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HEROIC

CODES IN SUMERIAN AND ANGLO-SAXON EPICS

CÓDIGOS HEROICOS EN LAS ÉPICAS SUMERIAS Y ANGLOSAJONAS

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ABSTRACT

One of the main spheres of learning the history of literature is literary relations and research about correlations between different literatures. Analysis of this problem shows the specific features of literatures of different nations and discovers their universal value. On this ground, making a comparative-typological analysis between the old Sumerian literary monument “The Epic of Gilgamesh” and the largest well-known example of Anglo-Saxon epic poetry “Beowulf” reveals very interesting points. It is known that “The Epic of Gilgamesh” represents the archaic period of Near Eastern culture, while “Beowulf” represents Old Middle Ages West European literature. Although these two monuments are different and apart from each other from areal and cultural points of view, many features characteristic of archaic epic (mythological plot, main characters combining the features of totemic ancestors and cultural heroes, their possession of supernatural power, the scenes of fight between them and various creatures, etc.) and the common features between the main characters Gilgamesh and Beowulf connect them. The common points combining these two heroes are mainly their representation of the good side in the confrontation between evil and good and their acceptance of the savior mission. This article draws parallels between the images of Gilgamesh and Beowulf and examines heroic codes, based on a comparative analysis of ancient Sumerian and Early Medieval Anglo-Saxon epic poetry.

Keywords: Epic poetry, Symbol, Mythological conscience, Historical process, Parallelisms.

RESUMEN

Una de las principales áreas del estudio de la historia de la literatura son las relaciones literarias y la investigación sobre las correlaciones entre diferentes literaturas. El análisis de este problema revela las características específicas de las literaturas de diferentes naciones y descubre su valor universal. Sobre esta base, un análisis tipológico comparativo entre el antiguo monumento literario sumerio “La Epopeya de Gilgamesh” y el mayor ejemplo conocido de poesía épica anglosajona, “Beowulf”, revela puntos muy interesantes. Se sabe que “La Epopeya de Gilgamesh” representa el período arcaico de la cultura de Oriente Próximo, mientras que “Beowulf” representa la literatura de Europa Occidental de la Edad Media. Si bien estos dos monumentos son diferentes y distantes entre sí desde un punto de vista territorial y cultural, muchos rasgos característicos de la epopeya arcaica (trama mitológica, personajes principales que combinan rasgos de ancestros totémicos y héroes culturales, su posesión de poderes sobrenaturales, las escenas de lucha entre ellos y diversas criaturas, etc.) y los rasgos comunes entre los personajes principales, Gilgamesh y Beowulf, los conectan. Los puntos en común que unen a estos dos héroes son principalmente su representación del lado bueno en la confrontación entre el bien y el mal, y su aceptación de la misión salvadora. Este artículo establece paralelismos entre las imágenes de Gilgamesh y Beowulf y examina los códigos heroicos, basándose en un análisis comparativo de la poesía épica sumeria antigua y la anglosajona de la Alta Edad Media.

Palabras clave: Poesía épica, Símbolo, Conciencia mitológica, Proceso histórico, Paralelismos.

INTRODUCTION

There are certain universal topics in world literary history being everlastingly compared and investigated (Farooque, 2024). Among these topics, of great relevance are heroic codes, understood as the ethical and moral frameworks that define the behavior of epic heroes, reflecting the values and norms of their respective societies. Christopher Collins writes:

Most epic heroes, it is fair to say, do little thinking before, during, or after every vigorous episode of smiting. Heroes like Gilgamesh, Beowulf, Sigurd, and Roland have a single code of behavior that provides an instant answer to any question which may occur to them. (Collins, 1996, p. 67).

The analysis of archaic layers of the epic "Beowulf" discovers interesting parallels between it and the oldest example of epic poetry in the world "The Epic of Gilgamesh". Though there are cultural differences regarding time and place between Old Near Eastern and West European societies, both of them "symbolize the archaic stages of Near Eastern and West European cultures in early Middle Ages" (George, 2000, p. 147). The Sumerian epic is quite different from the Anglo-Saxon epic, being older and having different plot-composition elements. However, these epics with different temporal and positional characteristics still have common points of archaic epic tradition and common features in the characters of Beowulf and Gilgamesh.

