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DEMONIC HYBRIDITY AND LIMINALITY: PAZUZU AND LAMAŠTU

Abstract:

In this text an overview is offered of some of the most significant categories of the demonic from the Mesopotamian beliefs – of hybridity and liminality – through some examples of the conceptions of the demons Pazuzu and Lamaštu. Firstly, the logical-dialectical relations of the sphere of the demonic as external and foreign, opposed to the homely, familiar and close sphere are sketched; as well as the relation of the demonic as terrifying and potentially menacing, as opposed to the ordered civilized sphere with norms of conduct. Then, several representations of the concepts of Pazuzu as an ambivalent demon are listed – he is an evil fighting against evil, his nemesis, Lamaštu, and precisely because of the need for him to be efficient in his protective function, he has to be a horrifying, dangerous demon. This is shown through the descriptions of the available incantations and preserved rituals. The terrifying threat of Lamaštu against the most precious part of the communities – the new generations – through her snatching and destroying of the newborns, is shown through the representations of her hybridity and monstrosity, and mainly through the incantations for her removal and (permanent) expulsion.

Keywords: demon, hybridity, liminality, Pazuzu, Lamaštu

Categories of hybridity and liminality

The demonic of the ancient Eastern and ancient Egyptian beliefs is ontologically and socially separate from the profane ontological zones; it is external, liminal, non-belonging, and thus (potentially) threatening. The demons are not purely and undoubtedly divine, although they are often believed to (in) directly originate from, or have a connection with, the divine, like in those instances where they execute divine orders.¹ Demons often have their own intentionality, and they perform the harmful and evil activities on their own accord. The demonic is liminal, foreign, it originates from, or belongs to the zones that border chaos; it disrupts the cosmic order. The liminality of demons can be imagined in an ontological-geographical and in a social framework: they are mediatory creatures between the divine sphere, the human sphere, and the underworld; they live outside of the known and close, homely human territory, and they do not act like civilized people do. Therefore, in the Mesopotamian and Ancient Egyptian beliefs, demons hail from the mountains, deserts, steppes, swamps, pit caves, gorges, and the places that are unknown and foreign. This is understandable, given that the potentially destructive is equated to the threatening, the foreign (expressed as diseases, ravaging natural phenomena, or enemy attacks). The demonic is foreign and menacing, which is whence its strong association with the hostile comes from. The foreigners, enemies, and demons, as Heeßel formulates, share a habitat (2017, 21).

Demons are physically hybrid, in their bodies and appearances combining elements of different animals, while some of them keeping predominantly anthropomorphic characteristics. It can be claimed that the role of the demon (which can be harmful, or, it must not be overlooked, useful), is being executed within the borders of a culture, while the roots of the demon can be imagined as external to that culture. The demonic is part of a complex systems of borders and limitations within situations determined by culture. As Smith points out, the breach of the borders in certain situations might lead to creation, while in other situations, to chaos (Smith 1978, 429-430). In this sense, there is an ambiguity in the determination of the chaos and the cosmos: one community might, at a certain time, consider the law and order as a protective wall against the demonic, and in another occasion, as a repressive imposition of the demonic.

¹ It was believed that the *udug*, or *utukku* demons originate from the embryonic cosmos, the Mesopotamian “noch nicht” state. The *utukku* demons were considered to be produced by the Heavens and the Earth, through a creative pair of principles, before they were separated by *Enlil*. Or, in other conceptions, the demons were regarded as relatives of *Enki* and *Ninki*, a product of the Sacred Mountain, the birthplace of *Enlil*, or of *Apsu*, the primordial *topos* beneath the ends of the Earth. This creation of the demons by the original cosmological pairs, which differs from the successions in which the gods were begotten, Verderame sees as the reason for their lack of defining characteristics, as well as their monstrosity and liminality. For this supposition, Verderame 2013; see the succinct conclusions, 126.

