

The Myth of a Sumerian 12th Planet: "Nibiru" According to the Cuneiform Sources

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Those familiar with either the writings of Zecharia Sitchin or the current internet rantings about "the return of Planet X" are likely familiar with the word "Nibiru". According to self-proclaimed ancient languages scholar Zecharia Sitchin, the Sumerians knew of an extra planet beyond Pluto. This extra planet was called Nibiru. Sitchin goes on to claim that Nibiru passes through our solar system every 3600 years. Some believers in Sitchin's theory contend that Nibiru will return soon – May of 2003 to be exact. These followers of Sitchin's ideas also refer to Nibiru as "Planet X", the name given to a planet that is allegedly located within our solar system but beyond Pluto. Adherents to the "returning Planet X hypothesis" believe the return of this wandering planet will bring cataclysmic consequences to earth.¹

Is Sitchin correct – Is Nibiru a 12th planet that passes through our solar system every 3600 years? Did the Sumerians know this?² Are those who equate Sitchin's Nibiru with Planet X correct in this view? Unfortunately for Sitchin and his followers, the answer to each of these questions is no.

This paper will address these questions in the course of five discussion sections:

- ❑ Overview of the scholarship on Nibiru
- ❑ How often and where does the word "Nibiru" occur in cuneiform texts? What does the word mean, and is there an astronomical context for the word in any of its occurrences?
- ❑ What are the cuneiform astronomical sources for our knowledge of ancient Mesopotamian astronomy?
- ❑ What do those sources tell us about Nibiru?
- ❑ If Nibiru is not a 12th planet (and hence not Planet X), what is it?

Section One: Previous scholarly work on Nibiru

While scholarly material on cuneiform astronomy is fairly abundant, specific treatments of Nibiru are rare. The last treatment of Nibiru in a journal article in the English language was in 1961, and was co-authored by the great Sumerian scholar Benno Landsberger, editor of the Sumerian-Akkadian lexical lists I reference on my website in conjunction with Zecharia Sitchin's abuse of Sumerian-Akkadian vocabulary.³ An earlier article in German (1936) dealt

¹ It is important to note that Sitchin himself does not claim that Nibiru is Planet X or that Nibiru is returning this spring (May 2003).

² For readers who are familiar with Sitchin's use of cylinder seal VA 243 as a defense for Sumerian knowledge of 12 planets, see the webpage on my website devoted to this error and the accompanying PDF file.

³ The article is B. Landsberger and J.V. Kinnier Wilson, "The Fifth Tablet of Enuma Elish," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 20 (1961): 172ff. This is the scholarly journal of Near Eastern studies produced by the University of Chicago's Oriental Institute. The Sumerian-Akkadian lexical lists (cuneiform bilingual dictionaries) are referenced on my website in the discussion of Sitchin's idea that words like *shamu* refer to rocket ships. The Mesopotamian scribes tell us what these words mean in their own dictionaries (and Landsberger was the scholar who compiled these lists in a multi-volume work [in German]).

directly with the subject, and a recent German article (1990) does likewise.⁴ All of these articles were written well after the cuneiform documents / tablets that mention Nibiru as an astronomical body were known, and hence the authors had access to all the pertinent texts. Other works dealt with Nibiru (see below for sources and footnotes), but only in passing, as their focus was Babylonian astronomy in general. What you are reading in this present paper is an attempt to synthesize this material and account for all references to Nibiru in cuneiform tablets with an attempt to discern what exactly Nibiru is.

Section Two: How often and where does the word "nibiru" occur in cuneiform texts? What does the word mean, and is there an astronomical context for the word in any of its occurrences?

Fortunately for scholars and other interested parties, the work of the studies above and the editors of the monumental *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary* (= CAD hereafter) have located and compiled all the places where the word "nibiru" and related forms of that word occur in extant tablets. A look at the CAD entry (volume "N-2", pp. 145-147) tells us immediately that the word has a variety of meanings, all related to the idea of "crossing" or being some sort of "crossing marker" or "crossing point". In only a minority of cases (those references in astronomical texts) does the word relate to an astronomical body. Below is a brief overview of the word's meanings outside our immediate interest, followed by specific meanings and references in the astronomical texts.

General Meanings of Occurrences Outside Astronomical Texts

Word meaning, of course, is determined by context. "Nibiru" (more technically and properly transliterated as "nēberu"⁵) can mean. I have underlined the form of nibiru for the reader:

"place of crossing" or "crossing fee" – In the Gilgamesh epic,⁶ for example, we read the line (remarkably similar to one of the beatitudes in the sermon on the Mount): "Straight is the crossing point (*nibiru*; a gateway), and narrow is the way that leads to it." A geographical name in one Sumero-Akkadian text, a village, is named "Ne-bar-ti-Ash-shur" ("Crossing Point of Asshur"). Another text dealing with the fees for a boatman who ferries people across the water notes that the passenger paid "shiqil kaspum sha ne-bi-ri-tim" ("silver for the crossing fees").

"ferry, ford"; "ferry boat"; "(act of) ferrying" – For example, one Akkadian text refers to a military enemy, the Arameans: "A-ra-mu nakirma bab ni-bi-ri sha GN itsbat"⁷ ("The Arameans were defiant and took up a position at the entrance to the ford [gate, crossing point]"). In another, the Elamites are said to "ina ID Abani ni-bi-ru u-cha-du-u" ("[to] have cut off the ford [bridge, crossing way] of the river Abani").

I think the "root idea" of the *nibiru* word group and its forms as meaning something with respect to "crossing" is clear, and so we'll move on.⁸

⁴ A. Schott, "Marduk und sein Stern" ("Marduk and his Star"), *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* 43 (1936): 124-145; Johannes Koch, "Der Mardukstern Neberu" ("Marduk's Star Nibiru"), *Welt und Orients* 22 (1990): 48-72.

