**ARTICLE**

# Coping with time and death in the Ancient Near East

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**Abstract**

All humans, past and future, are forced to grapple with the abstract phenomenon of passing and ending time, as well as ideas about time, such as eternity and finality. Death especially is a confrontation with the passing, ending, irreversibility, and unpredictability of time, over which humans have little to no power. In response to the threat of time and death, humans employ coping mechanisms, a common and perhaps universal example of which is anthropomorphization. Fashioning events and phenomena into social agents with human-like characteristics and abilities reduces their uncertainty and unpredictability. It increases comprehension of and control over them, and renders them more manageable, palpable, and familiar. This paper explores how this process can be recognized in textual and iconographic sources from the Ancient Near East. Firstly, it gives an overview of what people expected and thought of lifetime and death, and demonstrates that the daily confrontation with uncontrollable time and what may be the biggest challenge of life, namely accepting its inevitable end, was perceived as a struggle. Secondly, it provides insight in how the personification of time and death as well as the responses to these phenomena, such as fear and grief, contributed to coping with these difficult experiences.

## 1 | INTRODUCTION: HUMANS STRUGGLING WITH DEATH AND TIME

At this very moment in time, the COVID-19 pandemic is raging throughout the world, and more than in normal times, humanity is exposed to its vulnerability at the hands of time and death. People across the globe are confronted with the possibility that they or their loved ones will be infected by a potentially lethal illness which humans have not yet controlled, and this is constantly affirmed by new cases in one's direct environment and media reports on death tolls, all of which causes immense anxiety (Lee et al., 2020; Menzies & Menzies, 2020). Lockdowns make time stand still or run in circles; illness makes time run out. One is forced to think about the relentlessness of time, the value of the time we have in this life on Earth, its finality and the inevitability of death, and the uncertainties of when and how death will strike.

This struggle with time and death is one that unites every human, not only those living now, but also those in the past and future. We all have in common that we have only been allotted a short period on this Earth–and none of us knows exactly how long. This reality comes with lots of strong emotions, in particular fear and grief. This paper will provide a brief overview of how textual evidence, with a focus on Akkadian sources dating to the 2nd and 1st millennium B.C.E., and iconography reflect how people felt about and grappled with the threat of time and death in the Ancient Near East. It focuses on a common and perhaps even universal coping mechanism that can be identified in these ancient sources, namely the process of materializing these two ungraspable phenomena and fashioning them into social agents with which (or whom) one could interact.

## 2 | THE TIME LEFT TO LIVE–DEATH AS THE END OF TIME IN ANCIENT MESOPOTAMIA

"When the gods created mankind, death they dispensed to mankind, and life they kept for themselves" (George, 2003, p. 278, iii 3–5). This line from an Old-Babylonian tablet of the Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic shows that death was perceived as an intrinsic part of human life; whereas the gods had eternal life, humans were destined to live only a certain amount of time. Death was in principle the opposite to life: whereas life was marked by the beating of the heart and *napištu*, "life, breath, life force", death meant that the heart had stopped and this life force left the body (George, 2003, pp. 895–6; Steinert, 2012, pp. 264, 315–47; Katz, 2014, p. 70). The body became motionless and silent, and no longer engaged in society–as if one was sleeping, and that (*ana*) *dūr dār*, "for eternity" (George, 2003, pp. 682–93 lines 70–1, 147–8, 247–8; Steinert, 2010, pp. 249–56; Katz, 2014, p. 71). Upon death, the deceased transitioned into another, timeless, state. They continued to exist as a spirit (*eṭemmu*), a divine, immortal part that was inherited from the gods at creation, when man was shaped through mixing clay with the flesh and blood of a slain god (Lambert, 1980, pp. 58–9; Steinert, 2012, p. 129; Katz, 2005, 2014). As long as the burial rites and ancestor cult were correctly executed by the ones who stayed behind and the deceased was kept alive in cult and memory, their human-like shaped spirits lived on in the Otherworld. This remote and unknown place was conceptualized as the opposite of human civilization, namely as an unpleasant, unstructured, primordial chaos that lacked basic necessities needed by mankind to stay alive (Katz, 2005). Here the dead were confined by space and time: upon entering this Land of No Return, one had to stay there for eternity. Death was consequently not the ultimate end of everything, but nevertheless the end of time with other humans on Earth.

