

Ishme-karab

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NAME AND SPELLINGS

Ishme-karab is an Akkadian name meaning “He heard the prayer.” His name exclusively appears in syllabographic spellings, both in Mesopotamia and in Elam. The Mesopotamian texts, all drafted in Akkadian, have Eš-me-ka-ra-ab, Iš-me-kà-ra-áb, Iš-me-kár-ab, Iš-me-ka-ra-ba, and Iš-me-ka-ra-bu. One text (STT 88 ix 45’) has I-šam-me-ka-[ra-bu] (Frankena 1961: 201). In texts from Old Babylonian Susa and Middle Elamite Haft Tappéh (Haft Tepe), the spelling is Iš-me-ka-ra-ab. Finally, the Elamite texts have two orthographies: Iš-né-ka-ra-ab and Iš-né-ka₄-ra-ab, whereby the former spelling is the oldest one. One brick inscription from the reign of Untash-Napirisha (ca. 1340–1300 BCE) erroneously has Iš-né-ga-ka-ra-ab (Steve 1967: 2).

HISTORY AND ROLE

There is still some debate as to the gender of Ishme-karab, although most authors (e.g., König 1965: 84, n.9; Steve 1967: 27; Black and Green 1992: 74; Malbran-Labat 1995: 194; Potts 2016: 162) consider Ishme-karab to be a goddess, more particularly the spouse of Inshushinak. The personal name Ishme-karab-ummi “Ishme-karab is my mother” seems to confirm the feminine character of this divinity, but unfortunately the name is badly damaged and its restoration is far from certain. On the other hand, Lambert (1976–80; also Vallat 2011) uses the presence of two masculine plural verbs used with Ishme-karab and Lagamal to plead for the masculinity of Ishme-karab. Although this argument is not entirely convincing (when in Akkadian the

subject consists of a male and a female component, the verb used is masculine), the fact that all but two Mesopotamian divinities related to justice are masculine (cf. Krebernik 2006–8) does lend some support to Ishme-karab being a god. Nevertheless, more convincing support for his masculinity is found in the inscription on the seal on MDP 23 321–322 (l. 2), where he is called king of Susa (*lugal Šušim*; De Graef 2018: 125). In sum, it may be accepted that Ishme-karab was a god, not a goddess.

The origin of this divinity is under debate. Vallat believes him to be associated with Inshushinak and therefore of Susian origin (Vallat 2002–3: 531; 2011), but according to Lambert (1976–80: 196; Hinz and Koch 1987: 790; Henkelman 2008: 330; Koch 2011: 66) he was a Mesopotamian deity borrowed from Babylonia during the Old Babylonian period. In that case, Ishme-karab certainly has an eastern Mesopotamian origin.

Although the name Ishme-karab is clearly Akkadian, this divinity occurs especially in Elam, more precisely in Susiana. The few Mesopotamian attestations are the following:

1. Ishme-karab- appears in the Babylonian god-list An = Anum (III 171), where he was one of the eight judges of Shamash (Litke 1998: 135, n.171).
2. In one of his inscriptions, the Assyrian king Erishum I (ca. 1974–1935 BCE) mentions this divinity as one of the seven divine judges of Assur. Interestingly, two other divine members of the Assyrian divine judge panels have very similar names: Shitamme-karabu “Hear the prayers” and Tishamme-pe-mukarribe “Hear the words of he who is praying” (cf. Krebernik 2006–8: 358–9).
3. In the Middle/Late Assyrian *tākultu* ritual, Ishme-karab is also invoked as one of the seven divine judges (Frankena 1954: 6; 1961: 203).
4. Finally, in the equally Middle/Late Assyrian “Götteradreibuch,” he has the same role (Frankena 1954: 123).

In Elam, Ishme-karab first appears in Akkadian texts from Old Babylonian Susa. In the legal texts, he often accompanies Inshushinak in the oath formula. This is of course to be expected, as he was a god of justice. One legal text includes a threat that the scepter of Ishme-karab will smash the skull of a breaker of the contract (MDP 23 321–322, seal inscription, ll. 14–15; cf. De Graef 2018: 125). In this context, it should be noted that some mace heads were unearthed in his temple in Chogha Zanbil (Koch 2011: 66).

