

The Enuma Elish: Perspectives on the World, Culture, and Leadership

Exploring the Babylonian Creation Myth and Its Meaning

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HUMA 1301 0312 - The Ancients

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April 20, 2023

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The path to understanding the origins of human civilization and how ancient peoples viewed the world begins with an exploration of the beliefs and values of ancient societies. It is fascinating that ancient civilizations viewed the world differently than modern people. But, just how much difference is there between these two groups? The Enuma Elish sheds light on the Babylonians' perspective on the nature of the world, people, culture, war, and leadership. Seven clay tablets, found in the ruins of Ninevah, hold its secrets.

The Enuma Elish was written between 2225 and 1926 B.C.E., during the First Babylonian Dynasty (Langdon 10; Fiero 18). It contains an Epic, "recited during the [Babylonian] festival of the New Year" which "celebrates the birth of the gods and the order of creation" (Fiero 17).

The Enuma Elish explains that the universe was created when the god Marduk defeated the god of chaos, Tiamat, literally "Sea", and used her body as the substance of creation (Campbell 246; Wisnom 211).

It begins by describing the development of the gods. The primeval gods, Apsu and Tiamat, mingle to give rise to another generation of gods, known as the elder gods. The elder gods foolishly kill Apsu. They make their home on the corpse of the primeval father and desecrate his image.

The angered Tiamat creates an army of monsters to avenge her husband's death. She creates nine destructive chimeras to wage war against the insurrection. She marries a new created god, Kingu. He is the leader of Tiamat's monster army. The king of the demons.

The elder gods send many gods to fight against Tiamat to no avail. When Marduk is sent to fight Tiamat, he makes a deal with the gods. He is granted great abilities and the power to determine fates, under the condition that he defeats Tiamat. Marduk casts a net upon Tiamat and cuts her body apart. He creates the universe from the body of Tiamat and creates humans from the blood of Kingu.

The story ends with the celebration of New Years, a time of renewal.

The Enuma Elish also describes the movements of celestial bodies at length. The Babylonians show a great understanding of what is happening in the sky. They believe, even, that the bow of Marduk, used to kill Tiamat, was placed in the heavens for remembrance. They attribute Canis Major with this honor. (Enuma Elish Bk VI 65-8)

Jordan Peterson recognizes the "phenomenological representation" of the world which the Babylonians adopted. In the Enuma Elish, the world is described as a "dome on a disc" (Peterson 00:45). This simplistic understanding shows the lack of scientific discoveries which the Babylonians had yet to find out. They believed that the dome of salt water which extended very far had a large mass, under which fresh water was found. The primeval gods were these water forces which made life.

The elder gods represent ways in which people operate, ways in which people live. They are identifiable and simplistic. Single-faceted. They are in rebellion against the natural world. They live on the corpse of Apsu, fighting off the chaos of natural order. Humans, likewise, live on the fresh water browned by dirt and grime. This anthropomorphization shows the Babylonian's understanding of the primary modes of operating as a human being.

Tiamat's anger towards the elder gods shows the natural world's attempt to squash humans. The planet is fighting to ruin and destroy the human endeavor. The beasts of land are congruent with the beasts of Tiamat.

Tugendhaft remarks that this epic centers "on a god who is victorious in battle", that he "is proclaimed a king", and it tells of a "royal abode being built for that god" (Tugendhaft 148). Marduk enters the scene as a unique individual. He is capable of confronting chaos. He ultimately defeats it. He divides Tiamat up into manageable pieces and creates a world upon it. This is the ability of a leader to create society from such a difficult situation.

So, this Marduk character must be superposable with the leader of the Babylonians. His skills are speaking and seeing (Peterson 8:10). He, like Marduk is in control and makes a path for a society to flourish. The leader of a society is tasked with the

position of dealing with the chaos and consistently confronting and responding to it. He must be able to destroy the beasts and make use of them, even the most ferocious beasts, such as Kingu represents in the epic.

The people, of course, must keep their leader accountable to their desires. The Enuma Elish story ends with the scene of the renewal of the year. The Babylonians are intent to remind their king and themselves of what is expected of all parties. Thus, the New Year's Festival, in Babylon, was a time in which this story was reenacted by the priests. They would gather on the spring solstice and renew their intention to act in the best interest of society (Peterson 12:45).

Weeks remarks that the evidence that the Babylonian rituals are connected to their myths come from sources other than the Enuma Elish. Of course, these other sources are the same which document further history of the Babylonians. It would be curious to see what these sources have to say regarding the Babylonians' understanding of the sky.

In the Enuma Elish, the sky is mapped poetically. In Book 5, the movements of the planets are documented vehemently. The movements of the sky must have been very important to the Babylonians. It would inform the priests of events happening between the gods. The priests could use this information to teach the people about incoming disasters, and help counsel the Babylonian leader regarding his actions. He is, as has been noted, supposed to model Marduk in his every step. What better way than with a map of the stars and a cabinet of expert astronomers?

The Enuma Elish opens a door into the mind of a Babylonian living thousands of years ago. It makes light of their understanding of the world and society. The struggle between chaos and order is evident above all else. Their recognition of good leadership shows that the culture, then, was intensely advanced. There is powerful metaphor in Marduk's victory and creation of a habitable world. It models, well, the role of a good leader.

Not only this, but the Babylonians had great awareness of their connection to the natural world. They were capable of using signs in the natural world to influence

the outcome of humanity.

Overall, this document reveals the Babylonians' perspective regarding the world, culture, and leadership. It has much to offer our society today. Any leader, today, could benefit from a healthy analysis of the leadership skills presented thousands of years ago, in the ancient near east.

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