CHAPTER EIGHT

THE LEGACY
OF SUMER

On the assumption that civilization is of some value for man, the long-dead Sumerians might well point with "fingerless" pride to the numerous innovations, inventions, and institutions which they helped to originate. To be sure, it might be said that these would have come to be in any case, Sumerians or no Sumerians. But this hardly seems to the point—the Sumerians were there first, and it seems not unfair to give credit where credit is due. Be that as it may, in this chapter I shall attempt to sketch rather briefly and hesitatingly some of their more palpable and significant contributions to the culture of man. However, before turning to the legacy of Sumer to later generations, let us take a look at the give-and-take between the Sumerians and their neighbors near and far in the days when they were alive and making history instead of being made into history. And let us start with Aratta, a far-off city-state probably situated in northwestern Iran near the Caspian Sea, which owes its fame and name not to its own achievements, though these seem to have been quite a few, but to the bards and poets of Sumer who, for some as yet undiscovered reason, sang of its metals and stones, its craftsmen and artisans, its boldly challenging en, its boastfully confident mashmash, and its beloved goddess, who seems to be none other than Inanna of Sumer.

In 1952 I published a Sumerian poem entitled "Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta: A Sumerian Epic Tale of Iraq and Iran"; it consists of over six hundred fairly well-preserved lines of text pieced together from twenty tablets and fragments now located in the Istanbul Museum of the Ancient Orient and in the University Museum of the University of Pennsylvania at Philadelphia.
The two main protagonists of this epic tale are Enmerkar, a priestly lord—or en, to use the Sumerian word—of Erech, an ancient Sumerian city which the Germans have been excavating on and off for the past thirty years, and an unnamed en of Aratta, an important but still unidentified city-state in ancient Iran. Briefly sketched, the content of this Sumerian epic tale runs as follows.

Once upon a time, Enmerkar, son of the sun-god, Utu, having determined to make a vassal state of Aratta, implores his sister, Inanna, the powerful Sumerian goddess of love and war, to see to it that the people of Aratta bring gold, silver, lapis lazuli, and precious stones and build for him various shrines and temples, particularly the Abzu, the sea temple of Enki, in Eridu.

Inanna, heeding Enmerkar's plea, advises him to seek out a suitable herald to cross the imposing mountains of Anshan and assures him that the people of Aratta will submit to him and carry out the building operations he desires. Enmerkar selects his herald and sends him to the en of Aratta with a message containing a threat to destroy and make desolate his city unless he and his people bring down silver and gold and build and decorate Enki's temple. To further impress him, Enmerkar instructs his herald to repeat to him the “spell of Enki,” which relates how the god Enki had put an end to man's “golden age” under Enlil's universal sway over the earth and its inhabitants.

The herald, after traversing seven mountains, arrives at Aratta, duly repeats his master's words to its en, and asks for his answer. The latter, however, refuses to yield to Enmerkar, claiming that he is Inanna's protégé and that she had brought him to Aratta as its ruler. Thereupon, the herald informs him that Enmerkar had brought Inanna to Erech and had made her queen of its temple, Eanna, and that the goddess had promised Enmerkar that Aratta would submit to him.

The en of Aratta is stunned by this news. He composes an answer for the herald to take back to his king in which he admonishes Enmerkar for resorting to arms and says that he prefers a “contest,” that is, a fight between two selected champions. He goes on to say that, since Inanna has become his enemy, he is ready to submit to Enmerkar only if he will send him large quantities of grain. The herald returns to Erech posthaste and delivers the message to Enmerkar in the courtyard of the assembly hall.

Before making his next move, Enmerkar performs several acts apparently ritualistic in character. First, he takes counsel with Nidaba, the Sumerian goddess of wisdom. Then he has his beasts of burden loaded with grain. They are led to Aratta by the herald, who is to deliver to its lord a message eulogizing Enmerkar's scepter and commanding the lord to bring Enmerkar carnelian and lapis lazuli. On arrival, the herald piles up the grain in the courtyard and delivers his message. The people, delighted with the grain, are ready to present Enmerkar with the desired carnelian (nothing seems to be said of the lapis lazuli) and to have the “elders” build his “pure house” for him. But the hysterical en of Aratta, after eulogizing his own scepter, refuses and insists, in words identical with those of Enmerkar, that the latter bring him carnelian and lapis lazuli.

On the herald's return to Erech, Enmerkar seemingly consults the omens, in particular one involving a suskina-reed, which he brings forth from “light to shade” and from “shade to light,” until he finally cuts it down “after five years, after ten years had passed.” He sends the herald forth once again to Aratta, this time merely placing the scepter in his hand without any accompanying message. The sight of the scepter seems to arouse terror in the en of Aratta. He turns to his shatam and, after speaking bitterly of the plight of his city as a result of Inanna's displeasure, seems ready to yield to Enmerkar. Nevertheless, he once again issues a challenge to Enmerkar. This time he demands that Enmerkar select, as his representative, one of his “fighting men” to engage in single combat with one of his own “fighting men.” Thus “the stronger will become known.” The challenge, in riddle-like terms, asks that the selected retainer be neither black nor white, neither brown, yellow, nor dappled—which seems to make little sense when speaking of a man.

On the herald's arrival at Erech with this new challenge, Enmerkar bids him return to Aratta with a three-part message: (1) He (Enmerkar) accepts the en of Aratta's challenge and is prepared to send one of his own retainers to fight his representative to a decision. (2) He demands that the en of Aratta heap up gold, silver, and precious stones for the goddess Inanna in Erech. (3) He once again threatens Aratta with total destruction unless its en and its people bring “stones of the mountain” to build and decorate the Eridu shrine for him.
In the first part of the message, Enmerkar’s words appear to clear up the lord of Aratta’s riddle-like terms about the color of the retainer to be selected. Enmerkar substitutes the word “garment” for “fighting man.” Presumably, the colors were meant to refer to garments worn by the combatants rather than to their bodies.

A remarkable passage follows which, if correctly interpreted, informs us that Enmerkar was, in the opinion of the poet, the first to write on clay tablets and that he did so because his herald seemed “heavy of mouth” and unable to repeat the message, perhaps because of its length. The herald delivers the inscribed tablet to the en of Aratta and awaits his answer. But help now seems to come to the en from an unexpected source. The Sumerian god of rain and storm, Ishkur, brings to Aratta wild wheat and beans and heaps them up before the en. At the sight of the wheat the en takes courage. His confidence regained, he informs Enmerkar’s herald that Inanna had by no means abandoned Aratta or her house and bed there.

From here on, the text becomes fragmentary and the context difficult to follow, except for the statement that the people of Aratta did bring gold, silver, and lapis lazuli to Erech and heaped them up in the courtyard of Eanna for Inanna.

In another Sumerian epic poem, which consists of close to three hundred lines and which has been only partially published to date, we again find Enmerkar, the en of Erech, in a bitter contest with an en of Aratta, but with one in this case who bears the good Sumerian name Ensukushiranna. Its plot, very briefly put, is as follows.

