

Comparative Study of the Role of the Journey as a Trial in the Myths of "*Gilgamesh*" and "*Esfandiyar*" Based on Joseph Campbell's Model

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Abstract

The study of similarities between the myths of different cultures leads researchers to uncover common mythological structures, which are repeatedly found in diverse literary and artistic works. "The Hero's Journey" is one of the theories that can be used to identify and analyze these recurring structures in the epic stories of various cultures. The concepts of journey and trial are key elements in myths and are integral parts of legendary and epic tales. Therefore, in comparing different stories, examining the "concept of journey and types of trials" in them becomes crucial. Mythical heroes, in their trials, undergo a "journey" through numerous stages, and many common features emerge during these stages, such as numbers, mythical creatures, and passage through the underworld. After overcoming each obstacle and passing through dangerous places, such as the underworld, the hero concludes their journey after several days or years. The central theme of both the *Epic of Gilgamesh* and *The Seven stages of Esfandiyar* is also "the journey." This paper, based on Joseph Campbell's approach, examines the journeys of *Gilgamesh* and *Esfandiyar*, highlighting the similarities and differences between these two important mythological figures in terms of their life periods, reasons for the journey, character traits, type of journey, and more. The findings suggest that these two mythic heroes, while sometimes appearing similar in terms of outward features and narrative

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structure, differ in their inner characteristics, motivations, and the spiritual essence of their journeys.

Keywords: Mythical journey, Trial, Epic, of *Gilgamesh*, The Seven stages of Esfandyar, Joseph Campbell.

1. Introduction

The concept of trials and the narratives related to the keyword "trial" is a common theme in many world myths. Typically, this theme is a pivotal moment in stories and serves as a key motivational element for the protagonist's initial actions in the narrative. Mythological trials were undertaken for various purposes and were not exclusive to heroes and warriors; in some myths, even gods underwent trials. The journey to heroism for remarkable mythological figures passes through trials that test both physical and spiritual strength, and "the journey" is one of the most crucial ways to prove the hero's worth. Additionally, the journey has been a subject of interest to humanity for ages and gradually became one of the key concepts in world mythology. In nearly all myths, heroes embark on journeys to discover valuable concepts such as eternal life or to explore unknown worlds. The classification and comparative study of mythological journeys across different cultures is an essential subject in the field of literary and mythological studies. This paper seeks to examine the theme of "journey" in the myths of *Gilgamesh* and Esfandyar, based on Joseph Campbell's framework, and to explore the similarities and differences in the function and form of the journey in these two myths.

2. Problem Statement

In the evolution of human thought and civilization, mythology and its components, especially the hero myth, are reflected in epics (as one of the manifestations of mythology). The hero myth, or "the symbolic hero figure," has always existed in the collective unconscious of humans throughout history. Regardless of the era or civilization to which humanity belongs, it has always sought similar ideals and desires. Heroes manifest in various forms and shapes, but they often share similar destinies and undergo comparable stages.

This paper aims to examine the similarities and differences between the two myths of "Esfandiyar" and "*Gilgamesh*" through Joseph Campbell's approach to the "Hero's Journey" model. Joseph Campbell, the American mythologist, proposed a unique model for all world myths; a model that considers a core structure for all heroic myths, composed of three parts: "departure, initiation, and return." The national epics of the *Shahnameh* and *Gilgamesh* are among the epic works that seem to share a structure similar to Campbell's mythical model.

Based on Carl Gustav Jung's theories, Joseph Campbell introduced the archetype of the Hero's Journey, creating a new realm for archetypal criticism. Campbell's ideas on this archetype offer vast potential for the comparative analysis and aesthetics of narrative works, particularly ancient epics, in which heroes pass through multiple stages to achieve a sacred and human goal. In this research, with an emphasis on the notion that time and place do not affect the hero's journey, the heroes chosen for study are from different civilizations, without regard to temporal alignment or misalignment. Attention to the similarities of myths and stories has guided researchers in discovering common mythological structures among them—patterns that are repeatedly reflected in literary and artistic works with limitless variety. The "Hero's Journey" is one theory through which one can uncover recurring structures in various narratives and analyze them. This study seeks to answer the question: Based on Joseph Campbell's model, what are the differences and similarities between the "journeys" of Esfandiyar and *Gilgamesh*?

