

Gilgamesh

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

Cuneiform references

In the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, Gilgamesh is credited with the building of the legendary walls of **Uruk**. An alternative version has Gilgamesh telling Urshanabi, the ferryman, that the city's walls were built by the **Seven Sages**. In historical times, **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**) 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** passing Uruk for the purpose of burying the dead king within the river bed. In **April** 2003, a **German** expedition claimed to have discovered his last resting place.^[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** and **Aga of Kish**. 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][5]}

In most cuneiform texts, the name of Gilgamesh is preceded with the star-shaped "**dingir**" 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 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**, the Second Dynasty ruler of **Lagash** (2144–2124 BC).^[6]

Later (non-cuneiform) references

In the **Qumran** scroll known as *Book of Giants* (ca. 100 BC) the names of Gilgamesh and **Humbaba** appear as two of the antediluvian giants (in consonantal form), rendered as **glgmš** and *hwbbys*. This same text was later used in the Middle East by the Manichaean sects, and the Arabic form *Jiljamish* survives as the name of a demon according to the Egyptian cleric **Al-Suyuti** (ca. 1500).^[7]

The name Gilgamesh appears once in Greek, as "Gilgamos" (Γίλγαμος), in [Aelian](#), *De Natura Animalium* (*Of the animal nature*) 12.21 (ca. AD 200).^[8] In Aelian's story, the King of Babylon, Seuechorus or Euechorus, determined by [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](#) (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][10]}