

Lilith unsexed

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Among the many types of demons which plagued ancient Mesopotamian were those of the *lil*-type.¹ One of the female members of this type, *lilītu*, is the ‘ancestor’ of the Jewish demoness Lilith, and indeed Aramaic incantation bowls from the city of Nippur make it possible to document the change from *lilītu* to Lilith over time.²

Not all the members of the *lil*-type are equally well attested. Assuming that information about one type also applies to the others, the following overall picture emerges. *Lil*-demons (at least sometimes) represent the spirits of people who died unmarried, and so roam the earth in search of living human spouses / sexual partners / children.³ Though they were not the only demon type to behave thus,⁴ it is nonetheless a significant characteristic, and one which is harmful to humans: incantations list them alongside other supernatural aggressors.⁵ One has the impression that they afflicted individuals rather than communities.⁶

It is not clear whether *lil*-demons’ attacks on adult humans *always* had a sexual dimension – the language, at least, is not always sexual.⁷ Furthermore, Sylvie Lackenbacher points out that the misfortune of the *ardat lilī* (leading her to prey on humans) is not just sexual: she also has the privation “de ne pas partager la vie sociale des autres *ardatu*”.⁸ Nonetheless, the sexual dimension is prominent in our extant sources in relation to the activities of *lil*-

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¹ By this I mean *lilū*, *lilītu*, *ardat lilī*, and *eṭel lilī*, on the basis that their names include an element ‘*lil*’ which is written sumerographically as *lil*. Wiggermann, *Studi e Materiali di Storia delle Religioni* 77/2 (2011) 312 suggests that the *naššuqītu* ‘female kisser’ belongs to the same group. AHW (1969) 761b takes this more generally as “bösaartig küssende (Dämonin)”, with ref. to GAG § 35o: 36 (“Adjektive für schlechte Gewohnheiten”). *CAD N/ii* (1980) 79a instead takes the word as “a hardship”. Be that as it may, the *naššuqītu* is so rarely attested that it makes little difference to the present analysis whether one includes her or not.

² See Montgomery, *Aramaic Incantation Texts from Nippur* (1913) and many more recent publications, such as Ford and Morgenstern, *Hilprecht Bowls* (2019) or Shaked, Ford and Bhayro, *Bowl Spells* (2022).

³ Lackenbacher, RA 65/2 (1971) 149 collected evidence that the *ardat lilī* was “la jeune fille qui n’a pas eu son destin normal, c’est-à-dire qui n’a pas perdu sa virginité et n’a pas eu d’enfant”. See also the characterisation by Scurlock, *Incognita* 2 (1991) 151: “The *lilū*-demons and their female counterparts the *lilītu* or *ardat-lilī* demons were hungry for victims because they had once been human; they were the spirits of young men and women who had themselves died young”. Geller and Vacín, *Udug-hul* (2015) 28:53 term them “incubus/succubus demons”. Cases have been reported in modern times of patients believing they had sexual congress with demons, e.g. Campbell Thompson, *Proceedings of the Society of Biblical Archaeology* 28/ccix (1906) 83: “[One of my men] told me that he knew a man in Mossoul who declared he was visited of nights by a spirit in the form of a beautiful woman who had borne him three children”, with the comment by Kinnier Wilson in *Studies Landsberger* (1965) 296; also Stol, *Epilepsy* (1993) 229.

⁴ Butler, *Dreams* (1998) 62-63 points out that the *alū*-demon is also attested as an incubus.

⁵ See e.g. Meier, AfO 14 (1941) 142 lines 34-36 in a *Bīt mēseri* incantation addressed to Lugalgirra: *ana utukki šēdi rābiṣi eṭemmi lilī lilīti kat-til-lu be[n]ni lemni šudingirakki rehūt šulpaea u antašubbē* “against *utukku*, *šēdu*, *rābiṣu*, *lilū*, *lilītu*, *kattilu*, evil *bennu*, *šudingirakku*, spawn of *Šulpaea*, and *antašubba*”. Though the latter items in the list are arguably diseases rather than demons, *lilū* and *lilītu* appear before the rare *kattilu*, which seems to be a demon. Cf. *CAD K* (1971) 307b, *inter alia* citing a passage where *kattilu* is listed between *utukku* and *rābiṣu*. AHW (1965) 466a books it as “ein mythisches Raubtier”.

