***Epic of Gilgamesh***

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The ***Epic of Gilgamesh*** is an [epic poem](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epic_poetry) from ancient [Mesopotamia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mesopotamia). Dating from the [Third Dynasty of Ur](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Third_Dynasty_of_Ur) (circa 2100 BC), it is often regarded as the first great work of literature. The literary history of [Gilgamesh](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gilgamesh) begins with five [Sumerian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sumerian_language) poems about 'Gilgamesh' (Sumerian for 'Gilgamesh'), king of [Uruk](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uruk). These independent stories were later used as source material for a combined epic. The first surviving version of this combined epic, known as the "Old Babylonian" version, dates to the 18th century BC and is titled after its [*incipit*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Incipit), ***Shūtur eli sharrī*** ("Surpassing All Other Kings"). Only a few [tablets](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clay_tablet) of it have survived. The later "Standard" version dates from the 13th to the 10th centuries BC and bears the *incipit* ***Sha naqba īmuru*** ("He who Saw the Deep", in modern terms: "He who Sees the Unknown"). Approximately two thirds of this longer, twelve-tablet version have been recovered. Some of the best copies were discovered in the [library ruins](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Library_of_Ashurbanipal) of the 7th-century BC [Assyrian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assyria) king [Ashurbanipal](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ashurbanipal).

The first half of the story discusses Gilgamesh, king of [Uruk](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uruk), and [Enkidu](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enkidu), a wild man created by the gods to stop him from oppressing the people of Uruk. After an initial fight, Gilgamesh and Enkidu become close friends. Together, they journey to the Cedar Mountain and defeat [Humbaba](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Humbaba), its monstrous guardian. Later they kill the Bull of Heaven, which the goddess [Ishtar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ishtar) sends to punish Gilgamesh for spurning her advances. As a punishment for these actions, the gods sentence Enkidu to death.

In the second half of the epic, distress about Enkidu's death causes Gilgamesh to undertake a long and perilous journey to discover the secret of eternal life. He eventually learns that "Life, which you look for, you will never find. For when the gods created man, they let death be his share, and life withheld in their own hands". However, because of his great building projects, his account of [Siduri](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siduri)'s advice, and what the immortal man [Utnapishtim](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Utnapishtim) told him about [the Great Flood](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flood_myth), Gilgamesh's fame survived his death. His story has been translated into many languages, and in recent years has featured [in works of popular fiction](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adaptations_of_the_Epic_of_Gilgamesh).

**History**



The [Deluge](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deluge_(mythology)) tablet of the Gilgamesh epic in [Akkadian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Akkadian_language)

Distinct sources exist from over a 2000-year timeframe. The earliest Sumerian poems are now generally considered to be distinct stories, rather than parts of a single epic. They date from as early as the [Third Dynasty of Ur](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Third_Dynasty_of_Ur) (circa 2100 BC). The Old Babylonian tablets (circa 1800 BC), are the earliest surviving tablets for a single Epic of Gilgamesh narrative. The older Old Babylonian tablets and later [Akkadian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Akkadian_language) version are important sources for modern translations, with the earlier texts mainly used to fill in gaps ([lacunae](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lacuna_(manuscripts))) in the later texts. Although several revised versions based on new discoveries have been published, the epic remains incomplete. Analysis of the Old Babylonian text has been used to reconstruct possible earlier forms of the Epic of Gilgamesh. The most recent Akkadian version (circa 1200 BC), also referred to as the "standard" version, consisting of twelve tablets, was edited by [Sin-liqe-unninni](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sin-liqe-unninni) and was found in the [Library of Ashurbanipal](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Library_of_Ashurbanipal) in [Nineveh](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nineveh).

