

Views of Epic Transmission in Sargonic Tradition and the Bellerophon Saga

By

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Abstract

One of the most memorable tales in Homer's *Iliad* is that of Bellerophon, the Corinthian hero sent as courier with a message deceitfully intended to arrange his death. A similar story is related in the Sumerian Sargon Legend of the eighteenth-century B.C.E., which tells of how Sargon of Akkad seized the kingdom of Uruk by divine aid. The motif of a treacherous letter is not the only similarity between general stories regarding Sargon and Bellerophon. Other shared themes include blood pollution, interactions with a queen, divine escort, and a restless wandering. Tales about Sargon and Bellerophon are disseminated across cultures. Sumerian and Akkadian texts describing Sargon's exploits have been found in Egypt, Syria, and Anatolia, while Bellerophon's adventures are described by storytellers of Greece and Rome.

Beginning with the Sargon Legend and Homer's Bellerophon, I explore the two narrative traditions primarily as case studies for epic transmission. I furthermore propose that cultural interaction and a complex network of oral and written storytelling contributed to the transmission of the traditions and motifs. The Bellerophon saga as a whole is particularly suggestive of Near Eastern sources and cultural interplay: Homer's reference to writing is strikingly Near Eastern, as is the beastly Chimaera slain by Bellerophon. However, the tradition is layered with Indo-European poetic language as Bellerophon carries out tasks assigned to him by the Lycian king. Finally, I note that several of the stories' motifs appear together in later literature as diverse as the Iranian *Shahnameh* and Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Observing Sargonic tradition and the Bellerophon cycle unfold over the years, we are able to see how the stories and their themes are treated by new storytellers, and to discuss the possible influence that these narratives have on each other and on other cultures.

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Introduction¹

Ἔγη μὲν με τέκεν, καινούργησεν δὲ σίδηρος·
εἰμι δὲ Μουσαίων μυστικὸν ἐκδοχίον·
κλειομένη σιγῶ· λαλέω δ', ὅταν ἐκπετάσῃς με,
κοινωνὸν τὸν Ἄρη μούνον ἔχουσα λόγων.
- Δελτός

Wood bore me, and iron worked me anew,
and I am a mystic repository of Muses.
Closed I am silent, but I speak when you unfold me;
Ares alone has the partaking of my speech.
- the Tablet
- Epigram on a writing tablet²

Of all the stories within the *Iliad*, one of the episodes that has received curious attention from scholars of antiquity through the modern era has been the tale of Bellerophon and King Proetus' letter, intended to bring about the death of the courier-hero. Bellerophon's fate becomes a popular tale in later Greece and Rome, spawning tragedies and sayings. The Homeric version of the story offers great puzzlement, leading to questions regarding the provenance of the Bellerophon saga and the author's knowledge of a Bellerophon cycle; when the hero meets his end, it is sudden and unexplained, coupled with the outpouring of divine disfavor. In a story similar to that of Bellerophon but written almost a millennium earlier, the legendary Akkadian ruler Sargon is the recipient of a deadly letter in a Sumerian text. The Sumerian "Sargon Legend," two fragmentary tablets from two different locations, relates the tale of Sargon's birth, service to King Ur-Zababa, and subsequent rise to power. The two stories of the Sargon Legend

¹ For their patient comments and instructive criticism in the preparation of this paper, I express humble appreciation and admiration to Professors Stanley Lombardo, Anthony Corbeill, and Molly Zahn. Errors are, of course, my own.

² A riddle from the Greek Anthology (14.60, Paton), in which Ares represents the stylus. Translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

and Bellerophon saga as a whole display similar cultural concerns, among them blood-guilt, dreams and divine tokens, and divine escort. As Sargon and Bellerophon are featured in later stories, the characters and elements evolve over time, and are adapted by other cultures.

In this paper, I examine general Sargonic epic and stories about Bellerophon in an attempt to watch as the traditions expand and experience dissemination across cultural boundaries. The Sargon Legend and Homer's Bellerophon act as starting points in this analysis, and function primarily as two case studies. However, I also note examples of Greek interaction with Mesopotamian and Eastern epics, and propose that forms of the Sargonic epics could have trickled into the Bellerophon cycle and contemporary tradition. No other known recensions of the Sargon Legend survive, and large portions of the text are damaged. Because of uncertainties regarding the Legend itself, and because of the many centuries between the Legend and recorded Greek mythology, it is difficult to debate any particular influence that the Legend or its later forms might have had on Greek epic and the developing Bellerophon cycle. Nevertheless, when discussing cultural narratives, it is essential to take into account the impressive amount of interaction between Greece and the Ancient Near East.

With its Near Eastern nuances, especially those observed in the description of a writing tablet, Homer's Bellerophon narrative is an apt example of cultural interplay. This version of the story is referred to by many later authors of classical Greece and Rome. It is found in *Iliad* 6.154-206, neatly inserted into the *aristeia* of Diomedes.³ In the passage, Glaucus recounts his genealogy as the warriors prepare to engage in battle. Born to Glaucus' ancestor, Bellerophon was a blameless man from birth, divinely gifted with a charming appearance and valor. The

³ For complete Greek text and translation of the story, see Appendix 1.

Argive queen Anteia lusts after Bellerophon, but he refuses her advances. Rejected, Anteia falsely accuses Bellerophon of improperly approaching her and incites King Proetus' anger against the innocent man. In his wrath, Proetus devises a scheme to bring about Bellerophon's death.

κτεῖναι μὲν ῥ' ἀλέεινε, σεβάσσατο γὰρ τό γε θυμῷ,
πέμπε δέ μιν Λυκίην δέ, πόρεν δ' ὅ γε σήματα λυγρὰ
γράψας ἐν πίνακι πτυκτῷ θυμοφθόρα πολλά, 170
δειῖξαι δ' ἠνώγειν ᾧ πενθερῷ ὄφρ' ἀπόλοιτο.
αὐτὰρ ὁ βῆ Λυκίην δὲ θεῶν ὑπ' ἀμύμονι πομπῇ.

He avoided killing him, for at any rate he feared that in his heart,
but he sent him to Lycia, and indeed he gave ruinous signs to him —
many of them, heart-eating, scratching them in a folded tablet, 170
and he ordered him to show them to his father-in-law, so that he would be killed.
But Bellerophon went to Lycia under the blameless guidance of the gods.

Il. 6.168-72.

Bellerophon is entertained by the unnamed Lycian king for nine days. Upon reading the letter on the tenth day, the king immediately sets deadly tasks for the hero. He is sent to slay the fire-breathing Chimaera and to battle with the Solymoi and Amazons. We are told that Bellerophon defeats the Chimaera by “trusting in the tokens” of the gods (τεράεσσι πιθήσας, 184), but Homer does not explain what the “tokens” are. On the return to Lycia, Bellerophon kills the region's best warriors, who have been set in ambush for him by the king. Finally, the king is convinced of Bellerophon's semi-divine status and gives his daughter to Bellerophon in marriage. The couple bears three children.

Bellerophon's fate takes a startling turn soon after the birth of his grandchild.

ἀλλ' ὅτε δὴ καὶ κεῖνος ἀπήχθετο πᾶσι θεοῖσιν,

ἦτοι ὁ κὰπ πεδίον τὸ Ἀλήϊον οἶος ἀλάτο
ὄν θυμὸν κατέδων, πάτον ἀνθρώπων ἀλεείνων·

But when indeed distinguished Bellerophon also
incurred hatred from all the gods,
truly throughout the Aleian plain he wandered alone,
eating his heart out, avoiding pathway of men.

Il. 6.201-03.

The narrative abruptly turns away from Bellerophon's successes and nobility. Instead, the hero is suddenly hated by the gods. The passage ends with the destruction of two of his children.

Certain elements or motifs that come to the reader's attention in the tradition of Bellerophon are noticeable in stories regarding the Akkadian king Sargon. Both traditions display themes such as blood pollution associated with the hero, or questions of the gods' approval. These motifs cause the heroes' stories to appear to be more similar than in the one aspect of the deadly letters. The motifs do not all appear directly in the Sargon Legend or the *Iliad*, but they are evident at some point in the stories being passed down.⁴ For instance, Pseudo-Apollodorus in the second century C.E. claims that Bellerophon came to Proetus seeking expiation for the miasma or blood-guilt of an accidental murder; and the Weidner Chronicle, perhaps a contemporary of the Sargon Legend, contends that Sargon was punished by the gods for an arrogant act of impiety.

The presence of common motifs can lead to questions of how the similar themes occur in both traditions. Perhaps the Greek tales are in some way a result of borrowed tradition or story outlines taken from other civilizations, and Greek storytellers add a local personality to the traditions. On the other hand, maybe the motifs seen elsewhere in Mesopotamia and the Levant

⁴ These elements are discussed with more detail in Chapter 1; see Appendix 3.

arise further west as well, finding their way into Homer's *Iliad* or Corinthian stories of Bellerophon. If transmission of Sargonic epics or general cultural motifs did occur, we might ask how these stories were transmitted, and by whom. One solution posits interaction between Greece and the Near East in the Late Bronze Age and during Homer's lifetime. Stories and themes could pass between cultures through merchants, royal bards or scribes, or settlers. Motifs may have arisen independently, but with the occurrence of this interaction, it is impossible to prove whether they did or did not come about separately, and they certainly did not have to do so.

Methods of Transmission

In regards to the transmission of tales and motifs from the Near East to Greece, scholars such as Burkert and West have made various suggestions about cultural exchange and Greek adaptation of pre-existing narratives. Mesopotamian motifs and cycles of mythology continue to gain attention for their possible influence on Greek storytelling. Burkert turns to the works of Homer and Hesiod for evidence of literary influence from Anatolia, Egypt, and Mesopotamia through Syria. Parallels noted by Burkert are both thematic and textual.⁵ Besides Burkert's statements, West describes different scenarios in which Greeks would have had ample opportunity to become familiar with Near Eastern themes or epics in some form. In addition to trade routes or brief commercial interactions between merchants, hints of Mycenaean settlements in Ugarit or Phoenician settlements in Greece, beginning in the ninth century, promise more prolonged cultural exchange.⁶ Interaction between kings, traveling singers, seers, and craftsmen in the Bronze Age is likely, when we consider the relationships of royalty in influential locations

⁵ Burkert 2005.

⁶ West 1997: 609.

such as Syria, Babylon, or Egypt; as West notes, a fourteenth-century pharaoh seems to have known of Mycenae, Semitic loan words in Linear B attest to Near Eastern influence, and Greek colonization of Cyprus and southern Anatolia in the twelfth and eleventh centuries established a Greek presence in the eastern Mediterranean.⁷

Based on these insights and ongoing studies of interaction between Greece and the Near East, the concept that Sumero-Akkadian traditions were passed to Greece in the Late Bronze Age and following centuries gains greater credibility. The Sargonic epics maintain a strong hold on Mesopotamian literature for over one thousand years, and the tradition makes its way to Syria, Egypt, and the Hittite empire.⁸ It can be suggested that Sargonic epic had some part in transmitting motifs, or that Bellerophon's story indirectly holds remnants of stories about Sargon, based on the influence that Near Eastern epic seems to have had on the poet of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Through contact occurring in Corinth or other Mediterranean areas, Homer or his predecessors could have been aware of Near Eastern narratives. Without more information about the Sargon Legend and its place in Sargonic tradition, suggestions of its influence remain inconclusive, based primarily on the contemporary reception of Near Eastern literature in Greece; still, with the prevalence of close parallels in the *Iliad*, the possibility merits attention.

Another possible explanation of similar elements in stories of Sargon and Bellerophon is the fact that many of these motifs are well-attested throughout the Near East and later Greece in

⁷ West 1997: 611, 625.

⁸ If a map indicating sites where fragments of the Gilgamesh epics have been discovered were to be compared with a map denoting sites of Sargonic epic, the resulting correlation would show the similar and widespread reach of the epics. Although Sargonic epic is not represented as well as the stories of Gilgamesh, surviving texts and their locations imply that Sargon was a character deeply embedded in the consciousness of the scribes. Cf. West 1997: 591, showing a map with sites of Gilgamesh findings, to the sites associated with texts in Chapter 2. Other Near Eastern epics referred to by Burkert for their similarities to Homeric epic, particularly Akkadian classics, were also diffused widely throughout the area. Diffusion through written narratives may be limited to scribal schools, but would still increase awareness of an epic, whether in literary or oral form.

general. Thus, the prevalence of the motifs in the surrounding regions could mean that the stories' similarities arise independently. A critical consideration at this point is again the fragmentary nature of the Sargon Legend. Due to our limited understanding of the text, the motifs and events that fill in the story's gaps remain open to interpretation. We do not know precisely what motifs or stock characters might have appeared in the complete Legend or in lost Sargonic texts. If the damaged sections of Sargon's story are actually radically different from Bellerophon's, then perhaps the similarities seem more likely to have arisen independently.

A further matter of interest, discussed in Chapter 4, is implied by the research of linguist Calvert Watkins, who attempts to trace the verbal root commonly used in Indo-European accounts of dragon-slaying. This verb is found in the section of Bellerophon's tasks as recounted by Homer, but nowhere else in the *Iliad's* tale of Bellerophon. If Bellerophon's tasks of slaying are treated as influenced by a separate motif or cultural tale reflecting Indo-European poetic language, or if this section was somehow introduced differently, the rest of the story features Bellerophon responding to situations more similar to those facing Sargon, who is not associated with stories of monster-slaying at any time in his tradition. Near Eastern dragon-slaying stories exist, but the narrative of Bellerophon's battles appears to take part in the Indo-European poetic tradition; only the tasks are expressed in this particular formulaic manner. A distinction between the tasks and the other portions of the story is shaky, but adds complexity to the Bellerophon cycle by showing how Bellerophon, without his encounters with monsters and exotic Amazons, is not unlike a heroic figure of the Near East. Moreover, the signs of a linguistic inheritance in its relation to dragon-slaying stories show the power of transmission in general, in that a formulaic phrasing or word is frequently associated with the motif seen in the tasks.

In the oral culture of pre-classical Greece, the incorporation of non-Greek stories and the evolution or innovation of heroic tales might have been accomplished easily enough. The spoken word was subject to purposeful alteration, adaptability for performance, or occasional memory lapses. Homeric readers interested in manuscript variations are frequently forced to consider the ramifications of orality, whether or not these readers agree that differing manuscript traditions are equally valid. To what extent is oral composition or performance responsible for variations in word order, or the deletion of an entire line? On a much broader scale, when does an oral composition become a fixed text? I do not raise these questions in an attempt to answer them or to reiterate past and present ideas regarding Homer, but rather to allude to the complex interplay of written and oral storytelling.⁹ With regards to the case studies of Sargon and Bellerophon, surviving writings demonstrate that the characters and their stories were subject to alteration. Emphasis could be placed on elements that had been omitted or diminished in previous tellings. As intermittent elements or as details that appear only once in the tradition, the letter in the Sargon Legend, or Bellerophon's adventures with Pegasus, might be examples of early development or rearrangement of the stories. The letter given to Sargon is only found in one fragmentary segment of the Legend. It is unclear whether this element of the letter is unique, belonging to more general Sargonic tradition, or if the Legend is a more unusual or variant version of Sargon's rise to power. Because each storyteller of a written or oral narrative wields some degree of power over the narrative, a story's evolution could be due to individual

⁹ To discuss the complications of oral tradition and the composition of the *Iliad* is beyond the scope of this paper. My intention is not to take up the issues of poetic multiformity and the mechanics of oral poetics themselves, although I will refer to these concepts occasionally. It should be noted that multiformity or misquotation (deliberate, or not?) is an issue to be considered in Pseudo-Aristotle's citation of *Il.* 6.200-02 (in *Problems*). These are the lines decided by Willcock to be insertion into an original Bellerophon cycle (246), whether by impulse of Homer or an early editor, and they diverge from traditional form as they appear in the *Problems*.

creativity or could be representative of changes occurring in the collective imagination of a culture.

The complex relationship between literacy and orality is demonstrated by Mesopotamian scribal training in antiquity. Although literacy was restricted to a small percentage of the overall population in the second millennium B.C.E., the few members of society who could write relied heavily upon orality and memory. As an example of how a literary-oral interface might function, Carr stresses that texts in ancient Greece were used as a “reference point for an ongoing process of largely oral recitation,” and comments, “Orality and writing technology are joint means for accomplishing a common goal: accurate recall of the treasured tradition.”¹⁰ As it is, scribal tradition indicates oral transmission by variations within texts used for training, or by multiple duplicates of texts. Black *et al.* state that transmission of Sumerian literature occurred “through dictation, repetition, and memorization. First, many of the variants appear to derive from *mishearing* rather than *misreading*. . . . Second, for longer literary works there are far more manuscript sources for the beginning of a composition than the end. . . . Third, we also find examples of *misremembering* whole words or perhaps remembering differently.”¹¹ Charpin explains, “Writing was only an oral discourse fixed on a support,” and elsewhere states that Sumerian literature, for instance, was “essentially oral in nature.”¹² Citing evidence for courtly performances of hymns, Black *et al.* posit the tentative performances of other types of literature:

If the literary tradition was essentially an aural one within the community of scribes, then presumably it—or part of it—was accessible to the vast illiterate majority too. . . . [M]any literary works, from collections of proverbs [to tales of

¹⁰ Carr 4, 7.

¹¹ Black *et al.* xlvi.

¹² Charpin 2, 205.

the natural order], give the impression (perhaps falsely) of being culled from some sort of ‘folk tradition’. But in that case the survival of Sumerian literature must have been dependent on the continued understanding of Sumerian as a *spoken* language, and that is extremely difficult to track through the *written* record.¹³

In a sense, the survival of Sumerian lore seems to have depended just as much upon the storyteller’s mouth as the scribe’s hand. In turn, the power of oral transmission is clearly evident in the sway of Homer’s poetry as it dominates the epic tradition. The stories of Sargon were extremely influential and widespread, and the fact that they could not be wiped from the cultural consciousness of Mesopotamia is inescapable. Because the cycle of Bellerophon’s triumphs and trials is a cohesive example of well-known motifs and seemingly purposeful omissions, it is possible to follow the course of the saga and propose that the ghost of the Mesopotamian epics is visible in the pre-Homeric background of the hero’s journeys.

Study Synopsis

My first chapter sets forth the Sargon Legend and Homer’s depiction of Bellerophon in more detail. The tablet and reference to writing indicate that the Homeric story of the letter was based on Near Eastern sources. Homer has carefully adapted the inset tale of Bellerophon to fit the context of his epic by placing it after a philosophical assertion by Glaucus, thus making sense of his selectivity in telling about Bellerophon’s adventures and fate. Homer possibly borrowed the story from Corinthian folktales or a written cycle of Corinthian stories that already included the concept of writing. The Sargon Legend includes an earlier model of a king’s deadly letter, but the Legend and *Iliad* treat the letter differently from other similar accounts. Other themes

¹³ Black *et al.* xlix. Italics are those of the original authors. Cf. Noegel (in Foley, 242) on themes drawn from popular oral tradition and applied to Mesopotamian epic for didactic purposes.

evident at some point in both of the ongoing traditions include divine favor and semi-divine status; attendance of the gods, either in ominous dreams or Homeric “tokens;” considerations of ring composition and of interactions with a king’s wife; and sudden disfavor and wanderings.

In the second chapter, I turn to the tradition of tales about Sargon. Texts regarding this legendary king span a period of more than one thousand years and are represented in Sumerian, Akkadian, and Assyrian literature, as the following non-exhaustive chart shows. The texts addressed in Chapter 2 are denoted by asterisks.

Old Babylonian Period (~1800-1700 B.C.E.)¹⁴

Sumerian Sargon Legend

Old Assyrian legend

Sumerian “I, Sargon”

Akkadian “Sargon, the Conquering Hero”*

Akkadian “Sargon in Foreign Lands”

Two Akkadian “Sargon Letters”

“King of Battle,”* text from Assur

Weidner Chronicle*

Old/ Middle Babylonian (~1650-1200)

Sumerian-Akkadian excerpt (Sargon in Ur-Zababa’s palace)

Akkadian “Sargon the Lion”

(Peripheral) Akkadian “King of Battle”*

Hittite “King of Battle”*

Chronicle of Early Kings*

Neo-Babylonian/ Neo-Assyrian (~1000-600)¹⁵

“Birth Legend”*

Akkadian “King of Battle”*

¹⁴ Based on Westenholz’s dates; see Chapter 2.

¹⁵ Dates for Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian are from Rubio’s Table 2.1, in Ehrlich.

Late Babylonian (539 -)

Geographical Text (World Map)*

Surprisingly, the kingly chronicles attribute impiety to Sargon. The consequence of his alleged sacrilege is a type of “wandering,” described as either insomnia or a restless roaming of Sargon’s spirit after his death. The Birth Legend of Sargon treats the motif of an infant exposed in a reed basket, ending with an emphatic challenge to any who would dare to be like Sargon. In the fifth century B.C.E. and the following centuries, Sargonic tradition continues to be relevant, and is integrated with other heroic tales and propagated in later literature.

Chapter 3 is devoted to following stories of Bellerophon as they pass through Greek and Roman culture, with contributions from Hesiod, Pindar, Euripides, Horace, and Plutarch, among others. The Greek tragedians show their familiarity with the character. Euripides’ Bellerophon roams in Lycia before attempting to ride Pegasus to the sky. Aristophanes parodies Bellerophon’s fall from Pegasus. Later authors concern themselves with Bellerophon’s wandering and claim that the hero suffered from madness, while many narratives focus on Pegasus. It is worth noting that Bellerophon’s ride to heaven bears resemblance to the Akkadian story of Etana, who attempts to fly to the gods on an eagle’s back. Bellerophon’s downfall and piety are intermixed in the tales of Plutarch, Nymph, or Pseudo-Apollodorus, complicating his heroism. The character’s adventures are well-known to Greeks and Romans, regardless of authors’ individual interests in telling the stories.

The fourth chapter examines possible Indo-European connections suggested by the specific language of the tasks, as well as Sumero-Akkadian stories of heroes who might share qualities of the beast-slaying motif. Perhaps due to the wide-reaching influence of Homeric epic, many of the elements of the letter, feigned madness, deceitful queens, blood-guilt, or wandering

occur together in narratives of the Middle Ages and Renaissance. The Iranian epic *Shahnameh* incorporates such themes in the lives of its main protagonists, as does the Iberian *Cantar de los infantes de Lara*. A final example of similarity or transmission of themes is Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, a story drawn from Scandinavian mythology. With the plight of Hamlet, who is unjustly accused, suffers from blood guilt, and is unsuccessfully condemned to an untimely death, the story of the hero-courier seems to come full circle.

