Chapter Three

What’s In a Name: Gilgamesh the King

Tablet 3 picks up the story begun at the end of Tablet 2, a story that will occupy Gilgamesh through Tablet 5: the quest for a name. Gilgamesh wants to take on a truly heroic task, the confrontation with Humbaba in the Forest of Cedars.

At the end of Tablet 2 Gilgamesh speaks to the young men of the city and then to the elders. Tablet 3 begins with the advice the elders give to Gilgamesh. They place King Gilgamesh in the care of Enkidu. The tablet ends, apparently, with Gilgamesh acting in his most kingly way. (Much of the tablet is still lost and is reconstructed by using the “Yale” Old Babylonian forerunner.)

It appears, then, that Gilgamesh makes ritual preparations for the dangerous journey. At the beginning he is asking advice of the elders. (They warn him against the adventure.) By the end of the tablet Gilgamesh is giving orders to the officers who will rule Uruk in his absence. The key principle: to judge the lawsuit of the weak (3.209). Gilgamesh also orders the men not to “assemble young men in the street” (3.208). The king is shown, then, recognizing one of the very oppressive practices that had brought the gods into the case against a tyrannical Gilgamesh.

Perhaps he is already gaining wisdom. In another very fragmentary piece, Gilgamesh appears to recognize that his desire to slay Humbaba is prompted by the “evil” the Sun God detests (3.305).

When the officers receive the king’s advice, they in turn offer advice to the two men, as the elders had done previously.

Almost half of the tablet is taken up with Gilgamesh’s mother, Ninsun. This important segment of the narrative will be taken up in the next chapter. It is worth noting, though, that, as in “Shulgi P,” Ninsun, though a goddess, resides in a palace, not a temple, and is traditionally associated with Gilgamesh as king rather than as an en.

Whatever else motivates Gilgamesh, his great desire is to make a name for himself.

Does his activity in Tablet 3 make him a “strong” or a “weak” king? Thorkild Jacobsen thought he detected in Sumer a “primitive democracy.”902 The earliest texts in Uruk, from the 4th millennium BCE, do refer to city councils, including an Assembly of Women. (Note their presence on the “Daily Bread and Beer” tablet.) In a much later Akkadian text analyzed carefully by Jacobsen, Enuma Elish, the cosmos itself develops into a monarchy ruled by the Babylonian high god Marduk.903 As Jacobsen reads the text, there is no cosmos at all at the beginning of the Creation Epic; rather there is chaos. At one point, when the gods are terrified by the very embodiment of cosmic chaos, Tiamat, Marduk consults a council of the gods and offers to fight Tiamat face-to-face, making him the
ultimate hero. But he has already taken the advice of his cunning father, Enki/Ea, making his offer contingent on Marduk’s becoming King of the Gods before he will fight Tiamat. The Council of the Gods represents, in Jacobsen’s view, a form of “primitive democracy,” a stage in the evolution of the cosmos as a state. It reaches its final form with a monarchy. The Babylonian king was considered the “shadow” of the King of the Gods Marduk. (The people then became a “shadow” of the King of Babylon.) For “safety” and “benefits” the people become obedient to the authority of the sovereign in the same way the gods had given up their authority to Marduk.

What drives Gilgamesh in large measure is the tension between the older role of the Urukean en, who was more like the CEO of a large corporation and who derived his authority from his intimate relationship with Inanna (who selected him), and the growing power of the lugal, the Sumerian king. In the earliest Gilgamesh texts Gilgamesh always conspicuously carries both titles.

Do Titles Matter?
The problem, though, is that Gilgamesh was an “en” long before he was “king”—and that brings sex into the equation, with all its complexity.

Assyriologists still scratch their heads about the meaning of the title, “en.” “En” is the keyword in unpacking the Gilgamesh tradition—especially the two thousand or more years that led up to the “Epic” of Gilgamesh.

The Sumerian word en is almost universally translated as “lord.” Gilgamesh is the “lord” of Uruk (or of Kullab, a district that became part of the growing Uruk) in most Sumerian stories about the hero. The problem is that while “king” is usually simple enough to grasp in stories of manly heroism, “lord” is often so empty of meaning that it becomes, paradoxically, opaque. My computer provides the usual synonyms: noble, aristocrat, lady, peer of the realm, and member of the aristocracy—meaningful enough for Europeans today, but a bit of a stretch for a democratic American in the 21st century. Movie titles give a hint as to current extensions of what once was fairly specific. Lord of the Rings, of course, fits perfectly into the medieval concept of an aristocrat with real power, and Lord of the Flies is a translation of the biblical Beelzebub (e.g., in Matthew 10:25), where the Greek transliterates Hebrew ba’al, cognate with our Akkadian bēlu. Lord Jim is one thing; The Lords of Discipline and The Lords of Flatbush another.

The etymology of English “lord” already presents problems. Eric Partridge’s Origins sends us immediately, if unexpectedly, to Paragraph 5 of “loaf.”904 Not that our English ancestors were loafers. In Old English the word was hlāfweard, the ward or guard of the loaf, of the bread. (We will see that such a meaning is not so far from the earliest meaning of en, when “daily bread” was not only a symbol of food in general but meant survival in a city-state based on the production of barley. Rations of barley constituted the first money, long before silver and then gold became the measure of value in the ancient Near East.) The “loaf” was already a sacrificial cake when our Old English speakers used the
term. The hlāfwēard was soon contracted to hlāford, and later the middle consonant was dropped in favor of our current pronunciation.

Urging us to translate Sumerian en and its common equivalent in the Akkadian language, bēlu, as “lord” is its compatibility with “Lord,” with its resonances of the sacred. In fact, in both Sumerian and Akkadian—the Semitic language that is used in the “Epic” of Gilgamesh—en and bēlu are frequently used for deities as well as for humans who exercise some form of rule, mastery, or ownership. Two of the three highest gods among the thousand deities of Mesopotamia, Enlil and Enki, have the title in their names. The Bible knows that the high god of the Babylonians is Bel, since in most contexts any good Babylonian would know that his Marduk was Lord.

“Lord” is regularly used to translate titles of deities in many religions. Lord Shiva seems to make sense to English-speaking Hindus, for example. It is so frequently used in English, though, because “Lord” covers key terms in the three religions whose traditions are so entwined: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Muslims know that the Lord (Rabb) is far more often associated with Allah than is King (Malik), though God has mastery in the Kingdom of the Heavens and of the Earth.

The “Lordship” of God in the Bible is so important that some Christians follow The Gospel of John in seeing Thomas’s insight, that Jesus is “My Lord and My God,” as the perfect summary of the Christian faith. (Note that the phrase does not include the Kingship of God.)

That Johannine phrasing, using the Greek kyrios and theos, would seem to reflect one of the most striking uses of “Lord” in the Hebrew Bible. As is well-known, the most sacred name of the deity was so important that when it was written in its four consonants, YHWH, it was not to be pronounced. (When people articulate the name today, it is usually Yahweh.) The tetragrammaton, as the four consonants came to be known, when encountered in the text, was read aloud as Adonai. We are now in a situation where the most colorless of terms, “Lord,” is used to translate a name so terrifying that a substitute was used in its place. “Lord” and “God” appear separately in the Hebrew Bible, but they are often found in the compound name Yahweh Elohim.

The Greeks and Romans, by the way, knew of the “Lord,” Adonis, beloved of Aphrodite (Venus). The Greco-Roman tradition may have been influenced by the Phoenician adon whose tragic death was lamented in annual rituals—like his Sumerian counterpart Dumuzi, of whom much will be said later. Adonis is likely to be the West’s closest parallel to the archetypal human en of the Mesopotamian tradition. The Sumerians knew him as Dumuzi, and Akkadian speakers called him Tammuz (as the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel makes clear). An important source, The Sumerian King List, considered Dumuzi as one of a small group of rulers in the First Dynasty of Uruk.

By the time The Sumerian King List was written, the en was already losing ground to the lugal, the Big Man or “King” of Mesopotamian city-states. Vestiges of the old ways continued, however, especially in Uruk. Even when Uruk lost its political autonomy to
increasingly remote centers—Babylon, Assyria, Persia, and Greece—the enship of Dumuzi and Gilgamesh remained in the Urukean tradition.

Sumerian kings absorbed many of the duties (and prestige) of the en, and, as we shall see, claimed a number of “priestly” titles for themselves. The narrative poetry that became standard features of the educational curriculum was heavily weighted toward Uruk’s “lords,” but divine and human. Inanna and Gilgamesh are the most prominent figures in that curriculum. The history of Sumerian kingship, on the other hand, is largely derived from the royal inscriptions that present a somewhat different face of divine and human rule over the land.

The title of the Big Man or King is thought to have originated, not in Uruk, but in nearby Ur. The implications of this point will appear later.

**The Dignity of the Upright Posture**

The poem praising Shulgi was the first literary work in the Decad. Among many other intriguing features of “Shulgi A” is the way it reinforces the value of physical activity, especially running. Shulgi is praised as no other Mesopotamian king for his astonishing feats as a runner. He boasts of being a “powerful man who enjoys using his thighs,” a “fast runner” who ran from Nippur to Ur “as if it were only the distance of a dannu” (a dannu is about six miles). His running is likened to both wild and domesticated quadrupeds and to the god Shakkan, the god imaged as a gazelle. (Shulgi shares this image with Enkidu.) He ran so far and so fast that he celebrated an esh-esh festival on the same day in both Nippur and Ur.

A memorable account of the importance and dignity of the upright posture, now seen in *ardipithecus ramidus* of more than four million years ago, was given by Erwin W. Straus in “The Upright Posture.” In his phenomenological analysis of the upright posture, Straus points out that it distinguishes humans from all other living creatures.

A breakdown of physical well-being is alarming; it turns our attention to functions that, on good days, we take for granted. A healthy person does not ponder about breathing, seeing, or walking. Infirmities of breath, sight, or gait startle us. Among the patients consulting a psychiatrist, there are some who can no longer master the seemingly banal arts of standing and walking. They are not paralyzed, but, under certain conditions, they cannot, or feel as if they cannot, keep themselves upright. They tremble and quiver. Incomprehensible terror takes away their strength. Sometimes, a minute change in the physiognomy of the frightful situation may restore their strength. Obviously, upright posture is not confined to the technical problems of locomotion. It contains a psychological element. It is pregnant with a meaning not exhausted by the physiological tasks of meeting the forces of gravity and maintaining equilibrium.

In discussing human kinematics, Straus describes at length the process of acquiring the upright posture; standing, which removes us from the ground and establishes distance from the ground, from things, and from other humans in ways that are not possible even in our closest relatives, the great apes; and walking. Straus points out the relationship
between the upright posture and the development of the human hand and arm: the hand as a sensory organ and as a tool; and the expansion of the body scheme by the arms. The relationship between the upright posture and the formation of the human head is explored at length. Language as well as sight is important for intelligence and human relationships. Straus shows that language has long recognized the dignity of the upright posture. “To be upright” means not only to rise, get up, and stand on one’s own feet, but also to follow a moral code: “not to stoop to anything, to be honest and just, to be true to friends in danger, to stand by one’s convictions, and to act accordingly, even at the risk of one’s life. We praise an upright man; we admire someone who stands up for his ideas of rectitude.”910 Our upright posture conditions the “orientational” metaphors we have mentioned above: UP and DOWN in any number of psychological postures as well as physical acts. The harimtu who strips before Enkidu prompts him to stand and gaze before she invites him to lie with her on the ground (separated, as we have seen, by her clothing as a mat).

As a phenomenological psychologists, Straus summarizes his detailed analyses by challenging the modern “Cartesian” tendency to split mind and body.

The wound cut by the Cartesian dichotomy of mind and body is covered over, but not yet healed, by mere reference to the mind-body unity. This term is useful only if it is filled with definite meaning and classified in its presuppositions as well as in its consequences. The idea of a mind-body unit demands, first of all, a revision of those traditional concepts of psychology which are shaped in accordance with a theory of a mind-body dichotomy. Experience can no longer be interpreted as a train—an accumulation or integration of sensations, percepts, thoughts, idea, and volitions occurring in the soul, the mind, the consciousness or the unconscious for that matter. In experiencing, man finds himself always within the world, directed toward it, acting and suffering.911

More recently, William H. Calvin has devoted a chapter in his A Brief History of the Mind to the “Upright Posture but Ape-sized Brain,” the period when hominids lived in woodlands between the forest and the savanna.912 He discusses the significance of what archaeologists have found in Ardi: the reduction of canine teeth and the upright posture, the latter involving pelvic changes. He wonders why the bipedal apes stood upright (to carry the baby? To avoid taking a “heat hit” on the broad back at midday?). The archaeologists and anthropologists who have studied Ardi suggests an evolutionary advantage of the upright posture. Ardi could climb trees as well as walk. She could then protect the helpless infants in the tree while males could find food and carry it back to mother and children. The kind of “joint attention” and cooperation between between males, females, and infant children allowed by exchanging food for sex may have allowed a “partnership” society to develop, more like the bonobos than the alpha-male aggressiveness of the other apes.913

Not being phenomenological psychologists, the Sumerians kings would nonetheless agree. The poems praising them make walking, running, traveling, providing
“abundance” to gods and humans, establishing justice in the realm, and—downplayed by Shulgi but emphasized by Lipit-Ishtar—fighting and subduing enemies.

Both kings praised in the Decad curriculum, Shulgi and Lipit-Ishtar, placed high value on intense physical activity, anticipating the later Greek ideal of a healthy body and a sound mind. The poetic celebration of running, though, reminds us of the artistic discovery of the groundline in early cylinder seal impressions. There naturalistic human figures stand and walk, especially on the cylinder seals that depict the en in his various activities. The Uruk Vase follows that artistic tradition. The key figures, the tallest of all a male and a female, stand face-to-face in their encounter. (In later, Early Dynastic, times the artists will prefer seated figures, in Banquet Scenes. Even there the figures sit upright.) The key figures on The Uruk Vase are portrayed as taller than the nude males who proceed in a line below them; and the nude men are taller than the quadrupeds who walk in a line below the men. Even the barley and date plants in the lowest register are standing tall.

Before King Shulgi the heroes of Uruk, especially Lugalbanda and Gilgamesh, are on the move. Even though the Sumerians knew the wheel, the cart, the sled, and a variety of boats—not to mention the quadrupeds they could ride on—the well-traveled Sumerian used his powerful legs to move about the countryside.

Notes on the Decad
One of the amazing products of the long habit of making lists and a bureaucratic organization of the schools that taught reading and writing cuneiform is a catalogue known as the “Decad.” As the name suggests, it is a list of 60 readings in the Sumerian language arranged in a fixed sequence, the list itself separated in groups of ten works. All but seven of the literary works are actually known today. The survival of such a larger number of readings points to their function in the curriculum of the scribal schools. Scholars today think the readings, all between 100 and 200 lines long, constituted a curricular sequence. While the Decad is best known from the city that gained authority throughout Mesopotamia in the 3rd millennium BCE, Nippur (or Nibru), Uruk, Isin and Larsa also housed scribal schools. Samuel Noah Kramer was much taken by the schools, especially the curriculum. The schools were established to develop professionals, scribes who could support the administrative and economic demands of the state (including both temple and palace). Given that aim, one might expect that the curriculum would be highly practical. Actually, it was more like a modern liberal arts curriculum. One part of it was, as Kramer put it, “semiscientific and scholarly.” The students memorized and copied lists into “textbooks,” which eventually became standardized. The lists included names of animals, trees and birds, botanical, mineralogical, and zoological terms. The Standard Professions List is one that can be traced back to the earliest writing in the 4th millennium BCE. Students also prepared mathematical tables and problems. The world’s first “dictionaries” were produced.

More surprising, perhaps, is the second part of the curriculum, the part presented in the Decad. The readings are literary works in the Sumerian language, and because these texts were used in the schools, they come closer than anything else to a canon of Sumerian literature. Because of their importance, more copies of these texts have been found and good parts of them have been recovered.
The Decad was not organized thematically. Different genres appear in different groups. For our purpose the distribution of literary works is most enlightening.

There are debate poems or contests and other pieces that might be called wisdom literature: “The Farmer’s Instructions” and “A Supervisor’s Advice to a Young Scribe,” for example, and diatribes like “Good Seed of a Dog.” Debates between Bird and Fish, Tree and Reed, Winter and Summer, and the one we have noticed before, “The Hoe and the Plow,” are in the curriculum. The debates are scattered through the decades; the instructional pieces are largely found near the end of the list. The clever poem, “The Song of the Hoe,” mentioned earlier, however, is the third reading listed in the whole catalog.

The beginning of the list may tell us something of its origins and at least something of the purpose of the list as a whole. The first two items are praise poems of two Sumerian kings. The first is our God-King Shulgi (who reigned 2094-2047 BCE), and King Lipit-Ishtar of Isin (1934-1924 BCE), who boasted of being divine. Another Shulgi hymn appears about midway in the list. Since a major reorganization of the state administration occurred in Shulgi’s reign, and the standardizing of documents, and cylinder seal styles, and the schools themselves were part of the administrative and economic changes, it seems reasonable to believe that he would be particularly prominent in the curriculum. Jeremy Black and others think the praise poems that open the list were meant to inculcate the ideals of kingship in the minds of the students. The two poems do provide a good sense of the ideology of Sumerian kingship as it evolved through the 3rd and into the early 2nd millennium BCE. (The Babylonian, Assyrian, Persian and Greek ideals were not exactly the same, but the later Mesopotamian kingships show many similarities.)

Before examining the praise poems of Shulgi and Lipit-Ishtar, something should be said about the literary works that form the heart of the Decad. Beginning with the third work overall, Inanna is central to a work known as “The Exaltation of Inanna,” a work attributed to the first named author in history, Enheduanna. (The Temple Hymns, which have provided us with portraits of the deities thought to dwell in the temples, were also attributed to Enheduanna, as we have seen.)

Although one might expect that Enlil and Ninlil of Nippur would be prominent in the catalog, only three works related to Enlil appear, and none related to Ninlil. On the other hand, Inanna is the dominant deity, with five works. In addition to “The Exaltation of Inanna,” we find “Inanna and Ebih,” possibly the earliest of the heroic myths of the “dragon-slaying” type; “Inanna’s Descent into the Underworld;” “Inanna and Shukaletuda” (mentioned earlier); and “Inanna Hymn D.” She is also a figure in other works, especially those related to Uruk.

Other gods on the list are Enki, Nanshe, and Nungal.

Human heroes who are celebrated in narrative poetry are almost exclusively Urukean. Like Shulgi and Lipit-Ishtar, most were at one point or another deified. Gilgamesh is the most prominent figure, with five Gilgamesh works (and possibly a sixth, a version of The Bull of Heaven story). And they appear very early in the list. Two versions of the
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Humbaba story are there. The Bull of Heaven is on the list. “Gilgamesh, Enkidu, and the Underworld,” which influenced our *Gilgamesh* and provided the basis for Tablet 12, is there.

Only one work devoted to Dumuzi is on the list. “Dumuzi’s Dream” should perhaps be tied to “Inanna’s Descent,” although the two are not listed together.

*The Sumerian King List* includes Dumuzi among the rulers of Uruk in the First Dynasty of Uruk. The first name on that list is a certain Mes-ki-ag-gasher, about whom little is known. The others, along with Dumuzi and Gilgamesh, are also very prominent. Two major works about Enmerkar and two about Lugalbanda were part of the curriculum.

When we consider that no other human figures are celebrated in narratives of the Decad, the dominance of Sumerian literary works devoted to the First Dynasty of Uruk is very striking. If the presence of Shulgi and, perhaps to a lesser degree, Lipit-Ishtar, is added in, the ideological connection with Uruk is even stronger. The hymns praising those kings include the intimate love they shared with Inanna. But there are other deities in the praise poems associated with these “model” kings. The question is, how much had kingship evolved before the Sumerian south would come to be dominated by northern, largely Semitic kings?

