

# The Gods Išum and Ḫendursanga: Night Watchmen and Street-lighting in Babylonia

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The ancient Mesopotamian gods Išum and Ḫendursanga have been studied separately and together.<sup>1</sup> It is not the purpose here to repeat the evidence and ideas put forward in these studies, but to explore a role of these two gods that has repercussions for our knowledge of the urban environment in ancient Mesopotamia.

## The Names of Išum

From at least the Old Babylonian period, the two gods were identified as one deity, Ḫendursanga in Sumerian contexts, Išum in Akkadian. Their equa-

tion is given formal expression in god-lists and other academic texts, such as the Old Babylonian (hereafter, OB) Nippur god-list (*SLT* 123 iv 18'–19 and dupls.), OB *Diri* Nippur 10: 10–11, the later Weidner god-list (*KAV* 63 iv 24 and dupls.), and *Aa* I/7 c 6'. These are well known and will not be illustrated by quotation here. An additional attestation, however, is furnished by a fragmentary three-column list known from the library of the temple of Nabû at Nimrud,<sup>2</sup> and an unpublished Late Babylonian fragment documented by copy and transliteration in the *Nachlass* of the late W. G. Lambert (Folios 1693, 7522). The list gives four or five entries on Išum-Ḫendursanga and then his wife, Ninmug:

### CTN IV pl. 133 ND 5556 ii' 12'–17'

ḫe-en-dur	[ <sup>d</sup> PA . . .]
i-šum	[ <sup>d</sup> PA . . .]
MIN	[ <sup>d</sup> SILA . . .]
MIN	[ <sup>d</sup> NÍMGIR . . .]
ḫa-ra	[ <sup>d</sup> GUD? . . .]
nin-mu-u[g!]	<sup>d</sup> nin-mug . . .]

### BM 47009: 11'–15'

[ḫe-e]n-dur	<sup>d</sup> PA	[. . .]
ṛ <sup>1</sup> -šum	<sup>d</sup> PA	[. . .]
[KI.MIN]	<sup>d</sup> SILA	[. . .]

<sup>2</sup> D. J. Wiseman and J. A. Black, *Literary Texts from the Temple of Nabû*. Cuneiform Texts from Nimrud 4 (London, 1996), 32 no. 223.

\* Abbreviations used in this article unless otherwise stated follow the *CAD* (*The Assyrian Dictionary of the University of Chicago* [Chicago, 1956–2010]). ETCSL = *The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature* (<http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk>).

<sup>1</sup> E.g., D. O. Edzard, “Ḫendursanga,” *RLA* 4 (1972–75): 324–45 and “Išum,” *RLA* 5 (1976–80): 213–14; D. O. Edzard and C. Wilcke, “Die Ḫendursanga-Hymne,” in *Kramer Anniversary Volume*, ed. B. L. Eichler et al. *Alter Orient und Altes Testament* 25 (Kevelaer, 1976), 139–76, esp. 142–43; H. Sauren, “Hendursaga, Genius des Saturn, Gott des Todes,” *Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica* 10 (1979): 75–95; P. Attinger and M. Krebernik, “L’hymne à Ḫendursaga (Ḫendursaga A),” in *Von Sumer bis Homer. Festschrift für Manfred Schretter*, ed. R. Rollinger. *Alter Orient und Altes Testament* 325 (Münster, 2005), 21–104, esp. 21–33; F. Weiershäuser, “Weiser Išum, der du den Göttern vorangehst,” in *Von Göttern und Menschen. Beiträge zu Literatur und Geschichte des Alten Orients: Festschrift für Brigitte Gronenberg*, ed. D. Shehata, F. Weiershäuser, and K. V. Zand. *Cuneiform Monographs* 41 (Leiden, 2010), 351–76.

[KI.MIN]           <sup>d</sup>NÍMG[IR]       [. . .]  
[ni-i]m-mug       <sup>d</sup>n[in-mug]     [. . .]

Other new information emerges from a fresh look at Tablet VI of the great god-list *An = Anum*, which treats the netherworld deities, Nergal and his court. The passage on Išum is ll. 16–21, the understanding of which now benefits from K 11197, a fragment identified as a source for *An VI* by W. G. Lambert in his manuscript edition of *An = Anum* (Folios 7268, 9772). Išum is followed by four learned names in Sumerian and then his wife:

<sup>d</sup>i-šum               = sukkal-bi dumu <sup>d</sup>utu-ke<sub>4</sub>  
<sup>d</sup>.min[nimgir?]-sila = MIN  
<sup>d</sup>PA-{b[il]}-sag     = MIN  
<sup>d</sup>sila-a-gú-en-na   = MIN  
<sup>d</sup>řšul<sup>1</sup>-gi<sub>6</sub>-<sup>r</sup>a-du<sup>1</sup>-du = MIN  
<sup>d</sup>nin-mug           = dam-bi-munus

His (Nergal's) minister, son of Šamaš  
ditto  
ditto  
ditto  
ditto  
His (Išum's) spouse

*An VI* 16–21<sup>3</sup> // *CT* 24 38 K 11197 i' 4'–8'

The first learned name (l. 17) is restored to match Išum's function, as recorded on amulets: <sup>d</sup>i-šum *nāgir*(nimgir) *sūqi*(sila), "I., herald of the street."<sup>4</sup> The second learned name is unlikely to be Pabilsag (l. 18, one ms. only), for he does not belong in the netherworld and is entered elsewhere in *An = Anum*, at V 125, after his spouse Gula. R. L. Litke and others<sup>5</sup> have accordingly suspected that <sup>d</sup>PA-bil-sag is here an error for <sup>d</sup>PA-sag, i.e., Ḫendursanga. Such an emendation is made more likely by the fragment K 11197, which has (i' 5') [. . .-g]á, for in lists Pabilsag does not carry the terminal -gá: the entry is more convincingly [<sup>d</sup>ḫendur-sag-g]á than [<sup>d</sup>pa-bil-sag-g]á. Other new information brought by K 11197 is, first, the identification of Išum's father as the sun-god, in agreement with the Old Babylonian narrative fragment *CT* 15 6 vii 8' (quoted below) and the Sumerian Nanše hymn,

<sup>3</sup> Ed. R. L. Litke, *A Reconstruction of the Assyro-Babylonian God-Lists, AN: A-nu-um and AN: Anu šá amēli*. Texts from the Babylonian Collection 3 (New Haven, CT, 1998), 201.

