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A NEW ASPECT OF THE SUMERIAN QUESTION.

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Despite the confident tone assumed by some Assyriologists, what has come to be known as the "Sumerian problem" is still far from having reached a solution that can be regarded as altogether satisfactory, and those who are not content with the tacit acceptance of a "tradition" cannot be satisfied with any other solution of the problem than the one to which the term "definite" can justly be applied. The impartial student must confess, however reluctantly, that this "definite" solution has not yet been reached. Granting that the evidence is sufficient to establish the hypothesis that "Sumerian" represents a real language, different and quite distinct from the Babylonian, and not merely a more or less artificial method of writing Babylonian — an outgrowth of the earlier period in which the method of conveying thought through writing was essentially ideographic—it still remains for the "Sumerologists," as the advocates of the former view may be called, to determine the group of languages to which the "Sumerian" belongs. All attempts to do so have failed,[1] and it must be confessed, rather sadly, that no serious progress toward such determination has been made since Professor Paul Haupt presented his paper on "Die sumerisch-akkadische Sprache"[2] at the International Congress of Orientalists in 1881.

[1] See Winckler's statement in his very recent publication, *Auszug aus der vorderasiatischen Geschichte*, p. 1.

[2] Published in the *Verhandlungen des fünften internationalen Orientalisten-Congresses* (Berlin, 1881), Vol II, 1, pp. 249-87.

Professor Haupt was generous enough to attach to his paper an appendix by Professor Otto Donner,[3] in which that eminent scholar showed that the "Akkadian," as it was then generally called, showed no affinity to the "Ural-Altaic" group with which "Sumerologists" were disposed to class it. Since that time Hommel alone has had the courage—or temerity—to tackle this particular problem, but the acceptance of his views on this, as on so many other questions, has been confined to one scholar—himself.[4] The most recent writer on the "Sumerian" problem, Fossey,[5] has confined himself so far to an attempted refutation of Halévy's "anti-Sumerian" hypothesis, without any indication, beyond some vague hints, as to the place to be accorded to the non-Semitic idiom of the Euphrates valley in the "Turanian" group or groups.

But besides the philological aspect of the problem, to which until recently the almost exclusive attention of scholars has been directed, there are ethnological and archæological phases which are scarcely less important. If the "Sumerian" represents a non-Semitic idiom, then the Sumerians ought to be a non-Semitic people; but the ethnological evidence for the predominance at one time of non-Semites in the Euphrates valley is confined to a number of mutilated heads of statues, which turn out to be portraits of the priest-king Gudea,[6] and to sculptures on early monuments. Three features in these heads have been singled out as proofs that they represent a non-Semitic type: (1) the turban-like head-dress, (2) the beardless face, and (3) the supposed contrast to the features of Semitic rulers. In regard to the head-dress, it is sufficient to recall that it can hardly be seriously taken as an index of race unless it can be shown, which is manifestly impossible if not absurd, that the turban which is characteristic of the ancient Arab and of the modern Bedouin was adopted by the Semites from their "Sumerian" enemies. The beardless face, as the shaven head in the case of early statues and monuments, may be due to a religious rite, or, as in the case of the statue of King

[3] Pp. 39–48 in the separate edition of the paper.

[4] Despite this fact, Hommel, in his latest work, *Geographie und Geschichte des alten Orients*, pp. 21 *sq.*, firmly clings to his position that the Sumerian belongs to the Altaic branch of the Ural-Altaic group. The list of "Sumerian" words, with their supposed Turkish equivalents which he furnishes on p. 22, does not inspire confidence in his method.

[5] *Manuel d'Assyriologie*, Livre troisième, chapitre II, "Origine sumérienne de l'écriture babylonienne."

[6] See De Sarzec, *Découvertes en Chaldée*, Ière Partie, pp. 129–45, and Heuzey, *Revue d'Assyriologie*, Vol. V, pp. 18–22.

Daudu found at Bismya—the ancient Adab[7]—to the rude character of the art; and the same factor minimizes the value of any deductions to be drawn from the general features of the individuals portrayed on early monuments. This argument, to be sure, does not apply to the Gudea heads, the workmanship of which represents a more advanced art,[8] and Hommel was quite certain, immediately upon the discovery of these heads, that they represented non-Semitic types.[9] Unfortunately, however, the noses are wanting on these heads, and ethnologists are agreed that, without so essential a feature, the criteria for determining the type represented are hopelessly imperfect. On the other hand, in the case of the figures on the monument of Ur-Enlil, which belongs to the very oldest period known, the late Professor Cope[10] —a most competent authority—declared that the noses and eyes pointed to a Semitic type, although other features, like the shortness of the jaw, did not appear to be Semitic. Granting, therefore, along with the assumption that the Sumerian represents a real language, that several races helped to produce the Euphratean culture, until something of a definite character shall have been determined regarding the specific origin and nature of the supposed non-Semitic population of Babylonia, the ethnological aspects of the problem are as far removed from the stage of a "definite" solution as the philological problem. The same criticism is to be passed upon the archæological aspects involved in the Sumerian problem. The position once taken by Sumerologists that a "Sumerian" text is to be regarded as indicative of the religious ideas and practices of the Sumerians, or of their social customs, their form of government, or the like, has been abandoned, ever since it was recognized that such texts may represent translations from the Babylonian-Assyrian into "Sumerian." Zimmern admitted this for the so-called "Penitential Psalms."[11] What applies to these productions applies to other hymns and prayers. The incantation series likewise bear all the marks of

[7] See Banks, *Biblical World*, 1904, pp. 377-79.