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| **“** | ...this discovery is evidently destined to excite a lively controversy. For the present the orthodox people are in great delight, and are very much prepossessed by the corroboration which it affords to Biblical history. It is possible, however, as has been pointed out, that the Chaldean inscription, if genuine, may be regarded as a confirmation of the statement that there are various traditions of the deluge apart from the Biblical one, which is perhaps legendary like the rest. |  |
| —*The New York Times*, front page, 22 December 1872 | | |

The *Epic of Gilgamesh* was discovered by [Hormuzd Rassam](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hormuzd_Rassam) in 1853. The central character of Gilgamesh was initially reintroduced to the world as "*Izdubar*", before the [cuneiform](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cuneiform) [logographs](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Logograph) in his name could be pronounced accurately. The first modern translation was published in the early 1870s by [George Smith](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Smith_(Assyriologist)). The most definitive translation is a two-volume critical work by [Andrew George](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andrew_R._George). George discusses the state of the surviving material, and provides a tablet-by-tablet [exegesis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Exegesis), with a dual language side-by-side translation. This translation was published by [Oxford University Press](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oxford_University_Press) in 2003. Stephen Mitchell in 2004 supplied a controversial translation that takes many liberties with the text and includes modernized allusions and commentary relating to the [Iraq war](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iraq_war) of 2003. The first direct Arabic translation from the original tablets was made in the 1960s by the Iraqi archeologist [Taha Baqir](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taha_Baqir).

The discovery of artifacts (ca. 2600 BC) associated with [Enmebaragesi](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enmebaragesi) of [Kish](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kish_(Sumer)), mentioned in the legends as the father of one of Gilgamesh's adversaries, has lent credibility to the historical existence of Gilgamesh.

**Versions**

From the diverse sources found, two main versions of the epic have been partially reconstructed: the *Standard Akkadian version*, or *He who saw the deep*, and the *Old Babylonian version*, or *Surpassing all other kings*. Five earlier [Sumerian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sumer) poems about Gilgamesh have been partially recovered, some with primitive versions of specific episodes in the Akkadian version, others with unrelated stories.

**Standard Akkadian version**

The standard version was discovered by Hormuzd Rassam in the [library of Ashurbanipal](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Library_of_Ashurbanipal) in [Nineveh](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nineveh) in 1853. It was written in a dialect of Akkadian that was used for literary purposes. This version was compiled by [Sin-liqe-unninni](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sin-liqe-unninni) sometime between 1300 and 1000 BC from earlier texts.

The standard Akkadian version has different opening words, or [incipit](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Incipit), than the older version. The older version begins with the words "Surpassing all other kings", while the standard version has "He who saw the deep" (*ša nagba īmuru*), "deep" referring to the mysteries of the information brought back by Gilgamesh from his meeting with Uta-Napishti ([Utnapishtim](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deluge_(mythology))) about [Ea](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enki), the fountain of wisdom. Gilgamesh was given knowledge of how to worship the gods, why death was ordained for human beings, what makes a good king, and how to live a good life. The story of Utnapishtim, the hero of the [flood myth](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deluge_(mythology)), can also be found in the Babylonian Epic of [Atrahasis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atrahasis).

The 12th tablet is a sequel to the original 11, and was probably added at a later date. It bears little relation to the well-crafted 11-tablet epic; the lines at the beginning of the first tablet are quoted at the end of the 11th tablet, giving it circularity and finality. Tablet 12 is a near copy of an earlier Sumerian tale, a prequel, in which Gilgamesh sends Enkidu to retrieve some objects of his from the Underworld, and he returns in the form of a spirit to relate the nature of the Underworld to Gilgamesh.

