

The "epic of gilgamesh" and mesopotamia essay



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Culture is one of the issues that create a strong point of comparison between the Epic of Gilgamesh and Mesopotamian society. This is based on the realization that the two settings share various elements of culture, such as a political organization, leadership gender roles, sex, violence, and conflict management. The setting in the Epic of Gilgamesh portrays different issues that are eminent in Mesopotamian society and culture (Samuel 147). From the political organization to the roles of gender in society, there are significant similarities between the two-story settings. It is in this regard that this study seeks to discuss how the Epic of Gilgamesh mirrors Mesopotamian society and its culture. The paper discusses the issue concerning the following topics.

In Mesopotamian society, women acted as the closest subordinates to men. In all the cities of Mesopotamia, there were significant biases in gender roles and particularly towards women. The roles of women were confined to the social issue of giving birth, raising children, brewing wine, and cooking food. Women were also used as sexual objects (Caprio & Wiesner, 124). For instance, in the Epic of Gilgamesh, Sharmhat is used to seduce Enkindu so that he could come to the village and stop living in the wilderness.

After Enkindu had slept with Sharmhat, he came to his senses and left the wilderness for the village. Another instance in the epic, which portrays women as sexual objects, is the use of the women as sex tools in the temple. Women in Mesopotamian society had the duty of brewing wine for men as portrayed in the Epic of Gilgamesh. Siduri is portrayed as the sole wine maker during different occasions in the empire (Rivkah 95).

In comparison to men, women acted as close assistants to the men in society. Their participation in leadership roles was very limited. Most of the leadership roles were taken by men. However, by marriage or family status, women could secure the opportunity to participate in the leadership roles if they were married to the king or emperors in Mesopotamian society. Unlike men who occupied the highest rank in political leadership, women could only lead to issues such as priesthood and prophecy. Their participation in decision making on issues affecting the society was confined to family matters. Men participated in decision making on issues such as leadership, trade, farming activities, and war. Men were the final decision-makers in every issue.

In Mesopotamian society, Men had the sole role in providing political and family leadership. Men also pursued aggressive roles such as farming, trading, hunting, and construction of buildings. They provided security to their families and the kingdom. For instance, in the Epic Gilgamesh, the writer of the story portrays the Gilgamesh as a leader who forcefully recruited the young men to defend the community against external aggression. The same case is evidence in Mesopotamia where young warriors had the duty of protecting the empire. The disparities in roles between men and women in Mesopotamia indicate the significance of gender roles.

The boys were to emulate the duties and functions of their fathers while the girls worked closely with their mothers to learn their duties. This practice perpetuated the disparities in gender roles between men and women. Sons of soldiers and warriors were to join their fathers in the army while the sons

of temple administrators also joined their fathers in their practice. Girls, on the other hand, learned how to cook, feed babies, and cultivate the garden (Samuel 146).

Gilgamesh portrays the characters of Mesopotamia rulers and gods. As a leader, Gilgamesh pursued activities such as leading the empire, defending the empire against external aggression. For instance, he fought Humbaba to defend the resources in the forest. The kings in Mesopotamia also organized wars against their neighbors to defend their territorial boundaries (Rivkah 95). The element of dictatorship also provides a good ground for comparison between Gilgamesh with the leaders and gods of Mesopotamia. He forcefully captured the sons of other men to join his army and took all the virgin daughters in the territory. Just like Mesopotamian leaders, Gilgamesh also ensured independence and sovereignty of his territory. Moreover, Gilgamesh was believed to possess supernatural powers like those of the Mesopotamian gods. For example, his strengths in the story have been compared to the gods of the sun (Caprio & Wiesner, 124).

Sex and violence were widely used in Mesopotamian society for sacred purposes and to portray the significance of power. For instance, sex in ancient empires was mainly used for sacred purposes such as eliminating infertility in the family. In Gilgamesh, prostitute temples were used by the leaders and their assistant to cleanse themselves. In Mesopotamian society, especially in ancient Babylon, parents were to donate their virgin daughters to act as temple virgins. In the year 1882 B. C. men in Babylon who were married to barren women were allowed to sleep with temple virgins.

Violence, on the other hand, was used to manifest the influence of power

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and leadership. For example, in Gilgamesh, the latter fought the bull to express his powers and might to the people (Rivkah 95).

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