



## Electronic Reserves Coversheet

### Copyright Notice

The work from which this copy was made may be protected by Copyright Law ([Title 17 U.S. Code](http://www4.law.cornell.edu/uscode/17/) <http://www4.law.cornell.edu/uscode/17/>)

The copyright notice page may, or may not, be included with this request. If it is not included, please use the following guidelines and refer to the [U.S. Code](#) for questions:

Use of this material may be allowed if one or more of these conditions have been met:

- With permission from the rights holder.
- If the use is "Fair Use."
- If the Copyright on the work has expired.
- If it falls within another exemption.

**\*\*The USER of this is responsible for determining lawful uses\*\***

Montana State University Billings Library  
1500 University Drive  
Billings, MT 59101-0298  
(406) 657-1687

# The Epic of Gilgamesh: Tablet XI

## The Story of the Flood

Tell me, how is it that you stand in the Assembly of the Gods,  
and have found life!"

Utanapishtim spoke to Gilgamesh, saying:

"I will reveal to you, Gilgamesh, a thing that is hidden,  
a secret of the gods I will tell you!

Shuruppak, a city that you surely know,  
situated on the banks of the Euphrates,  
that city was very old, and there were gods inside it.

The hearts of the Great Gods moved them to inflict the Flood. . . .

Ea, the Clever Prince(?), was under oath with them  
so he repeated their talk to the reed house:

'Reed house, reed house! Wall, wall!

O man of Shuruppak, son of Ubartutu:

Tear down the house and build a boat!

Abandon wealth and seek living beings!

Spurn possessions and keep alive living beings!

Make all living beings go up into the boat.

The boat which you are to build,

its dimensions must measure equal to each other:

its length must correspond to its width.

Roof it over like the Apsu.

I understood and spoke to my lord, Ea:

'My lord, thus is the command which you have uttered

I will heed and will do it.

But what shall I answer the city, the populace, and the  
Elders!'

Ea spoke, commanding me, his servant:

'You, well then, this is what you must say to them:

"It appears that Enlil is rejecting me

so I cannot reside in your city (?),

nor set foot on Enlil's earth.

I will go down to the Apsu to live with my lord, Ea,

and upon you he will rain down abundance,

a profusion of fowl, myriad(!) fishes.

He will bring to you a harvest of wealth,

in the morning he will let loaves of bread shower down,  
and in the evening a rain of wheat!"

Just as dawn began to glow  
the land assembled around me-  
the carpenter carried his hatchet,  
the reed worker carried his (flattening) stone,  
... the men ...

The child carried the pitch,  
the weak brought whatever else was needed.

On the fifth day I laid out her exterior.

It was a field in area,  
its walls were each 10 times 12 cubits in height,  
the sides of its top were of equal length, 10 times 12 cubits each.  
I laid out its (interior) structure and drew a picture of it (?).

I provided it with six decks,  
thus dividing it into seven (levels).

The inside of it I divided into nine (compartments).

I drove plugs (to keep out) water in its middle part.

I saw to the punting poles and laid in what was necessary.

Three times 3,600 (units) of raw bitumen I poured into the  
bitumen kiln,

three times 3,600 (units of) pitch ...into it,

there were three times 3,600 porters of casks who carried (vegetable) oil,

apart from the 3,600 (units of) oil which they consumed (!)

and two times 3,600 (units of) oil which the boatman stored  
away.

I butchered oxen for the meat(!),

and day upon day I slaughtered sheep.

I gave the workmen(?) ale, beer, oil, and wine, as if it were  
river water,

so they could make a party like the New Year's Festival.

... and I set my hand to the oiling(!).

The boat was finished by sunset.

The launching was very difficult.

They had to keep carrying a runway of poles front to back,  
until two-thirds of it had gone into the water(?).

Whatever I had I loaded on it:

whatever silver I had I loaded on it,

whatever gold I had I loaded on it.

All the living beings that I had I loaded on it,

I had all my kith and kin go up into the boat,  
all the beasts and animals of the field and the craftsmen I  
had go up.

Shamash had set a stated time:

'In the morning I will let loaves of bread shower down,  
and in the evening a rain of wheat!

Go inside the boat, seal the entry!'

That stated time had arrived.

In the morning he let loaves of bread shower down,  
and in the evening a rain of wheat.

I watched the appearance of the weather--  
the weather was frightful to behold!

I went into the boat and sealed the entry.