[8] It is to be remembered, however, that even in these statues, as Heuzey has shown (*loc. cit.*), the artists showed no regard for the proper proportions of the body in relationship to the head.

[9] See his *Geschichte Babyloniens*, pp. 241 *sq.*

[10] Hilprecht, *Old Babylonian Inscriptions*, Vol. I, 2, p. 48, note.

[11] *Babylonische Busspsalmen*, p. 1. I say "so-called" Penitential Psalms, for these productions are not to be separated from other prayers in the Babylonian-Assyrian literature See the writer's *Religion Babyloniens und Assyriens* Vol. II, p. 10.

being such "translations," or, to put it more correctly, of having been originally written in Babylonian-Assyrian. Sayce's attempt to distinguish between "Sumerian" and "Semitic" elements in the religion of Babylonia and Assyria, as first made in his "Hibbert Lectures,"[12] and repeated, though with less assurance, in his more recent "Gifford Lectures,"[13] fails to take cognizance of this fact, and it is sufficient to recall the extravagances to which scholars were led about twenty years ago as to the number and character of loan-words from the "Sumerian" in Babylonian, on the assumption that everything found in a "Sumerian" text or in the "Sumerian" column of a syllabary was non-Semitic, to demonstrate the untenability of the position maintained by the earlier Sumerologists.[14] It is now admitted that the earliest historical and votive inscriptions contain Semitic words and Semitic constructions,[15] and so strong an adherent of the non-Semitic character of the "Sumerian" language as Winckler frankly admits[16] that no satisfactory criterion has as yet been found for distinguishing between the "Semitic" and "non-Semitic" elements in the complex fabric of Euphratean culture.

Whatever, therefore, our individual attitude toward the Sumerian problem may be, we ought all cheerfully and gratefully to acknowledge our great debt to Joseph Halévy, the author and consistent advocate of the "anti-Sumerian" hypothesis for a period of over thirty years, to whose acute and effective criticism of the defects in the assumptions, arguments, and conclusions of the "Sumerologists," the important modifications and limitations, introduced from time to time in the formulation and implications of their position, are due. It was Halévy who, by his insistence upon the absurdities to which his opponents were led, forced from them the admission that a considerable number of the phonetic values attaching to the signs of the cuneiform syllabary were of Semitic origin. The number of signs placed in this category grew until at present at least one hundred of such phonetic values

[12] *Religion of the Ancient Babylonians*, pp. 325 *sq.*

[13] *Religions of Ancient Egypt and Babylonia*, Lecture 5.

[14] Quite a different method is pursued by Leander in his valuable work, *Sumerische Lehnwörter im Assyrischen* (Upsala, 1903), although here words are still entered as "Sumerian" on the basis of occurrence in "Sumerian" texts which are in all probability good Semitic terms; *e. g.*, *abulmaḫ* "great gate," *abzu* "ocean," *azu* "physician." *ēkallu* "palace," *kimaḫḫu* "sarcophagus," etc.

[15] See, *e. g.*, Radau, *Early Babylonian History*, pp. 145 *sq.*

[16] *Die Völker Vorderasiens* (Leipzig, 1900), p. 8.

are by common consent admitted to be derived in one way or the other from Semitic words. It is again due to Halévy that the Sumerologists were led to admit that "Sumerian" texts could be written by Semites for the purpose of giving their thoughts an outward archaic form; and while, as a matter of course, it does not follow from this admission that the "Sumerian" may not have been a genuine language, it favors the assumption that the "translations" from Babylonian-Assyrian into Sumerian represent an artificial process that may well have arisen out of a more primitive but natural method of giving graphic expression to language by means of ideographs, with the addition of numerous devices and conventional signs to represent modifications in verbal forms and in nouns that in a phonetic system can be more simply and more accurately indicated. If we recall that all writing, even of the most advanced form, is largely symbolic, we ought not to be astonished at the predominance of artificial devices in early attempts; and while, on the one hand, practical considerations would tend to the simplification of systems of writing, the mystery involved in the ability to convey one's thoughts by means of graphic signs would counteract this tendency and encourage the disposition, especially for official purposes and in matters connected with the cult, to surround the system with a certain amount of "cryptic" subterfuges.

Halévy, to be sure, has time and again protested against the application[17] of the term "cryptography" to his anti-Sumerian hypothesis, but he has weakened his case somewhat, it seems to me, by not emphasizing with sufficient force the largely artificial character of the "Sumerian" method of expressing one's thoughts, due, as is here suggested, to the two factors: (1) the inherent artificiality in every form of script, which is most pronounced at the period when a people attempts to modify a more or less primitive picture script in the endeavor to fix in writing facts and thoughts which, to a large extent, are in advance of the grade of culture which gave rise to the graphical system in question; and (2) the mystery connected in the popular mind with any form of writing.

