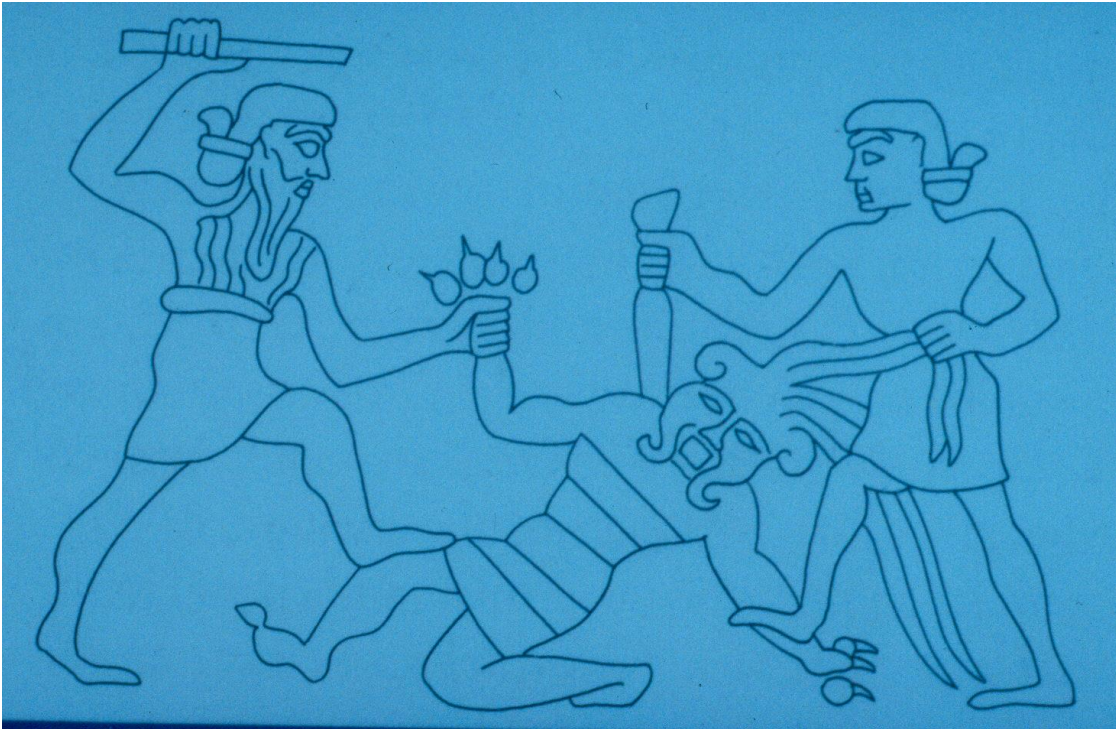


## **The Epic of Gilgamesh**

### **“The Great Man Who Did Not Want To Die”**

**by**

**Hélène Sader**



*“In rage and fury Enkidu severed his head at the neck”*

*Gilgamesh and Enkidu slaying the monster Humbaba*

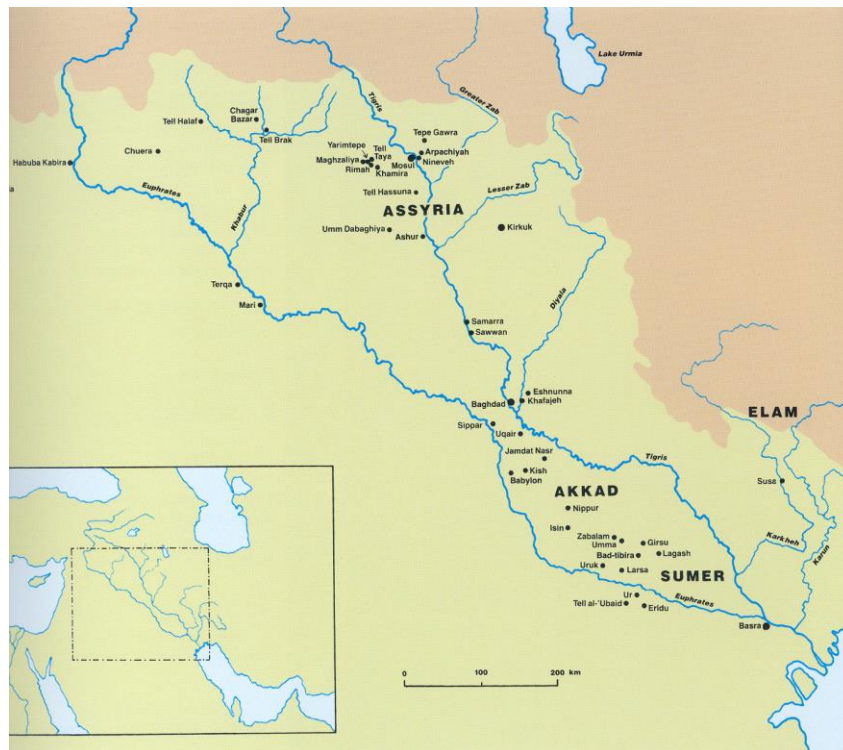
## General Introduction

- The C.S. approach is concerned with MAN.
- C.S. courses are based on reading primary texts.
- Three levels of text analysis: personal, communal or social, universal.

## The Epic of Gilgamesh

### **I- Introduction**

- An epic is a poem involving heroes and gods
