Chapter One

Prologue(s) and Epilogue(s)
Rebuilding Temples and Texts

In ancient Sumer, lacking the stones that made Egyptian temples the awesome structures standing even today, temples were built and rebuilt of sun-dried and oven-fired bricks. The foundation of temples was secured by thousands of other bricks, providing a level support and protection of the buildings from flooding. To restore a temple that needed repairs, one could of course take the brickwork down to its foundation and start over. A better plan was to keep the central core and build over it, expanding the structure, improving its faces, and adding to the prestige of the gods who were thought to dwell in it.

The group of Gilgamesh stories that make up *Gilgamesh* developed in a similar way. The stories themselves had for the most part already been set in stone or clay hundreds of year before *Gilgamesh* was given its “classical” or standard form, the *Gilgamesh* we know today. Some parts remain controversial today, after more than a century of scholarly study. Adding a story of the Flood is an example. Attaching a story about Enkidu’s death (Tablet 12) that is inconsistent with the story in Tablet 7 is another.

Finding the architectonics of a collection of tales can be tricky. Consider English poems that were left unfinished, say, *The Canterbury Tales* or *The Faerie Queene*. Would they have been rebuilt if the authors had been able to complete their ambitious works? We have Chaucer’s and Spenser’s original plans for the works, at least. We have nothing like that for *Gilgamesh*. But by sometime late in the 2nd millennium BCE a canonical form of *Gilgamesh* had been established.

One part of the argument in this analysis of *Gilgamesh* is that the collection retains and strengthens certain aspects of Sumerian culture, especially as it was expressed in the unique city-state of Uruk, which may have been lost in Greater Mesopotamia. The other part of the argument is that *Gilgamesh* was built like a Sumerian temple. The central, inner core is a brief but highly concentrated version of Gilgamesh vs. The Bull of Heaven. Especially in contrast with the lengthy development of the story that precedes it in the collection, Gilgamesh vs. Humbaba, a story that takes up fully four (and a bit of a fifth tablet), the central episode is as solidly built and finished as a brick room. (The tendency to call small structures in poetry “rooms” or “stanzas” persists in a number of literary traditions, including Arabic poetry, for instance.) On either end of the central story other stories are allowed to develop at greater length and complexity.

Fortunately, the entrance to this composition points to key themes and images that will be developed in the stories themselves. Tablet 1 of *Gilgamesh* opens to not one but two prologues, the more recent one laid over the older one the way an architect would have the bricklayers lay one face over another. The process, building text,
to an already complicated structure, but it provides a guide through the overall structure, as any good General Prologue should.

**Storytelling**

In reading *Gilgamesh* it soon becomes evident that Mesopotamian storytelling emphasizes the voice of characters in the story while compressing description and narrative into such brief passages that the subtleties in the poetry can easily be missed. (This assumes, of course, that modern readers have some feel for the languages that were lost for some two thousand years.) Some of the most beautiful poetry in *Gilgamesh* comes in dialogues and what are in essence soliloquies, Ninsun’s address to the Sun God, for example, or Gilgamesh’s eulogy for his lost friend.

The first few lines of *Gilgamesh* present another side: the main character, or protagonist, is a *writer*. The narrator, whom we shall call the poet (and who may have been the Sin-leqi-unninni credited in antiquity for writing the Standard Version of the Gilgamesh stories), tells us that upon his return to Uruk, Gilgamesh literally cut his experiences into a precious tablet. The collection of stories that makes up *Gilgamesh* (after the first prologue) is then envisioned as a kind of fictional autobiography of the hero.

The early stories in the Sumerian language have a markedly oral quality to them. It has been called an “oral aesthetic.” In the Sumerian “Gilgamesh and The Bull of Heaven,” for example, a poet, *nar*, repeats a story in exactly the same way as it was first narrated. This is a technique that is particularly effective in telling stories or composing poetry before a live audience. Modern storytellers, writing their short stories and novels from the privacy of their dens or cubicles for readers they may never see, let alone speak to, have developed very different techniques. One is to lead a reader on with suspense so that the reader will find the conclusion aesthetically satisfying and usually unexpected.

Oral composition often gives away the ending at the very beginning. The stories are as often as not old tales that have been told and retold. The conclusion is not in doubt. Rather, one sees a pattern of development that leads to the center, like the Flood story in Genesis where the waters rise to their highest level and God “remembers” Noah, the story recedes along with the waters. Each element in the A movement is reflected in the A movement after a central B.

In *Gilgamesh* we are asked to interpret the stories of Gilgamesh now that we know already that he will return to the city where both he and the goddess Ishtar dwell.

**The First (Later) Prologue: Tablet 1, Lines 1-28**

Of the one who saw the Depths (*sha nagba imuru*), support of the Land, who learned everything, wisdom itself, Gilgamesh, who saw the Depths, support of the Land, who learned everything, wisdom itself, crossed everywhere in the world, gaining the full understanding of it all. Secrets he saw and revealed what was hidden, brought back a story of before the Flood.
From his long journey he returned, calm, and at peace, and cut his hardships into a stone tablet.

He built the walls of Uruk-of-the-Sheepfold, the sacred storehouse of holy Eanna. Observe its walls, whose upper course is like bronze. View the lower course, which no work can equal. Approach Eanna, dwelling place of Ishtar, that no future king, no human being will ever match.

Go up and walk the walls of Uruk. Inspect the foundation, notice the brickwork: see if the interior is not of burnt brick and if the Seven Wise Ones did not lay down its foundation. One square mile is city; one square mile a grove of date palms; one square mile is a clay-pit; half a square mile the House of Ishtar. Three square miles and a half make up Uruk. (1:18-23 = 11:322-28)

Find the copper tablet-box, slip loose the ring-bolt made of bronze, open its mouth to its secrets. Draw out the tablet of lapis lazuli and read it aloud: how Gilgamesh endured everything harsh.
Biblical scholars interested in the composition history of the Book of Genesis frequently separate the opening chapter 1.1-2.4a from 2.4b-25. Two rather different versions of Creation are told there, and many scholars think that, as in Gilgamesh, the two accounts of Creation, which constitute a formal prologue, were written at different times. The First Account of Creation is attributed to the Priestly Document and the Second Account is attributed to a much earlier Yahwist Document. The Second Account is the older of the two. The first lines of Genesis, then, were written centuries later, some think during or after the Babylonian Exile of the 6th century BCE.

The First Prologue to Gilgamesh

Thanks to Jeffrey Tigay, who was able to sort out the many variations of the Gilgamesh stories existed in the Sumerian, Akkadian, and Hittite languages, and to A. R. George, whose magnificent edition of Gilgamesh is the culmination of more than seventy years of editorial work by many scholars of Mesopotamian literature, we now have a reasonably complete prologue to the Standard Akkadian Gilgamesh, which is often called The Epic of Gilgamesh. Actually there are two prologues, an older one and a newer one, which frames the first eleven tablets of Gilgamesh. A narrator introduces us to Gilgamesh in a way that is very different from the older prologue. The emphasis is on the suffering of the hero, what he sought and what he found, and the “wisdom” he obtained along the way. For the narrator Gilgamesh is primarily one who took a great journey and returned, exhausted, but at peace. One line in the prologue is key to my interpretation of the poem—and to the relevance of the story to this symposium.

The second emphasis in the prologue is a view of the city that is the center from which the stories radiate. We always know if we are inside the city wall, which from a very old tradition was thought to have been built by Gilgamesh, or outside the civilized place, that is, in the wilderness.

The city of Uruk was much older than its walls. The narrator describes Uruk from the perimeter in to its center, from the walls to the “house” of the goddess Ishtar. The interior of the city is divided, according to the narrator, into three segments, each of a square mile: city, a grove of date palm trees, and a clay-pit. The heart of the city is half a square mile: the House of Ishtar, the most famous temple complex known as Eanna. (One Sumerian tradition claims that Eanna was older than the city that grew up around it.)

The major themes of the story, as the narrator sees them, are announced immediately in the First Prologue: the journey of Gilgamesh, his return to Uruk, and the way he inscribed a tablet with his own experience. As agonizing as the journey was, Gilgamesh returned “calm, and at peace.”

Before getting into the details of what might be called the healing of Gilgamesh, I would like to highlight one aspect of the city that is often overlooked by scholars who tend to
overemphasize the famous walls of Uruk. It is true—and a very important observation—that Gilgamesh built the eight-mile wall around this very large city, that the walls are far more permanent than we mortals are (including Gilgamesh, who finally recognizes that death is inevitable), and that his experiences last long after his death because they are inscribed in stone. Note, though, that walls are always seen in relation to the temple complex at the heart of the city—a temple that was, by the way, still fully functioning at the time *Gilgamesh* was composed. Uruk is “Uruk-of-the-Sheepfold,” with a “sacred storehouse” in what is the dwelling place of Ishtar: both details point to the great goddess of the story, the goddess Sumerians knew as Inanna. That Gilgamesh built the walls of the city is old news; that he built the sacred storehouse of Ishtar, which may be suggested here, is an unusual addition to the story.

If *Gilgamesh* had been written a few centuries earlier, or a few centuries later, the city would have been characterized as the city of the god Anu, or perhaps Anu and his consort Antu, or even as Anu and Ishtar, as the Old Babylonian texts refer to it. In the evolution of the Gilgamesh stories, emphasizing Ishtar alone is very important, and we shall see just how important that is as we consider the adventures of the great king, Gilgamesh.

For our immediate purposes, note that the Akkadian poetic style introduces variation even when the ideas expressed are quite similar. The prologue is filled with synonyms for “knowing,” “learning,” “discovering,” especially “seeing” and “hearing.” Knowledge, wisdom, secrets, insight and gnosis variously characterize what Gilgamesh has learned, e.g., *némequ, hasīsu, niṣirtu*, and *ṭēmu*, to mention a few. They may all be picked up in the phrase that opens the poem, Gilgamesh as the one who “saw” the *nagbu*. One might have expected an *Abzu* or *Apsû*, from which we derive our Abyss, with all its sense of terror and majesty. Like the *Abzu* the *nagbu* points to underground waters, the source of rivers. Gilgamesh will cross dangerous waters and dive into deep water to retrieve a special plant. The *nagbu*, though, also meant the entirety of something, especially wisdom.

Until retranslating the prologue, though, I had not noticed the play on one of our key words, *anih*, “weary,” but also “calm,” in one line followed by *mānahti*, the man’s troubles, in the next. The experts are still finding eye-rhymes, sound effects, and puns in the poem that are only slowly coming to light. When we consider that for much of the ancient Near East, words were not just arbitrary and conventional signs but were powerful things intimately attached to persons and to the life world. The prologue already tells us what to expect in the story that will follow. Gilgamesh will suffer not just physically in his search, and he will return to his city exhausted. But at the same time the hendiadys, *anih u shupshuh*, suggests strongly that he has found something along the way that gives him peace, relief. The last line of the prologue emphasizes that Gilgamesh endured “all hardships,” *kalu marṣati*, the narrator using a term derived from the common term for “illness.” The phrase echoes the earlier line, where Gilgamesh, seen as a writer in the city that invented writing, incised a tablet with all his hardships,” *kalu manahti*. 

The Healing of Gilgamesh

Two lines in the First Prologue tell us that the quest was in a profound sense successful. I’ve wrestled with these lines. (I hope you will forgive the metaphor: Gilgamesh the wrestler met his rival and instantly they became best friends in a wrestling match and was remembered long after his death by wrestling contests in Urukean summer festivals).

From his long journey he returned, calm, and at peace, anih u shupshuh,
And cut his hardships into a stone tablet.

I read these lines a little differently than I did when John Gardner and I translated the poem decades ago. Re-translating the First Prologue forced me, sadly, to give up one of my favorite lines, as you will see.

Gilgamesh’s is a story of a process that highlighted at different times the joy and woe that was his epithet, and his fate.

But Gilgamesh is also a narrative that induces a similar process in the reader/audience, through empathy. As my mentor and friend Richard Henshaw reminded me, the impact on the audience is rather like Aristotle’s catharsis of the tragic emotions, as Walter Kaufmann understood them, ruth (eleos) and terror (phobos). At least that is what I want to argue in this essay.

We are fortunate in having a great many “healing” texts from Mesopotamia that include narratives. The most important and influential (for our purposes) were a group we call, sadly in my opinion, “Ea/Marduk Rituals” or incantations. “Divine Dialogues” is better, though it does not name the most important players in the majority of ritual texts. One example is in the Preface; later I will give an example to show how these work, mainly to show that Mesopotamia was as interested in healing, if not curing people who showed certain symptoms. And it may be significant that the Standard Akkadian Gilgamesh as attributed in antiquity to a certain Urukean named Sîn-leqi-uninnî, either a learned ashipu (or to be fancy, a mashmashu—you remember such fellows, in a long hood that made them look like fish-men, intently examining the patient in his bed), that is, a physician/exorcist, or a gala-mah, a performer of healing poems known as ershemma and ershahunga.

I cannot claim that the Mesopotamian Diagnostic Handbook had identified clearly a particular mental illness in Gilgamesh. But a syndrome was described, and if I had to give it a name I would call it melancholia.

Here I must confess to an astonishing turn in my wrestling with Gilgamesh. According to medical researchers Michael Alan Taylor and Max Fink, the ancient Greek term for a condition that was discussed at great length for more than 2000 years came to be discarded in the physicians’ manual, the DSM-III (1980). Melancholia largely disappeared from medical lingo—to be replaced by Depression. Ironically, I had opened an earlier essay by citing an expert, Gerald L. Klerman, who had just announced that the Age of Anxiety had just given way to an Age of Melancholy.
The sudden disappearance of melancholy and a preference for depression brought with it the loss of a most significant feature of earlier, traditional studies: that melancholia contained within itself, even in its most terrifying and terrible moments, a way back. Aristotle had observed that very creative and brilliant people suffered from melancholia, which could of course, then as now, lead to utter despair and suicide. But the tradition supported the at times fashionable notion that genius was melancholic. Think of Hamlet (and Ophelia) was the most memorable fictive characters from a time when countless artists and writers acted and dressed like Hamlet. (Or think of a more modern example: the fashion of dressing in blue and yellow like young Werther, whose sorrows moved multitudes of Europeans.)

Or, better, think of melancholia when religious people were strongly urged to look within themselves, especially Calvinists, who searched their souls for signs of “election.” Finding guilt and unworthiness, they were prone to sorrow and despair—ironically, the only unforgivable sin. Treatises like Timothy Bright’s A Treatise of Melancholie (1586) and William Perkins’ 1597 book are more important in that regard than the famous Anatomy of Melancholy by Robert Burton. Perkins’ title sums up the problem: A Treatise Tending Unto a Declaration, Whether a Man Be in the Estate of damnation or in the estate of grace.

At the lowest point a person could find what would enable the person to survive and revive. (In Book One of The Faerie Queene the Redcrosse Knight nearly succumbed to the eloquence of Despair.) We can see exactly this moment in the story of Gilgamesh. After his greatest moment of “joy,” he is pitched into despair that grows increasingly intense and involves denial. The lowest point, literally, comes with what appears as his greatest hope. He is given a “secret of the gods,” plunges into the depths and pulls up a healing plant (of revival).

Gilgamesh pulls it up, puts it by while he cleanses himself and dresses. He has already decided to give the plant to the elders of his city—and then he would eat of it himself—when suddenly it is snatched away by a serpent, which casts off its old skin as it hurries away with the plant.

Gilgamesh breaks down at this point. But then he completes his journey and, as I interpret the poem, he returns to his city and his goddess the calm figure we knew he would become.

When I first translated the opening of Gilgamesh, certain lines were missing, and they have been restored. We already knew then that the stories of Gilgamesh were framed by the description of Uruk. Tablet 11 exactly reproduces these opening lines: the circle is completed. Just before John Gardner and I published a translation, certain lines became visible. The narrator of Gilgamesh invites us relive the story of the hero as the hero himself told it.

Find the copper tablet-box,
Slip loose the ring-bolt made of bronze,
Open its mouth to its secrets. 
Draw out the tablet of lapis lazuli and read it aloud: 
How Gilgamesh endured everything harsh.

We are asked to open that box and read what is essentially the experience of the famous king of Uruk.

If, as Gerald L. Klerman suggested a few years ago, we have moved away from what W. H. Auden called The Age of Anxiety and are now well into The Age of Melancholy, the old hero is probably a man for our times. He is called, in a curious Akkadian phrase, hadī-ū’a-amēlu (1:234), literally the “Joy/Woe Man.” In that epithet is the germ of his story. He is also, strangely, compounded in another way: two-thirds god he is, one-third human (shittīnshu iluma shulultashu amēlūtu, 1:48). That means he must die. Although he enjoys the favor of gods and is the offspring of a goddess, he must, like all humans, die. Powerful, filled with great sexual attractiveness (kuzbu), the hero as we first see him is marked by a restlessness (lā ššālītu) that drives him day and night (1:239). He is so restless that the very people of his own city cry out to the gods for relief from his demands.

The story of this haunted figure reaches back to the 3rd millennium BCE. Gilgamesh, written on twelve clay tablets of cuneiform script, offers the modern reader many difficulties, since it far antedates Western literature and is even older than what we know about Western medicine and healing practices. The clay tablets were lost from antiquity until a little more than a century ago. Gilgamesh is the masterwork of ancient Mesopotamian literature. As only a few very ancient works, it has the power not only to move and delight modern readers, but also to change lives. The work has interested philologists, historians and students of myth and symbolism, as one might expect. More than that, psychologists and even theologians have turned to it. Gilgamesh’s agonizing search for an answer to the problem of death makes it the archetypal quest-myth.

**Key Words/Figures: Wisdom and Water**

The First Prologue refers twice to the time of the Flood. Gilgamesh gains a kind of life-transforming gnosis “from before the Flood.” To a Mesopotamian reader this reference, which anticipates the story of the great Flood in Tablet 11, would, I think, have connected that old story with the cosmic waters, the nagbu, where Utanapishtim tells the story and the waters into which Gilgamesh dives to find a Plant of Rejuvenation. The reader would also, possibly, have associated the teller of the tale, Utanapishtim, with the Seven Wise Ones who have laid down the foundation of Uruk’s city walls.

The association of wisdom and water, the Noah-figure and the Seven Sages may seem obscure because the poet employs untraditional language for both the source of waters, nagbu (instead of apsū) and the Seven (muntalku vs. apkallu). But I suspect this is rather a subtle poetic variation of well-known mythic figures.

It turns out that there were a number of apkallus (Sumerian abgal). Two types were apparently quite well known, in the form of fish and in the form of birds. The fish-apkallu
were the ones directly associated with the cosmic waters below the earth and the great god Ea.\textsuperscript{231} They were imaged as fish-garbed humans carrying buckets.

The myth of “Inanna and Shukaletuda” is introduced by the creation of the date palm.\textsuperscript{232} Enki/Ea gives detailed instructions to a certain “Raven” for the cultivation of the date palm. Once the plant grows, the bird acts like a man in climbing the date palm (with a harness) to fertilize the plant. And Raven again acts like a human in working the shadouf to provide the plant with plenty of water. Raven thus acts like a bird-\textit{apkallu}. Representations of the bird-\textit{apkallu} are well-known in Neo-Assyrian reliefs of the Tree of Life, often depicted as date palms.\textsuperscript{233}

Anthropomorphic\textit{apkallu}, which often substitute for bird-\textit{apkallu}, and fish-\textit{apkallu} are found in great numbers in sealings from Hellenistic Uruk. Ronald Wallenfels attributes the sealings, which were frequently used by exorcist-priests in that period, to a revival in Uruk—“a renaissance of Assyro-Babylonian culture”—after the Achaemenid period, where the representation of these figure is seldom seen.\textsuperscript{234}

**The Uruk Apkallu List**

Complicating the question about the \textit{apkallu} is a discrepancy between two lists that have come to light. The list given in the \textit{Babyloniaca} of Berossus, a priest of Babylon’s high god Marduk, is better known than one from Uruk, for reasons we will discuss below. Both are from the Hellenistic period. The Uruk list identifies seven \textit{apkallu} before the Flood, “seven brilliant \textit{purādu} fish,” and four (“of human descent” endowed by Ea “with comprehensive intelligence”) after the Flood.\textsuperscript{235}

According to the Uruk list, the first of the pre-Flood \textit{apkallu} was Uanna, who is identified with Adapa, a figure who ascended to heaven. The first of the post-Flood era was Nungalpiriggaldim. Both Adapa and Nungalpiriggaldim are associated with Uruk through the legendary Enmerkar.\textsuperscript{236} The Uruk version is particularly important in identifying the 8\textsuperscript{th} sage, Nungalpiriggaldim, as “the \textit{apkallu} of Enmerkar, who brought Ishtar down from heaven into Eanna.”\textsuperscript{237}

Berossus tells a rather different story. He tells of the first sage, Oannes (like Uanna, to be identified with Adapa),\textsuperscript{238} who instructed humans who had been living like wild animals. Berossus elsewhere lists the kings before the Flood and sages who were giving advice during the reigns of those kings, explaining “in detail the things which had been spoken summarily by Oannes.”\textsuperscript{239} The first king, a certain Aloros, is said to have been from Babylon. Giving priority to Babylon (as opposed to Eridu, the first city according to Sumerian tradition) has raised many questions. But it provides one piece of evidence—among many—that Berossus regularly offers a Babylon-centered view of reality. That is not surprising, since he identifies himself as a priest of Marduk. More telling is the information he gives about the first king and most of the others Berossus lists in the pre-Flood cities: they are Chaldeans. Berossus himself was a Chaldean.

The Chaldeans—identified as people from the \textit{māt Kaldu}, that is, the vast plain in southern Mesopotamia between the Euphrates and the Tigris—dominated Babylon in the
6th century BCE. The 11th Dynasty of Babylon lasted until the Persians conquered Babylon. While Chaldea had been a colony during the reign of Hammurabi of Babylon, the Chaldeans conquered Babylonia in the 8th century, battled back and forth for possession of Babylon, and saw Babylon sacked by the Assyrian king Sennacherib in 689 BCE. (Berossus is particularly harsh in his treatment of Sennacherib, his very model of the evil king.) Under Nabopolassar the Chaldeans gained control of Babylon and, after defeating the Assyrians and the Egyptians, established the Chaldean dynasty.240

The Chaldeans, if Berossus is any measure, had little to say about Uruk, though their land extended eastward from Uruk. They were an Akkadian-speaking Semitic people who, though not Arameans and another Semitic group who also appeared in the south at the same time, were organized in several tribes. The Bit-Yâkin, the Bit-Darkuri, Bit-Adini, Bit-Amukkani, and Bit-Shilani settled in the “Sea-Land.” Sometimes one tribe dominated Babylon, sometimes another. It was certainly a Chaldean from “Babylonia” who committed the outrage Urukeans remembered taking Ishtar away from Uruk and establishing a “foreign” goddess in her place.

If a certain Euechsios, whom Berossus refers to as a king who ruled over “the land of the Chaldeans” after the Flood, is Enmerkar, then Uruk received at least an oblique reference. (And if the king of succeeds Euechsios, Chomasbelus, is to be Lugalbanda, then there is another slight reference to Uruk, but the city itself is not named in either case.)

It is worth noting that the last king before the Flood, Xisouthros (a Greek rendering of Sumerian Ziusudra), completes the list of the pre-Flood king list according to Berossus. He, like the others, are Chaldeans. (Berossus, as we shall see later, gives a detailed account of the Xisouthros and the Flood. His Flood account, with its emphasis on saving the sacred writings in the City of the Sun, Sippar, and removing them after the Flood from Sippar to Babylon, is another example of the Babylon-centered worldview of this famous Chaldean.)

In brief, then, the two sources of the apkallu tradition turn out to be Uruk-based and Babylon-based, and the differences between the two point to not only disagreements between neighbors but at time outright hostility. When Assyrians tend to favor Uruk, Babylon—especially among certain of the Chaldean rulers—take a very different tack. Establishing mythic priority—among sages and early kings before and after the Flood—is yet another illustration of Mesopotamian societies vigorously drawing inward and defending their traditions in the face of external pressures.

Both Babylon and Uruk remained prosperous centers of learning in Hellenistic times—even though Babylon itself was greatly diminished when the Seleucids built a new city across the Tigris and established their capital there. Though the Greeks influenced “Babylonia” in this period, and both cities were ruled by outsiders, Babylon and Uruk held to their own traditions. Gilbert J. P. McEwan provides an interesting glimpse in his survey of temple personnel in the two cities during Hellenistic times. He found that the temples in the two cities used the same titles for some fourteen occupations. Both used, for example, āshipu and kalû, the professions favored by the Sin-leqi-unninnî clan, and
for the most learned of the scholarly titles, *túupshar Enûma Anu Enlil*, that is the scholar who specialized in the massive astronomical and astrological compendium. On the other hand, McEwan found 36 titles used in Babylon not found in Uruk, and some 26 titles used in Uruk but not found in Babylon—for the same basic occupations.²⁴¹

**Wisdom and the Written Word**

Berossus describes Oannes and the other *apkallu* as advisors to humans, especially to kings once humans were civilized. Berossus himself was a writer and appreciative of the written word. He depicts Oannes as giving humanity the knowledge of letters and claims that Oannes wrote “about birth and government” and offered the writings to men.²⁴² In his summary of the Flood story, Berossus also emphasizes writing. When Cronus—that is, Ea—reveals to Xisouthros that a flood is imminent, the god orders Xisouthros to bury, in the curious Babylonian phrase, “the beginnings and the middles and the ends of all writings.”²⁴³ They were to be buried in the holy city of Sippar, but once the Flood was over, the writings were dug up and transferred to the newly rebuilt Babylon.

A catalogue of texts and authors from early in the 9th century BCE reinforces the idea that the *apkallu*—at least Oannes—was considered an author. The catalogue lists written works in a hierarchical order from those authored by the god Ea through the *apkallu* Oannes-Adapa to “experts” (*ummiānu*) like Sîn-leqi-unninnī, who is credited with authoring *Gilgamesh*. (Enmerkar is on the list as, apparently, the author of two works on fruit, one of which is the date.)²⁴⁴ Judging from the first works listed in the catalogue, collections used by the *āshipu* and the *kalû* and the astronomical compendium *Enuma Anu Enlil*, credited to Ea himself, the catalogue reinforces the high status and great prestige of the learned scholars. Others in the profession are said to have authored literary works like “The Poem of Erra” and *Gilgamesh*.

Berossus, though, does not mention Gilgamesh—or Uruk, for that matter—even in his “Book of Kings.” We have, though, only fragments of Berossus’s *Babyloniaca*, and possibly the Greeks who preserved much of the work were interested only in Babylon. The story that convinced modern scholars to read the cuneiform signs we now see as “Gilgamesh,” on the other hand, may have come down from Berossus.²⁴⁵ The story, about a certain “Gilgamos,” who is “King of the Babylonians,” tells of his mysterious birth. The king Seuechoros, who might be Enmerkar, guarded his daughter closely because he was afraid a grandson would take the kingdom away from him. Nevertheless, she became pregnant (“by some obscure man”) and gave birth in secret. The men guarding her threw the infant from the citadel, but he was rescued by an eagle. The eagle set the boy down in a garden, where the keeper of the garden fell in love with him and raised the child. While these folklore motifs might have come from any oral or written source, they are important once again now that a “Birth of Gilgamesh” text has come to light. The story ends by naming the child Gilgamos.

