

The Sumerian City-State

AAGE WESTENHOLZ

Of course, there is no such thing as the Sumerian city-state. What we do have is a number of Sumerian city-states, each with its own peculiarities, from which a generalised, non-existent “Sumerian city-state” may more or less legitimately be abstracted. In addition, from the very beginning, over-arching structures linked the individual Sumerian city-states in a manner that is poorly known and understood. It is even possible that, around 3200 to 3000 B.C., there was an integrated territorial state in Babylonia, with Uruk as its capital, and that the later Sumerian city-state culture was but the decayed remains of that state.¹

The period under consideration here spans from about 3500 to 2330 B.C.;² and the region is that of Lower Mesopotamia, also known as Babylonia. During most if not all of this period, Sumerian was the dominant language and culture in that region, so at least “Sumerian” in the heading appears to be justified.

The cities of Lower Mesopotamia are often said to be humanity’s first. Recent excavations, particularly at Tell Hamoukar and at Tell Brak, both in north-eastern Syria,³ are said to have produced evidence of urbanisation as old or even older than that of southern Mesopotamia. Whether that claim will stand the test of time remains to be seen. In any case, urbanisation appears to have been an indigenous development in Babylonia. On a background of villages and small towns, subsisting on locally available resources only, some sites suddenly grew to a size hitherto unknown around 3500 B.C. There is little doubt that, from 3200 to 2900, Uruk was by far the largest city in the world, with about 500 ha of walled area, some 40,000 inhabitants, a complex hierarchical administrative structure, skilled artisans working in materials such as stone or metals that had to be imported sometimes from far away, and the most magnificent temples supporting a redistributive economy.⁴ What caused this apparently sudden development is a much debated question without any definitive answer – often our knowledge of a given topic is inversely proportional to the discussion devoted to it.

The sources for the following investigation are the

excavated remains of the cities themselves, plus whatever may be gleaned from extensive surveys about the cities’ relations with their hinterland villages and the river systems. Needless to say, no ancient Mesopotamian city has been excavated in its entirety. Many of them are still unexcavated, except for some illicit diggings; and in those that have been touched by archaeologists, usually only the large public buildings (temples and palaces) have been explored, often with quite primitive excavation techniques. Spectacular buildings and works of art have been recovered; but attention to their context has often been lacking. Many of the results, however crude, still lie unpublished in museums. From 3200 onwards, written documentation exists in the shape of sun-dried clay tablets to supplement the physical archaeological evidence. All of this written documentation comes from the large public institutions and contains above all the records of the administration of their assets. The only exception are the so-called “lexical texts”, unelaborated lists of entries belonging to the same category: one is a list of metals and metal objects, another of textiles, another of professions, and so on. Only from ca. 2700 onwards, a trickle of so-called “literary texts” (myths, hymns, proverbs and incantations) and “royal inscriptions” (mostly brief dedicatory inscriptions on votive gifts or foundation tablets, occasionally giving information on the political events of the time) allow us to glimpse snippets of the history, religion and world view of the early Sumerians. All these texts were written by and for people with the insider’s thorough knowledge of their cultural context. We have nothing comparable to the expository works of Classical literature to guide us to that inside knowledge and have to work it out all by ourselves. Many texts, especially the literary texts, are poorly understood. The earliest texts, from 3200 to 2900, are still in the process of raw decipherment.⁵ And the survival rate of the written documentation is no better than that of the archaeological remains. I reckon that of all the texts that were produced, 99 per cent were destroyed, most of it quite soon – the clay of the tablets was recycled. Of the 1 per cent that sur-

vived and is still buried in the ground, about 1 per cent has been recovered in excavations; and of that, about one-half has been made available to scholarship in often less-than-adequate publications. A sample of one in 20,000, quite unevenly distributed by random chance! Yet, Mesopotamia is unique in providing us with day-to-day administrative archives, free of any political or religious bias if properly understood within their context. But analytical work on this material has only just begun, in a somewhat haphazard fashion.

With that kind of spotty data base, the best one might say is that there is ample scope for future discoveries; the worst, that any attempt now to reconstruct anything like “the Sumerian city-state” is a woefully premature exercise in futility. Nonetheless, the material already at hand is so suggestive that the attempt must be made, however uncertain and preliminary the results may be. Obviously, there is no consensus among scholars yet on how to interpret the available data; and the following is my understanding of those data.⁶ *Caveat lector.*

The method and theory underlying the present investigation may be stated quite briefly. First, I try as far as possible to avoid ignoring pertinent but inconvenient evidence. Second, I try to reach an inside understanding of the facts, what is nowadays often called the emic view, rather than trying, for instance, to establish whether or not Sumerian society meets a number of constitutive features of the city-state defined beforehand from the outside – the etic view.⁷ This means, among other things, that I take religion seriously at face value (since there is ample documentation that the Sumerians did), not as a mere epiphenomenon of political “realities” or even a tool for exploitation.⁸ I will not deny that religion could be so used; but it cannot have been that kind of window-dressing all the time and in all places. It is better, I think, to find out what religion meant to the Sumerians themselves – and that might well have included a good part of politics too. But in principle, the gods were the masters of the world; and mankind had been created to serve them.

Finally, I must admit that the following investigation is unduly philological. Collaboration with a competent and open-minded archaeologist would no doubt have resulted in dramatic improvements.

The Mesopotamian Landscape 3500-2330

By nature, the “Land between the Rivers” is certainly no Garden of Eden. It is a flat, semi-arid alluvial steppe traversed by the numerous meandering, anasto-

mosing, ever changing branches of the Euphrates. The Tigris maintains one stream almost to the end and is difficult to harness for irrigation. In some places, especially towards the south-east, the rivers empty into extensive marshes thickly grown with reeds. The climate is hot and mostly dry, punctuated by the occasional torrential rain during the winter months. Dust storms can last for days, during which no work is possible. The only raw materials are clay, reeds from the marshes, fish in the rivers and marshes, and limestone in the outcroppings of the Arabian Plateau towards the west. In some places, bitumen can be found.

The Babylonian soil is potentially very fertile; but agriculture is only possible with artificial irrigation from the rivers. The cities, totally dependent on agriculture for their food supplies, were always situated on the river banks. The rivers also afforded convenient routes of transportation by boat. But the amount of water available for irrigation varies widely from year to year. At one extreme, destructive floods may sweep away entire fields along with the seeds sown on them; at another, the water is barely sufficient for a poor crop. Consequently, harvests may vary locally from almost total failure to bumper crops. Also, river water contains small amounts of various salts; and under the relentless heat of the sun, these salts accumulate in the irrigated soil. Eventually, cultivation is made impossible by salinisation, unless the fields are left fallow at regular intervals. As barley is relatively tolerant of salt, barley was the Babylonian staple. Other crops, as well as vegetables and date palms, require fresher water and were therefore more labour-intensive. Steps must also be taken to prevent the river from changing its course, leaving the inhabited area dry. This was accomplished by dredging the river and canal beds from time to time. “With sweat on your brow shall you eat your bread.”

During the third millennium, the river system seems to have been artificially regulated into a few large branches that ran almost straight through the land and served the main cities situated on their banks. Of course, earlier branches had to be abandoned, and their cities with them. An abandoned city soon decayed into a shapeless heap of earth – a tell. From these main branches, a network of lesser canals fanned out over the slightly sloping levees of the main branches. The cities thus lay strung along the main branches (Fig. 1), surrounded by villages in the cultivated area.

In between the river branches were wide expanses of empty steppe, where sheep could graze on the

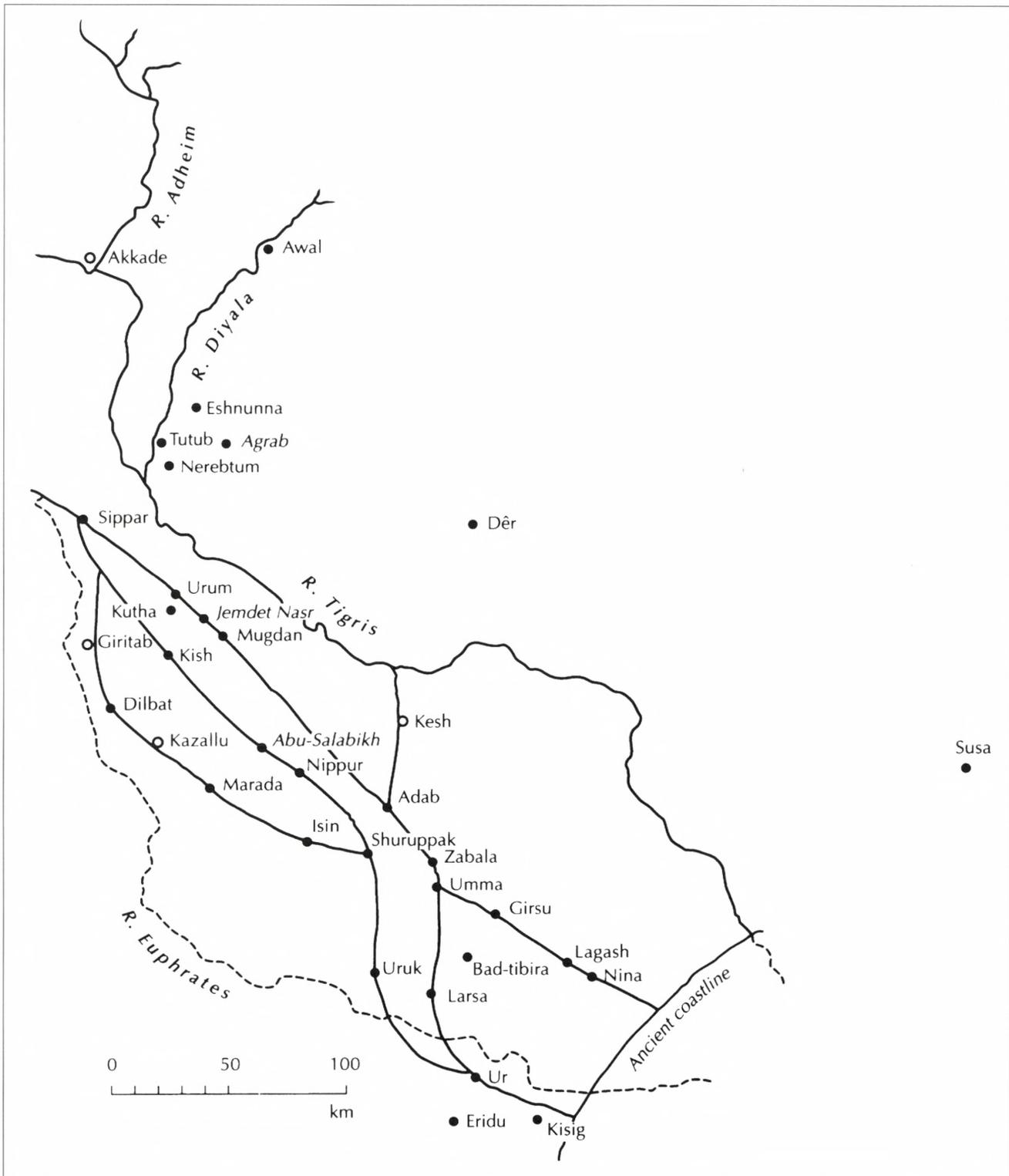


Fig. 1. Map of Babylonia, with the most important third-millennium cities shown. Ancient names are in ordinary type; modern names in italics. Cities of securely identified location are in solid black; cities of uncertain location are in outline only. The modern course of the Euphrates is indicated by a broken line; the reconstructed ancient watercourses are drawn in full. The reliability of these reconstructions is debatable.

The city-state of Lagash was in historical times (i.e. from about 2500 onwards) centred on the city of Girsu, while Lagash and Nina (conventional reading of uncertain value) were mainly ceremonial centres only. Likewise, Eridu, which belonged to Ur, was abandoned as a living city around 2900, but its temple for Enki was maintained for a millennium afterwards. The status and location of Kesh, belonging to Adab, is as yet uncertain.

