

FROM *The Epic of Gilgamesh*

With the exception of the Hebrew Bible, The Epic of Gilgamesh is the most celebrated literary work of the ancient Near East. Although Gilgamesh almost certainly was an actual ruler of the Sumerian city of Uruk in the early third millennium B.C.E., the Akkadian epic that developed around him (elements of which can be found in even earlier Sumerian stories about him) is most prized today not as a historical source for his era but as one of world literature's earliest and most profound statements on the human condition, and especially on the inescapability of human mortality. And, although it is not included in the excerpt that follows, the epic also contains by far the most detailed account of the Flood that is to be found in Mesopotamian literature. (In fact, the discovery of a cuneiform tablet containing this story, with its obvious parallels to the story of Noah and the Flood in the biblical Book of Genesis, helped to foster continued archaeological expeditions to Iraq in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.)

From *The Epic of Gilgamesh: A New Translation, Analogues, Criticism*, translated by Benjamin R. Foster (New York: Norton, 2001), pp. 3–12, 60–62, 66, 80–82.

FROM **Tablet I**

He who saw the wellspring, the foundations of
the land,
Who knew [. . .], was wise in all things,
Gilgamesh, who saw the wellspring, the founda-
tions of the land,
Who knew [. . .], was wise in all things,
[He . . .] throughout,
Full understanding of it all he gained,
He saw what was secret and revealed what was
hidden,
He brought back tidings from before the flood,
From a distant journey came home, weary, at
peace,
Engraved all his hardships on a monument of
stone,
He built the walls of ramparted Uruk,
The lustrous treasury of hallowed Eanna!
See its upper wall, whose facing gleams like copper,
Gaze at the lower course, which nothing will equal,
Mount the stone stairway, there from days of old,
Approach Eanna, the dwelling of Ishtar,
Which no future king, no human being will equal.

Go up, pace out the walls of Uruk,
Study the foundation terrace and examine the
brickwork.
Is not its masonry of kiln-fired brick?
And did not seven masters lay its foundations?
One square mile of city, one square mile of
gardens.
One square mile of clay pits, a half square mile of
Ishtar's dwelling,
Three and a half square miles is the measure of
Uruk!
[Search out] the foundation box of copper,
[Release] its lock of bronze,
Raise the lid upon its hidden contents,
Take up and read from the lapis tablet
Of him, Gilgamesh, who underwent many
hardships.

[The narrator tells of the extraordinary characteristics of Gilgamesh. An old version of the epic began here.]

Surpassing all kings, for his stature renowned,
Heroic offspring of Uruk, a charging wild bull,
He leads the way in the vanguard,
He marches at the rear, defender of his comrades.

Mighty floodwall, protector of his troops,
 Furious flood-wave smashing walls of stone,
 Wild calf of Lugalbanda, Gilgamesh is perfect in
 strength,
 Suckling of the subline wild cow, the woman
 Ninsun,
 Towering Gilgamesh is uncannily perfect.
 Opening passes in the mountains,
 Digging wells at the highlands' verge,
 Traversing the ocean, the vast sea, to the sun's
 rising,
 Exploring the furthest reaches of the earth,
 Seeking everywhere for eternal life,
 Reaching in his might Utanapishtim the Distant
 One,
 Restorer of holy places that the deluge had
 destroyed,
 Founder of rites for the teeming peoples,
 Who could be his like for kingly virtue?¹
 And who, like Gilgamesh, can proclaim, "I am
 king!"
 Gilgamesh was singled out from the day of his
 birth,
 Two-thirds of him was divine, one-third of him
 was human!
 The Lady of Birth drew his body's image,
 The God of Wisdom brought his stature to
 perfection.²

¹ Mesopotamian rulers sometimes boasted of restoring ancient temples that had been destroyed and forgotten long ago. Two lines up, the poet suggests that Gilgamesh became a dutiful king of this kind. Mesopotamian rulers also sometimes boasted of endowing temples with new offerings. This pair of lines (Restorer . . . , Founder . . .) sums up religious duties expected of a good king by citing two extremes of benefactions: those from the remote past and those beginning in his own reign.

