non-Semitic documents were evidently in an agglutinative language, naturally not uninfluenced by Semitic elements, but none the less essentially non-Semitic in origin and fundamental character. Scholars of this opinion believe that this language, which has been arbitrarily called “ Akkadian ” in England and “ Sumerian ” on the European continent and in America, was primitively the speech of the pre-Semitic inhabitants of the Euphratean region who were conquered by the invading Semites. These invaders, according to this latter view, adopted the religion and culture of the conquered Sumerians; and, consequently, the Sumerian idiom at a comparatively early date began to be used exclusively in the Semitic temples as the written vehicles of religious thought in much the same way as was the medieval Latin of the Roman Church. The solution of this problem is of vital importance in connexion with the early history of man’s development in the Babylonian region.

The study of the Sumerian vocabulary falls logically into three divisions. These are (1) the origin of the cuneiform signs, (2) the etymology of the phonetic values, and (3) the elucidation of the many and varied primitive sign-meanings.

Previous to Professor Friedrich Delitzsch’s masterly work on the origin of the most ancient Babylonian system of writing,@@1 no one had correctly understood the facts regarding the be­ginnings of the cuneiform system, which is now generally recog­nized as having been originally a pure picture writing which later developed into a conventionalized ideographic and syllabic sign-list. In order to comprehend the mysteries of the Sumerian problem a thorough examination of the beginning of every one of these signs is, of course, imperative, but it is equally necessary that every phonetic Sumerian value and word-combination be also studied, both in connexion with the equivalent signs and with other allied phonetic values. This etymological study of Sumerian is attended with incalculable difficulties, because nearly all the Sumerian texts which we possess are written in an idiom which is quite evidently under the influence of Semitic. With the exception of some very ancient texts, the Sumerian literature, consisting largely of religious material such as hymns and incantations, shows a number of Semitic loanwords and grammatical Semitisms, and in many cases, although not always, is quite patently a translation of Semitic ideas by Semitic priests into the formal religious Sumerian language. Professor Paul Haupt may be termed the father of Sumerian etymology, as he was really the first to place this study on a scientific basis in his *Sumerian Family Laws* and *Akkadian and Sumerian Cuneiform Texts.@@2* It is significant that all phonetic and gram­matical work in Sumerian tends to confirm nearly every one of Haupt’s views. Professors Peter Jensen and Zimmern have also done excellent work in the same field and, together with Haupt, have established the correct method of investigating the Sumerian vocables, which should be studied only in relation to the Sumerian literature. Sumerian words should by no means be compared with words in the idioms of more recent peoples, such as Turkish, in spite of many tempting resemblances.@@3 Until further light has been thrown on the nature of Sumerian, this language should be regarded as standing quite alone, a prehistoric philological remnant, and its etymology should be studied only with reference to the Sumerian inscriptions them­selves. On the other hand, grammatical and constructional examples may be cited from other more modern agglutinative idioms, in order to establish the truly linguistic character of the Sumerian peculiarities and to disprove the Halévyan contentions that Sumerian is really not a language at all.@@4

It is not surprising that Halévy’s view as to the cryptographic nature of Sumerian should have arisen. In fact, the first impression given by the bewildering labyrinth of the Sumerian

word-list is the conclusion that such a vocabulary could never have arisen in a regularly developed language. For example, anyone studying Brünnow’s *List@@i* will find the same sign denot­ing pages of meanings, many of which have apparently no con­nexion with any other meaning belonging to the sign in question. A great multiplicity of meanings is also attributed, apparently quite arbitrarily, to the same sign, sound-value or word. In these instances, however, we can explain the difficulty away by applying that great fundamental principle followed by the Semitic priests and scribes who played with and on the Sumerian idiom, and in the course of many centuries turned what was originally an agglutinative language into what has almost justified Halévy and his followers in calling Sumerian a crypto­graphy. This principle is that of popular etymology, *i.e.* of sound-association and idea-association which has brought together in the word-lists many apparently quite distinct meanings, probably primarily for purposes of mnemonic aid. The present writer in his *Materials for a Sumerian Lexicon* has mentioned this ruling phenomenon again and again. A very few examples, however, will suffice here. Thus the word *ag*=the sign RAM= *râmu,* “love” (proper meaning) is associated with *ramâmu,* “ to roar,” for phonetic reasons only. The word *a=* the sign A= “water” (original meaning) can indicate anything whatever connected with the idea moisture. Thus, *a=“* water, moisture, weep, tears, inundate, irrigate,” &c. The word *a* can also mean “ shining, glistening,” an idea evidently developed from the shining rippling of water. Note that in Turkish *su* means both “ water ” and “ the lustre of a jewel,” while in English we speak of “ gems of the first water.” The combination *a-má-tu,* literally “ water enter ship,” means *abûbu,* “ deluge,” ordinarily, but in one passage *a-má-tu* is made the equivalent of *shabûbu,* “ flame,” a pure pun on *abûbu, “* deluge.” Examples of this, the leading principle which was followed by the framers of the Sumerian system, might be cited almost *ad infinitum.*

Facts of this character taken by themselves would perhaps be sufficient to convince most philologists that in Sumerian we have an arbitrarily compounded cryptography just as Halévy believes, but these facts cannot be taken by themselves, as the evidences of the purely linguistic basis of Sumerian are stronger than these apparent proofs of its artificial character.

Briefly considered there are six most striking proofs that the Sumerian was based on a primitive agglutinative language. These may be tabulated concisely as follows:—

I. Sumerian presents a significant list of internal phonetic variations which would not have been possible in an arbitrarily invented language. Thus, taking the vowels alone; *e=a* by the principle of *umlaut.* Hence, we find the words *ga* and *ge, a* and *e* for the same idea respectively. The vowel *i* could become *e* as *de=di,* &c. Consonantal variation is most common. Thus, *b—m,* as *barun=marun.* Compare the modern Arabic pronunciation *Maalbek* for *Baalbek.* Perhaps the most interesting of these consonantal interchanges is that occurring between *n* and the sibilants *sh* and z; *ner = sher; na=za,* which by some scholars has been declared to be pho­netically impossible, but its existence is well established between the modem Chinese colloquial idioms. For example, Pekingese *zhen,* Hakka *nyin,* Fuchow *nöng,* Ningpo *zlιing* and *nying,* Wönchow *gang* and *nang* all = “ man.” This demonstrates beyond a doubt the possibility of a strongly palatalized *n* becoming a palatal sibilant or vice versa, between which utterances there is but a very slight tongue movement.

The discussion of these phenomena brings us to another point which precludes the possibility of Sumerian having been merely an artificial system, and that is the undoubted existence in this language of at least two dialects, which have been named, following the inscriptions, the *Eme-ku,* “ the noble or male speech,” and the *Erne-sal, “* the woman’s language.” The existence and general phonetic character of the “ woman’s language ” were first pointed out by Professor Paul Haupt,

*@@@1 Dte Entstehung des ältesten Schriftsystems oder der Ursprung der Keilschriftzeichen* (Leipzig, 1897).

*@@@2 Die sumerischen Familiengesetze* (1879). *Die akkadische Sprache* (Berlin, 1883). *Akkadische und sumerische Keilschrifttexte* (Leipzig, 1881). See especially his Sumerian grammar in this latter work, pp∙ 133-147.

@@@\* Cf. A. H. Sayce’s interesting article in Philological Society (1877-1878), pp. 1-20.

@@@\* Prince, *Materials for a Sumerian Lexicon,* pp. 18, 21.

@@@5 R. E. Brünnow, *A Classified List of all Simple and Compound Ideographs* (1889).