were associated in the course of time. Claudius Aelianus, a Roman author of the second century A.D., records the following curious story concerning the birth and childhood of Gilgamesh:

"When Seu!!choros reigned over the Babylonians, the Chaldeans said that the son who would be born of his daughter would wrest the kingdom from the grandfather. At this he was alarmed and, to express it jocularly, became an Acrisios to the girl; for he guarded (her) very closely. But without his knowledge—for fate was more ingenious than the Babylonian—the girl became a mother by an obscure man and bore a child. (Her) guards, in fear of the king, threw it from the acropolis; for it was there that the aforementioned girl was imprisoned. But an eagle very quickly saw the child's fall, and before the infant was dashed upon the ground got underneath it and received (it) on (his) back, and carrying (it) to an orchard, he set (it) down very cautiously. The caretaker of the place, seeing the beautiful child, loved it and reared (it); it was called Gilgamos, and reigned over the Babylonians."

According to our epic and an inscription of the Sumerian king Utubegal of Uruk, Gilgamesh was the son of the goddess Ninsun, the wife of the god Lugalbanda. His father, however, was not Lugalbanda, as would be expected, but rather an unknown mortal whom the Sumerian king list calls "the high priest of Kullab," a district in the city of Uruk. This circumstance is of importance because it explains why Gilgamesh, according to the epic, was part god and part man. One of his famous accomplishments was the building of the wall of Uruk, which is mentioned in the epic and in a Sumerian inscription of Anam (a later ruler of this city), who calls the wall of Uruk, which he rebuilt, "an ancient work of Gilgamesh."

In the course of time Gilgamesh became a god of the lower world. In a Sumerian inscription, the Ur-Nammu composition, he is designated as "king of the underworld," where he pronounces judgment. And in an inscription text, in which the sign for deity is prefixed to his name, he is addressed in these terms: "Gilgamesh, perfect king, [judge of the Anunnaki], wise prince, bra[ce(?) of mankind, who surveys the regions of the world], ruler of the earth, [lord of the underworld]: Thou art the judge, like a god thou perceivest (everything). Thou standest in the underworld [and] gives[t] the final deci[sion]. Thy judgment is not changed, [thy] word is not forgotten. Thou dost inquire, examine, judge, perceive, and lead aright. Shamash has entrusted into thy hand judgment and decision. Kings, rulers, and princes lie prostrate before thee."11

A Summary of the Epic

Like the Odyssey, the Aeneid, and the Nibelungenlied, the Gilgamesh Epic opens with a brief résumé of the deeds and fortunes of the hero whose praises it sings. It first extols the great knowledge and wisdom of him who saw everything and knew all things; who saw secret things and revealed hidden things; who brought information of the days before the flood; who went on a long journey (in quest of immortality), became weary and worn; who engraved on a tablet of stone an account of all that he had done and suffered; and who built the walls of Uruk and its holy temple Enna.

After these lines the text in the Assyrian edition, of which alone the proem has been preserved, breaks off. But, to judge from the first two lines of the next column and from the Hittite recension, the epic went on from here to relate the story itself. When the text again becomes fairly connected, the epic has already turned to the oppressive reign of Gilgamesh.

In his exuberant strength and vigor, his arrogant spirit and undisciplined desires, Gilgamesh apparently carries the maidens of the city off to his court and drives the young men to such heavy labors on the city walls and the temple Eanna that the

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7King of Argos, of whom a similar story is told in Greek literature.
inhabitants at length invoke the gods to relieve them of their unbearable burden. At last the gods listen to the cry of the oppressed and tyrannized population and decide to create a counterpart to Gilgamesh to divert the latter's attention to other matters, by having the two constantly strive, or wrestle, with each other.

The resultant creation is a wild-looking human being of titanic strength called Enkidu. His whole body is covered with hair; the hair of his head is long like that of a woman, and the locks of the hair on his head sprout like grain. He knows nothing about land or people and is garbed like Sumuqan, the god of cattle and agriculture. With the game of the field he ranges at large over the steppe, eats grass and drinks water from the drinking-places of the open country, and delights in the company of the animals.

First through dreams, and then through a trapper, Gilgamesh learns of this unique individual and sends out a courtesan to enchant Enkidu with her charms and to bring him to Uruk. There Gilgamesh and Enkidu meet, at the entrance to the community house. This place was to be the scene of one of Gilgamesh's nocturnal orgies. But Enkidu is so repelled by this unseemly affair that he tries to block the passage to prevent Gilgamesh from entering the house. Thereupon a bitter struggle ensues. The two fight with each other like infuriated bulls. They shatter the doorpost of the community house and cause the wall to shake. They fight in the doorway of the community house and they fight on the street. Finally Gilgamesh succeeds in forcing Enkidu to the ground, whereupon the fury of Gilgamesh abates and he turns away. Enkidu acknowledges Gilgamesh as his superior, and the two, admiring each other's strength and prowess, form a friendship.

