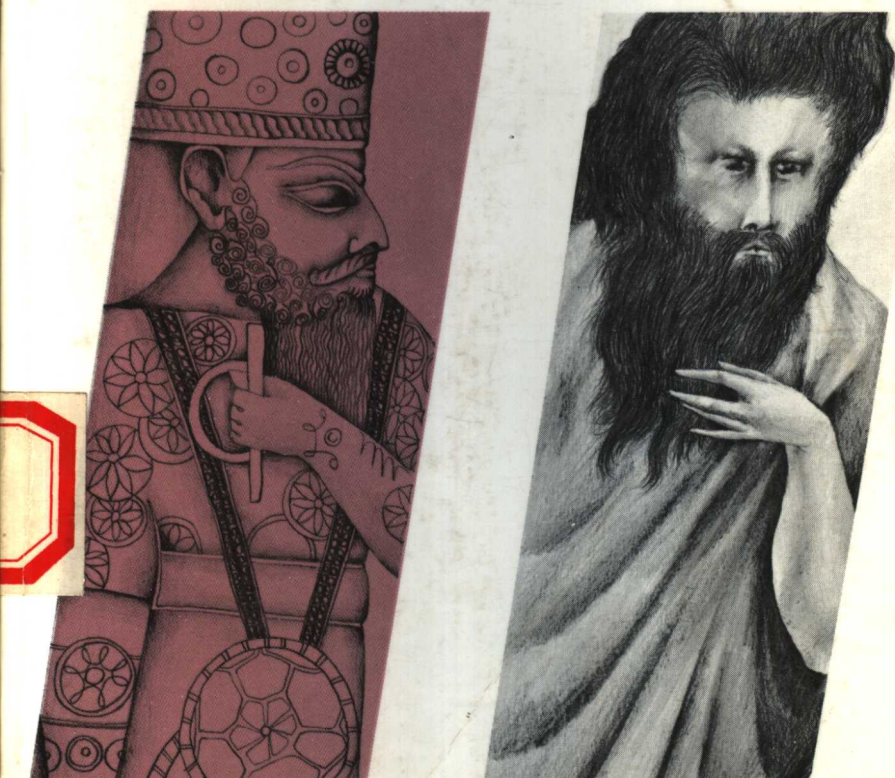


# THE GILGAMESH EPIC AND OLD TESTAMENT PARALLELS

A translation and interpretation of the Gilgamesh Epic  
and related Babylonian and Assyrian documents



*THE*  
GILGAMESH EPIC  
*AND*  
OLD TESTAMENT  
PARALLELS

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ALEXANDER HEIDEL

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## PREFACE

The present volume is a companion to my monograph The Babylonian Genesis and as such follows the same pattern. The translations of the Babylonian and Assyrian texts here offered were made originally for the Assyrian Dictionary files of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago. Like my publication on the Babylonian creation stories, this book is intended not primarily for the professional Assyriologist but for a somewhat wider circle of readers. With this purpose in mind, I have again published the texts in translation only and have endeavored to confine my discussions chiefly to matters which will be of a somewhat more general interest, striving at all times to treat everyone's view with due consideration and to present the material sine ira et studio, though it be in a straightforward manner.

In the preparation of the material here presented I again enjoyed the unstinted co-operation of the members of the Oriental Institute staff, particularly of Assistant Professor F. W. Geers, Associate Professor Thorkild Jacobsen, and Mr. Pinhas Delougaz. The work of translating the more objectionable passages into Latin has, for the most part, been done by a friend who prefers to remain anonymous. I wish to express my appreciation also to the director of the Oriental Institute, Professor John A. Wilson, for providing the necessary subsidy to make this publication possible. It goes without saying that as a co-worker on the Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute I had full access to the Dictionary files.

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## LIST OF SYMBOLS AND SPECIAL CHARACTERS

- ( ) in translations enclose elements not in the original but desirable or necessary for a better understanding in English.
- (?) indicate that the meaning is uncertain.
- [ ] enclose restorations in the cuneiform text.
- [ ] enclose a word, a phrase, or a line which is partially damaged.
- .... (1) in translations of cuneiform material indicate that the text is unintelligible to the translator;  
(2) elsewhere indicate omission.
- [....] or [....] indicate that the text is wholly or partially damaged and therefore unintelligible.
- ˉ or ˆ indicates a long vowel.
- ˘ indicates a short vowel.
- ’ = x.
- ‘ = y.
- h = n.
- q = š.
- š = w.
- t = u.