⁵ For the most part in this paper I have not used the standard scholarly transliteration font with diacritical marks. I have instead tried to spell Akkadian words phonetically for readers. An exception would be the chart of Nibiru references below.

⁶ Tablet X, ii:24.

⁷ The "GN" refers to a determinative for a geographic name.

⁸ Sitchin of course notes the basic "crossing" meaning in his book. One just needs a dictionary for this, as the above indicates. He then supplies – without textual support – the idea that Nibiru is a planet that "crossed" paths with other planets in our solar system on its regular 3600 year course. The rest of this paper will demonstrate the flaws in this view.

Nibiru as Referring to an Astronomical Body

The following is an exhaustive list of **the word** “nibiru” in astronomical texts and/or astronomical contexts. **If one wants to know what Nibiru as an astronomical body is, one is dependent on these texts – unless, like Zecharia Sitchin, one makes up meanings to prop up a theory. One either lets the texts tell you what Nibiru is, or ignores the scribes in favor of Sitchin.** I have, in these cases, given (a) the Mesopotamian text where the word occurs; (b) a Sumero-Akkadian transliteration;⁹ (c) a brief translation; (d) the page references to English translations of the Mesopotamian text in which the word occurs, so the reader can check the context and study further. (Note as well that in Section Three I discuss each occurrence in more detail and in context). In the following chart,

- superscripted “d” = the cuneiform sign for “god” (DINGIR), and so “neberu” may refer to a god (recall that Sumerians and Mesopotamians associated heavenly bodies with deities)
- superscripted “MUL” = the cuneiform sign for “star” (and so “neberu” is a star – the texts tell us this *point blank*)
- subscripted numbers = the numerical reference number for Sumerian signs that can stand for more than one syllable. This is a scholarly convention for keeping such overlapping signs distinct so the texts can be read accurately.

At the risk of some redundancy, you will notice quickly below that the word nibiru is preceded by both “d” and “MUL”, and so is referred to as a deity and a star. As Sitchin himself notes on various occasions (and this is common knowledge to ancient near eastern scholars), ancient people often identified the stars or planets as gods, as though the stars were deified beings. This is one reason why even in the Old Testament the sons of God are referred to as stars (cf. Job 38:7-8). In the texts that follow, Nibiru was variously regarded as a planet (specifically, Jupiter, but once as Mercury), a god (specifically, Marduk), and a star (apparently distinguished from Jupiter).

If you’re confused, you aren’t alone. This tri-fold (fourfold if you count Mercury) designation for Nibiru is why scholars of cuneiform astronomy have not been able to determine with certainty what exactly Nibiru is. We’ll go into the problem more in later sections. **One thing is certain from the texts, though: Nibiru is NEVER identified as a planet beyond Pluto.**

⁹ “Transliteration” refers to putting the characters of a foreign language into “English *letters and sounds*” so as to enable us to verbalize the text. Translation, on the other hand, is taking that text and putting its meaning into the appropriate *words* of another language. At times in printed works dealing with the texts in question the editing / layout differs (e.g., capitalizing or superscripting).

	Occurrence	Sumeru-Akkadian Transliteration	Meaning	English Translation Source
1	Enuma Elish Tablet V, line 6	ú-šar-šid mañ-zá-az ᵈNé-bé-ru ana ud-dú-u rik-sí-šú-un	"He [Marduk in context] set fast the position of Nibiru to fix their [the stars] bounds"	Horowitz, 115, 161; see also ANET by J.B. Pritchard in bibliography
2	Enuma Elish, Tablet VII, line 124	ᵈNé-bé-ru né-bé-re-et šamê u eršeti lu tameḫma	"let Nibiru be the holder of the crossing place of the heaven and of the earth"	same
3	Enuma Elish, Tablet VII, line 126, 130-131	126: ᵈNé-bé-ru kakkabu- šu ša ina šamê u-ša-pu-u 130-131 do not contain the name Nibiru, but elaborate on 126.	"Nibiru is his [marduk's in context] star, which he made appear in the heavens . . . [130-131] The stars of heaven, let him [Nibiru] set their course; let him shepherd all the gods like sheep."	same
4	Astrolabe B, the Star catalogue (known as "KAV 218B ii, lines 29-32)	MUL SA ₅ ša ina ZI ^{im} U ₁₈ LU EGIR DINGIR meš GI ₅ ti ug-da-mi-ru-nim-ma AN-e BAR-ma GUB-iz MUL BI ᵈNé-bé-ru ᵈAMAR.UD	"the red star which stands in the south after the gods of the night [the stars] have been finished, dividing the sky in half, this star is Nibiru, (i.e., Marduk)."	Mul.Apin (see the translated edition by Hunger and Pingree in the bibliography)
5	Mul.Apin I.i:36-38	kīma kakkabū šūt ᵈEnlil ugdammirūni išten kakkabū rabū šessu da' mat šamê uštamsalma izzaz kakkab ᵈAMAR.UD Né-bé-ru SAG.ME. GAR manzāssu ittanakkir šamê ibbir	"When the stars of Enlil have been finished, one big star – although its light is dim – divides the sky in half and stands there: that is, the star of Marduk, Nibiru, Jupiter; it keeps changing its position and crosses the sky."	same
6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13	Various star lists; (#s 6-7 = CT 26.41..v.1; 44.ii.12) (# 8,9 = CT 25.35.7; 36.6) (# 10-13 = CAD, p. 147; Omen Texts; see abbrev's. in CAD and last column here)	Numbers 6-7 = the word MULNi-bi-rum (in a list of stars) Numbers 8-9 = ᵈNé-bé-ru Marduk rēmēnû Numbers 10-11 have the word MULNi-bi-rum Numbers 12-13 have the word ᵈNé-bé-ru	"(the star) Nibiru" "(the god) Nibiru, the merciful Marduk" "(the star) Nibiru" "(the god) Nibiru"	<i>Cuneiform texts from Babylonian Tablets (=CT);</i> Mul.Apin K = tablets on the Kouyunjik collection of the British Museum; LBAT = Late Babylonian Astronomical and Related texts, ed. By J. Sachs
14 15	Tablets K.6174:9' and K.12769:6'	Both have the phrase: DISH ^{MUL} UDU.IDIM.GU ₄ UD AN-e BAR-ma GUB-ma ᵈNé-bé-[ru šumšu]	"If Mercury divides the sky and stands there, [it's name] is Nibiru."	Mul.Apin, 126
16 17	Two omen texts (CAD, p. 147)	Two short astronomical omens have MULNi-bi-rum	"(the star) Nibiru"	CAD entry

