

# Sumerian Mythology FAQ

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## I. History and Overview -

Sumer may very well be the first civilization in the world (although long term settlements at Jericho and [Çatal Hüyük](#) predate Sumer and examples of writing from Egypt and the Harappa, Indus valley sites *may* predate those from Sumer). From its beginnings as a collection of farming villages around 5000 BCE, through its conquest by Sargon of Agade around 2370 BCE and its final collapse under the Amorites around 2000 BCE, the Sumerians developed a religion and a society which influenced both their neighbors and their conquerors. Sumerian cuneiform, the earliest written language, was borrowed by the Babylonians, who also took many of their religious beliefs. In fact, traces and parallels of Sumerian myth can be found in Genesis.

### History

Sumer was a collection of city states around the Lower Tigris and Euphrates rivers in what is now southern Iraq. Each of these cities had individual rulers, although as early as the mid-fourth millennium BCE the leader of the dominant city could have been considered the king of the region. The history of Sumer tends to be divided into five periods. They are the Uruk period, which saw the dominance of the city of that same name, the Jemdat Nasr period, the Early Dynastic periods, the Agade period, and the Ur III period - the entire span lasting from 3800 BCE to around 2000 BCE. In addition, there is evidence of the Sumerians in the area both prior to the Uruk period and after the Ur III Dynastic period, but relatively little is known about the former age and the latter time period is most heavily dominated by the Babylonians.

The **Uruk** period, stretched from 3800 BCE to 3200 BCE. It is to this era that the Sumerian King Lists ascribe the reigns of [Dumuzi](#) the shepherd, and the other antediluvian kings. After his reign Dumuzi was worshipped as the god of the spring grains. This time saw an enormous growth in urbanization such that Uruk probably had a population around 45,000 at the period's end. It was easily the largest city in the area, although the older cities of Eridu to the south and Kish to the north may have rivaled it. Irrigation improvements as well as a supply of raw materials for craftsmen provided an impetus for this growth. In fact, the city of [An](#) and [Inanna](#) also seems to have been at the heart of a trade network which stretched from what is now southern Turkey to what is now eastern Iran. In addition people were drawn to the city by the great temples there.

The Eanna of Uruk, a collection of temples dedicated to Inanna, was constructed at this time and bore many mosaics and frescoes. These buildings served civic as well as religious purposes, which was fitting as the en, or high priest, served as both the spiritual and temporal leader. The temples were places where craftsmen would practice their trades and where surplus food would be stored and distributed.

The **Jemdat Nasr** period lasted from 3200 BCE to 2900 BCE. It was not particularly remarkable and most adequately described as an extension and slowing down of the Uruk period. This is the period during which the great flood is supposed to have taken place. The Sumerians' account of the flood may have been based on a flooding of the Tigris, Euphrates, or both rivers onto their already marshy country.

The **Early Dynastic** period ran from 2900 BCE to 2370 BCE and it is this period for which we begin to have more reliable written accounts although some of the great kings of this era later evolved mythic tales about them and were deified. Kingship moved about 100 miles upriver and about 50 miles south of modern Baghdad to the city of Kish. One of the earlier kings in Kish was [Etana](#) who "stabilized all the lands" securing the First Dynasty of Kish and establishing rule over Sumer and some of its neighbors. Etana was later believed by the Babylonians to have rode to heaven on the back of a giant Eagle so that he could receive the "plant of birth" from Ishtar (their version of Inanna) and thereby produce an heir.

Meanwhile, in the south, the Dynasty of Erech was founded by Meskiaggasher, who, along with his successors, was termed the "son of Utu", the sun-god. Following three other kings, including another Dumuzi, the famous Gilgamesh took the throne of Erech around 2600 BCE and became involved in a power struggle for the region with the Kish Dynasts and with Mesannepadda, the founder of the Dynasty of Ur. While Gilgamesh became a demi-god, remembered in epic tales, it was Mesannepadda who was eventually victorious in this three-way power struggle, taking the by then traditional title of "King of Kish".

Although the dynasties of Kish and Erech fell by the wayside, Ur could not retain a strong hold over all of Sumer. The entire region was weakened by the struggle and individual city-states continued more or less independent rule. The rulers of Lagash declared themselves "Kings of Kish" around 2450 BCE, but failed to seriously control the region, facing several military challenges by the nearby Umma. Lugalzagesi, *ensi* or priest-king of Umma from around 2360-2335 BCE, razed Lagash, and conquered Sumer, declaring himself "king of Erech and the Land". Unfortunately for him, all of this strife made Sumer ripe for conquest by an outsider and Sargon of Agade seized that opportunity.

**Sargon** united both Sumer and the northern region of Akkad - from which Babylon would arise about four hundred years later - not very far from Kish. Evidence is sketchy, but he may have extended his realm from the Mediterranean Sea to the Indus River. This unity would survive its founder by less than 40 years. He built the city of Agade and established an enormous court there and he had a new temple erected in Nippur. Trade from across his new empire and beyond swelled the city, making it the center of world culture for a brief time.

After Sargon's death, however, the empire was fraught with rebellion. Naram-Sin, Sargon's grandson and third successor, quelled the rebellions through a series of military successes, extending his realm. He declared himself 'King of the Four corners of the World' and had himself deified. His divine powers must have failed him as the Guti, a mountain people, razed Agade and deposed Naram-Sin, ending that dynasty.

After a few decades, the Guti presence became intolerable for the Sumerian leaders. Utuhegal of Uruk/Erech rallied a coalition army and ousted them. One of his lieutenants, Ur-Nammu, usurped his rule and established the **third Ur dynasty** around 2112 BCE. He consolidated his control by defeating a rival dynast in Lagash and soon gained control of all of the Sumerian city-states. He established the earliest known recorded law-codes and had constructed the great ziggurat of Ur, a kind of step-pyramid

which stood over 60' tall and more than 200' wide. For the next century the Sumerians were extremely prosperous, but their society collapsed around 2000 BCE under the invading Amorites. A couple of city-states maintained their independence for a short while, but soon they and the rest of the Sumerians were absorbed into the rising empire of the Babylonians. (Crawford pp. 1-28; Kramer 1963 pp. 40-72)

## Culture

Seated along the Euphrates River, Sumer had a thriving agriculture and trade industry. Herds of sheep and goats and farms of grains and vegetables were held both by the temples and private citizens. Ships plied up and down the river and throughout the Persian gulf, carrying pottery and various processed goods and bringing back fruits and various raw materials from across the region, including cedars from the Levant.

Sumer was one of the first literate civilizations leaving many records of business transactions, and lessons from schools. They had strong armies, which with their chariots and phalanxes held sway over their less civilized neighbors (Kramer 1963, p. 74). Perhaps the most lasting cultural remnants of the Sumerians though, can be found in their religion.

## Religion

The religion of the ancient Sumerians has left its mark on the entire middle east. Not only are its temples and ziggurats scattered about the region, but the literature, cosmogony and rituals influenced their neighbors to such an extent that we can see echoes of Sumer in the Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition today. From these ancient temples, and to a greater extent, through cuneiform writings of hymns, myths, lamentations, and incantations, archaeologists and mythographers afford the modern reader a glimpse into the religious world of the Sumerians.

