

GILGAMESH

MAN'S FIRST STORY

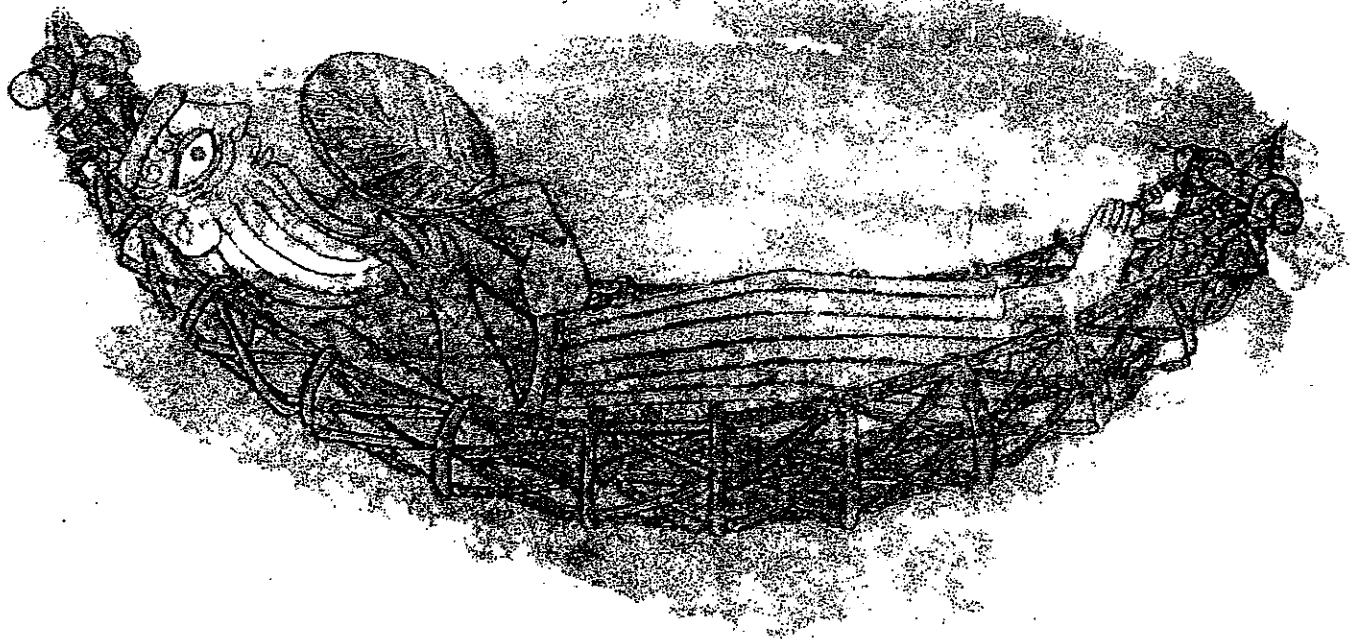
written and illustrated by

BERNARDA BRYSON

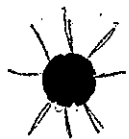
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Utnapishtim



Utnapishtim is lying in his hammock before the door of his house. He calls to his wife saying, "I see the boat approaching across the water, but the boatman is not alone; someone is with him. Come and tell me who it is that rides in the boat with Urshanabi!"

His wife comes out of the house and shades her eyes, looking across the water. "It is a young man not different from you and me, but his body is thin and his looks are wan!" *unkempt*

The boat comes to rest beside the quay and Gilgamesh leaps out and approaches Utnapishtim, his ancestor. He falls to his knees and looks at him. "O Utnapishtim, I gaze upon you and your face is not different from mine! I had thought to find you a dreadful warrior, towering and tall, but here you are lying on your side in your hammock like any mortal man!"

"I am not like you at all!" shouts Utnapishtim. "Look at you, *unkempt* and *woebegone*, and dressed in the filthy hides of wild animals! Who are you and how did you get here?"

"I am Gilgamesh, King of Uruk, O Utnapishtim, and you are my ancestor. I have come far, through deserts and over wild steppes and under the very foundation of the earth to find you and to ask you a question . . ."

