



I. Creation of Heaven and Earth

Scene depicting the birth of the heaven-god *An* and the earth-goddess *Ki*, by *Nammu*, the goddess of the primeval sea, who is described in a tablet in the Louvre as "the mother who gave birth to heaven and earth." In the myth of the creation of man, *Nammu* is called "the mother, the ancestress who gave birth to all the gods."

TALES OF SUMER

MAN'S OLDEST MYTHS

INTRODUCTION

The summer of 1955 saw one of the most unusual exhibits in museum history on exhibit in Philadelphia's University Museum: a combined show of modern paintings of man's earliest myths together with the ancient Sumerian cuneiform inscriptions on which they are based. On display were fifteen oils depicting such cosmological and mythological scenes as "Creation," "Separation of Heaven and Earth," "Struggle against Death and Evil," "Transfer of the Divine Ordinances," "The Goddess in the Nether World," "The God in the Devils' Clutches," "The Goddess and Her Tree," "The Hero and the Ghost," "The Gardener's Mortal Sin." All are based on Sumerian myths inscribed on clay tablets dating from about 1700 B.C. and originally composed some time about 2000 B.C., most of which were excavated by the University of Pennsylvania, and many of which are now in the tablet collections of the University Museum, the Istanbul Museum of the Ancient Orient, the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, and the Friedrich Schiller University in Jena.

This joint exhibit was the result of "long-distance" collaboration between a German artist and an American scholar who, though operating in two different cultural media, have seen their life work become closely and subtly intertwined. And this quite unexpectedly and without premeditation. Here in Philadelphia was I, a plodding prosaic cuneiformist, trying methodically and laboriously to piece together, translate, and interpret the texts of the Sumerian myths inscribed in the cuneiform script on hundreds of clay tablets and fragments scattered in the various museums the world over. And far away, in western Germany, in the small town of Northeim, was Hellmuth Schubert, an artist of whose existence I had not an inkling, in-

spired and moved to paint these very myths in vivid colors on canvas in accordance with his own imaginative vision. Until the fall of 1954 we had never met; our common, far-reaching bond was our mutual interest in the spiritual remains of the long dead and forgotten Sumerian people now being resurrected by a small band of archaeologists and cuneiformists whose scholarly efforts transcend national ties and geographic boundaries. My interest in the Sumerians goes back a quarter of a century; Schubert's began less than five years ago, and was the outcome of a rather unusual chain of circumstances involving a German Orientalist in the role of mediator and catalyst.

Sumerian culture and civilization have many facets, each of which demands a life-time of study. I had therefore decided long ago to limit my researches to Sumerian literature, and particularly the myths and epic tales. For more than two decades now, with the help of the contributions of numerous Sumerologists dead and alive, I have been trying to piece together, translate, and interpret the sacred and not so sacred stories revolving about the Sumerian gods, as inscribed primarily on clay tablets dating from the first half of the second millennium B.C. Over the years, I have published dozens of scholarly monographs and articles on the subject, and my *Sumerian Mythology* made a first attempt to present a relatively detailed and systematic treatment of the ancient Sumerian myths. These studies and researches were of course known internationally, but only to a very limited group of scholars, the relatively few Orientalists specializing in the history and culture of the ancient Near East.

One of these Orientalists was Hartmuth Schmoekel, whose book *Ur, Assur und Babylon* has just come off the press. A resident of Northeim, he there came in contact with Hellmuth Schubert, a painter who had settled in this small town following the end of the Second World War. Schubert had come back from several years of military service on the Eastern Front emotionally exhausted and spiritually rudderless. Gradually recovering his drive to paint, he was searching eagerly for universal rather than private themes, particularly those originating in man's distant past. Some four years ago he learned from the lips of his co-townsmen Schmoekel for the first time, about the ancient Sumerians and their long-lost myths; in many and prolonged sessions, the latter read and translated for him into German from my *English* versions of the *Sumerian* mythological poems. Deeply moved and irresistibly fascinated, Schubert has since devoted every spare moment of his time to the painting of the Sumerian divine tales, in

accordance with his own personal vision of their characters and incidents. To date he has completed more than a score of oil paintings covering all the more significant Sumerian mythological themes.