Each city housed a temple that was the seat of a major god in the Sumerian pantheon, as the gods controlled the powerful forces which often dictated a human's fate. The city leaders had a duty to please the town's patron deity, not only for the good will of that god or goddess, but also for the good will of the other deities in the council of gods. The priesthood initially held this role, and even after secular kings ascended to power, the clergy still held great authority through the interpretation of omens and dreams. Many of the secular kings claimed divine right; Sargon of Agade, for example claimed to have been chosen by [Ishtar/Inanna](#). ([Crawford](#) 1991: 21-24)

The rectangular central shrine of the temple, known as a 'cella,' had a brick altar or offering table in front of a statue of the temple's deity. The cella was lined on its long ends by many rooms for priests and priestesses. These mud-brick buildings were decorated with cone geometrical mosaics, and the occasional fresco with human and animal figures. These temple complexes eventually evolved into towering ziggurats. ([Wolkstein & Kramer](#) 1983: 119)

The temple was staffed by priests, priestesses, musicians, singers, castrates and hierodules. Various public rituals, food sacrifices, and libations took place there on a daily basis. There were monthly feasts and annual, New Year celebrations. During the later, the king would be married to Inanna as the resurrected fertility god Dumuzi, whose exploits are dealt with below.

When it came to more private matters, a Sumerian remained devout. Although the gods preferred justice and mercy, they had also created evil and misfortune. A Sumerian had little that he could do about it. Judging from Lamentation records, the best one could do in times of duress would be to "plead, lament and wail, tearfully confessing his sins and failings." Their family god or city god might intervene on their behalf, but that would not necessarily happen. After all, man was created as a broken, labor saving, tool for the use of the gods and at the end of everyone's life, lay the underworld, a generally dreary place. ([Wolkstein & Kramer](#) 1983: pp.123-124)

## II. What do we know about Sumerian Cosmology?

From verses scattered throughout hymns and myths, one can compile a picture of the universe's (anki) creation according to the Sumerians. The primeval sea (abzu) existed before anything else and within that, the heaven (an) and the earth (ki) were formed. The boundary between heaven and earth was a solid (perhaps tin) vault, and the earth was a flat disk. Within the vault lay the gas-like 'lil', or atmosphere, the brighter portions therein formed the stars, planets, sun, and moon. ([Kramer](#), *The Sumerians* 1963: pp. 112-113) Each of the four major Sumerian deities is associated with one of these regions. [An](#), god of heaven, may have been the main god of the pantheon prior to 2500 BC., although his importance gradually waned. (Kramer 1963 p. 118) Ki is likely to be the original name of the earth goddess, whose name more often appears as [Ninhursag](#) (queen of the mountains), Ninmah (the exalted lady), or Nintu (the lady who gave birth). It seems likely that these two were the progenitors of most of the gods.

According to "Gilgamesh, Enkidu, and the Netherworld", in the first days all needed things were created. Heaven and earth were separated. An took Heaven, Enlil took the earth, Ereshkigal was carried off to the netherworld as a prize, and Enki sailed off after her.

## III. What Deities did they worship?

Nammu

Nammu is the Goddess of the watery abyss, the primeval sea. She may be the earliest of deities within Sumerian cosmology as she gave birth to heaven and earth. (Kramer 1961 p. 39) She is elsewhere described both as the mother of all the gods and as the wife of [An](#). (Kramer 1961 p. 114) She is [Enki](#)'s mother. She prompts him to create servants for the gods and is then directed by him on how, with the help of Ninmah/[Ninhursag](#) to create man. (Kramer 1963 p. 150; Kramer 1961 p. 70)

### A. The Primary Deities

It is notable that the Sumerians themselves may not have grouped these four as a set and that the grouping has been made because of the observations of Sumerologists.

An

An, god of heaven, may have been the main god of the pantheon prior to 2500 BC., although his importance gradually waned. (Kramer 1963 p. 118) In the early days he carried off heaven, while [Enlil](#) carried away the earth. (Kramer 1961 p. 37-39) It seems likely that he and Ki/[Ninhursag](#) were the progenitors of most of the gods. although in one place [Nammu](#) is listed as his wife. (Kramer 1961 p. 114) Among his children and followers were the Anunnaki. (Kramer 1961 p. 53) His primary temple was in Erech. He and Enlil give various gods, goddesses, and kings their earthly regions of influence and their laws. (Kramer 1963 p. 124) Enki seats him at the first seat of the table in Nippur at the feast celebrating his new house in Eridu. (Kramer 1961 p. 63) He hears [Inanna's](#) complaint about Mount Ebih (Kur?), but discourages her from attacking it because of its fearsome power. (Kramer 1961 pp. 82-83) After the flood, he and Enlil make [Ziusudra](#) immortal and make him live in Dilmun. (Kramer 1961 p. 98) (See also [Anu](#).)

Ninhursag (Ki, Ninmah, Nintu)

Ki is likely to be the original name of the earth goddess, whose name more often appears as Ninhursag (queen of the mountains), Ninmah (the exalted lady), or Nintu (the lady who gave birth). (Kramer 1963 p. 122) Most often she is considered Enlil's sister, but in some traditions she is his spouse instead. (Jacobsen p.105) She was born, possibly as a unified cosmic mountain with [An](#), from [Nammu](#) and shortly thereafter, their union produced [Enlil](#). (Kramer 1961 p. 74) In the early days, as Ki, she was separated from heaven (An) and carried off by Enlil. (Kramer 1961 pp. 37-41) It seems likely that she and An were the progenitors of most of the gods. She later

unites with Enlil and with the assistance of Enki they produce the world's plant and animal life. (Kramer 1961 p. 75)

#### "Enki and Ninhursag"

In Dilmun, she (as Nintu) bears the goddess Ninsar from Enki, who in turn bears the goddess Ninkur, who in turn bears Uttu, goddess of plants. Uttu bore eight new trees from Enki. When he then ate Uttu's children, Ninhursag cursed him with eight wounds and disappears. After being persuaded by Enlil to undo her curse, she bore Enki eight new children which undid the wounds of the first ones. (Kramer 1963 pp. 147-149; Kramer 1961 pp. 54-59)

Enki seats her (as Nintu) on the big side of the table in Nippur at the feast celebrating his new house in Eridu. (Kramer 1961 p. 63)

#### "Enki and Ninmah"

She is the mother goddess and, as Ninmah, assists in the creation of man. Enki, having been propted by Nammu to create servants for the gods, describes how Nammu and Ninmah will help fashion man from clay. Prior to getting to work, she and Enki drink overmuch at a feast. She then shapes six flawed versions of man from the heart of the clay over the Abzu, with Enki declaring their fates. Enki, in turn also creates a flawed man which is unable to eat. Ninmah appears to curse him for the failed effort. (Kramer 1963 pp. 149-151; Kramer 1961 pp. 69-72)  
(See also [Aruru](#))

### Enlil

[An](#) and [Ki](#)'s union produced Enlil (Lord of 'lil'). Enlil was the air-god and leader of the pantheon from at least 2500 BC, when his temple Ekur in Nippur was the spiritual center of Sumer (Kramer 1961 p. 47). In the early days he separated and carried off the earth (Ki) while An carried off heaven. (Kramer 1961 p. 37-41) He assumed most of An's powers. He is glorified as "'the father of the gods, 'the king of heaven and earth,' ' the king of all the lands'". Kramer portrays him as a patriarchal figure, who is both creator and disciplinarian. Enlil causes the dawn, the growth of plants, and bounty (Kramer 1961 p. 42). He also invents agricultural tools such as the plow or pickaxe (Kramer 1961 pp 47-49). Without his blessings, a city would not rise (Kramer 1961 pp. 63, 80) Most often he is considered Ninlil's husband, with Ninhursag as his sister, but some traditions have Ninhursag as his spouse. (Jacobsen p.105) "Enlil and Ninlil" He is also banished to the nether world (kur) for his rape of [Ninlil](#), his intended bride, but returns with the first product of their union, the moon god Sin (also known as [Nanna](#)). (Kramer, Sumerians 1963: pp.145-147). Ninlil follows him into exile as his wife. He tells the various underworld guardians to not reveal his whereabouts and instead poses as those guardians himself three times, each time impregnating her again it appears that at least on one occasion Enlil reveals his true self before they unite. The products of these unions are three underworld deities, including Meslamtaea (aka. [Nergal](#)) and Ninazu. Later, when Nanna visits him in Nippur, he bestows Ur to him with a palace and plentiful plantlife. (Kramer 1961 p. 43-49) Enlil is also seen as the father of [Ninurta](#) (Kramer 1961 p. 80).

