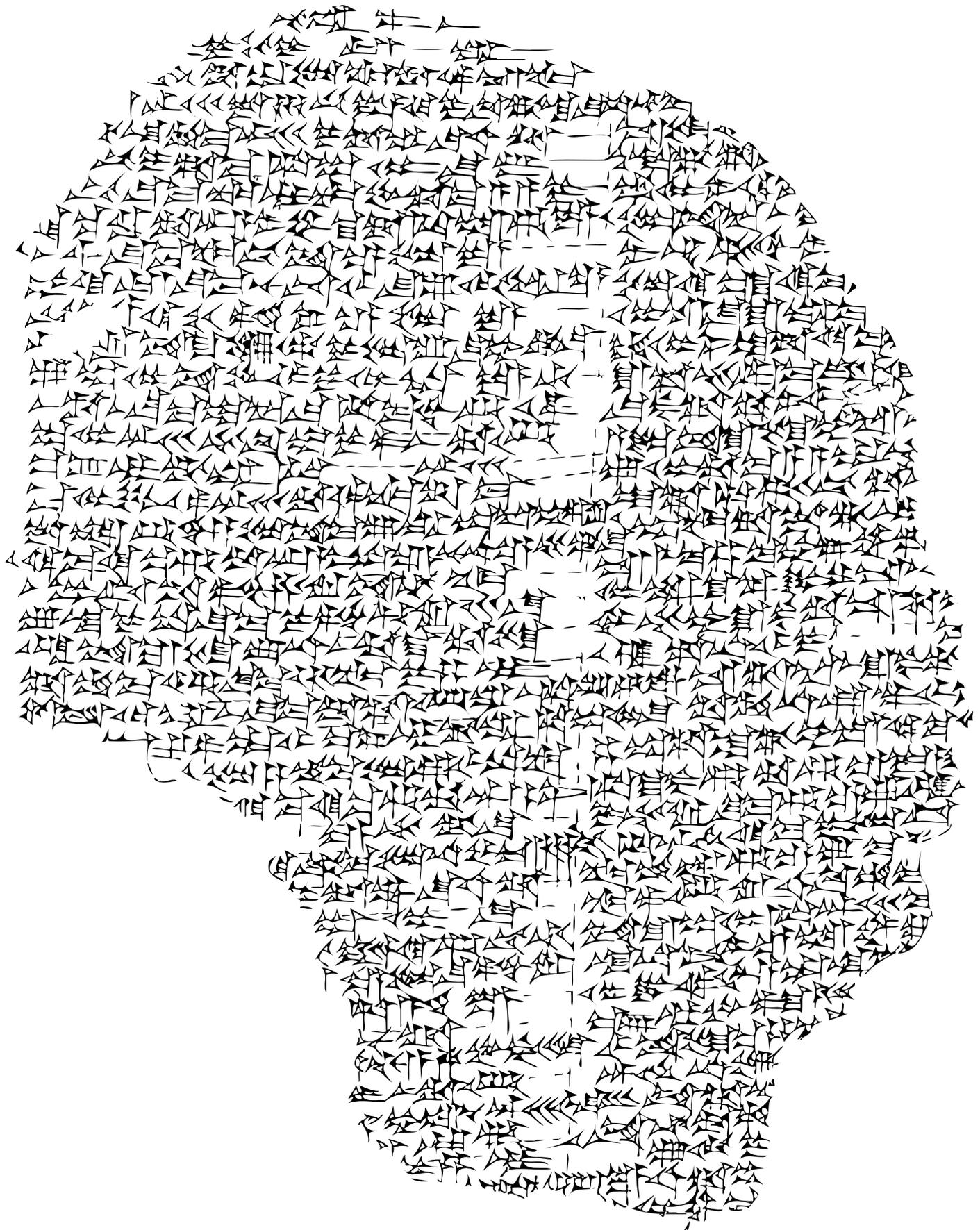


THE DREAM TABLET

RELATING PART OF THE EPIC OF GILGAMESH

CHRISTIE'S







The Gilgamesh Dream Tablet

A HIGHLY IMPORTANT MESOPOTAMIAN
CUNEIFORM TABLET WITH PART OF THE
EPIC OF GILGAMESH
MIDDLE BABYLONIAN PERIOD, FIRST
SEALAND DYNASTY, CIRCA 1600 B.C.

