The Religious Aspects of War in the Ancient Near East, Greece, and Rome

Edited by

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Battle-Descriptions in Mesopotamian Sources I: Presargonic and Sargonic Period[1]

Sebastian Fink

Our knowledge of ancient battles relies nearly exclusively on written sources and, even worse, in a lot of cases we only have battle descriptions from one side while the sources on the other side remain quiet. This is even the case for battles which are regarded to be of utmost historical importance, like those of the Persian wars.

But are battle descriptions in general reliable? With only one source available for a certain battle, source-criticism must mainly rely on a literary analysis of battle descriptions. The limits of our knowledge of seemingly well-known battles in the Greek world were demonstrated by Reinhold Bichler 2009[2] and he clearly articulated the problems to reconstruct ancient battles from texts, which themselves have to reduce the complexity of the events they describe and try to give these events an appropriate interpretation—as the modern historian does. At this point it seems questionable if a comparison and source-critical analysis of battle descriptions can really contribute to the reconstruction of events on ancient battlefield. Therefore this article does not try to reconstruct the battles in third millennium Mesopotamia on the basis of a source-critical reading of royal inscriptions. The aim of this article is to analyze how wars and battles were described in early Mesopotamia in order to answer the question of whether battle-descriptions follow a template or if they are rather neutral descriptions of observed events. If the first is the case (which I assume), than this article should be a further step toward a literary history of battle descriptions in Mesopotamia, which could also prove useful for other branches of history.

The method of choice is a chronological collection and analysis of battle-description that can be found in volumes I and II of the *Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia Early Periods* (RIME). The first royal inscriptions from Mesopotamia emerge around 2600 BC and are attributed to the Presargonic

1 I have to thank George Lang and Robert Rollinger for comments and language revision.

2 R. Bichler, "Probleme und Grenzen der Rekonstruktion von Ereignissen am Beispiel antiker Schlachtbeschreibungen" in *Das Ereignis. Geschichtsschreibung zwischen Vorfall und Befund* (= Internet-Beiträge zur Archäologie und Sudanarchäologie X, ed. M. Fitzenreiter, 2009) 17–34.

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Period of Mesopotamian history. Sargon of Akkad (c. 2300) is rightfully seen as a major turning point of Mesopotamian history because he created "the first world empire" in the Ancient Near East.[3] The first known royal inscriptions contain no narration of what we would consider a historical event; they are often very short and consist of a king's name and sometimes of a dedication of an object to a god. Nearly all of them are written in Sumerian, we only have a few instances of inscriptions in Akkadian, but basically an inscription written in logographic style could be read in several languages. The dating of the early texts and therefore the dating of the early kings is very uncertain[4] and therefore I will give no exact years—the sequence of the kings often relies on the Sumerian King List which is quite a problematical source, but for large parts of early Mesopotamian history the only source for a chronological structure at all. Here I will present the texts simply in the geographical order in which they were presented by Frayne.

Presargonic Period

The first 'description' of a military event from the ancient city Kiš is a text from the king Enna-il, which is only known from a later copy.[5] The text simply states:

> 1)dINANNA 2)en-na-il 3)DUMU 4)a-an[zú] (AM.[IM].MI).MUŠEN 5)NIM 6)GÍN.ŠÈ
>
> For the goddess Inanna, Enna-Il, son of A-Anzu, who smote Elam with weapons.[6]

The phrase for describing the military event is GÍN.ŠÈ which is quite formulaic and could be translated straightforward as "to (smote with) the axe". The corpus of texts from Lagaš is more rewarding when dealing with our question and the first, somewhat longer description is found in Ur-Nanše 6b, reverse:

3 *Akkad, the first world empire: structure, ideology, traditions* (= HANE.S, v, ed. M. Liverani, Padova: Sargon Ed., 1993).

