EPICS OF SUMERIAN KINGS

The Matter of Aratta

by

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The "back (side)" seems adequate, since it can stand for belly or hindquarter. The horns (si-mu₃) are more difficult. Perhaps the idea is that the milk is sent back into the cow's/goat's body as far as it can go and away from udder and subsequently milk pail.

Lines like this abound in the genre of the city laments, where the cities and the whole of Sumer are consistently presented as a byre that has been abandoned by its personnel and livestock. In fact, the whole passage might well appear in a lament—but in this instance it is to be taken literally.

Fish spawn, Sumerian agargara (lit. "disseminated semen"), is used by both magicians to create a series of animals. The animals created by Sagburu are consistently bigger and stronger than those created by the sorcerer. But the real emphasis of the magical contest is that the animals created by Sagburu use the others as food. The principle of providing food, which had been put to a stop by the sorcerer's first activity, is here shown to be stronger than its opposite. In other words, white magic has conquered black magic. Note also that the text shows here a clever bilingual pun or, perhaps better, a play on signs. The cuneiform sign for the Sumerian word agargara can be read more simply and much more generally as NUN; the Akkadian, and almost generally Semitic, word for "fish" is nānu.

Since he had threatened the life force of Ereš/Sumer.

Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta

Introduction

Most Sumerologists will agree that this relatively long composition (about 640 lines) is probably the finest piece of poetic storytelling ever produced by the Old Babylonian authors. The general theme of the cycle, namely, the rivalry between Unug/Sumer and Aratta, is presented here at first sight as a mere contest in cleverness. Yet there are several layers of meaning defining both the central narrative strategy and the obvious symbolism.

1. The story seems deceptively simple. Enmerkar, king of Unug, wants to embellish his city and the whole of Sumer with precious metals and stones, goods that are not to be found in Sumer but only in the fabulously wealthy city Aratta, which lies behind the mountains. Since trade does not as yet exist, he asks the goddess Inana what he should do: Inana is the goddess of Aratta as well. She favors Enmerkar and advises him to send a messenger with a challenge to Aratta, requisitioning what he wants and enforcing his claim by stating that she favors him. He does so, but the (unnamed) lord of Aratta refuses, claiming that Inana is his goddess as well and that anyway his mountain city is an impregnable fastness. Still, he is willing to enter into a contest with Enmerkar in order to see whose side Inana is really on. This results in a counterchallenge that takes the form of an unsolvable riddle: if Enmerkar succeeds in carting grain to Aratta in open nets instead of bags, he might reconsider. Enmerkar finds a solution: he uses sprouting barley to close the interstices of the nets so that no grain is spilled. Sending off the grain, he repeats his challenge. This time the lord of Aratta asks him to bring him a scepter made of no existing material. Enmerkar solves this riddle as well: he prepares a gluey plastic substance that he pours into a hollow reed; after this mass has hardened,
which takes a long time, he breaks away the reed mould and sends off the scepter with a renewed challenge. Finally, the lord of Aratta requests a dog of no known color to fight his own dog. Enmerkar again finds a solution: he weaves a cloth of no known color. When this is sent off to Aratta the messenger complains that the message has become too long and difficult for him to remember and reproduce. Thereupon Enmerkar invents writing—which throws the lord of Aratta in despair. At this point Ishkur, the god of storm and rain, intervenes, and the famine and drought that was scourging Aratta at the time is over. The fight between the two dogs now appears as part of a festival. Inanna reappears, confirms her predilection for Enmerkar, but also tells him to institute peaceful trade with Aratta from now on.

2. Arranged according to the several episodes and subparagraphs, the story looks somewhat like this:

_I. The Argument_

[A] General introduction, subdivided into:
(1) Short hymn to Unug 1–5
(2) Unug's wealth/absence of trade 6–27
(3) Inanna favors Unug 28–32

[B] Reason for and origin of the conflict: Enmerkar's plea and Inanna's answer:
(1) Introduction to Enmerkar's plea 33–37
(2) Enmerkar's plea: have Aratta deliver its riches! 38–64
(3) Introduction to Inana's reply 65–68
(4) Inana's reply: Send a messenger! 69–79
(5) Inana's reply: Aratta shall submit! 80–95
(6) Inana's reply: Praise to you, Enmerkar! 96–104

(= 49–64)

_Il. The Contest_

[C] Enmerkar's first challenge
(1) Marching orders to the messenger 105–113
(2) Enmerkar's threat 114–133
(3) The Spell of Nudimmud 134–155

[D] First voyage: Unug to Aratta
(1) Go now, messenger! 156–159
(2) The voyage 160–174

(164–169 = 73–78)

[E] Delivering the first challenge
(1) Opening formulae 175–178
(2) My king is supreme! 179–186
(3) Enmerkar's threat 187–207
(4) I shall carry back your (submissive) answer! (= 115–135)

[F] Aratta's reply; first counterchallenge
(1) Aratta shall not submit! 218–226
(2) Messenger: Inana has taken Unug's part! 227–235
(3) Aratta and Unug shall have a contest! 236–261
(4) Beware of Aratta's forces! 262–277
(5) Counterchallenge: deliver grain in nets! 278–293

[G] Second voyage: Aratta to Unug

(H) Solution and second challenge
(1) Enmerkar's reaction 299–307
(2) Ritual (and prayer?) 308–316
(3) Nisaba's solution: soaking the wheat 317–336
(4) Second challenge: a scepter to match mine! 337–346

[I] Third voyage: Unug to Aratta

[J] Delivering the second challenge
(1) Arrival in Aratta 352–375
(2) Opening formulae 376–380
(3) Hand over a scepter like mine! 381–388

(= 340–345)

[K] Aratta's reply: second counterchallenge
(1) Aratta's anxiety 389–396
(2) Counterchallenge: an impossible scepter 397–411

[L] Fourth voyage: Aratta to Unug

[M] Enmerkar's solution: a manmade substance

[N] Fifth voyage: Unug to Aratta

[O] Third counterchallenge
(1) Aratta's despondence 438–453
(2) Counterchallenge: a dog of no known color 454–461
Sixth voyage: Aratta to Unug

[Q] Final challenge
(1) Solution: a cloth of no known color
(2) Final challenge
(3) Enmerkar invents writing.