The obverse with seventy-four lines of cuneiform originally in three columns; with one and a half columns now remaining, the first column intact, and the left half of the second column remaining, the reverse with eight lines remaining, presumably from the fifth column

6¼ x 4¾ in. (16 x 12 cm.)

PROVENANCE:

Butterfield and Butterfield, San Francisco, 20 August, 1981, lot 1503.
with Michael Sharpe Rare and Antiquarian Books, Pasadena, California.

PUBLISHED:

A.R. George, "The civilizing of Ea-Enkidu: an unusual tablet of the Babylonian Gilgamesh epic", *Revue d'assyriologie et d'archéologie orientale*, vol. 101, 2007, pp. 59–80.



This fragment represents the upper left hand portion of a tablet which was, when complete, six columns long, three on each side. Each column is approximately 75 mm wide. The full width of the first column and left half of the second column are intact, while the right half of the second column and the third column are now lost. The writing is remarkably clear and crisp and the tablet is a particularly large example of cuneiform. It is also exceptionally rare – with only thirty other known surviving fragments from the Epic of Gilgamesh from the Old and Middle Babylonian periods, the majority being far smaller than this example. Every tenth line of text is marked with a decimal sign, an indication that the intention of the writer was to produce a permanent copy fit for consultation. The six column format was standard for library texts of Gilgamesh in the first millennium and also in the earlier Old Babylonian period.

This tablet was comprehensively studied in 2005 by Professor Andrew R. George from the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, and subsequently published. In his paper George discusses a unique use of numeric writing for the sun god Shamash for the hero Gilgamesh, and the water god Enki for his friend Enkidu. In addition, the city where the former resides is not written as Uruk, but Ur. These unique differences are known on no other Gilgamesh tablet to date. George suggests a provenance and date for the tablet as the First Sealand Dynasty, circa early sixteenth century, Middle Babylonian period. The Sealand Dynasty refers to a province in the far South of Babylonia, a swampy region between the mouths of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers.



THE TEXT

The fragment begins with the prostitute Shamhat in conversation with Enkidu, persuading him to come with her back to Ur where he will be seen, find companionship and where Gilgamesh has been having vivid dreams about him. She relates the dreams that Gilgamesh has been having and that he has been relating to his mother, the first about a meteorite and the second about an axe, which his mother interprets as the coming of a companion and saviour. Shamhat then goes on to give Enkidu more advice, asking him why he is wandering the steppes like a wild man if he is so beautiful, to put on clothes and to come with her to Uruk to find the joys of society. He takes her advice, shares her garment and rubs sweet-smelling oil over his body. She takes him to the shepherds' camp where the herdsmen and boys bow down before him, recognising him as a match for Gilgamesh. That night he becomes their watchman and he and Shamhat make love. The remaining ten lines on the reverse of the tablet describe how Shamhat will show Enkidu the fine city with women and Gilgamesh.

As George explains in his paper, the text is well known from the Epic. He points out that the dreams are known from three different versions: the Old Babylonian Pennsylvania tablet, the Standard Babylonian text, and this current tablet. There is also another Old Babylonian version found on a fragment of tablet from Bagazkoy, the Hittite capital in central Anatolia. When compared, these four sources show some fascinating differences and additions. George goes on to note that the major differences in the text of this tablet are the inclusion of the dream episode in the speech of the prostitute Shamhat rather than as the direct narrative of Old Babylonian texts; and the omission of the episode where Enkidu eats and drinks with the shepherds.





