

DISSERTATION SUMMARY

The Uses of ‘Bēlu’ and ‘Marduk’ in Neo-Assyrian Royal Inscriptions and Other Sources from the First Millennium BC¹

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In Assyrian and Babylonian sources of the first millennium BC, the god Marduk is often referred to not as ‘Marduk’, but as ‘Bēl’, or ‘Bēlu’. While ‘Bēlu’ just means ‘lord’, by the end of the second millennium it had come to function as a name of this god, being written with the ‘divine determinative’, a cuneiform sign that typically preceded divine names. Why, though, was Marduk so often referred to as ‘Bēlu’?

The Babylonians (but not the Assyrians) saw Marduk as the king of the gods, and so an assumption proliferates that, as ‘Bēlu’ means ‘lord’, it is a natural byname for a chief god. However, this assumption has never been tested. Marduk was a god thought to play many roles. As well as being thought of as the king of the gods by the Babylonians, to different groups at different times, he was a god of wisdom, magic, and healing, a warrior god, a creator god, a storm god, and the patron deity of the city of Babylon. Some of these roles had specific names associated with them. When being addressed in his role as a god of magic and healing, he was referred to as Asalluḫi. In his role as the king of the gods, he could be referred to as Lugaldimmerankia. As Beate Pongratz-Leisten has written, divine names in ancient Mesopotamia, ‘rather

1. George Heath-Whyte, ‘The Uses of ‘Bēlu’ and ‘Marduk’ in Neo-Assyrian Royal Inscriptions and other Sources from the First Millennium BC’ (PhD diss., University of Cambridge, 2022). Supervisors: Dr Martin Worthington and Dr Selena Wisnom.

than evoking a divinity as a personality, summon the divinity in a particular form of agency.²

By focusing not on the translatable *meaning* of 'Bēlu', but on the contexts of its use in comparison to the use of 'Marduk', I suggest in this dissertation that, in the Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions and in several other corpora from both Assyria and Babylonia, 'Bēlu' did not reference this god's divine supremacy, but referred to the god in his specific role as the patron deity of the city of Babylon, and to the primary cult image of the god in that role in Babylon's Esagil temple.

The inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian kings (tenth to seventh centuries BC) make up the main corpus of the study. These inscriptions provide us with almost 300 years of discourse surrounding this god, spread through hundreds of compositions, allowing any patterns in the use of 'Marduk' and 'Bēlu' to emerge, and any change in their use over time to be explored. As well as this corpus, the Neo-Babylonian royal inscriptions (seventh and sixth centuries BC), several 'topographical texts', and the Neo-Babylonian Ebabbar and Eanna temple archives are discussed.

I argue that the general pattern in the use of 'Bēlu' and 'Marduk' in these corpora is as follows: 'Marduk' was used in a large number of contexts (and in every context in which 'Bēlu' was used), whereas the use of 'Bēlu' clusters around a limited number of the contexts in which 'Marduk' was used. This pattern plays out in three broad areas, which I have termed *agency*, *location*, and *form*.

- 'Marduk' is often portrayed with a great deal of *agency*, as the subject of active verbs, performing a number of different roles, and provided with a wide range of epithets. 'Bēlu' is rarely portrayed performing any actions, but most often appears as the recipient of actions done *to* or *for* him.
- 'Marduk' is portrayed as acting in many different *locations* and being venerated in several temples and shrines throughout the Near East. Any *agency* attributed to 'Bēlu' is mostly confined to the region or interests of Babylonia, and his veneration to the Esagil temple of Babylon.
- 'Marduk' is used to refer to a variety of *forms* or manifestations of deity, whether terrestrial (a cult image or symbol), celestial (primarily the planet Jupiter), or ethereal (in an unspecified, non-physical form). 'Bēlu' is mainly used to refer to one particular form – the primary cult image of the Esagil temple.

2. B. Pongratz-Leisten, 'Divine Agency and Astralization of the Gods in Ancient Mesopotamia', in *Reconsidering the Concept of Revolutionary Monotheism*, ed. B. Pongratz-Leisten (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 148.

