

RASNET
Conference 2024
Unit 1
AOS 1.1

Dr Amanda Burritt

Plan for today

- Focus points from Study Design
- Key issues, concepts, questions about the nature and purpose of religion
- Question time
- Case Study 1: Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh
- Question time
- Case Study 2: Durrington Walls and Woodhenge
- Question time
- Where to next?
- Concluding remarks

Interrelated aspects of religion

Beliefs

Ethics

Rituals

Sacred stories

Social structures

Spaces, places, times and artefacts

Spiritual experiences

Symbols

Texts

(Study Design 2023 p 10)

Unit 1: The role of religion in society

In this unit students explore the spiritual origins of religion and understand its role in the development of society, identifying the **nature and purpose of religion over time**. They investigate religion, including the totality of phenomena to which the term 'religion' refers, and acknowledge religion's contribution to the development of human society. They also focus on the role of spiritualities, religious traditions and religious denominations in shaping **personal and group identity over time**. (SD 2023 p11)

Area of Study 1 The nature and purpose of religion

In this area of study students are introduced to the nature and purpose of religion in general, exploring the **role of religion in shaping and giving meaning to individuals and communities**. Religion has often been drawn on to provide **explanations for all phenomena, offering a means for finding answers to the big questions of life and answering such questions**. Students examine the aspects of religion in general, and then apply the aspects of religion as a framework to further examine spiritualities, religious traditions and religious denominations. They also study the interrelation of these aspects generally, and apply the aspects to spiritualities, religious traditions and religious denominations studied. They **investigate how the aspects may vary between spiritualities, religious traditions** and religious denominations.

(SD 2023 p11)

Key knowledge

- the nature and purposes of religion over time
- the aspects of religion and how they are interrelated
- **answers to questions about the origins of life and existence offered by religion**
- spiritual and religious **narratives** that explain truths of all existence
- **the role that religion can have in shaping and giving meaning to particular needs of individuals and communities**
- the role of religion generally in giving expression to beliefs through the other aspects of religion (SD 2023 p12)

Key skills

- discuss the nature and purposes of religion over time
- examine the aspects of religion and their interrelationship
- apply the aspects of religion to spiritualities, religious traditions and religious denominations
- analyse the ways that spiritual and religious **narratives** can explain truths of all existence
- describe the role of religion in shaping and giving meaning to the particular needs of individuals and communities
- interpret, synthesise and apply **primary** and **secondary source material** (SD 2023 p12)

Unit 1: The role of religion in society

- A range of examples is studied throughout the unit. For all areas of study, students explore detailed examples from more than one spirituality, religious tradition or religious denomination. These may be from one or more of the groups below. In addition, for Areas of Study 1 and 2 further shorter illustrative examples should be selected for study from across all the groups below:
- Spiritual and religious ideas in **prehistory** (associated with, for example, hunter-gatherer societies, Çatalhöyük, Göbekli Tepe, Jericho, Lascaux, Stonehenge)
- Religious traditions of ancient civilisations and empires (such as **Babylonia**, Canaan, Ancient China, Ancient Egypt, the Indus Valley civilisation, Ancient Rome, Sumer) (SD 2023 p11)

Religion and/or spirituality?

- What is the sacred?
- Are religion and spirituality the same?
- What is the role of personal and collective experience in religious belief and practice?
- How are religious beliefs transmitted within cultures?

What is religion?

- An organised body of doctrine and practice
- Religious tradition: ‘a **belief** and **practice** that comes from, and leads to, a human recognition of an ultimate reality and which is perpetuated, interpreted and communicated by an organised believing **community**’ (Tuohy, Green, Samuel and Valladares *Religion and Society* xiv)

What is spirituality?

- Transcendence
- Sense of numinous
- Sacred
- Beyond ordinary and physical
- Beyond the rational?
- ‘the act of being open to the perception and experience of everything being interconnected through an **ultimate reality**’ (Tuohy, Green, Samuel and Valladares *Religion and Society* xv)
- Spiritual experience: ‘when a **powerful emotion** is stirred by an encounter affecting one’s beliefs, emotions...’ (Tuohy, Green, Samuel and Valladares *Religion and Society* xv)

Ways of engaging

Supplication

Ritual

Story

Material culture

Natural environment

Mediation

Questions asked across time, societies and cultures, to which religions respond

What is the purpose of life?

