ENKI and NINHURSAG: a REHABILITATION

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Abstract
The interpretation of the ancient Sumerian myth ‘Enki and Ninhursag’ is undertaken in the framework of previous research. In addition I refer to other ancient texts to provide an alternative image of the way priests in certain parts of Sumer envisaged how the universe came into being and human civilization developed. The vast majority of researchers based their interpretation of the myth on one or two incorrect assumptions. Especially the enigmatic first and last scenes furnish proof the story has to be taken in its entirety.

Keywords

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# Inhoud

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Abstract
The interpretation of the ancient Sumerian myth ‘Enki and Ninhursag’ is undertaken in the framework of previous research. In addition I refer to other ancient texts to provide an alternative image of the way priests in certain parts of Sumer envisaged how the universe came into being and human civilization developed. The vast majority of researchers based their interpretation of the myth on one or two incorrect assumptions. Especially the enigmatic first and last scenes furnish proof the story has to be taken in its entirety.

Keywords

Introduction
The first almost comprehensive transliteration and translation of one of the oldest stories of world literature was published in 1945. The peerless author Samuel Noah Kramer called his monograph ‘Enki and Ninhursag: A Sumerian ‘Paradise’ Myth’¹, because the text contains some obvious parallels with the Biblical paradise story in Genesis. There are too many differences, however, to call ‘Enki and Ninhursag’ a paradise myth in the Biblical sense of the word.

The more I have been reading about the Sumerian myth ‘Enki and Ninhursag’, the less I’m convinced all has already been said. In this paper I offer an alternative interpretation primarily based on the firm conviction that we are dealing with a coherent story, contrary to the widely held belief that the story is a more or less accidental combination of two or more different stories, a proposition resulting from a misinterpretation of two or three crucial passages often passed over without comment.

Secondly I will argue that the for many so contradictory facts in the first part of the myth are both a consequence of the cyclic way of thinking and an archaic view on cosmology. Even more so considering the fact that the written version we know is a late echo of a much older orally transmitted story. This does not mean, however, that the author had no sense of historical time whatsoever. In some studies scant attention has been paid to the developments that took place in the course of time, nor to the possibility that different cultures or ideologies could have existed in Sumer at the same time. Similarly, there is little discussion of the possibility that the names of gods or goddesses could be related to other names with either more concrete or more abstract connotations.

Thirdly I will show how important it is to interpret the story by comparing it’s details to the geographic and agricultural development of the region over several millennia. Therefore I propose to view the second section of the myth as a meticulously planned

allegory that explains in a poetical way the at first natural and then manmade
development of the soil the Sumerians were living on and the culture they made for
themselves. Although it is often said that Dilmun is positioned on the isle of Bahrain, I’m
convinced that in ‘Enki and Ninhursag’ Dilmun or Dilmun-land only refers to Sumer.

Lastly I will give an interpretation of the third enigmatic section of the myth that will
set the story in the wider context of the earliest cosmological and religious beliefs. This
also sheds unexpected light on the parts Ninhursag and Enki are playing in this myth.

While some scholars focus on the status of gods and goddesses as a reflection of
gender roles in the real world, still others deal with the characteristics of only one
protagonist. Amazingly the main character in the story – Enki, the god of fresh water – is
regarded by many to be an ungenial person, a perpetrator of crimes like rape and
incest. However, comparative investigation shows that this picture is incompatible with
his image in every other story to feature him. All agree that the story is based on an
allegory, but lose sight of the metaphor where the concise style of the text, allied with
damage to some lines in the cuneiform manuscript, makes interpretation almost
impossible. As a result, Jacobsen and other scholars blame the author of the myth for its
apparent inconsistencies and subject the behaviour of Enki to serious criticism. I believe
the character of the god has been misunderstood. The composition of the story is more
cohesive than has been suggested in most essays. It took some time, however, before I
fully realised that I had to recover the literary conventions of an époque that lay
more than four millennia behind me. An important guiding principle was found in the
Wiggermann:

“The languages of Mesopotamia, Sumerian and Babylonian, can express
conjunction, disjunction, implication and quantification, the tools of logic; they can
express subordination, the tool of exposition, but the actual practice of speech
prefers to leave understanding to context, to imply relations rather than to make
them explicit. The tools are there, but not yet completely activated.”2

All the more reason therefore to see the story in a wider perspective, that is, to take into
account the geographical, ecological, ideological and historical context in which the
events of the story are supposed to have taken place and even more so to avoid
underestimating the intellectual potency of the author and his public. From this changing
perspective I will evaluate several interpretations of the myth ‘Enki and Ninhursag’ (E&N)
and offer an alternative interpretation. In a way my contribution can be seen as an effort
to rehabilitate the reputations of both the author of the myth and Enki, the god of fresh
waters.

First of all

The storey ‘Enki and Ninhursag’ (E&N) is based on at least three manuscripts. The two
most important mss. come from Nippur and Ur, very old cities in Sumer. Although the
myth is largely complete, modern scholars assume that the story is composed of
different stories. However, after almost seventy-five years no agreement has been
reached on the interpretation. In my view it would be wise to treat the text as a whole
assuming that Samuel Noah Kramer was right when he (in 1945) presumed that
Sumerian poets very well understood the art of connecting their “contemplation and
speculation on certain natural phenomena” with “the agricultural life about him.”3 Having
said that, I should like to point out that I am not a trained Sumerologist. Rather than
evaluating the grammatical accuracy of the translations in question, I compare them in
their historical and literary context. Where relevant I criticise inconsistencies in the
explanation of the translations at hand and will, eventually, take a stand against people
who suggest that I am trespassing into a scientific specialism. It is only beyond those

borders that my contribution enters the picture. My interpretation is primarily based on the accessible translation by Jeremy Black e.a. (1998-2006) in de “Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature (ETCL)”.

Although the interpretation is based on the assumption that the myth is not made up of different stories I split the story up into three. The first section of the ETCSL-version (accessible on the internet) consists of lines 1 to 49V, the second ends with line 246, the last with line 281. Here I will only cite the most relevant parts or phrases and do so in alphabetic order. Additional notes with an asterisk (*) are mine.

1. THE FIRST SECTION
Judging from the first lines of the ETCSL-translation of ‘E&N’ the storyteller is addressing the audience directly, explaining how the storey relates to them. He appeals to their imagination and evokes a time in which the world was still empty and dark. At the same time he makes it clear that the cities they know so well were allotted to them from time immemorial.

A¹
(1-4) – Pure are the cities -- and you are the ones to whom they are allotted. Pure is Dilmun land. Pure is Sumer -- and you are the ones to whom it is allotted. Pure is Dilmun land. Pure is Dilmun land. Virginal is Dilmun land. Virginal is Dilmun land. Pristine is Dilmun land.

The ritual character of these lines is fully appreciated by repetition and parallelism in the translation of Christopher Woods’ ‘Grammar and Context, Enki & Ninhursag ll. 1-3 and a Rare Sumerian Construction’, especially where it concerns the first lines:

A²
(1-6) – O pure cities – how you have come to be !
O pure Tilmun,
O pure Sumer – how you have come to be !
Pure is Tilmun !
Pure is the land of Tilmun ! Pristine is the land of Tilmun !
Pristine is the land Tilmun ! Untouched is the land of Tilmun !

The difference between – ‘and you are the ones to whom they are allotted’ (A¹) versus ‘how you have come to be ! (A²) – makes it clear that translation and interpretation are close neighbours. Pascal Attinger (updated 2015) reads the first lines this way: ‘Dans les villes splendides, comme vous étiez ! le pays de Dilmun était splendide.’ Focusing on the grammatical issues that are involved he might have lost sight of the wider context of the story. Sumerians attending to its performance would have been confused. In particular the use of the past tense (‘était’) would have given them the impression that everything had already been accomplished in an indefinable past. But the description of Dilmun and her cities being exceptionally beautiful (‘resplendissant’) is difficult to reconcile with a series of statements in the second part of this introduction showing Dilmun as still lacking everything belonging to a place where animals and people can exist (ll. 11-28 ETCSL version). The raven was not yet cawing, the lion did not slay and the wolf was not carrying off lambs. In those lines the narrator describes a scene in which everything belonging to the basic concept of Dilmun and her cities is still missing. There is no grain on the roofs of the houses because there are no widows to feed the birds, and thus no birds to peck at the grain (etc.) . . . This particular part of the introduction ends up with two lines in which the storyteller reveals that neither joy nor

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6 Attinger Pascal (1984), updated 2015), ‘Enki et Ninhursaga’, in: Zeitschrift fur Assyriologie und vorderasiatische archäologie, 74 (Transl. ‘How beautiful were Dilmun and her cities!’)
sorrow did exist: ‘no singer sang an elulam’⁷ there. No wallings were wailed in the city’s outskirts there.’

I prefer the translation of Christopher Woods (A²): ‘O pure cities – how you have come to be!’ O pure Tilmun, O pure Sumer – how you have come to be!’ In his words those lines represent “a speculative reflection of awe and wonder at how the world has achieved its current format – at how the world has come to be.”⁸ Immediately thereafter (ll.4-6) the present tense is used to emphasize that the cities are still non-existent, i.e. ‘pure’, ‘pristine’ and ‘virginal’ (‘untouched’ / Attinger: ‘immacule’/’vierge’). That is how the storyteller carries his audience away to times immemorial, bridging the gap between existence and non-existence.

1.1 The prologue
After the first six lines the reader might consider whether he has already been introduced to the main issue of the myth. Christopher Woods, in agreement with for instance Thorild Jacobsen in ‘The Harps That Once . . . Sumerian Poetry in Translation’ (1987)⁹ and Dina Katz (2007),¹⁰ assumes “that the myth likely represents the amalgamation of two independent stories. The first, Enki & Ninsikila, the Tilmun story, is connected with water as the basis of civilization, and the second, Enki and Ninhursaĝa, with water as the basis of fertility.”¹¹ However, both aspects are inextricably linked together: without water no fertility, no food, no life on earth, no people, no cities and no civilization can exist. The distinction Woods makes inadvertently suggests that the rise of civilization does not primarily depend upon the availability of water. When this conception is scrutinised it soon becomes clear why the myth – including the first section – is not called ‘Enki and Ninskikila’, but ‘Enki and Ninhursag’. Therefore, Enki – ‘Lord Earth’ (‘god of sweet waters’) – and Ninhursag – ‘Mother Earth’ – are the protagonists of the story.

In his ‘introduction’ Woods promises to place his grammatical analysis of the first three critical but puzzling lines in the broader literary context of the so-called first story - that is only the first 62 lines of the ETCSL-version. But starting from a distinction that does not really exist, he focuses on the existence of some artesian springs in a barren landscape of the island Bahrain, without rivers or marshes, 600 km away from Enki’s temple in Eridu and the oldest temple of Ninhursag at a distance of little more than 10 km from Eridu, according to tradition the oldest city of Sumer.¹² The three opening lines in his translation introduce – according to Woods – “the themes of creation and subsequent maturation, which characterize the prologue and the first story.”¹³ However, both themes are not characteristic of these sections at all because the so called ‘first story’ – including its ‘prologue’ – only deals with a situation that was not typified by action, let alone by ‘maturation’ or creation. The only information the audience has so far received is the result of that process: the existence of ‘cities’, not how they came to be. This is also in accordance with the translation of the ETCSL version: ‘Pure are the cities – and you are the ones to whom they are allotted’, although in this translation the storyteller is not addressing the cities but the audience present at the performance of the myth.

Of a different nature is the translation of the first lines by Katz who translates more or less in accordance with Attinger (updated 2015): ‘Pure is the city, You are the ones who share it,’¹⁴ By using the present tense she gives the impression that the process of

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⁷ Attinger: ‘elulam’: “un chant de joie”.
creation has already been accomplished despite the fact that all is still ‘pure’, ‘virginal’ or ‘untouched’. Nothing could be further from the truth.

My interpretation is based on the story as a whole, not coincidentally called ‘Enki and Ninhursag’. The prologue of that story in the ETCSL-version ends up with paragraph 49Q-49V in which the author, in anticipation of the process of creation, briefly summarises the result of it, echoing the first lines of Woods’ so-called prologue.

The city’s dwellings are good dwellings. Dilmun’s dwellings are good dwellings. Its grains are little grains, its dates are big dates, its harvests are triple .... triple . . ., its wood is . . . wood.

Another question that might cross the mind of the modern reader is whether the cities mentioned in the first line would develop both in Dilmun and in Sumer. For the ‘black-headed people’ of Sumer reflecting on that question there was only one place where it all began, a legendary place somewhere within the borders of Sumer: Dilmun. Christopher Woods does not shy away from associating ‘the cities’ mentioned in the first line with the cult centres of Enki in Sumer and Ninsikila on an island far away in the Persian Gulf.15

Ever since Thorkild Jacobsen postulated in 1987 that Dilmun could be identified with Bahrain, a small island situated halfway down the coast of Saudi Arabia, most commentators take that for granted. Nowhere, though, in the text as a whole, is there any mention of the fact that Dilmun is to be found outside Sumer. On the contrary, several phrases in the story, including the first 62 lines, make it clear that Enki cannot be associated with an island without rivers, ‘river quays’, ‘great basins’ (lakes) or ‘marshes’. A cult centre for Ninsikila has not been found anywhere.

1.2 The protagonists of the story

Dilmun, obviously a privileged part of the earth, is still awaiting its realization. The same applies to the main characters of the story, Enki and his ‘spouse’ (‘wife’) and . . . who the hell is Ninsikila?

He laid her down all alone in Dilmun, and the place where Enki had lain down with his spouse, that place was still virginal, that place was still pristine. He laid her down all alone in Dilmun, and the place where Enki had lain down with Ninsikila that place was virginal, that place was pristine.

For some reason Enki and his ‘spouse’ are not active in the real world and if they have plans they have still to be carried out. From that point of view they can hardly be regarded as the protagonists of the story. As long as this situation exists deterioration cannot occur. That is why the connotations ‘pure’, ‘pristine’ and ‘virginal’ (‘untouched’) are repeatedly used.

Soon the main characters of the myth are introduced to the audience. Two of them are called by their name: Enki and Ninsikila. Can she be Enki’s untouched ‘spouse’, the imaginary situation taken into consideration? Woods translates:

In Tilmun where he had once slept by himself, in that place he (*Enki) then slept with his wife – that place is pristine, that place is untouched !

And so, in advance, the audience is introduced to Enki, the god of the fresh waters, ‘his spouse’ and a goddess called Ninsikila. For neither of them is there place on a world that

cannot yet be called Mother Earth in a world that is still ‘virginal’ and ‘pristine’.\textsuperscript{16} Their substantiation will take place in due time. The same is true of everything else that is named by the all-knowing author: ‘In Dilmun the raven was not yet cawing, the partridge not cackling. The lion did not slay, the wolf was not carrying off lambs, the dog had not been taught to make kids curl up, the pig had not learned that grain was to be eaten. (etc.etc.).\textsuperscript{17}

Many commentators struggle to explain this state of affairs. Leick for instance writes in ‘Sex and Eroticism in Mesopotamian Literature’ (1994): ‘Dilmun, though ‘holy’, is strangely lacking in essential commodities, and the behaviour of people and animals differ from that of later times. These descriptions were probably meant to be funny and absurd.\textsuperscript{18} But in the absence of animals and human beings there can be no question of ‘behaviour’; neither can the paradoxically described situation be dismissed as absurd. It is only with the introduction of ‘the gardener’ in the second ‘section’ of the story, that the development of Enki’s world, Dilmun, really gets under way. She too should have taken notice of what Wiggermann describes as “the practice of implying relations rather than to make them explicit.” This applies especially to the presence of Enki’s ‘spouse’ at the imaginary scene of fragment C. This scene clearly indicates that Enki, ‘the fashioner of the design of everything’,\textsuperscript{19} is on his own. Again I prefer Woods’ translation: ‘where he had once slept by himself’. However, it is completely irrelevant whether he was ‘laying’ there or ‘sleeping’. Of the utmost importance is that Enki, ‘Lord Earth’,\textsuperscript{20} is completely inactive, not fashioning anything . . . yet. As a consequence, of course, this also applies to ‘his wife’, the Earth, who must be considered to be his future ‘spouse’. ‘Sleeping’, metaphorically meaning ‘cohabitating’, is out of the question. So, it should not come as a surprise when we learn in fragment D (below) that Ninsikila is destined to be Enki’s daughter but cannot be his daughter yet. This reading is once more confirmed by the phrase ‘that place is pristine, that place is untouched!’.

