with significant implications for the development of Babylonian cultic calendars—and consequently, for the Babylonian hemerology traditions. It is difficult to reconcile Livingstone's image of a standardized cultic calendar with the more varied calendars that are actually encountered in temple archives. I find no reason to question his core assumption that the hemerologies were derived from a cultic calendar from Babylon, at least as it manifested circa the early second millennium. Likewise, it also remains highly probable that the dual *nubāttu-eššēšu* days originated in the temple practices of Babylon, and that they were once associated—at least at an intellectual level—with Marduk and Nabû. The two-day *eššēšu*-festivals found in the Late Babylonian ritual calendar could have feasibly descended from the earlier *nubāttu-eššēšu* schematic as well. Still, the disappearance of the term *nubāttu* from archival texts use suggests that its nuance within the cultic calendar of Babylon had fallen into obscurity, and archival evidence shows that cultic calendars continued to evolve even after the composition of the hemerologies.

3 The *nubāttu*(*m*) as divine encampment or vigil

The nuance of *nubāttu* as an evening encampment or an overnight stay is attested at all periods of the Babylonian and Assyrians dialects. Perhaps its most famous use is in the Standard Babylonian *Epic of Gilgameš*, when Gilgameš and Enkidu intermittently pitch camp on the way to the Cedar Forest[27]. It is also used in Neo- and Late Babylonian texts to describe

[26]CAD N/II 307, s.v. *nubattu* lexical section; CAD B 298, s.v. *bubbulu* lexical section. On this list, see Hrůša 2010; Veldhuis 2014: §6.3.1.4.

[27]SB Gilgameš 4: 2, 35, 80, a+4', 120, 164: *ana šalašā bēr iškunū nubātta* "after thirty double-hours, they pitched camp." See latest edition in George 2022.

encampments that were made for divine statues, which allowed lengthy ritual processions to break for the night and resume the following morning. An example of this is found in a text most recently edited as *The Exaltation of Nabû*, which describes the cultic journey of the statue of Nabû from Borsippa to Babylon on the occasion of the New Year's Festival. The god encamps at Babylon's Uraš gate for the evening, and ritual offerings are made for him:

> "He made his way all along the Araḫtu, the channel that brings prosperity, proceeding upstream. Drawing near to the quay of the Red Gate in the Uraš Gate, he made an encampment (*nubāttu*). Bulls were slaughtered, sheep butchered; apricots were dedicated, . . . were scattered. Incense was burnt, the odor of sweet resin covered the sky like a thick mist. Torches were raised and the night was lit up. For one league's distance the district was ablaze with light"[28].

Though the nocturnal offerings made to Nabû hearken back to interpretations of *nubāttu* as a cultic vigil, they are not presented as isolated rituals but as activities performed within the larger context of the procession. Ashurbanipal may have drawn from this text or a similar source when he used the term *nubāttu* to describe the stops that Šamaš-šumu-ukīn made, while accompanying the statue of Marduk from Assur to Babylon:

> "From the quay of Baltil (Assur) to the quay of Babylon, wherever they stopped for the n[ight] (*nu*[*bāttu*]), sheep were butchered, bulls were slaughtered, (and) *armannu*-aromatics were scattered on ...s. They brought befo[re him] everything there was for morning (and) evening meals. Piles of brushwood were lit (and) torches ignited (so that) [th]ere was lig[ht] for one league. All of my troops were arranged in a circle (around him) like a rainbow (and) there were joyous celebrations day and night"[29].

[28]VAT 13834+14093 10–14 (dup. VAT 10060): *ša* ^{íd}*a-ra-aḫ-ti* BE-*rat* ḪÉ.NUN *i-ta-ti-šá gu-um-mur-ma i-šad-di-ḫa a-na ma-ḫi-ir-ti / i-ṭe$_4$-ḫa-a a-na ka-*<*ri*>*-a-ri* KÁ *sa-a-me ina* KÁ ^{d}*ú-ra-áš iš-ta-kan nu-bat-tú / li-i pu-ul-lu-qú as-li ṭu-ub-bu-ḫu ar-man-nu qud-du-šú sur-ru-qu ki-šuk-ki / [ṣ]e*-lu-ú qut-rin-ni e-reš za-*^{ɔ}*i ṭa-a-bi ki-ma im-ba-ri kab-ti sa-ḫi-ip šá-ma-mu / šuq-qu-ú di-pa-ru na-*[*pa*]*r-du mu-šú* 1-*en* KASKAL.GÍD.TA.ÁM *qaq-qa-ru na-mir-tú šak-na-at*. See latest edition in Lambert 2013: 348. On the significance of this stop and its possible connection to the New Year's Festival, see Debourse 2022: 272.

[29]RINAP 5/2 220: iii 7'–11', *ul-tu* KAR *bal-til*^{ki} *a-di* KAR KÁ.DINGIR^{ki} *a-šar i- šak -ka-nu nu -*[*bat-tú*] */ as-li ṭu-ub-bu-ḫu le-e pu-ul-lu-qú* ar-man-ni sur-ru-qu e- li*$^{?}$

A similar nuance may appear in a Late Babylonian commentary on rituals that were carried out during the month of Tašrītu (VII), apparently relating to the autumnal *akītu*-festival. In Frances Reynolds' translation, we are told that[30]:

> "On Tašrītu day 8, when the throne of Marduk's vigil (*kussû ša nubāttu ša Marduk*) and the Daughters of Esagil went to Dilbat and Borsippa, (and) did not enter Babylon until day 13, instead of the journey that Bēl would (otherwise) make to the land of Elam or the land of Subartu (Assyria), the throne goes away."