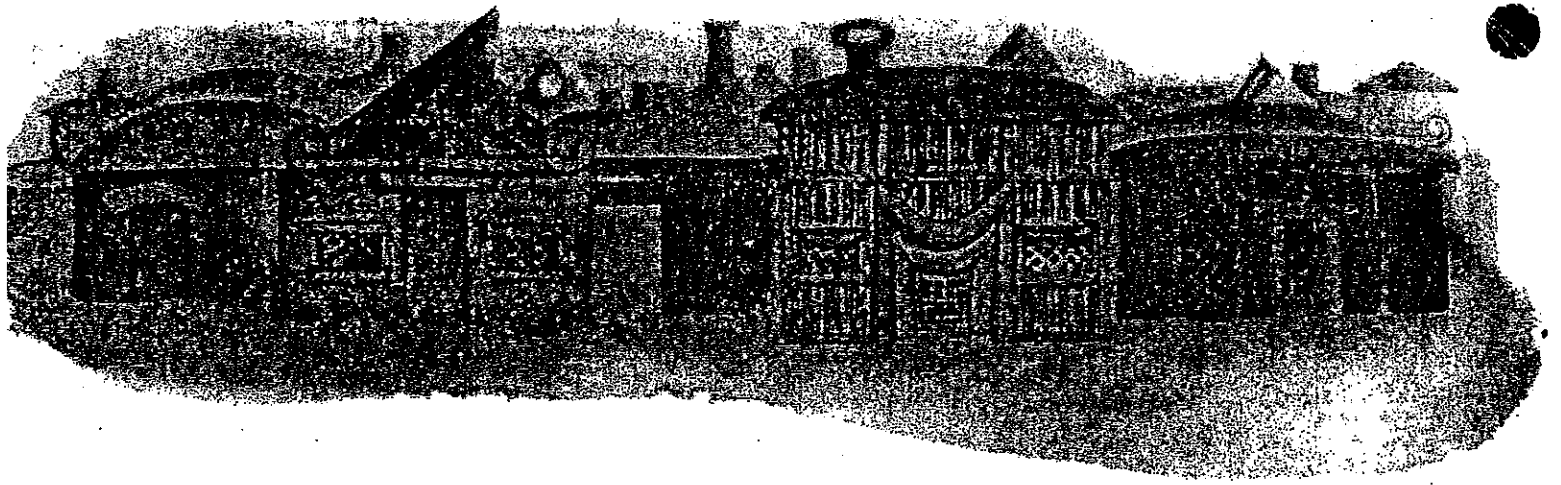
"You have no right to come here, you a mortal man. The boatman shall be punished!"

"Listen to me, O Utnapishtim! I had a friend dearer to me than a brother. Day and night we went together; together we roamed over the wild steppes and through the forests, hunting and wrestling with wild animals. Together we demolished the monster Humbaba that daily threatened our city; together we killed the Bull of Heaven that had been sent against us to destroy us. Everywhere we walked together, sharing all dangers and all delights. Then death came to Enkidu: the fate of mortal men overtook him! He did not die in battle like some hero; he didn't die of illness or venerable old age; the earth came up and seized him! Then, O Utnapishtim, I was overcome by terror and by grief. Alone, I set out over the wild places of the earth to find you, my ancestor. For I have been told that you were chosen to join the assembly of the gods, and that you know the secret of life and death. Tell me now, O Utnapishtim, must my brother remain for all the years lying at the center of the earth? Will he never again see the face of the sun, and must I too die?"

Utnapishtim speaks, answering Gilgamesh, "Do we build a house to last forever? Do brothers share their inheritance to last forever? When the gods gather together, O Gilgamesh, they decree the destinies of men. The days of life they measure out, but the days of death they do not measure!"

"Then tell me, Utnapishtim, what secret do you know? In what way did you come to be placed among the immortals? Were you, like me, two-parts god and only one-part mortal man?"

"Not at all," says Utnapishtim. "Squat down on your haunches Gilgamesh and listen. I will tell you the story; I will reveal to you the secret of my immortality!"