University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology,

Tablet bearing the Epic of Gilgamesh, object no. B10673

Courtesy of the Pennsylvania Museum, image #152331



University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cylinder lapis lazuli seal, object no. B16880
Courtesy of the Pennsylvania Museum, image #149019

THE EPIC OF GILGAMESH

The Epic of Gilgamesh is **one of the oldest known literary works** in the world. Most scholars agree that the origins of the poem lie in the legends of the Sumerian ruler Gilgamesh, the fifth king of the city of Uruk, who reigned in the middle of the third millennium B.C., which were collected together and transcribed much later in Akkadian. The oldest complete story known as the Old Babylonian version, dates from the 18th Century B.C. The most complete text comes from the later 13th Century Standard Babylonian version, and the twelve tablets found in the library collection of the Assyrian King Ashurbanipal (685–627 B.C.).

Written almost four thousand years ago, The Epic of Gilgamesh contains many of the universal themes found in the later epic literary traditions



of Achilles, Samson, Beowulf, Roland and King Arthur. The action of the epic falls into three phases of the demigod **hero's evolution**. The first phase sees **King Gilgamesh**, the tyrant, who sparks revolt among his own subjects by unrelentingly driving them in the building of a monumental wall around the city. The citizens pray to the gods for relief and the **king's mother, the goddess Aruru**, sends a powerful foe to distract him – the civilized **King's uncivilized alter-ego – the 'wild man' Enkidu**. After an epic battle of strength and endurance, Enkidu and Gilgamesh become inseparable friends, marking the second phase of his development. Gilgamesh and Enkidu embark on adventures which will bring them meaning and lasting recognition, including conquering the fearsome **monster Humbaba**, guardian of the cedar mountain. However, during this adventure, Enkidu accidentally touches the magic portal of the gate to the cedar wood and is cursed, a precursor to his eventual death later in the story. In the **final phase of the story**, the hero, grieving his friend and fearing death himself departs on a **journey to find immortality**. This search ultimately ends in failure when **a serpent eats the plant of everlasting life** which the hero has located on the bottom of the sea. Enkidu communicates with Gilgamesh from the Underworld and reveals to him that **nothing awaits man after death**

but worms and mud, prompting Gilgamesh to return to Uruk to fulfill his **role as shepherd to his people**. Thus Gilgamesh accepts his mortality and recognizes the **city** as an enduring testament to man's achievement and **the closest to immortality to which a mortal can aspire**.

The Gilgamesh Epic belongs to a group of Ancient Near Eastern 'societal' myths intended to substantiate and reinforce, through divine sanction, **the status quo** of a region and its power structure. The message conveyed through the Gilgamesh Epic is thus: if a heroic demigod cannot solve the mysteries of life and death and find immortality, there is nothing for the humble Babylonian citizen to do but **acknowledge the inevitability of death and embrace the role assigned to him by society**. Whilst clearly the myth underpins the Near Eastern belief that there is no afterlife, it also advocates the notion of seizing the day and making the most of this life.

explains the unexplainable

The Epic of Gilgamesh was **discovered in 1853** when the Assyriology and Archaeologist **Hormuzd Rassam** discovered the library of Ashurbanipal in Nineveh and the twelve tablet Standard Babylonian version of the epic. The first translation was published in the 1870s by George Smith, Assyriologist at The British Museum.



TRANSLATION OF THE TABLET
OBVERSE. COLUMN I

The tablet begins with the harlot, Shamhat speaking to Enkidu: (Shamhat is the cultic prostitute who seduced Enkidu and introduced him to the ways of man and woman.)

“... let him (Sin = Gilgamesh) see your face.
... seeking a friend.
Before you came down from your hills
... Sin (Gilgamesh) in Ur was having dreams
(about you).”

(New narrative:)

Sin (Gilgamesh) fell asleep and had a dream,
he arose and reported the dream to his mother:

“The stars of the heavens [collected together],
a boulder of the sky fell by me.
I lifted it but it was too heavy for me,
I pushed it, but could not dislodge it.
All of Ur was gathered around me,
the [... of ?] the young men were not able to
budge it.
I braced my forehead (or: shoulder) and they
braced me.
I picked it up and carried it off to you.”

The mother of Sin (Gilgamesh), understanding,
interpreted (the dream)
saying to Sin (Gilgamesh):

“For sure, Sin (Gilgamesh), someone like yourself
was born in the wild and the wild has reared him.
His strength is as powerful as a boulder of the sky.
Because they massed together with you
they harnessed it, they gathered over it,
and the young men kissed it.
You will see him and your heart will rejoice.
You will hug him and bring him to me.”

