

Gilgamesh and Lugalbanda in The Fara Period¹

J. D. BING

The University of Tennessee

Professor G. Pettinato, in his address to the SBL/ASOR plenary session in St. Louis on October 29, 1976, suggested raising the date for the Early Bronze stratum at Tell Mardikh and the many thousands of tablets of the royal archive from EB IV to EB III (ca. 2500 B.C.). The evidence for this change is largely based on the internal evidence of the texts found at Ebla and their similarity to the tablets of Fara and Abū Šalābīkh.² Moreover, in 1973 Professor W. W. Hallo suggested that the date for the Fara Period should be lowered to about the time of Ur-Nanshe, or perhaps one or two generations later: ca. 2500 B.C.³ It appears that the evidence is pointing toward the conclusion that the texts from Tell Mardikh and those from Fara and Abū Šalābīkh are approximately contemporary.

The Fara Period is now being recognized as the earliest flourishing of Sumerian literature. Along with the student exercises, word lists, and lexical texts are an increasing number of texts which can be legitimately designated as literature.⁴ Among these various types of texts is a growing body of evidence which indicates that the epic cycles concerning the First Dynasty of Uruk were already in the process of being composed, and it may no longer be necessary to postulate merely an oral tradition concerning Gilgamesh prior to the Third Dynasty of Ur.⁵

Until the Tell Mardikh discoveries, the earliest occurrence of the name Gilgamesh was in a god list at Fara where it is written *d g i š - b i l - p a b - g a - m e s*.⁶ Now Professor

1 I wish to thank Professor Robert D. Biggs for reading this paper, and especially for his suggestions concerning my transliteration of AbŠ 327. He does not necessarily agree, however, with my interpretation of this enigmatic text.

2 According to Pettinato, the script at Tell Mardikh is of the Fara type, and the syllabary appears to be pre-Sargonic. Cf. G. Pettinato, "Testi cuneiformi del 3. millennio in paleo-cananeo rinvenuti nella campagna 1974 a Tell Mardikh = Ebla," *Orientalia* 44/3(1975), 364. Pettinato also stresses the growing number of texts found at Ebla which also have been identified at Fara and Abū Šalābīkh.

See also Paolo Matthiae, "Tell Mardikh: The Archives and Palace," *Archaeology* 30/4 (1977), 252-53.

3 W. W. Hallo, "The Date of the Fara Period," *Orientalia* 42 (1973), 228-38.

4 For a discussion of the literary texts at Fara and Abū Šalābīkh, see R.D. Biggs' introduction in *Inscriptions from Abū Šalābīkh* (Chicago, 1974).

5 J. D. Bing, "On the Sumerian Epic of Gilgamesh," *JANES* 7 (1975), 1-11, esp. 13.

Pettinato has kindly informed me that Gilgamesh may also occur at Ebla in a standard sized tablet of twenty columns with the incipit *gu₄ a n*, "The Bull of Heaven." In this text the name is written *d b i l - g a - m e - e š*. Until this text is published, little more can be said about Gilgamesh in the Fara Period except that he was already deified, and seems to have figured in a developing literary tradition.

There is further evidence, however, that the epic heroes of Uruk were finding their way into literature about 2500 B.C. Lugalbanda, Gilgamesh's father and the subject of another Sumerian epic, had also achieved deification by the Fara Period. He appears in a god list from Abū Šalābīkh.⁷ Moreover, Lugalbanda occurs in at least two texts of a literary nature also at Abū Šalābīkh. First, in the *Z à - m ì* Hymns *d*Lugalbanda follows immediately after *d*Ninsun, his wife and the mother of Gilgamesh.⁸