The conclusion briefly returns to the concepts of these epic traditions that wind their way through history and across cultural lines. Writing and orality play intricate roles in the transmission of an epic narrative. The epic traditions themselves are powerful, unlimited by geography or a certain cultural viewpoint. In this sense, the themes and stories of the traditions live long beyond the peoples who claimed the heroes as their own.

A Brief Introduction to Mesopotamian History

As a classicist with admittedly limited knowledge of Near Eastern languages, I rely heavily upon the translations of the Mesopotamian literature. Understandably, the language barrier places constraints upon discussion of epic “formulae” and phrasing. As much as possible, emphasis is placed upon themes, rather than precise terminology. Because I assume that readers are mostly classicists, an unjustly but necessarily brief overview of the most relevant ancient Near Eastern cultures follows, along with, albeit curtly, a survey of their languages. Readers are encouraged to make use of the appendices and works cited for further clarification.

The name “Sumerian” denotes a people-group of southern Mesopotamia who suddenly rose to power for reasons still obscure, possibly as early as the fifth millennium B.C.E. The cuneiform script of Sumerian is the most archaic form of writing recognized. The written

Sumerian language was widely respected in Mesopotamian literature and was used in the region for millennia, with some modern scholars controversially arguing that even the spoken language did not become extinct until after the Old Babylonian period.¹⁶ Perhaps the Sumerian language is best compared to Etruscan for the classicist, in that Sumerian seems to be an isolate. Bilingual Sumerian-Akkadian texts have proven helpful in deciphering the language so that texts can be understood, but its linguistic classification and the reasons for the rapid growth of the Sumerian civilization are mysterious.

The “first” historical empire encompassing Sumer was founded by Sargon of Akkad in the late third millennium (~2300 B.C.E.) after Sargon seized power from his superior and the kings of other localities. Sargon’s empire is said eventually to have reached from southern Mesopotamia to Syria and Anatolia. Not only did he impress politically with his demonstration that the regions could be united under a single empire, but his military might and legendary splendor were also claimed by the other members of the dynasty that he inaugurated. Grand stories about Sargon’s grandson Naram-Sin become surprisingly negative in the kingly chronicles of the second millennium B.C.E., ascribing destruction and loss to the end of Naram-Sin’s reign.¹⁷ Rule returned to the city of Uruk in the twenty-second century after occupations by the mountain-dwelling Gutians, and a smaller “Kingdom of Ur” was managed by a family of Uruk in the “Ur III” period. The Ur III era lasts from approximately 2100 to 2000 or 1950. Foster observes that the Kingdom of Ur created new narratives about itself; Sargonic Akkadian

¹⁶ Charpin 43, who points out that Sumerian texts from the period are not suitable proofs of a lively use of Sumerian, comparing the avid inclusion of Latin in rhetoric classes through the nineteenth century.

¹⁷ Unlike Naram-Sin and the other kings who are punished in the surviving sections of the chronicles, Sargon is sentenced to insomnia or a restless roaming of his spirit, recalling the wandering of Bellerophon.

literature was stifled, as was the practice of bilingualism in favor of Sumerian.¹⁸ Only a cycle of poetry unparalleled in Akkadian literature and supposedly edited by Sargon's daughter survived, while stories about the Sargonic kings and their ruin transformed into traditional examples of divine punishment.¹⁹

Over the next one thousand years, Babylonia in southern Mesopotamia at various times endured hardships such as waves of invasions, civil wars, and Hittite raids. Sumerian city-states became Amorite kingdoms ruled by Babylon, only for the southern areas of Babylonia to suffer population loss and division of territory under Kassite rule, approximately two hundred years after the Amorite dynasty. Farther to the north in Mesopotamia, the Assyrian empire gradually grew to eclipse the ancient Akkadian conquests of Sargon. Throughout the centuries, the Akkadian language in its various forms gained prominence and renown as the *lingua franca* of Mesopotamia and much of the Middle East.²⁰ By the time of a ravaging "abrupt decline" of lifestyle in the eastern Mediterranean and Babylonia, occurring in the late Bronze Age, Akkadian literature and language flourished in lands such as Anatolia, the Levant, and Egypt.

As the native Semitic tongue of the peoples to the north of the Sumerians, Akkadian is unrelated to the Sumerian language; nevertheless, Sumerian loanwords manifest themselves frequently in the Akkadian dialects, and palace scribes of Assyria could show their hard-earned skill by producing Sumerian tablets. Like Sumerian, Akkadian is written in cuneiform. Signs can represent syllables or words. The oldest stratum of the Akkadian language in Mesopotamia,

¹⁸ "[B]etween the twentieth and eighteenth centuries Sumerian literature was subject to a vigorous transformational process, although it is impossible to determine if the change was gradual, catastrophic, or a mixture of both" (Michalowski 9, in Konstan).

¹⁹ Foster 147 in Ehrlich. See Rubio's Table 2.1 in the same title.

²⁰ Cf. Huehnergard xxv. On scribal training and bilingual learning of Sumerian, see Black 1991: 5. Akkadian remained in use as a scholarly language until the Hellenistic period (Foster Vol. I: 4).

Old Akkadian, was replaced by the Old Babylonian dialect. Even though Assyriologists continue to debate distinctions between Assyrian and Babylonian dialects in southern Mesopotamia, Old Babylonian is the dialect of Akkadian used heavily in cuneiform literature throughout Mesopotamia, even during the period of Assyrian rule in the south. Many of the extant Sargonic epics are written in Old Babylonian Akkadian and date to the early or mid-second millennium.

Scores of manuscripts were collected in the seventh century B.C.E. by the Neo-Assyrian ruler Ashurbanipal and housed at his palace in Nineveh. Ashurbanipal was not necessarily the first Neo-Assyrian king to gather the ancient texts. Correspondence and signs of literary ownership suggest that several of the king's predecessors acquired manuscripts to a lesser extent.²¹ Nineveh was burned by an enemy coalition in 612 B.C.E., baking the clay tablets and thus preserving their contents. Fragmentary evidence corroborates the presence of Sargonic texts in Ashurbanipal's collection, but reconstructions must be performed cautiously due to the lack of concern for provenance during nineteenth-century excavation. Tablets from Ashurbanipal's library have been confused with texts from nearby areas of Nippur. However, contrary to Western expectations about the appeal of epic literature, tablets assigned to the collection consist less of epic than standardized works of scribal curriculum or one-line omen texts recording events. In the 1970's, Oppenheim judged that the complete collection might have comprised a maximum of fifteen hundred tablets. Of the fifteen hundred, based on the proportion of surviving epic literature to the rest of the compendium, the presence of a mere fifty to sixty epic

²¹ See Charpin 186-201, particularly on the existence of a temple library and for Charpin's "disclaimer" (199): "Ashurbanipal is . . . not a 'patron of arts and letters' . . . Rather, he wanted to have at his disposal a reference tool that would allow him to verify personally what the diviners and other scholars in his service wrote to him." I follow Charpin in referring to the palace "library" as a private collection of manuscripts (201).

texts can reasonably be assumed.²² The gathering of the tablets into one treasury demonstrates the ongoing awareness of the traditions and their implications.

While Ashurbanipal was assembling his collection at Nineveh in the seventh century, the Homeric epics were being passed down to a new generation of Greek storytellers. The continuing relevance of these ancient narratives as they are rediscovered or transmitted today is a testimony to the power of the transmission or, in some cases, to the adaptability of the stories. Even when we today cannot truly comprehend the original cultural importance of the narratives preserved on a cuneiform tablet or in a papyrus manuscript, we seek ways to identify with heroes or to understand the nature of their humanity. Heroic traditions do not necessarily end with the rise or fall of an empire or dynasty, as shown in the following chapters as the stories of Sargon and Bellerophon transcend eighteenth-century southern Mesopotamia and eighth-century Greece.

²² Oppenheim 1977: 19. “(Westerners) have been exaggerating the importance of such (epic) texts, although they are few and far between in Mesopotamian literature,” Oppenheim comments. Almost all of the tablets in the library were subject to early standardization of wording and arrangement, but Oppenheim does not address the amount or dating of standardization for the less esoteric literature. Encyclopedic texts, for example, were one of the types standardized at an earlier date, labeled by Oppenheim as the “third quarter of the second millennium” (18). If this is an example of early standardization, other traditions could have been in continuous fluctuation when oral legends were circulating the Mediterranean in the Bronze or Dark Ages.

Chapter 1: Homer's Bellerophon and the Sargon Legend

With the questionable exception of the “signs” scratched out as lots for the duel of Paris and Menelaus or Hector and Ajax (*Iliad* 3 and 7, respectively), Proetus’ letter in the *Iliad* is the first known mention of writing in the ancient Greek world. The inclusion likely points to Greek knowledge of the historical truth that royalty used writing to communicate, at least in the Near East.²³ Powell flatly denies the possibility that Homer knows of written text, but finds no issue with the folding tablet upon which Proetus wrote the letter; he affirms that the Greek word *delta* originates from the terminology of the folding diptych, called *dlt*, or “door,” in West Semitic.²⁴ Burkert notes, “The writing tablet, *deltos* in Greek, has even kept its Semitic name, *daltu* . . . *Daltu* originally means door but is used for a writing tablet already in thirteenth-century Ugarit . . .”²⁵

What is remarkable is that the word *deltos* consistently carries the vowel *e* in normal Greek, as opposed to *a* in Semitic *daltu*; slight distortions of vowel coloring are not surprising with borrowed words, but the *e* is equally characteristic of the Greek letter *delta*, which reproduces the same Semitic word. . . . That the normal Greek term for the writing tablet and the letter name show the same metamorphosis indicates that both belong together from the start—in other words, that the *deltos* in Greece is as old as the Greek alphabet.²⁶

Weighing archaeological and literary evidence, Bellamy concludes, “Bellerophon’s tablet . . . no longer need be rationalized away, as a primitive pictographic scratching on improvised planks, or

²³ For example, cf. Hooker or Charpin 130-35 for images of Babylonian tablets and enveloped correspondence between kings. See also the Assyrian polyptych, a hinged writing-board, ironically labeled by ownership with the inscription, “Palace of Sargon” (Charpin 193).

²⁴ Powell 2002: 115, citing Powell 1997.

²⁵ Burkert 1992: 30.

²⁶ Burkert 1992: 30.

a dim reminiscence of Mycenaean glories, or an object as ‘fabulous’ to Homer as the Chimaera . . . ”²⁷ The Bellerophon tale is particularly intriguing in that it offers a clear intersection of Greek and Near Eastern mythology. The motif of a king’s deceitful letter dooming the courier, a motif frequently seen in the Near East, comes together with linguistic formulae and components of heroic tales that can be traced to Indo-European storytelling, while the Chimaera is reminiscent of monsters in both Indo-European and Near Eastern cultures. Mundi emphasizes the value of juxtaposing Greek texts with apparent Near Eastern analogues.

Like its counterpart in comparative Indo-European studies, comparison of Greek myths with Oriental analogues can help uncover ideological structures and conceptual relationship otherwise latent in the Greek mythological sources by making possible the study of Greek myth not only within in the confines of its own closed system, but also in a more extensive nexus of mythic themes and ideology common to Greek and Near Eastern thought.²⁸

The Bellerophon saga, first recorded by Homer and continuing with an influence that reaches as far as Shakespeare and present-day popular culture, is an excellent example of the “Greek myths and Oriental analogues” mentioned by Mundi. Themes appearing in Greece and surrounding cultures are artfully interwoven with Corinthian folk-heroism and Diomedes’ philosophical thoughts on mortal limitations, illustrated by the Dionysian story prior to Glaucus’ speech.

By recounting the story of Bellerophon, Glaucus implicitly chides Diomedes for presumptuousness, and expresses his own views of the transient nature of human life.

οἴη περ φύλλων γενεῆ τοίη δὲ καὶ ἀνδρῶν.
φύλλα τὰ μὲν τ’ ἀνεμος χαμάδις χέει, ἄλλα δέ θ’ ὕλη

²⁷ Bellamy 293.

²⁸ Mundi 144. In addition to Near Eastern motifs, a comparison of the two stories renders support for the give-and-take relationship between Greek culture and older Indo-European mythology, as discussed in Chapter 4.

τηλεθόωσα φύει, ἔαρος δ' ἐπιγίγνεται ὄρη·
ὥς ἀνδρῶν γενεὴ ἢ μὲν φύει ἢ δ' ἀπολήγει.

What sort are generations of leaves, even that is the sort for generations of men:
Wind showers the leaves on the ground, but the forest,
flourishing, produces shoots, and others arise in the spring season.
Thus generations of men: the one arises, and the other fades away.

Il. 6.146-49.

Once, Bellerophon also was vigorous and honored; now, with the passing of time, his splendor has passed away. Glaucus' warning and the reference to his great-grandfather's ambiguous downfall are timely if he means to cause reflection on reversals of fortune. Diomedes and Glaucus, pre-eminent among their peers in battle, ought to remember their own mortality and the tempestuous whims of fortune. "[T]he tale of Bellerophon's ultimate helplessness . . . calls into question the sufficiency of heroism alone."²⁹ Despite his strength and success, Bellerophon is still left to wander aimlessly and helplessly.

Scholiasts and later commentators in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries look beyond the philosophical aims of the Bellerophon tale in order to justify its place in the epic, entertaining notions that Homer excerpts stories from well-known Corinthian cycles by the mysterious poet Eumelus. One scholiast implicitly links Bellerophon to Eumelus in making the following conjecture regarding the preceding tale of Dionysus: "This account (of Dionysus) is given by many authors, but occurs first in Eumelus the poet of the *Europa*."³⁰ The idea that the stories of Dionysus and Bellerophon are borrowed from the Corinthian poet is rejected by scholars such as

²⁹ Fineberg 28. Fineberg continues, "Although no explicit narrative connection joins Bellerophon's wanderings with the welcome he received from Oeneus, the poetic logic of the juxtaposition suggests a connection. As Oeneus once secured Bellerophon, Diomedes will now secure Glaucus [with *xenia*]."

³⁰ Scholium, *Il.* 6.131. Translated by Edmonds.

Lang and Alden, despite its acceptance by Murray and other commentators.³¹ Making sense of Bellerophon's ruin based on the philosophy expressed in the passages would explain Homer's omission of further explanation. The audience does not need to know more details for the sake of the story at hand, but may very well be aware of the mythology as it exists orally elsewhere.

Powell contends that Homer is incorporating Eastern stories that the poet does not fully understand. For Powell, it is Homer's choice to call letters *σήματα* ("signs") rather than *γράμματα* ("scratchings") that argues against an intentional reference to words instead of symbols or simple characters.

But 'writing' is always *γράμματα*, 'scratchings,' reflecting the ancient Greek experience of writing, learned by scratching marks in a wax tablet. Homer does not understand the reference to writing. It came to him with the Eastern story, whose hero's name contains the Levantine storm god Baal. If writing were part of Homer's world, we would find more of it in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* than in a single clumsy reference . . .³²

He continues, "It is a test of Hellenic provincialism during the Iron Age that their epic poets, at its conclusion, have never heard of writing."³³ Powell does not address Homer's use of the participle *γράψας* ("having scratched") in regards to the *σήματα*.

The Sargon Legend

The Sargon Legend is a similar instance in which a written word is used as a weapon. In this case, the letter doubtlessly contains a type of writing. The traditions of Sargon and

³¹ Murray embraces the scholiast's idea. "Evidently Homer . . . since he was using the *Europa* for the story of Bellerophon, took the Dionysus-Lycurgus story from them at the same time" (162). Cf. Lang 173-74 and Murray 161-63. Alden's rejection of Homeric borrowing from Eumelus' written *Europa* is more implicit: "While I accept that the material eventually fixed in the poems of the Epic Cycle was familiar to Homer, I do have trouble with the certainty . . . that motifs in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* derive from fixed versions of the poems of the Epic Cycle. I would prefer to say that the Homeric motifs derive from songs in circulation in the epic tradition . . ." (9-10).

³² Powell 2002: 8.

³³ Powell 2002: 10.

Bellerophon share many other common elements besides the letters, including the role of divine support and descriptions of noble character. The Legend, composed of two incomplete tablets in Sumerian, describes Sargon's rise to royalty. The tablets date to the Old Babylonian period, or roughly 2000-1600 B.C.E.³⁴ Segments A and C of the Legend were discovered on one tablet in Uruk (Sumerian Unug).³⁵ Segment B was found at the Babylonian site of Nippur (Sumerian Nibru, Akkadian Nibbur), a thriving religious center in northern Sumer. Although Nippur, a home to scribal schools and a focal point of cult practices, has yielded over a thousand cuneiform tablets, no other copies of the Sargon Legend have been found at the site.³⁶ The fragmented portions of Segment A expresses the joy of Sargon's birth during the prosperous era of King Ur-Zababa's reign. Ur-Zababa rises to power over the kingdom of Kish.

A9. **an** ^d**en-lil**₂ inim kug-ga-ne-ne-a zid-de₃-eš X [X X]

10. ki ud-bi **šar-ru-um-ki-in** iri-ni /iri\ [...]

11. ad-da-ni la-i-bu-um ama-/ni\ [...]

12. šar-ru-um-ki-in šag₄ dug₃-ga mu-[...]

13. mu im-ta-tu-ud-da-aš X [...]

An and Enlil, however, authoritatively (?) decided (?) by their holy command to alter his term of reigning and to remove the prosperity of the palace.

Then **Sargon** -- his city was the city of,

his father was La'ibum, his mother,

Sargon with happy heart.

³⁴ Rubio's Table 2.1 in Ehrlich's compilation. The majority of the Legend was published by Scheil in 1916. Cf. Lewis 133.

³⁵ "[T]he events that concern the poem occur primarily in the north of Babylonia, the tablets on which it is recorded . . . come from the south" (Black *et al.* 41).

³⁶ Cf. Robson.

Since he was born³⁷

Sargon's excellence must have been further described in this section; later texts affirm that he merits divine favor from his youth. Presumably because of Sargon's impressive demeanor or strength of character, King Ur-Zababa promotes the hero from a deliveryman to his cupbearer. Sargon remains under the protection of the goddess Inana (kug ^dinana-ke₄ da-bi-a muš₃ nu-tum₂-me, "Holy Inana did not cease to stand by him," B7). The text is badly damaged in this portion, but indicates that Ur-Zababa begins experiencing frightening dreams after five or ten days.

B1. ud ne ud te-en-e um-ma-te-a-ta

2. ^mšar-ru-um-ki-in sa₂-dug₄ e₂-gal-še₃ im-de₆-a-ba

3. itima kug ki-tuš kug-ga-ni-a im-ma-da-an-nu₂

4. šag₄-ga-ni-še₃ mu-un-zu eme-na nu-ĝa₂-ĝa₂ lu₂-da nu-mu-un-da-ab-be₂

One day, after the evening had arrived
and Sargon had brought the regular deliveries to the palace,
Ur-Zababa was sleeping (and dreaming) in the holy bed-chamber,
his holy residence.

He realized what the dream was about, but did not put into words,
did not discuss it with anyone.³⁸

B8. ud 5-am₃ ud 10-am₃ ba-zal-la-ta

9. lugal ^dur-^dza-ba₄-ba₄ im-da-la₂ ki-tuš-bi-ta mi-ni-ib-ĥu-luh

After five or ten days had passed,
king Ur-Zababa and became frightened in his residence.

³⁷ A9-13 (Segment A, lines 9-13). Translations of the Legend are from the Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature (ETCSL) unless otherwise indicated. I have left the text in its electronic formatting for convenience, but comparison with Cooper's transliteration would be helpful for further consideration. Certain words are in bold to draw attention to forms or help with context. I will primarily use the ETCSL in discussing the Sargon Legend, but occasionally refer to the translations of Cooper and Heimpel. "Kic" is equivalent to "Kish," as "Belic-tikal" below is to "Beliš-tikal."

³⁸ As with A9-13 and all translations of the Legend unless noted, translations of B1-4, 8-9, and 12-24 are from the ETCSL.

The contents of the nightmares are not disclosed, but they repeatedly leave the king terrified.

Meanwhile, Sargon has a dream, as well.

- B12. ud-ba MUŠ₃.KA.UL e₂-kurun₂ ^dezina₂-ka
13. ^mšar-ru-um-ki-in³⁹ u₃-sa₂-gin₇ la-ba-nu₂ ma-mu₂-de₃ ba-nu₂
14. kug ^dinana-ke₄ ma-mu₂ id₂ mud-še₃ mu-un-gir₅-gir₅
15. ^mšar-ru-um-ki-in dum-dam-ma-na zu₂ ki-/še₃\ ba-da-ab-ra-/aḥ\
16. dum-dum-bi lugal ^dur-^dza-ba₄-ba₄ ḡiš tuku-tuku-da-ni
17. lugal-ra ki kug-ga-ni-še₃ im-ma-da-an-/sun₅\-ne-eš
18. ^mšar-ru-um-ki-in ki ^dur-^dza-ba₄-ba₄-še₃ im-ma-da-an-sun₅-ne
19. MUŠ₃.KA.UL(GA) ma-mu₂ ḡi₆ u₃-[na (X)]-/na u₃\-mu-ri-du₈
20. ^mšar-ru-um-ki-in lugal-a-ni im-ma-ni-ib-gi₄-gi₄
21. lugal-ḡu₁₀ ma-mu₂-ḡu₁₀ u₃-mu-ri-dug₄-ga
22. ^lu₂ki-sikil 1-am₃ an-gin₇ sukud-da-ni ki-gin₇ daḡal-la-ni
23. /suḡuš?\ bad₃-da-gin₇ ḡar-ḡar-ra
24. [id₂] /maḡ id₂ mud\-še₃ ḡa₂-ra mu-un-gir₅-re-de₃-en

It was then that the cupbearer of Ezina's wine-house,
Sargon, lay down not to sleep, but lay down to dream.
In the dream, holy Inana drowned Ur-Zababa in a river of blood.
The sleeping Sargon groaned and gnawed the ground.
When king Ur-Zababa heard about this groaning,
he was brought into the king's holy presence,
Sargon was brought into the presence of Ur-Zababa (who said:)
"Cupbearer, was a dream revealed to you in the night?"
Sargon answered his king:
"My king, this is my dream, which I will tell you about:
There was a young woman, who was as high as the heavens and
as broad as the earth.

