CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-88094-7 - The Cambridge Companion to the Epic
Edited by Catherine Bates
Excerpt
More information

I

A. R. GEORGE

The Epic of Gilgamesh

Introduction

The name 'Epic of Gilgamesh' is given to the Babylonian poem that tells the deeds of Gilgamesh, the greatest king and mightiest hero of ancient Mesopotamian legend. The poem falls into the category 'epic' because it is a long narrative poem of heroic content and has the seriousness and pathos that have sometimes been identified as markers of epic. Some early Assyriologists, when nationalism was a potent political force, characterized it as the 'national epic' of Babylonia, but this notion has deservedly lapsed. The poem's subject is not the establishment of a Babylonian nation nor an episode in that nation's history, but the vain quest of a man to escape his mortality. In its final and best-preserved version it is a sombre meditation on the human condition. The glorious exploits it tells are motivated by individual human predicaments, especially desire for fame and horror of death. The emotional struggles related in the story of Gilgamesh are those of no collective group but of the individual. Among its timeless themes are the friction between nature and civilization, friendship between men, the place in the universe of gods, kings and mortals, and the misuse of power. The poem speaks to the anxieties and life-experience of a human being, and that is why modern readers find it both profound and enduringly relevant.

Discovery and recovery

The literatures of ancient Mesopotamia, chiefly in Sumerian and Babylonian (Akkadian), were lost when cuneiform writing died out in the first century AD. Their recovery is one of the supreme accomplishments in the humanities; the process began in the middle of the nineteenth century and continues today. In 1850 the gentleman adventurer Austen Henry Layard tunnelled through the remains of an Assyrian palace at Nineveh, near Mosul in modern Iraq, extracting the limestone bas-reliefs that lined

© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-88094-7 - The Cambridge Companion to the Epic
Edited by Catherine Bates
Excerpt
More information

its rooms. He stumbled across a chamber knee-deep in broken clay tablets bearing cuneiform writing. This was part of the archive of the Neo-Assyrian kings, who ruled most of the Near East in the seventh century BC. Layard was unable to read the tablets, but shipped them back to the British Museum with the bas-reliefs.

Sixteen years later a young man called George Smith began to read the tablets. By 1872 he had sorted many into categories. Already discrete literary compositions were emerging, among them what he called the Poem of Izdubar. This was the Epic of Gilgamesh; the hero's name was not correctly read until 1899. Smith's translation gained wide readership because the poem included a story of the flood very similar to that of Noah in Genesis.[1]

Smith died soon afterwards, but his translation led German scholars to study the Assyrian tablets. Within fifteen years Paul Haupt published the cuneiform text of Gilgamesh, which he called the Babylonian 'Epic of Nimrod'.[2] The title was a reference to the great hunter of the Bible, who many supposed was based on the Babylonian hero. Alongside the Assyrian tablets this book included a single Babylonian tablet. This was the first of many Babylonian manuscripts of Gilgamesh to be identified among the huge number of tablets that the British Museum acquired by purchase and excavation in Babylonia, south of Baghdad, in the 1870s–90s.

Haupt's cuneiform text did nothing to make his discoveries known to the larger public, but in 1900 Peter Jensen's anthology of Akkadian narrative poetry transliterated the text into Roman characters and translated it into German.[3] Another early translation, by Arthur Ungnad, publicized the existence of the poem more widely and finally brought it recognition as a masterpiece of world literature.[4]

Meanwhile, more pieces of the poem had been identified in the British Museum, both Assyrian tablets from seventh-century Nineveh and slightly later pieces from Babylonia. Much older tablets soon began to appear on the antiquities' market but the British Museum had ceased collecting so voraciously and the bulk of tablets offered for purchase went elsewhere. These included three Gilgamesh tablets of Old Babylonian date (eighteenth century BC) from Babylonia, which ended up in Berlin, Yale and Philadelphia. At the same time archaeological exploration increased dramatically. German expeditions found a Gilgamesh tablet of the late second millennium at Hattusa (Boğazköy), the Hittite capital in central Anatolia, and a Neo-Assyrian tablet at Asshur, on the Tigris downstream of Nineveh. Both the market and excavations also began to yield tablets that contained poems about Gilgamesh in the Sumerian language. Thus the decade before the First World War saw a growing diversity in the provenance and period of tablets of Gilgamesh, and their diaspora to Europe and America.

© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-88094-7 - The Cambridge Companion to the Epic
Edited by Catherine Bates
Excerpt
More information

The sources for the Babylonian poem were next collected by R. Campbell Thompson, who published a verse translation in English in 1929, and cuneiform and transliterated texts a year later.[5] The second book fell short of the highest contemporaneous standards in Assyriology but, despite its poor reception, endured for more than seventy years as the only critical edition of the Babylonian Gilgamesh. By the 1960s the lack of a modern and authoritative treatment was everywhere deplored. By the end of that decade thirty-four pieces were known in addition to those edited by Thompson, twenty of them in cuneiform only. By the turn of the millennium any scholar wishing to read the poem from original sources had to consult a dossier of over thirty different publications.

The absence of an up-to-date critical edition of the Epic of Gilgamesh in the latter part of the twentieth century produced a boom in translations. Some of these translations were faithful renderings by people who could read Babylonian; others were less authoritative. At present, only three translations include the Babylonian poem in its most complete form: my own (1999), and those of Benjamin Foster (2000) and Stefan Maul (2005).[6] Foster's and my books also include the Sumerian poems of Gilgamesh.

In 2003 I brought together all the known sources of the Babylonian poem then accessible. The progress made in the recovery of the text across the preceding seven decades can be measured in the number of sources: where Thompson's edition was based on 112 manuscripts, mine utilizes 218 pieces. Another improvement in knowledge can be seen in the division of the material. Thompson interpolated the four second-millennium sources then extant into his edition of the first-millennium poem. I separate the sources into four periods and treat the versions of each period as distinct stages in the poem's evolution, showing that there is no single Epic of Gilgamesh: parts of different versions survive, spread across eighteen hundred years of history.

The recovery of the Epic of Gilgamesh continues, as does the recovery of Babylonian literature generally. Since 2003 no fewer than ten pieces of the poem have become available.[7] Some have already been published. It is certain that more will accumulate, adding to our knowledge in ways unsuspected as well as suspected, and eventually necessitating another critical edition.

Literary history

The oldest literary materials about the hero-king Gilgamesh are five Sumerian poems. These are known from tablets of the Old Babylonian period, especially the eighteenth century BC, but they probably go back to a period of intense creativity under the patronage of King Shulgi of Ur (2094–2047 BC).

© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-88094-7 - The Cambridge Companion to the Epic
Edited by Catherine Bates
Excerpt
More information

The Sumerian poems report some of the same legends and themes as parts of the Babylonian poem, but they are independent compositions and do not form a literary whole. The Sumerian and Babylonian poems shared more than just a common literary inheritance, whether that was oral (as seems likely) or written. They are products of a bilingual literary culture that displayed a high degree of intertextuality even between compositions in different languages; neither, however, is a translation of the other.

The oldest Babylonian fragments of the epic are contemporaneous with the Sumerian tablets. Would-be scribes demonstrated their competence by copying out texts from the scribal curriculum. The Old Babylonian curriculum consisted almost entirely of Sumerian compositions, and we possess multiple copies of most of them. Literary compositions in Babylonian were not then copied in the same numbers, so many fewer fragments are extant. Eleven pieces of Gilgamesh survive from this period, all from Babylonia itself. Some of them are fine copies of large sections of the poem; prominent among these are a pair of tablets now in Philadelphia and Yale (OB Tablets II–III), and a tablet from northern Babylonia (OB VA + BM). Other pieces are short excerpts, some poorly executed, and were the work of juniors, either as set exercises or as extemporized writing.

Altogether these eleven Old Babylonian manuscripts provide several disconnected episodes in a little over six hundred lines of poetry. Some of these lines are from passages that describe the same episode slightly differently, so it transpires that the eleven manuscripts are not witnesses to a single edition of the poem, but to at least two and probably more. There is not enough shared text to determine how extensive the differences are, but it is already clear that we can fairly speak both of distinct recensions (where the differences are minor) and of distinct versions (where the differences are major).

