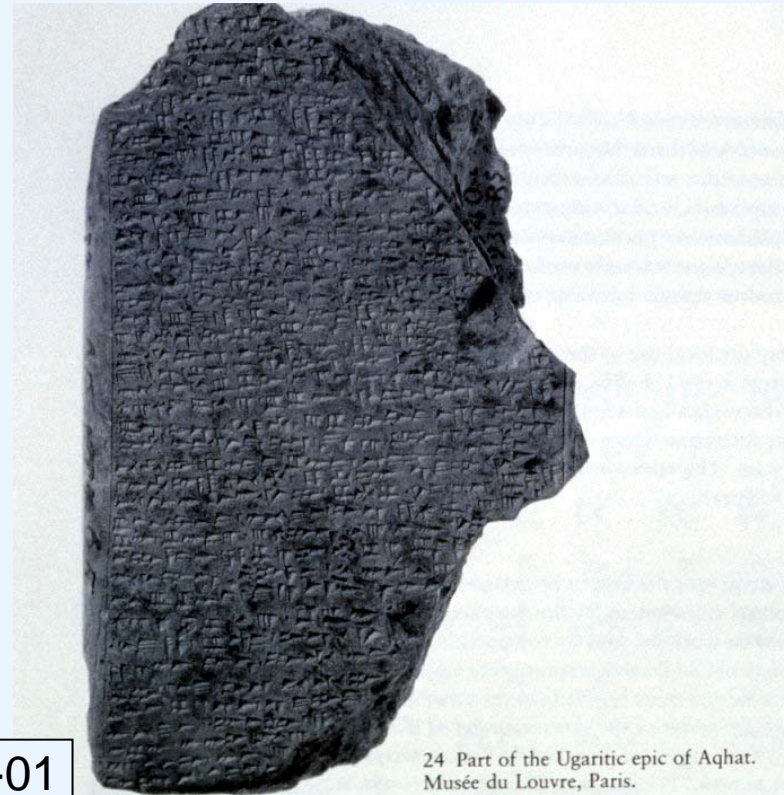


# Mesopotamian Literature

- the scriptures of the ancient Hebrews arise from the same general culture as Ancient Near Eastern literature
- this involves **cultural adaptation** as well as the adoption of others' literature
- cf. the “serene” creation story in Genesis



# repetitive parallelism

- the nature of Mesopotamian poetry is to repeat verses in couplets
- but often verses have slight variations in language
- *Enuma Elish* 4.3-6 (the Babylonian poem of creation):

You are the most important among the great gods;

Your destiny is unequalled, your command is Anu.

Marduk, you are the most important among the great gods,

Your destiny is unequalled, your command is Anu.

# progressive specification

- a more complex form of repetitive parallelism
- the second line paraphrases or recasts the first line
- *Enuma Elish* 1.1-2

When above, the heaven had not been named,

Below, the earth had not yet been called by name, ...

# incremental repetition

- another type of repetitive parallelism
- the second line adds an element (or elements) to the first line
- *Enuma Elish* 1.42-3

<Tiamat> was angry and cried out to her husband;  
She cried out and raged furiously, she alone.

# incremental repetition

- *Enuma Elish* 4.101-2

He released the arrow, it tore her belly,

It cut through her insides, splitting the heart.

- *Enuma Elish* 4.144-5

The Great Abode, its likeness, he fixed as Esharra,

The Great Abode, Esharra, which he made as the  
firmament . . .

# The Old Testament

- the scriptures of the ancient Hebrews arise from the same general culture as Ancient Near Eastern literature
- the verses of the Bible also use repetitive parallelism
- *Psalms 111.7-8*

**The works of His hands are truth and justice;**

**all His commandments are sure.**

**They stand fast for ever and ever,**

**done in truth and uprightness.**

# The Old Testament

- Old Testament scripture, however, shows more subtle use of repetition than most Mesopotamian literature
- e.g. Judges 5.6-7 (very old passage)

In the days of Shamgar the son of 'Anat,  
In the days of Ya'el, the highways were unoccupied,  
And the travelers walked through crooked byways,  
The inhabitants of the villages ceased, they ceased in  
Yisra'el,  
Until I Devora arose,  
I arose a mother in Yisra'el.

# The Old Testament

- e.g. Judges 5.19-21

The kings came and fought,  
Then fought the kings of Kena'an,  
In Ta'nakh by the waters of Megiddo;  
They took no gain of silver.  
They fought from heaven;  
The stars in their courses fought against Sisera.  
The *wadi* of Qishon swept them away,  
The ancient brook, the brook of Qishon.

