

After the Battle Is Over: The "Stele of the Vultures" and the Beginning of Historical Narrative in the Art of the Ancient Near East

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Source: *Studies in the History of Art*, Vol. 16, Symposium Papers IV: Pictorial Narrative in Antiquity and the Middle Ages (1985), pp. 11-32

Published by: National Gallery of Art

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42617833>

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After the Battle Is Over: The *Stele of the Vultures* and the Beginning of Historical Narrative in the Art of the Ancient Near East

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To raise the question of the nature of narrative is to invite reflection on the very nature of culture. . . .

Hayden White, "The Value of Narrativity . . . ," 1981

DEFINITIONS OF NARRATIVE, generally falling within the purview of literary criticism, are nonetheless important to art historians. From the simplest starting point, "for writing to be narrative, no more and no less than a teller and a tale are required."¹ Narrative is, in other words, a solution to the problem of "how to translate *knowing* into *telling*."² In general, narrative may be said to make use of third-person cases and of past tenses, such that the teller of the story stands somehow outside and separate from the action.³ But what is important is that narrative cannot be equated with the story alone; it is content (story) structured by the telling, for the organization of the story is what turns it into narrative.⁴

Such a definition would seem to provide fertile ground for art-historical inquiry; for what, after all, is a painting or relief, if not content ordered by the telling (composition)? Yet, not all figural works "tell" a story. Sometimes they "refer" to a story; and sometimes they embody an abstract concept without the necessary action and setting of a tale at all. For an investigation of visual representation, it seems important to distinguish between instances in which the narrative is vested in a verbal text—the images serving as but illustrations of the text, not necessarily "narrative" in themselves, but rather references to the narrative—and instances in which the narrative is located in the representations, the story readable through the images.

In the specific case of the ancient Near East, instances in which narrative is carried through the imagery itself are rare, reflecting a situation fundamentally different from that found subsequently in the West, and often from that found in the further East as well. We do not have a cultural situation in which monolithic religious/mythological/heroic texts stand behind the very fabric of society—as the Bible does for the Judeo-Christian West, the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad* for the classical world, or the *Ramayana* and the *Bhagavad Gita* for the Indian subcontinent. Nor do we have a tradition of inscriptions directly associated with and therefore identifying mythological/religious images. Through juxtaposition with text, as in illustrated books or through labeling, as on Greek vases, for example, images in later Western art at least are far more likely to be accurately identified; and these identifiable images then provide a basic corpus from which to argue for the unknown.⁵

The problem is further exacerbated by the tendency in the art of the ancient Near East, as discussed by Ann Perkins in the 1955 Chicago symposium on narrative in ancient art, to be "allusive" rather than explicit, with the "culminating

scene” of a given story standing for the whole.⁶ We often find the story behind the image, therefore, demanding the viewer’s prior knowledge and correct identification of the scene—a process of “matching” rather than “reading” of the imagery itself qua narrative.

However, there is one class of work in the corpus of ancient Near Eastern art—the battle scene, executed primarily in sculptural relief—that does fall into our definition of pictorial narrative. In content, these works tend to refer to specific events in time and place; to contain “action” as it has been distinguished from “description”; and to be “told,” as if in the third person and in the past tense.⁷ The subject matter of these monuments is neither religious nor mythological, but rather historical. Whether conveyed through the juxtaposition of successive episodes,⁸ or in a single image that nonetheless through its action enables one to “read” the event, these reliefs can by our definition be called “pictorial narrative,” as we are not required merely to associate through them to an underlying text or tale. This

is not to say that such works are never linked to texts, since many of the monuments are either accompanied by inscriptions carved directly upon the stone, or else can be related to parallel texts, through which our understanding of the narrative is clarified. Yet they are not dependent upon the texts for their reading. In the very depiction of historical events, as opposed to ritual or mythological events, we are presented with a complex internal sequence and development, through time and across space, which permits us to “read” the monument itself.

The battle narratives of the Neo-Assyrian period, from the ninth to the seventh centuries B.C., are perhaps the best known, and have been the subject of an earlier study, the results of which linked the exploitation of this particular genre directly to the contemporary political situation, as Assyrian kings used representations of conquest to validate the territorial expansion of the empire.⁹ Comparison with contemporary annalistic texts describing actual battles established an exact correspondence between battles reported

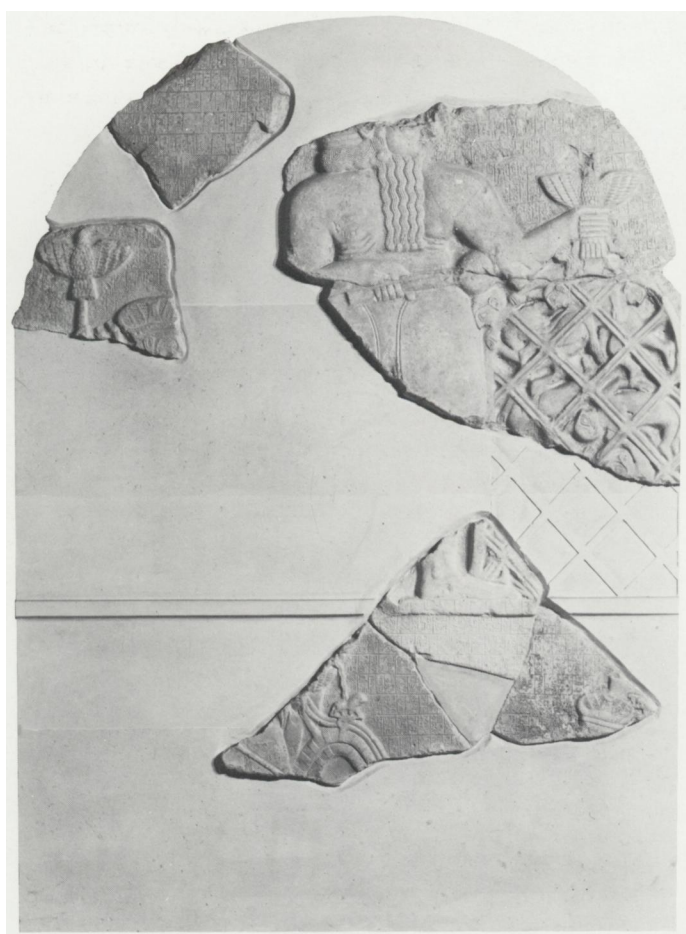


Fig. 1. Obverse, Stele of the Vultures of Eannatum, ensi of Lagash, c. 2460 B.C. White limestone; ht. 1.80m; found at Tello, ancient Girsu; Musée du Louvre (AO 50 + 2436-8 + 16109). Photo courtesy Musée du Louvre

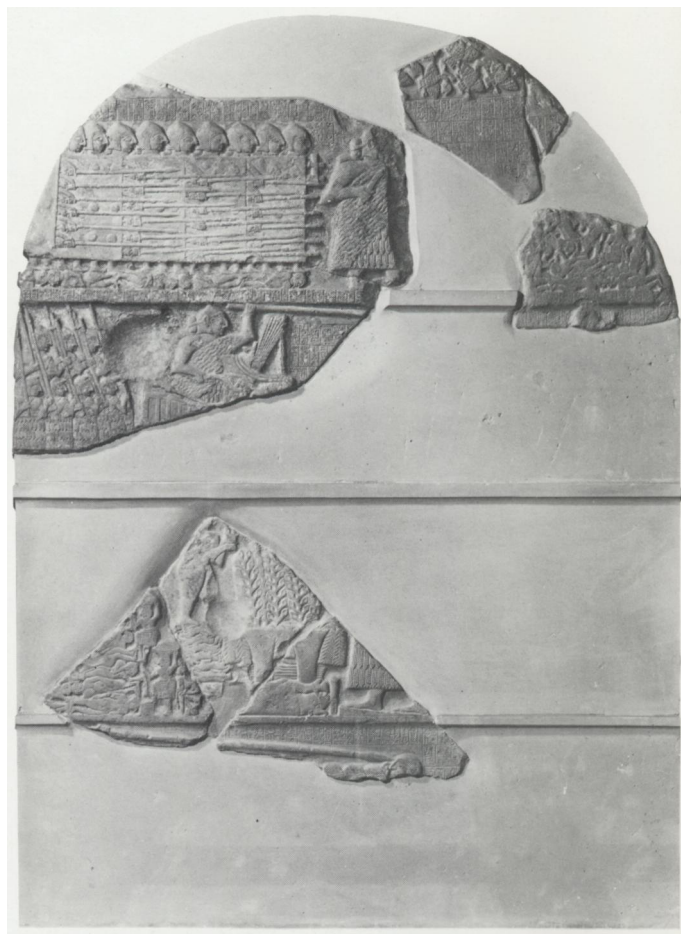


Fig. 2. Reverse, Stele of the Vultures. Photo courtesy Musée du Louvre

and battles depicted. In this isomorphism between the verbal and the visual, we are presented with a highly sophisticated and integrated system, in which both means are expertly manipulated toward the same rhetorical and political ends.

It is therefore of interest to look back to the very beginning of the sequence, to the late Early Dynastic period (E.D. III) c. 2500 B.C., in which conditions surrounding the consolidation of the city-state had given rise to the first monument that could be identified as public, historical, and narrative: the large, freestanding relief known as the “Stele of the Vultures,” commemorating a victory of the city-state of Lagash over the neighboring state of Umma (figs. 1, 2).¹⁰

My aim is fourfold: to see whether this monument truly fits the definition of “narrative” presented above; to bring forth the particular historical and cultural conditions that produced it and the issues embodied therein; to determine whether the same degree of integration between text and image prevailed as did in the Neo-Assyrian period and whether the same degree of political ends were being served; and finally, to see if it is possible to link this early example to later works in the history of art by elucidating the uses (and abuses) of public monuments on which historical narrative appears. For it should be clear from the outset that the “historicity” of these monuments was a highly manipulated one. In the Assyrian case, for example, only the enemies die; Assyrians never lose, never perish. The purported reality is thus carefully organized to “bring out the central mythos” of the state;¹¹ and even where events depicted are in fact true, the very fact of their having been recorded selects the event, its antecedents, and its consequences as meaningful.

* * * * *

The Stele of the Vultures, currently in the Louvre, is rather poorly preserved. Originally it was a large, rectangular slab of white limestone with a rounded top. The modern restoration of the whole is based upon only seven fragments. Six were excavated during the 1880s at the site of modern Tello, ancient Girsu, a satellite town within the city-state of Lagash in the Early Dynastic period and seat of the deity Ningirsu.¹² The seventh fragment, undoubtedly plundered from the site, was acquired by the British Museum in 1900 and later given to the Louvre for the restoration.¹³ As restored, the monument measures 1.80 meters in height, 1.30 meters in width, and is .11 meters in thickness.¹⁴

The stele is covered on both major faces with carving in relatively high, well modeled relief; the scenes of the re-

verse actually wrap around the two shallow sides as well. The negative space is filled with an inscription that is incised continuously from obverse to reverse. Much of the visual contents of the stele can be reconstructed, though there are a few significant losses. The inscription, however, has major gaps. We know from the extant portion that the stele was executed by one Eannatum, *ensí* (city ruler or governor) of Lagash in c. 2460 B.C. Eannatum presents the historical background, events, and consequences of his border conflicts with an unnamed ruler of Umma, the state immediately to the northwest of Girsu, in a dispute over the Gu’eden, the fertile tract of irrigated land between the two states.¹⁵ Thus, from the text, as well as from other contemporary references to the same conflict, we have the historical details to help anchor the visual representations on the monument. We are therefore in a position to approach the problem of pictorial narrative both from a reading of the imagery itself and from a comparison of text and image: that is, we can determine not only what tale is being told, but also how the tale is told.

