

MONSTERS AND DEMONS  
IN THE ANCIENT  
AND MEDIEVAL WORLDS

PAPERS PRESENTED IN HONOR OF  
EDITH PORADA

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# The Fantastic World of Sumerian Art; Seal Impressions from Ancient Lagash

Donald P. Hansen

This essay presents a group of recently found sealings from the Early Dynastic period of Sumer which are for the most part unpublished. These sealings were found in ancient Lagash and are important in that they represent several styles and are fixed in terms of securely dated findspots. They allow for a further understanding of the stylistic and chronological development of the glyptic of Early Dynastic Sumer. Though the impressions are extremely fragmentary, they are rich in iconographic content which demands some attention and commentary no matter how elusive and cryptic the meaning might be. Before the discussion of the subject matter of the sealings, however, they will be discussed for the contribution which they make to the understanding of the stylistic and chronological development of the glyptic of ancient Sumer.

Lagash, the capital of the city state of Lagash, is the modern site of al-Hiba located today in the south eastern part of Iraq between the other important cities of Girsu (modern Telloh) and Nina (modern Surghul).<sup>1</sup> It is the largest Sumerian city, covering some two square miles, and today is surrounded by marshes on three sides and by a large canal on the fourth. The period of Lagash's greatest geographical extent would have been during the second and third quarter of the third millennium B.C. With the rise of the kingdom of Akkad the city shrank considerably in size, and occupation was restricted to a long north-south ridge where many of the important Sumerian temples were maintained into the Old Babylonian period. It would appear that by the time of the post Akkadian period the residence of the Lagash ruler had moved to the city of Girsu.

The sealings of al-Hiba come mainly from the Areas B and C of the excavations. As far as is known at present Area B contains the *Bagara*, the great temple complex dedicated to Ningirsu. One building furnished with a series of ovens is probably the prototype of what in later times has come to be called the "Kitchen" temple. A copper dagger blade found in a room located to the north of the first courtyard on the west side of Level III was inscribed

1 References to the reports of the excavations of the Institute of Fine Arts of New York University and of The Metropolitan Museum of Art at al-Hiba are cited in the article "Lagaš" in the *Real-*

*lexikon der Assyriologie und vorderasiatischen Archäologie* VI: 5/6: p. 422. Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1983.

## EARLY DYNASTIC III GLYPHTIC

		LAGASH	UR		GLYPHTIC STYLES
EARLY DYNASTIC I & II	2740				Seal Impression Strata Styles    Fara Styles
	2720				
	2700				
	2680				
	2660				
	2640				
	2620				
EARLY DYNASTIC III A	2600			Mesilim	"Imdugud-Sukurru" Styles  Royal Cemetery Styles
	2580				
	2560	Urnanshe	Meskalamdug		
	2540	Akurgal	Akalamdug		
	2520				
EARLY DYNASTIC III B	2500	Eannatum	Mesannepada (Ninbanda) A'annipada		Ur-Lagash Styles
	2480				
	2460	Enannatum I			
	2440	Entemena			
	2420	Enannatum II			
	2400	Enetarzi			
	2380	Lugalanda Uru'inimgina			
	2360				
2340					

Fig. 1 Early Dynastic chronological chart

and gives the name of the *ensi* Eannatum.<sup>2</sup> In Area C, quite some distance from the *Bagara*, was a large structure over 100 square meters in size. It was not a temple, but is best termed an administrative complex which seems to have grown as needs demanded without any overall design. In Level IB of the building were found a royal sealing (Plate XIV, fig. 17a, b) and several tablets bearing the names of Eannatum and Enannatum I dating the level or a least part of it to the time of these rulers (c. 2500–2470 B.C.).<sup>3</sup> A cone with the name of Entemena ( $\pm$  2450 B.C.), although found in the surface debris of the building, might indicate that the level lasted into the time of his reign. The impressions when viewed as a whole are by far the best dated group of sealings for the later part of the Early Dynastic period.

The period of concern is the Sumerian Early Dynastic period from ca. 2900 B.C. to ca. 2370 B.C. (Fig. 1). This time span is generally divided into three parts: Early Dynastic I, II, and III. The phases of Early Dynastic I and II are shown without a division on the chart, and the upper limit of Early Dynastic I is not indicated. Early Dynastic III is divided into two parts, an earlier A phase and a later B phase. The chart has an absolute chronology, but the dates for the specific periods and the placement of royal names are only suggestions as no solid evidence is available.<sup>4</sup>

In the right hand column of Figure 1 various glyptic styles are given ranging from Early Dynastic I through Early Dynastic III B. The terminology employed is cumbersome to the specialist and non-specialist alike, but certain of the terms have become so firmly established that at the present time it seems preferable to retain some of these rather than introduce a new system based, for example, on numbers or letters.<sup>5</sup> No one system of classification is acceptable to all scholars. The terminology is intended to be taken only generally and defines certain groups of seals whose upper and lower chronological limits are not yet known. Each style or styles flowed easily into its successor so that precision is definitely lacking. The complexities of regionalism and possible time lapses are not suggested on the chart.

The earliest group in the Early Dynastic I and II range may be called the "Seal Impression Strata Styles" named after sealings found in dumped layers of debris at Ur. Comparable

2 V. Crawford, "Lagash," *Iraq* 36 (1974), p. 32.

3 R. D. Biggs, *Inscriptions from al-Hiba-Lagash, The First and Second Seasons*. ("Bibliotheca Mesopotamica," 3: p. 1 ff.) Malibu: Undena, 1976.

4 Crucial to the chronology of the Early Dynastic III period is the suggestion that Eannatum and Mesannepada are roughly contemporary. V. H. J. Nissen, *Zur Datierung des Königsfriedhofes von Ur*. Bonn: Habelt, 1966, p. 135 ff. and R. M. Boehmer, "Zur Glyptik zwischen Mesilim- und Akkad-Zeit (Early Dynastic III)," *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* N.F. 25. (59) Band. Berlin, 1969, p. 261 f. This places Meskalamdug and Akalamdug of the Royal Cemetery and Urnanshe in the later part of Early Dynastic III A which makes most sense archaeologically and art historically. The "notorious" king of Kish, Mesilim, would have reigned in the earlier part of that period. A similar scheme for ordering the rulers appears in J.

Cooper, *Reconstructing History from Ancient Inscriptions: The Lagash-Umma Border Conflict*, Sources and Monographs on the Ancient Near East, 2/1: p. 80. Malibu: Undena. The chart is given without comment.

5 For the study of Early Dynastic glyptic the following studies are of primary importance:

R. M. Boehmer, "Zur Glyptik zwischen Mesilim- und Akkad-Zeit".

P. Amiet, *La glyptique mésopotamienne archaïque*.

Paris: Editions du centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1961.

É. Porada, rev. of B. Buchanan, *Catalogue of Ancient Near Eastern Seals in the Ashmolean Museum*. Vol. I: Cylinder Seals. Oxford: Clarendon, 1966, in *Bibliotheca Orientalis* XXVII, 1/2 (1970) p. 8 f.

E. Porada, *Ancient Art in Seals*. Princeton Univ. Press, 1970, p. 7 ff.

seals and sealings come from Nippur, Fara, Kish, the Diyala region, and Susa, as well as from al-Hiba.<sup>6</sup> An actual seal found on the surface of the site well represents the class (Plate XII, fig. 2). Echoing an earlier tradition are the confronted bulls with simply defined bodies. Only the line of the haunch is emphasized, but other linear accents are added in the ears and eyes. The animals stand before a plant which has a flower in the form of a rosette on one side. Unlike earlier styles, a characteristic of this glyptic phase is the movement implied in the lion hovering over the bull's backs. The legs, ending in grasping claws, are stretched forth in different directions, and the head with open mouth is folded back completely against the body. Such violently contorted postures and the implied action are relinquished by the seal cutters in favor of upright figures locked into a vertical frieze as is exemplified by a somewhat later seal now in the British Museum (Plate XII, fig. 3).<sup>7</sup> Although figures grasp animals, there is a feeling of space between the various elements of the composition. The relief is high, yet its forms are relatively flat. A small bird is used as a filling motif within a scene composed of standing bulls and lions whose heads are seen both in profile and from above. The lions are seized by a nude belted heroic figure with vertical locks and by humanized bull men. The head of one bull man is in profile while the partially human head of the other is shown frontally. A common stylistic feature for this phase is the scalloped patterning of the lions' manes.