² According to one Mesopotamian tradition, the first human being was created by Mami, goddess of birth, whom the gods thereupon rewarded with the title "Mistress of All the Gods," and Enki, god of wisdom, working together. Subsequent human beings were born naturally. This passage means that Gilgamesh was physically a perfect human being, so much so that he resembled the first human created by the gods more than the product of a normal birth.

* * *

In the enclosure of Uruk he strode back and
 forth,
 Lording it like a wild bull, his head thrust high.
 The onslaught of his weapons had no equal.
 His teammates stood forth by his game stick,
 He was harrying the young men of Uruk beyond
 reason.
 Gilgamesh would leave no son to his father,
 Day and night he would rampage fiercely.

* * *

Bold, superb, accomplished, and mature!
 Gilgamesh would leave no girl to her [mother]!
 The warrior's daughter, the young man's spouse,
 Goddesses kept hearing their complaints.³

* * *

They summoned the birth goddess, Aruru:

You, Aruru, created [the boundless human
 race],
 Now, create what Anu commanded,
 To his stormy heart, let that one be equal,
 Let them contend with each other, that Uruk
 may have peace.

When Aruru heard this,
 She conceived within her what Anu commanded.
 Aruru wet her hands,
 She pinched off clay, she tossed it upon the
 steppe,
 She created valiant Enkidu in the steppe,
 Offspring of potter's clay(?), with the force of the
 hero Ninurta.
 Shaggy with hair was his whole body,
 He was made lush with head hair, like a woman,
 The locks of his hair grew thick as a grainfield.
 He knew neither people nor inhabited land,
 He dressed as animals do.

³ Certain goddesses were believed to pay particular attention to prayers of women. In this case, they are moved by the constant complaints of the women of Uruk that Gilgamesh was mistreating the women and men of the city.

He fed on grass with gazelles,
With beasts he jostled at the water hole,
With wildlife he drank his fill of water.

[A distraught hunter seeks his father's advice as to how to stop Enkidu's interference with his trapping. The father counsels him to go to Gilgamesh, who will give him a woman to seduce Enkidu from his untamed way of life.]

A hunter, a trapping-man,
Encountered him at the edge of the water hole.
One day, a second, and a third he encountered
him at the edge of the water hole.
When he saw him, the hunter stood stock-still
with terror,
As for Enkidu, he went home with his beasts.
Aghast, struck dumb,
His heart in a turmoil, his face drawn,
With woe in his vitals,
His face like a traveler's from afar,

* * *

[Giving heed] to the advice of his father,
The hunter went forth [. . .].
He took the road, set off towards Uruk,
To [the king], Gilgamesh, [he said these words]:

There is a certain fellow [who has come from
the uplands],
He is mightiest in the land, strength is his,
Like the force of heaven, so mighty is his
strength.
He constantly ranges over the uplands,
Constantly feeding on grass with his beasts,
Constantly making his way to the edge of the
water hole.

I am too frightened to approach him.
He has filled in the pits I dug,
He has torn out my traps I set,
He has helped the beasts, wildlife of the steppe,
slip from my hands,
He will not allow me to work the steppe.

Gilgamesh said to him, to the hunter:

Go, hunter, take with you Shamhat the
harlot,

When the wild beasts draw near the water
hole,
Let her strip off her clothing, laying bare her
charms.

When he sees her, he will approach her,
His beasts that grew up with him on the
steppe will deny him.

Forth went the hunter, taking with him Shamhat
the harlot,

They took the road, going straight on their way.
On the third day they arrived at the appointed
place.

Hunter and harlot sat down to wait.
One day, a second day, they sat by the edge of the
water hole,

The beasts came to the water hole to drink,
The wildlife came to drink their fill of water.
But as for him, Enkidu, born in the uplands,
Who feeds on grass with gazelles,
Who drinks at the water hole with beasts,
Who, with wildlife, drinks his fill of water,
Shamhat looked upon him, a human-man,
A barbarous fellow from the midst of the steppe:

There he is, Shamhat, open your embrace,
Open your embrace, let him take your charms!
Be not bashful, take his vitality!
When he sees you, he will approach you,
Toss aside your clothing, let him lie upon
you,
Treat him, a human, to woman's work!
His wild beasts that grew up with him will
deny him,
As in his ardor he caresses you!

