

From *Mythologies of the Ancient World*,  
edited by Samuel Noah Kramer  
(New York, 1961), pp. 93-137.

# Mythology of Sumer and Akkad

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*The extant myths of the Sumerians and Akkadians revolve primarily about the creation and organization of the universe, the birth of the gods, their loves and hates, their spites and intrigues, their blessings and curses, their creative and destructive acts. Only rarely do the Sumero-Akkadian myths revolve about the struggle for power between the gods, and even then the struggle is not usually depicted as a bitter, vindictive, and gory conflict. Intellectually speaking, the Sumero-Akkadian myths reveal a rather mature and sophisticated approach to the gods and their divine activities; behind them can be recognized considerable theological and cosmological reflection.*

## SUMER

As yet no Sumerian myths have been recovered dealing directly and explicitly with the creation of the universe; what little is known about the Sumerian cosmogonic ideas has been inferred and deduced from laconic statements scattered throughout the literary documents. But we do have a number of myths concerned with the organization of the universe and its cultural processes, the creation of man, and the

establishment of civilization. The deities involved in these myths are relatively few in number: the air-god Enlil, the water-god Enki, the mother goddess Ninhursag (also known as Nintu and Ninmah), the god of the south wind Ninurta, the moon-god Nanna-Sin, the Bedu-god Martu, and above all the goddess Inanna, particularly in relationship to her unlucky spouse Dumuzi.

Enlil was the most important deity of the Sumerian pantheon, "the father of the gods," "the king of heaven and earth," "the king of all the lands." According to the myth "Enlil and the Creation of the Pickax," he was the god who separated heaven from earth, brought up "the seed of the land" from the earth, brought forth "whatever was needful," fashioned the pickax for agricultural and building purposes, and presented it to the "blackheads" (the Sumerians, or perhaps mankind as a whole). According to the myth "Summer and Winter," Enlil was the god who brought forth all trees and grains, produced abundance and prosperity in "the land," and appointed "Winter" as the "farmer of the gods," in charge of the life-producing waters and of all that grows. The gods—even the most important among them—are all eager for his blessing. One myth relates how the water-god Enki, after building his "sea house" in Eridu, journeyed to Enlil's temple in Nippur in order to obtain his approval and benediction. When the moon-god Nanna-Sin, the tutelary deity of Ur, wants to make sure of the well-being and prosperity of his domain he journeys to Nippur on a boat loaded with gifts and thus obtains Enlil's generous blessing.

But although Enlil is the chief of the Sumerian pantheon, his powers are by no means unlimited and absolute. One of the more "human" and tender of the Sumerian myths concerns Enlil's banishment to the Nether World and tells the following story:

When man had not yet been created and the city of Nippur was inhabited by gods alone, "its young man" was the Enlil; "its young maid" was the goddess Ninlil; and "its old woman" was Ninlil's mother Nunbarshegunu. One day

the latter, having evidently set her mind and heart on Ninlil's marriage to Enlil, instructs her daughter thus:

*"In the pure stream, woman, bathe in the pure stream,  
Ninlil, walk along the bank of the stream Nunbirdu,  
The bright-eyed, the lord, the bright-eyed,  
The 'great mountain,' father Enlil, the bright-eyed, will see  
you,  
The shepherd . . . who decrees the fates, the bright-eyed,  
will see you,  
Will forthwith embrace (?) you, kiss you."*

Ninlil joyfully follows her mother's instructions:

*In the pure stream, the woman bathes, in the pure stream,  
Ninlil walks along the bank of the stream Nunbirdu,  
The bright-eyed, the lord, the bright-eyed,  
The "great mountain," father Enlil, the bright-eyed, saw her,  
The shepherd . . . who decrees the fates, the bright-eyed,  
saw her.  
The lord speaks to her of intercourse (?), she is unwilling,  
Enlil speaks to her of intercourse (?), she is unwilling;  
"My vagina is too little, it knows not to copulate,  
My lips are too small, they know not to kiss . . ."*

Whereupon Enlil calls his vizier, Nusku, and tells him of his desire for the lovely Ninlil. Nusku brings up a boat and Enlil rapes Ninlil while sailing on the stream, and impregnates her with the moon-god Sin. The gods are dismayed by this immoral deed, and though Enlil is their king, they seize him and banish him from the city to the Nether World. The relevant passage, one of the few to shed some indirect light on the organization of the pantheon and its method of operation, reads:

*Enlil walks about in the Kiur (Ninlil's private shrine),  
As Enlil walks about in the Kiur,  
The great gods, the fifty of them,  
The fate-decreeing gods, the seven of them,*

*Seize Enlil in the Kiur (saying):*

*"Enlil, immoral one, get you out of the city,*

*Nunamnir (an epithet of Enlil), immoral one, get you out  
of the city."*

And so Enlil, in accordance with the fate decreed by the gods, departs in the direction of the Sumerian Hades. Ninlil, however, now pregnant with child, refuses to remain behind, and follows Enlil on his forced journey to the Nether World. This disturbs Enlil, for it would mean that his son Sin, originally destined to be in charge of the largest luminous body, the moon, would have to dwell in the dark gloomy Nether World instead of in the sky. To circumvent this, he seems to devise this rather complicated scheme. On the way to Hades from Nippur he meets up with three individuals, minor deities no doubt: the gatekeeper in charge of the Nippur gates; the "man of the Nether World river"; and the ferryman, the Sumerian "Charon" who ferries the dead across to Hades. Enlil takes the form of each of these in turn—the first known example of divine metamorphosis—and impregnates Ninlil with three Nether World deities as substitutes for their older brother Sin, who is thus free to ascend to heaven.

One of the more detailed and revealing of the Sumerian myths concerns the organization of the universe by Enki, the Sumerian water-god who was also the god of wisdom. The myth begins with a hymn of praise addressed to Enki which exalts Enki as the god who watches over the universe and is responsible for the fertility of field and farm, of flock and herd. There follows a paean of self-glorification put into the mouth of Enki, and concerned primarily with his relationship to the leading deities of the pantheon, An, Enlil, and Nintu, and to the lesser gods known collectively as the Anunnaki. Following a brief five-line passage which tells of the Anunnaki doing homage to Enki, Enki "for a second time" utters a paean of self-glorification. He begins by exalting the power of his word and command in providing the earth with prosperity and abundance; continues with a de-

scription of the splendor of his shrine, the Abzu; and concludes with an account of his joyous journey over the marshland, in his *makurru*-boat, "the ibex of the Abzu," after which the lands Magan, Dilmun, and Meluhha sent their heavily laden boats to Nippur with rich gifts for Enlil. Then the Anunnaki once again pay homage to Enki, particularly as the god who "rides" and directs the *me's*, the divine laws which govern the universe.

The poet now introduces a description of the various rites and rituals performed by some of the more important priests and spiritual leaders of Sumer in Enki's Abzu-shrine. After which we find Enki in his boat once again all set to "decree the fates." Beginning, as might have been expected, with Sumer itself, he first exalts it as a chosen, hallowed land with "lofty" and "untouchable" *me's*, where the gods have taken up their abode, then blesses its flocks and herds, its temples and shrines. From Sumer he proceeds to Ur, which he extols in lofty, metaphorical language and blesses with prosperity and pre-eminence. From Ur he goes to Meluhha and blesses it most generously with trees and reeds, oxen and birds, gold, tin, and bronze. Following which, he proceeds to provide Dilmun, Elam, Marhashi, and Martu with some of their needs.

Enki now turns from the fate and destiny of the various lands which made up the Sumerian inhabited world, and performs a whole series of acts vital to the earth's fertility and productiveness. Directing himself first to its physical features, he begins by filling the Tigris with fresh, sparkling, life-giving water—in the concrete metaphorical imagery of our poet, Enki is a rampant bull who mates with the river imagined as a wild cow. Then, to make sure that the Tigris and Euphrates function properly, he appoints the god Enbilulu, the "canal inspector," to take charge of them. Enki next "called" the marshland and the canebrake, supplied them with fish and reeds, and appointed a deity "who loves fish"—the name is illegible—to take charge of them. He then turns to the sea, erects there his holy shrine, and places the goddess Nanshe, "the Lady of Sirara," in charge. Finally

Enki "called" the life-giving rain, made it come down on earth, and put the storm-god Ishkur in charge.

