
'I brought out a raven, I let it loose:
off went the raven, it saw the waters receding,
finding food, bowing and bobbing, it did not come back to me.

'I brought out an offering, to the four winds made sacrifice,
incense I placed on the peak of the mountain.
Seven flasks and seven I set in position,
reed, cedar and myrtle I piled beneath them.

'The gods did smell the savour,
the gods did smell the savour sweet,
the gods gathered like flies around the man making sacrifice.

'Then at once Belet-ili arrived,
she lifted the flies of lapis lazuli that Anu had made for their
courtship:
"O gods, let these great beads in this necklace of mine
make me remember these days, and never forget them!'

"All the gods shall come to the incense,
but to the incense let Enlil not come,
because he lacked counsel and brought on the Deluge,
and delivered my people into destruction.'

'Then at once Enlil arrived,
he saw the boat, he was seized with anger,
filled with rage at the divine Igigi:
"[From] where escaped this living being?
No man was meant to survive the destruction!'

'Ninurta opened his mouth to speak,
saying to the hero Enlil:
"Who, if not Ea, could cause such a thing?
Ea alone knows how all things are done.'

'Ea opened his mouth to speak,
saying to the hero Enlil:
"You, the sage of the gods, the hero,
how could you lack counsel and bring on the Deluge?

"On him who transgresses, inflict his crime!
On him who does wrong, inflict his wrongdoing!
'Slack off, lest it snap! Pull tight, lest it [slacken!]'

"Instead of your causing the Deluge,
a lion could have risen, and diminished the people!
Instead of your causing the Deluge,
a wolf could have risen, and diminished the people!

"Instead of your causing the Deluge,
a famine could have happened, and slaughtered the land!
Instead of your causing the Deluge,
the Plague God could have risen, and slaughtered the land!

"It was not I disclosed the great gods' secret:
Atra-hasis I let see a vision, and thus he learned our secret.
And now, decide what to do with him!"

'Enlil came up inside the boat,
he took hold of my hand and brought me on board.
He brought aboard my wife and made her kneel at my side,
he touched our foreheads, standing between us to bless us:

"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.

'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 frog already breathed over him.

Said Uta-napishti to her, to his wife:
‘See the fellow who so desired life!
Sleep like a frog already breathes over him.’

Said his wife to him, to Uta-napishti the Distant:
‘Touch the man and make him awake!
The way he came he shall go back in well-being,
by the gate he came forth he shall return to his land!’

Said Uta-napishti to her, to his wife:
‘Man is deceitful, he will deceive you.
Go, bake for him his daily bread-loaf, and line them up by his head,
and mark on the wall the days that he sleeps!’

So she baked for him his daily bread-loaf, she lined them up by his head,
noting on the wall the days that he slept.

His first bread-loaf was all dried up,
the second was leathery, soggy the third,
the fourth flour-cake had turned to white,
the fifth had cast a mould of grey,
fresh-baked was the sixth,
the seventh still on the coals:
then he touched him and the man awoke.

Said Gilgamesh to him, to Uta-napishti the Distant:
‘No sooner had sleep spilled itself over me,
than forthwith you touched me and made me awake!’
[Said] Uta-napishti [to him,] to Gilgamesh:

‘Come, Gilgamesh, count me your bread-loaves,
then you will learn [the days that you slept.]
Your [first] bread-loaf [was all dried up,]
the second was leathery, soggy the third,
the fourth flour-cake had turned to white,
the fifth had cast a mould of grey,
fresh-baked was the sixth,
the seventh still on the coals:
and only then did I touch you.’

Said Gilgamesh to him, to Uta-napishti the Distant:
‘O Uta-napishti, what should I do and where should I go?
A thief has taken hold of my flesh!
For there in my bed-chamber Death does abide,
and wherever [I] turn, there too will be Death.’

[Said] Uta-napishti to [him,] to the boatman Ur-shanabi:
‘[May] the quay [reject] you, Ur-shanabi, and the ferry scorn you!
You who used to walk this shore, be banished from it now!
As for the man that you led here,
‘his body is tousled with matted hair,
the pelts have ruined his body’s beauty.
Take him, Ur-shanabi, lead him to the washtub,
have him wash his matted locks as clean as can be!

‘Let him cast off his pelts, and the sea bear them off,
let his body be soaked till fair!
Let a new kerchief be made for his head,
let him wear royal robes, the dress fitting his dignity!

‘Until he goes home to his city,
until he reaches the end of his road,
let the robes show no mark, but stay fresh and new!’
Ur-shanabi took him, and led him to the washtub.