For the caulking of the boat, to Puzuramurri, the boatman,  
I gave the palace together with its contents.

Just as dawn began to glow  
there arose from the horizon a black cloud.

Adad rumbled inside of it,  
before him went Shullat and Hanish,  
heralds going over mountain and land.

Erragal pulled out the mooring poles,  
forth went Ninurta and made the dikes overflow.

The Anunnaki lifted up the torches,  
setting the land ablaze with their flare.

Stunned shock over Adad's deeds overtook the heavens,  
and turned to blackness all that had been light.

The... land shattered like a... pot.

All day long the South Wind blew ...,  
blowing fast, submerging the mountain in water,  
overwhelming the people like an attack.

No one could see his fellow,  
they could not recognize each other in the torrent.

The gods were frightened by the Flood,  
and retreated, ascending to the heaven of Anu.

The gods were cowering like dogs, crouching by the outer wall.

Ishtar shrieked like a woman in childbirth,  
the sweet-voiced Mistress of the Gods wailed:

'The olden days have alas turned to clay,  
because I said evil things in the Assembly of the Gods!  
How could I say evil things in the Assembly of the Gods,  
ordering a catastrophe to destroy my people!!

No sooner have I given birth to my dear people  
than they fill the sea like so many fish!  
The gods--those of the Anunnaki--were weeping with her,  
the gods humbly sat weeping, sobbing with grief(?),  
their lips burning, parched with thirst.  
Six days and seven nights  
came the wind and flood, the storm flattening the land.  
When the seventh day arrived, the storm was pounding,  
the flood was a war--struggling with itself like a woman  
writhing (in labor).  
The sea calmed, fell still, the whirlwind (and) flood stopped up.  
I looked around all day long--quiet had set in  
and all the human beings had turned to clay!  
The terrain was as flat as a roof.  
I opened a vent and fresh air (daylight!) fell upon the side of  
my nose.  
I fell to my knees and sat weeping,  
tears streaming down the side of my nose.  
I looked around for coastlines in the expanse of the sea,  
and at twelve leagues there emerged a region (of land).  
On Mt. Nimush the boat lodged firm,  
Mt. Nimush held the boat, allowing no sway.  
One day and a second Mt. Nimush held the boat, allowing  
no sway.  
A third day, a fourth, Mt. Nimush held the boat, allowing  
no sway.  
A fifth day, a sixth, Mt. Nimush held the boat, allowing  
no sway.  
When a seventh day arrived  
I sent forth a dove and released it.  
The dove went off, but came back to me;  
no perch was visible so it circled back to me.  
I sent forth a swallow and released it.  
The swallow went off, but came back to me;  
no perch was visible so it circled back to me.  
I sent forth a raven and released it.  
The raven went off, and saw the waters slither back.  
It eats, it scratches, it bobs, but does not circle back to me.  
Then I sent out everything in all directions and sacrificed  
(a sheep).  
I offered incense in front of the mountain-ziggurat.

Seven and seven cult vessels I put in place,  
and (into the fire) underneath (or: into their bowls) I poured  
reeds, cedar, and myrtle.

The gods smelled the savor,  
the gods smelled the sweet savor,  
and collected like flies over a (sheep) sacrifice.

Just then Beletili arrived.

She lifted up the large flies (beads) which Anu had made for  
his enjoyment(!):

'You gods, as surely as I shall not forget this lapis lazuli  
around my neck,

may I be mindful of these days, and never forget them!

The gods may come to the incense offering,  
but Enlil may not come to the incense offering,  
because without considering he brought about the Flood  
and consigned my people to annihilation.'

Just then Enlil arrived.

He saw the boat and became furious,  
he was filled with rage at the Igigi gods:

'Where did a living being escape?

No man was to survive the annihilation!'

Ninurta spoke to Valiant Enlil, saying:

'Who else but Ea could devise such a thing?

It is Ea who knows every machination!'

La spoke to Valiant Enlil, saying:

'It is yours, O Valiant One, who is the Sage of the Gods.

How, how could you bring about a Flood without consideration

Charge the violation to the violator,

charge the offense to the offender,

but be compassionate lest (mankind) be cut off,

be patient lest they be killed.

Instead of your bringing on the Flood,

would that a lion had appeared to diminish the people!

Instead of your bringing on the Flood,

would that a wolf had appeared to diminish the people!

