

10-6-1981

## Samuel Noah Kramer: 10-06-1981

Samuel Noah Kramer

John R. Maier

*College at Brockport*, [jmaier@rochester.rr.com](mailto:jmaier@rochester.rr.com)

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.brockport.edu/writers\\_videos](https://digitalcommons.brockport.edu/writers_videos)

---

### Repository Citation

Kramer, Samuel Noah and Maier, John R., "Samuel Noah Kramer: 10-06-1981" (1981). *Writers Forum Videos*. Video 20.  
[https://digitalcommons.brockport.edu/writers\\_videos/20](https://digitalcommons.brockport.edu/writers_videos/20)

This Video is brought to you for free and open access by the Writers Forum at Digital Commons @Brockport. It has been accepted for inclusion in Writers Forum Videos by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @Brockport. For more information, please contact [kmyers@brockport.edu](mailto:kmyers@brockport.edu).

Writer's Forum

Samuel Noah Kramer

8/11/1982

- Kramer: [1. gashan-a-men sha-ga mu-ti uzul-a-mu-ti  
2. gashan-a-men sh-mu-ti uzul-a-mu-ti  
3. uzul-a-mu-ti en-ne-du-mu-zi ga-mu-de  
4. uzula-gi-du-ash-e en-du ga-mu-de  
5. gaba-nu un-ri gaba-nu-unri  
6. um-me-ni ku-li-an-na shu-ni-a sha-ma um-du  
7. dingir ushumgal-anna gu-na-a gu-na-a da-ba-gub-a]

Now these seven lines, translated into English are as follows:

1. Last night, as I the Queen was shining bright
2. last night, as I the Queen of Heaven was shining bright,
3. As I was shining bright, as I was dancing about,
4. As I was uttering a song,
5. At the brightening of the oncoming night,
6. He met me, the Lord Kulianna met me.
7. The Lord put his hand into my hand, Ushumgalanna embraced me.

Maier: We have with us today, Samuel Noah Kramer, Clark Research Professor Emeritus of Assyriology at the University of Pennsylvania and curator emeritus of the Babylonian section of the University Museum at the University of Pennsylvania. For many years, Professor Kramer has written on Sumerian Civilization. He's the author of more than 25 books and monographs, more than 150 articles on Sumerian civilization and his most recent book is [History Begins at Sumer](#).

Maier: Professor Kramer, I would like to welcome you to the Brockport Writer's Forum series. I'm interested – you're reading something which you consider literature, I think. What is Sumerian literature? What do you mean by it?

Kramer Sumerian literature consists, we now know, after many many years research by numerous scholars, including myself, we know now that Sumerian literature consists primarily of epics, myths, hymns, laments, and so-called wisdom literature which consists of proverbs, fables, and essays of various sorts; especially essays in relation to education that tells us something about the old