Source: Adapted from J.N. Postgate, *Early Mesopotamia*, Routledge, London and New York 1994, p. 27.

sparse vegetation of thorny bushes. A shepherd's life was fraught with danger: wild animals would seek to devour his flock, and robbers or raiding enemies would try to kill him. The sheep provided not only meat and milk but above all wool, the basis of the flourishing Babylonian textile industry. Barley was the source of another Babylonian characteristic product: beer. Raw barley, beer and textiles were exported in return for all the things lacking in the land: gold, silver, copper, bronze, precious stones (indeed any stones other than limestone), spices, perfumes, resins for incense and good timber.

To the west of Babylonia was the Syrian desert, scarcely inhabited at all; to the east the Zagros mountains, home to various tribes of transhumant herds-men. These were regarded by the Sumerians as uncouth barbarians "of human form but with a dog's instincts", and with good reason: their murderous raids into Babylonia was a constant fact of life, or rather, death. To the north and north-west of Babylonia, in Upper Mesopotamia and Syria, lay other flourishing urban cultures, which the Sumerians of southern Mesopotamia regarded as alien to their own. In the time of the first urbanisation of the south, from 3500 to 3000 B.C., some of the Sumerian cities had set up colonies there;⁹ but why these colonies were established, and why they were abandoned shortly after 3000, remains unknown. One population group in that area, later known as the Akkadians, were destined to play a fateful role in the history of the Sumerians.

Such are, very briefly, the climatic and ecological constraints which shaped Sumerian society. It is clear that access to water was the limiting factor, while land was plentiful. The maintenance of the hydrological system required a high degree of collaboration between the cities depending on it; but unfair advantages taken by those upstream could lead to conflicts. The variations in harvests from year to year meant that individual family farmsteads were scarcely viable. The average output might be sufficient, but nobody can eat an average. A series of bad years would force the family to sell themselves into slavery. Only large institutions, with sufficient capacity for storage from the good years, could weather the vicissitudes of the climate. An almost emblematic illustration of the entire situation is found on the justly famous "Uruk vase" from the late fourth millennium (Fig. 2).

Sumerian Society

Babylonia was divided into a number of semi-auto-

nomous states, each usually based on one city only. Apparent exceptions to this rule will be discussed later. The name of the city-state was usually identical with the name of its capital city.¹⁰ Each city was headed by a god or goddess, or even a whole divine family, who regarded the entire city-state as their property. The borders between two city-states were fixed but could be subject to discussion among the gods. Around the cities lay their agricultural hinterland, dotted with villages; beyond that was the empty steppe, where the shepherd could graze his flock on the sparse vegetation of thorny shrubs, and where the hunter-cum-robber prowled.

The total number of the Sumerian city-states is difficult to assess and may have varied considerably over time. Sargon of Akkade (around 2330) mentions that, during his conquest of southern Babylonia, he fought Lugalzagesi of Uruk and the 50 city-state rulers allied with him. At that time, we may conclude, there were at least 51 city-states. Even though this number is only an approximation, it indicates the rough order of magnitude. The area covered by each of these city-states is also certain to have varied widely, but we have exact data on none of them. The state of Lagash, consisting of at least three cultic centres, is estimated around 2400 B.C. to have included up to 3000 square kilometers of irrigated land,¹¹ but that is probably a maximum estimate, and Lagash may well have been larger than the average. But, as already said, we are groping in the dark on this question.

Even though a large part of the population, perhaps even the majority, lived in the countryside, Sumerian culture was very much an urban one. In the city were the temples of the divine proprietors of the state and their worship and cult, considered vital for the survival of all; from the city came military protection and the management of land, water and other local resources, as well as incessant demands for food and manpower; only the city could organise the trade with foreign lands and thus procure metals, stone and timber; and only in the city were the arts, crafts and learning to be found. The villages appear to have produced nothing but the basic needs. Yet everybody depended on agriculture and husbandry for their daily bread, beer and clothing; hence the urban elites, too, were well acquainted with the facts of rural life. The traditional Sumerian literature (admittedly mostly known from much later sources) is replete with images drawn from the countryside; a "Farmer's Almanac"¹² and the "lexical texts" enumerating all sorts of cultivated plants and domestic animals belonged to

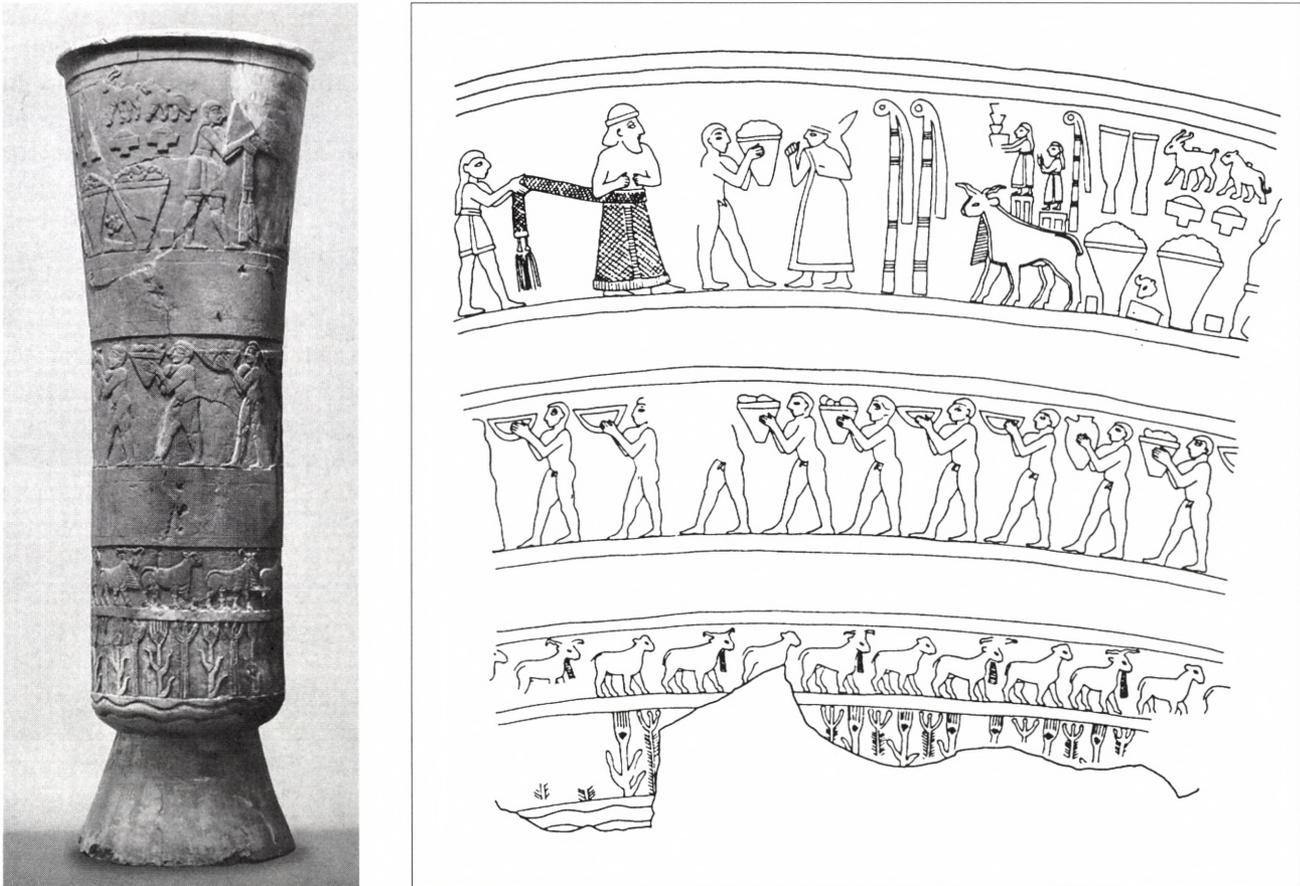


Fig. 2. The so-called Uruk Vase, in photograph and drawing. The banded relief is to be read from below like most Sumerian reliefs. In the lowest register, date palms and stalks of grain grow near a canal (the wavy lines at the bottom), while some distance from it, livestock is raised. In the middle register, naked men (priests?) bring provisions for a cultic festival, while in the upper register, the city ruler (partly restored), accompanied by his retinue, brings some of the harvest as an offering to Inanna. The goddess, standing before the entrance to her temple, receives the city ruler, while inside the temple, various cultic implements, votive statuettes and storage jars filled to the brim can be seen.

The vase is of alabaster and about 1 m high. It dates to about 3000 B.C. and was found in Uruk, within the temple complex of Eanna. It was already broken when it was deposited where the excavators found it. It is now in the Iraq Museum, Baghdad.

Sources: Photograph: E. Strommenger, *Fünf Jahrtausende Mesopotamien*, Hirmer Verlag, München 1962, Tf. 19. Drawing: M. van de Mierop, *The Ancient Mesopotamian City*, Oxford University Press 1999, p. 32.

the scribes' school curricula. The great temples, centres of the highest urban culture, were also great land-owners.

The basic principle in Sumerian social structure appears to have been like that of a crystal of salt: no matter how finely you grind a salt crystal, each grain still has the same atomic structure as the whole. A Sumerian village was governed by a body of village elders, called "field fathers" (*abba ašaga*¹³), who presumably decided on such things as when to irrigate and harvest and kept track of who owned what fields. The city was governed by an assembly of city elders (*abba uru*) under the chairmanship of the city ruler. The city rulers met in an assembly (*unken*) under the

chairmanship of a "big man" (*lugal*) to decide on peace or war and to adjudicate disputes between city-states. This is a structure of extraordinary resilience: if by some calamity the top layers are removed, the remaining ones can continue functioning without much change. The Sumerians ascribed a similar organisation to their gods. The Sumerians also had an extraordinary gift for bureaucracy. The city administration seems to have been an unbelievably complex machinery, with innumerable officials, of whose duties we often know next to nothing; and again, the Sumerians ascribed the same principle to their gods. Each god had his or her specific function. For instance, Kulla was the divine patron of brick-making.¹⁴

Each of these structures – village, town, city, and the assembly of city rulers – however imperfectly known, deserves a closer look. It should be noted, however, that the native terminology does not distinguish between “village”, “town” and “city” – all alike are *uru* in Sumerian.

The village. To my knowledge, only a single Sumerian village has actually been excavated and studied.¹⁵ It dates from ca. 2900 B.C. but resembles a traditional modern Iraqi village so much that the excavator’s Iraqi workmen felt very much at home in it and immediately could identify the various installations they found. Otherwise, the villages have been identified only in surveys by the scattering of potsherds on the surface. The potsherds also serve to date them.

We are woefully ignorant about Sumerian village culture. At least the later urban Babylonians (ca. 1800 B.C.) thought that the village lacked even the most elementary refinements of culture: “there is no diviner in a village!”¹⁶ Similar urban sentiments may well have been a constant throughout history. Modern Iraqi parallels suggest a much more complex village life than the mere procurement of food;¹⁷ but we know nothing about the Sumerian villagers’ relations with the gods of the land. Nor do we know whether they belonged to one lineage or not. A Sumerian village does not seem to have had its own patron deities; nor did it have a defensive wall.

Villages served as the source of foodstuffs and wool for the towns and cities, and of manpower for large public projects decided on and carried out by the city, such as dredging a major canal; and the recruiting official was much feared and hated, to judge by later evidence. However, there is no evidence of physical resistance by the villagers, nor of military coercion. Modern tax-payers are no different.

Villages were not the only settlements in the countryside. There were also rural sanctuaries, presumably along the overland roads and at the junctions of canals, where travellers could offer up a small gift and pray for their safe journey.

