MESOPOTAMIAN MYTHIC JOURNEYS IN PURSUIT OF LIFE

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"There are only two certainties in life: death and taxes"—so runs a well-known and oft-quoted proverb of modern times.

By drawing a parallel between an existential reflection on the natural world on the one hand and a human institutional construct on the other, the proverb proposes a rather fatalistic outlook on the latter by suggesting, in rather cynical fashion, an equivalence in universal validity between the two—whether the proposition is ultimately truthful from a theoretical or philosophical standpoint being of course beside the. Ultimately, we can presumably agree that the primary focus here is on taxation: in other words, the stress, any time we find ourselves uttering the proverb, in these or similar words, is on the human institutional artefact.

The proverb "works" only because of a tacit acceptance of its premise: that death is the inevitable outcome of life. Further, the proverb's ironic commentary on "reality" draws strength at some level from the inherent opposition between these juxtaposed metaphysical concepts. But what is of interest to us here is the fact that practically every—if not every—culture has engaged in some sort of speculation precisely on the validity of that very premise. Our common apparent observations to the contrary, we all like to ask, at some point or other: is death indeed the inevitable outcome of life?

From a Judaeic or Judaeo-Christian standpoint, several answers to the question are possible, depending upon one's hermeneutical approach to various elements present in the tradition, such as the Eden story, the bodily ascension of Elijah into heaven, the resurrection of Jesus (among others), and the bodily assumption of Mary, varying from yes to yes-with-rare-exceptions to no.

In the following discussion, I propose to go a little farther afield, and to examine the response to this question of another ancient Near Eastern culture, that of Mesopotamia, on the basis of the two literary productions which arguably serve to make this culture's core statement on the issue: these are the story of Adapa and the Southwind and the Epic of Gilgameš.

ADAPA AND THE SOUTH WIND

Sources

The Mesopotamian myth 'Adapa and the South Wind' has been known since the late 1800s, and is presently represented by five cuneiform tablet fragments certified as

clearly belonging to the composition. The largest of these, so-called Fragment 'B', contains the core narrative in the Middle Babylonian dialect, and dates to the 14th c. BCE, having been found in the el Amarna archives. The other four—Fragments 'A, A1, C, D'—from Ashurbanipal's library dialect and thus dating much later, to the 7th c. BCE, are composed in the so-called Standard Babylonian dialect (Izre'el, 2001:5).[1] These represent parallel variants (Fragment 'C'), an interpretive introduction to the core (Fragments 'A, A1'), and a parallel variant duplicating a portion of the core but ending with an alternate conclusion (Fragment 'D'). There is another text fragment (Fragment 'E') from Ashshurbanipal's library which may pertain to a different recension of the story, but due to its poor state of preservation and minimal degree of overlap with the other fragments in terms of content, it can in any case safely be omitted from consideration here. Finally, an apparent Sumerian precursor dating to the Old Babylonian period (ca. 20th–17th c. BCE) is in process of publication (Cavigneaux and Al-Rawi, 1993:91–101).[2]

Brief Summary of the Narrative

Given the fact that this composition is probably less well known to the general readership, a brief outline of the story is in order.

This narrative concerns one of the Seven Antediluvian Sages of Mesopotamian mythology by name of Adapa (Izre'el 2001:1), a priest of Ea (god of wisdom, magic, and subterranean water) at his ancient cult site of Eridu in southern Mesopotamia and an instructor of humankind in the 'ordinance of heaven and earth' (A 3'). It would seem that he was intimately involved in the details of the cult, since he participated personally in the baking of bread and the preparing of food and drink and himself caught the daily provisions of fish for the temple (A 10'–15'). In any case, one day, while he was out fishing, the South Wind blew particularly hard and capsized his boat, so that he fell into 'the deep part of the sea'. In his anger, Adapa cursed the South Wind and broke 'its wing', which henceforth prevented it from blowing. After seven days, Anu, god of the heavens, realised this and having enquired upon the reason ordered that a summons be issued for Adapa to appear before the divine Royal Court and render account of his actions. Ea, 'who knows heaven' (B 14'), and who therefore was or had become aware of this, prepared Adapa by telling him how to ingratiate himself with two lesser vegetation deities whom he would encounter at the gate of Anu, namely the fertility deities Dumuzi

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[1] Izre'el's book represents the most recent critical edition of all extant fragments with commentary and offers an interpretation of the myth in great detail. Cited references to the text are to this edition.

