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| http://faculty.gvsu.edu/websterm/harpist.gifBaked clay plaque of a harpist,  Isin / Larsa, Old Babylonian period,  c. 2000-1600 BC.  [Oriental Institute](http://www-oi.uchicago.edu/OI/MUS/HIGH/OIM_A9345.html), Chicago | **Sumerian Myth** ([Sumerian LINKS](http://faculty.gvsu.edu/websterm/SumerianMyth.htm#Sumerlinks))The Sumerians developed one of the earliest civilizations on earth (3500-1750 B.C.), but the existence of such a people and civilization was not even suspected until the middle of the 19th century.  People had long known about the Babylonians, since the ancient Egyptians, Hebrews, and Greeks had all come into contact with them and written about them. But no one knew that the Sumerians  had preceded the Babylonians and had developed the writing, religious, and agricultural systems which the Babylonians adapted and modified later.  In the early 19th century, British, German and French archeologists began to dig out the earthen mounds that are the remains of cities that once flourished thousands of years ago in the Tigris and Euphrates river valleys, a region called *Mesopotamia* ["between the rivers"] in the history books and called Iraq today. In the process of deciphering tablets written in the Babylonian language (called "Akkadian"), they came to suspect that the writing system was ill-suited for that language and thus must have been invented for an earlier, unknown tongue. Eventually, after a half-century of decipherment and excavation, the existence of the Sumerian language, people, and civilization was confirmed. |

Sumerian civilization originated in what is now southern Iraq, just upriver from the mouths of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers.  "Civilization" in this context means a settled town or city-dwelling people who possess a stable agricultural technology (including domesticated animals) and have developed a hierarchical system of social classes (peasants, laborers, slaves, craftsmen [smiths, masons, carpenters, potters, etc.], farmers, fishermen, merchants, doctors, architects, priests and temple attendants, bureaucrats, scribes, advisers, priest-kings). Since the climate of southern Iraq is hot and dry, agriculture requires an extensive irrigation system of canals and dikes. Often, the Sumerians wrote as if their civilization (agricultural techniques, cities, classes of people) came first, and people later. (Why do you think they thought this way?)  In such a hot climate, we find some recurring images and motifs:  the tree of life, shade, the desert or steppe beyond the irrigated areas, the storehouse for grain and other agricultural products, bricks for building cities and temples, and the measuring rod of the priest-king.


Map of Mesopotamian Archeological Sites ([Oriental Institute, University of Chicago](http://www-oi.uchicago.edu/OI/default.html))

Sumerian cities were close agglomerations of one or two story mud brick dwellings.  These low structures were overshadowed by the temple of the god, "a massive staged tower" (Kramer, *Sumerians* 73) called a ziggurat.  Each city was sacred to one god, and the priest-king of each city followed the god's instructions on how to run it.  Perhaps as much as ¼ of the land surrounding the city was owned by the god (the temple as an institution); the rest was owned by "nobles" (ruling princes, palace administrators, and priests) and ordinary citizens (Kramer, *Sumerians* 75-77).  The Sumerians developed a form of writing called cuneiform around 3000 BC  This script began as pictographic writing but eventually developed into a "purely phonetic system of writing in which each sign stood for one or more syllables" (Wolkstein and Kramer 125).  This writing is called cuneiform because it consists of wedge-shaped marks which were inscribed into wet clay tablets with a reed stylus.  The tablets were then baked, thus preserving a brittle and heavy, but rather permanent record of a very old civilization.  For more on the Sumerians, read S. N. Kramer's "Sumerian History, Culture, and Literature" (Wolkstein and Kramer 115-126).

**The Sumerian Creation**
Only one account of the Sumerian creation has survived, but it is a suggestive one.  This account functions as an introduction to the story of "The Huluppu-Tree" (Wolkstein 4).

 In the first days when everything needed was brought into being,
 In the first days when everything needed was properly nourished,
 When bread was baked in the shrines of the land,
 And bread was tasted in the homes of the land,
 When heaven had moved away from the earth,
 And earth had separated from heaven,
 And the name of man was fixed;
 When the Sky God, An, had carried off the heavens,
 And the Air God, Enlil, had carried off the earth . . .    (Wolkstein 4)

"An" the male sky god and "Ki" the female earth were separated by Enlil, their son and later the chief god of the pantheon.  Enlil thus carries off his mother the earth, taking his father's place in a manner somewhat similar to the way Kronos, in a much later story, usurped his father's (Ouranos') power.  But where did heaven (An) and earth (Ki) come from, you may ask?  According to another text, it was Nammu, the sea, "the mother, who gave birth to heaven and earth" (Kramer, *Sumerian Mythology* 39).  In a dry climate, water is the ultimate source of life--Diane Wolkstein points out that the word for "water also means 'semen' in Sumerian" (139).

