

DEATH THEY DISPENSED TO MANKIND THE FUNERARY WORLD OF ANCIENT MESOPOTAMIA¹

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Inhumation, rather than discarding of the corpse at a safe distance to rot or be devoured by wild animals, is a sign of respect to the human body. The traditional burial practices point to a funerary cult, with variations that suggest differentiation according to socio-economic status. Deposits of grave goods, particularly food, drink and personal belongings, demonstrate a belief that life continues beyond the grave, and therefore that humankind contains an immortal segment. Thus, death appears as a transitional phase, in which life is transformed from one mode to another. Modern readers may perceive it as a passage from an actual to a mythological reality, but the ancient Mesopotamian treated it as a continuous actual reality, in a different mode and location.²

¹Abbreviations used are those of PSD, CAD. Additional are: ETCSL (www.etcsl.orient.ox.ac.uk) DGil – The death of Gilgameš (Cavigneaux 2000), *Urnamma A* – The death of Urnamma (Flückiger-Hawker 1999; ETCSL 2.4.1.1), GEN – Gilgameš, Enkidu and the Netherworld (ETCSL 1.8.1.4), Gilg. – The (Akkadian) Epic of Gilgameš (George 2003), ID – *Inana's Descent* (ETCSL 1.4.1), IŠD – *Ištar's Descent*. For reasons of clarity, brackets marking reconstruction of text were omitted from the translations.

² It is not my intention to present an integrative history. Cultural uniformity has never really been achieved by the ancient Mesopotamian civilizations. Least of all religious practices, which involved official and popular streams. Therefore, one should bear in mind that we deal with a range of individual histories sharing basic principles and different degrees of common features. This overview derived from a study of the Sumerian written sources, in which I treated each text individually, and evaluated according to its own merits. Thus, here too I tried to highlight differences alongside the common features. The term “netherworld” is misleading because it defines a

Individuals were ritually buried in Mesopotamia since prehistoric times,³ signifying that the belief in life beyond the grave is as ancient. The written sources allow us also a glimpse into the speculations about death and afterlife. Sumerian and Akkadian texts from the second half of the third until the middle of the first millennium unfold traditions which were kept by the population since earlier times. The sources illustrate a belief that after the death the personality continues its existence as a ghost. It retains the needs and emotional characteristics of its former life and resides in a separate distant land of dead spirits. Deemed actual, the land of the dead was described in the social, political and economical terms of the familiar contemporary terrestrial kingdom.

1. *The face of death*

“When the gods created mankind,
Death they dispensed to mankind,
Life they kept for themselves.”⁴

Thus said the ale-wife to Gilgameš in an O^Bab fragment of the Epic of Gilgameš (henceforth Gilg.). In the Sumerian narrative *The Death of Gilgameš* (henceforth DGil) the legendary king of Uruk was informed of his approaching death:

“The bane of mankind has thus come.”⁵

The notion of a limited life span is articulated in Akkadian expressions with *adannu* – a given period of time: “he reached the appointed moment”,⁶ or with *šīmtu* – predetermined fate: *mūt šīmti* – natural death/*mūt la šīmti* unnatural death.

subterranean reality. I use it as a generic name, free of topographical and morphological characteristics to signify ‘the land of the dead’.

³ Evidenced by carefully laid corpses and added objects. A general summary of burial customs is still: *RIA* 3, 581-593 and 605-608 s.v. Grab and Grabbeigabe (resp.), and in prehistoric periods: J.D. Forest, *Les pratiques funéraires en Mésopotamie du cinquième millénaire au début du troisième, étude de cas* (Paris 1983).

⁴ George 2003: 278 iii:3-5.

⁵ Cavigneaux 2000: 17 and 32; George 1999: 203, N₁ v:17.

⁶ *CAD* A/1, 98/c.

A late second millennium bilingual version of the folktale *Enlil and Namzitara* puts forward that the life span of mankind is limited to one hundred and twenty years.⁷ Merely a handful of texts echo scepticism about afterlife, but how prevalent the denial was is not known.

2. *The foundation of afterlife*

The persistence of life beyond the grave, even if in a different and deficient mode, has a physical quality that seems, in a restricted sense, as a form of immortality. What could prompt a belief that attributes to man a divine property? Dreaming is an obvious possibility, as the evidence for the practice of necromancy bears out.⁸ Additional observations may have been involved, such as the endurance of the bones after the flesh decayed; the animated quality of the breath, which also marks the difference between a living and a dead body; and, perhaps, the general observation of the cyclic periodicity of life and death in nature.⁹

The belief that life continues beyond the grave is substantiated in one mythological narrative: *Atra-hasīs* - the essential early history of mankind.¹⁰ The OBad version of *Atra-hasīs* tells that man was created from a mixture of clay with the flesh and blood of a god who was slaughtered for that purpose (Tablet I):

212-213. "A god and a man / shall be mixed together in the clay.

⁷ Klein *ASJ* 12 (1990): 57-70. esp. pp. 58-59, 23'-24'; B. Alster, *Wisdom of Ancient Sumer*, chapter 3.5 (CDL, forthcoming). It is interesting that this particular statement is attested only in the version from Emar (the format of the tablet suggests that the source came from Hattuša). This version elaborates on l. 20 of the OBad Nippur version: "The days of mankind are getting closer".

⁸ E.g. Gilgameš' meeting the dead Enkidu in GEN: 243, "as a dream, his servant came up from the netherworld", discussion in Katz 2003: 30-32 and 42. Since dreams are inherent to the human mind, the belief in an animated afterlife existence may be too odd for our means to determine.

⁹ If this was a reason at all it may be related to the most common term for semen 'seed', and to the Sumerian theory that mankind sprouted from earth, like plants (see below).

¹⁰ And related issues. That the name of the protagonist means 'Surpassingly wise' is rather suggestive. The last treatment of the narrative, quoting all the previous bibliography and interpretations is in Shehata 2001. See also Alster 2002.

214-215. (Thus,) for future days we may hear the drum,¹¹ / (and) a ghost shall be from the god's flesh.¹²

216-217. She (Nintu) shall announce 'life' as his (man's) sign, and¹³ / that this is not forgotten a ghost shall be".

The ghost was created in order to form an everlasting reminder of the circumstances that led to the creation of man: why man was created and why this particular god was slaughtered.¹⁴ Since the everlasting memory

¹¹ What should be remembered for future days: how man was created or why? After the flood the gods took an oath not to wipe humanity off the face of earth ever again. The very oath underscores the dependence of the gods on the services of the people, for that purpose man was created. The interpretation of Lambert and Millard 1969: 152 ad l. 214 that the drum beat signifies the daily meals of the gods illustrates this purpose. Hence, I assume that the drum beat is a synecdoche signifying the services of man to the gods. For other interpretations see Abusch 1998, with previous literature.

¹² Abusch 1998: 366 maintains that ll. 214-217 form a double couplet organized as AB//AB, in which the 'A' signifies the living man and the 'B' - his dead spirit. Note, however, that there is an additional meaning: their function arranged in a chiasmus: $A \Rightarrow B_1 // A_1 \Rightarrow B$ where A_1 and B_1 signify the creation, while A and B signify its purpose. So we get the following sequence: the purpose of man > the creation of his ghost // the creation of man > the purpose of a ghost. Hence the double couplet begins with the purpose of man and ends up with the purpose of his ghost.

¹³ 'Life' is the sign of the man whose creation is in the centre of the narrative. Nintu brought the shaped clay to life, and therefore she is the natural agent of the verb. The only line that can describe it is 216/229 and, therefore, the verb should signify that Nintu brought life into the fashioned clay, and did it by proclamation (*wedû*). Ll. 217/230 on the creation of the ghost complements it, and together they encase man's everlasting existence alive and dead.

The idea that things come into existence by giving them a name or by decree of fate is a basic principle of the Sumerian world view. Few examples: the Sumerian creation myth *Enki and Ninmah*: 33-37 the clay image was enlivened by the decree of his fate; GEN:10. "When the name of mankind (mu nam-lú-u₁₈-lu) has been established"; *Lahar and Ašnan*: 10 "(before their creation) The names of wheat, the holy blade and the ewe were not known to the Anuna, the great gods". The operative force of announcing a name is recollected in the beginning of the classic Akkadian myth of creation *Enūma Eliš* Tab. I: 1-2. *enūma eliš la nabû šamāmu šapliš ammatum šuma la zakrat* "When above the heavens were not named, below the earth was not given a name"; and again I: 7-8 *enūma ilū la šūpū manāma šuma la zukkurū šīmātu la šīmū* "When none of the gods had yet been created, not called by name (and) destinies not (yet) decreed." It has to be stressed that according to *Enūma Eliš* the actual world was not created out of nothing, but from remnants of the primeval reality.

¹⁴ It has been suggested that the ghost commemorates the slaughter of a god or the divine element in humanity. The helplessness of the gods after the flood and their oath

required an undying component, they had to use divine flesh. Thus, the ghost is inherent to the human body, and the divine material enables humanity to continue to exist afterlife.¹⁵

The name given to the slaughtered god, Wê, makes puns in Akkadian.¹⁶ The word play in the Akkadian language suggests a Semitic origin for the newly created etymologies if not for the story itself. After the creation of man the gods gave the mother goddess a new name in Akkadian *Bēlet-kāla-ilī* – ‘Lady of all the gods’ (l. 247) instead of the generic Sumerian name Nintu ‘Lady birth’ (ll. 211/226). Also the Akkadian name Ea (l. 250) replaces the Sumerian name Enki (in ll. 201,204). The use of Sumerian names suggests that the story of *Atra-hasīs* depends on an earlier Sumerian tradition. It has already been recognized that the account of the creation of man in *Atra-hasīs* is related to the Sumerian account of *Enki and Ninmah*, in which man was fashioned of clay and animated by pronouncing his fate. But in *Enki and Ninmah* no divine substance was used, neither the flood theme mentioned. Thus, *Enki and Ninmah* was probably not the only source.¹⁷

demonstrate that the gods needed a constant reminder of the reason for the creation of man. Note that in the biblical creation story, in which man was created in the image of god and animated by god’s breath, the godly material created a living man, but in *Atra-hasīs* the godly material, flesh and blood, was used to create man’s ghost while his life was pronounced as in the Sumerian myth.

¹⁵ Note, however, that the ghost also reminds the people of their duties toward the gods. Thus, the function of the ghost generates a mutual commitment between the gods and humanity, and thereby the narrative also explains the relationship between man and his gods.