There is every possibility the narrator is playing games, putting his audience on the wrong foot. Even Jacobsen is fooled Following him, almost every commentator believes that Ninsikila is also ‘his spouse’, despite the impossibility of sexual relations in an unformed primordial world. However, the well-educated contemporaries of the storyteller would have appreciated the sophisticated way in which he was putting them to the test. This is already corroborated by a statement of Lambert and Tournay in 1949: "toutes les forces et tous les êtres y sont en puissance et déjà en place, mais aucune n’existe vraiment."\textsuperscript{21} The same applies to the conversation between Enki and his apparent daughter, Ninsikila, in which she blames him for not keeping his promise of the gift of a city:

\begin{enumerate}
\item \textbf{D} (29 ff.) – Ninsikila said to her father Enki: ‘You have given a city. You have given a city. What does your giving avail me? (−) a city that has no river quay (−) a city that has no fields, glebe or furrow’.\textsuperscript{22}
\end{enumerate}

Her complaint illustrates that there still is no water on earth, no river quay, no city, no people to live in it (etc.) as long as Enki, ‘the god of sweet waters and fashioner of designs’\textsuperscript{22} is lying or sleeping ‘all by himself’ like his future spouse and his future daughter Ninsikila. Enki’s lack of attention and proper care is in full accordance with the existing state of lethargy at this point in the story. It would be a mistake not to take into consideration the well-known ancient Sumerian literary convention based on the idea

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{16} Compare Genesis 1:1.
\item \textsuperscript{17} ‘Enki and Ninhursag’, ETCSL 1.1.1, ll. 11-28.
\item \textsuperscript{19} ‘Enki and Ninmah’ (ETCSL 1.1.2, l. 24 ff.).
\item \textsuperscript{20} Sum. ‘En - Ki’ = Lord Earth.
\item \textsuperscript{22} ‘Enki and Ninmah’, ETCSL 1.1.2.
\end{itemize}
that the interacting material forces, in particular the natural phenomena that are crucial for the well-being of mankind, were personified. In ‘The Treasures of Darkness’ Jacobsen described that process as the “progressive humanization out of human need for a meaningful relationship with them.” During that process the ancient gods and goddesses gradually gave way to human forms organized within “human patterns of family and occupation.” These objectives, however, have yet to be achieved.

The inchoative character of the verb denoting the beginning of action in the first lines as well as the perfective character implying the notion of completion are bridging the gap between ‘non-existence’ and ‘existence’. This might have tempted some scholars to think that the storyteller refers to a creation ex nihilo, a change of state in less than no time and ignore the fact that Enki, ‘the fashioner of all designs’ and his ‘spouse’ are still asleep, metaphorically. Precisely in this context Woods is talking of “spontaneous events, (-) actions or states that are conceived as unfolding independently of the intervention of an external cause. With such events, an explicit or salient agent either cannot be identified, . . . (-).” But in fact we are dealing in these lines only with a linguistic means of altering the perspective.

And it would be of no use for our storyteller when the first story ends there. It does when we agree with the widely espoused view that the negative picture of “the first story” (‘Enki and Ninsikila’) is all that answers the empathically stressed admiration expressed in Woods’ translation of the very first lines. It would have been a meaningless story ending with the mere notation that nobody was singing or weeping there. What is more, Enki would not go into Ninsikila’s complaint, not becoming that way the real protagonist of the story. His real wife too would stay anonymous forever. In this context it is also hard to believe that Enki ‘slept with Ninsikila’ (l. 11 Woods) and had a conversation with her while their ‘cult centres’, respectively Eridu in Sumer and Bahrain, were separated by a distance of about 600 km. The suggestion that the ‘cities’ mentioned in the first lines of the myth first of all refer to these cult centres is even more far-fetched.

It is very unlikely that Enki, Lord Earth, would leave his underground residence – the E-apsu in Eridu – to have a conversation with his future daughter somewhere in Bahrain while the residence of his future ‘spouse’, the temple of Ninhursag in Al’ Ubaid could be seen in clear weather from Enki’s ziggurat or temple tower in Eridu.

1.3 A crucial moment

The reader might be confused by the storyteller who is taking him away to the transcendent world of the gods, behind the boundaries of the real world. The conversation between Enki and his daughter takes place outside space and time. That is where he explains to her that Dilmun land and city can only develop once the cycle of fresh water has been activated by the appearance of the sun (Utu) and the moon (Nanna), which may not have been a big surprise to the audience.

E (40-43) – (Enki answers Ninsikila:) ‘When Utu steps up into heaven, fresh waters shall run out of the ground for you from the standing vessels (?) on Ezen’s (?) shore, from Nanna’s radiant high temple, from the mouth of the waters running underground.’

In a metaphorical sense ‘shore’ in ‘Ezen’s shore’ (fragment E) can be taken as the border between two areas. In this case it concerns the border between ‘Ezen’ (Sum.

24 Woods (2013), p. 508-9. The author is referring here to the prefix ‘ba-’ and its affinity for dynamic, change of state events when it is coupled with verbs that are intrinsically static.
'Edin': steppe landscape) and the lowland areas of alluvial deposits absorbing the water from the streams coming from the dessert, the sources or the rivers from the mountains – ‘the standing vessels’ – surrounding them. Those vessels made possible the creation of gardens and fields known in Genesis 2 as the ‘Garden of Eden’, a description that can be applied to almost every oasis in the desert, be it great or small.

In effect Enki, the god of fresh water proclaims in this paragraph his own appearance on earth. Accordingly Wiggermann says, “the explanation of nature is the history of its constituent parts represented as entities able to procreate and interact: gods.” Only after the appearance of Utu and Nanna will time come into being, and only then will Enki begin to act. For actions in the real world cannot be performed outside of time. That is also why the cities that were mentioned (fragment A) cannot yet be built. The formlessness, emptiness and the absence of time in which Enki, his ‘spouse’ and Ninsikila were lingering – the name Ninhursag in the capacity of Mother Earth is still missing of course – is illustrative of what Gonzalo Rubio in ‘Time before Time: Primeval Narratives in Early Mesopotamian Literature’ defined as “negative cosmology”. The first section of ‘E&N’ is a very appropriate example thereof.

Following the previous citation (E) from the ETCSL-version the god of fresh water elaborates on what might happen as a result of his ‘coming out’.

F (44-49) – ‘May the waters rise up from it into your great basins. May your city drink water aplenty from them. May Dilmun drink water aplenty from them. May your pools of salt water become pools of fresh water. May your city become an emporium on the quay for the Land. May Dilmun become an emporium on the quay for the Land.’

This imagined vision of Dilmun is supplemented with two fragments of a damaged cuneiform tablet found in the city of Ur (ETCSL 49A-49P and 49Q-49V), describing a prosperous city in great detail. That city, too, did not yet exist. However, at least some of the inhabitants of Ur present at the reading or performance of the story must have recognised their own city in the description of that full-blown town. The statement already outlined by Lambert and Tournay in 1949 is corroborated by Jacobsen (1987), Attinger and the translators of the ETCSL-version; they too opted for the subjunctive mood, that is the verbal form used to express wishes, desires and possibilities. So far their statement serves to exclude the story from the category of myths of origin; the same applies to the category of paradise myths as long as no development takes place.

A useful contribution to the debate was provided by Yvonne Rosengarten in ‘Trois aspects de la pensée religieuse sumérienne’ (1971): “Les mythes d’origine prolongent et complètent le myth cosmogonique: ils racontent comment le Monde a été modifié, enrichi et appauvri.” In light of this definition we can only speak of a myth of origin after the completion of the universe has been recorded. At the point Ninsikila complains about Enki’s lack of proper care and attention (fragment D), the creation of the universe is not yet finished. The sun and the moon, the big and the small hand of time, have not yet made their appearance in the sky. Enki explains the situation to his apparent daughter (fragment E) in a conversation that is not really taking place (ll.40 ff.). She must be patient, just like scholars who focus on a single or limited objective or view and suppose that Enki has already satisfied her demands. The images Enki offers her are only the blueprints of a world still waiting to become real. Most commentators do not distinguish the transition from this cosmological phase to the next phase in the story, which explains why they do not take account of the last paragraphs, in which Ninsikila is born. But the scene where Enki envisages how fresh water will take possession of Mother Earth

27 Etymologically there might also be a connection with Ezina, the grain goddess, venerated within the shores’ of the alluvial planes.
occurs in a world that is still dormant, though a world that will become active sooner or later. It is only when time finally comes into being that Enki can show what he is capable of and the development of Dilmun can begin.

Following Rosengarten I emphasise the need to distinguish between the cosmological phase of creation and the phase in which the development of the earth and human civilization gets under way. The assumption that the booming business of the metropolis described in the first section (49A-49P) already exists, neglects this distinction. For it is the auctorial narrator who in anticipation of the world that came to be, reminds his contemporaries that they are the ones to whom everything was allotted, including the cities he mentioned already in the inaugural lines of fragment A.

The first section is concluded with the second supplement echoing the result of a still unknown process that was heralded in the first sentences of Woods’ translation:

G  (49Q-49V) – The city’s dwellings are good dwellings. Dilmun’s dwellings are good dwellings. Its grains are little grains, its dates are big dates, its harvests are triple . . . its wood is . . . wood.

1.4 Structure and time
Structure and content of the story are to a great extent determined by the time factor. Time in the parallel world of the gods is dominated by the cyclic expiration of time. While time goes by for mere mortals, it goes on for the gods in the everlasting cycle of the seasons. The narrator must have been convinced that the two connotations of time are related somehow from the beginning of time. But in the first section the interaction between those two concepts of time has not yet been activated. What could happen does not really happen because actions take time. That is the thoughtful idea the storyteller is handing on to the audience in what can be considered to be the prologue of the myth ‘E&N’.

From the start the narrator appeals to the imagination of his audience and transports them to a time before time. In doing so he makes clear that the design of their community was decided in a dimension of space and time not of their world. In anticipation of the moment the sun (Utu) and the moon (Nanna) appear in the sky, he paints a world that only came into being after an indefinite period. The moment at which it all comes together is described in fragment E of the first section – ‘when Utu steps up in heaven’ – and will be repeated the first paragraph of the second section (ll. 50 ff.).

1.5 The prologue and the second section
On the basis of prior assessments I presume that the end of the prologue (the first section) is closely determined by the time factor and anticipated in the conversation between Enki and his future daughter (fragment D and E). However, Lambert and Tournay are surprised by the “new” Enki emerging in the scenes following the transition from the cosmological phase of creation to the next: “Seul Enki revient, mais si dissimilable qu’il n’a avec le dieu du passage précédent que le nom seul de commun; ce n’est plus le seigneur de l’eau, mais l’engendreur primordial . . .” But the first part of that statement falls short of what could be inferred from the first section. We do not really know this god who, up to this ‘substantiation’, has been abiding in an inaccessible dimension of space and time. Only after the activation of time can he manifest himself as ‘le seigneur de l’eau’ and ‘l’Engendreur’, travelling through the world both to shape it and to determine the destination of everything. This so-called metamorphosis must have been sufficient reason for Jacobsen to conclude that the myth is based on two different stories: “Even the identity of the Enki of the first story with the one of the second one may not be beyond doubt.” I suspect this statement is based on the supposition that the author of the myth was not able to make a cohesive single story out of two.

Curiously, my suspicion is supported by a passage from the same author in ‘The Treasures of Darkness’ (1976), in which he interprets a passage of a song dedicated to the god of the moon, Nanna. His comment reads as follows. Whenever the moon is not visible from the earth, Nanna is visiting the chthonic gods, ‘Enki and Ninki, the great lords, the great princes, the lords who determine fates (-).’ In their subterranean abode Nanna confers with them before returning to the sky. About that aspect of Enki’s personality Jacobsen writes: “This deity, whose name denotes ‘Lord Earth’ (en-ki), is a chthonic deity distinct from the god of the fresh waters Enki, whose name denotes ‘Lord (i.e. productive manager) of the earth’ (en-ki(a k)).” From the spelling ‘Enki(g)’ derived from this, Jacobsen deduces that he should be identified as the god who leaves his subterranean domain, the abzu, to go out into the world in order to implement and determine the destination of its phenomena. This double identity of Enki plays an important role especially when it comes to the interpretation of the third and last section of ‘E&N’.

The beginning of the second section of our story then relates how Enki meets his ‘spouse’ Nintud, ‘mother of the country’, for the very first time and how Dilmun begins to take shape due to the fresh water irrigating her parts. Acting in that capacity he is known as Enki ‘the fashioner of the design of everything’, the “engendreur” (Lambert and Tournay) or the “manager” (Jacobsen). The suggestion that we are dealing with an introduction to a myth of origin for the second time cannot be right for two reasons: the description of the world in the cosmological phase (the first 49 lines) is fictional and there is still nothing that can be considered a sequel to it. The second phase of the story, on the other hand, does satisfy many of the conventions of that genre. However, according to Dickson in ‘Enki and Ninhursag: The Trickster in Paradise’, (2007) there is not enough time for Dilmun’s development after its “dramatic physical and cultural transformation within the course of a single day.” In his view, this transformation sees Enki change overnight from “a sacred figure in a myth of origin” into a lecherous god much too occupied by his own busy life to contribute to the development of Dilmun. The distinction between the cosmological phase and the time-consuming development of a habitable world must have escaped his attention too. The same applies to the quality of the text supported by a statement of Kramer concerning Sumerian literature in his revised edition of ‘Sumerian Mythology’ (1972):

“It cannot be sufficiently stressed that the Sumerian cosmological concepts, early as they are, are by no means primitive. They reflect the mature thought and reason of the Sumerian as he contemplated the forces of nature and the character of his own existence.”

2 THE SECOND SECTION

In the first lines of the second section the god of sweet waters, leaves his subterranean home and embarks on a very momentous walkabout. His ‘coming out’ is set in motion when the dormant state of Dilmun prior to its irrigation ends. The setting of that moment is crucial to the interpretation of the story. The prediction in the first lines of fragment E becomes true in fragment H. After a few lines, a very concise summary of the developments the hydrological cycle generates follows, especially when it comes to agriculture and the emergence of cities: ‘Dilmun indeed became an emporium on the quay for the land.’

35 “Enki and Ninmah”, ETCSL 1.1.2.
37 Ibid.
39 ‘Walkabout’: a concept relating to the culture of the Australian aboriginals, sometimes described as ‘a rite the passage’, ‘temporal mobility’ or ‘an abrupt leaving and returning’.
At that moment, on that day, and under that sun, when Utu stepped up into heaven, from the standing vessels on Ezen’s (?) shore, from Nanna’s radiant high temple, from the mouth of the waters running underground, fresh waters ran out of the ground for her. The waters rose up from it into her great basins. Her city drank water aplenty from them. Dilmun drank water aplenty from them. Her pools of salt water indeed became pools of fresh water. Her fields, glebe and furrows indeed produced grain for her. Her city indeed became an emporium on the quay for the Land. Dilmun indeed became an emporium on the quay for the Land. At that moment, on that day, and under that sun, so it indeed happened.

The first action to take place after the cosmological phase of creation is Enki’s confrontation with Nintud in the marshes of Dilmun. Of course he is still on his own, eager to perform. The storyteller takes it for granted he is a wise god. However, many authors express their dissatisfaction at the shameless way in which Enki imposes his will on Nintud, ‘the country’s mother’ and has sex with her.

All alone the wise one, toward Nintud, the country’s mother, Enki, the wise one, toward Nintud, the country’s mother, was digging his phallus into the dykes, plunging his phallus into the reed beds. The august one (*Nintud) pulled his phallus aside and cried out: ‘No man take me in the marsh.’ Enki cried out: ‘By the life’s breath of heaven I adjure you. Lie down for me in the marsh, lie down for me in the marsh, that would be joyous.’ Enki distributed his semen destined for Damgalnuna. He poured semen into Ninhursaja’s womb and she conceived the semen in the womb, the semen of Enki.

2.1 The metaphor

The comparison between the god of the fresh waters who ejaculates and irrigates the dried up marshes and other plots of land belonging to ‘the country’s mother’ is not far-fetched especially since the cuneiform signs for ‘water’ and ‘seed’ (i.e. sperm) are identical. Some experts on Sumerian literature believe that this metaphor should be applied to the relation of Enki and Ninsikila, his daughter, in the first part of the myth. But references to the real world - a distinctive feature of any metaphor - are out of the question in the cosmological first section of the myth. Here again those authors betray a lack of confidence in the skills of the author and the intelligence of his contemporaries.

1. Part of a cylinder seal found in the ruins of Girsu (modern Tello), property of ‘Gudea (Lagash ca. 2175-2125 BCE). The picture is an illustration of Enki’s amphibious character. In his hands he holds the Euphrates and Tigris and their branches. Under his seat the ‘standing vessels’ of fragment H.

2.2 Nintud, Damgalnuna and Ninhursag (H)

While the heavenly bodies relentlessly follow their path, Enki’s wanderings take place in a parallel world of gods and goddesses with its own laws of time and space. His journey brings him into contact with Nintud and her daughters, who form part of the allegory that takes off when the appearance of the sun and the moon sets time into motion. Allegory is the device employed by the author to tell a story or explain an idea, unlike a metaphor that only incidentally refers to reality. Time and again sexual intercourse stands for the irrigation of the earth. The places where Enki is allowed to have sexual relations with
Nintud, her daughters and granddaughters are determined by Ninhursag, now becoming Mother Earth. The first to take Enki’s fancy is Nintud, an extension of Ninhursag, more precisely defined as ‘the country’s mother’. That epithet tells the audience she is the personification of Dilmun land, a part of the earth that lies within reach of Enki. Only she is ‘his spouse’, whom he has heretofore neglected. In other Sumerian texts she is named Damgalnuna ‘bride of Enki who determines fates favourably, great wild cow, exceptional in appearance, pre-eminent forever! Your husband, the great lord Nudimmud (*Enki) who makes perfect the borders of the Land, the lord on whom An (*god of heaven) the king has bestowed perceptiveness; etc.’

Fragment D of the same text also shows that she can be seen as an extension of Ninhursag (*Lady of the Mountain): ‘You never cease being the wife of Eridug, the mountain of abundance. She is birth-giver of the great gods, she is their goddess.’ These lines make it clear that she can be regarded as an extension of Ninhursag.

C.S. Kirk was one of the first to make conjectures about the characters in the story and their interrelationships. Looking back at the first section of the myth (1970) he writes in ‘Myth, its Meaning and Functions in Ancient and other Cultures’ (1970):

“Dilmun is ‘clean’ and ‘bright’, and is somehow associated with Enki’s lying with his wife Ninsikilla, ‘pure lady’ — an epithet probably of Ninhursag, that may explain the emphasis on Dilmun’s purity. In spite of this purity and the absence of old age and death, Dilmun is still short of water.”

