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The eternal journey of the human mind

A study of ancient creation myths and comparison
between different creation myths from different time
periods

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Abstract

This study discusses the rise of mythological thinking, focusing on ancient Near Eastern creation myths and creation accounts in mythological works in particular, with additional material drawn from lists of gods and other sources. The similarities and differences between several creation myths are analyzed by means of a diachronic and comparative method, tracing the development of mythological thinking about creation over thousands of years. The study departs in the main from six ancient creation myths and accounts of creation from ancient Mesopotamia: three Sumerian compositions to form the vestiges of a Sumerian creation myth, and three Babylonian myths which contain accounts of creation. A comparison of similarities and differences between these compositions is performed. In a final section, a comparison is made with the Old Testament and the Quran's creation account, where phrases from the latter two texts are compared to the earlier myths and accounts of creation to produce an understanding of which elements of creation in religions with modern day followers rest upon ancient Mesopotamian foundations.

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1. Introduction

In the early dawn of the human mind's written history, humans began to observe their environment and considered its origin, driven by temptations to describe the world that they lived in and seek to explain the events occurring in the nature surrounding them. At first those temptations were nothing but an attempt to control those events, but then realizing their inability of doing so, they started shaping beliefs in some high supernatural powers much stronger than them who had the control over the universe. Witnessing the force of nature lit a desire in the human mind to get closer to the prime effective powers by creating the idea of religion, presented in worship and in rituals. But before doing so a need of having a systematic knowledge of the primitive powers led the human mind to create mythology. This study will be focusing on creation episodes in four different textual traditions from different civilizations and time periods.

1.1. Aim and purpose

The main aim is to test the theory that the Babylonian creation myths did not add anything new to what was already provided by the Sumerians, or whether that was an inevitable result due to the fact that there had not been any other civilizations older than the Sumerian. Secondly, this study will draw upon the conclusions from comparisons between Sumerian and Babylonian creation accounts and see how they relate to the later, Abrahamic religions and their views on creation. The question to be answered in this study is: can it be assumed that only the Sumerians produced a creative way of thinking about the creation of the world and all later civilization just built on or were inspired by the inheritance from the Sumerians?

1.2. Method

The methods followed in this study are a comparative and a diachronic method. A diachronic in that it presents, analyzes and compares mythological documents belonging to different time periods. It starts with presenting the texts, analyzing each one, taking into consideration the religious and historical background then comparing them, showing their similarities and differences.

1.3. The sources

The type of material investigated in this study is two sets of secondary sources, a set of sources for each myth's translation and a set of sources for the interpretation of each one. Besides that another set of secondary literature is used to fill in gaps in the missing or incomplete texts. I based my search on finding the most well-preserved and complete myths and the most detailed translation of each of them until I decided on the myths presented below.

1.3.1. The sources for the Sumerian creation myth

Sumerians had various written accounts of creation but none of which is fully preserved so the myths used in this study are: a) the poem Bilgames and the Netherworld, b) Enki and Ninhursag: a Sumerian paradise myth and c) the Enki and Ninmah myth.

The translation and interpretation of the first poem is based on the edition in Andrew George's book: *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (1999), the Enki and Ninhursag myth is based on Samuel Noah Kramer's translation in his book: *Sumerian Mythology* (1944) and Therese Rodin's translation in her thesis: *The world of the Sumerian mother goddess* (2014). For the Enki and Ninmah myth, the translation used is from Therese Rodin's thesis again (2014) and the translation provided by Herbert Sauren's essay, Nammu and Enki (1993) as the secondary source for the interpretation .

The longest recorded Sumerian creation myths were written in the third millennium B.C. and they deal with three topics: the creation of the universe, the organization of the universe and the creation of man (Kramer, 1944, 44).

1.3.2. The sources for the Babylonian creation myth

As for Babylonian creation myths used in this study are: a) the *Enuma Eliš* epic, b) the Sippar creation myth and c) the *Atrahasis* poem as the primary texts.

The secondary sources used for the translation presented in the study are: Wilfred G. Lambert's translation of the *Enuma Eliš* epic in his book; *Babylonian Creation Myths* (2013), the translation of the *Atrahasis* poem by Wilfred G. Lambert and Alan Millard in the book named after the poem (1969) and Jean Bottéro's interpretation of the *Atrahasis* poem in the

book *Religion in Ancient Mesopotamia* (2001), in addition to Alexander Heidel's book *The Babylonian Genesis* (1970) for the Sippar creation myth.

1.4. Definition of myth

It seems hard to define myths since each historian and author has a different definition of what a myth is. However most historians have some aspects in their definition of myth in common and they would all agree on this definition: myth is a sacred, religious and traditional tale mostly inherited orally throughout generations. It can be considered as the community's collective memory for it contains and expresses the community's values, rituals, traditions, thoughts and principles. Myths tend to use an influential artistic formula to ensure its impact and control on the individuals, members of the community. As Marcel Sigrist once wrote: "Myths of creation explain why there is something rather than nothing" (2010, 397). As well as how the universe was conceived in the human mind at the time and they defined the function of its various parts (Lambert, 1975, 45). However it is important to affirm that a myth is not a superstition and was never looked at in that way. Besides that, myth is the origin of the art of theater, poetry and literature and the godparent of the art of music (Mache, 1992, 11-12)

2. Presenting the creation myths

In the following paragraphs each civilization's creation myth is presented briefly by pointing out the main lines of each creation myth and then summing up the cosmological events, the beliefs and purposes of each civilization's mythology.