Is there continued existence after physical death?

If so, what is it like?

How is it achieved by the individual?

How did the world and the cosmos come to be?

Is there an ultimate reality or being/s which relates to the created world?

Is this being/s morally good and powerful or capricious and judgemental?

How do I relate to the ultimate reality?

Why is there suffering?

How do I know how to behave towards other people and the natural world?

Some relevant terms

- Theism – belief that God exists
- Atheism – belief that God does not exist
- Agnosticism – belief that there is insufficient knowledge to know whether God/gods exist or not
- Henotheism – worship of one god while accepting the possibility of the existence of other gods
- Polytheism – worship of many gods
- Anthropomorphism – representation of gods in human form
- Theriomorphism – animal form as representation of the divine
- Pantheism – belief that the whole natural world is identical with God
- Secular Humanism – world view based on the value of human experience and reason without belief in transcendent spiritual powers

Communication of prehistoric and ancient beliefs

Oral

Textual

Visual

Material

Prehistoric sacred sites, built and natural

- Non-textual: symbolic inscriptions, not written language
- Limitations of our knowledge of prehistoric **beliefs** – interpretation of archaeological evidence/material culture, incorporating a range of comparative contexts, including sociological and anthropological
- Ritual landscape: whole context and orientation of topography and cosmos

A type of ancient textual source

MYTH – oral or written narrative, usually involving supernatural beings and addressing fundamental human questions regarding existence and behaviour

MYTHOLOGY – collection of myths and concepts which embody the world view of a culture and which provide guidance for living in that culture

EPIC – long poem narrating the deeds of mythical or historical figures, often aetiological and didactic

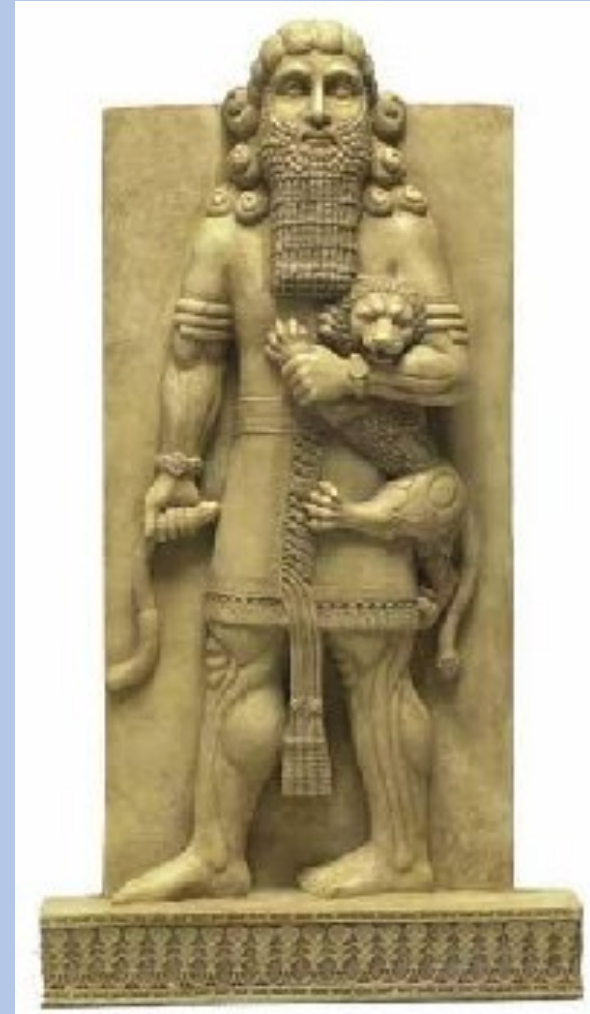
TYPICAL THEMES IN EPIC –relationship to the natural and supernatural world, contact with the numinous, concept of the heroic, quest, death, immortality, friendship, journey

Text and built environment

The Epic of Gilgamesh
(Babylonian)

Durrington Walls and
Woodhenge (Neolithic Britain)

THE EPIC OF GILGAMESH



Ancient textual sources

- Cuneiform on clay tablets
- Cuneiform was invented as a writing system c 3,000 BCE in lower Mesopotamia
- Clay tablets do not easily perish
- Large numbers of clay tablets survive in multiple sites in Mesopotamia, the Levant and Anatolia
- Story of Gilgamesh existed in diverse contexts and languages across different time periods. Sometimes fragmentary e.g. Sumerian poems (George XV)

The Epic of Gilgamesh is much older than the Greek epics *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* and the Roman epic *The Aeneid*

The first stories written about Gilgamesh were in Sumerian c 2100 BCE. They were based on earlier oral versions.

