

Topic
Sentence

The Epic of Gilgamesh is a tale that highlights the life and adventures of King Gilgamesh with his beast-man friend, Enkidu. In the epic, Gilgamesh is depicted as a cruel king, and thus the gods send Enkidu to kill the former man. However, the two end up becoming best friends after a long fight, and their friendship makes Gilgamesh a kinder person¹. When Enkidu ends up angering the gods, they kill him, leading Gilgamesh on a quest for immortality. However, ultimately, Gilgamesh fails at this quest and dies as an old man.

Transitions

In the year 1853, the standardized version of this epic was found in Niveneh's library of Ashurbanipal. This version was discovered by an Iraqi Assyriologist by the name of Hormuzd Rassam and was most likely compiled by the Mesopotamian priest, Sin-liqe-unninni². However, it must be noted that Sin-liqe-unninni only compiled the text somewhere between 1300 and 1000 B.C.E and that the original text is much older. This version became the most common one in the Middle East and was kept unexamined in the British Museum up until the year 1999³. It was then that an American Assyriologist found it, and it was later illegally imported into the United States. It was translated multiple times into different languages such as Arabic and English by academics such as Taha Baqir and Andrew George, respectively.

Organized Argument

Historically speaking, *The Epic of Gilgamesh* holds value as it is the first story of an epic hero in literature. The epic links the society of Mesopotamia to modern society by creating parallels with the Bible. For instance, the stories mentioned in the epic, such as the flood Gilgamesh had to face or the snake that ate the plant which was supposed to make Gilgamesh immortal, can be linked to the Bible. In the Bible, Noah had to face a similar trial while the snake

¹ "Week 4: Egypt and Mesopotamia." Class notes. Marywood University, 2021.

² Villiers, Gerda de. "Suffering in the Epic of Gilgamesh." *Old Testament Essays* 33, no. 3 (2020): 690-705.

³ Villiers, Gerda de. "Suffering in the Epic of Gilgamesh." *Old Testament Essays* 33, no. 3 (2020): 690-705.

tempted Adam and Eve to eat the apple of Eden. The story is significant in modern society as it is the first tale of an epic hero, which tells the modern audience about the values of the Mesopotamian society, such as their focus on strength and wisdom.

It is in this context that one must view the ancient world and its values. Since *The Epic of Gilgamesh* remains the oldest work of literature that is known to man, it is the best source to gain knowledge about the ancient world. It must be noted that the epic focuses on themes such as the meaning of life, mortality, relationships, and personal identity⁴. Thus, apart from the values of strength or wisdom, the tale teaches the audience about the thought process of older civilizations and the issues that matter to them. In the epic, the narrator says, "I was frightened and / I am afraid of Death, and so I roam open country"⁵ which depicts the human fascination with the subject of death. Thus, the epic poem teaches the modern audience about the ideals of the ancient world.

In conclusion, it can be stated that *The Epic of Gilgamesh* is a tale of significance from both the historical and modern standpoint. The tale comes from the ancient land of Mesopotamia and dates back to the Before Christ era. It is historically significant as it is the first piece of literary writing while it helps to link the ancient world to modern society. It is also helpful in teaching modern society about the ancient world's ideals and values, which makes ancient civilizations more relatable to a modern audience. Thus, the significance of this epic cannot be denied.

⁴ Farzana, U. Fathima. "Historical and Cultural Hegemony in The Epic of Gilgamesh."

⁵ Weisner-Hanks, Merry E, Patricia Buckley Ebrey, Roger B. Beck, Jerry Davila, Clare Haru Crowston and John P. McKay, *A History of World Societies*, Volume 11. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2021.

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