

Introduction

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1 The Evidence

In this book, we focus on administrative evidence from Girsu, dating between the two large 'empires' of late third-millennium BCE Mesopotamia, namely the Sargonic and Ur III empires. This roughly corresponds to the Late Akkad, Gutean and Lagaš II periods. Although a concise – and by no means complete – overview of the political developments that affected the Lagaš/Girsu region during that time span is provided below, we do not discuss here the chronological issues that affect this period. This approach is mostly dictated by two facts: 1) a detailed treatment of late third millennium chronology has been recently provided by several authors (Lehmann 2016; Pomponio 2011, 2016; Sallaberger, Schrakamp 2015; Steinkeller 2013, 2015); 2) the new texts published here do not add much in terms of chronological data. The matter is in fact both intricate and hard to untangle on the basis of the extant material: although some fixed points in the chronological sequence of events appear reasonably certain, the scarcity of reliable primary sources prevents scholars from reaching consensus on the time span between the death of Šarkališarri and the rise of Urnamma. Arguments have been brought forward for extra long (120 years), long (100 years), middle (80), and short duration (40 years) – the latter option seems however now outdated, owing to recently edited texts, most notably the Ur III recension of the Sumer-

ian king list (Steinkeller 2003). We tentatively adopt here a figure of 70 ± 10 years, as suggested by Sallaberger, Schrakamp 2015, which appears to be less problematic in terms of fitting most historical data in a fixed chronological grid. Be this as it may, the major political developments that occurred during this turbulent historical phase had little impact on the administrative practice in Girsu, which shows a good deal of continuity throughout the third millennium BCE.

As for its content, the book gathers all presently known cuneiform texts from Girsu, dating from Late Akkad down to Lagaš II periods, which in turn probably overlaps with the early Ur III period. Most texts have been published in the following volumes and articles: Berens, CT 50, DCS 4, MVN 3, MVN 6, MVN 7, MVN 10, RTC, Maiocchi, Molina 2019. To these documents, we added roughly a dozen of unpublished texts in the collections of the Louvre Museum. In total, the available evidence consists of roughly 600 documents. The great majority of them are translated here for the first time, in order to make their content available not only to Assyriologists, but to scholars in other disciplines as well, including History, Archaeology, Economics, etc. Although the sources presented in this book undoubtedly stem from different archives within ancient Girsu, they should be treated as a coherent whole for the purposes of historical inquiry, especially in the light of the fact that they show remarkable continuity in terms of content (prosopography, accountable practices, bureaucracy, material culture, etc.). The task of reconstructing social and economic developments there is, however, impeded by the fact that the documents are scattered over various collections: British Museum, Louvre, Istanbul Archaeological Museum, Bibliothèque Nationale de Strasbourg, Chester Beatty Library of Dublin. In addition, a few other documents are presently in the hands of private collectors. The aim of this book is to remedy to this unfortunate situation, by providing a research tool, useful to as many people as possible. As we shall see, the enormous value of the texts edited here lies on the unique level of detail they provide, which remains unsurpassed for the period considered here.

2 Historical Setting

Roughly in the second half of the XXII century BCE, the collapse of the Sargonic empire and the subsequent Gutean intrusion in southern Babylonia promoted a radical change in the political structures of that area. In what follows, we provide a tentative reconstruction of the events that affected Lagaš/Girsu during the time span covered by the texts edited in the present volume. Due to our expertise, the discussion is mostly focused on textual data, with only limited references to the archaeological record. These sources help to situate the

administrative texts edited here in a broader historical scenario. As for the sequence of Lagaš rulers in the period under present inquiry, we tentatively follow the list proposed by Maeda (1988, 22, 24), with the possible addition of Puzurmama as first independent ruler after the Sargonic domination (see discussion below).

Table 1 The rulers of Lagaš in the period between the death of Šarkališarri and the rise of Šulgi

Ruler	Years of reign	Title
Puzurmama	?	lugal
(Late Akkad domination?)	?	lugal
Urningirsu I	5	ensi ₂
Pirigme	2	ensi ₂
Lubau*	1	ensi ₂
Lugula*	1	ensi ₂
KAKu*	1	ensi ₂
Urbau	6	ensi ₂
Gudea	20	ensi ₂
Urningirsu II	2/6	ensi ₂
Urgar	1	ensi ₂
Urabba	1	ensi ₂
Urmama	1	ensi ₂
Nammahni	3	ensi ₂

