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A Study on Comparison of Creation in the Ancient near East

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Abstract – All cultures celebrate such myths and attribute to them varying degrees of literal or symbolic truth. Myths are retold orally from generation to generation and/or preserved in sacred collections or scripture, often believed to have emanated from a deity or deities. Myths are not only the stories of so-called dead cultures and religions such as those of the Ancient Greeks, Romans, Norse, or Egyptians. Extraordinary and supernatural sacred narratives are central to Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and Taoists, as well as to people of animist traditions to which the terms “pagan” and “primitive” have traditionally been applied with a negative connotation. Most mythologies which is to say, religions have deities, most have heroes who perform certain ritual deeds, many of which are found in most mythologies the quest, the descent to the Underworld, for example. Universal patterns or common motifs in mythology have been called archetypal, that is, reflective of psychological tendencies that are common to the human species as a whole. Nowhere in the Bible is the worldview of the ancient Israelites or their values toward nature explicitly laid out. This is not surprising. Ancient Israel was what Edward Hall has characterized as a high context society. In high context societies a rich common culture is assumed by all the members of the society, and the identity of individual members is defined in terms of that culture.

Keywords: Cultures, Myths, Truth, Believed, Religions, Ancient, Mythologies, Universal, Human, etc.

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INTRODUCTION

A comparison of the world's creation myths reveals basic creation types. Commentators on these myths have categorized them in different ways from various perspectives. Anthropologists have long recognized such dominant cultural motifs as creation from nothing, emergence creations, and earth-diver creations. Moreover, because the society is based upon a common culture, each individual requires an adequate understanding of that culture in order to function well within the society. Low context societies like the United States, in contrast, do not require little knowledge of culture in order for their members to get along, nor does culture play a determinative role in forming individual identity. According to a common axiom, the United States is not a society based on humans, i.e. culture, but on laws. A member of any other society can function well in the United States by simply adhering to minimal legal restrictions. This distinction between low and high context societies provides a helpful model for understanding the type of texts each society produces. On the one hand, low context societies tend to produce very detailed texts. Because little culture is shared among its members, texts written for low context audiences must describe in detail all

the relevant cultural features that are necessary to understand the text. The texts produced by high context societies, on the other hand, frequently lack this detail. They are written by insiders for insiders, and so most aspects of culture can be assumed.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

All the members of the society have been socialized into shared ways of perceiving and acting. Therefore, high context audiences do not need to be instructed in the culture because they are already intimately familiar with it (Ferdowsi, 2006). Such instruction, in fact, would be considered an insult, for it would challenge an audience's identification with its own culture, thus insinuating that they were outsiders. The Bible was produced by a high context society for high context readers. It assumes a rich culture that the biblical writers felt no need to describe. It is not surprising, then, that the Bible lacks any explicit articulation of the Israelites' worldview and values toward the natural world. Their worldview and values were simply assumed by all members of the society; they formed the presupposition of the biblical writers rather than the subject of their discourse. Consequently, we cannot expect to discover their

worldview and values from a low context reading of the biblical texts. If we hope to glean their unexpressed worldview and values from the biblical texts, then we must become acquainted with the ancient Israelite culture that is assumed by the texts. In other words, we must read the Bible from the high context perspective in which it was written. Fortunately for our purposes, the biblical texts themselves contain clues in the form of metaphor and myth that help to reveal the relevant aspects of ancient Israel's culture.

Myths of World Creation: From the first great culture of Mesopotamia, the Sumerians, no myth of world creation has survived. However, there are a few scattered references in other texts that make allusion to this creation, especially in their introductions where Sumerian scribes were accustomed to adding a few lines dealing with creation. In the epic tale entitled *Gilgamesh, Enkidu, and the Nether World*, for example, the first intelligible lines of the introduction read as follows:

After heaven had been moved away from earth,

After earth had been separated from heaven,

After the name of man had been fixed;

After An had carried off heaven,

After Enlil had carried off earth,

After (the earth) had been presented as dowry to Ereshkigal in the nether world

The introduction continues by telling how Enki, the god of the sweet waters, sets out to attack Kur, but for what reason, the text does not indicate. According to this brief account, the creation of the world involves the separating of the united heaven and earth, and the dividing of the respective gods of the heaven and the earth. A further detail is given in the introduction to *The Creation of the Pickax*; it was Enlil, the god of the air, who separates the heaven and the earth (Hultgard, Anders, 1998). In turning our attention to the heirs of the Sumerian culture, the Babylonians and the Assyrians, the myths of world creation become more plentiful and detailed. The most elaborate of these creation myths is frequently entitled the *Babylonian Creation Epic*, or more accurately, the *Enuma Elish*, the traditional title based on the first two words of the myth. Although the myth ostensibly describes how Marduk, the chief god of Babylon, rose to prominence among the gods and established monarchy [2], it also details his construction and organization of the world and the creation of humankind. Before we examine the myth, however, a helpful distinction needs to be made between the macrocosm and the microcosm. The macrocosm is the transcendent world of the gods that underlies and supports the microcosm. It may be eternal, or it might emerge from some preexistent state, such as water. The microcosm is best equated with the known world. This is the world of humans,

animals, plants, birds, fish, but also of the sun, moon, and stars. It is the physical world that mirrors or replicates the world of the gods. The *Enuma Elish* begins by describing the primordial state of the macrocosm, before the birth of the gods, when there existed only the two primal forces: Apsu, the fresh water, and Tiamat, the salt water. "When 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 (Kreyenbroek, Philip. 2002)."