This text continues with a few more tantalizing, but puzzling details about Sumerian beginnings.  Ereshkigal, the queen of the underworld, is said to have been "carried off into the nether world."  Afterwards, the water-god Enki "set sail for the nether world," whereupon his boat was attacked by stones and swamped (Kramer, *Sumerians* 200).  It is possible that Ereshkigal was originally a sky-goddess who was carried off to the underworld somewhat in the manner of Persephone.  Whether Enki was attempting to rescue Ereshkigal is unclear, but it may be that his trip to the underworld ended as soon as it began.  Enki's trip prefigures Inanna's later, more successful, journey to the underworld.

A different text recounts the strange way in which the moon was created.  When this story begins, the gods have apparently already established cities, for Enlil, the goddess Ninlil ("lady wind" or "lady air") and her mother Ninshebargunu are dwelling in their temples in the city of Nippur.  Ninlil's mother warns her that if she bathes in the canal called Nunbirdu, Enlil will see her and want to make love to her.  Naturally, Ninlil goes down to the canal the next day to take a dip.  Enlil sees her and asks for a kiss.  Ninlil refuses, saying she is too young to make love, so Enlil devises a plan.  He obtains a boat, floats over to where Ninlil is bathing, and rapes her, impregnating her with the future moon god Nanna (or Sin).  The other gods, dismayed by Enlil's outrageous conduct, demand that the "sex offender . . . leave the town!" (Jacobsen, Harps 174).  Enlil walks out of town in the direction of the underworld, and the pregnant Ninlil follows him.  Since Enlil does not want his son the moon to reside in the underworld, he concocts a rather bizarre plan.  Enlil impersonates a gatekeeper, a man in charge of the underworld river, and the ferryman to the underworld, and as each of these personages, he has sex with Ninlil, impregnating her with three deities who will reside in the underworld as substitutes for Nanna the moon, who will thus be free to rise to heavens where he belongs.  Apparently, Ninlil consents to go to bed with what she thinks are three minor underworld officials because she, too, sees this as a way for Enlil's child Nanna to "go heavenward."
**Questions**
1.  Name some ways in which this account of creation is like or unlike the Greek and Hebrew stories.  (Compare/ contrast to Genesis 1: 1-10.) Compare creators and the manner of creation in each.
2.  Why do you think Ninlil follows Enlil?
3.  What do you think the three substitute deities could stand for or symbolize?

**The Creation of Humans**

This poem begins with a description of how the gods had to work for their bread by digging out irrigation canals:

 The gods were dredging the rivers,
   were piling up their silt
   on projecting bends--
 and the gods lugging the clay
   began complaining  (Jacobsen, *Harps* 154)

Nammu, who is either the sea or the goddess of the riverbed, goes to her son Enki, who is asleep in the deep (the Apsu) and entreats him to rise from his bed and "fashion servants of the gods" (Kramer, History Begins 109).  Enki, who after all is the god of wisdom, thinks of the germinating powers of the clay and water of the abyss, and he tells Nammu to have some womb-goddesses pinch off this clay and have some "princely fashioners" thicken it, so she can mold it or give birth to it:

 Mix the heart of the clay that is over the abyss,
 The good and princely fashioners will thicken the clay,
 You, [Nammu] do you bring the limbs into existence;
 Ninmah [earth-mother or birth goddess] will work above you,
 The goddesses [of birth] .  . . will stand by you at your fashioning;
 O my mother, decree its [the newborn's] fate,
 Ninmah will bind upon it the image (?) of the gods,
 It is man . . . .    (Kramer, *History Begins* 109)

Jacobsen translates these apparently difficult to decipher lines somewhat differently, seeing a "birth chair" where Kramer sees the "image" of the gods.  Jacobsen's translation also stresses that the fashioning of the newborn imitates in some way the growth of a fetus in the womb.  Jacobsen translates the moment of birth like this (words and letters in brackets represent gaps in the original text):