At first thought it might seem that the purpose of the gods has been frustrated. But in reality it has not, for Gilgamesh now devotes his attention to his newly won friend and dreams of adventure, which is to insure everlasting fame for himself and his companion. Soon the two, armed with gigantic weapons, are found on a dangerous expedition against a terrible ogre, whose name appears as Humbaba in the Old Babylonian and Mittite versions and as Umbaba in the Assyrian recension. This ogre had been appointed by Enlil, the lord of the gods, as the guardian of a distant and almost boundless cedar forest, but in the pride of his heart he evidently overshot the mark and is therefore deserving of punishment. After a long journey the two companions arrive at the gate of the forest, which is guarded by a fearful watchman placed there by Humbaba. The watchman is killed, and Enkidu opens the gate to the beautiful cedar forest. But alas! the gate is enchanted, and as Enkidu opens it, his hand is paralyzed, and he hesitates to proceed. However, upon the urgent plea of Gilgamesh, who may have resorted to magic and thus may have restored Enkidu's hand to its former condition, Enkidu follows Gilgamesh, and the two go into the depths of the forest together. After another long journey they arrive at the sacred cedar of Humbaba. Gilgamesh takes the ax in his hand and cuts down the cedar. The resounding noise of the strokes of the ax brings fierce Humbaba to the scene. At the sight of this frightful ogre Gilgamesh is terror-stricken. He breaks into tears and cries to Shamash, the sun-god. Shamash hears his prayer and from all eight major points of the compass he sends mighty winds against Humbaba, so that he is neither able to go forward nor able to turn back and has to surrender. Humbaba pleads for mercy, but no mercy is granted. Gilgamesh and Enkidu cut off his head and victoriously return to Uruk.

Upon his arrival in Uruk, Gilgamesh washes his hair, polishes his weapons, and garbs himself in festive attire. As he puts on his tiara, Ishtar, the goddess of love, looks with admiration upon the young and handsome king and, with many attractive promises, offers to be his wife. But Gilgamesh, knowing the wiles of Ishtar, rejects her proposal in the most scathing terms. Enraged at this crushing humiliation, Ishtar mounts up to heaven and goes before Anu, her father, with the plea: "Create for me the bull of heaven [that he may destroy Gilgamesh]!" After considerable hesitation, Anu consents. The bull is created and sent down upon Uruk. A whole army of men rush out to dispatch him, but it is of no avail. One snort from the bull, and the king's men fall by the hundreds! Another snort, and additional hundreds fall to the ground! Then he rushes upon Enkidu, but Enkidu gets hold of the thick of his tail, while Gilgamesh comes running along, thrusts his sword into the nape of the bull, and kills him. Foiled in her plans, Ishtar ascends the wall of Uruk and utters a curse upon Gilgamesh. But Enkidu tears out the right thigh of the bull of heaven and tosses it before her, amid vulgar taunts, while Gilgamesh dedicates the bull's horns to his tutelary god, Lugalbanda. Thereupon Gilgamesh and Enkidu wash their hands in the Euphrates, on whose former banks Uruk was located, and then ride in triumph through the thronged and
has received blessed immortality, and decides to hasten to him with beyond recall, and Enkidu is buried with honors. kind; he is willing to go through the greatest perils and the most extraordinary hardships to gain immortal life! He thinks of far-away Utnapishtim, the Babylonian Noah, who, Gilgamesh has heard, must go on a long and arduous journey fraught with many dangers. He arrives at the towering mountain range of MBshu, probably the Lebanon and Antilebanon Range. Here is the gate through which the sun passes on his daily journey. The gate is guarded by a terrifying pair of scorpion-people, "whose look is death" and "whose frightful splendor overpowers mountains." At the sight of them the face of even a demigod like Gilgamesh becomes gloomy with fear and dismay, and he falls prostrate before them. But the scorpion-people, recognizing the partly divine nature of Gilgamesh, receive him kindly and permit him to enter the gate and to traverse the mountain range. After a journey of twelve double-hours of utter darkness, which does not permit him to see what lies ahead of him or what lies behind him, he comes out on the other side and stands before a beautiful garden of precious stones, with trees and shrubs, fruit and vines, all of glittering stone.