3. Previous Research

Various studies have been conducted on the myths of "Esfandiyar" and "*Gilgamesh*," using different approaches. Additionally, many scholars have analyzed epic works through Joseph Campbell's model. Seyyed Kazem Mousavi and colleagues (2016) in their article "*The Mythological Structure in the Black Dome of Haft-Paykar: Analyzing the Hero's Journey Theory in the First Dome*" applied the "Hero's Journey"

model by Vogler to analyze the mythological structures and the journey of the heroes in the first dome of *Haft-Paykar*. The aim of the article, besides demonstrating the use of Vogler's model in analyzing ancient texts, is to examine a form of the "defeated hero" model and its differences with the victorious heroes. These differences are observed and analyzed in the eighth (great trial), ninth (reward), and tenth (return path) stages of the model. Rahman Zibahi and Parvin Peykani (2016) in a study titled "*The Analysis of the Hero's Journey Archetype in the Darabnameh of Tarsusi Based on Joseph Campbell's Model*" examined the alignment of Darab's journey with this model. The Messenger calls Darab to the journey, and at first, he hesitates to accept the call, but eventually sets out on the journey. By overcoming the guardians of the first threshold, he enters the road of trials and triumphs over its obstacles. Then, he encounters a seductive woman and eventually marries a goddess. He succeeds in reconciling with his father and reaches the final blessing. Although he initially refuses to return, he eventually comes back to his homeland and, by overcoming the challenges ahead, becomes the master of both worlds. Although some parts of Campbell's model are absent in this story, the findings indicate a clear alignment with the mentioned model. Mohammad Hossein Karami and Rezvan Rahimi (2012), in their study "*A Reflection on the Inevitability of Gilgamesh and Alexander's Death and the Immortality of Utnapishtim and Khizr*", analyzed the journeys of heroes seeking immortality. And with reference to the failure of Gilgamesh and Alexander to attain the bliss of immortality, the secret of the immortality of Utnapishtim and Khidr is revealed—both of whom, in their respective stories, are granted the gift of eternal life. That secret is this: the gods (or God) bestow immortality only upon the human being who has striven in accordance with their (or his) purposes. The findings of the study show that according to Joseph Campbell's theory and Adam's Leming, all hero journeys seeking immortality are shaped based on the recurring pattern of the mythic-archetypal journey of the hero, and *Gilgamesh's* journey toward Utnapishtim and Alexander's search for the water of life follow this rule. The article is noteworthy in that

it explores the archetype of the journey in pursuit of immortality and compares the character of Utnapishtim, as a wise old man, with Khezr.

Masoud Naqashzadeh and Seyyed Mostafa Mokhtabad (2015) in their article "*Analyzing the Structure of Epic Films Based on the Hero's Journey Model*" noted that the hero myth is the most common and familiar myth in the world today, significantly influencing the structure of dramatic systems. The main objective of this article is to analyze the structure of mythic narrative within the dramatic framework of epic films, based on the hero's journey archetype. Aziz Mahdi (2015), in his research titled "*Analyzing the Fire Test in Shahnameh and Ramayana*", described the test as a common and widespread concept in Aryan culture, which over time, under the influence of non-Aryan cultures, has gained new layers, and concluded that both myths share common motifs and represent a point of intersection between the history and culture of Indo-Iranian traditions.

4. Theoretical Foundations

4-1. Mythological Narratives and the Hero Myth

Narratives, especially stories of all types, regardless of the medium through which they are conveyed, often propose assumptions about the world and how it is perceived and understood by the audience. For this reason, myths, which are narratives of recurring and enduring patterns of human spiritual experiences and events throughout various eras, gain significant importance in narrative theory. The importance of mythological narratives lies in the fact that the creation and formation of myths is considered a universal human trait across all ages (Schalkwijk, 2004: 1). From the perspective of mythology, the hero myth is the most widespread and familiar myth in the world today. Modern humans, living in a world constantly undergoing fundamental transformations, are more in need of the spirit of the hero myth than ever before (Pearson, 1998: 7). This is because the hero myth clearly holds extraordinary appeal and

profound psychological significance (Jung et al., 1973: 167). Therefore, the hero myth, in the design of a dramatic structure, serves a dual purpose. On one hand, the hero character has an inherent mythological function, and on the other hand, it plays a foundational role in constructing the dramatic structure.