He washed his matted locks as clean as could be,
he cast off his pelts, and the sea bore them off.
His body was soaked till fair,
he made a new [kerchief for] his head,
he wore royal robes, the dress fitting his dignity.
‘Until he goes [home to his city,]
until he reaches the end of his road,
let [the robes show no mark, but stay fresh and] new!’ XI 270

Gilgamesh and Ur-shanabi crewed the boat,
they launched the [craft,] and crewed it themselves.
Said his wife to him, to Uta-napishti the Distant:
‘Gilgamesh came here by toil and by travail,
‘what have you given for his homeward journey?’
And Gilgamesh, he picked up a punting-pole,
he brought the boat back near to the shore.
[Said] Uta-napishti to him, to Gilgamesh:
‘You came here, O Gilgamesh, by toil and by travail,
what do I give for your homeward journey?
Let me disclose, O Gilgamesh, a matter most secret,
to you [I will] tell a mystery of [gods.] XI 280
‘There is a plant that [looks] like a box-thorn,
it has prickles like a dogrose, and will [prick one who plucks it.]
But if you can possess this plant,
[you’ll be again as you were in your youth.]’ XI 285

Just as soon as Gilgamesh heard what he said,
he opened a [channel] . . . .
Heavy stones he tied [to his feet,]
and they pulled him down . . . to the Ocean Below. XI 290

He took the plant, and pulled [it up, and lifted it,]
the heavy stones he cut loose [from his feet,]
and the sea cast him up on its shore.
Said Gilgamesh to him, to Ur-shanabi the boatman:
‘This plant, Ur-shanabi, is the “Plant of Heartbeat”,
with it a man can regain his vigour.
To Uruk-the-Sheepfold I will take it,
to an ancient I will feed some and put the plant to the rest! XI 295

‘Its name shall be “Old Man Grown Young”,
I will eat it myself, and be again as I was in my youth!’ XI 300
At twenty leagues they broke bread,
at thirty leagues they stopped for the night.

Gilgamesh found a pool whose water was cool,
down he went into it, to bathe in the water.
Of the plant’s fragrance a snake caught scent,
came up [in silence], and bore the plant off.

As it turned away it sloughed its skin.
Then Gilgamesh sat down and wept,
down his cheeks the tears were coursing.
. . . [he spoke] to Ur-shanabi the boatman:
‘[For whom,] Ur-shanabi, toiled my arms so hard,
for whom ran dry the blood of my heart?
Not for myself did I find a bounty,
[for] the “Lion of the Earth” I have done a favour!

‘Now far and wide the tide is rising.
Having opened the channel I abandoned the tools:
what thing would I find that served as my landmark?
Had I only turned back, and left the boat on the shore?’ XI 315

At twenty leagues they broke bread,
at thirty leagues they stopped for the night.
When they arrived in Uruk-the-Sheepfold,
said Gilgamesh to him, to Ur-shanabi the boatman:

‘O Ur-shanabi, climb Uruk’s wall and walk back and forth!
Survey its foundations, examine the brickwork!
Were its bricks not fired in an oven?
Did the Seven Sages not lay its foundations?

‘A square mile is city, a square mile date-grove, a square mile is
clay-pit, half a square mile the temple of Ishtar:
three square miles and a half is Uruk’s expanse.’
The heart was stricken, his mind despairs.
The king searched for life,  
the lord to the Living One's Mountain did turn [his] mind.

A third recension, known from tablets from Ur, continues the dialogue:

'Did you see the one who cheated a god and swore an oath?'
'I saw him.' 'How does he fare?'

'He cannot get near the places in the Netherworld where the
libations of water are made, he drinks in thirst.'
'Did you see the citizen of Girsu at the place of sighs of his
father and mother? 'I saw him.' 'How does he
fare?'

'Facing each man there are a thousand Amorites, his shade
cannot push them off with his hands, he cannot charge
them down with his chest.
At the places in the Netherworld where the libations of
water are made, the Amorite takes precedence.'

'Did you see the sons of Sumer and Akkad? 'I saw them.'
'How do they fare?'
'They drink water from the place of a massacre, dirty
water.'
'Did you see where my father and mother dwell? 'I saw
them.' '[How do they fare?]'

'[The two] of them drink water from the place of a
massacre, [dirty water.]'

He sent them back to [Uruk.]
he sent them back to his city.
Gear and equipment, hatchet and spear he put [away] in the
store,
he made merry in his palace.
The young men and women of Uruk, the worthies and
matrons of Kullab,
looked upon those statues and their hearts rejoiced.
He lifted his head to the Sun God coming forth from his
chamber,
he issued instructions:

'O my father and my mother, I will have you drink clear
water!'
The day was not half gone, . . .
Bilgames performed the mourning rites.
For nine days he performed the mourning rites,
the young men and women of Uruk, the worthies and
matrons of Kullab wept.
And it was just as he had said,
the citizens of Girsu matched his actions:
'O my father and my mother, I will have you drink clear
water!'
O warrior Bilgames, son of the goddess Ninsun, sweet is
your praise!

