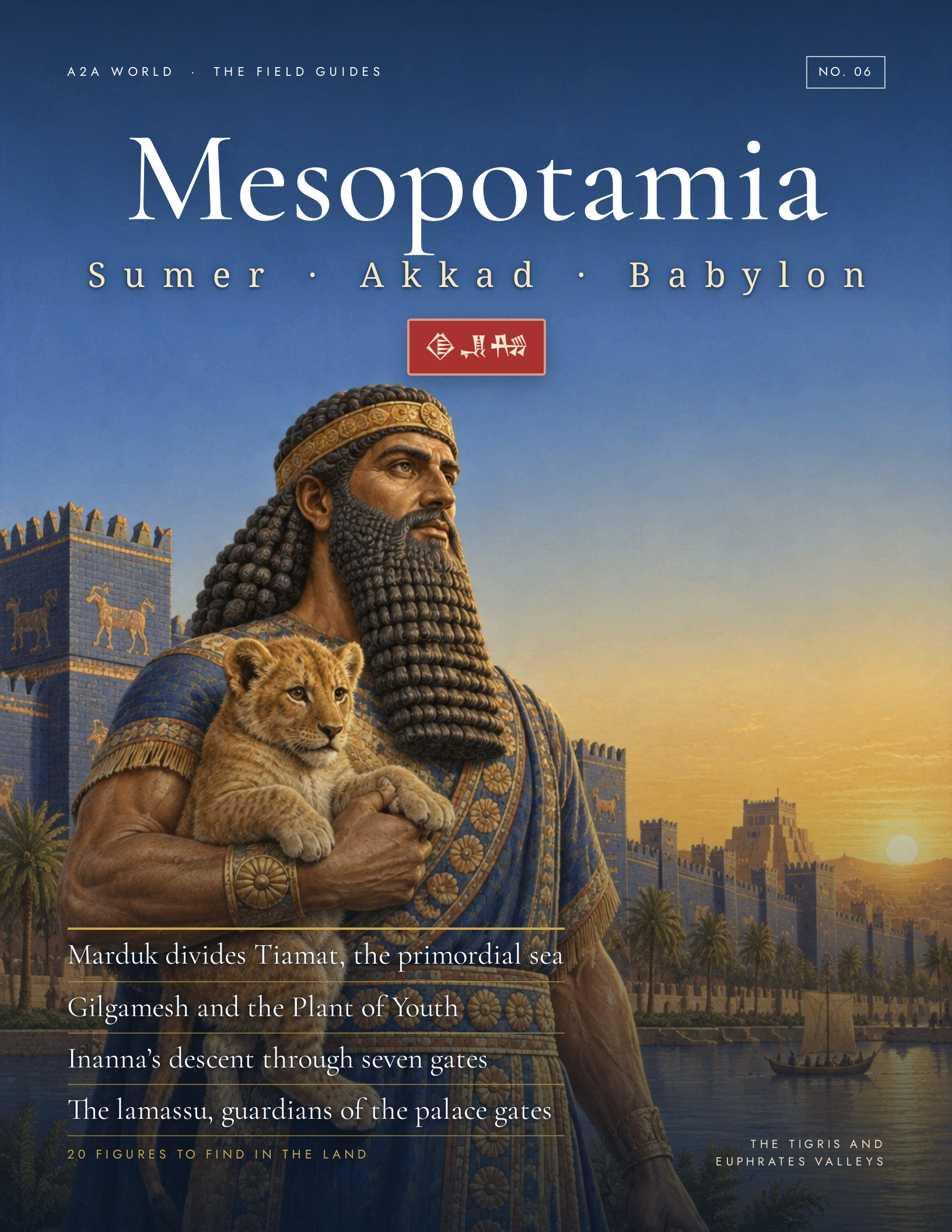
Mesopotamia

Sumer · Akkad · Babylon



Marduk divides Tiamat, the primordial sea

Gilgamesh and the Plant of Youth

Inanna's descent through seven gates

The lamassu, guardians of the palace gates

20 FIGURES TO FIND IN THE LAND

THE TIGRIS AND EUPHRATES VALLEYS

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The eight-pointed star of Inanna, the planet Venus

INTRODUCTION

Mesopotamian Mythology Field Guide

Names, attributes, and narratives from the world's oldest written mythology — Sumerian, Akkadian, Babylonian and Assyrian — organised so each entry can be used as a search target in deliberate pareidolia practice.