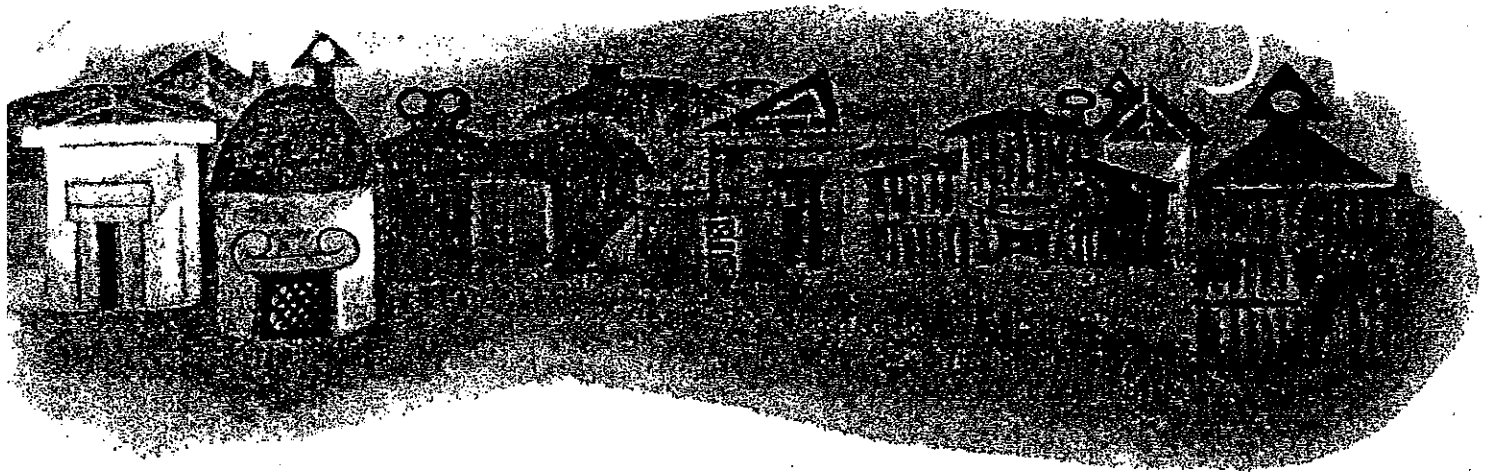
The Secret of Utnapishtim

"It was many many years ago," he begins. "I lived in a place called Shuruppak, a city already old and full of vices. Now the people of this place thought of nothing but pleasure and they spent all their time talking, arguing, shouting, and singing!

"Carrying on like this they raised a commotion, a loud noise, and this noise rose to heaven and it disturbed the gods, particularly the god Enlil.

"Enlil called together an assembly of the gods and he complained; 'They are making too much noise down there; I don't like it; I cannot sleep!' When the gods asked him what he proposed to do about it he said, 'I have conceived a plan whereby I can destroy all the people on earth and thus get some rest. In fact,' the god said, 'I have arranged a hurricane that will wipe out mankind, a deluge that will drown every living thing!'

"The gods disagreed, and they quarreled. Some wished only to punish mankind. Others said, 'We could send down a plague that would diminish the numbers of people on earth.' But Enlil is powerful and his domain is earth itself. He said to them, 'I reveal my plan to you the gods, but not one of you is to speak a word of it to any mortal man. No one is to survive!'



“In truth, Gilgamesh, no god spoke to me or told me anything. Yet one night I heard a voice and it seemed much like the voice of my lord, Ea. The voice came close to the wall of my house and spoke to it, saying:

‘Reed hut, reed hut!
Wall, wall!
Reed hut, listen!
Wall, hear!
Let the man of Shuruppak, son of Ubar-tatu
Tear down his house,
Destroy all,
Abandon everything!
Let him build a ship
To save life, to escape the storm,
Let him take onto the ship,
Seed of every living thing,
Of creeping things and flying things,
Domestic creatures and wild beasts,
And all those creatures that eat grass,
His wife, and his daughter. . . .’