- An epic entertains and carries a message.
- The Epic of Gilgamesh is “*the most significant literary creation of the whole of Ancient Mesopotamia*”.



*Map of Mesopotamia*

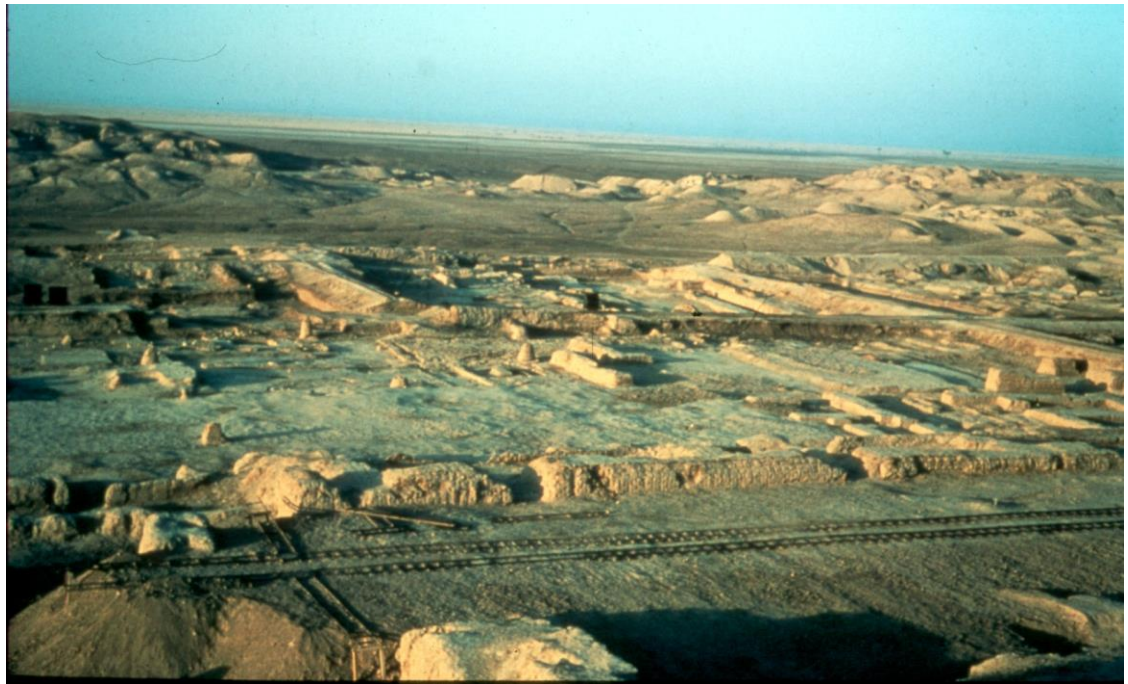
### **II- The Homeland of Gilgamesh**

- Mesopotamia: Greek name meaning (the land) “between the two rivers”, Tigris and Euphrates.
- The Sumerians are the earliest inhabitants of southern Mesopotamia. They are credited with the discovery of the earliest writing system: the cuneiform script. They spoke a language, Sumerian, that cannot be compared to any known language.



