

Sophus Helle

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Writer, translator,
and cultural historian.



Education and work

2020 – 2021: Research assistant at Aarhus University.

2017 – 2020: PhD in Comparative Literature, Aarhus University.

2019: Fulbright Visiting Scholar at Columbia University.

2011–2016: MA in Assyriology, University of Copenhagen,
with Erasmus exchange stay at Universität Würzburg.

Grants and awards

2020: European Young Research Award, Popular Prize.

2020: Nominated for the Weekendavisen Literary Prize.

2019: Generous grant from the C.L. David Foundation to
complete my English *Gilgamesh* translation.

2018: Fulbright Scholarship for a stay at Columbia University.

Selected publications

Gilgamesh: A New Translation of the Ancient Epic, Yale University
Press (2021). English translation with five essays.

With Morten Søndergaard, *Gilgamesh*, Gyldendal (2019). Danish
translation.

“What is an author? Old answers to a new question”, *Modern
Language Quarterly* 80 (2019).

“Love isn’t what it was: How Disney took to subverting its own
romantic ideals,” *Aeon* (2019)

Research focus

I specialize in ancient
literature, especially
the Babylonian epics.
But my interests range
widely, from the oldest
poetry to present-day
pop culture.

My work has primarily
focused on the poems
of Enheduana, the epic
Gilgamesh, the history
of philology, climate
change activism, and
the historical study of
sex, gender and affect.

Contact

sophushelle.com

sophushelle@cc.au.dk

+45 2984 9293

Photo: Alexandra
Freltoft.

Outreach and teaching

I have extensive experience in academic outreach and popularization, having given more than fifty lectures and interviews on *Gilgamesh*, Enheduana, the field of philology, gender in ancient Iraq, and other topics. You can find a sample of these talks at: sophushelle.com/talks-interviews/

My work has repeatedly been featured in Danish media, including twice on the front page of *Politiken* as well as on *Kulturen på P1* and *24 spørgsmål til professoren*.

2013 – 2019: Teacher in numerous courses in Assyriology and literary history, at BA and MA levels, at the University of Copenhagen and Aarhus University.

2016 – 2018: Editor of “Mar Shiprim”, the newsletter of the International Association of Assyriology.

2018: Invited guest speaker at Cambridge University, Freie Universität Berlin, and Helsinki University.

2018: Historical consultant for dramatic adaptation of *Gilgamesh* by Hotel Pro Forma, at the Glyptotek museum.

Other activities

I have been involved with climate change activism in Denmark for the past two years. I believe that activists should focus, not on shocking people into action, but in channeling their existing fears, shame and confusion into community-based activities.

2018: Co-founder of the Green Students' Movement (DGSB), a Danish organization of students fighting climate change.

2017: Session chair at the 7th instalment of the Institute for World Literature.

2017: Jury member for the Danish Bookfair's literary debut prize (“Bogforums Debutantpris”).

2017: Master class in cuneiform epigraphy at Universität Heidelberg.

Reviews of *Gilgamesh*

Praise for the Danish translation:

“One of those miracles that makes life worth living.” – *Politiken*

“The new translation of *Gilgamesh* is set to become a classic in this country.” – *Information*

“A wonderful, lively, wild, and violent encounter with this fascinating ancient portrait of us grim, dumb, yet so clever human animals.”
– *Weekendavisen*

On DGSB

I claim no credit for the success of DGSB, a group for Danish students fighting climate change. I co-founded it but had to withdraw shortly afterwards, while DGSB went on to become a truly inspiring influential movement, that reshaped the Danish political landscape. I strongly invite you to support them in any way you can: dgsb.dk

Sophus Helle: List of publications

Find all my published writings, including links, downloadable copies, and brief summaries, at sophushelle.com/category/academic

Books and theses

Forthcoming: *Gilgamesh: A New Translation of the Ancient Epic*, in press with Yale University Press.

Forthcoming: Editor, with Gina Konstatopoulos, of *The Shape of Stories: Narrative Structures in Cuneiform Literature*, under contract at Brill.

2020: “The first authors: Narratives of authorship in ancient Iraq.” PhD thesis, Aarhus University.

2019: *Gilgamesh*, with Morten Søndergaard. Gyldendal.

2016: “Emotions in *Gilgamesh*: Desire, grief, and identity in the Standard Babylonian *Epic of Gilgamesh*”. MA thesis, University of Copenhagen.

Articles

In review: “What is philology? From crises of reading to comparative reflections”. Second round of peer review.

Forthcoming: “The two-act structure: A narrative device in Akkadian epics”, accepted for publication in *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions*. Peer-reviewed article.

Forthcoming: “The chronotope of the threshold in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*”, accepted for publication in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*. Peer-reviewed article.

2020: “The birth of the author: Co-creating authorship in Enheduana’s *Exaltation*”, *Orbis Litterarum* 75.2, 55–72. Peer-reviewed article.

- 2020: “Marduk’s penis: Queering *Enūma Eliš*”, *Distant Worlds Journal* 4, 63–77. Peer-reviewed article, special issue.
- 2019: “A literary heritage: Authorship in the Neo-Assyrian period”, in review at *Kaskal* (special issue with conference proceedings).
- 2019: “What is an author? Old answers to a new question”, *Modern Language Quarterly* 80.2, 113–139. Peer-reviewed article.
- 2019: “Enheduana and the invention of authorship”, *Authorship* 8.1, 1–20. Peer-reviewed article.
- 2019: “Weapons and weaving instruments as symbols of gender in the ancient Near East”, in *Fashioned Selves*, ed. Megan Cifarelli, Oxbow Books, 105–15. Peer-reviewed chapter in anthology.
- 2019: “*Gilgamesh*: A subversive foundation”, in *Antike Kanonisierungsprozesse und Identitätsbildung in Zeiten des Umbruchs*, ed. M. Friesen and C.L. Hesse, Wissenschaftliche Schriften der WWU Münster, 27–41. Article in conference proceedings.
- 2018: “The role of authors in the ‘Uruk List of Kings and Sages’: Canonization and cultural contact”, *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 77.2, 219–34. Peer-reviewed article.
- 2018: “‘Only in dress?’ Methodological concerns regarding non-binary gender”, in *Gender and Methodology in the Ancient Near East*, ed. S. Budin et al., Edicions de la Universitat de Barcelona, 41–53. Article in conference proceedings.
- 2017: “Babylonian perspectives on the uncertainty of death: SB *Gilgamesh* X 301-321”, *Kaskal* 14, 211–19. Peer-reviewed article.
- 2016: “The return of Mess O’Potamia: Time, space and politics in modern uses of ancient Mesopotamia”, *Postcolonial Studies*, 19.3, 305–24. Peer-reviewed article.
- 2015: “Contrast through ironic self-citation in *Atra-hasis*”, *Nouvelles Assyriologiques brèves et utilitaires* 2015.4, no. 95, 158–160. Brief communication.
- 2014: “Rhythm and expression in Akkadian prosody”, *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* 104.1, 56–73. Journal article. [Link](#).