⁶ See already Bottéro, *Annuaire EPHE. 4e section* 1975 (1974-1975) 131 commenting on the incantation compendium BRM IV 20: “Chaque conjuration se rapporte à une action précise. Et chacune de ces actions intéresse la seule vie individuelle, jamais le bien commun, l’intérêt public”. He also notes that the *lilū* and *ardat lilī* “réparaissent également une demi-douzaine de fois dans S.T.T., 300 : 3, 8, 12; rev. 8, 11s, et devaient donc jouer un grand rôle dans la vie privée”.

⁷ Stol, *Epilepsy* (1993) 48.

⁸ Lackenbacher, RA 65/2 (1971) 151. See on this point also Steinert in *Fabric of Cities* (2014) 128, stressing that the *ardat lilī* “never ha[d] the chance to take part in the social life of her community”.

demons, and is the likely source of ‘gender polarity’ between demon and human victim (see below).

Gender polarity: the normal situation

Grammatically, *lilītu* is the feminine equivalent of masculine *lilû*. The *lilû* and *lilītu* are therefore generally viewed as gender-opposite (male and female) manifestations of the same demonic agency,⁹ who target victims of the opposite sex. Thus for example Marten Stol observes that, according to hemerologies, on particular days a man is in danger of being chosen for marriage by an *ardat lilī* demoness.¹⁰ Similarly, since the *ardat lilī* and *eṭel lilī* were not able to marry a human spouse in the normal way,¹¹ it can be supposed that they preyed on victims of suitable gender.

This picture is made even clearer by several diagnoses in Tablet XXVI of the *Diagnostic Handbook* (SA.GIG), where the gender of *lilû/lilītu* is the opposite of the gender of the afflicted human:

ana sinniṣti lilû(lil.lá.en.na) ana zikari lilītu(munuslil.lá.en.na)

For a woman: *lilû*; for a man: *lilītu*

Ex. 1. (SA.GIG XXVI 47')¹²

ana sinniṣti lilû(lil.lá.en.na) ana zikri lilītu(munuslil.lá.en.na) zi.zi-bi

For a woman, a *lilû*; for a man, a *lilītu* will *zi.zi-bi*

Ex. 2. (SA.GIG XXVI 83')¹³

qāt lilī(lil.lá.en.na) sar-ru ana sinniṣti lilû(lil.lá.en.na) zi.zi-bi

Hand of *maleficent*¹⁴ *lilû*; for a woman: a *lilû* will *zi.zi-bi*¹⁵

Ex. 3. (SA.GIG XXVI 49')¹⁶

This notion that humans are affected by a *lil*-demon of opposite sex seems to be the norm, cohering with the dominant role of heterosexuality in Mesopotamian written sources. The

⁹ See already e.g. Ebeling in *RIA II* (1938) 110b: *lilû, lilītu* and *ardat-lilī* “gehören zu einer Gemeinschaft, weil sie in ihrem Wesen übereinstimmen, sozusagen die männliche und weibliche Seite ein und desselben Prinzips darstellen”.

¹⁰ Stol, *Epilepsy* (1993) 47 with ref. to CT 51 161 rev. 15 (see now Livingstone, *Hemerologies* (2013) 168), KAR 177 rev. i[v].5 (= Livingstone p. 189) and Iraq 21 (1959) 48:14 (= Livingstone p. 183).

¹¹ Cf. *ardat lilī ša muta lā ṯšû eṭel lilī ša aššata lā ahzu* ‘the *ardat lilī* who does not have a husband, the *eṭel lilī* who was not able to marry a wife’ (Borger in *lišān mīthurti* (1969) 7) and similar passages.

¹² Heeßel, *Diagnostik* (2000) 282.

¹³ Heeßel, *Diagnostik* (2000) 282.

¹⁴ For *sarru* ‘mendacious(?)’, Heeßel p. 294 cites the parallel in BAM 407, 7' and 10'.