**Key Words/Figures: The Eye and The Ear**

*Gilgamesh* opens with an appeal to the eye. The hero is one who saw the *nagbu*, something like our “has seen it all.” We are likely to be reading a translation of
We do not know how original audiences would have known the story. Would many of them have, as we are invited to do, open a box, take out a tablet, and read *Gilgamesh*? That is the way we moderns are likely to open a book and read it alone. If so, we can imagine a relatively small, though learned readership in the ancient world, since very few people in Mesopotamian would have mastered the complicated and tricky cuneiform writing system.

On the other hand, one who could read might have read the tablets to others, and thus have recreated the oral performances of the ancient Sumerian *nar*, singer and poet, who composed poetry before others.

Whoever may have known *Gilgamesh*, versions of which were found far and wide in ancient sites—even outside Mesopotamia—and in a number of languages, the Standard Akkadian version invites the audience to see the walls of Uruk, the city within the walls and to read the written text inscribed by Gilgamesh himself.

The opening of *Gilgamesh* is only one of many appeals to see gods and heroes, sometimes as they are described and often as they act. These are, of course, common features of narratives, whether oral or written, ancient or modern. Actually, though, there is very little in the poem to help us visualize the gods or the human characters. The major figures, Enkidu first and then Gilgamesh, are described, but few other characters are treated in that way. Most (even the deities) are identified by the roles they play in family, society (and in the cosmos)—but the poet gives us little to visualize. The emotional reactions of the characters are more evident than their outer forms. In this case the narratives of *Gilgamesh* are much different from, say, modern novels.

Places are also described in the sketchiest of ways. We are asked to visualize the walls of Uruk and are given a kind of map of the city, but for the most part we are either in the city or in a wilderness outside the walls. Only ten place names appear in *Gilgamesh*, five of them cities (Uruk, Nippur, Aratta, Sippar, and Shuruppak), and only Uruk is described at all. Three mountain areas are mentioned (Labnānu—Lebanon—Sirāra, the Anti-Lebanon, and Nisir—Nimush, the mountains in the Zagros where the boat rests after the Flood). That leaves only two rivers, the Purattu (the Euphrates), and the Ulay (Ulāia, in modern Iran). Temples, houses, a palace, roads and hills are art of the setting, but the poet either expects us to know the places already or is indifferent to the way they look. It is, for the most part, a real landscape, but like other elements of the narrative, we are lucky to have the visual arts, especially cylinder seals, to give us some sense of the look of things.

In *Gilgamesh*, as if life, the sun—the Sun God Shamash—allows us to see things. The most vivid images are probably those in dreams, supplied by Shamash, dreams that are filled with monsters and underworld creatures.

The opening of the poem tells us, then, that Gilgamesh sees something quite profound. Characters do look at things, and are encouraged to do so. Verbs of seeing, looking at,
beholding (amāru, nat ālu, palāsu) and showing or displaying (kullumu) are frequent. The “face” (pānu) is an Akkadian way of seeing something in front of something else.

I mention the eye because serious modern fiction (not to mention fantasies and, of course, our great interest in theater, TV and film) has largely been defined by the visual. “Realistic” literature and visual art may always have meant more than the world of the senses, especially vision, and included a “realistic” understanding of the psychological and sociological motivations of characters, but it can hardly be denied that the modern West has invested heavily in the visible. In many ways it is an inheritance of the Greek tradition of mimesis, as Erich Auerbach in his classic study of the Western tradition of literature has made clear.

Akkadian literature inherited a different and, I think, profound preference for the ear over the eye. I will try to make the case that this preference provides a major theme and the main plot line of Gilgamesh. It is, of course, ironic that modern scholars are better able to read and to hear the dead languages of Sumerian and Akkadian, that is, to know how the words on the tablets were pronounced, than other ancient languages. The cuneiform writing system allowed signs to represent concepts (logograms), but also words and syllables. Gilgamesh contains different ways of writing the same word. For example, the god name Ishtar is spelled out (Ish-tar) some places and referred to by Ishtar’s divine number (#15, where the top number is #60)!

Perhaps it is not surprising that Mesopotamia, which must have had few literate persons in any given period of its long history, though it invented true writing, depended mainly on the spoken language and found the ear (Sumerian geshtu) the better representation of “wisdom” than the eye (igi).

Where there is a variety of “eye”-words in Gilgamesh, there is a much greater richness in “ear”-words: verbs of speaking (zakāru, amû, qabû), and many specific types of speaking (praying, crying out, blessing, curses and the like) occur in great numbers in Gilgamesh. The mouth and its utterance (pû), the ear (hasîsu, uznu) and the voice (tukku) frequently appear. Hearing (uznu, Šemû) is the key to “understanding.”

For every eye word for seeing truths and articulating them, such as inscribing tablets (harâssu), there are half a dozen for hearing, remembering (hasâsu), reporting (têmu), and solving problems (pashâru) represented by speaking and hearing. Most interpreters of Gilgamesh emphasize “wisdom” (in such words as milku, nêmêqu, têltu, mûdu) and its providers (apkallu, màliku, muntalku) in contexts where one passes knowledge and understanding from one to another. Gilgamesh needs to learn and does learn through his experience. (I will argue that the gods need to learn as well.)

Not every line of Gilgamesh has been recovered, but enough lines (some 2500 in Tablets 1-11 of the key Ninevite text) have been reconstructed that the distribution of straight narrative (description and the representation of action) can be plotted against speech. In the first eleven tablets almost 70% of the lines (1756) have characters speaking: dialogues, monologues and the occasional soliloquy. While the percentage changes from episode to
episode, where narrative and speech often alternates, the percentages change from a low of only 52% of speech over narrative (Tablet 4) to an astonishing 91% (in Tablet 7). Four of the tablets have 84%-87% speech.

This is in line with precedent. Sumerian literature is often said to follow an “oral aesthetic,” with the marks of orality—especially exact repetition and elaborate parallelism. When stories are narrated by characters themselves, such as the nar-poet in “Gilgamesh and The Bull of Heaven,” he uses the same techniques as the authors of the written texts. Table 12 of Gilgamesh is still very controversial. As many scholars think it is an “inorganic appendix” as think it should be considered part of the whole Gilgamesh. (For this reason I have kept the speech/narrative percentages in Tablets 1-11 separate from Tablet 12.) Tablet 12 is a close translation into Akkadian of a Sumerian original. By itself, the 153 line Tablet 12 has an even greater proportion of speech than any of the first eleven tablets: 93% of speech over straight narrative.

More importantly, the eye/ear distinction is thematically related to the two kinds of wisdom and the two gods who especially embody and exhibit such wisdom. The Sun God Shamash dominates the first half of Gilgamesh, as we shall see, where the god who is said to dwell in an abyss so dark that light cannot penetrate his house, dominates the second half: Enki, or as he was called in Akkadian, Ea.

Key Words/ Figures: The Shepherd and The Farmer

Another difference between older and later versions of the Akkadian Gilgamesh stories is the way Uruk is characterized by epithets. In Gilgamesh, the city is called supūru, a “sheepfold.” In the Old Babylonian texts the city is “broad-marted,” simply noting its wide streets. The “sheepfold,” on the other hand, resonates with the very ancient stories and love songs of Ishtar and “the lover of her youth,” Tammuz (or Dumuzi in the Sumerian accounts of Inanna and her famous, tragic lover).

In her series of studies on domestic life in ancient Mesopotamia, Rivkah Harris illustrated her contention that the ideal of marital relations was one of mutuality and shared sexual passion with a stone sculpture of a mature, obviously contented couple holding each other in an affectionate embrace. The sculpture was found in the temple of the goddess Inanna in Nippur. For the most part Harris demonstrates the mutuality and love between husband and wife through literary texts from very early in Mesopotamian history through the 1st millennium BCE. She even finds it in the myth of Nergal and Ereshkigal, where the masculine attributes of mastery and dominance are described in a very vivid fashion. It may be significant, though, that the stone sculpture of the contented couple comes from the temple of the most passionate lover in Mesopotamian literature, the great goddess Inanna, who tended to dominate her lovers. While the relationships between Inanna and her lovers are usually called “sacred” marriages, they are rarely considered models of actual human marriage. If Sumerologist Herbert Sauren is correct, an alternate form of marriage in Sumer, Entrance Marriage, provides a different view of marriage—rather, marriages—than what is usually interpreted in visual and literary illustrations of marital relationships.
One form of marriage came to dominate Mesopotamian society and another form disappeared. So thoroughly is the second form driven from view that standard works on Mesopotamian family law either ignore it or reduce it to an “anomalous” category. The form that disappears was called Entrance Marriage, or nam-nerba-sh. This essay will address certain vestiges of Entrance Marriage and ideological formations in myth and literature that involve such marriages.

The dominant form of marriage might be called the mutūtu-form. In this form especially marriage was understood as a contract between families wherein the man, mutu, “took” a woman. In what was more than a symbolic gesture the man “took” the woman from her home, the family compound, and installed her in his household. One important purpose—possibly the most important purpose—of such a marriage was to produce an heir. To the extent that lineage, traced through the male line, was important, a mutūtu marriage allowed for the regulated passing of property from generation to generation. As private property increased in importance, marriage customs were increasingly codified in legal documents.

For a variety of reasons, the other form, Entrance Marriage, largely disappeared by the end of the Old Babylonian period, that is, rather early in the 2nd millennium BCE. Vestiges of Entrance Marriage can be found in myths and literature that deal with what has become known as the “sacred” marriage. A few examples will show that Mesopotamian literature not only contains vestiges of the other form of marriage but also helps to articulate an ideological shift from Entrance Marriage to the increasingly dominant form.

In an Entrance Marriage the husband, far from taking his wife away from her home, entered into the wife’s household, where he displaced the wife’s father. The clearest example for such a marriage is the installation of the city ruler known as the en. When the en is espoused by the goddess Inanna, he remains cloistered in her “house” in Uruk, the temple Eanna. This was a very ancient pattern in Uruk and may have spread to other Sumerian cities. Better known than the en is the emergence in the 3rd millennium of cloistered women who were considered to be married to gods. The most important of these cloistered women were ens, lukurs, and nadītu. These high-ranking women were not expected to bear children. In some cases they were forbidden to have children (though they might adopt them). It may be that the ideological justification for such marriages of humans with deities derived from the “sacred marriage” par excellence, that is, the marriage of Inanna and the male she selected.248 (That a female could take the initiative in proposing marriage to a male is another feature that would be anomalous in mutūtu marriage.) In any event, at the very moment when Entrance Marriage disappears, so also do the cloistered men and women—except, perhaps, in Inanna’s Uruk.

We have, then, evidence for more than one form of marriage in Mesopotamia and for the marriages of humans to deities. The “sacred” marriage may be clarified if we see more than one form of marriage among the gods and goddesses of Mesopotamia, different forms of “sacred” marriage. Since a great deal of attention has been paid to the “sacred”
marriage literature and rites, it will provide the framework for a consideration of Entrance Marriage.

The “sacred marriage” is one of the most discussed and most controversial questions in Assyriology. The “marriage” of the great goddess Inanna and her lover, the en of her city and later the lugal or king of major cities like Ur, Isin, and Larsa, is well attested in documents from the 3rd and early 2nd millennia BCE. The prototype was her relationship with the most famous of her lovers, the en Dumuzi, who is perhaps better known in his Semitic name, Tammuz, as Inanna is also known from her Semitic counterpart, Ishtar. A love song describes the meeting of Inanna and Dumuzi at the entrance of her sanctuary in Uruk. The gipar is the holy of holies where Inanna’s bed and throne are located.

Meeting in the Gipar

The en meets the one with lapis lazuli stones gathered over the mound.
Dumuzi meets Inanna with lapis lazuli stones gathered over the mound.
The shepherd of An, the groom of Enlil—the en—meets her.
The groom of An, the sheep-breeder of Enlil—Dumuzi—meets her.
At the lapis door of the gipar the en meets her.
At the narrow door in the storehouse of Eanna Dumuzi meets her.
She who returns from the top of the mound,
Inanna who returns from the top of the mound,
The woman has chosen to have him enter her house, accompanied by her songs and...[illegible],
The young woman, while she sings, sends a messenger to her father.
Inanna, while she dances in joy, sends a messenger to her father:

"Have them rush into my house, my house, for me!
Have them rush into my house, my house, for me, the gashan,
Have them rush into my gipar, for me!
Have them build my flowered bed for me!
"Have them spread it with my herbs that look like the greenish lapis stones!
Let them bring in to me the man of my heart!
Let them bring in to me my Amaushumgalanna!
Have them put his hand in my hand for me!
Have them put his heart to my heart for me!
With his hand under my head, sleep is bliss.
With his heart pressing my heart, the pleasure is sweet too!" 249

In “Meeting in the Gipar” Dumuzi is clearly the one Inanna has selected to be her lover.
In other love songs she appears to preferring the Farmer.

The Romance of Wool and Barley

Ironically, the humble grain, barley, and wool made history’s First City the largest and most prosperous city in antiquity before Rome at the height of its empire. Uruk was so thoroughly identified with the great goddess Inanna that we wonder what internal logic developed the connection.
Literary texts and visual representations of Inanna’s temple and other structures in Uruk make one connection perfectly plain: Inanna’s “house” (itself a metaphor derived from the very different houses of families in Mesopotamian villages) is at its heart a “storehouse” for grain. When Inanna, anthropomorphized as a very sexy female, selects her lover, she invites him into the storehouse, where a bed and a throne await him.

Mario Liverani in his *Uruk, The First City* makes a good case for the enormous and surprising growth of this city: the cultivation of barley and the production of wool. In some ways barley is less desirable than wheat, which was cultivated elsewhere. But the peculiarities of the flood plain where Urukeans constructed a gigantic brick foundation for what must have been the most conspicuous sight for miles around, the temple complex Eanna and its high temple tower made barley a good choice. Not merely good, but decisive. Agriculture in that area depended not on rainfall but on rather irregular flooding of the Euphrates River and a complex irrigation system needed to provide water for cultivation. Nature’s payback for the abundant water gradually (over some 4000 years) brought about its doom: salts that doomed all but the hardiest of plants. Barley could better withstand the salt than other grains could.

Added to the choice of barley the invention of a plow that could be managed by strong men and pulled by oxen, Urukeans found a far more efficient way to direct the water into the fields. Instead of planting seeds where water puddles, the farmers plowed long rows that backed up to the irrigation ditches. The result was an astonishing 500 to as much as 1000 percent increase in the barley yield.

Whatever we might think a religious building—temple, church, or mosque—should be, the ancient literature that saw Eanna as at its heart a storehouse of barley pointed to the source of its wealth. We might think of the temple as a central bank, not only for the large city that formed around it but for the expansion of trade in a rather astonishing periphery. Uruk merchants, utilizing yet another innovation, large-scale manufacture of textiles, mainly linen and wool, spread their wares into what is now Syria, Turkey, and Iran—and into the Indus Valley and perhaps China.

The investment needed to fuel such expansion came, according to Liverani, from the surplus of grain that barley provided the First City.

We might note in passing, of course, that barley provided the key ingredient not only for bread but also for beer. Bread and beer were the staples of ancient Mesopotamia, as they were for Egypt. In addition to its other benefits, beer provided a safer source of water than did the untreated water of river and canal. The brewing process destroyed the usual antibodies that, then as now, tainted the drinking water.

Not surprisingly, bread and beer were given out as rations through a network of temple personnel—very bureaucratic, as the earliest texts and images show—to workers of all sorts. To the extent that the economy became centralized, it was the surplus of barley that allowed the system to develop and flourish. In effect, grain was the first money, the first capital, long before silver and then gold came to be used.
In addition to grain and other items like oil, an annual ration of clothing was given to those in the system. Surprisingly, barley had an effect on this part of the system as well.

[Fig. 17: “Daily Bread and Beer,” after Falkenstein, *ATU* (1936), #585 (details, redrawn)]

This peculiar, very ancient text dubbed by Richard A. Henshaw, as “Daily Bread and Beer,” offers an early insight into the complex society that was developed by the scaling up of production of barley. (The Sumerian word *bar* may be responsible for English and other Indo-European languages for “barley” and “barn” as a place to hold it.) Henshaw was struck by the the three large signs at the end of the tablet, at the bottom of the drawing. Reading from right to left we see a sun rising with the number “one” above it; a vessel containing (likely) beer; and a bowl. The bowl became a standard measure—the first money—for a ration of barley, the mean ingredient in beer and bread. The “beveled-rim bowl” was produced in the thousands and found wherever Sumerian traders lived, many hundreds of miles from Uruk. Beer was largely brewed by women, and all members of the society drank it the way others drank wine—for, among other reasons, protection from drinking water. (The same was true into 14th century England, where “brewsters”
provided the locals with their need for ale. When beer that in northern Europe was introduced on a large scale in England, the brewsters largely disappeared from view because of the competition from the breweries.)

The colophon, then, suggested that the signs could be read from the pictographs that gave rise to true writing as: “one” “day” “beer” “bread.”

At the top of the fragment is a sign that looks something like a helmet and contains another sign within it. My guess is that the two sides represent steps into a place, possibly an office where one could find the en. The sign inside the office suggests (to me) that the clear EN sign indicates the boss. The double line below may represent the “department” under the en. It seems clear enough from this and other administrative texts from the 4th millennium BCE that Uruk had not only become a large city-state—as large as any city except perhaps Imperial Rome many eras later. The scaling-up of agriculture, thanks to the plow that in this period allowed long rows to be irrigated, and of animal husbandry centralized by the temple administration, allowed (or demanded) a much more complex work force.

The large circles and semi-circles in the boxes under the EN no doubt indicated the number of daily rations for the people involved in the various departments.

Once true writing developed out of the pictographs that had been used to keep records in an earlier period the writing system took a peculiar turn: the system was rotated 90 degrees, and the signs became increasingly simplified and less pictorial. A baked clay plaque with a hole, presumably for hanging it up by a clay nail, is in the possession today of an individual (provenance unknown). It looks to me to indicate the presence of an en, maybe the way the modern office worker has a title at the door.
Experts in deciphering cuneiform ("wedge-shaped") script are collectively “Assyriologists,” and for a good reason, although the tablets found in ancient Assyria are among the youngest of the Sumero-Akkadian finds. “Gilgamesh” is a good example of what happened. A member of the British Museum staff traveled to what is now northern Iraq and found tablets containing part of what was first called “The Epic of Ishtar and Izdubar.” (“Izdubar” was an early reading of the signs making up “Gilgamesh.”) The discovery was an international sensation, not because it dealt with Ishtar and Gilgamesh, but because it contained a story of the Great Flood. The tablets were written in what is now called Standard Akkadian, which, it turned out, had different Babylonian and Assyrian dialects. Akkadian is the term for the Semitic language in the vast majority of cuneiform texts that have been discovered.

One result is that it took many decades to decipher tablets that were written in the Sumerian language, a language unrelated to Semitic languages (and one that has no clear relative today.) So Akkadian Gilgamesh texts came to be read and studied long before the Sumerian texts.

Over the millennia the cuneiform signs changed. The EN provides a good example.
From left to right the EN sign changed in such a way that the pictographic shape was mostly lost. George Smith would have read signs in the right column, the most recent, and may never have seen tablets with signs like “Daily Bread and Beer,” from the 4th and early 3rd millennia.

Speculating from the shape of Neo-Assyrian signs would be very difficult indeed, but one intriguing suggestion is that the early EN sign did not point to something that looked like a person; rather it may have represented a field that was irrigated from, e.g., the Euphrates River, then close to Uruk, or from one of the many canals that connected cities and towns. Even in our own times the most important official in towns along the Euphrates is the Water Engineer, the one who must plan for the difficulties in controlling the waters.

The suggestion, then, is that the *en* must at least have responsibility for the large-scale agriculture we first see in Uruk. The annual “Sacred Marriage” made his importance visible to all the population of the city.

**Linen vs. Wool**

The production of linen was largely a village activity. It was highly prized in ancient Mesopotamia (and even more so in Egypt), but here again barley effected a change. The cultivation of barley was so successful that it was expanded into larger and less fertile grounds around Uruk. Eventually barley cultivation crowded out the planting of flax needed for linen and for flax seed, which was pressed for its oil.252

Fortunately, we have a love song in Sumerian that identifies the complex process of producing linen. The literary context is the making of Inanna’s wedding sheets.253

Inanna is hesitant to select the man who is championed by her brother, Utu. Utu, the sun, eagerly agrees that all stages of linen-making will be carried out. We have, then, the stages marked out:

- Flax in the fields
- Hoeing
- Beating
- Spinning
Twining
Warping
Weaving and
Bleaching

Cutting the flax (actually pulling it from the ground) and leaving it soak in water for just
the right time ("retting" and drying), then beating the stalks to soften the threads (used
for many different purposes depending on the fineness of the thread), a process that
involves "breaking" woody fiber, "scutching" or scraping, and "heckling" fibers), was a
tricky and difficult operation that was carried out largely by villagers. The remainder of
the process could involve individuals or groups, and the whole process employed females
as well as males in the community, children as well as adults.

Raising flax depletes the soil quickly, and the process of producing linen is very labor-
intensive. In southern Iraq soil under cultivation brings salts to the surface; over four
thousand years of cultivating plants in that area, only the hardiest survived, and the once
flourishing production even of hardy barley gradually yielded less and less. Today the site
of Uruk is a wasteland.

To give at least an impression of the process, which the love poem glosses over, we should
consider that when the flax is mature, it is spread out on the ground to dry. Seeds are
removed; fibers have to be removed; unwanted fibers are loosened and left to decompose
(retting); several processes are required to remove 85% of the plant in order to recover
the "strick," long fibers that are then spun, stretched, boiled, and bleached to produce fine
garments—and, as in this poem, Inanna’s wedding sheets. (We might add that only the
elites in Mesopotamia possessed beds. The vast majority of the population slept on the
ground, with whatever they might have for protection and warmth.)

Eventually it became more efficient to develop that other part of the Agrarian Revolution,
the cultivation of sheep and goats for the wool they produced. We will see how this part,
which in Uruk involved very large herds owned and managed by the temple, also
transformed the economy of the First City.

Flax is mentioned often in the love songs of Uruk’s goddess Inanna. So is barley, whose
cultivation was key to the development of the first city-state. Barley grown in long rows
that were plowed by men and their oxen drove flax out of production. Unlike flax, barley
is a grain that provided food for humans and animals. The garments that became a major
export for Uruk were made of wool.

Because they are crops, though, flax and barley are often mentioned together in the love
songs. One of the best examples is called by its modern editor and translator, Yitschak
Sefati, “Inanna the Watered Field, Who Will Plow Her?” It describes the nudity of the
beautiful goddess as if she were a well-watered field. When she is “plowed” by her lover,
Dumuzi, the field blooms like a garden. After the ecstasy of sex with Dumuzi, the great
gull, Inanna is seen as having fresh fruit and shoots rising with her. “With her rose up
flax; barley rose up with her./ The plain has been filled with her like a blossoming
garden.” This is as close as Sumerian poets got to seeing Inanna as a mother. Her
sexuality is never in question, but Sumerian writers were careful to see that the goddess
had a profound effect on the fertility of animals and the soil. But the sexual relations with
her lovers rarely, if ever, results in pregnancy.

The Shepherd vs. The Farmer
The Sumerian Sun God Utu appears in three love songs as the “brother” of Inanna. In
one, “The Bridal Sheets and the Chosen Bridegroom,” Utu agrees to provide Inanna with
beautiful linen wedding sheets (clearly the product of the farmer’s cultivation of flax.
Scholars disagree about whether Inanna ends up accepting the shepherd, Dumuzi-Amaushumgalanna, or the farmer, Enkimdu. But nearly the entire poem is devoted to
linen, and the shepherd is mentioned only once in the last line.

In a second love song, “The Lovers’ Quarrel,” Inanna and Dumuzi argue about the relative
merits of their families. Inanna claims that if it were not for her “brother,” Utu, Dumuzi
would be a “ceaseless wanderer in the dark paths” of the steppe, that is, the wilderness.
For his part Dumuzi claims a divine lineage, and his father, Enki, is the equal of her father,
Suen (i.e., Nanna, the Moon God). Like most Sumerian poems this one has its share of
difficult lines and puzzling references. But one observation seems clear enough. As the
two lovers claim to be equals, their debate sparks “words of desire” (inim-hi-li-esh-ām,
line 23). “With the provoking of quarrel—his desire (is also aroused).”

“The Shepherd and the Farmer: Suitors’ Rivalry” is the most complicated of the three
poems. Here Utu advocates the shepherd’s suit. Inanna, however, balks at the
suggestion and the poem debates the merits of Dumuzi and Enkimdu. The debate is
particularly interesting in pointing out the products of the two rivals. For the shepherd
there are butter and milk, while the farmer offers flax and barely. Endimdu, “the man of
dikes and canals,” can give her a black or a white garment, while Dumuzi can provide her
with a black or a white ewe. One pours her his “prime beer” (and a variety of other types
of beer). The other gives her several varieties of milk. From one there are bread and
beans; from the other a surplus of milk and butter. The debate leads to one man
challenging the other, each on his own turf. The debate, however, is settled amicably. As
in the ages of negotiations between herders and farmers, they agree that the sheep may
pasture among the stalks of grain. They may eat grain “amid the shining fields of Uruk”
and drink water from the city’s great canal (lines 78-79). The shepherd wins the hand of
Inanna, but he invites Enkimdu to be his companion, probably something like the best
man at his wedding. The scholars who have commented on the poem disagree if the poem
is one of the disputations Sumerian poets liked, but the conflict in the poem is clearly
resolved by the end of the poem—which praises the young Inanna.

“The Shepherd and the Farmer: Suitors’ Rivalry” shows the binary oppositions common
to disputations but applied directly to Uruk. While the lovers, Inanna and Dumuzi, are
never quite equals—in spite of Dumuzi’s claims in “The Lovers’ Quarrel”—love songs
accomplish what the Bed Scene in Old Babylonian erotic art presents visually: sensual
and emotional bonding, face-to-face positioning of the bodies, a mutual gaze, with male and female of equal importance. Only a few of the many hundreds of Mesopotamian deities lent themselves to mythologizing that gave them, necessarily, anthropomorphic features. And no deity received more human attributes than Inanna, which is one reason we find her such a complex figure. In the love songs the result is very clear: the being of lesser status, Dumuzi, is exalted in the process while the goddess is literally brought down to earth, much as her “house,” Eanna, was brought from heaven to earth. In “The Shepherd and the Farmer: Suitors’ Rivalry” the “moist earth” of Uruk and its environs permits shepherd and farmer, Dumuzi and Enkimdu, sheep and grain, milk and beer, to coexist in harmony. The driving force in the contest is also the life force that permits rivals to become friends. Inanna, who holds the divine me, is the strong force, hi-li, that can produce “abundance” as well as it can generate tragedy.

In at least one poem, then, Dumuzi and the Farmer are reconciled with her choice. The tension between Shepherd and Farmer for the love of the goddess, is also present in the First Prologue of Gilgamesh, which speaks of a grove of date palms, to be tended by the farmer/gardener in the service of the goddess. Mesopotamian temples like Eanna possessed and maintained large flocks of sheep and goats (and herds of cattle) as well as extensive lands that produced, in the case of Uruk especially, dates and barley.