The suggestion that Ninsikila is an epithet for Ninhursag comes as no surprise, but in light of the story as a whole it is clear that Ninsikila and Ninhursag are totally different characters. Kirk might also have noticed that a lack of water could not have been experienced as a problem in the absence of people, animals and vegetation. But he did not. The same applies to Dickson almost forty years later. In an introduction to the sites Enki would visit, he writes: “Ninsikila (=Ninhursag) complains to Enki that Dilmun lacks water; its canals are empty.” But there are no irrigation canals yet. He too might have been encouraged by Jacobsen’s interpretation in ‘The Harps That Once (−)’. In the introduction to his translation of the myth Jacobsen notes that it is a bizarre text, best understood as a story meant “to entertain visitors from the island of Bahrain at a banquet at the Royal court of Ur.” Since then almost nobody tried to reconcile the difference between the first immaterial parts of the story and the subsequent description of Enki’s first erotic adventure, i.e. his passionate mating with Nintud, the mother of the land. According to him, the connection between “the first and the second story in the composition" was flimsy. Jacobsen: “Thus, essentially, there remains as link merely the identity of the chief characters in the two stories, Enki and Ninsikila, and even that identity is, at a closer look questionable.” He then refers to fragment C (above) from the first section of the myth in which it seems two deities are present: (1) Enki, (2) Ninsikila, who then must be ‘his spouse’ despite the fact that, shortly after that, she is called his daughter. However, at this point they are not manifest in the material world nor are they taking part in her development yet, which is why the world is described as ‘virginal’ and ‘pristine’. That might also be the reason behind the choice of the name Ninsikila, meaning ‘pure virgin lady’, an indication for the literate in the audience that she could not be ‘his spouse’, let alone a victim of incest.

Jacobsen, however, chooses for a different reading: “The Ninsikila of the first story is, we noted, the spouse (−) and the daughter of Enki (−).” He blames the composer of the text for not bothering “to smooth over the incongruity” of the two stories. Next comes a highly speculative reflection on the now outdated views with regard to geo-
morphological conditions on the island of Bahrain. In answer to the question of whether the identity of Enki and Ninsikila/Ninhursag in the first section really matches with the characters bearing the same names in the second part, he posits the identities of Enki and Ninsikila – being partners – have been derived from two characters seen as partners in another context: Ninsikila(k), a purely local goddess of Dilmun (Bahrain) married to Ensak, Lord of Dilmun. However, according to ‘The building of Ningirsu’s temple’ (ETCSL 1.7.2) both Ninsikila and Ensak are closely associated with Lagash in Sumer where the temple for the local supreme god, Ningirsu, was erected under supervision of Gudea, en-priest of Girsu: ‘Ninzaga (*Ensag) was commanded and he made his copper, as much as if it were a huge grain transport, reach Gudea, the man in charge of building the house. Ninsikila was also instructed (*by ‘the man in charge’) and she made large ḫalub logs, ebony, and aba wood reach the ruler building the E-ninnu.’

Jacobsen also considers the possibility that she was confused with another goddess: Ninsikila, consort of the god Lisi in the Sumerian city Adab. This observation will be taken up again later.

In two separate articles Dina Katz (2007, 2008) shares Jacobsen’s view that the rather small island of Bahrain in the Persian Gulf can be identified as Dilmun. Part one deals with the relationship between Enki and Ninsikila and the transformation of the isle of Dilmun into a habitable and prosperous trade centre; part two with Enki’s extra-marital relations and the consequences of his behaviour.

Postgate, too, has little confidence in viewing the known version of the story as an integrated whole. His contribution to the discussion in ‘Dismembering Enki and Ninhursaga’ (2010) is mainly based on Jacobsen’s work. It seems possible (he writes) “that we might achieve a better idea of what both the final version and its component parts were aiming to achieve by concentrating on the structure of the text as it now stands, and on how the two parts were connected.” This being said, he divides the story into three sections. His first section matches with what Jacobsen calls ‘Enki and Ninsikila’. He separates the second part (‘Enki and Ninhursag’) into “Enki’s incestuous relations with his daughters” (lines 64–186) and “Illness and cure of Enki” (lines 187–278). The first and the third section he associates with Dilmun, which, like Jacobsen, he identifies with the island of Bahrain in the Gulf. But he locates the second and central part of the myth, dominated by the copulation motif, in the southern part of Sumer. Postgate: “To be more specific, at the start of the text the Sumer-Dilmun connection is conveyed by portraying Enki (-) ‘on location’ in Dilmun, and in a close (if varying) relationship with Nin-sikil, a Dilmunite deity.” The unauthenticated phrase “the Sumer-Dilmun connection” is of course on behalf of the author himself. But Ninsikila has yet to be born (section 3) and not a single word is said about the imaginary nature of the scene or ‘the fresh waters that shall run for her out of the ground on Ezen’s shore’ (E), a passage that does not match with the salty and, at best, brackish waters of the Gulf that surround the island of Bahrain. Postgate: “Dilmun does not reappear until at the end of the text we find Ensag being made the ‘Lord (‘en’) of Dilmun’. According to Postgate this “Dilmun theme” can be seen as an outer shell, enclosing the central part of the text which has no apparent connection with the Dilmunite scene at Bahrain.

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51 Ibid.
52 Ibid.
53 Ibid., p. 239.
Obviously the middle section of ‘E&N’ – “Enki’s incestuous relations with his daughters” (Postgate) – does not fit the relatively small and stony island of Bahrain, surrounded by the salt water of the Gulf. Indeed, there are no ‘vessels on Ezen’s shore’, no marshes nor rivers whatsoever. This is also true of the fictitious first part of the myth. No wonder Postgate has no answers to the questions he poses: “Where should we draw the line between this core, and material created or inserted to provide the linkage between the two themes? (-) Here we are reduced to mere guesswork.”54 Otherwise he has little to say about the central part with its crucial information about Enki’s wanderings in Dilmun: “Until we know more, it seems hard to propose an interpretation of the central Enki and Ninhursaga story with any confidence.”55 In effect, his confusion is mainly caused by the supposition that Dilmun is in fact Bahrain. Postgate:

“Thus the Dilmun theme can be understood as an aetiological myth accounting for the incorporation of Dilmun (“i.e. Bahrain) in the Mesopotamian world through two episodes involving Enki at the beginning and end: providing fresh water and decreeing the destiny of Enzak.”56

However, in the last paragraphs of our story not only Enzak (Ensag) but also Ninsikila is assigned some responsibility, becoming part of the Sumerian pantheon as a result. I’ll see to that at the end of my interpretation. The idea the myth ‘E&N’ attempts to incorporate the cultural heritage of Bahrain into the story of the development of Sumer is refuted by the content and resolution of the story when considered as a whole. Once the misunderstanding has taken root it takes on a life of its own. It is astounding, for example, how Rice uses the initial verses of ‘E&N’ to paint a picture of Bahrain: “Dilmun (*sic) is splendidly described, a land of joy and peace, whose creation has been an unreserved success. Ninsikila is a tutelary goddess of Dilmun (-).”57 The evidence he gathers to show that Enki used to be worshipped on Bahrain is absolutely incompatible with the geo-morphological differences between the freshwater landscape in the south of Mesopotamia and the island with hardly 2% arable land, ten rainy days per year and average daytime temperatures of 27 degrees Celsius. To state this is to say nothing to the detriment of Bahrain, which in ancient times functioned as a stopping-place for ships on their way to and from Magan and even cities in the Indus valley. Therefore it goes without saying that the island was a melting pot of many different cultures, including those from Mesopotamia.

That Nintud is referred to in the same breath with Damgalnuna and Ninhursag (fragment I) has caused confusion. Attinger suggests the three names all refer to one person: “Nous admettons, non sans hesitation, que Nintu/Damgalnuna/Ninhursaga ne sont, dans ce texte, que d’autres noms de Ninsikila.”56 However, his explanation falls short because Ninsikila does not exist yet and is destined to be the daughter of Ninhursag. Jacobsen supposes the author changes her name deliberately “to have it as a pun on ki-sikil ‘maiden’,” designate the goddess before she was married to Enki.”58 Both neglect the fact she is referred to as his daughter and, moreover, that she only appears at the end of the story. That is where we hear the story of her birth and how she meets her destiny.

The way Enki imposes himself on Nintud is not exactly subtle. Initially ‘the august one’ (Nintud) turns him down (fragment I). But, says Jacobsen, when Enki insists, addressing her as ‘Great spouse of the Prince’ (‘Dam-gal-nun-a’) in order to show that there can be no misunderstanding about her status as his ‘wife’, she succumbs to the god of the sweet freshwaters. This interpretation seems to be sound because Damgalnuna’s position as Enki’s official partner is evident in other texts. It is the epithet ‘the country’s mother’ that suggests she is an extension of Mother Earth (Ninhursag),

54 Ibid., p. 240.
55 Ibid., p. 243.
56 Ibid., p. 242. (Etiological myth: in this case a story explaining the emergence of Bahrain.).
which means that Ninhursag is indirectly involved in the development of Dilmun at this stage in the story. The contemporary audience must have understood that it was Mother Earth who finally reaps the benefits of Enki and Nintud’s relation. In this context Enki is the personification of the waters that, with the coming of spring, surge powerfully and unstoppably through the landscape on their way to the lowlands. No wonder their copulation is so unceremonious. Besides, the earth was still uncultivated and missing irrigation canals. However, for many commentators the rather crude copulation sets the stage for the rest of their interpretation.

2.3 Sexual intercourse and pregnancy

The rivers form the perfect point of departure for Enki to start exploring different regions of Dilmun. He now turns his attention to the lowland areas around their banks; they are his first and easiest conquests. First he penetrates the marshes via the reed bed, which according to Jacobsen “is probably to be understood mythopoetically as the pubic hairs of the earth mother”. Next he conquers the lakes that have run dry. Every spring he will provide these areas with water in the same manner. Through his courtship with the daughters and granddaughters of Nintud/Ninhursag, the interaction can be followed closely. Each copulation heralds a new phase of development inside the mythical borders of Dilmun that, strangely enough, is considered by many scholars to be the island of Bahrain in the Persian Gulf.

In the parallel world of the gods, with its own laws of space and time, Nintud’s labour takes place without any problem: ‘(-) but her nine months were nine days. In the month of womanhood, like juniper oil, like juniper oil, like oil of abundance, Nintud, mother of the country, like juniper oil, gave birth to Ninsar.” The fruit of Enki’s courtship with Nintud is not so much the vegetation she brings forth, but the region in which Ninsar will live up to her name.

It is not long before Enki becomes aware of Nintud’s daughter, the maiden Ninsar. From the reed bed he spies on her. Attracted by the freshness of her beauty and after consulting Isimud, his counsellor, he has sex with her; as effortlessly as Nintud she too gives birth to a daughter: Ninkura. In the translation based on a manuscript from Nippur, additional lines of unknown origin have been inserted at this point (ETCSL 126A-126CC). The passage is almost identical apart from the fact that Ninkura gives birth to a daughter by the name of Ninimma. Ninimma, in turn, gives birth to Uttu. In the Nippur-version these lines are missing and it is Ninkura herself who gives birth to Uttu. The insertion will not be discussed here.

Courting, pregnancy and birth all receive the same treatment. Jacobsen translates the name Ninkura as “mistress of the mountains”, which inadvertently conveys the impression that her conception took place in the mountains. But generally speaking, ‘kur’ in Sumerian refers to the surface of the earth, irrespective of its elevation. The author probably intended her name to evoke areas that could not easily be reached by the water from rivers, even when the water level was rising in spring. These are the areas where the first settlements were built. That is where Uttu, ‘the exalted woman’, was born. The epithet suggests she differs from her sisters in more than one respect.

2.4 Uttu, the exalted woman

The lines that have survived suggest a drastic change in Enki’s relationships. It is clear from the first lines to follow that Enki’s encounter with Uttu does not unfold as one might expect in view of Enki’s love affairs so far. That is, judging from the interpretation of Jacobsen and other commentators, a bold statement. In many comments Enki’s libido

60 See e.g. ‘Enki and the world order’, ETCSL 1.1.3, ll. 250 ff.
62 ETCSL 1.1.1, ll. 75/87.
results in a dramatic confrontation with ‘Uttu, the exalted woman’. However, the precise details of its unfolding are uncertain because more than ten lines are missing or illegible.

J  (127 ff.) – (Nintud said:) ‘Let me advise you, and may you take heed of my advice. Let me speak words to you and may you heed my words. From in the marsh one man is able to see up here, is able to see up here, he is; from in the marsh Enki is able to see up here, is able to see up here, he is. He will set eyes on you.’

This is the moment Nintud, the mother of the land, can no longer remain indifferent to what is happening. Her behaviour is completely in line with the allegory that has governed the story so far. She is the wiser, older woman in a good position to advise her grandchild. Enki, who wants to know how far he can go, has to watch his step. It is not inconceivable that the literate contemporaries of the narrator associated Nintud’s actions with her role as midwife in other stories. In the myth “Atrahasis” she is involved in the creation of man together with Enki.  

K  (147-151) – ‘Bring cucumbers in ......, bring apples with their stems sticking out (?), bring grapes in their clusters, and in the house you will indeed have hold of my halter, O Enki, you will indeed have hold of my halter.’

During their first meeting, Uttu makes a strong impression on Enki. Now, if he wants her to feel comfortable in his presence, he has to behave like a gentleman. On the other hand, he can count on a generous welcome once he satisfies her requirements. Aside from naturally occurring vegetables, she also wants produce demanding actual cultivation. How can he obtain such produce? Luckily, a human being comes to his aid: ‘the gardener’. As a result, it looks as if his second visit to Uttu will reap real rewards. Without the aid of the gardener, however, this second visit would have ended in a second rejection.

L  (152-166) – When he was filling with water a second time, he filled the dykes with water, he filled the canals with water, he filled the fallows with water. The gardener in his joy rose (?) from the dust and embraced him: ‘Who are you who...... the garden?’ Enki (said to) ...... the gardener: (4 lines missing) He brought him cucumbers in ......, brought him apples with their stems sticking out (?), brought him grapes in their clusters, filled his lap.

The birth of Uttu and the appearance of ‘the gardener’ heralds a new era in the development of Dilmun.

2.5 The gardener
The meeting with the gardener takes place on higher ground. The crops cultivated there are part of the real world. Hard labour precedes the harvesting. Canals need to be dug. The irrigation system needs daily maintenance. Every year the gardener looks forward to

the moment fresh water again fills the canals. The collaboration between Enki and the gardener is one in which the gardener performs the hard labour while Enki enjoys its fruit. Servitude to the gods was man’s calling when Namma, the primeval mother of all the gods, decided to create man in dialogue with her son Enki.65

The encounter between the gardener and his god marks another special, but hardly understood moment in the development of Dilmun. The concise description of it and some missing lines make the passage difficult to understand. The gardener represents mankind and in this mortal capacity plays a part in the allegory. Enki is forced to cooperate with him in order to satisfy the wishes of Uttu. Both nature and the capricious Uttu, the face of the metaphor, must be dealt with carefully. The author meets the audience halfway by providing them first with the real world scene with the gardener, and only afterwards . . . with the imagined scene that allegorises it: the parallel world of the gods in which the second encounter between Enki and Uttu takes place. Only Enki can travel between those realms – one real, the other invented. These worlds, reality and the image of it, are interrelated and can be compared. The order of presentation, however, is irrelevant because there is no causality between reality and allegory and no temporal difference. Enki’s successful encounter with the gardener both reflects and is reflected by his successful meeting with Uttu, the exalted lady, although the linear narrative style suggests that the efforts of the gardener precede Enki’s second visit.

The gardener does the preparatory work, digging the canals and ensuring Uttu’s fields are irrigated when the water begins to rise. In the end it gives him great satisfaction to see his work completed and Enki fill the channels with fresh water. In turn, Enki does his utmost to make his visit to Uttu a success. For both Enki and the gardener the experience is new. When the live-giving water runs through the channels, the gardener expresses his deep gratitude and wonders to whom he owes his luck. Their meeting is notable because both Enki and the gardener traverse the boundary between their respective worlds when they embrace each other. And Uttu cannot believe her luck either when the fruit is handed over and Enki makes love to her.

The collaboration between Enki and his gardener gives real momentum to the development of Dilmun. Human labour has been added to the processes of nature. Those present at the presentation of the story must have understood that the gardener stands opposite his creator, in his image and likeness. Enki must be pleased with the result of the gardener’s labour and urges him to carry on that way. The gardener can be satisfied as well. The demand for his produce will increase with the passage of time. He serves as a model for a mankind in need of more than nature has to offer. For his part, Enki benefits from the labours of beings created in his image, after the likeness of gods. It therefore comes as no surprise that on visiting Uttu, Enki acts in his capacity as gardener and receives a hearty welcome as such.

It is remarkable how subtly the author/narrator succeeds in bridging the gap between the worlds of gods and men – the different dimensions of space and time. The concision of the allegory, too, is striking. This leads me to suspect the story was not read to the audience. I suppose, instead, the manuscript was studied in detail before the storyteller faced his public.

2.6 Enki, the courteous one

The introduction of the gardener represents a landmark in the process initiated by Enki. He irrigates not only the virginal grounds of Dilmun land, but also the cultivated fields of the industrious farmer and so does not arrive empty-handed at Uttu’s door. The analogical character of the allegory should not be ignored. It is Enki who irrigates Uttu’s fields, and it is ‘the exalted woman’ who grants Enki free access to her dwelling to make love with her. Enki changes into a courteous lover, the gardener into a hard worker and Uttu into a woman deserving of special treatment. Enki might push the limits where

possible, but thus far he has crossed no boundaries because there are none, as yet. Well-groomed and courteous, he knocks at Uttu's door.