Smith illustrates this complexity, or polysemy, with the demons' most prevalent form – that of hybrids or monsters, protean figures, or creatures with superfluous or exaggerated body parts. Smith calls the attention to one “taxic range”: the demonic often characterizes by extremes (as hard and cold, or squishy and rotten, overheated). In the line of the exaggerated definition or insufficient determinedness of the demonic, one of Smith's points is that it is not about an attempt to interpret substantive categories, but rather situational or relational categories. It is about moving borders that shift depending on the map that is being used, the perspective that is applied.² Relying on the suggestions made by Smith, Johnston has some additional observations on the reflection and strengthening of the structures through which a culture organizes its physical and moral worlds, through the characteristics of the demonic (Johnston 1999, 171-172). Not only is the demon or the demonic outside of a given category, but it is in between two categories which are otherwise mutually exclusive.³ This “displacement” of the demonic, therefore, is expressed as liminality. The hybrid nature of demons also reflects this. In flaunting the established categories, the association between the liminality and the demonic actually helps in preserving the categories to which the demonic is opposed, determining that anything that belongs in between them is dangerous and to be avoided. Another way in which the demonic can flaunt these categories, Johnston adds, is through its role of a concave mirror of the human world, “... in which perfect inversion of behavioural or physical desiderata are held up to view” – the demonic spites, and with that, implicitly upholds the established categories (Johnston 1999, 172).⁴

The ambivalent Pazuzu

In the Mesopotamian beliefs, the demons are mostly hybrid, and the hybrid creatures are dominantly demonic, but one must also have in mind the category of mixed creatures or in-between-creatures (from the German “Misch/en/wesen” and “Zwisch/en/wesen”). They have a hybrid physical form, and fulfil mediating functions between higher and lower ontological spheres. The

² The demons serve as markers for the classification of that which is strong and weak, or controlled and exaggerated, in a given community, at a given point in time. In formal terms, this could be formulated as a shift from a logic of identity to a logic of relations; in biological terms, from a monothetic classification to a classification by groups (Smith 1978, 430).

³ The demonic simultaneously is and is not in an exclusive disjunction: it is not placed in any of the categories connected with the function, but is not in the function itself, either, it is “displaced” from it. A certain auto-referentiality appears: the liminality of the demonic contains and limits itself.

⁴In this paradigm, according to her, the “normal” demonic behavior equals an abnormal human behavior. Thus, the demons who, by definition, relish in hurting or damaging humans (they twist the rules of civilized human behavior), are often imagined in physical forms that are liminal, because they are hybrid (op. cit., 173).

designation of them being mixed or “between” creatures is value neutral; additionally, one can talk of different groups - of mixed and in-between-creatures – which do not always overlap. Two groups are opposed to the evil demons – these are hybrid spirits, helpers, the Sages and the Monsters, who have important roles in the Mesopotamian apotropaic magic (Wiggermann 2011, 302; Wiggermann 1994, 222-246). The monsters are textually defined as a group in the rituals against an imposing evil, in the descriptions of artworks in the temples and the palaces, and especially in *Enuma eliš*, where they constitute the army of the primordial sea, Tiamat. The hybridity of the Monsters of *Enuma eliš* is due to the concept about their origin in the primordial, pretemporal, pre-“normal” existence, in the embryonic (undifferentiated) cosmos, similarly to the demons. The Monsters, unlike the Mesopotamian demons,⁵ and despite their involvement in the initial aggression, were not believed to bring upon suffering or disease.

A group that can be formally and functionally associated with the Monsters (Wiggermann 2011, 305) is that of the Four Winds. They are supernatural hybrids, who, although sometimes wear horned crowns (a typical sign of divinity), do not feature in the lists of gods. The Four Winds are unruly, but, like the Monsters, are not agents of disease and contagion, and can act like protective spirits in divine employment. Pazuzu, the wind demon, is simultaneously a demon and an apotropaic hybrid. As the king of the wind demons (and a wind demon himself), Pazuzu’s task is to placate his unruly subjects and order them to go back to where they came from (Wiggermann 2007, 125). Pazuzu was depicted as a creature with four wings, with a partial anthropomorphism, and a striking monstrosity (and, according to this, a part of the Misch/en/wesen category). Through his physical form and his role, Pazuzu, as an apotropaic demon, was supposed to oppose Lamaštu with appropriate power (Ibid.; Wiggermann 2003-2005, 372). The main opponents of Pazuzu are the evil wind demons (lilû), over whom he exerts power, as their king; Lamaštu, who is more powerful than the faceless wind demons, is his nemesis.⁶