(486–489 = 115–117)

53

Seventh voyage: Unug to Aratta

[S] Aratta’s reaction
(1) Opening formulae
(2) Repetition of the challenge; tablet
(3) Aratta’s reaction: he cannot read.

511–517
518–535
536–541

III. The Resolution

[T] The final confrontation
(1) Iskur sends rain; wheat begins to grow in Aratta.
(2) Inana has saved Aratta!
(3) Now let the champions fight!

542–555
556–568
569–580...

[U] The argument resolved
(1) Inana pleases Dumuzid.
(2) Inana orders Enmerkar to institute trade.
(3) Inana’s final counsel

584–587
588–625
626–636

3. This representation is thought to show the strong sense of structure, balance, and composition pervading this poem. An analysis of the structural features cannot be undertaken here, but many of them are obvious at first reading. The poem can be neatly divided into three parts, of which the first and the last are roughly equal in size. The argument (lines 1–104) as a unit is balanced by the resolution (lines 542–636*). What is more, these are the only sections in which Inana has a major part. The resolution does indeed resolve the argument in that now trade is invented, and thus Enmerkar is enabled to fulfill his ambitions. The contest (lines 105–541) takes up most of the poem and is itself divided into twice three parts consisting of an initial challenge followed by three counterchallenges—or riddles—and their solutions. This works out as a series of seven voyages that, as the texts says, have to cross seven mountain ranges. On the other hand, this game of numbers and parallel situations is handled with consummate skill. Word-for-word repetitions do occur, but they are mostly highly functional in that they generally emphasize basic elements of the opening argument or Enmerkar’s original threat.

4. One of the most intriguing features of this text is partly formal and partly substantial. At first glance it seems that the rivalry for sanctioned superiority, which lies at the base of all the Aratta poems, is resolved here by the simple expedient of a well-known folktales motif: that of the riddle to which no solution seems possible. These “riddles” have a tendency to appear in threes. On a purely formal level, this does seem to be the case here, although I hasten to add that I know of no other examples from Sumerian literature. Yet the riddles themselves, and even more so their solutions, show three other levels of significance.

First, there is the matter of the materials required. In the first case, the gold and precious stones are ultimately exchanged for Unug’s wealth in grain. This is indeed what both parties want: Enmerkar needs the luxury goods; Aratta, in the throes of a famine, needs food. In the second instance, the proposed exchange of scepters does not actually take place, but Enmerkar succeeds in manufacturing the required item. Third, the episode of the dogs can hardly be called an exchange, but again Enmerkar succeeds against the expectations of Aratta. Thus, the truly relevant
Epics of Sumerian Kings

substances are found only in the first exchange, which is taken up again at the end of the story.

Second, there is the symbolic meaning of the required objects. For Enmerkar the precious goods are necessary because of his responsibility for his city, which he wants to embellish as it should be. For Aratta grain is absolutely crucial at this point in time, and thus it also belongs to the responsibility of the lord of Aratta.5 The scepter episode, on the other hand, is an overt allusion to the thorny matter of overlordship. The fight between the dogs6 is probably a somewhat proleptic indication of the festivities accompanying the peaceful solution of the conflict.

There is also the manner in which Enmerkar solves the riddles. His first solution is a trick, but the point is that he is so conversant with the technology of wheat production that he can come up with this solution. The second instance is again a feat of technology: the very first manmade substance in history. And the third solution comes, somewhat unfairly one may think, from textile technology. So within one story we have not only references to the three main export products of Sumer—namely, wheat, manufactures, and textile—but also and perhaps mainly to the technological superiority of Sumer over the mere owners of raw though precious materials.

Thus one can see that the reason for Enmerkar's victory in this battle of wits lies not only in Enmerkar's superior intelligence and cleverness but also in the substance of the solutions he brings to the seemingly impossible tasks. All three have to do with technology and with the three most important export articles Sumer can produce.

Finally, to cap it all, this superiority that becomes evident as the story unfolds is further enhanced by the fourth and perhaps most important feat of technology. This consists of the introduction of Sumerian and cuneiform as the necessary means of administration, bookkeeping, and, finally, trade, the lack of which stands at the origin of the conflict. The overriding importance is clearly exemplified by the ingenious trick of presenting this motif in two parts—the Spell of Nudimmud and the Invention of Writing—which elegantly encompass the doubly threefold series of impossible tasks and their solution. Thus large-scale trade is seen to depend on writing, which simply implies Sumerian. And indeed, the very first cuneiform documents, without doubt written in Sumerian, are what we now call administrative and economic in nature. The scribes who are responsible for this text not only coined a term concordant with "cuneiform" (see line 540). They also hinted at the indubitable fact that writing was invented for economic, not intellectual, reasons.8

6. The poem was first published in its (then) entirety in Kramer 1952, which was a remarkable achievement for its time. The reworking by Jestin (1957) is still useful in places. Cohen (1973), an unpublished dissertation, added much to the material, the reading, and the interpretation. Relevant recent translations are Jacobsen 1987 and Vanshoff 1998 (84–112).
Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta
Composite Text

