The Collapse of the Akkadian Empire

A Review of Historical and Textual Sources

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Tiivistelmä – Referat – Abstract

The latter stages of the 3rd Millennium BC saw the rise and collapse of the Akkadian Empire. Although their system of political organization was not necessarily invented by the Akkadians, they developed it much further than had been done ever before - with a centralized state power that had hegemony over most of Mesopotamia and kings that developed new ideologies of world dominion to legitimize their rule. Yet, as spectacular as the Empire might have been, so too was its sudden collapse.

Due to the scarcity of our sources, the causes and events that eventually led to the collapse are enigmatic to us. Several theories have been presented, and especially the rise of palaeoclimatology and its methods have produced new theories as to why the Akkadian Empire collapsed.

This thesis is an in-depth review and examination of the historical and textual sources that concern themselves with the Akkadian collapse, with the purpose of assessing their reliability and to compare and reflect them against the prevailing theories. These sources include royal inscriptions, letters, chronicles, king lists and literary compositions. All sources are examined through translations to modern languages.

The results show how most of the theories have contradictions and issues relating to the textual sources. The fact of the matter is that with present sources no assured conclusions can be drawn, and it will take a breakthrough in discoveries – notably of the Akkadian capital – before any more light can be shed on the matter.

Avainsanat – Nyckelord – Keywords
Akkad, societal collapse, Mesopotamia, Assyriology, palaeoclimatology

Säilytyspaikka – Förvaringställe – Where deposited

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1 Introduction

1.1 Research Question and the sources

In this thesis I will study the Akkadian Empire and its fall circa 2150 BC. The original idea was to attempt to find similarities and links between modern climatological data and historical records, but this proved quickly to be quite impossible due to the scarcity of historical sources. The question whether there are any mentions of climate or abrupt climate change in the historical record can be answered with a rather simple and resounding *no* - which would not have made for a very interesting thesis.

Nevertheless I continued my research on the subject and simplified my research question to *what caused the fall of the Akkadian empire,* with the emphasis of the research being specifically in the historical sources. Thus the objective of my research was to study the historical sources and see how well they reflect on the current theories concerning the Akkadian collapse.

In this work I will examine and study a variety of sources. First there are the primary sources, which fall into two categories. First, there are the contemporary sources that are not only very rare but also random in their content. These consist of a few original royal inscriptions, seal impressions and other short inscriptions on objects. These are, however, supplemented by the richer and more numerous later (mostly) Old Babylonian copies, that are considered contemporary sources in this work; justifications for this will be presented later. Secondly, the later, non-contemporary sources take the forms of chronicles, legends and literary compositions that address the end of the Akkadian era on different terms and in a different fashion. The specifics of the historiography of the period and its implications to our research are discussed in chapter 2.2, whilst individual sources and pieces are presented and examined throughout this work.

All of my research was done through secondary sources; through the works of modern scholars. Even my examinations of primary sources happen through secondary sources due to my lack of knowledge of ancient languages (most notably the Akkadian languages and Sumerian) and the cuneiform script, meaning that I have had to rely on translations to modern languages. I make this distinction because in this work I will largely ignore the linguistic aspects of the sources and rely on the translations - but

I am very aware that the translations vary and the smallest of changes can have large implications on the meaning and objective of the texts[1].

The climatological data will also be briefly discussed because of its major implications for the subject at hand. Because I am no palaeoclimatologist and because it would be unnecessary to do so in this paper, the climatological data itself will not be examined in much detail. As pieces of peer-reviewed scientific studies, the assumption is made that the data is reliable and objective - but the interpretations and meanings of this data are indeed open for discussion, and this debate will be considered in chapter 3.3.

1.2 The Akkadian Empire: an Overview

Presargonic Period

The history of the early 3rd millennium BC in Mesopotamia is complex to say the least. Periodizations have been made, through the archaeological study of material cultures, and during this time we see the final phases of the Uruk culture, the emergence and end of the Jemdet Nasr culture, and the four distinct phases of Early Dynastic culture before finally reaching the Akkadian culture in the turn of the 25th century BCE. These archaeological periods, with several overlapping divisions and subdivisions, offer us no information except changes in pottery styles[2]. Whether the centuries preceding the Akkadian Empire, circa 2700-2350, are to be called Nasrian or Early Dynastic make no difference for this study, for there are far more interesting characteristics to observe than pottery or architecture. Historians have often[3] jumped this hurdle by calling this period the *Presargonic period*, which conveniently skips the hurdles of regional differences in the archaeological record and underlines the importance of what is to come. Whilst this idea is not without its flaws - as in every attempt at periodization - I will be confining myself to his term as it suits my topic of research very well and yet underlines the difficulties of exact chronology this era suffers from.

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[1] I believe this to be an important note to make in Assyriology, where - as we will see in this work – the slightest differences in translations can have hugely different implications.
[2] Glassner 2003: 29-33
[3] Compare McMahon 2006: 3-4 and Frayne 1993: 4

Before the Akkad era, the world of Mesopotamia was largely divided into independent city-states. Kish, Mari, Uruk, Nippur, Lagash, Sippar and Umma - just to name a few examples - were all cities that governed themselves and their immediate surroundings with their own kings[4], their own protector deities and temples, and their own trade connections and routes. Whilst the city-states were proudly independent, they obviously were not confined to themselves. There were communications and correspondences between the city-states, varying from trade deals to border disputes. There were coalitions and competition; in practice a permanent state of war around the region where battles and raids were commonplace. Yet, as Glassner[5] argues, there was a fine balance in this mosaic. Battles were usually small in scale and concentrated on single objectives (battles for a piece of land or the right to a water source, for example) - and to not disrupt the balance victories and conquests were often short-lived.

In the late Presargonic period, however, there came to be forces that wanted to disrupt this balance according to Glassner. Whether one sees it as Glassner or as the logical outcome of a constant state of competition, the idea of hegemony slowly came into fruition. In northern Babylonia there seemed to be a larger single territorial state with its gravity point usually[6] at Kish[7], and later in Sumer Lugal-zage-si was able to unify the cities of Umma, Adab, Ur and Lagash. Out of this situation there emerged a new power, centered in the region of Agade, led by its king Sargon of Akkad.

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[4] Different city-states had different titles for their leader, such as *lu, lugal, en, ensi, pa.nun*, but all are translated as "king" in English.

[5] Glassner 1984: 7

[6] "Usually", because according to some sources the competing forces of Mari and Akšak achieved ascendancy over Kish on at least two occasions. Frayne 1993: 5-6

[7] Where, for example, one Me-Salim seemed to enjoy some form of suzerainty according to some sources. Glassner 1984: 7

Sargon forges an empire

The exact dating of the Akkadian Empire is impossible at the present, as the whole chronology of the Bronze Age to Early Iron Age Mesopotamia remains provisional. This is owing primarily to different ways of interpreting astronomical events recorded by ancient scribes[8], further complicated by modern dendrochronological studies[9]. Whilst studying the Akkadian Empire, scholars tend to usually accept the Middle Chronology dates of 2334 - 2154 BC[10], or the slightly reevaluated dates of 2310-2160 BC[11], fully acknowledging the problems of this and the futility of exact dating. Therefore in this work I will try to avoid exact dating and keep the chronology as relative and generalized as possible, but when dates are needed the Middle Chronology dates will be used.

Thus sometime in the 24th century BCE Sargon rose to power in Mesopotamia - he declared independence from Kish[12] and seized its control[13], conquered the Sumerian territory set by Lugal-zage-si among many others, founded his capital Akkad where he centralized the power[14] of his land, took the title "King of Akkad", and set up an (unfortunately poorly known) organized system of governance, apparently based on a standardized system of accounting and record keeping and loyal Akkadian governors[15]. Most of the sources concerning Sargon are historically problematic and vague, meaning the details and the chronology of his deeds and his empire are largely lost to us - yet his reign was undoubtedly a turning point in Mesopotamian history. The world of independent city-states was lost, and a new era of self-acclaimed world dominion, imperialism and divine leaders had begun.

Sargon's successors continued on this path, with the dynasty reaching its peak possibly around the time of Nāram-Sîn (2254 - 2218 BCE), the grandson of Sargon. During this time the empire reached its geographical high-point[16], with Old Akkadian archives of this period unearthed from Eridu and Ur to the south, Susa to the east, Mari to the west and Nineveh, Ashur and Tell Leilan to the north.

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[8] Glassner 2004: xx
[9] McIntosh (2005): 47
[10] For example, Frayne 1993:3
[11] For example, Westenholz 1997: 1
[12] The sources mostly state that Sargon was indeed a usurper; but as the sources concentrate on Sargon, we do not know whom he rallied behind him nor how he managed to raise an army.
[13] Frayne 1993: 5-7
[14] Glassner 1984: 5
[15] Charpin 1995: 809-811
[16] There are several ways historians and archaeologists have mapped out the possible borders of the empire. These methods include studies of the Old Akkadian and imperial archives, inscriptions that deal with military and economic activity and developments in material culture at sites. Frayne 1993: 7, 24. Weiss 2012: 4. McIntosh 2005: 77-78.

The archives show a standardization of efforts led by a centralized power in the Akkadian heartland[17]. Furthermore, the sources cite even further military campaigns throughout the Near East[18], with practically never-ending wars, battles and raids being conducted throughout the region. Nāram-Sîn added the titles "God of Akkad" and "King of the Four Quarters" to his name, claiming for the first time in (known) Mesopotamian history unequaled divine world dominion.

The Sargon dynasty, beginning from Sargon and ending in Šar-kali-šarrī (son and successor of Nāram-Sîn; the fifth king of Akkad), was an unparalleled empire in Mesopotamian history. It brought continuity and unity into a land long dominated by a complex and ever-changing web of city-states; it introduced the idea of a divine righteous leader, destined for world domination; it quite possible started a culture of imperialism in Mesopotamian leadership, where warfare was no longer just a mean towards a goal but an objective in itself[19]; and it cemented the role of the Akkadian language as a written scholarly language in the whole of Mesopotamia. These accomplishments have not gone unnoticed by the modern historians nor especially by the ancients - yet for all their deeds the experiment lasted only roughly 150 years, and the empire came crashing down during the 22nd century BCE.

An abrupt end: Who indeed was king?

Of the period following Šar-kali-šarrī's reign and thus the Sargon dynasty, the Sumerian King List tells us the following: "Who was king? Who was not king? Igigi was king, Nanum was king, Imi was king, Elulu was king, their tetrad was king and reigned for three years". After this period of confusion - so called because the ancient chroniclers seemed to be just as confused as the modern scholars - two more kings mentioned in the Sumerian King List bore the title "King of Agade": Dudu and his son Šu-Durul. Although the sources are very limited, it is highly unlikely that much of the Sargonic

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[17] For example, Visciato 1999 provides a detailed analysis of a Sargonic archive at the site of Tell El-Suleimah.
[18] Westenholz 1997: 1
[19] Glassner 1984: 8. Glassner states that the Akkadian kings waged annual military campaigns not for specific purposes *per se*, but rather because it was what was expected of great kings - and the Sargonic dynasty brought this 'expectation' into the canon of Mesopotamian history. As the campaigns were glorified in royal inscriptions and year names, the actual scopes of the conflicts and battles must have been relatively small for the most part.

Empire was left by their time. And alas, the Sumerian King List states that after Ŝu-Durul Akkad was sacked and Agade[20] was destroyed and the kingship taken to Gutium via a short detour through Uruk.

As impressive as the Akkadian Empire might have been, equally impressive was its collapse. In a matter of decades after its peak during Nāram-Sîn's reign the whole empire was reduced to ash and its territory divided. Although such a collapse is by no means a unique event in Mesopotamian history, the fact that we have such limited knowledge of it makes it an interesting subject of study.

On this note, the historical sources concerning the end of the empire are indeed particularly rare and scarce, leaving the modern scholar feeding on scraps. The contemporary sources are predominantly scribes' documents and simple accounting samples, with the few exceptions being near impossible to date [21]- thus not giving us a lot to work with. The later sources are already much more ample, but are not without their problems leaving their truthfulness in the balance. These sources will be reviewed and discussed in chapter 2.3 and 2.4, with the problems of ancient historiography meriting its own chapter in 2.2.

However the lack of decisive evidence or unproblematic sources has not stopped modern scholars - and rightly so - from presenting their theories on the events. Although traditionally the collapse was merited to the invading Gutian tribes, some scholars[22] have also highlighted the internal troubles of the empire. In chapter 3.2 we will look at how one would come to these conclusions from the historical sources.

In recent decades another theory has swept through and taken a predominant role in the research. Through the development of climatology and its scientific methods climate (or more specifically climate change) has taken a predominant role in the conversation concerning the collapse. The idea that a change towards a hotter and drier climate was the primary cause for the collapse was first presented by Weiss *et al.* in 1993, and this theory has been further developed ever since. This research will be presented and discussed in chapter 3.3.

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[20] In this work, the term "Akkad" is used for the city, and "Agade" for the region surrounding the city, the Akkadian heartland.

[21] Glassner 1984: 2

[22] For example Charpin 1995: 809-811 and Franke 1995: 835

1.3 The importance of Akkad to contemporaries and to us

In his 1986 book "La Chute d'Akkadé: L'Événement et sa Mémoir", roughly translated as "Fall of Akkad: the Event and its Memory", Jean-Jacques Glassner studies the collapse of the empire through two different themes. First, he has a look at the event itself, but quickly comes to the conclusion that not much can be said of it as our knowledge is very limited due to the scarcity of contemporary sources. Therefore his work concentrates more on the "Memory" of the empire and its collapse, or how the later Mesopotamians remembered Akkad and how some possibly used this memory for their own purposes and objectives. Although more evidence is available to us 35 years later, Glassner's argument still stands today - that the later Mesopotamians held the kings of Akkad in high regard.

Though the experiment of the Sargonid Dynasty was relatively short-lived, it left a lasting mark on the development of the whole region. The era of independent city-states was over, and instead came the idea of massive, imperialistic kingdoms that would attempt to claim dominion of "the four quarters" of the world. For millennia to come, kings and rulers of the Near East would look to Sargon and his heirs for inspiration, as the Akkad Empire was largely seen as the ideal monarchy. Kings as diverse as Samsi-Adad I of Assyria (1813-1781 BCE) and Nabonidus (555-539 BCE), the last Babylonian king, made pilgrimages to the site of Akkad. Assyrian kings imitated the Sargonic titles, often bearing the title "king of the four quarters" or similar titles to express complete world dominion; a concept - as far as we know - invented by the Akkadian rulers. Two Assyrian kings went as far as to taking the name of "Sargon" themselves, thus directly associating themselves with the Akkadian Empire[23]. Furthermore, the royal inscriptions and steles of the Sargonic kings, such as the Victory Stele of Nāram-Sîn, became valuable and desired objects and were transported throughout the Near East often as war booty.

Yet not only the elite took an interest in the story of the Akkadian Empire. Directly after the events, the Sargonic kings apparently became the subject of a tradition of folklore, which later took a literary form. These legends became widespread and timeless, as copies or fragments of them have been unearthed throughout the Near East, not only in the Akkadian language but also in Sumerian and Hittite[24]. *The Curse of Agade*, *The Sargon Birth Legend* or *Nāram-Sîn and the Enemy Hordes* are all examples of this. As historical sources they are often unreliable because legends tend to tell us more

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[23] Westenholz 1997: 2
[24] Westenholz 1997: 2

about their narrators than the subjects of the stories themselves, but such is the scarcity of our sources concerning the collapse of the empire all leads must be investigated. These legends are discussed in chapter 2.4 among other non-contemporary sources.

2 The Sources

2.1 Overview

Mesopotamia in the Akkadian era, towards the end of the third millennium BCE, has been described by some scholars as a *sprachbund* [25]- a region where two or more languages (related or unrelated) converge and diffuse. Akkadian and Sumerian are thought to have been the two major spoken languages in the area with a widespread bilingualism. This can be seen by how the two linguistically unrelated[26] languages influence each other in their written vocabulary[27]. And whilst unrelated, they were both written using the same method: wedge-shaped marks impressed on a tablet with a reed stylus (or in some instances carved on stone), a script known today as the cuneiform script[28]. Invented by the Sumerians in the late 4th millennium BC, the cuneiform script became widely adapted and was used throughout the ancient Near East to record several languages from Egypt to Anatolia[29]. The bureaucratic Old Akkadian used by the Sargonid dynasty was no exception[30].

Because of the widespread of the cuneiform script and the durability of clay in dry soil, tens if not hundreds of thousands of tablets containing this script have been unearthed to this day. They cover a very vast space geographically, chronologically as well as thematically: the texts concern themselves with everything from large royal inscriptions depicting large battles to every-day receipts from small purchases and everything in between. A large portion of the documents have still not been translated nor analysed properly, and, in the case of the Akkadian Empire, undoubtedly a vast amount of tablets still lie in the sands of the Middle East.

