

Cuneiform Tablet Telling the Epic of Creation **The British Museum**

Neo-Assyrian, 7th century BC
From Nineveh, northern Iraq

Part of the library of King Ashurbanipal (reigned 669-631 BC)



This is one of a series of tall narrow cuneiform tablets that tell the story of the creation of the gods Apsu and Tiamat out of primordial waters. This particular tablet relates the episode in which the god Anshar summons the gods to celebrate Marduk's appointment as champion following his defeat of Tiamat.

The younger gods disturb Tiamat, and Apsu, her husband, decides to destroy them. However, before he can act, he is killed by the gods. Tiamat is enraged and gathers an army of monsters and demons and marches in revenge. The gods, gathered in assembly, at first are unable to face Tiamat. Eventually Marduk, a young god, steps forward and offers to fight Tiamat, in return for the throne of heaven. The gods agree and Marduk gathers his weapons. Tiamat's army is defeated and she is killed. From her body Marduk creates the heavens and earth and, from the blood of a defeated giant, humans are created to serve the gods.

The Epic was recited on the fourth day of the New Year Festival in Babylon, which took place in April. On this day the king's right to rule was symbolically renewed by the gods. The story probably has its origin in the second millennium BC, but was still known in the fifth to sixth centuries AD.

T.C. Mitchell, *The Bible in the British Museum* (London, The British Museum Press, 1988)

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S. Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creati* (Oxford University Press, 1991)

J.B. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern texts rel*, 3rd ed. (Princeton University Press, 1969)

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