And there in the distance, at the edge of the sea, probably the Mediterranean Sea on the Phoenician coast, dwells Siduri, the divine barmaid! Gilgamesh hastens thither and inquires of her how he can get to Utnapishtim, to obtain from him the secret of immortality. The barmaid at first tries to persuade him that his quest is vain, for there is no escape from death. She therefore advises him to enjoy life in full measure and to abandon his hazardous, yet hopeless, undertaking. Nevertheless, Gilgamesh persists in his plan, and at last the barmaid directs him to Utnapishtim's boatman, who has come across from the other side of the sea, where Utnapishtim dwells, and is now in the woods, in search of something. "Him let thy face behold," she tells Gilgamesh. "[If it is possible, cross over with him; if it is not possible, turn back (home).]" Gilgamesh leaves the goddess and goes to the boatman, who at length agrees to take him along. With much difficulty the two cross the sea and the waters of death and finally arrive at the shores of the land of blessed Utnapishtim.

When Gilgamesh sees Utnapishtim and notices that this ancient sage is not different from him but that there is, in fact, less life and energy in Utnapishtim than there is in himself, his hope of gaining immortality undoubtedly rises, and he asks Utnapishtim how he entered into the company of the gods and obtained everlasting life. Thereupon Utnapishtim relates to him at great length the story of the deluge, which we shall consider in detail in the final chapter of this book, and tells him how he obtained the boon of eternal life. After that he turns to Gilgamesh and says to him, in effect: "But now as for you, who will assemble the gods to you so that they may confer immortality on you?" After a moment's reflection, Utnapishtim offers this suggestion: "Come, do not sleep for six days and seven nights." The meaning of this line appears to be that if he can master sleep, the twin brother of death, he may then be able to master also death itself. But hardly has tired and exhausted Gilgamesh eaten down when he falls asleep and sleeps for six days, until Utnapishtim finally wakes him.
There now seems to be nothing left for Gilgamesh but to return home. However, just as he departs and his boat is already moving away from the shore, Utnapishtim calls him back and reveals to him a secret of the gods: There is a thorny plant of wondrous power at the bottom of the sea; if he will obtain that plant and eat it when he has reached old age, his life will be rejuvenated. Gilgamesh descends to the bottom of the sea and obtains the plant. In the joy of his heart he now sets out for Uruk, accompanied by Utnapishtim's boatman, who evidently has been banished from the land of Utnapishtim for having brought Gilgamesh to its shores. However, on the way home Gilgamesh sees a pool of cold water and goes bathing. While he is thus engaged, a serpent perceives the fragrance of the plant, comes up from the water, snatches the plant from him and eats it, and thus gains the power to shed its old skin and thereby to renew its life. Gilgamesh sits down and weeps bitterly, for his last ray of hope has disappeared, his last chance of gaining continued life is gone. But since there is nothing he can do about it, he returns to Uruk; and since he cannot change the course of destiny, he decides to be content with his lot and to rejoice in the work of his hands, the great city which he has built.

To this material was added in later days, as we shall see shortly, a story which in some respects is quite incompatible with what precedes. According to this tale, recorded on Tablet XII, Gilgamesh makes two wooden objects of some kind, called pukku and mikku, respectively. One day they fall into the underworld, and Gilgamesh is unable to get them up. Finally, Enkidu descends into the underworld to bring them up for him. But, unfortunately, he fails to follow the instructions which Gilgamesh has given him and therefore is unable to return to the land of the living. Gilgamesh then goes from one god to another in an effort to have Enkidu released from the realm of the dead so that he may commune with him and find out the worst that is in store for man. At long last Enkidu is permitted to ascend, and, in answer to the questions put to him by Gilgamesh, he tells his friend a rather gloomy tale concerning the conditions in the dark abodes of death. On this sad and somber note the Gilgamesh Epic ends.

The Central Theme of the Epic

The Gilgamesh Epic is a meditation on death, in the form of a tragedy. To consider the matter in logical arrangement, the
blessed estate and to hope to escape death! It is true, Ut-napiš-tim and his wife obtained eternal life, but that was an exceptional case; and, furthermore, it was by divine favor, not through their own efforts. The rule still holds good that all men must die.

Next, in point of logic, the epic considers the question of the life hereafter. The picture it draws on Tablet VII is extremely dismal. After the children of men have run their courses, all must go to the land of no return, to the sad and dark abodes of death, to "the house whose occupants are bereft of light, where dust is their food and clay their sustenance." There dwell kings and princes, high priests and acolytes, the powerful of the earth, the wise, and the good. There the mighty rulers of the earth are deprived of their crowns and have to play the roles of servants. However, according to Tablet XII, the outlook is not quite so gloomy. A man with two sons will be permitted to dwell in a brick structure and to eat bread; a man with three sons will drink water out of the waterskins of the deep; a man with five sons will be an honored scribe in the palace of the underworld; he who died a hero's death on the field of battle will rest on a couch and drink pure water: etc. But, even according to this tablet, man's heaven is on earth.