¹⁶ There is no other evidence for the existence of a deity named Wê and the complex puns suggest that the god’s name was concocted to correspond with the Akkadian nouns *awilum* ‘man’ and *eṭemmu* ‘ghost’. The two puns in a passage of 8 lines are Wê+*ilu* (‘god’) > *awilu* ‘man’ and Wê+*ṭēmu* (‘plan’) > *eṭemmu* ‘ghost’. Some scholars hold the view that Wê also creates a pun in Sumerian (written /PI/ as a wordplay on *gēštug*), but this remains doubtful. On the puns see e.g. J. Bottéro (1982): “La création de l’homme et sa nature dans le poème d’*Atrahasis*”, in M.A. Dandamayev et al. (eds.): *Societies and Languages of the Ancient Near East, Studies in honour of I.M. Diakonoff*, Warminster, pp. 22-32; Alster 2002, Abusch 1998: 367-8 and fn. 10, with previous literature. For the widely discussed meaning of *ṭēmu* see Shehata 2001: 69. It seems to me that the issue was settled in Alster 2002 (following Moran 1970): they slaughter “Wê, the god who had the plan,” namely, who conceived the rebellion against Enlil.

¹⁷ ETCSL 1.1.2 Enki plays a crucial role also in the story of the flood, but the purpose of *Enki and Ninmah* was to exalt Enki’s wisdom and skilfulness. Perhaps, therefore, the

The flood theme, however, has a very close literary parallel in another Sumerian narrative. There can be little doubt that the Sumerian version of the flood story began with the creation of mankind, but since the upper part of the tablet is broken we do not know how it was visualized, i.e. was a god slaughtered for the purpose?¹⁸ The Sumerian literature preserves traces of yet another, completely different theory about the creation of mankind, that man sprouted from the earth like vegetation.¹⁹ A vague allusion in the Sumerian flood story that animals sprouted from

creation episode served merely as a prologue to the ‘creation’ contest with Ninmah. That Enki’s mother Namma was instrumental in the creation of man together with Ninmah suggests that *Atra-hasīs* used an additional different tradition. Note also that the concept that man was created to serve the gods is not unique to *Enki and Ninmah* and *Atra-hasīs*. It was also integrated in *The song of the hoe* (ETCSL 5.5.4). The dedication inscriptions of the third millennium bear out the validity of the concept in real life.

¹⁸ ETCSL 1.7.4 with bibliography. Jacobsen’s reconstruction in JBL 100 (1981) 513-529 implies that the narrative of *Atra-hasīs* was based on the Sumerian flood story, which he calls ‘The Eridu Genesis’. Civil, in Lambert and Millard 1969: 138-145, argues that the flood theme is not mentioned in sources before the OBad period. Indeed, both the Sumerian and the Akkadian narratives show close links with the OBad versions of the Sumerian King List, including the flood theme, but the Ur III version of the list does not include the ‘pre-flood’ dynasties. However, in DGil (Cavigneaux 2000: 31:160-167) Enki mentions the flood and thematic reasons suggest that it was composed during the Ur III period (Katz 2003: 224 fn. 80 and passim). Since, *Atra-hasīs* depends on a Sumerian source but the Akkadian originated in late OBad Sippar while the Sumerian – in Nippur, it is possible that a Sumerian tradition of the flood existed before the OBad period when it was re-used for historiographic purposes in the Sumerian King List, as well as in the Sumerian and Akkadian versions of the history of mankind.

¹⁹ E.g. a hymn to Enki’s temple Engura, the relevant passage is cited in Van Dijk, *AcOr* (1964-65), p. 23 and Jacobsen, *JNES* 5 (1946), p. 136; *The Song of the hoe* ll. 18-20, translation and bibliography by G. Farber in Hallo 1997: 511; ETCSL 5.5.4. Note that the account seems to combine two different theories, first Enlil placed a model of man in a mould, and then man sprouted from the earth. Later, procreation was introduced by a mother-goddess, Ninmena (“Mistress of the tiara”; *RIA* 8: 505). The place where man was created is called uzu-è-a “(the place where) the flash sprouts” (ll. 6, 18). A list of place names includes “(the place where) the flesh grows” uzu-mú-a^{ki} in Nippur, see MSL 11, p. 11: 15 (Hh 21). Whether such a place really existed in Nippur, or the name was taken over from a literary text I do not know. This name is mentioned later in a MAss bilingual version of the creation of mankind KAR 4:24. Perhaps the expressions numun-è and numun-i-i draw on the same idea, see discussion in A. Sjöberg, *Sumerian Temple Hymns* (TCS III) p. 104 ad. l. 263, and S. Tinney, *The Nippur Lament* (Philadelphia 1996) p. 134 ad. 17 with previous bibliography.

the earth²⁰ may seem to allude to the sprouting theory. However, the text makes a distinction between man and beast (p. 140 ll. 48-49), indicating a substantial difference in the perception of the human nature. This may be related to the human mental capacities that the soul epitomizes, but the issue remains uncertain.

The extant sources imply that the Akkadian version of *Atra-hasīs* developed the theory about of the creation of man significantly: the clay enriched with divine flesh entrenched a concrete immortal segment in the constitution of man. Thereby the Akkadian story explained the immortality of the soul in ‘biological’ terms, and linked the belief in afterlife with the physiology of man. The chronological relation of *Atra-hasīs* to the Sumerian tradition of *Enki and Ninmah* is unknown. But we do know that the existing source for the Akkadian creation story comes from Sippar. The departure of *Atra-hasīs* from *Enki and Ninmah* suggests that the idea of a divine component in the constitution of mankind originated in the Semitic population.²¹ It has to be stressed, however, that whereas we can safely date the manuscripts of *Atra-hasīs* to the reign of Ammišaduqa we do not know the age of the theory about the divine flesh and the creation of a ghost.

In contrast to the Akkadian textual evidence, the Sumerian texts hardly elaborate on the meaning of life and death.²² Therefore one gets the impression that they accepted the survival of the spirit as a matter of fact, like the world around them.

²⁰ Civil in Lambert and Millard 1969: 145, l. 253. níg-ge₁₆ ki-ta e₁₁-dè im-ma-ra-e₁₁-dè “The animals which emerge from the earth he made come-up”.

²¹ Sippar, the most northern Babylonian city, was densely populated by Semites and had strong ties with the western cities as Mari and the Diyala region. During the first dynasty of Babylon the town was an important centre of scribal activity. On Sippar as the religious capital of northern Babylonia and counterpart of Nippur see J. Myers, *The Sippar Pantheon: A Diachronic Study* (Ann Arbor 2002, UMI Dissertations Service).

²² The Sumerian texts reflect a great interest in creation and life than in death and decay. Note, for example, that *Inana’s Descent* (ETCSL 1.4.1, Henceforth ID) is not about the realm of the dead but about Inana. Even lamentations focus on the personal grief. All the Sumerian references to the concept of death are gleaned from texts that centre on other topics. Some of these Sumerian texts, however, were composed during the OBab period.

3. *The emergence of a ghost and the cult of the dead*

Respiration, as opposed to a breathless corpse, makes the obvious difference between life and death. It may seem, therefore, that the breath represents the source of human intellectual and emotional faculties, which we may designate as the soul. A funerary ritual, aimed to enable the passage of the dead into the netherworld and to initiate his life there, indicates that the breath is the material of his afterlife state. The ritual was preserved in two O^Bab Sumerian laments.²³ In the instructions for his interment, the dead god Ašgi tells his sister (l. 55): “After you have called my ‘his spirit (wind) is released’ fetch me the bed.” The term employed for ‘spirit’ is ‘wind’, Sumerian *im* and an Akkadian gloss has *šāru*. In a second text a young woman performs the same ritual, however, this time for the spirit of a man who died elsewhere, whose spirit is no longer in the body but also not resting in the netherworld. The ritual ends with the statement (l. 48): “The spirit has entered, the spirit has departed.” Again, the term for ‘spirit’ is *im* ‘wind’. It appears, then, that the spirit which leaves the body was realized as a wind, thus unseen and yet tangible. The formal rite to release of the spirit was crucial in order to gain admittance to the netherworld and join the community of dead spirits, Sumerian: *gidim*²⁴ and Akkadian: *eṭemmu*. The changed terminology, ‘wind’ during the ritual but ‘ghost’ in the netherworld,

²³ The one “Lulil and his sister” mourn the death of the young dead god Ašgi (named in the lament Lulil, ‘man-spirit’), and the second “The messenger and the maiden” is a general model for a lament over a young man. The texts with previous literature are treated in Katz 2003: 201-212 and *passim*. Some elements of the ritual are attested elsewhere indicating that it was not restricted to the O^Bab period but customary earlier and later. The best known attestation is the elaborate funerary treatment that Gilgameš gave to Enkidu. The description includes almost all the elements found in the Sumerian ritual, see in more detail *op.cit* p. 209.

²⁴ The N^Ass incantation against evil spirit KAR 21: 11 reads: “whether a ghost who was discarded in the steppe, whose spirit not released and his name not called.” It means that the ritual was not performed and therefore the ghost does not reside in the netherworld but roams restlessly in the steppe. Some more examples are cited in CAD E, pp. 28-29. The Ur III text TIM 6, 10:1-9 suggests that the Sumerian made a distinction between *im* - the soul as the breath when it leave the body, and *gidim* - the ghost that already resides in the netherworld. We owe this observation to C. Wilcke, in “König Šulgis Himmelfahrt” in *Fs. Láslo Vajda* (1988) p. 254. This fine distinction was probably lost already in the O^Bab period.

seems to mark the beginning and the end of a liminal phase in the being of human's soul.

The making of the spirit and its endurance after the body was left to perish signifies an intrinsic but temporary duality in the composition of mankind, a coexistence of body and soul prior to death. Since the spirit is the transformed soul it retains the basic physical and emotional needs of its former earthly life, and its identity. But being an invisible ethereal entity its ways are mysterious. Most likely, this generated the cult of the dead.²⁵ Abundant textual and archaeological evidence makes manifest that the ghost was nourished with food and drink provided by living kinsmen,²⁶ signifying that it was held a corporal living entity. A figurine of the dead was made for the burial ritual, set on a chair and clad with a garment it received the offerings of food and drink.²⁷ The participation of the dead in the ritual by means of a statute allows the cult to be removed from the grave and conducted everywhere.²⁸ A corporal image of the

²⁵ The view that the (dead) ancestors became the family gods would not be discussed here. See instead K. van der Toorn, *Family Religion in Babylonia, Syria & Israel. Continuity and Change in the Forms of Religious Life* (Leiden 1996), pp. 48-65.

