

SONNENADLER
ETANA/GILGAMESH
OPUS OPERA
HIMMELFLUG

Time rewards us by accumulating wisdom. The eternal bliss of having art in itself creates that sensation of freedom in the face of the unknown.

To know the story of Etana, king of Kish, one must turn to sources outside the Sumerian royal lists. So far, several versions of this myth have been found on tablets discovered in Susa, Tell Harmal, Assur, and Nineveh. The actual narration of Etana's life is attributed to Lu-Nanna, a figure who, like the king himself, is lost in Sumerian mythology and symbolism. Lu-Nanna was an Apkallu or Abgal, translated as a great fish-man or ferryman. According to tradition, the Apkallu were wise spirits created personally by the god Ea, who acted as advisors to great kings since the times before the flood. The first of them was Oannes, and the last, possibly, Lu-Nanna. After the final Apkallu wrote down the story of the mythical king of Kish, the tale spread widely throughout Mesopotamia. Etana's reign is placed around the 29th or 27th century B.C., and it is said to have lasted over 1500 years. Etana would have been one of the kings from the Early Dynastic Period II. His reign is described as follows: After the flood had ended, and kingship had descended from the heavens, kingship was established in Kish. Of Etana as king it is said: *Etana of Kish, who ascended to heaven and consolidated all the foreign kingdoms.*

A serpent and an eagle live in a tree grown in the sanctuary of Adad: the eagle in the branches and the serpent among the roots. As they are traditionally enemies, they propose a pact of friendship before Shamash, the Sun god. For a time, they coexist peacefully. However, one day, the eagle decides to devour the serpent's offspring. When the serpent discovers her young have been killed, she demands revenge for the sacrilege.

The god Shamash hears the serpent's plea and tells her what to do to get revenge. He says he has left a wild bull in the meadow:

"Open its inside, tear its belly, make your dwelling in its belly. All kinds of birds of the sky will descend to eat its flesh. The eagle will come down. He will not perceive his doom, he will

eagerly seek the soft part of the flesh. When he enters inside, trap him, cut off his wings, his claws, pluck him and throw him into an unfathomable pit to die."

Everything happens just as Shamash foretold. The eagle, faced with such a horrible death, begs Shamash for mercy, who reproaches the sacrilege committed. However, although the god refuses to approach him, he prophesies that a man will come and help him.

Symbolically, the enmity between the eagle and the serpent represents the struggle between two opposing forces: matter and spirit; the earthly and the celestial. It is not uncommon to find images of the eagle dominating or devouring the serpent. Thus, while both animals have their own symbolism, together they represent the necessary dominance of spirit over the multiplicity of matter—a dominance impossible to achieve without struggle and self-sacrifice.

Etana, king of Kish, prays to Shamash for help with a no less serious problem than the eagle's: he could not have descendants. Etana asks the Sun god to show him where to find the Plant of Births.

Shamash again does not intervene directly but tells the king to find an eagle in a pit, and she will be the one to guide him to the plant. Etana travels until he finds the eagle, on the verge of death. The king cares for her until she recovers. Thus, in the eighth month, the eagle emerges from her punishment and offers to help Etana. The king desires only one thing: the Plant of Births. So the eagle lifts the king on her back into the skies, in search of Ishtar, the lady of love and life.

After a series of vicissitudes, the eagle interprets that Etana must reach the heaven of the god Anu. Again, they ride to the gates of the gods. Anu, Enlil, Sin, Shamash, Adad, and Ishtar open the doors and let them through.

The rest remains forgotten, as the ending does not exist. It is unknown whether the myth resolves Etana's problem, though one must assume so, as the Sumerian king list affirms that Etana was succeeded on the throne by Balih, his son.

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