Nergal: The shaping of the god Mars in Sumer, Assyria, and Babylon

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**Nergal: The shaping of the god Mars in Sumer, Assyria, and Babylon**

**Abstract**

By examining the attributes and characteristics assigned to the Mesopotamian god Nergal by Sumerians, Akkadians, and Babylonians, this dissertation focuses on the Mesopotamian deities that were conflated and syncretized to create the Neo-Babylonian version of the god Nergal. The main deities examined in this dissertation are Nergal, Meslamtaea, Ninazu, and Erra. Moreover, the Sumerian god Ninurta and the Greek hero-god Herakles are also examined because Nergal was deemed to be partly assimilated with Ninurta and with Herakles.¹

Along with the work of scholars of Assyriology and Mesopotamian history, primary sources from Mesopotamia (mainly myths, inscriptions, poems, and astrological reports) attesting the attributes or the characteristics of the god Nergal, are used to investigate whether the planet Mars (Ares in Greek) was syncretized or derived from Nergal. To assess whether the astrological meaning attributed to Mars in Mesopotamia was transmitted to Hellenistic astrologers, myths related to the Greek god Ares and attributes of Mars cited in the extant works of Hellenistic astrologers are compared with the attributes associated with Mars by Assyrian and Babylonian diviners.

**Introduction**

In Mesopotamia, Nergal was most likely promoted during the Sargonic period (ca. 2300-2200 BCE) by the Assyrian king Naram-sin, Sargon’s grandson. Cuneiform texts credit Nergal as the god behind Naram-sin’s conquests. Naram-sin created one of the first empires of history and was the first Mesopotamian ruler to proclaim

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himself a god. Most likely, the feats of Naram-sin indirectly promoted the god Nergal.

In the third millennium BCE, Nergal was a warrior and death-inflicting god who had nothing to do with the underworld, and who was not present in Sumer (south); during that millennium, the identity of Nergal was different from that of Meslamtaea, a god who might have had chthonian aspects. In fact, Sumer had the god Ninazu as a prominent underworld god. Nergal, however, during the second millennium BCE assimilated Meslamtaea and became an underworld god replacing Ninazu from the Sumerian underworld pantheon. Later, the myth known as ‘Nergal and Ereshkigal’ explained that Nergal married the queen of the Netherworld implying that Nergal seemed to reach the top of the Netherworld pantheon.

In Babylon, the god Nergal was associated with the planet Mars. Nergal was a god of war, a fighter, a hero, and also a god of death, plague, and ruler of underworld. In fact, according to a doctrine in Hellenistic astrology, Mars was a god of war, death, and plagues. Ptolemy attested that Mars was “assigned Scorpio and Aries, having a similar nature, and, agreeably to Mars’ destructive nature and inharmonious quality”. Since astrological reports by Assyrian astrologers mentioned similar characteristics of Mars, the purpose of this research is to investigate the attributes that were associated with Nergal in Sumer, Babylon, and Assyria, and compare those attributes with the characteristics associated with Mars in the extant works of Hellenistic astrologers.

**Literature review**

Egbert von Weiher found five main attributes of the god Nergal: underworld, war, light, as star, and plague. According to W. G. Lambert, the attribute of light should

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be suppressed arguing that the passages selected by von Weiher are not specific to Nergal but to any deity.\textsuperscript{6}

Gwendolyn Leick argues that \textit{Nergal} was not from Sumer but seemed to be a Babylonian god because the etymology of the name \textit{Nergal} is not Sumerian but Akkadian.\textsuperscript{7} Dina Katz presumes that \textit{Nergal} evolved from a god of war to a netherworld god, and contends that \textit{Nergal} became a major netherworld god from the Old Babylonian period onwards while his position as a heavenly god declined;\textsuperscript{8} and also that by the Middle Babylonian period (1500-1000 BCE) \textit{Nergal} was considered the spouse of \textit{Ereshkigal}, the Queen of the Netherworld.\textsuperscript{9} According to F. A. M. Wiggermann, \textit{Nergal} was associated first with the bull and later with the lion,\textsuperscript{10} and was considered a god who inflicted death to all life, human and animal, either by supernatural means such as plague or simply by supporting the king’s arms.\textsuperscript{11}

Lambert argues that the Sumerian god of the infernal regions was \textit{Ninazu} whereas \textit{Nergal} was originally an Akkadian god lord of Kutha.\textsuperscript{12} J.J.M. Roberts argues that \textit{Nergal} was a Sumerian god of the city of Kutha who was identified with \textit{Erra} by the Akkadians: the Sumerian name became popular in Akkadian circles and gradually pushed \textit{Erra} into the background in Akkadian texts.\textsuperscript{13} Jeremy Black and Anthony Green argue that \textit{Nergal} and \textit{Erra} were originally separate gods who went under the name \textit{Nergal} in the first millennium BCE; according to Black and Green, \textit{Nergal} adopted many of the features of \textit{Erra}, a violent warlike god responsible for plagues,

\textsuperscript{9} Katz, \textit{The Image of the Netherworld in the Sumerian sources}, p. 363.
fevers, famine, and forest fires. To Thorkild Jacobsen, *Erra* was a god of scorched earth, raids, and riots, who was syncretized with *Nergal*, god of war, sudden death, and ruler of the world of the dead. Roberts argues that *Erra* was Akkadian, not Sumerian, and the name *Erra* was first attested in the Sargonic period as a theophoric element in Akkadian personal names, and remained a popular theophoric element in Akkadian names through the Old Babylonian period (1950-1500 BCE). To Roberts, *Erra* was mostly portrayed as a warrior whose main weapons were famine and, to a lesser degree, plague. Roberts admits that scholars refer commonly to *Erra* as a god of pestilence. Peter Machinist and J. M. Sasson present a double nature of *Erra*: first a wild and destructive warrior, second a sleepy and inactive god who was very hard to arouse. Jeffrey L. Cooley surmises that the author of ‘*Erra and Išum*’ drew to some extent on the Mesopotamian science of celestial divination. David Brown argues that in ‘*Erra and Išum*’ *Erra* attempted to seize control of Babylon from *Marduk*, and presumes that if *Erra* was Mars, Jupiter was *Marduk*, and the *Sebetti* were the Pleiades, as it was accepted in the Neo-Assyrian period, then ‘the myth could be interpreted (partly) as a description of the behavior of these heavenly bodies’. Lorenzo Verderame argues that the Pleiades were equated with the Seven demons and were often associated with the planet Mars as astral god of the Netherworld. Verderame considers that when the Akkadian term to refer to the Seven demons, *Sebēttu* or *Sibitti*, appeared in astrological omens the tone of the omen became bellicose portending attack of the enemy, siege of city, or exercise of power.

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22 Verderame, ‘Pleiades in Ancient Mesopotamia’, p. 112.
Michael Baigent argues that Nergal was a god of war, plague, fevers, and pestilence, who was identified by Mesopotamian astrologers with Mars. Ulla Koch-Westenholz edited a Neo-Assyrian astrological-astronomical compendium known as the ‘Great Star List’, which contained most of the attributes of Nergal that have come down to us. J. L. Cooley uses the same compendium, and Frances Reynolds gathers textual evidence, mainly from that compendium, attesting that Mars was an unpropitious planet in Mesopotamia, and argues that Mars was linked with destructive natural forces, such as plague, death, and fire; the latter due to the red color of the planet.

Name and images of the god Nergal

By the third millennium BCE, the earliest Sumerian spelling of Nergal was aKIŠ.UNU, a spelling which, by the late third millennium, evolved to aKIŠ.UNU.GAL. The element KIŠ denoted a bull’s head, and KIŠ.UNU spelled Kutha, a city which was the main cult center of Nergal, located around 25 miles northeast of Babylon. In Sumerian hymns, Nergal was commonly described as a victorious bull; in fact, one of the earliest names of Nergal was a ‘bull whose great strength cannot be repulsed’. Wiggermann argues that the image of the victorious bull recurred among his names and in Sumerian texts, but it was less prominent in later Akkadian ones.

Later on, however, Nergal was associated with the lion, which is attested in Nergal’s scimitar. According to Green, the scimitar of Nergal was either single, often with a
lion’s head or a lion-demon’s head, or double with the heads of lion-demons.\textsuperscript{31} According to Wiggermann, \textit{Nergal} was compared with a lion and addressed to as a lion, and demons such as the Lion Dragon (\textit{Ukaduhhû}) and the forerunner of the Lion Demon (\textit{Ugallu}) served as executors of the will of \textit{Nergal}. Those demons, however, were not exclusive to \textit{Nergal}.\textsuperscript{32} It seems that whenever \textit{Nergal} was associated with demons during the late second and early first millennium BCE, those demons were most likely portrayed with leonine features. Edith Porada argues that the death-dealing gods in Mesopotamia, during the second millennium BCE, were depicted carrying weapons which ended in lion heads, or as humans with bull ears or other animal features; similarly, during the late second and early first millennium BCE, death dealing gods were mostly depicted as demons with leonine features.\textsuperscript{33} According to Black and Green, the Lion Demon (often depicted on Old-Babylonian seals holding a man upside down from one leg) not only represented an attendant of \textit{Nergal}, but was a bringer of disease.\textsuperscript{34} Black surmises that in ancient Mesopotamia the causes of disease were often ascribed to the work of gods or demons (acting as the agents of gods) for the punishment of sin.\textsuperscript{35} Summarizing, during the third millennium BCE \textit{Nergal} seemed to be represented as a bull. During the second millennium and early first millennium BCE, \textit{Nergal} was represented as a lion, and lions were commonly associated with demons, which were considered as bringers of disease. Hence, in Mesopotamia, Nergal was a death dealing god bringer of disease, which was caused either by demons or by \textit{Nergal} directly, and those demons were portrayed with leonine features.