¹⁵ *zi.zi-bi* poses two problems. **1**) it clearly represents a form of *tebû*, but exactly how to understand it is uncertain. Scurlock, *Sourcebook* (2014) 203 translates it as “he can get up (afterwards)”, apparently assuming the form is *tebû* Gtn (though AHW (1977) 1343a recognises several other nuances for this). However, at SA.GIG XXVI 82' (Heeßel p. 285) we find *šumma parid-ma it-te-né-et-bi magal iddanabbub u i[gd]anallu[t]* ‘if he is scared and *ittenetbi*, he speaks a lot and is constantly scared’, suggesting that our *zi.zi-bi* – also next to a form of *parādu* – might well be hiding an *ittenetbi* (Ntn present). The translation of *ittenetbi* is itself uncertain. Heeßel renders the two occurrences in the prescription in lines 82'-83' as “immer wieder aufsteht” and “sie werden sich hinwegheben”. *CAD T* (2006) 320b does not cite Heeßel's attestations, but interprets another as “causes pain continuously”, which does not fit SA.GIG XXVI 82' because the patient is the subject there. The second occurrence of *zi.zi-bi* above involves a female patient, and so may denote the male demon's sexual arousal. **2**) However the verb should be read, there is the question of who its subject is. My translation above supposes it is the *lil*-demon, but Scurlock supposes it is the human patient.

¹⁶ Heeßel, *Diagnostik* (2000) 282.

general principle coheres with Marten Stol's observation that women are always attacked by *lilûs*, never (in extant sources) by *lilîtu*.¹⁷

Gender polarity: exceptions

Sometimes, one finds a *lilû* where gender polarity vis-à-vis the human sufferer would lead one to expect *lilîtu*. Stol has rightly recognised “a problem” in such cases,¹⁸ because they upset the pattern of gender polarity.

An example is again found in the *Diagnostic Handbook*:

šumma ina mūši maruṣ-ma ina šērti baliṭ u ušamša qāt li[lî](lil.la[.en.na])

If in the night he is sick, and in the morning / at dawn he is well *but he has not slept*: hand of *lilû*.

Ex. 4. (SA.GIG XVII 78)¹⁹

What is going on in cases such as these – is a male incubus indeed afflicting a male human? Or does the logogram *lil.la.en.na* conceal (against all expectation) a feminine form? I will suggest a different answer.

The proposed solution

The solution proposed here is that, while *lilû* can denote the male demon specifically, it is also used as a gender-neutral umbrella term for the category of *lil*-demons as a whole.²⁰

The situation would be analogous to that for e.g. ‘dog’. Babylonian and Assyrian had two words (or two forms) for ‘dog’: morphologically masculine *kalbu* and morphologically feminine *kalbatu*. While it seems certain that *kalbatu* was only used for female dogs, many of the attestations of *kalbu* cited in *CAD* and *AHw q.v.* are as likely to apply to a female dog as a male one – the gender of the animal is unimportant. Instead of these all being male dogs, it is easier to suppose that *kalbu* can be used in a gender-neutral way, as occurs with masculine forms in many languages (including Arabic).²¹

This coheres with the fact that, when a Babylonian list of impossible occurrences wants to specify that a male dog has given birth, it goes out of its way to add the word ‘male’, a usage recognised by the dictionaries:²²

¹⁷ Stol, *Epilepsy* (1993) 48.

¹⁸ Thus e.g. Stol, *Epilepsy* (1993) 48, proposing as a solution that in Tablet XXVI of SA.GIG the “hand of *lilû*” is “solely a form of epilepsy”, while also noting that a male incubus might do harm to a man “in order to get hold of his wife”, like Asmodeus in the book of Tobit.

¹⁹ Edited by Heeßel, *Diagnostik* (2000) 202. The line is preserved on a Kuyunjik manuscript (K. 3962) and a Neo-Babylonian manuscript in Chicago, perhaps from Uruk (A. 3437; see George, *RA* 85/2 (1991) 138-139 n. 9). The end of the line was collated by Scurlock and Andersen, *Diagnoses* (2005) 751 n. 18.

²⁰ Cf. the observation by Fauth, *WdO* 17 (1986) 72 that an Aramaic incantation expressly mentions ‘male and female’ *lyly* (morphologically masculine) demons, suggesting that “auf einer älteren sprachlichen Stufe des Westsemitischen die Bezeichnung (לילי) offenbar auch für den weiblichen ‚Nachtdämon‘ verwendet wurde”. This was probably a feature from Babylonian. Fauth (*ibid.*) further observes that in later Aramaic magic the opposite of the Babylonian situation arises: the morphologically feminine word is used as an umbrella term for demons of both genders. For this phenomenon a different line of explanation is necessary. It probably has to do with the greater prominence of the female demon in the Aramaic magical tradition (which prominence is also inherited from Babylonian, probably owing to male-centric healing traditions – cf. fn. 34).