**Content of the standard version tablets**

(*Based on* [*Andrew George*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andrew_R._George)*'s translation*)

**Tablet one**

The story introduces Gilgamesh, king of [Uruk](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uruk). Gilgamesh, two-thirds god and one-third man, is oppressing his people, who cry out to the gods for help. For the young women of Uruk this oppression takes the form of a [*droit du seigneur*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Droit_du_seigneur) — or "lord's right" to sleep with brides on their wedding night. For the young men (the tablet is damaged at this point) it is conjectured that Gilgamesh exhausts them through games, tests of strength, or perhaps forced labor on building projects. The gods respond to the people's pleas by creating an equal to Gilgamesh who will be able to stop his oppression. This is the primitive man, [Enkidu](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enkidu), who is covered in hair and lives in the wild with the animals. He is spotted by a trapper, whose livelihood is being ruined because Enkidu is uprooting his traps. The trapper tells Gilgamesh about the man, and it is arranged for Enkidu to be seduced by [Shamhat](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shamhat), a [temple prostitute](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sacred_prostitution), his first step towards being tamed, and after six days and seven nights of continuous love making she takes Enkidu to a shepherd's camp to learn how to be civilized. Gilgamesh, meanwhile, has been having dreams about the imminent arrival of a beloved new companion.

**Tablet two**

Shamhat brings Enkidu to a shepherds' camp, where he is introduced to a human diet and becomes the night watchman. Learning from a passing stranger about Gilgamesh's treatment of new brides, Enkidu is incensed and travels to Uruk to intervene at a wedding. When Gilgamesh attempts to visit the wedding chamber, Enkidu blocks his way, and they fight. After a fierce battle, Enkidu acknowledges Gilgamesh's superior strength and they become friends. Gilgamesh proposes a journey to the Cedar Forest to slay the monstrous demi-god [Humbaba](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Humbaba), in order to gain fame and renown. Despite warnings from Enkidu and the council of elders, Gilgamesh will not be deterred.

**Tablet three**

The elders give Gilgamesh advice for his journey. Gilgamesh visits his mother, the goddess [Ninsun](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ninsun), who seeks the support and protection of the sun-god [Shamash](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shamash) for their adventure. Ninsun adopts Enkidu as her son, and Gilgamesh leaves instructions for the governance of Uruk in his absence.

**Tablet four**

Gilgamesh and Enkidu journey to the [Cedar Forest](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cedar_Forest). Every few days they camp on a mountain, and perform a dream ritual. Gilgamesh has five terrifying dreams about falling mountains, thunderstorms, wild bulls, and a thunderbird that breathes fire. Despite similarities between his dream figures and earlier descriptions of Humbaba, Enkidu interprets these dreams as good omens, and denies that the frightening images represent the forest guardian. As they approach the cedar mountain, they hear Humbaba bellowing, and have to encourage each other not to be afraid.

**Tablet five**



Tablet V of the Epic of Gilgamesh

The heroes enter the cedar forest. [Humbaba](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Humbaba), the ogre-guardian of the Cedar Forest, insults and threatens them. He accuses Enkidu of betrayal, and vows to disembowel Gilgamesh and feed his flesh to the birds. Gilgamesh is afraid, but with some encouraging words from Enkidu the battle commences. The mountains quake with the tumult and the sky turns black. The god [Shamash](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shamash) sends 13 winds to bind Humbaba, and he is captured. The monster pleads for his life, and Gilgamesh pities him. Enkidu, however, is enraged and asks Gilgamesh to kill the beast. Humbaba curses them both and Gilgamesh dispatches him with a blow to the neck. The two heroes cut down many cedars, including a gigantic tree that Enkidu plans to fashion into a gate for the temple of Enlil. They build a raft and return home along the [Euphrates](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Euphrates) with the giant tree and the head of Humbaba.

In 2014 a partially broken tablet V of the Epic of Gilgamesh was found according to the [Sulaymaniyah Museum](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sulaymaniyah_Museum), Iraq. According to Professor Farouk Al-Rawi (of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London), this tablets narrates how Gilgamesh and Enkidu enter the cedar forest and kill Humbaba. Professor Al-Rawi also said that the tablet mentions that Gilgamesh and Enkidu saw a "monkey"; this is not mentioned in the other available versions of tablet V.

