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LET'S PILE UP SOME CORPSES AND POUR OUT A LIBATION –
 A RECONSTRUCTION OF IIIRD MILLENNIUM BC BATTLEFIELD BURIAL TUMULUS
 IN ANCIENT MESOPOTAMIA¹

ABSTRACT The article is devoted to the battlefield burial tumuli which are to be encountered in cuneiform texts under Sumerian SAĤAR.DU₆.TAG₄, DU₆.SAR ĜAR, KI.GAL. It is believed that their Akkadian equivalents are *bērūtum*, *damtum* and *gurunnu* respectively, however it needs to be stressed, that this not certain. Since those peculiar structures have been an object of ongoing debate, the present study tries to change the trajectory of recent research and focus primarily on their physical features which have never been studied in detail before. The proposed reconstruction is based on scarce cuneiform documents and iconography known from the famous Stele of the Vultures as well as the so called 'Standard' of Ur. The present study deals with a battlefield barrows heaped up with the corpses of own fallen warriors in opposition to a similar structures composed of the corpses of defeated enemies, intentionally unprotected, in order to expose their bodies to outrage. The author gives an overview of the *bērūtum* architecture, pointing out that the structures mentioned might have been provided with a special drainage system, one comparable to the libation pipes (a-pap/a-pa₄), which played an important role in the cult of the deceased in Sumerian culture.

Keywords: battlefield burial tumuli, pile of corpses, Sumerian warfare, Stele of the Vultures, Sumerian burial customs

ABSTRAKT Niniejszy artykuł omawia zagadnienie kurhanów bitewnych spotykanych w tekstach mezopotamskich pod sumeryjską nazwą SAĤAR.DU₆.TAG₄, DU₆.SAR ĜAR, KI.GAL. Sądzi się, że ich akadyjskim ekwiwalentem są *berūtum*, *damtum* oraz *gurunnu*. jednakże należy podkreślić, że taka interpretacja nie jest do końca pewna. W związku z tym, iż problematyka tych intrygujących struktur jest obecnie przedmiotem intensywnej dyskusji, prezentowana praca stara się zmienić dotychczasową trajektorię dociekań, koncentrując się głównie na ich cechach konstrukcyjnych, gdyż zagadnienie to, nie było dotąd przedmiotem osobnych badań. W niniejszej pracy zaproponowano rekonstrukcję kurhanu bitewnego w oparciu o nikiłe dokumenty zapisane pismem klinowym oraz źródła ikonograficzne, do których należy zaliczyć słynną Stele Sępów oraz tzw. Sztandar z Ur. Prezentowane badania dotyczą kurhanu bitewnego usypanego z ciał własnych, poległych wojowników w odróżnieniu od podobnego obiektu, składającego się z ciał zabitych wrogów, lecz niezabezpieczonego, w celu wystawienia ludzkich szczątków na profanację. Autor przedstawia najważniejsze elementy architektury *berūtum*, wskazując, że opisywane obiekty mogły posiadać specjalny system odpływu, porównywalny z rurami libacyjnymi (a-pap/a-pa₄), odgrywającymi istotną rolę w kulcie poświęconym zmarłym przodkom.

Słowa kluczowe: wojskowość mezopotamska, kurhany bitewne, *berūtum*, SAĤAR.DU₆.TAG₄, Stela Sępów

Introduction

Military conflict played a significant role in the history of Ancient Mesopotamia. It is clearly discernible in the Early Dynastic III period (c. 2600-2340 BC.), when archaeological data can be

verified by cuneiform texts describing the passionate rivalry among Sumerian city-states. The reason for the war might vary, depending predominantly on political and economical factors. However, the religious ingredient was also certainly involved, since each city-state with its clearly defined boundary was the property of a particular god to be protected by its community, led by their leaders known as en, lugal or ensi.² Thus, any potential territorial strife inside

¹ The greater part of this research was presented to the audience at the International Conference 'The Religious Aspects of War' which took place in Pruszcz Gdański in 2014 and has never been published before.

² Nissen 1988: 134-135, 142; See Hallo 1957:

the Sumerian heartland could easily trigger local conflicts aroused by the activity of manifold agents.

