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The influence of creation and pursuit of immortality on human status in Mesopotamia

The article deals with the issues surrounding the creation of humanity and its aspirations to immortality. The two issues are treated with great piety in mythology, literature and strictly religious works. One can even recognize that they are a kind of leitmotif of local issues related to the human condition. While creation tries to arrange man as a tool in the hands of the gods, so man in his quest for the immortality tries to achieve divine status. This widely recognized theory, especially concerning the creation of man, has a number of exemptions, which the author presents step-by-step in Sumerian and Akkadian literature. In Mesopotamian mythology anthropological threads intermingle with the philosophical, all this in order to find a satisfactory answer to the most important questions about man and his relationship with the divine.

Key words: Mesopotamia, Sumerian, Akkadian, creation, immortality, Gilgamesh, mythology, literature

The Mesopotamian civilization has a long and rich history, already in the fifth millennium BC Ubaid culture (Van de Mieroop 2007: 18f.) was highly advanced. The fall of this civilization can be considered the conquering of Babylon by Cyrus (539 BC) (Linssen 2004: 1; Van Der Spek 2006)². The creation of human in Mesopotamian civilization is closely related to the tasks that he had to fulfill within his life time. In Mesopotamian tradition, the widely accepted idea is that human life is sinful, finite and strictly subordinate to the gods (Łyczkowska 1998: 24f.). I pose the question: has this civilization created only one, coherent vision of the origins of humanity and can differences be identified between the various stages of cultural development; “early-Sumerian” – and later phases associated with the

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² The true end of the Mesopotamian civilization occurred in the period between the suppression of the third Babylonian revolt by Xerxes (480–476 BC) and the 3 century AD, until then, according to M.J. Geller and M. Linssen there was ability to read the Akkadian.

domination of the Semitic elements? The second important issue is connected with immortality. Is it the defining feature which ultimately separates the human and divine world?

The Sumerian genesis

The Sumerian texts, which describe the creation of man, are a thousand years older than the OB version of *Story of the Flood (Atra-Hasis)*. In the Sumerian version, Enki is the only god who is responsible for the creation of man. This is confirmed by one of his names, Nudimmud, that is, one who formed the human (Jacobsen 1987: 158). Enki in the myth *Enki and Ninmah*³ seems to be the main god of the pantheon. He is blamed by the other gods for overloading them with excessively strenuous physical work (Jacobsen 1987: 154). In the first part of the myth the status of goddesses is privileged. Enki's mother Namma, the primeval sea, "the mother who gave birth to all the gods", suggested the idea of man's creation to him. Man would replace the rebellious gods in their work. She also formed the shape of a man and delivered him to the world. In this task she is helped by the goddess Ninmah⁴ and other lower-ranking goddesses: Ninmada, Ninshara, Ninbara, Ninmug, Dududuh i Ereshguna.

O mother mine,
 when you have determined
 its mode of being
 may Ninmah put together
 the birth-chair (?)
 and when,
 [without any m]ale,
 you have built it up in it,
 [May you give birth]
 To manki[nd]!
 [Without] the sperm
 of a ma[le]
 she gave [birth]
 to offspri[ng],
 to the [em]bryo
 of mankind (Jacobsen 1987: 157).

Enki's role in creation is limited to the supply of clay from the domain of Apsu. The second part of the myth, which according to T. Jacobsen (Jacobsen 1987: 152)

³ Named also *The birth of man* by T. Jacobsen.

⁴ In translation of S.N. Kramer she is named „the earth-mother goddess” (Kramer 1961: 70). Kramer is considering the possibility of her identification with the goddess of the earth Ki, who appeared in the world with the male god of the sky An, immediately after the primeval sea goddess Nammu (Kramer 1961: 74–75).

was originally a separate myth, tells the story of a party organized in honor of man's creation and a competition between Enki and Ninmah⁵. The myth(s) dealt with the problem of dominance in the divine pantheon. The preserved material cannot clearly determine whether the party was arranged by Enki or by Ninmah. The rivalry, as in many Mesopotamian myths, is connected with prestige, authority and power. Alster emphasizes the importance of man's creation, in the case of Enki without the participation of the feminine, in the case of Ninmah without a masculine element (Alster 1994: 223). Ninmah requests the right to decide about the role that the humanity will play in the life of the gods:

Ninmah said to Enlil⁶:
 "(As for) the build of men,
 what makes it good
 or bad
 is mine (affair),
 whichever way
 my turn of heart,
 I am making the decision
 About mode of being,
 Good or bad" (Jacobsen 1987: 158–159).