education. We know now after many many years, that there are about 20 myths. Many of them have been translated in part, but the situation is still in flux, myths are still being translated. We have nine epic tales so that we can now speak of a Sumerian heroic age of about 2,500 or even earlier B.C. That would include of course the famous hero Gilgamesh, but not only Gilgamesh that has been known for many many years, but also his predecessors such as Enmerkar or Lugalbanda who preceded Gilgamesh and about whom we have several heroic tales, several epic tales. It includes in addition to epics and myths, and those are the two aspects of the Sumerian literary genre, that I particularly specialized on. And also one other genre I specialized on which may be while the others are very happy joyous things, the others are lamentations like Lamentation over the Destruction of Sumer, Lamentation over the Destruction of Ur, Lamentation over the Destruction of Nippur, in which the poet gives his idea of how and why these cities and Sumer were destroyed. And depicts some of the agony and the wretchedness and the misery of these conquests – certainly matters quite unknown until these lamentation came into vogue. So we have a good many lamentations, a great many hymns, hundreds of them. I had not particularly concentrated on hymns. I have translated several, but other scholars are doing and have done a good deal of work, so that at present we could have translations of say 20 or so hymns, but there are still hundreds to be translated – these hymns. And then there are the famous wisdom texts, some of which have been translated, but a good many of which are still in the process of being reconstructed and being put together and translated, and the man that will do that, I hope and I hope that he hears this is Professor Miguel Civil who is a professor at the University at the Oriental Institute at the University of Chicago, and who was my assistant and associate for some years at the University of Pennsylvania, who is one of the leading of the new generation, one of the leading cuneiformists and especially Sumerologists of, you might say, of the younger generation. And he has been working on them for quite a number of years and there's every hope, that in the relatively near future he will produce those. And the reason, John, they are so important, I've had some difficulties with Mr. Civil on that account because I've urged him all the time, again and again, please produce translations of these. The reason being that they – if you analyze their contents, if you analyze the content of these disputations, for instance, one man disputes with another and tells him why he is an incapable person, or why he himself is a great person and in the process of doing it they tell you more about the daily life, of the actual daily life of Sumer than all the myths, than all the epics and all the lamentation which are after all conventional forms that only very indirectly tell you about the daily life of the ordinary Sumerian. But these disputations and these essays tell you a great deal. However, we must exonerate Mr. Civil a little bit. They are very difficult to translate.

Maier: They are difficult for what reason?

Kramer: Because they tend to be laconic, they tend to introduce new Sumerian words and phrases that are not known. They introduce them in a context that's not as readily controllable as we can control in epics and myths, especially in myths. For example in laments you get the general drift just from the content of them. When I talk about a lamentation I know that the next things is going to be something lamentful and tend to be able to look for it. But when it comes to these disputations and proverbs they are usually laconically written, and if you choose a wrong meaning, let me say for certain passages you get an entirely wrong picture of what is supposed to be. You sometimes get a negative for a positive for example. So it's a very difficult task and he's a very careful scholar and therefore it takes a long time. Nevertheless, we do hope that he will put those out. And again, I stress these because they are the only way we have of getting the ordinary daily psychological attitudes of the various people, or as in the case of the myths, we only get the attitudes of the poets. The people that almost you might say have an axe to grind, favoring a certain deity, favoring a certain king and fantasizing with their imagination about the heroic deeds of this and that man so that we don't get a real historical picture – as you well know of the Gilgamesh epic, which has been well known but we still don't get a real idea – what did Gilgamesh actually do in the city of Uruk when he became king. ...go on fighting.

Maier: Do we know the time period of Sumerian literature and **XXXXXX**?

Kramer: Yes we do. That's an interesting phenomenon, too. When I began the study of Sumerian literature, in my first book, Sumerian Mythology, I used to date the tablets on which these were written, about 2,000 B.C. We now know they're a bit later. They're about 1,800 B.C. We know that. Now we know however, that these tablets, many of them that is the hymns, the myths, the epics inscribed on these tablets were not originally composed in 1,800. That we are sure of. They were originally composed considerably earlier. That would be around two or three centuries earlier. So that in my next revision, in my second revision of Sumerian Mythology for example, I corrected the dates and I said there is very good hope, very reasonable hope, that sometime we will find the originals from which these copies were made, sometime around 2,100 B.C. That would be in the period, and I'll be a bit technical, that is generally known in the textbooks and among scholars as the Third Dynasty of Ur. That was a famous dynasty when Sumerian had a kind of renaissance. So our feeling was that the epics and myths and hymns that we were translating came from copies that were actually – the original writer/composer of which lived around 2,100 B.C. during this Renaissance.

Maier: So these are quite old. Does Sumerian literature continue beyond 1,800 B.C.?

