

# Gilgamesh (circa 2700 BCE)

## Biography / Overview

### Expanded Biographical Details (non-biased):

- **Early Life and Background:** Gilgamesh is traditionally described as two-thirds divine and one-third human. He appears historically as a king of Uruk, documented in the Sumerian King List.
- **Major Events and Contributions:** His legendary reign is depicted in various ancient texts, portraying his tyranny, transformation through friendship with Enkidu, heroic quests, battles against mythical beings, and pursuit of immortality.
- **Later Developments:** The narrative was compiled into a cohesive epic around 1200 BCE by the Babylonian scribe Sin-leqi-unninni, becoming the foundational epic narrative of Mesopotamian literature.

### Influences & Notable For

- **Significant Intellectual and Cultural Influences:** Influenced by Sumerian myths, religious cosmology, and broader Near Eastern narrative traditions.
- **Contributions to Fields or Disciplines:** Considered the world's oldest epic poem, contributing foundational themes in literature and mythology.
- **Notable Achievements and Recognition:** Renowned for themes of heroism, friendship, mortality, and human-divine interaction.

### Famous Quotes

- “There is no permanence. Do we build a house to stand forever?” (Tablet II)
- “When the gods created man, they allotted to him death, but life they retained in their own keeping.” (Tablet XI)
- “You were given the kingship, was it not your duty to let the people live?” (Tablet XII)

### Bibliography / Primary Sources & Major Works / Contents

- **Sumerian Gilgamesh Poems (2100–2000 BCE):** Earliest narratives preserved on clay tablets.
- **Old Babylonian Gilgamesh (1800 BCE):** First cohesive compilation of the various narratives.

- **Standard Akkadian Epic (1200 BCE):** Comprehensive twelve-tablet version by Sin-leqi-unninni discovered at Nineveh.

## Academic Questions

- How does Gilgamesh's dual nature (divine and human) inform themes of mortality and power?
- What role do companionship and loss play in Gilgamesh's transformation throughout the epic?
- How has Gilgamesh influenced comparative mythology, including parallels with later Greek and Biblical texts?
- In what ways has modern archaeology reshaped our understanding of Gilgamesh's historical and literary significance?

## Legacy / Modern Significance & Modern Moments

- **Historical and contemporary relevance:** Continues as a key text in comparative literature, mythology, and ancient Near Eastern studies.
- **Documented modern references or adaptations:** Inspires contemporary adaptations in literature, theater, and film.
- **Current scholarly interpretations and discussions:** Ongoing scholarly attention to new archaeological discoveries and interpretations of the text's themes.

## Critical Responses

- Scholars explore the epic's exploration of mortality, authority, friendship, and existential questions.
- Critical discussions often focus on the epic's significance in the development of literary archetypes and narrative structures.
- Interpretations consider cross-cultural influences, including flood narratives and hero-quest patterns.

## Digital Resources

- **Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature (ETCSL):** Digitized Sumerian texts and translations. <http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk>
- **Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative (CDLI):** Digital images and metadata of cuneiform tablets. <https://cdli.ucla.edu>

- **British Museum Collection:** Houses significant Gilgamesh-related artifacts and tablets.  
<https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/gilgamesh>

### Footnotes (Chicago Style)

1. "Gilgamesh," Wikipedia, accessed June 2025, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gilgamesh>.
2. Jeffrey H. Tigay, *The Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic* (Philadelphia: Univ. Pennsylvania Press, 2002).
3. Andrew George, *The Epic of Gilgamesh: A New Translation* (London: Penguin Classics, 2003).
4. Stephanie Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).
5. "Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature," ETCSL, University of Oxford, accessed June 2025, <http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk>.
6. "Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative," CDLI, accessed June 2025, <https://cdli.ucla.edu>.
7. British Museum, "The Epic of Gilgamesh," accessed June 2025, <https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/gilgamesh>.
8. Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1949).