\textbf{History of the formation of the god \textit{Nergal}}

During the Old Akkadian period (2500-2000 BCE), \textit{Nergal} as a god of war can be attested beyond Mesopotamia: in Akkadian and Hurrian inscriptions \textit{Nergal} was

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Black and Green, \textit{Gods, Demons and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia}, p. 121.
\item Black and Green, \textit{Gods, Demons and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia}, p. 67.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
referred to with the epithet ‘killer’, or ‘conqueror of rivals’, in the foundation inscription recording the building of a temple by Atalsen, king of Ukriš and Nawar.36 Nergal seemed to have been promoted by the Sargonid kings (c. 2350 – 2150 BCE) together with his cult centre at Kutha.37 From the time of Naram-sin (reigned c. 2254 – 2218 BCE) onwards, Nergal was known as the head of the pantheon of Kutha.38 An inscription from a stone monument in the temple of Sin at Ur credited Nergal with the success of Naram-sin’s campaign against Armanum and Ebla.39 The historical document known as ‘Naram-Sin in the Cedar Mountain’, explained that Nergal helped Naram-sin to conquer several territories:

the god Nergal did open up the path for the mighty Naram-Sin, and gave him Arman and Ebla, and he presented him also with the Amanus, the Cedar Mountain and (with) the Upper Sea […].40

Katz argues that the successful campaigns of Naram-sin accentuated Nergal’s warlike character and facilitated Nergal’s penetration in the Akkadian provinces of the northwest.41 According to Katz, however, the prominent position of Nergal during Naram-sim’s reign was not maintained by his successors.42 Nergal’s cult began to penetrate the Sumerian cult centers in the south during the Ur III period (c. 2100-2000 BCE), when the cult of Meslamtaea was still dominant; Nergal began to be mentioned in texts from southern Sumerian centers only from Šulgi’s time (reigned c. 2029-1982 BCE).43 The association of weapons and blood with Nergal, such as line 119 of Šulgi’s hymn X, which reads ‘Like Nergal, your weapon consumed blood’44 certainly makes of Nergal a warrior god. Katz argues that

41 Katz, The Image of the Netherworld in the Sumerian Sources, p. 412.
43 Katz, The Image of the Netherworld in the Sumerian Sources, p. 351.
the intense military activity carried out by Šulgi, and its own deification (Šulgi’s) could explain the incorporation of Nergal into the gods revered by Šulgi.\textsuperscript{45}

According to Katz, the naturalization of \textit{Nergal} in southern Sumer was generated by Šulgi as a premeditated act focused on the military success of Naram-sim in order to demonstrate that \textit{Nergal} was military more capable than \textit{Meslamtaea}. Katz argues that \textit{Meslamtaea} was a chthonic god (perhaps a young fertility-god) with a war-like aspect,\textsuperscript{46} and surmises that when Šulgi added Nergal as a warlike god to the circle of the gods that he venerated, they (Nergal and Meslamtaea) were worshipped in Kutha side by side.\textsuperscript{47}

According to Jacobsen, \textit{Meslamtaea} belonged to a pantheon of Sumerian city-gods of farming regions; a pantheon in which the male gods tended to be fierce warriors, warlike, with chthonian aspects, and belonging to a single divine family stemming from \textit{Enlil} of Nippur.\textsuperscript{48} According to Katz, \textit{Meslamtaea} was finally assimilated with \textit{Nergal} in the second millennium BCE.\textsuperscript{49} To Jacobsen, \textit{Nergal} became a major figure in the pantheon during the second millennium BCE when Assyria and Babylon arose as national states and the gods \textit{Marduk} of Babylon and \textit{Ashur} of Assyria became the head of the new pantheon, and the older gods receded, remaining prominent but with less power.\textsuperscript{50} During the second millennium BCE, \textit{Nergal} most likely penetrated in southern Sumer, assimilated \textit{Meslamtaea}, and became a major god in the pantheon of Babylon and Assyria.

\textit{Meslamtaea} was usually coupled with \textit{Lugal-irra}. \textit{Lugal-irra} and \textit{Meslamtaea} were twin gods considered hypostases of Nergal,\textsuperscript{51} and a duo of gods with netherworld

\textsuperscript{45} Katz, \textit{The Image of the Netherworld in the Sumerian Sources}, p. 418.
\textsuperscript{46} Katz, \textit{The Image of the Netherworld in the Sumerian Sources}, p. 417.
\textsuperscript{47} Katz, \textit{The Image of the Netherworld in the Sumerian Sources}, p. 417.
\textsuperscript{49} Katz, \textit{The Image of the Netherworld in Sumerian Sources}, p. 351.
\textsuperscript{50} Jacobsen, \textit{Toward the image of Tammuz and other Essays}, p. 35.
associations.\(^\text{52}\) First encountered as a pair in a hymnic cycle naming Ibbi-Sîn, last king of the Third Dynasty of Ur (c. 2100-2000 BCE), Lambert argues that Meslamtaea and Lugal-irra both dealt with the river that separated the dead from the living and that gave access to the netherworld.\(^\text{53}\) According to Erika Reiner and David Pingree, tablet K.42 attests that ‘Lugal-irra and Meslamtaea (are) Mercury and Mars’\(^\text{54}\). Since Meslamtaea had clear underworld links, by assimilating Meslamtaea Nergal began to play a role in the netherworld.

As son of Enlil, Nergal seemed to be identified with destruction and war. Jacobsen argues that the ‘Hymn to Enlil’ showed Enlil as a benefactor of man and all life on earth, and described Enlil’s authority and power making the other gods recognize him as their lord and master of the city of Nippur.\(^\text{55}\) Alberto R. W. Green argues that Enlil was often portrayed as the violent warrior who gave kingship to the land.\(^\text{56}\) Nippur and Enlil were recognized as a source of rule over Sumer as a whole; and any new king of Sumer needed the recognition of Nippur rather than that of his own city, concluded Jacobsen.\(^\text{57}\) Tablet BM 100042 described Nergal not only as a great warrior, as a hero, fierce, broad and high, but as junior of Enlil.\(^\text{58}\) Nergal may have inherited his warrior attributes from Enlil, who was considered a warrior who can bring destruction.\(^\text{59}\) Tablet BE39099, a version of the Atra-hasis myth\(^\text{60}\) from the Late Babylonian period (600 BCE–100 CE), attested that Nergal took on some attributes of Enlil:

Anu and Adad watched over [the upper regions],


Sin and Nergal guarded the earth [in the middle], […]\textsuperscript{61}

The Old-Babylonian myth of Athra-hasis showed \textit{Enlil} in charge of the Earth whereas the Late Babylonian version substituted \textit{Sin} and \textit{Nergal} for \textit{Enlil}. Tablet BM 100042 described \textit{Nergal} as the South wind, as the storm both great and fierce, and as the son born of \textit{Enlil} who fought for his father and who brought distress upon the disobedient.\textsuperscript{62} Jacobsen argues that the storm was culturally identified with the god \textit{Enlil}, and rendered the name \textit{Enlil} as ‘Lord Wind’.\textsuperscript{63} Tablet BM 100042 attests that \textit{Nergal} could be described not only as son but also as avenger of \textit{Enlil}, and as such, \textit{Nergal} might be assuming some of the epithets previously attributed to the Sumerian god \textit{Ninurta}. By being a son of \textit{Enlil}, \textit{Nergal} was considered a storm, a warrior who can bring utter destruction. Therefore, \textit{Nergal} began to assume the role of malefic deity. In the future, such role would most likely be conveyed to Mars, who would become a malefic planet.

\textit{Nergal} was neither the only son of \textit{Enlil} nor the only warrior god. \textit{Ninurta}, the warrior/hero of the ancient Sumerian pantheon, was also son of \textit{Enlil}.\textsuperscript{64} The mentioned sharing of epithets between \textit{Nergal} and \textit{Ninurta} has been noticed already by some scholars. Henri Frankfort surmises that both \textit{Nergal} and \textit{Ninurta} were originally aspects of a many-sided Sumerian deity who was first a personification of the generative force of nature, and argues that they became gods of death and war as the outcome of a specialization of functions that took place after Early Dynastic times (c. 2900-2350 BCE). To Frankfort, in later times they possessed solar characteristics and in the later pantheon they were warriors with solar qualities but which still belonged at the same time to the category of the ‘dying god’.\textsuperscript{65} According to A. Livingstone, in the Old-Babylonian period (1950-1500 BCE) \textit{Nergal} took on

\textsuperscript{61} Foster, \textit{Before the Muses 2nd edition}, p. 198.
the epithet of ‘avenger of his father Enlil’ and shared such epithet with the hero Ninurta who, along with Zababa, could be identified with Nergal.\textsuperscript{66}

Frankfort assumed that Nergal was a Sumerian god; on the other hand, current scholars such as Leick, Wiggermann, and Katz consider Nergal an Akkadian god. If Nergal was Akkadian, when Ninurta was active in the city of Nippur, and in Sumer in general, Nergal was not present in Sumer yet. Ninurta was associated with a city, and when that city decayed the god not only lost favor but sometimes was replaced by the god of a new city or capital favoured by the new ruler. Charles Penglase argues that the myths of Ninurta were assumed to a certain extent by other gods who became important later such as Nergal, Nabu, and Marduk (the god of the city of Babylon). According to Penglase, Nergal was closely associated with Ninurta and took over some mythological exploits and martial aspects of Ninurta.\textsuperscript{67} Therefore, Nergal seemed to take on from Ninurta (Saturn) the aspects of warrior and hero.