As noted previously, Nibiru was at times regarded as a planet (specifically, Jupiter, but once as Mercury), a god (specifically, Marduk), and a star (apparently distinguished from Jupiter).

In the next section, **Section Three**, I'll provide some information as to what the most important sources for cuneiform astronomy are. Specifically, any of the above references that add commentary about Nibiru (as opposed to just listing the name) will be discussed. With that background we'll head to **Section Four** and discuss the specific lines in context that talk about Nibiru. The final section of the paper, **Section Five**, will sketch the scholarly attempts to understand and explain the above (apparently) contradictory descriptions of Nibiru.

Section Three: What are the cuneiform astronomical sources for our knowledge of ancient Mesopotamian astronomy?
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Cuneiform tablets that contain astronomical data or references to astronomical bodies date as far back as 1800 B.C.¹⁰ The dating of cuneiform sources is secure,¹¹ but this date is not nearly as old as Zecharia Sitchin claims for Sumerian astronomical knowledge. The chronological gap is due to the fact that Sitchin does not derive his views from the tablets themselves, but from his imaginative interpretation of them. **Sitchin's entire cosmological-mythological system is based on three lines of argument:**

- (1) The cylinder seal VA 243, which is dismantled in another PDF file on my website.¹² In a nutshell, the "sun" on the seal (which allegedly depicts the solar system) is not the sun – based on the consistent style of the actual sun symbol in Sumero-Mesopotamian seals and art. Without a sun, you don't have a solar system.
- (2) The claim that Nibiru lies beyond Pluto and is home to the Anunnaki, neither of which come from the actual texts (see the chart above¹³).
- (3) The "reconstruction" of the formation of our solar system, accomplished by matching the names of gods in Sumerian creation-cosmological texts with planets – and then describing a "cosmic billiards" scenario supposedly conveyed to us in these

¹⁰ Francesca Rochberg, "Astronomy and Calendars in Ancient Mesopotamia," *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, vol. III, ed. Jack Sasson (2000): p. 1925. This is likely the best introduction lay to the subject, and so I use it here throughout.

¹¹ The reader must realize that dating ancient tablets is not arbitrary. Dates are determined by several methods: (1) The names of kings or other important figures in texts (like generals or priest) who are cross-referenced in other sources, often from other countries (like Egypt). In the case of kings, these names are then matched to king lists or other lists that tell us the number of years in succession each king reigned. One can therefore start plotting out a chronology in conjunction with the records of other ancient peoples. "Starting points" or benchmarks are obtained by Greek or Roman records (which take us well into the "AD" and several centuries back into "BC). (2) Astronomical events mentioned in texts (like eclipses) that can be plotted today via modern astronomical techniques and records. Often these events also show up in other ancient sources as well. (3) Important events that show up in texts (like battles or treaties) that reference other nations or are themselves recorded in other sources (common for both parties in treaties to record them). Again, these can be cross-referenced. (4) Once a body of cuneiform tablets accumulates that can be chronologically dated, scholars make note of changes in vocabulary, style, and grammar. This enable them to date tablets that do not have any of the chronological markers in them noted above. To illustrate, if you found a letter in your attic or a yard sale that had words like "thee" or "thou" in it, you'd know immediately that the letter could be an approximate number of years old. Once you checked with experts, you could get it quite close (at least to the decade). Conversely, if you found a letter that LOOKED old, but had the word "email" in it, you'd also know it couldn't be older than the year when email came into being.

¹² See www.facadenovel.com/SitchinPDFpapers.htm.

¹³ If one wants to disagree with the chart, I invite the reader to simply look up the references to Nibiru in the *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary* and then go look up the English translations in the sources in the charts, as well as the bibliography at the end of this paper.

texts. Cuneiform astronomical texts never list any more than five planets¹⁴ (seven if one counts sun and moon), and actually tell us which planets are which gods in their mythology. It should be no surprise that the Sumero-Akkadian planet-god correlations disagree with Sitchin's.¹⁵

The oldest cuneiform astronomical texts deal with omens (called by scholars, "celestial divination texts"). The detailed nature of omen texts (ca. 1800 BC), however, does raise a caveat in the dating. While our oldest texts go back to 1800 BC, it is apparent that celestial divination (and hence astronomical observation) did not come into existence at that time – it's already systematized. This argues for an older date, but precision is based only on speculation.

In regard to an older astronomy than 1800 BC, the reader should be advised that all I am saying (with scholars of this field) is that the practice of observing the heavens is older than 1800 – not that the Sumerians could have known how many planets there were. We have, in fact (see below) full-blown astronomical tablets with SUMERIAN star names (Sumer as a civilization pre-dates 1800 BC), yet it is these very tablets that inform us that the Sumerians only knew of five planets (plus sun and moon). They are not incomplete either, as though they forgot a few or left them off the tablet. MUL.APIN is a complete astronomical cycle of observations – it's a compendium of Sumero-Mesopotamian astronomy. But on to specific sources now!