Ninmah, within the bounds of the competition, shapes the seven creatures⁷, each with a different physical defect. For each of these creatures Enki finds a proper place in the community. According to J. Bottero, the god Enki finds justification for the existence of all people be they paralyzed, blind, bisexuals or eunuchs (Bottero 2001: 103). Then, Enki makes a bet with Ninmah about the destruction of her city. He creates a creature for which the goddess should find a place in the world. Ninmah loses the bet, because Enki creates a creature, which cannot be born – Udmu'ul ("Premature") (Jacobsen 1987: 159–165). The myth ends with the statement that the power of Enki is greater than that of the goddess (Jacobsen 1987: 166).

The translation of Jacobsen is not the only one. Kilmer suggests that Enki creates the first woman and first female genitals (Kilmer 1976: 266). In addition, Kilmer recognizes what appears to have no coverage in the content of the myth, that Enki impregnates woman himself, because at that time man would not have existed⁸. Udmu'ul, in the translation of Kilmer, occurs under the name Umul and is considered to be the son of Enki and is identified with Ziusudra (Kilmer 1976: 267).

⁵ Ninmah occurs in the first part of the myth only in the secondary role of midwife, not a creator.

⁶ Enlil was one of the major gods invited to this party.

⁷ S.N. Kramer talks about six creatures (Kramer 1961: 71).

⁸ It is worth to mention that in the first part of the myth Namma created all mankind, not just the female half.

The idea that the goddess alone created man appears also in *The Gilgamesh epic*⁹. In the opinion of Heidel, the Sumerian version largely coincides with the OB one. Moreover, it did not differ from younger accounts: both Neo-Assyrian (seventh century BC) and Hittite, the latter having been discovered at Hattusas (Heidel 1963: 14–15).

Great Aruru they called (the gods): “Thou, Aruru, didst create [Gilgamesh (?)];
Now create his equal, to the impetuosity of his heart let him be eq[ual].
(...)
When Aruru heard this, she conceived in her heart an image of Anu;
[A]ruru washed her hands, pinched off clay, (and) threw (it) on the steppe:
[...] valiant Enkidu she created, the offspring... of Ninurta (Heidel 1963: 18–19).

It is worth noting that Enkidu was created on the model of the supreme god of the Sumerian pantheon, Anu. Is it possible to identify heroes with ordinary people? Gilgamesh was two-thirds god and Enkidu became a representative of the human community under the influence of the element of civilization, which according to the Sumerian conception of *ME* was sexuality (Heidel 1963: 42). However, neither of them was fully god, they both were mortal.

The creation of humanity is also mentioned in the Sumerian myth, *Cattle and grain*. The myth tells that after the birth of the gods Anunnaki, but before the birth of the goddess of cattle Lahar, the goddess of grain Ashnan and the goddess of plants Uttu, the gods did not know civilized life. It was only the creation of these gods which contributed to the significant progress of civilization in the world of the divine and their separation from the world of nature. “Man was given the breath of life” to take care of the sheepfolds and deliver to the gods “good things” (Kramer 1961: 72–73). It seems, that after the gods have learned to eat food, and cloth themselves in garments, man was intended to facilitate a comfortable life for the gods (Kramer 1961: 53).

Bottéro claims that the Sumerian myths describe the story of creation in one other different way. Herein humanity emerges from the earth, which can be understood as the creation in a similar manner to that of plants. Unfortunately, no coherent texts have been preserved, which could fully explain the above issue (Bottéro 2001: 98). Lambert describes two different human genealogies. First, one that is associated with the god Ea, whose cult was based at Eridu. According to this genealogy, man was created from clay and blood. In the second genealogy the most important role in creation was attributed to Enlil and was connected with his temple, Ekur¹⁰, in Nippur. According to this tradition, man grew out of the ground like a plant at Nippur, in the place called Uzumua or Uzuea (Lambert 2006: 1832).

⁹ The oldest parts of the epic have been created by the Sumerians and it originated from the end of the third millennium BC.

¹⁰ In the translation a house or a mountain, appears under the name ES.NAM.TI.LA – “house of life” (George 1993: 116).

Strong echoes of this form of creation can be found in at least two Sumerian texts¹¹. The first one is called *Enlil and Pickaxe*:

(And Enlil) drove his pickaxe into the UZU-E
 In the hole (which he thus made) was the vanguard
 (SAG: head) of mankind,
 (And) while (the people of) land were breaking up
 through the ground (like plants) toward Enlil
 He eyed his black-headed ones in steadfast fashion (Bottéro 1985: 153–154).