The town. This is the modern designation of a city dependent on a capital city. Towns had temples for their patron deities and defensive walls and open squares, just like the cities.¹⁸ A town was headed by the director (*sanga*) of the main temple in its midst, who was responsible to the city ruler in the capital of the city-state. The names of the inhabitants often honour the local deity (e.g. Damu at Isin, a town

within the city-state of Nippur). Legal disputes could be referred to the city ruler if they could not be settled locally. Whether these towns had formerly been the capitals of independent statelets that were later incorporated in another one remains unknown. The following cases are instructive: around 2300, and possibly much earlier, Isin was a town in the city-state of Nippur; but later, it was independent and even became the capital of all Babylonia during the first centuries of the second millennium (the so-called Isin dynasty, ca. 2000-1850 B.C.). Kesh was a city in its own right about 3000 B.C.; but 600 years later it was apparently abandoned and was a ceremonial centre in the city-state of Adab. Zabala was a large town in the city-state of Umma; and around 2430, Il, the *sanga* of Inanna’s temple at Zabala, was the nephew of the city ruler Urlumma of Umma. When Urlumma was defeated and presumably killed in a battle with Entemena of Lagash, Il became the city ruler of Umma in his place.

The city. In physical terms, a Sumerian city, from temples to hovels, was built of mud. The sun-dried mudbrick, made from clay mixed with chopped straw, was used everywhere. Baked bricks were a luxury (in Babylonia, fuel is in short supply) and were used only in some foundations of city walls. A house built in mudbrick lasts for hardly more than 40 years. It is then demolished and a new one is built on top of the rubble of the old. In this way, a Babylonian city eventually lies on top of an enormous mound of old rubbish – its own predecessors. Some of these rubbish heaps still stand to a height of 25 m above the surrounding plain. Of course the temples, built of the same material, needed constant maintenance too, a task that fell to the city ruler.

All Sumerian cities seem to have been surrounded by a city wall for defensive purposes, though few have been found in excavations. Within the city wall, there was a crowding of houses with narrow, winding streets in between. There were also open squares, presumably market places where people could shop for their daily needs. And, towering above all the houses, there were the temples of the city’s divine owners and protectors, and (presumably) the city ruler’s residence. The main temple of course belonged to the patron deity of the city, but there were many lesser ones besides.

Within a Sumerian city we can expect to find the following institutions and population groups: the temples of its patron gods, the city ruler and his “palace” (*é-gal*), the assembly of the city elders, the free citizens, the resident aliens, and the slaves.

The temples. A Sumerian temple was of course in principle the god's abode. He or she was physically present in the shape of a statue, made of wood with gold plating and dressed in the best finery; but of course this was not the deity's only manifestation. The statue was the object of the regular cult and the recipient of the daily offerings. Only a few specially consecrated priests were qualified to approach the statue directly. Besides the main deity, there were many lesser ones: family members, servants, and even deified music instruments and cultic implements, which received offerings of their own. Also, many of the lesser deities had their own temples.

But the temple was much more than just the house of the god and the centre of the cult. It was an institution with considerable economic power. The temple owned land and employed hundreds of workers to cultivate it. These were remunerated with monthly allotments of raw barley, sometimes also wool and oil, from the temple's stores. It is worthy of note that the remunerations were not issued to the worker only. His wife, who presumably worked for the temple too, would also be paid, and even their infant children. The higher ranks in the temple staff were given prebend land which they had the right to use but not to sell. The temple's assets were managed by an administrative director (*sanga*) who apparently had no cultic functions.

It is an open question how far the temples were economically integrated in the city as a whole. Some temples – Enlil's temple in Nippur, or Bau's temple in Lagash – appear to have been largely autarkic and self-sufficient. In other cases, the temples were fully integrated in the city economy, managed by the city ruler. There were no doubt enormous variations in the relations between temple and city, but we know very little.

Some large temples lay in splendid isolation far away from the city, even though they were a part of the official cult of the city-state. They had once been the centres of cities that were later abandoned; but the cult and the temples were maintained nonetheless. As the places where they lay continue to be mentioned in the temple records of the city, we get the impression that the city-state of Lagash consisted of three urban centres; the city-states of Ur and Adab, of two each. In terms of ceremonial centres, that is a correct impression; in terms of civic and political importance, it is not. However, in a few cases, we do seem to have a multi-centre city-state before us, such as the Umma-Zabala state; but Zabala was a large town subordinated to Umma.

The city ruler. There is a bewildering array of titles for this figure. In Lagash, Umma, Nippur, Adab and various other places, he was called *ensi*, the literal meaning of which is obscure. In other cities, he was called *lugal*, literally "big man", followed by the name of his city; but as *lugal* is also used of the ceremonial head of the assembly of city rulers (see below), confusion reigns. Nor are these titles freely interchangeable. Urnanshe of Lagash (ca. 2530 B.C.) styled himself *lugal* of Lagash, as some of his shadowy predecessors had done. For unknown reasons, Urnanshe's seven successors, among them his own son Akurgal, all styled themselves *ensi* of Lagash, except that his grandson Eannatum late in his reign also claimed the title *lugal*.¹⁹ Eannatum's successors were all *ensi* of Lagash. Then Urukagina (ca. 2340) styled himself *ensi* of Lagash during the first two years of his reign, as his predecessors had done, but then changed his title to *lugal* of Lagash and counted his regnal years once again from that event on. In other words, the difference between being *ensi* of Lagash and being *lugal* of Lagash was to him obvious and important enough to merit a renewed year count; but to us it is totally opaque.

The city ruler acted as the city god's human deputy and managed the assets of the city as a whole. His residence was called "the big house" (*é-gal*), which probably came close to our City Hall. There the city's imports from foreign lands were delivered. He was responsible for the maintenance of the temples and, presumably, of the city wall and other public facilities, such as the canal system. He also acted as judge in disputes between his citizens. With the possible exception of the *en* at Uruk, and certainly the *ensi* at Lagash, he had no cultic functions. Presumably, he chaired the assembly of the city elders; but beyond the existence of those city elders, we know almost nothing about them or their powers. In part, this is no doubt due to the tendency in dedicatory and commemorative inscriptions to present the building of a temple, for instance, as done by the *ensi* personally, not as the result of a decision by the council of city elders.²⁰

The free citizens. These formed the bulk of the city's population. Many of them worked for the temples or were attached to the city ruler's "big house"; but there were also a large number of people without any permanent affiliation to the great institutions. They were artisans and craftsmen of all sorts, bankers, or tradesmen. Some, perhaps many, were absentee landowners or *Ackerbürger*, as known from other city-

state cultures, i.e. farmers who lived in the city and every day walked to their fields outside the walls.

A citizen was called “the son” of his city. We know nothing about what rights and duties citizenship actually implied. But there is no doubt that the citizens were quite proud of their city and its gods. The home city-state and its gods defined the identity of every Sumerian, as revealed by their personal names. Almost all Sumerian names are meaningful; they are usually short statements of a religious nature, such as “servant-of-DN” (= divine name), “DN-is-my father”, “DN-is-my-honour”. The divine names are almost always those of the local city-state. Also the city itself, always mentioned simply as *uru*, “the City”, is celebrated in the names, for instance, “the-City-grew-up-with-Heaven” (i.e. was primordial, created at the same time as the rest of the world), or “the-City-of-reliable-pronouncements” (meaning not exactly clear, as so much in Sumerian!). If nothing else, such names, very common, show how thoroughly urban was Sumerian culture.

None of the large institutions, including the city itself, shows any trace of a lineage-based organisation. Kinship appears to have been unimportant, except that there was a tendency – no more – that high offices, including that of the city ruler, would pass from father to son. But among the free citizens we do see extended family structures. They cut across the various groupings within the city. One member of a family may serve as a temple official, others as artisans or bankers without any institutional affiliation.²¹

Within the city, the citizens appear to have been divided into groupings called *imrua*. This subdivision occasionally appears in city administration documents and must somehow relate to the city ruler’s organisation of labour; but otherwise its significance is unknown. From later sources (1900-1600 B.C.) it is known that cities were divided into quarters (Akkadian *bābtum*), each usually associated with one of the gates in the city wall. Within a *bābtum*, people evidently knew one another and chose their witnesses in a lawsuit among them. Sumerian texts of about the same time describe a ritual where, on the ninth day of the month Abu, the young men from a *dag-gi-a* (the Sumerian equivalent of *bābtum*) arrange fist-fights and wrestling matches by torch-light in the night before the city gate, in honour of the memory of Gilgamesh. Whether all this has anything to do with the earlier *imrua*, and whether the *imrua* or the later *bābtum* are related to the extended families we see in the records, is entirely unknown, but the question seems pertinent.²²

The craftsmen appear to have been organised in trade unions of a sort, again with no evident kinship structure. For instance, the smiths (*simug*) were headed by a “chief smith” (*gal-simug*) who could take the occasional work commission from the temple or the “big house” and was paid in cash, i.e. weighed silver. “Lexical texts”, from about 3100 B.C. on, enumerate many such chief representatives of their professions.²³

One such professional organisation, that of the “merchants” (*damgar*), deserves special mention. They were the ones who travelled to foreign lands and procured much, if not all, of the city-state’s imports. They were commissioned by the temple or the city ruler to provide whatever was needed in imported raw materials, and were supplied with the domestic surplus production required for that task. That they also conducted their own private business besides, or that of their friends and relatives, goes almost without saying. In later times, at least, they also served as ambassadors to the same foreign lands, as they enjoyed international immunity. Even if two countries were at war, their citizens and their gods ought not to lack spices, incense or cedar beams!

The scribes,²⁴ to whom we owe most of our knowledge about the Sumerian city-state, appear also to have formed such a trade union. No doubt most of them worked as accountants for the great institutions and were possibly trained by them; but they were essentially freelance professionals. Enough of them are found in non-institutional contexts to show that literacy was not limited to the temple. The education of a scribe clearly went far beyond mere literacy. They mastered mathematics, law, theology and the largely religious traditional literature of their culture. Even so, contrary to what is often said, most scribes appear to have enjoyed only modest esteem and fortunes. A good musician did far better and was far more relevant to the cult in the temple and the entertainment at court. Scholars today will nod in sad recognition.

The resident aliens. These were apparently very few in number and were mainly ambassadors from other city-states, fed and clothed by the city administration. There seems to have been almost none of the lateral mobility of the population known from Old Babylonian times (1900-1600 B.C.), where members of the same family could live in several cities and yet maintain close contact.

Singers and musicians, and to some extent scribes, did travel from city to city; but they can hardly be described as “resident aliens”.

Slaves. Slavery had little economic significance. None of the great institutions employed slave workers. Slaves are only found in private households in numbers up to four or five, where they may have assisted their master in whatever profession he plied. The city ruler could of course buy a slave for his own domestic use, just as any other citizen could.

Most of the slaves known to us by name have Sumerian names and were thus native Mesopotamians. The most likely explanation for this is that these unfortunate people were once free citizens who had fallen on hard times and had had to sell themselves as slaves in order to survive. Yet their situation may not have been all that bad. A “house-born slave” was a highly valued, trusted servant. Abject chattel slavery was apparently unknown.

The Over-arching Institutions

Our understanding of the institutions that linked the individual city-states to each other is so patchy, and there are so many quite incompatible interpretations of the available data, that I think it is best to describe the disparate bits of evidence and then try to make some kind of synthesis.

The Assembly. In a hymn by King Shulgi of Ur (ca. 2050 B.C.), as well as in even later mythological texts (the extant copies are of early second millennium date), an assembly (*unken*) is mentioned where decisions are made which affect the country as a whole. In the mythological texts, the gods convene, under the chairmanship of An, the sky-god of Uruk, and Enlil, the storm-god of Nippur, to discuss such matters as the destruction of Ur. Only when everyone had said “So be it” was the decision carried out. Shulgi is more succinct: “In the assembly, they listen to me.”²⁵ The assembly that listened to Shulgi is of course not that of the gods but its earthly counterpart, the assembly of city rulers chaired by the *lugal* (on whom, see below). Both appear to have held their sessions in Enlil’s temple in Nippur.

