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**BEITRÄGE
ZUR SOZIALEN STRUKTUR
DES ALTEN VORDERASIEN**

**HERAUSGEGEBEN VON
HORST KLENGEL**



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Vorbemerkung

Mit dem Sammelband „Beiträge zur sozialen Struktur des alten Vorderasien“, herausgegeben von Horst Klengel, eröffnet das Zentralinstitut für Alte Geschichte und Archäologie der Deutschen Akademie der Wissenschaften eine neue Schriftenreihe. In ihr sollen Monographien, Sammelbände und Texteditionen publiziert werden, die den Alten Orient und seine historische und kulturelle Entwicklung betreffen.

In der neuen Reihe werden die Forschungsergebnisse, die Mitarbeiter des Zentralinstituts für Alte Geschichte und Archäologie der Deutschen Akademie der Wissenschaften erarbeitet haben, veröffentlicht. Darüber hinaus steht sie Wissenschaftlern aus anderen Instituten der DDR oder Forschern aus dem Ausland zur Publikation ihrer Arbeiten zur Verfügung.

Die Reihe „Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Orientforschung“, in der bisher Arbeiten zur Geschichte und Kultur des Alten Orients Aufnahme gefunden haben, hat inzwischen mit dem Band 76 ihr Erscheinen eingestellt.

Berlin, am 21. 10. 1970

Joachim Herrmann
Direktor des Zentralinstituts
für Alte Geschichte und Archäologie

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Vorwort

Es ist Aufgabe der althistorischen Forschung, aus der Beherrschung des Details zur Erkenntnis von größeren Zusammenhängen sowie von Gesetzmäßigkeiten in der Entwicklung der menschlichen Gesellschaft zu gelangen. Der Weg zu dieser Erkenntnis verläuft über die Interpretation einzelner Quellen und Textgruppen, die Untersuchung spezieller Probleme und die Darstellung bestimmter zeitlicher und räumlicher Bereiche. Diese Arbeit kann heute von einem einzelnen Wissenschaftler allein kaum noch geleistet werden.

In der Untersuchung der sozialökonomischen Entwicklung des alten Vorderasiens sieht auch die Keilschriftforschung an der Deutschen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin eine wichtige Aufgabe. Vom 18.–20. Juni 1969 wurde daher vom Bereich Alter Orient des Zentralinstituts für Alte Geschichte und Archäologie eine Arbeitstagung durchgeführt, die unter dem Thema stand: „Die soziale Struktur Vorderasiens im 2. Jahrtausend v. u. Z.“. Damit wurde einerseits die Problematik auf einen inschriftlich gut dokumentierten Zeitraum eingegrenzt, andererseits noch genügend Spielraum für die Themenwahl gelassen. Die im folgenden veröffentlichten Beiträge gehen zum größten Teil auf Vorträge zurück, die auf dieser Arbeitstagung gehalten wurden. Eine erschöpfende Behandlung der Tagungsthematik oder die Aufstellung von Strukturschemata waren weder beabsichtigt noch möglich. Vielleicht darf der vorliegende Band aber als ein bescheidener Beitrag zur Untersuchung von sozialen Problemen gewertet werden, die in der letzten Zeit immer mehr in das Interesse der vorderasiatischen Altertumskunde gerückt sind.