Instead of your bringing on the Flood,

would that famine had occurred to slay the land!

Instead of your bringing on the Flood,

would that (Pestilent) Erra had appeared to ravage the land!

It was not I who revealed the secret of the Great Gods,

I (only) made a dream appear to Atrahasis, and (thus) he

heard the secret of the gods.  
Now then! The deliberation should be about him!  
Enlil went up inside the boat  
and, grasping my hand, made me go up.  
He had my wife go up and kneel by my side.  
He touched our forehead and, standing between us, he  
blessed us:  
'Previously Utanapishtim was a human being.  
But now let Utanapishtim and his wife become like us,  
the gods!  
Let Utanapishtim reside far away, at the Mouth of the Rivers.'  
They took us far away and settled us at the Mouth of the Rivers."

[Gilgamesh leaves the land of the Gods:]

. . . Gilgamesh and Urshanabi bearded the boat,  
they cast off the magillu-boat, and sailed away.  
The wife of Utanapishtim the Faraway said to him:  
"Gilgamesh came here exhausted and worn out.  
What can you give him so that he can return to his land (with  
honor) !"

Then Gilgamesh raised a punting pole  
and drew the boat to shore.

Utanapishtim spoke to Gilgamesh, saying:  
"Gilgamesh, you came here exhausted and worn out.  
What can I give you so you can return to your land?  
I will disclose to you a thing that is hidden, Gilgamesh,  
a... I will tell you.  
There is a plant... like a boxthorn,  
whose thorns will prick your hand like a rose.  
If your hands reach that plant you will become a young  
man again."

Hearing this, Gilgamesh opened a conduit(!) (to the Apsu)  
and attached heavy stones to his feet.

They dragged him down, to the Apsu they pulled him.

He took the plant, though it pricked his hand,  
and cut the heavy stones from his feet,  
letting the waves(?) throw him onto its shores.

Gilgamesh spoke to Urshanabi, the ferryman, saying:

"Urshanabi, this plant is a plant against decay(!)  
by which a man can attain his survival(!).  
I will bring it to Uruk-Haven,

and have an old man eat the plant to test it.

The plant's name is 'The Old Man Becomes a Young Man.'"

Then I will eat it and return to the condition of my youth."

At twenty leagues they broke for some food,

at thirty leagues they stopped for the night.

Seeing a spring and how cool its waters were,

Gilgamesh went down and was bathing in the water.

A snake smelled the fragrance of the plant,

silently came up and carried off the plant.

While going back it sloughed off its casing.'

At that point Gilgamesh sat down, weeping,

his tears streaming over the side of his nose.

"Counsel me, O ferryman Urshanabi!

For whom have my arms labored, Urshanabi!

For whom has my heart's blood roiled!

I have not secured any good deed for myself,

but done a good deed for the 'lion of the ground'!"

## African Genesis

A familiar motif is to be found in a creation myth from the Basari of northern Guinea\*:

☉☉ Unumbotte made a human being. Its name was Man. Unumbotte next made an antelope, named Antelope. Unumbotte made a snake, named Snake. At the time these three were made, there were no trees but one, a palm. Nor had the earth been pounded smooth. All three were sitting on the rough ground, and Unumbotte said to them, "The earth has not yet been pounded. You must pound the ground smooth where you are sitting." Unumbotte gave them seeds of all kinds and said, "Go plant these." Then Unumbotte went away.

Unumbotte came back. He saw that the three had not yet pounded the earth. But they had planted the seeds. One of the seeds had sprouted and grown. It was a tree, and it had grown tall and was bearing fruit, red fruit. Every seven days Unumbotte would return and pluck one of the red fruits.

One day Snake said, "We too should eat these fruits. Why must we go hungry?" Antelope said, "But we don't know anything about this fruit." Then Man and his wife took some of the fruit and ate it. Unumbotte came down from the sky and asked, "Who ate the fruit?" They answered, "We did." Unumbotte asked, "Who told you that you could eat that fruit?" They replied, "Snake did." Unumbotte asked, "Why did you listen to Snake?" They said, "We were hungry." Unumbotte questioned Antelope. "Are you hungry, too?" Antelope said, "Yes, I get hungry. I like to eat grass." Since then, Antelope has lived in the wild, eating grass.

Unumbotte then gave sorghum to Man, also yams and millet. And the people gathered in eating groups that would always eat from the same bowl, never the bowls of the other groups. It was from this that differences in language arose. And ever since then, the people have ruled the land.