The stories were integrated into a longer poem written in **Akkadian** around 1600 BCE

Versions also in Hurrian and Hittite (Indo-European languages)

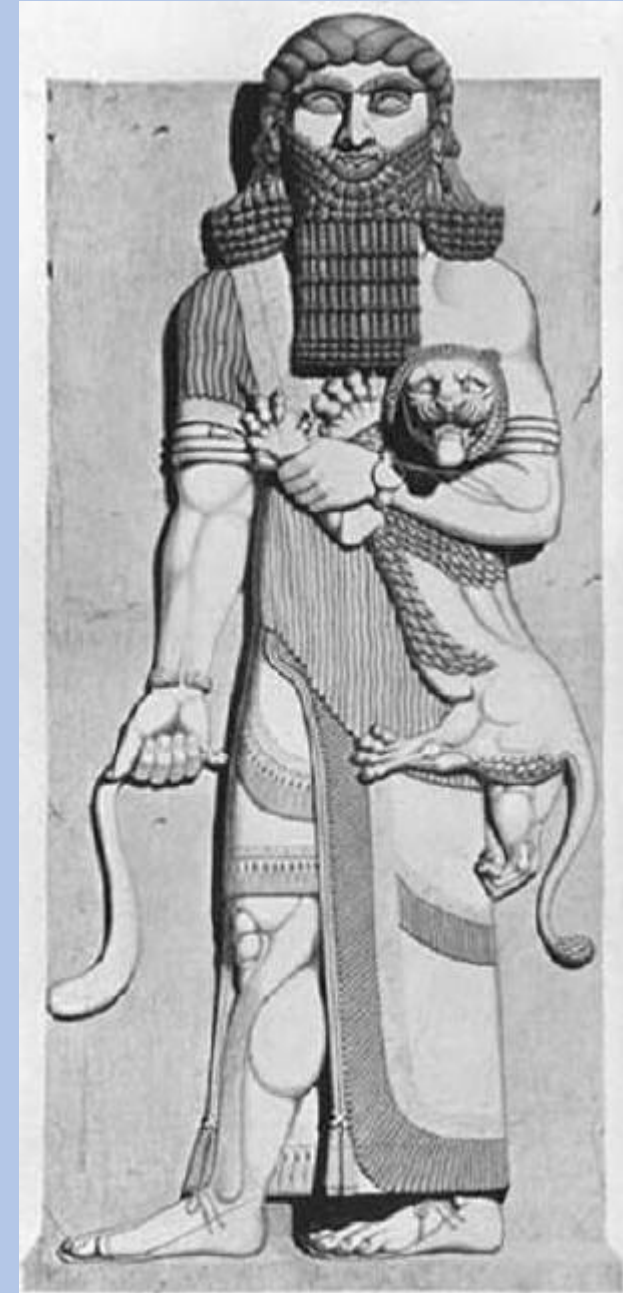


Standard or classical version

- Written in Akkadian
- First millennium Babylonia and Assyria, with inclusion of some older material
- Known as *He who saw the Deep*

(George XV-XVI)

The Epic of Gilgamesh addresses fundamental human questions that transcend time and culture



THE PRINCIPAL VERSION

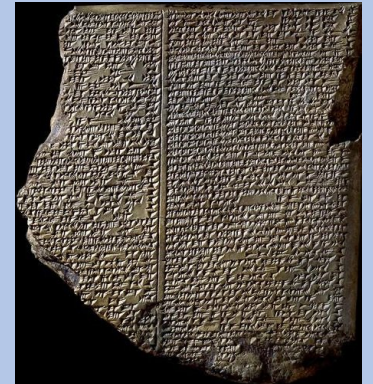
Fullest (principal) version comes from 12 tablets in Akkadian (1100 BCE)