This commentary explains the ritual through the lens of Babylonian history. A throne of Marduk is interpreted as a substitute for the statue of Marduk, which was infamously stolen from Esagil during invasions of Babylon by Elam and Assyria. Thus, the six-day journey of the throne from Babylon to nearby Dilbat and Borsippa is made to prevent another episode of godnapping, in which the statue of Marduk would be forced to spend twelve years in foreign captivity.

Reynolds (2019: 331) has characterized the object of this ritual, the throne, as "a subsidiary throne dedicated to Marduk and probably normally kept in the Esagil complex". Here she notes that the throne has gone out on the 8th day of the month, whereas the traditional *nubāttu* found in hemerologies falls on the 7th; there is no mention of an *eššēšu*-festival. While Reynolds proposes a connection between the *nubāttu-eššēšu* ritual sequence of the hemerologies and the ritual cycle of the autumnal *akītu*, such a connection is not explained within the text—or indeed, in the rest of the calendrical commentary, where the terms *nubāttu* and *eššēšu* are conspicuously absent. As such, I would like to propose that the term *kussû ša nubāttu ša Marduk* refers to a throne that was reserved for Marduk's encampment outside of Babylon.

X.GA$^{?}$.MEŠ / *mim-ma šum-šú nap-tan še-e-ri li-la-a-ti ú-ṭaḫ-ḫu-u ma- ḫar -*[*šú*] / *ab-ri nu-up-pu-ḫu di-pa-ri qé-e-du a-na* 1 KASKAL.GÍD.ÀM *na-mir-*[*tú*] *šak -nat* / *gi-mir* ERIM-*ni-ia ki-ma* ^{d}TIR.AN.NA *šu-tas-ḫu-ru* u_4*-mu u* GE_6 *šit-ku-nu nin-gu- tú* .

[30]Edition in Reynolds 2019: 202-203 (§9 (iii 16-19)), with commentary in 331–341. In BM 35407+ iii 16–19 (partial dup. BM 35188+ ii 18'–21'): *ina* ^{iti}DU_6 U_4 8.KAM *šá* ^{giš}GU.ZA *šá nu-bat-tu*$_4$ *šá* ^{d}AMAR.UTU *u* ^{d}DUMU.MUNUS.MEŠ É.SAG.ÍL / *a-na dil-bat*^{ki} *u bár-*[*s*]*ipa*^{ki} *il-li-ku-u*ʾ *a-di* UD 13.KAM *ana* KÁ.DINGIR.RA^{k}[^{i}] / *la i-ru-bu* [*k*]*u-u*[*m*] *a-la-ku šá* ^{d}EN *ana* KUR ELAM^{ki} *u* KUR SU.BIR_4^{ki} / *il-la-ku* ^{giš}GU.ZA *it-tal-lak*.

4 The *nubāttu*(*m*) in cultic documents from Syria

Given the dearth of rituals called *nubāttu* in southern Mesopotamia and the absence of any consistent equivalent of the Akkadian word in Sumerian texts, we may suggest that it was not a consistent element of southern Mesopotamian cultic life. The term *nubāttu* is well attested in documents in Upper Mesopotamia during the Old Babylonian period (e.g., Mari, Assur, and Šubat-Enlil), where it is used both to refer to the nighttime and to overnight lodgings. In contrast, it is almost completely absent from contemporary sources from the south[31]. Here, we may consider the probable origins of the term in nomadic practices of setting up overnight encampments, which would explain its attestations as a term for both the encampments and the time for setting then up (i.e., the evening). We may further understand it as a product of the more mobile lifestyles encountered among Semitic-speaking tribes of the west and north, as differentiated from the heavily urbanized lifestyles of the south. This would explain the early appearance of the term *nubāttu* in royal rituals from third-millennium Ebla and Old Babylonian Mari, as well as the absence of any similar terms in the rituals of Sumer.

The first documented appearances of the term *nubāttu* in such contexts are in two records of the performance of the so-called Royal Ritual at Ebla (ARET 11 1-2), understood in more recent literature as a wedding ritual for the Eblaite king and queen[32]. The rituals respectively began on the first day of the fourth month (in ARET 11 1) and the first day of the fifth month (in ARET 11 2). In both versions of the ritual program, the royal couples journeyed to the royal mausoleum in the nearby town of Binaš, accompanied by statues of the dynastic god KUra and his consort Barama. There, three seven-day ritual periods were observed, which involved seven-fold offerings for the *nubāttu* of KUra and Barama. The dates are as follows[33]:

[31] I would like to thank Janine Wende for this crucial observation. The sole attestation of the term *nubāttum* from a southern archive dating to the Old Babylonian period is found in a letter from Kisurra (FAOS 2 153: 6), where it refers to an overnight watch against enemy saboteurs.

[32] Edition in Fronzaroli 1993; See especially Bonechi 2016; further comments in Archi 2015: 19, 24; Ristvet 2015: 40–42, 68; Sallaberger 2018: 115, with n. 20.

