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ANCIENT MESOPOTAMIAN CONCEPTS OF DEATH AND THE NETHERWORLD

According to ancient literary texts

By

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ABSTRACT

This thesis attempts to elucidate the concepts of death and the netherworld found within Sumerian and Semitic literary texts. This particular topic has received very little attention in the past but studies of a similar nature have tended to take a fairly general approach dealing with Mesopotamian concepts in their entirety. Sumerian and Semitic cultures have not been distinguished due to the large number of similarities which were seen to exist between their societies, cultures, and religious ideas. More recently, however, such a methodological procedure has been brought into question since important differences have been found to exist within the literature of the two cultures. With this in mind the attempt of this thesis is to study traditions of death and the netherworld from a comparative perspective. The texts are examined individually within the Sumerian and Semitic corpora of texts, and conclusions are drawn from each set of documents to establish Sumerian traditions of death and the netherworld and Semitic concepts of the same. A comparison of the findings reveals that while a great similarity in language and descriptive material exists between the two bodies of material, the basic thrusts of the two cultures were essentially different. Sumerian traditions reveal a great concern for human beings as they enter the netherworld. Interestingly, they also reveal that the existence which the deceased was thought to experience in the underworld had many positive as well as negative aspects. The Semites, however, had little concern for humanity. Their focus was essentially quite negative and dwelt mostly on the activities of the netherworld deities who were portrayed in gruesome terms and with violent natures. These differences add to the cumulating evidence which suggests that scholars need to distinguish more carefully between Sumerian and Semitic societies and thought patterns.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Adp	"Adapa".
ANET	J.B. Pritchard, Ancient Near Eastern Texts, 1969.
Assy	Assyrian
BASOR	Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research.
Borger	Babylonisch-Assyrische Lesestücke.
CAD	The Chicago Assyrian Dictionary.
CT	Cuneiform Texts.
DoG	"The Death of Gilgamesh".
EG	R.C. Thompson, The Epic of Gilgamish, 1930.
EU	C.L. Woolley, Excavations at Ur, 1954.
FTS	S.N. Kramer, From the Tablets of Sumer, 1956.
GE	"The Gilgamesh Epic".
GEN	"Gilgamesh, Enkidu, and the Netherworld".
GEP	A. Heidel, The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels, 1949.
GLL	"Gilgamesh and the Land of the Living".
HBS	S.N. Kramer, History Begins at Sumer, 1956.
IAAM	Henri Frankfort, ed. The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man, 1946.
JAOS	Journal of the American Oriental Society.
JCS	Journal of Cuneiform Studies.
KAR	Keilschrifttexte aus Assur religiösen Inhalts, Leipzig.
KB	P. Jensen, Keilschriftliche Bibliothek, 1906.
MB	Middle Babylonian.
NA	Neo-Assyrian.
OB	Old Babylonian.
obv.	Obverse.
PFD	The Pushkin Museum Funerary Dirges.
PV	"The Prince's Vision of the Netherworld".
rev	Reverse.
SEM	E. Chiera, Sumerian Epics and Myths, Chicago: OIP, 1934.
SM	S.N. Kramer, Sumerian Mythology, 1946, 1961.
SS	S.N. Kramer, "The Epic of Gilgamesh and its Sumerians Sources" JAOS 64 (1944) pp.7-23.
ToD	T. Jacobsen, Treasures of Darkness, 1976.
UIR	S.N. Kramer, "Death and the Netherworld in Sumerian Literary Texts," in Ur in Retrospect, 1960.
UM	University Museum, Pennsylvania; Cuneiform text identification letters.
UN	"The Death of Ur Nammu and his Descent to the Netherworld".
WZKM	Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes.
ZA	Zeitschrifte für Assyriologie.
ZDMG	Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenlandischen Gesellschaft.

Symbols within translations:

(...) Enclose interpolations made for better understanding.

{...} Enclose doubtful translation of a known text.

[...] Enclose restorations in the text made by the translator.

Symbols within transliterations:

<...> Enclose a determinative found within the Assyro/Babylonian text.

[...] Enclose restorations to the text in which some certainty exists that the restoration is correct.

{...} Enclose doubtful restorations to the text.

... In transliterations and translations this indicates a lacuna within cuneiform texts.

.... In transliterations and translations this indicates a lacuna occurring within a cuneiform text before a final sentence period.

...xx In an attempt to avoid superscripted footnote numbers running into a preceding line of single spaced text, three dots followed by the footnote number are utilized.

ANCIENT MESOPOTAMIAN CONCEPTS OF DEATH AND THE NETHERWORLD
According to ancient literary texts

I. Introduction

A. Introductory remarks

Religious minds have been pondering the secrets of life beyond the grave for millennia. Speculations have abounded in all segments of human history. Much of what the ancient person thought about death was unavailable to us until fairly recently when, with the assistance of modern archaeology and linguistics, the thoughts of civilizations long extinct were brought to light. The splendour of the Egyptian pyramids and tombs and the great archaeological discoveries associated with them have led to much work being produced on the subject from that point of view. In spite of the fact that Mesopotamian society paralleled Egyptian society in time and state of progress, studies of the same from a Mesopotamian perspective have been comparably fewer. The reasons for this imbalance have to do, in the first place, with the excitement surrounding the Egyptian discoveries; remains relating to Mesopotamian burial practices have been found to be generally less sensational. In the second place, it has to do with the fact that our knowledge of Mesopotamian language and texts evolved a little later than that of Egypt and has suffered because of

poorer preservation of tablets in the damper climate of Mesopotamia. It was necessary, then, to expend a great deal of effort at the basic level of accounting for and placing broken fragments and ensuring accurate texts. While this was being done, studies at the secondary level of interpretation either were of a tentative nature and needed continual up-dating, or were put off until a later date.[1] To be sure, secondary studies continue to have a tentative nature in that they are always subject to new evidence and greater linguistic capabilities in this relatively young field. During the last fifty years, however, and especially in the last twenty years, cuneiform scholars have provided us with very adequate texts and translations of a good number of ancient literary compositions. Since so much of the literary material deals with speculations about death and the netherworld, it would seem prudent that if we are to further our knowledge of ancient thought we should come to grips with a topic that was given so much of the attention of the ancient Mesopotamian mind.

B. Review of the literature

Secondary literature on the topic of death and the netherworld is sparse. During the early days of ancient Near Eastern studies, the tendency was for conceptions of

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[1] This is not to say that the same problems were not present within Egyptology. Indeed they were, but perhaps to a lesser degree.

the netherworld to form sub-sections of large, general works devoted to Mesopotamian religion and mythology as a whole.[2] While useful, the generality of such studies often led to a lack in depth. In addition, the subject was treated to a great extent as an ancillary part of Old Testament studies.[3] The emphasis was on the Hebrew concepts of the afterlife and Near Eastern material was brought in primarily for comparison and to elucidate the Hebrew concepts. With the development of Sumerology and Assyriology into fields of study independent of Old Testament studies, more recent literature has tended to focus on the Mesopotamian material in itself.[4] In 1979 the twenty-sixth Recontre assyriologique internationale was devoted to the topic of

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[2] E.g. L.W. King, Babylonian Religion and Mythology (London: Paternoster, 1899). Morris Jastrow Jr., Aspects of Religious Belief and Practice in Babylonia and Assyria (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1911). More recently; Helmer Ringgren, Religions of the Ancient Near East transl. John Sturdy, (London: SPCK, 1974). An important work which went against this trend at an early date is Erich Ebeling's Tod und Leben nach den Vorstellungen der Babylonier (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1931.

[3] Alexander Heidel, The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels. (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1949) pp.137-223. H.W.F. Saggs, "Some Ancient Semitic Conceptions of the Afterlife," Faith and Thought XC No.3 (Wint. 1958), pp.157-182. Jastrow, Ibid., would also be an example of this tendency.

[4] R.R. Jestin, "La conception sumerienne de la vie post mortem", Syria XXXIII (1956) pp.113-118. S.N. Kramer, "Death and the Netherworld According to Sumerian Literary Texts," Ur in Retrospect, in memory of Sir L.E. Woolley, ed. M.E.L. Mallowan, D.J. Wiseman, (London: British School of Archaeology in Iraq, 1960). Bendt Alster, ed. Death in Mesopotamia, Mesopotamia: Copenhagen Studies in Assyriology, vol.8, (Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1980).

"Death in Mesopotamia". From this came a publication containing a good number of the papers read at that conference.[5] The present thesis hopes to add to the knowledge gained in this important and somewhat neglected area of study by examining the topic in light of ancient literary texts.

C. Direction of thesis and methodology

For the most part, ideas present within the ancient Near East have been viewed in undifferentiated terms. Scholars have spoken of a Mesopotamian concept of creation, a Mesopotamian concept of the divine, or a Mesopotamian concept of the afterlife.[6] The rationale behind this derived from the recognition of the fact that the Semites, when they infiltrated the Tigris and Euphrates river valleys during the third millennium B.C.E., took over the Sumerian system of writing, the Sumerian way of life, and the Sumerian religious practices. Of course these were all modified to some extent, but it was felt that, in essence,

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[5] Alster, Ibid.

[6] This was particularly true of earlier works. Perhaps the best example of this tendency would come from the myth and ritual schools which saw all ancient Near Eastern religious thought and practices as developing from a common source. See, for instance, S.H. Hooke, ed. Myth and Ritual (Oxford: University Press, 1933), cf. Heidel's GEP p.170 and George Roux, Ancient Iraq (Hammondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1980), p.90.

Sumerian and Semitic ways were not fundamentally different from one another.[7]

More recently some have questioned the similarity between the two cultures. In some instances, we have discovered that our knowledge differentiates Sumerian from later Semitic beliefs and practices.[8] With this in mind, the basic thrust of this thesis is not only to elucidate concepts of death and the netherworld in ancient Mesopotamia but also to approach the topic from a comparative perspective. The basic question is: How did the ancient Near Eastern person perceive death and that which followed it? Secondarily we will ask: Are there recognizable differences between Sumerian and later Semitic concepts of death and the netherworld?[9]

The basic question will take up most of the space in this thesis. In order to move toward the second question the texts studied must be assigned to Sumerian and Semitic cultures. This is done on the basis of language of composition and will effectively divide the basic question

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[7] Roux, loc.cit.

[8] E.g. Giovanni Pettinato's work on Sumerian and Akkadian concepts of creation. G. Pettinato, Das altorientalische Menschenbild und die sumerischen und akkadischen Schöpfungsmythen. (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1971).

[9] By "Semitic" I mean only those of Akkadian, Babylonian, or Assyrian origin. Although the peoples of the Canaanite regions of Ugarit, Phoenicia, Israel etc. might be included under the Semitic "umbrella" they are not the focus of this paper.

into two units; How did the Sumerians view death and the netherworld? And, how did the Semitic people view death and the netherworld? The method taken to analyze the texts within each section will be descriptive and inductive in nature. That it is of an inductive nature suggests that the attempt will be to examine each text on its own terms. While we cannot treat each text in a total vacuum, it is felt that an examination which keeps the search for interpretive clues and similarities with other texts to a minimum is the correct way to proceed. This should help us stay away from the methodological problems which were apparent in studies dating from the early part of this century.[10] Since the texts to be studied are diverse in origin and in time period, even within the proposed divisions, we need always to remember the words of Mowinckel, "It is urgently necessary to see each separate religion as a unique structural whole; all the separate elements which it contains derive their contents and meaning from the whole, whose parts they form, and not from that which they signify in another whole."[11] If each text is

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[10] The myth and ritual schools and followers of Frazer are in mind here. Often similarities were seen to exist between texts based on very flimsy evidence and failing to take account of important differences. cf. Henri Frankfort, The Problem of Similarities in Ancient Near Eastern Religions (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951.)

[11] R. de Langhe, "Myth, Ritual, and Kingship in the Ras Shamra Tablets," Myth, Ritual and Kingship (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958), p.132; Quoted from S. Mowinckel, Religion und Kultus, 1953.

treated as revealing something about religious thought in a certain place at a certain time then the interpretation of that text must be done on its own terms as part of a distinct whole. That we do not have the "whole" limits our interpretive capabilities and forces us, in some instances, to look for answers in other texts. This must be done carefully and prudently, making sure that foreign elements which have essential differences with the text in question are not carried into that text. Only after each text within the division is interpreted in this way will an attempt be made to sift through the material for a Sumerian or Semitic understanding of death and the netherworld. This will form the concluding section for each of the divisions of the thesis. Again, great care must be taken at this step for even within these divisions differences exist which cannot easily be reconciled. Different traditions appear to have existed in different areas/cities at different times. In the research, the ideal would be to be able to separate texts into places of origin and dates of composition. This would allow ~~us to~~ develop views of the netherworld from a geographical and historical perspective. Our slim resources, however, prohibit such an endeavour; we just do not know where or when most of the texts were composed, or even if what we have are original texts. The object, then, is to be as descriptive as possible, pointing out difficulties and inconsistencies and allowing these to co-

exist until further information arises. Finally, once a basic understanding has been gained of the elements common to each division, the second question can be answered by a comparison of the two divisions. We will seek out similarities and differences between Sumerian and Semitic conceptions of death and the netherworld and then attempt to suggest what significance the findings might have for further research in this topic as well as for Near Eastern studies in general.

II. SUMERIAN TRADITIONS of Death and the Netherworld.

A. Discussion of the texts and order of examination.

The texts have been divided into two categories; the Sumerian and Semitic sections. This division was natural, based on language. The next step is, however, more difficult. Since we do not have the resources to organize the texts into geographical and historical perspectives, as has been indicated, we must make do with an artificial grouping of the texts.

I have taken the liberty of dividing the texts into two major sections: human encounters with death and the netherworld and divine encounters with the same. Under the former category, they have been further divided into mythical texts, royal encounters, and non-royal encounters with death and the netherworld.[1] The following table reveals the texts and the order of study precisely. The reasoning behind the order is based on the possibility that there may be elements within divine encounters which differ from human encounters with the netherworld. Also it may be that beliefs and practices relating to royal persons differ

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[1] The categories are to be viewed broadly. Some of the texts could fit into several of the categories and a value-judgement was necessary to determine which one might be the more appropriate. The first category, for instance, "mythical" should not be taken to suggest that the others are to be considered non-mythical.

SUMERIAN TEXTS

		Excavated at:	Approximate Date:
1. Human Encounters with Death and the Netherworld:			
1a. In Mythical Texts:			
"Gilgamesh and the Land of the Living"	(GLL)	Nippur, Kish	early 2nd mil.
"Gilgamesh, Enkidu, and the Netherworld"	(GEN)	Nippur, Ur	....
1b. Royal Encounters:			
"The Death of Gilgamesh"	(DoG)	Nippur	c.1900's B.C.
"The Death of Ur Nammu"	(UN)	Nippur	c.2095 B.C.
1c. Non-Royal Encounters:			
"Pushkin Funerary Dirges"	(PFD)	Nippur(?)	....
2. Divine Encounters with Death and the Netherworld:			
"Inanna's Descent to the Netherworld"	(InD)	Nippur	early 2nd mil.
"Enlil and Ninlil"	(EN)	Nippur	....

SEMITIC TEXTS

1. Human Encounters with Death and the Netherworld:			
"The Gilgamesh Epic"	(GE)	Nineveh, Sippar, Boghazköy, Ashur	OB-17th cent. NA-7th cent.
"The Prince's Vision of the Netherworld"	(PV)	Ashur	7th cent. B.C.
2. Divine Encounters with Death and the Netherworld:			
"The Descent of Ishtar to the Netherworld"	(DIsh)	Ashur, Nineveh	7th cent. B.C.
"Nergal-Ereshkigal"	(NE)	El Amarna, Sultantepe	14th cent. Neo-Assyrian

from non-royal individuals.[2] By separating the texts, in this way, we will more readily be able to spot any differencs.

The format of this section will involve focussing on each text in turn. A brief introduction to each text will be given, outlining the assumed date of the tablet(s), place of excavation, and where it is currently housed. A synopsis of the contents of the text will follow together with notes concerning elements of the text dealing specifically with death and the netherworld. Subsequent to the examination of all the Sumerian texts, we will conclude the section by drawing together the elements and attempting to outline the Sumerian concept(s) of death and the netherworld.

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[2] One would like to use the term common person here. The fact, however, that writing was not in the hands of the common person prohibits such an assumption. More likely the non-royal persons who are spoken of in the texts, particularly the Pushkin texts, were of noble or priestly origin.

B. Examination of the texts with reference to death and the netherworld.

1. Human Encounters with Death and the Netherworld.

a. In Mythical Texts:

i. "Gilgamesh and the Land of the Living"

The poem entitled "Gilgamesh and the Land of the Living" is a compilation of fourteen tablets and fragments, eleven of which were discovered at Nippur, one at Kish, and two of unknown origin.[3] Kramer dates all of these in the first half of the second millennium B.C.E. and does not speculate about the date of composition.[4] The tablets are currently housed in the Oriental collections of the universities of Pennsylvania, Yale, and Illinois.[5]

The poem tells of the exploits of Gilgamesh and Enkidu as they venture into the "Land of the Living" or "Cedar

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[3] S.N. Kramer, "Gilgamesh and the Land of the Living," ANET, p.48. In the title of this work I am following the name given by Kramer in both ANET, pp.47-50, and "Gilgamesh and the Land of the Living," JCS 1 (1947), pp.3-46. The latter study still ranks as the best scientific edition of the text and includes hand copies of the cuneiform, transliteration, translation, and notes. More recent literature refers to the poem as "Gilgamesh and the Cedar Forest." cf. A. Shaffer, "Gilgamesh, the Cedar Forest and Mesopotamian History," JAOS 103.1 (1983), pp.307-313.

[4] S.N. Kramer, Ibid.

[5] S.N. Kramer, JCS 1 (1947), p.7.

Forest".[6] Gilgamesh's purpose is to set up a name for himself by entering into combat with the legendary Huwawa.[7] He is motivated by an anxiety towards death and the realization that he, as all humans, will encounter it. In a prayer to Utu, Gilgamesh tearfully describes death as follows:

> In my city man dies, oppressed is his heart,
> Man perishes, heavy is his heart,
> I peered over the wall,
> Saw the dead bodies...floating down the river;
> As for me, I too will be served thus;
> verily 'tis so. ...[8]

The words "oppressed" and "heavy" reveal that Gilgamesh views death with pessimism. It is one of the unpleasant aspects of life; something which is to be dreaded.

The third and fourth lines quoted are of unclear significance. Reference to a river is not uncommon in association with death and the netherworld, as we will discover.[9] In this context, however, it would appear that

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[6] Kramer notes that the title; "Land of the Living", which might be translated, "land of one who lives", may be the place where Ziusudra lives. This would equate the journey with the journey to find Utnapishtim in the Gilgamesh Epic, and hence with a search for eternal life. S.N. Kramer, "The Epic of Gilgamesh and its Sumerian Sources," JAOS LXIV (1944), pp.14 f.

[7] GLL lines 5 ff.

[8] GLL lines 23-27.

[9] In the present poem there is mention of a loaded boat, a corollary idea, in connection with death. GLL lines 105-115. Since the text is damaged this reference is also of unclear significance.

Gilgamesh is viewing something in the earthly realm.[10] The final line, above, reveals an acceptance by Gilgamesh of his fate as a human being. The context specifies, as has been said, that this is the reason he purposes to set up a name for himself.

As the story progresses, Gilgamesh asks Enkidu to accompany him on his quest to the "Land of the Living". Enkidu, hesitating because of fear, suggests that they should ascertain the approval of Utu before proceeding. After this is gained, Gilgamesh gathers some fifty young men around him and they head toward the "Cedar Forest". Shortly before reaching their destination, Enkidu tries to restrain Gilgamesh from completing the mission. He is again fearful of the possibility that an encounter with the terrifying Huwawa will lead to their deaths. At one point, Enkidu says that he will go back to the city and tell Ninsun, Gilgamesh's mother, of her son's imminent death. It is specified that she will shed "bitter tears", telling us something of the ancient human response toward the death of a loved one.[11]

Undaunted by Enkidu's words, Gilgamesh points out the great strength that the two heroes have and convinces Enkidu to continue. Soon they come face to face with Huwawa.

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[10] One wonders if this may have something to do with a local flood of the great Mesopotamian rivers?

[11] GLL line 106.

Huwawa fastens the "eye of death" upon them but to no avail, he is easily defeated.[12] Upon defeat, Huwawa pleads for his life. The poem states, "He adjured Gilgamesh by the life of heaven, life of earth, and life of the netherworld."[13] It would seem that our writer had a holistic view of existence. "Life" was conceived to be in all realms, the upper world with the life of the gods, earth with the life of humankind and nature, and the underworld with the "life" of the dead. That the form of life in the latter was not conceived to be up to the standard of life on earth might be deduced from Gilgamesh's dread and pessimism regarding death as noted above.

As the extant portion of our poem closes, Enkidu convinces Gilgamesh to kill Huwawa, in spite of his pleas. They cut off his head and bring it before Enlil and Ninlil.[14] The reason behind this action is not specified. Such an act is nowhere else attested. One would assume, however, that it either had a ritual significance or is related to Enlil and Ninlil's role as netherworld deities which we shall come to in the last text of this section.

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[12] GLL line 123. The "eye of death" will be noticed elsewhere. The significance of the remark is not clear as sometimes it might lead to the death of the person it is focussed on (cf.p.49 below), while at others, including the present text, death is not a necessary outcome. Perhaps it signifies merely an intent to kill.

[13] GLL line 151.

[14] GLL lines 167-169.

ii. "Gilgamesh, Enkidu, and the Netherworld".

The full text of this poem is as yet unpublished.[15] Material regarding the tablets and their source is sparse but an analysis of Kramer's works reveals that one tablet is from Ur, fourteen from Nippur, and one is of unspecified origin. Ten of these are now located at the University Museum in Philadelphia, three are in Istanbul, and one is in the British Museum.[16] No date has been offered for the time of composition or the time that the extant tablets and fragments themselves were copied. One would assume, however, that it comes from the early second millennium since it is written in Sumerian and was uncovered at Nippur with some of the other texts we are examining.

The introduction of the poem is significant in respect to the knowledge which it provides regarding how the Sumerians viewed the origins of the cosmos. For our purposes, however, we note within the introduction the euphemism for the netherworld, "The Great Dwelling".[17] We

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[15] I will be using the outline of the story and the partial texts given in two sources: S.N. Kramer, SM, pp.30-37; S.N. Kramer, HBS, pp.256-260. T. Jacobsen, in TOD, p.247,n.55, stated that an edition was being prepared by A. Shaffer. I have been unable to locate Shaffer's work although it certainly was not yet ready for publication at the time of his article "Gilgamesh, the Cedar Forest and Mesopotamian History," JAOS 103.1 (1983) pp.307-313.

[16] SM p.30,33. Also see: S.N. Kramer, Sumerian Literary Texts from Nippur, Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research 23 (New Haven, 1944), p.13. And; Ur Excavation Texts VI.p.7, London 1928- .

[17] UIR p.63.

also find a story about Ereshkigal, whom we know from elsewhere as the queen of the netherworld. She is depicted as being carried off to Kur as its prize.[18] Kramer comments that perhaps Ereshkigal was originally the sky goddess and was carried off by Kur, a monster or a dragon.[19] It is of some import that Ereshkigal was not always thought to have existed in the netherworld but was brought there by forces beyond her control.

The central story begins with the tale of Inanna and the huluppu tree. Inanna plants the tree in her garden in Erech and hopes that one day she can enjoy a chair and a couch from its wood. As time goes on a snake, the anzu bird, and Lilith (the maid of desolation) make their homes in the tree and when the tree matures Inanna is unable to cut it down. As she laments about her situation, Gilgamesh comes to the rescue. He disposes of the snake, chases away the other beings, and has the desired wooden objects fashioned for Inanna. As a reward he is given the untranslateable mikku and pukku.[20] Sometime later the mikku

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18 SM p.37.

19 SM p.38. Kur is a difficult term to come to grips with in Sumerian. It can mean the netherworld monster, the netherworld itself, or a mountain among other things.

20 SM p.34. For some time Landsberger's suggestion that these were a drum and drumstick was accepted, cf. ZDMG LXXXVIII (1934) p.210. He, however, rejected his own theory and his new proposal, that they were a wheel and stick, is said to be problematic. A.K. Grayson, ANET, p.507. cf. WZKM LVI (1960) 124-126; WZKM LVII (1961) p.23. It is notable that the relationship betweeen Gilgamesh and Inanna

and the pukku fall down into the netherworld, evidently through some sort of hole.[21] Gilgamesh attempts to retrieve them with his hand and his foot but fails. In disgust he sits at the gate of the netherworld and laments;

> O my pukku, O my mikku...
> (and six lines later)
> My pukku, who will bring it up from the netherworld,
> My mikku, who will bring it up from the face of the netherworld? ...[22]

Enkidu volunteers and is educated in the taboos of the netherworld. The thrust of these seems to be that he act as one of the residents of the netherworld in order that he not be entrapped by it. Enkidu, however, disregards the advice and is later seized by Kur.[23] Noting that he does not return, Gilgamesh pleads with the gods concerning the fate of his friend.

> O Father Enlil, my pukku fell into the netherworld,
> My mikku fell into the 'face' of the netherworld,
> I sent Enkidu to bring them up, Kur has seized him.
> Namtar (demon of death) has not seized him, Aasag (demon of disease) has not seized him,
> Kur has seized him.
> Nergal's ambusher (that is death), who spares none, has not seized him,
> Kur has seized him.

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is quite different from the relationship of Ishtar and Gilgamesh in the Semitic "Gilgamesh Epic".

[21] SM p.34.

[22] HBS p.258.

[23] Exactly what Kur is is unclear in this context. It could be an underworld demon/monster or the underworld itself. See discussion of the concept in SM pp.76 f.

In battle, the place of manliness, he has not fallen,
Kur has seized him.[24]

Enlil refused to help Gilgamesh who then moves on offering the same plea to Enki in Eridu. Enki, who had fought with Kur in an attempt to win back Ereshkigal in the prologue of the story, agreed to help. Enki ordered the sun-god, Utu, to open a hole in the netherworld and thus the "shade" of Enkidu was allowed to ascend.[25]

There are several items of interest in this portion of the text. First, we should note the spatial references to the netherworld. That it was thought to be below the surface of the earth is apparent from the mention of the mikku and pukku falling into the netherworld, and from the reference to Enkidu descending to retrieve them. The fact that the objects were thought able to fall into the netherworld indicates that, in Erech, a hole or opening of some sort existed which would allow such a thing to occur.[26] Whether or not this opening is connected with the "gate of the netherworld", by which Gilgamesh set up a lament, is unclear. The gate, nevertheless, was thought to block off the path to the netherworld through which one such as Enkidu might descend.

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[24] HBS p.259.

[25] HBS p.260; SM p.36.

[26] UIR pp.63,64.

Second, we might note that the dwellers of the netherworld had a sense of sight, smell, hearing, and feeling. This is indicated by some of Gilgamesh's words of warning (the taboos) to Enkidu before he de cended.

> Do not put on clean clothes,
> Lest like an enemy the stewards will come forth,
> Do not anoint yourself with the good oil of the bur-vessel,
> Lest at its smell they will crowd about you.
> Do not throw the throwstick in the nether world,
> Lest they who are struck by the throwstick will surround you,
> Do not carry a staff in your hand,
> Lest the shades will flutter all about you.
> "Do not put sandals on your feet,
> In the netherworld make no cry;
> (and five lines later)
> Lest the outcry of Kur will seize you,[27]

The idea seems to be that engaging in these normal and pleasurable earthly activities would set Enkidu apart from the netherworld residents. He would be noticed as an intruder and, therefore, entrapped by them.