The version represented by the tablets in Philadelphia and Yale (OB Tablets II–III) went by the name of its opening phrase, 'Surpassing all kings'. We do not yet know whether the titles of other Old Babylonian versions differed. The complexity of the written tradition in the eighteenth century suggests that by then the poem was a composition of some antiquity; in the absence of older written sources it seems justified to postulate an oral prehistory extending over several generations of singers. There is therefore no sign of any one author who might have been responsible for the poem's original creation.

The recensional situation is even more complex in the later second millennium (1600–1000 BC). From this intermediate or Middle Babylonian period twenty-three fragments survive. The oldest fragment is probably sixteenth-century, and probably from south-east Babylonia, which makes it very rare (MB Priv_1). It is also remarkable because the names of the

© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-88094-7 - The Cambridge Companion to the Epic
Edited by Catherine Bates
Excerpt
More information

poem's heroes, Gilgamesh and Enkidu, are replaced by the gods Sîn and Ea. The fragment provides the text of an episode already well known from an Old Babylonian tablet and the first-millennium text, but with very significant differences.

Other tablets of the intermediate period are Middle Babylonian pieces from Ur and a group from Nippur, probably from the thirteenth and twelfth centuries. The former tablet (MB Ur) is closely related to the Standard Babylonian epic of the first millennium. The latter group (MB Nippur) reveals the poem's use as a pedagogical tool in the training of scribes; by this time a Babylonian curriculum had replaced the Sumerian one. Roughly contemporaneous with these Babylonian tablets are manuscripts from Syria, Palestine and Anatolia. Cuneiform writing and the languages of southern Mesopotamia were exported to the west from the third millennium BC. Discoveries of tablets from the fourteenth to twelfth centuries reveal that cuneiform writing was taught from Egypt to Anatolia using a modified version of the Babylonian scribal curriculum. The Epic of Gilgamesh was part of this modified curriculum, and parts of it have turned up at Megiddo in Palestine, Ugarit and Emar in Syria and Hattusa in Anatolia. One of the oldest pieces of this material (MB Boğazköy from Hattusa) is remarkably close to the text of the Old Babylonian tablet now in Yale (OB Tablet III). Among the youngest are two (MB Emar) that are much more like the Standard Babylonian text of the first millennium. Several pieces are notable for corruption so severe that in places the text is no longer meaningful. At this time prose paraphrases of the epic were made in languages of the north Mesopotamian periphery, including Hurrian and Hittite.

Most sources for the poem come from the first millennium BC: to date about 190. This material can be divided by period into three groups: (a) early Neo-Assyrian manuscripts, (b) Neo-Assyrian manuscripts from Nineveh, and (c) Neo- and Late Babylonian manuscripts from Babylon, Uruk and other cities of Babylonia (sixth to second centuries BC).

To start with group (a): recent study in Berlin of tablets excavated at Asshur one hundred years ago has revealed two fragments of early Neo-Assyrian date, probably ninth century, that belong to a version of the poem clearly older than that known to the overwhelming majority of first-millennium manuscripts. This version was probably a Middle Babylonian text imported to Assyria in the intermediate period, perhaps in the reign of Tukulti-Ninurta I (1243–1207 BC), who is known to have carried off Babylonian scribal learning after sacking Babylon. Other tablets from Asshur and Kalaḫ (also known as Nimrud, a city south of Nineveh) show that other remnants of old editions of the poem survived into the seventh century.

© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-88094-7 - The Cambridge Companion to the Epic
Edited by Catherine Bates
Excerpt
More information

By far the majority of tablets and fragments of the Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh belong to groups (b) and (c), and are witness to a single version of the poem called after its opening phrase, 'He who saw the Deep'. This composition was divided into twelve tablets, also called the 'Series of Gilgamesh'. It was associated in Babylonian tradition with the name Sîn-leqi-unninni, a scholar-exorcist who was claimed as an ancestor by scribes of Uruk. Their view that he was the advisor of a historical King Gilgamesh immediately after the flood is anachronistic. His name is typical of the late Old Babylonian and Middle Babylonian periods. This was a time when scholars compiled standardized versions of many traditional compositions, bringing order to the multiple versions then extant. It is assumed that Sîn-leqi-unninni was responsible for producing the standardized text 'He who saw the Deep'. He probably lived towards the end of the second millennium BC.

