



The Debate Between Sheep and Grain

A Sumerian Creation Myth

Once upon a time, before the world was created, there was a place where the gods lived. It wasn't quite heaven, and it wasn't quite Earth. It was somewhere in between. Perhaps it was the place where the two met. It was here that mankind was given its first place to live. It was in this place that the gods created Edin.

At first, only the gods could live in Edin. Over time, the Anunnaki (a group of gods) created humans and allowed them to enter the land. The world that humans first entered was barren. There were no sheep or goats. No grains grew. There was nothing for people to make clothes from and so they wandered the world naked. The only thing that they could find to eat was grass. For water, they were forced to drink from ditches and stagnant ponds. It was not a welcoming place to live.

The god An decided that something needed to be done. An had already created the goddess of cattle, Lahar, and the grain goddess Ashnan. It was Ashnan that had first made people and brought them to the world. Between them, these gods vowed to create a better world for humans.

Ashnan was given a horse and a plough so that she could grow and harvest grain. She used these tools to pass on her knowledge to the people. She built them fields and sowed their seeds and made sure that they grew.

The Anunnaki gave Lahar sheep and a pen to keep them. Lahar used this knowledge to teach people how to farm animals. It was through this that humans learned about agriculture.

At the same time, the Anunnaki were also busy. Enki was one of the first gods created and hated disorder. Enki decided that the gods could only avoid chaos if everybody had jobs to do. As lord of wisdom, Enki was responsible for the most important jobs. He created the Tigris and Euphrates rivers and filled them with water from the mountains. He carved out the smaller streams and rivers and allowed water to flow into them. When he was finished with these, Enki created marshes and reedbeds and filled them with birds, fish and insects.



Enki felt that his work still wasn't complete. He set out and founded all of the cities of the world and created the first Sumerian kings. He gave them control over the world. When that was complete, he created the seasons of the Earth. Enki made sure that the rivers flooded in spring to fertilise the soil and that the crops had time to rest during the winter.

Finally, the world was ready to be left to humans.

In total, there are seven "debates" from Ancient Sumeria. Each one tells a different part of their creation story.

RETRIEVAL FOCUS

1. What was the name of the place that the first gods lived in?
2. What did the first humans eat in the myth?
3. Which god was given a horse?
4. Who was responsible for the most important jobs?
5. How many "debates" were there in Sumerian mythology?

VIPERS QUESTIONS

V

Find and copy a word that means that somewhere was empty and nothing could grow there.

V

Which word in the text has a meaning closest to "cut out or scraped"?

I

Why did An decide that something needed to be done for the humans?

S

What did Enki do after he created the streams and rivers?

S

What was Enki's final job?

Answers:

1. Edin
2. Grass
3. Ashnan
4. Enki
5. 7

V: Barren

V: Carved

I: It wasn't a nice place to live/there was no food or clothing

S: He created the marshes, reedbeds, fish, birds and insects

S: He created the seasons/made sure the rivers flooded in spring and crops rested in winter