*Clay tablets with cuneiform writing*

- Gilgamesh was a Sumerian king of Uruk who lived around 2700BC.
- The Akkadians are a Semitic people who spoke a language close to Arabic. They lived together with the Sumerians in southern Mesopotamia. Their language totally replaced Sumerian as a spoken language around 2000BC.



*The ruins of the city of Uruk*



### III- The Origin and Development of the Epic of Gilgamesh

- After Gilgamesh's death, oral transmission of his great deeds.
- Short, unconnected episodes or tales about Gilgamesh were written in Sumerian language.
- First integrated and coherent version of the Epic written in Akkadian towards the middle of the second millennium BC.
- Several copies or versions of this integrated epic were found in various cities of the Ancient Near East. In C.S. we are reading the better preserved and most complete version (called the Standard version) which was written on 12 clay tablets. These were found in the Library of the Assyrian King Assurbanipal in Nineveh.

### IV- The Story

- The hero Gilgamesh is the son of Lugalbanda, a human, and Ninsun, a goddess.
- He is restless and harrasses young men and girls of Uruk.
- The gods create Enkidu who becomes Gilgamesh's best friend.
- The two friends accomplish great things together.
- The gods decide Enkidu's death as a punishment for the killing of the Bull of Heaven.



*Gilgamesh and Enkidu slaying the Bull of Heavens*

- After his friend's death, Gilgamesh refuses to experience the same fate and starts a long quest for immortality.
- Visit to Utnapishtim, the only human who was granted immortality by the gods after the Flood.
- Gilgamesh fails in gaining immortality. He accepts his fate and returns to Uruk.

#### **V- The view of Man**

- For the Mesopotamians, to be a man is to be civilized, i-e to live with other men in an urban environment: Enkidu's humanization process.
- For the Mesopotamians, to be a man is first and foremost to be finite, mortal.

#### **VI- Gilgamesh's Attitude Towards Death.**

- Gilgamesh seeks immortality through fame.
- Gilgamesh rebels against death.
- Gilgamesh accepts death as his human condition.
- Gilgamesh becomes aware of the fact that the only immortality man can seek is in achievement.
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**The walls of Uruk**

## **VII- The Meaning of Life.**

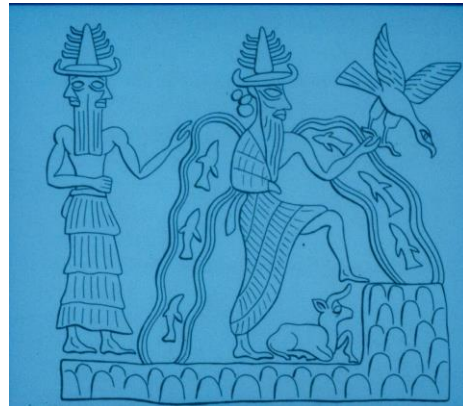
- The Mesopotamian philosophy of life as expressed by Sidurri, the tavern keeper, is hedonistic.
- Hedonism is to seek pleasure and avoid pain.
- In spite of the dreadful perspective of death, simple pleasures provided by love, family, friendship and civilized life make life worth living.

## **VIII- The Mesopotamian Gods and View of the Afterlife.**

- Sumerians and Akkadians were polytheistic, i-e they believed in a large number of divine beings.
- Mesopotamian gods are conceived as cosmic powers or natural phenomena, anthropomorphic and immortal.
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*The goddess Ishtar, goddess of fertility*



*Enki/Ea, god of the sweet waters*



*The god Shamash, the Sun god and god of justice seated on his throne*

- Man relationship with the gods is a master-slave relationship as attested in the story of the Flood.
- The Mesopotamians believed in life after death.
- The Underworld is a gloomy place where all the dead go and where all earthly pleasures are denied.

### **Conclusion**

The Mesopotamian view of man is pessimistic.