Shamhat loosened her garments.
She exposed her loins, he took her charms.
She was not bashful, she took his vitality.
She tossed aside her clothing and he lay upon
her,
She treated him, a human, to woman's work,
As in his ardor he caressed her.
Six days, seven nights was Enkidu aroused,
flowing into Shamhat.
After he had his fill of her delights,
He set off towards his beasts.

When they saw him, Enkidu, the gazelles shied off,
The wild beasts of the steppe shunned his person.
Enkidu had spent himself, his body was limp,
His knees stood still, while his beasts went away.
Enkidu was too slow, he could not run as before,
But he had gained [reason] and expanded his
understanding.

*[Shamhat urges Enkidu to return with her to Uruk,
artfully piquing his interest with tales of the pleasures
awaiting him there, then feigning second
thoughts as she describes Gilgamesh.]*

He returned, he sat at the harlot's feet,
The harlot gazed upon his face,
While he listened to what the harlot was saying.
The harlot said to him, to Enkidu:

You are handsome, Enkidu, you are become
like a god,
Why roam the steppe with wild beasts?
Come, let me lead you to ramparted Uruk,
To the holy temple, abode of Anu and Ishtar,
The place of Gilgamesh, who is perfect in
strength,
And so, like a wild bull, he lords it over the
young men.

As she was speaking to him, her words found
favor,

He was yearning for one to know his heart, a
friend.

Enkidu said to her, to the harlot:

Come, Shamhat, escort me
To the lustrous hallowed temple, abode of Anu
and Ishtar,
The place of Gilgamesh, who is perfect in
strength,
And so, like a wild bull, he lords it over the
young men.
I myself will challenge him, [I will speak out]
boldly,
[I will] raise a cry in Uruk: I am the mighty
one!

[I am come forward] to alter destinies!
He who was born in the steppe [is mighty],
strength is his!

[Shamhat speaks.]

[Come then], let him see your face,
[I will show you Gilgamesh], where he is I
know full well.

Come then, Enkidu, to ramparted Uruk,
Where fellows are resplendent in holiday
clothing,

Where every day is set for celebration,
Where harps and drums are [played].

And the harlots too, they are fairest of form,
Rich in beauty, full of delights,

Even the great (gods) are kept from sleeping at
night!⁴

Enkidu, you who [have not] learned to live,
Oh, let me show you Gilgamesh, the joy-woe
man.

Look at him, gaze upon his face,
He is radiant with virility, manly vigor is his,
The whole of his body is seductively gorgeous.
Mightier strength has he than you,
Never resting by day or night.

O Enkidu, renounce your audacity!

Gilgamesh is beloved of Shamash,

Anu, Enlil, and Ea broadened his wisdom.

Ere you come down from the uplands,

Gilgamesh will dream of you in Uruk.

*[The scene shifts to Uruk, where Gilgamesh is
telling his mother, Ninsun, his dreams. She explains
them to him.]*

Gilgamesh went to relate the dreams, saying to
his mother:

Mother, I had a dream last night:

There were stars of heaven around me,
Like the force of heaven, something kept falling
upon me!

I tried to carry it but it was too strong for me,

I tried to move it but I could not budge it.

The whole of Uruk was standing by it,

The people formed a crowd around it,

A throng was jostling towards it,

⁴ The Mesopotamians considered a small group of the gods "great" or "superior," above all the others.

Young men were mobbed around it,
 Infantile, they were groveling before it!
 [I fell in love with it], like a woman I caressed it,
 I carried it off and laid it down before you,
 Then you were making it my partner.