In the days when a certain Ennamibaragga-Utu was king of an empire presumably including Sumer and parts of ancient Iran, Ensukushiranna, the en of Aratta, issued a challenge to Enmerkar, the en of Erech, demanding that the latter recognize him as his overlord and that the goddess Inanna be brought to Aratta. Enmerkar is contemptuous of the challenge and in a long address, in which he depicts himself as the favorite of the gods, declares that Inanna will remain in Erech and demands that Ensukushiranna become his vassal. Ensukushiranna gathers the members of his council and asks them for advice. They counsel him to submit to Enmerkar, but this he indignantly refuses to do. Where-upon the mashmash-priest of Aratta comes to his aid and boasts that he will subdue Erech—and indeed, all the lands “above and below, from the sea to the cedar mountain”—by his magical power. Ensukushiranna is delighted and gives him five minas of gold and five minas of silver as well as the necessary supplies. The mashmash arrives in Erech in due course but is outwitted by the goddess Nisaba’s two shepherds and a wise old crone by the name of Sagbara, who finally kills him and throws his dead body into the Euphrates. When Ensukushiranna hears of what has befallen his mashmash, he hurriedly sends a messenger to Enmerkar and capitulates completely, admitting abjectly that Enmerkar is his superior.

Another Sumerian epic tale whose contents are revealing of the extraordinarily close political, religious, and cultural contacts between Erech and Aratta is one which may be entitled “Lugalbanda and Enmerkar.” It consists of approximately four hundred lines, and the relevant details of its plot are as follows.

Lugalbanda, one of the heroes of Erech belonging to Enmerkar’s military entourage, has just returned to Erech from a perilous journey, only to find his lord and liege in great distress. For many years past, the Semitic Martu have been ravaging both Sumer and Uri (roughly the later Akkad). Now they are laying siege to Erech itself, and Enmerkar finds that he must get a call for help through to his sister (none other than the goddess Inanna of Aratta). But he can find no one to undertake the dangerous journey to Aratta to deliver the message. Whereupon Lugalbanda steps up to his king and bravely volunteers for the task. Upon Enmerkar’s insistence on secrecy, he swears that he will make the journey alone unaccompanied by his followers. After receiving from Enmerkar the exact words of his message to Inanna, Lugalbanda hastens to his friends and followers and informs them of his imminent journey. They try to dissuade him, but with no success. He takes up his weapons, crosses the seven mountains that reach from one end of Anshan to the other—or, as the poet puts it, “from the ‘shoulder’ of Anshan to the ‘head’ of Anshan”—and finally arrives with joyful step at his destination.

In Aratta, Lugalbanda is given a warm welcome by Inanna. She asks what has brought him all alone from Erech to Aratta, and he repeats verbatim Enmerkar’s message and call for help.
Inanna’s answer is obscure; it seems to involve a river and the river’s unusual fish which Enmerkar is to catch; also involved are certain water vessels which he is to fashion. Enmerkar does as directed, and the poem closes with a paean of praise to Aratta, which seems to have supplied Enmerkar with metal- and stone-workers.

The contents of the three Sumerian epic tales sketched above are of unusual significance for the light they shed on the otherwise practically unknown ancient Iranian city-state of Aratta; they provide us with a number of revealing details regarding Aratta’s political organization, economy, and religion, all of which are quite new and unexpected. Thus we find, according to our Sumerian poet, that the political head of Aratta, just as in the Sumerian city-state of Erech, was a military and religious leader known as the en and that he bore a Sumerian name. We also find that there were other high officials in Aratta with such Sumerian titles as ensi, sukkal, shatam, ragaba, and uqula; and that Aratta, like the Sumerian city-state, had an advisory assembly, whose opinion, however, could be ignored by the city’s ruler if he felt disposed to do so.

In regard to religion, we learn that the Sumerian pantheon was worshipped in Aratta. Its tutelary deity was the Sumerian goddess Inanna who, to judge from the first of our epic poems, “Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta,” was only later made the “Queen of Eanna” in Erech by Enmerkar. Another favorite deity of Aratta was Dumuzi—long known as a deified ruler of Erech—the shepherd who, according to the Sumerian mythographers, became Inanna’s beloved and death-doomed husband. The god Enki, on the other hand, whose special protégé Enmerkar seems to have been, was rather inimically disposed toward Aratta and its en.

Aratta’s economic wealth, to judge from our poems, consisted primarily of gold, silver, and all kinds of stone; it was noted, moreover, for its skilled metal- and stone-workers, its masons and sculptors. It was for this reason, no doubt, that the rulers of Erech, a region destitute of stones and metals, were eager to add Aratta to their domain. On the other hand, Aratta was not rich in grain, which Erech had in surplus—hence, perhaps, the readiness on the part of her people to yield to Erech in spite of the wishes of their ruler.

Let us now turn to the geographic indications in our poems and try to figure out the probable location of Aratta on the map. First of all, we are reasonably certain that Aratta was located in Iran, since our poems depict it as separated from Erech, in southern Mesopotamia, by the entire land of Anshan, from its “shoulder” to its “head,” and Anshan, most scholars agree, is situated in southwestern Iran. A problem arises, however, in trying to locate Aratta in relation to Anshan. Is it to be sought north of Anshan in the direction of Lake Urmia and the Caspian Sea, or to the east in the direction of Baluchistan and India, or to the south in the direction of Laristan and the Persian Gulf? Once again, it is a Sumerian epic tale which may give us the answer. This poem, which may be entitled “Lugalbanda and Mount Hurum,” remained largely unintelligible until 1955, when a large six-column tablet from the Hilprecht Collection of the Friedrich-Schiller University in Jena became available; it tells the following story.

Enmerkar, the lord of Erech, has decided to journey to Aratta in order to make it a vassal state. Accompanied by a vast host of Erechites under the command of seven unnamed heroes and Lugalbanda, who, to quote the words of the poem, “was their eighth,” he arrives at Mount Hurum. Then and there Lugalbanda falls ill. His brothers and friends do all they can to revive him, but to no avail. Taking him for dead, they decide that they will leave his corpse on Mount Hurum, proceed on their journey to Aratta, and on their return from the campaign, pick up his body and carry it back to Erech. But Lugalbanda is not dead. Abandoned and forsaken, he prays to the gods of the sun, moon, and the Venus star, and they restore his health. He wanders all over the highland steppe, and there we must leave him for the present, since our available texts break off at this point.

It is clear from this poem that Mount Hurum was situated somewhere between Erech and Aratta, and since it is not unreasonable to assume that Mount Hurum was the original home of the Hurrian people from the neighborhood of Lake Van, we may conclude that Aratta lay in the vicinity of Lake Urmia or perhaps even farther east. In fact, Enmerkar’s campaign to Aratta might be compared to some extent with that of Sargon II more than two thousand years later (714 B.C.) to the land of the Mannai, the account of which, interestingly enough, mentions the
crossing of a river called Aratta, a name reminiscent, perhaps, of the city Aratta.

