

Spring 2009

# There Will Be Neither Fear nor Trembling: A Hermeneutic of Neo-Sumerian Epic

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## Recommended Citation

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ECLS Comps

**There Will Be Neither Fear nor Trembling:**  
A Hermeneutic of Neo-Sumerian Epic

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Sign Conventions:

- [ ] Enclase restorations from other sources
  - ... A gap in the existing text
  - Italics* When quoted represent uncertain renderings of original source
  - ( ) When quoted represent syntactical clarifications added by the translator
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The greatest contribution born to world literature from the ancient and various womb of Mesopotamian civilization is undoubtedly the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, known to the ancient world by its less anachronistic incipit “He who saw the Deep”. Rainer Maria Rilke, the 20<sup>th</sup> century German poet, was deeply moved by the poem, which he saw as a sublime didactic exercise on the universal theme of mortality. It was, as Rilke said in 1916, “das Epos der Todesfurcht”, an epic on the fear of death (George, xiii). The undeniable craft and beauty of the Akkadian *Gilgamesh* (itself a product of over one thousand years of transmission and editing) has also unfortunately overshadowed the popular awareness of an enormous expanse of Mesopotamian literatures. Clay tablets of cuneiform writing composed and preserved by the scribes of “twin-tongued Sumer” carried the myths, legends, histories, hymns, jokes, and tales that spoke for the cultures of Sumer, Babylon, and Assyria across two millenia—often with shocking fidelity— with the result that they may be recovered by the world and brought back to life in interpretation. In this study we will examine a little known and incredibly rich nook of the world’s oldest literature: the Neo-Sumerian epic.

Of the many cultures to inhabit the Iraqi plains, the first identifiable civilization was that of the Sumerians. It is probable that this individual ethnic group and their unique

tongue inhabited southern Iraq in small settlements for several thousand years before the development of a writing system sometime in the Uruk IV and Jemdet Nasr periods (3300-2900 BCE).<sup>1</sup> Cuneiform—Latin for “wedge-writing”<sup>2</sup>—became the administrative miracle which reproduced the Sumerian tongue across a large body of syllabic signs. A major shift in the ethnographic, political, and linguistic character of southern Iraq, Sumer, came from northern Iraq, Akkad, in the form of recorded history’s first unifying emperor, Sargon of Akkad.<sup>3</sup> It is rare that tablets in early cuneiform surface which resemble “literature” until this time. The scribes of the Sargonic dynasty (2334-2154 BCE) adapted the (ill-suited) script of the usurped Sumerian administrative structures to a Semitic language spoken by the northern Mesopotamian (Akkadian/Assyrian) tribes.<sup>4</sup> Over time, Akkadian became the standard spoken and bureaucratic language of the empire.<sup>5</sup>

The Sargonic dynasties fell to increasing mismanagement and foreign invaders (Gutians) in the 22<sup>nd</sup> century. The contrast between the mode of Sargonic rule and that of the succeeding Third Dynasty of Ur (Ur III, 2112-2004 BCE) is striking. This latter age, which produced the great poems which are the subjects of our study, is often regarded as “the Sumerian renaissance” for the staggering increase in administrative and juridical

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<sup>1</sup> “For some time many scholars refused even to believe that it was a language at all and suggested that it was a scribal trick or a form of cryptography... The early doubters may, however, be forgiven since Sumerian is quite unlike the well-known Indo-European and Semitic language groups.” It is, in fact, a linguistic isolate (Walker, 15).

<sup>2</sup> Surprisingly similar to the sentiment of the ironic “mere wedges” in ELA! (l. 540)

<sup>3</sup> Control of Sumer was martial and administrative in character, but Sumer, like ancient Greece, was never a unified “nation”. It was rather a patchwork array of constantly interacting city-states, linked to one another in mutual trade organizations.

<sup>4</sup> Of which the spoken dialect was Old Akkadian. The Akkadian dialects of Assyria and Babylon in the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium are referred to eponymously.

<sup>5</sup> The transformation was not immediate, however. Sargon’s daughter, Enheduanna, was in fact one of the great hymnal poets of earlier Sumerian. Furthermore, in keeping with the frustrating diversity of Sumerian history, some areas never keened to adopting Sumerian at all.

documentation,<sup>6</sup> as well as written poetic, historical, and religious works. Ethnically and culturally speaking, this age was hardly more Sumerian than that of the Sargonic centuries, but the well-educated (and uncharacteristically literate) Ur III kings presided over attempts to re-establish cultural links with pre-Sargonic Sumerian culture. The language of the courts and of the educated thus reverted to Sumerian, though the fact of time and the retention of Old Akkadian vernacular certainly altered the lexicon and grammar a great deal. Much of the Ur III and Old Babylonian literary and historical *oeuvre* glorified the pre-Sargonic Sumerian kings that established lordship in southern Iraq. Therefore, this age is the age of the “Neo-Sumerian” courts, ruled by scholar-kings, foremost of which was Šulgi.<sup>7</sup>

The present study will primarily engage with two poems from the Neo-Sumerian period (2112 – mid-19<sup>th</sup> ct. BCE): *Enmerkar and Ensuhrigirana* and *Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta*. Our task is to recover the social effect of the reading of these poems in their courtly setting. The first steps of scholarship in this direction, estimable philological study and critical translation, have taken enormous strides since the first studies published over a half century ago.<sup>8</sup> This has not, however, guaranteed a field of terribly interesting literary criticism. Unless we are content (as many are) to claim that these poems were merely thinly veiled and skillfully wrought exclamations of ultra-

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<sup>6</sup> Including the “Code of Ur-Nammu”, which preceded the famous “Code of Hammurapi” by at least three centuries.

<sup>7</sup> One argument for the cultural acceptance of the *Aratta* poems (which show parallels with Šulgi’s own heroic claims) holds that glorying in the ancient kings of Unug (where Utu-hegal/Ur-Nammu/Šulgi claimed lineage) reinforced legitimacy for rulership over all Sumer. I agree with Adele Berlin in stating that “This is putting the cart before the horse. It seems more reasonable that Ur III rulers, whether or not they had actual ties to Uruk [Unug], claimed Uruk origins because of the existence and acceptance of the epics” (Berlin, 17).

<sup>8</sup> I refer here primarily to H. Vanstiphout’s invaluable *Epics of Sumerian Kings: The Matter of Aratta* (2004), which is the basis for my research, and Samuel Kramer’s foundational but dated “Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta: A Sumerian Epic Tale of Iraq and Iran” monograph (1952) as it appears in *From the Tablets of Sumer* (, respectively. All quotations are taken from Vanstiphout’s edition.

nationalism, we must work towards an understanding of the mode of being of the work of the poetry. I believe the elemental signature of these poems to be the glorification of organizing disparate for the sake of infinite productivity. The *Enmerkar* epics represent a world that aspires to universal material prosperity achieved by way of maximally efficient organizations, a world which will one day reach a state of permanent fruition. Fertility is the constant theme of the Neo-Sumerian epic, and intimately intertwined with this is the act of interpretation, including the very nature of textuality itself. The significance of this claim will become more apparent with comprehensive textual and contextual analysis.