I heard of all this only about two years ago, and was no little intrigued by this rather unique and unexpected artist-scholar collaborative effort to get a deeper insight into an ancient culture which had played a significant role in the history of civilization. In the summer of 1954, therefore, I flew to Northeim and visited Schubert in his studio, a simple fourteenth century chapel set aside for him by Northeim's proud citizens. Here, covering the walls of the atelier were a score of paintings portraying plastically and imaginatively the imaginative and immortal themes of Sumerian mythology: creation; struggle against evil; divine laws governing man and his universe; love; hate and pride; ambition, heroism, and death. Nor is it to be forgotten that the Sumerian myths were first composed some four thousand years ago, perhaps even earlier, and thus represent some of the earliest known spiritual convictions and religious beliefs in the history of civilization. In more ways than one, therefore, this particular collaboration between a scholar and painter, between the pen and the paint-brush, was a cultural event without parallel or precedent, and arrangements were made for the Schubert paintings to come to Philadelphia where for a brief while at least, they could be shown side by side with the ancient documents which inspired them.

THE SUMERIAN WORLD VIEW

For a deeper understanding of Schubert's paintings the reader will do well to keep in mind these facts about the Sumerians and their world-view. The Sumerians lived and thrived between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers about five thousand years ago, long before we first hear of the Hebrews and the Greeks. With the sweat of their brow they drained the reedy marshes, irrigated and watered their hot, dry soil, sowed and tended their carefully preserved seed, and reaped their rich, ripe harvests. Their merchants and sailors carried on a busy trade with the surrounding lands, with Egypt and Palestine, with Persia and India. They built good-sized cities where the farmer brought his harvest, and the cunning craftsman made and sold his carefully worked products of metal, silver, and clay.

The hub and center of the Sumerian city was the holy temple of the city's god, with its sky-pointing stage-tower, the *ziggurat*. For according to the Sumerian thinkers, the whole land of Sumer belonged to the great gods who lived in the sky. King of all the gods was *Enlil*, the air-god who

at the time of creation had separated heaven from earth and thus made all life possible. But every large city had its own special god to whom the city had been given as his possession. The gods preferred to live in the sky, however, and so they selected and commissioned some worthy human being to represent them on earth. That is how, said the Sumerian philosophers, kings and leaders came to be.

Honored and cherished among the Sumerians were the gifted minstrels who, accompanied by the harp and lyre, sang the brave deeds of their heroic lords and chanted stories about the life of the gods. At first these tales of the gods and heroes were handed down from generation to generation by word of mouth only. But later the Sumerians invented and developed writing, the magic means of communication with the past and future. And so by about 2000 B.C. many of the ancient lays came to be written with reed stylus on drab but immortal clay.

For almost four thousand years the Sumerian clay tablets lay buried in the ruined cities of Sumer. But in the last hundred years many of these documents, written a thousand years before the Bible, have been dug up by the modern archaeologist. Slowly but surely they are yielding their secrets to the scholars and we now have dependable translations of quite a number of them.

The Sumerian myths are stories concerned with the plans and acts of the gods including the creation of the universe, the fashioning of man, and the establishment of the world order. The universe, according to the Sumerian thinkers, consisted of heaven and earth in the shape of a cosmic mountain which floated on the sea, primeval and eternal, without beginning and without end. At first heaven and earth were united as one. But in some way this solid heaven-earth mountain engendered the free-moving and expanding air which finally succeeded in separating them from each other. Out of the air came the moon and stars and from the moon in turn emanated the sun and the planet Venus.

Running this universe were the gods, man-like in form but superhuman and immortal, who, though invisible to mortal eye, guided and controlled the cosmos in accordance with well-laid plans and duly prescribed laws. Heaven and earth, sea and air, sun, moon, planet, and star, wind, storm, and tempest, river, mountain, and plain—each of these was in charge of one or another of the sky-gods who guided its activities in accordance with the divine rules and regulations.