Pioneers called the Akkadian language 'Assyrian', in reference to the Greeks' name for the land where the cuneiform tablets of Nineveh were discovered. Thompson employed this adjective in his edition, and the first-millennium poem is often still called the 'Assyrian' or 'Neo-Assyrian' version. Only the script of the Nineveh tablets is Assyrian; the language of 'He who saw the Deep' is a literary dialect of Akkadian now called Standard Babylonian. Accordingly, I use the term Standard Babylonian (SB) Epic of Gilgamesh.

The SB poem was soon adopted as the authoritative text, and after the seventh century no copies of variant versions survive. Nevertheless, the text of 'He who saw the Deep' was not completely fixed. Variants occur in grammatical form, vocabulary and line-order, even in contemporaneous manuscripts. More substantial changes, such as the omission and interpolation of lines, are uncommon but the point of division between Tablets IV and V altered over time. Textual variants do not allow us to distinguish recensions that accord with provenance and date (e.g. Neo-Assyrian v. Late Babylonian, Babylon v. Uruk). On present evidence, the text was remarkably stable.[8]

At present the SB poem is about two-thirds recovered; it must once have extended to about 3,600 lines of poetry. Some episodes are well preserved, others less so, but the narrative sequence is now certain. It is unlikely that future discoveries will much alter the placing of those sections of text that remain disconnected. Because the SB text is comparatively well established, the fragments of the second millennium can be properly situated in the story. But it is not possible to be sure of the full extent of any second-millennium version of the poem. A synopsis of the poem therefore relies almost entirely on the SB version.

© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-88094-7 - The Cambridge Companion to the Epic
Edited by Catherine Bates
Excerpt
More information

Synopsis

Tablet I. The poem begins with a prologue that introduces the hero as a man made wise, but also weary, by his unique experiences. The prologue is a late addition, being followed by the praise poem that introduced the Old Babylonian poem, 'Surpassing all kings'. Thus the SB poem has two prologues, old and new, contrasting a wise but worn-out man with a mighty and glorious king. Next it tells of the hero's semi-divine origins and miraculous size and beauty. Then begins the narrative proper, as Gilgamesh struts about his city, Uruk, tyrannizing his people. The people's complaints reach the gods of heaven, who create Gilgamesh's counterpart, the wild man Enkidu. Enkidu grows up with the animals of the steppe, but an encounter with a hunter starts his transition to the role the gods chose for him. The hunter goes to Gilgamesh in Uruk, who advises him to have a woman seduce Enkidu. The woman, a prostitute, sates Enkidu's newly awakened sexual desire over six days and seven nights. The animals no longer accept him but he has gained self-awareness. This is the first step in Enkidu's humanizing and civilizing by the woman, which continues as she tells him how Gilgamesh has dreamed of his coming.

Tablet II. Enkidu is led to a shepherds' camp, taught to eat bread and drink beer, shaved, clothed and given a club to defend the sheepfold. A passing stranger tells him of Gilgamesh's tyranny in Uruk, and Enkidu's destiny calls him there to confront Gilgamesh. They fight and become friends, as the gods planned. Enkidu is next found in misery, perhaps because of a realization that he has no family (damage to the text prevents certainty). Gilgamesh proposes an expedition to the Cedar Forest and is not put off by Enkidu's first-hand knowledge of its terrible guardian, the ogre Humbaba. They equip themselves with mighty weapons and Gilgamesh seeks the blessings of the young men and the elders of Uruk. The latter try to dissuade him but he laughs off their advice.

Tablet III. The elders give their blessing and entrust their king's safety to Enkidu. The heroes go to see Gilgamesh's mother, the goddess Ninsun. From her roof she addresses a long monologue to the rising sun, the god Shamash, asking his protection for Gilgamesh and calling for the winds to come to his aid in battle. She reveals to Shamash Gilgamesh's final destiny as divine king of the shades in the netherworld, then summons Enkidu and adopts him as Gilgamesh's brother. Further rituals are lost in damaged passages, and the tablet ends with the heroes' departure from Uruk, as the people commend their king into Enkidu's safekeeping.

