

Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh, and Others Study Guide

Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh, and Others by Stephanie Dalley

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Plot Summary

Myths From Mesopotamia: Creation, The Flood, Gilgamesh, and Others tells the tales of ten different myths from ancient Mesopotamia, including the Epic of Gilgamesh, Atrahasis, the Epic of Creation, and the Theogony of Dunnu. Believed to stem from oral tales, these stories have been translated from the original Akkadian stone tablets, showing clearly that these tales of heroism, evil, creation, and the rise and fall of gods spanned not only time, but great distances as well.

The book includes introductions to each story that help the reader to determine the time frame of the tale as well as introduce the main characters and plot line within each tale. First, the story of Atrahasis shows the creation of man, and the survival of man following the angry Flood sent by the gods. The Epic of Gilgamesh, one of the finest literary works of all time, tells the story of a hero's journey through rivalry, friendship, heroism, anguish, hope, carelessness, and finally acceptance of death, and a forward look for the future. Gilgamesh's quest for fame leads to the death of a friend, while his quest for immortality leads only to anguish. In the end, however, he survives, and is able to succeed as king. The story of the Descent of Ishtar shows the power of the gods and the rivalry among sisters, while the myth of Nergal and Ereshkigal show many of the same characters only in a much more humanistic light. In addition, Nergal and Ereshkigal's tale is one of the few passionate love stories found within the myths, and the variations of versions presented in the book show clearly that the tale was widespread in Mesopotamia.

The story of Adapa, who was tricked by the gods into refusing immortality, show the cruelty the gods sometimes showed to mankind. On the other hand, the tale of Etana shows the gods could also show care, concern, and even compassion for mankind, as Shamash leads Etana to the birthing plant. The tale of Anzu tells of the evils the gods did to one another and the disastrous results. There are two tales of creation in the text, those of the Epic of Creation and the Theogony of Dunnu. Drastically different in their presentation of the beginning of the world, the Epic of Creation follows Marduk, Tiamat, and Ea through their battle for survival, while the Theogony of Dunnu shows genocide, patricide, matricide, incest, and pure evil. Finally, the tale of Erra and Ishum show the use of powerful weapons against mankind and the powers of the gods to stop them.

While these stories show a common bond with the Old Testament, the Iliad, Odyssey, Hesiod, and Arabian Nights, they are distinct in their use of Mesopotamian language and surroundings and show that such tales, regardless of origin, are timeless in nature.



Preface 1, Preface 2, List of Figures, Sigla and Abbreviations, Introduction, Chronological Chart, and Map of the Near East

Preface 1, Preface 2, List of Figures, Sigla and Abbreviations, Introduction, Chronological Chart, and Map of the Near East Summary and Analysis

This book tells ten different myths from ancient Mesopotamia and introduces readers to early beliefs about the origin of the world, the creation of mankind, and the reasons for seasons and weather patterns. Simultaneously, the book introduces readers to variations of stories they may already know from texts such as the Old Testament and Arabian Nights. With introductions to explain where each version of each myth was discovered, through these written works these tales of the rise and fall of gods show clearly that what began as oral tradition spans both time and distance.

The Prefaces explain briefly how the myths have come into existence. The List of Figures section is simply a table of contents for the figures in the book, of which there are two. The Sigla and Abbreviations section describes certain aspects of the text and what those mean. The Introduction explains the origin of the myths, which are about the gods of Mesopotamia, an area that lies between the Tigris and Euphrates in what is now Iraq. There are often different versions of the same story, some of which vary drastically from tablet to tablet. Further, many tablets are partially destroyed, so that only fragments of the myth exist. Also, since the people of Mesopotamia traveled throughout the world, their myths and legends often make up the basis for tales in other languages and in other areas, such as tales in the Old Testament, the Iliad, Arabian Nights, and hundreds of others. An understanding of the origins of these tales is vital to understanding the stories behind the legends. Thus, this Introduction is necessary, both to place the text in a proper setting and to explain the reasoning for the multiple versions of stories given within the book. Finally, the author's notes of similarities between other stories helps relate the Mesopotamian tales to better known stories. The Chronological Chart shows a simplified time line of events to help the reader understand time lines given within the introductions to each myth.



Atrahasis

Atrahasis Summary and Analysis

The author begins by explaining the character of Atrahasis and the meaning behind the myth. Atrahasis, the savior of mankind, is much like the Babylonian character of Noah in that he builds an ark and saves mankind from destruction of the Flood. The author notes Atrahasis is, historically, referenced as the son of king of Shuruppak, and also as the king himself, as well as by the names Utnapishtim or Uta-na'ishtim in the story of Gilgamesh. The author believes the epic was written at that time to explain why the temple priestesses of the sun god Shamash were not allowed to bear children. The tale, he explains, is similar to that of the Epic of Creation and to Genesis, as well as to creation tales in Greek myth. He explains that the Flood, a proven event in history, was, in the epic, sent by the gods to reduce overpopulation.

The myth of Atrahasis begins with the gods tiring of their work and deciding to create man to bear their burden. Anu, king of the old gods, Ellil, god of earth and wind, Ninurta, the chamberlain, and Ennugi, the controller of the canals, seek out Ellil and threaten him until he and his father, Anu, agree to lessen their workload. Ea, the god of wisdom, instructs the other gods to find Belet-ili, the womb-goddess, and have her create man. Belet-ili, in the form of Nintu, tells them to ask Enki, god of civilization, for clay. It is important to note here that the text has shifted to the Babylonian version, and thus refers to "Enki", whereas the earlier text referenced "Ea". Enki tells them to purify one god and slaughter him, and to have Nintu then combine clay with the blood of the slain god. Ilawela is slain and mixed with the clay to form man. After a time, the population of the world becomes too numerous, and the noise begins to bother Ellil. He orders a sickness cast onto mankind. Atrahasis asks Enki how long the gods plan to make mankind suffer, to which Enki orders Atrahasis to make an offering to Namtara, the god of disease and pestilence. Namtara feels sorry, and halts the disease. Six hundred years later, mankind is again overpopulated, and Ellil orders a drought for the world to decrease food. Enki tells Atrahasis to again ignore the gods, and to make an offering to Adad, the storm god. Adad feels guilt and removes the drought. Three epochs later, Ellil orders Anu and Adad to stop the rains, Sin and Nergal, the god of seasons and the god of the netherworld, respectively, to halt the tides and the calendar, and Ea to keep the sea locked. With no water, Atrahasis prays for a dream. The people of the earth begin to starve, become diseased, and to slouch.

Here, thirty-two lines of text are missing, but based on the format of the rest of the story, one assumes the gods respond to Atrahasis and relent. Six hundred years later, Ellil again orders disease as a remedy for overpopulation. This time, however, Ellil assembles the gods and tells them to halt the disease. Instead, he orders drought, famine, and a death of all vegetation. The people again suffer, first depleting the stores, then appearing starved, slouching by the fourth year, selling children for food by the fifth, and eating one another by the seventh year. Atrahasis speaks again with Ea, who appears to take a message to the gods, although this text is missing from the tablets.



In the next section, however, Ellil is furious with the gods, as he has heard of their release of the torment of mankind. Ellil orders a flood to kill them all. Enki tells Atrahasis to build a boat and to save living things. Enki implies the flood will last seven days. Atrahasis tells his elders of the war between the gods. They work to build the boat, on which Atrahasis places all forms of animals. The flood rages through the land, placing the Earth into darkness. The gods are horrified at the result, and mourn for the dead. After a gap in the text, in which one can assume Atrahasis sends an offering to the gods, the gods gather together to eat the offering, blaming Anu and Ellil. When Ellil sees the boat of Atrahasis, however, he is furious, and tells the gods no life should have escaped. Anu blames Enki, who replies he did it to defy the order of the gods to ensure life would be preserved. The gods finally agree that, to control population, one-third of all women will not give birth successfully, another sect of women will not be allowed to bear children, and mankind will be limited to a specific life span, rather than be immortal.