\textbf{Nergal and the control of trade routes}

During the Isin-Larsa period (1950-1763 BCE), the city of Eshnunna (Tell Asmar) in the Diyala Valley (across the Tigris and east of Babylon) became a hegemonic power over the surrounding cities.\textsuperscript{68} Eshnunna was located close to the main communication route along the Tigris as well as the route that linked Mesopotamia with the Iranian plateau across the Zagros. During the nineteenth and eighteenth centuries BCE, Eshnunna played a major role in the relations between Assyria and Babylonia, contends McGuire Gibson, arguing that whoever controlled Eshnnuna could force the payment of tolls to use the route, or to forbid its use.\textsuperscript{69} Gibson argues about two major parallel northwest-to-southeast trade routes, one along the Tigris and another one along the Euphrates, both routes competing and tapping the same resources and markets.\textsuperscript{70} During the Isin-Larsa period, Eshnunna might have


\textsuperscript{67} Penglase, Greek Myths and Mesopotamia, p. 50.


\textsuperscript{70} Gibson, ‘Duplicate Systems of Trade’, p. 27.
controlled the Tigris route, which borders Iran, and the city-state of Mari, a trade center on the Euphrates river in Syria, might have been focused on the Euphrates route.

The Isin-Larsa period falls into the Middle Bronze Age (2100 – 1550 BCE). Bronze was produced mainly by adding tin to copper. The proportion of tin added to copper to make bronze varied between 6 to 10 percent of tin in the final alloy. Benno Landsberger argues that tin (anaku in Akkadian) was the main article for trade in the Old Assyrian merchant colonies in Anatolia at the beginning of the second millennium, overshadowing the trade of other current good such as silver, copper, and garments.71 Since both tin and copper had to be imported to Mesopotamia, it looks like Eshnunna played an important role in the route of tin from Elam (Iran) to Assyria and then into Anatolia (Turkey).

At least during the Isin-Larsa period, it seems that silver was used as money. Paul Garelli contends that one shekel of silver could buy in Iran between 13 to 14 shekels of tin, while the same tin could be sold in Anatolia at an average between 6 to 8 shekels of tin per shekel of silver.72 According to cuneiform tablets analyzed by Garelli, the profits of buying tin in Iran and selling it in Turkey were substantial. Hence, trade routes needed to be defended and protected from other city-states coveting that profit. A late nineteen century BCE composition known as ‘Naram-Sin, king of Eshnunna’73 declared Erra as protector of a king of Eshnunna who, showing gratitude for his victories, promised to build Erra a temple.74 Hence, the mentioned nineteen century BCE composition might attest the presence of Nergal in Eshnunna during the Isin-Larsa period. Besides, the presence of the Akkadian warrior-god Nergal to protect trade-routes makes perfect sense.

According to Jacobsen, Akkadian kings Sargon and Naram-sin created a new Akkadian empire using a large army not only for conquest but for garrisoning a network of army posts along the major routes of the empire.75 Hildegard Lewy

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73 Foster, Before the Muses 3rd edition, p. 124.
74 Foster, Before the Muses 3rd edition, pp. 124-5.
75 Jacobsen, Toward the Image of Tammuz, p. 139.
argues that the Assyrians throughout their history cherished the idea of the creation of a universal empire.\textsuperscript{76} Louis L. Orlin argues that the situation in Anatolia (Turkey) does not show that the Assyrian gods took an important position in the consciousness of the non-Assyrian inhabitants. Orlin presumes that the individual gods of the Anatolian pantheon were actively worshiped, and that there is in no way the appearance of an imposition of the Assyrian deities upon the religious life of the Anatolian.\textsuperscript{77} According to Mary B. Bachvaroba, however, a tablet from the Old Assyrian merchant colony of Kanesh (Anatolia) showed transmission of the deeds of Sargon to Anatolia already in the Old Assyrian period (2000-1750 BCE). Thus, Nergal might have been known in Anatolia as far back as the Old Assyrian period.

During the reign of the Amorite king Sin-iddinam (1849-1843 BCE), Nergal appeared among the five main deities of Larsa.\textsuperscript{78} According to Albrecht Goetze, the gods most mentioned in cuneiform tablets from Larsa were Šamaš (the Sun), Adad, Inanna, Nanaya, and Nergal.\textsuperscript{79} At the northernmost point where the Tigris and Euphrates rivers converge close enough to permit navigation, archeologists found the city of Mashkan-shapir. Elizabeth C. Stone and Paul Zimansky argue that Mashkan-shapir not only hosted a shrine to Nergal, which was one of the major temples of the land, but also a wall built by Larsa’s king Sin-iddinam, which indicated that the city played an important role for Larsa in trade and military maneuvering.\textsuperscript{80} Numerous barrel cylinders found at the wall contained an inscription attesting that the project was ‘undertaken at the command of the god Nergal to increase the dwellings of Mashkan-shapir’.\textsuperscript{81} Thus, during the Isin-Larsa period the presence of Nergal began to be attested in Sumerian cities of the south, such as Larsa, and in the control of the trade by those cities.

\textsuperscript{81} Stone and Zimansky, ‘Mashkan-Shapir’, p. 213.
According to Frankfort, during the Isin-Larsa period Eshnunna was a prosperous small-independent state; the bricks of a house of the Larsa period in Eshnunna contained inscriptions in Akkadian stating that Šulgi had built the temple E-sikil for a god called Tišpak, and inscriptions in Sumerian stating that it was built for Ninazu. Wiggermann contends that during the Old Akkadian period the city of Eshnunna received a migration of Akkadian speaking people, and among them the god Tišpak became their chief god, which was identified with the Sumerian chief god of the city: Ninazu. Even though Frankfort does not mention Nergal, Ninazu was later assimilated by Nergal. The fact that Eshnunna would be destroyed first by Hammurabi, and later by the son of Hammurabi, may have fueled the assimilation of Ninazu by Nergal.

Hammurabi, after defeating Larsa in 1763 BCE, Eshnunna in 1761 BCE, and Mari in 1758 BCE, ended up controlling the trade routes along the Tigris and the Euphrates. Hammurabi actually destroyed Eshnunna and resettled its population. Samsuiluna, king of Babylon (1749-1712 BCE) and successor of Hammurabi, left inscriptions commemorating the specific year when he defeated the army of Eshnunna and executed its king. According to Stone and Zimansky, unknown causes led to the abandonment of all the southern and central Babylonian cities during the reign of Samsuiluna, and thereafter no more is heard of the city of Mashkan-shapir. Lambert argues that from early second millennium, Ereshkigal ruled the netherworld without equal, and her husband was neither Ninazu nor Nergal. Lambert surmises that the decline of Enegi as a town must have contributed to Ninazu’s loss of preeminence in the netherworld pantheon, and with the rise of Babylonian literature during the Old Babylonian period, Nergal was promoted to be king of the netherworld. Therefore, Eshnunna might not only ceased to be of importance but decayed after being conquered by Hammurabi and Samsuiluna. That

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might explain when *Ninazu* could began to be assimilated by *Nergal*, and why *Nergal* became stronger in the Babylonian netherworld pantheon.

Besides the tablet from Kanesh (Anatolia) showing the deeds of Sargon, Bachvaroba propounds not only a second possible from of transmission via scribal schools of Mesopotamia and north Syria, but a third transmitted orally by the Hurrians, probably from north Syria.\(^89\) In fact, in the sixteenth century BCE, after the fall of the First Babylonian Dinasty to the Hittites, which ruled from Hattusha on the central Anatolian plateau, Mesopotamia was ruled in the south by the Kassites and in the north (Assyria) by the Hurrians from their kingdom of Mittani, centered in the Kabur region.\(^90\)

On the transmission of gods from East to West, Sarah P. Morris proposes that

> the transmission of religious beliefs and practices from East to West must
> have resembled the migration of metallurgy, or even the adoption of the
> alphabet: the process was not so much incremental but rather repeated in
> independent and informal encounters.\(^91\)

Dalley describes *Nergal* (*Erra*) as patron of copper smelting,\(^92\) but does not mention the original source. Copper was brought in Mesopotamia from Iran, Anatolia (Turkey), Magan (Oman), and Alashiya (Cyprus).\(^93\) In the eighteenth-century BCE copper from Alashiya made its first appearance in cuneiform texts.\(^94\) Around 1400 BCE in Cyprus, which since about 1700 BCE had been in contact with Syria-Palestine, appeared large quantities of Mycenaean pottery possibly being traded for copper, a trade which increased in volume during the thirteen century BCE.\(^95\) Hence, contacts between Mesopotamia and Cyprus started at least in the eighteenth century.

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BCE, and contacts with Syria-Palestine were also attested later. The steady imports of copper mean that one possible avenue of transmission of gods was in place.