Finally, the epic takes up the question as to what course a man should follow in view of these hard facts. The solution it offers is simple: "Enjoy your life and make the best of it!" Gilgamesh, after his many fruitless adventures in quest of eternal life, realized the wisdom of this course of action. Therefore he returned to Uruk and again devoted his attention to his beloved city and rejoiced in the work of his hands. "Climb upon the wall of Uruk (and) walk about," he told the boatman with evident satisfaction. "Inspect the foundation terrace and examine the brickwork, if its brickwork be not of burnt bricks, and (if) the seven wise men did not lay its foundation! One shar is city, one shar orchards, one shar prairie; (then there is) the uncultivated land (?) of the temple of Ishtar. Three shar and the uncultivated land (?) comprise Uruk" (Tablet XI:303-7). It is questionable whether the epic wants to go so far as to champion the divine barmaid's hedonistic philosophy of life.15 Such a philosophy would indeed be in full accord with the loose scenes in the epic, but it is more likely that this is just one of the views on life held by the Babylonians and that it was interwoven in this epic without an attempt at a complete harmonization.16 In the following section we shall note some striking examples of contradictory ideas existing side by side in the epic.

The Sources of the Epic

It has long been recognized that the Gilgamesh Epic constitutes a literary compilation of material from various originally unrelated sources, put together to form one grand, more or less harmonious, whole. The composite character of our poem is apparent from the following considerations.

To begin with, there can be no doubt that Tablet XII was drawn from an independent source, for we now have the Sumerian counterpart to it, showing unmistakably that the Gilgamesh Epic used only the second half of the original story. In addition to this, there is internal evidence that the material on this tablet originally formed a separate tale. For it must be obvious even to the casual reader that the final tablet is in some respects incompatible with what precedes. In the previous portions of the epic the death of Enkidu has already been recorded on Tablet VII: there he falls ill and dies at the decree of the gods because of his part in the killing of Humbaba and the bull of heaven. But in the opening passage of Tablet XII he is still alive, and here he descends into the underworld to recover the pukku and mikku for Gilgamesh but is deprived of life and kept in the lower world.

Moreover, also the Humbaba episode (Tablets III-V) and the deluge account (Tablet XI) have been found on Sumerian tablets which have no connection with the Gilgamesh Epic. Another episode which has been discovered on Sumerian fragments forming a separate composition is Ishtar's proposal to Gilgamesh and the subsequent story of the bull of heaven (Tablet VI). Tablets VI: 97-100 and VII, columns 111, 6-22, and 14, 33-39, in the Gilgamesh

15Tablet X (Old Babylonian version).

Epic have in all probability been derived from the myth of Ishtar's descent to the nether world, of which we have both a Sumerian and a Semitic Babylonian version. The composite character of our epic is thus established beyond any doubt.  

But the question as to the origin of the material of the various episodes cannot as yet be answered with any certainty. To judge from the Sumerian fragments of the epic which have so far come to light and from the fact that the Semitic Babylonians became in general the heirs of Sumerian culture and civilization, it appears reasonable to assume that also the other episodes in the Gilgamesh Epic were current in Sumerian literary form before they were embodied in the composition of this Semitic Babylonian poem. (From this, however, it does not necessarily follow that all this material had its origin with the Sumerians, either in their former home or after they had occupied the plains of the Tigris-Euphrates Valley. Instead, the material itself may have originated, at least in part, with the Semitic Babylonians, from whom the Sumerians may have taken it over, adapting it to their own views and beliefs and giving it expression in their own script and language. But irrespective of the origin of the raw material, the earliest literary form of most, if not all, of the tales or episodes imbedded in the Gilgamesh Epic was doubtless Sumerian, as far as available evidence goes. And these Sumerian literary pieces were then utilized by the Babylonian Semites in the production of their great national epic.) The work of the Semites, however, did not consist simply in translating the Sumerian texts and combining them into one continuous story; rather, it constituted a new creation, which in the course of time, as indicated by the different versions at our disposal, was continually modified and elaborated at the hands of the various compilers and redactors, with the result that the Semitic versions which have survived to our day in most cases differ widely from the available Sumerian material.

