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A NORTON CRITICAL EDITION

THE EPIC OF GILGAMESH



A NEW TRANSLATION
ANALOGUES
CRITICISM

Translated and Edited by
BENJAMIN R. FOSTER

YALE UNIVERSITY

THE SUMERIAN
GILGAMESH POEMS

THE HITTITE
GILGAMESH

Translated by
DOUGLAS FRAYNE
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

Translated by
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UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN



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I will reveal to you, O Gilgamesh, a secret matter,
 And a mystery of the gods I will tell you.
 The city Shuruppak, a city you yourself have knowledge of,
 Which once was set on the [bank] of the Euphrates,
 That aforesaid city was ancient and gods once were within it.
 The great gods resolved to send the deluge,
 Their father Anu was sworn,
 The counselor the valiant Enlil,
 Their throne-bearer Ninurta,
 Their canal-officer Ennugi,
 Their leader Ea was sworn with them.
 He repeated their plans to the reed fence:
 "Reed fence, reed fence, wall, wall!
 Listen, O reed fence! Pay attention, O wall!
 O Man of Shuruppak, son of Ubar-Tutu,
 Wreck house, build boat,
 Forsake possessions and seek life,
 Belongings reject and life save!
 Take aboard the boat seed of all living things.
 The boat you shall build,
 Let her dimensions be measured out:
 Let her width and length be equal,
 Roof her over like the watery depths."
 I understood full well, I said to Ea, my lord:
 "Your command, my lord, exactly as you said it,
 I shall faithfully execute.
 What shall I answer the city, the populace, and the elders?"
 Ea made ready to speak,
 Saying to me, his servant:
 "So, you shall speak to them thus:
 'No doubt Enlil dislikes me,
 I shall not dwell in your city.
 I shall not set my foot on the dry land of Enlil,
 I shall descend to the watery depths and dwell with my
 lord Ea.
 Upon you he shall shower down in abundance,
 A windfall of birds, a surprise of fishes,
 He shall pour upon you a harvest of riches,
 In the morning cakes in spates,
 In the evening grains in rains.'"

[The entire community helps to build the boat. The hull is constructed before the interior framing, as was customary in the ancient world, with cordage used to sew the planks together and to truss the hull for strength. The boat is an enormous cube. Utanapishtim, here referred to as "Atrahasis," loads on his family, his possessions, and every type of animal, as well as skilled individuals to keep alive knowledge of arts and crafts.]

Tablet XI

[Gilgamesh, whose search for Utanapishtim has been characterized by increasing violence, now finds to his astonishment that there is no battle to be fought; heroics will bring him no further. Now he needs knowledge. He asks Utanapishtim, the wisest man who ever lived, his great question: how did he alone escape the universal fate of the human race?]

Gilgamesh said to him, to Utanapishtim the Distant One:

As I look upon you, Utanapishtim,
 Your limbs are not different, you are just as I am.
 Indeed, you are not different at all, you are just as I am!
 Yet your heart is drained of battle spirit,
 You lie flat on your back, your arm [idle].
 You then, how did you join the ranks of the gods and find
 eternal life?

[In answer, Utanapishtim relates the story of the flood. According to Tablet I, among Gilgamesh's main achievements was bringing back to the human race this hitherto unknown history. The story as told here is abbreviated. In the fuller account, preserved in a Babylonian narrative poem called "Atrahasis," the gods sent the flood because the human race had multiplied to such an extent that their clamor was unbearable to Enlil, the chief god living on earth. After various attempts to reduce the population of the earth were thwarted by Enki (Ea), the god of wisdom and fresh water, Enlil ordered a deluge to obliterate the entire human race. At this point, Utanapishtim takes up the story. He lived at the long-vanished city of Shuruppak and was a favorite of the god Ea, who warned him of the flood, despite his oath not to reveal it. Ea circumvented this by addressing the wall of a reed enclosure. Utanapishtim had built near water, perhaps as a place to receive dreams and commands from his god. Utanapishtim is ordered to build a boat. When his fellow citizens ask him what he is about, he is to reply in ambiguous language, foretelling a "shower of abundance" soon.]

Utanapishtim said to him, to Gilgamesh:

1. Translated in Muses, pp. 160-203.

At the first glimmer of dawn,
The land was assembling at the gate of Atrahasis:

50

The carpenter carried his axe,

The reed cutter carried his stone,

The old men brought cordage(?),

The young men ran around [. . .],

The wealthy carried the pitch,

The poor brought what was needed of [. . .].

55

In five days I had planked her hull:

One full acre was her deck space,

Ten dozen cubits, the height of each of her sides,

Ten dozen cubits square, her outer dimensions.

