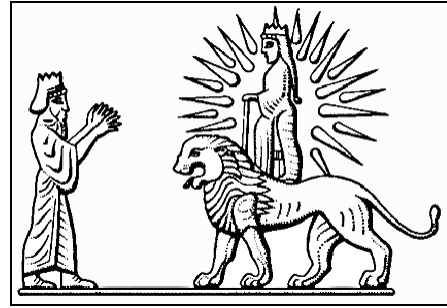


THE MELAMMU PROJECT

<http://www.aakkl.helsinki.fi/melammu/>



“The Gilgamesh epic and Manichaean themes”

STEPHANIE DALLEY

Published in:

Aram 3 (1991) 23-33.

Publisher: <http://www.peeters-leuven.be/>

This article was downloaded from the website of the Melammu Project:

<http://www.aakkl.helsinki.fi/melammu/>

The Melammu Project investigates the continuity, transformation and diffusion of Mesopotamian culture throughout the ancient world. A central objective of the project is to create an electronic database collecting the relevant textual, art-historical, archaeological, ethnographic and linguistic evidence, which is available on the website, alongside bibliographies of relevant themes. In addition, the project organizes symposia focusing on different aspects of cultural continuity and evolution in the ancient world.

The Digital Library available at the website of the Melammu Project contains articles from the *Melammu Symposia* volumes, as well as related essays. All downloads at this website are freely available for personal, non-commercial use. Commercial use is strictly prohibited. For inquiries, please contact melammu-db@helsinki.fi.

THE GILGAMESH EPIC AND MANICHAEAN THEMES

STEPHANIE DALLEY

The purpose of this paper is to examine the Babylonian *Epic of Gilgamesh* as a source for certain particular beliefs characteristic of Manichaean religion. Babylonian cuneiform writing had died out by the time of Christ, but several key names in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* are preserved in the *Book of the Giants*, a work known to us only from a few fragments in various languages. Originally it was a part of the *Book of Enoch* before and during the time of Christ, but then it was used for a Manichaean canonical scripture from the third century AD onwards. In a recent paper published in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* I showed that the *Tale of Buluqiya*, incorporated in Arabic in some versions of the *Thousand and One Nights*, was a much altered descendant of the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. The story, combined with two others, is narrated by the Queen of the Serpents to Hasib son of Daniel. Not only was a version attested in the manuscript used by Sir R. Burton, but also another version of the story is told by Tha'labi in his *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiya*, and so the story would have been well known in Abbasid times. Almost certainly a third version, of unknown origin, was used by Mardrus for his translation into French. The name of the hero Buluqiya was, I suggested, a hypocoristic form of Bilgamesh, which is an alternative pronunciation of Gilgamesh.¹ The character and name of Al-Khidhr, an immortal sage in the story, had some links with the survivor of the Flood, known in Babylonian tradition by two names: Atra-hasis and Ut-napishtim.

Certain major changes had occurred in the story which had made it difficult to recognise. One was that the central, heroic episode in which Gilgamesh and Enkidu killed Humbaba, guardian of the Pine Forest, had been replaced by another, in which the two heroes attempted to steal the magic ring from Solomon's corpse after they had travelled across the Seven Seas to reach his tomb. The other significant alteration was that the episode of the Flood was omitted.²

¹Scheil, V., "Actes juridiques susiens", *Mémoires de la Mission Archéologique de Perse* 22, (Paris, 1930), 85, deduced that the name in Elam was pronounced Gwilgamesh from spellings such as *We-el-gi-maš*.

²A Late Bronze Age text from Emar makes it virtually certain that the Flood episode had

Various characteristics in the *Tale of Buluqiya* made it clear that the genre to which it belonged was apocalyptic. The new *raison d'être* of the story was to foretell the coming of Muhammad and the dawning of a new era. Buluqiya, described in all versions as king of the Banu Israil, was a hero-type well known from Jewish apocalyptic, who tours heaven and hell, who communes with angels and sages, and who sees, or is told about, many of the mysteries of the universe.