The most spectacular monument showing the theatre of war in the Old-Sumerian period is the famous Stele of the Vultures, currently displayed in the Musée du Louvre commemorating the victory of the king of Lagaš, E-anatum over Umma (c. 2450 BC.). It is remarkable not only because of its rich iconography, which is a rare and therefore crucial source of knowledge about Sumerian warfare but also due to some unique cult motifs, depicted in literature as the heaping up of the corpses of dead warriors. Hence, the subject of this paper refers to the phenomenon of battlefield burial tumuli known also as ‘pile of corpses’ which are to be encountered in royal inscriptions of Mesopotamian rulers ranging in time from the Old-Sumerian to the Old-Babylonian period.

The goal of this study is to get a better picture of the so called ‘pile of corpses’ with reference to its construction details, which to my knowledge, have never been subjected to any lengthy discussion. In consequence, I will try to present a reconstruction of the Sumerian battlefield barrow with all its principal features.

Since the iconography and the text of the Stele are widely discussed elsewhere, I will not examine them here in detail, in order to avoid needless repetition of data. Instead, I will focus on the task in hand. Unfortunately, I have been unable to refrain from giving a short background of the written sources related to the ‘pile of corpses’ phenomenon in order to make my research more coherent.

The case of ‘pile of corpses’ found in military contexts gives rise to the fundamental question of for whom they were made. As was noted by Richardson³ the issue is not always clear in the written texts. This controversy is far from reaching a final resolution, but it is reasonable to acknowledge that generally some authors think that, depending on context, these structures were made either to bury dead enemies (especially the selected elite leaders)⁴ or to honor the casualties of one's own nation.⁵ The iconography of the Stele of the Vultures could be interpreted in support of both hypotheses, but unfortunately it does not solve the problem on the philological level. On the other hand, this observation is essential for the present study, which shall

focus on the best example of a battlefield barrow, known from the reverse-lower register of the Stele of the Vultures.

Stele of the Vultures – iconographic essentials

The Stele, made of white limestone and adorned with high relief, was found in the precinct of the god Ningirsu in ancient city of Girsu (Telloh). The almost 2 m-high monument has been fragmentarily preserved and consists nowadays of 7 pieces, so the original, full iconography of the monument is unknown.⁶ The name of the Stele comes from the image of vultures devouring the dead enemy soldiers displayed in the upper-left corner of the Stele.

The reverse side of the Stele is divided into 4 separate registers, featuring the following iconographical motifs: 1st register – the triumphant E-anatum leading his heavy infantry to the victory over the army of Umma; 2nd register – the king of Lagaš riding on a battle wagon accompanied by his light infantry; 3rd register – religious activities showing burial practices and cultic offerings made before the god Ningirsu or the king E-anatum⁷ (the image is incomplete); the lowest register is badly preserved, but might have contained another motif glorifying the king during the battle.

Obverse side of the Stele has only two registers. The first register is the most spectacular and depicts the god Ningirsu, holding in his left hand a massive net, full of defeated enemies. Since one of the captives is trying to poke his head out of the trap, the god strikes him with a mace. The identity of the god is corroborated by the presence of his heraldic bird Anzu, sitting on the top of the net. It seems reasonable to conclude, that behind Ningirsu there was an image of his mother Ninhursag, also accompanied by the emblem of Anzu. The lower register might have been showing the triumphant Ningirsu riding his divine wagon⁸ but since it is significantly damaged one can only speculate over its original nature.

It is believed that correct reading sequence of the reverse side of the Stele of the Vultures is from the bottom to the top of the monument.⁹ This would mean that after the military activity displayed on the lowest register (only fragmentarily preserved), E-anatum or even his predecessor A-kurgal was

3-29, 34-48.

³ Richardson 2007: 194-195.

⁴ Cooper 1986: 25, La 1.6; 41, La 3.5; 43, La 3.6; 55, La 5.1; Postgate 1992: 254.

⁵ Frayne 2008: 92-93, E1.9.1.6b, Rev., Col. III 8-9 and V 4-5.