The obverse of the stele is divided into two registers, the upper portion almost twice the height of the lower (figs. 1, 3).¹⁶ A large male figure, centrally placed, holds a mace in

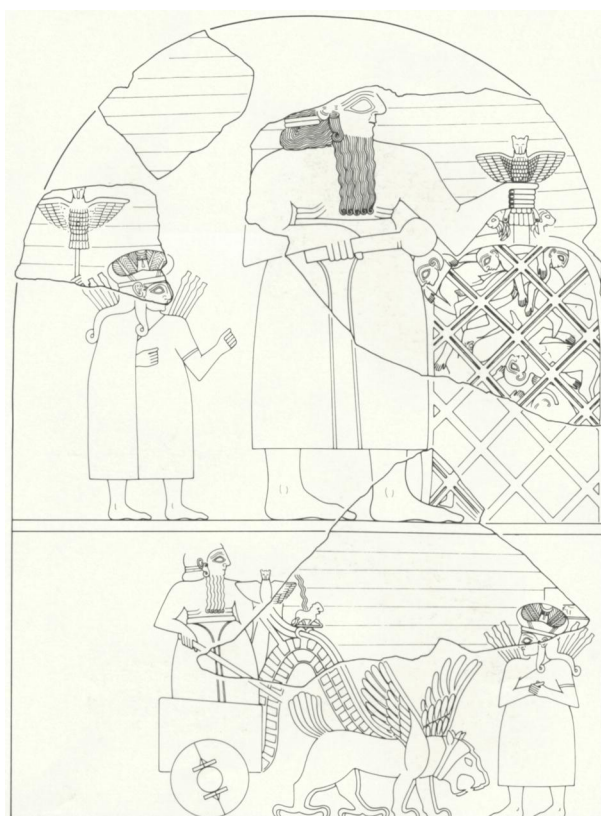


Fig. 3. Reconstruction drawing, obverse, Stele of the Vultures (drawing by Elizabeth Simpson)



Fig. 4. Detail, obverse: The god Ningirsu with battle net and emblem. Photo courtesy Hirmer, Munich

his right hand, the mace-head touching the bald head of a small man who protrudes from a large net further to the left of the central figure. The victim is nude, and the uppermost of what would have been at least a dozen other captives, densely packed and tumbled about within the net.¹⁷ With his left hand posed just above the top of the net, the central figure grasps the tail feathers of a frontal lion-headed eagle with outstretched wings, its talons visible below and resting upon the backs of two addorsed lions (fig. 4).¹⁸ This emblem, known from mythological texts, represents the *anzu*, or Zu-bird—associated with the thunderstorm—who was identified with the god Ningirsu in the early periods. Later texts record that the *anzu* absconded with the “Tablet of Fate” until Enlil, chief god of the Mesopotamian pantheon, ordered the hero Ninurta, a later form of Ningirsu, to retrieve them.¹⁹ Like the Gorgon head for Perseus, this emblem then became associated with, and was adopted as an attribute of, the vanquisher.

It has been a point of debate whether the standing male on the obverse of the stele should therefore represent the deity Ningirsu himself, to whom the stele is dedicated and

in whose name the victory over Umma was won; or whether it should represent Eannatum, favored by Ningirsu, who inscribed the stele and literally effected the victory.²⁰ The *anzu* emblem appears on several “royal” monuments found at Girsu, however those that are inscribed are all dedicated to Ningirsu (for example, the silver vase of Enmetena, nephew of Eannatum and one of his successors, fig. 5, or the votive plaque of Dudu, chief priest of Ningirsu under Enmetena).²¹ No royal figure ever actually wields the emblem.

This would suggest that the main figure on the obverse is in fact the city god. The question can be settled, I believe, through identification of the second figure in the scene, smaller in scale and standing as if behind or to the right of the central male. This smaller figure is female, as can be surmised from what is visible of her hair. She wears a head-dress of splayed (cow?) horns, between which are feathers or fronds flanking a central leonine head similar to that of the *anzu* emblem held by the male figure. Behind and to the left of this woman the emblem is repeated, raised like a standard on a pole. Three maces protrude from each of her shoulders, the traditional Mesopotamian manner of showing divine attributes.²² Parallels in headgear and attributes between this and other figures—as for example on a basalt vase fragment where the figure is identified by

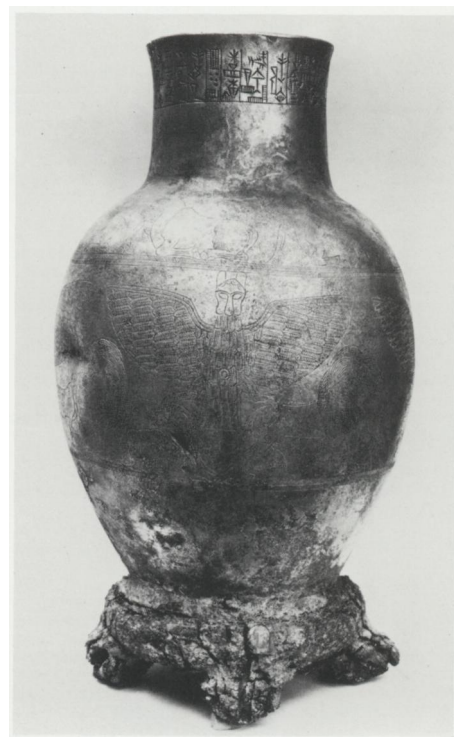
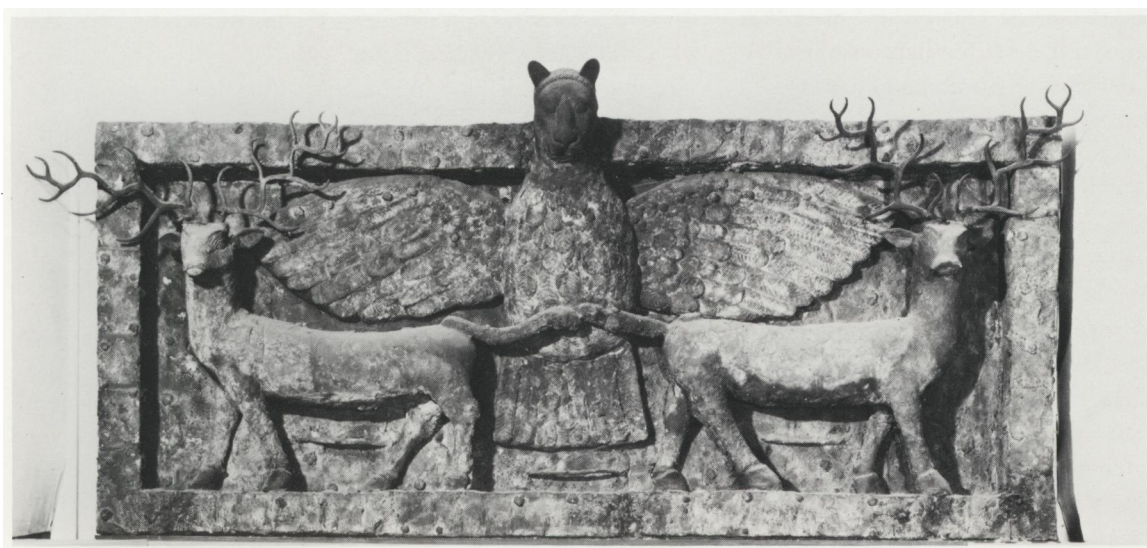


Fig. 5. Silver vase of Enmetena of Lagash, c. 2420 B.C., Tello; Musée du Louvre (AO 2674). Photo courtesy Musée du Louvre



Fig. 6. Votive plaque showing priest before the goddess Ninhursag, Early Dynastic III period, c. 2500-2350 B.C. Limestone; found at Tello; Musée du Louvre (AO 276). Photo courtesy Hirmer, Munich

Below: Fig. 7. Copper panel from temple of Ninhursag at al-'Ubaid, Early Dynastic III period, c. 2500-2350 B.C.; British Museum (114308). Photo courtesy Trustees of the British Museum



inscription²³ and on a limestone votive plaque (fig. 6) where the mountain scales upon which the female figure sits are a clue to her Sumerian name—allow us to identify this figure as a divine personage, specifically the goddess Ninhursag, Lady of the Mountain. She is, further, the mother of Ningirsu, and played a principal role in the myth of the capture of the *anzu*, by giving her son essential strategic advice.²⁴ Because of this role, the *anzu* emblem is associated also with the goddess, appearing on a large copper panel found in her temple at the site of al-'Ubaid (fig. 7).²⁵ This would explain the presence not only of the emblem in her head-dress, but also of the standard at her side.

It seems clear, therefore, that the figure in the upper register on the front of the stele represents the city god, Ningirsu, with his emblem, triumphant over the vanquished enemy of Lagash and accompanied by his mother, a primary figure in his mythical history and a deity venerated in her own right both in Lagash and in Girsu.²⁶

Although very poorly preserved, the lower register seems to corroborate this interpretation. It is evident that a chariot was depicted, moving toward our right; facing the chariot is a repetition of the goddess in the upper register. Further, it is possible to determine from a bit of visible skirt that the god himself was standing in the chariot. The wingtip of the *anzu* emblem is also visible; it was either held in the god's hand, or attached to the protective chest board of the chariot.

Although the draft animals for the chariot are not preserved, we have accepted Barrelet's argument that they were more likely to have been mythological animals than standard equids of the period (as depicted, for example, on the reverse side of our stele, see below and fig. 11; or on

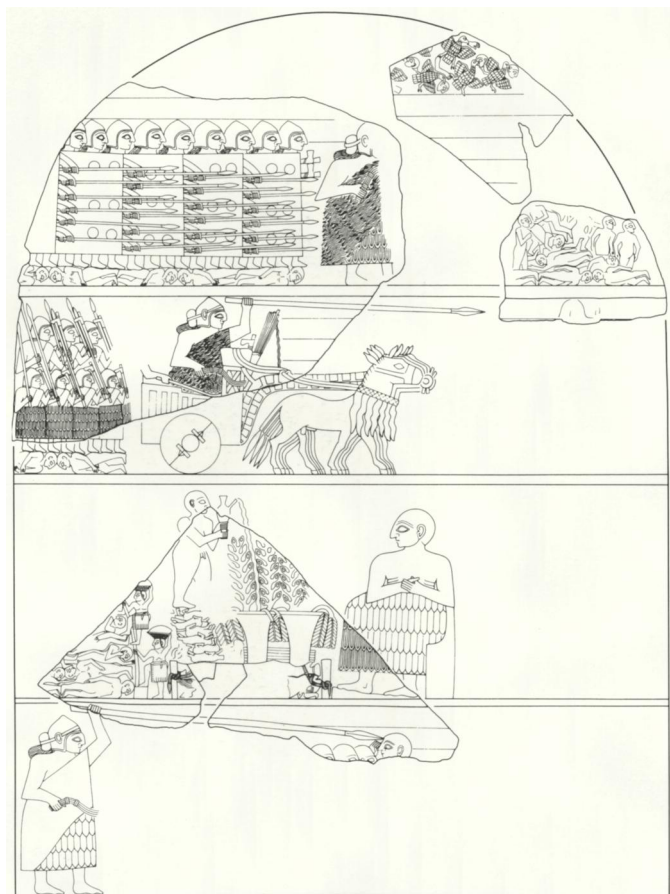


Fig. 8. Reconstruction drawing, reverse, Stele of the Vultures (drawing by Elizabeth Simpson)

the “Standard of Ur,” fig. 13). The argument is plausible, first, for reasons of available space in relation to the yoke pole; and second, because it would fit better with the mythical character of this side of the stele, particularly as Ningirsu was said to have harnessed the winds to his chariot in pursuit of the *anzu*. In this way, the draft animals would have contributed to the impression that the power invoked was supernatural.²⁷

Thus, the whole face of the obverse seems to center around the personage of Ningirsu, patron deity of the city of Girsu, to whom the stele was dedicated. The lower register seems to be less devoted to showing the action described in the inscription on the stele than to setting the stage for that action by providing attributes and antecedents of the city god. It is important to note that no mention of the Zu-bird or of the chariot of Ningirsu is made in the text on the stele. All these references come from texts and stories external to the monument, which were nonetheless likely to have been well known to the residents of Girsu. Thus, prior knowledge on the part of the viewer would have been

required, to which the representation stood in a referential status.

In the upper register, the god is shown with the vanquished enemy already in hand. It is not the action itself, but the consequence of action that is depicted. The forces of Girsu have won. And we have here the symbolic statement: “after the battle is over.”

In this respect, the obverse of the stele does not conform to our definition of pictorial narrative. At best, it can be called a “culminating scene,” because the action is completed. In fact, however, it is really a summary, a symbolic referent, couched in mythical terms, of divine intervention, and thereby verging on the “iconic”—intended to convey a total, abstract concept of divine patronage and favor. Behind the imagery lie the mythological history and associations of the deity, which are alluded to, but in no way acted out. Hence, this face of the stele at least is without “action”; without “telling.” It is the icon of the city and its victory, not its narrative.

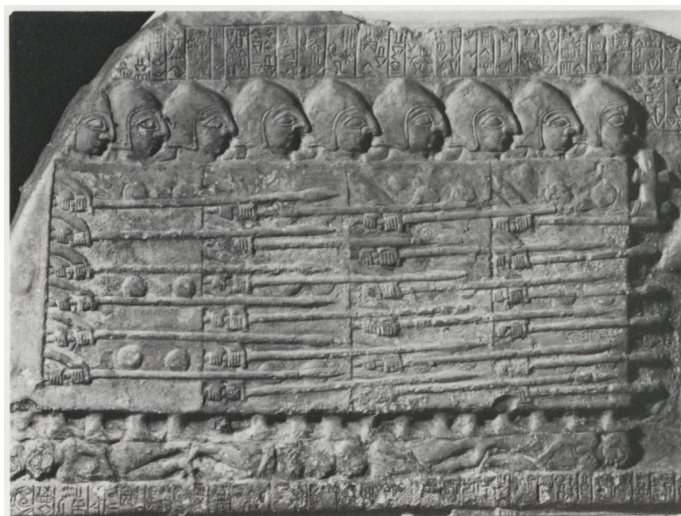
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The reverse face of the stele is divided into four registers (figs. 2, 8). The vultures that give the modern name to the monument are seen at the upper right, holding in their beaks the severed heads of the Ummaite enemy of Lagash (see detail, fig. 9). Its fragmentary condition notwithstanding, the image is a powerful one: ultimate defeat of the vanquished, the absolute success for the victors. The birds of prey fly above horizontal bands of inscription, so that the upper part of the stele seems separate from and subsequent to the rest of the action in the upper register. The main action seems to be that of the battle itself. From the left edge to virtually the center, a phalanx of twelve shielded soldiers (nine on the reverse face, three wrapped around the side) point their spears in attack position as they trample the bodies of their fallen enemies (fig. 10).²⁸ The soldiers are aligned as if marching behind the figure of the king, who also faces right, wrapped in a flounced garment probably made of sheepskin. The particular action in which these figures are engaged has been lost in the break; but we may assume it was a direct military encounter, since at the far right-hand edge of the register the bodies of some thirteen fallen enemies are piled in a heap.