I. THE ARGUMENT

A. GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1 iš gud huš AN,TEš₂ ni₂ gal gur₃-ru
   [kull]-ab₄ ki₄ bad₂ [...]
   gaba ud-da ki nam tar-[re-da]
unug₃ kur-gal šag₄ [...]
5 kiš₂-sig unu₂ gal an-'na' [...]

ud ri-a nam ba-[tar-ra-ba]
unug₃ kul-ab₄ ki₄ e₂-an³-[in]-[af] [...]
šag₄ li₂-la nun gal-e-ne 'mi'-[li]-[ni]-[...]
he₂-gal₂ a ēstub gal₂
10 šeg₃(IM.A) še gu-nu šal₂
unug₃ kul-ab₄ ki₄ i-ba-da-an-tab
kur dilmunki [...]] X in-nu
e₂-an-na unug₄ ki₄ kul-ab₄ ki₄-a-ka ki us₂-sa-a
ši₃-par₄ kug di₃-naa-ke₄
15 sig₄ kul-ab₄ ki₄-ke₄ kug ki-in-dar-ra-gin₂ pa ed₂ ak-am₃
[...] X X X nu-li₂-ba nu-ak-e
[...] nu-ll₂ nam-ga-raš nu-ak-e
[kug-sig₄, kug]-babbar urud nagga na₃-[lagab za-gin₂-nu₃
nu₄ hur-saq-ga₂] 'kur₃-bi-ta te₃-s₂-bi nu-mu-un-ed₂-de₃
20 [...]'ezen₃-ta a nu-un-tu₂₃
[...] nu-mu-un-dur₂-ru₃
[...] ud bi₂-[in]-[za₃]-[l]...}
[...]
[...]
[...]
[...]
25 [...]-[gin₃]-[gin₃]
[...] ki kug X [...]-[za₃]-[gin₃]-[duru₃]-[am₃]
'sag₄-[bi] [ši₃]-mes babbar-gin₂, gunun il₂-la sig₄-ga₃-am₃

[...] di₃-naa-ra en aratta₄-[ke₄]
saq₄ men kug-sig₁₃-ga mu-na-ni-in-gal₂
30 en kul-ab₄ ki₄-a-gin₇ nu-mu-na-sag₈
aratta₄ es₃ e₂-an-na ši₃-par₄ ki kug-gin₇
kug di₃-naa-ra sig₄ kul-ab₄ ki₄-gin₇ nu-mu-un-na-du₅
In those days did the lord, whom Inana chose in her heart,
Whom Inana from her shining mountain chose in her holy heart,  
Enmerkar, son of the Sun,
Address a plea to his sister, the Lady who grants wishes;  
He addressed a loud plea to Holy Inana;

"My sister, let Aratta for Unug
"Artfully work gold and silver for my sake!
"[Let them cut for my sake] polished lapis lazuli from its 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,
"Let Aratta artfully adorn its inner chamber for my sake
"So that I, the beaming youth, may dwell there
"Let Aratta submit to Unug!
"Let the people of Aratta
"Bring down for me the stones of their hills and mountains
"And build for me the great shrine, erect for me the great abode!
"For my sake, let them make illustrious the great abode, the abode of the gods!
"Let thus my power become evident in Kulab;
"Let the Abzu flourish like the holy mountain,
"Let Eridug scintillate like the hill ranges,
"For my sake, let them make shrine Abzu illustrious like silver in the lode!
"When I then sing in praise from the Abzu,
"When I then bring back the power from Eridug,
"When I am then dressed with the crown of lordship like a pure shrine,
"When I then don the holy crown of Unug-Kulab,
"May then the [mace-bearers] of the great shrine escort me to the Gipar,
"And may the [mace-bearers'] of the Gipar escort me to the great shrine.
"The people will applaud and admire me, 
"And the Sun will behold me with benevolence!"
Thereupon the splendor in the sacred sky, the Lady who watches over the highland,
The divine Lady who embellishes herself for Ama-ušumgalana,
Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta

Inana, mistress of all the lands,
Thus spoke to Enmerkar, son of the Sun:

"Come Enmerkar, I shall advise you—let my advice be heeded!—
"I shall speak a word—let it be heard!
"Having chosen among the troops a messenger, clever of speech and hardy,
"Where and to whom shall he carry the grave word of word-wise Inana?
"He shall carry it up into the Zubi range;
"He shall carry it down from the Zubi range.
"SuSin and the land of Anšan
"Will salute her11 humbly, like small mice.
"In the great mountain ranges the teeming multitudes
"Will grovel in the dust before her.
"Aratta shall submit to Unug!

"When the people of Aratta
"Have brought down the stones of their hills and mountains
"And built for you the great shrine, erected for you the great abode,
"For your sake, let them make illustrious the great abode, the abode
"of the gods!
"Let thus your power become evident in Kulab;
"Let the Abzu flourish for you like the holy mountain,
"Let Enidug scintillate for you like the hill ranges,
"For your sake, let them make shrine Abzu illustrious like silver in the
"lode!
"When you then sing in praise from the Abzu,
"When you then bring back the power from Enidug,
"When you are then dressed with the crown of lordship like a pure
"shrine,
"When you then don the holy crown of Unug-Kulab,
"May then the mace-bearers3 of the great shrine escort you to the Gipar,
"And may the mace-bearers3 of the Gipar escort you to the great shrine.
"The people will applaud and admire you,
"And the Sun will behold you with benevolence!"

"The people of Aratta
"Having carried [their burdens] all day,
"[...] when the cool of the evening has come,
"At the place of Dumuzid, where teem the ewes and kids and lambs,
"Yea, in the Akalag meadows, those of Dumuzid,
"They will come flocking to you like so many mountain sheep!
"Now, rise like the Sun over my holy bosom,
Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta

"For you are the jewel on my chest!
"Praise to you, O Enmerkar, son of the Sun!"

