

Posing the Sumerian Question: Race and Scholarship in the Early History of Assyriology

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INTRODUCTION¹

Is it not fitting that we celebrate Miguel Civil as we commemorate the quincentenary of the encounter of Spain with the New World? Spanish was the first European tongue to put down roots in the Americas, and Miguel belongs to the great stream of Spanish subjects that over the last half millennium have fulfilled potentials in this hemisphere that may have been more constrained at home.

1992 is also the 500th anniversary of the migration of Hispanophones in an opposite direction, leading to the creation of islands of Hispanic language use in the eastern Mediterranean that persist even today, if only as ever diminishing shadows of the robust communities still in existence in the early part of this century. And it was early in this century that a scion of one of those communities, who, like Miguel Civil, had pursued Oriental studies in Paris, was still valiantly fighting an already lost battle against the very notion that Sumerian was a natural language.

That *first* Hispanophone Sumerologist – he even published poetry in Spanish – Joseph Halévy, was born in 1827 in Adrianople². He taught in Jewish schools there and in Bucharest, and was active in promoting the Hebrew enlightenment (*haskalah*). In his free time he taught himself Near Eastern languages, and even mastered Amharic, because he was taken by the notion of making contact with the Jews of Ethiopia, who, having been cut off for a millennium from the rest of Jewry, were being intensively proselytized by Protestant missionaries. Halévy arrived in Paris in 1866, and the next year was sent to Ethiopia by the Alliance Israélite Universelle. His successful fulfillment of that assignment – he returned with important manuscripts and much information on the community – led to his being sent in 1869 by

1. I would like to thank C. Bier, R. Borger, J. Bottéro, S. Iwry, G. Krotkoff, A. Loprieno and H. Marks for their advice and assistance. P. Simon-Nahum, *La cité investie: La "Science du Judaïsme" français et la République* (Paris, 1991) appeared too late to be used in this study (reference courtesy M. Olender).

2. There are some variant traditions regarding his place of birth. M. Eliav, *Tarbiz* 35 (1966) 73 n. 85, states that he was born in Hungary, and D. Kessler, *The Falashas* (New York 1982) 120, says, without citing his source, that he was born in Galicia but moved to Turkey as a child.

the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres to the Yemen to collect inscriptions for the planned *Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum*. The Yemen was closed to European travellers, so Halévy disguised himself as a rabbi from Jerusalem and circulated among the Yemenite Jewish communities, surreptitiously copying South Arabian inscriptions along the way. He returned to Paris with 686 texts, by far the largest corpus of such inscriptions hitherto known, and published them in 1872-3. He was widely recognized for both the feat itself and his scientific achievement. In 1879 he was named professor of Ethiopian languages at the École Pratique des Hautes Études³.

"Nous devons nous résigner à accepter qu'il y ait des textes ... que nous ne pourrions jamais comprendre, sauf dans le sens le plus littéral et banal"⁴. Civil on Sumerian at his most pessimistic doesn't hold a candle to Halévy on the same subject: "Quant à nous, sumérologues modernes, *nous sommes absolument incapables de lire correctement une seule phrase 'sumérienne'*" (emphasis original), because "le sumérien n'a jamais exprimé une langue réelle parlée par un peuple quelconque"⁵. Sumerian, rather, was an originally ideographic system for writing Akkadian, which, as phonetic writing of Akkadian was developed, became a hieratic mode of writing that continued to be cultivated alongside the secular phonetic mode.

My first exposure to Halévy's theory came during a perusal of S. A. Pallis's *Antiquity of Iraq*⁶ when I was Civil's student in Chicago, and Pallis's explanation of Halévy's motives stuck in my mind: "Perhaps it was on account of racial prejudice that he denied that Babylonia, from where his ancestors, the Hebrew patriarchs, came, had been occupied by a non-Semitic people before the Semites, a people who were even said to have invented the writing which was the Semitic Babylonians' own ingenious invention"⁷. Recent attention that has been called to the "Orientalist" aspect of early ancient Near Eastern studies⁸ suggests that Pallis was only partly right: it was "racial prejudice", but not, or not only, his own, that motivated Halévy in his forty year struggle against "Sumerism".

HALÉVY'S THESIS⁹

The original statement of the anti-Sumerist position appeared in 1874 in the *Journal Asiatique* under the title "Observations critiques sur les prétendus Touraniens de la Babylonie"¹⁰. "Turanian", deriving from the Iraniana epic tradition¹¹, was first used by F. Max Müller in 1854 to describe the European and Asian languages that were not Indo-European, Semitic or Chinese, and the term came to be used more specifically for the broad language group that today we would call Uralo-Altaic. Earlier in the nine-

3. See the bibliography in the article on Halévy in the *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, and add I. Lévy, *Revue historique* 126 (1917) 215-218.

4. Civil, "Les limites de l'information textuelle", in M.-T. Barillet (ed.), *L'archéologie de l'Iraq* (Colloques internationaux du C.N.R.S. No. 580), 228.

5. Halévy, *Précis d'allographie Assyro-Babylonienne*. Paris 1912, pp. 18 and 13.

6. Copenhagen 1956.

7. P. 180.

8. M. T. Larsen, "Orientalism and the Ancient Near East". Pp. 181-202 in *The Humanities Between Art and Science. Intellectual Developments 1880-1914*, ed. M. Harbsmeier and M. T. Larsen. Copenhagen, 1989; A. Gunter and M. T. Larsen (eds.), *The Construction of the Ancient Near East* (forthcoming as a special issue of *History and Culture* [Copenhagen]).

9. For painstaking and relatively fair (but cf. below), if unsympathetic, expositions of Halévy's thesis and the ensuing polemics pro and con, see F. Weissbach, *Die sumerische Frage*, Leipzig 1898, and C. Fossey, *Manuel d'Assyriologie* I, Paris 1904, chap. II.

10. Pp. 461-536.

11. Cf. R. Frye, *The History of Ancient Iran*, Munich 1984, 59: The Tura became known in Iranian epic as the enemies of Iran *par excellence*, and with the advent of the Turks, became identified with them. In the Shah-Nama, Faridun divides the world between his sons: Rum and the west are given to Salm, the Turks and China to Tur, and Iran to Iraj. A jealous Tur kills Iraj, thus beginning the enmity between Iran and the Turks (R. Levy, *The Epic of Kings. Shah-Nama, The National Epic of Persia*, by Fedowsi [tr. revised by A. Banani], London 1967, 27ff.).

teenth century, E. Rask had used the term "Scythian" for the same purpose¹². The first characterizations of Sumerian by Rawlinson and Oppert assigned it to the "Scythian" group, but the term "Turanian" soon took over, and comparisons were made with Turkish, Finnish, Hungarian and other Turanian languages¹³. In the introduction to his pioneering grammar of Sumerian¹⁴, F. Lenormant claimed that Sumerian would eventually play the same role for the agglutinative Turanian family as Sanskrit had for Indo-European¹⁵. Halévy, who was fluent in both Turkish and Hungarian, easily demolished claimed affinities of Sumerian to either, and continued to do so over the years; this, perhaps, was his most lasting contribution to Sumerology.

But Halévy went further. He asserted that from the earliest to the latest, the monuments of Mesopotamian civilization show themselves to be the expression of a single race – the Semitic – and that neither Mesopotamian place names, nor the testimony of biblical or classical authors, nor the traditions of the Assyrians and Babylonians themselves betray the presence of Turanians or any other ethno-linguistic group beside Semites in early Mesopotamia. Sumer and Akkad, he explained, were geographic or political divisions, not ethno-linguistic. In the absence of mention of another ethno-linguistic group, the institutions of Assyro-Babylonian civilization, including the cuneiform writing system, must be understood as a Semitic achievement.

Since it was precisely the inaptness of cuneiform as a script for the Semitic language of ancient Mesopotamia that had led Hincks in 1852 to postulate that cuneiform had a non-Semitic origin, a postulate seemingly confirmed by Rawlinson's discovery in the same year that certain of the Nineveh tablets were bilingual¹⁶, Halévy's task was to show 1) that the cuneiform syllabary, in his words, "ne convient qu'à un idiome sémitique" and "les syllabes produites par les signes cunéiformes correspondent aux mots assyriens"; and 2) that "la composition et l'agencement des signes cunéiformes dans les documents nommés accadiens [= Sumerian] révèlent tous les caractères d'un système artificiel"¹⁷.

As to the syllabary, Halévy pointed out that it has special signs for emphatics and laryngals, marking it as originally designed for a language with just such phonemes, i.e. Assyro-Babylonian. The *origin* of the values of individual signs can be discovered by studying the Assyrian syllabaries: one can pick out among the many Assyrian words represented by a single sign, one or more that gave that sign its phonetic value(s). Thus A < *aphu*, SU < *zumru*, SU < *raḥāṣu*, DAN < *dannu*, MU < *šumu*, MAH < *maḥḥu*, SAG < *šaḡu*, etc.¹⁸ If then, on the one hand we admit that the syllabary is Semitic in origin, and, on the other, we know that many of its signs are used ideographically in Assyrian texts, it follows that the texts that have been called "Sumerian" should simply be a purely ideographic Assyrian, and not documents of a different, non-Semitic language. Most of the supporting arguments he brought are spurious (and were so recognized even then), but others, such as similarity in verbal affixation (in-lal, in-lal-eš // *i-šqul*, *i-šqul-u*), word order, adverb formation with -š, the shared use of *u* as a copula, and the fact that *ša* was the relative pronoun both in Assyrian and in the so-called Sumerian texts ("Les assyriologues le prononcent *gar*, afin

12. F. Max Müller, *The Science of Language*, New York, 1891, I: 396f.

13. Pallis, *Antiquity* 176-178.

14. At the time, Sumerian was called "Akkadian" by Lenormant and many others, while the true name "Sumerian" had been divined by Oppert in 1869, and fiercely advocated by him ever since, but was not proven correct until 1889. See the discussions in Weissbach, *Sumerische Frage* and Fossey, *Manuel I*.

