

ANUNNAKI AND IGIGI, a linguistic overview

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Anunnaki e Igigi are two recurring terms in mesopotamic mythology, describing what we now consider as having been Sumerian and Akkadian deities.

These terms, particularly Anunnaki, are used in both Sumerian and Babylonian literature, this latter using the Sumerian words and glyphs instead of the proper Babylonian ones. This makes hard to determine what or who the Anunnaki really were, because the etymology of the word is uncertain.

In myths, Anunnaki are often described as the '*gods of the netherworld*', with a negative or violent approach, e.g. in the myth known as "*the descent of Inanna to the netherworld*" where her sister Ereshkigal unleashes the Anunnaki to kill her; sometimes they are depicted as workers in the underground world, miners, and many other times as some sort of 'sages', wisemen of the 'Council of Twelve' having such a role as 'regulators' of the life for humankind. In some other myths we find the Anunnaki waging battles against each others, occasionally with the partnership of certain human kings.

The name Igigi instead is less used, and it almost always describes a portion of the Anunnaki (300 of them, as we read in the **Enuma Elish**) residing in Heaven and who occasionally went down to Earth (KI), as in the tale about Marduk marrying Sarpanit.

We should notice by now that there is a parallel between the Anunnaki of Sumerian mythology and the Nefilim of Semitic / biblical traditions. In fact the Hebrew root **NFL** has a meaning that is not only '*to fall*', but also '*to descend*'. Translating the Nefilim as '*the one who have descended*' or '*the ones who descend*', we can integrate this meaning with the name Anunnaki, that involves the two Sumerian terms: **AN** (sky - heaven) and **KI** (earth - land).

But are the Nephilim ALL the Anunnaki? The answer should be 'NO'. The Nephilim are only a part of the Anunnaki, and I consider it may be significant to identify them with the Igigi.

What I would like to point out in this article is the linguistic matter, not the mythological one; all the tries to give an etymologic source of the term Anunnaki has been unsuccessful, so that nowadays we have various versions who differ both in the transliteration and in the involved meanings. Most scholars translate Anunnaki as 'Sons of Anu' or 'The heirs of Anu', with Anu being the chief deity of the Sumerian pantheon, by dividing the term as

An.un[na]. But this translation and the concept it expresses leaves out the fundamental particle **KI**.

John Halloran, who published his last Sumerian Lexicon in 2004, on his website (sumerian questions and answers) proposes:

- 1) **a-nun-na (-k)**: noble stock; fear, dread ('offspring' + 'master'
+ genitive)
- 2) **d-a-nun-na (-ke4-ne)**: the gods as a whole; the gods of the netherworld, as compared to the dnun-gal-e-ne, the great gods of heaven

As we see, the particle KI is completely ignored. In the first definition the final **-K** is translated as a genitive case, and in the second one Halloran proposes that KI would actually be **KE4-NE**, another genitive form as reported in his Lexicon:

-ke4: often occurs at the end of a genitival compound which functions as the actor or agent of the sentence (ak, genitival suffix 'of', + e, ergative agent marker).

Another theory says that Anunnaki must be transliterated as **A.nun.ak.e**, where AK is a genitive (this based on Thorkild Jacobsen's material).

But how can we trust these translation that have sense only when letting a particle out of the analysis? These translations would be acceptable if we ONLY had the form Anunna, which is actually the most used. In the sumerian period infact we have always Anunna or Anunna Gods occurring. It is in accadian times that we find the use of Anunnaki. The fact that this form is used in Akkadian Cuneiform makes it easy to understand that it may not be an error, because the term occurs as a non-subordinated form. One who says that the term AK is always a genitive, and the term Anunnaki is the genitive case of Anunna, is indirectly saying that everytime the akkadian scribes used the cuneiform for Anunnaki, rendering the KI, they were mistaking sumerian grammar and writing. This is impossibile, because akkadian grammar was mor complex and had more subordinating particles than sumerian grammar. An error of this matter could only be made in the opposite case, when we render a more complex language in a simpler one, because we go to a higher grade of abstraction.

What is made for sure, in the term Anunnaki, is that the particle AN means 'Sky / Heaven', and the particle KI means 'Land / Earth', so the meaning of the name is something in relation with both heaven and earth. In my opinion the sumerian term Anunna describes the 'gods of heaven', and the akkadian term Anunnaki describes the act of these 'gods of heaven coming on the land'.

It is infact in the akkadian period that we find the term IGI.GI, this too coming from sumerian roots. The already mentioned Sumerian Lexicon has:

igi: n., eye(s); glance; face; aspect, looks; front (reduplicated ig, 'door') [IGI archaic frequency: 21]. v., to see.

gi(4): to surround, besiege; to lock up (circle + to descend into).

gi(17): n., young man (small and thin like a reed).

By using these rendering and translitteration, we can extend the 'young man' meaning to talk about the younger gods, or the 'to sorround / besiege' can be a validation of the concept that Igigi were described as the gods that remained in the sky, sorrounding the earth.

Besides, the term IGI.GI could also be a reduplication of the root IGI = 'to see'. Infact reduplication of particles was often used as a plural or to mean an emphasys, like we find in the Flood Tale when the boat of Ziusudra is called: MA2.GUR.GUR to mean a boat that can roll and turn upside-down, or the NA4.GUL.GUL in the myth called «a *shir sud to Ninurta*». In this case, the emphatic use of IGI reduplicated is consistent with the meaning of 'The Watchers', the same term used in the Bible to identify the Nefilim.

references:

- The descent of Inanna in the netherworld:

<http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=t.1.4.1&charenc=j#>

- John Halloran's Sumerian questions and answers - Anunnaki and Igigi:

<http://www.sumerian.org/sumerfaq.htm#s97>

- John Hallorans's Sumerian Lexicon:

<http://www.sumerian.org/sumerlex.htm>

- Enuma Elish:

http://www.bibliotecapleyades.net/sumer_anunnaki/esp_sumer_annunaki01.htm