The epic tradition in which our poems, *Enmerkar and Ensuhrirana* (EE) and *Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta* (ELA), were composed is not easily categorized.<sup>9</sup> The most similar epic in popular consciousness would clearly be the Akkadian *Gilgamesh* of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BCE. This similarity is because the Akkadian *Gilgamesh* is itself a product of a long literary history with roots in Sumerian epic literature. The Neo-Sumerian tales of the semi-divine king<sup>10</sup> Bilgameš—which were either ancient and very well-known or being newly composed out of common lore at the same time as our *Aratta* poems—were collated in the Old Babylonian period into a single, large narrative rather

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<sup>9</sup> The generic stability of “epic” is a rough and anachronistic imposition on the Neo-Sumerian hero tales. Jacobsen conceded to the term for popular understanding, but Black preferred “Heroes and Kings” for the sake of accuracy. Michalowski’s response was that “there is much that can be said against, as well as in defense of the term epic...I would therefore prefer to avoid any overt generic terminology so that one can assume a neutral stand as much as possible” (Michalowski, p. 228). What is truly at issue in the question of generic nomenclature is the inappropriate assumption of similarity between these and the traditions of other epics. Therefore the use of “epic” in our current study simply reflects a generalization which has become self-consciously commonplace among Sumerology’s major works.

<sup>10</sup> *Lu-gal* for “king”, which tended to be either a military leader or a mayoral figure with the duty/power (*me*, see n. 40 below) of land distribution. *En* is the more generalized “lord”, also typically with distributive oversight. The word also signifies high priest/priestess and may therefore carry with it a sense of religious authority.

than a cycle of semi-independent tales (the Akkadian text was a later, further edition of and addition to the cycle.)

Of the recovered Neo-Sumerian tablets, five are clearly tales of the deeds of Bilgameš, and in many ways two of these (*Bilgameš and the Underworld* and *The Death of Bilgameš*) seem to be “epics” out of modern association and not literary form.<sup>11</sup> The remaining four epics—which together make up the rather unfortunately titled *Matter of Aratta* cycle—are retellings of the exploits of two predecessors of Bilgameš, Enmerkar and Lugalbanda.<sup>12</sup> Two of these are our poems (EE and ELA), and the other two are essentially the first and second half (even the ancients considered them distinct poems, however) of Lugalbanda’s story. Each of the three *Aratta* narratives (collapsing “Lugalbanda in the Wilderness” and “The Return of Lugalbanda” into a single story) is a different account of how Enmerkar, king of Unug, bested the lord of Aratta in gaining the preference of the goddess Inanna.<sup>13</sup>

Never, however, does Enmerkar do this with overwhelming martial force. In fact, it is a common aspect of all of the Sumerian epics that realized violence has almost no poetic voice.<sup>14</sup> It is unthinkable that a version of the Enmerkar stories would resolve its narrative conflict with violence, yet even the deeds of Bilgameš, which seem inherently martial, are not treated as such. In the two versions of *Bilgameš and Huwawa* which

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<sup>11</sup> A subtler and more responsible account of this can be found in George, pp. 175-178, 195-197.

<sup>12</sup> Enmerkar was the pseudo-historical founder of Unug, Lugalbanda (sometimes Enmerkar’s son, sometimes not) a great king whose deeds ensured Unug’s divine favor and material success, and Bilgameš (sometimes Lugalbanda’s son, sometimes not) was a great military leader and builder/defender of the city’s famed walls.

<sup>13</sup> I have included a selection from a major hymn to Inanna as Appendix B to demonstrate just how central Inanna was to the Sumerian pantheon.

<sup>14</sup> I say “realized violence”, which is to say narrative violence, because the rich beauty of Sumerian simile often rests in the power of shocking violence. Take for instance a description of the dreaded Huwawa, “A warrior he is, his teeth the teeth of a dragon,/ his eye the eye of a lion!/ His chest is a torrent in spate,/ His brow devours the canebrake, none can go near him,/ like a man-eating lion, [on his tongue] the blood never pales” (George, p. 154 l. 99-103).

survive, our hero is truly more of an Odyssean trickster, capable of beguiling the forest demon with clever words and a single blow rather than subduing him (as in the Akkadian epic) with superior force. When Unug is threatened by the northern invader in *Bilgameš and Akka*, the hero does indeed best him in battle, but no battle poetry is ever present. When the invader is captured he is peacefully set free in just recompense for an instance in the past in which Akka saved the life of Bilgameš.<sup>15</sup>

Violence, and certainly revenge, does not equate to glory in Neo-Sumerian epic. The closest any of them comes to a scene of warfare is a bizarre and difficult to understand battle (which is an unsure attribution at best) between divine astrological forces which Lugalbanda comes into contact with in his convalescent cave, and the announcing of the fact of the successful defense of Unug by Bilgameš against Akka. The Neo-Sumerian epics, and in particular the *Aratta* poems, spurn solutions of brute force.

The poems in the *Aratta* cycle are all retellings of the legend of ancient Unug's establishing supremacy over the fantastic land of Aratta, allowing Enmerkar to guarantee the goddess Inanna's continued favor of his land by adorning her ziggurat, the Eanna, with the magnificent jewels from the hills of Aratta.<sup>16</sup> The conflict which arises between Enmerkar and Ensuhgirana (named only in EE<sup>17</sup>) is peacefully resolved in all of the *Aratta* poems.<sup>18</sup> While the *Lugalbanda* poems take this general structure as a diegetic

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<sup>15</sup> This prequel, if it survives in literature, has not been discovered.

<sup>16</sup> Attempts to geographically locate Aratta tend to deviate from any import within the poems. That Aratta could be a land beyond the Zagros mountain ranges or a general name for a large Iranian kingdom is truly secondary to the capacity that the city state plays within the poems, which is precisely that of an exotic, faraway, threatening, and naturally wealthy kingdom.

<sup>17</sup> Common alternative reading of "Ensuhrirana" as "Ensuhrkešdanna" e.g. Berlin, Kramer. The reason for this confusion is unclear to me, so I have uncritically adopted the pronunciation of the signs offered by Vanstiphout and Black.

<sup>18</sup> This includes the *Lugalbanda* cycle which begins with the expectation of martial proceedings on the march to Aratta, and ends with a magic prescription from Inanna rendering war unnecessary. One must wonder why the last lines of "The Return of Lugalbanda" are unmistakable praise for the mythic

impetus to frame the heroic story of the “savior-saint” character,<sup>19</sup> it is the *Enmerkar* poems which find their dramatic action in the matters of resolving interstate conflict.

The shorter of the two (at just under 285 lines), *Enmerkar and Ensuhgirana*, begins when Ensuhgirana first provokes the lord of Unug, “He must submit to me, he must bear my yoke!” (EE, l. 25). The reason for this aggression is symbolic,<sup>20</sup> as Ensuhgirana refuses to believe that Inanna (who has shown her favors to both kings) should prefer the king of Unug (and thus the land and people of Unug) to the king of Aratta. Failing to best Enmerkar in a war of words carried by messengers between the two kingdoms (l. 22-113), the lord of Aratta accepts the help of a destructive Hamazite sorcerer in destroying the fertility of Unug’s livestock. The magical attacks are stopped by a wise woman—sent by Utu, the brother of Inanna, sun god, and overseer of law/justice—who challenges the sorcerer to a duel on behalf of Enmerkar.<sup>21</sup> When the Hamazite loses and his “vital force”<sup>22</sup> is taken away (a preventative measure, rather than punitive), the lord of Aratta admits his inferiority to the lord of Unug.

The EE seems less “heroic” than the sort of epic with which we tend to employ the term. After all, the conflict is resolved in an unusual way, with the rulers having seeming little to do with their own battle after the initial exchange of the standard (and

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placeholder Aratta if the primary function of the *Aratta* poems is only to glorify Ur III Sumer (see Jacobsen’s intriguing claim to its role in entertaining Iranian ambassadors, p. 277, unintentionally supported in a fascinating way in 2005 by Sharlach, *passim*).