Even in a purely hieroglyphic script the artificial element inevitably makes its appearance. To represent a man by a picture

[17] See, *e. g.*, Halévy, "Le sumérisme et l'histoire babylonienne," *Revue sémitique*, Vol VIII, pp. 239 *sq.*, and the references in Weissbach, *Sumerische Frage*, p. 136.

of a man is a natural process, but to represent a man by a human head or a leg is already an artificial process; and when the idea of speaking is expressed by the picture of a man with his hand to his mouth, we have advanced a step further in the direction of artificialty. Developing along these lines, it is possible, by means of a comparatively simple picture script, to indite short dedicatory inscriptions on monuments or votive objects, and even to give a brief account of a military expedition; but when the need or the desire arises to give a permanent form to incantation formulæ, to prayers whose efficacy has been tested, or to the collection of omens and their significance as a guide for human conduct, and where much, if not everything, depends upon the *nicety* of expression, the artificial process becomes intensified tenfold in the endeavor to represent these niceties until the auspicious moment comes when the thought arises in the mind of a priest, keener than the rest, of substituting for the cumbersome, and at best vague, ideographic method a phonetic system with its flexible and adaptable basic principle. The phonetic system of the Babylonian script is obviously an artificial process, and this trait clings to it as it does to the next stage—the alphabetic, as represented by the Persian cuneiform—whether we adopt the "Sumerian" or the "anti-Sumerian" hypothesis.

That the newer and simpler phonetic method, however, did not drive the older ideographic method out of the field is due to the conservative instinct which prompted the retention for the religious cult of the "ideographic" texts already in use, as well as the production of new ones written in the old style. Again, in the writing of proper names of persons, gods, or countries which, because of the ideas associated with the "name," had a religious aspect, the ideographic style would naturally be retained; and one can also understand that, despite its cumbersome character, numerous expressions conveyed in this style that had become, as it were, stereotyped would be bodily carried over into the new phonetic method. Certainly, on the supposition of a single language as the vehicle for thought in the Euphrates valley, the "mixed" character of practically all the historical, and most of the religious, texts can better be accounted for—other things being equal—than on the assumption that the Semites, who could not have been interested in the preservation of the language of the dispossessed "Sumerians," should have continued to a late day to

preserve "Sumerian" methods of writing, and to write the distinctively Semitic names of rulers and individuals in the "Sumerian" style.

A second factor that would, on the supposition of a single language underlying the "Sumerian" and "Babylonian" systems of writing, account for the deliberately artificial character of the former and the persistency of artificial methods in the graphic expression of thought, is involved in the mysterious character attached in the popular mind to writing of any kind, and from the influence of which "superstition" (if we choose to call it so) even the intellectual class in antiquity would not be entirely free. The power supposed to reside in the spoken word, upon which the entire incantation lore, constituting so large an element in the Babylonian religion—as in all ancient cults—rests, was naturally transferred to the written word. Writing being an art confined to the priests in ancient society, who were the intellectual guides, as well as religious leaders, of the people, the masses must have been as much awed by the strange signs that had a meaning for the initiated only as they were by the power of these favored ones to bring about a response from the deities or to control demons—invoking or exorcising them at their will—through the utterance of certain formulæ. If it be borne in mind that to this day the use of amulets of one kind or the other, containing names of angels or demons, or some mystic formulæ, or extracts from sacred writings, is still widespread in the Orient; that up to a late period the Jews, *e. g.*, continued to associate an element of mystery with both the spoken and the written "Divine name;" that the cabalistic lore of the Middle Ages is bound up with the "mystery" attached to writing; that the untutored among the modern Arabs regard the written prescription of a physician as efficacious as the medicinal dose and therefore swallow both, it stands to reason that the ancient Babylonian scribes were not free from the influence of this aspect of writing. Under the influence of the mysterious element involved in giving a graphic expression to one's thought, every ancient system of writing, as it developed from a purely picture script to a more elaborate method of expressing precise formulæ and niceties of thought, would acquire a "cryptographic" aspect—precisely as modern stenography is essentially "cryptographic"—that is, an artificially devised system, the key to which is needed in order that it should become intelligible. Employed

in this sense, Halévy ought not, and probably would not, object to the application of the term "cryptographic" to his anti-Sumerian theory, for the phonetic method of writing Babylonian is likewise not free from a cryptographic aspect. We can well understand that, in addition to the conservative instinct leading to the retention of the traditional ideographic script for certain kinds of texts, this element of mystery connected with writing should have favored the accentuation of the "cryptographic" aspects, and thus directly contributed to the further development of purely artificial, as distinguished from more natural, methods of conveying one's thoughts through the medium of writing. In direct proportion as writing tended to become an art confined to the priests, the latter would be prompted by the instinct of self-preservation to invest the writing with as much mystery as possible, so mysterious, at least, that without access to the key it would remain a puzzle to the uninitiated.

