



## Rediscovering the Celestial Cuneiform Puns that Imparted the "Birth of Pegasus" Myth

John McHugh

Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, USA; e-mail: [jjmchugh72164@comcast.net](mailto:jjmchugh72164@comcast.net)

### Abstract

In a recent article the author has shown that Pegasus' appearance in Greek astronomy – as a Flying Horse severed at the navel – displays a one-to-one correlation with wordplay encrypted in its older, Mesopotamian title as the "Field". The current article expands on this idea, demonstrating that additional wordplay encrypted in the cuneiform terms for the Mesopotamian "Field" constellation embodied in the Pegasus Square and an adjacent star-figure imparted the words: "Medusa ('Ruling'), Perseus, cut-off, her, skull, leaped-forth, Chrysaor ('Golden-Sword'), the horse, named, Pegasus ('Springs'), because, he-was-born, near, the springs, of, the god, Ocean", – words which mirror the creation story of Pegasus in *Theogony* lines 280-282. Additional puns expose the celestial identity of the Greek god Ocean, while simultaneously disclosing why he was incongruously identified as a "River" in Greek mythology. Cuneiform literature confirms that the Mesopotamian astronomer was a "writer" whose overarching precept held that the constellations comprised a sacred "text" that imparted inviolable wisdom through the medium of wordplay. Archaeological and textual data insinuates that this Mesopotamian celestial conviction was transmitted directly into the Hellenic cultural sphere in the eight century BC. And circumstantial evidence implies that the first author to mention Pegasus, Hesiod, was directly or indirectly familiar with this Mesopotamian astronomical arcana prior to writing *Theogony*. The author's conclusion argues that the aforementioned Mesopotamian celestial esoterica allowed Hesiod, or someone collaborating with him, to decipher the strand of puns that explained Pegasus' mythical "Birth" story, which he then rendered into Greek as lines 280-282 of *Theogony*.

**Keywords:** celestial, mythology, constellation, heavenly, writing, lumashi, puns, wordplay.

### Introduction

The story of Pegasus' birth from the severed head of Medusa was a popular Hellenic religious myth. Although Homer alludes to themes in which Pegasus appears in later Greek mythology, he never actually mentions the Flying Horse (*BNP* 10, pp. 678-679; Astour, 1967, p. 267). However, by circa 700 BC Hesiod was fully apprised of Pegasus and recorded his birth story in *Theogony*. The latter recounts that the Flying Horse was named *Pēgasos*, "Springs", because he was "born near the springs [*pēgas*] of [the god] Ocean" (Hesiod, 1997, pp. 100-101, brackets inserted). He adds that Pegasus "flew away and left the earth ... and came to the deathless gods ..." (*ibid.*). This verse appears to refer to Pegasus' *katasterism*, "placing among the stars", which

explained how this creature attained immortality as a constellation in heaven (*BNP* 7, pp. 33-34; Condos, 1997, *passim*; Liddell, Scott, 1997, p. 914).

A crucial point here is that Hesiod seems to have already envisioned Pegasus as a constellation at the time he was reporting the story of its mythical birth. This becomes germane to the current article because of Hesiod's background. We will soon see Hesiod relied heavily on the writings of the Babylonian-Assyrian creation epic *Enuma Elish* in composing his *Theogony*. And *Enuma Elish* was one of the reference manuals of the Mesopotamian astronomer (Lambert, 1976, pp. 313-318; Rochberg, 2004, p. 211). Reliance on *Enuma Elish* presupposes knowledge of astronomical arcana revered by Mesopotamian astronomers. And it is this esoteric, celestial wisdom that exposes the basis for Pegasus' "Birth" story from the severed head of Medusa. It even unveils the astronomical identity of the Greek *Okeanos*/"Ocean", and resolves why he was incongruously described as a "River".

To expose the Mesopotamian foundation for the "Birth of Pegasus" myth we must first delve into the knowledge base of Hesiod, a father of Greek epic poetry and the first extant Hellenic writer to mention Pegasus.

### **Mesopotamia: the Origin of Many Greek Constellations**

Historians of astronomy have shown that many of the Hellenic constellations originated in Mesopotamia (Krupp, 2000; Rogers, 1998). E.C. Krupp notes that a little less than half of the forty-eight constellations codified by Claudius Ptolemy are founded on originals in Mesopotamia, adding that, "Most specialists are convinced that many Greek constellations were imported from Mesopotamia, although the routes by which they arrived are neither clear nor embraced by consensus" (Krupp, 2000, pp. 44, 47-48).

And it is in Mesopotamian astronomers' arcane conceptions of the celestial sky that provide the most elegant explanation for the abrupt appearance of a Flying Horse named Pegasus ("Springs") whose astronomical image has been cut off at the navel, and whom mythically "leaped forth" from the severed head of Medusa at a location that was "near the springs of (the god) Ocean".

### **Reading the "Heavenly Writing" of the Stars**

When we review Mesopotamian astronomical writings inscribed upon clay tablets in the cuneiform, or "wedge-shaped", script we find practices that we today can clearly recognize as astronomical. This includes the cataloguing of the starry sky into named constellations, the mapping of the celestial sphere into three levels of incipient declination, the codifying of the rising and setting times of stars for time-reckoning, and intercalation schemes that function to synchronize the 354-day lunar calendar with the 365-day solar year (e.g., *BPO* 2, pp. 17-18, 42-43; Hunger, Pingree, 1989, pp. 40-47, 72-77, 88-96, 139-154). While significant in its own right, none of this purely astronomical knowledge leads us to the origin of Pegasus and its "Birth" story.

What does lead us to the astronomical appearance of the Flying Horse and its "Creation" myth is Mesopotamian astronomical precepts and practices that we today would never categorize under the genre of "astronomy". The Fertile Crescent astronomer was one class of "scholar, expert" called an *ummânu*, who was proficient in one or more of the occult arts that involved interlocution with the divinities and included the astrologer, the diviner, exorcist, physician, and lamentation-chanter (Brown, 2000, p. 33; *CAD* 20, p. 108). The definition for *ummânu* given by late nineteenth and early twentieth century scholars, "magician, astrologer,

sorcerer", underscores the title's esoteric nature (Brown *ibid.*; Thompson, 1900, 2, pp. xiii-xxix). Therefore, the Mesopotamian "astronomer" was in function an "astrologer", as the two terms were not effectively discriminated until the sixth century AD (Barton, 1994, p. 5; Rochberg-Halton, 1988, p. 5). The title of the Mesopotamian "astronomer-astrologer" was *tupšarru*, a term that literally meant, "writer, scribe", and referred to an expert in the celestial divination series, *Enūma Anu Enlil* (Brown, 2000, pp. 33-36; Rochberg, 2004, pp. 41, 45, 71, 219; CAD 19, pp. 152-153). Such scholars were adept at reading and writing in the highly complicated cuneiform writing system, a task that included mastery of their own spoken tongue, Akkadian, as well as proficiency in the reading and writing of Sumerian, which was the "dead" language of the southern Mesopotamian people from whom the Akkadian-speaking Babylonians and Assyrians adopted the cuneiform writing system. Proof of the latter is seen with the fact that many constellation and planet names retain their Sumerian, rather than Akkadian, spelling (Hartner, 1965, p. 2; Gössmann, 1950, *passim*).

The astronomer's reference manuals were not confined to just astronomical and astrological subjects, as they also included *The Tale of Atra-Ḫasis* (i.e., the creation story that included the oldest Flood story), *The Gilgamesh Epic*, and the Babylonian-Assyrian creation epic *Enuma Elish*, a point verified from the list of texts edited by astrologers serving Assyrian King Esarhaddon (Lambert, 1976, pp. 313-318; Rochberg, 2004, pp. 209-236). Astronomers were also well versed in the circa 1800-1600 BC bilingual Sumerian-Akkadian "dictionaries" or "encyclopedias" that listed the Sumerian pronunciation of a Sumerian logogram beside its Akkadian meaning (*ibid.*); a Sumerian logogram consisting of a cuneiform sign or sign grouping that came to represent an Akkadian word with the equivalent meaning (Huehnergard, 1997, pp. 107-111). Modern scholars typically transcribe Sumerian logograms into capital letters, a convention that will be applied to all Sumerian words in this paper.

The Sumerian-Akkadian dictionaries indicate that the Sumerian logogram MUL stood for the Akkadian word *kakkabu*, "star", as well as the terms *šīirtum*, "inscription", and *šītru*, "writing" (CAD 8, pp. 45-46, *kakkabu*, lexical section; *ibid.* 17/pt.3, p. 144, *šīirtum*, lexical section, *ibid.*, p. 144-145, *šītru*, lexical section). This point is highlighted by the entry: USAN *šītir kakkabū*, "Evening [means] the writing of the stars" (*AHW* III, p. 1253, *šītru*, lexical section). Moreover, MUL was the common determinative (i.e., noun classifier) used before the names of planets, stars, and constellations (Borger, 2004, p. 302, no. 247).

This exposes a remarkable glimmer into the worldview of the Babylonian-Assyrian astronomer: each constellation, star, and planet was construed as a piece of "writing". And because stars, constellations, and planets embodied deities this writing was numinous – literally the "writing" of the star-gods. Francesca Rochberg comments:

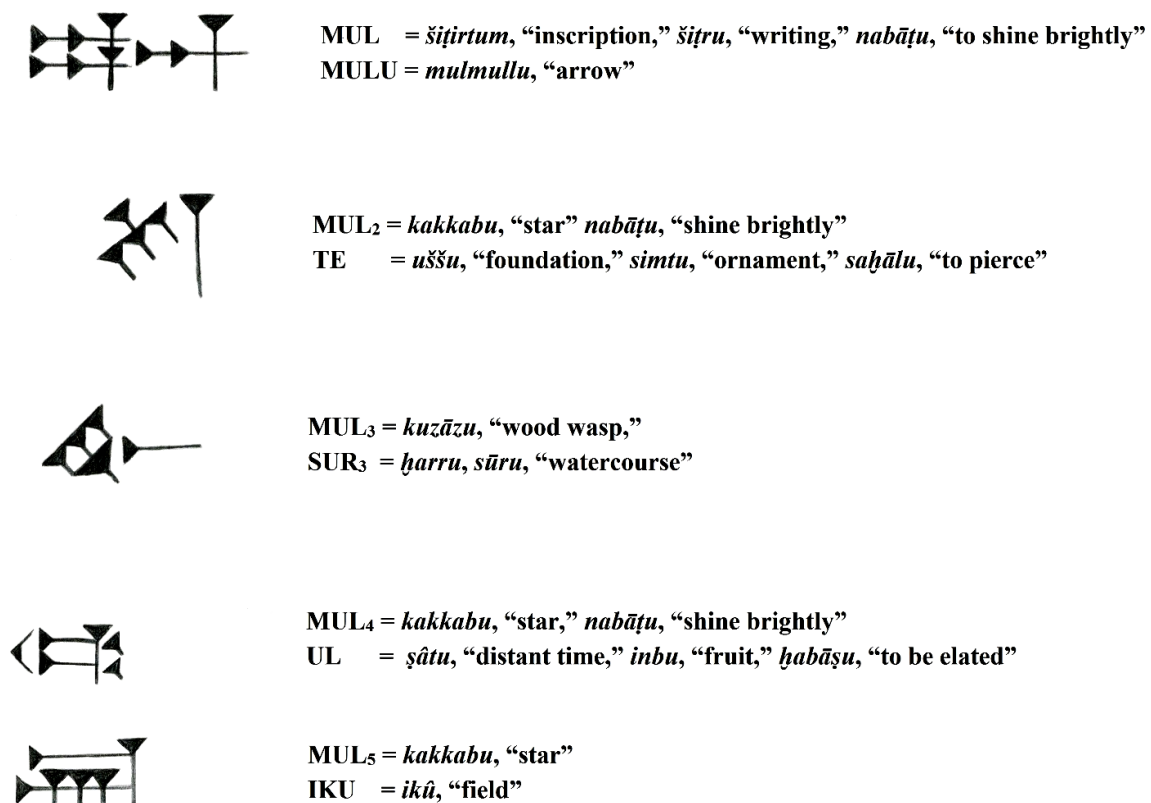
"The metaphor may be interpreted to express the idea that a written message was encoded in the sky, and that the message was a form of communication from the gods" (Rochberg-Halton, 1988, p. 15, n. 54).

This perception developed into the conviction that the starry sky consisted of *šīirti šamāmi*, *šītir šamē*, or *šītir burūmé*, "heavenly writing" (CAD 17/pt.3, p. 144, 2; Rochberg, 2004, pp. 64, 163, 294, 299). Hence the Babylonian-Assyrian "astronomer"/*tupšarru* was a highly literate "writer" who envisioned the starry sky as a divine cuneiform "text".

## The Pervasiveness of Puns in Cuneiform Writing

While studying to become an astronomer-magician, neophytes learned that their syllabic script lent itself to vast opportunities for polysemy (i.e., multiple meanings in a word or phrase), a point illustrated in Fig. 1. We have noted that the cuneiform sign MUL was a Sumerian logogram that represented the Akkadian word *kakkabu*, "star", – yet also functioned as the logogram for the Akkadian *šīirtum*/"inscription" and *šītru*/"writing". In addition, MUL represented the Akkadian verb *nabātu*, "to shine brightly" (*CAD* 11/pt.1, p. 22, *nabātu*, lexical section). MUL could also be read MULU, which represented the Akkadian word *mulmullu*, "arrow" (ibid. 10/pt.2, pp. 190-191, *mulmullu*, lexical section). Thus, when a Mesopotamian astronomer inscribed or read the cuneiform sign MUL it could potentially interject the meanings "star, inscription, writing, brightly-shining" and "arrow".

Moreover, the potential for polysemy increased due to the vast number of homophones (i.e., words that have the same pronunciation but different spellings and meanings, e.g., *there*, *their*, *they're*) found among the Sumerian logograms. The expansive number of homophones in cuneiform writing necessitated that modern linguists devise a transliteration system which allows researchers to distinguish which cuneiform sign appears on a tablet (Huehnergard, 1997, p. 70; Halloran, 2006, p. 1). This scholarly convention is exemplified in Fig. 1, which shows five different cuneiform signs that could be read "MUL". The sign most frequently read "MUL" does not have a subscript number; the second most frequent reading for the "MUL" sign is transliterated MUL<sub>2</sub>; the third most frequent reading for "MUL" is transcribed MUL<sub>3</sub>, and so forth. Crucial for non-specialist readers to remember is that *the subscript numbers are a modern convention*; an ancient astronomer would have pronounced all five of these signs as "MUL".



**Figure 1.** Five Sumerian logograms that were read "MUL" and the Akkadian words they represented (sketch by Ashely McCurdy).

In addition, the five "MUL" signs served as logograms for other Akkadian words, a fact already demonstrated with MUL. The cuneiform sign MUL<sub>2</sub> represented *kakkabu*/"star" and *nabātu*/"shine brightly", but could also be read TE and represented many additional words including: *uššu*, "foundation", *simtu*, "ornament", and *saḫālu*, "to pierce" (*ePSD*: mul<sub>2</sub>). MUL<sub>3</sub> stood for *kuzāzu*, "wood wasp" (*ePSD*: mul<sub>3</sub>), but was also read SUR<sub>3</sub>, the logogram for two Akkadian words that meant "watercourse" (Borger 2004, p. 388, no. 634). MUL<sub>4</sub> represented *kakkabu*/"star" and *nabātu*/"shine brightly" – but it was also read UL and stood for the Akkadian words: *šātu*, "distant time", *inbu*, "fruit", and *ḫabāšu*, "to be elated" (*CAD* 11/pt.1, p. 22, *nabātu*, lexical section; *ibid.* 16, p. 116, *šātu*; *ibid.* 7, p. 144, *inbu*, lexical section; *ibid.* 6, p. 8, *ḫabāšu* A). MUL<sub>5</sub> was an infrequent logogram for *kakkabu*/"star", but was commonly read IKU, which represented the Akkadian *ikū*, "field" (Borger, 2004, p. 290, no. 174). Hence, when a Mesopotamian magician read or inscribed the cuneiform sign MUL on a tablet it could interject the words "star, shine brightly, inscription, writing, arrow, foundation, ornament, pierce, wood wasp, watercourse, distant time, fruit, feeling-elated" and "field" through homophonous punning. Remarkably, Fig. 1 presents merely a fraction of the variable readings and meanings for the five cuneiform signs read "MUL".

The thousands of Sumerian logograms, their homophonous nature, their potential to be read in multiple ways, combined with Babylonian-Assyrian scholars' penchant to attribute multiple Akkadian words to a single logogram resulted in an enormous opportunity for wordplay to emerge in cuneiform writing. Victor Hurowitz summarizes the phenomenon, "The highly complex cuneiform writing system, in which every word could be written in a variety of ways and each sign had a potential of bearing numerous different phonetic or logographic readings, afforded Mesopotamian scribes unique levels of playing on written forms of words unavailable to scribes writing languages that employed alphabetic scripts" (Hurowitz, 2000, p. 66, n. 9, italics inserted).

One form of punning definitely involved the "heavenly writing" of the constellations. A monumental inscription made by the Assyrian king Esarhaddon (680-669 BC) finds him writing his name in *lumāši*, or "constellation"-writing. The passage reads: *lumāšī tamšīl šīṭir šumiya ēsiq šēruššun*, "I carved on them constellations, the image [i.e., equivalent] of the writing of my name" (Roaf, Zgoll, 2001, p. 266; Finkel, Reade, 1996, pp. 244-265; Reade, 1979, pp. 35-46; *CAD* 9, p. 245, *lumāšu*). Although Esarhaddon never mentions why he chose to write his name in the cuneiform signs, words, and images that were used to spell and depict the constellations, Scott Noegel cites texts that refer to "hidden words" (*amāt niširti*) as the "secrets of the gods" (*pirištu ša ilī*) (Noegel, 2007, pp. 37-38, n. 128). The implication being that Esarhaddon was communing with the gods in their own cryptic form of divine communication: secret messages delivered by puns encrypted in the constellations' images and the titles. Michael Roaf and Annette Zgoll have coined the term 'astroglyph' to describe *lumāši*-writing, and emphasize some of the script's characteristics:

"...Some signs are fairly obvious symbolic representations (direct or indirect pictograms), while others are derived from scribal knowledge of the forms of cuneiform signs, from equivalences between Sumerian logograms and Akkadian words ... Such linguistic and visual puns ... are commonly found in the Mesopotamian world" (Roaf, Zgoll, 2001, pp. 291-292).

Esarhaddon's use of *lumāši*-writing – i.e., enigmatic wordplays encrypted pictorially and linguistically in the constellation images and titles – implies an established scholarly tradition for encoding and deciphering such puns. And although Esarhaddon is the only author to

specifically refer to *lumāši*-writing (i.e., 'astroglyphs'), scholars have suspected that the use of similar symbols in temples constructed by his grandfather, Sargon II (721-705 BC), were also inscribed in constellation-writing (ibid., p. 267).

Here the remarks of A.R. George become vital:

"Some of this esoteric scholarly lore was committed to writing, but it may be that much of it will always remain hidden from us because it was passed down orally as secret knowledge" (George, 2003, I, pp. 86-87).

This author contends that in using *lumāši*/"constellation"-writing to write his name, Assyrian king Esarhaddon had brazenly or inadvertently disclosed a trade secret that was revered by Mesopotamian astronomer-magicians, i.e., that constellations were a form of divine cuneiform "writing" that imparted sacrosanct wisdom through the medium of wordplay.

This knowledge gets us one step closer to the astronomical origin of Pegasus and the "Birth" story Hesiod had ascribed to this constellation-god.

### Wordplay as Revelation

Today wordplay is typically regarded as a form of humor or witticism, the staple of comedians, politicians, and public speakers. But cuneiform literature indicates that punning held a far more sobering role – frequently being construed as a form of numinous inspiration. Noegel explains how this phenomenon came about:

"We tend to think of puns as a literary device – a sign of humor, rhetoric ... In antiquity, puns were not used in that way, because the conception of words was so different. Writing was considered of divine origin... Puns provided diviners with interpretative strategies.

Perhaps because the written word evolved from pictographs in Mesopotamia, words were considered the embodiment of the object or idea they represented. While we read the word "dog" and know that refers to a dog, ancient Mesopotamians would view the word "dog" as a dog in a concentrated form. As a result, individual words contained the power of essence, in this case the essence of a dog. *There was a whole envelope of information that came with every sign or part of a word*" (Joseph, 2002, second italics added).

Theodor Gaster adds, "The device [punning as the source of revelation] is based on the primitive idea that the name is an integral part of the identity. Accordingly, if a name possesses a double meaning, this implies *ipso facto* that what is so designated possesses a double aspect" (Gaster, 1954, p. 206, brackets inserted). Hence, the discovery of double entendre in a word or name was believed to divulge a hidden aspect of the entity it described.

This seems to explain why Babylonian and Assyrian magician-scholars – which included astronomers – embraced polysemy and puns with reverence, as if they had divulged a divine message illuminating a previously unknown aspect of the cosmos. Such pun-based edification was typically conceptualized as a revelation that had been imparted directly from the gods to humanity and was frequently accompanied with the admonition to keep this divine wisdom secret (Livingstone, 1986, pp. 1-4, passim; Rochberg, 2004, pp. 209-236; Noegel, 2007, pp. 37-38, 70-76).