In the second register, a group of soldiers again appears at the far left (fig. 11). This time, however, there are no raised shields. Each soldier holds a long-shafted spear in his right hand and a battle-ax in his left; but both weapons are raised in march rather than in attack position. Here, the soldiers follow behind the royal war chariot. The king holds the shaft of a spear in his left hand. Unfortunately,



Fig. 9. Detail, reverse: Vultures and enemy heads, upper register. Photo courtesy Hirmer, Munich



Top right: Fig. 10. Detail, reverse: Phalanx of soldiers, upper register. Photo courtesy Hirmer, Munich

both the tip of the spear and the object of the king's attention are missing. What is visible of the chariot itself indicates that it is significantly different from the one on the obverse.²⁹ This would suggest that a careful distinction was indeed made between the two, and thereby provides further support for the argument that it is indeed the god's vehicle on the front.³⁰

In the third register, the action seems directed from right to left (figs. 8, 12). The central figure faces left; only his feet and a portion of his flounced skirt are visible; the feet rest on a platform or low socle. In an unpublished paper, Michelle Marcus has argued that the figure was seated;³¹ this reconstruction would conform with seated figures known from other contemporary reliefs and sculpture.³² In front of the seated figure, a bull, presumably tethered for sacrifice, lies on its back. In the field above the bull are a stack of bodies of smaller animals, perhaps goats, and two large vases containing "sacred" plants with vertical leaves and drooping date clusters. The bases of these vases are obscured by the body of the bull, suggesting spatial depth. A naked priest, facing right, stands upon the stack of animals; he holds the bottom of a spouted vessel well known from other libation scenes (figs. 6, 16), as the stream of his poured liquid falls upon the potted plants.³³ Finally, at the far left of the register, naked bodies are stacked in a large mound, outlined by a double line as if it were a ladder seen in profile or some sort of covering shown in section. Skirted workers with filled baskets on their heads hold onto this band and climb up the mound of bodies. Such climbing figures with



Fig. 11. Detail, reverse: Eannatum in chariot, soldiers behind, second register. Photo courtesy Hirmer, Munich

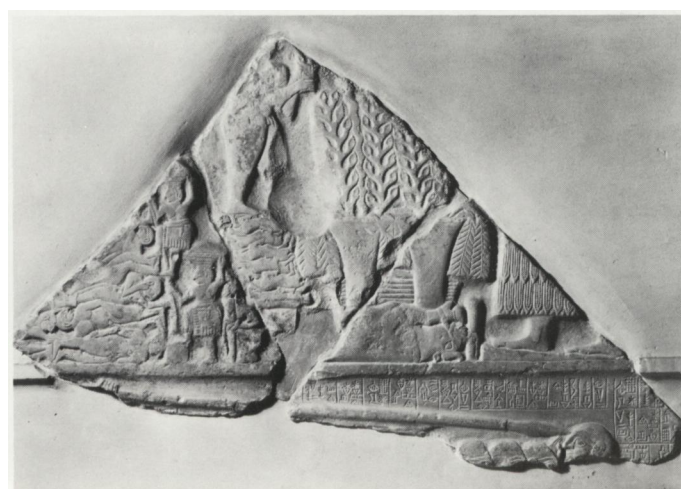


Fig. 12. Detail, reverse: Ritual scene, third register; and spear directed at enemy head, fourth register. Photo courtesy Hirmer, Munich

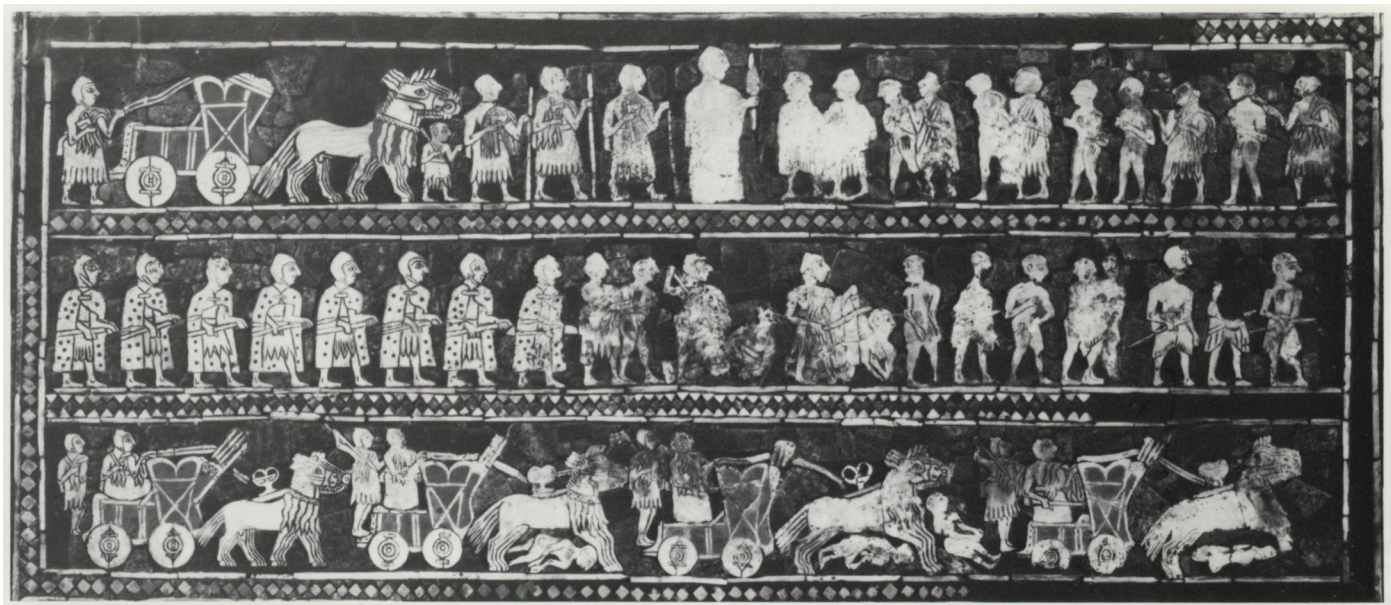


Fig. 13. "Standard of Ur," battle side, c. 2500 B.C. Shell, carnelian, and lapis inlay; found in Royal Cemetery at Ur; British Museum (121201). Photo courtesy Trustees of the British Museum

earth-filled baskets are the traditional means in Mesopotamia of representing construction workers, especially in temple-building scenes.³⁴ Here, they are clearly making burial mounds of earth poured over the stacked bodies.

The burial-mound, sacrificial animals, and ritual libation all raise the question of the identity of the seated figure who presides over this activity. Frankfort has called him the god Ningirsu; Moortgat would see him rather as Eannatum attending a ritual ceremony.³⁵ I would agree with the latter interpretation, and have so restored the figure in the drawing (fig. 8). First, the flounced skirt is the same as that worn by Eannatum, who is clearly labeled, on the rest of this side of the stele and different from the skirt of the god on the obverse; second, other rulers of Lagash wear this same skirt (for example, the standing statues of Eannatum I and Enmetena, brother and nephew of Eannatum, respectively, and his successors; and the relief plaque of Ur-nanshe, grandfather of Eannatum and founder of the dynasty, fig. 15).³⁶ Closest of all is the figure on the Ur-nanshe plaque, where both the flounced skirt and the seated posture are identical to those of the primary figure. Moreover, I shall argue below that the designation of Eannatum in this position fits far better with the suggested reading of the narrative on the reverse.

Only a small portion of the fourth register is preserved, the upper part, in which one sees a hand at the far left grasping the butt of a long spear shaft, the tip touching the forehead of a bald enemy near the center of the band. The enemy faces the oncoming spear; his head emerges from a

group of three additional bald heads before him, all facing in the opposite direction. The relationship of this cluster of figures to the menaced figure and the action is not clear. On the basis of analogies with registers one and two, the figure wielding the spear is presumably royal. As there is no room for a chariot at the far left, Marcus has suggested that this ought to be a standing king. Whether the three bald figures merely flee from the king, or deliberately surround his marked enemy, cannot be determined; whether the interaction constitutes real battle or just a threat is equally unclear.

Despite the poor state of preservation, we can attempt a reading of the reverse. Each of the four registers—whether showing battle or ritual engagement—depicts some contained action and can be individually read as a narrative, given our requisite of event told, not just referenced. More intriguing is the question whether, and then how, the registers may be read successively, in a coherent sequence.

The reverse side of the stele has generally been described proceeding from top to bottom, on the assumption that it was meant to be read that way: the story proceeding from a battle and heap of enemy bodies (register 1), to a continuation or second battle (register 2), to a victory celebration and sacrifice (register 3).³⁷ A major problem is then posed by the fourth register, in which the battle seems to be resumed after the celebration/ritual. Discussion has focused upon an early identification of the enemy facing the spear thrust as the "King of Kish," based upon the proximity of his head to the mention of a king of that state in the in-

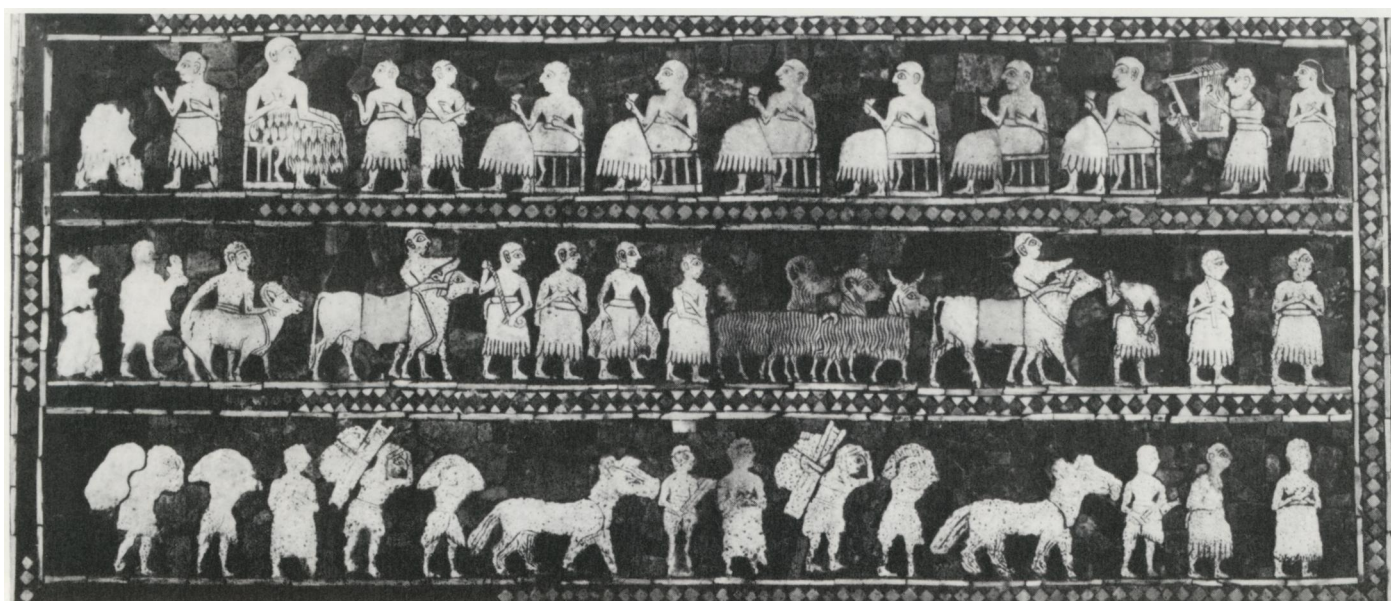


Fig. 14. "Standard of Ur," banquet side. Photo courtesy Trustees of the British Museum

scription. This problem requires a lengthy discussion not germane to the present study, but I would argue that the association is fortuitous, our vision skewed by the unfortunate breakage of the end of the text.³⁸ Nevertheless, whether or not this is the king of Kish, a question remains: why, after sacrifice and celebration, would Eannatum resume battle with anyone, much less with an enemy not recorded as such on the stele, when the text describes the conflict with Umma, whose dead are already heaped up above?

Since this problem cannot be resolved with a vertical reading from top to bottom, I would propose an alternative reading of the reverse of the stele, from bottom to top. This proposal is based first on the evidence from more complete Sumerian monuments where the preferred order of reading is indeed from bottom to top; and second, on the narrative sequence in the accompanying text of the stele.