4.2. Historical Development of Hero Myth Theories

Among all the studies conducted on the hero myth, which encompass a wide range of philosophical, narratological, psychological, sociological, and anthropological approaches, the most fundamental and foundational theories stem from the works of “Otto Rank,” “Lord Raglan,” and “Joseph Campbell.” Each of these theorists has developed a distinct model to explain and analyze the hero myth. Otto Rank's model is heavily influenced by Freud's theory and focuses on the birth of the hero. Lord Raglan's model is entirely influenced by James Frazer's theory, which views the myth as a ritualistic and religious text, centering on the final stages of the hero's journey and their death and transformation into a legendary and immortal figure. In contrast, Joseph Campbell's model is clearly based on Jung's theory of archetypes. In alignment with Jungian analytical psychology, Campbell views the hero's role as a symbol of the “Self,” and the progression of their journey as a symbol of “life.” His studies focus on the process of the hero's journey (Indick, 2004: 2).

4.3. The Hero's Journey Model and Joseph Campbell

The Hero's Journey model can be traced throughout the history of world literature and various works from different fields. This model has been used repeatedly by writers in various branches of literature, including narrative and dramatic literature. Joseph Campbell was the first to establish a structured framework for explaining this widely used model in his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949). This model was later explored by scholars such as “Stuart Voytilla” in *Myth and the Movies* (1999) and “Christopher Vogler” in *The Writer's Journey* (2007).

Joseph Campbell's theories in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* describe the internal journey of humans in the form of the hero's mythic journey. He shows that different myths, essentially, narrate a single story, and the diversity of human stories results from different versions of the same hero's journey. Therefore, Campbell argues that myths follow a single structural model, which he refers to as the "monomyth" and explains it through the process of the "Hero's Journey." In other words, "recorded myths are always more or less revised or modified versions of texts that have previously existed" (Eliade, 2012: 180).

The Hero's Journey, although a significant adventure in the life of a hero striving to achieve a tangible goal, is essentially a process of human evolution and spiritual ascent. In this mythic journey, the hero learns how to navigate the path of heroism and transcend personal desires for the greater good. Campbell argues that all mythic heroes follow similar stages and share common structural elements (Campbell, 2009: 206). He believes that in different mythological stories, certain characters reappear as archetypal figures, representing human nature, traits, and needs. The hero's mythic journey often honors and repeats the same model found in rites of passage: the three-part structure of "Separation, Initiation, and Return," which can be considered the core of the monomyth (Campbell, 2008: 40).

Based on this, Campbell divides the Hero's Journey model into three main parts: "Departure (Separation), Initiation (Rite of Passage), and Return" and describes it in seventeen stages as follows:

Table 1: Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey Model

Part One / Act One (Departure, Separation)	Part Two / Act Two (Initiation, Rite of Passage)	Part Three / Act Three (Return)
Call to Adventure, Beginning of the Journey	In the Path of Trials	Refusal of Return
Refusal of the Call	Meeting with the Goddess	Magical Flight

Part One / Act One (Departure, Separation)	Part Two / Act Two (Initiation, Rite of Passage)	Part Three / Act Three (Return)
Supernatural Aid	Woman as Temptress	Rescue from Without
Crossing the First Threshold	Crossing the Dark Realm / Inside the Whale	Crossing the Return Threshold
Atonement with the Father	Gods	Master of Two Worlds
Divine Intervention	Final Blessing	Freedom to Live

4-4. Journey and Its Types: “Real Journey and Symbolic Journey”

Journey in myths is important because it creates various situations for the hero. The story’s progression is shaped by the concept of journey and quest. Once the hero embarks on the journey, it becomes a testament to their heroism. If they overcome the challenges, they rise to the status of a superhuman; otherwise, they remain an ordinary human. Thus, the hero does everything to overcome obstacles and fight enemies, even entering the dark and mysterious world of the dead, knowing they may not survive.

Throughout the journey, the hero may lose strength, but the desire to become superhuman or achieve immortality drives them to keep fighting. Therefore, the journey in myths is not just a physical movement from one place to another but may symbolize transitions from one world to another or from one stage to another. The journey purifies the hero at each stage, ultimately bringing them to their best self. These stages may appear as the Seven Valleys of Attar, the Seven Stages of Esfandiyar, or the Twelve Stages of Heracles.