[33] See commentary in Fronzaroli 1993: 48; 2012: 167; Bonechi 2003: 88. On the god Kura and the royal ritual, see overview in Sallaberger 2018. Note that *nu-ba-du* is also the name of a town under Ebla's control, probably in the Euphrates valley (Archi 2015: 222), and it also seems to appear in MEE 12 35: r xiii 20 as the name of a daughter of

(ARET 11 1 r xi: 7 // 2 r ix: 26)
7 UD *sa-ba-tum* MAḪ
In the 7th day of the *šaba^{c}tum*

1 r xii: 18 // 2 r x: 29
3 UD *sa-ba-tum ga-ab-li-tum* (var.:[*ga*]-*bí*-[*li-a-tum*])
In the 3rd day of the middle *šaba^{c}tum*

The ritual implements repeat each time:

(ARET 11 1 r xi 9; xii 20; xiv 6)
2 SILA$_4$ 7 ÚTUL TUR 7 BANŠUR SIKIL-SIKIL
7 *ma-sa-ḫa-tum* 7 *gu/gú-mu-wa-núm*

(ARET 11 2 r ix: 28; xi 1; xii 2-3)
2 SILA$_4$ 7 ÚTUL TUR 7 ^{giš}ASAL [SIKIL]
7 *gú-mi-a-nu* ŠE+TIN 7 *maš-ḫa-tum*

2 lambs, 7 small cauldrons, 7 pure trables/trays,
7 strainers (?), 7 jugs (of beer)

Each time intended for:

(ARET 11 1 r xi 10-13; xiii 1-4 (restored); xiv 7-10)
nu-ba-du ^{d}KU-*ra ù* ^{d}*ba-ra-ma*

(ARET 11 2 r x 3-6; xi 2-5; xii 4-7)
UB.U$_8$.MUNUS ^{d}KU-*ra wa* ^{d}*ba-ra-ma*

The *nubāttu* of KUra and Barama

Only after these cycles were completed did the royal couple return to Ebla with their gods. In these contexts, the *nubāttu* could plausibly refer to either the encampment of KUra and Barama, who had been brought outside of their temple in Ebla on an extended pilgrimage, or their vigil. However, the usage of the logogram UB.U$_8$.MUNUS as a writing for *nubāttu* in ARET

Uti, son of the powerful vizier Ibrium (Waetzoldt 2001: 397–98; Michel 2014: 122; Archi 2015: 713).

II 1 (compare the GIŠ.U_8.MUNUS of the lexical texts) suggests that this iteration of the term should be interpreted to mean the deities' sleeping quarters[34]. The context of these rituals within royal weddings and parallel cycles of divine union further supports this interpretation.

The term *nubāttu* later makes conspicuous appearances in offering lists from Old Babylonian Mari, which were recorded during the reign of Zimrī-Lîm[35]. A list of twelve slaughtered sheep and a slaughtered goat, dated to the 13th day of Ebūrum (XII) in Zimrī-Lîm's accession year (ARM 23 330)[36], allocates the animals to offerings made for the Mariote dynastic gods Itūr-Mēr, Dagan, Annunītum, and Derītum[37]; for the "*nubāttum* of the temple of Itūr-Mēr" as conspicuously differentiated from Itūr-Mēr himself[38]; and for the king's table. The contents of the list suggest it concerns a royal ritual, culminating in a royal banquet.

Another notable instance (ARM 21 15; partial dup. ARM 21 16) is in a list of fifteen oxen that were sacrificed for various offerings, dated to the 10th day of the winter month of Lilliyātum (IX), year 13 of Zimrī-Lîm. Its contents pertain to the so-called Feast of Ištar or "the Feast of the Land" as it is known in contemporary sources: a ritual cycle celebrated over the course of the month that incorporated funerary offerings for royal ancestors, including tribal ancestors as well as Sargonic kings, and provided an opportunity for client rulers to gather in unison under the king's aegis. The first offering on the list is a fatted bull delivered "during the *nubāttum*"[39]. Other significant offerings were made for the royal gardens, the arrival of the gods to the palace, the chariot of Nergal, and the temples Ea and Dērītum. As such, the *nubāttum* offerings were likely associated with one of the temples of Ištar, probably in her manifestation as Dērītum[40].

[34]See again translation in Kogan and Krebernik 2021: 735, 846, 934 as "sleeping quarters," with citations of earlier discussions of the term.

[35]Listed in Jacquet 2011: 51.

[36]See translations in Feliu 2003: 74; Jacquet 2011: 116.

[37]On the Mariote high pantheon see Sasson 2001: 413–17; Schwemer 2001: 203–4; 2008: 129; Nakata 2011; Pappi 2012: 581–87.

[38]ARM 23 330: 10-11, *a-na nu-ba-tim / ša* É ^{d}*i-túr-me-er*.

[39]ARM 21 15: 1-2, 1 GU_4 NIGA / *i-nu-ma nu-ba-tim*.

[40]See discussion of the communal and ancestral aspects of the Feast of Ištar (Ristvet 2015: 92–152). On this particular *nubāttum*, Jacquet (2011: 201) suggests "au début du texte du grand rituel d'Eštar, le roi s'apprête à passer la nuit dans le temple de la déesse, la veille du sacrifice proprement dit." But this cannot be easily reconciled with the appearance of the *nubāttum* in the rituals of Itūr-Mēr. Cf. the interpretation of *nubattu* in Scurlock 2020: 51, as a sacrificial meal left to spoil overnight.

Though these instances of the ritual *nubāttum* are separated from each other by over five centuries and hundreds of kilometers, they each feature in royal rituals. However, their contexts do not suggest that these instances were regular facets of the ritual calendar. As a wedding ceremony, the Royal Ritual of Ebla would have been intended as a once-in-a-lifetime event. While each iteration of the wedding presumably built upon previous iterations, the extravagant nature of the proceedings allowed the royal family ample opportunity to improvise as desired. Likewise, the Feast of Ištar that Zimrī-Lîm celebrated has been interpreted as an adaptation of an earlier ritual cycle that was celebrated and perhaps invented by Samsi-Addu, who drew on heterogenous traditions to legitimize his suzerainty over Upper Mesopotamia. Letters to the Mariote court describe how some client rulers ignored or refused their invitations to the feast, suggesting that they did not ascribe the same importance to the ritual cycle that their overlords intended (Ristvet 2015: 146-52). The offerings that Zimrī-Lîm performed in Ebūrum also seem to have been performed for a set purpose for his personal gods, and thus were unlikely to have been part of a preordained ritual cycle.

