**A17932, on display in the Edgar and Deborah Jannotta Mesopotamian Gallery**

Tiamat may be considered an ingenious evil dragon goddess in Dungeons & Dragons, but her behavior in the Babylonian Myth of Creation (Enuma Elish) suggests that she did not always make the best choices. A pair of primordial gods, Tiamat and Apsu were the only entities in existence initially. Tiamat personified salt waters and Apsu fresh waters; they came together and produced the younger gods. These gods disturbed Apsu, so he planned to eradicate them, leading the younger god Ea to slay Apsu. Tiamat therefore decided to avenge herself on the younger gods and created eleven monsters and appointed her new consort, the god Qingu, to command them. Marduk defeated the monsters, Tiamat’s consort Qingu, and Tiamat herself, and used her body to create the world. In mythology she is depicted as a dragon, but not the five-headed dragon of D&D fame.

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**A25413, on display in the Dr. Norman Solhkhah Family Assyrian Empire Gallery**

We already looked at Pazuzu last week, but here’s a quick recap for those who may have missed it! Although a demon, Pazuzu was invoked to protect women and children against the demon Lamashtu (in D&D she is Pazuzu’s enemy and former consort). Therefore, it seems rather unfair for Dungeons & Dragons to attribute him with a chaotic evil alignment. This depiction may be influenced by Pazuzu’s star turn in the film The Exorcist, where he is also incorrectly depicted as an evil demon that possesses a young girl.

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A7369, on display in the Edgar and Deborah Jannotta Mesopotamian Gallery

We all know the lamassu, as it is one of the most iconic pieces in the OI museum! The lamassu is a figure that guarded the gateways at Neo-Assyrian palaces, warding off evil and protecting palace inhabitants from any harm. Lamassu also appear at Achaemenid Persepolis. Therefore, it is not surprising that Dungeons & Dragons states that the lamassu is “lawful good.”

A17666, not on display

The first edition Advanced Dungeons & Dragons manual Deities & Demigods casts the god Marduk as a lawful neutral 16th level magic user, as well as a 15th level bard. As the destroyer of Tiamat (and described in the Enuma Elish as being “king of the gods” after he destroys Tiamat), one would have expected him to rank somewhat higher. Further, he was also the patron god of the city of Babylon, which influenced his rise to king of the gods. Indeed, in some later versions of the Enuma Elish, Marduk is replaced with the god Ashur, reflecting the preeminence of the Neo-Assyrian empire at the time. Marduk was particularly identified with the planet Jupiter in the first millennium BC. Marduk presumably carries a silver net in the first edition of Dungeons & Dragons because he used a net to trap Tiamat in the Babylonian creation myth.
HERE ARE SOME OTHER D&D CHARACTERS THAT MIGHT LOOK FAMILIAR:

**Sphinx**

A27853, on display in the Henrietta Herbolsheimer, M.D. Syro-Anatolia Gallery

There are many different types of sphinxes in Dungeons & Dragons, with different levels of intelligence and different alignments. This example from the Oriental Institute Museum comes from the excavations of Tell Tayinat in Turkey. Sphinxes were an Egyptian construct that then spread throughout the ancient Near East, and examples such as this one were made locally.

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**Griffin**

A22212, on display in the Haas and Schwartz Megiddo Gallery

The griffin is described in Dungeons & Dragons as a semi-intelligent creature with a neutral alignment. The term “griffin” comes from the Greek, but such creatures also appear in ancient Egyptian and Near Eastern art. This example comes from the excavations at Megiddo and dates to the Late Bronze Age IIB period (1300–1200 BC). It is carved in a Mycenaean style, which means it could have been imported from the Aegean or be a locally made imitation.

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E10797, on display in the Joseph and Mary Grimshaw Egyptian Gallery

When mummies appear in Dungeons & Dragons, they inspire fear and instill a terrible rotting curse. Nevertheless, it is hard to imagine our brightly decorated mummy of the temple singer Meresamun inspiring similar feelings!

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