II. THE CONTEST

C. ENMERKAR'S FIRST CHALLENGE

The lord gave heed to the word of Inana;
He chose among the troops a messenger, clever of speech and hardy;
[Enmerkar spoke] to his messenger [...]:
"Where and to whom shall you carry the grave word of word-wise Inana?
"You shall carry it up into the Zubi range;
"You shall carry it down from the Zubi range.
"Sušin and the land of Anšan
"Will salute her humbly, like small mice.
"In the great mountain ranges the teeming multitudes
"Will grovel in the dust before her.

"Messenger, speak to the lord of Aratta, and say to him:
"Beware lest I make (the people of Aratta) flee from their city like a
115 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,
"Lest I make Aratta gather dust as does a devastated city,
"Lest, like when Enki 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!
"Therefore, Aratta, having packed gold nuggets in leather sacks,
"And packed them tight with gold dust,
"And wrapped the precious metals in bales,
"And loaded mountain asses with the crates,
"Must build for me, the young Enlil of Sumer,
"Chosen by Nudimmud in his sacred heart,
"A mountain of lustrous powers!
"Let them make it sumptuous with boxwood!
"Let them make its horns shine like the Sun coming forth from its
chamber!
"Let them make its doorposts sparkle brightly!

"In its (Aratta’s) chambers you must also chant to him this holy
song, this spell:
Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta

"It is the spell of Nudimmud!"¹⁹
"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,
"For man will then have no enemy.
"On that day the lands of Šubur and Hamazi,
"As well as twin-tongued Sumer—great mound of the power of lordship—
"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,"²⁰
"Will be able to speak to Enlil in one language!
"For on that day, for the debates²¹ 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, Lord of steadfast decisions,
"Lord of wisdom and knowledge in the Land,
"Expert of the gods,
"Chosen for wisdom, Lord of Erigug,
"Change the tongues in their mouth, as many as he once placed there,
"And the speech of mankind shall be truly one!"

D. FIRST VOYAGE: UNUG TO ARATTA

Furthermore, the lord gave these instructions to the messenger
Who was to go to the highlands, to Aratta:
"Messenger, at night, run swiftly as the south wind;
"At daybreak, rise like the dew!"

The messenger heeded the words of his king.
At night he journeyed by starlight;
By day he traveled with the sun in the sky.
Whither and to whom should he carry the grave word of word-wise Inana?
He carried it up into the Zubi range;
He carried it down from the Zubi range.
Šušin and the land of Anšan
Saluted her humbly, like small mice.
In the great mountain ranges the teeming multitudes
Groveled in the dust before her.
Five, six, seven mountain ranges he crossed.²²
And when he lifted his eyes, he had arrived in Aratta. Overjoyed he stepped into the courtyard of Aratta
And proclaimed the glory of his king.
Openly he spoke the words (that he had remembered) in his heart.  

E. DELIVERING THE FIRST CHALLENGE

The messenger spoke thus to the lord of Aratta:
"Your father, my king, has sent me to you;
"The lord of Unug and Kulab has sent me to you!"
Lord of Aratta
"What is it to me what your king spoke, what he said?"
Messenger
"This is what my king spoke, what he said:
"My king was destined for overlordship since his birth;
"He is lord of Unug, the sa-gi-kal-snake living in Sumer yet grinding
the highland to flour;
"He is the stag of the highlands, with great antlers;
"He is the buffalo, the deer trampling with its hooves the holy sapwort;
"He is the one the true cow bore in the heart of the highlands.
"He is Enmerkar, son of the Sun, and has sent me to you.
"This is what my king has spoken:

"Beware lest I make (the people/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,
"Lest I make Aratta gather dust as does a devastated city,
"Lest, like when Enki 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!
"Therefore, Aratta, having packed gold nuggets in leather sacks,
And packed them tight with gold dust,
And wrapped the precious metals in bales,
And loaded mountain asses with the crates,
Must build for me, the young Enil of Sumer,
"Chosen by Nudimmud in his sacred heart,
"A mountain of lustrous powers!
"Let them make it sumptuous with boxwood!
"Let them make its horns shine like the Sun coming forth from its chamber!
Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta

"Let them make its doorposts sparkle brightly!"
"In its chambers, the holy song, the spell,
"Chant to him for me the spell of Nidimmud!"24

"Now, when you will have replied to me whatever you want,
"To the scion of the one with the gleaming beard,
"To him whom his mighty cow bore on the hill of the lustrous power,
"To him who grew up on the soil of Aratta,25
"To him who was suckled by the teat of the true cow,
"To him, suited for office in Kulub, mountain of the great powers,
"To Enmerkar, son of the Sun,
"I will speak that word as glad tidings in the shrine Eana.
"In his Gipar, bearing fruit like a young MES-tree,
"I shall repeat it to my king, the lord of Kulub."

F. Aratta’s Reply; First Counterchallenge

When he had spoken in this vein <the lord of Aratta replied:>
"Messenger, address your king, the lord of Kulub, and say to him:
"It is I, being the lord proper for the lustrations,
"I, whom the great neck-stock of heaven, the Queen of Heaven and Earth,
"The goddess of the myriad powers, Holy Inana
"Brought to Aratta, the mountain of the inviolate powers;
"I whom she made block the entrance to the highlands as a great door!
"Why then should Aratta submit to Unug?
"There can be no submission of Aratta to Unug! Tell him that!"26

When he had spoken in this vein
The messenger replied to the lord of Aratta:
"This great Queen of Heaven who drives the fearsome powers,
"Who dwells on the peaks of the bright mountains,
"Who thus embellishes the bright mountain dais—
"It was my lord and king, her servant,
"Who had her installed as the divine Queen of the Eana!
"O lord, Aratta shall bow in deep submission!
"This she has promised in brick-built Kulub!"