M (167-177) – Enki made his face attractive and took a staff in his hand. Enki came to a halt at Uttu's, knocked at her house (demanding): 'Open up, open up.' (She asked): 'Who are you?' (He answered): 'I am a gardener. Let me give you cucumbers, apples, and grapes for your “Yes”.' Joyfully Uttu opened the ‘house. Enki gave Uttu, the exalted (?) woman, cucumbers in ......, gave her apples with their stems sticking out (?), gave her grapes in their clusters. (1 line not in the ms. from Nippur: He poured beer for her in the large ban measure.)

(178 ff.) – Uttu, the exalted (?) woman, ..... to the left for him, waved the hands for him. Enki aroused Uttu. He clasped her to the bosom, lying in her crotch, fondled her thighs, fondled her with the hand. He clasped her to the bosom, lying in her crotch, made love to the youngster and kissed her.

Enki cannot lag behind the developments he has brought about. It is significant that he introduces himself as a gardener. There is no question of deception. The gardener and Enki are allegorically intertwined to such an extent that he does not have to pretend he is the gardener. Uttu must have appreciated it or even perceived it as a witty remark. She too has undergone a gratifying development and can hardly be compared to previous manifestations of Nintud/Ninhursag.

Her name possibly holds a special significance. In “Enki and the world order (EWO)” the name Uttu is associated with the art of weaving: ‘He (“Enki) picked out the tow from the fibres, and adapted it for rags (?). Enki greatly perfected the task of woman. (-) Enki placed in charge of them the honour of the palace, the dignity of the king – Uttu, the conscientious woman, the silent one.” 66 In this story, Uttu is the goddess in control of the textile-industry, an important part of the palace-economy. Her name implies a status beyond the reach of the former Enki’s strategies in love. But now he has become the gardener, she welcomes him wholeheartedly. 67 Some commentators suggest Enki’s guise as the gardener shows he has to compete for her affection with a mortal being – or that Nintud took on the role of a marriage broker. But in privileging the image side of the metaphor, they neglect the referential frame of the story and complete the picture according to their own ideas.

Within the confines of the allegory that begins with the relationship between Enki and mother goddess Nintud, the gardener has no further role to play. He is only a supporting actor and disappears from sight, despite the fact that he will always belong to the reality beyond the images of the allegory. Enki remains the hero of the story, ensuring the gardener’s labour will bear fruit. When he knocks on Uttu’s door he is both Enki and, allegorically, the gardener. There can be no doubt about that. He is welcomed with open arms by both the gardener – ‘the gardener in his joy rose from the dust and embraced him’ – and Uttu!

2.7 Making love

While the gardener is performing his duties, Enki and Uttu become better acquainted. Their coupling has little in common with the uncontrollable sexual desire of Enki’s first encounter with Nintud. Uttu dances for him (‘waved the hands for him’), falls under his spell and willingly submits to his passion. In a revised version of 2015 (ll. 178-79) Attinger maintains that it is Enki who gets excited when Uttu dances for him and claps in her hands in delight. Anyway, both of them are fully immersed in a game that ends with a

66 ETCSL, 1.1.3 381-386.
kiss. Enki performs in the manner one might expect of a river god. There is no sense of anti-climax; on the contrary, Enki and Uttu are both fully satisfied.

N (184-189) – Enki poured semen into Uttu's womb and she conceived the semen in the womb, the semen of Enki. Uttu, the beautiful woman, cried out: 'Woe, my thighs'. She cried out: 'Woe, my liver. Woe, my heart.' Ninhursaja removed the semen from the thighs. (2 lines fragmentary)

The cries ‘the conscientious woman, the silent one’ utters recall a few lines in ‘Inana's descent to the nether world’. In that myth Ereshkigal, supreme goddess of the underworld, expresses her grief for the loss of her children in almost the same words. Enki sends two wailing-women to Ereshkigal's sickbed to win her sympathy so that she will release her sister, Inana, from the underworld. Jacobsen:

“As instructed by Enki the two mourning specialists join in her laments. Whenever she wails, 'Woe, alas for my heart!', they say to her, 'O you who are sighing, O our lady, alas for your heart!', and whenever she wails, 'Woe for my liver', they are ready with an, 'O, you who are sighing, O, our lady, alas for your liver!'”

The stakes are high. Should Inana, goddess of love, not return, life on earth is surely doomed. Surprised by the excessive display of compassion, Ereshkigal set Inana free on condition she provide a substitute. Introducing his translation of 'The Epic of Gilgamesh' Benjamin Foster writes: “These and other allusions to Mesopotamian intellectual tradition suggest that the anticipated audience included people of formal education appreciative of the adroit use of stock phraseology”.

Be that as it may, the contemporary audience had to decide for themselves how Uttu's exclamations should be interpreted. In light of the preceding scene, we can deduce that Enki and Uttu's love affair happens with the agreement of both ‘the country’s mother’ and Mother Earth, who is ever present in the background. Meanwhile, Uttu’s coming of age marks the end of Enki’s series of amorous encounters. Significantly, their union does not produce a daughter; the author does not repeat himself. Enki’s role as god of the fresh waters has past its prime. Dilmun land can no longer be imagined without gardeners and farmers. Nature has lost its innocence. The limits of its growth have been reached. The possibilities of cultivating more parts of Mother Earth have been exhausted.

2.8 The realms of common decency

The boldness of Enki’s love life has been a cause for concern among commentators, although the scenes following the beginning of time do not justify it. Enki is neither an opportunist nor a ‘trickster’ trading in disguises. He is the god who delivers sustainable changes for the benefit of the gardener’s descendants. He transforms Dilmun land into an area with a highly developed agricultural system, completely unknown to the inhabitants of Bahrain. His actions also seem to add to the beauty of ‘the country’s mother’ and following on from this of Ninhursag. But most commentators – exceptions are scarce – are highly critical of his manner of operating. His affair with Uttu gets an especially bad press, despite the fact his second visit to her signals his entrance to the civilized world, as previously stated.

This view of Enki has emerged as a result of most discussions’ focus on the myth’s metaphorical images after the first section. Kirk (1973) speaks of “various forms of sexual activity” and brands Enki's behaviour “incestuous”, although the allegorical character of the myth seems to exclude that qualification. Kirk: “This irregular use of sex merely wastes the fertile potentialities of the water-god, and in order to fulfil his latest

68 Uttu, according to “Enki and the world order” (EWO), ETCSL 1.1.3, ll. 381-386.
69 ETCSL, 1.4.1 – ll. 236 ff.
70 Jacobsen (1976), p. 58-9 (see also: ETCSL 1.4.1, - ll. 236 ff.).
incestuous desires he has to agree to water the uncultivated places so as to grow grapes and cucumbers.”  

However, Enki’s visit to Uttu underlines there is nothing wrong with his libido. The fields that in the real world have been cultivated by Enki’s mortal counterpart, the gardener, are awaiting his fresh waters. The meeting between the gardener and his god is as special as that between Enki and Uttu. The author does not choose grapes and cucumbers simply so that Enki can satisfy his dark desires – associations with the forbidden fruit of Genesis are not relevant here – but because they are pre-eminently appropriate to serve as gifts. This produce is symbolic of Dilmun’s development and progress. Statements about Enki that neglect this new phase in the development of Dilmun fall outside the myth’s true frame of reference. Kirk: “Perhaps I had better defend myself by adding that any modern explanation of a myth will falsify it by reducing it to a kind of reasonableness that it probably never possessed.”  

This statement inadvertently illustrates the common negligence of myths’ rational component leading to random interpretations. In “Enki and Ninhursag it is the allegory that should be seen as its rational element. It is only in the last fragments, when the text moves on to developments beyond the real world, that the allegory loses its influence.

This negative image of Enki’s behaviour that emerges from most commentaries is difficult to reconcile with the Enki portrayed in every other piece of Sumerian literature. In ‘Enki and the world order’ he is closely involved in the development of both Dilmun land and areas far beyond it. For that reason one should have been careful not to condemn too quickly the actions of a god that was so closely involved in the creation of mankind and the development of its world. But Jacobsen has little faith in the rational foundations of the text and, in his translation, has Enki enter Uttu’s house under false pretences. Mercilessly he proceeds to knock Enki off his pedestal. He claims that Enki manages to seduce her by offering a prospect of marriage and some fruit as wedding present.  

Consider how he renders the god of fresh water’s rampaging sexuality, “stabbing at her underbelly” / “hitting her parts”. For Jacobsen, this frenzy is why Ninhursag has to step in to remove the semen from Uttu’s thighs (fragment N). In a footnote to the introduction of his translation he briefly mentions that “the humorous character of the composition was missed by him in earlier attempt at interpretation.” According to him, the story – “tailored to a sailor’s robust sense of humor” – could perhaps best be understood as “an occasional piece put together to entertain the sailors at a banquet at the royal court in Ur.”

Frymer-Kensky (1992), elaborating on Jacobsen’s interpretation, claims that Uttu’s introduction to the secrets of marriage is painful: “The story of Uttu connects marriage and domesticity with difficulty in childbirth.”  

However, this encounter does not lead to either marriage nor the domestication of Uttu. Their love is mutual and if one of them is to be domesticated it must necessarily be Enki. The prevention of pregnancy does not make sense within the context of the allegory and talk of any rivalry between Enki and Ninhursag is out of the question. By arguing that Enki oversteps the limits of decency, most commentators effectively impose their own principles upon the world of the myth. The limits of decency, however, do not yet exist for Enki. It is he himself who sets the stage for them during his wanderings after the beginning of time and implements the blueprints of creation. What this would lead to was well known by the contemporary audience: the city described in the first section of the myth, a picture that could stand for almost any well-known city in Sumer. However, forgotten is the picture of the society that the contemporaries of the storyteller would have recognised with pride; forgotten too is

72 Ibid., p. 97.
74 ETCSL 1.1.3.
76 Ibid. p. 199.
77 Ibid. p. 181.
the description of the prospect that Enki offers his daughter, Ninsikila in the first section. No effort is made to pursue the allegory to its conclusion with the result that these interpretations stumble into a quagmire of free association.

2.9 Power relations between the sexes

In “The World of the Sumerian Mother Goddess – An Interpretation of Her Myths”, (2014) Rodin considers to what extent the relation between gods and goddesses could be seen to reflect the social behaviour of men and women in the real world. She focuses in particular on two myths: “Enki and Ninhursag” and “Enki and Ninmah”. Rodin:

“Besides the study of the society as depicted in each myth, I will also discuss whether something can be said of historic change in society regarding power relations when looking at both myths. Here, I will mainly focus on the role of women.”

Based on this approach she deduces that the relationships between Enki and Mother Earth, (Ninhursag), and between Enki and mother-goddess Ninmah are illustrative of the inferior status of goddesses in the world of the myths and, by extension, of women in real social life. In doing so she aims to show that the relation between the sexes was already out of balance at an early stage of history. I do not wish to question this idea in itself, but her presentation of the theory cannot be taken seriously when she compares Enki’s ‘élan vital’ to “fallocentrism that we see e.g. in the society reflected in the Bible” or even with the gender relations that we have up to this day. The many centuries separating the two myths from the texts in the Bible undermine the credibility of her argument. The way she tries to associate the two Sumerian myths and the marginalisation of women becomes clear when she looks back on her study. Rodin:

“It was argued that the mother goddess, Enki and Enlil represented three different types of leadership at different stages in the development of society. The mother goddess represents the leader in the villages or early urban societies, whereas Enki represents the leader of the irrigation agriculture. Enlil instead, is the leader of kingdom and empires. The myths enact a struggle between the leaderships represented by Ninhursaga/Ninmah and Enki, and we see an increasing denigration of the mother goddess. She is recalibrated from representing the origin of life and destiny, over having a complimentary role in creation at the side of Enki, to a role as mere helper at births, whereas the creative power comes from Enki.”

My comment on her definition of marginalisation can be concise. The emergence of “villages or early urban societies” depended first of all on the good relationship between the god of the fresh waters and Ninhursag, who must not be mistaken for a ‘mother goddess’ like Nintud or Ninmah, certainly not in the context of our myth. Neither these facts nor the two myths say anything about leadership. Enki and Ninhursag contribute equally to the development of Dilmun in their own way. My interpretation of the last section of the myth will show that neither character dominates the other, in spite of what some commentators claim. Her opinion is in all likelihood based on Enki’s formerly fervent love life, a metaphor. Rodin underestimates the effect of the geo-morphological situation and climate in Sumer on the social status of gods and goddesses, men and women. She also neglects the fact that older traditions and ideologies were not replaced by new religious and social ideas everywhere in Sumer, but could survive and develop alongside them.

It is common knowledge that over time lugal-rulership supplanted the less patriarchal en-rulership in central and northern Mesopotamia, but it is highly questionable that this development can be deduced from the myth ‘Enki and Ninmah’. Disregarding the outcome of the debate between the protagonists of the story – Enki, ‘the wise one’, outwits Ninmah, a mother goddess like Nintud – the text can be seen as a mockery of

80 Ibid., p. 297-8.
81 Ibid., p. 299.
the male-dominated Royal Court and its attendants, the misfits of creation who are only able to serve the king. By demonstrating that Enki, son of Namma, ‘mother of all the gods’, is entitled to determine the destiny of everything in creation, the author shows that Enki personifies the en-rulership that exists by virtue of Namma and her mother goddesses. By allowing Enki to outdo one of them the author only makes clear that the god of the fresh water’s role in the creation of mankind should not be underestimated.

The contrast between archaic and modern ideas about leadership reflects the difference between the ideologies of Ur and Lagash in the less accessible areas in the delta of Sumer on the one hand, and Nippur in central Mesopotamia on the other. In Nippur the city god Enlil was worshipped as the supreme deity of the pantheon. The rise of kingship and the related marginalisation of women probably came about as a result of the change in demographics caused by the arrival of immigrants from the periphery of Mesopotamia. This development can only be deduced from documents written after ca. 2500 BCE, when writing became a fully-fledged medium. In southern Sumer the archaic philosophy retained its influence during the last centuries of the third millennium despite the growing influence of the Nippur doctrine. When Ur became the centre of power in Mesopotamia almost a century after the sudden downfall of the Akkadian Empire ca. 2200 BCE, the old traditions again generated much interest. In that era new copies or versions of old stories like ‘E&N’ and ‘Enki and Ninmah’ came to light. It is precisely those myths Rodin uses as the cornerstones of her theory suggesting the prestige of Namma, Ninhursag and the mother goddesses had been undermined.

From among all the myths derived from Sumerian literary traditions, Ruether first chooses ‘E&N’ to demonstrate that the marginalisation of goddesses was already illustrative for the social position of women in Mesopotamia. She claims that Enki and Ninhursag are rivals, for Enki represents a threat to the status that Ninhursag has already seen reduced by both sky-god (An) and lord-air (Enlil). Ruether: “Enki wishes to displace Ninhursag and take her place as the third in rank. He challenges her to various contests.” Another of her examples first appears in Rivkah Harris’s ‘Gender and Aging in Mesopotamia: (etc)’ (2003), in which she argues that the myth ‘Nergal and Ereshkigal’ is also illustrative of the marginalisation of women. But in the extended version of the myth Nergal (Erra) does not fit the conventional image of Sumerian gods at all. Despite his extremely brutal and warlike behaviour he is described as a pitiful creature Enki and An are eager to get rid of. That his love affair with the goddess of the underworld (Ereshkigal) is preceded by a violent confrontation is completely in line with his identity as a god of war. Harris has a different view: “This myth (‘Nergal and Ereshkigal’) is a far cry from the Sumerian myth in which Enki is the incestuous abuser of his daughters (-).” She too acquiesces in the commonly accepted interpretation of the myth ‘E&N’ and writes about the relations between gods and goddesses, men and women as if differences between cultures, places and times are irrelevant. The difference between Enki’s brutal repression of women and his charitable character in literary tradition is also taken for granted by Nicole Brisch in “Water in Sumerian Mythology” (2016). With reference to Enki who protects human kind from total annihilation by the Flood she writes: “Enki’s role in the earlier Sumerian mythology was very different from this: instead of being the helper of humankind, he is depicted as a transgressor and as one whorapes women and commits incest.”

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2.10 Water, semen and seed

In comparison to the pithy descriptions of Enki’s first conquests, the author of ‘E&N’ pays significantly more attention to his encounter with Uttu. The fact their coupling ends with a kiss does not change Dickson’s verdict on Enki’s behaviour and the plight of Uttu, the exalted woman, as “the last female victim of his predatory lust.” Attempts to interpret Uttu’s cries as the result of the painful delivery of a baby immediately after Enki’s ejaculation are far-fetched. No more daughters will be born. Enki’s second visit marks the completion of the agrarian reforms. His ‘élan vital’ now finds its expression in a full production of crops, increasing wealth and, in the end, the emergence of cities like Eridu, Uruk, Kish and Ur. When Ninhursag wipes the superfluous semen from Uttu’s thighs, she does not impinge upon Uttu’s personal integrity because the allegory in question is still in force. The identities of Ninhursag (Mother Earth), Nintud (the Country’s Mother) and her daughters all overlap to a greater or lesser extent, just as Ninhursag must be seen as an extension of Namma, a cosmological abstraction that, actually, should not be personified.

