Nature as Conceived by the Mesopotamians and the Current Anthropological Debate over Animism and Personhood. The Case of Ebiḫ: Mountain, Person and God

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Abstract: The present paper considers how Mesopotamians conceived and related to the mountains according to Sumerian and Akkadian literary sources, while combining them with current anthropological theories, especially the so-called new animism with its innovative notion of personhood. From the written sources pertaining to the religious framework (i.e. myths, incantations, rituals and personal names) a multifaceted portrayal emerges, in which mountains were conceived not only as the abode of the gods and cosmic places at the border of the world, but were also conceptualized as living beings, acting in the world on behalf of humans and partaking of the divine community. The case of Mt. Ebiḫ offers the most striking evidence for how a mountain was regarded by the inhabitants of Mesopotamia over the centuries: it was envisioned as a mountain, as a person and as a god.

Introduction

Mountains are major topographical entities, that form a crown embracing the Mesopotamian plain. With their distant but bulky presence, mountains represented a dialectic element with the urban plain, and were fertile ground for the imagination of the ancient Mesopotamians. Together with other natural elements and topographical features of the landscape – such as rivers, trees, and stones– mountains constitute an essential part of the Mesopotamian landscape. In ancient Mesopotamian myths and rituals, mountains are referred to as living beings, acting in the world and partaking of the divine community: they protect and heal, do not submit to deities and threaten the divine spheres with their beauty, radiance and divinity.

This evidence speaks for different understandings of divinity, personhood and nature on the part of ancient Mesopotamians, as reflected by the literary sources, and calls into question the different ways in which the ancient inhabitants of Mesopotamia related, understood and conceptualized their natural surroundings. The present article focuses on how mountains were embedded within the religious framework through the emblematic case of Ebiḫ.[1] While exploring the ancient cuneiform sources, I use anthropological explanations to better understand the ancient myths and rituals, in order to investigate and further explain the connections between nature, the sacred and their materiality. I focus on the ongoing anthropological discussion about the term animism, with its innovative notion of personhood, which I apply as a theoretical tool in order to explore the ways in which mountains were understood, conceptualized and worshipped.

[1] The present paper is based on the part of my PhD dissertation *Mountains and Trees, Rivers and Springs. Animist Beliefs and Practices in ancient Mesopotamian Religion* (submitted in June 2018 and accepted in March 2019) focusing on Mt. Ebiḫ.

Anthropological theory and ancient Mesopotamian religion: a fertile dialogue

The anthropological concept of animism, especially in its innovative notion of "other-than-human" person, represents a category and conceptual tool which enables a great variety of questions regarding the relationship between humans and nature to be asked, and which can contribute to shedding light upon various aspects of Mesopotamian conceptions and practices involving religion, magic and nature. Hallowell's concept of "other-than-human" person (1960), Descola's modes of interaction between humans and nature (1996 and 2013), and Harvey's relational animism (2006 and 2013), are all notions that contribute to pointing out relevant aspects of how an ancient culture related to and conceptualized its natural surroundings.

These notions are employed as conceptual tools to reassess some emic notions of nature, divinity and personhood in the ancient Mesopotamian polytheism, understood as complex and multilayered lived religion. The applicability of anthropological theories and approaches to the study of an ancient culture is considered a challenge and an opportunity to try to explore some aspects of how ancient human communities, far away in time and place, envisioned, knew and related to their world.[2] As noted by Rochberg, this matter poses several challenges, but such an approach is required for anyone attempting to interpret and explore those societies, according to the different written sources.[3] Thanks to the advance of philological and linguistic understandings of the cuneiform sources, with the consequent flourishing of editions of different textual corpora, the ancient Mesopotamian documentation has become more easily available and awaits further studies on the *Sitz im Leben* of the ancient Mesopotamians. Hence, the anthropological theories should not be assumed as establishing anachronistic and uncritical parallels between an ancient culture and a non-Western one, nor between oral and written cultures, but it represents a fertile conceptual tool in order to explore and to interpret the written sources from an emic perspective.[4]

With the progressive dismissal of the classic use of the term animism, due to its colonialist and evolutionist connotations (Tylor; Frazer), a new usage of the term has come into being in the light of recent ethnographic, cognitive, literary, performative and material culture approaches (Bird-David; Descola; Harvey). According to the new animism, in some societies (or in some worldviews within a given society), the world is perceived and conceptualized as a relational and social one, as a "community of living beings",[5] populated by different persons, most of whom are non-human. Differently from its metaphysical counterpart of Tylorian memory, the new understanding of animism should be considered not as a deluded belief that everything is alive, nor as a mere fossil from earlier stages of mankind, but rather as a "sophisticated way of both being in the world and of knowing the world", that is "a relational epistemology and a relational ontology".[6] Consequently, the new animism highlights radically different understandings of divinity, person, and nature, and calls into question the dualistic naturalistic worldview, with its oppositions of animate and inanimate, natural and cultural, natural and supernatural, immanent and transcendent.