Thereupon the lord’s mood became dark and troubled. He had no rejoinder; he kept searching for a rejoinder, Staring at his feet with sad eyes, seeking a rejoinder. Finally he found a rejoinder and cried out.

The rejoinder to the message
He bellowed it loudly like a bull to the messenger:

"Messenger, to your king, lord of Kulub, speak and say:

"This great mountain range is a MES-tree grown high into the skies;

"Its roots are a net, its branches a snare;

"It is a bird whose talons are like those of the Anzud-eagle!

"This barrier of Inana is perfectly impenetrable;

"Its eagle talons make the bright mountains run with enemy blood.

"In Aratta there may be weeping [and bürger...],

"But water is being poured, flour is being sprinkled,28

"In the highlands sacrifices and prayers are reverently offered.

"With only five or ten men,29

"How could the levy of Unug march against the Zubi mountain?

"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,30

"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?

"Another thing I will tell you, O messenger;

"[I will] spell it out in careful terms ... so that you can grasp it.31

"In the Eana, to the lion crouching there on its paws,

"To the bull bellowing there,

"In his Gipar, bearing fruit like a young MES-tree,

"To your king, the lord of Kulub, repeat this:

"This mountain range is a warrior, tall and fierce:

"Like Utu wending his way home in the evening,

"It is as if blood is dripping from his face.

"Like Nanna, majestic in the high heaven,

"It is as if his brow carries a terrible sheen!32

"It is like an impenetrable wood in the mountains.

"Since she of the crown of Aratta,33

"The benevolent guardian of the mountain of the inviolate powers,

"Will warrant Aratta the holy crown of heaven,

"I shall surely proclaim my preeminence!

"Now, he may not pour grain into bags, nor into carts;

"He may not have that grain portaged over the mountains;

"He may not have collected by work parties.34

"If he were able to pour grain into nets

"And load these nets on pack-asses
“With remounts at their side,
“And if he were able to pile it up in the courtyard of Aratta—
“Truly, if he were able to pile it up in this manner, then the joy of
the grain-pile,
“The torch of the mountains, the emblem of the settlements,
“The ornament of the seven walls,
“The heroic mistress fit for battle,
“Inanna, the heroine of the battleground who makes the troop dance
er her dance,35
“Will then truly have cast out Aratta as a carrion-eating dog!
“Only then shall I kneel before him,
“Since only then will he have proven his preeminence,
“‘And, like the city, only then shall I concede my inferiority!’ Tell him
that!”

G. SECOND VOYAGE: ARATTA TO UNUG

When he had spoken to him in this vein,
The lord of Aratta made the messenger
Repeat the message as he himself had spoken it.36
The messenger turned, as the wild cow does on its haunches;
Like the sandily he sped forward in the cool of the morning.

H. SOLUTION AND SECOND CHALLENGE

Joyfully he stepped into Kulpab, the Brickwork.
The messenger sped to the great courtyard, the courtyard of the
throne-room.
To his king, the lord of Kulpab,
He repeated (the message) word for word.
He bellowed like a bull,
And Enmerkar listened to him like the ox-driver.
The king bade him sit at his right side ... And turned his left side to him.
“Does Aratta truly understand this proposal it made?” he said.

When day broke, to the rising Sun,
The Sun of the Land37 raised his head.
The king joined Tigris with Euphrates
And Euphrates with Tigris.38
Large jars were put out in the open,
And small vases were placed against their sides, like lambs lying in
the grass;
Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta

Shining jars were stood in the open next to them.
The king himself placed the golden es-da-vessels;
Enmerkar himself, the son of the Sun, placed them wide apart.
Thereupon the shining tablet of clay, the sharpened reed of the assembly,39

The golden statue fashioned on a blissful day,
Fair Nanibgal, grown up to lustrous luxuriance,
Nisaba, the Lady of broad understanding,40

Opened for him her holy house of wisdom.
Entering the heavenly palace, he paid attention;
The lord opened up his lofty storehouse
And fixed his lid-ga-measure in the earth.
The king separated the old grain from the (other) grain;
Greenmalt he soaked all through;
Its sprouts ... grew long like the hirin-plant,
And so he reduced the meshes of the nets.
He filled the nets with grain for the piles, and added some for the locust’s tooth;
He loaded it on pack-asses,
And placed remounts at their side.
The king, the lord of broad understanding,
The lord of Unug, the lord of Kulab,
Set them on the road to Aratta.
The people, (numerous) like ants from their crevices,
He made go to Aratta by themselves.

To the messenger who was to go to the highlands,
To Aratta, the lord added these instructions:
"Messenger, speak to the lord of Aratta and say:
"My scepter’s base is the power of overlordship;
"Its crown provides a protective shadow for Kulab;
"Under its starlike branches in the shrine Eana
"Holy Inana finds her cool refreshment.
"If he can cut a scepter from it, let him hold it in his hand;41
"Let him hold it in his hand like a string of carnelian and lapis lazuli beads;
"Let the lord of Aratta bring that to me! Tell him that!"

I. Third Voyage: Unug to Aratta

After Enmerkar had spoken to him in this vein,
The messenger, on his way to Aratta,
Plunged his feet in the dust of the road.
Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta

He made the pebbles rattle down the hills;
As if he were a dragon prowling the desert, there was no stopping him.

J. Delivering the Second Challenge

When the messenger had reached Aratta,
The people of Aratta
Came running to wonder at the pack-asses.
In the courtyard of Aratta
The messenger piled up the heaps of wheat, adding some for the
tooth of the locust.
As if caused by rain and sun from heaven,
Aratta was now full of wealth.
As gods returning to their dwellings
Aratta's hunger was stilled.
The people of Aratta
[Covered] the fields with his water-soaked greenmalt.
After that, couriers and merchants
The citizens of Aratta paid attention
He revealed the matter to Aratta.
Thus, in Aratta, from his hand
To the lord of Unug he [...] his hand.