In general, “journey” is divided into two main types: “Real Journey” and “Symbolic Journey.”

Table 2: Types of Real and Symbolic Journeys and Their Purposes

Row	Type of Journey	Purpose of the Journey	Example
1	Real	Journey to save someone or something	Rostam's journey in the Seven Stages to rescue Kavoos from the White Demon
		Journey for war	The journeys of Odysseus, Achilles, and other Greek heroes in the Trojan War to retrieve Helen
2		Journey as a test and overcoming a situation	Hercules' journey and overcoming the twelve Stages
	Symbolic	Journey to the underworld	Odysseus' journey and meeting the spirit of his mother
		Journey to find immortality	<i>Gilgamesh's</i> journey to find the plant of immortality
		Mystical journeys	Ardaviraf's dreamlike journey to Heaven and Hell

The test, like the “journey,” has various types. The most important tests include the “Fire” test, the “Water” test, the “Strength” test, the “Heroic or Seven Stages” test, the “Madness” test, the “Question and Answer” test, and the “Spiritual and Mystical” test. In the “Seven Stages” tests, which are specific to the class of heroes and often involve several tests simultaneously in passing through one labor, the tests are accepted at the hero's discretion, and the hero willingly undergoes several difficult stages. According to Meskoob, the most difficult test for heroes is the “Seven Stages.” In this, the hero strives to preserve his name and create glory (Meskoob, 1381: 34).

5. Discussion and Analysis

5.1. Summary of the Stories of *Gilgamesh* and the Seven Stages of Esfandyar

Gilgamesh - the oldest known epic - is a Sumerian epic dating back around three thousand years before Christ. This epic, written in verse, was found on twelve broken tablets from the library of Ashurbanipal (7th century BCE). The tablets were taken to the British

Museum, and George Smith, after reading them, pointed out in his 1862 speech that one of the tablets contained a story similar to Noah's flood (Shamisa, 1383: 97). In fact, the story of Utnapishtim and his survival from the flood mirrors that of Noah. *Gilgamesh* is a tyrannical king of Uruk, whose people complain to the gods about him. As a result, the gods create Enkidu to fight him. After meeting and wrestling, they form a brotherly bond and journey to the Cedar Forest to destroy Humbaba. After Humbaba's defeat, Ishtar (the goddess of beauty) expresses her love for *Gilgamesh*, but he rejects her, leading to a war with the gods. Consequently, the gods curse Enkidu, and he dies from a fever. Devastated by Enkidu's death, *Gilgamesh* embarks on a journey to find immortality and seeks his ancestor Utnapishtim to learn the secret of eternal life. Utnapishtim tells him that the plant of immortality lies deep within the waters. *Gilgamesh* finds the plant, but a snake eats it, and he thus fails to become immortal. Finally, he journeys to the land of the dead to see Enkidu again (See: Monshizadeh, 1383: 49).

Esfandiyar, the son of Goshtasp and Katayoon and descendant of Lohrasp, was invulnerable. In the *Shahnameh*, the exact way he became invulnerable is not mentioned, but in the Zoroastrian texts, it is stated that Zoroaster washed him as an infant in the sacred waters, which made him invulnerable, leaving only his eyes vulnerable. Esfandiyar commanded the army of Goshtasp during the battle against Arjasp, defeating him and returning near his father. However, the king was swayed by the influence of the jealous man, and Esfandiyar was imprisoned in the Gombedan Fortress. He was killed by a poisoned arrow shot at his eyes by Rostam (guided by the Simorgh). Lohrasp, the successor of Keykhosrow, had a son named Goshtasp, who, after a falling out with his father, went to Rome and later returned to Iran to take his father's place. It was during his reign that Zoroaster became a prophet. Arjasp, the king of China and Turan, waged war against Iran because the Iranians had converted to Zoroastrianism and replaced their old worship practices with the fire temple of Zoroaster. In this war, the hero of Iran and the leader of the Zoroastrians, Esfandiyar, fights to protect Iran. Arjasp takes his

army to Balkh, kills Lohrasp, and captures the daughters of Goshtasp. Esfandiyar defeats Arjasp's army and sets out to bring back his sisters from Turan. During his journey, he faces seven challenges, known as the "Seven Stages of Esfandiyar."

