

Gilgamesh and the early 17th century



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The Epic of Gilgamesh is a poem that was written on a historical king by the name of Gilgamesh. The *Epic Of Gilgamesh* was well cherished and idolized poem for Mesopotamia. The poem was based in the area of Uruk in Mesopotamia, which is known by Iraq today. In the poem Gilgamesh was ruled as a hero king, he conquered many challenges through the poem named *Epic of Gilgamesh*. Throughout the poem important roles and themes were eye openers such as friendship, the important role of being a king, companionship between male and female, pastoral versus city, and even demise.

Gilgamesh was described as being the “ wisest, strongest, and most handsome of mortals, for he is two-thirds god and one-third man.” (*Spatt*) Within a few hundred years, Gilgamesh’s stories were combined and edited into a long Babylonian poem, which today is known as the *Epic of Gilgamesh* . It can be considered the oldest surviving literary masterpiece in the world. Gilgamesh was named as a hero because he had characteristics of bravery, courage, confidence, devotedness, and faithfulness. Gilgamesh is most popular and well known king of Mesopotamia. Gilgamesh ruled the areas around Euphrates and Tigris rivers also, he was ruler near the time of 2700 B. C. E. Gilgamesh was known for building the wall of his city, which was located in Uruk. The walls was known to be at least ten kilometers long and nine hundred towers. “ Long after the death of Gilgamesh his people claimed him to be the best and greatest king of the Underworld.” (Ackerman) Since the writing of Gilgamesh there is not a specific author or writer for Gilgamesh. The earliest writing on Gilgamesh was in 2100 B. C. E and the story was written in the language of Sumerian. Sumerian was a language

that was known in Mesopotamia as their earliest language, which was written as cuneiform on twelve clay tablets. " After a long period of time and popularity Gilgamesh was forgotten , most importantly for the good deeds , he accomplished after circulating for centuries, Gilgamesh's story disappeared for over two thousand years." (Ackerman) Some writers state that it should be noted that a complete text of Gilgamesh has not yet been found from any source." Scholars have labored to piece together the existing fragments like a jigsaw puzzle and to fill in the remaining gaps with inspired literary guesswork. They know that the full text ran to 12 numbered tablets, with six columns of text on each."(Boucquey)

In the poem *Epic of Gilgamesh*, Gilgamesh was recognized as the world's oldest epic hero and the poem was written as the world's first epic poem. The word epic is known to mean song or a speech. " Gilgamesh share certain important featured with Greek epic." (Ackerman) " The epic poem is older than the *Iliad* , and it remains only a fragment of a much longer work, although the fragments that have been found and translated create a relatively complete, if episodic, account of the journey of Gilgamesh, the young king of Uruk (now Iraq)." (Sova) The *Epic of Gilgamesh* began as Gilgamesh having wealth, power, and attractiveness. " As the epic proper opens, we find that the people of Uruk are worn out with Gilgamesh's warlike energy, dispirited because his military levies deprive them of their sons, and angry that his sexual appetites require all the women to sacrifice their virginity to him before they marry. Responding to the people's prayers, the goddess of creation shapes a wild man named Enkidu who will be able to tame Gilgamesh."(Cook) In one part of the poem that was liked most about

Gilgamesh's bravery was when, Gilgamesh braved monsters, and run along with a sun's path and comes in contact with a mystery woman, he passed a garden of jeweled trees, and crosses water of death just to get to the house where Utnapishtim and his wife lived. Utnapishtim's story favors the story from the bible of Noah and the Ark. Gilgamesh was described as a ruler that looked after himself and accomplished his own needs and wants first. " The people of Uruk complains to Sumerian gods about the behavior caused by Gilgamesh. In the beginning, his people claimed him to be a selfish ruler to his city and the people that he was ruling." (Ackerman) " Gilgamesh's people complained to other Sumerians and to each other in Mesopotamia on how the city disliked Gilgamesh and the way he went about ruling the town of Mesopotamia." (Cook) Gilgamesh felt like he had so much power and since that he was the ruler , he felt as he could rule the city the way he wanted to , and the way that he like with no one's opinion.

