



Ancient Fanfiction: The Journey of Marduk By Hannah Neves

The boat ride was always the most pleasant part of the festival, in Marduk's opinion. The procession was no longer overwhelmed by the cheering crowds of the city who trampled over each other for a closer look at their god. Only a chosen few were allowed to journey with him to the Akitu house, the king among them. Now, they were all quiet, occasionally sneaking glances at the god. Mostly, they kept to themselves.

Their reactions weren't surprising. As the god of Babylon, Marduk expected to be revered and feared. After all, he was the most powerful entity in existence. For centuries, he had favored and protected the Babylonians, but gods were fickle beings. Marduk had been known to release his fury upon disrespectful mortals. To avoid his wrath, the Babylonians took care to appease him. They built him a great temple at the center of their city, known as the Esagila. There, his earthly vessel resided, a finely carved wooden statue coated in the purest silver and gold. Every day, he was clothed in the finest fabrics and given the most exquisite foods. His priests sang hymns in his honor and tended to his every whim.

Marduk took a deep breath. The smell of pure air was a welcome sensation. Though he enjoyed the luxuries of the Esagila, he relished his yearly trek down the river. Fresh water was his father's domain, and he had always felt a special connection to it. Maybe it was something to do with its permanence. He knew, no matter what, the water would be there to take him to the Akitu house in the New Year.

The New Year festival was the Babylonian's principal way of honoring Marduk. Offerings and prayers from the common people tripled, and even his own priests became more attentive. The king himself came to the Esagila and knelt at the god's feet, laying down the royal crown and scepter before him. The high priest then slapped the king in the face until he shed tears, the price he paid for his sins. After parading through the city, Marduk was placed on a boat and taken to the Akitu house. It was a ritual he had gone through hundreds of times — kings rose and fell, but Marduk's journey remained constant.

A gentle breeze brushed against the god's golden cheeks, interrupting his musings. The trees swayed with the wind and the boat glided effortlessly downstream. In the distance, Marduk finally spotted a small wooden structure that he knew was the Akitu house. It looked the same as it had for the past hundred years, and he was comforted by the familiar sight.

Context:

Marduk was the city god of Babylon, the capital city of the Babylonian Empire. During the heyday of Babylon, Marduk was considered the king of the gods and was widely revered as the most powerful deity in the Mesopotamian pantheon. As the chief deity of the city, two massive buildings were erected in his honor: the Marduk ziggurat, widely believed to have been the inspiration for the tower of Babel; and the Esagila, where his cult statue was housed. The statue was the god's vessel on Earth, and thus was considered the most sacred of objects. Marduk was honored by various festivals, most notably the New Year festival. During this festival, (also known as the Akitu festival), Marduk's statue was paraded through the streets of Babylon and presented to the king. Afterwards, he was taken by boat to the Akitu house, where more festivities took place.

Resources for more information:

<https://www.ancient.eu/Marduk/>

<https://www.livius.org/articles/religion/akitu/>

Artwork by Rosalijn Dekker:

