

## **THE ENUMA ELISH: Mythological Roots of Colonialism**

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Human beings have long been awed by the mystery of entering a world already formed and pre-existing the I that we commonly call "I". As consciousness of self and other gradually begins to develop in the human infant, it begins to dawn on the child that life does not begin and end with its own dreams and imaginings. The people who populate its world somehow go on when outside its sight. The question begins to form: where do I fit into their world? How do they fit into mine? What is the invisible thread that binds us together in this life?

That thread is best expressed and explained through story, a narrative or set of images that weaves together actors and events through time in space. Our personal stories are stories within stories---family stories, cultural stories, national stories, species stories. Just as each of us has a personal story that shapes us as we shape it, every culture and subculture has a common story---a history and mythos---which instructs its members in its particular version of what it means to be human, and thus, what is required of them as members of the society.

In this paper I will be examining a set of ancient Near Eastern cosmogonic stories, or myths, focusing especially on the Enuma Elish as a prototype, as a means of exploring the way in which a people explained to themselves how things became the way they had become, who they were in that world, and perhaps most interesting, the nature of reality (vs. the reality of nature.) I will be asserting that these myths are antecedent to the stories out of which Western culture still grounds its superior moral and political sense of itself, and its relationship to the cosmos and the natural world. These stories demonstrate a

fundamental cosmological shift over a period of a couple thousand years, from a beneficent living Earth world-view to a view of the cosmos as made up of chaotic and/or dead matter, to be conquered and tamed. This mythological transition was concurrent with a social and economic transition from village life centered around a female fertility figure, to an expanding military culture of kings and slaves which produced and maintained the great grain producing city-states dominating Tigris and Euphrates by the time of Babylon's rise to power in the second millennium BCE. These changes are interesting to us today because we are in a similar transition, in which the old stories no longer suffice to explain our world to us. We can observe the search for new mythology and the clash of two similar world views in Hollywood's neo-mythic films related to futuristic themes, such as *The Matrix*, *StarWars*, and *Contact*.

It is worth remembering that myth, like history, is written, or at least adapted, by the winners. Just as myth and story reflect people's lived experience of the way things are, it is also used to justify changes, to incorporate what is new into a people's traditional way of seeing the world, and oftentimes to discredit the old way. In places where rule was by "divine right," myth played a critical role in justifying the right of the ruler to rule. Thus is the image of Caesar Augustus being suckled at Isis' breast carved into the stone walls of Egyptian temples, as if to say "See, it says right here that Caesar was chosen by Isis, so who are you to argue?" And thus is the suppression of the Palestinian people justified on the same grounds, with ancient tales of a conquering god granting land and political supremacy to the Hebrews, in exchange for His supremacy in the pantheon and primary rights to obedience and devotion.

In this paper, I am operating in a domain I shall call mytho-political. In so saying I am asserting a relationship of confluence, not causality per se, between the mythic events described in a given culture's stories of world origin and its political events. This relationship has been explored at length by Gerda Lerner, Judith Ochshorn, and was acknowledged by Alexander Heidel in his book on Babylonian cosmogony. "Babylon's claim to supremacy over all the cities of the land . . . was supported (in the *Enuma Elish*) by tracing (Babylon's) origins back to the very beginnings of time and by attributing her foundation to the great Anunnaki themselves, who built Babylon as a dwelling place for Marduk and the gods in general (Tablet VI:45-73)."<sup>1</sup>

If we follow the myths, frescoes, and artifacts from pre-historic time onwards, doing our best to piece together the shards of collective memory, we see a long march from tribal and village based culture, in which devotion was directed primarily toward a maternal figure, to the patriarchal city-state and then the nation state, in which the ascendancy of the male warrior god increasingly dominated<sup>2</sup>. The Near Eastern and Hellenistic myths and images to which Western civilization is heir moved away from what we can reasonably infer (based on the names and attributes of the oldest deities as well as the icons found) were earlier universal themes of birth, death, the hunt, and regeneration. These were replaced by stories told of upstart male deities involved in courtship, seduction, or rape plots culminating in the Goddess's marriage to the stranger, dismemberment by the son, and eventually Her disappearance from the sacred literature altogether, except as heresy or as literary ghost. It has not escaped the notice of scholars that in the Eloist version of the Genesis story, written centuries later, the half remembered

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<sup>1</sup> Alexander Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951, p.11

<sup>2</sup> See Gimbutas, Eisler, Gadon, Ochshorn, and Goldstein for arguments and evidence.

name of the goddess Tiamat (doesn't She ever go away?) linger in the watery depths of unformed chaos ("Tehom") still being subdued by the male creator god<sup>3</sup>. From the Akkadian to the Hellenistic literature, we find stories of winners and losers, justified by megalomaniacal male gods. I intend to demonstrate in this essay that a continuum of the cosmogenic seeds which justified and normalized our present patriarchal, imperialistic social order, were planted by Sumerian and Babylonian creation myths.

I will especially focus on the well known Enuma Elish as evidence and apologia for the quantum shift from animate world born of the body of the divine (female) creator, to dead world, subdued by a warrior god's conquest of (female) chaos. This colorful tale is seed and precursor to the Biblical creation story, the military state, and to a polis based on the authoritarian warrior as ruler.

In those days of military conquest and upheaval, when the Enuma Elish was probably first told, and then written<sup>4</sup>, new stories were needed to justify and glorify the male gods of conquest and the male rulers they supposedly empowered. People who worshipped a Mother Goddess needed to know: how was the sacred will of their goddess reflected in this new hierarchy of kings, priests, warriors, and slaves? The earliest myths of the late Neolithic and Bronze Age show the conquering gods receiving their spiritual mandate to rule through their relationship to an indigenous goddess of whatever place

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<sup>3</sup> John A. Phillips, *Eve, the History of An Idea*, San Francisco: Harper and Row 1983, p.13

<sup>4</sup> According to Heidel (University of Chicago Press, 1951)The Enuma Elish was most likely written during the First Babylonian Dynasty, dated by Sidney Smith from 1894-1595 BCE), for this is when Marduk was most likely to have become a national God to justify Babylonian supremacy. This is corroborated, according to W. Van Soden, by the language of the poem, which points to the same period. Sproul (1979) asserts that it was most probably written during the reign of King Hammurabi (c1900 BCE). Her references date the first Babylonian Dynasty from 2057-1758 BCE.

they invaded<sup>5</sup>. We see this in the marriage saga of Inanna, in which the patron goddess of Sumerian civilization is persuaded to wed the invading shepherd god, Dumuzi.

These stories, dated back to the third millennium B.C.E., are from the time of the rise of city-states along the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers<sup>6</sup>. There was constant, brutal warring among these tribes for sufficient resources to feed and care for the populations that had been steadily increasing since the development of agriculture. By this time, men completely controlled the military and its hierarchy of kingship, while women priestesses maintained control of the temples and the culture's very important ritual life, whose sanction was still required to invest the king, and hence to justify and sanctify the killing and pillage<sup>7</sup>.

We find evidence of power struggles between different city-states, between men and women, gods and goddesses, and between the sacred and secular powers, in the Sumerian and the later Akkadian myths. The original Sumerians were an agrarian people, whereas the invading Akkadians were herders. In order for the Sumerian people to accept the yoke of colonization, it was necessary to perform the Sacred Marriage between the beloved local goddess, Inanna, and the Akkadian shepherd god, Dumuzi. If Inanna accepted Dumuzi as her king, the people must accept Akkadian rule as the will of the gods.

In the Akkadian version of the Marriage of Inanna, written following the invasion of Sumer by Akkad, Inanna, the Sumerian Queen of Heaven and Earth, is enjoined by her brother, Gilgamesh, to "Marry the shepherd. His cream is good. . . Whatever he touches shines brightly." In other words, Inanna and her people should join forces with the

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<sup>5</sup> Judith Ochsorn, *The Female Experience and the Nature of the Divine* , Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1981

<sup>6</sup> Samuel Noah Kramer, *Sumerian Mythology*, New York: Harper and Brothers, : 1961

<sup>7</sup> Ochsorn, 1981

victorious invaders, in exchange for which, the shepherd bargains, "I will give the farmer my leftover cream." Then ensues an argument in which the defiant goddess says she will never marry the shepherd, that the (Sumerian) farmer (also named Dumuzi) is the man of her heart. (Inanna always marries Dumuzi; but Dumuzi's national identity and economic role change over time.)

At the center of the argument, Inanna invokes the authority of the old Sumerian pantheon, and points out the Shepherd-King's need for their acceptance in order to rule Sumer. "Shepherd, without my mother, Ningal, you'd be driven away, Without my grandmother, Ningikuga, you'd be driven into the steppes..." Dumuzi replies that his lineage is equal to hers. "My father, Enki is as good as your father, Nanna. My mother, Sirtur, is as good as your mother, Ningal." etc. Of course the story ends with Inanna's declaration of love, and her investiture of the Akkadian shepherd god as her military leader and king. "In all ways you are fit... to sit on the lapis lazuli throne."<sup>8</sup> Thus the indigenous mythos is expanded to show the people of Sumer that it is the will of the gods, and of their beloved Inanna, that they accept Akkadian rule. It is now the shepherd, not the farmer, who should be rightful god-king. This has ecological, as well as religious and political, significance for the future of humanity.

It is worth noting that in this transitional period lasting over a thousand years, the names of the deities continue to reflect their old animistic origins. These figures were obviously nature deities long before their names were used to whitewash the agendas of

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<sup>8</sup>Samuel Noah Kramer and Diane Wolkstein, *Inanna Queen of Heaven and Earth: Her Stories and Hymns From Sumer*, New York: Harper and Row 1983, pp. 34 -35

conquering armies and greedy kings.<sup>9</sup> The Old Babylonian god and goddess names, for example, Enki and Ninki, mean Lord and Lady Earth, hearkening back to the earlier Sumerian Earth Goddess of the city state of Urash, named simply Ki (Earth). We also see the root "Ki" in the name of the feared and magnificent Sumerian goddess who ruled the underworld, Erishkigal. Thus it is possible to read these tales not only as a chronicle of the subjugation of indigenous, primarily female deities by invading hordes and city-states, but also to read them as a chronicle of the subjugation of nature by agrarian, military culture.

Inanna herself was originally the embodiment of the fertile storehouse that was filled with the cherished grain that made civilization possible. The original stories from Southern Sumer (Eridu) mythologize the marriage between Inanna and Dumuzi as a marriage between the force in the grain (Dumuzi) and the qualities of civilization (Inanna).<sup>10</sup> In spite of the politics of conquest and subjugation apparent in its later versions, the story tells us that Inanna had choice. She had to choose to marry the shepherd. The quality of divine embodiment in both male and female deity is still intact in the language of this tale. It is rich in erotic imagery, with the Divine Feminine as an active partner, singing "man of my heart! plow my vulva!" The shepherd-god, probably echoing the language of the earlier, agrarian Dumuzi, replies " Oh, Lady, your breast is your field... Your broad field pours out grain... Pour it out for me, Inanna. I will drink all you offer.<sup>11</sup>" Dumuzi may rule, but only by Her consent, and only Inanna can bring forth new life. In this early imperial literature, life is still recognized as emerging from

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<sup>9</sup> The most complete discussion of the changing notion of deity as reflected in ancient Near Eastern myths is to be found in Thorkild Jacobson's *Treasures of Darkness*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1976

<sup>10</sup> Jacobson, *ibid.* 1976

the body of the Goddess. Thus empire and herding must marry nature and grain cultivation.

There is a later Akkadian tale about the creation of humans that is worth a stop before proceeding on to the *Enuma Elish*. In it we can see the diminution of the role of the procreative goddess, and the growing image of deity as dictatorial and capricious rather than benevolent, abundant, and erotic. There is also increasing evidence of estrangement between god and human evident in this tale. The importance of bread as the cornerstone of the new civilization appears as the compensation for such estrangement and enslavement as has become the human lot.

The tale begins: "In those remote days... After the goddesses had been taken in marriage (sic), After the goddesses had been distributed within heaven and earth, After the goddesses had become pregnant... and had given birth . . . The first mother, who gave birth to the great gods (said to her son, Enki) . . . 'Fashion work-substitutes for the gods, let them relax from their labors!'" Enki, the giver of form, agrees to do so if his mother, Nammu, will birth them and provide features for them. At birth each human is handed a fate, or a role in the social order. In compensation for their pain, he gives them all bread. Bread is the reward and slavery the cost of civilization, according to patriarchal wisdom from Akkad to Freud. The story ends with Enki praising the work of his penis, for now the gods' houses will be built.<sup>12</sup> (Alas, the text does not tell us what he did with his penis, such that it should be praised.)

There is nothing in this tale affirming human, or any other, life; humans are the gods' bastard children, entitled to nothing more than bread in exchange for work. Their creation

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<sup>11</sup>Kramer and Wolkstein 1983, p.39



is not particularly sacred, even though they are birthed by the primal Goddess Nammu (who still gets grudging credit for theogeny). Nature as primal force is present nowhere in this tale, except in the ancient names of deities harkening back to another time. In a precursor to the Jahwist version of Genesis, people are entirely the product of civilization: they are fashioned first by Enki from clay. The new humans are not part of the Goddess or a celebration of Her life force. Nor are they a celebration of the god's virility, though they are clear proof of his cleverness. They have no intrinsic value or agency. Their lives are meaningless. They are mere matter. The Great Mother has become merely the oven in which they are baked, so to speak.

As we can see, the divine has ceased to be understood as the force of nature that animates all life. Deity has become abstracted and personified as a collection of obstreperous, tyrannical, petty personalities who occupy another realm and play with human lives like puppets, for their own amusement. The sacred has been relocated somewhere other than within the fleshy world of living, loving, birthing, and dying. Spirit has been split from materiality. That which is god-like, if it can be said to exist in human life at all, is identified in heroic acts of subduing nature and of military victory, offered for the greater glory of one or another deity. Life itself has become no more than a pecking order of service and exploitation, with animals and nature having become "livestock" and "natural resources," existing for the sole purpose of serving humans and making offerings to propitiate angry gods; with women serving men, slaves and subjects serving the king, the king serving the gods, and the gods jockeying for the upper hand among themselves.

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<sup>12</sup>Daniel A. Foxvog, "Enki and Ninmah," *Mesopotamian Literature and Documents* Part I, University of California at Berkeley Department of Near Eastern Studies, Unpublished, pp. 23-26

The Akkadian cosmology tells us the value and purpose of being human is to labor for the gods. If human life has no value except to serve one or another jealous god, then war and the building of empire may move to center stage with complete justification in the sacred literature, so long as it is done in the name of such service. It becomes perfectly acceptable to plunder those people who serve another god, as we see later in the Hebrew Scriptures, the Crusades, and the war in Bosnia. Indeed it is understood as the way of the cosmos, the natural order of things. It is at this point that we begin to encounter the concepts of vengeance, reward, and punishment in the laments and invocations. We hear people calling for their enemies to be humiliated, or destroyed utterly, with the same kind of blood thirst that we find in the Book of Psalms. This bespeaks an increasingly militarized image of deity, holding the scepter of judgment, the mace of punishment.

In nature, there are no rewards and punishments; there are fortune and consequences. But with the development of military, hierarchical culture and cosmology, reward for service, and punishment for failure, disobedience, and most of all, for being on the losing side, seem normal. Fortune and consequences are explained in terms of reward and punishment, foreshadowing the development of a Calvinism many centuries yet to come. Such notions fit with the new militaristic cosmology in which the gods are conquering royalty and we are their foot soldiers. In the later Sumerian and Babylonian tales we will begin to see the shift from an embodied, Earth based cosmology, to a cosmology that emphasized the arbitrary will and power of the gods, and kings with godlike powers.<sup>13</sup>

This is a far cry from seeing ourselves and all life as having value as part of the sacred body of the Goddess. Heaven and Earth have been sundered as the first step of a

new world order, taking spirit and matter with them, respectively. The “goddesses have been distributed between heaven and Earth,”<sup>14</sup> we are told. /In that split into dualism, the intrinsic worth of life on Earth, and human life in particular, has been lost. The gods have moved to the "spirit realm," far away from our earthly concerns, except to use, reward, or punish us for obeying or disobeying their whims. Communion and embodiment have been replaced by exploitation and alienation. Where estrangement and exploitation are the baseline of relationship, propitiation and rebellion are the only possible responses. Thus our relationship to the divine became one of propitiation, peppered with occasional bouts of rebellion

By the time of Babylon’s rise to power and the reign of Hammurabi, the symbol of the divine womb from which all life sprang no longer was consistent with the reality of a rising military elite and their quest for power and control. Women’s power had been steadily decreasing; whatever power they retained was in the hands of temple priestesses who still performed the sacred marriage. The primal Goddess was all but forgotten in this new world of military slavery and acquisition of wealth. New images would allow males to lay sole claim to the creation of life, as a means of justifying the right of a male warrior class to control every aspect of life, including women's sexuality and the means of reproduction. Origins could no longer be expressed in birth images, because only a Mother Goddess can give birth. Moreover, a mother does, by definition, give birth. So as long as there is a prolific, procreative goddess around there can be no claim to

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<sup>13</sup> Jacobson, 1976

<sup>14</sup> Foxvog, Ibid.

monotheism, with its corollary claims of omniscience and omnipotence.<sup>15</sup> In order to claim ultimate authority for a male god to justify a military state, the soldier king would have to mythically subdue the Great Mother and appropriate her body. This is what we find in the Enuma Elish.

In the Sumerian and Akkadian creation stories, the Goddess (the Salt Sea) gave birth to the world (Heaven and Earth) and to the gods. Then the god(s) created order, separating heaven and earth, marrying and subordinating the Goddess, creating the polis, and devising humans to do the heavy work. Now we see the next stage after the marriage of the Goddess to the stranger: her murder and dismemberment by the son.

The Enuma Elish is the Babylonian creation saga that set the stage for Genesis. It was probably written in the First Babylonian Dynasty, during the reign of King Hammurabi (c. 1900 B.C.E.), although several of the deities named in the epic are Sumerian, indicating that its roots may be much older. It is worth noting that coincident in history with the mythic vanquishing of Tiamat, the Mother Goddess, was the passing of the well known Hammurabic Code, a significant amount of which was devoted to codifying domestic and marriage law.

It was during this time that Babylon rose to political supremacy, and its homeboy deity, Marduk, became a national hero-god. Consequently most of the Enuma Elish is an explication of Marduk's rise to power as head of the local pantheon, as a parallel of earthly political developments.<sup>16</sup>

We first glimpse the cosmos of the Enuma Elish when it is still unformed. There is only the Great Mother, Tiamat (the bitter water), who is married to the First Begetter,

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<sup>15</sup> John A. Phillips, *Eve: The History of an Idea*, San Francisco: Harper and Row 1984

<sup>16</sup> Heidel 1951, p.11

Apsu (the sweet water). The gods are ". . . nameless, natureless, futureless<sup>17</sup>." We see the world prior to the beginnings of what we know as history, where people are living with life's cycles, in which linear time as we know it did not exist. In other words, the myth recalls a time before civilization, invasions, agriculture, and city-states. We are told the names of which gods are first born, and which overtaken and supplanted by which, recounting a mythic history of the polis. Soon we find several generations of gods warring in Tiamat's primal belly, just as the city-states representing different gods and goddesses, were warring from the Tigris and Euphrates to the Mediterranean basin.

Their father, Apsu, is much disturbed by their constant warring, and their overbearing and proud behavior. He wishes to destroy them and "all of their kind" so that he and his wife may have some peace again. But the patient, maternal Tiamat counsels, "If their ways are troublesome, let us wait a little while." Getting no cooperation from their mother, Apsu decides to take matters into his own hands, on the advice of his vizier, Mummu. His children discover his plan, however, and formulate their own plot to save themselves by slaying their father and give his crown to Ea. Ea, in his infinite wisdom, composes an incantation that puts Apsu to sleep, and slays him. Ea then establishes "his dwelling place" on Apsu, where "he founded his chamber. (There) Ea (and) Damkina, his wife, dwelt in splendor. In the chamber of fates, the abode of destinies, the wisest of the wise, the wisest of the gods, *the* god was begotten."<sup>18</sup> This tells us that Marduk is the rightful descendent of the wise Ea, thus even grander and wiser. The writer goes on at some length, telling us of Marduk's majesty and power.

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<sup>17</sup> All text of Enuma Elish quoted here, unless otherwise noted, is taken from Barbara C. Sproul, *Primal Myths*, San Francisco: Harper & Row 1979, pp.91-113, quoting version by N.K. Sanders, *Poems of Heaven and Hell from Ancient Mesopotamia*, Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1971, pp. 73-111

<sup>18</sup> Heidel, 1951, p.21

Tiamat does not stir until her children beg her to avenge their father and quell the storms so that they can sleep. Tiamat approves their plan, and conceives a new brood of monsters to fight alongside the gods in battle against the interlopers and disturbers.

"She made the Worm  
the Dragon,  
the Female Monster  
the Great Lion  
the Mad Dog  
the Man Scorpion  
the Howling Storm...

There was no pity in their weapons, they did not flinch from battle for her law was binding, irrevocable."<sup>19</sup> Tiamat then exalts Kingu, her new consort, to high commander of her army, and declares him to have dominion over all the other gods, by fastening the tablets of destiny to his breast.

When word of Tiamat's plot reaches Ea, Apsu's killer, he is stunned that his mother and siblings could possibly be planning such a thing, apparently forgetting his own recent patricide. In righteous indignation he goes to his father's father, Anshar, for help. Anshar counsels Ea to kill Kingu as he killed Apsu. But Ea, then others, one by one, cower at the sight of the primal mother, and find themselves unable to face her. At last Marduk, the brash, young hero, is called to defeat Tiamat. He agrees to do so, but only if he is given "precedence over all the rest... and forever let my word be law; I, not you, will decide the world's nature, the things to come." The intimidated gods, seeming to have no alternative, accede to Marduk's demands. They set up a throne for Marduk and declare him greater

than all the other gods, granting him the right ". . . to glorify some, to humiliate some, that is the gift of the god. Truth absolute, unbounded will..."

Marduk assembles a murderous array of warriors and weapons, including bow and net. When at last he faces Tiamat, she confronts him, "Upstart, do you think yourself too great? Are they scurrying now from their holes to yours?" He responds by accusing her, curiously enough, of inventing war, pitting fathers against sons. Then he challenges her to a duel to the death. His lies confuse her and "scatter her wits," making her an unfit match for the smarmy son. He ensnares her in his net, blows up her carcass, ". . . And now he shot the arrow that split her belly, that pierced the gut and *cut her womb* (emphasis mine)." He tramples and enslaves Tiamat's "unholy brood" of allies and followers. "When it was accomplished, the adversary vanquished, the haughty enemy humiliated... then brave Marduk tightened the ropes of the prisoners... He turned back to where Tiamat lay bound, he straddled the legs and smashed her skull (for the mace was merciless)... and the blood streamed down the north wind to the unknown ends of the world. When the gods saw all this they laughed out loud, and they sent him presents. They sent him their thankful tributes."

Ever the practical hero, Marduk now decides to make use of his battle's spoils, in the form of Tiamat's carcass. Now that the Great Mother is dead, the son can create the world anew in his own image---but not without the "stuff" of the original creation, the one whose body formed the world, the *anima mundi*. But now the substance of creation is dead. The new world is formed from the dead remains of the living goddess. And thus does living mater become dead matter.

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<sup>19</sup> Sproul, 1979 pp. 98-99

Marduk splits Tiamat's formerly life giving body "like a cockle-shell; with the upper half he constructed the arc of the sky, he pulled down the bar and set a watch on the waters, so they should never escape... He piled huge mountains on her paps and through them drove water-holes to channel the deep sources; and the high overhead he arched her tail, locked-in to the wheel of heaven; the pit was under his feet, between was the crotch, the sky's fulcrum. Now the earth had foundations and the sky its mantle. When God's work was done, when he had fashioned it all and finished, then on earth he founded temples and made them over to Ea."

The other gods are duly impressed with Marduk's accomplishments. "When all the gods in their generations were drunk with the glamour of the manhood (sic) of Marduk, when they had seen his clothing spoiled with the dust of battle, then they made their act of obedience." They name and celebrate him as the "Great Lord of the Universe."

Marduk is not content, however, to be king of the universe. He wants to be a creator of life. He wishes to be like woman, able to "join blood to bone... (to) form an original thing, its name is Man, aboriginal man is mine in the making." From whence shall he conceive this wonder? Only flesh can create flesh. Where the primal goddess gave birth from her own flesh, the warrior god kills to provide the material for new creation. So, just as Tiamat's corpse was the material used to create the world, now Kingu, her consort and war-leader, is killed so that his body may be used for the creation of human beings.

"When it was done, when Ea in his wisdom had created man and man's burden, this thing was past comprehension, this marvel of subtlety conceived by Marduk and executed by Nudimmud."



And so the world and humanity were created. At the celebration banquet Enlil lays the victorious net and bow of Marduk before the assembled gods, praising their intricacy and beauty. "Anu lifted the bow and kissed it, he said before all the gods, 'This is my daughter.'" Then, by the power of the bow, and on pain of death, the gods' Assembly ratified Marduk's authority as "King of Kings, Lord of Lords of the Universe... (singing) All glory to the son... shepherd of men... Black headed men will adore him on earth, the subjected shall remember their god... Let black-headed men serve the gods on earth without remission; while as for us, in the multitude of his names... let us hail him by his fifty names, one god."<sup>20</sup>

As in the Akkadian, humans in the Babylonian cosmology are the gods' beasts of burden. Their value is based entirely upon their ability to satisfy the whims of their masters; there is no notion of intrinsic dignity or value. One could easily parallel the god/human relationship to that of the master/slave. These new creatures called humans are made of the same substance as the gods, being from the flesh of a god, but a god of a lesser variety, for Kingu is defeated, and therefore, by definition, inferior. And he is dead.

We cannot overestimate the importance of this. The shift from viewing ourselves and the world around us as the living body of the divine, born of the Divine Mother, to viewing the entire physical world as a collection of inanimate stuff overseen by a capricious militarist, is key to our understanding of how we got where we are. One acts upon, not with, inanimate stuff. Stuff has no volition or creativity. It is malleable or resistant. If resistant, its resistance must be broken in order to work it. In animate creation, co-creation is always implicit, as every parent knows. Life has its own will and

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<sup>20</sup>All above quotes from Sproul, 1979, "The Enuma Elish" pp. 92-107

integrity. This myth shows creation as a violent act that is done to someone or something against or regardless of its will. On the positive side, it retains death as part of the cosmological equation; out of death comes life, as in the Paleolithic cave paintings and burial practices. The critical difference is that the new life here is material rather than sacred, because it is fabricated from inanimate flesh instead of being returned to the mother's womb for rebirth. The mother's womb has been slashed. The capacity for cosmic rebirth has been destroyed. Hence the myth lays the groundwork, for the later Hellenistic notion of a disembodied, asexual spirit that animates the inanimate world, and a personal soul which must be resurrected without being reborn.

But let us return to our mythic view of the world of the second millennium before the common era. The Great Mother, still grudgingly required by the Akkadian creation myth, must now be slain for civilization to be built, according to the Babylonian. The sons and warriors can no longer bear to look upon the eternal face of birth, life, and death lurking in the cracks of their architecture. Although she is characterized as chaos, we are told that Tiamat's order is binding and irrevocable. Although they are credited with establishing civilization, we know that the Babylonian army of Marduk sewed the seeds of war, slavery, and mayhem with their bow and their net. What, then, means chaos and what, order?

Where order was once organic, cyclical, in rhythm with the seasons of the earth and human life (and what law could be more binding and irrevocable than the law of Nature?), now order becomes defined by the imposition of human will over Nature's shifts and seasons---over all life, in fact. Marduk commands "You will enforce my will as law," a statement that would be ludicrous coming from Tiamat, for her law needs no

enforcement. It is simply the natural order of things. No wonder her personage strikes terror in their hearts. We have here not only a tale of the triumph of militarism over the last vestiges of mother-rule. We have a tale of the triumph of the city-state over nature. It is a tenuous triumph. And, as we know if we watched the 1993 floods in America's breadbasket take out the levies, it is relatively short-lived. At any moment Nature's order can arise to correct the imbalance, undoing any efforts that civilization has placed in opposition to her irrevocable law. (This, incidentally, is not a punishment; it is a consequence.) This does not deter our hero.

Marduk "pulled a bar down and set a watch on the waters so that they should never escape." In the bloom of his arrogance, Marduk has set out to tame and control the "chaos," or Mother Nature, who does not obey men's or god's laws. Obedience, after all, is paramount to military order. It now becomes the basis for assessing good and evil. With this version of order as our paradigmatic bottom line, Nature changes from the magnificent source of all life to a dangerous force which must be bound for civilization to exist. This repression of what is natural is the price of civilization, we are told by patriarchs from King Hammurabi to Sigmund Freud. And indeed it has been the price of a patriarchal, militaristic, civilization, but we need not go back further than Catal Huyuk to remember that there was another kind of civilization whose price was not so high.

There is another aspect of embodiment that is shattered with Marduk's sword: that of sexuality and relationality. The earliest cosmogony had the Goddess giving birth parthenogenetically. Then in later myths and images we saw her coupled with her consort, the virile bull. The Sumerian and Akkadian tales tell of pressured courtships and later of forced copulations, to be sure, but sexuality was still a factor in divine creation.

Eros was alive. With this tale, all that ends. Murder is substituted for sexual reproduction--not just any murder, but the murder of the divine consorts and of the Primal Goddess herself, with an arrow that splits her womb. We should not be overly surprised, then, when the other gods praise Marduk's manhood, not on the basis of his virility or his ability to please, as Dumuzi was praised in the Marriage Saga of Inanna, but on the basis of his victory over the Primal Mother. Battle dust and conquest of the mother have become the measure of manhood; war has become the basis for creation. The need for the birthing Goddess, or for any form of divine sexual union, has been removed from creation cosmology. The hero-god's ability to deal death has been put in the honored place of the Goddess's ability to give birth, as the source of life.

By severing his relationship with the Primal Mother, the figure of Marduk redefines the ideal (male) self as the separate, autonomous ego able to face down the influence of the overwhelming Other. Personal value is demonstrated, not in relationship, but in separateness. His heroism is grounded in his very lack of relationship. His value is based on his might. This redefinition of manhood will stand as a loss to men and women for millennia to come. The qualities glorified in this story for all to aspire to are remarkably like the John Wayne cowboy of the 1950's, nearly four thousand years later: power over primal nature, total independence, unbounded will, and truth absolute. We have moved from multiple, related, and changing deity within and without us, to the first image of God as the unmoved mover, the authority figure whose power and glory are independent

of any other, who is impervious to relational influences, and who can only be honored through obeisance and obedience.<sup>21</sup>

In our journey through Near Eastern cosmology, we have traveled, in large steps, from an animate universe---in which everything forms the sacred body of the goddess---to an inanimate empire, made by an independent hero from the dead remains of the goddess' body, and inhabited by a race whose only purpose is to labor and gratify the god's ego. This entire cosmogony serves primarily as a justification for Babylon's rise to power, its military hierarchy, and its conquest of other city-states and peoples. No longer is the creation story one that tells us of our place in the universal cycles of life and death. Rather, it justifies our place in the human political economy of power and conquest by a god whose primary purpose is to create empire. Most of all it tells us that our place is that of subservience to a king who rules by divine right. The primary human value taught by this cosmology is that of obedience to authority. Thus is the cosmological cornerstone laid for imperialistic, authoritarian patriarchy which only now is being questioned, and supplanted by a new cosmogony.

The myth's primary purpose is not to account for cosmogenic origins so much as to praise the hero, and the king as his living representative on earth.<sup>22</sup> Co-incidentally it does quite revealingly account for world origins through Marduk's exploits in matricide, in tone with the political climate of the period. At the Babylonian New Year's festival, where once a priestess had performed the Sacred Marriage Rites to bind the king's power to the Goddess, now the Enuma Elish was recited by a priest, and performed before a

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<sup>21</sup>Catherine Keller, *From A Broken Web: Separation, Self, and Sexism*, Boston: Beacon Press 1986, pp. 73-92

<sup>22</sup>Alexander Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1951, cited in French, 1986, p.51

statue of the hero, Marduk. "In ritually performing the myth, not only was the cosmos symbolically recreated, but the order of the world was reconfirmed. The king knelt before the high priest and submitted himself to humiliation before the god and his power. Rededicating himself in this fashion, the world was reestablished, the divine lease renewed, and the connection between the absolute and the temporal restored."<sup>23</sup> It is of more than passing interest that kingship as the symbol of the human/divine relationship is no longer affirmed through sexual union, but renewed through humiliation. The human/divine relationship is no longer grounded in loving co-operation between god and human, but in the god's power and authority over the king, and the king's authority over his subjects and slaves. The realms of human and divine have moved another step apart, and must be mediated by a priest.

"Next to singing the praises of Marduk," according to Heidel, "comes the desire, on the part of the Babylonian priests, who were responsible for the composition of this epic, to sing the praises of Babylon, the city of Marduk, and to strengthen her claim to supremacy over all the cities of the land. Babylon's claim to supremacy was justified by the fact that it was Babylon's god who had conquered Tiamat and had ordered and organized the universe. . . Our epic is thus not only a religious treatise but also a political one."<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Barbara C. Sproul, *Primal Myths, Creating the World*, San Francisco: Harper and Row 1979, p.92

<sup>24</sup>Heidel, 1951, p.11