³⁹ It is interesting that Segment B is the only one of the tablets to denote Sargon's name with the marker of the mortal's personal name, the ^m preceding the name. In later works, Sargon will be marked with the divine determinative ^d; in Segments A and C, his name is not marked with any determinative. I wonder if this detail should raise questions about greater distinction between Segments A and C and Segment B in the epic tradition itself, especially in light of the fact that the majority of more formulaic features seem to appear in B; still, Segment B is the portion with lengthy text.

She was firmly set as the base of a wall.

For me, she drowned you in a great river, a river of blood.

Ur-Zababa immediately devises a plan to have Sargon murdered by the chief smith, Belic-tikal, a literate man “who can write tablets” (B30). The plan is unsuccessful due to Inana’s diligent watch over Sargon. As he approaches the building where he would meet his death, Sargon is intercepted by the goddess as she jumps in his path:

B39. kug ^dinana-ke₄ /zag zid-da\ -ni muš₃ nu-tum₂-mu
40. e₂-sikil-la e₂ nam tar-ra-ka 5 nindan 10 nindan nu-te-a-na
41. kug ^dinana-ke₄ igi mu-/un-na\ -ni₁₀-ni₁₀ ĝiri₃-ni im-da-RU
42. e₂-sikil-la e₂ kug-ga na-nam lu₂ mud nu-mu-un-kur₉-re

Holy Inana, however, did not cease to stand at his right hand side, and before he had come within five or ten nindan of the E-sikil, the fated house, holy Inana turned around toward him and blocked his way, (saying:)
"The E-sikil is a holy house! No one polluted with blood should enter it!"

Finally, Ur-Zababa decides to send Sargon away to be indirectly executed.

B46. ^mšar-ru-um-ki-in ud 5-am₃ ud 10-am₃ ba-zal-la-ta
47. ki ^dur-^dza-ba₄-ba₄ lugal-la-na-še₃ im-ma-da-an-ku₄-ku₄
48. šag₄ e₂-gal kur gal-gin₇ /ki us₂\ -sa im-/ma-da\ -an-ku₄-ku₄
49. lugal ^dur-^dza-ba₄-ba₄ im-da-la₂ ki-tuš-/bi\ -ta mi-ni-ib-ĥu-luĥ
50. šag₄-ga-ni-še₃ mu-un-zu eme-na nu-ĝa₂-ĝa₂ lu₂-da nu-mu-un-da-ab-be₂
51. itima-ka ki-tuš kug-ga-ni ^dur-^dza-ba₄-ba₄ mi-ni-ib-ĥu-luĥ
52. šag₄-ga-ni-še₃ mu-un-zu eme-na nu-ĝa₂-ĝa₂ lu₂-da nu-mu-un-da-ab-be₂
53. ud-bi-ta <inim> im-ma /gub-bu ĥe₂-ĝal₂\ im /sig₉-sig₉-ge\ ba-ra-ĝal₂-la-am₃
54. lugal ^dur-^dza-ba₄-ba₄ ^mšar-ru-um-ki-in diĝir-re-e-ne šu dug₄-ga-ar
55. im-ma gub-bu niĝ₂ ni₂ ba-ug₇-a-ta
56. unugki-ga lugal-zag-ge₄-e-si šu ba-ni-ib-da₁₃-da₁₃

After five or ten days had passed, Sargon came into the presence of Ur-Zababa, his king;

he came into the palace, firmly founded like a great mountain.

King Ur-Zababa and became frightened in his residence.

He realized what was it about, but did not put into words,
did not discuss it with anyone.

Ur-Zababa became frightened in the bed-chamber, his holy residence.

He realized what it was about, but did not put into words,
did not discuss it with anyone.

In those days, although writing words on tablets existed, putting tablets into envelopes did not yet exist.

King Ur-Zababa dispatched Sargon, the creature of the gods, to Lugal-zage-si in Unug with a message written on clay,
which was about murdering Sargon.

Cooper translates B54-56 as “King Urzababa, for Sargon, creature of the gods,/ Wrote a tablet, which would cause his own death, and/ He dispatched it to Lagulzagesi in Uruk.”⁴⁰ Citing Cohen, Cooper points out that line 53 parodies one of the two Sumero-Akkadian etiologies for the invention of writing.

The *en* of Kulaba pressed some clay and wrote words
on it as if on a tablet -

In those days, writing words on tablets had not existed,
But now, with the sun’s rising, so it was!

The *en* of Kulaba wrote words as if on a tablet, and
so it was!⁴¹

Cooper interprets the message’s contents as being accessible to Sargon.

Urzababa must now be trying to anger Lugalzagesi, the overlord of southern Babylonia, against Sargon, hoping that Lugalzagesi will somehow do away with Sargon. Line 55 tells us that this plan will backfire, leading to Urzababa’s death, because, no doubt, the table written by Urzababa was seen by Sargon, and since

⁴⁰ Translation from Cooper 77, from tablet 3N T296. In his alternative translation, Heimpel does not address 51-56, saying, “I cannot give a running translation” (Cooper and Heimpel 78).

⁴¹ See Cooper and Heimpel 82n. 17, citing Cohen on the parody of “Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta” 503ff.

tablets in those days were not sealed in envelopes he could read the message and take appropriate countermeasures.⁴²

Segment B ends abruptly after the letter, and the majority of Segment C is essentially incoherent in translation. As for Sargon's rise to cupbearer and usurpation of the kingdom, the same motif is well-attested elsewhere. In other versions, Sargon was supposedly appointed royal gardener, rather than cupbearer. "[T]he elevation of a gardener to kingship was a favorite for Mesopotamian storytellers," Drews notes. Güterbock identifies the Sargon tradition as taking part in a common motif of kings who rise to royalty from a low birth, or "dem Typus 'des Königs niederer Herkunft.'"⁴³ For instance, according to some tales, the Persian king Cyrus was also originally a gardener. The Byzantine historian Agathias claims that a gardener named Beletaras supplanted the king of Isin, a Mesopotamian dynasty of the early second millennium B.C.E. Considering Agathias' assertion, Drews adds, "But Agathias's story might be used as evidence that the Babylonians told the same story about a king named Bel-eter as they told about Sargon . . ." ⁴⁴ The motif of the low-born king and his rise to power is not unusual. By the eighth century, Sargon's birth story is further inflated with the incorporation of another popular theme, that of the infant exposed in a river. The exposure story is included in the "Sargon Birth Legend." The Birth Legend does not tell of Ur-Zababa's lethal letter or Sargon's struggles to secure power. It is worth noting that the Birth Legend is the only surviving story of Sargon's alleged exposure at birth, just as the Sargon Legend is the single extant reference to the motif of

⁴² Cooper (Cooper and Heimpel) 82.

⁴³ Güterbock's words, cited by Drews 388. I wonder if the king's letter is a motif added to original Sargonic stories as a "historical" embellishment and if the emphasis on Sargon's ignoble parentage is inherited from older sources, thus evident in later installments about the king.

⁴⁴ Drews 390 f.16. The legendary line of Semiramis was ultimately overthrown by a gardener, as well (Drews 389-90).

the letter in relation to Sargon. The letter in the Legend is not quite like other such letters in epic or historiography; instead, like the letter in Homer's Bellerophon, the story is noteworthy for other qualities that make the letter motif appear more unusual.

The Uniqueness of the Letters in the Legend and *Iliad*

The motif of the letters in the stories of Bellerophon and Sargon is an example of what has been called the "Uriah Letter."⁴⁵ In stories of the Uriah Letter type, an unwitting messenger is sent (often by a king to another king) with a letter containing instructions for his own death. Variations on the theme appear in literature reaching across cultures and generations.⁴⁶ However, the Sargon Legend and the Bellerophon tale stand out from other Uriah Letter stories due to other common concerns in the elements or transmission of the sagas. Among the many intended victims of Uriah Letters, Sargon and Bellerophon are hero-couriers whose stories' developments can be traced through history and examined for their display of the following characteristics: undisclosed contents of the letter, dreams or visions, divine/ mortal favor, deadly intentions or signs, allusion to the "10-day" timing, specific divine escort attending the victim, reference to a king's wife,⁴⁷ and blood pollution upon the letter's victim.

Although the Uriah Letter in 2 Samuel 11 of the Bible exhibits many commonalities in essence with the Sargon Legend and Bellerophon cycle, it remains distinct from the two traditions. When efforts fail in his attempt to hide his illicit affair with Bathsheba, wife of the

⁴⁵ Cf. Schmidt 67, for example, who recognizes the motif by this title in his 1920 article.

⁴⁶ Examples include the blood-guilt attributed to Bellerophon much later by Pseudo-Apollodorus (*Lib. 2.3*; see Chapter 3).

⁴⁷ A common motif, with possible comparisons ranging from the Egyptian "Story of Two Brothers" to Tristan and Belinda in medieval romance. See also Joseph in the Bible (Genesis 39-42). The medieval version, however, has a twist on the theme: Belinda initially accuses Tristan of attacking her, but confesses to her deceit when Tristan's innocence is apparent. Nevertheless, the young man is sent from the kingdom (*An Entire New Collection of Romances and Novels* 202-03).

Hittite Uriah, King David sends Uriah from Jerusalem to the commander of the army with a letter. The letter contains instructions to place Uriah in the front lines of battle and deliberately cause his death. The ploy succeeds, and David soon takes Bathsheba as his wife. Even though King David's intentions are clearly deadly when he writes the letter, the letter's contents are specifically stated. No dreams or visions occur, nor do repetitive temporal phrases. Bathsheba may loosely meet the need for a "temptress" or (very loosely) a king's wife, and David will receive a form of blood pollution on his own head. By contrast, Sargon and Bellerophon had blood-guilt upon their heads in some particular form in the traditions, indicating that the victim should be guilty. Uriah is not said to be burdened by blood-guilt, at least not in the overt way that Sargon is, or as Bellerophon is in the stories where he has accidentally committed murder. Most importantly, while David suffers for his actions, there is no escort attending Uriah. The Hittite soldier is not the hero or "main character" of a narrative legend or epic, and he is not described as being shrouded in or favored by a divine presence. The episode with Uriah and the letter is more similar to the episodic accounts of the classical Greek historiographers; that is, in Herodotus and Thucydides, victims of Uriah Letters are not necessarily protagonists, their plights are described in passing or in the context of a larger narrative focusing primarily on other characters, and they do not always survive. For the historiographers, however, the allegedly historical letters have a more general function: rather than being directed towards the destruction of one individual, the letters serve as tools. The emphasis is on the messages contained within the letters, not the hazards of the messengers selected to carry them.

In addition to differences in purpose, another distinction between these "historical" letters and those of the other narratives would seem to be a difference in form. In the world of

Herodotus' *Histories*, where oracles and divine favor are factors in the narrative, secret communications are often strictly cryptographic. That is, the text of the message is deliberately and systematically made unavailable to a third party.⁴⁸ In the cases of Sargon and Bellerophon, cryptography is not necessarily a factor. It is unknown whether Proetus utilizes a pre-determined code or a language unfamiliar to Bellerophon, despite Homer's declaration that the tablet is folded. The indication that the text is concealed might reflect cultural norms. The Babylonians used clay envelopes to hide correspondence, and the folded tablet may be symptomatic of Greek acceptance of eastern custom. The folding of the tablet could support the conclusion that the letter is not encoded: Bellerophon may be illiterate, or the text could be in an inaccessible form; Homer leaves the point moot. By the same token, the Sargon Legend makes clear the fact that the king's letter is not contained in an envelope, but equivocates about Sargon's ability to read the tablet. Since the Legend is so fragmented that we can merely guess as to whether or not Sargon read the letter, Ur-Zababa's letter simply cannot be defined one way or another.

Specific references to divine escort, the protagonist's role, or direct malice for a courier do not apply to treasonous messages in Herodotus. Moreover, these letters frequently incorporate cryptography, as shown by many of the following examples catalogued by Van den Hout:⁴⁹

- A) 1.123: Harpagus to Cyrus. In response, A2) Cyrus writes a letter of his own; by attributing this to Astyages, he appoints himself governor of the Persians.
- B) 3.40: Amasis to Polycrates. Polycrates's response ends their guest-friendship.

⁴⁸ "The methods of cryptography . . . do not conceal the presence of a secret message but render it unintelligible to outsiders by various transformations of the plaintext (message to be encoded)" (Kahn xiii).

⁴⁹ I have modified the list for clarity, especially with the addition of alphabetical labels. Letters are defined here as "messages about one subject to an absent person" (van den Hout 23).

- C) 3.128: Bagaeus composes messages from Darius and deceives Oroetes's own guards into killing Oroetes.
- D) 5.14: Darius orders Megabazus to drive out the Paeonians.
- E) 5.35: Histiaeus writes to Aristagoras by tattooing a message on the head of a slave. He sends the slave after the slave's hair has regrown and covered the letter.
- F) 6.4: Histiaeus attempts to disrupt Persian ties with Artaphernes and composes letters making the Persians appear disloyal. The messenger Hermippus delivers the letters to Artaphernes, and Artaphernes has the Persians' responses delivered back to himself.
- G) 7.239: Demaratus secretly warns the Spartans of Xerxes's military plans. The text of the message is concealed on wooden tablets under a coat of wax.
- H) 8.2: Themistocles inscribes a message with dual meaning to the Persians and Ionians.
- I) 8.128: Timoxenus and Artabazus communicate with secret letters tied around arrows.

Despite the generic distinction between these allegedly historiographical letters and those letters of the epic traditions, the contrast between these messages and those of Sargon and Bellerophon is noteworthy: the Herodotean instances are personal letters, secret messages, and misdirections, but they are not surreptitious attacks sent in the hands of unwitting victims. The victims are not the main characters of narratives; their survival is not a critical turning-point for the respective episodes.

Treacherous letters fatal to the courier are described in historiographical detail by Thucydides, as well, and are different from the cases of Sargon and Bellerophon. The comparison between these letters and the epic legends demonstrates a disparity between the epic letter-bearer and literary versions of his historical counterpart. The following account from 1.132.5 of the *History of the Peloponnesian War* relates the treachery of Pausanias, but does not gloss the narrative with repetition or divine intervention.

πρὶν γε δὴ αὐτοῖς, ὡς λέγεται, ὁ μέλλων τὰς τελευταίας βασιλεῖ ἐπιστολὰς πρὸς Ἀρτάβαζον κομπεῖν, ἀνὴρ Ἀργίλιος, παιδικὰ ποτε ὄν αὐτοῦ καὶ πιστότατος ἐκεῖνῳ, μηνυτὴς γίγνεται, δείσας κατὰ ἐνθύμησίν τινα ὅτι οὐδεὶς πῶ τῶν πρὸ ἑαυτοῦ ἀγγέλων πάλιν ἀφίκετο, καὶ παρασημηνάμενος σφραγῖδα, ἵνα, ἢν ψευσθῆ τῆς δόξης ἢ καὶ ἐκεῖνός τι μεταγράψαι αἰτήσῃ, μὴ ἐπιγνῶ, λύει τὰς ἐπιστολὰς, ἐν αἷς ὑπονοήσας τι τοιοῦτον προσεπεστάλθαι καὶ αὐτὸν ἠῦρεν ἐγγεγραμμένον κτείνειν.

Until at any rate, as it is said, as he was about to send to Artabazus the last letters for the king, an Argilian man (who once was his favorite and most loyal to him) became an informer to the Spartans. He became afraid upon a reflection that no one yet of those messengers before him came back, and after forging a counter-seal so that, should he be mistaken in his thought and Pausanias seek to alter something, he would not discover it, he opened the letter, in which he found some such a thing additionally commanded as he had suspected, and that it was written in the letter to kill him.

Thuc. 1.132.5.

Deadly though the orders may be, the letters' contents are disclosed; there are no dreams or visions; no mention of the divine is found in the form of escort or favor; and neither the king's wife nor the messenger's blood pollution is an aspect of the narrative. The courier who is at once hero is missing altogether, even though the Argilian man acts heroically in the following episodes and causes Pausanias to inadvertently reveal the plot before the hidden Spartan ephors. Pausanias and Xerxes agree to execute any messengers bearing the letters, but the messengers are not the narrative's heroes or protagonists. The couriers' deaths are purely means to an end.

Other Thematic Considerations

If the cycles of stories about Sargon and Bellerophon are similar in the letter motif, how might they reflect other common themes shared between two distant cultures in traditions spanning almost three millennia? Earlier forms of the mythologies appear in later texts and testify to an

active oral (or scribal) transmission; however, it is evident that elements of the traditions are intersecting with those of other cultures and periods. Sargon and Bellerophon actively participate in motifs of the letter and divine (and occasionally mortal) favor and escort. Floating elements found in some versions of the stories suggest that perhaps the Sargon Legend was originally more similar to the Bellerophon saga with references to a king's wife, while Sargonic tradition as a whole toys with notions of unexpected error and divine retribution. On the other hand, the cycle of Bellerophon's escapades readily accepts episodes in which Bellerophon experiences dreams and is directly instructed by gods, not unlike Sargon is by Inana.

Repetition and epithets in each of the epics attest to the formulaic transmission that must have occurred prior to or in association with the written form of the texts. The significance of the tenth day is shared by the *Iliad* and the Legend. Events take place on the tenth day in typical Homeric verse (δεκάτη, 176), and after "five or ten days had passed" in the Legend (B8, 46). Repetition of phrasing and epithets in Homer's Bellerophon and Sumerian epic serve to demonstrate the effectiveness of formulaic elements. Not only do some themes permeate cultures, but methods of memorization and dictation seem to be coincidentally shared, as well. Noting oral elements in Homer's Bellerophon is a less daunting task due to the long-standing scholarship of Homeric oral tradition, but in identifying general formulae and repetition in the Sargon Legend, it is striking that most occurrences of these features are found in Segment B. Segment B of the Sargon Legend was found separately from Segments A and C. In this section,

poetic resonance occurs frequently, and titles are often repeated.⁵⁰ However, very little text of A and C is preserved, and thus little can be said about the texts' structure or themes.

A ring composition within the Sargon Legend itself is suggested by Sargon's necessary success and acquisition of the kingly power. The anticipatory opening of Segment A is to be fulfilled as Sargon rises to his destined position. A description of his strength and prosperity might follow in Segment C, as a description of royal or regional prosperity occurred in the beginning of A. At any rate, the conclusion of the lost lines must reiterate Sargon's power and earlier favor of the gods. In contrast to an egregious error Sargon is later alleged to have committed, the Sargon Legend is presumably in keeping with the majority of literature focusing on the king's secure and divinely-sanctioned leadership.

In regards to possible ring composition in Homer's Bellerophon tale, one might argue that the story begins and ends with a birth, or that Bellerophon's downfall fulfills implicit ring composition begun by the nearby allegations of capricious fate. Perhaps a sense of ring composition is evident in the relation of θυμοφθόρα, 170, and ὄν θυμὸν κατέδων, 203: the initial "signs" of Proetus are intended to be "heart-gnawing" or "soul-decaying;" in his wandering, Bellerophon could demonstrate that destruction of a "heart-eating" nature comes to pass. Bellamy translates γράψας ἐν πίνακι πτυκτῶ θυμοφθόρα πολλά (170) as "writing in a folded tablet *soul-killers many*." He explains,

The poet is evidently drawing attention here to a familiar multitude of characters, in a heavily alliterative line (crudely, 'setting down in a *deltos* his dense swarm of death dealers'), as if to reinforce a commonplace. He is visualizing . . . a specific

⁵⁰ See Appendix 3. Examples of epithets and titles could include the Legend's repetitive "E-sikil, the fated house" (B34, 36), "Belic-tikal, chief smith" (B30, 38, 44, 45), and "Holy Inana" (B7, 27, 39); or Homer's "blameless Bellerophon" (6.155, 191) and "intelligent Bellerophon" (6.164, 197). Repetition of lines is frequent in the Sargon Legend (cf. B9, 15, and B3-4/ 49-50).

calligraphy, the virtuosic minuteness and compression notoriously characteristic of the Near-Eastern ‘court hand.’ It is also the hand most likely to have become proverbial for concealing harm . . . ⁵¹

Suspense associated with the tablet and suspiciously foreign characters ominously foreshadow Bellerophon’s ruin in a distant land. Post-Homeric writers assert that Proetus purified Bellerophon’s blood-guilt produced by the inadvertent death of Bellerophon’s brother. If so, the letter’s “heart-eating” characters might rescind the purification process, effecting the “consuming” miasma and causing Bellerophon to wander in endless penance. Such an explanation would help alleviate the awkwardness offered by 6.200-02, the lines containing Bellerophon’s downfall. Willcock contends that these lines unsuitably interrupt the narrative about Bellerophon’s children, stating, “It seems that these three lines are an insertion by somebody, whether the Iliad poet or another, who did not wish to omit the final fate of Bellerophon, and chose an awkward moment for it rather than none at all.”⁵² However, if the “consuming” nature of the letter reverses the purification, the lines about Bellerophon’s fate can be interpreted as showing the consequences of the soul-destroying miasma.

The significance of the emphasis placed on consumption of the soul is intriguing. Is this an epic motif left over from pre-Homeric antiquity? The Sargon Legend has little to offer in this area, but it is interesting that Sargon and Ur-Zababa experience emotional reactions expressed by gnawing and biting. Sargon “gnaws the ground” in his dreams (B15); Ur-Zababa “chews” his lips in fear of Sargon’s dream (B25). In Homer, the term θυμοφθόρος is not unusual. In the *Odyssey*, for instance, θυμοφθόρ- occurs four times, often with meanings of “life-destroying” or

⁵¹ Bellamy 294.

