

Prof. Scott B. Noegel
Chair, Dept. of Near Eastern Languages and Civilization
University of Washington

“Fictional Sumerian Autobiographies.”

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FICTIONAL SUMERIAN AUTOBIOGRAPHIES

Scott B. Noegel*

Abstract

For many years scholars have noted the presence of a fictional autobiography genre in Akkadian literature. Longman's important monograph on the subject (1991), though a thorough and ingenious collation of research on the subject, nevertheless dismisses the possibility of Sumerian analogues. The following article posits that this dismissal is unfounded and finds four Sumerian texts to be fictional autobiographies. The existence of these four analogues suggests that a comprehensive search for this genre in Sumerian and a fresh examination of Sumerian historiography are in order.

Longman has argued convincingly for the validity of fictional Akkadian autobiography as a genre (1991:41). According to Longman, the genre, which is characterized by fifteen texts, possesses four features: it is fictional; written in Akkadian; written in prose; and it is autobiographical, i.e., written in the first person.¹ Longman further classifies these fifteen texts into four sub-genres based on their various textual endings, that is, either blessings/curses, donations, instructions, or prophecies.

Though there is no doubt that Longman's work contributes greatly to our understanding of ancient Semitic historiography one cannot but wonder whether Longman overstates his case when he asserts:

Even more striking, the genre of fictional autobiography is absent from Sumerian with one exception—Lugalannemundu, a fictional Sumerian autobiography with a donation ending. However, this composition is known only from an Old Babylonian tablet and may not predate that time period in composition—that the composition is written in Sumerian may mean nothing more than that the Old Babylonian composer, wishing to deceive his audience into the belief that Lugalannemundu composed the text in the third millennium, used Sumerian to convey that impression. Apart from

this possible exception Sumerian lacks fictional autobiography (1991:41).

If indeed the Lugalannemundu text was composed in the Old Babylonian period, it would, by Longman's own definition, be a fictional autobiography (1991:41). This possible exception provokes the question whether Sumerian did, in fact, possess fictional autobiography. At the very least, the Lugalannemundu text suggests that a thorough search for the genre in Sumerian literature is in order. Though the study below is not based on a comprehensive examination of all Sumerian literature, it does find four texts worthy of further investigation: the Lugalannemundu inscription, Ur-Baba's first statue inscription, the third brick (pedestal) inscription of Amar-Suen, and Eannatum's so-called Stele of Vultures.² Together they cover the spectrum of historical periods from Early Dynastic (ED) III to the Old Babylonian period, i.e., the periods in which these texts occur overlap with the one in which the fictional Akkadian autobiographies occur.

Before analyzing the various texts in question, it is important to comment on the mutual influence between Semitic and Sumerian literatures. Longman rightly remarks that the "closer the two objects of composition are to one another temporally, the more likely it is that they influenced each other" (1991:31). While this is undoubtedly true, it must be remembered that the Semites were present in Sumer from very early times, and that they enjoyed a symbiotic relationship with the Sumerians. As Owen notes, the exchange was quite significant: "In fact, I see a mutual influence between Sumerian and Akkadian which has colored both languages with reciprocal borrowing both on the lexical as well as on the morphological levels" (1991).

Though the relationship was symbiotic, the majority of the influence came primarily from the Sumerian side. In fact, the impact of Sumerian culture on the literature of the Old Babylonian period was such that a direct influence cannot be ruled out. Longman similarly remarks: "Besides borrowing their cuneiform script, Akkadian literature continued many of the genres employed by the Sumerians—myth, epic, law, proverb, hymn, and disputation" (1991:200-201).

²The Stele of Vultures has been dischronologized deliberately because the fragmentary nature of the text has left us in want of a consistent translation and interpretation. Thus, arriving at any conclusion must, in the very least, remain speculative. Nevertheless, as will be demonstrated below, there is sufficient reason to include it in this study.

* M.A. in Near Eastern Studies from Cornell University, Ph.D. student in Near Eastern Studies at Cornell University. I would like to thank Prof. David I. Owen both for his comments and for teaching a stimulating seminar on the Sumerian language, from which an earlier version of this article originated.

¹ A trait which is shared by numerous West Semitic inscriptions. See Poebel (1932:3-7).