The notion of "other-than-human" person is one of the salient features of the school of the new animism (Hallowell 1960; Bird-David 1999; Harvey 2006; Harvey 2013a, Harvey 2013b), and was firstly used in Hallowell's pioneering study on the Ojibwa worldview

[2] Robson 2008, 455–483; Rochberg 2016, 57–58.
[3] Rochberg 2016, 57–58.
[4] Rochberg 2016, 57–58.
[5] Harvey 2013a, 2. See also Sahlins 2017, 121–123.
[6] Hall 2011, 105 (commenting on Harvey 2006).

(1960).[7] This notion partakes of a broader philosophical and ontological debate which is still ongoing, and which involves disciplines as varied as cognitive sciences, ethology, philosophy and biology. According to this innovative understanding, the salient trait for defining a person is not physical appearance, but behavioral and relational features. In fact, the matter of personhood cannot be reduced to mere anthropomorphism or anthropocentrism. As stated by Hallowell, anthropomorphism is not a marker of what distinguishes a person from a non-person. What characterizes a person is its behavior and relationality: according to Hallowell, "animate persons" are "relational beings, actors in a participatory world".[8] Within the Ojibwa myths, Thunderbirds are conceived as acting like human beings.[9] Other indicators of the animate nature of relational beings are movement, gift-giving and conversation.[10] Thus, "all beings communicate intentionally and act toward each other relationally: this makes them 'persons'".[11] Reassessing Hallowell's definition of what a person is, Harvey argues that

> *Persons are those with whom other persons interact with varying degrees of reciprocity. Persons may be spoken with. Objects, by contrast, are usually spoken about. Persons are volitional, relational, cultural and social beings. They demonstrate agency and autonomy with varying degrees of autonomy and freedom*.[12]

The animistic universe is permeated by personalities, forces and spirits, which are interconnected and related to one another, in a "heterarchy of related beings".[13] According to Harvey, animist people "recognize that the world is full of persons, only some of whom are human, and that life is always lived in relationship with others".[14] Exploring the different "other-than-human" persons of the lively and personal ancient Mesopotamian polytheism is an essential step toward readdressing the interactions between humans and non-humans, and the conceptions of nature, landscape and the cosmos according to the Mesopotamians (Black 2002; Horowitz 1998; Rochberg 2016).

Together with the notion of personhood, Descola's modes of identification between humans and non-humans are relevant tools for investigating the connections between the ancient myths and rituals with their materiality. In his exploration of the modes in which humans relate to the natural world, and in discussing the dichotomy of nature and culture, Descola identifies four modes of interaction between humans and the natural world around them: animism, totemism, naturalism and analogism (Descola 1996; Descola 2013). With the notion of animism, he refers to a system which "endows natural beings with human dispositions and social attributes".[15] Conversely, he intends by totemic systems those where "the differential relations between natural species confer a conceptual order on society".[16] According to these definitions, animist systems "use the elementary categories structuring social life to organize, in conceptual terms, the relations between human beings and

[7] Hallowell 1960, 19–52. Hallowell's ethnographic work focused on the Ojibwa of Manitoba, Canada, a First Nation population speaking an Algonkian language.
[8] Harvey 2013b, 125.
[9] The term Thunderbird refers to the conception and representation in the Ojibwa mythology of the thunder in an avian form (See Hallowell 1960, 30–34).
[10] Harvey 2013b, 124. As Harvey further argues, commenting on Hallowell, "persons are known to be persons when they relate to other persons in particular ways. They might act more or less intimately, willingly, reciprocally or respectfully. Since enmity is also a relationship, they might act aggressively" (Harvey 2013b, 124).
[11] Harvey 2013b, 125. See also Levy-Bruhl's "law of participation" (1985), and Buber's I–Thou relational ontology and the "mystery of reciprocity" (1970) (Rochberg 2016, 52).
[12] Harvey 2005, preface xvii; Hall 2011, 105.
[13] Hall 2011, 107.
[14] Harvey 2006, xi.
[15] Descola 1996, 82–102.
[16] Descola 1996, 87–88.