<sup>4</sup> E.g., E. Reiner, "Plague amulets and house blessings," *JNES* 19 (1960): 151. The restoration is provisional; Lambert read <sup>d</sup>.min qū-[ud-ma]TAR (Folio 7270).

<sup>5</sup> E.g., M. Krebernik, "Pabilsag(a)," *RLA* 10 (2003–2004): 162.

in which Ḫendursanga is (l. 85) called dumu <sup>d</sup>utu-tu-da, "son born to Utu"; and second, the recovery of the third learned Sumerian name: <sup>d</sup>sila-a-gú-en-na, "Headman in the Street." As read here, the three names of Išum in *An VI* 17–19 flesh out the entries in the passage of the first-millennium god-list quoted immediately above: <sup>d</sup>PA, <sup>d</sup>SILA, and <sup>d</sup>NÍMGIR, but with the order adjusted to nimgir–PA–sila.

### Išum-Ḫendursanga as Night Watchman

As set out in *An VI* 17–20, Išum's learned names include, alongside Ḫendursanga, the epithet-names Nimgir-sila, "Herald of the Street," Silaa-guenna, "Headman in the Street," and řšul-gia-dudu, "Hero who Goes about at Night." These epithet-names accord with one of the main functions attributed to Išum and Ḫendursanga in Sumerian and Babylonian literary texts of the second and first millennia, particularly incantations and related texts. As most recently documented by L. Sassmannshausen,<sup>6</sup> P. Attinger and M. Krebernik,<sup>7</sup> and F. Weiershäuser,<sup>8</sup> these sources attribute various titles and epithets to Išum and Ḫendursanga. Among them the following are particularly relevant to the present purpose:

#### Ḫendursanga

nimgir-(gal) "(chief) herald" (Old Babylonian)<sup>9</sup>  
*ḫayyātu sūqi* "watchman of the street"  
izi-gar lú-u<sub>18</sub>-lu // *nūr niši* "lamp of the people"

#### Ḫendursanga // Išum

nimgir-gal maškim-maḫ // *nāgīru rabū rābišu šīru*  
"chief herald, high constable"  
nimgir sila (si-ga) // *nāgīru sūqi (ša-qummi)* "herald of the (silent) street"  
nimgir gi<sub>6</sub>-ù-na // *nāgīru mūši ša-qummi* "herald of the (silent) night"

<sup>6</sup> L. Sassmannshausen, "Funktion und Stellung der Herolde (nigir/nāgīru) im alten Orient," *Baghdader Mitteilungen* 26 (1995): 85–194, esp. 145–46.

<sup>7</sup> Attinger and Krebernik, "L'hymne à Ḫendursaga," 23–29.

<sup>8</sup> Weiershäuser, "Weiser Išum," 353–55.

<sup>9</sup> To attestations of Ḫendursanga as nimgir "herald" in Old Babylonian Sumerian incantations (Sassmannshausen, "Funktion und Stellung der Herolde": 186) add MS 3088 iv 2'–5' (miswritten ḫendur-BIL-gá), and MS 3056: 4; in both the key phrase sila si-ga "silent street" also occurs, with reference to the quiet of night, and in the former the night watchman's torch (iv 3': gi-izi!-lá) is mentioned. Both tablets will be published in A. R. George, *Mesopotamian Incantations and Related Texts in the Schoyen Collection* (forthcoming), as nos. 9 and 40. For the incantation *TIM* IX 74, addressed to Ḫendursanga in his function as nimgir, see below.

Išum

*sukkal sūqi* “minister of the street”

*nāgir ilī bēl sūqi* “herald of the gods, lord of the street”

*muttalliku* “walking about”

An additional first-millennium passage is Marduk’s Address to the Demons II 108, <sup>d</sup>̜endur-sag-gá *mut-t[āš-rab-bi-tu šá ri-ba-a-tú]*, “̜. who wanders the thoroughfares.”<sup>10</sup> Most eloquent in defining the gods’ role as benign watchmen are the first-millennium amulet-type tablets that invoke “Išum, herald of the gods, lord of the street,” to protect the house and its occupants as he goes about his rounds (*KAR* 35: 7–8, *KAR* 37: 1<sup>11</sup>). In brief, Išum-̜endursanga is “herald” (town-crier-*cum*-constable) and night watchman who patrols the streets.<sup>12</sup>

The last of Išum’s learned names in *An* VI, <sup>d</sup>šul-gi<sub>6</sub>-a-du-du, “Hero who Goes about at Night,” is an epithet attributed to ̜endursanga in an Old Babylonian catalogue of Sumerian literary incipits (*STVC* 41 rev. 10<sup>13</sup>): [<sup>d</sup>̜en]dur-sag šul gi<sub>6</sub>-a du-du. Hallo links this incipit with a Sumerian hymn to Nergal, *ISCT* I 71 Ni 9501 ii 1 (Nergal A): [. . . šu]l gi<sub>6</sub>-a du-du kur-kur bul-bul, “young hero who goes about at night, who makes the mountain lands quake.” As noted by Attinger and Krebernik, it could just as well be the lost incipit of the better-known hymn to ̜endursanga (on which see further below).<sup>14</sup>

The name Šul-gia-dudu encouraged a syncretism with the divine sentinel and night watchman <sup>d</sup>en-gi<sub>6</sub>-du-du, “Lord who Goes about at Night.” The syncretism is expressed in the Babylonian narrative poem

<sup>10</sup> W. G. Lambert, “An address of Marduk to the demons: New fragments,” *Afo* 19 (1959–60): 114–19, pls. 24–27, esp. 117 l. 21, restored from Lambert Folio 90 BM 46332: 4’.