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## CHAPTER I

### THE GILGAMESH EPIC

The Gilgamesh Epic, the longest and most beautiful Babylonian poem yet discovered in the mounds of the Tigro-Euphrates region, ranks among the great literary masterpieces of mankind. It is one of the principal heroic tales of antiquity and may well be called the Odyssey of the Babylonians. Though rich in mythological material of great significance for the study of comparative religion, it abounds with episodes of deepest human interest, in distinct contrast to the Babylonian creation versions; and, although composed thousands of years before our time, the Gilgamesh Epic will, owing to the universal appeal of the problems with which it is concerned and the manner in which these are treated, continue to move the hearts of men for ages to come. To Bible students in particular it will be of special interest because of its eschatological material and because it contains the best preserved and most extensive Babylonian account of the deluge.

#### The Discovery of the Tablets

During the seventh century B.C., to which the greater part of the available tablets date back, the Gilgamesh Epic consisted of twelve large tablets, each of which contained about three hundred lines, with the exception of the twelfth, which had only about half as many lines. Most of the material of this epic was found by Austen H. Layard, Hormuzd Rassam, and George Smith at about the middle of the last century among the ruins of the temple library of the god Nabû (the biblical Nebo) and the palace library of the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal (668-ca. 633 B.C.), both of which were located in Nineveh, the later capital of the Assyrian empire. Since then numerous other tablets and fragments belonging to the Gilgamesh series have come to light. At the turn of the century Bruno Meissner acquired a fragment of considerable size from a dealer in Baghdad. This piece, found among the ruins of ancient Sippar (the modern Abu Habba), contains part of an Old Babylonian version of the tenth tablet. In 1914 the University of Pennsylvania secured by purchase from a dealer in antiquities a large and fairly complete six-column tablet containing an Old Babylonian recension of Tablet II. At about the

same time Yale University had the good fortune to obtain from the same dealer a tablet which forms a continuation of the Pennsylvania tablet and is inscribed with an Old Babylonian version of Tablet III. Shortly before the outbreak of hostilities in 1914 the German excavations at Ashur, the old capital of Assyria, produced a considerable fragment of the Assyrian edition of the sixth tablet. And in 1928/29 the Germans discovered at Uruk two rather small pieces, which supposedly belong to Tablet IV. Numerous Sumerian portions of material bearing on the Gilgamesh Epic have been recovered from the mounds of Nippur, Kish, and Ur. Of these, the portions belonging to Tablet XII agree almost verbatim with the Semitic recension, while the others, not utilized in the present translation of the epic, differ very considerably from the Semitic version. Finally, from distant Hattusas (modern Boghazköy), the ancient Hittite capital, have come a Babylonian fragment containing a rather brief and widely deviating version of Tablets V and VI, about a dozen of fragments inscribed in Hittite, and even a few pieces of a Hurrian translation.<sup>1</sup> Despite all these discoveries, the text of some of the tablets is still rather incomplete; but the general trend of the story is quite clear.

#### The Publication of the Tablets

The story of the publication of the Gilgamesh material is rather long and need not be related in detail at this time. Suffice it to recapitulate some of the more salient points. The first arrangement and translation of the tablets discovered among the remains of Nineveh was made by George Smith, of the British Museum, who, on December 3, 1872, read a paper before the Society of Biblical Archaeology entitled "The Chaldean Account of the Deluge,"<sup>2</sup> in which he presented a translation and a discussion of a number of fragments of the Gilgamesh Epic, particularly of the deluge episode. Fragmentary as this material was, it created a tremendous enthusiasm throughout Europe and gave a great impetus to the study of cuneiform inscriptions in general. The first com-

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<sup>1</sup>On the Hurrian material see J. Friedrich, Kleinasiatische Sprachdenkmäler (Berlin, 1932), pp. 32-34, and the references given there.