⁶ Winter 2010a: 6.

⁷ Frankfort 1970: 71, Fig. 74; 72-73, Fig. 75; Parrot 1960: 135-136; Winter 2010a: 6-13.

⁸ Winter 2010a: 7-10; Winter 2010b: 54.

⁹ Winter 2010a: 14-15.

obliged to bury his fallen warriors in a barrow.¹⁰ According to this concept, the topmost register would illustrate the final battle that gave Lagaš a victory over Umma. This interpretation, as shown recently by G. J. Selz¹¹ would fit the observation made by J. Cooper¹² who suggested that there were at least two military episodes in the Lagaš-Umma conflict during the reign of E-anatum, which could alter the Stele's iconography.

'Pile of corpses' in Early Dynastic Sumer

The first reference related to the 'pile of corpses' is to be encountered in the Sumerian royal inscriptions dated to the reign of king Ur-Nanše (c. 2500 BC.). One of the stone slabs discovered in Lagaš commemorates a victorious military campaign led by lugal Ur-Nanše against Ur and Umma (Ĝiša). The victory over Ur was described in the following words: *The leader of Lagaš defeated and [captured] the leader of Ur...*¹³ This statement is succeeded by the list of captured Umma high ranking officials (i.e. ènsi-má-gur8, nu-bànda), whose names are immediately followed by the interesting phrase – 'buried in tumuli' (SAĤAR.DU₆.TAG₄ mu-dub). It is the same when the inscription pertains to the Umma (Ĝiša): *He defeated the leader of Ĝiša. He captured Lupa and Bilala, the lieutenants. He captured Pabilgatug, the ruler of Ĝiša. He captured Ur-pusag the lieutenant. He captured Ĥursaĝšemaĥ, the chief of the merchants (and) buried in tumuli*¹⁴ (SAĤAR.DU₆.TAG₄ mu-dub).

The concept of the tumulus is also present in the vision of the battle sent over E-anatum by Ningirsu in a dream which is found in the long cuneiform text constituting an integral part of the Stele of the Vultures. In this way, the reader gets an unique but fragmentary (the text is only partly preserved) insight into the course of the military clash, so for example it is known that E-anatum was probably wounded during the combat, but luckily survived. However, the significance of this dream relies on the fact that Ningirsu make a kind of promise to the king in the form of these words *Oh Eanatum, you will slay there. Their myriad corpses will reach the base of heaven*¹⁵

which apparently really happened, since several lines later E-anatum boasts that *He defeated Ĝiša and made 20 burial tumuli for it* (SAĤAR.DU₆.TAG₄-bi 20 bi-dub).¹⁶

The custom of heaping up human corpses was not only restricted to the military activity inside Sumer, but also successfully performed during foreign campaigns, which is shown when E-anatum triggered a operation against Elam and Arawa: *Eanatum defeated Elam, the lofty mountain and heaped up a burial mounds for it* (SAĤAR.DU₆.TAG₄-bi mu-dub)¹⁷; *He defeated the ruler of Arawa, who stood with the (city's) emblem in the vanguard and heaped up a barrow for it.*¹⁸

It is clear that conflict between Lagaš and Umma, which focused over the fertile fields of Gu'edena did not cease, and was not resolved after E-anatum's victory. His successor, En-metena (c. 2400 BC.) describes the struggle with neighboring Umma, making a similar reference to burial tumuli. The slaughter of Umma's military forces is described in a vivid way in order to highlight the miserable fate of Lagaš adversaries: *His asses (originally belonging to UR-LUMA ensi of Ĝiša) – there were 60 teams (?) of them – he abandoned on the bank of LUM-ma-ĝirnunta canal, and left the bones of their personnel strew over the Eden district. He heaped up there tumuli in five places* (SAĤAR.DU₆.TAG₄-bi ki-5-a i-mi-dub).¹⁹

In Old-Sumerian texts the battle field burial tumuli are called SAĤAR.DU₆.TAG₄ from which it can be understood that they took shape of a mound or a heap (du₆) made of earth, sand or dust (saĥar), perhaps located somewhere in the vicinity of the battlefield (tag₄ – 'to leave, to abandon').