<sup>11</sup> See S. M. Maul, *Zukunftsbewältigung. Eine Untersuchung altorientalischen Denkens anhand der babylonisch-assyrischen Löserituale (Namburbi)*. Baghdader Forschungen 18 (Mainz am Rhein, 1994), 177.

<sup>12</sup> The translation of *nimgir* // *nāgiru* as “herald” is conventional, even if misleading (Sassmannshausen, “Funktion und Stellung der Herolde”: 86). As Jacobsen noted (T. Jacobsen, “The Stele of the Vultures col. I–X,” in *Kramer Anniversary Volume*, ed. Eichler et al., 247–59, esp. 250 n. 10), one of the functions of a *nimgir* // *nāgiru* was to patrol the streets at night. Sassmannshausen’s rebuttal (“Funktion und Stellung der Herolde”: 146–47) seems ill-founded in the light of the several names and epithets that are attributed to the “heralds” ̜endursanga and Išum and allude very firmly to their nocturnal activities.

<sup>13</sup> Ed. W. W. Hallo, “Another Sumerian literary catalogue,” *Studia Orientalia* 46 (1975): 77–80, esp. 79.

<sup>14</sup> Attinger and Krebernik, “L’hymne à ̜endursağa,” 28.

Erra and Išum,<sup>15</sup> in which Išum’s role is to decry Erra’s random violence and to wage just war.<sup>16</sup> The poem’s opening invocation to Išum, which addresses him in his Sumerian name of ̜endursanga, clearly envisages him as a night watchman patrolling the streets:

<sup>d</sup>en-gi<sub>6</sub>-du-du bēlu(en) mut-<sup>r</sup>tal-lik’ mu-šī mut-tar-ru-u ru-bé-e  
šá eṭ-la u ar-da-tu ina šul-<sup>r</sup>mi’ i[ṭ-t]a-nar-ru-ú  
ú-nam-ma-ru kīma(gim) u<sub>4</sub>-mi

Erra and Išum I 21–22

O lord En-gi-dudu, who patrols at night,  
guiding the nobleman,  
who guides man and woman in safety, shining a  
light bright as day.

As is well known, the epithets of l. 21 arose from literal and speculative interpretations of Sumerian en-gi<sub>6</sub>-du-du.<sup>17</sup> The second line refers again to Išum’s role as night watchman, and introduces the idea that Išum was responsible for providing light in the dark. The Sumerian names Šul-gia-dudu and En-gi-dudu are both compounds of the phrase gi<sub>6</sub>-a-du-du, “going about at night.” This expression is translated in lexical texts by Akkadian *hā’iṭu*, literally “watcher” (*Lu* II 11, *Nabnītu* V 12). The place of the entry lú-gi<sub>6</sub>-a-du-du = *hā’iṭu* in the personnel list *Lu*, between the men in charge of locking up and the watch, indicates that, in the human world, it referred to a person with a specific role in the task of keeping guard at night, and the job title *hā’iṭum* does indeed occur in Old Babylonian documents, written lú-gi<sub>6</sub>-(a)-du-du.<sup>18</sup> Accordingly,

<sup>15</sup> L. Cagni, *L’epopea di Erra*. Studi semitici 34 (Rome, 1969).

<sup>16</sup> A. R. George, “The poem of Erra and Ishum: A Babylonian poet’s view of war,” in *Warfare and Poetry in the Middle East*, ed. H. Kennedy (London, 2013), 39–71; online at: <http://eprints.soas.ac.uk/17171/>.

<sup>17</sup> See further J. Bottéro, “Antiquités assyro-babyloniennes,” *Annuaire de l’École Pratique des Hautes Études, IV<sup>e</sup> Section, sciences historiques et philologiques* 1977–1978: 107–64, esp. 113–14 n. 5, 160 (reprinted as: “Le poème d’Erra. Les infortunes de Babylone et sa résurrection expliquées,” in J. Bottéro, *Mythes et rites de Babylone* [Paris, 1985]); S. Tinney, “<sup>d</sup>en-gi<sub>6</sub>-du-du: *muttaru rubé*, a note on Erra I 21,” *Nouvelles assyriologiques brèves et utilitaires* (1989): 2–4 no. 3; S. B. Noegel, “‘Wordplay’ in the Song of Erra,” in *Strings and Threads: A Celebration of the Work of Anne Draffkorn Kilmer*, ed. W. Heimpel and G. Frantz-Szabó (Winona Lake, IN, 2011), 161–93, esp. 171–72.

<sup>18</sup> See references collected in *AHW* s.v. Note further an entry in the first-millennium compendium of oneiromantic omens that reports a dream of being a night watchman, using the abstract noun derived from *hā’iṭu* (A. L. Oppenheim, *The Interpretation of Dreams in the Ancient Near East with a Translation of an Assyrian Dream-Book*. Transactions of the American Philosophical Society

the gods Šul-gia-dudu and En-gi-dudu were night watchmen. For this reason, En-gi-dudu was adopted as the divine sentinel of Aššur, and his statue guarded the city's Tabira Gate, as listed in the *Götteradressbuch* of that city.<sup>19</sup> His name was rendered <sup>4</sup>*ki-du-du* in an inscription of king Shalmaneser III,<sup>20</sup> which incidentally discloses that the first-millennium pronunciation of DU.DU in this name was *dudu*.

