

viations (e.g., i.e., etc.), occur in English. This was proven to be the case when whole documents in the Sumerian language were discovered, when texts were found giving lists of Sumerian words with translations into Akkadian, and when, eventually, it became possible to draw up a whole history of many parts of the Sumerian culture. It was evident that the Sumerian was a distinct language, antedating the writing of the Akkadian, a language which in its grammatical features is entirely distinct from Akkadian, having perhaps less similarity to it than Chinese has to English. The writing was taken over from the Sumerians by the Akkadians, and continued to be used for certain official purposes, right up to the end of the preChristian era, long after Sumerian itself was a completely dead language.

5. Akkadian as a lingua franca.

In 1887 a peasant woman in southern Egypt happened upon a large group of clay tablets, with cuneiform marks on them. They were unlike anything she had ever seen before. Her friends took them to Cairo and tried to sell them, but they were unfamiliar to scholars of Egyptology, and it was some time before a student from Mesopotamia happened to see them and recognized immediately that these tablets, though found far south in Egypt, were written in the Akkadian language and the cuneiform writing. This set of tablets, most of which are either in the British Museum or in the Berlin Museum, are known as the El Amarna documents, because they were found at the capital of Akhenaton in Egypt. Reference has already been made to them (II.D.5). They show that Akkadian had come to be used for correspondence between people who spoke entirely different languages just as French has become a primary language for diplomacy in modern times. There was also the advantage that clay tablets were very convenient for carrying about on diplomatic missions.

In northern Mesopotamia a group of people speaking an entirely different