CHAPTER NINETEEN

SEX, RHETORIC, AND THE PUBLIC MONUMENT: THE ALLURING BODY OF NARAM-SÎN OF AGADE

Sex

What, the modern viewer may ask, is Naram-Sîn of Agade doing on his Victory Stela (cf. figs. 1–3), displaying for us not only his victory in battle but his well-rounded buttocks, his muscled calves, his elegantly arched back, his luxuriant beard? More Baryshnikov than Stallone, he is nonetheless, within our cultural lexicon of value, well proportioned, lithe, fit, and simply "divine"!

That the Stela of Naram-Sîn has found a responsive audience in the West since its discovery in 1898 is clear from its inclusion in virtually every survey of art, from Gardner to Janson.[1] However, if we are to pursue what this particular mode of representing the body of Naram-Sîn might have meant in his own time (c. 2254–2218 B.C.E.), it must be viewed, insofar as we are able to reconstruct it, within a Mesopotamian lexicon of value. At issue is whether those values include sexuality, along with other positive qualities of form and substance. By virtue of the title of this chapter, my position is clear. The problem posed for the modern viewer by the eroticized body of the political leader was not a problem for the ancient Mesopotamians; rather, I shall argue, sexuality was inextricably linked to potency, potency to male vigor, and male vigor to authority and dominance, hence rule. Indeed, for the royal body, a rather unusual set of ideal attributes emerges in the Mesopotamian

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[1] See the most recent publication of the stela, in P. O. Harper et al., *The Royal City of Susa: Ancient Near Eastern Treasures in the Louvre* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1992), #109, for bibliography from discovery to date. General surveys include H. W. Janson, *History of Art* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1962), Fig. 76, and H. Gardner, *Art Through the Ages*, 6th ed. (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1975), Figs. 2–17.

lexicon: an accumulation of good form or breeding, auspiciousness, vigor/vitality, and, specifically, sexual allure or charm—all of which are not only ascribed in text, but equally to be read in imagery.

The first attribute, from the Akkadian verb, *banû*, meaning "to build," also "to generate"—hence "form plus breeding"—yields as an adjective one who is well built, well-formed.[2] The term is applied to women, especially goddesses, and also to men. Of the epic hero, Gilgamesh, for example, his companion-to-be, Enkidu, is exhorted: "Look at him . . . well-formed in young manhood."[3] Good conformation, therefore, a term used in modern times with reference to show animals, is conveyed by the physically positive to indicate both form and breeding.

The second quality, from the Akkadian term *damqu*, is used in descriptions of persons and things and may be rendered as "auspicious/good."[4] That Naram-Sîn is himself both auspicious and protected by the auspicious is marked in two ways on his body. First, there is archaeological evidence to confirm that his neck bead (see detail, Figure 3) was not only ornamental but also protective. Examples have actually been found, inscribed with the name of the ruler and his favored status with respect to a particular deity, thereby becoming wish-fulfilling markers.[5] The beads are auspicious insofar as they offer the protection of the deity named and thereby keep away the equivalent of the "evil eye."[6] Further, Naram-Sîn's inherent auspiciousness is manifest in the king's perfect body itself. Note that he stands in such a way that his right side is entirely visible to us. From Mesopotamian omen texts, we know the right is the side that, if deformed in any way, portends ill for the country and the ruler. If no right ear, "the days of the prince will be at an end;" if no right forearm or hand, "the outlying districts will become wasteland."[7] In other words, the king NEEDED to show, the

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[2] See *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary* (henceforth, *CAD*) (Chicago, University of Chicago Press). *B*:81–83, *banû*.

[3] Cited *CAD, B*:142, *baštu*.

[4] *CAD, D*:68–74, *damqu*, gives "good, gracious, propitious." I prefer "auspicious."

[5] For example, an inscribed turquoise pendant, literally called a "neck stone" (written in Sumerian logograms as $NA_4.GU_2$), belonging to a Middle Assyrian ruler, which identifies the king as the "Favorite of (the gods) Enlil and Ninurta": see B. K. Ismail and M. Tosi, "A Turquoise Neck-Stone of King Ninurta-apal-Ekur," *Sumer, 32* (1976), 105–12.

[6] M. L. Thomsen, "The Evil Eye in Mesopotamia," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 51 (1992), 19–32.

[7] See, for example, E. Leichty, *The Omen Series Summa Izbu*, Texts from Cuneiform Sources IV (Locust Valley, N.Y.: J. J. Augustin, 1970), Tabl. II, lines 12, 16, 19; Tabl.

Mesopotamian viewer NEEDED to see, that the right ear was there, that the right limbs were perfectly formed; indeed, as Mary Kelly has described it with respect to contemporary maleness: that there was a lack of a lack.[8] With those conditions fulfilled, the auspiciousness of the person is apparent and can be read from his body. As such, the goddess Ishtar looks with desire upon the *damqu* of the hero Gilgamesh, and Enkidu is asked to reflect upon his companion, *damqu* ^{d}*Gilgameš*.[9] I would suggest that this auspiciousness was manifest physically as wholeness and perfection, the underlying referent actually being a more ineffable quality of being.

The third attribute, *baštu*, is translated as life force, vigor, vitality.[10] Thus, Gilgamesh, once identified as "well-formed in young manhood," is further described as "having (lit., bearing) vitality."[11] That this is also visually perceptible is clear, since in the poem we are first exhorted to "look upon Gilgamesh" in order to see the quality of vitality, or life force, he possesses. Evidence for this vitality is likewise inscribed in/on the body. An inverse illustration may be found in the account of the Assyrian king Sennacherib, who, in cutting off his enemies' beards, is said to rob them of their *baštu*.[12] Here, I would suggest that what is manifest in men's beards—an important secondary sexual characteristic—is precisely their fully developed manhood; and note Naram-Sîn's beard, most abundant by far on the stela (see fig. 3). Vitality is therefore conflated with manliness (for men), and is articulated visually by facial hair, along with breadth of chest and virile stance.