Approximately contemporary is a sealing from Fara, the site after which the style is named (Plate XII, fig. 4).<sup>8</sup> Again, there are upright animals, but in this case the lion and bull cross and the heroic figures have different hair-styles. One figure on this seal has two long tufts of hair reminiscent of a jester's cap. An element of the monstrous is introduced in the central figure whose upper body is like that of the adjacent figure, but whose lower body is in the form of two hand-standing lions. Their heads, although schematically rendered, are seen from above and their tails which end in small profile lion heads are grasped by the figure itself.

For the following Early Dynastic III A period the term "Imdugud Sukurru" indicates a seal style contemporary with a group of texts from Fara datable to this phase. The term is usually read now as "Anzu Sud", but the previous name "Imdugud Sukurru" is so firmly associated with a particular style that the older usage is retained here. This style seems to have regional variations.<sup>9</sup>

Plate XII, fig. 5 is an example from Ur where the figures of the animal frieze are more closely interlocked than previously.<sup>10</sup> Shown are crossing lions attacking horned animals whose heads are turned back. An upright dagger is placed in the field between the lions. Beside the main group the field breaks down into two registers with additional lions. The

6 Other than the references cited above in n. 5, for Early Dynastic I seals v. D.P. Hansen, "Some Early Dynastic I Sealings from Nippur," in *Studies Presented to George M.A. Hanfmann*. Philipp von Zabern, 1971, pp. 47-54, and P.R.S. Moorey, "Unpublished Early Dynastic Sealings from Ur in the British Museum," *Iraq* 41 (1979) p. 105 ff.

7 British Museum 89538; E. Strommenger, *Fünf Jahrtausende Mesopotamien*. Munich: Hirmer, 1962, Pl. 42, bottom.

8 E. Heinrich and W. Andrae, ed. *Fara: Ergebnisse der Ausgrabungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft in Fara und Abu Hatab 1902/03*. Berlin: Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. Vorderasiatische Abteilung, 1931, Pl. 51 l.

9 R.M. Boehmer, "Zur Glyptik zwischen Mesilim- und Akkad-Zeit," p. 263 ff.

10 C.L. Woolley, *Ur Excavations II. The Royal Cemetery*. London: Oxford, 1934, Pl. 204:149.

strong linear patterns on the lions' manes and on the horned animal bodies are reminiscent of previous styles.

From the so-called Royal Cemetery at Ur there is a seal with the name of Akalamdug dating to the later part of the Early Dynastic III A period (Plate XII, fig. 6).<sup>11</sup> It shows two crossed lions attacking a bull and a reversed goat. A second lion also seizes the goat's hind end. The photograph in the publication is badly lighted, but still one begins to sense a more fully rounded relief than formerly. The seal of his predecessor, Meskalamdug (Plate XII, fig. 7), has an even higher degree of modelling as evidenced in the crossed lions attacking standing bulls.<sup>12</sup> The manes are now indicated by heavily carved locks of hair and no longer by just linear incised patterns. Royal seals, however, show only one aspect of the product of the glyptic of a single period. Many other seals were executed in a more rudimentary style in which the figures are only roughly indicated. Many examples were also found in the "Royal Cemetery" such as the seals depicting a banquet scene in the upper register and musicians with a singer or dancer in the lower register (Plate XII, fig. 8).<sup>13</sup>

In the chart, Early Dynastic III B begins with the ruler Eannatum of Lagash. This Early Dynastic phase includes the remainder of the Lagash rulers as well as the important kings of the First Dynasty of Ur. I have used the term "Ur-Lagash Styles" as a general name for the glyptic of the period. Therefore, the new group of al-Hiba sealings dating to Eannatum, Enannatum I, and perhaps Entemena belong to the earlier half of the Early Dynastic III B period.

The cylinder seal as used in antiquity probably served many purposes; for example, a rolling of the seal could have been used as a simple indication of ownership, or indicate an origin for a traded object, or the seal itself could have been dedicated as a votive object. Be that as it may, the fragments of mud rescued from excavations bear impressions of seals with only partially completed designs, or impressions of seals rolled in a slap-dash, haphazard fashion. These sometimes bear little likeness to the finely executed rollings of actual cylinder seals in our possession today. Even so, the majority of the al-Hiba impressions do give some idea of the original seal designs. For a group of such well dated seal impressions of the late third millennium B.C. from one site and mostly from one building, one is struck first of all by the extraordinary number of design types and the wide range of styles.

Some of the seal designs are composed of purely geometric patterns (Plate XIII, fig. 9), while others are geometric designs formed of partially recognizable elements such as a cross or floral motif (Plate XIII, fig. 10). One might argue that these sealings were made with rollings of much older seals which were used again long after the time of the seal's original manufacture. There are obvious examples which demonstrate that older seals were sometimes reused, but it is more probable in this case that geometric seals had a long history in Mesopotamian glyptics and that such sealings represent one aspect of the Ur-Lagash styles.

Among the sealings with designs which include human figurative elements is Plate XIII, fig. 11. In this double register seal is a seated man apparently working on a table or bench with perhaps groups of three types of pots shown in the field above the working space. The figure is greeted by another, and between them is a curious object which looks something like a churn, but is probably not. Also included is a "temple facade," an architectural element which suggests that the activity is somehow connected with the cult. Architectural

11 *Ibid.*, Pl. 198:65.

12 *Ibid.*, Pl. 196:55.

13 E.g., *ibid.*, Pl. 194:22.

> why?  
who?

motifs are used in other sealings with scenes of seated and standing figure groups which unfortunately are incompletely preserved. Standing animals are shown in the lower register of Plate XIII, fig. 12, and in Plate XIII, fig. 13 are included entwined serpents, two animals perhaps originally horned, a portion of a plant frond, and curious symbol reminiscent of an *ankb*. In the mind of the seal cutter as well as in the mind of the person who commissioned the seal, the scenes in both registers must have been connected no matter how nebulous the associated meanings might have been.

In the sealing of Plate XIII, fig. 14 the design is composed exclusively of a juxtaposed series of symbols. It is impossible to recognize most of these; however, within our ken is the coiled serpent or perhaps even a snail and a monster-like inverted animal above the serpent. Clearer is the animal with extremely long sectioned horns shown next to a scorpion depicted from above in the sealing of Plate XIII, fig. 15. In the lower register is a newt or salamander. It is unfortunate that the entire impression of Plate XIII, fig. 16 is not preserved, for occasionally in the *œuvre* of the Lagash seal carvers there is almost a baroque touch, evident here in the manner in which the horns of the animal melt into the register line and swirl upward and forward only to reverse and grow into an entwined serpentine motif.

Seals with scenes of human and animal combat were the most popular during the Early Dynastic period, and most of the impressions from al-Hiba belong to this category. As one might expect, the finest of the seal impressions preserved was made by a royal seal. Plate XIV, fig. 17a,b shows a portion of a seal of Eannatum. Unfortunately most of the main group of the composition is not extant, but a small area divided into two registers is virtually intact. In the lower portion is a contest and in the upper portion a label with the name of the *ensi* Eannatum.<sup>14</sup> A large bull with head turned back on the right side of the impression is part of the main contest scene which probably had as the central axis two crossed lions. The bull is provided with a large well defined eye, an upright ear, and a single twisted horn. His long tail is also twisted, and a circle executed by means of a single drill hole is placed between his legs. A small lion whose head is seen from above is fitted into the curve of the bull's back and seizes the bull's neck with his mouth. Two figures fill the space between the inscription. On the right is a heroic figure whose lower body is turned towards the left, but whose upper body and head are seen frontally. Although nudity is certainly intended, the thighs of his legs are clearly demarcated from the lower leg so that he appears to be wearing pants. The head is overly large in relation to the rest of the body, and the full hair is elaborate. A part divides the hair in the middle, and there are large full locks upturned on either side of the face. The manner in which he grasps the figure to the left is unique, and he seems to stab the latter with a dagger. One or both figures hold a reversed animal by the rear leg. Even though the sealing surface is not broken and the carving is sharp, it is difficult to decide exactly what animal is represented. This is curious since the rest of the seal is carved with a wealth of clear and precise details. Some who have seen the sealing suggest that the animal most closely resembles a boar or a pig. If this were the case, the representation would again be unique. The demonic figure to the left is a bull man. His profile lower body is that of a bull, but his torso is human as well as are his arms. However, his head is a fusion of both bovine and human elements. Down his back falls a thick tress which turns up at the bottom. Like the heroic figure who attacks him, he also attacks and puts a dagger into the hero's

<sup>14</sup> There seems to be a portion of a sign preceding the PA. I am unable to explain this.



head. An idea of the style of the carving can be gained from the photograph of the actual sealing. The modelling is fully rounded and there is a meticulous attention to detail. The effect is one of a richness of execution, yet the over-all impression is quite static due to the clarity with which each part is rendered.