Wiggermann determines that the nature of Pazuzu is double, with components that are only superficially integrated (Wiggermann 2003-2005, 372). This is noticeable in the incantations: as a home “spirit” Pazuzu is a constant

⁵ Sonik suggests taxonomy of differentiation between the spheres of action and actionality in demons and monsters (Sonik 2013, 113-114). She tries to simplify the explanation of the important, but implicit characteristics that unite the individual *Zwischenwesen* with others who are “like” them, and separate them from other categories of interstitial (or liminal) creatures, like the ghosts, witches and Sages. The *Zwischenwesen* who might be considered as Monsters, and those who might be classified as demons (or daimons) share some mutual characteristics: anomalies in their physical bodies, geographical exile, and social alienation in one way or another (Sonik 2013, 104, 107, 108, 113).

⁶ While in the textual sources his conflict with Lamaštu is not directly described, various amulets depict them as an opposing pair. Pazuzu is evil and threatening, but works as a protector against Lamaštu’s evil intentions.

guest in the houses of people, and on the other hand, as a wind demon, he is an untamed loner who wanders around the mountains and deserts. Or rather, by his origin, Pazuzu is a wind demon, who has been adapted for a home use through mythological metaphors (Wiggermann 2007, 126). As a home spirit he continues the apotropaic use of Humbaba/Huwawa,⁷ who got lost in the Bronze Age. The powers of Pazuzu, like those of Humbaba, are located in his head, in the misshapen and unhuman ugliness which deters the unwelcome visitors (Wiggermann 2007, 125).⁸

Pazuzu is represented on amulets which, at the top, contain his head⁹ which needs to face the room of the ill or frail person. In the narrative scene below, a full-bodied Pazuzu is shown, chasing Lamaštu away to whence she came. The complementarity of Pazuzu's apotropaic function (homely, static, familiar) and his exorcistic function (external, mobile, wandering, active) is shown in the best possible way in his relation with Lamaštu. So that he can function as an opponent to a menacing evil demon, through his iconography Pazuzu is illustrated¹⁰ as a hybrid and as strikingly aggressive, with hypertrophy of certain body parts, and general wickedness: with horns, bird talons and huge wings, and a body covered in scales; as ithyphallic and/or with a tale like a

⁷ The iconographic depiction of the head, like the one of Humbaba's, paired with the body of the West wind, does not have a predecessor in the Bronze Age, remarks Wiggermann (2003-2005, 373).

An overview of Humbaba's head, and especially the problem of the formal parallels with the cultural-religious sources containing representations of the head, in images and texts, as well as the history of the interpretations of the demonic Humbaba/Huwawa as an apotropaic element, in Graff 2012, 117-129.

⁸ Wiggermann remarks that originally, Lamaštu was a monstrous baby-snatcher, an independent figure without a special connection to other demons, and without a designated demonic opponent. In the late Bronze Age, Lamaštu became a member of the class of wind demons, which shifted the structures of power in the demonic world. The origin of Pazuzu should be located in this new convergence of evils: a new position had opened up, one for an equally powerful opposing demon, king of all the wind demons, a monster menacing enough to be able to chase away Lamaštu and her minions out of the environment meant for people, and back to the underworld. This creature needed to have combined in itself both the features of familiar apotropaion, similar to Huwawa, and those of a restless passerger to and from the liminal zones (Wiggermann 2007, 135).

⁹ From the fact that clay heads of Pazuzu were mass produced for a wide-spread consumption, it can be concluded that, according to the belief, Pazuzu's power was identified mostly with the head and the face. It is the most prominent essential feature of this demon. This could mean that the head was taken pars pro toto for the entire demon (Heeßel 2011, 358; Heeßel 2017, 26).

¹⁰ The earliest visual evidence is from the royal tombs in Nimrud at the end of the eight century BCE, but, as Heeßel formulates, Pazuzu became a favorite apotropaic figure from that time onwards (Heeßel 2017, 22).

scorpion; with a face of a dog, the jaws and teeth of a hound and bulging eyes, as well as similar varying combinations of parts.¹¹

Heeßel remarks that Pazuzu is the first demon in Mesopotamia, and probably in the entire Ancient East, whose face consists of a combination of different human and animal features (Heeßel 2011, 364). The iconography of other demons shows no diversity; sometimes, some hybrid elements are added to the head, so the demon would have donkey's ears, or a lion's mane in some representations. Heeßel supposes that this is the reason why Pazuzu remained popular until modern times – he incarnates all the elements of our own outlook on demonic creatures (Ibid.).