As experts in Sumero-Mesopotamian astronomy note, three texts "characterize the interest of Babylonian astronomy before 500 BC, as well as the level of penetration into astronomical phenomena attained in this period."¹⁶ These three texts are: *Enuma Anu Enlil* (which is not the same as *Enuma Elish*), the "Three Stars Each" tablets (better known as "Astrolabes"), and MUL.APIN. The first of these has little bearing on the Nibiru matter. When we discuss Nibiru momentarily, we shall also need to look at *Enuma Elish* Tablet V which, though not an astronomical text, does mention Nibiru.

Enuma Anu Enlil

This tablet mathematically calculates "the duration of lunar visibility throughout a thirty day equinoctial month."¹⁷ Since the length of night changes from month to month, the Babylonians also devised a method of mathematically calculating lunar visibility for any day of the year.

"Three Stars Each" or "Astrolabe"

Rather than a concern with lunar visibility, the astrolabes are concerned with the "variation in length of daylight throughout the year."¹⁸ The main content of the astrolabes is a "fixed star calendar in which months of heliacal risings are given for three fixed stars in each of the twelve months in a schematic year."¹⁹ Hence the "three stars each" name for these tablets. In other words, three fixed stars were observed each month as to the point / time of their appearance over the horizon just prior to the sun's appearance. These stars "[were] further assigned to three 'paths' in the sky, named for the three great gods Anu, Enlil, and Ea. The paths were defined with respect to the eastern horizon and represent areas of the sky in

¹⁴ See the chart from MUL.APIN below.

¹⁵ Again, you either get your facts from the Sumero-Akkadian texts and scribes or Sitchin. The choice seems obvious enough to me.

¹⁶ The quotation is from Rochberg, p. 1927, but see also the bibliography at the end of the paper.

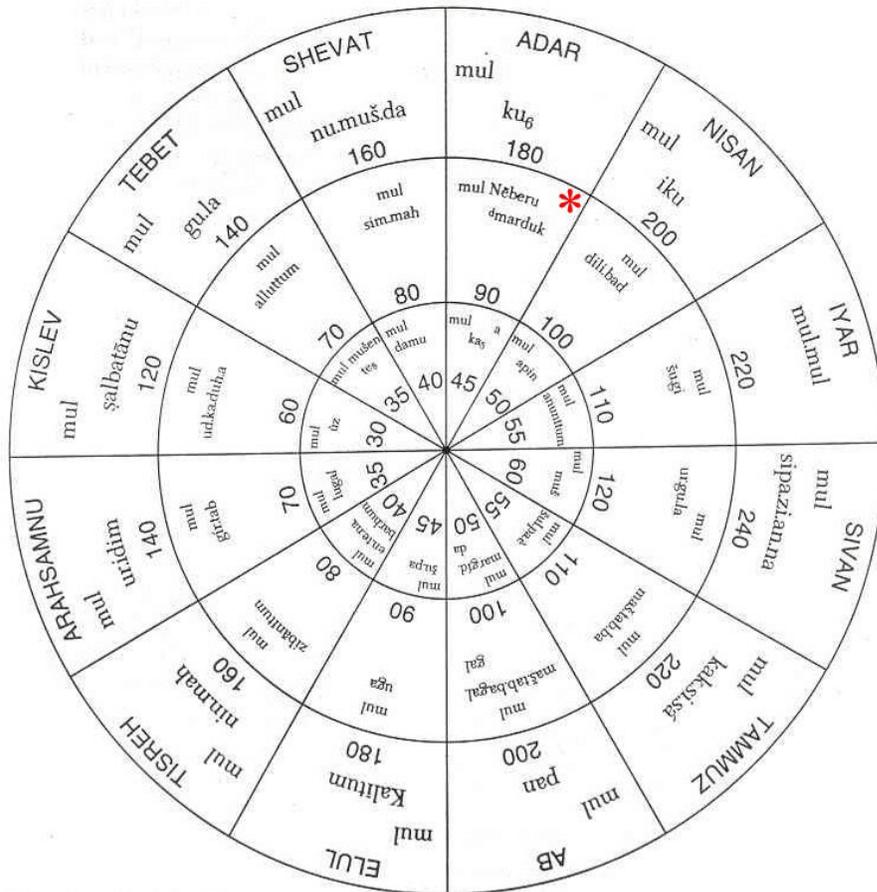
¹⁷ Rochberg, p. 1927.

¹⁸ Rochberg, p. 1929.

¹⁹ Ibid., 1929.

which one sees stars rise in seasonal regularity (one of the chief differences between them and the planets). The attempt to place the stars in the sky and to describe their cyclical return to their place accounts for the modern title 'Astrolabe'.²⁰

To illustrate the content of the astrolabe,²¹ scholars have arranged the data in the cuneiform sources in astrolabe fashion (note the red asterisk where Nibiru, star of the god Marduk [Jupiter; ^{MUL}Neberu ^dMarduk^{''}] is mentioned):



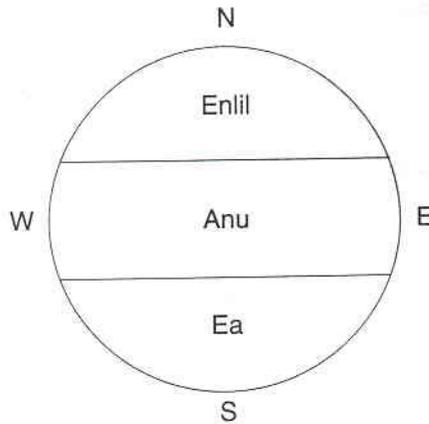
Circular Astrolabe Reconstruction

One observation is appropriate before moving on. The fact that these stars in the astrolabe are all **“fixed”** (likely as part of constellations) may suggest that since Nibiru is described as Marduk-Jupiter and also Mercury different texts and **“changes course”** (see # 5 reference in the chart above), this shows that the fixed star of Nibiru may have changed position, depending on when its observation in the various texts was made. This is descriptive of precession and/or pole shift. More on that idea below under Section Five.