'Pile of corpses' in Early Dynastic Mari

The custom of piling up bodies of dead warriors is in all probability attested in Early Dynastic Mari, a powerful kingdom lying to the north of Sumer on the middle Euphrates. The military activities involving this intriguing practice testify that they were performed even when the army operated in mountainous lands.

¹⁰ Selz 2015: 390-392.

¹¹ Selz 2015: 392.

¹² Cooper 1983:26.

¹³ Frayne 2008: 92, E1.9.1.6b, Rev. Col. i 8-ii, 3.

¹⁴ Frayne 2008: 92-93, E1.9.1.6b, Rev., Col. iii 10-vi 1.

¹⁵ Frayne 2009: 131, E1.9.3.1, Col. vii 12-22; Cf.

opposite opinion formulated by Selz 2015: 391-392.

¹⁶ Frayne 2008: 131-132, E1.9.3.1. Col. xi, 12-15.

¹⁷ Frayne 2008: 147, E1.9.3.5., Col. iii. 1d5-16; Cooper 1986: 41, La 3.5.

¹⁸ Frayne 2008: 147, E1.9.3.5, Col. iii. 21-22; Cf. Cooper 1986: 41, La 3.5.

¹⁹ Frayne 2008: 197, E1.9.5.1, Col. iii. 19-27; Cooper 1986: 55, La 5.1.

The first example comes from the reign of king An(u)bu, who: *Defeated the cities of Aburu and Ilgi in the land of Belan and raised tumuli in the mountainous country of Lebnān.*²⁰ A similar situation happened during the reign of Sa'ūmu, when the king conducted two military campaigns – the first against the cities of Tibat and Ilwi, the second one against the lands of Ra'ak, NĪrum, Ašaltu, and Ba'ul. As a result, the king (...) *raised the tumuli in the mountainous country of Anga'i*²¹ and *raised tumuli in the border region of (geographical name scarcely preserved) near the wadi*²² respectively. A great number of battle barrows are known from the military campaigns led by Išup-Šar (18 in total).²³ An unspecified number of battlefield tumuli is also mentioned in one royal inscription of Enna-Dagān.²⁴

In Mari texts the tumuli are called DU₆.SAR ĜAR which one may interpret as barrows, heaps (du₆) made of particular amount of earth (sar- volume measure) established in a chosen spot (ĝar – 'to put, place, lay, set down'), hence they may be seen as similar structures as SAĤAR.DU₆.TAG₄. Nevertheless, as has been recently pointed out by G. J. Selz²⁵ it is not evident whether this phrase indicates burial mounds or implies that a particular city and the surrounding settlement were turned into the ruins of hills, which would better fit the Akkadian context. On the other hand, the numerals applied to DU₆.SAR ĜAR advocate the concept of treating them as battlefield tumuli, which are known from the Old-Sumerian sources.

'Pile of corpses' – Old-Akkadian
to Old-Babylonian period

The battlefield tumuli phenomenon seems to be present in the Akkadian period, which is clearly visible during the reigns of Rimuš and Naram-Sin.²⁶ For example, Rimuš claims that *Zahara and Elam had assembled in Paraḥšum for battle but he*

*was victorious and struck down 16 212 troops, took 4216 captives (...). Further he heaped up over them a burial mound (birūtum) in the area of the city.*²⁷ Similarly, the texts from the III rd Dynasty of Ur, dedicated to Šulgi and Šu-Sin mention those constructions in the context of military activities. One of the texts, dated to the reign of Šulgi, is of great importance since it suggests that battlefield tumuli might have been surrounded by a kind of moat, akad. *ḥirītum*: *When he (Šulgi) destroyed the land of Kimaš and Ḥurtum set out a moat (ḥirītum) and heaped up a pile of corpses (birūtum).*²⁸