natural species".[17] Descola further explains that while in "totemic systems non-humans are treated as signs, in animic systems they are treated as the term of a relation".[18] Naturalism is the third mode and represents the typical Western worldview, based on an ontological duality of nature and culture.[19] Finally, analogism refers to "the idea that all the entities in the world are fragmented into a multiplicity of essences, forms and substances separated by minute intervals, often ordered along a graded scale".[20] What is peculiar to analogism is the "recombination of the initial contrasts into a dense network of analogies linking the intrinsic properties of each autonomous entity in the world".[21] It has to be underlined that these four modes of identifications are not mutually exclusive and can be organically present within a single society, or "each human may activate any of them according to circumstances".[22]

The predominant Western naturalistic mode of identification and interaction with nature does not match with the entirety of Mesopotamian worldviews and conceptions. Some evidence points in this direction, but other contexts, especially myths and rituals, speak to a different vision of the relationship between humans and nature, and to a radically diverse conception of personhood and divinity.[23] The emblematic case of Ebiḫ offers the most complex evidence of how a mountain was conceived within the religious framework of ancient Mesopotamia. With its long-lasting tradition, Ebiḫ is one of the most relevant mountain ranges of the cosmic and sacred landscape of ancient Mesopotamia, and sheds light upon the various conceptions revolving around these majestic topographical features in the complex and fluid polytheisms of ancient Mesopotamia.

The case of Ebiḫ: mountain, person and god

Ebiḫ (Sum. E n - t i , Akk. *Ebeḫ* or *Abiḫ*) has a particular history in the literary and ritual evidence, being attested as a person and as a deity from the 3rd to the 1st millennium BCE. In the Sumerian myth which describes the battle between Inana and Ebiḫ, the mountain is represented as a topographical entity, while also being described with the attributes typically ascribed to a person and to a deity. Its divine status is featured also in the onomastic, god lists, rituals and incantations throughout the centuries. This mountain has been identified with Jebel Hamrin, which is an outlier in South-West Iraq of the western range of the great Zagros mountains.[24]

As an antagonist of the goddess Inana, Ebiḫ is a main character of the Sumerian myth *Inana and Ebiḫ* from the Old Babylonian period.[25] This myth tells of the battle that the goddess Inana initiates against Ebiḫ, which is alternatively described as a topographical entity and as a person with divine attributes. The mountain is firstly referred to as a mountain range, which acts intentionally against the goddess:

> *in-nin$_9$-me-en kur-re te-a-me-en ní-bi na-ma-ra-ak*
> *^{d}inana(-me-en) kur-re te-a-me-en ní-bi na-ma-ra-ak*
> *ḫ[ur-saĝ] Ebiḫ^{ki}-ke$_4$ te-a-me-en ní-bi na-ma-ra-ak*
> *ní-bi-ta na-ma-ra$_7$-da-ab-ak-gin$_7$*

[17] Descola 1996, 87–88.
[18] Descola 1996, 87–88.
[19] Descola 1996, 88; Viveiros de Castro 1998, 310.
[20] Descola 2013, 83.
[21] Descola 2013, 83.
[22] Descola 2013, 85.
[23] In this line, see Porter's arguments and methodological enquiry about the anthropomorphic and non-anthropomorphic divine in ancient Mesopotamia (Porter 2009, 153–194). See also the works of Haberman on how rivers and trees are conceived in contemporary India (Haberman 2007; Haberman 2013). The centuries-old devotion to the goddess Yamuna draws an intriguing picture of the diverse conceptions and theologies concerning this river goddess, while his study of the sacred trees of India highlights the understanding and perception of them as persons.

[24] Black 2002, 50.
[25] See Limet 1971, 11–28; Attinger 1998, 161–195 for the main editions of the myth. See Bottéro – Kramer 1989, 219–229; Attinger 2015, 37–45.

giri$_{17}$-bi ki-šè na-ma(-ra)-ab-te-a-gin$_7$ nundum saḫar-ra na-ma-ni-ib-ùr-ra-gin$_7$ ḫur-saĝ zi šu-ĝu$_{10}$ ga-àm-mi-ib-si ní-ĝu$_{10}$ ga-mi-ib-⌈zu⌋

When I, the mistress, approached the mountain, it didn't show any fear to me, when I, Inana, approached the mountain, it didn't show any fear to me, when I approached the mountain range of Ebiḫ, it didn't show any fear of me.Since it showed me no respect, since it did not approach its nose to the ground for me, since it did not rub (its) lips in the dust for me, I shall fill my hand with the soaring mountain range, and it shall learn fear of me.[26]

In this meeting, Ebiḫ is described as behaving like a person, who shows no respect to the goddess and does not fear her divine status. By not bringing its nose to the ground nor rubbing its lips in the dust, Ebiḫ refuses to act according the code of obedience and submission to the great gods. The understanding of Ebiḫ as a person is remarked by the grammar: the verbal chain denotes the specification of Ebiḫ as an animate being, a trait that is typically ascribed to humans, deities and animals in the Sumerian language. However, an alternation between animate and inanimate specification is notable in both the grammar and the narrative description of Ebiḫ.