Finally, a fourth quality, *kuzbu*, connotes attractiveness of a different sort. It is an attribute applied to temple, palace, garden, sculpture, and cultic paraphernalia as well as to gods, kings, and lovers; when applied to persons, it refers to sexual allure or charm. From the range of uses it is clear that both the Akkadian term and its Sumerian counterpart, ḫi-li, carry multiple significations—sometimes quite concrete, sometimes

III, lines 2, 48–56, 85; etc. For a discussion of the opposite, the god-given positive features of the ruler's body, like a strong right arm, see I. Winter, "The Body of the Able Ruler: Toward an Understanding of the Statues of Gudea," in H. Behrens et al., eds., *Dumu É-dub-ba-a: Studies in Honor of Åke W. Sjöberg*, Occasional Publications of the Samuel Noah Kramer Fund, 11 (Philadelphia: University Museum, 1989), 573–84.

[8] Mary Kelly, "Masculinity on Display," lecture given at Harvard University, March 16, 1994.

[9] Cited, *CAD, D, damqu* (supra n. 4).

[10] *CAD, B*:142–4, *baštu.*

[11] Ibid., 142, *baštu* 1: *eṭlūta bani balta iši* (note that *baštu* can also be written *baltu*).

[12] *CAD, B*:143, *baštu* 3a: *sapsapāte unakkisma baltašun ābut.*

more abstract; for that reason, the *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary* includes "luxuriance," "abundance," "delight," "attractiveness," "charm," "sexual vigor," and "voluptuousness" among its meanings.[13]

Wilfred Lambert seems to have come closest to the underlying meaning of the term in associating the range of metaphoric usage and generally "fruity language" with the "luscious natural attractiveness of (ripe) fruit" and other conveyors of sweetness, such as honey.[14] When applied to gardens, especially in the Neo-Assyrian period, the obvious association is with abundant water and vegetation, as in *mušarê kuzbi*, luxuriant gardens.[15] But the gateway sculptures installed by Sennacherib in his palace are also endowed with *kuzbu*.[16] Indeed, they are possessed of both *kuzbu* and *baltu*, a not uncommon pairing of attributes, whereas a processional boat built by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon is said to be "adorned with *kuzbu*, (and) full of delight" [= *lalû*, another frequent pairing].[17]

Deities are also described as possessing *kuzbu*, as when the goddess Ninlil is referred to as the *balti Ešarra kuzbu Ekur*, "the vital one of the (temple) Esarra, the *k.* of the (temple) Ekur."[18] Although female deities are more frequently described as possessing this quality, male deities such as the moon god Nanna, Enlil, and Ninurta are also credited with being adorned with, or charging the heavens or a particular sanctuary with *kuzbu*.[19]

In a study of the nature of divinity in Mesopotamia, Elena Cassin has suggested that implied in these references is some balance between voluptuousness and generative power.[20] There are also clear occasions

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[13] *CAD, K*:614–15, *kuzbu*.

[14] W. Lambert, "Devotion: The Languages of Religion and Love," in M. Mindlin et al., eds., *Figurative Language in the Ancient Near East* (London: SOAS, 1987), 30–1. Indeed, the signs used in the writing of the Sumerian ḫi.li further suggest that what is conveyed is some play on "sweetness" + "joy."

[15] Cited *CAD, M*2:234, *mušaru*, and *CAD, K*:614, *kuzbu*, re Sennacherib and Assurbanipal.

[16] Cited *CAD, L*:51, *lalû*.

[17] *ša kuzba zānatu lalâ malātu*, cited *CAD, K*:615 *kuzbu*, and *CAD, L*:51, *lalû*.

[18] Text cited in E. Cassin, *La splendeur divine: Introduction à l'étude de la mentalité mésopotamienne*, Civilisations et Sociétés 8 (Paris and La Haye: Mouton, 1968), 88, n. 27, and discussed by Å. Sjöberg, in Sjöberg and E. Bergmann, *The Collection of the Sumerian Temple Hymns.* Texts from Cuneiform Sources, 3 (Locust Valley, N.Y.: J. J. Augustin, 1969), 119.

[19] Riekele Borger, *Die Inschriften Asarhaddons Königs von Assyrien*, Archiv für Orientforschung, Beiheft 9 (Osnabrück: Biblio-Verlag, 1967), 77, text 49, p. 1; see also Cassin, *La splendeur divine*, 88.

[20] Cassin, *La splendeur divine.*

when *kuzbu* is used to refer directly to sexuality, as in the first tablet of the Gilgamesh epic, when the harlot is instructed to expose herself to Enkidu: *ūrki pitêma kuzubki lilqi*, "expose your nakedness, so that he can take (in) your *k.*"[21] In such a context, one would have no trouble to translate this either explicitly as sex or voluptuousness, or euphemistically as charms or lusciousness. Similarly, in a reference to Gilgamesh himself, we are told that he, too, is adorned with *k.: zu'una kuzba kalu zumrišu*. This has been variously translated: "His whole body is covered with attractiveness;[22] "adorned with charm is his whole body;"[23] "his entire body exudes voluptuousness."[24] As such, it is a direct variant of ḫi-li-su$_3$ as sexual virility or attractiveness in Sumerian love poetry, where there are frequent references to the beloved's ḫi-li.[25]

At the same time, when ḫi-li, or *kuzbu*, is ascribed to the king in the guise of a lion, as in a text of Lipit-Ishtar, then we get a sense not of the sex appeal of the lion, but of his open mouth and powerful, roaring charge.[26] Here, the term may come closer to what Cassin would see as a powerful force issuing from its possessor. That sense of "emanation" is particularly useful when the term is ascribed to a temple, or to an object, where an alternative to sex appeal is obviously called for.

For purposes of scholarly rather than literary translation, I find I am most comfortable with attempting to render the literal underlying concept with one consistent term whenever possible, and then activating the various connotations from context, not as variation in translation. Lusciousness, or luxuriance, deriving from the sweet, ripe, or fruity range of associated metaphors and associations, seems to serve well as the ascribed quality being signaled. What it does not do is suggest the quality as an active force radiating from the subject. The most suitable term in English I have found for this aspect, in all of its usages, is "allure." Like attractiveness, with its base in physical pull or magnetism, it implies not just a passive attribute, but one in which energy passes

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[21] M. Kovacs, *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989), 8 (= Tabl. I, 163). For *urû* as nakedness, see W. Von Soden, *Akademisches Handwörterbuch* III (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1981), 1435.

[22] *CAD*, *Z*:49, *zânu*.

