

# The Birth of Gilgamesh

From the text of

De Natura Animalium

By Claudius Aelian:

Roman author and teacher of rhetoric who died 222 A.D.

“The love of man is another characteristic of animals. At any rate an eagle nursed a baby. And I intend to tell the whole story so that it may be evidence of what I stated.

When Euechoros was king of the Babylonians, the Chaldaeans foretold that the son born of his daughter would wrest the kingdom from his grandfather (note: what was said by the Chaldaeans had the status of a prophesy). This made him shiver with fear and (if I may be allowed the small jest) he played Acrisius to his daughter: he put the strictest of watches upon her. Yet, the daughter gave birth to a child (for fate outwitted the Babylonian), being pregnant by some obscure man. So the guards, from fear of the king, hurled the infant from the citadel, for that was where the aforesaid daughter was imprisoned. Now the eagle which saw with its piercing eye the child while still falling, before the baby would be dashed to the earth, flew beneath it and flung its back under it, and conveyed it to some garden and set it down with the utmost care. Well, the caretaker of the place, when seeing the pretty baby, fell in love with it and nursed it; and it was called Gilgamos and was king of the Babylonians.

If anyone regards this as a mere story, I, after testing it to the best of my ability, do [not] agree with the verdict. Indeed I hear that Achaemenes the Persian, from whom the Persian nobility are descended, was the nurseling of an eagle.”

Per Wouter F.M. Henkelman (Leiden) “The Birth of Gilgamesh (A3l. NA XII.21): A case-study in literary receptivity:

Sumerian Kinglist: Enmerkar – Lugalbanda – Gilgamesh

Aelian: Euechoros – / – Gilgamos

“[This] tradition has Lugalbanda as Enmerkar’s successor and as Gilgames’s father or stepfather.