Upon the continuation of the narrative, Ebiḫ is described as a topographical entity, featuring a forest and an abundance of watercourses, but it is also referred to as possessing a moral aspect. The mountain is said to be wicked and inaccessible, being part of the Aratta mountain range.[27] Because of its inaccessibility and threatening features, Inana turns to her father Anu, telling him of the mountain's arrogant conduct and her desire to destroy it. Ebiḫ is here once more described both in anthropomorphic terms and in topographical ones: the mountain is characterized by its evil deeds of not putting its nose on the ground and its lips in the dust, but also by its majestic slopes, forest and watercourses.[28]

Anu's reply assumes a position in favor of Ebiḫ, that is referred as a cosmic and divine mountain. Ebiḫ is the pure abode of the gods, whose fearful splendor is said to spread upon the land of Sumer and beyond. The *melammu*, "radiance",[29] of the mountain is perceived as terrible and awe-inspiring, weighing upon all the lands, while reaching up to the heart of heaven with its height. The mountain emerges as a powerful entity, cloaked with a divine aura, that covers all the divine and human realms.[30] Anu continues with Ebiḫ's portrayal focusing on the physical description of the mountain, which is depicted as a luxuriant forest, abundant with trees, fruits and wild animals, in a triumph of joy and exuberance.[31] Its thriving gardens and magnificent trees, which

[26] *Inana and Ebiḫ*, 29–35 (Attinger 1998, 170–171: 29–35; ECTSL 1.3.2: 30–36).

[27] *Inana and Ebiḫ*, 44–47 (Attinger 1998, 170: 44–47; ECTSL 1.3.2: 45–48).

[28] *Inana and Ebiḫ*, 89–106 (Attinger 1998, 170–174: 89-106; ECTSL 1.3.2: 89–107).

[29] The term *melammu* is generally translated as "radiance, supernatural awe-inspiring sheen" (CAD M II, 9–12, s.v. *melammu*) and also as "aura". It is an attribute mainly associated with and possessed by deities, kings and royal objects, but also with temples, and with cosmic and divine entities –such as the Tablet of Destinies, Anzû (the mythical Thunderbird), and the cosmic mountain. This evidence addresses the question about the emic concepts of divinity and the dichotomies of natural/supernatural and animate/inanimate in the Mesopotamian cultures (see Porter 2009, 153–194).

[30] *Inana and Ebiḫ*, 116–120:
(116) ki-gub diĝir-re-e-ne ke$_4$ ní ḫuš im-da-ri-ri
(117) ki-tuš kù ^{d}A-nun-na-ke$_4$-ne su-zi im-du$_8$-du$_8$
(118) ní-bi ḫuš-a kalam-ma mu-un-ri
(119) ḫur-saĝ(-ĝá)(ní) me-lim$_x$-bi ḫuš-a kur-kur-ra (ša-)-mu-ri
(120) sukud-rá-bi an-na šà-bi NIR mi-ni-i[b]-[è]
"The abode of the gods is covered by a fearful splendor, the pure dwelling of the Anuna (deities) is adorned with awe. Its furious splendor is spread over the land (of Sumer), the *melammu* of the mountain is terrible and is spread upon all the lands. With its height, is has formed an arch in the center of heaven" (Attinger 1998, 174–175: 116–120; ECTSL. 1.3.2: 116–120).

[31] *Inana and Ebiḫ*, 121-128 (Attinger 1998, 174–176: 121-128; ETCSL 1.3.2: 121–128).

are called the "crown of heaven",[32] offer shelter and dwelling to lions, wild goats, red deer, and wild bulls. The mountainous forest emerges as a dimension abundant of life, radically different from the urban plain, and displays the features of the cosmic mountain. Anu's response stands for preservation and respect of the established cosmic order, which comprises the fearsomeness and the divinity of the mountain. Thus, Inana cannot enter in Ebiḫ's kingdom, nor oppose its supremacy.[33]

Despite Anu's denial, Inana, who cannot stand her pride to be hurt, prepares for battle against the mountain. The battle scene between Inana and Ebiḫ refers to the mountain with both anthropomorphic and natural features. Inana is said to kill the mountain in the same way a person is murdered: the goddess grasps its neck like alfalfa grass, presses a dagger into its heart, and splits its big mouth like a thunderbolt. The stones, which form Ebiḫ's body, are said to be flesh themselves. Their collapse creates a dreadful noise, while Inana moves on, in her fury cursing the forest, cutting the destinies of the trees short and making them die of thirst, scattering fire all over, until she finally spreads silence in the mountain.[34]

