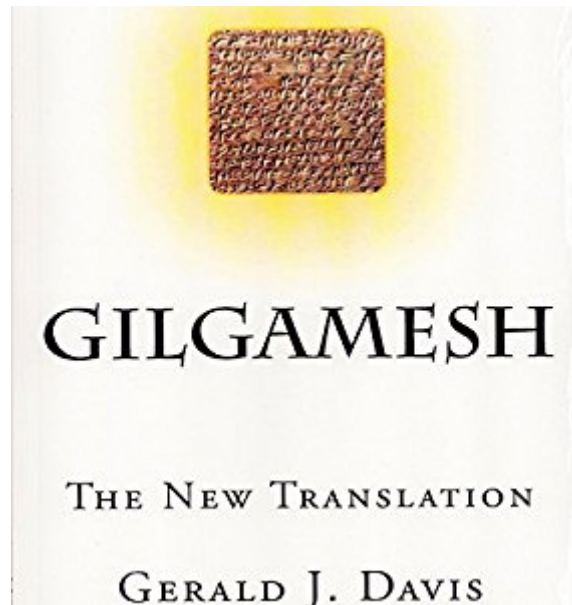


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# Gilgamesh: The New Translation



## Synopsis

The Epic of Gilgamesh is the oldest story that has come down to us through the ages of history. It predates the Bible, The Iliad and The Odyssey. The Epic of Gilgamesh relates the tale of the fifth king of the first dynasty of Uruk (in what is modern-day Iraq), who reigned for 126 years, according to the ancient Sumerian list of kings. Gilgamesh was first inscribed in cuneiform writing on clay tablets by an unknown author during the Sumerian era and has been described as one of the greatest works of literature in the recounting of mankind's unending quest for immortality.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Not a horrible translation, but too many liberties were taken with the original text. In other translations it is made clear what is original and what is supposition on the part of the translator. This is more of a novel based on the Gilgamesh tablets than it is a translation that can be used for study purposes. That stated, it's not awful. I found the narrative engaging.

This is an interesting new translation of an ancient epic from Mesopotamia that many of us know from Kramer's earlier, near-literal transcription of the fragmentary cuneiform tablets available at the time of Kramer's investigations into Near Eastern religious texts. (I believe Kramer was the first to note the parallels between this ancient poem and the Old Testament story of The Great Flood, recorded probably after the Hebraic Captivity in Babylon - i.e., during the Diaspora ). At any rate, Gerald Davis has set himself the task of being worthy of "Gilgamesh"; the reader will, of course,

judge for himself if he has succeeded. I believe he has and would recommend this book as a worthy addition to any college-level syllabus on ancient and medieval epics, especially those - like Beowulf - in which warrior friendship such as that between Gilgamesh and Enkidu plays a role.

I found it to be a fun read. I am not sure of the accuracy of translation, and not sure how it compares to other translations as I have not read any others. The author stated in the preface that he took some liberties and filled in the missing gaps and stated that he did not notate these liberties. I wish that the liberties were notated so a reader unfamiliar with the story would be able to identify what was what.

received Gilgamesh by Gerald Davis last week. I was fascinated by the story. His translation is wonderful. I have also read his previous two translations - Don Quixote and Beowulf. Mr Davis has done it again. He makes ancient history easy to read and understand. Keep up the good work Mr. Davis. I give this 5 stars and look forward to the next book.

This is quite readable and reveals why this epic has survived for thousands of years. Gilgamesh doesn't have the kind of character development that you'd expect from a modern novel, but people didn't think of divine beings the way we think of fictional characters. That said, this is a great journey through love, loyalty, duty, and passion. Give it a go!

I followed this book with Irving Finkel's *The Ark Before Noah*, an account of discovering and translating recently uncovered cuneiform tablets, and the difficulty of translating ancient Sumerian, Akkadian, and Babylonian works. I recommend Finkel's book if you're interested in the history and scholarly debate around the various translations and meanings of the Gilgamesh tale. The original work is believed to originate in 2500-2000 B.C. and the earliest tablet dates to 1700-1800 B.C. Davis prefaces his translation by noting which accounts were considered to have originated from which time period, some may have been unrelated but written as a sort of parallel. He apparently takes quite a few liberties with the translation to make the narrative flow, but maintains the poetic repetition of verses that are repeated. I suppose it compares roughly with the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*. My main motivation in reading this is because I've recently been studying Genesis more closely and wanted to compare the flood narratives. The flood makes up a relatively minor part of the Gilgamesh tale, and it's fairly evident to even a lay reader like myself that it's an older tradition woven into the "newer" Gilgamesh epic. In listening to Gilgamesh, I was reminded of C.S. Lewis' statement about