**Shulgi of Ur, Lipit-Ishtar of Isin**

One other Gilgamesh narrative is included in the Decad, “Gilgamesh and Akka” (variously Aga and Aka). Royal inscriptions are the earliest of “literary” forms, and they give us the best chance of reconstructing a history of kingship in Sumer during the Early Dynastic or Presargonic period. “Gilgamesh and Akka” is a Sumerian literary work that narrates the one event that promises to place Gilgamesh (alone among those in the First Dynasty of Uruk before him) into that history. In defeating Akka, ruler of Kish, a city-state that is credited with domination of Sumer, Gilgamesh may actually have changed power relations in southern Mesopotamia. In the story Gilgamesh had only to display his magnificence on the famous wall of Uruk to defeat the invading Akka.

Of all the Gilgamesh poems in the Decad, only “Gilgamesh and Akka” was ignored in putting together the collection of Akkadian stories we know as *Gilgamesh*. If military might is the clearest gauge of royal greatness, and certainly was for Babylonian and Assyrian kings, *Gilgamesh* may have reverted to a somewhat “weaker” ideology of kingship. (George Smith and A. H. Sayce were convinced that the Gilgamesh story had at its center a great military conflict between Sumer and the Elamites.)

The Decad only singles out two Sumerian kings for praise (and Shulgi rates two hymns). The two praise poems are alike in many respects. Both poems put the praises of the kings in the mouth of the kings themselves. “Shulgi A” provides, as suggested above, a balance between physical and intellectual achievements. The “powerful man who enjoys using his thighs” and runs between Nippur and Ur (Urim) is also the “knowledgeable scribe of Nisaba.”918 This shows an appreciation of literacy, of course, but it also shows that the
wise goddess Nisaba (mentioned in *Gilgamesh* in regard to Enkidu’s flowing hair) had not been downgraded by the late 3rd millennium BCE).

Lipit-Ishtar, a century and a half after Shulgi, has other things to brag about. He does not claim to run or to be literate.

Shugi does show a great concern for establishing his “name” for “distant days.” In “Shulgi A” he only relates the name to his running ability. He does not ignore the “holy scepter” that goes with his throne. He claims to have consolidated his kingship (which he did) and to have “subdued the foreign lands” and “fortified the Land of Sumer” (which he also did). He repeats the claim in the final section of the poem. (And praises the goddess Nisaba at the end.)

But he links his destruction of foreign lands to his role as “purification priest of heaven and earth,” the *ishib an-ki-a.*

Shulgi devotes a good deal more not only to his running and his scholarship, but also to his relationship with the gods. He claims, like Gilgamesh, to be the son of Ninsun (or Ninsumun); one text offers a variant, having Shulgi claim that, again like Gilgamesh, his father is the saintly Lugalbanda. Of course these claims tie him to Uruk, and he also refers a number of times to An. But he is just as interested in claiming Enlil and Ninlil as protectors. And he has gained wisdom from Enki. And he is the “growling lion” of the Sun God Utu. Since he has ties both to Uruk and to Ur, he refers to Ur frequently, and claims to have brought abundance to the god of Ur, Nanna (here Suen).

Inanna (or Inana) loves him, attracted by his beauty (*hili-pad₃-da*). A Banquet Scene (lines 79-83) solidifies this important relationship. The “maiden” Inanna, the *nin of hili an-ki-a*, is his spouse (*nitalam-gu*). At the banquet “in the palace of An” with his brother and companion, Utu, he drank beer. His singers (*nar*) praised him in song and accompanied themselves with seven *tigi*-drums. There he sat with his spouse Inanna.

The praise poem of Lipit-Ishtar (or Eshtar) reads a bit differently. As a youth he grew muscular and engaged in athletic pursuits (though he does not specify what pursuits). The poem is more interested in his great beauty. He has lips “appropriate for all words,” and beautiful fingers. (This combination of strength and beauty is, I think, characteristic of both Gilgamesh and Enkidu.)

Lipit-Ishtar is a “human god.” He too is a “beloved husband” of Inanna. He claims to be a “proficient scribe of Nisaba.” The poem appears to drop the relationship with Inanna—until the end, when he credits Inanna for establishing his throne in his palace. “She will embrace me forever and eternally. I will spend all day for the Mistress in the good bedchamber that fills the heart with joy!”

Like Shulgi, Lipit-Ishtar makes crops grow abundantly. He is both shepherd and farmer, a provider for gods and his people. He stands in prayer (in all humility). (Note the upright posture.) He is a purification priest who provides abundance for Nippur, Ur and Eridu. Uruk is largely ignored in the poem.
Lipit-Ishtar boasts at least as much of his manliness and his handling of weapons. Far more than in “Shulgi A,” Lipit-Ishtar is a great fighter and leader of men, protector of the soldiers. He is also a king who established justice in Sumer and Akkad. Justice is what gives him a “name” in all the foreign lands.

Clearly, boasting is an important attribute of a great king. (Enkidu’s boasting commits him to the difficult task of taking on Gilgamesh.) The final line does Shulgi even one better. Where Shulgi praises the wise goddess Nisaba (the traditional ending of a hymn), Lipit-Ishtar brags that it is “sweet” to praise him.

**Early Heroes of Uruk: Enmerkar and Lugalbanda**

Gilgamesh is the only Urukean hero to have captured the imagination of modern readers. That is not altogether surprising. Even in ancient Mesopotamia Gilgamesh stories, in their variety and in the extent to which they traveled throughout the region and even beyond Mesopotamia itself, were unique. Probably the only parallel in the ancient world was Alexander the Great, whose legendary feats may have been influenced by the much older Gilgamesh stories. Dumuzi (or Tammuz, his Akkadian name) is the only possible rival in Sumer, but his fame rested not on his accomplishments—certainly not the typical heroic accomplishments of fighting enemies, leading his people into battle, and introducing changes into his community—but on his relationship with Inanna. Dumuzi remains, in spite of his fame, a shadowy, largely one-dimensional mythic figure. The same cannot be said for the two other figures of Third Millennium Uruk who are only now becoming better known, Enmerkar and Lugalbanda. Information about them is still very sketchy, but it is clear that Uruk considered them important in the period before Uruk’s rivals, especially Ur, came to dominate Uruk and appropriated Urukean culture for their own.

*The Sumerian King List*, which, as we have seen, was probably begun during the reign of a king of Ur and completed when the city of Isin claimed to be the legitimate heir to Eridu and Uruk, situate Enmerkar, Lugalbanda—and Dumuzi—in the First Dynasty of Uruk. As *The Sumerian King List* constructed the early history of Uruk, kingship passed by force of arms from the city of Kish to, not Uruk proper, but to the temple, Eanna. The first ruler was Mes-kiag-gasher, who was identified as both en and lugal. Although the king list does not deify Mes-kiag-gasher, he is identified as the son of the sun god, Utu, and he is credited with entering the sea and coming out of it to the mountains—as if he too followed the sun’s path. He is said to have reigned 324 years. Enmerkar (earlier Enmekar), his son, became king and ruled for 420 years. *The Sumerian King List* credits him with one accomplishment, but it is from the perspective of our interest in the temple an important one. Enmerkar is said to have “built Uruk.”

Exactly what that may have meant is not entirely clear, but it may suggest that from its center, the Eanna temple, Enmerkar may have expanded the city and in the process secularized the rule of the territory in the narrow sense we have been considering it during the Early Dynastic Period: a shift in emphasis from the en of the temple to the lugal who deals more with intercity affairs, often warfare. The German archaeologists who
meticulously excavated the ancient site make it clear that Uruk is much older than the Early Dynastic Period. We would prefer to translate the sense as “rebuilt Uruk.” The *Sumerian King List* does not explicitly call Enmerkar an *en*, as his father had been identified; rather, in spite of his name, which looks like a title that begins with *en*, he is called “king.” (The many personal names that begin with *en* implicitly praise the important title.) The stories that have survived treat Enmerkar was precisely the kind of transitional figure the terminology suggests, something between pure concepts of *en*-ship and *lugal*-ship.

Enmerkar’s son, Lugalbanda, then carried the *lugal*-ship in his name, which like Enmerkar, is more like a title than a personal name. (As with *en*, names beginning with *lugal* certain honor the title.) The *Sumerian King List* succinctly marks three elements of the son. First his name is written with the god-sign (*dingir*) as a silent determinative at the beginning; that may mean that he was deified. Second, he is identified as a *sipa*, shepherd. Third, his reign is said to have been 1200 years, far in excess of his father or grandfather, and nearly ten times as long as his more famous son, Gilgamesh. Gilgamesh is said to have reigned a mere 126 years. Gilgamesh’s successors fare even worse, though. His son, the obscure Ur-Nungal, reigned but 30 years; his son only 15; and the next two, who are not even identified as sons and fathers, only nine and eight years respectively. Among the last three kings of the First Dynasty of Uruk two stayed in power thirty-six years and one only six years. Of them nothing is said except the mention that one was a smith (*simug*). (The detail may indicate an important industry in Uruk at that time.) Not surprisingly, after 12 kings and 2310 years in the reckoning of The *Sumerian King List*, Uruk, too “was smitten with weapons,” and kingship passed to Ur. The abrupt change from exaggerated lengths of the earliest of kingly reigns to those we moderns consider reasonable terms may point to actual historical figures rather than the idealized figures of legend. That does not appear to be the purpose of the king list, which is more concerned with a theory of Sumerian history than with the kind of precise chronology modern historians prefer. And it reminds us that much of contemporary Sumerian history is nowhere in evidence. The city-state of Lagash, for example, was as important at times as the cities that make the king list. Clearly there is a special bond between Eridu, Kish, Uruk, Ur, and Isin as controlling divine *me* of kingship moves from site to site. Claus Wilcke has shown that a complex geographical pattern appears in the movement of kingship from place to place in the list in addition to the more obvious genealogical principle that is emphasized even when kings like Gilgamesh’s son have little else to commend them than a distinguished father. William W. Hallo has discerned three distinct ideologies in Sumer, those of Eridu, Nippur, and Lagash. The theology of Eridu eventually eclipsed the others.

The longevity of the early kings may bring to mind the genealogies in the biblical Genesis. The numbers no doubt served the same purpose: we readers are mere shrimps in comparison with our early ancestors, and the relative importance of the ancestors is at least in part reflected in the longer or shorter reigns the gods have given them. The three kings in the First Dynasty of Uruk whose names are written with the god-sign—Lugalbanda, Dumuzi, and Gilgamesh, in that order—in The *Sumerian King List* are
clearly thought to be more important than their successors. It is interesting to see Dumuzi in this list, since it breaks up the dynastic principle that seems to prevail in this part of the list. Gilgamesh follows Dumuzi, who is called a *SHU-PESH* (a term that has yet to be understood) from the city of Ku’ara, reigned one hundred years. *The Sumerian King List* does not consider him to be the father of Gilgamesh, his successor. Gilgamesh, apparently in agreement with “The Birth of Gilgamesh” mentioned above, is said to have been fathered by a *lil-lá*. The line is Seeed parenthetically between the name Gilgamesh and his designation as “*en of Kullaba.*” That epithet, as we have seen, became a standard reference in Gilgamesh texts.

Three tales of Lugalbanda have survived. “The Birth of Gilgamesh,” as mentioned earlier, is one of the earliest narratives in Sumerian. The problematic encounter between Lugalbanda and his father, Enmerkar, who expected the son to have returned from his travels with far more than a bride and an infant grandson, is part of a story that involves Lugalbanda and his bride from the eastern mountains, the goddess Ninsun. “Lugalbanda in the Mountain Cave,” on the other hand, is a story of Lugalbanda in the mountains, where he cleverly figures out how to survive without the food that was familiar to him in Uruk, that is, cultivated grains.

According to William W. Hallo, “Lugalbanda in the Mountain Cave” credits the hero (*ur-sag*) with inventing, if not hunting itself, techniques of hunting even very large wild animals, including the now-extinct wild bull, the aurochs. Left by his companions in a cave when Lugalbanda fell sick, he found himself without food in a region devoid of plants that he could eat. For Hallo, just as Genesis suggests that humans were first vegetarians and only later (with Noah after the flood) were permitted to eat meat, the Sumerian story gives an account of the transition but in a somewhat different way. Lugalbanda learned how to trap animals, and he appears to have invented fire-making by striking flintstones together.

Before he is able to cook the animals, Lugalbanda is faced with a dilemma: how to use his ax and dagger to kill them. His problem is resolved when a dream-god provides him with instructions. The ritual killing involves killing the animals at night in front of a pit. The blood drains into the pit, surely associated with the underworld, and the fat runs into the plain. The reason, Hallo surmises, is that the animal will die just at daybreak.

More important than these discoveries and inventions, which already mark Lugalbanda as a cultural hero, is the invention of animal sacrifice. Without being prompted by the dream-god, Lugalbanda offers four of the high gods of Sumer, An, Enlil, Enki and the mother goddess Ninhursag (but not Inanna) a banquet at the pit, a ritual *gizbun* (Akkadian *takultu*). The last intelligible lines of the poem point to Hallo’s interpretation: “So of the food prepared by Lugalbanda/ An, Enlil, Enki and Ninhursag consumed the best part.”

Anthropologists have suggested that the practice of animal sacrifice is bound up with the guilt humans feel at the shedding of blood, and Hallo follows that suggestion. That is at least as probable as the more or less official position taken in Mesopotamian myths, that
humans were created in order to relieve the gods of work they had done before. The gods depended upon humans to feed them. In a lively debate over the origins of sacrifice, Walter Burkert, René Girard, and Jonathan Z. Smith could not agree that the origin of sacrifice had been discovered. A particular sticking point involved the differences between hunting societies and societies like Sumer’s, dependent upon animal husbandry and agriculture. Smith suggested that animal sacrifice is certainly prevalent in the latter situation, but not in hunting societies. In any event, animal sacrifice almost everywhere involves *domesticated* animals, not wild animals. As usual, Sumer provides much good but contradictory evidence. For one thing, it is difficult to categorize fish, for example, as wild or domesticated, and the evidence for fish sacrifice is particularly strong at Eridu and Uruk. On the other hand, “Lugalbanda in the Mountain Cave” does seem to offer the possibility that Sumerians considered sacrifice to have originated in hunting. If nothing else, the story offers a gloss on a peculiarity of Archaic Uruk cylinder seals, where the “priest-king” (i.e., the *en*) is portrayed carrying animals whose head and feet have been removed to the temple. The animals are typically wild, not domesticated. And vessels in the shape of wild animals are carried to the temple as well, or discovered in the sacred precinct, as is the case with the Uruk Vase.

In the story of Lugalbanda’s departure from the cave in which he was left by his brothers, Lugalbanda is called not only “hero” but also the “son of Ningal” (line 256), the goddess usually considered the wife of the moon god Nanna and mother of the sun god, Utu. (As we have seen Lugalbanda’s father Enmerkar was considered the son of Utu.) He is credited with being the “righteous one” (*zi-du*) who takes counsel with the god Enlil. In an earlier part of the poem, Lugalbanda prays to the sun, moon, and the morning star—the astral deities important in Uruk already in Archaic times. Although she is not invited to the feast at the end of the poem, Inanna is present in that early passage as the morning star. The four gods for whom Lugalbanda sacrificed the animals—An, Enlil, Enki, and Ninhursag—form the early pantheon in Sumer; later, Inanna takes the place of the lone female in the group, the mother goddess Ninhursag. Hallo suggests that the dream that is given to Lugalbanda is “exceptionally enigmatic” even for Mesopotamian dreams lore, where interpreting dreams is a mark of particular wisdom. (Gilgamesh’s mother, Lugalbanda’s wife, Ninsun, was a goddess gifted with that wisdom.) The dream sequence opens thus:

The king no sooner lay down to sleep when he lay down to dream.
In the dream: a door that does not close, a door-post that does not turn (?).
“With the liar it lies, (with) the truthful one it acts truthfully.”
In order for someone to celebrate joyfully, in order to sing (dirges),
It is the *hippu*?-basket of the gods
It is the beautiful chamber of Ninlil,
It is the counselor/consort of Inanna. (lines 332-37, after Hallo)

Hallo suggests that door may be identified with Inanna, who is mentioned in the last line. The goddess is identified with the door in the Akkadian *Gilgamesh*. The chamber (*unu*) of Ninlil in turn suggests the place where the sacred marriage was consummated in the temple. And the ambiguous *ad-gi-gi* (“counselor/consort”) may refer to Lugalbanda’s
role. For Hallo, then, the dream “may anticipate the royal role for which Inanna has helped to save him,” a role that, as was traditional with the en, involved his selection as spouse of Inanna. One might add that the paradoxes involving the door and the lie/truth come quite frequently in the Inanna literature. The joyful celebrations and the opposite, the singing (presumably) of lamentations (if the parallelism is exact in the latter phrase), were events in which the keepers of Inanna’s temple were especially prominent. For a poem in which Lugalbanda by necessity acts alone in the wilderness, the dream would seem to tie the hero to his duties in the temple as king and consort of the great goddess.

Lugalbanda, who is, of course, by himself at the moment, has to interpret his dream by himself, and presumably he does so, since—though terrified by the dream—he immediately acts upon it to kill the animals in the proper way and offer them to the high gods. Even more isolated than Gilgamesh, who has his companion Enkidu to discuss the dreams the heroes receive from the gods, Lugalbanda is celebrated for his ability to manage in the wild, alone, but he is still connected with the center, his city.

The Lugalbanda tales consistently portray the wandering hero, a hunter in the mountains. Thorkild Jacobsen has pointed out that “Lugalbanda and the Thunderbird” provides the setting for “Lugalbanda in the Mountain Cave,” and presents a more explicitly military man than the other tales do. Lugalbanda was abandoned when he and his brothers, officers in Enmerkar’s army, led the army against the rebellious city of Aratta. (The gods had granted Enmerkar rule over the famous—perhaps legendary—city.) “Lugalbanda and the Thunderbird” focuses on the story when Lugalbanda regains his health after having been left in the cave. Much of the story involves Lugalbanda’s friendship with an enormous bird of the mountains, the Thunderbird. For Lugalbanda’s help in feeding the bird’s young and decorating the nest, Lugalbanda is offered something of the bird’s powerful magic. He asks only to be given speed and endurance afoot.

Lugalbanda’s powers will help him with a truly heroic task. Unable to take Aratta, Enmerkar becomes upset with Inanna and asks for a volunteer to send a message to her in “brickbuilt Kullaba.” Among the sons of Enmerkar (who is identified, as his father had been in The Sumerian King List, as the “son of Utu” the sun god) only Lugalbanda comes forward. The brothers are terribly upset, and they are convinced that no one man could make such a dangerous journey.

By himself, though, Lugalbanda is able to make his way to Uruk. The goddess looks upon him as she had Amaushumgalanna before, and listens carefully to the message he brings. With her help he provides Enmerkar with a plan that will defeat Aratta. In the spirit of these tales, the solution is not a simple military exercise. Rather, Inanna tells him that a certain fish constitutes the ruler of Aratta’s life. When Enmerkar is able to catch the fish, eat it and feed it to his troops, the rebellious city will fall.

Thorkild Jacobsen observed that the story is “rather an odd one for a tale about a warrior and future king of Uruk.” The main oddity for Jacobsen is Lugalbanda’s refusal of the gifts of military prowess in favor of speed and endurance as a runner, the “virtues of a
simple messenger.” But the story is odd—for us—in providing not an heroic, military solution to the conflict between Uruk and Aratta but rather one that involves magic and wisdom. Jacobsen classifies the story as a “romantic epic verging on the fairy tale” (231). Precisely the qualities that keep it from becoming an epic in the Homeric tradition tie it to the religious life of Sumer, in particular the temples of the two cities, both dedicated to Inanna. At the beginning of “Lugalbanda and the Thunderbird” Lugalbanda, alone in the mountains with no father, mother, or friend to advise him, thinks up a plan to help him find the whereabouts of his troops. By having the Thunderbird enjoy a good meal and good bit of beer, Lugalbanda reasons, the bird will feel expansive and give him the information he needs. As it turns out the bird gives him much more—the runner’s speed he will need to return to Uruk and also advice to keep his secret before his envious brothers.