4 RIME 1, 13.

5 For the details see the discussion in RIME 1, 75.

6 RIME 1, 75.

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I 1)[ur-dnanše] 2)[lugal] 3)lagaš 4)lú.uri$_5$ 5)lú-giš$_{KÚŠU.KI}$ 6)ME+LAK 526
7)e-šè-DU 8)lú-lagaš II 1)lú-urí 2)GÍN.ŠÈ m[u]-⌜ sé ⌝ 3)mu-[dab$_5$]

Ur-Nanše, king of Lagaš went to war against the leader of Ur and the leader of Ǧiša (Umma). The leader of Lagaš defeated and captured the leader of Ur.[7]

Then a long list of other captured enemies follows and at the end of the text a kind of dust-tumuli (SAḪAR.DU$_6$.TAG$_4$) is mentioned for the first time, which is interpreted by Frayne as an honorary burial for the dead soldiers of Lagaš. The burial of casualties of war in tumuli will accompany us as a reoccurring motif in Mesopotamian battle descriptions but the interpretations of these burials vary. As already mentioned Frayne interprets these tumuli as honorary burials of one's own casualties and not as 'heaps of the enemy dead (as some scholars have previously translated)'.[8] He states that he follows Josef Bauer[9] in this respect, but a look at Bauer's article shows that he gives arguments for a contrary opinion and argues in favor of an interpretation of these tumuli as heaps of dead enemies.[10]

In the royal inscriptions of Ur-Nanše war is not a very prominent topic—only one out of thirty-three inscriptions describes acts of war in some detail. Things only change with the so called 'Stele of the Vultures'[11] with the inscription of the grandson of Ur-Nanše, E-anatum, who is one of the most prominent warrior-kings of the third millennium. It even seems that E-anatum had his own battle name.[12] As the text describing the acts of war is much too long for a detailed discussion of every line, I will only give an overview of the structure

7 *Ibidem*, 92.

8 *Ibidem*, 90.

9 J. Bauer, "Der vorsargonische Abschnitt der mesopotamischen Geschichte" in *Mesopotamien. Späturuk-Zeit und Frühdynastische Zeit* (= OBO 160/1, eds. J. Bauer, R. Englund, M. Krebernik, Freiburg Schweiz: Academic Press, 1998) 564.

10 For an in-depth discussion of the question who were the deads in this tumuli with a somewhat open result see G. Selz, D. Niedermayer, "The Burials after the Battle. Combining Textual and Visual Evidence" in *It's a Long Way to a Historiography of the Early Dynastic Period(s)* (eds. R. Dittmann, G. Selz, Münster: Ugarit Verlag, 2015) 387–404. In this article Selz also clarifies that Frayne's reference to Bauer is based on a misunderstanding.

11 For a discussion of this monument see Bauer, *Der vorsargonische . . .*, 457–462 with further references.

12 See RIME 1, 126 for a discussion and references to literature concerning this complicated issue.

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of the text. It should be mentioned that the text is not complete, as the Stele of the Vultures is only preserved in fragments.

The first three columns describe the cause for the war, namely the evil acts of the leader of Ǧiša / Umma, that enraged the god Ninǧirsu. To solve this problem with Umma Ninǧirsu causes the birth of E-anatum, who is accompanied by the goddess Inanna and breast-fed by the goddess Ninhursağ, and finally installed as the king of Lagaš (Col. iv–v). So E-anatum clearly has a divine mission. In columns vi–ix (columns viii and ix are heavily destroyed) Enanatum is told by Ninǧirsu that he has to punish the evil neighbors in Umma. Peeter Espak interprets this text as the first recorded evidence for the concept of a 'holy war' as the war itself and even the implementation of the semen of king E-anatum in his mother's womb are described as a result of the divine will.[13]

Due to the lacunas in the text the battle description is missing, we are just told in in the following columns that E-anatum won the war, established just regulations and thereby accomplished his divine mission. The rest of the text consists of oath-formulas that the defeated man of Umma had to swear in order to secure future peace with the aid of the gods. Even if the real battle description is more or less missing, this text clearly demonstrates that wining a battle is based upon divine favor and thereby the description of the events is highly interwoven with ideological matters. The destruction brought forth by E-anatum is even described as a destruction of which only gods are capable, a devastation originating from the king's control of windstorms and floods:

> x [1]é-an-na-túm-me [2giš]KÚŠU.KI-a [3]im-hul-im-ma-gim [4]a-MAR mu-ni-tag$_4$
>
> E-anatum provoked a windstorm, like the baneful rain of the storm he provoked a flood there in Ǧiša (Umma).[14]

At the end of the inscription we have a long list—the list begins after a lacuna and ends with one, so we do not know its exact length—of the victories of E-anatum. The list uses the already known formula "place name + GÍN.ŠÈ + sè" (rev. col. vi 10—rev. col. ix 2'). More interesting than the textual evidence is the pictorial one of this monument because it seems to contain the first depiction

13 P. Espak, "The Emergence of the Concept of divine Warfare and Theology of War in the Ancient Near East," *ENDC Proceedings* 14 (2011) 115–29.

14 See RIME 1, 131.

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of a phalanx, i.e. a closed battle formation of foot soldiers equiped with shield and spear,[15] and E-anatum, who is fighting on a chariot.[16]

In E-anatum 3 a new formula is introduced to describe the defeat of the enemy that uses the verb 'ha.lam'—'to destroy':

ii'4 giš$_{KUŠU.KI}$ 5e-ha-lam

and he destroyed Ǧiša (Umma)[17]

Also E-anatum's incscription no. 5 features a list of cities smitten with the axe and mentions that tumuli were heaped up. In this inscription E-anatum is praised as a mighty warrior before whom all the foreign lands tremble.[18] He appears to be the first ruler who constantly stresses his activities as a warrior in his inscriptions, but single stages of each battle are not mentioned in any detail, the defeat of the enemy is only described in stock phrases.

In inscription 2 of En-anatum I[19]—the younger brother of E-anatum who succeeded him—we find an account of the battle between En-anatum and Ur-LUM-MA with some details, but again the main actors are the gods. They decide what is going to happen and the king is depicted as a tool of the goods who acts in order to establish the divine order. The structure of the text is characteristic for later battle descriptions from Mesopotamia and can be analyzed by the following pattern:

1) The evildoer gathers an army, that often includes mercenary soldiers from foreign lands (vii 7–viii 1).
2) The enemy transgresses (here the characteristic verb 'bal' is used, which basically means 'to turn' but its meaning in this context is 'to transgress the terms of an agreement' or 'to transgress the divine world-order') former agreements and borders (viii 2–4).
3) The enemy does not care about the will of the gods but relies on his own strength and military power (viii 5–7).

15 The designation phalanx for the battle-formation depicted on the 'Stele of the Vultures' is common in Ancient Near Eastern Studies, see, e.g. Selz, Niedermayer, *The Burials . . .*, 394.

16 War scenes in Presargonic art are discussed in detail in E. Braun-Holzinger, *Das Herrscherbild in Mesopotamien und Elam* (= AOAT 342, Münster: Ugarit Verlag, 2007) 46–54.

17 RIME 1, 143.

18 *Ibidem*, 147.

19 *Ibidem*, 170–73.

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4) The just king waits for the decision of his god and takes action according to the god's will (viii 8–x 5).
5) The just king defeats the enemy and reestablishes justice (x 6–xi 6).