Enki applies himself to the earth's cultural needs. He attends to the plow, yoke, and furrow and appoints Enlil's farmer, Enkimdu, in charge of them. He next "calls" the cultivated field, brings forth its varied grains and vegetables, and makes the grain-goddess Ashnan responsible for them. He looks after the pickax and brick mold, and puts the brick-god Kulla in charge of them. He lays foundations, aligns the bricks, builds "the house," and puts Mushdamma, "the great builder of Enlil," in charge.

Leaving farm, field, and house, Enki directs his attention to the high plain, covers it with green vegetation, multiplies its cattle, and makes Sumugan, "the king of the mountains," responsible for them. He next erects stalls and sheepfolds, supplies them with the best fat and milk, and appoints the shepherd-god Dumuzi to take charge of them. He fixes the "borders"—presumably of cities and states—sets up boundary stones, and appoints the sun-god Utu "in charge of the entire universe." Finally Enki attends to "that which is woman's task," specially the weaving of cloth, and puts Uttu, the goddess of clothing, in charge.

The myth now takes a rather unexpected turn, as the poet brings on the scene the ambitious and aggressive Inanna, who feels that she has been slighted and left without any special powers and prerogatives. Bitterly she complains that Enlil's sister Aruru, alias Nintu, and her (Inanna's) sister goddesses Ninisinna, Ninmug, Nidaba, and Nanshe have all received their respective powers and insignia, but that she, Inanna, has been singled out for neglectful and inconsiderate treatment. Enki seems to be put on the defensive by Inanna's complaint, and he tries to pacify her by pointing out that she actually does have quite a number of special insignia and prerogatives—"the crook, staff, and ward of shepherdship"; oracular responses in regard to war and battle; the weaving and fashioning of garments; the power to destroy "the indestructible" and to make perish the "imperishable"—as well as by giving her a special blessing. Following Enki's

reply to Inanna the poem closes with a four-line hymnal passage to Enki.

Another Enki myth tells an intricate and as yet somewhat obscure tale which involves the paradise-land Dilmun, perhaps to be identified with ancient India. Very briefly sketched, the plot of this Sumerian "paradise" myth, which treats of gods, not humans, runs thus:

Dilmun is a land that is "pure," "clean," and "bright," a "land of the living," which knows neither sickness nor death. What is lacking, however, is the fresh water so essential to animal and plant life. The great Sumerian water-god Enki, therefore, orders Utu, the sun-god, to fill it with fresh water brought up from the earth. Dilmun is thus turned into a divine garden, green with fruit-laden fields and meadows.

In this paradise of the gods eight plants are made to sprout by Ninhursag, the great mother goddess of the Sumerians, perhaps more originally Mother Earth. She succeeds in bringing these plants into being only after an intricate process involving three generations of goddesses, all conceived by the water-god and born—so our poem repeatedly underlines—without the slightest pain or travail. But probably because Enki wanted to taste them, his messenger, the two-faced god Isimud, plucks these precious plants one by one and gives them to his master Enki, who proceeds to eat them each in turn, whereupon the angered Ninhursag pronounces upon him the curse of death. Evidently to make sure that she does not change her mind and relent, she disappears from among the gods.

Enki's health begins to fail, eight of his organs become sick. As Enki sinks fast, the great gods sit in the dust. Enlil, the air-god, the king of the Sumerian gods, seems unable to cope with the situation when up speaks the fox. If properly rewarded, he says to Enlil, he, the fox, will bring Ninhursag back. As good as his word, the fox succeeds in some way—the relevant passage is unfortunately destroyed—in having the mother goddess return to the gods and heal the dying water-god. She seats him by her vulva and after inquiring which eight organs of his body ache him, she brings into

existence eight corresponding healing deities, and Enki is brought back to life and health.

Although our myth deals with a divine rather than a human paradise, it has numerous parallels with the Biblical paradise story. First, there is some reason to believe that the very idea of a paradise, a garden of the gods, is of Sumerian origin. The Sumerian paradise is located, according to our poem, in Dilmun. It is in this same Dilmun where later, the Babylonians, the Semitic people who conquered the Sumerians, located their "land of the living," the home of their immortals. And there is good indication that the Biblical paradise, too, which is described as a garden planted *eastward* in Eden, from whose waters flow the four world rivers including the Tigris and Euphrates, may have been originally identical with Dilmun, the Sumerian paradise-land.

Again the passage in our poem describing the watering of Dilmun by the sun-god with fresh water brought up from the earth is reminiscent of the Biblical, "But there went up a mist (?) from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground" (Genesis 2:6). The birth of the goddesses without pain or travail illuminates the background of the curse against Eve that it shall be her lot to conceive and bear children in sorrow. And obviously enough, Enki's eating of the eight plants and the curse uttered against him for this misdeed recall the eating of the fruit of the tree of knowledge by Adam and Eve, and the curses pronounced against each of them for this sinful action.

But perhaps the most interesting result of our comparative analysis of the Sumerian poem is the explanation which it provides for one of the most puzzling motifs in the Biblical paradise story, the famous passage describing the fashioning of Eve, "the mother of all living," from the rib of Adam. For why a rib? Why did the Hebrew storyteller find it more fitting to choose a rib rather than any of the other parts of the body for the fashioning of the woman whose name, Eve, according to the Biblical notion, means approximately "she who makes live." The reason becomes quite clear if we assume a Sumerian literary background, such as that rep-

resented by our Dilmun poem, underlying the Biblical paradise tale. For in our Sumerian poem one of Enki's sick members is the rib. Now the Sumerian word for "rib" is *ti* (pronounced "tee"). The goddess created for the healing of Enki's rib therefore was called in Sumerian Nin-ti, "the lady of the rib." But the very same Sumerian word *ti* also means "to make live." The name Nin-ti may thus mean "the lady who makes live," as well as "the lady of the rib." In Sumerian literature, therefore, "the lady of the rib" came to be identified with "the lady who makes live" through what may be termed a play of words. It was this, one of the most ancient of literary puns, which was carried over and perpetuated in the Biblical paradise story, although here, of course, it loses its validity, since the Hebrew word for "rib" and that for "who makes live" have nothing in common.

There is also an Enki-Ninhursag myth concerned with the creation of man from "clay that is over the abyss." The story begins with a description of the difficulties of the gods in procuring their bread, especially, as might have been expected, after the female deities had come into being. The gods complain, but Enki, the water-god, who, as the Sumerian god of wisdom, might have been expected to come to their aid, is lying asleep in the deep and fails to hear them. Thereupon his mother, the primeval sea, "the mother who gave birth to all the gods," brings the tears of the gods before Enki, saying:

*"O my son, rise from your bed, from your . . . work what is wise,  
Fashion servants of the gods, may they produce their doubles (?)."*

Enki gives the matter thought, leads forth the host of "good and princely fashioners," and says to his mother, Nammu, the primeval sea:

*"O my mother, the creature whose name you uttered, it exists,  
Bind upon it the image (?) of the gods;*

*Mix the heart of the clay that is over the abyss,  
 The good and princely fashioners will thicken the clay,  
 You, do you bring the limbs into existence;  
 Ninmah (the earth-mother goddess) will work above you,  
 The goddesses (of birth) . . . will stand by you at your  
 fashioning;  
 O my mother, decree its (the newborn's) fate,  
 Ninmah will bind upon it the mold (?) of the gods,  
 It is man. . . ."*

The poem now turns from the creation of man as a whole to the creation of certain imperfect human types in an obvious attempt to explain the existence of these abnormal beings. It tells of a feast arranged by Enki for the gods, no doubt to commemorate man's creation. At this feast Enki and Ninmah drink much wine and become somewhat exuberant. Ninmah then takes some of the clay which is over the abyss and fashions six different varieties of abnormal individuals, while Enki decrees their fate and gives them bread to eat.

After Ninmah had created these six types of man, Enki decides to do some creating of his own. The manner in which he goes about it is not clear, but whatever it is that he does, the resulting creature is a failure; it is weak and feeble in body and spirit. Enki is now anxious that Ninmah help this forlorn creature; he therefore addresses her as follows:

*"Of him whom your hand has fashioned, I have decreed the  
 fate,  
 Have given him bread to eat;  
 Do you decree the fate of him whom my hand has fashioned,  
 Do you give him bread to eat."*

Ninmah tries to be good to the creature but to no avail. She talks to him but he fails to answer. She gives him bread to eat, but he does not reach out for it. He can neither sit nor stand, nor bend the knees. Following a long but as yet unintelligible conversation between Enki and Ninmah, the latter utters a curse against Enki because of the sick, lifeless crea-

ture which he produced, a curse which Enki seems to accept as his due.