<sup>2</sup>Published in the Transactions of the Society of Biblical Archaeology, II (1873), 213-34.



plete edition of the known cuneiform texts of the epic was put out by Paul Haupt, Das Babylonische Nimrodepos (Leipzig, 1884-91),<sup>3</sup> with Tablet XII in Beiträge zur Assyriologie, I (1890), 49-65. Some years thereafter Peter Jensen published a transliteration and translation of the extant material, together with an extensive commentary, in his Assyrisch-Babylonische Mythen und Epen (Berlin, 1900), pages 116-265 and 421-531. This work marked a great advance over all previous translations and is still a mine of useful information. Another important work from the earlier days of the decipherment of our epic was issued by Arthur Ungnad and Hugo Gressmann, Das Gilgamesch-Epos (Göttingen, 1911), which contains a translation of the epic and a detailed discussion of its contents. The most recent edition of the cuneiform text is found in R. Campbell Thompson, The Epic of Gilgamesh (Oxford, 1930). While Thompson has published the cuneiform text of only the Assyrian recension, he has given us a complete transliteration of all the Semitic Gilgamesh material known to him at the time, and, unless otherwise indicated, the present rendering of the Semitic version of this epic is based on Thompson's edition of the cuneiform original. The latest translations are those by Erich Ebeling in Gressmann's Altorientalische Texte zum Alten Testament (Berlin and Leipzig, 1926), pages 150-98; Thompson, The Epic of Gilgamesh (London, 1928); Albert Schott, Das Gilgamesch=Epos (Leipzig [1934]); G. Contenau, L'Épopée de Gilgamesh (Paris, 1939); and F. M. Th. Böhl, Het Gilgamesj-Epos (Amsterdam, 1941).<sup>4</sup> Mention may be made also of a rendition in free rhythms by W. E. Leonard, Gilgamesh, Epic of Old Babylon (New York, 1934).

#### The Hero of the Epic

The central figure of our poem is a youthful ruler named Gilgamesh, originally a historical personage whom the Sumerian king list assigns to the First Dynasty of Uruk, allowing him a reign of one hundred and twenty-six years, and with whose illustrious name scores of myths and legends of quite distinct origin

<sup>3</sup>Haupt called our poem the "Babylonian Nimrod epic" because in former days Gilgamesh was identified with Nimrod (Gen. 10:8-10), although without sufficient evidence.

<sup>4</sup>I regret that, because of present conditions, Böhl's translation is not available to me.

were associated in the course of time. Claudius Aelianus,<sup>5</sup> a Roman author of the second century A.D., records the following curious story concerning the birth and childhood of Gilgamesh:

"When Seuēchoros<sup>6</sup> reigned over the Babylonians, the Chaldeans said that the son who would be born of his daughter would wrest the kingdom from the grandfather. At this he was alarmed and, to express it jocularly, became an Acrisios<sup>7</sup> to the girl; for he guarded (her) very closely. But without his knowledge—for fate was more ingenious than the Babylonian—the girl became a mother by an obscure man and bore a child. (Her) guards, in fear of the king, threw it from the acropolis; for it was there that the aforementioned girl was imprisoned. But an eagle very quickly saw the child's fall, and before the infant was dashed upon the ground got underneath it and received (it) on (his) back, and carrying (it) to an orchard, he set (it) down very cautiously. The caretaker of the place, seeing the beautiful child, loved it and reared (it); it was called Gilgamos, and reigned over the Babylonians."

According to our epic and an inscription of the Sumerian king Utuḫegal of Uruk, Gilgamesh was the son of the goddess Ninsun, the wife of the god Lugalbanda. His father, however, was not Lugalbanda, as would be expected, but rather an unknown mortal whom the Sumerian king list calls "the high priest of Kullab," a district in the city of Uruk.<sup>8</sup> This circumstance is of importance because it explains why Gilgamesh, according to the epic, was part god and part man. One of his famous accomplishments was the building of the wall of Uruk, which is mentioned in the epic and in a Sumerian inscription of Anam (a later ruler of this city), who calls the wall of Uruk, which he rebuilt, "an ancient work of Gilgamesh."<sup>9</sup>

<sup>5</sup>De natura animalium xii. 21. Translated by Hugo Gressmann, Mose und seine Zeit (Göttingen, 1913), pp. 11-12, and A. M. Harmon in A. T. Clay, A Hebrew Deluge Story in Cuneiform (New Haven, 1922), p. 48, n. 15.