²⁶ In addition to dishes containing the remains of food, numerous administrative texts record the delivery of goods for funerary offerings (Sumerian *ki-a-na²*, Akkadian *kispu*). The texts pertain, of course, to well to do families. A comprehensive study of the Akkadian sources for the cult is Tsukimoto 1985. For the third millennium see B. Jagersma, "The calendar of the funerary cult in ancient Lagash", a review article for *BiOr*, on: Chiodi, S.M., *Offerte "Funebri" nella Lagas presargonica* (Roma 1997), forthcoming. Special pipes going down from the surface into the grave rooms, presumably for the periodical food offerings were detected in some graves in the royal cemetery of Ur, i.e. PG 800, 1054, 1237 in L. Woolley, *Ur Excavations* vol. II (1934), Text, pp. 73-124. Presumably these are the remains of mortuary chapels. The food of the dead was taboo for the living.

²⁷ The function of a statue is revealed by both Sumerian literary rituals mentioned above, which also describe the spirit (Lulil and the messenger) in terms of a statue, i.e. someone who has eyes and mouth but cannot see nor speak. More references to the erecting of a statue are DGil source N₁:7 (Cavigneaux 2000: 16 and translation p. 61); Gilg. VIII:68-72 (George 2003: 656) - Gilgameš orders to erect a statue of Enkidu's funeral. Statues were made from moulds in mass production, therefore within almost everybody's means.

²⁸ Jagersma (forthcoming) presents textual evidence indicating that the Sumerian *ki-a-na²* signified the mortuary chapel where the offerings were presented. Of the many graves excavated in Mesopotamia very few preserve traces of offerings facilities, suggesting that usually mortuary chapels were elsewhere. A letter of king Hammurabi to Šîn-iddinam bears out that the cult of the dead was detached from the material remains of the

dead brought the ethereal nature of the ghost in line with the physical quality of the offerings, and endowed the ritual with a concrete setting of actual reality. The image actualised the presence of the dead person in the ritual and, moreover, it preserved his identity in the cult which focused on the family unit.²⁹ Numerous incantations and rituals aiming to chase away restless spirits testify that hungered ghosts, neglected by their family, returned to the living and caused troubles, diseases and untimely death.³⁰ However, a family that cared for the spirits of its dead members benefited from their protection. Thus, the dead and the living were mutually dependent. The belief in the eternal existence of the spirits and their power to influence the lives of their relatives endowed them with some godly qualities. Since the family unit and line were of major social significance the spirits of the dead remained part of the family circle and their cult was observed for some generations to come.³¹

deceased. It concerns the claim of a father that eight years long had made funerary offerings (*kispu*) for his son assuming that he died, but then discovered that the son is alive and lives somewhere else (Van Soldt, AbB 13, no. 21). It stand to reason that the majority of the population had chapels in their houses. Since, however, undamaged figurines were rarely found I assume that when the inhabitants moved out they took the clay images of the ancestors with them and left only damaged ones, which were not used in the cult any longer. Note, however, that figurines were used in private house also for apotropaic purposes.

²⁹ The identity of the dead and his social status is at the heart of the cult. In terms of burial customs it was kept by depositing personal belongings, particularly important are seals bearing the name of the dead, weapons, and jewellery.

³⁰ These incantations became prevalent at the beginning of the second millennium and were transmitted until the middle of the first. The O Bab Sumerian incantations are edited in Geller 1985. A Bilingual version from the NAss period is CT 16-17. The ghosts' most notorious for malicious behaviour is a group of seven evil spirits, procreated and raised in the netherworld, which distinguishes them from the human ghosts. They are the target of most of these incantations. The dominant evil spirit is the *galla* (Sumerian) / *gallû* (Akkadian). Third millennium incantations against evil spirits are remarkably few, usually against the *Udug-hul* 'evil spirit' (already Pre-Sargonic), and in the Neo-Sumerian period also the *Ala-hul* and *Namtar*. The *galla* is attested, so far, in only one Ur III incantation. The development of its image in the literature is outlined in Katz 2003: 127-154.

³¹ After several generations the spirits whose memory already faded away were, presumably, commemorated communally in the public mourning rituals. How important the observance of the cult was is illustrated by adoption contracts which stipulate that the adoptee would care for the spirit of the adopter. Particularly interesting is the adoption of a daughter as a son for that purpose, see e.g. J. Paradise, "Daughters as 'Sons' at Nuzi",

4. *Survival as a ghost*

Following the performance of the appropriate ritual, the soul enters into the land of the dead, where all the spirits assemble, and continue an animated existence. The dialogue of Gilgameš and Enkidu in GEN is often used in the secondary literature to describe the afterlife existence of the spirits.³² Gilgameš' questions are rooted in the social reality of the terrestrial kingdom, and so are Enkidu's answers, but not all convey the image of afterlife. A case in point is the list of men with one to seven sons, in which the different number determines the quality of the spirit's existence. In principle, rather than the number of sons it is the performance of the rite which makes the difference, and for that one son would suffice. Thus, it seems that Gilgameš who discovered his own mortality and fears death is advised about living the good life no less than about the afterlife.³³

The dependence of the spirits on supplies from the living kinsmen indicates that the abode of the dead lacks even the basic necessities for survival. The deposited grave goods display whatever one needs or can afford in life, from food and drink to luxury items. The textual evidence specifies the choice of provisions, when and where they were offered. Hundreds of dated administrative records list the delivery of goods for funerary offerings indicating that in addition to private memorials there were fixed dates for public commemorations of the dead.³⁴ Particularly

in D.I. Owen–M.A. Morrison (eds.), *Studies on the Civilization and Culture of Nuzi and the Hurrians* (Winona Lake 1987), pp. 203–213.

³² Lastly D.O. Edzard in P. Attinger et al (eds.), *Mesopotamien. Die altbabylonische Zeit*, (Friburg and Göttingen 2004) *OBO* 160/4, pp. 605–609. The OBab Sumerian narrative was translated into Akkadian and concludes the epic of Gilgameš as the XIIIth tablet.

³³ The purpose of the text is treated in Katz 2003: 182–184 and *passim*, with previous literature.

³⁴ Note that the texts represent those who received rations from the state storehouses, mainly the rich and the mighty, and many concern members of royal families. Numerous texts come from Pre-Sargonic Lagash, but most of the sources date to the Ur III period. See W. Sallaberger, *Der kultische Kalender der Ur III Zeit* (Berlin–New York 1993) *UAVA* 7/1–2; M.E. Cohen, *The cultic calendars of the Ancient Near East* (Bethesda 1993), with additional bibliography. Further information comes from genres dealing with daily life, such as letters, judicial documents or exorcizing rituals. Those are useful mainly for the study of the second and first millennium, see Tsukimoto 1985.

revealing is the literary description of the funeral of Urnamma the founder of the third dynasty of Ur (2111-2094 B.C).³⁵ In the lament over his death historical and mythological realities are mixed together combining belief and practice to one complementing whole. As Urnamma arrived in the kingdom of death he offered a lavish banquet to the inhabitants and then presented rich gifts to each of the major netherworld gods.³⁶ These explain the richly furnished graves. A similar but not detailed list is attested also in DGil.³⁷ The lists indicate that part of the grave goods were intended for the gods, a token of reverence as the worship during lifetime, and therefore probably a general custom.

A common misunderstanding in the secondary literature is that the inhabitants of the netherworld were naked. It originated in the description of Inana's entry into the netherworld through seven gates submitting items of her attire, which was later reproduced in the Akkadian myth IŠD.³⁸ These items, however, are Inana's divine powers

³⁵ *Urnamma A*, text edition with commentary: Flückiger-Hawker 1999. Passages concerning the burial rite and the circumstances in the netherworld are analysed and discussed in Katz 2003, see especially pp. 121-22, 215-16 and 329-336.

³⁶ For a comparative study of Sumerian literary lists of netherworld gods see Katz 2003: 357-382. For similar list in Akkadian see Gilg. VIII:130-188. The junction of mythological and historical realities is manifested here in that the banquet and the gifts to the gods were offered by Gilgameš on behalf of Enkidu.

³⁷ Cavigneaux 2000: 23, ll. 8-13. The detailed list of gifts to the gods in *Urnamma A* suggests that the author used the authentic administrative records of the expenditure of good for Urnamma's historical funeral. DGil, however, is entirely fiction.

³⁸ ID is one of several Sumerian narratives about Inana whereas IŠD is an Akkadian myth about the netherworld rather than a mere translation. These two related texts are the only evidence for nudity in the netherworld, and there is enough textual and archaeological evidence to refute it: e.g. Inana herself was naked before she was dead; in *Urnamma A* Ereškigal receives a royal gown, and some other deities received items similar to those removed from Inana; in GEN Gilgameš warned Enkidu not to wear his clean clothes but dirty ones; in *Nergal and Ereškigal*, iii:46' Ea warns Nergal against Ereškigal's sex appeal when she comes out of the bath and puts on a fine dress (Hallo 1997, 386); in Gilg. VIII:59 Gilgameš covers the face of Enkidu "like a bride" (George 2003: 654); In a NAss elegy the dead woman is described: "Your face shrouded as you cross the river of the inner city (the netherworld)" (Hallo 1997: 420). Yet, despite the many published sources to the contrary, this episode was indiscriminately interpreted as a general rule of the netherworld rather than an incident in Inana's biography. Moreover, in the Mesopotamian social system garments always had a symbolic value for the identity of the individual, they were used in rituals to establish and manifest attachment to the family while nudity was degrading. Considering the importance of the cult of the dead,

and their removal intended to expose her defenceless. The dead were laid shrouded in their graves, received a garment in the funerary ritual, and there is no reason to assume that they lost their clothes on the way to the netherworld.

A poetic three lines passage in *Ningišzida's journey to the Netherworld* encapsulates the essence of the netherworld.³⁹ The god warns his sister not to join him on the boat sailing to the netherworld (II. 29-31):⁴⁰

The river of the netherworld flows no water, its water you should not drink,
would you sail then?

The field of the netherworld grows no grain, flour is not milled from it,
would you sail then?

The sheep of the netherworld carries no wool, cloth is not woven from it,
would you sail then?

This passage demonstrably signifies that the basic necessities for survival, water, food and clothes are not available in the netherworld. The field and the sheep, though, also epitomize agriculture. The production of food and clothes from the cultivated fields and the domesticated animals is the hallmark of the civilized world. But a field that does not yield grains and a sheep that does not make wool are non-existent. Further, a waterless river it is not a river. Without water there is no life, no agriculture and no civilization. Thus, beyond the absence of

its objective to keep the ancestors as family members for generations, and the value of garments as markers of identity and respect, it is unimaginable that the dead would be deprived of garments, or treated according to a different set of norms. The social significance of garments is treated in K. van der Toorn, *Family Religion in Babylonia, Syria and Israel* (Leiden 1996), pp. 42-43.