The problem of interpretation arises from the text's translation from Sumerian. Kramer, translating the same text, primarily emphasizes the praise of the pickaxe, which is necessary to the development of civilization. The text suggests that man could emerge from the ground, while Enlil separated the heavens from the earth in order to make space for humanity:

In order to make grow the creature which came forth,
 In the “bond of heaven and earth” (Nippur) he stretched out the...
 (...)
 The head of man he placed in the mould,
 Before Enlil he (man?) covers his land,
 Upon his black-headed people he looked steadfastly (Kramer 1961: 52).

Reference to this understanding of man's emergence from the earth is also made in the text *Enki's journey to Nippur*:

In those remote days, when destiny was determined,
 In a year (full of abundance), which An had created,
 When people sprang up from the earth like herbs (and) plants (Al-Fouadi 1969: 69–85).

A variation of this genealogy, which was defined as “agricultural”, is the birth of man as a result of the connection of the deified and personalized power of heaven and earth. The Earth, fertilized by divine rain falling from heaven, gave birth to man (Sollberger 1967: 280–281). It may be meaningful, especially for this paper, to consider that this is the same manner in which the god Anu created a number of gods:

When Anu, king of the gods, sowed his seed in the earth,
 She bore him seven gods, he called them the “Seven” (Foster 1995: 134).

Creation of humankind was written in Akkadian, but a significant number of Sumerian ideas are woven into its content. The creation of humanity takes place on the initiative of the Anunnaki gods in the aforementioned place called Uzumua,

¹¹ Reflections of this tradition are found also in the Akkadian literature (George 1992: 259, 443).

in Nippur. Humanity is charged with the most troublesome duties of the gods. Not only are instructions regarding the performance of physical labor given in detail, but also directions as to the celebration of divine feasts and festivals. In this myth man's task is to gain knowledge and wisdom. There are mentioned many other differences. Man was created from the blood of the gods Alla, so at least two gods/goddess (Foster 2005: 492). Two beings had been created at once (perhaps male and female) named Ullegara and Annagarra. Their names could be translated as the establishment of abundance and prosperity, but they can also refer to the words "yes" and "no" (Foster 2005: 493). The goddess Aruru takes care of people, perhaps this is a reference to the fact that she was their creator. An additional problem is the passage referring to the goddess Aruru and most likely, to humanity. It suggests that they could grow from the ground: "Making many of them spring out of the earth, like grain" (Foster 2005: 493). It seems to be a reference to the "agricultural" concept, although in this case it could refer to the crops that people have to sacrifice to the gods.

The Akkadian literature of creation

In the OB *Story of the Flood* (*Atra-Hasis*), the work written on the three tablets by Nur-Ajja and dated to the rule of king Ammisaduqa (1646–1626 BC), the fourth successor of Hammurabi (1792–1750 BC), it is written that man was created as a result of the rebellion of lower gods Igigi against the superior Anunnaki (Moran 1970: 48–56¹²). The inferior gods demanded equal rights (Foster 1995: 52). The solution to this difficult situation was found by the wise Enki (Haas 1986: 30¹³), who created man. Man as a species replaces the gods at work. To give life to the clay, the blood of the lower ranking god We was added. In addition, all the gods spit on the clay¹⁴.

Let the one god be slaughtered,
 Then let the gods be cleansed by immersion.
 Let Nintu mix clay with his flesh and blood.
 Let that same god and man be thoroughly mixed in the clay.
 Let us hear the drum for the rest of time,
 From the flesh of the god let a spirit remain,
 Let it make the living know its sign,
 Lest he be allowed to be forgotten, let the spirit remain (Foster 1995: 58–59).

¹² The author deals with the origins and nature of man in *Atra-Hasis*.

¹³ Under his Semitic name Ea occurred in the Akkadian texts. However, had occurred even earlier, during the creation of the Akkadian state under the name Aa, which indicates foreign, not Semitic origin.

¹⁴ Not because they were disgusted in some way, which could suggest the codes of contemporary culture, but to add more power to successfully complete the venture. In this way, at least partially, points out their participation in the creation.

Thus, from the god (the Akkadian *ilu*) Wê man was created (*awêlu* or *awîlu*) (Foster 1995: 59¹⁵). Man received from the god a spiritual element (*têmu*), and after death remains as a spirit in the sense of a ghost (*(w)etemmu*) (Bottéro 2001: 100).

