Gilgamesh

**Gilgamesh** (pron.: [/](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help%3AIPA_for_English)[ˈɡɪl.ɡə.mɛʃ](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help%3AIPA_for_English#Key)[/](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help%3AIPA_for_English); [Akkadian cuneiform](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Akkadian_language) [], *Gilgameš*, often given the [epithet](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epithet) of **the King**, also known as **Bilgames** in the earliest [Sumerian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sumer) texts)[[1]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gilgamesh#cite_note-1) was the fifth king of[Uruk](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uruk), modern day Iraq (Early Dynastic II, first dynasty of Uruk), placing his reign ca. 2500 BC. According to the [Sumerian king list](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sumerian_king_list) he reigned for 126 years. In the *Tummal Inscription,*[[2]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gilgamesh%22%20%5Cl%20%22cite_note-2) Gilgamesh, and his son [Urlugal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ur-Nungal%22%20%5Co%20%22Ur-Nungal), rebuilt the sanctuary of the goddess [Ninlil](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ninlil%22%20%5Co%20%22Ninlil), in Tummal, a sacred quarter in her city of [Nippur](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nippur). Gilgamesh is the central character in the [*Epic of Gilgamesh*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epic_of_Gilgamesh)*,* the greatest surviving work of early Mesopotamian literature. In the epic his father was [Lugalbanda](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lugalbanda%22%20%5Co%20%22Lugalbanda) and his mother was [Ninsun](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ninsun%22%20%5Co%20%22Ninsun) (whom some call Rimat Ninsun), a goddess. In [Mesopotamian mythology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mesopotamian_mythology), Gilgamesh is a [demigod](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demigod) of superhuman strength who built the city walls of Uruk to defend his people from external threats, and travelled to [meet the](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gilgamesh) sage [Utnapishtim](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Utnapishtim%22%20%5Co%20%22Utnapishtim), who had survived the [Great Deluge](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Deluge). He is usually described as two-thirds god and one third man.

Cuneiform references

In the [*Epic of Gilgamesh*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epic_of_Gilgamesh), Gilgamesh is credited with the building of the legendary walls of [Uruk](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uruk%22%20%5Co%20%22Uruk). An alternative version has Gilgamesh telling Urshanabi, the ferryman, that the city's walls were built by the[Seven Sages](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apkallu). In historical times, [Sargon of Akkad](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sargon_of_Akkad) claimed to have destroyed these walls to prove his military power.

Fragments of an epic text found in Me-Turan (modern [Tell Haddad](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tell_Haddad)) relate that at the end of his life Gilgamesh was buried under the river bed. The people of Uruk diverted the flow of the [Euphrates](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Euphrates) passing Uruk for the purpose of burying the dead king within the river bed. In [April](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gilgamesh) 2003, a [German](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Germany) expedition claimed to have discovered his last resting place.[[3]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gilgamesh#cite_note-3)

It is generally accepted that Gilgamesh was a historical figure, since inscriptions have been found which confirm the historical existence of other figures associated with him: such as the kings [Enmebaragesi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enmebaragesi%22%20%5Co%20%22Enmebaragesi) and [Aga](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aga_of_Kish) of [Kish](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kish_%28Sumer%29). If Gilgamesh was a historical king, he probably reigned in about the 26th century BC. Some of the earliest Sumerian texts spell his name as *Bilgames*. Initial difficulties in reading cuneiform resulted in Gilgamesh's making his re-entrance into world culture in 1872 as**"Izdubar"**.[[4]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gilgamesh#cite_note-4)[[5]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gilgamesh#cite_note-5)

In most cuneiform texts, the name of Gilgamesh is preceded with the star-shaped "[dingir](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dingir%22%20%5Co%20%22Dingir)" [determinative](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Determinative) ideogram for divine beings, but there is no evidence for a contemporary cult, and the Sumerian Gilgamesh myths suggest that deification was a later development (unlike the case of the [Akkadian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Akkadian_Empire%22%20%5Co%20%22Akkadian%20Empire) god-kings). Over the centuries there was a gradual accretion of stories about him, some probably derived from the real lives of other historical figures, in particular [Gudea](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gudea%22%20%5Co%20%22Gudea), the Second Dynasty ruler of[Lagash](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lagash) (2144–2124 BC).[[6]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gilgamesh#cite_note-6)

Later (non-cuneiform) references

In the [Qumran](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Qumran) scroll known as [*Book of Giants*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book_of_Giants) (ca. 100 BC) the names of Gilgamesh and [Humbaba](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Humbaba%22%20%5Co%20%22Humbaba) appear as two of the [antediluvian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antediluvian) giants (in consonantal form), rendered as **glgmš** and *ḩwbbyš*. This same text was later used in the Middle East by the [Manichaean sects](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manichaeism), and the Arabic form *Jiljamish* survives as the name of a demon according to the Egyptian cleric [Al-Suyuti](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Suyuti) (ca. 1500).[[7]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gilgamesh#cite_note-7)

The name Gilgamesh appears once in Greek, as "Gilgamos" (Γίλγαμος), in [Aelian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Claudius_Aelianus%22%20%5Co%20%22Claudius%20Aelianus), *De Natura Animalium* (*Of the animal nature*) 12.21 (ca. AD 200).[[8]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gilgamesh#cite_note-8) In Aelian's story, the King of Babylon, Seuechorus or Euechorus, determined by [oracle](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oracle) that his grandson Gilgamos would kill him, so he threw him out of a high tower. An eagle broke his fall, and the infant was found and raised by a gardener, eventually becoming king.

[Theodore Bar Konai](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theodore_Bar_Konai) (ca. AD 600), writing in Syriac, also mentions a king *Gligmos*, *Gmigmos* or *Gamigos* as last of a line of twelve kings who were contemporaneous with the patriarchs from Peleg to Abraham; this occurrence is also considered a vestige of Gilgamesh's former memory.[[9]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gilgamesh#cite_note-9)[[10]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gilgamesh#cite_note-10)