15. *Études Accadiennes*, I Paris 1873, p. 1.

16. Pallis, *Antiquity* 175f.

17. *JA* 1874 534f.

18. *Ibid.*, 506-510. The follow-up article in *JA* 1876 lists over five hundred signs with their Semitic derivations, a list that was systematized, updated and revised in subsequent publications over the next thirty-five years. The great majority involved errors or spurious etymologies, such as NIN "mistress, lord" < Sem. (Heb.) *nyin* "to increase, propagate". More convincing were those like AN < Sem. *Anu* or SAG < Sem. *šaḡu*, all of which, like these two, have turned out to result from either Sumerian loans into Semitic, or coincidental similarities (cf. Thureau-Dangin, *RA* 10 [1913] 194). A final category involved secondary values derived from Semitic equivalents, such as EL < *ellu*, where the actual Sumerian reading (in this case *sikil*) was not yet known.

d'en effacer l'affinité avec l'idiome sémitique"¹⁹) were not so far-fetched in 1874. Halévy also pointed to features of the so-called non-Semitic language that could not possibly, according to him, occur in a natural language; here, certainly, contemporary students of Sumerian might agree.

The divergence between the two methods of writing, ideographic (our Sumerian) and phonetic, was explained as follows: the writing system had been originally purely ideographic, meant for the eye and not for the ear, but early on, a method of phonetic writing developed, whose endproduct is the phonetically written Assyrian texts. However, because writing was thought to be a divine gift, the original ideographic system was not abandoned, but was maintained and cultivated by the priests (much as Egyptian hieroglyphs were used alongside demotic), separately from the spoken language, for religious purposes. In this way, it also came to be pronounced, and hence developed phenomena resembling those of a natural language, like vowel harmony²⁰.

For the next forty years, Halévy would adapt and modify this theory in response to criticism, new data and his own increasing familiarity with cuneiform sources. Both he and his critics characterized him as an outsider to the field in 1874, but through his subsequent preoccupation with the Sumerian question, as well as with other areas of cuneiform studies, such as Amarna, he became an Assyriologist, if heterodox, and autodidact in this field as in all others²¹. Certain notions he developed in defense of his thesis are extraordinary in their ingenuity as well as in their incredibility: the fact, for example, that Semitic prepositions appear in "Sumerian" texts as postpositions is explained as necessary to avoid confusing these particles of relations with the actual substantives that they modify; hence, the substantives are written first²².

RACE, PHILOLOGY AND POLITICS

Almost forty years after his first anti-Sumerian manifesto, Halévy wrote, in his final restatement of his position, that once he understood that Sumer and Akkad did not refer to two different races, but rather to geographical regions, "je m'aperçus que les textes censés exprimer la langue sumérienne expriment en réalité l'idiome assyro-sémitique ordinaire, mais dans une mode de rédaction archaïque, auquel nous devons l'invention de l'écriture cunéiforme"²³. The question of "Sumer(ian)" and "Akkad(ian)" continues to stir controversy in our own time, and the Sumerian language, even as we know it today, can seem unreal. But Halévy's solution, as his critics never ceased to indicate, is more unreal still. Although his thesis was well enough argued to win over, if only temporarily, Delitzsch and the young Thureau-Dangin (see below), the vast majority of Assyriologists of the time rejected it. What possessed a scholar of Halévy's learning to concoct such a bizarre theory and defend it so tenaciously, and at such great cost to his reputation and credibility, for over four decades? What inspired his sense of mission, his crusade, as Oppert aptly characterized it (see below)?

The answer suggested by Pallis referred to earlier, prejudice conditioned by Halévy's own Semitic background, was suggested by his contemporaries as well, but before turning to these critical responses to Halévy's thesis, we must put the question of race and civilization into its proper intellectual context in the

19. Ibid., 525.

20. Ibid., 529.

21. Delitzsch in 1874 completed his Habilitation after only a one year introduction to Assyriology under Schrader. "Cuneiform study being in its infancy", he could do this "with comparative ease, as he himself said" (Price, *BA* 10/2 iii). Note, too, Sayce's comment on Halévy and his theory: "Started while as yet he was ignorant of Assyrian, it has been supported and preached by him with renewed vigour since his enrolment in the band of Assyriologists" (*Lecture on the Origin and Growth of Religion* [The Hibbert Lectures, 1887], 2nd ed., London 1888, 429).

22. *Actes du sixième congrès international des orientalistes* (1883) vol. 2 558. Cf. *ibid.* 563 for his explanation of why Assyrian accusative and dative pronominal suffixes appear before the verb in the hieratic (= Sumerian) mode.

23. *Précis d'allographie assyro-babylonienne*, Paris 1912.

Europe of 1874. This done, it will become clear that Halévy's motivation was provoked by more than petty racial pride.

"En politique, comme en poésie, en religion, en philosophie, le devoir des peuples indo-européens est de rechercher la nuance, la conciliation des choses opposées, la complexité, si profondément inconnues aux peuples sémitiques, dont l'organisation a toujours été d'une désolante et fatale simplicité"²⁴. Thus pontificated Ernest Renan in his inaugural lecture at the Collège de France in 1862. Renan was the dominant figure in Semitic philology in France when Halévy arrived in Paris in 1866, and remained so for decades. He was also "the chief scientific sponsor of the Aryan myth in France"²⁵. This Aryan myth, so-called, as described by L. Poliakov and M. Olender²⁶, was the product of European romanticism's search for origins, and for an explanation of European dominance in science, politics and commerce. The discovery of the Indo-European languages at the end of the eighteenth century combined with the Enlightenment's abandonment of biblical anthropology, led European scholars to discover their "racial" origins in Aryan antiquity, an antiquity that, with the triumph of biblical higher criticism, could be said to reach back beyond that of the Old Testament. The elaboration of the Aryan myth involved locating within Europe's Aryan inheritance all the virtues that set Europe apart from the rest of the world, and viewing the triumph of Aryan Europe as the providentially guided culmination of human history.

The great paradox to be resolved for Christian Europe was that the spiritual salvation of the Aryan race came not from religious intuitions of its own, but from those of the alien Semites. This resolution was accomplished by making polytheism and mythology, the major spiritual *defects* of the Aryans, the natural products of the dynamism from which sprang their numerous virtues. Conversely, the spiritual virtue of the Semites – their only great virtue – which gave monotheism to the world, was said to derive from the quiescence which otherwise characterized that race²⁷. Renan, for example, argued that until the appearance of Christ, the Jews had made nothing of their monotheism, and that Christianity really had little to do with Judaism (whose true continuation was rather, Islam), but adopted the mentality of the (Indo-European) people among whom it spread. Mentality, for Renan, was determined by language. The Indo-European languages, he claimed, are varied and always propagating and transforming themselves, whereas Semitic languages are few, immobile, stagnant and fixed at an infantile stage. Semitic stubbornness and resistance to change derived from these linguistic qualities, as did monotheism. Semitic, which developed in the empty desert, is syntax-poor, incapable of conceiving multiples; hence the notion of a single god. This linguistic simplicity made Semites incapable of abstraction, metaphysics and intellectual creativity. Aryans, with a rich and complex grammar and syntax, could comprehend the multiplicity of nature, hence polytheism and mythology, and, later, science and metaphysics. The Semitic incapacity to conceptualize multiplicity meant that in literature Semites were limited to proverb, parable and verse; epic was inconceivable for them. Monotheism is simply a specific instance of a linguistically determined lack of imagination²⁸.

Renan's elder contemporary, the Indo-Europeanist Adolphe Pictet, who used a method he called "linguistic paleontology" to restore the world of the earliest Aryans, went further. Unable to imagine that

24. E. Renan, *De la part des peuples sémitiques dans l'histoire de la civilisation*, Paris 1862, 16.

25. León Poliakov, *The Aryan Myth. A History of Racist and Nationalist Ideas in Europe* (tr. E. Howard), New York 1974, 206. Renan is an easy target, and appears as a villain also in E. Said's *Orientalism* (New York, 1978) and in M. Bernal's *Black Athena I* (New Brunswick, 1987). His idea of race, however, was ambiguous, and ultimately was more linguistic than anthropological: "Le Turc, dévot musulman, est de nos jours un bien plus vrai Sémite que l'Israélite devenu Français, ou pour mieux dire, Européen" (cited by M. Olender, *Les langues du paradis. Aryen et Sémites: un couple providentiel*, Paris 1989, 85, and see pp. 82-84).

26. See the works cited in the preceding note.

27. Olender, *Langues* 28.

28. See the discussion of Renan in Olender, *Langues* 75-111. Cf. the critique of modern reflexes of the Renanian concept of Semitic religion by A. Archi, p. 26 of *Modes de contacts et processus de transformations dans les sociétés anciennes* (Collections de l'École Française de Rome 67), Pisa/Rome 1983.

a people as intellectually gifted as the Aryans could have produced only base polytheistic religions, he thought he could identify a primitive monotheism among the first Aryans. This germ of monotheism remained with them, to flourish again with Christianity. He cites the teachings of Zarathustra as an example of pure, independently conceived Aryan monotheism. What led most Aryans astray for so long was the spirit of liberty, unique to their race, a spirit that sparked the invention of politics, science and the arts, but also pushed the Aryans toward representing the complexity of nature in a polytheistic religious system. Providence destined the Hebrews – authoritarian, intolerant, single-minded – to preserve a pure monotheism, but “où en serait le monde s'ils étaient restés seuls à la tête de l'humanité?” It was the Aryans, “douée dès le début des qualités mêmes qui manquaient aux Hébreux pour devenir les civilisateurs du monde”, whom providence chose to bring progress and enlightenment to the world²⁹.