The apotropaic functions of Pazuzu are not underlined in a significantly great number of ritual texts, literary, and documentary sources. Wiggermann cites an almost completely preserved ritual text from Nineveh, known as NH 60, which, through Akkadian and bilingual incantations, offers a list of the evils against which the fight is supposed to be lead, as well as instructions on how Pazuzu is supposed to be represented, so that he can be as effective as possible. There are three extant short rituals in which incantations from the Nineveh rituals are repeated, with directions on how to fashion Pazuzu's head out of clay. In addition, there is a partial ritual from Uruk in which the Nineveh incantations are also featured in the context of a ritual against witchcraft. In a collection of ritual instructions from Uruk it is recommended that a bronze representation of Pazuzu be worn, in order to protect the pregnant woman from a miscarriage caused by the evil sorcery of Lamaštu (Wiggermann 2003-2005, 373-374).¹²

In a preserved ritual from Nineveh (NH 57), Pazuzu introduces himself to his hosts as the king of the evil winds, after which he reports on what has happened when he travelled the mountains - that he climbed an imposing mountain, which shook. Two of the incantations from the ritual texts ("standard A" and "standard B" incantation), were regularly inscribed into different kinds

¹¹ On the mixture of theriomorphic and anthropomorphic elements of the face and head of Pazuzu, Heeßel 2002, 9-22; Heeßel 2011, 357-360.

¹² About the editions from which he summarizes on these rituals, see 381. Although it had usually been considered that Lamaštu (directly) targets the mother of the newborn, or rather, that she is responsible for the deadly puerperal fever - a suggestion originating in D. O. Edzard's research, repeatedly perpetuated throughout the Assyriological literature - numerous researchers do not associate Lamaštu with any particular disease (for the discussion on the development of the conceptions on the matter, along with the references, see Farber 2007, 139, 141, ff). Farber researches the idea according to which Lamaštu does not threaten the life and health of the expecting mothers, but only of the newborns (Farber 2007, 137-145). Lamaštu is focused solely on her prey – which is the newborns, while the mothers and the communities are collateral victims of her evil actions (by depriving the community of its new generations, and even the very memory of them, Farber 2007, 141). Besides, there is evidence that Lamaštu had never been held accountable for the stillborn children, as she is interested in the babies only after they have been born (Ibid.).

of Pazuzu representations, and they excellently illustrate his aggressiveness and liminality.¹³ In these formulations it is introduced how Pazuzu, when he wandered in the mountains, encountered the evil winds who were headed west, and one by one he incapacitated them, by breaking their wings. The decisive victory in the mountains serves as a warning for any evil enemy who would evade his wrath and escape away.¹⁴

The destructive power of Pazuzu causes the soil and trees to parch, the mountains to freeze, and executes vicious attacks on young men and women (spell 2-4, Foster 1996, 847).¹⁵ Pazuzu has the power to rage and crumble mountains, to parch the marshland, to wither the reeds, and to aggressively and destructively act towards all the elements of the environment. His late arrival in the Mesopotamian pandemonium, along with these descriptions of a demonic power that appears in the mountains and descends to rage in the Mesopotamian (civilized) plains, for Heeßel serve as a confirmation that Pazuzu is so obviously a foreign (demonic) power, that he does not need to be labelled as a foreigner (Heeßel 2017, 29). Pazuzu threatens the potential danger with the words: "Do not enter the house I enter, do not come near the house I come near, do not approach the house I approach" (11-14, Foster 1996, 847; Heeßel 2011, 365). In another variant, he identifies himself as the one who drives away evil and expels fate, which means that he wards off any penetrating evil, and calls on Marduk to remove any evil sorcery (Wiggermann, 2003-2005, 374).