In the first instance, I have argued elsewhere that the major relief monument of the preceding Uruk period, the cult vessel known as the "Warka Vase," is best understood when read from the lower registers (cultivated plants and domesticated animals) toward the top (cult scene before the goddess Inanna).³⁹ Certainly the nearly contemporary "Standard of Ur" from the Royal Cemetery (figs. 13, 14) is to be read this way. On one side of the standard, three horizontal registers progress from battle chariots at the bottom to the gathering of prisoners in the middle to the presentation of the prisoners before a larger central figure, presumably a ruler, at the top. On the other side, the scenes proceed from the amassing of pack animals and goods in

the lower register to the procession of food animals and men bearing fish in the middle to the banquet in the upper register that again is dominated by a slightly larger figure in a flounced skirt, probably the ruler. In fact, the dominant, primary position of the ruler at the center of the upper register on the battle side, the culmination of the narrative sequence, is comparable to the position of Eannatum in the upper register of the *Stele of the Vultures*.

In the second instance, although it will be pursued further below, we may now consider the text inscribed on the stele and surrounding most of the pictorial action. If only the imagery is read, it is difficult to see the ritual burial and libation as anything other than a postbattle celebration of victory.⁴⁰ However, when the imagery is read in conjunction with the text, we see that before Eannatum actually goes off to battle with Umma, he enters the temple to receive a dream oracle from Ningirsu, in keeping with the common practice in Mesopotamia for those seeking divine instruction.⁴¹ In the dream, it is foretold that a mound of enemy corpses would reach up to the very base of heaven (text, col. 7:21-22). This prediction is followed by a break of some seven to eight lines, after which we find Eannatum has already taken up arms against Umma (col. 8).

It is possible, therefore, to see the scene in the third register as preceding rather than succeeding the battle. Although Eannatum is described in the text as "the reclining one," and in the third register he is seated, this in itself poses no problem. There is no tradition for representing reclining figures in Mesopotamian art, while Eannatum would

certainly have had to preside seated over cult performances in the temple on the same occasion. A parallel depiction of a seated figure referring to a dream sequence occurs on one of the well-known statues of Gudea of Lagash in the later, Neo-Sumerian period. The statue shows Gudea holding the plan of a temple on his lap, having received instructions to build a new temple by a dream oracle, while he slept in an older sanctuary.⁴²

Everything represented in register three may thus be seen as anterior to the battle(s), which itself can be best read in sequence from register two, with soldiers in battle march, to register one, with soldiers in attack position behind their ruler, and, rendered at the far right, the resultant mound of corpses predicted in the temple oracle. The vultures carrying off their prey at the top would then represent the very end of the narrative. Their action is the narrative counterpart to the symbolic statement of the obverse: the historical “after the battle is over.”

The problem of the bottom register remains—two apparent battle sequences are still divided by a register of ritual activity. In my proposed reading, this apparent anomaly can be explained in either of two ways: first, as corresponding to the preamble of the text (cols. 1-3), which lays out the previous history of the conflict between Lagash and Umma under earlier rulers; or second, as corresponding to a portion of the dream itself, where the promised corpses are after all the results of a projected battle. The former seems more consistent with the progression through the action, and parallels the development of the text; but either way, register four reads best if it is seen as setting the scene for the subsequent action.⁴³

This development works better in terms of composition as well. If one reads the stele from bottom to top, the figure of the king seems to move from the left-hand margin of the lower register to a point almost exactly one-quarter of the way across the space of register two, to dead center in register one. If, by contrast, one reads from top to bottom, the king seems to be backing up. It would be far more logical to see the king progressing steadily toward the culmination in the upper register, where he occupies the same central position as the “ruler” on the Ur “Standard.”

Thus, the action on the reverse of the stele can be read both as a linear progression across each register (synchronically) and as a progression up the registers (diachronically). If we follow the story parallel to the inscription, as suggested, the movement of the ruler’s figure is both spatial and temporal. In contrast to the obverse of the stele, the reverse conforms to the definition of “narrative” as established at the beginning of this paper: organized action, progression through time, reference to a specific event, and

readability rather than mere reference.

If, then, we conclude that the reverse of the Stele of the Vultures is “narrative,” and “historical narrative” at that, while the obverse is not, we must articulate the ways in which the two faces work with one another in the single monument.

Virtually everyone who has written on the stele has commented on the opposition between the mythological and the historical aspects of the respective sides.⁴⁴ Perhaps most penetrating is Moortgat’s observation that the stele reflects the dualism inherent in the “Sumerian age” in divine acts and events of the mortal world.⁴⁵ Groenewegen-Frankfort, in turn, noted the separation of the “actuality” of the depicted battle on the one side from its “transcendent significance” on the other.⁴⁶

All commentators have concentrated on the content of the reliefs, however. When we come to describe how that content is presented, it becomes evident that different pictorial modes have been selected to represent the two realms: what we have called the “iconic,” on the one hand, and the “narrative,” on the other.

In this respect, we may note that the obverse is divided into only two registers, one larger than the other, while the reverse is divided into four more or less equal bands. The resulting effect is that the god on the obverse occupies considerably more space than any other figure. He is also bulkier in proportion and more nearly frontal in pose. Following Schapiro’s analysis of the importance of “format” in establishing the expressive parameters of an image, and his correlation between rank and size, which assumes an equation between a scale of qualities and a scale of magnitudes,⁴⁷ the message is clear. Whatever human agents have participated in the event(s), the end has been achieved only through the god’s patronage and guidance. However, the god is not shown engaged in action, but rather in a symbolic gesture of dominance; the actual events are over. If anything, the relief presents what Svetlana Alpers has called a deliberate de-emphasis or suspension of narrative, achieved through a “fixity of pose.”⁴⁸ Just as the god holds his emblem, the *anzu*, he is himself an emblem of the state and of its victory. The time represented on the obverse, therefore, follows that of the reverse. But simultaneously it is the summary statement of the whole. For this reason, the inscription begins on the god’s side, and ends on the reverse making clear the weighting of the two faces. We are given important visual clues via composition, pose, and attributes to serve as aids in deciphering the obverse. But because it requires prior knowledge to identify the god through his emblems and his association with the accompanying female deity, and a background in mythology to fully understand the visual

references, the viewer must control more of the “code” for the obverse to be understood.

The reverse, by contrast, can be read more easily through the depicted events. Each register seems to have contained a coherent and complete action, achieving closure of the part before it was to be integrated as a segment into the whole and read in sequence. The technique of superimposed registration is not uncommon in later art. As Brilliant has pointed out, it is one means of transcending the limits of the register system, through stacking in a loaded sequence, where the whole equals more than the sum of its parts.⁴⁹ On the Stele of the Vultures as well as on the “Standard of Ur,” we are very close to the beginnings of this system. In the particular stacking of the four registers on the reverse of the Stele of the Vultures, we can follow the sequence of the conflict between Umma and Lagash to the ultimate victory proclaimed by Lagash. The story unfolds directly as narrative within the pictorial frame, as a progression of individual actions and their sum total, which equals success. On the obverse, by contrast, the story lies behind the pictorial—the “referential” as opposed to the “told.”

Yet this opposition cannot be dismissed as a simple division between obverse and reverse; for on each side, the dominant mode of representation also contains within it an echo of its opposite. On the obverse, for example, though the god is the “icon,” there is an obvious reference to the “historical narrative” and the political consequences of the battle won in the net he holds. On the reverse, as one proceeds from bottom to top through the “historical narrative” of the conflict, the figure of the ruler as well becomes an effective “icon,” which through repetition establishes a rhythmic pattern as he ultimately achieves center stage at the top.

Thus, the ambiguities posed by the opposition are resolved in the interplay of main and subsidiary themes. The stele is clearly an attempt to integrate myth with history;⁵⁰ one in which different modes of representation are used, while neither mode is totally separate from the other. In this bifacial union of myth and history displayed through the pictorial modes of icon and narrative, a complex dynamic has been established between the telling and the already told. The power of the stele lies in that union, and clearly, both components are required for the monument to achieve its power.

* * * * *

A few issues remain which must be considered in order for us to properly place the Stele of the Vultures into the

context of the beginnings of pictorial narrative on the historical monuments of the ancient Near East. First, how did the text inscribed on the stele relate to the imagery (a necessary question in the evaluation of the overall impact of the monument)? Second, what is the nature of the stele itself as a public monument? Third, what was the relationship between the historical event commemorated on the stele and the general history of the city-state of Lagash during the Early Dynastic period? For these three issues are crucial to our understanding of the essential questions: **Why narrative? Why historical narrative? Why at that time?** It is only through consideration of these questions that we can reconstruct the impact of the visual message we are calling pictorial narrative on this particular stele in this period.

The Text

In the incorporation of a lengthy text along with figured relief, the Stele of the Vultures marks a significant departure from such earlier monuments as the plaque of Ur-nanshe on which the text consists simply of crudely incised labels and epithets (fig. 15). Eannatum is identified by label twice on the stele, in the field adjacent to his own head, much the same as Ur-nanshe is on his plaque. The rest of the inscription, however, consists of a continuous text that begins in the upper field of the obverse and continues in parallel bands down the entire face. It then picks up at the top of the reverse and continues down that face, even across



Fig. 15. Votive plaque of Ur-nanshe, king of Lagash, c. 2500 B.C. Limestone; found at Tello; Musée du Louvre (AO 2344). Photo courtesy Musée du Louvre

the raised bands that separate registers (figs. 1, 2, 9, 10, 11). As on the plaque of Ur-nanshe, the figures carved in raised relief were executed first. The incised columns and subdividing “cases” with their enclosed signs were added later, over virtually all the available background space.

The text was first read by François Thureau-Dangin not long after its discovery.⁵¹ A new edition of the text is included in the collection of Old Sumerian inscriptions published by Steible and Behrens, and an English translation and discussion forms part of Cooper’s study of texts pertaining to the Lagash-Umma border conflict, both containing full bibliographies of intervening studies.⁵²

In short, the text begins with what must have been, despite major breaks, a historical account of the background to the dispute, citing events in reigns prior to that of Eannatum. It then goes on to introduce Eannatum, and describe his generation by the god Ningirsu, his suckling on the lap of the goddess Ninhursag,⁵³ his heroic qualities, and the bestowal of his name by the goddess Inanna. This early history was apparently necessary as justification for Eannatum’s engaging the ruler of Umma, whose arrogance had led him to encroach into the arable lands of the Gu’eden, the “beloved fields of Ningirsu,” without recompense to Lagash. But before the actual encounter, there occurs the dream sequence described above, in which Eannatum receives an oracle foretelling the encounter. After a short break, the text resumes in the midst of the action. Eannatum, apparently wounded, carries on until Umma is defeated. Twenty burial mounds of the enemy are heaped up, as Eannatum succeeds in restoring to Ningirsu the fields of the Gu’eden, each one carefully listed in detail.

This section of the text ends along the register division separating the upper and lower portions of the obverse. Beginning in the first column of the lower register is an account of the aftermath of the battle, in which the vanquished ruler of Umma swears on the “great battle-nets” of six major deities that he will respect the now properly reconstituted border.

By modern dramatic standards, the long description of each oath and the attendant rituals to secure each one seem to be merely the working out of terms and hence secondary to the battle itself. Yet it is actually the longest sequence in the text, continuing from the obverse through the entire upper register of the reverse and ending along the register line. Toward the end of the same register line we enter into the final section of the text, in which the titles, epithets, and deeds of Eannatum are recounted. The litany includes the lands he has conquered, how he has restored the Gu’eden to Ningirsu, and finally, how he has erected this very stele for the god. This last portion falls in the bottom register of

the reverse. It is likely that standard curses aimed at anyone who would remove or destroy the stele would have comprised the very end of the text, but are not preserved, due to the breaks in the lowest register (see n. 38).

The text thus may be divided into six principal sections: background, introduction and preparation of Eannatum, action, immediate consequences of action, aftermath, and summary plus commemoration. These six sections conform closely to the requirements of the “Display Text,” delineated as a separate category of narrative by Pratt:⁵⁴

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. Abstract
(summary of
viewpoint) | = Background |
| 2. Orientation
(identification) | = Preparation and naming of
Eannatum |
| 3. Action | = Battle |
| 4. Evaluation/
consequence | = Restoration of fields |
| 5. Resolution | = Oaths toward stability |
| 6. Coda | = Recapitulation of titles, ded-
ication of stele and curses |

The text thus constitutes a coherent narrative in itself; it lays out the position of Lagash with respect to the border conflict with Umma, and the actions taken by Eannatum. It is immediately apparent (as noted also by Donald Hansen in a lecture entitled “Early Dynastic Demons and Monsters” at the Pierpont Morgan Library in April 1983) that the correspondence between text and imagery is not exact. Significant elements within the verbal narrative are not depicted on the stele, while certain of the details so carefully depicted in relief are not fully described in the text. Read in conjunction with the imagery, the text does help to identify the specific conflict and interpret certain details of the pictorial narrative. But the visual imagery has its own agenda, not identical to that of the text.

The major pictorial narrative on the reverse is devoted to a detailed representation of the preamble and actual conflict with Umma, a sequence passed over very quickly in the text. By contrast, those portions given the longest description in the text—the delineation of all of the restored fields and the oaths sworn by Umma—are entirely omitted from the visual narrative.