Nothing further would have happened if mother goddess Nintud and Mother Earth had not interfered in Uttu’s life. Instead, Enki leaves Uttu’s dwelling completely satisfied. The author takes delight in teasing the audience with a play on words and – as will be seen in the last section of the myth – with names. The ambiguity of the words ‘water’, ‘semen’ and ‘seed’ stems from the fact that language sometimes lags behind scientific developments. Even after the invention of the microscope the words, ‘seed’ and ‘sperm’ – compare ‘pollen’ – are being used interchangeably. The same applied in times past. When Enki and the gardener are done, they may rest on their laurels. The ‘country’s mother’ can be satisfied, too. What happens next is up to Mother Earth. This is the moment Ninhursag takes Enki’s semen (or seed) from Uttu’s thighs, i.e. Uttu’s fields (fragment N). The gardener knows that if it were not for Mother Earth, nothing would become of the seed. Seeds could be taken away, collected, fermented, or consumed. Women were responsible for grain storage. Registration and distribution of produce was becoming more and more complex during the Late Uruk period (ca. 3300-3000 BCE) and resulted in the development of a system of writing that eventually evolved into a fully-fledged medium. The connections between agriculture, accounting and writing meant that Nissaba, the goddess of grain, became the patron of scribes and was only replaced in that function by Nabu, son of Marduk, supreme being of Babylon, in the course of the second millennium BCE.

2.11 Naming, determinating and nominating

It is in the interest of both, gods and man, that the encounters between Enki, Nintud and her daughters continue beyond one cycle. To secure the growth of a new generation of crops and other kinds of vegetation, Ninhursag puts aside the surplus seed resulting from Enki’s meeting with Uttu. From this seed she grows eight plants that thus enjoy a status above that of many other plants, herbs or trees and the vegetation growing outside the carefully cultivated lots of land, the fields of the other daughters of Nintud. Turning his attention to the vegetation adorning Mother Earth, Enki is accompanied by his counsellor Isimud or (Akkadian) Usmu, the man with two faces looking in opposite directions. On discovering the eight plants, Isimud plays his part in the development of Dilmun by naming the eight plants, a creative act not supposed to be Enki’s task after his coming out into the world. He decides to investigate further. The ritual play of question (O) and answer (P) that follows is repeated eight times in an almost identical manner.

88 Semen: liquid containing sperm produced by men and male animals.
89 Seed: part of the plant from which a new plant of the same kind can grow.
Enki was able to see up there from in the marsh, he was able to see up there, he was. He said to his minister Isimud: 'I have not determined the destiny of these plants. What is this one? What is that one?'

His minister Isimud had the answer for him. 'My master, the 'tree' plant', he said to him, cut it off for him and Enki ate it. (etc.)''

Following the consumption of the other seven plants, this elaborate conversation is summarized by the narrator: 'Enki determined the destiny of the plants, had them know it in their hearts.' The verbal ritual in front of the eight plants shows the interest of the author in the evocative nature of language. Naming makes people aware that somebody or something really exists. What is not mentioned does not exist or, to put it mildly, does not really matter. It is a way of thinking echoed in Genesis 1:3: *And God said,' Let there be light': and there was light.* In the first sentences of the ‘Babylonian Creation Myth’ (‘Enuma Elish’) the evocative power of language too plays an important role: *When skies above were not yet named, nor earth below pronounced by name (...).* Naming and determination come one after the other without exception. Enki’s behaviour resembles that of a very young child that tries to understand the character of the object that attracts its attention. In this way he tries to satisfy his insatiable hunger for knowledge. Allegorically this scene can be seen as the next step in the development of Sumer and the elevation of its inhabitants. But it is Ninhursag who selects the plants and is closely involved in their growth. The task of determining their destination, however, is reserved for Enki. That the experience (the tasting of the plants) immediately follows the naming, suggests a close relation between the act of naming (Isimud) and the acts of determining and nominating by Enki. How Isimud comes by the names is unclear for now.

### 2.12 Isimud or Enki’s split personality

It is often assumed that Isimud, Enki’s two-faced ‘sukkal’ or vizier, is a messenger or go-between who represents Enki – in my opinion particularly when he is not able or qualified to act himself.

[Image of Enki and Isimud]

The myth ‘Inana and Enki’ offers substantial support for this view. In short, the story is about a visit Inana pays to Enki in his subterranean domain, the ‘abzu’, rightly or wrongly often equated with ‘engur’ during the last centuries of the third millennium BCE. Inana,

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91 ETCSL 1.3.1.
the goddess of love, is received with full honor by Isimud. During the drinking session it becomes clear that Enki, the god of fresh waters, cannot hold his drink as well as his guest. While he is sleeping it off, Inana makes off with the ‘Mes’, the prerogatives of gods and men to judge or make decisions though Enki is responsible for distributing them after fixing the destinies. By order of his master, Isimud sets off in pursuit. How his negotiation with Inana’s ‘sukkal’ proceeds is unclear due to some illegible lines, but I suppose her mistress ends up with a good deal.

Although the myth contains no concrete indications of Isimud’s role, his character and function are put into relief by Enki’s mode of addressing him. He calls his alter ego ‘My Sweet Name of Heaven’ more than fifteen times. This epithet suggests that Isimud represents Enki not only in heaven where sky god An and Inana usually can be found, but also Enki’s chthonic alter ego, when he leaves his subterranean domain, the abzu, to wander the earth. In this light Isimud might be seen as the representative of Namma’s son and has access to the blue-prints of creation in which everything has already been preordained. In fact he is Enki simultaneously operating in another dimension of space and time.

This interpretation does not contradict the scenes that take place when Enki has his eye on Ninsar and the other daughters of Nintud, ‘the country’s mother’. On the contrary, when Enki asks ‘Is this nice youngster not to be kissed? Is this nice Ninsar not to be kissed?’ his minister Isimud repeats those words verbatim. It is as though he is putting the words in his mouth, but it is Enki who suits the action to the words. Isimud: ‘My master will sail, let me navigate. He will sail, let me navigate.’ This division of responsibility is specific to the process of creation. Hitherto, little attention has been reserved for the role Isimud played in the story, although it seems quite self-evident when we look at the myth as a unitary composition.

2.13 The cursing

After fixing the destiny of the eight plants, we are shown Ninhursag’s emotional reaction. It is as if she turns her back on him and his world on seeing what he has done to her plants. Was he overplaying his hand? It seems that their united effort to make the earth a habitable place for the gardener and his offspring has come to an end.

Q (220 ff.) – Ninhursaja cursed the name Enki: ‘Until his dying day, I will neverlook upon him with life-giving eye.’ The Anuna sat down in the dust.

The terse style – see Wiggermann’s statement in my introduction – creates the impression that hardly any time passes between the verbal ritual and Ninhursag’s reaction. But that is far from certain. First of all, one should notice that she curses the name En-ki (Lord Earth). Naming and cursing are correlative acts. If we regard cursing to be the opposite of naming, her reaction to Enki’s behaviour shows he is no longer living up to her expectations nor to his name: En-ki, Lord of the Earth, ‘the manager’ who wanders along her favoured plots of land. Her wrath extends not to the god of fresh waters himself. And if her reaction is the inevitable result of what went on before, it also has significance for the myth as a whole. The author does not keep us waiting. Enki’s

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92 Some time after 3500 BCE Eridu was economically overtaken by Uruk. The most important deities of Uruk were skygod An and Inana, who was sometimes called ‘Queen of Heaven’, although the experts are in the dark about her roots.
93 ETCSL 1.1.1, ll. 88 ff.
94 To be precise, ‘primordial’ and ‘primeval’ are different concepts. The first refers to Rubio’s ‘time before time’, the second to the ancient past, that is the earlier phase of life on earth and the emergence of human civilization.
‘élan vital’ has been exhausted. Mother Earth will no longer reward his efforts. In the context of the myth that can only mean one thing: no more plants will grow. From what follows we learn that Enki has become very ill. The consequences for the primordial gods are expressed succinctly in fragment Q: ‘The Anuna sat down in the dust.’

The scene with the eight plants too has inspired commentary that – to say the least – is not to Enki’s advantage. Despite the fact the text gives no indication of what Enki has done wrong, almost every commentator, perhaps encouraged by his appetite for sex, adheres to the opinion that Enki has once more overstepped the limits of decency. Kirk even uses Enki’s eating of the eight plants to accuse him of cannibalism, comparing his act to scenes in texts from completely different traditions, such as the Greek primeval god Kronos’s devouring of his own children. But at this point in the myth we have not yet met any of Enki’s children, excepting Ninsikila, who is still to be born. Ninsar, Ninkura and Uttu cannot be regarded as his daughters because, like Nintud, they represent different aspects of Mother Earth. Enki’s relationships with them can at best be described as serial monogamy. It is only in the final scenes that we are introduced to his sons and daughters. One of them, of course, is Ninsikila.

2.14 Separate ways

The question of what provokes Ninhursag’s anger has yet to be answered. That Enki crosses the ostensible moral boundaries he has drawn himself seems very unlikely. Was there a price to pay for his increasing consciousness? That too is unlikely. If so, the consequences of his curiosity can be compared to the punishment Adam and Eve suffered after they satisfied their hunger for knowledge and are driven out of paradise. But there is nothing to justify that explanation. That does not alter the fact both Genesis and ‘E&N’ record a very important moment in the development of mankind. In Genesis 3 Adam and Eve cross the boundary established by Yahweh by eating the forbidden fruit, gaining knowledge of good and evil in the process, but also awareness of guilt and mortality. It is notable that Eve takes the initiative. Adam follows. He is punished and committed to hard labour; but the gardener, shaped in the image of Enki, cheerfully starts working the land when the god of sweet waters fills the irrigation canals.

The phrase ‘Until his dying day, I will never look upon him with life-giving eye’ (fragment Q) only makes sense when placed in the broader context of the story. Obviously Enki and Ninhursag have become estranged from one another. But how did that happen? Does she take her eyes off him or does he escape her gaze? From what follows it appears Enki becomes ill and disappears from the face of the earth. Because the storyteller thinks it unnecessary to go any deeper into this dramatic turn of events, nothing can be done but to rely on the allegory that has dominated the myth so far and well-known facts of life in an agricultural society. In that case Enki’s illness and the reaction of Ninhursag are important, interrelated aspects of the next phase in the development of Dilmun until Enki is almost dying: ‘until his dying day’. So the tale turns on the imaginative projection of a process that can be explained in two different ways at the same time: Enki removes himself from her presence and Ninhursag dissociates herself from him. We can exclude the possibility that she curses him personally, for from her perspective his life force has been beneficial to the Mother of the Country and her daughters. Besides, now he has been taken seriously ill he will play no further part in her life. He, in his own way, will not look on her with a life-giving eye. Again, they are both on their own, as described in the first lines of the myth. However, there is one striking difference: the god of sweet waters has fallen ill. Kirk: “As a consequence of trying to force irrigation beyond the natural place, and of Enki’s over-violent reaction, water perhaps fails, and there is a drought, that has to be corrected by action of the great gods.” It is only a suggestion, but one that does point in the right direction.

96 Kirk (1973), p. 95.
2.15 Enki’s disease

Like rituals, myths usually deal with matters of universal interest or situations of regular occurrence. The author is thus not obliged to provide his audience with accurate and unambiguous images of what is going on. The predominantly agricultural population knew very well what happens when the god of the fresh waters is no longer able to fulfil his obligations and Mother Earth turns her back on the people of Sumer. If water became scarce in the rivers outside ‘Ezen’s shore’, it could lead to serious problems for the irrigation of the fields. But that situation could hardly be seen as a kind of illness. There has to be more to it.

Under favourable conditions groundwater and the nutrients contained in it move through the plant’s semi-permeable cell membranes in the direction of the salt solution in its leaves and stems. When the salinity of groundwater increases, however, the process is reversed. Both water and the nutrients are now sucked out of the leaves and stems through the same cell membranes. There is now reason to believe that Enki consumes the plants from within. The salinization of the fields means Enki cannot perform his duties and has nothing to offer aside from his sick and salty seed. He is no longer worthy of his name.

In ‘The History and Culture of Ancient Western Asia and Egypt’ A.B. Knapp wrote: “The waters of both rivers contained a high proportion of dissolved salts, and irrigation hastened salinization of the soil. Inundated every year for centuries, the ground became encrusted with salt. Textual evidence from ancient Mesopotamia vividly describes the threat that salt posed to the harvest...” Sumer’s familiarity with this phenomenon can also be concluded from the Old Babylonian version of ‘Atrahasis’, named after Enki’s pious confidant. Its author describes how, prior to the Great Flood, An and Enlil make several efforts to obliterate mankind. Time and again it is Enki who is able to thwart their plans. One of their efforts is described as follows.

ATRAHASIS

(-) The flood did not [rise] from the depths. The womb of the earth did not bear. Plant life did not come forth. People were not seen about. The black fields whitened, the broad plain was filled up with salts. The first year they ate old grain, the second year they exhausted their stores. When the third year came, their features were [grey] from hunger, their faces were crusted, like crusted malt, life was ebbing, little by little.

The symptoms of the catastrophe that threaten the survival of the gardener and his offspring are also recorded by the author of ‘E&N’. His references to this threat to the welfare of humanity are appropriate to the chronic character of the ‘disease’. It is clear from Knapp’s diagnosis why Ninhursag will no longer look at the moribund Enki ‘with a life-giving eye’. However, both are suffering as a result of their world’s demise and lose sight of each other. Mother Earth is forced to give up her rich vegetable adornment while Enki withdraws to his subterranean domain, the Abzu. The Anuna gods ‘sat down in the dust’, which can be seen as their reaction to the situation. Now everything depends on the question of whether Enki and Ninhursag will be reconciled.

2.16 The fox

Threatened by drought and salinization, Enki turns away from Nintud and Mother Earth. Ninhursag’s emotional reaction is more than just heartfelt grief for the loss of her relationship with Enki. It recognises too both the vulnerability of their world and transience of her beauty. Now her relationship with him is over, there is little consolation

97 Salinization is the accumulation of soluble salts in soils to the extent that soil fertility is severely reduced.
99 Foster (2005), Old Babylonian version, tablet II, p. 244.
in the sight of her bare fields. If she persists in her attitude, life on earth will surely come to an end. The gardener, the farmer and the herdsman will perish before their settlements can develop into cities. The gods are desperate. Suddenly a fox appears. He offers to look for Ninhursag – for a reward, naturally – so they can discuss things with her.

R  (220 ff.) – But a fox was able to speak to Enlil: ‘If I bring Ninhursaja to you, what will be my reward?’ Enlil answered the fox: ‘If you bring Ninhursaja to me, I shall erect two standards for you in my city and you will be renowned.’

It is not the first sudden twist in the story. Once more it is as if different styles and genres are competing for supremacy. In this respect it is a typical creation of a scribal school that integrates folkloristic and other oral traditions with more sacred texts. But the presence of Enlil in this context is rather enigmatic. Why is Enlil, worshipped in Nippur, assigned the role of a mere onlooker? He comes across as a rather short-sighted patriarch, despite the fact his role as a supreme god seems to have been undisputed since halfway through the third millennium BCE. In this passage, I suppose, the author is responding to the contemporary controversy between adherents of the more authentic religion in southern Sumer and the followers of the doctrine of the priests in Nippur. He portrays Enlil as largely unable to take effective action. His answer to the request of the fox must have provoked some hilarity in the audience. Ambition, shrewdness and a total indifference to supernatural affairs make the fox pre-eminently suitable to change the destiny of the world. In his capacity as the trickster among animals, he is keeping up with the times. Carefully groomed, like Enki on his second visit to Uttu, he travels to Nippur, Ur, Larsa and even Uruk.

S 228-246) – The fox first anointed his body, first shook out his fur (?), first put kohl on his eyes (4 lines fragmentary) (The fox said to Ninhursaja:) ‘I have been to Nibru, but Enil . . . . I have been to Urim, but Nanna . . . . I have been to Larsa, but Utu . . . . I have been to Unug, but Inana . . . . I am seeking refuge with one who is . . . .’

At this point seven lines are missing, but I surmise that the gods of those cities decline any liability for what is going on. It is not unlikely that the fox, as a judicious inhabitant of an underground hole, already knows that Enki has sought refuge behind the broad back of Mother Earth, in the abzu where the scorching heat of the sun cannot reach him. The fox does not lack tact. With due consideration for her maternal feelings, he tells Ninhursag how he has looked high and low to provide shelter for somebody who is seriously ill; how he has even travelled to Enlil in Nippur, Nanna in Ur, Utu in Larsa and even to Inana in Uruk (Unug) to ask for help, but all in vain. When it dawns on her that he might be referring to Enki, she hastens to the appointed place.

T  (247-253) – Ninhursaja hastened to the temple. The Anuna slipped off her garment, made . . . ., determined its destiny and . . . .

Ninhursaja made Enki sit by her vagina. (1 line not in the ms. from Nippur: She placed (?) her hands on . . . . and. . . . on its outside.)

Opposite the E-Abzu – House of the Subterranean Waters – the Anuna are waiting to help remove her clothes, the last remnants of her once proud adornments. Thus, stripped to the essence of her being – no longer being Mother Earth – they prepare her for the decisive meeting with the god of the waters that are not so sweet any more.