A different way of characterizing Uruk also separates older and later versions of the Gilgamesh stories. In the Old Babylonian texts, Uruk is the city “of Anu and Ishtar.” In Gilgamesh, though, it is the city of Ishtar. The actual status of the Sky God Anu, Creator God who is usually mentioned as the first of the highest gods in the pantheon, is problematic in almost every period of Mesopotamian history. Centuries after Gilgamesh Anu became very prominent in Uruk. The differing ideologies almost always have a political as well as a theological dimension to what may appear to us to be a relatively minor matter.

**Hoes and Plows**

In the developing economy of the southern Mesopotamian city-states, the plow was, as we have already seen, an important invention. Anthropologist Helen Fisher knows, however, that technological innovation does not necessarily mean social progress. Like Simone de Beauvoir earlier, Fisher, in Anatomy of Love, claims that women in particular were hurt by the invention of the plow.

The Plow. There is probably no single tool in human history that wreaked such havoc between women and men or stimulated so many changes in human patterns of sex and love as the plow. Exactly when the plow appeared remains unknown. The first farmers used the hoe or digging stick. Then sometime before 3000 B.C. someone invented the “ard,” a primitive plow with a stone blade and a handle like a plow’s.

What a difference this made.
In cultures where people garden with a hoe, women do the bulk of the cultivating; in many of these societies women are relatively powerful as well. But with the introduction of the plow—which required much more strength—much of the essential farm labor became men’s work. Moreover, women lost their ancient honored roles as independent gatherers, providers of the evening meal. And soon after the plow became crucial to production, a sexual double standard emerged among farming folk. Women were judged inferior to men.260

Sumerian scribal schools were well aware of the importance of the two key tools in agriculture. “The Debate between the Hoe and the Plow”261 is most interesting in this respect. The Hoe has a sophisticated, eloquent argument for its superiority to the upstart Plow. The Plow in his turn is mostly bluster, emphasizing his strength.

Interestingly, another Sumerian composition, “The Song of the Hoe,”262 was listed even earlier in the catalogue of writings to be used in the schools. “The Song of the Hoe” was the third work listed in the first group of ten compositions, after only two poems praising kings.263 (The curriculum reflects the increasing importance of kingship and, since the best document is a Nippur text, the King of the Gods, Enlil, is very evident in the opening of “The Song of the Hoe.”) “The Debate between the Hoe and the Plow” also appears in the catalogue, but only in the third decade.

“The Song of the Hoe” is particularly rich in puns on the word for hoe, al. The poem, of slightly more than one hundred lines, is dedicated to “Father” Enlil and to the goddess Nisaba. Nisaba, mentioned in Gilgamesh, was a prominent goddess of grains—and of wisdom. H. J. L. Vanstiphout considers it a prime example of the writer’s use of ambiguity, multiple “readings” of a single logogram, and symbolism.264

“The Debate between the Hoe and the Plow” shows a “high degree of literary consciousness,” including ironic use of intertextuality.265 In the debate—a quarrel started by the Hoe—the mighty Plow boasts of its great strength and his prestige. In the month of harvest, for example, the king himself sacrifices cattle and sheep in honor of the Plow and “pour beer into a bowl.” Drums resound during the festival. The king also takes hold of the Plow and harnesses oxen to the yoke. “Great high-ranking persons walk at my side.” All “the lands” admire it, and the people “watch me in joy.” The Plow ridicules the smallness of the Hoe and consistently associates the Hoe with the humblest of occupations and persons.

For its part, the Hoe laughs at the Plow when its parts break and the Plow is useless. The Hoe even claims to have a higher rank in Enlil’s place. Mainly the Hoe, however, identifies its many different productive works: building embankments, digging ditches, filling the meadows with water. The fowler and the fisherman make use of the Hoe’s activities. The Hoe lives in the city and is a faithful servant to its masters. Among the Hoe’s works is pressing clay and making bricks. It lays the foundation of the “good man’s house” and builds the city walls. Throughout its claims, the Hoe points out that its work helps the ordinary citizen, the householder and his wife and children.
Interestingly, the Hoe wins the dispute with the Plow. Enlil himself adds a dimension to the Hoe’s work—the work of the scribe. It is the connection between the clay tablet, the scribe, and the goddess who is the “inspector” of the Hoe, the goddess Nisaba. We have seen already that the grain goddess was also a major “wisdom” deity, especially in Sumerian times. The debate between the Hoe and the Plow ends with praise to Nisaba.

[See “Illustrations”: Fig 20: Neo-Assyrian seal (ca. 700 BCE), Ishtar and Palm Tree, BM 89769]

**King Palm**

Mesopotamia visualized demonic threats to humans in a wide variety of, usually, terrifying images like the *ugallu*, a large lion-headed man with feet that end in bird claws. The *ugallu* carries a mace in one hand and is poised to strike with a knife held in the other hand.\(^{265}\) Most have been catalogued by F. A. M. Wiggermann in his study of *Mesopotamian Protective Spirits*.\(^{267}\) Like medieval devils, they tend to be malformed creatures combining features elements of different levels of the cosmos, like flying bulls and lion-headed humans. Once constrained by gods or heroes the monsters could be turned to protect the persons they had threatened. They maintained their power and terrifying mien, but they could be used in magic rituals and their images set up in palaces and temples to ward off dangers.

Among these was a certain King Palm (*lugal-gish-gishimmar*). It is difficult to imagine how a palm tree could be threatening.\(^{268}\) He was, however, defeated by the Warrior God Ninurta. With millions of date palms, Iraq is still the largest provider of health-giving and nutritious dates in the world. The world’s date palms originated in southern Iraq and Saudi Arabia. A wild supposition might be that, like bulls in a herd of cattle, only a single “King,” i.e., a male date palm, is needed to service many female date palms. More than one male cuts down the efficiency of date production, and the excess would be culled from the garden.

The date palm was king in Uruk, no doubt from earliest times. (The Sumerian name for the date palm was borrowed from another language, reflecting the presence of the plants by the time Sumerians entered southern Iraq.) The most abundant documentary evidence of the date palm in Uruk comes from a time slightly later than *Gilgamesh* itself.

We have noticed above the curious stamp seal found in Eanna during the Persian period. Behind the kneeling figure, who is facing a great serpent, is a female date palm laden with dates. A somewhat older (Neo-Assyrian period) seal clearly associated the date palm with Ishtar.
Date Palms in Uruk
Andrew George departs from earlier translators in reading GISH.SAR.MESH in the second of four divisions of Uruk as “date-grove” (I.22). In the past the Sumerograms GISH.SAR, in Akkadian kirût, were interpreted as generic “garden” or “orchard.” (The MESH at the end simply indicates a plural.) Where others have read, then, a square mile of gardens or orchards, George prefers the more specific palm-grove.

The choice of “date-groves” for a significant portion of the city is sensible in view of the persistence of date palms along watercourses, as seen throughout the desert regions of Western Asia. The Annales school of history, best represented by Fernand Braudel’s majestic The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II (1966), provides an ecological context for this significance. For Braudel, the “true” Mediterranean world “lies between the northern limit of the olive tree and the northern limit of the palm grove” (I.234). The date palm spread west from Mesopotamia to Iran and reached the Indus Valley and Pakistan. From Egypt it spread toward Libya, the Maghreb and the Sahel. While the trees will grow beyond the areas that favor its growth (basically between 24ºN latitude and 34ºN latitude), they will not fruit properly beyond those favored geographical limits. Much of Iraq is in this favored zone, as far north as Kirkuk (at 35º27’), from which it turns southwest to the Mediterranean. The southern line continues to the coasts of Arabia and Pakistan to the limits of the Indus.

Uruk, modern Warka, is located at 31º 19’ northern latitude and 45º 40’ eastern longitude, safely within the area where the date palm originally emerged.

The date palm (Phoenix dactylifera) has been a source of food for thousands of years. Thought to have originated around the Persian Gulf, the date palm was spread in medieval and Early Modern times by through North Africa and Spain by the Arabs. The “wine” sometimes mentioned in texts from the Sumerian south was actually beer sweetened with dates.

Cultivation of the date palm shows a remarkable symbiosis between humans and the natural world. The trees are either male or female. Seedlings produce smaller and poorer quality fruit than do trees pollinated by human hand. While today wind machines may be used to flow pollen onto the female flowers, in places like Iraq laborers still climb ladders or use a special climbing tool to reach the flowers. A great advantage of this ancient practice is that very few male date palms need to be raised. (In some cases, male flowers are purchased in local markets, and growers then need not cultivate any male plants.)

The Date Palm in Akkadian
The common term in Akkadian for the date palm tree is gishimmaru, borrowed from the Sumerian gish-gish-sim-mar (CAD 5.102-4). Just as Arabic has a great number of terms for the stages of growth and for varieties of the date palm, so Akkadian has many terms, not all of them clearly differentiated today. One obscure text even pairs the gishimmaru with the huluppu tree.
In *Gilgamesh* the most conspicuous reference to dates and their importance comes midway in Tablet 6 (lines 64-79) when Gilgamesh accuses Ishtar of mistreating her lover, Ishullanu. The example of her treachery is by far the longest in Gilgamesh’s list of complaints against her. The list begins with the famous lover of her youth, the tragic Tammuz, develops in length and intensity through wild and domesticated animals to a shepherd and finally Ishullanu. He is described as the date-gardener (*nukarribu*) of Ishtar’s father. It was, by the way, a prominent position in Urukean society. (Assurbanipal was credited with restoring the date orchard of Uruk and turning the work over to such gardeners). According to Gilgamesh, Ishtar fell in love with Ishullanu, who continually brought her baskets of dates (*shugrû*). Not surprisingly, Ishtar uses the language of fruit to entice him to have sex with her. When he haughtily refuses her offer (as Gilgamesh is doing), she finally has enough of his insults and transforms him as she had her other lovers. Assyriologists have puzzled over the transformation of Ishullanu, and there is as yet no scholarly consensus in what must be a subtle poetic satire. The gardener is turned into a *dallālu* (6:76), something that then can neither go up nor go down. Suggestions range from a frog, a scarecrow, and even a dwarf. Whatever Ishullanu becomes, he is stuck in his own garden. Foster thinks his “well sweep” does not go up and his “bucket” does not go down. Since all the transformations are metaphorically related to the lovers’ status or work, Foster’s “bucket” (following the CAD 3.56) could conceivably be related to Ishullanu’s work with the date palm. The bucket is frequently used for drawing water, but if we envision a man climbing a date palm, either to fertilize the tree or to collect the dates, which he would then deliver to Ishtar, a symbolic punishment would be to have him stuck midway up the trunk of the tree.

The Sumerian myth, “Inanna and Shukaletuda” provides an early example of the importance of the date palm—and may be related to the later Ishullanu story in *Gilgamesh*. A lively controversy has redeveloped over the representation of trees in Mesopotamian art. As early as E. B. Tylor in the 19th century a very popular motif in Assyrian art, a “sacred tree” that appeared to be “fertilized” by humanoid figures on either side of the tree. Sometimes human headed and sometimes with the head of birds, the figures are always winged, suggesting that they were divine or semi divine. They may have been bird-apkallus like their counterparts in Enki’s underwater domain, the fish-apkallus who are depicted as humans wearing elaborate fish skins. Tyler identified the sacred tree as a date palm and the activity as fertilization of the date palm. The identification of the tree has been challenged. A recent and very thorough investigation of the question by Mariana Giovino led her to the conclusion that the “sacred tree” was not a specific tree, but a stylized object. One of the more interesting interpretations comes from a botanist, who thinks the “tree” is actually a representation of the Egyptian blue lotus. Some of the trees in Mesopotamian art certainly resemble the date palm; others do look more like spreading lotus flowers. It is possible that no single tree was the sacred tree—or that the ancient interest in the date palm gave way in the 1st millennium BCE to other possibilities.
Barbara Nevling Porter, who still maintains that Assyrian cylinder seals and wall carvings from the 9th century BCE depict the date palm, points out that the tree is represented in Room I of Assurnasirpal II’s palace in Kalhu no fewer than 96 times. It was, she maintains, the most popular motif in Assyrian art. Like others, she wonders why the date palm, which may not have been cultivated as far north as the Assyrian capital city, was still employed. But she has a ready explanation for the two most puzzling features in the representations: the oval, cone-like object held by the winged figures and the bucket carried by the figures. She thinks that the cones look like the ripe male flower that was shaken over the female flowers to fertilize them.

In some ways it is unfortunate that the controversy about the “sacred tree” revolves so frequently around Assyrian representations of some form of vegetation that appears to be fertilized by winged figures or kings. Many trees are mentioned in Mesopotamian literature, among them a great number (like the huluppu and mēsu) that have not been identified. Benno Landsberger found more than one hundred and twenty-five Akkadian equivalents of the Sumerian date palm (gish-gššimmar) in a single bilingual dictionary. The great variety of ancient terms for the date palm, its parts and products is easily matched by the rich Arabic vocabulary in use in territories where the date palm has been cultivated for thousands of years. Mariana Giovino is skeptical that we can know what methods the ancients used to fertilize the date palm. Even if the date palm were represented in (some) Assyrian art, it is not clear that the figures show the pollination of the tree. Much of her argument depends on the dried male flowers that, separated from their spathe, look much like modern brooms. (Once the pollination is completed, the male flowers are used for brooms.)

The male flowers do look like large fanlike blossoms when they are set out to dry; but the “cones” carried by the winged figures actually look strikingly the spathe that protects the flowers until they mature. (Giovino actually sets next to each other a photo of a person holding a spathe in exactly the way a winged figure holds a “cone,” Fig. 4-5.) One might speculate that the Assyrian artists, whether they were familiar with the complexities of date palm pollination or not, captured a moment in the process that was visually clear and aesthetically pleasing. Sometimes, in order to assure a successful pollination, gardeners see sprigs of the male flower, as it opens, into the female flowers as the spathe that protects them opens. Giovino includes photographs of modern gardeners using a “pollen bag,” a cone-like tip on a long stem that can be seeded directly into the female flowers (Giovino Fig. 35-36).

Paul Popenoe showed how frequently the Arabic terms used for the pollination of the date palm are derived from the reproductive parts of the human anatomy, and that fertilization is seen as sexual intercourse. Humans helping to pollinate the female tree allows cultivators to dispense with most male trees. Only one male for one hundred females is necessary, and the rate of successful pollination is much greater than when nature is left to its devices with equal numbers of male and female trees. Giovino’s photograph of a man in harness high in a tall date palm seeing his stick into the female spathe (Fig. 36)
shows how easily sexual imagery could be used for the process in Arabic. Possibly Mesopotamia saw it in the same way.

Two of the most discussed Assyrian wall reliefs from Assurbanipal’s palace at Nimrud are Figs. 1 and 2 in Giovino’s study of interpretations of the “sacred tree.” Figure 2 shows two bird-headed and winged figures holding “cones” that touch the flowers of the tree. They hold the cones in their right hands. In their left hands they hold a “bucket.” These “genies” are now identified as bird-apkallus.

Figure 1 has two figures very similar to those in Figure 2, except that they are human-headed rather than bird-headed. As with the bird-apkallus, they have robed, deeply powerful human bodies, and reveal the lower part of a muscular leg. There are, however, two very important additions to the scene. One is a winged sun disk centered above the “sacred tree.” This is no doubt the highest god in the Assyrian pantheon, Assur. Between the sacred tree and the apkallus, however, two human figures have been introduced. No doubt they represent the Assyrian king.

The ubiquitous “bucket” also has a familiar place in date palm cultivation. The dried male blossoms are dipped in water before they are sprinkled onto the female flowers; and the female flowers are often sprinkled after they are dusted with the male blossoms to better ensure a complete pollination.287

The “bucket” of water used by the humans who help pollinate the female tree would seem to fit into the emphasis in “Inanna and Shukaletuda” that the newly created plant requires plenty of water drawn from below and is used in the pollination process.

**The Date Palm: “Inanna and Shukaletuda”**

The suggestion that Ishullanu reflects the Sumerian myth of “Inanna and Shukaletuda,”288 depends mainly on the importance of Shukaletuda as the first gardener, that is, the first human to care for orchards. The myth runs to slightly more than three hundred lines, many of which are missing or fragmented, as is so often the case with these ancient texts. Shukaletuda is the first human in the story given the task of watering garden plots and building an installation for a well among the plants,289 and he is strikingly inept at the tasks. Not a single plant survived his care, since he pulled them out by their roots and destroyed them. This stupidity or rebellion may be responsible for the brutal act at the center of the story: he rapes Inanna while she is sleeping beneath a shady tree. If he is the model for Ishullanu—who may well be the prototypical gardener—he is anything like the rapacious Shukaletuda. In our story Ishullanu is the model gardener and the most attentive person serving Inanna/Ishtar.

What is striking about the connection, though, is that the myth tells of the first fruit tree—the date palm.

In any event, the central episode in the central tablet of *Gilgamesh* reminds us of the narrative frame, where in the description of a walled Uruk, Ishtar’s temple stands at the very heart of a city characterized by date palm cultivation.290
Palms and Ishtar’s Eanna

Fortunately, there is considerable evidence for the importance of the date palm for Ishtar’s temple in Uruk. The textual evidence is somewhat later than the *Gilgamesh* itself, but much of it can be assumed to reflect conditions that may well have been the case centuries earlier. Denise Cocquerillat dates the texts in her *Palmeraies et cultures de l’Eanna d’Uruk* (559-520) to the reigns of Babylonian kings Nabuchodonosor II, Amēl-Marduk, Nergal-shar-us*ur, Lā-abâš-Marduk, Nabonidas, and the Persian kings Cyrus, Cambyses, and Bardiya. While cereal grains—the barley whose surpluses allowed the extraordinary expansion of Uruk nearly three thousand years before—claimed much of the arable land in the environs of Uruk, the marshy land around the Eanna temple complex supported very productive cultivation of dates. The area was served by the King’s Canal, which had a quay at the temple. In this period Uruk produced more than 20-40% more capacity of Mesopotamia, and the workers were paid more than they were in other cities.

Cultivation of the date palm was not simply a pious activity in 6th century BCE Uruk. It was a vital and prosperous commercial interest. The ties to Ishtar and her temple Eanna are, however, as clear in the economic field as they are in the art, literature and mythology of Uruk.

[See “Illustrations”: Fig. 21: Cocquerillat (*Palmerais*) map of Uruk.]

The Date Palm in a Sumerian Love Song

One of the many Sumerian poems celebrating the love of Inanna and her *en* Dumuzi/Tammuz (DI T), today called “Meeting in the Storehouse” exemplifies the aspect of joy and “love in security” Thorkild Jacobsen saw in the aspect of the lover known as Amaushumgalanna. Jacobsen thought that Amaushumgalanna represented the “power in and behind the date palm.” An important feature is that, unlike the dairy products of Dumuzi the shepherd, which were seasonal and only slightly storable, the dates given to Inanna by Amaushumgalanna were “eminently storable and enduring.” The storehouse, the *gipar* of Inanna’s “house” in Uruk, was the appropriate place then for the “Sacred Marriage” of “the man” (*lū*) and his divine lover.

The poem opens with “the man” who gathers dates (*lū-zú-lum-ri-ri-ge*) by (apparently) ascending the date palm (*mu-nim-mar*, the Emešal dialectal variant for *gish-gish-sim-mar*). He also brings Inanna water, the seeds of black emmer, and a great heap of precious stones. (The jewels are positioned over the body of the goddess, literally from head to toe, with a certain emphasis on her genitals.) The forty-seven line poem calls “the man” an *en*, Dumuzi, “shepherd of An,” groom and sheep-breeder of Enlil—as is often the case, connecting the two realms of shepherd and farmer-gardener. He meets Inanna at the door to the storehouse, where she makes the decision to accept him. In her joy Inanna sings, dances and sends a message to her father, to prepare her house for the wedding. The poem ends with the sweet pleasure she feels when Amaushumgalanna is brought to her “flowered bed,” where hands and hearts meet.
As was predicted by Jacobsen, the poem that identified Dumuzi as Amaushumgalanna is filled with pure joy, with no hint at all of the tragic aftermath of the Dumuzi cycle. In Gilgamesh’s list of Ishar’s lovers, just the opposite is the case. Tammuz, the lover of Ishtar’s youth, in Gilgamesh’s commentary, is reduced to the annual lamentation over the lover’s death demanded by Ishtar herself.

[Fig.22: “Uruk III Temple.” after Heinrich (detail, redrawn)]

The Importance of Writing

The invention of writing in Sumer, perhaps first in Uruk, was important from the start in organizing the city. The various uses of writing developed at different times. By the Seleucid Period, the study of an immense collection of astronomical omens was, for example, the most prestigious of scholarly pursuits. Literature was not among the earliest uses. The earliest version of “The Early Dynastic Hymn to Gilgamesh” so far discovered goes back almost to the time of his purported reign in Uruk.

[See “Illustrations”: Fig. 23: The Earliest Gilgamesh Text, Biggs, IAS #278 (Early Dynastic Period)]
The different uses of writing and the approximate date of their first appearance in Mesopotamia are charted below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Early Uses of Writing in Mesopotamia&lt;sup&gt;298&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Periods in Which the Text Type is Found</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uruk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Timeline</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3000 BCE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Type of Text</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lexical Lists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal documents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Royal Inscriptions”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literary Texts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Records</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Law Codes”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Date of Composition

While some clay tablets are dated and signed by their scribes (or copyists), an assigning an exact date of the composition of *Gilgamesh* is very difficult. Since Gilgamesh-related texts were written in the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BCE and especially (in Akkadian) in the early 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium, establishing a date for the final redaction is problematic. If the author of the “standard” Akkadian *Gilgamesh* was Sin-leqi-unninnī (“Moon God, Hear My Prayer”),

the standard edition would have been written in the late 2nd millennium, sometime between the 13th and 11th centuries.298 The best manuscripts are from 1st millennium, from 7th century Nineveh in Assyria.

The Author of *Gilgamesh*

The ancients considered a certain Sin-lēqi-unnini the author of *Gilgamesh*. Little is known about him, but centuries later important persons in Uruk claimed him as a famous ancestor. The name itself is a request that the Moon God Sin “accept his prayer.”299 It was a common practice to give a person a “theophoric” name, the name of a god or goddess with, as this one, an implied request for protection or help. The practice can lead to problems for the modern reader. Since such names are written with the sign for deity, DINGIR, at the beginning, it sometime happens that the name means the person is divine or has been deified. (The Babylonian king Hammurabi stopped the practice in mid-career, apparently signifying that he was not to be considered a god.) Sometimes the sheer number of names beginning with a certain god name indicates that the worship of that god has become widespread. The number of names beginning with the god Anu in one period, for example, suggests a rise in prestige of the god.

No such interpretation has been given to the name Sin-lēqi-unnini. The god Sin (Su-en, Sumerian Nanna) was the chief god of Uruk’s neighbor Ur. There is no evidence that Ur or its god were particularly prominent at the time of Sin-lēqi-unnini’s composition of *Gilgamesh*, that is, late in the 2nd millennium BCE.

Sin-lēqi-unnini is listed as the author of the “series” *Gilgamesh* in a most interesting catalogue of works and authors.300 There he is called a mash-mash, an incantation priest or exorcist, possibly a learned physician, the break at the end of the line probably placed him with the others in that section of the catalogue, as an “expert.” The catalogue gives a unique glimpse into the prestige of writing and authors. The parts of the catalogue are arranged hierarchically, beginning with works attributed to the high god Ea, then works credited to the most prominent of the “sages,” Oannes or Adapa. From there, human “experts” dominate the list. Most are lamentation-priests and scholars or various sort. It may be significant that the first complete entry cites the literature of the gala (Akkadian kalû) and the mash-mash (Akkadian mashmashshu). These were not only the learned works supposedly composed by Enki/Ea, magician and “crafty” god who is so important in Tablet 11 of *Gilgamesh*. They are also the works “experts” like Sin-lēqi-unnini had to master. Sin-lēqi-unnini’s descendents were mainly masters in these same areas of expertise.

That these were prestigious positions in the 1st millennium is indicated by the high status of descendents of Sin-lēqi-unnini in Uruk. A certain Ibni-Ishtar, for example, was gala of Ishtar-of-Uruk but also ērib-štī of Nanaya (one who is cleared to enter the sanctuary of the goddess), shangû (“pontiff”) of another goddess, Uṣur-amāssu, and “scribe of Eanna.”301 Another descendent, Nabû-usshallim, was also a gala, a shangû, and a scribe of Eanna.302 Two of his descendents were galamāhu—head of the galas—in their time.303 Yet another, Simbar-Shipak, was gala and scribe of Nanaya and also ērib-štī of
Kanisurra. The tradition continued into Hellenistic times, when descendents were prominently *galas* and sometimes *āshipus*.

**From the (Sumerian) South to the (Assyrian) North**

“I Am of Uruk”

The earliest collections of cuneiform texts excavated in the 19th century were found in Assyrian territory, and it is becoming increasingly clear that the archives discovered then—especially the “Library (or properly the Libraries) of Assurbanipal”—were quite unique. We know that King Assurbanipal pressured his empire for copies of a great variety of tablets. A letter from the scribal school located in the southern city of Borsippa to Assurbanipal praises the king for his understanding of the “scribal art” and indicates the willingness of the scribes to “strain and toil day and night” copying texts. Some 25,000 tablets and fragments have been recovered from the Assurbanipal’s city of Nineveh. The variety of texts makes the collection unusual: copies of older tablets, historical inscription, state documents, and “literary” texts. But even with the extensive records from Assyria, it is still difficult to detect what made Assyria different from their neighbors in the south, the Babylonians.

Now that an international team of Assyriologists is editing and translating the vast collections of Assyrian writings and art historians are closely examining Assyrian visual art, the particular character of Assyrian culture is beginning to shine through the traditional (usually southern) material. The large reliefs of warfare and hunting that greeted visitors to Assyrian palaces have long been recognized for their excellence in representing, e.g., lions hunted by the king or the grim business of siege warfare. Many of the individual motifs are quite old, some, like the ruler with his bow, going back to early Uruk. (The date palm was an important motif, as we have seen, though there is some question if the many palms that far north were actually fertile.)

There are signs, though, that the Assyrian king differed from his southern counterparts in a number of ways. Assyrian texts emphasize the king’s role as high priest. Assyrian royal inscriptions regularly mention the king’s *šangûtu*, that is, his priest-ship, at it were, before introducing the achievements of his kingship. The goddess Ishtar was especially important in Assyrian religion, as she was in the south. That gives some indication of the incredibly widespread influence of Uruk’s Great Goddess.

“Assurbanipal’s Hymn to Ishtar of Nineveh” describes the goddess in her temple, Emashmash, which the king, clothed in clean garments and a “magnificent robe” (*labish rabûti*), enters and offers wine and beer. The goddess Ishtar—identified with Mulissu and the “Lady of Nineveh”—then is driven in her chariot to her Akitu House (*bit akīti*), and the king accompanies her there. An inscription of Assurbanipal gives details of the procession and the king’s priestly functions in the Akitu House. After praising himself for carrying out the command of Assur and Ishtar (defeating enemies in Elam and Arabia), Assurbanipal writes of making sacrifices in Emashmash and performing rites in the Akitu
House. He forced the kings of Elam and Arabia to “grasp the yoke of the carriage, and they drew it under me as far as the gate of the sanctuary.”