Kramer: Let me first answer, if you don't mind, the other question. So we thought it was around Ur III period. What troubled us and what troubled me especially and what's known in print in general as a result of that is that very little Sumerian

literature has been excavated, has been found from Ur III period. For instance in the city of Ur that was excavated by Leonard Woolley, you would expect that below the period of 1,800 B.C. when you came to the period of the Third Dynasty kings, one might expect he would find some literary .... and when we compare what little he did find with some of the copies, there are quite a number of changes and so on, which of course one can expect. This is why I want to continue this. But in very recent years, in the last decade, an excavation has taken place in a place called Salabikh which is not far from Nippur where the Oriental excavated, and there the excavators found tablets with literary writing as early as 2,500 B.C. or 2,400 B.C., and these have been published by the Oriental Institute especially by a professor by the name of Robert Biggs, a very fine scholar who has produced a wonderful book about these. Now, some of those are duplicated, some of those earlier ones are duplicated in the later one. For instance, one of them you may be aware of perhaps is the Instructions of Shuruppak. Shuruppak was supposed to be a wise man who lived before the Flood and he instructed his son and so on and we have some of the instruction. And they're remarkably similar. There are a great many changes, of course, but they're remarkably similar. Another one is a famous hymn to a temple known as Kesh. So now we know that there was writing as early that Sumerian poets were writing as early as 2,500 B.C. What fascinating about it, (I'll come to your other question), about namely how long it continues, is that many of the scribes, they signed their names in this earlier, not in the later period, but in the earlier period, they tended to sign their name in many cases, and many of them, not all happened to have Semitic names, which raises a whole question, namely who were these Semites, assuming they were Semites and assuming they were Semites because of their Semitic names. That's not by any means necessarily true, but assuming they were, why would they write Sumerian literature and how much went before? There must have been Sumerians who wrote that literature, not Semites, and so on. And that raises a very very interesting problem, especially in connection with Ebla. You know about the Ebla excavations, of course, which also date from about 2,400 B.C., and they're written in Eblaite language, which is a Semitic language, but using Sumerian ideograms all this times and Sumerian conventional motifs and so on and so forth. Now may I go back to your other questions?

Maier: What happens after 1,800?

Kramer: What happens after 1,800 is the Sumerians become extinct more or less as a political unit. They're conquered by Semites known as Amorites, who were nomads from the east, and who took over the Sumerian culture in exactly the same way as the Romans took over the Greek culture. Not having a culture of their own or having a very limited culture of their own – surely they had gods of their own and so on – they took over the myths and the epics and so on. But then they transformed them, the poets. What happened exactly immediately afterwards is not known very well – it's called the "Dark Age," let's say between

1,600 and 1,300 and so on. You might have heard it under the name the Kassite Period. I'm sure there were people working when we say a dark age it's dark –

Maier: -- for us.

Kramer: I'm by no means certain that it was a dark age for them, but still we know little about it. But then they began to transform, to copy some of the Sumerian literature, so they would take an epic, let me say, and write on one line, they would write the Sumerian, on the other line they would write a translation. That would not involve a creative process, that would simply involve a translation. But they also began to transform Sumerian literature in a creative way, and the major result of that creative process that these Semitic Amorites introduced after they conquered Sumer of course, was The Epic of Gilgamesh. Now The Epic of Gilgamesh we have – the Sumerians never wrote an epic of Gilgamesh that began let me say with the city in Uruk and with his going out and doing some heroic deeds, and then becoming obsessed with his fear of death so that his drive was a drive for immortality and then going and finding plant that might have given it to him with the help of Utnapishtim and then losing that plant so that he's no longer immortal and he comes back to Uruk a disappointed man. Now there you have a story, you might say, with a beginning, a climax, and a sad end to the climax. The Sumerians could never quite produce that thing but they had numerous poems about Gilgamesh. They had Gilgamesh and his journey to The Land of the Living and so on where he performed heroic deeds. They had Gilgamesh and his friend Enkidu; Gilgamesh losing certain things in the netherworld and Enkidu coming to pick it up and so on. They had at least five that we know of—these epic tales, and no doubt they had a good many more because we have fragments of others that we don't know what they deal about. What these Semitic poets then did was take all this material, leave out what they didn't feel was necessary for their climactic approach to the matter and they produced a Gilgamesh epic which has now become one of the major epics of the world, but it's based on Sumerian material with innovations, however by the Amorites.

