

**Sin-leqqi-unninni, *The Epic of Gilgamesh A*
Wesley Advocates 5 February 2017**

Introduction

Although the formal introduction to our text may not answer all of these questions, we ought at least think about them.

Please study the map on page vi and all of the illustrations, including the cylinder seals. What key characters can we identify in these illustrations? Where is Gilgamesh? Enkidu? Humbaba? The Bull of Heaven? Ishtar?

From these artifacts, what do we learn about Sumerian architecture, warfare and weaponry, clothing styles and materials, festivals, livestock, music, commerce, travel, writing?

When did Sumer shift from Paleolithic to Neolithic? From Neolithic to “civilized”? When did the Sumerians begin writing?

What elements or characteristics signify for us “civilization”? How did the Neolithic Revolution (around 8000 BCE) prepare the Near East for civilization? How do we see those characteristics borne out in Sumer? How do we know that Sumerian civilization developed several centuries before that of Egypt?

Identify key city-states in ancient Sumer, then in Akkad, Assyria, Babylonia.

What typifies Sumerian religion as we observe it in *Gilgamesh*?

What is a ziggurat? What building materials did Sumerians rely on? Why? How did the ziggurat function?

What is cuneiform? How did pictographs develop into Sumerian, then Akkadian cuneiform? Into a cuneiform syllabary?

Who was George Smith? Why is he important to our story?

Early in the 20th century, Sir Leonard Woolley discovered the great city at Ur (only a few miles from Gilgamesh’s Uruk) and thousands of artifacts within Queen Pu’abi’s burial chambers and several other cemeteries. What do these artifacts tell us about life in Ur, Uruk and other Sumerian cities?

What are Sumer's great contributions to art, architecture, literature? To mathematics and science?

What is the Great Flood story? Where did it originate? Why do we even care about the many varieties of the Flood story?

How did the Sumerians record on clay? How many tablets constitute the Gilgamesh story? How many columns per tablet? Written how? Why does that matter?

I. i. (Tablet 1. Column 1)

What does Figure 19 (page lxii), illustrate?

Usually we regard column 1 as the proem. How does this proem introduce key ideas for the entire poem? What specifically do we learn about Gilgamesh himself from this proem? About his birth and youth? About his daring? About his accomplishments? About the significance of the Gilgamesh epic?

I. ii

How does the poet characterize Gilgamesh's behavior as a young king? How does he alienate his people?

Who are Anu and Aruru? What solution do they devise to improve Gilgamesh's behavior?

Who creates Enkidu? From what? Where? How does Enkidu behave initially?

Why is the hunter troubled when Enkidu and the herds frequent his watery hole for three days? What does he expect Enkidu to do once he signals

What does Figure 20 illustrate?

I. iii

What does the hunter report to his father? How does this incident parallel the citizens' complaints to Anu and Aruru?

What does the father advise the hunter to do? To consult? To employ?

What specifically does Gilgamesh advise the hunter to do? Where? After how many days?

I.iv

Describe the role of Shamhat, the temple priestess, in civilizing Enkidu? How precisely does Shamhat ensure Enkidu will leave the herds? How does Shamhat's action parallel that of Aruru in creating Enkidu?

What does Figure 21 illustrate?

What literary devices (hyperbole, understatement, simile, metaphor) do you observe in lines 160-204?

For how long does Shamhat lie with Enkidu? Why so long?

Why is Enkidu now "like a god"? And why is he now fit to leave the forest and journey (note journey motif introduced here for first time) to Uruk?

Why does Enkidu now, for the first time, wish for a friend?

I.v

What powers does Enkidu boast of as he approaches Uruk?

In lines 211-218 Shamhat lists some of the benefits of urban civilization. What are they?

Why is Gilgamesh "the other self" to Enkidu? Beginning about line 225, how does the poet describe Gilgamesh's behavior?

What dream does Gilgamesh describe to his mother, Ninsun? (Note: the dream recital continues in the next column.) How does the dream presage Enkidu's arrival and subsequent friendship?

I.vi

What epithet does the poet use for Ninsun?

When Gilgamesh fears the dream, compares the "friend" to a weapon, how does Ninsun reassure him? What does she promise?

What would the Sumerians associate with shepherding?

What does Figure 22 illustrate?