The reason why the main heroic episode concerning Humbaba had been changed was almost certainly that it was too closely associated with the *Book of the Giants*. Attested at Qumran as a part of the *Book of Enoch* in Aramaic, it was later excised from that Book because the Manichaeans took it into their canon of holy scripture. For a similar reason it was taken out of the Gilgamesh-Buluqiya story before the *Tale of Buluqiya* reached its final form. The conclusion was tentative because it depended to some extent upon fragments still unpublished from Qumran, in which Milik thought he had read the name of Gilgamesh. Evidence for Humbaba's name was stronger and adequately published. Since that study was done, a completely independent piece of research by John C. Reeves of Winthrop College has indicated that the Flood episode was also used in the *Book of the Giants*, and that the name of a giant in a Middle Persian fragment, 'TNBYŠ "Atambish", is a corruption of the Babylonian name Ut-napishtim.³ In view of this it seems certain that the Epic of Gilgamesh in a late and unknown form provided the Manichaeans with important material for their religion, and so it is now appropriate to look in more detail at themes which seem to be common to the Epic of Gilgamesh and Manichaean beliefs.

To introduce the matter, a few words may be said about the rediscovery of Manichaean religion. Discoveries of papyri and other ancient writing materials during the course of the last century, particularly from Egypt and from Central Asia, are making it possible to reconstitute gradually, from fragments of texts in many different languages, the canonical scriptures of the Manichaeans. This allows scholars to adjust a view based on the polemical denigration of them by Christians and others, and one result is that the religion is seen not simply as a Christian heresy but as a sect which developed into an independent, world religion that was effectively blotted

been added to the *Epic of Gilgamesh* by that period, and is not an Iron Age addition. Arnaud, D., *Recherches au pays d'Aštata VI/4*, (Paris, 1987), no.767:13-15

³Reeves, J.C., "Ut-napishtim in the Book of Giants?", *Journal of Biblical Literature*, forthcoming; *Jewish Lore in Manichaean Cosmogony: Studies in the Book of Giants Traditions*, (Cincinnati, 1992), p. 116 and n. 373. I am most grateful to him for making the results of his work available to me in advance of publication.

out by total persecution. The founder of the religion, Mani, was born c. 216 AD and brought up in Babylonia. Most commentators have looked towards Iran and Zoroastrianism for the roots of his dualist creed, although a few emphasised the Babylonian contribution.⁴

From the standpoint of the cuneiformist, a close association of religious ideas between the Iranian and Babylonian worlds from earliest proto-historic times is to be expected. The Sumerian King List, written in the Middle Bronze Age to record the traditions of the third millennium BC, includes among the cities of Mesopotamia proper the Iranian kingdom of Awan; and Sumerian epic tales of the same period refer to Anshan, now identified as Tell-i-Malyan near Persepolis. At various periods - the Uruk period in the late fourth millennium, the Early Dynastic period in the mid third millennium (the putative lifetime of Gilgamesh) and the Third Dynasty of Ur in the late third millennium - the kingdoms of Elam in Iran belonged to the Mesopotamian cultural community to such an extent that most of their records during the second millennium (when knowledge of the Gilgamesh Epic was widespread) were written in Sumerian and Akkadian. The national Elamite revival that followed was relatively short-lived, and by then many literary and material conditions were demonstrably held in common by the two countries.⁵ Gilgamesh was a mythical hero well-known in the early second millennium among the people of Susa, whose rulers were blood relatives of the kings in Anshan. If the lifetime of Zoroaster is to be dated to the Middle Bronze Age as recent authorities assert,⁶ the concepts characteristic of his faith will have originated and developed in kingdoms deeply impregnated with ancient Mesopotamian culture. The Assyrians knew of the Indo-Iranian gods Mitra, Varuna, Indra and Nasatya from their Mittanian overlords of the 14th century BC;⁷ they encountered people with Iranian names and titles in the region around Lake Urmia in 714 BC (and perhaps on earlier campaigns too),⁸ and they kept a statue of Ahura-Mazda

⁴I am grateful to Dr Reeves for pointing out to me the article Kessler, K., "Mani, Manichäer", in Herzog, (ed), *Realencyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche*, 3. Auflage (Leipzig, 1903), Band XII 193-228, which attributed many Manichaean ideas to Babylonian traditions, but made dubious comparisons relying upon the now badly outdated work of Delitzsch, Jensen and Jastrow.