In Agade an empire was born. An empire that had massive repercussions for the development of not only ancient Mesopotamia but of the whole Near East. Undoubtedly significant, yet we, the modern historians, know remarkably little of the Akkadian Empire. This is, as often is the case in ancient history, due to the sources. Extremely few contemporary sources have survived, meaning that the modern historian has to work with later sources, such as Old Babylonian copies of inscriptions and

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[25] Deutscher 2000: 20-21
[26] Sumerian is a language isolate (no known relatives); Akkadian is an East Semitic language
[27] Glassner 2003: 2
[28] Van de Mieroop 1999: 2
[29] Van de Mieroop 2016: 2
[30] The later Akkadian languages, Babylonian and Assyrian, were also written using the cuneiform script. Namely Old Babylonian, to which I will be alluding to several times in this work.

king lists, which offer opportunities for the historian but do not come without problems. In this main part of this work, I will present and discuss the historical sources that we have of Akkad to date, beginning by taking a step back and looking at the bigger picture and noting the larger difficulties and characteristics of Mesopotamian historiography in more general terms in the next chapter.

This chapter is devoted to the sources themselves, which I have tried to categorize according to their nature. I will begin with the contemporary sources and later Old Babylonian copies thought to be loyal to the originals in chapter 2.3. This includes royal inscriptions, engravings, clay seals and correspondences - basically anything that could (accurately or not) be considered a contemporary source. The following chapter 2.4 will concern itself with the later sources that can most definitely be considered as non-contemporary, such as king lists and Babylonian chronicles. Whilst these sources were created for their own political or theological purposes and cannot be trusted blindly, they may shed some light on the Akkadian dynasty as well. In this same chapter are also included the sources that concern the *legends* of the Akkadian kings. These legends, as we will see, have a lot in common with the other non-contemporary sources but also differ in many ways – and present us with the possibility to examine how folkloristic tales viewed the collapse of this mighty empire.

2.2 Nature of the sources: a complex Mesopotamian historiography

Before going into the sources themselves, a consideration into the nature of the sources in a more general and historiographic manner is necessary. One could argue that before the Hellenistic period there are no examples of literary works that could be recognized as history, and that before the times of Herodotus and Thucydides there were indeed no group of literati known as historians. But history, as either a methodological study or a tale about the past, is not and has never been an activity reserved for a group of scholars themselves "historians". And indeed there are many kinds of different literary works from ancient Mesopotamia that treat historical subjects or reflect historical concerns.

Yet as the later Babylonian and Assyrian scribes, from whose works most of our sources stem from, selected and described events both past and present, their work did not give rise to history. Firstly, because the events selected by the scribes concerned exclusively the actions and lives of rulers; all knowledge we have of the average Mesopotamian comes from different sources such as the archaeological record, private correspondences or analyses of bureaucratic accounts (for example. lists of grain deliveries). The historical events recorded were about the great deeds and victories of kings or the blessings and curses handed by the gods to them. These events were then often compiled into chronologies and lists, some of which were chronologically quite accurate but unscientific in their aims and objectives[31]. As such the Mesopotamian way of handing down events of the past did not result in an objective and rational understanding of the past

As the ancient scribes wrote documents and texts that relate to either the remote or the recent past, the scribes did not concern themselves with the methods of the modern historian. Objectivity, or a scholarly methodological attempt of it, is simply not present in ancient sources: the history of Babylonia under Assyrian control was conceived of and written about in vastly different ways in Babylon and in Uruk[32]. But the differences do not constrain themselves to just political aims: as a crossroad for different ethnicities and cultures, ancient Mesopotamia saw the emergence of several distinct historiographical traditions. Scholars often categorize Sumerian, Amorite, Babylonian and Assyrian historiographies as separate entities, as peoples with different cultures, traditions and beliefs would have different concepts about and relations with their pasts. For example, as Glassner argues, the later Assyrians and Babylonians had very distinct concepts about time, with the former often favouring a cyclical chronology and the latter a durational[33]. As such the Assyrians often organized their past on cyclical terms (the rise and fall of Akkad would be one historical cycle, which preceded and was followed by other cycles), whereas Babylonian scribes favoured a flat chronological order. This somewhat follows Pečirková's argument[34], as she states that Assyrians and Babylonians believed that certain natural phenomena were always followed by the same historical event in a cyclical fashion. Thus we can analyse the characteristics of Assyrian annals and Babylonian chronicles, and see that albeit being historical sources, they concentrate on different aspects of the past, reach different conclusions and have their own separate aims.

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[31] Pečirková 1975: 12
[32] Glassner 2004: 3
[33] Glassner 2004: 7-11
[34] Pečirková 1975: 20, 32-33

Illiteracy was the norm among the populace during this period, meaning that written texts - whether they be receipts, letters or chronicles - had to be written by, and to, a very specific group of literate people. We call this group the *scribes*, who then had to narrate orally any messages for the people, such as royal inscriptions and victory steles. Every court and temple had their own scribes, who would have been responsible for all writing, copying and archiving of texts. This was not a simple mundane task, however, as we saw with the case of the bureaucracy of the Akkadian Empire, where bureaucratic measures and archiving (and especially the Akkadian language) were used as a method for unifying the different regions of the empire and centralizing power. Within the group of scribes, a further distinction needs to be made between the copyists – a profession that could be classified as manual labour – and the learned scribes. The learned scribes would have been intellectuals that were responsible for collecting libraries, compiling chronicles from different sources and rewriting compositions to better suit contemporary political ideas. For the rest of this chapter, the discussion is focused on the latter group.

The scribes would have as such held enormous responsibility in not only holding the accounts of rulers and temples, but also in shaping the image the rulers wanted to express of themselves to the people of today and tomorrow. Two possibilities arise from this. Either the scribes of the court were carefully selected by the rulers, hand-picked from the scribe schools, chosen from friends and associates of the court to serve as loyal employees - or, as Glassner[35] suggests, that the scribes formed their own part of the ruling classes, with powerful families of scribes at their helm. "Let us not misunderstand: between the intellectual, political and religious spheres lay no insurmountable barriers", he writes. The suggestion is that rather than being employees for the system, the scribes, or intellectuals, were at the top of the social hierarchy among the kings and priests. Self-gain is indeed the best motivation for work, and this would be one way of explaining the loyalty of scribes to a regime.

Glassner names a few examples to make his case. First he mentions one Qurdi-Negal of the Neo-Assyrian period (7th century BCE), who possibly ran a scribal school in Huzirina, modern day southern Turkey, before becoming a priest in the city. Then he mentions the temple of Samas at Sippar that housed a rich library, and finally the Babylonian king Marduk-zakir-shumi II, who ascended the throne in 703 BCE after leading a revolt as a member of a great family of scribes[36]. These examples

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[35] Glassner 2004: 11-12
[36] Glassner 2004: 11

suggest a fluidity amongst the ruling classes to Glassner, but it is important to note that mere four examples so apart in time and space do not prove much by themselves.

Beyond this not much is known of the scribes. Some libraries, scribe schools, archives and other points of scribal activity have been excavated, but beyond the few examples no notable scribes are known to us today. This is largely because Mesopotamian writings, just as in Sumer where cuneiform writing emerged, are anonymous. There are a few exceptions, of course, such as Saggil-kinam-ubbid the author of the Babylonian Theodicy, Kabti-ili-Marduk the author of the poem of Erra[37] or En-hedu-ana the supposed author of the Sumerian Temple Hymns[38]. But the names of a handful of authors and copyists scarcely make up for the tens of thousands pieces of cuneiform texts. It seems then, that for the ancient scribe and the Mesopotamian author the focal point was the subject of the texts. In many cases the subject of the legends, epics and inscriptions became the narrator as well, as in to completely attempt to mask the identity of the author and remove him from his own writings. Furthermore, no sources are mentioned, further alluding to the objectivity of the writings - to acknowledge the presence of an author is also to acknowledge subjectivity and the possibility of several points of view. Therefore all Mesopotamian texts that concentrate on historical events need to be analyzed critically; the voice of the author(s) and their purpose need to be read in between the lines. The writings are indeed far from the disciple we call history.

As I have been discussing the question of "who wrote" in ancient Mesopotamia, it is also interesting to consider "to whom did they write to" - as in who were the intended audiences of the cuneiform texts? In a world characterized by illiteracy, who would benefit from the written texts? This would of course depend on the nature of the text. Large royal inscriptions carved in stone or written on large monuments and victory steles were intended to be seen by the whole population, to be read out for the populace and for their message to spread via word of mouth. These inscriptions are then obviously very propagandistic: they concentrate on the great deeds and victories of the kings. These would have been had to read out loud to the general populace. There is no evidence whatsoever as to how the public would have reacted to this form of propaganda, but some scholars[39] have argued that they were critical of it too.

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[37] Glassner 2004: 11
[38] En-hedu-ana and the Sumerian Temple Hymns are discussed later in this work.
[39] Eg. Selz 2010: 2

Furthermore, some royal inscriptions were hidden from view, carved into the foundations of palaces and temples. These texts, often called building inscriptions, were carved into the walls of very restricted areas and were not intended for the public to see. But as Mesopotamian kings often conducted renovations and works on their important palaces and temples, during which these foundation deposits could be discovered, these inscriptions were written solely for future kings as an attempt to leave a lasting legacy. Yet these building inscriptions are rarely nothing but advertisements and self-praise left for future readers - thematically they focus on the same great victories and building projects as the royal inscriptions. Sometimes, however, they could hold a piece of warning or advice for future kings.

The question of the audience becomes more difficult for the other genres of texts. The legends concerning Akkadian kings might have begun as folklore and as such the stories belonged to the people. Through these oral traditions the general public shared their (assumed) interest in the past in their own way, as literacy is no prerequisite for an interest in the past[40]. Yet the fact that these legends have survived today pose a problem. The reason they were written down in the first place, copied time and time again, and spread throughout the region is unknown to us. It is possible that familiar tales were preferred in scribal schools, or that possessing these tales in written form symbolized some sort of social status, or as Drews[41] suggests from Oppenheim's[42] works that the sanctuaries developed a written tradition to support the spoken legends - but this is nothing but speculation.

As for the piles of documents, chronological and genealogical king lists, dynasty lists and lists of year names created by the later Assyrians and Babylonians, the question remains the same: who were they writing and copying these for? Whilst the archives the scribes composed certainly had a bureaucratic nature to them, the political messages woven into the chronicles and annals they created pose problems. Written by scribes to scribes and the few literates, these chronicles and annals held distinct political motivations - such as to link contemporary kings to the past great dynasties and legitimize the kings holding power. Yet the question that arises is that why would the works of the scribes have political aims and propagandistic characteristics, if their works could not be read by a large majority of the subjects of the king? Two options arise. It is possible that they written for future scribes as a tool to uphold the legacy of the king, meaning that they were written to highlight and underline the importance of the present king so that his name would not be forgotten - to ensure that his name

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[40] Drews 1974: 387
[41] Drews 1974: 388
[42] Oppenheim 1964: 150

would remain in the annals of future scribes. Alternatively, if continuing along Glassner's idea of a high scribal class, it could be possible they were written to legitimize the rule of the king to contemporaries. Thus the intended audience would have been the elite of the society, the ruling classes, who were either literate themselves or could afford the services of a scribe. These would have been the people in or near the royal court, some of whom undoubtedly would have been powerful men - to whom the king would have needed to legitimize himself to.

2.3 The Contemporary Sources

Douglas Frayne[43] offers in his work the most recent compilation of Mesopotamian royal inscriptions from the Sargonic period. Here, the application of the term 'royal inscription' is loose, as Frayne's volume compiles all inscriptions not just made by the royals, but also inscriptions that concern the kings, such as offerings and dedications. All legends are excluded however.

Some contemporary inscriptions are included, Old Akkadian inscriptions like the victory stele of Nāram-Sîn, but as mentioned before, they are extremely rare and scarce. Therefore most of the inscriptions are later Old Babylonian copies. These copies, however, have several questions that need to be addressed beforehand. First of all, it would not be unreasonable to question their validity and truthfulness. After all, as we saw in the previous chapter, ancient Mesopotamians had no issues in modifying aspects of the past to better suit their political or ideological needs - so is it safe to assume that the copies are reliable and stay true to their originals? Unsurprisingly, the experts say yes; Glassner[44] especially validates this at length. He mentions how the ancient labourer, the copyist, found credibility in faithful citation of the material being copied, and how the first task of these scribes was the faithful reproduction of documents and the compilation of sources. Thus the copyist or compiler had to guard against any personal contributions. Of course there are a few exceptions where the copyists have been found to have edited and compiled several original excerpts into one - but these do not break the general assumption.

The points that Glassner makes sit rather well with the ideas I presented in the previous chapter. As the scribes wrote anonymously, they did not (or at least never presented it as straightforward) display their own opinions or thoughts in their inscriptions. As such, the daily work of the ancient copyist did not differ enormously from that of the monastic scribe in medieval Europe - accurate copying of texts formed the bulk of the labour that was undertaken. The purpose of this copying is unknown to us, but nonetheless the assumption that the copies follow their originals is safe *in general*. The exceptions when this is not the case, probably or possibly, need to be considered separately.

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[43] Frayne 1993
[44] Glassner 2004: 14-15

Another interesting point to be made of the copies concerns geography. Firstly, the locations they have been discovered in or excavated from can be revealing in themselves. A majority of the Sargonic copied inscriptions come from the main cities of southern Mesopotamia, such as Nippur, Ur and Uruk, but some have been found in northern Mesopotamian cities such as Sippur and interestingly as far east as the Elamite capital of Susa. The fact that these inscriptions were copied throughout the Near East for whatever reason - be it educational, historic or archival – or transported between cities as war booty, further underlines the importance of the Akkadian Empire to the ancients. Secondly, the copies do not tell us the locations of the original inscriptions. Some of the larger detailed inscriptions can tentatively be linked to exact cities and temples - such as the two large Sammeltafeln[45] from Nippur with inscriptions on Sargon were possibly inscribed originally on triumphal steles that once stood in the courtyard of Enlil's temple in Nippur [46]- but in general the original locations remain as big a mystery as the original inscriptions themselves. Whether the originals were stolen, destroyed or still waiting to be discovered is unknown, but fortunately for us the ancient scribes' work has not been in vain.

The contemporary sources of the next chapters have been organized chronologically following the relative chronology of the Sumerian King List and the example of Frayne. First are examined the sources concerning Sargon, followed by those concerning Nāram-Sîn and Šar-kali-šarrī before finally reaching the period of the empire's fall. This is not an unproblematic approach by any means, but it is nonetheless a decision taken for the sake of simplicity and cohesion - notwithstanding a few examples, all of the contemporary sources are royal inscriptions. The problems of this will be discussed later in this work.

Sargon

Although Sargon, the founder of the empire, had long passed on when Akkadian empire fell, it is important to examine the sources concerning him when studying the collapse of the dynasty. This is because of his stature among the later Mesopotamians; not only was his rule seen as the ideal form of governance as he became the exemplary for future rulers, but he also became a character in folkloristic tales about the era. In these legends, as we will see in chapter 2.4, Sargon often plays a

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[45] A Sammeltafeln is a cuneiform tablet that contains several shorter texts.
[46] Frayne 1993: E2.1.1.1, p.9

role in the collapse of the empire as the heroic good poster-child of the gods, whose successors could not live up to his example. Thus, as Sargon's influence is undoubted, we must take a look at the sources that concern him. And again, unsurprisingly, they are scarce - and the very limited contemporary inscriptions are in most cases later Old Babylonian copies.

Notable is the lack of any date list[47], meaning that it is impossible to make a secure chronology of his reign. The chronology of the early empire is in fact quite problematic. There are several inscriptions, varying in length, that deal with Sargon's conquests of southern Mesopotamian cities of Ur, Uruk, Lagash, and Umma. Especially inscription shown in Figure 1 highlights how Sargon defeated and captured Lugal-zage-si, the king of these Sumerian cities. The order of these conquests is unknown, as are all the details of it - but off the available evidence the outcome seems certain. From being "king of Kish" to "king of the world", Sargon took control of the region and centered its power into Akkad.

1) *śar-ru*-GI
2) LUGAL
3) *a-kà-dè*.KI
4) MAŠKIM.GI

5) INANNA
6) LUGAL KIŠ
7) PA.ŠEŠ AN
8) LUGAL
9) KALAM.MA.KI
10) ÉNSI
11) *en-líl*

1-11) Sargon, King of Agade, bailiff to the goddess Aštar, king of the world, anointed priest of the god Anum, lord of the land, governor for the god Enlil,

12) *in* (KASKAL + [x])
13) UNU.KI
14) *iš-ar*

12-14) was victorious over Uruk in battle.

[...]
25) *ù*
26) lugal-zà-ge-si
27) LUGAL
28) UNU.KI
29) *in* [x]
30) ŠU.DU.A
31) *in* SI.GAR-*rì-im*
32) *a-na* KÀ
33) *en-líl*
34) *u-ru-úś*
[...]

25-34) Further, he captured Lugal-zage-si, king of Uruk, in battle (and) led him off to the gate of the god Enlil in a neck stock.

Figure 1: Lines 1-14 and 25-34 of the E.1.1.2 inscription from Frayne 1993: 13-15. Compiled from two Old Babylonian sammeltafeln copies from Nippur, CBS 13972 and Ni 3200, housed today in the Philadelphia University Museum and the Istanbul Arkeoloji Müzeleri, respectively. The original Old Babylonian text written in cuneiform has first been transcribed to Latin alphabet, then translated to English.

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[47] Frayne 1993: 7

The inscription shown in Figure 2 is a prime example of a tablet where the location of its discovery tells us more than the inscription itself. It is a very fragmentary victory stele, with just a few preserved lines of the end of a royal inscription and an adjoining caption that identifies the king as Sargon. The fragments were found by de Morgan during his excavations of the Elamite capital of Susa at the turn of the 20th century. Off the fragments de Morgan made the conclusion, which is withheld by Frayne[48], that the original victory stele was deliberately defaced in antiquity. There are two theories as to why this monument was found in Susa. Firstly, it could suggest that Sargon's war efforts to the east went as far as the Elamite capital, where upon its conquest the stele measuring 50cm was issued to commemorate the victory. It would then make sense for the stele to have been destroyed as the Akkadian rule crumbled. Secondly, it is possible that the monument was transferred to Susa as war booty, either in one piece or already broken. This would have probably happened during the 12th century, when the Elamite king Shutruk-Nahhunte invaded Babylonia and took several famous pieces [49]to his capital.

As the inscription itself is too fragmentary to give us much information - it does not state which victory it celebrates - the victory stele could be used as proof of either Sargon's far-reaching conquests or of his importance and influence among later Mesopotamians. Yet with the information available to us today, neither case can be definitively proved, and if anything, the stele highlights the unknowns of this period.

Side A
Col. i'
Lacuna
i 1'-4')   (When Sargon) [con]quered the place … [in[battle, ...

Col. ii'
Lacuna
ii 1'-5')   [May the two gods … tea]r out [his foundations] and destroy his progeny.

Side C
1-2)   Sargon, the king

Figure 2: Inscription E.2.1.1.10 from Frayne 1993: 26-27. Five fragments of a victory stele were found in Susa; on one side (A) of the largest fragment there are preserved a few lines of the end of an inscription, and on another side (C) of the same piece there is a depiction of the king, with a rather simple title for Sargon.

[48] Frayne 1993: 26
[49] Among the best known of these are the Code of Hammurabi and the Victory Stele of Nāram-Sîn

The inscription of Figure 3 is an interesting one because it mentions Sargon's daughter, En-hedu-ana, as the priestess of the god Nanna at Ur. En-hedu-ana was by all probability not her birthname, as it is a purely Sumerian name meaning "priestess, ornament of heaven" - one she must have received whilst or just after taking her position as *entu* priestess at Ur. Her clear identification as Sargon's daughter is important for two reasons. Firstly, she is often[50] claimed to have been the first known poet whose name has been recorded: the authorship of the Sumerian Temple Hymns, is credited to her.

The Sumerian Temple Hymns is a collection of 42 hymns addressed to temples located in 35 cities throughout Mesopotamia, on a south-north-west axis of Eridu, Sippar and Ešnunna covering the whole region of what would later be called Babylonia. Whilst there is indeed no reason to doubt the authorship and compilation of the collection by En-hedu-ana[51], the implications of her roles as *entu*-priestess, Sargon's daughter and the author of the collection are a different matter. Whereas the modern translators and compilers of the collection simply called the matter debatable[52], Van de Mieroop has conceived some intriguing ideas. To begin, Van de Mieroop[53] states that the compilation of these hymns into one series shows how the numerous and various religious cults in the region were considered to belong to an integrated system, with the city of Ur and its temple playing some sort of significant role in this cobweb of cults.

Furthermore, according to Van de Mieroop, by having an Akkadian princess in this influential position in one of the main Sumerian centers of the south, shows Sargon's intentions related to his own powers: to attempt to unite Babylonia under his dynasty and to connect the cultic systems of the region to the royal family. Both attempts must have been successful at least to some extent, as Nāram-Sîn expanded on this policy by placing several of his daughters as high priestesses of prominent cults in other Babylonian cities, and in fact all rulers for about 5 centuries afterwards who claimed authority over Babylonia and Ur would place their daughters as high priestesses of Nanna at Ur. It is indeed not out of the question either that the temple would have held considerable riches, made available to the rulers this way.

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[50] Even her Wikipedia page mentions this: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enheduanna
[51] Sjöberg & Bergman 1969: 5
[52] Sjöberg & Bergman 1969: 6: *"Whether there exists any connection between the position of En-hedu-ana and her literary activities cannot be decided"*
[53] Van de Mieroop 2016: 70

(a)

1-3)	Ed-h[e]du-ana, *zirru* priestess, wife of the god Nanna,
4-7)	daughter of Sargon, [king] of the world
8-9)	in [the temple of the goddess Inan]na-ZA.ZA in [U]r,
10-11)	made a [soc]le (and)
12-13)	named it 'dais, table of the god An'

(b)

1-4)	[Nāram-Sîn, king of the] f[our quarters]:
5-11)	En-men-a[na], *zirru* priestess of the god Nanna, spouse of the god N[anna], *entu* priestess of the god Sin at Ur, [is] his daughter.

Figure 3: Inscriptions relating to the daughters of the kings

  (a): *Inscription E.2.1.1.16 from Frayne 1993: 35. Known from an inscribed disk and its Old Babylonian copy, both of which were found in excavations at Ur, deals with the fashioning of a socle for the goddess INANNA.ZA.ZA, by En-hedu-ana, the entu priestess of the god Nanna at Ur and the daughter of Sargon. The original disk is housed in the University Museum of Philadelphia, with the inscription on one side and a carved pictorial relief on the other, depicting En-hedu-ana pouring an oblation over an altar. The god INANNA.ZA.ZA mentioned has not been certainly identified. Museum number CBS 16665 (Philadelphia University Museum).*

  (b): *Inscription E2.1.4.33 from Frayne 1993: 145-146. This inscription is found on a fragmentary clay tablet from Ur, and it mentions the daughter of Nāram-Sîn, En-men-ana, holding the same spiritual position in Ur as En-hedu-ana, Sargon's daughter.*

Nāram-Sîn

Although according to the sources there were two kings in between Sargon and Nāram-Sîn, Rimuš and Man-ištūšu, for the sake of this study they will be skipped. Nāram-Sîn had a relatively long reign - although the 56 years mentioned in the Sumerian king list is thought to be highly unlikely [54]- and it is thought that the Akkadian Empire reached its peak during this time. There is no date list for the time of Nāram-Sîn either, so it is impossible to compile an accurate chronology for his reign. However some clues, such as the presence or absence of the prefixed divine determinative, can be used to create a vague idea of a relative chronology.

The two major events of Nāram-Sîn's reign (as far as we know), his deification and the 'Great Revolt', are surprisingly well documented in the primary sources. The rebellion is known to us through both historical and literary texts, with several of Nāram-Sîn's royal inscriptions either treating the event directly or alluding to it. Figure 4 is an excerpt from the Kutcher text - named here after its original

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[54] Frayne 1993: 84; Pouysségur XXXX. Further, the different manuscripts of the Sumerian King List give different reignal years. The issues of the Sumerian King List are discussed later in this work.

publisher- It is an inscription of Nāram-Sîn known from two Old Babylonian tablet copies from Nippur that deals with the crushing of the Great Revolt[55]. In it, Nāram-Sîn's main adversaries are named, King of Kish Iphur-Kiš and the king of Uruk Amar-Girid, who formed coalitions in the north and in the south to oppose the Akkadian throne.

Col. i
1) [d]*en-líl*
2) *il-śu*
[...]

i 1-2) The god Enlil (is) his (personal) deity (and)

6) *[na]ra-am-*[d]EN.ZU
7) *[d]a-núm*
8) [LU]GAL
9) *[ki-ib-r]a-tim*
10) *[ar-ba-im]*

6-10) [Na]ram-Sin, the [m]ighty, [ki]ng of the [fou]r [quar]ters,

Lacuna

i 1'-20') [In Kish] they elevated Iphur-Kish to kingship, and in Uruk they elevated Amar-Girid likewise to kingship. Iphur-Kish, king of Kish, went to war and [rallied] (the cities of) Kish, Kutha, TiWA, Sippar, Kazallu, Kiritab, [Api]ak, [...]

iv 25'-35') Further, he [Nāram-Sîn] filled the Euphrates River with their [bodies], conquered the city of Kish, and destroyed its wass.

iv 36'-45') Further, he made the river/canal go forth in its (city's) midst and struck down 2,525 men within the city. Further ...

Col. v
Lacuna
v 1'-21') [Amar-Girid], ki[ng] of Uruk, went to war and rallied (the cities of) Uruk, Ur, Lagash, Umma, Adab, Shuruppak, Isin, and Nippur, and (settlements) from (the province of) the Lower Sea.
[...]
v 29'38') Nāram-Sîn, the mighty, heard about him and hast[ened] to [his] side fr[om] Kish. The two of them engaged in battle [and] grappled with each other. By the verdict of the goddess Aštar-annunītum [...]

Col. vi 1'-9'

vi 1'-9') …, and made the … river/canal go forth (in its midst). ...

Figure 4: Excerpt from the Inscription E2.1.4.6 from Frayne 1993:103, the 'Kutscher text'. From two Old Babylonian tablet copies from Nippur that deal with the Great Revolt against Nāram-Sîn. Museum numbers BT 1 (University of Haifa) and N 3539 (Philadelphia University Museum). The first 10 lines are shown in both languages purposefully.

From the Kutscher text we can really grasp the magnitude of the rebellion. The northern coalition gathered the support of important cities such as Kish and Sippar (most of the cities of this coalition are lost to us due to the fragmentary nature of the tablets), whilst the other coalition consisted of all the major Sumerian centers of the south, such as Uruk, Ur, Nippur and Lagash. These are evident from lines i 1'-20' and v 1'-21'. If we assume the Akkadian heartland to be around the Diyala region, the revolt would really have almost encircled the Akkadian capital. Notable is also Nāram-Sîn's

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[55] Frayne 1993: 103

reaction, of how he extinguished the revolts by force, with several allusions to extreme violence. Column iv 25'-35' mentions how the Euphrates River was filled with the bodies of his enemies. The expression "he made the river/canal go forth in its midst", used twice in the text to describe the destruction of both coalitions, can be understood both literally or figuratively - but in both cases the result is violence and death, as seen in column iv 36'-45') "[...] and struck down 2,525 men within the city". Oddly specific number, and whether true or made up, it was inscribed to clearly highlight the destruction caused by Nāram-Sîn's armies, and possibly to serve as a warning for whoever would dare to oppose the dynasty.

Whilst the inscription of Figure 4 becomes increasingly fragmentary towards the end, the result of the rebellion is also known to us from other sources; an apparent astounding victory for Nāram-Sîn and his armies. In fact, the royal epithet *ša-ir* 10 LAL 1 REC *in* MU 1 "victor in 9 battles" that Nāram-Sîn took after the revolt , shown in Figures 5 and 6, would suggest that there were 9 astounding victories. Also notable in all these texts is the writing of Nāram-Sîn's name as *na-ra-am-* [d]EN.ZU, where [d] represents the dingir sign, the divine determinative used in cuneiform script to indicate that what followed was the name of a god[56]. This sign is also shown in Figure 3, where preceding the names of the gods Nanna and Inanna is the [d] sign.

1) *na-ra-am-*[d]EN.ZU
2) *da-núm*
3) LUGAL
4) *ki-ib-ra-tim*
5) *ar-ba-im*
6) *ša-it*
7) 10 LAL 1 REC 169

1-7)   Nāram-Sîn, the mighty, king of the four quarters, victor in nine battles in one year:

Figure 5: First lines of the inscription E2.1.4.9 from Frayne 1993: 111. The inscription is found on four door sockets from Marad, where apparently Nāram-Sîn's son Lipit-ilī was governor. The rest of the inscription deals briefly with Nāram-Sîn's victory over "three kings" (in all likelihood Iphur-Kiš of Kish, Amar-Girid of Uruk and Enlil-nizu of Nippur of the Great Revolt) and the building of a temple at Marad.A fine example of Nāram-Sîn's titles. Museum number YBC 2164 (New Haven, Yale University).

[56] Van de Mieroop 2016: 74

The inscription in Figure 6 gives us more detail and explicitly tells us of Nāram-Sîn's apotheosis, though it is difficult to imagine his deification being the result of the people's will rather than megalomaniac behaviour of an absolute ruler. Yet, the text can be used to prove that apotheosis is the correct term to be used for Nāram-Sîn's divine claims - he did not claim to be born into divinity, thus not automatically granting his predecessors and successors the same title, but rather because of his great deeds he (and him alone) was elevated to a divine status by the other gods. Conceptually, this placed him in a very different realm from previous rulers; some earlier kings had been granted a cult after death, but Nāram-Sîn received one while he was still alive.

1) *na-ra-am*-[d]EN.ZU
2) *da-núm*
3) LUGAL
4) *a-kà-dè*.KI

1-4)	Nāram-Sîn, the mighty, king of Agade,
5-9)	when the four quarters together revolted against him,
10-12)	through the love which the goddess Aštar showed him,,

13) 10 LAL 1 REC 169
14) *in* MU 1
15) *iš-ar-ma*
16) *ù*
17) LUGAL-*rí*
18) *šu-ut i-śi-*〈*ù*〉*-nim*
19) *i-ik-mi*

13-19)	he was victorious in nine battles in one year, and the kings whom they (the rebels [?]) had raised (against him), he captured.
20-23)	In view of the fact that he protected the foundations of his city from danger,
24-53)	(the citizens of) his city requested from Aštar in Eanna, Enlil in Nippur, Dagān in Tuttul, Ninhursag in Keš, Ea in Eridu, Sîn in Ur, Šamaš in Sippar, (and) Nergal in Kutha, that (Nāram-Sîn) be (made) the god of their city, and
54-57)	they built within Agade a temple (dedicated) to him.

Figure 6: Excerpt from the inscription E2.1.4.10 from Frayne 1993: 113-14. The inscription, in Old Akkadian, is incised on the base of the "Bassetki statue", depicting a naked man sitting down (only the bottom half of the statue has survived). The statue was discovered by accident in the 1960's in the small village of Bassetki near the most northern point of modern day Iraq. It is thought that because of this inscription, the statue once stood in front of Nāram-Sîn's temple in Akkad - but how or why the statue traveled hundreds of kilometers up north is a mystery. The piece was stolen from the Iraq Museum during the 2003 invasion of Iraq, but was later recovered and reinstalled[57].

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[57] Russell 2003: 1

Arguably the most famous piece of this period, the Victory Stele of Nāram-Sîn (Figure 7), is also a prime example of Nāram-Sîn's acclaimed divinity. A 2m high stone carved in bas-relief, it commemorates a victory of the king over the Lullubi, a mountain people from the Zagros Mountains. The original inscription is heavily fragmented and offers us little else than the name of the Lullubi, but the picture is in this case worth more than a thousand words. Nāram-Sîn dominates the composition and holds the highest visual hierarchy - top and center, the large character of Nāram-Sîn draws not only the attention of the viewer but also of the other characters depicted on the piece as they look up to him. Wearing the insignia of royalty, bow, arrow, and a battleaxe - he is also sporting the horned helmet, a symbol reserved for divinity[58]. The organized and uniform Akkadian army, led by a divine king, are shown to literally trample over their enemies. Nāram-Sîn himself looks upwards as well - but not towards any man, but rather the sky, the stars and the gods.

Col. i

1) [d][*na-r*]*a-am*-[d]EN.ZU

2) *da-núm*

i 1-2)	[Nar]am-Sin, the mighty,
i 1'-5')	Lacuna, … Sidu[r-x] (and) the highlanders of Lullubum assembled together …
ii 1-3)	… bat[tle]. For/to …
ii 1')	Lacuna the high[landers …] Lacuna
iii 1)	[heap]ed up [a burial mound over them].
iii 2-5)	… (and) dedicated (this object) [to the god …]

Figure **7**: *The Victory Stele of Nāram-Sîn. Only the original inscription is presented; the later addittion by the Elamite king Šutruk-Nahhunte is omitted. From Frayne 1993: E2.1.4.31 pp.143-144.*

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[58] Van de Mieroop 2016: 74

Šar-kali-šarrī

The Sumerian King List states that Šar-kali-šarrī, the son of Nāram-Sîn, reigned for 25 years, which according to the Middle Chronology would have been around 2217 - 2192 BCE. Šar-kali-šarrī, the son of Nāram-Sîn, is the last attested king of the Akkadian Empire and the last successor of the Sargonid dynasty. Thus Šar-kali-šarrī witnessed the fall of the Akkadian Empire, with the contemporary sources alluding to other cities claiming independence and the arrival of the Gutians.

1-5)   Šar-kali-šarrī, son of the king: Tāb-pû-ālim, scribe, is his servant

Figure **8**: *Inscription E2.1.4.2021 from Frayne 1993: 178. A seal (excavation number 13N 336) found during excavations at Nippur. Šar-kali-šarrī, son of the king Nāram-Sîn, apparently served in a high administrative post at Nippur, possibly as governor of the city, prior to his accession to the throne.*

 Contrary to the previous kings, over half of the year names of Šar-kali-šarrī's reign are extant, meaning that most of the events during his reign can be dated fairly accurately. Unfortunately, however, only few royal inscriptions have survived, meaning that we do not know of many events which to date[59], meaning that the major events of his reign have to be retrieved as well as possible from the generally vague year names. Early in his reign, Šar-kali-šarrī completed the construction of the Enlil Temple at Nippur, a work that had been begun by his father. Several inscriptions mention this deed, such as Figure 9, and was deemed so important by Šar-kali-šarrī that one of his regnal years was named after this[60].