#### "Enki and Eridu"

When Enki journeys to Enlil's city Nippur in order for his own city, Eridu to be blessed. He is given bread at Enki's feast and is seated next to An, after which Enlil proclaims that the Anunnaki should praise Enki. (Kramer 1961 pp. 62-63)

#### "The Dispute between Cattle and Grain"

Enlil and Enki, at Enki's urging, create farms and fields for the grain goddess [Ashnan](#) and the cattle goddess [Lahar](#). This area has places for Lahar to take care of the animals and Ashnan to grow the crops. The two agricultural deities get drunk and begin fighting, so it falls to Enlil and

Enki to resolve their conflict - how they do so has not been recovered. (Kramer 1961 pp. 53-54; Kramer 1963 pp. 220-223)

"The Dispute between Emesh and Enten"

Enlil creates the herdsman deity Enten and the agricultural deity Emesh. He settles a dispute between Emesh and Enten over who should be recognized as 'farmer of the gods', declaring Enten's claim to be stronger. (Kramer 1961 p. 49-51).

"Enki and Ninhursag"

He helps Enki again when he was cursed by [Ninhursag](#). Enlil and a fox entreat her to return and undo her curse. (Kramer 1961 p. 57)

"Enki and the World Order"

The *me* were assembled by Enlil in his temple Ekur, and given to Enki to guard and impart to the world, beginning with Eridu, Enki's center of worship. (Kramer 1963 pp. 171-183)

"Inanna's Descent to the Nether World"

Enlil refuses Ninshubur's appeal on behalf of his [grand-]daughter, [Inanna](#) to help rescue her from Ereshkigal in the underworld. (Kramer 1961 pp. 86, 87, 89, 93)

"Ziusudra"

After the flood, he and An gave Ziusudra eternal life and had him live in Dilmun. (Kramer 1961 p. 98)

"Gilgamesh, Enkidu and the Netherworld"

When [Gilgamesh](#) loses his *pukku* and *mikku* in the nether world, and [Enkidu](#) is held fast there by demons, he appeals to Enlil for help. Enlil refuses to assist him. (Kramer 1961 p. 35-36)  
(See also the Babylonian [Ellil](#))

## Enki

Enki is the son of [Nammu](#), the primeval sea. Contrary to the translation of his name, Enki is not the lord of the earth, but of the abzu (the watery abyss and also semen) and of wisdom. This contradiction leads Kramer and Maier to postulate that he was once known as En-kur, lord of the underworld, which either contained or was contained in the Abzu. He did struggle with Kur as mentioned in the prelude to "Gilgamesh, Enkidu, and the Underworld", and presumably was victorious and thereby able to claim the title "Lord of Kur" (the realm). He is a god of water, creation, and fertility. He also holds dominion over the land. He is the keeper of the *me*, the divine laws. (Kramer & Maier Myths of Enki 1989: pp. 2-3) "Gilgamesh, Enkidu, and the Underworld"

Enki sails for the Kur, presumably to rescue [Ereshkigal](#) after she was given over to Kur. He is assailed by creatures with stones. These creatures may have been an extension of Kur itself. (Wolkstein and Kramer p. 4; Kramer 1961 p. 37-38, 78-79)

"Enki and Eridu" Enki raises his city Eridu from the sea, making it very lush. He takes his boat to Nippur to have the city blessed by Enlil. He throws a feast for the gods, giving Enlil, An, and Nintu special attention. After the feast, Enlil proclaims that the Anunnaki should praise Enki. (Kramer 1961; pp. 62-63)

"Enki and the World Order"

The *me* were assembled by [Enlil](#) in Ekur and given to Enki to guard and impart to the world, beginning with Eridu, his center of worship. From there, he guards the *me* and imparts them on

the people. He directs the *me* towards Ur and Meluhha and Dilmun, organizing the world with his decrees. (Kramer 1963 pp. 171-183)

#### "The Dispute between Cattle and Grain"

Enlil and Enki, at Enki's urging, create farms and fields for the grain goddess [Ashnan](#) and the cattle goddess [Lahar](#). This area has places for Lahar to take care of the animals and Ashnan to grow the crops. The two agricultural deities get drunk and begin fighting, so it falls to Enlil and Enki to resolve their conflict - how they do so has not been recovered. (Kramer 1961 pp. 53-54; Kramer 1963 pp. 220-223)

#### "Enki and Ninhursag"

He blessed the paradisaical land of Dilmun, to have plentiful water and palm trees. He sires the goddess Ninsar upon [Ninhursag](#), then sires Ninkur upon Ninsar, finally siring Uttu, goddess of plants, upon Ninkur. Uttu bore eight new types of trees from Enki. He then consumed these tree-children and was cursed by Ninhursag, with one wound for each plant consumed. [Enlil](#) and a fox act on Enki's behalf to call back Ninhursag in order to undo the damage. She joins with Enki again and bears eight new children, one to cure each of the wounds. (Kramer 1963 pp. 147-149; Kramer 1961 pp. 54-59)

#### "Enki and Ninmah: The Creation of Man"

The gods complain that they need assistance. At his mother Nammu's prompting, he directs her, along with some constructive criticism from Ninmah (Ninhursag), in the creation of man from the heart of the clay over the Abzu. Several flawed versions were created before the final version was made. (Kramer 1963 pp. 149-151; Kramer 1961 pp. 69-72)

#### "Inanna's Descent to the Nether World"

He is friendly to [Inanna](#) and rescued her from Kur by sending two sexless beings to negotiate with, and flatter Ereshkigal. They gave her the Food of Life and the Water of Life, which restored her. (Wolkstein and Kramer pp. 62-64)

#### "Inanna and Enki"

Later, [Inanna](#) comes to Enki and complains at having been given too little power from his decrees. In a different text, she gets Enki drunk and he grants her more powers, arts, crafts, and attributes - a total of ninety-four *me*. Inanna parts company with Enki to deliver the *me* to her cult center at Erech. Enki recovers his wits and tries to recover the *me* from her, but she arrives safely in Erech with them. (Kramer & Maier 1989: pp. 38-68)

(See also [Ea](#))

### III B. The Seven Who Decreed Fate

In addition to the four primary deities, there were hundreds of others. A group of seven "decreed the fates" - these probably included the [first four](#), as well as [Nanna](#), his son [Utu](#), the sun god and a god of justice, and Nanna's daughter Inanna, goddess of love and war.