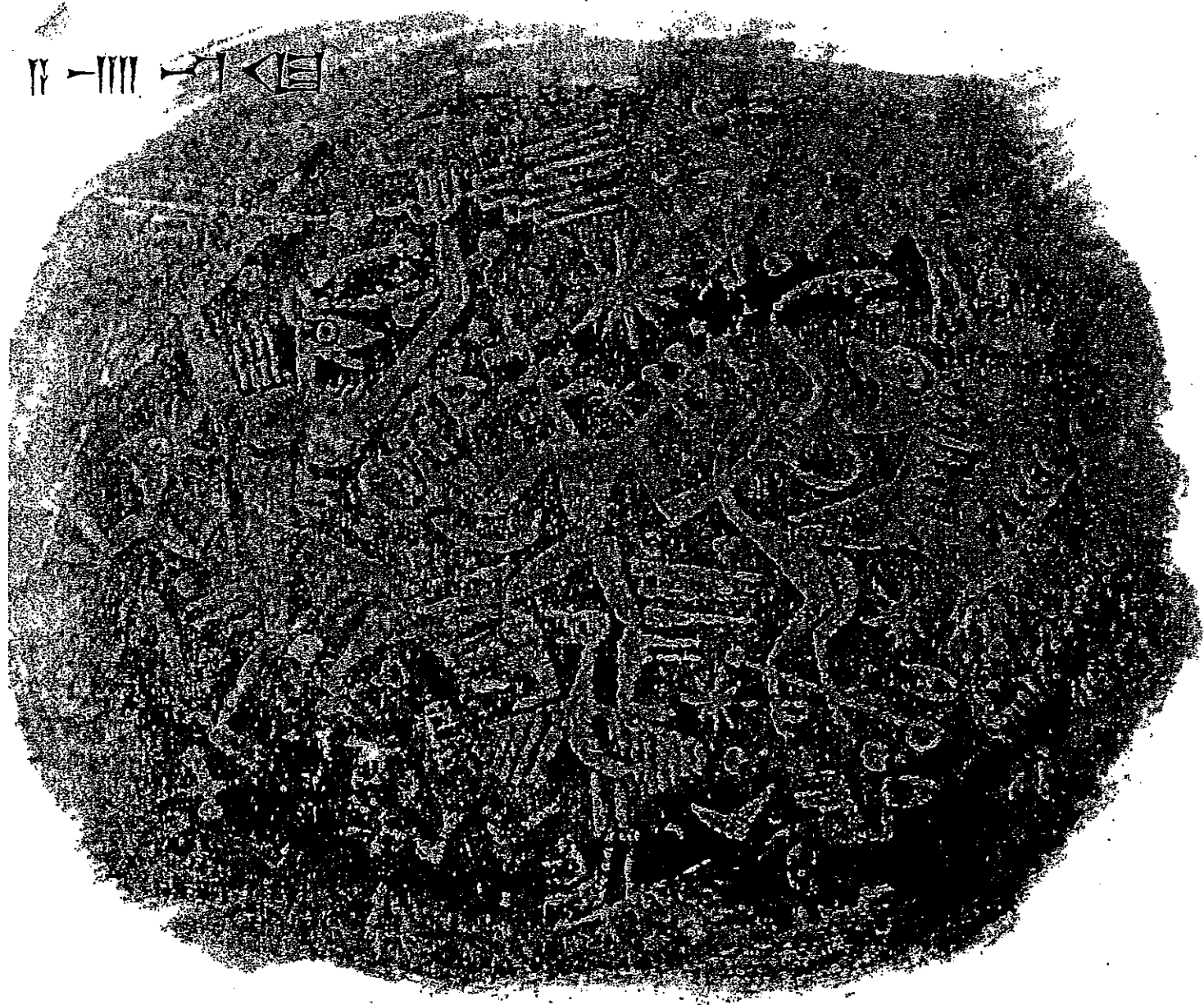
“So I, as a carpenter, was given the dimensions of the ship, the height, the width, and the breadth. And, speaking beside the wall of my house, I asked, ‘But what shall I say to the people of Shuruppak?’