The Epic of Gilgamesh - Standard version and Old Babylonian Version

The Epic of Gilgamesh - Standard version and Old Babylonian Version Summary and Analysis

The author begins by explaining a bit about the epic of Gilgamesh. As the longest composition written in Akkadian, the piece is a legendary epic that is not yet in its entirety. The epic, according to the author, is about a man's quest for fame and immortality, who is pursued by a man with a huge capacity for love, friendship, adventure, emotion, and weakness who loses an opportunity through carelessness alone. The life of Gilgamesh is believed to have occurred between 2800 and 2500 BC. He is said to be the son of the goddess Lady Wild Cow and a demon. There appear to be several versions of the story, and all are pieced together to form a single work. The author then notes ties between the Epic of Gilgamesh and such tales as the Odyssey, Sinbad the Sailor, and Arabian Nights, again suggesting all come from a central event, and explaining the differences in versions. The author also asserts that the tale was written in part to support kingship, in that the story shows that while kings can be imperfect, their kingship will still prevail.

Gilgamesh begins by introducing the story of a hero. Gilgamesh is described as superior to other kings, the son of the wild cow Ninsun and king Lugalbanda, making him one third mortal and two thirds divine. However, Gilgamesh is also constantly fighting the young men of Uruk to prove himself superior and molesting the women of the town. Finally, to calm Gilgamesh, Aruru, goddess of creation, also called Belet-ili, creates Enkidu, a primitive man, to rival Gilgamesh. A hunter sees the man and tells his father, who instructs him to go speak with Gilgamesh in Uruk. Gilgamesh instructs him to lead the harlot Shamhat to the watering hole Enkidu drinks from. She is to entice him to enter her, at which time he will leave be forced to leave the society of animals and join mankind. Shamhat does so. After, Enkidu is unable to rejoin the animals, and instead plans to travel to Uruk with Shamhat to challenge Gilgamesh. Shamhat, however, tells Enkidu of a dream Gilgamesh told to his mother Ninsun, where a man as strong as he arrives in Uruk. Ninsun told Gilgamesh the man was to be his friend. After a gap of forty-five lines, the story finds Enkidu in Uruk, where the locals are impressed with his similarities to Gilgamesh. Enkidu stands in the way of Gilgamesh, however, at the door to Ishhara, and the two men fight brutally. The two eventually see one another as equals and embrace as fiends.

Gilgamesh decides to go stop Humbaba, the keeper of the Pine Forest, and appears to do so at the bidding of Shamash. It is clear Gilgamesh is determined to go on his journey, despite warnings from Enkidu as well as the elders of Uruk. Gilgamesh and Enkidu travel to speak with Ninsun, who asks Shamash why he has chosen her son to face Humbaba. Ninsun then tells Enkidu she adopts him as her own, and tells the two



men to travel to the Pine Forest. The two travel for many days, where Gilgamesh has many disturbing dreams. Enkidu, however, sees the dreams as good omens for success against Humbaba. After several gaps in the text, the two men arrive at the forest. Humbaba hears them and threatens to kill them, but Gilgamesh calls out to Shamash for assistance. Shamash calls forth the thirteen winds, and Gilgamesh begins to win the fight. Gilgamesh, at Enkidu's command, beheads Humbaba. The men make a raft and send the head down the Euphrates. Afterward, Ishtar, the evil goddess of love, offers to marry Gilgamesh, but he refuses, knowing she kills her husbands soon after marriage. Angry, Ishtar asks her father to send the Bull of Heaven down to strike Gilgamesh, and after some arguing, he relents. Ishtar lands the bull in Uruk, but Gilgamesh and Enkidu kill the bull, after which Ishtar curses Gilgamesh. The following day, Enkidu tells Gilgamesh of a dream in which Anu orders one of the two men to die for their victories over Humbaba and the Bull of Heaven, and Ellil says Enkidu must perish. Upon waking, Enkidu, realizes he will soon die, and curses the hunter and the harlot. Enkidu falls ill and dreams of his journey to the underworld. He perishes in the arms of Gilgamesh, who then recalls his journey with Enkidu and promises him the people will weep for him.

Gilgamesh mourns his friend bitterly, and sets out roaming the open country, searching for Ut-napishtim and immortality. Readers may recall Ut-napishtim as Atrahasis in the story of the Flood. It is clear Gilgamesh is attempting to avoid death. His travels lead him across the world through two mountains guarded by scorpion beings. They allow him to pass into total darkness, but Gilgamesh continues onward to reach the other side, where a beautiful land with leaves of jewels exists. Siduri, the midwife, greets Gilgamesh, and after he tells her of his misery following the loss of Enkidu, directs him to the boatman Urshanabi. Urshanabi is surrounded by "things of stone", argued by the author to represent stone golumns. However, Gilgamesh kills them, believing them to be hostile. In reality, the boatman explains, the stone creatures were the only ones able to cross to the land of Ut-napishtim, since it is across a lethal body of water. The boatman orders Gilgamesh to cut three hundred poles from the forest, so that they can cross the water without the stone creatures. When they finally arrive at Ut-napishtim, however, Ut-napishtim tells Gilgamesh he is a fool because all mortals must die. Gilgamesh asks why Ut-napishtim, a mortal, is allowed immortality, and he explains that he is the savior of mankind. He then tells the story of Atrahasis. At the end, he tells Gilgamesh that if he does not sleep for six days and seven nights, he will tell him how to attain immortality. However, Gilgamesh falls asleep. Ut-napishtim tells his wife to bake a loaf of bread for each day Gilgamesh sleeps. When he awakens, Ut-napishtim proves to him he has been sleeping, and banishes him and the boatman. However, Ut-napishtim's wife talks him into relenting, and he tells Gilgamesh of a plant growing down in the Apsu that will grant immortality. Gilgamesh immediately sinks to retrieve it, and declares he will take it back to Uruk. However, in the night, a snake steals the plant. Gilgamesh returns to Uruk a failure, but remarks about the success of Uruk upon their return.

The final tablet of Gilgamesh appears to be unassociated with the previous text. In this, Gilgamesh tells Enkidu of a toy he has dropped in the underworld, and Enkidu offers to fetch it. Gilgamesh tells him what not to do in the underworld so that he is able to return. However, Enkidu ignores his orders and is kept by the underworld. Gilgamesh prays to Ellil and Sin to assist, but they ignore his pleas. Finally, he prays to Ea, who opens a



hole in the earth from which Enkidu springs. He and Gilgamesh embrace, and Enkidu tells Gilgamesh of the agonizing conditions of the underworld.

The Old Babylonian version of the tale of Gilgamesh is slightly different than that of the standard version. The entire first tablet is missing. Enkidu and Shamkat (a different translation that Shamhat in the previous version) mate, and she brings him to Uruk. In this version, Shamkat and Enkidu are to marry, but Gilgamesh attempts to sleep with Shamkat first. They battle, but become friends. Tablet three is highly fragmented, but seems to tell the same tale of Gilgamesh's desire to travel to kill Hubaba, translated in this version as Huwawa. Tablet four appears to tell the tale of the slaughter of Huwawa. Enkidu tells Gilgamesh the Pine Forest has changed. Tablets five through nine are missing. Tablet ten begins with the telling of Gilgamesh's conversation with Shamash, and his admittance of overwhelming grief over the death of Enkidu. Gilgamesh meets the alewife who sends him to Sur-Sunabu, the boatman translated as Urshanabi in the standard version. Gilgamesh again smashes the stone columns, and the boatman tells him again to make three hundred oars to cross the sea. The rest of the tablets are damaged.

