

## APKALLU

I. In Mesopotamian religion, the term *apkallu* (Sum. *abgal*) is used for the legendary creatures endowed with extraordinary →wisdom. Seven in number, they are the culture →heroes from before the Flood. Some of the mythological speculations in which they figure have exerted influence on certain biblical and post-biblical traditions. Examples are the figure of →Enoch and the tale of the →Nephilim (Gen 6:1-4).

II. Akk. *apkallu* is derived from Sum. *abgal*, a term used in the 3rd millennium for a high official. In the Sumerian incantations of the Old Babylonian period *abgal* refers to a sage at the court of Enki. Based on a tradition that goes back to the 3rd millennium, the term *apkallu* is used for legendary creatures endowed with wisdom, seven in number. who existed before the flood. In the myth of the 'Twenty-one Poultrices' the 'seven *apkallū* of Eridu', who are also called the 'seven *apkallu* of the Apsu', are at the service of Ea (Enki). Ea is called the 'sage among the gods' (*apkallu ilī*) and the title was also used of his son →Marduk. A variety of wisdom traditions from the ante-diluvian period were supposedly passed on by the *apkallū*. We learn from the 'Etiological Myth of the Seven Sages' that the *apkallū* were "of human descent, whom the lord Ea has endowed with wisdom". The tradition of the *apkallū* is preserved in the *bīt-mēseri* ritual series and also by Berossus. The seven sages were created in the river and served as "those who ensured the correct functioning of the plans of heaven and earth" (*muštēširū ušurāt šamê u eršetī*). Following the example of Ea, they taught mankind wisdom, social forms and craftsmanship. The authorship of text" dealing with omens, magic and other categories of 'wisdom' such as medicine is attributed to the seven *apkallū*. Gilgamesh, "who saw everything" (*ša naqba īmurū*), is credited with having brought back knowledge whose origin was before the flood (*ša lām abūbi*) and on a cylinder seal he is called "master of the *apkallū*". In the course of the development of the traditions concerning them, the seven *apkallū* became associated with laying the foundations of the seven ancient cities: Eridu, Ur, Nippur, Kullab, Kesh, Lagash and Shuruppak. In the epic of Gilgamesh they are called 'counsellors' (*muntalkī*) and all of the seven sages were considered responsible for laying the foundations of Uruk (Gilg. I 9: XI 305). According to the Erra epic. the *apkallū* returned to the Apsu, the great abyss which was the home of Ea. and were never again within reach.

Uanna of Eridu, the first of the seven *apkallū* who served the early kings, was considered the master of a great store of knowledge. In some texts Adapa, a human sage who lived at that time and who bears the epithet *apkallu*, is assimilated to him. Adapa is at times called the son of Ea, but this refers to his being wise, rather than to his parentage. In turn the name Adapa became synonymous with wisdom. Oannes, in the late tradition transmitted by Berossus, "emerged daily from the Erythrean Sea in the time of the first king of history to teach mankind the arts of civilization". He is credited with giving man knowledge of letters and science and all types of crafts. Not only were highly qualified diviners given the title *apkallu*, but it was also popular among the late Assyrian kings. Sennacherib brags of having been given knowledge equal to that of the *apkallu* Adapa (D. D. LUCKENBILL. *The Annals of Sennacherib* [OIP 2: Chicago 1924] 117:4). Ashurbanipal, proud of his mastery of the skills of the scribe, boasted of having grasped "the craft of the *apkallu* Adapa, the esoteric secret of the entire scribal tradition" (M. STRECK. *Assurbanipal und die letzen Assyrischen Könige* [VAB 7; Leipzig 1916] 254: 13; 367: 13). He is called the offspring of both an *apkallu* (Sennacherib) and Adapa (Esarhaddon) by one of his haruspices (*ABL* 923; *LAS* 117). It was probably in the neo-Assyrian period that the title *apkallu* spread to the Arameans and also to the Arabian tribes. In the Nabatean, Palmyrean and Hatrene inscriptions it is a son of priest. *Apkallatu* occurs as the personal name of a queen of the Arabs in an inscription of Esarhaddon. In the Early South Arabian inscriptions '*fkl* is also a priest (cf. J. TEIXIDOR, *Notes hatréennes* 3: Le titre d' "aphkala", *Syria* 43 [1966] 91-93, and J. RYCKMANS, *JSS* 25 [1980] 199 n. 3).

The postdiluvian sages were called *ummānu*, a term which indicates mastery of a difficult subject. or being highly trained in a craft. Various literary works are attributed to specific *ummānū* and in the late period the *ummānū* functioned as the counsellors of the realm. The *apkallū* were also the keepers of esoteric lore which

then became the prized possession of the *ummânû*. In a tablet from the Seleucid period found during the excavations at Uruk the antediluvian *apkallu* and the postdiluvian *ummânû* are listed in conjunction with the kings whom they served. Thus Uanna (Oannes) is the *apkallu* of Aialu (elsewhere Alulu) the first king, and the list ends with Aba'enlildari, whom the Arameans call Ahiqar, the *ummânû* of king Esarhaddon.

In a variety of rituals, clay figurines of the seven *apkallû* were used with an apotropaic function. There were three types of *apkallû*, the seven anthropomorphic *ûmu- apkallû*, placed at the head of the bed of the sick "person, the seven bird-*apkallû* buried against the wall, but in an adjoining room. and the seven fish-*apkallû*, who guard the threshold of the bedroom. with two further groups of fish-*apkallû*, buried in front and behind the chair kept in the room. The *ûmu- apkallû* were made of wood, but the bird- and fish-*apkallû*; were made of →clay. The fish-*apkallû* are the best known since the fish-garbed men have been found in excavations in groups of seven (e.g. Nimrud). Their use is detailed in a variety of rituals. The fish-*apkallû* must be distinguished from the *kulullû*, a centaur-like fish-man. These *apkallû* are also found on wall-panels in Assyrian palaces or with apotropaic function flanking the doorways of temples and palaces. Berossus described Oannes a." having the body of a fish, a human head below the fish head and human feet below the tail.

III. The tradition of the seven sages spread during the 2nd and 1st millennium to the West, reaching as far as Greece. It has been proposed that the tale of the →Nephilim, alluded to in Gen 6:1-4, is based on some of the negative aspects of the *apkallû* tradition. An echo of the role of the seven *apkallû* may be found in Prov 9: 1 which should in all likelihood be rendered "→Wisdom built her house, the Seven set its pillars" instead of the traditional translation "Wisdom built her house. she set out its seven pillars". →Enoch, who was the "first among the children of men who had learned writing. science and wisdom" (*Jub.* 4:17). and taught knowledge to mankind was the seventh starting with Adam (*Jub.* 7:39). His ascension to →heaven is in all likelihood based on the tale of the seventh antediluvian *apkallu* Utuabzu who ascended to heaven according to the third tablet of the *bīt-mēseri* series. The later tradition. preserved by pseudo-Philo, of Enoch building seven cities, may hark back to the seven antediluvian cities noted above. The images of the seven patriarchs found on the throne of Solomon, the embodiment of Wisdom, may also have its origin in the myth of the seven sages.

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