²¹ Though see Alhawary, *Arabic Grammar* (2011) 39 on Arabic using default feminine forms for animals whose sex is “not obvious”, e.g. *ḥayya* ‘snake’, *naḥla* ‘bee’.

²² *CAD Z* (1961) 111-112, *AHw* (1981) 1526b.

ina qereb māt kaldi kalbu(ur.gi7) zikru/zakru(nita) itta 'lad
 In the middle of southern Babylonia, a male dog gave birth.
 Ex. 5. (CT 29: 48 19)²³

Evidently, the morphologically masculine form *kalbu* was deemed insufficient to make the point that the dog was biologically male, so a semantic reinforcement was sought.²⁴

This principle is likely to have a much wider application than just the word for ‘dog’. It probably holds good for all pairs of words where the gender distinction is of little importance. This would apply to most animals in most contexts (excepting those which have gender-specific lexemes, e.g. *lītu* ‘cow’ vs *alpu* ‘ox/bull’).²⁵ To wit the following case of a bird in a therapeutic ritual:

qaqqad iššūr hurri zikri/zakri teleqqe tušabšal
 You take (and) boil the head of a male *rock partridge*.
 Ex. 6. (K. 3719 = AMT 76,6 line 10’)²⁶

Where there is no such specification, presumably we should either understand that the animal’s gender was obvious contextually, or that it did not matter.

By contrast, in view of the strongly gendered nature of ancient Mesopotamian human society, in which being male or female made a big difference to the roles one performed, the principle of gender neutrality probably did *not* apply to most morphologically masculine nouns denoting people.²⁷

It is instructive to compare the use of the word *šalmu* ‘effigy’, which Nicholas Postgate observes to be used of people and gods but not animals, even though many figurines of animals exist. Postgate convincingly explains the asymmetry in terms of anthropomorphic beings’ greater individuality: anthropomorphic statuettes are effigies of a *particular person*, while statuettes of animals represent a *type*.²⁸

Where does this leave us vis-à-vis *līl*-demons? They were probably anthropomorphic rather than theriomorphic, but gender neutrality is less problematic for them than for humans: aside from gender polarity vis-à-vis the victim, the sources do not give this writer the sense of differences in nature or behaviour between male and female *līl*-demons. The idea that *līlû* could refer to both genders, like *kalbu*, seems plausible.

What is more, this idea coheres with the *Exorcist’s Handbook* (‘Leitfaden der Beschwörungskunst’), which lists *guruš.līl.lá* (i.e. *eṭel līlī*) and *ki.sikil.līl.lá* (i.e. *ardat līlī*)

²³ Edited by Guinan in AMD 2 (2002) 36 and 39, with comment on her p. 40. The form *itta 'lad* is presumably a corruption of *ittalad* (G perfect of (w)*alādu* ‘to give birth’)

²⁴ Salonen, *Fischerei* (1970) 143 and Salonen, *Vögel* (1973) 94 maintains that Sumerian used *ab* “father” (*sic!*) and *áb* ‘cow’ to indicate the gender of fish and birds. This usage would be different from the phenomenon discussed above, since Sumerian cannot indicate gender morphologically, whereas Babylonian and Assyrian can. However, PSD A 128a and 169a takes *ab* and *áb* as the names of fish (as does ePSD). This seems simpler, as usually there would have been little point in specifying fish’s gender.

²⁵ Cf. von Soden, *GAG*³ (1995) § 60a* on *pirsu*: “*pirsu* ‘entwöhntes Kind bzw. Tierjunges’ steht meistens auch für das Fem”.

²⁶ The edition by the BabMed team is accessible at <http://www.geschkult.fu-berlin.de/e/babmed/Corpora/AMT-2/AMT-76-6/index.html>.

²⁷ Though the morphologically male *amīlu* ‘man’ who is ubiquitous as the patient in Babylonian/Assyrian medical prescriptions has been suspected to represent a gender-neutral figure (cf. e.g. fn. 39). *CAD I-J* (1960) 90b and 98a envisage a small number of instances where the morphologically masculine *ilu* ‘god’ refers to a female deity. AHW (1963) 374a tentatively (i.e. with a question mark) recognises an instance in the Neo-Assyrian personal name *Ištar-ila-a-a* ‘Ištar is my god’. There is of course the problem of whether the sign *dingir* might represent *iltu*.

