# Book Reviews

## Sumerian Civilization

**The Sumerians.** Their history, culture, and character. Samuel Noah Kramer. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1963. xiv + 355 pp. Illus. $7.95.

In dealing with primitive peoples today, social and cultural anthropologists have one serious difficulty—it is increasingly hard to determine the extent of European influence on them since the beginnings of colonization. Of course, this is by no means the only difficulty encountered in recovering the patterns of thought and behavior which characterize "savage" peoples today, but it is one that it is impossible to escape, no matter how well trained and painstaking the investigator may be. Even if this difficulty is discounted, there still remains the problem of assessing possible cultural influences, diffused in considerably earlier times, from more advanced centers of civilization such as North Africa, India, and China. Since radiocarbon data have now established the great antiquity of sedentary culture in southwestern Asia as well as the very great lag between the earliest village life there and in more remote areas, the problem of diffusion grows more acute all the time.

Chiefly as a result of S. N. Kramer's unremitting efforts during the past quarter century, the oldest known literature in the world has been made accessible to students in all fields. The Sumerians, named by scholars after the land of Sumer in southern Babylonia, where their richest cities were located, created the oldest urban society with an advanced higher culture during the fourth millennium B.C. They were at least 3000, and perhaps 4000, years ahead of the most advanced cultures of Middle America in the millennium before the Spanish conquest. Even after Sumerian had vanished as a spoken language during the second quarter of the second millennium B.C., it remained the sacred tongue, cultivated by cuneiform scribes down into the first centuries of the Christian era. Thus, it was, in a way, comparable to medieval and modern Latin, except that there was no more linguistic affinity between it and the Semitic Akkadian language that succeeded it than there is between Turkish and English.

The existence of this oldest dead language of history became vaguely known to several students of cuneiform within a decade after the beginning of excavation in Assyria (at the end of 1842). For several decades only late bilingual texts in Sumerian and Akkadian were available for study, although a few unilingual Sumerian inscriptions were known to exist. The remarkably successful French excavations at Lagash (1877 to 1900) and the even more sensational work sponsored by the University of Pennsylvania at Nippur in central Babylonia (1889 to 1900) yielded evidence of a highly advanced urban civilization that dated as far back as approximately 2500 B.C., together with masses of unilingual Sumerian literary texts copied on clay tablets during the first centuries of the second millennium. Because of the minute and often exceedingly intricate script and the fact that the broken fragments of the tablets were scattered in many museums, work on the publication of these unilingual Sumerian texts lagged far behind, and it often seemed that the tablets would disintegrate before they could be copied and photographed.

After beginning to specialize intensively in Sumerian (1916 to 1925), I was forced by poor eyesight to abandon it for other less exacting fields, so it was with the greatest enthusiasm that I welcomed Kramer's increasing dedication, during the late 1930's, to the publication of literary tablets from Nippur. Kramer, with a superb training in the minutia of Sumerian philology, which he received under Arno Poebel, and with equally superb eyesight, has accomplished what seemed to be impossible. Since no one man, no matter how well endowed by nature and equipped by training, could possibly decipher the thousands of tablets and fragments of pre-Semitic Sumerian literature and join the fragments of once complete tablets that are now scattered through different museums without having available reasonably complete texts, another of the author's unusual qualities came into play—his infectious enthusiasm, which few have been able to resist. Many students have gathered around him, and they are now working in different countries, often under the most difficult circumstances. In Istanbul, Jena, and Moscow the name of the author is greeted with obvious pleasure and redoubled efforts to win his approval.

The Sumerians, who were far more fortunate than the Egyptians, wrote almost exclusively on clay tablets, which are almost indestructible under favorable conditions and when treated and baked by the excavators. Though Kramer is careful about dating Sumerian literary compositions, it seems certain that a high proportion of them were composed orally at least a thousand years before the date of the tablets excavated from the libraries of Nippur and Ur. Thorkild Jacobsen (Harvard), Adam Falkenstein (Heidelberg), and W. G. Lambert (Johns Hopkins) are now demonstrating that standard Sumerian literary compositions were being studied in scribal schools as early as the 26th century B.C. (Shuruppak). In my opinion, Kramer's cautious date for the original composition of most Sumerian literature, which he has set toward the end of the third millennium, must be raised by centuries. The heroic saga in particular should probably be pushed back into the late fourth millennium, after which it was handed down orally for centuries. This applies especially to the Lugalbanda and Gilgamesh cycles, which must be dated by archeological evidence, not because of occasional transposition of the traditional order of kings or the reappearance of ancient names. It is safe to say that most of the heroic saga may be dated back to the Warka-Jemdet Nasr age (about 3200 to 2800 B.C.), when Sumerian

culture reached an all-time high in some respects and extended its direct influence as far as Egypt. Semitic influence on the Sumerians goes back to very early in the third millennium (possibly even earlier), but it was never on a par with Sumerian influence on the Semites. The mighty Sumero-Akkadian empire of Sargon I and his successors (the 24th to the 22nd centuries B.C.), founded largely on commerce, was followed by the Third Dynasty of Ur (about 2000 B.C.), which was also built on trade and which became the most completely integrated bilingual civilization known to historians. At that time the Babylonians broke away from the "tyranny of words" and developed such disciplines as algebra and philology to a level beyond that of the Hellenistic world nearly two millennia later.