In the incantations Pazuzu opposes the enemies represented as a destructive storm, or by vague medico-magical terms which denote illness (or are used as appellations for some kinds of demons). In the instances where the evil is catalogued with a list of harmful doers, the therapeutic participation of Pazuzu in the ritual is described in appropriately precise formulations

¹³ See the (re)construction in Borger 1987, 15–32; see Heeßel 2002 23 ff, for a catalogue and a discussion on all the figurative and textual representations of Pazuzu. On certain six amulets with Pazuzu's head, containing the Standard B incantation, which allows for a fresh insight into the characteristics and powers that were attributed to it, see Niederreiter 2017, 109-132.

¹⁴ Pazuzu addresses a specific "strong wind" that had previously climbed the aforementioned mountain, who was a worthy opponent to all the winds, but who managed to escape their fate. Pazuzu addresses the ones present, testifying on the devious acts of the strong wind, in order to warn the other protective spirits and to obtain the protection of Marduk. Pazuzu talks to the strong wind, and with the help of various deities, chases him away, saying that he will not be able to come near, and will not be able to enter. In a variant of the incantations (known as an A/B combination), Pazuzu does not address the strong wind directly, but continues to talk about him; he identifies himself as the one who banishes all evil and expels fate, and declares that no illness will approach the home he enters (for the variants of the incantations, see the summary in Wiggermann 2003-2005, 374).

¹⁵ In Pazuzu's powers and features, like in the ones of Lamaštu, the extremes mentioned in the first part of these text are evident.

(Wiggermann, 2003-2005, 376).¹⁶ In the incantations there are no (nor is there a need for) descriptions of the physical appearance of Pazuzu – there is no mention of his hybridity and frightening physical features, evident in the visual representations, but rather descriptions of his actions, which is perfectly understandable.

The terrifying Lamaštu

The frightening iconography of Lamaštu, the personification of evil and aggressiveness, is similar to that of Pazuzu (Farber 2014, 3).¹⁷ In the material findings, Lamaštu is represented with the face of a lion; a naked body with spotted fur; donkey's ears and teeth; bird's talons with long sharp nails; with or without wings; sometimes with a tail. In the representations of Lamaštu there are combinations of anthropomorphic, avian and sometimes lupine characteristics, at first in a vague and under defined way, and in the first millennium iconography, with standardized images. Lamaštu's hybridity is a significant part of her monstrosity. The similarity to scary animals, Richey finds, not only underlines the fact that the demon poses a threat, but that it should be connected to the inhuman, the bestial, that which is outside of the society. This exclusion from the civilized, ordered community is in respect to both species and space (Richey 2021, 148). Such a (dis)placement clearly illustrates the hybridity and liminality of Lamaštu.

She is often represented clutching snakes in her claws; breastfeeding (often a puppy and a piglet) plays a part in her representations.¹⁸ After Lamaštu meticulously chooses a victim to stalk, if it is a new born, she will pretend to be either a wet nurse or a midwife, in order to snatch, poison, or strangle the baby. The idea is also that her breasts serve as a weapon (Wiggermann 2000,

¹⁶ In a collection of ritual instructions from Uruk, known as 161H, or Thureau-Dangin 1921, although there is no mention of women and babies as specific victims of the evil against which Pazuzu is fighting, and, granted, males are not exempt from the danger as potential victims, it seems that the evil is directed exactly against women and babies (NH 79, 84). Lamaštu is a frustrated "mother", a menace mainly to the (pregnant) women and their (unborn) children, but also to men, NH 59, 97 (Thureau-Dangin 1921, 161 ff, apud Wiggermann 2000, 223, 231).

¹⁷ In the following text, the references from the incantations are from this edition, in the format "(I-III, number of incantations, line/s)".

¹⁸ Lamaštu's relation to animals is specific. She is regularly depicted on amulets with two four-legged creatures from both sides, a puppy and a piglet (see also Lam. III, 6), shown standing beside her, or leaping towards her bosom, or being suckled by her (Wiggermann 2010, 407ff). Lamaštu has close bonds with domestic and wild animals, both as her prey, and as her cohabitants and travel companions through the steppes and the mountains, her home territory (Wiggermann 2010, 408). On the use of the animals and breast-feeding in Mesopotamian magic, and the use of piglets and puppies as substitutes for suckling babies through the ethnography, see op. cit., 410-412.