Significant to the astronomical and mythical origins of Pegasus is the manner by which divine names were analyzed for concealed puns that might disclose some previously unknown aspect of a deity:

"In ancient cuneiform scholarship the writing of a name can be adapted to impart information about the nature and function of its bearer...

... Babylonian scholars themselves were fond of the speculative interpretation of names in particular. *This was not a trivial pursuit but a means of revealing profound truth about the nature and function of deities and their attributes*" (George, 2003, I, pp. 86-87, italics added).

Put simply, if a Mesopotamian astronomer-magician discerned a pun within a deity's name, he was inclined to construe this concealed meaning as a numinous revelation from the gods – one that explained some previously unknown aspect or attribute of the deity in question. Such pun-based revelations were typically accompanied with some variation of the phrases: *mūdû mūdâ likallim lā mūdû aj īmur*, "Let the learned instruct the learned, the ignorant may not see"! and *pirištu ša ilāni rabûti*, "Secret of the great gods"! (Livingstone, 1986, p. 1; c.f. Rochberg, 2004, pp. 209-236; Noegel, 2007, pp. 37-38, 70-76). Hence, the discovery of a veiled pun in a god's name or epithet was construed as inviolable wisdom that exposed a previously unknown attribute of its possessor.

Nowhere is this concept better illustrated than in *Enuma Elish* tablet VII. Jean Bottéro has utilized the ancient scholars' commentaries on *Enuma Elish* to show that practically the entire seventh tablet was compiled through punning. In that text, Mesopotamian scholars decoded wordplay from the fifty epithets for the supreme Babylonian deity, Marduk, and then arranged these into coherent statements that exposed facets of his identity and powers (Bottéro, 1977, pp. 5-28; c.f., Dalley, 1989, 276-277, n. 47). Because the commentaries on puns given in *Enuma Elish* VII were an essential reference manual to Mesopotamian astronomers (Rochberg, 2004, pp. 209-236; Lambert, 1976, pp. 313-318), and the ancient techniques for discerning and utilizing wordplay are pertinent to the rediscovery of Pegasus' mythical birth in *Theogony*, we will analyze one astronomical line to illustrate how this practice was employed.

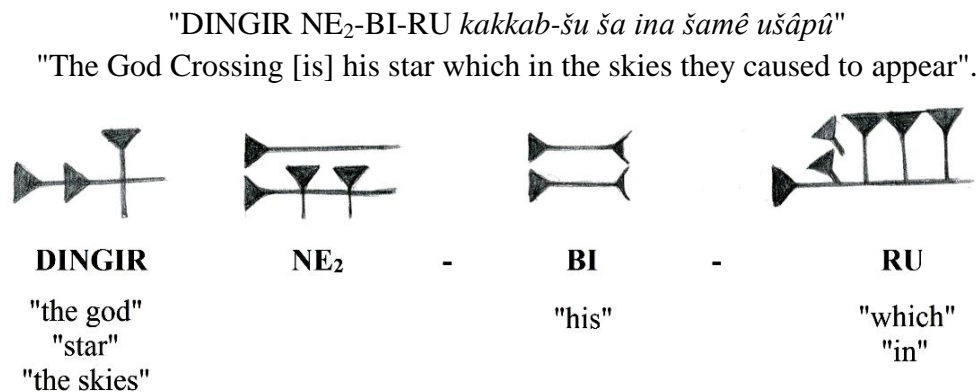
Line 126 of *Enuma Elish* VII reads:

"The god Crossing [is] his star which in the heavens they caused to appear" (Von Soden, 1942, pp. 16-17; Horowitz, 2011, pp. 114-115).

The deity Marduk was embodied in the planet Jupiter (Gössmann, 1950, pp. 97-99, no. 260). Astronomical texts often refer to Marduk by the Akkadian epithet, DINGIR *Nēbiru*, "the god Crossing", a title applied to this planet-god when he stood on the meridian and was therefore "Crossing" the midpoint of the sky (ibid. pp. 118-119, no. 311; Hunger, Pingree, 1989, pp. 28-29). Even though *Nēbiru* is an Akkadian name, pun-seeking Babylonian magicians envisioned it as if it were the Sumerian logogram: DINGIR NE<sub>2</sub>-BI-RU (Bottéro, 1977, p. 20). They then combed through this epithet in search of wordplay that exposed some previously undiscovered aspect of this planet-god's powers. From their expansive grammatical studies astronomers understood that the determinative DINGIR was also read AN, "skies, heavens", and was initially depicted by the symbol of a star (Kramer, 1963, p. 303); therefore conveying the meaning *kakkabu*, "star", and *šamê*, "the skies", in Akkadian (Bottéro, 1977, p. 12). Sumerian-Akkadian dictionaries imparted that BI represented the Akkadian word *sû*, "his" (Bottéro ibid.; Borger, 2004, p. 320, no. 358). Bottéro notes that by the first millennium BC the vowel in consonant-vowel signs such as RU had become multivalent, thus the RU sign in NE<sub>2</sub>-BI-RU was also read RA, a nuance mentioned in the secret commentaries for this line (Bottéro, 1977, pp. 17-18); and RA represented *ša*, "which", and *ina*, "in", in Akkadian (ibid. p. 12; CAD 17/pt.1, p. 1, *ša*, lexical section; ibid. 7, pp. 141-142, *ina*, lexical section). An additional commentary indicates

that an earlier epithet for Marduk given in line 9, TU-TU, could be read DU<sub>2</sub>-DU<sub>2</sub>, thereby forging a homophone with the composite logogram DU<sub>6</sub>-DU, which meant *šūpû*, "to cause to appear, shine" in Akkadian; the latter verb then conjugated into the third-person plural *ušāpû*, "they caused to appear", to suit the grammatical needs of the pun (Bottéro, 1977, pp. 12, 16-17; CAD 1/pt. 2, p. 202, *apû*, 5).

Therefore, polysemous readings embedded in the cuneiform signs used to write the title DINGIR *Nēbiru* yielded the puns: *kakkabu*/"star", *šu*/"his", *ša*/"which", *ina*/"in", *šamê*/"the skies", *ušāpû*/"they-caused-to-appear" (Fig. 2). These puns were then arranged into a coherent statement that imparted an aspect of Marduk-Jupiter's powers; wisdom that was then reported as fact in verse 126 of *Enuma Elish* tablet seven:



**Figure 2.** Each word from line 126 *Enuma Elish* VII came from a pun enciphered in the name of the planet-god *Nēbiru*. The verb *ušāpû*, "they-caused-to-appear", came from a pun embedded in an earlier epithet given in line 9. (sketch by Ashely McCurdy)

Thus, the Babylonian-Assyrian astronomer/*tupšarru* was literally a "writer" who envisioned the astral sky as a sacrosanct cuneiform "text" that imparted divine messages via polysemous readings for cuneiform signs – especially wordplay embedded in the title or epithet of a deity. And one of his most prized reference manuals consisted of the secret, scholarly commentaries on *Enuma Elish* VII.

**Hesiod Influenced by *Enuma Elish***

The aforementioned Mesopotamian celestial arcana suddenly becomes relevant to Pegasus when we learn that the first Hellenic writer to describe this star-figures, Hesiod, was heavily influenced by *Enuma Elish*. The *Oxford Classical Dictionary* states that Hesiod's *Theogony* "has striking parallels in Akkadian and Hittite texts, and seems originally to have come from the near east" (*OCD*, p. 700). In his analysis of Near Eastern influences on Hesiod's *Theogony*, Peter Walcot comments that:

"... Its closest companions in Greek literature are the Homeric Hymns, but even closer is the picture of Zeus in the *Theogony* and that of Marduk in *Enuma Elish*, and it is to Babylonian tradition and the eighth century BC that we should resort if we wish to assess Hesiod's debt to the Near East" (Walcot, 1966, p. 129).

Thus, Walcot's thorough analysis of Hesiod's writings indicate that the poet's leitmotifs in *Theogony* bear a closer resemblance to those in the Mesopotamian *Enuma Elish* than Homer's Hymns!



It therefore seems safe to say that Hesiod either directly or indirectly relied upon *Enuma Elish* when composing *Theogony*, the first extant Hellenic myth to recognize Pegasus. And dependence on *Enuma Elish* implies that Hesiod, or someone collaborating with him, was familiar with the methods used to discover the wordplays upon which tablet seven of that text was based. This idea is substantiated by Hesiod's use of a pun on the name Pegasus (Greek: *Pēgasos*) to distinguish the circumstances surrounding its birth: "... the horse *Pēgasos* who is so called because he was born near the springs [*pēgas*] of Ocean" (Hesiod, 1977, pp. 100-101, brackets inserted; Liddell, Scott, 1997, pp. 637). Hesiod's use of the accusative, plural term for "springs"/*pēgas* as the root for *Pēgasos* indicates that he had employed the same methodology that Babylonian-Assyrian scholars had utilized to reveal aspects of Marduk's identity in *Enuma Elish* VII.

How Hesiod might have become acquainted with the Akkadian *Enuma Elish* is seen in an archaic custom attested throughout ancient Near Eastern and Greco-Roman literature. Vanquishing monarchs conscripted foreign scholars of the occult – including astronomer-astrologers – into their own entourage, where they served as hostages in the court of the new regime (Brown, 2000, pp. 33-34). A perfect example of this is seen in the Hebrew Bible's Book of Daniel. The first six verses recollect how this young Jewish prophet and three of his countrymen were conscripted into the retinue of the conquering Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar II (604-562 BC), where they were to be "trained for three years, and after that ... to enter the king's service". Daniel's curriculum included learning "the language and literature of the Chaldeans [i.e., the Babylonians]", which was Akkadian and Sumerian, and, as we saw above, comprised numerous opportunities for punning. Verse 5:11 confirms that Daniel had risen through the ranks to become the supervisor of all forms of prognostication, including astrology, "... King Nebuchadnezzar your father – your father the king, I say – appointed him [Daniel] chief of the magicians, enchanters, astrologers, and diviners" (Daniel 5:11, brackets inserted).

In his *Natural History* Pliny the Elder (23-79 AD) declares that a similar conscription resulted in astronomy's importation into Rome, "... slaves on sale that had been imported from over-seas; instances of these being Publilius of Antioch the founder of our mimic stage and his cousin Manilius Antiochus the originator of our astronomy ..." (Pliny, 1968, pp. 406-409). And M. J. Geller recounts how a Babylonian *ummānu*/"scholar-magician" was taken in the Emperor Trajan's campaign in AD 116 and sold as a slave in Syria, where he eventually became the tutor for the Syrian author Iamblichus (Geller, 1997, pp. 50-51).