2.17 The temple
The narrator’s declaration that a temple has already arisen at the place Enki withdrew from the world may come as a surprise to the modern reader. But the cyclical nature of
time and the development of Dilmun over the years lies hidden in the allegory that dominates the story thus far. The audience must have understood that their sense of time did not match that in the parallel world of the gods. They knew there was only one place where Enki could be hiding: at home in the E-Abzu (engur), the temple in the oldest city of Sumer: Eridu, less than ten kilometres from Al U‘baid with the temple where Ninhursag was worshipped long before the rise of other cities in Sumer. There was his temple built of clay and reeds by the offspring of the gardener. In ‘Gods, Demons and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia (etc.),’ Black and Green describe Enki’s domain like this: “The Abzu was the particular realm and home of the wise god Enki (Ea), (-) Enki’s temple at Eridu was known as E-Abzu, ‘Abzu-temple’. The underworld was located even further down, beneath the Abzu.”

If everything went according to the design described in the first section of our myth, this would have been the site of the first Sumerian settlement, ‘the good city’: ‘The city’s dwellings are good dwellings. Its grains are little grains, its dates are big dates, its harvests are triple . . . , its wood is . . . wood.’

2.18 Back to earth

Ninhursag and Enki could hardly have avoided each other because the Abzu lies in the embrace of Mother Earth. There the magical boundary between the natural and the supernatural world has to be crossed in order to save the world of the gardener. The description of the location where they meet (fragment T) is rather obscure. Dickson’s well-documented article reviews every translation of that particular phrase – ‘before’ or ‘by’ or even ‘within’ her vulva. Kirk, well versed in classic literature, explains his preference for the last option in this way: “It is important to notice that in his cure he is seated within, and not just near, Ninhursag’s vagina. That is because he thus becomes implicated through her in the very process of birth – a natural birth, of the eight gods that eventually heal him (-).” However, a natural birth in the world of the gods is by definition out of the question, as is any possibility of natural healing. Dickson: “Despite acknowledging that the phrase ‘actually ... seems to say ‘in her vulva’, Kramer opts for ‘by (?) her vulva’ in his translation of the text.” Dickson leaves no ambiguity as to his own opinion: “Textual and social misgivings aside, there would seem to be no good reason not to take the text at face value, so to speak, and place Enki’s body directly inside the female body of Ninhursag.” But the suggestion that Enki is entirely incorporated into the undoubtedly huge body of Mother Earth is only tenable in light of the allegory. In spite of that there is broad consensus that the phrase can be taken literally. In light of this interpretation the fatally ill god is up for more sexual action after his successful copulations with ‘his spouse’, Damgalnuna, otherwise called Nintud. It is clear, however, that Ninhursag and Enki’s relationship is quite different from that between Enki and Nintud. That Ninhursag addresses him as ‘my brother’, now they have both retired from the world of the gardener, demands an interpretation that does not seem obvious at first sight. So far I am opting, if I must, for the circumscription of Yvonne Rosengarten – “elle (Ninhursag) prend sur son genoux le dieu malade” – an interpretation that, according to Dickson, could inadvertently create associations with the Pietà of Michelangelo.

101 ETCSL 1.1.1, ll. 49Q-49V.
105 Ibid., p. 29.
106 Ibid., p. 28. (Rosengarten, 1971, p. 31).
3. THE THIRD SECTION

From now on the author can make no further appeal to allegory, the extended metaphor that has dominated the second part of the myth. He is not to blame for his inability to find suitable images for what takes place beyond the boundary separating the natural from the supernatural. It is no coincidence that the series successively consisting of the ‘non-existent place’ (Gr. ‘ou-topos’) of the first section – marsh, garden, house and settlement of the second – concludes in the third with an enigmatic scene that takes place in the temple. There, at the good place (‘Eridug’) – (Gr. ‘eu-topos’) – not far from Al Ubaid with its temple dedicated to Ninhursag, the future of Dilmun will be decided. This is the place where the gardener’s descendants, the farmer and the herdsman, used the time allotted to them in the real world to build the first temple to Enki. Here the author again employs the dialogic form, but this time there is no suggestion of it actually being an interior monologue like the conversation between Enki and Isimud in front of the eight plants.

The description of the fully-fledged metropolis inserted in the first section of the story gives the impression the storyteller intends to glorify city-life, but there was no need for him to tell his contemporaries how much their cities meant to them. It was far more important to convince them that welfare and prosperity only could endure with the consent of the gods. After Enki and Ninhursag’s reconciliation, the reader is confronted with an extraordinary account of the birth of four gods and four goddesses who are charged with the responsibility for Dilmun land and her cities. Among them is Ninsikila, Enki’s daughter, who has kept us waiting so long.

3.1 Metaphysics and humanization

After the primeval gods help Ninhursag disrobe from her remaining vegetation (fragment T), the name Mother Earth no longer fits her. The question is which aspect of her being will predominate next. Her previous extensions include Nintud, ‘the country’s mother’, and her daughters. In that capacity she represented the regions of the earth fit for irrigation and even cultivation. But the name Ninhursag can also be interpreted as Lady of the Mound or Cosmic Mountain. She left behind what remains of her vegetation as a consequence of Enki’s illness. She, in turn an extension of Namma, the ultimate principle of creation, remains faithful to the very essence of her being: Lady Earth. From other texts the metaphysics can be derived of an authentic doctrine not (yet) supplanted by later worldviews. An extensive discussion of the matter would take a lot of time, but because elements of ‘E&N’ seem to correspond with the archaic philosophy cherished in the southern part of Sumer, a short review here is relevant.

The action described in the central part of the myth takes place in a context recognisable to the audience or the readers of the story. The first and certainly the third section of the story, however, appealed to their imagination and whatever knowledge they had of alternative worldviews. Those ‘sections’ refer, I suppose, to a cosmology familiar to the author and the literate among his audience. If so, they knew that Ninhursag (Mother Earth) and Enki, “the manager” (Jacobsen) and ‘fashioner of the design of everything’ (‘Enki and Ninmah’) used to be primordial gods involved in the creation of heaven and earth. After their retirement from the world of the gardener with its geographical dimensions, they must have returned to a status predating the appearance in the sky of the sun and moon. Research into Ninhursag and Enki’s antecedents provide an answer to the question of how the enigmatic final scenes should be interpreted.

Always and everywhere people must have wondered how their world came to be. Most explanations had one thing in common: there must have been something from which everything else derived. However, the problem was that it was impossible to express this idea without using images derived from the world they lived in. Cosmological images that would inevitably arise were the ‘Cosmic Egg’, the ultimate or Primal Mother and the Cosmic Mountain. But even then authors were looking for some primordial substance in
which those general concepts were incorporated. Sumerian authors described this substance or ‘prima materia’ as the abyss of some primordial ocean. In ‘Creation Myths of the World (etc.)’ (2009) David A. Leeming collected hundreds of answers to the question about the origin of heaven and earth. “In short” – he wrote – “the egg is a symbol of non-differentiation, differentiation between things being the essence of the creation of everything. It contains within itself male and female, light and dark, all opposites in a state of union. It is perfect entropy and signals the existence of creative power from the very beginning.”

The statement of Lorena Stooky in ‘The Thematic Guide to World Mythology’ (2004) is basically the same: “Arising from the pre-creation void, the egg represents in microcosm all that will come to be when the world assumes its shape. In the process of creation, the oneness of the cosmic egg is broken open to reveal the differentiation that is necessary to order the universe.”

The only difference between both statements is a certain pessimism that is reflected in the use of the term ‘entropy’ by Leeming, if it is to be understood as some form of decline or decay of the purity that was still unaffected before the process of differentiation started. That is why the storyteller of our myth emphatically uses the words ‘pure’, ‘virginal’ and ‘untouched’ in the first lines of the myth when he describes the situation that exists before the beginning of time.

In contrast to people who are devoted to monotheism, polytheists will classify the driving force that underlies the world and its fleeting phenomena into different dimensions that fall within the range of human comprehension. Jacobsen writes that “the life principles in observed phenomena” were personified at an early stage in history. That process he defines as “progressive humanization arising out of a human need for a meaningful relationship with them.” He also applies this schematisation to the undifferentiated ‘prima materia’ (i.e. Namma), if only to enable discussion of it (or her). Strictly speaking, that concept should not be personified, because directed action can only take place when the ‘prima materia’ begins to take shape. Once that process gets going the images and forms it adopts can be seen as extensions of a more abstract and timeless concept. So Ninhursag can be seen as a manifestation of Namma who, prior to the separation of heaven and earth, designed the blue-prints of the cosmos, including heaven and earth and everything that would materialise after Enki’s waking up from a timeless sleep. It is not inconceivable therefore that Ninhursag – ‘Lady of the Mound’ – at the end of the third millennium was still venerated as a tangible extension of Namma in some parts of Sumer. In light of the imminent birth of the eight gods in the last scenes of ‘E&N’, one wonders whether Ninhursag is still, like Namma, self-generating. Similar questions can be asked concerning changes in the status of Enki. He too had to adapt to the changing circumstances on earth after the appearance of the sun and moon in the sky. However, he must have taken with him the memory of the situation from which he emerged.

When it comes to understanding ancient texts that are dealing with the process of creation it is important to determine at what stage the process of differentiation results in a process of humanization and gender-related issues or metaphors. It is for instance very difficult to believe or imagine how the separation of heaven and earth could have been the result of a sexual union or marriage. The same applies to calling Ninhursag ‘Mother Earth’ when there is neither life on earth yet nor partner. That’s why, as I have said, the name of his ‘spouse’ was not mentioned in the first lines of ‘E&N’.

According to the myth ‘Enki and Ninmah’, Namma was – metaphorically speaking – the mother of all the senior gods, but Enki is the only god expressly named ‘her son’. The way the name Namma is written also seems to point to the existence of a close relationship between Namma and Enki. Her name is written with the sign ENGUR

109 Jacobsen (1976), p. 73.
110 “Enki and Ninmah”, ETCSL, 1.1.2, II. 12-23.
whereas Enki’s subterranean domain, the Abzu, is often – rightly or wrongly – called ‘House of Engur’ or E-engur. According to the Sumerian-Akkadian glossary ‘abzu’ (Akkadian ‘apsû’) and ‘engur’ are synonyms. In this context Wiggermann writes:

“Namma is later, in the finished universe, the watery deep, covered as other early entities by more recent ones – (*but) – in the beginning she is the primeval (*primordial) ocean from which everything comes forth. As a primeval (*primordial) deity, she does not have a man; the first move is asexual, later creation is procreation.”111

However, not long before this observation in 1992, Samuel Noah Kramer and John Maier adhered to the opinion that the theology of Eridu – in their vocabulary “the theology of Ea” – did not come into being before the middle of the Old Babylonian period, ca. 1750 BCE. Only after the emergence of the Nippur and Lagash doctrines during the third millennium BCE Sumerian literature would have focused on the role Enki played in mythology. In a review article ‘Enki and the Theology of Eridu’ relating to ‘Myths of Enki, the Crafty God’ by Kramer S.N. & J. Maier (1989),112 William W. Hallo summarizes one of their assumptions as follows: “The Sumerian flood story, in which Enki bests Enlil to assure the survival of humankind, was modified to provide a new antediluvian prologue, beginning with Eridu, to the Sumerian King List. A whole host of myths focussing on Enki developed the theme of his solicitude for humanity as a counterweight to the terror inspired by Enlil and his unalterable ‘word’.113 Obviously Espak in 2010 and Lisman in 2013114 hold on to the same opinion assuming the theology of Eridu only came about when the Nippur doctrine dominated the religious landscape in Sumer and crystallised after the first drafts of ‘The Babylonian Creation Myth’ (incipit: ‘Enûma elîš’) were published. However, the creation myth was inspired by several Sumerian texts surviving from the third millennium. See for instance Tamtik (2007)115 and Andrea Seri (2012). The latter takes the view the ‘Enûma elîš’ differs from other cosmogonies in that Marduk replaces the traditional male creators and stands apart from previous or contemporaneous cosmological passages because in it major creations originate from destruction.116 One of her concluding remarks in ‘The Role of Creation in Enûma elîš’ runs as follows: “At the textual level Enûma elîš is also a display of scribal erudition because it includes puns, literary etymologies, direct borrowings and allusions to various genres and topics of the Mesopotamian mythological literary tradition.”117

3.2 Engur and Abzu

In ‘The Mesopotamian God Enki-Ea’ (2015) Galter writes with reference to Espak: “The Sumerian concepts Abzu and Engur that are used to describe Enki’s subterranean domain are still very obscure for the early periods (Espak 2006, pp.13-17). Later, after his association with the Semitic god Ea, we find the Abzu connected with darkness, spring water and clay.”118 Inadvertently the author creates the impression that Enki and Ea were incorporated into the inner circle of gods and goddesses independently. That is not very likely. It is worth considering the possibility that in an early stage of history ideological systems developed in different directions and continued to exist alongside one another. In the process distinctions between related concepts might get lost. This applies to the basic concepts ‘abzu’ and ‘engur’. In the course of time the difference was ignored or neglected due to the rise of other ideas.

117 Ibid., p. 25.
After the collapse of Uruk’s commercial empire ca. 3000 BCE the migration of people alien to the alluvial plains of Sumer greatly increased. Especially Nippur would take the lead in cultural and religious matters. Important monastic writing schools in Nippur no doubt left their mark on Sumerian literature from the middle of the third millennium up to the collapse of the Akkadian Empire. After 2200 BCE the influence of Nippur dwindled in favor of the ideologies in the southern parts of Sumer, first of all in Lagash. Almost a century later Ur-Nammu, king of Ur, managed to unite the greater part of Mesopotamia. It is not inconceivable that his name was chosen deliberately to symbolize the emergence from the chaotic period that followed the collapse of the Akkadian Empire. During that era interest in the archaic ideas came to the fore again. Precisely during that period ‘Enki and Ninursag’ and ‘Enki and Ninmah’ came to light. The greater attention to the basic concepts underlying the characters of Namma (Nammu), Enki and Ninursag was not to the benefit of the Nippur-ideology. In those texts Enlil – ‘Lord Air’ – supreme being venerated by the Nippur-fraternity is not involved in the creation of heaven and earth nor in the creation of mankind. In the preserved version of the myth ‘Enki and the world order’ (EWO), very likely revised by their priests, the role of Enki is played down in favor of Enlil. Enki is called ‘the son of Enlil’ - the name Ninursag is only used once. Three times we read ‘Enil was delighted with Enki, and Nibr was glad.’ Rather unabashed the editor of the text proclaims: ‘Mountain Enil has pronounced your name, great in heaven and on earth.’

In the Babylonian myth (‘Ee’), the ‘prima materia’ is an infinite mixture of fresh and salt water, components that are to be personified after the first eight lines of the story. It is from this combination, respectively, Apsû (male) and Tiāmat (female), that several generations of primordial gods and goddesses spring forth. When the survival of those generations is threatened by Apsû, a struggle between Apsû and Enki takes place. Enki defeats Apsû and takes over his realm: the still primordial sweet waters, no longer mixed up with Tiāmat. The life of Tiāmat is brought to an end by Marduk, the son of Enki and Damkina (*Damgalnuna), after which he uses Tiāmat’s huge parts to create the universe, including the earth. Marduk is promoted to become the supreme deity of the world.

So it seems likely that the combination Tiāmat-Apsû reflects the archaic Sumerian bond between Namma and Enki, implying that the fresh waters of the primordial Enki were still mixed with the waters of Namma before his ‘coming out’ into the world. Apsû is undergoing the same process when he disassociates himself from Tiamat in the creation story to fight the gods together with his vizier called Mummu. This epos was composed several centuries after ‘E&N’.

In ‘Enki and Ninmah’ the personification of ‘the primeval ocean from which everything comes forth’ – i.e. Namma – pays a visit to Enki’s fresh-water domain, the Abzu, and arouses him from an apathy reminiscent of the first passages of our myth. Even this arousal can be seen as an act of separation or differentiation. There, in ‘the deep “engur”, in the flowing (‘!’) water, the place the inside of which no other god knows’ Enki and Namma are committed to internal conversation about the creation of man. The close connection between Namma and Enki and her name, including the written concept of the sign ‘engur’, means that Enki’s abode – the ‘Abzu’ – and ‘engur’, according to the authentic variant of creation, are so intertwined that Namma can ignore the exclusivity of Enki’s domain. The same happens when Ninursag, extension of

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119 EWO, ETCSL 1.1.3., ll. 212 ff.
120 ‘Primordial’ (comp. ‘time before time’) and ‘primeval’ times are conceived as different concepts.
121 “Enki and Ninmah”, ETCSL 1.1.2, ll. 12 ff.
Namma, after her meeting with the fox, looks for Enki in the Abzu, his domain that can hardly be distinguished from her own as a result of his sickness. There Ninursag repeatedly calls him ‘my brother’, another metaphor indicating that they are both closely related to Namma. There, in the subterranean regions – ‘the deep engur, in the flowing water’ – Enki is inconceivably cured of his illness. So, everything goes to show that in fact the myth ‘E&N’, just as ‘Enki and Ninmah’, is based on the Eridu model of creation, in which the chthonic motif features prominently. Many scholars on the other hand give preference to the cosmic concept of creation in which the copulation of heaven and earth takes centre stage before everything else.

3.3 Namma and Enki - Tiāmat and Apsû

In ‘Creation and the Divine Spirit in Babel and Bible’ (2013) Eckhart Frahm takes “a fresh look at the very first verses of Enūma elīš and Genesis 1.” The essence of his discourse is important for understanding different aspects of the personalities performing in ‘E&N’. According to Frahm the syntactical problems in the first five lines of ‘Ee’ are considered of less importance, which does not mean the interpretation is self-evident. He translates:

1 When on high no name was given to the heavens,
2 Nor below was the earth called by name,
3 Apsû was the first, their progenitor,
4 And mummu Tiāmat (i.e. the sea) was she who bore them all.
5 They were mingling their waters together.