But Snake was given by Unumbotte a medicine with which to bite people. ☉☉

Mbuti, Democratic Republic of Congo

☉☉ God made the first man and woman and put them into the forest. They had everything they could possibly desire; there was so much food that all they had to do was bend down and pick it up. God told them they should have children and that all humanity would live forever, and he let them do whatever they wanted, but he warned them: "Of all the fruit of the trees of the forest you may eat, but of the fruit of the *tabu* tree you may not eat." Both promised to abide by this prohibition.

The man was never interested in the *tabu* fruit, but while pregnant, the woman was overcome with an irresistible desire to eat it. She convinced her husband to steal into the forest and pluck the fruit, which he peeled and ate with her, hiding the peels under a pile of leaves. God, however, was not so easily fooled and sent a strong wind into the forest, which blew away the cover of leaves.

"You have broken your promise to me," reprimanded an angry God. "For this you will now learn what it is to work hard, to suffer illness, and to die. And the woman," he continued, "she will suffer even greater pain in the delivery of her children." ☉☉

## Logos Africana—The Sacred Word in Africa

From the Wapangwa, who inhabit the northeast shore of Lake Malawi in Tanzania, an account of creation begins like this<sup>19</sup>:

⊙⊙ The sky was large, white, and very clear. It was empty; there were no stars and no moon; only a tree stood in the air and there was wind. This tree fed on the atmosphere, and ants lived on it. Wind, tree ants, and atmosphere were controlled by the power of the Word. But the Word was not something that could be seen. It was a force that enabled one thing to create another. ⊙⊙

⊙⊙ One day the Word sent a terrible wind, and white frost appeared on the earth. Soon a warm wind followed, and the ice melted into water. The waters swelled and drowned the ants, and in the end flooded the whole earth, until no spot remained dry. In those days the earth was as large as it is now, and it was a desert of water. ⊙⊙

⊙⊙ One day the atmosphere brought forth beings that moved about in the air—they spoke and cried and sang. They settled on the earth and each created his own sound. Birds, animals, and men—each had his own cry.

There was little food. The animals wanted to eat the tree of origin, but men forbade them to do it. But when men saw that the animals did not obey, they called them into a valley and began a great war, attacking each other with sticks and stones. It was a terrible war. The wind blew powerfully and the water roared. Many died before the war was finally over. Some animals remained men's prisoners, others escaped to the forest. But the animals of the forest began to attack men and to eat them. So all evil came into the world—murder and eating one another. ⊙⊙

(Cherokee)

---

There was once a time, not long after the creation of the world, when humans and animals freely communicated. However, they did not remain on good terms for very long. The humans began to kill the animals for their furs and for food. It was easy to do at this time, as the animals were completely unprepared to be hunted and they walked up to human beings, trusting them. Then the animals became angry.

The tribe of the bear met in council, led by old White Bear. After several of the bears had voiced their complaints against the human beings, the entire tribe declared war on the humans. Once the angry crowd calmed down, White Bear told them that the human beings had a decided advantage—the spear, and the bow and arrow. So the bears decided to make their own weapons.

However, the bears had a problem: Their claws made it impossible to throw a spear. They couldn't shoot arrows either, as their claws made it impossible to properly draw back on a bow. Some of the younger bears thought of cutting their claws, but White Bear told them that bears needed claws to climb trees and subdue their food.

Meanwhile, the deer were also angry and they too met, presided over by Little Deer. The deer, of course, are less violent creatures than are bears, so they did not consider making war on human beings. However, they resolved to use their magic: Thenceforth if a hunter wished to kill a deer, he must first ask permission of the spirit of Little Deer or else seek his pardon afterward. Any human hunter failing to do so would be stricken with rheumatism.

The fish and reptiles also met to discuss their future relationship with the humans. They decided to haunt mankind with terrible dreams of serpents. Only the Cherokee can banish such dreams with the help of a medicine man.

The birds and insects met in council; each of them named a disease they could spread among the humans.

The plants, however, thought that all of this was getting out of hand, pointing out that, since many of the animals themselves killed for food, they were wrong to be so sharp in their judgment. Since the plants are everywhere, they had overheard the councils of the bears, deer, fish and reptiles, birds and insects, and knew what diseases would be inflicted on humans. So each plant decided to act as a remedy for one of the diseases, and thus was medicine born. ♦