When Enkidu fails to return, the plea of Gilgamesh to the gods suggests a third point. It is clear that it was thought that one could enter the netherworld and return again. Why else would Gilgamesh ask for someone to retrieve his lost items. Gilgamesh knew, however, that one could get trapped in the netherworld and thus his servant was given words of advice regarding the taboos. Upon recognizing that Enkidu was trapped, he still did not perceive the situation to be hopeless. He went to the gods whom he thought could

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[27] HBS pp.258,259.

help secure Enkidu's release. Since we will have reference to the netherworld as the "land of no return" (see below p.50), we here meet an inconsistency in Sumerian thought. In this case, the inconsistency ought not be pushed to far since, when he pleads with the gods, Gilgamesh seems to belabour the point that Enkidu had not died. Neither Namtar, Aasag, or Nergal's ambusher had seized Enkidu, nor did he die in battle.[28] Kur had seized him.[29] Evidently, the entrapment of a living human being in the netherworld was against normal cosmic order and it was thought that a release could be gained if the gods would assist.[30]

Finally, the description of the ascent of Enkidu is interesting. Utu is said to make a hole by which the "shade" of Enkidu ascended. Just what Kramer means by "shade" is not specified. It would seem that Enkidu was alive given the nature of Gilgamesh's plea on his behalf and from the emphasis of the ensuing lines which depict Gilgamesh and Enkidu physically embracing one another and discussing what Enkidu had seen.[31]

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[28] See above pp.17,18. These items may reflect the way Sumerian culture perceived humans to die.

[29] HBS. p.259.

[30] The fact that Utu, the god of justice, comes to the rescue is suggestive of the fact that Gilgamesh was basing his plea on the illegality of the situation.

[31] The Akkadian translation of GEN in Tablet XII of "The Gilgamesh Epic" lines 80 ff is interesting. If "u-tuk-ku" (line 84) means "soul", the context suggests that the Sumerians do not appear to have considered the afterlife to

The last section of the poem deals with the conversation between the two friends just referred to. Here we might expect to learn quite a bit about the netherworld but the passage is only of limited value. It concerns the fate of people in the underworld and, although some parts are fragmentary, it seems that the number of sons one has in this life has a positive correlation with the joy one experiences in the afterlife. Those with more sons are better off and more joyful in the netherworld than those with none or only one or two sons. Regarding the person who does not receive a proper burial, it is said that—"his shade finds no rest in the netherworld."[32]

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be a non-material existence (see below pp.101,102). How far this can be taken, however, is uncertain since it has been noted that Enkidu, perhaps, did not die.

32 SM p.37.

b. Royal Encounters with Death and the Netherworld.

i. "The Death of Gilgamesh"

The Sumerian work known as "The Death of Gilgamesh" is part of a poem of unknown length. The tablets were excavated at Nippur and date probably from the period following the fall of the third dynasty of Ur.[33] They are currently in the University Museum, Philadelphia. The text was compiled from three fragments with the beginning, end and a middle portion all missing. Two fragments SEM 24/25 and SEM 28 form section A of the text while UM 29-16-86 forms section B.[34]

Section A tells of the interpretation of a dream which reveals that Gilgamesh had not been destined for eternal life. He, however, was not to be depressed for Enlil had given him supremacy over humankind.[35] After some four poorly preserved lines and a break of ten lines, the section continues with what Kramer considers to be the tale of the

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33 S.N. Kramer, "The Death of Gilgamesh," BASOR no.94 (1944), p.2. This article contains a transliteration, translation, and comments. It also contains a handcopy of the tablet UM 29-16-86 which provides us with all that we have of section B of the poem. It should be noted that Kramer is not as precise in dating the work in his later translation in ANET pp.50-52.

34 Kramer, BASOR no.94, p.4. See his note no.5.

35 DoG A 34-41.

death of Gilgamesh.[36] Following a break of unknown length, section B relates how Gilgamesh made sacrifices for those who lay with him in his grave. The sacrifices were to the gods and dwellers of the underworld. The extant portion of the poem ends with praise for Gilgamesh.

Delving into the poem for evidence of the Sumerian concept of death and the netherworld, we find some very useful material. Early in the text we come across our first description of the netherworld as a dark place.

> "...the son of Utu,
> In the netherworld, the place of darkness,
> verily will give him light." ...[37]

The mention of "the son of Utu" and "light" are obscure because of the fragmentary nature of the preceding fourteen lines. We will see later, when dealing with the Pushkin text, that the elements Utu and light will again be mentioned in connection with the netherworld (see below p.38,40).

The meaning of the text becomes clear with the interpretation of the afore mentioned dream. The fact that

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[36] The death of Gilgamesh which is assumed to have taken place by Kramer is somewhat vague. Kramer notes that A.64 "The lord of Kullab lies and rises not" is decisive proof that the death is that of Gilgamesh (BASOR 94 p.4, n.8). This may be correct since B.42 describes Gilgamesh as "the lord of Kullab". However, B.42 is the result of a restoration to the text and Gilgamesh is elsewhere referred to as "lord, the son of Kullab" (GLL line 76). It has been decided to go along with Kramer's thought on the subject since to disagree presents more difficulties than perhaps are solved.

[37] DoG A.25,26.

the interpretation indicates that Gilgamesh will not have eternal life probably indicates that Gilgamesh, in the preceding non-extant portion of the poem, was seeking immortality.[38] This is supported by the exhortations of the interpreter that Gilgamesh not be grieved or depressed.[39] This search for immortality seems to fall in line with the similar theme contained in the later Semitic "The Gilgamesh Epic".[40] It differs, however, from the conception we receive from "Gilgamesh and the Land of the Living," in which Gilgamesh appears reconciled to the idea of his own human mortality.

In the section dealing with the death of Gilgamesh we find a recurrent phrase used as a euphemism for death. When one dies, "he lies and rises not". Evidently the phrase is used as a poetic device as it occurs at the end of nine successive lines.[41] Two other phrases used in a similar fashion as euphemisms are, "he who ascends the mountain (Kur)", and, "he who lies on the bed of Fate" (Fate is the netherworld demon of death).[42]

The reaction of the living to Gilgamesh's death is of interest. They are said to "not be silent", and to "set up

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38 Supportd by Kramer, BASOR no.94, p.4.

39 DoG A.36,37.

40 E. A. Speiser, "The Gilgamesh Epic," ANET, pp.72-99.

41 DoG A.60-69.

42 DoG A.67,68. See Kramer's note 12 in ANET p.51.

a lament".[43] Shortly after this there is an interesting depiction of one of the underworld demons. Namtar, the demon of death, is described as one "who has no hands, who has no feet, who drinks no water, who eats no food."[44] The reference to not eating and drinking, however, must be treated with caution since it is based on a reconstruction of the text which Kramer is unsure of. Also, we do have references elsewhere to eating and drinking within the netherworld.[45]

Section B is of great interest since Kramer suggests it is the first literary evidence for the multiple royal burials which Woolley found during his excavations at Ur.[46] Sir Leonard Woolley found that the early rulers of Ur went to the grave with a great array of personal possessions, a number of servants and family members, sacrificial animals, and in one case even horse drawn chariotry. Woolley thought the purpose of this stemmed from the idea that death was not the end of existence but rather the transfer of that existence to some other realm. In the new sphere of "life" the kings would continue their office and would, therefore,

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43 DoG A.70,71.

44 DoG A.75.

45 There are references to eating and drinking in the netherworld in the Ur Nammu text line 82; and Pushkin text A lines 92,94, and possibly line 111.

46 BASOR no.94 p.6. UIR p.59. C.L. Woolley, Excavations at Ur, (London: Ernest Benn Ltd., 1954), pp.52,90.

require a court, guards, chariot etc. Since there was no evidence of violence in association with the deaths of those in the tombs, it was assumed that these voluntarily threw in their lot with the dead king and participated in some sort of multiple suicide through the drinking of poison.[47] Woolley's interpretation has been questioned by some, but his refutation of those questions is difficult to disgard.[48]

The passage in question begins by listing those who lay with the deceased king in that place, the "purified palace...the heart of Erech". The list contains his beloved wife and son, his concubine, the musician, entertainer,

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[47] EU pp.80,81.

[48] "Moortgat's theory as things stand at the moment cannot be maintained," says H. Ringren, Religions of the Ancient Near East, trans. J. Sturdy (London: SPCK, 1973), p.48. Moortgat believed the mass burials to be indicative of Tammuz cultic practices. The tombs are, therefore, those of the festival kings sacrificed for the sake of the land. Woolley objects for two reasons. 1. If these were fertility rites, one would expect the deceased to be lying with a woman. Each tomb, however, has only one principle occupant, either a male or female. In the one case where there are two main figures within the tomb, Shub-ad lies in a different room than her husband and there is evidence to suggest that her room was dug at a later time EU p.68. It seems that she outlived her husband and was buried with him later for sentimental reasons. In any case Shub-ad was a woman of forty years or so. One would expect a fertility rite to utilize a young virgin. 2. The fertility rite is assumed to be an annual affair. From the thousands of tombs in Ur which represent a lengthy period of time, only sixteen are considered to be royal tombs. Cf. also H. Schmökel, Geschichte des alten Vorderasien (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1957) pp.37,38. Schmökel believes the tombs to be connected to "sacred marriage" festivities. Perhaps this position is also vulnerable to Woolley's objections.

valet, household, attendants, and caretaker.[49] We then hear of Gilgamesh making sacrifices to all the major netherworld deities, the dead, and various classes of priests and priestesses.[50] Evidently the Sumerians thought that the underworld contained an altar and perhaps a priestly caste to allow these various offerings to take place. If Kramer is right in his rendering of the text, the similarity between this and Woolley's interpretation of the royal burial sites is illuminating.

The latter portion of the text gives praise to Gilgamesh. The indication is that Gilgamesh is still "alive." Following Kramer's interpretation of the text it would seem that this "life" was conceived to lie in the netherworld.

ii. "The Death of Ur Nammu and his Descent to the Netherworld"

Of this work Kramer writes, "It seems to be the work of a highly imaginative palace or temple poet who was deeply affected by the death of Ur Nammu...."[51] He goes on to say,

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49 DoG B.1-7.

50 DoG B.9-33.

51 S.N. Kramer, "The Death of Ur Nammu and his Descent to the Netherworld'" Journal of Cuneiform Studies, XXI (1967), p.104. This is a scientific edition of the text with hand copies of the tablets, a transliteration, translation, and comments. Translation hereafter referred to as UN.

"If this turns out to be so, it is not unreasonable to surmise that the poet lived not too long after Ur Nammu's death."[52] Indeed, if Kramer's first statement is correct, it is probably not unreasonable to suggest that the author lived during Ur Nammu's reign itself and wrote the text shortly after his death. According to Roux's chronology, we might date the text, therefore, about 2095 B.C.E..[53]

The main source of the text, CBS 4560, was excavated at Nippur and is now housed in the University Museum, Philadelphia. The extant portion consists of most of columns ii-v of what was a six column text. We are fortunate to have the remainder of the text fairly well supplied from eight other small tablets and fragments, also from Nippur, but now housed in Istanbul and Jena. The theme of the text is a concern for injustice. Ur Nammu, who had done great things for the gods, had been betrayed by them and had died before his time. As the title suggests there is a great deal of material here for our purposes.

The text opens by describing the evil which had overcome Ur as Ur Nammu, "the righteous shepherd", was "carried off". An is charged with altering "his holy word". Enlil is said to have changed "his fate decree" as the

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52 JCS XXI p.104, n.1.

53 George Roux, Ancient Iraq, 2nd ed. (Hammondsworth, England: Penguin Books Ltd., 1980), p.461.

other gods stand idly by.[54] Ur Nammu's mother is said to be "wretched because of her son" and crying in lament, "Oh my womb!"[55] The people of the city weep, mourn, and cannot sleep because of what has befallen their king.[56] His soldiers are speechless, overwhelmed, "changed in form".[57] Ur Nammu's wife is "overcome as if by the south wind". She spends her days in bitter wailing and lament.[58] Such is the response of Ur Nammu's friends at his death.

That the well-being of the community is tied up with the life of the king, "the righteous shepherd", is clear. His death is said to bring about the silting up of the river, a poor harvest, and, although the text is damaged, it appears the livestock are affected negatively.[59]

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[54] UN lines 1-14. One wonders if the change in "word" and "fates" is viewed with the same disapproval as that of the judge who alters his decision: cf. Hammurabi's Law Code No. 5. In that case the judge was forced to pay the penalty of the case and was disbarred.

[55] UN lines 15,16.

[56] UN lines 19-21.

[57] UN lines 45-47.

[58] UN lines 50,174.

[59] UN line 22-30. It may be that some form of Dumuzi cult is in evidence here. The life of the community is tied up with the king's life. The fertility of the land and the animals, the silting up of the river, and Ur Nammu's name "the righteous shepherd" are suggestive. There is also the possibility that Inanna (lines 195 ff.) was actually Ur Nammu's wife; the latter's grief and anger are mentioned just prior to the section depicting Inanna's anger. It would seem natural that in her anger she would be destructive in an attempt to awaken the gods to their injustice. That the destruction was said to take place in

It is unclear whether Ur Nammu died in battle or from some illness. Possibly the former brought on the latter as, after mentioning his illness, it is asserted that the gods abandoned Ur Nammu on the battle field.[60] Subsequent to his death, Ur Nammu is said to have been buried with asses by his side. These probably formed part of the large hoard of gifts and sacrifices which he was thought to bring to the netherworld (see below p.31). In an obscure passage, we are told that Ur Nammu, upon death, travelled to the netherworld in a boat which broke up and sank.[61] The mode of travel to the netherworld, however, is unclear as later there is a reference to him riding a chariot on the road to the underworld.[62] Of course, there is the possibility that the trip was thought to involve travel by land and water. He, nevertheless, arrives in the netherworld which is described by the appositional phrase "the desolate".[63]

Upon arrival, a tumult arose amongst the inhabitants of the netherworld as if they knew already who he was.[64] Perhaps this points to some limited continuity envisioned to

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the gods' houses (Ekur, Eanna) and that the sacred marriage ritual was prominent during the Ur III period are also suggestive.

60 UN lines 32-39.

61 Cf. GLL lines 106-115. Cf p.13 above.

62 UN lines 66-72.

63 UN line 73.

64 UN line 79.

exist between the two worlds. Ur Nammu is, initially, seated down to a huge banquet, but the food of the netherworld is described as being bitter and the water brackish.[65] He then begins to make sacrifices and give gifts to the gods of the netherworld. The gifts are quite varied in nature and the sacrifices seem to take place in the palace of each god. It is clear that each underworld deity was thought to have his/her own palace as the upper world deities had their palaces and/or temples. The following passage should give us a flavour of the text.

> Perfect oxen, perfect kids (and) fattened
> sheep..., (line 86)
> A mace, a large bow, a quiver, an arrow,
> a fine(?) - toothed knife,
> A varicolored leather bottle, worn at the loin,
> To Nergal, Enlil of the Netherworld,
> The shepherd Ur Nammu offers as sacrifices
> in his palace. (line 90)
> A long bow, a horned(?) leather bottle (fit
> for) battle, an awesome...mace of lead(?),
> A sling reaching down to the ground, the
> "might of heroship,"
> A battle-ax beloved of Ereshkigal,
> To Gilgamesh, the king of the Netherworld,
> The shepherd Ur Nammu offers as sacrifice
> in his palace. ...[66]

The text goes on in similar style to describe the gifts given to Ereshkigal, Dumuzi, Namtar, Hushbishag, Ningishzida, Dimpiku, and Ninazi[mua]. Some of the gifts are apt for the recipients. For example, Ninazimua, the

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[65] UN lines 81,82.

[66] UN lines 86-95 in JCS XXI p.118.

scribe of the netherworld receives some sort of reed.[67] Others, however, are unclear in their significance.

It may be that the gifts and sacrifices were a requirement of the netherworld. This seems to be the point of the words; "Ur Nammu offers the gifts of the Netherworld as sacrifices," and, "after the king had carried out the ... of the Netherworld."[68] Of course the key word in the latter line is missing due to textual damage. If we will allow, however, that this is the intent, perhaps we have some indication of the purpose of, at least some of, the grave furniture which has been uncovered by archaeologists. Whether the requirement applied to all entrants into the netherworld or just those of royal descent cannot be specified.

In the passage quoted above, a couple of other things are noteworthy. Firstly, Gilgamesh is described as the king (lugal) of the netherworld. This is interesting since elsewhere we find that Nergal was the king of the netherworld.[69] The kingship of Gilgamesh might be an outgrowth of the tradition which tells us that when Enlil denied Gilgamesh eternal life he gave him kingship and

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67 UN line 124.

68 UN lines 85,131,132.

69 Nergal is king within some of the Semitic literature. In Sumerian literary texts he is referred to only as the "Enlil" of the netherworld.

supremacy over humankind.[70] Perhaps this role was thought to go beyond the earthly life into the "life" of the netherworld.

Secondly, it is noteworthy that Nergal is named, "Enlil of the Netherworld." Likewise Ereshkigal is named, "The mother of Ninazu."[71] This of no little importance for it seems to identify Nergal and Ereshkigal directly with Enlil and Ninlil. One wonders, however, whether the identification was thought to be direct or merely one of quality. Usually the phrase "Enlil of ..." denotes a ruler or one who fulfills the Enlil functions in some domain.[72] One such instance may occur in the Pushkin text A, line 91 (see p.38 below). There, Kramer places the article before "Enlil" in his translation and it reads, "[May] Nergal, the Enlil of the Netherworld...." The placing of the definite article would tend to indicate that, at least in that text, Kramer felt the identification was in qualitative terms only, i.e., Nergal fulfilled the functions of Enlil in the

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[70] DoG A.35,41. nb. line 40 when the interpreter of the dream states that, "The light and darkness of mankind he (Enlil) has granted thee." The terms "light and darkness" here may refer to the earth and netherworld or, more likely, to all human experience, ie. the good and the bad.

[71] UN line 99. Also noteworthy here is that Dumuzi receives the golden scepter of en-ship.

[72] Dr. Robert W. Fisher has advised me of this.

lower realm.[73] However, in the present text Kramer omits the definite article and suggests that the relationship which the writer has in mind is a direct identification.[74] He notes that the additional element calling Ereshkigal, "the mother of Ninazu," seems to be more than a coincidence especially given the thrust of the text which we shall examine last in this part of the study, the myth entitled "Enlil and Ninlil". In that text, Enlil is banished to the netherworld for the rape of Ninlil and Ninlil, who follows Enlil to the underworld, is said to give birth to Ninazu.[75] The equation of both Nergal and Ereshkigal with these two banished deities appears to indicate that the writer of the Ur Nammu text was aware of the "Enlil and Ninlil" myth and developed his ideas accordingly.[76] Hence, it is likely that the Ur Nammu and Pushkin texts present different ideas and traditions regarding the person of Nergal.

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[73] Dr. R.W. Fisher has also advised me that the Sumerian language does not differentiate between definite and indefinite states of the noun. Kramer's translations, "Enlil" and "the Enlil" may, therefore, be somewhat arbitrary.

[74] JCS XXI p.111, nn.8,9.

[75] See SM p.46. Note that the identification of Ereshkigal as the mother of Ninazu is a possible interpretation of a passage within the GEN text. See HBS p.259. cf. GE (Assy) XII.29.

[76] Note that the Enlil-Ninlil myth itself is not entirely supportive of this since Enlil seems to have continued his duties in the upper world in spite of his banishment.

The next section of our text states that Ur Nammu was set up in the netherworld, given certain servants and soldiers, and educated by Gilgamesh in regard to the judgements and decisions of the netherworld.[77] After a period of some seven or ten days, "the wail of Sumer verily overtook Ur Nammu."[78] The walls of Ur were unfinished; he had built but not lived to enjoy his palace; he could no longer fondle his wife or raise his son.[79] Ur Nammu laments. He feels betrayed for he had served the gods well. They had not stood by him. Nor now were they standing by his wife and family. Only Inanna, it seems, is angered by his fate and awakens the other gods to the injustice.[80] The latter part of the text is fragmentary and difficult to interpret. Kramer suggests it ends with the blessing of Ur Nammu by Inanna. However, the last line mentions weeping and lament and obscures this interpretation.[81]

The point in the passage for our purposes is that Ur Nammu seems to have some contact with the upper world. It is not a physical contact as lines 150 and 151 suggest, but a "spiritual" contact in which he knows what is going on in

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77 UN lines 133-144. "Judgements and Decisions" were translated "rules and regulations" by Kramer in his earlier UIR p.60.

78 UN line 146.

79 UN lines 146-154.

80 Cf. n.70 above.

81 cf. JCS XXI p.120.

regard to the plight of the city and his family. This Kramer terms a "sympathetic contact with the world above," in which the deceased might, "suffer anquish and humiliation and cry out against the undependable gods."[82] This may reflect a notion of limited continuity between this world and the underworld on the part of the Sumerian.

c. Non-Royal Encounters with the Death and the Netherworld.

i. "The Pushkin Funerary Dirges"

With what Kramer has called the Pushkin Funerary Dirges we come to two documents on one four column tablet now housed in the Pushkin Museum in Moscow.[83] In his article in the Woolley Festschrift, Kramer does not indicate where the text was found or any possible date of composition.[84] The text's importance lies in the fact that it seems to be concerned with death and conceptions of death among non-royal persons and how their families responded.[85]

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[82] UIR p.61.

[83] G.1 2b 1725 I have relied heavily in this section on Kramer's UIR article. A scientific edition was not available to me but has been published by the Soviet Academy of Science; S.N. Kramer, "Two Elegies on a Pushkin Museum Tablet: A new Sumerian Literary Genre." (1960).

[84] UIR pp.61-63. The text may be from Nippur since the city is named within the text as the habitat of the main characters.

[85] If we assume that the dirges are from the hand of Ludingirra (Kramer does p.61), or someone close to him we must also contend with the fact that as persons who could

Both documents concern the deaths of relatives of one Ludingirra. They begin with lengthy prologues in prosaic style. The main portions, which deal with the deaths of his relatives, "make use of highly poetic diction characterized by various types of repetition, parallelism, choral refrains, similies and metaphors."[86] In text A, Ludingirra's father, Nanna (to be distinguished from Nanna the moon god), had become ill and is dying. Ludingirra upon receiving word makes his way back to Nippur to find his father dead and is overcome with grief. In his grief he writes and the contents of the inscription are given by Kramer as follows.

> The dirge itself begins by depicting the desperate grief of the deceased's wife...(11.21-32); of an unnamed lukur-priestess of the god Ninurta (11.33-39); of an unnamed entum-priestess of the god Nusku (11.40-46); and of the deceased's sons and their brides (11.47-62). Following what seems to be a brief prayer for Nanna's welfare (11.63-69), the dirge continues with a description of the mourning for the deceased by his daughters, by the elders and "matrons" of Nippur, and by his slaves (11.70-75). Here, rather surprisingly, there seems to be interposed a one line prayer involving the eldest son of the deceased (1.76). Following which comes a passage containing a number of curses against Nanna's murderer and the latter's offspring (11.77-84). The dirge concludes with a series of prayers for the welfare of the deceased in the Nether World (11.85-98); for his favourable treatment at the hand of his personal god and the god of the city (11.99-103); and for the well being of his wife, children, and kin (11.104-112).[87]

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high up in the Sumerian socio-economic environment.

86 UIR p.61.

87 UIR p.62.

In spite of not having the whole text, we begin to sense in Kramer's notes the response of the living toward death. As today, a dead person is mourned by his family and friends. The wife of the deceased is depicted as being in desperate grief, and the son, whom Kramer believes wrote the dirge, is "overcome with grief".[88] Just why the priestesses and "matrons" were mourning is unclear. Perhaps the father of Ludingirra was connected with the temple in some way and they too were grieving the loss of a friend.[89]

It is fortunate that Kramer decided to include his translation of the latter part of the text (lines 87-112) in his article. Again I shall quote at length as it is most revealing.

> O Nanna, may your spirit(?) be pleased,
> may your heart be at rest,
> Utu, the great lord(?), of Hades,
> After turning the dark places to light,
> will judge your case (favourably),
> May Nanna decree your fate (favourably)
> on the "Day of Sleep,"
> [May] Nergal, the Enlil of the Nether World,
> ...before(?) it(?)
> May the bread-eating heroes(?) utter your
> name,...food,
> [May] the...of the Nether World...pity...,
> May(?) the...drinkers [satisfy(?)] your thirst
> with(?) its(?) fresh water,
> [May(?)]..., (line 95)
> In strength [may(?)] Gilgamesh...your(?) heart(?)

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88 UIR p.61.

89 Dr. Robert W. Fisher has told me that the name Ludingirra might be translated, "man of god". This would tend to support the priestly connection. If there was no priestly connection, it is possible that the priestesses were paid to mourn or that Nanna was a financial supporter of the temple.

[May] Nedu and Etana [be] your allies,
The great gods of the Nether World will
[utter(?)] prayer for you
May your (personal) god say, 'Enough!' May he
[decree(?)] (favourably) your fate,
May the god of your city..for you a..heart,
May he [annul] for you (your) promises(?)
and debts,
May he [erase] the guilt of the house(hold) [from]
the accounts(?),
[May he bring to nought] the evil planned against
you...,
May those you leave behind be happy, [may]...,
May the....take(?).....,
May the (good) spirits (and) genii [protect(?)]
you...,
May the children you begot be written(?) down(?)
for leadership(?)][90]
May all your daughters marry,
May your wife stay well, may your kin multiply,
May prosperity (and) wellbeing(?) envelop (them)
day in day out, (line 110)
In you...may beer, wine, (and all) good things
never cease,
May the invocation(?) of (your(?)) house(hold)
be forever the invocation(?) of your
(personal) god!" ...[91]

Here we find much of value. The fact that prayers are offered for the deceased indicates, again, the thought that some sort of existence followed death. Even the gods of the netherworld were to offer prayers on behalf of the deceased.[92] Utu, Nanna, Nergal (who is described as the Enlil of the netherworld, cf. above p.33), Gilgamesh, Nedu, Etana, the personal god, and the god of the city evidently were thought to have some say in how the dead person fared.

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[90] The beginning of the bracketed section is not evident in Kramer's text.

[91] UIR pp.62,63.

[92] PFD A.98.

It is interesting that several gods who had functions in this realm were also thought to fulfil those functions in the lower world. Utu is described as having a role of judgement while Nanna decrees the fate (probably Utu's judgement). Just what is meant by inferring that Utu is "the great lord of Hades" who turns "the dark places to light"; or Nanna decreeing the fate on "the Day of Sleep" is not completely clear.[93] We have already come across mention of the "son of Utu" and "light" in the netherworld (above, p.23). Kramer takes the statements to indicate that Utu after his travel across the earth's sky each day, travels across the "sky" of the netherworld at night, making the darkness into day. Nanna, he maintains, is in the netherworld on the moon's day of rest, the twenty-eighth or twenty-ninth day of each month.[94] Kramer is certainly speculating, at least with repect to Utu. The text itself does not specify when Utu enters the netherworld. His ideas about Nanna are slightly more probable but one should note that the "Day of Sleep" may also refer to the day of Nanna's death, sleep being used as a euphemism for death. Kramer says nothing about this possibility.[95] Nevertheless,

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93 PFD A.88,89. The fact that Utu brings light at all again seems inconsistent with the description of the netherworld as a dark place in DoG.

94 UIR p.63.

95 In the English translation this appears possible. It must be remembered, however, that Kramer is working with the Sumerian text itself. Perhaps there is something there

during his times in the netherworld, Utu seems to have the role of judge of the dead. It is likely that this was an extension of his role in the upper world.

The roles of Nergal and Gilgamesh are unclear as the text is damaged in those lines, while Etana, Nedu, and the personal god are thought to support the deceased in some way. The city god has the duty of erasing the debt and promises of the deceased.[96] This is extremely noteworthy in that it reveals a concern on the part of the people of this period for widows and children. The debts would probably be nullified in order that the wife and family not be burdened once their principal means of support had "passed on".