[Sin = Gilgamesh] replied to her, saying to his
mother:

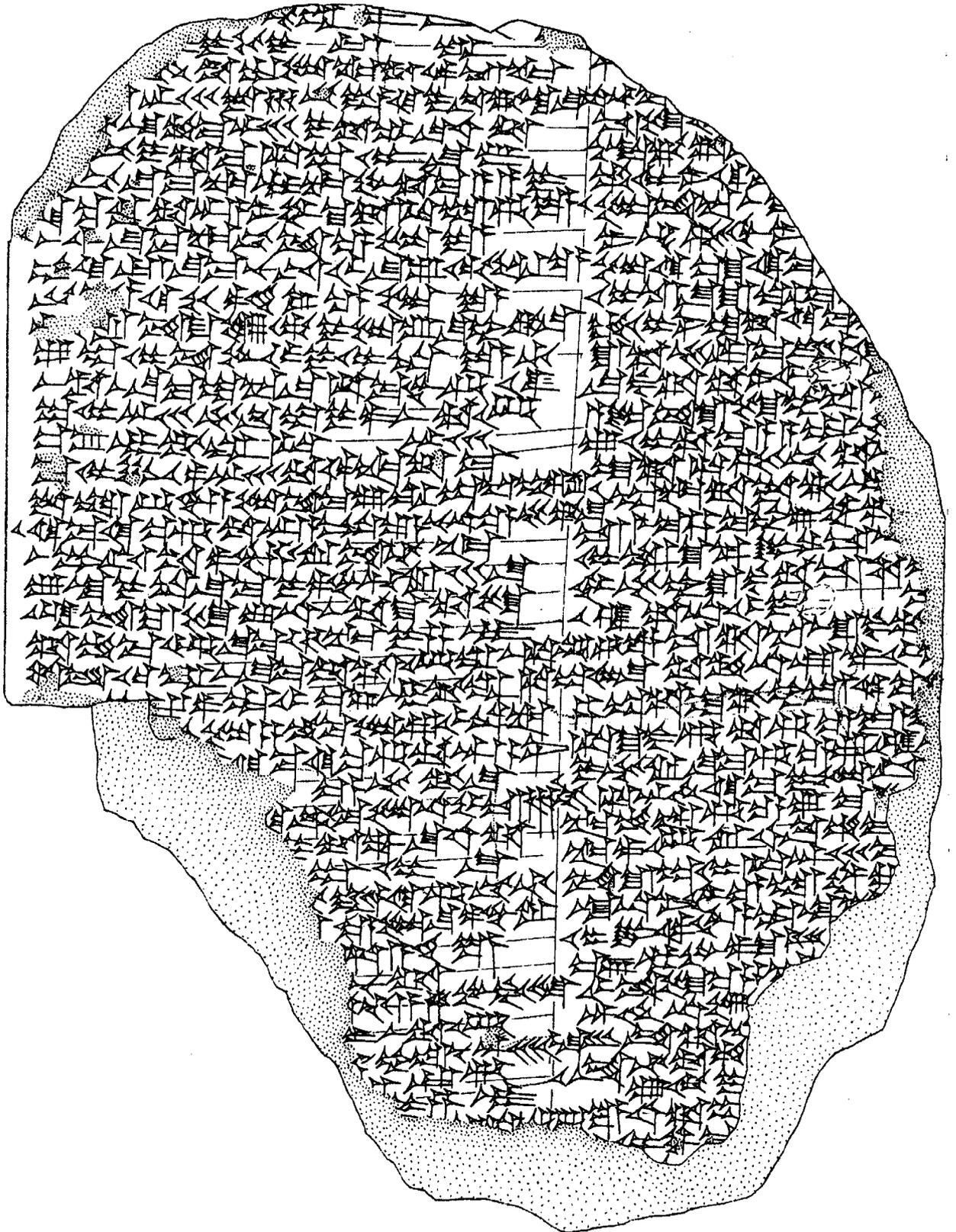
“come out, so it will be, let him come.
Like a boulder of the sky
his strength is powerful.
... let him gladden my heart”

He lay down and had (another) dream,
he arose and reported to his mother:

“In the capital city, Ur,
an axe was lying and (people) were gathered
around it.
I [picked it up and put it] at my side.
... I embraced it like a wife, hugging it.”