Next to his appearances in documentary texts, Ishme-karab also enjoyed considerable royal interest. The first Elamite king to mention him was Temti-Agun I (ca. 1600), who built a temple for him in Susa (IRS 14). This royal interest continued in the later periods. The Middle Elamite king Humpan-u-mena dedicated an inscribed bead (MDP 53 3) to this divinity and in the sanctuary of Chogha Zanbil, built by Untash-Napirisha, a temple in honor of Ishme-karab was erected (EKI 6e; MDP 41 8). The same site also yielded a glazed clay nail dedicated to this deity (MDP 41 57).

King Shutruk-Nahhunte I (ca. 1185–1155 BCE) dedicated a temple and a gate to Ishme-karab, the inscriptions being drafted in both Akkadian (IRS 56) and Elamite (EKI 37). Shilhak-Inshushinak I (ca. 1145–1120 BCE) too engaged in the restoration of a temple for this divinity in a city whose name is lost (EKI 47). Finally, Hutelutush-Inshushinak (ca. 1120–1100 BCE) built a grove temple (*siyan husame*) for this divinity in the town of Kipu (EKI 60).

Ishme-karab does not occur in texts from the Neo-Elamite or Achaemenid period, despite Malbran-Labat's assumption that IRS 56 should be dated to the reign of Shutruk-Nahhunte II (Malbran-Labat 1995: 134).

The sources above are quite typical Elamite dedication and construction inscriptions. The most fascinating attestation, however, is in a small group of seven funerary texts (MDP 18 250–253, 255–256, and 259) found in a tomb at Susa and dated to ca. 1500 BCE. In one of these

texts (MDP 18 251), Ishme-karab and Lagamal, another deity, lead the dead into the netherworld, where Inshushinak will “proclaim the judgment.” In this context, Ishme-karab is the *advocatus dei*, whereas Lagamal is the *advocatus diaboli* (Henkelman 2008: 61). This role of Ishme-karab has led some scholars to label him as a typical netherworld god (Frankena 1954: 94; Henkelman 2008: 330). Nevertheless, this is not necessarily true. More likely, Ishme-karab, like his Mesopotamian equivalent Shamash, had a role in the netherworld as the god of justice. This does not automatically make him a netherworld god, in analogy to Shamash who is not a netherworld deity either.

The triad of Inshushinak, Ishme-karab, and Lagamal has been compared to the Zoroastrian triad Mithra, Sraosha, and Rashnu, implying a possible Elamite influence on the Zoroastrian ideas on afterlife. Yet, this comparison does not make much sense; in all likelihood there was no mutual influence between Iranians and Elamites on this topic (Tavernier 2012: 482–7).

The last document to be discussed here is MDP 6 54, a fragment of an inscribed stela. The text is drafted in Akkadian and might date from the late Old Babylonian period. The text suggests that it is not a royal inscription. Rather one is dealing here with what looks like a prayer, possibly to Ishme-karab who is mentioned twice in the document. One of these attestations has “Ishme-karab, his lord.”

ISHME-KARAB IN ONOMASTICS

In Akkadian texts from Susa, dating to the Old Babylonian period, the divine element “Ishme-karab” was quite popular in personal names, nearly exclusively as the first element of the name. Examples are Ishme-karab-bani, Ishme-karab-ili, Ishme-karab-ishme-anni, Ishme-karab-mushezib, Ishme-karab-ša-Teli, Ishme-karab-shaqi, Ishme-karab-shemi, Ishme-[karab-um]mi, Ishme-karab-zilli, and Kuk-Ishme-karab. In Middle Elamite Akkadian texts from Haft Tappeh the names

Kuk-Ishme-karab and Rabi-Ishme-karab appear. One Middle Elamite princess had the name Ishme-karab-BAD, likely to be read Ishme-karab-huhun (Elamite).

SEE ALSO: Inshushinak; Shilhak-Inshushinak I; Shutruk-Nahhunte I; Sukkalmah regime; Untash-Napirisha.

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