60

I laid out her structure, I planned her design:

I decked her in six,

I divided her in seven,

Her interior I divided in nine.

I drove the water plugs into her,²

65

I saw to the spars and laid in what was needful.

Thrice thirty-six hundred measures of pitch I poured
in the oven,

Thrice thirty-six hundred measures of tar [I poured out]
inside her.

Thrice thirty-six hundred measures basket-bearers brought
aboard for oil,

Not counting the thirty-six hundred measures of oil that the
offering consumed,

And the twice thirty-six hundred measures of oil that the
boatbuilders made off with.

70

For the [builders] I slaughtered bullocks,

I killed sheep upon sheep every day,

Beer, ale, oil, and wine

[I gave out] to the workers like river water,

75

They made a feast as on New Year's Day,

[. . .] I dispensed ointment with my own hand.

By the setting of Shamash,³ the ship was completed.

[Since boarding was(?)] very difficult,

They brought up gangplanks(?), fore and aft,

80

They came up her sides(?) two-thirds (of her height).

[Whatever I had] I loaded upon her:

2. The "water plugs" have been explained in various ways, for example, as caulking, stabilizers, depth markers, water taps, bilge drains, and drains to let out rainwater when the boat was beached. None of these suggestions is supported by Mesopotamian evidence.

3. The references to Shamash here and in line 87 suggest that in some version of this story, now lost, Shamash, rather than Enki, warned Utnapishtim of the flood and told him how much time he had to build his ship. This substitution of the one god for the other may have been suggested by Shamash's role as protector of Gilgamesh in the epic. In the oldest account of the Babylonian story of the flood, Enki sets a timing device, apparently a water clock, to tell Utnapishtim how much time he has before the coming of the deluge.

What silver I had I loaded upon her,

What gold I had I loaded upon her,

What living creatures I had I loaded upon her,

I sent up on board all my family and kin,

85

Beasts of the steppe, wild animals of the steppe, all types

of skilled craftsmen I sent up on board.

Shamash set for me the appointed time:

"In the morning, cakes in spates,

90

In the evening, grains in rains,

Go into your boat and caulk the door!"

That appointed time arrived,

In the morning cakes in spates,

In the evening grains in rains,

I gazed upon the face of the storm,

The weather was dreadful to behold!

95

I went into the boat and caulked the door.

To the caulker of the boat, to Puzur-Amurri the boatman,

I gave over the edifice, with all it contained.

[The flood, accompanied by thunder and a fiery glow, overwhelms the earth.
The gods are terrified by its violence and what they have done.]

At the first glimmer of dawn,

100

A black cloud rose above the horizon.

Inside it Adad was thundering,

While the destroying gods Shullat and Hanish went in front,

Moving as an advance force over hill and plain.

Errakal tore out the mooring posts (of the world),

105

Ninurta came and made the dikes overflow.

The supreme gods held torches aloft,

Setting the land ablaze with their glow.

Adad's awesome power passed over the heavens,

Whatever was light was turned into darkness,

[He flooded] the land, he smashed it like a [clay pot]!

110

For one day the storm wind [blew],

Swiftly it blew, [the flood came forth],

It passed over the people like a battle,

No one could see the one next to him,

The people could not recognize one another in the
downpour.

115

The gods became frightened of the deluge,

They shrank back, went up to Anu's highest heaven.

The gods cowered like dogs, crouching outside.

Ishtar screamed like a woman in childbirth,

And sweet-voiced Belet-ili wailed aloud:

120

"Would that day had come to naught,

When I spoke up for evil in the assembly of the gods!

How could I have spoken up for evil in the assembly
of the gods,

And spoken up for battle to destroy my people?

It was I myself who brought my people into the world,
Now, like a school of fish, they choke up the sea!"

125

The supreme gods were weeping with her,
The gods sat where they were, weeping,

Their lips were parched, taking on a crust.

Six days and seven nights
The wind continued, the deluge and windstorm leveled

130

the land.

When the seventh day arrived,

The windstorm and deluge left off their battle,

Which had struggled, like a woman in labor.

The sea grew calm, the tempest stilled, the deluge ceased.

135

[As the floodwaters recede, Utanapishtim can see land at the far horizon.
The boat is caught on a mountain.]

I looked at the weather, stillness reigned,
And the whole human race had turned into clay.

The landscape was flat as a rooftop.

I opened the hatch, sunlight fell upon my face.

140

Falling to my knees, I sat down weeping,

Tears running down my face.

I looked at the edges of the world, the borders of the sea,

At twelve times sixty double leagues the periphery emerged.

The boat had come to rest on Mount Nimush,

145

Mount Nimush held the boat fast, not letting it move.