As the poem starts off, the reader is drawn into the tale through a tour of the majestic walls of Uruk, built by Gilgamesh. Hidden in the walls is a copper box containing the tablets that tell the tale of " he who has seen everything...but then was brought to peace?"(Boucquey) He was stated to be a great king, brave and courageous, Gilgamesh abuse young men and women of Uruk. The gods decide to create a rival, Enkidu, who was chosen as an innocent child of nature, at home with the animals. Enkidu was later on seduced by a prostitute, he then makes his way to Uruk to challenge the king Gilgamesh. The king wins the fight, but the two become friends despite the difference in status and personality. " Professions of friendship and love are a recurrent theme in the rest of the poem."(Boucquey) Gilgamesh then

proposes a joint quest to visit the Cedar Forest to kill Humbaba, thus gaining a kind of immortality through eternal fame. After a long journey, they succeed in slaying the demon, and Enkidu also fells the tallest cedar to use as a door in the famous temple at Nippur.

Feminist critics claim that the next episode, about the goddess of love, Ishtar, may signal a change in gender relationships in Babylon. After Gilgamesh rejects Ishtar's proposal of marriage, Ishtar has the gods send down the destructive Bull of Heaven. The hero kills the beast, reducing Ishtar and her priestesses to impotent grief. The gods decide to kill Enkidu in punishment for the killing of Humbaba and the Bull. When Enkidu asks for revenge against those who had seduced him away from his original state of innocence, the sun god Shamash lectures him on the simple civilized pleasures of food, wine, clothing, and friendship he has known, and assures him he will be properly mourned. Gilgamesh cannot be consoled after the death of his friend. Consumed with despair about his own mortality, he decides to seek out Utnapishtim, the only human who ever achieved eternal life.

In the poem, "the god of the Sumerian, Enlil, demanded Gilgamesh's mortality and his authority over his people, and Enkidu, interpreting a dream for his friend, explains to Gilgamesh both the extent and the limits of the power he was given." (Ackerman) Gilgamesh went to a nearby forest and he raised a statue to himself and to other gods, and destroy a giant that lived in the forest who who also lurks the area, however the giant was named Humbaba. The name stood for the enemies of Uruk. Enkidu tries to discourage his friend, but Gilgamesh fearlessly insists. He invokes the sun

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god Shamash, praying for his aid and approval in his undertaking, and then begins his preparations for the dangerous enterprise. Gilgamesh's mother, also prays that the sun god will protect both Gilgamesh and her adoptive son Enkidu as well. To Enkidu she entrusts Gilgamesh's safety. After advice from Uruk's counselors, they both went out and to destroy the beast. They cover huge distances in a very short time and eventually come to the forest of Humbaba. Enkidu counsels' immediate attack before Humbaba can cover all the layers of his clothing, but Humbaba sees them coming and withdraws into the forest. Gilgamesh fells a falling tree. Which prevented Humbaba, who is the guardian of the forest, and Enkidu gets scared. He describes the horrors of Humbaba to Gilgamesh, confesses that he is frightened to death, and suggests they go home. Gilgamesh encourages Enkidu's courage, however, and the two confront Humbaba, cutting down seven trees at his home in the forest. Humbaba pleaded that Gilgamesh to spare and save his life. Enkidu counsels his friend against this. Gilgamesh and Enkidu strikes Humbaba. Humbaba eventually dies, and they offer the giant's head to the god Enlil as a sacrifice. Enlil, is afraid . The god reproves the two killers and distributes Humbaba's former glory among wild creatures. " The episode with Humbaba in the forest may belong elsewhere in the epic. Its exact place in the story is unclear, and segments seem missing."(Cook)

The *Epic of Gilgamesh* was a poem written about the king Gilgamesh and the obstacles he accomplished as being ruler of Mesopotamia and the land around Euphrates and Tigris rivers. Gilgamesh was an inspiration to the people he ruled and left impact on today' world literature. Gilgamesh characteristics left an example to many rulers that lead by inspiration in

today's world, such as courage and confidence. Gilgamesh was accounted for a lot which led him to be the leader that was loved at the end.

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