It is of these gods and their loves and hates, their deeds and misdeeds that the Sumerian minstrel and poet loved to sing. For they saw divine creation in human terms and they conceived it in this fashion:

First existed *Nammu*, the goddess of the primeval sea, herself eternal and uncreated. The goddess *Nammu* gave birth to *An*, the male heaven-god, and *Ki*, the earth-goddess. The union of *An* and *Ki* produced the air-god *Enlil* who proceeded to separate the heaven-father *An* from the earth-mother *Ki*.

Enlil, the air-god, now found himself living in utter darkness with the leaden sky forming the ceiling and walls of his house and the black earth, its floor. He, therefore, begot the moon-god *Nanna* to brighten the darkness of his house. *Nanna* in turn begot the sun-god *Utu* as well as the bold, bewitching, and unpredictable *Inanna*, the goddess of the planet Venus, the most beloved figure in Sumerian mythology.

Heaven and earth once separated by the air-god *Enlil*, his father *An* carried off the heaven, but he himself carried off his mother *Ki*, the earth. The union of *Enlil* and his mother *Ki* set the stage for the organization of the universe and the establishment of civilization.

As for man, he was created by the gods out of the clay covering the great abyss, and his fate was decreed by the great earth-mother. Man, the Sumerians believed, was created for but one purpose—to serve the gods; and by his sweat, blood, and tears, he freed the gods from the need of laboring themselves for their food and shelter.

THE PAINTINGS

To return to the fifteen Schubert paintings, these are: (1) Creation of Heaven and Earth; (2) Creation; Birth of the Air-god Enlil; (3) Mother and Daughter; (4) Enlil and the Newborn Moon; (5) The Cattle-god and the Grain-goddess; (6) The Goddess Carries Off the Divine Laws; (7) Creation: Separation of Heaven and Earth; (8) Struggle against Death and Evil; (9) The Goddess and Her Ghoul-infested Tree; (10) The Hero and the Ghost; (11) The Idyllic Marriage; (12) The Goddess at the Nether World Gate; (13) The Nude Goddess before the Judges of the Nether World; (14) The God in the Devils' Clutches; (15) The Goddess and the Gardener.

The first two of these paintings are not based on any of the known

Sumerian myths. The frontispiece, Painting I, is a scene inspired by several statements concerning the goddess of the primeval sea, which are found in two tablets, one in the Louvre and the other in the University Museum. Painting II depicts a creation episode inferred from the known cosmological views of the Sumerian thinkers and sages, although as yet it has not been found recorded in any of the Sumerian literary works.

Paintings III and IV depict two scenes inspired by the myth "Enlil and Ninlil: The Begetting of the Moon-God," a rather charming tale which seems to have been evolved to explain the begetting not only of the moon-god, but of three other deities who were doomed to spend their days in the dark and dreary Nether World instead of in the eastern sky where the more fortunate deities dwelt.

When man had not yet been created and the city of *Nippur* was inhabited by the gods alone, "its young man" was *Enlil*; "its young maid" was *Ninlil*, and "its old woman" was *Ninlil's* mother *Nunbarashegunu*. One day the latter, having set her heart and mind on *Ninlil's* marriage to *Enlil*, instructs her to bathe in *Nippur's* pure stream and to walk along the river-bank so that *Enlil*, "the bright-eyed," might see her and fall in love with her. *Ninlil* gladly follows her mother's instructions and as a result *Enlil* becomes infatuated with her. She refuses his advances. *Enlil* thereupon has his vizier bring up his boat and, while sailing on the stream with her, rapes the young goddess and impregnates her with the seed of the moon-god. The gods are dismayed by this immoral deed and, though *Enlil* is their king, they seize him and banish him to the Nether World. The faithful *Ninlil*, however, refuses to leave him. She follows him to the world below and there begets three more sons for him, children doomed to live forever in the lower regions and never see the light of day.

Painting V is based on a myth which may be designated as a "Dispute between Cattle and Grain." It tells of two deities, the cattle-god *Lahar* and his sister, the grain-goddess *Ashnan*. These two cultural beings were created for the specific purpose of supplying the gods with food and clothes, but the gods were unable to make effective use of their products until man was created and given "breath of life." Once man had come into being, the two deities were dispatched to the earth to bestow their blessings upon rich and poor. But while in the fields the brother and sister drank too much wine and began to quarrel, each claiming to be more important for life and man than the other. The dispute was finally brought before the gods *Enlil* and *Enki* who decided in favor of the grain-goddess.