This concept is illuminated by Bradley Parker's discussion of a Greek (Ionian) sea-born raid on an Assyrian-controlled Phoenician port dating to the reign of Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser III (744-727 BC), an incursion that ended the moment the Assyrian military appeared and the Greek raiders "got into their boats and [disappeared] into the middle of the sea" (Parker, 2000, 14.3, p. 72). This was just one of three different instances where Greek pirates invaded Assyrian-ruled Phoenician ports in a timeframe contemporaneous with Hesiod, with the specific purpose of attacking and looting Phoenician coastal towns for plunder (Ibid., pp. 72-73).

The goal of the Greek pirates' intermittent raids on Assyrian-controlled Phoenician cities was to acquire booty, which could come in the form of slaves. Similar accounts appear in Greek epic poetry. Twice Homer describes sea-going Phoenician slave traders interacting with Greeks in his *Iliad* (Homer, 1999, pp. 56-59, 108-113). And the *Homeric Hymns* recount how the god Dionysus, while walking the beach in human form, was taken by pirates as booty, to be sold for a ransom (Hesiod, 1977, pp. 428-433).

### The Cultural Memory of a Mesopotamian Magician Taken "Hostage"

The Near Eastern and Greco-Roman custom whereby hostages were captured and sold or conscripted into the services of foreign political regimes may shed all new light on the identity of Homer. The Greek word *Homēr* means "Hostage" (Beekes, 2010, 2, p. 1067). And Zenodotus of Mallos (second or first century BC) maintained that he was a Chaldean, that is, a Babylonian (Haubold, 2013, pp. 24-25, 178). In summarizing the growing scholarly consensus on Homer, Martin West postulates "that 'Homer' was not the name of a historical poet but the fictitious or constructed name ... there was no original Homer, the *Homeridai* were not named after a person, but, not knowing any better, they invented a Homer as their ancestor or founder ..." (West, 2011, 1, pp. 408, 422).

In a fictional interview with *Homēr* the second century Syrian satirist Lucian also professed that the epic poet was a Babylonian:

Lucian: "Above all", said I, "where do you [i.e., *Homēr*] come from?"

*Homēr*: "... As a matter of fact, I am a Babylonian, and among my fellow-countrymen my name was not *Homēr* but *Tigranes*. Later on, when I was a hostage (*homēr*) among the Greeks, I changed my name" (Lucian, 1961, pp. 322-323).

If this imagined dialogue retains a scrap of historicity, then it attests to the memory of a Babylonian scholar-magician who had been taken "hostage" (*homēr*), the act serving as the eponym for the father of Greek epic poetry. A Babylonian *ummānu*/"scholar-magician" such as this would have encyclopedic knowledge of the Mesopotamian constellations, and would have also been indoctrinated to believe that the constellations depicted hallowed "writing" that imparted revelations via the conduit of wordplay.

The archaeological record accords with the plausibility of the aforementioned scenario. Artifact inventories indicate that by the second half of the eighth century BC – contemporaneous with Homer and Hesiod – Greeks had established amicable trading communities on the costal Syrian sites of Al-Mina, Al-Basit, and Tell Sukas (Walcot, 1966, pp. 104-130; Burkert, 2004, pp. 16-20; Burkert, 1992, pp. 1-40; Markoe, 2000, pp. 36-47; Boardman, 1980, pp. 45, 1-84 passim; Dunbabin, 1979, pp. 1-43).

Pertinent to the current paper is Al-Mina, Syria. There, Greeks from the Aegean isle of Euboea had established a thriving two-way trade among a population that consisted of Near Easterners and Greeks (Ridgway, 1992, pp. 15, 24-25, 30, 64-66, 108-113, 147; Burkert, 1992, pp. 21-22; Boardman, 1980, pp. 37-46). Active eighth century BC trade between Al-Mina and Euboea is intriguing because it indicates amicable relations between a coastal Syrian city under Assyrian political control (Boardman, 1980, p. 44), and a Greek island where Hesiod was present. In fact, it was in Euboea that Hesiod won a handled tripod as a prize for a song he performed at the burial ceremony of King Amphidamas (Hesiod, 1977, pp. 50-51). Walcot notes that Euboean Greeks "... seem to have been extremely active here [i.e., Al-Mina] during the eighth century BC, for part of which time the Assyrians were in control of the region. Al-Mina is an obvious place for the Greeks to have acquired a knowledge of *Enuma Elish* or any other work of Babylonian literature ..." (Walcot, 1966, p. 121, brackets inserted).

And acquiring knowledge of *Enuma Elish* implies the presence of scholars fluent in the Akkadian and Greek languages as well as the religious ideologies of both cultures. More importantly, it implies the presence of Mesopotamian astronomer-magicians indoctrinated with

the arcane belief that the constellations depicted divine "writing" that imparted sacred wisdom through wordplay.

Further evidence suggests that Euboean Greeks joined Assyrian forces as mercenaries at Al-Mina (Burkert, 2004, p. 9; Kearsley, 1999, pp. 109-134; Boardman, 1980, p. 42). And around 743 BC Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser III forcibly gained control of Syria and Cyprus, and it was his officer that later reported the maritime raid by Greeks off the Phoenician coast, an encounter discussed by Parker, above (c.f. Boardman, 1980, p. 44). In circa 711 BC Assyrian king Sargon II – who is thought to have had *lumāši*-writing inscribed in his palace – quashed the rebellion of a Greek at the Phoenician city of Ashdod (Burkert, 2004, p. 9; Burkert, 1992, p. 13; Boardman, 1980, p. 45). Finally, around 695 BC Sargon II's successor, Sennacherib, had Greek sailors working for him on the Tigris River in the Assyrian city of Nineveh (Boardman, 1980, p. 46).

The archaeological and literary record indicates that in Homer and Hesiod's time Greeks and Assyrians had established intermittent commercial-based alliances and also confronted each other in military skirmishes. Ironically, Walter Burkert reports that the military conflicts helped to amplify the Greek-Assyrian mercantile relationships, "On the whole the numerous violent incidents and catastrophes did not destroy East-West connections, but rather intensified them, perhaps because now streams of refugees were mingling with the traders" (Burkert, 1992, p. 13).

Any one of the aforementioned military conflicts, pirate raids, or trading expeditions between Mesopotamians, Phoenicians, and Greeks could have resulted in a Babylonian or Assyrian "astronomer-magician" being captured and sold to a Hellenic overlord, a vestige of the transaction found in the name *Homēr*: "Hostage". At which time the Mesopotamian concept of the starry sky as hallowed "writing" that imparted divine messages through the medium of wordplay would have passed into Hellenic thought.

Burkert argues for direct contact in the eight century BC:

"Akkadian cuneiform side by side with Aramaic, Phoenician, and Greek alphabetic script produces a continuum of written culture in the eighth century [BC] which stretches from the Euphrates to Italy. Cuneiform tablets are found not only as far as Syria but also on Cyprus and Tarsos, where the Greeks were definitely present... which proves that Greek literary practice is ultimately dependent upon Mesopotamia" (Burkert *ibid.*, pp. 31-32).

West also makes an unequivocal argument for direct colloquies between Greek and Mesopotamian scholars in the eight century BC:

"But how was this influence transmitted from one poetic tradition to another across the language barrier? ... I see no alternative to the assumption of a certain number of bilingual poets, probably easterners who had settled in Greece and learned to compose epic in the Greek manner ... In other instances we seem to detect close relationships between Homeric or Hesiodic passages and other 'classic' Babylonian texts such as *Atrahasis* and *Enūma Eliš*. To account for them we must surely postulate poets educated in the Levant who subsequently became Hellenized and practiced in Greece" (West, 2011, 1, p. 71).

In sum, the archaeological and textual record implies direct contact between Mesopotamian and Greek scholars throughout the eight century BC, a circumstance that has compelled three authorities on Mesopotamian-Greek cultural transmission (Peter Walcot, Walter Burkert, Martin West) to argue that direct encounters plainly occurred. The ancient record specifies how this transmission took place: a Babylonian *ummānu*/"scholar-magician" had been taken "hostage" by a Hellenic satrap. According to Lucian a vestige of the encounter remains in the eponymous title

of the father of Greek epic poetry, *Homēr*: "Hostage". Whence the Akkadian language and constellation names were transmitted into the Hellenic cultural sphere along with the secret conviction that the astral sky was a hallowed "text" that imparted revelation through wordplay; the manner in which astronomer-scholars were to utilize wordplay being exemplified in *Enuma Elish* VII.

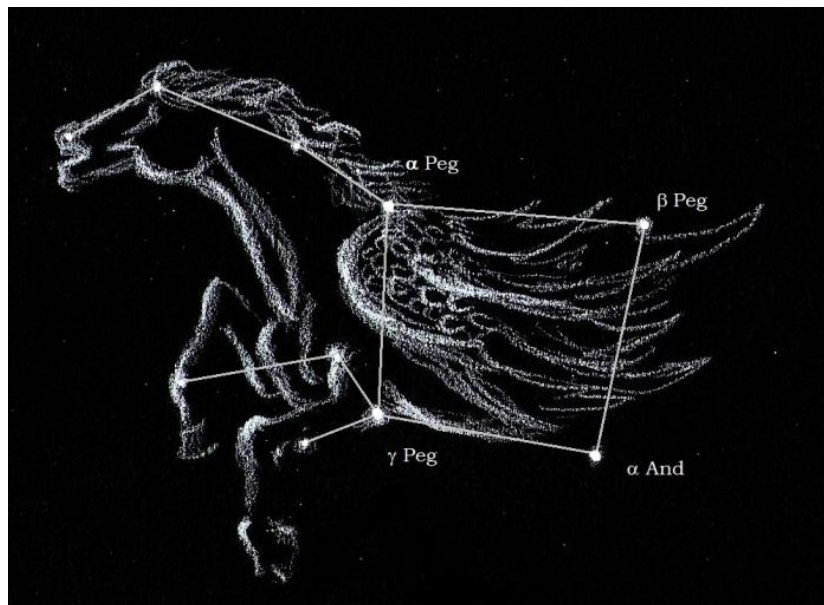
Conceptualizing the constellations as "heavenly writing" that imparted divine communication through wordplay in the manner illustrated in *Enuma Elish* provides the cipher which allows us to discern the astronomical origin of Pegasus and the myth recounting its birth.

### The Cuneiform Puns that Inspired Pegasus' Astronomical Appearance

To ascertain the celestial cuneiform puns that divulged the astronomical appearance of Pegasus and its "Birth" myth, it is first helpful to revisit the comments of Scott Noegel cited above:

"...There was a whole envelope of information that came with every [cuneiform] sign or part of a word" (Joseph, 2002, brackets inserted).