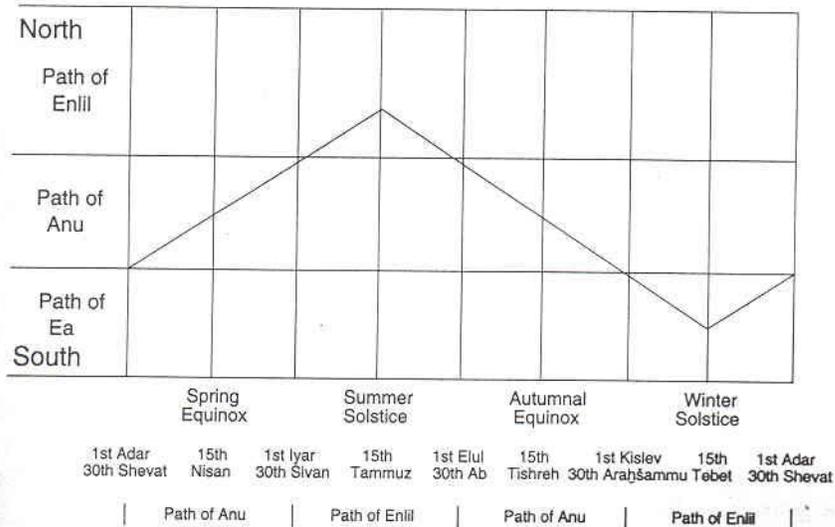
The three “paths” of the sky may be illustrated as well, using the sun’s path as an example:

²⁰ Ibid., 1929.

²¹ The three illustrations are from W. Horowitz, *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography* (Eisenbrauns, 1998): 156, 165, 173.



The Movement of the Sun according to Mul-Apin

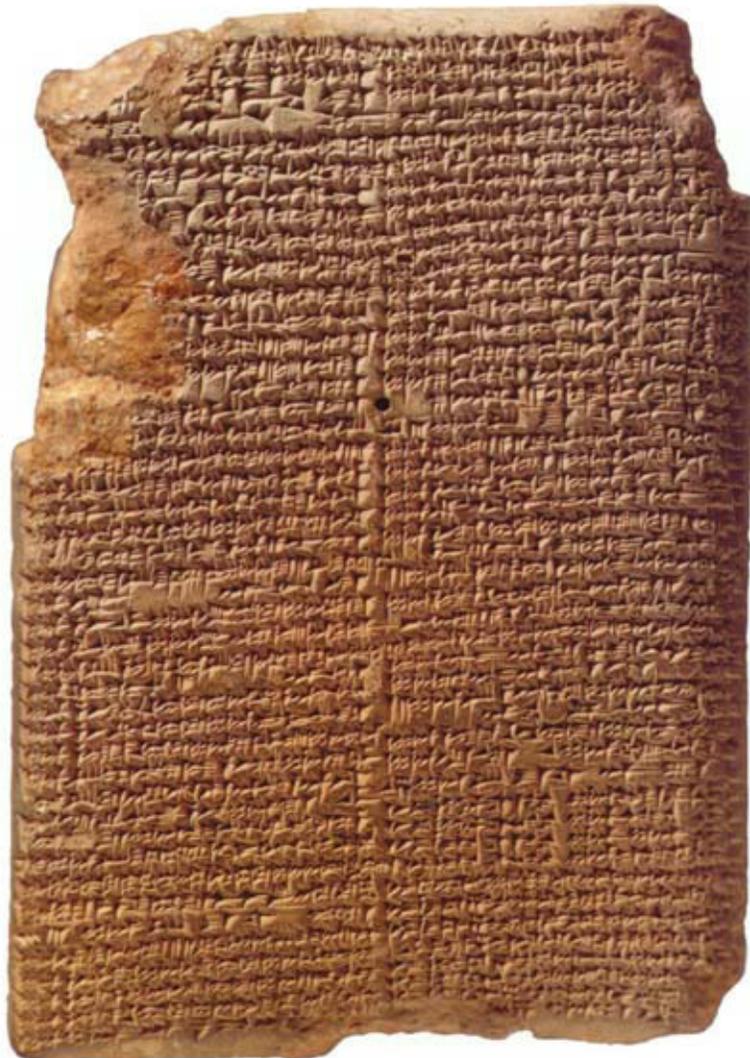


MUL.APIN

This cuneiform text (set of two tablets) is an astronomical compendium that "catalogues and systematizes a wide variety of celestial phenomena . . . [it] represents a comprehensive summary of the astronomical knowledge of the period about the seventh century BC."²² The first tablet begins by listing the fixed stars assigned to the three paths noted in the astrolabe material. Dates of heliacal rising of thirty-six fixed stars or constellations are given, twenty-four of which overlap with the thirty six stars of the astrolabe (including Nibiru). Tablet two continues with the path of the sun, moon, and planets. Appearances and disappearances of Venus, Jupiter, Mars, Saturn, and Mercury are provided, along with discussion of winds, the solar year, length of daylight at cardinal points of the year, and duration of the moon's setting.

²² Rochberg, p. 1930. Unless otherwise noted, this section is a summation of Rochberg, p. 1930.