In fact, a transmission of Nergal from Mesopotamia to Syria is attested in a Sirio-Canaanite deity known as Resheph. In the third millennium BCE at Ebla, Resheph was identified with the Mesopotamian god 4KIŠ.UNU, known later as Nergal.96 Edward Lipinski insists that Resheph was a warlike god and a protective deity identified with Nergal during the mid-third millennium BCE when Nergal was just a war-god, inflicting death in general, and not yet an underworld deity like Ninazu or with the properties of the chthonic gods from the circle of Ereshkigal.97

**Ninazu**

Katz describes Ninazu as a warrior god on one hand, and as young-dying snake-god related to agriculture and the netherworld god, on the other.98 To Wiggermann, Ninazu was an underworld deity who resembled Ninurta by being a warrior and a seal keeper.99 Wiggermann translates Ninazu as ‘Lord healer’ and describes him as king of snakes in Old Babylonian incantations, and argues that the cities of Ninazu were Eshnunna and Enegi (in southern Sumer).100 A hymn composed in Akkad by the daughter of Sargon, defined Enegi as the house of Ninazu and equated Enegi to the Kutha of Sumer.101 The translation seems to imply that Enegi was linked to the netherworld, hence Ninazu could be considered a Sumerian netherworld god. Lambert argues that the description of Enegi as Kutha of Sumer was an element of contrast with Nergal’s Kutha, which was in Akkad, and with the rise of Akkad as a political empire, any document composed in Akkad or during an Akkadian period would make the most of Nergal and denigrate his Sumerian rival Ninazu.102 Another Hymn attested that Ninazu had a temple in the city of Eshnunna, and described

Ninazu as son of Enlil, as a warrior, and as a lion who poured venom over any hostile land. The hymn compared Ninazu to a south storm, a raging storm, and a dragon raging against the rebel land.\textsuperscript{103} Besides the fact that being compared to Enlil reinforced the role of Ninazu as a warrior, being compared to a dragon might cast upon Ninazu the role of god related to the underworld.

According to Lambert, Van Dijk constructs two gods Ninazu: one Ninurta-type god at home in the city of Eshnunna with parents Enlil and Ninlil, and one underworld god at home in the city of Enegi with several different fathers and Ereshkigal as mother; Lambert also considers that there were two gods named Ninazu, one of the city of Enegi and another one of the city of Eshnunna, and presumes that only the Ninazu of Enegi had underworld connections.\textsuperscript{104} Wiggermann, however, contends that both gods Ninazu have the same wife, Ningirida, the same brother, Ninmada, and both are associated with the dragon mušhušsu. Therefore, to Wiggermann there is only one god Ninazu, and the connection with the underworld was the association of Ninazu with the dragon mušhušsu.\textsuperscript{105} Katz argues that the image of Ninazu in Šulgi’s court is illustrated by two hymns, known as Šulgi D and Šulgi X, which characterize Ninazu as a war-god, and the only link with the Netherworld is the epithet muš-huš which is mentioned in Šulgi D 308.\textsuperscript{106}

Attested in writing for the first time in a Sumerian wisdom composition from the area of Lagash (south of Sumer) dating about the twenty-fourth century BCE,\textsuperscript{107} the Akkadian term mušhušsu (a loan-word from Sumerian), literally a ‘fearsome serpent’, was a snake-dragon which denoted a supernatural being companion of certain gods and their ally against evil; it was also an apotropaic figure whose iconography showed a composite being with the front paws of a lion and hind paws like the talons of a bird of prey; his earliest forms had a lion’s head, and in the pre-Akkadian period a snake’s head.\textsuperscript{108} Theodor J. Lewis writes about two

\textsuperscript{103} Sjöberg, \textit{The Collection of the Sumerian Temple Hymns}, pp. 42-3.

\textsuperscript{104} Lambert, ‘The Theology of Death’, p. 61.


\textsuperscript{106} Katz, \textit{The Image of the Netherworld in the Sumerian sources}, p. 435.


representations from Eshnunna in which the god Tišpak is shown riding upon the mušhušsu, which Lewis translates as ‘dragon’ and as ‘terrifying serpent’. Katz argues that in the texts of the third dynasty of Ur Ninazu is not included in their lists of netherworld gods. It is as if Ninazu was being pushed out of the netherworld. Wiggermann argues that from Old Akkadian times onward, Ninazu as chief god of Eshnunna was succeeded by Tišpak, a god of foreign origin whose original character is still unknown, who apparently inherited from Ninazu the dragon mušhušsu. Jacobsen concluded, based on those two inscriptions, that during the old Akkadian period the god Tišpak took the place of the Sumerian god Ninazu. Katz, however, finds this conclusion debatable, arguing that Ninazu was still worshipped in Southern Sumer and appeared as a god of war in the so-called Šulgi hymns D and X. To Katz, during Sulgi’s time both Ninazu and Tišpak were worshipped in Eshnunna, side by side.

A remarkable fact was that Ninazu had a dragon, and it seems that Tišpak inherited that dragon. Wiggermann argues that Tišpak did not take the dragon with him from his original home by the fact that in Lagash (Gudea) mušhušsu is associated with Ninazu’s son Ningizzida. In either case, when Nergal assimilated Ninazu, Nergal most likely inherited a dragon, or a serpent.

Nergal as an underworld deity

In the myth known as ‘The Serpent’, Nergal was most likely referred to as ‘The Vanguard, tamer of serpents’. The extant text described Nergal as a hero in the vanguard, in an upfront position. On the other hand, his ability to tame serpents preliminarily connects Nergal to the netherworld: the term serpent may indicate not only a wild animal, but also a dragon, which can very likely be an underworld creature. It is also significant that Nergal was associated with serpents.

111 F. A. M. Wiggerman, ‘Tišpak, his seal, and the dragon mušhušsu’, To the Euphrates and Beyond: Archaeological studies in honour of Maurits N. van Loon (Rotterdam: Brookfield, 1989), p. 120.
113 Wiggerman ‘Tišpak, his seal, and the dragon mušhušsu’, p. 121.
114 Foster, Before the Muses 2nd edition, p. 483.
The myth known as ‘Enlil and Ninlil’ introduced Meslamtaea (Nergal) as the second son of Enlil and Ninlil. After the birth of their first son, Sin (Moon), Enlil, forced down to the Netherworld, changed his identity three times to copulate with Ninlil. As a result, three gods of the netherworld were conceived: Meslamtaea, Ninazu, and Enbilulu. Enbilulu in Sumer was considered an agricultural deity, whereas in Babylon he was a son of Ea (Enki).

Tablet BM 100042 described Nergal as the lord of the place where the sun rises, as one who turns the enemies into ghosts, as lord of the Netherworld. The Sumerian word for the netherworld, kur, also meant ‘mountain’ and ‘foreign land’. Katz assumes that the Sumerians originally conceived the netherworld as a mountain located in the outside borders of Sumer. In hymn thirty-six of The Collection of the Sumerian Temple Hymns, Nergal was called Girra (Erra, written d.gir.ra), lord of the Sunset, and Meslamtaea; in the same document Kutha was defined as the house of Nergal. According to tablet IX of the Standard Babylonian version of The Epic of Gilgamesh, Gilgamesh found two scorpion-beings guarding the entrance of the netherworld. F. A. M. Wiggerman writes that a scorpion man and a scorpion woman guarded the gate of mountain Māšu (in Akkadian Māšu means ‘twin’) which was the entrance of the Netherworld, and watch over the rising and the setting of the Sun. In another context, the gods Lugal-irra and Meslamtaea were thought to stand at the entrance to the Netherworld ready to dismember the dead as they entered. Astronomical texts also explain the constellation of Gemini as Lugal-irra and Meslamtaea. According to Roberts, the god Erra associated with Nergal was

115 Leick, A Dictionary of Ancient Near Eastern Mythology, p. 47.
119 Kramer, Sumerian Mythology, p. 76.
121 Sjöberg, The Collection of the Sumerian Temple Hymns, p. 44.
sometimes spelled “Irra”.¹²⁵ Thus, the entrance of the Netherworld was guarded by deities closely related to Nergal. In addition, Nergal not only added the features of the warrior god Erra, but by the Old Babylonian period, Nergal assimilated several rival Sumerian chthonic gods such as Ninazu, and Meslamtaea.¹²⁶

The myth known as ‘Nergal and Ereshkigal’, the earlier version dating from fourteenth century BCE,¹²⁷ described how Nergal ended up marrying Ereshkigal. According to Foster, ‘Nergal and Ereshkigal’ related how Nergal became king of the netherworld.¹²⁸ Katz argues that in the earlier periods Nergal appeared mainly as a warrior-god whereas in the later periods Nergal appeared also as netherworld god.¹²⁹

Nergal as a netherworld deity is attested in the Neo-Assyrian literature poem known as the Underworld Vision of an Assyrian Prince, a prince (who might be Ashurbanipal) comes face to face with the netherworld god Nergal, and sees the god as a luminescent being.¹³⁰

**Erra and the Sebetti**

Dating no earlier that the eighth century BCE, ‘Erra and Ishum’ is composition consisting of some 750 lines spread over five tablets,¹³¹ and centered on the destructive nature of the god Erra (Nergal). In ‘Erra and Ishum’, Erra was described as ‘the wild bull of heaven’,¹³² and as ‘the lion on earth’.¹³³ Both descriptions coincide with the general depiction of Nergal as a bull and as a lion. ‘Erra and Ishum’ introduced the Sebetti (literally ‘the Seven’) as a gift of Anu to Erra, and later described the Sebetti as invincible, flaming, with the face of the lion,¹³⁴ bearing

fierce weapons, a blowing wind, merciless and destructive, and filled with the venom of the dragon. According to Cooley, in ‘Erra and Ishum’ the god An charged the Sebetti to assist Erra in destructive acts such as the annihilation of humans and their domestic livestock; and notes that Sebetti were well attested in astronomical texts, and in the Neo-Assyrian period associated with the Pleiades. Thus, Erra (Nergal) was not only associated with destruction of humans and animals, but also the attributes of the Sebetti reinforced Erra (Nergal) as a warrior deity of death and destruction. ‘Erra and Ishum’ posited Nergal not only as a warrior, but as bringer of destruction and as a substitute for Marduk. Therefore, the myth contradicts Katz’s position that Nergal ended up being just a netherworld god.