Of Ninurta, the god of the stormy South Wind, there is a myth with a dragon-slaying motif. Following a brief hymnal passage to the god, the plot begins with an address to Ninurta by the Sharur, his personified weapon. For some unstated reason the Sharur had set his mind against Asag, the demon of sickness and disease, whose abode is in the Kur, or Nether World. In a speech which is full of phrases extolling the heroic qualities and deeds of Ninurta, he urges him to attack and destroy the monster. Ninurta sets out to do as bidden. At first, however, he seems to have met more than his match, and he "flees like a bird." Once again the Sharur addresses him with reassuring and encouraging words. Ninurta now attacks the Asag fiercely with all the weapons at his command, and the demon is destroyed.

With the destruction of the Asag, however, a serious calamity overtook Sumer. The primeval waters of the Kur rose to the surface, and as a result of their violence no fresh waters could reach the fields and gardens. The gods of Sumer who "carried its pickax and basket," that is, who had charge of irrigating Sumer and preparing it for cultivation, were desperate. The Tigris did not rise, it had no "good" water in its channel.

*Famine was severe, nothing was produced,  
At the small rivers, there was no "washing of the hands,"  
The waters rose not high.  
The fields are not watered,  
There was no digging of (irrigation) ditches.  
In all the lands there was no vegetation,  
Only weeds grew.  
Thereupon the Lord put his lofty mind to it,  
Ninurta, the son of Enlil brought great things into being.*

He set up a pile of stones over the Kur and heaped it up like a great wall in front of Sumer. These stones held back "the mighty waters," and as a result the waters of the Kur could rise no longer to the surface of the earth. As for

waters which had already flooded the land, Ninurta gathered them and led them into the Tigris, which is now in a position to water the fields with its overflow. Or, as the poet puts it:

*What had been scattered, he gathered,  
 What of the Kur had been scattered,  
 He guided and hurled into the Tigris,  
 The high waters it pours over the fields.  
 Behold, now, everything on earth,  
 Rejoiced afar at Ninurta, the king of the land.  
 The fields produced abundant grain,  
 The vineyard and orchard bore their fruit,  
 The harvest was heaped up in granaries and hills,  
 The Lord made mourning to disappear from the land,  
 He made happy the spirit of the gods.*

Hearing of her son's great and heroic deeds, his mother Ninmah was taken with love for him; she became so restless that she was unable to sleep in her bedchamber. She therefore addresses Ninurta from afar with a prayer for permission to visit him and gaze upon him. Ninurta looks at her with the "eye of life," saying:

*"Oh lady, because you would come to the Kur,  
 Oh Ninmah, because for my sake you would enter the inimical land,  
 Because you have no fear of the terror of the battle surrounding me,  
 Therefore, of the hill which I, the hero, have heaped up,  
 Let its name be Hursag (Mountain) and you be its queen."*

Ninurta then blesses the Hursag that it may produce all kinds of herbs; wine and honey; various kinds of trees; gold, silver, and bronze; cattle, sheep, and all "four-legged creatures." Following this blessing he turns to the stones, cursing those which had been his enemies in his battle with the Asag-demon, and blessing those which had been his friends.

Not a few of the Sumerian myths revolve about the ambitious, aggressive, and demanding goddess of love, Inanna—the Akkadian Ishtar—and her husband, the shepherd-god

Dumuzi—the Biblical Tammuz. The wooing of the goddess by Dumuzi is told in two versions. In the one he contends for her favor with the farmer-god Enkimdu, and is successful only after a good deal of quarrelsome argument leading to threats of violence. In the other, Dumuzi seems to find ready and immediate acceptance as Inanna's lover and husband. But little did he dream that his marriage to Inanna would end in his perdition and that he would be literally dragged down to Hell. This is told in one of the best-preserved Sumerian myths, "Inanna's Descent to the Nether World," which has been published and revised three times in the course of the past twenty-five years, and is about to be revised a fourth time with the help of several hitherto unknown tablets and fragments; it tells the following tale:

Inanna, "queen of heaven," the ambitious goddess of love and war whom the shepherd Dumuzi had wooed and won for wife, decides to descend to the Nether World in order to make herself its mistress, and thus perhaps to raise the dead. She therefore collects the appropriate divine laws and, having adorned herself with her queenly robes and jewels, she is ready to enter the "land of no return."

The queen of the Nether World is her older sister and bitter enemy, Ereshkigal, Sumerian goddess of death and gloom. Fearing, not without reason, lest her sister put her to death in the domain she rules, Inanna instructs her vizier, Ninshubur, who is always at her beck and call, that if after three days she has failed to return he is to set up a lament for her by the ruins, in the assembly hall of the gods. He is then to go to Nippur, the city of Enlil, the leading god of the Sumerian pantheon, and plead with him to save her and not let her be put to death in the Nether World. If Enlil refuses, Ninshubur is to go to Ur, the city of the moon-god Nanna, and repeat his plea. If Nanna, too, refuses, he is to go to Eridu, the city of Enki, the god of wisdom, who "knows the food of life," who "knows the water of life," and he will surely come to her rescue.

Inanna then descends to the Nether World and approaches Ereshkigal's temple of lapis lazuli. At the gate she is met by

the chief gatekeeper, who demands to know who she is and why she has come. Inanna concocts a false excuse for her visit, and the gatekeeper, on instructions from his mistress, leads her through the seven gates of the Nether World. As she passes through one gate after another her garments and jewels are removed piece by piece in spite of her protests. Finally, after entering the last gate, she is brought stark naked and on bended knees before Ereshkigal and the Anunnaki, the seven dreaded judges of the Nether World. They fasten upon her their eyes of death, and she is turned into a corpse, which is then hung from a stake.

Three days and three nights pass. On the fourth day Nishubur, seeing that his mistress has not returned, proceeds to make the rounds of the gods in accordance with her instructions. As Inanna had surmised, both Enlil and Nanna refuse all help. Enki, however, devises a plan to restore her to life. He fashions the *kurgarru* and the *kalaturru*, two sexless creatures, and entrusts to them the "food of life" and the "water of life," with instructions to proceed to the Nether World where Ereshkigal, "the birth-giving mother," lies sick "because of her children" and, naked and uncovered, keeps moaning, "Woe my inside" and "Woe my outside." They, the *kurgarru* and *kalaturru*, are to repeat sympathetically her cry and add: "From my 'inside' to your 'inside,' from my 'outside' to your 'outside.'" They will then be offered water of the rivers and grain of the fields as gifts, but, Enki warns, they must not accept them. Instead they are to say, "Give us the corpse hanging from a nail" and proceed to sprinkle "the food of life" and "the water of life" which he had entrusted to them, and thus revive the dead Inanna. The *kurgarru* and *kalaturru* do exactly as Enki bid them and Inanna revives.

Though Inanna is once again alive, her troubles are far from over, for it was an unbroken rule of the "land of no return" that no one who had entered its gates might return to the world above unless he produced a substitute to take his place in the Nether World. Inanna is no exception to the rule. She is indeed permitted to reascend to the earth, but is accompanied by a number of heartless demons with instruc-

tions to bring her back to the lower regions if she fails to provide another deity to take her place. Surrounded by these ghoulish constables, Inanna first proceeds to visit the two Sumerian cities Umma and Bad-tibira. The protecting gods of these cities, Shara and Latarak, terrified at the sight of the unearthly arrivals, clothe themselves in sackcloth and grovel in the dust before Inanna. Inanna seems to be gratified by their humility, and when the demons threaten to carry them off to the Nether World she restrains the demons and thus saves the lives of the two gods.

Inanna and the demons, continuing their journey, arrive at Kullab, a district in the Sumerian city-state of Erech. The king of this city is the shepherd-god Dumuzi, who, instead of bewailing the fact that his wife had descended to the Nether World when she had suffered torture and death, "put on a noble robe, sat high on a throne," that is, he was actually celebrating and rejoicing. Enraged, Inanna looks down upon him with "the eye of death" and hands him over to the eager and unmerciful demons to be carried off to the Nether World. Dumuzi turns pale and weeps. He lifts his hands to the sky and pleads with the sun-god Utu, who is Inanna's brother and therefore his own brother-in-law. Dumuzi begs Utu to help him escape the clutches of the demons by changing his hand into the hand of a snake, and his foot into the foot of a snake.