The royal style is found on other partially preserved sealings such as Plate XIV, fig. 18. In this fragment the rare ibex demon shown with a long tress is comparable to Eannatum's bull man. A bull also has twisted horns; however, the hero in this scene has a hair style composed of three large flame-like tufts which project from the head. Very characteristic for the glyptic of Lagash at this time is the placement of an assortment of small animals in the field. On this seal what appears to be a small lion fills the curvature of the bull's back. In the seal of Plate XIV, fig. 19 the central portion of the main scene shows two crossed lions with heads seen typically from above. Their manes are executed by means of large tufts of hair, and what appears to be the remains of an inscription separates the two lions. One lion seizes a bull while the other grasps what is perhaps a stag. Heroes flank this grouping and interestingly, attack not the predatory lions but the bull and the stag. On this seal small birds are used to fill the space formed by the curves of the herbivores' backs.

A lion, a bull, a stag surmounting a curious rectangular object, and a small horned animal form the right portion of the composition of Plate XIV, fig. 20. Replacing the hero who might be expected to appear to the left of the animals, there are two identical nude crossed humans. Each has a bended knee which seems to rest on three balls, the mountain or earth motif. Such crossed identical figures, usually called the twins, are not unique in Early Dynastic glyptic, but the manner in which they are shown here is. Also unparalleled, to the present writer's knowledge, is the depiction of the kneeling twins upon the mountain symbol.

In the contest scene of Plate XV, fig. 21 two crossed lions are shown. One attacks a herbivore who in turn is attacked by a flame haired hero with a dagger. The same composition appears in Plate XV, fig. 22 with a similar type of hero. The compositions of these designs are balanced with the crossing and attacking groups of animals and heroes. Unlike the previously discussed impressions, in Plate XV, fig. 22 the hero does grapple with the lion now shown reversed and held up by its tail. The fact that the lion is held in a reversed fashion is probably not overly significant, for there are examples of Early Dynastic III B seals where the hero actually contends with upright standing lions. Although there is a clarity of execution coupled with high relief, the style of these seals is less rich, and the carefully detailed figures of the royal style are here replaced by more cursory, stylized renderings with heavy linear accents.

The style of the Lagash sealings as exemplified by the seal of Eannatum cannot be very far removed in time from the royal seals of Mesannepada, the first ruler of the First Dynasty of Ur (Plate XV, fig. 23).<sup>15</sup> The seal of his wife Ninbanda, which may also be considered a royal seal, certainly differs from the earlier contest scenes, yet the execution is not only less elaborate but also less accomplished (Plate XV, fig. 24).<sup>16</sup> This points to the contemporary variations of styles at Ur. Chronologically, the Lagash sealings fall after the Royal Cemetery styles of Ur, roughly contemporary with Urnanshe and Akurgal of Lagash,

15 L. Legrain, *Ur Excavations III. Archaic Seal-Impressions*. London: Oxford, 1936, Pl. 30. 57:518.

16 C.L. Woolley, *Ur Exc. II*, Pl. 207:216.

and prior to the last kings of the Lagash dynasty, Lugalanda and Uru'inimgina (Plate XV, fig. 25, fig. 26).<sup>17</sup> The seals of Lugalanda are close to the Ur and al-Hiba sealings in the rigorously balanced compositions with a great attention to detail. However, one senses a more intense all-over pattern and a greater verticality here at the end of the Dynasty. Such tendencies are clearly brought forth in the seal of the wife of Lugalanda, Barnamtara (Pl. XVI, fig. 27).<sup>18</sup> In her seal three registers are employed and are filled with extremely vertical groups so that when the seal is rolled to an indefinite length, a continuous interlocked pattern is produced.

The iconography of the al-Hiba material is indeed difficult. At our disposal is very little which allows us to gain a real understanding of what the ancient Sumerian intended by these rich and varied images. Great learning or erudition can be truly overwhelming, but sometimes leaves one with the feeling that the scholarship itself and not the essential meaning of the image is what has become the essential pursuit of an investigation. On the other hand, the approach can be decidedly simplistic. In art, there must have been a many-faceted view—an overlapping of meanings—both esoteric and prosaic. The idea that a hero, or perhaps even a shepherd, protects the flock in no way fully provides an answer to what we see before us in these compositions. Yet something quite as basic as this could be the fundamental idea that some received from these images. Certainly there must have been a world of difference between what was conceived by the priesthood and what the common man comprehended. Meanings can change over the centuries and become completely misunderstood. Or else, the modern interpreter can come to a complete misunderstanding of an image without a fairly thorough knowledge of the entire range of the material. Plate XVI, fig. 28, for example, is an Ur-Lagash style sealing from al-Hiba from the same group of sealings discussed above. Here, there are two very monstrous creatures with grotesque bodies and heads. They are framed in a curving band with strange projections at the bottom. Between them is an abstract symbol shaped somewhat like a heart coupled with a cross from which project two bars. Undoubtedly the symbol is pregnant with meaning. However, on comparison with other representations it is clear that this is not something monstrous, but rather is a highly stylized rendering of two seated figures in a boat flanking a large pottery vessel from which project two long straws. The figures are in the process of, or are about to begin drinking beer. The representation of the beer drinking ceremony is a standard part of early Sumerian iconography and does not deal with the monstrous even though these images might appear to do so.

The art of the Early Dynastic period contained a rich and varied world of monsters and demons. One of the finest examples of a monster is on an engraved shell plaque in the collection of the Lands of the Bible Archaeology Foundation (Plate XVI, fig. 29). A divinity is depicted kneeling before a monster which has a speckled body and tail. A series of undulating lines inscribed over the back of the creature might well represent rain. The most distinguishing attribute is the seven serpentine necks and lion heads. One head has been destroyed by means of a weapon severing the neck, and thus it hangs lower and apart from the rest. One might think of the underworld with its seven divisions—each head representing a stage in the journey to be passed and conquered or subdued. But in other Early Dynastic representations the monster might have only three or five heads, and in at least two representa-

17 P. Amiet, *La Glyptique mésop. archaïque*  
Pl. 83:1098, 1100.

18 *Ibid.*, Pl. 83:1102.

tions known to the writer the god or hero is not represented, but rather the monster is shown beside a contest scene Plate XVI, fig. 30.<sup>19</sup> It is difficult to bring the possible variant meanings into a consistent pattern. Modern interpretations are many. This monster, or hydra as it has been called, has been seen as the constellation Hydra, as the personification of the enemy city, as a beneficial as well as an evil force, etc.<sup>20</sup> The possibility of a dual nature of a demon is important. Our concept of the word *demon* is fully colored by late Christian writings in which it is associated with evil. An evil connotation is not necessarily implied in the original Greek word. It is a being with a divine nature, and it is in that sense that the word is used here.

The majority of the al-Hiba sealings display compositions composed of combinations of humans and animals. The animals include the lion, the bull, the stag, and the goat among others; however, the animals are not depicted in a natural fashion. In an actual combat between a lion and a bull or a lion and a stag the animals would never be both standing and confronting one another as might, for example, two contending stallions. Rather the animals assume a partially human aspect which cannot be fully explained by suggesting that it is only a matter of artistic convention and a desire to assemble the groups into a heraldic scheme. Other figures such as the bull man display a real mixture of animal and human forms. The human-headed bull is also a favorite in early Sumerian art, but he is not well represented in the al-Hiba sealings.<sup>21</sup> In the Eannatum sealing the hero attacks the bull man and is in turn attacked by him. They are both shown wielding daggers.

Elsewhere it is clear that the hero must be divine or at least semi-divine for he is able to seize and hold a lion upside down with ease. The hero is usually nude, but sometimes he wears a belt. His sex may be shown, but usually it is not. He may be depicted in profile or in full face; the latter strengthens the image and gives it a great sense of power and immediacy. The frontal image is reserved for the divinity in Sumerian art. It is also used with the lion but only when the head is seen from above. Perhaps it is because the hero is nude that his hair seems to be stressed and to be very important. Radically different hair styles are employed which must have been significant. The idea of strength and power residing in the hair as suggested by the biblical story of Samson is a possible interpretation, but certainly could not be proven in any way.