While highly fragmented, this version of the story shows clearly the story of Gilgamesh was consistent other than naming translations throughout time as well as location. Showing both versions here serves to support the idea that these stories were originally orally transmitted from area to area, and were written down far later in time than the original story was developed. Additionally, the presentation of both versions serves to show literary differences between the two societies.



The Descent of Ishtar to the Underworld

The Descent of Ishtar to the Underworld Summary and Analysis

The author begins by noting these tablets are the Akkadian version of the story, but that there are other versions in existence. This version is shorter, and gives a less detailed account, but does end with ritual instructions for the taklimtu, a known annual ritual. The author also notes a close connection with the Greek story of Persephone, as well as with lines from Gilgamesh. The story begins with Ishtar, the daughter of Sin the moon god, determined to go to Kurnagi, the Underworld. She addresses the keeper of the gate, and announces that she is to be let in, or she will break down the door and make the dead rise and eat the living. The doorkeeper reports the situation back to Ereshkigal, queen of the underworld, and explains that her sister Ishtar is demanding entry. Ereshkigal is angry, but allows Ishtar entrance under the condition that she is treated according with the ancient rights. Her crown, earrings, beads, toggle pins, birth stone belt, bracelets, and clothing are all removed as she passes through the seven gates, arriving in Kurnugi. Upon arrival, Ishtar angrily leans over Ereshkigal, but she tells her vizier, Namtar, to cast sixty diseases onto Ishtar. On Earth, all sexual activity halts, as Ishtar, goddess of sexuality, is imprisoned in the underworld. Ea creates a man, Good-Looks, to attain the waters of life from Ereshkigal. Good-Looks travels to Kurnugi and asks Ereshkigal for the waterskin. Although she curses Good-Looks for his request, she has no choice but to allow Ishtar to be sprinkled with the waters of life and revived. Ishtar is then led out the seven gates and given back her belongings. According to the notes, Ereshkigal tells Namtar that Ishtar is being given back in exchange for Dumuzi. Dumuzi is the lover of Ishtar. He is to be washed with pure water, anointed with sweet oil, clothed in red, and lamented by young girls. Belili, sister of Dumuzi, offers herself in his place. According to the notes, Dumuzi spends half a year in the underworld and is thus the subject of the taklimtu ritual of lying-in-state, and is replaced by Belili in the off times. The author notes that some of this version of the tale is based on information in Sumerian and variant Akkadian tablets.



Nergal and Ereshkigal, Babylonian Version and Amarna Version

Nergal and Ereshkigal, Babylonian Version and Amarna Version Summary and Analysis

The author notes this version is a longer version than those found previously, and that it serves to record a change in the rule of the underworld from a single deity, Ereshkigal, to a joint rule between Ereshkigal and Nergal. She also mentions the myth may be related to the Phoenician god Melqart, in that it is believed Melqart was resurrected, much like Nergal is in this myth. Further, the author notes that there are vast differences between the two myths.

The myth begins with Anu telling Kakka to travel to the underworld and tell Ereshkigal to send a messenger up for a feast the gods are having so that she can be given a portion. Ereshkigal gratefully accepts the invitation and sends Namtar, her vizier. There are several lines of missing text, after which readers find Ea asking Nergal why he did not bow to the vizier Namtar, as the rites of the gods command. Clearly, when Namtar arrived, the other gods knelt respectfully, but Nergal, also called Erra later in the myth, did not. After a few more missing lines, Nergal speaks to Ea, who offers to make amends. Ea tells him to go chop trees. The Uruk version of the story notes here that Nergal made a throne from these trees, and the author explains that when traveling to the underworld, one should always take a chair to offer to the ghost of the gods during an offering, in order to escape. Ea tells him not to accept any chair offered to him in the underworld, nor any bread, meat, beer, or bath. Also, he is not to sleep with Ereshkigal. The myth takes Nergal to the underworld, using a similar description to that used during Ishtar's journey in her descent, showing the same literary style. Namtar goes to view the visitor. He is enraged, and explains to Ereshkigal that Nergal was the god who disrespected him at the feast. She explains sarcastically to Namtar that all gods have their own area to govern, and asks for Nergal to be let in. He explains to Ereshkigal that he was sent by Ea to judge the cases of the gods as punishment, but when they offer him a chair, bread, meat, beer, and bath, he refuses. However, he gives in to temptation, and the two make love for six days. On the seventh day, Nergal leaves Ereshkigal sleeping, and flees back to the above world. When the gods see him, they order him to be disfigured, as they know Ereshkigal will send Namtar to fetch him. In the underworld, Namtar tells Ereshkigal of Nergal's escape. Ereshkigal, furious at losing her lover before she was finished with him, sends Namtar up to the gods to demand Nergal's return. In her speech, she mentions she has been denied pleasure from birth as the watcher of the underworld, and that Nergal has impregnated her. She makes the same threat, that of allowing the dead to eat the living, that her sister Ishtar made during her descent into the underworld. However, when Namtar arrives at the place of the gods, he is unable to locate Nergal, as his appearance has been changed. When Namtar returns to Ereshkigal, however, she sends him back, recognizing the trick Ea has played



in disguising Nergal. Namtar again, however, cannot locate Nergal. However, soon after, Nergal returns to the underworld by himself, strikes down the seven doormen, seizes Ereshkigal, and the two embrace and go to bed for seven days. On the seventh day, Anu sends Kakka to Ereshkigal to inform her Nergal will remain in the underworld.

In the much shorter Amarna version of this story, Ereshkigal sends Namtar to the gods following his disrespect at the banquet. She seeks him to kill him, but he, as in the previous version, hides his face and is unrecognized. While Namtar reports to his mistress, Nergal pleads to his father to help him, to which Ea replies he will send fourteen demons with Nergal to the underworld. When Nergal arrives in the underworld, Ereshkigal plans to kill him. At each door into the underworld, however, Nergal releases a demon, and following the final door, seals Namtar into the forecourt. He rushes to Ereshkigal and plans to behead her, but relents when she promises him her hand in marriage as well as partial rule over the underworld.

Clearly, these two versions of the same story tell the same tale, that of the rise to power over the underworld of Nergal. However, in the first tale, Nergal appears almost to grow emotionally throughout the story, whereas in the second version, he appears to gain power through the help of his father alone. Both, however, show a clear passion between the two main characters, and a clear desire for one another, making this tale primarily a love story.



Adapa and Etana

Adapa and Etana Summary and Analysis

The author begins by explaining that Adapa was a sage sent by Ea, god of the first city, that of Eridu, to show mankind how to build a civilization. Adapa was responsible for showing man religious rites, but angered Ea, and thus lost his right to immortality. The author also notes this story is severely fragmented. The myth begins, after a few missing lines, by explaining that Ea gave Adapa wisdom, but not eternal life. Adapa is described as higher than man, much like Atrahasis in the Flood story, and as a holy and pure man, responsible for tending the rites, baking with bakers of the town, and fishing for Eridu. On one journey, however, he sets sail without a rudder, with a strong South Wind, and is blown over. Angered, he curses the South Wind, and the wing of the wind is broken. For seven days, the South Wind fails to blow, alerting Anu that something is amiss. Iabrat, his vizier, tells him of Adapa's angry words, and Anu angrily commands Adapa to appear before him. Ea instructs Adapa to appear unkempt in mourning clothing, and to win the favor of the door guards Gizzida and Damuzi by telling them he is mourning for their disappearance from the land. Ea tells him the guards will then put in a favorable word with Anu, but that Adapa must not eat the bread of death or drink the water of death they will offer him, and should put on the garment and oil they give him. When Adapa appears to Anu, all goes according to plan, except that Anu offers "the bread of life" and "the drink of life". It appears, based on the text, that Anu is attempting to make up for Ea's disclosure of the ways of the gods, but that Adapa, following Ea's instructions, misses the point. Conversely, the text could be interpreted as Ea's intentional misleading of Adapa to prevent him from attaining immortality. Regardless of one's interpretation, Adapa does not eat or drink, but does put on the garment and oil, as instructed. Anu laughs at his folly, and, after telling him he has missed his opportunity for eternal life, sends him back to Earth.