[2] Thanks to a private communication from Douglas R. Frayne I understand that this text is likely to agree substantially with the currently published material; thus, for our present purpose we may content ourselves with the published material.

and Gizzida who would have disappeared from the earth, who would then advocate on his behalf before Anu; he insisted, however, he *on no account* accept the bread and water he would be offered, as they would be the 'bread of death' and the 'water of death', though he should accept the garment and anointing oil which would also be offered. Adapa obeyed Ea to the letter; and when he was offered the 'bread of life' and the 'water of life' rather than the expected 'bread of death' and 'water of death' (B 76–78), he of course refused it and was sent back to 'his' Earth. According to the alternate ending (Fragment 'D') he (presumably) did partake of the bread and water, since, in that account, Anu released him from Ea's service and installed him in his own as a 'lord of Heaven to perpetuity' (D 9′–11′).

Analysis

The central character Adapa is no ordinary individual, as the introduction makes clear.

1. He was a sage, a citizen of Eridu (*apkallu mār Eridu*; A5′).
2. His speech was like the speech of Anu (*qibīssu kīma qibīt Ani*; A2′).
3. He was capable/skilled, exceedingly wise, (as) one of the Anunnaki[3] (*lēʾu atra ḫasīsa ša Annunakī šūma*; A8′).
4. Ea[4] had perfected him with a vast understanding (*uzna rapašta*; A3′) for the purpose of providing instruction in the cultural ordinances of the land/earth (*uṣurāt māti kullumu*; A3′).
5. Ea had appointed him as (his) follower from among humankind (*Ea kīma riddi ina amēlūti ibnīšu*;[5] A6′).
6. Ea had given him wisdom (*nēmeqa*; A4′) but not life to perpetuity[6] (*napišta dārīta*; A4′).

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[3] There has been considerable debate concerning the interpretation of the second portion of this statement, since it does not appear to apply to Ea, but cannot easily apply to Adapa either, as he is human and the Anunnaki are gods (Izre'el, 2001: 12). I take it as metaphorical.
[4] The text is very fragmentary and Ea is not named until A6′, but the context requires that we understand him to be the principle actor throughout the introductory portion of the text.
[5] The Akkadian verb *banû* (root **bn'*) often has a connotation similar to Hebrew ברא*, and one could see in Adapa a special creation, but this need not be so. Either way, however, the existential assertion of the myth remains the same.
[6] I am deliberately avoiding the seemingly more convenient phrase 'eternal life' due to the eisegetical pitfalls its use would likely entail as a consequence of its familiarity.

Adapa is thus a singular individual. He is a citizen of Eridu, belonging to the upper echelon as a sage who is skilled, exceedingly wise, of vast understanding and endowed with wisdom. Indeed, so excellent are his qualities that he is twice compared to the gods, having speech like Anu's and with skill and wisdom paralleling those of the Anunnaki. On the other hand, we are reminded that despite all of this, he very definitely belongs to the human rather than the divine realm: his knowledge and wisdom were specifically intended for application in human affairs, and he did not share life to perpetuity with the gods; in the conclusion, we are reminded a final time that he is of the 'seed of humanity' (*zēr amīlūti*; D12'). In sum, he represents the fullness of human potential, the best which could conceivably be hoped for short of being divine.

The power of myth lies in the archetypal and is manifested when an audience is made to identify with the narrative through existential experience. The behaviour of the South Wind (*šūtu*) and Adapa's angry response, far from being an arbitrary narrative element whose sole purpose is to set up the crux of the narrative, provides just such a point of identification. A study by Roux (1961) based on weather data gathered in the 1950s suggests conditions at that time which fit the literary scenario portrayed in the text (both pre- and post-outburst on the part of the South Wind) very well. Listeners would have been intimately familiar temperamental nature of the South Wind and its potential for violence and have sympathised with Adapa, bringing about a rapprochement between 'ultimate' human Adapa just described and themselves. According to Roux, the South Wind, blowing toward the land from the sea effected a fertilising influence, and Izre'el (2001:67) has noted that its interruption would have implied a corresponding cessation in fertility. Thus, the disappearance of Dumuzi ('son-life') and Gizzida ('right tree') from the earth and their consequent relocation to the abode of the gods was a logical consequence of Adapa's action, as the audience would have appreciated. The presence of Dumuzi in particular at the gate would have been in line with expectations: Hallo notes that according to one neo-Sumerian archival text, Shulgi, king of Ur, served for seven days as doorkeeper of heaven, apparently under the guise of Dumuzi (1996:202 and nn. 80f).

