Early and Late Versions
The beginning of Tablet 7, about thirty-six lines, is missing. The beginning is regularly filled in with a Middle Babylonian text in the Hittite language. Some sections of Tablet 7, including the last thirty-some lines, are still missing.

Much more of Tablet 8 is known thanks to the discovery of a Late Babylonian text that provides more than sixty lines that had been missing. The end of the tablet is missing. No older versions of the story have been discovered.

Episodes: What Happens in Tablets 7-8

Tablet 7

Tablet 7, Lines 1-36: The Gods in Council
The beginning of Tablet 7 is missing. Translations are usually reconstructed from a text written in the Hittite language (an Indo-European language). In that prose account Enkidu tells Gilgamesh of a dream in which the high gods hold an assembly. Anu tells Enlil that because, first, the men killed The Bull of Heaven and, second, they killed Humbaba (note the order), one of the men must die. Enlil immediately decrees that Enkidu, not Gilgamesh, must die.

Shamash complains that it was Enlil who ordered Enkidu to kill The Bull of Heaven and Humbaba. Why should Enkidu die, since he is innocent? (Note that both the order of the tales and the claim that Enlil ordered the killings are at variance with the Standard Akkadian Gilgamesh.

At this, Enlil angrily denounces Shamash, not because of the judicial reasoning involved, but simply because the Sun God daily considered the men as if they were friends of the god.

One might expect that Gilgamesh would interpret the dream for Enkidu, as Enkidu had done in Tablet 4. In the Hittite account, however, Enkidu, his tears flowing, sees that he will surely die and will never see his friend after that.

Tablet 7, Lines 37-93: Enkidu Curses the Door
In an apostrophe, Enkidu addresses the door he had built with the precious cedars—and curses the door. It was made of a tree that has no rival, and he hung the door in Enlil’s Nippur. Had he known what would have happened, he would have floated the door instead to Shamash’s temple, Ebabbar, presumably in Sippar. (The temples to the Sun God in both Sippar and Larsa were named Ebabbar.) He envisions not only tearing down the door but removing his name from it, so that a later king would not substitute his name for Enkidu’s. It appears that he does destroy the door.
Gilgamesh takes the cursing of the door as a dream. He knows that, if Enkidu dies, he will grieve deeply. So he will seek out the gods and appeal the case. There are gaps in the text where the gods’ names should appear, but the list presumably includes Shamash, Anu, Enlil (the only name clear in the text), and Ea.

Enkidu is not convinced that the appeal will help him. Enlil’s word is not like the other gods; his order will not be erased. His destiny is fixed.

Nonetheless, at dawn Enkidu appeals to Shamash for his life.

**Tablet 7, Lines 94-99: Enkidu Curses the Hunter**

In a few lines Enkidu curses the hunter for not allowing Enkidu to be as great as his friend Gilgamesh. The hunter should not be as great as his friend. The curse includes the hunter losing his profit and having his personal god leave him.

**Tablet 7, Lines 100-150: Enkidu Curses Shamhat**

Enkidu turns to the woman who had seduced and civilized him. The curse is much more elaborate than the curse of the door and the curse of the hunter. He will “fix” her destiny: she will not acquire a family; he fine gowns will be dirtied by the drunkard who takes her. She will sit at the juncture of highways and sleep in the shadow of the city wall. Because she had weakened him, she will be beaten by the drunk and the sober alike.

Of the three curses, this is the only one that prompts an immediate response from the Sun God above. Shamash presents a rational argument, first that Shamhat had been the instrument to bring Enkidu to his great friend and with that all the good things that had marked his life. Secondly, the people of the city will mourn him, and Gilgamesh himself will mourn him in an extreme fashion.

In a most important few lines, Enkidu’s fury drains away, and he turns to bless the woman.

**Tablet 7, Lines 151-161: Enkidu Blesses Shamhat**

The blessing of Shamhat cannot remove the curse, but it does offer compensations. The woman will attract great noblemen. Men will provide her with great wealth in jewels and gold. Ishtar herself will see that Shamhat will enter the house of a wealthy man, and the man will desert his wife, even if she is the mother of seven.

**Tablet 7, Lines 162-253: Enkidu’s Dream of the Underworld**

In a very lengthy and detailed vision, Enkidu provides a portrait of the world of the dead. It is a terrible place where the inhabitants are entirely deprived of life and are reduced to eating clay—even though the underworld is also a kind of place where keepers of the temple and deities dwell.

Gilgamesh has only one line in response to the dream: Enkidu’s vision is one that will never be equaled.
Tablet 7, Lines 254-67: Enkidu Falls Ill and Laments His Fate
The thirty some lines at the end of Tablet 7 are missing, but they probably continue the slow passage of an illness that lasts twelve days and causes Enkidu to lament the most bitter part of his fate: he will die, not in battle, where he would win his name, and immortality of a sort, but because a god has acted against him.