⁵Carter, E. & Stolper, M.W., *Elam*. (Near Eastern Studies vol. 25, Univ. Calif. Press, 1984), 131, 144-5.

⁶Boyce, M., *Zoroastrians*, (London, 1979), 18; Kingsley, P., "The Greek origin of the sixth-century dating of Zoroaster", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 53 (1990), 245-265.

⁷Wilhelm, G., *Grundzüge der Geschichte und Kultur der Hurriter*, (Darmstadt, 1982), 26.

⁸Hommel, F., *Ethnologie und Geographie des alten Orients*, (München, 1926), 197ff.

in one of their main temples alongside Mesopotamian gods.⁹ Therefore it is not a question of clearcut alternatives to discover whether Iran or Babylonia contributed to Manichaeism. Key terms for religious concepts in Indo-European Persian on the one hand and in Semitic Babylonian on the other, extant at different periods and in unhelpful contexts, may mislead in giving a superficial appearance of differences, apparently supported by different burial customs and types of sacrifice, which are only the outward forms of expression given to various different beliefs. None of the many concepts that are bound up with the Persian words *fravarti* and *daēnā* seem to be foreign to Mesopotamia if one takes into account well-established phenomena in the latter society: the deification of early kings and heroes, the power of ancestral spirits to help or harm, the protective power of *šalmu šarri* as a divine, royal counterpart depicted as the Winged Disc,¹⁰ the concept of personal goddesses who intercede between man and god, and the phenomenon of Enkidu as a heaven-sent match for Gilgamesh.

With the benefit of hindsight, we can now look into the *Epic of Gilgamesh* and related traditions to find which themes were particularly significant for the Manichaeans. As well as the tradition of promiscuous giants represented in the *Book of the Giants*, which is relevant to the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, two items from the gospel-like Cologne Mani Codex in which Mani describes his early life and calling are also pertinent. The first is described as: when Mani was 24 years old, "the most blessed Lord...sent to me from there my Twin,¹¹ appearing in great [glory]...mindful of and informer of all the best counsels from our Father...", to show him how he had been "led astray in this detestable flesh, and before I clothed myself with its drunkenness and habits." The second is when Mani shows himself aware of the agony of the date-palm as it is pruned or cut down, "wailing like human beings, and as it were like children. Alas! Alas! The blood was streaming down from the place cut by the pruning hook which he held in his hands. And they were crying out in a human voice on account of their blows." Mani also reports that a date-palm spoke with Aianos the Baptist from Koche and forbade him to cut it down.¹² These two passages express two of the most characteristic beliefs of the Manichaeans: that carnal man is provided by God with a

⁹3R66 ix 23'; see Menzel, B., *Assyrische Tempel*, (Rome, 1981), T122.

¹⁰Dalley, S., "The god Šalmu and the winged disk", *Iraq*, 48 (1986), 85-101.

¹¹Greek *σὺζυγος*, literally "yoked together".

¹²I have used the translation of Cameron, R. & Dewey, A.J., *The Cologne Mani Codex "concerning the origin of his body"*, (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1979); the more recent and more complete edition, Koenen, L. & Römer, C., *Der Kölner Mani-Kodex...kritischer Edition*, (Opladen, 1988), is not yet available to me.

spiritual twin or counterpart; and that trees suffer and speak like mortals.

SACRILEGE IN THE FOREST OF PINES

During the first part of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* the hero is presented in a remarkably unfavourable light for one who is virtually a national hero. He exploits his position as king of Uruk to seduce every girl and boy in the city when they reach maturity. That this is regarded as "unnatural" behaviour is clear from the instant reaction of Enkidu, the "natural" man who has arrived from the purity of open country to the corruption of city life, from a vegetarian diet to a carnivorous one, from water as his drink to beer, and from the company of wild animals to the promiscuity of human society. Enkidu is furious even before he has met Gilgamesh, as soon as he discovers the excesses of Gilgamesh's sexual behaviour. After they have met, fought and become firm friends, we must assume that Gilgamesh modifies that behaviour. But he is still an imperfect character: rash and foolish, he will not take advice from friends and elders as the model Mesopotamian ruler should do. He is determined to leave his city and royal responsibilities to find and kill Humbaba, defying all counsel including that of Enkidu. For this reason his mother is obliged to invoke the special protection of the Sungod, and the pretext is given that the Sungod, for reasons that are unclear, hates "Something Evil", and wants it exterminated. "Something Evil" is a name for a demon in apotropaic literature, but it cannot be equated with Humbaba; it is not clear that Gilgamesh rids the land of anything evil in slaying Humbaba.