Found in the ruins of the library of Ashurbanipal, King of Assyria (669–633 BCE) at Nineveh (city mentioned in Hebrew scriptures – modern Mosul, Iraq)

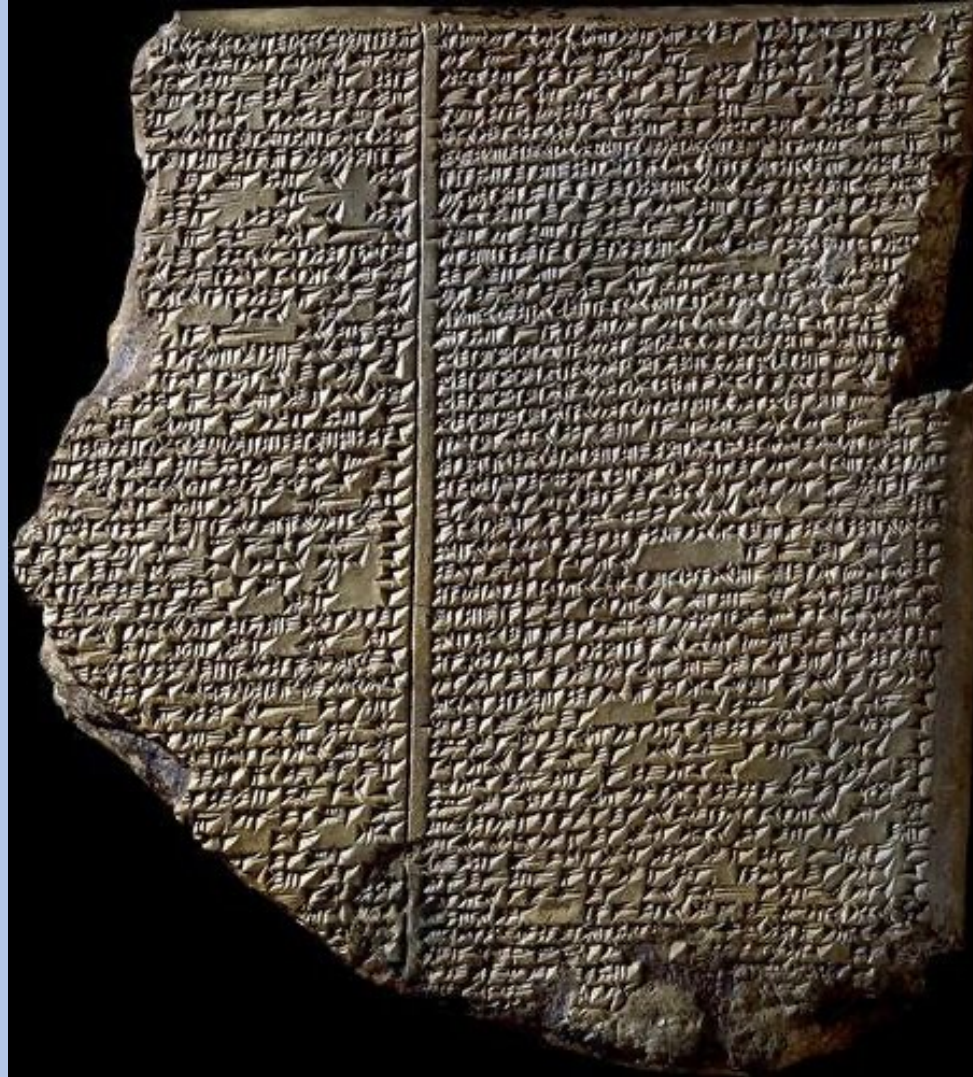
Library destroyed by the Persians in 612 BCE

Tablets damaged (and incomplete)

Tablets name the author of this version of the story: Shin-eqi-unninni. Such attribution is rare in the ancient world.