Lines 92-94 imply that eating and drinking go on in the netherworld. The hope of Ludingirra is that in the realm of the dead, Nanna, his father, would be given his due sustenance.

The final portion, in which prayers are offered for the family members who survive, requests that the spirits and genii support the family. The similarity with some of the religious practices of today is revealing. In Christianity, for instance, a minister often, at a time of death, will be heard to invoke the presence of the divine to aid the surviving family members.

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which leads him to his conclusions.

[96] PFD A.100-103.

The second Pushkin text is of lesser value for our purposes but it is not unlike the first. The prologue, is almost twice as long as the dirge itself. Again, it is a "bitter lament" by Ludingirra at the death of his wife Nawirtum.[97] The inhabitants of Nippur are said to be grieving and the religious rites of the city interrupted by the death.[98] Perhaps this would again be an indication that this family had something to do with the temple cultus, although Kramer gives no indication that this is so. Again prayers are offered for the deceased, her husband, the children, and the household.

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97 UIR p.62.

98 PFD B.113-138.

2. Divine Encounters with the Netherworld.

i. "Inanna's Descent to the Netherworld"

As the title would indicate, herein we have much data regarding the Sumerian concept of the netherworld. The text has been reconstructed from numerous tablets mostly from the Nippur and Ur excavations and dates no later than the very early part of the second milleniun B.C.E..[99] Indeed, it probably was composed during the third millennium B.C.E. and Jacobsen believes that its motifs derive from the fourth millennium.[100]

The story line goes as follows. Inanna, for unknown reasons, has abandoned heaven, earth, lordship, ladyship and seven cities, and has decided to descend to the netherworld. Worried about the possibility that she may not return from her journey, she enlists the help of her messenger

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[99] The tablets and fragments of this text have been appearing throughout this century. This has led to several updates in the scientific editions of the text. Kramer published a first edition based on eight tablets; Revue d'Assyriologie et d'archéologie orientale XXXIV (1937) pp.93-134. An edition based on thirteen tablets followed in Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society LXXXV (1942) pp.293-323, Pls i-x. In 1945 M. Witzel analyzed the text and secondary literature about it: Orientalia NS XIV (1945) pp.24-69. Kramer came back with more evidence in 1951; JCS V pp.1-17. More tablets were uncovered after this, three from Nippur and four from Ur. BM 17427 was published by Figulla, Cuneiform Texts XLII pp.3ff.. The others plus comments can be found in an article by Kramer: PAPS CVII (1963) pp.491-493, 510-516. For additional information cf. UIR p.67, n.22 and ANET p.53, esp. nn.7,8.

[100] T. Jacobsen, ToD pp.55-63.

Ninshubur. He is to gain the assistance of the gods if she does not come back in a reasonable period of time. Inanna then proceeds, adorned with the "seven ordinances" to the seven gates of the netherworld where she demands that Neti, the chief gatekeeper, let her in. After informing Ereshkigal, Neti opens the gates. As Inanna passes through each gate, Neti removes one of the "seven ordinances", in accordance with the "rules" of the netherworld. She thus enters the palace and throne room of Ereshkigal, her sister, stripped naked and bowed low. In this humble state, Inanna is held under the judgement of the Anunnaki, turned into a corpse, and hung on a stake.

After three days and nights, Ninshubur, realizing that Inanna had failed to return, cries for help before the great gods Enlil, Nanna, and Enki, as instructed.[101] It is Enki who decides to help. He fashions two beings, the kurgarrû and the kulaturra, who are equipped with the food and water of life. They are sent to the netherworld where Ereshkigal, described as "the birth-giving mother", lies sick because of

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[101] At this point the text seems to have some indication that it is a human or superhuman drama (line 169 ff), i.e., has ritual significance. It is of note that Ninshubur does not go to the gods themselves but to their earthly houses in which it was thought that they resided. While we must remember that the ancient person saw a relationship between symbol and reality, the fact that the "houses" are gone to is suggestive of something other than a story of divine activity. The ancient writers did, after all, mention gods visiting gods in some type of heavenly setting in other situations. Perhaps, therefore, the text has a cultic Sitz im Leben.

her children.[102] They are offered food and water but have been warned not to accept them. Instead they ask for the corpse on the wall. The corpse is that of Inanna upon which they perform a ritual, sprinkling it with the food and water of life sixty times. Inanna is thus revived and proceeds back to the upper world.[103] As she ascends the dead are said to ascend with her, along with the gallê. The purpose of the gallê accompanying her is to return to the netherworld with a substitute for Inanna. As they approach Ninshubur, Shara of Umma, Latarak of Badtibira, these, in turn, throw themselves at Inanna's feet, glad to see her return. Inanna, pleased with their actions, implores the gallê to let them remain on earth. When they approached Dumuzi, however, he does not throw himself at Inanna's feet nor had he been mourning her absence. At the sight of this, Inanna permitted the gallê to take Dumuzi. Dumuzi, it seems, managed to gain the assistance of Utu and his sister Geshtinanna and flees from the gallê. After a lengthy chase, he is caught and unwillingly is brought to the netherworld as Inanna's substitute.

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102 UIR p.68, n.22.

103 To this point I have used "Inanna's Descent to the Netherworld," ANET, pp.52-57. Henceforth "InD". The text is, however, incomplete and is missing lines 245-265 just discussed. It is also missing the second part of the poem lines 328 ff. concerning the substitution of Dumuzi. Summaries of these are available in UIR p.67, n.22; and ANET p.52, n.6. Also see S.N. Kramer, "Inanna's Descent to the Nether World; continued and revised," JCS V (1951) pp.1-17.

From this myth we can gain more insight into the netherworld. Regarding the netherworld itself, we find that one can walk towards it.[104] Probably this can be refined further by the fact that Inanna "descended" to it, and later, when restored to life, she "ascended" to the earth.[105] The descriptive phrase "the great below" used in contradistinction to "the great above" is a further indication of the location of the realm.[106]

It is evident from the text that the netherworld was not a pleasant place to be. Things did not exist there as they did on earth. In fact, decay appears to be rampant. Ninshubur, in the plea on Inanna's behalf, specifies that in the netherworld metals get covered in dust, lapis lazuli is broken up, and boxwood is cut up.[107]

In contrast to the apparent ease by which the mikku and pukku fell into the netherworld, and the descent by Enkidu, the present text depicts the entrance to the netherworld as blocked by seven gates.[108] Each was locked and under the care of the chief gatekeeper Neti.[109] Whether the gates are

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104 InD line 126.

105 InD lines 4,32.

106 InD lines 1,2.

107 InD lines 44 ff. The sense of this passage is difficult. I am interpreting the broken/cut up ideas as aspects of waste and destruction of the materials. Cf. Kramer's notes 18 and 19 in ANET pp.53,54.

108 The first gate is given the name Ganzir lines 117,123.

109 InD lines 72 ff.

conceived to be to the netherworld itself, to the lapis lazuli palace of the netherworld, or, to both is unclear. The problematic lines are as follows:

> When Inanna arrived at the lapis lazuli palace of the netherworld,
> At the door of the netherworld she acted evilly,
> In the palace of the netherworld she spoke evilly:
> Open the house, gatekeeper, open the house!...[110]

If the second and third lines are synonymous parallels it would indicate some identification of the palace with the netherworld. It might be suggested that the entrance to the netherworld and the entrance to the palace itself were conceived to be one and the same. The palace perhaps functioning as the entry point to the netherworld in which, if I may borrow from our preceding texts, the judgements of the netherworld were handed down and the fate of the deceased declared.[111] Already we have noted the existence of several palaces in the netherworld (see above p.30). Nevertheless, the lapis lazuli palace in which lies the throne room of Ereshkigal the queen seems to be the most important of these.[112]

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[110] InD lines 72-75.

[111] This of course is an attempt to harmonize the data. It must be realized, however, that the Sumerians themselves appear not to have been bothered by inconsistencies and logical difficulties at least not in the terms we today look for. The theory must be viewed only as a tentative one.

[112] InD lines 72,92,94,162.

The rules and regulations of the netherworld are of interest here. Inanna was stripped of all her vestments as she entered through the gates. When Inanna questions Neti concerning the practice, in each case he replies:

> Be silent Inanna, the ordinances of the nether world are perfect,
> O Inanna do not question the rites of the nether world." ...[113]

Kramer suggests that it was a common rule of the netherworld that the entrants had to appear naked and bowed low in humility.[114] Although this certainly appears a possibility, we should not forget that the "ordinances" with which Inanna was adorned had special significance. They were invested with power. It is possible, therefore, that initially the removal of Inanna's clothing was a unique occurence brought about to assure her arrival in the netherworld stripped of power and unable to cause trouble. Although it is arguing from silence it seems reasonable to assume that were nakedness a normal requirement of those entering the underworld we would have mention of it in the other Sumerian netherworld stories.[115]

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[113] InD 11.129,130 and elsewhere.

[114] UIR p.65.

[115] There is no mention of it, for instance, in the Ur Nammu text. Certainly, however, the Inanna emphasis seems to have influenced later thought. The Semitic writers of "Ishtar Descent..." and "Nergal-Ereshkigal" have taken the nakedness idea and incorporated it within their stories.

In the palace of the netherworld sat Ereshkigal and the Anunnaki who are defined as the seven judges.[116] The Anunnaki pronounced judgement upon Inanna and fastened "the eyes of death" upon her.[117] Although the text is damaged it is clear that the judgement and the" eyes of death" were effective in turning Inanna into a corpse.[118] At this point it is interesting that Inanna seems to be powerless in face of these forces. However, when revivified, it is the Anunnaki who are powerless before her and they flee from her presence. A contradiction is evident unless Inanna has managed to regain her vestments in which lay her power. This could be the case as Inanna is said to ascend to the earth one line prior to that which states that the Anunnaki flee.[119] Perhaps as she ascended through each gate she regained her vestments as is apparent in the later Semitic version of the story. This explanation is also not without problems as one would wonder what the Anunnaki were then doing in the upper realm.

Here also we have a significant difference with respect to the judges of the netherworld. The Pushkin text "A", as

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116 InD line 163.

117 InD lines 162,163. Cf. GLL above p.14.

118 The significance of the "eyes of death" is unclear. They are mentioned elsewhere in GLL line 123 in which Huwawa fastened the "eyes of death" upon Gilgamesh and Enkidu. In that case, however, they did not lead to death as Huwawa was defeated.

119 InD lines 273,274.

has been seen, depicts Utu as judging the case of the deceased (above p.38) and says nothing about the Anunnaki. Again this is probably evidence of different traditions among Sumerian sources.

With the Anunnaki judging the case, one wonders just what Ereshkigal's function was conceived to be. She is said to be the queen and seems vested with power and authority. Nowhere, however, is she said to judge the incoming dead. It may be that Ereshkigal fulfils a role similar to that of Anu in the upper realm. In that divine realm Anu had power, was the source of authority, and presided over the divine assembly.[120] Utu specifically was given the role of judge, a position which did not detract from the power of Anu at all. Given this type of role the import of the passage which describes Ereshkigal as the "birth-giving mother" who lies sick because of her children is unclear.[121] Evidently she had another function which we have a very limited amount of information about so far.

The netherworld was viewed with fear and trepidation. The title, "the land of no return" occurs and is indicative of that fear.[122] Inanna, for instance, feared the possibility that she might be entrapped by this "land of no return". The essence of her fear seems to lie in death

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120 Jacobsen, ToD pp.96.

121 UIR p.67, n.22.

122 InD lines 82,83.

itself. This is clear in Ninshubur's plea to the gods on Inanna's behalf. It revolved around the repetitive statement:

> ...let not thy daughter be put to death in the netherworld... ...[123]

If we tie this in with Inanna's experience, it was evidently thought that even in the netherworld one could enter into some form of non-existence or non-awareness, and that even in the case of the gods. This is supported by the reason Inanna gives the gatekeeper for her wish to enter. She states that she is coming to witness the funeral rites of Ereshkigal's husband Gugalanna who had evidently just died.[124] A state of non-interaction appears to have existed between husband and wife. Whether death in the netherworld was thought to lead to some other form of existence, i.e. a netherworld for the netherworld, is not specified.[125] Perhaps all that can be implied is that the speculations of the Sumerians led them to see the netherworld very much in this-worldly terms. If death occurs in this realm it might also occur in the other.

Finally, it is important to realize that the Sumerians do not appear to have had a concept of non-existence. Certainly no physical interaction was envisioned to exist

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[123] InD lines 43,47.

[124] InD line 86.

[125] Note that when Inanna died, she remained within the bounds of the lapis lazuli palace.

between the dead and the living, yet "life" itself continued in the other realm. Even Inanna, when reduced to a corpse, was not a total non-entity. Upon the application of some substance, the food and water of life, the corpse could be revivified to renew the life which it had once held and, indeed, continued to have in some sort of incipient form. With this, we leave Inanna and move to the final text in this section, the myth of "Enlil and Ninlil".

ii. "Enlil and Ninlil"

The myth of Enlil and Ninlil is of lesser value for our study than the previous texts but is nevertheless significant in some areas. The myth concerns the birth of the moon god Sin and how he came to be related to three underworld deities. I have been unable to uncover the source of the tablets with the exception of one which was uncovered at Nippur.[126] As far as I am aware there have been no attempts at forming a scientific edition of the text using all the tablets now available.[127] I proceed, therefore, in the unsatisfactory position of being without a

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[126] S.N. Kramer, From the Tablets of Sumer (Indiana Hills Colorado: Falcon Wing Press, 1956), p.79.

[127] Older texts are available but outdated due to subsequent discoveries. G.A. Barton, Miscellaneous Babylonian Inscriptions (New Haven: 1918). E. Chiera, Sumerian Epics and Myths (Chicago: Oriental Institute Publications XV, 1934), pp. 76,77.

firm text. Accounts of the story are available, however, and I will draw on several sources.[128]

The tale begins in the time before the creation of humankind, by describing how Ninlil's mother, Nunbarshegunu, instructs Ninlil on how to win Enlil's heart and thus gain his hand in marriage. Ninlil is told to bathe in a stream where Enlil is sure to see her beauty.[129] Enlil, indeed, does see her beauty and as his passions get the better of him he proceeds to rape Ninlil. From this encounter Ninlil is impregnated with the moon god Sin. When the great gods of the city find out about the immoral act they banish Enlil to the netherworld. As Enlil journeys out of the city, he becomes aware that Ninlil is following him. Realizing that if she follows him to the netherworld his first born would become a netherworld deity, he devises a plan to alter the situation. The plan involves three persons whom Ninlil would come in contact with on her journey; the "man of the gate", the "man of the netherworld river", and the "ferryman of the river". In each case, when Ninlil approaches the individuals, Enlil impersonates them in turn and again has intercourse with her. Each time she is impregnated with

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128 SM pp.43-47; FTS pp.79-83; ToD pp.103,104; IAAM pp.152-156.

129 Jacobsen thinks that the bathing by Ninlil actually was done in disobedience to her mother. ToD p.103. I have given Kramer's version, FTS p.80.

Meslamtaea, Ninazu, and Ennugi respectively.[130] These somehow substitute for Sin and Sin is permitted to take his place in the sky of the upper world. The netherworld deities, together with their parents, then proceed to the underworld. The myth ends, somewhat ironically, with a hymn of praise to Enlil.

It is of interest here that the Sumerians considered the act of rape to be immoral and deserving of such grave punishment. The act of punishing Enlil, however, sets up another contradiction in Sumerian thought. As Kramer says, "To judge from the Sumerian literary sources as a whole...Enlil continued as the active leading deity in the Sumerian pantheon without interruption, and it is difficult to reconcile his banishment with this fact, at least for the present."[131] A fall from grace on the part of Enlil may be indicated, however, in those passages which speak of Nergal, "the Enlil of the netherworld", and link Ninlil with Ereshkigal.[132]

The second and final thing which should be noted from this myth is that we have the idea of a "man devouring river" associated with the netherworld. This river had to be crossed with the aid of a ferryman in order for the dead

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130 The last name is difficult to read. Kramer does not try, Jacobsen specifies Ennugi; ToD p. 104.

131 UIR p.67, n.19.

132 See above pp.32,33.

to reach the netherworld.[133] Although we have come across the idea of a river already in the Gilgamesh cycle, this is the only place in Sumerian literature in which it is spoken about so explicitly and termed "man devouring".[134]

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133 SM. p.46; S.N. Kramer, The Sumerians (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), p.133.

134 The first "river" reference in GLL line 26 does not appear to refer to the netherworld river. The other passage (line 113) which speaks of the Magan boat may be connected. Also recall the travel by Ur Nammu across some sort of river.

C. Summary and Conclusions

Thus far, Sumerian texts have been examined individually in respect to concepts of death and the netherworld. In order to achieve an over-all Sumerian view of death and the netherworld, material must be drawn together from all our sources. There are dangers, however, in taking this step. The main danger derives from the fact that no one text provides us with a complete, or systematic, view of either subject. Each text reveals aspects of those subjects only within the parameters of the recitation of its story. By drawing all the material together we thus achieve a synthesis which is found in the texts as a group but which is not supported by any single source. In addition, the inconsistencies which have been noted throughout the study are in themselves a warning that any attempt to synthesize the material is bound to involve distortion. As with systematic theologies and the like, the general simplicity which syntheses tend to impose upon data may never properly ascertain the complexities of the traditions which prevailed in Sumerian thought.

In spite of these very real dangers, syntheses tend to be valuable for ordering and understanding bodies of data. In regard to the current study, we are perhaps justified in drawing together the information from the sources if we think of the outcome in terms of "Sumerian Concepts" of

death and the afterlife in circulation around the end of the third millennium and beginning of the second millennium. The term "Sumerian" is thus used loosely, not referring to a view held by every Sumerian but to views held within the Sumerian communities. This is necessary since the inconsistencies point to a pluralistic situation in which some Sumerians may have adhered to one tradition and not another and that the totality of views held by one individual were not necessarily identical to those held by another.[135]

Perhaps we are also justified in drawing together material from a number of sources based on the fact that all the texts were found in whole or in part at Nippur. The constant geographical location suggests that the ideas were known and possibly circulating at least in this one centre of religious activity within the ancient Sumerian world. With these things in mind, let us move on to consider the Sumerian concepts of death and the netherworld under the categories of; death, the response to death, descriptions of the netherworld, the inhabitants of the netherworld, and life in the netherworld.

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[135] This pluralism is not necessarily to be conceived as a measure of tolerance within Sumerian society. It may have been that each region of Sumer had its own fairly consistent view of the cosmos and life. These may or may not have agreed with those within another region.

1. Death

Within the texts which have been studied death is not looked upon enthusiastically. It is, rather, viewed with pessimism. The "oppression" felt by the deceased according to Gilgamesh and the grief on the part of the survivors are indicative of this negative view.[136] Several forms of human death can be noted; death from sickness, death through child-birth, death from combat, and death which results from murder.[137] It is also apparent that death can occur in the divine realm, and that even in the netherworld, as the cases of Gugalannna and Inanna suggest. Unlike later Semitic literature, it is not explicitly stated that the gods were immortal. Indeed, Inanna's concern about death as she is about to enter the netherworld is almost like that of a mortal. However, in spite of the lack of explicit references, it is probable that the Sumerians generally believed in the immortality of the gods. That Inanna and Gugalanna die in the netherworld may thus present an inconsistency.

Very little is said within the literary texts about care for the body and places of burial. Nothing at all is intimated regarding the graves of the common person but the tombs of the royal person, in particular Gilgamesh and Ur Nammu, are noted for their contents. Gilgamesh appears to

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136 GLL 11.23 ff.

137 Child-birth cf GEN, HBS 260.

lie in what is called, "the purified palace...the heart of Erech."[138] He is accompanied by family members, courtiers, and attendants. The idea that he was able to present gifts and make sacrifices to the netherworld deities probably suggests that he was also accompanied by much in the way of grave furniture. Although the "Ur Nammu" text makes no mention of accompanying humans there are explicit references to grave furniture and the gifts and sacrifices made by Ur Nammu are described in some detail.

It is important to note the tie between the well-being of the royal person and the well-being of the community. The death of Ur Nammu was detrimental to the community as the fertility of the land and animal life was brought to a halt. It should also be mentioned here that the death of a person prematurely, such as was the case of Ur Nammu, brought about charges that the gods had been deceitful in their dealings with the person. In Ur Nammu's case, An is said to have altered his "holy word" and Enlil is charged with changing his "fate decree".[139] It is implied, then, that the gods were in some way responsible for the longevity of life and the moment of death.

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138 DoG B 1.7.

139 UN lines 8,9.

2. Response to Death

Death brought a certain emotional response from family members and friends. These are depicted in terms not unlike the response of the modern person. The weeping of Gilgamesh's mother at the hypothetical death of her son and the grief shown within the Ur Nammu and Pushkin texts reveal this clearly. The Pushkin text is the most explicit in regard to the response of the living, mentioning great grief, prayers being offered for the deceased and their survivors, and curses brought to bear upon the murderer of Nanna. The death of royalty, probably due to its connection with the well-being of the community, results not only in lamentation amongst family and friends but within the whole community. The "Ur Nammu" text states;

> Because the righteous shepherd was carried off,
> The....weep in their..,
> The people....sleep not,
> Spend (their) days [in mourning(?)] for their
> righteous shepherd in his 'captivity". ...[140]

No mention is made of how the period of ill will is broken and prosperity restored to the community.

Finally, it should be said in this section that the response of some individuals toward death was to set up a name for themselves. Gilgamesh, prompted by his thoughts on death, believes he will be able to "set up a name for himself" through combat with Huwawa. If I might speculate here, it appears that "setting up a name" assures

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[140] UN lines 18-21.

remembrance of heroic acts and continuance of food and libation offerings for the deceased long after his death. Perhaps, therefore, behind the attempt for fame lies a concern for the well being of the individual in the netherworld throughout the ages.

3. The Netherworld: a description

The cosmos and life were viewed in a holistic fashion by the Sumerians. It is evident that death did not bring the end of human existence but, rather, the continuance of "life" in another realm, the netherworld. As has been indicated, no Sumerian text sets out to describe the netherworld in a systematic fashion. The material, therefore, has to be deduced from brief references throughout the texts. For the most part these references are inexact and even inconsistent. Perhaps the most obvious attribute of netherworld conceptions, one in which there is a general agreement, is the continual reference to the netherworld as being an "underworld", that is a place or region below the surface of the earth. Gilgamesh's mikku and pukku "fall" into the netherworld through some sort of hole; Enkidu "descends" in order to retrieve the lost objects; Inanna walks to the "great below" and later ascends back to earth. That parts of the underworld were not too far below the earth's surface seem to be implied by Gilgamesh's

unsuccessful attempts to retrieve his mikku and pukku with his hands and his feet.

In spite of the ease by which the mikku and pukku fall into the realm, the netherworld is often depicted as closed off to the natural world by seven locked gates.[141] The first of these is named in the Inanna text as "Ganzir".[142] The gates appear to serve the double function of keeping the living out and keeping the dead in their respective environs.[143] The latter is supported by the apellative term "land of no return", used once in Sumerian literature.[144] This concept, that one could not come and go from the netherworld as one pleased became a common assumption in Semitic texts. It is implied, however, in most Sumerian texts.[145]

An inconsistency is apparent here as Enkidu and Inanna are both depicted as returning to the upper world. The case

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141 It should be noted that the concept of seven gates is contained only within the Inanna text. The GEN text refers only to one gate as it depicts Gilgamesh lamenting "outside the gate of the netherworld". The UN text which also speaks of a journey to the netherworld fails to mention any gates. Certainly, however, the "seven" gates take on a greater significance in the Semitic texts.

142 InD line 123.

143 This is perhaps more explicit within the Semitic texts in which the common threat to let the dead escape is found.

144 InD line 82.

145 E.g. The idea that one, such as Ur Nammu, might return from the underworld to life in this realm is never entertained.

of Enkidu is perhaps the most obvious as the very idea that someone might enter the realm of the dead to retrieve lost objects is asserted. While Gilgamesh realizes that one might be trapped therein, the writer implies that possibility of return exists if one goes unnoticed in the netherworld. Even when trapped, the fact that Enkidu had not died appears to have still warranted the option of asking for the assistance of the gods to help gain his release. Enkidu's subsequent ascension through a hole created by Utu suggests that different traditions regarding the netherworld are in evidence.[146]

The gates of the netherworld lead, not only to the netherworld, but into the throne room of the lapis lazuli palace of Ereshkigal, the queen. There, the entrants possibly received the judgements of the netherworld which would establish their fate in their new "life". An exact description of what lay outside the palace, which one would assume was the place of the dead, is not provided. That more than one palace was thought to exist in the netherworld

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[146] It should be noted that Enkidu was alive when he entered the netherworld but was said to return as a "shade". That he returned this way should not detract from the force of the inconsistency. It is the fact that he got out of the netherworld that is important, whatever the form of his return. The other case, involving Inanna, might be classified as something else entirely as she was a goddess and deities have privileges beyond those of mortals. The fact, however, that a substitute was necessary may suggest that the general rule of "no return" held even in the realm of the gods.

is indicated by the fact that Ur Nammu sacrificed in the "palaces" of the chief netherworld deities.

The netherworld is not only blocked off by gates but, according to some texts, a netherworld river has to be crossed before one can enter the realm. Ur Nammu is said to have travelled to the netherworld, at least in part, by boat and Enlil disguises himself as the "man of the river" and the "ferry man of the river" as Ninlil travels to the the netherworld.[147]

A few other scattered references also tell us about how the ancient Sumerian perceived the netherworld. Twice there is reference to it being a dark place. This, however, is modified by the ideas that Utu and "the son of Utu" bring light to the region.[148] The mention of sacrifices being offered may imply that altars and perhaps some sort of priesthood were present to allow such activity to take place.[149] Finally the descriptive terms; "the great below", "the Great Dwelling", and "the desolate" provide more information about the perceived make up and vicinity of the realm.

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147 With the exception of the sinking of the Magan boat in GLL lines 112,113, none of the other texts mention a river or associated ideas.

148 cf. DoG and PFD.

149 References to altars are clear in DoG and UN. Note references to classes of priests within DoG B. 24,25.

4. The Netherworld: its inhabitants

The inhabitants of the netherworld are comprised of dead humans, both royal and non-royal; and the netherworld deities with their demonlike assistants. The main occupants are as follows:

Ereshkigal - The queen of the netherworld was, according to one text, brought there by Kur from the upper realm. She receives the prime position of order in the list of those sacrificed to by Gilgamesh in the netherworld. In the Ur Nammu text, Ur Nammu offers sacrifice to Ereshkigal third, after the offerings to Nergal and Gilgamesh.[150] Also in the "Ur Nammu" text Ereshkigal is identified as the "mother of Ninazu".[151] This would seem to equate her with Ninlil who is expressly identified as the mother of Ninazu in the poem entitled "Enlil and Ninlil".[152] The import of the statement describing her as the "birth-giving mother" is unclear.

Nergal - Although Saggs states that the name "Nergal" is of Sumerian origin, Nergal does not appear to play as large a role in extant Sumerian literature as he does in

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150 If the Gilgamesh text has its roots in a form which existed prior to the Ur Nammu text, perhaps we see the influence of Semitic society on the Sumerians. According to Saggs, unlike Sumerian society, leadership by a female was unacceptable to the Semite. H.W.F. Saggs, The Greatness that was Babylon (New York: Mentor Books, 1962) p.323.