When the goddess Nintu agrees to the proposal of creating humanity, the gods are so happy that they kiss her feet and give her the name Belet-kala-ili (another version is Bêlit-ilî), that means Great Lady, “Mistress-of-All-the-Gods”¹⁶. Then, she creates fourteen figurines from clay and saliva, with the help of the other birth goddesses, making seven women and seven men and combining them in pairs, in that way giving a pattern to the human race (Foster 1995: 59–60; Ebeling 1931: 174, 260). The goddess also determines the means of reproduction, and thus makes the further development of humanity dependent on itself and establishes a nine-month duration for pregnancy. The myth also speaks of the cleansing ritual and worship which need to be submitted by the people to Nintu and Ishtar under one of her names Ishara (Foster 1995: 60–61). Anyway, the primary task of the newly created humanity is work and the feeding of the gods (Foster 1995: 62).

[Belet-ili, the midwife], is present.
 Let her create, then, a hum[an, a man],
 Let him bear the yoke [],
 Let him bear the yoke []!
 [Let man assume the drud]gery of god... (Foster 1995: 57–58)

There was also a conviction uttered by the creator of humanity that only she is responsible for creation (Foster 1995: 61). It seems that in the final part of the myth, after the deluge, comes to the second creation of humanity. Unfortunately, the text is badly destroyed at this point, but in this case Nintu was compelled by Enlil to introduce death into the human world (Foster 1995: 76).

In the *Epic of creation*, the author of creation is Marduk, although he asks his father Ea, thus alluding to the tradition already known from the *Story of the Flood*, in which Ea/Enki was responsible for creation of man:

I shall compact blond, I shall cause bones to be,
 I shall make stand a human being, let “man” (*lullû*), be its name.
 I shall create humankind,
 They shall bear the god’s burden that those (gods) may rest (Foster 1995: 38).

In order to give life to the clay, Ea demands that divine blood has to be mixed with it. The sacrificed god was Qingu, who thus had to pay for his sin of disobedience to Marduk (Foster 1995: 31, 39).

¹⁵ Foster used the form Aw-ilu (akad. Awêlu – man), in the footnotes also gives the form Alla originating from (Aw-ila?).

¹⁶ In the text she is named Mami as well.

Let one, their brother, be given to me,
 Let him be destroyed so that people can be fashioned (Foster 1995: 38).

Then the gods punish him and shed his blood:

From his blood he made mankind,
 He imposed the burden of the gods and exempted the gods.
 After Ea the wise had made mankind
 They imposed the burden of the gods on them! (Foster 1995: 39)

According to a new ideology, the creator of man is Marduk, the highest-ranking god of the Babylonian pantheon. However, the impact of earlier centuries-old tradition, in which Ea¹⁷ was the creator of man, finds its resonance in the idea that the father of Marduk, the wise Ea, is largely responsible for the creation of mankind. Although the text attributed him only the idea, this deed is assigned to Marduk. The fact, however, that the new ideology moves the privilege and power of human creation to Marduk, demonstrates some of his fifty names. The second of his names is Marukka, the one who created mankind (Foster 1995: 43). The fifteenth, Tutu-Agaku, also refers to the creation of humanity, but emphasizes the compassion shown by Marduk, who creates the human race in order to remove the burden of work from the arms of the gods (Foster 1995: 45). The thirty-fifth name, Gishnumunab means the creator of man and the one who defeated Tiamat, establishing humanity from her parts (Foster 1995: 48). Also the forty-fifth name, Esizkur, refers to the fact that Marduk is the king of people from the four corners of the world (Foster 1995: 49).

The particular attention should be paid to the story *Creation of the King*, because here we are dealing with the idea of dual creation (Radner 2010: 26–27). Belet-ili creates the first man, based on the image of the gods. Ea says:

Let us make an image of clay, let us impost [the forced labor upon it],
 Let us relieve their weariness for all time (Foster 2005: 496).

The creature is so perfectly formed that it evokes the admiration of Enlil and the other gods. Enlil gives it the name “man”. The Lord of Nippur, apparently satisfied with the course of events, asks Belet-ili for the additional creation of the King. Later, the second act of creation is performed and the King is particularly generously endowed by the gods:

Make a king, a counsellor-man,
 Adorn his whole body with excellence.
 See to his features, make fair his body.
 Belet-ili fashioned the king, the counsellor-man.
 They gave the king warfare on behalf of the [great] gods.

