UNE ✦ SACRA

Mesopotamia

Enuma Elish

(The Epic of Creation)

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Babylonian scribes (anonymous)

Adaptation (edition 1.2)

Credits

Author	Babylonian scribes (anonymous)
Date	c. 1200–1100 BC (probable composition); copies from 900–200 BC
Original language	Akkadian
Version	Adaptation (edition 1.2)
Translation	Une Sacra, from L. W. King
Source	Une Sacra, from L. W. King, The Seven Tablets of Creation, 1902
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About:

The Enuma Elish is the Babylonian poem of the creation of the world. Its name comes from its first words in Akkadian, "When on high...": in the beginning there were only the mingled waters of Apsu, the fresh water, and Tiamat, the sea.

From them the generations of the gods are born. The noise of the young gods disturbs Apsu, who plans to destroy them, but Ea overcomes him; Tiamat then spawns eleven monsters and sets over them the god Kingu, to whom she gives the Tablets of Destiny.

No god dares to face her, until Marduk, son of Ea, agrees to fight if the gods make him king. He slays Tiamat, splits her body in two and makes one half the sky and the other the earth; he orders the stars, the moon and the calendar and resolves to create mankind to serve the gods (in the parts of the sixth tablet found later, man is made from the blood of Kingu).

The poem ends with the gods proclaiming the fifty names of Marduk.

It is a work in seven clay tablets, probably written at the end of the second millennium BC, when Marduk became the chief god of Babylon; it was recited at the New Year festival (Akitu).

The first tablets were found from 1849 onwards by Austen Henry Layard and Hormuzd Rassam in the ruins of the library of the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal at Nineveh (modern Mosul, Iraq), and published by George Smith in 1876; other copies came from Assur, Kish and Sultantepe.

This translation by L. W. King, of the British Museum, was the first to bring the seven tablets together (1902); square brackets mark what King restored and the dots what is broken in the clay.

Parts of the fifth, sixth and seventh tablets had not yet been found. The Anunnaki appear in the poem as the body of the great gods: Tiamat sets Kingu over them, and in the passages of the sixth tablet found after King's time it is they who, in gratitude, build for Marduk the city of Babylon and the temple Esagila.

Nibiru, a name much searched for today, is here one of Marduk's titles and his "station" in the sky, which scholars identify with the planet Jupiter. King's notes, introduction and appendices are not included.

For readers who want the story, the Une Sacra "Adaptation" retells it in modern language, with notes where the original is broken. L. W. King's translation remains available.

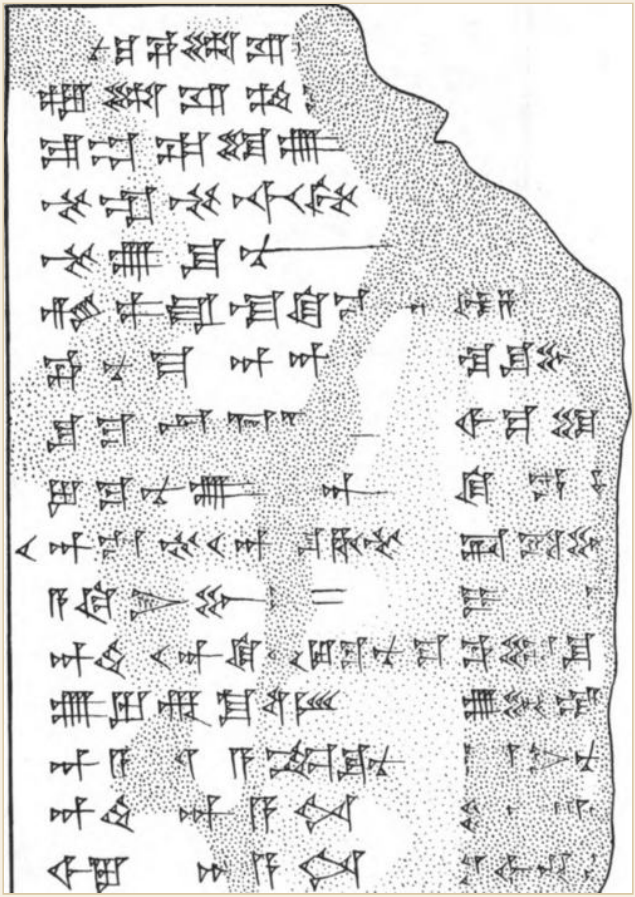
Source: https://web.archive.org/web/2018/http://www.sacred-texts.com/ane/stc/index.htm

Prose adaptation: the seven tablets told in modern English. Where the original is broken or needs explaining, a note in parentheses says what is missing and what is known from other sources. For the faithful text, choose the translation by L. W. King.