The inscription 1 of En-metena, the successor and son of En-anatum I, describes the ongoing conflict with Umma by using this very pattern. Additionally the inscription of En-metena gives an account of the history of the conflict with Umma before recounting the deeds of En-metena himself. Here we have the first occurrence of the later on well-known motive of the enemy full of fear who leaves his troops in order to save his own life:

> iii [15]ur-LUM-ma [16]ba-da-kar [17]ša-[ĝiš]KÚŠU.KI-šè [18]e.gaz [19]anše-ni ÉREN-60-am$_6$ [20]gú-i$_7$-LUM-ma-ĝír-nun-ta-ka [21]e-šè-tag$_4$ [22]nam-lú-ulù-ba [23]ĝirì-PAD.DU-bi [24]eden-da e-da-tag$_4$-tag$_4$
>
> Ur-LUM-ma escaped, but was killed in Giša (Umma) itself. His asses—there were sixty teams(?) of them—he abandoned on the bank of the LUM-ma-ĝirnunta canal, and left the bones of their personnel strewn over the Eden district.[20]

In contrast to the poor behavior of his enemy, En-metena takes good care of his own casualties and gives them a proper burial (iii 25–27).

Inscription 5 of URU-KA-gina, ruler of Lagaš, provides an interesting example of a fairly rare account of military events as the text recounts a seemingly successful campaign of URU-KA-gina's enemy, Lugazl-zage-si of Umma, against the city-state of Lagaš. No battle is mentioned—maybe due to the fact that URU-KA-gina lost the battle—but the result of the defeat, the plundering of Lagaš and its various temples is described in detail. From the background of the concept of a holy war the defeat of URU-KA-gina who presented himself—like his forefathers did—as a righteous man who defends the claims of his god Ninĝirsu, the defeat must have been an ideological disaster. At the end of the inscription listing the various destroyed temples the text states that Lugal-zage-si of Umma is responsible for this destruction and that these actions are not a sin of URU-KA-gina. Thus Lugal-zage-si should be punished by his personal god (URU-KA-gina 5, vii 10–x 3)[21] Interestingly, the sources from Umma do not mention military acts against Lagaš at all.[22]

20 *Ibidem*, 197.
21 *Ibidem*, 279.
22 *Ibidem*, 357–76.

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A text of An(u)bu (An(u)bu 1), a king of Mari, states that this king defeated (GÍN.SÈ) two cities and raised tumuli. This clearly shows us that the traditional Mesopotamian formulas of depicting war were widely spread already in Presargonic times.[23] The same formulas are used in Sa'ūmu 1 and 2[24], Išṭup-Šar 1[25] and in the texts of the succeeding kings of Mari. In the Presargonic corpus from Mari no new ways of describing battles can be found, the repertoire is built on the well-known standard-formulas.

The last two texts to be discussed in this examination of Presargonic royal inscriptions originate from Uruk—the numerous texts from Ur do not mention wars at all. The first is an inscription of En-šakuš-Ana in which he states:

> For Enlil, king of all lands, En-šakuš-Ana, lord of the land of Sumer and king of the nation—when the gods commanded him, he sacked Kiš (and) captured Enbi-Ištar, the king of Kiš. The leader of Kiš and the leader of Akšak, (when) both their cities were destroyed . . .[26]

Finally all the precious items looted from Kiš and Akšak are brought into the temple of Enlil. The last text even contains no direct allusion to war but bears witness of a new trope, one with ideological consequences—that of a king ruling the whole world:

> When the god Enlil, king of all lands, gave to Lugal-zage-si the kingship of the land, directed (all) the eyes of the land (obediently) toward him, put all the land at his feet, and from east to west made them subject to him then, from the Lower Sea, (along) the Tigris and Euphrates to the Upper Sea, he (Enlil) put their roads in good order for him.[27]

This new ideology might be seen as an implication of the formation of larger political units in Mesopotamia. The existence of such larger units and the claim of one ruler to be king of all lands increase the probability of large-scale conflicts and the existence of rulers continuously engaged in military conflicts.

To sum up: in the Presargonic texts we have the evidence for warrior-kings like E-anataum who are constantly involved in warfare and who describe their victories in their inscriptions. But these inscriptions mostly use standardized

23 *Ibidem*, 300.
24 *Ibidem*, 307–9.
25 *Ibidem*, 312–13.
26 *Ibidem*, 430.
27 *Ibidem*, 436.