The author begins Etana by noting the story is based on a king of Kish, and originates in Kish, although she notes only the god of Shamash is involved in the story. The text is derived from three sets of partials, those of the Old Babylonian version, the Middle Assyrian version, and the standard version. The basic premise, that of a man riding to heaven on an eagle, is used in Greek mythology as well as Alexander romance and in Iranian myth. The concept of a tree inhabited by a snake can be seen in the Old Testament, as well. The myth begins with noting that the Igigi, or the gods, built Kish. Etana is made king of Kish. After a very long break in the text, it is clear that Etana builds a fort by which a poplar grows. An eagle resides in the leaves and a serpent lived at the base. The two make a pact in the presence of Shamash, the sun god, that neither will cross the limits set by Shamash. The two help one another and allow each other's children access to slain animals for food. One day, however, the eagle eats the snake's young. The snake begs Shamash for revenge, and Shamash instructs him to hide inside a slain bull so that he can attack the eagle as he comes to feed. The serpent obeys, and attacks the eagle, cutting his wings, plucking it, and throwing it in a pit to die. When the eagle begs for help from Shamash, he sends Etana to the eagle. He instructs



the eagle that he is to help the man find the plant of birth so his wife may bear a child, in exchange for his help in saving the eagle's life. Shamash tells Etana where to find the eagle, and for several months, Etana feeds and trains the eagle. In the eighth month, the eagle is able to rise from the pit. The eagle searches for the plant he has promised, and when he cannot find it, offers to carry Etana to the skies to find Ishtar. The man climbs onto the eagle, but as they reach higher and higher, Etana becomes afraid and asks to return to Earth. The man has a series of three dreams that lead him to make a second attempt. This time, they reach the heaven of Anu, and greet the gods. The text ends here, but in the Sumerian king list, Etana was succeeded by his son, Balih, implying their quest for the birth plant was successful.



Anzu - Standard and Old Babylonian Version

Anzu - Standard and Old Babylonian Version Summary and Analysis

The author begins by noting that these two versions of the myth differ only in their length, complexity, and naming convention. The plot of the myth revolves around the theft of the Tablet of Destinies from the gods and the battle to regain the powerful talisman by the story's hero. The standard version of the myth begins in the first person, signifying the teller of the myth is introducing the story. After the introduction, the gods assemble and speak of the birth of Anzu, a lion-headed eagle figure born in the mountains of Hehe. Ellil chooses Anzu to guard the innermost chamber of his temple. When Anzu sees Ellil bathe himself, he dreams of gaining the power of Ellil by stealing the Tablet of Destinies, which controls the rites and the orders for the gods. One day, Anzu steals the Tablet and goes into hiding. The gods search, but cannot find the Tablet. Anu calls for the gods to kill Anzu. Anu's sons Adad and Gerra, as well as Shara's son Ishtar, are asked first to attack Anzu, but they refuse, knowing they will be turned to clay at the will of Anzu. When the gods become despondent, Ea asks Anu to let him choose the attacker, and when given permission, asks Mami (also called Belet-ili) to recruit her favorite son, Ninurta, the warrior god, to make the journey. Mami calls her son, and explains that she herself gave birth to the gods, and assigned the power of destinies to Ellil, her brother. Anzu, she notes, has taken that power, therefore robbing her. She tells him to kill Anzu, and reminds him that such a deed will make him known throughout the land and worshiped. Ninurta goes to the mountains and attacks, but after a fierce battle, finds his arrows unable to near Anzu, due to Anzu's control over all things because he holds the Tablet. Ninurta sends a message back to Ea through Sharur, Ninurta's own personified weapon, that the battle is being lost, and asks for assistance. Sharur returns, explaining that Ea has told him Ninurta is to tire Anzu, cut off his wings, and then pierce his heart with an arrow before Anzu can use the Tablet of Destiny to reattach his wings. Ninurta does this, and kills Anzu. The gods celebrate as they see Anzu's feathers float past them, and Ellil calls for Ninurta to return through Birdu, an underworld god. Birdu tells Ninurta he is now famous in the lands, and tells him of his names in various areas of the world.

In the shorter Old Babylonian version, Tablet One is missing. The story begins with the theft of the Tablet by Anzu, known in this story as Anzum. Anu, known as Anum here, assembles the gods, asks Adad, Gerra, and Shara to attack, but they refuse. Ea asks Mami, known here as the Great Goddess, to ask her son, named Nirgirsu in this version, to attack Anzum. As in the previous version, Nirgirsu attacks, but finds his arrows unable to near Anzum, due to Anzum's control over all things because he holds the Tablet. Here, forty-six lines are missing. When the story picks back up, Ea is giving the instructions to tire Anzum, cut off his wings, and slit his throat. Nirgirsu goes to

prepare for battle, and then ventures to Anzum once more, tiring him out and cutting of his wings. This is where the story ends.



Epic of Creation

Epic of Creation Summary and Analysis

The author begins in noting the phrase epic applied to this story only due to the narration of the activities of the earliest generation of the gods. The myth was recited or enacted during the fourth day of the Festival of the New Year as a propaganda piece for the reigning king. The myth begins with the primeval goddess Tiamat and her husband Apsu. It is interesting to note that in this myth alone, the name Apsu is seen as a god, not as the underground domain of Ea as in other myths. These primeval gods create offspring, those of Lahmu and Lahamu. To them, Anshar and Kishar are born, and to them, Anu, and to him, Nudimmud, or Ea is born. The gods are loud in their merriment, and begin to annoy Tiamat and Apsu. Apsu threatens to kill the gods, but Tiamat refuses. Apsu's vizier Mummu, however, talks him into a plan to kill them. Ea discovers the plan, and kills them both. He creates a place he calls Apsu as his dwelling, and to him and his lover Damkina, Marduk, the most powerful god, is born. He is described as perfect in build, fire breathing, with four eyes and four ears. Anu creates the four winds, and gives them to Marduk, but his use of them again upsets Tiamat and the older gods, who request that she kill the younger gods and avenge her husband's death. Mother Hubur "who fashions all things" creates giant, poisonous snakes, a serpent, a dragon, a lamhu-hero, a ugallu-demon, a rabid dog, a scorpion-man, umu-demons, a fish man, and a bull man as warriors. Tiamat places Qingu, her lover, as the leader of the army, and gives him the Tablet of Destinies. Ea discovers the plan, and goes to Anshar, his father, who tells him that because he started the fight, he should attempt to appease Tiamat. Ea goes to face her, but turns back, frightened. Anshar tells him again to seek her, and again Ea returns, too frightened. The Igigi assemble, and Anshar asks for someone to face Tiamat. Ea secretly asks Marduk, the perfect one, to volunteer. Anshar accepts his offer, and Marduk requests a special fate from the council. Anshar sends his vizier Kakka to Lahmu and Lahamu to ask for a destiny to be decreed. Marduk is made a ruler of the gods, and is sent to kill Tiamat. Marduk makes a bow, carries a mace, places lightning in front of him, and creates a net of the four winds within which to ensnare Tiamat. Marduk scolds Tiamat for her actions, and she angrily responds. The two battle, and Marduk traps her within the four winds, shoots an arrow through her heart, and kills her. Her assembly of warriors is captured, her demons are killed, and Qingu is captured. Marduk creates shrines and stands for the gods from the remains of Tiamat, creates constellations for the gods, made the moon and dictates its rise and fall, as well as using parts of her to make clouds, fog, springs, mountains, the sky, and the earth. In other words, Marduk creates the world from Tiamat.