151 UN line 99.

152 SM p.46. Cf. HBS p.259.

later Semitic thought.[153] His role and office are somewhat vague when Death is described as "Nergal's ambusher".[154] One would assume, however, that his position was similar to that which he maintained in later Semitic literature as the deceased Ur Nammu offers him a sacrificial gift first, before bringing gifts to other netherworld deities.[155] His name, however, is strangely omitted from the sacrifices of Gilgamesh in "The Death of Gilgamesh" and he is never spoken of as the "king" of the netherworld in Sumerian sources. Two texts speak of Nergal as "(the) Enlil of the netherworld". The implications of the title are two-fold. In the Pushkin texts, Nergal seems to take on the functions of Enlil, while in the Ur Nammu text the additional identification of Ereshkigal with Ninlil may suggest that the writer has identified Nergal and Ereshkigal directly with Enlil and Ninlil.[156]

Namtar - This individual is given much attention within Sumerian literature. In one text he is described as "the demon of death", while in another he is the one who "decrees all fates", a job which seems to belong to Nanna

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153 H.W.F. Saggs, loc.cit.

154 GEN cf. HBS p.259.

155 Perhaps here we have a inconsistent element present within Sumerian traditions. The Ur Nammu text seems to elevate his status while, with the exception of the statement regarding Nergal's ambusher in GEN, he is given no specific role in the other materials.

156 See above p.33.

elsewhere.[157] In the sacrificial texts, Gilgamesh sacrifices to Namtar second only to Ereshkigal while Ur Nammu places him fifth after Nergal, Gilgamesh, Ereshkigal and Dumuzi.[158] The rather morbid description of Namtar having no hands or feet and as one who neither eats nor drinks is unique within Sumerian literature. With this one exception Sumerian writers seem to have avoided speculations of this nature.[159]

Gilgamesh - Gilgamesh is described in a netherworld role in several texts. While two of the texts mention him but reveal very little about his status, the Ur Nammu text affords him the title of king (lugal). The magnitude of his position might be implied further in his receiving the sacrifice of Ur Nammu second, after Nergal, and before Ereshkigal. If one assumes, with the Semitic literature that Nergal was the king of the netherworld,[160] it may be that Gilgamesh's kingship was conceived to lie among the dead humans while Nergal was king of the divine element within the netherworld. While this is speculative, there is one reference to him functioning as the revealer of the

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157 Cf. UN line 107 and PFD.

158 GEN in HBS p.259. DoG A.72,75. DoG B.10; UN line 107.

159 Unlike the Semites who portrayed the netherworld demons in terrifying terms. E.g. PV rev. 1-10. See below pp.103 ff.

160 This might be the force of the statements "Enlil of the netherworld".

judgements and decisions of the netherworld to the incoming Ur Nammu.

Several other deities were given minor roles in one or two texts:

- Neti the gatekeeper of the netherworld, is mentioned as such in two texts.[161]

- The Anunnaki are mentioned in two texts. The Inanna text gives them the explicit role of judging Inanna and putting her to death.

- Kur is probably a netherworld dragon type figure.

- The gallê are depicted as policemen who can come and go from the netherworld when duty calls. As with Namtar they neither eat nor drink.

- Ninazimua is described as the scribe of the netherworld.[162]

Before leaving this segment, we should note that several upperworld deities were considered to function in the netherworld, at least on a part-time basis. Utu is said to enter the netherworld from time to time for the purpose of judging the dead (humans?).[163] He is also the one whom Enki had open a hole for Enkidu to escape to the upper

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161 In DoG and InD.

162 Many other names of the inhabitants occur, too many to note here. A lengthy list can be seen in the Death of Gilgamesh B.8-26.

163 In PFD. Perhaps the Anunnaki were only thought to judge divine beings.

regions. It would seem in this case that Utu's role in the netherworld was a projection of his role in the upper world. Nanna, the moon god, also operated in the netherworld from time to time. As has been indicated, he proclaimed the judgements of Utu in regard to the deceased. The mention of several upper world deities among those netherworld deities receiving sacrifices in the Death of Gilgamesh myth is odd. Whether some dual role was also envisioned to exist for Enki, Ninki, Sumugan, Ninhursag etc. is unclear. Finally the personal god of Ludingirra's father was thought to have some say in his fate in the netherworld. How this was accomplished is not specified within the Pushkin text. One would assume, however, that it was by mediation, in a similar fashion to the way the personal gods functioned with the great gods of the upper world.

5. The Netherworld: existence

a. "Activity within the Realm"

As has been indicated death was not viewed as the end of existence but rather as the point of passing into the after-"life". This after-"life" was not seen to be a mere shadow of one's former life in the upper world. From the texts it is clear that there was a fair amount of activity in the region: the inhabitants are portrayed as using all

five senses;[164] throughout the literature various interchanges take place between the residents of the netherworld and the incoming dead and visitors;[165] priestly activity occurs in which gifts and sacrifices were accepted on behalf of the netherworld deities;[166] Ur Nammu's entrance to the netherworld causes a tumult amongst the inhabitants, and immediately he is seated to a banquet.

In only two instances is there any notion of inactivity in the realm and both involve death in the netherworld. The first is that of Inanna as she is turned into a corpse in the netherworld. The other instance involved the husband of Ereshkigal, Gugalanna, who is said to have been killed.[167] Little more is said, but it is apparent that as when death occurs in this realm, contact with the "departed" ceases.

b. "Hierarchy and Inequality"

It is clear that not all were perceived to be equals in the netherworld. Among deities a developed hierarchical pantheon is in evidence and among humans a socio-political system was thought to exist in which kings were established

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164 C.f. the taboos given to Enkidu in GEN. For "taste" the emphasis on the "taste" of the food and water in the Ur Nammu text is revealing.

165 Ur Nammu's entrance to the netherworld; the judgement motif in the Pushkin text; and the interchange between Inanna and Ereshkigal are notable.

166 Cf. The priestly activities in DoG and UN.

167 InD line 86.

in similar roles to those which they had in the upper world.[168] Along similar lines, and possibly in an attempt to deal with injustice, a judgement motif is found in the literature which leads to a situation in which substantial differences in quality of "life" were thought to exist amongst the deceased. This is in evidence as Inanna is judged by the Anunnaki and sentenced to death while, among human entrants, Ludingirra's father is judged by Utu.[169] The prayer of Ludingirra, which reveals his understanding of what happens after death, calls for a favourable judgement upon his father, that he be provided for with sustenance, and that things may go well in the new "life". If these elements are tied in with the curses upon the murderer of Nannâ and his descendents, it would seem that a state in which one's deeds on earth were thought to receive their just reward was conceived to exist. While there are similarities here with later Judaeo-Christian thought, we must not confuse the two. From the evidence we have, moral and ethical judgements are not the sole basis for the fate of deceased persons. It must be remembered that Enkidu

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168 Note, for instance, Gilgamesh and Ur Nammu's position in DoG, UN, and PFD.

169 In Inanna's case this effectively separated her from other divine forces in the netherworld. It should be noted that it is possible that Inanna's purpose in entering the netherworld was to extend her control into her sister's realm. The animosity between the two goddesses, and the fate of Inanna in the netherworld suggests that Inanna's purpose was not merely to observe funeral rites.

witnessed a situation in which the number of sons one had in this life had a positive correlation with the joy one experienced in the netherworld. Also, whether one received proper burial or not was of importance, as the unburied found no rest in their new environment. While the judgement motif must be viewed in different terms than that which we are accustomed to, it nevertheless posits that a situation of inequality existed in the afterlife. Netherworld inhabitants are not equal.

c. "Positive and Negative Characteristics"

It has been common to view the "Mesopotamian concept" of the netherworld in a negative light. Elements of such a view are apparent within the Sumerian texts but these are moderated by a significant number of positive elements. Negative conceptions include: the list of taboos given to Enkidu which suggest a gloomy lifestyle; the idea that the entrants had no possibility of return from the region; the description of Namtar having no hands and no feet; the notion that the food and water were bitter or clay-like; Ninshubar's description of the decay in the netherworld; the idea those who do not receive proper burial find no rest; and finally, the weeping and lament of Ur Nammu in the last lines of the text devoted to his death and afterlife.

The many positive emphases can be seen in: the general activity within the underworld; the thought that a large

number of sons in this world would bring joy in the netherworld;[170] the notion that royal life was thought to continue whereby kings maintained a group of servants and staff in accordance with their position on earth; the function of sacrifices which was likely perceived to provide sustenance for the deities and achieve a measure of favour in return; the fact that Utu was thought to bring light to the region at certain times; and, finally, the very positive emphasis of the Pushkin tablets. In the Pushkin text "A" prayers are offered for the "well-being" of the deceased, for his favourable treatment, that the gods might be pleased and give him rest, and that he might be adequately provided for with food and water.

It is notable that here we find positive and negative elements about the netherworld existing side by side. One might question whether this displays a further inconsistency among the thoughts of Sumerian society. It may be wise to note, however, that an ambivalent view of death is common among virtually all cultures. Speculation about death is largely based upon experience, hope, and fear of the unknown. Hope and fear form the impetus for the positive and negative elements respectively, while experience probably dictates the extent of each element and general thrust of the view as a whole. The Sumerian lifestyle which has been depicted in terms of a "happy ploughman" has

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170 GEN in HBS p.260.

probably influenced Sumerian thought on the netherworld.[171] The relatively peaceful existence in a fairly difficult environment probably gave way to moderate speculative tendencies in which the negative elements were not too negative and the positive elements are somewhat guarded.[172]

The positive elements in themselves force one to ask another question. Why is it that the common ideas of the ancient Near Eastern netherworld concepts within scholarship are generally negative? Why have the positive concepts not been taken into account? The answer here may be two-fold. First, it is perhaps related to the already noted fact that studies of the netherworld have generally been done from a composite Mesopotamian perspective. It may be that the thrust of Semitic texts have influenced this total perspective in a negative way. We will attempt to investigate this in the next section of our study. Second, and probably the main reason for the failure to take account of positive elements, it is apparent that good editions of the texts which contained the most positive emphases, the

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171 The "happy ploughman" term was used several times in a graduate seminar at Wilfrid Laurier University (Department of Religion and Culture, course number 605, Autumn 1987) by Dr. Robert Fisher as a description of the relatively peaceful existence enjoyed by the Sumerians in the Early Dynastic Period, before the area between the rivers was infiltrated by the Semites.

172 One should note that negative conceptions are not really gruesome in Sumerian thought. Positive conceptions are always modified by elements which suggest that netherworld existence was not up to the same standards as life on earth.

"Pushkin Funerary Dirges" and "The Death of Ur Nammu", were not available until the 1960's.[173] Studies performed prior to this would then have had very little evidence of a positive vein.[174] Since interest in the netherworld has been limited and secondary studies are generally slow to follow primary textual work, the negative viewpoint has continued to be accepted. It is obvious, however, from this study, that Sumerian concepts of death and the netherworld were rather complex. Different traditions were operative within the Sumerian culture and positive and negative conceptions sometimes existed side by side. Both of these tendencies ought to be elucidated in any further work on the topic.

As we end this section of the study it is apparent that some basic similarities can be found in the Sumerian approach to what lay beyond this life. First, there is the agreement that life did not cease at death but went on into another realm where an active "life" was thought to continue. Second, that this other realm was below the surface of the earth is a common feature. Once the Sumerian began to think in detail about the netherworld, however, and

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[173] PFD published for the first time in 1960. Although editions of UN were published as early as 1917, the meaning of the text was obscure until additional fragments were located and Kramer published an up-dated text in 1967. See Kramer's words to this effect in JCS XXI (1967) p.112.

[174] Perhaps only the position of Gilgamesh in DoG.

the "life" it contained, consistency disappears and the evidence becomes imprecise. It is possible, for instance, that the concept of "the land of no return" was not adhered to in the case of Inanna or Enkidu, although the evidence is somewhat ambiguous. The concept of the netherworld being dark was negated somewhat as Utu was thought to descend at times for judgement and to bring light. Even the idea that Utu judged the dead may be inconsistent with the Anunnaki judging Inanna as she entered the underworld. If we add the fact that positive and negative elements concerning netherworld existence appear, side by side, it is obvious that netherworld traditions in the ancient world were not fixed; inconsistencies did exist. Whether they thought in terms of a "multiplicity of approaches" (i.e. that, in accordance with mythopoeic thought, all attempts to define the netherworld were equally correct) is unclear. More likely is a situation in which various traditions existed in the different geographical regions. The traditions of one region, or city, were not necessarily adhered to or believed by the people of another region. Regardless of this, however, the inconsistencies necessitate that we do not refer to a Sumerian view of the netherworld but rather Sumerian "concepts" of the netherworld.

III. SEMITIC TRADITIONS of Death and the Netherworld.

A. Discussion of the texts and order of examination.

The organization of this section of the study will parallel the preceding work. Again it would be desirable to organize the material according to geographical and temporal origins but our knowledge of these details is still inadequate. The texts, therefore, are organized in the artifical manner utilized in the previous section in accordance with the status of the main characters of the story, i.e. human and divine encounters with death and the netherworld.[1]

The format of the studies will also be of the same nature. Introductions to each text will be given, a description of the content of the myths, and notes on the contribution of each to the topic of death and the netherworld. The final section will draw together the information gained and attempt to describe Semitic concepts of death and the netherworld.

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[1] Cf. Table I, p.9b.

B. Examination of the texts with reference to death and the netherworld.

1. Human Encounters with Death and the Netherworld.

i. "The Gilgamesh Epic"

It is now well over one hundred years since George Smith layed the foundations of our knowledge of the Gilgamesh Epic.[2] Since then a great number of publications have dealt with the text and tablets. Of these, the critical editions of Jensen (1900), Thompson (1930), Schott (1934), Böhl (1941), and von Soden (1958) are the most notable.[3]

The Epic is made up of twelve tablets, of which the twelfth is an appendage with little relation to the

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[2] R. Campbell Thompson, The Epic of Gilgamish (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930) p.5. In spite of the fact that our knowledge of the text and language have increased tremendously since the date of publication and that more tablets and fragments have been found, this is still the most complete critical edition available in the English language. It contains the cuneiform text, a transliteration, and notes.

[3] P. Jensen, Keilinschriftliche Bibliothek VI (1900) pp.116ff.
Thompson, Ibid.
A. Schott, Das Gilgamesch-Epos. (1934) The standard German translation.
F.M. Böhl, Het Gilgamesj-Epos (1941). The Dutch translation with notes.
W. Von Soden, Das Gilgamesch Epos. (1958). An update of Schott's work. Critical notes on this: ZA LIII (1959) 209-35.
For a complete bibliography of the literature regarding "The Gilgamesh Epic" up to 1958 see L. De Meyer, "Introduction bibliographique," in, Gilgamesh et sa légende, ed. Paul Garelli, (Paris: C. Klincksieck, 1960), pp.1-30.

preceding story line.[4] The story which makes up Tablets I-XI was evidently a popular tale during the second and first millennia B.C.E. since tablets and fragments have been uncovered from several archaeological sites. The major source material derives from the British Museum's excavations at Nineveh, specifically in the library of Ashurbanipal and the temple library of Nebo. The Assyrian texts uncovered there date from the second half of the seventh century B.C.E..[5] Portions of an Akkadian recension together with fragments of Hittite and Hurrian renderings have been recovered from Boghazköy. It is thought that these should be dated around the fifteenth century B.C.E., while still older Babylonian sources, dealing with Tablets I, II, III, and X, found at Sippar, probably derive from the seventeenth century.[6] That they themselves are copies of still earlier texts is suggested by internal evidence.[7] Most scholars date the Epic in its Semitic form in the early part of the second millennium B.C.E..[8] For the most part

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[4] For this reason Tablet XII will be treated separately subsequent to the study of the other tablets as a whole (See below p.100).

[5] E.A. Speiser in ANET p.73. More Assyrian texts were discovered at Ashur (relating to Tablet VI) and at Uruk (relating to Tablet IV) see A. Heidel, The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949), p.2. Henceforth referred to as GEP.

[6] Some of the extant OB tablets are of unspecified origin - cf. GEP pp.1,2.

[7] Speiser, loc.cit.

[8] Ibid. Also EG. p.7.

the tablets are now kept in the British and Berlin museums and the university museums of Pennsylvania and Yale.[9]

We have already come across portions and themes of the Semitic story in the Sumerian section of this study. Some work has been done in the past attempting to account for the Überlieferungsgeschichte of the Semitic work. While it is clear that Tablet XII is a direct translation of "Gilgamesh, Enkidu, and the Netherworld", an analysis of the other tablets reveals that while certain motifs are based on Sumerian materials the central theme has no Sumerian prototype. Speiser, following Kramer, suggests that the first eleven tablets "constitute an instance of creative borrowing which, substantially, amounts to an independent creation."[10] Because of this fact, the Epic will be of value in assessing the concepts of death and the netherworld which were current in Semitic society. Indeed, the Gilgamesh Epic contains a wealth of information in regard to our topic.

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[9] GEP pp.1,2. One of the problems found in approaching the Epic concerns the fact that we have one Epic but texts deriving from a millennium. Since the textual resources are so limited, scholars have formed a composite text using all the available data. While this is also the approach taken here, references will be noted as being Old Babylonian (OB) or Assyrian (Assy) in origin in order that differences between the two recensions, if any, might be more readily noticed.

[10] Speiser, ANET p.73. S.N. Kramer covers the whole subject of literary sources very well in his, "The Epic of Gilgamesh and its Sumerian Sources," Journal of the American Oriental Society, 64 (1944) pp.7-23.

The Gilgamesh Epic is a rather lengthy composite story featuring the hero Gilgamesh of Uruk. The townspeople find Gilgamesh overbearing and petition the gods to create a person who would be his equal. In answer to the request, the gods create Enkidu but, for unknown reasons, place him in the animal world rather than in Uruk. When a certain Urukan hunter comes upon Enkidu he devises a scheme to bring Enkidu to the city and to Gilgamesh. The scheme involves luring Enkidu with a harlot. Because of the ensuing sexual act between the two, Enkidu is unable to return to the "purity" of the animal kingdom and is persuaded by the harlot to enter the realm of humanity. He thus comes to Uruk where initially he and Gilgamesh struggle in some sort of wrestling match. After the match they become great friends.

The story continues as Gilgamesh sets his heart on defeating Huwawa (Humbaba in the Assyrian version), the legendary protector of Enlil's cedar forest.[11] Enkidu, who has seen Huwawa, attempts to dissuade Gilgamesh from the mission for fear of death. Gilgamesh, however, without recognizing the seriousness of the situation, brushes aside the thought of death wishing only to elevate his name through combat in order that it will be remembered in generations to come.

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[11] In the Sumerian version the forest belongs to Utu.

The two set off with the blessing and prayers of the elders of Uruk.[12] In due course they reach the cedar forest and slay Huwawa. Upon victory they wash and don clean attire. Ishtar, perceiving the beauty of Gilgamesh, propositions him to be her lover. Gilgamesh, however, is familiar with Ishtar's deceitfulness in love. He recounts all her foul deeds and refuses to gratify her desire. Angry at his remarks, Ishtar asks Anu for the bull of heaven that the two heroes might be taught a lesson. Again, the two are victorious. The bull of heaven is slain and they continue to treat Ishtar with scorn. Apparently due to their insubordination, the great gods hold council and decide that a penalty must be handed down, Enkidu must die. This begins a rather lengthy portion of the text dealing with the death of Enkidu. Witnessing the death of his friend, Gilgamesh finally comes face to face with the reality of death. He experiences great grief at the loss and is stricken by the possibility that he too might fall prey to a similar fate. He sets out, therefore, on a quest for eternal life.

Gilgamesh wanders aimlessly in lament and anxiety. Eventually he determines to find Utnapishtim, the only human who had gained immortality. His journey is long and arduous and he is told several times of the futility of his quest. Undeterred, Gilgamesh pushes on to Utnapishtim. Upon

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[12] This is not in the Sumerian GLL. It is evidently an addition of Semitic origin.

reaching him he asks how eternal life can be gained. Utnapishtim takes the opportunity to recount the story of how he and his wife were granted life through surviving the great flood. Unfortunately, for Gilgamesh, it is made clear that it was a unique event through which they had gained the favour of Enlil. He could not receive the same blessing. Before sending Gilgamesh away, however, Utnapishtim, at the bidding of his wife, gives Gilgamesh directions on the whereabouts of an ocean plant which would "restore youth".[13] Gilgamesh locates the plant but does not eat it right away. Happily he carries it back toward Uruk. On the way, he decides to cool off from the hot sun in a well. Putting the plant aside, he returns from his swim to find that a snake has eaten it. As the snake departs it sheds its skin and Gilgamesh weeps at his misfortune. The story ends without resolving the problem for Gilgamesh. Possibly he reconciles himself to reality and he and Urshanabi, the boatman, enter Uruk.

As one approaches the Epic in search of references to our topic, one is struck, in the first instance, by the emphasis on the inherent mortality of humanity. Speiser uses the term "mortals" to translate the Akkadian nišum in several instances to elucidate this.[14] The point is made

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[13] GE (Assy) XI.270,279.

[14] Cf. GE (Assy) III.iv.2 & 5b. This fragment is placed before (OB) III.iv.2 by Speiser in ANET p.79. Nišum is generally translated "mankind", "human being" etc. cf.

clear, however, when, after the death of his friend, Gilgamesh sets out in search of Ūtnapishtim and eternal life. The ale-wife advises him of the futility of his quest;

> <ilu>GIŠ e-eś ta-da-a-al
> ba-la-tam ša ta-sa-aḫ-ḫu-ru la ṭu-ut-ta
> i-nu-ma ilâni<pl> ib-nu-u a-wi-lu-tam
> mu-tam iš-ku-nu a-na a-wi-lu-tim
> ba-la-tam i-na ga-ti-šu-nu iṣ-ṣa-ab-tu[15]
>
> Gilgamesh, whither do you rove?
> The life you pursue you will not find.
> When the gods created humankind,
> They set aside death for humankind,
> They retained life in their own hands.[16]

The same theme is apparent earlier in the Epic, as Gilgamesh attempts to convince a fearful Enkidu to continue with their journey to do battle with Huwawa.

> ma-an-nu ib-ri e-lu-u ša[-mi-i]
> i-lu-ma it-ti ^{d}Šamaš da-ri-is u[ś-šab]
> a-me-lu-tum-ma ma-nu-u ûmu(mu)-ša
> mi-im-ma ša i-te-ni-pu-šu ša-ru-ma
> at-ta an-na-nu-um-ma ta-dar mu-tam
> ul iš-šu da-na-nu kar-ra-du-ti-ka
> lu-ul-li-ik-ma i-na pa-ni-ka ...[17]

CAD 11.2.283.

[15] EG (OB) X.iii.1-5. It should be noted that all transliterations in this section are from EG. The reader will note that this work stems from an era in which transliterations had a slightly different standard and lacked much of the diacritical markings to distinguish signs which are common today.

[16] GE (OB) X.iii.1-5 (I have followed Speiser's translation but altered the older English forms).

[17] EG (OB) III.iv.5-11. In line 5 Thompson has ...e-lu-u ša m[u-ti] suggesting "(Who my friend) can rise above death". He notes, however, that Ebeling in Altorientalische Bilder zum Alten Testament vol.ii, has reconstucted the text to read ...e-lu-u ša[mi-i] (EG p.77 note on COL. IV.5). The

Who my friend can scale he[aven]?
Only the gods [live] forever under the sun[18]
As for mankind; numbered are their days;
Whatever they achieve is but the wind!
Even here thou art afraid of death.
What of heroic might?
Let me go before you,
....[19]

In the latter text, the context reveals that Gilgamesh is aware of the fact that all humans must encounter death. He tells Enkidu that even if this battle is their last it will not be in vain since they will die heroic deaths, the names of heroes apparently lived on in Semitic (and Sumerian) lore. While we will pick up the death in combat theme shortly, both passages illustrate a belief that humans and gods have different constitutions, one mortal the other immortal.[20] Death was perceived to be a part of the

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latter has been followed by Speiser and I accept this although it is noteworthy that Heidel refuses to translate the passage (GEP p.36 line 140).

[18] Heidel, noting the divine determinative, translates; "Only the gods d[well] forever with Shamash...." GEP p.36, line 141. This may be significant as we will note the emphasis on the the Sun or Shamash later (pp.88,89). Heidel may be entering into a logical dilemma as his translation would elevate Shamash to a position among the gods which he does not seem to have obtained. (Although whether this would have been such a great problem for the ancient person cannot be said for sure.)

[19] GE (OB) III.iv.5-11.

[20] This belief is inconsistent with other texts which depict the death of certain gods. E.g. Apsu, Tiamat, and Kingu in the "Enuma Elish", Inanna, Gugalanna, and Ishtar in the Sumerian and Semitic "Descent to the Netherworld". Note also references to killing Nergal in the El Amarna text of "Nergal and Ereshkigal" which implies the possibility of such an act. Lambert suggests that while the gods could not die natural deaths from illness, or old age etc. the

constitution of all humans. It was the will of the gods but no reason is given why this should be so.[21] A further point evident in the latter passage concerns the length of a human's days. The extent of life was believed to be determined by the gods. Later in the Epic, another passage is even clearer in this regard when Utnapishtim states that the Anunnaki and Mammetum have something to do with each human's fate.

amelu-u <am>e-ṭil : ul-tu ik-ru-bu [ana šimti-šu]
<ilu>A-nun-na-ki ilâni<pl> rabûti<pl> pa[ḫ-ru(?)]
<ilu>Ma-am-me-tum ba-na-at šim-ti it-ti-šu-nu
Ši-ma-tu i-š[im-mi]
iš-tak-nu mu-ta u ba-la-ta
ša mu-ti ul ud-du-u ûmê<pl>-šu[22]

"...The commoner and the noble,
Once they are near to [their fate]?
The Anunnaki, the great gods, foregather;
Mammetum, maker of fate, with them the fate decrees:
Death and life they determine.
(But) of death, its days are not revealed."[23]

The role of the Anunnaki is to decree the fate of individuals with Mammetum. Mammetum not only decrees the

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possibility that they could die in combat was left open in ancient thought. W.G. Lambert, "The Theology of Death," Death in Mesopotamia (Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1980), p.65.

[21] The fact that it had evidently been this way since the beginning is probably the meaning of GE (Assy) X.vi.26ff. esp l.32. Note the additionally preserved lines given by Grayson in ANET Supplement p.507. Lambert suggests that death became part of the human constitution only after the flood. Lambert, op.cit., p.57.

[22] EG (Assy) X.vi.35-39.

[23] GE (Assy) X.vi.35-39.

fates but is also charged with being the "maker of fate". The fate decrees would seem to be in the divine realm only as they are not revealed to humanity.

The final observation under this theme concerns the fate of those from different socio-economic levels of society. It is suggested in the above passage that the commoner and the noble have the same fate.[24] It should be pointed out, however, that the similarity in fates may refer to the commonality of the encounter with death and the fact that bodies decompose in the similar ways whether noble or pauper. It is uncertain in this context whether the similarity in fate proceeds into the netherworld and the after-"life".

It is well recognized within the Epic that death has a certain finality to it. Although the departed continues an existence of some sort in the netherworld (see below p.97), life in the realm of the living and the relationships within it come to an end. Enkidu declares on his death bed:

> "Must I by the spirit (of the dead)
> Sit down, at the spirit's door,
> Never again [to behold] my dear brother with
> (mine) eyes?" ...[25]

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[24] See also GE (Assy) VII.iv.41 ff.

[25] GE (Assy) VII.i.21-23. This portion is an insert from a Hittite text (ANET p.85). I do not have access to this cuneiform text but it is available. See Weidner, Keilschrifturkunden aus Boghazköi, VIII, no.48. As noted in EG p.45.

Further light is shed on the theme with the use of analogies to describe death.