Therefore, despite the scarcity of posited Sumerian exemplars,³ it is more plausible to view Akkadian fictional autobiography as representative of one point in a continuous development of the genre, than to see it as a wholly new invention in the Old Babylonian period.

THE INSCRIPTION OF LUGALANNEMUNDU⁴

Exemplars

There are only two texts known from this ruler, both of which were transcribed by Poebel (1909; 1914). There exists only one copy of the Lugalannemundu text, and to my knowledge only one transliteration and translation of it (Güterbock 1934:40-47).

Plot Summary

Following a section which praises the goddess Nintu, the text begins with the words of Lugalannemundu. He boasts his piety by reminding the reader of his construction of the temple of Nintu in Adab, and also his founding of the offerings and rites performed at this temple. Lugalannemundu continues his self-laudatory tone in a description of a revolt which he quickly suppressed. We are told that he battled some thirteen princes who came from places such as Elam, Subartu, Mubarsi, and Guti.⁵ He then follows this with a self-declaration proclaiming himself king of Adab leading into a description of the seven gates of his city, which are each given exalted names.⁶ The text concludes by mentioning a charitable donation to the Lady of Adab.

Lugalannemundu as Fictional Sumerian Autobiography

Güterbock (1934:46-47) believes that the text was written during the reigns of Abi-Ešuh (1711-1684) or Ammi-saduqa (1646-1626),⁷ but Jacobsen seems less certain (1939:102, n.183). Although Güterbock's

³ The scarcity of our material should not surprise us. For all the hundreds of extant Akkadian texts, Longman is able to provide only fifteen examples of fictional autobiography.

⁴ For the sake of consistency and comparison the study below adopts the format of Longman's book.

⁵ The homeland of some of the sovereigns is unknown due to gaps in the text.

⁶ Unfortunately, this section of the text is badly damaged. The names of the gates which are legible are in order: "the Majestic Gate" (II:31), "the Great Gate" (II:33), "the Gate of Appointed Destiny" (II:37), "the Gate of the Steady Wall Embankment" (II:41), "the Gate of Decision" (II:46), "the Door of Petition (?)" (III:19), and "the Heroic Gate (or Mountain Gate?)" (III:22).

⁷ This view is shared by Wilcke (1970:165-167); Curchin (1977:93-95); and Civil (1979:93).

suggestion places the text squarely in the Hammurabi dynasty, roughly one thousand years after the life of Lugalannemundu,⁸ it is probable that it was copied from an earlier version. In any event, its late date meets at least one of the criteria of a fictional autobiography.⁹

In addition, and again, according to Longman's criteria, the composition is written almost entirely in the first person; i.e., it is autobiographical. Examples of the first person style are as follows:

I:3-5 I, Lugalannemundu, the hero, the guardian of Nippur, the King of Adab, the King of the Four Quarters...

I:6 (I have) fixed the tribute of the lands, the people of all the lands I have made to repose in a meadow,

I:9-11 I have built the temple of the great gods, and have reestablished the land, I have been bestowed dominion over all...

II:19,24 My land responds...

II:26-29 Where the ancient building had once been, the great gods commanded me with their holy mouth, [to renew it]. The ancient temple of Adab, its blueprint eternal in time, 1 1/3 filled-Burs I designed its blue-print...

III:30-32 The great vizier from the Cedar mountains, from Elam, Marḥaši, Guti, Subartu, Amurru, Suti, and from the "mountain of E-anna," every single one (of them)...[brought] me a fattened ox (and sev[en (?)] fattened sheep (?)).

IV:13 [I] sat on a golden throne...

Date and Function of the Text

The text is concerned with the military superiority of Lugalannemundu and with his piety in reinstating the offerings and rites associated with the temple at Adab. That Lugalannemundu's victory and building achievements are promised by the gods themselves (II:27) represents an attempt to portray him and his exploits as divinely justified.

⁸ The date of this ruler depends to a large extent on the Sumerian King List. Kramer (1948:162, n.14) appears to be one of the only supporters of a Early Dynastic date for Lugalannemundu. Despite the harsh criticism of Curchin (1977:95, n.1), I see no compelling reason not to take the king list at face value. In fact, both sides of the argument may be correct; i.e., there was an early king Lugalannemundu, and also a forgery in his name created during the first dynasty of Babylon.

