

# *Todesfurcht*, page xiii

- “fear of death,” German poet Rilke (1916)
- “the human longing for life eternal” (A. George)
- *Gilgamesh* is also a study in the “path to wisdom,” especially the proper duties of a king

# The Deluge, xiii

- the gods attempt to destroy humanity
- the Flood story is found in at least three Ancient Near Eastern sources:
  - the Atram-hasis epic
  - The Epic of Gilgamesh*
  - Bible

# cuneiform tablets, xv

- “smooth, cushion-shaped rectangles of clay” (p. xxix)
- found in the ruins of many ancient Mesopotamian cities

# Akkadian language, xv

- related to Hebrew and Arabic
- Akkadian texts appear in profusion in Mesopotamian sites from ca. 2300 BCE (= rise of Sargon of Akkad)
- the text of Chapter 1 of George's translation is the Akkadian text

# “He who saw the Deep,” xv-xvi

- the title of the epic as recorded in Chapter 1 of the translation we are reading
- the classical *Epic of Gilgamesh*
- in the Sumerian language originally
- but it is preserved best in an Akkadian translation which the Assyrians and Babylonians called by the same name

# Sumerian language, xvi

- “without affinities to any known language” (George)
- “the medium of the earliest language”
- co-exists with Akkadian through the end of the third millennium (2000 BCE)

# Sumerian language, xvi

- the Sumerian language stops being used as a spoken language by the Old Babylonian period (ca. 1800 BCE)
- Sumerian lives on as classical (written) language
- Mesopotamian proverb: “A scribe who knows no Sumerian, what sort of scribe is he?”

# Shulgi, xvii

- a Sumerian king who reigned during the Sumerian Renaissance of 2094-2047 BCE
- “enthusiastic patron of the arts”
- founded libraries at Ur and Nippur
- *Gilgamesh* was originally a song sung at Shulgi’s court

# Tablet Houses, xx

- Shulgi's scribal schools
- most of our cuneiform literary texts derive from Babylonian scribal exercises written in Sumerian

# Ashurbanipal, xxi

- Assyrian king (668-627 BCE)
- had a great library at Nineveh
- ordered scribes (in chains!) to copy old literature, including *Gilgamesh*
- by Ashurbanipal's time (650 BCE), the focus of attention is on Akkadian text of *Gilgamesh* (not the Sumerian original)
- by then, the Sumerian original is long lost

# “Surpassing all other kings,” xxv

- name for first known integrated version of the *Gilgamesh* epic
- cobbled together in the Old Babylonian period
- became the basis of “He who saw the Deep” (the text we are reading)

# tablets, xxviii

- traditional divisions of the *Gilgamesh* epic
- tablet-divisions go back to the Old Babylonian period

# Ninsun, xxxi

- goddess-mother of Gilgamesh
- Gilgamesh's father is unimportant to the story

# Anu, xxxi

- Sky-God
- in general, Anu is less important in Mesopotamian myth than Enlil (the god of the air)

# Ishtar, xxxi

- Babylonian “Venus,” the goddess of love and sex
- but also the goddess of war

# Enkidu, xxxii

- the conventional “wild man” (the Mesopotamian equivalent of Bigfoot?)
- Enkidu first lives in the hinterland north of Uruk but eventually comes to live in Uruk
- in Uruk, Enkidu becomes Gilgamesh’s close friend and traveling companion

# Humbaba, xxxii

- an ogre that guards the Forest of Cedar (northwest of Mesopotamia, in modern Lebanon)
- the Forest of Cedar is a sacred area where the gods dwell

# Shiduri, xxxii

- a barmaid goddess who is full of sage advice and common sense
- she runs tavern at the edge of world, along the shores of the impassable Ocean
- this Ocean leads to the waters of death

# Ur-shanabi, xxxii

- the ferryman who ferries Gilgamesh to the island in the Ocean where Utnapishti lives
- on this island, the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers well up again

# Uta-napishti, , xxxii

- the only Mesopotamian king to survive the Deluge
- he was spared death by the gods
- tells his story to Gilgamesh in Tablet XI

# plant (of rejuvenation), xlv-xlvi

- shown by Uta-napishti to Gilgamesh who pulls it up from the sea bottom
- but a snake steals the plant from Gilgamesh
- henceforth, snakes shed their skin

# celestial bull (Bull of Heaven), xlvi

- sent by Ishtar to destroy Gilgamesh after he rejects and insults her
- a symbol of drought
- equated with the constellation Taurus which rises in spring (droughts happen often in spring in Mesopotamia)

# “document of ancient humanism,” xxxiii

- quote from William Moran, an Assyriologist
- Gilgamesh is celebrated for his human achievements, and not just his relationship with the gods
- the theme of *Gilgamesh* seems to center around our need to accept human limitations

# “document of ancient humanism,” xxxiii

- Thorkild Jacobsen (Assyriologist): “a story of learning to face reality, a story of ‘growing up’”

# Overview of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*

- on the next Pre-Assessment there will be fill-in-the-blanks drawn directly from the text of *Gilgamesh*
- for example:  
“\_\_\_\_\_ was his name from the day he was born,  
two-thirds of him god and one third human.”
- all answers will still be from the list of key-terms in the Chapter 2.II

# Tablet 1 of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*

- Introduction of Gilgamesh: two-thirds divine, one-third mortal; also physically imposing
- causes problems because he “harries” the young men of Uruk and “lets no girl go free to her bridegroom”
- the people of Uruk complain to the gods who summon the mother-goddess Aruru