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[59] Frayne 1993: 182
[60] Frayne 1993: 182

(a)

1) *śar-kà-lí*-LUGAL-*rí*
2) DUMU *da-dì* [d]*en.líl*
3) *da-núm*
4) LUGAL
5) *a-kà-dè*.KI
6) *ù*
7) *bù-ú-la-ti*
8) [d]*en-líl*
9) DÍM
10) *é-kur*
11) È[d] *en-líl*
12) *in* NIBRU.KI

1-12) Šar-kali-šarrī, beloved son of the god Enlil, the mighty, king of Agade and of the subjects of the god Enlil, builder of Ekur, temple of the god Enlil at Nippur. (Ainakin 5 ensimmäistä linjaa alkuperäistä tarvitaan, koska siihen viitataan myöhemmin)

(b)

1-3) Nāram-Sîn, builder of the temple of the god Enlil

Figure **9**: *Inscriptions relating to the building (or rebuilding) of the Ekur temple in Nippur*

       (a) *Inscription E2.1.5.2 from Frayne 1993: 188. An inscription known from four exemplars, all probably from Nippur, testifying for Šar-kali-šarrī building of a temple for Enlil at Nippur.*

       (b) *Inscription E2.1.4.15 from Frayne 1993: 119-120. Bricks excavated near the courtyard terrace of the Ekur Temple bear this three-line inscription.*

The relatively dated year names suggest that the end of Šar-kali-šarrī's reign was a troubled period, as their names become increasingly associated with warfare. The inscriptions themselves agree with this, as the king had to wage war on several fronts against enemies from outside his realm. An undated year of his reign became known as "[*i*] 1 MU *śar-kà-lí.*LUGAL-*rí* REC 169 MAR.DÚ *iš-a-ru*", 'The year Šar-kali-šarrī [was victorious over] the Amorites [61]at Mount Bašar'[62]. Our only piece of evidence of this battle is this year name, and as such the motives and details of it are completely unknown to us. Yet our interest to it comes from Figure 10, which states that his father had also fought the Amorites at the very same location. As we do not know who was the aggressor, and as warfare was very commonplace during this time it would be troublesome to draw any conclusions from this - yet it certainly could imply continuing Amorite activity towards the Akkadian borders.

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[61] The history of the Amorites is as problematic and contested as any in Mesopotamian history. In short, they were pastoralist peoples that came into Mesopotamia from Arabia between the 5th and the 3rd millennium BC. "Amurru" in Akkadian came also to mean "west", and it seems to have referred to West Semitic-speakers who derived from the regions west of Sumer and Akkad. It is likely that the name Amorite had a more general meaning and referred to a range of pastoralists found throughout Mesopotamia. Schwarts 1995: 254-255, Clay 1919: 17-27.

[62] Frayne 1993: 183, year name (I)

| 1-13) | Nāram-Sîn, (going) fr[om] the Euphrates River, reached Bašar, the Amorite mountain. |
| 17-24) | Nāram-Sîn, the mighty, was victorious in battle over REC 349 at Baš[ar}, the Amorite mountain. |

Figure **10**: *Excerpt from inscription E2.1.4.2 from Frayne 1993: 90. Inscription from an Old Babylonian Sammeltafel copy from Nippur, dealing with Nāram-Sîn's defeat of a coalition of Amorites and (unknown) Sumerian cities, possibly led by the city of Apišal.*

Further troubles for the Akkadian royal house came from the east. Another Šar-kali-šarrī's regnal year bears the name "The year Šar-kali-šarrī was victorious in battle over Elam and Zahara[63]". Again, no details of the battle are known to us except that it might have taken place near the city of Akšak, as is mentioned in one of the exemplars of the year name - which would probably place the battle somewhere in the region at the confluence of the Diyala and Tigris rivers and thus close to the Akkadian capital[64]. The intervention of Elamites at this moment in time is hardly surprising or unexpected, as Frayne [65]notes that throughout Mesopotamian history Akkad's eastern neighbour Elam was quick to extend its influence over the Diyala region whenever the central power was weak. This logic is far from flawless from the historian's point of view, however, as Elamite military expeditions cannot be in any way be used as a certain indicator of a decline in Mesopotamian centralized power throughout the millennia. Yet this could be another *suggestion* or an *implication* of a declining Akkadian Empire, especially as the battles took place close to the capital city.

The greatest attested threat to the Akkadian Empire and Šar-kali-šarrī came from the east as well. Not from Elam, but rather in the form of the Gutians - who during this period descended from the Zagros Mountains in numbers for an unknown reason and apparently threatened the Akkadian throne. Two year names of Šar-kali-šarrī are named after victories over Gutians: "The year Šar-kali-šarrī laid the foundations of the temple of the goddess Ammunitum and of the temple of the god Ilaba in Babylon, and captured Šarlak, king of Gutium"[66] and "The year Gutium was defeated"[67]. As such, undoubtedly there were confrontations between the Akkadians and Gutians, but these claims made by the year names are curious. In what way was "Gutium destroyed", if in reality Akkadian influence would decrease and Gutian involvement increase over the next decades in the region – and further, what is the "Gutium" that is being referred to? And who was this king Šarlak that Šar-kali-šarrī apparently

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[63] Frayne 1993: 183, year name (m')
[64] Van de Mieroop 2016: 76
[65] Frayne 1993: 186
[66] Frayne 1993: 183, year name (k), Hallo 1971: 709
[67] Frayne 1993: 184, year name (n), Hallo 1971: 709

captured? Some scholars have identified him as the Šarlagab mentioned in the Sumerian King List [68]- but this is far from certain and seems to be a question of language and translation.

Although the details are very hazy, there is another source that is often cited on the subject of Gutian threats during Šar-kali-šarrī's reign. It is a letter, presented in Figure 11, from a man named Iškun-Dagan to another called Lugalra. The letter was never officially excavated and was rather donated to the British Museum by a personal collector in the 1930's, and thus there is no certainty of its geographical origin - yet there is other evidence [69]through which one could assume it originated from the city of Adab, where Iškun-Dagan must have been an important man. The character of Lugalra is otherwise unknown, but the letter would suggest that he was either a landowner who paid taxes to Adab or an agricultural foreman. The letter was first translated into English by Oppenheim and later re-examined by Michalowski.

(a)

"This is from Iškun-Dagan to Lugalra:

Cultivate the field and watch over the cattle! And, above all, do not tell me: "The Guti are around, I could not cultivate the field." Man outposts at one-mile intervals and you yourself go on and cultivate the field! The men will go about their business (?). If the Guti attempt an attack against you, then bring all the cattle into town. Formerly (?) when the Guti men drove away the cattle I have never said a word; I have always given you silver (for the damages). But now (?) I swear by the life of King Šar-kali-šarrī that should the Guti men have driven away the cattle, and you cannot pay out of your own pocket, I shall give you no silver when I come to town. Now, won't you keep watch over the cattle!

I have already claimed from you the regular delivery of barley in piles.

This is a warning (?) - take cognizance of it."

(b)

Thus (says) Ishkun-Dagan to Lugalra: Work the field and guard the flocks! Just don't say to me: "it is (the fault of) the Gutians; I could not work the land!". Man *outposts* every mile, and then you will be able to work the land! If the soldiers attack, you can raise help and have the herd brought into the city. In the event that (you tell me) "the Gutians have rustled the flocks", I will say nothing about it and (just) pay you the money. Look here, I swear by the life of (king) Shar-kali-sarri that if the Gutians rustle the flocks, and you have to pay from your own assets, I will (re)pay you the money when I arrive in town. But even if you don't succeed in guarding the herds, I will ask you for the correct (amount) of the field rent (that you owe me)! … You should know (this)!

Figure 11: Letter in Old Akkadian, presumably from Adab, with a translation by Oppenheim (1967: 71-72) (a), followed by Michalowski's (1993: 27-28) version (b). British Museum (Museum number BM 121205).

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[68] Frayne 1993: 185, Jacobsen 1939: 207-208.
[69] Michalowski 1993: 27

Figure 11 shows the translated text of the letter, with both Oppenheim's and Michalowski's versions of it. Both versions are included to show the differences in translation, which are subtle but meaningful. The changes in the wording result in differing tones present in the letter. Oppenheim's translation sees the letter as a warning, written in a threatening tone; Iškun-Dagan is no longer willing to pay for the damages caused by the Gutians, and advises Lugalra to guard his flock better as all damages to it will be out of his pocket. Michalowski's version is far less threatening with Iškun-Dagan offering to pay for the damages in case of an attack, and is content with just the 'correct amount of rent'. One would assume that the differences stem from two factors; firstly advancements in Assyriology and in the analysis of ancient languages cannot be ignored. Secondly the subjectivity of all translation work must be taken into consideration.

Regardless of the differences in the translations, the implications of the letter remain the same. Whatever the tone in which Iškun-Dagan wrote, he wrote this letter because of increasing Gutian activity threatening the herds of Lugalra. From the letter it seems that the 'Gutians rustling the flock' is becoming a real weight on the business, with serious actions required. Notable also is the implied aggressivity of the Gutians, as the only way to counter their attacks is manning outposts around the fields.

I find the letter very troublesome for the modern historian, however. There is no mention of why the Gutians are in the area, or why they are disturbing the field work or attacking and rustling the herds – though it is not difficult to imagine why one would partake is cattle rustling. These questions must have been too obvious for Iškun-Dagan and Lugalra for them to be even mentioned in a short letter, and the fact that Iškun-Dagan forbids Lugalra of using the Gutians as an excuse would suggest that this is in no way a unique situation to either of them. Thus inherent in the letter is a lot of information obvious to the ancient reader, the nuances of which and references to are completely lost to the modern reader. Thus to understand the letter properly we would need to know the full scene - the complete picture of events and changes taking place - but this is of course impossible for a historian of any period, even more so for an Assyriologist. Yet I would argue that that reversing this idea, as in analyzing the historical scene through this letter, is problematic to say the least; and as such no theories should be taken for granted. But again the letter serves as a *clue*, not evidence, for increasing Gutian activity at the time.

Šar-kali-šarrī's troubles did not supposedly limit to external threats, as internal troubles and pressure are often [70]mentioned as one of the catalysts of the Empire's fall. The evidence comes from Lagash in the form of a letter and an inscription, both concerning an important man of the city called Puzur-Mama. Of the man himself we know very little, except that he was the governor of Lagash during the reign of Šar-kali-šarrī, since it has been documented [71]that Puzur-Mama's predecessor, Lugal-ušumgal, was the governor under both Nāram-Sîn and Šar-kali-šarrī. The letter concerns a border dispute between Lagash and Ur, and it seems to be an appeal by Puzur-Mama to Šar-kali-šarrī to guarantee the territorial integrity of Lagash and to keep the borders that have stood "since the time of Sargon", and the text is a royal inscription of Puzur-Mama incised on two clay bowls. Translations of both can be seen in Figure 12.

(a)
[Tell so-and-so]: Thus says Puzur-Mama, governor of Lagash: Since the time of (king) Sargon (the hamlets of) Sulum and E-apin were on the border, within (the territory of) Lagash. Ur-Utu, who was governor of Ur under (king) Nāram-Sîn, made the gift of two minas of gold. (Now) Ure, governor of Lagash, has seized (the two hamlets). After he left [...] Lagash [...]. He should [...].

(b)
Col. iii 1'-8')
[...] [his natur]al moth[er] is the goddess Ninšubur, his personal god is the god Šul-utula. Puzur-Mama, king of Lagash.

Figure 12:   *(a): Letter by Puzur-Mama, written in Sumerian, found from either Girsu or Lagash in the late 19th century. From Michalowski 1993: 20-21*

    (b): Excerpt from inscription E2.12.5 from Frayne 1993: 271. A royal inscription of Puzur-Mama, incised on two clay bullae housed in the Louvre Museum (museum number AO 4597 & AO 14537)

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[70] Eg. Charpin 1995: 810; Van de Mieroop 2016: 76; Cunliffe 2015: 116

[71] Frayne 1993: 271 references a historical reconstruction made by Volk in *Zeitschrift fur Assyriologie und Verwandte Gebiete* 82: 27. Unfortunately, this text is entirely in German thus incomprehensible to me – we will have to rely on Frayne!

The importance of Figure 12 does not come from the contents of neither the letter nor the inscription, but rather the signature of Puzur-Mama. In the letter, his name is written as *puzur-mama // énsi lagaš*[*-ke*]; meaning Puzur-Mama, governor of Lagash, whereas in the inscription it is *puzur-mama // lugal - // lagaš.*[*KI-kam*], meaning Puzur-Mama, king of Lagash. This change in his title has been thought to mark a change in the history of Lagash - as its ruler elevated himself from a governor to a king, the city must have evolved itself from a vassal city to an independent city-state. This transformation is thought to have happened either at the end of Šar-kali-šarrī's rule or shortly after his death, and it is indeed not unthinkable that Lagash was not the only city to do this (although it is the only one we have such direct evidence of).

After the fall: Period of Confusion, last Kings of Akkad and the Gutians

The Sumerian King List states that following Šar-kali-šarrī's reign there was a 'period of confusion', during which inside and outside forces apparently disintegrated the remains of the Sargonic Empire. However, none of these events are well represented in the primary sources, as the available evidence becomes notably scarce towards the end of the Akkadian rule and almost nonexistent during the Gutian period - to such an extent that this period has been called a 'dark age'.

To highlight just how deficient the contemporary sources become, let us - for the sake of argument - adapt the chronology offered to us by the Sumerian King List. Thus Šar-kali-šarrī's reign was followed by a period of confusion, during which four rulers (Igigi, Nanum, Imi and Elulu) claimed kingship during a period of three years. This was then followed by the relatively lengthy reigns of Dudu and Su-Turul, after which the kingship was taken - via a detour in Uruk - to Gutium. Now if we were to examine the contemporary sources available of these characters, we simply put would not have much to work with. The four kings of the period of confusion have exactly zero surviving royal inscriptions or letters[72], and as such our knowledge of them is not far from the same number. Of Dudu and Sur-Turul we have some surviving inscriptions, but their nature is well represented in Figure 13; they are but a few lines of inscription found on vases, seals and other small items of the sort and rarely contain much else than the name and title of the king.

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[72] Frayne 1993: 209

(a)

1) *du-du*
2) *da-núm*
3) LUGAL
4) *a-kà-dè*.KI
1-4)   Dudu, the mighty, king of Agade.

(b)

1) *šu-túr-ùl*
2) *da-núm*
3) LUGAL
4) *a-kà-dè*.KI
1-4)   Šū-Turul, the mighty, king of Agade.

Figure 13:   (a): Inscription E2.1.10.1 from Frayne 1993: 210. An inscription from Dudu, found on two vases housed in the Louvre Museum and the University Museum of Philadelphia (museum numbers AO 6773 and CBS 10119, respectively)

*   (b):Inscription E2.1.11.1 from Frayne 1993: 214. A copper head axe that bears a four-line inscription of Šū-Turul, from the Foroughi Collection.*

One inscription makes an exception to the pattern mentioned above, shown in Figure 14. This votive inscription[73] is short in length, but it is the only inscription of this period that gives mention of any historical event - which, in this case, would be Dudu's conquest of the city of Girsu. Yet this single piece of information is revealing. Albeit all the details of this conquest are unknown to us, the mere presence of such an inscription would suggest that there was a confrontation between Akkad and Girsu during the reign of Dudu - whatever the reasons, scale or results were. This much need not be questioned. It is the location of ancient Girsu, in the Sumerian heartland mere 25 km north of Lagash that makes the matter interesting. Not only could this confrontation suggest that the Akkadian control of Sumer was lost by the time of Dudu's reign, it could also strengthen the idea presented above of cities previously under Akkadian rule claiming independence. Was this 'conquest' made by Dudu to attempt to crush the independence asserted by Puzur-Mama in Lagash, or is it evidence of another insurrection in Sumer against Akkadian control? Whichever is the case, there is a clear implication of Sumerian uprising against the central power.

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[73] Votive offering is an object displayed or deposited without the intention of recovery or use for religious purposes. In the context of ancient Mesopotamia, this would usually mean offerings in form of objects (with or without inscriptions) made to a god or gods.

1-10) T[o] the goddess Aš[tar], Du[du], ki[ng of] Agad[e], when he con[quered] Gir[su], [dedicated] (this object) from the boot[y] of [Gi]rsu.

Figure **14**: *Inscription E2.1.10.2 from Frayne 1993: 211. A votive inscription of Dudu, from a Sammeltafeln copy dating to the Ur III period. Excavated from Nippur, housed in Yale University, New Haven (museum number 10736).*

Moving forward we can concentrate on the contemporary sources regarding the Gutians. The Sumerian King List states that 21 Gutian kings ruled during this period, 20 of whom are named preceded by 'a king without name'. Yet the dates of these kings is uncertain, as they appear in different order in different manuscripts of the Sumerian King List [74]- thus making it impossible to make either absolute or relative chronologies of the Gutian kings. Furthermore, we have very little evidence of the 20 named Gutian kings, as only four of them make an appearance in the contemporary sources - through either extant royal inscriptions and servant seals or mentions in other inscriptions. And again, these rarely go beyond the form of "[NAME] + the mighty, king of Gutium[75]".

One Gutian king, Erridu-pizir, stands as an exception. Of him we have three surviving statue inscriptions known to us from later Old Babylonian copies. Although the inscriptions are very fragmentary with several large text-breaking lacuna in between, the inscriptions are quite uncharacteristically lengthy. Even more curious is that Erridu-pizir's name does not make an appearance in the Sumerian King List, although he is the only Gutian king of whom we have contemporary sources going beyond the name of the ruler. Jacobsen[76] has suggested that Erridu-pizir could be identified as the "nameless king" of the Sumerian King List, and his theory is accepted by Frayne[77] - though it seems very suspect that the only king who left elaborate inscriptions behind would also be the only one to have his name forgotten.