In effect, then, the role of the visual portion of the monument is to convey on the reverse the immediate antecedents of the events and the action-through-narrative in which Eannatum played a primary role and on the obverse, a summary of that action through the icon of the state god as hero and victor. The verbal portion of the monument ex-



Fig. 16. Votive plaque from Ur, showing priest and female attendants before temple facade and deity, Early Dynastic III period, c. 2500-2350 B.C.; British Museum (118561). Photo courtesy the Trustees of the British Museum

tends further in time, both backward and forward—from the historical background of the conflict through to the consequent binding of Umma by oath, restoration of the disputed fields, and erection of the stele as witness to both event and agreement. In other words, the reliefs detail the immediate action(s), while the text emphasizes the longer-range antecedents and consequences.⁵⁵

In fact, the text and the imagery of the Stele of the Vultures come from two very different traditions. The text derives from a combination of known celebratory proclamations and legalistic documents that include background, current intervention, resolution, and proscriptions. The literary tradition is apparent in the use of certain cuneiform signs, which are otherwise restricted to poetic usage, while the legalistic tradition is reflected in the wording of oaths and sanctions.⁵⁶ However the imagery is relatively new, if we may judge from extant artifacts. It has developed out of a visual tradition of representing sequences surrounding, or culminating in, a single event. However, the stacking of registers that can be read both horizontally, as narrative of a single episode, and vertically, as a sequence of several events, makes the stele a more complex and sophisticated phenomenon than either iconic votive plaques such as that of Ur-nanshe (fig. 15) or the single-event strip narrative of the “Standard of Ur” (figs. 13 and 14) that preceded it by only some forty years.

We have before us, then, a situation very different from that described by Kurt Weitzmann, in which imagery may be used to “render literary content.”⁵⁷ On the Stele of the

Vultures, the literary and visual trajectories meet, but are not yet either truly parallel or identical in structure and content. The visual narrative on the Stele of the Vultures corresponds neither to Weitzmann’s “simultaneous” method, in which several actions take place within a single scene, nor to his “monoscenic” method, in which a single action is selected from a part of the story to stand for the whole. Nor does it correspond to his “cyclic” method, in which a coherent series of images represents stages within a single text.⁵⁸ It is, instead, an “autonomous narrative” method, if we may call it that, in which the figural representation on the stele has its own logic of organization and emphasis quite distinct from that of the text.

In fact, text and imagery differ not only in content but also in intent: the text serving the legal case of the legitimacy of Lagash’s claims over Umma and the Gu’eden at the highest (literate) levels, its audience both internal and external; the visual portion addressed more to an internal (not necessarily literate) audience, its message related to the hierarchy and power of the state itself.

The Stele

The preceding discussion of the text gives rise to the second contextual point, the nature of the stele as monument; that is, as the vehicle by which this particular text and imagery were carried.

The Sumerian word translated here as “stele”—NA-RÚ-A—is often preceded by the determinative, which identifies the noun in the class of “stone.” RÚ is the reading for the verb root DÛ, “to erect.” Thus NA-RÚ-A was understood in antiquity as a freestanding stone monument or marker, the size of which could vary considerably. The term also occurs in Akkadian (*narû*) as a Sumerian loan word designating a stone monument inscribed with laws and regulations, a stone monument used as a boundary marker in situ, or a memorial monument set up by a king.⁵⁹

At least one earlier stele is referred to by Eannatum, and again by his nephew Enmetena, and that is the original stele erected by Mesalim, king of Kish, some time within the Early Dynastic II period, c. 2700 B.C., when the proper boundary between Umma and Lagash was first adjudicated.⁶⁰ This stele would therefore have belonged to the second category of boundary markers in situ.

The question of where the Stele of the Vultures was originally intended to have been erected arises from several ambiguities in the text of the stele itself and from other textual references. Although the excavated fragments were found at the site of ancient Girsu, they were dispersed over



Fig. 17. Boundary/land-grant stele, Early Dynastic I period, c. 3000 B.C. Limestone; said to be from the area of Umma; The Metropolitan Museum of Art (58:29). Photo courtesy The Metropolitan Museum of Art

a rather wide area; it could be argued, therefore, that this was the secondary, and not the primary, location. At least three possibilities must be considered: an original location at the border, alongside the original stele of Mesalim; a location in the E.mah, a temple at Girsu dedicated to the goddess Nanshe; and a location within the temple precinct of Ningirsu.

Arguments for the first possibility are based on mention in the text of the stele and on two virtually identical clay cones of Enmetena that Eannatum, after his temporary resolution of the conflict, not only reestablished the border and restored the original stele of Mesalim, but also erected his own stele at the site.⁶¹ In fact, Perkins goes so far as to assume that the Stele of the Vultures is that very stele, without reference at all to the inconsistency of its findspot.⁶² Arguing against this, however, are the size of and complex decoration lavished upon the stele, which are more in keeping with stelae of later periods set up in urban temple compounds than with the smaller and more schematic land-grant boundary stelae, as for example, fig. 17.⁶³ An additional problem exists: why and when the monument would have been moved to Girsu, where it was discovered. Further evidence may be added from Cooper's restoration of an Eannatum text from two previously known fragments.

If Cooper's collation is correct, the name of the boundary stele set up by Eannatum has been preserved and is unrelated to the name given on the Stele of the Vultures.⁶⁴

Arguments for the second possibility come from a broken reference in the text of the Stele of the Vultures, in which we are told that Eannatum set up something in the E.mah, the temple of Nanshe.⁶⁵ Although the word "stele" has been restored here by Steible, in fact it is not to be found in the text, so that the missing noun could be almost anything.⁶⁶ Nor does the temple of Nanshe make any contextual sense for the Stele of the Vultures, dominated as it is by the figure of Ningirsu and containing no significant reference to the goddess Nanshe.

In favor of the third possibility, that the stele was originally set up in the temple precinct of Ningirsu, are the following: first, the distribution of five of the six excavated fragments on or around Tell "K" at Girsu, a low mound within the city on which the main temple to Ningirsu was situated; second, the example of later rulers setting up stelae in temples (as with the stele of Ur-nammu at Ur in the Neo-Sumerian period, c. 2150 B.C.); and third, the dedicatory references within the text, not only to Ningirsu, but also to the erection of the stele.

The most complete reference occurs at the very end, a band of fourteen separate cases set apart, almost as a label summarizing the whole object. It is worth quoting in its entirety, as it gives a very real sense of how the Sumerians conceived of the monument:

The stele,
its name
is not a man's name; it [its name] is:
"Ningirsu,
Lord, Crown of Lumma,
is the life of the Pirig-eden Canal."
The stele
of the Gu'eden—
beloved field
of Ningirsu
[which] Eannatum
for Ningirsu
returned to his [the god's] hand—
he [Eannatum] erected it.⁶⁷

Thus, the stele is dedicated to Ningirsu, is named for Ningirsu, makes reference to the main canal watering the disputed Gu'eden, and is erected for the god. In addition, I would argue that the obverse is carved with a monumental figure of Ningirsu as the icon of victory over Umma. All this, plus the findspots of the major fragments, strongly suggests that the stele originally stood as both testimony

and votive in the god's sanctuary.

The situation of the Stele of the Vultures would seem to correspond closely to the role of the royal stele as described in a later (Assyrian) version of the Cuthaeen legend of Naram-Sin, king of the Akkadian dynasty, c. 2290 B.C., in which the king speaks the following words:

I have . . . inscribed a stele for thee [a future king] and in Cutha, in the E.meslam [a temple], in the shrine of Nergal [a god not unlike Ningirsu in attributes], I have deposited it for thee. Read this document and listen to the words thereof.⁶⁸

The same text later resumes: "Let wise scribes read aloud thy stele"; while an earlier ruler is described as one who "did not write on a stele and leave it (for posterity)."⁶⁹

From these brief references, much can be understood about the function of the Akkadian *narû*. I would argue that this is relevant for the Early Dynastic stele as well. It was not merely intended as a commemorative monument; it was rather meant to be a living testimonial witness to the historicity of the events and the legitimacy of the legal terms (restoration of fields and reconstitution of the border) that it recorded. This would fit closely with Pratt's definition of the "display text" with which we matched the Stele of the Vultures above: that is, a text intended not only as a record of events, but also as a (verbal) performance, designed with audience in mind, in which support is elicited for the particular view held, and the event(s) described is intended to be morally and/or contractually kept alive.⁷⁰ The stele functioned, then, not only as a witness to events but also as a witness to the concluding agreement and to the consequences that would result were Umma to break its oaths. It would have been seen as an active agent in ensuring and enforcing, by virtue of its very existence, the conditions described on it, at the same time that it celebrated the power of those who were successful in bringing the present situation about: the *ensí*, Eannatum, and the city god, Ningirsu.

To borrow Eco's term, which Richard Brilliant has equally applied to the Column of Trajan, the stele is itself an "iconogram."⁷¹ A portion of its message is conveyed simply by belonging to a particular typological class: the NA-RÚ-A. We must therefore take into account not only the literal and rhetorical content of the text and imagery, but also the rhetorical value of the stele as a public monument—especially if it was meant to be preserved and read by successive generations.

The Historical Context

As Barbara Herrnstein-Smith has noted, "the fact that something is true is never a sufficient reason for saying (or depicting) it."⁷² Rather, every narrative is produced and experienced under certain social conditions; and every narrator or author (in this case, Eannatum) must have some interest in relating (or displaying) it. It has been suggested above that the very nature of the stele as a monument would have helped direct its audience to the intended response. But that response can only be reconstructed in the context of the larger historical picture of Lagash and the other city-states of southern Mesopotamia in the late Early Dynastic period.

The Early Dynastic period marks the full consolidation of the process of urbanization begun in the preceding Uruk period (c. 3500 B.C.). By the Early Dynastic III (c. 2500-2350), southern Mesopotamia was divided into a series of polities, each consisting of at least one major urban center that exercised control over surrounding tracts of agricultural and range lands as well as water sources.⁷³ Of these polities, Lagash was one of the most important. Thanks to the extensive archive excavated at its major satellite city of Girsu, it is also the only state from which sufficient documentation has been preserved to permit reconstruction of a history of the period and a profile of the workings of a city-state.⁷⁴

The state consisted of Lagash (modern al-Hiba) and two satellites, Girsu (Tello) and Nina (Surgul).⁷⁵ The total area controlled by Lagash in the Early Dynasty III period is estimated at 1,160 square miles,⁷⁶ sustaining a population of some 50,000 free men. At least twenty temples are attested within the state, of which one of the most prominent was the temple of Ningirsu at Girsu.⁷⁷ There is evidence that these temples were principal landowners with vast holdings, so that when Eannatum calls the Gu'eden the "beloved field of Ningirsu," this may well have been literally true.

Falkenstein has argued that all the major city-states of the period were more or less equal in size and similarly organized.⁷⁸ Each was politically autonomous and was ruled by an individual designated either by the title *lugal* (king; literally, great man) or *ensí* (city ruler, governor).⁷⁹ It is clear from textual references that at the beginning of the Early Dynastic period, rulers were considered appointees of the local deity. By the end of the period, however, the rulers had begun increasingly to usurp lands and prerogatives formerly held by the temple estates.⁸⁰

The end of the period was also marked by the expansion of centralized urban polities. Buffer zones of potentially rich but undeveloped land that had separated the rings of irri-

gated, agricultural fields surrounding the cities from those of neighboring states had been reduced to nothing. This shrinkage accounts for the struggles between Umma and Lagash, which were largely due to competition over the Gu'eden, the tract of fields and grazing lands along their twenty-eight-mile common border.⁸¹ The conflict persisted for almost two centuries, through the reigns of the six successive kings of the hereditary dynasty of Lagash during the Early Dynastic III period (including those of its founder, Ur-nanshe, his grandson Eannatum, and Eannatum's successors—his brother, Eannatum I, and his nephew, Enmetena); it then continued into the seventh and last reign of the period, that of the probable usurper, Uruinimgina.⁸²

The basis of this conflict was proprietary: who was entitled to exploit and derive wealth from the yield of this land? Thus, in the Stele of the Vultures text (cols. 10:14-11:30), Eannatum does not claim all of the land that, he declares, actually belonged to Ningirsu; he leaves a portion on the side of Umma. But Umma is expected to pay a percentage of the yield as rent. It is Umma's failure to acknowledge the debt and pay rent that brings about the subsequent conflict under Eannatum I and Enmetena.⁸³

Underlying the issue of land tenure is the even more fundamental issue of **water rights**, without which the land is useless. The state of Lagash lay to the southeast of Umma, with Girsu approximately halfway between the two on a direct line; and the contested lands northwest of Girsu were watered by the same Euphrates canal that passed through Umma.⁸⁴ As water is a crucial resource, the upstream user in controlling the supply of downstream water would clearly have great power—power that quickly became a political weapon.⁸⁵ Thus, much of the dispute recorded on the Stele of the Vultures has to do not only with the fields, but also with the irrigation canals within the Gu'eden.⁸⁶

Although Lagash may have been dominant in the early stages of this dispute, archaeological survey data would suggest that there was a rapid growth in the density of sites and in the political importance of Umma in the late Early Dynastic period.⁸⁷ At the very end of the period, Uruinimgina of Lagash was defeated by Lugalzagesi of Umma; the capital city was plundered, and in fact never fully recovered. Girsu took over as the principal city of the state, but absolute power had already shifted elsewhere.⁸⁸ Meanwhile, Lugalzagesi went on to conquer the powerful city-state of Uruk, which had formerly been allied with Lagash, and took upon himself the title, "King of Sumer."⁸⁹ By the end of the period events pointed firmly toward the establishment of the hegemonic nation-state achieved in the succeeding Akkadian period.