 [Without] the sperm
   of a ma[le]
   she gave [birth]
   to offspri[ng.,]
   to the [em]bryo
   of mankind.   (*Harps* 157)

Thus man was created to relieve the gods of their work.  The gods then decide to have a feast to celebrate their new creation, and Enki and Ninmah begin to drink beer and start "to feel good inside."  Ninmah boasts that she, as the goddess of birth and gestation, is the one who determines whether "the build of men" (*Harps* 158) turns out well or misshapen.  Enki responds that he, the clever god, can find places in society for even the most handicapped people.  Ninmah molds from the clay a man with shaking hands, but Enki places him as an attendant of the king.  Ninmah next makes a blind man, but Enki makes him a singer of tales.  Ninmah makes a person named "Hobbled-by-twisting-ankles," but Enki finds work for him with the metal workers (c.f. Hephaistos).  Ninmah continues to make handicapped people:  "a person unable to control his urine, a barren woman, a being with neither male nor female organs, and so forth, but in each case Enki was able to find a place in society for the [creature] and to ensure it a living" (Jacobsen, Treasures 114).  The woman who could not give birth, for example, was found a place overseeing the weavers in "the queen's household" (*Harps* 161), while the sexless being was to "stand before the king" (Kramer, *History Begins* 109-110).

Knowing that she cannot outsmart the clever Enki, Ninmah throws down the clay in defeat.  Now Enki decides to make his own misshapen being, and he challenges Ninmah to "determine / the mode of being / of that newborn one!" (*Harps* 162).  Enki, in a manner which is not all that clear causes a creature to be born whose name is "the-day-was-far-off."  In other words, the creature is born prematurely, before its fated birthdate.  This creature is also extremely deformed:  "its hands, having the shakes, / could not put food / to its mouth, / the spine was crushed, / the anus closed up, / the hips were brittle, / the feet (with their) skin breaking / unable to walk the fields " (*Harps* 162).  Ninmah tries to feed the creature some bread, but it is so weak and feeble that it cannot reach out for the loaves she offers it.  It cannot sit or stand or even bend its knees.  Ninmah is horrified at what Enki has made and curses him for it.  The remainder of the tablet is broken, but apparently Ninmah realizes that if such unformed and deformed beings are born with any sort of regularity, people will stop worshipping her.  Enki tries to appease her wrath by admitting that the deformed being "is lacking, in truth, / your work, Ninmah; [he] was born to me / incomplete" (*Harps* 165).  The poem ends with a song of praise for Enki's male generative powers and for his cleverness, but the story itself seems to indicate that Enki cannot make a functional being without the help of the birth goddess Ninmah.  Notice how the story starts with the gods needing to work for bread and ends with a creature unable to accept bread.

**Sumerian Creation Questions**
1.  In what ways is this creation story like / unlike the Adam and Eve or the Pandora creation stories?  Do you find a "fall" or introduction of evil(s) in this story?
2.  Compare / contrast Enki's and Ninmah's drunkenness with Noah's.  What do you suppose these handicapped beings signify?  What facts of nature might they explain?
3.  Do you find the explanations of origins offered by the myth satisfactory?  Why or why not?  What do you think this story says about male and female powers of creation?

**Enki and the Mother Goddess** ("The Affairs of the Water God")

The myth begins with a description of the island of Dilmun (probably modern Bahrain), a pure and clean place, a "land of the living," which knows no sickness, death or strife:

In Dilmun the raven uttered no cries,
The kite uttered not the cry of the kite,
The lion killed not,
The wolf snatched not the lamb,
Unknown was the kid-killing dog . . . (Kramer, *Sumerian* *Mythology* 55)

This paradise lacks one thing, though--fresh water. Enki the clever water god heeds the plea of the local mother goddess and asks Utu the sun god "to bring forth fresh water from the earth" (Kramer 55). Dilmun's wells soon supply plenty of fresh water, and crops and city flourish.