One day, a second day Mount Nimush held the boat fast,

not letting it move.

A third day, a fourth day Mount Nimush held the boat fast,

not letting it move.

A fifth day, a sixth day Mount Nimush held the boat fast,

not letting it move.

[Utanapishtim sends out three birds to see if land has emerged near the boat.
He then quits the boat and makes an offering to the gods, who crowd around
it, famished.]

When the seventh day arrived,

I brought out a dove and set it free.

150

The dove went off and returned,

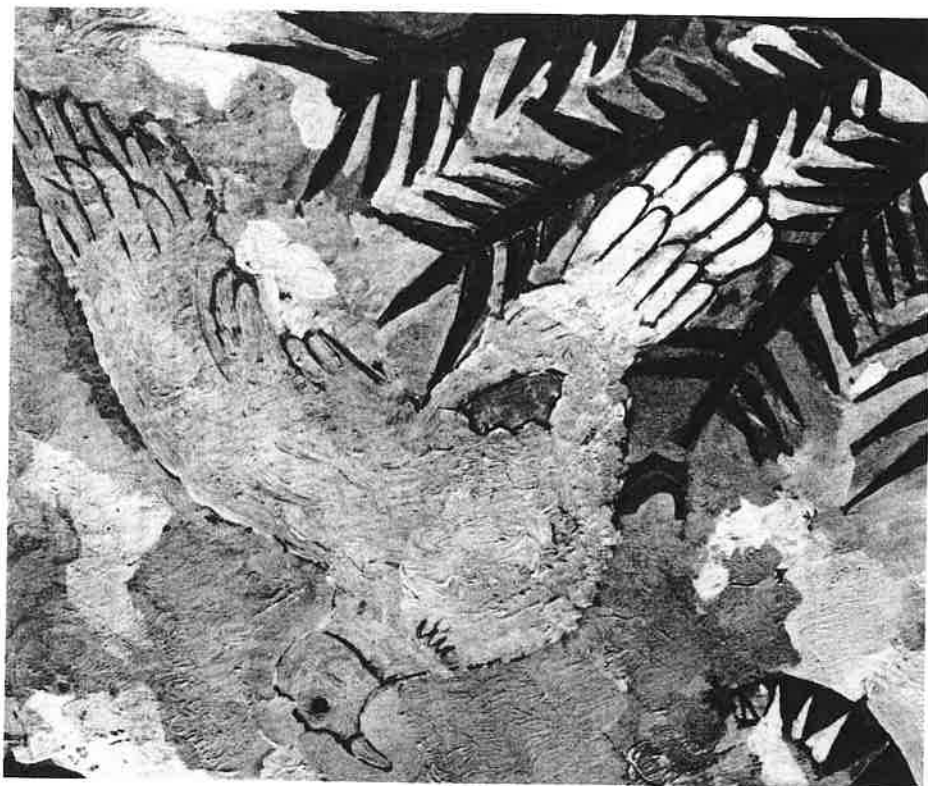
No landing place came to its view, so it turned back.

I brought out a swallow and set it free,

The swallow went off and returned,

No landing place came to its view, so it turned back.

155



11. I brought out a dove and set it free. Detail of a wall painting from a Mesopotamian palace.

I brought out a raven and set it free,

The raven went off and saw the ebbing of the waters.

It ate, preened, left droppings, did not turn back.

I released all to the four directions,

I brought out an offering and offered it to the four directions. 160

I set up an incense offering on the summit of the mountain,

I arranged seven and seven cult vessels,

I heaped reeds, cedar, and myrtle in their bowls.⁴

4. The Mesopotamians sometimes burned various plants and branches in order to produce an attractive odor when making offerings to the gods.

The gods smelled the savor,
The gods smelled the sweet savor,
The gods crowded round the sacrificer like flies.

[The mother goddess blames Enlil for the flood, saying her glittering necklace of fly-shaped beads, which may stand for the rainbow, will memorialize the human race drowned in the flood.]

As soon as Belet-ili arrived,
She held up the great fly-ornaments that Anu had made
in his ardor:

"O gods, these shall be my lapis necklace, lest I forget,
I shall be mindful of these days and not forget, not ever!
The gods should come to the incense offering,
But Enlil should not come to the incense offering,
For he, irrationally, brought on the flood,
And marked my people for destruction!"

As soon as Enlil arrived,
He saw the boat, Enlil flew into a rage,
He was filled with fury at the gods:

"Who came through alive? No man was to survive destruction!"

Ninurta made ready to speak,

Said to the valiant Enlil:

"Who but Ea could contrive such a thing?
For Ea alone knows every artifice."