'Flood Tablet'
11th tablet of the
Epic of Gilgamesh
(British Museum)



Mesopotamian cosmologies

- Enlil – Sumerian god of wind and storms. Akkadian and Babylonian king of the gods
- Ea/Enki – god of water, wisdom
- Shamash – sun god
- Ishtar – principal goddess of Uruk
- Aruru – goddess who created Enkidu from clay
- Ninurta – god of harvest and war, son of Enlil
- Anu – god of heaven/sky
- Ninsun (mother of Gilgamesh)
- Shiduri – minor goddess of wisdom
- Marduk – chief god of Babylon, *Enuma Elish* (creation story)

IMPORTANCE OF THE EPIC OF GILGAMESH

- **Conceptual**
- **Literary**
- **Historical**



GILGAMESH AND THE SUMERIAN KING LIST

- Gilgamesh was an historical king of Uruk
- He lived c 2700/2600 BCE
- The Sumerian King List records him as the fifth ruler of Uruk's First Dynasty
- **Son of the semi divine Lugalbanda (second king of Uruk in Sumerian King List, ruled for 1,200 years, deified) and the goddess Ninsun, making him partly divine and partly human**
- It was said that he built the city (of Uruk) with his own hands



A STORY TO BE HEARD

In a society with only a small literate elite the Epic of Gilgamesh was intended to be read aloud.

In many cultures, literate and non-literate, **hearing** sacred stories was and is fundamental e.g. oral traditions in indigenous cultures and in Celtic and Norse contexts and hearing passages from the Bible read aloud in churches and synagogues.

Questions across time and cultures addressed in Gilgamesh

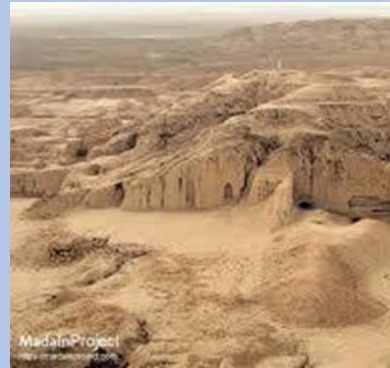
- Teleological – purpose of life
- Ontological – nature of being
- Cosmological – nature of the universe
- Theological - nature of the divine
- Immortality
- Good and evil

The story

‘Gilgamesh the tall, magnificent and terrible...
two-thirds of him god and one-third human’



‘He built the rampart of Uruk...’



‘let her create the equal of Gilgamesh...so
Uruk may be rested!’



‘The goddess Aruru....created Enkidu...’

cf Genesis 2:7 ‘then the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life’



‘His body is matted with hair...’

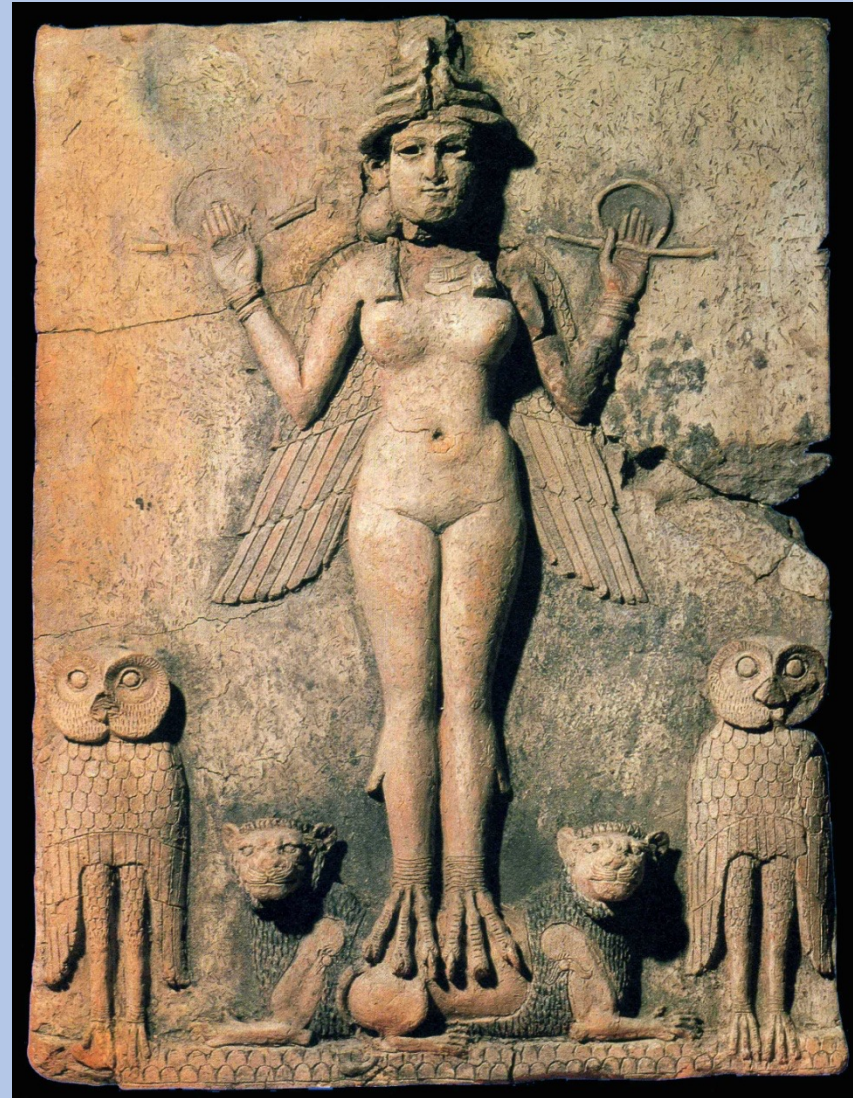
He is like a wild animal, not a human being of the city (contrast between ‘civilisation’ and the natural world)