Years ago scholars saw in many of the cylinder seal representations the semi-divine Gilgamesh and his companion the semi-human Enkidu. This idea has generally been discounted, for it would be hard to demonstrate that the bull man is the Enkidu we know from the myth.<sup>22</sup> Yet it would not be illogical to assume that the ideas or levels of meaning which underlie the epic found their expression in art. Although it is tempting to explain certain scenes by finding a counterpart in the myths, it is clearly very difficult to parallel the

19 E. Heinrich and W. Andrae, (*supra*, n. 8), Pl. 60b. A second example is found on an unpublished sealing from al-Hiba.

20 P. Amiet, *La Glyptique mésop. archaïque* p. 174 ff.

21 To my knowledge the lion-man does not occur in Sumerian art.

22 Some scholars have continued to see aspects of the myth preserved in pictorial repre-

sentations; e.g. H. Frankfort, *Cylinder Seals*, London: McMillan and Co., 1939, p. 62 ff. Cf. also E. Porada, "Nomads and Luristan Bronzes: Methods proposed for a Classification of the Bronzes," in *Dark Ages and Nomads c. 1000 B.C.*, ed. by M. Mellink, Istanbul: Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut, 1964, pp. 23-25, n. 56. For a discussion of the problems involved see the paper of W.G. Lambert in this volume.

artistic and the poetic image. One can only ask why is there such a lack of a fundamental relationship between what is written and what is represented?<sup>23</sup>

The composing of a myth or epic employs narrative. The visual representation of any section of the story would necessitate a highly developed pictorial means, that is, continuous narration. Continuous narration is one of the great contributions of Mesopotamian art, but in much later times during the Neo-Assyrian period.<sup>24</sup> Then, narration was directed toward the representation of the historical event with depictions of the army's advance into battle, the ensuing conflict, and the aftermath made specific by landscape detail and the employment of a variety of visual tools to represent spacial relationships. Religious subjects were not treated in the same fashion. In contrast to Mesopotamia, Egypt did not develop such an historical narrative except in rare instances. Rather, during the second millennium at least, a very sophisticated narrative was used in religious representations to illustrate the passage into the western horizon, the journey through the underworld, the conflict with the evil that lies therein, and the coming forth on the eastern horizon.<sup>25</sup> There is an intimate relationship between text and picture couched in the use of esoteric divine symbols, numerical symbolism, and even a color symbolism.

For the Early Dynastic period of Sumer there is one monument, the Stele of Eannatum, with an extended text and several registers of pictorial representation.<sup>26</sup> On the "divine" side of the stele the god Ningirsu is shown holding his great net crammed full with the defeated warriors of Umma, and on the "terrestrial" side Eannatum is shown twice, once leading his army on foot and then again by chariot. From his chariot he hurls a spear which strikes the head of a Ummaite. A simple register system is used, with each register standing as a complete entity. The registers stand for the whole and are not to be "read" as representing a sequence in time. The great net of the god is mentioned in the text, but what is seen of Eannatum is not. Even the vultures which have supplied the modern name for the stele are not included in the story, which is long and includes many subjects. A listing of the headings supplied by T. Jacobsen for convenience in his translation and reconstruction of portions of the text indicates the varied nature of the parts: Ningirsu's Hungry Lion, Birth of the Hero, the War with Umma as Mytho-History, the War with Umma as History.<sup>27</sup> To be sure there is a relation between text and picture, but the relationship is not exact. The visual images do not directly derive from the text even though comparable ideas are expressed in the representations.

Although we are dealing in the seal impression representations with a world of heroes, demons, and animals, where the immediate symbol could stand for a wealth of religious ideas and overlapping or fused concepts, we cannot find in the myths or epics passages

23 See the article of E. Reiner in this volume. It is of interest that in S. Kramer's book *Sumerian Mythology*. Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1944, the illustrations that are used to illustrate the myths are all from Akkadian art.

24 The essence or germ of narrative art already appears in the Lion Hunt stele of the Uruk period, for not only is the "royal" hunt represented but the main figure is repeated twice in two different actions as if he were taking part in two aspects of one undertaking.

25 V. e.g., N. Rambova and A. Piankoff, *The Tomb of Ramesses VI*. Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, Bollingen Series XL, 1954.

26 P. Amiet, *Art of the Ancient Near East*. New York: Abrams, 1980, p. 271:328-330.

27 T. Jacobsen, "The Stele of the Vultures Col. 1-X," *Kramer Anniversary Volume*. *Alter Orient und Altes Testament* 25, ed. by Barry L. Eichler. Kevelaer: Butzon and Bercker, Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1976, p. 244 f.

which explain the artistic iconography. It is clear, however, that the scenes deal with a struggle, a pitting of forces against each other. As in the representation on the seal of Eannatum where the hero is locked in combat with the demonic bull man, no one really conquers. Implied is a basic duality which is also suggested in the representation on the sealing with the twins who appear in many mythologies as the two brothers, the two contestants, or the two companions. This is the basic duality of death and life, or creation and destruction. One might well see a cosmological concept in this conflict of heroic man, man-animal, and animal which expresses progressive transformations. Although the *Enuma Elish*, the creation epic, is Akkadian and probably not composed in its present form until the second part of the second millennium B.C., the concepts of the generations of the gods, the rebellious gods, the creation of man out of the evil of the past cycle of creation to serve the gods are basic elements in many mythologies. For creation there must be conflict as noted long ago by Edith Porada in an article on one of the finest greater Mesopotamian demons.<sup>28</sup>

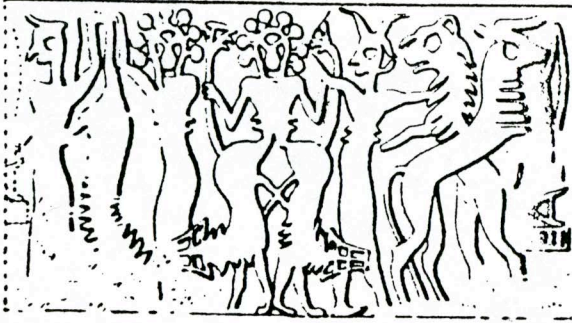
28 E. Porada, "A Leonine Figure of the Proto-literate Period of Mesopotamia," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 70:4 (1950) p. 223 ff.



