

# THE EPIC OF GILGAMESH

*The Babylonian Epic Poem and Other Texts  
in Akkadian and Sumerian*

*Translated and with an introduction by  
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## *Tablet XI. Immortality Denied*

Gilgamesh asks Uta-napishti how he gained eternal life, and hears how Uta-napishti survived the Deluge and was given immortality by the gods as a result. Uta-napishti suggests Gilgamesh go without sleep for a week. Gilgamesh fails the test and realizes in despair that if he cannot beat Sleep he has no hope of conquering Death.

“In the past Uta-napishti was a mortal man,  
but now he and his wife shall become like us gods!  
Uta-napishti shall dwell far away, where the rivers flow forth!”  
So far away they took me, and settled me where the rivers flow  
forth. XI 205

‘But you now, who’ll convene for you the gods’ assembly,  
so you can find the life you search for?  
For six days and seven nights, come, do without slumber!’

As soon as Gilgamesh squatted down on his haunches,  
sleep like a fog already breathed over him.  
Said Uta-napishti to her, to his wife:  
‘See the fellow who so desired life!  
Sleep like a fog already breathes over him.’

A different translation of Chapter XI with several references to sleep

## Tablet XI

The Flood

Trial of Sleeplessness

Foiled by the Serpent

Triumphant Return From the Dead

## Column I

To Utnapishtim, Gilgamesh said:

"When I first you saw

I thought to fight you as did I Hawawa demon of cedar forest far.

But now I see your face as if I saw my own in mirror surface.

It is from once mortal man that I came to find how death be avoided.

So tell me how came about wearing divinity like a skin?"

Utnapishtim said to him in swift reply:

"King of Uruk surely there is no one more bold

Here is knowledge that no other has ever been told..

Near where Euphrates born sits a city you call Shuruppak, home of those divine.

Enlil send from there a flood to stop noisy human babbling all the time.

Anunu, Anu, and Enlil were at Shuruppak.

But it was Ea who did speak in whispers through my roofly straw to tell me to attend to what he says,

Ea the ever vigilant did to me speak

Saying build a boat and abandon what I have, for you riches can not save your life.

Saying catch a creating match of every living thing which in your boat do put.

Saying make water tight your boat, protect it from the flood which comes.

Saying make the boat wide and equally long, then tile the roof with slate.

Saying listen and attend to what I say.

Saying tell your neighbours that you can not stay for Enlil hates you as he does

Saying tell your neighbours that you must find another place to place you head to rest

Saying tell your neighbours that Ea of the watery Abyss will protect you now, this you know.

Saying to me to attend, to listen to his words.

Saying to tell my neighbours that Shuruppak will reap only water and be no more.

Saying to tell my neighbours that first Shuruppak will receive like rain loaves, and fish most great

## Column II

So I did as Ea told to me  
and from each house did outward flow  
People came to build a boat.

Strong and weak, young and old.

Some carried pitch, and some carried oil.  
Some carried timber, and some carried nails.  
Some cut wood, and some nailed wood.  
Sixty lengths by sixty lengths the boat did grow.  
Six deck below, six decks above, twelve decks in all  
I drafted plans, I showed where each board should go. I showed where  
pitch must go  
Three times we pitched the outside in the seams.  
Three times inside in the seams.  
We slaughtered sheep and cattle by the score  
For our work done we feasted as every day was the last.

And on the seven day it was done.  
I oiled my hands and prayed thanks to Ea below.  
We loaded up the living things and then my gold, jewels every precious  
thing.  
We loaded up every household man, woman and child  
We grasped sixty poles in our hands  
And pushed the boat towards the setting sun.  
We pushed then pulled the ungainly boat till solid in the river water did it  
lay  
And in the sky the dark water heavy clouds did form as Ea had foretold.  
We hustled everyone below. Puzuramurri did caulk the top hatch full shut  
from outside where he did stand.  
So to make him glad I gave to him my house and everything around."