⁹ This is a point which Longman admits, but for reasons unknown, does not see as significant (1991:201).

Longman (1991:204) has noted that the choice of a pseudonym is often based on a shared circumstance between the real author and the historical figure represented by the pseudonym. If the text dates to the time of Abi-Ešuh (1711-1684) or Ammi-saduqa (1646-1626), as Güterbock has opined, then the choice of 'Lugalannemundu' as a pseudonym may have been determined by the parallel historical events, that is, by the Kassite and Elamite incursions during the time of Babylon's first dynasty. The Lugalannemundu text would have served, in this case, as a political justification for repelling these groups. Though the text could be attributed to either of the two rulers, it appears that Abi-Ešuh most likely would have produced the document. According to Saggs, Abi-Ešuh not only was a more capable ruler, but he was more active militarily in defending his borders.¹⁰ Ammi-saduqa, on the other hand, made little effort to recover the territory lost to the crown (Roux 1966:219).

UR-BABA'S STATUE INSCRIPTION NUMBER 1

Exemplars

There is only one headless version (AO 9) of the diorite Ur-Baba statue.

History of Research

The original transcription and translation of the Ur-Baba inscription were done first by Oppert (1882:39ff.). Succeeding translations were offered by Hommel,¹¹ de Sarzec (1884), and Parrot (1948). Photos of the statue also appeared with some discussion, primarily with respect to the art of the period, in the works of Moortgat (1967:164), Zervos (1935:177), and Johansen (1978). With no significant problems barring translation of the inscription, the text has not solicited much comment, and appears with little change in various translations and commentary articles.¹²

Plot Summary

Ur-Baba tells us how he embarked on numerous building projects, all of which are temples. The majority of these temples appear to have been built at Girsu, the famous quarter of Lagaš. The gods for whom the temples were constructed include Ninḫursag, Enki, Nindar, Ninagal, Ninmar, Ensignun, Geshtinanna, and

Dumuzi-Apsu. The only temple explicitly referred to as having been built outside of Girsu is Baba's Temple in Erim.

Ur-Baba's Statue Inscription as Fictional Sumerian Autobiography

Like the Lugalannemundu text, the Ur-Baba inscription is written in formulaic prose and is almost entirely in the first person. The brevity of the inscription permits a full citation of its first person style.

II:4-III:1 Ur-Baba am I, Ningirsu is my king. The earth...cubits deep I dug; the dirt shone like a polished stone—like silver tried by fire it shone.

III:2-VI:12 Its earth I returned to it, its foundation I laid. For its terrace I made a level place of ten cubits. On the level terraced place Eninnu of the divine and brilliant black storm-bird I built thirty cubits. For Ninḫursag, mother of the gods, her temple I built in Girsu. For Baba, the gracious lady, the child of Anu, I built her temple in Uru-azagga. For Ininni, holy lady, the great, I built her temple in Erim. For Enki, the king, the prince of Eridu, I built his temple in Girsu. For Nindar, the exalted king, I built his temple. For Ninagal, my god, I built his temple. For Ninmar, the gracious lady, the firstborn child of Nina, "the house which is a fold for all," I built the temple which is in her heart's memorial. For Ensignun, the ass-herd of Ningirsu, I built his "Temple of the ass' foal." To Geshtinanna, the lady who is princess of the dark-colored drink, I built her temple in Girsu. For Dumuzi-Apsu, lord of Kinunir, I built his temple in Girsu.

The autobiographical nature of the text is abundantly clear. Less clear, however, is the fictional aspect of the Ur-Baba inscription, which to some extent, may have been clouded by an emendation of the third person narrative in III:8-VI:12 to that of the first person. In Steible's words:

Der Wechsel von der 1. Person Singular zur 3. Person Singular ist zumindest für Kol. 5:4-7 zwingend. Es besteht der Eindruck, dass der Text dieser Statue auf zwei verschiedene Vorlagen zurückgeht, von denen die erste, in der 1. Person Singular verfasst, mit der ausführlichen Baubeschreibung des 'Eninnu - Weisser Anzu' in Kol. 3:7 endete, während der zweite Teil mit einer mehr oder weniger schematischen Aufzählung von Templebauten, der in der 3. Person Singular abgefasst war, in Kol. 3:8 begann. Dieser Auffassung einer zweigeteilten Inschrift trägt die hier vorgelegte Übersetzung Rechnung; so schon die Übersetzung

¹⁰ Abi-Ešuh was engaged continually in the construction of fortifications and walls. See Saggs (1969:74).