Upon proclaiming her victory over Ebiḫ, Inana addresses the mountain range as a powerful "other-than-human" person, with divine attributes:

> *ḫur-saĝ íl-la-zu-šè sukud$_{(x)}$-rá/da-zu-šè*
> *sa$_6$-ga-zu-šè si$_{12}$-ga-zu-šè*
> *tu$_9$-ba$_{13}$ kù-ge mu$_4$-ra-zu-šè*
> *an-né šu si sá(-a)-zu-šè*
> *giri$_{17}$ ki-šè nu-te-a-zu-šè*
> *nundum saḫar-ra nu-ùr-ra-zu-šè*
> *mu-un-ug$_5$-ge-en ki-šè mu-un-sì-[ge-en(?)]*
>
> *Mountain range, because of your elevation, because of your height, because of your goodness, because of your being green, because of your wearing a pure tuba-garment, because of your extending your hand straight to heaven, because you did not put your nose to the ground, because you did not rub your lip in the dust, I have killed you and thrown you down into the earth.*[35]

[32] *Inana and Ebiḫ*, 122: ĝeš mah-bi TÙN(aga$_x$) an-na, "its majestic tree, crown of heaven" (Attinger 1998, 174: 122; ETCSL 1.3.2: 122).

[33] *Inana and Ebiḫ*, 121–128:
(121) ^{ĝiš}kiri$_6$ nisi-bi gurun im-lá giri$_{17}$-zal i[m-du$_8$-du$_8$]
(122) ĝeš mah-bi TÙN(aga$_x$) an-na ní di u$_6$ di-[dè ba-gub]
(123) Ebiḫ^{ki}-a ĝeš-an-dil$_x$ pa mul-mul-la-ba ug tab-ba mu-un-LU
(124) šeg$_9$ lu-lim-bi ní-ba mu-un-durun
(125) am-bi ú lu-a mu-un-DU
(126) duraḫ-bi ḫa-šu-úr ḫur-saĝ-ĝá-ka e-ne-sù-ud-bi im-me
(127) ní-bi ḫuš-a nu-mu-e-da(-an)-ku$_4$-ku$_4$
(128) ḫur-saĝ-ĝá me-lim$_x$-bi ḫuš-a/àm ki-sikil ^{d}Inana saĝ nu-mu-e-dé-ĝá-ĝá
"In its flourishing gardens fruit hangs and joy spreads, Its magnificent trees, crown of heaven, (…) stand as a wonder to proffer. In Ebiḫ, lions are abundant under the protecting trees with their shining branches. Its lions are abundant companions, its stags stand on abundant grass, its wild goats of the Hašur-mountain are distant in playing(?). Its fearsomeness is terrible: you cannot enter! The *melammu* of the mountain range is terrible – Maiden Inana, you cannot oppose it!" (Attinger 1998, 174–177: 121–128; ECTSL 1.3.2: 121–128).

[34] *Inana and Ebiḫ*, 141-150:
(141) Ebiḫ^{ki}-a/e gú-bi ^{ú}númun(-bur)-gin$_7$ šu ba-an-ši-in-ti
(142) šà-ba/bi gù miri-a ba-ni-in-ra
(143) ka gal kurku-gin$_7$ mu-un-si-il-(l)e
(144) Ebiḫ^{ki}-e na$_4$ su ní-ba-ke$_4$
(145) bar-bi-a dub-dab$_5$ ḫé-em-mi-ib-za
(146) á-ta(-)ri-a-t^{a} muš šà-tùr gal-gal-e uš$_{7/11}$ mu-un-gú-guru$_5$-gú
(147) $^{(ĝeš)}$ter-bi áš bí-in-du$_{11}$ ĝeš-bi nam ba-an-ku$_5$
(148) ^{ĝeš}al-la-nu-um-bi su-ba mi-ni(-in)-ug$_5$
(149) bar-bi-a izi mi-ni(-in)-ri ib(b)i$_x$-bi bí-in-mú
(150) in-nin$_{(9)}$-e kur-re me bí-in-tál
"She grasped the neck of Ebiḫ like alfalfa-grass. She pressed the dagger's blade in its heart. She split its big mouth like a thunder. On the flanks of Ebiḫ the stones, which are themselves flesh, crackled down in a rumbling noise. From its sides, she cut down the poisonous spittle of big horned vipers. She cursed the forest and decreed the fate of its trees. She made die its oaks with thirst, she set fire on the flanks and made grow smoke. The mistress... spread silence over the mountain." (Attinger 1998, 176: 140–150; ECTSL 1.3.2: 141–150).

[35] Inana and Ebiḫ,152-159 (Attinger 1998, 178: 153-159; ECTSL 1.3.2: 153-159).