Similarly, the advice he is given by Inanna that enables Uruk to defeat the en of Aratta suggests the folklore motif of the bush-soul, the vital element of the en that is found in an urinu carp. The advice Inanna gives is strangely similar to the building of “brickbuilt” Uruk by Enmerkar.

When Enmerkar, son of the sun god,

has felled that tamarisk,

has fashioned it into a trough,

has pulled out the old reeds

of the pristine place at its stump,

and taken them in hand,

has made the urinu fish,

tutelary god of carp,

come out from their midst,

has caught that fish, has cooked it,

has dipped into it

and fed it to A’akara,

Inanna’s battle arm…(lines 401-406)

When Enmerkar has done that, the “life’s breath” of Aratta’s en, which dwells in the marsh, will end—through pure magic.

Enmerkar sent his son to his spouse Inanna with a message that chides the goddess for ignoring his great achievement, building Uruk itself. He reminds her that at Inanna’s request, she had had him enter “brickbuilt Kullab.”

At Uruk where, be it swamp,

waters verily flowed,

be it dry land,

poplars verily grew,

be it canebrake,

old reeds and new reeds

verily grew,

Enki, the owner of Eridu
pulled up, forsooth,
its old reed for me,
and released its waters for me.
In fifty years I verily completed it. (lines 297-303)

At the end of the story, Uruk has, it appears, been successful in subduing Aratta. In the process it gained the stones of its rival, and its jewelers, silversmiths, and stokers were prepared to complete Inanna’s temple in Uruk.

Lugalbanda is a key figure, then, in “Lugalbanda and the Thunderbird,” for he finds a way on his own to survive in the dangerous mountains and, later, with the help of Inanna to assist in the overtaking of Uruk’s rival, Aratta. In the extant stories about him, Lugalbanda is the great traveler, the one who represents Uruk’s expansion into territories far from the center. But even when the context suggests warfare, Lugalbanda, unlike his more famous son Gilgamesh, is not portrayed as a warrior. He is the instrument for bringing important goods—raw materials—to Uruk and, in “The Birth of Gilgamesh” introducing the mountain-goddess Ninsun to the south.

Even in “Lugalbanda and the Thunderbird,” however, Lugalbanda is overshadowed by his father, Enmerkar. It is Enmerkar’s message to Inanna that Lugalbanda carries, and it is Enmerkar’s task to catch the mysterious fish that will enable Uruk to overcome its rival.

Enmerkar appears in his own right and to his best advantage in a narrative that has achieved a great deal of attention by Assyriologists. “Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta” is a Sumerian poem of over six hundred lines, two parts of which, separately, have attracted attention. (One might have wished that it had been called “Enmerkar and the en of Aratta,” to indicate that the two contestants are ens of their respective cities.

The first is a magic incantation, a nam-shub of Enki, in the form of a very brief but intriguing myth. For reasons that are not entirely clear from the myth itself, Enki decides to transform the nature of humanity by introducing diverse tongues when before there had been a single language. Context suggests that it was one of a number of contests between Enki and the high god Enlil. The opening of the myth suggests that there was once a time when humans lived in harmony with nature—and that the change in language radically transformed the human situation, making it far more dangerous than it had been. Sumer (the south), Uri (the north, Akkad), Shubur-Hamazi (the north-east, equivalent to the later Subaru, north of Assyria) and Martu, the wild area to the west, beyond the borders of the city states where nomadic peoples roamed, seem to represent the poet’s world view. The myth has been compared to Golden Age myths and to the biblical Tower of Babel.

Once, then, there was no snake,
There was no scorpion,

There was no hyena,
There was no lion,
There was no wild dog,
No wolf,

There was no fear,
No terror:

Human had no rival.

Once, then, the lands Shubur-Hamazi,

polyglot Sumer,
that land great with the me of overlordship,

Uri,
the land with everything just so,

the land Martu,
resting securely,

the whole world—
the people as one—

to Enlil in one tongue gave voice.

Then did the contender—the en
the contender—the master
the contender—the king

Enki, the contender—the en
the contender—the master
the contender—the king

the contender—the en
the contender—the master
the contender—the king

Enki, en of hegal,
the one with the unfailing words,

en of cunning,
the shrewd one of the land,

sage of the gods,

gifted in thinking,
the en of Eridu,
change the speech of their mouths,
he having set up contention in it,
in the human speech that had been one.\footnote{954}

Note that the god is considered an \textit{en} as well as “master” (\textit{nun}) and “king” (\textit{lugal}), like the humans who follow the divine prototype. He is the \textit{en} of abundance in nature (\textit{hegal}) as well as of his special place, the city of Eridu, south of Uruk, and preeminently among the high gods, \textit{en} of speech, though, cunning and wisdom. Usually a benefactor of humanity, known to us best for saving humans in the great flood, his gifts often come with a price. In the flood story told in the Akkadian \textit{Gilgamesh}, for example, Enki challenges Enlil, who has demanded the flood, on what seems ethical grounds and then predicts the plight of humanity after the flood.

\begin{quote}
Instead of your bringing on the Flood, let lions rise up and diminish the people!
Instead of your bringing on the Flood, let the wolf rise up and cut the people low!
Instead of your bringing on the Flood, let famine be set up to throw down the land!
Instead of your bringing on the Flood, let plague rise up and strike down the people!\footnote{955}
\end{quote}

Thorkild Jacobsen speculates that the incantation-myth Seeed into “Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta” also participates in an attempt by Enlil to destroy humankind; that the confusion of languages, though destructive in some ways, allows humanity to survive.\footnote{956} And it certainly gives polyglot Uruk an advantage over its rivals in international trade.

The second part of “Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta” to receive attention is an extraordinary episode in which Enmerkar invents writing! Having burdened his envoy with increasingly difficult messages to carry over the mountains to Aratta, Enmerkar calmly invents what modern scholars feel decisively changed the way societies are organized—and perhaps altered of consciousness in a way that makes preliterate humanity difficult for us to understand: true writing. When the messenger presents the \textit{en} of Aratta with a lump of clay with marks on it that resemble nails, the \textit{en} is perplexed in the extreme. He cannot read it! The nail-like scratches on the surface suggest that Enmerkar had not developed a pictographic script, one that could be “read” in any language. Rather, he had invented cuneiform writing itself.\footnote{957}

H. L. J. Vanstiphout has made a good case that the invention of writing episode, so striking in itself (and interesting to us as an early model, perhaps the earliest, of the transition from orality to literacy), is even more interesting in its narrative context, as the last in a series of contests that pits the \textit{en} of Uruk against the \textit{en} of Aratta. Both have been favored by Inanna; both are vying for her continuing favor. From the few, brief references in the text, the two cities appear to be organized in the same way, with the \textit{en} who dwells in the gipar taking the leading role, and a council of citizens (line 368), “word-wise elders” (line 374) to advise him. Uruk is prepared to craft Inanna a beautiful gipar of lapis lazuli,
amber, gold and silver (lines 39-48), but is lacking in just those raw materials that Aratta possesses. At the end of the poem a wise old woman (unnamed) offers a solution that reconciles the rivals. Aratta will trade its unworked materials for Uruk’s abundant foodstuffs (lines 613-30). The rivalry between the cities had taken them to the brink of war; a challenger from both sides had been identified to win the conflict in single combat; but a trade agreement avoids the bloodshed.

Historians and archaeologists are still puzzling over Uruk’s extraordinary success in the late 4th millennium. It is clear, as we have seen, that Uruk traded with different peoples over an astonishing area. Uruk’s goods have not survived in those remote locales, largely because they consisted of foodstuffs and textiles. Since there is little evidence that Uruk’s success came from military operations—in sharp contrast to the Assyrians of a later age, as we shall see—it may well be that “Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta” reflects an already long tradition of international cooperation. The poem sees the process strictly from the point of view of Uruk. The agreement that is fashioned is still a victory of Uruk over its rival. But the reconciliation at the end of the story recalls a myth that dealt with a contest between Inanna and Enki. The incantation-myth that appears in “Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta” reflects the Sumerian tradition that saw the clever Enki as the contender (adamin) par excellence. In “Inanna and Enki: The Transfer of the Arts of Civilization from Eridu to Uruk” Inanna visits Enki, plies him with drink, and leaves with the gifts—a myriad of divine me, roughly the operating software of the city-state—Enki gives her in his vulnerable state. When he sobers up, Enki demands their return and, to secure them, sends a series of monsters to attack Inanna in her boat as she makes her way along the Iturungal canal from Eridu to Uruk. Through magical means she resists the attacks and lands safely in Uruk, where there is great joy upon her arrival. The en at the gate of the gipar greets her. In the myth en and lugal are fused; the en celebrates with songs and prayers; the lugal slaughters oxen and sheep and pours beer out of the cup. The clear victory of Uruk over Eridu reflects the overshadowing of the Sumerian city from which many of the traditions that move, the way kingship moves, through Sumer and later into the north country—by Uruk. (Eridu was reduced by the end of the 3rd millennium to a small pilgrimage site.) The end of the piece is broken, but it is clear that “Inanna and Enki” ends with a sixteen-line speech by Enki in which the god and goddess, and their two cities, are reconciled. “Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta” reflects the close association between Eridu and Uruk not only in the appearance of Enki as an ally of Enmerkar but also in the achievements of Enmerkar, who is commended for beautifying not only the temple in Uruk but also the Apsu temple in Eridu (lines 38-57).

The details of the contest between the en of Uruk and the en of Aratta in “Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta” are, as Vanstiphout interprets them, of at least as great an interest as the larger design, in which Uruk wins by being reconciled with Aratta. One of the curious features of the story is Aratta’s plight during the protracted contest with Uruk. It is suffering from drought and famine (lines 245-52), seen as the result of Inanna’s action: she has “shackled knee and beak” of the great thunderbird eagle, mythologically the figure that embodies the thunderstorm. The en of Aratta challenges Uruk to a battle of
champions—the part of the story that is deflected at the end by the old woman’s wisdom. But he also, and more importantly, challenges Uruk to a contest of intelligence. The first test involves sending grain to Aratta. The task seems impossible, since Aratta demands that it be carried in nets. With the inspiration of the grain goddess—also a major figure of wisdom in Sumerian thought—Nidaba, Enmerkar is able to accomplish the impossible feat (lines 320-32). He soaks the old grain stored in Uruk’s granary, and as it sprouts the grain locks together, making it possible to carry the grain in the netting. (He also reduces the size of the mesh.)

When Uruk’s grain arrives, Aratta is saved (lines 353-64). Afterwards, the rains come, as the god Ishkur, the storm god, acts. The en of Aratta attributes the downpour, as he should, to Inanna, who had not (completely) abandoned him (lines 556-67). When the “alert champion” (ur-igi-gál-la) and the “singer” (LI.DU-ni) from Uruk arrive in Aratta—to fight or to claim victory—the story swerves to a conclusion in which the two representatives of Uruk play no part. The wise old woman (umma) brings the story to an end with her suggestion that Aratta engage in trade, not war, with Uruk.

The conciliatory ending does not, however, detract from Uruk’s victory in the game of wits. As Vanstiphout masterfully interprets the poem, Enmerkar is given three apparently impossible tasks, each of which he completes in a clever way that places Uruk in a positive light. The solutions to the three tasks require innovative problem-solving, and each involves new technology. Enmerkar is helped in his first two tasks by the wise goddess Nidaba and Enki. The third task, a “champion of no known color,” infuriates Enmerkar, who until this point in the story had been remarkably restrained; he will send his champion (without quite explaining what the solution is) to fight Aratta’s champion in single combat. As we have seen, the story does not turn out the way it appears to be headed. Enmerkar’s champion does, it would appear, fulfill the challenge laid down by Aratta. But instead of battle, Enmerkar turns the tables, Enki-like (the way Enki did in the contest between “Enki and Ninmah”), and challenges the lord of Aratta to a task he cannot manage.

Vanstiphout argues that in inventing writing, Enmerkar is shown to be inventing cuneiform writing—at a stage beyond pictographs (that Aratta might well have been able to understand). Aratta’s response is important to an interpretation that sees the poem as a celebration of the intellectual and technological superiority of Uruk—and the Sumerian language. Since his messages to Aratta have become increasingly complex, Enmerkar simply “smoothed clay with the hand and set down the words on it in the manner of a tablet” (line 504). The poet interposes a comment: “While up to then there had been no one setting down words on clay,/ now, on that day, under that sun, thus it verily came to be” (lines 505-506). The authorial comment of course emphasizes the extraordinary innovation Enmerkar has brought into being.

For his part, the en of Aratta responds to the challenge in character. Unlike Enmerkar, his rival is consistently portrayed as a boisterous, arrogant leader. His inability to
understand the tablet leads to total frustration on his part. Vanstiphout reads the key line, “The spoken word was (but) a nail; his face grew angry” (line 519).

Words have been a problem for Aratta from the start. At each point in the story Enmerkar’s messages leave Aratta angrily interrupting the messenger. Before he challenges Enmerkar to a game of wits,

Then did the heart
burn in the lord,
the throat choked up,
no retort had he,
kept seeking
and seeking
for a retort.
At his own feet
he was staring
with sleepless eyes—
began finding a retort,
found a retort,
let out with a shout—
loudly like a bull
he bellowed
the retort to the message
at the envoy. (lines 237-42)

When the messenger returns to Uruk, he imitates the bombast of Aratta’s response.

Even when Uruk relieves drought-plagued Aratta, the en spends time trying to come up with a response to Enmerkar.

After thus he had been telling him
he went into the back
of his bedroom
and lay there
eschewing food.
Day dawned,
he was wallowing and wallowing
in words,
spoke words one does not
take in one’s mouth,
was wading around in words
as in donkey feed... (lines 390-94)

The satirical portrayal of a tongue-tied en of Aratta only makes Enmerkar look better by contrast. Words are what save Uruk: Enmerkar’s, spoken and written, Nidaba’s, Enki’s, and the old woman sage. Even Inanna is the master of words—truthful as well as deceptive, as the list of mes in “Inanna and Enki” makes clear.
It may be significant the achievement Inanna is credited with in “Inanna and Enki,” cleverly wresting the divine words from Enki in Eridu and bringing them to Uruk, is mentioned in “Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta” as the accomplishment of Enmerkar himself (line 89).

Sumerian narratives are saturated in words. Of course the poems themselves are constructed of words. But Sumerian narratives largely move stories along through dialogues, as in “Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta,” where the two ens engage in their contest through the intermediary of a messenger (and, finally, through the tablet Aratta is unable to read). Disputations were a favorite literary form in Sumer. But “Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta” is marked by word-wise deities and the production of words. Enmerkar is surely the very model of en-ship of a period before the military king came to dominate Sumerian life. His ability to manipulate words is connected not only to “wisdom” but also the technological innovation and problem-solving that, for the Urukean, distinguished that city from its rivals.

If this is so, the incantation-myth, “The Spell (nam-shub) of Nudimmud,” Seeed into “Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta,” which has been considered an irrelevant addition, would seem to foreshadow the triumph of Sumerian Uruk in the poem. Of the regions identified at the cardinal points, Sumer in the south is the only one characterized by language. The line, eme-ha-mun ki-en-gi kur-gal-me-nam-nun-na-ka (line 142), has been variously translated as “bilingual” or “polyglot” Sumer, but it highlights two features we have seen throughout the poem: Sumer—Uruk in particular—is linguistically sophisticated and a possessor of the “grand” mes. The otherwise terrible consequence of Enki’s act, to split an original language (praising his rival, Enlil) into diverse languages, in fact favors the overlordship of Sumer in the world. One might further speculate that the Sumerians recognized, as modern scholars suggest, that the bilingual (or polyglot) situation of the region, reflected in the world’s oldest schools, may have been the key precondition for developing Sumer’s greatest innovation, true writing.

The third Enmerkar poem, “Enmerkar and Ensuhkeshdanna,” is less than half the length of “Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta,” and it has not attracted as much attention of scholars as has the longer poem. To the extent that ancient and non-Western narratives approach familiar Western heroic narratives in the tradition of Homer and Virgil we seem to have relatively little difficulty appreciating them. Even if “Gilgamesh and Akka,” for example, does not actually detail the climactic battle the way Odysseus and his son fight the suitors or Achilles and Hector battle in the Iliad, the shape of the narrative is familiar to us in a way that solutions that depend on magic do not. Mesopotamian tradition maintained a continuous respect for the god of magic, wisdom, and the word, Enki; but modern scholars have been less willing to recognize his power—evident in a host of narratives and incantations—than the power of great fighting gods like Enlil or Babylon’s Marduk. Stories that turn on magic are more likely relegated to popular folklore than the more “serious” stories that resemble the Western epic tradition.
We have already seen two versions of Enmerkar’s besting of his rival in Aratta. “Enmerkar and Ensuhkeshdanna” offers a third. In “Enmerkar and Ensuhkeshdanna” the rivalry is carried out by extensions of the two ens. As in “Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta,” a wise old woman, this time identified as Sagburru, defeats a sorcerer who has been hired by the en of Aratta. In a battle of magicians, Sagburru has the more powerful magic and kills the sorcerer. The poem ends with a clear victory of Enmerkar over the en of Aratta—this time identified as Ensuhkeshdanna—in the contest (adaman).

Ensuhkeshdanna, having heard this matter,
To Enmerkar sent a man (saying);

“You are the beloved lord (en ki-ág) of Inanna; you alone are exalted;
Inanna has truly chosen you for her holy lap; you are her beloved.

From the west to the east, you are their great lord; I am subordinate to you;
From (the moment of) conception I was not your equal; you are the ‘big brother.’

I cannot match you ever.”

In the contest between Enmerkar and Ensuhkeshdanna,
Enmerkar was superior to Ensuhkeshdanna.

Nisaba, be praised! (lines 273-82)

As Adele Berlin points out, “Enmerkar and Ensuhkeshdanna” “displays the same main characters, historical background, style, tone, and purpose of the other narrative poems included in the Enmerkar-Lugalbanda cycle.” They are all pro-Uruk works. And they portray Aratta as virtually the mirror image of Uruk. Where Inanna favors both cities, and may have favored Aratta before she turned to Uruk, the poems clearly relate the triumph of Uruk to the increasing favor shown to Enmerkar. So the greater city perforce gains the favor of the greatest deity.

“Enmerkar and Ensuhkeshdanna” contains a very striking insight into the “sacred marriage” of Inanna and the en of the city. A sequence early in the poem makes a subtle distinction between two levels of intimacy with Inanna, roughly similar to the degrees of mystical ascent that would be developed in the Judeo-Christian West (and found as well in Islamic Sufism). They may define a Sumerian—or at least Urukean—idea of the most intimate relationships possible between the divine and human. The sequence occurs in a boasting challenge to Uruk. Since Uruk’s en eventually wins the contest, the lines may be said to define the winnings. Ensuhkeshdanna’s boast becomes Enmerkar’s reality by virtue of the favor of Inanna.

“[He—Enmerkar] may dwell with Inanna in the Egar;
(But) [I—Ensuhkeshdanna] will dwell with Inanna in the Ezagin of Aratta.

He may lie with her on the ‘splendid bed’;
(But) I will lie in sweet slumber with her on the ‘adorned bed’.
He may see Inanna at night in a dream;
(But) I will commune with Inanna face-to-face.

He may eat the fat goose;
(But) I will not eat the fat goose.

I…the goose…its eggs in a basket; its goslings…;
Its young for my pot; its old for my kettle.

The goose will not leave the river-bank,
When the ensi’s of the land [have submitted], they will eat [with me]”
(lines 27-38)

As is so often the case with this ancient poetry, a few breaks in the text reduce the certainty of our interpretation. The references to the geese have been plausibly explained by Adele Berlin. Rather than killing the goose, as Enmerkar would do, Ensuhkeshdanna would use its eggs and offspring for a “never-ending supply of geese” that would serve as food “for the victor and his vassals” (the ensi, who in this poem appear to be subordinate to the ensi).968

For his part, Enmerkar boasts that his relationship with Inanna is more intimate than her relationship with the en of Aratta. His rival may dwell with Inanna in the Ezagin of Aratta (line 78). She will dwell with Enmerkar when something—the line is broken—brings Inanna from heaven to earth. The battle of the beds is joined as well.