It remains to be demonstrated how this historical back-

ground animates our view of Eannatum and the Stele of the Vultures. We now see Eannatum as the ruler of one of the predominant states of Mesopotamia in the Early Dynastic period. The conflict with Umma, as recorded on the stele, is not merely one event among many but rather the primary external concern of the state at the time. The issues involved—control over land and water—were essential to the continued prosperity and well-being, if not autonomy, of the state.

The Early Dynastic period was also the time in which the institution of kingship became fully established; by the end of the period in particular, the rulers had amassed considerable power and privileges. As Hallo has pointed out, textual references to the ruler—sired by a chief god, suckled by a goddess, named and granted attributes by other deities—constitute an elaborate means of stressing the legitimacy of royal power.⁹⁰ These are the very claims made by Eannatum in the text of the Stele of the Vultures and, together with Eannatum's central role in the narrative, they signal the expanded role of the king. I would argue that the same message is conveyed visually by the prominent position given to the king in the pictorial narrative of the reverse. As we read from bottom to top, there would appear to have been a slight but ever-increasing change in scale, so that the upper figure is larger than the figure reconstructed at the bottom; at the same time, the ruler progresses from the margin to the exact center. I would suggest that this movement is not merely an artifact of compositional and narrative demands, but is rather a significant statement of **the structural development of kingship as an institution** in the late Early Dynastic period.

In the light of this political development, the visual and narrative tension between the obverse and the reverse of the Stele of the Vultures takes on far greater significance. We are not yet at a point where the king has assumed power over a national polity, nor has he actually declared himself a god, as in the Akkadian period.⁹¹ But the seeds of that subsequent development are present, represented on the stele as they were clearly in the political institutions of the age. Yes, Ningirsu is given full honors on the obverse, as the "icon" of the city. But at the same time, a challenge is put forth by the ruler: in the repetition of his figure and his shifting position, he, too, becomes an "iconic" figure of heroism and victory.

In short, just as the issues of land and water control raised on the stele are fundamental for the Early Dynastic period as a whole, so also is the development of the role of the ruler in the city-states of the period intertwined with the representation of Eannatum on his victory monument.

* * * * *

We are finally in a position to assess the impact of the use of historical narrative on this work in this period, and to analyze the general implications of the use of historical narrative within the history of art.

We have tried to demonstrate that the Stele of the Vultures played an active role in the ideology of the early Mesopotamian state; that it represented “not merely [a] passive reflection of the political system,”⁹² but rather a model for that system, by presenting as if given an underlying structure that itself had a powerful political agenda. We have suggested further that while the icon of the god was the traditional mode of Mesopotamian representation, the historical visual narrative introduced by Eannatum served new purposes. The latter not only told the story literally, it also served figuratively to establish the ruler as the legitimate force in the sequence of events. We have therefore imputed political ends to the introduction of narrative. These ends may not have been consciously manipulated (we will never fully recover intentionality), but the devices employed certainly were not unaffected by their times.

The principles underlying such a view were best articulated by Herrnstein-Smith when she wrote, “no narrative can be independent of a particular teller and occasion of telling, and . . . therefore every narrative has been constructed in accord with some set of . . . interests”;⁹³ and by Hayden White’s quote from Hegel: “it is the state which first presents subject-matter that is not only adapted to the prose of history, but underlies the production of history in the very process of its own being.”⁹⁴

Thus, the primary, official state message presented through the innovative use of historical narrative on the Stele of the Vultures is that of the legitimate claim of Lagash over the Gu’eden; and here we must emphasize that there are no comparable monuments from Umma of this period to give us the other side of the conflict. Despite the asserted objectivity of the verbal and visual texts, it is important to remember that the texts constitute instructed rhetoric, intended to provide witness to a very selected “truth.”

The secondary message presented through historical narrative is that of the centrality of the ruler in maintaining the state. It is our assessment that the stele would have been set up in the major temple to Ningirsu as a votive to the patron deity, who was given titular credit for the victory at the very time his authority was being eroded and his territorial prerogatives encroached upon by the secular city ruler. The god is given pride of place on the obverse; the king is on the reverse. But the challenge to the older, nominally theocratic base of the city-state is there. The hierarchy of the religious system is no longer identical with the administrative hierarchy of the state.

The visual power of the stele lies precisely in the tension between the two heros (god and king) and their two realms (mythological and historical). Yet, as we have observed, that tension—reflecting the old, “theocratic” state and the new, “dynastic” state—avoids open schism by cross-references. Ningirsu intervenes in battle; Eannatum’s power is attributed to the divine sphere.

It is particularly striking that distinct pictorial modes have been selected to represent the different conceptual realms: the iconic for the mythological world, and the narrative for the historical. It is as if the mythological were best represented by symbol and allusion, while the historical should be grounded in action and events. The historical narrative of the reverse of the stele provides a visual account of real events; but, as narrative discourse, it also lends weight to that reality, by providing it with the organizational structure that gives coherence, fullness, and closure.⁹⁵ Nevertheless, to get the complete message of the stele, one must combine the narrative with the icon, so that the antecedents to and the consequences of the specific events are alluded to and the whole intention made clear. Historical narrative in this period may thus be said to serve an end, rather than to be an end in itself; and the end it serves is the establishment of the logical basis for the resolution and the premises of the actions it records. In this respect, narrative becomes simply one code among others for a culture to exploit in the transmission of messages.⁹⁶

Located in the temple, the stele would transmit in no uncertain terms the mythic history of the city’s god, as well as the contemporary validation of that god, of the current ruler, and of the state as a whole. At the same time, it would have proclaimed the immediate legitimacy of the state’s position vis-a-vis Umma. And, carried in the historical narrative, would be the covert message of the monument: the increase in power and authority of the Early Dynastic ruler.

* * * * *

In the course of this examination of how pictorial narrative—and in particular, historical narrative—was incorporated into one early monument, a number of methodological and theoretical points have arisen, which it seems appropriate to summarize here.

First, with respect to the relationship between narrative and iconography: it would seem that the latter, as a central pursuit of the discipline of art history, constitutes a prior and necessary step in the reading of narrative, but that the two should be kept separate. The one represents a process of identification, basically descriptive (Panofsky’s iconographical analysis proper⁹⁷), the other a process of organi-

what
does this
mean?

zational analysis, of “how” as opposed to “what.”

Second, this analytic process makes clear that there is a very close relationship between narrative and structure, hence narrative analysis and structural analysis, to the degree that both attempt to lay out organizing principles. Yet, if both seek to answer the question “how”—in our case, how the imagery is organized so that it may be read—I would suggest that here, narrative analysis is a preliminary step for structural analysis, which then moves on to seek meaning in the patterns manifest in organizing principles and to answer the question “why.”

Third, it seems evident that narrative is but one representational code among several. Nothing demands that a historical battle be represented as narrated action. In ancient Egypt, for example, the motif of a smiting king was used as an icon for all military victories. Pictorial narrative is therefore selected as a mode of representation because it meets the requirements of the particular individual, period, or culture. Nevertheless, it may be said that narrative requires less prior knowledge than other sorts of codes; and that it is a particularly effective means of transmitting an ideological message, simply because it is so seductive in coercing the viewer to read along with what is given and so be brought to a desired and seemingly inexorable conclusion.

Fourth, visual narrative has properties very similar to those of verbal narrative. However, if as Bresson has demonstrated experimentally, following Piaget, competence in reading visual imagery is a skill that has its own developmental locus, separate from that of language, and if one can think through representations, not just through language,⁹⁸ then one can “make think” via representations—that is, use pictorial narrative with ideological, rhetorical aims.

Fifth and finally, in the standard communications theory diagram of sender-message-receiver, one must divide the message into at least two components: the actual information conveyed, and the extralinguistic or extravisual referent that is part of the subtext. The ideological message is often built into the structure of how the message is conveyed, rather than what the message contains.

* * * * *

Writing in 1951 about the sculpture of the ancient Near East, Henrietta Groenewegen-Frankfort stated:

The function of a monument is to penetrate the impermanent, to stress the transcended significance of human action. It requires both symbolic statement and factual representation—the tension between the ephemeral and the everlasting.⁹⁹

I would perhaps substitute the word “temporal” or “immediate” for “ephemeral”; but what Groenewegen-Frankfort has captured so well is the separation of the two domains, the need to combine them, and the tension that remains. All this we have tried to describe for the Stele of the Vultures, in the use of god and king, obverse and reverse, myth and history, icon and narrative on a major public monument.

But what we have also stressed are the *affective*, as opposed to the merely *reflective*, properties of the monument—the fact that monuments *constitute* the objects they represent as much as they mirror them, and are thus active agents in projecting particular responses in reception.¹⁰⁰

Public monuments, such as the Stele of the Vultures, were not neutral images. The power and awe-inspiring aspects of these monuments can be partially reconstructed from the enormous energy it took for the biblical world to shift away from visual foci in divine images and idols, a move that Northrop Frye has called truly revolutionary.¹⁰¹

Through the innovative use of pictorial narrative, the Stele of the Vultures engages both history and its audience. The monument stands at the beginning of a long line of historical narratives in the history of art. There are many gaps between the Stele of the Vultures (c. 2460 B.C.) and the fully formed historical narratives of Assyrian reliefs (c. 875 B.C.); but the linkages exist. And further linkages can be demonstrated to the classical and Renaissance worlds, as the visual arts strove to achieve first competence and then perfection in the representation of narrative.¹⁰² But at these initial stages, narrative is still balanced against the icon, as the historical is balanced against the mythological, and even, in many ways, as the image is balanced against the accompanying text. In the end, the Stele of the Vultures emerges as a monument with a complex message, and pictorial narrative but one of several codes activated to convey that message.

Acknowledgments

This study could never have been written without the help of a number of individuals. Two graduate students in art history at the University of Pennsylvania—Benjamin Kessler and particularly Michelle Marcus—laid the groundwork in their initial explorations of this monument in seminars on the art of ancient Mesopotamia. Jerry Cooper's recent study of the Lagash-Umma border conflict was essential; and I have profited from his comments on many of my ideas. Hermann Behrens patiently took me through the initial steps of the study of Sumerian in 1983-1984 and read with me the difficult text of the Stele of the Vultures. Without that background, and the timely publication of his joint effort with Horst Steible, I could not have dealt with any of the questions of text and image explored here. Renata Holod has been the source of several important bibliographical references and stimulating discussion on questions of visual narrative; Robert C. Hunt has provided valuable perspective on questions of irrigation and the relationship between land and politics. I am grateful also for the thoughtful comments of Hans Güterbock, Piotr Steinkeller, and Tsvi Abusch upon a reading of the manuscript—many of which I have incorporated into the final version.

The reconstruction drawings are also the result of many individuals' efforts. The figures on the obverse owe most to the work of Marie-Thérèse Barrelet; modifications in the chariots, both front and back, to the subsequent comments of Mary A. Littauer and J. Crouwel. On the reverse, the restored king's figure in the lowest register and the seated figure in the second register from bottom are the products of an unpublished seminar paper by Michelle Marcus, used with her generous permission. Some details, such as the verification of a lion's head on the several eagle bodies of the obverse, and the second figure behind the king in his chariot on the reverse, were determined in direct examination of the stele in the company of Agnès Spycket, who kindly made the closed Near Eastern galleries in the Louvre accessible to me and was enormously helpful in the procurement of photographs for publication. Elizabeth Simpson did a most remarkable job on the reconstruction drawings. Refinements such as the most logical position of arms, proportions of whole figures, and disposition of draft animals are frequently the result of her keen eye and mind, and occasionally of our fruitful collaboration. I have been in close touch with all of the above individuals, and am most grateful for their contributions.