⁵² Willcock 246.

simply “deadly.”⁵³ However, it does have an unusual sense as Penelope assures the disguised Odysseus of her protection: τῷ δ’ ἄλγιον, ὅς κεν ἐκείνων/ τοῦτον ἀνιάζη θυμοφθόρος· οὐδέ τι ἔργον/ ἐνθάδ’ ἔτι πρήξει, μάλα περ κεχολωμένος αἰνῶς (“And it would be worse for that one, whoever of those θυμοφθόρος should grieve this fellow,” 19.322-23).⁵⁴ The *Odyssey* usually associates θυμοφθόρ- with potions and the state of the body: Antinous worries that Telemachus will retrieve θυμοφθόρα φάρμακα (“drugs”) to poison the suitors (2.329), and Penelope is overwhelmed with θυμοφθόρον ἄχος (“anguish”) at hearing of Telemachus’s departure (4.716). Odysseus suffers a “heart-eating” effect as he is at the home of Circe, whose cleansing of Odysseus purges him of “heart-eating weariness” (ἐκ κάματον θυμοφθόρον, 10.363). When she notices that Odysseus abstains from food, Circe alludes to the second method of heart-consumption: τίφθ’ οὕτως, Ὀδυσσεῦ, κατ’ ἄρ’ ἔζξει ἴσος ἀναύδω,/ θυμὸν ἔδων, βρώμης δ’ οὐχ ἄπτεαι οὐδὲ ποτῆτος; (“Odysseus, why do you sit thus, like a speechless man, *eating your heart out*, and why do you touch neither food nor drink?” 10.379).⁵⁵

Phrases connoting devouring the heart are used occasionally by different Homeric characters, but with the consistent connotation of heartache. Thetis alters the typical θυμὸν ἔδων phrase to ἔδδει κραδίην as she admonishes Achilles to allow ransom of Hector’s body (τέο μέχρις ὀδυρόμενος καὶ ἀχεύων/ σὴν ἔδδει κραδίην μεμνημένος οὔτε τι σίτου/ οὔτ’ εὐνῆς, “How long lamenting and mourning will you consume your heart, turning your mind towards neither food nor your bed?” *Il.* 24.128-30). Odysseus and his companions “eat their hearts out” after the

⁵³ Liddell and Scott, θυμοφθόρος.

⁵⁴ Regarding Penelope in Book 19, Stanford comments, “This use of θυμοφθόρος as ‘heart-breaking, troublesome, hurtful’ is not exactly paralleled elsewhere: here only is it applied to persons. . . . It can hardly be passive (= ‘with soul destroyed, corrupted’) as the Scholiast suggests” (329; see his note on 19.322-24).

⁵⁵ I have followed the schemes of both Cunliffe and Liddell and Scott in distinguishing the ἔδων/ κατέδων of “eating one’s heart” from various other uses of the verbs.

encounter with the Cicones and a violent storm (ἔνθα δὺν νύκτας δύο τ' ἡματα συνεχῆς αἰεὶ/ κείμεθ', ὁμοῦ καμάτῳ τε καὶ ἄλγεσι θυμὸν ἔδοντες, "And we laid there for two nights and two days, at the same time eating our hearts with weariness and sorrows," 9.74-75), and as the crew lands on Circe's island (ἔνθα τότε ἐκβάντες δύο τ' ἡματα καὶ δύο νύκτας/ κείμεθ' ὁμοῦ καμάτῳ τε καὶ ἄλγεσι θυμὸν ἔδοντες, "Then disembarking there for two days and two nights we lay, at the same time eating our hearts with weariness and sorrow," 10.142-143).

Because Odysseus is a cursed man throughout the course of the majority of his adventures, his θυμὸν κατέδων can compare to that of Bellerophon. In some way, both men are abominable to gods. Nonetheless, no thematic curse is applied in the case of Achilles in *Iliad* 24. Elsewhere in Homer, then, the phrase and its variation with ἔδων appear where we might consider it to be proper, or even expected: characters grieve their misfortunes, remaining in a contemplative state of misery. For Bellerophon, the unexpectedness of θυμὸν κατ-έδων (heightened by the κατ-) is usually explained by Homeric omission. The deaths of his son and daughter occur after the gods' enmity, as indicated by the δέ, introducing a new subject rather than an explanation, as well as the aorist tenses employed in the description: Ἴσανδρον δέ οἱ υἱὸν Ἄρης ἄτος πολέμοιο/ μαρνάμενον Σολύμοισι κατέκτανε κυδαλίμοισι/ τὴν δὲ χολωσαμένη χρυσήνιος Ἄρτεμις ἔκτα ("And Ares insatiate-of-war killed his son Isander battling with the renowned Solymi, and golden-reined Artemis, enraged, killed his daughter, *Il.* 6.203-205).

Odysseus is made to wander accursed for almost the entirety of the time that he has fallen from favor. If not for Athena's intervention, he, like Bellerophon, would be made to wander in the ongoing state of "eating out" his heart. Sargon is likewise dependent upon direct intervention and support of a goddess, as is manifest from the beginning of the Sargon Legend. The gods step

in and counteract the effects of the letter or miasma upon the couriers, proactively interfering with or supporting them.

In the cases of Sargon and Bellerophon, divine favor is manifested as an ongoing presence. The gods bestow beauty and charm upon Bellerophon at his birth, and as Sargon is called “creature of the gods,” so Bellerophon is heroically recognized as θεοῦ γόνον, or “offspring of a god” (192). A more subtle declaration of Bellerophon’s godlike qualities is emphasized by the persistent application of the epithet ἀμόμωνα (“blameless,” 155, 191) to Bellerophon himself and to the attendance that he receives on his journey to Lycia (ἀμόμوني πομπῆ, 172). An indication that the death of the Chimaera is well-known to Homer’s audience is implicit in the lack of elaboration, when Bellerophon slays the beast purely through faith in “tokens” of the gods (θεῶν τεράεσσι, 184).

Pausanias refers to Athena’s assistance of Bellerophon in the *Description of Greece*, showing that the gods’ obscure “tokens” are defined by non-Homeric narratives. Bellerophon’s connection with Athena is specifically illustrated (Ἀθηνᾶν γὰρ θεῶν μάλιστα συγκατεργάσασθαι τὰ τε ἄλλα Βελλεροφόντη φασὶ καὶ ὡς τὸν Πήγασόν οἱ παραδοίη χειρωσαμένη τε καὶ ἐνθεῖσα αὐτῇ τῷ ἵππῳ χαλινόν, “For they say that Athena especially of the gods assisted Bellerophon in other respects, and in that she delivered Pegasus to him, after herself taming and setting a bridle on the horse,” 2.4.1). The existence of further mythology surrounding the character is clear. In the years after the *Iliad*, information filling in the possibly intentional Homeric gaps is supplied by commentators, mythographers, and historians who provide glimpses into the active oral dimension of the hero’s exploits. Through the years, Bellerophon’s connection to the gods

becomes more intricate: in some versions, he is particularly pious and his downfall is overlooked; in others, Pegasus is praised for his righteousness in casting off Bellerophon.

Even as Bellerophon's interactions with the gods are clarified or modified in various versions of the story, his early ties with the divine remain linked to the hero's accomplishments. The emphasis on his former piety enhances the poignancy of his tragic downfall. In Sargonic tradition after the Legend, Sargon's forceful association with the divine at first remains strong; in the chronicles and Akkadian tales, the gods maintain a powerful grip on his success. However, Sargon's end is confusing in the propagandistic kingly chronicles that hint at his "fall" into irreverent action. Like Bellerophon, his earlier behavior is unwaveringly devout and accompanied by the immortals' blessing, as would be expected of a heroic king selected by the gods. The Sargon Legend, for example, states that Inana "did not cease to stand by" Sargon (B7), or that, as in Cooper's translation, Inana "was unceasingly working behind the scenes."⁵⁶ Inana does "not cease to stand at (Sargon's) right hand side" (B39) as he carries out his errand of delivery to Belic-tikal.⁵⁷ Interestingly, just as Athena comes to Bellerophon in later versions and delivers a harness for Pegasus, Inana appears to Sargon and actively intercepts him. West's note

⁵⁶ ETCSL, and Cooper and Heimpel 76, respectively. Kug, translated as "holy" (or "pure") can also be "shining" (Pennsylvania Sumerian Dictionary, PSD). Homer's gods and goddesses are often "shining," as are mortals (e.g., Penelope, "shining of women"). Sumerian's use of "shining" in the sense of "holy" or even "divine" ("godlike?") is parallel to Akkadian and Indo-European etymologies linking divinity with light. We may think of Jupiter and "Deus Pater" > δῖος as "shining." The Akkadians and Sumerians indicated divinity by placing a logogram DINGIR, before names as the transcribed determinative of ^d. DINGIR has the appearance of a star, and does represent a star in its identification as the sign AN. For classicists, the imperial Roman practice of depicting stars above the head of *Divus Iulius* (the divine Julius Caesar) comes to mind. The star's linkage to the deification was associated with the appearance of a comet in 44 B.C.E., used by Antony to legitimize Caesar's divinity. Because the peoples of the Near East sought astrological interpretations as justifications for rule, a correlation between "shining" and "divine" in Babylonian culture could be transmitted to Greek and Roman culture; or, perhaps, Proto-Indo-European civilization shared or inspired the concept. Sargon's name does not receive the divine determinative in the Sargon Legend as it does in later Akkadian texts.

⁵⁷ Other celebrated Mesopotamian heroes, such as Sargon's grandson, are similarly attended; Sargon's connection to the gods is not unusual. In the story of the siege of Apishal, for example, it is said of Naram-Sin that "[t]he gods of the land went with him" (Foster Vol.1: 106, line 3).

that *παρίστασθαι* in Greek epic regularly denotes divine attendance as a metaphorical “standing by” the hero is valid also in the Sargonic literature, where the proactive escort of the god(desses) is both literal and metaphorical.⁵⁸

Inana in Sargon’s dream as related to Ur-Zababa is described as deities frequently are revealed in Sumero-Akkadian mythology. Sargon states that he dreamt of “a young woman, who was as high as the heavens and as broad as the earth. She was firmly set as the base of a wall” (B22-23).⁵⁹ Sargon is afterward said to be “firmly founded like a great mountain” in B48, as if he now has divine or unnatural status. This elevated status could reflect propaganda of the historical Sargon, perhaps based on royal inscriptions that were placed on *narû*, stelae with autobiographical “information” affirming power and legitimacy.⁶⁰ The extension of self-glorifying propaganda from inscriptions on *narû* and in cultural traditions might be evident in B54, when Sargon is called “creature of the gods.” The Sargon Legend is far from autobiographical, but is fairly consistent in its portrayal of Sargon as a “larger-than-life” hero. With his support from the gods and portrayal as more than just a mortal, Sargon is an unyielding force, not unlike the “mountain” he is compared to in B48.

Sargon’s steadfastness is a quality demonstrated in the final surviving lines of the Legend’s Segment C. Here, his stubborn righteousness may be in some way associated with another element possibly shared by the two traditions: the significance of a king’s wife in her interactions with the hero. Sargon is never falsely accused by a spiteful queen as Bellerophon is, but the Sargon Legend may have a relevant point of interest with its mention of a queen in

⁵⁸ West 1997: 224.

⁵⁹ ETCSL, as in Cooper and Heimpel.

⁶⁰ Cf. Grayson in regards to the Weidner Chronicle, cited in Chapter 2.

Segment C. The fragmentary lines C1-10 abruptly resume the narrative that trailed off after the composition of the letter. “With the wife of Lugal-zage-si . . . She (?) . . . her femininity as a shelter. Lugal-zage-si did not . . . the envoy. ‘Come! He directed his steps to brick-built E-ana!’ Lugal-zage-si replied to the envoy: ‘Envoy, Sargon does not yield.’ After he has submitted, Sargon . . .”⁶¹ Based on the obscure mention of the queen and Sargon’s whereabouts, perhaps Sargon is beseeching Inana in response to an unfounded accusation, or is refusing to yield in that he will not turn the goddess’ wrath away from Lugal-zage-si.⁶² In the latter situation, Sargon would be reflecting Bellerophon’s behavior in an anecdote related by Plutarch. Plutarch records that Bellerophon was once invoking Poseidon against King Iobates, and could not be persuaded to avert the god’s anger until the local women shamed him with their immodest entreaties.⁶³ On the other hand, in the Legend, the king’s wife may be willingly joining with Sargon to remove her husband from power. Without more text, we cannot determine the role of the king’s wife in this narrative. Whatever the case may be, the mysterious mention of the queen is worthy of note for its conceivable relation to the motif of the hero’s interactions with the king’s wife.

No queen is featured in other Sargonic epics, just as the letter never appears elsewhere in the king’s biographies. Sargon’s rise to power is a recurring theme, and his conquests of surrounding nations are propagated in numerous narratives. A millennium after his lifetime, the king’s reign is remembered as a proverbial golden age for Akkad; at least fifteen hundred years

⁶¹ ETCSL translation; E-ana, the “House of Heaven,” was a temple of ancient Uruk (Jackson 400). Cf. Cooper’s 3-12: “Lugalzagesi would not [*reply*] to the envoy, (and said:)/ ‘Come now! Would he step within Eana’s masonry?’/ Lugalzagesi did not understand, so he did not talk to the envoy,/ (But) as soon as he did talk to the envoy, the eyes of the prince’s son were opened./ The lord said ‘Alas!’ and sat in the dirt./ Lugalzagesi replied to the envoy:/ ‘Oh envoy, Sargon does not *yi[eld]*./ ‘When he submits, Sargon [] *Lugalz[agesi]*./ ‘Sargon [] *Lugalzagesi]*./ ‘Why does S[argon]?’” (77).

⁶² Lewis conjectures, “[I]t appears that Sargon is a brash rebel who has taken a woman belonging to Lugalzagesi, perhaps as a provocation” (111), yet maybe Sargon’s blamelessness is more credible in the context.

⁶³ This story, told in *Moralia* 248A-B, is discussed in Chapter 3.

after his death, the king himself remains the subject of fabulous birth stories and breathtaking images of world domination. In the following chapter, a survey of the tales about Sargon shows how the tradition is maintained or altered over the centuries. Beginning with the earliest preserved epic narratives of the eighteenth century B.C.E., legends of Sargon also begin to be adopted by other cultures and languages, and, in turn, by new storytellers.

Chapter 2: The Sargonic Tradition

While the Sumerian Sargon Legend has not (yet) been found in any other texts, Sargon remains a cultural hero throughout periods of Akkadian and Assyrian prominence. His exploits as king and conqueror are affirmed by successive generations, reaching across geographical and temporal distance. The two different locations of the tablets from Uruk and Nippur bear witness to the traveling tradition.⁶⁴ The fact that Sargonic tradition was not restricted to the tablets of the Sargon Legend in eighteenth-century Mesopotamia is corroborated by the prominence of the tradition in other texts. Sargon's story is circulated throughout surrounding civilizations, as well, with these texts bearing witness to the literary growth of the epics and Sargonic legend. An interface of orality and literacy likely played a large role in transmitting and transforming these stories where the infant Sargon is placed in a basket and set adrift in a river, or where the Hittites have transferred his famous royal campaigns against the East to Anatolia. Dissemination of the Bellerophon tale took place over centuries, and spilled over into Roman literature; the same phenomenon occurs with the Sargon story over a longer period of time. Interestingly, the influx of Sargonic legend into Assyrian and Hittite culture occurs in a roughly equivalent amount of time to the distribution of the Bellerophon cycle in Italy, and as the stories develop, so does the character. The flexibility of the epic traditions is manifest in these texts, as it is in the additions to and removals from the Bellerophon story.

⁶⁴ In 1904, Fisher argued for a Mycenaean presence in Nippur, identifying the remains of a local palace as Mycenaean (412). He also claimed that archaeological artifacts demonstrated practice of the Tree and Pillar cult, theoretically the cult mentioned by Penelope in *Odyssey* 19.163 (cf. C. Fisher 415ff; Cook 325 on an ancient "tree and pillar cult" of Knossos; and Van Leeuwen 436-47, on *Od.* 19.92f). Fisher's conclusions about the palace as Mycenaean were immediately challenged by Marquand and Peters, however. Neither respondent speaks of the gems, seals, and other small artifacts supposedly reflecting Mycenaean trade or settlement in the Bronze Age. If these finds were accurate reflections of cultic practices, then perhaps some residents of Nippur could have celebrated a cult of far-reaching antiquity, known to the Mediterranean long before the eighth century and attesting to a transmitted tradition of the mythology. Nevertheless, Mycenaean activity or trade in Nippur is not an essential factor in this discussion of epics and transmission.

In compiling the non-exhaustive list of Sargonic works given below, I have followed the approximate dates assigned by Westenholz to the composition of individual texts.

Old Babylonian (~1800-1700)⁶⁵

The first “autobiography” of Sargon, often called “I, Sargon,” is a fragmentary nine-line Akkadian narrative that dates to this period. Other texts from around the period include a single-manuscript Old Assyrian Sargon Legend (~1850) focusing on Sargon’s effectiveness and cataloguing the peoples conquered, among other things; an Akkadian text also found in one manuscript, “Sargon, the Conquering Hero,” telling of battle and victory; and another Akkadian text in one manuscript, called by Westenholz “Sargon in Foreign Lands,” narrating Sargon’s victory, Ishtar’s aid, and expressing the king’s piety in the form of his thanksgiving. Akkadian “Sargon Letters” of Ur and Nippur survive in single-manuscript form, the second with its beginning in a school text. The discovery of contemporary Assyrian texts of the “King of Battle” suggests that the legends of Sargon’s conquests were modified to fit local audiences, perhaps by Assyrian merchants.⁶⁶

Old/ Middle Babylonian (~1650-1200)

A bilingual Sumerian-Akkadian excerpt places Sargon in Ur-Zababa’s palace before the hero rises to the position of king. Two Akkadian manuscripts contain lines about battle and the eastern Cedar Forest in a story called “Sargon the Lion.” Dating from the Middle Babylonian period at ~1350, two peripheral Akkadian manuscripts of the King of Battle survive. Between 1300-1200, six late Hittite manuscripts of the King of Battle adapt the story of Sargon’s conquests of the East and create an Anatolian setting for the events.

⁶⁵ Texts and descriptions are adapted from Westenholz’s essay (2010, in Konstan, especially 26-40) and Westenholz 1997; dates for Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian are those of Rubio in Ehrlich, as cited below. Dates listed with texts are those assigned by Westenholz to the individual texts. For the divisions of dynasties and periods, see the appendix or Rubio 19: Table 2.1 in Ehrlich. The Late Babylonian geographical texts introduced later in this section are purposefully omitted from the list of the more archaic stories, as are the kingly chronicles.

⁶⁶ Westenholz 2010: 39.

Neo-Assyrian/ Neo-Babylonian (~1000-600)

In addition to the Sumerian Sargon Legend's letter, the Birth Legend of Sargon is probably one of the most well-known Sargonic stories. This particular legend displays almost the greatest deal of cultural sharing of epic motifs with its similarities to a key theme running throughout sources in Mediterranean, Anatolian, and even Roman mythology. Two Akkadian manuscripts of the King of Battle also date to this period.

The continuous stream of stories regarding Sargon encompasses genres of all kinds, latching onto diverse cultures with a firm grip. The Sargon Legend is fanciful, but it is not alone in its insight into the popularity of Sargon in the early second millennium, nor in its hints that Sargon's adventures were popular in earlier tales which do not survive. One of the other oldest tales about Sargon from the Old Babylonian Period, "Sargon, the Conquering Hero," treats the vanquishing of Sargon's enemies. The king crosses into Anatolia and piously prepares for battle, calling upon the gods who have placed him in his sovereign position. "He brought his army across the fir-tree (land),/ he conquered the Cedar Mountain./ He took for his weapon the lightning bolt of his [g]od Hanish. He made his offerings, he prayed . . ." ⁶⁷ After a successful conquest, Sargon's army continues on the campaign. Of special note in this text is a solar eclipse coinciding with the invasion. The eclipse is shown as part of the epic tradition here and in omens regarding the king, and is used to represent Sargon's greatness as the stars themselves come to his aid against foes. ⁶⁸ The text ends with Sargon's review of his victories, ending with a triumphant challenge for any rival to traverse the many places where Sargon has gone.

⁶⁷ Lines 11-14, Episode 1; Foster's text and translation (Vol. 1: 100).

⁶⁸ Sargonic tradition preserves the event of the eclipse for generations. Foster cites an allusion to Sargon "who underwent darkness but for whom light came out" (Vol. 1: 103n. 1).

The King of Battle with its versions found in Akkadian and Hittite is by far the most prolific surviving epic regarding Sargon’s heroic career. The King of Battle is inconsistent in that it places Sargon and his unification of Sumer and Akkad in a historical context that fits circumstances hundreds of years after his lifetime, when 1) Assyrian merchants are heavily involved with Anatolia and 2) the city mentioned in the text, Purushanda, is exceptionally influential.⁶⁹ Chavalas concludes that campaigns of Sargon I of Assyria may have become conflated with those of Sargon of Akkad in this Old Assyrian period, but argues that the text ought to be viewed as a reflection of literary themes and tradition concerning Sargon of Akkad.⁷⁰

In a Middle Babylonian telling of the story, Nur-daggal, conquered king of Purushanda, is made to bow before Sargon in submission. Although the overthrown ruler previously believed that Sargon could not reach his region, he now proclaims a belief that Sargon must have been assisted by the gods: “My lord, no doubt your gods lifted up(?) and brought your soldiers across./ [] to cross the river./ What lands could rival Agade? . . . ”⁷¹ A fragmentary copy from Ashurbanipal’s library is either an augmented or disparate version of the same epic. When subject merchants request help against their poor treatment by the arrogant Nur-daggal, Sargon displays his piety by immediately hurrying to the temple of Ishtar.

3. . . .] a-mat mārī^{meš} tamkāri ina še-me-šu im-ra-aš lib-[ba-šú . . .
4. . . . ^{md}šarru-G]I.NA a-mat mārī^{meš} tamkāri ina še-me-šu im-ra-aš l[ib-ba-šú . . .
5. . . .] ^{giš}kakki^{meš} urudqul-mi-i ši x [. . .
6. . . .] x an ina pu-ri-di-šú il-lik i-ru-[ub . . .
7. . . . ^diš-tar šar-rat é-ul-maš [. . . ⁷²

⁶⁹ Chavalas 26.

⁷⁰ Chavalas 27, or 24-28.

⁷¹ Foster Vol. 1: 251, lines 17-20.

⁷² Text and its reconstruction are by Lambert (161).

3. . . . [W]hen he had heard the merchants' words,
he became sick at he[art]
4. [] when [Sar]gon had heard the merchants' words,
he became sick at he[art]
5. [] weapons, axes, . . . []
6. [] on his own legs he went and enter[ed]
7. [] Ishtar, queen of E-ulmash, []⁷³

Lambert translates the lines as “when he heard the word of the merchants [his] hea[rt] was grieved/ when [Sarg]on heard the word of the merchants [his] h[ear]t was grieved . . . ”⁷⁴ The metaphorical importance of the lines is clear: although he is now a powerful conqueror, Sargon is still devout. He suffers distress at the merchants' news of Nur-daggal's boastfulness, and rushes to the temple so that he may express his troubles to the goddess Ishtar.