*Possibly to be moved after Urgar

2.1 The End of Akkadian Domination: Towards Local Autonomy

The reasons for the fall of the large political structure put in place by Sargon and his successors are not entirely clear: climate change in the Diyala region, central incompetence in dealing with the administration of a vast territory, conspiracies within the royal court, inherent political instability within the individual city-states controlled by Akkad, lack of resources, economic crisis, social disorders, warfare, as well as foreign invasions are possible factors that contributed to the decline of the so called “first world empire” (Liverani 1993, 3-5; Foster 2016, 22-5; Westenholz 1999, 56-9). Signs of crisis in the South already emerge toward the end of Šarkališarri’s reign, i.e. at the apex of the Sargonic expansion. Several Old-Akkadian letter-orders speak of administrative problems of various kinds: lack of manpower, delays in the shipment of goods, issues with field production, and pillages by Guteans are well attested in the royal correspond-

ence.¹ In a year name,² Šarkališarri actually claims to have captured Šarlag, king of Gutium, but his ‘victory’ was by no means final. In another year name, he mentions his victory against Amurru, on the western border -- a fact that speaks for increasing military activity on that part of his “empire” as well.³ Events probably took an irreversible turn just after Šarkališarri’s death, which triggered further political instability (as attested in the well-known Sumerian King List passage “Who was king? Who was not king?”). A progressive contraction of the territory directly controlled by Akkad followed, although the details of this process remain obscure. The Sargonic capital actually retained its political prestige, as well as the control of at least part of northern Babylonia, up to Nippur, for some forty years, under the reigns of Dudu and Šudurul – i.e. during the so-called Late Akkad Period –, which in turn overlaps with the rise of the Guteans: a foreign population, probably stemming from the Zagros area, which managed to infiltrate in southern Babylonia (see below § 2.2.3). Some time during or shortly after the ‘anarchy’ period mentioned above, Lagaš was ruled by a certain Puzurmama.⁴ Be he of local or foreign origin, he took advantage of the uncertain political situation within

1 Gutean pillages are attested in FAOS 19 Gir 19 = LEM 22. As far as letter-orders are concerned, Guteans may also be attested in FAOS 19 Um 3 = LEM 51, but the context is fragmentary.

2 Cf. the colophon of RTC 118: “In the year when Šarkališarri laid the foundations of the temples of Annunitum and Aba in Babylon, and took prisoner Šarlag, the king (lugal) of Gutium”.

3 Cf. colophon of MAD 1 268: “In the year Šarkališarri was victorious against Amurru”.

4 He is traditionally (and probably mistakenly) identified with a former local ruler (ensi₂) active under Šarkališarri. The synchronism between the two was postulated on the basis of a letter-order, namely RTC 83 (=FAOS 19 Gir 26; LEM no. 4) sent by a certain puzur₄-d[...] to the Akkadian king, but the integration of the personal name as puzur₄-d[ma-ma] is improbable at best (cf. remarks of Sommerfeld 2015, 272-3). Although a direct prosopographical link between them is excluded, a certain Puzurmama is attested in the colophons of two Girsu texts, namely RTC 181 and ITT 5 6758, with two different titles, respectively ensi₂ and lugal lagaš^{ki}. The former is a two-column tablet on both obverse and reverse, and the same probably apply to the latter, which is much more fragmentary in nature (only a few lines on the reverse columns remain). In both instances, the name and title of Puzurmama are placed at the end of the text, surrounded by an unscribed space. The dating of both texts cannot be established with certainty on prosopographical grounds. From the point of view of palaeography, they look Classical Sargonic (i.e. from the period from late Naramsuen down through Šarkališarri) or perhaps slightly later, but certainly not Ur III. The implications of placing his name within blank spaces in the above-mentioned tablets are not entirely clear: a full dating formula would be more explicit (ex.: *mu puzur₄-ma-ma ensi₂ “year Puzurmama became ruler”), and the same is true for a reference to a specific occasion (ex.: *in u₄ puzur₄-ma-ma ensi₂ “when Puzurmama became ruler”). Tentatively, one may consider that the PN + title formula makes explicit the ultimate responsibility for the items mentioned in the text, but this remains speculative.

the region, proclaiming himself king of Lagaš (lugal lagaš^{ki}).⁵ It is difficult to estimate the length of his reign, but it seems plausible that it was a short one. In fact, his name does not appear in later offerings to deceased local rulers, dated to the Ur III period – a fact that also speaks for a dating of his reign before the advent of the well-established Lagaš II dynasty, unless of course his exclusion was due to other factors. For instance, one may consider the idea that he might have been unrelated by family ties to the subsequent Lagaš II dynasty. Be this as it may, his political emergence was ephemeral.