Nanna (Sin, (Suen), Ashgirbabbar)

Nanna is another name for the moon god [Sin](#). He is the product of [Enlil](#)'s rape of [Ninlil](#). (Kramer, 1963, pp. 146-7.) He travels across the sky in his gufa, (a small, canoe-like boat made of woven twigs and tar), with the stars and planets about him. (Kramer 1961 p. 41) Nanna was the tutelary deity of Ur (Kramer 1963 p. 66), appointed as king of that city by [An](#) and Enlil. (Kramer 1963 pp. 83-84) He journeyed to Nippur by boat, stopping at five cities along the way. When he arrived at Nippur, he proffered gifts to Enlil and pleaded with him to ensure that his city of Ur would be blessed, prosperous, and thus, not be flooded. (Kramer 1963 pp. 145-146, Kramer 1961

pp. 47-49) Nanna was married to Ningal and they produced [Inanna](#) and [Utu](#). (Wolkstein and Kramer pp. 30-34; Kramer 1961 p. 41) He rests in the Underworld every month, and there decrees the fate of the dead. (Kramer 1963 p. 132, 135, 210) He refuses to send aid to Inanna when she is trapped in the underworld. (Kramer 1963 pp. 153-154) He established Ur-Nammu as his mortal representative, establishing the third Ur dynasty. (Kramer 1963 p. 84)

Utu

Utu is the son of [Nanna](#) and [Ningal](#) and the god of the Sun and of Justice. He goes to the underworld at the end of every day setting in the "mountain of the west" and rising in the "mountain of the east". While there decrees the fate of the dead, although he also may lie down to sleep at night. (Kramer 1963 p. 132, 135; Kramer 1961 pp. 41-42) He is usually depicted with fiery rays coming out of his shoulders and upper arms, and carrying a saw knife. (Kramer 1961 p. 40) When [Inanna's](#) *huluppu* tree is infested with unwelcome guests, he ignores her appeal for aid. (Wolkstein and Kramer pp. 6-7) He tries to set her up with Dumuzi, the shepherd, but she initially rebuffs him, preferring the farmer. (Wolkstein and Kramer pp. 30-33) He aided [Dumuzi](#) in his flight from the galla demons by helping him to transform into different creatures. (Wolkstein and Kramer pp. 72-73, 81) Through Enki's orders, he also brings water up from the earth in order to irrigate Dilmun, the garden paradise, the place where the sun rises. (Kramer 1963 p. 148) He is in charge of the "Land of the Living" and, in sympathy for Gilgamesh, calls off the seven weather heroes who defend that land. (Kramer 1963 pp. 190-193) He opened the "ablat" of the Underworld for the shade of [Enkidu](#), to allow him to escape, at the behest of [Enki](#). (Kramer 1963 p. 133; Kramer 1961 p. 36)

(See also [Shamash](#))

Inanna

[Nanna](#) and [Ningal's](#) daughter Inanna, goddess of love and war. "Gilgamesh, Enkidu, and the Underworld"

A woman planted the huluppu tree in Inanna's garden, but the Imdugud-bird (Anzu bird?) made a nest for its young there, Lilith (or her predecessor, a lilitu-demon) made a house in its trunk, and a serpent made a home in its roots. Inanna appeals to [Utu](#) about her unwelcome guests, but he is unsympathetic. She appeals to Gilgamesh, here her brother, and he is receptive. He tears down the tree and makes it into a throne and bed for her. In return for the favor, Inanna manufactures a *pukku* and *mikku* for him. (Wolkstein and Kramer pp. 5-9)

"Gilgamesh and the Bull of Heaven"

Later, Inanna seeks out Gilgamesh as her lover. When he spurns her she sends the [Bull of Heaven](#) to terrorize his city of Erech. (Kramer 1963 p. 262)

"The Courtship of Inanna and Dumuzi"

Her older brother Utu tries to set her up with Dumuzi, the shepherd, but she initially rebuffs him, preferring the farmer. He assures her that his parents are as good as hers and she begins to desire him. Her mother, Ningal, further assures her. The two consummate their relationship and with their exercise in fertility, the plants and grains grow as well. After they spend time in the marriage bed, Inanna declares herself as his battle leader and sets his duties as including sitting on the throne and guiding the path of weapons. At Ninshubur's request, she gives him power over the fertility of plants and animals. (Wolkstein and Kramer pp. 30-50)

"Inanna's Descent to the Nether World"

Inanna also visits Kur, which results in a myth reminiscent of the Greek seasonal story of Persephone. She sets out to witness the funeral rites of her sister-in-law [Ereshkigal's](#) husband Gugalanna, the Bull of Heaven. She takes precaution before setting out, by telling her servant Ninshubur to seek assistance from [Enlil](#), [Nanna](#), or [Enki](#) at their shrines, should she not return. Inanna knocks on the outer gates of Kur and the gatekeeper, Neti, questions her. He consults with queen Ereshkigal and then allows Inanna to pass through the seven gates of the underworld.



After each gate, she is required to remove adornments and articles of clothing, until after the seventh gate, she is naked. The Annuna pass judgment against her and Ereshkigal killed her and hung her on the wall. (see [Ereshkigal](#)) ([Wolkstein & Kramer](#) 1983 pp. 52-60)

Inanna is rescued by the intervention of [Enki](#). He creates two sexless creatures that empathize with Ereshkigal's suffering, and thereby gain a gift - Inanna's corpse. They restore her to life with the Bread of Life and the Water of Life, but the Sumerian underworld has a conservation of death law. No one can leave without providing someone to stay in their stead. Inanna is escorted by galla/demons past Ninshubur and members of her family. She doesn't allow them to claim anyone until she sees [Dumuzi](#) on his throne in Uruk. They then seize Dumuzi, but he escapes them twice by transforming himself, with the aid of [Utu](#). Eventually he is caught and slain. Inanna spies his sister, [Geshtinanna](#), in mourning and they go to Dumuzi. She allows Dumuzi, the shepherd, to stay in the underworld only six months of the year, while Geshtinanna will stay the other six. ([Wolkstein & Kramer](#) pp. 60-89) As with the Greek story of the kidnapping of Persephone, this linked the changing seasons, the emergence of the plants from the ground, with the return of a harvest deity from the nether world. Geshtinanna is also associated with growth, but where her brother rules over the spring harvested grain, she rules over the autumn harvested vines ([Wolkstein & Kramer](#) p. 168).

"Inanna and Mount Ebih"

Inanna complains to [An](#) about Mount Ebih ([Kur?](#)) demanding that it glorify her and submit lest she attack it. An discourages her from doing so because of its fearsome power. She does so anyway, bringing a storehouse worth of weapons to bear on it. She destroys it. Because she is known as the Destroyer of Kur in certain hymns, Kramer identifies Mt. Ebih with Kur. ([Kramer](#) 1961 pp. 82-83)

"Inanna and Enki"

The [me](#) were universal decrees of divine authority -the invocations that spread arts, crafts, and civilization. [Enki](#) became the keeper of the [me](#). Inanna comes to Enki and complains at having been given too little power from his decrees. In a different text, she gets Enki drunk and he grants her more powers, arts, crafts, and attributes - a total of ninety-four [me](#). Inanna parts company with Enki to deliver the [me](#) to her cult center at Erech. Enki recovers his wits and tries to recover the [me](#) from her, but she arrives safely in Erech with them. ([Kramer & Maier](#) 1989: pp. 38-68)

(See also [Ishtar](#))

### III. C. The Annuna (Anunnaki) and others

At the next level were fifty "great gods", possibly the same as the Annuna, although several gods confined to the underworld are specifically designated Annuna, An's children. The Annuna are also said to live in Dulkug or Du-ku, the "holy mound". ([Kramer](#) 1963: pp. 122-123, Black and Green p. 72, [Kramer](#) 1961, p. 73). In the "Descent of Inanna to the Nether World" the Anunnaki are identified as the seven judges of the nether world. ([Kramer](#) 1963 p. 154; [Kramer](#) 1961 p. 119)

Ereshkigal

Ereshkigal is the queen of the underworld, who is either given to [Kur](#) in the underworld or given dominion over the underworld in the prelude to "Gilgamesh, Enkidu, and the Underworld". ([Wolkstein and Kramer](#) p. 157-158; [Kramer](#) 1961 p. 37-38) She has a palace there with seven gates and is due a visit by those entering Kur. ([Kramer](#) 1963 pp. 131, 134) She was married to [Gugalanna](#), the Bull of Heaven, and is [Inanna](#)'s older sister. When Inanna trespassed on her domain, Ereshkigal first directs her gatekeeper to open the seven gates a crack and remove her garments. ([Wolkstein and Kramer](#) pp. 55-57) Then when Inanna arrives she:

...fastened on Inanna the eye of death.  
She spoke against her the word of wrath.  
She uttered against her the cry of guilt

She struck her.