One Middle Babylonian Akkadian version of the King of Battle, preserved on a school tablet, was probably copied at the Hittite capital and then sent to Egypt for scribal training; the text was found at the Egyptian site of El-Amarna.⁷⁵ The six fragmentary versions of the story in Hittite are slightly varied. Sargon leads his hesitant forces on a campaign against the city of Purushanda, reporting that the goddess Anzili (Ishtar) appeared to him in a dream and gave instructions for victory. The god Enlil appears in a dream to Nur-daggal and promises the king's safety. The importance of dreams and Ishtar's guidance, seen also in the Sargon Legend, prove to be long-lived epic elements in the Anatolian texts. The Hittite versions deliberately shift the

⁷³ Foster Vol. 1: 255, lines 2-7. E-ulmash, Foster notes, is the Ishtar temple in Akkad (or Agade).

⁷⁴ Lines 3-4, Lambert 162. The phrase “sick at heart” does not appear to have any particular linguistic significance in relation to the Homeric “consuming his heart,” except in the figurative sense of heartache. (Another literal translation of the lines of this Late Assyrian recension would be “his heart became troubled” or “his heart was distressed.” Huehnergard suggests translation of *imraṣ libbi* as “(his) heart became annoyed” [*marāsum*, Glossary of Akkadian Words, p. 505].)

⁷⁵ Foster Vol. 1: 250. Cf. Güterbock.

focus of Sargon’s campaign away from other lands to Anatolia, signifying that the Anatolians involve themselves in the consequent victories and revolts in tales of the Akkadian kings. The Hittites did not adopt the tradition of writing their own heroic epic literature, but their version of the King of Battle shows their ability to adapt epics already in circulation.⁷⁶

Other substantial pieces of Sargonic tradition survive in “historiographical” form as kingly chronicles. These texts function to fulfill the specific purpose of differentiating “good” kings from “bad” kings, purporting to provide information about individual rulers and their activities during their rule.

Weidner Chronicle

Probably dating to the first dynasty of Babylon in the Old Babylonian Period, the incomplete “Weidner Chronicle” narrates alleged events of the third millennium B.C.E. Three copies remain, but the location of the most legible fragment, which is in the Neo-Assyrian dialect, is unknown; the text can only be seen in photographs. This chronicle purports to record outcomes for rulers in relation to their reverence for Marduk, the divine patron of Babylon. Explaining that the rulers are evaluated for whether or not they offered fish provisions for Marduk’s temple, Esagil, Grayson calls the chronicle “a blatant piece of propaganda written as an admonition to future monarchs to pay heed to Babylon and its cult.”⁷⁷ Ur-Zababa loses his rule because he attempts to commit sacrilege when he desires to change the sacrifice for Marduk’s temple.

46. Ur-^dZa-ba₄-ba₄ ^{giš}karānī^{meš} ma-qa-a-ti šá É-sag-gíl a-na . . .
 šu-pil-li i[q(?)-bi(?)]

⁷⁶ For this view of the Hittites’ role in reshaping the King of Battle, see Gilan in Konstan 51-65 (chapter 4: “Epic and History in Hittite Anatolia: In Search of a Local Hero”).

⁷⁷ Grayson 43-44.

47. Šarru-kîn ul uš-pe-el it-ta-id-ma ana É-sag-gíl
 [(. . .) uš-ta-aḥ-m]e(?)-e[t(?)]-ma]
48. ^dMarduk mār bīti šá Apsê ḥa-diš ip-pa-lis-su-ma šarru-ut ki[b]-rat ar-ba-ʿi
 id-din-šú
49. za-ni-nu-ut É-sag-gíl [e-piš] x x x x Bābili^{ki} bi-lat-su x x x
50. šu x x kur ^dBēl x [(x)] x pu šu i x [x] e-pir šat-pi-i-šu i-suḥ-ma [. . .]⁷⁸
51. ina maḥ-rat A-ga-dè^{ki} āla i-pu-uš-ma Bābili^{ki} a-na šumi-šú [im-bi]
52. [ana ikk]ib i-pu-šu ik-kir₆-šu-ma iš-tu(!) ši-it ^dŠamši^{ši} a-di e-reb ^dŠamši^{ši}
- 52b. ik-ki-ru-šu-ma la ṣa-la-lu ṣakin-[šu(?)]

46. Ur-Zababa *c[ommanded]* Sargon to exchange
 the libations of wine for Esagil . . .
47. Sargon did not exchange (them). (Instead) he was careful to [*deliver with*
h]as[*te (the fish)*] to Esagil.
48. Marduk, “son of the temple” of Apsu, looked with joy upon him and gave to
 him sovereignty over the Four Quarters.
49. To provide for Esagil, *bread for the shrines at* Babylon, his tribute . . .
50. . . . Bel . . . he dug up the dust of its pit [. . .]
51. In front of Agade he made (another) city and [cal]led it Babylon.
- 52-52b. [Because of] the wrong he (Sargon) had done, he (Marduk) became
 hostile towards him (Sargon). They (his subjects) rebelled against him from east
 to west. He was afflicted with insomnia.⁷⁹

The text of Sargon’s sacrilege suggests to some scholars a conflation with Sargon II of Assyria, whose body was reportedly unburied after a mysterious assassination;⁸⁰ however, the episode claims that it describes the legendary Sargon of Akkad, and is thus relevant to the tradition as a

⁷⁸ Cf. Grayson 149 for the beginning of this line; I have removed italics, but a stylized font would have to be maintained to reproduce his edition (i.e., šu x x kur ^dBēl x . . .).

⁷⁹ Translation and text of Grayson (148-49).

⁸⁰ Sargon II’s son Sennacherib considered the murder a punishment for some crime committed by his father, leading Sennacherib to consult oracles and attempt to appease the gods with expiatory rites (Maspero 271).

whole. Oppenheim interprets the consequences of the sacrilege differently, translating the passage in the following way:

[Sargon] took away earth from the (foundation)-pits of Babylon and he built upon it a(nother) Babylon beside the town of Agade. On account of the sacrilege he (thus) committed, the great lord Marduk became enraged and destroyed his people by hunger. From the East to the West he alienated (them) from him and inflicted upon [him] (as punishment) that he could not rest (*in his grave*).⁸¹

Other kings are not afflicted with the same punishment of unrest in the chronicle, but only approximately seventy-five lines of the composition survive. The other lines describe penalties paid by Sargon's impious successors. After Sargon's death, his grandson Naram-Sin is punished for destroying Babylon's population. Marduk sends savage invasions against the land, and eventually gives sovereignty to Utu-hegal. However, this new king "carried out criminal designs on his (Marduk's) city, and the river (Euphrates) [*carri*]ed [*off*] his corpse."⁸² Sargon's exact punishment is repeated in the Chronicle of Early Kings, a composition highly influenced by the Weidner Chronicle and omen texts.⁸³

Chronicle of Early Kings

The "Chronicle of Early Kings" deals with events from Sargon's late third-millennium reign to that of a king in the 1500's B.C.E. The portion of narrative describing Sargon's fall from

⁸¹ Oppenheim's "Sargon Chronicle," 1969: 266. Italics are added. Wandering is not an uncommon act of grief in Greek or Near Eastern texts. Consider the Homeric Hymn to Demeter, in which Demeter wanders despairing of Persephone's loss; or the Egyptian (New Kingdom) hymn to Osiris, where Isis sorrowfully seeks her deceased brother and husband Osiris ("sought him without wearying" and "roamed the land lamenting") (Hollis 130 in [Ehrlich](#)).

⁸² As above, translation and reconstruction by Grayson (151).

⁸³ Charpin surmises that the Weidner Chronicle is in general an "apocryphal royal letter, though the identity of the fictive correspondents is not certain" (116). Classifying the Weidner Chronicle and its contents as "epic," "admonitory," or "historiographical" offers challenges, causing considerable confusion as to how the episode about Sargon's sacrilege ought to be interpreted. Nevertheless, the popularity of the motifs of Sargon's rise to power, and in some cases subsequent and sudden decline, is evident in the transference of the Sargonic narratives sharing these themes.

favor appears to be copied from the Weidner Chronicle or from a lost omen.⁸⁴ Two lines preceding Sargon’s condemnation in the Chronicle of the Early Kings are parallel to those in the Weidner Chronicles and in a Neo-Assyrian omen collection. Grayson comments, “This theme (of condemning Sargon for desecrating Babylon), which does not appear elsewhere in the Chronicle of Early Kings, is the predominant one in the Weidner Chronicles.”⁸⁵ De Mieroop expresses surprise that in the first millennium “a negative element in (Sargon’s) career appears, a novelty in a tradition that previously had nothing but praise for him.”⁸⁶ Indeed, the record begins positively before presenting Sargon’s degradation: “Sargon, king of Agade, came to power during the reign of Ishtar and/ he had neither rival nor equal” (1-2). Sargon quashes rebellions that arise in his old age and defeats a strong rival, but his own sin follows soon after his victory.

- 18. e-pe-er e-se-e šá Bābili^{ki} is-suḥ-ma
- 19. i-te-e A-ga-dè^{ki} miḥir (gaba.ri) Bābili^{ki} i-pu-uš
- 20. a-na ikkib i-pu-šu bēlu rabû^ú dMarduk i-gu-ug-ma
- 21. ina ḥu-šaḥ-ḥu nišē^{me}-šú ig-mu-ur
- 22. ul-tu ši-it dŠamši^{ši} a-di e-reb dŠamši^š[i]
- 23. ik-ki-ru-šú-ma la ṣa-la-la i-mi-id-[su]

- 18. He dug up the dirt of the pit of Babylon and
- 19. made a counterpart of Babylon next to Agade.
- 20. Because of the wrong he had done the great lord Marduk became angry and

⁸⁴ Grayson 45.

⁸⁵ Grayson 47. Grayson (47) continues, “The author of (either the Weidner Chronicle or the collection) could have copied from the other or both authors could have had a third common source for this passage (i.e. the original omen which has so far not been discovered. Further note that there is one statement (concerning [fellow king] Utu-hegal’s drowning) in the Weidner Chronicle which is reminiscent of an omen. But there is only a similarity between the two, not close parallelism. Apart from these two doubtful instances the statements in the Weidner Chronicle are not similar to omen apodoses. Thus there is little indication of a close affinity between the Weidner Chronicle and omens.” I find the mention of a king’s drowning significant. Conceivably, the drowning of Ur-Zababa foreseen in Sargon’s dream could have originated in relation to omen texts.

⁸⁶ Van de Mieroop 69. In terms of possible conflation of Sargon (of Akkad) with Sargon II, it would be worthwhile to consider the influence of materials regarding Sargon II, although the current study prevents me from doing so. Such conflation might provide a context and cause for Sargon’s more negative portrayal in the Assyrian tradition.

- 21. wiped out his people by famine.
- 23. They (his subjects) rebelled against him⁸⁷
- 22. from east to west
- 23. and he (Marduk) afflicted [him] with insomnia.⁸⁸

In this chronicle, Naram-Sin and the majority of the kings are mentioned solely as conquerors, but a few kings are criminals who suffer for their crimes: one is mysteriously “consumed,” perhaps by disease (“[the god] Bel caused . . . to consume his body . . . *killed him*,” 30); another, who has for some reason appointed his gardener as a substitute king, died “in his palace when he sipped a hot broth.”⁸⁹ In the chronicles, the Sargon Legend’s epic or poetic elements are largely absent. Formulaic repetition and epithets do not appear as they do in the different genre of the Sargon Legend. This “history” maintains features of propaganda and literary tradition regarding Sargon’s divine support and immense glory, while suggesting that Sargon himself might have come to an unexpected end in later literary tradition.⁹⁰

Sargon Birth Legend

Texts from the first millennium show that Sargonic stories proceeded to undergo conflation, or rather inflation, from the influence of other traditions. “The various forms which the Sargon-story takes reflect successive stages of a continuously evolving oral and public

⁸⁷ Line numbers are retained from Grayson’s text; presumably the line number 23 is repeated to show that English word order requires rearranging lines 22 and 23 for a more understandable translation.

⁸⁸ Text and translation of Grayson (153-54, Chronicle 20).

⁸⁹ Grayson 155, lines 29-34.

⁹⁰ In a work known as the “Cursing of Akkad” (Ur III), Sargon is a legendary detail of the distant past. The idea that he received the kingship directly from Enlil by divine right is still propagated, as is an implicit association with piety and Inana. The “Cursing of Akkad” has a line expressing temporality similar to the Sargon Legend: “Not five days it was, not ten days it was . . .” (line 64, Jacobsen 364). Jacobsen notes that the “Cursing” is a unique piece of literature, representing not epic, myth, or hymn. He classifies the work as “admonitory history,” or “mythohistory” regarding the events during the reign of King Naram-Suen (359). Perhaps “admonitory ‘history’” is not a misnomer for the Weidner Chronicle, which labels the reigns of past kings as either “good” or “bad” as encouragement for royal observance of Babylon’s cult worship.

tradition,” Drews states.⁹¹ Several Assyrian and Babylonian manuscripts provide an account of Sargon’s origins in a text now called Sargon’s Birth Legend.⁹² The narrative purports to be autobiographical, but the saga has by now inherited a well-known theme in its story of a child set adrift in a reed basket.

I am Sargon, the mighty king - king of Akkad.
My mother was a high priestess; I did not know my father.
My father’s brother occupies the mountains,
Azupiranu is my city, situated on the bank of the Euphrates.
My mother, the high priestess, conceived me; in secrecy she bore me. 5
She placed me in a reed basket; she sealed my opening with bitumen.
She gave me to the river, from which I could not come forth.
The river carried me; to Aqqi the water-drawer it brought me.
Aqqi the water-drawer brought me forth when he tipped his bucket.
Aqqi the water-drawer raised me as his adopted son. 10
Aqqi the water-drawer made me his gardener.
While I was a gardener, Ishtar loved me and
I reigned as king for [. . .] years.⁹³

Listing achievements and the vast expanse of his empire, Sargon issues a dare to opponents.

Any king who arises after me
[Let him reign as king for . . . years.]
Let him rule humankind!
Let him [cut through] mighty mountains with [copper] pickaxes. 25

⁹¹ Drews 393.

⁹² The Birth Legend is occasionally classified as *narû* literature, named after the stela commemorating kings’ successes. This compositional type begins with a first-person introduction and account of achievements, ending with a formulaic blessing or curse. The Birth Legend was probably never placed on a *narû* (Chavalas 22).

⁹³ Translation from Chavalas 24, as below. “[T]he association with gardening is very old and must have arisen shortly after Sargon’s death if not during his lifetime. . . . It is not impossible that a folktale existed, based on the pattern of (myths in which Ištār had relationships with gardeners), connecting Sargon and Ištār during his career as gardener. Such a tale may have served to explain Sargon’s rise from obscurity and the special attention he lavished on the Ištār cult as the consequence of the liaison that took place in the days when he was a lowly gardener. This type of story of story may have circulated orally and never have been written down” (Lewis 95-96). Compare the details in the Sumerian King List. On Sargonic stories’ popularity continuing throughout at least the eighth century B.C.E., see Lewis 98-111.

Let him ascend the high mountains.

[Let him traverse the foothills.]

Let him sail around the sea lands three times.

Elements of repetition and a type of recurrent epithet are apparent here, but the following text is virtually inscrutable.⁹⁴ The infusion of other legends and motifs into stories of Sargon's origins is readily visible in the Birth Legend, as is the ongoing popularity of Sargon himself. The Birth Legend shows an intermixing of Sargon's obscure beginnings with the infant motif, as if Sargon is a mythological figure whose origins can be readily altered or combined with other themes. The flexible exaggeration of the hero's background foreshadows the mythological treatment Sargon receives in following centuries.

In the Late Babylonian Period and Beyond: Geography, Gilgamesh, Greece

In the Late Babylonian Period, beginning in 539 B.C.E., Sargon is a highly mythologized character in geographical texts. These texts express the wide extent of Sargon's rule, claiming that he conquered areas spanning from sunrise to sunset, including Crete. A world map with Babylon at its center imaginatively describes distant regions beyond the oceans "as populated with exotic animals and monsters . . ." ⁹⁵ Sargon appears in the text together with Utnapishtim and Nur-daggal, his foe from the King of Battle. "The association of (Utnapishtim) with Sargon is clearly due to a confusion in the names of the heroes of the (Epic of Gilgamesh) and of Sargon's enemy, Uta-rapashtim, in the Old Babylonian Sargon story."⁹⁶ During the Greek

⁹⁴ The reed-basket theme is extremely well-known among ancient civilizations, including the Egyptians, Hittites, Greeks, and Romans. Compare also the birth and exposure of baby Moses in the Bible (Exodus 2:1-10). (Lewis provides a very comprehensive treatment of stories with this element.) I find the priestess-mother motif to be an interesting correspondence with the legends of Romulus and Remus, but the similarity is slight. Sargon is not a deity's child, the reasons for his being set adrift are unknown, and the circumstances of his rescue are quite different.

⁹⁵ Van de Mieroop 70.

⁹⁶ Van de Mieroop 71.

classical period, Sargonic tradition remains strong, and the king's travels to the edges of the world become increasingly flamboyant and impressive. Incidents of mixed mythologies regarding Sargon and other prominent heroes such as Gilgamesh suggest the continuing prevalence of Sargonic legend around the Mediterranean. Long after the Birth Legend, connections between Sargon and Gilgamesh are perpetuated in intermixed folktales. Pinches argues that the tale of Gilgamesh in Aelian's *De Natura Animalium* of the third century C.E. is an example of such integration. A Babylonian king sequesters his daughter in fearful response to omens that he will be usurped by her child.

. . . λάθρα δὲ ἡ παῖς (ἦν γὰρ τοῦ Βαβυλωνίου σοφώτερον τὸ χρεῶν) τίκτει ὑποπλησθεῖσα ἕκ τινος ἀνδρὸς ἀφανοῦς. τοῦτο οὖν οἱ φυλάττοντες δέει τοῦ βασιλέως ἔρριψαν ἐκ τῆς ἀκροπόλεως· ἦν γὰρ ἐνταῦθα ἀφειργμένη ἢ προειρημένη. οὐκοῦν ἀετὸς τὴν ἔτι τοῦ παιδὸς καταφορὰν ὀξύτατα ἰδὼν, πρὶν ἢ τῇ γῆ προσαραχθῆναι τὸ βρέφος, ὑπῆλθεν αὐτὸ καὶ τὰ νῶτα ὑπέβαλε, καὶ κομίζει ἐς κῆπὸν τινα, καὶ τίθησι πεφεισμένως εὖ μάλα. ὁ τοίνυν τοῦ χώρου μελεδωνὸς τὸ καλὸν παιδίον θεασάμενος ἐρᾷ αὐτοῦ καὶ τρέφει· καὶ καλεῖται Γίλγαμος, καὶ βασιλεύει Βαβυλωνίων. εἰ δέ τῳ δοκεῖ μῦθος τοῦτο, σύμφημι πειρώμενος ἐς ἰσχὺν κατεγνωκένας αὐτόν· Ἀχαιμένη γε μὴν τὸν Πέρσῃν, ἀφ' οὗ καὶ κάτεισιν ἢ τῶν Περσῶν εὐγένεια, ἀετοῦ τρόφιμον ἀκούω γενέσθαι.

But his daughter gave birth secretly (fate was of course wiser than the Babylonian) being impregnated by some unknown man. Therefore the guards out of fear of the king hurled the child from the acropolis. (For the aforementioned girl was confined there.) Then an eagle seeing very keenly the child still in its fall, before the infant struck the ground, came up under it and placed its back beneath it, and carried it to a certain garden, and set it down very carefully. Therefore the keeper of the ground, after he saw the beautiful child, loved him and raised him. And he is called Gilgamesh, and he rules over the Babylonians. But if this seems to anyone to be a myth, I concede that I am trying to confirm it.

Indeed, I also hear that Achaemenes the Persian, from whom descends the nobility of the Persians, was a nursling of an eagle.⁹⁷

Nat. Anim. XII.2.

The obscure father and the gardener foster parent are elements that link Aelian's narrative with the Sargonic legends. The Birth Legend declares that Sargon did not know his father. Aelian, in turn, claims that Gilgamesh's father was *aphanous* ("invisible") or "some obscure man."⁹⁸ Rather than declaring that the father is divine, as might be expected for a Greek origins story, the narrator assumes that the father is simply unknown. The implication of highly-complex transmission is clear: Aelian's work reflects interaction with tales of Sargon and Gilgamesh.

Sargon's legacy survives in geographies, conflated mythologies, supposed autobiographies, and epic chronicles. His reputation may suffer damage, either as it is confused with Sargon II or developed in the first millennium, but his influence remains. Sargonic epic was available in central cities of Mesopotamia well into the eighth century B.C.E., and Greek tales demonstrate their own interplay with stories such as Gilgamesh; at the same time, Gilgamesh and Sargon might be mixed together. "[T]he literary tradition about the Sargonic dynasty diverges considerably from the historical record revealed by archaeology and contemporary documents. All the Sargonic kings were forgotten except for the names of Sargon and Naram-Suen," Black remarks regarding Sargon's literary enhancement.⁹⁹ Lewis states,

⁹⁷ West calls the story "a remarkable synthesis of genuine Babylonian and Greek story motifs," adding that "[t]he birth legends of Sargon, Cyrus, and Perseus as well as the death of Astyanax seem to have contributed to it" (1997: 478). Cf. 1997: 627-28 on synthesis of Homeric and Mesopotamian tales ("In the case of the *Iliad* there are other passages, unconnected with Gilgamesh, that strongly indicate some sort of 'hot line' from Assyrian court literature of the first quarter of the seventh century. . . . [I]f the existence of such a 'hot line' is admitted no further explanation need be sought out for our poet's acquaintance with Gilgamesh and perhaps other Akkadian classics . . .").

⁹⁸ Tigay 255.

⁹⁹ Black *et al.* 117.