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Manuscripts and images



L. W. King's hand copy of the cuneiform text of the first tablet of the Enuma Elish ("When on high..."), from one of the plates of his 1902 book.

L. W. King, The Seven Tablets of Creation (1902), prancha I — Wikimedia Commons · High resolution



Drawing of an Assyrian relief from Nimrud (9th century BC) showing a god armed with thunderbolts pursuing a monster. For a long time it was presented as Marduk against Tiamat; scholars now identify it as Ninurta and the monster-bird Anzu.

Desenho do relevo de Nimrud (Museu Britânico), em The Sacred Books and Early Literature of the East (1907) — Wikimedia Commons · High resolution

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Facsimiles and more images:

- L. W. King's book (1902), scanned, with the cuneiform plates (Wikimedia Commons)
  https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_seven_tablets_of_creation.pdf

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TABLET I

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1 When on high the sky had not yet been named, and below the earth had not yet been named, there were only Apsu, the fresh waters, the first, the begetter of all, and Tiamat, the salt waters, the mother of all. Their waters mingled into one. There was no field and no marsh, no god had been called into being, none had a name, no fate had been fixed.

2 Then, in the midst of the waters, the gods were born. First Lahmu and Lahamu. Ages passed, and Anshar and Kishar were born, greater than they. The days grew long, and Anu came, their son, the sky. And from Anu was born Nudimmud, who is Ea, full of all wisdom, mighty beyond measure, without rival among the gods.

3 The new gods made noise and stirred Tiamat up from within. (Several lines are broken.) Then Apsu called Mummu, his counsellor: "Mummu, you who gladden my spirit, come, let us go to Tiamat." The two went and sat down before her, to decide what to do with the gods, their children.

4 Apsu said to Tiamat: "Their ways give me no peace. By day I cannot rest, by night I cannot sleep. I will put an end to them, so that there is silence and we can sleep again." When Tiamat heard this, she was furious and cried out: "Shall we destroy what we ourselves have made? Their ways are hard, but let us be patient." (Tiamat's reply is broken; the speech comes from the copies found later.)

5 But Mummu counselled Apsu against the gods: "Put an end to their ways, and by day you will have rest, and by night you will sleep." Apsu's face lit up at the plan to do harm to the gods, his children.

6 The gods found out and were distressed; they sat in silence, in mourning. But Ea, who knows all things, understood the plan. (Here there is a great gap. From the other copies, Ea casts a spell that puts Apsu to sleep, kills Apsu, binds Mummu and builds his house over the fresh waters. There, with his wife Damkina, he begets Marduk, the wisest and strongest of the gods, with four eyes and four ears, who shines like the sun.)

7 The other gods went to Tiamat and goaded her: "They killed Apsu, your husband, and you kept still. They will not let us sleep. Take revenge on them!" (The text is broken here and there.) Tiamat agreed: "Let us make war!"

8 The gods who were on her side gathered and marched beside her, furious, plotting evil day and night, ready for battle. Tiamat, who is also called Mother Hubur, she who formed all things, made invincible weapons and gave birth to monstrous serpents, with sharp teeth and merciless fangs. She filled their bodies with venom in place of blood, clothed the giant vipers in terror and splendour, so that whoever saw them would die of fear.

9 She made eleven monsters in all: vipers, dragons, the monster Lahamu, hurricanes, raging dogs, scorpion-men, great storms, fish-men and rams (this is King's list; in today's readings, the great lion and the bison are also included). They carried cruel weapons and had no fear of battle. Tiamat's commands were mighty; no one could resist them.

10 Among the gods who supported her, Tiamat chose Kingu and set him above all: to march at the head of the army, give the signal for battle and command the fight. She seated him in rich robes and said: "I have pronounced your spell and raised you up in the assembly of the gods. You are my chosen husband. May your name be magnified above all."