³⁹ Katz 2003: 219-20 and passim. Edition: Th. Jacobsen and B. Alster, "Ningišzida's Boat-Ride to Hades" in A.R. George–I.L. Finkel (eds.) *Wisdom, Gods and Literature*, Lambert AV (Winona Lake 2000), pp. 315-344; ETCSL 1.7.3. In the third millennium Ningišzida was a local incarnation of the dying god. The narrative explains how his divine character has changed to the chair-bearer of the netherworld. This change occurred in the OBab period and thereby dates the text.

⁴⁰ The leitmotif of the laments describes the young dying god followed by his worried sister, mother or wife, usually they also search for him. Since it is a young god the lamenting female is mostly his mother or sister. Ningišzida, like Dumuzi, is also known as a married god (his wife Ninazimua) nevertheless, both deities are also bewailed by their sisters, Amašilama and Geštinana (resp.).

the basic necessities the choice of words signifies that the netherworld is the opposite of the human civilization, a primordial savage realm.

A recurring formulaic description in Akkadian portrays the netherworld as a dark house, full of dust whose inhabitants are clad with feathers eating clay and mud.⁴¹

To the dark house, the abode of Irkalla,
 To the house which those who enter cannot leave
 To the road which its course cannot be reversed
 To the house in which those who enter yearn for light
 Where soil is their sustenance, clay their food.
 Light they do not see, they dwell in darkness
 Clad like birds with a garment of feathers.⁴²
 Over the door and the bolt dust has spread.

The Akkadian text offers a brief but comprehensive depiction of the netherworld, defined by the basic elements of a subterranean reality: darkness, mud, clay and dust. The incorporation of this passage in three different compositions and its long transmission imply that it remained a loyal reflection of the current belief for centuries. This sober image, constructed in terms of a grave, has no equivalent in the Sumerian sources, neither in scope nor in concept. The earlier Sumerian traditions share with the Akkadian description the link between the netherworld and the grave but differ on the rest. The focus is on the food of the spirits but unlike the Akkadian source, rather than mud and clay, the Sumerian texts deal with real victual as offered to the dead. The reality emerges from the inferior quality of the food.⁴³ Environmental conditions, darkness and dust which one expects to find in a closed underground sphere are barely reflected in Sumerian traditions earlier than the OBab period. Compared with the focused Akkadian description, the Sumerian sources lack a consistent theory. And against the Akkadian sources that

⁴¹ IšD, CT 15, 45:4-11 and Hallo 1997: 381; *Nergal and Ereškigal*, STT I, 28 iii:105, and Hallo 1997: 386; Gilg. VII:182-205, George 2003: 644. These are three sources for a single text, the earliest known version is MAss (LKA 62).

⁴² The description of the spirits clad with feathers like birds is imaginative. Perhaps it was inspired by the belief that the spirits are ethereal beings, and therefore blow like the wind or fly with it.

⁴³ The Sumerian sources are quoted and discussed in Katz 2003: 212-233. The quality varies according to the nature of the text or of the author.

reckon with the historical burial experience, some Sumerian traditions relate a direct continuation of the actual life, on horizontal plane, regardless the burial practice.

5. *The geographical setting*

Where was the realm of the dead? Under the ground to the whole extent of earth, or in a particular spot, and how deep? The Sumerian sources add to the uncertainty because some describe an underground location, while others a place in the open air. Furthermore, the standard Sumerian term for ‘netherworld’ is *kur*, literally ‘mountain’. Diametrically opposed images raise questions about the origin of the Sumerian sources, whether they record contemporary traditions of different beliefs (related to local pantheons), or represent developments in a mainstream theory during long periods of time. In short, do they record a synchronic or diachronic images.

From the beginning of the second millennium we notice the emergence of a fairly uniform mainstream theory.⁴⁴ In line with the burial practice, all the Akkadian sources point to a subterranean realm of death. This is best demonstrated by the use of the verb *arādu* ‘to descend’.⁴⁵ Euphemisms such as “House of Darkness” (*bīt ekleti*) or ‘house of dust’ (*bīt eprī*) convey the image of a grave. The depth is illustrated by the use of the netherworld’s name *Arallū* to describe immense cosmic dimensions. A fine example is the image of the Twin mountain on the way of Gilgamesh to Utanapištim (Gilg. IX ii:5): “Their peaks reach the vault of heaven; below, their edge reaches the netherworld.”⁴⁶ The same use but with the name *Kigallu* occurs in descriptions of the foundations of temples where it depicts their depth

⁴⁴ The sources are of different genres, and consequently the language of the descriptions may be styled according to the standard of the genre, and vary in keeping with the purpose, the focus and the poetic needs of the given text. Because death was universally feared there is an extensive use of euphemisms in all genres. Some insight into the images can be drawn only from terminology for physical movement, mainly direction.

⁴⁵ In Sumerian the frequently used verb *e₁₁* signifies a vertical movement, up and down.

⁴⁶ George 2003: 668, l. 40-41. Additional examples are cited in CAD A/2, 226-227. Note especially its use in descriptions of temples, signifying mythological dimensions.

and firmness.⁴⁷ In texts of a cosmological purport the netherworld is sometimes identified with Apsu, the underground waters, abode of Ea. In these cases it is used in connection with chthonic gods and the evil spirits, believed to be engendered in the netherworld. We find it mostly in incantations.⁴⁸ Very rarely the Apsu was used as the place of the human spirits. One example is in the myth of Erra, I:147: “I made those craftsmen go down to the Apsu, and I said they were not to come back up.”⁴⁹

A sense of depth in concrete terms is conveyed by the description of Gilgameš’ ineffective attempt to reach by hand and foot his hoop and stick which fell into the bottom of the netherworld.⁵⁰

An OBab incantation against evil spirits offers a comprehensive geographical perspective by detailing the passage to the netherworld, referring to a gate, a road, and direction.⁵¹ The text first outlines the way of the evil spirits out of the netherworld (Il. 250-252):

In the Arali⁵² the path is laid out for them
In the grave⁵³ the gate is open for them

⁴⁷ See examples in CAD K, 349. *Kigallu* corresponds to Sumerian ki-gal ‘big place’. ki-gal in the name Ereškigal, the queen of the netherworld, attested already in mid third millennium suggests that in Sumerian it originally designated ‘netherworld’. A secondary meaning ‘base’ is more prevalent in both Sumerian and Akkadian, probably a later development as the outcome of its use in constructs of mythical dimensions.

⁴⁸ VS 17, 10:10-11 (OBab) Apsu occurs in apposition with é-kúkku ‘dark house’. More examples with Apsu are quoted in Horowitz 1998: 342-344. All the quoted sources postdate the OBab period.

⁴⁹ Translation: Dalley 1989: 291 with previous bibliography, text: KAR 168 r. i:27.

⁵⁰ OBab, GEN:164-168.

⁵¹ Geller 1985: 34-36. The text is analysed and discussed in Katz 2003: 27-29, and 338-341, with related bibliography.

⁵² Arali was originally the name of the grassland between Uruk and Badtibira. In mythology - the site of Dumuzi’s death. Later it lost its actual geographical sense and from the OBab period it appears as one of the names of the netherworld. Note that Arali was used in association with the evil spirits and the goddess, but when the incantation refers to the human victim (l. 285-6) the name is kur ‘mountain.’

⁵³ Here the word urugal (literally ‘big city’), which also means ‘netherworld’. In the meaning ‘netherworld’ this phrase would form a synonymous parallelism with previous, but consequently it would empty it of meaning, because a road and a gate at the same place are mutually exclusive. The meaning ‘grave’ allows that the gate is at the other end of the road from the netherworld. Thereby the two phrases make a complementary parallelism and create a gradual development of the image (Katz 2003: 338-40).

They leave toward the gate of sunset.

Eventually, the evil spirits failed to kill their victim, so the man could not depart to the netherworld (ll. 284-286):

Without Geštinana, the great scribe of the Arali (netherworld)
He (the man) does not enter the road to the Kur (netherworld)
He will not cross the path of the Kur.

A gate at the grave and a road between it and the netherworld illustrate the idea of strict separation and distance of the land of the dead from the surface of earth. A first millennium Akkadian translation and commentary of the first two lines reveals a different concept of the grave (LKA 82:11-12):⁵⁴

In the Arali they set foot: for murder they are!
In the grave they opened a gate: in the netherworld they opened a gate.

Apparently, this late source equates the grave with the netherworld and thereby diverts from the Sumerian sources which set a clear distance bridged by a road between them.

The OBad incantation designates the way out – ‘the gate of sunset’, which suggests that the passage to the netherworld was in the west. Heavenly bodies as the sun (Šamaš) and the planet Venus (Inana) indeed set and disappeared in the west,⁵⁵ so in cosmic terms the gate was there, and the supernatural constitution of the evil spirits qualifies then as cosmic powers.⁵⁶ But for people, in actual reality, graves were dug everywhere. Moreover, every hole dug especially for the purpose gave

Therefore I find ‘grave’ preferable. Late bilingual editions also prefer ‘grave’ see: UET 6, 393:12 and LKA below.

⁵⁴ The Akkadian text aims to depict the wickedness of the evil spirits. As of the second millennium there is a tendency to emphasize the monstrosity of the evil spirits.

⁵⁵ Some Sumerian sources telling that the sun went to sleep at night suggest that his lodging is in the western horizon. According to *How the grain came to Sumer* (ETCSL 1.7.6, ll. 28-32) Šamaš watches over the gate of the kur and also sleeps there.

⁵⁶ The incantations against the evil spirits indicate that they were procreated and raised in the netherworld, e.g. Geller 1985: 34, l. 247 of this incantation: “They were spawned by An”. Cf. also ll. 359-373 and elsewhere. However, they are not divine.

access to roads leading to the netherworld.⁵⁷ Therefore, regarding human beings the ‘gate of sunset/Šamaš’ is an euphemism.⁵⁸

Evil spirits moved freely in and out of the netherworld, not so human beings.⁵⁹ Their journey to the abode of the dead is the liminal phase during which the soul is transformed from ‘wind’ to ‘ghost’. Geštinana, the scribe of the netherworld, would consult a list of those destined to die on that day, and only he who appears on her list she will let into the road to the netherworld. Her function demonstrates the belief that the fate of human beings is predetermined, and recorded on a tablet.⁶⁰ This concept recurs in all the periods of Mesopotamian history and seems to remain unchanged.⁶¹

⁵⁷ As in the events narrated in GEN: in Uruk the hoop and the stick dropped to the bottom of the netherworld (ll. 164-168), Enkidu went to retrieve them (179-180), and in Uruk a special hole was magically opened and Enkidu’s ghost appeared to Gilgameš in a dream. For the Akkadian version of tablet XII see George 2003: 729 ll. 4-9 and 733 ll. 85-87.