A letter has survived in which the question is asked if the king, in this instance Esarhaddon, Assurbanipal’s father, or the high goddess, Ishtar herself, should enter the temple first during the procession in which king and goddess return from the Akitu House to the temple. That the question of priority should arise in the first case is an indication of the exalted status of the Assyrian king.

Underscoring the importance of Ishtar (and also the priest-king) for the Assyrians is the tendency to identify her as Mulissu and Ninlil, “the Mother of the Great Gods” and the consort of the highest divine being, Assur. Both “Assurbanipal’s Hymn to Ishtar of Nineveh” and the inscription above make that connection.

Esarhaddon, according to one tablet, was given “long days and eternal years” by Ishtar of Arbela. The goddess claims to be both midwife and wet nurse to the king, who is also praised as the “legitimate heir of Ninlil,” wife of the most powerful of the old Sumerian gods, Enlil. Assurbanipal’s hymn to Ishtar of Nineveh and Arbela goes even further. In that text he claims descent from Assur. He “knew neither human father nor mother” (which must have surprised them); rather he “grew up on” his “goddesses’ knees.” Ishtar as Lady of Nineveh is “the goddess who bore me;” as Lady of Arbela she “created me.”

So striking is this Assyrian metaphor of the king as offspring of the highest deities that Sumerologist Thorkild Jacobsen saw in it the evidence of a large paradigm shift in the relationship of human and divine, with the king as a mediating figure between the two realms. Where the Sumerian king had been seen, like Dumuzi, the lover of Inanna, the Assyrian king claims a different, though no less intimate and powerful relationship, the divine son.

Assyrian palace reliefs show the king enthroned in the territories he is conquering, sometimes receiving booty the way temples received spoils of war ostensibly for the gods and goddesses whose houses the temple were thought to be.

One of the great annual rituals in both north and south took place in and around a special sanctuary, the Akitu House referred to in the texts above. While it has been known for some time that the Assyrians adopted much of the ancient and prestigious southern religious imagery and practices, only recently have scholars begun to notice that the practices themselves may have served different purposes for the Assyrians than for their Babylonian rivals. Beate Pongratz-Leisten considers the Neo-Assyrian transfer of the akitu-festival to have served, as did other matters, a very different imperial theme. Sennacherib, who transferred the theology of Babylon’s Marduk to the Assyrian Assur after the king’s destruction of the Babylonian capital, also introduced the akitu-festival into the north. Close analysis of the texts show that, unlike the Babylonian ritual, in which the gods of the cities under Babylonian control traveled to the center of the empire, to the temple of Marduk (thought to inhabit the center of the universe), where the Babylonian
king entered the sanctuary to be ritually beaten and made to confess that he had brought no harm to the empire, the Assyrian version had the king—or his garments—traveling to the remote sites of the expanding Assyrian empire, a centripetal rather than centrifugal treatment of space. In locations both inside the Assyrian heartland and on the expanding periphery of the empire, the Assyrian *akitu*-festivals were marked by the presence of the king (or his garments) and the processions from the temple, the heart of the city, to the Akitu House located outside the city. As the example of Assurbanipal’s triumphant progress from Emashmash in Nineveh to the Akitu House beyond it shows, the display of captured Elamite and Arabian kings pulling Assurbanipal’s carriage vividly and publicly illustrates the exaltation of the king and the expanding empire. Pongratz-Leisten concludes that

> With the exception of the city of Aššur, it is not the national god Aššur who is the central figure of the cultic events. Rather, the Assyrian king is at the centre, accompanied by the respective patron-god whose blessing the king receives after the *akitu*-festival. In Assyria, the net of power is not produced by the visiting gods coming from the periphery to the centre of the empire, but the Assyrian king departs from the centre toward the periphery.\(^{317}\)

Neo-Assyrian prophetic texts regularly claim that the oracles are the “words of Ishtar.” Simo Parpola, who has edited the prophecies, thinks that the Assyrians considered Assur not just the king of the gods, as Marduk was for the Babylonians to the south, but “the only, universal God” and “the totality of gods,” a monotheistic deity beyond human comprehension.\(^{318}\) The vast multitude of gods and goddesses were reconceived as aspects of the one Assur. Ishtar, Parpola contends, reveals Assur in his “mother aspect.”\(^{319}\) And she is regularly paired with the mother goddess Mulissu. The reports of the prophets and prophetesses are written in the mother tongue, pure Neo-Assyrian.\(^{320}\) In one striking case, a prophetess from Arbela, Dunnaša-amur, alludes to the Urukian hero, Gilgamesh, identifying with him in his agonizing search for eternal life. The prophecy, giving words of encouragement to Assurbanipal, opens with a recognition of the power of Mullissu and the Lady of Arbela, that is, Ishtar. They are the “strongest among the gods.” The poet/prophet then describes her difficult journey.

> I roam the desert desiring your life. I cross over rivers and oceans, I traverse mountains and mountain chains, I cross over all rivers. Droughts and showers consume me and affect my beautiful figure. I am worn out, my body is exhausted for your sake.\(^{321}\)

Immediately after this she speaks in the voice of the goddess.

> I have ordained life for you in the assembly of al the gods. My arms are strong, they shall not forsake you before the gods. My shoulders are alert, they will keep carrying you.
It is not merely for political advantage—as a recognition that Uruk stood with Assyria against the Babylonians—then, that Inanna/Ishtar is said to speak in one of the few poems composed in the Assyrian dialect, in praise of her city, Uruk. Called “Psalm in Praise of Uruk” by its editor and translator, Alasdair Livingstone, it might well have been called, after its first line, “I Love Uruk.”

Uruk; I love ditto, I love Eanna, my nuptial chamber!
Ditto; I love (its) ziggurat, house of my pleasure!322

The poet then goes on to name the cities, mainly from the south, also beloved by Inanna: Babylon, Borsippa, Ezida, Shapazzu, Cutha, Der, Kish, and then the Assyrian cities of the north, Assur, Nineveh, Arbel, Calah, and Harran.

The poem then takes a somewhat different turn, repeating the praise of southern cities once again, in the order they were mentioned in the first part, but with some elaboration. The Assyrian cities are not included in the second part of the poem. (The lines include a play on the shape of the cuneiform sign for “love,” AG, which originally depicted a fire set inside a container, i.e., an oven, with the “fires” of the cities, temples, gods and goddesses that together identified the sacred houses.) In the case of Uruk and other cities, the formula employed by the poet is that the “fires” consume her, constantly plucking at the goddess’s heart.

Following the long Sumerian tradition, Uruk is identified with the “house” of the Great Goddess, Eanna, and the sacred mountain, the first of its kind, the ziggurat called the “house” of her pleasure.

**Uruk: When the City Had Been Pillaged**

Even when the Assyrians were most respectful of the Sumero-Babylonian traditions of the south, they were capable of initiating—or at least registering—changes to the tradition. Alasdair Livingstone emphasized that the Assyrian hymns to cities appear to be a native Assyrian development.323 No real parallels among Babylonian literature have appeared. Yet they may, like the poem praising Uruk, be a development of a very early literature in the Sumerian language, hymns to temples, from the time when the temple was so central to the city that the two institutions were virtually identified with one another. A striking example of the process can be seen in a Sumerian “canonical lamentation” called from its incipit “Uru Amirabi,” translated as “That City which has been Pillaged.” Mark E. Cohen has carefully edited the text from the thirteen Old Babylonian and twenty-six 1st millennium BCE versions that have survived. Many of the 1st millennium texts are bilingual, providing the Sumerian with an interlinear Akkadian translation.324 The vast majority of 1st millennium versions were found in Assyria.

The frame of “Uru Amirabi” is maintained throughout the tradition. A city has been devastated by the very gods who have been dedicated to its preservation. In this case the city is Kulaba, the ancient quarter that was absorbed into the expanding Uruk at a very early period. It is, like Uruk itself, the special concern of Inanna, whose Eanna temple complex was considered her house. But Inanna and other of the high gods of Sumer are
arrayed against the city: Enlil, Ninlil, An, and Nudimmud (Enki). As with many of the Sumerian city laments, it is not entirely clear why the gods have been angered and have turned upon the people. The poem opens abruptly with the terrible sense of loss.

That city which has been pillaged! Oh its children!
Mother hierodule, that city which has been pillaged! Oh its children!
Kullaba, that city which has been pillaged! Oh its children!
Hierodule of heaven, Inanna!
Destroyer of the mountain, lady of the Eanna!
She who causes the heavens to rumble, lady of the gipar!
Lillaenna, lady of the cattle pen and sheepfold!
Mother of Uruk, Ninsun!
Its children! Its adults!
Its children who had been tenderly cared for!
Its adults who had traversed the highways!
That destroyed city which has been carried off from me!
That destroyed house which has been carried off from me!
That (city) whose destruction has been ordered.
That (city), the killing (of whose people) has been ordered.
That (city) whose lady decided to leave when the destruction came forth. 325

The parallelism that is so conspicuous a feature of Sumerian poetry causes problems for the modern reader, since it tends to identify the very things it names differently. The “city” is also the “house.” The “mother” is the “destroyer.” The lady who orders the destruction is the one who decides to leave when the destruction begins. Uruk and Kullaba, the Eanna and its most sacred interior, the gipar, are all variations on the same theme. Parallelism can be confusing in the way it treats different beings as if they were identical. The “hierodule of heaven” is a very traditional epithet of Inanna. She is presumably also “mother hierodule” whose children are the citizens of Uruk. All of the opening lines may refer to Inanna, though Lillaenna, “lady of the cattle pen and sheepfold,” sometimes has an identity apart from Inanna, and Ninsun, “Mother of Uruk,” famous in Mesopotamian literature as the mother of Gilgamesh, is usually quite a separate entity. Where no Sumerian texts would identify the great gods Enlil, An, and Nudimmud, who are named in the next passage as the ones who have turned against the city, the goddesses are often “aspects” of one central formation, sometimes a “mother” goddess primarily, more often Inanna, who from the earliest texts had separate rites that differentiated four different “aspects.”

Even more puzzling for the modern reader is the identification of the speaker in this passage and a parallel passage326 that uses identical language but makes it clear that Inanna herself is lamenting the fate of her city.

Chaos has entered the normally well-ordered city. The slave wields a weapon; the wife deserts the family; the young man and the young woman are sick. Lice, flying crows beset the city, which is being destroyed by both fire and “a high flood, like waters which have never been known.”327 Everyone is affected, patrician and plebian, shepherd and farmer, the one who travels by boat along the canal, and the one who travels the highways with
his chariot. These formal, usually binary oppositions read very powerfully in the Sumerian, but they are unlikely to furnish any particulars about an actual lament. Is “Uru Amirabi” the account of a single historical event? That seems unlikely. The conventional features of city laments suggest that it is a mythic event that may have once occurred or may recur at intervals but is more likely the anxiety under which the citizens who keep the sacred house always live.

And just as it is difficult to suggest a specific historical event, it is difficult in such a mythic narrative to assign a cause or causes of the city’s devastation. Sumerian myths are notorious for plunging right into an action without explaining its causes. The causes, if made explicit at all, are explained later. (Not surprisingly, the first parts and last parts of compositions written on clay are frequently damaged, and when the end of a composition is missing the point of the work is often difficult to reconstruct.)

“Uru Amirabi” is a composition of over 500 lines. In spite of the many fragments that have survived, the end of the work has not yet been recovered. One of the earlier editors of the work, Miguel Civil, pointed out that “balag-poems” such as this one (the balag is the instrument used in the performance of the poem) consists of blocks of text that are repeated in the same poem, in other balag-poems and in other, related types of compositions. Thus it is difficult to establish the correct sequence of blocks even when, in Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian times, the texts were standardized and arranged in a fixed sequence. (That is why Mark Cohen calls his collection “canonical lamentations.”)

As Cohen reconstructs the poem, after a long passage that lists not only the powers of Inanna but her seven powerful names, names that cause singers from singing and writers from writing and maintain awe in the other priests who serve her (gala, abru), the last intelligible lines swerve from the main point, that Inanna has been installed as “the hierodule” (mugig, Emesal for nugig). The last eighteen lines, before the break at the end of the composition, reinforces only the loss of Inanna, the hierodule and “princess” (gashan), who no longer reveals herself. She no longer comes out of her sacred places. Her angry heart still “rains down fire upon the rebellious land” as well as “bearing the heavenly light” that might possibly signal a turn in the poem. The broken ending of the poems, then, does not make it clear if Uruk recovers when Inanna’s anger is assuaged.

It is difficult to tell from the center of the poem what prompted Inanna’s anger and the subsequent withdrawal of her power to protect the city.

The poem is, though, without a doubt a very strong, often reiterated affirmation of the cosmic stature and power of Inanna. Within this larger affirmation, the First Millennium—primarily Assyria—added a most intriguing central episode. In this episode a girl, a maidservant who is called the “mother of sin,” is ritually punished for violating the holiest of holy places in the gipar, where the throne and bed of Inanna were long the central symbols of her powers.
The episode is not entirely unprepared for in the older (Old Babylonian) versions of the poem. Inanna laments that something has been taken from her city. (“He who is aware of the property has expropriated it from me.”) Her city has been turned upside down. The potter breaks his own pots. The wet nurse “pours out wails in the street.” Inanna’s clothing is stripped from her. The canal inspector smashes “the pots,” the farmer returns to her with an empty basket, and at night thieves break into homes. The sequence in Inanna’s lament ends with grieving about her “slave girl” and “maidservant.” In a brief (six-line) section that follows, the servant girl and the manservant who are usually stationed at their posts, are no longer there. Clearly the robbery of the treasures in her house causes her to lament her loss, but it is not clear that the servants are responsible for the chaos in Uruk.

Then, after a large break of approximately 400 lines in the Old Babylonian material, the First Millennium material is Seeed. Miguel Civil, who had translated a short segment of this material, begins with the lines that would seem to be another speech of Inanna. Cohen translates the line,

I am of Uruk. I am of Uruk. I am the young woman. I am of Uruk.329

But Cohen adds a series of admittedly broken lines before this one that makes the identification of the speaker problematic. There is no question that Inanna and Dumuzi are primary figures in the first part of this First Millennium addition to the poem. The epithets that make up most of the lines identify the “young woman of Uruk,” the “lady” and “scribe of Arali”330 as the figure who is prominent in the Sumerian “Descent of Inanna to the Underworld” as the sister of Dumuzi, Geshtinanna.331

The passage clearly indicates that the speaker is a “bride of Uruk” who is also “the wet nurse of Kullaba.” She asks, “why do I wear a veil?” and “why do I sing a lullaby.” While this may refer to Inanna—since the poem does imagine a motherly role for the goddess and Assyrian kings, as we have seen, sometimes imagined themselves the offspring of Inanna332— the young girl who is the bride is apparently quite surprised to be the mother, the one “who gave birth to him.” (The “him” is not a clear reference to a figure in Mesopotamian mythology.)

To reinforce the identification of the young girl as Geshtinanna, the poem then explicitly refers in a long series of lines to the festival of her brother, Dumuzi, who is with Gilgamesh and Ningishzida, “his peers,” in the underworld.

I, the young woman, cannot sleep because of my brother who is lying down like a wild bull.
I, the young woman, cannot sleep because of Dumuzi who is lying down like a wild bull.
Will not someone replace the holy corpse, the clean corpse. I am the young woman.
Will not someone replace the one whose donkeys have been set loose? I am the young woman.333
In the Sumerian mythological tradition, it is Dumuzi’s sister, Geshtinanna herself, who accepts the role as a substitute for Dumuzi. In the conclusion to “The Descent of Inanna to the Underworld,” Inanna pronounces the sister’s fate.

“Now, alas, you and your sister—
You—half the year, your sister—half the year,
The day you are asked for, that day you will be seized,
The day your sister is asked for, that day you will be set free.”

The substitute par excellence is provided with a substitute for half the year. “The Descent of Inanna” does not make explicit the reason the sister is selected for this role, nor does it make the substitution a voluntary self-sacrifice.

The Dumuzi-Geshtinanna section in “Uru Amirabi” is followed, in Cohen’s edition, with one of the most striking First Millennium additions to the poem. In the section, a figure who is called the “maidservant” (gi₄-in) is accused of wrongdoing and punished. The woman has committed an ám-gig (Emesal for níg-gig) and is ritually killed. In a frenzy, in “ecstasy,” the woman committed a terrible wrong. Ironically, the woman’s offense reflects the most conspicuous characteristics of Inanna herself, symbolized by the throne of power and her bed. The woman sat upon Inanna’s throne and had both intercourse and fellatio in Inanna’s bed.

Besides being called a “maidservant” (or slave) and “girl” (ki-sikil), the woman is consistently referred to as the “mother of sin,” ama-na-ám-tag-ga.

Inanna, referred to in this section as the “lady of heaven” and the “lady of heaven in Zabalam,” is outraged. The narrator calls for an audience in the city, where the “mother of sin” will be punished.

Come! Let’s go! Let’s go!
As for us, let’s go to the city!
Let’s go to the city to see!
Let’s go to the city, to Kullaba!
Let’s go to the brickwork of Uruk!
Let’s go to the brickwork of Zabalam!
Let’s go to the Hursagkalama!
Let’s go to the Eturkalama!
To the city! To the city! (Let’s go) to the brickwork of Tintir!

What follows is an extraordinary ritual drama, to be observed by the citizens. At first the wrongdoer is “set on a dust heap.” Then, with death in her eye, Inanna shouts, grabs the “mother of sin” by the forelock, and throws her from the wall. Four attendants complete the ritual.

Let the shepherd kill her with his staff!
Let the gala-priest kill her with his drum!
Let the potter kill her with his pitcher!
Let the cult dancer killer her with his dagger and knife!
Chapter One: Prologues and Epilogues

Of the four players, the kurgarra (in Emesal, kur-mar-ra) alone is traditionally involved in ritual play that suggests (or actually involves) such violence. 339 The shepherd’s crook and the potter’s pitcher are less likely weapons. It is surprising that the group includes a shepherd and a potter, two figures of some importance to the community no doubt, but who almost never appear in Mesopotamian rituals. The gala, on the other hand, though three different mythological texts claim that the god Enki created the gala, they are consistent in claiming that Enki created them for Inanna. And the extensive use of the Emesal dialect in this piece is usually associated with rituals involving this most important priest. 340

Influence of the First City

As kingship came to dominate the political life of Sumerian cities in the 3rd millennium BCE, the city of Nippur also rose to prominence. Nippur, home to the “King of the Gods,” Enlil and his spouse Ninlil, functioned as something like the Vatican for Sumer. It was for many centuries the center of a league of cities. Not surprisingly, at Nippur excavators found many documents that indicate the importance of the city, among them lists of literary works used in the education of scribes.

After a first hymn to Eridu’s god Enki, the next six hymns in the collection of Temple Hymns are devoted to Nippur deities: Enlil, Ninlil, Nusku, Ninurta, Shuzianna, and Ninhursag. 341 But Inanna had an important influence on the center as well.

A very unusual group of seal impressions from a period earlier than the rise of Nippur suggests that Uruk had functioned in much the same way as the “Kengir League” with its center in Nippur. Jar sealings from archaic Jemdet Nasr and Ur (and one from Uruk). The oldest are from the period of Uruk III, and with one exception were found at Jemdat Nasr. 342 The sealings turn out to be icons of major cities in Sumer. Each city had its distinctive, complicated and stylized symbol. A seal impression from Ur contains 13 cases. It is still difficult to identify all the cities on these sealings, as many as twenty. Those of Ur, Larsa, Zabalam, Urum2, Kesh, and a certain BU.BU.NA2 have, however, been identified. 343

The example from archaic Ur is useful in that it contains at least 13 cities. (Some cases contain symbols of more than one city.) 344
From city seals Piotr Steinkeller has been able to a league of cities older than Nippur—with Uruk at its center. As Steinkeller reconstructs the scene, documents that were mainly receipts for goods, mainly foodstuffs, that were collected in the cities and sent to Uruk. In Uruk they went to the “triple goddess” of Uruk, who could be none other than Inanna. Offerings were made to three of the four aspects of Inanna in Uruk IV and III. (Inanna Kur, the fourth aspect, did not receive offerings.) In other words, the sealings provide more evidence than before that Uruk in its period of greatest productivity (and size of population) deeply influenced the economy of a wide area, even the northern cities of Urum and Jemdat Nasr. Steinkeller considers it a “supra city-state institution.”

Steinkeller’s conclusion is very striking indeed.

...sometime at the beginning of the Early Dynastic period, the original Urukean organization underwent a dramatic transformation, by which its focal point was transferred from Uruk to Nippur. Such a development appears to be entirely plausible, for there exists independent evidence of the rise, roughly at that time, of Enlil to the position of the head of the Sumerian pantheon, which was concomitant with the decline of the importance of the cults of Enki and Inanna. Undoubtedly, this religious transformation reflected political changes which had taken place either at the end of the Uruk period or at the very beginning of Early Dynastic times: the ascendance of the city of Kish and its region to power, as a
result of which the center of gravity of Babylonian politics had moved from the area of Uruk and Eridu to the region of Nippur.\textsuperscript{348}

The association between Inanna and Enki, Uruk and Eridu, was close during the period of Uruk’s greatest productivity (and independence). It is interesting that Steinkeller notes the ascendance of Kish in the rise of Nippur. The only military operation that was celebrated in the stories of Gilgamesh was his defeat of an invading Kish. Later, the city of Agade or Akkad would claim the mantle of kingship from Kish. The interpretation of \textit{Gilgamesh} offered here is that many centuries after the events that were recalled in Gilgamesh poems Urukeans preserved traces of their glorious heritage, religious, political and military (though the last aspect was largely mythologized as Gilgamesh’s victories over demonic enemies.) The historical Gilgamesh, if such a figure can be reconstructed, stood at the very crisis Steinkeller details. The First Prologue of \textit{Gilgamesh} recalls just that moment of greatest glory for an institution that had persisted for perhaps a thousand years before its most famous \textit{en} and king, Gilgamesh. The Second Prologue will pick up on the kingly aspect of the hero.

One might notice that the icon of Uruk does not appear in the Ur sealing above. The Proto-cuneiform sign of Uruk looked like this:\textsuperscript{349}

![Fig. 26: After Labat (1976) #195, UNUG sign (redrawn)](image)

Variations of this sign are conspicuous among the city seals. One city seal, without the scratch marks inside the picture, has rising sun at the top; another has a serpent; others have birds on the wing. They may be additional features that identify the city as a variation of City itself. (The sign for Uruk is UNUG.).

Why, if Uruk was so important to a league of cities, the recipient of goods, does its icon not appear among the many city seals? Steinkeller thinks that the “owner” of the seal was based outside the cities that are represented. As the “focus and beneficiary of the system” Uruk does not appear among the seals because it received, rather than gave, the goods that were sealed for transport to the First City.

\textbf{The Second (Earlier) Prologue: Tablet 1, Lines 29-50, 51-55}

Surpassing other kings, famous, powerfully built, hero, child of Uruk, rampaging wild bull, he leads the way, he marches in the rear as one the brothers trust.
A mighty floodwall to protect his men,
a battering floodwave that knocks the stone walls flat,
Wild Bull of Lugalbanda, Gilgamesh is the very model of strength,
calf of that great Wild Cow, the goddess Ninsun.

Gilgamesh, tall, dazzling, terrifying,
opener of upland passes,
digger of wells on the mountain slopes,
he crossed the ocean, the wide sea, as far as the rising of Shamash.

He is the one who searched for life the world over,
who through sheer force reached the Distant One, Utanapishtim,
who restored the sacred places the Flood destroyed,
and set up rites for humankind.

Who can rival his kingship
and say like Gilgamesh, “I am King?”
Gilgamesh was his name from the day he was born,
2/3rd god, 1/3rd human.

The Great Goddess drew the image of his body
While Nudimmud made his stature perfect. (1:29-50)

Lines 51-55 are very fragmented, but it is clear that they continue the description of Gilgamesh. The lines refer to his stature, body, foot, leg, thumb, cheeks, locks and height—that is, his handsome and powerful body from bottom to top. Not only are his feet large and legs exceptionally long, his stride is immense. On he other hand, he is bearded, and the locks of his hair are as “thick as a field of grain.” Tall and strong, he is ideally handsome.

These are not so much thumbnails of stories but are rather epithets that identify a person (or thing—like a temple) in a certain way. The older version continues with Gilgamesh as one who opened passes in the mountains and dug wells on the slopes of hills, and crossed the ocean. These are some of the oldest epithets we know—from even earlier than the Old Babylonian poem. The earliest lines about Gilgamesh found so far—in very early Sumerian—describe Gilgamesh in this way. Our Gilgamesh goes on to identify a reason for the long and difficult journey. Now we hear that Gilgamesh searched the word for the “life,” forcing himself even to the land where the wise man, Utanapishtim, still lives. Utanapishtim is a figure like Noah, and his story of the great flood appears in Gilgamesh in Tablet 11, as we shall see. When John Gardner and I translated Gilgamesh in the late 1970s, we did not have the lines that tell us that, having found Utanapishtim, Gilgamesh restored the temples that were destroyed by the flood and set in place the “rites of the cosmos” that had presumably been lost also in the flood. This makes Gilgamesh a true culture hero and a sage close to the gods.

These new epithets are followed by something a little more conventional for a hero. Gilgamesh was the very model of a king. We will return later to the question of
Gilgamesh's kingship, but in these opening lines it is worth mentioning that the nearly godlike Gilgamesh is a great warrior and sage, but he is only “2/3rds god,” and, in the end a mortal like the rest of us.

King Gilgamesh

A Gilgamesh scholar used the phrase, “King Gilgamesh,” at least fourteen times on two pages of introduction to the hero of the poem—far more often than Gilgamesh is called “king” in the entire poem. There is no question he was considered a Sumerian king. Very likely he is the prototypical Urukean sovereign, and that the careful combination of en and lugal in the Sumerian Gilgamesh poems represents a moment of crisis in the governance of Uruk. Some kind of emerging concept of kingship is announced in the Old Babylonian prologue to an Akkadian heroic narrative. The author of Gilgamesh retained it. Like a briqueteur the author faces the edifice with another prologue and another emphasis. It is possible that the Akkadian—rather than the Sumerian—Gilgamesh in the Old Babylonian period slanted toward a Semitic tradition of a strong chieftainship. Even if that is the case, Gilgamesh qualifies that tradition by reinserting very old Urukean traditions that were, I believe, were never erased from the First City.

What complicates the reading of the Second Prologue for us is that we carry around a view of kingship that is neither “Babylonian” and Semitic nor “Urukean” and Sumerian. It may have been formed in the individual reader by King Arthur or George III, Alexander the Great or Augustus, Harun ar-Rashid or Elizabeth I. The biblical story about the institution of kingship in ancient Israel is one such element in our view of the sovereign. It contains a remarkable and, as far as I know, unique debate about whether kingship is even desirable. People cry out for a king so that they can be like other nations. God and his prophet are more than doubtful, and the first selection, Saul, is a mess. His successor, David, is better, but hardly perfect. I rather think that the sequence of Saul—David—Solomon leads to a model king, one who supports a temple and priesthood as much as he rules from a palace. I may be wrong in that reading of the biblical text, but one basic element of ancient Semitic kingship is reinforced in the story: the importance of patrimonialism. The institution is regularized once a legitimate male offspring succeeds his father.