<ilu>GIŠ a-na ša-a-šum iz-za-kar a-na ku-ra-di-im
<ilu>Šamši(ši)
iš-tu e-li ṣi-ri-im a-ta-al(?)-lu(?) ki da-li-im
i-na li-ib-bu ir-ṣi-tim kak-ka-di(?) um-ma-du-u
aṭ-ti-il-lam-ma ka-lu ša-na-tim
i-na-ia ša-am-ša-am li-ip-tu-la-a-ma ma-wi-ir-tam
lu-uš-bi
ri-ki-e-it ik-li-tum ki ma-ṣi na-wi-ir-tum
ma-ti mi-tum li-mu-ra-am ša-ru-ru <ilu>Šamši(ši)[26]

Gilgamesh says to him, to valiant Shamash:
"After marching (and) roving over the steppe,
Must I lay my head in the heart of the earth
That I may sleep through all the years?
Let mine eyes behold the sun
That I may have my fill of light!
Darkness withdraws when there is enough light.
May one who indeed is dead behold yet the
radiance of the sun!" ...[27]

The analogy between death and sleep is made several times within the Epic.[28] In this passage, the finality aspect is elucidated by the idea that the sleep is "through all the years", one never rises from such sleep. The passage also illustrates the role of "darkness" and "light" in mythology. Gilgamesh wants to live and requests that he be allowed to

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26 EG (OB) X.i.9-15, p.53.

27 GE (OB) X.i.9-15. One might possibly translate the term <ilu>Šamši(ši) as Shamash since the determinative is used here and not in line 13. The indication would thus be that Shamash was not perceived to have a presence in the realm of the dead. However, it should be noted that elsewhere the determinative appears when the "sun" may be implied (Assy) X.vi.31. Perhaps, though, it is not possible to separate "Shamash" and "sun" to this extent.

28 cf. VIII.ii.13 (Sultantepe text S.U. 51,7). Note also the comparison between death and those who rest (Assy) X.vi.32 ff. As well as the association of the two in Tablet XI.199 ff.

see the sun that he might have his fill of light. The light-dark dichotomy is clear elsewhere when it is suggested that one who is dead is said to have been overcome by darkness ("benighted").[29] Darkness then is equated with death and light/sun with life.[30]

The combat motif is a prominent theme in the first portion of the Epic. The sheer repetitiveness of elements dealing with heroism in death would seem to indicate that this was a powerful force within the youth of Semitic culture. Gilgamesh is quoted as saying;

šum-ma am-ta-ku-ut su-mi lu-uš-zi-iz
<ilu>GIŠ-mi it-ti <ilu>Hu-wa-wa da-pi-nim
im-ḳu-ut iš-tu
i-wa-al-dam-ma tar-bi-a ˀi-na bîti-ia[31]

"Should I fall, I shall have made a name:
"Gilgamesh" - they will say - against fierce
Huwawa
Has fallen!" (Long) after
My offspring has been born in my house,[32]

Later he asserts:

..-[n]u(?)-ub(p) lib-ba-ka tu-ḳu-un-tu:
mu-u-tu mi-ši-ma la tu-ma(?)-... ...[33]

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[29] GE VIII.ii.14, a Sultantepe text S.U. 51, 7.

[30] The light=life and dark = death or netherworld existence ideas seem contrary to Sumerian ideas that Utu brought light and judgement to the netherworld. See above pp.23 and 40.

[31] EG (OB) III.iv.13-16

[32] GE (OB) III.iv.13-16. Note the similar thrust in the poem "Gilgamesh and the Land of the Living".

[33] EG (Assy) IV.vi.36.

> Let your heart {[lux]uriate} in combat;
> Forget death and do not [...]. ...[34]

Death is not to be worried about, thinks Gilgamesh. Since everyone must die at some point, why not let one's own death be a glorious one, met in combat with a worthy opponent, in order that one's fame may live on.[35] In his youth, Gilgamesh seems unable to recognize the unpleasant aspects or the finality which it can bring.[36] As Jacobsen says, he has "a knowledge of death only in abstract."[37] "...Death holds no terror; it is part of the game, and is mitigated to some extent by fame, ...one's name will live in future generations."[38] Enkidu's words reveal a similar notion when he says;

> That we might do one thing, a deed which
> will not be made ignomious through death![39]

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[34] GE (Assy) IV.vi.36. "Luxuriate" is an adoption of Schott's suggested reconstruction of the text; [lih]-nu-ub. Speiser, GE, ANET, p.82, n.83.

[35] Jacobsen, "Mesopotamia: VII. The Good Life;" IAAM, p.209.

[36] That this was a youthful understanding appears to be the thrust of the reply of elders of Uruk as they warn Gilgamesh of the consequences of a battle with Huwawa. "Thou art yet young Gilgamesh, thy heart has carried thee away." GE (OB) III.v.10.

[37] Jacobsen, loc.cit.

[38] Jacobsen, loc.cit.

[39] GE (OB) V.b.17; ANET Supplement p.504. There Grayson notes von Soden's remark that Enkidu seems to be saying this is a cause worth dying for. I have been unable to gain access to this cuneiform text but it is available: J.J.A. van Dijk, Sumer, XIII (1957), pp.66,91; and, XIV (1958), pp.114-121.

Again, lying on his death bed, he states;

> My friend, [...] has cursed me!
> [Not] like one [fallen] in battle [shall I die]
> For I feared the battle [...]
> My friend, he who [is slain] in battle [is blessed]
> But as for me, [...][40]

A search for answers to one's fate was common in the ancient world, as it is even today. Enkidu is still under the illusion that death through combat is good and noble and in his search for answers he laments the form of his death and the fact that he will not gain the glory of having died in battle. It is interesting that blame for his fate is put on the fear which he encountered at the thought of battling Huwawa, as well as on the curse placed upon him by the great gods. In his case then, sickness is the result of both his own actions and the personal will of the gods.

In contrast to the heroic death concept, fear of death is another important recurrent element in the story. In the first part of the story the fear of Enkidu just mentioned is the most obvious.[41] As they enter the cedar forest Enkidu says;

> [ib-ri a-a nit]-tar-da [ana lib <iṣu>kišti]
> [i-la-'-ḳa]-te-e-ma i-man-g[i i-di-ia ...[42]

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[40] GE Addition to the Assyrian according to Schott, ZA, XLII (1934), p.113 ff. As given by Speiser ANET p.87. Again I have no access to the cuneiform or a transliteration of this text.

[41] GE (OB) III iv.9.

[42] EG (Assy) IV.vi.24,25.

["Let us not go] down [into the heart of the
forest],
[In open]ing [the gate my hand] became limp."[43]

Gilgamesh replies;

...-[š]i(?) tal-tap-pit-ma ul ta-ad-dar [mu-u-ti]
...
...
[l]u-ṣi man-gu ša i-di-ka u lu-'-tu lit-ba-a [ša
ka-te-ka] ...[44]

Touch but my [garment], and thou wilt not fear
[death].
(lines 32,33 unintelligible)
That the limpness may depart from thy arm,
And the weakness pass [from thy hand].[45]

The passage seems descriptive of how a person might react to fear, becoming immobile and not wishing to move forward another step. Such descriptiveness is again evident as the two reach the "green mountain";

[in-na]-siḫ a-ma-ti-šu-nu šu-nu iz-ziz-zu

Their words were [silen]ced; they themselves
stood still ...[46]

The style of the writer in this whole section of tablets IV and V would appear to be of a tension building nature, building up to the great battle with Huwawa, who, in spite of their fear, is easily defeated by Gilgamesh and Enkidu with the aid of Shamash.

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[43] GE (Assy) IV.vi.24,25.

[44] EG (Assy) IV.vi.31,34.

[45] GE (Assy) IV.vi.31-34.

[46] GE (Assy) IV.vi.41.

While Enkidu portrayed the fearful elements in the early portion of the story, his death brought Gilgamesh to the reality of death.[47] Gilgamesh is depicted as wallowing in the emotions of grief for his friend: He weeps, "moaning like a wailing woman;"[48] he recalls the things they had experienced together; he paces back and forth; he pulls out his hair; he tears off his fine clothes; and he even makes the people of Uruk weep and lament over the death of his friend.[49] Gilgamesh's love for Enkidu perhaps went so far as to deny death. Tablet X tells how he was unwilling to give him up for burial, weeping over him for a week in hope that he will arise, until, "a worm fell out of his nose."[50] At this Gilgamesh put on a lion skin and is said to "roam over the steppe".[51]

In face of the finality and reality of the death of his friend, and possibly due to having witnessed the decomposition of the body, Gilgamesh is haunted by the prospect of encountering a similar fate. He states;

a-na-ku a-mat-ma ul ki-i <i-lu>EN.KI.DU-ma-a
ni-is-sa-a-tum i-te-ru-ub ina kar-ši-ia
mu-ta ap-lah-ma a-rap-pu-ud ṣêri ...[52]

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[47] In spite of his earlier realization that all must die.

[48] GE (Sultantepe/Assyrian) VIII.ii.2,3 and IX.i.2.

[49] GE VIII.ii.8,20,21,22; iii,4,6,7.

[50] GE (OB) X.ii.5 ff.

[51] GE (Sultantepe/Assyrian) VIII.iii.6,7.

[52] EG (Assy) IX.i.3-5.

When I die shall I not be like Enkidu?
Woe has entered my belly.
Fearing death I roam over the steppe[53]

The same is true as he speaks to Shamash;

i-na li-ib-bu ir-ṣi-tim kak-ka-di(?) um-ma-du-u
at-ti-il-lam-ma ka-lu ša-na-tim ...[54]

Must I lay my head in the heart of the earth
That I may sleep through all the years? ...[55]

And to Siduri, the ale-wife;

i-na-an-na sa-bi-tum a-ta-mar pa-ni-ki
mu-tam ša a-ta-na-ad-da-ru a-ia a-mu-ur[56]

O ale-wife, now that I have seen thy face,
Let me not see the death which I ever dread.[57]

In contrast to the fear and anxiety of Gilgamesh which led to his quest for eternal life, the ale-wife advises him to become more realistic in his response to death..

<ilu>GIŠ e-eš ta-da-a-al
ba-la-tam ša ta-sa-aḫ-ḫu-ru la tu-ut-ta
i-nu-ma ilâni ib-nu-u a-wi-lu-tam
mu-tam iš-ku-nu a-na a-wi-lu-tim
ba-la-tam i-na ga-ti-šu-nu iṣ-ṣa-ab-tu
at-ta <ilu>GIŠ lu ma-li ka-ra-aš-ka
ur-ri u mu-ši ḫi-ta-at-tu at-ta
ûmi(mi)-ša-am šu-ku-un ḫi-du-tam
ur-ri u mu-ši su-ur u₄me-li-il
lu ub-bu-bu zu-ba-tu-ka
ga-ga-ad-ka lu me-si me-e lu ra-am-ka-ta
zu-ub-bi ṣi-iḫ-ra-am ṣa-bi-tu ga-ti-ka
mar-ḫi-tum li-iḫ-ta-ad-da-a-am(?) i-na su-ni-k[a]
an-na-ma ši-pir [a-wi-lu-tim] ...[58]

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[53] GE (Assy) IX.i.3-5.

[54] EG (OB) X.i.11,12.

[55] GE (OB) X.i.11,12.

[56] EG (OB) X.ii.12,13.

[57] GE (OB) X.ii.12,13. See also the refrain evident in (Assy).X.i and iii.18 ff.

[58] EG (OB) X.iii.1-14.

"Gilgamesh, whither rovest thou?
The life which thou pursuest thou shalt not find.
When the gods created mankind,
Death for mankind they set aside,
Life in their own hands retaining.
Thou, Gilgamesh, let full be thy belly,
Make thou merry by day and by night.
Of each day make thou a feast of rejoicing,
Day and night dance thou and play!
Let thy garments be sparkling fresh,
Thy head be washed; bathe thou in water.
Pay heed to the little one that holds on to thy hand,
Let thy spouse delight in thy bosom!
For this is the task of [mankind]!" ...[59]

As Shamash had indicated in an earlier part of the story, the Ale-wife again affirms to Gilgamesh that immortality is beyond the reach of humankind.[60] The impression one receives from this, and in the comments made by the elders, Shamash, and Utnapistim suggests that running away from one's mortality was not indicative of mature ancient thought.[61] Realism is strong throughout the myth and Gilgamesh's search for "life" through heroism and later through Utnapishtim is given a certain unnatural flavour. In the end, Gilgamesh's quest is not satisfied. That the story never answers the riddle of death and life for Gilgamesh is revealing. The wisdom of the age, which the

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[59] GE (OB) X.iii.1-14. Note that lines 1 and 2 are repeated by Shamash (OB) X.i.7,8; and that the thrust is similar to the remarks of Utnapishtim when he is faced with the same question (Assy) X.vi.26ff.

[60] Shamash's advice: GE (OB) X.i.7,8.

[61] Cf. GE (OB) III.v.10; (OB) X.i.7,8; and (Assy) X.vi. Note the addition to the latter text in ANET Supplement p.507.

ale-wife et al. espouse simply recognizes that the human constitution is mortal and does not seek to answer why this was so.[62] That is the way it was created and nothing can alter the fact. Therefore, anxiety should be put away, fear should be lost in the knowledge that all must suffer the same fate, and life should be lived to its utmost within the bounds which one has been given.

While the Epic's main topic concerns Gilgamesh's handling of death and search for life, a small portion in Tablet VII contains a description of the netherworld itself. Lines 14-54 pertain to a dream which Enkidu had foretelling his death and entrance to the netherworld.[63] The interesting thing here is that we come across, for the first time, what must have been a standard formula for netherworld descriptions, akin to the "little creeds" which von Rad thought operative within the traditions of Israel.[64] Von Rad, of course, held that such creeds were of cultic significance but whether this passage was used as such in this context is unclear. It is, however, a description of

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[62] Other than the idea that the gods somehow willed death to happen.

[63] The death of Enkidu seems to be inherent in the thought that he was transformed "So that his arms were [...] like those of a bird." 1.32. This fits the description given to the inhabitants of the netherworld in 1.38.

[64] Gerhard von Rad, The Problem of the Hexateuch: and other essays, transl. E.W.T. Dicken (London: S.C.M. Press, 1966).

the netherworld with a decidedly negative bent. Lines 33-39 read:

> ṣab(?)-tan-ni i-rid-dan-ni a-na bît ik-li-ti šu-bat <ilu>Ir-ka-la
> a-na bîti ša e-ri-bu-šu la a-ṣu-u
> a-na ḫarrâni ša a-laḫ-ta-ša la ta-a-a-rat
> a-na bîti ša a-ši-bu-šu zu-um-mu-u nu-u-ra
> a-šar ip-ru bu-bu-uš-si-na-ma a-kal-ši-na ṭi-iṭ-ṭi
> lab-ša-ma kima iṣṣuri ṣu-bat kap-pi
> u nu-u-ra ša im-ma-ra-ma ina e-ṭu-ti aš-ba[65]
>
> Looking at me, he leads me to the House of Darkness, the abode of Irkalla,
> To the house which none leave who have entered it,
> On the road from which there is no way back,
> To the house wherein the dwellers are bereft of light,
> Where dust is their fare and clay their food.
> They are clothed like birds, with wings for garments,
> And see no light residing in darkness....[66]

The passage is a direct parallel of a section in "The Descent of Ishtar" and a section in "Nergal and Ereshkigal".[67] Which version is primary is difficult to determine. Of the three, Ishtar is the most likely to have had cultic significance and one could suggest that a cultic formula had influenced the other stories. However, it is also noteworthy that lines 38 and 39 are reversed in the Ishtar recension while the Nergal-Ereshkigal version follows

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[65] EG (Assy) VII.iv.33-39.

[66] GE (Assy) VII.iv.33-39.

[67] DIsh 4-10; NE (Neo-Assy) ii.62-64 - iii.1-5. Thompson believes DIsh. line 11 should be inserted after line 39 of the Gilgamesh text (as a line 39a, see EG p.46.n.9). He cites the fact that tablets 79-7-8 and 335 "evidently" contained the lines as evidence but notes that other tablets/fragments omit the line entirely.

the Gilgamesh line order directly. This would suggest that a corruption took place within the Ishtar text transmission process, or, possibly, that if the corruption was in the Gilgamesh text, that alteration came into common use. By the time of the later Nergal-Ereshkigal story the order within the Gilgamesh Epic seems to have achieved primacy.

We should, however, note the negative, though not altogether gruesome, remarks within the passage. The darkness within the netherworld is apparent, as is the idea that the netherworld is "the land of no return". The food of the netherworld is described as clay although the mention of baked meats and cool water being served presents an inconsistency which might be accounted for if one assumes the standard formula was forced into an already existing myth, or, even more likely that the good food was for the divine inhabitants of the realm. The "house of dust" concept further negates the appeal of the underworld and in the lines which follow, it is possible that all humans of whatever social stature were conceived to have equal status upon death.

lab-ša-ma kima iṣṣuri ṣu-bat kap-pi
u nu-u-ra la im-ma-ra-ma ina e-ṭu-ti aš-ba
a-na b[ît ip-r]i ša e-ru-bu a-na-ku
ap-pa[l-lis] . . . -ma ku-um-mu-su a-gu-u[68]

They are clothed like birds, with wings for
garments, (line 38)
And see no light, residing in darkness.

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68 EG (Assy) VII.iv.38-41.

In the House of Dust which I entered,
I looked at [rulers], their crowns put away....[69]

And some lines later:

a-na bît ip-ri ša e-ru-bu a-na-ku
aš-bu e-nu u la-ga-ru
[a]š-bu i-šip-pu <am>maḫ-ḫu[70]

In the House of Dust, which I entered,
Reside High Priest and acolyte,
Reside incantory and ecstatic....[71]

The context seems to imply that death and removal to the underworld are part of the lot of mankind, commoner and noble alike (cf. above pp.86,87). Unlike the Sumerian texts which speak of royalty maintaining their position in the netherworld, the former passage appears to indicate that the office is not continued. The couplets evident in the latter one may also suggest that regardless of one's cultic office, all dwell together in the netherworld.[72] The contrast is again apparent in the portrayal of princes serving meats and pouring cool water from waterskins in the netherworld. A situation seems to exist in which it was thought that those

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[69] GE (Assy) VII.iv.38-41. Note that Thompson's transliteration is somewhat obscure. I have followed Speiser's translation which Heidel generally agrees with (GEP p.60).

[70] EG (Assy) VII.iv.45-47.

[71] GE (Assy) VII.iv.45-47.

[72] My understanding of this is based on the sense of the passage and the statement in (OB) X.vi.33-39. It must be said that the sense of the passage is difficult. Lines 45 ff may merely indicate that a priestly division lived in the netherworld. If this was true, however, it is to be questioned why the highest and lowest offices within a cultic system would be coupled together.

served in this life receive roles of servitude in the next.[73]

We come now to Tablet XII of the Epic which has been described as an "inorganic appendage".[74] Although the first eleven tablets represent an independent creation on the part of the Babylonian writers, Tablet XII, while omitting the first part of the story regarding Inanna and the ḫulʾuppu tree, is described by Kramer as "a slavish copy of the Sumerian original."[75] The fact that it was a direct translation may indicate that it is of limited value in determining netherworld concepts within Semitic society. However, that it was copied at all might suggest that it had some influence on Semitic thought.

Owing to the close relationship of the Sumerian and Semitic stories we do not need to dwell on it a great deal.[76] We should note, however a few additional elements omitted from our discussion in the Sumerian section.[77] When Enkidu is trapped again Kur has seized him but there is also

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[73] GE (Assy) VII.iv.43,44.

[74] Speiser, ANET, p.97, follows Kramer, SS, p.23.

[75] Ibid.

[76] Cf. GEN pp.15.

[77] The additions may actually be included in the text of GEN. As noted, however, I have been unable to locate a critical edition of this text and doubt that a full edition is available.

a statement that the mother of Ninazu would not allow Enkidu to ascend.[78] Upon ascension, it is noteworthy that Enkidu may in fact be experiencing already the decomposition of his body.

[ib-ru(?)]...ša tal-pu-tu-ma lib-ba-ka iḫ-du-u
[pagri-šu(?) kima lu-b]a-ri la-bi-ri kal-ma-tu
kal
[kal-la-tu (?)] ... [ša t]al-pu-tu-ma lib-ba-ka
iḫ-du-u
[pagri-ša(?)] ... e-pi-ri ma-li[79]

"[{My body}...], which thou didst touch as thy
heart rejoiced, (line 93)
Vermin devour [as though] an old garment.
[{My body}...], which thou didst touch as thy
heart rejoiced,
[...] is filled with dust."[80]

Although decomposition would be a normal occurence for those in the netherworld, we are not told that Enkidu has died. It must be assumed, then, that even if one entered the netherworld while alive the dangers included the normal fate of a corpse, decomposition and loss of one's earthly body. That this in itself may have been death is indicated in the passage which tells us that when Enkidu was released, his "spirit" (u-tuk-ku) ascended like a windpuff (za-ḳi-ḳi).[81]

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[78] GE (Assy) XII.50. Cf. GEN in HBS p.259. The mother of Ninazu is said to be, perhaps, Ninlil. HBS p.259. Possibly it is Ereshkigal cf. p.33. above dealing with Ur Nammu text.

[79] EG (Assy) XII.93-96. The basis of Thompson's reconstruction of the first parts of these lines is not clear. The cuneiform text is completely obliterated in these parts, cf. EG Plate 57.

[80] Speiser GE (Assy) XII.93-96. Again note the first part of the lines is highly doubtful.

[81] GE (Assy) XII.84.

It is interesting that Enkidu's "spirit" and Gilgamesh are depicted as embracing, a physical interaction. The Sumerians and Semites appear to have not differentiated between "spiritual" and physical as the writer portrays the spirit in a material, but somewhat decomposed, form.

Other additions include the fact that when Enki agrees to assist Gilgamesh in gaining the release of his friend, he asks Nergal not-Utu, as in the Sumerian version, to open the hole that Enkidu might exit. Finally, when Gilgamesh receives word from Enkidu concerning the state of netherworld existence the following interchange occurs:

> ša e-dim-ma-šu pa-ki-da la i-šu-u ta-mur a-ta-mar
> šu-ku-la-at di-ḳa-ri ku-si-pat a-ka-li ša ina su-
> ḳi na-da-a ik-kal
>
> "Him whose spirit has no one to tend (it) hast
> thou seen?"
> "I have seen:
> Lees of the pot, crumb of bread, offals of the
> street he eats." ...[82]

Apart from the obvious negative state being envisioned for those in this situation, perhaps here we have an indication of the necessity of food-offerings for the dead. Those who do not have their spirits "tended" are thought to eat scraps and filth in order to "survive". Those who are provided for through offerings are believed to eat quite well. This may further explain the desire to set up a name for oneself as the more persons who remember you the more the chances of

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[82] GE (Assy) XII,153,154. Again see note 60 above.

receiving food offerings from the living throughout the ages.

ii. "A Prince's Vision of the Netherworld"

The text known as "Die Unterweltsvision eines assyrischen Kronprinzen" or "A Prince's Vision of the Netherworld", was discovered at Ashur and dates from the mid-seventh century B.C.E..[83] Since its discovery two critical editions of the entire tablet have been published by von Soden and Ebeling.[84] Only translations are available in English, notably those of Heidel and Speiser.[85] The text is found on one large tablet with forty lines on the obverse and thirty five on the reverse. Unfortunately the obverse is badly damaged and its meaning is thus obscured. The reverse, however, is in a fairly good state of preservation and it is this alone which has been translated in the English versions mentioned above.[86] Given this situation it

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83 Titles follow those given by von Soden, ZA XLIII (1936) pp.1-31; and Heidel, GEP pp.132-136. The date follows Speiser, ANET p.109. Nb. von Soden, op. cit., p.3 - "...dass er nicht vor 700 geschrieben worden sein kann."

84 Von Soden, Ibid. Erich Ebeling, Mitteilungen der altorientalischen Gesellschaft, Leipzig, X,2 (1937) pp.1-20.

85 Heidel, Ibid. Speiser, Ibid.

86 The obverse is only available in the critical editions. cf. note 85.

is probably prudent to confine the study to the legible reverse side of the tablet.

The subject of the text is not so much concerned with death as it is with the netherworld. In fact, it tells us very little even about the netherworld itself, the focus is on the inhabitants of the netherworld and the interactions between them. An Assyrian prince named Kummâ desires a view of the netherworld and he receives that view via a vision. When approaching the details of Kummâ's experience we should remember that for the ancient person a visionary experience was perceived to be no less real than the waking state. Dreams were considered a part of reality and the portents of a vision carried great significance.[87]

Kummâ first of all witnesses various gods and demons of the underworld and describes their appearance. The descriptions are horrific and one begins immediately to sense the fear of the prince. Namtar, Namtartu, the death god, the evil[...], Alluhappu, the "Upholder of Evil", the boatman of the netherworld, the evil Utukku, Shulak, Mamitu, Nedu, "All that is Evil", and four other gods are

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87 See Henri Frankfort, "Myth and Reality," in IAAM pp.10ff. Also note the emphasis on dreams within "The Gilgamesh Epic". Frankfort's assertions are clearly in evidence there.

described.[88] The descriptions are along the following lines:

> ...ú-tuk-ku lem-nu qaqqadu nēšu qātā<II> šēpā<II> <ilu>zû<mušen> <ilu>šu-lak nēšu ka-a-a-ma-ni-ú ina muḫḫi šēpe<II>-šú ár-ka-a-ti ú-šu[-uz]
>
> <ilt[u>ma]mîtu qaqqada <UDU>enzu qātā<II> šēpā<II> amēlē<MEŠ> <ilu>ne-dug ātû(NI-GAB) erṣeti<tim> qaqqadu nēšu qātā<II> amēlē<MEŠ> šēpā<II> iṣṣuru mim-ma lem-nu II-qaqqadē<MEŠ>-šú ištên qaqqadu nēšu šanû qaqqadu [....] ...[89]
>
> ...The evil Utukku (had) the head (of) a lion, hands (and) feet (of) the Zu-bird. Shulak was a normal lion stand[ing] on his hind legs.
>
> [Ma]mitu (had) the head (of) a goat, human hands (and) feet. Nedu, the gatekeeper of the nether world, (had) the head (of) a lion, human hands, feet (of) a bird. 'All that is Evil' (had) two heads; one head was (that of) a lion, the other head [....] ...[90]

Following the descriptions Kummâ prays to these gods. He then states that he beholds a "man" and describes him as one having a black body, a face like Zu, wearing a red cloak carrying a bow and sword, and treading upon a serpent.[91] This is the only "human" description within the vision and it is interesting in that it may be another indication of

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88 It is said that fifteen gods are seen and described; PV rev.9. My own count indicates that sixteen gods are described between verses 2 and 9.

89 PV rev.6b and 7 from von Soden op.cit. p.16, lines 46b and 47.

90 PV rev.6b-7.

91 PV rev.10. The phrase ištên<en> eṭ-lum at the beginning of line rev.10 = von Soden line 50, is translated "a man" and "Ein Mann" by Speiser and von Soden respectively. According to Riemschneider, An Akkadian Grammar, "one young warrior" is a possible translation.

how humans were thought to be transformed in the netherworld. No more is said about the person at this point of the story. We will speculate as to his identity in due course.

Lines eleven and following introduce the figure of Nergal into the story. The description here is useful and illuminating. We shall quote at length.