¹⁷ In this passage he appears, as in the Sumerian texts, under the name Nudimmud.

Anu gave his crown, Enlil ga[ve his throne],
 Nergal gave his weapon, Ninurta gave [his splendor],
 Belet-ili gave [his] fea[tures],
 Nusku commissioned a (wise) counsellor and
 he stood in attendance upon him.
 (...)

 [The gods of heaven and netherworld assembled],
 [They blessed the king, the counsellor-man] (Foster 2005: 496).

This vision of creation can be defined as a version of the one described in the *Epic of creation*. However, some significant differences should be noted. There is no mention of making humanity from clay mixed with the blood of a god. In this version the king in his majesty is equal to the gods.

Even more meaningful for this article is the fact that in the NA period the kings used the same scheme for explaining their own genealogy. Esarhaddon, in one of his inscriptions, adopted this account of creation and establishes his rule:

At the beginning of my kingship, in my first year, when the god Ashur, king of the gods, kindly placed me on the throne of my father, the god Anu granted me his crown, the god Enlil his throne, the god Ninurta his weapon, (and) the god Nergal his awesome splendor, good signs were established for me in heaven and on earth, concerning the refurbishing of the gods and the (re)building of shrines (Esarhaddon 2011: 106).

In the Sumerian section I explained the influence of the Akkadian literature. Here it I should mention the new Akkadian ideology that tries to assimilate the Sumerian heritage, which is incompatible with it. The myth *The creation account from Ashur* describes the genesis of the world in general, and also mentions the creation of man.

Marduk bound a structure of reeds upon the face of the waters,
 He formed dust, he poured it out beside the reed-structure.
 To cause the gods to dwell in the habitation of their heart's desire
 He formed mankind.
 The goddess Aruru with him created mankind (Barton 1937: 303–305).

In the Sumerian version only the goddess Aruru was responsible for the creation of man. Here, she must share this privilege with Marduk. Very rarely, however, in the tradition of Semitic Mesopotamia does it happen that anyone besides Marduk, and eventually Ea, participate in the creation of mankind.

In the Akkadian literature one can also find other links concerning the creation of creatures that could be considered to be man, but they are often secondary to the material discussed herein. In the myth *When Ishtar went to the Netherworld*, Ea creates Asushunamir, most likely a male prostitute or transvestite (the description paints it as a wonderful being) (Foster 1995: 82; Kapełus 2000:

89). *The legend of Naram-Sin* presents in an ideological way that the tribes from beyond the mountains had been created “from the dirt of the finger nails” of the god Ea (Foster 1995: 175).

In the *How Erra wrecked the world* the person Kusig-banda is mentioned:

“Where is Kusig-banda, fashioner of god and man,
Whose hands are sacred?” (Foster 1995: 180)

It would be a tempting opportunity to consider Kusig-banda to be one of the creators of humanity. This explanation is, however, unjustified. It is the name of one of the artisans who produced divine statues. It is well known that after the mouth-opening ritual – *mīs pī*¹⁸, a statue became a god. The hands of the craftsman in the text were considered sacred because they created a god. In the common perception craftsmen do their work under the direction of the god Ea. During the rites a sculptor was ultimately separated from the statue, his hands were symbolically bound and “cut off” by a wooden tamarisk sword. He speaks the words: “I did not make you, but rather the god of all crafts made you” (Dick 2002: 34–35). Since the statue was then treated like a living god, he could eat and drink, and after meals was given water to wash his hands (Rudman 2002: 39). In the course of further research it is very meaningful to draw attention to the fact that in the Sumerian version of *The epic of Gilgamesh* called *The death of Bilgames*. “*The great wild bull is lying down*” there is a passage in which it is said that only due to Gilgamesh were the very old rites of hand-washing and mouth-washing transferred intact to the later generations who inhabited the earth after the deluge (George 2000: 198–199). This is of even greater importance with regard to further considerations in the next section. The essential act of mouth-opening is performed by a human. This significant step is assigned to the *apkallu* (the wise man) and *abriqu*-priest of Eridu (the holy city of the god Enki/Ea)¹⁹. This act of creating a god was in historical times the most unusual and closest form of communication between the divine and human worlds. The constructed image was not a product of human craft but was born. The craftsmen were treated as midwives. The whole process, using the brick of the birth goddess Bêlit-ilî, recalls a similar passage from the *Story of the Flood (Atra-Hasis)* where the goddess created mankind (Walker, Dick 1999: 116).