Notions on the exact limit of human life set by the gods are expressed in the bilingual versions of the Sumerian myth Enlil and Namzitarra that were found at Emar and Ugarit, but which probably reflect a wider-spread Mesopotamian tradition (Cohen, 2013, 162–3). The relevant passage reads as follows:

> The days of mankind are near! Day after day they verily decrease, month after month they verily decrease, year after year they verily decrease! 120 years are the years of mankind - verily it is their

*bane/limit*, (this is so) from the day that mankind exists until today! (Klein, 1990, pp. 58–9, 64; Al-ster, 2005, pp. 336–8; Cohen, 2013, pp. 153–63).

The sentence "verily it is their *bane/limit*" is difficult to interpret. The term níg-gig/*ikkibu* can either be quite neutral and refer to the mere fact that human lifetime is finite (Cohen, 2013, p. 161); it could also have the more loaded meaning of "abomination" or "bane" (Klein, 1990; Alster, 2005, p. 338), which could indicate that this finality was a source of trouble and anxiety. The round typological number of 120, which was influenced by the Mesopotamian sexagesimal system and is reminiscent of Genesis 6:3 and the age of Moses upon his death (Deut. 34:7 and 31:2), remarkably corresponds to the biological upper limit of the human lifespan (Dong, Milholland & Vijg, 2016).

Lifetime was measured in years and months, as well as days. The term for the latter, *ūmū/ūmātu*, was used to indicate longer spans of time, including a lifespan and lifetime (CAD U/W, pp. 150–3; Böck, 2000, p. 30; Stol, 2012; Streck, 2017, p. 246). These days of life were literally said to be numbered (George, 2003, pp. 200–1, iv 142). At birth, the days of life were bounteous and death was far off, which is expressed in the myth Enki and Ninmaḫ, in which the gods create the first baby, which is called $u_4$-mu-ul, "My day is far off" (Kilmer, 1976; Ceccarelli, 2016, pp. 61–9). Only for the Mesopotamian survivor of the Flood eternal life was granted and therefore his days did not diminish, which is captured in his Sumerian name, zi-$u_4$-sudr-a, meaning "life of distant days" (George, 2003, pp. 152–4). For everyone else, time decreased as one aged, and death marked "the end of days" (*taqtīt ūmī*). Death means that one's days were completed and used up (*gamāru*), and ill people could be given the prognosis that their lifetime had been brought to a conclusion when they were not expected to survive their illness (Aro & Nougayrol, 1973, p. 50 lines 23–5). That this end of life was often unwelcome is clear from the abundant expressions of the wish for more lifetime. Blessings and prayers regularly contain requests for enduring days (*dāriš ūmī*) and for days to be long and far-off (*ūmū rūqūtu*). People asked the gods to lengthen (*urruku/šūruku*) their days of life so that they may last (*balāṭu/ūmū labāru*), and for the day of death to be remote. Because even when life was filled with bad days–which will be discussed below –, it still was better than death (Alster, 1997, p. 276 coll. 25.5; ETCSL 6.1.25 lines 16–7; Steinert, 2012, p. 45). Expressions of the days of life being only few (*ūmū īṣūtu*) or being near (*ūmū/ūmāt qerēbu*) refer to the value of shrinking time; they show that people felt the pressure of time and feared that their days were running out (AHw, pp. 915–6; CAD Q, pp. 229–30; Heintz, 1971; Sasson, 1992; Stol, 2012, p. 537). A life of short or near days and for "the end of days" or death to come soon was an unfortunate fate wished on one's enemies (e.g. Hunger, 1968, 81 no. 240; Durand 2000, p. 326, no. 1146 rev. 8′; see also Heintz, 1971; Sasson, 2015, p. 284).