The remaining ten paintings all revolve in one way or another about the goddess of love who, under one name or another, sparked the imagination of men throughout the ages. Venus to the Romans, Aphrodite to the Greeks, Ishtar to the Babylonians, and Inanna to the Sumerians, minstrels and poets delight to tell and sing of her deeds and misdeeds.

Painting VI depicts a scene based on "Inanna and Enki: The Transfer of the Arts of Civilization," a unique cultural myth which reveals the goddess as ambitious for the welfare of her city and tells the following story:

To keep the universe running smoothly and efficiently, century after century, millennium after millennium, the creating gods, with *Enlil* at their head, devised and prepared a set of over one hundred rules and regulations. These divine ordinances, which governed man and his culture, were placed in the care of *Enki*, the god of wisdom, who had his house in the deep abyss. But *Inanna*, the patron deity of *Erech*, was eager to obtain them for her own city. She, therefore, journeyed by boat to *Enki's* abode, and feasted and banqueted with *Enki* until the latter, happy with drink, presented them to her several at a time. *Inanna* loaded them on her boat and made off for *Erech* with her precious cargo. After the effects of the banquet had worn off, *Enki* realized his terrible loss, and sent wave after wave of sea monsters to seize the boat and return it to the abyss. Needless to say, he failed, and *Inanna* and her boat arrive safe and sound at *Erech*, where, amidst jubilation and feasting, its delighted inhabitants unload the divine decrees, one by one.

Paintings VII-X were all inspired by a myth which may be best entitled "The Goddess, the Tree, and the Hero," in which *Gilgamesh*, the most famous of Sumerian heroes, plays a becomingly chivalrous role. The poem begins with a "creation" passage concerning the separation of heaven and earth and the ensuing struggle with a monster personifying evil, chaos and death. It then continues with a most unusual story, the plot of which runs as follows:

Once upon a time, there was a *huluppu*-tree; it was planted on the banks of the Euphrates and nurtured by its waters. But the South Wind tore at it, root and crown, while the Euphrates flooded it. The goddess *Inanna*, the Sumerian Venus, who was walking by, took the tree in her hand and brought it to her city, *Erech*. She planted it in her holy garden, and tended it most carefully. For when the tree grew big, she planned to make of its wood a chair for herself and a couch.

Years passed, the *huluppu*-tree matured and grew big. But *Inanna* was now unable to cut down the tree. For at its base, the snake "who knows no charm" had built its nest. In its crown, the vicious *Imdugud*-bird had placed its young. In its middle, *Lilith*, the maid of desolation, had built her house. And so *Inanna*, the light-hearted, ever-joyful maid, shed bitter tears. And as the dawn broke and her brother, the sun-god, arose, she repeated to him tearfully, all that had befallen her *huluppu*-tree.

Now *Gilgamesh*, the great Sumerian hero who also lived in *Erech*, overheard *Inanna's* weeping complaint and chivalrously came to her rescue. He donned his armor, weighing fifty *minas*, and with his "ax of the road," over four hundred pounds in weight, he slew the snake "who knows no charm" at the base of the tree. Seeing which, the *Imdugud*-bird fled with his young to the mountain, and *Lilith*, to her accustomed desert haunts. The men of *Erech*, who had accompanied *Gilgamesh*, now cut down the tree and presented it to *Inanna* for her chair and couch.

But what does *Inanna* do with it? Of its base she makes a *pukku*, and of its crown she makes a *mikku*, and presents the two magic objects to *Gilgamesh* as a reward for his gallantry. But alas, he loses them only too soon. For "because of the cry of the young maidens" the *pukku* and the *mikku* fall into the Nether World through a hole in the ground. *Gilgamesh* puts in his hand to retrieve them but is unable to reach them, he puts in his foot but is quite as unsuccessful. And so he seats himself at the gate of the Nether World and cries with fallen face:

My *pukku*, who will bring it up from the Nether World?
My *mikku*, who will bring it up from the "face" of the
Nether World?