### Column III #

Then Utnapishtim continued, saying :

"By next day's dawn Adad made noise in the underground darkness in the clouds above.

Before Adad moved more, Hadad the horrible herald came before

Then the Annanuki blazed a terrible light,

Which even we caulked in below did this light into our eyes did cut.

Then like pushing waters escaping from a dam above came rain pushing down to us below.

Nergal from his underground home did break the posts and up water from below did come.

Ninurta let watery chaos abound

Drowning babe, cattle, and then trees.

South wind pushed waters into eyes

So people scrambling around flowing water could not see and so were drowned.

Like pieces of a broken pot lay the pieces of land among the spreading water.

So high did the water go that even the gods scrambled for mountain so high

And cringed like rain whipped dogs in the storm.

Eanna did cry like a birthing mom:

"This is not what I thought would be when I did bring to council my complaints.

Now the humans are like fish but still as if out of river had they gone on to stoney ground."

The Annunaki wept with her in regret

For all that came out of anger pure.

For six days did they weep,

Then on the seventh day the squall of this birthing storm did still, so did their eyes dry every one.

I, Utamipishtim, did break open the hatch and in the daylight poured.

All about was flat, like flattened baked clay.

Nothing moved. Humans were once more clay.

The eyes of god now dry, my own eyes did weep.

And while my tears did fall in rivers along the land of my face

I continued to look in everfy way for something not river made.

First far off then so close

That the boat did run aground,

Mt. Nishur was our stopping place.  
For seven days the boat stood in ground.  
So on the seventh day I let loose a single dove,  
Which flew around but could not land so returned to me.  
So on the seventh day I let loose a single swallow,  
Which flew around but could not land so returned to me.  
So on the seventh day I let loose a single raven,  
Which flew around and found a place to land so it returned not to me.  
So on the seventh day I let loose all the birds,  
Which flew around, and found places to land so they never returned to me.?"

#### Column IV

Upnapishtim continued:

"Seven vessels did I set out  
When we got ashore.  
Then seven more vessels did I set out.  
A libation did I give to the gods.  
I built a fire. A set it alit.  
Smoke of cedar, myrtle and cane wafted heavenward.  
The Igigi were pleased.  
I slaughtered a sheep, and roasted it for the gods.  
So pleased were they, than down came fertile Eanna  
With necklace of lapis lazuli, gold, and amethyst, which  
Thereinafter we called the rainbow  
As this artisan gift she gave to us.  
A gift she gave to ever remind us of dimmer sadder days.  
So all the gods could partake in this holy smoke save Enlil, evil  
personified.

The gods about the altar did meet.  
When Enlil did see the boat and humankind about the altar he spit in rage.  
"Why are any of these humans alive, when the flood I sent was to score  
all of them from my sight."  
Ninurta spoke with contempt: "Ask Ea for he knows."  
Ea spoke to Enlil with contempt:  
"For one man's crimes do you kill all the rest?  
And crime's punishment should match the act.  
One one offence you kill all including the innocent.  
Here me now I did not tell the secrets of the gods to Utnapishtim  
But he listened to the wind and used his mind

And the rest he wroth you do now see.

So in the presence of this council atone you now  
For you act's excess."

So Enlil frowned then went down  
To my boat on the ground.  
He made me and my wife kneel on the deck, and said thus to us:  
"You mere human are now an immortal  
Dwell you now where all the rivers come." So thus it came to be that I  
live where now you see." So Gilgamesh, king and man, if you want the  
council of gods to convene  
Sit you down for a week with no sleep  
And by this test of seven nights find out  
What the gods think best."

#### Column V

But when Gilgamesh sat from the sea came a sleeping mist  
And into deep slumber did he slip.  
Utnapishtim sadly turned to his wife and said:  
"So this King Gilgamesh would sleep instead of awaiting the gods with  
open eyes."  
But his wife took pity on the hero form and this she said in reply:  
"Awaken him with your touch and send him back to Uruk bound."  
Utnapishtim laughed and said:  
"This be a man. He will first deceive himself and then us too.  
So on each day bake a loaf and lay that beside his form.  
Make a mark on yonder wall for each night this hero sleeps away his  
immortality."