Omina regularly predicted whether people would have short or long lives, and could for instance state that individuals would die in the "prime" (*lalûtu*) of their lives. Thoughts on what would be a short or long life is recorded in a short passage preserved as part of a scholarly compendium:

> 40 is the prime of life (*lalûtu*);
> 50 is (a life of) short days (*ūmū kurûtu*);
> 60 is maturity (*meṭlūtu*);
> 70 is (a life of) long days (*ūmū arkûtu*);
> 80 is old age (*šībūtu*);
> 90 is extreme old age (*littūtu*)
> (Gurney & Hulin, 1964, no. 400 lines 45–7)

This scholarly work probably reflects the thoughts on and expectations of the human lifespan as held by the elite, and these were realistic; it was not uncommon for socio-economically advantaged people to reach the age of 70 or older in ancient Mesopotamia.[1] Old age however did not automatically mean a fulfilled life. In a prayer to the god Nabû, the supplicant states that although he has reached old age (*šībūtu*), it is not yet time to die:

"I have received wealth, precociously I achieved my goal; but old age has confined me to my bed before my time. I have become finished through pain, as if I did not fear your godhead; I weep (because) I did not experience the beauty of my life" (Livingstone, 1989, pp. 30–2 no. 12 obv. 11–4).

The life of the supplicant has been long and good, but he still wants to see the beauty of his life. In his opinion, death cannot come yet, it is "before my time" (*ina lā simanīya/ūmūya*). He feels powerless against his old age, which restricts him and forces him in a state similar to death. The anxiety of (waiting for) death and his miserable state are too much for him to bear, and cause the man to repeatedly consider taking matters into his own hands and jump from the roof to end his life. He ultimately decides against this because his life is too precious. He finishes the prayer with a request to his god that he, who is as dead, may live again, and that "his finished life be again" (*gamirte napšassu lū taturru*, Livingstone, 1989, 30–2 no. 12 rev. 19).

This passage illustrates well how people suffered from the fear of missing out on lifetime and not knowing when death would come. There was a season (*simānu*) or appointed time (*adannu*) for death, which is clear from the idiom "to reach the appointed time" (CAD A/1, p. 98; Katz, 2005, p. 56; 2014, p. 70); if one was lucky, one could die even after this appointed time (Koch, 2005, p. 155 no. 6 line 11′ [13]). But when this time would come, remained a mystery; it could arrive utterly unexpectedly (Freedman, 2006, pp. 220–1 line 89′). Only the gods knew, but did not reveal it (George, 2003, pp. 698–9 line 322). The final unknown made humans feel like prisoners of time (Lambert, 1980, p. 57; George, 2003, p. 506). They saw the dying as victims who were abducted by Death and who like prisoners of war were taken during the prime of their lives to a place where they could not be found and where they lost all contact with loved ones (Lambert, 1980, p. 57; George, 2003, pp. 506, 876–7; Sibbing-Plantholt, 2020).

Consequently, ancient Mesopotamians brooded over the power of time and the fleetingness of life. They felt the pressure of time running out and were concerned about an unjust and premature end of life. Moreover, they struggled with having little to no influence on or knowledge of the course and end of life, for themselves and others, and this conjured up anxiety, fear, despair, and sadness. An important way to come to terms with the human limitations of being mortal and not knowing the length and the course of one's life was to devise time and death anthropomorphic agents who themselves were at the hands of human-like deities.