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[74] Frayne 1993: 219
[75] Frayne 1993: 228-230, inscriptions E2.2.14.1 – E2.2.20.1
[76] Jacobsen 1939: 117, 205-207
[77] Frayne 1993: 219

(a)

12-19)   Erridu-pizir, the mighty, king of Gutium and of the four quarters: …

(b)

Col iii - iv

8' - 1)   When KA-Nišba (king of Simurrum), [in]itiated hostilities,

2-10)   ignored (the orders of) my fa]ther, Enrida-pizir, the mighty, king of Gutium and of the four quarters,

11-14)   caused the mountain lands and cities to revolt,

15-22)   (and) as far as the land of [Lu]llubum (and the lands) …

Lacuna

Col v

1-5)   Further, the goddess Aštar had stationed troops in Agade

6-11)   The whole army assembled for him (Erridu-pizir) (and) went to Simurrum

12-18)   He entered … (while) it (the army?) was making offerings of large male goats to the gods in Agade.

Figure **15**: *These excerpts are from three statue inscriptions, all bearing the same writing of Erridu-pizir's name. All three inscriptions once appeared on the same Old Babylonian tablet, fragments of which were excavated from Nippur. It is possible that the statues once stood in Nippur to commemorate Erridu-pizir's victories, but this is by no means a certainty.*

(a)   *Excerpt from inscription E.2.2.1.1 from Frayne 1993: 221. This excerpt is from the first statue inscriptions*

(b)   *Excerpt from inscription E2.2.1.1 from Frayne 1993: 224. This excerpt is from the second statue inscription.*

Figure 15 shows the title that Erridu-pizir used in the inscriptions of these statues, "king of Gutium and of the four quarters". "The king of the four quarters" creates a direct correlation with Nāram-Sîn and the Sargonic kings, which is indeed very interesting, but I cannot accept Jacobsen's claim that this is evidence of the Gutians defeating and overthrowing Nāram-Sîn from the throne[78]. If anything, it works to show the ambition held by (at least one) Gutian kings, as Erridu-pizir viewed himself as the next conqueror of the world, the next great king to continue the grandiose plans of the Sargonic kings. To me, this title is not evidence of Nāram-Sîn's defeat in the hands of Erridu-Pizir, but rather further evidence of the legacy left by the Akkadian kings.

Furthermore, excerpt (**b**) from Figure 15 shows another interesting comparison between Nāram-Sîn and Erridu-pizir. The translations of this passage are filled with uncertainties and lacunae (such as lines 2-10: was the father Enrida-pizir also a king or is the phrasing just off?), but the mentions of revolts in Sumurrum and Lullubum are interesting. Especially as it draws an almost direct comparison with Figure 7, The Victory Stele of Nāram-Sîn that depicts the king defeating the Lullubi mountain people in war. Why the Lullubi would revolt against the rule of another Zagros tribe in Mesopotamia

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[78] Ultimately, this claim has been proven to be false several times before and will be done so again in this work

is completely uncertain, but it could be an indication of the Gutian kings (or Erridu-pizir particularly) accepting and imitating the Akkadian kings and their traditions and ideas – including their enemies. Was warfare against the peoples of the Zagros Mountains expected from a king in imitation of Sargon's dynasty; or was this confrontation over a wholly different matter, such as resources? Whatever the case, just the fact that this is mentioned in this inscription would suggest that Erridu-Pizir was victorious - or at least claimed to be.

(a)

1-2)	For the goddess Ninura, mother of Umma
3-5)	Namahni, governor of Umma,
6-7)	built her E-ula temple
8)	(and) restored it

9) i-ba *ià-ar-la-ga-an*
10) lugal-*gu-ti-um*-kam

9-10)	At that time Iarlagan was king of Gutium

(b)

1-3)	Lugal-ana-tuma, governor of Umma
4-7)	35 years having past since (the territory of) Umma was divided up -
8-9)	built the E-gidru at Umma
10-11)	drove into the earth its foundation pegs
12-13)	(and) saw after everything that was necessary therein.

14) u-ba *si-ù-um*
15) lugal-*gu-ti-um*-kan

14-15)	At that time, Si'um was king of Gutium.

Figure **16**: *Translated inscriptions E2.11.12* **(a)** *and E2.11.13* **(b)** *from Frayne 1993: 267-268. The former is an inscription on a cylindrical object bearing the museum number YBC 2149 housed in Yale University, while the latter is an inscription incised on a marble tablet of which the present whereabouts are unknown.*

The Figure 16 shows us two inscriptions found on two objects from Umma (thought to be, at least: not because of where or how they were found but rather because of their content). The inscriptions are found on different objects, but the texts have several similarities. Firstly, they both deal with governors of Umma and the construction of temples in the city. Most importantly, however, they both mention a king of Gutium in the form of "at that time, X was king of Gutium". It could be thought that this would be an indication of Gutian rule in Umma, to whom the governors of the city would be loyal to, but this is very unlikely the case[79]. Rather it should be interpreted as an indication of the influence of the Gutian royal succession, as it was apparently seen to be important enough to serve to date events at Umma.

The names of the kings are also problematic. Whilst both names of the kings appear in this form in Jacobsen's [80]translation of the Sumerian king list, as the 19th and 20th kings, this information should not be taken at face value. The translatory problems of the Gutian kings' names go far deeper, and these issues shall be discussed in more detail later.

Fact is that we know very little of the Gutians throughout Mesopotamian history. We know that they were a nomadic people from somewhere in the Zagros Mountains, but besides that the historians have had very little to work with. This is because the Gutians have not left us any historical sources or archaeological material culture to examine, and as such their constant absence in the records is striking. All evidence we have of them is secondary and not written by Gutians, and thus they are generally portrayed as a barbaric, un-godly and savage people who destroy and disrupt the Mesopotamian way. This is very much true in the case of Akkad, where the mighty empire is often seen even by modern historians to have been destroyed by barbaric Gutian tribes.

However, some tentative deductions can be made from the lack of sources. As the Gutians did not leave behind any written records, it is very possible that their language (whatever it was) was not one that had been transferred to writing. Furthermore, one could assume that their form of governance was not based on heavy bureaucratic measures - at least not in a way the Akkadian rule was. As such the 'dark age', the period after the Akkadian empire marked by an almost complete lack of sources is even in today's writing often seen in a bad light. This is because our knowledge of the Gutians come from Akkadian and Sumerian accounts, where the Guti people are describes as barbaric brutes

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[79] Hallo 1971: 712
[80] Jacobsen 1939: 121

- and historians have too often accepted this very one-sided view too easily. The Erridu-pizir statue inscriptions are proof of this; the lengthy (though fragmentary today) inscriptions are written in an elaborate style as they mimic the style of the Mesopotamian rulers, the inscriptions concentrating on commemorating military victories. Furthermore, the main deities of the Akkadians are also mentioned, Enlil and Aštar, as Erridu-pizir apparently made offerings and dedicated his statues to them, as shown in Figure 15 **(b)**, col v lines 12-18. As some of the only sources written by the Gutian rulers, these statue inscriptions should not be ignored as their style shows them in a very different light - not as a disruptive or disturbing force, but rather as part of the Mesopotamian canon.

Other than offer another point of view into the Gutian rule, the statue inscription in itself is quite fragmentary. It mentions several of Erridu-pizir's victories, but most of them are too fragmentary to accurately be read or to extract much information. What is interesting is the mention of Mesopotamian/Sumerian/Akkadian gods Enlil, Aštar, Ninhursag and Nintu in the second statue inscription, an example of which is shown in Figure 15 **(b)**, col v lines 1-4. It is unknown whether the Gutians worshipped the same gods as the Mesopotamians, but this inscription would certainly suggest so - although it cannot be said whether this was actually the case or if the inscription was a conscious attempt to make the Gutian ruler seem more favourable to whomever would see his statues. Furthermore, the inscription in Figure 15 **(b)** (lines 6-11) alludes to the fact that Erridu-Pizir's army was stationed in Agade, from where they began their attack on Simurrum, implying that by his time the Akkadian rule had already come to its end.

2.4 Later and non-contemporary sources

Introduction

To best explain the necessity to divide the sources into contemporary and non-contemporary in this work, I will contrast certain works by Hawkes and Liverani. Jacquetta Hawkes wrote her book *The First Great Civilizations* in 1973, in which there is a chapter called The First Semitic Empire that tells the story of the rise and fall of the Sargonid dynasty. Hawkes begins her narrative with a comparison between Sargon and Napoleon; both were virtuous men from humble origins that rose to great power, both fell to temptations and difficulties before a final failure. Then, as "greatness often misses a generation", Nāram-Sîn took the empire to its highest peak, until finally the Gutians overthrew it under Šar-kali-šarrī. Whilst Hawkes uses some contemporary sources to make her arguments, the outline of her narrative is almost straight out of the Akkadian legends and her chronology from the Sumerian King List. This is by no means a personal criticism of Hawkes' work, as countless books and works share this identical narrative.

The problem, according to Liverani[81], comes from the use of the sources. In his example Liverani uses the Telipinu Edict - a document that shed light on the early Hittite Kingdom, a period scarcely understood - and how the text was taken at face value because of this. "The temptation was too great," writes Liverani as the events and their explanations on the Edict were accepted by many without criticism. The "lazy historian" had not taken into account that the Telipinu Edict, according to Liverani, was a political document with its own intentions and agendas.

Thus it becomes evident why, especially in the case of Akkad, a division between contemporary and non-contemporary sources is crucial. The legends, king lists and chronicles were written decades if not several centuries into the 2nd millennium, at the very least several generations after the fall of the empire. As such, they are not to be considered primary sources, but as historical reconstructions in themselves[82]. As we have already seen, the Mesopotamians did not know of history as a genre, as an (attempt at an) objective narrative of the past. Therefore the later sources, through which the story of the Akkadian Empire and its rulers if often told, need to be looked at critically. What is the aim and purpose of each source? Are they reliable sources, and to what extent can we trust the information they convey?

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[81] Liverani 2004: 28-31
[82] Liverani 2004: 28

These are the questions that I will attempt to answer in this chapter. I examine seven separate compositions, and they include king lists, chronicles and legends. These terms are not unproblematic, as what makes a king list a king list and not a chronicle or something else is difficult to define. Further, I often use the term 'legends' in this work while being well-aware that this might cause disagreement. There has indeed been wide and extensive scholarly discussion[83] on the genres of ancient Mesopotamian compositions – and whilst it is an interesting and important topic by itself, for the purposes of this study the issues surrounding the genres are largely disregarded, and for this reason the compositions are examined within their own sub-chapters.

The Sumerian King List

The Sumerian King List has already been mentioned in the previous chapters numerous times. The purpose of this chapter is to explain the importance of this document for our period of study and examine in more detail the texts of the King List. This might sound contradictory, as I will first highlight the usefulness of this source before criticizing it for all the problems that are held within it. In the case of the Sumerian King List, however, this could be considered quite normal as Assyriologists continue to be puzzled by this unique and quite peculiar source.

The Sumerian King List survives today as a compilation of sixteen[84] different copied fragmentary manuscripts of the original text. Whilst there was increasing interest - often very optimistic - in the various manuscripts at the turn of the 20th century, it was not until 1923 that an almost complete version was published. Jacobsen's groundbreaking translated compilation, complete with a critical analysis of the source was published in 1939 is still often cited today and this work is no exception.

The King List retraces the origins of Babylonian kingship from the very distant mythical times all the way to the Isin dynasty (during the Isin-Larsa period) around the 19th and 18th centuries BC. Two things remain constant in the King List. Firstly, the idea of a single Babylonain kingship, which transcended from heaven, is present throughout. This theory presented by the author is untrue to such an extent that it is not even necessary to prove it wrong, yet this propagandistic view is persistent in

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[83] For example: Glassner 2004, Westenholz 1997, Grayson 1975 – just to name very few.
[84] Glassner 2004: 117

the King List. Secondly, the writing format of the King List remains the same from start to finish. The city A holds the kingship and its kings and their reignal years are listed, until the city is 'smitten with weapons', the kingship taken to city B and person N becomes king - this cycle is then repeated, as they are shown in Figure 17. As such, the format of the King List is unique to Sumerian literature as far as we know.

In Agade Sargon
his …was a date-grower
cupbearer of Ur-Zababa(k)
king of Agade, the one who
built Akkad
became king and reigned 56 years;
[…]
Nāram-Sîn
son-of Man-ištūšu,
reigned 37(?) years;
Šar-kali-šarrī,
son of Nāram-Sîn
reigned 25 years.

Who was king? Who was not king?
Was Igigi king?
Was Nanum king?
Was Imi king?
Was Elulu king?
Their tetrad was king
and reigned 3 years!
Dudu reigned 21 years;

Šu-Durul, son of Dudu,
reigned 15 years.
11 kings reigned its 181 years
Agade was smitten with weapons;
its kingship to Uruk was carried
[…]
Uruk was smitten with weapons;
its kingship
to the horde of Gutium was carried.
In the horde of Gutium,
A king without name!
[…]
Tiriga(n) reigned 40 days.
21 kings reigned its 91 years and 40 days.
The horde of Gutium
was smitten with weapons;
its kingship to Uruk was carried
In Uruk Utu-heĝal became king
[…]
Uruk was smitten with weapons;
its kingship to Ur was carried.
In Ur Ur-Nammu became king

Figure **17**: *Excerpts from the Sumerian King List, as translated by Jacobsen (1939): 111-123. Some names, such as Sargon and Akkad, have been changed from the translation to better suit the terminology of this paper.*

The author of the original version of the King List is unknown to us, although some theories about when and for what purpose it was written exist. Jacobsen[85] argues that it was written during the reign of Utu-heĝal of Uruk after he had defeated the Gutian forces and restored the old independence in Sumer, and thus the King List was written to further Sumerian national feeling and glorify their past. Michalowski[86], however, states that the likelier origin of the King List is during the Isin dynasty, and the purpose of the composition was to legitimize the rule of the later kings and to bolster their claims of hegemony. Additionally, Glassner[87] sees the origins of the King List in the reign of Nāram-Sîn, with the purpose of legitimizing his new ideology of a centralized

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[85] Jacobsen 1939: 129, 140
[86] Michalowski 1983: 240
[87] Glassner 2004: 95

power, and that this original work was then continued later by others with different motives. Whatever was the case, it is clear that the King List was created for a clear political purpose (as opposed to practical purposes of e.g. date lists) as it presents a non-factual theory of Babylonian unity and singularity in kingships.

To what extent can a historian use and trust the information of such a biased and political source? Michalowski's and Jacobsen's opinions differ on this as well. Whereas the former[88] states that as the King List is not a reflection of real events but is rather a depiction of an *idea* of reality, the text should be banished from the reconstruction of early Mesopotamian history, the latter is not nearly as radical in his approach. Jacobsen[89] argues that whilst the chronology and arrangement of the King List is of negligible value, the sources and material used by the author to compile the List are of a respectable quality, a notion also accepted later by Maisels[90]. Thus Jacobsen 'undoes' the work of the original author of the Sumerian King List, and creates new chronologies and theories from the perceived original sources of the King List. An example of this are the proposed events and chronology of the fall of the Akkadian Empire, discussed below.

What does, then, the Sumerian King List tell us of the Akkadian Empire and its fall? It tells us that the kingship was in Uruk, held by Lugal-zage-si, until it was smitten with weapons and taken to Akkad (col. vi 24-30). Then, the King List very uncharacteristically gives some extra details about Sargon: "his [...] was a date-grower - // cupbearer of Uz-Zababa(k), // king of Agade, the one who // built Agade" (col. vi 33-35). These two factors, that Sargon came from humble origins and that he had Akkad built, were deemed so important by the author that he especially wanted to highlight them. According to the list, Sargon ruled for 37 or 56, depending on the manuscript and translation, years and was then succeeded by Rimush, Man-ištūšu, Nāram-Sîn and Šar-kali-šarrī who ruled for 9, 15, 37 and 25 years, respectively. The King List states that all these rulers were part of the same family.

The exact chronology or the exact regnal years aside, the information given here seems accurate. The names of the kings, their order and family ties are given to us in a way that is confirmed by the primary sources[91]. This in turn would strengthen the case made by Jacobsen, that the author of the King List had reliable sources to work with and that not all of his composition should be disregarded.

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[88] Michalowski 1983: 243
[89] Jacobsen 1939: 165-166
[90] Maisels 1999: 352
[91] For example Figure 8 of this work.

Starting from col. vii , the King List goes on about what is often called the 'period of confusion'. This name has been given due to the, again, uncharacteristic first line of the column: "Who was king? Who was not king". The List then names four kings who reigned for 3 years, before mentioning Dudu and Šu-Durul. Also important to note that Dudu or Šu-Durul are not mentioned to be related to the kings before the period of confusion, thus marking and confirming our knowledge that the Sargonid dynasty ended with Šar-kali-šarrī.