Tablet 8

Tablet 8, Lines 1-58: The Great Elegy
At dawn Gilgamesh begins the mourn Enkidu with a long and moving elegy. He sees Enkidu as a child and force of nature, whose mother is a gazelle and whose father is a wild donkey. Trees and wild animals, a river in the East (in Elam) and a river in Sumer (the Euphrates) will mourn him. The young men of Uruk who witnessed the battle against The Bull of Heaven, plowmen, shepherds, and Ishtar’s women will mourn the loss. Gilgamesh himself will wail like a woman, a professional mourner. He describes his friend as “the axe” at his side, the knife in his belt, his shield—but also in imagery of urban festivals, with Enkidu as his “festive garment” and his “belt of pleasure.” He recalls their great victories over The Bull of Heaven and Humbaba. Then he touches the body and feels no heartbeat.

Tablet 8, Lines 59-64: The Response of Gilgamesh
In a brief but powerful response, Gilgamesh covers the face of Enkidu “like a bride” and then circles the body “like an eagle.” He acts like a lioness that has lost her cubs, pacing this way and that. He tears out clumps of hair and throws away his clothes, as if it were taboo.

Tablet 8, Lines 65-91: A Second Day of Mourning
At dawn Gilgamesh calls for the craftsmen to fashion a statue of Enkidu in precious jewels and gold. In words that recall Shamash’s prophetic speech to the dying Enkidu, Gilgamesh promises to lay Enkidu out on a magnificent bed, then to place him next to him in a seat where the rulers of the underworld will kiss his feet. The people of Uruk will mourn while Gilgamesh himself, with matted hair and clothed in the skin of a lion, will wander the wilderness.

Tablet 8, Lines 92-188: A Third Day of Mourning
At dawn Gilgamesh opens his treasury and provides an immense number of precious goods for Enkidu to present to the inhabitants of the underworld. The gifts are then identified in a long list of items and the gods who will receive them. The list begins, apparently, with Shamash and Ishtar, then identifies the deities (like Ereshkigal, the “sister” of Ishtar and the ruler of the underworld) associated in one way or another with the world of the dead. Dumuzi (Tammuz) the shepherd, lover of Ishtar, is one of them; later in the list Dumuzi of the Abzu, called literally the “scapegoat” of the underworld, is also mentioned. All of this wealth is displayed before the Sun God.
Tablet 8, Lines 208-219: A Fourth (?) Day of Mourning
Gilgamesh completes ritual acts, again at dawn and before the Sun God. One line, about the idea of damming a river, suggests that Enkidu may be buried in a tomb like the one describes in “The Death of Gilgamesh,” a Sumerian poem. The last thirty or so lines of Tablet 8 are missing. Presumably they complete the public mourning for Enkidu.

Key Words

Tablet 7
The Door cursed by Enkidu is the one he built for Enlil at Nippur.

Ebabbar, the name of the temple of Shamash in both Sippar and Larsa, literally The White House.


Skin of a lion, worn by Gilgamesh after he has stripped off his clothes.

House of Darkness, Seat of Irkalla, House of Dust, different terms for the underworld, in contrast to the watery abyss, home of the god Ea.

en, lagar, ishippu, lumahhu, gudapsu, titles of “priests” who keep Mesopotamian temples, especially in Uruk

Etana, Shakkan, Ereshkigal, Queen of the Underworld, and Belet-s○eri, Scribe of the Underworld, mythological figures and deities who dwell in the underworld.

Enkidu’s sickness is not specified: a common term for “illness”

Tablet 8

Ulay River, in Elam (modern Iran), to the east of Sumer,

Euphrates River, with its canals, allowed the irrigation of Uruk and many of the Sumerian city-states.

“Prostitute” and Mourner, titles of women in the service of Ishtar.
Axe, knife, festive garment, belt of delight, bride, lioness: images Gilgamesh uses to describe his relationship with Enkidu.

First Glimmer of Brightening Dawn, a **poetic formula** like one found in Homer, used often in the second half of *Gilgamesh.*

Statue of Enkidu, though to give a measure of immortality to mortals.

Treasury, a usual part of a Mesopotamian temple.

Gifts were given for the deities of the underworld.

**Dumuzi-of-the-Abzu,** called a *mashultuppû,* literally a *scapegoat* used to avert evil.

Damming the river is a device used in the Sumerian “The Death of Gilgamesh” to allow a tomb to be built in the riverbed, to be covered (and thus not easily found) once the damn is released.

For critical and philological notes on these texts, see George, BGE, II, 844-61.