To Brown, in ‘Erra and Ishum’ the absence of Marduk and the temporary take-over by Erra is a parallel of two heavenly-ill events: the absence of Jupiter behind the sun and the brilliance of Erra. The absence of Jupiter behind the Sun may mean an astrological conjunction of the Sun with Jupiter which renders the latter invisible. In fact, Brown argues that Marduk’s decision to descend to the apsû and have his garments cleaned, may in part be describing Jupiter’s conjunction with the Sun. It may well be, as Cooley argues, a conjunction, but it can also be a period of non-visibility of Jupiter because Marduk is descending to the apsû, which was a place located underground and supposedly full of water, to clean his garments, most likely with those underground waters. Therefore, the disappearance of Jupiter could be due either to a conjunction with the Sun, or by a period of non-visibility of Jupiter in the northern hemisphere by being under the earth. The point of the myth could be that if Erra took command, destruction and war would ensue.

The astrological meaning of Nergal

Strength was attributed to Nergal at least during the Middle Babylonian and Neo-Assyrian periods. In the myth known as ‘The Serpent’, the mother goddess Aruru
confessed ‘I granted strength to Nergal. To Nergal did I give the fullest’.\textsuperscript{144} Simo Parpola argues that strength occurred in Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions as a common epithet of \textit{Nergal}.\textsuperscript{145} Besides strength, another common attribute of \textit{Nergal} was danger. Leick comments that numerous prayers and hymns were addressed to \textit{Nergal} in order to avert his dangerous influence.\textsuperscript{146} \textit{Ploutos} was the Greek god of riches son of Demeter, goddess linked to the underworld by her other daughter, Persephone, who was abducted by Hades to the Netherworld. Parpola introduces a connection between \textit{Nergal} and \textit{Ploutos} based on a few names of \textit{Nergal} related to riches, such as ‘king of opulence’ (\textit{Lugal-hegal}), ‘day of opulence’ (\textit{Ud-hegal}), and the personal name \textit{Šubši-mešre-Šakkan} (‘Bring-Riches-Šakkan’).\textsuperscript{147}

Koch-Westenholz argues that in Mesopotamia the planet Mars was sometimes referred to as red, while in others was considered not only bringer of evil but with a sinister character, whereas in an astrological context, Mars was called the planet \textit{Salbatānu}, a name which was explained as ‘constantly portending pestilence’ or as ‘the incalculable star’.\textsuperscript{148} Koch-Westenholz translates some of the names of \textit{Nergal} from ‘The Great Star List’ as enemy, liar, evil, different, and strange; and writes that Mars was considered in that list as one of the twelve stars of \textit{Amurru}.\textsuperscript{149}

Reynolds claims that the unpropitious role of Mars comes mainly from the following section on epithets of Nergal from the ‘Great Star List’:

- fiery red, red, yellow, sinister, strange, hostile, liar, evil, fox, star of Elam, robber, wolf, eagle, evil, Simut, incalculable, plough, yoke, star of dignity, raven, kidney, star of Eridu, and panther.\textsuperscript{150}

In addition to that, Reynolds lists another set of seven names of Nergal (Mars) from the ‘Great Star List’:

\textsuperscript{144} Foster, \textit{Before the Muses 2nd edition}, p. 482.
\textsuperscript{146} Leick, \textit{A Dictionary of Ancient Near Eastern Mythology}, p. 128.
\textsuperscript{149} Koch-Westenholz, \textit{Mesopotamian Astrology}, p. 128.
\textsuperscript{150} Koch-Westenholz, \textit{Mesopotamian Astrology}, p. 191.
Those seven names, however, are all found within the section of the ‘Great Star List’ containing the epithets of Nergal.

Most of the epithets of Mars (Nergal) listed in the ‘Great Star List’ are attested in extant reports of Assyrian and Babylonian astrologers. A report by diviner Nergal-Etir attested that ‘The red planet is Mars’.  

Diviner Rašiš, in a report on March 15th 668 BCE, wrote that ‘The Yoke star means Mars’. Diviner Nabû-ahhe-eriba wrote twice that the Wolf star is Mars: the first time on a report on March 26th 670 BCE, the second time on a report on January 23rd 668 BCE. Diviner Nergal-etir wrote in a report that ‘The panther is Nergal’. Gavin White surmises that the Panther’s attributes of destruction and death were emphasized by associating the Panther with Nergal. Thus, astrological reports of the Neo-Babylonian period treated Nergal as god of death and destruction by associating Nergal with constellations such as the Panther. In a composition known as ‘The rites of Egašankalamma’, line 37 reads ‘The fox which comes out howling, is Nergal’. The fox-star was associated with tricks; in fact, a Mesopotamian proverb showed that the fox was regarded as a smart animal:

The man who seized the tail of a lion sank in the river. He who seized the tail of a fox escaped.

Mars as the False star, the red planet, and the strange star is attested in report by Nabû-iqiša of Borsippa on June 11th 678 BCE:

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151 Koch-Westenholz, Mesopotamian Astrology, pp. 199-201.
152 Hermann Hunger, Astrol ogical Reports to Assyrian Kings, State Archives of Assyria vol. VIII (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1992), [hereafter Hunger, SAA 8], 274 r. 6, p. 273.
153 Hunger, SAA 8, 383: r-4, p. 219.
154 Hunger, SAA 8, 45:4, p. 27.
155 Hunger, SAA 8, 48:5, p. 28.
156 Hunger, SAA 8, 284:2, p. 156.
If Jupiter and the False star meet: a god will devour [...] 
If the red planet and the big star come close: fall of cattle. The red planet is Mars, the big star is Jupiter. 
[...] 
If a strange star comes close to Jupiter: in this year, the king of Akkad will die but the harvest of the land will prosper. 160

In the same report, Nabû-iqiša of Borsippa portended that such conjunction (Jupiter and the False star meet) was bad for all lands. 161

Reporting on June 25th 669 BCE, diviner Bullutu associated Mars with the god Nergal, 162 stated that Mars portended death, 163 and discussed the effect of the brilliance Mars stating that the more brilliant Mars was, the more malefic it became. Bullutu wrote:

‘If Mars becomes faint, it is good; if it becomes bright, misfortune’. 164

Bullutu forecasted a good year if Mars was near Jupiter (Šulpa’e). The line of the report reads:

If Mars goes behind Šulpa’e: this year is good. 165

Therefore, Bullutu considered Jupiter benefic to such an extent that the evil attributes of Mars were absent when both planets were in conjunction. The same report seemed to associate Mars with the Anzu star:

If a planet comes near the Anzu star: horses will die. 166

Anzu was a lion-headed eagle, defeated by Ninurta (Saturn). 167 Bullutu also discussed, in the same report, other attributes of Mars:

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160 Hunger, SAA 8, 288:3, r. 1, 5, p. 160.  
161 Hunger, SAA 8, 288:1, r. 7, p. 160.  
162 Hunger, SAA 8, 114:8, p. 72.  
163 Hunger, SAA 8, 114:3, p. 72.  
164 Hunger, SAA 8, 114: r. 3, p. 73.  
165 Hunger, SAA 8, 114: r. 4, p. 73.  
166 Hunger, SAA 8, 114: r. 1, p. 73.  
If Mars becomes visible in Tammuz (month IV) the cemetery of the warriors will enlarge.

[...] If Mars stands in the east: attack of Subartu and the Kassites against the land.
If Mars rises scintillating and its radiance is yellow: the king of Elam will die.
If Nergal in his appearance is very small and white, and scintillates very much like the fixed stars: he will have mercy on Akkad; the force of my troops will go and defeat the enemy troops, it will conquer the land for which it strives; the enemy troops will not be able to stand in the face of my troops; the cattle of Akkad will lie in the steppe undisturbed; sesame and dates will prosper.168

In the report, the east of Sumer (Iraq) seemed associated with Elam (in Iran), and Mars standing in the east implied war, attack coming from Subartu and the Kassites, and the brilliance and the color of Mars also had meaning: yellow was bad for the enemy, white was good for Akkad. On the meaning of the brilliance of Mars, Cooley argues that in astronomical texts a bright Mars is regarded with anxiety, and then speculates that outcome could be ambiguous.169 The ambiguity mentioned by Cooley is attested a report by Nergal-etir in which Nergal means abundance on one hand, and plague on the other:

Mars carried radiance. The red planet (means) plenty for the people; the red planet (means): plagues will be raging.170

On a report, diviner Bullutu wrote ‘if Mars becomes faint, it is good; if it becomes bright, misfortune’171, Cooley argues that a bright Mars was normally considered a bad thing.172 Cooley, however, concludes that most often ‘a bright Mars foretold doom, as one would expect for a planet associated with Erra/Nergal’.173

Cooley argues that Mars was malevolent and was associated with countries that were malevolent to the diviner and therefore to his king.174 Cooley argues that even though Mars was mundanely associated with Elam, in an astrological report by Rašil Mars

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168 Hunger, SAA 8, 114:1-8, pp. 72-3.
169 Cooley, ‘I Want to Dim the Brilliance of Šulpae!’, p. 185.
170 Hunger, SAA 8, 274 r.3-5, p. 273.
171 Hunger, SAA 8, p. 115.
173 Cooley, ‘I Want to Dim the Brilliance of Šulpae!’, p. 185.
was considered ‘the star of Amurru’; then Cooley concludes that Rašil understood Mars as referring to either of the traditional eastern or western foreign enemies of the land. In general, it seems that Nergal, as the Enemy star, was associated with the enemy, no matter where it was located.