He returns the Tablet of Destinies to Anu, gives the warriors over as hostages, and uses images of the eleven creatures of Tiamat as warnings on the door to Apsu. Anu, Enlil, and Ea give Marduk gifts during a victory celebration, and the Anunnaki kiss his feet. Lahmu and Lahamu pronounce him King of the Gods. Marduk proclaims he will fashion for them a luxurious house in front of Esharra for them to use when they come up from the Apsu or come down from the sky. He names the area Babylon, and makes it the hub



of religion. In addition, he tells Ea of a plan to make a primeval man to take the work of the gods. Ea tells him to make the man with the blood of a hostile god. The Igigi decide Qingu should be killed, and mixed with clay to form man. The Anunnaki, in return, make a shrine to Marduk known as Babylon from mud bricks. When construction is complete, there is an assembly of the gods, and a blessing of "the bow". It is important to note here that the blessing of the bow is understood to be the blessing of Anu's daughter, Ishtar. The gods then give Marduk a plethora of new names to identify him as the leader of the gods. Marduk is given seven names by the gods Anshar, Lahmu, and Lahamu in respect of his achievements, those of Marduk, Asarluhi, Marukka, Marutukku, Lugal-Dimmer-Anika, Nari-Lugal-Dimmer-Ankia, and Asarluhi. In the assembly of the gods, the other fifty gods and goddesses elevate his status even higher by each giving him another name. In some cases, the names are those of true gods whose powers are similar to an aspect of Marduk, and in some cases the names are created. Each god gives the name, and a listing of the qualities he or she attaches to Marduk and his name. The ending of the myth is a tribute to Marduk, relaying hopes that all mankind will worship Marduk as the savior of the gods and the king.



Theology of Dunnu

Theology of Dunnu Summary and Analysis

The author explains this myth is another version of the creation story, although it differs greatly from the Epic of Creation, showing clearly that not all areas held the same belief. The story begins with the union of Plough and Earth, and their offspring, the Sea and the Cattle God. Together, they create Dunnu. The Cattle God kills his father, Plough, and marries his sister, the Sea. They give birth to The Flocks God, who kills the Cattle God and marries his mother, the Sea. Sea then kills Earth. The son of the Flocks God then marries his sister, River, and kills the Flocks God and the Sea. The Herdsman God marries Pasture and Poplar, his sister, and populates the Earth's vegetation and animal kingdom before killing River and Flocks God. Haharnum marries Belet-seri, his sister, and kills the Herdsman God and Pasture and Poplar. Hayyashum, son of Haharnum marries his sister, and takes over the dominion of his father, but does not kill him, and instead imprisons him. The rest of the tablet is missing. While this story is short and highly fragmented, one can see the pattern used for this creation myth. Each mating between pieces of the Earth gives rise to a new portion until the Earth has been fully created. Each individual takes reign during a new month, also showing a cycle of seasons through the calendar year, culminating with the New Year.



Erra and Ishum

Erra and Ishum Summary and Analysis

The author explains that this myth appears more as a series of speeches than a telling of a narrative. Erra, the unpredictable and violent god, threatens war, while Ishum, the placater of Erra, seems to wish to quell Erra's destructive wishes. Marduk plays a part, as Erra attempts to usurp him, as well. The author explains the myth is likely an account of the hardships of Babylon at the dawn of a "new king of Akkad", which is likely referring to Nabonassar.

The myth begins with the restlessness of Erra, the warrior of the Gods. He is clearly wishing to go to war, and attempts to convince Ishum to encourage a battle. The Sebitti, however, give Erra encouragement to rise for battle. The Sebitti, or the terrible seven, are the offspring of the Earth and Anu, and are vicious by nature. They convince Erra that everything is better when in battle, and that he should fight so that the Igigi, Anunnaki, kings, and countries revere him. They originally claim to want war because they are unable to sleep due to the noise of the people, but in the end, admit they feel out of shape and bored. Erra again asks Ishum to join him, but Ishum asks him to turn back. Erra tells him he wants the people to fear him, and will anger Marduk and overwhelm his population. He arrives in Esagila, and asks Marduk why his adornment has become dirty. Marduk discusses going to speak with the gods, but knows that by leaving his palace he will cause floods, darkness, winds, and war. Erra offers to keep watch over things until Marduk returns, and Marduk agrees. However, when Marduk leaves, the world begins to crumble.

Erra, at this point, is keeping everyone away from Marduk's temples, insuring Marduk's drop in power. Istar attempts to calm Erra, but Erra is furious. The gods have attempted to halt his attack, and he vows to show Ea and Marduk he is not to be reckoned with. He notes he will devastate the land, destroy mountains, stir up oceans, leave no life, and force the people to have evil in their hearts. Erra continues to glorify the horror of war for several lines. However, when Erra unleashes the terrible seven on the people, Ishum realizes the devastation. Erra continues to claim no one respects him, but Ishum points out he has taken over the universe, so he must be respected. Ishum recounts Erra's deeds one by one, and shows him he is powerful. He requests that Erra stop his rampage, and offers the gods' services as reward for the halt of violence. Ishum calls for the scattered people of the now destroyed Akkad to become numerous again and to repair the cities and the farms. He also demands that the people praise Erra and Ishum for their works. The final portion of the tablet appears to be a description of the author, one Kabti-ilani-Mardukm, who dreamed of the encounter.



Characters

Anu

As the god of Uruk and the father of the older generation of gods, Anu plays a vital role in several Mesopotamian myths. In "Atrahasis", Anu tells the other gods who to look for in order to create mankind. In "Anzu", it is Anu who calls for the death of the thief of the Tablet of Destiny. In "Erra and Ishum", it is Anu who gives the seven terrors to Erra as destroyers of mankind. Further, Anu is father to Ellil, Adad, Gerra, Shara, and in some areas, Ishtar. Without Anu, many of these stories would not have characters, nor a "father" figure for the gods. Anu is the son of Anshar and Kishar.

Atrahasis

Also known as Ut-napishtim in the myth of "Gilgamesh", Atrahasis is the savior of mankind. Atrahasis, through his relationship with his god Ea, saves the population of the earth several times prior to the Flood. Following Ellil's final blow against humanity, Atrahasis builds a boat, and upon it places animals and humans so they may survive the Floods. In "Gilgamesh", Atrahasis is the keeper of the secret to immortality. He is often seen as the Mesopotamian version of Noah.

Ea

Also known as Enki and Nudimmud, Ea is the god of fresh water, wisdom, and incantations, as well as a helper of mankind. Ea sent the seven sages to earth to help man build civilization. Ea lived within the Apsu, named after one of the first gods. In Atrahasis, it is Enki who tells the gods to slay Ilawela to make man, and it is Ea who speaks to Atrahasis to help save mankind from the disease, famine, and Flood Ellil sends down. During the descent of Ishtar to the Underworld, Ea creates Good-Looks in an effort to save Ishtar from permanent residence in the Underworld. In "Nergal and Ereshkigal", Ea helps Nergal escape the Underworld as well by giving him instructions on how to avoid Ereshkigal's grasp. In "Adapa", it is Ea who, depending on translation, either tricks his own sage into not accepting eternal life, or attempts to help him by instructing him how to avoid death. Ea also instructs Ninurta how to kill Anzu after his theft of the Tablet of Destinies. Perhaps most importantly, it is Ea who slays Apsu, the father god, during the Epic of Creation, starting a war between the gods that results in the rise of Marduk.