## 2.1 | Coping mechanisms: Giving time and death a face

In response to the threat and power of time and death, humans employ coping mechanisms to exert a certain amount of control over these unfathomable phenomena. Humans "tame" time through technologies like mortuary rituals, mummification, and longevity procedures (Refslund Christensen & Willerslev, 2013). These can give the semblance of control over time, through structuring time intervals and rhythms but also through redefining time, life, and death (Refslund Christensen & Willerslev, 2013, pp. 2–3). An example of a coping mechanism that can be found across time and space is the materialization and embodiment of time and death, namely rendering the latter an embodied social agent that can be engaged. Making abstract, uncertain, and unpredictable events and phenomena into agents makes them more comprehensible and predictable. Since the most familiar and important agents known to mankind are humans or humanlike, individuals involuntarily default to anthropomorphism (Guthrie, 1993, 2015; Waytz, Epley & Cacioppo, 2010). This does however not require the bodies of the anthropomorphized events or phenomena to be fully human. They can also have the shape of an animal, or even have no body; what above all makes them human are their mental capacities, intentions, and actions (Guthrie, 2015; Waytz, Epley & Cacioppo, 2010). Also in ancient Mesopotamia, giving time and death human features and characters helped to better understand them and talk about these phenomena. It created the opportunity to engage with them and even use and manipulate them for certain purposes.

## 2.2 | Time

On the cosmic level, time was conceptualized as humanlike agents who brought forth and organized the world. According to some Mesopotamian cosmogonies, *Dūri Dāri*, "ever and ever", that is eternal, unmeasurable time, was together with sky, water, and Earth the primary matter from which everything came forth (Cancik-Kirschbaum, 2009, p. 46; Lambert, 2013, pp. 411–2, 418). *Dūri Dāri* were rendered as a male-female couple, "Mr. and Mrs. Eternity"; a capacity in which time was able to create and procreate. Mesopotamian society at large was organized by natural structures of time such as days, months, years, and seasons, which were marked and measured by astral and climatic phenomena. These also had anthropomorphic deities behind them, most importantly Nanna/Sîn (the Moon), Utu/Šamaš (the Sun), and Inana/Ištar (the morning- and evening star Venus).[2] According to the mythology from the 2nd millennium B.C.E. on, the ruling gods of the Mesopotamian pantheon installed and controlled the moon, sun, and other celestial bodies, and the anthropomorphic divine agents associated with them became acting members of their cabinet (Lambert, 2013, pp. 169–201). The temporal and calendrical systems by which society's time was regulated were thus embodied but also managed and controlled by divine agents, who maintained this cosmic and socio-political order. As mentioned before, the gods also held in their hands the fate and lifetime of individuals, who could try to convince the gods to change their mind, or understand the ways of the gods through the use of prayers and magic and divinatory rituals.

On this micro-level, days, months, and years, the units of time of which a human lifespan consisted, were anthropomorphic entities with their own intentions, character, and qualities that influenced the daily lives of mortals (Wiggermann, 1992, pp. 169–72; Livingstone, 1999; Lambert, 2002). They were not deities themselves, but personified natural phenomena that were the demonic instruments and emissaries of the gods. Most visible of these personified time units were the day demons, who represented the day itself and what it brought forth (Roberts, 1972, pp. 55, 117, 150; Jacobsen, 1978, p. 6 n. 30; Westenholz, 1997, pp. 242–3). They could be good or bad, and this nature of the day could greatly affect the events happening on it; a Bad or Evil Day (*ūmu lemnu*) could bring (undesirable) divine intervention in a human life, such as illness, destruction, and worst of all, death. Bad Days were thought of as fierce and dangerous day demons resembled raging storms, and had a recognizable shape in iconography, namely that of leonine monsters (Wiggermann, 1992, pp. 169–72, 185; 2007, p. 111; 2011, pp. 315–6). They caused feelings of distress, and the fact that they could be called "killer" (*ūmu dāʾiku*, Wiggermann, 1992, pp. 35–6) shows the fear and horror these bad Days provoked. There were several types of them, among which the u$_4$-ka-duḫ-a/*ūmu nāʾiru*, "roaring day" (i.e. bad weather), u$_4$-gal/*ugallu*, "Big Day", and u$_4$-ḫul-gál/*uḫulgallu*, "Evil Day". They could attack as a pack, chasing off Good Days and bringing down the reign of a kingdom, such as described in the Lament over the Destruction of Ur (ETCSL 2.2.2, Römer, 2004) for the Ur III dynasty (Wiggermann, 1992, p. 171). Good days were usually mentioned in contrast to the Bad Days who made an end to them. Particularly good were the glorious days before the Flood, which were personified as wise men (*ūmu-apkallū*, Wiggermann, 1992, pp. 65, 171).