10.2 And she placed the Tablets of Destiny on his breast: "Your command shall not fail, the word of your mouth shall stand firm." Kingu, thus raised up, decreed the fate of the gods on his side: "May the breath of your mouth quench the fire god, and may whoever excels in battle show his strength!"

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TABLET II

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1 Tiamat prepared her work and plotted evil against the gods, her children, to avenge Apsu. Someone told Ea how she had gathered her army. Ea was deeply distressed and sat in silence. After some days, when his anger had calmed, he went to Anshar, his grandfather, and repeated all that Tiamat had plotted: the army, the eleven monsters, Kingu raised up, the Tablets of Destiny.

2 When Anshar heard that Tiamat was in revolt, he bit his lips, grew restless and lamented bitterly. (Lines are missing.) He said to Ea: "You killed Mummu and Apsu. But Tiamat has raised up Kingu, and who can face her?" (From the other copies, Anshar first sends Ea himself, who comes back without succeeding.)

3 Then Anshar said to his son Anu: "My strong hero, whose strength is great and whose attack no one can withstand, go and stand before Tiamat, so that her spirit may be calmed and her heart may have mercy. If she does not listen to your word, tell her ours, so that she may be appeased." Anu went, saw Tiamat's fury up close, could not face her and came back.

4 (Lines are missing.) At last Anshar called Marduk: "You are my son, who gladdens my heart. Go into battle; whoever sees you will have peace." Marduk rejoiced at his father's word, came and stood before Anshar. Anshar saw him, his heart filled with joy, he kissed him on the lips, and his fear went away.

5 Marduk said: "My father, may the word of your lips not be overcome. Let me go, and I will do all that is in your heart." Anshar answered: "Who would send you into battle? Is Tiamat, who is a woman, coming armed against you? Rejoice: soon you will tread on Tiamat's neck. My son, you who know all wisdom, calm Tiamat with your pure spell. Set out quickly: your blood will not be shed, you will come back."

6 Marduk rejoiced and said: "Lord of the gods, if I, your avenger, defeat Tiamat and give you life, call an assembly, make my fate the greatest of all and proclaim it. Sit together, glad, in Upshukkinaku, and let me, by my word, decide fate in your place. Let nothing that I do be changed, and let the word of my lips never be annulled."

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TABLET III

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1 Anshar called Gaga, his messenger: "Gaga, go to Lahmu and Lahamu, the most ancient gods. Call all the gods to a banquet: let them eat bread, drink wine and decree the fate of Marduk, their avenger." And he gave Gaga the whole message: Tiamat's revolt, the eleven monsters, Kingu with the Tablets of Destiny, Anu who came back without succeeding, Ea who was afraid, and Marduk's request.

2 Gaga went, bowed before Lahmu and Lahamu, kissed the ground at their feet, stood up and repeated everything, word for word. (In the poem, the whole message is repeated twice, as was the custom in ancient poetry.)

3 Lahmu and Lahamu heard and cried out. All the Igigi gods wept bitterly: "What has changed, that Tiamat should do this? We do not understand what she has done!"

4 Then the great gods, all those who decree the fates, gathered and went to Anshar. They filled the hall, kissed one another in the assembly, sat down to the banquet, ate bread and drank sesame wine. The sweet drink made them merry; they drank their fill, grew calm and high in spirit. And then they decreed the fate of Marduk, their avenger.

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TABLET IV

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1 They prepared for Marduk a princely throne, and he sat down before his fathers. They said: "You are the most important of the great gods. Your fate has no equal, your word is like Anu's. From now on your command shall not fail: it is in your power to raise up and to bring low. No god shall pass the bounds you set. We give you kingship over the whole world. Lord, spare the one who trusts in you, but take the life of the god who began the revolt."

2 They placed a garment in their midst and said: "May your fate be the greatest among the gods: to destroy and to create. Command, and the garment will vanish; command again, and it will return." Marduk spoke, and the garment vanished; he spoke again, and it reappeared. Seeing this, the gods rejoiced and hailed him: "Marduk is king!" They gave him the sceptre, the throne and the ring, and an invincible weapon: "Go and take the life of Tiamat, and may the wind carry her blood away to hidden places."