**Tablet six**

Gilgamesh rejects the advances of the goddess [Ishtar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ishtar) because of her mistreatment of previous lovers like [Dumuzi](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tammuz_(deity)). Ishtar asks her father [Anu](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anu) to send [Gugalanna](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gugalanna), the Bull of Heaven, to avenge her. When Anu rejects her complaints, Ishtar threatens to raise the dead who will "outnumber the living" and "devour them". Anu becomes frightened, and gives in to her. Ishtar leads Gugalanna to Uruk, and it causes widespread devastation. It lowers the level of the Euphrates river, and dries up the marshes. It opens up huge pits that swallow 300 men. Without any divine assistance, Enkidu and Gilgamesh attack and slay it, and offer up its heart to Shamash. When Ishtar cries out, Enkidu hurls one of the hindquarters of the bull at her. The city of Uruk celebrates, but Enkidu has an ominous dream about his future failure.

**Tablet seven**

In Enkidu's dream, the gods decide that one of the heroes must die because they killed Humbaba and Gugalanna. Despite the protestations of Shamash, Enkidu is marked for death. Enkidu curses the great door he has fashioned for Enlil's temple. He also curses the trapper and Shamhat for removing him from the wild. Shamash reminds Enkidu of how Shamhat fed and clothed him, and introduced him to Gilgamesh. Shamash tells him that Gilgamesh will bestow great honors upon him at his funeral, and will wander into the wild consumed with grief. Enkidu regrets his curses and blesses Shamhat. In a second dream however he sees himself being taken captive to the [Netherworld](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Underworld) by a terrifying Angel of Death. The underworld is a "house of dust" and darkness whose inhabitants eat clay, and are clothed in bird feathers, supervised by terrifying beings. For 12 days, Enkidu's condition worsens. Finally, after a lament that he could not meet a heroic death in battle, he dies.

**Tablet eight**

Gilgamesh delivers a lamentation for Enkidu, in which he calls upon mountains, forests, fields, rivers, wild animals, and all of Uruk to mourn for his friend. Recalling their adventures together, Gilgamesh tears at his hair and clothes in grief. He commissions a funerary statue, and provides grave gifts from his treasury to ensure that Enkidu has a favorable reception in the realm of the dead. A great banquet is held where the treasures are offered to the gods of the Netherworld. Just before a break in the text there is a suggestion that a river is being dammed, indicating a burial in a river bed, as in the corresponding Sumerian poem, The Death of Gilgamesh.

**Tablet nine**

Tablet nine opens with Gilgamesh roaming the wild wearing animal skins, grieving for Enkidu. Fearful of his own death, he decides to seek [Utnapishtim](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Utnapishtim) ("the Faraway"), and learn the secret of eternal life. Among the few survivors of the [Great Flood](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deluge_(mythology)), Utnapishtim and his wife are the only humans to have been granted immortality by the gods. Gilgamesh crosses a mountain pass at night and encounters a pride of lions. Before sleeping he prays for protection to the moon god Sin. Then, waking from an encouraging dream, he kills the lions and uses their skins for clothing. After a long and perilous journey, Gilgamesh arrives at the twin peaks of Mount [Mashu](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mashu) at the end of the earth. He comes across a tunnel, which no man has ever entered, guarded by two terrible scorpion-men. After questioning him and recognizing his semi-divine nature, they allow him to enter it, and he passes under the mountains along the Road of the Sun. In complete darkness he follows the road for 12 "double hours", managing to complete the trip before the Sun catches up with him. He arrives at the Garden of the gods, a paradise full of jewel-laden trees.