“He may lie with her in sweet slumber on the ‘adorned bed’;
(But) I on the ‘splendid bed’ of Inanna that is strewn with pure plants.

At its back is an ug-lion; at its head is a pirit-lion:
The ug-lion chases the pirit-lion;
The pirit-lion chases the ug-lion;
The ug-lion is [chasing] the pirit-lion;
The pirit-lion is [chasing] the ug-lion. (lines 80-86)

Clearly the decoration on the “splendid bed” (qish-ná-gi-rin) marks its superiority to Aratta’s bed. But that is not all. The love-making between Inanna and the en of Uruk continues far beyond the length of time Aratta presumably spends with her: 15 “double-hours” (line 88) when once Inanna enters the holy gipar. Even the sun will not gaze into the holy precinct (muš). Whatever “really” happened in the gipars of Sumerian temples when a “sacred marriage” was performed, the poets imagine an intensely erotic scene. And it seems clear enough that communing with the god “face-to-face” (line 32) is superior to receiving the goddess in a dream (line 31). Berlin notes that the Hebrew Bible also knows the difference, as Moses, alone among the prophets is said to have seen God face to face (Numbers 12:6-8). Miguel Civil translates the line, “I converse with Inanna when she is awake” (gir-babbar-ra). In either case, as Berlin points out, the contrast is between a dream vision and a direct manifestation of the goddess.969
The poet also imagines Aratta as having the same religious life as Uruk. When Enmerkar, as he had done in “Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta,” responds to the challenge by writing out a message on clay, his rival asks the advice of the attendants who dwell with him in the gipar of Inanna’s temple there. The list of keepers is the same as we have seen earlier: the ishib, lú-mah, gudu, and girsiga (line 118). The “convened assembly” (unken-garr-ru) that advises him (line 128) is presumably that same group of temple insiders. They urge Ensuhkeshdanna to resist the arrogant threats, and the en agrees.

The actual contest is waged, not by the ens themselves, but by their agents. Aratta hires a sorcerer (mash-mash) from another place, Hamazu; the sorcerer is said to have practiced sorcery in the gipar-house (line 137). He travels as close to Uruk as the city of Eresh, whose location is still in doubt. (Possibly Eresh is Abu Salabikh.) The city is identified in the poem as the “city of Nisaba” (or Nidaba, the grain goddess whose wise advice helped Enmerkar in “Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta”). At Eresh the sorcerer uses his power to destroy the cattle-pens and sheepfolds, the cheeses and milk produced there. “On that day he turned the cattle-pen and the sheepfold into a house of silence; he caused devastation” (line 198).

Suddenly his rival appears in the form of an “old woman” (umma) named Sagburru. They engage in a battle of magic. In each instance Sagburru defeats the sorcerer from Aratta. He admits defeat, asks for mercy and claims he will sing Sagburru’s praises in Aratta. The “old woman,” however, is deaf to his pleas. He had committed “the forbidden thing” (line 264) and needs to be punished, which she carries out efficiently, tossing the corpse onto the bank of the Euphrates when once she dispatches him.

The poem ends, as we have seen before, with a very clear declaration that Enmerkar has won the contest. Enmerkar, his rival admits, is the “beloved lord of Inanna” (za-e-me-en en-ki-ág, line 275).

The poem is dedicated to the goddess Nisaba, whose help in the contest is only suggested by the connection she is presumed to have with the “old woman” Sagburru. Although Sagburru is taken as a personal name here, sag-bur (and its alternative, bur-sag) from very early days was the title of one of the temple keepers. On the Standard Professions lists the title appears in association with a variety of others, including wearers of linen and leather, and performers such as the sag-ur-sag and the gala. In some contexts it appears that she is a singer, but the actual function of the sag-bur is not entirely clear.

As in “Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta,” the goddess who is associated with grain and with writing is an ally of Uruk in “Enmerkar and Ensuhkeshdanna.” The close association she has with Uruk suggests that, in some tradition, Nisaba was considered almost an extension of Inanna herself. (The variation in translating the goddess’s name derives from the difference between the Sumerian name, Nidaba, and the Semitic equivalent, Nisaba.) Her city, Eresh, has not been discovered, but she is closely identified with both Uruk and Nippur. In her survey of the female “sage” in Mesopotamian literature, Rivka Frymer-Kensky goes a great deal further, considering Nisaba the “paradigmatic wise
woman,” credited early not only with grain and writing, but also a number of other technologically sophisticated tasks that came eventually to be associated with men: architecture, ploughing, digging, building wells and the like.974

(Possibly the metaphoric link between Nisaba and Enkidu is not entirely a connection between her grain and his flowing hair.)

This brief and very selective survey of inscriptions—all of them included in the Decad curriculum—from or about Uruk at the dawn of an “heroic” age supports a growing scholarly consensus that a shift occurred in the 3rd millennium from what may be called an en-centered society to a lugal-centered one: a shift from temple to palace. Whether increased warfare between Mesopotamian city-states was the cause or effect of the shift, it is clear that the great walled city of Uruk provided the paradigm that, no doubt, was drawn from nearby Eridu and perhaps from “the mountains” from which Inanna and Ninsun were said to have come. The inscriptions we have seen so far undoubtedly reflect an elite loyal to the great kings, whose influences over the city-states grow through the centuries. The ens-ship-model is never lost in this long period. The kings of Ur and Isin do not claim to be kings of Uruk even when they triumph over the old center. Rather, they appropriate the en-ship for themselves. They perform rituals the ens must have performed, and they claim the intimate relationship with Inanna that the “sacred marriage” texts relate to Dumuzi and the early ens.

From Enmerkar to Lugalbanda to Gilgamesh the image of the leader shifts from the religio-magical possessor of the divine me (through Inanna) to the military king who acts with the help of Inanna but is already resisting the influence she attempts to exert over the one she selects as her spouse. Sumer and Akkad see Uruk as the place where this momentous transformation takes place. Uruk, for its part, resists its rivals, and periodically succumbs—without losing its religious authority. The very intensification of the notion that a city is primarily the dwelling place of a god or goddess may well be a backformation. Was not Uruk always the house of Inanna? Ur the house of Nanna? Nippur the house of Enlil?

From the inscriptions we have considered so far, it should be clear that as the military hero comes to dominate the discourse that makes its way into writing in the 3rd millennium, the role of one very important part of the population fades. The old women sages, the goddess Nisaba—and Inanna herself—are very prominent in the stories of the earliest heroes, but less so as time went on. The extent to which the goddesses of Sumer reflect the social status of women is one of the most controversial questions discussed these days. With the conspicuous exception of Inanna and the goddesses who live with her and in some ways seem to have been extensions of her, the goddesses do appear to be eclipsed by males in the Sumerian pantheon.

But women were not silent in the literature that emerges in the 3rd millennium. Indeed, it is ironic that among the many cuneiform inscriptions of that period, the vast majority of which are anonymous, the only named “authors” are women.
One in particular will occupy us here.

**Enheduanna, The First Author**

Uruk attributed to its *en*, Enmerkar, the invention of true writing. Since we now think that Archaic Uruk script is true writing, that is, conventional and arbitrary signs that, however much the signs show traces of pictographs—designs that *look like* the objects and concepts they represent—they were to be read in a particular language, Sumerian. It may be this feature that angered and befuddled Enmerkar’s rival in Aratta. When the *en* of Aratta was presented with a cuneiform tablet, he could not read it. It looked to him, as it does to us today, as a surface impressed with nails. One hundred years of intense scholarly effort has given modern Sumerologists confidence that they can decipher much of the difficult language and, increasingly, texts that show the cuneiform writing system changing throughout the three thousand years it was employed.

Possessing true writing does not imply authorship of texts. Clearly, *someone* wrote them, and we know that some texts were frequently copied. As Hans J. Nissen has pointed out, the earliest writing from Uruk in the late 4th millennium BCE was “well developed from the outset.” The writers are not named on the tablets. It may be significant that another highly developed art of that early period, cylinder seals, were not inscribed with the names either of the artists who made them or the owners who used them. The recognition of individuals (rather than religious and social roles, known through the titles that are preserved in Archaic Uruk texts) in both arts comes only later.

The history of Sumerian literature is bedeviled by the problem that much of it was preserved at a date when the language itself was dying, early in the 2nd Millennium BCE, during a era known as the Old Babylonian Period. Many new and strikingly original literary works were produced during that period in the language that came to dominate Mesopotamia, the chief rival to Sumerian, the language spoken by the Babylonians and Assyrians and taught with Sumerian in the scribal schools, Akkadian. (It is “Akkadian” after the capitol of the first empire, Sargon the Great’s city of Agade, or Akkad.) Although Sumerian and Akkadian borrowed many words from one another, they are completely unrelated languages. Sumerian is classified as an agglutinative language, structured like Hungarian and Turkish, it has no known relatives. Akkadian, on the other hand, belongs to the Semitic family of languages, and is clearly related to Aramaic, Hebrew, and Arabic, languages spoken today. (Akkadian, like Sumerian, started dying out when Aramaic spread through the ancient Near East, as early as the 6th century BCE, while it continued to be used in Uruk until the first century BCE.)

Authorship is a tricky concept. Modern, literate society tends to see ancient, primarily oral cultures in its own image, giving considerable prestige to individuals who go off by themselves, write and rewrite texts until they have achieved a fixed shape and can be mass produced in print, to be read by persons who in all likelihood will never see, let alone hear the author. By something of a fluke in British history, a Germanic heroic tale celebrating the achievements of a certain Beowulf came to be written down in medieval England and was preserved until a time when scholars in the 19th century could translate
it into modern English. There is hardly any question that it reflects oral composition and oral transmission—and with it group authorship and multiple authorship, as traditional materials are passed along through generations—until it entered the different stream of writing. Still, modern students of literature are often uncomfortable with literary works that cannot be assigned to individual, named authors. (An exception is the Romantics’ celebration of “folk” literature, like ballads, thought to have been expressions of a purer collective spirit than alienated “modern” individuals possessed.)

Authorship in the ancient world, through most of the period we are dealing with, was different. The author of a work was more usually the authority that authorized the statement. So we have a biblical prophet, Isaiah, from the 8th century BCE, who may have written much of the first thirty-nine chapters of what is today called First Isaiah but is unlikely to have authored the more influential Second Isaiah, chapters 40-55, thought to have been written two centuries later, which, incongruous with its companion, is anonymous. W. G. Lambert discovered a cuneiform text that listed many literary and “scientific” works, including *Gilgamesh*. The text assigns authorship of *Gilgamesh* to a certain Sin-leqi-unninnī, as we have seen, a mash-mash who was thought to have been the great ancestor of an Uruk family of scribes, but about whom very little is known. Many writers claiming descent from Sin-leqi-unninnī were still active in the Seleucid period late in the 1st Millennium BCE. The list is even more interesting, though, in the way it categorizes the texts. First come those “from the mouth of” gods, especially Enki. These are followed by works “from the mouth of” the famous antediluvian sages (*ab-gal*) like Uan (better known as Oannes). Only then are there works that are attributed to persons like Sin-leqi-unninnī who may have been actual historical individuals. They are designated ummianu, “experts” or “scholars”—important, but not of the prestige or significance that attached to gods and sages. (Mesopotamian thought tended to see the great flood as a dividing point in human history. Before the flood, the sages taught human beings how to survive—in a sense, how to be “civilized.” With the flood, the great sages disappeared and mere humans carried on the tradition, but in a reduced way. The Sumerian King List follows this division of history.)

So it is with some surprise that a named author in the modern sense shows up at a very early period in Mesopotamian history. There is a lingering irony in the persistent tradition that the first female author was the Greek poet, Sappho, since we now know the names of at least two 3rd millennium BCE authors, both of them women, fifteen hundred years before Sappho. The more important of these authors is Enheduanna, daughter of Sargon the Great.

Six different literary compositions are attributed to Enheduanna. Joan Goodnick Westenholz has demonstrated that she was a strong personality and an important political figure in a very turbulent time. The daughter of Sargon, she became *en* and *zirru* (a title Westenholz explains as the female bird to the god Nanna, chief god of Ur, imaged as a male bird; Enheduanna would have been considered the consort—in Westenholz’s
translation, “hen”—of Nanna), and also dam, “spouse” of the god. Westenholz suggests that “the title may reflect the connubial metaphor for the closeness of the religious experience between an immanent deity and a human being.” Like the en in Uruk, who was considered the spouse of Inanna, Enheduanna was at least symbolically associated with the fertility aspect of the great god, whose “sacred marriage” “connoted a desire for intimate intercourse between the human and divine spheres for the benefit of cultural stability.” Like her counterpart in Uruk, she lived in the gipar of the temple and slept in the “fruitful” bed of Nanna, the prototype of which was the ritual bed of Inanna and Dumuzi. On the other hand, the en-priestess, like the naditu-priestess, was cloistered at an early age and was expected to be celibate. (Rivkah Harris has noted that such priestesses—holding office on average from 35–40 years—may have owed their longevity to the cloister, where they were relatively immune from the epidemics of the city and they escaped the perils of giving birth.) And it is difficult for us to know how literally to understand the sexual language of such poetry; much is clearly metaphorical.

As en, Enheduanna was selected by the gods, a process that involved divination. She would have undergone a series of purification rituals, and she would have had the duty of carrying the masabbu basket and grinding the groats, that is, preparing the meal offering for the god. She sang a song, the asila, the nature of which is still in doubt, but one that is associated with the gudu priests. Westenholz points out that Enheduanna was not only the “first woman poet on record but the first poet on record.” Like Inanna, her role model as a poet, Enheduanna describes herself as a poet, inspired at midnight—in a metaphor that is seen elsewhere in world literature, “giving birth” to the poem then, to be repeated at noon by the gala. Of royal families in the 3rd Millennium only one king, Shulgi, claims to have received a scribal education. Since two women are known from this period, Westenholz infers that “woman poets were the rule rather than the exception” in 3rd Millennium Sumer.

We are fortunate to have visual evidence of the female en as well as the male en—the one usually identified as the “priest-king”—from the 4th Millennium. [Fig. 37: See “Illustrations”: Fig. 6 in Collon, “Depictions of Priests,” p. 29]

And a depiction of Enheduanna herself, engaged in a ritual activity, exists. Irene J. Winter examines the Disk of Enheduanna closely along with earlier depictions of women in the office Enheduanna held. She argues on the basis of visual evidence that the office was not initiated by Sargon for Enheduanna but existed as early as the Early Dynastic III period, and that women held important public roles in Sumerian cities. On the other hand, women are seldom depicted in ancient Mesopotamian art or in epic literature; and the roles they play are quite limited. Those women who are depicted are usually elites in socially-sanctioned public roles. In the very thorny question that is much-debated today, the status of women in Mesopotamia and the possible changes in women’s status over time, Winter suggests that the cultural mores that obtain today in much of the Middle East, where gender largely determines public and private roles, may have been the case
in Mesopotamia as well. Enheduanna and other women who served as *en* are conspicuous exceptions to the rule.

[Fig. 38: See “Illustrations” Fig. 1 in Winter, “Women in Public,” p. 29.]

Enheduanna also had the duty of preserving sacred buildings, and she accepted it. She was also the author of a great cycle of hymns to the temples of Sumer and Akkad. The magnificent collection of temple hymns is as close to a theology or philosophy of religion as one will find in early antiquity. It is in the collection that she makes what may be her boldest claim for authorship.

The last of the forty-two temples in Enheduanna’s survey is, significantly, the “shining house” of the goddess Nisaba in the town near Uruk, Eresh. Nisaba was the “true woman who possesses exceeding wisdom” (line 536). Among the roles attributed to this important Sumerian goddess, the architect of heaven and earth, is her literacy: she consults a lapis lazuli tablet (line 538). The final lines of the poem swerve in an unusual way. Every temple hymn in the collection ends with a line that identifies the temple, its patron god or goddess, and its location. Here it is “The house of Nisaba in Eresh” (line 545). Interposed between the formal praise of Nisaba (line 542) is the signature of the human composer of the poem: “The one who compiled this tablet is Enheduanna” (line 543), who addresses her king (*lugal*) with the claim that she has created something “no one else has created” (line 544).

The Temple Hymns, too, were part of the Decad curriculum.

That Enheduanna was *en* of the god Nanna does not tie her to Uruk. Nanna was, by the Akkadian period, the god of nearby Ur. But she was the *en* of Inanna. In a most powerful poem—the one she claims was inspired at night—she went so far as to transfer the divine *mes* from Nanna, who had abandoned her in her time of need, to Inanna. “The Exaltation of Inanna” claims for Inanna overlordship of all the gods in the pantheon. “The Exaltation of Inanna” was also listed among the texts in the Decad curriculum.

There is a curious subtext to her title as *en* of Inanna. During the Ur III and Isin periods the offices of *en* of Uruk and *en* of Inanna were separated. When kingship passed from Uruk to Ur, Ur-Namma, whose reign inaugurated the Ur III dynasty, assumed the title of *en* of Uruk, but he appointed one of his son to the office of *en* of Inanna. In a poem Ur-Namma, who claimed to be “brother” of Gilgamesh and also Geshtinanna, held the “golden sceptre of *en*-ship” and played the instruments on which the *en* performed (*tigi, adab, and zamzam*). In “Urnamma C” Ur-Namma’s ritual acts involve putting on linen garments, lying on a flowered bed in the gipar, providing the people with delicious food (in his role as the farmer Enkimdu), and tending the cattle pens and sheepfold (in his role as the shepherd Dumuzi). (lines 73-84). The resulting abundance takes care of the well-being of Sumer. A remarkable detail in the poem is Ur-Namma’s semen ejaculated into the “pure womb,” of Nanna, who is almost everywhere else imaged as male (lines 42, 44). As king of Ur (but not of Uruk), Ur-Namma is credited with expelling the enemy, the Gutians (lines 85-92). In “Urnamma D,” the king is praised for digging two canals. The
king’s military victories are thus not absent in the poems, but they are de-emphasized in favor of his activities as en of Uruk.

When, according to The Sumerian King List, kingship passed to the city of Isin, its king, Ishme-Dagan, also expressed his overlordship of Uruk not as its king but as Uruk’s en. The Uruk Lament” narrates a moment when the high gods abandon Uruk and permit a great monster like a “wild bull” to destroy the city. Enlil demands war, with devastation like the great flood itself. The Gutians attack. Even the primeval city (Kulaba) that had been incorporated in the larger city was “turned into a place of murder” (line 4.31). When the turn comes, Ishme-Dagan is singing in restored Uruk and performing on the tigi and the zamzam, performing, in other words, as nar and gala as well as en (lines 12.14-23). He is a “humble man” in the gipar of Uruk. He makes offerings of beer, fat, oil, honey and wine. But he does not claim kingship of Uruk. Rather, he is the city’s “steward” (ú-a, line 12.9).

It would appear, then, that the kings of Ur and Isin, even in defeating Uruk, appropriated the religious traditions of the ancient city without adopting the title of Uruk’s king.

While there is still considerable debate about what actually happened in the “sacred marriage” of the en and Inanna during the reigns of the Ur III and Isin kings, the en-ship of Enheduanna seems to represent an important change. Documents state clearly enough that Enheduanna was installed as the en of Ur’s high god, Nanna, the moon. Piotr Steinkeller points out that Enheduanna’s is the earliest documented case of woman serving as the consort (or wife) of a Sumerian god. (It is difficult to know what the pairs of male and female deities signified; some, like Anu and Antum, appear more like male and female aspects of a divine being.) As Steinkeller reconstructs the development, Enheduanna was installed as en in Ur by her father, Sargon, an act driven, he thinks, by political reasons, to “create an independent power base in the south.” In doing so, Sargon followed a tradition in the north—where the first true empire in the region had its capital, Agade—wherein a woman was designated DAM.DINGIR or “wife” of a god. The innovation in the southern city must have been resisted. Enheduanna herself tells of the difficulties she encountered when the city turned against her—thematically, when Nanna failed to support her in her extreme distress, when she was banished from the city.