### Išum as Fire

Earlier in the poem of Erra and Išum, Erra's heart explicitly identifies Išum as *diparu*, "a firebrand," that the gods follow into battle (I 10).<sup>21</sup> From this it follows that the light which the night watchmen Išum and Ḫendursanga shone to lead people home at night was a burning torch or firebrand.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, it seems likely that Išum's divine power was instantiated in the fiery glow of the torch, and that his name was indeed the masculine form of the Akkadian common noun *išātum*, "fire."<sup>23</sup>

The conclusion of Erra and Išum has something more to say about Išum and illumination in the dark. It will be recalled that the poem makes the claim that it was revealed to Kabti-ilāni-Marduk in a nocturnal vision:

*ka-šir kam-me-šú<sup>m</sup> kab-ti-ilāni(dingir)<sup>meš</sup> dmar-duk māṛ(dumu) da-bi-bi*

n.s. 46/3 [Philadelphia, PA, 1956], 308 III 8): *ḫā'itūta(gi-du-du)<sup>mm</sup> ipuš(dù)<sup>id</sup>*.

<sup>19</sup> A. R. George, *Babylonian Topographical Texts*. Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 40 (Leuven, 1992), 176 l. 135.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 459; A. K. Grayson, *Assyrian Rulers of the Early First Millennium BC 2 (858–745 BC)*. Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Assyrian Periods 3 (Toronto, 1996), 98–99 ll. 32, 39.

<sup>21</sup> On the identities of speaker and addressee, see G. G. W. Müller, "Wer spricht? Bemerkungen zu 'Išum und Erra,'" in *Vom alten Orient zum Alten Testament: Festschrift für Wolfram Freiherrn von Soden zum 85. Geburtstag*, ed. M. Dietrich and O. Loretz. Alter Orient und Altes Testament 240 (Kevelaer, 1995), 349–60, esp. 351; and George, "The poem of Erra and Išum," 51–52.

<sup>22</sup> For Ḫendursanga's association with gi-izi-lá, "torch," see MS 3088 iv 3' (quoted above, n. 9) and compare ll. 16–17 of the Ḫendursanga hymn, discussed below.

<sup>23</sup> See now Attinger and Krebernik, "L'hymne à Ḫendursaga," 22–23. An attempt to associate Išum with the hearth, and consequent identification of him as *il bītim* "house god" (J. Scurlock, "Ancient Mesopotamian house gods," *JANER* 3 [2003]: 99–106, esp. 103–104, 106), contradict the certain fact that Išum operated in the street and thus protected households from without, not from within.

*ina šat mu-ši ú-šab-ri-šú-ma ki-i šá ina mu-na-at-ti id-bu-bu  
a-a-am-ma ul iḫ-ṭi e-da šu-ma ul ú-rad-di a-na muḫ-ḫi*

Erra and Išum V 42–44, line division according to BM 55363<sup>24</sup>

The compiler of its text was Kabti-ilāni-Marduk, son of Dābibu:

he revealed it to him in a nocturnal vision and, just as he declaimed it while wakeful, so he left nothing out, he added to it not a single line.

The line (V 43) that describes the process of the text's delivery has no explicit subjects. My translation follows the general consensus, that Išum was the agent who caused Kabti-ilāni-Marduk to receive the poem (lit. *ušabrīšūma*, "he caused him to see"), and that the latter woke up with the words already on his lips (*idbubu*, "he declaimed") and then set them down in writing without error (V 44). A similar passage that concludes another Babylonian mythological narrative poem also employs the second verb, *idbubu*, to describe the recitation by a human agent of a divinely revealed text (*Enūma eliš* VII 157<sup>25</sup>). Until now no compelling reason has been put forward for accepting Išum as the subject of the first verb in V 43, *ušabrīšūma*, however much it may seem appropriate that he was the author of Kabti-ilāni-Marduk's dream and thus of the poem itself.

Close reading suggests that confirmation of Išum as subject of *ušabrīšūma* lies in the temporal phrase that qualifies *idbubu*. The phrase in question contains the word *munattu*, "waking period," a term often associated with dreams and divine revelation in Babylonian literature.<sup>26</sup> This period of wakefulness or drowsing—the term is derived from a Semitic root meaning sleep (*nwm*)—was not necessarily at the end of the night; it could have been in the middle. The pattern of continuous sleep that in modern times is considered normal and desirable has not always applied. Roger Ekirch's study of nocturnal human activity in medieval and early modern Europe, *At Day's Close: A History of Nighttime*, reveals that it was common in days

<sup>24</sup> W. G. Lambert, "New fragments of Babylonian epics," *AfO* 27 (1980): 71–82, esp. 80.

<sup>25</sup> Ed. W. G. Lambert, *Babylonian Creation Myths*. Mesopotamian Civilizations 16 (Winona Lake, IN, 2013), 132.

<sup>26</sup> Oppenheim, *Interpretation of Dreams*, 225.

before artificial lighting and nighttime entertainment for people to sleep in segments.<sup>27</sup> “First sleep” and “second sleep” were interrupted by a period during which people might drowse in bed or get up to pursue nocturnal activities.

This period is a *munattu*. The point is that, if Kabti-ilāni-Marduk awoke with the poem in his head *ina munatti*, and wrote it down immediately, he was probably working at night. It would be impossible to write well in the dark, so we may presume that he illuminated the night by using an oil-lamp (*nūru*) or torch (*diparu*). As noted above, the opening invocation of Erra and Išum (I 21–22) celebrated the fire god Išum as “Engidudu, who patrols at night, . . . shining a light bright as day.” Thus Išum himself illuminates the night with his flame. In this way it was indeed he who enabled Kabti-ilāni-Marduk to see the poem—literally. The conventional view, that Išum must be the subject of *uṣabrišūma*, “he caused him to see,” in V 43, is thus substantiated and, from the image of the author working in the god’s aura, the passage gains a deeper meaning.