Citizens of Aratta
"As for us, in our sharpest hunger,
In our dire famine, let us prostrate ourselves to the lord of Kulab!"
The word-wise elders
Were wringing their hands, leaning against the wall.
To the lord they proferred their treasure chests.

[...] [...] his scepter [...] in the midst of the palace [...]
[Openly] he spoke [the words he had learnt by heart]:
"[Your father, my king], sent me to you;
"Enmerkar, son of the Sun, sent me to you!"

Lord of Aratta
"What is it to me what your king spoke, what he said?"

Messenger
"This is what my king spoke, what he said:
"My scepter's base is the power of overlordship;
"Its crown provides a protective shadow for Kulab;
"Under its starlike branches in the shrine Eana
"Holy Inana finds her cool refreshment.
"If he can cut a scepter from it, let him hold it in his hand;" 46
"Let him hold it in his hand like a string of carnelian and lapis lazuli beads;
"Let the lord of Aratta bring that to me! Tell him that!"

K. ARATTA'S REPLY: SECOND COUNTERCHALLENGE

This having been said,
(The lord of Aratta), because of this, entered his cella and lay there fasting.
When day broke he was raving;
He spoke gibberish;
He was stumbling around in words like a feeding donkey in wheat. 47
Now, what could the one say to the other?
What could the one say in addition to the other?
What the one said to the other, it was thus:

"Messenger, speak to your king and tell him:
"A scepter, not of wood, nor with the name of wood."
"When … it is taken in hand and inspected,
"Not i d a g-wood, nor s i m g i g-wood,
"Nor cedar, nor cypress,
"Nor h a s u r, nor palm,
"Nor hardwood, nor z a b a l u m,
"Nor poplar as in a chariot,
"Nor worked reed as in whip handles,
"Nor gold, nor copper,
"Nor genuine refined silver, nor silver,
"Nor carnelian, nor lapis lazuli—
"If he can cut a scepter from such a substance, let him show it;
"Let him hold it in his hand like a string of carnelian and lapis lazuli beads;
"Let the lord of Kulab bring that to me! Tell him that!"
Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta

Joyfully he stepped into Kulab, the Brickwork.
To his king, the lord of Kulab,
He repeated the message word for word.
Enki now granted insight to Enmerkar.49
The lord gave orders to his chief steward.
[In his house [...]]
The king took a hairy hide [...]
As if wrapping (something in it), he rolled it up and looked at it.
With a pestle he pounded it like a herb
And poured (the mass) into a gleaming reed.
From the sunlight he brought it into the shadow,
And from the shadow he brought it into the sunlight.
Five, maybe ten years50 passed,
And then he split the gleaming reed with an axe.
The lord looked at it with pleasure
And poured on its mass fine oil, oil from the bright mountains.
In the hands of the messenger who was to travel to the mountains
The lord then placed the scepter.

N. Fifth Voyage: Unug to Aratta

The messenger's race to Aratta
Was like the U-bird's flight over the hills, like a fly's dashes) over the dust.
He darted over the highland like a swimming carp and reached Aratta.

O. Third Counterchallenge

Joyfully he stepped into the courtyard of Aratta
And put the scepter in his ...
Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta

"This misery of Aratta, where shall it lead us?
"For how long shall the yoke-ropes have to be our lot?
"Must we, because of this dire famine,
"crawl before the lord of Kulab in our stark hunger?"

The lord of Aratta then entrusted to the messenger
A message, important like a tablet.52
"Messenger, speak to your king, lord of Kulab, and say:
"A dog that is not black, a dog that is not white,
"A dog that is not brown, a dog that is not red,
"A dog that is not yellow, a dog that is not pied—such a dog he must give you!
"My dog will wrangle with his dog,
"So that the stronger one be known! Tell him that!"53

P. SIXTH VOYAGE: ARATTA TO UNUG

(The lord) having spoken to him in this vein,
The messenger set off in all haste.
Brickwork Kulab answered like a . . .
Like a goat on the mountain slopes he lifted his eyes; like a huge M1R snake coming out of the fields he . . .
In . . . he lifted his head.

Q. FINAL CHALLENGE

[The lord of] of Aratta.
From his throne he spoke to him [like a raging torrent]:
"Messenger, when you speak to the lord of Aratta, say this:
"A cloth that is not black, a cloth that is not white,
"A cloth that is not brown, a cloth that is not red,
"A cloth that is not yellow, a cloth that is not pied—such a cloth I will give him!
"My dog is embraced by Enlili; this dog I will send to him.
"My dog will wrangle with his dog
"So that the stronger one be known. Tell him that!
"Second, when you speak to him, say also this:
"He must now stop prevaricating54 and come to a decision.
"Those of his city shall walk before him like sheep,
"And he, like a shepherd, shall follow them.
"At his coming, the holy mound of lapis lazuli
"Shall humble itself before him like a crushed reed.
"They shall amass shining gold and silver
Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta

"For Inana of the Eana
"In the courtyard of Aratta in great piles.
"Third, when you speak to him, say also this:
"Beware lest I make (the people) 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],
"Lest I make the wind carry them away!
"At his coming, when he holds the precious stones of the hills,
"He must build for me the shrines of Eridug, Abzu, and Enum;
"He must adorn for me its architrave with a slip of clay
"He must make it spread its shadow over the Land for me!
"When he speaks ...
"Tell him this as a sign for him!"