Inanna was turned into a corpse,  
...And was hung from a hook on the wall.( [Wolkstein & Kramer](#) 1983 p. 60)

Later, when [Enki](#)'s messengers arrive, she is moaning in pain. When they empathize with her, she grants them a boon. They request Inanna's corpse and she accedes. ([Wolkstein & Kramer](#) pp. 64-67) (See also [Babylonian Ereshkigal](#))

Nergal (Meslamtaea) -

Nergal is the second son of [Enlil](#) and [Ninlil](#). ([Kramer](#) 1961 pp. 44-45) He is perhaps the co-ruler of Kur with Ereshkigal where he has a palace and is due reverence by those who visit. He holds [Enkidu](#) fast in the underworld after Enkidu broke several taboos while trying to recover [Gilgamesh](#)'s *pukku* and *mikku*. He is more prominent in Babylonian literature and makes a brief appearance in II Kings 17:30. (See [Babylonian Nergal](#))

Ninlil

Ninlil was the intended bride of [Enlil](#) and the daughter of Nunbarshegunu, the old woman of Nippur. Enlil raped her and was then banished to the nether world (kur). She follows him to the nether world, where she gives birth to the moon god Sin (also known as [Nanna](#)). They have three more children in the nether world including Meslamtaea/([Nergal](#)) and Ninazu who remain there so that Sin may be allowed to leave. ([Kramer](#), Sumerians 1963: pp.146-7; [Kramer](#) 1961 pp. 43-46). In some texts she is Enlil's sister while Ninhursag is his bride. ([Jacobsen](#) p.105) Her chief shrine was in the Tummal district of Nippur. (See also [Babylonian Ninlil](#))

Ningal

She is [Nanna](#)'s wife and the mother of [Inanna](#) and [Utu](#). She begs and weeps before [Enlil](#) for them not to flood her city, Ur. (see also [Babylonian Ningal](#) and [Nikkal](#) of the Canaanites.)

Nanshe

Nanshe is a goddess of the city of Lagash who takes care of orphans and widows. She also seeks out justice for the poor and casts judgement on New Year's Day. She is supported by [Nidaba](#) and her husband, Haia. ([Kramer](#) 1963 pp. 124-125)

Nidaba

The goddess of writing and the patron deity of the *edubba* (palace archives). She is an assistant to [Nanshe](#). ([Kramer](#) 1963 pp. 124-125)

Ninisinna (Nininsinna)

The patron goddess of the city Isin. She is the "hierodule of An"

Ninkasi ("The Lady who fills the mouth")

She is the goddess of [brewing or alcohol](#), born of "sparkling-fresh water". ([Kramer](#) 1963 pp. 111, 206) She is one of the eight healing children born by [Ninhursag](#) for [Enki](#) She is born in response to Enki's mouth pain and Ninhursag declares that she should be the goddess who "sates the heart" ([Kramer](#) 1961 p. 58) or "who satisfies desire". ([Kramer and Maier](#) p. 30)

Ninurta

Ninurta is Enlil's son and a warrior deity, the god of the south wind. ([Kramer](#) 1963 p. 145; [Kramer](#) 1961 p. 80) In "The Feats and Exploits of Ninurta", that deity sets out to destroy the [Kur](#). Kur initially intimidates Ninurta into retreating, but when Ninurta returns with greater resolve, Kur is destroyed. This looses the waters of the Abzu, causing the fields to be flooded with unclean waters. Ninurta dams up the Abzu by piling stones over Kur's corpse. He then drains these waters into the Tigris. ([Kramer](#) 1961 pp. 80-82). The identification of Ninurta's antagonist

in this passage as Kur appears to be miscast. Black and Green identify his foe as the demon Asag, who was the spawn of An and Ki, and who produced monstrous offspring with Kur. The remainder of the details of this story are the same as in Kramer's account, but with Asag replacing Kur. In other versions, Ninurta is replaced by [Adad/Ishkur](#). (Black & Green pp. 35-36) (See also [the Babylonian Ninurta](#))

#### Ashnan

The kindly maid. Ashnan is a grain goddess, initially living in Dulkug (Du-ku). (Kramer 1961 p. 50) [Enlil](#) and [Enki](#), at Enki's urging, create farms and fields for her and for the cattle god [Lahar](#). This area has places for Lahar to take care of the animals and Ashnan to grow the crops. The two agricultural deities get drunk and begin fighting, so it falls to Enlil and Enki to resolve their conflict - how they do so has not been recovered. (Kramer 1961 pp. 53-54)

#### Lahar

Lahar is the cattle-goddess, initially living in Duku (Dulkug). [Enlil](#) and [Enki](#), at Enki's urging, create farms and fields for him and the grain goddess [Ashnan](#). This area has places for Lahar to take care of the animals and Ashnan to grow the crops. The two agricultural deities get drunk and begin fighting, so it falls to Enlil and Enki to resolve their conflict - how they do so has not been recovered. (Kramer 1961 pp. 53-54; Kramer 1963 pp. 220-223)

#### Emesh

Created by [Enlil](#) this god is responsible for agriculture. He quarrels with his brother Enten, and makes a claim to be the 'farmer of the gods', bringing his claim to Enlil after Enten. When Enlil judges Enten's claim to be stronger, Emesh relents, brings him gifts, and reconciles. (Kramer 1961 pp. 49-51)

#### Enten

He is a farmer god, and is [Enlil](#)'s field worker and herdsman. He quarrels with his brother Emesh and makes an appeal to Enlil that he deserves to be 'farmer of the gods'. Enlil judges Enten's claim to be the stronger and the two reconcile with Emesh bringing Enten gifts. (Kramer 1961 pp. 42, 49-51)

#### Uttu

She is the goddess of weaving and clothing (Kramer 1963 p. 174; Black and Green p. 182) and was previously thought to be the goddess of plants. She is both the child of Enki and Ninkur, and she bears eight new child/trees from Enki. When he then ate Uttu's children, Ninhursag cursed him with eight wounds and disappears. (Kramer 1961 pp. 57-59)

#### Enbilulu

The "knower" of rivers. He is the god appointed in charge of the Tigris and Euphrates by [Enki](#). (Kramer 1961 p. 61)

#### Ishkur

God appointed to be in charge of the winds by [Enki](#). He is in charge of "the silver lock of the 'heart' of heaven". (Kramer 1961 p. 61) He is identified with the Akkadian god, [Adad](#). (Black and Green pp. 35-36)

#### Enkimdu

God placed in charge of canals and ditches by [Enki](#). (Kramer 1961 p. 61)

#### Kabta

God placed in charge of the pickax and brickmold by [Enki](#). (Kramer 1961 p. 61)

#### Mushdamma

God placed in charge of foundations and houses by [Enki](#). (Kramer 1961 p. 61)

#### Sumugan

The god of the plain or "king of the mountain", he is the god placed in charge of the plant and animal life on the plain of Sumer by [Enki](#). (Kramer 1961 pp. 61-62; Kramer 1963 p. 220)

### III. D. Demigods, mortal Heroes, and Monsters

Dumuzi (demigod) (Tammuz)

A shepherd, he is the son of [Enki](#) and Sirtur. (Wolkstein & Kramer p. 34) He is given charge of stables and sheepfolds, filled with milk and fat by [Enki](#). (Kramer 1961 p. 62) He has a palace in Kur, and is due a visit by those entering Kur. He is [Inanna](#)'s husband. In life, he was the shepherd king of Uruk.