But there, right in the middle of Dumuzi's prayer, the available tablets break off, and the reader was left hanging in the mid-air. Now, however, we have the melancholy end. Dumuzi, in spite of the three-time intervention of Utu, is carried off to die in the Nether World as a substitute for his angered and embittered wife, Inanna. This we learn from a hitherto largely unknown poem which is not actually a part of the "Inanna's Descent to the Nether World" but is intimately related to it and which, moreover, speaks of Dumuzi's changing into a gazelle rather than a snake. This new composition has been found inscribed on twenty-eight tablets and fragments dating from about 1750 B.C., and the full text has only recently been pieced together and translated, at least

tentatively, although some of the pieces were published decades ago. In fact the first of the pieces belonging to the myth was published as early as 1915 by a young Sumerologist, Hugo Radau, but it contained only the last lines of the poem and its contents therefore remained obscure. In 1930 the French scholar, Henri de Genouillac, published two additional pieces which contained the initial fifty-five lines of the poem. But since the entire middle portion was unknown there was no way of knowing that the Radau and the de Genouillac pieces belonged to the same poem. By 1953 six additional pieces, published and unpublished, became available, and Thorkild Jacobsen, of the Oriental Institute, one of the world's leading Sumerologists, was the first to give an idea of its plot and to translate several passages in the *Journal of Cuneiform Studies*, vol. XII, pp. 165-66, and in Leo Oppenheim's *The Interpretation of Dreams in the Ancient Near East*, p. 246. Since then, I have identified nineteen additional tablets and fragments, ten of which are in the Museum of the Ancient Orient in Istanbul; these have been copied by Mmes. Muazzez Cig and Hatice Kizileyay, the curators of the tablet collection in Istanbul, and myself. As a result of all these new documents it was possible, at long last, to restore the text of the poem almost in full and to prepare the tentative translation on which the following sketch of its contents is based.

The myth begins with an introductory passage in which the author sets the melancholy tone of the tale he is to tell. Dumuzi the shepherd of Erech has a foreboding premonition that his death is imminent, and so goes forth to the plain with tearful eyes and bitter lament:

*His heart was filled with tears,  
 He went forth to the plain,  
 The shepherd—his heart was filled with tears,  
 He went forth to the plain,  
 Dumuzi—his heart was filled with tears,  
 He went forth to the plain,  
 He fastened his flute (?) about his neck,  
 Gave utterance to a lament:*

"Set up a lament, set up a lament,  
     O plain, set up a lament!  
 O plain, set up a lament, set up a wail (?)!  
 Among the crabs of the river, set up a lament!  
 Among the frogs of the river, set up a lament!  
     Let my mother utter words (of lament),  
 Let my mother Sirtur utter words (of lament),  
 Let my mother who has (?) not five breads (?)  
     utter words (of lament),  
 Let my mother who has (?) not ten breads(?)  
     utter words (of lament),  
 On the day I die she will have none to care (?) for her,  
 On the plain, like my mother, let my eyes shed tears (?),  
 On the plain, like my little sister, let my eyes shed tears."

Dumuzi, the poem continues, then lies down to sleep and has an ominous and foreboding dream:

Among the buds (?) he lay down, among the buds (?) he  
     lay down,  
     The shepherd—among the buds (?) he lay down,  
 As the shepherd lay down among the buds (?), he dreamt a  
     dream,  
 He arose—it was a dream, he trembled (?)—it was a vision,  
 He rubbed his eyes with his hands, he was dazed.

The bewildered Dumuzi now has his sister Geshtinanna, the divine poetess, singer, and dream interpreter, brought before him and tells her his portentous vision:

"My dream, oh my sister, my dream,  
     This is the heart of my dream:  
 Rushes rise up all about me, rushes sprout all about me,  
 One reed standing all alone, bows its head for me,  
 Of the reeds standing in pairs, one is removed for me,  
 In the wooded grove, tall (?) trees rise fearsomely all about  
     me,  
 Over my holy hearth, water is poured,  
 Of my holy churn—its stand (?) is removed,

*The holy cup hanging from a peg, from the peg has fallen,  
 My shepherd's crook has vanished,  
 An owl holds a . . . . .,  
 A falcon holds a lamb in its claws,  
 My young goats drag their lapis beards in the dust,  
 My sheep of the fold paw the ground, with their bent limbs,  
 The churn lies (shattered), no milk is poured,  
 The cup lies (shattered), Dumuzi lives no more,  
 The sheepfold is given over to the wind."*

Geshtinanna, too, is deeply disturbed by her brother's dream:

*"Oh my brother, your dream is not favorable, which you  
 tell me!  
 Oh Dumuzi, your dream is not favorable which you tell me!  
 Rushes rise up all about you, rushes sprout all about you.  
 (This means) outlaws will rise up to attack you.  
 One reed standing all alone, bows its head for you,  
 (This means) your mother who bore you will lower her head  
 for you.  
 Of the reeds standing in pairs, one is removed,  
 (This means) I and you—one of us will be removed. . . ."*

Geshtinanna thus proceeds to interpret, item by item, her brother's somber and foreboding dream, ending with a warning that the demons of the Nether World, the *galla's*, are closing in on him and that he must hide immediately.

Dumuzi agrees, and implores his sister not to tell the *galla's* of his hiding place, thus:

*"My friend, I will hide among the plants,  
 Tell no one my (hiding) place,  
 I will hide among the small plants,  
 Tell no one my (hiding) place.  
 I will hide among the large plants,  
 Tell no one my (hiding) place.  
 I will hide among ditches of Arallu,  
 Tell no one my (hiding) place."*

To which Geshtinanna replies:

*"If I tell your (hiding) place, may your dogs devour me,  
The black dogs, your dogs of 'shepherdship,'  
The wild dogs, your dogs of 'lordship,'  
May your dogs devour me."*

And so the *galla's*, the inhuman creatures who

*Eat no food, know not water,  
Eat not sprinkled flour,  
Drink not libated water,  
Accept no gifts that mollify,  
Sate not with pleasure the wife's bosom,  
Kiss not the children, the sweet . . . . .*

come searching for the hidden Dumuzi but cannot find him. They seize his sister Geshtinanna and try to bribe her to tell them of Dumuzi's whereabouts, but she remains true to her given word.

Dumuzi, however, returns to the city, probably because he fears that the demons will kill his sister. There the *galla's* catch hold of him, belabor him with blows, punches, and lashes, bind fast his hands and arms, and are all set to carry him off to the Nether World. Whereupon Dumuzi turns to the sun-god Utu, the brother of his wife, Inanna, the tutelary goddess of his city Erech, with the prayer to turn him into a gazelle, so that he can escape the *galla's* and carry off his "soul" to a place (as yet unidentified) known by the name of Shubirila, or as Dumuzi himself puts it:

*"Utu, you are my wife's brother,  
I am your sister's husband,  
I am he who carries food for Eanna [Inanna's temple],  
In Erech I performed the marriages  
I kissed the holy lips (?)  
Caressed (?) the holy lap, the lap of Inanna—  
Turn my hands into the hands of a gazelle,  
Turn my feet into the feet of a gazelle,  
Let me escape my *galla*-demons,  
Let me carry off my soul to Shubirila. . . ."*

The sun-god harkened to Dumuzi's prayer. In the words of the poet:

*Utu took his tears as a gift,  
Like a man of mercy, he showed him mercy,  
He turned his hands into the hands of a gazelle,  
He turned his feet into the feet of a gazelle,  
He escaped his galla-demons,  
Carried off his soul to Shubirila. . . ."*

But to no avail. The pursuing demons catch up with him once again, and beat and torture him as before. A second time, therefore, Dumuzi turns to the sun-god Utu with the prayer to turn him into a gazelle; only this time he will carry off his soul to the house of a goddess known as "Belili, the wise old lady." Utu does so, and Dumuzi arrives at the house of Belili pleading:

*"Wise old lady, I am not a man, I am the husband of a goddess,  
Of the libated water, let me drink a little (?)  
Of the flour which has been sprinkled, let me eat a little (?)."*