It is worth noting that in the Sumerian and Akkadian literature one do not find comments on the importance of man’s act of creation. In fact, the main Akkadian ideas repeated scheme known from the Sumerian literature (Jacobsen 1987: 145–150). W.G. Lambert points two main changes in the Akkadian ideas. First one, of lesser meaning, gods who rebelled did only leave, but also burn their tools. The second, anthropological one, stresses that every manifestation of social life bears

¹⁸ Specifically the Babylonian ritual procedures for making the statue alive are called *mīs pī* (mouth-washing), or sometimes *pit pī* (mouth-opening).

¹⁹ *STT 200 Incantation*, l. 76–80 (Walker, Dick 1999: 100).

the divine signs and for this reason it is worth understanding (Lambert, Millard, Civil 1999: 21–23).

In my opinion, it is worth paying attention to other differences. The creators are Anu, Enlil, Enki i Ningursag (Jacobsen 1987: 146), although as the only mother of mankind the goddess Nintur is mentioned (Jacobsen 1987: 145–146).

The Babylonian evidence in the Greek language

New light on the divine act of the creation of man was shed by the *Babylonian history (Babyloniaká)* of Berossos²⁰. The work was written in Greek in about 290 BC, unfortunately it is only preserved in the records of later authors. Berossos precisely describes the creatures, which came to teach people from the depths of the sea²¹. Their gift was not only explanatory but didactic. This mythical topic, with one exception, has gone unconfirmed by the most important preserved Akkadian literary texts and the antediluvian king's list. The exception is the passage from the myth *How Erra wrecked the world*, in which Marduk says to Erra:

“Where are the seven [sa]ges of the depths, those sacred fish,
who, like Ea their lord, are perfect in sublime wisdom,
the ones who cleansed my person?” (Foster 1995: 141)

This tradition is known from the bilingual (Sumerian-Akkadian) *Etiological myth of the Seven Sages*, an incantational text belonging to the apotropaic series *Bīt Mēseri, Advice to a Prince*²², and the *Uruk Sage List* (c. 165 BC) (Lenzi 2008a: 106–120). Excavators found the tablets at Uruk, which originated from the OB period and referred to these teachers of mankind together with the kings of the antediluvian era (Berosus, Mantheo 2001: 17; Van Dijk 1962: 43–61). Presumably Berossos received his information from the archived collection in Esagila, the largest and most important temple of Marduk in Babylon (Van Der Spek 2008: 277–318; Berosus 1978: 143–144). Most of his information is repeated in the *History* of Abydenus, written in the 2nd or 3rd century AD. All these creatures, the teachers of mankind, were similar to each other, had a body like a fish, however, under the fish's head was a second human head and under the tail of the fish were attached human legs. This creature could with equal ease spend time in the water and on the land²³.

²⁰ Berossos is a Greek rendering of an Akkadian name. Originally his name was Bēl-reūšunu (Bel is their shepherd).

²¹ It is also attested in other Hellenistic works, e.g. in the fragments of Chaeremon, an Egyptian priest of the first century AD (Horst 1984: 11, 27). Two fragments preserved by Psellus mention Oannes/Joannes, clothed in a fish-skin, descendant or son of Hermes and Apollo.

²² We have to do with the different translations (Lenzi 2008b: 147–148; Lambert 1996: 112–113).

²³ This creation has been also described by Apollodorus, 2nd BC. The author lived at Athens, Pergamon and Alexandria.

In the NA period, the rulers attributed “broad understanding” (*uzna rapašta*) to themselves:

As for me, Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, pious prince, to whom the prince, the god Ninshiku (Ea), gave (wisdom) equal to that of the sage Adapa (Esarhaddon 2011: 121, 156; Melvin 2010: 4f.).

The Nikarchos inscription of 244 BC confirmed the archaizing tendency of the Seleucid-era and named Adapa himself as the first of the antediluvians *apkallu* and the founder of the Bit Rēš temple²⁴.

Berosos explains that human birth, as we know it today, has not always occurred as such. At first, the most bizarre creatures in the world were created, people with the head of a bull or bulls with human heads, creatures with two heads, with two sets of sexual organs: male and female, people with four wings and two faces, centaurs, hybrids of horses, scorpions, snakes, etc. We can identify not only a certain conception of evolution, but also inconsistency, because only after this stage did Marduk (Bel) create the well-known world and man²⁵. After destroying all the creatures described previously, a god cut off his own head, other gods mixed the blood spilled on the ground and in this way they formed humanity, which shares divine wisdom (Berosus, Mantheo 2001: 45; Syncellus 1911: 6).