2.2 A Late Akkad Domination in Girsu?

It is possible – albeit by no means proved – that shortly after Puzur-mama’s proclamation as local king, Girsu was conquered or simply plundered (*en-a-ru*) once more by a Late Akkad king. This event is recorded on a poorly preserved Ur III copy of an original inscription now lost, namely NBC 10736 (RIME 2.1.10.2 = Frayne 1993, 211), found in the temple of Ištar in Nippur. The restoration of the royal name as ¹*du*¹-[*du*] remains difficult, but it is presently the most likely option.⁶ As Pomponio (2011, 228) remarks, the title “king of Akkad” (lugal a-ga-de₃^{ki}), although compatible with Sargon and Naramsuen, cannot possibly refer here to either of them, as they never mention the conquest of Girsu in their own extant inscriptions (cf. also Gelb, Kienast 1990, 283). The title was also used by Dudu and Šudurul, the traces best fitting – albeit not without problems – the former. Of course, it is not impossible that we are dealing here with a king of the Late Akkad or Gutean periods not attested in the Sumerian King List, such as for instance LI-*lu-ul*-DAN, mentioned in one inscription only (RIME 2.1.12), but this seems less likely. In such a scenario, however, Puzurmama may have attained kingship in Lagaš just after the short-lived conquest of the Akkadian king – whoever he may have been.

⁵ As it is well known, during the Sargonic domination the title *ensi*₂ is reserved for the local subordinate to the king of Akkad, to whom the title *lugal* is reserved. The fact that one Puzurmama uses such title clearly speaks for his being an independent local ruler. Whether he was previously an *ensi*₂ or whether we are dealing with two name-sake individuals remains unclear.

⁶ On the integration and previous interpretations cf. Sommerfeld 2015, 273-4. The photo of the reverse is now available on CDLI (P227535).

2.2.1 Gutean Presence in Babylonia

Be this as it may, the regional political instability was certainly increased by the progressive intrusion of Guteans, already mentioned in Classical Sargonic texts from Umma, Adab, Kish, Tell Agrab and Umm-el-Hafriyat.⁷ The Gutean homeland presently remains largely elusive to us: Guteans appear to be originally semi-nomadic people, possibly organised in tribes, scattered throughout the southern Zagros region. After an initial phase devoted to pillage activities, Guteans settled – and apparently flourished – in Adab and Umma. Lagaš/Girsu was initially affected by this phenomenon as well, losing part of its territory to the newcomers. The same is probably true for Irisan-grig (Steinkeller 2001, 31), thus implying control of a strategic point of passage for commercial activities, and possibly upstream control of both sides of the Tigris, in close proximity to Nippur.⁸ It is therefore not surprising that the Gutean presence in Sumer was regarded as problematic, to say the least, by the locals. Later ideological compositions, such as the so-called “Curse of Akkad” and the “Lamentation on the Destruction of Ur”, ascribe this anti-Gutean sentiment to cultural distance, portraying the Guteans as uncivilised people (Cooper 1983, 56-9; Michalowski 1989, 40-5, 50-1), thus ignoring altogether the urban presence they certainly acquired after settling in Adab and Umma. Further south, all major urban centres, such as Uruk, Ur, Larsa, and Lagaš/Girsu, managed to keep their independence.

2.2.2 The Lagaš II Dynasty at a Glance

The impact of the Gutian interregnum over Lagaš/Girsu seems in fact to have been minor. The city progressively gained prominence: a few year names attributed to Urningirsu I commemorate local building activities, and a votive object in the shape of a human-headed bull was dedicated by his wife in the Ebabbar temple in Larsa. Little is known about the achievements of his son, Pirigme, except for a reference to the construction of a weir, mentioned in three bricks, stemming from a structure on the eastern part of the tell in Girsu, where bricks of Urningirsu were also found. Nothing is known of the three ensis who allegedly followed Pirigme, namely Lubau, Lugula, and KAKU. On the contrary, Urbau’s buildings activities are well documented: apparently he built the temples of several deities in Girsu, including Bau, Enki, Ninhursag, Inanna, Nindara, Ninagala, Ninmarki, Geštinanna, Du-

⁷ Schrakamp 2015, 226, 236, 242. On the Umm-el-Hafriyat texts see most recently Milano, Westenholz 2015.