It is important to mention that Mesopotamian gods are described in all of the epics above as being just like humans, they had body parts, they lived, loved, ate, drank, had sexual desires, got angry, annoyed... in short they had the needs, feelings and behavior of mankind and according to the Mesopotamian mythology as shown in the Enki-Ninhursag myth; humans were created in the image of the gods as Enki the great god orders (Kramer, 1963, 150; Bottéro, 2001, 65-67)

2.1. Sumerian creation mythology

History begins in Sumer. The Sumerian civilization began to flourish some time at the middle of the fifth millennium B.C. (4500 B.C.) in the southern end of the Tigris-Euphrates plain, between modern Baghdad and Basra (Lambert, 1975, 42). The Sumerians were the first to record history and document it; the earliest poetic epics, religious hymns, spiritual rituals, civil and political laws and most importantly the first cuneiform writing system all were invented by the Sumerians. They founded the basis for astronomy and mathematics. The earliest written and pictorial creation myth texts come as a result from Sumer nearly 3000 B.C. written in the Sumerian language. Even after the Akkadian language became the dominating spoken language in Mesopotamia, Sumerian was kept alive as a literary language, similar to today's Latin (Lambert, 1975, 49). Sumerian literary texts are poetic and the creation myths are no exception to that (Sauren, 1993, 199).

The Sumerian civilization was located in a very distinctive environment; warm land in southern modern Iraq, totally depended on agriculture in every aspect of life, so sweet water, springs and rivers, were believed to be the primary sources of life due to their use for irrigation in agriculture.

2.1.1. Bilgames and the Netherworld

Around the beginning of the second millennium five poems were written in Sumerian, together they make up the epic of Gilgameš that describes the creation of the universe. The five poems are believed to be completed during the residency of king Šulgi of Ur of the Chaldees in the twenty-first century B.C. but the myth itself is believed to have been created and transferred orally through generations from much earlier times since Gilgameš who was the king of Uruk lived and ruled around 2800 B.C. (George, 1999, xii-xx, xxix). In the Sumerian poems the name of Gilgameš is written with a B as the first letter as Bilgames (George, 1999, 141); later when the epic was restructured in Akkadian, the scribes wrote his name with a G as it is known to us today: Gilgameš¹.

The epic's main theme is Gilgameš, who was half human and half divine on his mother's side, and his search and aim for immortality. He goes through a lot of struggles, makes a journey to the netherworld, travels far, faces monsters and makes friends with the strongest among them until finally the Sumerian god pantheon agrees on assigning him a fate as judge in the netherworld, but to get there he had first to accept his death like humans. (Bottéro, 2001, 63)

The Bilgames and the netherworld poem starts with a mythological prologue describing how at the beginning the gods divided the universe between them after the high had been moved away from below, after the earth had been separated from heaven, and after An had carried off on-high and Enlil had carried off below and Ereškigal had been given the Netherworld as her dowry-gift from Enlil. After all that, humans came into existence. (Bottéro, 2001, 84; George, 1999, 169-179).

The brief introduction of the poem; line 1 to line 14 indicates that the Sumerian cosmology for a starter is divided to three levels: the heaven above, then the earth where humans live and the netherworld where Ereškigal, the goddess who ruled the underworld lived (George, 1999, 178-179).

¹ The way of writing the name of Gilgameš went through a lot of changes. The earliest forms of similar names indicate a reading pabilga-mes and a translation "the forebear (was/is) a hero" or something similar, is a likely interpretation. Readings from the early second millennium B.C. include Gelgamiš, Galgamiš, Kilgameš and possibly Gišgimmaš, among many others. For these, and an overview and interpretation of forms and the spread of Gilgameš into later cultures in the Near East, see George, 2003, 71-90.

It indicates as well the importance of Enlil, the air god. Enlil and An are mentioned in several Sumerian compositions as the supreme deities of the Sumerian Pantheon (Kramer 1963, 83–84).

Later in a list of the Sumerian gods, it is mentioned that Nammu, the primeval water goddess, gave birth to the earth and heaven that later got separated from each other. So the earth was considered an island in the primitive water. It is also mentioned that Kur which is the name of the Netherworld is given to Ereškigal by Enlil (Kramer, 1961, 37-39).

Even though the above does not give a clear coherent explanation of the universe but one may say that the Sumerian cosmology was mythological and divided to four zones; the upper one where the gods lives, below it is an island which is the earth where people live, in a body of water, Nammu, and at the lower level is the netherworld where the netherworld's gods live.

2.1.2. Enki and Ninhursag myth

The epic of Enki and Ninhursag is a paradise myth which takes its beginning when the earth and many things in it had already been created. It focuses on Ninhursag giving birth to nature and healing's deities; it deals also with the subject of committing the sin of incest causing instability in the committer's health and the life in paradise. The myth was written down sometime during the Old Babylonian period but it was compiled under the third millennium B.C. on a six column tablet excavated in Nippur in Iraq (Pritchard, 1969, 37).

Thorkild Jacobsen assumes that the myth is rooted back in the fourth millennium B.C. when a network of water canals was founded in the south of Mesopotamia causing a major economic coup because of the maximum benefit of the two great rivers' water (represented in Enki) which irrigates the surrounding lands (represented by Ninhursag), leading to the flourishing of vegetation and plants (represented by Uttu, Ninmu and Ninkurra). Considering that the canals irrigated the field most during the seasonal floods, the time between the floods was symbolized as the time when Enki got sick (Jacobsen, 1976, 113).

Line 1-56:

In the land of Dilmun² where nothing bad happened, death and sickness did not exist, and wild animals did not kill, Enki the god of sweet water and magic lived with his lover Ninhursag the earth and mother goddess. The earth was not fertilized though so with the help of Utu, the sun and daylight god, Enki created rivers and springs in the land of Dilmun to provide the earth with sweet water and sunlight so that agriculture would flourish and fishes would swim.

Line 65-110:

When Ninhursag, the earth, got Enki's water, semen, inside of her, she named herself Nintur, the mother goddess, the womb of every living thing, and she gave birth to her first daughter: Ninmu, the vegetation lady with no pain or effort. Ninmu later got impregnated by her father, Enki and gave birth to Ninkurra without pain or efforts either, just like her mother Ninhursag.