Tablet XII of the Babylonian epic preserves a slightly different version of ll. 172–
301 in an Akkadian translation:

'Today, had I only left my ball in the carpenter's workshop!
[O carpenter's wife who is like a mother] to me! Had I only [left it!]
O [carpenter's daughter who is like a] little sister [to me!] Had [I
only left it!]
Today [my] ball fell down to the Netherworld,
my mallet fell [down] to the Netherworld!'

Enkidu [answered] Gilgamesh:
'O master, why did you weep [sick] at heart?
Today I myself shall [bring you] the ball up from the Netherworld,
I myself shall [bring you] the mallet up from the Netherworld!'

Gilgamesh [answered] Enkidu:
'If [you are going down] to the Netherworld,
[you must pay heed to] my instructions!
[You must not dress in] a clean garment,
[you] will be revealed as a stranger!
You must not anoint yourself in sweet oil from the flask,
at the scent of it they will gather around you!
You must not hurl a throwstick in the Netherworld,
those struck by the throwstick will surround you!
You must not carry a staff in your hand,
the shades will tremble before you!'
You must not wear sandals on your feet,
you must not make a noise in the Netherworld!
You must not kiss the wife you loved,
you must not strike the wife you hated,
you must not kiss the son you loved,
you must not strike the son you hated,
the outcry of the Netherworld will seize you!
The one who lies, the one who lies, the Mother of Ninazu who lies,
her gleaming shoulders are not draped in a garment,
hers breasts are bare like flasks of stone.'

[As Enkidu] went down [to the Netherworld,]
he paid no heed [to the instructions of Gilgamesh:]
he dressed himself in [a clean garment,]
[he] was revealed [to be a stranger,
He anointed himself in sweet oil from the flask,
at the scent [of it] they gathered around him.
He hurled a throwstick in the [Netherworld,]
[the shades] did tremble,
those [struck] by the throwstick surrounded him.
He carried a staff in [his] hand,
[the shades did] tremble.
[He wore] sandals on [his feet,]
[he made] a noise [in the Netherworld,]
[He kissed] the wife [he loved,]
[he struck the] wife he hated,
he [kissed the] son he loved,
he [struck the] son he hated,
the outcry of the Netherworld seized him.
The one who lies, [the one who] lies, the Mother of Ninazu who lies,
[her] gleaming shoulders were not draped in a garment,
hers breasts were bare like flasks of stone.

He had not fallen where men do battle, the Netherworld had seized him!
Then the goddess Ninsun's son [went] weeping for his servant,
Enkidu,
he went off alone to Ekur, the house of Enlil:
'O Father [Enlil], today my ball fell into the Netherworld,
my mallet fell into the Netherworld!
Enkidu, who [went down] to bring [them up, the Netherworld seized him!]
Namtar did not seize him, Asakku did not seize him, the Netherworld seized him!
Nergal's pitiless sheriff did not seize him, the Netherworld seized him!
He did not fall where men do [battle], the Netherworld seized him!
Father Enlil answered him not a word.

He went off [alone to Ur, the house of Sin:]
'O Father Sin, today my ball fell into the Netherworld,
my mallet fell [into the Netherworld!]
Enkidu, who [went] down to bring [them up, the Netherworld seized him!
Namtar did not seize him, Asakku did not seize him, the Netherworld seized him!
Nergal's pitiless sheriff [did not seize] him, the Netherworld seized him!
He did not fall where [men do battle], the Netherworld seized him!
Father [Sin answered him not a word.]

[He went off alone] to [Eridu, the house of Enki:] 
'O [Father Enki, today my ball fell into the Netherworld,]
my mallet [fell into the Netherworld,]
Enkidu, [who went down to bring them up, the Netherworld seized him!]
Namtar did not [seize him, Asakku did not seize him, the Netherworld seized him!]
Nergal's pitiless sheriff [did not seize him, the Netherworld seized him!]
The Death of Gilgamesh:

The great wild bull is lying down

Thanks to the recent discovery at Mé-Turan (Tell Haddad) of several new manuscripts this poem is now much better known than formerly, but it is still very difficult in places. The remarks about the provisional nature of the translation prefaced to 'Bilgames and the Bull of Heaven' apply here too.

The poem begins with a lament for the stricken Bilgames. He has