But wait! Hincks and Rawlinson had demonstrated by 1850 that Assyro-Babylonian was a Semitic language. Hadn't this rendered obsolete any notions that Semites were incapable of creating great civilizations? Not at all! As we have seen, no sooner had the Semites been brought in from the wilderness to the cradle of civilization, than it was decided that it was not they who created their own writing system; an earlier, non-Semitic people had invented writing and created the basic institutions (religion, mythology, literature and science) of Mesopotamian civilization. This was what stuck in Halévy's craw³⁰. In the 1876 follow-up to his 1874 article, Halévy stated the issue directly: Where does Mesopotamian civilization come from? “A quelle race faut-il attribuer la création, l'initiative?” He then referred to “cette catégorie de savants qui ont de la peine à accorder aux Sémites certaines aptitudes qui se révèlent avec éclat dans la civilisation de la Mésopotamie. Des telles hésitations ne disparaîtront entièrement que le jour où l'origine “sémitique de l'écriture cunéiforme sera devenue une certitude”³¹. Only by showing that cuneiform itself was a Semitic invention could Semitic virtue be upheld, and this was the task that Halévy set for himself.

A peculiarity of Halévy's 1874 article, and one for which he was severely taken to task by his critics, was that he never cited another scholar by name, even when quoting directly. Rather, he explained, “dans le but d'observer la plus stricte impersonnalité”³², he simply attributed the opinions against which he argued to “les assyriologues”. But at the end of his article he relented: In a postscript, he reported that at the moment he was correcting proofs, he noticed a passage in the just published *Höllenfahrt der Istar* by Eberhard Schrader, the father of German Assyriology. There Schrader tried to explain away the incontestable evidence that Semites were indeed capable of epic composition, as manifest in the text he edited. The Semites, explained Schrader, developed that capability only as the result of contact with the Turanians of Babylonia, from whom they took their writing system and mythology. Halévy found it outrageous that, as he interpreted Schrader, Schrader was so certain that the Semites were unable to develop an epic tradition using their own resources, that he was compelled to ascribe such a tradition, once found, to a purely hypothetical non-Semitic source.

Of course, the imagined limitations of the Semitic mind were not Schrader's only reasons for postulating what we could call a Sumerian origin for *Ishtar's Descent*, and we know that in this case, certainly, he was absolutely correct. But Schrader's views on the Semites were especially objectionable. In 1875, he

29. Olender, *Langues* 127-141. Note pp. 135-137, which record the young Saussure's negative reaction to Pictet's project and methods.

30. In a discussion of nineteenth century attitudes toward the Phoenicians, Bernal devotes a short paragraph to this problem, without mentioning Halévy. He concludes: “By attributing all aspects of Mesopotamian civilization to the Sumerians, the anti-Semites who by the 1890s dominated much of the writing of ancient history were able to maintain their general tenet that Semites were essentially uncreative” (*Black Athena* I, 338). I would bring his dates down to the 1860s.

31. *JA* 1876 201-203. Although published two years after the first article, this was already in proof just a few months after the first appeared. Halévy attributed the delay in publication to “des influences occultes” (*Revue sémitique* 6 [1898] 172), i.e. Oppert.

32. *JA* 1874 465f. n. 1.

published "Semitismus und Babylonismus. Zur Frage nach dem Ursprunge des Hebraismus"³³, in which he claimed that all "North Semites", including Babylonians, Phoenicians and Hebrews, migrated from Arabia to Babylonia, dispersing from there to the west and south. It was from the non-Semitic population of Babylonia that they received the elements of civilization: writing, mythology, pantheon, phallus worship – even *parallelismus membrorum*! Whatever can't be found among the Arabs isn't Semitic, and must be attributed to that civilizing sojourn in Babylonia:

der gesammte Nordsemitismus, eingeschlossen den Hebraismus, ist durch das Anderssein des Babylonismus hindurch gegangen und hat sich nach seinem, ihm eigenthümlichen und denselben von dem Arabismus unterscheidenden Charakter, was Anschauungs- und ganze Seinsweise betrifft, erst ausgebildet in Babylonien und durch den Kontakt mit den nichtsemitischen, vor den Semiten bereits in Babylonien ansässig gewesenenen Bewohnern³⁴.

Only after this contact with non-Semitic Babylonians were the Hebrews fit for revelation: "in Babylon war das Gefäss bereitet, in welches später der Inhalt ewiger Wahrheit gethan werden sollte"³⁵. So even monotheism, the single Semitic virtue that even the most enthusiastic Aryanist would not contest, was now claimed to have been realized only because of contact in lower Mesopotamia with the "vermutlich dem innern Hochasien entstammenden Urbewohner, auf deren Rechnung auch die Erfindung der wunderbaren Keilschrift zu setzen ist"³⁶.

Halévy seems especially outraged in his early articles by the notion that the Turanians, of all people, should be credited with achievements thought beyond the capacity of the Semites. Lenormant, together with Oppert the chief target of Halévy's 1874 article, was especially keen on the Turanians. In 1874, Lenormant published *La magie chez les Chaldéens et les origines accadiennes*, half of which is devoted to demonstrating the affinities of the Sumerian ("Akkadian" in his terminology) language and system of mythology and magic with those of the Turanian peoples. According to Lenormant, the Sumerian language had special affinities with the Finno-Ugric group and Basque, and a long chapter was devoted to the resemblances of Finnish and Sumerian mythology. Halévy regarded the Turanians as little more than savages recently emerged from forest and steppe; having lived among the Turks and Magyars, he clearly did not like them. He was quite properly rebuked by both Oppert and Lenormant for harboring groundless prejudices against the Turanians, not dissimilar, one might add, to the prejudices that others held against the Semites³⁷. But Halévy was not alone in Paris; in the aftermath of the Franco-Prussian war, the great French anthropologist Quatrefages explained the barbarous conduct of the Prussians by theorizing that they were not really Germans at all, but actually Finns, remnants of a primitive (Turanian) race that had preceded the Aryans in eastern Europe³⁸.

The "Aryan myth" was a philological enterprise, and it was as a philologist working in a field permeated by the mystique of Aryan superiority that Halévy was provoked to vindicate the Semitic roots of Assyro-Babylonian civilization. It was not only in Assyriology that he labored against aspects of the Aryan myth.

33. *Jahrbücher für protestantische Theologie* 1 (1875) 117-133.

34. Ibid. 131. Halévy, *Rev. de philologie et d'ethnographie* 2 (1876) 267, said in response that taking the Arabs as the model for Semitic capabilities would be like taking the Baluchis or Afghans as representative of the Aryans.

35. Ibid. 133.

36. Ibid. 120.

37. J. Oppert, *Gött. gel. Anzeigen* 1877 1416f.; F. Lenormant, *La langue primitive de la Chaldée et les idiomes touraniens*, Paris 1875, 393. Ironically, Lenormant had just published a stinging attack against Renan's whole conception of the Semitic mentality, which Lenormant refuted on the basis of Assyro-Babylonian evidence (*Les premières civilisations*) vol. II, Paris 1874, 113-123). It was hardly antisemitism that brought him to champion the Turanians.

38. Poliakov, *Aryan Myth* 261.

He vigorously disputed the claimed antiquity of orally transmitted Sanskrit scripture³⁹, tried to show that the Avesta was influenced by the Old Testament (hence any Zarathustran monotheism was Semitic in origin)⁴⁰, and he vigorously combatted the documentary hypothesis of the composition of the Pentateuch, without, however, defending traditional Jewish teachings in that regard⁴¹.

The Aryan myth did not remain confined to the lecture halls of the academy or the pages of learned journals and books. Barely nascent in Paris of 1874, a virulent political antisemitism developed in the 1880s, culminating in the Dreyfus Affair of the 1890s. The racial theories upon which this antisemitism was based drew their justification from the works of philologists like Renan, and it may well have been this ever more prominent role of antisemitism in French political life that provoked Halévy to maintain so tenaciously his anti-Sumerist thesis until his death in 1917⁴².

PERSONALITIES AND PROFESSIONAL LIFE

Halévy's challenge, addressed to "les assyriologues", was, in fact, as we have seen, directed at Oppert and Lenormant in Paris, and at Schrader in Germany. Oppert responded in the *Journal Asiatique* with the cleverly titled "Sumérien ou rien?"⁴³ and Lenormant with a 399-page book⁴⁴. Both took a tone of exasperated politeness, wondering why someone who had achieved so much in other branches of Semitic studies would so foolishly venture onto a terrain that was not his own, and pretend to overthrow the last quarter century of Assyriological scholarship. And both thought they knew the answer:

Pourtant l'attachement de l'auteur à ses propres idées ne suffirait pas à l'aveugler à ce point, s'il ne s'y était pas joint une sorte de sentiment de patriotisme de race, imparfaitement conscient de lui-même et pourtant impossible à méconnaître. Ce sentiment a quelque chose de nature à étonner les esprits habitués à envisager de semblables questions avec l'impartialité de la critique, ceux qui, n'étant ni Touraniens, ni Sémites, ne se croient pas chargés du rôle de champions de l'honneur de l'une ou de l'autre de ces races et y demeurent tout à fait indifférents. Mais M. Halévy semble vraiment se tenir pour solidaire de la gloire des Sémites dans l'antiquité. (Lenormant)⁴⁵

39. E.g. "Nouvelles observations sur les écriture indiennes", *Rev. sémitique* 3 (1895) 222-285. Just as Jewish oral law claimed to have been transmitted orally from Moses to the Pharasaic scribes, so the Brahmans claim millennia of oral transmission for their sacred books. In reality, both the Jewish oral law and the Sanskrit texts are little older than their writing down. The question is still a matter of dispute today; see Jack Goody, *The Interface Between the Written and the Oral*, Cambridge 1987, chap. 4.

40. E.g. "L'influence du Pentateuque sur l'Avesta", *Rev. sémitique* 4 (1896) 164-174, where he lashes out at the Aryanists who have tried to show that any similarities between the Avesta and the OT were due to the influence of the former on the latter, because the Avesta, like the Veda, "devait représenter l'antique religion de la race indo-européenne sans aucun mélange hétérogène et surtout de conceptions sémitiques dont on ne voulait à aucun prix". The question remains controversial today.