With the possible exception of Gilgameš, Sargon of Akkad dominated the literary tradition of Mesopotamia as no other historical figure before or after. His life and career made so great an impression on the popular imagination that Sargon stories were recounted for nearly two thousand years, not only in Mesopotamia but in Anatolia and Egypt. . . . In the eyes of the tradition, Sargon was a heroic figure larger than life . . . ¹⁰⁰

The Sargon Legend was transmitted across Sumer in cultural centers such as Uruk and Nippur, and Sargon's legacy stretches beyond the limits of his realm literally and figuratively. Akkad and Anatolia cling to the image of the legendary king chosen by the gods and endowed with almost superhuman features, passing down an altered portrait of a man selected from birth. In the next chapter, we see that the cycle of stories regarding Bellerophon passes down through Greece and Rome in a similar way. Tales about the hero abound in the literature of both civilizations. Storytellers receive the saga differently, with some authors indicating that they were aware of variant versions that include events unmentioned by Homer, and others showing that they are interested in completely different aspects of the character.

¹⁰⁰ Lewis 107.

Chapter 3: The Bellerophon Saga

After the *Iliad*, Bellerophon's story fluctuates and grows in the public mind, meshing details of unyielding heroism with exile from a brother's murder, madness, or tenacity in the face of temptation. Other elements remain the same: Bellerophon is "blameless," and he is the recipient of immortal favor for the greater part of his life. Homer's omission of Pegasus is probably most glaring in comparison with other Greek stories. References to Bellerophon are intertwined with Pegasus as early as the *Theogony*, where the Chimaera is vividly described as the creature that "Pegasus destroyed, and noble Bellerophon" (325).¹⁰¹ Fragment 7 from the sixth-century *Catalogues of Women* depicts Pegasus and Bellerophon together and characterizes Bellerophon in terms close to those of the *Iliad*.

So Glaucus came seeking (Eurynome) to wife with gifts; but cloud-driving Zeus, king of the deathless gods, bent his head in oath that the . . . son of Sisyphus should never have children born of one father. So she lay in the arms of Poseidon and bare in the house of Glaucus blameless Bellerophon, surpassing all men in . . . over the boundless sea. And when he began to roam, his father gave him Pegasus who would bear him most swiftly on his wings, and flew unwearying everywhere over the earth, for like the gales he would course along. With him Bellerophon caught and slew the fire-breathing Chimera. And he wedded the dear child of the great-hearted Iobates, the worshipful king . . . lord (of) . . . and she bare . . .¹⁰²

Pindar claims that Bellerophon receives divine inspiration as the hero sleeps beside the altar of Athena, during the course of the tasks assigned by the Lycian king. The king is now called by his non-Homeric name, Iobates.

He boasted to them that in the city of Peirene lay the rule and rich estate and hall of his ancestor, Bellerophon, who once suffered greatly when beside the

¹⁰¹ Cf. *Theogony* 280ff, where Pegasus is mentioned but Bellerophon is not.

¹⁰² Translation by Evelyn-White, with the translator's lacunae retained. (See Hesiod in Works Cited.)

spring he wanted to harness Pegasus, the son of the snake-entwined Gorgon; until the maiden Pallas brought to him a bridle with golden cheek-pieces. The dream suddenly became waking reality, and she spoke: "Are you sleeping, king, son of Aeolus? Come, take this charm for the horse; and, sacrificing a white bull, show it to your ancestor, Poseidon the Horse-Tamer." The goddess of the dark aegis seemed to say such words to him as he slumbered in the darkness, and he leapt straight up to his feet. He seized the marvellous thing that lay beside him, and gladly went to the seer of the land, and he told the son of Coeranus the whole story: how, at the seer's bidding, he had gone to sleep for the night on the altar of the goddess, and how the daughter herself of Zeus whose spear is the thunderbolt had given him the spirit-subduing gold. The seer told him to obey the dream with all speed; and, when he sacrificed a strong-footed bull to the widely powerful holder of the earth, straightaway to dedicate an altar to Athena, goddess of horses. The power of the gods accomplishes as a light achievement what is contrary to oaths and expectations. And so mighty Bellerophon eagerly stretched the gentle charmed bridle around its jaws and caught the winged horse. Mounted on its back and armored in bronze, at once he began to play with weapons. And with Pegasus, from the chilly bosom of the lonely air, he once attacked the Amazons, the female army of archers, and he killed the fire-breathing Chimaera, and the Solymi. I shall pass over his death in silence; but Pegasus has found his shelter in the ancient stables of Zeus in Olympus.

*Olympian Ode 13.61-93.*¹⁰³

The dream related by Pindar would occur during the Homeric tasks, where Homer ambiguously refers to the "tokens of the gods" (*Il.* 6.184). Bellerophon's immense "suffering" in trying to harness Pegasus is unparalleled in Homer. Pindar recalls the capriciousness of fate in detailing Bellerophon's unexpected irreverence: "Inasmuch as winged Pegasus cast off his master Bellerophon, who wished to go to the abodes of heaven with the company of Zeus; but the sweetness beyond due measure is awaited by the most bitter end" (*Isthmian Ode 7.44-48*).

¹⁰³ Translated by Svarlien. (See Pindar in Works Cited.)

Pindar's telling is popular among later authors, and may indicate a common source shared with Homer for the oral tradition itself.¹⁰⁴

Tragedy, Wandering, and Insanity

Taking up the story with great eagerness, the tragedians supplement the Homeric version. In Euripides' fragmentary tragedy *Bellerophon*, Bellerophon wanders the Lycian plain before deciding to mount Pegasus and ride up to the heavens. Thus, Euripides' Bellerophon is resentful towards the gods before he commits his ultimate act of foolishness and tries to ascend to the heavens.¹⁰⁵ Aristophanes parodies Bellerophon as a poor cripple dressed in rags (*Acharnians* 426-29). His depiction of the character's ruin shows that Bellerophon's wandering can be chronologically rearranged to fit the sequence desired by the author: scholiasts claim that the rags and lameness "were consequences of Bellerophon's flight" in Aristophanes, but the anachronistic features signify that the play may have begun with the sorrowful wandering. Collard and Cropp argue that showing Bellerophon in this fashion "would be rather pointless if seen first in his death scene."¹⁰⁶ The same flexible timelines come to light in Euripides' *Stheneboea*, where Homer's Anteia is Euripides' Stheneboea. Bellerophon rejects the queen's advances and is by her contrivance sent away with the deadly letter. Queen Stheneboea pines after Bellerophon and laments her unrequited love during his absence. He returns to exact vengeance upon his false accuser, and after luring her onto Pegasus' back, he hurls her from the air into the sea. Murray supplies an ending for the story, stating, "Bellerophon returns for the last

¹⁰⁴ I return to this point in the final chapter regarding Pindar and Homer's wording for the tasks.

¹⁰⁵ Euripides records imagery of Pegasus in the battle against the Chimaera in *Ion*: καὶ μὲν τὸνδ' ἄθρησον/ πτεροῦντος ἔφεδρον ἵππου· / τὰν πῦρ πνέουσιν ἐναίρει/ τρισώματον ἀλκάν, "And look, this seat of the winged horse: it slays the three-bodied force breathing fire," *Ion* 201-204.

¹⁰⁶ Collard and Cropp (See Euripides in Works Cited; 291). In *Peace* 136, Aristophanes returns to mockery of Bellerophon's flight on Pegasus, portraying a heroic figure who rides a dung beetle into the heavens.

time to hurl denunciations upon Proetus and all the human race, and goes away to end his life in desert places.”¹⁰⁷ Murray’s idea may be drawn from the narrative hypothesis of the play that was recorded by Ioannes Logothetes, a Byzantine scholar who lived around 1100 C.E. The hypothesis relates how Bellerophon initially returned from Lycia to “denounce Proetus,” killed Stheneboea after hearing of a second plot to murder him, and returned to Proetus in a last denunciation of the evils that the royal couple committed against him.¹⁰⁸ Conversely, one fragment assigned to the beginning of the play by Collard and Cropp features Bellerophon’s statement that he will remain virtuous in the face of treachery. Instead of staying in the king’s house and suffering abuse, he will “deliberate in the countryside” (ἀλλ’ εἰς ἀγροῦς γὰρ ἐξιῶν βουλευσομαι, fr. 661, line 27).¹⁰⁹ The adaptability of the tragic context for the wandering and incurring of divine hatred demonstrates that the Bellerophon cycle (composed of the Anteia, the tasks, and the wandering) was not considered to be fixed by any authoritative written source. At any rate, the existence of variant versions allowed for embellishment and poetic license.¹¹⁰

Blending the evolving tradition of Bellerophon’s insanity with Iliadic interpretation, Greek and Roman authors eagerly sift Homer’s text for answers about madness. The plague of insanity upon men of Bellerophon’s intelligence and skill is Pseudo-Aristotle’s chief concern in *Problems Regarding Thought, Reason, and Wisdom* (953a). The author initially poses a question to readers: why do men who are preeminent in philosophy, politics, or arts “appear to be melancholic, and some so much so that they also seem seized by sicknesses from black

¹⁰⁷ Murray 345.

¹⁰⁸ Collard and Cropp, Euripides 129-131.

¹⁰⁹ Collard and Cropp, Euripides 135.

¹¹⁰ Cf. Kovacs on Euripides’ treatment of variant mythologies surrounding Medea and the birth of Theseus. Kovacs argues that the *Medea* refers to one version of Theseus’ birth while implicitly recalling another, allowing Euripides to demonstrate his creativity and awareness of the overall tradition.

bile . . . ?”¹¹¹ Allegedly afflicted by such disease, Hercules was cast into a trance and endured an outbreak of sores upon his body.

For the same (occurrence of ulcers) also happens to the majority of sufferers due to black bile. . . . And still in regards to the affairs surrounding Ajax and Bellerophon, of whom the former became completely entranced, and the latter sought the deserts; therefore thus Homer wrote, “But when indeed distinguished Bellerophon also incurred hatred from all the gods, truly throughout the Aleian plain he wandered alone, eating his heart out, avoiding pathway of men” (αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ καὶ κεῖνος ἀπήχθετο πᾶσι θεοῖσιν,/ ἦτοι ὁ καππεδίων τὸ Ἀλήϊον οἶος ἀλᾶτο/ ὄν θυμὸν κατέδων, πάτον ἀνθρώπων ἀλεείνων).¹¹²

The spirit of Pseudo-Aristotle’s inquiry is echoed by the fifth-century C.E. Roman poet Rutulius, who disparagingly compares ascetic monks to Bellerophon in his madness.

*quaenam perversi rabies tam stulta cerebri,
dum mala formides, nec bona posse pati?
sive suas repetunt factorum ergastula poenas,
tristia seu nigro viscera felle tument,
sic nimiae bilis morbum assignavit Homerus
Bellerophonteis sollicitudinibus:
nam iuveni offenso saevi post tela doloris
dicitur humanum displicuisse genus.*

Just what madness of a perverse mind is so foolish,
while you fear bad things, not to be able to bear good things?
They either demand their own punishments
in compensation for deeds, as inmates,
or their hearts swell with black bile,
as Homer attributed a disease of excessive bile

¹¹¹ See Hett’s edition of Aristotle (rather than Pseudo-Aristotle) for the entire speech in Book 30.1.

¹¹² Greek text from Hett’s Loeb edition, but translation is mine. Cf. the differing text of the OCT: ἀλλ’ ὅτε δὴ καὶ κεῖνος ἀπήχθετο πᾶσι θεοῖσιν,/ ἦτοι ὁ κὰπ πεδίων τὸ Ἀλήϊον οἶος ἀλᾶτο/ ὄν θυμὸν κατέδων, πάτον ἀνθρώπων ἀλεείνων, 6.200-02.

to the sollicitudes of Bellerophon.

For to the young warrior, wounded after darts of savage grief,
it is said that the human race was a displeasure.

De Reditu Suo 1.446-53.

Rumors of Bellerophon's madness and "bile" can thus bias authors' perception of Homer's story. Fisher writes, "This claim that Homer portrays Bellerophon as suffering from an excess of bile is erroneous . . . Given such a blunder, it is hard to believe that Rutilius had made any sort of study of Homer."¹¹³ Courcelle observes, "Vessereau points out that the Homeric text does not speak of bile as the cause of the sickness. I think that Rutulius probably and mistakenly applied to Bellerophon line 166, which actually refers to Proetus."¹¹⁴ Scholars caution that derangement in itself is not a necessary factor of Homer's version. "Homer only intimates the insanity of Bellerophon," says Seymour.¹¹⁵ Stating Bellerophon's post-Homeric acceptance as a "paradigmatic example of the madman," Hershkowitz names two reasons for the connection with insanity: the wandering, and the idea that the wandering was a disease caused by the wrathful gods. "Yet there is nothing particular in the passage to suggest that Bellerophon's actions should be read that way here. Elsewhere in Homeric epic the gods' anger or hatred leads to many actions and interactions, but never to the outright production of madness."¹¹⁶ The insanity

¹¹³ G. Fisher 122. Almost thirty years before Rutulius, the madness of Bellerophon was used by Paulinus and Ausonius to represent a dangerous and ascetic misanthropy. See Trout 71-72.

¹¹⁴ (τὸν δὲ ἄνακτα χόλος λάβεν οἷον ἄκουσε, "Wrath took the king by what he heard.") Courcelle 225n. 7. Courcelle's contention that Rutulius mistakenly attributed the madness to bile overlooks the coincidence of the same explanation in the *Problems*.

¹¹⁵ Seymour offers for comparison passages from Cicero (untranslated by Seymour) and Milton: *qui miser in campis maerens errabat Aleis, / ipse suum cor edens hominum vestigia vitans*, "who wretched wandered mourning in the Aleian Fields, / himself eating his own heart, shunning the steps of men, Cic. *Tusc.* iii. 26.63, 'Lest . . . as once Bellerophon, on th' Aleian field I fall, / Erroneous there to wander and forlorn,' Milton *Par. Lost* vii.17 ff.

¹¹⁶ Hershkowitz 125-26. "Diseases of the mind, in all their varying stages, the Greeks always ascribed to the action of divinities. It is not strange, therefore, to find traces in the Homeric poems, the more so, as all sudden resolutions and changes of mind in the heroes are directly attributed to divine action" (Riess 237).

unmentioned in Homer is by most authors intrinsically linked with Bellerophon's urge to ride to the heavens. With this explanation for the insanity, Pegasus is essential to the story of Bellerophon. "Bile" is less of a factor than is a senseless desire to challenge or be among the gods. When his madness receives less attention than the fall from Pegasus itself does, Bellerophon is not unlike earlier figures who attempt to go into the sky and are thwarted.

Parallels, "Corrections," and Signs of Variants

Although Mesopotamian parallels are not a focus of this chapter, there is a certain story unrelated to Sargon or the letter motif and yet particularly suitable for comparison with Bellerophon. The hero's irrational desire to ride to heaven, either a challenge or expression of a longing to be among the gods, is conceivably the result of influence from a Mesopotamian tale about the young man Etana and his ascent on an eagle. The Etana story has no element akin to madness, although subsequent stories include generic wanderings of a rider set down by an eagle in a desolated clearing. The tale is attested in multiple manuscripts throughout the second millennium B.C.E. and was present in Ashurbanipal's library. In an Akkadian telling, Etana seeks a fertility plant that will allow his wife to conceive children. Learning in a dream about an injured eagle, he rescues the eagle from a pit in exchange for a ride into the sky. As the pair ascends, Etana becomes terrified and asks to return to land. The tablet ends in abrupt fragmentation. "[N]o one knows how the story ended. Perhaps . . . Etana had tried the impossible and lost the prize. Etana is known to have had a son in the Mesopotamian tradition, . . . so it is possible that a subsequent venture was successful, or that Etana achieved his goal in some other way."¹¹⁷

¹¹⁷ Foster Vol. 1: 438.

The legend is interpreted differently by Hastings, who reconstructs the story with an ending more akin to that of Bellerophon's flight: "[I]n flying to the gate of Ishtar the strength of the Eagle gives way, he falls headlong, and Etana atones for his presumption by his death. He is transferred as a demi-god to the under-world. Shortly afterwards the Eagle also loses his life through the cunning of a serpent whose young he had devoured."¹¹⁸ Hastings refers to an episode in which the eagle was almost killed by a serpent whom it had betrayed, but this episode in alternate editions appears before Etana ever meets the eagle.¹¹⁹ Foster's texts state that it is Etana, rather than the weakened eagle, who causes the descent. Hastings also assumes that Etana loses his life due to his actions; as Foster shows, the story's outcome is debatable.¹²⁰ Kirk states, "Pegasus and Bellerophon are based no doubt partly on the Akkadian tale, but the whole Bellerophon cycle, so far as we can guess from tantalising fragments, developed an imaginative force of its own."¹²¹

Not only do Hesiod, Pindar, and Euripides incorporate Pegasus and an Etana-Bellerophon correspondence, but the winged horse is also mentioned by later authors ranging from the first century B.C.E. to beyond the fifth century C.E., and is featured in genres from poetry to geography. Horace, for instance, refers to Pegasus as "begrudging" or "casting off" the "earthly horseman Bellerophon" (*Pegasus terrenum equitem gravatus/ Bellerophontem, Carm.* 4.11.27-28). The horse is subject of its own cults and legends that do not attribute overriding importance to Bellerophon. Strabo's Pegasus is actually associated more with the Horse's

¹¹⁸ Hastings 222.

¹¹⁹ Foster Vol. 1: 459.

¹²⁰ Cf. Foster Vol. 1: 448, 459

¹²¹ Kirk 1972: 84.

Fountain in Helicon than with the Greek hero.¹²² Hyginus in the first century C.E. is among one of the many authors who relates Pegasus' role in the slaying of the Chimaera, saying, "This he slew, riding on Pegasus, and he is said to have fallen in the Aleian plains and have dislocated his hip. But the king, praising his valor, gave him his other daughter in marriage, and Stheneboea, hearing of it, killed herself" (*Fab.* 57).¹²³ The account includes Pegasus in a sweeping array of oral and written tradition: Anteia is the tragic Stheneboea, but in this version she is suicidal because her father Iobates presents the triumphant Bellerophon with his other daughter; Bellerophon destroys the Chimaera from Pegasus' back, but is injured by his plummet into the Aleian plains; and his fall is not caused by his presumption so much as by chance.

The narrative proffered by Pseudo-Apollodorus, possibly in the second century C.E., borrows from assorted authorities in another imposing and inclusive witness to epic versatility. Bellerophon obtains blood-guilt after accidentally killing his brother Deliades, also called Piren or Alcimenes, according to the author. Proetus carries out the necessary rites to purify the hero. Once more, Proetus' queen schemes against Bellerophon in retaliation for her rejected advances towards him, resulting in Bellerophon's visit to Iobates with the letter ordering death. Almost one thousand years after Homer, the mythographer feels it fitting to repeat the words of both Homer and Hesiod: "It is said, too, that this Chimera was bred by Amisodarus, as Homer also affirms, and that it was begotten by Typhon on Echidna, as Hesiod relates" (*Lib.* 2.3.1).¹²⁴

Pegasus and Bellerophon defeat the Chimaera, and Bellerophon completes his tasks with

¹²² "And there (at the Pierene) they say that Pegasus (the winged horse from the neck of Medusa), drinking, was captured by Bellerophon, and they say that the same horse caused there to spring up also the Fountain of the Horse in Helicon by striking the underlying rock with its hoof," *Geography* 8.6.21. Cf. Aratus *Phaen.* 206ff, Ovid *Fasti* 3.449ff, Paus. 9.31.1, *i.a.*

¹²³ Translation by Grant.

¹²⁴ Translations of the *Library* are Frazer's (see Apollodorus).

victories over the Solymi, Amazons, and ambush of the Lycians. “But when Bellerophon had killed them also to a man, Iobates, in admiration of his prowess, showed him the letter and begged him to stay with him; moreover he gave him his daughter Philonoe, and dying bequeathed to him the kingdom” (*Lib.* 2.3.2). The author embraces Homer’s construct of the events, meshing the Homeric details with fine points adopted and adapted from elsewhere.

Without alluding to Pegasus, Plutarch offers local or less mystical renditions meant to explicate or properly contextualize other reports. He recalls tales told by locals in Lycia that interpret the Chimaera in different ways. Some people say (φασιν, “they say”) that Chimarrhus was a warmongering, savage pirate who commanded a ship with lion as figurehead and serpent as stern (*Mor.* 247F). Bellerophon and Pegasus purportedly slay the barbaric man, but Bellerophon turns to the gods for retribution when he is cheated of any rewards by Iobates.

Bellerophon waded into the sea, and prayed to Poseidon that, as a requital against Iobates, the land might become sterile and unprofitable. Thereupon he went back after his prayer, and a wave arose and inundated the land. It was a fearful sight as the sea, following him, rose high in air and covered up the plain. The men besought Bellerophon to check it, but when they could not prevail on him, the women, pulling up their garments, came to meet him; and when he, for shame, retreated towards the sea again, the wave also, it is said, went back with him.

Mor. 248A-B.¹²⁵

A second group of storytellers intends to prove the mythology groundless or to lessen the need for unnatural elements. They maintain that Bellerophon’s prayers are unable to move the sea, but he destroys a coastal ridge standing as a dam for the river. The men fruitlessly beg him for help when the plain flooded, but “the women, flocking about him in a crowd, met with respect, and caused his anger to subside.” According to a third contingent of interpreters, the Chimaera is a

¹²⁵ All translations of Plutarch’s *Moralia* are by Babbitt.

towering mountain reflecting the sunlight so fiercely that it causes the crops to wither.

Bellerophon graciously diverts the sunlight by cutting into the mountainside. He is angry at the ungrateful Lycians and turns to vengeance, but the women coax him to yield in his wrath.

Plutarch records also a fourth possibility set forth by Nymphis in the third century B.C.E.:

[F]or he says (in his fourth book of his treatise about Heracleia) that Bellerophon killed a wild boar which was making havoc of the stock and crops in the land of the Xanthians, but obtained no fitting reward; whereupon he addressed to Poseidon imprecations against the Xanthians, and the whole plain suddenly became glittering with a salt deposit and was completely ruined, since the soil had become saline. This lasted until Bellerophon, out of respect for the women who besought him, prayed to Poseidon to give up his anger.

Mor. 248D.

In these tales, Bellerophon's noble behavior towards the women highlights his sense of propriety. Man or monster, the slain Chimaera is only one example of Bellerophon's heroism in the stories.

Heroism and female entreaties are again important features in the *Astronomica* of Pseudo-Hyginus, presumably in the second century C.E. This passage is particularly momentous in light of its relevance to Near Eastern transmission discussed earlier in this study: Bellerophon is more like Etana than in any accounts yet discussed, and the alternative explanation for his departure from Argos looks ahead to Iranian epic with Iliadic parallels. In addition, Bellerophon possesses Pegasus before his tasks in Lycia. The spring associated with Pegasus' harnessing in so many other versions is peculiarly described. Anteia (Antia) replaces Stheneboea. Unless implied in Bellerophon's deliberate flight from Argos, the wandering is absent altogether.