²⁸ Postgate in *The Ancient Mind* (1994) 178-180.

consecutively,²⁹ while later giving only *líl.lá.en.na* (i.e. *lilû*):³⁰ *prima facie*, *lilîtu* is missing. Since the Handbook lists titles of incantation series, we would have a situation where the other three *líl*-types each had their own collection of incantations, while *lilîtu* did not. Most likely, *líl.lá.en.na* = *lilû* covers both the male and female incarnations of the same basic lexeme (i.e. both *lilû* and *lilîtu*) – a compression which cannot be achieved in the case of *ardat lilî* and *eṭel lilî*, because they involve different lexemes.

The same consideration might explain why, as Marten Stol observes, babies are only reported as being attacked by *lilûs* (not *lilîtus*):³¹ if in the context of medical writings babies were considered gender-neutral,³² then *lilû* would fit, as the gender-neutral term.

The principle of gender neutrality may also clarify the thinking behind a lexical list which explains Sumerian *igi.kár* as *Bab/Ass hâru ša lilî* ‘to choose/marry, (said) of a *lilû*’.³³ If the picture in our sources is representative,³⁴ marrying a human victim seems more characteristic of the female demonesses than the male *lilû*.³⁵ Probably the compiler of the lexical list used the morphologically masculine form as a catch-all.

Finally, if *ardat lilî* means ‘maiden possessed by a *lilû*’,³⁶ then following rigid consideration of grammatical gender one would expect her male counterpart to be *eṭel lilîti*, ‘young man possessed by a *lilîtu*’. That one instead finds *eṭel lilî* would suggest that *lilû* is again being used in a gender-neutral way, and in fact referring to female demons.

The perspective suggested above does not solve *all* the problematic passages. Notably, there is a case in the terrestrial omen series *Šumma ālu* where a man is apparently ‘seized’ by a male *lilû*:

šumma biršu kîma zîmî(sag.ki) ili zikari(nita) innamir(igi.duṣ) amîlu šû líl.lá iṣabbassu
šumma biršu kîma zîmî(sag.ki) ilti sinniṣti(munus) innamir amîlu šû ki.sikil.líl.lá 2
mu^{més} iṣabbassu

If (there is) a *biršu* like the face³⁷ of a male god, that man: a *lilû* will seize him.

If (there is) a *biršu* like the face of a female god, that man: an *ardat lilî* will seize him for two years.

Ex. 7. (*Šumma ālu* XX 26-27)³⁸

²⁹ KAR 44: 10: *gu-ru-uš.guruš.líl.lá^{més} ki.sikil.líl.lá^{més} u alan.níg.é.sag.íl.me[š].udug hul.gál.a mu.du.du*, ed. Geller in *Studies Lambert* (2000) 244 (with minor variants on the two duplicate manuscripts, BM 55148+ and Rm 717+; lacuna in von Weiher, *SpTU V* (1998) no. 231). I see no reason to follow Geller *ad loc.* (on his p. 253) in viewing the gloss *gu-ru-uš* as referring to another incantation. For comments on *gu-ru-uš* see Farber, *ZA* 79/1 (1989) 33 n. 45.

³⁰ KAR 44: 34: *a.lá hul líl.lá.en.na sag.hul.ha.za šu nam.érim.ma šu nam.lú.u₁₈.lu* (Geller p. 291; *hul* omitted on the two duplicate manuscripts). The asymmetry between this and the earlier line is noted by Stol, *Epilepsy* (1993) 48.

³¹ See Stol, *Epilepsy* (1993) 48 on this point as a “flaw in the picture” of *líl*-demons’ gendered behaviour.

³² Cf. Steinert, *Menschseins* (2012) 96 on how Mesopotamians sometimes classified people as “Alte (Frauen und Männer), Erwachsene (Frauen und Männer) und Kinder”, the latter category implicitly being gender-neutral. Admittedly there are also rituals in which infants were given gender-specific objects, see Stol, *Epilepsy* (1993) 63.