Line 111-150:

Ninkurra, lady of mountains and foreign lands, shortly after that together with her father, Enki, gave birth to another female deity: Uttu- a clothing related goddess, who was Ninhursag's great-granddaughter and equally as beautiful as her female begetters. She received an advice from Ninhursag to not cohabit with Enki unless he brings her some – what appears to be – fruits and vegetables difficult to get hold of: grapes, apples and cucumbers.

Line 151- 195;

Enki did not conceive that request as a difficult task, he waters some uncultivated places and in return get the fruits from there. As he heads back to Uttu with the fruits she had demanded getting ready to impregnate her, Uttu gets very satisfied and allows him to impregnate her. Ninhursag finds out about it and gets very upset, she curses Enki and takes out his semen from Uttu's womb, resulting in eight plants coming to life, including honey and tree plants.

² The land of Dilmun is mentioned later in other Babylonian epics, as the land where gods and people who had been given immortality live (Pritchard, 1969, 119). The common identification of the land of Dilmun is today's sheikhdom, Bahrain. The land is commonly held as mentioned already in archaic Uruk texts from the late fourth millennium B.C. (Rodin, 2014, 117).

Line 196-240;

Enki commits another sin as he starts eating the eight plants in order give them their names and to decide their destinies. Suddenly he gets very sick and needs Ninhursag's help but she was long gone after she had cursed him. Enlil the greatest god in the Sumerian pantheon had someone bring her back to Dilmun to help cure Enki.

Line 241-270;

Ninhursag³ heals Enki through asking him eight times which of his organs was in pain, for each organ he would name, she causes the birth of a healing god, and repeated the process until eight healing gods came to life: Abu, Nintulla, Ninsutu, Ninkasi, Nazi, Azimua, Ninti and Enšag who becomes the lord of Dilmun (Kramer, 1944, 85; Pritchard, 1969, 37-41).

2.1.3. Enki and Ninmah

The myth of Enki and Ninmah is a Sumerian myth giving an account of the creation of mankind, that Herbert Sauren suggested consisted of a conflation of myths, where the main characters were Enki and Nammu; he suggested that it was originally composed of six strophes, of twelve verses each, and which he hypothesized was transformed and added to by the Nippur scribes in Old Babylonian times (Sauren, 1993, 198). The translation is based mainly on Rodin's translation and Sauren's essay, Nammu and Enki.

Section I

Line 1-9: The epic starts on the day when heaven gets separated from earth, when gods took goddesses into marriage and impregnated them. Enki the great god is creator of all myriads in existence and all gods which were divided into groups encompassing minor gods bearing the toil and great gods watching them and enjoying the fruits of the formers' labour.

Line 10-23: Then the minor gods become angry and tired because of their situation, and head to Nammu, the foremost mother of all gods complaining about how hard their duties are, pouring their tears before her. She carries their tears and goes to visit the wise god Enki who

³ Ninhursag, the Sumerian mother goddess, was mentioned as birth-giver in hymnic texts dating back to 2600 B.C. found in Abu Salabikh, modern Iraq (Rodin, 2014, 95).

was asleep. Nammu tells Enki her son to rise up from his bed and listen to the gods who are protesting loudly against him, and demands of him to do something to make the gods' lives and duties easier on them. She requests of him to create other creatures to do the gods' tasks instead of them.

Line 24-37: Enki obeys his mother and tells her that those creatures she proposed will exist, he tells her to mix water from her belly with clay, bind upon it the image of gods and decide their destiny. He tells her to fashion those creatures with the help of the seven birth goddesses who will stand by her side: Ninimma, Šuziana, Ninmada, Ninbara, Ninmuga, Sarsadru, and Ninguna.⁴

Section II

With Ninmah, Enki's sister, watching over Nammu and the birth goddesses, together they created mankind whom Nammu gives birth to. Enki was delighted as he saw the new creatures coming to existence on his order⁵. Enki and Ninmah celebrate together: Ninmah created seven humans and Enki decreed their destinies. then Enki created one creature, named him Ugul and told Ninmah to decree his destiny but she could not do that, and so Enki got angry at her and said that she could not equal him (Rodin, 2014, 338-342; Sauren, 1993, 198-201).

2.1.4. Summary of the Sumerian creation mythology and god-lists

In the beginning there was nothing but Nammu, the sweet water, which gave birth to a male and a female deity: An god of heaven and supreme leader of the gods, and Ki, the goddess of earth, both bound to each other, inseparable in an eternal darkness (Kramer, 1961, 37-39; Black and Green, 2014, 134).

Then Enlil was born, the god of wind and storms who was called the great mountain and the king of the foreign lands.

⁴ The list of goddesses counts Ninbara twice, something which different scholars have come up with different solutions to. See Rodin 2014, 97, footnote 496; and 267.

⁵ The creation of mankind is mentioned in the poem of Cattle and Grain as well. In the poem it is described that when the Annunaki first were created they did not know how to make bread and neither did the humans when they first were created, however mankind was created for that specific purpose (Kramer, 1963, 220).

Enlil separated Ki, his mother, from An, his father and created the space of air between them for himself, that which made them become earth, air and sky (Kramer, 1981, 65). Then Ninlil, Enlil's wife gave birth to Nanna, the moon god and Nanna was the begetter of Utu the sun god, so light was created (Black and Green, 2014, 135).

Enlil was the begetter of many gods, gods which together shaped the life and universe including everything within it, such as Inanna, goddess of love and war, and identified with the planet Venus (Black and Green, 2014, 108-109), Iškur, the god of storms and rain (Black and Green, 2014, 110), and Nergal, the god of forest fires, fever and at times associated with underworld (Black and Green, 2014, 136).

