

PENGUIN CLASSICS

THE EPIC OF
GILGAMESH

A NEW TRANSLATION



THE EPIC OF GILGAMESH

*The Babylonian Epic Poem and Other Texts
in Akkadian and Sumerian*

*Translated and with an introduction by
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PENGUIN BOOKS

I

The Standard Version of
the Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic:
'He who saw the Deep'

Tablet I. The Coming of Enkidu

Prologue and paean. King Gilgamesh tyrannizes the people of Uruk, who complain to the gods. To divert his superhuman energies the gods create his counterpart, the wild man Enkidu, who is brought up by the animals of the wild. Enkidu is spotted by a trapper, who lures him away from the herd with a prostitute. The prostitute shows him her arts and proposes to take him to Uruk, where Gilgamesh has been seeing him in dreams.

He who saw the Deep, the country's foundation,
[who] knew . . . , was wise in all matters!
[Gilgamesh, who] saw the Deep, the country's foundation,
[who] knew . . . , was wise in all matters!

[He] . . . everywhere . . .

I 5

and [learnt] of everything the sum of wisdom.

He saw what was secret, discovered what was hidden,
he brought back a tale of before the Deluge.

He came a far road, was weary, found peace,
and set all his labours on a tablet of stone.

I 10

He built the rampart of Uruk-the-Sheepfold,
of holy Eanna, the sacred storehouse.

See its wall like a strand of *wool*,
view its parapet that none could copy!

I 15

Take the stairway of a bygone era,
draw near to Eanna, seat of Ishtar the goddess,
that no later king could ever copy!

Climb Uruk's wall and walk back and forth!
 Survey its foundations, examine the brickwork!
 Were its bricks not fired in an oven?
 Did the Seven Sages not lay its foundations?

I 20

[A square mile is] city, [a square mile] date-grove, a square mile is
 clay-pit, half a square mile the temple of Ishtar:
 [three square miles] and a half is Uruk's expanse.

[See] the tablet-box of cedar,
 [release] its clasp of bronze!
 [Lift] the lid of its secret,
 [pick] up the tablet of lapis lazuli and read out
 the travails of Gilgamesh, all that he went through.

I 25

Surpassing all other kings, heroic in stature,
 brave scion of Uruk, wild bull on the rampage!
 Going at the fore he was the vanguard,
 going at the rear, one his comrades could trust!

I 30

A mighty bank, protecting his warriors,
 a violent flood-wave, smashing a stone wall!
 Wild bull of Lugalbanda, Gilgamesh, the perfect in strength,
 suckling of the august Wild Cow, the goddess Ninsun!

I 35

Gilgamesh the tall, magnificent and terrible,
 who opened passes in the mountains,
 who dug wells on the slopes of the uplands,
 and crossed the ocean, the wide sea to the sunrise;

I 40

who scoured the world ever searching for life,
 and reached through sheer force Uta-napishti the Distant;
 who restored the cult-centres destroyed by the Deluge,
 and set in place for the people the rites of the cosmos.

Who is there can rival his kingly standing,
 and say like Gilgamesh, 'It is I am the king'?
 Gilgamesh was his name from the day he was born,
 two-thirds of him god and one third human.

I 45

It was the Lady of the Gods drew the form of his figure,
while his build was perfected by divine Nudimmud.

I 50

* * *

A triple cubit was his foot, half a rod his leg.
Six cubits was his stride,
... cubits the *front part* of his ...

I 56

His cheeks were bearded like those of . . . ,
the hair of his head grew thickly [as barley.]
When he grew tall his beauty was consummate,
by earthly standards he was most handsome.

I 60

In Uruk-the-Sheepfold he *walks [back and forth,]*
like a wild bull lording it, head held aloft.
He has no equal when his weapons are brandished,
his companions are kept on their feet by his *contests.*

I 65

The young men of Uruk he harries without warrant,
Gilgamesh lets no son go free to his father.
By day and by night his tyranny grows harsher,
Gilgamesh, [*the guide of the teeming people!*]

I 70

It is he who is shepherd of Uruk-the-Sheepfold,
[but Gilgamesh] lets no [daughter go free to her] mother.
[*The women voiced*] their [*troubles to the goddesses,*]
[*they brought their*] complaint before [*them:*]



2 'Like a wild bull lording it, head held aloft'.

'[Though powerful, pre-eminent,] expert [and *mighty*,]
 [Gilgamesh] lets [no] girl go free to [her *bridegroom*.]'
 The warrior's daughter, the young man's bride,
 to their complaint the goddesses paid heed.

I 75

The gods of heaven, the lords of *initiative*,

[*to the god Anu they spoke*] . . . :
 'A savage wild bull you have bred in Uruk-the-Sheepfold,
 he has no equal when his weapons are brandished.'

I 80

'His companions are kept on their feet by his *contests*,
 [the young men of Uruk] he harries without warrant.

Gilgamesh lets no son go free to his father,
 by day and by [night his tyranny grows] harsher.

I 85

'Yet he is the shepherd of Uruk-the-Sheepfold,
 Gilgamesh, [*the guide of the*] teeming [people.]
 Though he is their shepherd and *their* [protector,]
 powerful, pre-eminent, expert [and *mighty*,]
 Gilgamesh lets no girl go free to her *bride*[groom.]'

I 90

The warrior's daughter, the young man's bride:
 to their complaint the god [Anu] paid heed.

I 93

The stanza which gives Anu's reaction has been dropped in the late edition of the epic, but by good fortune it is preserved as a short extract from an older version of the text, which was written by a student scribe on an exercise tablet found in the city of Nippur:

'[Let] them summon [Aruru,] the great one,
 [she it was created them,] mankind so numerous:
 [let her create the *equal* of Gilgamesh,] one mighty in strength,
 [and let] him vie [with him,] so Uruk may be rested!'

MB Ni

The text of Tablet I resumes:

They summoned Aruru, the great one:
 'You, Aruru, created [mankind:]
 now fashion what Anu has thought of!'

I 95

'Let him be a *match* for the *storm* of his heart,
 let them vie with each other, so Uruk may be rested!'
 The goddess Aruru heard these words,
 what Anu had thought of she fashioned within her.

I 100

The goddess Aruru, she washed her hands,
 took a pinch of clay, threw it down in the wild.
 In the wild she created Enkidu, the hero,
 offspring of silence, knit strong by Ninurta.

All his body is matted with hair,
 he bears long tresses like those of a woman:
 the hair of his head grows thickly as barley,
 he knows not a people, nor even a country.

I 105

Coated in hair like the god of the animals,
 with the gazelles he grazes on grasses,
 joining the throng with the game at the water-hole,
 his heart delighting with the beasts in the water.

I 110

A hunter, a trapper-man,
 did come upon him by the water-hole.
 One day, a second and then a third,
 he came upon him by the water-hole.
 When the hunter saw him, his expression froze,
 but he with his herds – he went back to his lair.

I 115

[The hunter was] troubled, subdued and silent,
 his mood [*was despondent*,] his features gloomy.
 In his heart there was sorrow,
 his face resembled [one come from] afar.

I 120

The hunter opened [his mouth] to speak, saying [to his father:]
 'My father, there was a man came [*by the water-hole*.]
 Mightiest in the land, strength [he possesses,]
 [his strength] is as mighty [as a rock] from the sky.'

I 125