Reporting on Mars and Pegasus in the halo of the moon, Rašil wrote that Mars was a star of the Westland; the Field Star (Pegasus) behind which were the Pleiades, was Aries; and Aries was a star of the Westland.

In a report dated June 20th 666 BCE about Mars in Scorpio but about to move out of the sign, Rašil wrote:

Mars, […] until the 25th of Tammuz (month IV) it will move out of Scorpius; and its radiance is fallen. Let the king my lord be happy; […] but until Mars goes out, let the king guard himself.

Rašil confirmed that the king should not worry because the radiance of Mars was dimmed. Therefore, it was the radiance of Mars which was taken into account when making predictions, and according to those reports, the more radiant the more dangerous Mars became. One more consideration from the report is the meaning of the sign of Scorpio; Rašil warned the king to take precautions until Mars was out Scorpio. Hence, Rašil implied that Scorpio was a dangerous sign for the king. Later, in Hellenistic astrology, Ptolemy stated clearly that Scorpio was ruled by Mars.

In a report from May 20th 672 BCE on Mars standing in the halo of the moon, diviner Nabû-ahhe-eriba predicted:

Loss of cattle; the Westland will become smaller.
That is bad for the Westland.

Diviner Nabû-šuma-iškun, reporting on Mars standing in the halo of the moon, predicted:

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177 Hunger, SAA 8, 412: r. 2-4, pp. 233-4.
178 Hunger, SAA 8, 387:3, p. 222.
180 Hunger, SAA 8, 41:5,8, p. 25.
fall of cattle and of animals of the steppe; the cultivated field will not prosper, … will diminish.\cite{Hunger181}

The interpretation of the effect of Mars standing next to the halo of the moon is not beneficial for the cattle and diminishes the yield of the crop. In the same report, Nabû-šuma-îškun wrote that the Pleiades (MUL.MUL) were equivalent to Mars.\cite{Hunger182} The Sebetti (seven stars) were also associated to the Pleiades, and the Sebetti in the myth know as ‘Erra and Ishum’ were associated to Erra (Nergal).

Reporting on March 15\textsuperscript{th} 668 BCE, Šapiku of Borsippa wrote

Mars, the star of Subartu, is bright and carries radiance: this is good for Subartu. And Saturn, the star of the Westland, is faint, and its radiance is fallen; this is bad for the Westland; an attack of an enemy will occur against the Westland.\cite{Hunger183}

From that report, it can be argued that the planets were associated to countries, and the brilliance of a planet indicated the fate of the country to which it was associated. Mars was associated to Subartu, and Saturn to the Westland. Hence, a bright Mars indicated that the land associated to Mars would be fine, and Saturn dimmed indicated that the land associated to Saturn would suffer.

In a report on March 15\textsuperscript{th} 668 BCE, Rašil predicted:

loss of cattle; in all lands cultivated fields and dates will not prosper; the Westland will diminish.
If the moon is surrounded by a halo, and the Yoke star stands in it: the king will die, and his land will diminish; the king of Elam will die.
[...].
Mars is the star of the Westland, evil for the Westland and Elam. Saturn is the star of Akkad. It is good for the king my lord.\cite{Hunger184}

The previous report attested that Mars, the Yoke star, was associated with Elam and the Westland, which was the enemy. The report associated Saturn with the king of

\cite{Hunger181} Hunger, SAA 8, 376:1, p. 213.
\cite{Hunger182} Hunger, SAA 8, 376:9, p. 213.
\cite{Hunger183} Hunger, SAA 8, 491:7, p. 271.
\cite{Hunger184} Hunger, SAA 8, 383:7, r. 1, 5-7, pp. 219-20.
Akkad. *Rašil*, reporting on Mars approaching the Old Man star (Perseus), predicted a revolution in the Westland in which brother will kill bother and

the emblems of the land will be overthrown; a secret of the land will go to another land; the gods will leave it and will turn away from it.  

**Ares and Nergal**

Walter Burkert discusses that Ares may be an ancient noun meaning war or throng of battle, and argues that Homer, who used the term *ares* for battle, considered Ares a god insatiable in battle, destructive, and man-slaughtering. According to Homer, Ares was furious and ‘bane of mortals’ and was considered by Zeus as the most hateful of all the gods of Olympus because strife was ‘dear to thee and wars and fightings’.

J. N. Bremmer argues that Ares was a fierce and destructive warrior who did not represent matters of defense but the brutal aspects of war. Thus, Ares, deemed to be a destructive god of war ruinous to men, resembled the Mesopotamian version of *Nergal* as *Erra*, a god of destruction and death.

Burkert argues that *the Iliad* associated Mars with the Trojans, the losing side. Similarly, in the myth of the fight for the city of Pylus, Athena fought for Herakles, the winning side, while the Pylians were defended by Ares, Hades, Poseidon, and Hera. In both cases, Ares was on the losing side, and was associated with the enemy. Thus, Nergal as a god associated with the enemy, somehow was matched by Ares, who was usually associated with the enemy.

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185 Hunger, SAA 8, 400:5, pp. 228-9.
Similarities between Ares and Nergal can be found in the myth of the foundation of Thebes. According to Apollodorus, Cadmus founded the city of Thebes.\(^{193}\) Cadmus, upon reaching Thebes, ended up killing a dragon guarding the fountain of Ares; supposedly, the dragon was an offspring of Ares. Following the advice of Athena, Cadmus sowed the teeth of the dragon and out of them grew the Spartans who, after a trick performed by Cadmus, ended up killing themselves except for five who survived: Echion, Udaeus, Chthonius, Hyperenor, and Pelorus.\(^{194}\) According to Jordi Pàmies, the name of each surviving Spartan was self-explanatory: Echion was serpentine, Chthonius and Udaeus chthonic, Hyperenor arrogant, and Pelorus gigantic.\(^{195}\) Albeit indirectly, Apollodorus revealed the nature of Ares through the offspring of the god. Nergal was also arrogant, strong, chthonic, and had a dragon.

There might be certain links between Cadmus, Melqart (the Phoenician city-god of Tyre) and Nergal. Pherecides claimed that Cadmus was either son of Phoenix or of Aegis.\(^{196}\) West writes that Aegis was the father of Phoenix, and surmises that the word Phoenix must be understood as an eponym of the Phoenicians, and argues that by the fifth century BCE the myth was established that Cadmus was originally from Tyre in Phoenicia.\(^{197}\) The foundation of Thebes showed links with Ares: Cadmus was married to Harmonia, daughter of Ares,\(^{198}\) the myth happened nearby the fountain of Ares, and the first inhabitants of Thebes were Spartans born from the teeth of a dragon associated with Ares. Furthermore, M. L. West contends that the inhabitants of Thebes were designated after the name Cadmus, and that the etymology of the root of Cadmus seems not to be Greek but West Semitic meaning either ‘east, eastern’ or ‘ancient, antiquity’.\(^{199}\) Thus, Cadmus meaning east or eastern could be linked with Nergal who, as the star of Elam (Iran) was associated with the East. Besides, the links that Thebes had with Ares might have been imported from Tyre. The striking point is that the city-god of Tyre was Melqart which, according to

\(^{196}\) Ferecides, *Històries*, p. 79.
Dalley, was not only closely assimilated with *Nergal* but was a Phoenician translation of *Nergal*.\footnote{Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia*, p. 164.} Richard J. Clifford defines *Melqart* as a dying and rising god associated primarily with the city of Tyre, where his cult appeared in the tenth century BCE, and who was identified with the Greek Herakles; Clifford argues, however, that the term *Melqart* means ‘king of the city’, and that *Melqart* was a chthonic god only in the case that ‘city’ referred to the underworld.\footnote{Richard J. Clifford, ‘Phoenician Religion’, *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, No. 279 (Aug., 1990), p. 57.} Robert Graves argues that the Pythoness of Delphi addressed Herakles for the first time as Herakles rather than *Palaemon*, and the title of *Palaemon* identified Herakles with Melicertes of Corinth (who was deified under that name), and that Melicertes was *Melqart*, the Tyrian Herakles.\footnote{Graves, *The Greek Myths*, pp. 463-4.} Burkert argues that there is no question that Herakles was equated to *Melqart* because that was the reason why the pillars of *Melqart* in the temple of Cadiz became the pillars of Herakles.\footnote{Burkert, *Greek Religion*, p. 210.} If, as Dalley surmises, *Nergal* was assimilated in Phoenicia as *Melqart*, then *Melqart* could be one possible via of cultural assimilation of attributes of *Nergal* by Ares. In addition to that, *Melqart* was later identified by the Greeks with Herakles, who, according to Homer, was born in the city of Thebes.\footnote{Homer, *The Iliad*, vol. I, XIV 321, p. 91.} Graves assumes that the central story of Herakles was an early variant of the Babylonian *Gilgamesh* epic which reached Greece via Phoenicia.\footnote{Graves, *The Greek Myths*, pp. 450-1.}

Mary R. Bachvarova surmises that the Phoenician presence in Cyprus by the ninth century BCE allowed a flow of narrative traditions from the Near East, and propounds one possible transmission route:

First being transferred to Cyprus at some time in the Late Bronze Age, then crossing the Mediterranean to Greece centuries later in the first quarter of the first millennium. There is evidence that there was syncretism between Alashiyan and Ugaritic gods.\footnote{Mary R. Bachvarova, *From Hittite to Homer: The Anatolian Background of Ancient Greek Epic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), [hereafter Bachvarova, *Hittite to Homer*], p. 305.}

In the Late Bronze Age, *Resheph* reappeared as a god armed with arrows, who could spread disease and plague.\footnote{Lipinski, *Resheph*, p. 244.} According to Lipinski, *Resheph* was identified with
Apollo in Cyprus, and according to Bachvarova, Resheph was syncretized with Apollo as archer god at Cyprus, and linked with the Apollo that sent the plague on the Greek army at the beginning of the Iliad. Thus, Apollo might be another example of a Semitic god adopted by the Phoenicians and reinterpreted by the Greeks, via Cyprus.

Besides the identification of Nergal with Resheph during the third millenium BCE, Lipinski propounds a second identification of Nergal with Resheph in Tarsus (Cilicia), attested by coins dating around 400 BCE showing an arrow-armed god resting on a lion, with the legend ‘Nergal of Tarsus’. Furthermore, Lipinski argues that a war-god of Tarsus, known as Sanda, was first identified with Nergal and later with Herakles, in the same way that Nergal was identified with Herakles at Palmyra and Hatra.

**Nergal and Herakles**

As we have seen, Nergal was son of Enlil, Lord of the Wind. According to Homer, Herakles was son of Zeus and Alcmene, and Zeus, as an atmospheric god, could actually be equated to Enlil. Agreeing with Burkert, Black and Green also propound that Nergal was equated to the Greek Herakles; Dalley describes Nergal (Erra) as partially assimilated with Gilgamesh on one hand, and with Herakles on the other, arguing that the myth ‘Erra and Isum’ mentioned Erra as changing his divine nature and becoming like a man, and such ambivalent nature of Erra, as god and as mortal, was shared by Herakles. In the same way, Herodotus noted that the Greeks worshiped Herakles both as a god and as a dead hero. Similarly, the Greek god Ares, associated with Nergal, was sometimes considered a human. Bremmer

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208 Lipinski, Resheph, p. 244.
209 Bachvarova, Hittite to Homer, pp. 243-4.
210 Morris, Daidalos and the Origins of Greek Art, p. 115.
211 Lipinski, Resheph, pp. 244-5.
212 Lipinski, Resheph, p. 245.
216 Dalley, Myths from Mesopotamia, p. 283.
217 Dalley, Myths from Mesopotamia, p. 302.
contends that Ares was the only god to fight like a human on the Trojan battlefield.\(^\text{219}\) Ares as human, to a certain extent, was implied when Homer wrote that Ares would have perished, after being bound in a brazen jar for thirteen months, unless Hermes had not liberated Ares.\(^\text{220}\)

According to Burkert, Oriental motives were present in the myths of Herakles.\(^\text{221}\) As we have seen, Nergal not only emerged as son of Enlil, Lord of the Wind, but was associated with lions and bulls. Hence, Herakles shared similar traits with Nergal. The establishment of a fixed cycle of twelve labors, and the prevalence of the iconography of Herakles in the lion skin, can both be dated around 600 BCE.\(^\text{222}\) Nergal, on the other hand, was a much older god.

For instance, West proposes that the absence of lions in Greece might indicate that the lion-slaying theme originated in the Near East: Enkidu and Gilgamesh killed lions routinely, and Ninurta killed ‘the lion, the terror of the gods’\(^\text{223}\). Similarly, Black argues that whereas lions were not common in Greece, they were in Mesopotamia until the end of the third millennium BCE, adding that in the Epic of Gilgamesh the gods discussed sending a plague of lions instead of the flood.\(^\text{224}\) In addition, West sees parallels between the trophies of Ninurta and the labors of Herakles, and argues that the Nemean lion, and the seven-headed serpent clearly match creatures killed by Ninurta, whereas the bison pictured as a bull-man which is slain in the middle of the sea, might be compared with the Cretan Bull.\(^\text{225}\)

In his second labor, Herakles was bitten in the foot by an enormous crab while fighting with Hydra.\(^\text{226}\) According to West, two Mesopotamian seals that may foreshadow the crab-reptile alliance against the hero: the earliest seal, showing a fight between a hero and a seven-headed serpent, was framed by scorpions, one of which was located right behind the hero; the second seal, Neo-Assyrian of the ninth or eighth century BCE, showed a man aiming an arrow at a big scorpion and snake.

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\(^{221}\) Burkert, *Greek Religion*, p. 209.
\(^{222}\) Burkert, *Greek Religion*, p. 209.
which reared up vertically before him. Likewise, Burkert argues that the motif of the serpent with seven heads smitten by a god appeared first on Sumerian seal images. In Eshnunna, archeologists found a seal and an alabaster group which resemble the motives associated with Herakles. While the seal depicted a hero-god defeating a multi-headed dragon, the alabaster group depicted a dragon which appeared as an adjunct of the Snake-god. According to Frankfort, the dragon of the alabaster group resembled, except for the multiplicity of heads, the dragon of the seal, and the multi-headed dragon of the seal resembled an Hydra.

During the Hellenistic period, the connection between Mars and Hercules persisted. According to Ptolemy, Mars was ‘also called the star of Hercules’, and Erathostenes involved Herakles in the formation of the following constellations: the constellation called ‘the Serpent’ was originally the serpent who guarded the golden apples and was killed by Herakles; the constellation of ‘the Kneeling man’ was Herakles because he had his foot planted on the Serpent; the crab crushed by Herakles fighting the Hydra was transformed into the constellation of Cancer; the constellation called ‘the Lion’ was created to honor the first labor of Herakles; and the constellation of Centaurus was Chiron immortalized by Zeus as compensation for Chiron being killed by an arrow dropped accidentally by Herakles. Behind those constellations, figures such as the serpent or the lion, or motives such as Herakles fighting, or accidents leading to death, were all in tune with the nature of Nergal.

Finally, the coupling Herakles with the formation of the Milky Way reinforced the eastern origins of the myth of Herakles. Erathostenes explained that Hermes took Herakles after birth to the breast of Hera who, realizing that she was suckling Herakles, pushed him away promptly, and the milk spilled by Herakles created the Milky Way. West argues that the idea of Herakles being suckled by Hera was a

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229 Frankfort, *Cylinder Seals*, pp. 72, 121-2.
230 Frankfort, *Cylinder Seals*, plate XXXIII j.
231 Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, I-9, p. 49.
common ancient idea in Mesopotamia where many of the Sumerian kings claimed to have been nourished by the milk of the Sumerian goddess Ninhursaga.235

**Mars and Nergal**

Dorotheus of Sidon described Mars as murderous236, and considered ‘violent acts or anger or thieves, or the burning of fire’237 belonging to the nature of Mars. Dorotheus considered Mars a malefic planet,238 associated with enemies,239 and which under certain conditions could bring disaster,240 destruction or squandering of the father’s property,241 death242, falling in misery243, and running away from one’s city244. A malefic Mars matches Nergal as an evil planet. Nergal as enemy, sinister, strange, hostile, liar, false, and robber star, also coincide with the nature of Mars described by Dorotheus. To Dorotheus, some possibilities of death related to Mars were: killed by thieves or by enemies, devoured by lions, burnt by fire, or struck by a sword.245 Fire, enemies, and weapons were attributes of Nergal. By including lions as causes of death associated with Mars, either lions were common to Dorotheus, who was from Sidon (Phoenicia) next to Mesopotamia, or Dorotheus was paraphrasing Babylonian astrologers. Lions were common to Babylonian astrologers who, most likely, were used to see Nergal depicted with leonine features.

Anubio associated Mars was with death (general and violent death), destruction (of the paternal house) either by fire or war, and rulers with the right over life and death.246 Death, destruction, fire, and war were common attributes of Nergal (Erra). Anubio associated Mars with criminals, forgers, liars, athletes, and with bad actions, dangers, and madness.247 Strength (an athlete must be strong) was an attribute of

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244 Dorotheus, *Carmen*, II-25, p. 228.
245 Dorotheus, *Carmen*, IV-1, p. 256.
Nergal. Finally, the ‘Great Star List’ described Nergal as false, sinister, liar, hostile, evil, enemy, and the destructive Panther star. Finally, in Mesopotamia Nergal ruled over possessing demons associated with madness.

Anubio linked Mars with those exiled from their country. In the ‘Great Star List’, Nergal was the enemy star, the strange star, the star of Elam, and the star of Eridu. Nergal was a star (planet) indicating people from other countries, including enemies. Hence, Nergal could be associated not only with those living abroad, but with those captured, enslaved, and forced to move to another country due to war or conquest.

Marcus Manilius, Roman poet and astrologer of the first century CE, described Mars as scorching and launcher of flames, and as a savage war-god waging bloody battles. Such description of Mars matches Nergal as a fiery god and Erra as a scorching and brutal war-god. Manilius associated with Mars those who ‘follow the god of war in hope of booty’. Thieves and warriors who very likely fought for a booty, were attributes of Nergal. Manilius wrote that Pallas was the protectress of Aries and ‘bellicose Scorpion clings to Mars’. The word Pallas might have a non-Greek origin, and could be interpreted as Maiden or as the weapon-brandishing.

According to Burkert, Athena was the Pallas of Athens, the city goddess, an armed goddess who was also found in the Near East. Athena, associated with the winning side of the Trojan war in the Iliad, was a goddess of protection. In the end, however, it was Ares who ended up ruling Aries instead of the smarter and less brutal and sanguinary Athena.

Claudius Ptolemy, Alexandrian astronomer and astrologer of the second century CE, considered Mars a maleficent planet whose nature was destructive and inharmonious, and associated Mars with injures from a blow, a thrust, iron, or burning. To Ptolemy, Mars caused not only dangers from fire, wounds, bilious
attacks, robberies, or the splitting of blood, but also quarrels, scheming, enmities, illegitimate relations, disputes, and even lawsuits arising through business or poisoning. Those attributes of Mars mentioned by Ptolemy are in line with the attributes associated with Mars by Assyrian and Babylonian astrologers.