At last humankind was created out of clay by the order of Enki, the god of wisdom and sweet water, and his mother Nammu, to work as servants of the gods (Kramer, 1961, 57-59; Rodin, 2014, 338-339).

2.2. Babylonian creation mythology

The Babylonian civilization flourished sometime in the early beginning of the second millennium B.C. in Mesopotamia. Not only the Babylonians spread their culture across north-western Mesopotamia but also Babylonian texts were found in some Hurrians sites such as northern Mesopotamia and Syria, and in Hittite sites in Anatolia, modern Turkey. A large collection of Babylonian texts in other archives than the Babylonian ones was found in the Assyrian libraries in sites on the Tigris River in modern Iraq (Lambert, 1975, 43).

*2.2.1. The *Enuma Eliš**

The *Enuma Eliš* epic is extant in two versions, Babylonian and Assyrian. The Assyrian version consists of a total of 68 tablets and fragments, found in Nineveh, modern Mosul in Aššurbanipal's libraries. The tablets can be divided into three different groups from the early, middle and late Neo-Assyrian period, while the Babylonian versions is written in the Neo-Babylonian period. Only seven pieces of a total of 95 pieces of the composition were found in excavations in Kish, Uruk and Sippar, the others were collected through the black market (Lambert, 2013, 3-4).

Below is presented the Babylonian version of *the Enuma Eliš* which despite it being a literary masterpiece as an epic, it is admitted generally that it is based on the Sumerian cosmology in its content (Heidel, 1970, 12). In addition to its beautiful poetic language as a complete work of art, it provides an important overview of Babylonian beliefs. The main event in the *Enuma Eliš* is the struggle between the cosmic order and chaos, which created a rich fateful drama (Pritchard, 1969. 60).

Tablet I

In the beginning before anything existed there was nothing but Apsu, the primeval sweet-water, his wife Tiamat, the salt water – who gave birth to all gods – and Mummu, the mist over both waterbodies in an eternal silence. The three water types mingled in one and gave birth to Lahmu and Lahamu, who gave birth to Anšar and Kišar, who in their turn bore Anu, the supreme god of heaven. Anu was here considered father to Ea, god of wisdom and magic and sweet water.

The sudden noise that these new generations of deities were causing made Apsu very mad, he couldn't sleep during the night nor rest in the days, and so he decides to get rid of them.

As this line appears early on in the first tablet of the epic, it indicates that the separation between the day and night had already existed before the creation of the sun and the moon.

Ea, however, who was stronger than his begetters managed by using his magical crafts to send Apsu into an immortal sleep before Apsu could do anything to harm the new generation of deities. Ea took Apsu's crown and divine position. Then Marduk, Ea's son, the king of all gods was born.

At that time Tiamat had created Qingu, her lover and the head of her army and she had given him the tablet of destinies. Qingu together with the first generations of deities advise and urge Tiamat to take revenge on the new generation of deities for the death of her husband. Tiamat builds an army of eleven monsters, dragons and giant snakes preparing for the battle.

Tablets II and III

The new generation of deities had heard about Tiamat's preparations and started immediately their search for the mightiest and the wisest hero among the deities to lead their army. Both

Ea and Anu refused to take the leadership as they had seen how horrifying the army of Tiamat is. By then, Marduk had gotten stronger and braver so they asked him to be the leader and he only agreed after they promised he would get Anšar's power of creation and deciding the destinies. After Marduk was given the powers he starts preparing his weapons, using storm forces and sets off to face Tiamat's army. When the two armies met on the field battle, Marduk decides to confront Tiamat on his own.

Tablet IV

After a fierce battle between the two of them, Marduk destroys Tiamat, tears her body into two halves, lifts the first half forming the sky and stretches out the other half creating the earth, rivers, temples and mountains. The army of Tiamat gets defeated and destroyed as well, and Qingu's tablet of destinies is taken over by Marduk.

Tablets V and VI

After defeating Tiamat, Apsu and Mummu, the eternal silence and the primitive chaos had come to an end as well, because Marduk begins organizing that chaos and putting the primitive elements in order. He creates the stars for the deities to rest on, and he creates the sun and the moon.

Finally Marduk creates mankind of Qingu's blood as he creates animals and plants. Then he celebrates with all the deities as he gets crowned as the lord of the universe. Then the deities build the city of Babylon and the temple of Esagila (Heidel, 1970. 3-9, Lambert, 2013, 49-133).

The Babylonian cosmos seems to be divided into heaven, where gods live, air and wind, earth where humans live in a waterbody and a netherworld or abyss (Lambert, 1975, 68-69).

Marduk, the god of Babylon appears to play the most important role in the creation process and his relation to Ea as his son and Anu as his grandson appears to be important to legitimize his role and affirm his divinity.

2.2.2. The Sippar creation myth

The Sippar composition is bilingual myth written in both Sumerian and Babylonian but it goes back to the Neo-Babylonian period (622–539 B.C.) as its content confirms that it cannot be written in the Sumerian period. It was found in the ruins of the ancient city of Sippar,

modern Abu Habbah, in Iraq. The Sippar myth's creation account may have its origins in or around the city of Eridu at the mouth of the Persian Gulf. At that time the Babylonian empire had grown over a larger geographical area, which had shown its impact on the Babylonian mythology as shown in the Sippar myth. The myth's main subject is the process which positioned Marduk as the king among the gods (Heidel, 1970, 61), a theme which is reminiscent of a main theme in *Enuma eliš*, as was seen above.

At the beginning when neither temples nor cities were built, and Apsu had not existed, nothing existed but sea, then Eridu and the temple of Ea were made, the temple, the foundations of which, laid within the Apsu, and Babylon was made.

Gods were created as equals and in the holy city, Marduk created clay on the surface of the water and of that clay (dust) he created mankind to comfort the gods. Then he created the animals and the rivers of the Tigris and the Euphrates and gave them their names. Lastly he created plants, green fields, forests and the cities of Nippur and Uruk and their temples (Heidel, 1970, 63).