⁵⁸ However, I found no additional evidence for the use of that euphemism for people. It seems that as of the OBab period the terminology employed for people is usually different from that used for mythological entities, perhaps to distinguish between worldly and cosmic-mythological realities.

⁵⁹ kur-nu-gi₄ ‘land of no return’ and har-ra-an/kaskal nu-gi₄-gi₄ ‘road of no return’: ID ll. 83, 84 (resp.). So far, the first is attested only once in Sumerian texts, the second twice (also in Edina-usa²ake). Therefore, although expressing the pure truth, there is no justification to present kur-nu-gi₄ as the typical name of netherworld.

⁶⁰ In the Ur III list of netherworld gods of *Urnamma A* the scribe is Ninazimua, the wife of Ningišzida, whom Gudea king of Lagaš identified with Geštinana. However, the extant sources suggest that originally it is the function of Geštinana, e.g. the myth *Dumuzi’s Dream*, ETCSL 1.4.3, ll. 21-23 “Bring my tablet knowing scribe, bring my sister” etc. Discussion with previous bibliography in Katz 2003: 174 and 397-401.

⁶¹ Explicitly in Akkadian expressions for ‘death,’ based on the word *šimtu* ‘(predetermined) fate’ with the verbs *alāku* ‘go’ as in: go to the fate of mankind (Gilg. OBab Sippar, George 2003: 278 col. ii:4), or: go to one’s fate (Codex Hammurabi^a 163). Also with *abālu* ‘carry away’ to one’s fate (some examples are cited in CAD A/1, 17b). The sense of predestined fate is bluntly expressed in compounds with the verb *mātu* ‘die’, cf. King Sennacherib about the king of Elam: *ina ūm la šimtišu urruhiš imtūt* “he died suddenly an untimely death (on a day other than his fate)” (OIP 2, 41 v:13). The opposite, predestined death is *mūt šimti* e.g. OBab omen (YOS 10, 41:29). Many examples are cited in CAD Š/III, 17-18. Also compounds with *adannu*, a fixed period of time, cf. an OBab personal name “May he reach his appointed time” (TCL 1, 150:7), or a NAass liver omen: “Until (the day of) his appointed time he will live, after (the day of) his appointed time he will die” (CT 31, 36 r. 9). A third millennium example is

The road to the netherworld is mentioned in many sources from the third until the first millennium B.C.⁶² A realistic description of a road is in the lament over the death of Urnamma the king of Ur (ll. 71, 73-74).⁶³

The king was <sitting> on his donkey, <the donkey was buried with him>
The road of the Kur is a desolate path.
With the king the chariot was covered, the road twists he cannot advance.

The combination of actual and mythological realities, typical to this lament, conveys a sense of movement and distance. Furthermore, the reference to a donkey and chariot suggests that the grave is far away from the netherworld. The evidence of the lament is corroborated by finds of chariots, donkeys and oxen in Early Dynastic graves at Ur, Kish and Susa.⁶⁴

Additional dimension to the image of the road is given by texts that describe a journey across the water. The Mesopotamian plain was embraced by two big rivers that led to the sea and covered with a network of canals, so a boat was a normal transportation means in the Mesopotamian landscape. Model boats, made of clay, bitumen, silver or bronze that were found in graves substantiate the belief in a journey on

Urnamma A, where the goddess Inana protests against the great gods for changing the fate of the king.

⁶² Note, however, that the famous list of temples at the beginning of the Sumerian myth ID does not outline Inana's route to the netherworld, which explains why it was not included in the Akkadian adaptation IŠD. This list (ll. 4-13) is a part of a bigger literary unit, which adds up all the things that Inana lost because of her uncontrolled desire to rule the whole cosmos, and therefore it cannot describe her route. When the Sumerian story about Inana's scheme was converted into the Akkadian myth IŠD about the netherworld the list of temples was omitted. This indicates that the ancient scribe did not read the list as the road to the netherworld. Inana's actual journey is reported after she donned her attire. Her statement to the gate keeper that she goes east indicates that the narrative explains her heavenly course as the planet Venus the evening star. For her course and the list see Katz 2003: 93-98 (esp. 95-96) and 251-258 (resp).

⁶³ The full passage Flückiger-Hawker 1999: 114.

⁶⁴ Ur: A chariot harnessed to two donkey was found in Pu-abi's grave (PG 800), see Woolley, *Ur Excavations* II, 73-91, pl. 36. The finds in PG 789 include two chariots harnessed to six oxen, and coachmen, *ibid.*, p. 64 and pl. 29, and two models of boats in pl. 169. Kish: P.R. Moorey, *Iraq* 28 pp. 41-43, with previous bibliography; Susa: Delougas, OIP 53, p. 138.

the water.⁶⁵ The texts also describe water relating activities of gods, on a cosmic plane in or at the netherworld but are unrelated to death or the human spirits.⁶⁶

The oldest source for a boat trip, the cosmological introduction to GEN, describes the god Enki sailing on stormy waters to the kur (ll. 14-26). The imagery suggests that rather than on river, Enki's journey was on sea water, most likely associated with his dwelling in the Apsu, the deep subterranean sea (ll. 23-26):⁶⁷

Against the King, the water at the bow of the boat/ Devour everything like a wolf // Against Enki, the water at the stern of the boat/ Smites like a lion.

The passage is merely a part of the chronological setting of the following narrative and it contains no information about the purpose of the trip.

A better example is *Ningišzida's journey to the netherworld*.⁶⁸ The young god Ningišzida was caught by the Galla –the deputies of the netherworld– and was forced to sail with them on the river to the netherworld. His sister begs to join him, and he warns her against it (ll. 27-30):

⁶⁵ Especially interesting in the Cemetery of Ur is a 155cm. long and 35cm. wide model from PG 1847 (Woolley, *Ur Excavations* II, p. 194 fig. 60a and Pl. 84a). A model of 88cm. long and 30cm. wide was found in PG 627, inside it were two ceramic jugs. It has to be noted that in Ur only two small models date to the Early Dynastic period, one of silver and the other of copper from PG 789. The rest of the models are not earlier than the Akkadian period, see H.J. Nissen, *Zur Datierung des Königsfriedhofes von Ur* (Bonn 1966), pp. 164-191.

⁶⁶ This is a speculation based on descriptions of deities acting in both heaven and netherworld or in between, on the horizon. E.g. hymn B of Ibbi-Suen (2027-2003) to Meslamtaea and Lugalira attributes to these chthonic deities the control over the river ordeal and links their activity with the two opposite ends of world, the mountain of sunrise where all begins and the netherworld where all ends (ETCSL 2.4.5.2. ll. 23-28). The Oakk. inscription of Lu'utu dedicated to Ereškigal, attributes to the queen of the netherworld activity in both worlds, but the Nungal hymn (probably composed in the Ur III period), tells that Ereškigal handed her authority over the river ordeal to Nungal. Therefore, if there was a distinction it was made during the Ur III period.

⁶⁷ ETCSL 1.8.1.4 with previous literature. The cosmological introduction consists of quotations from traditions older than OAb. His destination the kur does not support the possibility of a journey to Dilmun.

⁶⁸ Katz 2003: 36-37; and see fns. 39 and 40 above.

“My sister, my Galla is sailing with me, would you sail?”
 “The man who threw things at me is sailing with me, would you sail?”
 “The man who bound my hand is sailing with me, would you sail?”
 “The man who tied my arms is sailing with me, would you sail?”

Disregarding the warning, the sister joins her brother’s journey to the realm of the dead (ll. 57-58). Although the boat, ^{2is}má-gur₈ *makurru* is a deep going vessel it does not indicate the nature of the trip because it is also the typical boat for gods’ journeys between the Sumerian religious centres.⁶⁹

When Enlil was expelled from Nippur to the netherworld,⁷⁰ and Ninlil pregnant with Suen followed him, he copulated with her three times on the way. In their second encounter he was disguised as the man in charge of the river of the Kur, “the river that eats men” (ll. 98-99 i₇-lú-gu₇-gu₇), and in the third, as the ferry-man (ll. 124-125. lú-^{2is}má-addir). Since the chthonian deities Nergal and Ninazu were born as a result, this river must have been in the realm of the dead. Thus, *Enlil and Ninlil* describes a journey from Nippur first overland and then on water, as if the river cut the netherworld from the main land. Still, in *Urnamma A* the king travelled overland as if sailing was optional.

As of the second millennium a river seems to become a standard part of the concept of the netherworld. The Akkadian texts refer to crossing (*ebēru*) the river Hubur. Thus, in an incantation and ritual the petitioner asks Dumuzi to transfer the evil with him to the netherworld:⁷¹

“When you cross the Hubur river
 Adjure it by Ea so that it will not return.”

⁶⁹ Compare: Šulgi D:48 and 354-361 (ETCSL 2.4.2.04); *Nana-Suen Journey to Nippur*: 37 ETCSL 1.5.1).

⁷⁰ H. Behrnes, *Enlil and Ninlil, Ein sumerischer Mythos aus Nippur* (Roma 1978); ETCSL 1.2.1. Jacobsen 1987: 167-180. Note that the narrative deals with the structure of the pantheon rather than with the land of the dead.

⁷¹ W. Farber, *Beschwörungensrituale an Ištar und Dumuzi* (Wiesbaden 1977), p. 137 ll. 81-82. In another incantation, KAR 178 r. vi:40-52 the supplicant wishes that his sin would cross the Hubur with the statue of his dead father.

Crossing the Hubur is equated with walking the road of death, in *The Babylonian Theodicy*, (ll. 16-17):⁷²

“Our fathers give up and go the road of death
‘To cross the river Hubur’ is said since old (times).”

The seventh century composition *Underworld Vision of an Assyrian Prince* describes the boatman of the netherworld: “Hummuṭ-tabal, the boatman of the netherworld, his head – Anzu-bird, his fe[et ...].”⁷³

Gilgameš, fearing his own death set out to find Utanapištim, the man who survived the flood and was rewarded with eternal life like a god. When Gilgameš asked Shiduri, the tavern-keeper at the sea shore, for the road to Utanapištim’s place she warned him (X ii:24-25):⁷⁴

“The crossing is perilous, its way full of hazard,
And midway are the waters of death, crossways the passage forward.”