In Mesopotamian thought, events in the earthly realm reflect or are reflected by parallel occurrences in the divine realm. In this case, Adapa's action against the South Wind, which has a farther-reaching consequence for fertility, implies a consequent shift in the divine realm, symbolised by the displacement of the fertility deities Dumuzi and Gizzida. Adapa's trip to heaven is the result of the divine reaction to Adapa's implicit interference in the divine realm.

The details of the trip, which can be understood as belonging to a liminal transition, are left aside as irrevelant. What we are told is as follows:

1. Anu issued the command that Adapa be brought into his presence (B13′).
2. Ea made Adapa unkempt and dressed him in a mourning garment (B15′f), and put him on the road/path to heaven (lit. 'he caused him to seize the road to heaven': *harrān šamê ušeṣbissūma*; B37′) as a consequence of which he ascended to heaven (*ana šamê itēlīma*; B37′).
3. Dumuzi and Gizzida granted his entrance into heaven and escorted Adapa into the presence of Anu under the influence of Ea's advice.

In line with the nature of the trip as divine reaction, each element of the journey is initiated from the divine side.

Once in heaven, Adapa was quizzed on his action by an angry Anu. However, his explanation, helped along by Dumuzi and Gizzida's intercession, brought about a reversal in Anu's attitude: 'his heart was calmed, and he became silent' (*ittūh libbašu issakuʾat*; B56′). Indeed, although it is not stated explicitly, the audience would have understood that even more was going on: in the so-called Epic of Creation, a similar change on the part of the younger generation of gods from rambunctious and noisy to calm and silent when they discovered that they were about to be destroyed by their parents meant that they were 'stunned' (ll. 55ff; see Foster, 2005:441). In our story, this is borne out by the fact that Anu then posed a series of rhetorical questions including why Ea had revealed things 'of heaven and earth' (*ša šamê u erṣeti*; B57′f) to a mere human and what they (the gods) should do for Adapa under the circumstances. A breach of boundary had taken place, which had to be addressed.

Anu's solution to the problem was to have brought to Adapa not the bread and water of death, as Ea had suggested would happen, but rather the bread and water of life (B60′). The narrative depends for its successful outcome on the apparent contradiction between Ea's favourable disposition toward his servant Adapa and his misleading or faulty advice to decline the bread and water, and a great deal of scholarly discussion has taken place on this point. As I have treated that matter elsewhere (Feuerherm, in press), and it is in any case not particularly germane to the analysis I wish to conduct here, I will refer the interested reader to that paper and relevant items in the bibliography below.

This myth is particularly interesting in that there are two extant endings for it. In the more complete version, Adapa turned down the bread and water of life in accordance with the instructions he was given, though he accepted the garment and

anointing oil. The consequence of this choice is that Anu laughed at him (B66′) and proclaimed 'you (will) not live/you (are) not alive' (*lā bālṭāta*; B68′). The stative form *bālṭāta* has no implicit tense, but in light of the context must either be taken as implying some different quality of life than what Adapa currently enjoyed, amounting to a renewed denial of the 'life to perpetuity' which we were told he had not been given to begin with. On the other hand, because he accepted the garment and anointing oil, his external state was restored to what it had been before the beginning of his adventure. In other words, to use Aristotelian categories, neither his substance (a human without life to perpetuity) nor his accident (external appearance) were ultimately affected by his trip to the divine realm. Anu's last command is that Adapa be sent back to 'his land/earth' (*qaqqarīšu*; B70′), by which we can understand his appropriate domain.