Here we see that mankind is created from clay, dust and primeval water, while earlier in *Enuma Eliš*, mankind was created of a deity's blood.

The importance of the city of Eridu is highlighted as well in this myth, besides Babylon remaining as the fundamental city in Babylonia.

2.2.3. The *Atrahasis* poem

The *Atrahasis* poem came to us in different fragments from the Old Babylonian period and from the Neo-Assyrian period. The Assyrian version dates back to the time of Assurbanipal (669–631 B.C.) and the Babylonian version goes back to the king Ammišaduqa (1646–1626 B.C.) (Pritchard, 1969, 104). Both versions are very similar and they complete each other.

The poem of *Atrahasis*, written in Akkadian, was written on three tablets in 1200 lines and it kept on being used later as an incantation for childbirth in Assyrian times (Bottéro, 2001, 89). It summarizes the entire history of humanity, from mankind's first appearance, through the mythical era of creating and formatting everything, to the beginning of the historical era.

Tablet I

Line 1-18: The events of the poem begin at the time when only gods existed, they needed to organize themselves to obtain through their work all the goods and services they needed. Anu, their king who was also their father had gone up to the heaven, while Enki was given the sea and had gone down to the Apsu, and the warrior Enlil was their counselor. The leader deities, the Anunnaki, assigned the ten great gods which in this tale are described as the lower class gods: the Igigi, to do all the work (Lambert and Millard, 1969, 43).

Line 37-71: The Igigi did all the work until they were exhausted and decided to go on strike and rebel against the Annunaki. They had had enough and did not want to continue working under other deities which they shared their nature with so they head to Anu and ask for his help (Black and Green, 2014, 106; Bottéro, 2001, 99).

Line 74-173: The divine society panics at first then Enlil hears the Igigi's complaints. After hearing them Enlil orders Anu to carry the Igigi with him to heaven and punish the Annunaki by having one of them killed.

Line 174-191: Enlil gathers the divine society in a council and Ea gets the order of punishing the Annunaki then he proposes a solution which involves creating beings to substitute the worker gods.

Line 208-241: The beings would be made of clay mixed with blood from one of the minor deities and would have spirit and personality from the god's flesh. With the assistance of the supreme mother goddess, who is sometimes called Nintu, sometimes Mami, and the birth-goddesses *Belet-ili* mankind was created and the purpose of their creation as servants of the gods was achieved (Lambert and Millard, 1969, 43-60).

Tablet II

The land extended and the people multiplied after a long period of time and the gods got annoyed by the noise and chaos that the fast growing reproduction of mankind caused. Enlil, the king of the gods, irritated and unable to sleep decided to destroy them. He sent all different kinds of disasters and illnesses but *Atrahasis*, who was the king over mankind, each time managed to save them with the help of Ea, their creator.

At last Enlil sent them an unescapable flood to destroy them all, *Atrahasis* this time managed to escape the flood with his family only with the help of Ea, by building a ship. Enlil comes to his senses after having ordered the destruction of all mankind and vows not to do it again. Then the reproduction of mankind continued, but happening at a slower and calmer pace this time, not to disturb Enlil again (Bottéro, 2013, 99-103; Lambert and Millard, 1969, 60-80).

2.2.4. Summary of the Babylonian creation mythology

The primitive water is perceived to be the source of life and the begetter of all other elements in the universe.

The universe is in a state of eternal silence since there was nothing but the primitive waters.

Deities came to existence from and in the primitive waters creating very loud noises.

The earth beneath and the upper sky, heaven, were both the first two nature bodies created of the primitive water.

Planets, stars, the moon then the sun were created bringing in light with their creation.

The creation of mankind of either divine blood or of clay mixed with divine blood happened next in order.

Then the creation of animals and plants and forests takes place.

And at last a celebration among the deities and crowning Marduk⁶, the creator as the king of gods and universe.

In both *Atrahasis* and *Enuma Eliš* epics, the leader god gets irritated by the noise that minor, younger gods or humans make and decides to destroy them. That might indicate the importance that silence had in the Babylonian world.

⁶ In the Sippar myth the main focus is on Marduk as the creator of all living thing and the king of gods. While the *Atrahasis* poem focuses on Ea being the creator and savior – one might say – of mankind.

3. The comparisons and results

In order to compare the Sumerian and Babylonian accounts of creation the following paragraph will outline the similarities and differences between them and then try to present some explanations of these similarities. Finally, The Mesopotamian creation accounts are presented and compared to the accounts encountered in the Abrahamic scriptures, the Old Testament, and the Quran.

3.1 Comparison between the Sumerian and Babylonian accounts

The most noticeable similarity is that in the Sumerian and Babylonian creation myths and accounts, the primitive elements of the universe can be said to be the same. The chronological order of the events occurring causing the creation to start is also very similar as shown in the next paragraphs.

3.1.1 The chronological order of the creation

The basic progression of creation is illustrated below, showing the sequence of events in the Sumerian and Babylonian accounts next to each other.

The Sumerian	The Babylonian
1 First was Nammu, the primitive sweet water	First was Apsu and Tiamat, the primitive water in darkness
2 Then was An and Ki, the sky and earth.	Then the light
3 Then Enlil, the air	Then the earth and heaven out of Tiamat's corps
4 Then Nanna the moon to lighten the dark	Then Sin the moon
5 Then Utu the sun and the planets and stars	Then Šamaš the sun and the stars and planets
6 Vegetation, animals and humans get created on the order of Enki	Vegetation, animals and humans get created on the order of Marduk
7 Finally Enki rests and celebrates among the gods	Marduk rests and is celebrated among the gods

3.1.2 Similarity in the deities' gender

The primitive element as already mentioned is practically the same in all creation accounts studied in this paper which is: water, though the gender of the primitive water is different in each epic, for instance in the Sumerian mythology, Nammu, the primitive water is a female deity, in the Babylonian mythology, Tiamat is the mother goddess and primitive water that everything is created of is female as well, but she was not alone in that epic, her husband Apsu is part of the primitive water as well.