Doubtless this institution of an assembly, in Heaven of the gods of the various cities, on Earth of their human executives, is ancient. The mythological texts are traditional, and their basic conceptions are of high, if unknown antiquity. King Shulgi of Ur was the second of a dynasty (the so-called Third Dynasty of Ur, or Ur III for short, about 2100-2000 B.C.) which sought to centralise power in the person of the *lugal* to an extent hitherto unknown; and yet he saw fit to

mention the assembly, albeit as a mere rubber-stamp institution. His remark is so brief as to suggest that everyone would know which assembly he meant; but even so he conveys an important piece of information, namely that (in theory at least) he must *persuade* the members, he cannot just give them orders.

As a matter of fact, an *unken* is mentioned in several administrative documents from Uruk as early as ca. 3000 B.C.; but the significance of this is unknown. The texts themselves are barely deciphered. References to a *ki-unken*, “the place of the assembly”, are also known from records from Shuruppak, dating to about 2600 B.C.; but again, the significance of this is uncertain.

Ki-en-gi. This is the native designation of the Sumerian land, the geographical equivalent of the institution *unken*, “the assembly”. The literal meaning of the term is unknown. From 2100 onwards, when the kings of Ur were building their empire, *ki-en-gi ki-uri* were the standard names for the Sumerian southern Babylonia and the Akkadian northern Babylonia, which we translate as Sumer and Akkad. But *ki-en-gi* is mentioned already in mythological texts from 2600 on, where it appears to be the land which the gods once divided among themselves. Enshakushanna of Uruk, who was *lugal* around 2350 B.C., described himself as “*en* of *ki-en-gi*, *lugal* of the Land”. It is tempting to interpret this double title as the cultic and the political aspects of the same entity: *ki-en-gi* was the area of the cultic confederacy of the Sumerian city states, the “land” that acknowledged the *lugal* Enshakushanna. On the *lugal*, see below.

In the course of the third millennium, *ki-en-gi* became increasingly limited to southern Babylonia. Around 2600, it encompassed all of Babylonia, from Kish in the north to Ur in the south; but around 2350, it reached no further north than Nippur. The reason for this contraction of *ki-en-gi* seems to be the steady immigration of Akkadians from Upper Mesopotamia from about 2800 on. They settled peacefully in northern Babylonia, first in the countryside and then in the cities. With them came other gods, another language, another culture. However much they took over from the Sumerians, they were not Sumerians. They could not participate in the Sumerian cult based on the Sumerian language. Enshakushanna, *lugal* around 2350, treated Kish in northern Babylonia as a foreign city: he raided it and dedicated the spoils to Enlil in Nippur. After all, one of the *lugal*’s duties was to keep foreigners in check (see below). And Lugalzagesi, the last independent *lugal*, only enumerates cities south of

Nippur in his inscription, including of course Nippur itself.

Ki-en-gi appears further in administrative records from Shuruppak (ca. 2600), in connection with some or all of six cities, namely Uruk, Adab, Nippur, Shuruppak, Lagash and Umma. In some of these contexts, a *ki-unken*, “place of the assembly”, also appears. Some of these texts list contingents of men (troops?) who are said to go to *ki-en-gi* or to reside there; others enumerate fields from some of the cities that are allotted to *ki-en-gi* or *ki-unken*.²⁶ The significance of this is not yet understood.

The lugal. As with the city rulers, we have a number of titles for this figure. Besides simply *lugal*, he was known in the earliest times as *lugal kiši*, later as *lugal kalama*, “*lugal* of the Land”. The last to use the title *lugal kiši* was Lugalkinshedudu, around 2430. What the earlier title actually means has been much debated.²⁷ Most likely, it mentions the city of Kish in northern Babylonia;²⁸ but with the possible exception of Mebaragesi, the earliest known incumbent (ca. 2700),²⁹ none of the *lugal* known to us as *lugal kiši* came from that city but from various southern centres. The local city rulers of Kish were titled, variously and confusingly, as *ensi kiši* and *lugal kiši*. The change of *lugal kiši* to *lugal kalama* may have been due to the fact that in later times, Kish was no longer a Sumerian city. A neat instance of the change is afforded by Enshakushanna of Uruk, *lugal kalama* around 2350, who defeated Yinbi-Ashtar, the local ruler of Kish (*lugal kiši.ki*) and raided his city.

Shortly after 2000 B.C., a text was composed which enumerates all the *lugal* who had ruled the land since “*nam-lugal* (“*lugal*-ship”) came down from Heaven” – the so-called *Sumerian King List*, or *SKL*. The basic structure of this text is quite simple: “When *nam-lugal* came down from Heaven, it was in city A. In city A, X became *lugal* and exercised (*nam-lugal*) for x years. Y exercised for x years. Z exercised for x years . . . City A was smitten with weapons, its *nam-lugal* was carried to city B. In city B, N became *lugal* and exercised for x years”, etc. This list of successive *lugal* is divided into two sections, one before the Flood, with five cities, and one “after the Flood had swept over the land”, down to the author’s own time. Especially those before the Flood were made of good timber: one held *nam-lugal* for 28,800 years, another for 36,000. Enmeluanna of Bad-tibira leads them all with his 43,200 years. About half of the available manuscripts omit the antediluvian section, which is therefore believed to be a later addition to the original text.

This text was clearly considered a serious scholarly work in the early second millennium. Copies have been found from Susa in Persia to Tell Leilan in Syria, with Nippur, Isin, Larsa, Sippar and Kish in between. It was evidently the backbone of the history of the land as seen by native tradition around 2000 B.C. According to that tradition, *nam-lugal* was always held by a city and exercised by the city ruler there. It passed from one city to another as the result of the military defeat of the incumbent city.

Modern scholars have not been so kind to it. They quickly noted that many “kings” (actually city rulers) of the period between 2550 to 2330, who are known from their own inscriptions, fail to appear in the *SKL*. In particular, the unbroken sequence of the nine “kings” of Lagash, whom we know relatively well from contemporary texts, is omitted entirely. Lagash is not mentioned at all in the *SKL*. Scholars also noted that some *lugal* in the *SKL* are separated by several hundred years, while we know them to have been roughly contemporary, albeit in different cities. In short, they say, the *SKL* is anachronistic in the sense that it projects back in time the concept of a unified Babylonia under one king, current around 2000 B.C., onto an earlier reality of many feuding city-states. They even say that it is a propagandistic work designed to legitimise the sole rule of some early second-millennium dynasty, only they cannot agree on exactly which dynasty.

Some of our difficulties with the *SKL* (though certainly not all) disappear if we make four assumptions: 1) that the *SKL* is a list, not of kings of all Babylonia, nor of local rulers in the cities mentioned, but of the ceremonial heads of the assembly (*unken*), i.e. the *lugal*; 2) that a *lugal* was at the same time the local ruler of one of the cities; 3) that Enlil, the storm-god of Nippur, regarded by many Sumerians as “the father of the gods”, made and unmade the *lugal*, though Nippur itself never held *nam-lugal*; 4) that Lagash for most of its recorded history in the two centuries before 2330 did not belong to *ki-en-gi*, the league of cities whose rulers met in the assembly. There is plentiful contemporary evidence for assumptions 2-4, and one piece of evidence to the contrary. I shall mention only the most important of both.

Lugalzagesi, the last independent *lugal* around 2340 B.C., began his career as city ruler (*ensi*) of Umma, as his father had been. Under unknown circumstances, he became the ruler of the far more prestigious city of Uruk and, perhaps in connection with that, he was installed as *lugal* in Nippur. For that ceremony, he had more than 60 calcite cups made and

inscribed with a long inscription.³⁰ In poetic language, it describes a reign of bliss for a number of cities under his guidance (e.g. “with him, Ur raises high its head like a bull . . . Umma, beloved by (the god) Shara, lifts its huge horns; all Zabala cries out like a mother sheep to whom her lamb has been returned”). Even the foreign lands, normally home to murderous barbarians, submit in peace. But Lagash stands out by its absence in the inscription. Most likely, the cups were made as beer mugs for the city rulers (who doubtless were all literate) and their retinue who met for the occasion in Enlil’s temple; but as these mugs were also dedicated to Enlil, they could not be removed from his temple, until the American excavators of Nippur did so between 1893 and 1900. The inscription also says *expressis verbis* that Enlil had chosen Lugalzagesi.

An administrative record from Nippur is dated to “the year when Lugalzagesi received *nam-lugal*”, no doubt referring to the same event. Similar records mention two further *lugal* in their year names; but the exploits of those *lugal* took place far from Nippur.³¹ It seems that the *lugal* had a special relation with Nippur, more precisely with Enlil, since accountants in Nippur dated their documents after them. That all three *lugal* known from Nippur year names reappear in the *SKL* is of course nice but hardly proof: the *SKL* contains well over a hundred names.

In Enlil’s temple, many dedicatory inscriptions other than Lugalzagesi’s have been found, dating from the time between 2500 and 2330 (and of course also later, but not earlier³²). Not one of them is dedicated by local citizens of Nippur, not even the city ruler. Except for a large calcite vessel dedicated by Entemena, *ensi* of Lagash (ca. 2430), all of the donors are *lugal*. Some of them are known from the *SKL*. Presenting gifts to the Most High was evidently not for everyone. And not one of these *lugal* hailed from Nippur; Enlil’s own city never held *nam-lugal*. Entemena’s gift to Enlil is only seemingly an exception. Its fragmentary inscription³³ reveals it to be a return favour for the recognition by Enlil (and presumably his *lugal*) of Entemena’s independence and the autonomous status of his city-state Lagash. In the same vein, Entemena concluded a “brotherhood” pact with the *lugal* Lugalkinshedudu.³⁴ Entemena is also known to have introduced a cult of Enlil in Lagash, which must be regarded as another *quid pro quo*.

As already said, Lagash did not belong to *ki-en-gi*, while Umma did. It had not always been so. The patron deity of Lagash, Ningirsu, appears in the religious literature and god lists from ca. 2600 along with

all the others; administrative records from the same time count men from Lagash among contingents from other cities of *ki-en-gi*; and Mesilim, who was *lugal* around 2650, had settled the dispute between Lagash and Umma and drawn the boundary between them. But for two centuries after 2530, Lagash maintained its independence and pursued its conflict with Umma on the battlefield with varying success. Perhaps a *lugal* after Mesilim had judged the conflict in Umma’s favour, and Lagash decided to opt out. But Lagash did not become an enemy of *ki-en-gi*, only of Umma. Even when Lugalzagesi, the former *ensi* of Umma, became *lugal*, he could not call on all the city-states under him to fight against Lagash but had to rely on the forces from his own cities, Umma and Uruk, alone.