MUL.APIN



Section Four: What do these sources tell us about Nibiru?

In concert with the chart of references to Nibiru, we'll focus the rest of the discussion on those texts and passages that do more than just list Nibiru among stars. The major references to Nibiru are *Enuma Elish* (mentioned only in the chart thus far), the *Astrolabe*, and MUL.APIN.

Enuma Elish (esp. Tablet V)

Enuma Elish is no doubt familiar to those who have heard of Zecharia Sitchin or Nibiru before. This Mesopotamian epic recounts the origin of the universe in a total of seven tablets. In the closing portion of Tablet VI and through most of Tablet VII the gods proclaim the fifty names of Marduk. In Tablet VI, lines 39-44, Marduk divided the Anunnaki gods into two groups: 300 in heaven and 300 on earth. After doing this (lines 55ff.), the Anunnaki petition Marduk to be allowed to build a sanctuary, and remind Marduk that he had earlier promised to build Babylon. The Anunnaki then build Babylon at Marduk's behest, followed by their own shrines. Tablet VI, line 121 through Tablet VII, line 138 contains the

pronouncement of Marduk's names. One of these names of Marduk, in line 124 of Tablet VII, is Nibiru. I'll following Horowitz's translation below (with interspersed comments on my own).²³

In line 124 the name is given in Sumerian (Nibiru prefixed by the DINGIR sign for deity) and then a short Akkadian description follows:

^dNé-bé-ru né-bé-re-et šamê u erṣeti lu tameḫma

Nibiru: let him/it [Nibiru] be the holder of the crossing of heavens and earth. (line 125 follows: ". . . so that they [the heavens] cannot cross above and below, but must wait for him[Nibiru]").

Observations: In context (Marduk's names) this text refers to Nibiru as a celestial object that has something to do with a crossing *place* – that is, nibiru here isn't DOING the crossing, but marks or is positioned at a crossing point. Marduk is correlated with Jupiter in MUL.APIN's list of deity-planet pairings (see below), it seems that Nibiru is Jupiter according to this text. Another text below, however, describes nibiru as "crossing the horizon". When taken in the context of the cuneiform astrolabe, this is another point of contradiction with Sitchin's teachings (see below for why).

Tablet VII then continues in lines 126-127 with this statement:

^dNé-bé-ru kakkabu-šu ša ina šamê u-ša-pu-u

Nibiru is his [Marduk's] **star**, which he made appear in the heavens.

lu-ú ša-bit kun-sag-gi šu-una ša-a-šu lu-ú pal-su-ša

He [Nibiru] is the one who holds the "turning point" [the crossing point, juncture]; they must look to him.

Observations: Horowitz notes that the word *kunsaggi* is only attested in *Enuma Elish*. There is a *kun-sag-ga* in another text where that word is paralleled by the word *muḫru*, which is a street sign or **marker for a turning point** during a processional circuit. At any rate, Nibiru marks some sort of juncture or "intersection."

The final reference to Nibiru in Tablet VII occurs in lines 130-131, where the name is not present, but which continues the thought of the previous lines:

The stars of heaven, let him [Nibiru] set their course;
let him shepherd all the gods like sheep.

Observation: Line 126 clearly labels Nibiru with the DINGIR sign again, and yet calls it specifically Marduk's star (*kakkabu* is the generic word for star in semitic; cf. Hebrew *kkb*). Since this text has already referenced nibiru as a name of Marduk [Jupiter], we are left to wonder what "Jupiter's star" that marks some turning point might be.

Tablet V of *Enuma Elish* echoes the words Tablet VII. This is the portion of the epic that deals with Marduk's arrangement of the stars. Lines 1-8 read:

²³ *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography*, pp. 114-115.

- 1) He [Marduk] fashioned the stations for the great gods.
- 2) Their stars, their likeness he set up, the constellations.
- 3) He fixed the year, drew the boundary lines.
- 4) Set up three stars for each of the 12 months. [a reference to the astrolabe setup]
- 5) After he drew up the designs of the year.
- 6) He set fast **the station of Neberu** to fix their bands.
- 7) So that none would transgress or be neglectful at all.
- 8) He set the station of Enlil and Ea with it.

Observation: This "station" is explained by scholars by referring to the above lines (124-127) in Tablet VII. Nibiru's "stationing" is taken to be the "special role" assigned by Marduk: some sort of regulating point or influence over the stars that seems to dictate the courses of the stars.

Astrolabe B

As noted in the reconstructed astrolabe above, Nibiru and the stations of Enlil and Ea are identified with either the last month of the old year (Adar), but could admittedly be associated with the first month of the new year (Nisan).²⁴ Astrolabe "B", column ii, lines 29-32 read:

The **red star** which stands in the south after the gods of the night [the stars] have been finished [i.e., have faded], dividing the sky in half, **this star** is Nibiru-Marduk.

Observation: This text explicitly refers to nibiru as a star. As Horowitz notes, the above text in the Astrolabe indicates that Nibiru, Marduk's star, along with those stars of Ea and Enlil, were to be found in the sky as the old year passed and the new year began. The phrase "red star" is interesting, and makes one think of Mars. The Mesopotamians of course knew of Mars (its orbit is catalogued in MUL.APIN). Unfortunately, my astronomical knowledge is minimal. Perhaps (and this is a guess) if Mars appears colored red and not colored red at different times there could have been some confusion. Is there a time when Mars "follows" Jupiter's path so as to confuse an association to the ancient observer? If so, Nibiru and Mars might be correlated. If these options are unworkable, there may be others that account for some association.

MUL.APIN Tablet I, col. 1, lines 36-38

The words of these lines mirror the texts above:

"When the stars of Enlil have been finished, one big star – although its light is dim – divides the sky in half and stands there: that is, the star of Marduk, Nibiru, Jupiter; it keeps changing its position and crosses the sky."