<sup>6</sup>On the identification of this king with Enmekar, king of Uruk, see Thorkild Jacobsen, The Sumerian King List (Chicago, 1939), p. 87.

<sup>7</sup>King of Argos, of whom a similar story is told in Greek literature.

<sup>8</sup>Cf. A. Poebel, Historical Texts (Philadelphia, 1914), p. 75; Jacobsen, *op. cit.*, pp. 90-91.

<sup>9</sup>F. Thureau-Dangin, Die sumerischen und akkadischen Königsinschriften (Leipzig, 1907), p. 222.

In the course of time Gilgamesh became a god of the lower world. In a Sumerian inscription, the Ur-Nammu composition, he is designated as "king of the underworld," where he pronounces judgment.<sup>10</sup> And in an incantation text, in which the sign for deity is prefixed to his name, he is addressed in these terms: "Gilgamesh, perfect king, [judge of the Anunnaki], wise prince, bra[ce(?) of mankind, who surveys the regions of the world], ruler of the earth, [lord of the underworld]! Thou art the judge, like a god thou perceivest (everything). Thou standest in the underworld (and) givest the final deci[sion]. Thy judgment is not changed, [thy] word is not forgotten. Thou dost inquire, examine, judge, perceive, and lead aright. Shamash has entrusted into thy hand judgment and decision. Kings, rulers, and princes lie prostrate before thee."<sup>11</sup>

#### A Summary of the Epic

Like the Odyssey, the Aeneid, and the Nibelungenlied, the Gilgamesh Epic opens with a brief résumé of the deeds and fortunes of the hero whose praises it sings. It first extols the great knowledge and wisdom of him who saw everything and knew all things; who saw secret things and revealed hidden things; who brought information of the days before the flood; who went on a long journey (in quest of immortality), became weary and worn; who engraved on a tablet of stone an account of all that he had done and suffered; and who built the walls of Uruk and its holy temple Eanna.

After these lines the text in the Assyrian edition, of which alone the proem has been preserved, breaks off. But, to judge from the first two lines of the next column and from the Hittite recension, the epic went on from here to relate the story itself. When the text again becomes fairly connected, the epic has already turned to the oppressive reign of Gilgamesh.

In his exuberant strength and vigor, his arrogant spirit and undisciplined desires, Gilgamesh apparently carries the maidens of the city off to his court and drives the young men to such heavy labors on the city walls and the temple Eanna that the

<sup>10</sup>G. Langdon, Sumerian Liturgical Texts (Philadelphia, 1917), pls. XIX:11 and XXI:16-17 (cf. S. N. Kramer in the Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research, No. 94 [April, 1944], p. 6).

<sup>11</sup>Erich Ebeling, Tod und Leben nach den Vorstellungen der Babylonier (Berlin and Leipzig, 1931), p. 127:7-15 (cf. W. von Soden in Zeitschrift für Assyriologie, XLIII [1936], 266).

inhabitants at length invoke the gods to relieve them of their unbearable burden. At last the gods listen to the cry of the oppressed and tyrannized population and decide to create a counterpart to Gilgamesh to divert the latter's attention to other matters, by having the two constantly strive, or wrestle, with each other.

The resultant creation is a wild-looking human being of titanic strength called Enkidu. His whole body is covered with hair; the hair of his head is long like that of a woman, and the locks of the hair on his head sprout like grain. He knows nothing about land or people and is garbed like Sumuqan, the god of cattle and agriculture. With the game of the field he ranges at large over the steppe, eats grass and drinks water from the drinking-places of the open country, and delights in the company of the animals.