'Say to them,' the voice went on,
' "The god Enlil is displeased with me,
Therefore I go to dwell upon the waters
That are the domain of my lord, Ea.
But as for you, the people of Shuruppak,
A rain of wealth will fall upon you,
Rain of barley,
Rain of birds and of fishes,
Rain of harvest wealth!" '

"Then," Utnapishtim goes on, "I laid the keel and constructed the framework according to the measurements. I directed the laborers and the artisans, and even children carried baskets of pitch. To keep the workmen happy I killed bullocks from the herd, and I poured out red wine and white wine like water. We put the covering over her; I loaded the ship; I dismissed the builders."

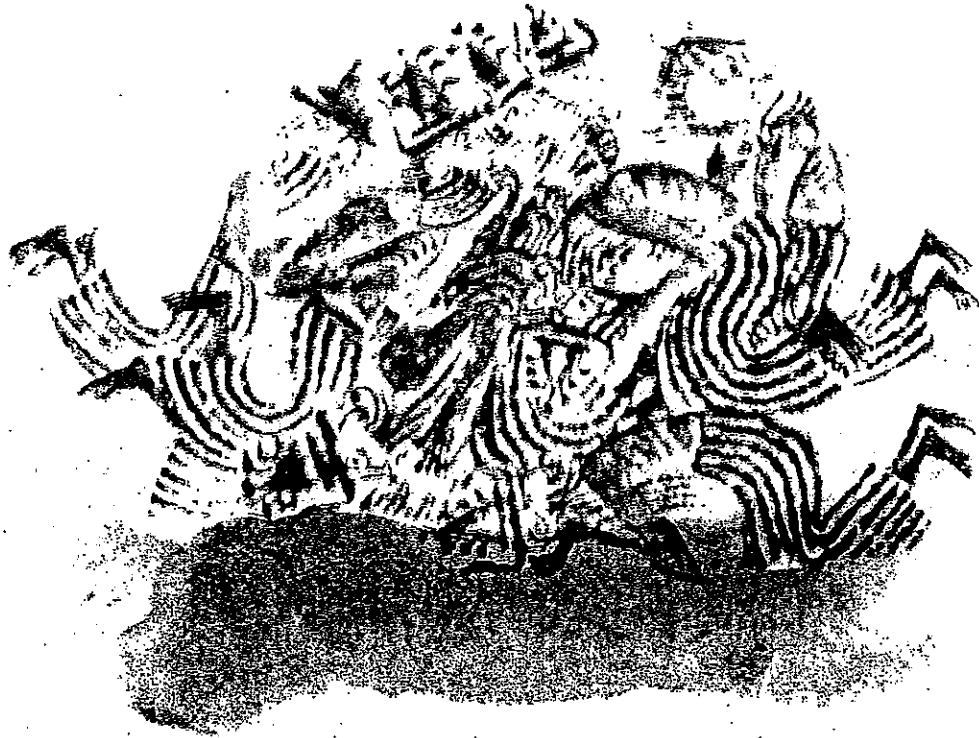


"And what became of all the people of Shuruppak?"