The fierce and terrifying character of the Bad Days reflects feelings of powerlessness and anxiety as a result of a confrontation with time and death. However, fashioning them into agents made more sense of the days of one's life and what they put on one's path, also made them more controllable and predictable. They could be warded off with incantations and the gods, who ultimately governed the Days, could be asked to rein them in. To get an even better understanding of the Days, people could use hemerologies, that is calendars that listed which days were favorable and unfavorable and which activities should be undertaken or avoided on them (Livingstone, 1999, 2013). This knowledge could be used to manipulate the Days with magic rituals, for instance when something important was scheduled to happen on a day that was predicted to be bad (Livingstone, 1999). Moreover, a Bad Day was not necessarily unfavorable to everyone (Livingstone, 1999, 2013), and their evil could also be beneficial, for instance when it caused the downfall of an enemy (Leichty, 2011, pp. 82–83 obv. ii 1–13). Another way in which the agents behind days could be used for good was through calling on them as witnesses to the events that happened on the day that they embodied, and asking them in curses to protect the outcome of these events, as seen in treaties and agreements. Moreover, Days, as well as Months and Years, could themselves be invoked to drive away other forces

of evil or to bring about blessings (Lambert, 2002, 2013, p. 424).[3] The anthropomorphization of time thus allowed humans to exercise power over time and engage it in a way that was helpful to them, with as most important goal to extend it, and make life last longer.

## 2.3 | Death

Death was also a natural phenomenon that was anthropomorphized in ancient Mesopotamia, like in many other cultures–think of the iconic Grim Reaper who harvests mortals. In Mesopotamia, there were many demons and monsters that caused illness and death, but Death itself was embodied by two fear-inspiring agents. The first one is Namtar (nam-tar/*namtarru*, *šīmtu*), "Fate" as determined by the gods, usually ill-fate and misfortune, such as poverty and death (Klein, 1998, 2017). From the 3rd millennium B.C.E. on, Namtar was a governing instrument with which the divine installed and maintained world order. Over time, Namtar could also be perceived as a personified agent modelled after human relations and institutions; according to sources from the 1st millennium B.C.E, he was the head of a household with a wife, daughter and mother, and he operated by command of his supervisors, the gods. His task was to execute and enforce their decrees, to which belonged mankind's ultimate fate of death. His work was generally perceived as evil and undeserved and humans attempted to turn him away (Klein, 1998).

The second personification of death was *mūtu*, "Death", who did not embody a divine decision but a purely natural phenomenon, an inescapable law of nature that every human being would have to succumb to one day. He was death in all forms: Good Death or Bad Death, timely or untimely, ordered by gods or not. Death was not dependent on governing deities–it came regardless of them, and was in fact himself called the "Lord of Mankind". In this role, he accompanied humans from birth, guiding them through life until the moment he claimed obedience, without them even noticing–perhaps even forgetting about him sometimes.[4] Like a human lord, Death's ways were unknown and had to be accepted when the moment came to submit. However, even when Death was surrendered to and even accepted, he caused sadness and fear; after all, death is the unavoidable end and the beginning of the unknown, the loss of everything. Death as unwanted and feared was embodied in various ways. He could be envisioned as a terrifying predator with a poisonous bite that resembled mythological monsters like the Anzû-bird and the *mušḫuššu*-dragon. He also could be an evil creature or thief who took what did not belong to him. As such he planned ahead, standing on the road waiting for people to pass by, or sneaking into bedrooms to abduct people to the Otherworld whilst they are in their most vulnerable state. Death thus embodied the fear, anxiety, revulsion, frustration, despair, and grief felt over losing life and loved ones, as well as the acceptance and resignation that it could not be avoided (Sibbing-Plantholt, 2020).