First through dreams, and then through a trapper, Gilgamesh learns of this unique individual and sends out a courtesan to enchain Enkidu with her charms and to bring him to Uruk. There Gilgamesh and Enkidu meet, at the entrance to the community house. This place was to be the scene of one of Gilgamesh's nocturnal orgies. But Enkidu is so repelled by this unseemly affair that he tries to block the passage to prevent Gilgamesh from entering the house. Thereupon a bitter struggle ensues. The two fight with each other like infuriated bulls. They shatter the doorpost of the community house and cause the wall to shake. They fight in the doorway of the community house and they fight on the street. Finally Gilgamesh succeeds in forcing Enkidu to the ground, whereupon the fury of Gilgamesh abates and he turns away. Enkidu acknowledges Gilgamesh as his superior, and the two, admiring each other's strength and prowess, form a friendship.

At first thought it might seem that the purpose of the gods has been frustrated. But in reality it has not, for Gilgamesh now devotes his attention to his newly won friend and dreams of adventure, which is to insure everlasting fame for himself and his companion. Soon the two, armed with gigantic weapons, are found on a dangerous expedition against a terrible ogre, whose name appears as Huwawa in the Old Babylonian and Hittite versions and as Humbaba in the Assyrian recension. This ogre had been appointed by Enlil, the lord of the gods, as the guardian of a distant and almost boundless cedar forest, but in the pride of his heart he evidently overshot the mark and is therefore deserving of punishment. After a long journey the two companions arrive at the gate

of the forest, which is guarded by a fearful watchman placed there by Humbaba. The watchman is killed, and Enkidu opens the gate to the beautiful cedar forest. But alas! the gate is enchanted, and as Enkidu opens it, his hand is paralyzed, and he hesitates to proceed. However, upon the urgent plea of Gilgamesh, who may have resorted to magic and thus may have restored Enkidu's hand to its former condition, Enkidu follows Gilgamesh, and the two go into the depths of the forest together. After another long journey they arrive at the sacred cedar of Humbaba. Gilgamesh takes the ax in his hand and cuts down the cedar. The resounding noise of the strokes of the ax brings fierce Humbaba to the scene. At the sight of this frightful ogre Gilgamesh is terror-stricken. He breaks into tears and cries to Shamash, the sun-god. Shamash hears his prayer and from all eight major points of the compass he sends mighty winds against Humbaba, so that he is neither able to go forward nor able to turn back and has to surrender. Humbaba pleads for mercy, but no mercy is granted. Gilgamesh and Enkidu cut off his head and victoriously return to Uruk.

Upon his arrival in Uruk, Gilgamesh washes his hair, polishes his weapons, and garbs himself in festive attire. As he puts on his tiara, Ishtar, the goddess of love, looks with admiration upon the young and handsome king and, with many attractive promises, offers to be his wife. But Gilgamesh, knowing the wiles of Ishtar, rejects her proposal in the most scathing terms. Enraged at this crushing humiliation, Ishtar mounts up to heaven and goes before Anu, her father, with the plea: "Create for me the bull of heaven [that he may destroy Gilgamesh]!" After considerable hesitation, Anu consents. The bull is created and sent down upon Uruk. A whole army of men rush out to dispatch him, but it is of no avail. One snort from the bull, and the king's men fall by the hundreds! Another snort, and additional hundreds fall to the ground! Then he rushes upon Enkidu, but Enkidu gets hold of the thick of his tail, while Gilgamesh comes running along, thrusts his sword into the nape of the bull, and kills him. Foiled in her plans, Ishtar ascends the wall of Uruk and utters a curse upon Gilgamesh. But Enkidu tears out the right thigh of the bull of heaven and tosses it before her, amid vulgar taunts, while Gilgamesh dedicates the bull's horns to his tutelary god, Lugalbanda. Thereupon Gilgamesh and Enkidu wash their hands in the Euphrates, on whose former banks Uruk was located, and then ride in triumph through the thronged and

lordly city, as Gilgamesh calls out in exultant gladness: "Who is the (most) glorious among heroes? Who is the (most) eminent among men?" and an enthusiastic crowd responds in joyful acclaim: "Gilgamesh is the (most) glorious among heroes! [Gilgamesh is the (most) emine]nt among men!"

That night Enkidu has a dream foreboding his own speedy end. He sees the gods assembled together, as they deliberate which of the two who killed Humbaba and the bull of heaven should perish. The lot falls on Enkidu. Subsequently he takes ill and dies, at the decree of the gods.