In lines 13-24 the List mentions that Agade was smitten with weapons and the kingship was taken to Uruk, where 5 kings reigned before the kingship was taken to the horde of Gutium (from line 26). In Gutium, there ruled 21 kings, one of which is specifically unnamed. There are, according to Jacobsen[92], several irregularities and contradictions between the different exemplars for this part. The unnamed king seems to be so not because of a lack of name, but because the scribes who were copying the exemplars that have survived today had a lacuna in their original piece that was being copied, meaning they added the 'unnamed'-part themselves. Additionally, the different manuscripts give different names and a different order for the Gutian kings, further puzzling the modern reader**.** Then, according to the King List, the horde of Gutium was smitten with weapons and the kingship taken to Uruk where Utu-heĝal became king (col viii 1-5).

Since the theory of a single Babylonian kingship presented by the author of the King List is false by all accounts, the relative chronology presented by the List is completely unreliable. There are several chronological contradictions in the passage itself. Firstly, Sargon is mentioned to be the cupbearer of Ur-Zababa, yet there are 7 kings that are mentioned in between them that ruled for just under 100 years (that is excluding the ridiculous 400-year reign of Ur-Zababa mentioned in one of the exemplars). Further, if we are to take the King List at face value, it would suggest that it was not the Gutians that were responsible for the fall of Akkad but rather the Uruk kings. It is possible that the suspect nature of the Sumerian King List was not lost on its contemporaries either, as shown by the Chronicle of Lagash. Lagash as a city was fully omitted from the Sumerian King List, and the Lagash Chronicle is often[93] interpreted as a parody of the King List. The Chronicle, no earlier than the 18th century BC preserved in a single Old Babylonian tablet copy, tells the history of Lagash from the beginning of the world to Gudea in a style very similar to the King List, with the exception that all regnal years are of ridiculous, even comical length that often span millennia.

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[92] Jacobsen 1939: 117
[93] Glassner 2004: 144-149

The historical value of the King List is therefore debatable. As Michalowski sported for the banishment of the composition in reconstructions of Mesopotamian history, Jacobsen[94] attempted to take the ideology out of the King List and create a more reliable timeline of events. Jacobsen argued that the two Uruk dynasties that preceded and succeeded the Gutians in the King List actually ran continuously and parallel with the Gutians, placing the defeat of the final Gutian king Tirigan to the fourth year of the final Uruk king Utu-heĝal. Furthermore, Jacobsen continues that the Gutian rulers ran parallel with the Akkadian kings, naming the unnamed first Gutian king as Erridu-Pizir and making him a contemporary of Nāram-Sîn. Jacobsen's chronology is highly suspect, however, as he uses the "narrative historical epics" and Erridu-Pizir's inscriptions (Figure 15 in this work) as his main evidence to relatively date the end of the Akkadian Empire and the beginning of the Gutian rule.. What Jacobsen failed to take into consideration is that there is a possibility that the author of the King List may have had a lack of reliable sources regarding the Gutians at his disposal[95].

As we have seen, the Sumerian King List is a unique, problematic and curious source for Mesopotamian history. The author of the King List undoubtedly used some reliable sources to make his King List, but attempting to dissect these from the finished work is a troublesome affair, as seen in the case of Jacobsen's chronology. It is easy to argue that as a non-contemporary source it is a better source about the author and his contemporaries rather than the dynasties he portrays, but this becomes troublesome as well as the exact dating of the King List is suspect. It is not an unreasonable stance to omit the King List completely from reconstructions of Mesopotamian history, but as is obvious from chapter 2.3 of this work I have used it quite extensively - not as an absolute chronological reference point, but rather as a framework for relative chronology of the Akkadian era. It is therefore not a fully obsolete tool for the modern historian, yet one must practice exceptional caution in utilizing it.

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[94] Jacobsen 1939: 205-208
[95] Maisels 1999: 352

Weidner chronicle, or the Esagila chronicle

Excavations at Ashur yielded a damaged tablet which was announced and published by E. F. Weidner in 1926, and the document still bears his name in scholarly discussion today[96]. Since then four smaller pieces of other copies have been identified and an almost complete manuscript tablet was recovered from a Neo-Babylonian library at Sippar. "Almost complete", because it seems that the scribe who copied it was working from a highly damaged original, as he tried to represent explicitly the cracks, damages and breaks from his original exemplar[97]. The composition is in the form of a letter, supposedly written by a king of Isin to a king of Babylon, likely king Damiq-ilishu writing to Apil-Sin - yet it is more than likely that the Weidner Chronicle is in fact a literary piece composed later, that has an inaccurate and fictitious historical setting.

The author of this literary, or fictitious royal[98] letter is unknown to us, yet its purpose is very clear: it is a blatant piece of propaganda[99] that highlights the importance of the god Marduk and his temple-cult in Esagil throughout Mesopotamian history. The Mesopotamian dynasties are categorized in terms of 'good' or 'bad' in accordance whether they made the correct offerings to Marduk, who then punishes the bad rulers and passes the kingship forward. Thus the chronicle part of the composition bears little historical value for our subject matter because of not only a very pro-Babylonian biased view, but also because it makes the false assumption that the Esagila temple of Babylon's patron-deity existed in Sargonic, Early Dynastic and even legendary times.

As propagandistic and biased it may be, since the Weidner Chronicle gives its own version for the end of the Akkadian Empire it is definitely worth an examination. In Glassner's[100] translation of the composition the Akkadian story goes something like this: Sargon, Ur-Zababa's cupbearer, delivered an offering to the Esagila and took care of the temple, thus winning the favour of Marduk, resulting in Marduk entrusting the kingship of the four quarters to him. But later in his reign Sargon built a new city facing Akkad and named it Babylon - Marduk/Enlil saw this as a sacrilege, and raised a revolt from the East to the West against Sargon and afflicted him with restlessness[101]. Nāram-Sîn, then, destroyed the living creatures of Babylon not once but twice, which resulted in Marduk raising

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[96] Millard 2003: 468
[97] Al-Rawi 1990: 1
[98] Glassner 2004: 263-269
[99] Grayson 1975: 43
[100] Glassner 2004: 263-269
[101] Restlessness here refers to the condition of an unburied corpse whose ghost does not receive appropriate offerings. Dalley 2008: 29

the army of Guti against him, entrusting the kingship to the Gutians. But the Gutians did not know how to honour the gods nor how to perform divine rites and ceremonies correctly, and thus Marduk removed the kingship from the Gutians and entrusted it to Utu-heĝal.

Some scholars, like Van de Mieroop[102] and Dalley[103], have argued through this passage that the Weidner chronicle may date to the 8th century BC, to the reign of Sargon II of Assyria. Sargon II was, quite obviously, very aware of the story and the deeds of the already by-then ancient Akkadian king and modelled much of his rule and image after him. Sargon II portrayed himself as an usurper who took power from humble origins and as a great conqueror - not unlike his supposed role-model - and built himself a new capital, Dur-Sharrukin, 'The fortress of Sargon'. In the composition, Sargon of Akkad's building of a new city is seen as a sacrilege by Marduk of which he is punished; thus, Van de Mieroop argues, because the composition is so anachronistic, it may actually be a condemnation of Sargon II's building project by his own contemporaries through analogy with the Akkadian Sargon. Further, Dalley sees the affliction of 'restlessness' by Marduk to Sargon in the composition could be an allusion to the death of Sargon II, who died in battle and never received a proper burial.

Whether this was the true purpose of the Weidner Chronicle or not is impossible to say with certainty. What is certain, however, is that the composition is highly ahistorical and should be treated as a propagandistic literary work. As such its use for historical reconstructions is limited. But what is shows us is that the legends and stories of Sargon and his Akkadian Empire persisted for centuries, even millennia after his death. This includes the myths concerning the Gutian invasion.

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[102] Van de Mieroop 1999: 73
[103] Dalley 2008: 28

Chronicle of Early Kings

The Chronicle of Early Kings, also called the Chronicle of Ancient Kings, is a narration of the Mesopotamian past from the reign of Sargon to the reign of Agum III (.c 1450 BC). The text is preserved on two tablets; the first goes from Sargon to Enlil-bani of Isin and the second from Enlil-bani to Agum III with a slight duplication between the two tablets on the breakaway point[104]. The author of the early part of this chronicle, which is of interest to us, apparently used two documents as his main sources: a collection of omens of Sargon and Nāram-Sîn[105] and the Weidner chronicle discussed above, as almost every line concerning either of the two Akkadian kings present in this chronicle is copied straight from either of the two compositions. Thus, Grayson[106] argues that the early sections of the Chronicle are presumably a product of a scribe's interest in putting together omen apodoses in pseudo-chronicle form, but other than that the author and his purpose are a mystery. There does not seem to be any logical reason, for the modern scholar at least, for the narration to start from Sargon and end at Agum III; nor does there seem to be any obvious reasons why some kings are omitted or why Sargon and Samsuiluna are the only kings written about in detail.

Therefore the Chronicle of Early Kings is a document shrouded in mystery, and as such its validity as a historical source is questionable. After all, if we accept Liverani's critique on the use of Mesopotamian non-contemporary sources, it becomes rather difficult to analyse a source of which we do not know the author, it's time period nor the purpose of. Grayson[107] states that "The historian may use this document as source material but he would be well advised to exercise caution".

The section on Sargon is indeed quite detailed, with the first half of it detailing his military conquests in the east and the west; Elam, Subartu and the crushing of an internal revolt are mentioned. Whilst the Omens go into these in more detail, the Chronicle follows the same order and structure closely. The language used is almost grandiose: "He had neither rival nor opponent, his fame spread over all the lands[108]," which really highlights the deeds of the Akkadian king. In the latter part, however, it seems that the author switched the source he used, as the final lines follow closely those from the Weidner Chronicle - how Sargon built a new Babylon near Akkad, which angered Marduk and as a

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[104] Grayson 1975: 45

[105] This piece has been pulished by King 1907 as chronicles n. 3 and 4. As the Chronicle of Early Kings follows this piece quite closely, I have deemed for the sake of this study not to examine the omen collections closer. When the Omens are mentioned, Lewis' translations are used.

[106] Grayson 1975: 47

[107] Grayson 1975: 48

[108] Glassner's translations are used, from Glassner 2004: 268-273. Chronicles 39 & 40.

result he was afflicted with restlessness and a revolt from the East to the West was raised against him. A small but noteworthy difference, however, is the addition of a line that states "the great lord Marduk[109], overcome with rage, diminished his people by *famine*". There is no mention of a famine in the Weidner Chronicle - nor in any of the other sources for that matter either - and the use of this word by the scribe raises some questions. Did the original author use a third source that explicitly mentioned a famine, or was it an impromptu addition by the author? Was the presence of a famine during Sargon's time - or perhaps during the latter stages of the Akkadian Empire - common knowledge, or were famines so common in times of war that the author could make the assumption comfortably?

Nāram-Sîn on the other hand has not merited any sort of special treatment from the author of the Chronicle. The document mentions two Nāram-Sîn's military conquests, where he marched against the cities of Apišal and Magan and captured their kings - nothing more, nothing less. It is likely that the author had to rely on his source material, as this passage follows the Omens very closely. This lack of material on Nāram-Sîn and the abundance of information on Sargon may be interpreted as a sign that by the time of the writing of this Chronicle - presumably several centuries if not over a millennium in between, as it is later than the Weidner Chronicle - the legends surrounding Sargon and his empire were still in circulation, whereas Nāram-Sîn had been, to some extent, forgotten.

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[109] Marduk makes only two appearances throughout this chronicle – as such, the composition does not revolve around the god Marduk like the Weidner Chronicle does.

The Birth Legend of Sargon

The Sargon Birth Legend survives today as four separate clay tablets, three of which are in neo-Assyrian script and presumably come from Nineveh while the fourth is in neo-Babylonian script presumably from Dilbat[110]. The date of the original composition is unknown, though Foster[111] believes that the earliest written versions date to the reign of the above-mentioned Assyrian king Sargon II who commissioned a number of texts intended to glorify his old namesake. Yet it is possible that the story itself is considerably older than that, having been part of a vivid oral tradition amidst the non-literate public[112].

When the first exemplar of the Birth Legend was discovered in 1870, it sparked scholarly interest from the onset. This is not because it was at first thought to be an authentic inscription of Sargon (which was proven wrong at an early stage), but because of the biblical implications of the text as the Sargon Birth Legend strikes a startling similarity between Sargon's birth and that of Moses[113] - which is why the composition still holds the name Birth Legend today, although it is only a small concern in the composition as a whole.

Our knowledge of this composition is limited to the extant fragments of the first two columns. Column i can be divided[114] into three parts. First, a first-person introduction (lines 1-4), where Sargon as the narrator tells the reader of his titles, family ties and place of birth. Second, a first-person narrative history (lines 5-21) that depict Sargon's life from a humble birth and abandonment to his rise to power, conquests and heroic feats. Finally, column i concludes with a blessing formula (lines 22-33) where, depending on the interpretation[115], Sargon either offers advice, a blessing or a challenge to future kings to mimic his deeds. The column ii, however, is problematic, as not only it is highly fragmentary it also seems to contain a series of rhetorical questions that do not, to the best of our present knowledge, relate to the story of Sargon presented in column i. Westenholz[116] states that it

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[110] Westenholz 1997: 38
[111] Foster 2003: 461
[112] Drews 1974: 392
[113] Longman III 1991: 54
[114] This division has been taken, with a correction concerning the lines of the second part, from Longman III 1991: 55.
[115] For example, Longman III and Westenholz 1997 disagree on the meaning of the final part.
[116] Westenholz 1997: 36

could contain a reflection by Sargon at the end of his life, or it may describe a tragic cataclysm at the end of his reign or, possibly yet contain an altogether different and unrelated composition[117].

If we are to assume that this composition was written during the reign of Sargon II with the purpose of legitimizing his rule through the ancient Akkadian king, as some scholars have argued, the Birth Legend of Sargon is a prime example of how the later Mesopotamians viewed Sargon - not forgetting that well over 1500 years separated Sargon from his Assyrian counterparts. A man from humble origins, who rose to great power and influence through piety and will - a 'rags to riches' story that has been a favourite with peoples of every era and every nationality, that would in the Mesopotamian context simply change the name of the protagonist to Cyrus in the 6th century BC[118]. These aspects, and the traits given to Sargon in the later legends about him, would also play a major part in our understanding of the fall of the Akkadian Empire.

The Curse of Akkad

The composition known today as The Curse of Akkad[119] is of particular interest not only for the modern scholar studying this period today, but also, it seems to have been to the ancient literates as well. The Curse of Akkad is one of the best preserved and reconstructed compositions of the Sumerian literary tradition, as over 130 manuscripts[120] of it have been unearthed. A large portion of these tablets come from Nippur, but some have been excavated from Kish, Ur, Susa and Isin - not to forget the several exemplars that are from an unknown location. As most of the tablets are written in Old Babylonian, it would certainly seem that the Curse of Akkad was a must-have composition for any contemporary collection.

This is indeed a very interesting composition for the sake of this work, as it is one of the very few sources that even touch upon the end of Akkad, let alone address it so explicitly. The Curse of Akkad is a composition to which a clear genre is difficult to impose, but it tells the story of Nāram-Sîn, who through his sacrilegious acts loses the favour of the gods and therefore he and his people must suffer

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[117] Longman III seems to prefer the latter interpretation, as his chapter on the Birth Legend of Sargon does not contain even a mention on the column ii.
[118] Drews 1974: 388, 392
[119] Though the most common spelling of this name is The Curse of Agade, from Cooper 1983, for the sake of coherence the composition will be called The Curse of Akkad in this work.
[120] Cooper 1983: 68-70

the punishments. In many ways it is a classic tale of piety, religious obligations and godly vengeance, yet the implications of the story have been a talking point and a cornerstone of studies on the Akkadian Empire.

The composition is relatively long and detailed, so what follows is a summary of its contents and its story[121]. The Curse of Akkad begins with a *mise-en-scène*: Enlil, the chief of the Sumerian pantheon, has brought defeat to warring cities of Kish and Uruk, bestowing the kingship and sovereignty of Mesopotamia on Sargon of Akkad. As a consequence, the patron deity of both Kish and Uruk, Inanna, installs herself in Agade and works relentlessly to bring prosperity for the city. A new king. Nāram-Sîn, appears from line 40, and the next section details the geographical greatness of his empire. In lines 55 and 56, Inanna suddenly turns against her protégés; she abandons Agade, the gods withdraw their favour and the city faces problems. Nāram-Sîn sees the end of his city in a dream, and looks to win back the favour of Inanna - but the omens and signs given by Enlil do not give permission for him to build a temple for her. Enraged, Naram-son loses patience and marches on Nippur, destroying and plundering Enlil's sacred temple Ekur in the city. This sacrilege did not go unpunished, as Enlil unleashed the Guti hordes on Babylonia and the great gods of Babylonia set a terrible curse on Agade, whose king had been responsible for the land's misfortunes. The city is destroyed, and the composition ends in a section praising Inanna.

The exact dating of the composition is difficult, although a *terminus post quem* can be set as the reign of Nāram-Sîn, and a *terminus post quem* the Ur III period c. 2000 BC, to which three of the manuscripts are dated to. This gives us a range of a few centuries - which in itself is not too bad all things considered - but the discussion on its exact date quickly turns into a discussion on the function and purpose of the composition. The obvious purpose, from the story of the composition, would be the glorification of Nippur. This is partly at least the case, too, as the Curse of Akkad was in all probability composed in Nippur[122]. But this alone would not explain the popularity of the piece, as it must have served another purpose for it to have spread throughout Mesopotamia as it did.