Lagash is also exceptional in that it is the only city-state besides Nippur to have left “royal” inscriptions with long and detailed accounts of the political events of their time, as seen from the Lagashite point of view. No other city has produced similar accounts, only brief dedicatory inscriptions. It is tempting to see this as an indication of the independent status of the rulers of Lagash. Eventually, Lagash produced a somewhat fanciful “King List” of its own.³⁵

But if Lagash was exceptional, so was Nippur, Enlil’s own city. It never held *nam-lugal*, though we have no idea why this was so. Also, Nippur seems to have been two cities rolled into one. Ekur, the temple of Enlil at Nippur, clearly had an autonomous status within the city. The city ruler of Nippur had little, if any, authority over Ekur and its assets, nor could he dedicate votive gifts to Enlil. Enlil’s temple seems to have been the centre of all *ki-en-gi*, much as the Vatican, within the city of Rome, is the centre of the entire Catholic world.³⁶ The rest of Nippur, the domain of its city ruler, was at the same time the domain of Enlil’s son Ninurta. This god is described as *ensi-gal*, “great *ensi*”, of Nippur or of Enlil.³⁷

Against the thesis that Enlil made and unmade the *lugal*, a few facts may be noted. In one of his numerous inscriptions,³⁸ Eannatum of Lagash (ca. 2470) states that “Inanna, in her great love for him, bestowed *nam-lugal kiši.ki* on him, in addition to the *nam-ensi* of Lagash.” Inanna is here surely Inanna of Lagash, the goddess who had given Eannatum his name.³⁹ Eannatum was a valiant and ambitious warrior who, unlike his predecessors and successors at Lagash, smashed cities near and far: Kish and Akshak in northern Babylonia; Ur, Uruk, and of course Umma in the south; and various Elamite centres in the east. And yet he maintained good relations with Enlil. In

support of his claim to *nam-lugal kiši*, a small fragment of an inscription of his has actually been found at Kish.⁴⁰ I am not sure how to explain this evidence; but it is worth noting that Eannatum, who otherwise was not chary of repeating his titles and epithets in his many inscriptions, mentions this momentous honour only once. Perhaps he overplayed his hand and soon recanted. After all, his city-state Lagash was not a member of *ki-en-gi*; and yet he had claimed its highest title, on the authority of what was, after all, merely a local goddess. In any case, none of his successors at Lagash mentioned it, not even his own brother Enannatum I.

Lugalkinshedudu of Uruk and Ur (ca. 2430) donated numerous stone vases to Enlil, all inscribed with the same inscription.⁴¹ In that, he says that “ever since Enlil truthfully called him and bestowed on him both the *nam-en* and the *nam-lugal*, Lugalkinshedudu has exercised *nam-en* in Uruk and *nam-lugal* in Ur.” But in a similar vase inscription dedicated to An and Inanna of Uruk,⁴² Inanna confers on Lugalkinshedudu the very same titles. *En* was at Uruk traditionally the title of Inanna’s high priest. The *en* may also have been the city ruler there, but direct evidence for this is lacking, while both *lugal* and *ensi* are attested.⁴³

Perhaps An or Inanna of Uruk and Enlil of Nippur appointed the *lugal*. Both An and Enlil are described in Lugalkinshedudu’s inscriptions as “master of all lands,” in apparent contradiction. It seems that votive inscriptions from either city would name the local deities – An and Inanna in Uruk, Enlil in Nippur – as the sole source of *nam-lugal*. If so, we should expect to find many more statements about Inanna, or An, conferring *nam-lugal* on someone in votive inscriptions from Uruk. Maybe one day we shall – as it is, inexplicably, we have next to nothing from mid third-millennium Uruk, while we have relative plenty from Nippur. In any case, Enlil appears to have been the most important.

If, despite this ambiguity, we accept that the *lugal* was indeed the ceremonial head of the assembly (*unken*) of city rulers belonging to *ki-en-gi*, we might next seek evidence for his functions. It is willingly forthcoming.

Two “literary” texts from 2600 to 2500 B.C. mention the *lugal* dedicating objects to gods, or bringing sacrifices, in various cities not his own.⁴⁴ Some of those objects have actually been found. Fragments of alabaster bowls dedicated by Mebaragesi, *lugal ki_i* around 2700, have been found at Tutub and Tell Agrab in the Diyala Region and presumably somewhere in the south.⁴⁵ Mesilim (of Dêr?), *lugal kiši* around 2650,

left votive objects with dedicatory inscriptions in both Adab and Lagash.⁴⁶ The later votive objects from Nippur, donated by various *lugal* dating from ca. 2500 onwards, are well known.

“Royal” inscriptions from Lagash, from ca. 2470 on, repeatedly mention that the same Mesilim once had regulated the boundary between Lagash and its neighbour, the city-state of Umma, and that the rulers of Umma wilfully violated the agreement.⁴⁷ A similar regulation of the boundary between Lagash and Ur by Sargon of Akkade (around 2330) is mentioned in a letter a century later.⁴⁸ It seems that the *lugal* could judge disputes between city-states, at least if called on to do so, much as the city ruler (*ensi*) could judge disputes among his citizens, even in the various towns of his city-state.

But the most impressive testimony to the importance of the *lugal* in Sumerian culture are the innumerable personal names. As already mentioned, Sumerian personal names are almost always meaningful (see 30 above). These names of persons, high and low, which appear in their myriads in the administrative documents, constitute an almost untapped source of information chemically free of any official bias. Many names mention the *lugal* as a cultic figure: “the-*lugal*-(goes)-to-the-festival”, “the-*lugal*-(fills)-the-ceremonial-boat”, “the-*lugal*-fills-the-sanctuary”, and many more. Others describe the bliss that resulted from his cultic activities: “the-*lugal*-(brings)-life-from-Heaven”, or “the-*lugal*-(provides)-abundance-far-and-wide”. Others again stress his function as defender of the land against the barbarians: “the-*lugal*-smashes-the-foreign-lands”, or “the-foreign-lands-are-at-his-feet”. Women’s names are similar, except that they are usually based on a goddess’ name or *nin*, the consort of the *lugal*, put more stress on the caring and protective nature of the *nin*, and make no mention of defensive functions. The gods invoked in the personal names are usually those of the city-state where the person was a citizen; but names composed with *lugal* or *nin* are found everywhere, even in cities such as Nippur, Umma and Lagash, which had no *lugal*. Another large group of Sumerian personal names are based on *en*, which is a high priest of some sort, certainly a cultic figure, and at Uruk perhaps also the local city ruler. In contrast, the city ruler (*ensi*) is scarcely honoured at all in the onomasticon, except for two or three names of courtiers at Lagash.

There are some problems with these *lugal*-names. They do not extend further back in time than ca. 2900 B.C. Before that time, the very term *lugal* seems to be unknown, while we have other evidence for inter-city

relations dating two centuries earlier (the so-called “city sealings”, see below). Also, in Sumerian, *lugal* means simply “owner” or “head”; you may be the *lugal* of a boat or a house or a family. In some of the names mentioned before, *lugal* may refer to the city god, the supreme “owner” of the city state. And *nin* is not only the female counterpart of *lugal*; it is also an ordinary “sister” – and, to judge from the frequency of names mentioning the “brother” (*šeš*), we must reckon with a similar frequency of “sister”-names of females. Finally, what dictated the choice of a name for a newborn, and how much the parents thought about the literal meaning of the name, is uncertain; but what little evidence we have indicates that the literal meaning of a name was mostly unimportant. But, as already said, the study of early Sumerian personal names has barely begun, and it should be possible to sort it all out.

In conclusion, the functions of a *lugal* may be summed up as follows: a *lugal* was expected to carry out cultic functions in several cities and attend the cultic festivals there; he could adjudicate disputes between city-states; and he should keep foreign enemies and invaders at bay.

The Sumerian pantheon. However devoted the Sumerians were to the gods of their home city-state, they always acknowledged the gods of other Sumerian city-states as gods, even during war. Moreover, all these gods, whether patrons of cities or of crafts, were integrated into a comprehensive pantheon; and most considered Enlil of Nippur to be the chief god of them all, though in Uruk, An was claimed to be the head. That difference of opinion seems to have mattered little. Lugalkinshedudu of Uruk (ca. 2430) dedicated numerous stone vases to Enlil, “the master of all lands”, in Nippur; and (at least) one to An, also “the master of all lands”, in Uruk!⁴⁹

From two cities, Shuruppak and Tell Abu-Salabikh (ancient name uncertain), we have several lists of gods, all dating to around 2600 B.C. Two of these, one from each city, enumerate some 560 names of gods and goddesses, and even deified human heroes of the past. They are clearly the work of theologians attempting to list all the gods and deified heroes known in those times; and so they may not be representative of a pantheon recognized by all Sumerians. Nevertheless, almost all the names are Sumerian; and all the major city gods are found, from Zababa of Kish to Ningirsu of Lagash. The order of the names follows several conflicting principles at the same time – association by cuneiform signs, by similar nature, or by

similar location – but the beginning of the lists consists of the major gods of the pantheon. In the edition from Shuruppak, they are: An, Enlil, Inanna, Enki, Nanna and Utu; in the Abu-Salabikh edition: An, Enlil, Ninlil, Enki, Nanna, Inanna, Ningirsu. Despite some differences, both lists agree more or less on who were the “great gods”.

Literary works from the same early times confirm this picture. The clearest expression of the religious unity of all Sumerian cities are the so-called “*zà-me* hymns”, known so far only from Abu-Salabikh but in so many manuscripts that the text is almost complete.⁵⁰ After a brief introduction, in which Enlil apparently assigns cult places to the gods, the text names each of these places (often cities and towns), accompanied by a brief poetic description (most of them quite obscure to us) and concluded by “god So-and-so, praise!” In this way, Enlil indeed assigned to each god or goddess his or her place. Once again, the area covered stretches from Kish and Uruk in the north, to Lagash and Ur in the south; and once again, we see Enlil as the “father of all gods”. In the mythological texts,⁵¹ so far very imperfectly understood, it is said that the gods all descend from a primeval divine couple, Enki and Ninki (not to be confused with the “present day” gods of the same names). In short, the Sumerians attributed a common origin to all their gods. One text, known in contemporary duplicate copies from Shuruppak, Abu-Salabikh and Nippur, appears to describe how, after the Creation, the gods received their cult centres.⁵² There seems to be little doubt that all Sumerians shared the same mythological literature.

The religious literature of about 2600 B.C. was of course not written to teach us about Sumerian society. In fact, we have no idea why it was written at all, some of it even in the so-called UD.GAL.NUN secret code. That nonetheless the image of many cult centres (i.e., on the earthly level, cities) living in perfect harmony with each other under Enlil’s leadership (or An’s, if you are an Urukean) comes across so clearly in texts that are not even half understood, is a measure of its importance to the Sumerians themselves.

The “city sealings”. A “sealing” is a piece of clay with the impression of a cylinder seal on it. Many sealings appear to have served in the shipment of goods. When a jar or a basket had been filled with the goods to be sent somewhere, its opening was closed and a lump of moist clay was put on the container, around the strings that kept it closed, and a cylinder seal was rolled over the clay. In this way, nobody

could tamper with the contents without breaking the sealing until it had reached its destination. There the sealing would be broken and thrown away; but as even unfired clay is quite durable, many such fragments of sealings have survived to be excavated in modern times. Other sealings were put on doors of storage rooms. Occasionally, a seal cylinder was rolled over a tablet.

One group of such sealings has attracted much attention. Instead of the pictorial scenes that were usual on seal cylinders, this group only contains stylised cuneiform signs – the names of a number of cities arranged next to each other. These sealings have been found in Uruk, Ur, Jemdet Nasr and Urum and date from ca. 3100 to 2900 B.C. The ones from Jemdet Nasr and Urum, ca. 3100 B.C., are all impressions of the same enormous seal cylinder on tablets recording small quantities of delicatessen sent from these two cities as offerings for “the triple Inanna” in Uruk. Unfortunately, even with 14 impressions, the seal cylinder cannot be reconstructed in its entirety. The 20 or so cities named on the seal, as far as they can be identified, stretch from Urum in the north to Ur in the south. The sealings from Ur, ca. 2900 B.C., are made from different seals and mention almost only southern cities in varying order. Most of them were placed on jars.⁵³

What kind of institution or person used these seals? An interesting question without any answer! But at least they suggest that the league of Sumerian cities existed already by 3100 B.C., and that it was sufficiently formalised to possess and use seal cylinders. Why no such sealings dating later than 2900 have been found is another mystery.