He had barely had time to partake of food and drink, when the *galla's* appear and beat and torment Dumuzi a third time. Again Utu turns him to a gazelle, and he escapes to the sheepfold of his sister Geshtinanna. But all in vain, five of the *galla's* enter the sheepfold, strike Dumuzi on the cheek with nail and sticks, and Dumuzi dies. Or, to quote the melancholy lines which end the poem:

*The first galla enters the sheepfold,  
He strikes Dumuzi on the cheek with a piercing (?) nail (?),  
The second one enters the sheepfold,  
He strikes Dumuzi on the cheek with the shepherd's crook,  
The third one enters the sheepfold,  
Of the holy churn, the stand (?) is removed,  
The fourth one enters the sheepfold,  
The cup hanging from a peg, from the peg falls,  
The fifth one enters the sheepfold,*

*The holy churn lies (shattered), no milk is poured,  
The cup lies (shattered), Dumuzi lives no more,  
The sheepfold is given to the wind.*

Thus Dumuzi comes to a tragic end, a victim of Inanna's love and hate. Not all the Inanna myths, however, relate to Dumuzi. There is one, for example, which relates how the goddess obtained through trickery the divine laws the *me's* which govern mankind and his institutions. This myth is of considerable anthropological interest. Because its author found it desirable in connection with the story to give a full list of the *me's*, he divided civilization as he conceived it into over one hundred culture traits and complexes relating to man's political and religious and social institutions, to the arts and crafts, to music and musical instruments, and to a varied assortment of intellectual, emotional, and social patterns of behavior. Briefly sketched, the plot of this revealing myth runs as follows:

Inanna, Queen of Heaven, the tutelary goddess of Erech, is anxious to increase the welfare and prosperity of her city, to make it the center of Sumerian civilization and thus to exalt her name and fame. She, therefore, decides to go to Eridu, the ancient and hoary seat of Sumerian culture where Enki, the Lord of Wisdom, "who knows the very heart of the gods," dwells in his watery abyss, the Abzu. For Enki has under his charge all the divine decrees that are fundamental to civilization. And if she can obtain them, by fair means or foul, and bring them to her city Erech, its glory and her own will indeed be unsurpassed. As she approaches the Abzu of Eridu, Enki, no doubt taken in by her charm, calls his messenger Isimud, whom he addresses as follows:

*"Come, my messenger Isimud, give ear to my instructions,  
A word I shall say to you, take my word.  
The maid, all alone, has directed her step to the Abzu,  
Inanna, all alone, has directed her step to the Abzu,  
Have the maid enter the Abzu of Eridu,  
Give her to eat barley cake with butter,  
Pour for her cold water that freshens the heart,*

*Give her to drink beer in the 'face of the lion'  
At the holy table, the Table of Heaven,  
Speak to Inanna words of greeting."*

Isimud did exactly as bidden by his master, and Inanna and Enki sit down to feast and banquet. After their hearts had become happy with drink, Enki exclaims:

*"By the name of power, by the name of my power,  
To holy Inanna, my daughter, I shall present the divine  
decrees."*

He thereupon presents, several at a time, the over one hundred divine decrees which, according to our author, control the culture pattern of civilization as he knew it. Inanna is only too happy to accept the gifts offered her by the drunken Enki. She takes them and loads them on her Boat of Heaven, and makes off for Erech with her precious cargo. But after the effects of the banquet had worn off, Enki noticed that the *me's* were gone from their usual place. He turns to Isimud and the latter informs him that he, Enki himself, had presented them to his daughter Inanna. The upset Enki greatly rues his munificence and decides to prevent the Boat of Heaven from reaching Erech at all cost. He therefore dispatches his messenger Isimud together with a group of sea monsters to follow Inanna and her boat to the first of the seven stepping stations that are situated between the Abzu of Eridu and Erech. Here the sea monsters are to seize the Boat of Heaven from Inanna; Inanna herself, however, must be permitted to continue her journey to Erech afoot.

Isimud does as bidden. He overtakes Inanna and the Boat of Heaven and informs her of Enki's change of heart, and that while she is free to go on to Erech, he will have to take the boat and its precious cargo from her and bring it back to Erech. Whereupon Inanna berates Enki roundly for breaking his word and oath, turns to her vizier, the god Ninshubur, for help, and the latter rescues her and the boat from Isimud and the sea monsters. Enki is persistent; again and again he sends Isimud accompanied by various sea monsters to seize

the Boat of Heaven. But on each occasion Ninshubur comes to the rescue of his mistress. Finally Inanna and her boat arrive safe and sound at Erech, where amidst jubilation and feasting on the part of the delighted inhabitants she unloads the precious divine *me's*, one at a time.

There is one Inanna myth in which a mortal plays an important role; its plot runs as follows:

Once upon a time there lived a gardener by the name of Shukallituda, whose diligent efforts at gardening had met with nothing but failure. Although he had carefully watered his furrows and garden patches, the plants had withered away; the raging winds smote his face with the "dust of the mountains"; all that he had carefully tended turned desolate. He thereupon lifted his eyes east and west to the starry heavens, studied the omens, observed and learned the divine decrees. As a result of this newly acquired wisdom he planted the (as yet unidentified) *sarbatu*-tree in the garden, a tree whose broad shade lasts from sunrise to sunset. As a consequence of this ancient horticultural experiment Shukallituda's garden blossomed forth with all kinds of green.

One day, continues our myth, the goddess Inanna, after traversing heaven and earth, lay down to rest her tired body not far from Shukallituda's garden. The latter, who had spied her from the edge of his garden, takes advantage of Inanna's extreme weariness and cohabits with her. When morning came and the sun rose, Inanna looked about her in consternation and determined to ferret out at all costs the mortal who had so shamefully abused her. She therefore sends three plagues against Sumer. Firstly, she fills all the wells of the land with blood, so that all the palm groves and vineyards are saturated with blood. Secondly, she sends against the land destructive winds and storms. The nature of the third plague is uncertain, since the relevant lines are too fragmentary. But in spite of all three plagues she is unable to locate her defiler. For after each plague Shukallituda goes to his father's house and informs him of his danger. The father advises his son to direct his step to his brothers, the "black-headed people," that is, the people of Sumer, and to stay

close to the urban centers. Shukallituda follows this advice, and as a result Inanna is unable to find him.

After her third failure Inanna realizes bitterly that she is unable to avenge the outrage committed against her. She therefore decides to go to the city Eridu, to the house of Enki, the Sumerian god of wisdom, and ask his advice and help. But here unfortunately the tablet breaks off, and the end of the story remains unknown.

Except for references to mankind as a whole, mortals play little role in the Sumerian myths. In addition to the Inanna-Shukallituda myth just described, there is only one other myth involving a mortal. This is the long-known flood-story so important for comparative Biblical studies. Unfortunately only one tablet inscribed with this myth has been excavated to date, and this tablet is only one-third preserved. The beginning of the myth is broken away, and the first intelligible lines concern the creation of man, vegetation, and animals; the heavenly origin of kingship; the founding and naming of five antediluvian cities, which are presented to five tutelary deities. We then learn that a number of deities are bitter and unhappy because of a divine decision to bring the flood and destroy mankind. Ziusudra, the Sumerian counterpart of the Biblical Noah, is next introduced in the story as a pious god-fearing king who is constantly on the lookout for divine dreams and revelations. He stations himself by a wall, where he hears the voice of a deity, probably Enki, informing him of the decision taken by the assembly of the gods to send a deluge and "destroy the seed of mankind."

The myth must have continued with detailed instructions to Ziusudra to build a giant boat and thus save himself from destruction. But all this is missing because of a rather large break in the tablet. When the text resumes we find that the flood in all its violence had already come upon the earth where it raged for seven days and nights. Following which, the sun-god Utu comes forth lighting and warming up the earth, and Ziusudra prostrates himself before him and offers him sacrifices of oxen and sheep. The last extant lines of the

myth describe the deification of Ziusudra: after he had prostrated himself before An and Enlil, he was given "life like a god" and translated to Dilmun, the divine paradise-land, "the place where the sun rises."

