The idea that gods die seems at first to be countercultural in an ancient near eastern context, not least because of well-placed statements that divide the gods and humanity on the very issue of immortality. This is expressed succinctly in the widely quoted lines from the Epic of Gilgamesh:

When the gods created mankind,  
Death for mankind they set aside,  
Life in their own hands retaining.  

*Gilgamesh* 10.iii:3–5 (ANET, p. 90)

While the popularizing of the ‘dying and rising god’ theme by Sir James Frazer and others has made the idea of the dying god more familiar, it has little to contribute to the present study. The idea has, in any case, been subjected to periodic attack, and conspicuously in recent times by Jonathan Z. Smith¹ and Mark S. Smith.² Mark Smith, for example, seeks to re-describe the Ugaritic Baal Cycle in the light of his premise that gods scarcely ever die. He accepts that there is prima facie evidence for the dying and rising theme in the final two tablets of the Cycle (KTU 1.5–1.6),³ but he claims that the extant text never recounts Baal’s return to life.⁴ More significant for his purpose, the corpus of Ugaritic ritual texts never mentions the death and rising of Baal.⁵ Smith lifts the Baal narrative right out of ritual and argues that it is the royal funerary cult that provides parallels for Baal’s death, as in KTU 1.161.⁶ Elements from

the discrete worlds of the natural, human, and divine all help account for the existence of the Baal myth, and these include the natural cycle and the royal funerary cult. So if there are one or two cases of ‘dying and rising gods’ in the ancient Near East, Smith does not recognize Baal as one of them. In West Semitic culture, cosmic divine enemies such as Yamm and Mot, or Tiamat, may die, but gods with active cults seldom do, and Baal’s death becomes all the more striking. W. von Soden had previously commented on the absence in Babylonian mythology of the humiliation of a major deity, with the exception of an Assyrian text in which Bel (= Marduk) is subjected to an ordeal and humiliation, but Von Soden concluded that this text is politically motivated and relates to Sennacherib’s endeavour to subject Babylon and Marduk to Assur.

More recently, Tryggve N.D. Mettinger has sought to rehabilitate the ‘dying and rising gods’, claiming that ‘[t]he world of ancient Near Eastern religions actually knew a number of deities that may be properly described as dying and rising god’. He includes Baal among these, and argues that the *descensus* mytheme may have entered the Baal tradition from the Mesopotamian Dumuzi cults. We shall happily bypass the ‘dying and rising’ issue in this essay, focussing, rather, on texts dealing with the censure and punishment of deities and those who aspire to deity.

The idea of gods, whether formally in council or otherwise, sitting in judgement on erring colleagues is, of course, well attested in Mesopotamian sources. A text from the Mari archive has a prophet reporting a judgement against Tishpak, the tutelary god of Eshnunna, who had fallen into disfavour with members of the pantheon.

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9 Wolfram von Soden, ‘Gibt es ein Zeugnis dafür, dass die Babylonier an die Wieder­auferstehung Marduks geglaubt haben?’, *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* NF 17 (1955), pp. 130–166 (161). The text in question (KAR 143) comes from Assur and there is a related text from Nineveh (KAR 219), both of which Von Soden sets out in transliteration. Von Soden mentions Tiamat as an exception to the rule that gods do not die, but she is a negative figure and so not regarded as contradicting the basic principle (p. 161).