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. 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 equation 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 Diṭi Nippur 10: 10–11, the later Weidner god-list (KAV 63 iv 24 and dupls.), and Aa 1/7 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however, is furnished by a fragmentary three-column list known from the library of the temple of Nabû at Nimrud, and an unpublished Late Babylonian fragment documented by copy and transliteration in the Nachlass of the late W. G. Lambert (Folios 1693, 7522).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′

\[\text{ṭe-en-\-d} \quad [^4\text{PA} . . .]
\]

\[\text{i-\-šum} \quad [^4\text{PA} . . .]
\]

\[\text{MIN} \quad [^6\text{SILA} . . .]
\]

\[\text{MIN} \quad [^6\text{NIMGIR} . . .]
\]

\[\text{ṭa-ra} \quad [^4\text{GUD?} . . .]
\]

\[\text{nin-mu-\-u[g]} \quad [^4\text{nin-mug} . . .]
\]

BM 47009: 11′–15′

\[\text{ṭe-\-e\-n-\-d} \quad [^4\text{PA} . . .]
\]

\[\text{ṭi-\-šum} \quad [^4\text{PA} . . .]
\]

\[\text{KI.MIN} \quad [^6\text{SILA} . . .]
\]

* 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).


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:

\[ d-i-\text{šum} = \text{sukkal-bi dumu } d-\text{utu-ke}_4 \]
\[ d-mm\text{-[nimgir]}-sila = \text{MIN} \]
\[ d-pa\text{-[b[il]]}-sag = \text{MIN} \]
\[ d-sila\text{-a-gú-en-na} = \text{MIN} \]
\[ d-sul\text{-g}i\text{-}a\text{-du\text{-}du} = \text{MIN} \]
\[ d-nin\text{-mug} = \text{dam\text{-}bi\text{-}munus} \]

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

\[ d-pa, d-sila, \text{ and } d-nimgir, \text{ but with the order adjusted to nimgir–pa–sila.} \]

Išum-Ḥendursanga as Night Watchman

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

Ḥendursanga

nimgir-(gal) “(chief) herald” (Old Babylonian)⁹ ḫayyāṭu sūqi “watchman of the street” izi-gar lú-ú₄₁₈₄₄ // nīr niš “lamp of the people” Ḥendursanga // Išum

nimgir-gal maškim-maḥ // nāgiru rabû rābišu ṣīru “chief herald, high constable” nimgir sīqi (ṣaqummi) “herald of the (silent) street” nimgir gi₄-u-na // nāgir mūši ṣaqummi “herald of the (silent) night”

⁹ 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-sag-ğ), and MS 3056: 4; in both the key phrase sila si-ga “lamp of the people” and the (silent) night” is mentioned. Both tablets will be published in A. R. George, Mesopotamian Incantations and Related Texts in the Schøyen Collection (forthcoming), as nos. 9 and 40. For the incantation TIM IX 74, addressed to Ḫendursanga in his function as nimgir, see below.

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⁴ E.g., E. Reiner, “Plague amulets and house blessings,” JNES 19 (1960): 151. The restoration is provisional; Lambert read \[ d-mm\text{-[nimgir]} \] (Folio 7270).
Išum

$sukkal\ suqi$ “minister of the street”

$nāgir\ ili\ bēl\ suqi$ “herald of the gods, lord of the street”

$muttalikum$ “walking about”

An additional first-millennium passage is Marduk’s Address to the Demons II 108, $\text{ḫe}ndur-sag-gá\ nāgir\ aš-rab-bi-tu\ ša\ ri-ba-a-tu$ “H., who wanders the thoroughfares.” 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 ($KAR\ 35:7–8$, $KAR\ 37:1$). In brief, Išum-Ḫendursanga is “herald” (town-crier-$cum$-constable) and night watchman who patrols the streets.12

The last of Išum’s learned names in $An\ VI$, $šul\ gi₇-a\ du-du$, “Hero who Goes about at Night,” is an epithet attributed to Ḫendursanga and Išum and allude very firmly to their nocturnal activities.

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

$\text{en-gi₇-du-du\ bēlu\(en\)\ mut₅-tal-lik\ mu₄-si\ mut-tar-ru-u\ ru-bē-e\ ša\ et-la\ u\ ar-da-tu\ ina\ šul₄\ mi\ il-r₃ a-nar-ru-ú\ u-nam-ma-ru\ kima\(gim\)\ u₄-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-gi₇-du-du.17 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 gi₇-a-du-du, “going about at night.” This expression is translated in lexical texts by Akkadian ḫā’ītu, literally “watcher” ($Lu\ II\ 11$, $Nabnītu\ V\ 12$). The place of the entry lū-gi₇-a-du-du = ḫā’ītu 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 ḫā’ītu does indeed occur in Old Babylonian documents, written lū-gi₇-(a)-du-du.18 Accordingly,


12 The translation of nimir / nāgir 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 nimir / nāgir 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” Ḫendursanga and Išum and allude very firmly to their nocturnal activities.


15 See references collected in $AHw$ ss. Note further an entry in the first-millennium compendium of oneromantic omens that reports a dream of being a night watchman, using the abstract noun derived from ḫā’ītu (A. L. Oppenheim, The Interpretation of Dreams in the Ancient Near East with a Translation of an Assyrian Dream-Book. Translations of the American Philosophical Society
the gods Šul-gia-du-du and En-gi-du-du were night watchmen. For this reason, En-gi-du-du 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. His name was rendered ʾki-du-du in an inscription of king Shalmaneser III, which incidentally discloses that the first-millennium pronunciation of DU.DU in this name was ḫudu.22

Išum as Fire

Earlier in the poem of Erra and Išum, Erra’s heart explicitly identifies Išum as ḫiri, “a firebrand,” that the gods follow into battle (I 10). From this it follows that the light which the night watchmen Išum and Ḥendursanga shone to lead people home at night was a burning torch or firebrand. 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 ʾisātum, “fire.”23

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-ṣir kam-me-šu ʾkab-ti-ilāni(dingir)i-ši ʾmar-duk mar(duму) ʾda-bi-bi

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. ʾušabrīšu, “he caused him to see”), and that the latter woke up with the words already on his lips (ʾidbubu, “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, ʾidbubu, to describe the recitation by a human agent of a divinely revealed text (Enûma eliš VII 157). Until now no compelling reason has been put forward for accepting Išum as the subject of the first verb in V 43, ʾušabrīšu, 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 ʾušabrīšu lies in the temporal phrase that qualifies ʾidbubu. The phrase in question contains the word nunattu, “waking period,” a term often associated with dreams and divine revelation in Babylonian literature. 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
before artificial lighting and nighttime entertainment for people to sleep in segments.27 “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-ilâni-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 (nûru) or torch (diпарu). As noted above, the opening invocation of Erra and Išum quoted above, it was the task of the night lent streets,” i.e., at night. The first sign is damaged but, since the first trace preserved after the break is once equipped with his staff and on patrol in the “si- lent streets,” i.e., at night. The first sign is damaged but, since the first trace preserved after the break is.

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).29 Other literary texts agree.30 The following lines of the hymn, 13–17, seem to describe how he came by this duty. They begin by invoking Ḫendursanga as “[lord] of the poet’s aura, the passage gains a deeper meaning.

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What follows in l. 17 more plausibly relates to fire. The line describes how Ḫendursanga 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,34 one can restore the line to read: [iz]-zu sila-si-ga il-la-aš ‘igi im-dù⸣, “she watched your flame, raised aloft in the silent streets.” As I see it, Ḫendursanga’s staff is now alight and ready for use as a torch. In this reading, the passage explains how Nanše gave Ḫendursanga his job of torch-bearing

28 Edzard and Wilcke, “Die Ḫendursanga-Hymne”; ETCSL 4.06.1, Ḫendursanga A; Attinger and Krebernik, “L’hymne à Ḫendursanga.”
29 Edzard and Wilcke, “Die Ḫendursanga-Hymne”; ETCSL 4.06.1, Ḫendursanga A; Attinger and Krebernik, “L’hymne à Ḫendursanga.”
30 The “Fable of the Fox” implies that locking and unlocking the city gates was controlled by the nágâr dišu, “town herald” (passage quoted by Sassmannshausen, “Funktion und Stellung der Herolden”: 145), and Išum is in charge of gates in the menology KAV 218 A ii 14, 20, ed. G. Çağrın, “Three more duplicates to Astrolabe B,” Belleten 48 (1984): 400–416, esp. 407.
night watchman, and serves as a mythological etiology 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.35 They translate “ḥa/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 ṣīrti, “who bears an august staff,” derived from Ḫendursanga’s name in Erra and Išum I 3.36 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 ḫuṭāru (or ḫuṭṭāru?), however, may be related. It shares an equivalence with Sumerian pa (Sa N 9′: [p₃₈ ap] = 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.37