Vettius Valens, Hellenistic astrologer of the second century CE, associated Ares with losses, diminishment, destruction, plundering, theft, robberies, wars, the military, soldiers, gladiators, armorers, subordinates in the foreign service, slaves, captivity, death, those who have power over life and death, hostile enemies, lies, dangers, violence, fire, and iron. The astrological attributes that Valens associated with Mars are in line with the attributes associated with Mars by Assyrian and Babylonian astrologers.

Julius Firmicus-Maternus, Latin writer and astrologer of the fourth century CE, considered Mars a malefic planet indicating evils, misfortunes, injures by fire, wandering in foreign countries, and those who become slaves. Those attributes of Mars match the fire, evils, foreign countries, and slavery associated with Nergal. Besides, the warrior and hero-god Nergal can be attested when Firmicus-Maternus associated Mars with dangers, athletes, and soldiers. Furthermore, Babylonian astrologers considered Mars a liar; similarly, Firmicus-Maternus associated Mars with deception and abuse. Nergal as god of death and king of the netherworld was somehow implied by Firmicus-Maternus when the latter not only associated Mars with violent and sudden death, but described Mars as holding the right over life and death. Nergal as ruler over demons could be discerned in Mars when Firmicus-Maternus associated Mars with exorcists and with the power to liberate both the body and the spirit from all kinds of perverse and malevolent demons.

Paul of Alexandria associated Mars with the military, and related Mars with poverty, strained circumstances, losses, destruction of personal enterprises, and those without adequate income. Nergal, as a god of war and destruction, could indicate not only losses but slavery. Hence Mars, if derived from Nergal, may indicate losses and tough circumstances. Paul of Alexandria claimed that Mars indicated wounds, injuries, illnesses, sicknesses, short-lived persons and those who die violently. Nergal, as a god of war, destruction, and death, could be associated with violence and injuries. Nergal was also associated with possessing demons causing illnesses and madness. Paul of Alexandria associated Mars with emigrants, those who lived abroad, and those who die in a foreign or strange land. Nergal, as indicator of enemies and people from other countries, could be associated with those living abroad. Nergal was also a god of death, hence Mars as those who die in a foreign land is also very much in tune with Nergal.

The casting of Lots in Hellenistic culture, argues Dorian G. Greenbaum, was a divinatory practice used to know the will of the gods. Paul of Alexandria mentioned seven Lots, each one originating from one of the seven planets. According to Greenbaum, each planetary lot embraced qualities associated with that planet, and for Mars the Lot of Courage showed boldness but also rashness. Paul of Alexandria associated with Mars the Lot of Boldness (Courage) and described it as:

the cause of boldness and treachery and strength and all criminal acts.

Hence, Paul of Alexandria associated boldness, courage, treachery, strength, and criminal acts with Mars. These three attributes of the Lot of Boldness are in line with the attributes of Nergal. Besides, Nergal as the false star, the enemy star, the

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270 Greenbaum, *The Daimon in Hellenistic Astrology*, p. 299.
destructive Panther star, or the killing god *Erra* most likely would commit treachery and criminal acts.

Heliodorus introduced many extra lots besides the seven Lots mentioned by Paul of Alexandria.273 Among these extra lots, the ones involved with Mars had a name which coincided with an attribute Mars, such as the Lot of Enemies, the Lot of Destruction, the Lot of Thieves, the Lot of Living abroad, the Lot of Injury, the Lot of Slaves, the Lot of Warfare, or the Lot of military service.274 The name of almost all of the lots associated with Mars are very related to attributes of *Nergal*.

Hephaestio of Thebes considered Mars, along with Saturn, a malefic planet associated with want of arms, war, battles, death, carrying off booty, and slavery.275 Hephaestio of Thebes associated Mars (along with Saturn) with bodily weaknesses, damages, and stoppages.276 Hephaestio also associated Mars with weapons, anger, instability, jealousy, losses, and premature death.277 According to Hephaestio, Dorotheus considered Ares fiery-bright planet associated with heavy diseases, renewed battles, and dreadful violence.278 The attributes of Mars according to Hephaestio, such as death, violence, losses, destruction, war, booty, or injuries, are all quite related to *Nergal*.

Rhetorius the Egyptian associated Mars with losses279, and with the destruction of possessions.280 Rhetorius claimed that Mars would bring about

- military commanders, soldiers, troop commanders, rulers of life and death,
- terrible [in their actions] against cities and countries. […] hot-blooded,
- reckless individuals, those livings abroad.281

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276 Hephaistion, *Apotelesmatics*, III.30 6, p. 95.
278 Hephaistion, *Apotelesmatics*, III.30 8, p. 95.
Furthermore, Rethorius associated Mars with wounds and injuries,282 and cuts from iron283, with dwelling abroad284, those fearful of the Gods and to daemons285, with being struck by a poisonous animal286, and with death287. The attributes of Mars according to Rethorius match not only the basic qualities of the god Nergal but also the astrological attributes associated with Mars by Assyrian and Babylonian astrologers.

In conclusion, apart from Iron, which might not be associated with Mars in Mesopotamia (but was associated with weapons and therefore indirectly associated with Nergal), most of the attributes of associated with Mars by Assyrian and Babylonian astrologers are found, sometimes in an indirect way, in the attributes associated with Mars according by Hellenistic astrologers.

In 1899, Auguste Bouché-Leclercq wrote that Mars resembled the Chaldean god Nergal.288 Besides, Bouché-Leclercq argued not only that the Chaldeans associated Nergal with war, pestilence, and death, but also of a possible Egyptian tradition which substituted the brutal Ares by the strong but debonair Herakles.289 Bouché-Leclercq was perhaps one of the first scholars to notice a connection between Ares and Nergal. However, in Mesopotamia the attribute pestilence originally belonged to Erra. Later, pestilence would be assumed by Nergal.

According to Baigent, reports of Assyrian astrologers attest that in Mesopotamia, astrologers identified Mars with the god Nergal: a war-god, lord of battle, and a god of plague, fevers and pestilence. Baigent surmises that Nergal became god of the underworld by marrying the goddess Ereshkigal, and concludes that many of the characteristics of the god Nergal have remained attached to the planet Mars up to today.290 The source used by Baignent was The Reports of the Magicians and

Astrologers of Nineveh and Babylon in the British Museum;\(^{291}\) in order to determine the nature of Mars in Babylon, Baigent selected cuneiform tablets in which Nergal was mentioned.

Nergal, in the third millennium BCE, was a god of war helping kings to win wars and create empires. Erra, on the other hand, was a violent god of death and pestilence. In the myth ‘Erra and Ishum’, Erra was a god of death who brought destruction when he was active. Thus, Erra as a god of destruction and plague could be considered a malefic god. In fact, Dorotheus and the rest of the Hellenistic astrologers considered Mars a malefic planet. Most likely, the characteristics of Nergal they were using were those of Erra.

**Conclusion**

By the third millennium BCE, Nergal was first attested as \(\text{KIS.UNU}\), god of war and fighting depicted as a bull, and transmitted to Syria as Resheph. During the second millennium BCE, Nergal was considered son of Enlil inheriting attributes which rendered Nergal a malefic god; besides, Nergal was addressed to as a lion, and associated with demons of leonine features and bringers of disease; moreover, Nergal assimilated Meslamtaea, Ninazu, and became a prominent underworld deity. Nergal was also syncretized with Erra, a god of death and destruction who most likely reinforced the malefic role of Nergal. Lastly, Nergal was perhaps assimilated with the Phoenician god Melqart.

In Mesopotamia during the first millennium BCE, Nergal was associated with the planet Mars. Many attributes, most of them malefic, were assigned to Mars by Assyrian and Babylonian astrologers. In fact, most of these attributes of Mars are attested in the works of Dorotheus of Sidon, Anubio, Manilius, Ptolemy, Valens, Firmicus-Maternus, Paul of Alexandria, Heliodorus, Hephaestio of Thebes, and Rhetorius the Egyptian. Therefore, it is very likely that some attributes of Mars used in Hellenistic astrology came actually from Mesopotamia.

In addition to that, the similarities between the Greek god Ares and *Nergal* may indicate that Ares was derived from *Nergal*; and one possible via of transmission was the Phoenician god *Melqart*. Finally, the eastern motives present in the myth of Herakles, the motives of Ares present in the myth of the foundation of the Greek city of Thebes, and the connection of Thebes with the Phoenician city of Tyre, along with the attributes of *Nergal* present in the constellations related to Herakles, may indicate that *Melqart* was probably transmitted to Greece as Herakles.
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Primary Sources


Secondary Sources


South of the Assyrian heartland lies Babylonia. As the birthplace of Mesopotamia's common cuneiform culture, the region could boast cultural traditions stretching back for millennia. But by the 8th century BC, its political unity as a kingdom under the rule of the king of Babylon had been lost and the ancient cities and tribal federations of Babylonia acted as independent units whose conflicts made the region subject to repeated political upheaval. Neighbouring states became increasingly involved in the politics of Babylonia, and foremost among them was Assyria. In 729 BC, Tīglath-pīleser Nergal (also known as Erra and Irra) is the Mesopotamian god of death, war, and destruction. He began as a regional, probably agricultural god of the Babylonian city of Kutha in the Early Dynastic Period (c. 2900-2700 BCE). As his temple was known as E-meslam, he was known as Meslamtaea ('he who comes forth from Meslam'). He was still associated with death even at this early period as he represented the high summer sun which scorched the earth, and the afternoon sun of most intense heat, which hindered crop production.