

**THE TOWER OF GILGAMESH**  
(*or* **THE ISO-RECTO-TETRAHEDRON**)

PERSONS AND MASKS

**Lil-Amin**, queen of Uruk, priestess of Inanna  
**College of Widows**, hierodules of the Temple  
**The Rector** of the Temple, priest of Inanna,  
 formerly governor of Uruk  
**Optimates**, a council of ephors representing  
 the people  
**Gilgamesh** [Giszax], king-errant of Erech [Uruk]  
**Norkid**, captain of his Kassite guard  
**Troopers**, Kassite bowmen of the guard  
**Eber**, Gilgamesh's vizier and patriarch of nomads  
**Traders**, sons of Eber, nomadic merchants  
**Engidu** [Enkidu], a wild man from the steppes

GLOSSARY

	<i>Men's Language</i>	<i>Women's Language</i>
Erech = Uruk (a city in Sumer)	___ <b>Err-ek</b>	Ur- <b>uk</b>
Ishtar = Inanna (city goddess)	___ <b>Ish-tar</b>	In-an- <b>na</b>
Enlil (the high god)	___ <b>En-lil</b>	En- <b>lil</b>
Lil-Amin	___ <b>Lil-a-min</b>	Lil- <b>ah</b> -min
Engidu = Enkidu	___ <b>En-gi-du</b>	En-ki- <b>du</b>
Gilgamesh = Giszax	___ <b>Gil-ga-mesh</b>	Gee- <b>zax</b>

PRODUCTION NOTES

1. *General Desiderata*. In principle this is a play for actors who may be dancers, but in practice it may as well be staged by actors alone. It would be a fine thing if musicians playing derabucca drums or Indian cymbals, and a flute or recorder, could be sitting on the stage throughout the performance; but music may be otherwise provided, electronically if necessary, as long as the apparatus is not concealed. In a full-scale theatrical production, each of the four choruses (Widows, Troopers, Traders, and Optimates) would consist of three or more persons; but in any cast they must equal each other in the number of at least two each.

2. *Notation*. Dialogues shown in italics are spoken or chanted in unison. In choral parts not individually specified, dashes at the beginning of clauses indicate an arbitrary alternation of speakers.

3. *Suggestions for casting or masking.*

GILGAMESH: tall; cleanshaven.

ENGIDU: dark; shaggy and lithe, but muscular or otherwise athletically impressive.

EBER: bearded, longhaired; elderly but vigorous.

RECTOR: perhaps hairless; remarkably strong (even if short); maybe tattooed.

LIL-AMIN: dark; preferably tall and slender.

NORKID: fairhaired; stocky or burly; wears steel-rim eyeglasses

WIDOWS: lightly wimpled or veiled.

4. *Properties.*

Gilgamesh's *axe*: standard double-bitted steel head on a straight wooden haft.

Engidu's *bannerstone*: a primitive symmetrically winged stone mounted on a short throwing handle.

Engidu's *bow and arrow*: the two-part tool used to make fire—a drilling device.

(The Troopers use classic English *longbows*.)

The *Iso-recto-tetrahedron*: a solid formed by the corner of a cube, its perpendicular edges of equal length, its oblique face forming an equilateral triangle; threaded with a hole and small enough to wear around the neck on a thong or chain.

5. *Design criteria.* Ad lib: any style from extreme simplicity of set and costume (freely anachronistic, with never more than hints of historical verisimilitude) to sparsely ornamented expression of cultural contrast. (The basic dress may be leotards of solid colors that each characterize one of the four choruses.) Individual masks may be simply or elaborately distinctive.

## PROLOGUE

Herodotus of Halicarnassus hereby acknowledges that he was fatally unable to keep the promise in his book about Persia to write a more ancient History of Mesopotamia and Canaan.

I had wished to take entire leave of my own millennium and trace to their origins or antitheses the vestigial myths and rituals I mentioned in the work on Europe, Africa, and Asia that has come down to you. With waxing excitement I was advancing my researches, but had grown weary of the narrative form, which no longer seemed appropriate to my matter, when death overtook me.

The play you are about to see, my first and only attempt at drama, was the last thing I ever wrote, though only the introduction to my project. I was hoping to have it produced at the Greater Dionysia of the year you would designate as the 431st before your era, but I was debarred from competition both because of my disallowed Athenian citizenship (on the basis of a dead-letter law) and because, lacking poetic credentials, I was presumed to know nothing about the theater worthy of anybody's investment. In any case, my manuscript was disqualified when the archon refused to recognize it as comedy or satyr play, let alone tragedy.

Anyway, that year I would have found myself in rivalry with *Oedipus Tyrannus*. I was not terribly distressed that the battered scroll of my play, having been mistaken for mere notes to a History that would never be written, was burned at my funeral in Thuria as a symbolic sacrifice by my beloved wife.

For centuries I was called the father of lies; but your scholars have revived interest in our common cultural origins and therewith justified many of my conjectures about barbarian peoples and places denied or ignored by the proud Athenians, whose western seapower blinded them to the formative influence of Sumer, of which Akkad, Assyria, and the Babylon I visited were but imperial degenerations.

At the time of legendary Gilgamesh, a couple of thousand years before Semiramis and her even greater successor Nitocris (who made a labyrinth of the upper Euphrates to protect her Babylon from riverain invaders), the Sumerian city of Uruk—known in your Bible as Erech, especially sacred to Enlil (the original Bel or Baal), indigenous father of the gods, and to his daughter Inanna (later Ishtar)—was upstream hegemon of the eastern Sea-Lands. It was a time when the Tigris and Euphrates still debouched separately into the reedy silt-marshes of the Gulf that has since been named the Persian—almost as far from the splendid concerns of Pericles in miles as in years.

As you know from Boethius and others, those two rivers arose from the Ararat rocks, near alpine Lake Van, which remains more central to the world than Greece itself. I believe that in

Sumer, at the bottom of that double-rivered plain, west of Eden, mankind first invented agriculture, writing, and other technology. The myths of Gilgamesh, or Giszax, began in pre-Semitic Sumerian ritual.

At some point an historical tyrant may have taken upon himself that famous name, perhaps as that of a traditional conqueror from the Zagros Mountains; but it's more likely that the primeval stories accrued to a born king Gilgamesh of the world's first city. In Babylon I heard an epic poem, a latterday redaction; but it seems to have simplified the tensions and conflicts that Gilgamesh must have experienced at the fountainhead of culture, where not merely two streams divided, but three or even four.