Thereupon the lord ... on the throne dais, on the throne, the noble seed of princes, ... grown all alone.
His speech was very grand, its meaning very deep;
The messenger's mouth was too beauteous; he could not repeat it. Because the messenger's mouth was too beauteous, 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!

R. SEVENTH VOYAGE: UNUG TO ARATTA

The messenger was like a bird flapping its wings. "Raging" like a wolf, he crossed five, six, seven mountain ranges.
Lifting his head, he had reached Aratta.

S. ARATTA'S REACTION

Joyfully he stepped into the courtyard of Aratta And proclaimed the preeminence of his king. He spoke out what was in his heart And transmitted it to the lord of Aratta:
"Your father, my king, has sent me;
"The lord of Unug and Kulab has sent me."
Lord of Aratta

"What is it to me what your king spoke, what he said?"

Messenger

"This is what my king spoke, what he said:

"My King is a tall MES-tree, the son of Enlil.
"This tree has grown so tall that it links heaven and earth;
"Its crown reaches heaven;
"Its roots are set fast in the earth.
"He who has manifested lordship and kingship,
"Enmerkar, son of the Sun, gave me this tablet.
"O lord of Aratta, when you have read this tablet, learned the gist of the message,
"When you will have replied to me whatever you want,
"To the scion of the one with the gleaming beard,
"To him whom the mighty cow bore on the hill of the lustrous power,
"To him who grew up on the soil of Aratta,
"To him who was suckled by the teat of the true cow,
"To him, suited for office in Kulab, mountain of the great powers,
"To Enmerkar, son of the Sun,
"I will speak that word as glad tidings in the shrine Eana.
"In his Gipar, bearing fruit like a young MES-tree,
"I shall repeat it to my king, the lord of Kulab."

This having been said,
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.

III. THE RESOLUTION

T. THE FINAL CONFRONTATION

At that moment the lord worthy of the holy crown, the son of Enlil
Iskur thundered in heaven and on earth.
A storm he caused, raging like a great lion.
He made the highlands quake,
He shook the hillsides.
The awesome radiance ... of his breast ... He made the highland,
Aratta's parched flank in the midst of the mountains, raise its voice in joy.
Wheat began growing of its own accord, and so did chickpeas;
The wheat grown of its own accord, into the granary of …
They brought for the lord of Aratta,
And before him they heaped it up in the courtyard of Aratta.
The lord of Aratta looked at the wheat;
The messenger looked amazed, he …

The lord of Aratta cried to the messenger:
“In her majesty has Inana, Lady of all the countries,
“Not yet abandoned Aratta to surrender it to Unug!  
“Nor did she abandon her Ezagina to surrender it to the Eana;
“Nor did she abandon the mountain of the shining powers to surren-
der it to Kulab, the Brickwork;
“Nor did she abandon her sweet bed to surrender it to the flowery bed;58
“Nor did she abandon the purity of her lord to surrender it to the lord of
Unug and Kulab!
“(On the contrary), the right and left flanks of Aratta—
“Inana, Lady of all the countries,
“Protects them when the mighty flood is rising!
“Its people are distinct from other people;
“They are a nation Dumuzid selected among the other nations,
“One that firmly establishes the holy word of Inana!!
“So let now the Wise Dog and the … of Dumuzid lock on to each other.
“Quick, come, inly young …!”
“They were steadfast before the flood.
“After the flood had swept over,
“Inana, Lady of all the countries,
“Out of her great love for Dumuzid,
“Sprinkled the water of life over them,
“And subjected the Land to them!”59

The Wise Dog, when he came,
Had covered his head with a pied head cloth
And wrapped his body in a lion skin

U. The Argument Resolved

Inana …
Her song pleased Ama-ušumgalana, her husband,
And since that day, for the holy ear, the ear of Dumuzid,

88

Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta 89
Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta

She perfects it, singing the song and teaching the words.  

The Wise Woman, when she came to the mountain of the shining Powers,
Went up to him like a maiden whose period is at an end;
She painted her eyes with kohl,
She donned a dazzling white robe,
She made the true crown sparkle like moonlight,
She arranged [her tresses] on her head;
She sat her [spouse] Enmerkar on the throne with her (and spoke):
"When you have raised …
 [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 foal soals shall multiply!
"Since in Aratta they will now agree,
"They will heap up … in piles
"The abundance that is truly yours.
"When you have instituted [made] with the Lord of Aratta,
"He will […]
"He did […]
"He came forth […]
"He set right […]
"[…]
"[…]
"[…]
"[…] what is fitting […]
"[…] the ilu-song of the heart […]
"[…] your abundance in his […] is tin […]
"[…] Enil has granted you; my [luxuriousness] be known!
"[…] his father was not fertile, produced no semen.
"Enil, 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,
Grammar and philology could bear such a reading. Yet the style of the episode and certainly its meaning and function in the story argue strongly for my interpretation. Putting it in the past cannot be of any use in the development of the narrative. Reference to the future—as one expects from a spell—can and does, since it makes a very neat and sophisticated pendant to Enmerkar’s invention of cuneiform, which accompanies the last challenge.

20 “The whole world of well-rulled people” refers to the imagined or ideological state of Ur III Sumer, described in its different provinces, to wit Subur and Hamazi (north and east), Sumer and Akkad (center), and Martu (west).

21 The Sumerian word for debate, ada-ma-nu dagga, is also the term for formal school disputations. It also occurs as a qualification in the last lines of Enmerkar and Enushigirana. This has led some scholars to classify both that poem and Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta as disputations. I do not think that there are sufficient grounds for this.

22 The threefold series of challenges and replies going to and fro between Unug and Aratta works out naturally at a total of seven journeys, since the series starts at Unug but ends in Aratta and is not merely a sequence of challenge-and-response: the responses carry their own challenges. The messenger also has to travel over seven mountain ranges. This is a fine instance of the very sophisticated interpretation or reuse of a common folktales technique.