# The Old Testament

- the actual mechanism of Ancient Near Eastern poetry is unclear
  - it does not seem to measure anything, therefore it is not a “meter” as such
  - not based on rhyme or rhythm
- the only perceptible basis is repetition
  - usually in couplets, but sometimes in quatrains
  - or within half-lines
- but not all lines are repeated

# *Enuma Elish*

- not a **creation myth (story)** as such
  - a text read at the Babylonian New Year's celebration
    - justification of **Marduk**'s supremacy
    - skims over earlier phases of the creation story which do not involve Marduk
    - excludes the creation of humankind
  - but it includes an outline of the Babylonian creation myth (**cosmology**)
- thus, not strictly parallel to Genesis

# *Enuma Elish*

***Enuma elish la nabu shamamu***

When on high not were named the heavens

***Shaplish ammatum shuman la zakrat***

When below the earth its name not was pronounced

- cf. Genesis 1.5: naming as part of creation

And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night

– cf. the importance of naming in ANE culture

- e.g. Sennacherib = “Sin has made recompense for the brother”
- Isaiah 49.1: The Lord called me before I was born,  
While I was still in my mother’s womb he named me

# *Enuma Elish*

- *Enuma Elish* 1.3-5:

When primordial Apsu, their begetter,  
And Mummu-Tiamat, she who bore them all,  
Their waters mingled as a single body, . . .

- aboriginal chaos is characterized as **Primal Waters (the Primeval Ocean)**

- *Enuma Elish*: Apsu (sweet waters) and **Tiamat** (salt waters)
- Genesis 1.2: the origin of the waters is left unexplained:  
And the earth was without form and void and darkness covered the face of the deep. And a wind from God moved over the surface of the waters.

# *Enuma Elish*

- *Enuma Elish* 1.6-10

**No** reed hut had sprung forth, **no** marshland had appeared,  
**None** of the gods had been brought into being,

And **none** bore a name, and **no** destinies determined

Then it was that the gods were formed in the midst of heaven.

Lahmu and Lahamu were brought forth, by name they were called.

- cf. Genesis 2.5: use of **negatives**

And <when> **no** plant of the field was yet in the earth, and **no** herb of the field had yet grown, for the Lord God had **not** caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was **not** a man to till the ground, {but} there went up a mist from the earth, and it watered the whole face of the ground.

# *Enuma Elish*

Then it was that the gods were formed in the midst of heaven.

**Lahmu** and **Lahamu** were brought forth, by name they were called. (*EE* 1.9-10)

- **Lahmu/Lahamu** = “silt”?
  - memory of alluvial deposits in Sumeria?
  - otherwise, nonsense “jingling” names
- cf. **Tohu/Vohu**:

And the earth was without form and void (*Tohu*) and darkness (*Vohu*) covered the face of the Deep (*Tehom*). (Genesis 1.2)

  - *vohu* is a nonsense word in Hebrew
  - a jingling name, cf. Lahamu

# *Enuma Elish*

- n.b. no “silt” (*Lahmu*) in Genesis
  - silt would have been meaningless to the ancient Israelites
  - but there is a separation of light and dark:  
And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness (Genesis 1.4)
  - silt/light: changes in visual/horizontal status
    - but whereas the Babylonian text focuses on a concrete item (silt)
    - the Hebrew text centers on an abstract image (light/dark)

# *Enuma Elish*

And the earth was without form and void (*Tohu*) and darkness (*Vohu*) covered the face of the Deep (*Tehom*). (Genesis 1.2)

- ***tehom*** = “(the) deep”
  - no clear etymology, but cf. Tiamat
    - however, it is not clear that that *tehom* is cognate with Tiamat
    - while it seems not to be, Hebrew distorts borrowings from other languages in unpredictable ways, e.g. Sennacherib, Nebuchadnezzar
  - n.b. no article (“the”) in the Hebrew text
    - should we then understand ***Tehom*** as a name?

# *Enuma Elish*

- *Enuma Elish* 1.11-12

Before they had grown in age and stature,

**Anshar** and **Kishar** were formed, surpassing the others.

Long were the days, then there came forth...

Anu was their heir, of his fathers the rival;

Yes, Anshar's first-born, Anu, was his equal.

Anu begot in his image Nudimmud.

- **an-** “heaven, up”

- **ki-** “earth, down”

– n.b. these are Sumerian word-radicals

– which hints at the extreme age of the story

# *Enuma Elish*

## Marduk's Test and Triumph (Tablet 4)

- the gods test Marduk's powers, i.e. his ability to defend them against Tiamat
  - Pritchard, pp. 31ff.
- cf. Judges 6:36-40: Gideon tests God twice
  - wet fleece on dry ground, and then dry fleece on wet ground
- also Exodus 4:1-7
  - Moses' staff > snake > staff
  - Moses' healthy hand > unhealthy > healthy

# *Enuma Elish*

## Marduk's Test and Triumph (Tablet 4)

- Marduk does the same sort of magic, i.e. changes something, then changes it back

At the word of <Marduk's> mouth the cloth vanished,  
He spoke again, and the cloth was restored.

- but “cloth” is a misreading
  - we now know the word means “constellation”

# *Enuma Elish*

## Marduk's Test and Triumph (Tablet 4)

- Marduk as **storm god** does battle with Tiamat
  - uses lightning (4.39-40)  
In front of him he set the lightning,  
With a blazing flame he filled his body.
- cf. Zechariah 9:14  
Then the Lord will appear over them,  
and his arrow will go forth like lightning; . . .
  - n.b. expressed as a simile, because God must not be literal or limited
  - ANE attribute > Biblical imagery



294. Stele with weather-god, from Ras Shamra.  
Paris, Louvre

# *Enuma Elish*

## Marduk's Test and Triumph (Tablet 4)

- sometimes, however, imagery verges on an attribute of God
    - e.g. Deut. 32:41: God's "swift sword (which is lightning)"
      - not his lightning-swift sword
      - or "glittering" as in the King James translation
    - also Psalm 29:3: God's voice is thunder
- The voice of the Lord is upon the waters. The God of glory thunders: the Lord is upon many waters.

