

## Babylonian Creation Myth (summary)

The Babylonian creation myth is recounted in the "Epic of Creation" also known as the Enûma Elish. The Mesopotamian "Epic of Creation" dates to the late second millennium B.C.E.

In the poem, the god Marduk (or Assur in the Assyrian versions of the poem) is created to defend the divine beings from an attack plotted by the ocean goddess Tiamat. The hero Marduk offers to save the gods only if he is appointed their supreme unquestioned leader and is allowed to remain so even after the threat passes. The gods agree to Marduk's terms. Marduk challenges Tiamat to combat and destroys her. He then rips her corpse into two halves with which he fashions the earth and the skies. Marduk then creates the calendar, organizes the planets, stars and regulates the moon, sun, and weather. The gods pledge their allegiance to Marduk and he creates Babylon as the terrestrial counterpart to the realm of the gods. Marduk then destroys Tiamat's husband, Kingu using his blood to create humankind so that they can do the work of the gods. (Sources, Foster, B.R., *From Distant Days : Myths, Tales, and Poetry of Ancient Mesopotamia*. 1995, Bethesda, Md.: CDL Press. vi, 438 p., Bottéro, J., *Religion in Ancient Mesopotamia*. 2004, Chicago: University of Chicago Press. x, 246 p., Jacobsen, T., *The Treasures of Darkness : A History of Mesopotamian Religion*. 1976, New Haven: Yale University Press. 273.)

## Enuma Elish

### 'When on high'

#### The Babylonian Epic of Creation (full text)

Translator unknown.

The Babylonian/Mesopotamian creation myth, Enuma Elish, When on high, was written no later than the reign of Nebuchadrezzar in the 12th century B.C.E. But there is also little doubt that this story was written much earlier, during the time of the Sumerians. Drawing some new light on the ancients, Henry Layard found within the ruins of the library of Ashurbanipal in Nineveh, texts that were not unlike the Genesis creation in the Bible. George Smith first published these texts in 1876 under the title, 'The Chaldean Genesis'. Akkadian text written in the old Babylonian dialect.

When on high the heaven had not been named,  
Firm ground below had not been called by name,  
Naught but primordial Apsu, their begetter,  
(And) Mummu-Tiamat, she who bore them all,  
Their waters commingling as a single body;  
No reed hut had been matted, no marsh land had appeared,  
When no gods whatever had been brought into being,  
Uncalled by name, their destinies undetermined-  
Then it was that the gods were formed within them.  
Lahmu and Lahamu were brought forth, by name they were called.  
For aeons they grew in age and stature.  
Anshar and Kishar were formed, surpassing the others.  
They prolonged the days, added on the years.  
Anu was their son, of his fathers the rival;  
Yea, Anshar's first born, Anu was his equal.  
Anu begot in his image Nudimmud.  
This Nudimmud was of his fathers the master;  
Of broad wisdom, understanding, mighty in strength,  
Mightier by far than his grandfather, Anshar.  
He had no rival among the gods, his brothers.  
The divine brothers banded together,  
They disturbed Tiamat as they surged back and forth,

Yea, they troubled the mood of Tiamat  
By their hilarity in the Abode of Heaven.  
Apsu could not lessen their clamour  
And Tiamat was speechless at their ways.  
Their doings were loathsome unto (. . .).  
Unsavoury were their ways; they were overbearing.  
Then Apsu, the begetter of the great gods,  
Cried out, addressing Mummu, his vizier:  
"O Mummu. my vizier, who rejoicest my spirit,  
Come hither and let us go to Tiamat!"  
They went and sat down before Tiamat,  
Exchanging counsel about the gods, their first born.  
Apsu, opening his mouth,  
Said unto resplendent Tiamat:  
"Their ways are verily loathsome unto me.  
By day I find no relief, nor repose by night.  
I will destroy, I will wreck their ways,  
That quiet may be restored. Let us have rest!"  
As soon as Tiamat heard this,  
She was wroth and called out to her husband.  
She cried out aggrieved, as she raged all alone,  
Injecting woe into her mood:  
"What? Should we destroy what we have built?  
Their ways are indeed troublesome, but let us attend kindly!"  
Ill wishing and ungracious was Mummu's advice:  
"Do destroy, my father, the mutinous ways.  
Then shalt thou have relief by day and rest by night!"  
When Apsu heard this, his face grew radiant  
Because of the evil he planned against the gods, his sons.  
As for Mummu, by the neck he embraced him  
As (that one) sat down on his knees to kiss him.  
(Now) whatever they plotted between them  
Was repeated unto the gods, their first born.  
When the gods heard (this), they were astir,  
(Then) lapsed into silence and remained speechless,  
Surpassing in wisdom, accomplished, resourceful,

