

The Epic of Gilgamesh: Tablet I

Tablet I. The Coming of Enkidu

Prologue and paeon. 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. 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!
Take the stairway of a bygone era, 15
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? 20
Did the Seven Sages not lay its foundations?

[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! 25
[*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.

Surpassing all other kings, heroic in stature,
brave scion of Uruk, wild bull on the rampage! 30
Going at the fore he was the vanguard,
going at the rear, one his comrades could trust!

A mighty bank, protecting his warriors,
a violent flood-wave, smashing a stone wall!
Wild bull of Lugalbanda, Gilgamesh, the perfect in strength, 35
suckling of the august Wild Cow, the goddess Ninsun!

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; 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, 45
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.

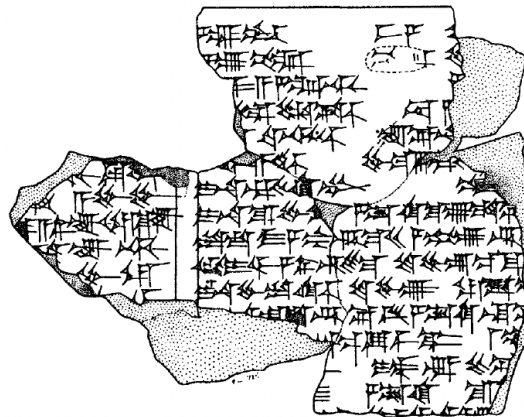
It was the Lady of the Gods drew the form of his figure,
while his build was perfected by divine Nudimmud. 50

* * *

A triple cubit was his foot, half a rod his leg. 56
Six cubits was his stride,
... cubits the *front part* of his ...

His cheeks were bearded like those of ... ,
the hair of his head grew thickly [as barley.] 60
When he grew tall his beauty was consummate,
by earthly standards he was most handsome.

In Uruk -the-Sheepfold he *walks* [*back and forth,*]
like a wild bull lording it, head held aloft. 65
He has no equal when his weapons are brandished,
his companions are kept on their feet by his *contests*.



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

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!*] 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:*]

‘[Though powerful, pre-eminent,] expert [and *mighty,*] 75
[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.

The gods of heaven, the lords of *initiative,*
[*to the god Anu they spoke*] ... : 80
‘A savage wild bull you have bred in Uruk-the-Sheepfold,
he has no equal when his weapons are brandished.

‘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, 85
by day and by [night his tyranny grows] harsher.

‘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,*] 90
Gilgamesh lets no girl go free to her *bride*[*groom.*] ‘

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

The text of Tablet I resumes:

They summoned Aruru, the great one:
‘You, Aruru, created [mankind:] 95
now fashion what Anu has thought of!’

'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. 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, 105
 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.

Coated in hair like the god of the animals,
 with the gazelles he grazes on grasses, I 110
joining the throng with the game at the water-hole,
 his heart *delighting* with the beasts in the water.

A hunter, a trapper-man,
 did come upon him by the water-hole.

One day, a second and then a third, 115
 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.

[The hunter was] troubled, subdued and silent,
 his mood [*was despondent,*] his features gloomy.

In his heart there was sorrow, 120
 his face resembled [one come from] afar.

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. 125

'Over the hills he [*roams all day,*]
 [always] with the herd [*he grazes on grasses,*]
 [always] his tracks [*are found*] by the water-hole,
 [I am afraid and] I dare not approach him.

'[He fills in the] pits that I [myself] dig, 130
 [he pulls up] the snares that I lay.
 [He sets free from my grasp] all the beasts of the field,
 [he stops] me doing the work of the wild.'

[His father opened his mouth to] speak, saying to the hunter:
 '[My son, *in the city of*] Uruk [*go, seek out*] Gilgamesh! 135
 in his presence,
 his strength is as mighty [as a rock from the sky.]