NOTES

1. Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg, *The Nature of Narrative* (London, 1966), 4.
2. Hayden White, "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality," in *On Narrative*, ed. W.J.T. Mitchell (Chicago, 1981), 1.
3. Gérard Genette, "Boundaries of Narrative," *New Literary History* 8 (1976), 8.
4. Irene J. Winter, "Royal Rhetoric and the Development of Historical Narrative in Neo-Assyrian Reliefs," *Studies in Visual Communication* 7 (1981), 2.
5. How lucky we are, for example, that Euphronios tells us his dying warrior is Sarpedon on the Metropolitan Museum krater, so we do not have to waste scholarly energy arguing whether or why it is not the dead Achilles or the suicidal Ajax instead.
6. Ann Perkins, "Narration in Babylonian Art," *American Journal of Archaeology* 61 (1957), 55.
7. White, "The Value of Narrativity," 3; Genette, "Boundaries of Narrative," 8.
8. Perkins, "Narration," 55.
9. Winter, "Royal Rhetoric," 31.
10. E. de Sarzec, *Découvertes en Chaldée II: Epigraphie et planches* (Paris, 1884-1912), pls. 3, 3 bis, 4, 4 bis, 4 ter.
11. Northrop Frye, "History and Myth in the Bible," in *The Literature of Fact*, ed. A. Fletcher (New York, 1976), 1-19 and especially 7-11.
12. Leon Heuzey, "La Stèle des Vautours," *Gazette archéologique* (1884), 164-180 and 193-203; Andre Parrot, *Tello, Vingt campagnes de fouilles* (Paris, 1948) 95; Louvre, AO 50 + 2436-2438. That Tello, often identified as Lagash in the early literature, is actually ancient Girsu has been demonstrated in more recent excavations: cf. Donald P. Hansen, "Al-Hiba, 1968-9: A preliminary report," *Artibus Asiae* 32 (1970), 244.
13. Parrot, *Tello*, 95; piece was British Museum 23580, now Louvre AO 16109.
14. See Leon Heuzey and François Thureau-Dangin, *Restitution matérielle de la Stèle des Vautours* (Paris, 1909), especially pls. I, II. A recent study by Marie-Thérèse Barrelet, "Peut-on remettre en question la restitution matérielle de la Stèle des Vautours?" *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 29 (1970), 233-258, has argued that the lowest register on each side might be compressed a bit, but not more than 10-15 cm in all. On the basis of our restoration drawing, presented here, this would seem to be highly desirable from the point of view of scale and proportion in relation to the upper registers, especially for the reverse.
15. The text was originally read and published by Thureau-Dangin, see Heuzey and Thureau-Dangin, *Restitution matérielle*, 42-63, and until recently had not been fully restudied. Thorkild Jacobsen published a new reading, heavily restored for the missing portions, of the first ten columns in 1976: "Translation of the Stele of the Vultures, Cols. I-X," in *Samuel Noah Kramer Anniversary Volume* (Alter Orient und Altes Testament 25), ed. Barry N. Eichler (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1976), 247-259. See now, however, full edition in Horst Steible and Hermann Behrens, *Die altsumerischen Bau- und Weihinschriften, Teil I: Inschriften aus 'Lagas'* (Wiesbaden, 1982), 120-145; and, based upon that, an English translation by Jerrold S. Cooper, in *Reconstructing History from Ancient Inscriptions: The Lagash-Umma Border Conflict* (Sources from the Ancient Near East, vol. 2, fascicle 1) (Malibu, 1983), 45-47.
16. As opposed to Henri Frankfort, *The Art and Architecture of the Ancient Orient*, 4th ed. rev. (New York, 1977), 71; Henrietta Groenewegen-Frankfort, *Arrest and Movement: An Essay on Space and Time in the Representational Art of the Ancient Near East* (London, 1951), 158; and Perkins, "Narration," 58—all of whom call it the reverse. But that cannot be, as the inscription begins on this side, and the text breaks at the bottom, to continue on the other side. Further arguments in structure will be presented below to corroborate this visually.
17. The net is a well-known literary topos, clearly reflecting actual battle practices, as Marduk in a late version of the Creation epic catches his adversary Tiamat in a net (see James S. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 3rd ed. (Princeton, 1969), 67. Furthermore, in the second half of the inscription on the stele itself, the

vanquished ruler of Umma is made to swear by the "battlenets" of various gods that he will not transgress the reestablished border (compare below).

18. In the present state of preservation of the stele and in recent photographs, this head is broken, and it has been questioned whether or not it was originally a lion's head or simply a normal eagle's head. I have checked the stele, and can clearly see at both top and bottom the double-curved line that would have been the outline of a leonine muzzle. In addition, Agnès Spycket of the Département des antiquités orientales, Musée du Louvre, who kindly made the stele accessible to me, pointed out that the stele had unfortunately suffered damage since its excavation. When first brought to the Louvre, more of the main figure's eye and brow, as well as more of the head of this emblem, were preserved than at present. On a postcard of c. 1910 shown me by Mlle. Spycket, the lion head of the bird held in hand is clearly visible; hence our reconstruction in the present drawing, fig. 3. I believe that the same outline of a lion's head is apparent upon examination of the emblem atop a standard at the far left of this register; however, here it is possible that reference is to the šir-bur bird (raven?) sometimes associated with the goddess Ninhursag.

19. Jean Nougayrol, "Ningirsu, vainqueur de Zu," *Revue assyriologique* 46 (1952), 87-97. See also, Ilse Führ-Jaepelt, *Materialien zur Ikonographie des Löwenadlers Imdugud-Anzu* (Munich, 1972); B. Husk, *Der Mythenadler Anzu in Literatur und Vorstellung des alten Mesopotamien* (Buda-pest, 1975).

20. See, for example, Perkins, who calls him Eannatum ("Narration," 58), vs. Frankfort, who calls him Ningirsu (*Art and Architecture*, 158), as does Anton Moortgat, *The Art of Ancient Mesopotamia* (London and New York, 1969), 63.

21. Frankfort, *Art and Architecture*, fig. 70; Moortgat, *Ancient Mesopotamia*, figs. 113, 117.

22. See, for example, Henri Frankfort, *Cylinder Seals* (London, 1939), pls. XVIII, XX, XXV; and Barrelet, "Peut-on remettre . . . ?" 244.

23. See Moortgat, *Ancient Mesopotamia*, figs. 114, 115: votive tablet and vessel fragment, also from Tello, the latter inscribed by Enmetena, nephew of Eannatum and a later ruler of Lagash (compare Steible and Behrens, *Bau- und Weihinschriften*, 249 for text).

24. Nougayrol, "Ningirsu," lines 73 ff.

25. Frankfort, *Art and Architecture*, fig. 63.

26. Adam Falkenstein, *Inschriften Gudeas von Lagash I: Einleitung* [Analecta Orientalia 30] (Rome, 1966), 104-105.

27. See on this the excellent arguments for restoration on which our drawing is based, in Barrelet, "Peut-on remettre . . . ?" 245-249, 249-254 and figs. 10a, 10b. For the draft animals, we have followed the subsequent suggestion of Mary A. Littauer and Jost Crouwel, "The Vulture Stela and an Early Type of Two-wheeled Vehicle," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 32 (1973), 324-329, that they must be harnessed in pairs. While this reconstruction remains problematic, it is not inconsistent with the attested character of the god. In a later, Neo-Assyrian version of the myth of the Anzu, when Ningirsu of the Sumerians has been assimilated with Ninurta of the Assyrians, we are also told that the god's chariot was decorated with emblems of his victories (compare Erica Reiner, "Le char de Ninurta et le prologue du mythe de Zu," *Revue assyriologique* 51 (1957), 109, and Jerrold S. Cooper, *The Return of Ninurta to Nippur: An-gim dīm-ma* [Analecta Orientalia 52] (Rome, 1978), 141-154 and especially chart, 143), which would be quite consistent with having the *anzu* emblem and the lion represented here upon the chariot box and yoke pole.

28. On both the first and second registers, the soldiers visible on the reverse are a continuation in an unbroken line of figures beginning on the shallow left side (11 cm thick). Allowing for missing figures, with those on the side we can account for twelve figures in each register behind the king; thus, an equal number in each register, despite the apparent inequity of what is visible on the reverse face alone.

29. The equids and the chariot box have been restored on the basis of other Early Dynastic period representations of chariots and draft animals—for example, on the Standard of Ur, fig. 13 (see notes on this in Littauer and Crouwel, "The Vulture Stela," 325-328). The ridge pole is less curved than that on the chariot of the obverse, as if attached to taller animals and aimed directly at their necks. This would further fit the restoration of equids here (ass or onager), and possibly also support the argument for different (mythological?) animals on the obverse.

30. Note also that what seems to be an arm holding a goad is visible behind the king in the chariot box. This would signify a second passenger in the vehicle, not unlike the additional figures shown on the running boards of chariots on the Standard of Ur, fig. 13.

31. Written at the University of Pennsylvania, January 1982.

32. See Moortgat, *Ancient Mesopotamia*, figs. 114, 116: stele with libation to seated goddess Ninhursag, from Tello, and plaque with libation poured to seated male god (Nanna?), from the *giparu* at Ur.

33. Compare with this, Moortgat, *Ancient Mesopotamia*, figs. 114, 116, cited above, n. 32.

34. For example, on the plaque of Ur-nanshe, our fig. 15, and on the Stele of Ur-nammu in the Ur III period, c. 2100 B.C. (Moortgat, *Ancient Mesopotamia*, fig. 194).

35. Frankfort, *Art and Architecture*, 71; Moortgat, *Ancient Mesopotamia*, 43.

36. See Moortgat, *Ancient Mesopotamia*, figs. 85, 87, 88, 109, 111, 112. See also the seated statue of Dudu, priest of Ningirsu under Enmetena, whose body, flounced skirt, and seated posture are the model for our reconstruction figure: Eva Strommenger, *500 Years of the Art of Mesopotamia* (New York, 1964), fig. 86.

37. Perkins, "Narration," 58; Frankfort, *Art and Architecture*, 71; Donald P. Hansen, "Frühsumerische und frühdynastische Flachbildkunst," in *Propyläen Kunstgeschichte*, vol. 14, ed. W. Orthmann (Berlin, 1979), 189.

38. In brief, I would argue on typological grounds that this is not a cartouche identifying the adjacent figure (as is the case with labels for the figure of Eannatum on the reverse, registers one and two, see fig. 11); rather, it is part of the main body of the text itself (see fig. 12). Mention of the king of Kish in this place may be understood in the light of another text, an inscription on a stone mortar dedicated by Eannatum (Steible and Behrens, *Bau- und Weihinschriften*, 174-175), where the reference is part of a string of protective curses that traditionally end texts on important monuments. It is precisely that part of the Stele of the Vultures that has been lost, but we may hypothesize that the text would most likely have ended with just such curses against the destruction of the monument, and then a final citation of Eannatum, his titles, and his special relationship with/dedication to the god Ningirsu.

39. Irene J. Winter, "The Warka Vase: Structure of Art and Structure of Society in Early Urban Mesopotamia," paper presented to the American Oriental Society, Baltimore, 1983. For the image, see Moortgat, *Ancient Mesopotamia*, figs. 19-21.

40. It has even been suggested that this represents Lagash burying its own dead (Frankfort, *Art and Architecture*, 71), though this seems to me a most unwarranted supposition not at all consistent with Mesopotamian traditions, in which only the enemy are ever shown dead.

41. See Leo Oppenheim, *The Interpretation of Dreams in the Ancient Near East* (Philadelphia, 1956), particularly pages 185-189 dealing with "message dreams."

42. Oppenheim, *Interpretation of Dreams*, 211, 245.

43. Even if I am wrong about the identification of the enemy in the lower register and it is the king of Kish (see above, n. 38), it should be noted that in the dream/oracle of our text (Steible and Behrens, *Bau- und Weihinschriften*, 125: col. 7, lines 1-3) there is an enigmatic reference: "As is Umma, so is Kish, running about. . . ."

44. From de Sarzec, *Découvertes*, 357-358, to Hansen, "Frühsumerische. . . . Flachbildkunst," 181.

45. Moortgat, *Ancient Mesopotamia*, 43.

46. Groenewegen-Frankfort, *Arrest and Movement*, 158.

47. Meyer Schapiro, "On Some Problems in the Semiotics of Visual Art: Field and Vehicle in Image-Signs," *Semiotica* 1 (1969), 234-236.

48. Svetlana Alpers, "Describe or Narrate? A Problem in Realistic Representation," *New Literary History* 8 (1976), 16.

49. Richard Brilliant, *Visual Narratives: Storytelling in Etruscan and Roman Art* (Ithaca and London, 1984), 23-26.

50. A not unusual phenomenon: see Scholes and Kellog, *Nature of Narrative*, 135. In this, as well as in the role of repetition in creating the "icon" of the king, I am indebted to Richard Brilliant's discussion of the repetition of the figure of Trajan on his column (*Visual Narratives*, 115-

116), and to Wesley Trimpf's discussion of Aristotle's comments on the repetition of personal names in public oratory so that people will think the individual more significant ("The Meaning of Horace's *Ut Pictura Poesis*," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 36 [1973], 4).

51. François Thureau-Dangin, *Die sumerischen und akkadischen Königsinschriften* (Leipzig, 1907), and again in Heuzey and Thureau-Dangin, *Restitution matérielle*.

52. Steible and Behrens, *Bau- und Weihinschriften*, 120-145, and Cooper, *Reconstructing History*, 45-48.

53. Note that, if anything, this makes all the more clear the identification of these two figures on the obverse of the stele, as argued above.

54. Mary Louise Pratt, *Toward a Speech Act Theory of Literary Discourse* (Bloomington, 1977), 44-45, as cited in Marilyn R. Waldman, *Toward a Theory of Historical Narrative: A Case Study in Perso-Islamicate Historiography* (Columbus, 1980), 18-20. Pratt has based her work upon that of William Labov, *Language in the Inner City* (Philadelphia, 1976), and Labov and J. Waletzky, "Narrative Analysis: Oral Versions of Personal Experience," in *Essays on the Verbal and Visual Arts* [Proceedings of the 1966 Annual Spring Meeting of the American Ethnological Society] (Seattle, 1967).