3 Marduk made ready his bow, chose his weapon, took up the spear, raised the mace in his right hand and hung the bow and quiver at his side. He set the lightning before him and filled his body with flames. He made a net to catch Tiamat and set the four winds, south, north, east and west, so that nothing of her could escape. He created the evil wind, the tempest, the hurricane, the fourfold wind, the sevenfold wind, the whirlwind and the wind without equal, and let them loose behind him.

4 Then he raised his great weapon, the thunderbolt, mounted the chariot of the storm, terrible beyond compare, and yoked four fierce, swift horses, with foaming teeth, trained to trample. He clothed himself in terror, and a fearsome radiance crowned his head. He set out and went to meet the raging Tiamat. The gods, his fathers, watched him.

5 Marduk drew near and looked inside Tiamat, and saw through the plan of Kingu, her husband. When Marduk stared at him, Kingu lost his step, his will and his movement, and the gods marching beside him were dazzled. But Tiamat did not turn her neck and, with firm lips, spoke words of rebellion.

6 Marduk raised the thunderbolt and answered: "You have grown great and raised yourself too high, and your heart has led you to call for war. You raised Kingu to be your husband, to give orders as if he were Anu. You followed evil and plotted against the gods, my fathers. Let your army arm itself! Stand up: you and I, let us fight!"

7 When Tiamat heard this, she became as one possessed and lost her reason. She cried out loudly and trembled to her roots. She recited a spell, cast her charm, and the gods of battle called for their weapons. Tiamat and Marduk advanced against each other to fight.

8 Marduk spread his net and caught her, and let loose the evil wind in her face. When Tiamat opened her mouth as wide as she could, he drove in the evil wind before she could close her lips. The terrible winds filled her belly, she lost her courage and stood with her mouth gaping. Marduk took the

spear, tore open her belly, cut through her insides and pierced her heart. So he defeated her and took her life. He threw her body to the ground and stood upon it.

9 With Tiamat dead, her army broke apart. The gods who helped her trembled, were afraid and fled, but they were surrounded and could not escape. Marduk bound them, broke their weapons and put them in the net. The eleven monsters too, the troop of demons, he tied up and trampled. And Kingu, who had been raised above all, he defeated and counted among the dead gods. He took from him the Tablets of Destiny, which were not his by right, sealed them and placed them on his own breast.

10 Then he went back to Tiamat. He stood upon her body and, with his merciless mace, smashed her skull. He cut the veins of her blood, and the north wind carried it away to hidden places. The gods, his fathers, saw and rejoiced, and brought him gifts.

11 Marduk rested, looking at the body, and thought of an ingenious plan. He split Tiamat in two, like a dried fish. With one half he made the sky, like a roof; he set a bar and a guard and ordered them not to let her waters out. He went through the sky, examined its regions, and, facing the Deep, set the dwelling of Ea. He measured the Deep and founded Esharra, a great house in its likeness (the sky), and in it he made Anu, Enlil and Ea dwell, each in his own region.

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TABLET V

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1 Marduk made the places of the great gods in the sky and fixed the stars, which are their images, as the constellations of the sun's path. He fixed the year and divided it into parts, and for each of the twelve months he set three stars. He founded the place of Nibiru, to mark the bounds of all, so that none would go astray, and set beside it the places of Enlil and of Ea.

2 He opened great gates on both sides of the sky, to the east and to the west, with strong bars. In the middle he set the highest point. He made the moon shine and entrusted the night to it, and had it mark the days: "At the beginning of the month, when you shine upon the earth, show your horns for six days; on the seventh, half your crown; on the fourteenth day, stand facing the sun, full." (The rest of the instructions to the moon is broken.)

3 (Here there is a great gap. From the copies found later, Marduk makes the clouds and the rain from Tiamat's spittle, opens the Tigris and the Euphrates from her eyes, heaps up the mountains over her head and binds the earth with her tail.)

4 The gods saw the net that Marduk had made, saw the bow and his work, and praised it all. Anu raised up the bow in the assembly, kissed it and gave it its names: "Long-Wood shall be the first; the third shall be Bow-Star, and

it shall shine in the sky." And he fixed its place among the stars. (The end of the tablet is badly broken; in it, the gods speak of Marduk, the son who gave them life.)