Battlefield barrows also appear in Old Babylonian inscriptions dedicated to the kings Samsuiluna and Iaḥdun-Līm. For example, the first one boasts that *In the land of Kimaš he heaped up a burial mound (damtum) over him (Rīm-Sîn). Twenty six rebel kings, his foes, he killed; he destroyed all of them*²⁹ whereas the second proclaims that he had defeated the rebel of three kings and then (...) *vanquished their troops and their auxiliaries and inflicted a defeat on them. He heaped up their dead bodies (gurunnu). He tore down their walls and made them into mounds of rubble.*³⁰

The concept of battle field tumuli is also present in a long curse covering a vast part of the Hammurabi Code epilogue, showing that these objects still played an important role in the theater of war: *May Ishtar, the lady of battle and conflict (...) strike down his heroes (and) let the earth drink their blood (and) let his armies be left a heap of corpses (gurunnu) on the plain.*³¹

After the Old-Akkadian period, the enigmatic tumuli are probably quoted in texts as *bērūtum*, *damtum* or *gurunnu* – which could be understood, following A. Westenholz and CAD as '(natural) hill'/'(artificial) heap of earth',³²'(burial) mound'³³ and 'heap/mound'³⁴ respectively. In the inscriptions from the reign of Narām-Sîn these structures are known as KI.GAL³⁵ (i.e. *building platform*,

²⁰ Frayne 2008: 300, E1.10.1.1., Col. i 8-ii 8.

²¹ Frayne 2008: 307, E1. 10.8.1., Col. ii 10-iii 8.

²² Frayne 2008: 309, E1.10.8.2., Col. iii 9-iv 12.

²³ Frayne 2008: 312, E1.10.9.1., Col. iv-v 13; 326, E1.10.12.5., Col. vi 8 – vii; 328, E1.10.12.6., Col. vii 2-viii 4; 330, E1.10.12.7., Col. viii 5-14, Rev. i 4-ii 8; 330, E1.10.12.8., Col. Rev. i 9-ii 11.

²⁴ Frayne 2008: 336, E.1.10.14.1., Col. Rev. iii 11-iv 2.

²⁵ Selz 2015: 399.

²⁶ Westenholz 1970: 27-28; See also Richardson 2007: 194, Tab. 10.1 showing early victory burial mounds typology.

²⁷ Frayne 1993: 52-53, E2.1.2.6., 9-23 and 43-47.

²⁸ Frayne 1997: 141, E3/2.1.2.33.

²⁹ Frayne 1990: 387, E4.3.7.7.

³⁰ Frayne 1990: 606, E4.6.8.2.

³¹ Driver, Miles 1955: 104-105.

³² Westenholz 1970: 28-29; CAD (*birūtu*) 1965: 267-268; CDA (*bērūtum*, *bīrūtum*) 2000: 43.

³³ CAD (*damtum*) 1959: 74; Westenholz 1970: 28-29.

³⁴ CAD (*gurunnu*) 1956: 142; Westenholz 1970: 28-29.

³⁵ Frayne 1993: 129, E2.1.4.24., Col. ii 1'-iii 4, Cf. 144, E2.1.4. 31., Col. iii 1-5 (?).

foundation, great Earth, underworld).³⁶ On the other hand, the inscription related to the conquest of Kimaš and Ħurtum (see above under Šulgi) suggests that some parts of *bērūtum* might have been constructed with much more solid material, because the quoted text was found on a clay brick.

'Pile of corpses' – barrow architecture

There exists no coherent description of the 'pile of corpses' in cuneiform texts, but its key features may be tentatively reconstructed. There are two piles of corpses on the reverse side of the Stele of the Vultures. The first is located in the second lower-register, whereas the other one in the right corner of the topmost register respectively. Since the latter is beyond the scope of the present study, we will briefly describe it first.

The object located in top register depicts a chaotic and carelessly-made tumulus of naked corpses, which seem to have been heaped up, which is inferred from several figures standing amidst human bodies.³⁷ This barrow is apparently made out of defeated enemies, whose corpses were left to be maltreated, since some of the vultures depicted flying above the heap carry human heads and limbs in their beaks and claws. The heap was constructed to humiliate Lagaš's adversaries and, most importantly, to deprive them of a proper burial. However, apart from having a religious and propaganda³⁸ significance, the image fails to provide solid evidence on the subject of battlefield tumuli architecture.