> [ē]nē<II>-ia ki-i ad-ku-ú qarradu <ilu> Nergal(UGUR) ina <iš>kussî šarru-ú-ti-šú a-ši-ib a-gu-u šarru-ú-ti a-[p]i-ir ina qātē<II>-šú ki-lál-le-e II <iš>me-i?-ši ezzūti (ŠÚR-MEŠ) ṣa-bit II-a-a qaqqadē<MEŠ> <ilu>?[..]? DU[.]
>
> [21 (geringe Spuren)]? šú-nu kam-ru te? i?-di-šu birqu(NIM-GIR) i-bar-ri-iq <ilu>Anunnaku(NÊR) ilī<MEŠ> ra-bûti!<MEŠ> imna(XV) šumēla(CL) kán-[šú...]? bu?[.]
>
> a-ra-al-lu ma-li pu-luḫ-tu i-na pa-an mār rubê[e] na-di ši-iš?-šú dan-nu [...ina?] a-bu-sa-ti-ia iṣ-bat-an-ni-ma a-na maḫ-ri-šú ú-qar-[ri?-ba]n?-ni
>
> [a-]mur-šu-ma i-tar-ru-ra iš-da-a-a me-lam-mu-šu ez-zu-ti is-ḫu-pu-u-ni- šēpē<II> ilū-ti-šu [rabī-t]i áš-šiq-ma ak-miṣ a-zi-iz? i-na-ṭa-al-an-ni-ma ú-na-a-š[á? qaqq]ad?-s[u]
>
> [ri-g]im-šu ú-dan-nin-am-ma ki-ma u$_4$-me š[e-g]i-i ez-zi-iš e-li-ia i-šá-as-si šab-bi-ṭu si-mat ilū-ti-šú šá ki-ma ba-áš-me pu-luḫ-tu ma-lu-ú
>
> [a?-n]a? lib-bi-ia i-šá-a-ta a-na da-ki[-ia]... ...[92]

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92 PV rev.11-16a; von Soden op.cit. p.17, lines 51-56a.

> 11 When I moved my eyes, valiant Nergal was seated on the royal throne; his head gear was the crown of royalty; in his two hands he held two wrathful {maces}; two heads[...].
> 12 [...] they were cast down; {from} [...] of his {arms} lightning was flashing; the Anunnaki, the great gods, stood bowed to the right (and) to the left [...].
> 13 The nether world was filled with terror; before the prince lay utter {st[il]lness}. [...] took me by the locks of my forehead and dr[ew me] before him.
> 14 When [I] saw him, my legs trembled as his wrathful brilliance overwhelmed me; I kissed the feet of his [great] godhead as I bowed down; when I stood up, he looked at me, shaking his [head].
> 15 With a fierce [c]ry he shrieked at me wrathfully like a fu[rio]us storm; the scepter, which befits his divinity, one which is full of terror, like a viper,
> 16 He drew [tow]ards me in order to kill [me];....
> ...[93]

The fear and terror instilled in the prince at the sight of Nergal are readily apparent and the tension is heightened by the vivid description. Some elements of the description are not unlike the theophany language and motifs found within Hebrew literature. Among these one might note the references to: "lightning flashing", "shrieking like a furious storm", the circumlocution evident when he speaks of the "wrathful brilliance" of Nergal, the humbling fear before the god, and possibly the linking of death with the action of seeing god.[94] In spite of the fact that theophanies are rare within Mesopotamian sources, it would

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[93] PV rev.11-16a.

[94] PV 11.12, 15, 15, 14, 16a respectively. Cf. Exodus 20, 24; Ezekiel 1; Daniel's visions, Psalm 18:14; Revelation 4; etc. within the Hebrew and Christian traditions.

appear that a commonality in thought and language regarding the appearances of a god existed between these fellow Semites and Near Eastern neighbours.[95]

In line thirteen the Sumerian term arallû is used for "netherworld" and it is said to be filled with terror. Speiser believes that the use of arallû is merely for stylistic effect in contrast to irṣitum which is used in the preceding lines.[96] This, indeed, would seem to be the case. The Anunnaki are said to stand bowed to the right and left of Nergal in line 12. This is a position which is hitherto unattested but again is not unlike the position of supporting staff given within Hebrew/Christian theophanies.[97] That Kummâ was not dead as he entered the netherworld is also of interest. Nergal's immediate reaction is to kill the prince thus confining him to the netherworld for ever.[98] If we might refer to the taboos within the Tablet XII of the Gilgamesh Epic and "Gilgamesh, Enkidu and the Netherworld", it may be that it was a common belief in Mesopotamia as a whole that any entrance into the netherworld regions risked death. It is notable, however,

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95 The theophany parallels are most interesting as this is the first description of this kind which I have come across within Mesopotamian literature.

96 ANET p.110, n.10. Term also used in line 58.

97 Note Revelation 4 etc.

98 PV 1.16a.

that both Kummâ and Enkidu escape through the intercession of some benevolent divine being.

Following the negative, and fearful, description of the gods, the man, and Nergal, we now encounter an opposing tendency within this perception of the netherworld. As Nergal moves to extinguish the life of the prince he is halted by one Ishum who is called;

> ...ma-lik-šu mu-kil ab-bu-ut-ti e-ṭir(KAR)<ir> napišti<tim> ra-'-im ki-na-a-ti ù ki-am. ...[99]
>
> ...his counselor, the intercessor who spares life, who loves truth, and so forth.... ...[100]

Ishum counsels Nergal not to kill Kummâ but instead to allow him to return to earth that he might tell of Nergal's might and fame.

> [..t]aš(?)-ri-ḫi-i-ka ba-ḫu-la-ti ša māti kalâma lil-tam-mu-ú lib-bi kaš-ka-ši dan-dan-ni ka-mì-i lemnûti<MEŠ>... ...[101]
>
> "Let the subjects of all the land ever hear [...] of your fame!" The heart of the all powerful, (that is Nergal) the almighty, who vanquishes the evil ones.... ...[102]

The role described here for Ishum and Nergal mitigate to some extent the terror which the prince has faced to this point. The emphasis on "truth" and "vanquishing the evil ones" might even indicate a degree of justice conceived to

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99 PV rev.16, from von Soden, loc.cit., l.56.

100 PV rev.16.

101 PV rev.17, von Soden loc.cit., line 57.

102 PV rev.17.

exist within the realm. In light of this, it may be that the experience of the prince which is envisioned, i.e. the terror within the situation, is not to be generalized and made to pertain to all who might enter the netherworld. This would tend to be supported by the fact that the prince seems to have engaged in some sin against Ereshkigal. In the next line, when Nergal has regained his composure, he asks the prince;

> ...am-mī-i-ni ḫi-ir-ti na-ra-am-ti šar-rat a-ra-al-lu tu-šá-as-li[.] ...[103]
>
> ..."Why didst thou {slight} my beloved wife, the queen of the Nether world?" ...[104]

Without an answer being given, Biblu, the slaughterer of the netherworld is said to give the prince to Lugalsula, the gatekeeper, that the prince might be led out through the Ishtar-Aya gate. The relationship thought to exist between Lugalsula and Nedu, who also is given the title "gatekeeper of the netherworld", is unclear.[105] The gate mentioned appears to be located within the netherworld but we have not come across this name before. It presupposes the Ishtar story and possibly has something to do with an exit from the netherworld rather than an entrance.

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[103] PV rev.18, from von Soden, loc.cit., line 58.

[104] PV rev.18. Word translated "slight" is tu-šá-as-li. Von Soden has "verhöhnt".

[105] cf. PV. rev.7.

Before he leaves, the prince is again warned not to forget Nergal and is threatened with a terrible insomnia if he fails to tell of Nergal's greatness.[106] Again, before leaving, the text returns to the "man" whom Kumma saw in verse 10 (see above p.105). Nergal calls him the "re-'-e šit-ra-ḫi", the "exalted shepherd (to whom my father, [...] the king of the gods (presumably Anu) granted all that was in his heart)."[107] The man is also said to have something to do with the well-being of the lands, was a priest who took part in the New Year Festival in Ashur, was one who was protected in battle, one with broad understanding, and finally was the begetter of the prince.[108] The last item, specifically, would seem to indicate that this etimmu(?) (shade) was Kummâ's father, the deceased king of Assyria. Evidently the father had suffered his fate due to some sin. Line 27 states that in spite of his good treatment by the gods the king had partaken of "the forbidden and trampled on the consecrated." Perhaps the indication is that the prince's father had profaned some temple items.[109]

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106 PV rev.20,21.

107 PV rev.22.

108 PV rev. 23-26.

109 Perhaps also the emphasis on not forgetting Nergal, line 20, suggests that they had failed to bring funerary offerings or offerings for the dead and or the netherworld deities.

After these warnings and explanations, the prince then awakes from his vision. The description of his condition at this point portrays vividly the great fear which the prince had of his encounter.[110] He cries "Woe! Ah me!" and proceeds to fulfil his obligations by offering praise to Nergal before the people of Ashur.

Up to this point much of the vision has been reported in the first person. In the middle of line 29 it becomes mostly a report in the third person. Lines 33-35 appear to be a colophon of some kind in which the scribe switches his attention to himself. Evidently the scribe had sinned by taking a bribe and he repents from his actions. It would seem that his expiation was to put the prince's vision in writing.[111]

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110 PV rev.30,31.

111 This seems to be the implication of: PV rev. 35.

2. Divine Encounters:

i. "The Descent of Ishtar to the Netherworld"

The poem known as "The Descent of Ishtar to the Netherworld" has come down to us in two recensions. Recension [illegible], the older of the two, comes from Ashur.[112] Recension N, recovered from the library of Ashurbanipal at Nineveh, is to be dated specifically to Ashurbanipal's reign; a colophon at the end of the text describes him as the king of the world and Assyria.[113] These Assyrian texts generally resemble the Sumerian, "Inanna's Descent to the Netherworld". While the basic thrusts are the same, however, the Semitic accounts do differ in some detail from their predecessor.[114] That they are not mere copies of a Sumerian original suggests that they may be treated

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[112] Text available in KAR no.1, pls. 1-4, p.321. S. Geller has a transliteration and German translation of A in Orientalistische Literaturzeitung, vol.XX (1917), cols.41-50.

[113] DI (N) rev.59,60. Cf. Heidel, GEP p.128. Recension N can be found in CT 15, Pls. 45-48. Transliteration and translation given by P. Jensen, KB VI.I.80-91. English translation by Heidel, GEP pp.119-128. Speiser has made a composite translation of A and N in ANET pp 106-109. For the most part I will refer to the latter work.

[114] Perhaps the wording here should read "predecessors" as it is evident that several versions of the story are to be found within Sumerian literature. Cf. Kramer's UIR pp.67,68; nn.22,24, and note his "'Inanna's Descent to the Nether World' Continued and Revised," JCS V (1951) pp.1-17.

independently for evidence of death and the netherworld in a later age.

The story tells of how Ishtar sets her mind on a trip to the netherworld. Upon reaching the gate she threatens to smash the door and break the lock before issuing the common threat to "...raise up the dead, eating the living, so that the dead will outnumber the living."[115] Seemingly unperturbed, the gatekeeper asks Ishtar to wait while he announces her to his mistress Ereshkigal. Several lines then depict a worried Ereshkigal before she directs the gatekeeper to allow the entrance of Ishtar in accordance with the ancient rules of the netherworld. The rules in question follow the Inanna pattern and necessitate that Ishtar must remove a piece of clothing at each of the seven gates en route to Ereshkigal's court. As Ishtar enters, Ereshkigal again is disturbed at her presence and Ishtar proceeds to attack her sister. With apparent ease, however, Ereshkigal is able to fend off the attack and orders Namtar to imprison Ishtar in her palace. Therein the "sixty miseries" are unleashed upon her and these seem to effect her death.

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115 DIsh obv.19,20. Transliterations of DIsh derive from the cuneiform text in Riekele Borger's Babylonisch - Assyrische Lesestücke Rome: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 1963 pp.50 ff.

19	ú-še-el-la-a mi-tu-ti	KU <meš>bal-tu-ti
20	UGU bal-tu-ti	i-ma-'a-du mi-tu-ti

Noticing the absence of Ishtar and a decline in the fertility of the earth, Papsukkal the vizier of the great gods seeks the help of Sin and Ea to gain Ishtar's release. Ea conceives a eunuch named Asushunamir and sends him to the netherworld with instructions on how the release can be effected. He is to wait until Ereshkigal makes an oath granting him a wish. Asushunamir waits as he is told and when the wish is granted under oath he asks for the life water bag. In anger over the request, Ereshkigal curses Asushunamir. Due to the oath, however, she is forced to comply and orders Namtar and the Anunnaki to sprinkle Ishtar with the water of life. When revivified, Ishtar is escorted out of the netherworld, having her clothing returned at each gate. A remark is made that a ransom must be paid for her release. Thereafter the meaning of the text is obscure. It seems, however, that Tammuz also was in the netherworld and is released.

A comparison with the Sumerian story reveals numerous changes, omissions and additions. The major alterations in content can be easily seen in the table on the following page which outlines the content of the stories. Dashes under the Semitic heading imply that that element of the Sumerian story is not continued in the Semitic story.

TABLE II

Inanna and Ishtar's Descents to the Netherworld

Sumerian		Semitic
Inanna's abandonment of heaven, earth, lordship etc	.	------
Inanna dons the seven ordinances	.	------
Inanna's instructions to Ninshubar	.	------
------	.	The common creedlike description of the netherworld
Inanna at the gate, reason for entering netherworld	.	Violent threats at the gate
Neti seeks directions from Ereshkigal,	.	Gatekeeper announces Ishtar is at the gate,
----		Ereshkigal's fear,
Is instructed to let her enter		Instructed to let her enter
Inanna enters, seven ordinances removed	.	Ishtar enters, seven items of clothing removed
------	.	Conflict. Ishtar imprisoned, the sixty miseries
Death of Inanna	.	------
------	.	Ishtar's influence on fertility of the earth
Ninshubar, Inanna's servant, cries to Enlil, Nanna, and Enki	.	Role taken by Papsukkal, vizier of the gods who goes to Enlil and Ea
Enki fashions the Kulaturra and Kulagurra and instructs on how to get Inanna out of the netherworld. He equips with water and bread of life	.	Ea creates Asushunamir and instructs on how to get Ishtar out of the netherworld
		----
They ask for corpse and sprinkle with the bread and water of life 60 times	.	He asks for water of life and Namtar and Anunnaki sprinkle Ishtar
------	.	Asushunamir cursed
Inanna revived, ascends with gallê	.	Ishtar revived & escorted out of the netherworld
------	.	Her clothing is returned
------	.	Requirement of the substitution
The story of the gallê and Dumuzi's substitution	.	------
------	.	Tammuz ascends ??

The most obvious omissions are the missing beginning and ending.[116] Dashes under the Sumerian section reveal additions in the Semitic text which are not present in the extant Sumerian poem. Major additions include the creed-like formula for the netherworld, the fear of Ereshkigal (or at least an increased emphasis on fear), the more violent interchanges between Ishtar and the gatekeeper and Ishtar and Ereshkigal, the fertility connection with Ishtar, the curse upon Ea's messenger, and the idea that Tammuz ascends after Ishtar. Alterations in the story are not so evident. The major changes, however, would include the imprisonment and infliction of Ishtar with the sixty miseries rather than just being put to death, the fact that the role of Ninshubar is taken by Papsukkal, that the roles of the kulaturru and the kurgarru are taken by Asushunamir, and the fact that the life water bag seems to reside in the netherworld rather than being brought there by Enki's messengers. To these differences we might add also the inclusion of a role for Namtar within the Semitic story.

For the most part "The Descent of Ishtar to the Netherworld" is valuable to us only within the netherworld category of our study; very little is said about death at all. In regard to the netherworld, again we find the common, creed-like description of the region in lines 4-10.

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116 This does not appear to be caused by a broken tablet since we have the colophon at the end of the text.

Since we have already dealt with this in the Gilgamesh Epic we shall pursue it no further here (cf.p.97).[117] Line 11 informs us that over the door and bolt of the netherworld dust is spread, an idea that is not completely detached from the mention of the "House of Dust" within the "The Gilgamesh Epic".[118] Added to this line in the A recension is:

[...] stillness is poured out.[119]

Heidel translates the term for "stillness" as "silence".[120] Both terms, however, bring a new element to our descriptions of the netherworld suggesting almost a quiet, perhaps unpleasant tranquility existing. This is to be contrasted with the activity envisioned in other myths and even within the present text. From within the standard formula and mentioned elsewhere several times, it appears that the term, irṣit la tari, or, KUR.NU.GI$_4$.A, (the land of no return) has become a standard appellation for the netherworld. It is used numerous times within the myth.[121] The netherworld is

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117 The transliterations of the text have no serious differences.

118 DI obv.11; cf. GE (Assy) VII.iv.40.

119 According to Speiser, ANET p.107, n.4.

120 GEP p.121, n.63.

121 Described as such DI obv.1,12,41,63; rev.6,13,14.

also described as the dwelling place of ^{d}Irkalla, and as Kutu^{ki}.[122]

Little is added in this text concerning our knowledge of the inhabitants of the netherworld. The gatekeeper is unnamed here whereas the Sumerian version tells us it was Neti. Ereshkigal is one of the main characters in the story and in the usual role of queen. The Anunnaki are present in a role similar to that in the Sumerian story, and Namtar is written in as Ereshkigal's vizier fulfilling the commands of Ereshkigal and performing duties which she herself seems to perform in the earlier version. The incoming Ishtar is described as the sister of Ereshkigal. As with the "Nergal-Ereshkigal" text (see below p.126), it is unclear if this is deemed to be a real relationship or merely one of collegiality.

The relationship and interaction between Ishtar and Ereshkigal is of interest. As Ishtar demands to enter the underworld Ereshkigal's response reflects a degree of fear not evidenced in the Sumerian material. When Ereshkigal hears of Ishtar's plans she is described thus;

ki-ma ni-kis <GIŠ>bi-i-ni e-re-qu pa-nu-ša
ki-ma ša-pat ku-ni-ni iṣ-li-ma ša-pa-tu-ša[123]

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[122] DI obv.4,40. Speiser links Irkalla with Ereshkigal (ANET p.107 n.2). Kutu<ki>, Kuta<ki> is thought to be a name for the netherworld and is identical to that of the Akkadian city "Cutha" (ANET p.107, n.13).

[123] From Borger p.50.

Her face turned pale (green) like a cut down tamarisk
Her lips turned dark (black) like a bruised
kuninu-reed. ...[124]

Evidently Ereshkigal fears Ishtar's presence and she asks;

mi-na-a lib-ba-ša ub-la-an-ni mi-na-a kab-ta-sa-ma
uš-par-da an-ni-ma ..[125]

What drove her heart to me? What impelled
her spirit hither? ...[126]

That this fear may have been a fear of death might be implied in the next line;

an-ni-tu me-e a-na-ku it-ti ^{d}A-nun-na-ki
A<MEŠ> a-sat-ti ...[127]

Behold, should I drink water with the Anunnaki?[128]

The concept of drinking water with the Anunnaki occurs in the Nergal-Ereshkigal story (see below p.136). In that context there are some indications that the practice was thought to bring about death.[129] The fear is also in the fact that Ishtar has threatened Ereskigal with the standard threat to raise the dead to devour the living.[130] If this were to happen and the dead returned to earth there would be

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[124] DIsh obv.29,30.

[125] From Borger p.50.

[126] DIsh obv.31.

[127] From Borger p.50.

[128] DIsh obv.32.

[129] Nb. NE (NAssy) iii.38,39.

[130] DIsh obv.19,20. cf. NE NAssy.v.25-27; GE Assy.VI.92 ff.

a discontinuation of offerings for the netherworld. Ereshkigal and her court would thus be forced to eat clay and drink muddied water. This is the nature of her complaint in line 33.

ki-ma NINDA<MEŠ> a-kal IM ki-ma KAŠ a-šat-ta-a A<MEŠ> dal-ḫu-te ...[131]

Instead of food should I eat clay, instead of beer should I drink turbid waters ...[132]

When Ereshkigal instructs the gatekeeper to let Ishtar in, she is to enter only in accordance with the "ancient rules".[133] In another reference, these rules are called "the rules of the mistress of the Nether World."[134] As with the Sumerian myth, Ishtar is forced to give up one piece of her clothing at each of the seven gates. The significance of the removal of these is unclear within the myth itself. Unlike the Sumerian version the adornments are not given a great deal of emphasis and are not specifically linked with the power of the Sumerian ordinances (the Sumerian term ME).

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131 Borger p.51.

132 DIsh obv.33. I am here following the interpretation of Heidel, GEP p.123, n.70.

133 DIsh obv.38.

134 DIsh obv. 44,47, etc. Whereas in the Sumerian "Inanna" story, it is possible that the rules were specifically designed for Inanna (see above p.48), the situation here is less likely so. That such rules were also enforced for the incoming Nergal in the "Nergal-Ereshkigal" myth suggests that by the Semitic era the necessity of the rules had been generalized to affect all incoming persons, at least those of divine origins.

When Ishtar enters the presence of Ereshkigal a violent interchange ensues.

^{d}EREŠ.KI.GAL i-mur-ši-ma ina pa-ni-ša ir-a'-ub
^{d}Ištar ul im-ma-lik e-le-nu-uš-ša uš-bi ...[135]

^{d}Ereshkigal saw her and in her presence she trembled[136]
^{d}Ishtar did not think, she rushed at (above) her. ... [137]

In the Sumerian version this act is not attested. There it appears that Inanna, having lost her ordinances, was in a much weakened state and was easily judged and killed. In spite of Ishtar's apparent strength in the later version, Ereshkigal, again, easily gets the upper hand and asks Namtar to imprison her foe and release the "sixty miseries" upon her.[138] That Ishtar died from this experience is nowhere stated but might be implied from the need of the "life-water" bag to revive her.[139]

As noted, the role of the kulaturra and kurgarru is taken by Asushunamir, a eunuch, in the Semitic story. Unlike the Sumerian story, in which the beings were given

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135 DIsh obv.64,65 from Borger p.51.

136 From verb râbu. Marcus suggests "tremble" p.154. Speiser translates "burst out", ANET p.108; Heidel translates "enraged".

137 DIsh obv.64,65.

138 DIsh obv. 68 ff. Note that in the Sumerian version when the kulaturra and kurgarru performed the ritual to revive Inanna they sprinkled her with the water and bread of life sixty times. InD line 271.

139 DIsh rev.38.

the water and bread of life by Enki, it appears that in the Semitic text the "life-water" bag is already located in the netherworld. When Asushunamir is granted a wish upon the oath of Ereshkigal he asks for the "life-water" bag.[140] The fact that he asked for this warranted a curse on Asushunamir. Ereshkigal, however, is bound by her oath and she has Namtar and the Anunnaki sprinkle Ishtar with the magical substance and lead her out of the netherworld.[141] As Ishtar ascends she regains her adornments. The ending of the poem is difficult but it appears that a ransom is required from Ishtar for her freedom. Just what this ransom is is not specified. It also appears that Tammuz was already in the netherworld and ascended with Ishtar. Again, however, the implications of the text are obscure.[142]

ii. "Nergal and Ereshkigal"

Until 1951 this mythical story was known to us only from two middle-Babylonion fragments uncovered at El Amarna. Apparently used as tools for training Egyptian scribes in the lingua franca, Semitic cuneiform, the texts seem

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[140] DIsh rev.19.

[141] DIsh rev.30 ff.

[142] The presence of Tammuz in the netherworld and the fact that he appears to ascend with Ishtar's entourage makes one wonder if, in this version of the myth, Ishtar descended to the netherworld to bring back her lover Tammuz?

difficult and somewhat unreliable.[143] In 1951, however, a lengthy late Assyrian version was unearthed at Sultantepe. The cuneiform text of this recension was published by O.R. Gurney in 1957. A transliteration, translation, and notes followed one year later from the same hand.[144] Several discrepancies between the two recensions exist, although the many similarities assure us that both are telling the same story. Since the discrepancies are substantial in some instances, it may be useful to consider the texts independently.

The El Amarna fragments amount to approximately seventy lines of somewhat legible text. A basic transliteration and German translation has been given by Knudtzon.[145] Speiser and Heidel have provided English translations.[146]

Fragment A begins by asserting that the gods were preparing a banquet. Ereshkigal is invited to attend but it is recognized that she is unable to ascend from the underworld. One of the gods suggests that she send someone up to bring her food portion to her. Ereshkigal thus sends

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143 ANET pp.103-104.

144 O.R.Gurney, "The Sultantepe Tablets: VII. The Myth of Nergal and Ereshkigal," Anatolian Studies X (1960), pp.105-131. Also see A.K. Grayson, ANET pp.507-512.

145 J.A. Knudtzon, Die El Amarna Tafeln. (West Germany: Otto Zeller Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1964, orig. 1915), I.968-973.

146 Speiser, ANET, pp103-104. Heidel, op.cit., 129-132

Namtar, her vizier. When Namtar arrives for the food he is welcomed by all but one of the gods. Nergal, for unknown reasons, does not show proper respect by rising before him. After a break, fragment B tells of Namtar's report to Ereshkigal of his visit. Ereshkigal, feeling that Nergal's slight was a personal affront, reveals her wish to kill him and Namtar is sent back to heaven to escort Nergal to her presence. When Namtar returns, Nergal is disguised and goes unrecognized. After a break in the text, it is obvious that Nergal has been found out and he is asked to go to Ereshkigal. Fearing that she will kill him, Nergal asks Ea, his father, for help. Ea gives him the "seven and seven", evidently demons of some sort, to assist him on his journey to the underworld.

Reverting to the reverse of fragment A, Nergal passes through some fourteen gates to the netherworld and stations one of the demons at each gate. The stationing of the demons seems to give Nergal the upper hand when he enters the palace and he takes hold of Ereshkigal. As he is about to cut her head off, Nergal pauses to hear Ereshkigal's plea. She offers him her hand in marriage and dominion over her kingdom. He accepts, and the extant portion ends with Nergal's odd statement "Whatever you have wished for me since months past, So be it now!"[147]

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147 NE (MB) lines 87,88. It is odd since Ereshkigal wished for his death.

In the first instance, we might note the relationship between the gods of the upper world and Ereshkigal. She is regarded as their sister.[148] This may reflect the idea that Ereshkigal was originally thought to have existed in the upper world before being taken to the netherworld by Kur as is indicated in the prologue to the Sumerian story, "Gilgamesh, Enkidu, and the Netherworld". We have no evidence, however, that this portion of the Sumerian story was extant in the fourteenth century B.C.E. and one cannot rule out the possibility that the sisterhood was thought merely to lie in the their collegiality as gods and goddesses.

The next few lines are interesting when considered next to the parallel passage in the neo-Assyrian text.

Middle Babylonian Version:

ni-i-nu ú-lu nu-[u]r-ra-da-ak-ki
ù at-ti ul ti-li-in-na-a-ši ...[149]

Knudtzon's translation:

Selbst wenn wir zu dir hinabsteigen,
kommst du doch nicht zu uns herauf.[150]

Even if we can go down to you,
You cannot come up to us. ...[151]

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148 NE (MB)[1.2

149 J.A. Knudtzon, op.cit., p.968, lines 4,5.

150 J.A. Knudtzon, op.cit., p. 969, lines 4,5.

151 ti-li-in-na-a-si is a form of the irregular verb elû. It could be G-stem preterite, but probably the verb is present and parallels the form of waradu in the preceding line (G present 2nd person singular with ventive and 1st common plural suffix). The present indicates incomplete action. Ereshkigal continues to be unable to ascend to the

The Neo-Assyrian version:

um-ma at-t[i-m]a ul ša e-li-[i]
ina šatti (MU.AN.NA?)-[k]i ul te-li-i ana maḫ-ri-ni
u ni-nu-ma ul šá a-ra-di
ina arḫi-[i]-ni ul nu-ur-rad ana maḫ-ri-ki [152]

You are one not able to come up;
during your year you do not come up to visit us;
and we are unable to go down;
during our month we do not go down to visit you. ...[153]

An inconsistency is readily apparent between recensions. In the Neo-Assyrian version, Ereshkigal cannot leave the netherworld, nor can the gods of heaven go down to the netherworld. The curious phrases, "during your year," and "during our month," appear to suggest that at certain times Ereshkigal might be able to ascend, and in certain months the gods could descend to the underworld. The emphasis, however, is on the inability of the gods to go to each others realm. In the Amarna version again Ereshkigal is unable to ascend but the gods can descend. The ability of the gods to descend should probably be interpreted in light of the concept of the "the land of no return". They could enter the netherworld if they wished, whether or not they got out again is another matter. In opposition to the concept of the "land of no return", we do find that the

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upper regions.

[152] O.R. Gurney, op.cit., p.108, lines 4'-7'. Cf. lines 31'-34' on p.110.