[23] Benjamin Foster, "Gilgamesh: Sex, Love, and the Ascent of Knowledge," in *Love and Death in the Ancient Near East: Essays in Honor of Marvin H. Pope*, ed. John H. Marks and Robert M. Good (Guilford, Conn.: Four Quarters Publishing, 1987), 29 = Nineveh I, v, 16–18.

[24] Kovacs, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, 10 (= Tabl. I, 218).

[25] See discussion of Lambert, in *Figurative Language*, 30–1.

[26] Text cited and discussed in Cassin, *La splendeur divine*, 88–9.

between the possessor and the receiver. But whereas for attractiveness, magnetism even, the direction of movement is a pulling IN toward the possessor, for ḫi-li/*kuzbu* the force seems to emanate OUT from the possessor, like some sort of pheromone.

As for Gilgamesh, so I would suggest for Naram-Sîn. Not only is his body beautifully proportioned and lithe, but his girdle is tied seductively over his right hip, the masterfully executed pleats and knot pulled to reveal the outline of the perfectly rounded buttocks—a *Glutäenerotik* par excellence (see Figure 3).[27] Indeed, all of the qualities—inner states and outer manifestations—discussed above are readable at a glance from the sculpted body of the king: good conformation, auspiciousness, (male) vigor, and (sexual) allure.

Rhetoric

What virtue would there be, one might then ask, in representing the victorious ruler as one not only well-formed, auspicious, and virile, but also sexually alluring? If one distinguishes "sex" as a necessary component of biological reproduction from the distinctively cultural determination of "sexuality," one seeks the referent within a particular "set of norms and practices developed *in response to* the fact of human biology" (emphasis mine).[28] The sexuality manifest by the individual is then to be situated within a social body. Moreover, Naram-Sîn as ruler is not just any male, but the *dominant* male within the state hierarchy; so one must further inquire how these values fit within, or work for, the state and the ruler's position in it, and why these attributes and not others have been selected for the royal image? In short, how does the body of the king relate to the body politic?[29]

The revealed and developed body of Naram-Sîn seems to be a new development within the Akkadian period, the well-rounded and muscled

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[27] See Paul Brandt, *Beiträge zur antiken Erotik* (Dresden: Paul Aretz, 1924), 31–4: "Viewed from an aesthetic standpoint, nothing more beautiful or more perfect can be imagined than the form of the human buttocks."

[28] See on this, Jeffrey Henderson, "Greek Attitudes toward Sex," in *Civilizations of the Ancient Mediterranean: Greece and Rome*, ed. M. Grant and R. Kitzinger (New York: Scribners, 1988), 1250. Also, Peter Tatham, *The Makings of Maleness: Men, Women and the Flight of Daedalus* (New York: New York University Press, 1991), esp. xvi.

[29] For a different set of desirable physical characteristics, as exemplifying a different social body, see John J. Winkler, "Phallos Politikos: Representing the Body Politic in Athens," *differences*, 2 (1990), 29–45.

upper torso of what may have been a sculpture of a ruler in the Uruk period (fourth millennium B.C.E.) notwithstanding.[30] The one stela sufficiently preserved from the previous, Early Dynastic period—the Stela of Eannatum, ruler of the city state of Lagash c. 2500 B.C.E.—is organized very differently, and the ruler represented very differently: Eannatum is identified by name and wrapped in a distinctive garment, but otherwise barely distinguished physically from the phalanx he leads into battle (fig. 4).[31] Certainly, there is power inherent in the solid proportions of his body, but missing is the full development of the revealed body of Naram-Sîn, with its subtle articulation of parts. That this "new" body happens to coincide with an equally new elevation of the king to divine status will be argued below to be anything but accidental.

Naram-Sîn's grandfather, Sargon of Agade—founder of his dynasty, and first unifier of the previously autonomous city-states into a nation—appears to have begun to disengage his body from others', as is seen on his fragmentary victory stela from Susa.[32] However, I would suggest that the immediate model for the fuller unwrapping and display of the body of Naram-Sîn is not to be found in representations of prior rulers. Rather, it is to be seen in representations of a type of generic, semi-divine "heroic genius," often engaged in combat with wild predators on earlier cylinder seals (for example, fig. 5).[33]

As suggested above, this fusion of hero-plus-ruler into a new royal body occurs at exactly the historical moment when for the first time the king is elevated to divine status. This shift is manifest in inscriptions, in which both Naram-Sîn and his son after him write their names preceded by the determinative for god, not man, and take on particular epithets in their titularies, such as "god [not king] of Agade."[34] The helmet worn

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[30] See A. Moortgat, *Art of Ancient Mesospotamia* (London and New York: Phaidon, 1969), Pl. 13.

[31] See discussion in I. Winter, "After the Battle is Over: The *Stele of the Vultures* and the Beginning of Historical Narrative in the Art of the Ancient Near East," in H. L. Kessler and M. S. Simpson, eds., *Pictorial Narrative in Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, Studies in the History of Art, 16 (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1985), 11–32.

[32] See Harper et al., *The Royal City of Susa*, #106.

[33] These seals are best seen as a group in R. M. Boehmer, *Die Entwicklung der Glyptik während der Akkad-Zeit* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1965), Figs. 2–8 of the Early Dynastic period, and Figs. 13–158 of the Akkadian period prior to Naram-Sîn. The figure has been identified by F. M. Wiggerman as the semi-divine *laḫmu*, a benevolent protective genius—see "Exit *Talim!* Studies in Babylonian Demonology, I," *Jaarbericht van het Vooraziatisch-Egyptisch Genootschap Ex Oriente Lux, 27* (1981–2), 90ff.

[34] See most recently on this, W. Farber, "Die Vergöttlichung Naram-Sîns," *Orientalia, 52* (1983), 67–72, and J.-J. Glassner, *La chute d'Akkadé* (Berlin: Reimer, 1986). Indeed the inscription on the seal impression, Figure 6, uses this title in the second line.

by Naram-Sîn on the stela has long been seen as the visual counterpart of this phenomenon, bull horns having heretofore been reserved for the headgear of gods alone (see, for example, fig. 6).[35] In addition, I would argue that the innovation of a perfect, alluring, "heroic" body for the ruler, coming as a visual quote from a pictorial tradition hitherto reserved for a semidivine hero, also represents a conscious strategy of representation. Along with the divine determinative and the divine headgear, the "divine" body equally marked the elevation of the ruler to the status of a god.