¹¹ The translation which is unavailable to me is referred to in le Gac (1892:126,n.5).

¹² See Thureau-Dangin (1907:60-61); Kramer (1963:326-327); Falkenstein (1966:230-233); Sollberger and Kupper (1971:115-116); Steible (1991:1:135-140); Cooper (1983:19,n.32).

von E. Sollberger...,¹³ dagegen hält S. N. Kramer,¹⁴ bei seiner Übersetzung an der 1. Person Singular fest (1991:I:139).

It is possible that the switch from first to third person reflects the presence of the real author summing up his work under a pseudonym. (This switch will be discussed further below in connection with the Stele of Vultures.) One cannot report one's own achievements in the third person no more than one can discuss what someone else has done in the first person. Therefore, the switch in person is evidence of either two authors, or as I prefer, a pseudonymous stylistic convention. Nevertheless, the possibility that Ur-Baba dictated the text and afterwards had a scribe summarize it, i.e., that the scribe may have written it in the third person, leaves us with insufficient evidence of the text's fictionality.

There is also some difficulty in fitting the Ur-Baba inscription into Longman's sub-genre classification scheme because it has no ending. Nevertheless, this does not completely disqualify it from the genre. More likely, as will be developed below, it represents merely another variation of the genre.

Date and Function of the Text

Since Ur-Baba extols his building exploits, particularly the reconstruction of temples, it is difficult not to view this text as propaganda. Vanstiphout expresses it in the following manner: "As the reign of a certain prince increases in length, or if he wants to make an even greater impression on his readers, divine and/or human, he will sum up all his previous construction activities" (1970:10). Indeed, as temples were in large part responsible for the well-being of a kingdom's economy, the construction of these temples served as economic indicators. Boasting of one's rebuilding efforts was tantamount to vaunting a prosperous economy.

That the inscription was meant to impress also is apparent in both the divine determinative before Ur-Baba's name and in the foundation deposit figurines which show him with the status of a god (Ellis 1968:74-75). When we recall that the inscription was inscribed on a statue of Ur-Baba himself, the propagandistic nature of the text becomes apparent.

AMAR-SUEN'S BRICK (PEDESTAL) INSCRIPTION NUMBER 3

Exemplars

There are four versions of this text: BM 90036; 90039; 90353 and 90811.

¹³ See Sollberger and Kupper (1971:115-166).

¹⁴ See Kramer (1963:326-327).

History of Research

Responsible for transcribing the various versions of the Amar-Suen inscription were C. B. F. Walker (1881:30-31,60ff.), and L. W. King (1896:21,25-26), D. Edzard (1925:64ff.), C. J. Gadd and L. Legrain (1927:172), H. Hunger (1968:35), and H. Behrens (1985:233). The transcriptions were followed by a host of translations, including those of Walker (1881:30-31), Thureau-Dangin (1907:197-200), Barton (1929:286-289), Sollberger (1971:149-150), Kärki,¹⁵ and most recently, Steible (1991:II:221-225). Hallo (1962:35) also incorporated the brick inscription into his typology of Ur III royal inscriptions.

Plot Summary

Amar-Suen proclaims himself selected by Enlil in Nippur, the grand patron of Enlil's temple, and lauds himself with a string of other lofty epithets, such as "the Mighty King," and "the King of the Four Quarters." After reporting the name of the statue on which he placed this inscription, he closes with a curse against anyone who attempts to alter or destroy the statue or its pedestal.

Amar-Suen's Third Brick (Pedestal) Inscription as Fictional Sumerian Autobiography

There is nothing poetic or hymnic about this inscription. The language is formulaic and straightforward. That it opens and continues in the first person is also beyond dispute.¹⁶

I:1-9 I am Amar-Suen, proposed in Nippur by Enlil, the patron of the temple of Enlil, the mighty king of Ur, the king of the four quarters.

As for its fictional character, apropos is the comment of Hayes:

In addition to the copy of the text produced above, a late, Neo-Babylonian copy from the seventh century BC is also preserved. It was inscribed on what was apparently a model pedestal. This copy is interesting because... it has a colophon written in Akkadian, which seems to say that the model was to be used in an "exhibition" (*tāmartu*) of some kind (1990:177).