The mother of Gilgamesh, knowing and wise,
 Who understands everything, said to her son,
 Ninsun [the wild cow], knowing and wise,
 Who understands everything, said to Gilgamesh:

The stars of heaven around you,
 Like the force of heaven, what kept falling
 upon you,
 Your trying to move it but not being able to
 budge it,
 Your laying it down before me,
 Then my making it your partner,
 Your falling in love with it, your caressing it
 like a woman,
 Means there will come to you a strong one,
 A companion who rescues a friend.
 He will be mighty in the land, strength will be
 his,
 Like the force of heaven, so mighty will be his
 strength.

* * *

Gilgamesh said to her, to his mother:

Let this befall according to the command of
 the great counselor Enlil,
 I want a friend for my own counselor,
 For my own counselor do I want a friend!

Even while he was having his dreams,
 Shamhat was telling the dreams of Gilgamesh to
 Enkidu,
 Each was drawn by love to the other.

*[Eventually, Enkidu confronts Gilgamesh in Uruk;
 they fight; and they become fast friends and com-
 panions in fantastic adventures. They journey to
 the Pine Mountain to fell the trees there, but must
 first slay Humbaba, the terrifying monster who
 guards the forest. Afterwards, Ishtar, the goddess of*

*love and sex, is smitten with Gilgamesh and offers
 to marry him, but, knowing the fate of her previous
 lovers, Gilgamesh spurns her. Grievously insulted,
 Ishtar approaches her father, Anu, the chief of the
 gods, to ask for the Bull of Heaven to send against
 Gilgamesh and Enkidu. At first reluctant, Anu
 eventually agrees, but the two heroes kill the Bull of
 Heaven as well and insult Ishtar with part of its
 carcass. The gods then decide that one of them must
 die: Enkidu. As Enkidu grows progressively more ill,
 Gilgamesh begins to mourn.]*

FROM **Tablet VIII**

At the first glimmer of dawn,
 Gilgamesh [lamented] his friend:

Enkidu, my friend, your mother the gazelle,
 Your father the wild ass brought you into the
 world,
 Onagers raised you on their milk,
 And the wild beasts taught you all the grazing
 places.
 The pathways, O Enkidu, to the forest of
 cedars,
 May they weep for you, without falling silent,
 night and day.
 May the elders of the teeming city, ramparted
 Uruk, weep for you,
 May the crowd who blessed our departure
 weep for you.
 May the heights of highland and mountain
 [weep for you],
 [. . .]
 May the lowlands wail like your mother.
 May [the forest] of balsam and cedar weep for
 you,
 Which we slashed in our fury.
 May bear, hyena, panther, leopard, deer,
 jackal,
 Lion, wild bull, gazelle, ibex, the beasts and
 creatures of the steppe, weep for you.
 May the sacred Ulaya River weep for you, along
 whose banks we once strode erect,
 May the holy Euphrates weep for you,
 Whose waters we libated from waterskins.

May the young men of ramparted Uruk weep
for you,
Who watched us slay the Bull of Heaven in
combat.
May the plowman weep for you [at his plow],
Who extolled your name in the sweet song of
harvest home.⁵
May they weep for you, [. . .] of the teeming
city of Uruk,
Who exalted your name at the first [. . .].
May the shepherd and herdsman weep for you,
Who held the milk and buttermilk to your
mouth,
May the [nurse] weep for you,
Who treated your rashes(?) with butter.
May the [. . .] weep for you,
Who held the ale to your mouth.
May the harlot weep for you,
Who massaged you with sweet-smelling oil.
May the wedding guests weep for you,
Who [. . .]
Like brothers may they weep for you,
Like sisters may they tear out their hair for
your sake.
[. . .] Enkidu, as your father, your mother,
I weep for you bitterly, [. . .]

Hear me, O young men, listen to me,
Hear me, O elders of [Uruk], listen to me!
I mourn my friend Enkidu,
I howl as bitterly as a professional keener.
Oh for the axe at my side, oh for the safeguard
by my hand,
Oh for the sword at my belt, oh for the shield
before me,
Oh for my best garment, oh for the raiment
that pleased me most!
An ill wind rose against me and snatched it away!
O my friend, swift wild donkey, mountain
onager, panther of the steppe!
O Enkidu my friend, swift wild donkey, moun-
tain onager, panther of the steppe!