⁸ On the location of Irisan-grig see Molina 2013a.

muziabzu and Ningirsu, as attested in an inscribed diorite statue of him from Girsu. His name is also engraved on several stone objects (vessels, mace heads and tablets) – a fact that speaks for a flourishing economy and ability to exploit the trading routes for semi-precious stones. He reinforced his political position by placing his daughters in important institutional positions: a certain Enanepada became high-priestess of the moon god at Ur; another daughter of his named Ninala married Gudea; another one, whose name is not preserved, married Urgan; yet another one, named Ninhedu, married Nammahni, the last ruler of the dynasty. Gudea is undoubtedly the most notable figure of the Lagaš II dynasty, having provided us with an impressive number of statues and inscriptions celebrating his deeds. Not only that, but the subsequent kings from the Ur III dynasty looked to him with reverence and devotion. Under his reign, Lagaš/Girsu became a focal point for the circulation of precious items within Mesopotamia. He re-enabled the routes that once were controlled by the Sargonic kings, thus allowing long-distance trade from both east (perhaps as far as the Indus valley) and west. Local building activities also flourished, the construction of the new (albeit smaller) temple of Ningirsu perhaps being the most famous one. Gudea's warfare activities are by contrast poorly documented: only the defeat and resulting booty of Anšan and Elam are mentioned in his own inscriptions, albeit briefly. Gudea's relative chronology is still a debated topic. Pomponio (2016) convincingly argues for placing his reign before the rise of Utuhengal of Uruk (see discussion below). Urningirsu II, son and successor of Gudea, possibly married one of Utuhengal's daughters (Carroué 1994, 75, based on administrative data), and possibly assisted him in the campaign that eventually put to an end the Gutean domination at Adab and nearby centres. Lagaš/Girsu, however, was set on a path of decline: the king of Uruk apparently intervened in a controversy regarding the territory of Lagaš/Girsu, on which Ur had made claims. The action of Utuhengal in favour of Lagaš/Girsu is not surprising, giving the possible family connections. It is also a reminder of the situation dating back to Early Dynastic times, when the king of Kish (temporarily) solved the border issues between Lagaš and Umma for the control of the fertile Guedena region, lying between the two city-states. However, the fact that the king of Uruk now bears the title "king of the four quarters", as well as the fact that Lagaš/Girsu had to rely on his help for getting back the control of its south-western territory, imply that the political axis of power had moved away from Lagaš. Urningirsu II continued the traditional building activity of his predecessor, albeit on a much reduced scale, and managed to fashion a couple of statues of himself, in alabaster and diorite. Utuhengal's successful military expedition in turn set the ground for the rise of the Ur III empire: he was to unify Sumer once again for roughly one century, at the very end of the third millennium BCE. However, de-

spite Utuhengal's immediate victory, the Gutean question remained open: Urnamma, founder of the Ur III empire, was to fight Guteans once again, this time probably in their native homeland, as attested in one of his year names. The local ensi who ruled Lagaš/Girsu after Urningirsu II appear in fact to be modest figures on the political scene: the only remarkable datum concerning Urgar (who married a daughter of Urbau), Urabba and Urmama is that they kept receiving funerary offerings in the time of the third dynasty of Ur. Despite the fact that Nammahni left a good number of inscriptions in Girsu, the most notable fact about him is that he was probably promoted there as local governor by the king of Ur, as mentioned in the so-called Urnamma law code.⁹ Ur was in fact the new hegemonic power in Mesopotamia, which was to rule Lagaš/Girsu and the surrounding regions for nearly a century.

3 Dating, Phraseology, and Arrangement of the Texts in the Present Book

With a few exceptions, it is very difficult to establish temporal correlations between the known rulers of late third millennium Girsu and the documents studied here. However, on prosopographical and palaeographical grounds, most of the texts appear to be dated to the reigns of Gudea and his son Urningirsu II. Year names occur with remarkable frequency in the colophons of the tablets edited here, thus providing anchor-points for the dating of the texts. Roughly 16% of the tablets are in fact dated:¹⁰ although the number may appear small in absolute terms, one should compare it with the situation for the previous period, i.e. the Sargonic period, which provides a much smaller figure (less than 1%).¹¹ The attribution of many year names to a given king remains however often conjectural – most notably, Urningirsu (I) is impossible to distinguish from his namesake descendant using only internal criteria. Due to these uncertainties and for reasons of completeness, we included in the book also tablets which may belong to the so-called Late Akkad and Ur III periods. Concerning such evidence, the selection is limited to documents dated with a year name, however problematic in terms of chronolo-

⁹ Cf. translation "I had Namhani to follow in the governorship of Lagaš" in Sallaberg, Scharkamp 2015, 120-1.

¹⁰ Cf. indexes – other terms at the end of the book, s.v. "mu".

¹¹ The available evidence for the Sargonic period is of course larger, i.e. roughly 10,000 tablets, stemming from several sites. This is in sharp contrast with Lagaš II sources, which are fewer in number and almost invariably stem from Girsu. Whether this fact implies a bias in the percentages presented above cannot be determined.

gy. The reader is advised that future studies may prove such documents are to be moved either earlier or later than the period we are concerned with in the present book.