**Tablet ten**

Gilgamesh meets alewife [Siduri](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siduri), who assumes that he is a murderer or thief because of his disheveled appearance. Gilgamesh tells her about the purpose of his journey. She attempts to dissuade him from his quest, but sends him to [Urshanabi](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Urshanabi) the ferryman, who will help him cross the sea to Utnapishtim. Gilgamesh, out of spontaneous rage, destroys the stone-giants that live with Urshanabi. He tells him his story, but when he asks for his help, Urshanabi informs him that he has just destroyed the only creatures who can cross the Waters of Death, which are deadly to the touch. Urshanabi instructs Gilgamesh to cut down 120 trees and fashion them into punting poles. When they reach the island where Utnapishtim lives, Gilgamesh recounts his story, asking him for his help. Utnapishtim reprimands him, declaring that fighting the common fate of humans is futile and diminishes life's joys.

**Tablet eleven**

Gilgamesh observes that Utnapishtim seems no different from himself, and asks him how he obtained his immortality. Utnapishtim explains that the gods decided to send a great flood. To save Utnapishtim the god Ea told him to build a boat. He gave him precise dimensions, and it was sealed with [pitch](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pitch_(resin)) and [bitumen](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asphalt). His entire family went aboard together with his craftsmen and "all the animals of the field". A violent storm then arose which caused the terrified gods to retreat to the heavens. Ishtar lamented the wholesale destruction of humanity, and the other gods wept beside her. The storm lasted six days and nights, after which "all the human beings turned to clay". Utnapishtim weeps when he sees the destruction. His boat lodges on a mountain, and he releases a dove, a swallow, and a raven. When the raven fails to return, he opens the ark and frees its inhabitants. Utnapishtim offers a sacrifice to the gods, who smell the sweet savor and gather around. Ishtar vows that just as she will never forget the brilliant necklace that hangs around her neck, she will always remember this time. When Enlil arrives, angry that there are survivors, she condemns him for instigating the flood. Ea also castigates him for sending a disproportionate punishment. Enlil blesses Utnapishtim and his wife, and rewards them with eternal life. This account matches the flood story that concludes the Epic of [Atrahasis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atrahasis) (see also [Gilgamesh flood myth](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gilgamesh_flood_myth)).

The main point seems to be that when Enlil granted eternal life it was a unique gift. As if to demonstrate this point, Utnapishtim challenges Gilgamesh to stay awake for six days and seven nights. Gilgamesh falls asleep, and Utnapishtim instructs his wife to bake a loaf of bread on each of the days he is asleep, so that he cannot deny his failure to keep awake. Gilgamesh, who is seeking to overcome death, cannot even conquer sleep. After instructing Urshanabi the ferryman to wash Gilgamesh, and clothe him in royal robes, they depart for Uruk.

As they are leaving, Utnapishtim's wife asks her husband to offer a parting gift. Utnapishtim tells Gilgamesh that at the bottom of the sea there lives a [boxthorn](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boxthorn)-like plant that will make him young again. Gilgamesh, by binding stones to his feet so he can walk on the bottom, manages to obtain the plant. Gilgamesh proposes to investigate if the plant has the hypothesized rejuvenation ability by testing it on an old man once he returns to Uruk.

'There is a plant that looks like a box-thorn, it has prickles like a dogrose, and will prick one who plucks it. But if you can possess this plant, you'll be again as you were in your youth'

'This plant, Ur-shanabi, is the "Plant of Heartbeat", with it a man can regain his vigor. To Uruk-the-sheepfold I will take it, to an ancient I will feed some and put the plant to the test!'

Unfortunately, when Gilgamesh stops to bathe, it is stolen by a [serpent](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Serpent_(symbolism)), who sheds its skin as it departs. Gilgamesh weeps at the futility of his efforts, because he has now lost all chance of immortality. He returns to Uruk, where the sight of its massive walls prompts him to praise this enduring work to Urshanabi.