You who stood by me when we climbed the
mountain,
Seized and slew the Bull of Heaven,
Felled Humbaba who [dwelt] in the forest of
cedar,
What now is this sleep that has seized you?
Come back to me! You hear me not.

But, as for him, he did not raise his head.
He touched his heart but it was not beating.
Then he covered his friend's face, like a bride's.
He hovered round him like an eagle,
Like a lioness whose cubs are in a pitfall,
He paced to and fro, back and forth,
Tearing out and hurling away the locks of his
hair,
Ripping off and throwing away his fine clothes
like something foul.

[*Gilgamesh commissions a memorial statue of
Enkidu.*]

At the first glimmer of dawn,
Gilgamesh sent out a proclamation to the land:

Hear ye, blacksmith, lapidary, metalworker,
goldsmith, jeweler!
Make [an image] of my friend,
[Such as no one ever] made of his friend!
The limbs of my friend [. . .]
[Your beard] of lapis, your chest of gold,
Your skin of [. . .]

I will lay you down in the ultimate resting
place,
In a perfect resting place I will surely lay you
down.
I will settle you in peaceful rest in the dwelling
sinister,
Rulers of the netherworld will do you homage.
I will have the people of Uruk shed bitter tears
for you,
I will make the pleasure-loving people
burdened down for you,
And, as for me, now that you are dead, I will
let my hair grow matted,
I will put on a lion skin and roam the steppe!

⁵ Mesopotamian literature referred to work songs sung when the crops were brought in from the harvest as symbols of happiness and prosperity.

FROM **Tablet IX**

Gilgamesh was weeping bitterly for Enkidu, his friend,
As he roamed the steppe:

Shall I not die too? Am I not like Enkidu?
Oh woe has entered my vitals!
I have grown afraid of death, so I roam the steppe.

Having come this far, I will go on swiftly
Towards Utanapishtim, son of Ubar-Tutu.

[To reach Utanapishtim, who corresponds to Atrahasis in the first reading in this chapter, Gilgamesh must undertake a dangerous journey that culminates in a voyage by boat across a sea of lethal water. Finally, he reaches the far shore, where an amazed Utanapishtim has watched him coming.]

* * *

FROM **Tablet X**

Utanapishtim said to him, to Gilgamesh:

Why are your cheeks emaciated, your face cast down,
Your heart wretched, your features wasted,
Woe in your vitals,
Your face like a traveler's from afar,
Your features weathered by cold and sun,
Why are you clad in a lion skin, roaming the steppe?

[Gilgamesh tells Utanapishtim his mission, wallowing in the luxury of self-pity on the difficulties of his quest.]

Gilgamesh said to him, to Utanapishtim:

My cheeks would not be emaciated, nor my face cast down,
Nor my heart wretched, nor my features wasted,
Nor would there be woe in my vitals,
Nor would my face be like a traveler's from afar,
Nor would my features be weathered by cold and sun,

Nor would I be clad in a lion skin, roaming the steppe,
But for my friend, swift wild donkey, mountain onager, panther of the steppe,
But for Enkidu, my friend, swift wild donkey, mountain onager, panther of the steppe,
He who stood by me as we ascended the mountain,
Seized and killed the bull that came down from heaven,

Felled Humbaba who dwelt in the forest of cedars,
Killed lions at the mountain passes,
My friend whom I so loved, who went with me through every hardship,
Enkidu, whom I so loved, who went with me through every hardship,
The fate of mankind has overtaken him.
Six days and seven nights I wept for him,
I would not give him up for burial,
Until a worm fell out of his nose.

I was frightened [. . .]

I have grown afraid of death, so I roam the steppe,

My friend's case weighs heavy upon me.
A distant road I roam over the steppe,
My friend Enkidu's case weighs heavy upon me!

A distant path I roam over the steppe,
How can I be silent? How can I hold my peace?

My friend whom I loved is turned into clay,
Enkidu, my friend whom I loved, is turned into clay!

Shall I too not lie down like him,
And never get up, forever and ever?