Humbaba himself is not portrayed as an evil figure. Large, loud-voiced, fearsome and powerful, he is a divine creature who has been entrusted with protecting the trees in his forest by none other than Ellil, head of the pantheon of "good" gods.¹³ The two heroes know that their action is bad: they anticipate fury from Ellil at the slaying of Humbaba. When they cut down trees,¹⁴ they commit a further sacrilege, which Enkidu later tries to justify by making a door to present to Ellil's city Nippur, and addressing the timber of the door as if it were a person. "I selected the timber for you over

¹³In the OB version the west semitic god Wer/Ilwer may take that role. The Humbaba episode has been discussed by Ellis, M. de J., "Gilgamesh' approach to Huwawa: A New Text", *Archiv für Orientforschung*, 28 (1981-82), 124-131; and Edzard, D.O., "Gilgamesh und Huwawa", A.I. Teil, *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie*, 80/II (1990), 165-203. Forsyth, N., "Huwawa and his trees", *Acta Sumerologica*, 3 (1981), 13-30, contributes in particular some illuminating Hittite material.

¹⁴In the Sumerian version, which is more complete than the Akkadian, Gilgamesh definitely seeks out and cuts down a pine tree before the encounter with Humbaba.

twenty leagues, Until I had found a fully mature pine. There is no other wood like yours! Your height is six poles, your width two poles, Your doorpost, your lower and upper hinge(?) are made [from a single tree]. I made you, I carried you to Nippur. Be aware, door, that this was a favour to you, And this was a good deed done for you." Only after the heroes have angered the gods on three counts - the slaying of Humbaba, the cutting down of his trees, and the insulting of Ishtar - does Enkidu pay the price of death. Only then does the character of Gilgamesh change from an undisciplined, exploitative, rash type to a thoughtful, careful man of wisdom. The change is achieved by bitter experience and by travels to the ends of the world where superhuman beings are encountered who dispense their wisdom.

SPIRITUAL AND FLESHLY COUNTERPARTS

Gilgamesh ends up where Enkidu began, as a chaste man who wears animal skins, shuns human society by wandering alone in the open country, and reflects on the values of life. Enkidu was created by the gods to match Gilgamesh: the gods assert that they are creating him to match Gilgamesh and his mother prophesies that she will treat Enkidu as equal to Gilgamesh. It is made clear that Enkidu will guard and protect Gilgamesh. The two heroes are compared closely for form and physical attributes by the shepherds outside Uruk, who say: "The young man - how like Gilgamesh in build, Mature in build, as sturdy as battlements". Gilgamesh is explicitly described as a giant in the Hittite version; so also must Enkidu be a giant. Humbaba is also enormous, much larger even than Gilgamesh, by inference from the passage in which Humbaba says scornfully to Gilgamesh: "You are so very small that I regard you as I do a turtle or a tortoise, which does not suck its mother's milk, so I do not approach you. [Even if I] were to kill (?) you, would I satisfy my stomach?". The *Epic of Gilgamesh* is about three giants. Enkidu, sent by the gods to match and reform Gilgamesh, is the partner of Gilgamesh in the Manichaean sense of a spiritual counterpart, a divine twin sent by God to convey noble counsel. If Enkidu is to some extent regarded in this light, a partial explanation is given to the apparent incoherence of tablet XII, in which Enkidu, who had died earlier in the Epic, is back alive with Gilgamesh and is able to visit the Underworld and to come back again to report on it.¹⁵ Neither Gilgamesh nor Mani is sent his spiritual partner until he is fully adult; the relationship between Gilgamesh and

¹⁵I am very grateful to Professor Jonas Greenfield, who suggested to me the possibility that Enkidu is in some sense the double of Gilgamesh.