Once the pattern was established in the south, though, the principle of a female en was extended to other Sumerian cities. Steinkeller sees the expansion of en-ship by the kings of Ur and Isin as a powerful political tool based on the Sargonic model.

Supporting Enheduanna as en, though, was the Sumerian tradition of the en of Inanna. And it was to Inanna that Enheduanna turned when Nanna failed her. In one of the most striking poems written in Sumerian, Enheduanna herself transfers the divine me to Inanna, exalting the goddess to virtual identification with the highest gods of the Sumerian pantheon. Known from its incipit, nin-me-shár-ra, or “Lady of all the me,” the 150-plus line poem has been translated by its modern editors, William W. Hallo and J. J. A. Van Dijk, and more recently by Betty De Shong Meador, as “The Exaltation of Inanna.”
“The Exaltation of Inanna” begins and ends with praise of Inanna as the “hierodule” of heaven, *nu-gig-an-na*, who gathered up and guards the great *me*. Near the end of the poem, Enheduanna pronounces a formula, *hé-zu-àm*, “be it known!” for each of eleven major epithets, all of them confirming Inanna’s terrifying power, and ending with the statement—or rather demand—that Inanna alone is exalted, *asha mah-me-en* (line 134). The exaltation is followed by an extraordinary passage in which Enheduanna tells of preparing the censer and performing rites to purify the “nuptial chamber” (*é-ésh-dam-kù*, line 137) for Inanna’s nocturnal appearance to her. The poem she gave birth to, in pain, she recited to Inanna, and she expects the *gala* to repeat it to the goddess at noon (lines 138-39). It is the earliest of what comes to be a widespread metaphor of poetic inspiration. Jungian analyst Betty De Shong Meador captures the vigor of the passage:

I have heaped up coals in the brazier  
I have washed in the sacred basin  
I have readied your room  
in the tavern  
(may your heart be cooled for me)  
suffering bitter pangs  
I gave birth to this exaltation  
for you my Queen  
what I told you in the dark of night  
may the singer recount at noon  
child of yours I am a captive  
bride of yours I am a captive  
it is for my sake your anger fumes  
your heart finds no relief.

(While Inanna’s anger may have been prompted by an action of Enheduanna herself, the motif of the god’s anger—as often as not without explanation—is so pervasive in Mesopotamian literature that it may have marked the natural stance of the gods, who need to be pacified.)

The middle of the poem describes Enheduanna’s desperate plight: banishment from Ur, her appeal to the god of the city, Nanna, and a bitter indictment of her political foe, a certain Lugalanne. The passage regarding Lugalanne is difficult to follow (56-57), for Lugalanne is not only her foe in Ur, but is a usurper in Inanna’s Uruk. Inanna has removed herself from Uruk.

Its woman no longer speaks of love with her husband.  
At night they no longer have intercourse.  
She no longer reveals to him her inmost treasures. (lines 55-57)

Lugalanne has “stripped An of Eanna” (line 86), and brought the sanctuary to destruction. “Having entered before you as a partner, he has even approached his
sister-in-law” (line 90). Just as the city suffers from sexual dysfunction when Inanna withdraws from the temple, the offense of Lugalanne is couched in metaphors of sexuality, even, apparently, incest.\textsuperscript{1009} As Hallo and Van Dijk demythologize the complaint, they see Enheduanna claiming that Lugalanne is not her legitimate sovereign. He may have the great An in his power, but Inanna has power equal to the highest god. Ur, then, should “aid the Sargonic party in the suppression of the revolt of Uruk, or at the very least not the support the rebellion.”\textsuperscript{1010} Enheduanna appeals to Nanna, but is rebuffed. She loses her priestly offices in Ur and Uruk. Where she once “carried the ritual basket” and “intoned the acclaim” as \textit{en}, Enheduanna was reduced to the “lepers’ ward” and could no longer live with her deity (lines 68-69).

Uruk, seen as a “malevolent rebel” against Nanna of Ur, is cursed (lines 92-99). The Mesopotamian belief in the power of the word—based on the identity of word and thing, word and event—is clear in Enheduanna’s lament. Curse and sacred song are enlisted to effect the much-desired result even as the situation is described. The god who should have supported her is then included in the indictment. Where Nanna has failed her, Inanna, the “queen beloved of An” (line 121), will take pity on the self-described “brilliant high priestess of Nanna,” \textit{en-zalzale-ga nanna-a-me-en} (line 120). The goddess who is “lofty as Heaven (An),” “broad as the earth,” who “devastates the rebel lands” and “devours cadavers like a dog,” with her “terrifying glance” will bring Enheduanna the relief she demands (lines 123-30). And the poem ends with Inanna’s restoration. The goddess appears in the garb of womanly beauty, like the light (ironically) of the “rising moon” (line 147). In her appearance as the moon—as the god Nanna or as Nanna’s “wife” Ningal\textsuperscript{1011}—Inanna thus completes the exaltation to the highest rank—an exaltation effected by the human poet and \textit{en}.

In view of her rank and importance Enheduanna is careful to sign her name (line 67) to the poem. Her signature appears in another, very different poem, known in antiquity from its incipit, \textit{é-ue-nir}, repeated in the colophon, which also carefully notes the number of lines in the poem: 480.\textsuperscript{1012} The work is a series of temple hymns, as mentioned earlier forty-two in all, each of which is variation of a highly patterned genre with very little connection with modern literary genres. The temple hymns describe, by pointing out certain features, the appearance of the sacred sites and, indirectly, the powers of the gods whose “houses” they are. Each hymn ends with a notice of the (1) number of lines in the hymn, (2) the “house” of the god who dwells there, and (3) the city where the temple is located. It is not a comprehensive description of temple complexes, which archaeologists have shown can be exceedingly difficult to describe in any given period. Mesopotamian temples tended to be rebuilt right over the earlier temples and thus show a complicated process of development. And there are within a given temple a multiplicity of rooms, over whose functions archaeologists still puzzle. The Eanna temple in Uruk, for example, was expanded and extended on its wide base over the three thousand years it was in use. Documents refer to many shrines within it, devoted to a vast multiplicity of gods, some of whom may have been attributes of Inanna as much as independent entities—much the way Christian churches may have a central focus but may also contain separate niches...
and altars. References in various texts to activities in courtyards, ziggurats and places such as the gipar remind us of how little we know of the function of these increasingly large structures.

The forty-two temple hymns Enheduanna wrote may have already been a traditional genre, and her composition may have been, on one level, a matter of collecting traditional texts. But they are already a gross simplification of the temple scene in Sumer. Many temples are not described at all. The features are idealized rather than actual sketches of the sort, say, that Napoleon’s draftsmen produced when he took his army into Egypt in 1798. One conspicuous feature of Enheduanna’s collection is the association of a single god with a city, a tradition that we now think developed in the 3rd Millennium, not earlier as was previously thought.

At the very end of the series Enheduanna signs herself within the poem rather than outside it, in the colophon. Since the last temple is the “house” of Nisaba in the city of Eresh, which has not been discovered but which must have been in the close vicinity of Uruk, Enheduanna’s signature as the “compiler of the tablet” and her claim that what was created in the collection had never been created before (lines 543-44) are both remarkable. Since many texts are careful to indicate that they are copies of much earlier texts, Enheduanna is clearly making a statement about authorship and originality—nothing new in modern literature but rare in deep antiquity.

Enheduanna’s description of Inanna’s temple in Uruk may serve as an example of the genre. Inanna herself is credited in the collection with three temples in different cities. She is not the only deity to have multiple locations—Nanna and Ninazu have two temples—but she is the only god with three, another indication of her importance—at least in Enheduanna’s eyes. Eanna in Uruk is the first one described. Another, Ekizaballam, is located in Zabalam, and a third, Eulmash, is located in Ulmash (i.e., in Agade). It is possible that in these satellite locations the city and temple are virtually identified. It is also evident that the high god An, who was conspicuous in “The Exaltation of Inanna” (largely for having been overcome by Lugalanne), is entirely absent from the hymn to Eanna.

We have already seen the great hymn to Eanna (#16). The eleven line poem celebrates Eanna as a place of Seven Points, Seven Fires, and at night Seven Desires.

Contrast Enheduanna’s image of Inanna’s house in Uruk with the goddess’s house in Ulmash, that is, her native Agade, capital of the empire her father gained through conquering, among other cities, Uruk.

Ulmash, Upper Land, ...of the land,
ferocious lion, raging against the Wild Bull,
a net spreading over the enemies,

it makes silence fall upon the hostile land;
as long as it is not submissive poisonous foam is poured out upon it;
House of Inanna, of silver and lapis lazuli, storehouse;

your nun is the urabu-water-bird, nugig of the storehouse;

arrayed in battle, beautiful..., who handles the utug-weapon, who washes the tools in the Blood of Battle, she opens the Door of Battle,..., the wise one of the heavens, Inanna, has, Ulmash, set the House upon your high terrace, has taken her place on your high seat.

10 lines: the House of Inanna in Ulmash

(Temple Hymn #40: Inanna in Ulmash [=lines 507-19])

Although several details are obscure, the sense of the whole poem is clear enough. In Agade,\textsuperscript{1018} Inanna was seen as the warrior-goddess, as Enheduanna saw her in “The Exaltation of Inanna.” There are some similarities to Uruk, of course. The silver, lapis, and gold of the temple we have seen before in descriptions of Eanna. She is both nun, a Sumerian term that is usually translated “prince” or “princely” but even in Archaic Uruk texts is attributed to Inanna\textsuperscript{1019} and perhaps best considered “majestic”—as she was in Temple Hymn #16—and in Archaic Uruk texts—and nin; and she holds the title, nugig, traditional with her. As in the earlier poem in the collection, she is associated with the nigingar, apparently a sanctuary within the temple complex.\textsuperscript{1020} She is also “wise” (gal-zu). For the most part, though, Inanna is the goddess of battle. In “The Exaltation of Inanna,” as we have seen, that aspect was also emphasized. There she is credited with winning the first recorded heroic battle with a monster, Ebih.\textsuperscript{1021} A separate, extended account of Inanna’s victory over Epih, imaged as a mountain-wilderness, is attributed to Enheduanna.\textsuperscript{1022}

The third hymn that describes a temple of Inanna (#26) is found near the middle of the collection, that is, between the poem on the Agade temple and the one on the Uruk temple. Its city, Zabalam, is, appropriately enough, between the northern and southern extremes of Sumerian influence.

House full of light, clad in jewels, Radiant, pure storehouse of Inanna, Adorned with true me, decorated....;

Zabalam, temple of the shuba-mountain, Temple of the Morning Star;

It has let the Word that Fills the Heavens resound;
Your “good” sanctuary has the nugig Word that Fills the Heavens found for you;

Your nin is Inanna,..., the unique Woman,
The great Dragon who speaks inimical words to the evil one,
Who makes everything clean as the whitest of things,
Who goes against the enemies’ land,

Through her heaven’s vault is beautified in the evening,
The great daughter of Nanna, holy Inanna,
Has, House of Zabalam, set the House upon your high terrace,
has taken her place on your high seat.

12 lines: the House of Inanna in Zabalam

(temple Hymn #26: Inanna in Zabalam [=lines 315-27])

Although the famous city of Agade has not been precisely located yet, it is possible that Zabalam, modern Ibzeh is east of both Agade and Uruk. For whatever reason, Inanna of Zabalam is imaged in her astral aspects as “daughter” of Suen, that is, Nanna, the moon, chief god, as we have seen, of Ur. The obscure reference to dawn and the later reference to Inanna’s making the firmament beautiful in the evening suggest her aspects as Morning and Evening Stars. Radiance and purity are the features most emphasized in this portrait of the temple at Zabalam.

The three portraits agree in many ways with the earliest aspects of Inanna known from the Archaic Uruk texts. References to the puzzling šuba in the first line suggests a connection between Inanna’s brightness, “purity” and her erotic beauty. Certainly the Inanna of Uruk continues the Archaic aspects, especially those of power, fertility and erotic attractiveness. Sexual or gender differences are highlighted there. In Agade, on the other hand, the beauty and wisdom of Inanna are subordinated to her warlike qualities. Her temple in Zabalam is filled with light, appropriate to her astral qualities as Morning Star, Evening Star, and daughter of the moon. Enheduanna is careful to distinguish the three temples; together, the temple hymns present a remarkably complex and multifaceted Inanna.

On the other hand, Enheduanna’s temple hymns tell us little about two parts of the temple as an institution in Sumerian society. The temple hymns seldom mention the vast number of temple keepers; only those important roles that could be attributed to the goddess and her human functionaries, like nugig, find their way into the hymns. Thus the many activities of the temple, from maintaining herds and storing grains to beer-making and support of crafts, are ignored in the hymns. We might contrast Enheduanna’s description of a temple with a sequence in a hymn sung by the gala in the voice of the goddess Ninisina, who speaks of her “house,” which has been devastated in her absence.

Oh house, my tasty good which is not being eaten!
Oh house, my sweet water which is not being drunk!
My house of the good seat where no one is sitting!
My house of the good bedchamber where no one is lying down!
My house of the holy plate where no one is eating!
My house of the holy bronze (vessel) where no one is drinking!
My house of the holy offering table which no one carries!
My (house) of the holy vessel where no one libates water!
My (house) of the holy kettledrum where it is not set up!
My (house) of the holy balag-instrument which no one plays!
My (house) of the holy halhallatu-drum which does not resound!
My (house) of the holy manzu-drum which does not sound sweet!
My reed-pipe which does not thunder forth!
My instruments which are not being distributed!
My gala-priest who no longer soothes my heart!
My gudu-priest no longer speaks happily!
My house! My happy spouse who no longer is present there!
My house! My sweet child who no longer is present there!
My house! I, its lady, do not majestically pass through it.
I do not majestically pass through it. I am no longer majestically present there.
(#159, lines 9-28)

In this hymn we see the temple as it were from the inside, where a complex ritual life has been interrupted by the (unexplained) withdrawal of its “lady” (gashan). Food and drink are not consumed, and the vessels are not being used. The “good seat” and the bedchamber are empty. The catalogue of musical instruments, mainly drums (ub, shem, and me-zé, translated into their Akkadian equivalents in lines 17, 19-20) and a balag, possibly a lyre, are those used by the gala to “soothe the heart” of the deity. The passage then largely focuses on the keeper, the gala, who not only performed the hymn (along with the gudu), but was responsible for making copies of the hymns and no doubt composing them.

We have seen earlier that Enheduanna refers indirectly to the temple personnel in “The Exaltation of Inanna.” In her other magnificent hymn to Inanna, “Lady of Largest Heart” (in-nin-šà-gur4-ra), she refers at some length to two other temple keepers, pili-pili, kurgarra, al-è-dè, and sag-ur-sag. In an astonishing passage Enheduanna describes Inanna’s power to change a woman into a man

in sacred rite
she takes the broach
which pins a woman’s robe
breaks the needle, silver thin
consecrates the maiden’s heart as male
gives to her a mace...

And a man into a woman

a man
one who spurned her
Chapter Three: What’s in a Name: Gilgamesh the King

she calls by name
makes him join
woman
breaks his mace
gives to him the broach
which pins a woman’s robe

The ones Inanna has changed are now renamed “reed-marsh woman” and “reed-marsh man.” The myth would seem to account for two prominent figures in the temple who interpret sexuality. In this poem the *pili-pili* and *kurgarra* are associated with ecstasy and trance, and

they weep
they weary and wear out
singing songs to quell a god’s rage

The last detail recalls the Sumerian myth, “The Fashioning of the *gala*,” in which the singer and drummer are created by Enki precisely to soothe the anger of the gods, especially Inanna.

Enheduanna also wrote the poem that praises Inanna for her heroic victory over the “mountain” Epih. Once victorious, Inanna celebrates by building a temple, “stone upon stone,” finished in splendor, “standing hard on bedrock,” with a grand throne. Two keepers of the temple are summoned immediately upon the construction of her temple. The *kurgarra*, as in “Lady of Largest Heart,” is called with his emblematic mace and dagger. With him is the *gala*, with kettle drum and hand drum. They perform the “head-overturning” rite as in the other poem, turning male into female, female into male.

It is clear, then, that Enheduanna was interested in and knowledgeable about certain of the rituals performed in Sumerian temples and the performers who carried them out. It is no criticism of the poet that she largely ignored the vast operations of the economically powerful temples in favor of a concentration on those prominent figures who are particularly related to Inanna and have, if not their origin, their prototypes in Uruk.

The complexity of the physical structures of the temple is also ignored in Enheduanna’s poetry. Even the temple built to celebrate her victory over Epih is described in a few broad strokes. The collection of Temple Hymns, in the same vein, identifies the ideal temple, not the actual buildings.

Poems addressing religious architecture are not unknown in other traditions, where their ideological import can usually be gauged. As anthropologists employ their insights to an understanding of ancient societies, they are inclined to see ideologies, especially those reinforcing the claims of elite groups, behind even as practical a construction as a temple. The Sumerian temple was, as we have seen earlier, a fixture of the culture from as early as Ubaid times, certainly ancient when Enheduanna composed the temple hymns collection. Her collection begins with the temple of Enki in Eridu, according to Mesopotamian tradition, one of, if not the earliest of cities; and the small temple excavators have found in Eridu as they peeled away layers of increasingly large structures.
built over it is the earliest brick structure discovered in the region. These were indeed “practical” structures, since they provided a center for the economy, operated like a central bank, and held the capital—grain especially—needed for large-scale and long-term social projects. The temple and the projects required social stratification, specialized labor, and some form of leadership—all of whom were evident by the 4th millennium.

The temples of the south were practical in another, rather pedestrian way. By Late Ubaid, the temples came to be set upon massive platforms. Not long after Enheduanna’s time, Mesopotamian temples began to include large ziggurats, still rather mysterious to us, which may have been extensions of the older platforms. But in a flood plain such as southern Mesopotamia, the platform raised the temple complex itself above the periodic floodings that made Mesopotamian mythology so anxious.

Even without the platform, the Sumerian temple stood high above the plain, and had to be the most conspicuous structure in the land. The platform made its dominance of the landscape that much greater. As Susan Pollock has shown, the highly visible temple provided an ideological statement about social and political relations. In Enheduanna’s day, moreover, a new, rival structure came to challenge the dominance of the temple: the palace. The palace, at first a relatively temporary structure on the margins of the Sumerian city, gradually came to dominate even the temple. The palace does not appear before mid-3rd millennium. At the same time, a conflict between religion and kingship becomes evident. The identification of a city with a single deity, such as one sees in the temple hymns, may have been invented within that growing conflict.

What role, then, must Enheduanna’s collection of forty-two temple hymns have played in the conflict? Palaces are entirely absent from the collection, and kings are mentioned only rarely; and the temple hymns themselves are, obviously, a celebration of the importance of the temple in Sumerian society—and Akkadian society, too, since Inanna’s temple in Agade (Ulmash) and Aba’s (or Ilab’s) temple in the city, which come just before the end of the collection (Temple Hymns #40 and #41) are the only ones of, we might guess, many in that city, to be highlighted. Of the hundreds of temples in Mesopotamia, why were only forty-two included? It may be that the collection of temple hymns constitutes a great simplification of the scene of a bewildering number of deities and sacred places. The collection presents, certainly, a sophisticated theology. One might suspect that Enheduanna is securing the traditional centrality of religion in a time of crisis.

By linking temples and their deities in the south to one in Agade, however, the import may be quite the opposite. Not long after Sargon had established the first empire, and even closer to the time of Sargon’s daughter, the king of Agade, Naram-Sin—in a move that would prove to be highly controversial—claimed to be a god himself. (A later tradition would claim that the gods punished him for his blasphemy.) Susan Pollock considers it possible that, “As a member of the first dynasty to establish and maintain for several generations a large-scale territorial polity, he promoted a political form that clashed with the local, temple-based leaders whose power was threatened. Declaring himself a god was an attempt to place his credentials beyond dispute” (193). (One might
note that the Ur III period, when kings were also considered divine, added a temple hymn to Enheduanna’s collection, in which the deity is king Shulgi. Shulgi is, however, called, not king but nun, in Temple Hymn #9. The major god of Ur, Nanna, is, though, addressed as “king” of the city in Temple Hymn #8.) We must then entertain the possibility that the very sophistication of Enheduanna’s collection, organizing as it does the complexity of competing city-states, establishes a kind of imperial control over the religious scene. Without losing local traditions, the collection may yet reinforce the new order founded by Enheduanna’s powerful father.