Shiduri referred Gilgameš to the ferry-man Uršanabi, who told him of how to cross without touching the lethal water. If the idea of crossing the ‘water of death’ is similar to that of crossing the river of the netherworld (which is not certain) then this episode suggests that the road to eternal life parallels the road of death, and both lead eastwards.

A journey eastward to the netherworld was taken by the goddess Ninhursa²a when she followed the path of her dead son. The young god was drowned, and as she was searching for him in the marshes overgrown with reeds she approached the mountains (kur) (ll. 6-12):⁷⁵

Inquiring and searching the foot of the mountain (kur) gets closer.
Like a ewe whose lamb was torn away she would not be detained,

⁷² Lambert, BWL, p. 70. Additional references to Hubur cf. Lambert, “Marduk’s address to the demons” AfO 17 (1954-56), p. 312:8-9; the incantation KAR 227 ii:7*-8*; LKA 90 ii:7; Lambert, BWL, 58:7 (*Ludlul bēl nēmeqi* IV). There are also references to just ‘river’.

⁷³ SAA 3, 71, no. 32 r. 5. His name means ‘remove quickly’. The prince describes more inhabitants of the netherworld with monstrous physical features.

⁷⁴ Translation: George 2003: 682 (ll. 83-84).

⁷⁵ *Eršemma of Ninhursa²a*, CT 58, 5; S.N. Kramer, “BM 98396, A Sumerian Prototype of the Mater-Dolorosa”, *Eretz-Israel* 16: 141*-146*. The relevant passage is treated in Katz 2003: 19-22, 67 and passim.

Like a she-goat whose kid was torn away she would not be detained.
 The foot of the mountain gets closer, the peak of the mountain gets closer.
 And she, she lifts Numun-rushes in front of her, she lifts Sumun-rushes,
 The mother of the lad lifts Šušu-reeds.
 The mother of the lord shed tears in the reed thicket.

Ninhursa²a's course in the marshes along the current of the river downstream is set in the geographical reality of southern Sumer, looking from the plain toward the distant mountains in the north-east.

The mountain is also the destination of Damu's mother when she followed her dead son to the netherworld.⁷⁶

"If wished, let me walk with you, you lad, the road of no return.
 Oh lad, lad, my Damu."
 She goes, she goes toward the edge of the mountain (kur).⁷⁷
 The day is ebbing, the day is ebbing, towards the dark mountain.⁷⁸

Damu's mother takes 'the road of no return' to 'the edge of the mountain', i.e. the point where the slope meets level land. In other words she goes to the foot of the mountain. Thus, Ninhursa²a and Damu's mother walk toward the same spot. Another passage of *Edina-usa²ake* describes the dead young god crying at the end of his road to the netherworld. He was standing at the foot of the mountain.⁷⁹

The lad weeps at the place of the foot of the mountain,

⁷⁶ The liturgical lament *Edina-usa²ake*, "In the desert by the early grass" ll. 1-4. Translation: Jacobsen 1987: 56-84. Text and translation: M. Cohen, *The Canonical Lamentations of Ancient Mesopotamia* (Potomac 1988), pp. 668-703. The nature, origin and date of this important lament, its place in the lamentation literature as well as a selection of passages are discussed in detail with previous literature in Katz 2003: 309-328 and passim. The passage quoted above is on pp. 24-25.

⁷⁷ Literally: "the breast of the mountain". The Sumerian word for breast was used in transferred meaning to signify the front edge of actual geographical features. See some examples and discussion in Katz 2003: 68-77.

⁷⁸ The reading of the adjective is uncertain, whether 'dark' or 'frightening'. More interesting is the version of the NAss bilingual edition, it is very likely that the early source of the bilingual had un 'high'. The nature of the bilingual and how it was created is treated in Katz 2003: 320-321, and 324-325.

⁷⁹ Lines 8 and 10, see Katz 2003: 22-23 and 66. This passage and the lament of Ninhursa²a employ the same geographical term kur-úr-ra for "the foot of the mountain".

The lad at the place of the road where they finished him off.

‘Mountain’ – *kur* is the prevalent Sumerian word for the domain of the dead, and in that meaning it was used in the Sumerian laments. Standard geographical terms that define parts of the *kur* by way of synecdoche, such as ‘the edge/peak/foot of the mountain’, indicate that the netherworld was pictured as a real mountain, rising beyond the plain of Sumer. Hence, the mythological scene was rendered realistic, as if it occurred in historical reality. The protagonists departed from their temples in Sumerian cities,⁸⁰ and walked to the mountain area. In terms of the actual geographical reality they walked toward the Zagros mountains beyond the eastern boundary of Sumer.

Though the route to the netherworld depended on the traveller’s point of departure, Inana’s descent to the netherworld is the most intriguing among the journeys of deities. The myth deals with Inana’s image as the planet Venus the evening star, describing her periodical disappearance. As an astral body she does not depart from her worldly temple walking overland to the netherworld, like Ninhursa²a, Damu, his mother, and his sister Gumura. As the evening star Inana traverses the sky westward, sets below the horizon and remains unseen for some days until she rises from behind the top of the mountains in the east.⁸¹ Inspected from the perspective of a Sumerian city, her unseen movement from west to east seems as a journey behind the Zagros chain of mountains and, therefore, she probably arrived at the same spot as the mother goddesses and their young dead sons. Namely, after Inana’s journey across the sky westward she disappeared behind the top of the mountains and then descended down the slopes to its foot at level land.

⁸⁰ E.g. *Edina-usa²ake* on Damu leaving the Giparu of the temple followed by his sister Gunura: “The one who left the Giparu, my healer, she inquires after the one who left the Giparu” (SK 26 ii:15-16). In the O²Bab period Damu became a healing god in Isin. Since SK 26 dates to that period, presumably the epithet ‘healer’ was then added to the text. As a young dying god Damu was probably a baby (for a possible allusion to that see Katz 2003: 318).

⁸¹ ID 1. 81. The directions are obviously schematic.

6. *The mythologization of the 'mountain'*

The cuneiform sign *kur* shows three mountain peaks, suggesting that 'mountains' was its basic meaning. In addition to the geo-physical meaning, *kur* has a geo-political meaning 'foreign (hostile) land', and in the cosmic geography it signifies the region of death – the netherworld. Thus, *kur* was a comprehensive concept, wide enough to incorporate the three different geographical denotations. The mountains that suit the complex image of *kur* are the Zagros mountains, stretching beyond the eastern border line of Sumer. Until the beginning of the third millennium the Zagros range seemed inaccessible to the Sumerians, who therefore considered the unknown mountain area and beyond an inhospitable territory, outside the civilized world. This, presumably, explains the meaning foreign hostile land. In Sumerian literature distant, inaccessible, fearsome, hostile and dangerous are descriptions common to the Zagros mountains and the netherworld.⁸² The shared properties explain the meaning 'netherworld', and the descriptions of the netherworld as an actual mountain, rising high in the open beyond the alluvial plain. The essence of the concept manifests itself when the term *kur* is compared with the term *kalam* 'the land', i.e. the heartland of Sumer. The pair *kur-kalam* constitutes two diametrically opposed geographical concepts: as a geo-physical term, *kalam* is a level land, in contrast to *kur* 'mountain area', and as a geo-political term, *kalam* is 'my land' as opposed to *kur* - 'foreign land'. In addition, the sign *kalam* in the reading *ù²* signifies the inhabitants of Sumer, in contrast to the spirits land in the *kur*. Thereby the binary opposition *kur* - *kalam* also expressed the antithesis Sumer versus the netherworld. In cosmological terms it reflects a horizontal perception of the universe.

During the third millennium, particularly under Sargon of Akkad and his successors, the geographical horizons of the Sumerians extended into the mountains and the binary opposition *kur-kalam* lost its grounds: the *kur* became accessible, familiar and unthreatening, while *kalam* could no longer embody a geographical and political unity. Subsequently, the

⁸² The narrative *Lugalbanda in the mountain cave* (ETCSL 1.8.2.1), is set in the mountains road to Aratta, playing exactly on the double value of the images, the real mountains and the cosmic mythological properties as the arena of supernatural forces and events.

concept *kur* was split into three homonymous independent words. *kur* remained the standard Sumerian term for ‘netherworld’, but it lost its actual morphological and topographical properties and became just a name. Thus the actual ‘mountain’ turned mythological, indicating a subterranean replica of a Sumerian kingdom. With the netherworld universally imagined under the ground like the grave, the mythical reality conjoined the actual and the vertical perception of the cosmos prevailed. Traces of the horizontal perception survived in old literary traditions which were transmitted until the first millennium, but attempts to adjust the text to contemporary views resulted in contradictions.⁸³

7. *The community of death*

The spirits came to the netherworld from all the walks of society. Therefore, the belief that they survived in a special segregated district resulted in speculations about the socio-political organization of their community. Our information, however, consists of an imbalanced variety of details, mostly indirect references in rituals, lamentations and lists of netherworld gods. These reveal the attitudes of an urban society, imprinted in appellation of the netherworld and mainly in its societal system where deities fulfilled governmental offices. Not surprisingly, the concept of afterlife was fashioned according to the actual life experience in the terrestrial kingdom.

The earliest glimpse into the speculations on community life is the description of *Urnamma*.⁸⁴ The account of his arrival in the netherworld portrays an animated population of human spirits, among them especially noted are ‘famous kings’ and high ranking priests. A lavish banquet that the dead king provided is probably the mythological facet of the actual funerary offerings at his grave. So are the gifts that he presented to the major gods of the netherworld. His position afterlife, decided by the queen *Ereškigal* (Il. 138-144), equals his former duties as

⁸³ For instance the change of the Sumerian “the high mountain” to “the land of the dead” in the NAss bilingual edition of *Edina usa²ake* see Katz 2003: 320-321 and 324-325.

⁸⁴ Flückiger-Hawker 1999: 115ff. *Urnamma A*, ll. 76-144 and 190-192. Note that *Urnamma A* has a political purpose.

king. The sad concrete reality emerges when Urnamma protests that he sits in the dust of the pit.