Gilgamesh said to him, to Utanapishtim:

So it is to go find Utanapishtim, whom they call the "Distant One,"
I traversed all lands,
I came over, one after another, wearisome mountains,
Then I crossed, one after another, all the seas.
Too little sweet sleep has smoothed my countenance,

I have worn myself out in sleeplessness,
 My muscles ache for misery,
 What have I gained my trials?
 I had not reached the tavern keeper when my
 clothes were worn out,
 I killed bear, hyena, lion, panther, leopard, deer,
 ibex, wild beasts of the steppe,
 I ate their meat, I [. . .] their skins.
 Let them close behind me the doors of woe,
 [Let them seal them] with pitch and tar,
 For my part, I [. . .] no amusement,
 For me, [. . .]

[Gilgamesh asks Utanapishtim how he "came to stand in the gods' assembly and sought eternal life." Utanapishtim tells him the story of how, long ago, the gods had decided to send a great flood to destroy humankind, but how, at the instruction of Ea (Enki), he had built a great boat and had brought aboard it all manner of living things to survive the flood. After the flood subsided, Utanapishtim and his wife were granted immortality. He chides Gilgamesh for his self-pity and ostentatious mourning, all the more unseemly because the gods had favored him. The village idiot, he points out, wears rags and eats bad food, but no one accords him merit for that. After a gap in the text, Utanapishtim is found discoursing on the nature of death.]

Utanapishtim said to him, to Gilgamesh:

Why, O Gilgamesh, did you prolong woe,
 You who are [formed] of the flesh of gods and
 mankind,
 You for whom [the gods] acted like fathers and
 mothers?

* * *

FROM Tablet XI

Now then, who will convene the gods for your
 sake,
 That you may find the eternal life you seek?
 Come, come, try not to sleep for six days and
 seven nights.

[Utanapishtim has challenged Gilgamesh to go without sleep for a week; if he fails this test, how could he expect to live forever? Even as he speaks, Gilgamesh drifts off to sleep. Thus passes from the scene the all-night rowdy of Tablet I.]

As he sat there on his haunches,
 Sleep was swirling over him like a mist.
 Utanapishtim said to her, to his wife:

Behold this fellow who seeks eternal life!
 Sleep swirls over him like a mist.

[Utanapishtim's wife, taking pity on Gilgamesh, urges her husband to awaken him and let him go home. Utanapishtim insists on a proof of how long he slept, lest Gilgamesh claim that he had only dozed. She is to bake him fresh bread every day and set it beside him, marking the wall for the day. The bread spoils progressively as Gilgamesh sleeps for seven days.]

His wife said to him, to Utanapishtim the Distant One:

Do touch him that the man may wake up,
 That he may return safe on the way whence he
 came,
 That through the gate he came forth he may
 return to his land.

Utanapishtim said to her, to his wife:

Since the human race is duplicitous, he'll endeavor to dupe you.
 Come, come, bake his daily loaves, put them
 one after another by his head,
 Then mark the wall for each day he has
 slept.

She baked his daily loaves for him, put them one
 after another by his head,
 Then dated the wall for each day he slept.
 The first loaf was dried hard,
 The second was leathery, the third soggy,
 The crust of the fourth turned white,
 The fifth was gray with mold, the sixth was
 fresh,
 The seventh was still on the coals when he
 touched him, the man woke up.

[Gilgamesh wakes at last. Claiming at first that he has scarcely dozed a moment, he sees the bread and realizes that he has slept for the entire time he was supposed to remain awake for the test. He gives up in despair. What course is left for him? Utanapishtim does not answer directly but orders the boatman to take him home. Further, the boatman himself is never to return. Thus access to Utanapishtim is denied the human race forever. Gilgamesh is bathed and given clothing that will stay magically fresh until his return to Uruk.]

Gilgamesh said to him, to Utanapishtim the Distant One:

Scarcely had sleep stolen over me,
When straightaway you touched me and roused me.

Utanapishtim said to him, to Gilgamesh:

[Up with you], Gilgamesh, count your daily loaves,
[That the days you have slept] may be known to you.