[Ea's speech urges future limits. Punish but do not kill; diminish but do not annihilate. He suggests that in the future less drastic means than a flood be used to reduce the human population. He refers to Utanapishtim as Atrahasis, his name in the independent Babylonian flood story. Enlil grants Utanapishtim and his wife eternal life but removes them far away from the rest of the human race.]

Ea made ready to speak,
Said to the valiant Enlil:
"You, O valiant one, are the wisest of the gods,
How could you, irrationally, have brought on the flood?
Punish the wrongdoer for his wrongdoing,
Punish the transgressor for his transgression,
But be lenient, lest he be cut off,
Bear with him, lest he [. . .].
Instead of your bringing on a flood,
Let the lion rise up to diminish the human race!
Instead of your bringing on a flood,
Let the wolf rise up to diminish the human race!
Instead of your bringing on a flood,
Let famine rise up to wreak havoc in the land!"

Instead of your bringing on a flood,
Let pestilence rise up to wreak havoc in the land!
It was not I who disclosed the secret of the great gods,
I made Atrahasis have a dream and so he heard the secret
of the gods.

Now then, make some plan for him."

Then Enlil came up into the boat,
Leading me by the hand, he brought me up too.

He brought my wife up and had her kneel beside me.

He touched our brows, stood between us to bless us:

"Hitherto Utanapishtim has been a human being.

Now Utanapishtim and his wife shall become like us gods.

Utanapishtim shall dwell far distant at the source
of the rivers."

Thus it was that they took me far distant and had me dwell
at the source of the rivers.

Now then, who will convene the gods for your sake,
That you may find the eternal life you seek?

Come, come, try not to sleep for six days and seven nights.

[Utanapishtim has challenged Gilgamesh to go without sleep for a week; if he fails this test, how could he expect to live forever? Even as he speaks, Gilgamesh drifts off to sleep. Thus passes from the scene the all-night rowdy of Tablet I.]

As he sat there on his haunches,
Sleep was swirling over him like a mist.

Utanapishtim said to her, to his wife:

Behold this fellow who seeks eternal life!

Sleep swirls over him like a mist.

[Utanapishtim's wife, taking pity on Gilgamesh, urges her husband to awaken him and let him go home. Utanapishtim insists on a proof of how long he slept, lest Gilgamesh claim that he had only dozed. She is to bake him fresh bread every day and set it beside him, marking the wall for the day. The bread spoils progressively as Gilgamesh sleeps for seven days.]

His wife said to him, to Utanapishtim the Distant One:

Do touch him that the man may wake up,
That he may return safe on the way whence he came,

That through the gate he came forth he may return
to his land.

Utanapishtim said to her, to his wife:

Since the human race is duplicitous, he'll endeavor
to dupe you.
Come, come, bake his daily loaves, put them one after another
by his head,
Then mark the wall for each day he has slept.

225

She baked his daily loaves for him, put them one after another
by his head,

Then dated the wall for each day he slept.
The first loaf was dried hard,
The second was leathery, the third soggy,
The crust of the fourth turned white,
The fifth was gray with mold, the sixth was fresh,
The seventh was still on the coals when he touched him, the man
woke up.

230

[Gilgamesh wakes at last. Claiming at first that he has scarcely dozed a moment, he sees the bread and realizes that he has slept for the entire time he was supposed to remain awake for the test. He gives up in despair. What course is left for him? Utanapishtim does not answer directly but orders the boatman to take him home. Further, the boatman himself is never to return. Thus access to Utanapishtim is denied the human race forever. Gilgamesh is bathed and given clothing that will stay magically fresh until his return to Uruk.]

Gilgamesh said to him, to Utanapishtim the Distant One:

Scarcely had sleep stolen over me,
When straightaway you touched me and roused me.

235

Utanapishtim said to him, to Gilgamesh:

[Up with you], Gilgamesh, count your daily loaves,
[That the days you have slept] may be known to you.

The first loaf is dried hard,

The second is leathery, the third soggy,

The crust of the fourth has turned white,

The fifth is gray with mold,

The sixth is fresh,

The seventh was still in the coals when I touched you and
you woke up.

240

Gilgamesh said to him, to Utanapishtim the Distant One:

245

What then should I do, Utanapishtim, whither should I go,
Now that the Bereaver has seized my [flesh]?⁵
Death lurks in my bedchamber,
And wherever I turn, there is death!