41. See F. Perles, *Ost und West* 17 (1917) 108 and I. Lévy, *Revue Historique* 126 (1917) 217f. He believed the Pentateuch to have been composed as a single work toward the end of Solomon's reign or early in the divided kingdom.

42. On French antisemitism, see R. F. Byrnes, *Antisemitism in Modern France* vol. I, New Brunswick 1950, chap. II; L. Poliakov, *The History of Anti-Semitism* vol. IV, New York 1985, chap. 2, and especially p. 34 there, where Renan is cited as "the major authority" for the racial component of political antisemitism, and this citation on p. 41 from E. Drumont's infamous *La France Juive* (1886), which has distinctly Renanesque echoes: "... the Semite, mercantile, greedy, scheming, devious, and the Aryan, enthusiastic, heroic, chivalrous, disinterested, frank, trusting". It is pointless to speculate further on Halévy's motivations without more evidence; he was however, distressed enough by the expulsion of the Jews from Moscow in 1882 to write and publish a poem in modern Hebrew on the subject.

43. *JA* 1875 442-497. See also Oppert in *Gött. gel. Anzeigen* 1877 569-574, 1409-1424.

44. *La langue primitive de la chaldée et les idiomes touraniens*, Paris 1875. Lenormant was enormously prolific, prompting the following remark of the young Friedrich Delitzsch in 1875: "Jedes Jahr die Welt mit einer Menge von Aufsätzen und Büchern zu beschenken, deren Inhalt man in kaum ein paar Monaten, durch neue Inschriften belehrt, zurückzunehmen oder wenigstens bedeutend modificiren muss ... widerstreitet mir durchaus" (letter to A. Dillmann cited by Johanning, *Bibel-Babel-Streit* 351).

45. Lenormant, *Langue primitive* 397.

Nous avons du supposer que des motifs, au moins très-respectables, ont engagé notre honorable antagoniste à s'opposer aux idées irrécusables dans notre opinion, et qui refusent aux Sémites l'invention de l'écriture cunéiforme. Le savant auteur ... en voyant échapper aux Sémites les origines de la science chaldéenne, craint de donner raison à de certaines prétensions des aryanistes qui regardent à tort comme supérieure la race des Indoeuropéens. Nous sommes d'accord avec M. Halévy: nous ne croyons pas que les Sémites aient dans l'histoire du monde une place moins privilégiée que celle qui devra revenir aux Aryas dans les origines de la civilisation. Mais c'est justement à cause de la grande influence qu'ont exercée les Sémites dans d'autres branches du développement de l'intelligence, que nous n'hésitons pas à ne pas leur accorder ce qui ne leur revient pas.

(Oppert)⁴⁶

Oppert continued: If the Semites did not invent the cuneiform system, so clumsy and "si peu appropriée aux besoins d'un peuple vraiment civilisateur", we should not forget that they invented the alphabet, "accepté par toutes les nations civilisées". This important fact alone should be enough to set aside the fears of those who worry about others devaluing those (Semitic) civilizations "auxquelles les temps modernes doivent leurs croyances religieuses. En tout cas, la question n'est pas là".

Both French scholars regretted the necessity of attacking a scholar of Halévy's accomplishment, but did so nonetheless. Their refutations regarding the Semitic origin of the syllabary were thorough and telling, but by clinging too closely to the Turanian hypothesis, they gave Halévy plenty of ammunition for his subsequent rebuttals. Both Oppert and Lenormant brought the argument – absurd to us now, and to Halévy then – that Sumerian TUR meaning "son, man (in the sense of citizen or group member)" was etymologically the same as Iranian Tur, the eponym of the Turanian language group⁴⁷, thus clinching, for them, the relationship with Sumerian⁴⁸. Oppert, trying to show how fundamentally different is the structure of Sumerian from any Semitic language, pointed to Sumerian nominal compounds (Semitic languages don't combine nouns), which he likened to Sanskrit compounds. To prove the point, he presented the ludicrous spectacle of a Sumerian hymn translated into Sanskrit!⁴⁹ Lenormant exposed himself to Halévy's ridicule by using the Marduk-našir kudurru⁵⁰ to illustrate the non-Semitic, high cheek-boned, straight-nosed Turanian type in Babylonian art⁵¹.

Schrader, eschewing the grace and humor of Halévy's Parisian colleagues, began his rejoinder⁵² with a school-masterish rehearsal of how and why Assyriologists concluded that cuneiform was invented by non-Semites, and why Sumerian could not be a Semitic language. He then tellingly demolished Halévy's arguments on syllabary and language. He skirted the Turanian issue, saying that calling Sumerian "Turanian" was just a convenient way of saying that Sumerian is an agglutinative language, and he left open the question of its nearer affinities. But he was fierce on the subject of the origin of Assyro-

46. Oppert, *JA* 1875 444.

47. See n. 11.

48. Oppert, *JA* 1875 464f.; Lenormant, *Langue primitive* 381 n. 1. For Oppert, this showed that "Le sumérien est par excellence la langue touranien". Furthermore, Oppert thought that a study of the basic ideogram stock of Sumerian showed that the Sumerians originated in the north.

49. *JA* 1875 454 n. 1.

50. E. Strommenger, *5000 Years of the Art of Mesopotamia*, New York 1964, 270f.

51. *Langue primitive* 382f. In fairness to Lenormant, he went on to justly criticize Halévy for insisting that racial labels can be applied to art. No Assyriologist, said Lenormant, puts the question on an either/or basis; rather, Babylonian civilization was a product of the coexistence of Semites and Turanians from earliest times, "la fusion des génies propres aux deux races" (388). See below for Halévy's inability to accept the notion of different "races" cooperating.

52. *ZDMG* 29 (1875) 1-47.

Babylonian civilization, whose accomplishments, he insisted, were decidedly non-Semitic, referring the interested reader to his "Semitismus und Babylonismus" (see above). And, Schrader argued, if Halévy saw continuity between later Assyro-Babylonian art and the earlier Mesopotamian monuments, it is because the Semites took over the entire earlier tradition, since the Babylonian Semites were themselves, "wie alle Semiten, was Kunst anbelangt, wenig originell"⁵³. Nor was Schrader open to compromise on the subject of literature: The Semites lacked an "epic drive", and if the Assyro-Babylonians, alone among Semites, had developed an epic deserving comparison with that of the Indo-Germans, then an unprejudiced scholar should note that the Babylonian Semites had been living together with a highly developed non-Semitic civilization, and that scholars would have to be blind not to put the two together, attributing Babylonian epic to that non-Semitic civilization⁵⁴.

Halévy's rebuttals were filled with sarcasm and self-assurance. His attack on Lenormant focussed on the Turanian question, where he was most effective: "Le grand prêtre de la religion préhistorique de la race touranienne brandit le glaive vengeur sur la tête du scélérat qui jette la torche incendiaire dans le parvis de son temple"⁵⁵. As to Lenormant's accusation of racial patriotism, Halévy rejected it by pointing to the fact that Oppert, who opposed him, was also a Jew⁵⁶. Halévy would use that argument over and over to defend against later, similar charges, seeming not to understand that the argument itself was illogical.

He replied to Oppert and Schrader jointly in a two-part article⁵⁷. In the first part, published in 1876, he stated most openly the issue he was trying to address: The Mesopotamian monuments had proved that the Semites were capable of all that the Aryanists had been insisting they were not, but scholars like Schrader were using the Sumerians to deprive the Semites of those very accomplishments⁵⁸. The second part of the rebuttal appeared two years later, with a note by Halévy describing the delay as due to the resignation of the journal's editor, and an editorial note saying that only the absence of an editor allowed the article to be printed without modifying the personal attacks it contained. Thus forewarned, the reader soon finds himself in the midst of a vicious personal attack on Oppert as a scholar and human being. Oppert "poursuit ses invectives avec tant d'acharnement, professe à l'égard du critique un dédain si bruyant que ... ces continuelles provocations nous obligent" to consider his scholarly qualifications. Despite Oppert's early education in Hebrew, his contributions to Semitic philology were marked by numerous failures: "Sous la main inexpérimentée de M. Oppert, les expressions les plus claires ... sont violentées ou déformées, à l'effet d'en tirer des idées creuses, pédantesques ou des images insipides et d'une platitude excessive"⁵⁹.

Acknowledging Oppert's role in the early years of the decipherment of cuneiform, he asserted that

53. Ibid. 42.

54. Ibid. 50f.

55. *La prétendue langue d'Accad, est-elle touranienne?* Paris 1875, 6.

56. Ibid. 5f. Halévy was also under the strange illusion that Weissbach, Haupt and Delitzsch were Jews (*Rev. Sémitique* 6 [1898] 172; *ibid.* 15 [1906] 184). He may have been confused by the fact that Weissbach can also be a Jewish name. Haupt was taught Hebrew as a child by a rabbi who was the father of his favorite playmate (Albright, *Studies Haupt* xxi), which may also have confused Halévy. Delitzsch's father, the famous theologian Franz Delitzsch, had defended himself for fifty years against charges that he was the illegitimate son of a Jew, one Lewy Hirsch, who had roomed in his parents' house and had helped support Franz, whose parents were quite poor, through gymnasium and university (K. Johanning, *Der Bibel-Babel-Streit* [Frankfurt 1988] 27f.). Franz became a life-long foe of antisemitism, but the leader of the movement to convert Jews to Christianity as well. His son Friedrich, the Assyriologist and erstwhile ally of Halévy, who had been taunted as "der Judenenkel", became a vicious antisemite towards the end of his life (Johanning, *op. cit.*; H. Huffmon, "Babel und Bibel: The Encounter Between Babylon and the Bible", *Michigan Quarterly Review* 22 (1983) 309-320 [also in M. O'Connor and D. N. Freedman, *Backgrounds for the Bible*, Winona Lake IN 1987]). Was Halévy taunting him as well?

57. *Rev. de philologie et d'ethnologie* 2 (1876) 259-272; 3 (1878) 193-214.

58. *Rev. de philol. et d'ethnol.* 2 266.