¹⁵ Kärki's work is unavailable to me. The citation was found in Steible (1991:II:222).

¹⁶ Though there is at least one version which omits the first person copula *me*. See Steible (1991:II:223).

is the seventh-century copy which is of concern here. Its late date qualifies it as "fictional,"¹⁷ and its use as a type of museum piece suggests that it may have had political import. The curse which ends the inscription typifies it, as one might expect, as a fictional Sumerian autobiography with a curse ending.¹⁸

Date and Function of the Text

The date of the inscription has been dealt with in the above discussion. As for the text's function, we can state that, at least by the seventh century, it was related to the brick's use as a museum piece, i.e., political propaganda. Yet, had we no seventh century copy, the political function of the brick inscription still would not be ruled out. According to Hallo's typology the purpose of such a monument:

was to convey the request of the donor (whether this was the king himself or not) for the long life of the king...the sculptor posed the donor in an attitude of permanent supplication, while the more modest monuments relied on their inscriptions, particularly the prayer which usually constituted the name assigned to the object, to carry their message (1962:14).¹⁹

The name of this statue, "Amar-Suen is the beloved of the king," could not have served any other function than to convey the legitimacy and the divine justification of his rule. This is suggested not only by the statue's name, but also by the boastful epithets which comprise nearly a third of the inscription. Additionally, we may note that the reference to Amar-Suen as "beloved" (*ki.ága*) is not only a very popular epithet among the kings of the Ur III and Old Babylonian periods, but it also appears on the inscriptions of Eannatum, Enmetena, and Ur-Baba (Seux 1967:416-417), i.e., three of the kings in this study who are discussed in conjunction with fictional Sumerian autobiographies.

EANNATUM'S STELE OF VULTURES

History of Research ²⁰

The first six fragments of the text originally were read and published by Heuzey (1884:164-180, 193-

203).²¹ Following the discovery of a seventh fragment in the British Museum, Thureau-Dangin attempted the restoration of the Stele called for by Heuzey (1909:42-63). Nearly eighty years later Jacobsen provided a new reading of the first ten columns, albeit not without heavy restoration (1976:247-259). This was in turn followed by Steible's work (1982:I:120-145). Since Heuzey, others, with the exception of I. Winter (1985:11-32; 1986:205-212), have added only minor changes to its interpretation.²²

Plot Summary

The Stele, which is inscribed on either side, both depicts and describes a battle between Eannatum, the king of Lagaš, and the town of Umma. Apparently, the battle began over a long-standing and bitter dispute over land and water rights. It tells of the wise Eannatum, who upon having a dream in which Ningirsu foretells his victory, attacked and defeated the town of Umma, and forced its rulers to swear oaths to the gods Enlil, Ninġursag, Enki, Sin, Utu, and Ninki. After a lacuna in the text, we are told that Eannatum erected a stele to commemorate the restoration of the temple Gu'edena to Ningirsu. The name of the Stele is then given amidst numerous divine and royal epithets.

Eannatum's Stele of Vultures as Fictional Sumerian Autobiography

One prerequisite of a fictional autobiography is that it must be written in prose. That the Stele of Vultures is written in monumental prose has not been questioned.²³ Another requirement within the genre is that the piece must contain a first person narration of events.²⁴ Following is a collection of first person references from the Stele.

²¹ His work is unavailable to me. He published them again in de Sarzec (1884-1912:II:Pl.4-8; 1894:1-12).

²² See Thureau-Dangin (1897:37-50; 1897:123-125); Poe-bel (1925:1-17; 1911:198-199); Jacobsen (1943:117-121; 1946:128152); Cooper (1986); Pettinato (1970/71:281-320); Barrelet (1970:233-258) argues that fragments ABDE are to be regarded as parts of a different stele than those of CF and G.

²³ This is not to say that the Stele does not contain any poetic elements. See Poebel (1914:159-169).