³³ For this meaning see refs in Stol, *Epilepsy* (1993) 47. *CAD H* (1956) list two verbs ‘*hâru*’, one meaning ‘to get ready (transitive)’ (attested only in “SB, NB”) and one meaning ‘to pick for marriage’. Since the meanings and uses are quite close, it is simpler to treat them as one verb, as done in *AHW* (1962) 342-342.

³⁴ As pointed out by Stol, *Epilepsy* (1993) 47, the higher incidence of female *líl*-demons (*lilîtus* and *ardat lilîs*) is probably because of male-centricity in the extant sources as regards the victim.

³⁵ The above statement discounts the ‘preparatory’ step by which an *ardat lilî* demoness came into being, as a human girl possessed by a male *lilû*.

³⁶ Cf. Scurlock, *Incognita* 2 (1991) 181 n. 192: “the term *ardat lilî* means literally ‘*lilû*’s girls’, which might imply that these were originally young girls chosen as wives by those demons”.

³⁷ In taking *sag.ki* as ‘face’ I follow Freedman, *If a City, vol. 1* (1998) p. 298 note to line 21, who cites an ancient commentary (CT 41 25 r.9): *sag.ki* = *zîmû* ‘*sag.ki* means ‘face’”.

³⁸ Freedman, *If a City, vol. 1* (1998) 298-299. On the place of K. 3698+ = CT XXXVIII 28 (CDLI P236900) within *Šumma ālu* see Heeßel, *Divinatorische Texte I* (2007) 7 n. 66.

Here the symmetry between the two lines suggests that, since a female deity results in seizure by the (female) *ardât lilî*, a male deity (unusual for this to be specified) results in seizure by a male *lilû*. There are two ways out of this scenario: one is to suppose that *amîlu* can be used gender-neutrally, to mean ‘person’. But while one can see why JoAnn Scurlock translates it thus in medical recipes,³⁹ where in most cases it (presumably) makes no difference if the patient is male or female, it seems difficult to suppose that *amîlu* (let alone *amîlu šû*) can refer specifically to a woman, *as opposed to* a man.

The second way to account for gender behaviour in our pair of omens starts with the observation that they are not, in fact, properly symmetrical: the second one has a temporal specification (‘for two years’) which is missing in the first. Had they been conceived as a pair, it is hard to see why this would be so. Perhaps, then, the two omens originated independently, and were brought together by a redactor of *Šumma ālu*. In this scenario, it would be fascinating if the redactor failed to realise that *lilû* was gender-neutral, and so inserted the specifications ‘male’ and ‘female’ to produce a contrast which was originally not there. This would cohere with the fact that the misunderstanding arose while dealing with terrestrial omens, not with typologies which presupposed expertise in demonology (such as SA.GIG). Perhaps redactors of *Šumma ālu* did not know much about demons! But the matter is hard to resolve.

A further gender complication

We have seen that (morphologically masculine) *lilû* can refer to male or female demons, and (morphologically feminine) *lilîtu* only to female ones. But, at least for First-Millennium Assyria, the situation was different in the plural.

Many Neo-Assyrian nouns which are masculine in the singular have morphologically feminine plurals in *-āte*. This can happen even with nouns denoting male humans. Thus *etinnu* ‘master builder’ is attested in a morphologically feminine plural ^{lú}*e-tin-na-ti* (SAA I 138: 13),⁴⁰ which is virtually certain to mean ‘male master builders’, despite its feminine morphology. The same applies to *hazannu* ‘mayor’:

ana ^{lú*}*ha-za-na-te ana urāsī šībūte assa’al*
I consulted the mayors, masons and elders.
Ex. 8. (SAA I 77: 12-14)⁴¹

Here too it is overwhelmingly likely that male mayors are meant.

Therefore, on Neo-Assyrian manuscripts, *lilâti* might be the plural of masculine *lilû*. One could object that, since Neo-Assyrian society did not (as far as we know) have female master builders or female mayors, the forms *etinnâte* and *hazannâte* are unambiguous (i.e. they can in practice refer only to men), whereas if *lilâti* were used to denote male demons, it would end up being ambiguous. However, this is not a serious obstacle, because when the gender of *lil*-demons is important, this is obvious from the context.