Especially the word ‘mummu’ has provoked many explanations over time. The author does not rule out that we are dealing with an epithet in line 4, written without the divine determinative (ד). However, sometimes ‘mummu’ does happen to be written with the determinative. Frahm: “A key question is whether all the references represent the same lemma.” In short, he distinguishes three options:

(A) ‘mummu’ as an epithet of Tiāmat (in Ee I 4), meaning “creative spirit”, without divine determinative! Frahm: “The verse should therefore be translated: ‘(And) Tiāmat (endowed with) creative spirit (mummu), was she who bore them all.’”

(B) ‘Mummu’ as the name of the vizier and adviser of Apsû (in Ee I 66-72), with divine determinative. Frahm: “In I 29-72, when Apsû takes over the initiative from Tiāmat, Mummu, now a deity, serves as his ‘vizier’. After Apsû’s defeat, Mummu becomes part of the world of Ea. The story of how he is vanquished by this god functions as an etiological tale that explains in mythological terms the origins of the well-established association between Ea, ‘the crafty god’, and Mummu.” In other words, ‘the crafty god’ also has ‘the creative spirit’ at his disposal that in fact belonged to Tiāmat before Apsû took over the initiative. Comparing Mummu to Isimud, vizier or messenger of the extremely wise god Enki, is not far-fetched.

(A/B) Both aspects (A) and (B) are summarized by Frahm as follows: “We can conclude by saying that all references in Enūma Eliš to mummu seem to designate the same dynamic principle. This principle can appear as an abstract concept or in personal manifestations. It migrates in the course of the story first from Tiāmat to Apsû, then to Ea, and finally to Marduk. In Ee I 4, when associated with Tiāmat, mummu is introduced

as an abstract force. The verse should therefore be translated: ‘(And) Tiāmat, (endowed with) creative spirit (mummu), was she who bore them all.’  

(C) ‘Mummu’ as “roar” only once (in ‘Ee’ VII 121). I will come to this later.

The epithet ‘mummu’ in Ee l. 4 line 4 belongs to category (A) and is – like the other lines related to the same lethargy that is attributed to Enki and his ‘spouse’ in the prologue of ‘E&N’. This is confirmed by the three lines that follow:

6 And no field was formed, no marsh was to be seen;
7 When of the gods none had been called into being,
8 And none bore a name, and no destinies were ordained;

When Marduk in Ee VII 86-87 is called ‘Mummu, creator of heaven and earth’ it calls to memory the fourth line in Ee, but also the epithets destined for Namma. However, all descriptions fail as soon as poets try to describe or personify the initial power that enables transformation. That is why Namma is seldom named and Tiamat has to leave the stage when Marduk tears her huge body apart. Now it becomes clear why the author of ‘E&N’ – several ages before the emergence of ‘Enūma Eliš’ – solved the problem by giving Enki a second voice: Isimud who kept the memory of divine creation and its designs alive. According to the myth ‘E&N’ and ‘Enki and Ninmah’ the realization of the Design itself is not included in the initial creative Power.

As previously stated, Apsû is defeated by Enki (Ea), who then founds his dwelling upon the corpse of Apsû. Mummu is taken prisoner by Enki. Frahm: “The nature of Mummu’s physical appearance remains rather unclear throughout this passage.” As for the translation and interpretation of l. 47-68 (l) there are – as he says – a lot of problems not in the least caused by the alternative use of the divine determinative in connection with the word ‘mummu’. In Ee l. 48 the determinative is missing. That is why Frahm has taken a different view from, for instance, Foster: “mummu designates the force that inspires the advice” given to Apsû, for the time being – not the adviser or vizier with that name. I can only speculate on that issue assuming that the authors of Ee were adapted to the archaic Eridu model of creation that is corroborated by the interpretation of ‘E&N’. In my opinion there can hardly be doubt about the parallel between Namma (‘mother of all the senior gods’), Enki and his adviser Isimud on the one hand, and Tiāmat (‘who bore them all’), Apsû and his adviser Mummu on the other.

3.4 The ‘metaphor of noise’

To my knowledge the possibility that Enki has a double identity was first suggested by Jacobsen in 1976. This is corroborated by some other surviving fragments, including the translation and interpretation of a pre-Sargonic fragment called ‘Urukagina 15’, a small Early Dynastic tablet (AO 4153) found at Girsu, now at the Louvre Museum in Paris. Espak’s translation consists of 10 lines dealing with the creation of heaven and earth, sun and moon.

| (column i) | (1) A hole in the earth, it is filled with semen / water |
| (column ii) | (2) An is the lord, in a young hero’s way is standing |
|            | (3) An en Ki in Union are shouting |
|            | (4) On that day Enki (and) Nunki (!) are not alive (yet) |

126 Frahm (2013), p. 111-12.1
127 Ibid., p. 105.
128 Ibid., p. 105-06.
129 See paragraph 1.3 ‘A crucial moment’ of this paper and Jacobsen (1976), p. 252 (footnote 173).
130 Other fragments are discussed in ‘Enki’s Omzwervingen’ (2017) / Dutch language.
Espak (2010) and Lisman (2013) base their interpretation of the first three lines on the cosmic motif, claiming that the separation between heaven and earth, personified as An and Ki respectively, comes about as a result of their sexual union, a rather paradoxical state of affairs. However, the prefix denoting divinity in ḍAn and ḍKi, which would signal that these natural phenomena are personified, is missing. Wiggermann does not share their opinion; he translates:

'The divine lord (dEn) was coming of age, Heaven and Earth (ki), still together, were screaming – in those days Enki and Nunki (*sic) were not yet alive, Enlil was not yet alive, Ninlil was not yet alive.'

He then writes:

'I take this to mean that the divine lord (dEn), the active, procreative element in the god’s name ḍEn-ki, grows inside Heaven and Earth still united, and starts the painful process of separation that by way of Enki and Nunki would culminate in the birth of divine Ether (Enlil).'

Not the noisy copulation of heaven and earth – sexuality being irreconcilable with separation – but Enki, metaphorically speaking ‘son of Namma’, must be involved in the tumultuous separation of the ‘cosmic mountain’ into heaven and earth. Contrary to what Wiggermann writes the ‘diĝir determination’ or prefix (D) for ‘divine’ is missing in the transliteration of the name Enki, which probably means that the future god of sweet waters still can be seen as a non-personified, natural phenomenon. In that case we are dealing with the description of a physiological process whereby the inclination to personify those concepts by using the prefix is hard to suppress.

The tumultuous and noisy separation of heaven and earth in Urukagina 15 can be related to the third option (C) mentioned by Frahm: ‘Mummu’ as “roar” in ‘Ee’ VII 121, although this speculation might overreach the scope of my interpretation and competence. So one or two examples will do. Frahm: “The final reference to mummu to be found in Enûma Eliš occurs in VII 119-121b, in a passage on Marduk’s new name Addu (- -):

‘(-) Addu shall be his name, the whole sky he shall cover,
His beneficent roar (rigmu) shall thunder over the earth,
May (his?) mummu reduce the burden of the clouds (by making them rain?)
And give sustenance to the people below.”

The equating of mummu with rigmu - an Akkadian word for ‘noise’ by a commentary on Enûma Eliš - was used by Michalowski to speak of “the noise metaphor” and to explain the meaning of ‘mummu’ this way: “(-) in bilingual texts the Sumerian word for noise is mu-μu. Even if that is a late equation, it is still important to our discussion, for in line 4 the extension of homonymic and synonymic balances goes further.”

In the wording of line Ee 4 – according to Michalowski – mummu is related to ummu, ‘mother’. And the author has more coming concerning the play on words and its functions. In short: “In Mesopotamia there was no meta-language; reflexivity was part of the construction of the text itself. The way in which texts imparted meaning was thus of

136 Michalowski (1990), p. 386.
prime importance (\textsuperscript{137}). A few pages later he briefly summarizes his opinion also according to the semantic implications of the enigmatic fourth line of \textit{Enûma Eliš}: “The metaphor of noise, which is there, although poetically \textit{in absentia}, at the beginning of the world, establishes a privileged position for the concept of creation, activity, independence (\textsuperscript{138}). A similar statement appears in ‘Time before Time’ (2013), also with reference to Michalowski (1990). In a complicated line of reasoning Gonzalo Rubio explains that the epithet ‘\textit{mummu}’ in \textit{Ee I-4} refers to a very unpleasant sound -- “an obnoxious noise” -- by way of a “chain of lexical connections” and “a circle of phonetic and semantic associations”. Rubio: “Thus, both this Early Dynastic composition and the \textit{Enûma eliš} would echo the primordial noise of creation, the literal \textit{big bang} of Heaven and Earth.” (\textsuperscript{139})

This interpretation is fully in accordance with the introduction to the story ‘Inana and the Huluppu Tree’. These first lines represent a more or less traditional way to emphasize that the story concerned took place not long after creation of heaven and earth. This prologue consists of two parts. The general picture is outlined first with deliberate omission of the second part, getting special attention that way. The picture that unfolds afterwards might be a perfect description of the tumultuous process of separating heaven from earth according to the first lines of Ukg 15:

(Then) when An had taken the heavens for himself, when Enlil had taken the earth for himself, when the nether world had been given to Ereshkigal as a gift; when he set sail, when he set sail, when the father set sail for the nether world, when Enki set sail for the nether world – against the king a storm of small hailstones (\textsuperscript{140}) arose, against Enki a storm of large hailstones (\textsuperscript{140}) arose. The small ones were light hammers, the large ones were like stones from catapults (?). The keel of Enki’s little boat was trembling as if it were being butted by turtles, the waves at the bow of the boat rose to devour the king like wolves and the waves at the stern of the boat were attacking Enki like a lion. (At that time - - - etc.)

In ‘Sumerian Mythology’ (1972) Samuel Noah Kramer circumscribes the introduction as a “composition which furnishes the most significant material for the Sumerian concepts of the creation of the universe.” (\textsuperscript{141}) However, there is more to say about Ukg 15. An additional problem is that Enki is mentioned together with Nunki: ‘On that day, Enki (and) Nunki are not yet alive’. The question arises, then, of whether Ninki (‘Lady Earth’) would be more appropriate. Espak is of the opinion that Van Dijk confuses ‘\textit{Enki and Nunki}’ with ‘\textit{Enki and Eridu}’ because NUN\textsuperscript{142} could also signify Eridu, the city so closely associated with Enki. The plural form of the verb used would then justify the translation ‘\textit{Enkis (\textit{plural}) in Eridu}’. But because the names Enki and Nunki were used alternately, he did not consider that likely. (\textsuperscript{143}) I will keep that in mind, comparing his opinion to that of Rubio who on the other hand writes of “a graphic pun grounded in semantic connections.” In that case the two Enkis could be considered as ‘Lord’ (‘\textit{En}’) and ‘Prince’ (‘\textit{Nun}’) whereby the latter should be considered as the earthbound (younger) version of Enki “the

\textsuperscript{137} Michalowski (1990), ‘Presence at the Creation’, p. 387.
\textsuperscript{138} Michalowski (1990), p. 389.
\textsuperscript{139} Rubio (2013), p. 5.
\textsuperscript{141} Kramer Samuel Noah Kramer (1972), p. 37.
\textsuperscript{143} Rubio (2013), p. 6.
manager” (Jacobsen) who enters the world after the activation of time. That idea is supported by a description ‘Enki and Ninki (*Nunki?), the great lords, the great princes’ in ‘An adab to Nanna’.\(^{144}\) Lisman points out that the name Eridu(g) (*the good place*) most probably used to be an epithet for the settlement that was originally called ‘Nun’, the former name of Enki: “According to the order of the gods at the beginning of the Fara god list SF1 (VAT12760), the sign NUN in SF7 most likely represents Enki.”\(^{145}\) This is corroborated by the original name of GAL-NUN’s (i.e. Enki’s) formal spouse, \(d\)am-gal-nun-na, which appears in the oldest surviving texts.\(^{146}\)

These arguments might support the idea that Enki and Nunki in ‘Urukagina15’ are the chthonic aspects of Enki-g, who manifests himself in the complementary role being committed to the fate of the world and the well-being of its inhabitants. The couple En-Ki / Nin-Ki of the god lists, on the other hand, can be equated, then, with the two yet-to-be-personified entities of the Holy Mound or Cosmic Mountain that in the earliest stage of creation emerge from the primordial waters of Namma.

### 3.5 Chthonic and cosmic motif

From the surviving literature, mostly copies or revised manuscripts, it is difficult to deduce the original meaning of the word ‘engur’ and its relation to the concept of ‘abzu’. I suppose that the equation of the two concepts came about as a result of changes in the composition of the population during the ‘dark ages’ following the collapse of the Uruk Imperium ca. 3000 BCE. The migrants who sought refuge in the alluvial plains of Sumer were not very well acquainted with the irrigation systems and how essential they were to the well-being of ‘the black-headed people’. Outside those plains people’s welfare depended first of all on rainfall and the changing seasons with the result that they were often forced to follow the changes in the landscape. The fundamental differences in lifestyle between the sedentary population and the nomads living outside the alluvial plains must have influenced contemporary philosophies. In ‘Le motif cosmique dans la pensée sumérienne’ (1965)\(^{147}\), Van Dijk highlights how differences in lifestyle also had an important effect on ideas about the creation of heaven and earth and the establishment of the pantheon. The nomads’ roaming existence under the wide skies must have encouraged the idea that heaven and earth continued to have a relationship beyond the point of their separation. That was clearly demonstrated every time the rain enabled Mother Earth to show herself at her best under the eyes of Heaven.

By the time writing had been sufficiently developed around 2500 BCE, these foreign ideas had found a place alongside the philosophy that for centuries had been part of the cultural heritage cherished by the sedentary communities in the south. Local leaders probably understood that society was best served if the religious and cultural differences between the offspring of the migrants and the autochthonous people were kept to a minimum. The priests of Nippur and the kings who rejoiced in their favour, in particular, must have encouraged these developments. It is possible the lists of gods, which had been composed since the middle of the third millennium, were arranged in such a way as to keep the peace between the adepts of different convictions.

Van Dijk distinguishes on the basis of ethnic and cultural differences two components underlying the different ideas about the creation of heaven and earth. He characterises the ‘chthonic motif’ as the idea that gods connected with the subterranean domains were closely involved in the creation of heaven and earth. The ‘cosmic motif’ on the other hand is connected with the conviction that heaven and earth were the result of their cohabitation or copulation. The two systems must have co-existed for centuries. Irrespective of the intermediate ideas that existed in Mesopotamia, the Eridu model of creation, based exclusively on the chthonic model, must be seen as the archaic ideology

\(^{144}\) Jacobsen (1976), p. 122-23 (See also the introduction Second section, this paper).
\(^{145}\) Lisman (2013), p. 130.
\(^{146}\) Ibid., p. 131.
compared to the Nippur doctrine in which Enlil was promoted as the supreme god of Sumer. That the older philosophy came under pressure can be inferred from the revision of several Sumerian texts by the priests of Nippur. It is enough to mention ‘Enki and the world order’ and ‘Enki’s journey to Nibiru’, in which Enki’s important role is reduced in Enlil’s favour.

Only recently (2015) Espak paid attention to the controversy. Like Kramer and Maier, he adhered to the opinion "the majority of written sources known to us from ca 2500-1500 B.C. do not give Eridu any special status as the first or primordial mythological city.″¹⁴⁹ The underlining of Eridu’s special divine status he deems often exaggerated. He even suggests “this sort of theology was actually first elaborated during (-) the second part of the second millennium, reaching its fullest form in the theology of Enûma eliš."¹⁵⁰ However, at the end of his argumentation he articulates what I hope to make clear in this article based on my interpretation of ‘E&N’. Espak:

“If the theories of (-) Enki being the ‘original head of the pantheon’ (-) are to be considered correct, then, of course, Eridu might have been for some areas of Mesopotamia in the archaic periods the central point of worship (-) before the first written mythological compositions and royal inscriptions appeared.”¹⁵¹

In analysing ‘E&N’ the main issue is to establish Enki’s status after his retreat to his subterranean domain, in which he no longer needs the help of Isimud, his alter ego, counsellor or go-between, who’s role in the myth has been neglected in almost every commentary on the myth and whose spiritual and cultural bond with ‘mummu’ are hardly surmised.

3.6 Born at last

The theory that Dilmun’s future is only subject to Enki’s libido cannot be right. His relationship with Ninhursag has changed radically since she in her capacity of Mother Earth took care of Enki’s ‘seed’. Only where he meets the country’s mother and her daughters is he allowed to implement the decisions or blue-prints of creation. Returning to the former dimension of space and time Ninhursag becomes a close extension of Namma again and gives in a self-generating way birth to gods and goddesses capable of handling their responsibilities ab origine. That, too, is where Ninhursag (not Enki) by virtue of Namma distributes responsibility for Dilmun’s welfare equally among them. In the ‘Hal-an-kug, his (‘Enki’s) room for pondering’, the secret room in ‘Enki and Ninmah’ also described as ‘the deep engur, the flowing water, the place the inside of which no other god knows’,¹⁵² the miraculous birth of eight deities and Enki’s healing take place. Despite the many colourful interpretations pertaining to it, there is not much to be said. At this point in the myth references to reality make way for the magic of language.