The second pile located in the 2nd lower-reverse register of the Stele of the Vultures (Fig. 1) is the best and most representative example of a battlefield tumulus known in Sumerian art. Nevertheless, before I outline the basic features of this object, it needs to be stressed that it was an extraordinary structure, designed to be the burial place of the dead warriors of E-anatum. Its building process must have been accompanied by pious cult activities honoring the dead. The funerary ceremony took place after the battle without any rush and with close attention to the construction details, as is suggested by another scene to the right of the barrow, which shows an elaborate offering set in front of the king or the god Ningirsu. All these data lead to the conclusion that we are dealing here with a credible image of a funerary tumulus dedicated to fallen comrades.

The barrow is made of at least 6 piled-up tiers of naked human corpses (the top layer is indicated by the remains of a human foot) disposed in two similar columns, together constituting the interior part of the tumulus. It seems that bodies' arrangement was deliberately designed, so that the barrow could hold a great number of dead warriors in one place. My conclusion is supported by the fact that each of the intertwined columns and rows of corpses is organized to economize space: the first body layer is made of corpses arranged with their feet lying together whereas the second one by heads and so on. This sequence, when constantly repeated, avoided any loss of space between the bodies, and was designed to achieve better stability in the construction. The outer sealing of the tumulus is equally intriguing. First of all, it has been depicted in profile and consists of 2 different units: the first one is a kind of a cube-like foundation layer, the second one- a thin and curved band delineating the ovoid shape of the barrow. It has been inferred earlier from the phrases SAĦAR.DU₆.TAG₄ and DU₆.SAR ĠGAR that the core of these structures was in all probability made of corpses covered with earth and dust, which harmonizes with the image of two men climbing up the tumulus with basket of earth on their heads, as depicted on the Stele of the Vultures. Nevertheless, since the barrow is quite high and remarkably steep, and at least twice human height (c. 3.5 m) it seems that its outer covering was made of something different than just loose earth.

Thus, I would infer that the barrow depicted on the Stele of Vultures in the lower register was constructed according to the following rules (Fig. 3). The corpses were piled up in a special way to economize the space (see above) and to avoid the barrow's collapse. After that, the constructors outlined the perimeter of the heap by lying down one or several brick layers (the cube-like object shown in the profile is quite massive) on the ground. This foundation – a brickwork clay band was of great importance, since it probably featured numerous vertical tree branches or shrub twigs, creating a frame enveloping the dead bodies, depicted here as a thin and curved band delineating the shape of the battle heap.

It must be stressed that the workers carrying the baskets are apparently treading the corpses (the upper basket bearer is balancing his lower foot on the head of a dead individual who belongs to the 3rd corpse layer whereas the other one seems to be standing on the feet of a dead warrior who constitutes 4th layer, respectively) but at the same time they secure themselves by grasping branches or twigs, shown in the iconography as a constricting

³⁶ Halloran 2006: 138.

³⁷ Selz 2015: 395, Fig. 5a.

³⁸ Cohen 2005: 69.

band. This would mean that the workers are covering corpses with earth when the frame is already in place.

The earth might have been acquired from the surrounding countryside, applying some profound constructional or architectural vision since the unique brick text testifies that after the military campaign against Kimaš and Ħurtum Šulgi *made a moat (ħirūtum) and made a bērūtum* (see above). This would mean that battle barrow could have been surrounded by a moat, which is important archaeological feature. One would also like to suggest that this brick may have come from a real Akkadian *bērūtum*. When all the warriors had been covered with earth and encompassed by a wooden frame, the latter was probably coated with a clay mixture, which would not only improve the whole structure, but also prevent wild carnivores such as vultures but especially jackals from profaning the remains of the dead warriors.