²⁴ There is some disagreement among scholars as to the first person narration on the Stele. Jacobsen (1976:247-259), Steible (1982:I:120-145), Winter (1986:205-212), and Cooper (1983:45-47) seem to have ignored the frequently occurring and highly visible enclitic first person copula *me* in their translations, despite the often certain reading of the sign. Thureau-Dangin (1907:198ff.), Radau (1900:71-83), and Sollberger (1951:110-111; 1971:115ff.), on the other hand, have opted for the first person. The existence of the copula even in Jacobsen and Steible's transliterations seems to warrant a rendering of the first person. See for example Col.

¹⁷ Accurately speaking it would still be an example of fictional Sumerian autobiography, though at the hand of Semites.

¹⁸ The first of Longman's categories.

¹⁹ As Hallo notes (n.109), this is particularly evident on the Stele of Vultures, to be discussed below.

²⁰ For an excellent summary of the research behind the stele see Barrelet (1970:233-258).

VI:1-4²⁵ The mighty one whose name was ordained by Ningirsu; Eannatum am I; who speaks with rage to the nations. I, Eannatum, with the name which Inanna named.

XVII:20-24 I Eannatum, cast the great net of Ninḫursag over the men of Umma.

XVIII:1 ...I am great in wisdom.

XVIII:2-4²⁶ I offered two doves before him; on their eyes I placed kohl, and on their head I applied cedar resin, for Ninḫursag...

XVIII:5-7 For Ninḫursag in Kiš I...

XVIII:8 Before Ninḫursag, my Mother, on the order of who, in the prayer to whom, dare the man of Umma renege on his word?!

XVIII:24 I, Eannatum (some 20 lines lost).

XIX:16-22 The carps which are for the service of the Apsu, with them, I, Eannatum, paid homage.

XX:1-5 I cast (the great net of) the god Sin, the younger child of Enlil, over the men of Umma.

XX:13-18²⁷ I surrounded the field of Ningirsu, its whole extent, with a deep canal.

Rev. I:1-6 I, Eannatum, cast the great net of Utu, king of abundant brilliance, over the men of Umma.

Rev. III:6-7 By the name of Ninki I have sworn.

Rev. X:12-15 I, Eannatum, to Ningirsu set it up. I...(the rest is broken away).

The fictional aspect of the Stele is brought out further by the shift in address both on the obverse and the reverse of the Stele. From I:1 to VI:1 and again beginning with Rev. V:42-VIII:8 a third person narration of events is given. For example:

V:42-55 Eannatum, king of Lagaš, endowed with power by Enlil, fed with the milk of life by Ninḫursag, named with a good name by Ininni, endowed with intelligence by Enki, made understanding of heart by Nina, the exalted lady...

VI:4 where Jacobsen translates É-an-na-tù-me as "(let) Eannatum..." (1976:258-259).

²⁵ Repeated in Rev. V:22.

²⁶ Repeated in XXI:12-16; Rev. I:31-35.

²⁷ Repeated in Rev. I:13-15; IV:1-3.

VI:2-VII:8 The beloved of Dumuzi-Apsu, whose name was named by Hendur-saga, the beloved friend of Lugal-Uruba, the beloved spouse of Ininni, the conqueror of Elam, the Subar, and the land of... to the full extent he devastated, Susa... with the standard of the city, its Ensi marched. Eannatum, the country conquering prince.

XVIII:1-XI:3 Arua he destroyed, he subjugated Sumer. Ur in its entirety he subdued... with might Eannatum captured... for Ningirsu he erected a temple.

One must, therefore, again contend either with two narrators, or as is preferred here, with another variation of the genre.²⁸ The switch to the third person, at the beginning and at the end of the Stele, does not rule it out as an autobiography; Longman also allows for such a switch (1991:86).

Another reason why the Stele of Vultures should be considered fictional is the mythic proportions with which the text describes king Eannatum. He is said to be nine feet two inches tall (Cooper 1983:47,n.2)! Indeed, he is no mere mortal, but rather is created by Ningirsu himself. Moreover, the dream in which Eannatum is promised his victory was obviously written after the fact in order to lend the invasion divine sanction.

Based on a comparison with various dedicatory plaques of Presargonic Lagaš, Winter believed that the end of the Stele of Vultures "must also have been part of the closing of the narrative text, equally representing an excerpt from the closing curses should the stele be destroyed (1986:211)."²⁹ The Stele of Vultures, then, according to the sub-genre classification of Longman, is a fictional autobiography with a curse closing.