"The Courtship of Inanna and Dumuzi"

[Utu](#) tries to set Inanna up with him but she initially rebuffs him, preferring the farmer. He assures her that his parents are as good as hers and she begins to desire him. The two consummate their relationship and with their exercise in fertility, the plants and grains grow as well. After they spend time in the marriage bed, Inanna declares herself as his battle leader and sets his duties as including sitting on the throne and guiding the path of weapons. At Ninshubur's request, she gives him power over the fertility of plants and animals. (Wolkstein and Kramer pp. 30-50)

"Descent of Inanna to the Nether World"

Upon her rescue from the dead, he was pursued by galla demons, which he eluded for a time with the aid of [Utu](#). Eventually he was caught and slain; however, he was partially freed from his stay in the underworld by the actions of his sister [Geshtinanna](#). Now he resides there only half of the year, while she lives there the other half year; this represents seasonal change (see [Inanna](#) and [Geshtinanna](#)). (Wolkstein and Kramer pp. 71-89)  
(See also the Babylonian [Tammuz](#).)

Geshtinanna (demigoddess)

She is Dumuzi's sister. After his death, she visited him in the underworld with Inanna, and was allowed to take his place there for six months out of the year. Her time in the underworld and her periodic emergence from it are linked with her new divine authority over the autumn vines and wine. (see also [Inanna](#), [Dumuzi](#))

Ziusudra (Ziusura)

In the Sumerian version of the flood story, the pious Ziusudra of Shuruppak (Kramer 1963 p. 26), the son of Ubartutu (or of Shuruppak?) (Kramer 1963 p. 224) is informed of the gods decision to destroy mankind by listening to a wall. He weathers the deluge and wind-storms aboard a huge boat. The only surviving detail of the boat is that it had a window. The flood lasts for seven days before [Utu](#) appears dispersing the flood waters. After that, Ziusudra makes appropriate sacrifices and prostrations to Utu, [An](#) and [Enlil](#). He is given eternal life in Dilmun by An and Enlil. (Kramer 1963 pp. 163-164; Kramer 1961 pp. 97-98)

Jacobsen reports a more complete version of "The Eridu Genesis" than Kramer or Black and Green which is close to the Babylonian story of [Atrahasis](#). In this account, man had been directed to live in cities by [Nintur](#) but as they thrived, the noise irritated Enlil, who thus started the flood. In this account, [Enki](#) warns Ziusudra, instructing him to build the boat for his family and for representatives of the animals. The remainder is consistent with the accounts of Kramer and Black and Green. (Jacobsen p. 114)

Gilgamesh (demigod)

The son, either of a nomad or of the hero-king Lugalbanda and of the goddess Ninsun, Gilgamesh, may have been a historical King of Erech, during the time of the first Ur dynasty. His kingship is mentioned in various places, including the Sumerian King list and he was also an *en*, a spiritual head of a temple. He was also the lord of Kulab and by one account, the brother of [Inanna](#). He was "the prince beloved of An", (Kramer p. 260, 188) and "who performs heroic deeds for Inanna" (Kramer 1963 p. 187)

"Gilgamesh and Agga" - (Pritchard pp.44-47; Kramer 1963 pp. 187-190)

King Agga of Kish sent an ultimatum to Erech. Gilgamesh tried to convince the elders that Erech

should sack Kish in response, but the elders wanted to submit. He responded by taking the matter to the men of the city, who agreed to take up arms. Agga laid siege to Erech and Gilgamesh resisted with the help of his servant, [Enkidu](#). He sent a soldier through the gate to Agga. The soldier is captured and tortured with a brief respite while another of Gilgamesh's soldiers climbs over the wall. Gilgamesh himself then climbs the wall and Agga's forces are so taken aback by the sight of them that Agga capitulates. Gilgamesh graciously accepts Agga's surrender, praising him for returning his city.

After this episode, he apparently took Nippur from the son of the founder of the Ur I dynasty.

"Gilgamesh and the Land of the Living" (Pritchard pp. 47-50, Kramer 1963 pp. 190-197)  
Gilgamesh, saddened by the dying he sees in his city, decides to go to the "Land of the Living" says so to Enkidu. At Enkidu's urging, Gilgamesh makes a sacrifice and first speaks to [Utu](#), who is in charge of that land. After he informs Utu of his motives, the god calls off his seven guardian weather heroes. Gilgamesh recruits fifty single men to accompany them and commissions swords and axes. They travel over seven mountains, felling trees along the way eventually finding the "cedar of his heart". After some broken text Gilgamesh is in a deep sleep, presumably after an encounter with [Huwawa](#). Enkidu or one of the others wakes him. They come upon Huwawa and Gilgamesh distracts him with flattery, then puts a nose ring on him and binds his arms. Huwawa grovels to Gilgamesh and Enkidu and Gilgamesh almost releases him. Enkidu argues against it and when Huwawa protests, he decapitates Huwawa. Gilgamesh is angered by Enkidu's rash action.

"Gilgamesh, Enkidu and the Netherworld" (Kramer 1963 p.197-205)

Inanna appeals to Gilgamesh, here her brother, when her *huluppu* tree has been occupied and he is receptive. He tears down the tree and makes it into a throne and bed for her. In return for the favor, Inanna manufactures a *pukku* and *mikku* for him.

He leaves them out, goes to sleep and can't find them where he left them when he awakens. They had fallen into the underworld. Enkidu asks him what is wrong and Gilgamesh asks him to retrieve them, giving him instructions on how to behave in the underworld. Enkidu enters the "Great Dwelling" through a gate, but he broke several of the underworld taboos of which Gilgamesh warned, including the wearing of clean clothes and sandals, 'good' oil, carrying a weapon or staff, making a noise, or behaving normally towards ones family (Kramer 1963: pp. 132-133). For these violations he was "held fast by 'the outcry of the nether world'". Gilgamesh appeals to Enlil, who refuses to help. Intervention by [Enki](#), rescued the hero - or at least raised his shade for Gilgamesh to speak with.

"Gilgamesh and the Bull of Heaven"

He rejects Inanna's advances, so she sends the "[Bull of Heaven](#)" to ravage Erech in retribution. (Kramer 1963 p. 262)

"Death of Gilgamesh" (Pritchard pp. 50-52, Kramer 1963 pp. 130-131)

Gilgamesh is fated by Enlil to die but also to be unmatched as a warrior. When he dies, his wife and household servants make offerings (of themselves?) for Gilgamesh to the deities of the underworld.

He is given a palace in the nether world and venerated as lesser god of the dead. It is respectful to pay him a visit upon arrival. If he knew you in life or is of your kin he may explain the rules of Kur to you - which he helps to regulate.

His son and successor was either Ur-lugal or Urnungal.  
(see [Babylonian Gilgamesh](#))

## Enkidu

[Gilgamesh](#)'s servant and friend. He assists Gilgamesh in putting back Agga's siege of Erech.

He accompanies Gilgamesh and his soldiers on the trip to the "Land of the Living". Probably after an initial encounter with [Huwawa](#), Gilgamesh falls asleep and Enkidu awakens him. They come upon Huwawa and Gilgamesh distracts him with flattery, then puts a nose ring on him and binds his arms. Huwawa grovels to Gilgamesh and Enkidu and Gilgamesh almost releases him. Enkidu argues against it and when Huwawa protests, he decapitates Huwawa. Gilgamesh is angered by Enkidu's rash action.