<sup>19</sup> This is H. Vanstiphout’s critical understanding of the *Lugalbanda* protagonist, though I am not personally convinced. Claus Wilcke’s still untranslated *Das Lugalbandaepos* (1969) and Vanstiphout’s own volume are the two major collated editions of the *Lugalbanda* tablets, yet any remarkable breakthroughs in the literary interpretation of *Lugalbanda* have yet to be seen.

<sup>20</sup> Not politically necessary, as is the famine in the ELA.

<sup>21</sup> *Um-ma* quite literally translates to “wise/knowledgeable woman”, which is far more appropriate than any variation of “witch” (see n.23 below). *Maš-maš* (sorcerer) is more etymologically difficult. *Maš* means “twin” or something doubled, and *maš*<sub>3</sub> (which would have a different sign but identical phonetic quality) means “to be pure”. I suspect *maš-maš* came to then mean something on the order of one who is a negative doppelgänger of one who is pure. In this way, the very presence of the *maš-maš* would be dangerous, as “impurity” is not an action but a characteristic. (ETCSL)

<sup>22</sup> “Vital force” is Vanstiphout’s particular understanding. ETCSL has *zi* as “life” and “breath”.

obviously effective) Sumerian rhetoric of self-praise. Adele Berlin, a scholar of Mesopotamian ethnopoetics and a student of Samuel Kramer's, refers to the tale as a "romantic" epic, which is structurally similar to the "heroic fairy tale" (Berlin, p. 19) This is primarily because of the constant presence of what we would regard as supernatural elements, most obviously in the form of a magic duel waged between champions of the two city-states.<sup>23</sup>

The language and story of magic in the EE is in keeping with the prevailing theme of all four surviving *Aratta* poems: namely, fertility. The magic duel between Sagburu, the *um-ma*, and Urgirnuna, the sorcerer of Aratta, is likely the miniature narrative which motivated this particular incarnation of the epic cycle of Unug. The conflict is, simply put, that of production versus destruction. When approached by the sorcerer, the cow and the goat of Unug both respond to his questions identically, "Nisaba will eat my cream/ Nisaba will drink my milk/...Unless my milk has been brought from this splendid pen/ Faithful cow Nisaba, Enlil's oldest daughter, cannot institute the levy" (l. 176-182, l. 189-195).<sup>24</sup> Urgirnuna makes trouble by using his magic to render the livestock incapable of producing milk, the product which nurtures their calves, the citizens of the state, and the table of the goddess, Nisaba. The result is a mimicry of the standard trope of utter civic devastation in lament poetry (the city often being represented as a sheepfold), "Thereupon pen and byre became a silent house, a ruin...The holy churn remained empty;[...] was hungry and lay starving...In pen and byre he brought misery: he made

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<sup>23</sup> "Magic" is an unfortunate term, as in Sumerian culture there really was no qualitative distinction between "magic" efficacy and material efficacy. Likewise, there is no "supernatural" in Sumerian thought, only limited understanding.

<sup>24</sup> It is of course a striking detail in the context of the poem that the institution of levies is dependent on the production of farm animals! It is also important to remember that the production of milk in goats and cows requires constant fertility and impregnation. This mental association between fertility and milk production would, I believe, be quite immediately established by the citizens of a Sumerian city. Unug, of course, appears "as a cow with calf, a *pregnant* cow, it appears in opulence!" (EE, l. 10).

scarce cream and milk” (l. 198, 205, 220).<sup>25</sup> The (eventually) unsuccessful sorcerer Urgirnuna works what we would call “black magic” whereas Sagburu’s success in the contest comes from her ability to create rather than destroy. It is a competition won through reproductive prowess.

The sorcerer is implicitly doomed by the text from the start:

Now there was a sorcerer whose witchcraft was that of the Hamazites,  
Urgirnuna by name, whose witchcraft was that of the Hamazites:  
Hamazu having been destroyed, he had crossed over to Aratta,  
Where he now practices his sorcery in the inner chambers of the  
Egipara. (l. 135-139)

Hamazu was a region of the Zagros mountain range, the same area which provided consistent (and consistently violent) invasion forces (some of which inspired the destruction related in the lament poems) throughout Sumerian and Babylonian history, such as the Gutians that brought down the preceding Sargonic dynasty. The fact of Urgirnuna’s Hamazite heritage is brought up three times, the fact that the nature of his magic is Hamazite is mentioned twice, and in the third line it is once announced, seemingly as a simple explanatory point, that Hamazu had been destroyed. While this is not a direct indictment of magic use as such, it does indicate that Hamazu, unlike Unug, did not carry with it the capacity for its own reproduction.

The material used for the contest between the *um-ma* and the *maš-maš* is symbolic of the conflict itself. The foreign-born and culturally invasive magician must meet Sagburu on the bank of the Euphrates (the life-blood of Unug by default) to cast animal-producing fish-semen into the river. All of Sagburu’s animals consume and devour Urgirnuna’s creatures (her eagle to his carp, her wolf to his ewe and lamb, her

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<sup>25</sup> I believe the Neo-Sumerian epic to be the essential anti-thesis to lament poetry. The poems of the latter genre were spoken texts accompanied by music which repetitiously mourned the hopelessness of civic existence against the metaphorical storms of the god of winds and mortal destinies, Enlil.

lion to his cow and calf, his mountain lion to his ibex and wild sheep, and her tiger and lion to his gazelle, l. 228-248). Though this seems to be a concession to the power of violent animals, it is more likely that in keeping with the politically hierarchical conclusion of the piece (and of the other *Aratta* poems) that Sagburu's creations are of the higher orders on the food chain and are not destructive as such, but rather are simply more powerful within the levels of natural consumption.<sup>26</sup>

Indeed, the hierarchies of interstate politics (which are necessarily religious) are, in the language of the epics, determined solely by the reproductive capacities of the ruler and his land. The rhetoric of Enshugirana's opening challenge is unmistakably sexual:

He [Enmerkar] must submit to me, he must bear my yoke!  
If he submits to me well and truly, then, for him and me this  
means:  
He may live with Inana in the Egara,  
But I shall live with Inana in the Ezagina<sup>27</sup> of Aratta.  
He may lie with her on a flowery bed,  
But I shall converse<sup>28</sup> with Inana between her gleaming legs!  
(EE, l. 25-32).

Apparently Enshugirana's rhetoric has caused other "rulers of the highland" to submit to his overlordship so as to "partake" of his particular privilege (l. 38). Enmerkar is no pushover in the war of words, however, as he mimics and re-doubles the style of the challenge:

He may live with Inana in the Ezagina of Aratta,  
But I live with her when she descends from heaven to earth!  
He may lie with her in a sweet slumber on a bejeweled couch,  
But I lie in Inana's flowery bed strewn with glistening plants.  
(l. 78-81).

He continues more forcefully:

At its back there is an ug-lion; at its front there is

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<sup>26</sup> Further suggestion and clarification of this argument can be determined from the conclusion of n.45 below.

<sup>27</sup> Enshugirana's palace.