Date and Function of the Text

As its medium would suggest, the Stele would naturally serve as both a warning to Ummaites contemplating incursions, and as a glorification of Eannatum's military prowess and victory over the Ummaites. However, the Stele was not found on the border of Lagaš but rather in the temple precinct (Crawford 1991:173). This tends to rule out its use as a landmark threat.

The Stele of Vultures has been dated to the late ED III period primarily under the weight of the name of Eannatum on that stele. But, the presence of two separate and conflated conflicts on the stele³⁰ implies that it

²⁸ The literary change from first to third person may be typically Sumerian. Though this variation apparently does not occur in Akkadian, a reexamination of the available data perhaps will prove worthwhile.

²⁹ Though Cooper believes curses to be relatively rare in Presargonic inscriptions, he himself cites at least six examples (1984:91,n.10).

³⁰ As noted already by Poebel (1914:161).

was not created during the early or middle parts of Eannatum's reign. In addition, according to Cooper:

The lateness of the Stela is also suggested by the fact that only there, and in a tiny fragment of another inscription, is Eannatum called "king" (*lugal*); in all other inscriptions his title is "ruler" (*ensi*) (1983:26).

Though an ED III date late for Eannatum's reign is possible, there is no way of knowing if Eannatum ever erected the stela. That it was found in the temple precinct suggests that he probably did not.

Moreover, there is reason to believe that the Stela was created by Enmetena, Eannatum's nephew, rather than by Eannatum. First, Enmetena's report of the border conflict with Umma, known to us from a clay jar inscription (Cooper 1983:26), fuses his uncle's campaigns with his own. This shows that the conflation of historical narratives as found on the Stela of Vultures was practiced in Enmetena's day. It also points out that Enmetena was not above using such a device to boast his own achievements. Second, according to the words of Ningirsu to the dreaming Eannatum: "[The people of his own city] will rise up against him (the ruler of Umma) and he will be killed within Umma itself" (II:8). In addition, we also know from the clay jar of Enmetena that the Ummaites destroyed the stelas of both Mesalim of Kiš and Eannatum of Lagaš (Cooper 1986:55). The Stela of Vultures, therefore, could not have been this boundary stela.³¹

After Eannatum reestablished the borders, he invokes a curse against the leader of Umma: "May there be an uprising against him in his own city" (IV:3)! According to the clay jar inscription of Enmetena, this is exactly what happens to Urluma, leader of Umma, in Enmetena's lifetime: "Urluma escaped, but was killed in Umma itself" (No. 6:3). Either the stela's curse came true or the stela was written during the reign of Enmetena.³² Therefore, it probably served in the time of Enmetena as a type of propagandistic art. This is further supported by the stela's iconography which graphically depicts Eannatum as victor and his enemies as meat for vultures. As Crawford states:

The earliest *objets d'art* come almost without exception from the temple precincts, but from the mid-third millennium there is a change and although the objects continue to be found in the

temples they, in practice, glorify the ruler. The Stela of Vultures, for example, may be couched in terms of an offering to Ningirsu but it is also a celebration of the military might of Eannatum of Lagaš (1991:173).

One possible motive for the stela may have been the continuing Kišite, Gutian, and Elamite incursions into Lagaš, as well as the nearly continuous border disputes with the neighboring Umma. Despite the grandiose claims on the stela, there is reason to believe that little headway was made toward a settlement of the conflict, either during Eannatum's reign or in the period which followed (Cooper 1983:21-37; Pettinato 1970/71:281-320). According to Longman: "The function of the texts as propaganda depends on their being perceived as if they were real inscriptions—hence the retention of the prose style of their monumental prototypes" (1991:210). Whether Eannatum erected the Stela of Vultures or not is impossible to know. If he did not, as is posited above, then it is likely that the stela was used to boost confidence among the Lagašites and to provide a justification for the on-going dispute.

CONCLUSION

The cumulative evidence argues for the existence of a genre of Sumerian fictional autobiography. In two cases the genre appears with little variation from the Akkadian examples. This is evident in the Lugalannemundu text, which Longman dismissed, and the seventh-century Amar-Suen pedestal inscription. The statue of Ur-Baba, though apparently autobiographical, lacks both a sub-generic ending, i.e., a blessing/curse, donation, etc., and sufficient evidence of its "fictionality."³³ Though Eannatum's so-called Stela of Vultures also shares features of the fictional Sumerian autobiography genre, both the fragmentary nature of the text and the uncertain date leave it hanging in the balance. Nevertheless, given at least two, if not three examples of fictional Sumerian autobiography, the notion that the genre is unknown in Sumerian can no longer be maintained.