Hence, a Greek astronomer-poet fluent in Akkadian cuneiform would have envisioned each constellation title as an "envelope" or "cluster" of words and meanings that could impart divine wisdom through polysemy. And in the envelope of numinous puns encrypted in the cuneiform titles for the stars of the Pegasus, we find the basis for its astronomical appearance along with the "Creation" vignette reported by Hesiod.



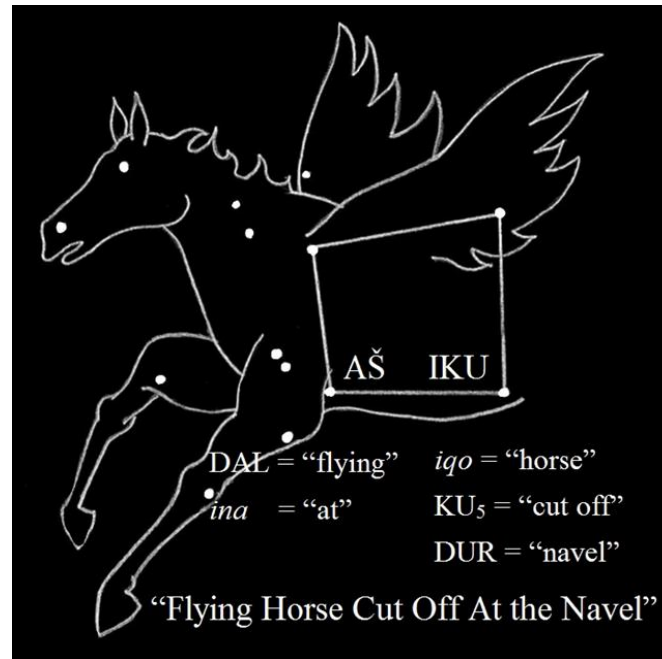
**Figure 3.** The Pegasus Square was called the "Field" in the Mesopotamian astronomical texts, a word represented by the logogram IKU (photo courtesy of the Griffith Observer).

Although no prototype of a Flying Horse appears in the Mesopotamian sky, its four brightest stars trace a conspicuous square in the heavens (Fig. 3). Because this stellar square resembled the quintessential Mesopotamian "field"/*ikû* – a square plot of agricultural land with 60-meter sides – it was named the "Field"/*ikû* constellation; the latter an Akkadian term that was represented by the Sumerian logogram IKU (Gössmann, 1950, pp. 76-79, no. 193) (Fig. 3).

In previous articles the author has shown that Pegasus' appearance in Greek astronomy – as a Flying Horse severed at the navel (Fig. 3) – can be directly traced to puns encrypted in its

Mesopotamian cuneiform titles (McHugh, 2016, pp. 82-86); a point that will be briefly reiterated here.

Classicist Douglas Kidd noticed that the logogram for the Mesopotamian "Field" constellation embodied in the Pegasus Square, IKU, formed a homophone with the Mycenaean word *Iqo*, "Horse" (Aratus, 1997, p. 258; c.f. Palmer, 1980, p. 227) – the direct correlation manifesting when we recall that cuneiform *u* was frequently rendered *o* in Greek (Geller, 1997, p. 68-69). Thus, a Greek astronomer fluent in the Akkadian cuneiform language would have noticed that his archaic word for "horse"/*iqo* was embodied in the logographic cuneiform spelling (IKU) for the Pegasus Square (Fig. 4).



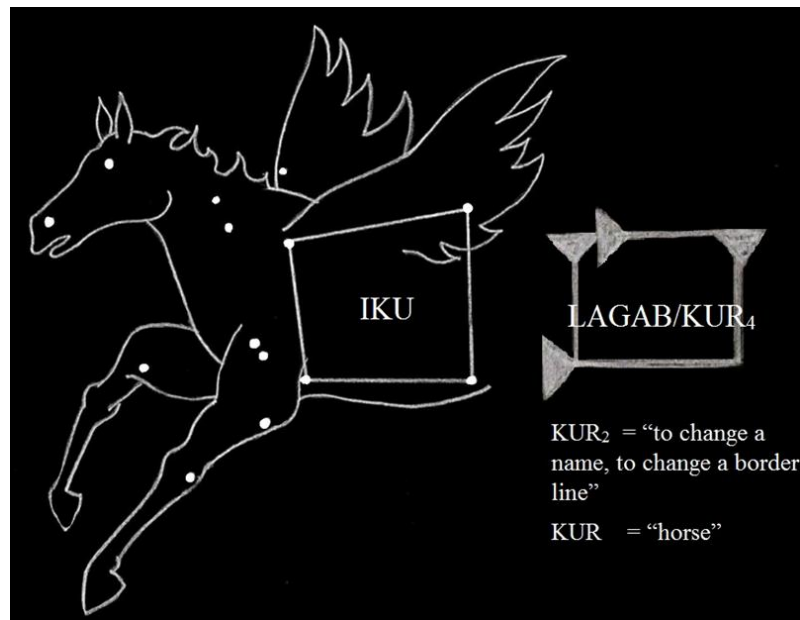
**Figure 4.** *Lumāši*, or "constellation"-writing puns encrypted in the cuneiform terms for the Pegasus Square imparted words that correlate with Pegasus' appearance in Greek astronomy. (sketch Ashley McCurdy)

Additional puns correlate with the details of Pegasus' appearance. Because the Mesopotamian "Field"/*Ikû* constellation was a form of surface area similar to the English term *acre*, its title often appears in astronomical texts as the logogram: AŠ IKU, "One Field" (Hunger, Pingree 1989, p. 29; *CAD* 7, p. 68, *ikû*, lexical section; Gössmann, 1950, pp. 76-79, no. 193). We just saw that IKU formed a homophone with the archaic Greek term for "horse"/*iqo*. And AŠ was the logogram that meant *ina*, "at" (Huehnergard, 1997, p. 498). AŠ was also read DAL<sub>3</sub>, phonetically imparting DAL, "to fly" (Borger, 2004, p. 245, no. 1; *CAD* 11/pt.1, p. 314, *naprušu*, lexical section). Moreover, Sumerian-Akkadian dictionaries referenced by Mesopotamian astronomers affirm that the logogram IKU was pronounced "I-KU" (*CAD* 7, p. 68, *ikû*, lexical section). Since Mesopotamian astronomers broke apart cuneiform words into their constituent signs in search of concealed puns, they presumably dissected IKU into its phonemic components, I-KU. The KU sign formed a homophone with KU<sub>5</sub>, "to cut off" (Halloran, 2006, p. 23). KU was also read as DUR<sub>2</sub> (Borger, 2004, p. 425, no. 808), which phonetically imparts the logogram DUR, "navel" (*CAD* 1/pt.1, p. 89, *abunnatu*, lexical section).

Hence, polysemous readings encrypted in the logographic spelling for Field constellation injected the puns: DAL/"flying", *Iqo*/"horse", KU<sub>5</sub>/"cut-off", *ina*/"at", DUR/"the navel"

(McHugh, 2016, pp. 82-86) (Fig. 4). This is precisely the image Pegasus assumes in Hellenic astronomy.

The Hellenic compulsion to "change" the Mesopotamian Field constellation into a "flying horse severed at the navel" appears to be founded on Mesopotamian astronomers' penchant to conceptualize the starry sky as a divine cuneiform "text" in which the constellations were envisioned as embodiments of the cuneiform signs they resembled (Finkel, Reade 1996, p. 248; Reade, 1979, p. 45). And, because the Mesopotamian "Field"/IKU constellation traced out a distinct square in the heavens, it resembled the cuneiform sign LAGAB, with the latter sign presumably serving as this constellation's 'astroglyph' (Fig. 5)



**Figure 5.** IKU's resemblance to LAGAB imparted that the Field's name and shape be changed. (sketch by Ashley McCurdy)

LAGAB had numerous readings, one being KUR<sub>4</sub> (Borger, 2004, p. 420, no. 755: *ePSD*: lagab). The latter forged a homophone with KUR<sub>2</sub>, the logogram that stood for the Akkadian verb *nukkuru*, "to change, become different; to change a name, to change a border line", and also formed a homophone with KUR, the Assyrian logogram "horse", as shown in Fig. 5 (*CAD* 11/pt.1, p. 159, *nakāru*, 7, 10, 11, lexical section; *ibid.* 15, p. 328, *sīsū*; McHugh, 2016, p. 85). Given that Mesopotamian astronomers believed that wordplay conveyed divinely imparted wisdom, and Hesiod was directly inspired by at least one of the texts that Mesopotamian astronomers studied to learn how to utilize wordplay for enlightenment, it seems plausible that the aforementioned puns served as the impetus for Hesiod to "Change the Outline, Name" of the Field constellation into the image of a "Flying Horse Severed At the Navel" as shown in Fig. 4 and Fig. 5 (McHugh, 2016, pp. 84-85).

### The Celestial Cuneiform Puns that Inspired Pegasus' Birth Story

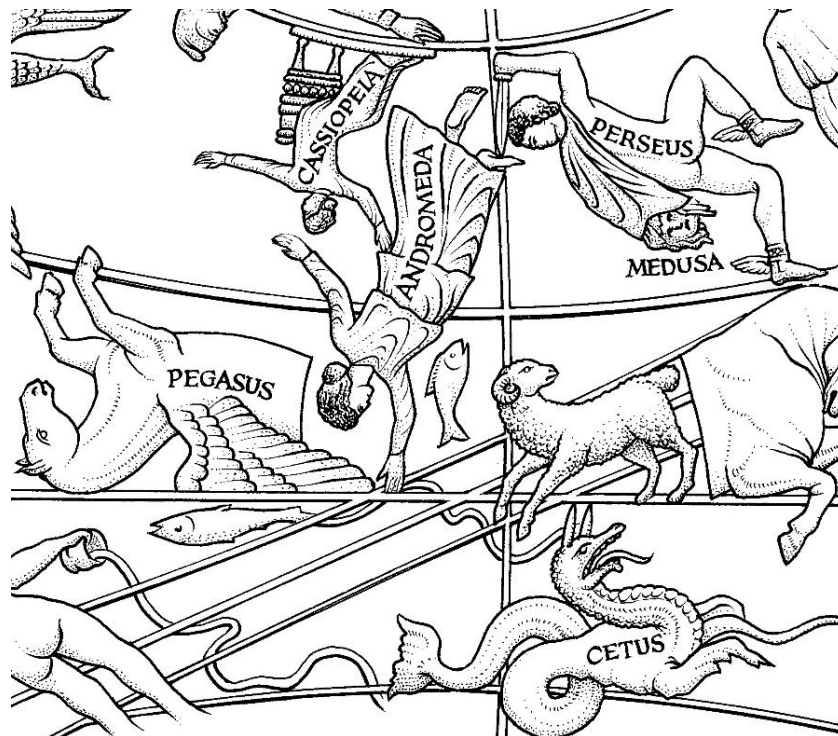
While the aforementioned astronomical correlations are intriguing in their own right, there is also an almost one-to-one correlation between the words from Pegasus' birth story and celestial puns encoded in the cuneiform terms for the Pegasus Square ("Field"/*Ikū*) and the constellation immediately south of it.