Possibly in the mood to celebrate the island's new-found fertility, Enki attempts to impregnate the mother goddess, who, after all, is really a local manifestation of the Sumerian mother goddess Ninhursag, or Nintu. Enki is rejected "until he formally propose[s] marriage" (Jacobsen 112). After nine days of pregnancy (explicitly compared to the nine months' gestation of a human pregnancy), the goddess gives birth to Ninsar ("Lady Plant"). Ninsar grows up, wanders along the riverbank and also becomes pregnant by her father Enki. After nine days, Ninsar gives birth to Ninkurra ("Lady of the Mountains"). Ninkurra in her turn is also impregnated by Enki, and she gives birth to Uttu, who is either the goddess of plants or the spider goddess of weaving. All of these goddesses are born without the slightest labor pains. Now Enki's wife Ninhursag intervenes and warns Uttu to beware of her father and stay indoors. But Enki seduces Uttu "by promising marriage and offering her various vegetables, which he had helped a gardener grow, as wedding gifts" (Jacobsen 113). After enjoying her favors, Enki abandons Uttu. Ninhursag helps the distressed girl by removing the semen from her body. From this removed (planted?) semen grow up eight plants. [It is clear that Enki's semen and his fertilizing capabilities as the god of sweet water should be equated, for "water also means 'semen' in Sumerian" (Wolkstein 139).]

Enki then walks by, sees the plants, and promptly gobbles up all eight of them. (In this story Enki shows the cleverness and the unrestrained appetites--for both sex and food--of a typical trickster.) The plants begin to develop in Enki's body, and, since he is not equipped to give birth, they make him very ill. Angry and disgusted with Enki, the mother goddess Ninhursag curses him: "Until thou art dead, I shall not look upon thee with the 'eye of life'" (Kramer, *Sumerian Myth* 57). Then Ninhursag disappears. (Compare / contrast with Demeter.) The gods "sit in the dust" while Enki grows weaker and weaker. The fox speaks up and volunteers to find Ninhursag if the gods give him a reward. We're not sure how (the tablet is broken here), but the fox finds the mother goddess and brings her back to heal the water god.

Since Enki has eight pains in eight different parts of his body (corresponding to the eight plants he ate), the mother goddess Ninhursag gives birth to eight different healing goddesses for each one of his aches. To do this, she somehow puts Enki in her vagina and then gives birth to each healing goddess after asking him where he hurts. (Thus in some way, each healing goddess represents the birth of one of the eight plants.) For example, the text reads:

*Ninhursag:* "My brother what hurts thee?"
*Enki:* "My side hurts me."
*Ninhursag:* "To the goddess Dazimua I give birth for thee."

*Ninhursag:* "My brother what hurts thee?"
*Enki:* "My rib hurts me."
*Ninhursag:* "To the goddess Ninti I give birth for thee."

(Kramer, *Sumerian Mythology* 58)

Each of the eight healing deities has a name that sounds like the name of the body part that needs healing. Kramer finds one of these double names to be significant:

Now the Sumerian word for "rib" is *ti* (pronounced "tee"). The goddess created for the healing of Enki's rib, therefore was called in Sumerian Nin-ti, "the lady of the rib." But the very same Sumerian word *ti* also means "to make live." The name Nin-ti may thus mean "the lady who makes live," as well as "the lady of the rib." In Sumerian literature, therefore, "the lady of the rib" came to be identified with "the lady who makes live" through what might be termed a play on words. (Kramer, *Mythologies* 103)

Kramer suggests that the passage in Genesis where Eve, "the mother of all living" is taken from Adam's rib may be an echo of this Sumerian pun, though he is quick to point out that "the Hebrew word for 'rib' and that for 'who makes live' have nothing in common" (*Mythologies* 103). I suppose it is possible that Eve ("life") was taken from Adam's rib (and not some other body part) because of some dim recollection of this Sumerian rib / life pun. I should note, however, that in the Bible the two terms are separated: Eve is created from Adam's rib at Genesis 2:21-24, but she does not receive her "life" name until Genesis 3:20. What do you think?

To return to our story: after Ninhursag gives birth to the eight healing goddesses and cures Enki, the water god finds husbands or special duties for all eight. The poem ends with the line, "O Father Enki, praise!" (Kramer, *Sumerian Mythology* 58).

**Questions:**
1. Compare / contrast this story of water and fertility with the story of Adam and Eve. In what ways is Eve like / unlike the mother goddess? Compare / contrast Enki's eating of the plants with the eating of the fruit of the tree of knowledge.

2. In what ways is this story like / unlike the story of Demeter and Persephone?

3. Why do you suppose Enki cannot give birth? Why do you think he has pains while the goddesses do not? Why do you think (presumably) life-giving plants almost spell death for the water-god?