230). Lamaštu slithers like a snake through the door-cracks and the windows in search for pray. She enters and exits the houses as she pleases, demanding that people bring her their sons, as she wants to suckle them; for their daughters she wants to be a nanny; in the mouths of the newborns, she wishes to place her breast (or formulations similar to this one, I, 5, 151-122; 8, 90-91; II, 140-141; RA (Thureau-Dangin) 18, 163 rev. 13–29, 10-11).

She is associated with scorching heat, but also with the opposite: fever, chills, ice; it is believed that she destroys the fruits and branches of the trees; spoils the riverbeds and the river banks. In her hands she holds colds, fevers, and chills; her body – again, seemingly contrary to this – is covered with fire that burns and scorches. She spits poison everywhere, and quite suddenly. Her poison is snakelike, or like from a scorpion (I, 5, 123-127). When she crosses a river, she makes its waters murky; by leaning against a wall, she smears it with mud;¹⁹ when she seizes an old man, she is called (they call her) “the Annihilator”; when she seizes a young man, she is called “the Scorcher”; when she seizes a young woman, she is called “Lamaštu” (I, 4, 62-69).²⁰ It is recalled how Lamaštu (in the text a direct speech form is used, “Lamaštu, you”) came here and attacked the face (of the patient), seized his joints and destroyed his limbs; she eats the muscles and twists the sinews, makes the faces go green, distorts the features, causes depression, and burns the bodies like fire (I, 4, 71-75).

In Mesopotamian medical magic, it was believed that there are different actions perpetrated by different demons, spirits and other nefarious agents, and the main task of the healer was to look for appropriate clues in order to determine the diagnosis, and with that, the course of treatment along with the prognostic factors, listed in the *Diagnostic Handbook*, the standard book on etiology and prognosis, in which there is an allotted table dedicated to babies and children. The influence of Lamaštu (or just “Lamaštu”) is a diagnosis based on the physical inconveniences of the patient, and the symptoms are typical for diseases like typhoid fever, for example. The signs that point to Lamaštu as the evil agent here include fever, dehydration and breathing problems, inflammation, jaundice or a maculopapular rash. Determining the exact diagnosis is problematic. It was mentioned before that some researchers do not think that Lamaštu directly threatens the mothers/women in labour, as well as that many researchers do not link Lamaštu do a specific diagnosis. In this respect Farber is hesitant in considering Lamaštu a fever demon, seen as the fevers (or heat flashes or chills), the physical epiphenomenon, can be interpreted

¹⁹ Cf. By crossing a river, she makes its water murky. / By travelling a road, she makes it impassable. / By leaning against a wall, she smears (it) with mud. / By leaning against a tamarisk, she scatters its twigs. / By leaning against a date palm, she strips off its fresh dates. / By leaning against an oak and a mountain terebinth, she causes shriveling (I, 5, 181-186).

²⁰ The translation of these parts from Lam. in Macedonian closely follows the translation in Тодоровска 2022.

as a result of the presence of Lamaštu attacking the subject (the patient), and not as Lamaštu who brings (causes) fever etc. The fever and raised temperature could not be monitored like they are now, which makes these symptoms rather non-descript, and the diagnosed feelings of “heat” and “coldness” could be subjective descriptions of an ailment that might have different causes (Farber 2007, 142). Lamaštu is a primary demon, and not a secondary personification of a disease, Farber concludes: nor her name, nor the described characteristics point to any particular disease as her ultimate *raison d’être* (Farber 2007, 145).

She is cruel, mean, rapacious, violent, destructive; aggressive is the daughter of Anu (II, 8, 154–155). It was believed that Lamaštu came from the marshes (a typical liminal zone) –fierce, violent, very strong, overbearing with divine power, terrifying (I, 5, 104-105). She hangs around in the dark corners and sits around on the thresholds, subversively and wickedly; she is not straightforward, but rather a she-devil (I, 5, 108-110). In this incantation the genesis of her as the daughter of Anu is mentioned, a demon on the earth: due to her inappropriate actions, Anu and Antu (her mother and father), made her come down from the heavens; she is equipped with wings (I, 5, 111-114).²¹ Lamaštu is compared to a power that shrivels, a female utukku-demon. She is evil, although of a divine origin, a daughter of Anu. Due to her nefarious ideas, and her chaotic spirits, her father, Anu, evicted her out of the sky and threw her out to the earth.²²