Maier: These Sumerian poems are written in cuneiform, difficult work. How did you get into your interest in cuneiform?

Kramer: I had a rather unusual career, I must say. As a matter of fact, I would say many scholars in our field, especially in Britain and in America, not so much in Germany, tended to get into it by accident, as it were. Usually it starts out with a man who has studied in a divinity school, is interested in the Bible, and since the bible talks so much about Syria, Babylonia – not about Sumer – as a matter of fact the first excavations that were done by the British for example, and the French in 1840 or 50 or so...the reason they got funds, the reasons they were able to have funds to go there, partly through the government, but partly it would be a newspaper, a big newspaper becoming interested, maybe they'll find something that explain the Bible, that illuminates the Bible, and that proves

the Bible. They of course liked the idea that it might prove the Bible. They were a little bit disillusioned in the latter. Nothing that we did proves the Bible but it certainly illuminates the Bible and gives a background to the Bible that has simply never been known before through this cuneiform literature. So that's one way in which people come. Now I didn't come that way but in a way, in a sense I did. I came to this country in 1906 when I was a kid of about eight. My father brought me here, and my mother. We were immigrants from the pogroms of Russia. I was born in a little town in Russia by the name of Zhashkiv which I hoped to visit when I was an exchange professor in Russia in 1957, but I didn't succeed. I think they meant well when they promised they would but it didn't turn out. So I've never seen that town again. So I was about eight when I come to this country. They entered me of course, in the elementary schools of Philadelphia. From then on I was a Philadelphia man to a large extent. And I attended the normal school, and you'd be interested in my name. My name in Hebrew is Simcha Noah and then the Kramer part we can leave out because that's alright. And my parents or someone took me to my first grade teacher who was a lady by the name of Miss Nelly whom I still remember with great pleasure. She was a nice buxom Irish lady, going out, a very going out lady, and she hears something like Simcha Noah Kramer, and to her that means nothing. Simcha, however, begins with an S, that spells like Samuel so she put the name Samuel to it. Noah bothered her. Had she been a Quaker, she would have known something about Noah being an important figure in the Bible, so she changed it to Nathan. So I became Samuel Nathan Kramer, and when I became a citizen and took out my papers, it's under the name Samuel Nathan Kramer. The reason I mention it is that my first publications in the Oriental Institute and there was under the name Samuel Nathan Kramer. Later on when I became, more or less, a figure in my own right, I accepted Samuel, but I did not want to accept Nathan, not that Nathan is not a lovely name but it just didn't fit me.

Maier: It's not yours.

Kramer: Well, I like Noah, and so I decided to change to Noah. So after my first few publications, all the other publications are by Samuel Noah Kramer. Now what would be the side effects, would you think of a thing like what? The librarians hate me. The reason being that every time they write Samuel Nathan Kramer they say see Samuel Noah Kramer.

Well, to go back to how I became that...now my father was not a Rabbi, but he was a teacher, that is a teacher of kids—Jewish. And he opened up what's known in Hebrew as a *cheder*, a little parochial school for the Jewish kids who were living in South Philadelphia and who after school would come to learn the Bible. Am I making sense – after school? And he made a living out of that, and as I got older – forgive me, at the same time while I went to the elementary school – this is important – I was going also to what's known in Hebrew as a *yeshiva*, which means a place where you learn the Talmud, because I had become quite advanced by that time. Am I in trouble? Have I talked more than I should?

Maier: Not yet.