Synthesis of the Above Evidence

If we attempt to reconstruct the situation about 2500 B.C., the picture emerges as follows: each Sumerian city-state was governed by a ruler, usually called *ensi*, who was sovereign within his city-state. He ruled with the consent of the assembly of city elders. Apart from building or renovating temples and equipping them with the required cultic implements and installations, his duties were purely political and administrative. With the notable exception of Lagash, the city-states were united into a loose confederacy which in times of peace was largely of a religious nature. This confederacy was headed by the *lugal*, who was at the same time the ruler of one of the city-states. On the cultic festivals, the *lugal* travelled by boat from city to city and brought offerings to the gods in each; but at

Lagash, the *ensi* had to carry out the cultic functions elsewhere fulfilled by the *lugal*. The *lugal* was appointed by Enlil in Nippur, a city which never held *nam-lugal* itself. He had no political powers, it seems, beyond that of calling the assembly of city rulers and judging disputes between them. He probably also could call on the city rulers in times of war when they were threatened by an enemy common to them all, as Lugalzagesi did when faced with the threat from Sargon of Akkade (see below). But the entire set-up had remarkably little to do with politics, as we understand it. Military alliances and feuds were no part of it but were left to the city rulers’ discretion.

Exactly how *nam-lugal* passed from one city to another is as yet unknown. The *Sumerian King List* mechanically gives military conflict as the reason; and that had indeed been the case for three and a half centuries when the *SKL* was composed. It may have been true even before that; but we have little evidence for warfare between the Sumerian cities in the third millennium, except for the protracted and bitter feud between Lagash and its neighbour Umma.

This picture is probably valid down to ca. 2330 B.C. How far it can be projected back in time is uncertain. The “city sealings” appear to belong in a similar framework, perhaps centred on Uruk rather than Nippur, and presided over by an *en* rather than a *lugal*. No doubt a confederacy of the same sort existed long before; but beyond the similarity in cultural artifacts from various places (which might be accounted for in many ways), we have no evidence. It may even be that the *en* of Uruk around 3000 B.C. ruled all the other cities in some sort of an integrated territorial state; but this remains only a distant possibility. On the one hand, the many cities in the “city sealings” suggest an assembly of equals; but, on the other, Uruk was by far the largest city back then. This problem must await future discoveries.

It will be seen that I have so far studiously avoided translating *lugal* as “king”, even though this translation is automatic in the entire scholarly literature on Mesopotamian civilisation. But there seems to have been no such autocratic figure in early Sumerian society. Decisions were made in assemblies, among gods as among villagers. The terms *lugal*, *ensi*, and *en*, are really culture-specific and therefore untranslatable and can only be explained in lengthy descriptions. But eventually, true kings did emerge in Mesopotamia.

Other Readings of the Data

Obviously, the same facts have been interpreted differently from the synthesis given above. The following is an attempt to render some of the most important of these “other readings” and to give them as fair a critique as I can.

P. Steinkeller, one of the leading experts on third-millennium Mesopotamia, recently outlined his synthesis of the data (Steinkeller [1999a]). According to Steinkeller, the Sumerian cities, from Uruk in the north to Uruk in the south, were ruled by kings called *en*, “which in Sumerian means ‘lord’ or ‘ruler’” (104) around 3000 B.C. After a gap of some 500 years with almost no sources for the political developments, around 2500 the Sumerian cities “are ruled by officials bearing the title of *ensik*, which interchanges with that of *lugal* ... The sole difference between [these two titles] is that each emphasizes a different dimension of royal power. The title *ensik*, which clearly has religious overtones, defines the status of a ruler in his rapport with the divine owner of the city-state. ... In contrast, the title *lugal*, when applied to humans, is free of any religious connotations. It describes the position of a ruler in relation to his subjects as their chief political and military leader” (112). Steinkeller then seeks to relate the question of the relationship of the earlier *en* to the more recent *ensi* (or *ensik*, as he prefers to spell it) to that of the overall ideological picture, especially the pantheon. About this, he writes that “it appears quite certain that the earliest Sumerian pantheon was dominated by female deities”, with “one dominant male figure. That was Enki, a personification of male reproductive power, the god of fresh water and creative intelligence. Enki undoubtedly was the original head of the pantheon” (113). To complete the picture, there were the three male astral deities: the sky god An, the moon god Nanna, and the sun god Utu. No Enlil here, as he was a “secondary development” in the Sumerian pantheon, possibly introduced into Nippur from northern Babylonia “in great antiquity”. Even Nippur, originally called Tummal, was the cult centre of Nin-hursag, the mother goddess (114 n. 36). But in the course of time, a number of male gods superseded the original goddesses, in new political centres. Steinkeller describes the mechanism behind this process thus: “It is as if an ambitious individual had moved out from the old capital and, in a location not too far removed from it, established for himself an independent seat of power. He then gradually wrested all real influence from the old capital, turning it eventually into a dependent religious centre.” The *ensi*,

with a military following – “this would fit what we know about the nature of the *ensik*’s office” – appropriated the *en*’s political and military powers, transferring them to the new capital, leaving to the *en* ritual functions only (115).

Much of this reconstruction cannot be documented in the sources, and some of it is plainly contradicted. It assumes a unilinear development of political power in Babylonia which is unlikely to have been ancient reality. In third-millennium Sumerian, *en* does not mean “lord”, it is a religious title. Of course, like many a cardinal or bishop in later times, the *en* may have wielded considerable political power; but only in Uruk does this seem to have been a regular feature. The *ensi*’s religious status is not confirmed by the Sumerian personal names which accord both the *en* and the *lugal* a high religious significance, while the *ensi* must languish in obscurity; and only in Lagash did the *ensi* have cultic functions. If Enlil is indeed a “secondary development”, introduced from the north (and no evidence for this is offered beyond an implausible Semitic etymology⁵⁴), he is a very early one: his city Nippur was written EN.LÍL.KI at least from 3100 B.C. onwards, literally “Enlil-place”, indicating that Enlil was well established there already then. There is no historical evidence that Tummal was the earlier name of Nippur, nor that the mother goddess Nin-hursag was its “original” deity. If Steinkeller wishes to uphold his hypothesis, he is forced back into deep prehistoric times, where any reconstruction of the “original” situation can be neither proven nor refuted.

In an earlier paper (Steinkeller [1993]), Steinkeller offered a somewhat different reconstruction. For the mid third millennium, he operates with a dichotomy between Akkadian northern Babylonia, which he says was a territorial state ruled by autocratic, secular kings; and the Sumerian south, which consisted of a number of city-states. Each of these latter was ruled by an *ensi*, who was the earthly representative of the divine owners of the city-state. The gods of the individual city-states were united into a “super extended family”, with Enlil as *pater familias*. In this capacity, Enlil “served as an arbitrator in conflicts, especially border disputes, between city-states” (without elaborating on how Enlil’s will was mediated). Southern kingship is described as weak and distinctly theocratic (116 ff). In contrast, the northern territorial state, centred on Kish, was a powerful kingdom which stretched to Mari along the Euphrates and well beyond the Tigris into the Diyala region; and a campaign by the northern cities Kish, Mari and Akshak, acting in

concert, against Eannatum of Lagash is recorded. On this background, the title *lugal kiši*, borne by several southern rulers (cf. 34 above), became also in the south “a generic term that described a particular form of kingship, namely, an autocratic and hegemonistic type that was unknown in the south, one which the southerners associated with the Kishite kingdom” (120).

This reconstruction is somewhat self-contradictory; and once again, it ignores much evidence to the contrary. Kish is described as the master of the north, and yet Mari and Akshak are presented as partners, even rivals. Besides, Kish itself appears to have been in serious decline between 2500 and 2330.⁵⁵ It is not explained why the title *lugal kiši* was abandoned by the southern rulers in favour of *lugal kalama* in the century before Sargon of Akkade (ca. 2330). It does account for the origin of the title *lugal kiši* but does not explain why weak, theocratic southern rulers would adopt the title; and the “hegemonistic” aspirations of these rulers have yet to be demonstrated. The very existence of the northern territorial state is not supported by any real evidence other than the title *lugal kiši*.

J.-J. Glassner, who wrote the predecessor to the present article (Glassner [2000]), denied that the term “city-state” can be applied to third-millennium Mesopotamia. His reasons for this are not entirely clear (35-36, 49). Apart from this, he imagined that the Sumerian states were ruled by assemblies around 3000 B.C., but that very soon afterwards the monarchy emerged. The monarch was titled *en* at Uruk, *ensi* at Lagash, and in most other places, *lugal* followed by city name. “Il est vraisemblable que les trois titres cumulés disent la totalité du concept de royauté propre à la Mésopotamie du 3^e millénaire, un concept que chaque terme, pris séparément, n’exprime que de manière incomplète,” he says (48), without going into the details of that peculiar Mesopotamian concept of kingship. The assemblies steadily lost political influence and relevance, being reduced in the end to mere juries in legal disputes. Kingship was either conferred by election (by whom?), or hereditary; and the king acquired and maintained power by the judicious use of gifts to his followers.

Glassner does not seem to consider the evidence of the early Sumerian literature or the personal names; nor does he account for the variation between *ensi* and *lugal* in the title of the Lagashite city rulers. He does provide some evidence contrary to his own thesis, that the assemblies lost political power: he describes in detail how the rebel leaders against Naramsin (ca.

2250) were elected in popular assemblies (43-44) – and this information comes from their enemy Naramsin! Also, he freely acknowledges the importance of the “city elders” (*abba uru*), who presumably sat in the assemblies, throughout the third millennium (43).

Many more “other readings” might be quoted. But this must suffice to show how far we are yet from an informed consensus on the political structure of the Sumerian city-states and their interrelations.

The End of the Sumerian City-states

In 2330 B.C., according to conventional chronology, Sargon of Akkade conquered all of Mesopotamia. Akkade was a city on the extreme northeastern periphery of Babylonia.⁵⁶ Sargon defeated the *lugal* Lugalzagesi and the 50 city rulers who accompanied him to the battlefield, and took him personally prisoner. He brought Lugalzagesi in fetters to Nippur and had him exhibited in the entrance gateway to Enlil’s temple. In this way, Sargon demonstrated to all with eyes to see that Enlil had rejected Lugalzagesi as *lugal* and had chosen Sargon instead.

The Sumerians apparently did not agree. Sargon had to conquer most of the Sumerian cities one after another and dismantle their fortifications. Only then could he wash his weapons in the Lower Sea, that is, the Persian Gulf.

Sargon introduced a new conception: kingship. As far as we can judge today, Akkadian culture did acknowledge real kingship, the concept of the powerful and largely secular monarch who could protect the weak against the strong and his people against enemies, who could organise the entire workforce of his land towards a single goal without anyone objecting. From now on, the term *lugal* acquired a new meaning, that of “the king”. “A people without a king is like a flock of sheep without a shepherd”, says a Babylonian proverb. What little is known about Upper Mesopotamian society before Sargon points to a much more centralised, “palatial” economy and administration.⁵⁷ The temples in the north were apparently of minor economic significance and were subordinate to the secular king. After his conquest of the Sumerian southern Babylonia, Sargon was the undisputed master of the land, of Sumerians and Akkadians alike; and he ruled it as a territorial state under a king. He revived the ancient title *lugal kiši*, apparently in an attempt to stress the unity of northern and southern Babylonia. He made his own city Akkade the capital of the entire land, and all the hitherto more or less autonomous city-states became mere provinces of the

centrally governed territorial state. As he could not rely on the loyalty of the Sumerian city rulers he had just defeated, he installed “sons of Akkade”, i.e., the leaders of his own power base Akkade, as city rulers. Most likely that experiment failed miserably and was never repeated; other solutions were found. Sumerian city-state bureaucracy is so intricate that it cannot be mastered by anyone who has not grown up with it. Yet the aspiration towards a centrally governed territorial state is unmistakable.