In the alternate ending, we unfortunately cannot read directly Adapa's response to the gift of bread and water, but the implication, given the reversals of outcome, seems logically to be that he accepted them. Here also, Anu laughed; but in this case in amusement at Ea, to whom he attributed an attempt to exceed Anu's own authority. Anu in this instance freed Adapa from Ea's service and set him in his own. The 'seed of humankind' (*zēr amīlūti*; D12′) he deemed to have acted in a lordly (*šalṭiš*; D13′) manner—in other words, in a manner not appropriate to a human—and so was to be accepted among them, and not sent back.

Conclusion

The statement made by the myth is clear, and the differing endings, far from making differing statements, confirm each other. There are two domains, the human and the divine, each of which have their qualities. Some of these are common to both domains, such as intelligence, wisdom, and power—and in the broader context of Mesopotamian literature, foolishness, fear, cowardice, and weakness also—but some are sharply divided: thus, humans do not possess life to perpetuity.[7] This is true even in the case of the alternate ending, since Adapa, once life to perpetuity has become his, must also be removed from the human domain and abide with the gods.

GILGAMEŠ

Gilgameš' journey in pursuit of life is framed somewhat differently from that of Adapa in two significant ways: first, the initiative to undertake it was not thrust upon him by the gods but was his own; and second, whereas in the case of Adapa the journey was implicit, and defined by the endpoints and the point of transition

[7] Death to perpetuity, on the other hand, is the ultimate destiny of all humans, as numerous Mesopotamian myths proclaim.

from the human realm to the divine realm, here the details of the journey from his own domain to that in which he hopes to obtain the secret to life to perpetuity are explicit.

Sources

[Include some discussion of the sources relevant to this analysis, perhaps, but not in great detail as this would consume too much space?]

Brief Summary of the Circumstances Leading to the Journey

The first six tablets[8] tell the archetypal story of brash youth which seeks its kicks without any consideration of the consequences. When Gilgameš is first introduced, he is portrayed as an abusive ruler of Uruk whose tyranny knows no bounds. 'Day and night he behaves with fierce arrogance' (SB I 69), he 'lets [no] girl go free to [her bride-groom]' (76), he 'lets no son go free to his father' (85). For this reason the gods fashioned Enkidu, his perfect counterpart in every way, with the aim of setting him against Gilgameš to hold him in check. The plan backfired, however, when the two became friends and Gilgameš subsequently proposed the foolhardy venture to enter the Cedar Forest and there slay Ḫumbaba, the guardian appointed by the supreme god Enlil.[9] Enkidu wisely counseled against this course of action, but Gilgameš ignored him, calling him a 'weakling' who utters 'feeble talk' (SB II 232–233), and brazenly taunted him with the fact that a human's days are numbered and that human activities amount to nothing more than wind (232–235). Following a failed attempt on the part of elders to dissuade him (287ff), Gilgameš set out with Enkidu in tow.

"The bigger they are, the harder they fall", as the saying goes; so when the gods decided that the pair must be punished, and Enlil decreed the death of Enkidu, [10] which ultimately ensued (end of SB VII, not yet recovered), Gilgameš was forcibly brought face to face with the brutal reality of human mortality which he had previously treated so glibly, and the impetus for his journey in quest of life was created. From this vantage point, one can see the greater part of the narrative in tablets I–VII as a at some level a mere subplot designed to bring us to the

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[8] This discussion takes as its basis the Standard Babylonian version of the epic (SB) with the breaks supplemented where possible from older versions. References are to critical edition by Andrew George (2003).

[9] Anu was at the time of writing still theoretically the king of the gods, but had become rather remote; Enlil, who determines fates, was therefore seen as the *de facto* most powerful god.

[10] The gods' discussion is recorded in a later Hittite version of the story.

contemplation of the ultimate existential human concern, since its introduction, in the form of Gilgameš' lament for Enkidu, takes up an entire tablet of its own (SB VIII).

Analysis

As noted above, Adapa's journey was initiated and propaaged by the divine: Anu issued the command, and Ea set him upon the path. I have argued that this was as it should be, since despite his superlative qualities, Adapa's legitimate sphere as a human was the realm assigned to humans, that is, the land or earth. Gilgameš, on the other hand, besides "surpassing all (other) kings" and being a "hero endowed with a superb physique" (SB I 29), was "two-thirds of him god" and only "one third of him human" (48). This represents a certain degree of escalation from Adapa, and his "dual citizenship" in the human and divine realms was probably the key factor in the Mesopotamians' acceptance of his right and ability to travel between the two realms without outside help. The fact that he was part human, however, meant that he was subject to certain limitations in this regard.