<sup>28</sup> "Converse" is not a morally conservative translation by Vanstiphout, *inim* (l. 33) does in fact mean "words" (ETCLS).

a piriĝ-lion.  
 The ug-lion chases the piriĝ-lion;  
 The piriĝ-lion chases the ug-lion;  
 The ug-lion is forever chasing the piriĝ-lion,  
 And the piriĝ-lion is forever chasing the ug-lion,  
 And so day does not dawn, night does not pass.  
 I roam with Inana for the whole journey of [...] leagues.  
 Utu does not set eyes on my holy crown  
 Once she has entered my holy Gipar!<sup>29</sup>  
 (EE, l. 81-90)

The power of Enmerkar’s words (which go on quite a while longer) drives Ensuhgirana to the realization that he is not likely to match Enmerkar in the eyes of Inanna, yet against the wise counsel of an assembly he stubbornly declares, “My city may become a mound of ruins, and I a potsherd in it/ Yet never will I submit to the lord of Unug!” (l.133-134). The suggestion here is that Ensuhgirana is not fundamentally concerned with the city’s well-being so much as he is stubborn to remain sovereign. Following the loss of his ace-in-the-hole, sorcerer-champion to Enmerkar’s *um-ma*, Ensuhgirana sends a final message to his newfound lord:

He sent to Enmerkar:  
 You are indeed the beloved of Inana; you alone are the greatest;  
 Inana has truly chosen you for her holy loins; you are her lover;  
 From the west to the east you are the great lord,<sup>30</sup> and I humbly  
 follow.  
 From your conception onward I was never your equal; you are  
 senior;  
 I can never match you! (l. 274-280)

A similar resolution in mutual beneficence and hierarchical peace concludes the *Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta*. This composition proves itself one of the finest pieces of Sumerian poetry ever composed, and at over twice the length of EE (roughly 640 lines, several missing) its narrative is also far more structurally complex. The opening of ELA should not come as a surprise after EE, as indications of fertility are again the

<sup>29</sup> *Ug*-lion and *piriĝ*-lion remain undefined but are likely male/female. The Gipar here is the royal bedchamber, but it can also mean Inanna’s personal bower in the Eanna.

<sup>30</sup> “Lord” – *en*, rather than *lu-gal*, makes the case of his supremacy less politically specific and more fundamentally general than “king” (see n. 10 above).

predominant image. The “dazzling” Unug is, in EE, like an opulent “pregnant cow” (l. 10), and in ELA the “Great Princes” (the gods) gave “head-lifting pride” to the Eanna in the form of “opulence, carp floods,<sup>31</sup> / and rains that bring forth dappled wheat” (l. 6-11).

While fertility is an absolutely central theme to ELA, we begin to see other interesting elements interspersed with the language of growth. Two lines following the mention of “carp floods”, the poem—keen to place us in the temporal space of the first days of kingship—informs us that “the land Dilmun did not yet exist,/ When the Eana of Unug-Kulab was already well-founded” (l. 12-13). Dilmun, present day Bahrain, acts here as a symbol of international trade and of the lands furthest from Sumer (Bahrain being exceptionally far, by ancient standards, from southern Iraq) (Vanstiphout, p. 93 n. 12).<sup>32</sup> Trade, in fact, has yet to exist at all, “[...] was not yet *imported*; there was no trading; [...] was not *exported*; there was no commerce” (l. 16-17).<sup>33</sup> By story’s end, Enmerkar invents trade as one of the conditions of the ongoing peace between Aratta and Unug at the insistence of Inanna (l. 603).<sup>34</sup> The result of trade between the technologically superior Unug and jewelry rich Aratta (goods for the praise of the gods) is unprecedented productivity shared by both lands:

[Verily,] for Aratta ewes and their lambs shall multiply;  
 [Verily,] for Aratta goats and their kids shall multiply;  
 [Verily, for Aratta] cows and their calves shall multiply;  
 [Verily, for Aratta] donkey mares and their swift foals shall  
 multiply!  
 Since in Aratta they will now agree,  
 They will heap up in ... piles  
 The abundance is truly yours.  
 When you have instituted [*trade*] with the lord of Aratta

<sup>31</sup> “‘Carp flood’ is a traditional poetic term for agricultural abundance” (Vanstiphout, p. 93 n. 11).

<sup>32</sup> Lamberg-Karlovsky’s “Dilmun: Gateway to Immortality” provides a fascinating glance into both the role of Dilmun in Sumerian literature as well as the international reach of Mesopotamian trade culture.

<sup>33</sup> What Vanstiphout renders as “imported” remains an unidentified set of three signs, however in the context of the phrase and the poem itself, it seems reliable enough.

<sup>34</sup> She is not named, but the previously unmentioned and magnificently adorned *um-ma* that appears to Enmerkar in his success is almost certainly Inanna.

(l. 596-603)  
 --- [Text is damaged beyond comprehension for 10 lines]  
 Enlil, King of all countries,  
 Has now established this execution of the tasks:  
 The people of Aratta  
 Have as their task the trading of gold and lapis lazuli  
 And the fashioning of golden fruits and fruity bushes  
 Laden with figs and grapes...; they shall heap up these fruits  
     in great piles;  
 They shall dig out flawless lapis lazuli in lumps;  
 They shall remove the crowns of the sweet reeds,  
 And for Inana, Lady of the Eana,  
 They shall heap them up in piles in the courtyard of the Eana.  
 (l. 616-625)

So it is that trade is the most efficient, and most productive method of sharing growth, in particular as the superior party in the eyes of the gods (i.e. Inanna) is understood as such by both partners. The establishment of trade, however, is in essence a framing device to the main narrative. The story of ELA, like EE, is that of responding to ultimatums which are equal parts (justified and effectual) boast and threat. Far more apparent in ELA than in EE, though, is the superhuman cunning and (quite literally!) inventiveness of Enmerkar. If “epic” is a strange generic association for the folk-tale story of *Enmerkar and Ensuhrirana*, it is only less odd regarding *Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta* because it is much longer. For though the high-rhetoric of the piece occasionally reaches nigh-apocalyptic levels, the struggle of the hero of ELA is, in essence, coming up with clever ways of solving riddles posed by the lord of Aratta.

This time, it is Enmerkar who demands Aratta’s submission:

My sister,<sup>35</sup> let Aratta for Unug artfully  
 Work gold and silver for my sake  
 [Let them cut for my sake] polished lapis lazuli from its [Aratta’s]  
     block  
 [Let them *work* for my sake] the translucent smooth lapis lazuli;  
 [Let them] build [for my sake] the holy mountain in Unug!  
 A temple [descended] from heaven—your place of worship,  
 The shrine Eana—let [Aratta] build that!  
 The holy Gipar, your dwelling,

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<sup>35</sup> Inanna. Though by way of his ancestral Utu, Inanna would be a “sister” to Enmerkar, it is obvious by context that *nin* (sister) typically intends “lady” when it is reverential in tone (ETCSL).

Let Aratta artfully adorn its inner chamber for my sake  
 So that I, the beaming youth, may embrace you therein!  
 Let Aratta submit to Unug!  
 (l. 38-48)

Inanna grants the request—which goes on quite a bit longer—repeating his own words with her own embellishments and statements of love, and demands that he secure Aratta’s submission for her sake. In an interesting inversion from EE, it is Enmerkar this time and not the lord of Aratta whose precipitating threats conjure the tropes of city lament poetry:

Beware lest I make (the people of Aratta) flee from their city  
 like a dove from its tree,  
 Lest I make them fly away like a bird from its permanent nest,  
 Lest I put a price on them as on mere merchandise,<sup>36</sup>  
 Lest I make Aratta gather dust as does a devastated city,  
 Lest, like as when Enki<sup>37</sup> has cursed a settlement  
 And utterly destroyed it, I too destroy Aratta,  
 Lest like the sweeping devastation, in whose wake Inana rose  
 Shrieking and yelling aloud,  
 I too make a sweeping devastation there!  
 (l. 115-123)

The lord of Aratta, having been blessed with her company in the past, does not believe that Enmerkar is the chosen lover of Inanna, and thus refuses to send to Unug the requested tribute of jewels. Enmerkar’s eloquent messenger rebuts him, to which the lord of Aratta “staring at his feet with sad eyes, seeking a rejoinder” (l. 238) finally decides that a contest of brains would be preferable to one of brawn:

Your king may be eager to confront me with arms,  
 But I am eager for another kind of contest.  
 He who does not understand this contest *shall not prevail*,  
 Just like a bull that does not know the strength of the other  
 bull.  
 But he who understands this contest *shall prevail*,  
 Just like a bull that perceives the strength of the other bull.  
 Dare he refuse this contest  
 Like [...], something no one can match?  
 Dare he refuse this contest? (l. 253-261)

<sup>36</sup> A still-powerful metaphor foreshadowing the invention of trade in the poem, which will be a process of interaction, not of trading “mere merchandise.”