5.2. The Sequence of Esfandiyar's Tasks in the Seven Stages

Esfandiyar, following the orders of his father, King Goshtasp, journeys to Turan to rescue his sisters. He chooses the shorter but more perilous route. Although he is accompanied by an army, brothers, and advisors, he faces his battles alone.

a) First Labor: Esfandiyar faces two wolves that have antlers like a stag and tusks like an elephant. He easily kills them with his bow and arrow, and then decapitates them with his sword.

b) Second Labor: Esfandiyar entrusts his army to Peshotan and personally fights two lions, killing the male lion first, then the female, before moving on to the next task.

c) Third Labor: In the third labor, Esfandiyar confronts a dragon. He builds a wooden chariot, attaches it to two strong horses, and drives toward the dragon. The dragon swallows the chariot but gets stuck on the chariot's spikes, unable to swallow or expel it. The dragon falls to the ground, and Esfandiyar kills it by striking its head.

d) Fourth Labor: Esfandiyar encounters a sorceress disguised as a beautiful woman. After praising the divine name, she reveals her true form, and Esfandiyar kills her with his sword.

e) Fifth Labor: Esfandiyar constructs a spiked chariot again and heads toward Mount Simurgh. When Simurgh sees the chariot, it descends to snatch it but is harmed by the spikes. Esfandiyar keeps striking it until its body is torn apart, then praises the divine.

f) Sixth Labor: Esfandiyar and his companions get trapped in snow and storms for three days. He realizes that brute strength and weapons won't help, and they must all pray to the divine to overcome the weather. Shortly after, a warm breeze clears the storm.

g) Seventh Labor: As foretold by the wolf guide, they reach a dry, waterless desert. However, after traveling further, they encounter a vast sea. The guides of the caravan, unaware, fall in and drown.

Esfandiyar questions the guide but harms him not. He and his army make their way along the shore to the Iron Fortress (Rooein-Dezh), where he confronts Arjasp, the king of Turan.

Summary of the Stages:

- * Esfandiyar kills two wolves.
- * He kills two lions (male and female).
- * Fights a dragon (using a spiked chariot).
- * Kills a sorceress disguised as a beautiful woman.
- * Kills a bird as large as the Simurgh.
- * Overcomes snow and cold with the help of divine prayer.
- * Crosses the sea and captures the Iron Fortress.

In the context of Esfandiyar's Seven Stages, the primary goal is to rescue his sisters, gain eternal glory, and take the throne. The tasks in the first and second Stages test his physical strength, where he battles the wolves and lions with his usual weapons. In the third labor, he relies on his intelligence and the help of the chariot to defeat the dragon. The fourth labor focuses on purity and resistance to temptation when he kills the sorceress. In the fifth labor, he faces a supernatural challenge by killing a bird like the Simurgh. In the sixth and seventh Stages, Esfandiyar demonstrates resilience, facing both physical challenges (snow and cold) and the crossing of water with his army.

Esfandiyar's trials are about more than just rescuing his sisters. They also involve the quest for fame and possibly the throne. His weapons and tools- especially the chariot- are key instruments of his success, but he is also aided by his divine connection and the prayers to the divine. Each trial represents a different aspect of heroism: strength, intelligence, purity, resistance, and endurance.

5-2. Comparison to Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey:

- * **Call to Adventure:** Goshtasp's request for Esfandiyar to rescue his sisters.
- * **Entering the Difficult Journey:** The journey to Turan.
- * **Allies and Helpers:** Esfandiyar's army, brothers, and advisors.
- * **The Trials:** The seven Stages of Esfandiyar.

* **Victory over the Dragon and Other Foes:** The third and first Stages.

* **Confrontation with the Temptress (Sorceress):** The fourth labor.

* **Success and Fame:** The completion of all seven Stages.

* **Spiritual Fulfillment:** Praising the divine in the fourth labor.

Esfandiyar's journey can be seen as an embodiment of the archetypal hero's journey outlined by Joseph Campbell, with each of the seven Stages mirroring different stages of the hero's transformation and ultimate success.