A later image but not very different is Enkidu's dream before his death.⁸⁵ Also Enkidu makes a special comment about dead kings and high ranking priests. They do not retain their lifetime function, but presented as an exclusive group. Again, Ereškigal is depicted as the queen. In front of her the scribe of the netherworld reads from a tablet.⁸⁶ Enkidu was ushered into the netherworld by a hybrid creature, probably the gatekeeper, described as a man whose hands and nails are lion's paw and eagle's talons. Mythological hybrid creatures are known already in the prehistoric time, but not necessarily as netherworld officials.⁸⁷ Later, the seventh century dream of Assyrian crown prince (perhaps Assurbanipal) is fully populated with hybrid monsters, most of them evil.⁸⁸ But since it may be related to the purpose of the text we cannot conclude that it signifies a dramatic development in the image netherworld creatures. The most detailed account is the dream of Gilgameš,⁸⁹ where the ghost of Enkidu answered his questions about the situation of different groups of spirits. The text describes the spirits living in a community, and the social-economic status of the individual members depends on their lifetime accomplishments. Although this notion gained momentum in the OBab period, some details seem too optimistic, creating the impression that rosy afterlife is possible. In addition, Enkidu's description indicates that man can strongly influence his own future, which is contrary to the concept of *šimtu*, predetermined fate. Indeed, that optimism is not proposed by the dreams of the Assyrian prince and Enkidu (Gilg VII). Presumably, therefore, the dream aims to

⁸⁵ George 2003: 644:182-210, Gilg. VII. The list of priests may be a sign of intertextuality. Similar lists are included also in DGil, Cavigneaux 2000: 29:104-107 and in an OBab prayer to Šamaš, M. Cohen, ZA 67 (1977) 1-19, ll. 58-60.

⁸⁶ Bēlet-šēri is the Akkadian name of Geštinana, whose authorization was needed to admit a person into the netherworld according to the incantation cited above (Geller 1985: 36:284). In the tablet, then, is probably a list of the persons who are doomed to die.

⁸⁷ Mischwesen, RIA 8 (1994), pp. 222-264. We should not expect hybrid monsters in *Urnamma A* because of its political purpose.

⁸⁸ Livingston, SAA 3, 71-72, ll. r. 1-10.

⁸⁹ GEN II. 243-end. The Sumerian text from l. 87 was translated into Akkadian and ends the epic of Gilgameš. See George 2003: 726-735.

instruct the way for good life in this world as well as in the netherworld and thereby ease the fear of death.⁹⁰

The Sumerian *urugal* ‘big city’, the Akkadian *āl mūti* ‘city of death’ and the office of a gatekeeper are few examples that indicate the image of a city-state.⁹¹ The gatekeeper’s name, Bite, derived from the Akkadian verb ‘open’, suggests an origin in the Semitic population of Sumer.⁹² ID tells that Inana entered the netherworld through seven gates. Since her gradual entrance has an essential function in the plot, and the myth is not about the netherworld but about Inana, I doubt that it exhibits the architectural image of the netherworld.⁹³ According to the Ur III lament *Urnamma A*, each god of the netherworld had his own palace. It is not impossible that this view reflects the plan of the sacred precincts which comprised of temples and chapels for several deities.

Most indicative are the titles of official positions, demonstrating that the netherworld was organized according to the model of the terrestrial kingdom. The earliest textual evidence dates to the Ur III period, but this image is most likely older. With some adjustments the terrestrial model outlived the ethnic, political and social developments in ancient

⁹⁰ After Gilgameš failed to find eternal life, a promising vision of afterlife would help him to come to terms with his mortality, and round up his adventure in a suitable finale, bearing on life and death. In an Akkadian source of the OBab period the ale-wife advised Gilgameš to give up his quest for immortality and enjoy his life instead (George 2003: 278, ii:14’-iii:15) I would not exclude the possibility that the OBab Sumerian source had the same purpose, which motivated its translation into Akkadian and adding it as the last chapter of the epic.

⁹¹ In Sumerian OBab sources ‘big city’ is sometimes interchangeable with grave. In a NAss elegy a dead woman is asked “... as you cross the river of the Inner City?” combining the image of a city with a river crossing. The image of ‘house’ such as in ‘dark house’, ‘house of dust’ and ‘house of death’, attested in Akkadian texts, is more likely draw on the grave.

⁹² Note that the laments over the young dead god which locate the netherworld at the foot of the mountain allude to a rural landscape, and therefore, either earlier or separate.

⁹³ At each gate Inana had to remove one of her divine symbols, which endow her with divine powers and immunity. Removing them leaves Inana defenceless in the hands of Ereškigal, and the gradual process is a literary device, important for the quality and reliability of the narrative. Also the typological number seven adds to the literary sense rather than to the factual credibility of the scene. Seven nameless gatekeepers are mentioned in *Urnamma A* but no seven gates, and its list of netherworld gods does not include a gatekeeper.

Mesopotamia. Changes in the status of individual deities did occur, mainly in the OBad period after the decline of the Sumerian hegemony.

The official positions were attributed to the major deities according to their rank in the pantheon. Gods' lists that specify functions reveal the details.⁹⁴ Until the OBad period the netherworld was a kingdom ruled by the queen Ereškigal.⁹⁵ Then Nergal became king alongside Ereškigal but gradually more important.⁹⁶ Nergal was a god of war, and this aspect of his divinity remained highly pronounced until the late periods. A lethal official is Namtar the adviser of Ereškigal. His Sumerian name signifies '(the one) who decrees fates'. Namtar served the cause of death ever since the third millennium until the later periods. In early incantations Namtar is the cause of headache.⁹⁷ An important courtier was Ningišzida. In the third millennium he was the young dying god of Ešnunna and Lagaš, but in the OBad period his divine role was changed to the chair bearer.⁹⁸ In Lagaš his wife Ninazimua was identified with

⁹⁴ Such lists appear in prayers, in rituals or independently. Younger lists are based on older traditions and thus usually preserved names of gods whose cult already ceased to exist. At the same time, the lists were expanded with additional officials and their family members, and thereby reflect changes in the pantheon. For an overview of the god lists see RIA 3, 473-479. Not all the offices attached to the palace are attested in the netherworld.

⁹⁵ Certainly in the Sumerian south. Ereškigal is the legal queen in ID, and the one who determined the position of Urnamma the dead king of Ur. Since everything in *Urnamma A* points to Ereškigal as the sole ruler of the netherworld, Nergal's epithet "Enlil of the netherworld" (l. 90) cannot signify kingship. Nergal is not included in the list of netherworld gods in DGil nor mentioned in ID. Before the second millennium there is no unequivocal evidence that Nergal was considered king of the netherworld even in the Semitic north. For more details see Katz 2003: 357-382 and passim.

⁹⁶ The Akkadian myth *Nergal and Ereškigal* (late second millennium) tells the events that led to Nergal's descent to the netherworld and his marriage with Ereškigal, thereby explaining the change in his divine character. Nergal is a Sumerian god whose cult was popular among the Semitic inhabitants of northern Mesopotamia, while in the main southern Sumerian centres his cult is hardly attested before the reign of Šulgi (2093-2046 B.C.). On Nergal see RIA 9, p. 215 ff. and Katz 2003: 404-420.

⁹⁷ See van Dijk and Geller 2003, no. 9.

⁹⁸ At the very end of the third millennium, following the fall of the Ur III dynasty, religious centres were abandoned or destroyed and the cult of many gods changed or stopped. Dumuzi became the sole young dying god while other local incarnations were either forgotten or assigned another function. Ningišzida, whose cult centre Gišbanda is not identified yet, became a chair bearer. Damu's cult centre, Girsu on the Euphrates (not

Geštinana, Dumuzi's sister and the scribe of the netherworld. Geštinana, who was probably the initial scribe of the netherworld, held the office until later periods under her Akkadian name Bēlet-šēri 'lady of the steppe'.⁹⁹ The gatekeeper is Bite 'open!' (see above). The Anunaki feature in Akkadian texts as a council.¹⁰⁰ In the third millennium, however, the Anuna is a group of the seven heavenly great gods, who act as the judges of the pantheon.¹⁰¹ Their association with the netherworld probably evolved from their role in ID: the Anuna sentenced Inana to death for usurpation.¹⁰² Later, as a condition for Inana's release, the Anuna stipulated that she would deliver a substitute, and sent the Galla, Akkadian *gallû*, to impose the execution of their condition. In historical reality the Galla were, probably, policemen. Because of their role in the myth they were eventually demonized. As of the OBad period the Galla are depicted as malicious evil spirits, neither human nor divine.¹⁰³

Gilgameš, the legendary king of Uruk, became a netherworld god already in the middle of the third millennium. In DGil he is promised to be the leader of the human spirits, corresponding to his partly human descent. From the OBad period he appears in literary god lists followed by Etana,¹⁰⁴ a legendary king of the first (Semitic) dynasty of Kish, both

yet identified), may have been abandoned earlier and the priesthood moved to Isin where Damu became a healing god.

⁹⁹ In Akkadian texts the steppe was associated with the netherworld as the domain of evil spirits. Thus, her name combines the image of the steppe with the belief that her brother Dumuzi died in the steppe.

¹⁰⁰ In *Underworld vision of an Assyrian prince* (SAA 3, rev. 12) they kneel to the left and right of Nergal.

¹⁰¹ KI 'place' is a common euphemism of the netherworld, and in the Akkadian versions of bilingual texts it replaces the Sumerian *kur*. Presumably, the Sumerian genitive suffix /-k/ in a-nun-na-ke₄ – 'seed of the prince', was included in the group's name – A-nun-na, which then became Anunaki. See details in Katz 2003: 402 with previous bibliography.

¹⁰² Inana's attempt to rob the me that symbolize Ereškigal legal claim for the kingship of the netherworld. Since the me is granted by the great gods, stealing them is not just a criminal offence but also a violation of the cosmic order.

¹⁰³ Their demonization coincided with the decline of the office in historical reality. In Ur III Umma we still find the office of 'chief Galla'. Before the OBad period Galla is attested in one Ur III incantation only (van Dijk–Geller 2003 no. 1), without the typical adjective 'evil'. The development of the demonic image is treated in Katz 2003: 126-154.

¹⁰⁴ Etana is the hero of an Akkadian epic-tale, narrating his ride to heaven on the back of an eagle in search of progeny. The narrative has no source earlier than the OBad

carry titles of officials. Gilgameš and Etana are the only human beings whose deification was canonized. *Urnamma A* relates that the dead king of Ur was appointed by Ereškigal to act as a judge together with Gilgameš. This office reflects the king's duty in lifetime and, presumably, pertains to the dealings between human spirits. Urnamma's status in the netherworld was not canonized.