Two strands are woven together in this argument that the divine body is correlated with divine kingship: a long-standing Mesopotamian tradition of rhetorical statements that the gods are responsible for shaping the royal body, and an explicit association of the ruler with the legendary hero Gilgamesh, who was himself a semidivine king. For the first strand, many Mesopotamian rulers make use of epithets that emphasize the king's maleness and valiance—for example, *zikaru qardu*, heroic male, or *eṭlu qardu*, ferocious (male) youth, terms that carry with them both a gender marker and also a sense of associative potency.[36] Naram-Sîn himself uses the term *dannum*, "strong one," as his most frequent epithet in his titulary.[37] This focus on the (male) *potestas* of the ruler as part of the formal title, I would argue, is rendered visually not only by the weapons he carried in hand, but also by the life force/vitality of his perfect and alluring (hence sexually desirable, for which, read "potent") body.[38] That

[35] Note, however, that the divine crown worn by Naram-Sîn is not one of multiple tiers of horns, as worn by the high gods of the pantheon, but rather consists of a single tier of horns, often used to distinguish lesser divinities on seals—as, for example, in Figure 6 (= Boehmer, *Die Entwicklung der Glyptik*, Fig. 725—belonging to an official of Naram-Sîn himself). This detail would have permitted the contemporary viewer to read simultaneously the king's divine standing and yet his relatively lower status with respect to the high gods.

[36] See, for example, the texts of Adad-nirari II of Assyria (911–891 B.C.E.), in A. K. Grayson, *Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia 2: Assyrian Rulers of the Early First Millennium* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 157 = AN II.4.4' and 13'; also, for Assurnasirpal II (885–53 B.C.E.), in Grayson, *Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia 2: Assyrian Rulers of the Early First Millennium 2*, 196 = ANP II.1.33. In one couplet, Adad-nirari all but beats his chest, as he announces: *labbāku u zikaraku*, "I am a lion and I am a (potent) male."

[37] H. Hirsch, "Die Inschriften des Könige von Agade," *Archiv für Orientforschung*, 20 (1963), 1–82; D. Frayne, *Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia: Sargonic and Gutian Periods* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 88–144.

[38] This potency on the part of the ruler is also clearly articulated as desirable with respect to the engendering of male issue. Its contrary, the negative attached to lack of male issue and an heir, is preserved in a text of Naram-Sîn himself, in which a closing

this body is not merely the product of good breeding and/or physical training may be inferred from a text of the Assyrian ruler, Adad-nirari II, which, in the voice of the king, relates that the gods "altered my stature to lordly stature,…made perfect my features and filled my lordly body with wisdom…[and] surrounded my head with the aura of rulership."[39] Comparable assertions are also recorded by Sumerian rulers of the third millennium, both before and after Naram-Sîn, with the specific bodily parts and qualities each delineated as the separate bequest of a particular deity.[40] Royal rhetoric thus invests the royal body with the authority of the high gods themselves. Despite the absence of such a statement exactly contemporary with Naram-Sîn, I would suggest that this tradition helps to illuminate the Akkadian period as well. The notion that the gods are said not only to select but also to shape the ruler underscores the importance of the viewer's ability to discern lordly stature and perfect features *from the royal image*, and all the more so in a period in which the ruler is himself accorded divinity.

The second strand in this argument, which explicitly adds the element of sexual allure to that of male power and perfection in the king's body, is founded on a relationship between the youthful and alluring Gilgamesh, king of Uruk, and Naram-Sîn, king of Agade. Not only is there a parallelism in attributes, but both rulers also shared a rhetorical ascription of divine status. The two kings thus participate—verbally for the one, visually for the other—in virtually identical representational practices.

Given the fact that the Akkadian version of the Gilgamesh Epic exists in its developed form as a relatively late, Neo-Assyrian composition of the first millennium B.C.E., and the only Sumerian fragments that

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curse invokes the wrath of the goddesses Ninhursag and Nintu not to grant someone male offspring—see Frayne, *Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia: Sargonic and Gutian Periods* 99 = text E2.1.4.3, vi, 29–35.

[39] Grayson, *Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia 2: Assyrian Rulers of the Early First Millennium*, 147 = AN II.2.6–7; see also a text of Assurbanipal, in which he asserts that "[the great gods] gave me a splendid figure, and made my strength great" (cited *CAD*, *Š*:289, *šamāḫu*).

[40] See, for example, the text of Eannatum of Lagash, written on his victory stela (J. S. Cooper, *Reconstructing History from Ancient Inscriptions: The Lagash-Umma Border Conflict* [Malibu: Undena Publications, 1983]) of the previous, Early Dynastic period; also, the texts of Gudea of Lagash (discussed by Winter, "The Body of the Able Ruler…"), of the subsequent Neo-Sumerian period. The separation of parts in such a context is then not unlike the familiar Charles Atlas comic-book ads, in which the various parts of the body to be developed are illustrated separately—chest, arms, legs, shoulders—their sum total adding up to "magnetic personality" (see fig. 7).

survive are dated to the second millennium, it would be quite acceptable simply to point to this parallelism as a sign of continuing values and representational strategies within a long range of Mesopotamian history. I would like to offer a more radical stress on the relationship between Naram-Sîn and Gilgamesh, however, which I believe has important implications for understanding both the erotics and the poetics of the stela.

The second-millennium copies of the Sumerian version of the epic were executed by scribes of the Old Babylonian period but are generally presumed to have been composed in the preceding Ur III period (c. 2110–2050 B.C.E.).[41] Certainly, by Ur III times, the person of Gilgamesh as legendary hero and king had already entered into popular culture, which is clear from the fact that rulers at the very beginning of the period already claimed filiation with him: Ur-Namma of Ur, founder of the dynasty, for example, is referred to as the "brother of Gilgamesh," and a similar claim was made by his son, Šulgi.[42] With no evidence in the form of early text fragments, it is impossible to demonstrate with certainty that the epic existed earlier than the Ur III period; however, circumstantial evidence suggests that the poem, or at least significant elements of the legend that would eventually be redacted as epic, must have existed considerably earlier.[43] This would fit well with the recent argument put forward by Piotr Steinkeller that there was a considerable early literature, now lost to us, for which the only remaining traces are the apparently mythological narratives on cylinder seals of the Early Dynastic and Akkadian periods.[44] Indeed, I believe one would have to prove that the legends of Gilgamesh were *not* well-formed and disseminated by the time of Naram-Sîn. In such a universe, the *kuzbu*-bearing body of Gilgamesh as ideal prince, would actually

[41] J. H. Tigay, *The Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), 242–4.