بیامد چو با شیر نزدیک شد	جهان بر دل شیر تاریک شد
یکی بود نرّ و دگر ماده شیر	برفتند پرخاشجوی و دلیر
چو نر اندر آمد، یکی تیغ زد	بُد ریگ زیرش به سان بُسد
ز سر تا میانش به دو نیم گشت	دل شیر ماده پر از بیم گشت
چو جفتش بر آشفّت و آمد فراز	یکی تیغ زد بر سرش رزمساز
به ریگ اندر افکند غلتان سرش	ز خون لعل شد دست و جنگی برش
به آب اندر آمد سر و تن بشست	نگهدار جز پاک یزدان نجست
چنین گفت کای داور داد و پاک	به دستم دَدان را تو کردی هلاک

* He came, and when he got close to the lion, the world became dark for his brave and lion-like heart.

* There were two lions, a male and a female, who boldly and courageously moved forward.

* When the lion came forward, he struck with his sword, and the sand beneath his feet turned as red as coral from the lion's blood.

* From head to waist, the lion was split in two, and the female lion's heart was filled with fear.

* When the female lion angrily approached (Esfandiyar), the warrior **Esfandiyar struck her head with his sword.**

* Her head fell among the rocks and rolled, and from the lion's blood, the hands and chest of the warrior Esfandiyar became like red ruby (and bloodied).

- * Esfandiyar entered the water, washed his head and body, and called upon God as his protector and guardian.
- * And he said, “O just and pure Judge! You have destroyed the wild beasts by my hand.”

The transformation and journey of “Esfandiyar” follow a classic storyline: he lives his ordinary life until he receives a call to adventure. Accepting the challenge, he embarks on a difficult trial, overcoming multiple stages to achieve a noble and humane goal. Ultimately, through his own abilities, the aid of others, and divine intervention, he attains great success and reaches spiritual enlightenment and self-awareness.

5-3. The Journey of *Gilgamesh*: Goals and Stages

The primary goal of *Gilgamesh*'s trials is to attain immortality. He must symbolically “die” to achieve eternal life and join the ranks of the gods. Unlike Esfandiyar, *Gilgamesh* does not undergo a test of wisdom; rather, his trials primarily assess his strength and endurance. As a being who is half-god and half-human, he ultimately fails his final trial, which tests both his willpower and physical ability.

Throughout his journey, *Gilgamesh* encounters both ordinary and supernatural challenges, such as crossing the sea and navigating a dark, endless tunnel. A fishmonger woman named Siduri serves as his guide. His journey lasts for a year, during which he relies on conventional weapons, such as his dagger, to overcome trials of strength. However, the only spiritual test he faces—one that he ultimately fails- is the trial of sleep.

Gilgamesh's journey aligns with Joseph Campbell's theory of the Hero's Journey in several ways:

- * **Embarking on a perilous and fearsome path**
- * **Receiving aid from heroic companions** (e.g., his close friend and counterpart, Enkidu)
- * **Battling a lion**
- * **Fighting a dragon**
- * **Slaying the Bull of Heaven**
- * **Seeking assistance from the gods**

5-4. Similarities Between Esfandiyar and *Gilgamesh*

By comparing Esfandiyar and *Gilgamesh*, we can identify several similarities between them. Both are extraordinary beings, almost divine in nature. Their mothers are goddesses, with Esfandiyar's mother named Katayoon (also referred to as Nahid), while in *Gilgamesh's* story, there is a goddess named Ishtar (also known as Nahid).

Both heroes embark on perilous journeys, willingly facing immense dangers. They both encounter monstrous beings—Humbaba in *Gilgamesh's* tale and the dragon in Esfandiyar's Seven Trials. Furthermore, both stories feature two significant female characters: Siduri in *Gilgamesh's* epic and the sorceress in Esfandiyar's trials. However, Siduri is a benevolent figure, while the sorceress is malevolent.

Just as Utnapishtim holds the key to immortality for *Gilgamesh*, Zoroaster plays a similar role for Esfandiyar by baptizing him in sacred water to make him invincible. Water is a symbolically crucial element in both narratives—Esfandiyar undergoes a holy purification ritual, while *Gilgamesh* seeks the plant of immortality, hidden in the depths of the sea.

Numbers also play an important role: Esfandiyar faces seven trials, while *Gilgamesh's* story is told across twelve tablets, and his trial for immortality involves seven days of wakefulness. Likewise, Esfandiyar is invincible except for his eyes, similar to *Gilgamesh*, who is two-thirds god and one-third mortal, making him vulnerable.

