

The Philosophy of *Gilgamesh*

Gentrain

Unit 1

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Relief: combat scene showing Humbaba, protector of the cedar forest, being put to death by Gilgamesh and Enkidu

Terracotta

H. 8 cm, W. 13.8 cm

Old Babylonian Period, early 2nd millennium BC

Babylonia

Berlin, Vorderasiatisches Museum, VA 7246

© Olaf M. Tessmer/SMB - Vorderasiatisches Museum Berlin



Statuette showing Gilgamesh upright on the head of Humbaba
 Terracotta (burnt), traces of red paint
 H. 16.5 cm; W. 5 cm
 Old Babylonian Period, first half 2nd millennium BC
 Tell Asmar, formerly Eshnunna (?)
 Paris, Musée du Louvre, Department of Near Eastern
 Antiquities AO 12475



Relief showing a combat with a bull: Gilgamesh and Enkidu fighting the
 bull of heaven
 Terracotta
 H. 8 cm, W. 14.2 cm
 Old Babylonian Period, early 2nd millennium BC
 Babylonia
 Berlin, Vorderasiatisches Museum, VA 5392
 © Olaf M. Tessmer/SMB - Vorderasiatisches Museum Berlin

The Philosophy of *Gilgamesh*

Philosophical questions

1. How should we understand the transition from hunter-gatherer to settled agricultural life?
2. What is the difference between humans and animals?
3. How do we reconcile ourselves to our own inevitable deaths?



Artist's rendition of Uruk



Transformations of the Hero

On the boundary between hunter-gatherer and agrarian

- ▶ First transformation: Transformation of Enkidu from animal to human – seven days with the Priestess
- ▶ Second transformation: Gilgamesh grieving over Enkidu – wraps himself in animal skins and takes to the forest and plains – grieves for seven days
- ▶ Third transformation: Gilgamesh sleeps for seven days – and yields to his mortal fate. He allows himself to be bathed and he replaces his animal skins for clothing



Siduri to Gilgamesh

“O Mighty King, remember now that only gods stay in eternal watch. Humans come then go, that is the way fate decreed on the Tablets of Destiny. So someday you will depart, but till that distant day Sing, and dance.

Eat your fill of warm cooked food and cool jugs of beer. Cherish the children your love gave life. Bathe away life's dirt in warm drawn waters. Pass the time in joy with your chosen wife.

On the Tablets of Destiny it is decreed For you to enjoy short pleasures for your short days.”

(translated by Yanita Chen, 1994)