Observations: The phrasing, "the star of Marduk, Nibiru, Jupiter . . ." is significant. The Sumero-Akkadian text here reads:

MUL ^dAMAR.UD ne-bi-ri DIŠ ^{MUL}SAG.ME.GAR

²⁴ Horowitz, 116.

Nibiru is again clearly called the "star of Marduk," and yet is Jupiter. **Oddly, here Nibiru "crosses the sky"** and so appears mobile – but elsewhere it was a "fixed" star.

This again – despite the "mobility" cannot refer to a planet beyond Pluto for two reasons: (1) Nibiru is visible EVERY YEAR according to the astrolabe; (2) it is (again) either a star associated intimately with Jupiter or IS Jupiter.

How do we know the above phrasing refers to Jupiter? Because MUL.APIN catalogues the paths of the known planets (five, plus sun and moon as planets, for seven). Here is a tabulation of the planet names in MUL.APIN, cited from the major technical study of these tablets:²⁵

Section 2: Planets

The names of the planets that occur in MUL.APIN are recorded in Table IX.

Table IX		
Planet	Names	References
Sun	^d UTU (Šamaš)	I iv 11; II i 1, 11, 14, 17, 20, 23; A 1, 3, 5, 7; iii 40, 41. See also Saturn
Moon	^d Sin	I iv 31, 38; II i 15, 19, 23; A 8, 9; ii 1, 2, 43-48; iii 4-14, 44.
Saturn	UDU.IDIM.SAG.UŠ (the stable planet)	I ii 15; II i 6, 38, 53, 64.
	ZibanĪtu (Scales)	II i 39, 64.
	MUL.ḏUTU (Star of the Sun)	II i 39, 64.
* Jupiter	Sagmegar ^d ŠuĪpaea ^d AMAR.UTU (Marduk)	I i 38; II i 38, 49, 60. II i 2. II B 1-6.
Mars	Šalbatānu	I ii 14; II i 4, 38, 51, 62.
Venus	Dilibat	I ii 13; II i 3, 38, 44, 47, 61.
Mercury	UDU.IDIM.GU.UD ša Ninurta šumšu (the jumping planet whose name is Ninurta)	I ii 16; II i 3, 38, 54, 66.

As noted earlier, two other tablets in the above chart aside from these major references refer to Nibiru as Mercury. More will be said in that regard below under Section Five.

Summation to This Point:

What do the cuneiform texts tell us about Nibiru – particularly in contradiction to Zecharia Sitchin? Here's the list:

²⁵ Hermann Hunger and David Pingree, *MUL.APIN: An Astronomical Compendium in Cuneiform*, Archiv fur Orientforschung 24 (Verlag Ferdinand Berger & Sohne Gesellschaft MBH, Austria, 1989): p. 146

- 1) Nibiru is called a star.
- 2) It is implied that Nibiru is a planet due to its identification with Marduk, who is Jupiter in Mesopotamian astronomy. Once Nibiru is also identified with Mercury. There isn't a single line, hint, or suggestion that Nibiru is a celestial body beyond Pluto or the known planets.
- 3) The Sumerians, by their own records, knew of only five planets (and accepted the sun and moon as planets). The planet-god associations of MUL.APIN establish this as fact.
- 4) Nibiru is never mentioned in any respect with the Anunnaki; it is never said to have been or be inhabited.
- 5) Nibiru is both a "fixed star" (or a celestial body perceived to be such) in some relationship to constellations (whether a member or just in proximity is unknown) that "holds" them in their courses, but is also described as "changing position" and "crossing" the sky at times.
- 6) Nibiru was seen every year, which demolishes Sitchin's view of a 3600 year cycle for it.

Hopefully the reader is getting a hint of two things: (1) That Sitchin's teachings are false; (2) that there seems to be warrant for the single scholarly article I referenced in the introduction that postulated Nibiru might be the pole star which has changed position in the sky. Unfortunately, I do not know much about astronomy so I cannot evaluate this. I will, in the final section, lay out the now-rejected scholarly interpretation of Nibiru (I am not referring to Sitchin here, but actual Sumero-Mesopotamian scholars of the last century) and the pole-shift interpretation.

Section Four: If Nibiru is not a 12th planet (and hence not Planet X), what is it?

The Former, Common Option

As Hunger and Pingree note in their study of MUL.APIN, until recently the most commonly held understanding of Nibiru, with respect to the confusing portrayal of the cuneiform texts, was that Jupiter was called *neberu* when standing near the meridian.²⁶ This view was held in part on the basis of Astrolabe B's reference to the fading of the stars (i.e., if Jupiter were the Nibiru in those lines such a description of the stars would be sensible).

As Koch's recent examination of Nibiru points out, the first major study of *neberu* was that of B. Weidner, who came to the conclusion that *Neberu* was the name of the Marduk-Star, if this star is seen "as strider over the center of the heavens; that is, strider through the meridian," and he related these findings astronomically with Jupiter, which is described as the "morning planet . . . In the early hours, as the stars fade, high above in the southern heavens on the meridian."²⁷ Two decades later, J. Schaumberger also had no doubt that *Neberu* referred to Jupiter at its culmination (MUL.APIN II 36 ff.); the tradition obviously was fully confirmed, particularly since the daily observance of Jupiter in the years 1932 and 1934: Jupiter "shines in the morning light; when it stands in the meridian, mainly near to or north of the equator . . . in this dominating position, Jupiter outshines all the stars . . . When the other stars have completely faded, Jupiter is always still visible – its light is dimmer, but it may still be discerned until the sun rises."²⁸

²⁶ Hunger and Pingree, p. 126.