At least one other list names both rulers and these teacher creatures, or *apkallu* (Berosus, Mantheo 2001: 71). The term *apkallu* (Sum. *abgal*) specifies the priest of the god Enki/Ea, the counselor of the kings before the deluge: the sage (Bottéro 1992: 246–249). According to this list, the first of the sages was called U-an (U-anna) and advised the first king Alili (or Ayalu). What is very interesting, in light of other mythological works, is that the other name of this sage is Adapa. The identification of Adapa with Oannes (the name of the first sage in the Berosos’s history) leads to interesting conclusions. As was mentioned earlier, after Marduk’s victory over Tiamat, he created the world from her body and human beings from the blood of the defeated Qingu. Most likely, this pattern was a repetition of the formula, in which Ea killed Apsu, and from his body created his own domain, named after the defeated Apsu (Foster 1995: 13). Ea subdued (the vital power) Mummu as his adviser. If this indicates parallelism between the two situations, we would expect Mummu to be killed in order to create a servant of Ea, which is exactly the way that Adapa is described in *How Adapa lost immortality* (Talon 2001: 271). It is a tempting idea, though not confirmed *explicitely* in the form of the creation of the first man.

At this point, it is worth asking how one might interpret the fact that Marduk cut off his own head to create humanity? Syncellus includes two alternatives in his account. The first suggests that it was actually the head of Marduk whilst in the

²⁴ This is however, a temple of god Anu at Uruk (Lenzi 2008b: 160).

²⁵ In the very important and well-known myths like the *Epic of creation* and *The legend o Naram-Sin*, Tiamat has been creating and feeding the monsters. However, in the latter of these examples Belet-ili is their mother (Foster 1995: 172).

second it was the head of another god that gave life to man and all creation (Berossus, Mantheo 2001: 45–46; Syncellus 1911: 6). The second description is similar to the version familiar from the *Epic of creation*.

The forbidden fruit – immortality

The matter of immortality is discussed in a number of Mesopotamian myths and stories. Man almost received it, but was always ultimately frustrated and stripped of his illusions. A very good example is the story of *How Adapa lost immortality*, in which Adapa is presented as a priest in the temple of the god Ea and a perfect man, chosen by Ea:

He (Ea) made him perfect in wisdom, revealing (to him) the designs of the land.
To him he granted wisdom, eternal life he did not grant him (Foster 1995: 97).

From a human point of view, the effects of his visit to the god Anu were beneficial for him but he ultimately lost the chance to gain immortality. The explanation for this sequence of events seems to be that, even the best of mortals cannot attain the right to eternal life. Instead, in another version, Anu gives Adapa a kind of eternal glory:

[An]u ordained that he be distinguished for his leadership for all time (Foster 1995: 101).

The story presented in *Etana, the king without an heir* is similar to the adventures of both Gilgamesh and Adapa. This story only indirectly refers to the attempted crossing of the borders of humanity and the finitude of human being (Foster 1995: 109).

The best example is presented in *The Gilgamesh epic*. Gilgamesh attempted to achieve something which seems to be impossible for a man – immortality – despite his awareness of the destiny of humankind.

Only the gods d[well] forever with Shamash.
(But) as for mankind, their days are numbered.
Whatever they do is but wind! (Heidel 1963: 36)

Gilgamesh trying to gain immortality is greeted with confusion by his interlocutors, both human and divine. First by the god Shamash (Heidel 1963: 69) and later by the barmaid Siduri, who explain:

Gilgamesh, whither runnest thou?
The life thou seekest thou wilt not find;
(For) when the gods created mankind,
They allotted death to mankind (Heidel 1963: 70).

His clash with the painful reality of his existence leads Gilgamesh to recognize death as the inevitable fate of humanity. The ruler of Uruk is, at the end of his adventures, reconciled with his human condition.

The immortal Utanapištim is an exception among mortals²⁶, however he received the gift of immortality due to services rendered to the gods and not by his own volition (Heidel 1963: 80–88).