From whatever point, therefore, we view the development of writing in the Euphrates valley, there would be powerful influences at work toward giving the older, and, in part, the newer, form of writing an artificial character. That the "Sumerian" presents many features which represent distinctly artificial processes is self-evident. It is sufficient to point to the frequent occurrence of the reduplication of signs to indicate the plural, as, *e. g.*, *an-an* "gods," *kur-kur* "countries," by the side of a genuine suffix *ne* or *ene;* the formation of the abstract of nouns by placing the syllable *nam* before the ideograph expressing the ordinary noun; the large number of prefixes attached to verbs, used to a considerable extent interchangeably, and corresponding to a variety of modifications of the fundamental idea attached to the accompanying ideograph; and more the like. It is inconceivable that a people possessing a high degree of culture, such as must have characterized the "Sumerians," on the assumption of the theory maintained by the Sumerologists, should not have perfected their script to a larger degree, and should have rested content with the vagueness and total incapacity for expressing niceties of thought that mark the Sumerian method of writing; whereas, on the supposition that these artificial features represent a species of stenography intelligible to those possessing the key, a much more satisfactory account can be given of the puzzles which the Sumerian presents even to those who believe that it represents a

language quite distinct from the Babylonian and belonging to a linguistic group that differs *in toto* from the Semitic Babylonian.

To be sure, the artificial character of the Sumerian being granted, it does not yet follow that the basis may not be a language different from the Babylonian; but at all events it is a great gain to establish the fact that what passes as Sumerian is to a large extent an artificial product, due to the Semitic settlers of the Euphrates valley; and if it reverts to a non-Semitic language once current in Babylonia, it no longer represents that language in its purity. The problem then consists in endeavoring to separate the artificial elements contributed by the supposed Semitic conquerors of the "Sumerian" founders of the Euphratean culture from the genuine features which belong to the language spoken by the founders—a task that has not yet been attempted, and which does not promise much success to the one who undertakes it.

These considerations of some of the aspects of the Sumerian problem are suggested by a remarkable concession made to Halévy's theory recently by an Assyriologist who is peculiarly competent to handle the vexed Sumerian problem. I refer to Dr. Rudolf Brünnow, the author of the indispensable "Classified List," and who in the gigantic task of preparing that work was at every point brought into direct contact with the problem of the relationship between Babylonian and the so-called Sumerian. In a recent number of the *Revue sémitique*[18] there appears a most suggestive series of letters exchanged between Halévy and Brünnow, which should be read, not only by all Assyriologists, but by all Semitists, as well as by students of linguistics in general. Passing far beyond the position taken by Sumerologists in admitting that the genuine Sumerian has been tampered with by the Semites of later days and "semitized" to a certain degree, Brünnow is prepared to accept the view that all the so-called bilingual texts revert to a Babylonian origin, and that the so-called "Sumerian" version is in all cases a translation from the Babylonian. This position carries with it as a necessary corollary that a much larger portion of the phonetic values in cuneiform syllabary is of Semitic origin than is admitted by him in his "Classified List." Indeed, one might conclude that Brünnow concedes the entire syllabary to be based on Semitic Babylonian,

[18] Vol. XIII (July, 1905), pp. 259–75.

for the novelty of the thesis that he puts forward consists in the proposition that the Sumerians, in whose existence as a people distinct from the Babylonians he still believes, represent, not the original inhabitants of the Euphrates valley, nor the founders of the Euphratean culture, but *late comers* who adopted and absorbed the Semitic civilization of the region, including the script and the syllabary which they used for writing their own non-Semitic language. The "Sumerian" votive texts and historical inscriptions, from this point of view, would represent the attempt of these newcomers to substitute for the language of the Semitic founders of the Euphratean culture that of the conquering people, while the bilingual texts—chiefly religious—would similarly form a part of the process involved in the absorption of the religious ideas, ritual, and customs of the Semites. Instead, therefore, of "Sumerian loan-words" in Babylonian, most if not all of the examples adduced by Leander in his recent monograph[19]—which, by the way, suggested the correspondence between Brünnow and Halévy—would be Babylonian loan-words in Sumerian. The non-Semitic conquerors maintained themselves for a sufficiently long time to acquire for their language official recognition, so that after their expulsion—or, if you choose, after their sway had come to an end—the Semitic "reconquerors" maintained the use of Sumerian, to a certain extent at least, in the cult, and continued to employ "Sumerian" for official purposes. The influence thus exerted by the Sumerian would account for such elements in the Babylonian method of writing and in the language itself as appear to be "non-Semitic." Naturally, Brünnow does not attempt to specify when the "Sumerian" invasion took place, or how much earlier the Semites were in possession, but the entire movement must have terminated before the date of the oldest "Sumerian" inscriptions, which, as admitted by the Sumerologists, contain Semitic words and show traces of Semitic constructions.

The honored name and distinguished services of Brünnow justify a careful and respectful consideration of any views advanced by him. In the present instance, the most noteworthy feature of the Brünnow-Halévy correspondence is the circumstance that Brünnow recognizes the unsatisfactory character of the solution proposed by the "Sumerologists" who constitute the large majority

[19] See above, and Halévy's detailed review in the *Revue sémitique*, Vol. XII, pp. 229-45, 325-48; Vol. XIII, pp. 23-53, "Les prétendus mots sumériens empruntés en Assyrien."

among Assyriologists. He justifies, therefore, the attitude of those (among whom I range myself) who have felt all along the inherent weakness of the current hypothesis, and who have recognized the absurdities to which it has led, without, however, being able to satisfy themselves that Halévy has as yet found the real key to the solution of the puzzle. As a matter of course, persons maintaining such an attitude lay themselves open to the charge (or suspicion) of being "noncommittal;" but when one recalls the number of theories of all kinds that have been shipwrecked in the stormy career of Assyriological science, a certain reserve in connection with the most difficult and perplexing of all problems in the realm of cuneiform research seems fully justified. The new aspect of the problem suggested by Brünnow's letters to Halévy shows that the definite solution of the problem has not yet been reached, and this admission is an important gain for Halévy, whose voice for over thirty years has rung out against a hasty acceptance of a defective theory.