Enkidu is described as similar to that of man and wife, and like that relationship it does not last from birth to the grave but is limited to a critical period of early manhood.

Distinct from the twin-like aspect of Gilgamesh and Enkidu, the double nature of Gilgamesh himself has long been recognised. Although the hero of the Epic signally failed to win immortality, he is given as a god in cuneiform god-lists from the Early Dynastic period onwards.¹⁶ Cuneiform texts also equate him with Nergal, whose double nature as both mortal and immortal is stated in the *Epic of Erra and Ishum* IV: "You have changed your divine nature and become like a human." If it is correct that the names Herakles and (N)ergal/Erakal are derived from the same word,¹⁷ the description of Herakles in *Odyssey* xi 601f as the double figure who exists as a wraith in the Underworld while his immortal counterpart feasts with the gods, is an example of the same phenomenon. Thus the naked hero shown on cylinder seals of the Akkadian period dressed in a lion skin and holding a club can equally be identified as Gilgamesh, Enkidu, Nergal and Herakles.¹⁸ The gigantic strength and massive body of Herakles are too well known to need further comment; he bears the epithet "gigantic" in, for instance, the *Argonautica* of Apollonius. This double nature of Herakles and of Nergal may be different from the type represented by Gilgamesh and Enkidu; not enough detail is available to allow a close comparison.

By rejecting fine clothes, good food, sexual relations and convivial company, Gilgamesh comes close to heaven. This is dramatically represented in terms of darkness and light, when he travels through total darkness to emerge into bright light and a jewel garden in Tablet IX, like the Manichaean Kingdom of Light attained by the Elect. In the Flood story Ut-napishtim becomes a god not simply by surviving the Flood, but by rejecting possessions to concentrate upon living things; by doing so he acts upon the advice of Ea: "Leave possessions, search out living things, reject chattels and save lives!" Ut-napishtim too travels through darkness to light; shortly before the Flood, "Everything light turned to darkness"; after the Flood, "I opened a porthole, and light fell on my cheeks." Rejection of the outward forms of material wealth and the choice of a solitary existence; passage through darkness to light; these two changes allow both Gilgamesh and Ut-

¹⁶References are given in Ebeling, E. & Meissner, B., (eds), *Reallexikon der Assyriologie*, Band 3, (Berlin/New York 1957-1971) s.v. Gilgamesh.

¹⁷Dalley, S., "Near Eastern deities of mining and smelting in the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages", *Report of the Department of Antiquities Cyprus*, (1987), 61-66.

¹⁸Collon, D., *Catalogue of the Western Asiatic Seals in the British Museum II*, (London, 1982) no. 213 with comments.

napishtim to come nearer to the great gods.

DIVINE AND TALKING TREES

In Babylonian literature trees are often divine, and they talk and have superhuman powers which they use to try and help men. The god (Nin)Gishzida, "Faithful Tree", attempted to mediate on behalf of Adapa in the *Myth of Adapa* to help the hero gain immortality. He acts as a doorkeeper of heaven in that myth, and it has been suggested that the Snake God on early Akkadian cylinder seals, often seated in front of a gate or a tree or both, is Ningishzida.¹⁹ Enkidu, by selecting the finest timber and making a door for Nippur which he addresses as if it were a person, highlights the connexion of trees and timber with men and gods. In the popular *Dispute between the Date-palm and the Tamarisk* two trees dispute points of philosophical content in a text of very ancient wisdom literature that dates from at least the early second millennium BC.²⁰ The work was used in a later piece of Parthian/Middle Persian writing, a dispute between a date-palm and a goat,²¹ which helps to bridge the gap between the end of cuneiform and early Iranian literature. In a Babylonian elegy mourning the death of Dumuzi, the tree, as the first person narrator, is cut down, causing tragedy for which its father weeps: "I was lofty in our orchard like a handsome tree! ...My father saw me and rejoiced greatly. Whenever you looked at me, like ... you rejoiced. Now they have felled me, have carried me off forever. My father sees me and weeps."²² A religious text contains an address to a tree: "You are the bone of divinity, the very holy tamarisk",²³ and the *Epic of Erra and Ishum* I 150 contains the question: "Where is the *mēsu*-tree, the flesh of the gods?" Certain trees are entitled in lists: "God-king *šinig*-tree", "God-king *asal*-tree", "God-king *ūr*-tree", and "God-king date-palm".²⁴

¹⁹Collon, *op.cit.* p.90 and nos.186-189. The connection may be important for understanding Genesis 3.