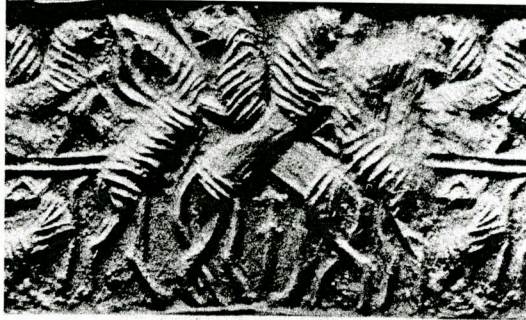
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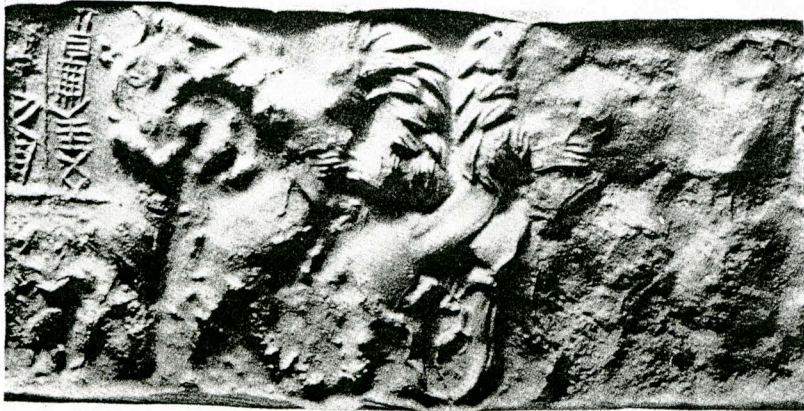
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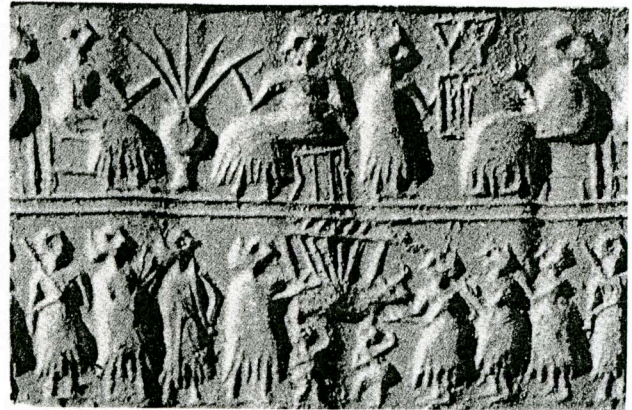
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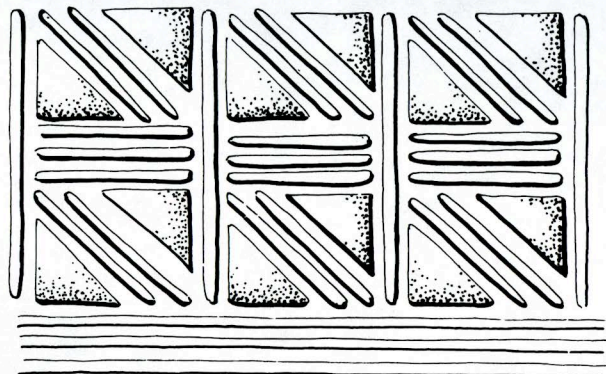
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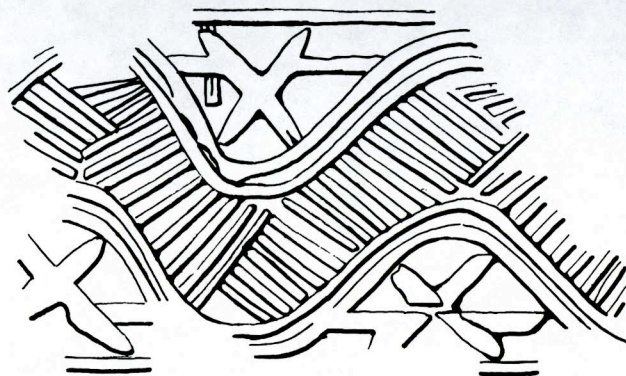
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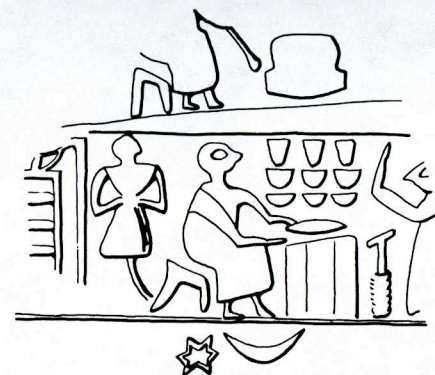
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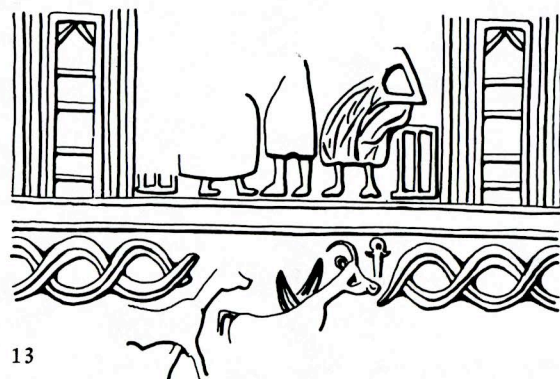
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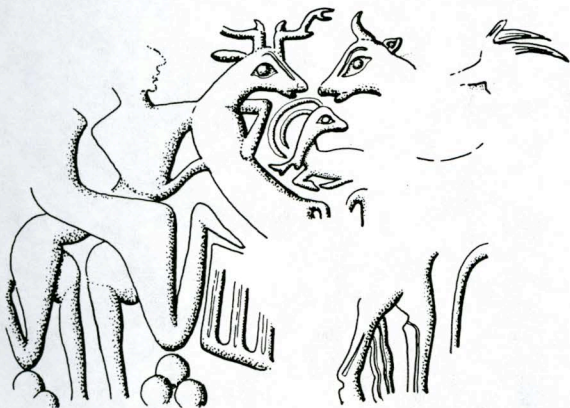
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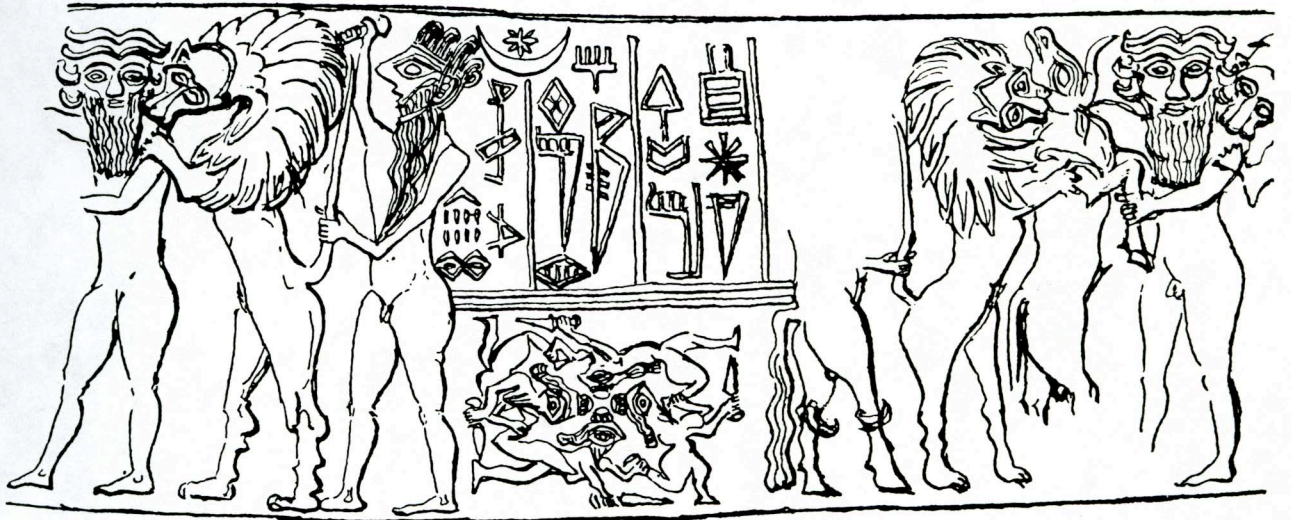