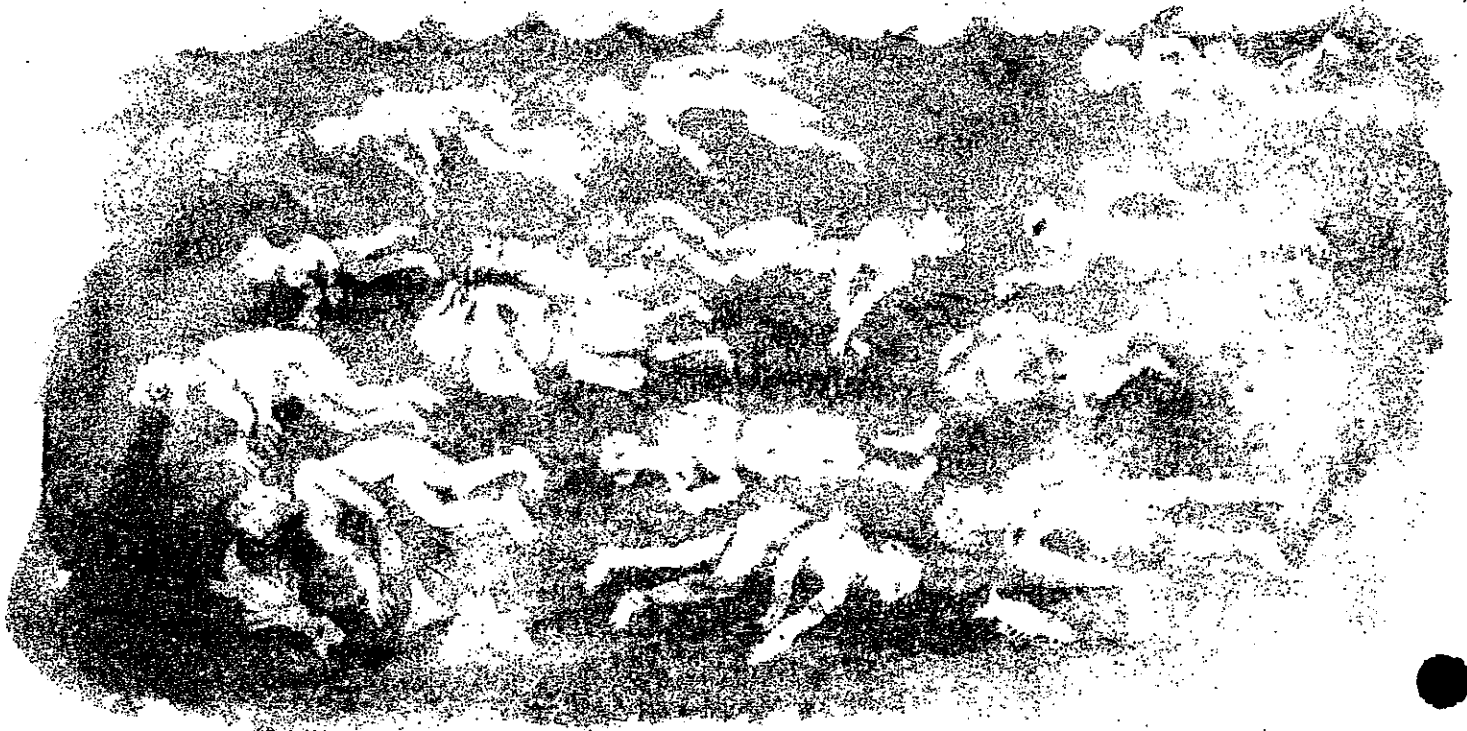


storm

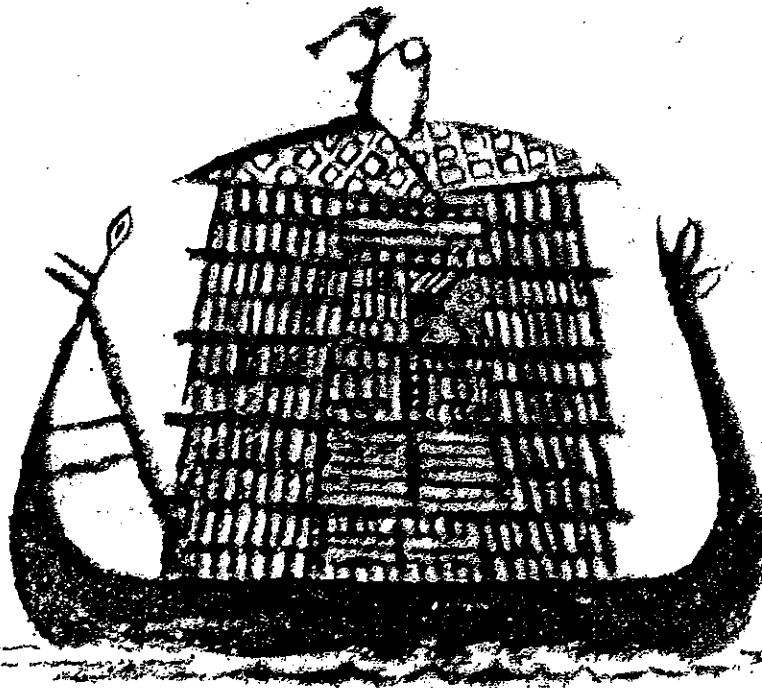
"The tempest came over the people like a battle! No man could see his neighbor. Adad thundered, and the demons of the wind ran this way and that. The Anunnaki waved their torches of lightning; then darkness came and water roared over the land. All that had been light became blackness; the dikes gave way and the earth was broken in pieces like a pot.