In both stories, Utnapishtim serves as a wise mentor to *Gilgamesh*, while Zoroaster fulfills this role for Esfandiyar. Additionally, lions appear in both narratives—*Gilgamesh* fears them and prays for protection, whereas Esfandiyar kills two lions with ease.

Finally, the challenges of crossing natural obstacles appear in both epics:

- Esfandiyar faces a deadly snowstorm in one of his trials.
- *Gilgamesh* must cross a deep valley and the Sea of Death on his journey.

These parallels highlight the shared archetypal themes in both stories, reflecting the hero's journey as a universal narrative pattern.

5-5. Examining the Differences Between the Two Heroes

Gilgamesh belongs to the matriarchal era, whereas Esfandiyar belongs to the patriarchal era. In the matriarchal era, the presence of goddesses and female deities is an inseparable part of stories, and it is a time of urban settlement and stability. In contrast, the patriarchal era is marked by travel, war, exploration, and interaction with the rest of the world. Therefore, it is evident that during this period, the number of journeys and battles is greater.

Gilgamesh embarks on a perilous journey to attain immortality, whereas Esfandiyar is granted invulnerability from childhood through the favor of Zoroaster. *Gilgamesh* was initially a tyrannical king, but after the presence of Enkidu, he transformed into a noble figure who wished to obtain the Plant of Eternal Life for all the heroes of his land. In contrast, Esfandiyar had only one goal in mind—gaining the throne.

In *Gilgamesh's* tale, there are numerous gods, and at times, he even clashes with them. However, in Esfandiyar's story, there are only two opposing forces—good and evil, represented by Ahura Mazda and Ahriman. In the Epic of *Gilgamesh*, there is a character named Enkidu, who serves as his companion and counterpart, but Esfandiyar lacks such a character in his story.

Gilgamesh travels to the Underworld to see Enkidu, whereas no such journey exists in Esfandiyar's story. In the end, *Gilgamesh* voluntarily embarks on his journey to the land of the dead, renouncing worldly life. In contrast, Esfandiyar, driven by arrogance and ambition for kingship, is slain by Rostam.

Gilgamesh undergoes three major journeys:

1. To the Cedar Forest,
2. To Utnapishtim,
3. To the Underworld.

Meanwhile, Esfandiyar faces seven trials.

Regarding Enkidu and *Gilgamesh*, Enkidu serves as *Gilgamesh*'s counterpart and ultimately descends into the Underworld, remaining there. The fear of death and the mystery of the afterlife are major themes in *Gilgamesh*'s story, portraying death as an enigmatic realm. In early human thought, death was perceived as something that separated a vital force from the body, stripping it of movement. Later, dreams and visions influenced by the material world reinforced the idea of the soul and various spiritual beliefs.

In ancient times, when humans dreamed of experiences from their waking life, they perceived dreams and reality as one. This mythological perspective led to the belief that one's soul could embark on journeys during sleep. The blending of dreams and reality in the popular imagination is a legacy of ancient beliefs and a reflection of mythological thought (Asad sangabi, 1995: 24).

In contrast, Esfandiyar fights as if death does not exist. In his Seven Trials, all forces unite to prevent him from reaching and rescuing his sisters, whereas in *Gilgamesh*'s story, all the strange and terrifying creatures ultimately guide him toward Utnapishtim.

For *Gilgamesh*, his journey represents a quest for immortality and a higher purpose, while for Esfandiyar, his journey is solely about attaining power. However, neither of them achieves their ultimate goal, and both meet failure in the end.

6. Conclusion

After a detailed and thorough analysis of the differences and similarities between the two heroes, it must be said that they do not bear much resemblance to each other, except where mythological discussions necessitate a similarity- particularly when the journey is considered a test. Certain elements such as numbers, creatures, characters, and fantastical places are key themes in world mythology, and in these aspects, similarities can be observed between the two stories. The two heroes differ in terms of their spiritual nature and the progression of their narratives, but ultimately, neither achieves their goal, and both fall victim to death.