55. Only by allusion may the obverse—with its representation of Ningirsu—be said to evoke visually missing portions of the written text: by reference to the god who was the progenitor of Eannatum, and by reference to his battle net, which recalls those of the high gods upon which the vanquished ruler of Umma takes his oaths after losing the battle to Lagash. For a complete discussion of these oaths, and the tradition surrounding them, see Dietz Otto Edzard, "Die Eide in der 'Geierstele' des Eannatum von Lagash," *Assyriological Studies* 20 (1975), 64-68.

56. Personal communication on the use of signs from Hermann Behrens, Babylonian Section, The University Museum, Philadelphia; on the legal tradition from Piotr Steinkeller, Harvard University.

57. Kurt Weitzmann, *Illustration in Roll and Codex: A Study of the Origin and Method of Text Illustration* (Princeton, 1970), 1.

58. Weitzmann, *Roll and Codex*, 13-14, 14-17, 17-33, respectively.

59. See "narû," in the *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary* "N" (Chicago, 1980), 364-367.

60. Steible and Behrens, *Bau- und Weihinschriften*, 158 (Eannatum text 6, col. 1:6-7); 177 (Eannatum text 63, col. 2:6-7); 230 (Enmetena texts 28, 29, col. 1:8-12). See also Cooper, *Reconstructing History*, 49-50. Cooper will publish a more detailed analysis of these texts in the forthcoming *Sumerian and Akkadian Royal Inscriptions, Volume I: Pre-Sargonic Inscriptions* [American Oriental Society Translation Series], the manuscript of which he has kindly made available to me. There he points out (MS, 48) that there may have been at least three additional stelae set up at the border, or at a new border more favorable to Umma, by the ruler of Umma after the destruction of Mesalim's stele (based upon Eannatum text 6, cols. 3:9-18 and 4:1, Steible and Behrens, in the work cited, 159-160). The original stele of Mesalim must have contained a lengthy inscription recounting the terms of the establishment of the original border, enumerating the fields and canals on either side (as the Stele of the Vultures includes a long list of the fields "returned to Ningirsu" by Eannatum—Steible and Behrens, in the work cited, 128-129 [Eannatum text 1, cols. 14, 15-16:11]). The smashing of the monument of Mesalim by the ruler of Umma as he crossed over the border at the time of Ur-nanshe, grandfather of Eannatum, must have been an act of political defiance of the terms set forth on the stele. Similarly, when Urlumma of Umma moved across the border against Enannatum I, brother and successor of Eannatum, he set fire to the stelae marking the boundary—presumably that of Eannatum and the earlier, restored one of Mesalim (Steible and Behrens, in the work cited, 236-237 [Enmetena text 28, col. 3:36-38]).

61. Steible and Behrens, *Bau- und Weihinschriften*, 126-127 (Eannatum text 1, cols. 10:14-11:4) and 234 (Enmetena text 28, col. 2:4-8). The Stele of the Vultures is very explicit: Eannatum defeated Umma, and set the new border. A certain amount of the disputed territory he left on the side of Umma, and at that place he set up a stele (emphasis ours).

62. Perkins, "Narration," 57.

63. For example, the Stele of Ur-nammu, set up in the temple precinct of the moon god, Nanna at Ur (see Moortgat, *Ancient Mesopotamia*, fig. 194).

64. Cooper, *Reconstructing History*, 27. He has joined two texts, one of Eannatum and one formerly believed to date to Enmetena, and suggested both belong to the reign of Eannatum. With that join, the name of the boundary stele can be reconstructed as "Ningirsu is the lord eternally exalted in the Abzu." Cooper has noted (27, n. 13) that this would then have nothing to do with the name of the Stele of the Vultures, which is preserved on the stele itself as, "Ningirsu, lord, crown of Lumma, is the life of the Pirig-eden canal" (see complete portion of the Stele of the Vultures text, below).

65. Steible and Behrens, *Bau- und Weihinschriften*, 128: cols. 12:21-13:2.

66. The word "stele" has been restored here by Steible, but in fact it is not to be found in the inscription. The sign used for the verb, "to erect" (RÚ), is the same sign as that used in other contexts for the verb, "to build" (DÜ); so that its translation is dependant upon the noun, which in this case, we do not know. Thus the missing noun could be anything that Eannatum either erected or built within the temple compound of Nanshe, and there is no reason to associate this reference with our stele.

67. Steible and Behrens, *Bau- und Weihinschriften*, 144-145 (Eannatum text 1, reverse col. 10, underschrift: 23-37). This band of inscription is separated from the end of column 10 proper by a marked space; the enclosing "cases" for signs are slightly narrower than those for the rest of the text. It therefore was clearly meant to stand apart, almost as a colophon labeling the object, rather than as a part of the narrative text.

68. Oliver R. Gurney, "The Sultantepe Tablets (cont'd)," *Anatolian Studies* 5 (1955), 106: lines 149-153.

69. Gurney, "Sultantepe Tablets," 108, line 173, 98, line 1.

70. Pratt, *Toward a Speech Act Theory*, 136, 138-139.

71. Umberto Eco, *Theory of Semiotics*, as cited by Brilliant, *Visual Narratives*, 96.

72. "Afterthoughts on Narrative, II: Narrative Versions, Narrative Theories," in *On Narrative*, ed. W.J.T. Mitchell (Chicago, 1981), 229, n. 24.

73. See Robert McC. Adams, *Heartland of Cities: Surveys of Ancient Settlement and Land Use in the Central Floodplain of the Euphrates* (Chicago and London, 1981), 137, showing a chart indicating a large rise in the number and size of sites in the Early Dynastic III period—78% of which were large urban centers of more than 40 hectares. See also, Adams and Hans J. Nissen, *The Uruk Countryside: The Natural Setting of Urban Societies* (Chicago and London, 1972), 17, which also gives a chart marking a substantial rise of larger sites and a decrease of smaller ones in the Early Dynastic II/III periods.

74. Dietz Otto Edzard, "The Early Dynastic Period," in *The Near East: The Early Civilizations* [Delacorte World History, vol. II], eds. Jean Bottero, Elena Cassin and Jean Vercoutter (New York, 1967), 52-90.

75. Lagash/al-Hiba has been excavated by Donald P. Hansen (see n. 2); Nina/Surgul has not to date been excavated.

76. See discussions by Adam Falkenstein, *The Sumerian Temple City* [Sources and Monographs in History: Ancient Near East I/1], trans. Maria deJ. Ellis (Malibu, 1974), 6; and Igor M. Diakonoff, *Structure of Society and State in Early Dynastic Sumer* [Sources and Monographs in History: Ancient Near East I/3] (Malibu, 1974), 6-7.

77. Edzard, "The Early Dynastic Period," 76; Diakonoff, *Structure of Society*, 6.

78. Falkenstein, *Sumerian Temple City*, 16.

79. Edzard, "The Early Dynastic Period," 70-75.

80. William W. Hallo, *The Ancient Near East: A History* (New York, 1971), 49; Edzard, "The Early Dynastic Period," 82, 88; and see especially the primary text, known as the "Reforms of Uruinimgina," last king of Lagash in the Early Dynastic Period, in which direct reference is made to earlier practice: Steible and Behrens, *Bau- und Weihinschriften*, 313-324 (Uruinimgina text 6), and Cooper, *Reconstructing History*, 51.

81. Adams, *Heartland*, 134; and Giovanni Pettinato, "Il conflitto tras Lagash ed Umma per la 'frontiera divina' e la sua soluzione durante la terza dinastia di Ur," *Mesopotamia* 5-6 (1970-1971), 281-320.

82. This has been the subject of a number of studies; see Cooper, *Reconstructing History*, for the present view and full bibliography; see also Edzard, "The Early Dynastic Period," 80-84, for summary.

83. See Steible and Behrens, *Bau- und Weihinschriften*, 198-202, 230-245.
84. See map, in Adams, *Heartland*, 157, fig. 28.
85. Robert McC. Adams, "Die Rolle des Bewässerungsbodenbaus bei der Entwicklung von Institutionen in der altmesopotamischen Gesellschaft," in *Produktivkräfte und Gesellschaftsformationen in vorkapitalistischer Zeit*, ed. J. Herrmann and I. Sellnow (Berlin, 1982), 119-140; Etienne de Vaumas, "L'écoulement des eaux en Mesopotamie et la provenance des eaux de Tello," *Iraq* 27 (1965), 81-99.
86. See Steible and Behrens, *Bau- und Weihinschriften*, 130 (col. 16:25-31), Cooper, *Reconstructing History*, 9, and important discussion by Hans J. Nissen, "Geographie," in *Sumerological Studies in Honor of Thorkild Jacobsen* (Assyriological Studies 20), ed. Stephen J. Lieberman (Chicago, 1975), 9-40. This is a portion of the present study that could be considerably expanded. As Hunt and Hunt have shown in case studies elsewhere, conflict between polities over irrigation water has high violence-potential, especially when both polities are not subservient to a larger, single authority; and when a downstream community is superior in political or military might (as was the case with Lagash before the end of the Early Dynastic Period), unless both reach some mutual agreement, there is likely to be recurring conflict (Robert C. Hunt and Eva Hunt, "Canal Irrigation and Local Social Organization," *Current Anthropology* 17 (1976), 395, and Eva Hunt and Robert C. Hunt, "Irrigation, Conflict and Politics: A Mexican Case," in *Irrigation's Impact on Society*, eds. T. Downing and McGuire Gibson [Anthropological Papers of the University of Arizona, 25] Tucson, 1974, 151). Thus, one of the aggressive acts of Umma that led to resumed hostilities under Eannatum I and Enmetena was the diverting of water in the boundary channels between the two states. It was apparently in an attempt to put an end to this dependency upon upstream water that Enmetena later undertook construction of a very long, new channel from the Tigris, despite the fact that Euphrates water flowed at a more regular and manageable rate (see Steible and Behrens, in the work cited, 235-237, 243; and Adams, *Heartland*, 134).
87. The increase of sites within Umma is recorded in Adams, *Heartland*, 160. Hallo (*The Ancient Near East*, 52) has suggested it was the repeated conflict with Lagash that provided the stimulus for the development of Umma toward the end of the period. However this may be, it is indeed unfortunate that the kingdom of Lagash was entirely outside the intensively surveyed area covered by Adams (in the work cited, 134), and has been subject only to brief scrutiny in 1953, as reported by Thorkild Jacobsen, "A Survey of the Girsu (Tello) Region," *Sumer* 25 (1969), 103-109. There is, then, a "tantalizing mis-match," as Adams has called it, between the textual materials and the archaeological survey data available from the two sites, which is particularly unfortunate with regard to the present issue. A survey of the entire Lagash region is needed, as is excavation of Umma.
88. Steible and Behrens, *Bau- und Weihinschriften*, 334-337, and Cooper, *Reconstructing History*, 52. One wonders whether this invasion of Lagash by Lugalzagesi would have not been a likely time for the destruction and dispersal of the Stele of the Vultures, as it would have been a monument particularly offensive to the Ummaites.
89. Edzard, "The Early Dynastic Period," 83, and Cooper, *Reconstructing History*, 10.
90. Hallo, *The Ancient Near East*, 49.
91. This, too, is reflected in the public monuments of the period, as Sargon of Akkad is shown holding the battle net himself on one stele, as the goddess Ishtar looks on (Moortgat, *Ancient Mesopotamia*, figs. 126-127); while on the stele of his grandson, Naram-Sin, the king occupies the summit of the only face of the relief, wearing the crown and bearing the determinant of a god (in the same work, fig. 155).
92. Robert Layton, *The Anthropology of Art* (New York, 1981), 85.
93. Herrnstein-Smith, "Afterthoughts on Narrative," 215.
94. White, "The Value of Narrativity," 11.
95. White, "The Value of Narrativity," 23.
96. White, "The Value of Narrativity," 2.
97. Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology* (New York, 1939, 11-12).
98. François Bresson, "Compétence iconique et compétence linguistique," *Communications* 33 (1981), 185-196, especially 194, on the absence of validity for the received wisdom that the image is more spontaneously and more easily received than text ("a picture is NOT worth 1000 words"). The two are, Bresson would claim, separate systems of cognition, equally but differently complex; and he calls for the development of new methods to analyze perception of figural imagery.
99. Groenewegen-Frankfort, *Arrest and Movement*, 21-22.
100. On this, see Hayden White, "The Fictions of Factual Representation," in *The Literature of Fact*, ed. A. Fletcher (New York, 1976), 28-29, with regard to the shared attributes of fact and fiction.
101. Frye, "History and Myth in the Bible," 4.
102. The other side of this development is discussed by Alpers, "Describe or Narrate?" 15-41. In that article, she describes the development of visual narrative as part of a process culminating in the Renaissance, then beginning a reverse movement: freezing or de-emphasizing narrative and turning more frequently to the descriptive, as we move from the beginning of the seventeenth century into the nineteenth.