59. *Rev. de philol. et d'ethnol.* 3 199-202.

now "tout le monde s'aperçoit que celui qui fut nauguère le premier des assyriologues est aujourd'hui très-arriéré"⁶⁰. More cutting still, and more revealing, was the following:

Les connaissances hébraïques et chaldaïques qu'il s'était acquises dès son enfance, quoique stationnaires et imparfaites, suffisaient cependant pour laisser loin derrière lui des devanciers ... et il y a lieu de croire que son origine sémitique n'a pas été pour peu de chose dans cette glorieuse obstination. Malheureusement, le défaut du goût, la recherche des invraisemblances ... enfin l'insuffisance de son capital de philologie sémitique, tout cela ensemble se fait jour dans ... son Expédition en Mésopotamie, la meilleure ... de ses oeuvres⁶¹.

Oppert's supposedly faulty scholarship, Halévy implied, was a betrayal of his Jewish upbringing. The presumption that a Jewish education should have provided a solid basis for Assyriology was also intended to boost Halévy's own credentials as a newcomer to that field.

Why, suddenly, such rancor? One could detect in Oppert's patronizing reassurance of Halévy on the subject of Semites and writing (see above) the self confidence of a sophisticated, socially well-assimilated Jew, teaching since 1869 at the Collège de France, who, having completed gymnasium and university in his native Germany, had lived virtually his entire adult life in France. He could not have been more different than his coeval correlative Halévy, an Ottoman Jew, autodidact, newly arrived in Paris with

la notion la plus exacte des manières d'agir, de penser et de sentir de l'Oriental ... élevé dans un monde séparé en "nations" particularistes par les différences de langue et de religion, il a gardé au judaïsme natal un attachement passionné qui fit de lui un champion toujours prêt à défendre, avec la bonne foi la plus ingénue, les causes favorables à la grandeur passée du peuple juif et des Sémites en général⁶².

Oppert had come to France, as had many other German Jews in the middle third of the century, in search of liberties available to Jews nowhere else on the continent. To cite only, once more, Renan in his famous lecture of 1862, "si l'on excepte la France qui a élevé dans le monde le principe d'une civilisation purement idéale, écartant toute idée de différence de races, les Juifs presque partout forment encore une société à part"⁶³.

Oppert never hid his Judaism; to the contrary, he was active in Jewish causes. But Halévy's manner of wearing his Judaism on his sleeve in professional life – precisely what was *not* necessary, theoretically, in France – must have been distasteful to Oppert. Oppert's work of the preceding quarter century, which early on had been unsuccessfully attacked by a notorious racist⁶⁴, was now being challenged with impertinence by an outsider, flying – in Lenormant's words (see above) – the "unmistakable" banner of Semitic pride. It is difficult to determine exactly what actions of Oppert prompted Halévy's outburst; although more socialized to the norms of appropriate scholarly discourse, Oppert was no less contentious or egotistical than Halévy, and he possessed tremendous influence in the Parisian academic community. By 1877, he was calling Halévy's theory "a contrived fantasy", and accusing him of preaching "einen unglücklichen Kreuzzug gegen 'Sumer und Akkad'"⁶⁵.

Decades later, Halévy remembered the period with great bitterness:

60. Ibid. 209.

61. Ibid. 206.

62. I. Lévy, *Rev. historique* 126 (1917) 215.

63. *Peuples sémitiques* 13.

64. The "most vehement" of the many early attacks on the decipherment of cuneiform came from Count J. A. de Gobineau (Pallis, *Antiquity of Iraq* 161f.). For Gobineau's racial theories, see Poliakov, *Aryan Myth* 233-238.

65. *Gött. gel. Anzeigen* 1877 I 572, II 1417.

Malgré le ton impersonnel et respectueux de mon article de 1875, ma théorie m'a valu des afflications sans nombre. On organisa une persécution sans trêve contre moi. Je fus empêché de faire des communications à l'Institut, on m'a évincé de la Société des Études juives et au moyen de dénigrement et de calomnies, on a tout fait pour me priver du poste que j'occupe à l'École des Hautes-Études. Et pour y arriver plus facilement, on a commencé à déclarer ma théorie ridicule, sachant que le ridicule tue vite en France⁶⁶.

The feud between the two scholars, harsh even by Parisian standards, continued unabated until Oppert's death in 1905⁶⁷. Oral tradition transmitted by a senior French colleague reports that the two actually came to blows with umbrellas in the hallway of the Institut! Unfortunately, most of the oral tradition and personal recollections that could have helped us to read between the lines of the published record are now lost.

SUMER SPEAKS

According to Pallis, the death blow to Halévy's thesis was dealt by Paul Haupt's work on Sumerian grammar from 1879-1882, and the publication, beginning in 1884, of the materials recovered by the French from Tello, the first site to be excavated in Sumer itself⁶⁸. But, in fact, Halévy's thesis enjoyed its greatest successes following these events. As we have seen, work such as Haupt's, which showed Sumerian to have the regular phonological and morphological features of a natural language, could be assimilated to Halévy's theory: As Sumerian, what Halévy considered to be the hieratic mode of representing Assyro-Babylonian, became more and more a special language of the priesthood, it was pronounced by those who learned and used it, and thus began to develop in some ways like the natural language it was not. As to the art from Tello, which, in Pallis's words showed "the outward appearance of the new people, and scholars as well as laymen could all see the difference from the well-known Semitic type"⁶⁹ – Halévy could account for this, too! The sculpture from Tello shows mortals as round headed, bald and clean shaven – the "new people" – but gods are bearded and rather "Semitic looking". In 1906, Eduard Meyer elaborated his own thesis to explain this distinction⁷⁰. The mortals were indeed the Sumerians, a non-Semitic racial type that conquered southern Babylonia, and the deities were Semitic, taken over by the newly arrived Sumerians from the indigenous Semites! Halévy's response: It is well known that primitive peoples render the human form in a very summary way but lavish a great deal of care on their representations of their gods. Thus, the mortals portrayed on the early monuments tell us nothing about how the people really appeared; only the images of their gods reveal the race of these people, and they are unambiguously Semitic.

Nor were the texts from Tello, and later Nippur, immediately decisive, as Pallis suggests they were. Both the Sumerist and anti-Sumerist positions had been elaborated primarily on the basis of Sumerian and bilingual texts from seventh century Nineveh. Older texts from the south were known (e.g. IR 1-5), but relatively rare. When, large numbers of early texts from Tello and Nippur did become available, their evidence was not immediately decisive, and they were hardly mentioned in the major confrontations with Halévy's thesis offered by Weissbach (1898) and Fossey (1904). In a paper read in 1882, Halévy was confident that the new inscriptions unearthed by de Sarzec at Tello would settle the Sumerian question

66. *Rev. sémitique* 17 (1909) 198f.

67. Weissbach 107 describes "a small skirmish" between the two in 1888-89: In a paper read to the Académie des Inscriptions, Halévy took the opportunity to repeat his anti-Sumerist position. "Oppert widersprach ihm in allen Punkten. Als Halévy seinen Vortrag dann veröffentlichte und Oppert zu widerlegen suchte, antwortete dieser mit einer Déclaration, Halévy mit einer Réponse und Oppert wieder mit einer Réplique, ohne dass die Sache selbst auch nur einen Schritt gefördert worden wäre".

68. Pallis, *Antiquity* 181f.

69. *Ibid.*

70. *Sumerier und Semiten in Babylonien*, Berlin 1906.

once and for all in his favor⁷¹, and on several occasions he presented transliterations of Early Dynastic inscriptions side-by-side with translations of them into Assyrian, to emphasize their Semitic character, together with French translations and philological notes that provided Semitic etymologies for each and every Sumerian word⁷².

In 1889, Friedrich Delitzsch declared himself for Halévy's position in the first edition of his *Assyrische Grammatik*⁷³. In a lucid and concise presentation of what Thureau-Dangin would later call "le meilleur de la thèse 'haléviste'"⁷⁴, Delitzsch remarked that the inscriptions of the ancient kings of Ur, Larsa and Tello betray their Semitic origins through words like da-rí (form *dārī*), but also through "semitische Denk- und Sprechweise" in, for example, royal titles and epithets⁷⁵. Eight years later, Thureau-Dangin published a selection of tablets from Tello, ranging from Presargonic through Ur III, including the first Sargonic tablets ever published. Thureau-Dangin was perplexed by the mixture of phonetic and logographic writing in these last. If a personal name written *a-hu-DUG₃* was obviously to be read as Semitic *aḥu-ṭābu*, was the name *gù-dé-a* on the same tablet to be read as written, or as Semitic *nabū*? Should *in-ne-ši-sa₁₀* be read as a form of Semitic *ša'āmu*, given the fact that in the same texts *šu ba-ti* alternates with the phonetically written Semitic *im-hur*?

Si je cite ces exemples que je pourrais aisément multiplier, c'est afin de montrer combien flottante et incertaine est, dans l'hypothèse d'une double langue, la limite à établir entre le sémitisme et le non-sémitisme: il n'existe à vrai dire aucun critérium permettant de distinguer d'une façon certaine une inscription non sémitique d'une inscription sémitique écrite idéographiquement. Dans la présente étude nous écarterons l'hypothèse d'une langue non sémitique⁷⁶.

Were there any true non-Semitic texts at all, they should be found in the period before Sargon, reasoned Thureau-Dangin, but when we examine the Presargonic inscriptions recently excavated in Babylonia, we find frequent phonetically written Semitic terms, such as *dam-ḫa-ra*, *da-rí*, and *gi-na*, which prove that the language of those that wrote the inscriptions was Semitic, as does "l'emploi de tournures ou de constructions se modelant sur la phrase sémitique ... On se trouve donc en présence d'inscriptions rédigées non pas en deux langues, mais d'après deux systèmes différents, l'un où domine le phonétisme, l'autre où domine l'idéographisme"⁷⁷. This was precisely Halévy's thesis!