The first loaf is dried hard,
The second is leathery, the third soggy,
The crust of the fourth has turned white,
The fifth is gray with mold,
The sixth is fresh,
The seventh was still in the coals when I touched you and you woke up.

Gilgamesh said to him, to Utanapishtim the Distant One:

What then should I do, Utanapishtim, whither should I go,
Now that the Bereaver has seized my [flesh]?⁶
Death lurks in my bedchamber,
And wherever I turn, there is death!

Utanapishtim said to him, to Ur-Shanabi the boatman:

Ur-Shanabi, may the harbor [offer] you no [haven],

May the crossing point reject you,
Be banished from the shore you shuttled to.
The man you brought here,
His body is matted with filthy hair,
Hides have marred the beauty of his flesh.
Take him away, Ur-Shanabi, bring him to the washing place.
Have him wash out his filthy hair with water,
clean as snow,
Have him throw away his hides, let the sea carry them off,
Let his body be rinsed clean.
Let his headband be new,
Have him put on raiment worthy of him.
Until he reaches his city,
Until he completes his journey,
Let his garments stay spotless, fresh and new.

Ur-Shanabi took him away and brought him to the washing place.
He washed out his filthy hair with water, clean as snow,
He threw away his hides, the sea carried them off,
His body was rinsed clean.
He renewed his headband,
He put on raiment worthy of him.
Until he reached his city,
Until he completed his journey,
His garments would stay spotless, fresh and new.

[Gilgamesh and Ur-Shanabi embark on their journey to Uruk. As they push off from the shore, Utanapishtim's wife intervenes, asking her husband to give the hero something to show for his quest. Gilgamesh brings the boat back to shore and waits expectantly. Utanapishtim tells him of a plant of rejuvenation. Gilgamesh dives for the plant by opening a shaft through the earth's surface to the water below. He ties stones to his feet, a technique used in traditional pearl diving in the Gulf. When he comes up from securing the plant, he is on the opposite side of the ocean, where he started from.]

Gilgamesh and Ur-Shanabi embarked on the boat,
They launched the boat, they embarked upon it.

⁶ "The Bereaver" is an epithet of death. It could also mean something like "kidnapper."

His wife said to him, to Utanapishtim the Distant One:

Gilgamesh has come here, spent with exertion,
What will you give him for his homeward journey?

At that he, Gilgamesh, lifted the pole,
Bringing the boat back by the shore.
Utanapishtim said to him, to Gilgamesh:

Gilgamesh, you have come here, spent with exertion,
What shall I give you for your homeward journey?
I will reveal to you, O Gilgamesh, a secret matter,
And a mystery of the gods I will tell you.
There is a certain plant, its stem is like a thornbush,
Its thorns, like the wild rose, will prick [your hand].
If you can secure this plant, [. . .]
[. . .]

No sooner had Gilgamesh heard this,
He opened a shaft, [flung away his tools].
He tied heavy stones [to his feet],
They pulled him down into the watery depths [. . .].
He took the plant though it pricked [his hand].
He cut the heavy stones [from his feet],
The sea cast him up on his home shore.

[Gilgamesh resolves to take the plant to Uruk to experiment on an old man. While Gilgamesh is bathing on the homeward journey, a snake eats the plant and rejuvenates itself by shedding its skin. Gilgamesh gives up. Immense quantities of water have flooded up through the shaft he dug and covered the place. He has left behind his tools so cannot dig another shaft. He has also lost the boat, so there is no going back.]

Gilgamesh said to him, to Ur-Shanabi the boatman:

Ur-Shanabi, this plant is cure for heartache,
Whereby a man will regain his stamina.

I will take it to ramparted Uruk,
I will have an old man eat some and so test the plant.
His name shall be "Old Man Has Become Young-Again-Man."
I myself will eat it and so return to my carefree youth.

At twenty double leagues they took a bite to eat,
At thirty double leagues they made their camp.

Gilgamesh saw a pond whose water was cool,
He went down into it to bathe in the water.
A snake caught the scent of the plant,
[Stealthily] it came up and carried the plant away,
On its way back it shed its skin.