His servant, *Enkidu*, his constant follower and companion, hears his master's cries, and says to him:

My master, why do you cry, why is your heart sick?
Your *pukku*, I will bring it up from the Nether World,
Your *mikku*, I will bring it up from the "face" of the
Nether World.

Gilgamesh warns him of the dangers, but *Enkidu* heeds him not and descends to the Nether World. There he is seized and prevented from reascending to the earth. Whereupon *Gilgamesh* pleads with the gods, and *Enki*, the god of wisdom, orders the sun-god, *Utu*, to open a hole in the

Nether World and to allow *Enkidu's* ghost to ascend to the earth. Master and servant embrace and *Gilgamesh* then proceeds to question *Enkidu* about what goes on in the world of the dead.

Paintings XI-XIV depict motifs and scenes in the mythological *Inanna* cycle which involves not only the goddess herself but also her husband *Dumuzi*, the Biblical Tammuz, for whom, according to the prophet Ezekiel, the women of Jerusalem still mourned in his own relatively late days. *Dumuzi*, according to the Sumerian poets, had wooed *Inanna* passionately and had won her hand in rivalry with the farmer-god *Enkimdu*. Little did he dream, however, that the marriage which he so eagerly desired would end in his own perdition and that—literally speaking—he would be dragged down to hell. But then he failed to reckon with a woman's overwhelming ambitions. All this is told in a myth pieced together from fifteen tablets and fragments which may be entitled "Inanna's Descent to the Nether World," particularly noteworthy for its resurrection motif, the first such known to man. The plot runs as follows:

Though already mistress of heaven, the "Great Above," *Inanna* hankers for still more power and sets her goal to rule the infernal regions, the "Great Below," as well. She therefore, decides to descend to the Nether World to see what can be done.

Now the queen of the "Great Below" is her oldest sister and bitter enemy, *Ereshkigal*, the goddess of darkness and death, and *Inanna* fears, not without reason, that she will put her to death in the Nether World. She therefore instructs her vizier to raise a hue and cry among the gods if she should fail to return, and assures him that *Enki*, the god of wisdom, "who knows the food of life," "who knows the water of life," will come to her aid.

Having taken these precautions, *Inanna* descends to the Nether World, arrives at *Ereshkigal's* temple of lapis lazuli, and the gate-keeper leads her through the seven gates of the Nether World. As she passes through each of the gates, part of her robes and jewels are removed in spite of her protest. Finally, after entering the last gate, she is brought stark naked before *Ereshkigal* and the seven *Anunnaki*, the dreaded judges of the Nether World. *Ereshkigal* fastens upon *Inanna* the "look of death," whereupon she is turned into a corpse and hanged from a nail.

So pass three days and three nights. On the fourth day her faithful vizier, seeing that his mistress has not returned, proceeds to make the rounds of the gods, clamoring for help, and the god *Enki* decides to come

to her rescue. He fashions two sexless creatures and entrusts to them the "food of life" and the "water of life," with instructions to proceed to the Nether World and sprinkle them upon *Inanna's* suspended corpse. This they do and *Inanna* revives.

But though once again alive, *Inanna's* troubles are far from over. For it was an unbroken rule of the "land of no return" that no one who has entered the gates can return to the world above until and unless he has produced a substitute to take his place there, and *Inanna* is no exception. She is indeed permitted to reascend to the earth, but is accompanied by a number of heartless demons with instructions to bring her back to the lower regions if she fails to provide another deity to take her place. Surrounded by these ghoulish constables, *Inanna* wanders from city to city.

Now at each city *Inanna* is met by the god in charge who throws himself at her feet dressed in sackcloth. When, therefore, each in turn is threatened by the merciless demons who are eager to carry him off to the lower regions as her substitute, *Inanna*, pleased by their fawning humility, refuses to turn them over. Finally, *Inanna* and her ghostly company arrive at *Erech*, where her own husband, the shepherd-god, *Dumuzi*, is in charge. Not unexpectedly perhaps, *Dumuzi* refuses to grovel in the dust before his power-lusting wife. Instead, he seats himself on a lofty throne dressed in "noble" garments. The enraged *Inanna* thereupon turns her husband over to the vicious demons who lose no time laying hands on him. But *Dumuzi* refuses to submit. Instead he lifts his tear-drenched face to *Inanna's* brother, the sun-god, *Utu*, and pleads with him to turn him into a snake that he might escape his demons. And here, unfortunately, the story breaks off for the present; the tablets upon which the end of the myth was inscribed still lie unexcavated in the dusty ruins of ancient Sumer.