From mountain-perched Aratta near the Caspian Sea, let us turn to two lands which often go together in the inscriptions, Magan and Meluhha; their location is still in doubt, although they may turn out to be Egypt and Ethiopia. In fact, most cuneiformists agree that by the first millennium B.C. Magan and Meluhha did correspond roughly to Egypt and Ethiopia. It is for the earlier periods—for the days of Sargon the Great, Gudea, and the Third Dynasty of Ur, for example—that this identification has been generally thought to be most unlikely, since it would involve the seemingly incredible assumption that the peoples of those early days had seagoing ships that could reach the east coast of Africa. This has led to the hypothesis that over the millenniums there was a shift in toponymy, that is, that in the third and second millenniums B.C. the names Magan and Meluhha corresponded to the lands bordering the east and southeast Arabian coasts but that for one reason or another these names were later transferred to Egypt and Ethiopia.

Now methodologically speaking, the verification of a hypothesis involving a name shift in the cuneiform documents for countries of such recognized importance as those referred to by the names Magan and Meluhha should be based on evidence that is reasonably assured and decisive. But as of today, there does not seem to me to be that kind of evidence; there is still a strong possibility, as will become evident from what follows, that there was no toponymic shift and that Magan and Meluhha correspond more or less to Egypt and Ethiopia in the third millennium B.C. as well as in the first millennium.

Magan and Meluhha are mentioned in both Sumerian and Akkadian texts from at least the time of Sargon the Great down to the middle of the first millennium B.C. Sargon the Great, in his own inscriptions, writes that the boats of Magan, Meluhha, and Dilmun rode at anchor in his capital, Agade. His grandson, Naram-Sin, captured Manium, the king of Magan, brought back booty from Magan, and had stones quarried there; a number of alabaster vases dedicated by Naram-Sin and inscribed with the words “booty of Magan” have been excavated. Gudea writes that he obtained diorite for his statues from Magan and wood for the building of his temple Eninmu from both Magan and Meluhha. Ur-Nammu, in the prologue to his law code, speaks of returning the Magan-boat of Nanna on the boundary—an enigmatic statement, but one which seems to point to the importance attached to trade relations between Magan and Sumer. Economic documents from the time of the Third Dynasty of Ur mention such imports from Magan and Meluhha as copper, ivory, carnelian, and onions. In the post-Sumerian periods, we find Meluhha mentioned several times as a place of “black men,” which leads naturally to an identification of Meluhha with Ethiopia.

There are also a number of references to Magan and Meluhha in the Sumerian literary texts, published and unpublished, which are highly significant of the close relationship between Magan, Meluhha, and Sumer and which point to the identification of Magan and Meluhha with Egypt and Ethiopia. The references are as follows:

1. A three-line passage in the poem “Gilgamesh and the Land of the Living” which reads:

   After it had sunk, after it had sunk,
   After the Magan-boat had sunk,
   After the boat “The Might of Magilum” had sunk.

These lines are part of a hortatory address by Gilgamesh to Enkidu, who, terrified by the thought of encountering Huwawa, the guardian monster of the “land of the cut cedar,” is reluctant to accompany his master on his dangerous journey. The implications of the passage are quite uncertain, but it proves that the theme of the Magan-boat and its sinking was current lore among the Sumerians. Moreover, there is some possibility that the third line, which mentions a boat called “The Might of Magilum,” actually refers to Meluhha.

2. A line toward the very end of the myth “Enki and Ninhursag” reads: “Let Nintullu be the lord of Magan.” These words are uttered by the god Enki, who is decreeing the fates of eight deities born by the goddess Ninhursag to heal his eight bodily organs

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1 The Sumerian texts as well as detailed references will be found in my “Magan and Meluhha according to the Sumerian Literary Texts,” prepared for the Huitième Rencontre Assyriologique.
which had become sick and ailing as a consequence of his eating eight forbidden plants. The name Nintulla has all the earmarks of a Sumerian complex and has the meaning “the lord of tul,” in which the syllable tul represents a word unknown at present. We learn from this line, therefore, that a god of Magan bore a Sumerian name and that the Sumerian poets and men of letters found no difficulty in originating and propagating the idea that their own god Enki had appointed him as the god of Magan. This speaks for a rather close and intimate relationship between the lands and peoples of Sumer and Magan.

3. An eight-line passage from “The Curse of Agade” reads as follows:

The Martu of the highland, who know not grain,
Bring him (Naram-Sin) unblemished oxen, unblemished kids;
The Meluhha, the men of the black land,
Bring to him all kinds of exotic wares;
The Elamites and Subarians carry the loads for him like load-carrying donkeys;
All the ensi’s and the sangal’s,
The courtiers of the Guedinna,
Lead (their) gifts straight (to Agade) monthly and at new years.

Here, then, we find the Meluhhaites listed as bringing tribute to Naram-Sin in his capital, Agade, alongside the Martu, Elamites, and Subarians. To be sure, it is rather surprising that Magan is not mentioned here, since according to the long-known contemporary votive inscriptions, Naram-Sin conquered Magan and brought back booty from it; in fact, it would seem not unlikely on general grounds that—to paraphrase a well-known American election dictum—“as went Magan, so went Meluhha.” Be that as it may, what is of no little importance in “The Curse of Agade” passage is the fact that the Meluhhaites are designated as “the men of the black land,” a phrase which closely parallels the expression “the black Meluhhaites” found in the first millennium inscriptions mentioned above. For this similarity tends to indicate that the land known by the name of Meluhha to the authors of that poem, who probably lived some time about 2000 B.C., was identical with that known as Meluhha to the first-millennium scribes, and that there had been no toponymic shift over the years.

4. A two-line passage in a Ninurta hymn published as text No. 61 in my Sumerian Literary Texts from Nippur, reads: “Carnelian and lapis lazuli you brought (?) from the land Meluhha.” This statement is part of a passage extolling the god Ninurta as the “bringer” of metals, stones, and minerals from the countries in which they are found. Carnelian is indeed well known as a product characteristic of Meluhha, but it is rather surprising to find Meluhha noteworthy also for lapis lazuli.

5. A still unpublished variant of a passage from the myth “Enki and Ninhursag,” consisting largely of a blessing uttered no doubt by Enki to Dilmun, reads as follows:

May the land Tukrish transport to you gold [from] Harali, lapis lazuli, (and) . . .;
May the land Meluhha [bring (?)] to you tempting, precious carnelian, messhagana-wood, fine “sea”(?) -wood, (and) large boats;
May the land Marhashi [bring (?)] to you “precious” stone (and) crystal,
May the land Magan [bring (?)] to you mighty copper, the strength of . . ., diorite, s-stone, and shuman-stone;
May the “Sea-land”(? ) bring (?) to you ebony (?), the ornament . . . of the king,
May the land Zalamgar transport to you wool, (?), good ore (?), (and) . . .;
May the land Elam transport to you wool (?) . . ., (and) heavy (?) tribute;
May Ur, the das of kingship, the city . . . ., [bring (?)] to you grain, sesame oil, noble garments, fine garments, (and) large boats;
May the wide sea bring (?) you its abundance;
The city—its dwellings are good dwellings, Dilmun—its dwellings are good dwellings;
Its barley is very small barley,
Its dates are very large dates,
Its harvests bring three . . .,
Its trees . . . .