An effect of this is that, when (as I have argued elsewhere)⁴² Ea uses *lilâti* to refer to demons in his ambivalent oracle in the *Gilgameš* Flood story, Neo-Assyrians would not

³⁹ Scurlock and Andersen, *Diagnoses* (2005) e.g. p. 30 and *passim*. Cf their p. xxiii: “the masculine LÚ and NA (but not the specifically male NITA/NĪTA) are used to refer to both sexes”.

⁴⁰ Parpola, SAA I (1987) p. 113. The word is followed by a lacuna. The context concerns a wall (é.sig₄) that [i]ddi’ib ‘caved in’ (line 12).

⁴¹ Parpola, SAA I (1987) p. 71. Frank Simons alerts me to another possible translation: ‘the mayors and senior masons’. The difference does not impinge on the argument above.

⁴² Worthington, *Ea's Duplicity* (2019) 225-227.

necessarily have understood him as referring to specifically female líl-demons, but to líl-demons generally.⁴³

The question of plurality

The above interpretation of *ina lîlâti* presupposes that one *can* have multiple *lîlîtu*-demonesses: in other words that *lîlîtu* is not the name of an individual demon (as is the case with Lamaštu or Pazuzu), but rather the label for a *type* of demon.

In Aramaic magic, from at least the time of the *Alphabet of Ben Sira* (8th-10th centuries AD onwards) there was an original Lilith, the first wife of Adam, who went on to produce a brood of her kind.⁴⁴ In discussions of Aramaic magic, ‘lilith’ is therefore often capitalised, as the proper name of an individual demon.⁴⁵ However, Aramaic magic bowls from Nippur mention plural *liliths*,⁴⁶ and also envisage *liliths* having names, showing that ‘lilith’ is not (or not always) their name.⁴⁷ Whether or not they were all regarded as the brood of an original Lilith, it seems safe to infer that it should often be uncapitalised, and understood as a demonic type rather than the name of an individual demon. In this, they may be preserving the Babylonian usage.

Similarly, it seems clear that Babylonian/Assyrian *lîlû* and *lîlîtu* denote a demon *type* rather than individual (named) demons in Pazuzu incantations. For a start, the plural líl.lá^{meš} *lem-nu-ti* ‘evil *lîlûs*’ is attested,⁴⁸ though Frank Simons (pers. comm.) points out that, in principle, this could refer to a quartet of individuals. Frans Wiggermann notes that the plural occurs *only* in Pazuzu incantations,⁴⁹ but this is as likely to derive from idioms of usage as than from varying perceptions of individualisation across source types. Secondly, the circumstance that Pazuzu describes himself as ‘king’ of the líl-demons suggests a large group:

én ġe₂₆.e d^hpà.zu.zu dumu d^hha.an.ba lugal líl.lá hul.a^{meš}
anāku pazuzu mār hanbi šar lîlê (var. *lîlêya*) *lemnūti*
hur.saġ kala.ga mun.huš ba.an.e₁₁.dè ġe₂₆-e-me-en
ana šadî danni ša uštar’iba ellāššu anāku
im.e.ne.ne lú šà.bé ġen.na im.mar.tu igi.ne.ne ba.an.ġar
šārî ša ina libbišunu attalku ana amurri panīšunu šaknū
dili.e.ne pa.e.ne.ne ba.an.haš
iltēnū izīrīšunu ušabbir

I am Pazuzu, son of Hanbu, king of the (var. my) evil *lîlûs*.

I shall rise up against the mighty mountain at which I anger.⁵⁰

The winds in whose midst (or: against whom) I march, they face West.

⁴³ The present argument thus fulfils the anticipation in fn. 928 of *Ea’s Duplicity*.

⁴⁴ Wojciech, *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women’s Studies & Gender Issues* /32 (2018) 115-116, who goes on to compare traditions about Lilith with earlier traditions about Eve. (Wojciech also notes that the *Alphabet of Ben Sira* may have originally been intended as satirical or scurrilous). For another example of the same tradition see Gingzberg, Szold and Radin, *Legends of the Jews* (2003) 172b (after Yerahmeel).

⁴⁵ E.g. Handy in *Lilith* (1992) 324.

⁴⁶ E.g. Montgomery, *Aramaic Incantation Texts from Nippur* (1913) no. 7 p. 147 = Isbell, *Aramaic Incantation Bowls* (1975) 21-22 line 14.

⁴⁷ Montgomery, *Aramaic Incantation Texts from Nippur* (1913) 118 line 15.

