

PREFACE

The origin of this study is an edition of the Sumerian epic-tale “Gilgamesh and Akka”, which I prepared as M.A. thesis under the supervision of Prof. Raphael Kutscher and which I submitted to Tel Aviv University. In 1985 I was studying the governmental institutions of Early Dynastic Sumer and returned to this text in search of historical clues. By this time, Römer’s edition of the text as well as reviews of his edition by Cooper and by Michalowski had already appeared. While working on the text I had the impression that it was not just another epic tale about Gilgamesh, as it had been generally considered, but a composition with historiographic overtones. That is to say, the events described in this tale are arranged so as to serve a political or propagandistic purpose. This idea called for a re-evaluation of the literary properties of “Gilgamesh and Akka” and of its historical value. A literary analysis of the composition appeared to reveal a process of redaction in which a story about Uruk’s war of liberation from the hegemony of Kish was adapted to create a tale focused on Gilgamesh and his glorification. Following this, I wrote a paper on the subject of the description of the two assemblies narrated in the composition (RA 81 [1987], 105–114). The edition presented here differs from my first edition mainly in the literary treatment of the text, and in the use of literary analysis for a better understanding of the development of the composition and its significance.

The manuscript of this book was written in 1987. Since then, some more material on “Gilgamesh and Akka” has been published by various scholars. I have tried to include all this material here, and I acknowledge the help of Dr. F. A. M. Wiggermann.

I wish to thank those who inspired and encouraged me to continue my work on the composition, especially Prof. Nadav Na’aman of Tel Aviv University with whom I had long discussions about the possibility of tendentiousness in this text. His views on historiography inspired me to analyze the composition in search of intentional literary elaboration. Later on, I was much encouraged by Thorkild Jacobsen, with whom I further discussed the literary structure of the composition and its significance. I also wish to thank Dr. F. A. M. Wiggermann for his useful comments while he was editing the book.