Coming now to a more specific consideration of the merits of Brünnow's view, it must also be recognized as a distinct gain for Halévy that Brünnow separates the question of the origin of the Euphratean culture from the "Sumerian" problem. The contention of the "Sumerologists" has always been that the "Sumerian" origin of the cuneiform syllabary carried with it the non-Semitic origin of the entire culture of the Euphratean valley which, according to the current view, was adopted by the Semites upon conquering Babylonia. This view involved the religious ideas as expressed in the names of the gods and in a considerable part of the cult; but since a study of the Babylonian-Assyrian religion betrays not the slightest trace of a break from the earliest period known to us down to the latest—the names of *all* the gods being expressed in "Sumerian" *and* Babylonian and used interchangeably, and the development of the religion, so far as it can be traced, proceeding in a perfectly normal manner—there was only one of two conclusions to be drawn: either that there were no *distinctive* Semitic features in the Babylonian-Assyrian religion, or that Sumerian and Semitic constitute synonymous terms. The former alternative is manifestly absurd, in view of the relationship between the religions of Babylonia and Assyria and the religion of other Semitic peoples, while the latter destroys the basis of the "Sumerian" hypothesis. What applies to the religion applies,

though in a different degree, to the other phase of the culture in the Euphrates valley. Brünnow's proposition does away with this difficulty. Separating the question as to the existence of a "Sumerian" language from the question as to the origin of the Euphratean culture, he clears the way for the acceptance of the fact that this culture, whatever its origin may be, is so thoroughly Semitic—or, if you choose, "semiticized"—at the earliest period to which it can be traced back, as to leave no room for any possible "non-Semitic" elements. Though Brünnow confines himself in his discussion largely to the linguistic features of the problem, he would no doubt be willing to include in his sweep the religion, the form of government, the social life, as well as the script. Indeed, he says in one passage[20] that he grants Halévy "toute la civilisation" as pre-Sumerian. To be sure, he does not concede the purely Semitic origin of the Euphratean culture, but is inclined to believe that it is a "mixed" product, due to the meeting of various races in the Euphratean valley, in which mixture, however, the Semitic element predominated, and eventually gained the supremacy. This theory, however, is entirely independent of the "Sumerian" problem and may be set aside in any discussion of the latter, since the possible non-Semitic elements in the old and original Euphratean civilization have nothing to do with the origin of the Sumerians, who enter as a factor *after* the script, the religion, the arts, and the social organization of Babylonia had been developed as a predominatingly Semitic product.

Halévy, on the other hand, makes an important concession in excluding from a consideration of the Sumerian problem the "obscure question of origins."[21] He contents himself with the assumption that the Euphratean civilization presents itself as a *fait accompli* and Semitic in character. While the implication may be that the Semites are also the sole originators of this civilization, Halévy has, as I believe, removed one of the objections to his anti-Sumerian position by frankly recognizing the possibility that others than Semites *may* have contributed to the production of the Euphratean civilization such as we find it when it comes within the scope of historical inquiry. The weak point, undoubtedly, in the attitude of both camps, has been the haste with which the leap was made from the oldest form of the culture in Babylonia to the origin of that culture. The "Sumerian"

[20] P. 265. [21] P. 262.

problem, as it has hitherto been presented, has been essentially a problem of origins, the difference between the two camps being resolved into the question whether Semites or non-Semites produced the culture of the Euphrates valley. The new aspect of the problem involved in Brünnow's position and in Halévy's concession eliminates this element—definitely in the one case and temporarily at least in the other. The removal of this disturbing element is to be accounted a distinct gain and points the way along which further endeavors toward the definite solution of the problem should proceed. If it is once admitted that the existence of a "Sumerian" language expressed in the cuneiform script does not necessarily involve the non-Semitic origin of that script, one can conceive the possibility of accepting the contention of the Sumerologists without involving oneself in the difficulties which the acceptance of their theory in its present form includes—difficulties that have from time to time brought distinguished adherents, like Guyard, Pognon, Jäger, Price, McCurdy, Alfred Jeremias, Thureau-Dangin, and at one time Delitzsch himself, the teacher of two-thirds of the present Assyriologists of acknowledged rank, to Halévy's side, and that have evoked notable concessions, as, *e. g.*, Zimmern at the outset of his brilliant career was inclined to make, and that Brünnow now has made.