Here, then, Meluhha is depicted as a land noted for carnelian and two types of wood, while Magan is depicted as noted for copper and three types of stone. Since several of these products are known from the economic documents as characteristic of Magan and Meluhha, it would seem not unreasonable to assume that the Sumerian men of letters had a moderately good idea of the
economic importance of the two countries and probably of their location as well. Moreover, while this passage tells us relatively little about Magan and Meluhha, it is invaluable for the picture it draws of Dilmun and may even prove significant for the location of that country.

6. A passage from the myth "Enki and the World Order" reads:

   The lands Magan and Dilmun
   Looked up at me, Enki,
   Moored (?) the Dilmun-boat to the ground (?),
   Loaded the Magan-boat sky high;
   The Magilum-boat of Meluhha,
   Transports silver and gold,
   Brings them to Nippur for Enlil, the king of all the lands.

Although the meaning of several of the words and phrases is uncertain, the sense of the passage as a whole is quite clear: the people of Magan and Meluhha are depicted as bringing their products by boat—note that the Magilum-boat is here clearly identified with Meluhha—to Enlil's temple in Nippur, that is, of course, to Sumer. It is hardly likely that this description of third millennium B.C. “international relations” was nothing more than an invention on the part of our poets; it must have been common knowledge that these three countries supplied Sumer with many of its economic necessities either through forced tribute or commercial exchange or both.

7. A second relevant passage from the same myth, consisting of sixteen lines, contains Enki's blessing of Meluhha. While some of the words and phrases of this passage are still obscure, it is obvious that the poet knew Meluhha (designated here, too, as “the black land”) as a prosperous and populous country rich in trees, reeds, bulls, dar-birds—note that the dar-birds of Meluhha are also known from the economic documents, which provides additional proof that the poet did not invent his description of the country—hoia-birds, and sundry metals.

All of this evidence hardly solves with finality the problem of Meluhha's location and identification. But no matter where situated, the fact that the Sumerian poets and men of letters were so favorably disposed toward it would tend to indicate that there was a rather close and intimate relationship between Meluhha and Sumer, far closer and far more intimate than has hitherto been generally thought.

The land Dilmun, to which we now turn, seems to have been even more intimately related to Sumer than Magan and Meluhha. Dilmun is identified by most scholars with the island of Bahrein in the Persian Gulf; a large and highly competent Danish archaeological expedition has been excavating there for the past ten years largely because of its faith in this identification. As the following analysis of the relevant literary material will show, however, there is considerable room for skepticism on this point. In fact, there is even some possibility that Dilmun may turn out to include the region in Pakistan and India where a remarkable urban, literate culture flourished toward the end of the third millennium B.C., the so-called Harappan, or Indus Valley, culture.2

A fairly obvious clue to the general direction in which Dilmun is to be sought is found in the last extant lines of the Sumerian deluge myth, according to which Ziusudra, the Sumerian Flood hero, is given eternal life and transplanted by the great gods An and Enlil to Dilmun, which is described as “the place where the sun rises.” Now the epithet “the place where the sun rises” hardly fits the island of Bahrein, which hugs the Arabian coast and is almost directly south of Sumer; it is much more likely to refer to the region of the Indus River, or perhaps to Baluchistan.

In the Lugalannemunu inscription (see pages 50–52), eight lands over which Lugalannemunu claims control are named several times in the same order, thus: “The Cedar Land,” Elam, Marhashi, Gutium, Subir, Martu, Sutium, and Eanna. On the not unreasonable assumption that this list is geographically oriented, “The Cedar Land” referred to would not be identical with the Lebanon to the west but with a land to the east of Elam. This is borne out by the fact that the sun-god, Utu, is described in the Sumerian literature as the god who “rises from the land of aromatics and cedar.” It is not unlikely that this land, which is certainly to be sought in the east, is the same as the “Cedar Land” of the Lugalannemunu inscription. Moreover, since the “Cedar Land” is the place from which the sun rises, it would not be surprising to find that the “Cedar Land” and Dilmun, “the place where the

2 For a discussion of this culture, see Sir Mortimer Wheeler's Early India and Pakistan (1959).
sun rises,” are roughly identical. And, indeed, the cedar is mentioned as a tree native to Dilmun in a cryptic and still enigmatic passage in a Dumuzi lament which reads:

- My shoulder is the cedar, my breast is the cypress,
- My... is the consecrated cedar,
- The cedar, the consecrated of Hashur,
- The shade of Dilmun.

If the identification of the “Cedar Land,” the place where the sun rises, with Dilmun should turn out to be correct, then the land to which Gilgamesh and Enkidu make their dangerous and adventurous journey in the epic tale “Gilgamesh and the Land of the Living” might also turn out to be Dilmun, although it is never explicitly so called in the poem. For this land, too, is characterized as a land of cedars, and the deity in charge of it is none other than the sun-god, Utu. Moreover, its epithet “the Land of the Living” may point to its identification with Dilmun; for Dilmun, according to the poem “Enki and Ninhursag: A Sumerian Paradise Myth,” is described as a land where

- The sick-eyed says not “I am sick-eyed,”
- The sick-headed says not “I am sick-bearded,”
- Its (Dilmun’s) old woman says not “I am an old woman,”
- Its old man says not “I am an old man.”

lines which seem to say indirectly and obliquely that Dilmun is a land of deathlessness and immortality. This would explain, of course, why Ziusudra had been transplanted to Dilmun once the gods had granted him immortality. In fact, it may yet turn out that Gilgamesh traveled to “the Land of the Living” in quest of immortality, in spite of the fact that the initial passages in the poem “Gilgamesh and the Land of the Living” point to the drive for name and fame as the impelling motivation.

But no matter where Dilmun is located, it is clear from what has already been said that it was looked upon by the Sumerians as a blessed paradise land, intimately related to Sumer especially on the religious and spiritual level. According to the myth “Enki and Ninhursag,” it appears to have been Enki’s home ground, as it were, where he begot quite a number of deities. The great goddess Ninhursag, too, seems to have been quite at home in Dilmun; indeed, it seems to have been the place where all the gods meet.

Its tutelary deity was a goddess bearing the good Sumerian name, Ninsikil, “the pure lady,” and her husband, whom Enki begot, was Enhshag, “the fair lord.” From the variant passage from Ur in the “Enki and Ninhursag” poem quoted above (see pages 147–49), we get the impression that Dilmun was one of the richest and most powerful countries in the ancient world.