In the Babylonian creation story, the world itself is made from the divided body of the sea goddess Tiamat. The idea that land is a body is among the oldest in written literature.

The idea that land is a body is among the oldest in written literature.

CONTEXT

How Mesopotamia Held Its Myths

Mesopotamian civilisation flourished between the Tigris and Euphrates for more than three thousand years. Each city had its patron god and temple, and myths were written on clay tablets in cuneiform — first in Sumerian, later in Akkadian. These are not living religions today, but they shaped much of the literature that followed.

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SOURCES

The Epic of Gilgamesh, best known from the twelve-tablet version found in the library of Ashurbanipal at Nineveh (7th century BCE). The Enuma Elish, the Babylonian creation epic. The Atrahasis epic, with its flood story. Sumerian poems such as Inanna's Descent to the Netherworld. Many tablets are fragmentary, so stories have gaps and alternative readings.



Myths were written on clay tablets in cuneiform — first in Sumerian, later in Akkadian

A MESOPOTAMIAN PRECEDENT

The Babylonian Map of the World, a clay tablet of about the 6th century BCE in the British Museum, draws the known world as a disc surrounded by a bitter river, with Babylon at the centre and distant regions marked as triangles beyond — one of the oldest surviving attempts to picture the whole Earth.



Marduk captures Tiamat in a net and drives the winds into her mouth

THE FEATURE

Marduk Defeats Tiamat

Enuma Elish

The making of heaven and earth.

Marduk captures Tiamat in a net, drives the winds into her mouth and splits her body in two like a dried fish: one half becomes the sky, the other the earth. The Tigris and Euphrates flow from her eyes.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
> *A divided serpentine body; two rivers from a head.*

Lamassu

Winged bull or lion with a human head.

Colossal pairs guarded the gates of Assyrian palaces, such as those of Sargon II at Khorsabad.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
> *A striding winged bull with a human face.*



A striding winged bull with a human face

THE TWO BEST FIRST TARGETS

1. Tiamat — the primordial sea, often imagined as a vast dragon or serpent; seafloor forms suit her. 2. The lamassu — a winged bull or lion with a human head. Strong alternates: Gilgamesh holding a lion, the Bull of Heaven, and Utnapishtim's ark.



I · CREATION & FLOOD

I From Chaos to Cities

Primordial waters, a divine battle and the first flood narrative.

Above: Apsu and Tiamat — the sweet waters and the salt sea mingle

Apsu and Tiamat

Enuma Elish

The sweet waters and the salt sea — the first parents.

Their waters mingle and the first gods are born. The young gods' noise disturbs Apsu, who plans to destroy them, and is killed by Ea.

LOOK FOR IN THE LAND

Two bodies of water meeting.

The Making of Humanity

Atrahasis

Humans made to relieve the gods' labour.

The lesser gods rebel against digging the rivers. The mother goddess (Belet-ili or Nintu) shapes humans from clay mixed with the blood of a slain god.

LOOK FOR IN THE LAND

A figure shaping clay.



The boat rests on Mount Nimush; a dove, a swallow and a raven are released

Utnapishtim's Ark

Gilgamesh, Tablet XI

Survivor of the flood.

Warned by Ea, he builds a great boat and loads his family and animals. After seven days of storm the boat rests on Mount Nimush; he releases a dove, a swallow and a raven.

LOOK FOR IN THE LAND

A boat on a mountain; birds in flight.

Enki and Ninhursag

Dilmun

The pure land of Dilmun.

Enki brings fresh water to Dilmun, a paradise land. When he eats forbidden plants, Ninhursag curses him, then heals the eight ailments by creating eight deities.

LOOK FOR IN THE LAND

An island; a spring.