Utanapishtim said to him, to Ur-Shanabi the boatman:

250

Ur-Shanabi, may the harbor [offer] you no [haven],
May the crossing point reject you,
Be banished from the shore you shuttled to.
The man you brought here,

255

His body is matted with filthy hair,
Hides have marred the beauty of his flesh.
Take him away, Ur-Shanabi, bring him to the washing place.
Have him wash out his filthy hair with water, clean as snow,
Have him throw away his hides, let the sea carry them off,
Let his body be rinsed clean.

260

Let his headband be new,
Have him put on raiment worthy of him.
Until he reaches his city,

265

Until he completes his journey,
Let his garments stay spotless, fresh and new.

Ur-Shanabi took him away and brought him to the washing place.
He washed out his filthy hair with water, clean as snow,
He threw away his hides, the sea carried them off,
His body was rinsed clean.

270

He renewed his headband,
He put on raiment worthy of him.
Until he reached his city,

Until he completed his journey,
His garments would stay spotless, fresh and new.

[Gilgamesh and Ur-Shanabi embark on their journey to Uruk. As they push off from the shore, Utanapishtim's wife intervenes, asking her husband to give the hero something to show for his quest. Gilgamesh brings the boat back to shore and waits expectantly. Utanapishtim tells him of a plant of rejuvenation. Gilgamesh dives for the plant by opening a shaft through the earth's surface to the water below. He ties stones to his feet, a technique used in traditional pearl diving in the Gulf. When he comes up from securing the plant, he is on the opposite side of the ocean, where he started from.]

Gilgamesh and Ur-Shanabi embarked on the boat,
They launched the boat, they embarked upon it.
His wife said to him, to Utanapishtim the Distant One:

275

⁵ "The Bereaver" is an epithet of death. It could also mean something like "kidnapper."

Gilgamesh has come here, spent with exertion,
What will you give him for his homeward journey?

At that he, Gilgamesh, lifted the pole,
Bringing the boat back by the shore.
Utanapishtim said to him, to Gilgamesh:

Gilgamesh, you have come here, spent with exertion,
What shall I give you for your homeward journey?
I will reveal to you, O Gilgamesh, a secret matter,
And a mystery of the gods I will tell you.
There is a certain plant, its stem is like a thornbush,
Its thorns, like the wild rose, will prick [your hand].
If you can secure this plant, [. . .]
[. . .]

No sooner had Gilgamesh heard this,
He opened a shaft, [flung away his tools].
He tied heavy stones [to his feet],
They pulled him down into the watery depths [. . .].
He took the plant though it pricked [his hand].
He cut the heavy stones [from his feet],
The sea cast him up on his home shore.

[Gilgamesh resolves to take the plant to Uruk to experiment on an old man.
While Gilgamesh is bathing on the homeward journey, a snake eats the plant
and rejuvenates itself by shedding its skin. Gilgamesh gives up. Immense
quantities of water have flooded up through the shaft he dug and covered
the place. He has left behind his tools so cannot dig another shaft. He has
also lost the boat, so there is no going back.]

Gilgamesh said to him, to Ur-Shanabi the boatman:

Ur-Shanabi, this plant is cure for heartache,
Whereby a man will regain his stamina.
I will take it to ramparted Uruk,
I will have an old man eat some and so test the plant.
His name shall be "Old Man Has Become Young-Again-Man."
I myself will eat it and so return to my carefree youth.

At twenty double leagues they took a bite to eat,
At thirty double leagues they made their camp.

Gilgamesh saw a pond whose water was cool,
He went down into it to bathe in the water.
A snake caught the scent of the plant,

[Stealthily] it came up and carried the plant away,
On its way back it shed its skin.

Thereupon Gilgamesh sat down weeping,
His tears flowed down his face,
He said to Ur-Shanabi the boatman:

For whom, Ur-Shanabi, have my hands been toiling? 315
For whom has my heart's blood been poured out?
For myself I have obtained no benefit,
I have done a good deed for a reptile!
Now, floodwaters rise against me for twenty double leagues,
When I opened the shaft, I flung away the tools. 320
How shall I find my bearings?
I have come much too far to go back, and I abandoned
the boat on the shore.

[Upon completing his journey, Gilgamesh invites Ur-Shanabi to inspect the
walls of Uruk, using the same words used by the narrator in Tablet I.]

At twenty double leagues they took a bite to eat,
At thirty double leagues they made their camp. 325
When they arrived in ramparted Uruk,
Gilgamesh said to him, to Ur-Shanabi the boatman:

Go up, Ur-Shanabi, pace out the walls of Uruk.
Study the foundation terrace and examine the brickwork.
Is not its masonry of kiln-fired brick?
And did not seven masters lay its foundations? 330
One square mile of city, one square mile of gardens,
One square mile of clay pits, a half square mile of Ishtar's
dwelling.
Three and a half square miles is the measure of Uruk!