This has an overpowering effect on Gilgamesh. He cries "bitterly like unto a wailing woman." For seven days and seven nights he weeps over his friend and refuses to give him up for burial, hoping that he will rise after all at his lamentation. Finally he reconciles himself to the fact that the life of his friend is beyond recall, and Enkidu is buried with honors.

Steepest in sorrow at the death of his friend who has turned to clay, Gilgamesh leaves Uruk and roams over the desert, lamenting: "When I die, shall I not be like unto Enkidu?" His grief-stricken spirit is obsessed with the fear of death and finds no comfort in the glory of his past accomplishments. His sole interest now lies in finding ways and means to escape the fate of mankind; he is willing to go through the greatest perils and the most extraordinary hardships to gain immortal life! He thinks of far-away Utnapishtim, the Babylonian Noah, who, Gilgamesh has heard, has received blessed immortality, and decides to hasten to him with all possible speed to obtain from him the secret of eternal life.

But to reach the dwelling place of Utnapishtim, Gilgamesh must go on a long and arduous journey fraught with many dangers. He arrives at the towering mountain range of Mâshu, probably the Lebanon and Antilebanon Range. Here is the gate through which the sun passes on his daily journey. The gate is guarded by a terrifying pair of scorpion-people, "whose look is death" and "whose frightful splendor overwhelms mountains." At the sight of them the face of even a demigod like Gilgamesh becomes gloomy with fear and dismay, and he falls prostrate before them. But the scorpion-people, recognizing the partly divine nature of Gilgamesh, receive him kindly and permit him to enter the gate and to traverse the mountain range. After a journey of twelve double-hours of utter darkness, which does not permit him to see what lies ahead of him

or what lies behind him, he comes out on the other side and stands before a beautiful garden of precious stones, with trees and shrubs, fruit and vines, all of glittering stone.

And there in the distance, at the edge of the sea, probably the Mediterranean Sea on the Phoenician coast, dwells Siduri, the divine barmaid! Gilgamesh hastens thither and inquires of her how he can get to Utnapishtim, to obtain from him the secret of immortality. The barmaid at first tries to persuade him that his quest is vain, for there is no escape from death. She therefore advises him to enjoy life in full measure and to abandon his hazardous, yet hopeless, undertaking. Nevertheless, Gilgamesh persists in his plan, and at last the barmaid directs him to Utnapishtim's boatman, who has come across from the other side of the sea, where Utnapishtim dwells, and is now in the woods, in search of something. "Him let thy face behold," she tells Gilgamesh. "[If it is possible, cross over with him; if it is not possible, turn back (home).]" Gilgamesh leaves the goddess and goes to the boatman, who at length agrees to take him along. With much difficulty the two cross the sea and the waters of death and finally arrive at the shores of the land of blessed Utnapishtim.

When Gilgamesh sees Utnapishtim and notices that this ancient sage is not different from him but that there is, in fact, less life and energy in Utnapishtim than there is in himself, his hope of gaining immortality undoubtedly rises, and he asks Utnapishtim how he entered into the company of the gods and obtained everlasting life. Thereupon Utnapishtim relates to him at great length the story of the deluge, which we shall consider in detail in the final chapter of this book, and tells him how he obtained the boon of immortal life. After that he turns to Gilgamesh and says to him, in effect: "But now as for you, who will assemble the gods to you so that they may confer immortality on you?" After a moment's reflection, Utnapishtim offers this suggestion: "Come, do not sleep for six days and seven nights." The meaning of this line appears to be that if he can master sleep, the twin brother of death, he may then be able to master also death itself.<sup>12</sup> But hardly has tired and exhausted Gilgamesh sat down when he falls asleep and sleeps for six days, until Utnapishtim finally wakes him.

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<sup>12</sup> A. Ungnad and H. Gressmann, Das Gilgamesch-Epos (Göttingen, 1911), p. 140; R. W. Rogers, Cuneiform Parallels to the Old Testament (New York and Cincinnati, 1926), p. 101.