Death had in common with the anthropomorphized Days, Months, and Years that, even though he was perceived as uncontrollable and often evil and unjust, he could also be deployed for good. In prophylactic rituals, figurines of Good Death were placed by the bedside of ill persons to send away evil forces. Good Death was portrayed as a strong force that needed to be restrained, but his strength was used to make sure that mortal illnesses and Evil Death did not seize humans before their time (Sibbing-Plantholt, 2020, pp. 350–3).

## 2.4 | The embodiments of emotions and expectations concerning lifetime and death

Besides the fact that the images of time and death embodied how humans felt about lifetime and death, their thoughts on the loss of lifetime and time with family, lovers, and companions and the subsequent emotions were themselves also personified into supernatural beings. Several demons embodied unfulfilled desires or unmet expectations about lifetime, and thus of humans dying before their time; the most significant of them were Kūbu, Lamaštu, and Lilû and Lilîtu/Ardat Lilî.

Kūbu was the spirit of stillborn babies who never got to spend time on Earth or enjoy the milk from their mother's breasts; indeed, they were described in terms of all joys of life they never experienced. Family members could pacify

these restless, unsatisfied spirits though giving them a meaningful place on Earth within the framework of their families, for instance through honoring and remembering them in personal names, and providing them with offerings so they would have a pleasant and abundant life in the Otherworld (Römer, 1973; Lambert, 1981; Scurlock, 1991, pp. 151–2; Stol, 2000, pp. 28–32; Kulemann-Ossen & Novák, 2000). Kūbus personified the fear of losing a child, but the fact that they haunted their families may also be a projection of the guilt, grief, and pain felt by the parents, who would have wished a proper lifetime on Earth for their unborn children. Being able to provide for these Kūbus may have provided some consolation.

The fear of the death of children was also personified in Lamaštu. This horrific baby-killing demoness stood for an affliction causing death as well as the fear of parents at the thought of their children being taken away from them by illness and death (Wiggermann, 2000, p. 248; Farber, 2014, in particular pp. 149, 201). As the demoness could be averted with incantations, so could this anxiety that was represented by her.

Lamaštu had overlapping traits with another group of demons, Lilû and Lilîtu/Ardat Lilî, the souls of youngsters who had died too early to experience adult life. Like the Kūbus, they were described in terms of unreached life stages and caesurae, unobtained experiences, and unrealized desires, such as becoming sexually active, getting married, and having children (Farber, 1987, 1989; Scurlock, 1991; Wiggermann, 2000, pp. 227–8).[5] These aggressive demons bothered the living searching for ways to make up for their unsatisfactory lives. They could not be seen, but their cries could be heard (George, 2018, pp. 28–9 no. 21), which must have been bone-chilling. They were the anthropomorphization of unfulfilled life-course expectations, the anxiety of an incomplete life and time running out before having achieved all there is to achieve in life.