One of the curious features of the temple hymns is that each of them—with a single exception of the last hymn in the collection—ends with a formula, in typical Sumerian style, with parallelism, where the god has “placed the house upon your müsh, and has taken his/her place on your dais.” What the müsh is has been a puzzle.¹⁰³⁶ The Akkadian equivalents of the Sumerian terms are mātu, which means land, often the land upon which structures are based, and zimu, which means mainly “appearance,” “looks,” and “luster” (CAD 21.119). The zimu is often a brilliant, awe-inspiring appearance—of gods, persons and objects, especially buildings (21.121). Most often the buildings are temples. Our translation of the formula is based on a possible conflation of the two Akkadian terms. What made the temple’s appearance so striking was the platform that raised it high above anything else on the plain. Just as the statue of the goddess is raised on its dais, the temple itself is elevated and, like the statue, conspicuous in its appearance.

The Temple Hymns, as we have noted above, do not describe the physical appearance of the temples. Aage Westenholz characterizes Enheduanna’s collection as “the closest one gets to a document of any official theology,”¹⁰³⁷ but not as eye-witness accounts of the buildings. Enheduanna need not have seen any of the temples she celebrates. A glance at the meticulous work of the German excavators in Uruk shows just how complex a Sumerian temple could be—and how little is actually described in the hymns.

Eanna functioned as a complex of temples from at least Level V (4th millennium), when the earliest temple in the Eanna precinct can be reconstructed¹⁰³⁸ until the Parthian period, that is, until the end of the Common Era. Level V was the period in which the great terraces upon which the many temples—and later, a large ziggurat—were built. The terrace was enlarged in different periods, especially in Level III, when the nearly 8’ high brick structure measured some 71’ x 60’.¹⁰³⁹ The precinct was built on a tripartite plan, with a large courtyard. An unusual feature is that the temples that constituted Eanna contained no altars, hearths, or statue bases as other Sumerian temples do. Offerings of fish and other animals were performed in troughs outside the buildings. It was a “vast cultic area”¹⁰⁴⁰ long before the massive ziggurat was built, a product of the first king of the Ur III dynasty, Ur-Nammu, something Enheduanna could not have seen. By the Neo-Babylonian period the whole area of Eanna was 112,200 square meters

[Fig. 39: See “Illustrations”: Fig. 2 in North, “Status,” 209]
The appearance late in the 3rd millennium of a named individual author, Enheduanna, is important in a society that had already long valued the transmission of largely anonymous documents along a “stream” of tradition. In the thousands of years of cuneiform writing, very few works are associated with individual authors. This was the case even though the names of a great many scribes are known, and texts are often signed by the scribe. Frequently the scribe is a copyist; often the scribe provides evidence of a binding contract. But few of the major religious and literary works are associated with an author, in the modern sense of the term. (Scribes could be authors in that sense, but their names are not often written on the tablets.) Enheduanna is unique in that she is not only credited with the authorship of an important work, but was said to have composed a whole series of important works. It is not so curious that her compositions show all the marks of traditional style. The genres she worked in largely demanded that she use, in many cases, stock phrases and more or less standard literary devices, including a great deal of repetition and parallelism.

What is significant is that a writer joins the short list of important named individuals that marks the emergence of an “heroic age.” Whether an Enmerkar, a Lugalbanda, or a Gilgamesh actually existed—that is, if the memories of these early figures match certain facts of the period in which they were supposed to have lived—is less important than the increasing importance given to individual humans. In Archaic Uruk texts a number of gods are named, the ones important enough to have been given regular offerings, but the texts are rather silent about human individuals. As the complex, hierarchical society emerged with the elaborate temple complexes, the roles persons played in the temple economy are clearly marked. We may never know how many of the heroic activities of the Sumerians in Early Dynastic and later times were centuries-old conventions of the en. For many years scholars debated if the hero—or pairs of heroes—contesting with and defeating ferocious animals, as seen in the glyptic art of the Archaic Uruk period were “Gilgamesh.” Conversely, now that we have an Early Dynastic poem that names “Amaushumgalanna” but is clearly about Gilgamesh, it is still not clear how many of the acts of Gilgamesh were traditional features of the en or of Inanna’s consorts like Dumuzi, who was often called Amaushumgalanna.

The idea that gave rise to an “heroic age” may turn out to be key after all. In spite of their intimate relationship with Inanna, Enmerkar, Lugalbanda, and Gilgamesh are humans, even if one or the other parent is divine. Certain of the Gilgamesh stories have been read as challenges to the traditional order of things, that is, challenges to the gods themselves. This assertiveness of a mortal, is evident in the ideology of kingship and the development of palaces. But it can also be interpreted as arrogance, leading in another direction. After the fall of Agade the human king, Naram-Sin, who had himself represented as a god, became the prime example of a mortal punished by the gods for what the Greeks would call hubris. Organized warfare would appear to be the driving force in this increasing focus on the king. The king’s legitimacy depended, as The Sumerian King List suggests, on the gods’ favor, evident in descent from important, if not divine, ancestors, or in
charismatic leadership that transferred kingship from one city to another by force of arms. Sargon of Agade may have been the fashioner of the first true empire, but the 3rd millennium BCE knew of other great figures, like Gudea of Lagash and Shulgi of Ur. Within this warrior aristocracy it is good to see that an author like Enheduanna could also be celebrated.

The textual emergence of named individuals has a curious parallel in the glyptic art of the 3rd millennium as well. Irene Winter and Holly Pittman have documented the way glyptic imagery played an important role in the development of complex administrative systems, especially at Uruk. Comparing the formal structure of proto-literate glyptic images with Proto-cuneiform texts lead Holly Pittman to a very striking conclusion. Cylinder seal impressions from Uruk and Susa from the Archaic Uruk period show an astonishing variety and clarity of expression—as do the early Proto-cuneiform signs—in the depiction of rituals and activities of production, linking religious and economic life of the emerging state. Different types of officials, including the ubiquitous en, acolytes, supervisors and personal workers are found on these seals (and in the economic texts and Professions List). Clearly there is an ideological display of a complex administrative structure centered on the temple. In contrast to earlier art, Pittman explains, “What images begin to do for the first time was to narrate social relations and social behavior; through illustration, imagery communicated social norms and it extended ritual. It stood outside of the event; it conveyed message through time and space that was clear to all who were literate in the visual sense.”

What is remarkable about these early images—and texts like the Professions List—is that they present general types, not individuals. Indeed, what is absent in the seal imagery is precisely names of individuals. “It seems in fact that the one topic that the seal imagery does not address is name.”

The number of Proto-cuneiform signs dropped rapidly between Archaic Uruk texts and Early Dynastic texts. Similarly, the large number of themes in the carefully crafted scenes on seals “are replaced by the undifferentiated and illegible theme of animal combat” in the later period. But what is added in Early Dynastic times is precisely the signature of officials who owned the seals. It may be the case that images on cylinder seals were thought through magic to protect the owner—we know they were used as amulets—but it is clear that the later seals designated the owner or the person in authority, by name. Since goods, doors, and locks were sealed, claims to authority are important. But the original functions of the seal appears to have diminished.

We may never recover the names of ens in Archaic Uruk. In the 3rd millennium the en is sometimes named. Whether Enheduanna is a personal name or a title, she was an en and the same person is credited with a number of literary texts that have survived. But kings are always named. The individuals who hold that title in the 3rd millennium created the most noteworthy genre of the times, the royal inscription. The early heroes of Uruk are named also, and kingship emerges within the three most important names, Enmerkar, Lugalbanda, and Gilgamesh. A few of the Urukean kings after Gilgamesh gained fame or
notoriety. By the end of the 3rd millennium the prototypical Sumerian city state had so diminished in political influence that it becomes difficult to find the names of their kings. And finding the names would only obscure the sad fact that a series of rivals, from outside Sumer (the Gutians), from nearby (Ur, Nippur, Sippar, Isin and Larsa), and increasingly from the north, especially Agade, gained power at Uruk’s expense. By the time of Hammurabi in the early 2nd millennium—with the rise, that is, of an obscure site that would claim to be the center of Mesopotamia (and the world), Babylon—Uruk’s autonomy would be no more.

The litany of great powers from the 2nd millennium on will be familiar to most readers because we in the West, thanks largely to the Bible and Greco-Roman history, have a better grasp of Babylon, Assyria, the Persians, and the Greeks who dominated Mesopotamia until the time of Christ than we do of the now-obscure sites like Nippur, Sippar, Eridu—and even Uruk. That is not to say that the economic influence of Uruk diminished through Mesopotamia. Uruk may never have regained the enormous lead it had over its economic rivals in the late 4th millennium. It certainly lost population from the time when it was the largest city in antiquity before Rome at the height of that city’s power.

We think that the very respect that Uruk’s rivals in Ur, Agade, and Babylon accorded the old city—they did not claim to be “king” in Uruk even when they governed the city—suggests that Uruk held its ground economically. More importantly, it was a model of Sumerian religious life, and Inanna’s temple must have continued its activities in much the same way as it had since record-keeping began there. We would go further in claiming that the very conservatism that kept Eanna and its city strong while political authority became more and more remote was a mechanism of self-defense. The city that had prided itself as the most innovative in Sumer came to hold onto its traditions as tightly as did any of its rivals, each of which, in the end, fell as Uruk had.

We have seen that as religion conflicted with the emerging institution of kingship, the concept that a city was the personal dwelling of a major deity seems to have developed as a back-formation. For Uruk this meant that, for most of its history, Uruk came to be thought of and was considered Inanna’s city. The literary tradition would continue to see it as the city of hero Gilgamesh, and would highlight, in some works, a conflict between Gilgamesh and the Great Goddess. Very late in the 1st millennium Inanna would be overshadowed by the god An. But however remote the great kings were from Uruk, Inanna persisted.

By late Hellenistic times Uruk would have moved from the center to the margins of empire. Since Rome did not control it, Uruk largely slipped from the viewfinders of the Western world. But through the 3rd millennium BCE it was a force far beyond its famed city walls.

The persistence of Inanna may not have had much of a bearing on what has become a major question for ancient Near East scholars: Did the status of women in Sumer change from Archaic Uruk through Hellenistic times? We have mentioned already the two sides
in the debate. On the one hand, Sumerian society may have seen women as equals—or partners, as Riane Eisler would have it\textsuperscript{1048}—of men, and the power of independent action, the roles they may have played in the society, may have diminished greatly, especially with the increased focus on the one activity from which they were entirely divorced, organized warfare, the game of kings.\textsuperscript{1049} The marginalization of a goddess like Nisaba would be symptomatic of that change. On the other hand, the status of Sumerian women may not have been equal to men, and the status may not have changed much through the millennia.\textsuperscript{1050} The persistent glorification of Inanna, not to mention periodic attempts to “exalt” her to the head of the pantheon, does not, from this perspective, tell us much of anything about women in society.

We suggest that this difficult question can be reformulated around access to the sacred house. The temple was not the only institution in Sumero-Akkadian society, but it remained a powerful force in the community. Certainly women in Mesopotamia were never separated from the temple in the way they were in ancient Israel, where only men were priests and only priests had access to the holiest of sites. The very complexity of the Sumerian temple as the center of economic activity militated against considering “the holy” as a sphere apart from ordinary life. Matters at the heart of Sumerian city life—production and sale of goods, reproduction of humans and animals, famine, plague and flood, maintenance of households, property, crime—could not have been separated from “religious” activities.

The keepers of the sacred house performed many roles, sometimes what we might consider symbolic, but often very practical functions in the life of the community. If the roles that had been assigned to women or were open to women changed over the centuries, then Sumero-Akkadian society may have taken the direction many think it did, that is, marginalizing women. We think the emergence of kingship went a long way in this regard, and that was much in evidence by the end of the 3\textsuperscript{rd} millennium. But the presence of women as keepers of the temple continued once the pattern of warfare was established.\textsuperscript{1051} We will need to watch later texts carefully for the light they shed on this vexing problem.

One final Sumerian text that clearly reflects 3\textsuperscript{rd} millennium society is the myth called “Inanna and Enki: The Transfer of the Arts of Civilization from Eridu to Uruk.”

**Inanna and Enki**

Inanna as Wisdom is best illustrated in a Sumerian myth.

“**Inanna and Enki: The Transfer of the Arts of Civilization from Eridu to Uruk**” is a poem of just over four hundred lines.\textsuperscript{1052} Like most Sumerian myths it has a strong narrative line and many levels of meaning to tantalize the modern interpreter. It is, most obviously, a story of Uruk’s triumph over its neighbor to the south, Eridu. At least one Sumerian tradition considered Eridu the first city. Its god, Enki, was already one of the high gods in the Archaic Uruk texts. Recall that the earliest brick building yet discovered was a small temple over which more than a dozen increasingly larger temples were constructed in
Chapter Three: What’s in a Name: Gilgamesh the King

Later ages. Eridu was clearly an important city for many years. By the end of the 3rd millennium BCE its political and economic power had declined precipitously, and Eridu was left as a virtual pilgrimage site. Enki, or his Akkadian equivalent, Ea, persisted, however, maintaining a presence in Mesopotamian religion and literature as long as Inanna did. Eridu’s loss, according to the myth, was Uruk’s gain. That meant a victory of Inanna over Eridu’s god, Enki.

Sumerian myths of Enki almost always involve a contest with goddesses, and in most of them Enki is victorious. But to speak of contests and victories is not to consider them heroic conflicts. There is an aspect of “Inanna and Enki” that suggests, indirectly, something like heroic struggle: Enki, having given Inanna the great me, attempted to regain them by sending a series of monsters after Inanna, but she escapes and successfully returns to Uruk. Consistent with his nature, Enki, quite unlike Inanna, is almost never seen as a warrior. More typically, Enki either outwits his opponents or figures a way to solve a problem by inventing creatures to do his bidding. The god is more like Enmerkar than, say, Gilgamesh or Sargon of Akkad. In “Inanna and Enki” Inanna turns the tables on him. And at the end of the story the great god is reconciled with the younger Inanna.

The myth ends, then, without bloodshed, but with celebration in Uruk and reconciliation between the clever gods. After five attempts to have the boat brought back to Eridu, Enki yields to Inanna’s victory. Inanna and her sukkal, Ninshubur, in the Boat of An, enter the Nigulla Gate of Uruk, and with them high waters sweep over the city’s streets and paths. The story turns festive. Elderly men and women join with the young men and little children in the festivities. When the boat docks, it is greeted with song by the en, who delivers “great prayers.” The king also participates by slaughtering oxen and sheep and by pouring beer out of the cup. Three musical instruments are sounded, no doubt by the gala.

The Boat of An proceeds through Uruk to the sacred gipar and then to its last stop, the White Quay. There, though the text is quite broken, it is clear that Inanna and Enki are reconciled. In the final three lines, spoken by Enki, it appears that the god points to the en and the “sons” or citizens of Uruk living there in joy. Enki assures Inanna that the old alliance between Uruk and Eridu will once again be restored.

It is important not to reduce the story to mere political allegory celebrating the increasing domination of Uruk over its ancient neighbor. The story would seem to justify the organization of the city through its appropriation of the earlier—perhaps the original, prototypical—city of Enki. Since the two cities were connected by canal, Inanna’s journey to and from Eridu by the Boat of An makes sense. (Processions of the gods by boat are frequently depicted on cylinder seals.) Where Uruk is always located on the earth, though, Eridu is mythologically conflated with the underwater “house” of the “god with streams,” Enki. Thus the journey may have been charged with a different meaning, Inanna’s descent to the Abzu, as was suggested by Bendt Alster. Alster noted that the story opens with Inanna appearing to her husband, that is, Dumuzi, “exposing her enormous sex appeal to him.” It is not sex, though, that allows Enki to be tricked into giving up
the *me* to the goddess who visits him. Rather, in his role as host, Enki becomes drunk with beer. Only when he sobers up does he attempt to seize the Boat of An on its return to Uruk. Alster notes the irony that beer drinking is a conspicuous part of the festival in Uruk when the goddess returns. With the story beginning, presumably, where the shepherd dwells, that is, outside the city, and ending in the city as a fully organized socius, the myth may narrate more than a simple transfer of *me*. The journey into and out of the Abzu, where Enki had held the *me*, provides the paradigm for the city-state itself. Margaret Whitney Green detected a significant pattern underlying Sumerian myths, the “rite of passage,” a concept derived from anthropologist Arnold van Gennep. In “Inanna and Enki,” Green sees the recurring theme of fertility and sexuality shaped into a puberty initiation rite. Whatever deeper patterns are involved in the story, the structure of city life that emerges is characteristically Urukean. If the same pattern obtained in other Sumerian cities, it may well be that they appropriated Uruk’s cultural norms the way Uruk considered it had appropriated Eridu’s.

For our purposes, the narrative frame is overshadowed by what makes “Inanna and Enki” unique. It contains a list of *me*, over a hundred of them. The *me* are such an important feature of Sumerian thought that they are mentioned in religious texts many times. Enheduanna’s poems about Inanna and the Sumerian temples are conspicuous examples. The *me* are always multiple, imagined as being carried or worn by the gods and goddesses who possess them. But “Inanna and Enki” is unique in actually listing a great number of them. Many of the temple keepers are included. In that way the poem resembles the great lists of Professions that go back to Archaic Uruk. Some are divine attributes.

A great many of the *me* are powers traditionally associated with Inanna and only secondarily related, if at all, to Enki. In the “name” of Enki’s power and in the “name” of his Abzu, the god who has become drunk with beer in the celebration he has when Inanna visits him gives Inanna “truth,” but also the power to speak in a variety of ways (“speech” that can be forthright, but also slanderous, or ornamental). Such crafty speech and two other *me*, “perceptive ear” and “the power of attention,” remind us that Sumerian thought considers “wisdom” originally a matter of oral discourse. Some of the *me* could well be attributes of any deity, e.g., the cluster that includes “the kindling of strife,” and “triumph,” but also “counseling, heart-soothing, judgment-giving” and “decision-making.”

For many of the clusters it is difficult to see the internal logic. “Deceit” and “the rebellious land” are clustered, for example, with “travel” and “the secure dwelling place.” Right in the middle of the cluster is “the art of being kind.” Such complex and often paradoxical attributes become traditional with Inanna to a degree that is not true of other Sumerian gods and goddesses.

Some are particularly related to the goddess of sexuality and fertility. “Procreation” is one. The “working of the penis” (sexual intercourse) and “the kissing of the penis” are other obvious examples. The “art of prostitution” is also part of the same package, no doubt related to the next cluster, which includes “the cult prostitute” and “the holy
tavern.” Less obvious are those related to the “feeding-pen” and “sheepfold,” which follow in the list “the holy purification rites.” These very Urukean attributes of Inanna also co-exist, as they do in hymns, lamentations, and, as we have seen, in the Temple Hymn that celebrates the northern Inanna of Agade, attributes of heroism including the art of “being mighty” and of “plundering cities.”

Enheduanna’s long hymn to Inanna discussed earlier, in-nin šà-gur-ra, contains an equally extensive list of attributes. They are cast (mainly) in the form of verbal phrases, followed by a formulaic expression, “Inanna za-a-kam,” that is, “Inanna, activity x is yours.” Some are simply nominals, as in “Inanna and Enki: “desirability” (la-la), libido (šà-zi-ga), gain and loss, profit, business, information, instruction, swiftness, slander, untruthful words, triumph, pursuit, and rebellion, for example. It is difficult to see the overall design of the list. Gaps in the text do not allow for a complete reconstruction. The list is framed by references to the “great mes of heaven and earth” (line 102) and closely related terms, royal and divine garza (line 108), possessed by Inanna. The first line in the list specifies “to run, to escape, to quiet, and to pacify are yours, Inanna” (line 115). Ironies and paradoxes abound. “To fall down” is followed by “to stand up.” Several are quite aggressive, but the list also includes giving assistance to the weak. “To destroy” and “to build up” are paired (line 119). Inanna’s ability “to turn a man into a woman and a woman into a man” is one line (line 120). The protective spirits alad and lama are Inanna’s, in the same line as “virility” and “vigor”—but also “cult-place”) (line 125). A series of diseases are under the control of Inanna. She has the power to “interchange (shár-shár) the brute and strong and the weak and powerless” (l. 140).