Aratus and many others have called (the constellation) Pegasus, offspring of Neptune and the Gorgon Medusa, who on Helicon, a mountain of Boeotia, opened

up a spring by striking the rock with his hoof. From him the spring is called Hippocrene. Others say that at the time Bellerophon came to visit Proetus, son of Abas and king of the Argives, Antia, the king's wife, smitten with love for the guest, begged to visit him, promising him her husband's kingdom. When she couldn't obtain this request, out of fear that he would accuse her to the king, she anticipated him by telling Proetus that he had offered violence to her. Proetus, who had been fond of Bellerophon, was reluctant to inflict punishment himself, but knowing that he had the horse Pegasus, sent him to the father of Antia (some call her Sthenoboea), for him to defend his daughter's chastity and send the youth against the Chimera, which at that time was laying waste with flames the country of the Lycians. Bellerophon was victor, and escaped, but after the creation of the spring, as he was attempting to fly to heaven, and had almost reached it, he became terrified looking down at the earth, and fell off and was killed. But the horse is said to have flown up and to have been put among the constellations by Jove. Others have said that Bellerophon fled from Argos not because of Antia's accusations, but so as not to hear any more proposals which were distasteful to him, or to be distressed by her entreaties.

Astron. 2.18.¹²⁶

The author's inclination to add "they say" is a constant reminder that despite his cowardly and confusing end, Bellerophon in his adventures remains as alive as ever.

Bellerophon's role as hero is paradoxically muddled in narratives such as those of Pseudo-Hyginus, or in accounts where Pegasus is acclaimed for rejection of the rider's irreverence. Post-Homeric forms of the story often pass over Homer's details in favor of a stronger interest in the Lycian tasks, and, hence, in Pegasus or the Chimaera. The tasks as they are presented in the *Iliad* inherently contain a linguistic hint that the monster-slaying, Bellerophon's greatest act of heroism, is passed down from archaic traditions once separate from the letter, or the incident with Anteia/ Stheneboea. If the tasks are introduced to the story-cycle

¹²⁶ Translation by Grant. (See Hyginus in Works Cited.)

from another source, or if Homer originally combined two traditions about Bellerophon, the portions of the Homeric story without the tasks would contain more of the motifs that were discussed in relation to Near Eastern tales in Chapters 1 and 2. The Indo-European pedigree of the tasks and accompanied monster-slaying, like “dragon-slaying” tales, could be indicated by the language of the passage and by the perfunctory “tokens of the gods” commended by Homer. However, in terms of the tasks as representative of a greater tradition of epic monster-slaying, it is intriguing to think that the Bellerophon story condenses this beast-slaying into a few lines, recalling heroes of the past while reaching forward to epic figures of the future.

Chapter 4: Inheriting the Tasks and Tales

As a whole, the motif of the hero who defeats the fire-breathing monster has been singled out as a favorite subject of Indo-European poets. As Calvert Watkins has endeavored to show, this motif is expressed as a poetic inheritance in terms of its language and theme. In the *Iliad*, Bellerophon's slaying of his foes, and in particular of the Chimaera, is a pronounced candidate for the Indo-European theme of a hero's "tasks." With a multitude of cuneiform tablets as yet uncatalogued, revelations about the poetic mechanics involved in Near Eastern beast-slaying tales could unexpectedly transform current impressions of Indo-European linguistic inheritances that recur in the dragon-slaying motif; but at this point, the linguistic legacy discernible in Hittite, Greek, or distant Celtic and Slavic texts bolsters the study of a tradition reaching across language barriers and oral or written storytelling. The impact of formulaic dragon-slayer stories upon Greece in its Dark Ages (~1200-800 B.C.E.), and particularly upon Homer's Bellerophon, is curious. The Chimaera as a synthesis of the dragon, goat, and lion is an apparently Oriental monster taking a place in the cycle of tasks laid upon Bellerophon, but the wording of the narrative itself supports the inherited nature of the tasks.

When Anteia orders Proetus to kill Bellerophon, she uses the -κτ- (κτείνω) root for "kill" (κάκτανε, 165). Proetus, in turn, sends the letter in hopes of destroying or killing Bellerophon, using the verb ἀπόλλυμι (ἄφρ' ἀπόλοιτο, 171). Ultimately, when Isander and Laodadeia are killed by the gods, there is a return to the -κτ- (κτείνω) root (κατέκτανε, 205; ἔκτα, 206). Nevertheless, during the entire episode of the tasks, whether in reference to destroying beasts or humans, there occurs a form of the verb πεφνέμεν (*φένω).

Bellerophon slays beast (Χίμαιραν, 180; πεφνέμεν, 181)
slays man (Σολύμοισι, 185; κατέπεφνε, 184)

slays woman (Ἀμαζόννας, κατέπεφνε, 187)

slays the bravest Lycians (ἀρίστους, 189; κατέπεφνε, 191)

The verbal recurrence of πεφνέμεν cuts off as soon as the tasks are completed. The emphatically repeated usage of (κατέ)πεφνε is identified by Watkins as a significant linguistic and poetic signal, attesting to a traditional function. Pindar reverts to the same verb when describing the tasks.¹²⁷

σὺν δὲ κείῳ καὶ ποτ' Ἀμαζονίδων
αιθέρος ψυχρῶν ἀπὸ κόλπων ἐρήμου
τοξόταν βάλλων γυναικεῖον στρατόν,
καὶ Χίμαιραν πῦρ πνέουσιν καὶ Σολύμους **ἔπεφνε**.

So mounted, out of the cold gulfs
of the high air forlorn, he smote
the archered host of women, the Amazons;
and the Chimaira, breathing flame; and the Solymoi,
and *slew* them.

Oi. 13.87-90.

Watkins adds that the same verb “probably recurs” in a Hesiodic verse telling of Bellerophon and Pegasus, although he admits that the line is reconstructed, “mostly by Wilamowitz’ [earlier] conjecture.”¹²⁸

σὺν τῷ πῦρ [πνέουσιν . . . **κατέπεφνε** Χίμαιραν]

With whom he *slew* the fire-breathing Chimaira.

Hesiod 43a.87 M.-W.

¹²⁷ Watkins 1995: 359-60, with Watkins’s translations for the two quotations following. Emphasis with italics and bold text is my own.

¹²⁸ Watkins 1995: 360.

Pindar’s word choice indicates to Watkins that the poet is “independently drawing on traditional verbal material, in which all three tasks are expressed by the verb *πεφνέμεν*.”¹²⁹ Watkins reconstructs **g^when* as the premiere Proto-Indo-European verb in poetic episodes of dragon-slaying, arguing that *πεφνέμεν* is derived from the archaic form. The systematic usage of *πεφνέμεν* in Greek poetry is typical of linguistic inheritance, and would set apart Bellerophon’s tasks from the rest of the Homeric narrative. The tasks would be a traditional legacy with the recognizable Indo-European pattern as its basic framework.

Katz applies Watkins’s dragon-slaying formula to the etymology of Bellerophon, teasing out Zenodotus’s claim that Bellerophon was also called “Ellerophon.”¹³⁰ *Ἐλλερο-* provides “eel,” while *-οφι-* (evoking the eel-snake famous to Indo-Europeanists) could be haplologized in the Greek form of the name; that is, the repetitive sound of *φ* is dropped, resulting in the pronunciation **Ἐλλερο-φόντης*. **Ἐλλερο-οφι-φόντης* offers a meaning of Ellerophon as “Slayer of the ‘eel-snake.’”¹³¹ Bellerophon’s battle with the snakish Chimaera, along with the striking restriction of *πεφνέμεν* to the tasks, may express a tale that was inherited from a source different from that of the other motifs of the letter, or the jealous wife; or perhaps Homer combined stories from separate Corinthian traditions.

¹²⁹ Watkins 1995: 359. The employment of *πεφνέμεν* still is not universal; for instance, Pseudo-Apollodorus later uses *κτείνω* in relating the tasks. The tripartite Chimaera and three tasks (three because the ambush is noticeably an addition to the duties to be performed by Bellerophon) might be an intriguing play on an Indo-European tendency towards threes. *E.g.*, see West’s discussion of tricola and triads in West 2007.

¹³⁰ Eustathius writes, *καὶ ὁ Βελλεροφόντης δέ, φασιν, Ἐλλεροφόντης ἐν τοῖς Ζηνοδότου εὔρηται*, “And Bellerophontes, they say, is called Ellerophontes in the works of Zenodotus,” 289.38-39. See Katz 325n. 27 regarding other proposed etymologies for Bellerophon’s name, particularly suggestions of Semitic borrowing (“Baal”), or the ancient references to Bellerophon as “slayer of Belleros.”

¹³¹ Katz 325-26. Cf. Katz 321-23 on the snake or eel’s association with water. Among others, Kirk does not attempt to explain the peculiarity of “Ellerophon,” saying merely that “Zenodotus’ preference for Ellerophontes . . . remains mysterious.” (1990: 178).

Near Eastern Beasts and Beast-Slaying Battles

It should be noted that sea monsters and dragon-slaying are not unknown to Semitic and Mesopotamian cultures, although there are no extant stories of Sargon as a dragon-slayer: as one example among numerous legends, the Canaanite god Baal defeats Yam, a sea-dragon.¹³²

Wiggerman's conclusions that Transtigradian snake-deities are frequently associated with the underworld imply "earthy" connotations for snake-gods: they are often "dying gods of vegetation," or linked to agriculture.¹³³ Wiggerman catalogues snake imagery among chthonic or netherworld deities, "where their primary home is in the earth, rather than the sea," and Smith and Pitard, referring to Wiggerman's study, determine that "[m]any of the snake/ dragon deities do not appear to be connected to the forces of chaos and destruction" in Mesopotamia.¹³⁴ If true, the imagery and disinterest in mayhem would seem more at odds with the snakes and dragons of the Indo-European tradition, which are predominantly watery creatures who haunt rivers and lakes.¹³⁵ However, such a general distinction between cultural views of these monsters does not fairly account for Sumerian, Akkadian, Ugaritic, or Hebrew tales of beast-slaying. In regards to the Sumerian or Semitic snake as a creature of the deep, two particular instances of Sumero-

¹³² See Smith on the Ugaritic Baal Cycle, as well as Kramer: "We may have three versions of the slaying-of-the-dragon myth as current in Sumer in the third millennium B.C.E. The first involves the Sumerian water-god Enki, whose closest parallel among the Greek gods is Poseidon. The hero of the second is Ninurta, prototype of the Babylonian god Marduk when playing the role of the 'hero of the gods' in the Babylonian 'Epic of Creation.' In the third it is Inanna, counterpart of the Semitic Ishtar, who plays the leading role. In all three versions, however, the monster to be destroyed is termed Kur. Its exact form and shape are still uncertain, but there are indications that in the first two versions it is conceived as a large serpent which lived in the bottom of the 'great below' where the latter came in contact with the primeval waters" (Kramer 112).

¹³³ Wiggerman 47.

¹³⁴ Smith and Pitard 250n. 54. The question remains as to whether dragons and snakes were autochthonous popular symbols or were imported from influential areas into West Semitic cultures.

¹³⁵ Cf. Katz 320-21, who cites further sources for the Indo-European concept of sea-dragons. A distinction between terrestrial and aquatic snakes could be effectively bridged by Watkins's connection with the chthonic home of snakish deities as an eel's watery pit or hole, or, perhaps, as the "deep pit" of the netherworld (Watkins 1985: 255n. 11, as cited and discussed by Katz 324).

Akkadian beasts stand out: the Asag, a demonic creature fought by the god Ninurta, and the Lion-Serpent, a marine dragon-snake. In fact, the two creatures could harken back to one underlying mythology. Such dragon beasts commonly are monstrously depicted in art, and occasionally have lion's heads or feet. The Chimaera, with its serpentine back and lion's head, could easily fit in among these creatures.¹³⁶

According to Sumerian texts, the Asag is a demonic creature born of the earth. The gods cower at the beast, which is impenetrable to weapons. Finally, the deity Ninurta gathers his courage and slays the beast by following the instructions of other gods. During its rampage, the Asag is pictured as a snakish, howling creature with hands.

For a club it uprooted the sky, took it in its hand; like a snake it slid its head along the ground. . . . Like an accursed storm, it howled in a raucous voice; like a gigantic snake, it roared at the Land. . . . It set fire to the reed-beds, bathed the sky in blood, turned it inside out.¹³⁷

Ninurta the slayer is more or less a Sumerian Hercules, with a mythology “dominated by his constant battles with a variety of fabulous creatures.”¹³⁸ Some of the monsters previously defeated by Ninurta are described before the battle with the Asag, and they are indeed quite fabulous, including other serpentine or dragon creatures: “the Mermaid, the Dragon, the

¹³⁶ See Fontenrose 146ff, or Wiggerman. Could the she-goat torso betray Greek interpretation of a monster's scaly or shaggy artistic appearance as “goatish?” Or is it possible that the Chimaera veils an archaic association with Enki (Akkadian Ea), the mischievous Sumerian god who was ruler of the waters and represented by Capricorn, a goat-dragon? Besides Aquarius, Ea's symbols formed Capricorn, the modern *Square of Pegasus*, Aries, and possibly Pisces (Rogers 11). Capricorn's imagery might have accompanied popularity of snakish creatures in mythology or art in an early Indo-European migration to Mesopotamia or Semitic cultures, especially if, as Rogers suggests, the Zodiac with its bestial figures was conveyed to Sumer from Elam (11). It is interesting that Enki is closely connected to Adapa/ Oannes, a traditional Babylonian monster with human head and fish's body; Oannes, according to Babylonian legend circulating at least as late as the third-century B.C.E., came forth from the sea and taught humans to write, among other things (Charpin 1).

¹³⁷ From lines 168-86 of *Ninurta's Exploits* (Black *et al.* 168). Cf. the description of Numušda, son of the moon-god, as a clawed creature with the face of a lion and “muzzle” of a serpent (*A Hymn to Numušda for Šin-iqīšam*, lines 13-23, Black *et al.* 162).

¹³⁸ White 61.

Gypsum, and the Strong Copper, the hero Six-headed Wild Ram, the Magilum Barge, Lord Samanana, the Bison, the Palm-tree King, the Anzud bird, the Seven-headed Serpent.”¹³⁹

The destruction of a vast serpent is the subject of Akkadian texts dating to the last half of the second millennium. One possible rendition was found among the ruins of Ashurbanipal’s library and depicts a gigantic beast called the Lion-serpent. The hero has killed the beast with great effort: he “shot (an arrow) [and killed] the Lion-serpent./ Three years, three months, one day and night,/ The Lion-serpent’s blood flowed . . . ”¹⁴⁰ The hero is named once in the text as Tishpak, an Akkadian god corresponding roughly to the Hittite storm-god Teshub. Teshub is the equivalent of Babylonian Marduk and the Greek Zeus.¹⁴¹ If the champion defeating the Lion-serpent is representative of Zeus, perhaps the Lion-serpent is akin to beasts defeated by Zeus; in this case, the story is similar to the Hittite myth of Illuyankaš, often considered a parallel for Zeus’s vanquishing of Typhoios. The eel-snake Illuyankaš and the comparable Typhoios would be counterparts of the Lion-serpent.¹⁴² Thus, the Chimaera can have precedents in Sumerian-Akkadian and Indo-European civilizations, and the Chimaera fought by Bellerophon may be a synthesis of cultural tales as well as of different creatures. Cross-cultural motifs are elaborately intertwined in the tales dealing with Bellerophon and dragon-slaying, as corroborated by the tradition’s amalgamation of famous themes or legends.

¹³⁹ *Ninurta’s Exploits*, from 122-134, Black *et al.* 167.

¹⁴⁰ Foster Vol. 1: 488-89.

¹⁴¹ In Egyptian legend, the imported god Tark is carrier of a mace, not unlike Ninurta, the Sumerian god who conquers the Anzu (Storm-bird) and speaks to his weapon in the original Sumerian text.

¹⁴² Cf. Watkins 1995: 459, with the estimation that the Typhoios myth and its Hittite/ Anatolian origins were transmitted to Greece in the mid-second millennium by language contact. This transferral of tradition would then be occurring in the same place and regions as Sargonic epic.

Examples of Reception and Transmission in the Middle Ages and Renaissance

The Chimaera is not the most essential element of the Bellerophon story, nor are the tasks the most celebrated part of the story as it is mimicked by much later epic. In examining later versions of stories with elements similar to Sargon or Bellerophon, we see that the themes of the mythology, and in some cases the figures themselves, do not necessarily disappear or diminish over time. Rather, they survive in oral and written form from the time of the ancients through the Middle Ages and Renaissance. An impressive display of epic poetry demonstrating similarity to or influence from the traditions is the eleventh-century Iranian epic *Shahnameh*, mainly attributed to the poet Firdausi. Besides likenesses to Bellerophon's wandering and ascent to heaven, I see also parallels to the motifs of divine dreams or portents of a king's death, as with Sargon and Ur-Zababa; or the child raised by non-royalty such as shepherds, groundskeepers, or gardeners. The Persian narrative relates in part the adventures of the youthful prince Siyawush. Although no Uriah Letter is used to accuse the main characters, other aspects of Siyawush's life or that of his son Kai Khusrau (Cyrus?) draw attention. Siyawush is accused of attempted rape by a deceitful queen, but he is proven innocent. Before going to battle with the forces of Kai Ka'us marshaled by Siyawush, the neighboring king Afrasiyab, who is also Siyawush's uncle, has a dream in which a youth kills him.¹⁴³ Astrologers warn that the dream portends fierce revenge if Afrasiyab overpowers Siyawush in battle. The nephew and uncle agree to terms of peace, but Kai Ka'us is angered by the treaty and banishes his son. Eventually, after another

¹⁴³ "As night advanced Afrasiyab cried out,/ And shook upon his bed like one with ague . . ." The king explains that in his dream he was led before Kai Ka'us and "a youth with moonlike cheeks: "a youth whose years/ Had not yet reached fourteen, who, when he saw/ Me standing there before his presence bound/ Came rushing at me like a thundering cloud,/ And clave me to the middle with his sword" (18. *Siyawush*, all translations of *Shahnameh* are by Warner and Warner; Ferdowsi in Works Cited). The phrase "with moonlike cheeks" again recalls Homeric and Near Eastern associations with light and characterizations as "shining" (e.g., Penelope or Inana). The interpretation that the death of Siyawush at Afrasiyab's hand (the blood-guilt?) will be avenged is mistakenly applied to Kai Ka'us. Siyawush's child will avenge his father.

ominous dream, Siyawush is killed by Afrasiyab and Afrasiyab's violent brother Garsiwaz. A child is posthumously born to Siyawush in the house of Siyawush's father-in-law Piran. This infant, Kai Khusrau, is exalted in Piran's inspired dreams on the night of the birth.¹⁴⁴ Kai Khusrau is raised among shepherds and, at Piran's urging, feigns madness so as to assuage Afrasiyab's fear of usurpation.

Kai Khusrau is given divine legitimacy of rule in the Avestan tradition, but this is essentially bestowed upon him by Anahita. It seems to me that Anahita, described by de Santillana and von Dechend as a "kind of Ishtar-Artemis," is very similar in this role to Inana in the Sumerian texts, or even to Athena in Bellerophon's tales.¹⁴⁵ The story of Kai Khusrau as told in the *Shahnameh* comes to a bittersweet end after the pious ruler's glorious sixty-year reign. Kai Khusrau suddenly begins acting strangely and secludes himself in the palace. At first, he is thought to be insane. However, it is announced that he is distressed at the notion that he might "grow arrogant in soul, and corrupt in thought' like his predecessors (including) among others, Kai Ka'us himself, who had tried to get himself carried to heaven by eagles like the Babylonian Etana."¹⁴⁶ Finally, Kai Khusrau names his successor and wanders to a mountain, claiming to follow divine orders; he vanishes in the night, receiving others' praise for his quality of character.

A fourteenth-century Iberian epic found in three different renderings, the *Cantar de los infantes de Lara*, recounts the slaughter of seven youths by their treacherous uncle Ruy

¹⁴⁴ As an adult, Khusrau is divinely gifted: "When news (of a victory),/ And of God's Grace upon him, reached Iran/ The world was in amazement that the prince/ Had won that Grace and greatness . . ." (19. *Kai Khusrau* 1).

¹⁴⁵ De Santillana and von Dechend 40.

¹⁴⁶ de Santillana and von Dechend 41. The tale of Kai Ka'us' endeavor to ascend to the heavens by riding eagles is related earlier in the *Shahnameh*. The poet states, "Kaus (*sic*), as I have heard, essayed the sky/ To outsoar angels, but another tale/ Is that he rose in this way to assail/ The heaven itself with his artillery./ The legend hath its other versions too . . ." The weary eagles are forced to land in a forest. The king survives miraculously: "Instead of sitting on his throne in might/ His business then was penitence and travail./ He tarried in the wood in shame and grief/ Imploring from Almighty God relief" (15. *Kai Kaus* 3).

Velázquez. Ruy Velázquez is incited to the betrayal by his conniving bride, Doña Lambra. The seven's heads are taken as trophies. In the meantime, Ruy Velázquez commissions their father Gonzalo Gustioz to deliver a message to the town of Córdoba. Before carrying out the letter's request that the letter-bearer be killed, the local caliph unwittingly asks Gonzalo Gustioz to identify the seven heads. Pitying the father, the caliph imprisons him, and while in prison, Gonzalo Gustioz begets a son by a Muslim woman. The boy at last has revenge upon Ruy Velázquez and his guileful wife. The story is another intriguing intersection of history and legend, with a basis in fact that is coupled with folkish elements of epic, such as the letter motif.¹⁴⁷

The fascination with elements of the stories like the Aleian Fields and the evil letter is retained in the Renaissance, sometimes with direct allusions to Bellerophon. Italian lexicographer Ambrogio Calepino includes the Aleian Fields in his Catholic dictionary of the late fifteenth century. In his encyclopedic entry under the Aleian Fields, Bellerophon is reported to be blind: *Locus est Lyciae, in quem cecidit Bellerophontes, quum a Pegaso ab oestro agitato excuteretur: sic dictus quod in eo caecus errarit Bellerophontes, donec periret* ("It is a place of Lycia, into which Bellerophon fell, when he was shaken off by Pegasus, who was disturbed by a gadfly: it (the field) is called thus because Bellerophon wandered in it, blind, until he perished"). The phrase *Bellerophontes litteras* ("Bellerophon letters") is included by Erasmus in his sixteenth-century collection of sayings, the *Adagia*, with the following explanation:

Locus erit huic proverbio, cum quis litteras velut commendaticias perfert, quae contra ipsum sint descriptae. . . . Itaque quisquis imprudens aut nunciat, aut facit quippiam, quo se prodit, in eum recte dicetur; Βελλεροφόντης τὰ γράμματα, aut quicumque sub officii praetextu laeditur,

¹⁴⁷ "The artistic structure . . . reveals a series of finely crafted parallelisms that show the poetic awareness of generations of *juglares* (minstrels) who gradually elaborated the *Cantar de los infantes de Lara* as now see in in the medieval sources" (Gerli 196).