**Tablet twelve**

This tablet is mainly an Akkadian translation of an earlier Sumerian poem, Gilgamesh and the Netherworld (also known as "Gilgamesh, Enkidu, and the Netherworld" and variants), although it has been suggested that it is derived from an unknown version of that story. The contents of this last tablet are inconsistent with previous ones: Enkidu is still alive, despite having died earlier in the epic. Because of this, its lack of integration with the other tablets, and the fact that it is almost a copy of an earlier version, it has been referred to as an 'inorganic appendage' to the epic. Alternatively, it has been suggested that "its purpose, though crudely handled, is to explain to Gilgamesh (and the reader) the various fates of the dead in the Afterlife" and in "an awkward attempt to bring closure", it both connects the Gilgamesh of the epic with the Gilgamesh who is the King of the Netherworld, and is "a dramatic capstone whereby the twelve-tablet epic ends on one and the same theme, that of "seeing" (= understanding, discovery, etc.), with which it began."

Gilgamesh complains to Enkidu that various of his possessions (the tablet is unclear exactly what — different translations include a drum and a ball) have fallen into the underworld. Enkidu offers to bring them back. Delighted, Gilgamesh tells Enkidu what he must and must not do in the underworld if he is to return. Enkidu does everything which he was told not to do. The underworld keeps him. Gilgamesh prays to the gods to give him back his friend. [Enlil](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enlil) and [Suen](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suen) don't reply, but [Ea](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enki) and [Shamash](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shamash) decide to help. Shamash makes a crack in the earth, and Enkidu's ghost jumps out of it. The tablet ends with Gilgamesh questioning Enkidu about what he has seen in the underworld.

**Old-Babylonian versions**

This version of the epic, called in some fragments *Surpassing all other kings*, is composed of tablets and fragments from diverse origins and states of conservation. It remains incomplete in its majority, with several tablets missing and big [lacunae](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lacuna_(manuscripts)) in those found. They are named after their current location or the place where they were found.

**Pennsylvania tablet**

*Surpassing all other kings* Tablet II, greatly correlates with tablets I-II of the *Standard version*. Gilgamesh tells his mother Ninsun about two dreams he had. His mother explains that they mean that a new companion will soon arrive at Uruk. In the meanwhile the wild Enkidu and the priestess (here called Shamkatum) are making love. She tamed him in company of the shepherds by offering him bread and beer. Enkidu helps the shepherds by guarding the sheep. They travel to Uruk to confront Gilgamesh and stop his abuses. Enkidu and Gilgamesh battle but Gilgamesh breaks off the fight. Enkidu praises Gilgamesh.

**Yale tablet**

*Surpassing all other kings* Tablet III, partially matches tablets II-III of the *Standard version*. For reasons unknown (the tablet is partially broken) Enkidu is in a sad mood. In order to cheer him up Gilgamesh suggests going to the Pine Forest to cut down trees and kill Humbaba (known here as Huwawa). Enkidu protests, as he knows Huwawa and is aware of his power. Gilgamesh talks Enkidu into it with some words of encouragement, but Enkidu remains reluctant. They prepare, and call for the elders. The elders also protest, but after Gilgamesh talks to them, they agree to let him go. After Gilgamesh asks his god (Shamash) for protection and both equip, they leave with the elder's blessing and counsel.

**Philadelphia fragment**

Possibly another version of the contents of the Yale Tablet, practically irrecoverable.

**Nippur School Tablet**

In the journey to the cedar forest and Huwawa, Enkidu interprets one of Gilgamesh's dreams.

**Tell Harmal tablets**

Fragments from two different versions/tablets tell how Enkidu interprets one of Gilgamesh's dreams on the way to the Forest of Cedar, and their conversation when entering the forest.

**Ishchali tablet**

After defeating Huwawa, Gilgamesh refrains from slaying him, and urges Enkidu to hunt Huwawa's "seven auras". Enkidu convinces him to smite their enemy. After killing Huwawa and the auras, they chop down part of the forest and discover the gods' secret abode. The rest of the tablet is broken.

The auras are not referred to in the standard version, but are in one of the Sumerian poems.

**Partial fragment in Baghdad**

Partially overlapping the felling of the trees from the Ishchali tablet.