Even those who firmly upheld the Sumerist position were uncertain about what the early inscriptions implied for it. Hilprecht, for example, was certain that Lugalzagesi was a Semite, whose name was to be read *Šarru-māli-emūqi-kēni*, but Lagash, according to him, was a Sumerian bastion⁷⁸. Radau, though, would read the names of all the early rulers of Lagash as Semitic: *Ur-Nanshe* = *Kalab-nanše*, *Eanatum* = *Bit-šamē-ukīn*, *Gudea* = *Nabū*⁷⁹. Chronology also played a role in the confusion. Nabonidus had dated Naramsin 3200 years earlier than himself, and despite the reservations of some scholars about the reliability of this date, it was generally accepted until King put early Babylonian chronology on a more solid basis in 1910⁸⁰. Thus Radau, noting that "Semitisms occur in almost all the earliest inscriptions",

71. *Mélanges de critique et d'histoire* (Paris 1883) 389-409.

72. E.g. *Le sumérisme et l'histoire babylonienne* (Paris 1901) 38-85.

73. F. Delitzsch, *Assyrische Grammatik*, Berlin 1889, §25.

74. *RA* 10 (1913) 194.

75. Delitzsch, *Assyrische Grammatik* 69.

76. *RA* 4 (1897) 73.

77. *Ibid.* 73f.

78. *BE* 1/2 (1896) 269f.

79. *Early Babylonian History*, New York 1900, 144.

80. L. W. King, *A History of Sumer and Akkad*, London 1910, 61-65; cf. F. Schmidtke, "Die Fehldatierung Naramsins durch Nabonid", *WO* 1 (1947) 51-56.

pushed the period of pure Sumerian culture, the beginnings of "civilization and history ... back to at least 6000 BC"⁸¹. Halévy could easily poke fun at scholars who insisted so emphatically on the existence of a people who lost their independence in such remote antiquity, and who left no unmediated evidence of their presence.

Nevertheless, continued study of the ever increasing number of early texts would, necessarily, lead to the abandonment of Halévy's thesis by both Delitzsch and Thureau-Dangin. Delitzsch dropped it already in his *Die Entstehung des ältesten Schriftsystems oder der Ursprung der Keilschriftzeichen* (Leipzig 1897); Thureau-Dangin passed over the question in silence in his *Recherches sur l'origine d'écriture cunéiforme* of 1898, and seems not to have explicitly acknowledged the existence of a separate Sumerian ethnolinguistic group until 1907⁸². Halévy, octogenarian, had lost his last prominent supporter, but he maintained his lonely course and produced, at 85, the *Précis d'allographie assyro-babylonienne*, a final, lengthy statement of this theory. In a peculiar, dismissive review of that work, Thureau-Dangin mentioned that Halévy's thesis had enjoyed Delitzsch's support for a time, but was completely silent about his own adherence to it⁸³.

INNOVATION AND DEVIANCE

The replies to Halévy by Oppert, Lenormant and Schrader, as well as the later overviews by Weissbach and Fossey, all began by setting forth the reasons for the two-decade old consensus that Halévy had attacked. Rawlinson's original decipherment of Akkadian (Assyro-Babylonian) cuneiform had shown it to be a Semitic language (1851), but two anomalies immediately became apparent. On the one hand, the cuneiform syllabary was neither structurally nor phonologically well suited to represent a Semitic language; on the other, the syllabic values of the logograms used to represent certain Semitic words had no obvious relationship to those words. Hincks quickly saw the resolution of these anomalies: Cuneiform had been originally intended to write another, non-Semitic language (1852), and at almost the same time this intuition was confirmed when Rawlinson and Oppert both characterized the non-Semitic language of the bilinguals as "Scythian", later "Turanian" (see above), because unlike Semitic or Indo-European languages, it was agglutinative, and Oppert theorized that the "Scythians" had invented cuneiform, which was then borrowed by the Semites. The subsequent twenty years of study of the bilingual texts fully substantiated Oppert's theory; indeed many features of both the lexical and literary bilingual texts made sense only in the context of such a theory⁸⁴.

The rapid development and confirmation of the theory of cuneiform origins in response to anomalies in the data elicited by Rawlinson's decipherment bears some resemblance to the forging of a scientific paradigm through which a new discipline is created, as described by Thomas Kuhn⁸⁵. Indeed, despite the enormous advances in nearly a century and a half of Assyriology, this basic paradigm still frames our approach to research: A prior Sumerian civilization invented the cuneiform writing system, which was subsequently adapted to write the Semitic dialect(s) ancestral to Assyro-Babylonian Akkadian, as well as other languages of neighboring areas. Mesopotamian civilization was the result of the interaction of Sumerian and Semitic elements (as well as, to a lesser degree, other groups), and a good bit of the religious

81. *Early Babylonian History* 149f.

82. F. Thureau-Dangin, *Die sumerischen und akkadischen Königsinschriften*, Leipzig 1907, introduction. See Halévy's reaction in *Rev. sémitique* 15 (1907) 389f.

83. *RA* 10 (1913) 194-197. Cf. Halévy's rebuttal in *Rev. sémitique* 21 (1913) 424-438.

84. See especially Schrader, *ZDMG* 29 (1875) 1-4.

85. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd ed., Chicago 1970. A discussion of the applicability of insights developed in studying the history and social structure of the natural sciences to the humanistic sciences must be deferred, except to note that Assyriology, with its narrow research consensus and positivist methodology can be said to resemble physics or biology much more closely than, say, the study of French literature.

and intellectual heritage of Assyria and Babylonia bears the Sumerian imprint. This is what Assyriologists believed when Halévy published his first challenge in 1874, and this is what they believe now.

Superficially, Halévy seems to have proposed a new paradigm, which was resisted by an Assyriological establishment whose mentality and careers were bound up in the old. But Kuhn makes it clear that it is not just any anomaly that triggers the kind of crisis that leads to a paradigm shift; there are many anomalies in any system, and the paradigm is often modified to account for them, or they are eventually explained, or they are too minor or marginal to trigger a crisis⁸⁶. The Sumerist paradigm was firmly grounded in the philological data for whose explanation it was originally constructed. Halévy's anti-Sumerist paradigm was based on paradoxes and marginal anomalies (absence of unambiguous reference in ancient texts to Sumerians or their language; erroneous attempts by others to show that Sumerian is a Turanian language; absurdity of denying to Assyro-Babylonians the credit for creating their own civilization). In order to account for these, Halévy explained the philological data (the syllabary and the bilingual lexical and literary texts) with a theory that both generated its own set of anomalies and paradoxes, and did a much less credible job of accounting for the philological data.

In reality, Halévy's thesis in many respects resembles a case of deviance rather than innovation. H. Zuckerman has elaborated a theory of deviant conduct in science, within the context of Robert Merton's norms of scientific behavior⁸⁷. These norms are of two types, cognitive and moral. The cognitive norms are essentially methodological, and here Halévy's search for Semitic etymologies to every Sumerian syllabic value went beyond the bounds accepted by most scholars of his day and ours. "Ihm fehlte eben, wie es bei seinem eigenartigen Studien- und Entwicklungsgang nicht verwunderlich ist, die strenge Zucht der Methode"⁸⁸. The moral norms that he violated were two: universalism and disinterestedness. Universalism forbids *ad hominem* attacks of the kind he made on Oppert, and which he was to continue to make throughout his career. He never seemed to understand or respect the limit beyond which scientific attack became personal; tolerance for the former was unlimited, but the latter was clearly considered unseemly in a scientific communication⁸⁹. Disinterestedness demands that ideological motives, such as Halévy's "unmistakable" though oft denied desire to prove that the Semites were capable of creating alone all the institutions of a high civilization, be kept out of the published scientific record. Of the possible explanations of deviant behavior cited by Zuckerman, two apply here. Differential association theory suggests that deviance would be most likely in an auto-didact like Halévy, who had not been socialized through training and apprenticeship in the profession. And the persistence over decades of Halévy's deviant behavior, that is, his wild etymologizing and personal attacks, is perhaps explained by labeling theory. That is, peer criticism of this method and style simply reinforced the behavior that was being criticized.

The paradox of Halévy's thesis is that despite its deviant presentation, it remained an attractive enough alternative to the reigning paradigm to win over, if only temporarily, minds of the caliber of Delitzsch and Thureau-Dangin. Somehow, despite the almost universal rejection of the Assyriological community when it was first advanced in 1874, the thesis maintained a vitality that justified the hundreds of pages devoted to explicating and refuting it by Weissbach (1898) and Fossey (1904). At the Interna-

86. *Structure* 82.

87. H. Zuckerman, "Deviant Behavior and Social Control in Science", pp. 87-138 in E. Sagarin (ed.), *Deviance and Social Change*, Beverly Hills 1977.

88. F. Perles, *Ost und West* 17 (1917) 107.

89. The cocksure and stinging criticism by the 21 year old Paul Haupt of Oppert and Lenormant was no less severe than that of Halévy, cited above, but it stuck strictly to philological matters. On Oppert: "Wenn er diese unverzeihlichen Fehler begeht, zu denen noch Hunderte von Beispielen der offenbarsten Unfähigkeit, auch nur eine Zeile Sumerisch correct zu lesen, hinzukommen: dann - wir überlassen das Urtheil dem Leser!" On Lenormant: "Ein Assyriologe, der einen Funken von Begeisterung für das herrliche Studium des Sumerischen besitzt, könnte sich an seiner Wissenschaft nicht so versündigen". (*Die sumerischen Familiengesetze*, Leipzig 1879, 13f.).

tional Orientalist Congress in Paris in 1897, so alive was Halévy's thesis that Assyriologists were asked to vote by a show of hands for or against the Sumerians; only Thureau-Dangin and Jeremias supported Halévy and voted against⁹⁰. The theory's vitality can be explained partly by the fact that the new evidence excavated in Sumer itself did not immediately and forcefully resolve the controversy in favor of the majority view (see above). But Halévy's cleverness and linguistic genius must have played some role as well in preventing the rapid demise that the theory deserved. Halévy's countless publications – literally thousands of pages advocating his anti-Sumerist position – also contributed to the prominence of his notions. His major outlet became the *Revue sémitique d'épigraphie et d'histoire ancienne*, founded by him in 1893 (one year before Oppert founded the *Revue d'Assyriologie*), whose pages he dominated for twenty-one years. Tom Jones implies that by 1900, "Halévy was discredited"⁹¹, but as late as 1906, Eduard Meyer could write that although he always opposed Halévy's thesis, current theories did not really counter Halévy's objections to the notion that Sumerians originated Babylonian culture. "Halévy hat der grosse und unbestreitbare Verdienst, eine Neuprüfung der oft vorschnell als sicher betrachteten Hypothesen herbeigeführt". Thanks to Halévy, continued Meyer, much more and deserved credit is given to the Semitic contribution to Babylonian culture than had hitherto been⁹².