There now seems to be nothing left for Gilgamesh but to return home. However, just as he departs and his boat is already moving away from the shore, Utnapishtim calls him back and reveals to him a secret of the gods: There is a thorny plant of wondrous power at the bottom of the sea; if he will obtain that plant and eat it when he has reached old age, his life will be rejuvenated. Gilgamesh descends to the bottom of the sea and obtains the plant. In the joy of his heart he now sets out for Uruk, accompanied by Utnapishtim's boatman, who evidently has been banished from the land of Utnapishtim for having brought Gilgamesh to its shores. However, on the way home Gilgamesh sees a pool of cold water and goes bathing. While he is thus engaged, a serpent perceives the fragrance of the plant, comes up from the water, snatches the plant from him and eats it, and thus gains the power to shed its old skin and thereby to renew its life. Gilgamesh sits down and weeps bitterly, for his last ray of hope has disappeared, his last chance of gaining continued life is gone. But since there is nothing he can do about it, he returns to Uruk; and since he cannot change the course of destiny, he decides to be content with his lot and to rejoice in the work of his hands, the great city which he has built.

To this material was added in later days, as we shall see shortly, a story which in some respects is quite incompatible with what precedes. According to this tale, recorded on Tablet XII, Gilgamesh makes two wooden objects of some kind, called pukku and mikkû, respectively. One day they fall into the underworld, and Gilgamesh is unable to get them up. Finally, Enkidu descends into the underworld to bring them up for him. But, unfortunately, he fails to follow the instructions which Gilgamesh has given him and therefore is unable to return to the land of the living. Gilgamesh then goes from one god to another in an effort to have Enkidu released from the realm of the dead so that he may commune with him and find out the worst that is in store for man. At long last Enkidu is permitted to ascend, and, in answer to the questions put to him by Gilgamesh, he tells his friend a rather gloomy tale concerning the conditions in the dark abodes of death. On this sad and somber note the Gilgamesh Epic ends.

#### The Central Theme of the Epic

The Gilgamesh Epic is a meditation on death, in the form of a tragedy. To consider the matter in logical arrangement, the



epic is concerned, first of all, with the bitter truth that death is inevitable. All men must die! For, when the gods created mankind, they allotted death to mankind, but immortal life they retained in their keeping.<sup>13</sup> The gods assemble and pass on life and death. And from their decrees there is no escape.<sup>14</sup>

The inevitability of death is demonstrated in the life of Gilgamesh and, to a lesser degree, in the life of his friend Enkidu. Gilgamesh was two-thirds god and only one-third man. Because of his preponderantly divine nature, his energy was almost inexhaustible; he rested neither day nor night, and no one could keep pace with him. He built the mighty walls of Uruk, which no man can equal. He worsted Enkidu, that savage man from the steppe. Together with Enkidu, he then killed fierce Humbaba, the terrible ogre who guarded the cedar forest. He spurned the love of so great a divinity as Ishtar and, aided by Enkidu, met her challenge with undoubted success, by killing the bull of heaven sent down by her. Then Enkidu, whose strength was like that of "the host of heaven" and—so we may infer—whose health mocked the doctor's rules, was snatched away from him by divine decree in the prime of his manhood! Gilgamesh at first refused to bow to the inexorable law of the gods and tried to call Enkidu back to life; but in the end he had to submit and give his friend up for burial. In his subsequent search for immortal life, Gilgamesh went through the most extraordinary hardships and performed superhuman feats. He succeeded in passing through the very gate of the sun-god, which is guarded by the terrifying scorpion-people, and traversed the dark mountain range Máshu. He crossed the wide and open sea and the waters of death, a feat possible only to the sun-god and to deified Utnapishtim's boatman, who, according to Berossus, shared in the honors of his master. He succeeded in coming into the very presence of immortal Utnapishtim, and for a while even had within his grasp the magic plant that bestowed ever recurrent youth, which is virtually synonymous with immortality. But in the end even he had to realize that there is no escape from death and that man's most valiant efforts avail him naught! If a superman and demigod like Gilgamesh failed to attain everlasting life, or at least ever recurrent youth, how utterly futile it is for a mere mortal to aspire to such a

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<sup>13</sup>Tablet X, col. 111, 1-5 (Old Babylonian version).

<sup>14</sup>Tablet X, col. vi, 36-39 (Assyrian version).