Ellil

Ellil, also called Illil, is often believed to be the king of the younger generation of gods, and is the father of Ninurta, the god who returns the Tablet of Destiny. Ellil shows throughout the myths his power, as well as his instability as a god. Perhaps most



importantly, it is Ellil who orders the destruction of mankind several times in the myth of "Atrahasis". Ellil also chooses Enkidu as the one to die following his and Gilgamesh's destruction of the Bull of Heaven. Ellil is also the holder of the Tablet of Destinies that Anzu steals.

Belet-ili

As the mother goddess, Belet-ili is also known as Aruru, Mami, Ninhursag, Ninmah, Nintu, Mamma, Mammitum, and other names. She was also the wife of Nergal in later myth. In "Atrahasis", it is Belet-ili who creates mankind from clay and the blood of a god. She is also the creator of Gilgamesh's rival and then friend, Enkidu, as well as the creator of Gilgamesh's form. As a mother figure, she is a highly powerful image in most of Mesopotamian mythology in a variety of forms.

Gilgamesh

As the hero of one of the most known literary works of all time, Gilgamesh is a highly popular character in Mesopotamian mythology. As the son of the wild cow Ninsun and king Lugalbanda, he is one third mortal and two thirds divine. He is described as superior to all other kings, a warrior of great stature, and as a protector of men with a body made perfect by Belet-ili, and a mind that allowed him to be powerful, superb, knowledgeable, and an expert of all things. The life of Gilgamesh is the legend that spawned many myths. In the myth in this book, it is the friendship between Gilgamesh and Enkidu, as well as their killing of Humbaba and the Bull of Heaven, that make the rise of Gilgamesh. The fall of Gilgamesh occurs with his fear of death following his friend's passing, as well as his loss of immortality due to neglect and carelessness. In the end, however, Gilgamesh does prevail, and arrives back in Uruk safely to become one of their most prized kings in all of history.

Enkidu

As the partner of Gilgamesh, Enkidu's place in Mesopotamian myth is secondary, but still vital to the storyline. Beginning his life as a primitive man, Enkidu is tamed by a harlot and taken to Uruk to rival Gilgamesh. The two befriend one another, and travel to kill the King of the Pine Forest, Humbaba. He also takes part in the killing of the Bull of Heaven. However, he is stricken with illness after the gods declare someone must die for these acts. Gilgamesh mourns Enkidu's death by searching for immortality, only to discover his own strengths. He is often associated with the lammu-hero within other Mesopotamian myths, as well.

Nergal (Erra)

Also called Erakal, Erra, Ninurta, and Herakles in Greek mythology, Nergal is the chief God of the Underworld following his decent into Ereshkigal's realm, and their passionate



affair. Nergal does not bow to Ereshkigal's vizier during a banquet, and is thus punished by being sent to assist her in the Underworld. The two have a passionate affair, after which Nergal escapes. He returns, however, later in the story to claim the throne of the Underworld. As Erra, the god of war, he ravishes Babylon to prove he is as powerful as Ea, only to be calmed by Ishum. However, his release of the seven terrors into the lands destroys much of creation. As Ninurta, he is the avenger of Ellil, killing Anzu following his theft of the Tablet of Destiny.

Adapa

Adapa is the first of the seven sages sent by Ea to bring civilization to mankind. Adapa is described as higher than man, much like Atrahasis in the Flood story, and as a holy and pure man, responsible for tending the rites, baking with bakers of the town, and fishing for Eridu. However, after cursing the South Wind, he is called before the gods, who fool him into rejecting immortality.

Etana

Etana is the twelfth king of Kish. However, he is unable to sire an heir, and requests the assistance of Shamash. Shamash leads Etana to a pit where an eagle lies broken, telling him if he assists the eagle, he will fly him to find the birth plant. Etana helps heal the eagle, and after several tries, flies with the eagle to heaven to speak with the gods. Soon after, his son, Balih, is born.

Anzu

Anzu is the lion-headed eagle whom Ellil chooses as doorkeeper for his temple. In the "Anzu" myth, he is portrayed as a thief who steals the Tablet of Destinies and wrecks havoc, only to be stopped by Ninurta. However, the author notes Anzu is portrayed as benevolent and good in other Mesopotamian mythology.

Ishtar

Also known as Innin, Inninna, and Inanna, Ishtar is the goddess of love and war. In some traditions she is the daughter of Sin, the moon god, while in others, the daughter of Anu. Ishtar travels to the Underworld to confront her sister, only to be saved by Good-Looks, sent by her father Anu. She is also responsible for the partial destruction of Uruk, after she attempts to kill Gilgamesh with the Bull of Heaven after his refusal to her marriage proposal.



Ereshkigal

As the mistress of the Underworld, Ereshkigal is the daughter of Anu, sister to Ishtar, and wife to Nergal. She is also the mother of Ninazu. Ereshkigal attempts to kill her sister after she angers her, but relents when her father sends a man to trick her. She also attempts to kill Nergal following his secret escape from the Underworld, only to marry him when he returns.

Tiamat

Tiamat is the sea goddess, personified as one of the primeval gods of creation. She is the epitome of chaos and the wife of Apsu. With Apsu, she creates the first generation of Gods, but is unhappy when they kill Apsu, who planned to kill his children. She, along with her lover, wage war against Marduk and his army. She is slaughtered, and her body is used to create the Earth.

Apsu

Apsu is the father of the primeval gods, and the wife of Tiamat. Unhappy with their noise, Apsu decides to kill the gods, only to be slaughtered by his own grandson, Ea. This prompts a war between Tiamat and the younger gods, in which Tiamat is slaughtered and used to make the Earth.

Marduk

As the patron god of Babylon, Marduk is a vital part of Mesopotamian myth. Born to Ea and Damkina, Marduk is the most powerful god. He is described as perfect in build, fire breathing, with four eyes and four ears. Anu creates the four winds and gives them to Marduk, but his use of them upsets Tiamat and the older gods, who request that she kill the younger gods and avenge her husband's death. Marduk is made a ruler of the gods and is sent to kill Tiamat. Following his successful slaughter of Tiamat, he creates the Earth, shrines and stands for the gods, constellations, the moon, and dictates its rise and fall, as well as creating clouds, fog, springs, mountains, the sky, and the earth. In other words, Marduk creates the world from Tiamat. He is hailed as the king of the Gods, and is given seven names by gods Anshar, Lahmu, and Lahamu in respect of his achievements, those of Marduk, Asarluhl, Marukka, Marutukku, Lugal-Dimmer-Anika, Nari-Lugal-Dimmer-Ankia, and Asarluhi. He is given another fifty names by the council of the gods.



Objects/Places

Mesopotamia

Mesopotamia is an area that lies between the rivers of the Tigris and Euphrates in modern Iraq, home to an ancient people focused on agriculture and oral tradition. Their society was urban, however, and was commonly controlled by those controlling irrigation to the area. Their travels for trading meant a broad base for these myths to be interpreted and reinterpreted over hundreds and thousands of years.

Akkadian

Akkadian is the broad term used to encompass the languages of the Semitic Babylonian and Assyrian dialect, and is the language used on most of the tablets these myths are translated from.

Tigris and Euphrates

The Tigris and the Euphrates are two rivers that brought most of the needed water to Mesopotamia. These rivers were vital to the lifeline of the people, and thus, are found in many of their stories.

Tablet of Destinies

The Tablet of Destinies is the clay tablet of which the fates were written by the gods. The tablet gave supreme power to anyone who held it, making it a highly envied possession.

Bull of Heaven

In Mesopotamian mythology, the Bull of Heaven is the first husband of Ereshkigal. Ishtar took the Bull of Heaven to Earth to kill Gilgamesh and Enkidu, both for their slaughter of Humbaba and their disrespect for Ishtar. Instead, the two heroes kill the Bull of Heaven.