Verses 280-282 of *Theogony* read:

"280. And when Perseus cut off her [Medusa's] head,  
 281. there sprang forth great *Chrysaōr* and the horse Pegasus  
 282. who is so called because he was born near the springs of Ocean".

(Hesiod, 1977, pp. 98-101).

A vestige of this story remains as a tableau in the starry sky. The knife-wielding Perseus is depicted carrying the severed head of Medusa, from which Pegasus is said to have spontaneously emerged (Fig. 6).



**Figure 6.** Perseus carries Medusa's Head, from which Pegasus was said to have spontaneously sprung (sketch of 2<sup>nd</sup> century Farnese star atlas courtesy of Michael Lyon).

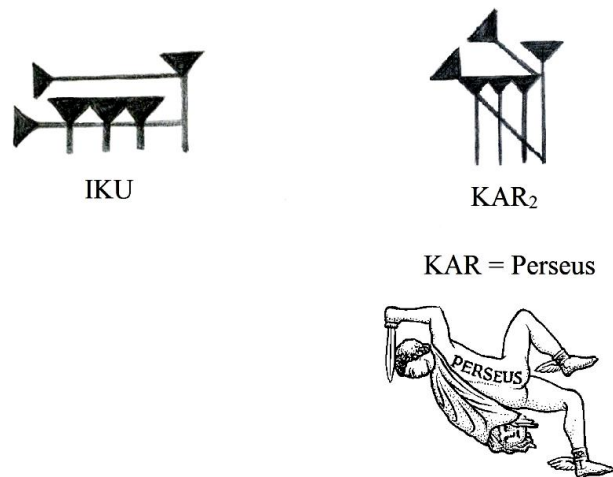
And although a still-frame of the event is present in the constellations, the narrative's characters, action, and key details can be found encoded as wordplay in the cuneiform terms for the Pegasus Square and the stars that came to depict the neck and head of Pegasus (ξ, ζ, θ, ε Pegasi).

### "Perseus"

In Mesopotamia the stars of Perseus were called *Šību*, "Old Man" (Gössmann, 1950, pp. 208-210, no. 378; *CAD* 17/pt.2, p. 390, *šību* A). A Greek astronomer-poet fluent in cuneiform would have known that the *Ikû*/"Field" constellation was an abstract concept, i.e., a unit of surface area. The tangible object depicted in the Field constellation was a "plot of land" – spelled *iku*, *eku*, or *igu* in Akkadian – and it was this "agricultural plot" (*iku/eku/igu*) from which the term for surface area, *Ikû*/"Field", was derived (*CAD* 7, p. 68). Hence, the object depicted in the Field constellations was a "Plot-of-Land" that was sometimes spelled *Igu*. And *Igu* forged a homophone with *IGU*, which was also read *ŠI* and *IGI*, the latter two readings serving as logograms for the term "Old-Man"/*Šību*, which is precisely what the constellation Perseus depicted in Mesopotamia (*CAD* 17/pt.2, p. 390, *šību* A, lexical section). Hence, the object

depicted in the Field constellation, *Igu*, also embodied the cuneiform logogram for the "Old Man" constellation embodied in the star-figure the Greeks knew as Perseus (Fig. 8).

A second pun may have established, or reinforced, the idea that Perseus was present in the celestial scene with Pegasus. Any Greek astronomer-poet fluent in Akkadian would have known all of the variations by which cuneiform signs were written, including the practice of writing certain cuneiform signs on a slant, called *tenû*/"inclined" (Glassner, 2003, p. 125). IKU was sometimes written on a slant – the slanted IKU being read KAR<sub>2</sub>, (Borger 2004, p. 290, nos. 174, 175) (Fig. 7). The latter forged a homophone with KAR, one of the logograms for Perseus/*Šību* (CAD 17/pt.2, p. 390, *šību* A, lexical section). Thus, phonetically embedded in one of the readings for the Field constellation was KAR, the logogram that represented the star-figure the Greeks knew as Perseus (Fig. 7).



**Figure 7.** Perseus was embedded in the Pegasus Square through the slanted form of the IKU sign (right), which was read KAR<sub>2</sub>, a homophone with KAR/"Perseus".

All told, the Mesopotamian object depicted in the Pegasus Square, *Igu*/"Plot-of-Land", imparted IGU – the logogram for the "Old Man" constellation; while the slanted form of the IKU sign could be read KAR<sub>2</sub>, which phonetically divulged KAR/"Old Man". A Greek astronomer-author fluent in cuneiform would have presumably recognized one if not both of the aforementioned puns, and would have known that the "Old Man" constellation was the Mesopotamian equivalent to Perseus; thereby interjecting Perseus into the celestial landscape of the Pegasus Square.

### "Medusa"

The Greek name *Medousa* (Μέδουσα) means "Ruling" (Beekes, 2010, 2, p. 918). We just saw that the "Field"/*Ikû* was an abstract concept (i.e., a unit of surface area), the tangible object depicted in this constellation being an *Igu*/"Plot-of-Land". And *Igu* forged a homophone with IGU, the logogram more typically read IGI, and which represented the Akkadian word for "spring", spelled *īnu* or *ēnu* (CAD 7, pp. 153-154, *īnu*, lexical section). And *ēnu* formed a homophone with the logogram ENU, which was more commonly read EN and represented the verb *bēlu*, "to rule" or "ruling" (*ePSD*: en; CAD 2, p. 199). Hence, the image depicted in the "Field" constellation – *Igu* – imparted the logogram for "spring"/*ēnu*, which yields the phonetic equivalent to the logogram ENU, "Ruling". And "Ruling" is precisely what the Greek *Medousa* means. In this way, Medusa joined Perseus in the celestial landscape of the Pegasus Square (Fig. 8).





**Figure 8.** Puns encrypted in the cuneiform terms for the Pegasus Square interjected the cuneiform equivalent to Medusa/"Ruling" along with the words "Perseus, Cut Off, Her, Head". (sketch by Ashley McCurdy).

### "Cut off her head"

The notion that Perseus had "cut off" (*apedeïrotomēsen*) Medusa's "head" (*kephalēn*) can be traced to further wordplay. Above we saw that the logogram for the Pegasus Square, IKU, was pronounced "I-KU", with the KU sign phonetically imparting KU<sub>5</sub> "to cut off". Moreover, the tangible object depicted in the Field constellation, *Igu*, formed a homophone with IGU. The latter logogram was also read ŠI, which represented *šuāti*, "her" (*CAD* 17/pt.3, pp. 163-164, *šuāti*, lexical section). The Akkadian word for "skull, head", *muḥḥu*, was written with the logogram A-SAG (*CAD* 10/pt.2 pp. 172-173, *muḥḥu*, lexical section). A Greek astronomer fluent in cuneiform would have known that the SAG sign can just as accurately be read ŠAG (Borger, 2004, p. 293, no. 184). Thus A-SAG ("skull, head") can also be read A-ŠAG. And the latter forms a homophone with AŠAG, which is one of the readings for IKU, "Field" (*ibid.* p. 290, no.174; *ePSD*: iku). Celestial punning thereby interjected the word "cut-off, her, head" into the frame of the Pegasus Square.

Altogether, the astral puns encoded in the cuneiform terms for the stars of Pegasus imparted the words "Medusa (Ruling), Perseus, Cut-Off, Her, Head"; terms that reappear in Hesiod's creation story for this creature (Fig. 8).

### "Sprang forth"

The Greek "sprang, leaped forth" (*ekthore*) has a correlate in the Field constellation's logogram IKU. Recall that Sumerian-Akkadian dictionaries affirm that the logogram IKU was read "I-KU", and that Mesopotamian astronomer-magicians were fond of breaking apart words into their constituent signs in search of wordplay. The KU portion of I-KU can be read GUD<sub>7</sub> (*ePSD*: ku; Borger, 2004, p. 205, no. 808), a homophone with GUD, the logogram that stood for *šaḥātu*, "to jump, leap up" (*CAD* 17/pt.1, p. 88, *šaḥātu* A, lexical section). Hence, an alternate reading for the KU sign in I-KU phonetically imparted GUD/"leap forth", which correlates to Hesiod's *ekthore*.



**Figure 9.** The logogram for the Pegasus Square was read "I-KU". Alternate readings for the KU sign phonetically imparted "Sprang Forth, Gold, Sword". And "Golden-Sword"/*Chrysaor* is precisely what "sprang-forth" from Medusa's severed head. (sketch by Ashley McCurdy, Michael Lyon).

### "*Chrysaor*"

The twin deity who sprang from Medusa's severed head with Pegasus was Chrysaor (*Chrysaōr*/Χρυσάωρ). In line 283 Hesiod explains that his name arose from his appearance: he leaped from Medusa's decapitation holding a "golden sword" in his hand (Hesiod, 1977, pp. 100-101). *Chrys* meant "golden", and *aōr* meant "sword" (Liddell, Scott, 1997, pp. 896, 86). Hence, *Chrysaōr* meant, "Golden-Sword". Here again we find a direct correlation with the Field's logogram, IKU, which was pronounced, I-KU. The KU sign could be read UŠ<sub>4</sub> (Borger 2004, p. 425-428, nos. 808, 809, 810), which forms a homophone with UŠ<sub>2</sub>, "gold" (*CAD* 6, p. 245, *hurāṣu*, lexical section) (Fig. 9). KU was also read GIR<sub>15</sub>, a homophone with GIR<sub>2</sub>, "sword" (*ibid.* 12, p. 279, *patru*, lexical section) (Fig. 9).

Hence, a Greek astronomer fluent in cuneiform would have been utilizing *Enuma Elish* tablet VII as his vade mecum, a text that exemplifies how divine names were dissected and examined in an effort to extract puns that imparted hidden attributes of the name's bearer. The KU portion of IKU yielded the phonetic equivalent to GUD, "Leaping-Forth", "UŠ<sub>2</sub>", "Gold", and GIR<sub>2</sub>, "Sword", – which equates perfectly with the Greek *Chrysaōr*, "Golden-Sword", – the name of the deity that "leaped forth" from Medusa's decapitated skull with Pegasus (Fig. 9).