'[Take the road,] set your face [toward Uruk,
 [do not rely on] the strength of a man!
 [Go, my son, and] fetch [Shamhat the harlot,] 140
 [her allure is a match] for even the mighty!

'[When the herd comes] down [to] the water-hole,
 [she should strip off] her [raiment to reveal] her charms.
 [He will] see her, and will approach her,
 his herd will spurn him, [though he grew up] amongst it.' 145

[Paying heed] to the advice of his father,
 the hunter went off, [set out on the journey.]
 He took the road, set [his face] toward Uruk,
 before Gilgamesh the king [he spoke these words:]

'There was a man [came by the water-hole,] 150
 mightiest in the land, strength [he possesses,]
 [his strength] is as mighty as a rock from the sky.

'Over the hills he roams all [day,]
 always with the herd [he grazes on grasses,]
 always his tracks [are found] by the water-[hole,] 155
 I am afraid and I dare not approach [him.]

'He fills in the pits that I [myself] dig,
 he pulls up the snares [that I lay.]
 He sets free from my grasp all the beasts of the field,
 he stops me doing the work of the wild.' 160

Said Gilgamesh to him, to the hunter:
 'Go, hunter, take with you Shamhat the harlot!

'When the herd comes down to the water-hole,
 she should strip off her raiment to reveal her charms.
 He will see her, and will approach her, 165
 his herd will spurn him, though he grew up amongst it.'

Off went the hunter, taking Shamhat the harlot,
 they set out on the road, they started the journey.
 On the third day they came to their destination,
 hunter and harlot sat down there to wait. 170

One day and a second they waited by the water-hole,
 then the herd came down to drink the water.
 The game arrived, their hearts *delighting in water*,
 and Enkidu also, born in the uplands.

With the gazelles he grazed on grasses, 175
 joining the throng with the game at the water-hole,
 his heart *delighting* with the beasts in the water:
 then Shamhat saw him, the child of nature,
 the savage man from the midst of the wild.

'This is he, Shamhat! Uncradle your bosom, 180
 bare your sex, let him take in your charms!
 Do not recoil, but take in his scent:
 he will see you, and will approach you.

'Spread your clothing so he may lie on you, 185
 do for the man the work of a woman!
 Let his passion caress and embrace you,
 his herd will spurn him, though he grew up amongst it.'

Shamhat unfastened the cloth of her loins,
 she bared her sex and he took in her charms.
 She did not recoil, she took in his scent: 190
 she spread her clothing and he lay upon her.

She did for the man the work of a woman,
 his passion caressed and embraced her.
 For six days and seven nights
 Enkidu was erect, as he coupled with Shamhat.

When with her delights he was fully sated, 195
 he turned his gaze to his herd.
 The gazelles saw Enkidu, they started to run,
 the beasts of the field shied away from his presence.

Enkidu had defiled his body so pure,
 his legs stood still, though his herd was in motion. 200
 Enkidu was weakened, could not run as before,
 but now he had *reason*, and wide understanding.

He came back and sat at the feet of the harlot,
 watching the harlot, observing her features.
 Then to the harlot's words he listened intently, 205
 [as Shamhat] talked to him, to Enkidu:

'You are handsome, Enkidu, you are just like a god!
 Why with the beasts do you wander the wild?
 Come, I will take you to Uruk-the-Sheepfold,
 to the sacred temple, home of Anu and Ishtar, 210

'where Gilgamesh is perfect in strength,
 like a wild bull lording it over the menfolk.'
 So she spoke to him and her word found favour,
 he knew by instinct, he should seek a friend.

Said Enkidu to her, to the harlot: 215
 'Come, Shamhat, take me along
 to the sacred temple, holy home of Anu and Ishtar,
 where Gilgamesh is perfect in strength,
 like a wild bull lording it over the menfolk.

'I will challenge him, for [*my strength*] is mighty, 220
I will vaunt myself in Uruk, saying "I am the mightiest!"
[*There*] I shall change the way things are ordered:
[one] born in the wild is mighty, strength he possesses.'