Gilgamešʾ avowed objective was to seek out Ūta–napišti ('I/he found life'[11]), the last of the ante-diluvian Mesopotamian rulers, to whom life had been granted 'like a god'.[12] The first step in this journey involved leaving human civilisation behind and roaming the wild, and after some time he crossed some mountain passes (in other words, a boundary point) and had to contend with lions which dwelt there (SB IX 8–18). At this point, he received his first warning from the sun-god Šamaš: "O Gilgameš, where are you wandering? The life that you seek you will never find" (Si I 7′f). Gilgameš' response was that there would be plenty of time for rest once he had entered the netherworld (11′). Here, 'rest' is opposed to 'wandering', and by implication, since in this context 'rest' is associated with the dead, Gilgameš was implicitly suggesting that 'wandering' (or at least, this particular wandering) could bring about life. Thus, although it is not explicitly stated, it would appear that Gilgameš was denying the inevitability of his own mortality for the first time.

The next stage of his journey brought him to the mountain range Māšu ('twin'), aptly named since its top reached 'the fabric of the heavens' while its base reached the netherworld (SB IX 37–41). Here we find a second boundary point, the mythical place of 'the rising [of the sun]' (39), which is to say, the edge of the world, guarded by two scorpion-people, one male, one female (42, 48) (note the interesting pattern: two mountains, two worlds, two guards, two sexes). The guards, having

[11] Or something along those lines; the analysis is difficult and consequently the meaning uncertain. For a discussion of this name, see George 2003: 152f.
[12] The original Sumerian story whose protagonist was Ziusudra ('life of distant days') can be found on-line at http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=t.1.7.4#.

recognised his dual nature, let him pass into the tunnel which the sun traverses at night, though with the warning that no one had attempted the immediate task before and expressing the concern that it would be dangerous (80f). [13]He did succeed, however, and the fact that he had left the human realm behind is immediately evident since the first thing he saw on the other side was 'the trees of the gods' (172).

This is an important item to note, since the next episode, beginning in tablet X, concerns his meeting up with a tavern woman, Šiduri, who lived by the side of an ocean. The nature of Šiduri, that is, whether she was divine or human, seems to me somewhat ambivalent. In one manuscript (known as "K_3"), her name is prefixed with the determinative indicating divinity, [14] but in another, it is prefixed with the female determinative. [15] George has identified her as "a mysterious goddess of wisdom" (2003:498) on the basis of older literature which cites a goddess by that name, and the fact that she offered Gilgameš sage advice (148f)—however, she barred her gate and went up to the roof at Gilgameš' approach, apparently out of fear, which seems incongruous behaviour for a divine being in her own territory.[16] I would like to suggest that the writing with the divine determinative in one manuscript simply reflects conservatism in the writing of the name (i.e. a frozen form), implying an overlap in character with the aforementioned goddess of wisdom but not an identity; this would seem to be corroborated by the later Hittite version of the epic, in which the determinative is also the female, rather than the divine determinative. In other words, as a boundary being, she has a boundary nature, evoking divine connotations in the minds of the audience but without being clearly divine. In this regard, she parallels the scorpion-people, who are clearly not natural beings in the conventional sense but are also not identified as divine. In both cases, we are dealing with liminal beings.[17]

The foregoing observations fit in well with the fact that when Gilgameš explained his purpose, Šiduri issued a similar warning to him as that offered by the scorpion-people: "There never was… a way across, and since the days of old none who can cross the ocean" (79f). Interestingly in this connection, she added that Šamaš could cross it (82); and between the commonality in the speeches and the fact that the tunnel beneath the mountain range was for Šamaš' use, one may perhaps be

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[13] The text is actually quite damaged here, but this is clear from what has been preserved.
[14] The sign DINGIR (meaning 'god).
[15] This is the sign MÍ (meaning 'woman).
[16] One might also ask what a goddess would be doing running a tavern—although this seems like an odd placement for a tavern in any case.
[17] This is different from the case of Dumuzi and Gizzida, who are deities. On the other hand, their ambivalent nature lies in the fact that they are also known as netherworld deities, so they are also in a sense 'both/and'.