Now Dilmun is not just a literary fiction, a never-never land created by the fertile imagination of the Sumerian bards and poets. It has a long history, to judge from the votive and economic documents, beginning with Ur-Nanshe, who records that “the ships of Dilmun brought him wood as a tribute from foreign lands.” The boats of Dilmun anchored at the Agade docks along those of Magan and Meluhha in the time of Sargon the Great. According to the economic documents from the time of the Third Dynasty of Ur and the Isin-Larsa period which followed, the imports from Dilmun consisted of gold, copper and copper utensils, lapis lazuli, tables inlaid with ivory, “fisheyes” (perhaps pearls), ivory and ivory objects (combs, breastplates, and boxes as well as human- and animal-shaped figurines and end pieces for furniture), beads of semiprecious stones, dates, and onions. “Dilmun onions,” in fact, are mentioned in the economic texts dating from as early as the twenty-fourth century B.C. Long after the Sumerians had ceased to exist, throughout the second and first millennia B.C., we find Dilmun mentioned in the Akkadian documents. There are Dilmun messengers and caravans. The Assyrian king Tukulti-Ninurta uses in his titles the expression “king of Dilmun and Meluhha,” reminiscent, in a way, of the Biblical “from India to Ethiopia” used of King Ahasuerus in the Book of Esther. There is a king of Dilmun by the name of Uperi, who paid tribute to Sargon II of Assyria. There is another king by the name of Hundaru, in whose days booty taken from Dilmun consisted of bronze, objects made of copper and bronze, sticks of precious wood, and large quantities of kohl, used as eye paint. In the days of Sennacherib, a crew of soldiers is sent from Dilmun to Babylon to help raze that city, and they bring with them bronze spades and spikes which are described as a characteristic product of Dilmun. Just how to interpret the Sumerian literary evidence which treats Dilmun as a Sumerian Elysium in the light of the “down to earth” Dilmun of the economic and historical documents must
remain more or less a mystery until intelligible written documents are found in Dilmun itself, whether it turns out to be the island of Bahrein or the region of Southern Iran and the Indus Valley.

As is evident from what has been said above about Aratta, Magan and Meluhha, and Dilmun, Sumerian influence, particularly at the religious and spiritual level, reached out for thousands of miles and in all directions. It is obvious, too, that over the centuries the Sumerians had accumulated no little information concerning foreign lands and alien peoples. Sumerian merchants roving far and wide by land and sea brought back with them reports of the strange places they visited and of the folk that inhabited them. So, too, no doubt, did the soldiers returning from successful military expeditions. Within the Sumerian cities themselves, there were considerable numbers of foreigners: soldiers captured in battle and brought back as slaves as well as freemen who had come to settle in the city for one reason or another. All in all, therefore, the Sumerian courtiers, administrators, priests, and teachers had considerable knowledge of foreign countries: their geographic location and physical features, their economic resources and political organization, their religious beliefs and practices, their social customs and moral tenets. In fact, not only did the Sumerians know a good deal about foreign countries and peoples; they also judged them, that is, they assessed their conduct and character and evaluated their way of life in accordance with their own Sumerian standards and values.

To judge from the available evidence, both archeological and literary, the world known to the Sumerians extended no farther than India on the east; Anatolia, the Caucasus region, and the more westerly parts of central Asia on the north; the Mediterranean Sea on the west, although perhaps Cyprus and even Crete might be included; and Egypt and Ethiopia on the south. There is at present no evidence known to me that the Sumerians had any contact with, or knowledge of, peoples living in northern Asia, China, or anywhere on the European continent. The Sumerians themselves divided the world into four udna's, that is, four regions or districts, which seem to correspond roughly to the four points of the compass. The oldest known grouping of this type is in the golden-age passage of the poem "Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta," the relevant portion of which reads as follows:

Once upon a time, the lands Shubur and Hamazi,
Many (?)-tongued Sumer, the great land of princeship's divine laws,
Uri, the land having all that is appropriate,
The land Martu, resting in security,
The whole universe, the people in unison,
To Enil in one tongue give praise.

If this passage is correctly translated, it seems to indicate that the Sumerians thought that their own land Sumer formed the earth's southern boundary; that the district Uri, usually equated with Akkad, though it may at that time have been thought to include a much larger territory, formed the earth's northern boundary; that the eastern district was comprised of Shubur and Hamazi; and that the western region was designated by the name of the land Martu, a word which actually came to mean "west" in the Sumerian language. In the Akkadian omen literature of a later date, which may of course go back to an earlier Sumerian counterpart, the four districts are usually given as Akkad (in place of Sumer) in the south; Elam or Gutium in the east; Shubur in the north (instead of the east as it seems to be in the golden-age passage); and Martu again in the west. Unfortunately, neither the Sumerian nor the Akkadian writers go into detail. Nowhere did they indicate what they thought was the actual extent of these four regions, which seem to leave out of account such countries as India, Egypt, and Ethiopia, for example, countries which were certainly known to both the Sumerians and Akkadians. In any case, according to the Sumerian thinkers, the boundaries of these districts and of the lands in them were marked off by the gods at the time of the creation of the universe, and at least by about 2400 B.C., the credo was accepted throughout Sumer that the air-god, Enil, was the king of the entire inhabited earth, "the king of all the lands," and not merely of Sumer alone.

Inhabiting the four corners of the earth were the nam-lulu; this is a Sumerian compound word probably consisting of lu, "man," reduplicated and the particle nam, used to form abstract nouns—it therefore corresponds in formation to the English "mankind." The Sumerian people—the "black-heads" as they called themselves from at least 2000 B.C. on—were only a part of this larger mankind but, needless to say, a very important part. In fact, they were so
important a part that at least in one case the “black-heads” seem to be identified with humanity as a whole. Thus there is a passage in the first part of the long-known Sumerian Flood myth which reads:

After An, Enki, and Ninhursag
Had fashioned the black-headed people,
Vegetation luxuriated from the earth,
Animals, four-legged (creatures) of the plain were
brought artfully into existence.

Here, then, “black-heads” seem to be juxtaposed with plants and animals, as if the word referred to mankind as a whole. Again, according to the same Flood-myth, when the gods had decided to send down “kingship” on earth, they founded all of the first five royal cities in Sumer. And when the Flood came “to destroy the seed of mankind,” it was the Sumerian king Ziusudra of Shuruppak who was saved by the gods as “the preserver of the name of vegetation and the seed of mankind.”

There is little doubt that the Sumerians considered themselves a kind of “chosen people,” “the salt of the earth,” as it were. In the myth “Enki and the World Order,” which treats of the god Enki’s creating and organizing the natural and cultural entities and processes essential to civilized society, we find him blessing Sumer in winged words which reveal that the Sumerians thought of themselves as a rather special and hallowed community more intimately related to the gods than mankind in general—a community noteworthy not only for its material wealth and possessions, not only for its powerful kings, but also for its honored spiritual leaders, the en’s—a community which all the fate-decreing heaven-gods, the Anunnaki, had selected as their abode.

Naturally enough by no means all foreign lands and peoples were looked upon with such favor as Meluhha, Dilmun, and Aratta. Bitterness, scorn, and hatred, however, were heaped primarily on the enemies at whose hands they suffered. The Gutians, for example, who in the days of the Dynasty of Akkad brought death and destruction to Sumer and its people, were described bitterly as “a people which brooks no control,” “a stinging viper of the mountains,” “an enemy of the gods.” The Elamites and Subarians are termed “men of destruction” in the Sumerian lamentations. Moreover, in the case of the Elamites, we find an attempt at succinct characterization of their personality in two sayings (from a Sumerian proverb collection) which Edmund Gordon is preparing for publication. The first reads literally: “The Elamite—one house for him to live in is not good,” that is, presumably, the Elamite was not satisfied with one house. If this interpretation is correct, it is clear that rightly or wrongly the Sumerians looked upon the Elamites as unusually greedy and ambitious. The second proverb reads literally: “The Elamite is sick: his teeth are chattering.” If the meaning is that the Elamite could not help wincing from pain, then it is clear that the Sumerians thought the Elamites to be “cry-babies” and unmanly.