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phrases that contain no information about what was really going on during the battle. From an ideological point of view, as Espak has convincingly shown, the concept of divine warfare is documented in Presargonic times and the pattern developed in the Stele of the Vultures and described above shows up in many later royal inscriptions.

As royal inscriptions are often known from copies by later scribes, e.g., the text of Enna-il[28] discussed above survived in a Ur III period copy, this clearly demonstrates that scribes looked for existing models of describing the kings deeds. If we consider the high number of later copies of the inscriptions of the Sargonic Period, which are discussed in the next chapter, then it seems that they have been regarded as exemplary inscriptions of exemplary kings by the scribes who collected and copied them. A detailed study of Mesopotamian scribes copying ancient inscriptions is provided by Stefan Maul.[29]

Sargonic and Gutian Periods

As already mentioned in the introduction the rise of the first dynasty of Akkad can be seen as a major turning point in Mesopotamian history. For the first time a huge territory ranging from the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean was under the control of one Dynasty. After five kings the Akkadian state experiences a 'Period of Confusion' and shortly afterwards the 'first world empire' is destroyed and only parts of it are taken over by the Gutium—a people from the east—for a short period of time. After the dynasty of Akkad the situation seems to have been like before its rise—Mesopotamia is divided into a number of city states again.

A major obstacle for the history of Akkad is the fact that Akkad, the capital of this empire was never found.[30] Nevertheless we have fairly a number of royal inscriptions from this period as originals and also as copies from later periods and—as one could guess—Sargon, the founder of the dynasty of Akkad had to fight numerous battles to establish his empire. The inscription Sargon 1 is known in two versions—an Akkadian and a Sumerian one—and provides a link to Lugal-zage-si who claimed to rule the world:

28 *Ibidem*, 75.

29 S. Maul, 'Tontafelabschriften des „Kodex Hammurapi" in altbabylonischer Monumentalschrift,' ZA 102 (2012) 76–99.

30 See A. Westenholz, "The Old Akkadian Period: History and Culture" in *Mesopotamien, Akkade-Zeit und Ur III-Zeit* (= OBO 160/3, eds. A. Westenholz, W. Sallaberger, Freiburg Schweiz: Academic Press, 1999) 31–4.

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> Sargon . . . conquered the city of Uruk and destroyed its walls. He was [victorious] over Uruk in battle, [conquered the city], captured [Lugal-z]age-si, king of [Ur]uk, in battle and led him off the gate of the god Enlil in a neck stock. (1–3).[31]

We can see that the description of the military events remain in the traditional formulas in this inscription. In Sargon 3 we find a first example of a feature that later on seems characteristic for the inscriptions of this dynasty—the use of exact numbers for the troops, casualties and captured enemies. It seems that the information in the text is now becoming a little more informative. The text states that Sargon conquered the city of Uruk with nine contingents from Agade and captured fifty governors and the king.[32] In a famous inscription that reports that Sargon was victorious in 34 battles we have another exact number that was the basis for a heated discussion about the question whether Sargon had a standing army or not. Lines 34–37 of the text read: '5,400 men daily eat in the presence of Sargon.'[33]

While the instances of the use of exact—or seemingly exact—numbers are relatively few in the inscriptions of Sargon the inscriptions of his successor Rīmuš use numbers excessively. Here are some examples:

> Rīmuš 1, 1–13: 'Rīmuš, king of the world, was victorious over Adab and Zabala in battle and struck down over 15,718 men. He took 14,567 captives.'[34]
> Rīmuš 2, 1–13: 'Rīmuš, king of the world, was victor[ious] over Umma and KI.AN in battle and struck down 8,900 men. He [took] 3,540 captives.'[35]
> Rīmuš 3, 1–13: 'Rīmuš, king of the world, was victorious over Ur and [Lagaš] in battle and struck down 8,040 men. He took 5,460 captives.'[36]
> Rīmuš 3, 30–36: 'Further, he expelled 5,985 men from their two cities and annihilated them.'[37]