justified in seeing the ocean with the Waters of Death as a kind of continuation of the liminal boundary between the human and divine realms. In the earlier Old Babylonian version of the epic, Šiduri essentially advised Gilgameš that he abandon his quest and eat, drink, and be merry (Si iii 6–13), for ultimately, he would die—"the life that you seek you will never find: when the gods created humankind, death they dispensed to humankind, life they kept for themselves" (2–5), which suits very well her position at the liminal boundary. In the Standard Babylonian version, Šiduri made no such comment on the mortality of humankind; this was left for Ūta–napišti to discuss later—probably for the sake of greater impact at the climax of the narrative[18]—and the details differ, though the implication was identical. Šiduri concluded her speech to Gilgameš with the advice that he seek the assistance of Ūta–napišti's boatman Ur–šanabi who was conveniently nearby with his sailors,[19] the "ones of stone" (SB X 87f), though she guaranteed nothing.[20]

For some strange reason, Gilgameš response to this seems highly illogical: he drew his weapons and attacked Ur–šanabi and his crew, overcame them, and smashed the "ones of stone" and dropped them into the water. Perhaps the point is to show that Gilgameš, despite having journeyed some distance had in fact made no real progress: he appears to have thought that forcing his will upon Ur–šanabi would be a surer thing than trying to win him over. The reality was, as Ur–šanabi pointed out, that in so doing, Gilgameš had obstructed his own progress (SB X 156), since the "ones of stone" (who were immune to the waters of death; 103),[21] were key to making the crossing. Gilgameš' success so far had been due to the support of the scorpion-people and Šiduri, and following this foolish action of his, he was able to continue only because Ur–šanabi offered him a work-around. The implication here is clear: Gilgameš may have chosen to embark on the journey of his own accord, but his progress toward the realm of life occurred only with the consent and support of its various representatives, and the attempt to "work out his own salvation" could only result in setback.

Ultimately, Gilgameš reached his stated objective with the help of the boatman, and pled his case before Ūta–napišti, hoping to secure the secret of life to

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[18] It may also be due to the fact that the right to make such pronouncements lay strictly with the gods, which in the Standard Babylonian version both Šamaš and Ūta–napišti (as we shall see later) were whereas Šiduri, if I am correct, was not.
[19] There has been considerable debate concerning the nature of "ones of stone", whether they were sailors or some aspect of the boat's equipment; but George (2003:501f) has argued persuasively in favour of the former.
[20] Her uncertainty, like that of the scorpion-people, can also be seen to suggest that Šiduri was not thought of here as divine.
[21] Perhaps their nature as "ones of stone" was intended to suggest that the it was the property of the Waters of Death to petrify living things, to which of course they would be immune.

perpetuity. Instead, however, he was treated to a lecture on his foolishness and the futility of his quest: "No one sees death, no one sees the face of death, no one hears the voice of death: ferocious death is the one who cuts down humanity" (SB X 304–7). According to Ūta–napišti, death is the inevitable lot of humanity, decreed for it by the gods (321f).

It is at this point, finally, that having reached his goal and been denied the prize that Gilgameš underwent change; for he confessed to Ūta–napišti that it had been his intent to do battle with him (SB XI 5). Interestingly, he noted that from the external standpoint, there seemed to be no difference between Ūta–napišti and himself ("your form is not different, you are just like me"; 3), though qualitatively, there was one ("as for you, how is it that you stood in the assembly of the gods and found life?"; 7).Gilgameš' query is certainly a legitimate one, for why should he fail where a royal predecessor had succeeded? (And of course, the answer to this question is also the answer to the audience.) Ūta–napišti then disclosed to him the story of the deluge, and how he himself had been saved at the instigation of Ea (11ff).

The crux of the narrative lies in the decision of the gods with regards to the fate of Ūta–napišti and his wife. *Because* of Ea's act (note again that divine initiative in this instance is key), on account of which Ūta–napišti had become privy to the "secrets of the gods" (197), they resolved two things:

1. "Formerly, Ūta–napišti (belonged to) humanity—but now, let Ūta–napišti and his wife become as we gods!" (204)
2. "Let Ūta–napišti dwell in the distance, at the mouth of the rivers!" (206)

As we can see, two things happened: Ūta–napišti and his wife were transformed from human to divine; and as a corollary, they were removed from the realm of humanity, to
"the mouth of the rivers", a mythological, rather than a geographical, location.[22] The message is clear: life (to perpetuity) belongs to the gods, while mortality belongs to humanity; a human can attain to it only by shedding his/her humanity in favour of divinity. Gilgameš fails, unlike his predecessor, precisely because there is no divine initiative in his case: on the contrary, he was warned that he would not succeed. Ultimately, the message is identical to that of the story of Adapa.

