

Eridu Genesis

The Eridu Genesis is written on a Sumerian cuneiform tablet of which about two thirds are now lost. The missing parts can be reconstructed from texts like the Sumerian King List and Berossus:

The story of the Creation and Flood has been extremely influential. Among the texts that were inspired by it are the Epic of Atrahasis, Tablet XI of the Babylonian Epic of Gilgameš, Berossus, the Biblical account of the Deluge, and several Greek and Roman sources, like Ovid.

The translation of the Eridu Genesis offered here is adapted from a translation by Thorkild Jacobson. It starts after a long lacuna, in which the creation of man must have been described.¹

The Creator Goddess thinks about humankind

[1'-9'] Nintur was paying attention:

"Let me bethink myself of my humankind, all forgotten as they are;
and mindful of mine, Nintur's, creatures let me bring them back,
let me lead the people back from their trails.
Let them come and build cities and cult places,
that I may cool myself in their shade;
may they lay the bricks for the cult cities in pure spots,
and may they found places for divination in pure spots!"

She gave directions for purification, and cries for clemency,
the things that cool divine wrath,

[10'ff] perfected the divine service and the august offices,
said to the surrounding regions: "Let me institute peace there!"

When An, Enlil, Enki, and Ninhursaga
fashioned the dark-headed people,
they had made the small animals that came up from out of the earth
come from the earth in abundance and had let there be, as befits it,
gazelles, wild donkeys, and four-footed beasts in the desert.

¹ This material is from the following website: <https://www.livius.org/sources/content/oriental-varia/eridu-genesis/#cities>

[large part lost; perhaps a story of a failed attempt to build a city]

Creation of kingship

[32'-40'] ... "and let me have him advise;

let me have him oversee their labor,

and let him teach the nation to follow like unerringly like cattle!"

When the royal scepter was coming down from heaven,

the august crown and the royal throne being already down from heaven,

the king regularly performed to perfection

the august divine services and offices,

and laid the bricks of those cities in pure spots.

They were named by name and allotted half-bushel baskets.

The first cities

[41'ff] The firstling of the cities, Eridu, she gave to the leader Nudimmud,

the second, Bad-Tibira, she gave to the Prince and the Sacred One,

the third, Larak, she gave to Pahilsag,

the fourth, Sippar, she gave to the gallant Utu,

the fifth, Šuruppak, she gave to Ansud.^{note}

These cities, which had been named by names,

and had been allotted half-bushel baskets,

dredged the canals, which were blocked with purplish

wind-borne clay, and they carried water,

Their cleaning of the canals established abundant growth

[Large part lost, in which the antediluvian kings must have been mentioned. Working in the canals and on the fields, they produced so much noise, that the supreme god Enlil persuaded the other gods to destroy humankind.]

[81'-89'] That day, Nintur wept over her creatures
and holy Inanna was full of grief over her people;
but Enki took counsel with his own heart.
An, Enlil, Enki, and Ninhursaga
had the gods of heaven and earth swear by the names of An and Enlil.

Ziusudra's Vision

At that time Ziusudra was king and lustration priest.
He fashioned, being a seer, the god of giddiness^{note}
and stood in awe beside it, wording his wishes humbly.
As he stood there regularly day after day

[90'-99'] something that was not a dream was appearing: conversation,
a swearing of oaths by heaven and earth, a touching of throats,^{note} and the gods bringing their thwarts
up to Kiur.

Enki's advice

And as Ziusudra stood there beside it, he went on hearing:
"Step up to the wall to my left and listen!
Let me speak a word to you at the wall and may you grasp what I say,
may you heed my advice! By our hand a flood will sweep over
the cities of the half-bushel baskets, and the country;
the decision, that mankind is to be destroyed, has been made.
A verdict, a command of the assembly, can not be revoked,

[100'ff] no order of An and Enlil is known to have been countermanded,

their kingship, their term, has been uprooted; they must bethink themselves ...

Now ...

What I have to say to you ..."

[Lacuna; Enki orders Ziusudra to build the ark and load it with pairs of animals.]

The Flood

[132'f] All the evil winds, all stormy winds gathered into
one and with them, them, the Flood was sweeping over the cities of the half-bushel baskets,
for seven days and seven nights.

After the flood had swept over the country,
after the evil wind had tossed the big boat about on the great waters,
the sun came out spreading light over heaven and earth.

Ziusudra's sacrifice

[138'-139'] Ziusudra then drilled an opening in the big boat
and the gallant Utu sent his light into the interior of the big boat.

[140'] Ziusudra, being the king,
stepped up before Utu kissing the ground before him.
The king was butchering oxen, was being lavish with the sheep,
barley cakes, crescents together with ...

... he was crumbling for him

...

juniper, the pure plant of the mountains he filled on the fire
and with a ... clasped to
the breast he ...

[Lacuna; Enlil is angry at finding survivors, but Enki explains himself]

End of Enki's speech

[175'-178'] "You here have sworn by the life's breath of heaven, the life's breath of earth that he verily is allied with you yourself;

you there, An and Enlil, have sworn by the life's breath of heaven, the life's breath of earth, that he is allies with all of you.

He will disembark the small animals that come up from the earth!"

Reward of Ziusudra

[179'] Ziusudra, being king, stepped up before An and Enlil, kissing the ground,
and An and Enlil after honoring him

[180'ff] were granting life like a god's,
were making lasting breath of life, like a god's, descend into him.
That day they made Ziusudra, preserver, as king,
of the small animals and the seed of mankind,
live toward the east over the mountains of Dilmun.note