In fact, The Epic of Gilgamesh was first presented to the world with a version called 'He who saw the Deep'. This manuscript was found in Babylonia and Assyria from the first millennium BC. According to Andrew George's research: "The Babylonians believed this poem to have been the responsibility of a man called Sin-liqe-unninni, a learned scholar of Uruk whom modern scholars consider to have lived between 1300-1000 BC" (George, 2000, p. 4). Having a general overview of Andrew George's research, it must be mentioned that his studies are mainly based on articles on Babylonian literature and religion, for which he read original clay tablets written by the scribes of ancient Iraq that are now kept in museums in Baghdad, Europe, and North America.

Among the researches made about "The Epic of Gilgamesh," specially mentioned sources are David Hawkins, at the School of Oriental and African Studies, who has also contributed the translation of a Hittite fragment, and Aage Westenholz of the University of Copenhagen, who is in the course of making an independent translation of the epic into Danish. Antoine Cavigneaux of the University of Geneva and Farouk N. H. Al-Rawi of the University of Baghdad published a book on the Sumerian composition known as the Death of Bilgames. Douglas Frayne from the University of Toronto has conducted several studies on Sumerian Gilgamesh poems. Additionally, Mark Geller from University College London and Steve Tinney from Pennsylvania University have also achieved results on several obscure points in the Sumerian text. The list of scholars contributing materially to the recovery of the ancient sources includes "George Smith, who was the first to decipher much of the Babylonian epic and whose pioneering translations of 1875 and 1876 gave the world the first glimpse of its majesty; Paul Haupt, who in 1891 first collected the cuneiform text of the epic; Peter Jensen, whose transliterations of 1900 were the first comprehensive modern edition; Campbell Thompson, who in 1930 brought up to date the works of both Haupt and Jensen; and Samuel Noah Kramer, who in the 1930s and 1940s first assembled the Sumerian poems of Gilgamesh". As Andrew George underlines:

In the often-unsung task of adding to our knowledge of the text of the epic, no contemporary Assyriologists can match the achievements of Irving Finkel from the British Museum, Egbert von Weiher from the University of Cologne and, especially, W. G. Lambert from the University of Birmingham. New pieces of Gilgamesh continue to appear. (George, 2000, pp. 12–13).

Naturally, the academic work on the Epic of Gilgamesh continues to add new nuances today. For example, Kline (2016) analyzes the religious and psychological aspects of the epic, arguing that while traditional interpretation emphasizes the acceptance of mortality and the enjoyment of earthly pleasures, this approach overlooks the profound human fear of death and desire for transcendence. The epic not only addresses the inevitability of death but also Gilgamesh's failed attempts to overcome this human limitation. Furthermore, Kynes (2023) compared the story of Eden in Genesis with the Epic of Gilgamesh, highlighting parallels between Enkidu and Eve as figures created to provide companionship. It is noted that both texts explore the boundaries between the human, the divine, and the animal. Furthermore, it is analyzed how these narratives address issues of gender and anthropology, showing that Enkidu and Eve represent different forms of humanization: Enkidu through his integration into civilization, and Eve as Adam's complement. These are some examples of how the transcendence of this story persists to this day, although other interesting aspects/dimensions are analyzed by different authors (Al-Hadi & Xiaoling, 2024; Gürkan, 2024).

When we look for studying about "Beowulf," it appears that only a single manuscript of the epic survived the

Anglo-Saxon era. For many centuries, the manuscript was all but forgotten, and, in the 1700s, it was nearly destroyed in a fire. It was not until the nineteenth century that widespread interest in the document emerged among scholars and translators of Old English. For the first hundred years of Beowulf's prominence, interest in the poem was primarily historical — the text was viewed as a source of information about the Anglo-Saxon era. It was not until 1936, when the Oxford scholar J.R.R. Tolkien (who later wrote works heavily influenced by Beowulf: "The Hobbit" and "The Lord of the Rings") published a groundbreaking paper entitled "Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics" that the manuscript gained recognition as a serious work of art. Nowadays, it is one of the most famous epics and is accepted as a permanent work of Early Middle Ages English literature. J.R.R. Tolkien writes about this:

There is not much poetry in the world like this; and though Beowulf may not be among the very greatest poems of our western world and its tradition, it has its own individual character, and peculiar solemnity; it would still have power had it been written in some time or place unknown and without posterity, if it contained no name that could now be recognized or identified by research. Yet it is in fact written in a language that after many centuries has still essential kinship with our own, it was made in this land, and moves in our northern world beneath our northern sky, and for those who are native to that tongue and land, it must ever call with a profound appeal until the dragon comes. (Tolkien, 1963, p. 88).