### How ̒endursanga Came to be Night Watchman

As is clear from the first of the two passages of Erra and Išum quoted above, it was the task of the night watchman to provide a light for people to follow in the dark. In this connection, it is productive to turn to the literary composition that has most to say about Išum’s Sumerian counterpart, the hymn to ̒endursanga.<sup>28</sup>

The opening of the hymn, which dwells on this god’s attributes and functions, is damaged but nevertheless revealing. One passage makes it clear that his functions included patrolling the streets at night and opening the city gates at dawn (ll. 10–11).<sup>29</sup> Other literary texts agree.<sup>30</sup> The following lines of the hymn, 13–17, seem to describe how he came by this duty. They begin by invoking ̒endursanga as “[lord] of

Sirara,” who controls the wide earth.<sup>31</sup> ̒endursanga is thus placed in the role of *nimgir*, “herald,” of Nanše, the patron deity of Sirara, a position that is also his in the Nanše hymn.<sup>32</sup> The passage then reports that the goddess Nanše’s steward Enniglulu stands at his beck and call, and Nanše herself takes his advice.<sup>33</sup> In l. 16, a staff of office, *gidru giš-ḥur-ra-bi*, “its staff of regulation,” is the object of *ki-sikil-la bí-in-mú*, translated by Edzard and Wilcke as “hat sie an reiner Stelle wachsen lassen,” and by Attinger and Krebernik as “a fait croître en un lieu pur.” If we can understand this “staff” as figurative for ̒endursanga’s torch, the line describes how Nanše procured this instrument and gave it to him as his official insignia. The verb *mú*, “to grow,” was sometimes translated by Babylonian scholars as *napāḥu*, “to kindle,” and this equivalence is lexicalized in word lists as *mú* = *napāḥu*, but the usage seems to be limited to the rising of celestial bodies, which “grow” in Sumerian but “catch light” in Akkadian. It would be going beyond the evidence to translate *bí-in-mú* in ̒endursanga A 16 as “she kindled.”

What follows in l. 17 more plausibly relates to fire. The line describes how ̒endursanga then looked, once equipped with his staff and on patrol in the “silent streets,” i.e., at night. The first sign is damaged but, since the first trace preserved after the break is a vertical wedge,<sup>34</sup> one can restore the line to read: *[iz]i-zu sila-si-ga ḫ-la-aš ḫiḫ im-dù*, “she watched your flame, raised aloft in the silent streets.” As I see it, ̒endursanga’s staff is now alight and ready for use as a torch. In this reading, the passage explains how Nanše gave ̒endursanga his job of torch-bearing

<sup>27</sup> U. Gabbay and C. Wilcke, “The bilingual Gudea inscription CUSAS 17, 22: New readings and interpretations,” *Nouvelles assyriologiques brèves et utiles* (2012): 98–99 no. 71, esp. 98.

<sup>28</sup> W. Heimpel, “The Nanshe hymn,” *JCS* 33 (1981): 65–139.

<sup>29</sup> Read in l. 13: [<sup>d</sup>en-níg-lu]-lu agrig-maḫ <sup>d</sup>nanše šu-za im-ma-gu[b], “[E.], Nanše’s chief steward, waits at your disposal.” The steward’s name is restored from the god-list *An* III 63, as read from *Uruk* III 107: 63: <sup>d</sup>en-níg-lu-lu-a = <sup>d</sup>agrig-maḫ <sup>d</sup>nanše-ke<sub>4</sub> // BM 42337 i 63 (Lambert Folio 1707): [. . .]-lu-lu <sup>d</sup>agrig-maḫ <sup>d</sup>nanše-ke<sub>4</sub> // CT 24 48 ii 10: <sup>d</sup>en-ša-lu-lu = <sup>d</sup>agrig-maḫ <sup>d</sup>x<sup>1</sup>-ke<sub>4</sub>. A steward produced *níg-lu-lu*-(a) by good management of the estate’s livestock: see the litany *SBH* 120 no. 68 rev. 11–13 (ed. M. E. Cohen, *The Canonical Lamentations of Ancient Mesopotamia*. 2 vols. [Potomac, MD, 1988], 435), which laments the destruction of *tùr*, “cattle-pen,” *amaš*, “sheep-fold,” and *níg<sup>1</sup>-lu-lu-a-bi*, “their teeming population” (*PSD* B 157: “its numerous [animals]”).

<sup>30</sup> Edzard and Wilcke, “Die ̒endursanga-Hymne,” 174, copy of MS B; photo Attinger and Krebernik, “L’hymne à ̒endursanga,” 96.

<sup>27</sup> A. R. Ekirch, *At Day’s Close: Night in Times Past* (New York, 2005), 300–311.

<sup>28</sup> Edzard and Wilcke, “Die ̒endursanga-Hymne”; ETCSL 4.06.1, ̒endursanga A; Attinger and Krebernik, “L’hymne à ̒endursanga.”

<sup>29</sup> Ed. Attinger and Krebernik, “L’hymne à ̒endursanga,” 37.

<sup>30</sup> The “Fable of the Fox” implies that locking and unlocking the city gates was controlled by the *nāḡir āli*, “town herald” (passage quoted by Sassmannshausen, “Funktion und Stellung der Herolde”: 145), and Išum is in charge of gates in the menology *KAV* 218 A iii 14, 20, ed. G. Çaḡırgan, “Three more duplicates to Astrolabe B,” *Bellesten* 48 (1984): 400–416, esp. 407.

night watchman, and serves as a mythological aetiology of this method of street-lighting.