[153] O.R. Gurney, op.cit., p.109, lines 4'-7'. Cf. lines 31'-34' on p.111.

viziers of the gods could come and go from the netherworld at will, or at least at the will of their master/mistress. This is certainly an inconsistency but it is interesting that this inconsistency is not without precedent. In the Sumerian "Inanna's Descent", the gallê appear to have had this capability as they sought a substitute for Inanna.[154] The inconsistency probably should not be pushed too far however. Travelling to and from the netherworld was, in these cases, only a temporary phenomenon and was connected with a specific task given by the divine powers. The general rule of "no return" holds as there is no indication that one could transfer residence from the lower realm to the upper realm.[155]

That Ereshkigal wished to kill Nergal is of interest as it assures us that he entered the netherworld alive. Together with the idea that Nergal wished to kill

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[154] The fact that we have the KUR.NU.GI.A clause and individuals ascending and descending in the same myth and within a few lines of each other in certain cases, should tell us that the inconsistency did not bother the ancient writer in the least.

[155] Dr. L.E. Toombs has suggested an interpretation which might prove to be a fruitful line of inquiry. He feels that the phrase "land of no return" is to be taken as a general rule especially from the human perspective. In certain instances, mostly involving divine characters, comings and goings from the netherworld are required by the story. This, rather than being a logical inconsistency, might better be termed a dramatic inconsistency as it is an exception necessary for dramatic effect. The same thing is apparent in Shakespeare's "Hamlet" when Hamlet, in his soliloquy speaks of the country from where no traveller returns. Yet he had spoken to the ghost of his father only a short time beforehand.

Ereshkigal, it indicates that, as was the case with Ishtar, death was thought to occur in the netherworld as it occurs in the upper realm. The possibilities of this have already been discussed (above pp.50,51).

As Nergal prepared to enter the underworld, Ea's gift of the "seven and seven" demons is of great significance since for the first time we have mention of not seven but fourteen gates to the netherworld. This is the only instance of this assertion in all the Sumerian and Semitic myths. At each of the fourteen gates Ea instructed Nergal to station one of the "seven and seven". That the names of each of the fourteen demons are explicitly given twice, suggests that there is no possibility of a scribal error. The stationing at the gates seems to give Nergal the upper hand and he violently dethrones her. Ereshkigal's plea seems to point to an aetiological function of the story. It explains how Nergal became lord of the netherworld.

la-a ta-du-ka-an-ni a-ḫu-a-a a-ma-ta lu-uḳ-ba-a-ku
iš-mi-ši-i-ma nêrigal ir-ma-a ga-ta-a-šu i-ba-ak-
ki ut-[t]a-ḫa-az
at-ta lu mu-ti-ma a-na-ku lu aš-ša-at-ka lu-še-iṣ-
bi-it-ka
šar-ru-ta i-na ir-ṣi-e-ti ra-pa-aš-ti lu-uš-ku-un
tu-up-pa
ša ni-mi-e-ki a-na ga-ti-ka at-ta lu bi-e-lu
a-na-ku lu bi-il-tu.... ...[156]

"Kill me not my brother! Let me speak a word to
thee!"
When Nergal heard this his hands relaxed.. She
weeps, humbled:

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156 NE (MB) lines 80-85a, from J.A. Knudtzon, op.cit., p.974.

"Be thou my husband and I will be thy wife. I
will let thee hold
Dominion over the wide netherworld. I will place
the tablet
Of wisdom in thy hand. That shalt be master,
I will be mistress!".... ...[157]

The later Assyrian recension of the story is extant on what originally was a six column tablet. Three columns are found on each side of the tablet which comprise a total of about 440 lines.[158] Of these 440 lines only some sixteen are preserved intact.[159] Some restoration has been possible due to the repetitious nature of Akkadian writing style and now a fair outline of the story is available.

The myth begins with a hymn of praise to Ereshkigal.[160] A break of some thirteen lines may be filled by the El Amarna fragments concerning the proposed banquet of the gods. When the extant material becomes intelligible, Namtar is sent to the upper world of the gods to collect Ereshkigal's food portion. Nergal fails to show proper

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[157] NE (MB) 11.80ff. One wonders if the tablets referred to in line 83 are some sort of parallel to the tablets of destiny which existed in the upper world divine realm. Cf. the emphasis on these within the "Enuma Elish".

[158] Gurney p.105.

[159] Ibid.

[160] Gurney questions whether or not the fragment which this comes from was actually part of the larger tablet at all.

respect by bowing to Ereshkigal's envoy.[161] When Ereshkigal hears of this she demands that he come and apologize.[162] Nergal descends to the netherworld with a staff and instructions from Ea to refrain from certain activities while in the netherworld. These are somewhat reminiscent of the instructions given to Enkidu by Gilgamesh and even those given to Adapa by Ea when he ascends to heaven. Nergal adheres to all the advice at first but then, at Ereshkigal's second attempt to lure him, he succumbs to her nakedness. The two engage in sexual intercourse over a period of seven days.

For unknown reasons Nergal asks to be allowed to ascend again to the upper world and promises to return. In his absence, Ereshkigal pines for her lover. It appears that Nergal's attempt is to transfer back to the upper realm indefinitely and when Ereshkigal discovers this she sends Namtar to ask Anu, Enlil, and Ea to send him back.[163] Nergal's action is inconsistent with the idea of "the land

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161 The social structures of the netherworld seem to reflect common earthly practice. Both Kaka and Namtar kiss the ground when they enter the palace of Ereshkigal (i.28, iii.49). Nergal in this instance failed to bow before Ereshkigal's vizier. It is interesting that in the Amarna version Nergal fails to stand before the vizier. Probably reflecting a different social custom in the land of each recension's origin.

162 The text here is fragmentary and a lacuna covers a large section. The sense is given by Grayson ANET, p.508.

163 Note that he disguises himself in order that he not be recognized and taken back to the netherworld.

of no return" and as with the other case we have come across his attempt to leave the netherworld is frought with problems. To get him back, Ereshkigal builds a legal case against him, not on the basis of the fact that he has broken the cosmological order by leaving the "land of no return", but on the basis of his sexual liason with her.

...u[l]-tú ṣī-iḫ-ra-ku-ma marṭā-ku
ul i-di mi-lu-lū šá ardāti<MEŠ>
ul i-[di] d[a-k]a-ka šá ṣi-ḫi-ra-a-ṭi
[ilu šá-a-šu šá] taš-[pu]-ra-na-*šu-ma ur-ta-ḫa-ni-ma li-ta-til itti-iá
i[la šá-a-šu šu]p-pu-ra-na-šu-ma lu ḫa-me-ri li-bit itti-iá
mu-[suk-ka-ku]-ma ul e-{bek}-ma ul a-da-ni di-ni ša ilāni<MEŠ> rabûti<MEŠ>
ilani<MEŠ> rabûti<MEŠ> a-ši-bu-ut qí-rib <d>Ir-kal- la
šum-ma ila ś[á-a-šú la ta]l-tap-ra-šu
ki-{i par-ṣi <d>Ir-kal-l}a u erṣetim<TIM> ra-bi-tú
ú-[šel]<EL>-ma mītūtī<MEŠ> ikkalu<MEŠ> bal-ṭu-ti
el bal-ṭu-ti u-šam-ad mītuti<MEŠ>[164]

..."Since I, thy daughter, was young,
I have not known the play of maidens,
I have not kn[own] the frolic of young girls.
[That god whom] thou didst send and had intercourse with me,
Let him lie with me,
Send [that god] to me that he might be my husband, that he might lodge with me,
I am sexually defiled, {I am} not {pure},
I cannot determine the verdicts of the great gods
The great gods who dwell in Irkalla.
If [thou dost not] send t[hat] god,
According {to the ordinances of Irkall}a and the great underworld,
I shall send up the dead that they might devour the living,
I shall make the dead more numerous than the living." ...[165]

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[164] NE (NAssy) V.2'-12' from Gurney, op.cit., p.122.

[165] NE (NAssy) v.2'-12' from Gurney op.cit., p.123.

The sense, here, seems to be that Anu, Enlil, and Ea send Nergal back for the dual purpose of satisfying Ereshkigal's sexual appetite and restoring her lost purity by becoming her legitimate spouse. Failure to judge the case favourably will warrant dire consequences. Evidently the case is approved and Namtar is told to find Nergal and escort him to the netherworld. Nergal, however, dons a disguise and is not recognized, Namtar returns empty handed. When Ereshkigal hears the report about a "bald" and "lame" god, she recognizes immediately that Ea had disguised Nergal. Namtar is sent back again for Nergal and this time is successful.

When Nergal travels to the netherworld he brings with him extra objects and pieces of clothing. At each of the seven gates of the netherworld one of these is deposited in order that he will not lose his own clothing and power as Inanna had. He was able to enter Ereshkigal's presence, therefore, with all his power and he seizes her in an authoritarian fashion. Again they engage in what would seem to be a rather violent sexual act. After seven more days together, Anu decrees that Nergal is to remain with Ereshkigal forever.

Descriptions of the netherworld are plenteous in this mythic tale. Early in the story we are confronted with the concept of a staircase which reached from heaven to the

netherworld. It was this that Kaka, Namtar and Nergal used to ascend and descend from one realm to the other.[166]

Blocking the way to the netherworld, even along this stairway, are the seven gates as is common with other Semitic literature.[167] For the most part these are referred to merely as gates.[168] However, in a couple of instances they are referred to by the specific title "the gate of Ereshkigal".[169] The significance of this is unclear but is probably minimal as elsewhere Namtar stands before "the gate of Anu, Enlil, and Ea".[170] Being even more specific, the author of this tale speaks of the gates according to their individual gatekeepers. Nedu, Kishar, Endashurimma, Enrulla, Endukuga, Endushuba, and Ennugigi are the gatekeepers named.[171]

When Kaka arrives in the netherworld he enters the wide courtyard of Ereshkigal. Evidently this is a reflection of the idea that Ereshkigal had a palace in the netherworld. Nergal enters the same wide courtyard when he descends.[172] There he is brought a throne from which he is asked to

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166 NE (NAssy) i.16,53; iv.26; etc.

167 NE (NAssy) i.20ff.

168 e.g. iii.18.

169 NE (NAssy) i.17; M.B. B.51f.

170 NE (NAssy) v.43.

171 (NAssy) iii.41ff.

172 NE (NAssy) ii.51.

execute the judgements of the great gods.[173] In all probability this was not Ereshkigal's throne and this is in the mind of the translators who all suggest an indeterminate rendering of kušši.

The term ^{d}Irkalla is used in two distinct ways in the myth. In line ii.7 it is used in the sense of the netherworld itself when "[the god]s who dwell in Irkalla" are referred to. In line ii.63 it is used with reference to a god of the underworld, the netherworld is "the abode of Irkalla". In each case it is given the divine determinative, suggesting that the latter case may have been the original form.

Life in the netherworld is depicted in two distinct ways. The standard formula again is used in a descriptive sense and reveals a negative, desolate concept of the netherworld itself.[174] Indications of negative activity include the plea of Ereshkigal to Anu that he might send Nergal back to her (quoted above). Evidently she could not enjoy some of the benefits and delights of the upper world. Secondly, we might note the rather violent interactions between the gods.[175] When Nergal returns to the underworld at the bidding of Anu, the sexual act which took place is

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173 NE (NAssy) iii.52.

174 NE (NAssy) ii.50 ff.

175 NE (NAssy) v.i ff; vi.29 ff.

preceded by some very rough treatment of Nergal's new consort.

Ea's advice to Nergal concerning what he should and should not do in the underworld offers the interesting suggestion that bakers, butchers, and brewers all fulfilled their offices in the netherworld, and this in spite of the fact that in another instance the food of the dead is said to be "clay".[176] While at first glance this appears a positive thing, a couple of things suggest otherwise. In the first place, Nergal fears death as he thinks about his journey to the netherworld.[177] Secondly, Ea's advice to him expressly warns that he not partake of the food and drink of the baker, butcher, and brewer. It would seem that to partake of such sustenance would carry some ill effects, perhaps death. If we remember that Ereshkigal wants Nergal dead, it is interesting that she states that she will give Nergal the bread and water of the Anunnaki. Following this statement, Ereshkigal proceeds to offer him the wares of the three tradesmen. The context suggests that the two forms of sustenance are one and the same. Perhaps we should compare the food and drink of the Anunnaki to the food and drink which Adapa was offered in the myth concerning his trip to the heavens. In the upper realm the food and drink offered

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176 NE (NAssy) ii.41ff and iii.46. NE (NAssy) iii.3. Note this is within the standard formula evidenced in the Ishtar and Gilgamesh stories.

177 NE (MB) B.27,45,60; (NAssy) vi.3.

to Adapa brought eternal life while in the lower realm the food and water of the Anunnaki brought eternal death or "life" in the underworld. If this is so and the two forms of sustenance are one and the same, the wares of the baker, butcher, and brewer carry a very negative significance.

In spite of these negative possibilities, we again find, to the contrary, more positive expressions of "life". Ereshkigal's plea to Anu would suggest that up until her meeting with Nergal, romance and sexual activity were not a part of netherworld "life". The fact that the two did engage in sexual intercourse prior to the plea, however, suggests that being in the netherworld did not necessarily preclude such a liason. This is made abundantly clear in the two seven day escapades of Ereshkigal and Nergal. Perhaps, again, we are being given a depiction of netherworld activity which can best be described as a shadow of upper world experience, i.e., similar activities took place in the lower regions but they were not quite up to the standards of earthly existence.

When Kaka faces Ereshkigal, she inquires as to the well-being of the great gods.[178] The concern seems real but we note that unlike Ur Nammu who was aware of what was happening in the upper world, Ereshkigal seems unaware of the goings on in heaven. Good wishes are then brought to Ereshkigal revealing that it was thought that good things

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[178] NE (NAssy) i.40ff.

might go on in the netherworld, at least in the realm of the gods.

Before moving on to the Semitic conclusions, two other things should be noted about this particular text. Firstly, the threat of Ereshkigal to Anu. She states that if he does not send Nergal down to her:

> I shall send up the dead that they might devour the living,
> I shall make the dead more numerous than the living.
> ...[179]

The recurrence of this phrase in several myths as a threat or possible action indicates another standard formula. It occurs elsewhere in "The Descent of Ishtar" as Ishtar threatens the gatekeeper, and in "The Gilgamesh Epic" as Ishtar threatens Anu in order to attain the bull of heaven.[180]. It has already been suggested that this might cause a breakdown in offerings for the dead. The explanation may be problematic here as one would assume that Ereshkigal would not want such a thing to occur. However, perhaps it is not totally out of the question since Ereshkigal seems to be in great distress. The threat would in all likelyhood carry equal dread to the upper world gods as the devouring of the living would cut off food offerings to the gods in that realm also. The curse is, therefore, nothing less than a threat of a total abrogation of the

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179 NE (NAssy) v.11,12. Transliteration above p.132.

180 DIsh obv.19,20. GE (Assy) VI.98-100.

established cosmological order, and, perhaps, a return to chaos. It is small wonder that the one who utters the curse is allowed to get her wish in each of the cases mentioned.

Secondly, it should be noted that the name of Nergal changes within the myth. There is an interchange of the names Nergal and Erra.[181] Similar interchange of names is common in ancient literature with no explanation. One wonders, however, whether this was part of the original story, the result of differing traditions being placed together, or the result of different names being used in different localities for gods who performed the same functions. More information is needed before this problem can be fully solved.

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[181] Cf. NE (NAssy) iii.9,20,41; iv.4',11.

C. Summary and Conclusions

As we end this section of the study, again the lead is taken from the preceding Sumerian section. In the summary of Sumerian texts, it was noted that there are dangers in synthesizing the material in a systematic form. No one text contains a complete or systematic view of death or the netherworld. Hence we might be in danger of forming a view of the netherworld which simply did not exist as such in any segment of ancient society. To help get around this hurdle, it was suggested that we think of the outcome of the synthesis in terms of "Sumerian Concepts" of death and the netherworld, using the term Sumerian loosely, referring to views held by numerous individuals and sectors of society while recognizing a plurality of traditions. This would seem appropriate in the Semitic section also but we must be aware of the fact that the situation is not completely identical.

In the Semitic section we have dealt with only four texts. Each has its own story and each has its own contributions to our study. When we come to synthesize the material, it is apparent that most of our information regarding human death is contained in "The Gilgamesh Epic". Much of our information on netherworld inhabitants derives from "The Prince's Vision"; and much of our information regarding divine activity in the netherworld comes from "The

Descent of Ishtar" and "Nergal and Ereshkigal". Of course the texts supplement one another here and there, but the fact that our knowledge of death, for instance, comes principally from one source suggests that we are dealing with at least one tradition which was surely held in the ancient world.

We also have come across standard formulas in this section; one dealing with a description of the netherworld, the other with a curse which was used by the gods in certain situations. For this study, the former formula is the more important and it is found in all but one of our texts. Although it is conceivable that the standard formula was not an original part of each text, the fact that it is in the Neo-Assyrian renditions does suggest that at least by Neo-Assyrian times this formula was in widespread use. It is another indication that we can be certain that this tradition was a part of Semitic lore. This is not to say that inconsistencies did not exist in Semitic thought. They certainly did, among and within individual myths. Perhaps, however, these are not to the same extent as was evident in the Sumerian texts. The fact that they did exist necessitates that we continue to think of the synthesis as forming "Semitic Concepts" rather than a "Semitic Concept" of death and the netherworld.

1. Death and the Response to Death

"The Gilgamesh Epic" reveals most of our information regarding human death. We are informed that humans were created mortal with a constitution different from that of the immortal gods. Death, therefore, was a fact of human life. All humans of whatever background, common or noble, encountered it.

The length of life and the time of death were thought to be determined by the god Mammetum. It was believed that he declared the fates of individuals to the gods and at the time of an individual's death the Anunnaki would gather around. It was also believed that the point of death could be delayed or put off entirely through the eating of the correct substance. Three substances of this nature are discussed in the literary texts. The first magical substance was obtained by Gilgamesh after a difficult journey to Utnapistim. Apparently only Utnapishtim and his wife knew of the whereabouts of this plant which renewed one's youth.[182] Unfortunately, Gilgamesh did not eat the plant immediately and on his way back to Uruk it was stolen and consumed by a snake. The second substance was encountered by Adapa in the Adapa myth. There Adapa ascends to heaven and is warned by Ea not to eat the "bread of death". Unfortunately Adapa had been misinformed for that which he refused was, in fact, the "bread of life" and he

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182 GE XI.282.

lost his chance for eternal life. In both of these cases it is probably of note that the humans failed to eat the substance and gain eternal youth or life. Interestingly, the only humans to achieve immortality, Utnapishtim and his spouse, were granted that life by Enlil, the eating of a life giving substance is not mentioned.[183] The final substance is mentioned in connection with the revivification of Ishtar in the netherworld. In this case the dead Ishtar did not eat the substance but rather the "water of life" was sprinkled upon her to restore her life. Although this, being an incident within the divine realm, is to be set apart from the human encounters with life giving substances, it clearly displays the belief that the proper application of some substance could bring life.[184]

Analogies and mythological language are often used in the literature to describe death. A dead person is, for instance, likened to "one who sleeps" and "one who rests". The mythological light/dark antithesis is used to elucidate the difference between life and death. The living are spoken of as those dwelling in light, the dead are said to have been "benighted". Living under Shamash, or the light of the sun, and living without Shamash, or the sun, are also indicative of a similar tendency.

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[183] See GE XI.189 ff.

[184] It should be noted that the proper application of a substance could also bring death. As has been suggested the food and water of the Anunnaki carried this function.

Intellectual responses to death are varied. In mature ancient thought we find a note of realism and acceptance. The ale-wife suggests to Gilgamesh that he should not worry about death. Death is a fact of life which cannot be avoided. The best one can do is enjoy the life one has with family and friends. A less mature view is evident in the activities of Gilgamesh and Enkidu. In what might be called the approach of youth, Gilgamesh recognizes that death must occur and suggests that if one must die, let that death be a heroic one, a death in combat with a worthy opponent.[185] In so doing, it was thought that one's name might be established and remembered in the traditions of the people throughout the ages. As Gilgamesh and Enkidu drew near the abode of Huwawa, however, the joys of heroism leave Enkidu. Confronted with the very real possibility of death, he succumbs to fear. Later, after seeing Enkidu die, Gilgamesh also displays a fear that he will encounter a similar fate. This fear leads him yet further in an unrealistic and unsuccessful search for eternal life.

When death arrives, the response of friends and loved ones again is not unlike that of today. Gilgamesh's reaction to the death of Enkidu involves crying, weeping, grieving. His subsequent consideration of his own well

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[185] Note the comment of the elders of Uruk made to Gilgamesh concerning his plans to fight Huwawa; "Thou are yet young, Gilgamesh, thy heart has carried thee away." GE (OB) III.v.10.

being and fate are, perhaps, normal consequences of the grieving process. The death of Enkidu, however, not only affected Gilgamesh. We are told that Gilgamesh had the whole city lament at his passing. It would seem, from this and other ancient literature, that sometimes rulers would dictate periods of mourning upon the deaths of certain noble individuals.

As in the human realm, the gods could also die and fear the possibility of death. The descent of Ishtar to the netherworld brought about her death at the hand of Ereshkigal. Elsewhere, in the Enuma Elish, the death of several gods at the hand of Ea and Marduk is attested. The potentiality of death is also entertained in the Nergal-Ereshkigal story. There Ereshkigal and Nergal are both said to want to kill the other and Nergal's reaction to being sent to the netherworld portrays a fear of this very hazard.[186] The fact that the gods were considered to have been immortal in the Gilgamesh Epic, presents an inconsistency which is not easily explained. Lambert suggests that the Sumerians and Semites distinguished between two types of death, the natural and the unnatural, or violent, death. While it was thought that the gods would not die from natural causes such as old age or sickness, it is Lambert's belief that the ancient people thought that the gods were not necessarily exempt from violent deaths, i.e.

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186 NE (MB) B.45.

they could die in combat.[187] Finally in this segment, it should be noted that the death of Ishtar in the netherworld brought about infertility in the upper world.

2. The Netherworld: a description

As with Sumerian mythology, the Babylonians and Assyrians believed that "life" did not end with death but continued in some other form in the netherworld. In the Semitic literature we are fortunate to find a common formula which provides a brief description of the netherworld. The formula is seven lines long (see above pp.96 ff.) and occurs in three of the texts; "The Gilgamesh Epic", "The Descent of Ishtar", and "Nergal and Ereshkigal". The occurence in "The Desent of Ishtar" differs from the others in that it switches the order of the last two lines of the formula. Differences in the Assyrian text itself are neglible. The recurrence of the formula in the different stories perhaps tells us that it became standardized and that the thoughts within it were widespread in Assyrian society at the time. The formula describes the netherworld as a place of darkness with no light, a place of dust where clay is eaten for food, and the place where ^{d}Irkalla lives. Those who enter the netherworld are said to have no way back to the upper regions and are clothed, in the netherworld, like birds with

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187 W.G. Lambert, "The Theology of Death," Death in Mesopotamia ed. B.Alster, (Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1980), p.65.

wings. The thrust of the formula is, thus, quite negative and reveals a dull drab existence for the residents.

That the entrants into the netherworld are barred from ascending again to earth is further implied in the use of the descriptive phrase, "land of no return". While this phrase occurs only once in Sumerian materials, the repetition of the phrase in Semitic texts indicates, again, that a standardization has occurred. The import of the clause is clear but the comings and goings of Enkidu, Ishtar, Nergal, Kummâ, and the viziers of the gods of the lower and upper worlds would seem to present an inconsistency. In these inconsistencies there is not really a solid transfer of residence from one realm to the other by any individual and it would seem that the general rule is upheld. The viziers were only outside the realm in accordance with the wishes of Ereshkigal. In the four cases where an attempt is made to leave the netherworld permanently special situations seem to apply. Enkidu, it is claimed, had not died and his return is said to be as a "shade"; Ishtar requires a substitute; Nergal is forced to return; and Kummâ is sent back to tell of Nergal's greatness. The latter case may also differ in that his visit to the underworld was in visionary form.

The Semitic texts present a new element to what we know of the netherworld when Nergal and the viziers of the gods are depicted as ascending and descending to the netherworld

by means of a staircase. It would appear that the staircase connected the divine realm of the upper world to the divine realm of the lower world. No mention is made of an access to the staircase in the realm of humanity. Within the netherworld, the staircase led directly into the courtyard of the palace of Ereshkigal. In one case a throne is spoken of in this courtroom upon which Nergal was directed to sit and make judgements.

The netherworld is, for the most part, thought to be blocked off from the upper world by the familiar seven gates. The seven gates are not named with the exception of one, the Ishtar-Aya gate through which Prince Kummâ exited from the netherworld. In the Amarna version of the "Nergal and Ereshkigal" story fourteen gates are mentioned. These fourteen gates are also unnamed but the fourteen demons whom Nergal stationed at each of the fourteen gates are named twice.

Little else is said of a descriptive nature within the texts. There is no mention of an altar for sacrifice as was in the Sumerian texts. However, the mention of priests and temple attendants within Tablet VII of the Gilgamesh text might suggest that this element was not entirely absent.

3. The Netherworld: its inhabitants

The netherworld is said to contain the dead, netherworld deities, and the assistants of the deities. The Semitic literature tends to emphasize the activity of the divine realm much more than the activities and fate of the human dead. Unfortunately more divine figures are named than could possibly be mentioned in the context of this thesis. Again we shall dwell only on the main inhabitants.

Ereshkigal - Ereshkigal is again given the title "queen of the netherworld" and, in the Ishtar text which derives from a fairly early period, embodies absolute authority in the realm. There is, however, a noticeable development in her character over time. In the "Nergal-Ereshkigal" story, which is extant in middle-Babylonian and neo-Assyrian forms, we learn how Nergal was envisioned to enter the netherworld and take over dominion of that realm. Some have argued that this was necessitated by the patriarchal nature of Semitic society which disallowed matriarchal rule.[188] The character development seems finalized in the neo-Assyrian text named "The Prince's Vision of the Netherworld" when Ereshkigal is given only a very minor role as Nergal's spouse, Nergal is

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[188] It is noteworthy that the writers did not simply delete Ereshkigal's role. It was acknowledged that Ereshkigal's rule existed prior to the events surrounding Nergal's entrance.

the driving force with which the prince must contend.[189] It would thus seem that over a period of some thirteen hundred years a development took place which saw Ereshkigal's role change from an active and absolute ruler to a much lesser role as wife of a dominant Nergal.

Nergal - Apart from what has already been indicated in the preceding paragraph, the character of Nergal is interesting because of the theophanic description given in "The Prince's Vision". The initial impression within that description is one of a terrifying god. Later references, however, refer to him as an all powerful god and the vanquisher of the evil ones. In all probability this should be interpreted not as an inconsistency but as two elements within the same character. The terrifying element must be seen within the context of the sin of the prince. It would seem that his treatment in the netherworld was predicated by this sin and that not all entrants to the netherworld necessarily encountered the wrath of Nergal. In the "Nergal-Ereshkigal" story, Nergal seems to take another name in some instances, that of Erra. The significance of this

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189 Within PV one gets the distinct impression that although Nergal is the centre of netherworld activity, Ereskigal still maintained some authority and power. Perhaps her relationship to Nergal was conceived to be not unlike the relationship of Anu to Enlil, or El to Ba'al. In regard to this, note that Nergal seems concerned with the fact that the prince has slighted his wife by entering her realm.

is unclear but we cannot rule out the possibility of variant traditions being brought together in the myth.

The Anunnaki - The role of the Anunnaki is not clear in Semitic literature. "The Gilgamesh Epic" has them involved in the death process, assisting Mammetum when the "fate" of each human is near. In "The Prince's Vision" the Anunnaki stand around Nergal probably in some sort of supportive role. Finally, the Ishtar text depicts them fulfilling the commands of Ereshkigal in regard to the death and revivification of Ishtar. The roles envisioned here are perhaps diminished from the role of judging in which they functioned within Sumerian literature.