According to Michael Lapidge's review for the book by Richard North "The Origins of Beowulf: From Vergil to Wiglaf," the origin of the epic "Beowulf" differs according to the researches made by different scholars: since there is no agreed evidence indicating where, let alone by whom, the poem was composed, there has never been a shortage of crackpot theories about its origins, such as those by A.S. Cook, who assigned "Beowulf" to the court of King Aldfrith of Northumbria (d. 706), or by D.R. Howlett, who argued that the poet has encoded his name in lines 887–8 ('under harne ***stan*** / ***æþel*** ingesbearn') and was to be identified as the Æthelstan who was a priest in the service of King Alfred, with 887–8 representing the years in which he composed the poem; or by K.S. Kiernan, who, in violation of the palaeographically dating of the unique manuscript, argued that it was composed during the reign of King Cnut (1016–35), when its Danish subject-matter would have found a receptive audience in England" (North, 2007).

Given the relevance of these epics the goal of this research is to compare the heroes Beowulf and Gilgamesh. It is known that both seek glory, but Beowulf is more about defending his people (as seen in his battles against Grendel and the dragon), which reflects Anglo-Saxon warrior ideals, while Gilgamesh, on the other hand, evolves from a reckless king to a wiser leader, and his quest for immortality highlights Mesopotamian concerns about death. We consider relevant to establish parallelisms and differences since both are foundational texts in their literary traditions, and may reveal how situations/contexts shape heroic behavior and/or how heroism is constructed across different cultures and time periods.

DEVELOPMENT

The mission of both characters is to serve humans and to protect them from various chaotic powers. Gilgamesh takes care of his nation as the king of the city Uruk, builds the protection walls around the city, legislates regulations, and stands against all difficulties that interrupt people's cultural evolution. Gilgamesh does not only protect his people's and city's development; he also thinks about all humanity and tries to save them. After his friend Enkidu's death, Gilgamesh starts his search for eternal life, deeply thinking about the philosophical sense of life. Gilgamesh's "improving ideas about life not only for himself but also for all humanity, the development of his personal desires to the national and universal ones" (Veliyev, 2007, p. 5) establishes him as a universal hero. This feature is mentioned in the epic as:

"[I am seeking] the [road] of my forefather,

who attended the gods' assembly,

and [found life eternal:] of death and life [he shall tell me the secret.]'

The scorpion-man opened his mouth [to speak,]

saying to [Gilgamesh:] 'Never [before],

Gilgamesh, was there [one like you,] never did anyone

[travel the path] of the mountain."

(George, 2000, p. 133)

Beowulf also tries to help people as Gilgamesh does. In contrast with those archaic heroes, Beowulf helps not only his own tribe but also other tribes. From this point of view, Beowulf, almost like Gilgamesh, may be characterized as a hero who protects humanity. In the Anglo-Saxon epic, Beowulf's native tribe, his warriors, neighboring tribes, all existing German tribes—in one word, symbolize all humanity. The other common feature between the characters of Beowulf and Gilgamesh is the confrontation between good and evil in both epics and their taking the side of good in these situations. Besides having the features of the cultural hero characteristic of the period of passage

from chaos to cosmos, Gilgamesh and Beowulf are heroes who take the emancipation mission upon themselves in the context of the confrontations between good and evil that appeared in later monotheistic religions.

From the very period of human beings finding themselves as conscious creatures, the characteristic confrontation of good and evil has taken an important position throughout all periods of literature. In "The Epic of Gilgamesh," this theme covers the period of the fall of the tribal structure and the formation of class society, where Gilgamesh is the hero who acts and struggles against different terrible creatures performed as symbols of evil that decelerate evolution. However, Gilgamesh is not alone in his struggle against the powers of Evil. His friend Enkidu is his best support in this way. Enkidu has a great role in Gilgamesh's formation as a savior character. Precisely because of his friendship with Enkidu, Gilgamesh is inspired to perform greater acts; with his help, he defeats Humbaba, and so forth. Being one of the leitmotifs of the epic, the Gilgamesh-Enkidu friendship is the symbol of the bright, Good power that struggles against Evil.