But *Dumuzi* was by no means the only one who suffered from the wrath of this not so gentle goddess of love; at one time she actually sent destructive plagues against the whole of Sumer. To be sure, this time her anger was justified, at least in some measure. Which brings us to the last of Schubert's paintings.

Painting XV depicts a scene from the myth "Inanna and Shukallituda: The Gardener's Mortal Sin" which tells the following story:

One upon a time, there lived a gardener by the name of *Shukallituda* whose first efforts at gardening had ended in dismal failure. Although he had carefully watered his furrows, the plants had withered away; the raging

winds smote his face with the mountain dust, and what he had so carefully tended turned desolate. But he lifted his eyes to the gods of the east and the west, observed and studied the omens, and learned to know the fates decreed by the gods. As a result of this laboriously acquired wisdom, he learned to plant his vegetables under and between trees "of wide shade," and his garden blossomed forth with all kinds of green.

One day *Inanna*, the goddess of the planet Venus, after traversing heaven and earth and the countries of *Elam* and *Shubur*, lay down to rest her weary body not far from the garden tended by *Shukallituda*. The latter, who had spied her from the edge of his garden, took advantage of *Inanna's* extreme weariness and cohabited with her. When morning came and the sun arose, *Inanna* looked about her in consternation and determined to ferret out at all costs the mortal who had so shamefully abused her. She therefore sends three plagues against Sumer, but to no avail. With the help of advice from his father, *Shukallituda* succeeds in eluding the irate *Inanna*. But in this case, too, our text breaks off, and we do not know the end of the story.

* The photographs were taken by Reuben Goldberg.



II. Birth of the Air-God Enlil

Scene showing the air-god *Enlil* springing into being in the midst of the primeval sea from the union of the heaven-god *An* and the earth-goddess *Ki*.

This creation episode is nowhere explicitly stated in the Sumerian myths; it is adduced from the known cosmological views of the Sumerian "philosophers" who believed that in the beginning was the primeval sea, eternal and uncreated, that the primeval sea brought forth the cosmic mountain consisting of heaven and earth, between which moved the free element of air, the breath of all life.



III. Mother and Daughter

Scene from the myth "Enlil and Ninlil: The begetting of the moon-god." In the foreground, *Nunbarashegunu*, mother of the goddess *Ninlil*, instructs her daughter on how to obtain the love of *Enlil*, "Nippur's young man."

"Then the mother who gave birth to her, gave counsel to the maid,
Nunbarashegunu gave counsel to *Ninlil*:
'In the pure river, O maid, bathe in the pure river,
O *Ninlil*, walk along the bank of the *Nunbirdu* River,
The bright-eyed, the lord, the bright-eyed,
The 'Great Mountain,' Father *Enlil*, the bright-eyed, will see you,
The shepherd, the . . . fate-decree, the bright-eyed, will see you,
Will embrace you, will kiss you.'"

Four-column tablet inscribed with the myth "Enlil and Ninlil: The Begetting of the Moon-god." The passage describing the begetting of the mood-god reads:

Enlil says to his vizier *Nusku* . . .
The maid, the fair, the lovely,
Ninlil, the fair, the lovely,
No one has embraced her, no one has kissed her. . . .
The king *Enlil* . . . lay down by her side,
Embraced her, kissed her,
After he had embraced her, after he had kissed her,
The seed of the moon-god *Sin*, the new moon,
He planted in her womb.





IV. Enlil and the New-born Moon

Painting inspired by the myth "Enlil and Ninlil:
The Begetting of the Mood-god."

V. The Cattle-god and the Grain-goddess

Scene from the myth "The Dispute between Cattle and Grain," depicting the descent of the cattle-god *Lahar* and the grain-goddess *Ashnan* from heaven to earth to bestow their cultural gifts upon man, at the behest of the great gods *Enlil* and *Enki* (in the background).