Namtar - Namtar is called the vizier of Ereshkigal in two of the texts and vizier of the netherworld in general in a third. His most active role is in "Nergal and Ereshkigal" as he ascends and descends the stairway between the heavens and the underworld at Ereshkigal's bidding.

Ishum - Ishum is given the role of counselling Nergal and interceding for humans in order to spare life. He is credited with saving Kummâ from the hand of Nergal and it seems that he ensured a degree of justice within the judgements of the netherworld.

Nedu and Lugalsula - These individuals are described as gatekeepers in the netherworld. Nedu is the more prominent and is mentioned in two texts. Lugalsula is mentioned once, in "The Prince's Vision". Since Nedu is also named in that

text one wonders what the relationship between the two actually was. It may be that since seven gates were conceived to exist they were both gatekeepers of different gates. In "The Nergal and Ereshkigal" myth it is apparent that the gatekeepers played a fairly important role, ensuring that the netherworld really was the "land of no return". Even Nergal was forced to explain to the gatekeeper that Ereshkigal had given him leave to return to the upper world for a time.

Biblu - slaughter.

Belit Seri - the recorder of the netherworld.

The dead in the netherworld are given comparatively little attention. The man in the Prince's Vision, probably Kummâ's father, is described as one with a black body, a face like Zu, and is clad in a red coat. The only other mention of humans is within "The Gilgamesh Epic". In the seventh tablet the residents are described as being clothed like birds. Priests and princes "without their crowns" are mentioned, as well as Etana, the legendary king of Kish. The twelfth tablet because of its literal transmission from the Sumerian may be of less value for establishing Semitic concepts of the netherworld. Nevertheless, the fates of various classes of dead are discussed.[190]

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190 GE XII.147 ff.

4. The Netherworld: existence

a. Activity within the Realm

Unlike the Sumerian material references to the activities of the human dead are limited in Semitic literary texts. It is, therefore, difficult to say much about this aspect of the netherworld existence. From scattered references of a general nature, it would seem to be a very drab and dreary existence. The only specific reference to a human in the region involves the prince who was terrorized in the netherworld before being saved by Ishum. The wrath of Nergal which he faced may, however, have had more to do with the alleged sin of the prince than it has with normal netherworld practices.

Much more can be said from the perspective of divine activity in the netherworld. Most of the texts indicate that a divine court was thought to exist in the netherworld. Two of the texts place Ereshkigal at the head of the court with various attendants around her. When Nergal enters the scene he takes over the leadership and many of Ereshkigal's duties.[191] The text dealing with Kummâ's vision reveals that Nergal has his own court with his own attendants to assist him.

Moving beyond the structures of the divine in the netherworld, one is struck by the violent nature of the characters who interact. While more will be added to this

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[191] See pp. 106 and 130 above.

later, Ishtar's dealings with the gatekeeper and Ereshkigal are much more violent in nature than her Sumerian predecessor, Inanna. Nergal's treatment of the prince is also violent as he terrifies the poor man, while he and Ereshkigal wish to kill each other at various points in the story devoted to them. That the two also engage in what might be described as "rough" sexual activity is another indication of this tendency, as well as informing us about another aspect of netherworld activity. However, one must be cautious about extrapolating from the activities of the two deities to the netherworld in general.

That sexual activity took place between Nergal and Ereshkigal is interesting in itself as it sets up an element of activity similar to activities of the upper world. When Ereshkigal asks Anu for Nergal's return, it is revealed that up to that point she had not been able to engage in the pleasures of maidens in search for lovers. Perhaps this is evidence that netherworld life, at least in its divine form, could encounter new elements. It was not a stagnant existence but one which was in process. However, the process certainly was not perceived to be up to the standard of life in the upper world.

In only one instance does activity seem to cease in the netherworld. Following the Sumerian lead, it involves Ishtar and the death she encounters in the netherworld. Little is said about this condition, in fact one must infer that Ishtar has died from her revivification by the water of

life. One would assume, however, that death was viewed in terms quite similar to deaths which occur in this realm. Life would leave the body and inactivity would result.

b. Hierarchy and Inequality:

The Semitic texts seem to present us with a view of the netherworld in which a general equality of status existed among the human residents. Unlike Sumerian sources, no information is given which would suggest that the kings of this realm took on similar roles in the underworld. In fact the idea of princes serving meat and water tends to give an opposing point of view, a role of servitude.[192] Additionally, "The Gilamesh Epic" twice appears to suggest that commoner and noble suffer the same fate.[193]

These elements, which seem to deny the existence of any form of human hierarchy, must be qualified by the recognition that the dead did not all have the same fate and type of existance. First, Nergal's role as "vanquisher of the evil ones" together with Ishum's role of interceding indicates a judgement motif. It is obvious that the judgement dictated different fates for different individuals in accordance with how they had lived and served the gods. Second, if we can again utilize the problematic Tablet XII

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192 It may be that this act of servitude was a service to the gods of the netherworld themselves which they would have been obliged to perform.

193 As has been intimated this similarity in fate may only be in reference to their experiences of death.

of "The Gilgamesh Epic", various classes of dead are there depicted as receiving varying treatments in accordance with the number of sons they had, how they died, and whether or not they were given proper funerary arrangements. In essence, however, the picture we receive from the texts involves a situation in which the human dead were thought to have no human hierarchy, perhaps being ruled directly by the gods, and a situation in which human fates were dependent upon the various factors associated with judgement.

c. Positive and Negative Characteristics:

We now turn to the Semitic material for evidence of the negative conception of the netherworld which has existed in scholarship. It is probably fair to say that Semitic texts we have studied have a decidedly negative bent. The description of the netherworld tends to be rather drab and dreary, while strong tendencies toward fear and violence are present within the writings. The most obvious example of fear is found as the prince enters the netherworld and encounters the resident demons and a terrifying Nergal. His fear is well described as he awakes from the vision.

69 a-gal-ti-m[a] ki-ma eṭ-li ta-pi-ik da-me šá
ina ṣu-ṣe-e i-di-ši-šú it-tan-al-la-ku bēl bir-ki
ik-tùm-mu-šú-ma i-tar-[r]a?-ku lìb-bu-u-š[ú]

70 ù ki-ma lil-li-di šaḫî (ŠUL!) ṣe-eḫ-ru ša ina muḫḫi sin-niš-ti-šú e-lu-ú lìb-bu-šu it-tan-am-pa-ḫu ṭiṭṭa a-[n]a pî-šú ù arkatî-šú it-te-ni-iṣ-ṣi ...[194]

I awoke." And like a man who has shed blood, who wanders alone in the marshes, (and) whom a catchpole has overcome, while his heart pounded,

Or like a young boar just matured, who has mounted his mate - his insides constantly tumescing - he ejected dirt from his mouth and behind. ...[195]

Fear is also not limited to the human entrants into the netherworld. Nergal fears death in the netherworld at the hand of Ereshkigal and Ereshkigal, herself, is fearful of the incoming Ishtar.

Violence in the netherworld is apparent in several incidents. At the entrance to the netherworld, Ishtar threatens to smash down the gates and release the dead to the upperworld if the gatekeeper does not unlock them. When she enters the palace of Ereshkigal, she "flies" at a trembling Ereshkigal while, upon defeat, Ishtar is imprisoned, suffers the sixty miseries, and is apparently killed.[196] The violent tendencies are, perhaps, most noticeable in "The Prince's Vision" and "Nergal and Ereshkigal". Nergal, in Kummâ's vision, terrifies the young

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194 PV rev.29,30, from von Soden op.cit., p.18, lines 69,70.

195 PV rev.29,30.

196 The sixty miseries are omitted from the Sumerian text and appear to suggest a horrid experience which leads to death.

prince, shrieks at him wrathfully, and attempts to kill him before Ishum intercedes. Ereshkigal and Nergal, in the myth devoted to them, both desire to kill each other at various points in the story, Nergal attempts to cut off Ereshkigal's head, and the pair engage in a what seems to be a "rough" sexual liason.

i'-[i-ir]-ši-ma i-ṣi-iḫ
iṣ-bat-si-ma ị-na ụp-ri-i-ši
ul-tú mu[ḫ-ḫi <giš>{kussî} i]-UD-X[X X]X -[ši]
iṣ-ba-si-ma [{i-na ab+bu-ut-ti-ša}]
[{ma-ḷa}]-ra-'-i[{-mu+t}]i-šu šá [lib!-bi]-šu
[i]n-na-[an]-ad-[ru-ma] aḫḫi<MEŠ> ki-
lal-l[a-a]n
[ana ma-a-a-li šit]-mu-riš i-ter-b[u][197]

He (Nergal) went up to her (Ereshkigal) and laughed.
He seized her by her coiffure,
He [dragged] her from [{the throne}].
He seized her [{by her locks}]
[{for the love}] that was [{in}] his [{heart}].
The brother and sister embraced one another,
Passionately they got [into bed].[198]

In spite of these negative elements, some more positive things are apparent. In the "Nergal and Ereshkigal" text, the gods of the upper world ask about the "well-being" of Ereshkigal and wish her well. In matters of judgement, "The Prince's Vision" describes Ishum as the intercessor while Nergal is said to vanquish evil. Finally, the idea that

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197 NE (NAssy) vi.30-36.

198 NE (NAssy) vi.30-36. Note that Gurney believes that line 32, which is damaged, relates somehow to lines 78,79 of the Amarna text in which Nergal's act of dragging Ereshkigal from the throne is followed by the attempt to cut off her head. O.R. Gurney, Anatolian Studies X (1960) p.131, n. vi.32.

sexual intercourse took place in the netherworld between Nergal and Ereshkigal carries a positive message of what can take place in the realm, at least among its divine residents. Even here, however, the thrust of the positive elements is not entirely clear. We must remember that Nergal terrified the young prince; and that the sexual act contained violent elements. If we take into account the fact that the well wishes were in the divine realm, it would appear that, on the whole, conceptions of the netherworld in Semitic texts are decidedly negative.

As this section of the study comes to a close, it is obvious that there is a consistency at a basic level in the Semitic approach to the netherworld. Like the Sumerian texts, these texts display a belief in an afterlife which exists in a realm deemed to be below the earth's surface. Probably due to the influence of the standard netherworld description, however, we can go a little beyond the Sumerian levels of consistency. It is safe to say that generally the Semites believed that the netherworld was a dark and dusty place in which the human inhabitants were clothed with wings like birds. Moving beyond this, things are a little less clear. The phrase "Land of no Return", for instance is standardized and used numerous times in reference to the netherworld. The concept refers to the inability of individuals who enter the realm to leave the region at will.

As a general rule it seems to hold but is confused at times as some myths contain references to certain individuals coming and going from the netherworld.[199] The cases of Enkidu, Nergal, Kummâ; and the various viziers all seem to involve special circumstances. It is interesting that the first three cases mentioned involved situations in which the individual was alive upon entrance to the realm,[200] and that there is no case of anyone actually being successful in changing their residency to the upper world once dead.[201] It would seem, then, that the concept of the "land of no return" has achieved a fair level of consistency within our texts. However, some unanswered questions continue to exist.[202]

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199 It should also be noted that even divine status does not ensure ability to come and go from the netherworld at will. It is clear that Ereshkigal could not go to the banquet of the upperworld gods.

200 The viziers were only outside their respective realms temporarily fulfilling the wishes and commands of their master or mistress.

201 Except for Ishtar who was forced to provide a substitute for her release. Even when entering the netherworld alive, return to the upper realm is performed only with difficulty. Nergal required permission for a "temporary" absence, Kummâ needed Ishum's intercession, and Enkidu required the intercession of Enki/Ea to gain a release.

202 For instance, why is it that Ereshkigal can not leave the netherworld temporarily to attend the feast while Nergal seems capable of leaving the netherworld on a temporary basis. Additionally, I am still not content with the ascension of Enkidu to the earth. Was he actually a "shade" and dead or did he effectively leave the realm? The arguments of Gilgamesh to gain his release suggest that there was an injustice to the situation and Enkidu should be allowed to leave in the form he entered.

Two other minor inconsistencies present themselves in the texts. The idea of seven gates blocking off the netherworld appears to be a standard descriptive element in Semitic texts but, unfortunately, we have a reference to fourteen gates in the Amarna version of the "Nergal and Ereshkigal" myth.[203] The makeup of the sustenance found in the netherworld is also unclear. Twice cool water is referred to together with baked meats on one occasion. This deviates from the conception within the standard netherworld description which states that the inhabitants ate clay. In one case, the reference to the cool water and baked meats may refer to offerings devoted to the gods of the netherworld. The other reference derives from the twelfth tablet of the Gilgamesh Epic and may be a holdover from Sumerian thought. If both these suggestions are found to be true then the food - clay equation may be looked upon as a consistent element within Semitic texts.

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[203] One wonders if this difference was due to some element within Egyptian thought.

IV. Comparison of Sumerian and Semitic Traditions:

Having looked at Sumerian and Semitic texts individually we can now begin to compare the two. The purpose here is to note the similarities and differences which exist between Sumerian and Semitic traditions of death and the netherworld.

At the outset two problems appear to confront us. First, we must realize that while we have set up Sumerian and Semitic categories based on language, the language element in itself does not completely ensure us of Sumerian and Semitic ideas. The Gilgamesh and Ishtar cycles, for instance, while reaching their final forms in Semitic society, had their roots in Sumerian thought. Thus what we know as Semitic is heavily influenced by Sumerian culture. Furthermore, it is apparent that most of the Sumerian texts derive from a rather late period in that civilization. By the late third and early second millennium, the Semites had already taken over the Mesopotamian world and had lived in Sumer for hundreds of years. Semitic thought then evidently had some influence on what we know as Sumerian texts. All we can hope for in this regard is that the Sumerian texts reveal mostly Sumerian thought, and that later second and first millennium Semitic texts reveal independent creations and alterations specific to the Semitic mind.

Second, limitations in the material may present a situation in which an idea may be found in one text and not in another. It is conceivable that the themes and concerns within a story may not lead an author to cover everything he knows about the netherworld. The problem surfaces, for instance, in the example of the staircase which the Semites believed to exist between the upper and lower divine realms. That this element is completely lacking in Sumerian thought, or in several of the Semitic texts for that matter, does not necessarily mean that we should treat the staircase element as an inconsistency or even a new Semitic tradition. As it happens the text which contains this feature is the only text which depicts messengers of the gods performing errands in each others' realm. It may be that since no other text speaks of such communication between divine realms, it was unnecessary for the writers of these myths to refer to the staircase. This factor tends to limit our ability to differentiate or note similarities between the two areas of study. The observation that certain concepts occur in one text, or group of texts, and not in another does not necessarily point to an inconsistency. Comparing the sets of texts, then, must be approached with great care. Only differences in broad themes and blatant textual differences really qualify as inconsistencies. With this in mind let us proceed to the comparison utilizing a similar format to those found within the conclusions of the two sections.

1. Death and the Reponse to Death:

To begin this comparison of Sumerian and Semitic thought we right away encounter an inconsistency. In regard to death, both sets of texts charge the gods with determining the fate, and hence the life and death, of each human being. It is asserted in the Semitic, "Gilgamesh Epic" that Mammetum was the "Maker of fates", and that the Anunnaki decreed those fates. The Sumerian Ur Nammu story, however, suggests that when Ur Nammu died at an early age, "An altered his holy word," and "Enlil deceitfully changed his fate decree."[1] It would seem that this particular role taken by Enlil in Sumerian literature was assigned to Mammetum in Assyrian times.

The responses to death are, for the most part, similar in the two societies. The response of family and friends to the death of an individual, in both cases, is not unlike the response of people today to the death of a loved one. Intellectual responses, such as the reconciliation to the fact of one's mortality on the part of the Ale-wife in "The Gilgamesh Epic", are not attested in Sumerian literature. It may be that this is purely a Semitic development since some have maintained that the attempt to deal with injustice, like that of death, was a second millennium B.C.E. phenomenon.[2] The intellectual response may have been

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[1] UN lines 8,9. GE (Assy) X.vi.35 ff.

[2] See ToD chapter 2.

an attempt to come to grips with the reality of death, especially the deaths of upright individuals. Other responses involved the attempt to set up a name through combat and the quest for eternal life. These receive the attention of both sets of texts and while the former attempt is almost an identical story in both societies, the latter appears to be more developed and given Epic form in the Semitic era.[3]

2. The Netherworld: descriptions

Descriptions of the netherworld in both societies are similar but achieve a greater depth in level of consistency in the Semitic texts. Both think of the netherworld as being the place of the dead which exists below the surface of the earth. Also, both contain traditions indicating that the netherworld was blocked off by seven gates.[4] The Sumerian Inanna story seems to have given impetus to this idea but other Sumerian stories depicting travel to the netherworld notably neglect to mention the gates. As the entrants arrived in the netherworld they were generally thought to enter the lapis lazuli palace. Here Ereshkigal, and later Nergal, were thought to reside and in the court of

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[3] Search for life in Sumerian thought is implied in the DoG myth.

[4] The fact that a couple of Sumerian texts do not mention any gates and one Semitic text speaks of fourteen gates should not detract from this general belief in seven gates within the traditions.

this palace, the judgements and decisions were handed down in regard to the fate of the deceased. Although it is never explicitly stated, it appears that the dead usually resided outside this palace. That the dead could not leave the netherworld is implied by the phrase "land of no return". Both Sumerians and Semites employed the phrase but it receives much more frequent use in Semitic literature.

Finally, the standard description of the netherworld utilized in Semitic texts is not in evidence in Sumerian literature. It would appear that this was a later development within the Semitic world. The descriptive elements contained in the standard creed appear to be a little more negative in thought than the general view one gains from the Sumerian texts. To be sure elements, such as the darkness of the realm, do occur in Sumerian literature. These, however, tend to be mitigated elsewhere by more positive assertions. The idea, for instance, that Utu brings light to the netherworld from time to time, as he comes to judge the incoming dead, negates the element of darkness and certainly makes the conception of the region more appealing.[5]

3. The Netherworld: inhabitants

The inhabitants of the netherworld are similar in each group of texts. The netherworld is made up of the dead, the

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[5] This is an inconsistency since the Semitic texts specify in several places that no light exists in the netherworld .

netherworld deities, and the assistants of these deities. A major difference resides, however, in the fact that the emphasis within Semitic literature is on the divine inhabitants rather than on humans. Whereas in Sumerian texts there is a concern for the dead, their fate, and lifestyle, this concern is almost totally lacking in the Semitic literature. The only references to the human dead within Semitic texts are from the standard formula, that they are clothed like birds, and from the brief description of what appears to be the prince's father from "The Prince's Vision". This contrasts sharply with the vivid descriptions of what Ur Nammu and Gilgamesh did and experienced in the afterlife, as well as the material which can be deduced from the prayers and petitions of Ludingirra regarding his father.

It would appear from the Semitic emphasis on the equality of the commoner and noble that it was thought that no hierarchy existed within the human realm of the netherworld. This, again, would tend to be inconsistent with the ideas within the "Ur Nammu" and "Death of Gilgamesh" texts which portray the inhabitants taking on roles similar to those which they had on earth. Thus kings were set up with various orders of attendants etc. There is evidence in Semitic texts, however, of an element of justice associated with the role of Nergal in the netherworld. Utu is given the role of judging the dead in the Sumerian

materials so that it appears that while different gods were associated with netherworld justice both Sumerians and Semites believed that an inequality existed among the inhabitants, each human had a different fate.

When we consider the divine realm in the underworld, a developed pantheon exists in both groups of texts. It is obvious, however, that a development in Semitic thought relating to the roles of Ereshkigal and Nergal took place. In Sumerian society Ereshkigal's role is fairly secure. She was the queen and matriarchal ruler of the underworld. Only in the "Ur Nammu" text is there the possibility that Nergal, and Gilgamesh for that matter, were competing with her for power. As has been indicated in the Semitic section, her role is secure in the Ishtar text, which of course, may be affected by its origins in Sumerian tradition. In the "Nergal-Ereshkigal" myth which has no Sumerian prototype, Nergal is depicted as entering the underworld and taking over but Ereshkigal is still active within the myth. The "Prince's Vision", however, the latest text which we have examined, relegates Ereshkigal to a relatively minor, or at least less active role. It would seem then, perhaps based on the predilection for patriarchal ascendency, that over a considerable period of time, Nergal's status in the netherworld increased at the expense of Ereshkigal.

Finally, we should note that in the Semitic texts some vivid descriptions of the netherworld deities and demons are

given. Mostly this is apparent in "The Prince's Vision" which seems partially designed to reveal the horrors of the netherworld. That the description is rather gruesome perhaps indicates another place where Semitic conceptions of the netherworld are rather negative. The Sumerians, for the most part, seem content to speak of the occupants without providing details about their physical appearance.[6]

4. The Netherworld: existence

The literary texts of the Sumerians, Babylonians, and Assyrians portray the netherworld as an active place, it really was an after-"life". In discussing these activities we now come to what may be perceived to be the greatest difference between Sumerian and Semitic thought. It will be remembered from the summary of Sumerian traditions that life in the netherworld contained not just negative elements but also many positive elements. The same cannot be said, however, for Semitic conceptions of the netherworld. The Semitic emphasis on the gruesome inhabitants, the drab, dreary existence and violent interactions between the gods is decidedly negative. Only a few positive factors exist in Semitic descriptions of the netherworld (see above pp.156 ff.).

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[6] Except for the case of Namtar who is said to have no hands and no feet. See above p.25.

Perhaps it is the violence evident in Semitic texts which is the most noticeable difference. Apart from the remarks made concerning this in the preceding section, it may be possible to maintain that the further one gets from Sumerian society the greater the violent and negative emphasis becomes. There is no Old Babylonian evidence from "the Gilgamesh Epic" that would differ much from the relatively non-violent Sumerian thought. The Middle-Babylonian evidence from the El Amarna "Nergal and Ereshkigal" story begins, however, to elucidate a more violent tendency in the thought of the authors. But it is in the later Assyrian texts that the negative and violent material comes completely to the fore. The vision of the prince, for instance, contains elements which are completely unattested in Sumerian literature. The demons which he describes lock him in fear, the sight of Nergal brings the prince trembling to the ground, and Nergal at first wishes to kill the prince.[7] We have no mention of a Gilgamesh or Ur Nammu fearing anything in the netherworld. The Neo-Assyrian version of "Nergal and Ereshkigal" portrays similar violent tendencies as the two deities confront each other. Again in the divine realm, Ishtar and Ereshkigal battle one another in "Ishtar's Descent". While this text derives from Sumerian sources, a

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[7] Although here the sin of the prince may have something to do with the wrath of Nergal.

cursory reading of the two versions provides ample evidence of more negative and violent tendencies within the Semitic text. The opening lines which speak of Inanna entering the "Great Below" become the "Land of no return", the dark house, where dust is their fare and clay their food in the Semitic myth. The actions of Inanna at the gate of the netherworld amount to "speaking evilly" to the gate keeper. Ishtar threatens to smash down the door and raise up the dead to devour the living. When Inanna confronts Ereshkigal, Inanna is bowed low and put to death, while Ishtar is said to "fly" at Ereshkigal in a rage and receives the "sixty miseries" for punishment as well as death. Such extensions of the story in the Semitic texts would seem to suggest a more violent and negative society was in existence at the time of the Semitic reconstructions.

Before moving on to our conclusions, we need to address the question which was put forth in the previous section (above pp.69,70). It was there noted that the Sumerian materials contained not just negative speculations about the netherworld but also some more positive ideas. Since most studies of the netherworld have previously been done from a Mesopotamian perspective and have been generally negative, we asked why the positive elements were not taken into account. One answer was said to lie in the fact that the two more positive Sumerian texts were not available, at least in a reliable form, until the early 1960's. It would

seem that in their absence positive remarks of a milder nature were overlooked. The other answer must lie in the preponderance of negative conceptions of the netherworld within Semitic traditions. These conceptions appear to have overpowered, and were allowed to modify, the milder Sumerian traditions. Future discussion, it seems, will have to take into account all the elements within Sumerian and Semitic literature and distinguish between the two.

V. Summary and Conclusions:

It has been said that once the Semites entered the fertile land between the Euphrates and Tigris rivers, they absorbed much of Sumerian culture, religious beliefs, ideas, and language. That they did so has been a common assumption within Near Eastern scholarship and is also apparent within the bounds of this comparison of Sumerian and Semitic concepts of death and the netherworld. Similarities are clear between Sumerian and Semitic views of death and responses to death, in their basic traditions which describe the netherworld, and in their basic views on the divine inhabitants of the region. The Semitic writers, however, did not incorporate Sumerian ideas in their entirety. Differences are apparent between the two bodies of literature. The basic difference is not found in the make up and language associated with the netherworld but in the activities and "life"-style which one might be expected to experience in the region. Given the hardiness of the Semites in general and the seemingly more barbaric character of the later Assyrians, it is not surprising to find certain gruesome, fearful, and violent tendencies within their myths, especially those of Assyrian origin. The Sumerians have little of this and even present some very positive elements in their conceptions of netherworld existence. The Semitic borrowing, therefore, must be seen to have a creative element as they refined, developed, and even

altered various aspects of the Sumerian traditions, thus placing their own cultural "stamp" upon them.

A further distinction between Sumerian and Semitic traditions involves the observation that the Semites made little reference to the human element within the netherworld. This may indicate a lack of concern for the basic human element in society. The Sumerians, on the other hand, were acutely interested in human beings and reveal this in their interest in the fate of the deceased in their new environment. The cases involving Gilgamesh, Ur Nammu, and Ludingirra's father convey this concern admirably. Perhaps this distinction derives from the basic form of the two societies. The Sumerians tended towards a socialistic approach in which all individuals fulfilled important roles in the service of their god and fellow humans. The Semites, however, had absolute monarchies. In Semitic society, and especially in Assyrian society, the king and his nobles were of prime importance. Ordinary citizens were of very little interest except as instruments of the ruling class.

Having noted differences in broad emphases within the texts, not to mention the small differences in detail which we have come across in our study, one wonders whether the common practice of examining various issues from an undifferentiated Mesopotamian perspective, without distinguishing between cultural/societal groups, remains

viable.[8] As has been said, Pettinato has already noted important differences between Sumerian and Semitic concepts of creation in his work entitled Das altorientalische Menschenbild und die sumerischen und akkadischen Schöpfungsmythen.[9] Given this, and the distinctions we have found, it would seem that studies from a general Mesopotamian perspective would not tell the whole story. Future Near Eastern scholarship needs to engage in studies at a more specific societal level. Perhaps this might be best accomplished in accordance with the structures which have already been set up in the linguistic area. Sumerian, Old, Middle, and Neo-Babylonian, and Old, Middle, and Neo-Assyrian would appear to form appropriate societal levels which could function as independent areas of study.

Within this study it was also found that inconsistencies existed not only between the Sumerian and Semitic writings but among texts within each division. Having worked through the texts and examined the inconsistencies, it is the opinion of this author that these might best be explained as individual speculative traditions deriving from the various independent city states throughout the ancient Near East.[10] In some cases, therefore, it may

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[8] Cf. p.4 and nn. 6-8 in the Introduction above.

[9] See n.8 in the Introduction above.

[10] It is interesting here that inconsistencies were more apparent in Sumerian material. By the time of the later Semitic writings a certain amount of standardization

be necessary to break down the proposed societal levels even further, taking into account the traditions of a certain city-state within a fairly narrow timespan. While this would be the optimum, in many instances the amounts of specific material related to a topic may be so small as to render the task impossible. Perhaps the best that can be done in most secondary studies of this nature would involve an examination of materials at the larger societal level, as suggested, while noting where appropriate, and resources allow, specific distinctions of smaller societal group traditions.

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of ideas seems to have occurred.

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