It is also worth noting that the idea of heaping up mounds might have had some deeper and hidden symbolic meaning in the context of the 3rd millennium BC. This fact is suggested by the existence of *du₆-ku₃* ‘the Sacred Mound’ in a Sumerian city’s landscape. Those mounds, according to written documents, were connected with the cult of Enlil’s ancestors and present in at least some Sumerian cities, including Lagaš. *Du₆-ku₃* were real structures made, among other materials, out of twigs as indicted by some cuneiform records from Drehem.³⁹

However, the discussed heap on the Stele of the Vultures is apparently under construction (hence the motif of the workers with baskets) and not finished yet, so it is not known whether it was originally furnished with any other object or not. To develop this speculation I would refer to the so-called Standard of Ur⁴⁰, found in grave PG 779⁴¹ which has been identified by Roaf⁴² as the sounding box of a musical instrument. This masterpiece of Sumerian art was adorned with an ornamental mosaic, which on one side showed some fierce scenes of war and on the other – peace and harmony. Nevertheless, at least one unobtrusive triangular end of the ‘Standard’ is critical here, showing in all probability steppe landscape inhabited by wild animals, depicted together with an unusual semicircular object covered with 3 small circles in the bottom register (Fig. 2a).

This object is similar in shape to the funerary mound depicted on the Stele of the Vultures, and surprisingly its outer shell is also clearly emphasized. It is worth noticing that first reconstruction published by C. L. Woolley⁴³ showed another (Fig. 2b), smaller but comparable heap at the second triangular end of ‘Standard’, although it was subsequently discarded from its bottom register for reasons unknown to me.⁴⁴ The main difference between the barrow shown on the Stele of the Vultures and the ‘Standard’ of Ur is that the latter depicts enigmatic circles covering its body. This factor may be seen as ornamental design but one can not help the feeling that it was placed here purposely in order to express some construction details.

There is only one funerary object that would fit this context, namely the clay pipes for ritual offerings known as *a-pap/a-pa₄* in Sumerian texts (see below). Archaeological records demonstrate that some of tombs of the Royal Cemetery of Ur (PG 1237 and PG 337) were furnished with special drains linking small offering-tablets placed in burial shafts to the interment site below.⁴⁵ In all probability, similar drain fixtures are known also from Tell Asmar and Tell Agrab,⁴⁶ whereas the performance of libation to the dead city rulers and officials in a place known as *ki-a-nag* ‘water-drinking place’ or ‘libation place’⁴⁷ is well documented in Pre-Sargonic Lagaš.

The main goal of *a-pap/a-pa₄* was to deliver funerary offerings to those departing for the realm of the Netherworld through the symbolic conduit in the place of the person’s interment. The dead could not survive in the Netherworld without offerings due to the unpleasant conditions in *kur*. This is clearly expressed by king Urnammu who says that *Bitter is the food of the Netherworld, brackish is the water of the Netherworld*.⁴⁸ The impact of funerary offerings on the standard of living in *kur* is vividly portrayed in the Gilgamesh Epos. When Enkidu is describing to Gilgamesh the conditions in the Netherworld, he claims that those deceased

⁴³ Woolley 1934: U.11164, Pl. 93.

⁴⁴ Cf. The Standard of Ur, Museum no. 121201, Registration no. 1928,1010.3, Excavation no. U.11164, The British Museum Collection Online, internet address: http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details/collection_image_gallery.aspx?partid=1&assetid=1546346001&objectid=368264 (accessed 16.05.2019).

⁴⁵ Woolley 1934: 36, 46, 114.

⁴⁶ Cohen 2005: 105, footnote no. 38; Cf. two drains noted by H. Frankfort 1933: 22; 21, Fig. 14.

⁴⁷ Selz 1995: 155-156.

⁴⁸ Kramer 1967: 118, Col. 82.

³⁹ Cohen 1993: 106-108.

⁴⁰ Over so called ‘Standard’ of Ur Cf. Hansen 1998: 43-47 and Reade 2003: 97-100.

⁴¹ Woolley 1934: 61, 266-274.