It is probable that the minor differences which the above autobiographies possess are indicative of their development from royal dedicatory plaques,³⁴ like those found in Presargonic Lagaš.³⁵ Such dedicatory plaques often open with curses to potential vandals and often are followed in prose by a boastful first person narrative.

³¹ This gives some support to the argument of Barrelet (1970:23-258) who believes that the various fragments of the text come from different, but similar stelas.

³² I do not find convincing Cooper's argument that the death of a ruler by his own people was merely a stylistic topos (1983:40-41). Moreover, his only other exemplar comes from the reign of Enmetena, the suspected author of the Stela of Vultures.

³³ Though it was suggested that the switch from first to third person represents another variation of the genre, and therefore, qualifies it as fictional.

³⁴ This is somewhat of a clarification of the result of Longman's work, which sees a possible development from royal inscriptions, but not specifically dedicatory plaques.

³⁵ The similarity between the Stela of Vultures and dedicatory plaques also is discussed by Barrelet (1970:257).

They are merely shorter non-fictional³⁶ versions of the fictional autobiography. Similar variations also are attested in the Akkadian fictional autobiographies.³⁷

The results also substantiate some scholars' rejection³⁸ of Güterbock's classification and term, "*narû*-literature" (1934:40-47). The resemblance which such autobiographies have, at least in Sumerian, to dedicatory plaques³⁹ bespeaks the need for a more specific term.

One catalyst in the development from dedicatory plaques to fictional autobiographies may have been the telescoping of historical events, as seen especially in the clay jar inscription of Enmetena, but also on the Stele of Vultures. The modern Western view cannot easily tolerate the conflation of historical events. It tends to treat such blending as ahistorical, or at best, "fictional." But to the ancients fusing historical events or the self-attribution of the deeds of one's ancestors apparently did not pose a major intellectual problem. This also is true of the Egyptian pharaohs who often replaced the cartouches of their predecessors with their own and who also had political reasons to do so. At the very least it seems that a fresh examination of Sumerian historiography is in order.⁴⁰

Also suggested by this study is the significance of the borrowing of epithets. This is especially noticeable with the epithet "beloved" (*ki.ága*) which is found on every inscription in this study.⁴¹ The borrowing of epithets is probably to be taken hand in hand with the adoption of pseudonyms. Longman remarks:

It is becoming increasingly clear that the choice of a pseudonym is not an arbitrary decision on the part of the actual author of a pseudonymous composition... a pseudonym is chosen because the situation that confronted the real author of the composition was identical to the situation which confronted the pseudonym in his historical setting (1991:205).

This can be seen most easily in the case of the Stele of Vultures, where it is Enmetena, the nephew of Eannatum, who, under nearly constant siege of the Gutians and

Elamites, wishes to be identified with his more powerful and effective uncle.

For a modern, and I think fitting, analogy, we need only turn to the inscribed memorial bricks of Saddam Hussein found in his reconstruction of the walls of Babylon which are modeled after the original boastful bricks of Nebuchadnezzar (Zamora 1991:38). It is in light of such borrowings that Cooper's comment regarding the more ancient of such inscriptions becomes completely apposite: "In observing the unfolding of this genre through time, we have much to learn about ancient attitudes toward language, writing and history, and perhaps, something about our own" (1983:43).

³⁶ It now seems fitting to ask whether any text containing a first person address may be deemed "non-fictional." Caution will be extremely important when attributing a text to the ruler whose name appears on that inscription.

³⁷ Longman's sub-genre classification, as well as his acceptance of third-person and second-person variations, are implied here.

³⁸ For example: Kraus (1947:79ff.); Grayson and Lambert (1964:7-30); Cooper (1983); Grayson (1985:7); Klein (1986:17); Longman (1991:44-47, 51-55, 57).

³⁹ As opposed to *narû*, i.e., monumental steles.

⁴⁰ The work of Kramer notwithstanding (1953:217-232).

⁴¹ In the Lugalannemundu text it is used to refer to the goddess Nintu (l:1).

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