It requires, however, no elaborate argument to demonstrate the untenability of Brünnow's specific hypothesis. Apart from the fact that not a particle of evidence exists for the assumption that the control of the Semites in the Euphrates valley was interrupted by a non-Semitic invasion, such an invasion would have left its traces in other ways than in inducing the reconquerors to preserve a language in which they could not have been in the least interested. Indeed, the one thing that under such circumstances would not have been preserved, would have been the "Sumerian" language, since it would neither have been hallowed by any historical or religious traditions, nor associated with anything that would have appealed to the Semites sufficiently to outweigh the hold that the earliest associations for them—which, according to Brünnow, would have clustered around an essentially Semitic culture—must have had.

Just as there has been no break in the religious development of Babylonia from the earliest period to the latest, so there does not appear to have been any political movement from the earliest

period sufficiently radical to create a condition of bilingualism in the country. Considering that Cassites held sway in Babylonia for over five hundred years without imposing their language on the country, strong arguments would have to be forthcoming before we could be led to give favorable consideration to a theory which supposes an invasion that led to the "sumerization" of a country in which a Semitic script had been developed as the outcome of an intellectual movement of long duration.

Moreover, on the basis of Brünnow's theory, the artificial and archaic elements in "Sumerian" would be the strangest of puzzles. If "Sumerian" represents a real language, the conclusion is irresistibly forced upon us that as an essentially ideographic form of writing it must be earlier than Babylonian, which is a mixture of phonetic and ideographic writing; and similarly if the "Sumerian" system of writing is dependent upon an earlier Semitic one, it is inconceivable that the Sumerians should have been content with the vagueness and ambiguity inherent in the "Sumerian" system—a system so vague that no *certain* criterion exists for determining whether a "Sumerian" inscription is to be regarded as genuinely "Sumerian" or merely as a "Sumerian" form of what is to be read as Babylonian.[22] All these phenomena, however, can be accounted for without much difficulty on the assumption that the "Sumerian" represents the earlier and less advanced system. As Halévy urges with force, the development of writing everywhere is from the ideographic to the phonetic method, from vagueness and ambiguity in the graphic expression of thought to definiteness and clearness, from a cumbersome system to a more simplified one; whereas Brünnow's hypothesis would just reverse the order. If therefore Brünnow is justified in his admission that the "Sumerian" presupposes the "Semitic," the burden of proof is shifted from the followers of Halévy to the "Sumerologists" to prove that Sumerian is not "Semitic." This is the new aspect which is now presented by Brünnow's attitude. The only conclusion compatible with all that we know of the lines along which systems of writing develop, the only conclusion in accord with all that we know of the historical traditions and the unfolding of religious thought in the Euphrates valley from the assumption that the cuneiform syllabary is Semitic in origin, is

[22] So Zimmern, *Busspsalmen*, p. 4, admits, and his remarks still hold good at the present time, even if not to the same degree, since there are some early votive inscriptions apparently free from the "Semitisms" to be tinguished in the great majority of them.

that what is known as "Sumerian" is merely an older and an essentially ideographic method of writing Babylonian, developed to the extent of introducing a variety of more or less artificial devices for indicating, albeit in a vague way, the various forms of verbs and nouns and syntactical constructions which in a phonetic system can be expressed in a more definite manner. That in the later phonetic system abundant traces of the earlier ideographic method should have survived is exactly what we should have a right to expect; and that in the writing of proper names, in votive inscriptions, and in religious texts the older ideographic style should have been preferred is again in keeping with the conservatism attaching to everything connected with the religious beliefs of a people. On the other hand, that in the course of time the ideographic method, through the introduction of devices for conveying more elaborate thought than is involved in a short dedicatory inscription on a monument or a sacred object, should itself have been systematized so as to present features which have all the appearance of being regular prefixed, infixed, and suffixed syllables, postpositions, and the like, similarly proceeds along a perfectly natural line of development. Be it remembered that on the assumption of the anti-Sumerian hypothesis, what passes for "Sumerian" is due to the comparatively small body of religious leaders in whose hands writing, up to a latest period, was largely, if not exclusively, confined. Under such circumstances, the artificial though systematic methods devised on the basis of an ideographic script represent a natural outcome. The system involved in the "Sumerian" form of writing lends to it, according to this view, the appearance of a real language distinct from Babylonian, while the artificiality of the system accounts for the impossibility of assigning the "Sumerian" to any of the known linguistic groups.

One can well understand how Brünnow was led to the view that the entire cuneiform syllabary was Semitic. He was not satisfied with the "half-way" position of Sumerologists who, besides admitting Semitic elements in Sumerian, assumed that the Semites, after they had adopted the Sumerian, had introduced into the syllabary new phonetic values derived from Semitic words, and had artificially preserved the use of Sumerian in the cult until finally a "monkish" form of it, for which the Latin of the Middle Ages, in comparison with the classic speech, seemed to offer an