The offerings made to *nubāttu*(*m*) in Ebla and Mari suggest that this term was already established in some capacity within local religious traditions. The occurrences specifically within royal rituals is also noteworthy, considering Marduk's status from the Old Babylonian period onward as patron god of Babylonian kingship. However, it seems that the Syrian attestations of the *nubāttu*(*m*) were exclusively found in *ad hoc* rituals performed by royal families, and were not fixtures of regular cultic calendars. The apparent flexibility of these rituals is contrasted with the fixed appearance of the *nubāttu*(*m*) mandated by the later hemerology traditions. We may tentatively understand the Syrian ritual *nubāttu* in the context of local traditions of nocturnal rituals, which were attested already during the third and early second millennia in conjunction with divination, apotropaic magic, and domestic religion. Indeed, the evening (*nubāttu*) is the most frequently specified time of day for rituals to occur in the *zukru*-festivities of Emar (see Daniel Fleming 2000: 97). Likewise, nocturnal rituals were already well-attested in the religions of Ebla and Old Babylonian Mari[41]. Thus, the overnight *nubāttu*-encampments found in the

[41]Nocturnal rituals invoking the fire god and the Gods of the Night, later known from Mesopotamian apotropaic literature, are already known from Ebla. Pelio Fronzaroli (2012: 170–71, 174) suggested that they were imported from Mari, noting the presence of the *maslaḫtum*-vessel in both the Ebla rituals and in rituals of Mari.

rituals of Ebla and Mari adhere to the general religious programs of the cuneiform western periphery.

5 The early Marduk and the apotropaic *nubāttu*

It is at this stage that we encounter the most arcane invocations of the ritual *nubāttu*, in Standard Babylonian apotropaic texts. The relationship between Marduk and the *nubāttu* is most clearly established in a curious formula that is found in two anti-witchcraft incantations, which were integrated into the anti-witchcraft series *Maqlû*. In this formula, attested in *Maqlû* 2: 170–171 and *Maqlû* 7: 18–19, the narrator invokes the power of Marduk as "lord of the *nubāttu*" (*bēl nubātti*), a title that is not attested in any other known context in the cuneiform record (Tallqvist 1938: 51). It also invokes Asalluḫi, firstborn son of the wise god Enki/Ea and patron god of the ritual purification arts of *āšipūtu*:

> *anāku ina qibīt Marūtuk bēl nubātti*
> *u Asalluḫi bēl āšipūti*
>
> I, by the word of Marduk, lord of the *nubāttu*
> And Asalluḫi, lord of magic ...[42]

The grammatical separation of Marduk from Asalluḫi is curious: though the two gods originated as separate deities, the process of syncretization was already completed during the Late Old Babylonian period. Indeed, most Standard Babylonian narrative literature and ritual texts, including *Marduk's Address to the Demons* and *Enūma eliš*, understand Asalluḫi as a ritual epithet of Marduk. It is only in texts from the Isin-Larsa period (e.g., Nippur God List, OB Udug-Ḫul, the Genouillac God List) that the two deities appear in the same context, but as distinct entities from each other[43].

[42] See editions in Abusch 2016. Text partiture on 72, 169; composite transliteration on 239, 263; normalization and translation on 300, 350. Note also the appearance of *asalluḫi bēl āšipūti* "Asalluḫi, lord of magic" without the companionship of Marduk in *Maqlû* 1: 62 and 72.

[43] On the relationship between Marduk and Asalluḫi in the Nippur God List, see Peterson 2009: 54; Rubin 2023: 175–76. On OB Udug-Ḫul, see Geller 1985: 30; Oshima 2001: 43. On the Genouillac List (TCL 15 10), see Richter 2004: 104–8; Lambert and Winters 2023: 6.

The formula in *Maqlû* is also noteworthy in that it assigns the tradition of *āšipūtu* exclusively to Asalluḫi, with the implication that Marduk and his *nubāttu* fell outside of the traditional corpus as it was previously conceived.

Considering that some of the ritual-incantations that formed the basis of Maqlû were already known from sources from the early second millennium[44], we may consider the retention of Marduk and Asalluḫi as discrete entities as evidence that this formula was developed as part of an earlier tradition, apparently from before their syncretism had been finalized. As such, the relationship between Marduk, the apotropaic arts, and the ritual *nubāttu* was likely known already from earlier times. His pre-existing relationship with incantation rituals may have invited a point of comparison between himself and Enki-Ea, thus allowing his worshipers to bring Marduk into the wise god's circle before his formal merger with Asalluḫi.

However, the text does not clarify when this *nubāttu* was observed, or even whether this instance refers to a period of time or a divine encampment. At least by the first millennium, the entire *Maqlû* series was performed over the course of a single night and the following morning at the end of the midsummer month of Abu (V). An early version of the ritual known from the later Middle Assyrian period, which did not include either instance of the formula with *Marūtuk bēl nubātti*, may have only been performed in the early morning (Abusch 2015: 4–6).