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[121] From Cooper 1983: 5
[122] Cooper 1983: 7

It is thus possible, that instead of limiting itself to the glorification of Nippur, the composition was actually written during the Third Dynasty of Ur to legitimize its re-emerged Neo-Sumerian Empire. Cooper[123] presents two points to make his case. Firstly, the story gives a religious justification for the end of the Akkadian Empire - that it is the gods' will that the kingship is no longer in the Akkadian north but rather in the Sumerian south. Secondly, the story shows how the end of the Akkadian Empire was attributable to an avoidable error of Nāram-Sîn, and was not the inevitable result of imperial strategy - thus legitimizing the centralization of the power to Ur.

Both of these points would be difficult to prove, but doing this is of no interest to me. This is because Cooper, quite correctly, does not use the Curse of Akkad as a source for the period of the Akkadian Empire, but rather for the period of its composition, Ur III. Using the Curse of Akkad as a historical source is indeed very problematic - however attractive it might seem. First of all, the historical problems are obvious. The city of Akkad out-lasted Nāram-Sîn, as there were several kings still after him, one of which belonged to the Sargonid dynasty proper. Further, while it is indeed probable that Nāram-Sîn marched against Nippur, and possible that he had Ekur destroyed, the composition does not mention how Nāram-Sîn and his successor Šar-kali-šarrī rebuilt the temple - a fact proven by primary sources.

The Cuthean Legend, or Nāram-Sîn and the Enemy Hordes

The Cuthean Legend might well have been the most popular of all the legends mentioned[124], since the exemplars that have survived today show that this story was told all over the Near East for more than a millennia. Our knowledge of the composition comes from four sources: first, the neo-Assyrian version from Sultantepe and the library of Assurbanipal, which is our most complete version of the composition. Second, we have a fragmentary Old Babylonian version; thirdly an Akkadian version and finally, a Hittite version[125]. The four versions vary between them quite significantly - for example, it is thought that the original Old Babylonian version was at least two tablets long and held over 600 lines, while the neo-Assyrian version only holds some 180 lines[126] - but the legend is still very clearly

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[123] Cooper 1983: 7-8
[124] Westenholz 1983: 330
[125] Longman III 1991: 103-105
[126] Westenholz 1997: 263

the same in all versions. As the neo-Assyrian version is the most complete, it is the version usually referred to, and this work will be no exception in this regard.

The composition is a prime example of a piece of *narû*-literature, Akkadian fictional autobiography, and thus presents Nāram-Sîn as the protagonist and the narrator. The plot goes something like this: following his introductory lines, Nāram-Sîn's enemy is soon presented as the Umman-manda[127] who attack Mesopotamia under Enmerkar[128]. The enemy is strong, barbarous and have a bizarre appearance - often described as something of birdlike - and they encircle Mesopotamia with their army. Nāram-Sîn leads a force against the invaders, but the Akkadians are utterly destroyed and devoured. As a result, Nāram-Sîn performs a test on the dead bodies of the enemy. Turns out that the enemy do bleed, and are mortal after all. With this encouraging news Nāram-Sîn turns to the gods; he wants the gods to bless his upcoming counter-attack. The gods decline, but Nāram-Sîn disobeys and he begins his counter offensive without his gods. The results are disastrous, as Nāram-Sîn three times sends troops against the foreign army, and each time they are totally consumed. Nāram-Sîn realizes the foolishness of his sacrilegious actions, and turns back to the gods.

An invigorated, humble and pious man, Nāram-Sîn takes a new much more peaceful stand against the invaders on the advice of the gods. Though he apparently gets the green light to attack, there is a clear change of attitude: no prisoners are to be punished, no cities are to be burned. In the final section the narrator speaks directly to the future reader/ruler and offers advice: "Be meek, be humble. Answer them "Yes my lord." To their wickedness, repay kindness. To their kindness repay with gifts and the realization of their wishes " (lines 168-171[129]). A shocking contrast of the stereotypical ancient Near Eastern despot, Nāram-Sîn thus offers advice of peace and political isolationism: to build up a strong, defensive domestic policy and to ignore troubles on the kingdom's periphery.

Dating the composition is, once again, impossible to do with accuracy and certitude. Yet the situation is quite similar to that of the Curse of Akkad: a *terminus post quem* is naturally the reign of Nāram-Sîn and the *terminus ante quem* the Old Babylonian period to which one of the version dates to. Thus the Cuthean Legend probably dates to somewhere early in the second millennium BC. When

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[127] The Umman-manda are mentioned in the Neo-Assyrian, but the adversary's identification varies from version to version. In some versions, the enemy are the Hurrians, in some versions they are described but not named. Westenholz 1997: 265.

[128] Enmerkar was a historic king of Uruk, who later became a legendary hero of tales – not unlike Gilgamesh. The main difference is that Enmerkar never reaches a divine status and is always depicted as a mortal in the legends.

[129] Longman III 1991: 109

compared to other compositions in this chapter, the curious function of this piece does not offer any help for the dating either.

There are several striking similarities between the Cuthean Legend and the Curse of Akkad, but their differences are crucial. Whilst both of the compositions revolve around similar main themes - the importance of gods, kings' humility before them and *hubris* - they differ significantly in their endings. In the Curse of Akkad Nāram-Sîn is punished for his sacrilege and the city of Akkad is cursed and destroyed, whereas in the Cuthean Legend Nāram-Sîn is given a chance to redeem himself after his sacrilege, which he does, and there is no indication of any kind of end for Nāram-Sîn, the Akkadian empire nor its capital city.

The adversary in both the legends is also interesting. In the Curse of Akkad they are clearly named as the Guti, but in the Cuthean Legend it seems that the exact adversary has changed through time as shown in the different versions of the composition. Be it the Umman-Manda, the Lullubi[130] or the Guti, the opponents still have similarities in the legends; they are described as almost non-human, barbaric and ungodly tribes of mountain people. Because there is an allusion to this in the primary sources as well, in the form of the Victory Stele of Nāram-Sîn, it seems there must have been some historical fact to Nāram-Sîn battling eastern mountain people, but not much can be taken for granted from the legends. As it seems that although the Curse of Akkad and the Cuthean Legend are very similar compositions, they seem to take part in different parts of Nāram-Sîn's reign and describe two different events on very similar terms. As such the use of either of them as historical sources is dubious at best - but why did Nāram-Sîn's barbaric opponents become a defining aspect of his legends?

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[130] See The Victory Stele of Nāram-Sîn; Figure 7 in chap. 2.3: Nāram-Sîn

The Great Revolt against Nāram-Sîn

This literary legend is extant in four different versions, one of which is in Old Akkadian and the rest in Old Babylonian[131]. The four versions have some slight variations between them - some follow the royal inscription presented in Figure 4 very closely whilst some bring deities into the story and highlight Nāram-Sîn's piety - but due to the similarities three of the four can be undoubtedly said to have been versions of the composition. The fourth, an Old Babylonian recension, is a heavily varied version. The Great Revolt is also a fine example to show the difficulty in asserting genres to these compositions, as the Great Revolt has been classed as a votive text; a piece of *narû*-literature worded in the form of a royal inscription; a historical inscription of literary type; a pseudo-historical inscription and a literary legend. Whilst the composition in all probability dates to the end of the 3rd millennium BC, no questions on its authorship can be answered - although Tinney[132] offers us the observation that the composition has several parallels to the Sumerian King List in its ideas of kingship, especially in Kish.

The general plot of the compilation can be roughly summarized as follows[133]. All of the versions depict an uprising against Nāram-Sîn. The opponents are named in all versions, and the tale recounts the gathering of city-states under Iphur-Kish of Kish in the north, and a separate rebellion led by either Ur or Uruk (depending on the version). Nāram-Sîn stands tall, but alone, against all his enemies; as such, he is placed above all the other rulers, with one version putting Nāram-Sîn on the divine level. Nāram-Sîn's piety toward his divine allies highlighted, although the gods themselves take no action at any point in the narrative. Most of the versions end here, as they become too fragmentary to read, and the final resolution of the conflict in the narratives is lost to us - although one of them (the Mari exemplar) gives an allusion to nine battles being fought.

One of the versions of the composition, a later Old Babylonian apparently revised version[134], depicts the battles in more detail - but gives such a different narrative that it is in many ways more comparable to the Curse of Akkad. This version, also called *Gul-AN and the Seventeen Kings against Nāram-Sîn*, is such a different version it is a mystery to me how or why Westenholz considers this to be related

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[131] The translations of all four versions used are from Westenholz 1997: 221-261
[132] Tinney 1995: 1
[133] From Westenholz 1997: 221-223. As none of the versions are fully complete, the rough summary has been derived from all four versions.
[134] Westenholz 1997: 221

to the Great Revolt. In this version a rebellion is also formed, but not by Sumerian city-states, but rather by forces that could be described as external threats: the Lullubi, Hurrians, Amorites and Elamites are all mentioned to be led by Gul-AN, the king of Gutium. The narrative is still written in the form of a royal inscription from the point of view of Nāram-Sîn, but although the ending is missing in this version as well, the signs for Nāram-Sîn are far from good: he suffers defeats in his first battles, after which his army is encircled in Akkad - before the text breaks. The fact that in this version, the threat against Nāram-Sîn comes in the form of external tribes, mainly Gutium, is of interest. This version of the legend thus makes no allusions to internal threats nor does it mention Sumerian rebellions, but rather enforces the narrative aspect of the Curse of Akkad, where Gutian forces marked the downfall of Nāram-Sîn.

Conclusions

Whilst the main part of the discussion will take place in the next chapter, some main observations from the sources can be made from the get-go. First of all, I have not amassed all of the sources, contemporary nor non-contemporary, concerning the fall of the Akkadian in this chapter - nor have I at any stage set myself to do so. All of the primary sources are impossible to be amassed into the confines of a single work, nor have I examined every single legend, omen, lamentation or hymn concerning the city of Akkad. But I do believe I have examined a good enough portion of them for them to be considered representative, and as such some conclusions can be drawn from them. From Sargonic royal inscriptions to the legendary pseudo-histories - or whatever are they to be called - most, if not all, of the more famous and more often cited works of Mesopotamian literary and historical traditions concerning the end of the Akkadian empire are found within this work.

Of the primary sources I have attempted to pick ones that relate directly to the question at hand - furthermore, I have attempted to choose at least a few for every king (when applicable), to ultimately show the types of sources that are available for each king of the Akkadian period. The meanings of these will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter, but the reader should at this point have a general understanding of what we are dealing with.

The non-contemporary sources have caused more problems - not only for me, but Assyriologists altogether for at least some decades. One of the main scholarly discourses for them - for chronicles and legends alike - seem to revolve around their genres. As this is a discussion not intended in this work, I have attempted to be wary and bypass this minefield - yet I am very aware that some terms used in this work to describe these texts can be seen as problematic. But I believe this to be beside the point. The later sources, again, form a cohesive and representative collection of the sources available. Not every single chronicle, annal, king list or list of year names is presented, but the ones that shed light on the matter at hand are examined and discussed. Similarly, some legends are omitted from this work. This is especially true for the case of the Sargon legends, only one of which is presented, but I believe the one to be enough to make my case. For this same reason some omens and city lamentations that could be considered relevant are absent from this work.

3 Discussion

3.1 Gutium and external threats

In the Curse of Akkad, the Weidner Chronicle, Gul-AN and the Seventeen Kings against Nāram-Sîn, the Sumerian King List and, to some extent, the Cuthean Legend, the fall of the Akkadian Empire is ascribed to either the Gutians or other mountain peoples of the Zagros. The Gutians are, especially in the legends, depicted as a sort of counterforce to the Mesopotamian way of life. On one hand, there is civilization, religious piety, humanity and rightfulness, on the other barbarism, irreligion, sacrilege, violence and a barely-human way of life. This attitude is maybe best summarized in lines 1-14 of another literary-historical composition presented in Figure 18, where the juxtaposition is obvious, but a similar idea is present in all the other compositions as well. Whilst the reasons for the Gutian invasion vary between the compositions, it is always depicted as an *invasion* by violence and force. As such, the Gutians are often mentioned at least as a factor in studies on the fall of the Akkadian Empire. The question becomes apparently clear: to what extent can we trust this historical reconstruction of events?

1-14)   The god Enlil - (as for) Gu[tium], the *fanged* serpent of the mountain, who acted with violence against the gods, who carried off the kingship of the land of Sumer to the mountain land, who fil[l]ed the land of Sumer with wickedness, who took away the wife from the one who had a wife, who took away the child from the one who has a child, who put wickedness and evil in the land (of Sumer)

15-23)   the god Enlil, lord of the foreign lands, commissioned Utu-heĝal, the mighty man, king of Uruk, king of the four quarters, the king whose utterance cannot be countermanded, to destroy their name

Figure 18: First 23 lines of inscription E2.13.6.4 from Frayne 1993: 284-285. This is thought to be a literary-historical composition that tells of Utu-heĝal's victory against Tirigan, the king of Gutium.

Firstly, the ahistorical setting of the compositions must be addressed. The idea that the Empire was felled by the Gutians during the reign of Nāram-Sîn is clearly shown to be false by the primary sources. The amount of royal inscriptions of Šar-kali-šarrī prove that the Akkadian Empire, though possibly past its peak, was still very much going strong during at least a part of his reign. The building of the Ekur temple in Nippur by Šar-kali-šarrī, shown in Figure 9, proves that the Sumerian heartland and its religious center were still under Akkadian control and influence during his reign. In fact, the primary sources seem to suggest that it was Šar-kali-šarrī rather than Nāram-Sîn who had to deal with the rising problem of the Gutians. The letter shown in Figure 11 and the two year names of Šar-kali-

šarrī's reign presented on page 27 of this work clearly describe this. But both of these sources are problematic as well. The year names record Šar-kali-šarrī's victories, not defeats, against the Gutians, whilst the letter seems to describe the Gutians more like a nuisance on business practices rather than an organized invasion force. These sources show that not only did the Gutian invasion not take place during Nāram-Sîn's reign, but also that the term *invasion* can be put into question as well.

Yet in the Mesopotamian literary works, the story of the Akkadian Empire was often told through two of its kings: Sargon and Nāram-Sîn. The legendary elements of Sargon's narrative - that he was a cup-bearer, a man of humble origins who rose to great power through his strong character and the willingness of the gods - were often pitted against the less fortunate and pious traits of Nāram-Sîn. Although Sargon's story would outlive that of Nāram-Sîn's in the Mesopotamian literary tradition, the folkloristic and fictional aspects of Sargon's stories have been recognized for a century in modern scholarly discussion - probably due to the resemblances between his and Moses' tales. But why have the aspects regarding the fall of the Akkadian Empire, namely the role of the Gutians, been so readily accepted by historians?

Glassner[135] offers a theory on how the Gutian invasion became the prevailing element in the Mesopotamian historical and literary narratives on the end of the Akkadian Empire. As mentioned above, Glassner believes that the Sumerian King List dates to the reign of Nāram-Sîn and that later rulers then continued the list to further their own claims to Babylonian power. One of the rulers to do so, according to Glassner, was Utu-heĝal. Utu-heĝal is often credited as being the ruler who drove the Gutians out - as is shown in Figure 18 - and being one of the rulers, alongside Ur-Nammu, to begin the re-emergence of Sumerian culture through the neo-Sumerian Ur III dynasty[136].

There is evidence that Utu-heĝal did indeed battle against the Gutian king Tirigan in the form of a year name, and there is no reason to doubt this. But, according to Glassner, the scale, scope, importance and meaning of this battle were blown out of proportions. Thus the consequences of this small-scale minor conflict were romanticized through propaganda - that Utu-heĝal had actually saved Sumerian culture from barbarism, that he had returned the kingship of the land from vile and evil creatures back to civilization, that he had liberated Mesopotamia from outside rule and that he had the gods by his side. Utu-heĝal's modest military victory was thus transformed into an event of universal significance. To Glassner, these are the political motivations behind not only the

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[135] Glassner 2004: 97-98
[136] Charpin 1995: 812

composition in Figure 18, but also the rewriting and continuation of the Sumerian King List: he argues that the chronicler entirely made up an important Gutian dynasty to highlight the importance of Utu-heĝal and to present the kingship as a cornerstone of Mesopotamian identity.

Whilst Glassner's theory is interesting, there are a few problems. Firstly, there is the question of the dating of the Sumerian King List. Both Michalowski[137] and Maisels[138] date the composition to the later Isin dynasty, and as such a theory based on the dating of the Sumerian King List becomes very difficult to prove. Maisel actually argues that the reason the different manuscripts of the Sumerian King List give varying information on the Gutian rulers is because the sources available to the author(s), which would include the legends, were inaccurate and contradicting themselves. Furthermore, some of the primary sources contradict Glassner's theory. The inscriptions from Umma presented in Figure 16 show that there indeed were kings of Gutium that the contemporaries in Sumer thought to be important enough to distinctly mention. Erridu-Pizir and his inscription in Figure 15 is of interest as well, as it shows that there was at least one man who bore the title "king of Gutium" and who, according to the writer of this inscription, followed in the footsteps of Akkadian kings and thought of himself highly enough to bare the title 'king of the four quarters'. The primary sources contradict with the idea that the Gutian dynasty was in its entirety fiction.