In the legend of *Gilgamesh*, the oldest heroic epic known to humankind, the concept of the journey is vividly present, and he is compelled to embark on a journey to achieve his goal. These journeys occur in three stages: first, for battle; second, in search of eternal life; and finally, a journey to the realm of the dead. However, in Esfandiyar's Seven Trials, he sets out to rescue his sisters, who have been captured by Arjasp the Turanian, and must go to the impregnable fortress of Arjasp to save them and prevent disgrace from tarnishing the reputation of the Goshtasp family. The reward promised to him by the King of Iran is the throne, which was ultimately never granted to him.

In this story, Esfandiyar passes through seven trials to rescue his sisters from Arjasp, and his mythological journey unfolds through seven dangerous valleys, each carrying symbolic meaning. In these trials, Esfandiyar battles two wolves, two lions, a dragon, a pair of Simurghs, an enchantress, and Gorgsar, defeating them one by one. Meanwhile, *Gilgamesh*, with the help of Enkidu, slays Humbaba and later ventures alone to meet Utnapishtim and then to the realm of the dead. In reality, the only battle *Gilgamesh* faces is with Humbaba; from that point forward, his journey is centered on attaining immortality. Along the way, he encounters a mountain and sees lions, pleading with the moon god to keep him alive. He must pass through two mountains guarded by a male and a female giant with scorpion-like lower bodies. They tell *Gilgamesh* that to reach Utnapishtim, he must traverse a narrow and dark valley to reach the gateway of the sun. From there, he will arrive at the Sea of Death, which no one has ever crossed.

He follows this path and reaches Shamash, the sun god, who instructs him to visit Siduri, the wise woman of the celestial mountain. Siduri then guides him to Urshanabi, Utnapishtim's boatman. To cross the Sea of Death, *Gilgamesh* constructs 120 wooden poles, throwing them into the waters, and must ensure that not even a single drop touches him, as it would mean certain death. When he finally reaches Utnapishtim, he inquires about the secret of his immortality. Utnapishtim, after recounting his own story,

reveals the location of the plant of eternal life, which lies in the depths of the world's waters.

After finding the plant, *Gilgamesh*, contemplating saving the lives of his city's heroes from death, loses it to a serpent, which devours the plant. He returns home in despair and ultimately travels to the realm of the dead to meet Enkidu.

The key difference is that in Esfandiyar's Seven Trials, all forces unite to prevent him from reaching and rescuing his sisters, whereas in *Gilgamesh's* story, all strange and terrifying creatures somehow guide him to Utnapishtim. In *Gilgamesh's* story, two lions appear, but he does not fight them- he only prays to the gods for protection. In contrast, Esfandiyar slays two lions in battle.

Some additional comparisons include:

- Both stories feature two lions, but *Gilgamesh* fears them and prays for protection, while Esfandiyar slays them.
- The dragon in the Seven Trials bears a strong resemblance to Humbaba, both of whom are slain by the heroes- though *Gilgamesh* accomplishes this with Enkidu's help, whereas Esfandiyar does so alone.
- In the Seven Trials, there is an evil sorceress who seeks to kill Esfandiyar, whereas in *Gilgamesh's* story, Siduri, the wise woman of the celestial mountain, is a positive figure who guides him.
- Esfandiyar must pass through snow, while *Gilgamesh* must navigate a narrow valley and the Sea of Death- both incredibly arduous challenges.
- *Gilgamesh's* story involves a journey to the realm of the dead, whereas Esfandiyar's story contains no such element.
- In *Gilgamesh's* story, all forces seem to assist him in his quest for immortality, while in the Seven Trials, all forces act against Esfandiyar.
- For *Gilgamesh*, the journey symbolizes his pursuit of immortality and a higher purpose, whereas for Esfandiyar, the journey is solely about attaining power. Ultimately, however, neither hero succeeds in achieving his goal.

Gilgamesh becomes emotionally attached to Enkidu, and a deep sense of love and affection develops between them. According to his mother, Enkidu is his brother, born alongside him on the same day. This bond purifies *Gilgamesh* of his former arrogance and transforms him into a true hero. In his desperate attempt to revive Enkidu, he is willing to do anything, but when all hope is lost, he turns to seeking immortality- not just for himself, but for all the warriors of Uruk. This compels him to embark on a perilous journey.

In contrast, Esfandiyar is a proud prince, and his struggle through the Seven Trials and his quest to rescue his sisters are ultimately a means to secure power and claim the throne.

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