Oppert had complained early on that Halévy was not really proposing a new paradigm (not Oppert's word), but rather reverting to the original untenable assumption that the Assyrians had invented the cuneiform writing system. In this sense, Halévy could be compared to scientists who cling to traditional views, refusing to accept a new scientific paradigm: "The source of resistance is the assurance that the older paradigm will ultimately solve all its problems, that nature can be shoved into the box the paradigm provides ... that assurance seems stubborn and pigheaded as indeed it sometimes becomes"⁹³. Such people "are simply read out of the profession, which thereafter ignores their work"⁹⁴. Halévy always thought he was being ignored; despite the voluminous rebuttals by his opponents, he complained incessantly that his theory never received the serious evaluation it deserved. Since he could demolish to his own satisfaction all arguments put forward against him, the scientific community should either come up with better arguments or convert⁹⁵ to his anti-Sumerist position. But eventually, from at least 1905 on, and from a much earlier time by many, he really was ignored. Halévy often chided other Assyriologists for claiming as their own ideas he had already published, often years before. Thureau-Dangin responded in 1907 to a Halévy scolding as follows: "Je suis ... surpris que vous ayez pu supposer que j'aurais, de propos délibéré et pour un motif que d'ailleurs j'ignore, évité de citer votre nom ... Mon seul tort est de ne vous avoir pas lu". To which Halévy retorted on the same page: "Votre oubli de lire ce mémoire, m'explique votre récent ralliement au sumérisme"⁹⁶. A few years later, Bezold appealed to Halévy's "éminentes Sprachgefühl", asking him to finally recognize that Sumerian was a natural, non-Semitic language. "Denn erst dann werden die Fachgenossen die Lust, ja die Verpflichtung empfinden, nicht mehr achtlos an den vielen Punkten vorüberzugehen, die Sie in Ihren zahlreiche Schriften ... aufgezeigt haben". Halévy's answer: "Jamais je n'aurais cru les adversaires capables de me présenter un marché aussi dégradant! Libre à eux de continuer leur système de tabou et de dédain aussi longtemps qu'ils voudront; je ne vendrai à aucun prix ma conviction scientifique"⁹⁷.

90. Weissbach, *Die sumerische Frage* iv.

91. Tom B. Jones, *The Sumerian Problem*, New York 1969, 47.

92. Meyer, *Sumerier und Semiten* 3f.

93. Kuhn, *Structure* 151f.

94. *Ibid.* 19.

95. Kuhn's description in *Structure* 151 of the transfer of allegiance from one paradigm to another as a conversion process that cannot be forced by logical argument fits the Sumerist-anti-Sumerist controversy well. Terminology of conversion and apostasy was used in contemporary discussions of the issue.

96. *Rev. sémitique* 15 (1907) 521.

97. *Rev. sémitique* 17 (1909) 189f.

Eventually, "after the last holdouts have died, the whole profession will again be practicing under a single ... paradigm"⁹⁸. In 1917, Halévy's thesis died with him. On the occasion, Moses Schorr wrote of the tragic aspect of Halévy's

über vierzig Jahre währende Kampf, der die besten Geisteskräfte eines hochbegabten, schöpferisch veranlagten Mannes absorbiert, in dessen Verlaufe die anfangs und auch später ganz erkleckliche Zahl der Anhänger sich immer mehr abbröckelt, bis der Führer auf dem Gipfel seines arbeitsreichen Lebens ganz vereinsamt dasteht ...⁹⁹.

Much in the same vein as Meyer, quoted above, Schorr goes on to stress the scientific value of Halévy's consistent and penetrating opposition to the dominant view. At the same time, across the battle-scarred continent, Isidore Lévy echoed those sentiments:

Quand les érudites écriront l'histoire des origines et du développement du système cunéiforme, lorsqu'ils retraceront les étapes qui ont marqué la transformation du sumérien en une langue savante ayant survécu aussi longtemps à l'idiome vivant ... et feront le tri des matériaux susceptibles de mesurer la part des Sémites dans la collaboration entre Babyloniens et Sumériens, ils rendront hommage à l'inépuisable fertilité d'invention, à l'incomparable maîtrise du vocabulaire sémitique qui ont permis à Halévy de rendre acceptable aux esprits les plus critiques un paradoxe qui choquait la vraisemblance superficielle¹⁰⁰.

RACISM IN HISTORIANS, RACE IN HISTORY

In 1905, Halévy managed to entice R. E. Brünnow into a public correspondence on the Sumerian question that would last for five years. Brünnow's courtesy and discretion – and willingness to admit a large measure of Semitic influence on the Sumerian texts from seventh-century Nineveh – led Halévy to believe that he might win a new convert. In anticipation, he assured Brünnow that "votre origine en dehors de la race 'inférieure' vous épargne l'insinuation blessante de combattre *pro domo* et les traits encore plus pénétrants de *rabbin* et de *pansémite* qui assaillent de tous côtés celui qui a eu la malchance – pour parler un instant avec Henri Heine – de naître au sein du peuple élu"¹⁰¹. Halévy had the perspicacity to distinguish between suggestions that his own Jewishness fueled the passion of his advocacy for the Semitic origin of cuneiform, and accusations that he is more rabbi than scholar, or that he believed the Semites to be *the* superior race. If he could not escape what was certainly a correct presumption that his anti-Sumerist thesis was motivated by his origins, he had every right to expect that he would be refuted on a scholarly basis, and that his views would not be twisted to make him out to be not only wrong, but a racist.

So eager was Weissbach to discredit Halévy on this point, that he misread a passage in which Halévy talks about "the most gifted races", whereby he meant, certainly, in accord with contemporary beliefs, the Indo-Europeans and the Semites. Weissbach read the passage in the singular, "the most gifted race", and triumphantly claimed to have finally exposed Halévy as a racist!¹⁰² Weissbach continues: "Halévy fasst die harmlosesten Bemerkungen seiner wissenschaftlichen Gegner (selbstverständlich mit Ausnahmen Oppert's) als antisemitische Angriffe auf". But what examples does he provide? In the 1887 Hibbard Lectures, A. H. Sayce argued that the prominence of the dog "in what I may call the zoological mythology of Chaldaea" showed that "Babylonian totemism" was "pre-Semitic", because the dog is and was "distasteful" to Semites¹⁰³. Halévy upbraided Sayce for reviving "une erreur ancienne", then cited

98. Kuhn, *Structure* 152.

99. *Deutsche Literaturzeitung* 1917 633.

100. *Revue historique* 126 (1917) 217.

101. *Rev. sémitique* 13 (1905) 275.

102. *Sumerische Frage* 138. Cf. Halévy, *Rev. sémitique* 6 (1898) 174.

103. Sayce, *Lectures* 287.

evidence for respect for dogs in the ancient Semitic world, and suggested that Sayce was ignoring "ces faits qui contredisent son antisémitisme"¹⁰⁴. By "antisemitism", it is clear here that Halévy means Sayce's opposition to the Semitic origin of Babylonian religion, not hatred of Jews!

In the same lectures, Sayce remarked that to believe Halévy's theory "requires the robust faith of a mediaeval rabbi"¹⁰⁵. Halévy rightly objected¹⁰⁶; after all, one wouldn't disagree with a Catholic scholar by referring to the faith of priests, nor would one disagree with Delitzsch by conjuring up a stern Lutheran pastor. Why should a Jewish lay scholar be tainted so? Weissbach totally missed the point: "Aber wer kann denn leugnen, dass die mittelalterlichen Rabbiner einen robusten Glauben entwickelt haben?" And, continued Weissbach, perhaps Halévy has inherited some of this faith. The proof? One of Halévy's wilder etymologies connected Sumerian a-ra-li "netherworld" with Hebrew 'ārel "uncircumcised", because the Hebrew term is often used for dead enemies¹⁰⁷. This, according to Weissbach, is "alarmingly" close to the rabbinic notion that the uncircumcised will all go to hell! Halévy never alluded to this; it is all Weissbach's fantasy.

Neither Sayce nor Weissbach were antisemites¹⁰⁸; rather, we might say that they were "insensitive". Weissbach was clearly also offended by the tone of Halévy's argumentation, which, as we have seen, deviated from the accepted norms of scholarly discourse. In the same paragraph in which he accused Halévy of racism, hypersensitivity and rabbinism, Weissbach complained: "Sprechen wir nicht von der ungeheuchelten Freude, die Halévy jedesmal empfindet, wenn er der sumeristischen Theorie den 'Gnadenstoss' versetzt zu haben glaubt, auch nicht von dem höhnischen, gelegentlich geradezu wegwerfenden Tone, den er seinen Widersachern gegenüber anzuschlagen liebt"¹⁰⁹. Halévy's idiosyncracies could bring out the least attractive side of his opponents, who reacted to his deviant discourse – and, perhaps, to his exotic persona¹¹⁰ – with deviance of their own.