‘the hunter saw him...’



'take with you Shamat the harlot...'



‘the beasts of the field shied away from his presence...’



‘You are wise, Enkidu, and now you have become like a god...’

cf Genesis 3:4-5 (Tree of Knowledge of good and evil) ‘For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.’

Genesis 3: 22 ‘Then the Lord God said, “See the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil;”’



Gilgamesh and Enkidu fight, then
become friends
'Gilgamesh knelt, one foot on the
ground...'



‘Ferocious Humbaba,...let us slay him,
so his power is no more ’



‘Shamash roused against Humbaba
the mighty
gale-winds...’



‘Gilgamesh opened his mouth to speak saying
to the Lady Ishtar...’



Neo-Babylonian | Ishtar Gate | 604-562 BCE | Berlin State
Museum | Vorderasiatisches Museum, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin
<https://about.jstor.org/blog/the-rebirth-of-the-ishtar-gate/>



Dreams

cf Joseph -
Genesis Ch 40-41



Gilgamesh Dream Tablet

- Looted from an Iraqi museum in 1991 during Gulf War.
- Returned to Iraq 2021.



‘Gilgamesh began mourning his friend ...’



‘I grew fearful of death and so wander the wild.’



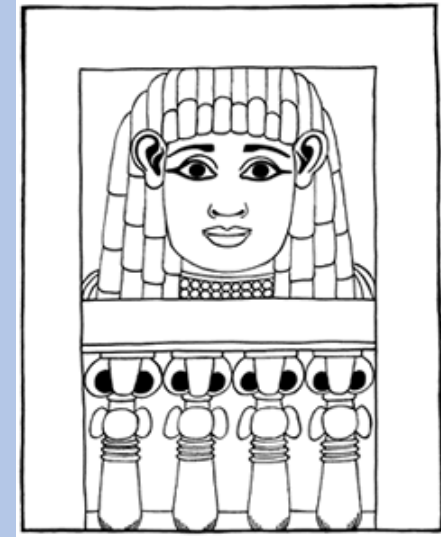
THE JOURNEY TOWARDS IMMORTALITY



‘There were scorpion-men guarding its gate, whose glance was death’

SIDURI

- Towards the end of his journey, Gilgamesh encountered Siduri, a tavern keeper
- Siduri explained the Mesopotamian philosophy of life and death to Gilgamesh
- She told Gilgamesh he would never find eternal life:
'When the gods created people they allotted death to them.'
- She advised Gilgamesh to make every day a day for rejoicing
cf. *Ecclesiastes* 9:7-9



(*carpe diem* 'seize the day')

GILGAMESH AND THE QUEST FOR ETERNAL LIFE

- Utnapishti and his wife were bestowed with eternal life
- Gilgamesh sought them out in his quest for eternal life
- Utnapishti explained to Gilgamesh that he is not a god, and cannot make Gilgamesh immortal
- This is a challenging statement for Gilgamesh to accept