Then does *Enki* say to *Enlil*:

"Father *Enlil*, the gods *Lahar* and *Ashnan*,

Who have been fashioned in the *Dukug* (creation chamber of the gods),

Let us make them descend from the *Dukug*."

At the pure word of *Enki* and *Enlil*,

Lahar and *Ashnan* descended from the *Dukug*,

For *Lahar* they (*Enlil* and *Enki*) set up the sheepfold,

Plants, herbs, and . . . they present to him,

For *Ashnan* they establish a house,

Plow and yoke they present to her;

Lahar standing in his sheepfold,

A shepherd increasing the bounty of the sheepfold is he;

Ashnan standing among the furrows,

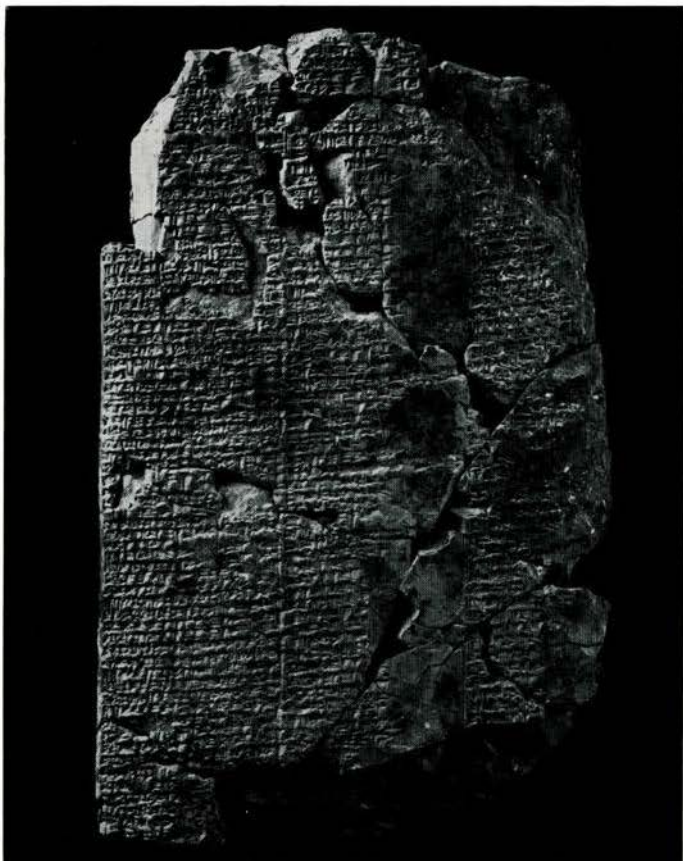
A maid kindly and bountiful is she.



VI. The Goddess Carries Off the Divine Decrees

Scene from the myth "Inanna and Enki: The Transfer of the Arts of Civilization," depicting the goddess *Inanna* in her boat loaded with the divine rules and regulations attacked by the sea monsters at the behest of the great gods *An* (with the halo), *Enlil* (with the "tablet of fate" in his right hand) and *Enki* (with water flowing from the shoulders). At *Inanna's* side is her vizier *Ninshubur* who saves the boat and its precious cargo.

Six-column tablet inscribed with the myth "Inanna and Enki: The Transfer of the Arts of Civilization." More important than the plot of its story is the fact that this document represents man's first recorded attempt at culture analysis, listing a considerable number of what are now generally termed culture traits and complexes such as: kingship, priesthood, law, art, music, crafts, various emotional states, ethics and morals, war and peace.



VII. Creation: Separation of Heaven and Earth

The Painting is inspired by the first part of the introduction to the myth "The Goddess, the Tree, and the Hero," a passage significant for Sumerian cosmogony. The scene depicts the heaven-god *An* carrying off heaven, and the air-god *Enlil* (with the "tablet of fate" in his right hand) carrying off the earth. This separation of heaven and earth set the stage for the organization of the universe, the creation of man, and the establishment of civilization.

After heaven had been moved away from earth,
After earth had been moved away from heaven,
After the name of man had been fixed;
After *An* carried off heaven,
After *Enlil* carried off earth.