The gender of the creator deity is the same in all creation myths mentioned earlier: Enki, Enlil, Marduk, all are male deities.

3.1.3 Phrases from the Sumerian and Babylonian accounts

Besides the similarity in the order of events taking place in the sequence of creation, some phrases from the Sumerian accounts and *Enuma eliš* will be valuable for comparison, and will allow for comparison with the Abrahamic creation accounts.

Phrases from the Sumerian myths

After heaven had been parted from earth, after earth had been separated from heaven (Bilgames and the Netherworld, 7: 8-9).

Nammu gave birth to mankind, the being, out of the waters, the head (of mankind) came out (Enki and Ninmah, Sauren 1993, 203: 6.I:1-2).

(Enki says to Nammu:) Womb-clay (?) will be mixed for you on the top of the Abzu. The womb goddesses will nip off the clay there, and then you will bring the form into existence. Ninmah will act as your assistant. /.../ My mother! You will decide his (lit. its) destiny; Ninmah will bind the basket (of work for the gods to him), (Enki and Ninmah, Rodin 2014, 339: 31-37).

Phrases from the *Enuma Eliš*

When the heavens above did not exist, and earth beneath had not come into being, there was Apsu, the first in order, their begetter, and Mummu, Tiamat, who gave birth to them all (*Enuma Eliš* 1:1-4).

He split her (meaning Tiamat the primitive water) into two...one half of her he set up and stretched out as the heavens (*Enuma Eliš* 4:137-138).

Thus (meaning the other half of Tiamat) he stretched out and made it firm as the earth (*Enuma Eliš* 5:65).

Phrases from the Sippar myth

A city had not been made, a living creature had not been placed (therein) /.../ All the lands were sea (Heidel 1970, 62: 5-10).

Marduk constructed a reed frame on the face of the waters; He created dirt and poured (it) out by the reed frame. In order to settle the gods in the dwelling of (their) hearts' delight, He created mankind (Heidel 1970, 62-63: 17-20).

Lord Marduk piled up a dam at the edge of the sea; [...] a swamp he made into dry land (Heidel 1970, 63: 31-32).

3.2. Comparison with Abrahamic creation accounts

The ancient Mesopotamian creation accounts can be contrasted and compared with the two main Abrahamic religions and their creation accounts. The contents and similarities of both the Old Testament and the Quran when it comes to accounts of creation allow them to be looked at together. The similarities to the Sumerian and Babylonian accounts will be clear in many places.

3.2.1. The Old Testament and monotheism

The Old Testament's first books are traditionally attributed to Moses as the author or – in more reliable terms – editor. Moses was either born, or raised, in Egypt, where the first monotheistic religion was founded by Ikhnaton. The Egyptian religion of Aton was the formal religion of Egypt at the time of Ikhnaton, however all evidence of that religion or its rituals disappeared and vanished by the death of Ikhnaton since his offspring did not take after his religion and rather got back to the old polytheistic religion of Egypt. Thereafter Moses

became known as the creator or the first who proposed the idea of monotheism (Freud, 1939, 27).

The impact of the Atonian religion on the Abrahamic creation myth might be considered as influencing some key differences between the older Mesopotamian creation myths and the Abrahamic creation accounts, seen most commonly through the first book: Genesis.

Genesis

At the beginning there was nothing but a divine spirit in a chaotic void and formless water in eternal darkness until Yahuwah, the divine spirit, creates light out of darkness and out of the formless water he calls the heaven and the earth into being. Then he creates the moon, the sun, planets, stars and the calendar. Rivers and mountains seem to be created very early as well. By the time Yahuwah finishes creating the universe and everything within, the earth was given fertility so seeds can grow, animals can be given lives and then Yahuwah creates mankind out of dust mixed with the divine spirit to rule over the animals (Genesis, 1:1-2:15).

A sub-category of divine-like beings are the angels. There is no mention to when angels were created, but they are mentioned a great deal as the angels of the lord – Yahuwah – and sometimes appear as spirits related to flame and fire (e.g. Exodus 3:2).

What is interesting about Old Testament creation myth is that most of the time it doesn't refer to Yahuwah, the Old Testament's god as the creator of the cosmos, but more like the organizer, literally, the one who regulates the chaos, gives it name and out of it calls things into being. He, for instance, orders the dry land to appear and the water to be gathered in one place so seas will be created (Genesis 1:9-10). In other words, the Old Testament's god is not referred to as the creator of the universe in Genesis; instead he is the wise judge with a vision and idea of how the perfect world should be, which makes his character, the god deciding faith and destinies.

3.2.2. The Quran creation mythology

The Quran is conceived by its believers to be the words of Allah, the Islamic creator god, given to humanity through Muhammad, who is conceived by believers in the Quran to be the prophet and messenger of Allah. The book was written by several different scribes and collected in one standard manuscript in 652 A.D. (Cook, 2000, chapter 1). The creation story

in the Quran is not mentioned in a chronological order in one chapter – called Surah – or verse, instead it develops in various verses.

The Quran

In the beginning there was only Allah, the creator god, sitting in his crown on primitive water. The sky and the earth were united in one formless smoky body. Then Allah separates them and makes them have their present shapes. First in order Allah created the earth then mountains and rivers and then the heaven (Quran 13:2, 88:18-19). Allah creates seven skies and seven earths beneath each other, as in seven layers (Quran 65:12).