GILGAMESH AND THE GREAT FLOOD

- In the mythical past, humans and gods lived together
- The humans were boisterous preventing the gods from getting any rest
- Enlil decided to exterminate the humans by sending a great flood
- Ea, the god of wisdom, warned Utnapishti and told him to build a ship
- When the boat was finished, he loaded it with his family, farm animals and craftsmen
- After seven days and nights the flood stopped

(cf. Noah and the Ark, Genesis 6:1 – 9:29)

Noah's Ark, 1846
Edward Hicks
(American, 1780–1849)

<https://philamuseum.org/collection/object/52107>



KEY POINTS

- The conflict between civilization and nature forms a key element of the story
- The epic embodies fundamental human questions that transcend time and culture
- To be human is to be mortal
- In the end Gilgamesh accepts the finite limits of his life



Prehistoric sacred sites, built and natural

- Non-textual – symbolic inscriptions, not written language
- Limitations of our knowledge of prehistoric **beliefs** – interpretation of archaeological evidence, incorporating range of comparative contexts including sociological and anthropological
- Ritual landscape: whole context and orientation of topography and cosmos

Sacred sites, built and natural: Stonehenge Avenue

- Two parallel ditches and inside banks 22 metres apart
- Runs 3 kilometres from Stonehenge to River Avon
- First 500 metres from Stonehenge runs directly along midsummer sunrise alignment
- 2008 research showed geological feature created in Ice Age about 480,000 years ago
- Same alignment as The Avenue and would have been visible in landscape

The sacred landscape

- Probably processions down The Avenue and alongside Avon to Durrington
- Monument complex – earthwork henge, three timber monuments: Northern and Southern Circles at Durrington and Woodhenge, c2,600-2,400 BCE
- Concentric rings now seen as post holes (concrete markers in place)
- Both timber circles later enclosed by henge earthworks

Digital model of Durrington Walls

<https://archaeology.co.uk/articles/features/rethinking-durrington-walls-a-long-lost-monument-revealed.htm>



Woodhenge

<https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/woodhenge/>



Woodhenge

<https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/woodhenge/>



Durrington

- Entrance to Woodhenge has **midsummer sunrise** and **midwinter sunset** alignment like Stonehenge
- Southern Circle at Durrington oriented south-east towards **midsummer sunset** and **midwinter sunrise**
- Specific gatherings at different times of year – symbolic and ceremonial differences
- Significant settlement at Durrington – houses
- One closer to monument – entrance posts and enclosure ditch – special purpose?
- Middens – pig bones, flint tools, pottery fragments – large feasts
- Probably temporary accommodation for those who built sarsens at Stonehenge

Research: Parker Pearson and Ramilisona

- Archaeologists Mike Parker Pearson (UK) and Ramilisona (Madagascar) draw on contemporary practices in Madagascar to propose Stonehenge and Durrington had distinct roles and meanings
- Madagascar – stone used for mortuary purposes and standing monuments – everlasting material
- Organic materials for houses to live in
- Stonehenge with its cremation cemetery for the dead
- Durrington with wooden architecture and houses for living

Key References

- George, A. (trans.) (1999). *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. Penguin Books: London.
- Garrow, D. and Wilkin, N. (2022). *The World of Stonehenge*. The British Museum Press: London.

A question to consider

What relevance does the mythology and sacred material culture of the ancient world have for contemporary Australian society?

Assessment

The award of satisfactory completion for a unit is based on whether the student has demonstrated the set of outcomes specified for the unit.

Teachers should use a variety of learning activities and assessment tasks that provide a range of opportunities for students to demonstrate the key knowledge and key skills in the outcomes. (SD 2023 p 14)

Assessment (cont.)

Suitable tasks for assessment **may** be selected from the following:

- analytical exercises
- case studies
- debates
- essays
- extended responses
- multimedia presentations
- structured questions
- visual analyses.

Where teachers allow students to choose between tasks they must ensure that the tasks they set are of comparable scope and demand. (SD 2023 p 14-15)

ACTIVITY

- Identify content on which you will focus in your teaching of AOS 1
- Explain how this material will enable you to address the key **knowledge** and **skills** requirements