Beowulf is also the representative of the Good. He protects the interests of neighboring tribes together with the interests of his own tribe. He fights with various terrible monsters in the seas before he defeats Grendel. However, he struggles alone, sometimes even without weapons against Evil. We cannot find the great friendship motifs in "Beowulf." Although Hrothgar deeply respects Beowulf and rewards him greatly, the relations between them do not go further than the relations between the king and his warriors and the mutual respect and responsibility feelings. If Beowulf's coming to Hrothgar's aid is, on one hand, the result of his desire to help Danes in their struggle against the terrible monster, on the other hand, this is the demonstration of the responsibility of warriors toward their prince. A.N. Kokuyev notes on this topic: "Being tied with the relations of responsibility with his warriors and nation, Beowulf must be faithful to his duties for being relevant to his social role" (Kokuyev, 2009, p. 147).

The relations between Beowulf and his fellow warriors are described as the "military democracy" of his time. This feature makes the epic of "Beowulf" more similar to the Turkish epics. For instance, the Kirghiz hero Manas is related to his fellow warriors through ties of friendship and mutual loyalty (Zhirmunsky, 1974, p. 60). Additionally, special attitude and respect is noticed toward the warriors as they represent the main military power and the basis of the khan's government. It is known that Bayandir khan highly respects his warriors and holds parties in their honor in "Kitabi-Dede Gorgud." Similarly, in "Beowulf," Hrothgar, Higelac, and later Beowulf deeply respect their warriors, and the latter even sacrifices himself for the sake of keeping his warriors alive, which is a vivid example of these relations.

"Beowulf's warriors worked to defend

their lord's life, laying about them

as best they could with their ancestral blades"

(Heaney, 2000, p. 53).

Hrothgar highly evaluates Beowulf's heroism and gives him many presents. While Gilgamesh was fully interested in the philosophical issues of life and death after his friend's death, Beowulf was also interested in wealth and popularity. Beowulf's being rewarded with different presents for his bravery was also part of "military democracy." V.M. Zhirmunsky writes about this: "For those who live in the condition of the military welfare (warriors – H.A.) the war becomes?" (Zhirmunsky, 1974, p. 60).

The sense of ambition is characteristic of both Beowulf and Gilgamesh. Both of them consider fame important. If Gilgamesh wants to become famous by saving people from death by means of the flower of vitality, Beowulf looks for secular fame and does not forget about personal benefits. A.N. Kokuyev stresses that the following feature was underlined by the scribe of the old work: "The scribe's text underlines the values of Beowulf's fellow-warriors' personal benefits in the motivation of his actions" (Kokuyev, 2009, p. 150).

T.A. Shippey writes that the epic reflects idolatrous as well as Christian visions (Shippey, 1978, p. 43). Although the clerics who recorded the epic "Beowulf" tried to identify him for his mission as a savior with Jesus Christ, his conceit and ambition for fame did not align with the Christian idea of complete obedience to God:

"When he heard about Grendel, Hygelac's thane

was on home ground, over in Geatland.

There was no one else like him alive.

In his day, he was the mightiest man on earth,

high-born and powerful. He ordered a boat

that would ply the waves. He announced his plan

to sail the swan's road and search out that king,

the famous prince who needed defenders.

Nobody tried to keep him from going,

no elder denied him, dear as he was to them.

Instead, they inspected omens and spurred

his ambition to go, whilst he moved about

like the leader he was, enlisting men,

the best he could find; with fourteen others

the warrior boarded the boat as captain,

a canny pilot along coast and currents"

(Heaney, 2000, p. 15).

However, in the second part of the epic, the older Beowulf acts wisely: he protects the young people and fights with the fire dragon himself, and his wish is to spend all his treasure for his nation. Thus, while at the beginning of the epic Beowulf saves people and pursues his own fame simultaneously, by the end of the story, like predominant archaic epic heroes, he places his nation's interests above his own and sacrifices his life. Another common feature between Beowulf and Gilgamesh is found in the travels undertaken by these characters. Gilgamesh travels to strange countries in search of immortality and journeys to the end of the world. He isn't even afraid of making a one-way journey to the place of God Dilmunia in search of Utnapishtim, who was the only person who attained immortality. Similarly, Beowulf travels to another country in search of glory and prowess. During his journey, he must dive into the depths of the sea, into the dark world – to Grendel's mother's cave.