The framework underlying the patterns in these corpora, I suggest, is one in which 'Marduk' was the name of the god 'in general', or to use Pongratz-Leisten's and Gell's terminology, the divine 'primary agent',³ a name that could be used to refer to this god in any form, in any role or sphere of agency, and in any location. 'Bēlu', on the other hand, was the name of the god in his particular role as the city god of Babylon, and of the cult image of this city god – a divine 'secondary agent' of Marduk through which he could be worshipped in Babylon, who was not portrayed as possessing the full extent of Marduk's agency.

In certain sources that use both 'Marduk' and 'Bēlu', we see this relationship play out within a single passage. For example, in the Assyrian king Esarhaddon's description of the remaking of Marduk's cult image, to be rehoused in Esagil,⁴ we read that 'Marduk' gave Esarhaddon the idea of remaking his image, but when it is made, or 'born', the image is referred to not as 'Marduk', but as 'Bēlu'. According to such inscriptions, 'Marduk' existed independently of 'Bēlu', but 'Bēlu' did not exist independently of 'Marduk' – he was something of a subsidiary of the god, through which he could be made present in Babylon and receive offerings.

Following an Introduction, the dissertation proceeds in three parts. Part 1 deals with sources and corpora that focus on the locations of gods within particular shrines and temples in the cities of Mesopotamia. While there are many such sources, I deal only with those that mention both 'Marduk' and 'Bēlu'. The compositions *Tintir*=Babylon, the Assyrian *Tākultu* ritual text K.252, the so-called 'Götteradressbuch' of Aššur, and the Ebabbar and Eanna temple archives are each explored in turn. Taken together, they attest that at various points in the first and late second millennia, 'Marduk' had multiple shrines throughout the city of Babylon, a temple in the city of Aššur, a shrine in Gula's temple in Aššur, and was thought to be manifested as the planet Jupiter, but that 'Bēlu' was only venerated in Babylon's Esagil temple and, in the Neo-Babylonian period, in Uruk, in a direct extension of the Esagil temple cult.⁵

The bulk of the work is contained in Part 2, which explores the uses of 'Bēlu' and 'Marduk' in the Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions. I start with a short

3. Pongratz-Leisten, 'Divine Agency and Astralization', 146–152; Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 20.

4. Esarhaddon 48. See Erle Leichty, *The Royal Inscriptions of Esarhaddon, King of Assyria (680-669 BC)*, RINAP 4 (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 103–109. (Online edition at <http://oracc.org/rinap/Q003277/>.)

5. See Paul-Alain Beaulieu, *The Pantheon of Uruk during the Neo-Babylonian Period*, CM 23 (Leiden: Styx/Brill, 2003), 75–79, <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004496804>.

chapter on the religious context of Marduk in Assyria before proceeding to the early Neo-Assyrian inscriptions (c. 911–727 BC, beginning with this corpus's first mention of 'Marduk'), then to individual chapters on the inscriptions of Sargon II, Sennacherib, Esarhaddon, and Ashurbanipal. The general patterns outlined above in the use of 'Bēlu' and 'Marduk' are upheld distinctly until after the reign of Sennacherib, who destroyed Babylon and the images of its gods. Sennacherib's successor, Esarhaddon, remade the image of Babylon's patron deity in Aššur, later to be returned to Esagil by Ashurbanipal. These events see 'Bēlu' mentioned frequently outside of his previously Babylonian confines, often within long lists of Assyria's divine supporters. I argue from the order and identity of deities within such lists, however, that every mention of 'Bēlu' in Esarhaddon's and Ashurbanipal's inscriptions still refers implicitly to the god in his role as Babylon's patron.

Part 3 briefly explores the use of 'Bēlu' in the Neo-Babylonian royal inscriptions (c. 626–539 BC). I find that, despite (most of) these kings' official devotion to Marduk as supreme god, their inscriptions only rarely used 'Bēlu' to refer to him. When 'Bēlu' was used, it was mostly in the same way as in the Neo-Assyrian inscriptions, to refer specifically to the primary cult image in Esagil.

In concluding the dissertation, I summarise its findings, and further explore the suggested framework behind the patterns observed. At least in the corpora analysed, while 'Marduk' referred to the god in any form or mode of agency, in any location, or to the god 'in general', 'Bēlu' functioned as a name that referred to this god not as king of the gods, but in his role as Babylon's patron deity, and to the cult image of Marduk in that role.