²⁰Wilcke, C., "Die Emar-Version von 'Dattelpalme und Tamariske' - ein Rekonstruktionsversuch", *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie*, 79/2 (1989), 161-190. Dr Glenthøj drew my attention to similarities with the Council of the Trees in Judges 9:7-16.

²¹Brunner, C.J., "The Fable of the Babylonian Tree", *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 39 (1980), 191-202, 291-302.

²²Livingstone, A., *Court Poetry and Literary Miscellanea*, (State Archives of Assyria III, Helsinki University Press, 1989) 41 = STT 360.

²³Zimmern, H., *Beiträge zur Kenntnis der babylonischen Religion* II, (Leipzig, 1901), 45.ii.10.

²⁴In addition to the texts quoted by Livingstone, A., *Mystical and Mythological explanatory works of Assyrian and Babylonian Scholars*, (Oxford, 1986), 92-112, see Arnaud, *op.cit.* No 539:69'-73'.

Against this background of belief in the divinity of trees should be seen the enormity of the crime which Gilgamesh and Enkidu committed in cutting down the trees in the Pine Forest. More than that, it emphasises how important was the role played by Humbaba, who was appointed by Ellil to keep the forest safe. The triumphant adventure of the two heroes was nothing less than sacrilege, an outrageous escapade to avoid the boredom of staying at home and to win fame at any cost. In the Old Babylonian version of the Epic, when Gilgamesh weeps for frustration at the wise and cautious counsel of his friends, he cries out to Enkidu: "Must I live in security forever? ... Must I be satisfied by a home with your manly charms?" The Babylonian religious background makes clear the role of the giant who guards the trees of Paradise in the *Tale of Buluqiya*, and shows that no great reinterpretation has taken place between the Babylonian and the Arabic stories in this respect. Each of the three versions of the tale has plants that speak, but Tha'labi's version gives the greatest detail in naming the *qarmal* tree as the one that addresses Affan by name and gives helpful advice.

In stories from Late Antiquity that are connected in other ways with Gilgamesh and Buluqiya the theme of superhuman trees is almost invariably found. In a Jewish version of the Alexander Romance, a talking tree told Alexander where to find the Water of Life in an episode closely comparable to Ningishzida's attempt to help Adapa obtain the Water of Life in the *Myth of Adapa*.²⁵ In Greek and Ethiopic versions of the Romance, a talking tree foretold the death of Alexander. In the *Zosimos Apocalypse* (also known as the *History of the Rechabites*) in an episode long recognised as based on that of the Brahman gymnosophists in the Alexander Romance, two trees are instrumental in lifting Zosimos up into the Land of the Blessed by purposefully stretching out their helpful branches.²⁶ In the Ethiopic *Book of Mysteries* Adam brought saplings out of Eden to begin cultivation of trees outside Paradise. In the Old Testament, perhaps most closely connected is the vision of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon in Daniel 4:8-18, in which a tree that grows up to heaven provides food for all flesh, but the Watchers decree that it shall be cut down, and this dream illustrates rule by the basest of men. It may allude to the *Book of Enoch* at a time when it still included both the *Book of the Watchers* and the *Book of the Giants*, before those popular themes had been taken up by the Manichaeans and later excised. In

²⁵Gaster, M., "An Old Hebrew Romance of Alexander", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, (1897), 485-549.

²⁶Charlesworth, J.H., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, II, (London, 1985), 443-462. Reasons for connecting the *Zosimos Apocalypse* with the Gilgamesh-Buluqiya tradition will be given in detail in my forthcoming book.

giving the vision as one experienced by a Babylonian king, the *Book of Daniel* associates the wonderful tree with ancient Mesopotamian tradition. II Kings 19:23 and Isaiah 37:24 may also contain an allusion to the Humbaba episode: Sennacherib is condemned for arrogance by the Lord for saying: "With my many chariots I have climbed the tops of mountains, the utmost peaks of Lebanon. I have felled its tall forest of cedars, its finest cypresses. I have reached its furthest recesses, its forest garden."²⁷ The passage may imply that Sennacherib has committed sacrilege just as Gilgamesh did.