Kramer: Anyhow, so that I learned a great deal about the Talmud and the Bible because my father was a very orthodox Jewish man. And then finally when I went to college and began to learn about various things, I realized, of course that I had learned things by rote, not scientifically. And when I became a young man and had gotten my B.S. in college and my B.S. in education in college my problem was what to do, what career should I take up? You may not like to hear it and maybe others might not like to hear it, I didn't—I was thinking of the academic life but I did not like academe. And the reason I did not – I had no experience with it – is because in the '20s, when this happened, I was reading the master of all Jewish boys who thought they write a little bit was H. L. Mencken, and he snarled and mocked the academic as much as possible, and because I thought H. L. Mencken was a great guy – he introduced Dreiser, for example, who I thought and still think was one of the great figures in American literature and Anderson and I therefore followed them a good deal, to some extent, and of course had some little hope that I could write. I did not want to join so that for several years I did not go into – between – my BA, and going for my Doctorate took a period of about 5 years during which I did nothing but hopefully tried to write.

Maier: What were you writing?

Kramer: Well, I thought I would write poetry, I thought I would write novels. Now I'm not a very bright man, but I'm not saying that. I'm not bright, but one bright thing I have about myself which is a double-edged quality, a double-edged characteristic. Namely, I know my limitations and I realized therefore – for writing I have no gift. On the other hand I have a pretty good gift for scholarship. I sit down, I look at evidence, I search for evidence, I make conclusions from the evidence. I knew I was pretty good at that, but not good at writing. Now as I say, that's a double-edged thing because once you recognize that, then you don't even try anymore in that area, and who knows, I might have been one of the greats, but I went into academe. Now how would I go – I'm still answering your question, John, how would I go into academe in Philadelphia – I'm not a rich boy, but I do have some money because I was helping my father teach that Hebrew school that I was telling about which children paid a certain amount. Money at that time – I had a reasonable subsistence at that time. So I tried Law, being a nice Jewish boy with a Talmud training which is of course a legal setup. I tried law and I went to the Penn law school for a while, but I sat down I remember and a chap by the name of Keede who taught torts and began to say if a person does this and this, that will follow that and that and that reminded me so much of the Talmud that I can't contend where it came from, no use of continuing there. Still what to do, I can't write, I hadn't chosen law or medicine I never hadn't thought of particularly because I didn't think I was good with my hands for it, and so I said maybe I can put to use my Talmudic learning, my Biblical, my Hebrew learning that I had. Now we're coming to the point. Now Philadelphia has a college which is well known now in

the world. It was not so well known then perhaps. It was originally a college and now thinks that it's a university as so many of them do. It's a very small place, with a very small faculty, the Dropsie College. At that time it was Dropsie College. And at that time it had a little faculty and I said to myself, let me go to that college and try out whether I can use my material, let me learn something from it. And let me tell you it was a change of life for me. I had nothing but Hebrew and Talmud by rote as it were, without any historical understanding of what went on. And I came to this college and there's a professor Max Margolis who was one of the famous Biblical scholars of his days and he taught the Bible in a very scientific manner, with all kinds of versions and so on. There was a man by the name of Skoss who taught Arabic. I'd never heard of Arabic before and I began to take Arabic. There was a professor Talmud but he taught the Talmud, a fellow by the name of Zeitlin – you may have heard of the name. He was a rather quirky type of man, not well liked. But he taught the Talmud from the historical point of view not just from repetition and rote. And there was an Egyptologist, one of the few Egyptologists on the east coast of America at that time. Penn didn't have one, Hopkins didn't have one, Yale didn't have one. The reason there was an Egyptologist was because we have a very famous rich man in Philadelphia that everybody knows named Rosenfeld. The man I think originally behind Sears, I think he just died recently, and one of his brothers or somehow became interested in Egyptian culture and so he invited a Vienna scholar who knew Egypt from Egypt and made him a professor, that is he gave the fund for his becoming a professor, so the Dropsie of all places suddenly has an Egyptologist. And I went to his classes and I loved it. He had a marvelous hand and he made beautiful hieroglyphs. But he was very quirky. He was deaf and insecure because he'd just come from Vienna. He wanted to show big classes whereas I was for a while the only man in his class and I could get along with him. I just couldn't get along with him and I had to drop out of Dropsie, but by that time I had become a relatively sophisticated man in the field of academe. I have heard that the University of Pennsylvania has an Oriental department – then called the Department of Semitics and Archeology. Now it's called the Oriental Department, not Semitics. Semitic sounded as though I would be a qualified chap. Archeology was, of course, romantic at that time though I had very little to do with archeology at that time. And so I went to that department which was run by three people – two relatively old people, one by the name of Montgomery, a fine biblical scholar, one by the name of George Barton, who I hope he'll forgive me was a rather poor scholar. He wrote a lot of books but none of them stood up in the course of time, and a young fellow (these were old people), but the name of Speiser, who later on became as you I'm sure know John, one of the leading cuneiformists and so on. And so I took my doctorate with Speiser, but not in Sumerian because Speiser didn't know Sumerian much. I took it in a field called Nuzi because Speiser was excavating at Nuzi. Nuzi was a very important site in northern Mesopotamia, not in Sumer. And my first expedition as an archeologist was on Speiser's expedition to two