<sup>37</sup> While it is the metaphor of Enlil’s storm which ruins cities in lament poetry, Enki (the god of wisdom, cleverness, and technical invention) has “cursed a settlement” when he stays outside the city walls, allowing devastation to occur in the absence of his blessing (e.g. *Lamentation for Eridug* l. 11-18, ETCSL).

Of course, Enmerkar is up to the challenge, which, with increasing levels of despondent frustration at Enmerkar's inventiveness, becomes three challenges from the lord of Aratta.

The first: Enmerkar must bring to the starving land of Aratta piles of grain directly (i.e. not collected *en route*) from Unug's storehouses, with the catch that Enmerkar ship all of the grain using open-holed nets.<sup>38</sup> This he solves, with the wisdom granted him by Nisaba (a central goddess, as in EE, to whom we will return), by laying out the flat nets and pouring water over greenmalt grain. This causes the grain to sprout across the holes in the nets (he even has the insight to put extra grain on the outside for the locusts on the trip!), creating a nested fabric of growing grain to contain the greater piles of grain. When the barley grain arrives in Aratta, the land's "hunger was stilled" (though incompletely) when "The people of Aratta/ [*Covered*] the fields with his water-soaked greenmalt" (l. 360-362). Therefore, the fertile grain of Unug secured (via the technological ingenuity of Enmerkar) the transfer of its own fertility to foreign soil.

The successful solution of the first challenge causes the lord of Aratta to fast, rave, speak gibberish, to stumble "around in words like a feeding donkey in wheat" (l. 390-394),<sup>39</sup> until he comes up with another challenge. Though the solution to the first challenge is exceptionally clever, it is also reasonably clear. The solutions to the second and third challenges are less immediately comprehensible, but what is clear is that Enmerkar is up to nearly superhuman, spontaneous bursts of problem-solving. Enmerkar

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<sup>38</sup> It is to the lord of Aratta's credit that he never reveals the famine of his city, which would be the first indication of Inanna's abandonment. We don't learn of the famine until the grain arrives, wherein the starving elders prostrate themselves before the messenger and proffer their treasures (Vanstiphout thinks this may be another foreshadowing of the invention of trade, p. 95 n. 45)

<sup>39</sup> An idiom of obvious contextual resonance.

insists that his “scepter’s base is the power<sup>40</sup> of overlordship” (l. 382), and that it would do the bested lord well to cut his scepter from one of Unug’s lesser branches. The lord of Aratta, playing off of the metaphor, challenges Enmerkar to fashion a literal scepter out of no existing material. Immediately after the messenger issues the challenge, Enki<sup>41</sup> “granted insight to Enmerkar” (l.420), and with this insight Enmerkar pours an artificial liquid<sup>42</sup> into a hollow reed and allows time it time to solidify. The totally artificial symbol of kingship—the first manmade substance in history (Vanstiphout, p. 54)—is delivered to Aratta, causing its lord to be “*blinded*” and “undone by fear” (l. 441-442). On the brink of surrender, the lord of Aratta demands one more test. Enmerkar must send a contender for a dogfight, but the dog must not be black/white/brown/red/yellow/pied (or, the sense is, any color known to dog-dom.) The ruler’s superior knowledge of textiles allows him to manufacture a coat of previously unknown color<sup>43</sup> to be applied to the dog. When the dog arrives, however, his true function is not as another proof of Enmerkar’s technological superiority (as it already was when Enmerkar announced his solution), but as festival entertainment.

Before the solution of the dog can become relevant to the plot, rains have fallen on Aratta and broken the famine. This rain is not a simple chance of weather, nor does it

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<sup>40</sup> The common and untranslatable word *me* is translated here as “power”. The usage of the word in reference to both the gods and mankind carries the meaning of “duty” and “function”. Furthermore, “this notion taken in a broad sense combines potentiality, essential property, and unopposable force” (“Why did Enki organize the world?”, p. 119 n. 10).

<sup>41</sup> God of wisdom, cleverness, and technical invention. Customarily a helper of heroes and mankind in general. Also often seen properly distributing *mes* among the gods according to function, e.g. *Inana and Enki* (Appendix B) and “Why did Enki organize the world?” (Vanstiphout).

<sup>42</sup> He mashes a “*hairy hide*” with mortar and pestle (l.423-425)? Vanstiphout thinks it a “gluelike plastic substance” (p. 49), but I see little which points to this in the text alone.

<sup>43</sup> The text is unclear as to whether this means an entirely new color, or a new color as far as dog fur is concerned.

indicate preference for the lord of Aratta. The advantageous storm from the god Iškur<sup>44</sup> compels the lord of Aratta to recognize his subservience to the fertile powers of the lord of Unug. This, in brief, has nothing to do with the technicolor coat of the dog champion. It is related, rather, to the other of Enmerkar's inventions which accompanied the messenger on his final trip: writing.

The sense of Iškur's storm is one of terrible power, "A storm he caused, raging like a great lion" (l. 544), the result of which is the spontaneous growth of needed crops.<sup>45</sup> The words which Enmerkar had the messenger send to Aratta were orally composed "[like a raging torrent]" (l. 469). The moment ("At that moment" l. 542) that the lord of Aratta, dumbfounded, encounters Enmerkar's words, the rains fall on Aratta. The "raging torrent" Enmerkar has, through language, carried the literalized metaphor of his own fertile power to the foreign land of Aratta. This time, however, the words were not simply transferred by messenger.

Here we reach one of the brilliances of the *Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta*. The first and second challenges and solutions were relayed by the admirable messenger.<sup>46</sup> For Enmerkar's third solution and ultimatum, however, the messenger required a particular form of assistance:

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<sup>44</sup> God of rainstorms, thunderstorms, hail, and floods.

<sup>45</sup> Torrents carry simultaneously the potential for utter destruction (e.g. "The evil-bearing storm went out from the city. It swept across the Land -- a storm which possesses neither kindness nor malice, does not distinguish between good and evil. Subir (invading foreign forces) came down like rain.", *Lament for Eridug* l. 19-23 ETCSL) and the necessary ingredients for fertility (ELA, l. 549-550, etc.) This sense of awesome productive/destructive effectuality I believe explains the common and seemingly-odd Sumerian simile of spoken torrents. For instance, Enmerkar "spoke to him (his messenger) [like a raging torrent]" (l. 469), and Huwawa's "voice is the Deluge" (OBV, Yale tablet, George, p. 112). The torrent is a flash of utter effectuality, causing either instant death and utter destruction (like Huwawa or Subir) or spontaneous fecundity (like Enmerkar). The simple understanding (for both the Sumerians and ourselves) of Inanna as the goddess of both war and sex, as well as her central importance in the *Enmerkar* epics, is thusly explained. Therefore, the legitimacy of the *en* of the Sumerian epic has no place in a grounding of moralistic superiority, but in a very natural sense: greater force (destructive or productive) takes priority over lesser forces.

<sup>46</sup> See n. 62 below.