The documents presented here are all administrative in nature. A cursory overview of phraseology used in the texts reveals a remarkable continuity in bureaucratic praxis. The clause *zi-ga* - i.e. 'expenditure' - is the most common. The *zi-ga* texts are in fact especially interesting, in that they form a coherent group, thus providing the main criterion for the definition of individual dossiers, attached to the officials described below. The present book is in fact structured according to such dossiers: we believe that such arrangement is beneficial in terms of understanding the activities of the most important individuals of the Gudea's dynasty, highlighting shared features and differences. Other arrangements are of course possible (by content, by tentative chronology, etc.). These solutions have both strengths and weaknesses. We adopted a dossier-based arrangement, whenever possible, as a middle-way, keeping content-based arrangement (i.e. alimentary items, cattle management, etc.) as a secondary parameter. Besides dossiers attached to individual officials, we also recognised a group of texts concerned with taxation and slavery, as well as another one concerned with manumission.

Returning to the expression *zi-ga*, this is frequently followed by the name of the official involved in such administrative operation. In more detail, the expression *zi-ga PN* occurs in roughly 200 documents, as opposed to roughly 40 texts having only the clause *zi-ga*, i.e. without further indications. In such occasions, it is possible that the local ruler or some other high authority was directly involved in the movement of goods. On prosopographical grounds, it seems likely that the *zi-ga PN* clause was first introduced in the Lagaš/Girsu documents roughly at the time of the reign of Urbau. The most frequently attested officials involved in the *zi-ga* texts are: Urbagara, Dada, Erenda, Šaraisa, Šuna, Lugalnimdu, Urningirsupalil, Luinanna, Girine, Itaea. Occasionally, namesake individuals are said to be *maškim* (agents?) or *ugula* (supervisors). Whether the above-mentioned persons acted in such capacity in the *zi-ga* texts remains conjectural. As for Urbagara, Visicato (2010, 435, 452; contra Sommerfeld 2016, 276-9) offers an in-depth analysis of his career and the relevant chronological implications, in terms of dating the Urbagara texts to the post-Sargonic period. A finer, more precise dating can be achieved only by prosopographical analysis of all individuals involved in the archives. However, such a task is complicated by the fact that the actual list of Girsu rulers active in the period between the death of Šarkališarri and the beginning of Ur III dynasty is notably controversial. Without an in-depth prosopographical study, the risk of a circular argument is therefore high. For the time being, we maintain that the early texts mention the following individuals: Ur-

bagara, Uruki, Šeškura and Utulu (referred to as Group A in Visicato 2010, 438-9). Urbagara occurs also at the time of Gudea, therefore implying that his activities cover a couple of decades. His late office overlaps with those of Dada (his son), Lugalnimdu, Urnigar, and Bazi. Toward the end of the reign of Gudea, another important official appears, namely Šaraisa. He probably kept his office throughout the reign of Urningirsu II. He is the most frequently attested official in the texts discussed here. After him, his position was probably taken by a certain Šuna, who appears to be active from the late reign of Urningirsu II to the beginning of the reign of the new ensi, perhaps Urgan. Whithin the zi-ga texts, a few other individuals in charge of expenditures are known, but they are harder to place in a chronological grid. Here, it is worth mentioning Itaea, who probably worked after Šuna and Urgan. By and large, it seems that most texts belong to the time of Gudea and at the beginning of the reign of Urningirsu II, as the most important officials are mentioned in this time span. Only a minor part of the documents can safely be dated to the period before Gudea, as proved by the sparse mention of known ensis.

4 Content of the Texts at a Glance

As for their content, the text may be classified according to the following categories: 1) land management; 2) barley, emmer, wheat; 3) bread; 4) flour; 5) beer; 6) fruit; 7) fish; 8) fat and cheese; 9) cattle; 10) wool; 11) textiles; 12) personnel; 13) furniture; 14) metal; 15) miscellaneous texts. Overlaps among individual categories are frequent. As it is true for all cities throughout Mesopotamian history, the items listed above appear to be the pivotal points of urban management in late third millennium Girsu, not only in terms of primary production, but also in terms of labor management and consequent social structure. It must be stressed, however, that the sources studied in this volume are primarily institutional, therefore omitting evidence from outside the sphere of city administration. With this limitation in mind, the emerging picture shows a highly centralised urban system, rotating around the local ruler and the institutions under his authority. The dense network of administrative patterns emerging within the royal family and its entourage (ministers, cupbearers, scribes, 'captains', supervisors, administrators, etc.) speaks for a mature system, similar to Sargonic and Ur III administration.