The Age of the Epic

When this process of compilation began, and when the "first edition" of the Gilgamesh Epic appeared, cannot be stated with certainty. The tablets of the Ninevite recension, which forms the main base of our knowledge of the epic, date from the reign of Ashurbanipal, i.e., from the seventh century B.C.; the fragment from the city of Ashur is probably two or three hundred years older; while the pieces discovered at Hat-tusas belong approximately to the middle of the second millennium B.C. The oldest portions of the epic are the Melissaer fragment and the two tablets now in the museum of the University of Pennsylvania and Yale University; these tablets are inscribed in Old Babylonian and therefore go back to the First Babylonian Dynasty. But even these are probably copies of older originals. The prominence given to the old Sumerian ruler deities Anu and Enlil in our epic and the complete absence of the name of Marduk, in sharp contrast with the main Babylonian creation story, indicate that our epic was composed before Anu and Enlil, in the days of Hammurabi, "committed the sovereignty over all the people to Marduk," and before Hammurabi "brought about the triumph of Marduk." The date of the composition of the Gilgamesh Epic can therefore be fixed at about 2000 B.C. But the material contained on these tablets is undoubtedly much older, as we can infer from the mere fact that the epic consists of numerous originally independent episodes, which, of course, did not spring into existence at the time of the composition of our poem but must have been current long before they were compiled and woven together to form our epic.

This, however, does not imply that all the episodes now contained in this work were incorporated at the time when the Gilgamesh Epic was first composed, no matter how long some of them may already have existed in literary form. Tablet XII, as attested by the Sumerian fragments, consists of material which dates from about the end of the third millennium or the beginning of the second millennium B.C. and which therefore existed in literary form already at the time of the commonly accepted date of the composition of the epic. Nevertheless, this tablet is without question a later supplement to the adventures of Gilgamesh. For it will be noted that the concluding passage of Tablet XI returns to the beginning of the epic and closes with almost the same words with which the poem  

17 T. S. Kenyon, The Letters and Inscriptions of Hammurabi, Vols. II and III (London, 1900), Pl. 185:1-7 and pp. 188 ff., respectively.
ends, indicating that the wreath of myths and legends is complete. An instructive parallel to this is found in Psalm 8, which closes with exactly the same words with which it opens—"O Lord, our Lord, how glorious is Thy name in all the earth!" Others are contained in the sections on the new, postdiluvian world order and the sign of the covenant in Gen. 9:1-7 and 12-17, which close in much the same way in which they begin. It will be recalled that some of our church hymns, ending with the same stanza with which they begin, exhibit this feature.

Hereewith we shall conclude our introductory comments and turn to a perusal of the epic itself. As pieced together on the basis of the various fragments of the different versions, the story reads as follows.20

Tablet I
Column I
1. [He who] saw everything [within the confines(?)] of the land;
2. [He who] knew all things and was versed(?) in everything;
3. [....] together [....];
4. [....] wisdom, who everything [....].
5. He saw [secret thing(s)] and [revealed] hidden thing(s);
6. He brought intelligence of (the days) before the flood;
7. He went on a long journey, became weary and [worn];
8. [He engraved on a tablets of stone all the travail.
9. He built the wall of Uruk, the enclosure.
10. Of holy Eanna, the sacred storehouse.
11. Behold its outer wall, whose brightness22 is like (that of) copper!
12. Yea, look upon its inner wall,23 which none can equal!

20With the entire translation are to be compared A. Schott's notes in Zeitschrift für Assyriologie, XLII (1934), 92-143. Where I feel especially indebted to Schott, it will be indicated.
21Eanna was a temple in Uruk and was dedicated to Anu, the head of the Sumerian pantheon and the patron god of Uruk, and to his daughter Ishtar, the goddess of love.
22Reading ni-i-p-b[u-shu]. On the meaning of this word see Cuneiform Texts from Babylonian Tablets, etc., in the British Museum, Vol. XVIII (London, 1908), Pl. 5, obv. 9: šá-ru-ru = ni-in-bu.
23Cf. Schott in Zeitschrift für Assyriologie, XLII, 93-94.

Tablet I
13. Take hold of the threshold, which is from of old;
14. Approach Eanna, the dwelling of Ishtar;
15. Which no later king, no man, can equal;
16. Climb upon the wall of Uruk (and) walk about;
17. Inspect the foundation terrace and examine the brickwork,
18. If its brickwork be not of burnt bricks,
19. (And if) the seven [wise men] did not lay its foundation:24

At this point the Assyrian recension, to which we owe virtually all the material on this tablet, breaks off. To judge from the length of the other columns of this tablet, about thirty lines are missing. Some of this material, however, can be restored from the opening passage of the Hittite version, which, after two almost completely destroyed lines, reads as follows:

3. After Gilgamesh was created(?)
4. The valiant god [.... perfected] his form ....
5. The heavenly Shamash granted him [comeliness];
6. Adad granted him heroism [...].
7. The form of Gilgamesh the great gods [made surpassing].
8. Eleven cubits [was his height]; the breadth of his chest was nine [spana].
9. The length of his [...] was three(?) [...].
10. [Now] he turns hither and thither [to see] all the lands.
11. To the city of Uruk he comes [...].25

After a few more fragmentary lines the Hittite text breaks off. The second column of the Assyrian version, setting in before line 10 of the Hittite fragment, continues the description of Gilgamesh.