Myths of Human Creation: Closely related to the myths of world creation are those of human creation. In fact, human creation is often placed in the context of world creation. This is true of the Sumerian myth of *Enki and Ninham*. This myth begins by describing the structure of the world that resulted from the creation:

In days of yore, the days when heaven and earth had been fashioned, in nights of yore, the nights when heaven and earth had been fashioned, in years of yore, the years when the modes of being were determined, when the Anunnaki gods had been born when the goddess-mothers had been chosen for marriage, when the goddess-mothers had been assigned to heaven or earth, and when the goddess-mothers had had intercourse, had become pregnant, and had given birth, did the gods for whom they baked their food portions and set therewith their tables, did the major gods oversee work, while the minor gods were shouldering the menial labor. The gods were dredging the rivers, were piling up their silt on projecting bends – and the gods lugging the clay began complaining about the corvée (The Vishnu Purana, 1840. Mahabharata, Vana Parva, 1896. Mallory, 1989. Nigosian, 1993). The creation of the world had resulted in a great disparity between the major and the minor gods. On the minor gods fell the task of maintaining the earth, particularly the work of dredging the rivers and canals? This is hard, back-breaking work, so the gods began to complain. Fearful to approach Enki, they bring their complaint to Namma, Enki's mother and the mother who bore all the major gods.

Nihilo Creation: The central fact of the creation from nothing, or ex nihilo, creation myth type is a supreme deity, existing alone in a pre-creation emptiness or void, which consciously creates an organized universe on his own. Thus the God of the Hebrews in Genesis simply decides to create, and He „made Heaven and Earth. The ex nihilo creation is firmly imbedded in the collective psyche in the parts of the world dominated by the monotheistic religions; Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, religions centered on an all-powerful supreme deity who embodies in himself all of the elements assigned to various deities in polytheistic systems. But the ex nihilo creation is not limited to the three Abrahamic religions and is not the exclusive

product of the monotheistic cultures. In fact, it is ubiquitous in all parts of the world and is arguably the most common of the five types. It existed in ancient Egypt, in the ancient Rig Veda of India, and is present to this day in the mythologies of many animistic cultures of Africa, Asia, Oceania, and North America. The mythological ancestors of the ex nihilo creator are, in all likelihood, the sky gods of earlier religions; the personifications of the elements of nature we associate with the heavens. The ex nihilo creator often maintains characteristics of ancient storm and weather gods and embodies the power of the sun.

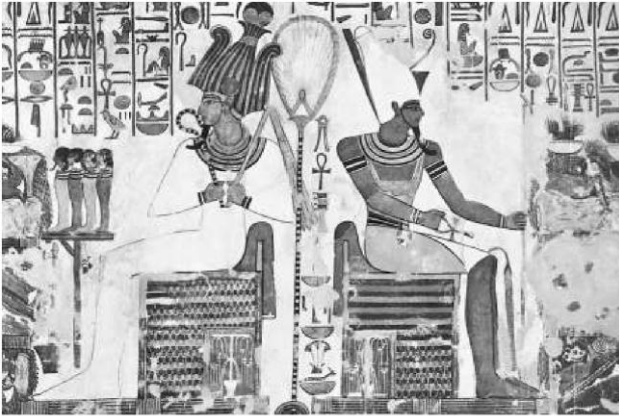


Figure 1 - Egyptian tomb painting and hieroglyphs depicting the gods

The Lenape hero Nana push decided to „make use of powers given him by the Creator to create a new world. The Wiyot Condor decided to mate with his sister, and the first of the new people were born. „They looked just right, and they made more people. Old Man in the heavens was happy. Sometimes the creator simply makes completely new post-flood humans. The Tlingit creator-trickster Raven „made new humans out of leaves and the old humans became stones. But to „Our Father all of this adds up not to the healthy development of his children into adulthood, individuality, and creativity, but to disobedience and corruption. The natural instinct of the defied patriarch is to punish the wrongdoers, those who defy him even as they imitate him and his creation. So comes the flood that will wipe the slate clean and provide the possibility of a new creation. The waters are, of course, a model for the waters of birth and the ark is the placenta of rebirth Chosen representatives of an obedient humanity become the fetuses of that rebirth and will participate in a new creation, the success of which, of course, remains to be seen. The assumption of the obedient descendants of the chosen is that the Supreme Deity is still there controlling his creation.



Figure 2- the Creation One of six panels illustrating the six days of the creation of the world this panel represents the creation of the sun and moon and stars. Florentine woodcut, late 15th century

CONCLUSION:

The myth of the universe image, creation mythology, human, hero and ritual myth and resurrection myth in a reduction process in myth, the cosmos system (in macro size) at last ends to social system on earth. Myths of creation (and also the myth of time) do unquestionably belong to the first category, in as much as they portray the making of the world, even in those cases where that primal process of events includes the feats of individual heroes in adventurous tiding. All creation myths are cosmological, but the reverse is not always the case. All cosmological myths are myths of change in the world order, and of those some are myths of primary change of world order. All creation myths are myths of primary change of world order, and vice versa. Adventure myths, where heroes tirelessly proceeding on their quests are performing their grand feats, others are struck terribly by the most tragic events, tribes are finding their land, fighting a mighty foe, and so forth. These characters may be human beings, animals or the kinds of super humans usually labeled gods - no matter, as long as the myth in question is mainly an adventure story.

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