His speech was very grand, its meaning very deep;  
 The messenger's mouth was too *heavy*; he could not repeat it.  
 Because the messenger's mouth was too *heavy*, and he could  
     not repeat it,  
 The lord of Kulab patted some clay and put the words on it as  
     on a tablet.  
 Before that day, there had been no putting words on clay;  
 But now, when the sun rose on that day—so it was:  
 The lord of Kulab had put words as on a tablet—so it was!  
 (l. 500-506).<sup>47</sup>

But if Enmerkar's cuneiform text is spontaneous and unprecedented, how in the world is the lord of Aratta to read it? Simply put, it doesn't matter. The lord of Aratta, perhaps somewhat humorously, is ignorant of cuneiform,<sup>48</sup> yet all the same his reading of the inscrutable (but divinely inspired) words causes the rains to come:

The lord of Aratta took from the messenger  
 The tablet (and held it) next to a brazier.  
 The lord of Aratta inspected the tablet.  
 The spoken words were mere wedges—his brow darkened.  
 The lord of Aratta kept looking at the tablet (in the light of)  
     the brazier.  
 At that moment the lord worthy of the holy crown, the son of  
     Enlil  
 Iškur thundered in heaven and on earth. (l. 537-543)

Writing thus becomes the great framing device of the narrative. Just as the invention of the written word ends the conflict, so too did it precede the lord of Aratta's resistance in the form of Enmerkar's formidable "spell of Nudimmud":

It is the spell of Nudimmud!<sup>49</sup>  
 One day there will be no snake, no scorpion,  
 There will be no hyena, nor lion,  
 There will be neither (wild) dog nor wolf,  
 And thus there will be neither fear nor trembling,

<sup>47</sup> Knowing this conclusion, it becomes clear how focused the poet was throughout the text to remind the reader of the importance of writing, in particular as it relates to oral composition and recitation (certainly important to the Cantor reading the poem aloud in court!). For example, ELA l. 174, 263, 296, etc.

<sup>48</sup> Ironically, so were most Sumerian kings. As stated before, however, the kings of the Third Dynasty of Ur, particularly Šulgi, prided themselves on their literacy and own compositions. Of course, to suggest that these poems took up the figure of Enmerkar as the inventor of writing to legitimize the Ur rulership is, as Berlin stated (n.7 above), "putting the cart before the horse."

<sup>49</sup> Epithet for Enki (see n. 41 above). Literally "Man-fashioner" (George, p. 224), "Nudimmud" is an allusion to his role in crafting mankind out of clay. The use here of "Nudimmud", an uncommon epithet in the rest of *Aratta*, is likely intended to suggest that the mandate of the "Spell" (the peaceful and productive unification of all lands under Sumer) and of mankind is one and the same.

For man will then have no enemy  
 On that day the lands of Šubur<sup>50</sup> and Hamazi,<sup>51</sup>  
 As well as twin-tongued Sumer<sup>52</sup>—great mound of the power  
     of lordship—<sup>53</sup>  
 Together with Akkad—the mound that has all that is  
     befitting—  
 And even the land Martu, resting in green pastures,  
 Yea, the whole world of well-ruled people,  
 Will be able to speak to Enlil in one language!  
 For on that day, for the debates between lords and princes and  
     kings  
 Shall Enki, for the debates between lords and princes and  
     kings,  
 For the debates between lords and princes and kings,  
 Shall Enki, Lord of Abundance,<sup>54</sup> Lord of steadfast decisions,  
 Lord of wisdom and knowledge in the Land,  
 Expert of the gods,  
 Chosen for wisdom, lord of Eridug,  
 Change the tongues in their mouth, as many as he once placed  
     there,  
 And the speech of mankind shall be truly one!

The character of this prophecy is fundamentally non-eschatological. The first steps of the spell of Nudimmud are realized in the poem. Peaceful and co-productive “debate” is realized when Enmerkar’s written tablet (composed in Enlil’s “one” language, Sumerian) materially prevents (via Iškur’s fertilization) the need for martial strife between the two land. All causes for “fear and trembling”, powerfully summarized in the forms of snake, scorpion, lion, etc., are to be wiped away with what amounts to a system of perfect living communication. The elimination of contingency by the “Spell” does not suggest an ontological crystallization. Rather, the establishment of one language (where, the sense seems to be, there is no potential for miscommunication) allows for constant,

<sup>50</sup> The destructive, foreign “Subir” of n. 45 above.

<sup>51</sup> Ruined homeland of destructive foreigners, preeminent of which is the sorcerer of EE.

<sup>52</sup> “Twin-tongued”- the Tigris and the Euphrates, as well as spoken Sumerian and Akkadian. Though accurate pronunciation of the isolate, Sumerian, is impossible to recover, it is a perceptive metaphor on the part of the poet that Akkadian and Sumerian are two very distinct glottal groups.

<sup>53</sup> *Ki-en-gi*, (lit. “Place (of) lordship (and) verdicts”, ETCSL), re-emphasizes the sense of general lordship (*en*) as opposed to specific military or political authority (*lu-gal*). See n. 10 above.

<sup>54</sup> Rarely is Enki directly a “Lord of Abundance”, but (in keeping with the theme of the poem) the direct result of proper governance in all forms of technology (Enki’s jurisdiction) is abundance. It is also, I submit, no rhetorical accident that “Abundance”, “steadfast decisions”, “wisdom and knowledge” are the immediate successors to “one language” and *a-da* (“contest”, ETCSL, see *a-da-min* below) chanted nine times (Vanstiphout only reproduces it three times).

idealized “contest”<sup>55</sup> among all “lords and princes and kings”, much like that between Enmerkar and his adversary.

*A-da-min*, “debate”, refers, in addition to its obvious senses, to a popular genre of poetry which existed alongside the epic in the Sumerian court. In the *a-da-min*, two anthropomorphized subjects (*Sheep and Grain, Hoe and Plow, Winter and Summer* etc.), played by paid Cantors, would argue (“with considerable acrimony” as Black politely points out) their respective benefits to mankind before a judge. The god or hero adjudicator determines one thing or the other to be more important to living well in the city (Black, 225). The third to last line of EE even refers to the finished story as a successfully resolved *a-da-min* between Enmerkar and Ensuhgirana.<sup>56</sup> Whether or not the same association would have been made in the final lines of ELA (the last six lines are broken) is perhaps unnecessary to recognize that, though not rhetorical disputation of the *a-da-min*, ELA is a resolution of a conflict by way of reason. The spell of Nudimmud in the ELA foretells a perfect technology for rational debate and resolution, written Sumerian, which will insure the proper and peaceful carrying-out of all *a-da*, which are inherently productive.

The *Enmerkar* epics are unquestionably preoccupied with the notion of fertility. As we have seen technology, in both its literal and general sense, is essential to the increased fertility of the city-state, and the presentation of its efficacy sometimes makes cause-effect relationships indistinguishable. This is true of magic, agriculture, trade,

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<sup>55</sup> *A-da*. I am unsure as to why Vanstiphout translates *a-da* as “debate” in ELA 147-149, which would be more appropriate to *a-da-min*, as with his choice at EE, l. 281. *A-da* is more generally “conflict” and thus more appropriate to the scope of the “Spell” (unless, of course, Enki has a vested interest in school disputations), however, it is not difficult to see that the terms may roughly be used interchangeably.