There will be a place for this proverb when someone offers letters as if they are recommending of him, which are written against him. . . . Therefore anyone who unwittingly either brings word or does anything by which he betrays himself, it will rightly be spoken against him, ‘the letters of Bellerophon,’ or whoever is harmed under the pretext of a service.

Adagia 2.6.82.¹⁴⁸

Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* reflects older Scandinavian mythology, but is yet another incarnation of the themes particularly visible in the Bellerophon cycle. As the play progresses, Hamlet brings miasma upon himself, encounters the supernatural in the form of his late father’s ghost, is accused of improper advances towards his cousin Ophelia, and feigns madness. As Sargon and Bellerophon were sent away with royal letters, Hamlet is sent to England with a letter from King Claudius.¹⁴⁹ He discovers the treachery before leaving Denmark and rewrites a letter instructing the execution of the ambassadors Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Shakespeare’s source for the story of Hamlet is indirectly a medieval Danish historian, Saxo Grammaticus. The material of Saxo’s *Historia Danica*, including the tale of the Danish prince Amleth, comes to Shakespeare primarily in translations of *Histoires tragiques* by François de Belleforest. Belleforest turned to the story of Amleth (or Hamblet) after exhausting material from his own informant, the works of Matteo Bandello. Of Amleth’s exile with the letters, Belleforest writes,

Now, to beare him company were assigned two of Fengons faithfull ministers, bearing letters ingraved in wood, that contained Hamblet’s death, in such sort as he had advertised the king of England. But the subtile Danish prince . . . raced out the letter that concerned his death, and in stead thereof graved others, with

¹⁴⁸ Erasmus cites this saying or similar references to Bellerophon as used by Zenodotus, Plautus, and Lucian, adding, “The adage is also expressed in another form: Βελλεροφόντης κατὰ σαυτοῦ, Bellerophon against himself.”

¹⁴⁹ Claudius explains the letter’s contents in IV.III.60-71. Hamlet describes how he opened the sealed packet with the letters: “where I found, Horatio, -/ O royal knavery! - an exact command, -/ Larded with many several sorts of reasons,/ Importing Denmark’s health, and England’s too,/ . . . (that) My head should be struck off,” V.II.15-22.

commission to the king of England to hand his two companions (and . . .) wrote further, that king Fengon willed him to give his daughter to Hamlet [*sic*] in marriage.¹⁵⁰

Saxo's description of the letter given to Amleth by his stepfather Feng is impressive, but one remarkable phrase added by either Saxo or his editor is left out by Belleforest's rendition. When Saxo explains "that the messengers carried with them 'litteras ligno insculptas' [*sic*] ('letters engraved in wood'), he qualifies the statement: 'nam id celebre quondam genus chartarum erat' ('for *that kind of letter was common at that time*')."¹⁵¹

For comparison, I return to the writing of Ur-Zababa's letter found in B53 of Sargon Legend and cited as a parody by Cooper: "*In those days, writing on tablets certainly existed, but enveloping tablets did not exist . . .*"¹⁵² Saxo could not have been aware of the Sargon Legend, but his words are reminiscent of the poetic language and concerns seen in the Legend and Bellerophon. In the complex cultural interplay and import shared by these stories and reaching across vast amounts of time, it seems that the famous letters are not to be out-classed by themes of dragon-slaying, madness, or the role of the gods. In the blood-stained hands of the otherwise blameless Hamlet, the epic tradition of Sargon and Bellerophon continues to evoke the audience's imagination.

¹⁵⁰ *The Hystorie of Hamblet*, 1608 translation, cited by Stewart 277.

¹⁵¹ Stewart 278; italics are mine.

¹⁵² ETCSL translation; I have again added the italics.

Conclusion

The stories of Sargon and Bellerophon wind their way through history, gaining momentum as they spread across cultural lines or are adopted among other mythological themes. In recent decades, Near Eastern scholarship and translations of newly-discovered Sargonic literature have made a comparison of the epic traditions more possible. Both cycles are the result of centuries of innovation, complete with oral cues and fanciful elements. The Sargon Legend, written long after Sargon's reign, contains formulaic epithets, temporal repetition, vivid portents, and portraits of relationships between mortals and immortals. The remnants of the Sumerian story point to creative intertextuality between the Legend and older narratives. Similar motifs exist in the Bellerophon saga in general. Homer does not touch upon the details of Bellerophon's success or ruin, indicating that he either overlooks an irrelevant tradition existing in the unwritten world of folktales and legends, or that the tradition had yet to develop and would come alive in the collective consciousness, conceivably in response to Homer's silence.

Because Sumerian perceptions of Sargon are comparatively scarce, Akkadian and Assyrian literature essentially comes to the forefront in examination of Sargonic stories. Supposed autobiographies, kingly chronicles reflecting Sargon's presence in older texts, and the multicultural versions of the long-standing epic King of Battle propagate the historical king's elevation as a semi-mythologized figure. Texts involving Sargon's famous conquests have been discovered at influential cultural centers in Mesopotamia, Anatolia, and Egypt. Nippur, the site of excavation for the Sargon Legend's most epic section of Segment B, was a long-standing and thriving religious hub. Interaction between Greece and the Near East in the Bronze Age suggests cultural exchange both materially and ideologically. Lastly, the eighth-century Birth Legend

garners attention for its portrayal of Sargon exposed at birth. The tale demonstrates intermixing of cultural themes, as the Sargon Legend itself seems to with its anomalous (or at least solely-surviving) but popular notion of the Uriah Letter. Like Bellerophon, who ultimately and puzzlingly suffers a loss of divine favor and an ensuing punishment, so too does Sargon of Akkad in the peculiar kingly chronicles.

While Homer leaves much of the story to his audience's imagination, the chronology and details of Bellerophon's legend are adapted to suit the interests or interpretations of individual storytellers. Bellerophon's fall from grace and from the back of Pegasus strongly suggest Mesopotamian sources, specifically the tale of Etana's failed ascent to heaven on an eagle. Playwrights, poets, and geographers play with the story and its various features, indicating that the lively tradition persists in popular tales before and after Homer. The falsely accused but stubbornly blameless Bellerophon could evoke similar imagery in the fragment Segment C of the Sargon Legend. As the tradition spreads from Greek to Roman culture and crosses cultural boundaries, storytellers continue their enthusiastic attempts to explain Bellerophon's fate. Commentators determine that Bellerophon suffered outright madness, or local storytellers try to dismiss the fantastical Chimaera as a mere man with an outrageous ship. Bellerophon's life-story is fodder for poets interested in the tragic cycle, and his passage from prosperity to hybris and nemesis, although condensed by Homer's version, is magnified.

The Sargon Legend shares Semitic elements such as the letter with stories of nearby cultures, and the vibrant reception of Sargonic epic beyond Mesopotamia is persuasive evidence for the tradition's continuous development long before the surviving tablets were produced. Indo-European and Near Eastern influences are present in Homer's Bellerophon, displaying the

zeal for combining and evolving mythologies or motifs into comprehensive stories.

Bellerophon's tasks and the resulting slaughters seem set apart from the rest of Homer's tale. However Indo-European the hero's ventures may be, the Chimaera appears to incorporate Sumero-Semitic sources. Extant literature of Sumer contains some of its own fantastic beasts and heroic exploits, although fewer examples of the dragon-slaying type are known to survive. Akkadian and Hittite writings passed about the Mediterranean demonstrate how the Chimaera and other snakish creatures may have been popular subjects of dragon-slayer mythology elsewhere in the Near East.

The lasting power of storytelling is evident in the detailed portrayals of Sargon and Bellerophon over time, especially as the tales are placed side-by-side with medieval epics, or even Shakespearean drama. The fragments of the Sargon Legend are such that the other elements may have accompanied the letter in the original text, based on the common pairing of the letter with certain motifs. It is implausible that the epic traditions of the various cultures can be entirely disparate from one another; elements intertwine, tales conflate, and historical becomes legendary.

I began this study with the epigraph of a Greek riddle found inscribed on a tablet: "Wood bore me, and iron worked me anew, and I am a mystic repository of Muses. Closed I am silent, but I speak when you unfold me; the stylus alone partakes of my speech." The answer to the puzzle is the δελτός, the writing tablet shaped of wood and containing within its leaves the inspired utterance of the Muses. In its strict or literal interpretation, the riddle illustrates the innovation and capability of the written tablets. Yet as we see in the stories committed to the various tablets, the δελτός has the power to deliver more than written words alone. It can act

also as a “door” to the traditions of the past. A stylus, like other storytellers who preserve their narratives for the future, takes part in an ongoing transference of tales. The tablets of the Sargon Legend or the papyrus of Homer and his successors represent a storehouse of written lore, but the motif of the δελτός in the stories of Bellerophon, Sargon, and their heirs is a symbol of energetic spoken and written traditions. The epic characters live on in the mouths and minds of their own cultures, but those of others, too, and the tablets provide a glimpse into the greater cycles passed between generations and peoples; watching as the tales spread, we find that, in a sense, the timeless couriers still pass into new territory, and their missions, perhaps, are not yet completed.

Appendix 1: *Iliad* 6.154-206

ὁ δ' ἄρα Γλαῦκον τέκεθ' υἷόν, αὐτὰρ Γλαῦκος τίκτεν ἀμύμονα Βελλεροφόντην·	155
τῷ δὲ θεοὶ κάλλός τε καὶ ἠνορέην ἐρατεινὴν ᾧπασαν· αὐτὰρ οἱ Προΐτος κακὰ μήσατο θυμῷ, ὅς ῥ' ἐκ δήμου ἔλασσεν, ἐπεὶ πολὺ φέρτερος ἦεν, Ἀργείων· Ζεὺς γάρ οἱ ὑπὸ σκῆπτρῳ ἐδάμασσε.	160
τῷ δὲ γυνὴ Προΐτου ἐπεμήνατο δῖ' Ἄντεια κρυπταδὴ φιλότητι μιγήμεναι· ἀλλὰ τὸν οὐ τι πεῖθ' ἀγαθὰ φρονέοντα δαΐφρονα Βελλεροφόντην. ἦ δὲ ψευσαμένη Προΐτον βασιλῆα προσηύδα· 'τεθναίης ᾧ Προΐτ', ἦ κάκτανε Βελλεροφόντην,	165
ὅς μ' ἔθελεν φιλότητι μιγήμεναι οὐκ ἐθελούση. ὣς φάτο, τὸν δὲ ἄνακτα χόλος λάβεν οἶον ἄκουσε· κτεῖναι μὲν ῥ' ἀλέεινε, σεβάσσατο γὰρ τό γε θυμῷ, πέμπε δὲ μιν Λυκίην δέ, πόρεν δ' ὅ γε σήματα λυγρὰ γράψας ἐν πίνακι πτυκτῷ θυμοφθόρα πολλά,	170
δειῖξαι δ' ἠνώγειν ᾧ πενθερῷ ὄφρ' ἀπόλοιτο. αὐτὰρ ὁ βῆ Λυκίην δὲ θεῶν ὑπ' ἀμύμονι πομπῆ. ἀλλ' ὅτε δὴ Λυκίην ἶξε Ξάνθον τε ρέοντα, προφρονέως μιν τῖεν ἄναξ Λυκίης εὐρείης· ἐννήμαρ ξείνισσε καὶ ἐννέα βοῦς ἰέρευσε.	175
ἀλλ' ὅτε δὴ δεκάτη ἐφάνη ῥοδοδάκτυλος Ἥως καὶ τότε μιν ἐρέεινε καὶ ἦτεε σῆμα ἰδέσθαι 'ὅττι ῥά οἱ γαμβροῖο πάρα Προΐτοιο φέροιτο. αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ δὴ σῆμα κακὸν παρεδέξατο γαμβροῦ, πρῶτον μὲν ῥά Χίμαιραν ἀμαιομακέτην ἐκέλευσε	180
πεφνέμεν· ἦ δ' ἄρ' ἔην θεῖον γένος οὐδ' ἀνθρώπων, πρόσθε λέων, ὄπιθεν δὲ δράκων, μέσση δὲ χίμαιρα, δεινὸν ἀποπνεΐουσα πυρὸς μένος αἰθομένοιο, καὶ τὴν μὲν κατέπεφνε θεῶν τεράεσσι πιθήσας. δεύτερον αὖ Σολύμοισι μαχέσσατο κυδαλίμοισι·	185

καρτίστην δὴ τὴν γε μάχην φάτο δύμεναι ἀνδρῶν.
 τὸ τρίτον αὖ κατέπεφνεν Ἀμαζόνας ἀντιανείρας.
 τῷ δ' ἄρ' ἀνερχομένῳ πυκινὸν δόλον ἄλλον ὕφαινε·
 κρίνας ἐκ Λυκίης εὐρείης φῶτας ἀρίστους
 εἶσε λόχον· τοὶ δ' οὐ τι πάλιν οἶκον δὲ νέοντο· 190
 πάντας γὰρ κατέπεφνεν ἀμύμων Βελλεροφόντης.
 ἀλλ' ὅτε δὴ γίγνωσκε θεοῦ γόνον ἦν ἐόντα
 αὐτοῦ μιν κατέρυκε, δίδου δ' ὃ γε θυγατέρα ἦν,
 δῶκε δὲ οἱ τιμῆς βασιληίδος ἤμισυ πάσης·
 καὶ μὲν οἱ Λύκιοι τέμενος τάμον ἔξοχον ἄλλων 195
 καλὸν φυταλιῆς καὶ ἀρούρης, ὄφρα νέμοιτο.
 ἦ δ' ἔτεκε τρία τέκνα δαΐφροني Βελλεροφόντη
 Ἴσανδρόν τε καὶ Ἴπλόλοχον καὶ Λαοδάμειαν.
 Λαοδαμείη μὲν παρελέξατο μητίετα Ζεὺς,
 ἦ δ' ἔτεκ' ἀντίθεον Σαρπηδόνα χαλκοκορυστήν. 200
 ἀλλ' ὅτε δὴ καὶ κεῖνος ἀπήχθετο πᾶσι θεοῖσιν,
 ἦτοι ὃ κὰπ πεδίον τὸ Ἀλήϊον οἶος ἀλάτο
 ὄν θυμὸν κατέδων, πάτον ἀνθρώπων ἀλεείνων·
 Ἴσανδρον δὲ οἱ υἱὸν Ἄρης ἄτος πολέμοιο
 μαρνάμενον Σολύμοισι κατέκτανε κυδαλίμοισι· 205
 τὴν δὲ χολωσαμένη χρυσήνιος Ἄρτεμις ἔκτα.

And (Aeolus' son Sisyphus) begat a son, Glaucus, 155
 then Glaucus begat blameless Bellerophon:
 and to him the gods gave both beauty and charming manhood.
 But Proetus contrived evils in his heart against him,
 who drove him from the land of the Argives,
 since he was better by far.
 For Zeus subdued them by Proetus' scepter. 160
 And Proetus' wife, shining Anteia, madly desired
 to lie with Bellerophon secretly. But in no way
 did she persuade intelligent Bellerophon, mindful of good things.
 And she deceptively spoke to Proetus the king:
 "Die, o Proetus! - or kill Bellerophon, 165
 who wished a forced seduction against me, unwilling.
 Thus she spoke, and wrath took the king by what he heard:
 he avoided killing him, for at any rate he feared that in his heart,
 but he sent him to Lycia, and indeed he gave ruinous signs to him —
 many of them, heart-eating, scratching them in a folded tablet, 170
 and he ordered him to show them to his father-in-law,
 so that he would be killed.
 But Bellerophon went to Lycia under the blameless guidance of the gods.
 Yet when he came to Lycia and the Xanthian stream
 gladly the king of broad Lycia honored him:
 he entertained him for nine days, and sacrificed nine oxen. 175
 But when indeed the tenth rosy-fingered Dawn appeared
 and he then inquired of him and asked to see whatever signs
 were brought to him from his son-in-law Proetus.
 But when he received the evil sign from his son-in-law,
 first he ordered him to slay the mighty Chimaera. 180
 She was by birth divine, and not born of men,
 in front a lion, but in back a dragon, and in the middle a she-goat,
 breathing out a terrible rage of blazing flame,
 and he slew her, relying on signs of the gods.
 Then in turn he battled with the renowned Solymi; 185
 indeed, he said the battle was the mightiest he entered of men.

Third, then, he slew the Amazons, rivals of men.
 And against him returning the king contrived another shrewd treachery:
 choosing from broad Lycia the bravest men
 he prepared an ambush; but none of these came back home, 190
 for blameless Bellerophon slew them all.
 But indeed when the king realized that he was a good descendant of a god
 there he detained him, and he gave him his own daughter in marriage,
 and gave to him half of all of his royal honor,
 and the Lycians drew off for him an estate most eminent of all, 195
 good for orchard and plow land, so that he could manage it.
 And his wife bore three children to intelligent Bellerophon:
 Isander and Hippolychus and Laodameia.
 With Laodameia lay counseling Zeus,
 and she bore godlike bronze-armed Sarpedon. 200
 But when indeed distinguished Bellerophon also¹⁵³
 incurred hatred from all the gods,
 truly throughout the Aleian plain he wandered alone,
 eating his heart out, avoiding pathway of men.
 And Ares insatiate-of-war killed his son Isander
 battling with the renowned Solymi, 205
 and golden-reined Artemis, enraged, killed his daughter.

¹⁵³ I render καὶ as “also” rather “even” specifically due to context provided by the Dionysian tale immediately preceding in Book 6.

Appendix 2: Chronology - Sargon through Homer

~2300	Sargon of Akkad
~2100-2000	Ur III Dynasty (Kingdom of Ur)
2300-2000	Archaic Period of Akkadian Literature
2000-1600 B.C.	S: Old Babylonian Period
~1800	Sargon Legend Segments A-C
1950-1750	N: Old Assyrian
2000-1500	Classical Period of Akkadian Literature
1600-1000	S: Middle Babylonian Period
1500-1000	N: Middle Assyrian
1500-1000	Mature Period of Akkadian Literature
1200	Late Bronze Age: cultural decline in Babylonia and eastern Mediterranean
~1200-1000	Mycenaean settlements in Nippur
~1184	Trojan War
1000-539	S: Neo-Babylonian
1000-600	N: Neo-Assyrian
1000-100	Late Period of Akkadian Literature
~800-750	Homer and the <i>Iliad</i>

*Dates from Rubio 19: Table 2.1 in Ehrlich, and Foster Volume 1 for Akkadian Literature

**S refers generally to Southern Mesopotamia; N to Northern

Appendix 3: Common Elements

Bellerophon

<i>blood pollution</i>	Pseudo-Apollodorus <i>Lib.</i> 2.3, Hyginus <i>Fab.</i> 57, <i>i.a.</i>
<i>dreams</i>	In temple of Athena, Pindar <i>Ol.</i> 13.63ff
<i>divine/ mortal favor</i>	ἀμύμονα, 155; κάλλος, ἠνορέην ἐρατεινήν, 156; φέρτερος, 159; ἀμύμων, 191; δαΐφρονη, 197 Paus. 2.31.9, <i>i.a.</i> - Athena's aid
<i>king's wife</i>	τῷ δὲ γυνὴ Προίτου ἐπεμήνατο δῖ' Ἄντεια/ κρυπταδίη φιλότητι μιγήμεναι: ἀλλὰ τὸν οὐ τι/ πεῖθ' ἀγαθὰ φρονέοντα δαΐφρονα Βελλεροφόντην, 161-64
<i>the tablet</i>	γράψας ἐν πίνακι πτυκτῶ, 170
<i>deadly intentions</i>	σήματα λυγρὰ, 169; θυμοφθόρα πολλά, 170
<i>divine escort</i>	ἀμύμονι πομπῆ, 172
<i>10 days</i>	δεκάτη, 176
<i>hated by gods</i>	ἀπήχθετο πᾶσι θεοῖσιν, 201 Pindar <i>Isth.</i> 7.44ff - trying to reach heaven Pseudo-Hyginus <i>Astron.</i> 2.18 - trying to reach heaven (frightened by looking down) Nonnus, <i>Dionysiaca</i> 28.167ff.
<i>the wandering</i>	εδίον τὸ Ἀλήϊον οἶος ἀλᾶτο, 203

Sargon

<i>blood pollution</i>	"No one polluted with blood should enter [the holy house of E-sikil]!" B42 ¹⁵⁴
<i>divine/ mortal favor</i>	"An and Enlil, however, authoritatively (?) decided (?) by their holy command to alter (Ur-Zababa's) term of reigning and to remove the prosperity of the palace," A9; "After Sargon had received the regular deliveries for the palace, Ur-Zababa appointed him cupbearer," B5-6; "creature of the gods," B54; see also Inana's ongoing favor in <i>divine escort</i> below and perspectives of Sargon as divinely selected king

¹⁵⁴ Translations of the Sargon Legend in this portion and below from the ETCSL.

<i>dreams</i>	Ur-Zababa, B3-4; Ur-Zababa, B9?; Sargon, B13; Ur-Zababa, B49-50?
<i>the tablet</i>	“although writing words on tablets existed, putting tablets into envelopes did not yet exist,” B53
<i>deadly intentions</i>	“which was about murdering Sargon,” B55
<i>divine escort</i>	“Holy Inana did not cease to stand by him,” B7; “Holy Inana, however, did not cease to stand at his right hand side,” B39
<i>10 days</i>	“After five or 10 days had passed,” B8, B46
<i>king’s wife?</i>	“With the wife of Lugal-zage-si . . . her femininity as a shelter,” C1-2
<i>the wandering?</i>	Weidner Chronicle 46-52b, <i>i.a.</i>

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