The mention of judges points to a functioning law and order. Three Sumerian expressions of judicial sense demonstrate it: 'the me of the netherworld', 'the instruction of the netherworld' and 'the judgement of the netherworld, the verdict of the netherworld'.¹⁰⁵ The first two signify a fixed divine order. The me, represented by an actual object, is the authorities that belong with a given function; it is conferred by the great gods and therefore it is a part of the cosmic order, binding divine as well as terrestrial matters. In the second millennium this fundamental Sumerian cosmological concept it was absorbed in garza – cult, sacred norm, indicating that they deemed overlapping.¹⁰⁶ The 'instruction of the netherworld' is a set of regulations imposed by deities, defining the proper order mainly social hierarchy. The essence of third, 'judgement' and 'verdict' is uncertain. The various uses of this pair in everyday life in Babylonia¹⁰⁷ suggests that it imparts the Sumerian concept of justice implanted into the kingdom of the dead. Divine judgement of the dead is mentioned for the first time in the OBad period, exercised by Šamaš, the sun.¹⁰⁸ Since then, prayers and rituals to Šamaš indicate that the sun god decides on the afterlife, even absolves sins when necessary¹⁰⁹ and his judgement seems based on the individual's behaviour during his lifetime.

period. Other references to his flight are of the same period (e.g. the Sumerian King List, ETCSL 2.1.1, ll. 64-67). The theme appears as a glyptic motive on Oakk seals, but whether it is Etana is uncertain. See also Katz 2003: 114-121.

¹⁰⁵ me-kur-ra, á-á²-á²-kur-ra and ka-aš-kur-ra/ di-kur-ra (resp., kur – 'netherworld').

¹⁰⁶ In IŠD the gatekeeper refers to garza only.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Šulgi X:142-147. For more references see Klein, *JCS* 23 (1970), pp. 118-122.

¹⁰⁸ For the Semitic inhabitants of northern Babylonia the sun always played an important role as a judge. The Sumerian texts which attribute judgement to the sun-god date to the OBad period, and thus coincide with the decline of the Sumerian "nationality". The Sumerian sun-god Utu acts in the texts as Inana's brother. On Šamaš in texts of the early third millennium see Ch. Woods, "On the Euphrates", *ZA* 95/1 (2005) (in print).

¹⁰⁹ E.g. Alster, "Incantation to Utu", *ASJ* 13 (1991): 37-79, especially ll. 109-236. The extant evidence does not support the impression that Šamaš visited the land of the dead at

The judgment of the dead, and moreover prayers to absolve sins are an intricate issue, because the Mesopotamians did not discern paradise and hell, and whether a spirit was a resting benevolent or restless hostile one depended on the performance of the cult. Therefore, the judgement could have no consequences. Correspondingly, in the third millennium the focus was on worldly life. Incantations which expose the sources of fears and misfortune were mostly against mundane agents as snakes and scorpions and less against ghosts.¹¹⁰ Furthermore, in the dedication inscriptions the donators appeal to the gods to reward their devotion in this world with long life.¹¹¹ This view underlies Inana's complaint that the great gods changed Urnamma's fate, which caused his premature death.¹¹² However, the idea that the dead king could keep his lifetime duties signifies a change of mood, making manifest that the reward for lifetime achievements waits in afterlife. This tendency is more explicit in DGil, when Enlil spells out Gilgamesh's prospects in afterlife. Alongside the concept of one undivided land of all the spirits, the attitude that lifetime circumstances can influence the individual's quality (not location) of afterlife gained popularity during the OBad period.¹¹³ An OBad school text, the lament of Ludišira over his murdered father plausibly reflects the current practice.¹¹⁴ Ludišira appeals to Šamaš and Sin to judge and decree a good fate for his father, from the netherworld gods he asks to care for him, and from his city's and personal gods - to absolve the father's sins and guilt. The prayer ends with blessings for the

night. I would rather suggest that it was from his dwelling behind the horizon where heaven touches the door of the netherworld and both worlds are in his reach.

¹¹⁰ Cf. van Dijk-Geller 2003. Note that the number of ghosts is small: Udu (ghost) Ala and Namtar. The vast majority of incantations against evil spirits were composed in the OBad period. A world free of snakes and scorpions typifies a future golden age according to *Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta* l. 136 (ETCSL 1.8.2.3) and pre-civilization in UET 61 i:11 (reconstructed).

¹¹¹ Destinies were fixed at birth and fate (*nam-tar* / *šimtu*) was as a binding concept predetermined. Truly, the great gods had the authority to change man's fate for better or for worse.

¹¹² *Urnamma A*, Flückiger-Hawker 1999: 135-142

¹¹³ Implied by some of Enkidu's descriptions in GEN, and incantations that sort out ghosts according to the circumstances of death, cf. Geller 1985: 36-39, ll. 311-333, and CT 23, 15:8.

¹¹⁴ The first elegy from the Pushkin Museum: ETCSL 5.5.2, The relevant passage is treated in Katz 2003: 374-382. The text is not historical, therefore it is not burdened by political, religious or other tendencies beyond the scribal education purposes.

welfare of the remaining family members, which suggests that the ritual is a formal initiation of the deceased into the circle of protective spirits, and perhaps even as a family god.¹¹⁵ Ludi²ira's prayer extended the funerary ritual, it departs from a passive attitude to an influence on the quality of the individual's afterlife. Since, however, the extant sources signify that the ancient Mesopotamian thinkers did not entertained the concept of paradise and hell, one wonders what prompted this quasi eschatological speculation. Evidently, Ludi²ira sought justness for his wronged father. Hinging the circumstances in afterlife on lifetime experience is an answer for his quest for justice. In principle, the ability to improve the conditions in afterlife opens a window for optimistic attitude toward human existence. Interestingly, therefore, this last possibility coincides with an increasing concern about the netherworld, so I wonder whether the hope was not born out of the fear.

Šamaš and the judgement which belongs with his divinity are an intrinsic component of the Semitic cultural property. His invocation proposes the possibility that this belief was introduced in Mesopotamia by the Semitic inhabitants.

8. *Last remarks: continuity and change*

The beginning of the second millennium saw the dawn of a new era in Mesopotamian history, a period of political, ethnic and cultural evolution. The collapse of the Ur III kingdom at the close of the third millennium marked the end the Sumerian hegemony, and the land was now split into a number of Semitic kingdoms. Scribal schools, though, seem to carry on uninterruptedly from the Ur III period, resulting in a major revival of the Sumerian literacy. With the passion of new converts or perhaps of a doomed generation, scribes put in writing all the literary legacy of the higher Sumerian culture and more.¹¹⁶ Most of the existing

¹¹⁵ There are few indications to the effect that the ancestors' spirits became minor divinities, though not enough to propose that this was always the case. In the OBab period private family religion seems to become the focus of the religious practice, see van der Toorn *Family religion*, pp. 11-147, particularly 48-65, and Jacobsen 1976: 152-164. Or is it the nature of the extant texts? There is also archaeological evidence for religious practice in private houses in third millennium.

¹¹⁶ The texts were part of the scribal education so the obvious purpose was to master the material, language and style. However, the unique comprehensive scale of the scribal

Sumerian texts were generated in the OBad period, based on older Sumerian traditions of all sorts and genres, or newly authored compositions combining old and new values. But rather than the Sumerian, the major intellectual achievements emerge from the Akkadian literature.

In the OBad period the basic principles of the cult of the dead and the perception of the spirit remained stable. However, the attitude toward death and the netherworld has changed. For the first time texts deal with the meaning of life and death. Man shows concern about his own existence, he recognizes and defines his limitations, describes his fears and helplessness, and looks for explanation and guidance. Thus the netherworld came into focus. It is inhabited by monstrous creatures radiating fear, but their threat is countered with hope, with the belief in justice and in a reward for the previous proper lifestyle. These notions are expressed in Akkadian texts. Most revealing is the regeneration in Akkadian of popular Sumerian narratives, reinterpreted and enriched with new meanings that endowed them with intellectual depth. Thus, Sumerian tales about the exploits of Gilgameš were transformed into a quest for the purpose of life and the meaning of death. The Sumerian tradition of the creation of man was developed in Atra-hasīs into a theory that offers a physiological explanation to the immortality of the soul, and perhaps to the unique intellectual facilities of mankind. Moreover, integrated with the flood story it proposed a comprehensive theory about the origin and meaning of present life. The Sumerian myth of ID was reworked as well. In the OBad Sumerian tale *Dumuzi and Geštinana* the plot was twisted and turned to tell about the extreme cruelty of the Galla and to vindicate Inana as their victim.¹¹⁷ The Galla, whose mythological life originated in ID, were now described as neither human nor divine in a formula that was added to Sumerian mythological laments about the young dying god. The demonization of the Galla conveys the growing fear of the netherworld and is best demonstrated by numerous OBad Sumerian and bilingual incantations against demonic evil spirits. Later,

activity is still very intriguing, how many and who outside the scribal schools understood Sumerian? Why new compositions were authored in Sumerian? See also N. Veldhius, *Religion, Literature, and Scholarship: The Sumerian Composition Nanse and the Birds* (Leiden 2004).

¹¹⁷ Exists in a single copy from Ur (UET 6, 11), so reservations about this version are due. See also Katz 2003: 289-300.

in the famous Akkadian IŠD the plot of ID was used as a skeleton to creates, with additional material, a myth about the netherworld.

The emanation of interest in the human condition coincided with the collapse of the Sumerian political power and the Semitization of Mesopotamia. In the early OBad period many Sumerians still operated in Nippur and Isin, upholding the Sumerian literary legacy. But it was a period of transition in which the Sumerian texts became increasingly imprinted with new concepts. Were these ideas the cultural properties of the Semites? The emerging trend may have been a hidden, unwritten asset of the Semitic population, verbalized after the collapse of the Sumerian superiority and the change of the ethnic landscape.¹¹⁸ The interest in the meaning of life and death kept increasing, yielding new texts like the comprehensive edition of the Gilgameš epic, the no less penetrating *Ludlul bēl nēmeqi* (“I Will Praise the Lord of Wisdom”), ‘The Babylonian Theodicy.’¹¹⁹

The horrific image of afterlife sets the Mesopotamian attitude apart from the Egyptian’s. The reasons why the Mesopotamian did not fled the actual reality into a promising paradise, why they did not develop eschatological theory that would shift the focus of life from the present hardships to a pleasant future afterlife are still elusive, and subject to speculations. Introducing the judgement of the dead, however, could mitigate the fear of death and perhaps that was the intention.

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¹¹⁸ The prompt emergence of a mature Akkadian literature in the OBad period is baffling. How comes that the story of Etana, a king of the Semitic first dynasty of Kish, has no earlier sources? Why did the OBad Sipparean source of Gilgameš turn from the traditional adventure story to deal with the meaning of life. What made Sippar, with large Semitic population, a great scribal centre, parallel to Nippur? I wonder if the Ur III state did not control the literary material studied and copied in the scribal schools.

¹¹⁹ Lambert, BWL, pp. 21-62 and 63-91 (resp.)

- Near Eastern Studies in Memory of Thirkild Jacobsen*. Winona Lake, pp. 35-40.
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