



Although this narrative includes a short account of creation, Enuma Elish is a succession story, not a primeval protohistory. It tells the story of the succession of Marduk, the god of Babylon, over traditional Ancient Near Eastern deities: Anu, Enlil, and Ea. The Akkadian text is divided among seven cuneiform tablets, each between 115 and 170 lines long. The first begins “enūma elish lä nabû shamämü”—“When above not was-named heaven....”

Chaos (TABLETS 1-3)

A war breaks out between the older gods led by the evil Tiamat, and the younger gods led by Anu. Tiamat creates monster-serpents, and exalts Kingu. Anu tries to appease her, and another god tries to use magic spells on her, but their efforts fail. They turn to Marduk, who offers his help under the condition that if he succeeds he will gain absolute control over the other gods. They accept his condition.

Marduk slays Tiamat (TABLET 4)

The gods prophesy Marduk’s success, and praise him as their lord. He fashions a bow and a net for his battle, and departs. The sight of him weakens Kingu; Tiamat turns her neck and stares. When Marduk calls her to a one-on-one battle, she rages and summons her monster-serpents. Marduk captures her in his net, blows an evil wind in her mouth, and bursts her belly with a spear. He takes her life, stands on top of her body, and smashes her skull.

Marduk establishes order (TABLETS 5-6)

Marduk cuts Tiamat’s body down the middle, stretches one half to heaven, and the other half to the deep. This separates and forms the heavens, the earth, and the sea. He assigns Anu the sky, Enlil the earth and air, and Ea the fresh water. He places planets and constellations in the heavens. He then creates the human race with his own flesh and blood, so that they will serve the gods. The gods and men dwell in Upsukkinnaku.¹

Marduk glorified (TABLET 7)

After seating themselves in an assembly, the gods praise Marduk, giving him fifty-one names.

Epilogue (TABLET 7)

The names given to Marduk are to be remembered and passed on to future generations. The wise and understanding are to consider them. Fathers shall teach them to their sons. The narrator praises Marduk’s defeat of Tiamat, his character, and his power.

¹ This may be a reference to Babylon.