Shamhat:

'Let [*the people*] see your face, 225
..... that exists I know indeed.
Go, Enkidu, to Uruk-the-Sheepfold,
where young men are girt with waistbands!

'Every day [*in Uruk*] there is a festival, 230
the drums there rap out the beat.
And there are harlots, most comely of figure,
graced with charm and full of delights.

'Even the aged they rouse from their beds!
o Enkidu, [as yet so] ignorant of life,
I will show you Gilgamesh, a man happy and carefree,
look at him, regard his features! 235

'He is fair in manhood, dignified in bearing,
graced with charm is his whole person.
He has a strength more mighty than yours,
unsleeping he is by day and by night.

'O Enkidu, cast aside your sinful thoughts! 240
Gilgamesh it is whom divine Shamash loves.
The gods Anu, Enlil and Ea have broadened his wisdom.

'Before you even came from the uplands,
Gilgamesh in Uruk was seeing you in dreams:
Gilgamesh rose to relate a dream, saying to his mother: 245
"O mother, this is the dream I had in the night—

"The stars of the heavens appeared above me,
like a rock from the sky one fell down before me.
I lifted it up, but it weighed too much for me,
I tried to roll it, but I could not dislodge it. 250

"The land of Uruk was standing around it,
[the land was gathered] about it.
A crowd [*was milling about*] before it,
[the menfolk were] thronging around it.

"[Like a babe-in]-arms they were kissing its feet, 255
like a wife [I loved it,] caressed and embraced it.
[I lifted it up,] set it down at your feet,
[and you, O mother, you] made it my equal."

[The mother of Gilgamesh] was clever and wise,
 well versed in everything, she said to her son—
 [Wild-Cow] Ninsun was clever and wise, 260
 well versed in everything, she said to Gilgamesh:

‘ “The stars of heaven [appeared] above you,
 [like a] rock from the sky one fell down before you.
 You lifted it up, but it weighed too much for you,
 you tried to roll it, but you could not dislodge it.

‘ “You lifted it up, set it down at my feet, 265
 and I, Ninsun, I made it your equal.
 Like a wife you loved it, caressed and embraced it:
 a mighty comrade will come to you, and be his friend’s saviour.

‘ “Mightiest in the land, strength he possesses, 270
 his strength is as mighty as a rock from the sky.
 Like a wife you’ll love him, caress and embrace him,
 he will be mighty, and often will save you.”

‘Having had a second dream,
 he rose and entered before the goddess, his mother.
 Said Gilgamesh to her, to his mother, 275
 ~’Once more, O mother, have I had a dream -

‘ “[In a street] of Uruk-the-Town-Square,
 an axe was lying with a crowd gathered round.
 The land [of Uruk] was standing around it,
 [the country was] gathered about it. 280

‘ “A crowd *was milling about* before it,
 [the menfolk were] thronging around it.
 I lifted it up and set it down at your feet,
 like a wife [I loved] it, caressed and embraced it,
 [and you, O mother,] you made it my equal.” 285

‘The mother of Gilgamesh was clever and wise,
 well versed in everything, she said to her son—
 Wild-Cow Ninsun was clever and wise,
 well versed in everything, she said to Gilgamesh:

‘ “My son, the axe you saw is a friend,
 like a wife you’ll love him, caress and embrace him,
 and I, Ninsun, I shall make him your equal. 290
 A mighty comrade will come to you, and be his friend’s saviour,
 mightiest in the land, strength he possesses,
 his strength is as mighty as a rock from the sky.”

‘Said Gilgamesh to her, to his mother,
 “May it befall me, O mother, by Counsellor Enlil’s command! 295
 Let me acquire a friend to counsel me,
 a friend to counsel me I will acquire!”

'[So did Gilgamesh] see his dreams.'

[After] Shamhat had told Enkidu the dreams of Gilgamesh,
the two of them together [began making] love.