Tablet IV. Gilgamesh and Enkidu travel for three days, camp for the night and conduct a ritual to bring a dream. Gilgamesh wakes in terror and tells

© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-88094-7 - The Cambridge Companion to the Epic
Edited by Catherine Bates
Excerpt
More information

his nightmare to Enkidu, who explains it as a favourable portent. This happens five times, related in passages that in the SB poem are repeated word for word, save for the dreams and their explanations. As they near their goal Gilgamesh and Enkidu hear Humbaba bellowing from afar. Shamash urges them to attack before the ogre can cloak himself with his mysterious auras of power. The Ugarit fragments reveal that Gilgamesh or Enkidu (or both) are temporarily incapacitated, probably by contact with one of Humbaba's auras. They recover and the tablet ends with a dialogue in which Gilgamesh exhorts Enkidu to 'forget death' and go fearless into battle.

Tablet V. The heroes arrive at the forest and marvel at the cedar, the mountainous terrain and the ominous tracks left by Humbaba. A damaged section follows, in which they enter the forest and encourage each other with proverbial wisdom. When the text resumes Humbaba is challenging them. Gilgamesh and Humbaba meet in single combat and the winds blind Humbaba so that Gilgamesh can overcome him. Then begins a parley that ends when Enkidu, insulted by Humbaba, cuts off his head. But Humbaba has already laid a curse on him. Gilgamesh and Enkidu then cut timber in the forest, which Enkidu wants to turn into a huge door for the god Enlil. They make a raft of cedar, and return home down the river Euphrates with Humbaba's head.

Tablet VI. Back in Uruk Gilgamesh washes and changes. His renewed beauty captures the heart of the goddess Ishtar, who proposes marriage to him. Gilgamesh refuses, recalling the unhappy ends of her previous lovers. His plain speaking infuriates her. She rushes up to heaven to persuade her father, Anu, to give her the fiery Bull of Heaven with which to take revenge. She leads the bull to Uruk, where it causes mayhem. Enkidu grabs it by the tail and Gilgamesh pierces its neck with his knife. Enkidu insults Ishtar as she establishes rites of mourning over the bull's carcase. Gilgamesh dedicates its horns to his father's memory, the heroes parade in Uruk and hold a feast. That night Enkidu has a dream.

Tablet VII. The dream is not preserved in the SB poem. According to the Hittite paraphrase Enkidu sees Enlil and other gods in assembly; for the wrongs he and Gilgamesh have done the gods, they sentence him to death. The SB text resumes with Enkidu lying delirious on his deathbed, cursing first the door of cedar he had made for Enlil, then the hunter and the prostitute, both indirect agents of his misfortune. Shamash bids him also bless the prostitute, because she brought him the love of Gilgamesh. Enkidu has a terrible dream in which he is dragged captive to the netherworld. The passage in which he describes to Gilgamesh what he saw there is largely missing. He sickens and dies.

© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-88094-7 - The Cambridge Companion to the Epic
Edited by Catherine Bates
Excerpt
More information

Tablet VIII. Gilgamesh utters a great lament for his friend. The funeral lasts several days: a funerary statue is made, the grave goods are displayed in public, and prayers are spoken for Enkidu's well-being in the netherworld. The tablet is poorly preserved; it must have ended with Enkidu's burial.

Tablet IX. Gilgamesh abandons his city and royal duties. In fear of death he takes to wandering the world, searching for his remote ancestor, Uta-napishti, the one man in human history who became immortal, whose secret he covets. The journey brings him to the mountain where the sun sets, guarded by a monstrous couple, half human, half scorpion. Eventually they allow him to pass, and he races the sun along its hidden path under the mountain, emerging just in time in a fabulous garden where trees bear gemstones for fruit.