Sargon ruled for at least four years after his conquest of the south, probably much more, and was then succeeded by his son Rimush. At Sargon’s death, the Sumerian cities (except Nippur) revolted in a victory-or-death rebellion. For thousands, it was death. Rimush gives the exact numbers of those who fell in battle, and of those who were afterwards deported into labour camps. From these numbers it appears that the rebel cities lost between a quarter and a third of their male workforce. No sane city ruler would think of further armed resistance after that; and none was in fact attempted until some 50 years later. But the numbers of the slain also show how bitter was the Sumerian resistance against Akkade and its rule. Later copies of the votive inscriptions dedicated by Rimush to Enlil, made by 19th century B.C. historians at Nippur, survive to tell us about all this.

Even though Rimush does not say why the Sumerian cities rebelled, they had two good reasons. One is that the Sumerians considered Sargon and his “sons of Akkade” to be foreigners; another, that the cities had lost their relative autonomy. All of them were reduced to towns under Akkade and its king. It was in fact the end of the Sumerian city-states and their entire culture as the city rulers knew it. For even though the Empire of Akkade collapsed a century or so later, its example was never forgotten. The ideal of a unified Babylonia ruled by one capital city and its king was brought to perfection by the kings of Ur (the so-called Ur III dynasty, ca. 2100-2000 B.C.) and survived two centuries of fragmentation during the early second millennium, until Babylon became the undisputed centre. The Akkadian Empire became the model for all future kings; the sagas about it were retold during two millennia afterwards, both as an ideal to be emulated and as a warning against human hubris. Nobody wished to follow the example of the early Sumerian city-state culture, it seems.

Conclusion

Does early Sumerian society, as described above, fit Mogens Hansen’s definition of a city-state culture? Despite my lack of interest in such questions (cf. 24 above), the answer must be a clear Yes. The only question is how much political power was exercised by the *lugal*; but as far as I can see, he had no constitutional power to impose his will on the city-states. Politically, he was acknowledged as *primus inter pares*, nothing more, despite his tremendous religious significance. Religious integration and political fragmentation is the main impression one gets from the scattered and woefully inadequate sources.

Notes

1. Elizabeth Stone (1999) argued rather persuasively that the ecological conditions of Babylonia favour the formation of city-states rather than larger, territorial states. But as such territorial states were certainly known and considered superior by the Babylonians themselves from the late third millennium onwards, I see no reason why it could not have been the same in late prehistoric times. At least, Uruk’s exceptionally large size around 3000 B.C. calls for some explanation.
2. The absolute chronology of early Mesopotamia is a most inexact science. The dates quoted in the following are informed guesses and reasonable estimates, based on various inconclusive indications, and on the datum 2330 B.C. = Sargon’s conquest of southern Babylonia. This datum is itself by no means certain.
3. So far only preliminary reports are available, see Gibson (2000); Emberling (2001) 21 ff.
4. Uruk was also ten times larger than even the largest contemporary cities in Babylonia. Only the much later capitals of Assyria and Babylonia, Nineveh and Babylon, grew beyond the size of early Uruk.
5. For a good overview of that documentation, see Englund (1998).
6. For some different opinions, see 37 below.
7. Mieroop (1999) 17, said it well: As usual, a scholarly classification obscures the details one can observe in our data. The proficiency of scholars in obfuscation as well as explanation should not be underestimated. Also, with regard to societies as poorly known and investigated as the Sumerian, it might be said that no comparative linguist would attempt to classify unknown languages.
8. This view of native religious expressions as merely politics by other means pervades almost all modern writings on ancient Mesopotamia. One recent instance of this is Mieroop (1999), who believes that religious ideology was used by the priesthood to extract produce from the rural population (32, cf. also 24 and 217). Some of us moderns apparently find it difficult to accept that the gods were in fact the movers and shakers of history, no matter what our ancient sources may say. At all costs, we must reduce the three-dimensional world view of the ancients to our own two-dimensional one to find it credible. Is that good historical method? For a lucid critique of a similar rationalist reading of Sumerian myths, see Jacobsen (1946) 150-52 = (1970) 129-31.

9. This is the so-called “Uruk Phenomenon”, which has spawned a considerable discussion. Most authors assume that the colonists came from Uruk itself; but the later presence of Enlil and Ninhursag at Mari, and of the moon-goddess Ningal at Ugarit, indicates that Nippur, Kesh and Ur took part in the colonisation as well. That the colonists were indeed Sumerians is indicated by early Sumerian loan-words in later North-west Semitic dialects, such as Proto-NWS **haikallum*, palace (from an archaic form **hai-kal* of Sumerian *é-gal*, literally “big house”), with descendants in Ugaritic, Hebrew and Aramaic; or **kurrum*, a container with a standardised capacity (Hebrew *kor*), from Sumerian *gur*. Cf. Mankowski (2000) 51-52, 73.
10. One well-known exception is the city-state of Lagash, which in historical times (from ca. 2550 B.C. on) had Girsu as its capital. Scholars usually infer, perhaps correctly, that the city Lagash, which in historical times was a ceremonial centre only, had once been the capital city.
11. Diakonoff (1956) 174.
12. See Civil (1994) for the most recent edition. In its present form, it dates no earlier than 1900 B.C.
13. To my knowledge, this term is found only once, in a legal document from Eshnunna, written in Akkadian and dating to about 2220 B.C. (UCP 9/2, no. 83 iii 3 4: 1 *sá-lim-a-ḥu dumu rí-ba-tim abba-ašas šī maš-gan.ki*, “Salim-ḥu, son of Ribatum, the village elder of Mashkan”, among the witnesses). The text is therefore both later and geographically outside the scope of this article, and even written in the wrong language. Our evidence is often like this.
14. On this god, see W.G. Lambert (1987). Kulla naturally played a large part in rituals concerned with the foundations of any dwelling.
15. See Wright (1969) 43 ff.
16. VAS XVI 22, line 28: *ina kaprim bārām ul ibašši*.
17. A good example is given by Ochsenschlager (1999). Despite its forbiddingly scholarly title, this article is a perceptive description of the changing customs and internal tensions within a village and among its neighbours.
18. Even quite small towns (about 1 ha) seem to have had all the trappings of city life. See Stone (1999) 218-19, admittedly discussing early second-millennium instances.
19. Cf. Cooper (1983) 26. Eannatum also gave his father Akurgal the title *lugal*, a title which Akurgal never claimed himself.
20. Cf. Larsen (1976) 160 ff, about similar phenomena from Old Assyrian Assur (ca. 1900 B.C.). The letter from the representative of the Kanesh colony at Assur, quoted *ibid.* 163, which informs the Kanesh colony of the decision of the Assur assembly to collect 10 minas of silver (ca. 5 kg) from each of the colonies, clearly reflects the decision by the assembly to build a (new) city wall around Assur. But if ever a commemorative inscription about that work is found, it will surely be phrased as the sole initiative of the *iššiak aššur*, i.e. the Old Assyrian king, without any mention of who paid for it.
21. Evidence of this comes from the private archives and sale contracts from ca. 2600 onwards. For the time being, see Westenholz (1987) 60, concerning a family archive from Nippur of Sargonic times (ca. 2280-2240); but the much earlier contracts from Shuruppak also offer pertinent evidence.
22. A survey of the relevant archaeological evidence is found in Stone (1999) 212 ff. Perhaps she exaggerates the internal segregation a wee bit. In (1997) 19, she seems to take it for granted that the segmentation reflects vertical divisions based on affiliation, without citing her evidence. On the other hand, Mieroop (1999) 103 and 112 finds little evidence for extended families except in rural contexts; and the inhabitants of a *bābtum*, even neighbours, were unrelated to one another. The data are all second millennium or even later.
23. ATU 3, 69 85 (Lú); 86 89 (Officials).
24. For scribes in the early periods, see Visicato (2000).
25. See Wilcke (1974) 183, with further references to the ability of Urnammu and Shulgi to persuade the members of the assembly.
26. Pomponio (1994) 10 ff.
27. Maeda (1981). Instead of a chronological change, he posits a special relation between Inanna and the *lugal kiši*, while Enlil has nothing to do with it. But cf. BE I/2, 93 = Steible (1982) II, 220-21, where no Inanna appears, only Enlil and Ninlil. The author of this inscription, Ur-zà-è, *lugal kiši.ki*, is known to be a ruler of Uruk, albeit of uncertain date.
28. The title was certainly so understood by Entemena of Lagash (ca. 2430): he refers to a boundary regulation between Lagash and Umma by Mesilim, *lugal kiši.ki* (CIRPL Ent. 28-29 i 8 = Steible (1982) I, 230), adding the place-name determinative *ki* to the earlier writing used by Mesilim himself. This certainly means the city of Kish. Similarly, an unnamed *lugal kiši.ki* appears in a literary text from about 2600 B.C. (the archaic Kesh Temple Hymn, IAS 308). However, Mesilim was probably the city ruler of Dêr, not of Kish: it was on the order of Ishtaran, the patron god of Dêr, that he drew the boundary between Lagash and Umma.
29. See Steible (1982) II, 213 for the two pitiful fragments extant. Mebaragesi is assumed to be identical with Enmebaragesi, known both from the *Sumerian King List* and from other Sumerian literary works of the early second millennium as a (female?) ruler of Kish, roughly contemporary with Gilgamesh and credited with a reign of 900 years.
30. BE I/2, no. 87 = Steible (1982) II, 315 ff, Luzag. 1.
31. Westenholz (1974).
32. Earlier inscriptions must have existed. The ones we have were found broken into fragments and scattered in fill under a pavement of the temple courtyard laid down in the 13th century B.C. that is, in a context some 1200 years later than the inscriptions themselves! The earlier inscriptions were probably broken and buried within the temple area in a similar fashion, but much earlier and in a different place, presumably now below the ruin of the enormous ziggurat built by Urnammu, ca. 2100 B.C.
33. CIRPL Ent. 32 = Steible (1982) I, 247-48.
34. See the detailed discussion of this in Cooper (1983) 31.
35. Sollberger (1967). Sollberger considers this text, which so far is known in one copy only, written about 1800 B.C., to be a parody on the *SKL*.
36. Westenholz (1987) 29.
37. See Steinkeller (1977) 51 note 37; (1992) 38-39.
38. CIRPL Ean. 2 = Steible (1982) I, 145 ff, v 23 vi 5.
39. This touches upon a difficult question: how far did the Sumerians, Eannatum in particular, consider the various local manifestations of Inanna to be the same deity? Did they regard Inanna of Uruk, in later times at least the protector of sexual abnormalities, as the same goddess as the warlike Inanna of Kish or Akkade? We don't know; but a comparison with the various local figures of Saint Mary within the Catholic world may suggest an answer of both yes and no.
40. Grégoire, apud Moorey (1978) microf. 3, D08 D09, no. 1, 1930.204.
41. BE I/2, no. 86 = Steible (1982) II, 299 ff.