Berlin, November 1969

Horst Klengel

Abkürzungsverzeichnis

- AASOR = The Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research, New Haven.
AfO = Archiv für Orientforschung, Berlin/Graz.
AHw = W. von Soden, Akkadisches Handwörterbuch, Wiesbaden 1959ff.
AJSL = American Journal of Semitic Languages, Chicago.
ANET = Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament, Princeton.
AnOr = Analecta Orientalia, Rom.
AnSt = Anatolian Studies, London.
AO = Bezeichnung von Tafeln des Musée du Louvre, Paris.
ARM = Archives Royales de Mari, Paris.
ArOr = Archiv Orientální, Prag.
BASOR = Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research, South Hadley/
New Haven.
BE = Babylonian Expedition of the University of Pennsylvania, Series A: Cunei-
form Texts, Philadelphia.
BIN = Babylonian Inscriptions in the Collection of J. B. Nies, New Haven.
BiOr = Bibliotheca Orientalis, Leiden.
BM = Bezeichnung der Tafeln des British Museum, London.
BoSt = Boghazköi-Studien, Leipzig.
BoTU = E. Forrer, Die Boghazköi-Texte in Umschrift, 2. Band, Leipzig 1926.
CAD = The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of
Chicago, 1956ff.
Corpus = A. Herdner, Corpus des tablettes en cunéiformes alphabétiques décou-
vertes à Ras Shamra-Ugarit de 1929 à 1939, Paris 1963.
CT = Cuneiform Texts from Babylonian Tablets, London.
DLZ = Deutsche Literaturzeitung, Berlin.
Driver-Miles, AL = G. R. Driver and John C. Miles, The Assyrian Laws, Oxford 1935.
EA = Bezeichnung von el-Amarna-Briefen nach J. A. Knudtzon, Die el-Amarna-
Tafeln, Leipzig 1915.
GD = J. E. Gauthier, Archives d'une famille de Dilbat, Kairo 1908.
HAB = F. Sommer und A. Falkenstein, Die hethitisch-akkadische Bilingue des
Ḫattušili I. (Labarna II.), München 1938.
HG = J. Kohler et alii, Hammurabi's Gesetz, Leipzig 1909ff.
HSS = Harvard Semitic Series, Cambridge, Mass.
IBoT = Istanbul Arkeoloji Müzelerinde bulunan Boğazköy Tabletleri, Istanbul.
JAOS = Journal of the American Oriental Society, New Haven.
JCS = Journal of Cuneiform Studies, New Haven.
JEN = Joint Expedition with the Iraq Museum at Nuzi, Paris.

- JESHO = Journal of Economic and Social History of the Orient, Leiden.
 JKAF = Jahrbuch für Kleinasiatiscbe Forschung, Heidelberg.
 JNES = Journal of Near Eastern Studies, Chicago.
 KBo = Keilschrifttexte aus Boghazköi, Berlin.
 Koschaker, NRU = P. Koschaker, Neue keilschriftliche Rechtsurkunden aus der El-Amarna-Zeit, Leipzig 1928.
 KUB = Keilschrifturkunden aus Boghazköi, Berlin.
 LAMMD = Lietuvos TSR Aukštųjų Mokyklų Mokslo Darbai, Istorija, Vilnius.
 LB = Tafeln der Sammlung F. M. Th. de Liagre Böhl, Leiden.
 LIH = L. W. King, The Letters and Inscriptions of Hammurabi, London.
 MAH = Bezeichnung der Tafeln im Besitz des Musée d'Art et d'Histoire, Genf.
 MAOG = Mitteilungen der Altorientalischen Gesellschaft, Leipzig.
 MCS = Manchester Cuneiform Studies, Manchester.
 MDOG = Mitteilungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft, Berlin.
 MDP = Mémoires de la Délégation en Perse, Paris.
 MIO = Mitteilungen des Instituts für Orientforschung, Berlin.
 MVAG = Mitteilungen der Vorderasiatisch-Ägyptischen Gesellschaft, Berlin/Leipzig.
 OLZ = Orientalistische Literaturzeitung, Berlin.
 Or (NS) = Orientalia (Nova Series), Rom.
 PBS = Publications of the Babylonian Section, University Museum, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.
 PRU = Le Palais Royal d'Ugarit, Paris.
 RA = Revue d'Assyriologie et d'Archéologie Orientale, Paris.
 RHA = Revue Hittite et Asiatique, Paris.
 RLA = Reallexikon der Assyriologie, Berlin.
 RS = Bezeichnung der Texte aus Rās Šamrā (Ugarit) mit Grabungsnummer.
 RSO = Rivista degli Studi Orientali, Rom.
 SMN = Inventarnummer der Nuzi-Texte des Semitic Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.
 StOpp = Studies Presented to A. Leo Oppenheim, Chicago 1964.
 SZ = Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte, rom. Abt., Weimar.
 TCL = Textes cunéiformes du Louvre, Paris.
 Trudy = Trudy dvacat' pjatogo mez'dunarodnogo kongressa vostokovedov, Moskva 1960, t. 1, Moskau 1962.
 Ugaritica = Cl. F.-A. Schaeffer, Ugaritica, Paris.
 Ungnad, BB = A. Ungnad, Babylonische Briefe aus der Zeit der Ḫammurapi-Dynastie, Leipzig 1914.
 Urk. IV = Urkunden des ägyptischen Altertums, 4. Abt., hrsgg. von K. Sethe und W. Helck, Leipzig/Berlin.
 UT = C. H. Gordon, Ugaritic Textbook, Rom 1967.
 VDI = Vestnik Drevnej Istorii, Moskau-Leningrad.
 VS = Vorderasiatische Schriftdenkmäler, Berlin.
 WdO = Die Welt des Orients, Stuttgart/Göttingen.
 YOS = Yale Oriental Series, Babylonian Texts, New Haven/London.
 ZA (NF) = Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und verwandte Gebiete (Neue Folge), Leipzig/Berlin. [baden.
 ZDMG = Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft, Leipzig/Wies-
 ZDPV = Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins, Leipzig/Wiesbaden.