how he came to the Bible in his memoir *Surprised by Joy*: He'd spent a lifetime familiar with the ancient myths and could clearly recognize that the stories in the Bible were not myths, they're quite different. The Gilgamesh text is filled with gods of every aspect of nature, they quarrel, scheme, are surprised, and have other human qualities. The text is ultimately about Gilgamesh's quest to become immortal, like the gods. Gilgamesh is an ancient king of Uruk and god-like in his qualities. He was known for his cruelty, having sex with every wife, killing every husband, and being roundly unfair. A goddess makes a man named Enkidu to humble Gilgamesh through battle. Enkidu lives like a wild beast until tamed by intercourse with a temple prostitute who leads him to Uruk to confront Gilgamesh. (Scholars apparently believe that ancient Mesopotamian culture believed a boy became a man in a ritual engagement with a prostitute, a practice that I can note is still alive and well in nearby countries like Azerbaijan.) Gilgamesh and Enkidu wrestle but eventually become lifelong companions, engaging as warriors together. They unite against Humbaba, defender of the cedars. Gilgamesh constantly prays and offers homage to the sun God Shamash for favor. There are several instances of dreams and interpretation by either Enkidu or Gilgamesh. Together they kill Humbaba and then are challenged by the goddess Ishtar's bringing the bull of heaven to earth after Gilgamesh rejects Ishtar's marriage proposal. The friends slay the bull and offer his heart to Shamash, after which the gods demand retribution. Enkidu has a foreboding dream immediately followed by an illness in which he dies. Gilgamesh mourns for his comrade until he sees a maggot crawl out of his nose, after which he buries him (this detail is repeated a few times). Gilgamesh is inconsolable and rages against the world, seeking an explanation as to why his friend had to die and why he doesn't die with him. Shamash eventually has pity on Gilgamesh. Gilgamesh meets Utnapishtim, an immortal who somehow survived the flood and was given the secrets of the gods, which he then tells to Gilgamesh. The flood was intended to quiet the clamor of man which had annoyed the gods. The god Ea told him to build an ark, and he quickly gathered craftsmen and others to build it in 5 days and made sure to take his gold with him (who would need gold after the world was destroyed?). The gods are surprised by the amount and brutality of the flood and seem to argue with each other about the consequences and who is to blame. Afterwards, Enlil grants Utnapishtim and his wife immortality. Utnapishtim's wife tells Gilgamesh where to find a plant on the bottom of the sea that will keep him eternally young, but a serpent then steals the fruit and Gilgamesh is left weeping for his mortality. Oddly, the story continues with Tablet 12 which seems like a parallel or additional story, in which Gilgamesh loses his ball in the underworld and is again crying for his loss. His friend Enkidu agrees to go and retrieve it for him and later answers questions about the condition of Gilgamesh's family and the various types of people one may find in the

underworld. Gilgamesh is eventually granted a sort of immortality by the gods, being granted lordship of the underworld. I am not sure if this was in the original tale, its various renditions, or if the author just made it up for a different ending. This is an ancient compilation of even more ancient texts, so my rating goes on the translation-- which I had to read other accounts to find out. 4 stars? Worth reading and wondering.

Disclosure: I received this ebook from the translator. After reading Gerald Davis's translations of Don Quixote and Beowulf (on audiobook), I was excited to read his new translation: Gilgamesh. Like these other two books, Gilgamesh is an epic story beautifully translated. It's the story of Gilgamesh, King of Uruk (now Iraq), his battle and then friendship with Enkidu, and later his solo quest. Although I generally haven't read the classics since high school and college, translations by Gerald Davis make content lyrical and accessible. Recommended.

Gilgamesh is an epic story beautifully translated by Gerald J. Davis. This translation provides a distinctively Western version of the ancient Mesopotamian narrative. Overall, it is vibrant, earnest, clear and easy to read as it captures the larger than life Hero of an ancient time.

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