### "*The horse Pegasus*"

Above we saw that the word "Horse" was encrypted in the Pegasus Square's cuneiform title in two ways. The archaic Greek (i.e., Mycenaean) word for "horse"/*iqo*, was embedded as a homophone in the cuneiform term for the Pegasus Square, IKU (Fig. 4). And the IKU/"Field" constellation's conspicuously square appearance resembled the cuneiform sign LAGAB, which

was read KUR<sub>4</sub>, phonetically imparting the Assyrian logogram for "horse"/KUR (Fig. 5). Hence, the archaic Greek word for "horse"/*iqo* and the Assyrian logogram for "horse"/KUR were enciphered in the various readings for the "Field" constellation depicted by the Pegasus Square (Figs. 4, 5).

### **"So called"**

Hesiod uses the term *epōnymon* "called, named" in line 282 (Hesiod, 1977, pp. 100-101; Liddell, Scott, 1997, p. 310). Its cuneiform correlate is found in the tangible object depicted in the "Field" constellation, the *Igu*/"Plot-of-Land". *Igu* formed a homophone with the cuneiform sign IGU. The latter was also read PAD<sub>4</sub> and ŠE<sub>20</sub> (*ePSD*: igu), phonetically imparting the Sumerian verbs PAD<sub>3</sub> and ŠE<sub>21</sub>, "to call by a name" (*CAD* 11/pt.1, p. 32, *nabû* A, lexical section; *ePSD*: še<sub>21</sub>).

Hence, the cuneiform terms "Call-by-a-Name" (PAD<sub>3</sub>, ŠE<sub>21</sub>) were encrypted as constellation-writing wordplay in the cuneiform terms for the Pegasus Square. Words that approximate Hesiod's "named"/*epōnymon* (McHugh 2016, 85-86) (Fig. 11).

### **"Because"**

Hesiod has *hot* (ὄτ'), "because". The exact correlate is found in the Field constellation's common astronomical logogram, AŠ IKU ("One Field"). The Sumerian logogram AŠ can be read AŠŠA (*ePSD*: aš), which forms a homophone with the Akkadian *ašša*, "because" (*CAD* 1/pt. 2, p. 460) (Fig. 11).

### **"He-was-born"**

Hesiod has *genth*/"he-was-born" (Hesiod, 1977, pp. 100-101). Recall that Mesopotamian astronomers broke apart cuneiform logograms in search of puns, with IKU separated into its composite syllables according to its pronunciation in the Sumerian-Akkadian dictionaries: "I-KU". The KU portion of this word forms a homophone with KU<sub>4</sub>, the logogram that was also read TUD, TU, DU<sub>2</sub>, "to be born" (Halloran, 2006, p. 24; Borger, 2004, p. 263, nos. 86, 87, 88). Thus, the cuneiform correlate to Hesiod's Greek *genth*/"he-was-born" was embedded as a pun in the cuneiform term for the Pegasus Square (Fig. 11).

### **"Near"**

Bilingual Greek astronomer-magicians would have known that one of the typical celestial determinatives affixed to the *Ikû*/"Field" constellation was MUL<sub>2</sub>, which also meant *sanaqu*, "to be adjacent to, next to", as well as *lētu*, "nearby region". (*CAD* 15, p.133, *sanaqu*, 5; *ibid.* 9, p. 148, *lētu*). Here lies the cuneiform equivalent to Hesiod's *peri*, "near" (Hesiod, 1977, pp. 100-101) (Fig. 11).

### **"The springs"**

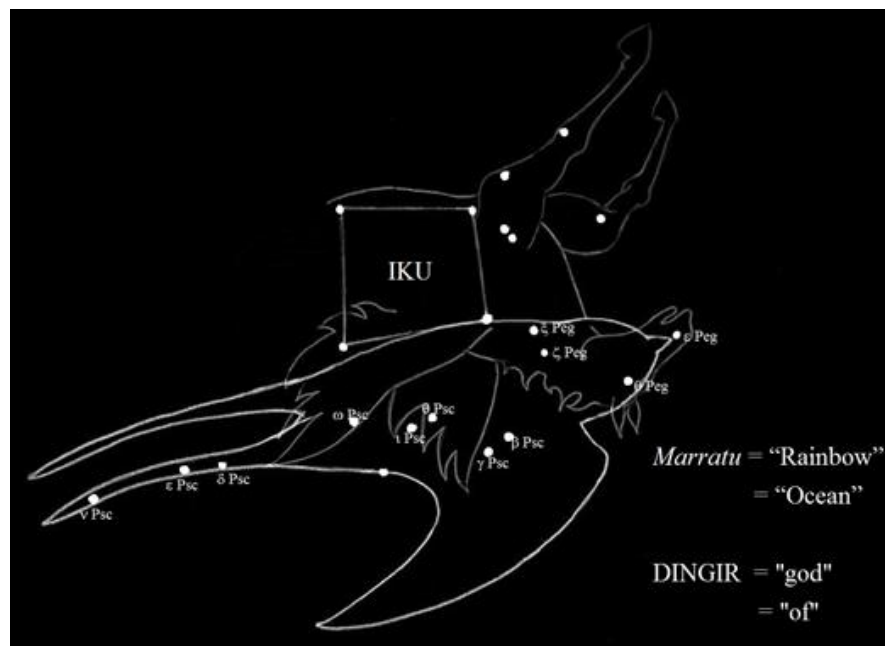
Hesiod contends that the name *Pēgasos* ("Springs") was derived from the location of his birth, i.e., his close proximity to the "springs"/*pēgas* of the deity *Okeanos* (Hesiod, 1977, pp. 100-101; Liddell, Scott, 1997, p. 637). The corresponding cuneiform term is found in the tangible object depicted in the "Field" constellation, which was an *Igu*/"Plot-of-Land". We have shown that the Akkadian *Igu* made a homophone with the logogram IGU, which was more commonly read IGI and represented the Akkadian *īnu/ēnu* "spring" (Borger 2004, p. 187, no. 724; *CAD* 7, p. 153, *īnu*, lexical section). A Greek astronomer-poet fluent in Akkadian would have known that the plural form of "spring" (*īnū/ēnū*) was spelled exactly like the singular.

Therefore, the Field constellation's image as an *Igu* imparted the cuneiform equivalent to the Greek "springs" (Fig. 11).

### "Of [the god] Ocean"

Hesiod tells us that Pegasus was born near the springs "of Ocean", the latter translation derived from Greek *Ōkeanou* (Ὠκεανοῦ) – the genitive case form of *Ōkeanos*, "Ocean". The astral identity of the latter deity is detectable as a pun in the Mesopotamian constellation positioned immediately south of the Field/IKU.

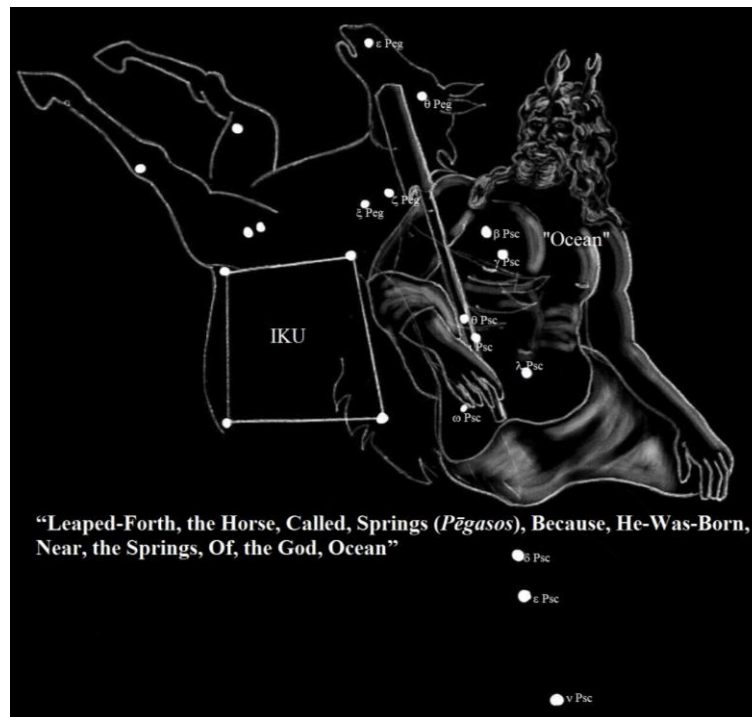
Cuneiform astronomical texts confirm that the Southern Pisces Fish depicted SIM-MAḪ, the "Great-Swallow" (SIM = "swallow"; MAḪ = "great"; *BPO* 2, p. 14; van der Waerden 1949, p. 15). Yet astronomical tablets verify that it extended slightly further west than the modern Southern Pisces Fish, and included some of the stars that came to be incorporated into the Flying Horse's neck and head, i.e., the stars: ξ, ζ, θ, ε Pegasi (ibid.) (Fig. 10).



**Figure 10.** The Mesopotamian "Great-Swallow" constellation was a deity that incorporated the stars of the Southern Pisces Fish and the head and neck of what eventually became Pegasus. It was sometimes called *Marratu*, "Rainbow", a word that also meant "Ocean" (sketch by Ashley McCurdy).

The 686 BC cuneiform star atlas, "MUL-APIN", unequivocally confirms that the "Great-Swallow" was a deity (Hunger, Pingree, 1989, pp. 67-69). The same text equates the "Great-Swallow" with IM-ŠEŠ (ibid., p. 45), a logogram that represented the Akkadian, *Marratu*, "Rainbow" (*CAD* 10/pt. 1, p. 286 *marratu* C; ibid., *manzât*, p. 230 lexical section, p. 231, 1b). And *Marratu* makes a homonym (i.e., a word with the same spelling and pronunciation but different meaning) with the Akkadian word *marratu*, "ocean, sea" (ibid. p.285, *marratu* A; Horowitz, 2011, pp. 22, 29-30). Because the Southern Pisces Fish was a "god" it had the divine determinative DINGIR affixed to it, a logogram that also stood for the Akkadian word *ša*, "of" (*CAD* 17/pt.1, p. 1, *ša*, lexical section). Hence, directly south of the Pegasus Square, and incorporating stars that came to become part of the Flying Horse's neck and head was a constellation-god named *Marratu*, "Rainbow", a spelling that also yielded, "Ocean". In cuneiform writing this star-deity would have the determinative DINGIR/"god" affixed to his

name, a logogram that also meant *ša*/"of". Thus, polysemy enciphered in the star-figure immediately adjacent to the Field held the terms: *ša*, DINGIR, *Marratu*, "of, the god, Ocean"; the cuneiform equivalent to Hesiod's *Ōkeanou*/"of Ocean".