4. Jacobsen says that this story "seems . . . to celebrate the generative power in river water and to attribute to it a variety of other powers, such as those in plants, in mountains, in the spider, etcetera. The fact that the river's high waters are of limited duration, briefly rise and fall, may be reflected in Enki's inconstancy; his eventual, near fatal, illness alludes perhaps to the near drying up of the rivers in an arid summer" (*Treasures* 113). What do you think of this (quasi-allegorical) interpretation?

5. In what ways is Enki like a dying god in this story? How is he like a typical trickster?

**Stories of the Organization of the Earth**

There are quite a few Sumerian myths concerned with how the gods organize human activities, especially those involving agriculture (ditch-digging, irrigation, plowing, etc.).  Samuel Noah Kramer summarizes these myths as follows:

. . . it was Enlil, the air-god, who "caused the good day to come forth"; who set his mind to "bring forth seed from the earth" and to establish the hegal, that is, plenty, abundance, and prosperity in the land.  It was this same Enlil who fashioned the pickax and probably the plow as prototypes of the agricultural implements to be used by man; who appointed Enten, the farmer god, as his steadfast and trustworthy field-worker.  On the other hand, it was the water-god Enki who begot Uttu, the goddess of plants.  It is Enki, moreover, who actually organizes the earth, and especially the part of it which includes Sumer and its surrounding neighbors, into a going concern.  (*Sumerian Mythology* 42)

In the story of his civilizing activities, Enki is depicted as blessing cities, filling the Tigris and Euphrates with water and fishes and putting a god in charge of each.  He sets up the rules for the sea (the Persian Gulf) and the wind and appoints a goddess and god to take care of each of them.  Next he turns his attention to agriculture:

 The plow and the yoke he directed,
 The great prince Enki . . . . .,
 Opened the holy furrows,
 Made grain grow in the perennial field
 The lord, the jewel and ornament of the plain,
 Fitted out on its strength, Enlil's farmer,
 Enkimdu, the god of the canals and ditches,
 Enki placed in their charge.  (Kramer, *History Begins* 97)

Enki puts Ashnan, the grain goddess, in charge of the storehouse and the brick-god Kabta in charge of the pickax and brick-mold.  After placing more deities at the head of building projects, stables, sheepfolds, and boundaries, you might think Enki could rest from his labors, but you would be mistaken.  The goddess Inanna enters Enki's temple and demands to know why she was not given any powers.  She proceeds to name many other goddesses and their powers (among them Aruru or Nintu, the birth-goddess [the same as Ninmah above]), complaining that she alone has been left out:

 Me, the woman, why did you treat me differently?
 Me, the holy Inanna, where are my powers?  (Kramer, *History Begins* 98)

At this point in the story, the tablet is broken, but it appears that Enki awards Inanna "with 'the crook of shepherdship,' with various kinds of garments, with love of battle and destruction, and with the power to attract men" (Kramer, *History Begins* 98-99).  We also know that Inanna was often depicted as the goddess of the granary or storehouse.

**The Sumerian Flood Story**

The Sumerian flood story comes down to us in a single fragmentary tablet, which was not published until 1914.  The poem begins with the mother goddess Nintur ("Lady birth-house" or "Lady womb") recalling that her creatures, mankind, have no place in the world and are apparently wandering around:

    let me bring them back,
 let me lead my people back from their trails    (Jacobsen, *Harps* 145)

She decides that her people should "come and build cities and cult places, / that I may cool myself in their shade" (*Harps* 145).  She shows them how to purify the land, to perform divine services, and to utter "cries for clemency"  (*Harps* 146).  There is also some indication that this civilizing and city-building will establish peace in the surrounding regions.
 After a long gap in the tablet, which perhaps told of a failure to build a city because of anarchy among the people, Nintur installs a priest-king to lead the people:  "let me have him oversee their labor, / and let him teach the nation to follow along / unerringly like cattle!" (*Harps* 146).  The first five cities are built and given to their respective deities:  Eridu to Enki, the clever fresh water-god, Badtibira to Dumuzi and Inanna, Sippar to Utu the sun god, and so on.  The people dredged the canals, "which were blocked with purplish / clay," and carried water, which "established abundant growth" (*Harps* 147).