The sun, the moon, the planets and stars were created to light up the earth. Allah made the rain pour from the sky so the vegetation of the earth would come into being. Next all living, breathing and moving creatures were created from water. At last, Allah created humans from clay mixed with his spirit to work, plant the earth and worship him (Quran, 39:11, 9:105).

Allah's angels warn and question his decision on making mankind the dominator on earth by asking him; “will you place upon the earth one who causes corruption therein and sheds blood?” (Quran 2:30). This indicates that angels have an eternal knowledge of destinies (Al-Azm, 1969, 91). However the angels in the Quran – like in the Old Testament – have no role in the process of creation, but their task is to be god’s messengers to humans on earth and to take the souls of the dead ones (Genesis 24:7, 40; 31:11; Quran 19:46, 6:61). They don’t have a free will, their duty is to do whatever god asks them to do. As they should obey god, one of them manages to disobey him and work against him, becoming the source of evil on the earth (Quran 20:116, 38:74).

3.2.3. Summary of the Abrahamic creation accounts

The Abrahamic gods are conceived in the interpretations of the Abrahamic text as monotheistic gods.

In the beginning there was nothing but the divine creator god Yahuwah or Allah alone and the primitive water.

Earth and sky were united in a formless, inseparable body until the Abrahamic god separates them, rise the sky up and makes the earth flat under.

Mountains and rivers were created very early.

Then the moon, the sun as light sources and other planets and stars get created.

Then the earth gets fertilized by the rain or the sun so the vegetation starts.

Animals were created and lastly mankind formed of clay and the divine spirit is given life.

Angels as divine messengers are created of fire or light and they exist with no indication as to how or when they were created. Those creatures nevertheless have access to both the human and the divine world as they travel freely between heaven and earth.

Notes on the Abrahamic creation accounts

The number seven is important in both creation texts, as both indicated that the creation of the cosmos was done in 6 days and the creator god took rest on the seventh day (Genesis 2:2-4, 17; Quran 25:59, 11:7). The number seven was mentioned in the Babylonian Enki and Ninhursag's myth as the number of healing deities who came to life when Ninhursag helped healing Enki after he had eaten seven plants and had been in pain because of them.

Because the angels have the knowledge of destinies, they might be compared to Qingu the Babylonian destinies tablet's holder before Marduk killed him and took the tablets for himself and out of his blood created mankind.

In both the Old Testament and the Quran the primitive water is not a deity so it does not get referred to as female or male element, but since inside the primitive waters both the earth and the sky existed and from it they came into being, one might argue that it indicates that the primitive water have a womb which inside it things can grow and come to existent, which makes it of a female nature.

The highest religious feminine figure in all Abrahamic books is of a motherly or sisterly character to a savior hero (Exodus 15:20-21; Quran 23:5): her name: Miriam, with variants Mary or Maryam is probably of Northwest Semitic origin and later borrowed into Arabic. The

name has been suggested to contain reference to the word *yam*,⁷ which means “sea” or “lake”, in Hebrew,⁸ and was also borrowed into literary Arabic as *yamm*, “sea, flood, river”, appearing in the Quran only in the Moses story.⁹

3.2.4. Phrases from the Abrahamic creation accounts

In section 3.1.3., some key phrases from some of the Sumerian and Babylonian accounts were collected, which may be compared with passages from the Abrahamic scriptures to illustrate their similarities.

Phrases from the Old Testament

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light (Genesis:1:1).

God made the two great lights the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night and the stars (Genesis 1:16).

Then God formed man from the dust of the ground (Genesis 2:7).

Phrases from the Quran

The heavens and the earth were a joined entity, and we separated them and made from water every living thing (Quran 21:30).

He created the heavens and earth in truth. He wraps the night over the day and wraps the day over the night and has subjected the sun and the moon (Quran 39:5).

And certainly did we create man from an extract of clay (Quran 23:12).

⁷ See, for example, Tigay, 1986, 71.

⁸ Klein, 1987, 259, the word יָם.

⁹ Jeffery, 1938, 293, the word يَمٌّ.

3.3. The difference between the different creation accounts

The differences between the older creation accounts from the Sumerian myths, and the *Enuma Eliš* creation myth on one side, and the Old Testament on the other, is that the latter assumes that earth and water both existed but in formless chaotic shape, while in the *Enuma Eliš* and the Sumerian mythological accounts only water existed, and everything existed inside that primitive waterbody. The same goes here for the Quran creation account which otherwise is identical with the Old Testament's.

The shift from polytheism in both the Sumerian and Babylonian creation myths to the Old Testament and Quran's monotheism is the second difference. The Sumerian and Babylonian myths maintain that different elements in the universe mated and gave birth to other ones and so on until the universe got its current shape. Those elements however are divine and personified. While the Abrahamic gods Yahuwah and Allah created or organized the universe alone, or at least the interpretations we have today of both scriptures claim that.

The third main difference is the material that mankind was created from, which, according to the Sumerian and the Abrahamic creation accounts was clay mixed with divine spirit or blood, while the Babylonian *Enuma Eliš* presumes that humans were made out of Qingu's blood, the holder of the tablet of destinies who was created by Tiamat, the Babylonian primeval goddess, to serve her in her war against the younger generations of gods. The Sippar myth and the *Atrahasis* poem, however, disagree with the *Enuma Eliš* epic on that matter, and agree with the Sumerian and Abrahamic accounts.

The purpose for mankind's creation varies as well; according to the Abrahamic creation accounts, mankind was created to rule over the animals and to take care of the vegetation of the earth. In the Babylonian creation myths, humans were created to free the working deities from labor and to serve them. As for the Sumerian mythology, both purposes apply in Sumerian creation myths: humans are mainly conceived to be created to serve the deities, but there seem to be traditions which take another aspect into account: in a debate poem sometimes called "The Dispute between Cattle and Grain", sometimes called "The Debate between Grain and Sheep", the purpose of mankind's creation is taking care of animals and grain to provide food for the deities (Kramer, 1963, 220-222).