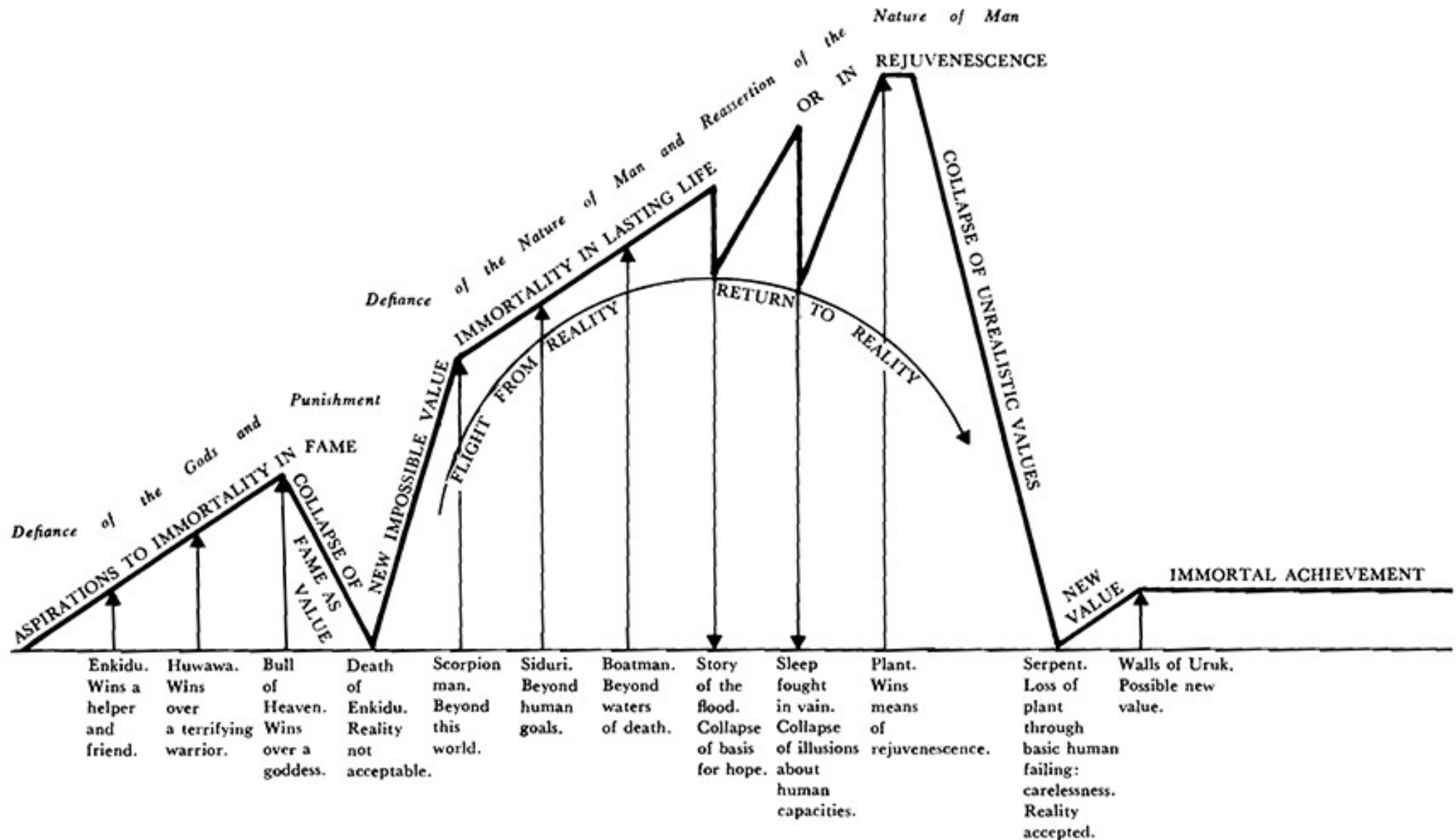


How should we interpret this advice?

- ▶ Earliest articulation of *carpe diem* philosophy
- ▶ Hedonist?
- ▶ Gilgamesh is a human, must seek human joys



The Hero's Journey



Thorkild Jacobsen "And Death the Journey's End": The Gilgamesh Epic".

Discovery of *Gilgamesh* tablet adds new information to the story of Humbaba and Enkidu

- ▶ In 2015, a collection of clay tablets was discovered in Iraq
- ▶ Humbaba presented not as a demon, but as a ruler/elder in a different land with a different way of life
- ▶ Revealed that Enkidu spent much time with Humbaba in his youth

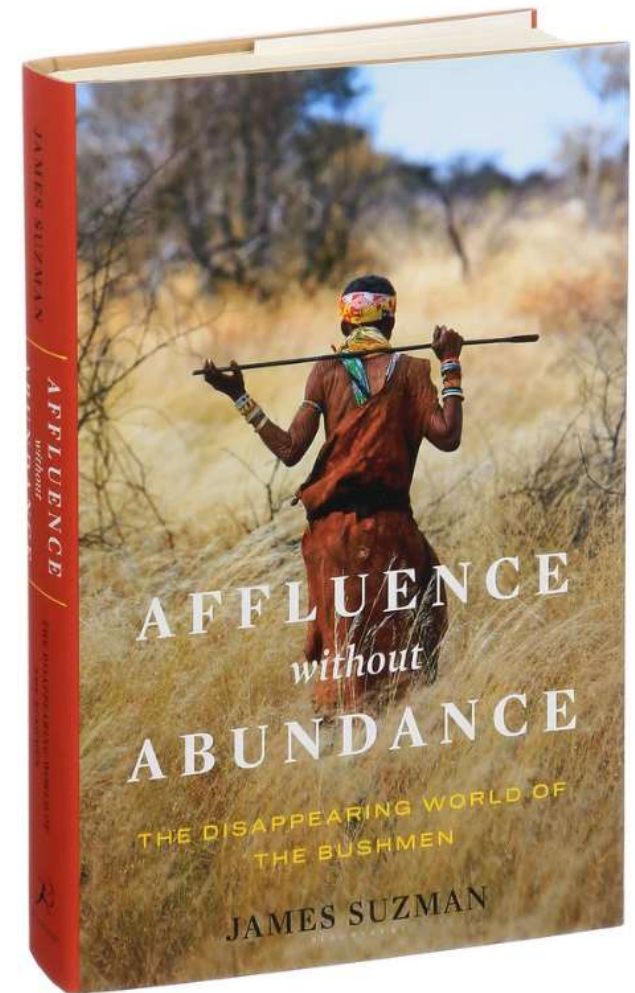


A newly discovered tablet V of the epic of Gilgamesh. The left half of the whole tablet has survived and is composed of 3 fragments. The Sulaymaniyah Museum, Iraq. Photo © Osama S.M.Amin.