24Cf. Tablet XI: 304-5.
1. Two-thirds of him is god and one-third of him is man. 26
2. The form of his body [none can match (?)].
3-8. (Almost completely destroyed.)
9. The onslaught of [his] weapons has no [equal].
10. [His] fellow[s] are ....
11. The men of Uruk [their] chambers(?)
12. "Gilgamesh leaves no son to [his] father;
13. [Day and] night his outrageousness continues unrestrained.
14. [Yet Gilgamesh] is the shepherd of Uruk, the enclosure.
15. He is [our] shepherd, [strong, handsome, and wise].
16. [Gilgamesh] leaves no [virgin to her lover],
17. The daughter of a warrior, the chosen of a noble;
18. Their lament [the gods heard over and over again].
19. The gods of heaven [called] the Lord of Uruk:
20. "[Aruru(?)] brought this furious wild ox into being.
21. [The onslaught of his weapons] has no equal.
22. "[His fellow[s] are ....
23. Gilgamesh leaves no son to [his] father, day and night his outrageousness continues unrestrained;"
24. And he is the shepherd of Uruk,28 [the enclosure];
25. He is [our] shepherd, and (yet) [he oppresses them(?)].
26. Strong, handsome, (and) wise [.....]
27. Gilgamesh leaves no virgin to [her lover],
28. The daughter of a warrior, the chosen of a noble;"
29. When [Anu] heard their lament over and over again,
30. Great Aruru they called: "Thou, Aruru, didst create [Gilgamesh(?)];"
31. Now create his equal, to the impetuosity of his heart let him be equal.
32. Let them ever strive (with each other), and let Uruk (thus) have rest."
33. When Aruru heard this, she conceived in her heart an image of Anu;

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26Cf. Tablet IX, col. 11, 16.
27This expression refers to Anu, the patron god of Uruk.
28I.e., the king of Uruk.
6. [He ever eats grass] with the game;
7. [He ever sets] his [foot] toward the drinking-place.
8. [I am afraid and] do [not] dare to approach him.
9. [The pits which I dug] [he has filled in again];
10. The traps which I set he has torn up;
11. [He helps] the game and animals of the steppe to escape out of my hands
13. [There is no one] who has prevailed against him;
14. [His strength is strong like (that of) the host of heaven].
15. [Go, set your face] toward Uruk;
16. [Tell Gilgamesh of] the strength of (this) man.
17. [Let him give thee a courtesan, a prostitute, and] lead her with thee;
18. [Let the courtesan] like a strong one prevail against him.
19. [When he waters the game at the drinking-place,]
20. [Deponat vestem suam et nudet venustatem suam.]
21. [When he sees her, he will approach her].
22. [But then] his game, which grew up on his steppe, will change its attitude toward him.
23. [Listening] to the advice of his father,
24. The hunter went [to Gilgamesh].
25. [He set out on (his) journey (and) stopped] in Uruk.
26. [Addressing himself to] Gilgamesh he said:
27. [There is a unique man who has come to the field of my father].
28. [He is the strongest on the steppe; strength he has];
29. [And] [his strength] is strong like (that of) the host of heaven.
30. [He ranges at large over the field of my father];
31. [He ever eats grass] with the game;
32. [He ever sets] his foot toward the drinking-place.
33. [I am afraid and do not dare to approach him].

33Lit.: [He does not allow] me the doing of the steppe.
15. (Cum) amorem amorem toti importat.
17. Ea non cunctabatur et approinquare;
18. Ea solvit vestem suam, et is incumbebat in eam;
19. Ea incitabat libidinem in eo, opus feminae,
20. Et is incitabat amorem suum et.
21. Sex dies et septem noctes Enkidu colbat cum meretrice.
After he was sated with her charms,
He set his face toward his game.
(But) when the gazelles saw him, Enkidu, they ran away:
The game of the steppe fled from his presence.
His knees failed, because his game ran away.
Enkidu slackened in his running, no longer (could he run) as before.
But he had intelligence, while was his understanding.
He returned (and) sat at the feet of the courtesan,
Looking at the courtesan,
And his ears listening as the courtesan speaks,
[The courtesan] saying to him, to Enkidu:
"Wise art thou, O Enkidu, like a god art thou;
Why dost thou run around with the animals on the steppe?
Come, I will lead thee to Uruk, the enclosure,
To the holy temple, the dwelling of Anu and Ishtar,
The place where Gilgamesh is, the one perfect in strength,
Who prevails over men like a wild ox."
As she speaks to him, her words find favor;
(For) he seeks a friend, one who understands his heart.
Enkidu says to her, the courtesan:
"Come, O prostitute, take me
To the holy temple, the sacred dwelling of Anu (and) Ishtar,
The place where Gilgamesh is, the one perfect in strength,
Who prevails over men like a wild ox.
I, I will summon him and [will] speak boldly;"
179. How, O how couldst thou without reflection bring on (this) deluge?