42. A. Goetze, *JCS* 15 (1961), 105-6 = Steible (1982) II, 302-3. See n. 49 below.
43. Both titles occur in the same private votive inscription from Uruk, Thureau-Dangin (1923) 4 = Steible (1982) II, 307-8: Lugalkisalsi is *lugal* of Uruk; Girimsi is *ensi* of Uruk. The reason for this difference is plain: Lugalkisalsi, the donor's grandfather, had been a *lugal* recognised by Enlil, which Girimsi was not.
44. IAS 308 (on which see Biggs [1971] esp. 202) and ECTJ 219.
45. Steible (1982) II, 213; Edzard (1959) 19 ("confiscated at Kut" in southern Iraq); Jacobsen (1942) 291, no. 9. In this latter, the name of the *lugal kiši* is broken away; but it can be dated by its epigraphy to the time of Mebaragesi or even earlier.
46. Steible (1982) II, 215 ff.
47. Both Eannatum of Lagash (ca. 2470) and his nephew Entemena (ca. 2430) refer to this event in their accounts of the conflict between Lagash and Umma. See Cooper (1983) 22 ff.
48. RTC 83 = Kienast (1995) 102, Gir 26.
49. A. Goetze, *JCS* 15 (1961), 105-6 = Steible (1982) II, 302-3. This inscription was actually found at Nippur, in an Ur III context in the Inanna Temple there. However, the shape of the object, marking it as a gift to a male god, as well as its main divine beneficiaries An and Inanna, point to Uruk as its original location.
50. IAS nos. 257 77, see *ibid.* 45 ff. See also D'Agostino (1988) on the introductory section of the text.
51. For instance, SF 37 and duplicates from both Shuruppak and Abu-Salabikh describe how Enlil was the first-born of the primeval couple; but they bore seven, Enki perhaps one of them. Further generations of gods are described. Many literary texts mention Father Enlil as an almost loving epithet. On the various third-millennium creation stories in general, see also Michalowski (1998) 239-40.
52. IAS 116, with Shuruppak and Abu-Salabikh duplicates as given by Krecher (1978) 157. The Nippur duplicate, though excavated in 1893, remains unpublished and is known to me from field photographs, also unpublished. Such is life in Assyriology.
53. Matthews (1993) 33 50, with important comments by Steinkeller (2002) 251 ff.
54. Enlil, whose name was certainly pronounced *illil(um)* by the later Babylonian Akkadians, is derived from Semitic *il-ili*, 'God of the gods'. A similar idea was suggested (independently?) by Michalowski (1998) 241-42; but in the attempt to overcome the contrary evidence (which Steinkeller apparently ignored), Michalowski's argument became too tortuous to carry conviction.
55. See Westenholz (1999) 29-30, n. 58 and the references given there.
56. The exact location of Akkade has been discussed for a century, without conclusive results. See most recently Westenholz (1999) 33 ff. The location of Akkade given on the map, Fig. 1, is in agreement with the evidence presented there but is still uncertain.
57. Foster (1986); Lambert (1998) 58; Steinkeller (1999b) 299 ff. The city-state of Assur in the 20th century B.C. (Larsen [1976] 109-70) is a notable exception.

Bibliography

- Biggs, R.D. 1971. "An Archaic Sumerian Version of the Kesh Temple Hymn from Tell Abū Šalābikh", *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* 61: 193-207.
- Civil, M. 1994. *The Farmer's Instructions: A Sumerian Agricultural Manual*. *Aula Orientalis – Supplementa* 5.
- Cooper, J. 1983. *Reconstructing History from Ancient Inscriptions: The Lagash-Umma Border Conflict*. Sources from the Ancient Near East II/1 (Malibu).
- D'Agostino, F. 1988. "Die ersten 14 Zeilen des sog. 'zà-me'-Textes aus Abu Salabikh und die Bedeutung des Wortes zà-me", *Oriens Antiquus* 27: 75-83.
- Diakonoff, I.M. 1956. "The Rise of the Despotism in Ancient Mesopotamia", in: I.M. Diakonoff (ed.), *Ancient Mesopotamia, Socio-Economic History. A Collection of Studies by Soviet Scholars* (Moscow 1969) 173-203.
- Edzard, D.O. 1959. "Königsinschriften des Iraq Museums II", *Sumer* 15: 19-28.
- Emberling, G. 2001. G. Emberling and H. McDonald, "Excavations at Tell Brak 2000: Preliminary Report", *Iraq* 63: 21-54.
- Englund, R.K. 1998. "Texts from the Late Uruk Period", in P. Attinger and M. Wäfler (eds.), *Annäherungen I: Mesopotamien. Späturuk-Zeit und Frühdynastische Zeit*, Part 1: *Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis* 160/1: 15-233.
- Foster, B.R. 1986. "Agriculture and Accountability in Ancient Mesopotamia", in H. Weiss (ed.), *The Origins of Cities in Dry-Farming Syria and Mesopotamia in the Third Millennium B.C.* (Guildford, Connecticut) 109-28.
- Gibson, McG. 2000. "Hamoukar: Early City in Northeast Syria", *The Oriental Institute News and Notes* 166: 1-8, 18-19.
- Glassner, J.-J. 2000. "Les petits Etats mésopotamiens à la fin du 4^e et au cours du 3^e millénaire", in M.H. Hansen (ed.), *A Comparative Study of Thirty City-State Cultures* (Copenhagen) 35-53.
- Jacobsen, Th. 1942. "The Inscriptions", in P. Delougaz and S. Lloyd (ed.), *Pre-Sargonid Temples in the Diyala Region*. Oriental Institute Publications 58: 289-98.
- Jacobsen, Th. 1946. "Sumerian Mythology: A Review Article", *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 5: 128-52.
- Jacobsen, Th. 1970. *Toward the Image of Tammuz and Other Essays on Mesopotamian History and Culture* [by] Thorkild Jacobsen, ed. by W.M. Moran (Cambridge, MA).
- Kienast, B. and Volk, K. 1995. *Die sumerischen und akkadischen Briefe*. Freiburger altorientalische Studien 19.
- Krecher, J. 1978. "Sumerische Literatur der Fara-Zeit: Die UD.GAL.NUN-Texte (I)", *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 35: 155-60.
- Lambert, W.G. 1987. "The Sumero-Babylonian Brick-God Kulla", *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 46: 203-4.
- Lambert, W.G. 1998. "Kingship in Ancient Mesopotamia", in J. Day (ed.), *King and Messiah in Israel and the Ancient Near East*. Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar. *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, Supplementary Series* 207: 54-70.
- Larsen, M.T. 1976. *The Old Assyrian City-State and its Colonies*. Mesopotamia 8 (Copenhagen).
- Maeda, T. 1981. "'King of Kish' in Pre-Sargonic Sumer", *Oriens* 17: 1-17.
- Mankowski, P.V. 2000. *Akkadian Loanwords in Biblical Hebrew*. Harvard Semitic Studies 17.
- Matthews, R.J. 1993. *Cities, Seals and Writing: Archaic Seal Impressions from Jemdet Nasr and Ur*. Materialien zu den frühen Schriftzeugnissen des vorderen Orients II.

- Michalowski, P. 1998. "The Unbearable Lightness of Enlil", in J. Prosecky (ed.), *Intellectual Life of the Ancient Near East. Papers Presented at the 43rd RAI, Prague, July 1-5, 1996* (Prague).
- Mierop, M.V.D. 1999. *The Ancient Mesopotamian City*, (2nd edn, Oxford).
- Moorey, P.R.S. 1978. *Kish Excavations 1923-33* (Oxford).
- Ochsenschlager, E. 1999. "Ethnoarchaeology and Archaeology: Rethinking the Past – the Evidence from Al-Hiba", in H. Klengel and J. Renger (eds.), *Landwirtschaft im Alten Orient*, Berliner Beiträge zum Vorderen Orient 18: 65-76.
- Pomponio, F. and Visicato, G. 1994. *Early Dynastic Administrative Tablets of Šuruppak*. Istituto Universitario Orientale di Napoli, Dipartimento di Studi Asiatici, Series Maior VI.
- Sollberger, E. 1967. "The Rulers of Lagaš", *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 21: 279-91.
- Steible, H. 1977. "Seal Practice in the Ur III Period", in McG. Gibson and R.D. Biggs (eds.), "Seals and Sealing", *Bibliotheca Mesopotamica* 6: 41-53.
- Steible, H. 1982. *Die altsumerischen Bau- und Weihinschriften I-II*. Freiburger altorientalische Studien 5.
- Steinkeller, P. 1992. *Third-Millennium Legal and Administrative Texts in the Iraq Museum, Baghdad. Mesopotamian Civilizations* 4 (Eisenbrauns).
- Steinkeller, P. 1993. "Early Political Development in Mesopotamia and the Origins of the Sargonic Empire", in M. Liverani (ed.), *Akkad: The First World Empire. History of the Ancient Near East / Studies* (Padova) V: 107-129.
- Steinkeller, P. 1999a. "On Rulers, Priests and Sacred Marriage: Tracing the Evolution of Early Sumerian Kingship", in K. Watanabe (ed.), *Priests and Officials in the Ancient Near East* (Heidelberg) 103-37.
- Steinkeller, P. 1999b. "Land-Tenure Conditions in Third-Millennium Babylonia: the Problem of Regional Variation", in M. Hudson and B.A. Levine (eds.), *Urbanization and Land Ownership in the Ancient Near East* (Cambridge, MA), *Peabody Museum Bulletin* 7: 289-329.
- Steinkeller, P. 2002. "Archaic City Seals and the Question of Early Babylonian Unity", in T. Abusch (ed.), *Riches Hidden in Secret Places. Ancient Near Eastern Studies in Memory of Thorkild Jacobsen* (Eisenbrauns) 249-57.
- Stone, E. 1997. "City-States and their Centers. The Mesopotamian Example", in D.L. Nichols and T.H. Charlton (eds.), *The Archaeology of City-States* (Washington) 15-26.
- Stone, E. 1999. "The Constraints on State and Urban Forms in Ancient Mesopotamia", in M. Hudson and B.A. Levine (eds.), *Urbanization and Land Ownership in the Ancient Near East. Peabody Museum Bulletin* 7: 203-28.
- Thureau-Dangin, F. 1923. "Notes Assyriologiques", *Revue d'Assyriologie* 20: 3 ff.
- Visicato, G. 2000. *The Power and the Writing. The Early Scribes of Mesopotamia* (Bethesda, MD).
- Westenholz, A. 1974. "Early Nippur Year Dates and the Sumerian King List", *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 26: 154-56.
- Westenholz, A. 1987. *Old Sumerian and Old Akkadian Texts in Philadelphia II*. CNI Publications 3 (Copenhagen).
- Westenholz, A. 1999. "The Old Akkadian Period: History and Culture," in P. Attinger and M. Wäfler (eds.), *Annäherungen III: Akkade-Zeit und Ur III-Zeit. Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis* 160/3: 17-117.
- Wilcke, C. 1974. "Zum Königtum in der Ur III-Zeit", in P. Garelli (ed.), *Le palais et la royauté. XIXe Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale* (Paris) 177-232.
- Wright, H.T. 1969. *The Administration of Rural Production in an Early Mesopotamian Town*. Anthropological Papers, Museum of Anthropology, University of Michigan, no. 38. (Ann Arbor, MI).

Abbreviations

- ATU 3 R.K. Englund and H.J. Nissen, *Die lexikalischen Listen der archaischen Texte aus Uruk. Archaische Texte aus Uruk, III* (Berlin, 1993).
- BE I/2 H.V. Hilprecht, *The Babylonian Expedition of the University of Pennsylvania*, Series A: *Cuneiform Texts, I: Old Babylonian Inscriptions, Chiefly from Nippur, Part II* (Philadelphia 1896).
- CIRPL E. Sollberger, *Corpus des inscriptions "royales" pré-sargoniques de Lagaš* (Genève 1956).
- ECTJ A. Westenholz, *Early Cuneiform Texts in Jena*. Det kgl. Danske Videnskaberne Selskab, Historisk-Filosofiske Skrifter 7, 3 (Copenhagen 1975).
- IAS R.D. Biggs, *Inscriptions from Tell Abū Šalābīkh*. The University of Chicago, Oriental Institute Publications, XCIX (Chicago and London 1974).
- JCS *Journal of Cuneiform Studies*.
- RTC F. Thureau-Dangin, *Recueil des tablettes chaldéennes* (Paris 1903).
- SF A. Deimel, *Schultexte aus Fara*. Wissenschaftliche Veröffentlichungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft 43 (Leipzig 1923).
- UCP 9/2 H.F. Lutz, *Sumerian Temple Records of the Late Ur Dynasty*. University of California Publications in Semitic Philology 9/2 (1928).
- VAS XVI O. Schroeder, *Altbabylonische Briefe*. Vorderasiatische Schriftdenkmäler der Königlichen Museen zu Berlin, XVI (1917).