

History

The Epic of Gilgamesh is a piece of Sumerian text, originating from the ancient lands of Mesopotamia, detailing the life and actions of the demi-god Bilgamesh (the Sumerian word for Gilgamesh) and his companion Enkidu. Thought to have been originally composed in the 25th Century BCE, only small fragments of the text have been recovered from this period; most versions are derived from either the 13th, 10th or 7th Century BCE which are more complete. The text is one of the earliest pieces of surviving literature ever found, outdating Homer's *Odyssey* by almost one and a half thousand years (Sanders 1985, pp.7-8).

Synopsis

Gilgamesh is one third man and two thirds god; he was made by the gods to be a perfect individual. However his power was bred into arrogance, the gods then made Enkidu to act as the humble contrast to Gilgamesh. The two form a great friendship and seek to overcome many great troubles in the land, such as defeating Humbaba, the guardian of Cedar Mountain. When Ishtar, the Goddess of love and war, is harshly rejected by Gilgamesh she orders the death of Enkidu as punishment. Stricken by grief, Gilgamesh searches for a method to grant eternal life; his search ends up fruitless, but instead finds the immortality he seeks in the everlasting legend of his deeds in life (Sanders 1985).

Theme #1: Love

Although the text lacks a distinct female love interest for Gilgamesh or Enkidu, with the exception of the harlots who initiate Enkidu and the advances of the goddess Ishtar towards Gilgamesh, the platonic love between the two individuals is a core theme throughout the book and the driving force behind most of their actions. Gilgamesh and Enkidu's relationship is the catalyst for both of their character development; Enkidu humbles Gilgamesh from his tyrannical nature and is equally made more noble and conscientious himself. It is also their love for each other that causes Gilgamesh to hunt in futility for