Anunnaki

Anunnaki is the term used to depict the older generation of deities of fertility and the Underworld, who are led by Anu. They are also called the Anunna, Anukki, and the Enunaki.



Igigi

Igigi is the term used for the great gods of the younger generation, led by Ellil.

Lamhu-hero

The lamhu-hero is the term used to describe the primeval hero form of man, who had three pairs of curls and is generally shown naked other than a small sash. They are often seen as the controllers of the bolt to the sea and of the fish.

Sebitti

The Sebitti are a group of seven warrior gods who march with Erra into battle. They are the offspring of Anu and the Earth, and are often described as terrifying monsters of fire, ferocious lions, fierce weapons, the wind, and poison.

Uruk

Uruk, now Warka, was a city in lower Mesopotamia used in a number of myths, leading scholars to believe this was a highly important area during the time. Uruk was also the home of Gilgamesh and Enkidu.

Esagila

The Esaglia is the temple of Marduk in Babylon.

Apsu

Both the name of the primeval god, and of a physical place. The Apsu is a domain of water beneath the earth that is home to Ea.



Themes

Creation

The theme of the creation of mankind is popular throughout many of the myths recounted within the book. In "Atrahasis", it is Belet-ili who creates man from the clay of Ea and the blood of Ilawela to relieve the gods from their work. In "Etana", the gods create the city of Kish, and form Etana to be their builder and the king of the city. In "Epic of Creation", Tiamat and Apsu create primeval gods, who then spawn the rest of the gods. Mankind is not created until Tiamat is killed, and Marduk creates the Earth. Following the gods' proclamation of Marduk as their king of the gods, he creates mankind to do the work of the gods. Ea tells him to kill a god from which to make man, and the assembly chooses Qingu, Tiamat's lover and king of her army. In "Theogony of Dunnu", Plough and Earth unite to form the gods of each portion of the earth. As each gives birth, he or she is killed by her offspring, who then marries either a sibling or a parent. Through this cycle, the Earth is created, as are all living things upon it.

It is clear there were several myths involving the creation of man. "Atrahasis" and the "Epic of Creation" are closest in their depiction, in that mankind is created from the blood of a slain god and other, earthly materials, and are created to reduce the workload of the gods. However, in the Atrahasis myth, it is Belet-ili and Ea who make man, whereas in the Epic of Creation myth, it is Marduk and Ea. In "Etana", however, the gods seem only concerned with creating man for their own particular city, and it is not said how man is created. In "Dunnu", the gods are much more violent and sinister than in other creation myths. It is clear from the numerous accounts of creation, as well as the inclusion of creation explanations within other myths, that this was a topic of high interest to the people of Mesopotamia. Explaining their origins, particularly as extensions of the gods themselves, has been vital to myth and legend in nearly all corners of the world, and these myths have similarities with others, such as the creation tales within Genesis as well as within Greek mythology.

Quest for Fame

The quest for fame, both within the realm of the gods and from mankind, is a popular theme throughout many of these myths, in one form or another. In the Epic of Gilgamesh, Enkidu and Gilgamesh seek fame by killing Humbaba, an act that in part gets Enkidu killed later in the tale. In Anzu, the theft of the Tablet of Destinies would give Anzu fame and power over all of mankind and the gods, but he dies as a result of his quest. In the Epic of Creation, Ea seeks fame and vengeance through killing Apsu, but finds himself a coward when asked to face his crimes. Marduk seeks the fame and favor of the gods in his quest to kill Tiamat, and through his creation of the Earth and of mankind. In "Erra and Ishum", Erra seeks the fame of the gods by attacking the people of Earth, and by releasing the Sebitti.



In several cases, it appears that the quest for fame is seldom rewarded within the myths. In Gilgamesh, the hero loses a dear friend partly because of his quest for fame on Earth, and in Anzu, his quest to rule the people is stopped by death. In "Creation" Qingu, the leader of Tiamat's army, seeks fame but is killed as a result. In "Erra and Ishum", Erra wins, but is usurped by the man who stopped him, Ishum. However, those who have fame thrust upon them such as Marduk appear to be rewarded with shrines and blessings, showing a clear moral theme throughout the stories.

Violence and deception

In every myth within the book, there is a running theme of violence and deception by the gods, a theme common in nearly all mythology. In "Atrahasis", the gods are angry with man for their noise, and send plague, famine, drought, and finally a massive flood to kill mankind. It is only through the deception of Ellil that Ea through Atrahasis is able to save mankind. In "Gilgamesh", Shamhat deceives Enkidu on behalf of Gilgamesh, forcing him into society. Ishtar deceives her father, and as a result, nearly kills Gilgamesh and Enkidu with the Bull of Horns. Gilgamesh and Enkidu slay both Humbaba and the Bull of Horns. Later in the story, Ut-napishtim deceives Gilgamesh into thinking he has slept for days. In the Descent of Ishtar, Ishtar threatens to allow the dead to eat the living if her sister Ereshkigal does not permit her access to the Underworld, and Ereshkigal responds with a plague of sixty diseases. In Nergal and Ereshkigal, Ereshkigal threatens to kill Nergal for his transgressions against her, and in another translation, Nergal attempts to kill Ereshkigal. In Adapa, either Ea or Anu deceives Adapa into rejecting immortality. In Etana, the eagle deceives the snake and eats his young. In turn, the snake deceives the eagle and nearly kills him. In Anzu, Ea is deceived by Anzu in order for him to steal the Tablet of Destinies, and Ea in turn has Anzu slaughtered. In Creation, Ea kills Apsu, but only after Apsu plots to kill Ea and his siblings. Tiamat and Qingu plot to kill the gods, but Marduk kills Tiamat instead. In Dunnu, nearly everyone is killed or kills another. Finally, in Erra and Ishum, Erra slaughters most of humanity.

It is clear that violence was common during the time period in which these were written, and that the violence and chaos of the gods was often used to explain the unexplainable happenings on earth. With the gods as violent and unstable creatures, nearly all things on earth could be explained through the mood of the gods. In this way, the people of Mesopotamia could create myth that tied into reality, and would have the original myths to explain the violence of the gods.



Style

Perspective

The perspective of these myths alters with each story. In most cases, the tale is told from a third-person perspective, as a witness to the actions of the gods. The narrator rarely appears to be a first-hand witness of the proceedings, but appears instead to be retelling a tale that has been told to him. Since history now shows a tradition of oral storytelling among the people of Mesopotamia, this method works well to transfer the oral story to written dialog. In a few rare cases, a tablet will appear written by the god or person of whom the tablet speaks, making portions of the tale nearly first-person. However, it is an unwritten assumption that those portions are merely written in first person view from a third party to elaborate the feelings and emotions of the gods. The biases of the narration are specific to the myth being told at the time, in that each myth is written as a tribute to a god, and thus, speaks about the greatness of each. These alterations of perspective help the reader to determine which god is speaking at certain times, and to whom. In terms of the introductions to the myths, the perspective is always third-person, which helps the author tell of the history and legend behind each myth. This perspective is vital, in that the narration is authoritative without being biased.

Tone

The tone of the myths alter as the plot of the story changes. In some cases, the tone is argumentative, which is often the case during the disagreements of the gods. In other areas, it is objective, as in the case with descriptions of tales not related to the narrator, such as the Descent of Ishtar. In areas such as Gilgamesh's outcry of affection for Enkidu and the gods' honorary speeches to Marduk, the tone becomes revering. In all cases, the tone helps the reader to discern what is occurring within the myth, and the intentions of the gods at the time. In terms of the introductions to the story, the tone is authoritative and helpful, without bias.