VIII. Struggle against Death and Evil

Scene illustrating the second part of the cosmological passage in the poem "The Goddess, the Tree, and the Hero." *Enki*, the god of wisdom, son of the air-god *Enlil*, goes forth to do battle with *Kur*, the guardian of the Nether World, who had carried off one of the sky-goddesses (in foreground). *Kur* was conceived as a monster personifying evil, chaos, and death.

After the goddess *Ereshkigal* had been
 carried off into the Nether World, . . .
After *Enki* against *Kur* had set sail, . . .
Against the king (*Enki*), it (*Kur*) hurled
 the small ones . . . the large ones;
 Its small ones, hand-stones,
 Its large ones, dancing reed stones,
The keel of *Enki's* boat,
Like an attacking storm, in battle overwhelm;
Against the king, the water at the boat's prow
 Like a wolf devours, . . .
 Like a lion strikes down.





IX. The Goddess and Her Ghoul-Infested Tree

Scene from the myth "The Goddess, the Tree, and the Hero." The goddess *Inanna* and her brother, the sun-god *Utu*, wave their angry fists at the vicious *Imdugud*-bird, *Lilith* the maid of desolation, and the snake "who knows no charm."

The tree grew big, she could not cut its bark,
At its base, the snake who knows no charm had set up its nest,
In its crown, the *Imdugud*-bird had placed its young,
In its midst, *Lilith* had built her a house.
The ever-singing, ever-rejoicing maid,
The pure *Inanna*, how she weeps!
In her plight which his sister had described to him,
Her brother, the hero *Gilgamesh*, came to the rescue.



X. The Hero and the Ghost

A scene from the end of the myth "The Goddess, the Tree, and the Hero." The hero *Gilgamesh* looks with horror and despair on the ghost of his faithful servant and companion *Enkidu* who is rising from the Nether World through a crevice in the ground.

Father *Enki* stood by him (*Gilgamesh*) in this matter,
He says to the god *Utu*, the hero born of the goddess *Ningal*:
"Now then, open a crevice in the earth,
And raise his (*Enkidu's*) ghost from the Nether World."
He (the god *Utu*) opened a crevice in the earth,
And raised his ghost from the Nether World.



XI. The Idyllic Marriage

Scene depicting the shepherd-god *Dumuzi* (Biblical Tammuz) playing the flute while his wife *Inanna* looks on enchanted. This motif is not found expressly stated in any of the extant Sumerian myths, but is implicit in the contents of several *Dumuzi-Inanna* poems.

XII. Inanna at the Entrance to the Nether World

Scene from the myth "Inanna's Descent to the Nether World," depicting *Inanna* bidding farewell to her vizier. As she is about to leave the earth and its living creatures and enter the snake- and ghoulish-filled nether world, her hieroglyphic symbol is in the hands of the gate-keeper of the Nether World.



XIII. The Nude Goddess before the Judges of the Nether World

Scene from the middle of the myth "Inanna's Descent to the Nether World," depicting the goddess, deprived of her robes and jewels, about to be put to death by *Ereshkigal*, the queen of the "Great Below," and dreaded judges of the nether world.



XIV. Dumuzi in the Devils' Clutches

Scene from the very end of the myth "Inanna's Descent to the Nether World," depicting the devils' attempt to carry off *Dumuzi* to the world of the dead at the behest of his enraged spouse *Inanna*. The tablet on which this scene is based is in the Babylonian Collection of Yale University.





XV. Inanna and the Gardener

Scene from the myth "Inanna and Shukallituda: The Gardener's Mortal Sin." The weary *Inanna* and the guilty gardener in *Shukallituda's* garden.

Four-column tablet in the Museum of the Ancient Orient in Istanbul, inscribed with the myth on which the painting "Inanna and the Gardener" is based. The relevant lines in the poem read:



One day, after my queen had traversed the heaven,
Had traversed the earth,
After *Inanna* had traversed the heaven,
Had traversed the earth,
Had traversed the countries *Elam* and *Shubur*,
The holy one lay down to sleep. . . .
Shukallituda spied her from the edge of the garden. . . .