First Writing Assignment: Genesis 1 and its Ancient Near Eastern Contexts
Due IN CLASS in printed form on Thursday, February 13.

**Background:** The *Enuma Elish* is a canonical Mesopotamian creation myth with a strong polytheistic context. It begins with a description of the world prior to heaven and earth – when Apsu, a male god who represents primeval freshwater, has sex with Tiamat, a goddess who represents primeval saltwater. This sexual union brings about the first demons and monsters into the world, and then only after them both good and evil gods, who are numerous and battle one another.

The *Enuma Elish* exhibits some similarities and differences to Genesis 1-2. It dates to around the 2nd millennium BCE, but our copy is from the 7th century BCE (Nineveh). It is a poem that celebrates the “triumph of order over chaos and the ascendency of Marduk,” a Babylonian deity, “as supreme ruler of the Babylonian pantheon,” in four sections – birth of gods; struggles between them; cosmogony; praise of Marduk. This work was highly influential in ancient Mesopotamia, and on the Bible – Psalms and Jeremiah often refer the battle between the Lord and a sea beast similar to Marduk and Tiamat.1

**The Assignment:** Read the following passage from the Enuma Elish. Write an essay (min. 400 words; max. 600 words) that gives detailed and succinct answers to each of the following prompts:

1. Compare the role of water in this excerpt of the Enuma Elish as compared to the role of water in Genesis 1 (especially Gen 1:1-1:9) (at least two points of comparison)
2. Compare how the power of divine naming or speaking plays a role in these two texts (at least two points of comparison)
3. In class, we saw how the Hebrew word for “deep” (*tehom*) in Gen 1:2 comes from the same root as the word for “Tiamat.” If we interpret Genesis 1’s reference to “deep” as related to Tiamat, how might the meaning of the creation story in Genesis change?
4. What can one learn by comparing the biblical text with its ancient Near Eastern contexts? Be as specific as you can.

**Excerpt from *Enuma Elish***

When skies 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.  
Lahmu and Lahaumu emerged, their names pronounced.  
As soon as they matured, were fully formed,  
Anshar and Kishar were born, surpassing them.

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1 Assignment drawn and adapted from J. Mohktarian, “Intro to the Hebrew Bible Course,” 2018
REL-A 210: First Writing Assignment (Spring 2020) Grading Rubric

Student: ________________________________

Comments:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria for Evaluation</th>
<th>Strong (A range) (5)</th>
<th>Satisfactory (B range) (4-3)</th>
<th>Needs Improvement (C range) (1-2)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Does the essay address all areas of the prompt?</td>
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<td>Does the essay employ specific textual evidence (biblical and comparative ancient texts) to illustrate and defend their points?</td>
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<td>Does the essay demonstrate intelligible and creative thinking about the assigned texts and their context?</td>
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<td>Is the essay easy to read, and relatively free of grammatical errors? Does it follow the notation directions given in Appendix I of the syllabus? Does it fall within the word count range? (400-600 words)</td>
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Grade:  /20