The last scenes are dedicated to the end-determination of the myth. The way in which the future of Dilmun is secured shows that the contemporary audience did not consist of people with countrified manners or sailors with a robust sense of humour, but included at least some erudite people who would appreciate the complicated puns that are featured. Denise Schmandt-Besserath explains how, before 2500 BCE, writing in pictograms had changed into a system that was based on phonetics.¹⁵³ How much time this process took is unknown, but the last fragments of ‘E&N’ still provide evidence of a fascination with sounds, syllables and the evocative power of speech: in short, the verbal magic of language. In the final stages of the story the storyteller treats his audience to the pleasure of an ingenious play on words that is presented in two stages. Before Ninhursag gives birth to each of the four gods and four goddesses, the same procedure

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¹⁴⁸ Resp. ETCSL 1.1.3 and 1.1.4.
¹⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 65.
¹⁵¹ Ibid., p. 66.
¹⁵² Both descriptions occur in the named myth.
takes place. She asks Enki which part of his body hurts. He mentions his head, hair, nose, mouth, throat, arm, rib and side in succession, and every time she gives birth to a god or goddess (U). In the next stage (V), the future of Dilmun is secured by relating each deity to its destiny through a play on words. Kramer (1945) was the first to establish how each pun played with the names of the different parts of the body, the eight deities and the functions distributed among them.

\[ U \quad (254/263) \quad – \quad (\text{Ninhursaja asked:}) \]
\[ ‘\text{My brother, what part of you hurts you?} ‘ \]
\[ (*\text{Enki answered:}) ‘\text{My ribs (ti) hurt me.’} \]
\[ \text{She gave birth to Ninti out of it.} \]

\[ V \quad (\text{She said:}) \]
\[ ‘\text{Ninti shall become the lady of the month (-)}’ \]

The answer to Ninhursag’s seventh question is: ‘\text{My ribs hurt me.’} Looking for similarities between ‘E&N’ and the creation story in Genesis, Kramer wondered why the Hebrew editor happened to choose the rib of Adam to create Eve, his future wife. In fragment U and V naming and determinating are closely intertwined. The same is true of the bible story in Genesis: ‘\text{And Adam called his wife’s name Eve, because she was the mother of all living.}’\textsuperscript{154} The explanation for one of the most ancient of literary puns, carried over and perpetuated in the Biblical paradise story, says Kramer, can be found in the relation between the painful spot (ti: rib) and Ninti’s destiny according to fragment (V): ‘\text{Ninti shall become the lady of the month’}. Kramer: “But the Sumerian word ti also means ‘to make live’.”\textsuperscript{155} “The name Nin-ti may therefore mean ‘the lady who makes live’, as well as ‘the lady of the rib’.”\textsuperscript{155} The epithet ‘lady of the month’ refers, then, to the monthly cycle of fertility that enables women to give birth. The play on words was, of course, lost to the reader of Genesis because the Hebrew word for ‘rib’ and for ‘to make life’ have nothing in common.

The other seven puns on the names of gods and goddesses are also based on certain similarities in articulation and different meaning of the same words or syllables. They confirm the impression the author of the myth should not be denied some sense of humour or even freethinking. Another example of this play on words is provided by Dickson.\textsuperscript{156} The fourth painful spot mentioned by Enki is his ‘mouth’ (Sum. ‘ka’). This word becomes a syllable in the name Nin-ka-si, easy to associate with ‘kash’ (Eng. ‘beer’), which determinates her destiny in the last paragraph of the myth: ‘\text{Ninkasi shall be what satisfies the heart.’} A few lines from ‘A hymn to Ninkasi’\textsuperscript{157} displace second thoughts about this explanation.

\[ 1 \text{ ff.} \quad (\text{Ninkasi}) \quad – \quad \text{Given birth by the flowing water ...., tenderly cared for by Ninhursaja !} \]
\[ 9 \text{ ff.} \quad – \quad \text{Your father is Enki, the lord Nudimmud, and your mother is Ninti, the queen of the abzu.} \]
\[ 25 \text{ ff.} \quad – \quad \text{It is you who soak the malt in a jar; the waves rise, the waves fall} \]
\[ 45 \text{ ff.} \quad \text{the Tigris and the Euphrates.} \]

These lines should not be linked to a small island anywhere. The same counts for the pun on Na-zi who like the Sumerian goddess Nanše, supreme goddess of Lagash, is destined to be the wife of Nindara. For more arguments against the idea that Dilmun

\textsuperscript{154} Bible, King James Version, Genesis 3:20.
\textsuperscript{156} Dickson (2007), p. 32.
\textsuperscript{157} ‘A hymn to Ninkasi (Ninkasi A)’, ETCSL 4.23.1.
should be identified with Bahrain, see Warttig Mattfeld y de la Torre who is operating outside the comfort zone of mainstream science.\footnote{158}{Warttig Mattfeld y de la Torre W.R., www.bibleorigins.net/DilmunGardenOfEdenQurnah.html.}

### 3.7 A real daughter

Among the puns on names, the name Ninsikila is particularly important. Her name cannot be left out because it has already been mentioned in the myth’s first section. When Enki refers to his hair ("siki") as a part of his body that bothers him, Ninhursag involves him in the naming of Nin (Lady) - siki (hair) - la (suffix). As a result, she can rightfully be called his daughter.

\footnote{159}{ETCSL 1.1.3, ll. 238 ff.}

\footnote{160}{Prefix "Nin-" can be translated with either ‘Lord’ or ‘Lady’.}

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W  (254 ff.) – (Ninhursaja asked:) ‘My brother, what part of you hurts you?’
   (*Enki answered:) ‘The locks of my hair (siki) hurt me.’
   She gave birth to Ninsikila out of it.

X  (She said:) ‘Ninsikila shall become lord (*sic) of Magan.’

Ninsikila cannot be seen as a personification of a concept that refers to reality. But on the basis of the imaginary conversation in the early verses of the myth, we can infer her assignment or destination is closely related to Dilmun and Dilmun city. A passage from ‘Enki and the World order’ leaves no doubt about it: ‘He (*Enki) cleansed and purified the land of Dilmun. He placed Ninsikila in charge of it.’\footnote{159}{ETCSL 1.1.3, ll. 238 ff.} There are, however, two complications. Firstly, in fragment X* (below) Ninhursag bestows her with the responsibility for Magan, located almost a thousand kilometres away from Sumer. In addition, we have to consider the fact that responsibility for Dilmun has been assigned to Ensag – Y → Z – the last deity in the sequence of eight. It is he who will become ‘Lord of Dilmun’.

W* (NINHURSAJA asked: - 254/263)
   ‘My brother, what part of you hurts you?’
   (ENKI:)
   ‘The locks of my hair (siki) hurt me.’
   She gave birth to Ninsikila out of it.

Y.- (264/271)
   ‘My brother, what part of you hurts you?’
   (ENKI:)
   ‘My sides (zag) hurt me’
   She gave birth to Ensag out of it.

X*  NINHURSAJA: (272-280)
   ‘Ninsikila shall become lord (*nin?)
   of Magan.’\footnote{159}{ETCSL 1.1.3, ll. 238 ff.}

Z - (272-280)
   ‘and Ensag shall become lord of Dilmun.’

So we may also expect Ninsikila’s destination to be closely related to Ensag’s lordship of Dilmun. The last phrases (X* and Z) seem to contradict that conclusion. The copyist seems to have been confused, calling her ‘Lord of Magan’ instead of ‘Lady of Magan’.

Anyhow, a good relationship with the inhabitants of Magan was of great importance for the Sumerians. Magan provided Sumer with natural resources that were not available in Mesopotamia: ore, diorite and hardwood. Less than five decennia after the collapse of the Akkadian Empire ca. 2200 BCE, the trading relationship between Lagash in the river basin of the Tigris and Magan near the Strait of Hormuz was again initiated. In a passage from “The building of Ningirsu’s temple” (ca. 2150 BCE), Ensag and Ninsikila are named in the same breath. From that it seems that Ensag (‘Ninzaga’) is closely involved in the supply of copper for the restoration of the E-ninnu, the temple in Girsu,
while Ninsikila takes care of the supply of ‘large ḫalub logs, ebony, and aba wood’ from the Al Hajar Mountains near Magan\textsuperscript{161}

3. – Transgression of the Gulf since the end of the last Ice Age ca. 12000 BCE. Migration took place to the northwest where the border between the salt and fresh water came to a halt and the settlements could develop into cities. Traditions and gods followed the migrants closely. It cannot be ruled out that the population in Sumer, especially in and around the marshlands, could be distinguished ethnically and culturally long after 2500 BCE from the migrants that came from the north.

Anyhow, a good relationship with the inhabitants of Magan was of great importance for the Sumerians. Magan provided Sumer with natural resources that were not available in Mesopotamia: ore, diorite and hardwood. Less than five decennia after the collapse of the Akkadian Empire ca. 2200 BCE, the trading relationship between Lagash in the river basin of the Tigris and Magan near the Strait of Hormuz was again initiated. In a passage from “The building of Ningirsu’s temple” (ca. 2150 BCE), Ensag and Ninsikila are named in the same breath. From that it seems that Ensag (‘Ninzaga’) is closely involved in the supply of copper for the restoration of the E-ninnu, the temple in Girsu, while Ninsikila takes care of the supply of ‘large ḫalub logs, ebony, and aba wood’ from the Al Hajar Mountains near Magan\textsuperscript{162}

But that is not all. There was already a Lady of Dilmun: Ensag’s wife, Meskilak. In their beautifully illustrated encyclopaedia Black and Green write: “The name Meskilak, goddess of the city of Dilmun, must be related to Ninsikila (-). Nin-Dilmun, ‘Lady of Dilmun’, was probably a title of the same goddess.”\textsuperscript{163} This last suggestion is rather incomprehensible. Black and Green:

“The two principal gods of (the author is referring to Bahrain), the God Inzak and the goddess Meskilak, are referred to in both Mesopotamian and Dilmunite sources. Inzak was regarded by the Sumerians (by whom he was called Enzag) as the chief god of Dilmun, but in Dilmun itself (the author is again referring to Bahrain) he was characterised as a god of Agura-(eastern Arabia).”\textsuperscript{164}

To make matters even more complicated it appears that Ninsikila is known as the wife of Lisin in two Sumerian cities, Adab and Kesh.\textsuperscript{165} But the confusion caused by the

\textsuperscript{161} ETCSL 2.1.7, “The building of Ningirsu’s temple (Gudea, cylinders A and B)”, ll. 397ff.
\textsuperscript{162} ETCSL 2.1.7, “The building of Ningirsu’s temple (Gudea, cylinders A and B)”, ll. 397ff.
\textsuperscript{163} Black J, & A. Green (2003), p. 66.
\textsuperscript{164} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{165} Jacobsen (1987), p. 183 (footnote 7).
enigmatic last paragraphs of the myth that in all likelihood already existed at the end of the third millennium can be dispelled, I suspect, if we treat the name Ninsikila again as a pun, a rather complicated one.

3.8 Ninsikila and Meskilak

The syllables – s(i) ki la(k) – feature in both the names Me-s(i)kilak and Nin-sikila(k). The vowel ‘i’ has been purposely added to the name of Enki’s daughter to generate the Sumerian word si-ki (hair) in fragment (T*) that inspired Ninhursag to give birth to Ninsikila (fragment U*). The word ‘siki’ also means ‘pure’, illustrating the imaginary, virginal situation preceding the beginning of time. Jacobsen (1987) comes close to solving the riddle: “It is also possible, however, that he (*the author) changed the name deliberately to have it as a pun on ki-sikil ‘maidens’, to designate the goddess before she was married to Enki.” But according to my interpretation, she cannot lose the status of a virginal maiden before she is born ab origine as the wife of Ensag, Lord of Dilmun in the last scene of the myth. My conclusion, therefore, is that the name Ninsikila was invented for three reasons: (1) to reflect the pristine condition before the beginning of time (2) to facilitate the birth of Enki’s daughter and (3) to match the name and function of Meskilak, wife of Ensag, Lord of Dilmun.

Now we know what made the author invent the name Ninsikila, it is possible to speculate about the time the story was first set down in writing. As indicated above, the name Ninsikila first appears in ‘The building of Ningirsu’s temple (Gudea, cylinders A and B)’. This text can undoubtedly be dated to five or six decennia before Ur-Namma, first king of the Ur III dynasty, subjected the greater part of Mesopotamia to his will, around 2100 BCE. Probably a version of the myth ‘E&N’ based on oral tradition was already recorded in cuneiform script before 2200 BCE. Storytellers in Kesh or Adab acquainted with the popular myth, might have used the name Ninsikila instead of the name Meskilak or have given the goddess a prominent place in their local pantheon. Sometimes the name Ensag (Inzak, Inzaga) occurs in texts or inscriptions associated with trading posts between Sumer and Magan near the Street of Ormuz. But that does not tell anything about the place where Ensag and Meskilak really were venerated. The observation that the name or parts of the name Ensag are embedded in the personal names of people living in the area east of the Tigris valley, however, says a great deal more about the areas where he and his spouse Meskilak were worshipped. In ‘The tangible Evidence for the Earliest Dilmun’ (1981) Therese Howard-Carter distances herself from the widely held idea that the name Dilmun was associated with the area along the southwest coast of the Gulf before the last centuries of the third millennium:

“However, because no objects from Mesopotamia found in either Bahrain or Falaika can be dated earlier than 2200 B.C., it is impossible that Dilmun was located there before that time. Thus, as I have attempted to demonstrate here, the earliest Dilmun is most likely to have been located in the region of Qurna.”

At the time mentioned by the author the fresh waters from the Euphrates and Tigris drain into the Gulf near Qurna, east of Eridu and Al Ubaid. That is where ‘the black-headed people’ lived before the Great Flood swept over according to ‘The Sumerian king list’ and tablet XI of ‘The Gilgamesh Epic’. In the much older Sumerian version – segment E of ‘The Flood story’ (translation) – that location is called Dilmun: ‘At that time, because of preserving the animals and the seed of mankind, they settled Zi-ud-sura the king in an overseas country, in the land Dilmun, where the sun rises.’ This is where not very long ago the sun could be seen rising from the perspective of the ruins of Eridu, Al

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166 Ibid.
167 ETCSL, 2.1.7.
169 ETCSL, 2.1.1 (l. 40).
171 ETCSL, 1.7.4., Segment E.
Ubaid and Ur, above a watery landscape that, in springtime, could bear comparison with a real sea.

3.9 The end-determination
From the first lines of ‘E&N’ the author intends to clarify why his contemporaries should not take their prosperity for granted and stand idly by to let the gods look after their interests. The sacred bond between the world of the gods and the world of the ‘black-headed people’ had to be confirmed ritually after each cycle of time, be it short or long. There was always the possibility the cycle of nature would be interrupted when they leave their well-being to the capriciousness of the gods. It goes without saying that Enki recovers from his illness. The audience did not require the storyteller to state this explicitly because the continued existence of Sumer served as proof. They knew Enki would not let them down. That is evident in how he saved life on earth from total destruction when the Flood swept over – and from the phrase with which the myth’s author closes this thoughtfully composed and wonderful story: ‘Praise be to Father Enki’.

4.0 Summary
Immediately following the inaugural lines we are introduced to the main characters of the story. Ninhursag goes unmentioned although her name features prominently in the title of the myth. It is one of the reasons why authors come to the conclusion that several works were combined. However, many have not taken into account the sophistication of the author and his audience. This becomes apparent where deities can be seen as extensions of more abstract gods or goddesses, main feature of polytheistic religions. Ninhursag may not be mentioned in the first lines, but one of her manifestations, Enki’s future ‘spouse’ and mother of the privileged parts of her world is not forgotten. In the same fragment we learn that Enki was biding his time all by himself like ‘his spouse’ and his (future) daughter, Ninsikila. Of all the gods and goddesses born in the last section of the story, she is chosen to personify the clean earth (‘ki-sikil’), the pure world of Enki and his ‘spouse’ who like herself, do not really exist yet. The author invented her name to express the imaginary, non-deteriorated character of the situation and to foreshadow the destiny of Dilmun.

Another stumbling block, apart from the concise style and some illegible fragments, is the fact that no full attention is paid to the fundamental difference between the situation before and after the activation of time. But even after the story becomes a myth of origin, the action does not take place according to the timescale of the gardener and his offspring.

Enki’s inspired and inspirational performances in the parallel world of gods and goddesses can be seen as a meticulously performed metaphor reflecting developments in the real world of the gardener.

Many scholars in the field paid insufficient attention to the morphological aspects of the landscape and the climate of Dilmun, hidden behind the allegory that dominates the greater part of the story. This clarifies why they promulgate the theory that the name Dilmun refers to the island Bahrain. Negligence of those aspects also gave rise to the idea that the story could be taken at face value. As a consequence, Enki is accused of polygamy, rape and even incest. This explanation, however, cannot be reconciled with the inaugural lines in which the narrator suggests Enki will give full support to the rise of cities and the well-being of its citizens.

Understanding the archaic ideology of the ‘black-headed people’ in southern Mesopotamia is of crucial importance to the interpretation of the first and last enigmatic paragraphs of the myth. The interpretation of ‘E&N’ gives rise to the supposition the Eridu theology, including the archaic model of creation, is characteristic of and vital to an ideology that was never fully systematized before the invention of writing. The already marginalized philosophy of the archaic Eridu theology was integrated in the shrewdly fabricated patchwork of the ‘Enûma Eliš’ to annihilate the influence of the Nippur doctrine and marginalize the role of the goddesses.
The never-ending cyclic character of time that predominates the world of the gods makes it possible that Enki and Ninhursag can adapt to a former situation or status. That is what happens when Enki falls ill and the world of the gardener is in danger. The narrator and his audience know that it is not the end of the story. In ‘the place of which no other gods knows’ Enki and Ninhursag come together again. While Enki recovers from illness four gods and four goddesses are generated by Ninhursag. They will monitor the well-being of the gardener and his world. Enki will survive and visit ‘his spouse’ and her world again and again.

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