[42] See Thorkild Jacobsen, *Treasures of Darkness* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 158, and J. Klein, "Šulgi and Gilgameš: Two Brother-Peers (Šulgi O)," *Alte Orient und Altes Testament*, 25 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Harrasowitz, 1976), 271–92.

[43] See, for example, K. Afanasieva, "Gilgamesh and Enkidu in Glyptic and in the Epic," *Klio*, 53 (1971), 59–75, esp. 72; also implied in already existing Early Dynastic terminology related to Gilgamesh presiding over the deceased rulers in the underworld (see P. Steinkeller, review of J. Marzahn, *Altsumerische Verwaltungstexte aus Girsu/Lagaš* for the *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, forthcoming; I am grateful to the author for making the ms. available to me prior to publication).

[44] P. Steinkeller, "Early Semitic Literature and Third Millennium Seals with Mythological Motifs," *Quaderni di Semitistica*, 18 (1992), 243–75.

lie quite explicitly behind the visually alluring body of Naram-Sîn.[45]

In the epic, the narrative specifically calls for Gilgamesh to be alluring, since the goddess Ishtar becomes enamored of the young ruler; however, the visual signs of his desirable qualities are equally discernible to his companion Enkidu. For Naram-Sîn to identify himself with the epic hero on his own victory stela would have served the same rhetorical ends as the divine Augustus identifying himself with Alexander or the Greek gods[46]—in short, legitimation through association, and participation in an honored heroic tradition that itself had rhetorical power.

The Public Monument

The ultimate question to be posed here concerns the consequences of using this particular rhetorical strategy, this particular image of Naram-Sîn, on a freestanding stone stela (Akkadian *narû*). How *does* sex(uality) mix with politics in public? And, indeed, can we be certain that the monument *was* in the public domain? Since the stela was carried off as booty to Elam in the twelfth century B.C.E.,[47] we cannot know for certain where it was placed originally; however, circumstantial evidence is helpful in positing a likely venue in the temple precinct of the sun god Shamash at Sippar. First, other stelae, of periods both earlier and later, are known to have been set up in such locations; second, specific Akkadian period monuments were apparently installed in temple courtyards; and third, the Elamite ruler who carried off the actual

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[45] Herbert Sauren has implied the same thing, noting that Gilgamesh is described as two-thirds divine in the epic and Naram-Sîn is two-thirds the height of the mountain opposite which he stands on the stela: see "Die Königstheologie in der Kunst des 3. Jahrhundert," *Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica*, 13 (1982), 50. A more subtle inference may be drawn from the use of the title *mut dINANNA*, "beloved of Ishtar," by Naram-Sîn, comparable to the status of Gilgamesh in the epic: see B. Kienast, "*Naramsîn mut dINANNA,*" *Orientalia*, 95 (1990), 196–203.

[46] Cf. John Pollini, "Man or God: Divine Assimilation and Imitation in the Late Republic and Early Principate," in *Between Republic and Empire: Interpretations of Augustus and His Principate*, ed. K. A. Raaflaub and M. Toher (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 334–63. For Greek athletic heroes identified with Herakles, see also Leslie Kurke, "The Economy of Kudos," in *Cultural Poetics in Archaic Greece*, ed. C. Dougherty and L. Kurke (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), n. 13, and Wendy J. Raschke, "Images of Victory: Some New Considerations of Athletic Monuments," in *The Archaeology of the Olympics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), 43, 45.

[47] See P. Amiet, *L'art d'Agadé au Musée du Louvre* (Paris: Editions des Musées Nationaux, 1976), 29.

Naram-Sîn stela and subsequently inscribed it himself, tells us that he took it from Sippar and that he set it up as a trophy in the precinct of *his* god at Susa, where it was actually found some 4,000 years later.[48] In addition, the Mesopotamian tradition of copying inscriptions on earlier monuments indicates that scribes at least had access to them well beyond the period in which they were made.[49] Indeed, the fact that an Elamite ruler carried the Naram-Sîn stela off in the twelfth century demonstrates that it was still around a millennium after its manufacture. For want of evidence to the contrary, therefore, even if we cannot determine for certain the range of individuals who would have had access to the temple precinct or to the stela, I feel it is not inappropriate to speak of it as set up in "public" space.

Still at issue, however, is an assessment of the stela's particular rhetorical strategy. The public monument constitutes a special subset of material culture per se, in that it not only has physical substance, it also has as part of its ontology a key aspect of display. I shall neither contest nor attempt to document the often noted likelihood that in some measure, the god to whom the stela was dedicated, or the Mesopotamian gods in general, as well as the king himself, constituted a portion of the stela's intended audience.[50] At the same time, the mix of erotics/allure with military victory that constitutes the subject matter of the stela is of great interest when projected at an audience neither royal nor divine.

The paintings of J.-L. David have been used recently to probe the association of beautiful male bodies and idealizing political messages in the period following upon the French revolution, suggesting that

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[48] See the discussion of freestanding stelae in general in Winter, "After the Battle is Over," 23–5; for Akkadian-period monuments in the courtyard of the Enlil temple at Nippur, see P. Michalowski, "New Sources Concerning the Reign of Naram-Sîn," *Journal of Cuneiform Studies*, 32 (1980), 236 and 239; for the later inscription on the Naram-Sîn stela, see Amiet, *L'art d'Agadé*, 27; for its findspot, see Suzanne Heim, "Royal and Religious Structures and Their Decoration," in Harper et al., *The Royal City of Susa*, Fig. 41.

[49] See reference above to Michalowski, "New Sources Concerning the Reign of Naram-Sîn," 239, where Akkadian inscriptions in Nippur were subsequently copied by Old Babylonian period scribes. In addition, a whole genre exists, known as *narû* literature, which purports to be copied from monuments, although this was apparently a fictional attribution designed to enhance the importance of the contents: See J. Westenholz, "Heroes of Akkad," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 103 (1983), 327–36.