analogy, was produced.[23] One cannot resist the impression that all these admissions are simply so many steps in a gradual retreat, which will land us very close to Halévy's outposts—if not into his camp. If a hundred of the values of the cuneiform signs are of Semitic origin, may not the fact that more are not admitted be merely due to our ignorance of the Semitic words from which they are derived? It is not assumed by anyone that we know *all* the ideographic values of all the signs; and as long as this is not the case, he would be bold indeed who would venture dogmatically to maintain that any particular phonetic value may not turn out to be Semitic. Nor is there any valid reason why Semitic words and constructions should appear in the oldest inscriptions known to us, if the "Sumerian" is a non-Semitic language. If the writers of those inscriptions were Semites, we should expect them to have written Babylonian. If they were Sumerians and the possessors of a system of writing invented by them, there is no reason why they should have found it necessary to introduce foreign elements; and if they were Semites, intent on writing Sumerian as a sacred script distinct from the Babylonian spoken and written by them for general purposes, they would hardly have profaned the sacred character of Sumerian by introducing Semitic words and Semitic constructions. If we have not yet found texts reverting to a period when "pure" Sumerian was written, if the bilingual texts represent translations from Babylonian into "monkish" Sumerian, then it is surely more rational to wait until we get copious specimens of "pure" Sumerian before we adopt the hypothesis of the Sumerologists. Hope deferred is apt to exhaust one's patience, and Brünnow, after waiting for sixteen years after the publication of his "Classified List" without finding that the Sumerologists had any prospect of advancing beyond the "half-way" position in which they appear to be now stuck fast, has taken the radical step of practically admitting the Semitic origin of the entire cuneiform syllabary. It must be confessed that this position is much more satisfactory than that occupied at present by the majority of "Sumerologists," and, viewed merely as a working hypothesis, affords a better outlook for advancing the solution of the problem than the complicated theory of a "Sumerian" language which is full of "Semitisms," which is not "pure" Sumerian, and for

[23] See, *e. g.*, Sayce, *Religion of the Babylonians*, pp. 322, 323, and, quite recently, Winckler in Helmolt's *History of the World*, Vol. III, pp. 4, 5, and Hommel, *Geographie und Geschichte d. alten Orients*, p. 21.

which it is impossible to find a place in any linguistic group. All things considered, the indications are that ere long Halévy will have the satisfaction of knowing that in reality the tables have been turned, and that the burden of proof for the thesis that Sumerian represents a real language distinct from the Semitic Babylonian, rests with those who maintain it, while those who maintain that Sumerian represents a highly complicated and largely artificial system for writing Babylonian, devised on the basis of an earlier ideographic system before a simpler phonetic system was introduced, will have the assumption of plausibility in their favor.

Further than this I, for one, do not feel disposed at present to go, and that for a very definite reason. It has above been suggested that Halévy's concession, that the question of the origin of the Euphratean civilization is to be separated from the "Sumerian" problem, removes an objection that has been experienced by many who might otherwise have been attracted to his theory. There are good reasons, besides the biblical tradition, for believing that the Euphrates valley was in very early days, as it still is at the present time, a gathering-place of various races. The impulse to culture comes everywhere through the commingling of peoples of different origin, and Dr. Ward has recently furnished some strong grounds for assuming that the invasion of the Euphrates valley by a people coming from the East—from ancient Elam—furnished the stimulus for the development of the Babylonian civilization. This people was in all probability—nay, one may say with certainty—non-Semitic, and if Dr. Ward's view turns out to be correct, a substantial basis will be given for the assumption, in itself probable, that Babylonian culture is a mixture of Semitic with non-Semitic elements. If this be so, we should be justified in expecting to find traces of the non-Semitic elements, both in the language and also in the script; and those non-Semitic elements would, in the nature of things, be more pronounced in the earlier form of the script—when it was still in the ideographic stage—than in the later stage when the advance to a phonetic system had been made. In view of this, the possibility that there may lurk in the "Sumerian" system of writing some features which point to the existence at one time in the Euphrates valley of a non-Semitic language, spoken, and perhaps even written, by the side of the

Semitic Babylonian, must be admitted. A civilization produced by the commingling of peoples of different origin should be expected to leave traces of that mixture in all phases of the culture so produced—in the customs, in the form of government, in the religious ideas, in the cult, and also in the language and system of writing. This hypothesis does not, however, affect the main contention of those who are inclined to follow Halévy, that the cuneiform syllabary and the entire system of writing developed in the Euphrates valley are *essentially* a Semitic product, and that within that system we are to distinguish between two successive phases: an earlier phase in which the ideographic method prevails, modified by a large number of more or less artificial devices for expressing one's thoughts with greater nicety than is possible in a purely ideographic script, and a later phase in which the advance step toward phonetic writing has been taken without, however, a total abandonment of the earlier system. The survival of the old in the new is in accord with the law of progress to be observed everywhere and in all departments of human endeavor. The conservative instinct which presides over cultural development precludes (except in rare instances) the absolute break between the old and new. Instead, we have a constant process of transition; and since there are no certain indications that in the unfolding of the Euphratean civilization there was the sharp division involved in the assumption of the transfer of a non-Semitic system of writing, invented by a non-Semitic people for a non-Semitic culture produced by them, to a Semitic language spoken by Semitic Nomeds who fell heir to a foreign culture, the presumption is in favor of a hypothesis which does not require so radical an assumption. When, in addition, this less radical presumption is enforced by evidence that points at all events to the thorough "semitization" of the system of writing used by the Semitic Babylonians, then in the choice between the alternative whether this "semitization" is to be ascribed to the fact that the system is actually, or at least essentially, of Semitic origin, or that it points to a non-Semitic origin of the system, the burden of proof, as things now stand, and in view of the important concessions made from time to time by "Sumerologists" to Halévy's contentions, may properly be said to rest upon those whose position involves the assumption that the Euphratean civilization represents one of the exceptions to the rule of cultural develop-