The Sumerian and Babylonian creation mythologies mostly focused on the creation of the cosmos and the universe as the major events of the creation, beside the birth of the deities and their respective family trees. The main event in the Abrahamic creation accounts is rather the creation of mankind.

One might argue that the Abrahamic religious texts consider mankind as the center of the universe, while the Babylonian and Sumerian creation myths considered the elements of the nature being the most important and the center of the universe.

4. Conclusions

After studying and comparing the three sets of creation accounts, one may come to the conclusion that there is no single answer to whether the later accounts are inspired in every detail by the oldest mythical compositions of this kind, meaning the Sumerian creation mythical accounts, since there is no way to find out if there were any older versions of the same myths, given the fact that the Sumerians were the first to invent writing. There might be other ways to look at the texts as well; however I will sum up the result of this limited study in the following main conclusions.

Given the fact that the Sumerians and Akkadian-speaking peoples lived in Mesopotamia and the fact that the Sumerian language kept on being used as the intellectual and religious language long after the Sumerian civilization was assimilated into the Babylonian, the influence of the Sumerian mythology on the Babylonian mythology and literature can be considered as a natural progress rather than a lack of creativity of Babylonians. On the other hand one may be confused by the fact that the Babylonian civilization did not develop a completely independent cosmological thinking differing in more than some details from the Sumerian accounts.

Since the Babylonian language from the early second millennium B.C had become the diplomatic language from Mesopotamia to the western coast of modern Syria, north to modern Turkey and south to Tell Amarna in Egypt. The great spread of the language, was followed by a great spread of the culture and beliefs that sooner or later were going to become the dominating culture and beliefs, witnessed by the Abrahamic faiths. In addition, there is the factor of the Babylonian captivity during the sixth century B.C. that may have left a great impact on the way that certain parts of the Old Testament were written. All these factors made the *Enuma Eliš* throw its shadow on the Abrahamic creation accounts.

Considering the close proximity of the different cultures, it is not out of the question that this proximity resulted in the close similarities in their creation mythologies that have been displayed in the present work. And since the Old Testament was the first Abrahamic text, in

addition to the influences from the Atonian religion in Egypt had time to make its way north and sparked the idea of a monotheistic creation myth.

Eventually there might be very different explanations to the similarities of the creation epics, people might try to scientifically refute or prove them, regardless how anyone might treat, see, understand or feel about any of these texts, it is important to keep in mind that those texts are products of literature, and the information we get from them are about people's way of thinking and believing, so the accuracy of the historical or cosmological context is not a concern.

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Appendix A. Glossary of important Sumerian deities' names

Here, the most important Sumerian deities of relevance to the creation myths treated in this study are listed, along with common properties associated with them, and relationships to other gods.¹⁰

An: the Sumerian word for heaven, and the sky god and supreme leader of the gods for a period of time in the Sumerian mythology.

Annunaki: the Annunaki are unnamed Sumerian gods who are mentioned frequently as participants in the creation process. They have An as their begetter in the myth of Cattle and Grain, and they are described as the seven judges in the Netherworld in a myth called Inanna's descent to the netherworld.

Enki: god of fresh-water and wisdom in the Sumerian mythology. He is the son of Nammu and it is he who gives the order to create mankind.

Enlil: supreme god and a leader in the god's pantheon in the Sumerian mythology, he is called the great mountain, the lord of the foreign lands.

Ereškigal: the Netherworld's goddess.

Nammu/Namma: primeval water goddess, who gave birth to all gods in the Sumerian Mythology.

Nanna: the moon god in the Sumerian creation myth.

Ninhursag: the earth and mother goddess in the Sumerian paradise myth, who named herself Nintur, the fertilized goddess.

Ninkurra: lady of the mountains land in Sumerian, and she is the granddaughter of Enki and Ninhursag in the Sumerian paradise myth.

Ninlil: the wife of Enlil and mother of Nanna in the Sumerian mythology.

Ninmah: a Sumerian goddess who is described as Enki's sister in the Sumerian poem Enki and Ninmah which she plays a subsidiary role in the creation in it.

Uttu: a vegetation deity in the Sumerian paradise myth. She is the great-granddaughter of Enki and Ninhursag.

Utu: the sun god in Sumerian mythology, who is son of Nanna.

¹⁰ The information has been gathered from the material referred to in the study, and in general from Black and Green, 2014.

Appendix B. Glossary of important Babylonian deities' names

Here, the most important Babylonian deities of relevance to the creation myths treated in this study are listed, along with common properties associated with them, and relationships to other gods.¹¹

Anšar: the third generation of deities in the Babylonian mythology, he is the son of Lahmu and Lahamu and the father of Anu.

Anu, the sky god who equals An in the Sumerian mythology. He is the son of Anšar and Kišar and he is the father of all gods in the Babylonian mythology.

Apsu: the primitive water and father god in the Babylonian mythology.

Ea: freshwater god who has magical powers and equals Enki in the Sumerian mythology. He is the son of Anu and the father of Marduk in the Babylonian mythology.

Ki: the earth goddess in the Babylonian mythology, who were the offspring of the goddess Nammu.

Marduk: the king of all gods in the Babylonian pantheon, who created the earth and sky of Tiamat's corpse and who created mankind.

Qingu: Babylonian deity created by Tiamat as her army's leader. Mankind is created from his blood by Marduk in the Babylonian creation myth, the *Enuma Eliš*.

Sin: the moon god in the Babylonian mythology equals Nanna in the Sumerian mythology.

Šamaš: the sun god in the Babylonian creation equals Utu in the Sumerian mythology.

Tiamat: the primitive water and mother goddess in the Babylonian mythology.

¹¹ The information has been gathered from the material referred to in the study, and in general from Black and Green, 2014.