The journey to the depths of the Earth is considered one of the most important elements of the mythological scenery in archaic societies. There are accounts of Odin going to the underworld and obtaining information about the future. Starting from the Sumerian epics, this motif is widely spread in the mythology of many nations as a crucial stage of the initiation rite. Only the chosen ones could enter the underworld and find answers to the questions that interested them. However, in old Irish epics, this process was facilitated through water.

The Celtic Otherworld was always connected with a body of water either beneath the surface of the sea or the lake or beneath the ground. As emphasized by O'Rahilly: 'In the Celtic belief, the Otherworld was the source of all wisdom and especially of that occult wisdom to which humanity could not (except in very limited degree) attain. (Dooge, 1996, p. 16).

As the cult of water was predominant in Ireland, seas, lakes, and springs were considered to be sacred places of the Gods. Being the result of mythological consciousness, these motifs appear in both Sumerian and Anglo-Saxon epics. In Sumerian epics, the flower of eternal life is located in the depths of the sea. In Mesopotamia, water was accepted as the symbol of human wisdom.

According to Andrew George's translation and his research based on those translations, Gilgamesh asks Utnapishtim how he gained eternal life and learns how Utnapishtim survived the Deluge and was granted immortality by the Gods (George, 2000, p. 149). We discover that Gilgamesh learns how to obtain the plant-coral which could give him immortality, and he embarks on his long journey from this point. However, a serpent takes the plant from him, and Gilgamesh becomes deeply upset. He and Ur-shanabi arrive in Uruk where, with words that echo the prologue, Gilgamesh shows the ferryman the walls that will be his enduring monument.

"Said Gilgamesh to him, to Uta-napishti

the Distant: 'O Uta-napishti,

what should I do and where should I go?

A thief has taken hold of my [flesh!]

For there in my bed-chamber Death does abide,

and wherever [I] turn, there too will be Death.'

[Said] Uta-napishti to [him,] to the boatman

Ur-shanabi: '[May] the quay [reject] you,

Ur-shanabi, and the ferry scorn you!

You who used to walk this shore,

be banished from it now!

As for the man that you led here,

(…)

Until he goes home to his city,

until he reaches the end of his road,

let the robes show no mark,

but stay fresh and new!' Ur-shanabi took him,

and led him to the washtub"

(George, 2000, p. 149).

Accordingly, Gilgamesh's diving to the depth of the water for the flower/plant is not a random occurrence. He loses the flower/plant which he obtained under such difficult conditions in the same water, as the serpent, which knew the secret of the flower of eternity, steals it, taking away the hero's last chance. In the XI tablet of the Babylonian version, the information about this plant is given as:

"[Said] Uta-napishti to him, to Gilgamesh:

'You came here, O Gilgamesh, by toil and by travail,

what do I give for your homeward journey?

Let me disclose, O Gilgamesh, a matter most secret,

to you [I will] tell a mystery of [gods.]'

There is a plant that [looks] like a box-thorn,

it has prickles like a dogrose, and will [prick one who plucks it.]

But if you can possess this plant,

[you'll be again as you were in your youth.]

(…)

'This plant, Ur-shanabi, is the "Plant of Heartbeat",

with it a man can regain his vigour.

To Uruk-the-Sheepfold I will take it, to an ancient

I will feed some and put the plant to the test!'

Gilgamesh found a pool whose water was cool,

down he went into it, to bathe in the water.

Of the plant's fragrance a snake caught scent,

came up [in silence], and bore the plant off"

(George, 2000, p. 159).

The dual character of water – as a symbol of both life and death – is depicted in a specific way in this episode. The idea of eternal, endless life is replaced by the idea of the inevitability of death. As Gilgamesh comes to understand death as an unavoidable end to his life, he returns to his native city Uruk and completes his worldly business. The mythological character of the serpent described at the end of this Sumerian epic represents the traditional symbol of Evil. While Gilgamesh defeated all his enemies through his strength alone, ultimately, he could not complete his mission to present eternity to humanity. The serpent, representing evil powers, easily thwarts his desire. However, this should not be interpreted as the defeat of humanity before Evil. The traditional attitude of Sumerian mythology regarding human beings and their role in this world is vividly depicted in "The Epic of Gilgamesh." According to this worldview, humans were created by the Gods only to serve them, while eternity is reserved exclusively for the Gods. This idea is described in Shiduri's speech in the epic:

"The life that you seek you never will find:

when the gods created mankind,

death they dispensed to mankind,

life they kept for themselves"

(George, 2000, p. 45).