This short list—it could be prolonged by details of nearly every inscription of this king—clearly exhibits that the style of the inscriptions changed with

31 RIME 2, 10.
32 *Ibidem*, 16.
33 *Ibidem*, 29.
34 *Ibidem*, 41.
35 *Ibidem*, 43.
36 *Ibidem*, 45.
37 *Ibidem*, 43.

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Rīmuš. Exact numbers are now considered to be an important part of battle descriptions. As it seems possible that some persons might think that these numbers are exaggerations Rīmuš anticipatorily swears in Rīmuš 6, 78–83, 'by the gods Šamaš and Ilaba [...] that these are not falsehoods, (but) are indeed true.'[38]

In inscription 2 of Narām-Sîn we can find a detailed account of the route of the king and his army during a campaign against a coalition of Sumerian cities and Amorites:

> He (Narām-Sîn, went) from Ašimānum to Šišil. At Šišil he crossed the Tigris River and (went) from Šišil to the side of the Euphrates River. He crossed the Euphrates River and (went) to Bašar, the Amorite mountain. (ii 3–ii 20).[39]

The text gives the details of the route and depicts the opening of the battle as a personal decision of Narām-Sîn (iii 9–13). After his victory the outcomes of the battle are summarized as follows: 'He struck do<wn> in the campaign a total of 9 chiefs and 4,325 man.' (iv 13–18).[40]

Narām-Sîn 6 describes the events during a battle in much more detail then the texts discussed before. Ipḫur-Kiš, a rebel king, goes to war and starts raiding southern Mesopotamia. The locations of the battles are given in detail. The enemy of Narām-Sîn draws up his battle lines and waits for him to come. The encounter between the king and his enemies takes place 'in between the cities of TiWA and Urum, in the field of the god Sîn' (i 3''–8''), the second 'right beside Kiš, at the gate of the goddess Ninkarrak' (iii 14'–21').[41]

Besides the common enumeration of names and numbers of captured enemies this text uses new metaphors for the description of the destruction:

> Further, he filled the Euphrates River with their (bodies), conquered the city of Kiš, and destroyed its wall. Further, he made the river/canal go forth in its (the city's) midst and struck down 2,525 men within the city. (iv 25'–45').[42]

38 *Ibidem*, 54.
39 *Ibidem*, 91.
40 *Ibidem*, 92.
41 *Ibidem*, 105–6.
42 *Ibidem*, 107.

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Narām-Sîn 23 mentions a personal deed of the king, namely a heroic act as hunter. The king 'defeated ḪARšamat and personally felled a wild bull at Mount Tiba[r]' (6–14).[43] The heroism of Narām-Sîn culminates in a motif well known from Neo-Assyrian inscriptions but found here for the first time—the idea that a king has to outdo his predecessors by going to places where none of the former kings had gone before and by accomplishing deeds no one did before him. The passage reads as follows:

> Now, [wh]en he went [t]o Talḫadum—no king (previously) had gone on such a campaign—Narām-Sîn, king of Agade, went there and the goddess Aštar gave him no rival. (17–32).[44]

This motif is also present in Narām-Sîn 26. This inscriptions begins with the statement that 'no king whosoever had destroyed Armānum and Ebla' (i 5–10),[45] and now we already know what is going to happen in the next lines. Narām-Sîn, the heroic king, is able to destroy these two cities. Later on in the inscription the personal heroism of the king is stressed by the statement that he personally captured an enemy king (iii 7–10).[46]

The inscriptions of the following kings are relatively short and show no new features concerning the description of military events. Only with Utu-ḫegal the inscriptions undergo relevant changes again. The idea of restoring the divine order is constantly stressed, so for example in Utu-ḫegal 1:

> For the goddess Nanše, the mighty lady, the lady of the boundary, Utu-ḫegal, king of the four quarters, restored into her (Nanše's) hands the border of Lagaš on which the man of Ur had laid a claim.[47]