23 The messenger has had to learn the message by heart. At the occasion of the ultimate message from Enmerkar this will cause a problem. Enmerkar will find a highly appropriate solution.

24 Presumably the messenger now recites the spell of Nudimmud, but somewhat unexpectedly the spell itself is not repeated.

25 Unclear. Why should Enmerkar have been born on the soil of Aratta?

26 Note that the lord of Aratta’s answer does not reply to the challenge as such, nor does the spell of Nudimmud seem to have had any effect.

27 The mountains are here represented as a throne, which is “embellished” by Inana when she sits on it.

28 Traditional “sacrifices” accompanying an entreaty or appeal to the gods.

29 This traditional way of expressing a small number or a short time always puts the smaller number before the larger one, somewhat against our expectation.

30 That is, the lord of Aratta is willing to join battle only in a new kind of contest: a contest of cleverness. In doing so, he is laying down the rules (the negative conditions in lines 279–280). If his antagonist is unable to fulfill these conditions—or cannot fathom the meaning of the contest—he will lose, just like a fighting bull that does not reckon with the strength of its opponent.

31 The second time the oral means of communication is highlighted.

32 Both similes are about the aspect of the mountains’ bare flanks reflecting the blood-red light of the westering sun and the pale sheen of the moon.

33 I.e., Inana.

34 I.e., he may not collect the wheat en route from Unug to Aratta.

35 Battle is called “the dance of Inana.”

36 Here and in line 302 we find again an insistence on the spoken word as the only means of communication.

37 Enmerkar, who elsewhere is called “son of the Sun.”

38 This is, of course, a stupendous operation. Is Enmerkar collecting a vast amount of water? If so, to what purpose? The passage remains unclear and physically impossible: it is very hard to connect the Euphrates to the Tigris when based in Uruk.

39 For the first time the notion of a tablet is introduced. This will finally lead up to the solution of the communication problem much later on. Here the tablet only figures as a rather involved epithet of Nisaba, goddess of both wheat and writing. The reader is warned.

40 Nisaba is identical to Nanibgal.

41 The meaning is not altogether clear. Does it mean: “if he can make a scepter like this?” The broader meaning, however, is clear: if the Lord of Aratta should surrender his scepter—however he came by it—to Enmerkar, he would thereby accept Enmerkar’s superiority! It is quite possible that Enmerkar’s “scepter” is in fact the holy MES-tree of Unug. Enmerkar then seems to offer a small piece of the tree to the lord of Aratta so that he may share in its authority under the superior rule of Unug. The lord of Aratta counters this by agreeing to accepts Unug’s lordship only if an impossible scepter is given to him.

42 I.e., by the normal succession of the seasons, implying sowing and reaping.

43 After having been feasted?

44 Thus the text. A mistake for Aratta? Owing to the state of preservation (broken passage; only one manuscript), the matter cannot as yet be decided.

45 Perhaps an indication of the outcome of the whole story, which is the institution of trade. Do the elders offer their treasure hoards in return for Enmerkar’s unexpected supply of wheat?

46 See above, note 39.

47 A fine simile, making clever use of the fact that grain has just arrived in Aratta.

48 The section GI5 (wood) of the great lexical list ur₃-ra buballu contains a number of entries beginning with the GI5 sign but that designate objects that are strictly speaking not made out of wood. It is probable that the meaning here is that a clever use of the lexical lists as a solution to the riddle is not allowed.

49 Enki appears here in his customary role as the helper of heroes—and in this case as the god of technique as well as understanding.

50 It is uncertain but not impossible that a period of ten years is really intended. The Sumerian word mu can also mean “time(s).” The process apparently involves braying and macerating hides and pouring the bone-glue into a hollow reed to let it set and harden. This may have taken considerable time, but ten years seems excessive. Still, this is undoubtedly the first instance of a manmade substance in human history.

51 The image is that of a city vanquished and destroyed by barbarians. Its populace is then taken away to the foreign countries.

52 As the text unfolds, the references to Enmerkar’s great invention become clearer and clearer.

53 There is much literature about these lines but little doubt that ur here does indeed mean “dog.” An almost identical passage occurs in the animal section of the lexical list ur₃-ra buballu.

54 This is certainly a mistake for Unug.

55 The text has a term that implies subterfuge.
The Lugalbanda Poems

Introduction

There can be but little doubt that the two poems that have Lugalbanda as their hero belong together. Neither of them is a complete story without the other. In the broadest outline the complete story runs somewhat like this.

I. Lugalbanda in the Wilderness

Enmerkar of Unug wants to conquer Aratta. During the march, Lugalbanda (his son?) falls mortally ill and is abandoned in a cave in the mountains. He prays to the great luminaries, who save his life. Being all alone, he reinvents fire, cooking, and baking. He captures a wild bull and a wild goat. Acting on a portentous dream, he sacrifices these animals to the great gods. A band of spirits arrives. The hero masters them with the help of Utu. There seems to follow a battle between the forces of light and the forces of darkness. The former seem to win this battle.

II. The Return of Lugalbanda

Lugalbanda is now stranded in the highlands. He decides to go and look for the Anzud bird, who rules over that region. He feasts Anzud’s chick so well that it is stuffed with food and probably asleep when its parents return from foraging; therefore, it does not answer their call. The frightened parents are very happy when Lugalbanda appears and tells them what has happened. Anzud rewards him with the gift of superhuman speed. He returns to his companions, who are laying siege to Aratta. To force a decision, Enmerkar sends Lugalbanda back to Unug in order to ask for Inana’s advice. In a single day Lugalbanda reaches Unug, and Inana gives her advice. Aratta seemingly submits peacefully.