180. On the sinner lay his sin; on the transgressor lay his transgression.

181. Let loose, that he shall not be cut off; null tight, that he may not get (too) loose.

182. Instead of thy sending a deluge, would that a lion had come and diminished mankind.

183. (Or) instead of thy sending a deluge, would that a wolf had come and diminished mankind.

184. (Or) instead of thy sending a deluge, would that a famine had occurred and [destroyed] the land.

185. (Or) instead of thy sending a deluge, would that Irra had come and smitten mankind.

186. (Moreover,) it was not I who revealed the secret of the great gods:

187. (But) to Atrahasis I showed a dream. and so he learned the secret of the gods.

188. And now take counsel concerning him.

189. Then Enlil went up into the ship.

190. He took my hand and caused me to go aboard.

191. He caused my wife to go aboard (and) to kneel down at my side.

192. Standing between us, he touched our foreheads and blessed us:

193. 'Hitherto Ut-napishtim has been but a man;

194. But now Ut-napishtim and his wife shall be like unto us gods.

195. In the distance, at the mouth of the rivers, Ut-napishtim shall dwell;

196. So they took me and caused me to dwell in the distance, at the mouth of the rivers.

197. But now as for thee, who will assemble the gods unto thee,

198. That thou mayest find the life which thou seekest?

199. Come, do not sleep for six days and seven nights.'

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200. (But) as he sits (there) on his hams,

201. Sleep like a rainstorm blows upon him.

202. Ut-napishtim says to her, to his wife:

203. "Look at the strong man who wants life (everlasting).

204. Sleep like a rainstorm blows upon him.

205. His wife says to him, to Ut-napishtim the Distant:

206. "Touch him that the man may awake,

207. That he may return in peace on the road by which he came,

208. That through the gate through which he came he may return to his land.'

209. Ut-napishtim says to her, to his wife;

210. 'Deceitful is mankind, he will try to deceive thee.

211. Pray, (therefore.) bake loaves of bread for him (and) place (them) at his head.

212. And the days that he has slept mark on the wall!'

213. She baked loaves of bread for him (and) placed (them) at his head;

214. And the days that he slept she noted on the wall.

215. His first loaf of bread was all dried out;

216. The second was ....; the third was (still) moist; the fourth was white, his ....;

217. The fifth was moldy; the sixth had (just) been baked;

218. The seventh—suddenly he touched him, and the man awoke.

219. Gilgamesh said to him, to Ut-napishtim the Distant:

220. "Hardly did sleep spread over me,

221. When quickly thou didst touch me and rouse me."

222. Ut-napishtim [said to him], to Gilgamesh:

223. '[.... Gilgam!esh, count thy loaves of bread;]

224. [The days which thou didst sleep] may they be known to thee.

225. Thy [first] loaf of bread [is(already] all dried out;

226. [The second is ....]; the third is (still) moist; the fourth is white, thy ....;

227. [The fifth is moldy; the sixth has (just) been baked;

228. [The seventh—suddenly thou didst wake."

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202 I.e., punish man, lest he get too wild; but do not be too severe, lest he perish (cf. Ebeling in Archiv für Orientforschung, VIII, 231).