Pazuzu and Lamaštu, as it was mentioned before, are associated with the (demonic) crossing of borders of the ordered world, being liminal creatures, and are often conceived and represented as foreigners. But, as Heeßel points out, the case of Lamaštu simultaneously offers an example of demon representation as if they are aboriginal powers of Mesopotamia. In the frequent determinations of Lamaštu as a “daughter of Anu”, she clearly has a divine origin, but has been chased away from the heavens, so that she would steal and eat babies on the earth (Heeßel 2017, 27-28). She is an integral, albeit dark part of the Mesopotamian pantheon,²³ although she is called “a foreigner” (sometimes with more precise names, showing the land of presumed origin, Heeßel 2017, 28).

²¹ Cf. Anum begot her, Ea raised her, Enlil fitted her with a dog’s face; she hardly has any hands, but has long fingers and claws, “OB2”: An OB Lamaštu Incantation on a Single Tablet, 1-5; the edition by Farber 2014 is used also for these instances of texts outside of the Lam. I-III.

²² Lamaštu came down from Heaven, wearing her uprū-headgear, with her crown on her head. She keeps slithering in by the windows, keeps leaning over the walls of the house. She moves about between the oxen, roars all the time between the donkeys, runs around between the oxen, jumps up and down between the donkeys, shouting “Bring me your sons: I want to suckle (them), in the mouth of your daughters I want to place my breast!” (“SKS”: A Lamaštu Incantation To Pacify Crying Babies, 1-10).

²³ The use of “pantheon” is perfectly correct in this instance, unlike when applied to other demons, where “pandemonium” would be a more suitable term.

In the incantations against evil demons the protective deities are called in to assist the healer (exorcist), but it is also possible to directly negotiate and trade with demons (through pleas and promises of rewards), because they have their own intentionality. These principles of bribery are applied in the communication with Lamaštu, to whom, for example, various gifts, such as cosmetics, shoes, vessels etc. were offered in the exchange that she leaves. Lamaštu, it is mentioned, likes to eat meat that is not for eating, and break bones that are not for gnawing (I, 5, 187-188). In this incantation Lamaštu is reprimanded that the meat is not for devouring, the bones are not for gnawing, and Anu and Antu are called to strike her down, so that she stops harming people. The exorcist is called (or help of the divine mediator, or facilitator, Asalluhi), to give Lamaštu gifts as a bribe: a comb, a fibula, a distaff, a rug and a pin, so that she collects her animals and take off for the wilderness. The wish is to make her permanently distance herself, thanks to some appropriately tempting gifts: everlasting shoes, waterskin to quench her thirst, some groats and some malt and brew-mix for beverages, etc (I, 5, 191-210).²⁴

It is said of Lamaštu that she has her hair hanging loose in tangles, her forehead is as strong as rock (II, 8, 84-86). She is monstrous, the daughter of Anu, and causes death and destruction (in babies).²⁵ Her paws are like a snare net, her bosom spells death. Cruel, raging, wicked, rapacious, violent, destructive; she places her hands on the wombs of the women during labour, she snatches the babies from the hold of their nannies; she suckles the babies, sings to them, covers them with kisses (II, 12, 152-158). It is similarly formulated in the description of Lamaštu as fierce, violent, of divine power, terrifying. Her feet are like the feet of an Anzû bird, her hands spell decay; her face is that of a powerful lion. She appeared from the marshes, with her matted hair hanging loose; with no underwear. She walks in the dung-filled tracks of the cattle, follows the tracks of sheep; her hands immersed in flesh and blood. She appears by the window, slithers under the door-pivots; enters and exits the house as she pleases, demanding that people bring her their sons and daughters to suckle them (RA, inc. Thureau-Dangin, 18, 163, rev. 13-19, 1-12).

²⁴ Cf. the formulation with the admonitions from her father, in which he tells her that instead of acting like a wet nurse, she should have learned human behavior; instead of plunging her hands into flesh and blood, and running towards to homes of men, she should accept the gifts that are being offered: from the merchant – a pouch and what is needed for the journey, from the blacksmith – rings suitable for her hands and feet; from the jeweler – eardrops befitting her ears; from the gem-cutter – carnelian befitting her neck; from the woodworker - a comb, a distaff, and a needle for her sewing (RA, inc. Thureau-Dangin, 18, 163, rev. 13-19, 14-21).