The next section of the story is lost, but it probably contained a list of pre-flood rulers of the first five cities.  These priest-kings were credited with extraordinarily long reigns; other sources say that one king, for example, reigned 36,000 years.  (Compare the genealogies in Genesis and the long childhoods of people in Hesiod's silver age.)  As in the later Story of Artrahasis, the flood probably comes about because mankind makes too much noise, angering the chief god Enlil ("Lord of wind"), who can't sleep because of the noise.  When the gap in the text ends, the goddesses Nintur and Inanna are weeping for their doomed people, but the clever Enki "took counsel in his own heart" (*Harps* 147).  Enki contacts the pious priest-king of Nippur, Ziusudra ("He saw life"), who already has had a vision of the gods meeting and swearing an oath.  Enki speaks to the flood-hero Ziusudra through a wall, perhaps to avoid breaking an oath not to tell the people what the gods planned.  He tells Ziusudra that the gods have commanded that "a flood will sweep over the cult centers; / To destroy the seed of mankind" (Kramer, *History Begins* 153).  No doubt the text continues with Enki's advice on how to build a boat and fill it with living creatures, but here another gap ensues.  After the gap comes a description of the flood itself:

 All the windstorms, exceedingly powerful, attacked as one,
 At the same time, the flood sweeps over the cult centers.  (*History Begins* 153)

After seven days and nights, the sun god Utu comes out and shines his light on the heaven and earth.   Ziusudra either drills a hole in the boat or opens a window to let the sun's rays in.  Then he kisses the ground before Utu (prostrating himself) and sacrifices sheep and oxen in thanksgiving for his deliverance.  After another gap in the text, we find Enki (?) noting that the gods have sworn "by the life's breath of heaven / the life's breath of earth" that Ziusudra is "allied with all of you" (Harps 149).  Ziusudra kisses the ground again, this time before An and Enlil, who reward him with "life like a god's . . . lasting breath of life, like a god's" (*Harps* 150).  Then the gods transport Ziusudra, now called preserver of "the seed of mankind," to the land of Dilmun, in the east.

Dilmun may refer to the island of Bahrain, but at this early time, it was seen as an Eden-like land of peace and purity.  Another text about Dilmun describes it as "a pure place . . . a clean place" where "the raven uttered no cries . . . the lion killed not, / The wolf snatched not the lamb" (Kramer, Sumerian Mythology 55).  There is also some archeological record of a great flood in this area.  When excavating the site of Ur in 1926-29, Sir Leonard Woolley found an eight-foot band of  "perfectly clean clay" (21) probably laid down by a massive flood around 3500 BC.  Woolley estimated that the flood may have affected an area of the lower Tigris and Euphrates river valleys "perhaps 400 miles long and 100 miles across" (24).  The flood was by no means universal, but such a deluge could have given rise to the tradition of a flood which happened in the dim beginnings of time.

**Generic Flood Questions**
1.  Why do you suppose flood stories are so popular?  What events or religious tenets might flood stories explain?
2.  Floods may cleanse but they also destroy.  Why do you think flood stories often occur shortly after the creation?
3.  Why are humans destroyed in each story?  Why are the flood heroes picked to survive?  What do your answers reveal about each culture's concerns, and its view of the relations between men and gods?
4.  How does the flood affect the gods?  (Note their reactions to sacrifices.)  How does various gods' behavior before, during, and after the flood affect each culture's and/ or your view(s) of these gods?
5.  Compare and contrast the rewards that each flood hero gets after his journey.  Why do you think these particular rewards are given in each case?
6.  Compare and contrast the covenant and / or promise given at the end not send another flood.  No covenant or promise?--why?
7.  In what ways is the world different after the flood?  What does each story tell us about the relations between gods and men in each culture?
8.  Some flood stories end with an emphasis on the descendants of the flood hero.  Do you see any significance in the ways mankind reproduces (or in the ways the gods limit life-spans or reproduction) at the beginning or end of each story?
9.  Do you think the lessons that each story teaches are similar or slightly different?  Do the gods learn any lessons after the flood?

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**Sumerian LINKS**

[**Christopher Siren’s Sumerian Myth site**](http://pubpages.unh.edu/~cbsiren/sumer-faq.html):  http://pubpages.unh.edu/~cbsiren/sumer-faq.html

[**Oriental Institute, University of Chicago**](http://www-oi.uchicago.edu/OI/default.html): http://www-oi.uchicago.edu/OI/default.html
[Authoritative, impeccable scholarship, if a bit puzzling to navigate--check out their ABZU index to Ancient Near Eastern Resources on the web.]

For some nice **images** go to the [Highlights of the Collection](http://www-oi.uchicago.edu/OI/MUS/HIGH/OI_Museum_Highlights.html) at the Oriental Institute.