On the first day she baked a loaf as dry as dust.  
On the second day she baked a loaf was hard as rock.  
On the third day she baked a loaf wet and awfully rotten all through.  
On the fourth day she baked a loaf custed with white slime  
On the fifth day she baked a loaf blue with mold.  
On the sixth day she baked a loaf which looked quite good.  
On the seventh day Utnapishtim touch the hero on his head  
And up from his deepest sleep came Gilgamesh.  
Gilgamesh did proclaim: "I nearly fell asleep but your touch did keep me  
awake.  
Utnapishtim shook his head and pointed to yonder wall  
"Look, O Hero, see the marks for every day which you did sleep,

And on the ground there beside you know lay six loafs, one each day made

By my wife, and note:

On the first day she baked a loaf as dry as dust.

On the second day she baked a loaf was hard as rock.

On the third day she baked a loaf wet and awfully rotten all through.

On the fourth day she baked a loaf custed with white slime

On the fifth day she baked a loaf blue with mold."

Gilgamesh did now frown and said with sadness and with fear:

"What can I do?

Sleep is much like death when into it I peek

It captures me and from that prison I cannot escape."

Column VI

With this humble answer Utnapishtim did nod, and said:

"Boatman take his man and cast his

Wild animal skins away. Bath him, annoint him, braid his hair most fine

Cloth him in kingly robe, Return him to his Uruk town.

To Uruk town he be bound in honor with kingly replensident.

So thus was done

The boatman did take King Gilgamesh wild animal skins and away them threw.

The boatman did take King Gilgamesh bathing and annointing true.

The boatman did take King Gilgamesh and braided his hair most fine.

The boatman did take King Gilgamesh and cloth him kingly robes to make him kingly replensident.

The boatman did take King Gilgamesh and on the ferry boat did make him stand.

Utnapishtim's wife spoke up now

Oh husband, this man has endured great hardship to come here, give him something for his return

So Utnapishtim said to Gilgamesh:

"I shall tell you this secret of gods for you to take on your return.

There is a thorny bush which underwater does grow.

This plant is named Reborn Man and here is what you should do.

Dive down to that plant and seize it the Reborn Man in your hand.

And know I tell you so you know Reborn man is under you boat deep in the deadly sea.

So Gilgamesh tied two massive stones, one two each of his feet.

Into deadly waters did he leap  
Down, down this in his hand he seized Reborn Man taking the pain of  
thorns in one hand

While with other he did cut free of the stones and thus descend back to  
Utnapishtim's shore.  
Column VII

With a cry of joy did Gilgamesh speak to boatman Urshanabi.  
"With Reborn Man new life can be made  
With Reborn Man our Elder there can share new life with everyone  
With Reborn Man I can return to youth wherein I be most strong"

### Column VIII

So away did they sail.  
When 20 long walks did they pass  
They did eat.  
When another 20 long walks did they pass  
They did a short time rest.  
When another 20 long walks did they pass  
They did make camp.  
It was then that with plant in hand Gilgamesh did go to bathe.  
But to wash himself he must Reborn Man put down, and then  
A nearby serpent smelled its myrrh, and straight  
To it did it go.  
The serpent stole and ate it, and thusly  
Does the snake Reborn of skin once every full moon.

Gilgamesh realized his loss.  
He weep and said:  
"What is the use of this long journey,  
For now I am as at the start."  
But seeing nothing could be done  
Gilgamesh the king, two parts divine one part man, went on.

### Column IX

Within 60 days the boatman and the King saw holy Uruk in their sight..  
Boatman mark these walls, so high and thick.  
Boatman mark those fields so lush and fertile.  
Boatman mark these people so vital and rich.  
Boatman mark that this town is Uruk. It is mine.