Though the details might be contradictory, I believe that the main idea of Glassner's theory is not far from the truth; that the role of the Gutians in Mesopotamian affairs was highly inflated by later writers to serve other political purposes. This would mean that the question whether the legends were inspired by the Sumerian King List or *vice versa* would become a question of the chicken or the egg - thus irrelevant. The underlying idea is that the Gutian invasion was a concept which originated in propaganda and became an underlying motif in Mesopotamian literature, and had no proper historical basis. To clarify, the key term here is *invasion*. As shown by the primary sources, there was in increase in Gutian activity and there were indeed Gutian kings during this period in Mesopotamia, but the notion that a large scale Gutian military *conquest* felled the Akkadian Empire is more literary than historical.

[137] Michalowski 1983: 40
[138] Maisels 1999: 352

Balatti[139] states something similar in her work. She argues that the term 'Gutians' became a *topos* in literary Mesopotamian tradition. This would mean that when the Gutians are mentioned in the literary works, it would refer not to the historical people of Gutium, but rather to a general form of external barbarism. This would also, according to Balatti[140], explain why in the Cuthean Legend and in the Gul-AN and the Seventeen Kings against Nāram-Sîn the opponents are no longer the Gutians but instead the Umman-manda - as the literary works evolved, so did the *topos*, and the barbarians were no longer designated by their ethonym (Gutians) but rather by a different term (Umman-manda) that is highly enigmatic to us. Though not explicitly mentioned by Balatti, the resulting logical reasoning is clear: the reason the term Gutians was not used in these works meant that the authors knew that the actual Gutian people had nothing to do with the literary term, and as such they wished to employ a different term to convey the message of invading barely-human barbarians. The point being made is that the stories and legends had evolved through time to such an extent that the authors felt that "Gutians" was no longer the correct term to depict the invaders – a term that in itself evolved and changed throughout Mesopotamian history.

The fact is that we have very little information on the Gutians - who they were, how their society worked or if they had a 'true' settlement, city or land they could call home - other than that they were a nomadic people from the Zagros mountain range who did not leave written records behind them. The very few primary sources we have on them are enigmatic, especially those concerning the mysterious character Erridu-Pizir: but why was he the only person in this period who claimed the title of 'king of Gutium' to leave behind elaborate royal inscriptions? Whilst some of the primary sources make allusions to a rise in Gutian activity, I believe their role in the fall of the Akkadian Empire to be largely inflated by the later Mesopotamian literary traditions. All of the compositions discussed have been shown to either serve blatant political purposes or to have fully ahistorical settings - and as such the *topos* of a Gutian invasion should not be accepted into historical discussion. It is understandable why the Gutians filled the gap of the historical narrative created by the so-called 'dark-age' following the fall of the empire to begin with. But I would argue that the Gutians fill the gap *too* nicely - and the concept of a Gutian *invasion* being the main cause for the fall of the Akkadian Empire should now be abandoned once and for all.

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[139] Balatti 2017: 7
[140] Balatti 2017: 8-9

3.2 Internal threats and dissolution

Another theory often[141] presented concerning the fall of the Akkadian state relates to the internal struggles of the empire. This interpretation usually revolves around the following themes. The empire reached its peak during the reign of Nāram-Sîn, but his political reforms and the concentration of power were met with opposition that the Akkadian ruler managed to overcome. Yet his weaker successors failed to do so, and especially Šar-kali-šarrī failed to maintain Akkadian control over the vast region - thus the sphere of Akkadian influence grew steadily smaller, until it was confined to just the region around the capital city. Thus the power vacuum that was created was filled by not only the city-states that had re-gained their independence, albeit short-lived, but also by external peoples and tribes that moved into the region, such as the Amorites and the Guti.

One could call this the middle ground of the theories, and there are several things to like about it - mainly, that it is largely based on the contemporary sources rather than the later sources. Firstly, we can consider Šar-kali-šarrī's name and titles as they are presented to us in the royal inscriptions, of which Figure 9 is a fine example. Noteworthy are the differences when compared to those of Nāram-Sîn: we can see that Šar-kali-šarrī does not employ the divine determinative, as the dingir sign is missing from his name. Furthermore, his title is more modest as well. Šar-kali-šarrī seems to have been content with "*da-núm* Lugal *a-kà-dè*.KI", "the mighty king of Agade", dropping off the more ambitious "king of the four quarters". What these titles (or lack thereof) seem to suggest that Šar-kali-šarrī was less ambitious than his predecessor and father; not only did he not claim to be of divine origin in his inscriptions, he fully abandoned the title which claimed kingship over the known world. Whether this lack of grandiose ambition was due to choice and free will or forced upon him due to other factors cannot be determined - but the implication that Šar-kali-šarrī failed to follow in his father's footprints it attested in the primary sources.

Secondly, the internal troubles can also somewhat be seen from the primary sources. The revolt of several Sumerian cities against Nāram-Sîn is known to us through inscriptions and literary works - and though the exact consequences of the revolt are unknown, it seems that Nāram-Sîn managed to maintain Akkadian control through force. The Figure 12 could suggest that this was no longer the case under Šar-kali-šarrī, as Puzur-Mama adopted the title of "king of Lagash", which could mean that the city-state declared independence from Akkadian control - either during or after Šar-kali-

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[141] For example. Charpin 1995: 809-811, Franke 1995: 835, Cunliffe 2015: 115

šarrī's reign. Furthermore, as the content of the letter in Figure 12 **(a)** seems to relate to a border dispute between Ur and Lagash, with Puzur-Mama apparently appealing to Šar-kali-šarrī to resolve the matter. The fact that the letter is (directly or indirectly) addressed to the Akkadian king suggests that the king's word still had weigh in the region - although that there is an indication of troubles between cities could also suggest a rise in opinions against the current political situation.

The phrasing of the previous paragraphs should make my point obvious - that although the primary sources *imply, suggest and indicate,* they make it difficult to form decisive historical arguments. This is, of course, due to their nature. Their scarcity, seeming randomness of content and often fragmentary states leave much to be desired. This is why I called this approach the 'middle ground'.

The main weakness of this argument thus relates directly to the sources. As all the historical sources concentrate mainly on the actions of the kings, the argument that the fall of the Akkadian state related to Šar-kali-šarrī's failures to maintain his father's influence and control is problematic. Though as we have seen the primary sources suggest that Šar-kali-šarrī was a more modest ruler, it is impossible with our current knowledge to tell if this was a cause or a consequence of the faltering Empire. As the fact that his royal inscriptions and year names make allusions to several victories imply that Šar-kali-šarrī must have been in many ways a traditional Mesopotamian king, the question becomes even more shrouded.

The archaeological record is of interest as well. Whereas the sites of northern Mesopotamia, such as sites in the Khabur Plains of modern-day northwest Syria like Tell-Leilan show a clear decline in activity and material culture at around the time of the fall of the Akkadian Empire between 2200 and 1900 BC[142], a similar decline is not visible in the archaeological records of the large southern Sumerian sites, such as Nippur[143]. The implication is clear: whatever caused the abandonment of the northern Akkadian sites did not affect the large Sumerian city-states. This gap in (or continuation of) the archaeological record at certain sites should not, however, be used as evidence to deduce the causes of the collapse, as it rather shows us its consequences. There are several possible explanations for the differences in archaeological records in that period, all of which are difficult to prove, but what is clear is a shift in power from the north to the south - which is also attested in the historical sources.

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[142] Gibbons 1993: 985, Weiss 2012: 5, 10
[143] McMahon 2006: 146-147

3.3 Climate

The role of climate and climate change in the Akkadian collapse has been one of the focal points of scholarly discussion on the subject in the last decades. Harvey Weiss and his team published a paper in 1993[144] that was the turning point. In it, through stratigraphy the team identified four phases of occupancy at the site of Tell Leilan from its formation to its imperialization by the Akkadian state and eventual abandonment. The team claimed that the abandonment had been caused by severe aridification which was also visible at other near-by sites across the plains. From this the team concluded that the change towards a drier climate enforced a mega-drought that led to the abandonment of urban settlements in northern Mesopotamia. This led to an increase in pastoral subsistence strategies at the cost of agricultural production, which resulted in the collapse of the Akkadian state due to grain shortages - and later to the collapse of Ur III due to pressure from refugees coming from the north and grain shortages. Since then, several climatological studies have been conducted and climate proxies have been derived from sediment cores from the Gulf of Oman[145], calcite flowstones from central Italy[146], speleothems (cave deposits) from Soreq Cave in Israel[147] and laminated sediments from Lake Van in eastern Anatolia[148], among many others. The data shows not only a shift to a drier climate in the southwest regions of Asia at around 2200 BC, but also a global[149] climate change taking place around this period - to such an extent that this phenomenon has been labeled the '4,2 kyr event' by palaeoclimatologists and researchers of Holocene climate.

There is a clear reason as to why the climatological data has taken such a prevailing role in modern studies concerning the collapse of the Akkadian Empire. As I have shown throughout this work, there is a very distinct scarcity in the available historical sources. Although archaeological excavations have unearthed more cuneiform tablets, their translation is a difficult and slow undertaking - and as such new sources on the subject matter have not been discovered in the past few decades. Thus the emergence of high-resolution palaeoclimatic data has offered a breakthrough; new, accurate and peer-reviewed scientific data has given the opportunity to interpret the past in a new way. This is exactly where the pitfalls lie; as the data itself should not be put into question, the subjectivity of history becomes evident in the interpretation of the data.

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[144] Weiss *et al.* 1993
[145] Cullen *et al.* 2000
[146] Drysdale *et al.* 2006
[147] Bar.Matthews *et al.* 1999
[148] Wick *et al.* 2003
[149] For example; Davis & Thompson 2006

Thus the question becomes this: to what extent has climate change driven or influenced societal collapse in the past? Whilst the question is very relevant in today's world as well - which certainly has contributed to its research and controversy - we must refrain ourselves to not only the past, but more specifically the late 3rd millennium for the purposes of this work. In this framework we can say that the model presented by Weiss in 1993 and revised[150] several times later is the most developed, cited and discussed work. The main points of this model, also called the Leilan Climate Change Model (LCCM), are presented above.

In Weiss' model, climate is one of the main drivers of human and societal activity. This is explained in his 2001 paper[151], where he argues how a change towards an agriculturally more favourable climate was a major factor in the collapse of the Natufian communities, resulting in the Neolithic revolution. In similar fashion, abrupt changes in climate throughout Mesopotamian history involved regional abandonment, replacement of one subsistence base by another (such as agriculture by pastoralism) and/or conversion to a lower energy sociopolitical organization. As all of these factors are, according to the LCCM, visible in northern Mesopotamia during the Akkadian collapse, the role of abrupt climate change must have been crucial in the collapse.

Weiss' model has come under scrutiny however, and it has been criticized on all accounts. McMahon[152] focuses on the climatic grounds. First, he criticizes the data itself: how the abruptness and suddenness of the climatic change is questionable and varies between the climate records and how the climate records come from places far away from the northern plains of Mesopotamia, highlighting the difficulty in reconstructing regional and global climatic factors. Further, McMahon mentions the impossibility of precisely dating climatic events, and thus connecting them to historical events - of which the chronology is also inaccurate - is a slippery slope. Secondly, the connection between climatic data and societal collapse can be seen as a result of modern-day fear of climate change - how historical reconstructions based on climate can be seen as works of 'environmental determinism[153]' that reflect the present rather than the past.

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[150] For example, Weiss 2012, Weiss 2016
[151] Weiss & Bradley 2001
[152] McMahon 2012: 665
[153] Coombes & Barber 2005

Weiss' LCCM model has been criticized on archaeological and historical grounds too. First, the severity of the north Mesopotamian urban collapse questioned, with several studies claiming that it was not as wide-spread as argued by Weiss[154]. But whatever the scale of the northern collapse, more importantly the very central contention of Weiss' model - that the Akkadian Empire was dependent on northern agriculture - has also come under scrutiny. Zettler[155] states that Weiss has failed to document the large-scale transportation of grain from north to the south. It is indeed a brave to assume that a state would have been so dependent on imported grain as early as the 3rd millennium BC. As this is a vital assumption in the LCCM model, and unfortunately for Weiss I agree with Zettler's criticism: in the articles cited in this work, Weiss does not make any attempt to prove his assumption nor have I come across this in my research. As such, even if a shift in climate had taken place, its impact on the political organization - the Akkadian state – should not be taken for granted.

Furthermore, Weiss[156] has made tentative attempts to use historical sources as a climate proxy. His attempt mainly revolves around the Curse of Akkad and city lamentations, where several lines apparently allude to climate disasters such as drought, wind turbulence and harvest collapses. Though the details of Weiss' work are unknown to me, based on my research I will still have to disagree with the idea that historical sources can be used as a climate proxy for the fall of the Akkadian Empire. This is in fact one of the main arguments of this work and my research - that no such allusions exist in any of the textual sources. The only mention of a famine was found in the Chronicle of Early Kings, but by itself it is not necessarily a reference to climatic conditions. And even if such allusions are to be found - after all a lot of the wording can change between translations - they are not to be taken literally. I have already proven in previous chapters why the historical literacy works, such as the Curse of Akkad, are very problematic and should not be taken at face value in historical reconstructions.

Thus the model presented by Weiss is problematic to say the least, and in all probability does not provide the truest and most accurate historical reconstruction - however scientific its data may be. In my opinion, its biggest downfall is its almost complete disregard for the written sources. Although they are scarce and often lack in quality and (especially) quantity, the little that are available provide

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[154] Wossink 2009: 3, Zettler 2003: 26
[155] Zettler 2003: 20-21, 27-28
[156] Weiss (2000): 'Causality and Chance: Late Third Millennium Collapse in Southwest Asia', in *Subartu VII*, pp. 207-217. Unfortunately, as this article was published in a rather obscure French series, getting access to it has proven impossible. Therefore this citation comes from Zettler 2003: 18. Because of this Weiss' arguments from the historical sources will not be discussed in detail.

the backbone for historians and Assyriologists alike. Whilst the climatological data should not be ignored and its research should be continued and pursued, Weiss' current model that entertains climate as the motor behind historical change really seems to ignore the Mesopotamians themselves. It forgets human activity and especially its complexity: culture, traditions and society as well as the motivations of individuals from kings to the poor. If anything, the historical literacy narratives and legends should be proof that the ancient Mesopotamians were no less human than we are.

Whilst Weiss' model is problematic, the role of climate change should not be ignored. In all likelihood the events leading to the collapse of the Akkadian Empire did not transcribe as described by the LCMM model. Yet this means that Weiss' interpretation of the data is incorrect – not that the climatic data itself is wrong and insignificant. Neither should we ignore climate change completely on the grounds that it is not referred to in the primary sources. There are several possible explanations for this; such as how the concept of a gradual climatic change was unknown to the ancients, and therefore it is noteworthy that the textual sources do not contradict the climatic data. A shift to a drier climate may have played its part in the degradation of the Akkadian Empire, but with present knowledge it cannot be concluded that climate change was the catalyst that led to the collapse.

4 Conclusions

In studies[157] on the collapse of the Regional System in the Near East at the end of the Bronze Age, it is clear from a glance that historical, archaeological and palaeoclimatological sources are used together to a much larger degree than in the subject of our current topic. This is largely due to the abundance of sources that are available for the late Bronze Age. With the scarcity of sources regarding the Akkadian era and especially its latter stages, it is no wonder that Assyriologists very rarely discuss climatological data or *vice versa*. The different theories regarding the fall of the Akkadian Empire seem to rule each other out; this could mean that they are all partially correct and there were several factors that contributed to the collapse, or that our knowledge of this period is so limited that we are really off course on the topic.

The biggest flaw of the historical sources is their scarcity. The primary sources are rare and rely largely on luck of discovery; the non-contemporary sources are highly unreliable and reflect later political agendas and literary themes. The most obvious, if not the only, possibility for a breakthrough in research would be the discovery of the Akkadian capital. There is no doubt that Akkad would produce the most accurate sources on the organization of the Empire, the daily life of its citizens and the kings' undertakings and failures. Akkad's libraries, temples, archives, storages and palaces would shed light on the rise and fall of the capital city.

As I have shown throughout this work, the interpretation of the climatological data has proven to be complicated. None of the contemporary sources give mention of climatic disasters or events; as such, the sources cannot be used as a climate proxy nor can the palaeoclimatological data be used as a historical source. The main issue is that the historical sources available at the moment simply do not support the LCCM model - whether this is because the model is flawed or because we simply have not discovered the 'correct' historical sources is left to be seen. Thus the lack of textual sources concerning climate do not confirm the climate hypothesis, but neither do they disprove it. But for the time being one can see why Palaeoclimatology has not become the norm in all aspects of Assyriology.

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[157] For example: Van de Mieroop 2016: 203-213. With no necessity to go into any greater detail, Van de Mieroop summarizes the point being made very well.

In light of all this, the theory that I dubbed the "middle ground theory" concerning the fall of the Akkadian State is at the moment our best reconstruction of the events. A gradually faltering area of influence under Šar-kali-šarrī combined with the re-emergence of southern and Sumerian city-states and the emergence of mountain tribes and Elamites into the area most probably all played a part in the collapse - if it even can be called one. It is also probable that a slowly changing climate also played some role in the collapse, although the extent of its influence is debatable. The sources neither confirm nor disprove this. The reality of it is that the sources are not conclusive nor accurate enough at this time for certain conclusions.

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