<sup>56</sup> It is, however, formally quite unlike the actual *a-da-min* poems aside from its insistence on beneficial, hierarchical resolution.

debate, and most importantly writing. It is the essential character of the Neo-Sumerian epic (and perhaps the ontological structure of the age) that natural hierarchies are based on interactions of force.<sup>57</sup> Therefore, though technology in our sense of the word is exhibited far less in EE than ELA, the central poetic characteristic of the two poems is identical: the playing out of natural organization. Terrible destruction results for the weaker party that refuses to acknowledge this system (as in the very real threats lobbied by Enmerkar, and the very real devastation of lament poetry), but endless and peaceful productivity results for those parties which regard their proper place in the constant interactivity of human *a-da*.

We must examine the court culture of the Sumerian language before we continue. Cuneiform tablets were the product of an intricate mechanical process which allowed for smooth, wet clay blocks which could be variously indented with the end of a sharply cut reed. Cuneiform writing, which broadly refers to the many variants of the script initially developed in southern Mesopotamia in the early 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BCE, was common enough for the codification of edicts, all kinds of civil inventories and receipts, land allotments, spells, songs, stories, and more. As most tablets were not intended for greatness, they would typically be re-wetted and used again for transitory writings, propping up furniture, or fixing the side of one's home. If a tablet were deemed important enough for preservation, or if invading forces burned a mud hut containing a library of tablets, it would be baked and stored for posterity. It must not be forgotten, however, that though writing was a common tool of the Mesopotamian city-state, the ability to read and write was in the hands of a very select and socially privileged few at any given time.

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<sup>57</sup> I refer the reader again to n.45 above.

Sumerian was fluently spoken in the courts, but composition in and reading of the language remained the gift of scribes and a few priests. Social conditions and a rather extreme learning curve tended to keep the literate population at an operationally viable minimum, never becoming popular practice but always carrying the respect typical of a socially preferred, educated craft.

That the miracle of the act of writing was not forgotten to Neo-Sumerian civilization was probably due to its exclusivity, and words were popularly conceived of as having a mystical efficacy.<sup>58</sup> Nail-shaped cones inscribed with statements of royal ownership (and often including lengthy historical and cultic stories) would be ceremoniously hammered into the sides of temples and palaces. Likewise, bricks with the names of royalty and the scribe who composed the inscription would be placed in the walls of new buildings, with the bizarre result that even if one had the capability of reading Sumerian cuneiform “the inscription would become invisible as soon as it was built into a structure, and only the gods could read it” (Walker, p. 30).<sup>59</sup> More frequently, grants of land along with the royal decrees which established them and statements of divine witness were carved onto land-boundary markers. Also common were amulets, usually worn around the neck, with short messages (certainly inscrutable to most owners) intended to ward off evil spirits, seduce members of the opposite sex, insure a good diet, etc.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> “Mystical” in the same sense that the *um-ma* and *maš-maš* of EE employ “magic.” See n. 21 above.

<sup>59</sup> That the act of reading cuneiform would serve as an effective legitimization is perhaps easier for us to understand when it is realized that, for example, some 4400 years after a series of commemorative cones were struck, the rediscovery of cuneiform allowed us to attribute rulership of the city-state Lagash to an Enannatum I (Walker, p. 30).

<sup>60</sup> I have not encountered Neo-Sumerian amulets/spells written in Sumerian, but given the status of Sumerian as a courtly language at the time this is not odd. Contemporary spells would have been in Akkadian, as may be seen, for instance, in Benjamin Foster’s impressive tome of Akkadian literature

One of the most important associations that cuneiform held in the Neo-Sumerian's mind would have been divine. The goddess of writing and (thus) administrative accounting was Nisaba. As we have already seen, Nisaba was the recipient of the milk and cheese produced by Unug's goats and cows in EE. The last lines of EE give us a proper understanding of her actual importance to the narrative, "In the contest between Enmerkar and Ensuhgirana,/ Because Enmerkar was greater than Ensuhgirana,/ Praise be to Nisaba!" (l. 281-283).<sup>61</sup> Neither Sagburu nor Enmerkar are credited with Unug's victory because Nisaba, as the goddess of writing, is also the goddess of grain and agriculture, and is thus a potent symbol of civic fertility.<sup>62</sup> Enki (often associated with Nisaba) praises her with a slightly altered but similar role as in that of EE in "Hymn to Nisaba (A)", "Nisaba, may you be the butter in the cattle-pen, may you be the cream in the sheepfold, may you be the keeper of the seal in the treasury, may you be a good steward in the palace, may you be a heaper up of grain among the grain piles and in the grain stores!" (ETCSL, l. 52-55).

Nisaba does not invent writing in ELA (such a thing would get in the way of Enmerkar's personal accomplishments), but she is structurally parallel to Enki. Enki grants inspiration for the solution of the second challenge, the artificial scepter, and is the centerpiece of the peace and production spell of Nudimmud. Nisaba "opened for him (Enmerkar) her holy house of wisdom" (l. 321) to solve the first challenge with knowledge of particular grain growth, and writing (for even if she isn't credited with its

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*Before the Muses.* Either way, the wearer would be completely ignorant of its content without a scribe's assistance.

<sup>61</sup> *A-da-min*, "debate", emphasizes her central role in scribal culture. I am unsure why Vanstiphout chose "contest", which would typically be *a-da*. Either word established the grounds for confrontation which resulted in Enmerkar's superiority.

<sup>62</sup> "Nisaba as goddess of writing is also and by that token the goddess of administration and bureaucracy. When she starves, civilization will starve. This is a stark expression of their realization of the fact that writing ultimately must serve the administration of civilized life" (Vanstiphout, p. 47 n. 34).

invention, nothing suggests that it isn't her *me*) inspires the rain and trade which realizes the spell of Nudimmud. In EE, Enmerkar's literacy is also exhibited (though to a much less organically cohesive degree), "He patted clay into a clay-tablet; he examined it as a clay-tablet" (l. 76), but the poet's association of the text with *a-da-min* and claiming victory for Nisaba makes this detail less central than in ELA.

Writing is therefore a productive act not only because it radically increases agricultural yields (Nisaba's purview) but also because it is a technology which bridges interpretive gaps (Enki's purview). As we have seen, the effective technologies of hierarchy and fertility are inextricably bound to one another within the *Enmerkar* poems.

These were courtly poems, and though they were composed on clay tablets, they would have been read aloud. The language of our epics is indeed a kind of "high-Sumerian", which is to say the language was not nearly as natural to its audience as the Semitic vernacular, Akkadian, or the modernized Sumerian. The courtly audience would have had to pay close attention to follow the meaning of words, for though there was a definitive and ubiquitous court culture in Iraq, the minds and tongues of the elite of the Mesopotamian city-state, even the *ens*, were not at all sheltered from everyday (Akkadian-language) life in the city until the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BCE (Oppenheim, 95-109). Even the very fluent in Sumerian, and surely there were many, would have had to strain their ears from time to time to understand linguistic archaisms, preserved more by scribal tradition than by common usage or understanding. This is in addition to the need for the audience to constantly interpret the standard poetic practice of complex and musical word choices, liberties in artificial syntax, constant metaphorizing, and intricate narrative structure (Black, pp. xx-xxiv) (Vanstiphout, pp. 9-14).

The *Enmerkar* poems glorify the successful bridging of gaps, linguistic or otherwise.<sup>63</sup> ELA in particular self-consciously illuminates the act of interpreting language, and does so in the context of the spell of Nudimmud and Iškur/Enmerkar/Nisaba's fertilizing storm, insofar as the act of language is itself a technological progression of hierarchies coming to productive awareness. We have begun to unravel an incredibly sophisticated poetic turn in the art of Sumerian court performance. The Sumerian language was the most ancient known to the Neo-Sumerian, and cuneiform was believed to be the work of Nisaba and the earliest king of Unug. If, then, Sumerian cuneiform was a symbol of Unug's fertile self-reproduction, then the audience of ELA literally partakes of the continued realization of the spell of Nudimmud merely by listening! For listening and interpreting (linguistically and—though literary criticism as such may not have been born for millennia—logically) are necessary to the being of the work of the performed arts, an observation hardly necessary for a people so moved by rhetorical posturing. The audience of the EE, too, is caused to reflect on the productive *a-da-min* (the paradigm of linguistic technology) and the eternally fertilizing Nisaba just as they finish the story of Unug's first victory of self-reproduction over destruction.