The divine status of Ebiḫ is here affirmed, together with the reasons for Inana's anger and envy. Ebiḫ's characteristics are elevation, height, goodness, beauty, and it is said to wear a holy garment typical of deities, and to reach heaven with its hand. Together with divinity and beauty, Ebiḫ shows a rebellious and powerful temperament: the mountain did not show any fear or respect to Inana, who could not stand to have such a majestic rival. The myth concludes with the establishment of a palace and a cultic area on Mt. Ebiḫ by Inana. Her triumph over the mountain was probably celebrated in the urban temple, during the rites for Inana, or even during a commemorative festival.[36]

The literary description of Ebiḫ displays an alternation, or rather a coexistence, of natural features and human-like features: Ebiḫ is portrayed as a bearded man with divine status, and as a luxuriant mountain rich in lakes, trees and animals. The portrayal of Ebiḫ as a half-anthropomorphic and half-mountainous entity finds a correspondence in the visual representations of mountain-deities in the iconography throughout the centuries. An eloquent example is offered by a limestone mold fragment attributed to Nāram-Sîn which features one of the earliest depictions of mountain deities and a river deity (figs. 1 and 2).[37] On this mold fragment, the king is portrayed together with the goddess Ištar sitting on a ziggurrat. The ziggurrat is bordered by a female river goddess bearing offerings, while Ištar is holding ropes in her left hand. These ropes lead to the noses of two mountain deities and two human prisoners.

Focusing on the representation of the mountain deities, their lower bodies are portrayed as mountains with the indicative pattern of drill holes, while their upper body is

Fig. 1: Drawing of the scene portayed in the mold fragment (Hansen 2002, 93).

Fig. 2: Detail of the human prisoners, mountain deities and river goddess (Hansen 2002, 95).

anthropomorphic. The divinity of these male figures is shown by their horned crowns.[38] Their bearded heads wear horned crowns, like that of the king Naram-Sîn, a clear indication of their divinity. Moreover, the large chignons at the back of the head are a typical representation of gods and kings in the Akkadian period.[39] Each divine prisoner carries in their hands an offering vessel, which is filled with objects defined as a series of drill holes similar to those used to represent the mountains.[40]

[36] *Inana and Ebiḫ*, 171–175 (Attinger 1998, 178–179: 171–175; ECTSL 1.3.2: 171–175).
[37] Hansen 2002, 91–112; Aruz − Wallenfels 2003, 296–297; Woods 2005, 17–18.
[38] Hansen 2002, 99.
[39] Hansen 2002, 96.
[40] Hansen 2002, 96.

Notable in the Sumerian myth is a tension between a more "ecological" worldview, which tends to behave with a reverential and protective attitude toward the natural entities and to the cosmic order (i.e. An), and one which aims at objectifying and taming the natural world (i.e. Inana). Interestingly, these two worldviews appear both to belong to the same realm, presided over by the great anthropomorphic gods. Moreover, some transfers of genres and changes in religious beliefs and symbolic meanings regarding Ebiḫ are traceable. This mountain is defeated by the anthropomorphic goddess, but it later reappears as a deity worshipped in the temple and called upon in the ritual performances. Indeed, while in the Old Babylonian myth Ebiḫ represents a divine power challenging the urban gods with its beauty, radiance and superiority, in other genres Ebiḫ is addressed as an healing and protecting deity, partaking of the entourage of the main deities of the pantheon.

Ebiḫ's divinity and agency stretches from the 3rd until the 1st millennium, appearing in the onomastic, offering lists, lists of deities and rituals. This mountain occurs as a theophorous element in personal names from late Early Dynastic to Old Babylonian times, especially in Semitic names from the Diyala region, until the Middle Assyrian period.[41] Names such as *Ir'e-Abiḫ* (written *Ir-e-*^{d}En-ti), "Abiḫ-shepherded", *Ur-Abiḫ* (*Ur-*^{d}En-ti), "Hero-of-Abiḫ", *Puzur-Ebiḫ*, "Shelter/Under-the-protection-of-Ebiḫ", and the Middle Assyrian *Ebeḫ-nāṣir*, "Ebiḫ is protector/protects", and *Ebeḫ-nīrāri*, "Ebiḫ is assistant/assists", show Ebiḫ as a god actively involved with worshippers.[42] The theophoric name *Abiḫ-il* (written En-ti *-il*), "Abiḫ-is-god", explicitly states the divine nature of the mountain.[43] This name is attested written on the back of an Early Dynastic statuette from Mari, which represents a man called *Abiḫ-il* and was found in the temple of Ištar (fig. 3).[44]