203 The god of pestilence.

204 This name—in reality a descriptive epithet meaning "the exceedingly wise"—is another designation for Ut-napishtim.

205 I.e., he will decay that he slept (so Landsberger in Zeitschrift für Assyriologie, XLII, 141, n. 1.).
Tablet XI

229. [Gilgamesh] said to him, to Utnapishtim the Distant:
230. "Oh, what shall I do, Utnapishtim, (or) where shall I go,
231. As the robber has (already) taken hold of my [members]?
232. Death is dwelling [in] my bedchamber;
233. And wherever [I set] [my feet] there is death!"
234. Utnapishtim said to him, to Urshanabi, the boatman:
235. "Urshanabi, [may] the qu[a[y not re]joice in thee, may the
place of crossing hate thee!
236. Him who walks about on its shore banish from its shore.
237. The man before whose face thou didst walk, whose body is
covered with long hair,
238. The grace of whose members pelts have distorted,
239. Take him, Urshanabi, and bring him to the place of washing;
240. Let him wash his long hair (clean) as snow in water.
241. Let him throw off his pelts and let the sea carry (them)
away, that his fair body may be seen.
242. Let the band around his head be replaced with a new one.
243. Let him be clad with a garment, as clothing for his
nakedness.
244. Until he gets to his city.
245. Until he finishes his journey,
246. May (his) garment not show (any sign of) age, but may it
(still) be quite new."
247. Urshanabi took him and brought him to the place of washing.
248. He washed his long hair (clean) as snow in [water].
249. He threw off his pelts, that the sea might carry (them)
away, (And that) his fair body appeared.
250. He rep[aced the band around] his head with a new one.
251. He clothed him with a garment, as clothing for his nakedness.
252. Until he [would come to his city],
253. Until he would finish his journey,
254. Gilgamesh and Urshanabi boarded the ship;
255. They launched the ship [on the billows] (and) glided along.

256. Gilgamesh, this plant is a wondrous(-?) plant,
Whereby a man may obtain his former strength(-?).
I will take it to Uruk, the enclosure, I will give (it) to
eat [... may cut off the plant(-?).
Its name is 'The old man becomes young as the man (in his
prime).'

258. His wife said to him, to Utnapishtim the Distant:
259. "Gilgamesh has come hither, he has become weary, he has
exerted himself,
260. What wilt thou give (him wherewith) he may return to his
land?"
261. Then he, Gilgamesh, took a pole
262. And brought the ship near to the shore.
263. Utnapishtim said to him, [to] Gilgamesh:
264. "Gilgamesh, thou hast come hither, thou hast become weary,
thou hast exerted thyself;
265. What shall I give thee (wherewith) thou mayest return to
thy land?
266. Gilgamesh, I will reveal (unto thee) a hidden thing,
Namely, a [secret of the gods will I] tell thee:
267. There is a plant like a thorn (-?).
268. Like a rose(-?) its thorn(s) will prick thy hands.
269. If thy hands will obtain that plant, [thou wilt find
new life]."
270. When Gilgamesh heard that, he opened [...].
271. He tied heavy stones [to his feet];
272. They pulled him down into the deep, [and he saw the plant].
273. He took the plant, (though) it pr[icked his hands].
274. He cut the heavy stones [from his feet],
275. (And) the [... threw him to its shore.
276. Gilgamesh said to him, to Urshanabi, the boatman:
277. "Urshanabi, this plant is a wondrous(-?) plant,
278. Whereby a man may obtain his former strength(-?).
279. I will take it to Uruk, the enclosure, I will give (it) to
eat [... may cut off the plant(-?).
280. Its name is 'The old man becomes young as the man (in his
prime).'

207. I.e., death?
208. Var.: to his land.
209. Gilgamesh was no doubt called back by Utnapishtim.
Tablet XI

282. I myself will eat (it) that I may return to my youth."211
283. After twenty double-hours they broke off a morsel.
284. After thirty (additional) double-hours they stopped for the night.
285. Gilgamesh saw a pool with cold water;
286. He descended into it and bathed in the water.
287. A serpent perceived the fragrance of the plant;
288. It came up from the water and snatched the plant,
289. Sloughing (its) skin on its return.212
290. Then Gilgamesh sat down (and) wept,
291. His tears flowing over his cheeks.
292. [...] of Urshanabi, the boatman:
293. "[For] whom, Urshanabi, have my hands become weary?
294. For whom is the blood of my heart being spent?
295. For myself I have not obtained any boon.
296. For the earth-lion213 have I obtained the boon,
297. Now at (a distance of) twenty214 double-hours (such a) one(?) snatches it away (from me):
298. When I opened the [ ] of Urshanabi, the boatman:
299. I have found something that [has been] set for a sign unto me:
I will withdraw
300. And will leave the ship at the shore."215 After twenty
[double-hours] they broke off a morsel.

The purpose of this plant was to grant rejuvenated life;
and it was to be eaten after a person had reached old age. For
this reason Gilgamesh does not eat the plant at once but decides
to wait until after his return to Uruk, until he has become an
"old man" (cf. Christian in Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des
Morgenlandes, XI, 149).

Cf. W. F. Albright in Revue d'Assyriologie, XVI (1919),
189-90. By eating this magic plant, the serpent gained the power
to shed its old skin and thereby to renew its life (cf. J. Morgen-
ster in Zeitschrift für Assyriologie, XXIX [1918/19], 284 ff.).

Apparently the serpent (cf. lines 287 ff. and Jensen in

We should expect "fifty" (cf. lines 283-84).

In the loss of the plant Gilgamesh sees a sign that he
should leave the ship behind and proceed by land. The boatman
went along, for, according to line 235, he apparently has been unhastened
from the shores of the blessed for bringing Gilgamesh there.