GILGAMESH AND HOMER. A COMPARATIVE
STUDY OF MOTIF SETS, DISTINCTIONS AND
SIMILARITIES

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The Epic of Gilgamesh and Homer’s Iliad and Odyssey: what
genius can be found in both epics and yet they are such a world of
difference. Homer’s epics, however, have a lot of advantages over the
Epic of Gilgamesh:

a) The Iliad and Odyssey are completely intact, whereas the Epic
of Gilgamesh shows a lot of gaps;

b) Homer poses no real problems in understanding. The Epic of
Gilgamesh requires a rather inaccessible tool, viz. the knowledge of
oriental languages such as Sumeric, Akkadian, Hettite and Hurritic, in
order to be fully understood.

The cuneiform script of the Epic of Gilgamesh has been taken
from the standard volume by R. Campbell Thompson. We also made
grateful use of the transcription, transliteration, research, findings and
interpretations of the Seminar for Cuneiform Philology at the
Rijksuniversiteit Ghent.

Our investigation started with the lecture of Peter Jensen’s
extensive works, in which he defends the bold thesis that almost all
stories that have been handed down to us in the Old and New
Testament, as well as the legends and tales of nearly all peoples would
have undergone the literary influence of this epic poem either directly
or indirectly. In this context, the musical terms ‘motif’ and ‘motif sets’
are therefore preferably used; in P. Jensen’s opinion they have been
derived from the Epic of Gilgamesh and always reappear in the same
order. Not only the lives of Moses, David or Elijah, but also Jesus’ life

1 Translated from Dutch by Bert Cruysweegs, M.A. Germanic philology.
2 A. Ungnad, ‘Gilgamesch-Epos und Odyssee’. Kulturfragen 4 + 5, Breslau,
3 R. Campbell Thompson, The Epic of Gilgamish. Text, Transliteration and
& Teil II, Marburg a. L., 1928.