In the case of two other peoples, the Hurrians and the Martu, it is not improbable that we have a contemptuous capsule-like characterization wrapped in one word. The Hurrians, as is well known, lived originally on Mount Hurum, the region about Lake Van. Now a word hurum is found in Sumerian literature with the meaning “boor,” “fool.” In fact, in the edubba essay “The Disputation between Enkimansi and Girnshag,” the word hurum is combined with the word galam, which means “clever,” to describe one of the students as a “clever-fool,” or sophomore. Now if the word hurum, “fool,” is identical with the word hurum in the phrase kur-hurum, the “land Hurum,” this one word would say a whole pageful about what the Sumerians thought of the Hurrians.

Similarly, in the case of the people known as Martus, it is the etymology of the Sumerian word arad, “slave,” which may prove revealing. For it has been suggested, and in my opinion not without reason, that the word arad derives from the word (m)art(u); if this is true, it would indicate that the Sumerians characterized the Martu as of a slavish, servile disposition.

In the case of the Martu, too, there is a Sumerian proverb of cultural significance; it reads literally: “Wheat is prepared with (?) gu-nunuz-grain as a confection; the Martu eat it but know not what it contains.” This proverb fits in well with an epithet of Martu well known from the literary documents which reads: “Martu who knows not grain.”

The Martu, as is well known, were Semites. But if the Sumerians spoke critically of them, it was only with regard to their culture, not their ethnic origin. This leads us to the problem of the
relationship between Semites—particularly those Semites which came to be known as Akkadians—and the Sumerians. Until recently the history of early Mesopotamia was viewed as a bitter, deadly struggle between the two racial groups. Some years ago, however, Thorkild Jacobsen collected some fairly convincing evidence which led him to the conclusion that Semites and Sumerians lived “peacefully side by side in Mesopotamia.” This, however, can only be partially true. For when, for example, the Semite Sargon the Great dedicated his statues and steles in the most Sumerian of Sumerian temples, the Ekur of Nippur, he (and also his successors Rimush and Manishtushu) had them inscribed in both Sumerian and Akkadian and primarily in the latter, which indicates, of course, that Sargon and his successors were quite conscious of their Semitic origin and background. Similarly, in order to keep the conquered Sumerian cities under their control, Sargon and his successors appointed their Akkadian kin to the higher administrative posts and garrisoned them with all-Akkadian troops, to such an extent, in fact, that economic documents written in the Akkadian language began to appear all over Sumer— all of which would hardly endear them to the Sumerians. Thus, it seems not unlikely that there was considerable friction and hard feeling between the Sumerians and the Semitic-speaking and kin-conscious Akkadians who, during the period of the Sargonid dynasty, were striving to become the lords and masters of Sumer—a rather intolerable situation which may explain in part the desecration and destruction of the Ekur at Nippur by Naram-Sin, as described with such bitterness and chagrin by the author of “The Curse of Agade.”

In any case, it was a Semitic people—the Amorites—who put an end to the Sumerians as a political, ethnic, and linguistic entity. To be sure, the conquered conquered the conquerors, and the Amorites, commonly known as Babylonians because their capital was the city of Babylon, took over Sumerian culture and civilization lock, stock, and barrel. Except for the language, the Babylonian educational system, religion, mythology, and literature are almost identical with the Sumerian, excluding, of course, the expected changes and variations due to political developments and the passing of time. And since these Babylonians, in turn, exercised no little influence on their less cultured neighbors, particu-
of place notation, which may have been the forerunner of the Hindu-Arabic decimal system now in use. Traces of the Sumerian sexagesimal system exist even today in the measurement of the circle and angle by degrees and in some of the weights and measures that were current until relatively recent times.

In the field of technology, the potter’s wheel, the wheeled vehicle, and the sailboat are all probably Sumerian inventions. And while metallurgy is certainly not of Sumerian origin, the products of the Sumerian metalworkers were dispersed all over the ancient Near East, and some even reached as far as Hungary and Central Europe.

Architecture was the major art of Sumer from earliest times, in particular the construction of temples with their stone foundations and platforms, niched cellas, painted walls and altars, mosaic-covered columns, and impressive façades; it would not seem unlikely that at least some of these architectural techniques were diffused over the ancient world. Sumerian architects also made use of the dome, vault, and arch, and it is not improbable that the arch first came to Greece and Rome from contact with Babylonia, which had inherited it from Sumer. Near Eastern sculpture, too, particularly the practice of fashioning statues of gods and men, may go back to Sumerian origins, since it was the Sumerian theologians who first conceived of the idea that the statue represented the ruler, or even some other high official, standing before his god in unceasing prayer, as it were, for his life. The Sumerian cylinder seal “rolled” its way all over the ancient world from India to Cyprus and Crete, and there is many a church in Europe today whose capitals are ornamented with conventionalized motifs going back to scenes first imagined and engraved by the Sumerian artist and craftsman.

The achievements of the Sumerians in the areas of religion, education, and literature left a deep impress not only on their neighbors in space and time but on the culture of modern man as well, especially through their influence, indirect though it was, on the ancient Hebrews and the Bible. The extent of the Hebrew debt to Sumer becomes more apparent from day to day as a result of the gradual piecing together and translation of the Sumerian literary works; for as can now be seen, they have quite a number of features in common with the books of the Bible. This chapter will close, therefore, with a sketch of the Biblical parallels found in Sumerian literature by isolating and analyzing the various beliefs, tenets, themes, motifs, and values which seem to be common to the ancient Hebrews and the much more ancient Sumerians.

The form and content of the Sumerian literary works have been discussed and analyzed in great detail in chapter vi of this book, and no further elaboration is needed at this point. It goes without saying that a written literature so varied, comprehensive, and time-honored as the Sumerian left a deep impress on the literary products of the entire Near East. Particularly was this so since at one time or another practically all the peoples of western Asia—Akkadians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Hittites, Hurrians, Canaanites, and Elamites (to name only those for which positive and direct evidence is available at the moment)—had found it to their interest to borrow the cuneiform script in order to inscribe their own records and writings. The adoption and adaptation of this syllabic and logographic system of writing, which had been developed by the Sumerians to write their own agglutinative and largely monosyllabic tongue, demanded a thorough training in the Sumerian language and literature. To this end, no doubt, learned teachers and scribes were imported from Sumer to the schools of the neighboring lands, while the native scribes traveled to Sumer for special instruction in its more famous academies. The result was a wide dissemination of Sumerian culture and literature. The ideas and ideals of the Sumerians—their cosmology, theology, ethics, and system of education—permeated to a greater or lesser extent the thoughts and writings of all the peoples of the ancient Near East. So, too, did the Sumerian literary forms and themes—their plots, motifs, stylistic devices, and aesthetic techniques. And the Hebrews of Palestine, the land where the books of the Bible were composed, redacted, and edited, were no exception.

