



# The Buried Book: The Loss and Rediscovery of the Great Epic of Gilgamesh

*David Damrosch*

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**Adventurers, explorers, kings, gods, and goddesses come to life in this riveting story of the first great epic—lost to the world for 2,000 years, and rediscovered in the nineteenth century**

Composed by a poet and priest in Middle Babylonia around 1200 bce, The Epic of Gilgamesh foreshadowed later stories that would become as fundamental as any in human history, The Odyssey and the Bible. But in 600 bce, the clay tablets that bore the story were lost—buried beneath ashes and ruins when the library of the wild king Ashurbanipal was sacked in a raid.

*The Buried Book* begins with the rediscovery of the epic and its deciphering in 1872 by George Smith, a brilliant self-taught linguist who created a sensation when he discovered Gilgamesh among the thousands of tablets in the British Museum's collection. From there the story goes backward in time, all the way to Gilgamesh himself. Damrosch reveals the story as a literary bridge between East and West: a document lost in Babylonia, discovered by an Iraqi, decoded by an Englishman, and appropriated in novels by both Philip Roth and Saddam Hussein. This is an illuminating, fast-paced tale of history as it was written, stolen, lost, and—after 2,000 years, countless battles, fevered digs, conspiracies, and revelations—finally found.

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