The author has given us a great deal more than is promised in the subtitle; his book is really an attractively presented compendium of Sumerology, which omits technical details. He gives us descriptions of the recovery of the Sumerian language and culture, of Sumerian history, social organization, religion, belles lettres, education, and intellectual and spiritual values, and he sketches Sumerian influence on the ages that followed. In appendixes he gives us surveys of more technical questions, a discussion of such problems as the extent of Sumerian geographical knowledge, and extensive samples, even complete translations, of important Sumerian historiographic and juristic records. Long extracts from Sumerian literature are distributed through the book at appropriate places. No other Sumerian scholar of our time could possibly equal Kramer's total achievement, though he might improve on him here and there. Virtually every printed synthesis of Sumerian civilization is completely antiquated by *The Sumerians.*

Last but not least, cultural and social anthropologists will find a wealth of pertinent material in this recently recovered civilization of the third millennium B.C. Even where translations or interpretations are uncertain or incomplete, we possess the original documents and can always improve on them. And there can never be any question of borrowing from a still older high culture; we assist at the birth of the highest intellectual tradition of pre-Greek times.

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## Success and Security

**The Reluctant Job Changer.** Studies in work attachments and aspirations. Gladys L. Palmer, Herbert S. Parnes, Richard C. Wilcock, Mary W. Herman, and Carol P. Brainerd. University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1962. xx + 225 pp. $7.50.

The authors of this volume have put together four research studies that bear upon the general question of occupational mobility. With divided authorship, but with unity of impact, the monograph points to a high and increasing reluctance on the part of blue collar industrial workers to change jobs and occupations, and the authors attempt to answer the question—Why are these reluctant job changers inclined to stay put? They also wonder about and attempt to resolve an apparent contradiction between this growing indisposition to move onward and upward and traditional subscription to the American Dream of Success.

By means of structured and unstructured interviews, the authors quizzed samples of skilled and semiskilled workmen about their employment experiences and attitudes. Persons selected as respondents were restricted, in the main, to male workers aged 25 to 50, in order to tap that phase of the life span when family responsibilities are heaviest.

One major tentative conclusion stands out in prominent salience in relation to a set of subsidiary conclusions and qualifications, namely, that the reluctant job changer sits tight or, at least, does not change jobs voluntarily, because he cherishes his seniority. Seniority translates into economic security plus various equities and amenities that give life on the production line a modicum of cheer and well-being. Concomitantly, the demurrer perceives only dimly, if at all, a linkage between "onward" and "upward." Opportunities for job or occupational improvement do not seem to be in the range of his grasp. There is no beckoning bird in the bush to tease release of the one in hand. The American Dream, however, has not been abandoned; it has been redefined. Success is Security, the security of a steady job that pays a wage adequate to maintain standardized patterns of consumption. Aspiration for higher occupational status is passed on to the children.

An interesting but not surprising subsidiary discovery is that the company pension plan seems not to increase job attachment. To the industrial worker, $65 per month would appear to be no more exciting in anticipation than the prospect of being 65 years old.

A procedural challenge lies in the authors' consideration of various "indicators" for measuring job attachment. A basic need here is for a set of measures by which various influences on attachment can be expressed in functional relatedness to form a linguistically coherent frame of analysis.

Whatever their technical difficulties and limitations, the researchers have performed a timely service in adding to our understanding of the reluctantly mobile workman before he is removed from the industrial scene by automation.

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## History of Science

**Japanese Studies in the History of Science.** No. 1. Suketoshi Yajima, Ed. History of Science Society of Japan, Tokyo, 1962. vi + 140 pp. Illus. Paper, $5.

The first Nobel prize awarded to a Japanese scientist (in 1949 to the physicist Yukawa) is one landmark in world recognition of the achievements of Japanese science. The geographical expansion of the scientific activity behind this event and the shifts in centers of science during the years from 1500 to the present (treated by Yuasa) is one of the many themes presented in this collection of 21 articles; most of the papers are in English, which is commendably clear and readable, with two in German and one in French. The collection is a welcome and noteworthy introduction to the work of the History of Science Society of Japan, whose members are eager and demonstrably qualified to make significant contributions to cosmopolitan scholarship.

Space limitations permit mention of only a few of the outstanding articles; topics include problems in the history of Japanese, Chinese, and world science; pseudoscience (astrology); mathematics; the philosophy of science; medicine, including occupational diseases; and technology. Saigusa, in a paper entitled "Die Entwicklung der