Finally, there is a Sumerian myth which, although concerned with gods only, provides an interesting bit of anthropological information about the Semitic Bedu-people known as Martu. The action of the story takes place in the city of Ninab, "the city of cities, the land of princeship," a still unidentified locality in Mesopotamia. Its tutelary deity seems to have been Martu, god of the nomadic Semites who lived to the west and southwest of Sumer. The relative time when the events took place is described in cryptic, antithetical, and obscure phrases, thus:

*Ninab existed, Aktab existed not,  
The holy crown existed, the holy tiara existed not,  
The holy herbs existed, holy nitrum existed not. . . .*

The god Martu, the story begins, decides to marry. He asks his mother to take him a wife, but she advises him to go and find a wife for himself in accordance with his own desire. One day, the story continues, a great feast is prepared in Ninab, and to it comes Numushda, the tutelary deity of Kazallu, a city-state located to the northeast of Sumer, together with his wife and daughter. During this feast Martu performs some heroic deed which brings joy to the heart of Numushda. As a reward, the latter offers Martu silver and lapis lazuli. But Martu refuses; it is the hand of Numushda's daughter which he claims as a reward. Numushda gladly consents; so, too, does his daughter, although her girl friends try to dissuade her from marrying Martu since:

*He lives in tents, buffeted by wind and rain,  
Eats uncooked meat,  
Has no house while he lives,  
Is not brought to burial when he dies.*

## AKKAD

The myths of the Akkadians (that is, of the Babylonians and Assyrians) derive largely from Sumerian prototypes. At least two of them—"Ishtar's Descent to the Nether World" and the "Flood"-story as told in the Epic of Gilgamesh—are well-nigh identical with known Sumerian originals. But even those for which no Sumerian counterparts have as yet been recovered contain mythological themes and motifs which reflect Sumerian sources, not to mention the fact that most of the deities involved are part of the Sumerian pantheon. This is not to say that the Akkadian poets imitated slavishly their Sumerian prototypes; they introduced many innovations and changes in both theme and plot. But by and large, the Akkadian men of letters could not escape the deep and all-pervading influence of their Sumerian heritage.

The best-known of the Akkadian myths is the "creation" poem usually called *Enuma-Elish*, from its initial two words which mean "when above." Actually the poem was composed not so much to tell the story of creation, but to glorify the Babylonian god Marduk and the city of Babylon. But in the course of doing so it introduces and relates Marduk's acts of creation, and is thus a prime source for the Akkadian cosmogonic ideas. Thus the poem tells us that at the very beginning, when as yet "the heavens had not been named on high" and "the earth had not been called by name below," there existed only the primordial oceans, Tiamat and Apsu (the Sumerian Abzu). Then, at some unspecified time, several generations of gods were born, one of whom was Ea, the Sumerian Enki, the god of wisdom. These gods, however, distressed Apsu and Tiamat with their unceasing bustle and clamor, and Apsu decided to do away with them, although his wife Tiamat urged him to have compassion on them. Fortunately for the gods, however, Ea succeeded in killing Apsu with the

help of a magic incantation. Ea then established his own abode upon the dead Apsu, and there his wife gave birth to Marduk, a heroic and imposing figure of a god who soon had occasion to show his bravery by saving the gods from Tiamat, bent on avenging the death of her husband Apsu, with the help of some renegade gods and a host of vicious monsters. Following this victory, Marduk created heaven and earth from Tiamat's huge corpse by splitting it in two. He then created special "stations" for the gods, set up the stellar constellations, constructed gates through which the sun might enter and depart, and caused the moon to shine forth. Then, to free the gods from menial labor, Marduk, with the help of his father Ea, created mankind from the blood of Kingu, the rebel god who had been leader of Tiamat's inimical host. Following which, the appreciative gods built the Esagila, Marduk's temple at Babylon, prepared a joyous banquet, and recited Marduk's fifty names which attributed to him the powers of practically all the major gods of the Akkadian pantheon.

In addition to the *Enuma-Elish* version, there are a number of other and much briefer creation accounts which differ in numerous details from each other and from that of *Enuma-Elish*. Thus there is one account used as an introduction to an incantation for the purification of a Babylonian temple, which relates that at first nothing existed, neither reed nor tree, neither house nor temple, neither city nor living creatures, and that "all lands were sea." Then the gods were created and Babylon was built. After which Marduk fashioned a reed frame over the face of the waters and created mankind with the help of the mother goddess Aruru (the Sumerian Ninmah, alias Nintu, alias Ninhursag). Following man, Marduk created the beasts of the plain, the rivers Tigris and Euphrates, grass, rushes, and reeds, the green herbs of the fields, lands, marshes, and canebrakes, the cow and her young, the ewe and her lamb, the sheep of the fold. And thus it was that dry land came into being, and cities such as Nippur and Erech together with their temples and houses were built of bricks fashioned in brick molds.

According to another brief creation account, one that was intended for recitation in connection with a ritual for the restoration of a temple, it was the god Anu (the Sumerian heaven-god An) who created the heavens, while Ea (the Sumerian Enki) created the dry land and everything on it. He "pinched off clay" from over his sea dwelling, the Apsu, and created the brick-god Kulla. He created the reed marshes, and forests, the mountains and the seas, together with the gods in charge of such crafts as carpentry, metal work, engraving, and stonecutting. In order that the temples, once built, might be provided with regular offerings, he created the deities in charge of grain, cattle, and wine, as well as a divine cook, cupbearer, and high priest. Finally, in order to maintain the temples and perform the labor which the gods would otherwise have to do themselves, they created men and kings.

There is a fragmentary creation myth used as an introduction to a childbirth incantation, of which only the passage dealing with the creation of man is preserved. According to this version, the gods turn to Mami, alias Aruru, the mother goddess, also known by her Sumerian names Nintu, Nin-hursag, and Ninmah, with a request to create man "to bear the yoke" of the gods. Mami asks Enki for counsel, and he advises that Mami fashion man as a partly divine creature by mixing clay with the blood and flesh of a deity slain by the gods.

There is one "creation" poem devoted primarily to the creation of man alone. This version begins with the statement that after "heaven had been separated from earth" and the earth had been fashioned, after the "fate" of the universe had been decreed, and the Tigris and Euphrates together with their dykes and canals had been "established" and given their proper direction, then all the gods seated themselves in their exalted sanctuary and Enlil, the king of the gods, asks:

*"Now that the 'fate' of the universe has been decreed,  
Dyke and canal have been given proper direction,  
The banks of the Tigris and Euphrates have been established,*

*What else shall we do?  
 What else shall we create?  
 O Anunnaki, great gods,  
 What else shall we do?  
 What else shall we create?"*

The Anunnaki thereupon urge upon Enlil that the gods should create man out of the blood of two *Lamga* (craftsman) gods whom they will slay for this purpose. Man's portion, the gods continue, will be to carry out the service of the gods for all time, by tilling and irrigating the fields and building temples and sanctuaries for them. Accordingly there were created two mortals having the names *Ullegarra* and *Zallegarra* (two Sumerian words whose meaning is still uncertain), and these were blessed by the gods with generous increase and rich abundance, so that they might celebrate the festivals of the gods "day and night."

How the Akkadian poets felt free to modify the current cosmogonic ideas in accordance with the need of the moment is well illustrated by a creation version used as an incantation against toothache which, according to the Akkadian medical practitioners, was due to a blood-sucking worm lodged in the gums. As the author, who was a poet, priest, and physician combined, puts it:

*After Anu had created heaven,  
 Heaven had created earth,  
 Earth had created rivers,  
 Rivers had created canals,  
 Canals had created marsh,  
 Marsh had created worm—  
 The worm came weeping before Shamash,  
 His tears flowing before Ea:  
 "What will you give me to eat?  
 What will you give me to drink?"*

*"I will give you the ripe fig,  
 The apricot."*

*“What to me are the ripe fig,  
 The apricot?  
 Lift me up and let me dwell  
 Among the teeth and the gums,  
 I will suck the blood of the tooth,  
 And will gnaw away of the gum its roots.”*

The text closes with instructions to the dentist-incantator to “insert the needle and seize its (the worm’s) foot”—that is, presumably, to pull the sick nerve—and to perform an accompanying ritual involving the mixing of “second-grade beer” and oil.

Among the non-cosmogonic myths there is one which tells of the slaying of the huge sea-born monster Labbu, who brought havoc and destruction to the people and their cities. Another myth revolves about the slaying of the monstrous Zu-bird, who in its inordinate lust for power stole the “Tablets of Fate” right from under Enlil’s nose, as it were, and thus usurped the sovereignty over the gods. The plot motif of the two stories is similar; several deities ordered to go and do battle with the monsters decline the honor in cowardly terror, in spite of the promised reward; then one courageous deity—probably Marduk or Ninurta—agrees, slays the monster, and is rewarded accordingly.