II · GODS & GODDESSES

II The Great Gods of the Cities

Each city had its patron, temple and ziggurat.

Above: Each city had its patron, temple and ziggurat



Inanna with her eight-pointed star, standing on a lion

Inanna (Ishtar)

Goddess of love and war; the planet Venus.

Patron of Uruk; her symbol is an eight-pointed star and she is often shown with a lion.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
> *An eight-pointed star; a woman standing on a lion.*



Enki, streams of water filled with fish flowing from his shoulders

Enki (Ea)

God of fresh water, wisdom and crafts.

Shown with streams of water, filled with fish, flowing from his shoulders. A friend to humanity in the flood story.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
> *A figure with two streams flowing from the shoulders.*

Enlil

God of wind and air; king of the gods at Nippur.

Separates heaven from earth; in the flood stories it is he who decides to destroy humankind.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
> *A horned crown; a figure parting sky and ground.*

Shamash (Utu)

Sun god and god of justice.

Shown on the stele of Hammurabi's laws, handing the king the rod and ring of authority.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
> *A seated figure with rays from the shoulders.*

Ereshkigal

Queen of the underworld.

Inanna's sister, ruler of Kur, the land of no return.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
> *A figure beneath the ground behind seven gates.*



III · CREATURES & GUARDIANS

III Monsters and Protectors

Composite beings with powerful outlines.

Above: The mushussu in glazed brick on the Ishtar Gate of Babylon: scaled body, lion forelegs, eagle hind legs, forked tongue

Humbaba

Guardian of the Cedar Forest.

Gilgamesh and Enkidu journey to the Cedar Forest and slay him.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
> *A grotesque face; a forest.*

The Bull of Heaven

Gugalanna

Sent by Ishtar against Uruk.

When Gilgamesh rejects Ishtar, she sends the Bull of Heaven; Gilgamesh and Enkidu kill it. Often linked to the constellation Taurus.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
> *A charging bull.*

Mushussu

Serpent-dragon of Marduk.

Shown in glazed brick on the Ishtar Gate of Babylon: scaled body, lion forelegs, eagle hind legs, forked tongue.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
> *A long-necked dragon on four legs.*



Anzu, the lion-headed eagle

Anzu

Lion-headed eagle.

Steals the Tablet of Destinies from Enlil and is defeated by the warrior god Ninurta.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
> *A great bird with a lion's head.*



IV · EPIC AND ODD TALES

IV Stranger Narratives

Friendship, death and the search for immortality.

Above: While Gilgamesh bathes, a snake steals the Plant of Youth and sheds its skin

Gilgamesh and Enkidu

King of Uruk and the wild man made to be his equal.

They wrestle, become friends and adventure together. When Enkidu dies, Gilgamesh sets out to find the secret of eternal life.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
> *Two wrestling figures; a hero holding a lion.*

The Plant of Youth

Gilgamesh, Tablet XI

A lost chance at immortality.

Gilgamesh dives to the bottom of the waters for a plant that restores youth; while he bathes, a snake steals it and sheds its skin.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
> *A snake beside a pool; a diver.*

Inanna's Descent

Journey to the underworld.

At each of seven gates she must give up a garment or jewel. She dies, is revived, and must send her husband Dumuzi below in her place for half the year.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
> *A figure passing through a series of gates.*

Adapa

The sage who refused immortality.

Breaking the wing of the South Wind, he is summoned to heaven; warned by Ea, he refuses the food and water of life offered to him.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
> *A figure with a broken-winged bird.*



King Etana rides on an eagle's back toward the heavens

Etana and the Eagle

A king flown to heaven.

Seeking the plant of birth for his heir, King Etana rides on an eagle's back toward the heavens.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
> *A figure riding a great eagle.*

A NOTE ON RESPECT

These traditions survive on damaged clay tablets, and translations differ. Names are given in their most common forms (Sumerian / Akkadian). Present readings as interpretations of fragmentary texts.

The plates in this issue are interpretive illustrations, not historical artefacts.



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Earth Heritage and Perceptual Resilience

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