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TABLET VI

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1 When Marduk heard the word of the gods, his heart led him to devise a plan. He told Ea what he had imagined: "I will gather blood and make bones, and I will create the human being. He will live on the earth and serve the gods, and their temples will be built. So the gods will be able to rest."

2 Ea answered him (the speech is broken; from the copies found later): "Let one god be handed over, the guilty one, and from him let mankind be made." The gods said that the guilty one was Kingu, who had stirred Tiamat to war. They bound Kingu and brought him to Ea. They punished him by cutting his veins, and from his blood Ea created human beings and gave them the labour of the gods, so that the gods would be free.

3 (Also from the copies found later:) In gratitude, the Anunnaki said to Marduk: "We will build you a sanctuary where we may rest." They worked for a year making bricks and, in the second year, raised up Babylon and the temple of Esagila, with its tall tower.

4 The gods rejoiced and fixed their dwelling in Upshukkinaku. Of the hero son, their avenger, they said: "He has saved us!" They sat down in assembly and, all together, started to proclaim the names of Marduk.

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TABLET VII

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1 (This tablet is a hymn: the gods give Marduk fifty names, each with its meaning. Here are the ones the tablet preserves.) Asari, "who gives the planting and founds the sowing, who creates grain and plants and makes the green shoots spring up". Asaru-alim, "the one revered in the house of counsel, rich in counsel", before whom the gods bow in awe.

1.2 Asaru-alim-nuna, "the mighty one, the light of the father who begot him, who directs the commands of Anu, Enlil and Ea". He is the protector of the gods, and his providence is abundance.

2 Tutu, "who created them anew". If he casts a spell, the gods are calmed; if they attack him in anger, he withstands them. Let him be exalted in the assembly of the gods: no god compares with him. Tutu is also Zi-ukkina, "the life of the host of the gods", who established the shining sky for them and marked out their path. His deeds will never be forgotten among men.

3 Tutu as Zi-azag, in the third place: "who brings purification, the god of the favourable wind, the lord who hears and has mercy, the creator of abundance, who makes the small grow". "In distress we feel his favourable wind": let them say this, let them revere him and bow before him.

4 Tutu as Aga-azag, in the fourth place: "the lord of the pure spell, who gives life to the dead, who had mercy on the captive gods and lifted the yoke from the enemy gods. So that they might be forgiven, he created

mankind; he is the Merciful One, to whom it belongs to give life". May his deeds endure and never be forgotten in the mouths of the men his hands have made.

5 Tutu as Mu-azag, in the fifth place: let their mouths proclaim his "pure spell", with which he destroyed all the wicked. Shag-zu, "who knows the heart of the gods and sees the innermost part", who founded the assembly of the gods and subdued the rebels. Zi-si, "who put an end to anger". Suh-kur, "who destroys the enemy and confounds his plans".

5.2 (Many other names follow, most of them broken: Agil, "the creator of the earth"; Zulummu, "who gives counsel"; Mummu, "the creator"; Gishkul, "who brought the enemy gods to nothing"; Lugal-durmah, "the king of the company of the gods, the lord of those who rule"; Adu-nuna, "the counsellor of Ea", to whose majesty no god can attain; Lugal-dul-azaga, of pure dwelling.)

6 And they gave him the name Nibiru: "he who crossed through the midst of Tiamat without rest, who keeps the path of the stars of the sky and shepherds all the gods like sheep. He defeated Tiamat and put an end to her life. In the future of men, when the days grow old, may this be heard without ceasing and last forever."

7 Because he created the sky and formed the solid earth, father Enlil called him "Lord of the World". Ea heard the title that all the spirits of heaven proclaimed, rejoiced and said: "He whose name his fathers have glorified shall be like me; his name shall be Ea. He shall control all my laws and make known all my commands." And so, with the name "Fifty", the great gods proclaimed his fifty names.

8 Let these names be remembered, and let the first man proclaim them. Let the wise and those who understand study them together. Let the father repeat them and teach them to his son, let them be in the ears of the shepherd. Let man rejoice in Marduk, the lord of the gods, so that his land may be fertile and he may prosper.

8.2 The word of Marduk stands firm, his command does not change, and no god has ever annulled what came out of his mouth. When he looks in anger, he does not turn his neck, and when he is angered, no god can withstand his fury. But his heart is wide and his compassion is great. (The end of the tablet is broken.)

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