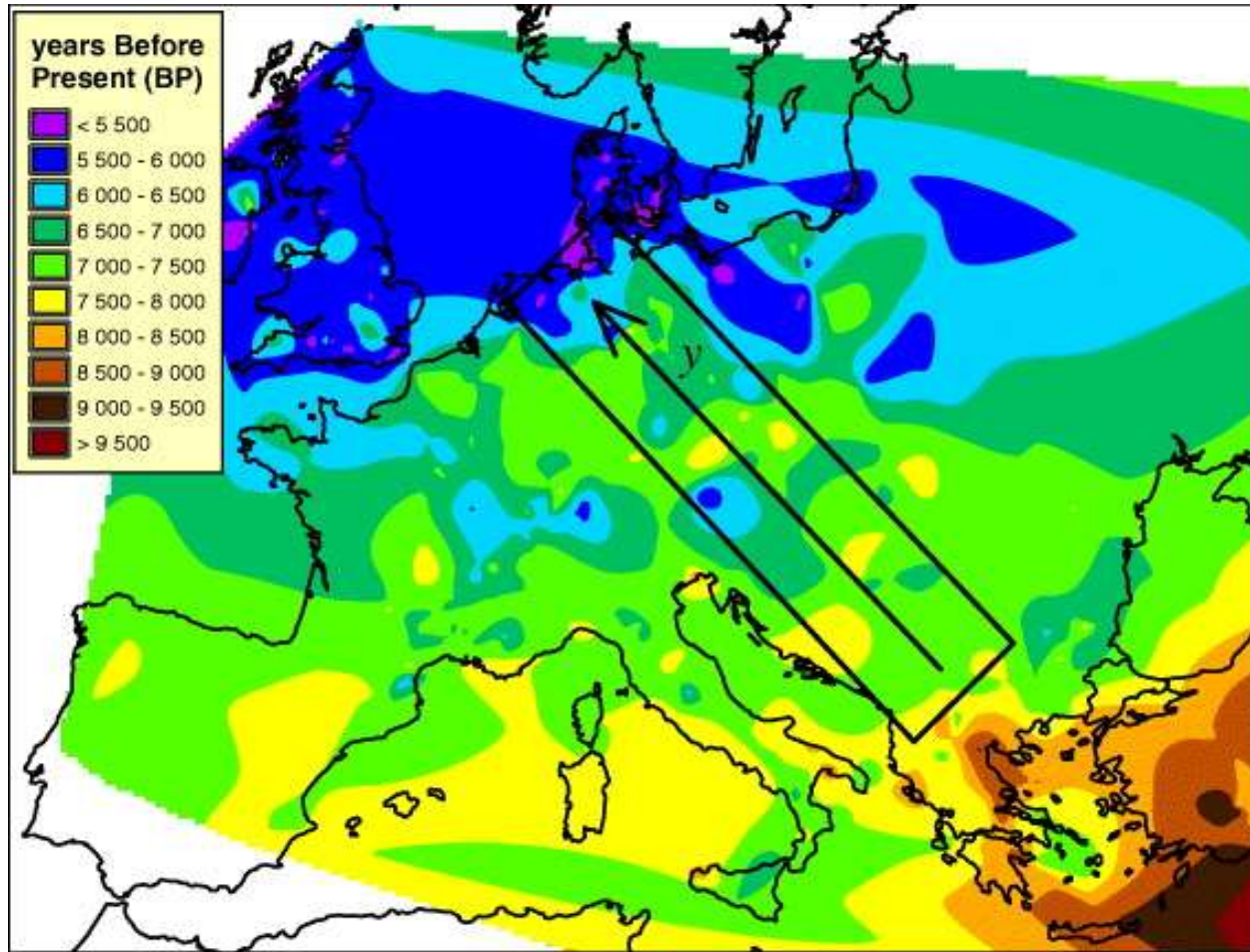
What is the best way to live?

- ▶ What is work? What is play?
- ▶ Individual? Or collective identity?
- ▶ What is our relationship to our food? To our natural world?

A study back in the 1960s found the Bushmen have figured out a way to work only about 15 hours each week acquiring food and then another 15 to 20 hours on domestic chores. The rest of the time they could relax and focus on family, friends and hobbies.



Neolithic expansion stalled by resistance from nomadic people



Chronology of the Neolithic wave of advance in Europe. Map obtained by interpolation of 765 early Neolithic data published by Pinhasi.

“Anisotropic dispersion, space competition and the slowdown of the Neolithic transition”

Neus Isern I and Joaquim Fort I

Published 3 December 2010

New Journal of Physics, Volume 12

Artist's rendition of Uruk (approx. 4,000 BCE to 700 CE)



Landowner horrifies villagers by threatening to invite gypsies on to land in planning row

A LANDOWNER left villagers horrified after he threatened to move gypsies on to a field opposite their homes in Leicestershire unless they backed his house-building plan.

Enforcement action could be taken against Gypsies near Norwich Airport

Luke Powell luke.powell@archant.co.uk @LukePowell88

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Travellers illegally camping on Witley Parish Council's playing field ordered to leave

Witley Parish Council, Waverley Borough Council and Surrey Police are working together to remove the unauthorised encampment

Travellers 'assumed by police to be criminals rather than victims'

Biased approach to Travellers, Gypsies and Roma may breach equality laws, says report

The Roma are yet again scapegoats for society's ills

Kevin McKenna

The Washington Post
Democracy Dies in Darkness

Asia & Pacific

Mongolia's nomadic way of life threatened by climate change, neglect, modernity

My community is vehemently against Travellers settling on a local common. How can I challenge this?

Suggested further reading:

- ▶ William Moran, “The Gilgamesh Epic: A Masterpiece from Ancient Mesopotamia”
- ▶ Thorkild Jacobsen, “And Death the Journey’s End: The Gilgamesh Epic”
- ▶ Karen Armstrong, *Short History of Myth*