[22] In the so-called Babylonian Epic of Creation, the mouths of the rivers were described as having been made by Marduk from the eyes of Tiāmat (tablet 5 5; see Foster 2005:465).

The Epic of Gilgameš goes one farther, however. Having failed to obtain the life he sought, Gilgameš was offered the opportunity to acquire a plant of rejuvenation by Ūta–napišti, who, we must keep in mind, was no longer human, but of the gods: as with the bread and water of life offered to Adapa, the offer here comes from the side of the divine. The plant in question was to be found in the divine realm, in this case, the apsû, the abode of Ea. Unfortunately, after having retrieved it, Gilgameš made the all too human decision to bathe while leaving the plant on the shore, and a serpent came and bore it away, becoming rejuvenated in the process.[23] Thus, not only can human beings not attain the qualitative change from mortality to life (to perpetuity), they also cannot obtain the quantitative change in duration of mortal life: it is fundamentally against their nature. It is interesting to note in this connection that the greater change (in quality) is mythically located at the end of the journey, that is, in some sense diametrically opposite to the location of the mortal realm, while the lesser change (in quantity) was located somewhere on the return journey, though still in the divine realm: there is a clear correlation.

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS (to date)

The analysis of Adapa and the South Wind and the Standard Babylonian Epic of Gilgameš suggests that the Mesopotamian answer to the question, “can human beings have life to perpetuity” (in either sense of the phrase) is an unequivocal “no!” Such life belongs to the gods alone.

In these stories, we are presented with the voyages of two human beings from the human realm to the divine realm. In the first case, the character was fully human, and the impetus to make the journey came from the divine. In the second case, the character was partly divine; though he set upon the journey of his own accord, this is still owing to a divine impulse—his own—as is borne out by the consequences of his one attempt to involve his human side, and is confirmed by the fact that all along the way, it is the divine which leads him forward.

The two stories relate in a very interesting way. Adapa has two endings: in one of these, he failed to be transformed and was returned to “his” earth, while in the other, he was, and was removed to the abode of the gods. Gilgameš has only one ending, but the same double statement is made: here, Gilgameš himself parallels the first Adapa, and had to return to his land, while Ūta–napišti corresponds to the second Adapa, the one who was transformed and is consequently removed from the human realm to the divine realm.

[23] It is important at this juncture to accept the quality of myth as statement of existential reality. The rationalist mind may baulk, and ask why Gilgameš did not simply obtain another plant. However, the point of the myth has been made, and that is the end of it. If Gilgameš had retrieved another plant, he would only have had to lose it all over again.

The realm in which humans live, move, and have their being is also the realm of mortality; the realm of life to perpetuity is mythically segregated from it, and is populated strictly by the divine. Whereas, mythically speaking, there is a liminal state, necessarily populated by liminal beings, the application, the statement made by the myths we have considered has been that in the here and now, the realms are absolutely discreet: one must belong to one or the other, and partake of the appropriate nature.

NOTES TO REVIEWERS

The foregoing is a first draft proposal. I am conscious of the fact that the presentation is fairly rough, and the approach has not been altogether consistent throughout, however the basic argument has been presented, which I wish to amplify in appropriate places with additional material.

The argument as presented here represents to some extent a treatment I conceived sometime ago when I was working with the Adapa material in another context, and therefore treats of two realms and qualities in opposition: human/mortal :: divine/immortal. I have become conscious over the time I have put this together, however, that the treatment thus far represents only one half of the argument (the negative statement as it were with respect to human options), and that this really should be put into context with mythological travel to the netherworld as well, since this makes the same argument, though in the affirmative sense of "humans are necessarily mortal". There was no time to enter into this before Congress 2008, and indeed, this submission is quite late already. I would be interested to know the views of reviewers and respondent on this particular point, however.

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