The second literary text is an exercise tablet, and may have a direct bearing on the oral and literary tradition out of which the Sumerian Epic of Gilgamesh was ultimately composed. This difficult text seems to begin with an episode involving Ninsun and Lugalbanda.⁹ At the conclusion of this episode, the goddess Inanna appears:

v.	1. [^d] I n [a n n a] 2. m é s - š è m u - g i n 3. L u g a l - b à n - d a 4. e n - r a k i - z a m u - a g x (N A) 5. e n L u g a l - b à n - d a	In[anna] approaches the prince, Lugalbanda (saying) "I shall make a place of stone for the <i>en</i> ." <i>En</i> Lugalbanda
vi.	1. i n i m m u - g i 4 - g i 4 2. n i n d a - z u t ú m k u r - t a 3. u 6 d u g 4 - g a 4. a n ù n s i - m u - s á - s á 5. n i n d a k ú [r s i - m u - s á] - s á	replies: "Your provisions brought from the land are being cared for. (To you) I direct noble water. Bread of the land I direct (to you)."
vii.	1. L u g a l - b à n - d a k i s a l - b a r - š è 2. i m - m a - t a - è 3. [i] m š u b x x 4. i m a n u n š u b 5. é Š U x [. . . .] 6. [.]	Lugalbanda to the outer court went out. [Rai]n falls Rain, noble water, descends. A house [.]

6 See W. G. Lambert, "Gilgameš in Religious, Historical and Omen Texts and the Historicity of Gilgameš," in P. Garelli, ed., *Gilgameš et sa Légende* (Paris, 1960), 48, and note 3.

7 Biggs, *Abū Šalābīkh Tablets*, No. 82, col. vi.

8 *Ibid.*, No. 268, lines 84 and 86.

9 *Ibid.*, No. 327, and briefly discussed by Biggs in "The Abū Šalābīkh Tablets A Preliminary Survey," *JCS* 20 (1966), 85. In this text Lugalbanda is written without the *d i n g i r*, and in one instance has the title *e n*: v. 4-5. One passage seems to link this text with the lines in the *Z à - m ì* Hymn devoted to Lugalbanda. AbŠ 327, viii. 4-6 reads: *L u g a l - b à n - d a l u ħ - ħ a ' b a 4 ' u b - [n u n]* The *Z à - m ì* Hymn (AbŠ 268, 85-86) reads: *b a 4 a m a r k ù u b n u n d L u g a l - b à n - d a z à - m ì*, "The House of the pure calf, the Ub-nun, Lugalbanda be praised." Biggs, *Abū Šalābīkh Tablets*, 54, takes a *m a r k ù* as an epithet of Lugalbanda. Presumably *u b - n u n* is in apposition to *b a 4*.

On the other hand, the story in AbS 327 apparently did not form part of the established literary repertory in the Fara Period.¹² It is written on an exercise tablet, and was probably either composed by a scribal student or dictated to the student by a teacher. In any case, it is very likely that the story of this text constituted part of an oral tradition concerning Lugalbanda just a few generations after his reign in Uruk. It has also been suggested that the archaic literary texts in general may have been written not so much for literary purposes, but rather "as a memory aid to scribes already familiar with their contents."¹³

The accumulating evidence, therefore, indicates that the rulers of Early Dynastic II Uruk were already becoming subjects of literary interest in the Sumerian scribal schools of the Fara Period. Such an early date for an inchoate literary tradition concerning Lugalbanda and Gilgamesh enhances the possibility that the stories about these rulers reflected the cultural concerns and historical issues of ED II which is the main thesis of my article in *JANES* 7 (1975), 1–11.

The apparent neglect of these earlier Sumerian cultural issues in the Akkadian versions of the Gilgamesh Epic now appears to be the result of a conscious revision of the Sumerian epic in order to emphasize the themes which were of a more universal interest, or to introduce new ideas and motifs reflecting cultural concerns which were more germane to the historical experience of the Babylonian society.

12 For some general remarks concerning the exercise tablets at Abū Šalābīkh, see Biggs, *JCS* 20 (1966), 85.

13 Biggs, "An Archaic Sumerian Version of the Kesh Temple Hymn from Tell Abū Šalābīkh," *ZA* 61 (1971), 191, note 5. Also see M. Civil and R. D. Biggs, "Notes sur des textes sumériens archaïques," *RA* 60 (1966), 13.