Structure

The structure of the book is that of a reference book, with many different sections that are vital to the understanding of the myths, but that are not part of the myths themselves. The book begins with Prefaces that explain how the myths have come to be known, and the difficulties in locating the tablets and translating them into complete stories. The List of Figures at the beginning of the book tells the location of two primary pieces of reference, those of the map and the character depiction. The map is vital to understanding where the myths originate from, and where in the area each myth is based. The character depiction helps readers to visualize the characters within the myths. The Sigla and Abbreviations section, which describes certain aspects of the text, are vital to an understanding of the text, and include notations for missing text, inserted



words for better translation, areas of uncertainty, unknown words, and abbreviations for different versions of the texts. The Introduction explains the origin of the myths and places the text in a proper setting and explains the reasoning for the multiple versions of stories given within the book. Following the myths, the Glossary section gives a brief description of hundreds of gods, places, and things found within the myths. Finally, the Bibliography lists references for reader who wish to gain a better understanding of Mesopotamian myth. The myths themselves are varied in length. In all, the book is 342 pages in length.



Quotes

"So oral tradition continued to develop alongside written literature, and the primary purpose of recording stories in writing was not necessarily to supply individual readers with a coherent and connected account. Ancient stories were used for a multitude of purposes, often in extracts; attached to a ritual, to give authenticity or to provide an aetiology; to give the weight of some ancient tradition to a custom or to an incantation." p. xvi

"On the first, seventh, and fifteenth of the month I shall make a purification by washing. Then one god should be slaughtered. And the gods can be purified by immersion. Nintu shall mix clay with his flesh and his blood. Then a god and a man will be mixed together in clay." p. 15

"Would a true father have given birth to the rolling sea so that they could clog the river like dragonflies? They are washed up like a raft overturned, they are washed up like a raft overturned in open country! I have seen, and wept over them! Shall I ever finish weeping for them?" p. 33

"He was superior to other kings, a warrior lord of great stature, a hero born of Uruk, a goring wild bull. He marches at the front as leader, he goes behind, the support of his brothers, a strong net, the protection of his men, the raging flood-wave, which can destroy even a stone wall. Son of Lugalbanda, Gilgamesh, perfect in strength, son of the lofty cow, the wild cow Ninsun. He is Gilgamesh, perfect in splendor, who opened up passes in the mountains, who could dig pits even in the mountainside, who crossed the ocean, the broad seas, as far as the sunrise. Who inspected the edges of the world, kept searching for eternal life, who reached Ut-napishtim the far-distant by force. Who restored to their rightful place cult centres which the flood had ruined. There is nobody among the kings of teeming humanity who can compare with him, who can say 'I am king' beside Gilgamesh." p. 51

"Come Good-Looks, I shall curse you with a great curse. I shall decree for you a fate that shall never be forgotten. Bread gleaned from the city's plough shall be your food, the city drains shall be your only drinking place, the shade of a city wall your only standing place, threshold steps your only sitting place, the drunkard and the thirsty shall slap your cheek." p. 159

"You can be my husband, and I can be your wife. I will let you seize Kingship over the wide Earth! I will put the tablet of wisdom in your hand! You can be master, I can be mistress." p. 180

"Why did Ea disclose to wretched mankind the ways of heaven and earth, give them a heavy heart? What can we do for him? Fetch him the bread of eternal life and let him eat!" p. 187



"O Shamash, you have enjoyed the best cuts of my sheep, Earth has drunk the blood of my lambs, I have honoured the gods and respected the spirits of the dead, the dream interpreters have made full use of my incense. The gods have made full use of my lambs at the slaughter. O Lord, let the word go forth from your mouth and give me the plant of birth, show me the plant of birth! Remove my shame and provide me with a son!" p. 196

"The Lord listened to the words of far-sighted Ea. He hunched in trepidation, and went into hiding. The Lord marshalled the seven evil winds, who dance in the dust, the seven whirlwinds. He mustered a battle array, made war with a terrifying formation; even the gales were silent at his side, poised for conflict." p. 217

"When the skies above were not yet named nor earth below pronounced by name, Apsu, the first one, their begetter and maker Tiamat, who bore them all, had mixed their waters together, But had not formed pastures, nor discovered reed-beds; When yet no gods were manifest, nor names pronounced, nor destinies decreed, then gods were born within them. Lamhu and Lahamu emerged, their names pronounced." p. 233

"Face to face they came, Tiamat and Marduk, sage of the gods. They engaged in combat, they closed for battle. The Lord spread his net and made it encircle her, to her face he dispatched the imhulla-wind, which had been behind: Tiamat opened her mouth to swallow it, and he forced in the imhullu-wind so that she could not close her lips. Fierce winds distended her belly; her insides were constipated and she stretched her mouth wide. He shot an arrow which pierced her belly, split her down the middle and slit her heart, vanquished her and extinguished her life." p. 253

"Let me put blood together, and make bones too. Let me set up primeval man: Man shall be his name. Let me create primeval man. The work of the gods shall be imposed on him, and so they shall be at leisure. Let me change the ways of the gods miraculously so they are gathered as one yet divided in two." p. 261

"The great gods assembled and made Marduk's destiny highest; they themselves did obeisance. They swore and oath for themselves, and swore on water and oil, touched their throats. Thus they granted that he should exercise the kingship of the gods and confirmed for him mastery of the gods of heaven and earth." p. 264

"Then Earth raised her face to the Cattle God, {Plough's} son and said to him, 'Come and let me love you!' The Cattle God married Earth his mother, and killed Plough his father." p. 279

"Different is the divine nature of the Sebitti, unrivaled warrior; their birth was strange and full of terrible portents. Anyone who sees them is smitten with terror, for their breath is lethal; people are petrified and cannot approach them." p. 286

"To Marduk and to Ea I shall bring a reminder: He who grows up in times of plenty shall be buried in times of deprivation. He who travels out of a path with water shall return along a way of dust-storms." p. 297



"O warrior Erra, you have put the just to death, you have put the unjust to death. You have put to death the man who sinned against you, you have put to death the man who did not sin against you. You have put to death the en-priest who made tallimu-offerings promptly, you have put to death the courtier who served the king. You have put old men to death on the porch, you have put young girls to death in their bedrooms." p. 307



Topics for Discussion

In "Atrahasis", Ellil sends down several damaging commands intended to kill humankind (i.e., plague, famine). Discuss two of these in detail, explaining the consequences, and what Atrahasis did in each case to help save humanity.

In "The Epic of Gilgamesh", Gilgamesh attempts to find Ut-napishtim. Why did Gilgamesh seek him? Do you think the response of Ut-napishtim was fair, or unjust? Why?

List three difference between the Standard and the Old Babylonian versions of Gilgamesh.

Based on the text, why do you believe Ishtar went to the Underworld to see Ereshkigal in "The Descent of Ishtar"? Be sure to support your idea using phrases from the text.

The myth of "Nergal and Ereshkigal" is often referred to as a love story. Using examples from the text, explain what leads people to believe this is a tale of love and passion.

In "Adapa", it is argued that either Ea misleads Adapa or Anu deceives him in terms of his inadvertent refusal of immortality. Based on the text, which argument do you feel is correct? Support your answer using lines from the myth.

In "Etana", Shamash spares the eagle in exchange for his help in finding the birth plant for Etana. Why would Shamash spare the eagle, who betrayed his trust, in exchange for the plant?

At the end of "Anzu", as well as many other myths, the gods give the hero a variety of different names. Why do they do this? What is the purpose of the naming?

Explain the creation of man, using the information contained in "The Epic of Creation". Be sure to be specific in terms of the actions of each god.

Compare and contrast, using examples from the book, the four versions of creation presented in "Atrahasis", "Etana", "The Epic of Creation", and "Theogony of Dunnu"