²⁷ Johannes Koch, "Der Mardukstern Neberu" ("Marduk's Star Nibiru"), 48-49.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 48-49.

More recent scholars have taken the reference to Mercury as Nibiru in tablets K. 6174: 9' and K. 12769: 6', however, as rendering the accepted "Jupiter on the meridian=Nibiru" view implausible. The former (partially fragmented) tablet, for example, reads:

DIS^{MUL}UDU.IDIM.GU₄.UD AN-e BAR-ma GUB-ma ^dNe-bi-[ru šumšu]
If Mercury divides the sky and stands there, [its name] is **Neberu**.

The reason this text upends the "Jupiter on the meridian=Nibiru" view is that "Mercury cannot get away from the sun far enough to be visible while in the meridian."²⁹ Several other texts refer to Venus with the same verbiage of "dividing" the sky – that (tablet K.8688:11) Venus can "divide the heavens" upon its appearance. However, the visibility issue with Mercury in the meridian holds true for Venus, another inner planet, as well.³⁰

For this reason, Schott, in his influential 1938 article, swept aside the Mercury tablet reading as a scribal error and concluded that the cuneiform tablets simply contradicted themselves. He then embraced a Jupiter/Marduk-Nibiru equation with Jupiter standing near the meridian. Schott did add, though that, Jupiter could have had the title Neberu "as a tacked-on name" for when it traverses the heavens from the left to the right side, as it stands in the meridian.

Personally, it seems to me that we should resort to scribal error as an explanation only as a last resort. What is meant by "tacked on name" is unclear as well.

Koch, in the most recent appraisal of the material and associated problems, agrees that the "Jupiter on the meridian=Nibiru" view is untenable, and argues that Nibiru must be either Jupiter or Mercury, or it can be both, depending on *what* was being observed *where* and *when*. Referencing an Astrolabe disagreement with MUL.APIN, he makes much of the fact that:

[According to KAV 218 B II 29-33 \(Astrolabe B\) Marduk-Jupiter is an Anu-star; according to Mul Apin Ii 36-39 it is an Enlil-star. What are the consequences of these different classifications?](#)

Koch understands *Enuma Elish* VII 126f. to *Mercury's* greatest elongation. He thus assumes a "Marduk-Mercury" equation in that text). He seems to import this meaning (for "consistency") from K. 6174: 9' and K. 12769: 6', according to which Mercury is Neberu when it "divides the heavens and remains in that place." Koch states:

Therefore Mercury is clearly found in the east, where, from the view of astronomical observers, it divides the heavens into two equal halves: a northeast half and a southeast half. In ancient Mesopotamia the heavenly directions were important orientation makers, which they rendered more precise thorough astronomical procedures. The above fixed-star commentary upon Astrolabe B (KAV 218 Bii 29) accounts in this way for Marduk-Neberu, which stands "at the southern point" and so "divides the heavens" . . . So, Marduk-Neberu being the "divider of the heavens" indicates, analogously to the findings regarding Neberu-Mercury, that the astronomical observers, who looked to the south and saw Jupiter culminate at the meridian, observed that Jupiter sectioned the heavens into two halves: the southeast and the southwest half.

In their 1961 article in the University of Chicago's *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, B. Landsberger and J.V. Kinnier Wilson took an entirely different direction on the matter: Nibiru referred to the Pole Star.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

Quoting them at length:

Applied to Marduk, there is no question that in the late periods *neberu* is a planet, whether Jupiter or Mercury, and this identification has been read into the *Enuma Elish* passages in one form or another by all previous editors . . .³¹

The new identification was based on noted Sumerologist B. Landsberger's contention that the word **KUN.SAG.GA** (= *muhru*, see p. 10 above) meant literally "front-back". Citing a number of cuneiform references pertaining to *muhru* as a cultic building, he argued that the word referred to a symmetrical structure.³² Taking this "front-back" symmetry to *Enuma Elish* VII: 126ff, he translated the text as (I have colored important phrases to his argument):

Nibiru is his [Marduk's] star, that he made appear in the sky;
He [Nibiru] shall occupy the **central pedest**, and they shall prostrate themselves
before him
Why! He who, without tiring, **used to cross** the midst of the Sea
His name shall be Nibiru, the occupant of her midst,
He shall establish the roads of the stars of heaven.

Landsberger argued that the verb "used to cross" (Akkadian *ittebiru*), which comes from the *nibiru* word family, suggested that Nibiru the star was NOW stationary – at the time of the writing of *Enuma Elish*. This implied, in his mind, that Nibiru had at one time NOT been stationary. Further, to "establish the roads of the stars of heaven" spoke to the role of the Pole Star, as the other stars revolve around it. Finally, he notes, "It is thus submitted that the conception of *nibiru* in *Enuma Elish* is not reconcilable with the later conception of Marduk as a planet (or planets)."³³ The point here is that *Enuma Elish* reflected a "very rough cosmology . . . and one that dealt only with the fixed stars and their revolution." In effect, he is arguing that later scribes and astronomers in Mesopotamia did not know this about the references to *nibiru* in *Enuma Elish* – that the earlier cosmology had been lost and forgotten. Referencing (and disagreeing at points) with earlier work, Landsberger tied his views into the Milky Way, a point which I cannot begin to evaluate, given my own lack of astronomical knowledge.

What I can say is that the text DO convey the possibility of either misidentification of planets / stars thereby confusing the Nibiru identity, or that, with Landsberger, the language suggests "fixation" and "movement" which is characteristic of Pole shifting.

Beyond this, it remains for others to look up the references to Nibiru and apply the precession theory.

³¹ Wilson, Landbserger, 172.

³² Wilson, Landbserger, 173.

³³ Wilson, Landbserger, 174.