While other Sumerian deities are associated with creating objects, including the universe itself, no deity changes things into their opposites to the extent that Inanna does. She gathers the me of an and ki (“above” and “below,” that is, the entire universe); she has the groundplan (gish-hur) of the universe, and the great garza (ll. 3, 8, 68, 108, 156, 164, 214). She has transforming power (balas well. Besides the striking ability to change man into woman and vice versa, as mentioned above, she changes light into darkness (ll. 49, 253), one role into another (l. 88), and the strong into the weak (l. 140). For a culture that attaches so much importance to “fate,” for a person largely fixed at birth, the goddess who can change the nam-tar is powerful indeed.

Enheduanna’s great hymn envisions Inanna’s stance as anger (lines 17, 29, 33, 112, 134, 198, 250, and 259). She is a warrior carrying her giri-ûr-ra, a hip-dagger (line 64) and a destroyer who uses both flood and fire to defeat her enemies. But she shows mercy (lines 132, 252), care (lines 252), and compassion (line 252). She gathers the dispersed people and allows the to return home (line 170). She kisses the small child (line 138), assists the weak (line 140), and shows pity (line 132). Among opposites she produces are: destroying and building up; falling down and standing up; financial gain and loss; grief and happiness; and she both tears down and settles things in. She brings down the great and makes the low great.
In short, the list includes several attributes traditionally associated with goddesses, or specifically with Inanna, but as many of the traits that would seem to define Sumerian civilization could be equally masculine or feminine traits. In a hymn that exalts the goddess to the head of the pantheon—as in Enheduanna’s “Exaltation of Inanna”—such variety is to be expected. Enki of Eridu is conspicuously absent in the poem, perhaps implying that Inanna had already absorbed the attributes of that god. (Wisdom in a variety of forms is included in the list.) The high gods An and Enlil, on the other hand, are quite prominent. (An is Inanna’s “beloved”—ki-ág in line 258.) An and Enlil are the powers responsible for Inanna’s great destiny (l. 265). In general, though, the paradoxical nature of Inanna is compatible with the heroine of “Inanna and Enki.” While Inanna is considered equal to An and Enlil in “The Exaltation of Inanna,” the great hymn sees her superior even to those high gods.

We are particularly interested in the mes of “Inanna and Enki” that name the keepers of the sacred house. Since the me includes the power or craft that allows people to act, they are written with the abstract-forming particle nam. Thus en and lugal appear in the list as nam-en, “en-ship,” and nam-lugal, “kingship,” not as the things or persons who possess those qualities or powers. With that in mind, it is not surprising that the highest-ranking powers are mentioned first, and the list combines both roles and the symbols of office. The very first is en. Last, though not because it is less significant, is the “king.” The cluster is broken up into two groups. The first and last places may be tied together in a chiastic pattern:

- en-ship
- lugal-ship
- godship,
  the noble, enduring crown,
  the throne of kingship.

- the noble scepter,
- the staff and nose-rope,
- the noble dais,
- shepherdship,
- kingship.

The second cluster of me lists the now-familiar figures who are associated with Inanna but also with Gilgamesh in the underworld and with certain of the non-Urukean kings who acted as ens.

- egizi-ship
- nindingir-ship,
- ishib-ship,
- lumah-ship,
- gudu-ship.
The next group of me is fragmentary, but three of the items are clear, and we think the first two are related to the third. “Descent into the Nether World” and “Ascent from the Nether World” suggest shamanic flights, but it is not entirely clear if the kurgarra was traditionally given such roles to perform. And the next group continues dealing with the performers: sagursag, along with symbols (the dagger and sword) and perhaps ritual accoutrements and acts: the black garment and the colorful garment; the “loosening of the nape-(hair),” and “the binding of the nape-(hair).” One wonders if the gala, who is often listed with these other performers, would have appeared at the head of the group, where the cuneiform signs have been lost. In any event, the list of cultic offices ends with the “holy ngingar-shrine,” the “lover of An,” the “resounding musical instrument,” the “art of song,” and “eldership,” at least some of which are certainly connected with the gala. Certainly the instruments, tigi, lilis, ub, meze, and ala (#100-104), are the drums traditionally played by the gala.

Another group of functionaries is particularly important if we recall the complex economic activities that were at least originally centered in the temple. The grouping shows that our modern separation of religion from economic and political realms distorts the far more comprehensive view of Sumerian ideology. Since the writer, the scribe, is bundled in among the craftspersons, hand workers who would be completely separated from “mind-workers” by Hellenistic times (e.g., in the biblical Book of Proverbs), it is important to see that they were all considered important in the life of the temple in this poem.

the craft of the carpenter,
the craft of the copper-worker,
the craft of the scribe,
the craft of the smith,
the craft of the leather-worker,
the craft of the fuller,
the art of the architect,
the art of the reed-mat braider.

A casual stroll through the medina of any Middle Eastern city today would show all of these crafts still quite visible, but unconnected with church or mosque—and in something that could not have been said of their Sumerian counterparts, practiced exclusively by males. Lists of such crafts appear early in the Mesopotamian Professions Lists. The sequence differs from list to list, and what seems to us an unusual figure—the dub-sar, or writer—among the crafts, does not occur in the lists. On the other hand, a literary text includes the dub-sar, the “singer” (nar), the gala, with three of the crafts listed among the me in our poem: carpenter, smith, and fuller.1066

The highest officials are, of course, the en and the lugal. A Presargonic inscription discovered on a stone vase in Nippur sheds light on the connection between en and king in “Inanna and Enki”—and in the 3rd millennium, which saw the emergence of such powerful kings. A king of Kish, a certain Lugalkiginedudu, claimed to be en of Uruk when he was specially summoned by Inanna, “his mistress.”1067 It is significant enough that
Lugalkiginedudu was, according to the inscription, king of Ur—but not king of Uruk. The inscription shows that a person could be both en and lugal, but the first title in Uruk was, still, en. More significant is the Seeing that it was Inanna who “combined lordship with kingship” for Lugalkiginedudu. There were, however, “kings” of Uruk among Lugalkiginedudu’s descendants (who were not described in the texts as kings of Kish). We have seen before, though, that even in the early 2nd millennium a king of Isin, Ishme-Dagan (1953-1935), who claimed to have restored peace and prosperity to Uruk after Sumer had collapsed, like Ur-Namma of Ur, called himself en of Uruk, not king.

The Sumerian en would, however, not survive the overlordship of a regime that would transform Mesopotamian history in the 2nd millennium, the Akkadian-speaking rule initiated by the famous king of a city in the north that was quite obscure until Hammurabi rose to power. The cuneiform sign used to designate the en survived, translated into Akkadian as bēlum. That term, regularly translated in modern English as “lord,” became an important—probably the most powerful—epithet of gods and kings. (The Bible employs the term Bel as an equivalent to the city god of Babylon, Marduk.) Like nun in the Archaic Uruk texts, EN/bēlum, became the lofty sign of majesty. Unlike lugal, translated into Akkadian as sharru, which specifies certain clear functions of “kingship,” EN has no actual role to play either in the court of the heavens or in the palace of the gods’ earthly representative.

As for Inanna’s long-attested power to select the lugal of, especially her city of Uruk, it fades quickly as the center of political power moves farther and farther away from the ancient heartland of Sumer. After a series of famous ens and kings in the 3rd millennium, kings of Uruk, when they exist at all, largely disappear from view. Babylonians, Assyrians, Persians, Greeks, and Parthians may not have been able to reduce the city’s fame or its economic health, but they were able to push Uruk increasingly to the periphery of empire.

Kingship in the Heroic Age

Sumerologist Samuel Noah Kramer considered a number of narratives about human beings—rather than myths of deities—evidence of humanity’s first “heroic age.” Kramer identified nine Sumerian poems that he thought paralleled the epic literature in Indo-European languages but were at least fifteen hundred years earlier than the oldest of Western epic literature, the Homeric epics of ancient Greece. Of the nine that have survived from that age, all of them deal with men of Uruk: two with Enmerkar, two with his son Lugalbanda, and five with the hero who gained the greatest fame of all Mesopotamian heroes, Lugalbanda’s son Gilgamesh. Not surprisingly, the heroes are closely tied to the great goddess of Uruk, Inanna.

A common feature of the Sumerian heroic poems is the rivalry between city-states, between Uruk and its (possibly mythical) opponent in the mountains east of Mesopotamia, Aratta, and between Uruk and cities like Kish. The art of the period emphasizes conflict as well. Cylinder seal impressions are show less variety and are simplified in contrast to the earlier Uruk Period. Archaeological evidence suggests that a profound decentering was taking place within Sumerian cities. During the period
known to scholars as Early Dynastic in recognition of the increasing power of rulers like Enmerkar, Lugalbanda, and Gilgamesh and an emerging concept of dynastic succession. The city-states not only struggled for regional hegemony but within the cities themselves the “secular” rulers were beginning a competition with the temples. Palaces came to rival the temple complexes, but were at first transitory structures built away from the temple. From a much earlier period, as we have seen, temples were built on sites that must have been considered sacred, and the tendency of later ages was to expand the holy sites by building increasingly large structures over the earlier ones. But palaces would become increasingly important throughout Mesopotamia. The early inhabitants of the “great houses” (é-gal, or ekallu) are portrayed the way the en had been portrayed, carrying gifts and offerings to the temple. Two thousand years later the temples would be routinely taxed by the palace. The modern, Western notion of separate realms of “secular” and “religious,” such as we find in the U.S. Constitution, is not a very adequate way of representing Mesopotamian thinking. Even with the powerful kings of Assyria in the First Millennium BCE, when kings were also shangus (sometimes translated as “high priests”) and had access to the holy places, Mesopotamian kings were always aware that they operated as agents of the gods.

The “heroic age” is evident in the development of extensive city walls, clearly needed for security, and large-scale organized warfare, which precipitated the need for protection from outsiders. Scholars still conceive of Mesopotamian history from the Early Dynastic period on as a series of eras marked by great overlords, battles, empires, and dynasties, that is, by the increasing domination of the palace. The economic history of the area does not actually follow the contours of that “great man” view of historical periods. And an anthropological approach to Mesopotamia, which looks, for example, at burial practices in different times and places as well as at the building of large scale monuments that provided support for ideological changes, shows that societies change and maintain continuity in ways that are not reflected in dynastic changes. These newer approaches to Mesopotamian culture look critically at the literature that comes from the centers of power and emphasize the royal ideology that reinforces much of the official literature from all periods. And far from celebrating the great victories and the emergence of imperial powers, such approaches emphasize the exploited workforce that is largely ignored in the texts of the powerful elites. Whether women diminished in status over the millennia is a hotly debated question among scholars of Mesopotamia, but it is clear that organized warfare, more even than the development of tools like the plow, kept women from participating fully in the powerful urban centers.

Uruk, which provided Sumer with so many of the ideological markers that emphasized the temple and its keepers, was very prominent throughout the 3rd millennium BCE, sometimes on top, sometimes giving ground to other cities in the south—eventually to the first great empire that was centered in the north, at Agade (or Akkad), founded by Sargon the Great. Even in its dominance over its rivals, however, Uruk would never again enjoy the enormous reach and power it had in the late 4th millennium. And as power shifted from Uruk to other centers, Uruk took up a posture of resistance. Its later history, as we
shall see, is marked by resistance toward, especially, the new city in the equation, Babylon, which emerges early in the 2nd millennium. The idea that is so strongly emphasized in literature by and about Uruk—and spreads throughout the south—that a city is the dwelling-place of a major god or goddesses, in Uruk usually Inanna/Ishtar but in a later period, An/Anu—may itself be part of the resistance, an attempt to maintain a local identity in the face of regional hegemony. The idea of a “temple city” may well have been an “invented tradition,” constructed in an attempt to protect the privileges of the religious leaders and the autonomy of individual city-states at a time (around the middle of the third millennium) when other power factions were attempting to create an overarching political unity that would subsume the individual city-states—the model that Sargon succeeded in establishing, as Susan Pollock expresses it.

For our purposes it is worth considering that the center of power in Uruk (and in the smaller cities) of the 4th millennium was never more than a half-day’s walk for people in the region. The monumental architecture of a temple complex raised like Uruk’s “White Temple” on a high platform provided visual proof of that power, and even though the innermost parts of the temple, like the gipar, may have been accessible only to special persons in the complex hierarchy that ruled the city, the goddess was in some way visible to all. When the city came under the domination of its rival, especially when even Inanna herself could be taken away to become an honored presence as, e.g., the Lady of Babylon, some degree of alienation and displacement must have been evident to everyone. From its glorious centrality, Uruk saw power draining from it, moving ever north to Agade, Babylon, the Assyrian nation, and finally to peoples who had less contact with Sumerian culture, Persians and Greeks of the Seleucid Period.

As Uruk moves from center to the periphery of empires, it deepens its image of itself as the special place of the greatest of goddesses, Inanna/Ishtar, and the temple-city with special place in the cosmos. We think that the tendency among scholars to label everything in the south as “Babylonian” obscures the resistance of that very southern city. As often as not, Uruk found itself in a very uncomfortable relationship with its northern neighbor.

It is possible that even the celebration of Uruk’s heroes, Enmerkar, Lugalbanda and Gilgamesh was part of the resistance. But the earliest narrative literature that has yet been deciphered (as opposed to the Archaic Uruk texts that were discussed earlier, mainly lists and accounting texts) comes from Early Dynastic III—and deals with those three heroes.

To appreciate the Urukean heroes of legend, it is useful to consider the historical context as the ancients saw it. Uruk appears to be the origin of a complicated work of historiography known as The Sumerian King List. As the title suggests, the work is both a favorite Sumerian device for organizing complex related material, a list, and specifically a list of kings. It may have been written as early as the reign of Utu-hegal, a king of Uruk who is credited with defeated the dreaded, uncivilized foreigners, the Gutians ca. 2100 BCE. (The king list, which begins with a king who reigned 28,800 years,
assigns Utu-hegal’s reign to exactly 7 years, 6 months, and 15 days [121]. His opponent among the Gutians, one Tirigan, fared a lot worse. The king list says that he managed only 40 days.)

Kingship, according to the 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.

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. 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.” 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 the stories we have seen developed. Enmerkar is identified as the “king of Uruk” (not of Eanna) and as the “one who built Uruk.” (We might consider 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.

*The Sumerian King List* claims that Gilgamesh, an *en* of Kullab, whose father was a *lillú-demon*, 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 Akkad 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.

The defeat of Uruk’s Lugal-zage-si by the famous Sargon of Akkad (Agade) has been considered earlier. A victory of the First City over barbarians is worth noting.
Chapter Three: What’s in a Name: Gilgamesh the King

Utu-hegal vs. the Gutians

The fate of a somewhat later Uruk king is rather more positive. The 5th Dynasty of Uruk was, like Lugal-zage-si’s, very brief: only one man reigned. His name was Utu-hegal. The 

*The Sumerian King List* claims that he ruled for seven years, six months, and fifteen days. Then, as is usual for the list, “Uruk was smitten with weapons,” and kingship was removed from Uruk and established once again at Ur. Uruk’s loss inaugurated one of the most celebrated eras in the 3rd Millennium, the Third Dynasty of Ur, or the Ur III period. It is possible that the Ur III period showed a development of the concept of kingship, one that emphasized an often controversial claim that the kings were deified, perhaps at their death. But Ur was still well within the Sumerians’ idea of their own culture. What made Utu-hegal’s short reign a notable one for Sumerian society was his defeat of an enemy that possessed a very different culture.

*The Sumerian King List* in its laconic way notes that Utu-hegal’s enemy, the Gutians, were different. Many years before Utu-hegal, the last of the 4th Dynasty of Uruk, one Ur-Utu, was defeated by a group repeatedly characterized as a “horde” (*kisulubgar*). The list even includes an unusual editorial comment about the victorious horde of Gutium. It was lead by “a king without name!” Nevertheless the list goes on to record twenty-one kings of the Gutians. The last one, the king who lost to Utu-hegal, by the name of Tiriga, lasted only forty days.

William W. Hallo has claimed that “the essential ingredients of civilization are three: cities, capital and writing.” From the viewpoint of the Sumerian city states, the nomadic or semi-nomadic ways of life that existed side by side with the cities “seemed a rude throwback to more primitive ways.” The early collection of Sumerian proverbs known at “The Instructions of Suruppak,” considered in connection with the development of Enkidu, ends, as we have seen, with a series of proverbs about the nomads and mountaineers who do not eat grain or build houses “like civilized men.” Certainly by the time of Ishme-Dagan of Isin, who claimed to be both *en* and “steward” (*ú-a*) of *Uruk* (but not *king* of Uruk), the Gutians were a people who blew into Uruk like a hurricane and destroyed the city.

An account of Utu-hegal’s campaign against the Gutians has survived. It seems to have been a popular text and has been classified as a literary-historical composition rather than a royal inscription by some scholars because of its popularity. For our purposes the text is important not only for its vivid account of the enemy and the capture of Tirigan (certainly the same as the Tiriga of *The Sumerian King List*) but because it indicates something of the way the king of Uruk related to the gods and the temple.

Three Sumerian gods are prominent in the nearly 130 line composition. Enlil commissions Utu-hegal to destroy the “name” of the Gutians, who are described as “the fanged serpent of the mountain, who acted with violence against the gods, who carried off the kingship of the land of Sumer to the mountain land, who filled the land of Sumer with wickedness, who took away the wife from one who had a wife, who took away the child from the one who had a child, who put wickedness and evil in the land.” As he
prepared for the campaign, however, he went to Inanna and prayed to her, presumably in Uruk. In the very direct account of his going to Inanna and praying to her, nothing is said of intermediaries or even the temple where the praying took place. The king, who took upon himself the title of “king of the four quarters”—that is, king of the world, a title used by the last king of the Ur III period, simply operates on his own to address the great goddess. He informs Inanna, the “lioness of battle,” that Enlil has commissioned him to bring kingship back to Sumer—and asks for her help.

With that Utu-hegal leaves and pacifies both banks of the Tigris River, where the Gutians had blocked water from the fields, closed off roads and caused tall grass to grow up along the highways. With the help of Enlil and Inanna, then, Utu-hegal comes to be called “the mighty man” (nita-kalaga). In the temple of Ishkur (presumably in Uruk itself), he calls out to the citizens (dumu-uru) and tells them that Enlil and Inanna has aided him—and he also adds two other Urukian allies: Dumuzi (who is called both Dumuzi and Amaushumgalana) and Gilgamesh, called the son of Ninsun. Interestingly, Utu-hegal claims that Gilgamesh has assigned Dumuzi to himself as a “bailiff” (mashkim), a term we shall see again.

The address to the citizens is successful. He makes them “happy,” and “they followed him as if they were (just) one person.”1098 With his “select elite troops,” Utu-hegal then leaves Uruk and sets up something, the nature of which is still debated, at various points along the way. The text mentions first Nagsu on the Iturungal Canal, where he captures two of Tirigan’s generals and puts them in handcuffs. Then he proceeds to Ishkur’s city, Karkar, and prays to the god there. At Adab he prays to Utu. He lays a trap for Tirigan, who flees alone on foot. At first Tirigan finds a safe haven at Dabrum, but then the citizens of Dabrum realize Utu-hegal is “the king to whom the god Enlil had granted power,” and they hold him for the envoys of Utu-hegal, who capture the Gutian king.