Ea, the all wise, saw through their scheme.  
A master design against it he devised and setup,  
Made artful his spell against it, surpassing and holy.  
He recited it and made it subsist in the deep,  
As he poured sleep upon him. Sound asleep he lay.  
When Apsu he made prone, drenched with sleep,  
Mummu, the adviser, was impotent to move,  
He loosened his band, tore off his tiara,  
Removed his halo (and) put it on himself.  
Having fettered Apsu, he slew him.  
Mummu he bound and left behind lock.  
Having thus upon Apsu established his dwelling,  
He laid hold on Mummu, holding him by the nose rope.  
After he vanquished and trodden down his foes,  
Ea, his triumph over his enemies secured,  
In his sacred chamber in profound sleep he rested.  
He named it "Apsu," for shrines he assigned (it).  
In that same place his cult hut he founded.  
Ea and Damkina, his wife, dwelled (there) in splendor.  
In the chamber of fates, the abode of destinies,  
A god was engendered, most potent and wisest of gods.  
In the heart of Apsu was Marduk created,  
In the heart of holy Apsu was Marduk created.  
He who begot him was Ea, his father;  
She who conceived him was Damkina, his mother.  
The breast of goddesses did she suck.  
The nurse that nursed him filled him with awesomeness.  
Alluring was his figure, sparkling the light in his eyes.  
Lordly was his gait, commanding from of old.  
When Ea saw him, the father who begot him,  
He exulted and glowed, his heart filled with gladness.  
He rendered him perfect and endowed him with a double godhead.  
Greatly exalted was he above them, exceeding throughout.  
Perfect were his members beyond comprehension,  
Unsuited for understanding, difficult to perceive.  
Four were his eyes, four were his ears;

When he moved his lips, fire blazed forth.  
Large were all hearing organs,  
And the eyes, in like number, scanned all things.  
He was the loftiest of the gods, surpassing was his stature;  
His members were enormous, he was exceedingly tall.  
"My little son, my little son!  
My son, the Sun! Sun of the heavens!"  
Clothed with the halo of the ten gods, he was strong to the utmost,  
As their awesome flashes were heaped upon him.  
Disturbed was Tiamat, astir night and day.  
The gods, in malice, contributed to the storm.  
Their insides having plotted evil.  
To Tiamat these brothers said:  
"When they slew Apsu, thy consort,  
Thou didst not aid him but remaindest still.  
Although he fashioned the awesome Saw,  
Thy insides are diluted and so we can have no rest.  
Let Apsu, thy consort, be in thy mind  
And Mummu, who has been vanquished! Thou are left alone.  
Then joined issue Tiamat and Marduk, wisest of gods,  
They swayed in single combat, locked in battle.  
The lord spread out his net to enfold her,  
The Evil Wind, which followed behind, he let loose in her face.  
When Tiamat opened her mouth to consume him,  
He drove the Evil Wind that she close not her lips.  
As the fierce winds charged her belly,  
Her body was distended and her mouth was wide open.  
He released the arrow, it tore her belly,  
It cut through her insides, splitting the heart.  
Having thus subdued her, he extinguished her life.  
He cast down her carcass to stand upon it...  
The lord trod on the legs of Tiamat,  
With his unsparing mace he crushed her skull.  
When the arteries of her blood he had severed,  
The North Wind bore (it) to places undisclosed.  
On seeing this, his fathers were joyful and jubilant,

They brought gifts of homage, they to him.  
Then the lord paused to view her dead body,  
That he might divide the monster and do artful works.  
He split her like a shellfish into two parts:  
Half of her he set up and ceiled as sky,  
Pulled down the bar and posted guards.  
He bade them to allow not her waters to escape.  
He crossed the heavens and surveyed (its) regions.  
He squared Apsu's quarter, the abode of Nudimmud,  
As the lord measured the dimensions of Apsu.  
The Great Abode, its likeness, he fixed as Esharra,  
The Great Abode, Esharra, which he made as the firmament.  
Anu, Enlil, and Ea he made occupy their places.  
When Marduk hears the words of the gods,  
His heart prompts (him) to fashion artful works.  
Opening his mouth he addresses EA  
To impart the plan he addresses EA  
To impart the plan he had conceived in his heart:  
"Blood I will mass and cause boned to be.  
I will establish a savage, 'man' shall be his name.  
Verily, savage man I will create.  
He shall be charged with the service of the gods  
That they might be at ease! The ways of the gods I will artfully alter.  
Though alike revered, into two (groups) they shall be divided."  
Ea answered him, speaking a word to him.  
To relate to him a scheme for the relief of the gods:  
"Let but one of their brothers be handed over;"  
He alone shall perish that mankind may be fashioned.  
Let the great gods be here in Assembly,  
Let the guilty be handed over that they may endure."  
Marduk summoned the great gods to Assembly;  
Presiding graciously, he issued instructions.  
This utterance the gods pay heed.  
The king addresses a word to the Anunnaki:  
"If your former statement was true,  
Do (now) the truth on oath by me declare!

Who was it that contrived the uprising,  
And made Tiamat rebel, and joined battle?  
Let him be handed over who contrived the uprising.  
His guilt I will make him bear that you may dwell in peace!"  
The Igigi, the great gods, replied to him,  
To Lugaldimmerankia, counsellor of the gods, their lord:  
"It was Kingu who contrived the uprising,  
And made Tiamat rebel, and joined battle."  
They bound him holding him before Ea.  
They imposed on him his guilt and severed his blood (vessels).  
Out of his blood they fashioned mankind.  
He imposed the service and let free the gods.

[Mesopotamian Texts Archive](#)  
[Library Lobby](#)  
[Home](#)