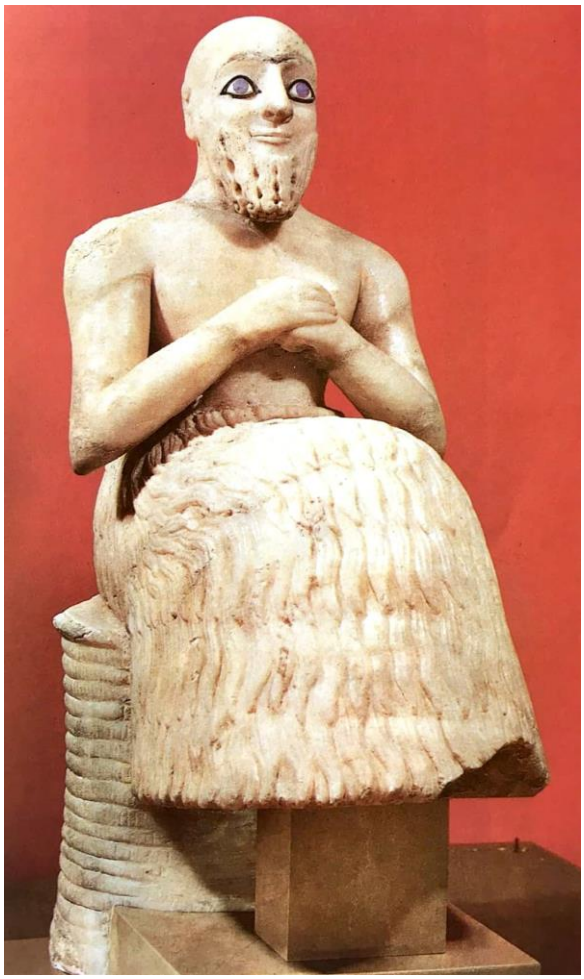

Fig. 3: Statue of Abiḫ-il from Mari, Early Dynastic (Orthmann 1985, 166, Abb. III).

Ebiḫ is recorded in an Old Babylonian god list from Nippur,[45] but it is in the Neo-Assyrian rituals that Ebiḫ re-emerges as a god with full divine status, invoked among the great deities of the Assyrian pantheon, and as a recipient of offerings.[46] In the *Tākultu*[47] for Sennacherib in

[41] Lambert 1983, 84.
[42] Roberts 1972, 12; Lambert 1983, 84; Porter 2009, 169.
[43] Porter 2009, 169.
[44] Orthmann 1985, 166; Hrouda 1991, 66.
[45] Lambert 1983, 85.
[46] Menzel 1981; Lambert 1983, 84–85; Porter 2009, 169; Parpola 2017.
[47] The term Tākultu (literally "meal") refers to the major Neo-Assyrian festival. This festival, "stemming from an older tradition of communal food consumption of the king with his officials and soldiers, … gained an increasing popularity until it became one of the most important elements of State propaganda due to its universalistic and celebratory features that echoed the royal ideology" (Ermidoro in the *Introduction* of Parpola 2017, xxvi).

Nineveh, Ebiḫ is listed three times: first, with Mt. Dibar, and the rivers Tigris and Euphrates; it is recorded twice with the determinative for deity (^{d}*E-bi-iḫ*) while standing with the gods of the House of Anu and of those of the House of Sîn; while the third attestation refers to Ebiḫ in its topographical characterization (k u r –*E-bi-iḫ*), but while including it in a list of deities.[48] In the *Tākultu*[49] for Assurbanipal, the god Ebiḫ occurs four times, where he is invoked together with the great gods of the Assyrian pantheon and he is the recipient of offerings in the various shrines of Assur. Ebiḫ stands among the great gods of the House of Anu and Adad of the Inner City together with the Ulaya river, in the House of Sîn and Šamaš, and among the gods whose name is to be invoked in the evening of Kurbail.[50] The divine Ebiḫ is recorded, once among the nine gods of the House of Anu and once more among the five gods of the House of Sîn, in a text which displays the cultic topography of Assur.[51] In the royal coronation ritual, two stones are placed to represent this deity, while all the other gods are embodied by one stone each.[52] Finally, Ebiḫ, without the divine characterization, is invoked in the *Tākultu*[53] ritual for Aššur-etel-ilāni together with the Tigris and the Upper and Lower Zab, all the villages and the divine boundaries.[54] All this evidence speaks to the fact that this mountain was considered a deity of some importance within the Neo-Assyrian pantheon.[55]

Mt. Ebiḫ occurs also in the 1st-millennium incantations as an active agent in ritual performance. Ebiḫ is invoked in the *Lipšur Litanies*, where it is called "the bolt of the country" (*sikur māti*).[56] This epithet reminds us of the scene in the *Lugale* when Ninurta piled up the corpses of dead stone-warriors, creating the Zagros mountains.[57] This myth reports that the pile of rocky bodies arose like a great wall, forming a barrier around the land of Sumer and Babylonia.[58] Furthermore, Ebiḫ is called upon, together with the temple E'ulmaš, in an incantation that aims at dispelling the malevolent demoness Lamaštu.[59] In this incantation Ebiḫ is not characterized by the determinative for deity, but by that of mountain (kur), and its epithet is "strong mountain" (*šadû dannu*), referring to it as topographical entity. However, in this passage the two topographical entities, the mountain and the temple, are considered to be helpless with regard to the wicked actions of Lamaštu, since they are said to have been unable to remove her defiling hands from the chosen victim. Mountain and temple are seen as active and powerful entities, which would normally have been able to act on behalf of the patient against the demonic forces.

This evidence from religious literature offers a glimpse into the animate and relational cos-

[48] SAA XX, 38, II: 37, [^{d}*e-b*]*i-iḫ*; SAA XX 38, ii: 53, ^{d}*e-bi-iḫ* ; SAA XX 38, iv 3': KUR.*e-*[*bi*]-[*iḫ*] (Parpola 2017, 105–107).

[49] Parpola 2017.

[50] SAA XX, 40, II 15: ^{d}*e-be-eḫ*; SAA XX, 40, II 28: ^{d}EN.TI; SAA XX, 40, rev. I 4, ^{d}*e-be-eḫ*; SAA XX, 40, rev. IV 34', ^{d}*e-bi-iḫ* (Parpola 2017, 112 ff.) See also duplicate SAA XX, 41, ii 1 ^{d}[*e-be-eḫ*] (Parpola 2017, 120); and a fragment of a *Tākultu* text SAA 20, 46, rev. I 5', KUR.*e-b*[*i-iḫ*] (Parpola 2017, 126).

[51] SAA XX, 49: 57 and 64, ^{d}*e-be-eḫ* (Parpola 2017, 133–134).

[52] SAA XX, 7: rev. iii 26: 2 ^{d}*e-be-eḫ* (Parpola 2017, 18).

[53] Parpola 2017.

[54] SAA XX, 42, rev. III 3', KUR.*e-b*[*i-iḫ*] (Parpola 123).

[55] Porter argues that "these references establish that Ebiḫ was viewed as a living and active divine entity. They do not refer however to the physical form in which Ebiḫ was represented in temples or how he (or it) was envisioned, although they seem to imply a non-anthropomorphic form by giving the deity the name of the well-known mountain range" (Porter 2009, 169).

[56] *Lipšur Litanies*, 37 (Reiner 1956, 134–135).

[57] Black 2002, 51.

[58] See *Lugal.e*, 349-351 (ECTSL 1.6.2: 349–351).

[59] *Lamaštu* II, 1-3: ÉN *anamdi šipta lazzu milikki ul ušši qātēki Ebiḫ šadû dannu E'ulmaš qašdu šubat ilī rabûti*, "Incantation: 'I am casting a spell (against) your persistent counsel: Ebih, the strong mountain, was unable to remove your hands, (nor) holy E'ulmaš, the residence of the great gods'" (Farber 2014, 164–165).

mos of ancient Mesopotamians. Ebiḫ should be thus understood as an "other-than-human" person, partaking of divinity within the ancient Mesopotamian polytheism. In such a relational cosmos, the notions of natural and supernatural, and of immanent and transcendent, dissolve, leaving the ancient written sources to speak for different ontologies and epistemologies, where the concept of personhood plays a key role in shedding new light upon the emic notions of divinity and nature.[60]

Conclusions

Through the lens of the anthropological theory pertinent to the current debate over animism, nature and the human-environmental relationships, some insights into various aspects of Mesopotamian conceptions and practices about their natural surroundings emerge. In ancient Mesopotamian literature and religion, the notions of personhood and relationality are fully expressed and call into question the ways in which the ancient Mesopotamians engaged with and conceptualized their divine cosmos. Ebiḫ emerges as a powerful person and deity, who was called upon on behalf of humans for its protecting and helping attributes, as much as for its mighty strength. Ebiḫ is not only considered as a bearded man, tall and beautiful, but is worshipped due to its goodness, purity, divinity and rebellious spirit. This mountain is thus to be considered not only as cosmic topographical entity or as the mere abode of the gods, but also as an "other-than-human" person and god. The personhood ascribed to Ebiḫ derives not only from its physical representation, but is due particularly to its agency within the lively and relational cosmos of the ancient Mesopotamians.

[60] Descola 2013a, 82; Rochberg 2016, 44; Harvey 2013b, passim.

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