To be sure, even the earliest parts of the Bible, it is generally agreed, were not written down in their present form much earlier than 1000 B.C., whereas most of the Sumerian literary documents were composed about 2000 B.C. or not long afterward. There is, therefore, no question of any contemporary borrowing from the Sumerian literary sources. Sumerian influence penetrated the Bible through the Canaanite, Hurrian, Hittite, and Akkadian literatures—particularly through the latter, since, as is well known, the
Akkadian language was used all over Palestine and its environs in the second millennium B.C. as the common language of practically the entire literary world. Akkadian literary works must therefore have been well known to Palestinian men of letters, including the Hebrews, and not a few of these Akkadian literary works can be traced back to Sumerian prototypes, remodeled and transformed over the centuries.

However, there is another possible source of Sumerian influence on the Bible which is far more direct and immediate than that just described. In fact, it may well go back to Father Abraham himself. Most scholars agree that while the Abraham saga as told in the Bible contains much that is legendary and fanciful, it does have an important kernel of truth, including Abraham’s birth in Ur of the Chaldees, perhaps about 1700 B.C., and his early life there with his family. Now Ur was one of the most important cities of ancient Sumer; in fact, it was the capital of Sumer at three different periods in its history. It had an impressive edubba; and in the joint British-American excavations conducted there between the years 1922 and 1934, quite a number of Sumerian literary documents have been found. Abraham and his forefathers may well have had some acquaintance with Sumerian literary products that had been copied or created in their home town academy. And it is by no means impossible that he and the members of his family brought some of this Sumerian lore and learning with them to Palestine, where they gradually became part of the traditions and sources utilized by the Hebrew men of letters in composing and redacting the books of the Bible.

Be that as it may, here are a number of Biblical parallels from Sumerian literature which unquestionably point to traces of Sumerian influence:

1. **Creation of the Universe** The Sumerians, like the ancient Hebrews, thought that a primeval sea had existed prior to creation. The universe, according to the Sumerians, consisted of a united heaven and earth engendered in some way in this primeval sea, and it was the air-god, Enlil—perhaps not unlike the ruach-elohim of Genesis—who separated heaven from earth.

2. **Creation of Man** Man, according to both the Hebrews and the Sumerians, was conceived as having been fashioned of clay and imbued with the “breath of life.” The purpose for which he was created was to serve the gods—or Jahweh alone, in the case of the Hebrews—with prayer, supplication, and sacrifices.

3. **Creation Techniques** Creation, according to both Biblical and Sumerian writers, was accomplished primarily in two ways: by divine command and by actual “making” or “fashioning.” In either case, the actual creation was preceded by divine planning, though this need not have been explicitly stated.

4. **Paradise** No Sumerian parallels to the story of the Garden of Eden and the Fall of Man have yet been found. There are, however, several paradise motifs that are significant for comparative purposes, including one that may help to clarify the rib episode in Genesis 2:21-23. Moreover, there is some reason to believe that the very idea of a divine paradise, a garden of the gods, is of Sumerian origin (see pages 147-49).

5. **The Flood** As has long been recognized, the Biblical and Sumerian versions of the Flood story show numerous obvious and close parallels. Noteworthy, too, is the fact that according to at least one Mesopotamian tradition there were ten antediluvian rulers, each with a life span of extraordinary length, which is reminiscent of some of the Biblical antediluvian patriarchs.

6. **The Cain-Abel Motif** The rivalry motif depicted in the undoubtedly much abbreviated Cain-Abel episode of the Bible was a high favorite with the Sumerian writers and poets (see pages 217-23 for fuller details).

7. **The Tower of Babel and the Dispersion of Mankind** The story of the building of the Tower of Babel originated, no doubt, in an effort to explain the existence of the Mesopotamian ziggurats. To the Hebrews, these towering structures, which could often be seen in a state of ruin and decay, became symbols of man’s feeling of insecurity and the not unrelated lust for power which brings upon him humiliation and suffering. It is most unlikely, therefore, that a parallel to this story will be found among the Sumerians, to whom the ziggurat represented a bond between heaven and earth, between god and man. On the other hand, the idea that there was a time when all peoples of the earth “had one language and the same words” and that this happy state was...
brought to an end by an irate deity may have a parallel in a
golden-age passage which is part of the Sumerian epic tale “En-
merkar and the Lord of Aratta” (see pages 262 and 285).

8 The Earth and Its Organization The Sumerian myth “Enki
and the World Order: The Organization of the Earth and Its Cul-
tural Processes” (see pages 174–83) provides a detailed account of
the activities of Enki, the Sumerian god of wisdom, in organizing
the earth and in establishing what might be termed law and order
on it; this poem has its Biblical echoes in, for example, Deuteronomy
32:7–14 (note especially verse 8) and Psalm 107.

9 Personal God To judge from the covenant between God and
Abraham—note, too, the reference to a “god of Nahor” in Genesis
31:53—the ancient Hebrews were familiar with the idea of a per-
sonal god. The belief in the existence of a personal god was
evolved by the Sumerians at least as early as the middle of the
third millennium b.c. According to Sumerian teachers and sages,
every adult male and family head had his “personal god,” or a
kind of good angel whom he looked upon as his divine father.
This personal god was in all probability adopted by the Sumerian
paterfamilias as the result of an oracle or a dream or a vision in-
volving a mutual understanding or agreement not unlike the cove-
nant between the Hebrew patriarchs and Jahweh.

To be sure, there could have been nothing mutually exclusive
about the covenant between the Sumerian and his tutelary deity,
and in this respect, therefore, it differed very significantly from
that between Abraham and his god. All that the Sumerian ex-
pected of his personal god was that he speak in his behalf and in-
tercede for him in the assembly of the gods whenever the occa-
sion demanded and thus insure for him a long life and good
health. In return, he glorified his god with special prayers, sup-
pliations, and sacrifices, although at the same time he continued to
worship the other deities of the Sumerian pantheon. Nevertheless,
as the Sumerian literary document “Man and His God” indicates,
there existed a close, intimate, trusting and even tender relation-
ship between the Sumerian and his personal god, one which bears
no little resemblance to that between Jahweh and the Hebrew
patriarchs and, in later days, between Jahweh and the Hebrew
people as a whole.

10 Law That the Biblical laws and the long-known Hammu-
rabi law code show numerous similarities in content, terminol-
yogy, and even arrangement is recognized by practically all students of
the Bible. But the Hammurabi code itself, as has been shown in
recent years, is an Akkadian compilation of laws based largely on
Sumerian prototypes (see pages 79–88). In fact, there is good rea-
son to infer that the extraordinary growth and development of
legal concepts, practices, precedents, and compilations in the an-
cient Near East goes back largely to the Sumerians and their
rather one-sided emphasis on rivalry and superiority (see pages
266–67).