In the end we note the existence of a separate version of the *Story of the Flood* (*Atra-Hasis*). It differs from the OB edition and is defined as the LB version, presumably being based on a lost MB recension. It originates from the NB or even Achaemenid period. It varies from the standard version in numerous places and seems to unite the names of both heroes from the different Sumerian (whose hero was named Ziusudra) and OB versions and to multiply the quantity of immortal people:

“You are Zisudra, let [your name] be Ut-napištim.
 [Your] son, your wife, your daughter, [...]
 You will become like a god; [you will receive] life.
 Let the lady stand opposite me” (Spar, Lambert 2005: 199–200).

Based on the same evidence we can draw very different conclusions. According to Batto, the texts *The rulers of Lagash*, *The Eridu Genesis* and *Cattle and grain* present early humanity as similar to the animals in the way they slept on straw beds in pens because they did not know how to build houses and also as beings who lived at the mercy of the rains because they did not know how to dig canals for irrigation. Mankind progressed a from nearly animal-like existence, in which humans were incapable of harnessing the elements of nature for their benefit, to civilized life, in which they enjoy the blessings of divine gifts and a more “god-like” status. Batto shows Enkidu’s transformation from his earlier wild, animal-like status to a civilized human (almost divine knowledge) by receiving wisdom resulting from the loss of his relationship with the animals (Batto 1992: 18–22).

Berosos especially clearly emphasizes that in Mesopotamian myths the arts of civilization come to humanity through divine or semi-divine intermediaries, such as the *apkallu* or heroes who are often semi-divine (Melvin 2010: 3).

Conclusion

In sum, the guiding idea in the creation of mankind by the gods was to replace gods with humanity in order to perform their hard daily work. One might identify a significant number of ambiguous impressions that would bind the gods to humanity in a close relationship.

²⁶ Among the immortalized humans is also mentioned Enmeduranna (or Enmeduranki) from Sippar (Zimmern 1901: 116f.).

Sumerian concepts are more diverse than the Akkadian ones, and create a more positive and optimistic picture of humanity and its role in the world. The task of humanity is not reduced to mere manual labour. Man is created in the likeness of the supreme god Anu (*The Gilgamesh epic*), he is characterized by aesthetic beauty and ethical courage. Mankind has much in common with the gods, as cited above Gilgamesh and Enkidu are created by the goddess Aruru (Gilgamesh is a son of the goddess Ninsun or Ninsunna), whilst Ziusudra (Atrahasis, Adapa) could be a son of Enki/Ea (*Enki and Ninmah, How Adapa lost immortality*, Berossos's history). Even the Akkadian literature mentions some examples of humanity's divinity. The purpose of humankind is to acquire wisdom, and being wise unambiguously implies participation in the world of the divine (*Creation of humankind*). Most likely the *Story of the Flood (Atra-Hasis)* shows, in the first version, that people were created immortal like the gods. In the text, there is no reference to the fact that the people are destined to die. The creation of humanity after the "agricultural" fashion has a lot in common with the creation of the Seven (Sibitti) gods (*How Erra wrecked the world*). The unique role of the king, almost equal to divine status, is presented in *Creation of the King*. In many NA inscriptions the wisdom of kings is compared to that of Adapa. A god's blood is essential to the creation of man in the *Story of the Flood* (god Wê), the *Epic of creation* (the god Qingu) and in the late Berossos history (the god Marduk). The latter examples might even suggest that according to the later Greek model of successive generations of humanity²⁷, in Mesopotamia humanity replaced the gods.

As far as immortality is concerned, we are accustomed to the fact that this feature is an integral component of divinity. However, this is only true at a late stage in the development of a religion, *i.e.* in monotheism. For the polytheistic religions, immortality is not an inherent feature of divinity, the best examples of this is the gods sacrificed for the creation of humanity (Tiamat, Qingu, Wê and even Marduk). Regardless, Gilgamesh was divinized after his death and become a principal god of the Netherworld. All in all, the human race, even absent immortality, was very closely related to divine beings.

We cannot forget about the meaning of the *mīs pī* ritual. The *apkallu*, understood as mediators between human and divine worlds in remote times, in historical times became "the wise" without the participation of whom the process and the gods' creation would be seriously threatened. In the ritual we find a reversal of roles from the time of man's creation. In this case, a human makes a god. Even if the human only follows the act of creation instituted by the gods, in the historical era the world of the divine is closely correlated with the human one. Of course, the whole action is dependent on divine right and their birth takes place in the world of the divine (Heaven), however, this action would be impossible without human involvement and most importantly, without the human's will to make (create) gods.

²⁷ The traces of these generations can be found already in Sumerian literature (Kramer 1943: 191–194).

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