# *Enuma Elish*

## Marduk's Test and Triumph (Tablet 4)

- the most interesting of these images are God's "chariot" and "net"
  - Ezekiel 12:13, 17:20-22, 32; Hosea 7:12
  - cf. the Stele of the Vultures (Eannatum)
    - Ningursu holds enemies in a net



# *Enuma Elish*

## Marduk's Test and Triumph (Tablet 4)

- *EE* 4.41-50

He then made a **net** to enfold Tiamat therein.

The four winds he stationed that nothing of her might escape,  
The South Wind, the North Wind, the East Wind, the West Wind.

Close to his side he held the **net**, the gift of his father, Anu.

He brought forth Imhullu "the Evil Wind," the Whirl-wind, the  
Hurricane,

The Fourfold Wind, the Sevenfold Wind, the Cyclone, the  
Matchless Wind;

Then he sent forth the winds he had brought forth, the seven of  
them.

To stir up the inside of Tiamat they rose up behind him.

Then the lord raised up the flood-storm, his mighty weapon.

He mounted the **storm-chariot** irresistible and terrifying.

# *Enuma Elish*

## Marduk's Test and Triumph (Tablet 4)

- God also has a chariot
  - cf. Habakkuk 3:15:  
You trampled the sea with your horses, churning the mighty waters.
  - also, Psalms 104:3-4:  
. . . you make the clouds your chariot, you ride on the wings of the wind, you make the winds your messenger, fire and flame your ministers.

# *Enuma Elish*

## Marduk's Test and Triumph (Tablet 4)

- Job 26:13

By his wind the heavens were made fair; his hand slew the  
slant serpent

***brwh.w***    ***shmym***    ***shprh***  
by his wind    the heavens    beauty

- Tur-Sinai's emendation:

***brwh.w***    ***shm***    ***ym***    ***shprh***  
by his wind    he put    the sea    in a net

– *shprh* = Akkadian ***sapparu*** (“hunting net”)

- *-h* = locative ending (“in a ...”)

# *Enuma Elish*

## Marduk's Test and Triumph (Tablet 4)

- Tur-Sinai emendation of Job 26:13
  - With his wind he put the sea in a net; ...
- but why was the text misread?
  - the word \**shpr* (“hunting net”) was forgotten?
  - God cannot fight his own creation, the sea?
    - whereas Ba'al fights Yam in Canaanite myth
  - or to monotheists was it better to create nonsense ('by his wind the heavens beauty') than to preserve a polytheistic attribute?

# *Enuma Elish*

## Marduk's Test and Triumph (Tablet 4)

- Tur-Sinai was later called “the worst of the misfortunes” Job suffered
- but this shows the close relationship between early Israelite literature and his Ancient Near Eastern cognates
- Murray Lichtenstein: “[this passage] makes the closest passage [in the Bible] paralleling the *Enuma Elish*, if you accept the emendation.”

# *Enuma Elish*

## Marduk's Test and Triumph (Tablet 4)

- *EE* 4.135-38: Marduk carves up Tiamat's body, creating the **Division of the Waters**

Then the lord paused to view her dead body,  
That he might divide the form and do artful works.  
He split her like a shellfish into two parts:  
Half of her he set up as a covering for heaven, . . .

- cf. **Genesis 1:6-7**

And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide water from water. And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament.

# *Enuma Elish*

## Marduk's Test and Triumph (Tablet 4)

- water must be controlled, cf. irrigation
  - *EE* 4.139-40
    - <Marduk> pulled down the bar and posted guards.  
He bade them to allow not her waters to escape.
  - cf. Job 38:8-11: God addressing Job
    - Or who shut up the sea with doors, when it broke forth, and issued out of the womb? . . . and prescribed bounds for it, and set bars and doors, and said, "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further: and here shall thy proud waves be stayed?"
- thus like Marduk, God establishes his domain by destroying enemies

# *Enuma Elish*

## Marduk's Test and Triumph (Tablet 6)

- the **Creation of Humankind** marks an important difference between the Bible and the *Enuma Elish*
  - in Babylonian tradition, humankind is almost an after-thought, made from the body of Tiamat's co-conspirator Kingu (*EE* 6.31-6)
    - They imposed on him (Kingu), his punishment and severed his blood vessels.
    - Out of his blood they fashioned mankind. . .
    - (and) imposed upon them the service of the gods—
  - the gods need servants to feed them

# *Enuma Elish*

## Marduk's Test and Triumph (Tablet 6)

- but in the Bible, mankind is the steward of the Earth
  - Genesis 1:27-8

So God created man in his own image, . . . and God said unto them, Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.
- God needs humanity as a terrestrial caretaker
  - whereas Marduk has other gods to look after his affairs on earth