The patrimonial principle is established in The Sumerian King List, which may derive from a northern tradition (the city-state of Kish), perhaps even a Semitic tradition (of Akkad), but the Urukean part of it is problematic. Until Gilgamesh is identified as the son of Lugalbanda and Gilgamesh’s very ordinary descendents are listed, the patrimonial order is at best uncertain. The dynasties that follow Uruk—Akkad, Ur, Isin, Larsa, Babylon and the like—emphasize patrilineal descent. Change of dynasty, when it occurs, is explained in the simplest possible way: force of arms.

We have noticed that, to give kingship its due, literature began with royal inscriptions. True writing is century older than the strong kingship that gives scholars the characterization of an era as “Presargonic” (i.e., before the king, Sargon of Akkad, who forged the first true empire) and as “Early Dynastic” (for reasons of lineage). Early kings
did not necessarily love their parents. Shulgi of Ur seems to have erased his human father, Ur-Namma, from his respect. The earliest literary works are “royal inscriptions,” and sometimes they are as simple as the writing of the king’s name. Before the narratives of Gilgamesh and other figures of First Dynasty Uruk the “inscriptions” probably hold little interest for readers of World Literature, but they do establish that a decisively new era had begun.

Details of the history of kings in Mesopotamia, where they touch upon Uruk, will come later. At this point it is important only to see the striking turn from a First Prologue to a Second, which celebrates a prototypical kingship.

Key Words/Figures: Bull, Cow and Child

Not surprisingly, the more than a thousand years separating the historical Gilgamesh and the standard series of Gilgamesh stories show that interests in the hero had changed. The differences can be seen in a comparison between the metaphors and figures employed in earlier and later versions of the story. In an Old Babylonian version from the early 2nd millennium BCE (about a thousand years before the standard texts), the poem opens differently from the one with which we are familiar. The later version adds some 28 lines at the beginning of the poem, lines that have the effect of framing the collection as a whole.

Two powerful metaphors are found in these lines. Gilgamesh is the “son” not only of the human Lugalbanda and the goddess Ninsun, but he is also the “offspring” of the city of Uruk itself. Three different Akkadian terms are used for his sonship: lillidu of Uruk, emu (we think, the text is not entirely clear) of Lugalbanda, and maru of the goddess. This triplet gives us a glimpse of Akkadian poetic practice. Where Sumerian poetry tended to repeat epithets, Akkadian practice was to provide variety. Each of these terms means something a little different, but they all emphasize his sonship. Perhaps to us the first one is the most surprising: “son” of the city. But to Mesopotamia this was a very ancient—and most interesting—metaphor. Both Sumerian and Akkadian writers used the logogram DUMU to describe what we would call the “citizen” of a city. Literally the citizen (a word derived from city and civilization) is a child of the institution we take for granted. In the case of Gilgamesh, he was the “son” of the first city in history, Uruk.

Wild and Tame Animals

It is useful to consider our modern eating habits in light of cultural and historical differences that separate us from ancient Mesopotamia. It is safe to say that for most of us the connection between the food we eat and the physical environment that produced it is no longer very obvious. When we can buy processed food, sometimes already prepared, in brightly lighted, air-conditioned supermarkets that are open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, stores that bring in fresh food from across the globe, it is easy to forget what ancients who lived even in the largest cities could never ignore: that their survival depended upon the transformation of humanity that agriculture and animal husbandry produced.
The world is now largely free of wild bulls and cows, and the domesticated varieties today, though still powerful and fierce, no longer lead us to wonder how humans domesticated the ferocious aurochs. The number of visual records of human heroes variously slaying bulls and feeding and protecting herds suggests that both wild and domesticated animals were part of a fascination with the civilizing process itself.

We live in an age when a tiny minority of our population actually deals with the animals that provide us with food. Most of us know beef and veal only as packaged products to be found in supermarkets.

We might remind ourselves that in a herd of domesticated cattle, bulls are expendable. In the wild the bulls will fight until the losers are driven out of the herd.

In domesticated herds, the mature, fertile bull is useful only for breeding. The ancients discovered that others could be made useful by castrating the males, leaving them powerful but docile. And we see them on Mesopotamian cylinder seal impressions as they were used to plow fields and perform other services for humans. Uruk provides many examples of the uses of bulls and cows because the temple owned so much of the stock, and domestication was validated by religion. Very young males could be killed for food or as offerings to the gods; very likely the two activities were intimately connected in Uruk, where feeding of the gods (and the personnel who kept the temple) was always a major daily activity.

By the way, Sumerian elites preferred lamb to beef, but beef nevertheless was a valued foodstuff. Probably, then as now, the main diet for the vast majority of Sumerians consisted of bread and beer, both making use of the barley that allowed Uruk to develop; meat, if part of the diet at all, was likely to be eaten only on special occasions. Only the elites of the city would taste such delicacies more frequently than that. Interestingly enough, the Sumerian story of The Bull of Heaven ends with the treatment of the dead bull (while our Gilgamesh Tablet 6 simply ignores this aspect of the story). In the Sumerian story, Gilgamesh’s mother encourages him to think about the consequences of killing The Bull of Heaven, and he vows to put every part of it to good use. He will throw the carcass in the alley and put the entrails in the main street (apparently as food for animals); give the hide to the tanner, who will make something useful out of it; “meat by the bushel” to the orphans of the city; and, in the one detail picked up in the later text, will take The Bull of Heaven’s horns into the temple. Both versions of the story show Gilgamesh performing his duties as a king, and remind us The Bull of Heaven is a threat to settled life in the city. Ironically, the Sumerian tale ends up as praise for the very goddess who has brought down the Bull upon her city. As we have seen, Gilgamesh gives the horns to his deified father, Lugalbanda. In the Sumerian version he gives the precious horns to Inanna in her Eanna temple.

The Bull of Heaven can symbolize, then, any threat to the city, but especially the threat of famine. The Sumerian story shows how Gilgamesh was able to turn the threat literally into a way to feed and protect the citizens.
The Bull of Heaven is a very special figure in the Gilgamesh stories, but first of all it is an animal (unlike Humbaba, who has the gift of speech can communicate with humans). The bull and cow were particularly important animals for the ancient world, providing milk and meat for humans (and the gods). The bull especially was large, powerful, virile, and destructive, wild and domesticated. Tamed, the animals were used in the field in a variety of ways. They were even let loose in the fields at a certain time of year to trample what remained of vegetation in order to prepare the soil for the next crop. If Mario Liverani is correct, as we have pointed out earlier, that the oxen used to plow long rows in the difficult soil of southern Mesopotamia led to the startling surpluses of grain that allowed Uruk to become the First City in history, one can see that this story of men against beast (and the gods) could hold great interest.

The Bull of Heaven would appear to capture the complexities of human interface with the natural, social, and religious environments. Tablet 6 has the most completely worked out animal metaphors in *Gilgamesh*, but the metaphor is already announced in the Second Prologue and in Shamhat’s characterization of Gilgamesh as a “wild bull” in Tablet 1.

**The Horns of Divinity**

Whatever the fascination with bulls may still remain today, their association with divinity in the ancient world was certainly widespread. Alexander the Great created quite a stir when, after a military victory in India, he raised himself (or was raised by his followers) to the status of a god. The evidence is on coins minted after the victory, where Alexander is depicted with the horns of the Egyptian god Ammon protruding from the conqueror’s forehead.

While the cuneiform sign for “god” (DINGIR, male or female) was originally the picture of a star representing the heavens (AN), a very different visual image came to represent the divine itself: the Horns of Divinity. By late in the 3rd millennium BCE a multi-horned cap had become the headdress of divinity. Up to seven pairs of horns marked a statue or other visual image as divine. Cattle were, of course, important for food, leather, and agricultural work. The urine and saliva of the bull were used for medical purposes. They were offered to the gods.

It seems likely that the enormous power and fertility of the bull derived not so much from the domesticated stock as from the aurochs (*Bos taurus*), now extinct but still alive into Neo-Assyrian times in northwest Mesopotamia. The wild bull as a symbol of the hero and the wild cow, the metaphor used in *Gilgamesh* for the hero’s mother, the goddess Ninsun, recall a creature as tall as 5’9” at the shoulders (vs. the still impressive modern domesticated strain at about 4’7”) with an enormous pair of horns. As an indication of its reputation, a monument to the last recorded aurochs, a female that died in 1627 CE, can be seen in Poland’s Jaktorów Forest.

The ferocity of the wild bull, which would attack humans as well as other creatures, is captured in the literary uses of the term (*rimu* in Akkadian, *gud-am* in Sumerian). The animals were hunted or trapped by kings, who boasted of killing them and also of
capturing them alive. In *Gilgamesh* the wild bull is mentioned some eleven times; the female equivalent is used on at least seven occasions.\textsuperscript{356} The distribution of the term in *Gilgamesh* is instructive. Occasionally it refers to the animal itself. Mainly, though, it is a metaphor used as an epithet for Gilgamesh himself, as he uses his power to oppress the citizens of Uruk. As elsewhere in Akkadian literature, it is used as an epithet of gods. This shows up in *Gilgamesh* where the god Shamash appears in a dream. The “wild cow” (*rīmtu*) is a fixed epithet of the goddess Ninsun. She is a powerful goddess in her own right—a wise figure, capable of interpreting dreams—but the epithet also carries the notion of fertility, since she is the mother of Gilgamesh.

A special Akkadian term is used for The Bull of Heaven, in Sumerian *gud-an-na* (in Akkadian *alû* and *lû*). The term occurs twelve times in Tablet 6 alone—not surprisingly, since the tablet centers on the heroic conquest of the Bull of Heaven—but ten other times in different tablets.

**Still More Bull Lore**

Bulls (and cows) were so highly regarded in the ancient world that nearly every civilization told stories, painted pictures, and incorporated them into religious rites. In Mesopotamia they became symbols of power and fertility. The horns of the great bull even provided the symbolism of godhead itself. (When “pagan” gods were vilified in the Judeo-Christian religions, the horns of the divine were turned into the symbols of the devil.)

Domesticated cattle today, although they are often impressive, are mere shadows of the animals that inspired such awe in ancient times. Today a bull might stand 1.4 meters at the withers. The bull that evolved in India some two million years ago had found its way into the Middle East by 250,000 years ago and later into Europe. The last known aurochs, as the breed is known, died in 1627 CE in Poland. The aurochs was much larger than its modern descendents. It could stand 1.75 meters high. Everywhere the wild aurochs was known it was feared for its terrifying power and its incredible mean streak: it would aggressively attack humans as well as other animals. Killing the bull was a test of manhood just as the hunting of lions would become.

Bruce Chilton has given a vivid account of a ritual—known from sources later than *Gilgamesh*—that was part of the cult of the god Mithra, originally Persian but one of the popular “mystery” religions that, like Christianity, swept through the Roman Empire from the “East.” Mystery religions offered, Chilton writes,

> Intimacy with a god or goddess (perhaps Dionysos or Isis) and personal initiation into the divine power of the deity. These initiation rites were expensive and flamboyant. The god Mithra became popular among Roman soldiers who could afford him. In Mithra’s cult, the initiate maintained a regime of fasting for weeks and repeatedly immersed himself. At the end of this period of purification, the Mithraic warrior joined in a performance that reenacted on the earth what happened in the divine realm, when the god Mithra triumph over and slaughtered the cosmic bull.
This lavish ceremony—with its decorative costumes, dance, carousing, and feasting—took place at night. At its climax, the initiate descended into a pit with an iron grate overhead. A bull was conducted onto the grate and then a priest slit its throat, drenching the initiate with the blood and excrement of the bull’s thundering death. When the initiate emerged from the pit, his fellow worshipers cried out that he was renatus in aeternum (“reborn into eternity”). All well and good if you could afford the bull (the Mercedes-Benz of sacrificial offerings), the time involved, the feasting, and the equipment—all luxuries few people could pay for or commandeer as a marauding soldier might.

We have no evidence that the Mesopotamian Bull of Heaven was considered such an object or that rituals like this or like the far more elaborate Egyptian rituals involving the Apis Bull were related to the Bull of Heaven. Still, Gilgamesh’s killing of the Bull of Heaven looks like a ritual, as is seen in the aftermath of the story in both Sumerian and Akkadian versions. That the Bull of Heaven was sent by Inanna/Ishtar when she was rejected by the human she had selected for the Sacred Marriage, that the Bull was slain and Enkidu, as we shall see, must die for the offense, intricately interlaces many elements of the myths and rituals involving the Great Goddess and her en, including the tragic death and lamentation over her first lover (and first en) Dumuzi suggest that those ancient elements could serve many different story lines.

And we should finally note, as we have seen before, that both Gilgamesh and his mother Ninsun are connected by fixed epithets to the “wild” aurochs. The Sumerian version of this story even opens with the Great Goddess addressing the hero, her selected en, as her “wild bull.”

**Early and Late Kings**

The evolution of kingship in Mesopotamia is taken up in a later chapter. Since Gilgamesh is prominent in *The Sumerian King List*, though, a brief sketch of the earliest Urukean kings in royal inscriptions and the curious idea that Gilgamesh may have been a “Babylonian” king should be mentioned here.

The Second Prologue in *Gilgamesh* credits the hero with being a king, indeed surpassing others, a model king, and illustrates his kingship with Gilgamesh’s leadership in battle. He leads the way, marches in the rear, protects his men and earns the trust of his “brothers.” He is the very image of force: both a floodwave and a floodwall. Who could hope to rival Gilgamesh?

Still, it is surprising that Gilgamesh’s most celebrated military accomplishment—defeating Akka of rival Kish—is not mentioned in the Second Prologue or anywhere else in *Gilgamesh*. The story was told in a Sumerian text that has been preserved.

Gilgamesh’s defeat of Akka is also not mentioned in the earliest royal inscriptions that have been discovered so far. There is a reference to the parent of Akka in an Early Dynastic inscription, but nothing yet on Gilgamesh and his rival.
Douglas R. Frayne collected royal inscriptions regarding Uruk before the time of Sargon the Great, that is, the period roughly 2700-2350 BCE. According to Frayne, no royal inscriptions have yet been found for the first twelve rulers of Uruk mentioned in The Sumerian King List. That would include Gilgamesh and his successors and the earlier rulers who, like Gilgamesh, figured in literary texts, figures like Enmerkar, Lugalbanda, and Dumuzi.

It is clear that both Uruk and Kullab are mentioned in the early texts. One text (409) refers to them a “twins.”

Inanna is, as expected, very important in these royal inscriptions. An is also mentioned, especially in a zà-mì hymn of praise. (At one point his spouse is named Namma.) Enlil is quite important as well, reflecting the increasing importance of Nippur.

Kingship is clearly important. One text points out that Inanna combined en-ship with kingship for Lugal-kigšine-dudu. As his name suggests, he was lugal in Ur, but he was en in Uruk. Later, Lugal-KISAL-si has the title of king both of Uruk and of Ur. An even later figure, En-shakush-Ana, carries the double title of en of Ki-en-gi, that is the Land of Sumer, and also King of the Nation (lugal-kalam-ma). The relative scarcity of royal inscriptions from Uruk itself may be owing to the destruction of the Eanna temple complex caused by Sargon of Akkad, or such inscriptions may have been removed by Ur III kings.

Many stone vessels contain inscriptions that cite Lugal-kigšine-dudu as both en and king. In one (E1.14.14.1), Enlil, King of All Lands, combines both titles; the same formula is used in inscriptions on two other stone vessels, but in these inscriptions (E1.14.14.2), it is Inanna who combined the two titles and gave en-ship to Uruk and kingship to Ur. In later royal inscriptions, Uruk kings, like Lugal-KISAL-si, are called both king of Uruk and king of Ur. The famous Lugal-zage-si is called king of Uruk and “King of the Land.” Not surprisingly, these inscriptions come from Nippur, where Enlil was himself King of the Gods, emphasized kingship.

Note in passing that the preserved royal inscriptions contain nothing of Gilgamesh’s offspring.

**Patrimonialism**

J. David Schloen has revived Max Weber’s sociohistorical model of “patrimonialism” as a way of understanding ancient Near Eastern societies. Schloen calls it the “patrimonial household model,” and he contrasts it with “rationalized bureaucracies.” He challenges the tendency among scholars of the ancient Near East to see the complex city-states as bureaucracies in the modern sense. The phrase “House of the Father” does capture an important feature of the early city-states (and certainly the Bronze Age states dominated by fatherly kings and male deities). This is Schloen’s summary of Weber’s position.

Patrimonialism is the antithesis of rationalized bureaucracy. In a patrimonial regime, the entire social order is viewed as an extension of the ruler's household—
and ultimately of the god’s household. The social order consists of a hierarchy of subhouseholds linked by personal ties at each level between individual “masters” and “slaves” or “fathers” and “sons.” There is no global distinction between the “private” and “public” sectors of society because governmental administration is effected through personal relationships on the household model rather than through an impersonal bureaucracy. Likewise, there is no fundamental structural difference between the “urban” and “rural” components of society, because political authority and economic dependency are everywhere patterned according to the household model, so that the entire social order is vertically integrated through dyadic relationships that link the ruling elite in the sociocultural “center” to their subordinates in the “periphery.”

The most complete expression of patrimonialism in ancient Near Eastern literature can be found in the famous Babylonian “Creation Epic,” *Enuma Elish*. Schloen mentions the poem in passing, mainly to note its connection with early Amorite stories of battles between storm gods and the sea. I would add to Schloen’s insight the pattern in *Enuma Elish* in which a Father’s House is, literally, built into the story. In many ways the Sumerian creator god Enki (whose Akkadian equivalent was Ea) is more of a Father than the first of the gods in the pantheon, An (or Anu). Enki is the crafty god par excellence, a problem-solver far more than he is a fighting god. The Divine Dialogues pass secrets of the gods from Enki to his Son, Asalluhu, who carries out the father’s plans (through the “magicians” who have learned the texts). In many ways *Enuma Elish* could be considered a very elaborate working-out of such a Divine Dialogue. The Son, Marduk, takes on the character of the Amorite storm god as part of the plan suggested by the Father. The story clearly shows the way Babylon appropriated Sumerian myth to justify its rise to power.

As Schloen points out, Weber was sparing in his use of ancient Near Eastern materials, since relatively little of it was known as the time he was writing. He did, however, find a “pure” type of “patriarchal patrimonialism” in the Islamic states of the Near East, and it is this type of patrimonialism Schloen adopts.

A very succinct treatment of this “patriarchal patrimonialism” is given by Ibrahim Muhawi and Sharif Kanaana in their study of Palestinian Arab Folktales, *Speak, Bird, Speak Again*. Their survey of folktales, published in 1989, makes the point that even though a majority of Palestinian Arab no longer live in extended family households, “the standards of behavior characteristic of this ancient institution are still current in their social milieu,” testimony to just how deeply rooted is the patriarchal system. Muhawi and Kanaana define the Palestinian family as “extended, patrilineal, patrilateral, polygynous, endogamous, and patrilocal.”

The social system assigns roles for members of the Palestinian family. Three criteria dictate the way authority is managed: sex, age, and position. The male head of the family has, as one might expect, the greatest authority; but the wife of the patriarch has authority over all females in the household; and other members of the household possess various degrees of authority based on the roles to which they are assigned. Since both written and
figural narratives are often used to shed light on ancient social institutions, it is worth noting the way Muhawi and Kanaana relate their folktales to family structure. They caution that the modern notion of character in modern fiction, especially short stories, novels, and we might add, films, often gets in the way of appreciating stories that depend on the roles figures are expected to play.

Certainly, the notion of role is more helpful to the study of the folktale than is that of character, which is more appropriate to the analysis of short stories and novels. And indeed, from the perspective of the extended family—the social unit on which our analysis is based—individuals are important only insofar as they fulfill roles (father, mother, son, daughter, husband, wife) that help perpetuate the institution of the family.377

With this caution in mind it becomes clear that the roles played in ancient myths, art and literature—father/son, mother/daughter, brother/sister, husband/wife and the like—where they provide portraits of social reality are often similar to the roles portrayed in modern folktales.

*Enuma Elish*, for example, can be seen as portraying the evolution of the family as well as, as has frequently been noted, the evolution of kingship. Before there are gods, the primal pair, Tiamat and Apsu, reproduces in a kind of chaotic, disordered way. When the First Male is killed off and his substance made into the basis, literally, of a first “house,” the First Female continues to produce living beings from herself alone. The results are monstrous hybrid creatures who are formed into a kind of army. Tiamat even goes so far as to take one of her sons as her lover and invest him with a kind of kingship, commander of the army.

Over several generations they gods who were produced by Tiamat and Apsu eventually settle into a model family. Enki/Ea, who defeated Apsu and built the first “house” upon the body, takes a consort, Damkina, and they produce the great Son, Marduk. When he becomes king of the gods, defeats Tiamat, her son, and the monster army, he sets about forming the cosmos and building his “house” on the model of his father’s house. By the end of the story the physical universe and the social universe—a pure patriarchal patrimonial system where humans reflect the order first established in the divine sphere.

There is little wonder that *Enuma Elish* eventually became required reading, especially for the priests of Marduk who were to recite the story during the New Year’s Festival in Babylon.

It would be difficult to find a more perfect portrait of the Amorite patrimonial household than *Enuma Elish*. Schloen recognizes, though, that the situation was more complex in the Sumerian south of Mesopotamia. He recommends the work of Piotr Steinkeller in this regard. Steinkeller has argued that there was a long-lasting difference between the Sumerian south and the Semitic north in Mesopotamia.378 I would argue that different Sumerian city-states themselves provide a variety of socioeconomic systems. Different designations of the central authority figures, like the *en*, *lugal* (“king”), and *sīpa*
(“shepherd”), all assumed, e.g., by the famous Shulgi of Ur, were originally separate roles in different Sumerian cities.

The Babylonian were right—or persuasive—in maintaining a connection between the social order they thought had existed in what Sumerians sometimes considered the First City, Eridu. “Father” Enki was seen in many myths as the originator of many social practices as well as changes in the physical environment. He often seems to act in an arbitrary and capricious manner, and is frequently involved in contests with goddesses. Mostly he wins such contests, but even when he wins there is usually a reconciliation with the goddesses. (There is an argument that has been made, e.g., by Samuel Noah Kramer and others that Enki replaced the Mother Goddesses in the highest ranks of the Sumerian pantheon.)

The goddess who gains more than others—and wins a most important contest with the crafty Enki—is Inanna of Uruk. A peculiar myth shows Inanna as the beneficiary of the “Father’s” advice. “Inanna and Shukaletuda,” which we have seen before, tells of the creation of the date palm, like many Sumerian myths, has been pieced together from more than a dozen fragments, and is still not complete, and so any interpretation is necessarily tentative. But it seems clear enough that the story begins with the great goddess who wants to detect falsehood and establish justice in the land; and the story ends with Father Enki giving her the advice she needs to do just that.

At the heart of the story is a very inept gardener who takes advantage of a sleeping Inanna to rape her. She finds it difficult to find the culprit, largely because his father keeps advising the disgraceful Shukaletuda to avoid being found. With the help of Enki Inanna is able to find and determine the destiny of the rapist.

Preparation for the appearance of the gardener Shukaletuda is made by Enki, who creates the first fruit tree—perhaps the original tree. Enki gives instructions to a raven for what turns out to be a date palm. The text underscores two features: that the date palm is something never seen before; and that the raven acts like a human being in cultivating the plant and drawing water with a shadouf. In short, this is a story about the origins of the date palm and the need for humans to care for it. Enki is responsible, ultimately, for a change in the environment that is also a change in the social order.

The scoundrel Shukaletuda has a father, but is otherwise known only as a very poor gardener. He is supposed to water garden plots and build the installation of a well among the plants. Instead, he pulls the plants up from their roots and destroys them. This could well be a story about the First Gardener, and he is a human who has much to learn.

For our purposes “Inanna and Shukaletuda” is a story that reflects a kind of patriarchy, such as might have been found in the ancient city of Eridu. Inanna, like Marduk in the Akkadian Šamaštana Elish, addresses Enki as her “father,” and he gives his wise advice to her, as to Marduk, in a way that a father should. Even Shukaletuda consults with his father. On the other hand, like other myths involving Inanna—especially “Inanna and Enki: The Transfer of the Arts of Civilization from Eridu to Uruk”—Inanna is the
exalted one, who only gains in wisdom and power as she negotiates the patriarchal world. Enki's wisdom empowers and liberates her.

“Inanna and Shukaletuda” can be compared in an interesting way with a shorter piece, “Inanna and An.” The god An (Akkadian Anu) is a most peculiar figure in Mesopotamian thought. He is almost always considered the highest of the gods, a creator god, the first among the three male figures, An, Enlil and Enki. (Where the formula admits of a goddess, the males are listed first, then either a Mother Goddess or Inanna rounds out the top four.) From the earliest Mesopotamian texts he is associated with Uruk. In the very latest Mesopotamian texts, from the first millennium BCE, An and his consort are raised to a level that had not been seen before in their “native” city. Massive temples were constructed in Uruk at that time, the largest temples in the history of Mesopotamia. Where in the earliest texts, An is mentioned occasionally, and there is no evidence that An received offerings (while Inanna received offerings in three of her four incarnations), even in his later exaltation, An does not entirely eclipse Inanna. There are relatively few myths where An is a major, active figure. For the most part he seems to be so far removed from human activities that he may best be seen as one of the Sleeping Gods.

An is, however, often considered the “father” of Inanna. In the Sumerian “Inanna and An” (and in the much later Akkadian Gilgamesh), he is certainly addressed as her father. (We have seen, though, that she is elsewhere considered the “daughter” of Enki and other of the “older” generation of gods.)

In “Inanna and An,” An acts mainly as a blocking figure. The text is rather broken at the point where Inanna complains to her “brother,” the Sun God Utu, that she has wanted to give her great “house,” Eanna to her lover. An would not allow it. Her lover, whose name is not clear in the text, is apparently a human. When An refuses to allow Inanna to give the lover the great house in heaven, she steals it. “Inanna and An” is one of several pieces to refer to the capturing and removing of Eanna from heaven to earth.

From the earliest Mesopotamian texts the most exalted temple in Uruk was the Eanna. Even when Inanna was, millennia later, given another great temple, Eanna continued to function. So important was Inanna that for most of Uruk’s history it defined the city—and Inanna, far more than An, was considered its resident deity. That is, the great temple was the House, not of the Father, but of “daughter” Inanna. “Inanna and An” reflects this major transformation in the relationship between Father and Daughter. Once she steals away Eanna, An slaps his thighs and laments that his “child” has now become greater than he is. The very reckoning of day and night becomes established in the process. Faced with the fact of his daughter’s rebellion, An decrees that Eanna should be “as firm as heaven,” never to be toppled. Its name should be “The Settlement of the Land,” and it should have no rival.

From early Sumerian times, temples were called, simply enough, the “house” of a deity. At a certain point in Sumerian history the city came to be seen as the residence of a major god or goddess, although there were actually a number of temples dedicated to different
deities in the cities. Thus Uruk was Inanna’s city, Ur was the home of the Moon God Nanna, and Nippur the home of Enlil.

