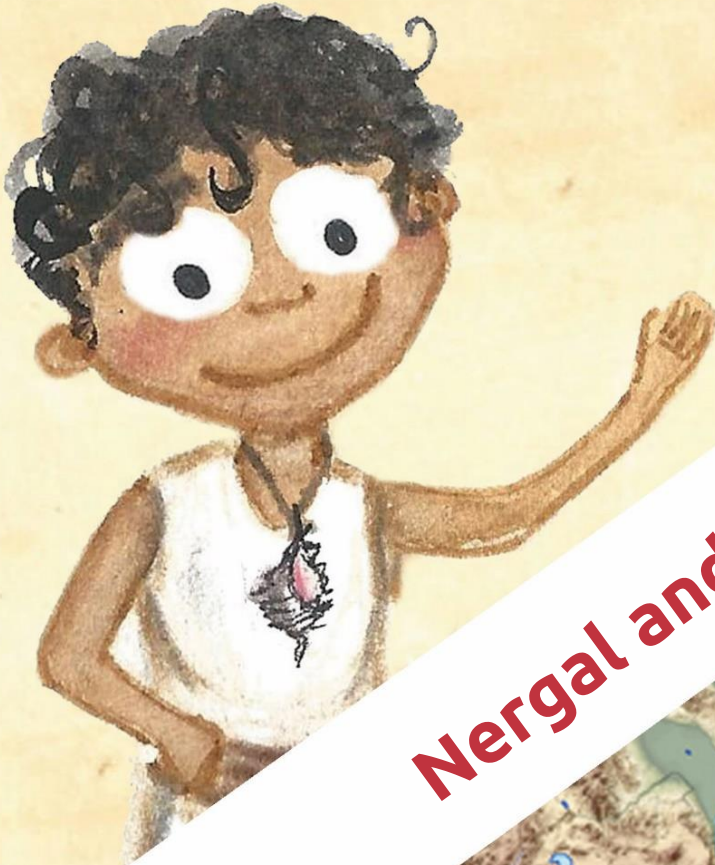


Stories from Ancient Mesopotamia



Nergal and Ereškigal ...

They are ruling hand in hand over the Mesopotamian Netherworld and are equally dreadful....

But how did they meet?!



Nergal and Ereškigal: the love story of the demonic Mesopotamian couple



It is a very old tale, and we do not know for sure all of it. One day, when I am a famous scribe, I will gather all the tablets about this myth and restore a complete version ! My master also told me there are different stories... Here is the one I know.

Ereškigal, the powerful queen of the Netherworld, feels a bit isolated in her kingdom. The gods in the sky would be happy to invite her to their feasts but she cannot leave the Netherworld. Still they would like to share a dish or give her a piece of cake. They suggest Ereškigal to send a messenger in heaven to get a little something for her. Ereškigal chooses her vizier and son, Namtar, to go to the upper world.

All the gods warmly greet Namtar and show him respects, except the young Nergal. Namtar is shocked by Nergal's behaviour: it is like an insult to Ereškigal herself!



Nergal, one of Enlil's son, is very powerful. He is a warrior: he loves ruins, destructions and disasters. He often provokes fires, fevers and plagues, floods or drought, for the fun. In brief, he has all qualities required for the Netherworld...



Believe me, that must have been really annoying because Ereškigal calls the dead by their names to admit them in the Netherworld. Just imagine the queue if she stops! Dead people don't know what to do and where to go!

Namtar returns to the Netherworld empty-handed. Ereškigal is furious when she hears the story. She gets off her throne and refuses to render any further judgements in the Netherworld.

Ea, the wise, asks Nergal why he did that (but Nergal's answer is strangely confused).

He orders the young god to go to the Netherworld to apologise to Ereškigal, with a resplendent throne as a gift. Nergal is admitted in the Netherworld, but again he is rude! He hardly salutes Ereškigal and just orders her to resume her duties. Ereškigal turns round without a word and goes to have a bath to express her contempt. And then... Nergal is subdued by her beauty, and... they fall in love!

But the story is not so easy....

Nergal and Ereškigal: the love story of the demonic couple

When Ereškigal falls asleep, Nergal tricks the gatekeeper of the Netherworld and returns to heaven. The gods are taken aback: why would he do that? Ea, fearing the wrath of Ereškigal against her lover, distorts the features of Nergal so that nobody recognises him.

In the Netherworld, when Ereškigal wakes up, she is in total despair and sobs her heart out, crying that she is so lonely here, that life is unfair because Nergal is her soul mate! Namtar is moved by the pain of his Ereškigal, and swears to bring Nergal back to the Netherworld.

Namtar goes back to heaven.

Alas, Ea's trick works well, and Namtar does not recognise Nergal.

Namtar goes back to the Netherworld alone.

But when Namtar describes the gods to her, Ereškigal sees through Ea's trick and identifies Nergal.

Namtar goes back to heaven to summon Nergal.

This time, Ea tells Nergal that he should go back to the Netherworld, but also that he should overthrow Ereškigal and take her place at the head of the Netherworld!



This is a bit weird, because it looks as if Ea and Nergal are secretly plotting to overthrow Ereškigal... It has something to do with the throne. Remember? I don't like that: I think it is better when they rule together.

But when he arrives in the Netherworld, both he and Ereškigal fall into each other arms and forget all plans and deceit! Nergal decides to stay with his darling for ever. This is how they rule the Netherworld together, equally terrifying and dreadful.



I like the happy end! even if their kingdom is not the greatest place to be... It is said that dead people eat dust and don't even have water to drink. This is why we give them food and drinks, so that they have a better life. Usually during the moonless nights or the summer, when the ghosts are more likely to pay a visit to their families.