The close association between Marduk and the *nubāttu* is also illustrated in an opaque *ušburrudû* incantation-ritual, which was used to dispel curses caused by broken oaths (*mamītu*)[45]. The incantation is narrated in the voice of the personified *nubāttu*, who calls herself "the sister of Marduk"[46]:

> ÉN *anāku nubāttu aḫāt Marūtuk*
> *Zappu ērânni Bālu ulidanni*
> *Luḫušû ana liqûtīšu* (var.: *kallūtīšu*) *ilqânni*
> *anašši ubānātīya ina birīt Zappi u Bāli ašakkan* (var.: *ušeššeb*)
> *ultēšib* (var.: *ušeššeb*) *ina pānīya Ištar bēltu* (*rabītu*) *āpilat*
> *kūmū'a* (var.: *kīmū'a*)

[44]See history of *Maqlû* and the anti-witchcraft tradition in Abusch 2015: 4–5.

[45]See editions of the text with commentary on its ritual functions and astronomical setting in Stol 1992: 251–53; Abusch and Schwemer 2016; n. 7.11:15–22, with introduction and commentary on pages 48, 62–63; Konstantopoulos 2023: 230-31; Renzi-Sepe 2023: 84–86.

[46]Text partiture of K 1289: r 8–17 and duplicates, following Abusch and Schwemer 2016: 52–55.

aḫī Marūtuk ummī šapattu abū'a araḫ (var.: *ūmu*)
ittīya-(ma) lipšurā kala tâmāti
māmīt atmû (var.: *ša attemmû*) *lā tuqarraba* (var.: *uqarrab*)
rēmēnû Marūtuk (TU_6 ÉN)

Incantation: "I am the night (*nubāttu*), sister of Marduk
Zappu (Pleides) conceived me, Bālu (Orion) birthed me
Luḫušû (another astral body) took me as his adoptee (var: daughter-in-law)
I raise my fingers, I place them between Zappu and Bālu
I have seated before me (great) Lady Ištar (evening star), who answers for me
My brother is Marduk, my mother is the full moon day, my father is the new moon day
With me, may all the seas undo (the evil)!
The (broken) oath that I have sworn: Merciful Marduk, do not (var.: may merciful Marduk not) allow it to approach me!
(Incantation formula)

The ritual instructions vary between manuscripts, all of which date to the first millennium. It was used variously to cure different types of witchcraft, *di'u* and *diliptu* diseases, *mamītu*-curses, and for healing the left kidney. One Late Babylonian manuscript from Babylon (BM 42272: 15–17) calls for this incantation to be recited over anti-witchcraft and anti-curse medication, which was supposed to be drunk on the third, seventh, and sixteenth day of seemingly any month. This schematic seems to draw from the understandings of the *nubāttu* of Marduk in the hemerological tradition, as a sub-monthly festival. In contrast, ritual instructions assigned to this incantation in other exemplars do not specify when it should be performed[47]. The inconsistencies surrounding this incantation supports the possibility that it was passed down through oral transmission, and that it had been adapted independently for a wide variety of apotropaic functions.

[47]Compare ritual instructions in Neo-Babylonian manuscript from Babylon 81-7-27, 205: r 3–4, where the incantation is recited three times over water or beer, which the patient drinks; Neo-Assyrian manuscript from Nineveh BM 123385: r? iv 10, where it is recited over the left kidney; and another Neo-Assyrian manuscript from Nineveh K 1289: r 12, where it is recited three times over drugs for undoing witchcraft, which must be drunk in any beverage and chased down with bread, following which the patient is rubbed with oil.

However, the form that the *nubāttu* takes in the incantation itself is much narrower, and appears to be connected to a specific alignment of astral bodies. The motions of the *nubāttu*'s fingers has been compared to an astronomer measuring the distance between astral bodies (Koch 2003: 90; Renzi-Sepe 2023: 86). Tzvi Abusch and Daniel Schwemer (2016: 63) have convincingly explained that "the *nubattu* is the personified time period during which the described astral phenomena can be observed." Thus, as the child of the full moon day (fifteenth) and new moon day (first/last), the *nubāttu* must represent the seventh day in the month, a period in the lunar cycle called *kalītu* or "kidney" due to the shape of the first-quarter moon. Maria Teresa Renzi-Sepe (2023: 86) has succinctly noted that "Regardless of the identification of the exact stars involved, the prayer is apotropaic, and it describes the nocturnal sky in one particular night, the night of the seventh day of Nisannu."

The incantation is also notable for describing Marduk as the *nubāttu*'s brother in a familial sense, rather than its master as in *Maqlû*[48]. Nevertheless, neither of these relationships are attested anywhere else in the cuneiform corpus. As with the formula describing Marduk as *bēl nubātti* in *Maqlû*, we may identify the incantation *anāku nubāttu aḫāt Marūtuk* as a relic of an older ritual context. Renzi-Sepe (ibid.) has suggested that it might have been older than the first millennium BCE, as a record from Old Babylonian Tuttul includes offerings to the astral bodies Zappu and Bālu. The use of the obscure astronomical names Bālu and Luḫušu may suggest that this incantation was informed by older conceptions of the cosmos, which first-millennium astronomical traditions seldom observed.