[50] The original inscription of Naram-Sîn, badly effaced, still preserves a portion of the closing, dedicatory verb; see now, Frayne, *Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia: Sargonic and Gutian Periods*, 143–4 = E2.1.4.31, col. iii, 3)–5).

aesthetic pleasure can serve as the vehicle by which a highly seductive ideal vision is articulated for the citizen-viewer. Thus, for Alex Potts, "beautiful and graceful nudity . . . is . . . a formal idealizing device," transforming the subject of the painting into a "more effective signifier of heroic virtue than a naturalistic image."[51] Potts argues that the rhetorical power of images that combine an erotic charge with violence, as represented in military battles, derives precisely from an engagement with the sensual body. At the same time, Ewa Lajer-Burcharth suggests that this engagement occurred precisely at a moment in which the work was inserted into a new and very public discourse.[52]

One is, of course, in a far better position to assess the viewer's engagement with the attractive male body in late eighteenth-century France, when contemporary critical reactions have been preserved. Chaussard, for example, exhorts the viewer to look at David's Romulus in the *Sabine Women* (fig. 8), and exclaims, "How these extremities, how these legs shine with beauty!"[53] Yet, surprisingly, there are similar hints in Mesopotamian literature to suggest that a comparable association of viewing pleasure and inspiring response existed. An exhortation to view the physical perfection of Gilgamesh has been noted above. In addition, a first-millennium bilingual text about a ruler uses an intensive conjugation of the verb "to see" in order to rhapsodize that "the people of the land stared at his tall, perfect [lit., fitting, appropriately endowed], princely body."[54] And far closer in date to Naram-Sîn is a line in the Sumerian epic poem "Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta," in which the king declares: "May the people look at me admiringly!"[55]

This articulation of a cathected viewing of the royal person illustrates for us the value vested in the stela, set up to (re)present the ruler at his moment of triumph. If, in the absence of additional evidence, we use Ishtar's response to Gilgamesh as an illustration of the normative heterosexual Mesopotamian female response to male attractiveness, the similarly idealized manly body of Naram-Sîn would equally constitute an obvious locus of pleasurable engagement—situating the woman

[51] A. Potts, "Beautiful Bodies and Dying Heroes: Images of Ideal Manhood in the French Revolution," *History Workshop Journal*, 30 (1990), 1–21, esp. 4.

[52] E. Lajer-Burcharth, "David's *Sabine Women*: Body, Gender and Republican Culture under the Directory," *Art History*, 14 (1991), 397–430.

[53] Cited by Lajer-Burcharth, "David's *Sabine Women*," 400.

[54] *ibtarrâ nišī māti lānšu elâ šūšumu etella*, cited *CAD, E*:383, *etellu.*

[55] [nam]-lu_2-lu_6 u_6 du_{10}-ge-eš ḫu-mu-un-e, cited in T. Jacobsen, "Lugalbanda and Ninsuna," *Journal of Cuneiform Studies*, 41 (1989), 78.

libidinally in relation to the ruler as today before a cinema idol.[56] Of course, Ishtar's response to Gilgamesh may not be normative and may have been possible precisely because she was a goddess and so freer to respond than an ordinary female. Social constraints placed in an attempt to control female sexuality are certainly not rare;[57] however, even if that were to have been the case in Mesopotamia, the very fact that the goddess is permitted what the ordinary woman was not argues for the importance of this area of suppression, in need of literary transference.

More difficult to account for is the projected response of a normative heterosexual Mesopotamian male. The construction of an ideal masculinity in works of art that is to serve as a model for social formation has been at the forefront of much recent work, as has the question of the gaze of men upon men.[58] How to assess it for an ancient culture in which sources are limited is a serious methodological problem, however—even when, as in the present case, we have literary evidence that Enkidu looked as appreciatively (if nonsexually) upon the charms of Gilgamesh as did Ishtar. One can project that for the not-fully-formed (adolescent) male, the king may serve as inspiration, an ideal to be emulated; for the mature adult male, however, things get more complicated. Does the image of the king represent the projected self, if not of the individual, then of the self-in-the-nation?[59] Or, as emphasized in the king's greater size and divinely engineered perfection, does the ruler represent an impossible standard—competitor/father—never to be achieved by any but the king himself? Or, in fact, could both reactions be operative simultaneously, such that the normative viewing male

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[56] As noted by Mary Ann Doane, theories of female spectatorship are rare; but the concept of a *necessary* distance between self and the image (as in the modern cinema) permits one to account for the emergence of a meta-desire bonding the female viewer to the icon before her. See "Film and the Masquerade: Theorizing the Female Spectator," in *Femmes Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis* (New York and London: Routledge, 1991), 20–1.

[57] See Tamar Garb, "The forbidden gaze: women artists and the male nude in late nineteenth-century France," in *The Body Imaged: The Human Form and Visual Culture Since the Renaissance*, K. Adler and M. Pointon, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 33–42. For Mesopotamia, the topic has yet to be pursued.

[58] See, for example, Michael Hart, "Muscles, Morals, Mind: The Male Body in Thomas Eakins' *Salutat*," in *The Body Imaged*, 57–69; see also the editors' comments on "Bodies of Masculinity," 53–5.

[59] As discussed by Raschke, "Images of Victory," 48; and by Jonathan Rutherford, "Who's That Man?" in *Male Order: Unwrapping Masculinity*, ed. R. Chapman and J. Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1988), 24.

is at once dwarfed/engendered by his king *and* united with him in his embodiment of/as nation—thereby merging himself in the sum larger than the total of its individuals?

Here it is important to keep in mind that the stela displays not only the physical build, grace, vitality, and military prowess of the king but also his "sexuality." Within the Mesopotamian lexicon of value, sexual allure has been associated with potency and desirability, linked to ideal maleness. This element thus constitutes a variation within traditional genres of *Machtkunst*—images of power that serve to reinforce hierarchies of dominance. Just *how* sexuality adds to that discourse as an independent variable is at issue. I can only point the way toward the tantalizing problem, knowing that the present case is not one that is likely to provide a solution.