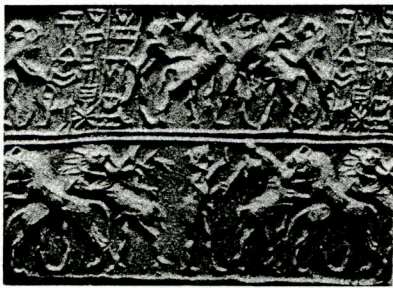
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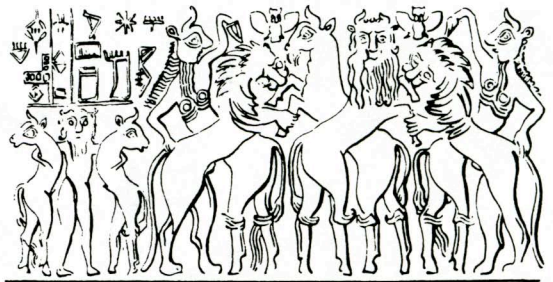
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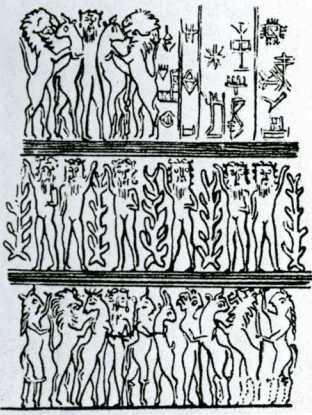
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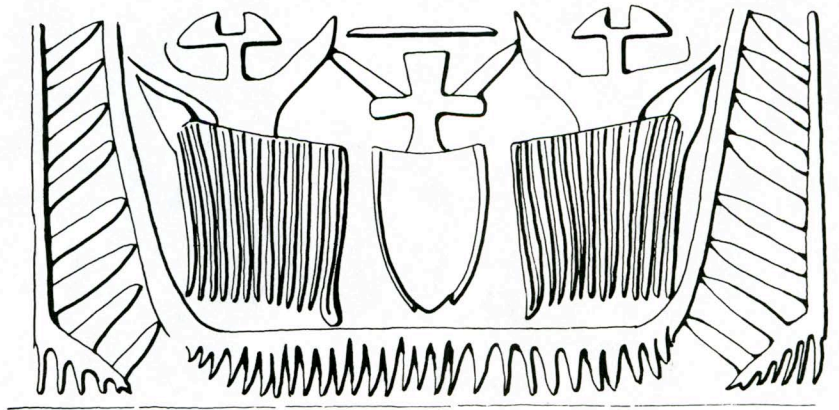
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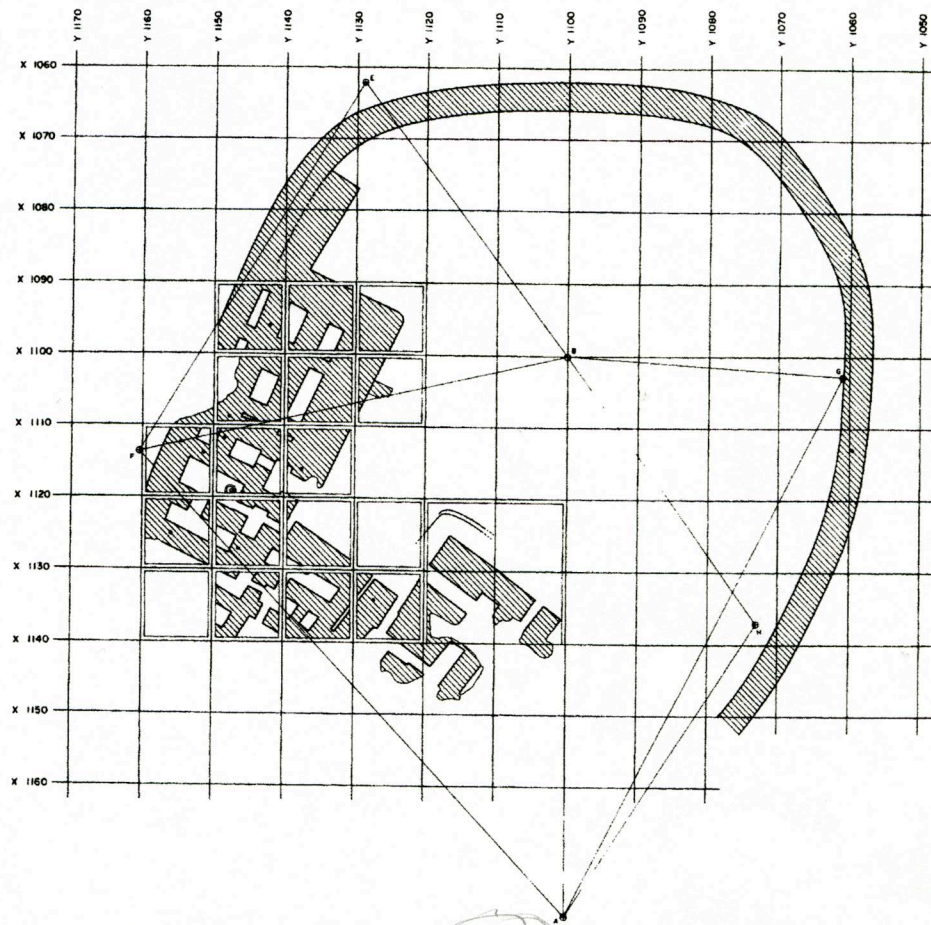


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# Royal Building Activity At Sumerian Lagash in the Early Dynastic Period

by Donald P. Hansen

The Early Dynastic period is the interval of Sumerian history from about 2900 to 2340 B.C.E., which follows the Uruk and Jemdet Nasr periods. This was the age in southern Mesopotamia of the early city-states, a time that often saw the individual cities in conflict with each other. Archaeologically, it has been divided into an early Early Dynastic I and II and a later Early Dynastic III A and III B. Written documents supplement the archaeological record of the latter period and sometimes make it possible to associate finds made during excavations with known historical rulers. Although there have been rather extensive excavations at such major cities as Uruk, Ur, Nippur and Kish as well as in the somewhat provincial region of the lower Diyala River east of modern Baghdad, our knowledge of the Early Dynastic period is still fragmentary. Many scholars as yet do not agree on the finer points of the chronological development.



Plan of the Ibgal of Inanna, built originally by Urnanshe. The temple was later rebuilt by his grandson, Enannatum. For some unknown reason, the Ibgal was built at the extreme southwest edge rather than near the center of the city.

Sir Leonard Woolley's excavations at Ur in the 1920s, where he uncovered the remains of an extensive series of graves of extraordinary richness that have come to be known as the Royal Cemetery, are the most renowned excavations of the Early Dynastic period. However, as yet we are not certain how to interpret these graves in light of what we know of Sumerian religion (Woolley 1934; Moorey 1977; Pollock 1991). Much of the cemetery dates to the time of Early Dynastic III A—about 2600 B.C.E.—and includes objects inscribed with royal names that just antedate King Mesannepada of the First Dynasty of Ur (Early Dynastic III B). Woolley's excavations also provided some knowledge of the early phase of the Early Dynastic period through an examination of both the graves and the many layers of dumped debris in the region of the Royal Cemetery.

The latter produced early tablets with cuneiform script and many impressions of cylinder seals rolled on clay that were originally used for sealing the contents of containers.

In more recent years, large-scale excavations at the site of al-Hiba in southeastern Iraq have added to our knowledge of both the Early Dynastic I phase as well as the historic period of Early Dynastic III B. Six seasons of excavations beginning in 1968 have been undertaken at al-Hiba by a joint expedition of the Institute of Fine Arts of New York University and the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The campaigns have been interrupted by the Iraq-Iran war as well as by the recent hostilities in the Persian Gulf.

The site of al-Hiba, one of the largest mounds in the southeastern part of Iraq, covered an area of more than 600 hectares during the late

Early Dynastic period. It is located some 15 miles east of the modern town of Shatra. On the basis of textual evidence (Crawford 1974), it has been known for some time that al-Hiba is the remains of the ancient city of Lagash, the capital of the state of Lagash that included two other major cities, Girsu (Telloh) and Nina (Surghul). The recent excavations have confirmed this identification.

It was probably late in the Early Dynastic period that the actual residence of the rulers shifted from the city of Lagash to Girsu. Because of finds made at Girsu years ago, we know the most about Gudea, whose many statues are now housed in the Louvre. He was an *ensi* or governor of the Second Dynasty of Lagash who ruled around the beginning of the twenty-first century B.C.E. and was a contemporary of Urnammu, the first king of the Third Dynasty of Ur. A sequence of rulers who lived roughly half a millennium earlier, the First Dynasty of Lagash has been established despite the fact that it is not included in the Sumerian king list. Among these leaders are such well-known figures as Urnanshe and Akurgal dated to Early Dynastic III A, and Eannatum, Enannatum and Enmetena dated to Early Dynastic III B. Eannatum of the First Dynasty of Lagash was roughly contemporary with Mesannepada of the First Dynasty of Ur.

Because of the size of al-Hiba, the recent excavations have covered only a small part of the city. Work has concentrated on the western side of the site, which includes the highest preserved portion of the mound, about 6 meters above the surrounding fields and marshes. Here, occupation of the site continued into the Isin Larsa-Old Babylonian period. Elsewhere, however, it ceased for the most part in the later part of Early Dynastic III B, perhaps due to the plundering and destruction of the city by Lugalzagesi of Umma, an adjacent city-state and a longtime rival of Lagash.

This western part of the city was an area devoted to some of the temples of the major gods. The chief god of Lagash was Ningirsu, "Lord of Girsu," and his temple precinct was known as the Bagara. Other gods included Gatumdug, known as the "Mother of Lagash"; Nanshe, whose precinct was the Shagepada; the goddess Bau; and the goddess Inanna, whose temple was called the Ibgal. Both the Bagara of Ningirsu and the Ibgal of Inanna have been located and partially excavated.

Inexplicably, the important Ibgal of Inanna was built at the extreme southwest edge rather than near the center of the city. Three levels of the temple of this goddess of love and war were partially revealed. The top level, Level I, could be identified with the rebuilding of the temple by Enannatum I, who records his pious deed in inscriptions mentioning how he decorated the building with gold and silver and made it greater than any temple in other lands. His grandfather, Urnanshe, is known to have built the Ibgal, but it is not exactly clear whether his building activity should be associated with

Level II or III since no inscriptions were found in either of these levels.