“For six days and six nights the storm blew. The gods were terrified and they huddled together like dogs. Great Ishtar wept. She wrung her hands, saying to Enlil, ‘O why did I not oppose you in the assembly of the gods! How could I agree to such evil! How could I allow the destruction of my people, my children who now lie like dead fish in the sea?’”



“When the seventh day came the storm abated. I opened a window and looked around me and everywhere there was water; there was no land to be seen. Everything was silence and all mankind was turned to clay!



“As I stood there weeping,” Utnapishtim continues, “the top of a mountain took hold of the bottom of the ship and held it fast. I saw the water begin to recede so I let a dove go free. It flew round and round, but it came back for there was no place where it could alight. After some time I sent out a swallow; it too returned, but there was mud on its feet. I sent out a crow and she flew this way and that; she found food, she ate, she cawed; she flew away and did not return!

“When the top of the mountain lifted up out of the water, I left the ship and stood on the earth. And in my gratitude I poured wine onto the mountain-top.



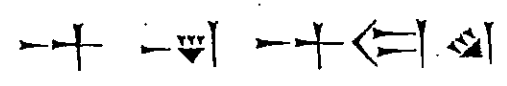
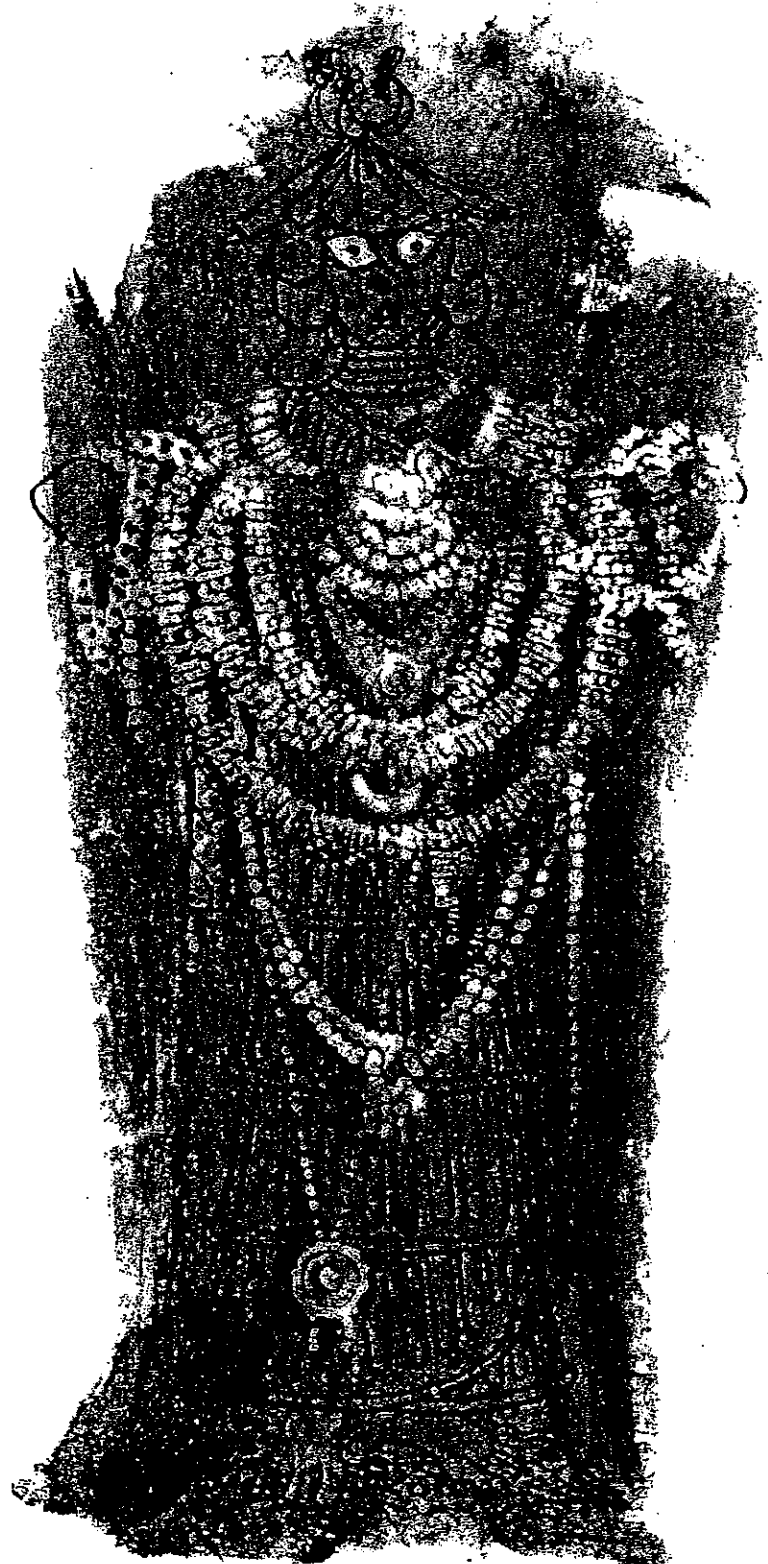
"I set up seven kettles that I might make a feast for the gods. Under these kettles I made fires of fragrant cedar, cane and myrtle; and I filled them with meat which I had seasoned with herbs. The gods smelled the odor; they smelled the sweet odor, and they gathered like flies around the cooking-pots.