11 Ethics and Morals The ethical concepts and moral ideals
developed by the Sumerians (see pages 123–25) were essentially
identical with those of the Hebrews, although they lacked their
almost palpable ethical sensitivity and moral fervor, especially as
these qualities are exemplified in the Biblical prophetic literature.
Psychologically, the Sumerian was more distant and aloof than
the Hebrew—more emotionally restrained, more formal and
methodical. He tended to eye his fellow men with some sus-
picion, misgiving, and even apprehension, which inhibited to no
small extent the human warmth, sympathy, and affection so vital
to spiritual growth and well-being. And in spite of his high ethi-
cal attainments, the Sumerian never reached the lofty conviction
that a “pure heart” and “clean hands” were more worthy in the
eyes of his god than lengthy prayers, profuse sacrifices, and elab-
orate ritual.

12 Divine Retribution and National Catastrophe Jahweh’s
wrath and the humiliation and destruction of the people that in-
curs it constitute an often repeated theme in the Biblical books.
Usually the national catastrophe comes about through a violent
attack by some neighboring people, especially selected as Jah-
weh’s scourge and whip. To this theme the historiographic docu-
ment “The Curse of Agade” offers a rather interesting parallel:
Enlil, the leading deity of the Sumerian pantheon, having been
deeply angered by the blasphemous act of a ruler of Agade, lifted
his eyes to the mountains and brought down the barbarous and
cruel Gutians, who proceeded to destroy not only Agade but al-
most all of Sumer as well.
13 The Plague Motif The Sumerian myth "Inanna and Shukalletuda: The Gardener's Mortal Sin" (see pages 162–63) contains a plague motif which parallels to some extent the Biblical plague motif in the Exodus story: in both cases, a deity angered by the misdeeds and obduracy of an individual sends a series of plagues against an entire land and its people.

14 Suffering and Submission: The “Job” Motif Quite recently, a Sumerian poetic essay which is of rather unusual significance for Biblical comparative studies has become available. Its central theme, human suffering and submission, is identical with that treated so sensitively and poignantly in the Biblical Book of Job. Even the introductory plot is the same: A man—unnamed in the Sumerian poem—who had been wealthy, wise, righteous, and blessed with friends and kin is overwhelmed one day, for no apparent reason, by sickness, suffering, poverty, betrayal, and hatred. Admittedly, however, the Sumerian essay, which consists of less than one hundred and fifty lines, compares in no way with the Biblical book in breadth, depth, and beauty; it is much closer in mood, temper, and content to the more tearful and plaintive psalms of the Book of Psalms.

15 Death and the Nether World The Biblical Sheol, and, for that matter, the Hades of the Greeks, has its counterpart in the Sumerian Kur. Like the Hebrew Sheol, the Kur was the dark, dread abode of the dead. It was a land of no return, from which only exceptionally the shade of a once prominent figure might be called up for questioning. In the Sumerian literary documents, there are several other interesting parallels with Hebrew ideas relating to the nether world: its depiction as the pitiful home of former kings and princes; the raising of the shades of the dead from it; and the imprisonment in it of the god Dumuzi, the Biblical Tammuz, for whom the women of Jerusalem were lamenting as late as the days of the prophet Ezekiel.

So much for some of the more obvious and significant Biblical parallels from Sumerian literature. Needless to say, this list only scratches the surface. Thus, while revising the translation of the Farmers' Almanac for this book, I was struck by two Biblical parallels of an ethical character which the earlier translation had missed: the touching exhortation to the farmer to show compassion to the "gleaners" during the harvesting and to the oxen during the threshing. In the coming years, as more and more of the Sumerian literary documents become available, the number of Sumerian parallels will grow and multiply—particularly for such books as Psalms, Proverbs, Lamentations, and Song of Songs. These considerations bring us to a question which may already have occurred to the reader: If the Sumerians were a people of such outstanding literary and cultural importance for the ancient Near Eastern world as a whole that they even left their indelible impress on the literary works of the Hebrew men of letters, why is it that there seems to be little trace of them in the Bible? In Genesis, chapters 10 and 11, for example, we find lists of quite a number of eponyms, lands, and cities. But except for the rather obscure word "Shinar," which scholars usually identify with Sumer, but which actually stands for the Sumerian equivalent of the compound word "Sumer-Akkad," there seems to be no mention of the Sumerians in the entire Bible, a fact which is hardly reconcilable with their purported pre-eminence and influence.

Interestingly enough, a solution to this rather puzzling enigma was suggested over a quarter of a century ago by my teacher and colleague, Arno Poebel, in the form of a brief comment in an article published in the American Journal of Semitic Languages (LVIII [1941], 20–26). Poebel's suggestion has found no responsive echo among Orientalists, and it seems to have been relegated to scholarly oblivion. It is my conviction, however, that it will stand the test of time and in due course be recognized as a significant contribution to Hebrew-Sumerian interconnections.

Before evaluating Poebel's explanation, however, the reader will have to bear in mind a rather curious, but well-founded and generally accepted, Sumerian phonetic law which is essential to an intelligent approach to the problems involved. This law, the formulation of which marked a milestone in the study of the Sumerian language, may be stated as follows: Sumerian final consonants were amissible and were not pronounced in speech unless followed by a grammatical particle beginning with, or consisting of, a vowel. Thus, for example, the Sumerian word for field, ashag, was pronounced asha (without the final g). But when this same word appeared in the Sumerian complex ashag-a, "in the field," in which the -a is a grammatical element equated with the Eng-
lish "in," it was pronounced asrag, not asha. Similarly, the Sumerian word for "god," dingir, was actually pronounced dingi, with the final r silent. But in the complex, dingir-e, "by god," in which the -e stands for the English "by," the word was pronounced dingir, not dingi.

Now to return to our problem and the quest for the word "Sumer," or rather "Shumer," to use the form found in the cuneiform documents. Poebel was struck by the word’s resemblance to the name "Shem," Noah’s eldest son, and the distant ancestor of such eponyms as Ashur, Elam, Aram, and above all, Eber, the eponym of the Hebrews.

The equation of "Shem" and "Shumer," however, presented two difficulties: the interchange of the vowels e and u and the omission of the final er. Now the first of these presents no difficulty at all; the cuneiform u often becomes e in Hebrew—a particularly pertinent example is the Akkadian shumu, "name," and the Hebrew shem. As for the second difficulty—the omission of the final er of "Shumer" in its Hebrew counterpart "Shem"—this can now be explained by applying the Sumerian law of amissibility of final consonants. For the word "Shumer" was pronounced Shumi or, even more probably, Shum (the final i is a very short, shewa-like vowel), and the Hebrews thus took it over from Sumerian as "Shem."

Nor is Shem the only example of a Hebrew name borrowed from a Sumerian word without its final consonant. The name of the city where Abraham was born is written as Ur in the Bible. But the Sumerian name, as has long been known, is not Ur but Urim; "in Ur," for example, is urim-a, not ur-a. In this case, too, therefore, the Biblical authors had borrowed the name as actually pronounced in Sumerian when not followed by a grammatical element beginning with a vowel.

If Poebel’s hypothesis turns out to be correct, and Shem is identical with Shumer-Sumer, we must assume that the Hebrew authors of the Bible, or at least some of them, considered the Sumerians to have been the original ancestors of the Hebrew people. Linguistically speaking, they could not have been more mistaken: Sumerian is an agglutinative tongue unrelated to the inflected Semitic family of languages of which Hebrew forms a part. But