Here one might raise again the issue of the etymology of the name *Ḫendursanga*, last discussed by Attinger and Krebernik.<sup>35</sup> They translate “*ḫa/endur de la tête*,” and “[*celui*] du *ḫa/endur supérieur/premier/principal*,” but can find no good meaning for the name’s first element. As they noted, A. Falkenstein proposed that this first element meant “staff,” in accordance with its logographic writing PA, “stick,” and following the ancient understanding witnessed by the epithet *nāš ḫaṭṭi širti*, “who bears an august staff,” derived from *Ḫendursanga*’s name in Erra and Išum I 3.<sup>36</sup> The Sumerian word *ḫendur* occurs only in this name, and *ḫa/endurum* in Akkadian offers nothing useful. As a deified staff, the late Akkadian word *ḫutāru* (or *ḫuttāru?*), however, may be related. It shares an equivalence with Sumerian *pa* (Sa N 9’: [pa<sup>a</sup>-p]a = *ḫu-ṭa-a-ru*), has a similar consonantal profile, and is semantically suitable. It seems likely that *Ḫendursanga*’s name derives from his function, as Falkenstein proposed: torch-bearer (*ḫendur*, “staff”) who goes in front (*sag-gá*, “of the head”). It then joins other names deriving from deified insignia.<sup>37</sup>

The lighting of the night watchman’s torch and its function are again referred to in a later, less damaged passage of the hymn to *Ḫendursanga*:

lú-ùlu gi-(izi)-lá izi ù-bí-in-dab<sub>5</sub> šu-na  
 ù-mu-ni-[íl]  
 mu <sup>d</sup>ḫendur<sup>1</sup>-sag-gá-ke<sub>4</sub> um-mi-in-pà[d]  
 sila si-[ga] gi<sub>6</sub>-ù-na-ka si-sá-bi mi-ni-díb-[bé]  
 N 4181 rev. 8–10<sup>38</sup>

Having set light to a torch and [lifted it] in his hand,  
 having invoked the name of *Ḫendursanga*,  
 a person passes with ease along the silent streets  
 of nighttime.

Here it seems that *Ḫendursanga*’s human counterpart, the night watchman, or perhaps any person out

at night, calls on the divine patron of the torch for protection and is thus assured safe and unhindered passage through the streets. Invoking the god’s name signifies that Babylonian night watchmen customarily uttered a few words to him on setting out. Perhaps it was a spell for safe passage. One such spell, clearly alluding to *Ḫendursanga*’s role in illuminating the street at night, is an Old Babylonian incantation that was published in cuneiform nearly forty years ago but seems not to have been edited yet (*TIMIX* 74 obv.<sup>39</sup>). It may be useful to give the full text here:

1 ‘x x x’ <sup>d</sup>r-en-ki’ me-en  
 2 [ni]mgir me-en <sup>d</sup>ḫendur-sag-gá me-en  
 3 en me-en<sup>40</sup> sa<sub>7</sub>-ga me-en i-duḫ<sup>41</sup> an-na me-en  
 4 u<sub>4</sub>-sakar-re iti<sub>6</sub><sup>42</sup>  
 5 e-sír-ra ḫa-ba-ab-šub  
 6 ‘e’-sír-ra gír-mu-šè ki ḫa!-ba-ni-si<sup>43</sup>  
 7 [d<sup>u</sup>]dug-ḫul <sup>d</sup>lamma-ḫul  
 8 [gal<sub>5</sub>]-lá-ḫul maškim-ḫul  
 9 [gì]r-mu-šè na-an-gil  
 10 [egi]r?-mu-šè ḫé-éb-ta-gi<sub>4</sub>  
 11 [bar-š]è ḫé-eb-ta-gub  
 12 [z]i an-na ḫé-pad zi ki-a ḫé-pad  
 13 [k]a-inim-ma níg<sup>44</sup> sila DU.DU

You are the . . . (of) Enki, you are the herald,  
 you are *Ḫendursanga*, you are the lord with the  
 lovely tiara, you are the doorkeeper of heaven! May  
 the lunar crescent cast moonlight on the street,  
 may it make the ground in the street easy for my  
 footfall! May not evil *udug*, evil *lamma*, evil *galla*,  
 or evil *maškim*-demon obstruct my footfall! May  
 it turn back [behind] me! May it stand aside! Be  
 adjured by Sky, be adjured by Earth!  
 Incantation for a person going along a street.

In this incantation *Ḫendursanga*’s function as torch-bearer is not made explicit. Instead, he sees to it that the moon casts enough light on the ground for safe passage along the street. Thus he lights the way by enlisting a celestial proxy. Perhaps that explains the epi-

<sup>35</sup> Attinger and Krebernik, “L’hymne à *Ḫendursaga*,” 22.

<sup>36</sup> See now George, “The poem of Erra and Išum,” 66 n. 7.

<sup>37</sup> See G. J. Selz, “The holy drum, the spear, and the harp’: Towards an understanding of the problems of deification in third millennium Mesopotamia,” in *Sumerian Gods and their Representations*, ed. I. L. Finkel and M. J. Geller. Cuneiform Monographs 7 (Groningen, 1997), 167–213, esp. 171.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Edzard and Wilcke, “Die *Ḫendursanga*-Hymne,” 146 ll. 43–45; Attinger and Krebernik, “L’hymne à *Ḫendursaga*,” 39 ll. 41–43.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. G. Cunningham, “*Deliver Me from Evil!*”: *Mesopotamian Incantations 2500–1500 BC*. Studia Pohl s.m. 17 (Rome, 1997), 140 no. 194.