**Figure 11.** Pegasus' birth from the "springs" of the god Ocean correlate directly with wordplay encrypted in the cuneiform terms for the Pegasus Square and Great Swallow (Southern Pisces Fish + ξ, ζ, θ, ε Pegasi). (sketch by Ashley McCurdy).

All told, the puns enciphered in the "Field" (Pegasus Square) and the coterminous "Great-Swallow" (Southern Pisces Fish + ξ, ζ, θ, ε Pegasi) divulged: "Medusa, Perseus, Cut-Off, Her, Head, Leaped-Forth, Gold-Sword (*Chrysaōr*), [and] the Horse, Called, Springs (*Pēgasos*), Because, He-Was-Born, Near, the Springs, Of, the God, Ocean"; words that correlate to Pegasus' creation story in Hesiod's *Theogony* (Fig. 11).

The proffered evidence indicates that the Flying Horse's mythical "Birth" narrative can be traced to wordplay encrypted in the cuneiform terms for the Mesopotamian "Field" (Pegasus Square) and "Great-Swallow" (Southern Pisces Fish + ξ, ζ, θ, ε Pegasi) that came to comprise the constellation Pegasus in Hellenic astronomy. Even the deity *Okeanos*/"Ocean" can be found entwined as a pun in the stars that came to represent Pegasus' head and neck stars (ξ, ζ, θ, ε Pegasi).

A Greek astronomer-poet fluent in cuneiform and indoctrinated with Mesopotamian celestial arcana would possess the linguistic acumen to recognize these puns, would have perceived them as inviolable, and would have been able to transcribe them into articulate Greek – conjugating the infinitive form of the verbs into coherent finite forms.

### Why the Greek God "Ocean" Was Described as a "River"

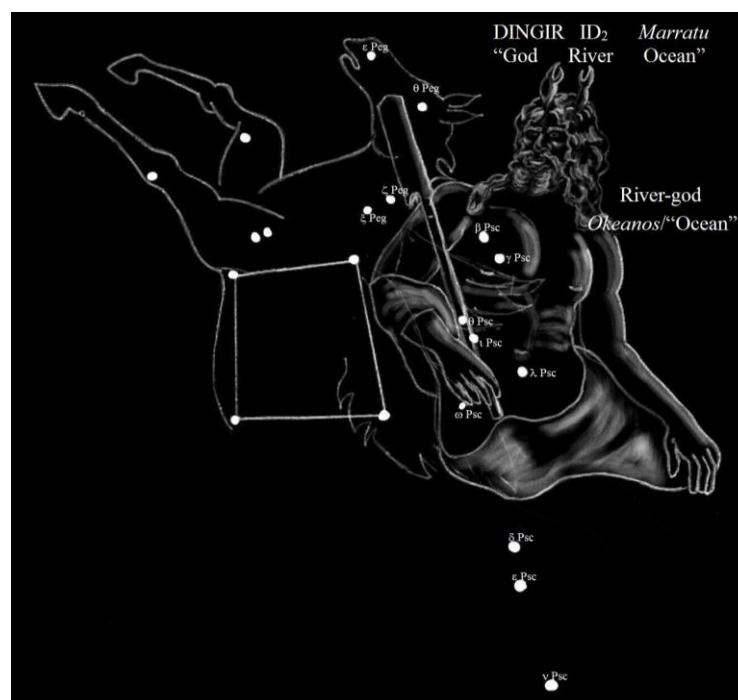
An additional point serves to bolster the author's claim that Hesiod's "Birth of Pegasus" story was founded on celestial punning in the cuneiform terms for Pegasus and the Southern Pisces Fish + ξ, ζ, θ, ε Pegasi. In Hellenic religious mythology, the god "Ocean"/*Okeanos* is depicted in a remarkably incongruous way: as a *Potamos*, "River". Károly Kerényi writes, "*Okeanos* was a river-god; a river or stream and a god in the same person ..." (Kerényi, 1985, p. 15; *BNP* 10, pp.

10-14; *OCD* p. 1030). The *Brill's New Pauly* describes *Okeanos* as a, "Divine representation of the world river ..." (*BNP* 10, pp. 10). The point is underscored by Hesiod, who refers to Ocean as the *telēntos potamoio*, "perfect river" (Hesiod, 1977, pp. 96-97; c.f., Liddell, Scott, 1997, p. 799). Given the expansive pool of seemingly endless ocean visible to the throngs of shoreside inhabitants of Greece, along with the myriad Hellenic sailors that plied the Aegean and Mediterranean, the portrayal of Ocean as a "River"/*Potamos* seems entirely discordant. Here again, the answer to this discrepancy lies in an astronomical pun enshrouded in the stars adjacent to Pegasus, four of which became the Flying Horse's neck and head ( $\xi$ ,  $\zeta$ ,  $\theta$ ,  $\epsilon$  Pegasi).

We just saw that the Mesopotamian "Great-Swallow" was a DINGIR/"deity" embodied in the Southern Pisces Fish +  $\xi$ ,  $\zeta$ ,  $\theta$ ,  $\epsilon$  Pegasi, and was equated with the term *Marratu*, "Rainbow", – a word that also spelled, "Ocean" (Fig. 12).

However, cuneiform texts confirm that the term *Marratu*/"Ocean" typically had the determinative for "river", ID<sub>2</sub>, affixed to its title (*CAD* 10/pt.1, p. 285, *marratu* A; Horowitz, 2011, pp. 22, 29-30). Thus, a common first millennium BC cuneiform spelling for the word "Ocean" was: ID<sub>2</sub> *Marratu*, "River Ocean" (ibid.). Hence *lumāši*-writing puns encrypted in the Mesopotamian Great-Swallow constellation (Southern Pisces Fish +  $\xi$ ,  $\zeta$ ,  $\theta$ ,  $\epsilon$  Pegasi) embodied the term DINGIR ID<sub>2</sub> *Marratu*, "God River Ocean". The latter term correlates perfectly with the Greek conception of *Okeanos*/"Ocean": a deity whose name referred to the "Ocean" but whose description was that of a "River" (Fig. 12).

The evidence suggests that the incongruent Hellenic perception of "Ocean"/*Okeanos* as a "River"-god was founded on *lumāši*-writing puns in the Southern Pisces Fish +  $\xi$ ,  $\zeta$ ,  $\theta$ ,  $\epsilon$  Pegasi that yielded the title: "God River Ocean". A bilingual Hellenic poet indoctrinated with Mesopotamian astral esoterica would possess the skills to easily recognize the aforementioned double entendre and render it into eloquent Greek.



**Figure 12.** Wordplay embedded in the stars of the Southern Pisces Fish +  $\xi$ ,  $\zeta$ ,  $\theta$ ,  $\epsilon$  Pegasi imparted the terms: DINGIR ID<sub>2</sub> *Marratu*, "God River Ocean". And the Greek *Okeanos*/"Ocean" is incongruously described as a "River"-god in Hellenic mythology (sketch by Ashley McCurdy).

## Discussion of Results

The current article has presented evidence indicating a direct correlation between the "Creation of Pegasus" myth in *Theogony* 280-282 and wordplay enciphered in this constellation's pre-Hellenic cuneiform titles. Included in these puns is a precise, astronomical correlate to the Greek *Okeanos*, a deity whose name ("Ocean") is incompatible with his identity as a "River", – a discrepancy that is resolved when we turn to the cuneiform title for the stars that became Pegasus' neck and head: DINGIR ID<sub>2</sub> *Marratu*, the "God River Ocean".

A skeptic could easily argue that the polysemous readings of the cuneiform titles for Pegasus produce a plethora of meanings, thus there is no way for the author to *prove* his argument. This author's retort is grounded in two crucial facts that are unequivocal: 1. Mesopotamian astronomers viewed the starry sky and its constellations as a divine "text" that imparted revelation through wordplay; 2. When a pun was discerned from a star-deity's name or epithet it was construed as a "secret of the gods" and typically accompanied by the admonition to keep it concealed. Thus, the silence in the ancient record regarding Mesopotamian celestial punning as the inspiration for the constellation Pegasus and its "Birth" myth may lie in the frequent warning that accompanied the discovery of pun-based wisdom in cuneiform literature: "*Let the learned instruct the learned, the ignorant may not see!*" (Livingstone, 1986, p. 1, italics inserted). The author contends that the pun-based data presented in this article was treated with supreme secrecy because of its content. Modern scholars unwilling to immerse themselves into the arcane mindset of the Mesopotamian astronomer will forever remain "ignorant" of the astronomical and mythical origins of Pegasus. But the bold few scholars that are willing to embrace the archaic thinking paradigm of the ancient Mesopotamian astronomer are quickly treated to the "*secret of the great gods*"; a rediscovery of the arcane system of truth-verification that exposes precisely how a Flying Horse named "Springs"/*Pēgasos* and his twin brother named "Golden-Sword"/*Chrysaōr* managed to "leap forth" from the severed head of Medusa in close proximity to the River-god, Ocean.

## Conclusion

Mesopotamian astronomer-magicians were indoctrinated with the extraordinary conviction that the constellations depicted sacred "writing" that imparted inviolable truth through the medium of wordplay. The ancient record implies that sometime during the eighth century BC a Mesopotamian astronomer-magician had been taken "hostage" and sold to a Hellenic satrap; an idea supported by the numerous literary references to pirate raids in which hostages were taken with the intent of being sold for profit. This suggests that, over time, multiple Mesopotamian astronomer-writers had been taken "hostage" by Greek overlords, became fluent in Greek, and disseminated their skills in colloquies with Greek neophytes. Zenodotus of Mallos (second or first century BC) asserted that *Homēr* was a Babylonian. And the second century Syrian author Lucian stated that the name of the father of Greek epic poetry was eponymous, noting that *Homēr* means "Hostage" because the latter was a Babylonian magician-scholar taken "hostage"/*homēr* by a Greek satrap. Sitting in colloquies with his Greek counterparts, this "hostaged" Mesopotamian astronomer-magician presumably disseminated the aforementioned astronomical wisdom and precepts into the Hellenic cultural sphere.

The implication being that a cadre of bilingual (cuneiform-Greek) scholars came into existence, a remnant of their origin encoded in the eponymous name *Homēr*/"Hostage". Such bilingual astronomer-poets possessed the ability to decipher the "envelop" of puns encrypted in

the cuneiform titles for the stars of Pegasus. Sacred wordplay that imparted: "Medusa, Perseus, Cut-Off, Her, Head; Sprang-Forth, *Chrysaōr*/Golden-Sword, [and] the Horse, Named, *Pēgasos*/Springs, Because, He-Was-Born, Near, the Springs, Of, the God, Ocean". Hesiod's well-known reliance on *Enuma Elish* implies that the he – or someone collaborating with him – had detected these celestial puns and translated them into eloquent Greek as lines 280-282 of *Theogony*.

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