tells, Tel Gawra which was a very famous prehistoric tel, and Tel Billah which Speiser hoped would be the capital of the Hurrians because he was interested in the Hurrians. Unfortunately, it didn't turn out to be the capital and when I was there for two months, well I tell you something, even though it's not very scholarly, I became sick with acute appendicitis, it had something to do with it. Now Tel Billah and Gawra are near a town in Iraq called Mosul from which we get word muslin for example. It's very well-known now because it's near the oil fields and the Kurds and Iraqis are having trouble there. And they had one little room for a hospital. They couldn't take me to Baghdad where they had a relatively big hospital because it was too serious they said, and it was a Canadian doctor who operated on me and who had me a long time under ether he told me and so cut me up pretty badly and couldn't sew me up so well, so that I have a scar which was Mosul born as it were, but my appendix is in Mosul floating around somewhere. But, and this is what's fascinating, this was in 1930, by the way. In 1930, there was another excavation being conducted, not in Assyria, but in Sumer, and that was being conducted by a man who later on became a very famous archeologist – Eric Schmidt, who later on went to Iran and dug in a place called Persepolis and in Hissar. But our museums, of course I have no connection with the University of Pennsylvania at that time, I was just going on a fellowship. It so happened at that time – 1930 – the American Council of Learned Society had just been formed and they were dishing out one or two fellowships and I was lucky enough to get one of these fellowships. I was not connected with any institution at that time. This was immediately after my doctorate as you recognize. Now Eric Schmidt was digging in Fara. Fara is the modern name of the ancient Shuruppak. Shuruppak is the seat of that famous fellow of Noah after whom I was named, whose name in Sumerian is Zi-ud-sudra. And Schmidt was digging there on a test case because he wanted to go on to Iran. It was on the way to Iran that he was going on. This was in 1930, and he was an excellent excavator but he had no epigraphist. Now over in Billah we had two epigraphists. We had Speiser who was much more capable than me at that time, and myself but not a single tablet came out. And Schmidt on the other hand, quite a number of tablets came out. So they called me at that time, after I had lost my appendix. They called me and I became the epigraphist on Schmidt's team. And that was the first article on Sumerian tablets were the tablets found in Fara.

Maier: The first ones.

Kramer: But what was not literature. It was administrative work. I still haven't come as to how and why I became a Sumerologist because as I told you Speiser – there were no American Sumerologists at that time. There were some in Europe, some in Germany and France, and one or two in Britain, but none in America at that time. So I come back from this excavation, tell me if I'm talking too long, don't hesitate to stop me because that won't leave me time for all I want to tell to you – so I'm coming back to this country and I have no job. I'm a young fellow