To this we may compare an incantation-ritual known from first-millennium sources, which begins: "I am equipped with *ruʾtītu-sulphur*, daughter of the great gods which undoes witchcraft on the new moon day and *mamītu*-curses on the *nubāttu* of the seventh." This incantation agrees that the *nubāttu* of the seventh day is fortuitous for the removal of curses, though it does not necessarily limit this day to once per year (Abusch and Schwemer 2010: n. 7.8.3: 46'-48'). The ownership of this seemingly monthly *nubāttu* varies throughout the hemerology tradition: the *Offering Bread Hemerology* assigns it to Ea, while *Inbu bēl arḫi* assigns it to Marduk. The entry in the

[48]It is tempting to associate the notion of Marduk having a sister with the peculiar appearance of a goddess in Babylonian god lists, called Mamê (^{d}*ma-me-e*) in *Anum* (*Weidner God List*): 72, and Mamia in *An = Anum* 2: 252, the latter of whom is identified as Marduk's sister (^{d}*ma-mi-a* = nin ^{d}amar-utu-ke$_4$).

parallel *lipšur* litany conspicuously includes both gods and a fragmentary verb; it may be reconstructed as: "May the seventh day, the *nubāttu* that Ea *gave*[?] to [...] Marduk, absolve!"[49]. If this statement is interpreted correctly, it suggests the construction of a myth, in which Ea transferred ownership of the *nubāttu* of the seventh day from himself to Marduk. Perhaps this myth was made to account for a discrepancy in two hemerological traditions. Of course, it should be noted that no other sources on record explicitly attach Ea to the *nubāttu* of the seventh day.

The astral connotations of *nubāttu* also feature in an Old Babylonian prayer to the Gods of the Night, probably from Sippar (CBS 574: 10–11): *in su-in* ^{d}UTU *it-te-er-bu-*[*ma*] / *e-ṭi-ru na-ap- ša -tim ma-lu-ú nu-ba-t*[*u-šu-nu*] "When the moon (Sîn) and sun (Šamaš) have set / the saviors of life then fill [their] encampment[s]" (Horowitz and Wasserman 1996: 58–59). The scene of the Gods of the Night (i.e., deified fire and astral bodies) assembling after the sun and moon have set is a common motif in apotropaic literature, and it may point to the recitation of this prayer on the occasion of the new moon. In this case, *nubāttu* can only be translated as an encampment, poetically describing masses of stars illuminating the moonless sky. This phrasing is not known in later descriptions of astral bodies in orbit, but it accords with later identifications of *nubāttu* with the *bubbulu*-day of the vanishing of the moon.

My best guess is that the use of *nubāttu* in these scattered apotropaic texts reflects an early tradition related to anti-witchcraft rituals, which was perhaps local to northern Babylonia circa the early second millennium. The fact that this manifestation of *nubāttu* is directly associated with Marduk seems to position it a predecessor of the "*nubāttu* of Marduk" and the *nubāttu-eššēšu* pairing found in the Babylonian hemerology tradition. However, we cannot easily reconcile it with the way the term is used in the rituals of Ebla or Mari, nor does it have any feasible connection to the encampments set up for multi-day processions in later Babylonian ritual manuals. Perhaps the intended nuance of this apotropaic *nubāttu* and the nature of its connection with Marduk, much like the calendrical *nubāttu* it

[49]CTN 4 110: r 9, [UD.7.KÁ]M [*lip-šu*]*r n*[*u-bat-t*]*u* ^{d}*é-a ana* ^{d}AMAR.UTU MAŠ[?] GAR[?] . Saki Kikuchi (2024: 59) has normalized the verb as *išruku/iqša*, translating "Abendfest(tag), an dem Ea dem Marduk (sein ...) schenkte. See previously the restoration in Wiseman 1969: 178: 66', with translation "The seventh day, the night(-feast) of Ea, part to Marduk, absolve." Livingstone (2013: 251) does not attempt a restoration of the last two signs. Marti (2014: 197) tentatively restores ^{d}MÚŠ[?] instead.

was supposedly connected to, lost its particular significance over time. This would perhaps explain its creative reimagining in the text of *Enūma eliš*, circa the end of the second millennium.

6 The ritual *nubāttu* in *Enūma eliš*

The term is encountered again in the fifth and sixth tablets of *Enūma eliš*, in dialogues presaging the divine foundation of Babylon[50]. The term is encountered again in the fifth and sixth tablets of *Enūma eliš*, in dialogues presaging the divine foundation of Babylon. After defeating Tiamat and creating the cosmos from her corpse, Marduk informs the gods of his plans to build the city of Babylon and his new home, the Esagil temple, where the gods will gather for the divine assembly (*Enūma eliš* 5: 119–30). As such, Babylon would act as the *nubāttu* for the gods, with *nubāttu* here taking on its more common nuance as an overnight encampment. Marduk also declares that they will hold a festival in this new city, which will be called *nubāttu*:

elēnu apsî šubat ḫašmāni
meḫret ešarra ša abnû anāku elkun
šapliš ašrati udannina qaqqarša
lūpuš-ma bīta lū šubat lalêya
qerbuššu māḫāzašu lušaršidma
kummī luddâ lukīn šarrūtī
enūma ištu apsî tellâ ana purussê
ašruššu lū nubāttakun ana maḫār(i) puḫrīkun
enūma ištu šamāmī turradā ana pur[ussê]
ašruššu lū nubāttakun ana maḫār(i) puḫrīkun
lubbīma šumšu bābili bītāt ilī rabûti
isinnu qerbuš [...] *ippušū šī nubāttu*

Above the Apsû, the azure dwelling
A counterpart to Ešarra, which I built for you
Below the firmament, whose grounding I made firm
A temple (*bīta*) I will build, may it be an abode of my pleasure
Within it I will establish its cult center (*māḫāzašu*) and
Found my cella (*kummī*). I will establish my kingship

[50]See most recent critical editions in Lambert 2013: 104–105, 112–13; and transcription and translation in Heinrich and Helle 2024: 70–74, 76–77.