As Judith Butler has noted, "sexuality" is a primary means of establishing gender, its display closely associated with identity-formation.[60] To display sexuality, therefore, is to perform gender; and to display sexuality in a work of art is to give form to a particular cultural construction of gendered identity. The admiration with which the individual is to look upon the allure of the ruler in Mesopotamia is thus more than aesthetic; it calls forth an act of social approbation on the one hand, and on the other, it induces in the viewer a state of what Michael Fried has called "specularity," in which he or she, oblivous to the membrane of the medium, engages in a quasi-corporeal relationship with the image.[61] Viewed in this light, Naram-Sîn's display of male attributes on a public monument does more than just narrate his role as victorious potentate. By setting up active currents of positive value through seductive allure, the display also facilitates identificatory processes that elicit a series of vicarious associations and projections that have a socializing function: for women, their subordination to desire and by men; for men, their fusion with authority at the same time as they are subject to it.[62]

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[60] J. Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), 2–3.

[61] M. Fried, "Between Realisms: From Derrida to Manet," lecture given at Harvard University, December 6, 1993.

[62] Note that there are no female images on the stela. The victory and the display take place in a landscape peopled only by male figures. An important aspect of this, apart from its "narrative" value, may well be, as noted by Rutherford, "Who's That Man?" in *Male Order*, 47, that "the appeal of the hero" (in this case, Naram-Sîn or Gilgamesh) "is his freedom from women"; "a man's man." At the same time, the enemy have long hair, wear animal skins, and cringe—in other words, they are gendered female, uncivilized, and submissive.

Underlying this issue may be a clue to one of the most vexing questions for political analysts: namely, by what mechanisms of social control are subordinate populations subjected to, or do they accede to, subordination?[63] Recent work on the psychoanalytic foundations of hegemony sees the modern West grounded in a dominant discourse of masculinity.[64] There is certainly ample evidence for a parallel discourse of masculinity in ancient Mesopotamia, and I would see in sexual allure one of the mechanisms by which dominance can be brought into play. In other words, for Naram-Sîn, as for Gilgamesh, sexuality, couched as part of an ideal poetics, is put in the service of the political, toward the social, not merely the libidinal, seduction of the viewer.

I have used the term "poetics" advisedly. If cultural poetics may be defined as that process "whereby a society and its sub-groups construct widely-shared meanings—behavioral conventions, social distinctions . . . aesthetic values . . . [and] gender roles,"[65] then what I am emphasizing here may better be called "cultural rhetorics"—that process whereby meaning and representation are turned into ideology. Potts argues with respect to David's heroes that "the rhetorical power of [the] forms derives from an erotic engagement with the body."[66] On the stela, the erotic allure of Naram-Sîn would be at least one of the triggering mechanisms that turns the viewer of a military victory into an identified, engaged, but subordinated enthusiast; and seduction may be seen as a goal, a product, of the work. The generative power of the body of Naram-Sîn then produces the viewer as his seed, his consort, his surrogate self.

The metaphor of the ruler's potency, and hence reproductive potential, functions as a very literal operator within Althusser's construct that every social formation must be constantly *reproduced* in order for the system to be maintained.[67] If it is the job of ideology to turn the living subject into one *subjected* to the system, then the polyvalence reflected in

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[63] L. Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation)," *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, tr. B. Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 127–86.

[64] See Kaja Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), esp. 23–35.

[65] David M. Halperin, John J. Winkler, and Froma I. Zeitlin, eds., *Before Sexuality: The Construction of Erotic Experience in the Ancient Greek World* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990), 4.

[66] Potts, "Beautiful Bodies and Dying Heroes," 6.

[67] Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," 128, 180.

the English word "subject"—subject *of* the work, subject (ego) viewer, and subject (political) dominated—is beautifully played out on the Stela of Naram-Sîn, where all three are brought together through the seductive allure of the body (politic). And as a corollary to the now widely accepted premise that "representation constitutes its subject" (by which Louis Marin meant subject *matter*, the king whose portraiture he was discussing),[68] I would argue further that representation also constitutes its subjects (plural), meaning its subordinates!

The attributes identified as positive signs of value inscribed in the ruler's body—good conformation, grace, vitality, and allure—had to exist within a lexicon of cultural value before they could be deployed as part of a politicized aesthetic. They could be deployed precisely because they had a prior value. Naram-Sîn's strategic deployment of these attributes—and especially the innovative correlation of sexuality and divinity—coincided with a number of strategic political moves during his reign, as the king continued the consolidation of the nation-state set up by his grandfather.[69] The eroticized body of the ruler can therefore best be seen in conjunction with a moment in time when new mechanisms of social control were required within a new system of political organization. Since the stela is unique in the Mesopotamian repertoire as recovered to date, we cannot say for certain that this eroticized body posed no problem for the Mesopotamian viewer, as heroic nudes of the Emperor Augustus apparently did not pose a problem for the Romans. We can project the normative viewer from the king's rhetoric, but s/he cannot speak with her or his own voice. Nevertheless, since virility and sexuality were intimately linked to concepts of power and leadership for nearly two millennia in Mesopotamia, it is quite possible that this coupling was seen as not unnatural.

The context of military victory and territorial expansion in which the alluring ruler was depicted on the stela brings into one unified field

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[68] Louis Marin, *Portrait of the King*, tr. Martha M. Houle (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), 5.

[69] Cf. P. Michalowski, "Thoughts about Ibrium," in *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft von Ebla*, Heidelberger Studien zur Alten Orient, Bd. 2, H. Hauptmann and H. Waetzoldt, eds. (Heidelberg: Heidelberger Orientverlag, 1988), 267–77. Note that I am in no way imputing any universality to this particular strategy. For a study of contrasting strategies, corresponding to different but neighboring constructs of kingship, see Maurice Bloch, "Tombs and States," in *Mortality and Immortality: The Anthropology and Archaeology of Death*, ed. S. Humphreys and H. King (London and New York: Academic Press, 1981), 137–48.

of vision the three dominant "P" 's of maleness: "(im)pregnate, protect, provision."[70] In so doing, the stela not only engages the subject-viewer's moral commitment to the values of his or her own society, as noted by David Gilmore for art in general;[71] it also, I would argue, truly subjects the viewer to the hegemony of the ruler. In other words, the stela provides a powerful *visual* form of rhetoric, in which physical and social characteristics can be shown to have political as well as cultural coordinates.[72]

The sexual allure of the ruler's body serves as a positive attribute; it also functions as a triggering mechanism within a powerful rhetoric of rulership. At issue is not merely the "self-fashioning" of king and viewer,[73] but the fashioning of the social body. Viewed in this light, the monument on which Naram-Sîn is depicted may be said to have played an *affective*, not merely a reflective, role—shaping its constituency according to the political strategy of its leader, shaping its constituency *in* the image of its leader.