and have no job because at that time there were only about four American institutions that were teaching cuneiform and none of them Sumerian. There was Penn, John Hopkins had a man by the name of Albright and he had one or two Sumerians. Yale had two people that was pretty good. Harvard had virtually nobody in cuneiform, Berkeley was even unknown at the time, but there was Chicago with the Oriental Institute where Breasted, who had found that very famous, deservedly famous Egyptologist who was a historian – had gotten 10 million dollars from the Rockefeller people and he was building up the Institute, and he therefore with the help – he's not a cuneiformist, but he had a cuneiformists by the name of Luckenbill alongside of him and they wanted to start did start an Assyrian dictionary which is still going on between that time and then and therefore they needed a few young fellows to come and work on the dictionary. And I was very fortunate in being one of these young fellows coming to the Oriental Institute at \$1500 a year to work which I considered a great sum at that time to work on the Assyrian dictionary. And in the Oriental Institute, there was a German scholar. This Assyrian dictionary consists – well it's all Assyrian, remember Assyrian is all written in cuneiform, but Assyrian is a Semitic language, but a lot of this stuff comes from Sumerian sources, as I told you there is bilinguals and so on in these Sumerians, and so they needed a Sumeriologist. So they brought over this German by the name of Arnold Poebel who had just written a grammar and he and I clicked. He and I were just wonderful to each other. He liked me as his best disciple and I liked him as my real teacher. As I said last night I sat at his feet and I drank his words and that's how I became a Sumerologist.

Maier: That's how you became a Sumerologist.

Kramer: And perhaps thought I continue now about how I got into literature. I became a Sumerologist and – this is fascinating – but again John tell me, because I don't want to miss the last part, remember.

Maier: We're getting pretty close to it, so...

Kramer: I'm at the Oriental Institute, now again to repeat that Assyrian dictionary – Poebel took care of the Sumerian, but he was not the editor-in-chief of the dictionary. The editor-in-chief of the dictionary was a man by the name of Edward Chiera – one of the leading scholars at that time. He had been in Pennsylvania, and when Breasted at the Oriental Institute needed an editor, he knew that this Chiera as an energetic type who would go for it now...

Maier: We're getting pretty close to your ....

Kramer: Getting too close.

Maier: Yeah pretty close.

Kramer: How much more we got?

Maier: Just a few minutes. I'll tell you, I have a question for you.

Kramer: Okay.

Maier: I have a question for you.

Kramer: Okay name it.

Maier: You're reading these, you started out reading this difficult cuneiform.

Kramer: Right.

Maier: How do you know that, that's what it says?

Kramer: Well let me, let me just give you three more, three more lines. The beginning of a famous myth called "Thou I Love Best."

1. an-gal-ta ki-gal-she geshtug-ga-ni na-an-gub
2. dingir an-gal-ta ki-gal-she geshtug-ga-ni na-an gub
3. Inanna an-gal-ta ki-gal-she geshtug-ga-ni na-an-gub]

[From the Great Above to the Great Below she opened her ear

From the Great Above to the Great Below the goddess opened her ear

From the Great Above to the Great Below Inanna opened her ear]

Which means from the great above to the great below she set her mind right?

Maier: Right.

Kramer: So whenever I give a lecture, somebody from the audience gets up and says Doctor Kramer, are you pronouncing these, how do you know how to pronounce these words? And my answer then is as follows. If one of the dead Sumerians that Leonard Woolley dug up at Ur, if he was miraculously resurrected and came in to the room and you heard me say. [ Foreign Language ] He would say. That man Kramer he's doing very well, he's pronouncing his words and I understand them. But my goodness does he have a Jewish accent.

Maier: Thank you Doctor Kramer.

Narrator: This exclusive Brockport Writers Forum Program was recorded on video tape on October 6th 1981. As part of the Writers Forum, a department of English presentation, State University of New York, College at Brockport. This has been a production of the Educational Communication Center, State University of New York, College at Brockport.

[ Music ]

[Note: Original Sumerian and accompanying translations provided in 2017 by Dr. John Maier, the host of this forum and Distinguished Service Professor Emeritus.]