[The mother of Sin = Gilgamesh] interpreted [the
dream]:

“The axe, Sin (Gilgamesh), that you saw is a man,
... friend,
your heart will rejoice,
[you will ... and bring] him to me.



Tablet obverse

OBVERSE. COLUMN II.

(About ten lines lost at the bottom of column I, and two at the top of column II, followed by several fragmentary beginnings of lines. The text resumes with Shamhat speaking:)

“... from [...],
you are handsome ...,
why [...] like [...]
put on a garment, wrap on the belt, [...].
Take your weapon [...] like [...].
Why do you [...] .
Why do you [...] like [...]
You should see Uruk [...] the residence of (civilized) people [...] where young men are girt [...], and daily the bed [...]
You to ... [...],
you are uprooted from the land (??) [....]”

(Enki = Enkidu) heard her words and consented [to what she said],
the woman's counsel [struck home in his heart.]
She stripped (a garment) off,
and [gave him ?] one (piece of) the garment while she put the other one on herself.

He put on the garment
and rubbed himself with oil.
Holding his hand like [a god she led him]
to the shepherd's camp, [the site of the sheep pen].
The shepherds saw him and [...].
To Enkidu as if for a god,
the shepherds were prostrate before [him].
The herdsboys ...

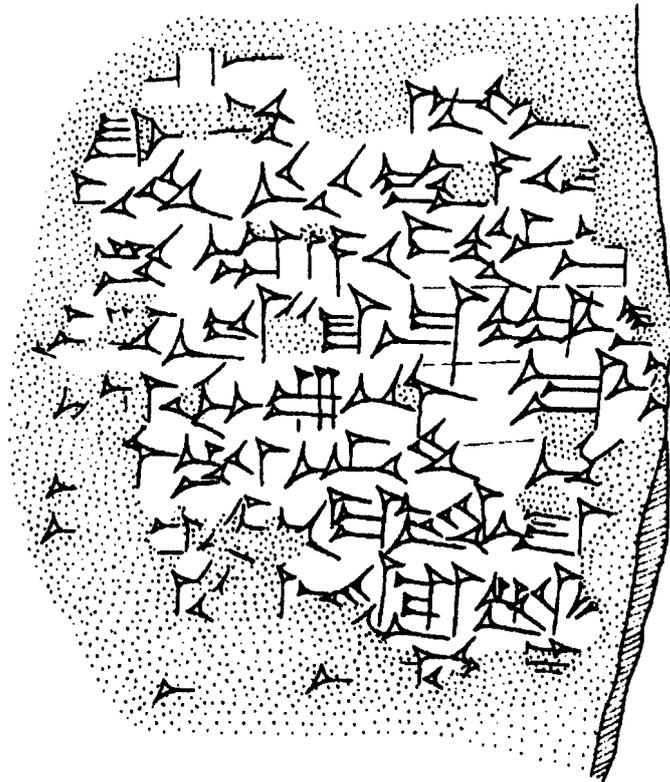
[...] “That fellow resembles Sin (Gilgamesh),
though not as tall, he is of heavier build.
... of stature [...]
For sure it is he who was born he was born in the hills.”

The shepherds lay down [at night],
[...] sleep fell [over them].
Enkidu was [their] watchman,
... and he keeps [...].
With ... [...]
he does not [...],
he keeps [...].
Whatever [...]

REVERSE. COLUMN V.

*(Long break of two and one half columns, then
the remains of ten lines with only a few readable
words.)*

[...]... Ea (Enkidu) Ur
[...] young women [...]
Ea (Enkidu) Ur
[...] will show] you a youth [...]
handsome young manhood [...].



Tablet reverse