Acknowledgments

My sincere thanks to the many students who have worked on aspects of this stela over the years; without their frequent insights and serious endeavors, my own thoughts would be significantly limited. In particular, I would like to acknowledge the stimulus of Cynthia Hall, Lisa Pon, and Kishwar Rizvi. In addition, I would like to thank a number of colleagues with whom I have discussed the Stela of Naram-Sîn and related issues, and who will no doubt find pieces of themselves herein: Bettina Bergmann, Norman Bryson, Natalie Kampen, Leslie Kurke, Ewa Lajer-Burcharth, Peter Machinist, Michelle Marcus, and Piotr Steinkeller.

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[70] David Gilmore. *Manhood in the Making: Cultural Concepts of Masculinity* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990), 223.

[71] Gilmore, *Manbood in the Making*, 224.

[72] See M. Pointon and K. Adler, "Introduction to Part IV: The Body as Language," in *The Body Imaged*, 126, in which the authors argue that the importance of visual forms of rhetoric has not been adequately appreciated. And yet, we seem to have no trouble at all accepting claims about the degree to which gender is shaped, not merely mirrored in contemporary advertising—see Erving Goffman, *Gender Advertisements* (New York: Harper and Row, 1979). Perhaps because it is so problematic to establish agency in periods other than our own, the visual arts have been less subject to analysis as *agents* in social formation, rather than as *mirrors* of form.

[73] M. Gleason, "The Semiotics of Gender: Physiognomy and Self-Fashioning in the Second Century C.E.," in *Before Sexuality*, 389–413.

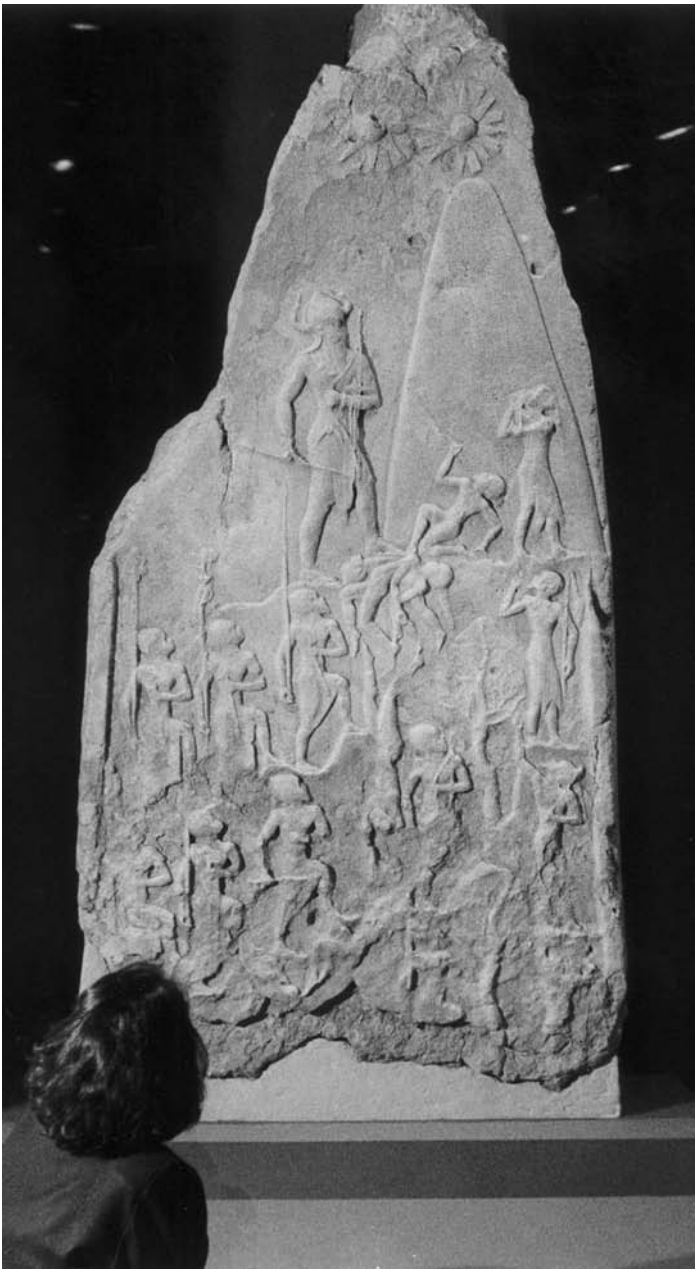

Figure 1. Stela of Naram-Sîn (c. 2250 B.C.E.), found at Susa; height 2 m. Photo by the author, reproduced courtesy Musée du Louvre, Département des antiquités orientales.

Figure 2. Detail, Stela of Naram-Sîn.

Figure 3. Detail, Stela of Naram-Sîn.

Figure 4. Stela of Eannatum of Lagash (c. 2500 B.C.E.), detail, reverse. Found at Tello. Photo courtesy Musée du Louvre, Réunion des Musées Nationaux.

Figure 5. Drawing of cylinder seal impression, Early Dynastic/Early Akkadian period (c. 2340 B.C.E.), from Ur. After R. Boehmer, *Die Entwicklung der Glyptik*, Pl. IV, 31.

Figure 6. Drawing of cylinder seal impression, Akkadian period (reign of Naram-Sîn, c. 2250 B.C.E.) from Ur. After R. Boehmer, *Die Entwicklung der Glyptik*, Pl. LXIII, 725.

Figure 7. Detail of advertisement for Charles Atlas body-building methods, from inside cover of *Dare Devil*, Marvel Comics, March 1974. Printed by permission of Charles Atlas, Ltd., New York.

Figure 8. Jacques-Louis David, *The Sabine Women.* Photo Courtesy Musée du Louvre, Réunion des Musées Nationaux.