Tablet X. There, in her tavern by the shore of the world-ocean, lives the wise Shiduri. Terrified by the newcomer's haggard and menacing appearance she bars her gate and quizzes him from her roof. Gilgamesh tells her of his quest and begs her assistance. She tells him that only the sun crosses the ocean but he should seek aid from Uta-napishti's ferryman, Ur-shanabi, who is to be found by the shore with his magic crew of Stone Ones. Without thinking, Gilgamesh rushes down on them, overcomes Ur-shanabi, smashes the Stone Ones and casts them into the water. Ur-shanabi asks who his assailant is and Gilgamesh answers, in a long passage that repeats much of Gilgamesh's dialogue with Shiduri. Ur-shanabi reveals that smashing the Stone Ones has hindered Gilgamesh's quest; he will have to cut three hundred enormous punting poles to cross of the Waters of Death. This done, they set off in Ur-shanabi's boat and reach the Waters of Death. But the punting poles run out too soon, and Gilgamesh is driven to hold Ur-shanabi's garment aloft as a makeshift sail. He is spied by Uta-napishti and lands on his shore. In a third repetition, Uta-napishti asks Gilgamesh his business and the hero again tells of his quest, wishing at last to put his sorrows behind him. Uta-napishti counsels him on the un-wisdom of his behaviour, and apparently admonishes him for neglecting his kingly duties. Then he voices a beautiful elegy on the fragility of human life and the unpredictability of death. On an Old Babylonian fragment similar sentiments are expressed by Shiduri.

Tablet XI. Gilgamesh interrupts Uta-napishti, demanding to know how he came to be immortal. Uta-napishti tells his story, how he alone was chosen to survive the great flood that long ago destroyed mankind, how he had built a strange boat and taken on board his family, men skilled in every craft, and animals of all kinds. A great storm had then swamped the world, drowning all left behind. After the boat had run aground Uta-napishti had sent out birds to determine that the waters were receding, disembarked and burnt incense to the gods, who had gathered 'like flies'

© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-88094-7 - The Cambridge Companion to the Epic
Edited by Catherine Bates
Excerpt
More information

around the 'sweet savour'. Enlil had made him immortal in unique circumstances. Who could do the same for Gilgamesh? Can he even resist sleep? He cannot. Uta-napishti gives him a magic white garment and orders Ur-shanabi to take him home. At the last moment, he takes pity and tells Gilgamesh how to obtain a magic plant of rejuvenation. This secured, Gilgamesh leaves with Ur-shanabi. But on the way home, while Gilgamesh is bathing in a pool, a snake catches scent of the plant and steals it, sloughing its skin as it goes. All has ended in bitter failure; Gilgamesh wishes he had never reached his goal. Returning to Uruk he shows Ur-shanabi the view of the city from the wall: one part city, one part date-groves, one part clay-pits, one part the temple of Ishtar. All humanity is there: domestic life, agriculture, industry, and spiritual and mental activity.

Tablet XII. This prose appendix comprises a translation of the latter part of one of the Sumerian poems of Gilgamesh. It is related to the epic but not in form and structure. The hero tyrannizes his people with playthings fashioned from a primordial tree, and at their outcry the playthings fall into the netherworld. Enkidu goes to retrieve them but is taken captive. Gilgamesh raises his ghost and questions him about conditions in the realm of the dead.

Cultural context and genre

No evidence survives for the Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh before its emergence in the eighteenth century BC. We know that Babylonian courts employed singers and it seems likely that the poem took shape as a courtly entertainment, a function for which its topic, the exploits of the greatest king of old, made it suitable. The mood of the Old Babylonian poem, most clearly expressed in the prologue embedded in SB Tablet I, is one of praise and glory. This is epic not far removed from its 'primary' or oral stage, in C. S. Lewis's distinction.[9]

The moment a text enters the scribal tradition we begin to lose sight of any oral version; we can only chart the poem's evolution as a piece of written literature. Written texts were largely an outcome of scribal training, but fine copies were kept by scholars. During the Old Babylonian period the poem already appears in a pedagogical environment, although it was not yet part of the scribal curriculum of set texts. The few surviving apprentices' tablets present parts of the long episode that relates the expedition to the Cedar Forest. The Sumerian poem that tells the same story (Bilgames and Huwawa) was one of a group of ten standard texts of the Old Babylonian scribal curriculum. Routine study of the Sumerian poem was evidently accompanied by, or generated, a less intense engagement with its Babylonian analogue.

© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org