Lastly, an emotion that is closely associated with death is *niziqtu*, a term describing an intense, negative emotion that in the context of death can be translated as the multidimensional emotional state "grief". Grief also had a body: she was a female creature with wings who expressed mourning with her pose. Grief was the embodiment of the multidimensional state of grief that is intrinsically connected to death and the relentless passing of time. The fact that Grief was felt in a state of sickness and at the brink of death by both young children and adults made it a fundamental emotion of life (Sibbing-Plantholt, 2020). Death and Grief in fact often occurred together, and both were fundamental, inherent, yet undesired aspects of human life with which every individual was confronted, young or old, in the past or present. Like Death, Grief was perceived as a threat: she attacked and took hold of her victims, and she could cause unbearable (physical) discomfort and social isolation that had be cured or relieved to avoid it causing illness and even death. There were several coping strategies for overcoming Grief, including medicinal remedies, praying for divine intervention, and seeking out the company, comfort, and empathy of others, and the materialization of Grief through personification (Sibbing-Plantholt *forthcoming*). The last-mentioned helped to get a grip on this ungraspable and overwhelming phenomenon. It allowed the mourning to accept the fact that their unbearable grief was caused by a being who flew towards them and overwhelmed them, and who could be either warded off or accepted; either interaction empowered the "victims" and provided relief.

## 3 | CONCLUSION

Time and Death were abstract, irreversible, and unpredictable natural phenomena and inherent conditions of life over which humans had little to no power. Nevertheless, humans attempted to comprehend and to make sense of them. A common strategy to obtain perceived control was to give them a body and make them agents, and this can also be recognized in the Ancient Near East. Seeing them as human and recognizing human behavior, desires and motives in these demons gave people the tools to make them more concrete, to better understand and anticipate them, talk about them, and keep them at bay whilst using them to ward off other chaos and evil. The expectations of life and thoughts on time and death and the emotions these caused, in particular fear and grief, were also anthropomorphized. Conceptualizing emotions as agents allowed individuals to send them off and free themselves of them, and find solace in their state of vulnerability to the hands of time.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author certifies that she has no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest (such as honoraria; educational grants; participation in speakers' bureaus; membership, employment, consultancies, stock ownership, or other equity interest; and expert testimony or patent-licensing arrangements), or non-financial interest (such as personal or professional relationships, affiliations, knowledge or beliefs) in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

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## PEER REVIEW

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## ENDNOTES

[1] For example Dandamaev (1980); Tenney (2017), p. 753; they could even reach extreme old age, as for instance demonstrated by Adad-Guppi, the mother of king Nabonidus, who would have died at the age of 102 (Schaudig, 2001, p. 14; Maul, 2012, pp. 23–4). The age of 70 may have been perceived as a full life span; this notion is also conveyed in Psalm 90: 10 (Malamat, 1982; Klein, 1990, p. 62; Weinfeld, 1992; Böck, 2000, p. 31; Maul, 2012, pp. 23–4).

[2] For the anthropomorphization of celestial bodies and their relationship with gods in ancient Mesopotamia, see Rochberg, 2009.

[3] For an overview of other monsters and demons that personified astral and cosmic phenomena and acted as servants to the major deities of time (with which humans were not directly or commonly confronted), see Wiggermann, 1994. In addition to the Day itself, parts of the day, such as the night and dusk, were anthropomorphized as well. These beings represented dangerous parts of the day and therefore instilled fear in humans; with the help of incantations they could be chased off (Livingstone, 1999; Wiggermann, 2007). These however represent certain aspects of the day rather than the course of life and thus are not mentioned in detail here.

[4] Notoriously, in the Epic of Gilgameš, Gilgameš is painfully confronted with his own mortality through the death of his best friend Enkidu; in all his superhuman strength and vigor (note that Gilgameš is only one-third human and two-thirds divine), he seems to have forgotten or did not think about his looming death, and this reminder that he will too die one day instils in him emotions of sadness, despair, and anxiety (George, 2003, pp. 666–75 [Epic of Gilgameš Tablet IX], see also pp. 272–86). Death would probably nevertheless have been much more public and visible in the ancient world (Ariès, 1982). Hauser (2012) points out that in the Neo-Assyrian period, the living were constantly reminded of death through the burial of deceased family members under the floor of their houses and their responsibility to take care of the souls of the dead through rituals.

[5] For textual and iconographic evidence for these demons, see furthermore Lackenbacher (1971); Porada (1987); Geller (1988), (2000).

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