⁴⁸ Borger in *Studies Reiner* (1987) 25: 103 (Sm 98: 9’ and STT 147 r.11); cf. also line 102. Pazuzu heads offer further plural forms, e.g. líl-lá-hul-a^{meš} (Heeßel, *Pazuzu* (2002) p. 105).

⁴⁹ Wiggermann, *Studi e Materiali di Storia delle Religioni* 77/2 (2011) 312.

⁵⁰ Interestingly, the Št of *ra’ābu* is used of wind in medical descriptions of symptoms (see *AHw* (1971) 933a). It is possible that it has overtones of windiness in our incantation (but this is not certain, as it is also used of the gods).

One by one I broke their wings.

Ex. 9. (*Pazuzu 'Standardinschrift A'*)⁵¹

Strictly speaking, the Akkadian has the same ambiguity as the English over whether the epithet 'king of the evil *lilûs*' belongs to Pazuzu or to his father Hanbu.⁵² But the variant *lilêya* (spelled *lil.lá-ia*) 'of my *lilû*-demons', found on a Pazuzu head from Babylon,⁵³ shows that at least in the mind of one person Pazuzu ruled over the *lilûs*. Further, Nils Heeßel has sensibly pointed out that, as Hanbu is attested nowhere outside the Pazuzu incantations, his own ontology is faltering, and essentially he only exists as part of the Pazuzu demonology.⁵⁴ Hence, even if the title is his, it very likely applies to Pazuzu too.⁵⁵

Of course, *lilîtu* could have originated as a personal name and subsequently become a type (in the same way that Ištar became a word for 'goddess'),⁵⁶ but at present there is no evidence for this.

Summary

The morphological gender of words denoting *lil*-demons need not always reflect the gender of the demon denoted. Grammatically masculine *lilû* served as a gender-neutral term covering both male *lilû* and female *lilîtu* (and possibly other members of the *lil* 'family'). This explains seeming departures from the principle of 'gender polarity' between demon and victim. Conversely, the morphologically feminine plural *lilâti* which appears (as I have argued elsewhere) in *Gilg. XI* need not refer to specifically feminine *lil*-demons, but could itself be a catch-all plural.

⁵¹ Text composed eclectically (with variants usually not noted) from the 'score' transliteration in Borger in *Studies Reiner* (1987) 25-26. The translation follows the Akkadian and is informed by Heeßel, *Pazuzu* (2002) pp. 109-110. As Heeßel (his p. 95) points out, 'Standardinschrift A' (a term introduced by B. K. Ismail) corresponds to lines 102-109 of the Nineveh Pazuzu collection, and is attested more often as unilingual Sumerian than bilingually.

⁵² Apparently sometimes pronounced Anbu (dumu *an-bi*). This is how I interpret the Pazuzu head published by Frank, RA 7 (1909) 24 line 2. Differently Heeßel, *Pazuzu* (2002) p. 111, positing a *saut du même au même* (^d and *an* being two readings of the same cuneiform sign): dumu ^d<Ha-an>-*bi* and Frank, MAOG 14 (1941) 20, positing a logogram: dumu ^dBI.

⁵³ Borger in *Studies Reiner* (1987) 25:103 MS VA Bab 569. The inscription was first edited by Lambert, FuB 12 (1970) 42 ("text F"), who read the signs syllabically (*lil-lá-ia*).

⁵⁴ Hanbu's obscurity might be reflected in variation over the pronunciation of his name (see fn. 52 and cf. Worthington, *Textual Criticism* (2012) 77 n. 260 on corruptions of unfamiliar place names).

⁵⁵ Heeßel, *Pazuzu* (2002) pp. 65-66: "Hanbus Führungsanspruch ist vollständig auf Pazuzu übertragen und daher kann sich der Titel auch auf Pazuzu beziehen".

⁵⁶ For the view that *lilîtu* "auf einen Individualnamen für eine ... Dämonin des altbabylonischen Pantheons zurückgeh[t]" see Fauth, WdO 17 (1986) 67. On his p. 79 he notes that plurality could have come about through the demons' activity as incubus and succubus. (I do not understand the suggestion on his p. 68 that "Lilitu von vornherein in einer die verschiedenen dämonischen Aspekte einfangenden Trias (Lilu, Lilitu, Ardat Lili) integriert war").

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