<sup>40</sup> Phonetic for men.

<sup>41</sup> i-duḫ for ì-duḫ.

<sup>42</sup> Tablet: UD.<sup>d</sup>rŠEŠ<sup>1</sup>.KI!-ti; for /iti/ “moonlight” written UD.<sup>d</sup>NANNA, see Å. W. Sjöberg, *The Collection of the Sumerian Temple Hymns*, with E. Bergmann. Texts from Cuneiform Sources 3 (Locust Valley, NY, 1969), 71–72.

<sup>43</sup> ḫa-ba-ni-si is defective late Sumerian for si ḫa-ba-ni-sá.

<sup>44</sup> Late Sumerian, níg = ša = lú.

thet “doorkeeper of heaven,” used of him only here.<sup>45</sup> The allusion of the epithet *en me-en sa<sub>7</sub>-ga* is more certain: “the lovely tiara” that ̜endursanga wears is certainly the flame of the night watchman’s torch.

### Why Išum was Left in the Street

Further evidence to associate Išum with fire in general, and street-lighting in particular, can be adduced from a fragment of Old Babylonian poetry (*CT* 15 5–6<sup>46</sup>). One passage of this poem reports the origin and function of Išum, and is thus a partial analogue of ̜endursanga A 14–17. The scene takes place in Enlil’s temple at Nippur, where the goddess Ištar has apparently brought her nephew Išum, whose nurse she either is, or is expected to be:

[*ki-m*]a ta-ri-i-tim it-ta-na-al-la-ak qè-er-  
bu-um é-kur  
a-na-ku a-̜i te-ri-a-ku a-̜i ša a-na a-̜i-ia  
wa-al-du  
<sup>d</sup>en-líl pa-a-šu i-pu-ša-am-ma  
is-sà-aq-qá-ar a-na la-ba-tim <sup>d</sup>ištar(inanna)  
a-a-ia-am a-̜a-ki ta-ri-a-at a-̜a-ki ša a-na  
a-̜i-i-ki wa-al-du  
<sup>d</sup>i-ša-am <sup>d</sup>nin-líl a-na <sup>d</sup>šamaš(utu) ú-li-id-ma  
uš-ta-̜i-iz-ma i-na šu-li-i-im i-zi-ib-šu  
CT 15 6 vii 3’–9’

[Like] a foster-nurse she was walking back and forth inside E-kur.

“Am I to foster my brother, my brother who was born to my brother?”

Enlil opened his mouth, saying to the lioness Ištar:

“What brother will you foster, your brother who was born to your brother?”

“Išum! Ninlil bore him for Šamaš, *uštā̜iz* and left him in the street!”

This passage reveals two important facts about Išum. As many have pointed out, the first line identifies his parents as the sun-god Šamaš and the goddess Ninlil (or Mulliltu). Since Šamaš was Ninlil’s grand-

son, this was an irregular connection, and it made Išum at once son and great-grandson of Enlil’s spouse Ninlil. For the present discussion, it is significant that Išum was a product of the fire in the sky, a little bit of sun on earth.

The second fact is that his mother Ninlil, having borne him, “*uštā̜iz* and left him in the street.” The derivation of *uštā̜iz* in this line is clearly from *šutā̜uz*, but its interpretation has caused difficulties. W. H. Ph. Römer (“schwierig”<sup>47</sup>) was undecided between the differing opinions of the leading dictionaries (*CAD* A 183 *ahāzu* 10a, “she was induced [by someone] to abandon him in the street,” versus *AHW*. 19 *ahāzu*[*m*] Št. lex. 2 “etwa: sie wurde verheiratet”). Subsequent commentators on Išum have not progressed further (Edzard and Wilcke: “umstritten”; Weiershäuser: “als Ninlil verheiratet wurde”<sup>48</sup>), though both Römer and Weiershäuser saw the connection between this passage, in which Išum’s mother leaves him in the street, and his function as “herald of the street” in exorcistic texts.

In fact, the line under comment has nothing to do with inducement nor with any wedding. A breakthrough in understanding was achieved by the editors of the Sumerian hymn to ̜endursanga, who quoted the passage and translated the verb *uštā̜iz*, with some reservation, as “fut enflammée(?)”<sup>49</sup> citing Michael Streck’s note on *šutā̜uz*, “to set alight,” in his study of the Akkadian Š<sub>2</sub> stem.<sup>50</sup> This *šutā̜uz* is the active mood of *nan̜uz*, “to catch fire,” treated in the lexical text *Nabnītu* III 272–73, where Sumerian [izi]–lal and [izi]–lál, “to set on fire” = *šu-ta-̜u-zu šá išātī*(izi). Given that Išum was associated with fire, there is no need for any reservation in translating *uštā̜iz*. What Ninlil did, having given birth to Išum, was to set him alight. The two lines are to be translated, “Ninlil bore Išum for Šamaš, then set (him alight) and left him in the street.”

There is an obvious allusion here to the practice of abandoning unwanted babies in public places: in this regard, Išum was a foundling, even though it was his aunt who ended up looking after him.<sup>51</sup> But

<sup>45</sup> An anonymous reviewer had a superior explanation: “The epithet . . . may refer to the end of Išum’s ‘shift’ as watcher of the night, when the watchman opens the gates of the city which were shut during the night; cosmically, Išum opens the gates of the sky for sunrise (and then he himself is dimmed by the sunlight).”

<sup>46</sup> Ed. W. H. Ph. Römer, “Studien zu altbabylonischen hymnisch-epischen Texten (2). Ein Lied über die Jugendjahre der Götter Šin und Išum (*CT* 15, 5–6),” *JAOS* 86 (1966): 38–47.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

<sup>48</sup> Edzard and Wilcke, “Die ̜endursanga-Hymne,” 142; Weiershäuser, “Weiser Išum,” 371.