One myth concerns the Nether World and relates how the god Nergal, originally a sky-god, became king of Hades where until then the goddess Ereshkigal had reigned supreme. The story begins with an invitation by the gods to Ereshkigal, queen of the Nether World, to send a representative to a banquet which they had prepared, since she herself cannot leave her dominion. Ereshkigal accepts and sends Namtar, that is, Fate, the demon of death. Namtar arrives in heaven and is welcomed with due honor by the gods except for Nergal, who insults him by remaining seated when all the gods rise to greet him. To avenge this insult Ereshkigal demands that Nergal be extradited to the Nether World, where she will put him to death. On the plea of Nergal, however, the god Ea comes to his rescue by giving him fourteen

demons to accompany him to the Nether World and stand by him against Ereshkigal. Upon arrival in Hades, Nergal posted the fourteen demons at its fourteen gates while he himself, after being admitted by the gatekeeper of the Nether World, rushed into Ereshkigal's palace, dragged her from the throne by her hair, and was all set to cut off her head. But she tearfully pleaded with him not to kill her, and to become her husband instead, and take dominion over Hades. Whereupon Nergal kissed her, wiped away her tears, and agreed to become lord and king of the Nether World with Ereshkigal as his lady and queen.

There are three mythological compositions in which mortals play the major role. In one of these the protagonist is a sage of Eridu by the name of Adapa, who might have secured eternal life for himself and all mankind had he not followed the unwise advice of Ea, the god who is usually depicted as man's best friend. The myth begins with a description of Adapa as "the wise son of Eridu," "the most wise," "a leader among men," the "skillful and exceedingly wise," "the blameless and clean of hands," who daily provided Eridu, the city of Ea, with food and drink. One day, as Adapa set sail in the Persian Gulf in order to catch fish to provision Ea's sanctuary, the South Wind blew up a gale and submerged him and his boat. Enraged, Adapa uttered a curse against the South Wind and thus broke his wings. When the South Wind had failed to blow upon the land for seven consecutive days, the heaven-god Anu inquired what was the trouble, and his vizier, Ilabrat, told him what had happened. Anu, beside himself with anger, rose from his throne, cried out, "Let them fetch him (Adapa) hither."

Here Ea comes into the story and unwittingly, it seems, deprives Adapa and mankind of the gift they desire most, that of immortality. For he counsels Adapa thus: On his journey to heaven and Anu's palace he is to wear his hair long and unkempt and dress in mourning. This will arouse the curiosity of the two heavenly gatekeepers, Tammuz and Gishzida, two deities who had once lived on earth. Upon their questioning him as to why he is in mourning, Adapa is

to answer them ingratiatingly that he is mourning "two gods who had disappeared from the land." When they further ask him, "Who are the two gods who have disappeared from the land?" he is to say, "They are Tammuz and Gishzida." Delighted by this flattering response, they will intercede for Adapa before the irate Anu.

So far so good. Ea then, however, adds a bit of advice which, intentional or not, turns out to be tragic for Adapa and mankind. This, in Ea's own words, runs as follows: "As you stand before Anu they will offer you the food of death—do not eat it. They will offer you the water of death, do not drink it." But when Adapa arrives in heaven, garbed in mourning, and Tammuz and Gishzida, upon learning the purported reason for his mourning, intercede with Anu in his behalf, the latter offers, not the food and water of *death*, but the food and water of *life*. Unfortunately, true to Ea's counsel, Adapa rejects both and misses the golden opportunity to secure immortality for himself and mankind. Anu sends him back to earth where man continues to be the victim of sickness and disease, although these can be allayed to some extent by Ninkarrak, the goddess of healing and medicine.

Another mortal who plays a major role in an Akkadian myth is Etana, reputed to be a mighty ruler of the dynasty of Kish, the first after mankind had recovered from the legendary flood. He, too, ascended to heaven, but not as in the case of Adapa to answer to the gods for a misdeed he had committed; his burning desire was to obtain "the plant of birth." For though he was a pious, god-fearing king who practiced the divine cult faithfully and assiduously, he was cursed with childlessness and had no one to carry on his name. According to the myth, he is borne to heaven by an eagle whom he had rescued from a pit where it had been cast by a serpent whose friendship it had betrayed and whose nests it had devoured. The Etana myth was popular among the seal cutters, to judge from a number of seals depicting a mortal climbing toward heaven on the wings of an eagle.

The third Akkadian myth in which a mortal plays a significant role revolves about a sage named Atrahasis and his

repeated efforts to save mankind from destruction at the hands of the gods angered by man's chronic depravity and evil-doing. Unfortunately only a few fragmentary passages of the composition, originally 1245 lines in length, are preserved. From these we gather that the gods, disturbed and oppressed by "the clamor of mankind," sent famine, plagues, pestilence, and disease against it, so that people were reduced to cannibalism and self-destruction. But again and again Atrahasis pleads with the god Ea to intercede, and in one way or another mankind is saved, only to multiply once again and become noisy, rebellious, and clamorous. One of the decimating inflictions sent against man by the gods, according to this myth, is the flood, and in this case man is saved when Atrahasis, on the advice of Ea, builds himself a huge boat and boards it with his wife, family, and craftsmen, his grain, goods, and possessions, as well as the beasts of the field, "as many as eat herbs." All this sounds like just another version of the well-known and not too different Sumerian, Akkadian, and Biblical flood-stories in which the hero's name, however, is not Atrahasis, but Ziusudra, Utanapishtim, and Noah.

Finally, there is a myth concerned with the trials and tribulations of mankind, and particularly the Akkadians, though it ends on a note of hope and salvation; in this case, however, it is not a mortal, but a god who acts as the savior of mankind. This myth, which is not readily accessible to the layman, will be treated here in considerable detail since it is noteworthy in several respects: its diction is highly poetic; some of its ideas and expressions seem to have Biblical echoes; it ends with an unusual epilogue which illuminates to some extent the literary practices and conventions of the ancient myth writers.

The two major protagonists of the myth are Irra, the god of pestilence, and his vizier and constant companion, Ishum, the god of fire. Following a description of Irra as "the fearful slaughterer" who "lays waste the plain" and who takes joyous delight in devastating the land, the story begins with Irra lying lazily about, uncertain of what cruel and destructive deed to perform next. Whereupon Sibbi, his strange and

unnatural seven-bodied weapon, whose "breath is death" and who inspires all with dread and terror, speaks up to the dilatory Irra in bitter anger:

*"Rise up and march forth, Irra,  
Like a pale old man you linger in the city,  
Like a whimpering child you linger in the house,  
Like one who rides not the plain we eat woman's food,  
Like one who knows not battle we dread the combat.*

*Arise, hero, ride the plain,  
Lay low man and beast,  
Gods will hear and be dismayed,  
Kings will hear and be affrighted,  
Demons will hear and be terrified,  
The mighty will hear and quake,  
The towering mountains will hear and tremble,  
The billowy seas will hear and be convulsed.*

*Irra, hear, I have said my word,  
Taut is the good bow, pointed the sharp arrow,  
Drawn is the sword for slaughter."*

Whereupon mighty Irra calls to his vizier and guide, his "torch," Ishum, and says:

*"Open the path, I would take to the road,  
Sibbi, the hero unrivaled, will march at my side,  
While you, my guide, will walk behind."*

Ishum heard these words with anguished heart. He took pity on man and says to Irra:

*"Lord! Against god and king you have planned evil,  
To destroy all the land, you have planned evil,  
Will you not turn back?"*

*Irra opened his mouth and speaks,  
Addresses Ishum, his guide:*

*"Silence, Ishum, and hear my words,  
Let me answer you concerning man and his fate,  
Guide of the gods, Ishum the wise, hear my words:*

*In the heavens I am a wild ox,  
 On earth I am a lion,  
 In the land I am a king,  
 Among the gods I am mighty,  
 Among the Igigi (heaven-gods) I am valorous,  
 Among the Anunnaki (here, the Nether World  
 gods) I am powerful,  
 Because man feared not my utterance,  
 And heeded not the word of Marduk,  
 But acted according to his own heart,  
 I will arouse Marduk, the princely,  
 Will summon him forth from his dwelling place,  
 Will destroy man."*