> When you come up from the Apsû to make decisions
> Let this place (*ašruššu*) be your repose in that pl[ace] (*nubāttakun*) before your assembly
> When you come down from heaven to make decisions
> Let this place (*ašruššu*) be your repose (*nubāttakun*) before your assembly
> I shall call its name Babylon: "houses (*bītāt*) of the great gods"
> They will hold a festival (*isinnu*) in its midst […]: it is the "repose" (*nubāttu*)[51].

The gods agree to Marduk's proposal. Though their reply is unfortunately fragmentary, they appear to repeat Marduk's description of Babylon in lines 137–38[52]:

> [*bābili*] *ša tazkura šumšu*
> *aš*[*ruššu nubātt*]*ani idi dārišam*
>
> [Babylon], as you have proclaimed its name: that pl[ace] (*ašruššu*) will be our [rep]ose ([*nubātt*]*āni*) forever!

At the beginning of the next tablet, Marduk forms plans to create humanity. In a proposal he relays to his father Ea, the humans would perform the gods' labor, so that the gods themselves may rest (*pašāḫu*). Ea agrees to his plan, and it is carried out: Qingu is executed, and father and son make humanity from his blood. In a short speech in *Enūma eliš* 6: 49–54, the grateful gods declare they will build Babylon and Esagil. They refer to the city and its shrine as their place of repose (*nubāttāni*) and announce that they will rest there whenever they come to visit:

> *inanna bēl ša šubarrâni taškunūma*
> *mīnû dumqâni ina maḫrīka*
> *i nīpuš parakka ša nabû zikiršu*
> *kummuk lū nubāttāni i nušapšiḫ qerbuš*
> *i niddi parakka nēmeda* (var.: ša nimmidu) *ašaršu*
> *ina ūmi ša nikaššada* (*i*) *nušapšiḫ qerbuš*

[51]Compare other translations of this line (*Enūma eliš* 5: 130). Lambert (2013: 105) reads "Within it we will hold a festival, that will be the evening festival." Heinrich and Helle (2024, 73) read "within it […] we shall hold a festival, that of repose."

[52]Note that *Enūma eliš* 5: 137–38 is reconstructed from Neo-Assyrian manuscript K 3445+: r 37–38, which substitutes Assur (^{iri}BAL.TIL^{ki}) where Babylon was presumably invoked in the original text.

> Now, O Lord, that you have established our freedom
> What will be our reward before you?
> Let us make a dais (*parakka*), whose name is renowned!
> Let your shrine (*kummuk*) be our repose (*nubāttāni*)! Let us rest within it!
> Let us erect a dais (*parakka*), a cultic platform there!
> On the day that we visit, let us rest (*nušapšiḫ*) within it!

The repetition of the term *nubāttu* within these passages imbues it with theological significance, especially as it is encountered three times in the rhythmic passage of *Enūma eliš* 6: 126–130: twice as *nubāttakun* "your (the gods') repose," and once as *nubāttu* "repose." The text also makes use of the two more common nuances of *nubāttu* as both a physical encampment and as a time for setting up camp. The former is achieved by making *nubāttu* synonymous for terms associated with Babylon and the Esagil temple (*bītu* "house," *māḫāzu* "cult center," *kummu* "cella," *ašru* "place," and *parakku* "dais"), as the place where the gods may encamp whenever they gather in assembly. The latter is achieved in *Enūma eliš* 5: 130, which makes *nubāttu* a name or function of a festival (*isinnu*) that will be held in Babylon. The festival in question most likely refers to the Babylonian New Year's Festival—either in its entirety or in part—when the statues of the gods were brought to Babylon to proclaim the sovereignty of Marduk[53].

The use of the term *nubāttu* to describe Babylon and the program of the New Year's Festival is unique to this text. However, it follows in the footsteps of a considerable body of apotropaic and hemerological literature, in which the term is used for a sacred period associated with Marduk. Its usage here is strikingly different from what we have seen in earlier texts, in which *nubāttu* served either as a sub-monthly date in the Babylonian cultic calendar or as an evening in the springtime when apotropaic ceremonies were considered unusually effective. The latter tradition, represented by the incantation depicting the *nubāttu* as Marduk's sister, is at least reminiscent of the performance of the New Year's Festival in the spring month of Nisannu. Still, the language of this text is so radically different from the theological world of *Enūma eliš* as to rule out an organic connection between them.

[53]See most recently Debourse 2024, Gabriel 2024, and a veritable armada of earlier literature. At least during the Neo- and Late Babylonian periods, the gods assembled at the Dais of Destinies in Babylon on the eighth and eleventh days of Nisannu to honor Marduk and determine the destiny of the king (Debourse 2022: 24–25).

In this regard, we must understand these passages as endeavors to reinterpret the early *nubāttu* traditions of Marduk in light of the distinct theological-political program of *Enūma eliš*, which celebrates this god as the demiurgic master of the cosmos and Babylon as his cosmic capital. The text redefines this older cultic term by manipulating its literal meaning as an encampment or period of encampment: the *nubāttu* of Marduk is reinterpreted as a title of Babylon and its temples as the place where the gods gather, and as a title of the New Year's Festival as the time when the divine council convenes. *Enūma eliš* 6: 52 further connects the image of *nubāttu*-encampments as a restful abode with the traditional *topos* of humanity being created to relieve the labor of the gods, best known from the Mesopotamian flood narratives (see e.g., Gabriel 2014: 202–3.) Not only is Babylon the place where the gods may rest, but it is also where they may they rejoice over the easing of their burdens.