The main body of the Gilgamesh tale includes a trip to the nether-world. Enkidu enters the "Great Dwelling" through a gate, in order to recover Gilgamesh's *pukku* and *mikku*, objects of an uncertain nature. He broke several taboos of the underworld, including the wearing of clean clothes and sandals, 'good' oil, carrying a weapon or staff, making a noise, or behaving normally towards one's family (Kramer 1963: pp. 132-133). For these violations he was "held fast by 'the outcry of the nether world'". Intervention by [Enki](#), rescued the hero or at least raised his shade for Gilgamesh to speak with.

## Kur

Kur literally means "mountain", "foreign land", or "land" and came to be identified both with the underworld and, more specifically, the area which either was contained by or contained the Abzu. (Kramer 1961 p. 76) In the prelude to "Gilgamesh, Enkidu and the Underworld", [Ereshkigal](#) was carried off into the Kur as its prize at about the same time as [An](#) and [Enlil](#) carried off the heaven and the earth. Later in that same passage, [Enki](#) also struggled with Kur as and presumably was victorious, thereby able to claim the title "Lord of Kur" (the realm). Kramer suggests that Kur was a dragon-like creature, calling to mind Tiamat and Leviathan. The text suggests that Enki's struggle may have been with instruments of the land of kur - its stones or its creatures hurling stones. (Kramer 1961 p. 37-38, 78-79) (See also [Apsu](#) and [Tiamat](#).)

In "The Feats and Exploits of [Ninurta](#)", that deity sets out to destroy the Kur. Kur initially intimidates Ninurta into retreating, but when Ninurta returns with greater resolve, Kur is destroyed. This looses the waters of the Abzu, causing the fields to be flooded with unclean waters. Ninurta dams up the Abzu by piling stones over Kur's corpse. He then drains these waters into the Tigris. (Kramer 1961 pp. 80-82). The identification of Ninurta's antagonist in this passage as Kur appears to be miscast. Black and Green identify his foe as the demon Asag, who was the spawn of An and Ki, and who produced monstrous offspring with Kur. The remainder of the details of this story are the same as in Kramer's account, but with Asag replacing Kur. In other versions, Ninurta is replaced by [Adad/Ishkur](#). (Black & Green pp. 35-36)

"Inanna and Mt. Ebih": Inanna is also described in Hymns as a destroyer of Kur. If one, as Kramer does, identifies Kur with Mt. Ebih, then we learn that it has directed fear against the gods, the Anunnaki and the land, sending forth rays of fire against the land. Inanna declares to An that she will attack Mt. Ebih unless it submits. An warns against such an attack, but Inanna proceeds anyway and destroys it. (Kramer 1961 pp. 82-83).

## Gugalanna (Gugal-ana)

He is [Ereshkigal](#)'s husband, and according to Kramer, the Bull of Heaven. (Wolkstein and Kramer p. 55) Black and Green tentatively identify him with Ennugi, god of canals and dikes,

rather than the Bull of Heaven. (Black and Green p. 77) After Gilgamesh spurned Inanna, she sends the Bull of Heaven to terrorize Erech. (Kramer 1963 p. 262)

#### Huwawa

Guardian of the cedar of the heart in the the "Land of the living", Huwawa has dragon's teeth, a lion's face, a roar like rushing flood water, huge clawed feet and a thick mane. He lived there in a cedar house. He appears to have attacked Gilgamesh, Enkidu and company when they felled that cedar. They then come upon Huwawa and Gilgamesh distracts him with flattery, then puts a nose ring on him and binds his arms. Huwawa grovels to Gilgamesh and Enkidu and Gilgamesh almost releases him. Enkidu argues against it and when Huwawa protests, he decapitates

Huwawa. See also the [Babylonian Humbaba](#)

Gods in Kur with palaces who are due reverence:

Namtar - "Fate", the demon responsible for death. Namtar has no hands or feet and does not eat or drink. (Pritchard p. 51)

Hubishag

Ningishzida - the god of dawn

Dimpemekug - due gifts, no palace

Neti - the chief gatekeeper

the scribe of Kur - due gifts, no palace

The Sumerians had many other deities as well, most of which appear to have been minor.

## IV. What about the Underworld?

The underworld of the Sumerians is revealed, to some extent, by a composition about the death and afterlife of the king and warlord Ur-Nammu. After having died on the battlefield, Ur-Nammu arrives below, where he offers sundry gifts and sacrifices to the "seven gods" of the nether world:

...[Nergal](#), [the deified] [Gilgamesh](#), [Ereshkigal](#) [the queen of the underworld, who is either given to Kur in the underworld or given dominion over the underworld in the prelude to Gilgamesh (Kramer & Maier 1989: p. 83) (Wolkstein & Kramer 1983: p. 4)] , [Dumuzi](#) [the shepherd, Inanna's husband], Namtar, Hubishag, and Ningishzida - each in his own palace; he also presented gifts to Dimpimekug and to the "scribe of the nether- world."... [After arriving at his assigned spot] ...certain of the dead were turned over to him, perhaps to be his attendants, and Gilgamesh, his beloved brother, explained to him the rules and regulations of the nether world. ([Kramer](#) 1963: p. 131)

Another tablet indicates that the sun, moon, and their respective gods, spent time in the underworld as well. The sun journeyed there after setting, and the moon rested there at the end of the month. Both [Utu](#) and [Nanna](#) "'decreed the fate' of the dead" while there. ([Kramer](#) 1963: p. 132) Dead heroes ate bread, drank, and quenched the dead's thirst with water. The gods of the nether world, the deceased, and his city, were prayed to for the benefit of the dead and his family.

The Sumerian version of Gilgamesh includes a trip to the nether world as well. In the prologue, [Enki](#) sails for the Kur, presumably to rescue [Ereshkigal](#) after she was given over to [Kur](#). He is assailed by creatures with stones. The main body of the tale includes a trip to the nether world as well. [Enkidu](#) enters the "Great Dwelling" through a gate, in order to recover Gilgamesh's pukku and mikku, objects of an uncertain nature. He broke several taboos of the underworld, including the wearing of clean clothes and sandals, 'good' oil, carrying a weapon or staff, making a noise, or behaving normally towards ones family ([Kramer](#) 1963: pp. 132-133). For these violations he was "held fast by 'the outcry of the nether world'". Intervention by Enki, rescued the hero.

When Enlil visits the nether world, he must pass by a gatekeeper, followed by a "man of the river" and a "man of the boat" - all of whom act as guardians.(Kramer 1961 pp. 45-47)

[Inanna](#) also visits Kur, which results in a myth reminiscent of the Greek seasonal story of Persephone. She sets out to witness the funeral rites of her sister-in-law [Ereshkigal](#)'s husband [Gugalanna](#), the Bull of Heaven. She takes precaution before setting out, by telling her servant Ninshubur to seek assistance from [Enlil](#), [Nanna](#), or [Enki](#) at their shrines, should she not return. Inanna knocks on the outer gates of Kur and the gatekeeper, Neti, questions her. He consults with queen Ereshkigal and then allows Inanna to pass through the seven gates of the underworld. After each gate, she is required to remove adornments and articles of clothing, until after the seventh gate, she is naked. The Annuna pass judgment against her and Ereshkigal slays her and hangs her on the wall ([Wolkstein & Kramer](#) 1983 p. 60)

[Inanna](#) is rescued by the intervention of [Enki](#). He creates two sexless creatures that empathize with [Ereshkigal](#)'s suffering, and thereby gain a gift - Inanna's corpse. They restore her to life with the Bread of Life and the Water of Life, but the Sumerian underworld has a conservation of death law. No one can leave without providing someone to stay in their stead. Inanna is escorted by galla/demons past Ninshubur and members of her family. She doesn't allow them to claim anyone until she sees [Dumuzi](#) on his throne in Uruk. They then seize Dumuzi, but he escapes them twice by transforming himself, with the aid of [Utu](#). Eventually he is caught and slain. Inanna spies his sister, [Geshtinanna](#), in mourning and they go to Dumuzi. She allows Dumuzi, the shepherd, to stay in the underworld only six months of the year, while Geshtinanna will stay the other six. ([Wolkstein & Kramer](#) pp. 60-89) As with the Greek story of the kidnapping of Persephone, this linked the changing seasons, the emergence of the plants from the ground, with the return of a harvest deity from the nether world. Although he had always been a shepherd (and possibly a mortal king) he was blessed with the powers of fertility following the consummation of his marriage to Inanna in "The Courtship of Inanna and Dumuzi".