**Sippar tablet**

Partially overlapping the *Standard version* tablets IX-X. Gilgamesh mourns the death of Enkidu wandering in his quest for immortality. Gilgamesh argues with Shamash about the futility of his quest. After a lacuna, Gilgamesh talks to [Siduri](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siduri) about his quest and his journey to meet [Utnapishtim](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Utnapishtim) (here called Uta-na’ishtim). Siduri attempts to dissuade Gilgamesh in his quest for immortality, urging him to be content with the simple pleasures of life. After one more lacuna, Gilgamesh smashes the "stone ones" and talks to the ferryman Urshanabi (here called Sur-sunabu). After a short discussion, Sur-sunabu asks him to carve 300 oars so that they may cross the waters of death without needing the "stone ones". The rest of the tablet is missing.

The text on the Old Babylonian Meissner fragment (the larger surviving fragment of the Sippar tablet) has been used to reconstruct possible earlier forms of the Epic of Gilgamesh, and it has been suggested that a "prior form of the story - earlier even than that preserved on the Old Babylonian fragment - may well have ended with Siduri sending Gilgamesh back to Uruk..." and "Utnapistim was not originally part of the tale."

**Sumerian poems**

There are five extant Gilgamesh stories in the form of older poems in [Sumerian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sumerian_language). These probably circulated independently, rather than being in the form of a unified epic. Some of the names of the main characters in these poems differ slightly from later Akkadian names, e.g. "*Gilgamesh*" is written for Gilgamesh, and there are some differences in the underlying stories (e.g. in the Sumerian version Enkidu is Gilgamesh's servant):

1. *`The lord to the Living One's Mountain`* and *`Ho, hurrah!`* correspond to the [Cedar Forest](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cedar_Forest) episode (*Standard version* tablets II–V). Gilgamesh and Enkidu travel with other men to the Forest of Cedar. There, trapped by Huwawa, Gilgamesh tricks him (with Enkidu's assistance in one of the versions) into giving up his auras, thus losing his power.
2. *`Hero in battle`* corresponds to the [Bull of Heaven](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bull_of_Heaven) episode (*Standard version* tablet VI) in the Akkadian version. The Bull's voracious appetite causes drought and hardship in the land while Gilgamesh feasts. [Lugalbanda](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lugalbanda) convinces him to face the beast and fights it alongside Enkidu.
3. *`The envoys of* [*Akka*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aga_of_Kish)*`* has no corresponding episode in the epic, but the themes of whether to show mercy to captives, and counsel from the city elders, also occur in the standard version of the Humbaba story. In the poem, Uruk faces a siege from a Kish army led by King Akka, whom Gilgamesh defeats and forgives.
4. *`In those days, in those far-off days`* is the source for the Akkadian translation included as tablet XII in the *Standard version*, telling of Enkidu's journey to the Netherworld.
5. *`The great wild bull is lying down`*, a poem about Bilgames' death, burial and consecration as a semi god, reigning and giving judgement over the dead. After dreaming of how the gods decide his fate after death, Gilgamesh takes counsel, prepares his funeral and offers gifts to the gods. Once deceased, he is buried under the Euphrates, taken off its course and later returned to it.

**Later influence**

The Epic of Gilgamesh has influenced both ancient and modern literature and culture, and themes from the Epic can be found in later biblical and classical literature.

**Relationship to the Bible**

*Further information:* [*Panbabylonism*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panbabylonism)

Various themes, plot elements, and characters in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* have counterparts in the [Hebrew Bible](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hebrew_Bible), notably the accounts of the [Garden of Eden](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Garden_of_Eden), the advice from [Ecclesiastes](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ecclesiastes), and the [Genesis flood narrative](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_flood_narrative).

**Garden of Eden**

The parallels between the stories of Enkidu/Shamhat and Adam/Eve have been long recognized by scholars. In both, a man is created from the soil by a god, and lives in a natural setting amongst the animals. He is introduced to a woman who tempts him. In both stories the man accepts food from the woman, covers his nakedness, and must leave his former realm, unable to return. The presence of a snake that steals a plant of immortality from the hero later in the epic is another point of similarity.