On the calming down spell by which Lamaštu should be befuddled and driven away, II, 6, 1-11; see also II, 6, 14-21. On the complicated ritual for expelling Lamaštu, the objects needed and their exact positioning within the home, on the speech acts and the text that should be included on a purposefully placed table, see III, 1-56.

²⁵ Lamaštu forbids even to bury them properly (I, 5, 155-160).

Lamaštu is tenacious: night after night, dawn after dawn, she regularly returns to the gates of the women who have blocked the entrance (a security measure which is apparently insufficient); every day she (re)counts how many women are pregnant, and stalks the one who have just given birth; she counts the months, she keeps track of the days with scratches on the wall. She slaughters boys, is brutally violent with the girls; she destroys the little ones. If the house is open, she enters in the usual way, through the door (I, 5, 127-132).²⁶ Even those with measures of precaution are unsafe: in a locked house Lamaštu will enter through the door-hinges; she slithers like a snake and strangles the boys; with their blood she smears her face (I, 5, 133-136). In this description of the terrifying actions of Lamaštu, there is a brief overview of her physical characteristics: she has the shins of a panther, teeth like a dog, her talons like those of an eagle; her fibula seems broken; her breasts are bare (I, 5, 139-142). Her hair dangles loose, her underwear is stripped off; she goes directly to whomever who is lacking divine protection. She is capable of weakening the muscles (even) of a lion, (...) the sinews of the youth and the children.²⁷

As Richey points out, in the textual and the visual sources, Lamaštu is represented as a figure that breaks the Mesopotamian gender categories in several connected ways. She is represented opposing the rules of personal hygiene and attire, which presents her as an opponent to the social conventions, and as a (potentially) sexualized being; through the incantations her nudity is constantly underlined to a point of a dissolute and even violent impropriety (Richey 2021, 150). Her hair being matted and untidy shows her reverting to the natural circumstances, which simultaneously denies any artifice, and evokes dishevelled eroticism. The illustrations and descriptions of Lamaštu hint at the fact that her divergence from the ordinary is not only by her species, but also by her gender. With long unclean nails and hairy armpits (I, 5, 109), underwear that has been clipped off or stripped off, tousled half-missing clothes, and/or nudity, and general untidiness, Lamaštu goes outside of the norms of femininity, which makes her an active threat to the civilized society, and what is even worse, to its most precious part, its children (Richey 2021, 151). As Richey puts it – it can be claimed that the disjunction of categories and the threats to society are not lurking in any individual, but in specially marked, demonic bodies, which could allegedly be recognized by their hybridity, disorder, deviancy, hypertextualization. This discourse is supposed to bring comfort, by teaching

²⁶ Lamaštu is said to be evil, constantly moving (OB3, 1-2 - an Old-Babylonian incantation on a tablet with an unrelated other spell). Although she is not a physician, she puts on bandages; although she is not a mid-wife, she wipes off and cleans the newborn; she counts the months of the pregnant women, constantly blocking the doorways of the woman due to deliver soon. Lamaštu snatches away the boy during a prayer, the girl during play-time, the child from the shoulder of the nanny, OB3, 3-11.

²⁷ An example of incantations against Lamaštu that are not part of the Standard Babylonian series, or “non-canonical Lamaštu/Lam.,” separate Old-Assyrian and Old-Babylonian incantations, 1-24.

that in order to repel such threats, some specific corporally-structurally distant non-human bodies should be fixed or removed (Richey 2021, 153). This again places the demonic not only as an external to the established human categories, but as if it is in between categories that would otherwise be mutually exclusive. The demonic is ontologically, geographically, socially, magico-medically liminal.

In this text the categories of monstrosity, hybridity and liminality of the demons were demonstrated through the examples of the Mesopotamian Pazuzu and Lamaštu. A short overview was offered on some of the ways in which the demonic was conceived and represented as liminal and hybrid, through the available sources concerning the beliefs in the opposed pair of demons – Pazuzu, who is ambivalent, being an evil fighting against evil, and Lamaštu, the terrifying threat to the most precious part of the communities.

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