Although Levels II and III were not well preserved, the basic form of these buildings was undoubtedly similar to the latest rebuilding of Enannatum I, that is, a temple oval. The main shrine of a temple enclosed within an oval exterior wall is one of the characteristic temple types of the Early Dynastic period and is known elsewhere from Tell el-Ubaid near Ur and from Khafajah in the lower Diyala region. This Lagash temple, coupled with other recent evidence, indicates that the oval or round building was a more prevalent type in Early Dynastic Mesopotamia than has been previously thought.

Unfortunately, nothing of the superstructure of the Ibgal built by Enannatum was preserved; however, much of the foundation was found, giving an indication of the layout of the building and illustrating the often complicated foundation system used in Sumer. The lower walls, made of plano-convex bricks flat on the bottom and curved on the top, belong to Level II and were incorporated into the foundations of Level I; that is,

*Three levels of the Ibgal of Inanna have been partially revealed. The subfoundation walls of Level II and upper foundation platform of Level I of the Ibgal of Inanna are shown here.*



↓  
Stek of the Vultures

the floors and wall plasters were for the most part removed, and the area was filled in with a new, clean earth. On top of this sub-foundation, the builders constructed an upper foundation platform with a series of open rectangular areas undoubtedly related to the actual layout of the rooms of the superstructure. These spaces within the foundation platform were then filled with broken pieces of mud and some layers of sand. Toward the top of this upper foundation, the spaces were capped with mud bricks so that when complete, the foundation appeared as a solid platform. Undoubtedly this very elaborate method of constructing a foundation was associated with rituals of temple building known from later texts of Gudea.

Buried within and at the bottom of the platform were a series of foundation deposits. Each deposit consisted of an inscribed stone and a copper figurine that stood erect with its peg-shaped base touching the ground. As the foundation was built, the figurine was encased in the mud bricks. On top of the third brick course the inscribed stone was placed behind the head of the figurine that faced eastward. The inscribed stone indicated that the temple was the Ibgal, that it was dedicated to Inanna of Eanna, that it was built by Enannatum I of Lagash, and that the figurine represented Shulutula, the personal



*Foundation figurine representing Shulutula, the personal god of Enannatum I. Inscribed stones found with this figurine indicate that the temple was the Ibgal, that it was dedicated to Inanna of Eanna, that it was built by Enannatum I of Lagash, and that the figurine represented Shulutula.*

god of Enannatum, in an attitude of prayer before Inanna (for a translation see R. Biggs in Hansen 1970).

At the highest point on the western side of the mound is located the precinct that was called the Bagara—belonging to Ningirsu, the god of Lagash. Although the rest of the city was, for the most part, abandoned late in the Early Dynastic period, the Bagara continued to be rebuilt. Gudea undertook an extensive renovation of the area, but his efforts were badly destroyed in the Isin Larsa-Old Babylonian period when a large temple tower, probably stepped, was erected with a shrine on top.

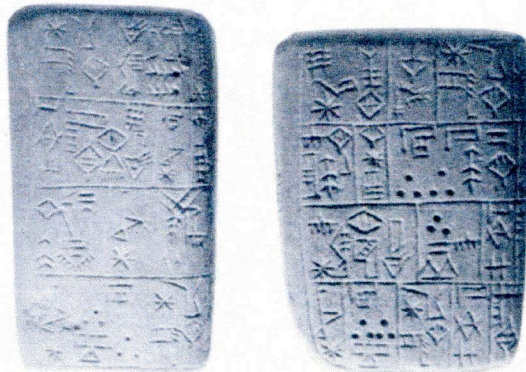
This later building activity has inhibited our knowledge of the Early Dynastic Bagara, but we have been able to identify a series of individual buildings dating to Early Dynastic III B. Each building served a different function within the cult of Ningirsu and was probably situated around the main temple, which as yet has

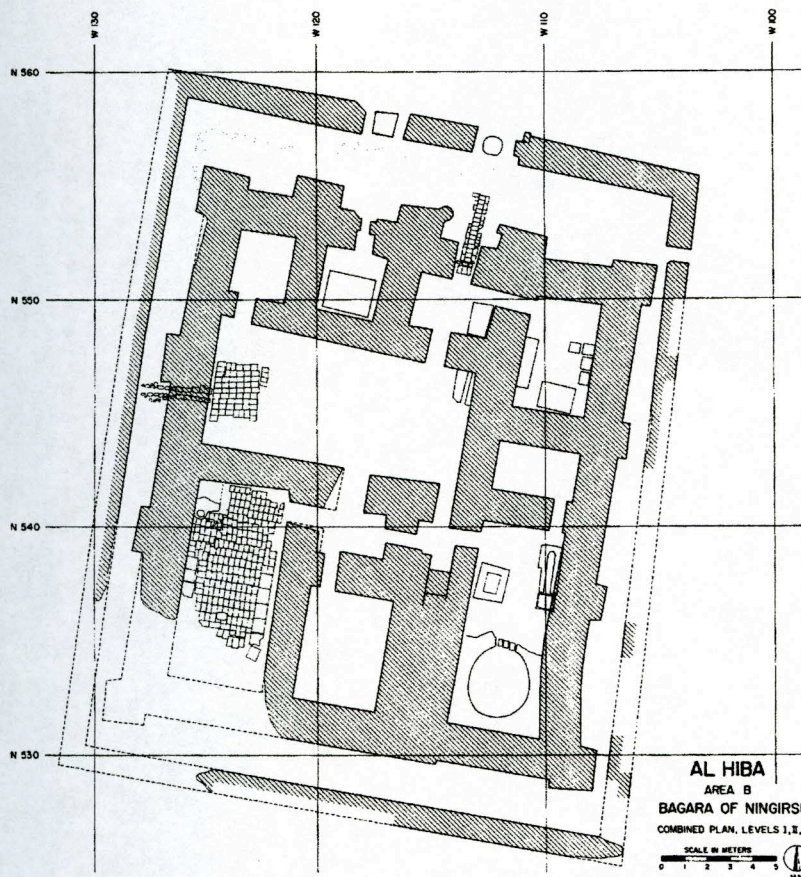
not been located. The first of these subsidiary structures was found immediately beneath the late platform. It was some 30-by-20-meters in size with three distinct construction phases, labeled Levels I, II and III. The building was surrounded by a low curtain wall constantly renewed with layers of mud plaster and penetrated by two entrances on the north leading to the main door of the building proper. Although many of the characteristics of Early Dynastic temple architecture were present, there was no primary cella with a main altar, so it cannot be considered a true temple. Instead there were several courts or unroofed rooms: one with a small oven in the central part of the building, one with a baked tile paving in the southwest corner, and a third with a large oval oven and a tank for liquids in the southeast corner. Between these two courts was a staircase leading to the roof and a small room with a great many fish bones strewn on the floors.

There was also a group of fine objects, including a votive stone mace head with a carving in relief of a lion-headed eagle—a symbol of Ningirsu—grasping horned ruminants in its talons. Beside this group is the figure of the donor of the mace head, a worshiper named Dudu. One may conjecture that the building was dedicated to serving some of the god's needs and that it may well be a forerunner of the so-called "kitchen" temple known from later times. Another votive object was found in Level III—



*Left: The top of a foundation figurine and inscribed stone discovered in foundation of Level I. Right: An inscribed stone from the foundation of Level I. As the foundation was built, the figurine was encased in the mud bricks. On top of the third brick course the inscribed stone was placed behind the head of the figurine, which faced eastward.*





Votive macehead of Dudu found in the Bagara of Ningirsu next to a group of fine objects, including a votive stone mace head with a carving in relief of a lion-headed eagle—a symbol of Ningirsu—grasping horned ruminants in its talons. The building may have been dedicated to serving some of the god's needs and may well be a forerunner of the so-called "kitchen" temple.



The Bagara of Ningirsu was found at the highest point on the western side of the mound. Although the rest of the city was, for the most part, abandoned late in the Early Dynastic period, the Bagara continued to be rebuilt. Gudea undertook an extensive renovation of the area, but his efforts were badly destroyed in the Isin Larsa-Old Babylonian period when a large temple tower, probably stepped, was erected with a shrine on top.

an inscribed copper dagger, dedicated to Ningirsu of the Bagara during the time of Eannatum, who ruled Lagash just before his brother Enannatum I.