We cannot be so charitable, however, in judging John Dynley Prince, who in 1905 talked of

the constanly decreasing Halévyan school of Jewish Chauvinism ... In all fairness it should be stated that the idea of the non-Semitic origin of the Sumerian idiom does not in the slightest degree detract form the glories of the mental powers of the early Semites. What other ancient people has been able to adopt an entirely and radically foreign idiom and so to alter it, that a school of distinguished modern scholars could be almost justified in regarding the resulting mixed idiom as the invention of the unconscious perverters?¹¹¹

It is as unfair to accuse Halévy of being a *Jewish* chauvinist for championing the ancient Mesopotamian Semites as it would be to accuse Renan of being a *French* chauvinist on the basis of his belief in Aryan superiority. And is it hypersensitive to understand, with Halévy¹¹², that Prince vaunts the perversion of Sumerian as one of the great intellectual achievements of the early Semites, and to be appalled to find such a statement in a work of scholarship?

104. *Rev. de l'hist. des religions* 17 (1888) 204.

105. Sayce, *Lectures* 432.

106. He called the remark "un peu d'antisémitisme, délicatement changé en antirabbinisme" (*Rev. de l'hist. des religions* 17 [1888] 175).

107. Halévy, *Mélanges* 293.

108. Weissbach, an outspoken freemason, was banned from teaching at Leipzig by the Nazis the same year (1935) that they drove out Landsberger (M. Müller, *Wiss. Zeit. Karl-Marx Univ. Leipzig*, Ges.-und Sprachwiss. R. 28 [1979] 85).

109. Weissbach, *Sumerische Frage* 138.

110. In his eulogy published in *JA* 1917 179f., the president of the Société Asiatique characterized Halévy as follows: "Joseph Halévy, par plus d'un trait, par certain tour d'esprit, faisait songer à quelque maître des écoles rabbiniques d'autrefois, transporté comme par miracle dans un milieu étrangement changé, élargi, émancipé. Le respect que commandaient sa personne et son activité se mêlait de je ne sais quel intérêt sympathique pour un passé lointain qui se renouvelait en lui".

111. *Materials for a Sumerian Lexicon* Part I, Leipzig 1905, iiif.

112. *Rev. sémitique* 14 (1906) 184.

The final insult of this sort, again, probably insensitive and ignorant rather than vicious or ill-intentioned, came from E. Wallis Budge, the author of the only – alas! – history of Assyriology:

Halévy was a good Semitic scholar, and a man of great learning; but he was obsessed with the idea that the Semitic peoples of Babylonia were the direct ancestors of the Jews and the founders of all civilization in Western Asia, and the inventors of the writings, literature, science, and the arts and crafts, which had merely been adopted by later peoples. He would cordially have accepted the view of the eminent Talmudist who said that all modern learning was contained in the Talmûdh, and the belief of the chief *mullah* of Baghdâd who was convinced that all Occidental sciences were to be found in the Kur'ân¹¹³.

Nothing that Halévy wrote justifies these misrepresentations, and it is a pity that Halévy was not alive when they were made, to give them the scornful, mocking reply they deserve.

Victim as he was of racial prejudice and preconceptions, Halévy had his own prejudices, as we have seen from his references to “gifted races” and his disdain for “Turanian” peoples. He also bore the prejudices of his time, a time of growing nationalisms the world over, regarding contact between “races”. One of his strongest arguments against the existence of a separate Sumerian ethno-linguistic group was the lack of evidence in ancient texts for conflict between Sumerians and Semites. That is, it was unthinkable that both groups could have existed side-by-side without conflict, so, if there was no conflict, there could not have been two ethno-linguistic groups in ancient Babylonia. The cooperation of two different ethno-linguistic groups in elaborating Babylonian civilization was inconceivable to him¹¹⁴, as was the possibility that “les conquérants sémitiques se sont si bien pénétrés de ce génie si compliqué qu'ils ont pu, non seulement nous transmettre à travers des milliers d'années, ces combinaisons, dans les détails les plus minutieux mais les appliquer aussi à la représentation de leur propre langue”¹¹⁵. Contact could only be understood in terms of the conquered and the conquerors, and the conquerors would never have preserved the language of the conquered for millennia, used it on their most sacred occasions, and given it priority over their own language in bilingual contexts.

If the absence of explicit reference to racial conflict in the sources was taken by Halévy as proof that only one race – the Semitic – was of any significance in early Babylonia, the ever more persuasive evidence that there were two races – Sumerian and Semitic – meant, for Leonard W. King, that “the early history of Sumer and Akkad is dominated by the racial conflict between Semites and Sumerians, in the course of which the latter were gradually worsted”¹¹⁶. The assumption of both scholars was the same: if two ethno-linguistic groups were in contact, conflict would result. The difference, however, is that King's assumption distorted his historical interpretation of the philological data, whereas Halévy's assumption led him to distort the philological data itself.

King's *History of Sumer and Akkad* of 1910 marked the end of the Sumerist controversy¹¹⁷. Benefitting from Thureau-Dangin's work on the early Sumerian and Akkadian royal inscriptions, as well as from a more realistic approach to chronology (see above), King's work has remained “in a certain sense ... a definitive work with reference to the early history of Mesopotamia”¹¹⁸. His assumption of “racial conflict”, while unfortunately all too much in tune with contemporary assumptions, remained unchal-

113. E. W. Budge, *The Rise and Progress of Assyriology*, London 1925, 211f.

114. E.g. *Rev. sémitique* 5 (1897) 54.

115. *Ibid.* 64.

116. L. W. King, *A History of Sumer and Akkad*, London 1910, ix.

117. “The controversy has now an historical rather than a practical importance ... M. Halévy himself continues courageously to defend his position ... but his followers have deserted him” (King, *History* 6 n.1).

118. O. Carana, *History of the Near Eastern Historiography and its Problems: 1852-1985 Part I* (AOAT 218/1), Kevelaer 1989, 51.

lenged until T. Jacobsen's seminal "The Assumed Conflict Between Sumerians and Semites in Early Mesopotamian History" of 1939¹¹⁹. No reference, explicit or implicit, can be found in ancient texts to any such conflict; the "conflict" was the product solely of scholars' assumptions about human behavior¹²⁰, and these assumptions were heavily influenced by the times.

The assumptions and times that Jacobsen was reacting against in 1939 are well known. J.-P. Vernant, speaking of the "Aryan myth" that dominated nineteenth-century thinking about Indo-Europeans and Semites, asked "comment pourrions-nous aujourd'hui ne pas voir, comme à l'arrière-plan obscur d'un tableau, se profiler l'ombre des camps et monter la fumée des four?"¹²¹. Renan's notion that Christianity's virtues are rooted in its northern origins, in the green and fertile Galilee, not in the stern and rocky Judean desert, and hence Christianity is not really Semitic¹²², is only by degrees less racist than Friedrich Delitzsch's position, in his infamous third Babel-Bibel lecture and more scurrilous *Die grosse Täuschung*, that Jesus was not really a Jew, because the Galilee had been settled by the Assyrians with Babylonian deportees, who were of a mixed race with an Aryan component!¹²³ This is kin to the theory that Delitzsch's teacher, Schrader, had propounded: whatever of value ancient Israel produced must be credited to the non-Semitic component of the Babylonian civilization with which it came into contact (see above). A similar use of racial mixing to somehow save something admired from the taint of Semitism can be found in another scholar's later monograph, nearly contemporary with Jacobsen's "Sumerians and Semites", in which the nobility of the Assyrian warriors (including the composition of the Tukulti-Ninurta Epic), was ascribed to the strong admixture of Hurrian and Aryan peoples in Assyria, which was contrasted to a more Semitic, "im Krämertum versinkenden" Babylonia¹²⁴.

So good was business in Babylonia, according to Delitzsch, that many Jews preferred to remain there and practice usury, even after Cyrus had granted them freedom to return to the promised land. Delitzsch warned his fellow Germans "dass ein solches absichtlich vaterlandsloses oder internationales Volk für alle übrigen Völker der Erde eine grosse, eine furchtbare Gefahr darstellt"¹²⁵. The warning – and others like it – was heeded only too well.

Durch den Labyrinth grosser Irrtümer ringt sich die Menschheit mühevoll zur Wahrheit empor. Männer von Geist, die im Grossen irren, sind Marksteine und Wegweiser zugleich in der Entwicklung dieses menschlichen Wahrheitstriebes. Daring liegt die Beduetung auch Joseph Halévys¹²⁶.

Thus ends Moses Schorr's obituary of Halévy, alluding to the scholarly contribution of Halévy as an intellectual gadfly. Perhaps, too, Halévy had intimations of an evil that Schorr, in 1917, would not have imagined possible. The genius and tragedy of Halévy was to perceive and strongly feel that the very existence of the Sumerians provided ammunition and comfort to the most base antisemitism. Trapped himself by the racial assumptions of this times, he unwittingly sacrificed a scholar's dearest possession, his objectivity, in a lifelong battle against a people and a language dead some four thousand years.

119. *JAOS* 59 (1939) 485-495.

120. Similar assumptions, unsupported by textual evidence, mark Gelb's attempt to refute Jacobsen in *Aspects du Contact Suméro-Akkadien* (Rencontre Assyriologique 9 = *Genava* NS 8) 261, but Jacobsen's position has been supported, e.g., in Kraus, *Sumerer und Akkader. Ein Problem der altmesopotamischen Geschichte*, Amsterdam 1970; Cooper, *The Curse of Agade*, Baltimore 1983; Becker, "Neusumerische Renaissance?" *Baghdader Mitteilungen* 16 (1985) 229-316.

121. In the preface, p. 11, to Olender, *Les langues du paradis*.

122. Olender, *Langues* 99f.

123. Johanning, *Bibel-Babel* 58-63, 78; Huffmon, "Babel und Bibel" 318.

124. W. von Soden, *Der Aufstieg des Assyrienreichs als geschichtliches Problem* (Der alte Orient vol. 37 1/2), Leipzig 1937. Compare Delitzsch's blond and Aryan Assyrian queen of the first Babel-Bibel lecture (Johanning, *Bibel-Babel* 34).

125. Johanning, *Bibel-Babel* 78f.

126. Schorr, *Deutsche Literaturzeitung* 1917 633.