"Ishtar came, wearing her necklace of gold and gems. 'O great gods,' she cried out, 'as I shall never forget my jewels, so will I never forget these days of destruction! Let all the gods join the feast, but not Enlil who brought on the flood!'"

"Enlil, however, saw my ship and he drew near. His anger was terrible to see. He accused all the gods in turn, saying, 'Has any mortal escaped? No one was to live through the destruction!'"

"The gods pointed to Ea, and he answered in this way: 'O Enlil, how could you willfully do this thing? You might have punished those who did wrong; you might have sent wolves or lions against those who offended you; you might have wiped out some of the people; but why should you want to destroy mankind? Even so, Enlil, I did not reveal your secret to any living man!'"

"Enlil came toward us. He took my wife and me by the hand and led us onto the ship. He made us kneel. He touched our foreheads. 'Hitherto,' he said, 'Utnapishtim has been a man. Now



he and his wife shall be like unto us gods. He shall be immortal; he shall dwell at a distance, at the confluence of the rivers . . .'

"So you see," Utnapishtim tells Gilgamesh, "it was a god that interceded for me. But who will intercede for you, O Gilgamesh? Who will call together a meeting of the gods for you? Who will grant you the life you seek?"

Gilgamesh, wan and weary after all his hardships, has fallen asleep. Utnapishtim wakens him. "Don't you know that the immortals never sleep, O King Gilgamesh! Come, let me see you stay awake for seven days and seven nights!"

Gilgamesh agrees, but soon his head nods.

Utnapishtim turns to his wife. "See how the strong man sits on his hams! Sleep, like a rainstorm blows over him!"

But the wife pities the young man. "Waken him, husband! Let him go back along the way by which he came!"

"Remember, O wife, how deceitful are the ways of mortals! I must prove to this one that he is not fit to dwell among us." Utnapishtim then orders his wife to bake a fresh loaf of bread for each day during which Gilgamesh sleeps, and to place each loaf at his head.

Seven days have passed and Utnapishtim rouses Gilgamesh who says, "I had hardly nodded, O carpenter, when you touched my arm!"

"Then count your loaves, young man; a fresh one has been baked for each day during which you slept."

Gilgamesh counts the loaves and the first is fresh and still warm, but the second is cold. The third is already stale and the fourth hard. The fifth is cracked and dry, the sixth black, and the seventh has begun to mold.

Such is the greeting of Utnapishtim toward Gilgamesh who traveled far and suffered hardships only to see him.