The longest and most elaborate surviving inscription of this king, Utu-ḫegal 4, has a highly literary depiction of the evil enemy, which runs as follows:

> [...] (as for) Gu[tium], the fanged serpent of the mountain, who acted with violence against the gods, who carried off the kingship of the land of Sumer to the mountain land, who fi[ll]ed the land of Sumer with wickedness, who took away the wife from the one who had a wife, who took

43 *Ibidem*, 127.
44 *Ibidem*, 131.
45 *Ibidem*, 132–33.
46 *Ibidem*, 134.
47 *Ibidem*, 281.

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> away the child from the one who had a child, who put wickedness and evil in the land (of Sumer). (2–14).[48]

Clearly this situation is unbearable for the god Enlil, who therefore commissioned Utu-ḫegal to restore order by destroying the Gutium (15–23). In the following lines the text gives an account of the evil deeds of Tirigan, the king of Gutium. Tirigan had occupied both banks of the Tigris and he blocked—as Frayne interprets the text—the water from the fields in the south and closed the roads to the north, thereby ruining the economy of Sumer (33–45).

All these features of the text are already known from earlier inscriptions and were only elaborated in this inscription, but the idea to include the following speech of the king to the citizens of Uruk and Kullab in a royal inscription is an innovation:

> He [Utu-ḫegal—S.F.] called out to the citizens of his city, (saying): "The god Enlil has given Gutium to me. My lady, the goddess Inanna, is my ally. The god Dumuzi-ama-ušumgal.-ana has declared 'It is a matter for me'. The god Gilgameš, son of the goddess Ninsun, has assigned him (Dumuzi) to me as abiliff". He made the citizens of Uruk (and) Kullab happy. His city followed him as if they were (just) one person. (53–68).[49]

The campaign starts with a six-days-journey and on the seventh day the battle against Tirigan takes places. In a quite difficult passage the preparations of Utu-ḫegal are described in the following way:

> [98]ki-bé bar-*gu-ti-um*.KI [99]giš mu-na-bar [100]éren mu.na.lah$_5$

> In that place, against the Gutians, he laid a trap (and) led (his) troops against them. (98–100).[50]

The phrase in question is the compound verb in line 99 giš—bar. Its meaning is not entirely clear and as far as I can see this is the only instance of giš—bar as a compound verb. Frayne's translation follows the *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary*, G, 107, s.v. "*gišparru*" which is seen as a loanword from Sumerian and translated as 'a trap'. There are several first millennium bilingual texts quoted in the entry which use 'giš.bar' as noun and from the context it is clear that the

48 *Ibidem*, 284.

49 *Ibidem*, 285–86.

50 *Ibidem*, 286.

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meaning of this word has to be trap. If we rely on these late texts then we can interpret the text as the first description of a special manoeuver or stratagem.

Summary

Our overview of the battle descriptions from the beginnings of writing in Mesopotamia to the end of the Gutian Period is hampered—as always in antiquity—by the possibility that important texts are lost but the picture that evolves here is reasonably clear. In the first texts mentioning acts of war these events are depicted in a very formulaic way. Only with the 'Stele of the Vultures' war is described with a broader narrative and—as described by Peeter Espak[51]—can a theology of war be extracted from the texts.

With Lugal-zage-si an ideology of world-rule is clearly expressed and realized to some extent by Sargon of Akkad. The inscriptions of the successors of Sargon show a keen interest in numbers. Beginning with Rīmuš exact numbers inform about dead enemies and captives. The inscriptions of Naram-Sîn give some details about the route of the royal army during the campaigns and new metaphors of destruction show up.

Some major innovations can be found in the inscriptions of Utu-ḫegal. One of them uses for the first time a speech of the king to his troops as a stylistic element. Most probably this text also includes information on a stratagem and thereby introduced new ways of depicting acts of war.

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