The *Enmerkar* poems come from an ontological grounding of hierarchical power relations which had the potential to result in constant renewal. By building into their narratives linguistic self-consciousness, they engage their audience in the very game of

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<sup>63</sup> The rather incredible role of the Messenger in all of the *Aratta* poems (wherein Lugalbanda's savior role is that of messenger!) attests to this. These messengers, I suspect, are reverentially based on the *sukkal* "Diplomatic Corps" ambassador/messenger/translators of Ur III Sumer, whose job it was to travel across Mesopotamia in bureaucratic service. The Old Babylonian counterparts to the *sukkal* courtiers also acted as interpreters for foreign dignitaries when called upon (there is not enough surviving evidence to claim whether or not this happened in Neo-Sumerian courts) (Sharlach, pp. 13-25). If these poems, as is likely, were read at festivals which also entertained foreign guests, the issue of interpretation would have taken on another level of significance.

interpretive technologizing which (again) brings to engaged life the story of Sumer's eternal fertility. Despite mankind's formidable drive to better the world however it may, the faith of the *Enmerkar* poets in the power of people to perfect political and material existence into a constantly engaged and forever fertile world is perhaps difficult for us to understand. The popularity of the epic form rested in that faith—a faith baked into clay and brought back through interpretation into a kind of life by a various, global, and unthinkably alien civilization 4000 years later.

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## Appendix A

**Proper Nouns:**

- Akka – Northern aggressor in *Bilgameš and Akka*.
- Akkad – Still unidentified land in Assyria, which stood in for all of Assyria.
- Aratta – Geographically unidentified exotic locale with natural jewelry.
- Assyria – Northern Iraq.
- Babylon – Southern Iraq, replacing the Sumerian culture and name c. 19<sup>th</sup> cent. BCE.
- Dilmun – Present day Bahrain, exotic locale symbolizing distance and int'l trade.
- Eanna – (Eana) The ziggurat of Inanna in Unug.
- Egara – Palace of Enmerkar (EE).
- Egipara – Room or bridal chamber (of Egara in Unug, of Ezagina in Aratta).
- Enheduanna – Daughter of Sargon. Priestess and poet.
- Enki - God of wisdom, cleverness, and technical invention. A helper of heroes and mankind in general. Distributes *mes* to the gods.
- Enlil – Overseer of the divine assembly, head of the gods.
- Enmerkar – Lord of Unug, predecessor to Lugalbanda and Bilgameš.
- Ensuhgirana – Lord of Aratta (EE).
- Eridug – Sister city of Unug miles 7 miles south, city of Enki.
- Ezagina – Palace of Ensuhgirana (EE).
- Gilgamesh – Sumerian Bilgameš, hero of Unug. Defeated Huwawa, among other tasks, on a search for immortality.
- Gipar - Egipara
- Hamazu – Geographically unidentified city near Zagros ranges. Ruined in EE.
- Huwawa – Forest demon of *Epic of Gilgamesh* (Humbaba) and *Bilgameš and Huwawa*.
- Inanna – (Inana) Goddess of war and sex. City goddess of Aratta and Unug.
- Iškur – God of storms and floods.
- Kulab – Mentioned with Unug as a twin city. Perhaps a temple quarter of the city.
- Lugalbanda – Successor to Enmerkar, hero of two *Aratta* poems.
- Martu – Tribal people of the middle Euphrates meeting the Syrian desert.
- Nisaba – Goddess of grain, administration, and writing.
- Nudimmud – “Man-fashioner” epithet of Enki.
- Sagbur – *Um-ma* champion of Enmerkar (EE).
- Sargon of Akkad – Imperial ruler of Mesopotamia, 24<sup>th</sup> cent. BCE.
- Subir – City northeast of Sumer, provided invaders.
- Šulgi – Scholar king of Ur III Sumer, along with Utu-hegal, Ur-nammu, and others.
- Unug – Uruk, biblical Erech. Ancient Sumerian capital.
- Urgirunna - *Maš-maš* champion of Ensuhgirana (EE).
- Utu – Sun god, oversees justice and law. Brother of Inanna.

## Appendix B

In this selection from *Inana and Enki*, the goddess has tricked the elder god by way of beer into giving her divine jurisdiction over far more divine *me* than he intended. It is indicative of her place in the Sumerian pantheon. The text is reproduced from <http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=t.1.3.1#> Translated and edited by Jeremy Black (1998).

**Segment D**

1-5. "I will give them to holy Inana, my daughter; may ..... not ....." Holy Inana received heroism, power, wickedness, righteousness, the plundering of cities, making lamentations, rejoicing. "In the name of my power, in the name of my abzu, I will give them to holy Inana, my daughter; may ..... not ....."

6-9. Holy Inana received deceit, the rebel lands, kindness, being on the move, being sedentary. "In the name of my power, in the name of my *abzu*, I will give them to holy Inana, my daughter; may ..... not ....."

10-13. Holy Inana received the craft of the carpenter, the craft of the coppersmith, the craft of the scribe, the craft of the smith, the craft of the leather-worker, the craft of the fuller, the craft of the builder, the craft of the reed-worker. "In the name of my power, in the name of my *abzu*, I will give them to holy Inana, my daughter; may ..... not ....."

14-17. Holy Inana received wisdom, attentiveness, holy purification rites, the shepherd's hut, piling up glowing charcoals, the sheepfold, respect, awe, reverent silence. "In the name of my power, in the name of my *abzu*, I will give them to holy Inana, my daughter; may ..... not ....."

18-21. Holy Inana received the bitter-toothed (?) ....., the kindling of fire, the extinguishing of fire, hard work, ....., the assembled family, descendants. "In the name of my power, in the name of my *abzu*, I will give them to holy Inana, my daughter; may ..... not ....."

22-27. Holy Inana received strife, triumph, counselling, comforting, judging, decision-making. "In the name of my power, in the name of my *abzu*, I will give them to holy Inana, my daughter; may ..... not ....." Holy Inana received ....., ....., **approx. 78 lines missing**

**Segment E**

1-4. "He has given me righteousness. He has given me the plundering of cities. He has given me making lamentations. He has given me rejoicing."

5-9. "He has given me deceit. He has given me the rebel lands. He has given me kindness. He has given me being on the move. He has given me being sedentary."

10-17. "He has given me the craft of the carpenter. He has given me the craft of the coppersmith. He has given me the craft of the scribe. He has given me the craft of the smith. He has given me the craft of the leather-worker. He has given me the craft of the fuller. He has given me the craft of the builder. He has given me the craft of the reed-worker."

18-26. "He has given me wisdom. He has given me attentiveness. He has given me holy purification rites. He has given me the shepherd's hut. He has given me piling up glowing charcoals. He has given me the sheepfold. He has given me respect. He has given me awe. He has given me reverent silence."

27-36. "He has given me the bitter-toothed (?) ..... He has given me the kindling of fire. He has given me the extinguishing of fire. He has given me hard work. He has given me ..... He has given me the assembled family. He has given me descendants. He has given me strife. He has given me triumph. He has given me counselling."