While many of these cities could, then, be considered the House of the Father, in the conspicuous case in Mesopotamia, the Father lost his House to his rebellious and powerful Daughter. We are only now coming to glimpse the extent to which Urukean society was based, not on the patrimonialism that is so conspicuous in the Semitic north, but on a very different socioeconomic basis.

“Babylonian” Kings

The latest date for *Gilgamesh* is the defeat of Assyria at the hands of their great rivals in the 1st millennium BCE, the Babylonians. So great has been the impact of Babylon and things “Babylonian” on the Western imagination that the “epic” of Gilgamesh is usually called the “Babylonian” epic of Gilgamesh. There is some truth to that. The attempt to gather together various Gilgamesh legends into a larger story can be seen in Old Babylonian times, i.e., early in the 2nd millennium BCE, a thousand years before the Assyrian empire rose and fell. And the dialect employed in *Gilgamesh* is Babylonian (as opposed to the closely related Assyrian dialect of Akkadian).

Nevertheless, “Babylonian” in this context can be confusing. The historical Gilgamesh— to the extent that one can talk about an actual historical figure—would have spoken Sumerian, not Akkadian, and, more important, lived some six hundred years before the city of Babylon existed. There are no references to Babylon in *Gilgamesh*.

Moreover, relations between Uruk and Babylon, once Babylon defeated the Sumerian south (including Uruk), were often troubling. Like Assyrian kings before them, the Neo-Babylonian and Late Babylonian kings of the 1st millennium BCE sometimes supported Uruk. Kings claimed to have restored or rebuilt Eanna. (In so doing the kings were reverting to the earliest ideology of Sumerian kingship: building temples and restoring the rites to be performed for the gods of that area.)

Assyriologists use “Babylonian” to refer to Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian and even Hellenistic (Seleucid) kings.

The most decisive change in Urukean religious traditions occurred when the Persians entered Babylon and ruled “Babylonia.” As is often the case, innovations were masked as “restorations” of ancient rites. In the case of Uruk, the innovation was the introduction of the cult of the Sky God An/Anu and his “wife” Antum. In Seleucid times this would lead to the building of the largest temples and the largest ziggurat in Mesopotamian history, and the most significant of the temples, the Bīt Rēsh, was dedicated to the service of Anu and Antum. The new rites did not cause Ishtar to disappear. Eanna survived, though it tended to be somewhat marginalized. A new temple was built for Ishtar, though, another massive structure called Irigal.

The worship of Ishtar continued until the end of the 1st millennium BCE, when the Parthians conquered the city and established humble quarters in the grand Eanna.
Kingship, according to The Sumerian King List, was lowered from heaven, that is, not an invention of human intellect. It is “carried” (túm) from city to city as one city after another is “smitten with weapons.” Two rather different traditions appear to have been fused in the list. The first part deals with kingship before the flood, the event that in other Mesopotamian texts is said to have divided human history. Before the flood, so one tradition has it, humans were assisted by sages; kingship only appeared after the flood. In The Sumerian King List, kingship is first lowered to the city of Eridu and is carried to a number of cities until it reaches Shuruppak, where the last of the sages, equivalent to the biblical Noah, helps Enki to save humankind in the flood. After the flood kingship is lowered again from heaven, but this time to Kish, a city that will feature prominently in the “epic” tale of Gilgamesh and the king of Kish, Akka. In the long list, three cities are prominent: Kish, Ur, and, of course, Uruk. Five different times kingship passed to Uruk (more than in any other city). Utu-hegal’s was the fifth dynasty—and it consisted of only one man. The list continues with the king who established what is called the Ur III dynasty, Ur-namma. The list ends with yet another shift, as Ur yields to nearby Isin. Undoubtedly The Sumerian King List in its present form was put together during the reign of the last of the “divine” kings of Isin mentioned in the text, one Shu-magir.

The Sumerian King List is, of course, an ideological construct that is based on the legitimacy of kingship itself and what is taken to be a divinely ordained history that binds major Sumerian city centers together when there was no political “Land of Sumer.” Simplified, it traces a flow of power from Eridu and Kish through Uruk, Ur and Isin. (Larsa will claim the title after Isin, and it will fade before Babylon.)

It is the first of these constructs that interests us here. William W. Hallo has argued that among certain competing theologies in Sumer, one tradition, developed originally in Eridu, came to prevail. Hallo calls this the “Theology of Eridu.” As we shall see, Uruk acknowledged the priority of Eridu, as, later, Babylon would acknowledge it. The term for “king” in “The Sumerian King List,” however, may have developed at neither Eridu nor Uruk. Rather, it appears to have arisen at Ur. By the time of Utu-hegal, however, it was clearly taken root in Uruk. The term, lugal, regularly translated into Akkadian as šarru, became the common term that is translated into English as “king.” It is generally thought to mean, literally, “big man.” The abstraction kingship is nam-lugal.

The “Head” Man

Our interest in the terminology of rule is that it gives us an index to the relationship between palace and temple in Uruk during the Early Dynastic period. The ways lugal varies from the term we had seen so prominent in Uruk before, en, tell us a great deal, though indirectly, about the king’s relationship to the temple.

In The Sumerian King List, lugal and nam-lugal are ubiquitous. Exceptions are quite rare and, therefore, significant. Utu-hegal in the 5th Dynasty of Uruk, is “king.” Nearly all the others in the four dynasties that precede him are kings. The great legendary figure of Uruk, Dumuzi, shows up twice. A “divine” Dumuzi appears as a “shepherd” (and king)
of Bad-tibira in the antediluvian section of the work (72-73). He reigned 36,000 years. After the flood, when kingship was lowered to Kish, there were, according to the list, twenty-three kings, the last of whom was Akka. Then Kish was smitten with weapons and kingship moved to, note, Eanna (not Uruk). A certain Mes-kiag-gasher is the first ruler mentioned, and it is worth noting that he was both en and lugal. The list rarely says anything about the rulers, but Mes-kiag-gasher is said to have gone “into the sea” and come “out of it to the mountains” (86-87). Since he is also identified as a son of the sun-god, Utu, Mes-kiag-gasher appears to have followed the journey of the sun.

His son is the first of the “heroes” around whom stories developed. Enmerkar is identified as the “king of Uruk” (not of Eanna) and as the “one who built Uruk” (86-87). (We might translate it “rebuilt.”) Some names in the king list are written with the sign of divinity, dingir, which sometimes indicates that the person’s name includes a god’s name, but sometimes indicates that the person himself was divine, or perhaps deified. At any rate, in this first dynasty of Uruk, Mes-kiag-gasher and his son Enmerkar do not have the dingir determinative, while the three kings that follow do. Lugalbanda, called “a shepherd,” and Gilgamesh—and one who is injected between them, Dumuzi (again)—all carry the god-sign.

Since Gilgamesh in particular will occupy our attention in this chapter and in others, as stories about him continue to expand, we should mention that “The Sumerian King List” claims that Gilgamesh, an en of Kullab, whose father was a lillú-demon (88-91) had a son. While Gilgamesh's reign is a (relatively modest) 126 years, his son Ur-Nungal, reigned only reigned 30 years. His son reigned only 15 years; another generation 9 years; the next 8 years; a smith reigned 36 years; two others reigned 6 and 36 years. (It may be significant that Gilgamesh's son is the first person to have a normal range of years. Possibly his reign is “more historical” than previous kings on the list.) After Ur-Nungal, none of the kings of Uruk in this dynasty are said to have been sons of the previous figures. And no stories about the men have yet emerged.

Thus “The Sumerian King List” preserves, with some odd quirks, the tradition of the “divine” heroes at the foundation of Uruk. Only two of them, the mysterious Mes-kiag-gasher and Gilgamesh, are specifically called en, and the first of Eanna, Gilgamesh of Kullab. This reflects, not confusion, but the complexity in a system of titles that seems to be clarified in “Gilgamesh and Akka.”

The other dynasties of Uruk do not provide much significant information. The second dynasty has only one member, before kingship passes to Ur. The third dynasty also contains only one king, Lugal-zage-si, whom Sargon of Agade claimed to have defeated. Five rather undistinguished members of a fourth dynasty follow the decline of Agade. The fifth is, as we have seen above, the king who defeated the savage Gutians, Utu-hegal. He, too, is the only member of the dynasty, as Ur once again asserts itself—or, to follow Sumerian practice, is accepted as kingship yet again is carried to Uruk’s rival.
Sargon vs. Lugal-zage-si
A 3rd millennium king of Uruk, Lugal-zage-si, had the unlucky fate of losing to a man whose fame equals the great heroes of Uruk, even Gilgamesh. Sargon of Agade is credited with inventing the world’s first empire. The site of his capital, Agade or Akkad (from which the name of the Semitic language Akkadian is derived), is still one of the great unsolved mysteries of Mesopotamia. One suggestion for the failure thus far to find Agade is that, like many other ancient places, it sits below a city today, possibly Baghdad. If not there, Agade may be found beneath other locations along the Tigris River. In any event, Uruk was defeated by a man from the north who celebrated his first of many victories in a series of inscriptions that are worth looking at for the light they shed on Uruk. Ironically, two of those inscriptions, dedicated to the god Enlil, were written in both the Akkadian language and in the Uruk dialect of Sumerian.

Uruk was, after all, the first of Sargon’s campaigns, and at least seven inscriptions have survived that detail Sargon’s victory over Lugal-zage-si. One begins,

[Sargon, king of Agade, bailiff of the goddess Aštar, king of the world, anointed priest of the god An], lord of the land, governor for the god Enlil, conquered the city of Uruk and destroyed its walls. He was [victorious] over Uruk in battle, [conquered the city], captured [Lugal-z]age-si, king of [Ur]uk, in battle and led him off to the gate of the god Enlil in a neck stock.

In another text Sargon claims to have “conquered fifty governors” with his divine mace. Another indicates that Sargon personally captured Lugal-zage-si. The conquest of Uruk was a verdict of Enlil.

The Sargonic texts are highly formulaic and straightforward: lists of achievements with few descriptive details. Sargon does not forget that it was the high god Enlil who directed his hand. The epithets include not only “king” (lugal) and “governor” (énsi), which may have “secular” connotations. (“Lord of the land” is not en, but rather lugal kalam-ma.) Others have more obvious religious connotations. “Bailiff of the goddess Ashtar” translates mashkim of a goddess written with the INANNA sign (evidently a form of Ishtar). Most interesting is the designation of Sargon as “anointed priest of the god An” (gūd-an-na). If the title is read pashishu of An, Sargon has adopted the priestly role of Lugal-zage-si.

The Sargonic inscriptions do not detail his priestly roles, if in fact he did engage in any activities as mashkim or pashishu. There is little in the inscriptions to tell how Sargon related to the great gods of Sumer—only that they do not mention intermediaries, temple officiants. The texts do seem to reflect a difference between Agade in the north and the
great Sumerian cities of the south. In the earliest (Early Dynastic Akkadian) texts only two gods, one male (Il, or Ilum), and one female (Ashtar), are recorded. The Sargonic inscriptions mention others whose Akkadian names will come to be associated with Sumerian deities. More interesting for the light it sheds on Sumerian thinking, the Sargonic account reflects a view that celebrates individuals and unique events, where Sumerian texts tend to see even the great kings as agents of divine will directing human affairs.

Aage Westenholz is more inclined to credit Sargon’s new weapons and military tactics for his victory. Long before the Romans, the Sumerians had mastered the phalanx, but as Westenholz points out, “An Eannatum-style phalanx would be sitting ducks for the Akkadian slingers and archers, despite their shields. Bows and arrows do seem to have been a shocking innovation to the Sumerians.”

The notion of an heroic age provides the final irony in the sad history of Lugal-zage-si. It fits in well with our Romantic view of an autocratic Byronic hero who turns all who fall before him into subjects. As Westenholz notes, whatever we mean by the world’s first “empire,” “there can be little doubt that, in the eyes of his contemporaries, Sargon created something never seen before.” Lugal-zage-si had created a rather impressive coalition of city states in the south. In addition to Uruk Lugal-zage-si controlled Ur, Eridu, Umma, Zabala, Larsa, perhaps Adab and Kish, and a place called KI.AN (the reading of the name is not certain. But unlike Sargon, who boasted of destroying the walls of the cities he defeated, Lugal-zage-si “pointedly reports no military conquests; he describes a peaceful reign of bliss. He did not tear down fortifications, nor did he install Urukeans as ensis.” Westenholz considers him a rather ordinary “ceremonial head” of a “loose confederacy” of Sumerian cities. The claim to a peaceful reign may be as much a self-aggrandizing piece of political rhetoric as is Sargon’s image of toughness, but it is rather sad that a peaceful reign is less interesting than a record of military achievement.

## Kings and Foreign Kings

Since kings appear so often in stories, including and perhaps especially in children’s stories, the idea of kingship seems simple enough. Typically the king is the ruler of a large or small society, and he is able to act in an arbitrary and capricious way. He is not so much above the law and he is the embodiment of law. At any rate although he may listen to an advisor—the wicked wazir of so many Arabic folktales—his decision is final. There is no social mechanism to overrule the king—short of deposing him. (To a lesser degree, perhaps, a queen can operate in the same way, so long as a king is not in the picture.)

Since we live in an age that is largely post-monarchical, such an image of the king is probably harmless. But it obscures an interesting distinction that is relevant to the development of kingship in the ancient Near East.

The ordinary word that translates Sumerian lugal is, as we have seen, Akkadian sharru. The Chicago Assyrian Dictionary devotes more than thirty pages to that single word (and more, if derivatives like sharrūtu, or kingship, are added to the count). Another Akkadian
term for king, *malku*, on the other hand, deserves less than three pages. Derived from the root, *mlk*, which largely has to do with giving advice, *malku* is used only for foreign kings.\textsuperscript{398}

A glance at some of the most influential ancient and medieval writings will illustrate why this is the case. The English word “king” is very old and is related to words in not only Germanic languages but most Indo-European languages as well. It relates, in ways that Hamlet suggests in a famous Shakespearean pun used by Hamlet to describe the despised king, his uncle as, “A little more than kin, and less than kind!” (I.i.65), to *cynn*, both “kin” and “kind” (as in “humankind”). Our “kindness” develops for a supposed empathy for those who are closely related to us. This Indo-European root is less visible but still evident in Latin and Greek terms for “generation.”\textsuperscript{399}

The point is that our common term, “king,” is not related to Semitic roots for king. The three root letters, /mlk/, is common in Semitic languages. In West Semitic languages the root generates “king,” while in Akkadian, an East Semitic language, it is used for a “counselor” or a foreign king, as we have seen. Exactly opposite is the case with the most influential of ancient Semitic texts, the Hebrew Bible. There /mlk/ is used almost everywhere as *melek* and elsewhere as *malka*, *melukah*, *mamlakah* and the like.\textsuperscript{400}

On the other hand, the root, /srr/, is used only three times in the entire Hebrew Bible, in the form meaning “to be a prince.” (In Akkadian, /mlk/ often designates a prince in contrast to a king.)

Likewise, the Qur’an prefers *malik*. This frequently occurring term is even used on five occasions as a Divine Attribute, God as King. In the Qur’an the terms *malaka* “kingdom” and “rule,” is found in many places, usually in a very positive way.\textsuperscript{401} There are many terms for “chief,” especially *kabīr*, which is also a Divine Attribute, but none derived from the Semitic root /srr/.

It is worth noting that the New Testament also uses something other than the usual Indo-European terms for “king” and “kingdom.” Although the New Testament is written entirely in an Indo-European language, it employs the Greek *basileus* for “king” and *basileia* for “kingdom.” Since the Kingdom of God is an important term in the gospels (except for the Gospel of John), the choice of *basileia* points to a rather different notion than, say, an “empire” along the lines of the occupier Romans. Significantly, “Caesar” (*kaisar*) appears about twenty times in the New Testament—always in reference to the Roman emperor himself, never to a positive notion of “empire” or “kingdom.”

### King and Lord?

While the modern English word “king” seems simple enough—a word that has flattened almost all of the nuances of its long past—the term “lord” seems unnecessarily complex. “Lord” has, like “king,” lost much of its ability to terrify. It reserves something of that potential in the religious use of the term. When used for God, Lord expresses power and ultimate authority; but even there, Christians often use the term for the softer side of the
divine: Jesus as “Lord” as often as not suggests an intimacy and concern that stands in contrast to the wrathful God of Scripture.

There are good indications that even in the ancient Near East the terms usually translated “lord” had lost some of their awful grandeur and had become honorific. The “master” and “owner” of property or of people always have claims upon others, but the full power of the earliest Sumerian en seems to have been lost over the centuries.

**The Two Prologues Together**

In the later First Prologue kingship provides a transition to the earlier Second Prologue. As Gilgamesh approaches Uruk on his return, the reader is invited to view the wall and then draw near to Ishtar’s temple. The reader is told that something is in that view “that no later king could ever copy!” as Andrew George translates the line (1.17). Benjamin R. Foster, on the other hand, reads the lines slightly differently. He sees something, “Which no future king, no human being will equal.” The line would seem to refer to Ishtar’s temple, Eanna, but it could also refer to the walls of Uruk, which are attributed to Gilgamesh. Certainly his brickwork will never be equaled. The succinct description of the “house” of Ishtar is placed at the center of a chiastic pattern that begins and ends with the walls of the city.

No better vision of Ishtar in her “house” at the center of her walled city could be imagined. The lines tie the approaching Gilgamesh to his final destination, with outside and inside, human and goddess and, I would suggest, “king” and “lord.”

(Interestingly, this line is not included in the formal conclusion to Tablet 11, which otherwise repeats exactly lines from the First Prologue.)

These lines contain the only reference in the First Prologue to kingship, whereas kingship is emphasized in the Second Prologue. After these early parts of Tablet 1 there are actually very few references to kings of any sort. With more lines yet to be discovered, the story of the Uruk king may still contain more references than we have now, but the fourteen that are in the extant texts will probably never be expanded to a large number. Most of the references to “king” (sharru) and “kingship” (sharrūtu) occur in the first half of the story.

The beginning of the Second Prologue, as we have seen, proclaims a king who surpasses all others (1.29). The author employs the EN sign in the line, a sign that can be read as a noun (bēlu, our en) or a verb (bēlu, to rule over or control). Probably the sign is used here as a visual pun, hence “lording it” over the other kings. As in the wall or temple that no later king will match, no future king will match the achievements we expect in a great king. Another nice transition that ties together an older and a newer vision of Gilgamesh.

The sequence in which Gilgamesh is the preeminent king (1.29-48) displays another envelope pattern. It begins with Gilgamesh surpassing other kings and ends (1.45-46) with potential rivals unable to boast of a name like his. Within that poetic structure we find a different view of Gilgamesh than in the First Prologue, but one that is probably equally ancient. He is the “wild bull” fathered by Lugalbanda and that great “wild cow,”
the goddess Ninsun. The sequence ends with a return to this remarkable claim. He is 2/3rd god, but still a mortal man (1.48), puzzling fraction but one that derives from the union of a divine mother and a human who is, apparently, deified, perhaps as a gift of the goddess who cleverly selected (i.e., seduced) him. The emphasis is, of course, on parents and the child produced by them.

Three motifs follow. Each is given four poetic lines. In the first quatrain, Gilgamesh is the warrior. In the second quatrains, Gilgamesh is the one who opens the wilderness. (This would have particular point in early Uruk, whose reach went far beyond the city to the north, east and west of Uruk.) In the mountains he opens passes, digs wells, and crosses the ocean. The third quatrains fills this traveling Gilgamesh to his search for life, a search that takes him to Utnapishtim. It adds the assumed but not explicitly narrated activity that would follow the meeting with Utnapishtim. Gilgamesh will restore cult centers destroyed in the Flood and reset the rites of the world for the people.

All three aspects of the hero celebrated in these lines can be found in the Amaushumgalanna tradition, as found in “The Early Dynastic Hymn to Gilgamesh,” as Douglas Frayne reconstructs that poem. The Amaushumgalanna tradition is also to be seen, I think, in the cylinder seal impressions that predate the hymn, the depictions of the “priest-king” of Uruk.

The Second Prologue, then, so different stylistically from the First Prologue, is nevertheless brought into line with an expanded image of the prototypical king and “lord” as understood at least in Uruk.

The end of the Second Prologue is still rather fragmentary, but it is clear from what has been restored that the poem describes a powerful, almost gigantic, and beautiful man, one whose libido matches his form. Gilgamesh is a man with the libido to fight face-to-face and to love face-to-face as well.
Chapter One: Prologues and Epilogues

The Epilogues

Tablet 11, Lines 321-28

Gilgamesh spoke to him, to Ur-Shanabi the Boatman,
“Go up, Urshanabi, and walk the walls of Uruk.
Inspect the foundation, notice the brickwork:
see if the interior is not of burnt brick
and if the Seven Wise Ones did not lay down its foundation.
One square mile is city; one square mile a grove of date palms;
one square mile is a clay-pit;
half a square mile the House of Ishtar.
Three square miles and a half make up Uruk.”

These lines bring an end to Tablet 11 and, many think, to Gilgamesh as a whole. The best text brackets the lines for emphasis. With one exception, the lines exactly reproduce a key passage in the First Prologue. When we first read this famous description of Uruk from its walls inward to the House of Ishtar at its heart, the voice is that of the anonymous narrator who is introducing us to Gilgamesh upon his return to his city. Here the passage is put into the mouth of Gilgamesh himself. The one addition to the earlier lines is the name of the boatman, Ur-Shanabi.

Since the opening of Gilgamesh is retrospective, by the end of Tablet 11 shows us that the anonymous narrator is repeating the hero’s vision of Uruk. There is no explicit description of Gilgamesh’s feelings as he approaches his city and its goddess. Most readers project feelings of great admiration and pride in the hero, especially in the impressive walls of the city that were attributed to Gilgamesh.

This mirroring of a portion of Tablet 1 in the very end of Tablet 11 has immense implications for interpreting Gilgamesh as a unified whole. Andrew George is so convinced that this is the conclusion to Gilgamesh that he even separates Tablet 12 from the first volume of his magisterial edition of the poem. Like many, he considers Tablet 12 to be an inorganic appendix to the work as a whole.

This is not the place to examine the evidence for or against George’s position, which is held by many (though not all) readers of Gilgamesh. Suffice it here to point out that it strongly suggests a unified Tablet 1-Tablet 11 rather than a loose collection of Gilgamesh stories.

Of readers who have argued for the unity of Tablets 1-11, no one has made a stronger case than H. L. J. Vanstiphout in his 1990 essay, “The Craftsmanship of Sin-leqi-unninni.” While Vanstiphout does not differentiate the two prologues as such, preferring to call one an “authorial introduction” and the other a prologue, he does show that the end of Tablet 11 closes a great circle. He traces large and small circles in the poem. “Circularity” is one
of the principles of “macro-form” in the work. The two journeys have circular form. Tablet 6, which he takes to be the central tablet of the poem, provides evidence of a “double circularity.” In Tablet 6 “the action takes place simultaneously in Uruk and in Heaven, and Uruk is the final point of the first, lesser, journey, and the starting point of the second and greater one.”

Not only are elements within the poem circular structures. “The whole composition is circular,” as Vanstiphout demonstrates. Gilgamesh ends where he started from, Uruk. He is “also as far from the realization of his ambitions as when he started out. True, he is now chastened and wise, but the circle is closed.” In the article Vanstiphout demonstrates in fine detail how the whole work is a chiastic structure, with the short Tablet 6 at the center. We will draw on Vanstiphout’s insights in our treatment of Tablet 6, The Bull of Heaven episode.

The schematic structure of the narrative we presented earlier differs in some ways with Vanstiphout’s, but overall they are quite similar.

Vanstiphout finds five principles that shape the narratives in Gilgamesh: linear form, symmetry, expansion, entrelace, and circularity. Implications of Vanstiphout’s analysis will be seen in the chapters that follow. Since he sees the hand of an individual author shaping the narratives into a coherent whole, he can then analyze the intention of the author. Central to the story is Gilgamesh’s towering ambition, leading to hubris. However successful he may be, with each episode he remains unsatisfied and seeks more. Vanstiphout thinks that the “real turning point” for Gilgamesh occurs when he is finally able to accept the reality of the human condition.

Many readers find in the story a hero in the process of growing up. Vanstiphout focuses on the psychological development of Gilgamesh. This insight, that Gilgamesh is never static but continually developing, can be tied to another of Vanstiphout’s claims, that the poem as a whole is an “epic,” as modern readers frequently call it. There are great deeds performed by Gilgamesh and Enkidu. The defeat of Humbaba and The Bull of Heaven are the prime examples. Vanstiphout surveys epics in the Western tradition, and he locates the “epic” not so much in heroic deeds as in the personal, psychological development of the hero.

The subtle analysis of form and intention offered by Vanstiphout is most convincing in enabling us to see the evolution of Gilgamesh’s attitude toward the city. This is evident as Gilgamesh returns to Uruk and points out to Ur-Shanabi the great works that will remain after him, the walls and the city within the walls. The repetition of lines we have already seen in the First Prologue completes the great circle of the work.

The last lines of Tablet 11 do not, however, repeat the crucial point made already in Tablet 1: as much as the great walls of the city, when Gilgamesh literally inscribes his life into a tablet, the character is pointing to his greatest achievement, the written word that will remain for others after him to read. Gilgamesh the writer also invites us to see the celebration of the author of Gilgamesh, whatever his name might have been. Wall, city,
Gilgamesh’s tablet and the tablets that constitute the literary work itself provide the immortality of the hero. Vanstiphout emphasizes this key point. “The central theme must indeed be stated or restated in this way: for a royal and heroic figure the meaning of life resides in the *immortality given him by the great works he has left to mankind*. This is put in explicit terms at the beginning and at the end of the epic.”

**Tablet 12**

In a curious way, even the strange Tablet 12 of *Gilgamesh* reinforces the problems of Enkidu’s inexplicable death. The twelfth tablet has always been a problem. It is much shorter than the other tablets (shorter even than Tablet 6). It is appended to a poem that appears to end when the final lines of Tablet 11 echo the opening of Tablet 1. Tablet 12 is, as we have seen, a close translation Into Akkadian of the Sumerian poem, “*Gilgamesh, Enkidu and the Underworld*” (or “Bilgames and the Underworld”).—and even there it is odd, since it is only a translation of the last part of the Sumerian original. The details are not of interest here. Tablet 12 is mainly an account of the terrors of the Underworld, the fate of all humans. Probably its main thrust is to impress upon the reader the necessity of the living to care for the dead. Enkidu, who is swallowed up by the Underworld, appears to Gilgamesh, and gives him the grim details of the Underworld. For many scholars Tablet 12 is an inorganic appendix to a poem they consider complete in eleven tablets.

Many recent translations of *Gilgamesh* do not include Tablet 12—or relegate it to a section on the Sumerian “*Gilgamesh, Enkidu and the Underworld*,” as do Andrew George and Benjamin R. Foster. Stefan Maul mentions Tablet 12, but does not translate it or comment on it. Stephanie Dalley does translate it, but adds a qualification that has the support of many scholars today: that the epic was complete in eleven tablets, and the twelfth was added at a later date by another redactor. Simo Parpola’s edition of *Gilgamesh* does, however, retain the handcopy, transliteration, and glossary for those who would want to consider Tablet 12.