**Advice from Ecclesiastes**

Several scholars suggest direct borrowing of [Siduri](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siduri)'s advice by the author of [Ecclesiastes](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ecclesiastes).

A rare proverb about the strength of a triple-stranded rope (*a triple-stranded rope is not easily broken*) is common to both books.

**Noah's Flood**

[Andrew George](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andrew_R._George) submits that the [Genesis flood narrative](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_flood_narrative) matches that in Gilgamesh so closely that "few doubt" that it derives from a Mesopotamian account. What is particularly noticeable is the way the Genesis flood story follows the Gilgamesh flood tale "point by point and in the same order", even when the story permits other alternatives. In a 2001 Torah commentary released on behalf of the Conservative Movement of Judaism, rabbinic scholar [Robert Wexler](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Wexler_(rabbi)) stated: "The most likely assumption we can make is that both Genesis and Gilgamesh drew their material from a common tradition about the flood that existed in Mesopotamia. These stories then diverged in the retelling." [Ziusudra](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ziusudra) ("*he who found long life*"), [Utnapishtim](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Utnapishtim) ("*he who found life*") and [Noah](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Noah) ("*he who found rest*") are the respective heroes of the Sumerian, Akkadian and biblical flood legends of the [ancient Near East](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Near_East).

**Other biblical parallels**

Matthias Henze suggests that [Nebuchadnezzar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nebuchadnezzar)'s madness in the biblical [Book of Daniel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book_of_Daniel) draws on the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. He claims that the author uses elements from the description of Enkidu to paint a sarcastic and mocking portrait of the king of Babylon.

While not directly discussed in the Epic itself, many of the characters in the Epic also have myths associated with them with close biblical parallels, notably [Ninti](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ninti), the [Sumerian goddess](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sumerian_goddess) of life, was created from [Enki](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enki)'s rib to heal him after he had eaten forbidden flowers. Some scholars suggest that this served as the basis for the story of [Eve](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eve) created from [Adam](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adam)'s rib in the [Book of Genesis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book_of_Genesis).

**Influence on Homer**

Numerous scholars have drawn attention to various themes, episodes, and verses, that indicate a substantial influence of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* on both of the [epic poems](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epic_poems) ascribed to [Homer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homer). These influences are detailed by [Martin Litchfield West](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin_Litchfield_West) in *The East Face of Helicon: West Asiatic Elements in Greek Poetry and Myth*. According to Tzvi Abusch of Brandeis University, the poem "combines the power and tragedy of the [*Iliad*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iliad) with the wanderings and marvels of the [*Odyssey*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Odyssey). It is a work of adventure, but is no less a meditation on some fundamental issues of human existence."

**In popular culture**

Main article: [Gilgamesh in popular culture](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gilgamesh_in_popular_culture)

The *Epic of Gilgamesh* has inspired many works of literature, art, music, as [Theodore Ziolkowski](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theodore_Ziolkowski) points out in his book *Gilgamesh Among Us: Modern Encounters With the Ancient Epic* (2011). It was only after the [First World War](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_I) that the Gilgamesh epic reached a wide audience, and only after the [Second World War](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_II) that it began to feature in a variety of genres.

**See also**

* [List of artifacts in biblical archaeology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_artifacts_in_biblical_archaeology)
* [Atra-Hasis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atra-Hasis)
* [Babylonian literature](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Babylonian_literature)
* [The Book of Giants](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Book_of_Giants)
* [Cattle in religion](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cattle_in_religion)
* [Flood myth](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flood_myth)
* [Panbabylonism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panbabylonism)
* [Sumerian creation myth](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sumerian_creation_myth)
* [Sumerian literature](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sumerian_literature)
* [The Tower of Druaga](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Tower_of_Druaga)

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