Handcuffed and blindfolded, the Gutian is made to lie at the feet of the Urukean king. Utu-hegal places his foot on his neck. The text then ends quickly, ending with Utu-hegal’s great contribution to Sumer. From the uncivilized Gutians “he brought back the kingship of the land of Sumer.”1099

For a composition that praises the military victory over a dreaded foreign enemy, the poem is remarkably free of the details of fighting. Rather, it concentrates on the right relationship Utu-hegal has with the gods of the cities on the campaign. Significantly, Utu-hegal prays to the gods with no particular assistance of the temple officiants. What is at stake is the return of kingship to Sumer. Although Utu-hegal receives the help of Inanna and her famous lovers, Dumuzi and Gilgamesh, the inscription does not call him the en of Uruk or the spouse of the great goddess.

The historical events portrayed in the poem may not have been as dramatic as the text makes them seem. The 4th and 5th Dynasties of Uruk may actually have succeeded one another without incident. And the Gutians were not even the only one to claim victory over these mountaineers. The texts do show, however, that the gods allowed the Gutians to dominate Mesopotamia because of
sacrilege against the gods; and the Sumerians were released from domination because of a sacrilege committed by the Gutians themselves.

**Coda: The Heroes in Later Ages**

Gilgamesh is, of course, the most famous of the three heroes. His fame continued into the 1st millennium BCE and not just in literature and art. At some point he became a god in the underworld. Paul-Alain Beaulieu found scant evidence for a Gilgamesh cult in the early periods, though he is mentioned in an Ur III document and in king Anam’s early 2nd millennium inscription commemorating the restoration of the city wall. Beaulieu, who treats Gilgamesh among the minor gods worshipped in Uruk, found three Neo-Babylonian texts from Eanna that mention a “garden” or gardens of Gilgamesh. Some of these references are to gardens outside Uruk itself. A garden of Gilgamesh in the city of Dēr is mentioned in a Hellenistic text from Uruk, but there is little evidence of ritual activity from that period.

Enmerkar is the one credited with building Uruk itself, and his reputation becomes caught up in that Urukean myth of Inanna’s exaltation at the expense of her “father” An. Just as Enmerkar is largely responsible for winning over Inanna and having her move from Aratta to Uruk, in some accounts he helps the “sage” Nungalpiriggal steal Eanna from An and establish Eanna in Uruk. Stealing Eanna at first angers An, but he then reconciles himself to the fact that Inanna has become greater than An himself. For Uruk, this is the decisive change that occurs after the Flood (rather than the descent of kingship from heaven)—and probably the reason *The Sumerian King List* considered Eanna to have existed before Uruk itself, which was established by Enmerkar.

Probably because of this early reputation of Enmerkar as a culture hero, the Babylonians, as we will see, tried to tear him down along with the notorious Akkadian king Naram-Sîn. At any rate, Enmerkar does not appear to survive as even a minor god through the 1st millennium BCE.

The one who does survive as a god, though a minor one like Gilgamesh, is Lugalbanda. According to Beaulieu, Lugalbanda was already worshiped in Uruk during the Old Babylonian period. Sin-kâshid, who had a special regard for Uruk, took credit for rebuilding a sanctuary for Lugalbanda and Ninsun there, a sanctuary known as Ekankal. Like Gilgamesh, he was apparently a god of the underworld. He received offerings at a small sanctuary either in Uruk or in the town known as the Town of the Temple of Lugalbanda. In Hellenistic times there was an annual ritual for Lugalbanda even in Babylon.

“Saint” Lugalbanda, then, is still a figure of some importance in Babylon and Uruk, as is suggested by the honors bestowed upon him by Gilgamesh in Tablet 6 of *Gilgamesh*. For all her importance in *Gilgamesh*, though, Ninsun does not appear to have been important in Neo-Babylonian times in Uruk and appears only in this festival in the Hellenistic period.
Dumuzi is the other figure from the classical period of Uruk who persists in literature and in rituals.1106 Even though *The Sumerian King List* considered Dumuzi among the rulers in the First Dynasty of Uruk, his importance lies elsewhere than in heroic literature. Since his fate was, literally, bound up with Inanna, he will be discussed along with the Great Goddess herself.

**Notes to Chapter Three**


907  “A praise poem of Šulgi,” translated in *The Literature of Ancient Sumer*, 304-308; transliteration in The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, c.2.4.2.01.


909  Straus, 137.

910  Straus, 137.

911  Straus, 164.


913  Calvin discusses similarities and contrasts between chimps and bonobos in his chapter, “When Chimpanzees Think,” 3-14, at the beginning of the history of the mind.

914  *The Literature of Ancient Sumer*, 300-304.


917  For Enheduanna and “The Exaltation of Inanna” in particular, see Betty De Shong Meador, *Inanna, Lady of Largest Heart*, esp. 168-92; *The Literature of Ancient Sumer*, 315-320.

918  *The Literature of Ancient Sumer*, 305.

The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, line 100.

The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, line 86B.

The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, line 15.

The Literature of Ancient Sumer, 309.

For an overview of the heroic poetry, see Bendt Alster, “Epic Tales from Ancient Sumer: Enmerkar, Lugalbanda, and Other Cunning Heroes,” Civilizations of the Ancient Near East, ed. Jack Sasson, 2315-26. Alster emphasizes the works as “performance poetry” and suggests that in an age which saw the growing importance of kingship and state formation, the heroic tales actually stress the wisdom or cleverness of the little man who prevails over his superiors.


Jacobsen, The Sumerian King List, considers En-me-kar the older orthography, whereas en-me-er-kár a younger form of the name.


For overviews of the excavations, see Robert North, “Status of the Warka Excavation,” Orientalia 26 (1957), 185-256; and Ann Louise Perkins, The Comparative Archaeology of Early Mesopotamia (Chicago: University Press, 1949), 120-28. Possibly the building of Uruk could mean the building of an immense city wall, attributed to Gilgamesh, but certainly Early Dynastic, or the incorporation of Uruk’s “twin settlement,” Kullaba, joined to Eanna within the single wall of Uruk; see North, 240, for the Utuhegal inscription that suggests Gilgamesh was involved in the unification of the settlements.


Limet, 167ff.

M. W. Green and Hans J. Nissen, Zeichenliste der Archaïschen Texte aus Uruk (Berlin: Mann Verlag, 1987), #484, provides evidence for the Uruk III period.


William W. Hallo, “Enki and the Theology of Eridu,” 231-34.


Hallo, Origins, 218.
Archaic Uruk texts clearly show the dominance of Inanna among the high gods, although that may have been true for that city alone. The mother goddess Ninhursag, one of the greatest figures in early Sumer, one of three deities, begins to decline in importance in later Sumerian texts, and by the Isin and Larsa periods (early 2nd millennium) was in a fourth position, as is the case in this poem, with An, Enlil, and Enki forming the supreme divine triad, Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake of the Goddesses*, 71-72. For Inanna in the Uruk III period, see Green, *Zeichenliste*, #374.


The text was edited by Claus Wilcke, *Das Lugalbandaepos* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1969).


*The Literature of Ancient Sumer*, 22-31, translates it as “Lugalbanda and the Anzud bird.” Note the reference to Enki’s “splendid ‘eagle’ tree on the summit of Inanna’s mountain,” 23.


Russell E. Gmirkin, *Berossus and Genesis, Manetho and Exodus: Hellenistic Histories and the Date of the Pentateuch* (New York: T & T Clark, 2006), 119-27, does not consider this piece but suggests that the biblical Tower of Babel episode derives from “The Poem of Erra” via Berossus.


For a discussion of this passage, see below, Chapter Nine. C/c Gardner and Maier, 240.


For the tricky problem of “wise” women in Mesopotamia, see Rivka Harris, “The Female ‘Sage’ in Mesopotamian Literature,” 3-17; rpt. *Gender and Aging in Mesopotamia*, 147-57.

For the writing *a-da-en a-da-nun a-da-lugal* (ll. 147-49), see *The Sumerian Dictionary A/I/57*. 
Chapter Three: What’s in a Name: Gilgamesh the King

Kramer and Maier, *Myths of Enki*, 57-74.

Claus Wilcke traces the geographical movement of kingship in *The Sumerian King List* from south to north and explains the curious violations of clear genealogical principles in the king list in “Genealogical and Geographical Thought in the Sumerian King List,” 557-71.

It may be significant that proto-Elamite script of the early 3rd millennium from the region where Aratta may have been located (or imagined by the Sumerian poets) is derived from the Sumerian script. Before cuneiform signs were impressed on wet clay with the wedge-shaped tips of the stylus used by Mesopotamian scribes, the more pictographic script could be scratched on surfaces other than clay, e.g., stone, and had rounded shapes rather than the “nail” shape of cuneiform suggested in the poem.


Black, *The Literature of Ancient Sumer*, 3-11, translates it as “Enmerkar and En-suh-gir-ana.”


See Meador, *Princess, Priestess, Poet*, 237-47. Nisaba’s temple, Ezagin, was located in Abu Salabikh. For Nisaba and Enheduanna in the Temple Hymns, see also Maier, “The ‘Truth’ of a Most Ancient Work: Interpreting a Poem Addressed to a Holy Place,” 27-44.

Henshaw, 202-203.


Rivka Harris, “The Female ‘Sage’ in Mesopotamian Literature,” 147-57. Harris points out that women rarely were taught to read and write. But goddesses sometimes take the role of scribes in the netherworld, 149.


In his review of Green and Nissen, *Zeichenliste der Archaischen Texte aus Uruk*, Piotr Steinkeller claimed, on the basis of phonetic indicators in the early Uruk script, which is primarily logographic, that the Uruk writings “provide an iron-clad proof that the language underlying the Uruk script is in fact Sumerian,” *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 52 (1995), 694-95. For a groundbreaking account of early writing, see I. J. Gelb, *A Study of Writing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), especially Chapters 1, “Definition of Writing” and 3, “Sumerian System.”


modern critical approaches to literature and points out the difficulties we face in dealing with texts that are not “author-centered,” 43-45.

978 See Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy* (New York: Methuen, 1982).


982 For zirru, see Henshaw, 51-52; dam, 60.


985 A disk portraying Enheduanna was found in the gipar of the temple at Ur, “Enheduanna,” 540.


990 There is, however, no Sumerian term that clearly approximates the modern English “poet.” Performers such as the nar, gala, and kurgarra (often difficult to differentiate in texts) are the most likely candidates, especially the nar, a “singer.” See Henshaw, 96-102.


992 Dominique Collon, “Depictions of Priests and Priestesses in the Ancient Near East,” *Priests and Officials in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Kazuko Watanabe (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 1999), 117-46, considers the robed woman with a flat or pointed head-dress, who appears alongside the “priest-king” on cylinder seals and the Uruk Vase, as the equivalent to the male figure, and Collon refers to her then as a “priestess-queen,” 19.


Early in the poem Inanna is praised in relation to the high gods, especially An and Enlil, to indicate the importance of the *me* she possesses. William W. Hallo and J. J. A. Van Dijk, *The Exaltation of Inanna* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 9-10, suggest that Sargon himself may have been responsible for the exaltation, in identifying Inanna with Akkadian Ishtar.

Hallo and Van Dijk note the problems archaeologists have had with Uruk in the Sargonic period, suggesting that there may be evidence that Eanna was destroyed in that period, 57.

Hallo and Van Dijk, 57; see Meador, *Inanna, Lady of Largest Heart*, 168-70.

Hallo and Van Dijk, 57.

See Hallo and Van Dijk, 5.

Sjöberg and Bergmann., *The Collection of the Sumerian Temple Hymns*, 17, 49.

Sjöberg and Bergmann point out that a forerunner, from Early Dynastic times, is quite different, and opens, e.g., with a place other than Eridu, 6. The “Kesh Temple Hymn” was also included in the Decad.

That Nanna and king Shulgi are both associated with Ur is not entirely inconsistent with this principle. The famous king of the Ur III dynasty was added to the original collection, according to Sjöberg and Bergmann, 8.

Sjöberg and Bergmann consider Eresh to lie between Sirara and Zabalam, 146.

If Dumuzi and Dumuziabzu are identical in the poem, then the husband of Inanna would also have two temples described in the work, #17 and #24.

Sjöberg and Bergmann, 146.

For the evidence that Ulmash was located in Agade, see Sjöberg and Bergmann, 145-46.
Inanna was worshipped in Uruk under four aspects in the Archaic Period, one of them nun; and the name of only one temple from that period is known, “House-Sweet-nun,” according to Krystyna Szarzyńska, “The Temple e-dug-nun/e-nun-dug in the Archaic City of Uruk,” *Travaux du Centre d’archéologie méditerranéenne de l’Académie polonaise des sciences* 12 (1983), 9-12.

Sjöberg and Bergmann, 92-93.

Hallo and Van Dijk are not certain that the passage (lines 43-50) which opens, “In the mountain where homage is withheld from you vegetation is accursed,” refers to Epih; but the great hymn to Inanna attributed to Enheduanna refers to mountain-lands that showed the proper respect for Inanna, in contrast to Epih, who “did not bow down before” the goddess (lines 110-111). See Åke W. Sjöberg, “*in-nin šà-gur₄-ra*: A Hymn to the Goddess Inanna by the en-Priestess Enheduanna,” *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* 65 (1975), 188-89. Meador discusses and translates the poem, “Inanna and Ebih,” in *Inanna, Lady of Largest Heart*, 81-113.

“Enheduanna, En-Priestess,” 540.

Sjöberg and Bergmann, 117. See Meador, *Princess, Priestess, Poet*, 228-34.


From *eršemma* #159. Ninisina is identified with Gula in this hymn, translated by Mark E. Cohen, *Sumerian Hymnology: The eršemma* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College, 1981),105. For more on the *eršemma*, see his Chapter Three.

Meador’s translation, 124, of “Lady of Largest Heart,” follows Åke W. Sjöberg, “*in-nin šà-gur₄-ra*: A Hymn to the Goddess Inanna by the en-Priestess Enheduanna.” How well-documented is the changing of woman to man—the *pili-pili* is usually male—is a question raised by Henshaw, 299; Sjöberg cites parallels in texts that refer to the *sag-šu-bal* ritual (“head-overturning”), 223-26). Here they are conflated with the ecstatic priest and priestess, *lú-al-è-dè*, according to Meador, 204. Sjöberg discusses the eccstatics (*lú-al-è-dè*) and other keepers, 223-25.


Meador, 102-103.

John Maier, “The ‘Truth’ of a Most Ancient Work: Interpreting a Poem Addressed to a Holy Place,” 27-44, surveys different approaches to the symbolism of the temple hymn.


Temple Hymn #41 is poorly preserved, and the god of the temple in Agade, Aba, is obscure, as Sjöberg and Bergmann point out, 146. They point out the possibility that DINGIR-A-MAL, which they read Aba could be read *i-la-ba*, 154. Aage Westenholz has noted that Pre-Sargonic (Early Dynastic) Akkadian theophoric names refer to only two deities, Il(um) and Aštar, male and female high gods; in the Sargonic period, a number of Semitic gods from Northern Babylonia appear in the names, including Ilab, Walther Sallaberger and Aage Westenholz, *Mesopotamien: Akkade-Zeit und Ur III-Zeit* (Freiburg:
Universitätsverlag, 1999), 78. Ilaba is still an obscure figure, since he disappears after the Akkadian period, Black and Green, *Gods, Demons and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia*, 106-107.

1036 Sjöberg and Bergmann, 55-56.


1046 Nissen, 72.

1047 And perhaps by Antum, Anu’s “consort” or “wife,” often mentioned in Seleucid Uruk texts.


1051 Over seventy-five titles of female cultic officials are discussed in Henshaw, passim.

1052 The text has been edited by Gertrud Farber-Flügge, *Der Mythos “Inanna und Enki;” a scribe totaled the lines at 411, 63; for a more recent transliteration and translation, see The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature c.1.3.1 and t.1.3.1.


1054 Piotr Steinkeller, “On Rulers, Priests and Sacred, 113-14, speculates that the earliest Sumerian pantheon was dominated by goddesses, and that Enki, “undoubtedly the original head of the pantheon,”
and then other masculine figures largely gained power at the expense of the goddesses, though never superseding them.


1056 Bendt Alster, “On the Interpretation of the Sumerian Myth, ‘Inanna and Enki,’” *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* 64 (1975), 20-34. Alster’s interpretation of the poem turns on the broken final lines, which he considers a punishment of Inanna for having taken the *me*. He thinks the punishment is that Inanna will have to descend and return from the underworld eternally; and humans are punished by having to propagate themselves eternally—that is, to die and not return from the underworld, 29.


1058 As Inanna approaches the Abzu of Eridu, she does speak to herself the curious line, “It shall never escape me that I have been neglected by him who has had sex,” as *The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature* translates the line (B.5). The line suggests that her sexual allure will be helpful in seducing Enki.


1061 For the list of *me*, see Kramer and Maier, 59-63. Farber-Flügge discusses each one in the clusters in which the *me* appear, 101-115.


1063 For a translation and discussion of the poem, see Meador, *Inanna, Lady of Largest Heart*, 168-91.

1064 The point is emphasized by Rivkah Harris, “Inanna-Ishtar as Paradox and a Coincidence of Opposites,” *Journal of the History of Religions* 30 (1991), 261-78.

1065 Kramer and Maier, 60.

1066 Farber-Flügge, 112-13. For a list of temple functionaries auxiliary to the cult, see Henshaw, 324-26.


1068 A parallel inscription found in Nippur attributes the combining of lordship with kingship to Enlil, and claims that it was Enlil, “his beloved master,” who specially summoned him to rule Uruk and Ur; Cooper, 101. The eldest son of Lugalkiginededu, Lugalkisalsi, and some others after him, are called “king of Uruk.” A grandson of Lugalkisalsi, a certain Di’utu, is described as “servant of Girimsi ‘governor’ (*ensi*-GAR) of Uruk. Cooper notes that he would be “governor” and not “ruler” because, living during the Sargonic period, he would rank below the king of Agade, 104.


1070 M. W. Green, “The Uruk Lament,” 255.

1071 Samuel Noah Kramer, *History Begins at Sumer*, 223-44.
Chapter Three: What’s in a Name: Gilgamesh the King

[re ED cylinder seal impressions vs. Uruk period]


Dan Snell, *Life in the Ancient Near East*, 131-32. Snell is not as certain as other scholars that kings gradually usurped authority and land from temples, which owned most of the land in ancient Mesopotamia, but he noticed that relations between palace and temple had changed by the Neo-Assyrian period, when the temples were taxed. The Persians followed the practice, rebuilding temples but at a minimal cost in comparison with the taxes collected from them.


E.g., Susan Pollock, *Ancient Mesopotamia*, chapters 5 and 8 especially.


An earlier version of *The Sumerian King List* may have been composed in the Old Akkadian period in order to demonstrate Akkad’s legitimate rule after Kish had been defeated. Steinkeller, “An Ur III Manuscript of the Sumerian King List,” 267-92.

Hallo, “Enki and the Theology of Eridu,” 231-34.


M. W. Green, “The Uruk Lament,” 272. Green points out that Ishme-Dagan was the first ruler since Ur-Namma to adopt the title of *en* and the title of “spouse of Inanna,” and that the titles were carried by Isin rulers after him. For Ishme-Dagan operating as the “steward” of Uruk—preparing bull sacrifices, dedicating offerings, and making beer, fat, oil, honey and wine flow—see 275-76.
Chapter Three: What’s in a Name: Gilgamesh the King


Paul-Alain Beaulieu, *The Pantheon of Uruk during the Neo-Babylonian Period*, 340. For the cycle of heroes, see 106-108.


Beaulieu, *Pantheon of Uruk*, 340-41. Sîn-kāšid also takes credit for rebuilding the gipar, where he installed his daughter as the nin-dingir of Lugalbanda.

Linssen, 65.

See Beaulieu, *Pantheon of Uruk*, 238-42, 335-37, 345. The rituals for Dumuzi, which occurred at Uruk in the month that carried his name and the following month, Abu, appear to deal with his death, 336. He, too, is considered one of the minor gods in Uruk, and received offerings.