<sup>49</sup> Attinger and Krebernik, “Lhymne à ̜endursaga,” 30.

<sup>50</sup> M. P. Streck, “Funktionsanalyse des akkadischen Š<sub>2</sub>-Stamms,” *ZA* 84 (1994): 161–67, esp. 166.

<sup>51</sup> On foundlings in ancient Mesopotamia, see C. Wunsch, “Findelkinder und Adoption nach neubabylonischen Quellen,” *AfO* 50

the point here is that the fiery Išum was left in the street *as a flame*. Attinger and Krebernik took this circumstance to allude to Išum's functions as herald and watchman,<sup>52</sup> but I would propose that the phrase "left in the street" might better describe a stationary fixture rather than a perambulating night watchman's torch. This raises the prospect that Babylonian night watchmen not only carried lights as they walked, but also that they or other parties left lamps to light the paths of those out late at night. Accordingly, this Old Babylonian fragment provides another mythological aetiology of street-lighting, this time perhaps specifically of fixed street-lamps.

It is then possible to explain why Ištar, the sun's sister, appears in the myth as Išum's nurse. She calls her nephew "brother," and so is herself cast in this scene as an unmarried girl. According to all mythology, Ištar was not at any age temperamentally disposed to care for a baby. Her words in the passage quoted may accordingly carry a tone of adolescent resentment. However, celestial Ištar was the planet Venus, which appears either at dusk as the Evening Star or at dawn as the Morning Star. When the stars come out, it is as if lamps are lit in the sky, and there is none brighter than the Evening Star. It would then be fully plausible if the Babylonian mytho-poetic imagination gave Ištar a role in nurturing, as terrestrial equivalents of the stars, flickering lamps that illuminated the darkening streets.

## Conclusion

These two passages of ancient Mesopotamian poetry, *Ḫendursanga A 14–17* and *CT 15 6 vii 8'–9'*, are interpreted here as making allusion to different forms of street-lighting. They provide evidence for the existence in ancient Mesopotamia of a social benefit to city-dwellers that is better known in more recent times. Much comparative evidence is collected by Ekirch in his history of nighttime.<sup>53</sup> Counterparts of the Babylonian *ḫā'itum* were instituted in England by the Statute of Winchester in 1285, which decreed that night watchmen were to police urban streets in a regular patrols.<sup>54</sup> Street lighting in London began

(2003–2004): 174–244, esp. 176–77, with further bibliography; and the legal studybook *Ana ittišu* III iii 28–37. The foundling whom destiny contrives to be nursed by a close relative is perhaps a folklore motif: cf. Moses.

<sup>52</sup> Attinger and Krebernik, "L'hymne à Ḫendursaga," 30 n. 12.

<sup>53</sup> Ekirch, *At Day's Close*.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

long before the advent of gas lamps in 1807. Municipal oil lamps first appeared by Act of Parliament in 1736,<sup>55</sup> but the practice of lighting public thoroughfares was already ancient, even then. From the early fifteenth century households fronting London's main streets were required to hang out lanterns on winter evenings.<sup>56</sup> Paris followed suit in 1461. This is perhaps the model to be proposed for street-lighting in Babylonian cities: a local responsibility, rather than a municipal service, provided at the expense of the residents, not of any public administration.

Street-lighting is unlikely to show up in the archaeological legacy of urban Mesopotamia or to have made much impact on the administrative record. People who are explicitly identified as street night watchmen rarely occur in the extant administrative documentation,<sup>57</sup> unlike the personnel who saw to the security of palaces, temples and city gates.<sup>58</sup> Much that must have gone on in local communities was unimportant to the accountants of the great institutions and only comes to notice in literary and academic texts. Thanks to references in hymns, narrative poems and incantations, we can picture the Babylonian night watchman on his rounds after dusk, bearing aloft a burning torch and perhaps even tending the flames of oil-lamps left out by conscientious householders in the more respectable neighborhoods.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 330.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>57</sup> On *ḫā'itum*, "night watchman," in Old Babylonian documents, see above, n. 18. A specific Akkadian term for "lamplighter" has been identified in the expression *šārip nūri* (*CAD N/2 350a*), which occurs in the apodosis of a liver-omen that compares part of the liver to the sign *kud* (E. Frahm, "Reading the tablet, the exta, and the body: The hermeneutics of cuneiform signs in Babylonian and Assyrian text commentaries and divinatory texts," in *Divination and Interpretation of Signs in the Ancient World*, ed. A. Annus. Oriental Institute Seminars 6 [Chicago, 2010], 93–136, esp. 106 no. 25): <sup>duš</sup>*diqar*(útu) *naṭ-tan šarrū*(lugal) *ibḫeppe*(gaz)<sup>pe</sup> *ša-ri-ip nu-ri i-š nar?*<sup>7</sup> *-ru-uṭ ú-lu kasú*(gú-zi) *ina qātī*(šu)<sup>min</sup> *šāqī*(šu!<sup>!</sup> sila!<sup>!</sup> gab) *i-tar-ru-ur*, "a dish for the king's meal will shatter, the *šārip nūri* will quiver, or a cup will shake in the cupbearer's hand." The dish and cup in this apodosis are inanimate objects that spontaneously do things of ominous significance, and one wonders whether *šārip nūri*, lit. "burner of the lamp," is a term for the lamp's wick (normally *bušinnu*), rather than a functionary. However that may be, this context is evidently the palace and not the street.

<sup>58</sup> E.g., K. Radner, "Gatekeepers and lock masters: The control of access in Assyrian palaces," in *Your Praise is Sweet. A Memorial Volume for Jeremy Black*, ed. H. D. Baker, E. Robson and G. Zólyomi (London, 2010).