# Tablet 1 of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*

- Aruru creates for Gilgamesh a “friend” named Enkidu who is nearly as powerful as Gilgamesh himself
- she puts Enkidu out in the wild where he lives in harmony with the animals
- Enkidu starts freeing his fellow animals which have become trapped in human snares
- the people of Uruk face starvation

# Tablet 1 of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*

- a hunter reports about Enkidu to Gilgamesh
- Gilgamesh sends a prostitute named Shamhat to seduce Enkidu and bring him to Uruk
- Gilgamesh dreams of Enkidu's impending arrival and his mother Ninsun interprets his dreams for him

# Tablet 2 of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*

- Shamhat seduces Enkidu
- after having sex with Shamhat, Enkidu's animal companions reject him
- Enkidu can no longer run fast or live in the wild
- Shamhat feeds Enkidu human food and cleans him up

# Tablet 2 of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*

- Shamhat escorts Enkidu to Uruk
- in Uruk, Enkidu finds Gilgamesh at a wedding where Gilgamesh is about to take the bride for himself
- Enkidu stops Gilgamesh from asserting his *droit de seigneur* and they fight
- then they become best friends

# Tablet 2 of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*

- there is a major gap in the text during which for some reason Gilgamesh has decided to fight Humbaba, the dreadful ogre that guards the Forest of Cedar
- Enkidu tries to convince him not to go but does not succeed
- the elders of the high council of Uruk also try but fail to dissuade Gilgamesh

# Tablet 3 of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*

- a poorly preserved tablet
- Ninsun prays to Shamash (the sun god) to help Gilgamesh on his journey
- Gilgamesh and Enkidu make preparations for their journey to the Forest of Cedar

# Tablet 4 of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*

- another poorly preserved tablet
- Gilgamesh and Enkidu travel to the Forest of Cedar
- Gilgamesh seeks guidance from a series of dreams which Enkidu interprets
- at the end of the tablet Gilgamesh and Enkidu reach the Forest of Cedar

# Tablet 5 of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*

- Gilgamesh and Enkidu encounter Humbaba and, with Shamash's assistance, defeat him in battle
- though Humbaba begs for his life, Enkidu encourages Gilgamesh to kill him, which he does
- before Humbaba dies, he curses both heroes
- Enkidu and Gilgamesh fell many trees in the Forest of Cedar

# Tablet 6 of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*

- Ishtar (goddess of sex and war) tries to seduce Gilgamesh but he insults and rejects her
- Ishtar is enraged and demands that her father Anu (the sky god) allow her to ravage the earth with the Bull of Heaven
- Gilgamesh and Enkidu fight together against the bull and destroy it

# Tablet 7 of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*

- Enkidu dreams that the gods have decreed he must die in Gilgamesh's place because they have killed the Bull of Heaven
- he curses his life and Shamhat who seduced him but at the bidding of Shamash he renounces his curse
- Enkidu dies (most of this passage is still lost)

# Tablet 8 of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*

- Gilgamesh holds an elaborate funeral for Enkidu
- Enkidu's death has made Gilgamesh see his own mortality
- he tries to repair his relations with the gods

# Tablet 9 of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*

- Gilgamesh wanders the world mourning the loss of his friend Enkidu and seeking eternal life for himself
- he encounters the scorpion-men who guard the boundaries of the world
- recognizing Gilgamesh's divine nature, they let him cross the mountains at the edge of the world

# Tablet 10 of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*

- at the shores of the Waters of Death (the great ocean which encircles the world), Gilgamesh meets the barmaid goddess Shiduri
- Shiduri warns him about the dangers that lie ahead but he insists on continuing his journey to meet Utanapishti, the one mortal who has escaped death

# Tablet 10 of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*

- Gilgamesh encounters the ferryman Urshanabi and kills many of his assistants, the Stone Men
- Urshanabi tells him that he now has no one to row them across the Waters of Death
- Urshanabi orders Gilgamesh to cut down huge trees and hew punting poles out of them

# Tablet 10 of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*

- Gilgamesh cuts down the trees and makes many punting poles
- he and Urshanabi set out to cross the Waters of Death
- when Gilgamesh runs out of punting poles, he and Urshanabi use their clothes as a sail and Gilgamesh's great frame as a mast

# Tablet 10 of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*

- they reach the other side and meet Utanapishti
- Gilgamesh explains to Utanapishti about Enkidu's death and his own fear of death

# Tablet 11 of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*

- Utanapishti explains how he survived the Deluge and was granted eternal life by the gods
- he then tells Gilgamesh he must conquer sleep before he can escape death and bids him stay awake for seven days
- Gilgamesh fails the test as Utanapishti proves with the “bread test”

# Tablet 11 of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*

- at the bidding of his kindly wife, Utanapishti shows Gilgamesh a “plant of rejuvenation” which grows deep in the sea and gives the one who eats it new life
- Gilgamesh recovers it but a snake steals the plant of rejuvenation and eats it
- this explains why snakes shed their skin

# Tablet 11 of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*

- Urshanabi takes Gilgamesh back to Uruk
- in the closing lines of the epic, Gilgamesh points out to Urshanabi the sturdy grandeur of the walls of Uruk
- the implication is that Uruk and its walls are Gilgamesh's true path to "immortality"