According to Andrew George's opinion:

these lines, and the advice that follows, do not appear in the episode of the late epic where Gilgamesh talks with Shiduri. It seems that the poet of the standard version wanted to keep the wisdom for the climax and intentionally held it in reserve for Uta-napishti. The dispensing of death and life took place, as Uta-napishti tells us, in an assembly of Gods. This is another reference to the mythology of early human history. The newly created man, as we have witnessed, was flawed by virtue of his innate rebelliousness. George (2000).

There are many characters in Babylonian poetry who seek God's mercy. Gilgamesh, however, relies on his own power and heroism. We can see this clearly in the following lines:

"O Ur-shanabi, climb Uruk's wall

and walk back and forth!

Survey its foundations, examine the brickwork!

Were its bricks not fired in an oven?

Did the Seven Sages not lay its foundations?"

(George, 2000, p. 36).

The epic itself, and especially this part, reflects a deep belief in human power. Gilgamesh is introduced in his early years, but his development as a hero continues throughout the epic. As a result, he emerges as the savior of his nation. He is depicted not only as the hero of a single epic but as an exemplary figure for the young generation. Researcher I. Sadig relates the theft of the flower by the serpent to the Gods' will: "Gods created humans with a fatal fate. Gilgamesh's desire to make people immortal was not accepted by Gods, so one of them might have transformed into the serpent and stolen the flower" (Sadig, 2012, p. 49). The cleric who transcribed the epic "Beowulf" also attributed all the hero's bravery and success to the will of God. Nevertheless, the rebellious and fighting spirit of old Germanic tribes is evident in each episode of the epic. Beowulf and his warriors primarily rely on their own power and fate.

"Sometimes at pagan shrines they vowed

offerings to idols, swore oaths

that the killer of souls might come to their aid

and save the people. That was their way,

their heathenish hope; deep in their hearts

they remembered hell. The Almighty Judge

of good deeds and bad, the Lord God,

Head of the Heavens and High King of the World,

was unknown to them. Oh, cursed is he

who in time of trouble has to thrust his soul

in the fire's embrace, forfeiting help;

he has nowhere to turn. But blessed is he

who after death can approach the Lord

and find friendship in the Father's embrace"

(Heaney, 2000, p. 13).

Like Beowulf, Gilgamesh also has to dive into the depths of water – a marsh. His action also represents his moral purification and his advancement to a new stage. According to ancient beliefs, diving into the depths of water made a person morally wiser and bestowed secret power upon them. By defeating the evil powers – Grendel and his mother – Beowulf not only became famous as an undefeatable hero but also passed through a specific stage of initiation and consequently advanced to a new level of wisdom. Beowulf's selection as king and his just rule over his nation for fifty years was a demonstration of his moral wisdom. Just as Gilgamesh became the ruler of the city of Uruk and accepted responsibility for his entire nation, in the second part of the epic, Beowulf wisely governed his people and served their interests.

CONCLUSIONS

The comparative-typological analysis of the epics "Beowulf" and "Gilgamesh" reveals their common features. Both literary monuments are archaic epics. "The Epic of Gilgamesh" represents the archaic period of Near Eastern culture, and "Beowulf," in its turn, represents the archaic epic formatted during the Early Middle Ages. "Beowulf" amalgamates the elements of archaic and classic epic. The predominating ideas of both epics are such universal ideas as serving humanity, protecting it from various Chaos powers, and rescuing the world. Both Gilgamesh and Beowulf have the characteristics of the hero specific for the period of passing from chaos to the cosmos. They represent the goodness in the struggle between good and evil. Gilgamesh's friend Enkidu helps him in his struggle. Accordingly, the leitmotifs of friendship are predominating in the epic. Although we cannot see any friendship motive in "Beowulf," the sense of duty and mutual faith is common among Beowulf and his warriors. The Anglo-Saxon hero mainly fights alone in dangerous cases and always wins. However, both Gilgamesh and Beowulf fight strongly and bravely till the end to achieve their goals. Both of them are ambitious. If Gilgamesh wants to find the plant of eternity and to be famous, Beowulf, in his turn, mainly longs for world fame and plans to get a variety of loot. Consequently, the comparative analysis of old Sumerian and Anglo-Saxon epics shows that natural and social events had the same way of development in their literature since various nations in the world have passed through the same historical process.

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