**Sumerian literature**

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Sumerian inscription on a ceramic stone plaque.

**Sumerian literature** is the literature written in the [Sumerian language](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sumerian_language) during the [Middle Bronze Age](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Middle_Bronze_Age). Most Sumerian literature is preserved indirectly, via [Assyrian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assyria) or [Babylonian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Babylonia) copies.

The [Sumerians](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sumer) invented the first [writing](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_writing) system, developing [Sumerian cuneiform](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sumerian_cuneiform) writing out of earlier [proto-writing](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Proto-writing) systems by about the 30th century BCE. The earliest literary texts appear from about the 27th century BCE.

The [Sumerian language](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sumerian_language) remained in official and literary use in the [Akkadian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Akkadian_empire) and [Babylonian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Babylonian_empire) empires, even after the spoken language disappeared from the population; literacy was widespread, and the Sumerian texts that students copied heavily influenced later [Babylonian literature](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Babylonian_literature).

Sumerian literature has not been handed down to us directly, rather it has been rediscovered through [archaeology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Archaeology). Nevertheless, the [Akkadians](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Akkadian_Empire) and [Babylonians](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Babylonia) borrowed much from the Sumerian literary heritage, and spread these traditions throughout the Middle East, influencing much of the literature that followed in this region and [Ancient Egypt](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Egypt)

**Literary works**

Important works include:

* A [*Creation and Flood Myth*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sumerian_creation_myth) ([translation](http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=t.1.7.4))
* Three epic cycles:
  + Two [Enmerkar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enmerkar) legends:
    - [*Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enmerkar_and_the_Lord_of_Aratta) ([translation](http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=t.1.8.2.3))
    - [*Enmerkar and En-suhgir-ana*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enmerkar_and_En-suhgir-ana) ([translation](http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=t.1.8.2.4))
  + Two tales of [Lugalbanda](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lugalbanda) during Enmerkar's campaign against [Aratta](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aratta):
    - [*Lugalbanda in the Mountain Cave*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lugalbanda_in_the_Mountain_Cave) ([translation](http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=t.1.8.2.1))
    - [*Lugalbanda and the Anzud Bird*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lugalbanda_and_the_Anzud_Bird) ([translation](http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=t.1.8.2.2))
  + Five stories in the [Gilgamesh](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gilgamesh) [epic cycle](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gilgamesh_epic):
    - *Gilgamesh and Huwawa* ([version A](http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=t.1.8.1.5), [version B](http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=t.1.8.1.5.1))
    - *Gilgamesh and the Bull of Heaven* ([translation](http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=t.1.8.1.2))
    - *Gilgamesh and Aga* ([translation](http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=t.1.8.1.1))
    - *Gilgamesh, Enkidu and the Netherworld* ([translation](http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=t.1.8.1.4))
    - *The Death of Gilgamesh* ([translation](http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=t.1.8.1.3))
* The [*Lament for Ur*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lament_for_Ur) ([translation](http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=t.2.2.2&charenc=j))

**See also**

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|  | [***Ancient Near East portal***](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Portal:Ancient_Near_East) |
|  | [***Literature portal***](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Portal:Literature) |

* [Ancient Egyptian literature](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Egyptian_literature)
* [Cuneiform law](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cuneiform_law)
* [Sumerian creation myth](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sumerian_creation_myth)

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