As an aesthetic response to *Gilgamesh* the argument for not considering Tablet 12 is convincing to many readers. The beautiful narrative structure of Tablets 1-11, with its framing device of Gilgamesh’s return to Uruk, suggests that the additional tablet is a clumsy attempt to correct something in the first eleven tablets.

The difficulty with the aesthetic argument is that what Andrew George calls the Standard Babylonian Text tells us in colophons that the text was *not* complete in 11 tablets and that it *was* complete in 12 tablets. (Four different colophons of Tablet 11 and three colophons of Tablet 12 have already been discovered, as George carefully notes.) Even as he dismisses Tablet 12 George attributes the tablet to the closest thing we have to an author of the Standard Babylonian Text, Sīn-lēqi-unninni.
At some point when the text became standardized, then, Tablet 12 was considered part of the whole. It is always possible that an excavation will reveal a version that says the work is complete in 11 tablets. But for now we have only the evidence of a 12 tablet Gilgamesh.

What then happens to the argument for rejecting Tablet 12. The modern penchant for calling *Gilgamesh* an “epic” gives us a clue to what we want to see in the ancient text: a well-made and internally consistent story that as an “epic” rests comfortably in what was (at least until recently) the most prestigious genre in the Western literary canon. Alas, the same ancients who considered it a text in 12 tablets also failed to call it an epic. Rather it was a “series” (*iškaru*) known from the opening line of Tablet 1 and as a collection of Gilgamesh stories.

Many years ago John Gardner and I argued that we should take the text as it was—and try, as we would any difficult text that challenges our modern views of genre, to accommodate its apparent generic anomalies. Many have risen to the challenge. I will only suggest here what we argued back then, that Tablet 12 could be considered an “Epilogue” to the other stories in the collection. (We see epilogues today even in rather humble storytelling genres like TV sitcoms.) Tablet 12 tells us how Gilgamesh learned secrets of the underworld. It may be that Sîn-lēqi-unninni rejected another possible epilogue, “The Death of Bilgames” (if he knew it), in favor of an epilogue that showed Gilgamesh worthy of his last great achievement, when, translated into a god, he became a judge in the underworld.

Interestingly, scholars in the ancient world debated a similar case with the prestigious epic, Homer’s *Odyssey*. On aesthetic grounds Hellenistic scholars argued that the final book, the 24th Book, did not belong to Homer’s story. Book 24 introduces a quick change of perspective and tells of the death of the great hero, Achilles. Then it switches to Odysseus and his father Laertes. Odysseus tests Laertes, much as he had earlier tested Penelope. Ultimately Odysseus, Laertes and Telemachos make a stand against their enemies, and the goddess Athene brings the conflict to an end.

Hellenistic scholars, prompted perhaps by the growing interest in the Greek novel, with its shift to romantic involvement and the private lives of the characters, argued on aesthetic grounds that the *Odyssey* should end with Book 23. At that point in the epic, Odysseus has returned home, purified the household by killing off the suitors, and slept with his wife after his many years of wandering. I rather like that as an ending to the *Odyssey*, since it reinforces the parallels between the Greek epic and *Gilgamesh* 1-11. But I know of no modern scholar of Homer who accepts a 23 book *Odyssey*.

**A Hero Dying Young**

As in Tablet 7, the death of a healthy, vigorous young man is seen as problematic. Enkidu descends to the world of the dead and in the process violates all the instructions Gilgamesh gives him. As a result he is swallowed up by the Underworld itself. Again and again the point is made: Enkidu did not die from normal causes, even “Fate” (Namtar). The poem refers to Asakku, a demon and the disease it causes, a non-specific mythological
threat that may be taken as Disease itself. (The term is not used in medical texts.) Rather, the Underworld seizes Enkidu. The greatest problem is that the young man did not die in battle.

Enkidu—rather the spirit of Enkidu, the part of any human that lives on in the Underworld—is able to return temporarily to earth, where he speaks to Gilgamesh. Since Gilgamesh has already grasped something of the secrets of the Underworld, he is finally able to obtain from the crafty god Enki what he could not get from the gods Enlil and Sin, a secret way to communicate with his friend. One point seems clear: Gilgamesh is or has become “wise” in this poem in a way that would make sense to, say, a mashmashu exorcist. (Recall that he learned about Enki from Utnapishtim in Tablet 11. Here he communicates directly with the crafty god.)

Enkidu tells Gilgamesh of different “cases,” the different ways humans are treated. Gilgamesh asks about many different situations. And the final lines give a glimpse of unrelieved horror:

“The one whose body was left in the wilderness--have you seen him?”
--“I have.
His spirit does not rest in the Earth.”

“The one whose spirit has no one to care for him--have you seen him?”
--“I have.
He eats what was left over in the pot and scraps of bread that were thrown into the street.” (12.15-54)

Although the Akkadian is a careful translation of the Sumerian, the abrupt ending does not exactly follow any of the three Sumerian versions that have been recovered so far. The version from Nippur adds four more cases and ends with a man who was burned to death (and whose spirit ascended to the heavens). A version from Mé-Turan adds three more lines that suggest Gilgamesh did not accept what he has learned and goes off seeking “life.” A third version, from Ur, adds a reference to what seems to be a massacre of the sons of Sumer and Akkad at the hands of Amorites. Like those who were massacred, Gilgamesh own father and mother were forced to drink muddy water from the place of the massacre. When Gilgamesh hears that, he takes action, including apparently making statues for them, and bringing the remains home to Uruk for proper burial and ritual mourning. Gilgamesh will provide his parents the clear water they need in the Underworld.

It seems to me significant that Tablet 12 (and even more obviously, the Sumerian version from Ur) emphasizes family in a way that Tablets 1-12 do not. It makes the absence of any reference to Gilgamesh descendents, especially the son who, according to The Sumerian King List, succeeded his father in Uruk, all the more surprising. The fates of many in the Underworld are grim in the extreme, but the ones who have loved ones on earth who provide for them are relieved of the worst problem they face, the lack of potable water. The more children a person
has, the better the spirit is likely to be cared for in the land of the dead. Nothing explicitly connects this with Gilgamesh and Enkidu, but the poem leaves open the possibility that its view of family is very different from what we see in the first eleven tablets.

The Twelfth Tablet reminds us that, while the birth and death of Enkidu are important in the *Gilgamesh* series, the birth (only hinted at) and death of Gilgamesh himself are not part of the series, though Sumerian accounts of both have been discovered. The absence of the son, Ur-lugal, whose name is known from a few references in Sumerian texts, is also striking.

The “wisdom” In Tablet 12 is, I think, closer to the advice given by Siduri to Gilgamesh in the Old Babylonian version than in the Standard Version.419 Tablet 12 is a kind of coda in that regard. Enkidu has been swallowed up because, precisely, he has refused to follow the customs of the Underworld. When he descended, he acted like a normal human being on the earth, while he had been warned to act in precisely the opposite way (the Underworld—“Earth” in this case, erṣetu --exactly reversing life on earth):

To the advice Enkidu was deaf.
He put on a clean garment.
They marked him for a stranger.
He anointed himself with good oil from the bowl.
At its smell they gathered around him.
Into the Earth he threw the throw-stick.
The spirits trembled.
Those hit by the throw-stick turned on him.
He carried a staff in his hand.
Put sandals on his feet.
He made noise in the Earth.
He kissed the wife he loved,
beat the wife he hated,
kissed the child he loved,
beat the child he hated.
The outcry of the Earth seized him (12.32-47)

Note the image of “life” as lived normally. It is this “life” that the epic (at least, possibly, in the Old Babylonian versions of the story) sees as the “cure.” Even the treatment of the dead reflects this concern. In his list of “cases,” Enkidu notices that the man who has seven children is better off than the one with six, the one with six better off than the one with five, and down the line until the detached, isolated figures--killed in the wilderness, loners-- are mentioned. It is the broken individuals who suffer the most, the hopeless ones who have no one on the earth to help them in their misery. (And note that their misery is not a result of sins or crimes committed either on earth or in the Underworld.)
Wisdom in *Gilgamesh* Tablet 12

The god Ea is once again the god who provides Gilgamesh with wisdom that he will presumably need to possess when he becomes a god in the Underworld. There he will be one of the judges, like Dumuzi and Ningishzida. (Gilgamesh meets both Dumuzi and Ningishzida there in “The Death of Gilgamesh.”) Several scholars have emphasized stages in the enlightenment of Gilgamesh, notably Benjamin R. Foster and Tzvi Abusch. Foster does not consider Tablet 12 as part of *Gilgamesh*. Abusch distinguishes between an eleven-tablet *Gilgamesh* and a twelve-tablet *Gilgamesh* and offers an interpretation that has Gilgamesh preparing for his role as judge in the Underworld. For Abusch, Gilgamesh first must learn to be a normal man (based on the Old Babylonian wisdom offered by Siduri), then what it means to be king (through Utnapishtim’s story of the Flood), and finally what it means to be a god—in Tablet 12.

It is, of course, in Tables 11 and 12 that we see the importance of Enki/Ea. In light of what is narrated earlier in *Gilgamesh*, the sequence in Tablet 12 that involves Ea is particularly striking. When Enkidu is trapped in the Underworld, and it is made clear that he had not died as a hero in battle, Gilgamesh, as “the son of Ninsun” approaches three of the high gods for help. The first two dismiss Gilgamesh’s plea. Gilgamesh goes first to Enlil’s temple in Nippur, the Ekur. Enlil gave him “not a single word” in response. Gilgamesh then approaches the Moon God Sin in his temple in Ur. The appeal is identical and the response the same: not a word.

Finally, Gilgamesh approaches Ea in his temple in Eridu. He makes the identical appeal, and Ea answers him. The response is brief but important. Gilgamesh is to open a hole in the Earth so that the spirit of Enkidu could rise. When he does this, Enkidu’s spirit does indeed emerge “like a gust of wind.” They embrace and kiss; they discuss and agonize over Enkidu’s condition and the condition of others in the Underworld.

In Tablet 11, we have seen, a “hole” or channel to the bottom of Ea’s *apsû* allows Gilgamesh to find and bring up the Plant of Rejuvenation. Here a different term for “hole” is used, *takkapu*, a rare term that translates the Sumerian *ab-làl*.

**Gilgamesh and The Underworld**

The most thorough study of the Underworld to date is Dina Katz’s, *The Image of the Netherworld in the Sumerian Sources*. Gilgamesh is frequently mentioned in that study, including Tablet 6 of the Standard Akkadian *Gilgamesh*. Several of her conclusions bear directly on the image of the Underworld in relation to kingship. For one thing, *Gilgamesh* contains what appear to be different Mesopotamian traditions. In one case (Tablet 10.301) Utnapishtim, as we have seen, expresses a rare skepticism toward survival after death. In another, Sumerian and Semitic views are different in many respects. The importance of the Sun God, Utu/Shamash, as judge of the dead is a late, possibly Semitic concept that appears after Ur III. For Katz, a key text is the Sumerian “Death of Gilgamesh,” which, if it is an Ur III text is the earliest statement of the principle that death is the fate of all humanity.
We have a tendency to think of kingship as a relatively simple and persistent concept. What complicates the issue is that when kingship emerges, it appears to be significantly different from the *ens*hip that characterized human rule in Uruk, with its intimate partnership with the goddess Inanna. The Ur III deified kings, beginning with Urnammu and Shulgi, complicate the picture, for they are both kings and *ens*. Shulgi, especially, derived both titles from his association with Uruk: *ens*hip from selection by Inanna, and kingship from a dynastic principle (as brother of Gilgamesh, he enjoyed kingship through their divine mother, Ninsun). The “Death of Urnammu” and “The Death of Gilgamesh” provide much of the evidence for Sumerian views of the Underworld. The Ur III pattern disappears in Old Babylonian times, certainly by Hammurabi’s mid-career. I would argue that Uruk preserved ideas that may well have disappeared in other parts of Mesopotamia, but found their way into *Gilgamesh*.

**The Death of Gilgamesh**

The notoriously difficult problem of dating Sumerian literary texts complicates the issue of Gilgamesh’s death. The death of Enkidu, narrated immediately after the glorious victory over The Bull of Heaven, is the crisis that impels Gilgamesh to search for answers to the great questions of life and death.

Dina Katz suggests that the poem, “The Death of Gilgamesh,” which like most other Sumerian works is known from Old Babylonian copies—that is, from the early 2nd millennium when Babylon, especially under King Hammurabi, was in its ascendancy—may well have been composed earlier, in the Ur III period. Katz looks very carefully at all references to the world of the dead in Sumerian sources. The Semites who came to dominate Mesopotamia north and south appear to have had a different idea of life after death than that held by the Sumerians. (The role of the Sun God as a judge in the Underworld is an example.) A key text for Katz is “The Death of Utnapishtim,” the founder of the Ur III dynasty. Much of Sumerian ideology can be gleaned when “The Death of Urnammu” is compared with “The Death of Gilgamesh.”

“The Death of Gilgamesh” contains what may be the earliest statement of the key principle that death is the fate of all humanity (Katz 247). If we add “The Early Dynastic Hymn to Gilgamesh,” which is even earlier than “The Death of Gilgamesh,” we may be able to see how the Gilgamesh narratives came to displace the death of Gilgamesh onto the death of the hero’s friend.

It is worth emphasizing that “The Death of Gilgamesh,” like “The Early Dynastic Hymn to Gilgamesh,” makes no significant reference to Enkidu. (Enkidu is mentioned in a list as Gilgamesh’s “comrade in battle,” ll.100 and 200, but has no role to play in the narrative). Like many Sumerian poems the narrative of “The Death of Gilgamesh” is carried by a series of speeches. Gilgamesh receives dreams of the high gods in council. Enlil plans to reward Gilgamesh with eternal life for the hero’s great achievements. The crafty Enki balks at the plan. Enki recalls that after the Flood the gods had agreed that no human would live forever. Even though Gilgamesh is the son of a divine mother, he will not gain the life of the gods. Enki decrees his fate: he will be governor of the dead and a judge, like
Ningishzida and Dumuzi. Gilgamesh recounts his dreams to his own council. Since, as we have seen earlier, *Gilgamesh* has the hero conspicuously recounting his dreams to Enkidu, the absence of any significant reference to Enkidu in such an obvious parallel situation suggests that the motif of the friend is a later development to the story.

Katz sees a significant evolution of the Underworld idea in this “The Death of Urnamma.” Ur III kings, especially Urnamma and his son Shulgi, claimed to be brothers of Gilgamesh. Where the Ur III king had been raised to the level of the already legendary hero Gilgamesh, Gilgamesh is raised to the level of the judges Ningishzida and Dumuzi.

**Displacement**

The argument developed here is that the complete life, and especially the death, of Enkidu involves a displacement of a life-and-death story of Gilgamesh, a story that could have been put together from Sumerian poems like “The Early Dynastic Hymn to Gilgamesh,” “The Birth of Gilgamesh,” the heroic poems regarding the defeat of Aka, Humbaba, and The Bull of Heaven, and “The Death of Gilgamesh.” One advantage of this reordering of material (in several stages of many hundreds of years) is that Enkidu comes to represent primal humanity, who comes of age in the wild and progresses through stages of culture to approach something like an American Dream—only to have his life cut short as happens with great heroes. Gilgamesh, in contrast, is an adult when we first see him. His heroic acts are complicated, as in the case of Humbaba, where the Sun God is responsible not only for protecting Gilgamesh but also for having placed in Gilgamesh the desire to rid the world of an evil force. Gilgamesh is given a special status by the gods from birth and from the high status of his parents, Lugalbanda and Ninsun. Unlike Enkidu, Gilgamesh is 2/3rd god. He is king by virtue of a dynastic principle of succession.

On the other hand, *Gilgamesh* preserves an even more ancient Sumerian role, as *en*, that may have been kept alive (in some form) only in Uruk. This is his special relationship with the goddess Inanna. She selects those lovers. Gilgamesh has the wit and arrogance to deny her proposal, but in the end, gains enough “wisdom” to return to Uruk and to his dual role in the city-state that was identified by the Great Goddess and her temple, at the “heart” of the city.

What is also gained by the increasingly important role Enkidu plays in the *Gilgamesh* story is empathy. The audience of *Gilgamesh* is invited to identify with Enkidu at first. His is a story of struggle and eventually of pain, terror, and illness leading to a death that seems incomprehensible. As in many stories ancient and modern, an inner life of an Enkidu is revealed in conflict and suffering.

There is relatively little of an inner life of Gilgamesh until the center of the story, when he challenges Ishtar. It is not his impending death that allows an inner life to reveal itself to the audience. It is, rather, the love he has for his special friend that leads to the suffering and increasingly mad Gilgamesh. Gradually, as he meets the Scorpion Man and his Mate, Siduri, and Utnapishtim—as the audience introjects more of the suffering Gilgamesh—he
learns from his experience, as Enlil and Ishtar have had to learn from theirs—and gains enlightenment.

Tablet 12 returns the audience to Enkidu. Death has not relieved his suffering, except for giving him the chance to reveal himself and the situation of the Underworld to Gilgamesh. In one sense Tablet 12 provides a counterbalance to certain emphases in Tablets 1-11. We have noted that many readers of Gilgamesh prefer the Old Babylonian wisdom of Siduri to Siduri of the Standard Gilgamesh. While I do not share this enthusiasm for the Old Babylonian view of life, I can see how it fits into Tablet 12. Enkidu is advised (by the already enlightened Gilgamesh) that he should act in the Underworld in a manner that reverses ordinary life on earth. Enkidu refuses the advice and is trapped in the Underworld. The sequence allows for a reinforcement of “ordinary” life. Such a life consists of wearing clean garments and shoes, cleaning one’s body with perfumed oil, carrying weapons, making noise, kissing the wife and son a man loves and beating the wife and son he hates. Most people in the Underworld, as Enkidu describes the place, would love to return to such a happy state. In the Underworld there is little to eat or drink, and the world below is very dark—though it is not the world of punishment such as the Judeo-Christian and Muslim world envisioned.

There is, however, a ray of hope for the dead. In a tradition that goes back millennia, where people poured libations through a hole to relieve their dead ancestors, the great consolation for mortals is to have a loved one remain on earth. The fates of the dead Enkidu identifies are often dreadful, but he includes the fates of the father who has one, two, or six offspring. In each case, the father below has increasingly good treatment if has many children. The father’s condition improves almost to the level Enkidu had experienced on earth.

Certainly Tablet 12 reinforces the patrimonial, patriarchal family. Enkidu, of course, has no children. His only hope in the Underworld is his beloved Gilgamesh. The Sumerian King List knows of a Gilgamesh son, a grandson, and other descendents, none of whom gained any notice or importance in the traditions even of Uruk. If Enki insists in “The Death of Gilgamesh” that even the hero, being human, must die, a motif that appears in “The Early Dynastic Hymn to Gilgamesh,” his special relationship to the Great Goddess is what will provide him a special, divine status in the Underworld. Recall that in “The Descent of Inanna” and “The Descent of Ishtar” (in less detail), the sacrifice of the lover, Dumuzi/Tammuz, also leads to his transformation as god and judge in the Underworld. Like Dumuzi, Gilgamesh will be deified through the Great Goddess, and will remain, as a god, of lesser status than Inanna/Ishtar. But it is still an exalted role. Thus, for example, the Ur III king Shulgi links his fate to his “brother” Gilgamesh.

In Tablet 12, the deified Gilgamesh is only hinted at, largely through the “secrets” given to him by the wise Ea.

One of the reasons Tablet 12 is often rejected by modern readers is that it is unique in the “series” of Gilgamesh tales that make up the Standard Gilgamesh in that it is a very close translation into Akkadian of a known Sumerian poem. John Gardner and I thought there
may be a point a reader of *Gilgamesh* in translation may often miss. Especially for the learned professionals in 2nd and 1st millennia BCE Mesopotamia—such as Sin-leqi-unninnī, ancestor of *gala* and *āshipu* alike—Sumerian must have had the same prestige that, say, Greek had for Latin poets and scholars (and still has for many scholars in the modern world). Bilingual texts, especially the important incantations, have interlinear Sumerian and Akkadian versions, and it seems pretty clear that the Sumerian is the text, the “modern” Akkadian text a help for those who had not learned the long-dead Sumerian. One might find a parallel today in the Qur’an, where the classical Arabic is not quite the same as Modern Standard Arabic, and where no translation of the Qur’an into any language is considered equal to the original. As texts like *Gilgamesh* came to have canonical forms toward the end of the 2nd millennium BCE, the professionals who copied texts and translated them must have seen the preservation of a Sumerian text in the Akkadian of Tablet 12 something far more than a minor effort to keep alive a tradition. As both Greek and Latin pass from the Modern West it is well to remember the power such languages had for centuries after their classical forms had disappeared from speech.

**Are the Heroes Healed?**

As I read *Gilgamesh*, even if the problematic Tablet 12 is to be ignored, the opening lines of Tablet 1 suggests that Gilgamesh suffered from a recognizable condition, akin to the Western understanding of melancholia, and that his experiences, written into precious tablets, relieved that condition upon his return to Uruk. We do not know from *Gilgamesh* how Gilgamesh died, if he, like Enkidu, was given special benefits during his lifetime but was fated to die young. The Sumerian “The Death of Gilgamesh” suggests just that. It was a bitter lesson for the hero to learn. (Gilgamesh learns of his fate through dreams.) He was, however, able to overcome the terror that it initially caused him.

The situation facing Gilgamesh in “The Death of Gilgamesh” is displaced in *Gilgamesh* upon Enkidu. The wisdom provided to Enkidu by the Sun God in Tablet 7 does not obliterate the fear of death, but it does allow him to see the extraordinary benefits his life with Gilgamesh has given him. The language in his acceptance of that wisdom is the same as the language of healing in the opening lines of *Gilgamesh*, where Gilgamesh himself has had to learn equally bitter, possibly “tragic” truths.

*Gilgamesh* is not “about” sickness and its cure, in the sense that it is a scientific study of a pathological state, or in the sense that much of Mesopotamian “literature” is incantatory. Yet the double episode of the double character, Gilgamesh/Enkidu, their “illness” and the “wisdom” that heals them reflect the way in which Mesopotamian literature draws in what we have medicine and psychotherapy to deal with today. Certainly scientific medicine is the great gain of the West. Herodotus was appalled at the dreadful condition of medicine in Babylon when he (supposedly) visited there. What we can gain from Mesopotamia, though, is a working-out of an holistic approach to human experience, especially as it reconciles male and female, body and mind. Mesopotamian literature is very frank. It seldom ignores a problem, physical or mental. But it had not yet
learned to separate the parts of man in the destructive ways the West has learned to do—and is trying to unlearn.

**Tablets 11 and 12**

Nicola Vulpe argued that Tablet 12 does belong to a unified *Gilgamesh.* Against the idea that *Gilgamesh* is complete when Gilgamesh returns to Uruk at the end of Tablet 11, Vulpe examines the literary irony in the story to demonstrate its unity. In the process he calls attention to similar uses of dramatic irony in Greek and Shakespearean tragedies, where the audience understands what the hero’s view of himself initially conceals from himself. He finds a second key aspect of *Gilgamesh.* Gilgamesh goes from being a god to being a human, conscious of limitations and “a being able to transcend his own, immediate interests.” As in *Prometheus,* the gods are “neither wise nor just.” He even sees the Sun God Shamash limited in that way.

Gilgamesh is very different at the end of the story than at the beginning. Vulpe emphasizes Gilgamesh’s determination to share the Plant of Rejuvenation with others: it is not just a search for eternal life for himself. Tablet 12, Vulpe argues, “confirms the final concordance of perspectives” in the poem, as the ironic distance between protagonist and audience vanishes.

Tzvi Abusch, whose other works discuss *Gilgamesh* in detail, provides a rationale for a 12th Tablet added after *Gilgamesh* had been edited in a standard, “frozen,” form by the end of the 2nd millennium.

In his interpretive essay Abusch argued for a development of the Akkadian Gilgamesh stories in three major stages. By the Old Babylonian period, Gilgamesh is a warrior-king who oppresses his people, but who learns to become a man, that is, human. In this version, when Gilgamesh loses his friend because of hubris, he is directed to the “tavern-keeper” Siduri. It is the wisdom she imparts to Gilgamesh that “may represent the very message of our Old Babylonian version.” Siduri’s advice has captured more than one reader who laments that, as Abusch points out, the key passage is almost completely eliminated from later versions of the story.

Siduri, in effect, tells Gilgamesh to appreciate the good things that life brings a human being. He will never find what he seeks, eternal life. He should, then, accept a full belly, the joy in dancing and playing, and a good life that involves clean clothes, a washed head, and a good bath. Siduri ends with what may be the most precious gifts, a child who holds his hand and a wife with whom he can enjoy repeated intimacies. (Much of this advice, deleted from not only Siduri’s speeches in later versions but in the whole 11-tablet version, will return when Tablet 12 is added to the collection of Gilgamesh stories.)

For Abusch, the 11-tablet version, which ends with Gilgamesh’s return to Uruk (and the addition of a new prologue), emphasizes Gilgamesh’s role as king. Here he literally goes beyond Siduri to find Utnapishtim. Utnapishtim’s advice to him also explains why he will never find the “life” he seeks. But the return to Uruk shows that he has accepted his role as king, and Gilgamesh points out the achievement of building the walls and, even more
important, writing his experiences. “In the eleven-tablet version, there is thus greater emphasis on the community, on universal history, and on continuity than on the individual, his private story, and immediate future.”

Where Abusch is particularly innovative is in his interpretation of a 12-tablet version. He notes that the development from Siduri to Utnapishtim to Enkidu in the underworld is also an expansion of the spatial or global reach of the hero. Gilgamesh learns finally what he must know when he becomes a god. Abusch reads the early story as Gilgamesh’s turning away from the “sacred marriage” he is expected to enter when he is to meet with the goddess Ishhara in the Wedding House. At the entrance he is literally blocked by Enkidu, who fights him. When later, in Tablet 6 when Ishtar offers him a form of divinity such as she had given Tammuz, he refuses the offer. (Abusch builds on his earlier interpretations of Ishtar’s proposal, which, we will see, Abusch thinks is an offer that can only be effected in the underworld.)

Abusch has written extensively on Akkadian incantations, and he cites one, in a translation by W. G. Lambert, that brings his point about Gilgamesh home. Gilgamesh must become a god. The incantation makes this very clear.

Gilgamesh, supreme king, judge of the Anunnaki,
Deliberate prince, the...of the peoples,
Who surveys the regions of the world, bailiff of the underworld,
Lord of the (peoples) beneath,
You are a judge and have vision like a god,
You stand in the underworld and give the final verdict,
Your judgement is not altered, nor is your utterance neglected.
You question, you inquire, you give judgement,
you watch and you put things right.
Shamash has entrusted to you verdicts and decisions.
In your presence kings, regents and princes bow down.
You watch the omens about them and give the decision.

For me, the tradition that Gilgamesh became a divine judge in the underworld is behind Gilgamesh’s return to Uruk and to the goddess who has selected him for that fate. It is also the impetus for adding the 12th Tablet, in which Enkidu tells him the fates of ordinary humans in the underworld. The incantation Abusch cites identifies Shamash the Akkadian Sun God as the one who invests Gilgamesh with the wisdom to administer the rules of the underworld. In Tablet 12 Shamash has a role to play—he opens a “hole” through which the spirit of Enkidu can return to earth to speak with his friend—but in that story Shamash acts at the request of the God of Wisdom who is uniquely able to help Gilgamesh, the god Ea or Enki.

