

STORIES OF CHALDEA, CHAPTER II By Edith Ralph

THE FIRST SETTLED PEOPLES OF CHALDEA AND THEIR SUPERSTITIONS

In ancient times, the southern part of Chaldea, where the Turanian race settled, was called Shumir¹, —in Hebrew “Shinar,”—while the north went by the name of Accad. From these words, the people have been called Shumiro-Accadians, or simply Accadians, by which name their language is also known,² as already said.

Those whose only occupation is rearing cattle need, of course, a certain amount of land for the creatures to feed upon, and thus it came to pass that some of the early tribes gradually spread northwards, each family or clan having its own chief or patriarch. We have an instance of such a separation in Genesis, when Abraham and Lot found the land round their tents insufficient for the wants of their combined herds.

In time, each tribe cultivated the land of which it had taken possession, thus reaching the first stage of civilization. This led to the invention of canals; for the ground became so dry in summer, that the crops would have withered without water being thus conducted to the fields from the great river.

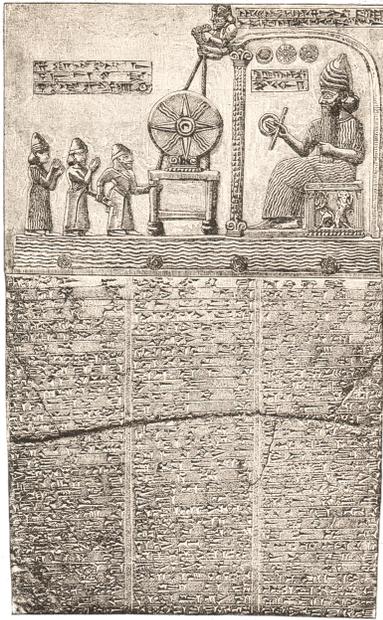
The religion which the Sumerians, no doubt, brought with them from Central Asia was a strange one, about which as many as two hundred tablets, arranged as three works, have been found in Nineveh. The first treats of evil spirits, the second is about diseases, and the third is a collection of hymns and prayers. The last belongs, however, to a later period.

The early Sumerians thought the sun was a good god, who ripened their grain, and that another good god sent rain; but that an evil spirit sometimes spoiled the work of the sun by making it burn up the grass and flowers, and that an evil spirit caused the rain to come down too heavily, washing away their slight houses and the produce of their fields. According to their ideas, there were seven important evil spirits, besides a great man others, whose constant pleasure was doing harm; on the other hand, the sun, moon, and five plates were good spirits or gods, who opposed them.



¹ A spelling variant of Sumer from which Sumeria got its name.

² Accadian (or more commonly spelled Akkadian today) is distantly related to Hebrew, Aramaic and Arabic while distinctly different from Sumerian. The Accadians later took rule over all of Chaldea including the Sumerians to the south under King Sargon I who ruled from the city of Accad. Their language then became the dominant language of Chaldea and was still spoken at the time of Abraham.



**SHAMASH—THE SUN
GOD**

They considered that the shape of the earth was that of a bowl turned upside down, the heavens being supported over the world by a gigantic pillar which held them up. This supposed pillar they had, of course, not seen, but they said it was far away in the north. The head-god, then, was Ana—heaven. Next in importance came Ea, god of the earth and of the water. The Sumerians thought he sailed round the world in a splendid ship, and was very powerful. They did not pray much to him, however, being afraid to trouble him; but they believed he had a son, Meri-dug, and if anyone wanted advice or help he asked the priest to pray to Meri-dug, who was supposed to consult his father Ea, and then let the priest know what the person was to do.

As they were so dependent on the help of the priests with regard to good and evil spirits, they naturally treated them with great respect; indeed, the head-priest was king, and for many years there were priest-kings, “patesi,” as they were called. We often hear of such an office in Bible times, for it is to be met with the early history of almost every nation. Job was priest as well as prince; also, Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law; Samuel, the ruler of Israel, offered sacrifices as a priest, so did King Solomon.

The Sumerians were terribly afraid of the dark, for they thought evil spirits would be rampant when the good sun was not there to drive them away. They learned from the priests to say spells and incantations to keep them off, but were thankful when the morning broke, and they again beheld the sunrise as a conqueror, having, as they supposed, spent the night in fighting evil powers under the earth, where they thought the souls of the dead all lived.

They wore amulets made of precious stones, shining like the sun, to keep themselves safe, and had besides what they considered an excellent device for preventing evil from entering their abodes. The ugliest image they could devise was made and placed by their door, to represent the evil spirit, who, they thought, would be so frightened when he saw what he was like, that he would run away! Many little stones with incantations on them have been found under the threshold of Chaldean houses; and thinking that a bull with wings represented a guardian spirit, they often placed such images on each side of the door, calling them “Kirubu,” in Hebrew “Kerobim,” from which comes our word “Cherubim.”

The Sumerians had no idea how to treat sickness; but, supposing it to be the work of evil spirits, repeated as many spells as they could think of to drive it away. For instance, they would peel an onion and burn it, saying, “May the evil or sickness be burnt like an onion!” When they found such remedies did no good, they would carry

the sick person into the street, and ask everyone who passed whether he could think of anything further to do or say, and they tried everything that was recommended; I fear, without much avail.

You will judge from all this that they were very superstitious, and their priests little better than magicians—teachers of magic spells. They looked, indeed, upon the most trifling events as omens, as the following sentences from the tablets will show: “If a blue dog enter a palace, that palace will be burned;” “If a tawny dog enter the palace, peace will be concluded with the enemies.”