The creative reinterpretation of the cultic term *nubāttu* joins a litany of other speculative etymologies within the text, in which that older terms with unclear or counterintuitive meanings are recast as mementos of Marduk's primordial exaltation and as evidence of the supremacy of Babylon[54]. It is especially remarkable in light of the wordplay in *Enūma eliš* 5: 129, in which the name of Babylon is interpreted to mean *bītāt ilī rabûti* "houses of the great gods." This epithet is clearly derived from the common etymology of Babylon as *bāb-ilim/ilī* "gate of the god(s)," as reflected by the logographic writing KÁ.DINGIR.RA^{ki}. The composer of the text has evidently taken advantage of the graphic similarity between the cuneiform signs for gate (KÁ) and house (É)[55], though it raises the question of why he avoided the more traditional etymology in favor of a more speculative reading. We may tentatively propose that he was exploiting the phonetic and semantic similarities between *bītāt*(*u*) "houses" and *nubāttu* "encampment"[56].

[54]Compare the creative etymologies of the names of Marduk within the text, including the famous insistence in *Enūma eliš* 1: 101-102 and again in *Enūma eliš* 6: 127–28, that ^{d}amar-utu-(ak) or "son (lit: bull-calf) of the sun"—a counterintuitive name for a god who was never considered a solar deity or significant relation of the sun god—should really be interpreted as *māri šamšu šamšu ša ilāni* "The son (who is) the sun, the sun (i.e. ruler) of the gods" (Lambert 2013: 124). See also Seri 2006 on the etymologies of the fifty names of Marduk; and SooHoo 2024 on a similar case of bilingual paronomasia in another Marduk composition, *Ludlul bēl nēmeqi*.

[55]As previously noted in Heinrich and Helle 2024: 71 n. 100.

[56]I would like to thank Janine Wende for noting the common roots of these two terms.

Conclusions

Our survey of the term *nubāttu* in cuneiform literature has revealed no real consistency in how it was utilized in ritual contexts. It has demonstrated that the previous definition of the term as "eve of feast, evening ceremonies" was informed by maximalist interpretations of material from Ashurbanipal's library. Instead, it has shown that its nuance varies between textual genres, and across discrete time periods. Likely originating within a nomadic cultural milieu, the term *nubāttu* likely referred to an overnight encampment first, and was later used to refer to the night-time as a time of encampment. These nuances were repeatedly recontextualized in religious environments, especially in rituals relating to the cult of Marduk:

1 In Ebla and Mari, it seems to refer to an overnight encampment for divine statues, which received offerings in *ad hoc* rituals associated with royal deities.

2 In apotropaic incantation-rituals, many of which were later integrated into *Maqlû* and other anti-witchcraft texts, it seems to refer to a specific evening when rituals against oath-curses (*mamītu*) and other spiritual causes of human discomfort were believed to have greater efficacy. Its direct connection with Marduk reflects his early role as an apotropaic deity.

3 In Standard Babylonian hemerological compilations, it is the first day of a two-day cultic festival, typically dedicated to Marduk, which fell on the third, seventh, and sixteenth days of the month. It was always followed by the *eššēšu* day, typically dedicated to Nabû. In this manner, the *nubāttu* seems to function as a unifying term for pre-festival celebrations, like those that were already attested in Ur III contexts. While this arrangement presumably reflected the cultic calendar of Babylon circa the early second millennium, its schematics were certainly not followed in Late Babylonian temples, which instead observed two-day *eššēšu*-festivals in five-to-seven-day intervals.

4 In descriptions of rituals from first-millennium Babylonia, it refers to overnight encampments that were made during lengthy divine processions.

5 In *Enūma eliš*, it is a learned epithet for Babylon and its New Year's Festival, as the time and place where the gods gathered to honor Marduk.

We may wonder if the term was already obscure when it first entered the Babylonian lexicon circa the early second millennium, perhaps as it had crossed over from earlier rites from the western periphery of Mesopotamia. Once it entered the ritual lexicon of northern Babylonia, the term became fluid, inviting numerous unique interpretations on its significance that depended on how it was employed within larger ritual contexts. The *nubāttu*'s association with Marduk in apotropaic material, including the god's title of *bēl nubātti* in incantations from *Maqlû*, demonstrates that the term had become integrated into his domain of anti-witchcraft magic. This association seems to have resulted in the further integration of the *nubāttu* of Marduk into the ritual calendar of Babylon. The appearance of the *nubāttu* of Marduk in hemerological compilations suggests that this ill-defined evening, which probably did not occur more than once a year in its earlier apotropaic conceptions, had become redefined as a more regular event. However, its inconsistent appearances in sources already from the Kassite era suggests that its significance had been subject to reinterpretation. Although first-millennium royal inscriptions make references to the *nubāttu* of Marduk and the *eššēšu* of Nabû, as described in the hemerological tradition, these days had likely vanished from the living cultic calendar of Babylon.

The conspicuous use of the term *nubāttu* in *Enūma eliš* suggests that it had been recontextualized in light of more salient religious trends pertaining to the god's newfound supremacy over the pantheon, as well as the dominion of his city of Babylon over the rest of the region. Even then, older interpretations of the *nubāttu* of Marduk continued to be transmitted in manuscripts pertaining to incantations and hemerologies, which ultimately arrived in Ashurbanipal's library. In a sketch of this one fluid term, we encounter the entire history of Babylon in miniature, personified through the character of Marduk: a relative oddity in the cuneiform corpus that grew to become a symbol of absolute power, leaving isolated traces of its former self behind.

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