Although the Standard version of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* probably dates to the Late Bronze Age in the late second millennium BC, some of the ideas we have looked at seem to be present in the Sumerian royal hymns of Shulgi king of Ur, who ruled Mesopotamia from c.2094-2047 BC. The king is compared for strength, beauty and fertility with a number of different kinds of tree, and he claims to be the brother and friend of Gilgamesh, child of the same divine parents. In particular, Gilgamesh is called his "double head", Sumerian *sag tab.ba*, equivalent to Akkadian "helper", reminiscent of Enkidu's role with Gilgamesh.²⁸ This is an indication that the Manichaean concept of a spiritual partner sent from heaven to help the earthly man has its ancestry in Mesopotamia in the late third millennium.

An echo of the theme of humanoid trees persists in Mandaean traditions recorded by Drower in south Iraq, in which the *nabqa* tree and the *sidr* tree groan if they are cut; their sap flows like blood, and it is a disaster if they are cut down.²⁹ It would be wrong to propose too narrow a sphere for pre-Manichaean humanoid trees; as Henrichs has shown, trees with human characteristics are also found in Classical literature, for instance in Callimachus and Ovid; and trees with powers of speech were sacred in early Indian civilisation.³⁰ But the persecution of the Manichaeans may have helped to eradicate this sacred attribute of trees from the beliefs of many different groups in Late Antiquity, leaving only thin threads of continuity that survived the ban of Diocletian in 296 AD and its aftermath.

²⁷Translation from the Jerusalem Bible. I am grateful to Dr J. Glenthøj for the observation during discussion at the conference that this passage was relevant. Note that the Sumerian story of Gilgamesh and Humbaba contains the information that the heroes crossed seven mountains to reach the Pine Forest.

²⁸Klein, J., *Three Shulgi Hymns*, (Bar-Ilan University, 1981), esp. 73-5 and 83, with note on p.112 to line 293.

²⁹Drower, E.S., *The Mandaeans of Iraq and Iran*, (Oxford, 1937), 347.

³⁰Henrichs, A., "'Thou shalt not kill a tree': Greek, Manichaean and Indian tales", *Bull.Am.Soc.Pap.*, XVI (1979), 85-108.

Many changes took place in substance, purpose and interpretation between the *Gilgamesh Epic* and the *Book of the Giants*. Certain clues are visible: Humbaba to the Manichaeans was a spirit of darkness, not the good guardian of sacred trees, under the name Hummamah. The pine or cedar forest itself is evil in the Dream of Baruch, reported in the Syrian *Apocalypse of Baruch*, ch.36, a work that appears to date earlier than the lifetime of Mani.³¹

The *Epic of Gilgamesh* contains much that perplexes the modern reader. When Al-Birūnī (973-1048 AD) managed to acquire a copy of the Manichaean scriptures, including the *Book of the Giants*, after forty years of eager searching, he dismissed them contemptuously as rubbish.³² An understanding of its Babylonian ancestry may help to show why the work attracted so many intelligent men in Late Antiquity.

In the absence of the full text of the *Book of the Giants* and the various versions of the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, closer comparisons are impossible. But with the names of Gilgamesh, Humbaba and Ut-napishtim all preserved as giants, there is no longer any doubt that the Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh was a major source from which Manichaean beliefs developed.

³¹I rely upon the introduction and translation of R.H. Charles, revised by L.H. Brockington, in *The Apocryphal Old Testament*, Sparks, H.F.D., (ed), (Oxford, 1984) and am grateful to Dr Glenthøj for mentioning the text to me in discussion.

³²I am grateful to Dr G. Strohmaier for this information, available in his German translation: Al-Birūnī, *In den Gärten der Wissenschaft: ausgewählte Texte*, (Reclam-Verlag, Leipzig, 1991), 147.