SAMUEL N. KRAMER, Philadelphia

Aspects of Mesopotamian Society. Evidence from the Sumerian Literary Sources

The Sumerian men of letters, as is well-known, wrote no learned sociological and anthropological treatises; they were bards and poets who preferred to compose entertaining tales about the deeds and misdeeds of their gods and heroes; to glorify their kings and deities in hymnal chants, to bewail the destruction of their land and cities in bitter laments, that ended on a happy note of restoration and rejoicing; to prepare disputations, dialogues, and essays concerned with sundry cultural activities, character portrayals and school life; to collect proverbs and precepts by the hundreds. But of systematic generalizations about their society and its institutions, there is not a trace in their writing. When, therefore, I received the generous invitation to participate in a symposium on Mesopotamian social organization during the second millennium B.C., I first thought that I would have to decline the honor, since it was only with the kind of literary documents described above that I was intimately acquainted. On second thought, however, it occurred to me that while it is true that the Sumerian literary compositions make no systematic statements about the society and its organization, they do contain numerous passages that indirectly and obliquely show some bearing on Mesopotamian social moves and behavior, and that these might be not unrevealing for the theme of our symposium. With this in mind I combed the Sumerian myths, epic tales¹, hymns, lamentations, and wisdom compositions for passages relevant to our theme, and some of these will be presented and analyzed in this paper. Let me emphasize and stress, however, that this is by no means an exhaustive treatment of the subject; it is no more than a preliminary pioneer survey that hopefully will provide the impetus for a broader and deeper study by one scholar or another at some future time as the Sumerian literary works become ever more available and intelligible.²

¹ These epic tales are concerned with the Sumerian Heroic Age of the early third millennium B.C. and their contents, revealing as they are for social organization of that early period (cf. S. N. Kramer, *History Begins at Sumer*, New York 1959, pp. 200–203 and Th. Jacobsen, *Early Political Development in Mesopotamia: ZA [NF] 18, 1957, p. 91ff.*), are not relevant to Mesopotamian social organization in the second millennium B.C.

² For a résumé of the extant Sumerian literary material, cf. note 1 of my "Sumerian

Let us start with a passage from the Gudea Cylinders inscribed some time about 2100 B.C. with two hymnal compositions³ dedicated to the building of the Eninnu temple in Lagash, that are gradually coming to be reckoned among the poetic masterpieces of the ancient world.⁴ The background for this passage is as follows: Gudea had just awakened all a-tremble from a sleep during which Ningirsu, the tutelary deity of his city, had appeared to him in an awesome vision, and had depicted to him in exalted language the blessed, prosperous state of Lagash and Sumer that would follow the building of his holy Eninnu. The wise ensi sets about at once to carry out his god's command, and begins his pious task by purifying his city morally and spiritually in order to make it a fit place for so holy a sanctuary. Or, as the poet puts it:

The ensi directed (the people of) his city like one man, united (the people of) Lagash like the children of one (and the same) mother. He planted trees, ripped out thorns.⁵ He turned away complaints; turned back wickedness into "its house". He loosened the "tongues" from whip and cane, substituted for them the wool of a mother sheep. The mother scolded not the son; the son spoke nothing disrespectful against his mother.⁶ The slave who had committed an offense—his master did not beat him in the head. The slave-girl who acted mischievously towards her mistress did not slap her face. To Gudea, the ensi who built the Eninnu, no one brought their accusations. The ensi purified the city, cleansed it with fire, expelled from the city the unclean, the bully (?), the depraved (?).⁷

Similes: A Panoramic View of Man's Oldest Literary Images": JAOS 89, 1969, 1-10.

³ For the possibility that there were three Gudea Cylinders rather than two, and that Cylinder A and B should really be designated as B and C, cf. note 5 to Chapter 2 of my "The Sacred Marriage Rite: Aspects of Faith, Myth and Ritual in Ancient Sumer" (now in press, Indiana University Press).

⁴ For an analysis of the poetic style of these cylinders, cf. Chapter 2 of the book cited in the preceding note.

⁵ Logically speaking the position of the two clauses in each of these two sentences should be inverted; that is, Gudea first had to unite the people of Lagash in order to be able to direct them as one man, and he first had to rip out the thorns in order to plant trees in their stead; for this frequently occurring "illogical" word order in Sumerian, cf. note 7 to Chapter 2 of the book, cited in note 3. Note moreover that the "ripping out of thorns" and "planting of trees" may perhaps be the poetic figurative way of depicting the spiritual purification of the city, especially since what follows refers almost entirely to moral purging rather to material improvement.

⁶ Nothing is said about the improvement of relations between the son and father, which may indicate that, whatever the psychological and cultural factors, there was more friction between the son and mother than between the son and father (cf. also note 10).

⁷ Cf. Cylinder A XII 21-XIII 15.

If now we analyze the passage, we note that for a Mesopotamian city to become pure enough, spiritually and morally, to permit the building of so hallowed a sanctuary as Ningirsu's temple, the Eninnu, its citizens had to be united in a close bond of brotherly regard; punishment of all sorts had to be eliminated or at least minimized⁸; the relationship between the member of the family, and especially between mother and son, had to be smoothed out; slaves had to be treated with exceptional kindness and forgiveness; the unclean and depraved had to be expelled from the city. All of which implies, of course, that in actual daily life, when there was no special need for sanctity and purity, that is, when it came to what we would describe as "week-day-practise" in contrast to "Sunday preaching", the Mesopotamian city of about 2100 B.C., and no doubt of later times, as well, was marked by disunity, contentiousness, and strife among the citizens⁹; by family fending and disrespect; by physical punishment that was harsh and cruel; by the beating of slaves for misconduct towards their owners; by the presence in its midst of numerous depraved immoral types.

Let us turn now to a second passage in the Gudea Cylinders, whose contents parallel the preceding passage, but in variant form. The temple has now been built, and its god, the revered Ningirsu, has entered its holy precincts. This, too, according to our poet, called for extraordinary high moral conduct on the part of the Lagash citizenry, at least for a short while. Or, as the poet puts it:

When his (Gudea's) king (Ningirsu) had entered the house, for seven days the slave-girl was the equal of her mistress, the slave walked by the side of his master. In his city the strong and the weak slept side by side. From evil speech the word was altered; wickedness was turned back into its house; the just laws of Nanshe¹⁰ and Ningirsu were strictly adhered etc. The orphan was not given over to the rich; the widow was not given over to the powerful; in the house where there was no male heir, the daughter was the heir.¹¹

⁸ The deeds and misdeeds for which the lashings by whip and cane were meted out are not mentioned anywhere in the passage; for the possibility that the scribe had a considerably fuller text which he telescoped and excerpted, cf. note 15.

⁹ All this is quite in line with the Sumerian character as surmised from a variety of written sources, cf. Chapter 7 of "The Sumerians: Their History, Character and Culture", Chicago 1963.

