

THE WELL OF SAMAS

Elena G. Rabinovitch

Tavricheskaja 5-61 St-Petersburg 193015 Russia

In the Akkadian version of "The Epic of Gilgames" (frg. K8586, vers.46-49) the protagonists dig a well for their protector Samas (Sun-god), and then, performing a sacrifice, address the well as "mountain" ("He has thrown a handful of meal to the well /and said/ 110 mountain, send me "prophetically dream!"-- v.48-49). The well and the mountain represent the sacred Axis of the world (axis mundi), but a well -- unlike more common images such as a mountain, a tree, etc. -- represents it in its subterranean part. In rites of ancient Mesopotamia the most common representations of the

Axis was "ziggurats" (altars-mountains-sanctuaries), which explains the oddity of a hero's address to the well: the prophetic dream, which Samas sends to Gilgames, is therefore typologically identical to the prophecies uttered at the world tree or any other axis. But the axis as a cosmological concept is homogenous, through all regions of the Universe being an image of the most fundamental concept of "altitude" (Latin "depth-height"); its epic and ritual representations usually differ depending on the direction to heavens or to hell; in the myth of the well of Samas the well is ritual, the addressing is ritual as well, but the absurdity of addressing to one item by the name of another is based on irrelevance of ritual asymmetry in the context of the symmetry of "altitudo universalis".