Thereupon Gilgamesh sat down weeping,
His tears flowed down his face,
He said to Ur-Shanabi the boatman:

For whom, Ur-Shanabi, have my hands been toiling?
For whom has my heart's blood been poured out?
For myself I have obtained no benefit,
I have done a good deed for a reptile!
Now, floodwaters rise against me for twenty double leagues,
When I opened the shaft, I flung away the tools.
How shall I find my bearings?
I have come much too far to go back, and I abandoned the boat on the shore.

[Upon completing his journey, Gilgamesh invites Ur-Shanabi to inspect the walls of Uruk, using the same words used by the narrator in Tablet I.]

At twenty double leagues they took a bite to eat,
At thirty double leagues they made their camp.
When they arrived in ramparted Uruk,
Gilgamesh said to him, to Ur-Shanabi the boatman:

Go up, Ur-Shanabi, pace out the walls of Uruk.
Study the foundation terrace and examine the brickwork.
Is not its masonry of kiln-fired brick?



TWO IMAGES OF SUMERIAN RULERSHIP (C. 2480 B.C.E.)

The first image (top) is a plaque of Ur-Nanshe, who ruled the Sumerian city-state of Lagash around 2480 B.C.E. He is shown both as a builder carrying a basket of bricks, with his family around 2480 B.C.E. He is shown both as a builder carrying a basket of bricks, with his family facing him (above), and enthroned (below). The second image (bottom), from a limestone monument known as the Vulture Stela, depicts Ur-Nanshe's successor Eannatum leading the troops of Lagash to victory against the rival city-state of Umma. The inscriptions on the stela record Lagash's victory and the terms it imposed on Umma. What do these images suggest about the status and responsibilities of Sumerian rulers? What do they suggest about the uses of cuneiform writing during the mid-third millennium B.C.E.?

And did not seven masters lay its foundations?
 One square mile of city, one square mile of
 gardens,
 One square mile of clay pits, a half square mile
 of Ishtar's dwelling,
 Three and a half square miles is the measure of
 Uruk!

* * *

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What kind of figure is Gilgamesh?
2. What becomes of his quest in this epic, and why?
3. What roles do the gods play in the story?
4. When his quest is completed, what is Gilgamesh's view of his fate?

FROM The Code of Hammurabi

Dating to the reign of Hammurabi of Babylon (the conventional dates for which are 1795–1750 B.C.E.), the Laws of Hammurabi are not the earliest Mesopotamian compilation of legal rulings known to us. They are, however, the longest and most diverse collection and undoubtedly constitute the single most informative document yet discovered regarding concepts of justice and social regulation in Mesopotamian society. Hammurabi's laws also provide extremely important evidence about the status and rights of women of various social classes in Babylonian society in the early second millennium B.C.E.

From *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor*, edited by Martha T. Roth, SBL Writings from the Ancient World Series, vol. 6 (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1995), pp. 76–135.

When the august god Anu, king of the Anunnaku deities, and the god Enlil, lord of heaven and earth, who determines the destinies of the land, allotted supreme power over all peoples to the god Marduk, the first-born son of the god Ea, exalted him among the Igigu deities, named the city of Babylon with its august name and made it supreme within the regions of the world, and established for him within it eternal kingship whose foundations are as fixed as heaven and earth, at that time, the gods Anu and Enlil, for the enhancement of the well-being of the people, named me by my name: Hammurabi, the pious prince, who venerates the gods, to make justice prevail in the land, to abolish the wicked and the evil, to prevent the strong from oppressing the weak, to rise like the sun-god Shamash over all humankind, to illuminate the land.

I am Hammurabi, the shepherd, selected by the god Enlil, he who heaps high abundance and plenty, who perfects every possible thing for the city Nippur, the city known as band-of-heaven-and-earth, the pious provider of the Ekur temple;

the capable king, the restorer of the city Eridu, the purifier of the rites of the Eabzu temple;

the onslaught of the four regions of the world, who magnifies the reputation of the city Babylon, who gladdens the heart of his divine lord Marduk, whose days are devoted to the Esagil temple;

* * *

When the god Marduk commanded me to provide just ways for the people of the land in order