ment. I trust at some time to develop still further, on the general lines laid down by Halévy, the thesis of the largely artificial character of the devices used in the so-called "Sumerian" system—which I would designate as the modified ideographic system—for indicating verbal forms, prepositions, syntactial constructions, and the like. Meanwhile, I trust that this sketch of certain new aspects of the problem may serve at least to call renewed attention to the fact, admitted, *e. g.*, by Jeremias in his recent admirable sketch of the Babylonian-Assyrian religion,[24] that "the Sumerian problem still awaits a definite solution;" and I believe, furthermore, that Jeremias is justified in his assertion that the problem will not be solved by the exclusive appeal to philology.

SUPPLEMENT.

After reading the proof of this article, I received from Professor J. D. Prince, of Columbia University, the advance sheets of the Introduction to his forthcoming work, *Materials for a Sumerian Lexicon, with a Grammatical Introduction*, which is to appear as Vol. XIX of Delitzsch and Haupt, *Assyriologische Bibliothek*. In this work, on which Professor Prince has been engaged for a number of years, and which promises to be of great value, a further concession is made to the contentions of Halévy, to which attention should be directed. Professor Prince admits (pp. vii–viii of the Introduction) that, with few exceptions, the most ancient "Sumerian" inscriptions contain "Semitic loanwords" and "grammatical Semitisms." He is inclined to except the Gudea inscriptions; but against this see Radau, *Early Babylonian History*, pp. 145 and 209. Prince also admits that "in many cases" a Sumerian text represents a "translation of Semitic ideas by Semitic priests into the formal religious Sumerian language," and, passing far beyond scholars like Winckler and Hommel, who regard the Sumerian in the bilingual religious texts as a corrupt Sumerian, corresponding to the monkish Latin of mediæval times as against the classical speech, he concedes that under these influences the Sumerian developed into a "cryptography," or what practically amounts to such. It is because of this artificial character of Sumerian that attempts to connect it with any linguistic group have failed, and Prince is emphatic in

[24] In the third edition (1905) of Chantepie de la Saussaye's *Lehrbuch der Religionsgeschichte*, Vol. I, pp. 262, 263.

declaring that, though there are "tempting resemblances between the Sumerian and Turkish vocabularies, ... Sumerian as we know it up to the present time stands alone" (*loc. cit.*, p. viii). "Nor is it possible," he adds, "to connect Sumerian as yet with any language by dint of probably accidental verbal similarities." Prince would probably be willing to go as far as Halévy in the recognition of the principle of *paranomasia* (or "popular etymology," as he defines it) in "Sumerian," and at all events he accepts unreservedly the largely artificial character of many of the phenomena presented by Sumerian. Indeed, he goes even a step farther and concedes that the evidences of word-plays in the meanings attached to signs and of other artificial features, "if taken by themselves, would be sufficient to convince most philologists that we have to deal here with an arbitrarily arranged cryptography rather than with a language." The saving clause here is "if taken by themselves," and the dividing line between Prince's position and Halévy's theory is moved back into the prehistoric period in which Prince assumes that Sumerian existed and flourished as the current speech of the Euphrates valley. For him Sumerian, as we know it, stands out as "a prehistoric philological remnant," from which it is possible, however, to draw the conclusion that the speech was non-Semitic, and that the people speaking this non-Semitic tongue were the inventors of the script and the originators of the Euphratean culture. Granting the largely "cryptographic" character of what passes as Sumerian, the question arises whether a criterion can be found to distinguish between older elements that revert to a genuine language distinct from the Semitic Babylonian, and such as are due to the devices of Semitic priests. So far as can be judged from the Introduction, Professor Prince makes out a strong case for the assumption that behind the artificial phrases of Sumerian lies a *real* language, but his proof is not convincing that this language must necessarily have been non-Semitic. He adduces no new evidence for the non-Semitic origin of the Euphratean culture, and he does not answer the objections against the assumption that the Semites should have retained a language in which they had no interest as the vehicle of religious thought up to the latest period of their supremacy in the Euphrates valley.

Professor Prince confines himself, in accord with the purpose of his instructive work, to the philological aspects of the problem,

and there is every reason to believe that his extensive collection of material will enhance the possibility of obtaining a clearer grasp of the complicated and intricate "Sumerian" system of writing; but unless he furnishes a satisfactory criterion for distinguishing between "cryptographic" and natural features in Sumerian, it is not clear how a definite solution of the problem can be reached, and even if such criterion is forthcoming, the obligation rests upon him definitely to establish the non-Semitic character of the "natural" elements. Meanwhile, his clearly defined position as an advocate of the largely "cryptographic" character of Sumerian, amounting, as he would no doubt admit in the case of many texts, to a purely cryptographic character for all practical purposes, may be said to mark an advance step in the discussion of the problem, just as Brünnow's innovation in separating the question of the origin of the Euphratean culture from the question as to the linguistic character of "Sumerian" represents a decided progress in the direction of attaining greater clearness in the presentation of the issues involved.