



The Seven Tablets of Creation: The Babylonian Creation Mythos (The Enuma Elish)

Leonard William King

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The Enuma Elish

by Leonard William King

Luzac's Semitic text and translation series.

The Enuma Elish (also spelled "Enuma Elish"), is the Babylonian creation mythos (named after its opening words). It was recovered by Austen Henry Layard in 1849 (in fragmentary form) in the ruined Library of Ashurbanipal at Nineveh (Mosul, Iraq), and published by George Smith in 1876.

PERHAPS no section of Babylonian literature has been more generally studied than the legends which record the Creation of the world. On the publication of the late Mr. George Smith's work, "The Chaldean Account of Genesis," which appeared some twenty-seven years ago, it was recognized that there was in the Babylonian account of the Creation, as it existed in the seventh century before Christ, much which invited comparison with the corresponding narrative in the Book of Genesis. It is true that the Babylonian legends which had been recovered and were first published by him were very fragmentary, and that the exact number and order of the Tablets, or sections, of which they were composed were quite uncertain; and that, although they recorded the creation of the heavens and of the heavenly bodies, they contained no direct account of the creation of man. In spite of this, however, their resemblance to the Hebrew narrative was unmistakable, and in consequence they at once appealed to a far larger circle of students than would otherwise have been the case.

The Enuma Elish has about a thousand lines and is recorded in Old Babylonian on seven clay tablets, each holding between 115 and 170 lines of Sumero-Akkadian cuneiform script. Most of Tablet V has never been recovered but, aside from this lacuna, the text is almost complete. A duplicate copy of Tablet V has been found in Sultantepe, ancient Huzirina, near the modern town of Sanliurfa in Turkey.

This epic is one of the most important sources for understanding the Babylonian worldview, centered on the supremacy of Marduk and the creation of humankind for the service of the gods. Its primary original purpose, however, is not an exposition of theology or theogony but the elevation of Marduk, the chief god of Babylon, above other Mesopotamian gods.

The Enuma Elish exists in various copies from Babylon and Assyria. The version from Ashurbanipal's library dates to the 7th century BCE. The composition of the text probably dates to the Bronze Age, to the time of Hammurabi or perhaps the early Kassite era (roughly 18th to 16th centuries BCE), although some scholars favour a later date of c. 1100 BCE.

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