Like the most famous of Ishtar’s lovers, Tammuz (Sumerian Dumuzi), Gilgamesh ends up as a judge and ruler of the underworld. To obtain immortality Tammuz and Gilgamesh must give up “actual human life” and become a god, and they do, although neither Ishtar nor Tammuz are actually mentioned in Tablet 12.
As we shall see, Tablet 12 is part of a Sumerian story that opens with heroic acts on the part of Gilgamesh and Enkidu. The heroes come to the aid of Inanna by ridding her special tree of demonic forces. The tree then provides Inanna with her bed and throne. The men, for their part, receive parts of the tree that are made into the instruments that happen to fall into the underworld. Especially if the author of Tablet 12, a close translation of the Sumerian original, expected readers to know the lead up to the grim account of most persons in the underworld, the connection between Ishtar and the divinity given to Gilgamesh is implied. Tablet 12 then would have a place in a *Gilgamesh* that developed along the lines suggested by Tzvi Abusch. The emphasis there is on the wisdom he must gain in order to carry out his duties as judge there.

**Two Centers?**

Many years before H. L. J. Vanstiphout, Nicola Vulpe, Tzvi Abusch and Andrew George greatly expanded the interpretive possibilities for 11-tablet and 12-tablet editions of *Gilgamesh*, fictionalist John Gardner and I struggled with Tablet 12. We were interested in small and large narrative units, where and how they began (some in the middle of a tablet), how they developed and linked up with others before and after them. We had identified Tablet 6 as the center of the standard text of *Gilgamesh*, but we also suggested, tentatively, that the author had a second text that might have formed the central narrative. The Bull of Heaven in Tablet 6 prepares the reader for the death of Enkidu in Tablet 7, a narrative that includes among other things Enkidu’s dream-vision of the underworld. Tablet 12 presents problems for the idea of a unified composition because it offers a very different story of Enkidu entering and describing the underworld. What Samuel Noah Kramer had called “Gilgamesh and the Huluppu-Tree” and others have called “Gilgamesh, Enkidu and the Netherworld”—now “Bilgames and the Netherworld”—the Akkadian translation of a good part of constitutes Tablet 12. Gardner and I considered it the displaced center of *Gilgamesh*.

Uruk is not mentioned specifically in Tablet 12, but it provides the initial setting of the story. When Enkidu is trapped in the underworld, Gilgamesh makes his way to Nippur, where he seeks help from Enlil, then to Ur, where he asks Nanna for help, and finally Eridu, where Enki/Ea is able to help him. The story does not explicitly return to Uruk, but the connection with Gilgamesh’s city is still implied. Enkidu tells Gilgamesh of the sad fates of many people in the underworld. Only those who have loved ones behind on earth can comfort the dead. In his case, Enkidu has his beloved Gilgamesh. In the cases he mentions, the loved ones are sons of the deceased. The more sons, the better. In an otherwise dreary place, the one who leaves behind five sons lives like a scribe in a palace; with six sons, the man is filled with joy like a plowman; and the man with seven sons sits on a throne among the lesser gods. The last, with his seven sons, is the perfection of life as Siduri in the Old Babylonian text makes clear. *Gilgamesh* itself makes no reference to a wife or even a son of Gilgamesh. The implicit connection between having the ideal number of sons and Gilgamesh having a *friend* suggests that Enkidu, miserable though he is in telling of his life in the underworld, will find his status changed radically by...
Gilgamesh. At least in the underworld Gilgamesh will have been transformed into one of the lesser gods and Enkidu will have an exalted place with him.

This is speculation beyond both Sumerian and Akkadian versions of the story, which do not make explicit what will eventually happen to Enkidu—or to Gilgamesh—in the world of the dead. It is difficult to know how far to extrapolate the situation in Tablet 12. We do not know what the readers of *Gilgamesh* would know of the ancient texts. Gardner and I suggested that one aspect of Tablet 12 that tends to bother modern readers is that Tablet 12 is such a close translation of its Sumerian original. We rather thought that it pointed to the continued high respect for the long-dead Sumerian language held at least by the ancient scholars. Many incantations were copied in bilingual interlinear texts. The Sumerian original governs the Akkadian translation. Additions to Sumerian texts were also made many hundreds of years after the Sumerian language died out. The Sumerian original of Tablet 12 was used in the scribal schools of Nippur and Babylon in earlier times. It was one of those literary texts identified in the Decad, a scribal curriculum. While the Sumerian original of Tablet 12 would not have been considered a “sacred” text, it would have held great prestige among those who could read it—or translate it. “Experts” like the mashmashu-exorcists and gala-singers who were certainly among the most important scholars in the time of King Assurbanipal’s great collection of texts would no doubt have appreciated both a translation into Akkadian and the original Sumerian of Tablet 12. (Recall that Assurbanipal was one of very few Mesopotamian rulers who claimed to be literate.) That is not to say that they would have known what to do with an epilogue like Tablet 12.

**Notes to Chapter One**

214 “Text-building” is an approach to interpreting writings that is derived from new theories in the humanities, especially the New Historicism, and the theory anthropological linguistics known as the New Philology. The approach seeks to establish the cultural and historical context of texts that may be oral compositions and ritual performances as well as products of early literacy. The status of an “author” is one aspect, as is the prestige of certain texts like stories of heroism. The New Historicism is probably better known to literary studies than the New Philology. The New Historicism corrects a tendency in literary studies to deal with a text in isolation from its historical context. New Historicists consider the historical and cultural conditions of a text’s production and the history of a text’s interpretations and evaluations. The New Philology is part of a rapidly growing cross-disciplinary enterprise known as Cultural Studies. Alton Becker, who invented the term, studied the textual coherence of a type of Javanese Shadow Theatre known as the wayang. To develop a New Philology, Becker challenged the Aristotelian notion that texts are “imitations” of something more real, more true, and more fundamental than the imitation. For Becker, the meaning of a text is not just a gloss on the meaning of words and phrases; rather, meaning must relate to contextual relations within the text (“hierarchy” and “coherence”), to other texts, to the intentions of authors and audiences, and to nonliterary events. See Alton L. Becker, “Text-Building, Epistemology, and Aesthetics in Javanese Shadow Theatre,” *The Imagination of Reality: Essays in Southeast Asian Coherence Systems*, ed. A. L. Becker and Aram A. Yangoyan (Norwood, New Jersey: Ablex, 1979), 211-44. On the New Historicism see, e.g., Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980). Anthropologists influenced by the New Philology include Clifford Geertz in *Local Knowledge: Further Essay in Interpretive Anthropology*. Biblical and classical scholars have made productive use of these insights, e.g., Kenneth E. Bailey, *Poet and Peasant* and *Through


217 The final passage of Tablet 11, set off by lines drawn before and after it on the clay tablet of the best edition, is identical to the passage in Tablet 1 except for identifying the one who is to view the walls and the city, that is, the boatman Urshanabi. Line 5 follows CAD 10.ii.134.

218 For a breakdown of these sources, see, e.g., Anthony F. Campbell and Mark A. O’Brien, Sources of the Pentateuch: Texts, Introductions, Annotations (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 1-160. For a discussion of the Documentary Hypothesis and its relationship to Babylonian influences on the Bible, see Russell E. Gmirkin, Berossus and Genesis, Manetho and Exodus: Hellenistic Histories and the Date of the Pentateuch (New York: T & T Clark, 2006), esp. chs. 2 and 11.


221 Hans Nissen, “Uruk: Key Site of the Period and Key Site of the Problem,” Artefacts of Complexity: Tacking the Uruk in the Near East, ed. J. N. Postgate (Baghdad: British School of Archaeology in Iraq, 2001), 2. A major complication is distinguishing the early levels of the great ziggurat from the later Anu temple complex. Nissen suggests that the site of Anu worship may have been Kullaba, a settlement across the river from Uruk and Eanna. The oldest central structure was a high terrace with a temple on the top, the so-called “White Temple,” 8.

222 Details of this analysis are given in a paper delivered at the Parker Institute Symposium on “The Healing Power of Ancient Literature,” on disk of The Parker Lectures (Reno: The Parker Institute, 2009), Lecture 2.
Chapter One: Prologues and Epilogues


226 CAD 6.24; The transliteration of Gilgamesh normally follows Simo Parpola, *The Standard Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh*, or Andrew R. George, *The Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh*, or the CAD. Unless otherwise noted, translations are mine. The famous *hapax legomenon* is interpreted by Jeremy Black, Andrew George, and Nicholas Postage, editors of *A Concise Dictionary of Akkadian* (CDA) (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1999) as “of fickle mood,” 100, following Wolfram von Soden in his *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch*, 3 Vols. (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1972-1981), where the word represents an emotion, perhaps mimicking an emotional cry. (My thanks for Richard A. Henshaw for this observation.)

227 The basic text used in translations of the epic is a version from Nineveh of the seventh century B.C.E., but the story is much older. Gilgamesh stories have been recovered in Sumerian, Old Babylonian, Akkadian, Hittite, and possibly Elamite versions. Gilgamesh was a historical figure, king of Uruk (and *en* of Inanna) around 2600 B.C.E. The epic itself, written in Akkadian, dates from about the end of the Old Babylonian period, ca. 1600 B.C.E. For a recent discussion that considers dates, sources and structural analysis, see the Clarendon Press edition of A. R. George. An earlier translation by George, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, *A New Translation* includes translations of Sumerian and other Akkadian Gilgamesh texts, as does Foster, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, with literary analyses by William Moran, Thorkild Jacobsen, and Rivkah Harris, a poem by Hillary Major, and translations of Sumerian Gilgamesh poems by Douglas Frayne and the Hittite Gilgamesh by Gary Beckman. Stephanie Dalley’s translation is found in *Myths from Mesopotamia*, 39-154.

228 The discoverer and first translator was a British Museum assistant, George Smith. For the early material, see George Smith, *The Chaldean Account of Genesis*, Rev. Ed. A. H. Sayce (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1880).

229 Consider, for example, the importance of the epic in, among older studies, John Dunne, *The City of the Gods* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), and in Kopp, *If You Meet the Buddha on the Road, Kill Him!* II.i.23-31, which Erna Bowman was kind enough to bring to my attention. For a sampling of somewhat more recent work (1982-94), see Maier, ed. *Gilgamesh, A Reader*.

230 Richard Henshaw, following Vladimir Propp’s *Theory and History of Folklore*, suggests that it is a tale of life itself, as “reality.” This is further shown in Chapter 2 of that work by his famous idea that all tales are reducible to a single plot. [Personal Communication]
F. A. M. Wiggermann, *Mesopotamian Protective Spirits: The Ritual Texts*, 46-79. The naked “heroes” in early cylinder seal impressions look like *abgal*s. Could the figure arresting Big Day in the scene (Louvre 10 [A142]), Fig. 6 above, paired with the Sun God who is arresting the *kusarikku*, be an *abgal*? If so, the scene may suggest two potential calamities, drought and famine, checked by the underground waters of the *abzu*, and Flood, checked by the sun.

“Inanna and Shukaletuda” was one of the texts listed among the scribal curriculum. See Jeremy Black, et al., *The Literature of Ancient Sumer*, 303; for a translation, see The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature t:1.3.3.


Reiner, 4. This sage is followed by two more who anger the gods (Adad and Ea) and the final sage, Lu-Nanna, who “drove the *ushumgallu*-dragon” from the Eninkarnunna temple of “Ishtar of Shulgi.” For a different version of the story, see J. J. A. van Dijk, “Inanna raubt den “grossen Himmel”: Ein Mythos,” *tikip santakki mala bašmu...: Festschrift für Rykle Borger zu Seinem 65. Geburtstag am 24. Mai 1994*, ed. Stefan M. Maul (Groningen: Styx, 1998), 9-38; The Electronic Corpus of Sumerian Literature t.1.3.5.

Burstein, 13.

Burstein, 19.

For a survey, see “Chaldea” at en.wikipedia.org.

For the connection between Oannes’s writing and Enuma Elish, which encourages people of all sorts to read the story of Marduk for the wisdom it contains, see Burstein, 14.

242 For the connection between Oannes’s writing and Enuma Elish, which encourages people of all sorts to read the story of Marduk for the wisdom it contains, see Burstein, 14.

Burstein, 20.


Burstein considers it a “possible fragment,” and thinks Berossus is the likely source for the story in Aelian [personal communication].

Many of the Banquet Scenes in Early Dynastic art show, in addition to servers of food and musicians, figures who may possibly represent singers/storytellers like the nar, e.g., Amiet, La Glyptique Mésopotamienne Archaïque, Plates 88-91.

Rivkah Harris, Gender and Aging in Mesopotamia: The “Gilgamesh Epic” and Other Ancient Literature, 144. This section appeared in Maier, “Sacred Marriage(s) in Mesopotamian Literature,” Proceedings of the Eastern Great Lakes & Midwest Biblical Literature Societies 24 (1004), 17-34.

A striking modern parallel can be found in anthropologist Vincent Crapanzano’s study of a 50-year-old unmarried Moroccan tile maker, in Tuhami: Portrait of a Moroccan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 66-72. Tuhami was convinced that he had been seduced by the powerful demoness, Aisha Qandisha, whose exploits are known throughout Morocco. Once seduced by Aisha Qandisha, Tuhami became one of her “husbands,” and she entirely dominated his sexual life. While Islam allows no possibility of the existence of a goddess, it is noteworthy that Aisha Qandisha is honored in the same place as the two most powerful Sufi saints of Morocco. Her grotto is a pilgrimage site for both men and women, particularly those involved in ecstatic and occult activities. See also Fatima Mernissi’s interview with “Habiba the Psychic” in Doing Daily Battle, tr. Mary Jo Lakeland (London: The Women’s Press, 1988), 126-44. See also Maier, “The Wisdom of the Serpent: Siduri, Yamlika, and Aisha Qandisha,” The Maghreb Review (London), 227-41.

Mario Liverani, Uruk: The First City, 33-40.


Liverani, 39.


Sefati, Love Songs in Sumerian Literature, 225.


For details of the seeder-plow, threshing sledge, and clay sickles, hoes and baskets, see Liverani, 15-19, 65.


ETCSL translation t.5.3.1.


See CAD 8.411-15.


A. Zaid and P. F. de Wet, “Chapter II: Origin, Geographical Distributional Values of Date Palm,” [www.fao.org/DOCRREP/006/T4369E/v4360e06](http://www.fao.org/DOCRREP/006/T4369E/v4360e06). Zaid and de Wet include a cylinder seal impression that appears to show cuttings taken from a date palm.


“Phoenix dactylifera.”

CAD 11.ii.325.

The suggestions are Dalley’s (78) and Parpola’s (123), which was our own guess some time ago, Foster’s (48), and George’s (50) respectively.

The connection is suggested by Herman Vanstiphout, *Het epos van Gilgameš* (Roeselare: Roularta Books, 2002), 96.


Benno Landsberger, *The Date Palm and its By-products according to Cuneiform Sources* (Graz: Im Selbstverlage des Herausgebers, 1967), 1-4.


Giovino, 77-91.

Compare the “cones” with photos of the date spathe in Giovino, figs. 4-7, versus the blossoms, figs. 8 and 9.

Popenoe, 343-47.

Porter, 134.


Among characterizations of cities, there was no standardized description, and among numerous descriptions, that of Uruk in *Gilgamesh* is quite unusual. See CAD 1.i.379-89, under ālu, esp. physical features of the city, 379-80.


Cocquerillat, 27-30; and see Planche 3a and Planche 3b.

Cocquerillat, 104.


296 Ernst Heinrich, *Die Tempel und Heiligtümer im alten Mesopotamien* (Berlin: Deutsches Archäologisches Institute, 1982), abb. 372.

297 Biggs, IAS #278 [complete citation]

298 George, *The Epic of Gilgamesh: A New Translation*, xxiv-xxv. See also Foster, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, xiv-xv, and Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia*, 47. All assume that the author wrote an eleven tablet collection of Gilgamesh stories and that the 12th tablet was added later.


300 W. G. Lambert, “A Catalogue of Texts and Authors,” 59-77. Lambert dates the catalogue to the first quarter of the 1st millennium BCE, 76. All the fragments come from the libraries of Assurbanipal.

301 Paul-Alain Beaulieu, *The Pantheon of Uruk during the Neo-Babylonian Period*, 173.


307 See CAD 17/I, 38384, for numerous citations.


Chapter One: Prologues and Epilogues

310  Pongratz-Leisten, “The Interplay of Military Strategy and Cultic Practice,” 250. In this case, the city is Arbela, another major site of Ištar worship in Assyria.

311  Note that Ištar is even identified with the primordial goddesses Kishar and Tiamat, Alasdair Livingstone, Mystical and Mythological Explanatory Works of Assyrian and Babylonian Scholars (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 234.

312  Foster, Before the Muses: An Anthology of Akkadian Literature, 712.

313  Before the Muses, 718-19.

314  Thorkild Jacobsen, The Treasures of Darkness, 237. Jacobsen detected a shift from the early metaphor of the gods as providers to the gods as rulers and finally the gods as parents. Assurbanipal could even be imagined as having an attitude of childlike helplessness before the goddess, a “quietistic” view Jacobsen notes as uncharacteristically lacking in self-assertiveness but nevertheless meritorious and pious. Such an attitude never enters Mesopotamian love poetry, where it would have been unseemly for the male to adopt the obsequious posture of, say, the medieval knight in European courtly love. See W. G. Lambert [complete citation].


319  Assyrian Prophecies, xxvi.

320  Assyrian Prophecies, lxvii. Hence the texts are not copies of Babylonian texts.

321  Assyrian Prophecies, #9 (41).


Cohen, *Canonical Lamentations*, 588.


If Arali is a term for the underworld, the epithet is appropriate to Geshtinanna. Among the goddesses who are identified as $t\text{upsharrat irs} \text{itim}$ are Belit-šeri, Ninanna, and in a passage that calls her $\text{dub-sar-mah arali-ge}$, Nin-geshtin-na, Knut Tallqvist, *Akkadische Götterepitheta* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1974), 102. The problem with names such as Geshtinanna is that they could be read as epithets in their own right. The term geshtin by itself refers to wine, and the goddess has been identified by Thorkild Jacobsen as the “power in the grape,” *The Treasures of Darkness*, 62.

Cohen reads the name in line a+172 as $[d\text{Mu-tin}] \text{-an-na}$, Emesal for Geshtinanna.

And the Standard Babylonian version of *Gilgamesh* identifies Ishtar as the mother goddess in the Flood story.

Cohen, 591.


Emesal for gemé, glossed in the text as amtu, “slave girl” or “servant girl.”
The Akkadian gloss uses the term *ikkibu*, an interdicted or forbidden thing (CAD 7, 55). The CAD considers *ikkibu* as a loanword from the Emesal *emgeb*, often “taboo,” and suggests that in later texts the term is “reduced to a more or less vague synonym of words for ‘sin’ and also denotes, as such words do in Akkadian, the punishment incurred by the infringement of the interdict,” 57

Cohen, 566 (c+215-19). Compare the divine *me* appropriated by Inanna in “Inanna and Enki,” #37 and #38, where the two terms are combined as they are here. Gertrud Farber-Flügge, *Der Mythos “Inanna und Enki,”* 107-108.

Cohen follows precedent in translating *nam-tag-ga* as “sin.” The range of its Akkadian equivalent, *arnu*, is more inclusive and less theologically problematic than the Judeo-Christian concept of sin. As with Akkadian *gillatu* and Sumerian *nig-gig*, *arnu* covers the range of guilt, wrongdoing, misdeed, offense, even punishment and fine (CAD, 1. 2. 294).

Richard A. Henshaw, *Female and Male*, Appendix 3.3.


Legain, #431.

One text from Uruk does list slave-women who were donated to Inanna’s temple by a number of cities. Steinkeller, “Archaic City Seals,” 256.


350 See Rosemary Ellison, “Some Thoughts on the Diet of Mesopotamia from c. 3000-600 B.C.” Iraq XLV (1983), 146-50. Ellison deals with breads, vegetables, fruit, and animals. The gazelle was important; a month was named for the eating of gazelle, though it is not clear if Mesopotamia domesticated the gazelle. The preservation of food, especially meat and fish, is taken up. Ellison considers the amount of food needed to sustain life under conditions in Mesopotamia. About dates, while today dates do not ripen in northern locations like Nineveh, there is evidence that in the Middle Ages dates ripened as far north as Mosul, so it is possible that climate change accounts for the representation of date palms and dates in, e.g., Assyrian art, 147.

351 Mario Liverani, Uruk, The First City, 32-36.

352 Black and Green, Gods, Demons and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia, 102-103.

353 For the range of meanings in Sumerian (GUD) and Akkadian, see Chicago Assyrian Dictionary under alpu (I.2.364-372). The classic study of the representation of animals in Sumerian literature is Wolfgang Heimpel, Tierbilder in der Sumerischen Literature (Rome: Päpstliches Bibelinstitut, 1968), which studies a wide variety of ungulates, 75-209, but does not consider “Gilgamesh and the Bull of Heaven.”

354 See, e.g., “Aurochs” at en.wikipedia.org. The original scientific name, Bos primigenius, has been replaced by Bos taurus. The species is now not considered separate from domesticated cattle.

355 Sumerian had many categories of gud (or gu₄), from breeding bull and plow ox to very specialized uses like the grazing and trampling oxen used to kill reeds and unwanted plants in converted wasteland before it was to be brought into cultivation. See John A. Halloran, ed. Sumerian Lexicon (Los Angeles: Logogram, 2006), 88-91. The wild bull (rīmu) is the equivalent of Sumerian gud-am, while the wild cow (rīmtu) translated Sumerian gud-sún.

356 Gilgamesh 1.28, 66, 166, 195, 202; 2.13; 4.166, 174, 175; 7.175; 8.17 for different spellings of rīmtu. For “wild cow” (rīmtu) see 1.34, 243, 266; 2.102, 137; 3.101, 117. Line numbers here refer to Simo Parpola, The Standard Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh, 138.

357 Bruce Chilton, Mary Magdalene, A Biography (NY: Doubleday, 2005), 120-21.
As above, George, whose *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic: Introduction, Critical Edition and Cuneiform Texts*, is the definitive edition of *Gilgamesh* Tablet 6, provides an extensive summary and analysis of the Sumerian and Akkadian texts of the stories, I.470-78. George’s edition of Tablet 6 is based on ten different texts of the poem, I.616-17. Transliteration and translation of the 183 lines poem follow, I.618-631. “Critical and Philological Notes” to the tablet are found in II.829-44. George’s line numbering differs slightly from that in Simo Parpola’s *The Standard Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh*, 91-93, where Parpola counts 187 lines.

Douglas R. Frayne, *Presargonic Period (2700-2350 BC)* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 55-57. Frayne’s has a section on EN.ME-barage-si with two texts, E1.7.22, though the two texts read ME-barage-si, and do not mention Akka, the son.


373  Schloen, 51.

374  Muhawi and Kanaana, Speak, Bird, Speak Again, 11-29.

375  Muhawi and Kanaana, 12.

376  Muhawi and Kanaana, 13.

377  Muhawi and Kanaana, 19.


380  Jean Bottéro suggests that Shukaletuda’s father is also Enki; see “Lishtar” on Bottéro and Samuel Noah Kramer, Lorsque les dieux faisait l’homme: mythologie mésopotamienne (Paris: Gallimard, 1993).

381  See Kramer and Maier, 57-68.

382  “Inana and An,” The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature.


387 For a recent discussion of the site, see Walther Sallaberger and Aage Westenholz, *Mesopotamien: Akkade-Zeit und Ur II-Zeit* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999), 31-34.

388 Aage Westenholz, in *Mesopotamien*, 38.


392 Aage Westenholz, in *Mesopotamien*, 37.

393 Aage Westenholz, in *Mesopotamien*, 78.

394 Aage Westenholz, in *Mesopotamien*, 65.

395 Aage Westenholz, in *Mesopotamien*, 40.


397 Aage Westenholz, in *Mesopotamien*, 40.

398 CAD 17.ii.76-114, 10.i.166-69.


315 Vanstiphout provides a slightly different graphic, 53, but he brings the point home by showing the numerous examples of symmetry in the poem.


318 The first is the title Samuel Noah Kramer gave to the poem, a title that emphasizes the tree that is still not fully identified; the second is Andrew George’s title, which emphasizes the hero’s Sumerian name, 175-95. Douglas Frayne refers to it as “Gilgamesh, Enkidu, and the Underworld,” Foster, 129-43.

319 Tablet 12, though it has clear support in the colophons that have survived, is not considered part of the poem by a number of contemporary translators, like George and Foster; it is retained by others, e.g., Stephanie Dalley.


321 This, in spite of the evidence so far obtained that shows the Standard Akkadian *Gilgamesh* was complete in twelve tablets. A *Gilgamesh* complete in eleven tablets, ending with Gilgamesh return to Uruk, may someday appear, but the colophons of existing manuscripts clearly mark the beginning of Tablet 12 as we have it and indicate that the poem is complete in twelve tablets. See Parpola, 113, 155.

Dalley, 42, 120-25.


Stephen Bertman [personal communication].


George introduces and translates Tablet 12 with the three Sumerian recensions, 175-94.

For the son of Gilgamesh, Ur-lugal (Ur-lugal-la, or Ur-nungal), see The Electronic Corpus of Sumerian Literature on “The Sumerian King List.” For the son in “The Death of Gilgamesh,” see Niek Veldhuis, “The Solution of the Dream: A New Interpretation of Gilgames’ Death,” 133-48. The formula used in what may be the prototype of “The Sumerian King List” does not include relationships of parent to offspring, and the relationship is added only in three unusual cases, one of which is Aka, noted as the son of Enmerbaragesi of Kish, Piotr Steinkeller, “An Ur III Manuscript of the Sumerian King List,” *Literatur, Politik und Recht in Mesopotamien*, 270, 276.


For Enki/Ea in Tablets 11 and 12, see Kramer and Maier, 117, 160-65. Poet Charles Olson “transposed” Enkidu’s descent into the Underworld; see Maier, “Charles Olson and the Poetic Uses of Mesopotamian Scholarship,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 103 (1983), 227-33, to which is appended “Musical Settings for Cuneiform Literature: A Discography” by J. M. Sasson, 233-35; rpt. in [complete citation].
Chapter One: Prologues and Epilogues

423 CAD 18.75.


427 Steinkeller, “An Ur III Manuscript of the Sumerian King List,” points out that the USKL ends with Ur-Namma and Shulgi. Shulgi’s name is written with the divine determinative, which allows Steinkeller to give a probable date for the version at Shulgi 20-48, when Shulgi had been deified, 269. Steinkeller proposes that the very notion of kingship cycling through Sumerian city-states, a notion absent in USKL, developed after the shocking collapse of the Ur III dynasty. In the earlier text kingship appears to be linear concept, originally justifying the immensely long reign of Kish (“as king”) that yielded to Sargon of Akkad.


432 Vulpe, “Irony and the Unity of the *Gilgamesh* Epic,” 279.


Gardner and Maier, 36-37.


Black, et al., *The Literature of Ancient Sumer*, translates the Sumerian, 31-40; for the poem in the Decad, see 302.