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-úlu gi-(izi)-lá izi ù-bi-in-dab₃ šu-na
ù-mu-ni-[il]
mu ḫen-dur-sag-gá ke₃ um-mi-in-p₄₄ d₃
sila si-[ga] gi₃ ū-na-ka si-sá-bi mi-ni-dib-[bê]
N 4181 rev. 8–10

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 (TIM IX 74 obv.39).

It may be useful to give the full text here:

1 'x x i² en-ki³ me-en
2 [ni]mgir me-en ḫendur-sag-gá me-en
3 en me-en sa-ga me-en i-duḫ₄ an-na me-en
4 u₅ sakar-re itiⁿ;²¹
5 e-sir-ra ḫa-ba-ab-šub
6 'e²-sir-ra gir-mu-sê ki ḫa³-bal-ša-ni-si³
7 [u]jduḡ-ḥul ḫanna-ḥul
8 [ga₃] lā-ḥul maškim-ḥul
9 [gl] r-mu-sê na-an-gi
10 [egi³] mu-sê ḫe³tb-ta-gi₇
11 [bar-šê ḫe³tb-ta-gub
12 [zi] an-na ḫe³-pad zi ki-a ḫe³-pad
13 [k]a-im-ma níg₉₊ sila ḫanna

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 gala, 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-

36 See now George, “The poem of Erra and Išum,” 66 n. 7.
40 Phonetic for men.
41 i-duḫ for i-duḫ.
43 ḫa-ba-ni-si is defective late Sumerian for si ḫa-ba-ni-sá.
44 Late Sumerian, níg = ša = lú.
nephew of Ḫendursanga 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:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{[ki-m]a} & \text{ ta-ri-i-tim it-ta-na-al-la-ak qē-er-bu-um ē-kur} \\
a-na-ku & \text{ a-ḫi te-ri-a-ku a-ḫi ša a-na a-ḫi-ia wa-al-du} \\
\text{en-līl} & \text{ pa-a-šu i-pu-ša-am-ma} \\
is-sā-qā-qā-র & \text{ a-na la-ba-tim i-štar (inanna)} \\
\text{a-ni-a-am} & \text{ a-ḫa-ki ta-ri-a-at a-ḫa-ki ša a-na a-ḫi-ik-wa-al-du} \\
\text{i-ša-am} & \text{ nin-līl a-na iša (utu) ū-li-id-ma} \\
\text{uštāḫi-iz-ma} & \text{i-na šu-li-i-im i-zi-ib-šu}
\end{align*}
\]

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, uštāḫiz 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. Since Šamaš was Ninlil’s grandson, 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, “uštāḫiz and left him in the street.” The derivation of uštāḫiz in this line is clearly from šutāḫuzu, but its interpretation has caused difficulties. W. H. Ph. Römer (“schwierig”47) was undecided between the differing opinions of the leading dictionaries (CAD A 183 aḥāzu 10a, “she was induced [by someone] to abandon him in the street,” versus AHw. 19 aḥāzu[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”48), 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 Ḫendursanga, who quoted the passage and translated the verb uštāḫiz, with some reservation, as “fut enflammée(?),”49 citing Michael Streck’s note on šutāḫuzu, “to set alight,” in his study of the Akkadian Št, stem.50 This šutāḫuzu is the active mood of nanḫuzu, “to catch fire,” treated in the lexical text Nābittu III 272–73, where Sumerian [izi]-lal and [izi]-lāl, “to set on fire” = šu-ta-ḫu-zu ša ištāti [izi]. Given that Išum was associated with fire, there is no need for any reservation in translating uštāḫiz. 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.51 But

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43 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).”

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, 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. Counterparts of the Babylonian ḫāʾiṭum 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. Street lighting in London began long before the advent of gas lamps in 1807. Municipal oil lamps first appeared by Act of Parliament in 1736, 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. 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, unlike the personnel who saw to the security of palaces, temples and city gates. 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.


53 Ekirch, At Day’s Close.
54 Ibid., 75.