And so Irra proceeds to Babylon, the city of Marduk, the king of the gods. He enters Marduk's temple, the Esagila, and urges Marduk to leave his dwelling place and go forth toward a place which he describes as "the house where the fire will purify your garments," perhaps the mountain to the east where the gods live. Or in the words of the poet:

*Mighty Irra toward Babylon, the city of the king of the gods,  
 set his face,  
 Entered Esagila, the palace of heaven and earth, and stood  
 before him,  
 Opened his mouth and to the king of the gods speaks:  
 "Lord, the nimbus, the symbol of your lordship,  
 Full of brightness like a heavenly star—  
 Darkened is its light,  
 The crown of your lordship is cast down;  
 March you forth from your dwelling place,  
 Toward the house where fire will purify your garments,  
 Set your face."*

But Marduk is troubled lest if he leave Babylon and the Esagila, complete chaos will follow on earth; evil winds, demons, and the gods of the Nether World will destroy the lands, devour its inhabitants, and kill all living creatures, with none to turn them back. Irra reassures him that he will take

full charge while Marduk is away, and see to it that the earth and its inhabitants are unharmed either by the heaven-gods or the Nether World demons. But as soon as Marduk leaves Babylon, Irra calls Ishum and says:

*"Open the path, I will take to the road,  
The day is come, the hour is passed,  
I will speak, and the sun will drop its rays,  
I will cover with darkness the face of day;  
Who was born on a day of rain  
    Will be buried on a day of thirst,  
Who went forth on a well-watered path  
    Will return by a road of dust.*

*I shall speak unto the king of the gods:  
    'Come not forth from the house you entered,  
    Faithfully will I carry out your commands,  
    When the blackheaded people (the Akkadians) cry out  
        to you,  
    Receive not their prayers.'*  
*I will put an end to all habitations  
    And turn them into mounds,  
I will devastate all the cities  
    And make them into ruins,  
I will destroy the mountains  
    And wipe out their flocks,  
I will convulse the seas  
    And destroy their bounty,  
I will uproot canebrake and forest  
    And crush the mighty,  
I will lay man low  
    And wipe out all living creatures."*

Ishum is filled with pity for man thus doomed to destruction. He therefore pleads with Irra to renounce his evil plans. But to no avail. He first destroyed Babylon and its inhabitants, as well as its walls and outskirts. Babylon a ruin, he turned to Erech, "the city of hierodules, courtesans, and sacred prostitutes to whom Ishtar (the goddess of love) was hus-

band and master"; the city "of eunuchs and sodomites, the merry-makers of Eanna (Ishtar's temple), whose maleness Ishtar had turned to femaleness, in order to terrify man." Erech a ruin, Irra still found no peace and rest, saying in his heart:

*"Slaughter I shall multiply, and vengeance,  
I shall kill the son,*

*And his father will bury him,*

*I shall kill the father,*

*And there will be none to bury him.*

*Who has made himself a house, saying:*

*'This is my resting chamber,*

*This I have made to rest therein,*

*The day the fates carry me off, I shall lie in its midst'—*

*Him I shall put to death*

*I shall destroy his resting chamber,*

*After it had become a ruin*

*I shall give it to another."*

But Ishum, deeply disturbed by Irra's indiscriminate slaughter and destruction, pleads with him and tries to pacify him in these words:

*"Mighty Irra!*

*The righteous you have put to death,*

*The unrighteous you have put to death,*

*Him who has sinned you have put to death,*

*Him who has sinned not you have put to death,*

*Him who burned offerings to the gods you have put to death,*

*The courtiers and the king's man you have put to death,*

*The elder in the assembly you have put to death,*

*The young maiden you have put to death,*

*And yet you refuse to rest, and say unto your heart*

*'I shall crush the mighty*

*And lay low the weak,*

*I shall kill the leader of the host*

*And make the host turn back,*

*I shall destroy the tower chamber, the wall coping,  
 And wipe out the wealth of the city,  
 I shall rip out the mast—the ship will be lost,  
 I shall break the tying post—it will not touch shore,  
 I shall tear asunder the cable, rip off its flag,  
 I shall make dry the breast—the babe will not live,  
 I shall make dry the springs—the rivers will not bring  
 the waters of abundance,  
 I shall make fall the planet's light—leave the stars un-  
 tended,  
 I shall tear out the roots of the tree—its fruit will not  
 grow,  
 I shall rip out the foundation of the wall—its top will  
 totter,  
 To the dwelling of the king of the gods I shall betake  
 me—there is none to oppose me.' ”*

Ishum's address seems to pacify Irra to some extent, and he proffers at last a note of hope, at least for the Akkadians, if not for mankind as a whole:

*Mighty Irra heard him,*

*And the word which Ishum spoke was soothing as oil,  
 And thus did mighty Irra speak:*

*“The Sealander—the Sealander,  
 The Subarean—the Subarean,  
 The Assyrian—the Assyrian,  
 The Elamite—the Elamite  
 The Kassite—the Kassite,  
 The Sutaean—the Sutaean,  
 The Gutaeon—the Gutaeon,  
 The Lullamaean—the Lullamaean,  
 Land—land, city—city,  
 House will attack house,  
 Brother will not spare brother,  
 They will kill one another,  
 Then will the Akkadian rise up,  
 And subdue them all.”*

And so Irra at last finds peace and rest, and he informs the gods that while it is true that he had formerly been angered by man's sins, and had planned his total destruction and annihilation, he had a change of heart as a result of Ishum's counsel and urging; he will now see to it that the Akkadians defeat and conquer their enemies and carry off their booty to Babylon; that the land will prosper in peace and war; and that once again Babylon will rule the world. Or, in Irra's own words to the happy Ishum:

*"The people of the land, the few, will turn into many,  
The short and the tall will seek out its roads,  
The Akkadian, the weakling, will capture the Sultaeon, the  
mighty,  
One will carry off seven like sheep,  
His cities you will turn into ruins, his mountains to mounds,  
His heavy booty you will carry off to Babylon.  
The gods of the land, the irate,  
    Appeased, you will bring them to their dwellings,  
Cattle and grain will prosper in the land,  
The fields which had been made desolate,  
    You shall make to bear produce,  
All the governors, from the midst of their cities,  
    Will bring their tribute to Babylon,  
The Ekur temples which have been destroyed—  
    Like the rising sun, their peaks will shine forth in light,  
The Tigris and Euphrates with waters of abundance will  
    overflow,  
    And unto distant days Babylon will rule the cities  
    all."*

The poem closes with an epilogue which sheds some light on the psychological attitude of the author of the myth, as well as of the audience for whom it was intended. The first part reads:

*That for the glory of Irra  
    This song might be sung years without count—*

*How Irra had become angry,  
 And had set his face to devastate the land,  
 To lay low man and beast,  
 How Ishum his counselor had pacified him,  
 And a remnant was saved—  
 To Kabti—Ilani—Marduk, his tablet keeper,  
 The son of Dabibi,  
 Ishum showed it in a vision of the night,  
 When he arose at dawn, not a line did he miss,  
 Not a line did he add.*

To judge from this statement, which is hardly likely to have corresponded to the facts, the ancient myth writer deemed it important to proclaim to his intended audience that he did not create the poem himself, but merely reproduced what a god had "shown" him in a vision. Nor is it unlikely that his claim was doubted by those who heard it—it may well be that the author himself was convinced of its truth. In any case our poet is very eager to have his song endure through the ages, and to this end he closes his epilogue as follows:

*Irra heard and welcomed it,  
 The song of Ishum was pleasing to him,  
 All the gods revered it with him.  
 And thus did mighty Irra speak:  
 "Who honors this song—in his sanctuary abundance will  
 overflow,  
 Who causes it to be neglected will not smell incense,  
 The king who exalts my name will rule the four quarters,  
 The prince who utters the glory of my might will  
 have no rival,  
 The singer who chants it will not die in slaughter,  
 To prince and king his word will be pleasing,  
 The scribe who learns it by heart will be saved from the  
 enemy's land,  
 In the assembly of the learned, where my name is honored  
 unceasingly,  
 I shall open wide the ears,*

*To the house where this tablet is stored,  
Should Irra be irate and Sibbi rage,  
The sword of slaughter will come not near,  
Peace and well-being will be its lot,  
May this song exist for all time,  
May it endure unto eternity,  
All the lands shall hear and revere my might,  
All the inhabited earth will say and exalt my name."*

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