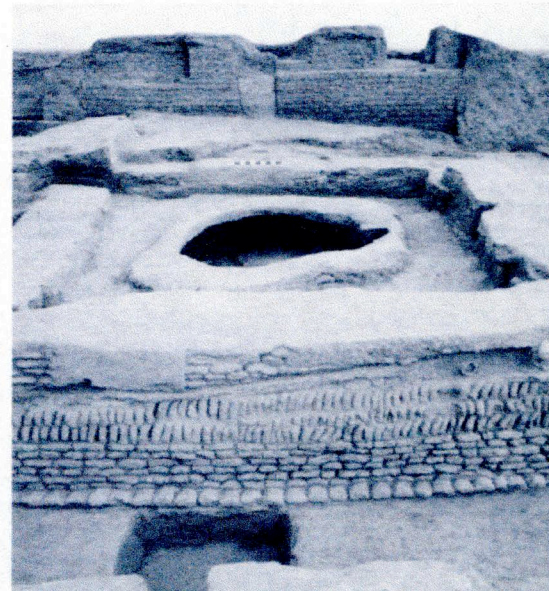
Immediately to the east of this building and separated from it by a narrow street was another building of a very different type. It was entered from the narrow street and contained a major court with ovens and a large tank for liquids, as well as storage rooms with the bottoms of immense storage vats in situ. The most important feature of this building was another oven that entirely filled a room to the north of the courtyard. It was constructed of corbeled mud bricks in the form of a dome measuring approximately 5 meters in diameter, a particularly large dome for this period.

The find of a single tablet gave an indication of the function of this particular building within the Bagara

precinct. It mentions the *ébappir* (the brewery) and a brewer. It seems likely that here in the great oven the *bappir* for Ningirsu was prepared. Beer was particularly important to the Sumerians, and this building, which can be dated specifically to the time of Eannatum on the basis of inscribed finds, is certainly the earliest brewery known.

Both Eannatum and Enannatum I can be associated with another building of a completely non-religious nature located in the central part of the mound to the east of the ridge where the temples were located. It was a very large building covering some 1,000 square meters that was so completely destroyed in a conflagration that many of the mud-brick walls had turned into baked brick. The plan was not well ordered around a series of courts, but consisted of a series of rooms added as needed in an almost

View of the brewery of the Bagara of Ningirsu. This building, which can be dated specifically to the time of Eannatum on the basis of inscribed finds, is certainly the earliest brewery known.



Area C?

agglutinative fashion. There were no clearly defined residential units, so the building probably functioned as an administrative center that was neither part of a temple precinct nor the residence of a king. Clay tablets as well as many clay sealings were recovered from several of the rooms, including a fragmentary impression of one of the royal seals of Eannatum. Only the back and head of a rearing bull is preserved of the main scene of the seal. To the left, in the upper register, is inscribed the name of Eannatum and part of his title, and in the lower register is depicted a conflict between a heroic figure with large locks of hair and a human-headed bull. Executed in a fully modeled style, the seal represents the best of Lagash workmanship.

A buried hoard of copper objects that had been wrapped in reed matting was found beneath the floor of one of the rooms. The reason for this burial is not clear. It consisted of a bucket with handle, a large flaring vessel, an axe and adze as well as two flat disks that were probably balance pans. Inside the bucket were a variety of small tools, strainers and bowls. Such copper objects are much like others from contemporary sites in Mesopotamia and Elam.

During the most recent season of excavations at al-Hiba, a new area on the western ridge lying midway between the Ibgal of Inanna and the Bagara of Ningirsu was investigated. This area was chosen to gain some understanding of Lagash during Early Dynastic I, an important period situated between the earlier Uruk and Jemdet Nasr phases of Sumerian culture and the subsequent historical periods. Several phases of a large curving wall of the period immediately below the present surface of the mound were excavated. Although this curved wall may well enclose part of a temple quarter, the character of the complex will prove to be quite different from the later temple ovals. A section of a building complex that must be part of the administrative



*A royal sealing of Eannatum found in a very large building so completely destroyed in a conflagration that many of the mud bricks had turned into baked brick. There were no clearly defined residential units, so the building probably functioned as an administrative center that was neither part of a temple precinct nor the residence of a king.*

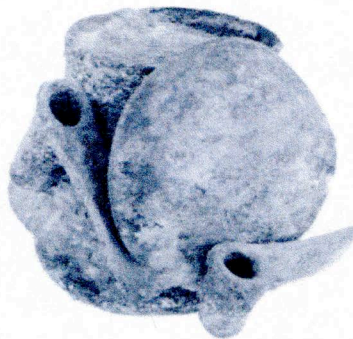
and working quarter of a temple precinct has been excavated 40 meters west of the curved wall.

Several courts and rooms contained fireplaces and bins, and the finds included a large quantity of pottery, which increased the corpus of Early Dynastic I pottery at al-Hiba to more than 160 types and variants. Jar lids and a series of jar sealings with the impressions of some 10 dif-

ferent cylinder seals were found, suggesting that the contents of the jars were removed and processed in these rooms. These sealings are analogous to the seal impressions of the period that Woolley found at Ur, as well as to sealings found in the temple of Inanna at Nippur. One might expect to unearth archaic tablets in the vicinity, but none have been found thus far. It is not known to which deity this precinct belonged, but it is hoped that in the future we will be able to obtain some insights into the nature of this temple area in the period before the well-known rulers such as Eannatum and Enannatum I of Lagash.

Although this capital city of the Sumerian city-state of Lagash is exceedingly large in comparison with other contemporary Sumerian sites, the excavations have already revealed that a good portion of the area was devoted to the manors of the major gods. Thus far, the excavated buildings point to the richness and variety of architectural forms in temple construction of the Early Dynastic period. It is important to note that, for the first time, it has been possible to link specific excavated buildings at al-Hiba to known rulers of this early phase of Mesopotamian history whose building activities were known formerly only from references

*Two pieces of a copper hoard found in the administrative building. The objects had been wrapped in reed matting and were found beneath the floor of one of the rooms. The reason for this burial is not clear, but included copper objects that are much like others from contemporary sites in Mesopotamia and Elam.*



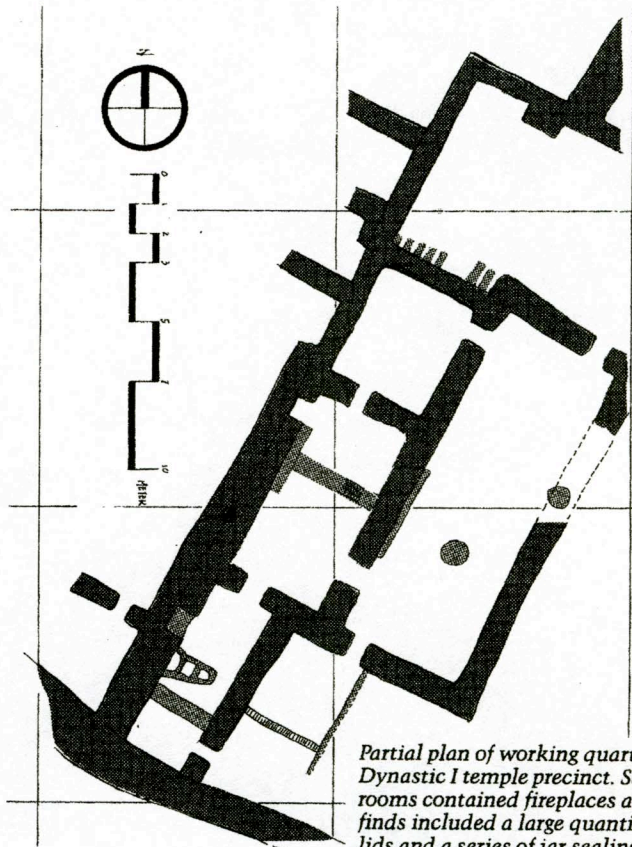


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in the texts. When it becomes possible to return to Iraq for more archaeological work, it will be necessary to investigate further just what constitutes the divine precinct and to learn more about the non-religious part of the city on the eastern part of the mound, which seems to have been separated from the temple quarter by a major canal.

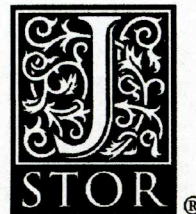
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Partial plan of working quarter of the Early Dynastic I temple precinct. Several courts and rooms contained fireplaces and bins, and the finds included a large quantity of pottery, jar lids and a series of jar sealings with the impressions of some 10 different cylinder seals were found, suggesting that the contents of the jars were removed and processed in these rooms.





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