¹⁰ For a hymn to Nanshe as the goddess in charge of social behaviour, cf. "The Sumerians" pp. 249-268 and the Introduction to the forthcoming "Sumerian Literary Texts in the Museum of the Ancient Orient", by Muazzez Cığ and Hatice Kizilyay. In this composition, Nanshe is depicted as a deity who spurns the arrogant, the rebel, the cheat, the chief, the pander, the wealthy oppressor, the husband who abuses his wife; also she covenants with her vizier Hendursagga to protect the orphan, the widow, and the weak, and to punish those who disturb the harmony of family, especially the son who mistreats his mother.

¹¹ Cf. Cylinder B XVII 18-XVIII 9.

This passage, even more than the preceding, reveals the gaping chasm between the ideal and the actual, between the Sunday preaching and the daily practice. The poet portrays a virtually classless, egalitarian society in which there was trusting harmony between the weak and the strong, the slave and the master; there was no injustice and oppression, and even women in certain circumstances were treated as first class citizens. Unfortunately this idyllic state of affairs lasted only seven days, only until the solemnity and awesomeness of the special occasion had worn off and life could go back to "normal". And normal life in Lagash, it is not unreasonable to surmise, was far from ideal, classless and egalitarian; the slave was no doubt often made to feel the lowliness of his position; the strong lorded it over the weak; justice was honored largely in the breach; the orphan and the widow were at the mercy of the rich and the powerful; the woman was treated as a second class citizen that could not inherit the property of her parents, even when there was no male heir.¹²

Let us turn now to a passage on a Gudea statue that in some respects is even more comprehensive and specific than the two passages from the Gudea cylinders. It reads:

When Ningirsu looked with a steady eye on his city, chose Gudea as the righteous shepherd in the land, (and) took him by hand from the midst of the myriad multitude (literally: from 3600×60 men), he (Gudea) purified the city, cleansed it with fire, set up the brickmold, chose the brick by omen. The unclean, the bully(?), the depraved(?), the pervert, he expelled from the city. Its baskets (the baskets filled with clay for the building of the temple) were not carried by women, the eunuchs built it for him¹³; he built the house of Ningirsu in a pure spot, like Eridu. No one was struck with a whip, no one was struck with a strap(?). The mother did not strike her son. There was release from . . . inspection by governors, supervisors, foremen, corvée officials. In the cemeteries of the city no one dug (a grave); no dead were buried; the gala brought not (his) lyre, uttered no lament; the women-keepers wept not. Throughout the territory of Lagash no accused was brought to the "place of oath"; no creditor entered a man's house.¹⁴

Reading between the lines, therefore we may surmise that normally, that is except for the rare occasion when the citizens had to be on extra good behavior, baskets filled with earth for building constructions were carried by women, whipping and beating were common; workers suffered from constant bureau-

¹² This passage is virtually repeated in Gudea, Statue B VII 24-46 except for minor variations; both passages also probably include the promulgation of a debt moratorium, cf. Cylinder B XVII 17 and Statue B VII 29 (cf. also the end of the Statue B passage, cited on p. 4 of this manuscript).

¹³ Taken literally this seems to be a surprisingly sympathetic attitude toward the weaker sex, at least on certain special occasions.

¹⁴ Cf. Statue B III 6-V 12.

cratic supervision and inspection; the accused were frequently dragged to take an oath; creditors could enter the house of debtors at will.¹⁵

It should be obvious from what has been said above that social conduct in Lagash, and no doubt in the other Mesopotamian cities, was just and noble only on rare, hallowed occasions. But there was one Mesopotamian city that was pure and holy the whole year round, as it were—Nippur, the city that was main seat of worship of Enlil, the leading deity of the Sumerian pantheon throughout much of the third millenium B.C. At least so we may gather from a hymn whose virtually complete text has been pieced together in recent years, a pious, devotional document composed by a Sumerian poet in glorification of Enlil, his city Nippur, his temple, the Ekur, and his gracious wife, Ninlil.¹⁶ The composition begins on a narrative note that relates how the all-commanding, all-searching, deeply revered Enlil had set up his sacred dwelling in Nippur. It then proceeds to portray Nippur as a holy city that is the guardian of man's loftiest moral and spiritual values, and therefore a most fitting place for Enlil's hallowed shrine, the Ekur. Or, in the words of the poet:

The city—its "face" is awesome fear, dread,
 Its outside no mighty god can approach,
 Its inside is (full of) cries of mutilation, cries of bloodshed (?),
 It is a trap that serves as a pit (?), a net (net) against the rebellious land,
 It grants not long days to the braggart,
 Allows no evil word to be uttered against (the divine) judgment,
 Hypocrisy (?), distortion,
 Abuse, malice, unseemliness,
 Insolence (?), enmity, oppression,
 Envy (?), (brute) force, libellous speech,
 Arrogance, violation of agreement, breach of contract, abuse (?) of a (court)
 verdict (?),
 (All these) evils the city does not tolerate.
 Nippur, whose "arm" is a vast net,
 Whose "heart" is the fast-stepping ḫur in-bird,
 Whose "hand" the wicked, the evil, cannot escape,
 The city endowed with truth,
 Where righteousness, justice, are perpetuated,
 Where clean garments are worn (?) (even) at the quay,
 Where the older brother honors the younger brother,
 acts humanely (towards him),

¹⁵ To judge from the variations in the passages cited from Gudea Cylinders A and B and Statue B, the scribe probably had before him a considerably more detailed text concerned with the moral purging of Lagash, from which he excerpted what for one reason or another he deemed suitable for his purposes.

¹⁶ For bibliographical details, cf. my contribution to the Supplement of ANET (now in press).

Where the word of the elders is heeded, where it is repeated in (?) fear (?),
 Where the son humbly fears his mother, where eldership endures — —
 In the city, the holy seat of Enlil,
 In Nippur, the beloved shrine of the Father, the Great Mountain,
 The shrine of plenty, the Ekur, the "lapis-lazuli" house, he raised up out of
 the dust,
 Planted it in a pure place like a high-rising mountain,
 Its prince, the Great Mountain, Father Enlil,
 Set up (his) dwelling on the dais of the Ekur, the lofty shrine.

While not everything in this passage is crystal clear, it does shed no little light on the moral values of Mesopotamian society; the abomination of any number of vicious character traits, as well as a yearning for equitable family relationships.

A fruitful source for certain aspects of Sumerian social organization is the poetic prologue of the Sumerian lawcodes, such as those of Urnammu and Lipitisttar.¹⁷ Unfortunately both of these prologues are poorly preserved and only partly intelligible. Still we learn from the prologue to the Urnammu Code of the existence of a predatory bureaucracy whose abuses the king did away with, of the regulation by the ruler of weights and measures current throughout Sumer; and of his concern for the welfare of the orphan, the widow, and the poor. In the extant portion of the Lipitisttar prologue, on the other hand, the stress is on equitable family behavior, and on the "freeing" by the king of certain cities (Nippur, Ur and Isin) from corvée labor and military service that had been imposed on them.

The king, as is obvious from these prologues, as well as from numerous royal hymns, played a dominant role in Mesopotamian society; in fact the institution of kingship was the very hallmark of civilization in the eyes of the Mesopotamian theologians and intellectuals. Kingship did not, of course, come full-blown, full-grown on the Mesopotamian political and social scene; it had undergone a slow process of evolution from the time when the king was no more than a temporary leader appointed by the citizen assembly to the period of the Third Dynasty of Ur, when to all intents and purposes he was the sole and absolute ruler of the land. Still, it is worth stressing, a Sumerian sovereign was no arbitrary despot, no cruel and capricious tyrant; a king such as Shulgi, for example, was fully aware that he was only the vicar and representative of the gods, and responsible to them for the well-being and prosperity of the land and its people. It is not for nothing that the priests and poets kept on constantly reminding him in their hymns of glorification and celebration, that he was especially selected by the gods who transferred to him some of their divine power and understanding, for no other reason, than "to give good guidance to Sumer", "to let the people of Sumer and Akkad refresh themselves under his shade", "to supply them with abundant food to eat, and sweet water to drink".

¹⁷ Cf. Or (NS) 23, 1954, pp. 40–51 and ANET pp. 159–161.