

Dramatis personae

An acute accent marks the vowel of a stressed syllable. Where such a vowel falls in an open syllable it will often be long (e.g., Humbaaba). In some names the position of the stress is conjectural.

Gilgámesh, king of the city-state of Úruk
Nínsun, a goddess, his mother
Enkidu, his friend and companion
Shámhat, a prostitute of Uruk
Shámash, the Sun God
Humbába, the guardian of the Forest of Cedar
Íshtar, the principal goddess of Uruk
Shidúri, a minor goddess of wisdom
Ur-shanábi, the ferryman of Uta-napishti
Úta-napishti, survivor of the Flood

A comprehensive list of the proper nouns that occur in the texts translated in this book is given on pp. 222ff.

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 . . . 15
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. 110
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!
Take the stairway of a bygone era, 115
draw near to Eanna, seat of Ishtar the goddess,
that no later king could ever copy!