As the farmer, let him make the fields fertile,

As the shepherd, let him make the sheepfolds multiply,

Under his reign let there be vegetation,

Under his reign let there be rich grain ([Wolkstein & Kramer](#) p. 45)

Geshtinanna is also associated with growth, but where her brother rules over the spring harvested grain, she rules over the autumn harvested vines ([Wolkstein & Kramer](#) p. 168)

## V. What are *me* anyway?

Another important concept in Sumerian theology, was that of *me*. The *me* were universal decrees of divine authority. They are the invocations that spread arts, crafts, and civilization. The *me* were assembled by [Enlil](#) in Ekur and given to [Enki](#) to guard and impart to the world, beginning with Eridu, his center of worship. From there, he guards the *me* and imparts them on the people. He directs the *me* towards Ur and Meluhha and Dilmun, organizing the world with his decrees. Later, [Inanna](#) comes to Enki and complains at having been given too little power from his decrees. In a different text, she gets Enki drunk and he grants her more powers, arts, crafts, and attributes - a total of ninety-four *me*. Inanna parts company with Enki to deliver the *me* to her cult center at Erech. Enki recovers his wits and tries to recover the *me* from her, but she arrives safely in Erech with them. ([Kramer & Maier](#) 1989: pp. 38-68)

## VI. I've heard that there are a lot of Biblical parallels in Sumerian literature. What are they?

Traces of Sumerian religion survive today and are reflected in writings of the Bible. As late as Ezekiel, there is mention of a Sumerian deity. In [Ezekiel 8:14](#), the prophet sees women of Israel weeping for [Tammuz](#) ([Dumuzi](#)) during a drought.



The bulk of Sumerian parallels can, however be found much earlier, in the book of Genesis. As in Genesis, the Sumerians' world is formed out of the watery abyss and the heavens and earth are divinely separated from one another by a solid dome. The second chapter of Genesis introduces the paradise Eden, a place which is similar to the Sumerian Dilmun, described in the myth of "[Enki](#) and [Ninhursag](#)". Dilmun is a pure, bright, and holy land - now often identified with Bahrain in the Persian Gulf. It is blessed by Enki to have overflowing, sweet water. Enki fills it with lagoons and palm trees. He impregnates Ninhursag and causes eight new plants to grow from the earth. Eden, "in the East" ([Gen. 2:8](#)) has a river which also "rises" or overflows, to form four rivers including the Tigris and Euphrates. It too is lush and has fruit bearing trees. ([Gen. 2:9-10](#)) In the second version of the creation of man "The Lord God formed man out of the clay of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and so man became a living being." Enki and Ninmah (Ninhursag) use a similar method in creating man. [Nammu](#), queen of the abyss and Enki's mother, bids Enki to "Knead the 'heart' of the clay that is over the Abzu " and "give it form" ([Kramer & Maier](#) p. 33) From there the similarities cease as the two create several malformed humans and then the two deities get into an argument.

Returning to [Enki](#) and [Ninhursag](#), we find a possible parallel to the creation of Eve. Enki consumed the plants that were Ninhursag's children and so was cursed by Ninhursag, receiving one wound for each plant consumed. [Enlil](#) and a fox act on Enki's behalf to call back Ninhursag in order to undo the damage. She joins with him again and bears eight new children, each of whom are the cure to one of his wounds. The one who cures his rib is named Ninti, whose name means the Queen of months, ([Kramer & Maier](#) 1989: pp. 28-30) the lady of the rib, or she who makes live. This association carries over to Eve. ([Kramer](#), History Begins at Sumer 1981: pp. 143-144) In Genesis, Eve is fashioned from Adam's rib and her name hawwa is related to the Hebrew word hay or living. ([New American Bible](#) p. 7.) The prologue of "Gilgamesh, Enkidu and the Underworld" may contain the predecessor to the tree of knowledge of good and evil. This tree not only contains a crafty serpent, but also [Lilith](#), the legendary first wife of Adam. The huluppu tree is transplanted by [Inanna](#) from the banks of the Euphrates to her garden in Uruk, where she finds that:

...a serpent who could not be charmed  
made its nest in the roots of the tree,  
The [Anzu](#) bird set his young in the branches of the tree,  
And the dark maid Lilith built her home in the trunk. ([Wolkstein and Kramer](#) 1983: p. 8)  
It should be noted that Kramer's interpretation that this creature is Lilith has [come into question of late](#).

Another possible Sumerian carry-over related to the Fall of man is the lack of "pangs of childbearing" for those in Dilmun. In particular, [Ninhursag](#) gives birth in nine days, not nine months, and the pass "like good princely cream" ([Kramer](#) 1981: p. 142,145) or "fine oil" ([Kramer & Maier](#) 1989: p. 25)

The quarrels between herder god and farmer deity pairs such as [Lahar](#) and [Ashnan](#) or [Enten](#) and [Emesh](#) are similar in some respects to the quarrels of Cain and Abel. In the Sumerian versions death appears to be avoided, although we do not have the complete Lahar and Ashnan story. (Kramer 1961 pp. 49-51, 53-54)

The ten patriarchs in Genesis born prior to the flood lived very long lives, most in excess of 900 years. The seventh patriarch, Enoch, lived *only* 365 years before he "walked with God". (Genesis 5). The account which numbers those Patriarchs as ten is attributed to the Priestly source. The Yahwist source (J), details only seven Patriarchs prior to Noah, so that with him included, there are eight antediluvian patriarchs. (Genesis 4: 17-18) The eight antediluvian kings of in the Sumerian King List also lived for hundreds of years. (Kramer 1963 p. 328) S. H. Hooke notes another version of the Sumerian King list, found in Larsa details ten antediluvian kings. (Hooke, p. 130) The clearest Biblical parallel comes from the story of the Flood. In the Sumerian version, the pious Ziusudra is informed of the gods decision to destroy mankind by listening to a wall. He too weathers the deluge aboard a huge boat. Noah's flood

lasts a long time, but Ziusudra comes to rest within seven days and not the near year of the Bible. He does not receive a covenant, but is given eternal life. (Kramer 1963 pp. 163-164; Kramer 1961 pp. 97-98)

As far as the New Testament goes, many also draw a parallel between [Dumuzi](#) and Jesus because Dumuzi is a shepherd-king and he is resurrected from the dead. This is perhaps appealing to some as Dumuzi's Akkadian analog, Tammuz, appears in the Bible, however Dumuzi's periodic return from the underworld is not unique even in Sumerian literature. His sister [Geshtinanna](#) also rises from the dead, and if one counts those born as deities, [Inanna](#) does as well. Periodic death and rebirth is a common theme in agricultural myths where the return of the deities from the earth mirrors a return to life of plants.