⁴² Roaf 1990: 92.

who got numerous living offspring cannot complain in kur, whereas those who left behind just one descendent or none, are left crying in the wall corner or eating leftovers.⁴⁹ It is known from later sources that neglecting the obligation to provide burial offerings was seen as one of the factors that could trigger a malevolent ghost's activity, which was regulated in Babylonian culture on the human level by *ašipu* specialists (exorcists).⁵⁰ However, as has been pointed out by A. C. Cohen,⁵¹ exorcism of this type is only attested in Old Babylonian contexts and not before. On the other hand, in the context of Sumerian times one should note the existence of the peculiar 'festival of ghosts' *ne-IZI-gar* in the 5th month of the Nippur Calendar, which is also attested in other Mesopotamian cities such as Drehem, Adab, Ur, Larsa, Uruk and Ešnunna.⁵²

The function of *a-pap/a-pa₄* is clarified in the so called First Pushkin Elegy written by Ludingirra, dedicated to his dead father. It is expressed here by following statement: *may the good beer never cease in your libation pipe*.⁵³ *A-pap/a-pa₄* is also known from the literary composition 'Lulil and his sister' where it is described as a device used during funerary rituals: *Pour out the water into libation pipe pour it in the dust of the Netherworld*.⁵⁴ The funerary pipe may also have been the subject of a Sumerian riddle suggesting that the offering conduits were seen as 'windows' connecting opposite worlds: *My mother built me a house; window, what comes out? she said, window what comes in? she said. Answer: the flour of an remembrance ritual that someone brings*.⁵⁵

Therefore *a-pap/a-pa₄* pipes played the important role of passing water, beer and other offerings to the underworld where the deceased could not stay in peace without the support of their leaving relatives, due to the hurtful conditions in kur. Naturally, liquid offering could have been poured out onto the ground as in some royal graves at Ur (PG 789 and PG 800)⁵⁶ but there apparently was a difference between a libation poured through the *a-pap/a-pa₄* and one poured straight onto the soil. This issue was studied by D. Katz⁵⁷ who suggested that

in the absence of a grave the mourner would simply pour out a libation onto the ground but when the place of burial was known and accessible to the living relatives they would prefer to make an offering using libation pipes.

The proximity of water might have been a factor in the placing the battle barrows, which seems to be suggested by extraordinary Old-Akkadian map quoted by G. J. Selz⁵⁸ (unfortunately fragmentarily preserved) showing an ovoid object described as [s]aḥar ldu tag₄-a located in the vicinity of a river or a canal.

Taking all these arguments into consideration, I would identify the enigmatic circles covering the barrows as depicted on the triangular ends of the 'Standard' of Ur as sealed libation pipes. In this configuration, the number of openings would imply to the viewer that the dead fallen on the battlefield are not deprived funerary offerings and the custom of making a libation is preserved. Naturally, these ritual activities might have had an individual character, performed by the relatives of the deceased if the battle tumuli are considered to lie somewhere in steppe land.

This interpretation fits the general context of the 'Standard of Ur' for the following reasons. First of all, the 'Standard' was placed in a funerary context as a burial furnishing in grave PG 779 which due to its developed architecture and furnishings, may be seen as linked as to the upper class or royalty. This fact apparently excludes any potential randomness in its art since the ruling class paid attention to traditional religious customs and beliefs.

Secondly, the panel showing the scenes of war is thematically correlated with the image of battle tumuli visible on its triangular sides. Battle field barrows, as being the aftermath of a military campaign, placed surrounded by wilderness were a clear and readable symbol of reverence for the dead. Finally, the original function of the 'Standard' is of great importance. If the sounding box interpretation is correct, and we are evidently dealing here with the remains of a lyre, its relationships with the funerary rituals and mourning activities after the battle becomes more explicit. The lyre identified with the Sumerian *balaḡ* was an instrument associated with laments performed by gala specialists. One of the Sumerian literary compositions illustrates the gala duties as follows: *A hoe was not put to the cemetery. A corpse was not buried. The Lamentation specialist brought no*

⁴⁹ George 1999: 194-195, Tablet XII 102-119.

⁵⁰ Farber 1995: 1897; Jonker 1995: 190-211; Scurlock 2006: 23-24.

⁵¹ Cohen 2005: 104.

⁵² Cohen 2003: 456-457, 100-103.

⁵³ Cohen 2005: 106.

⁵⁴ Katz 2003: 101.

⁵⁵ Cohen 2005: 106.

⁵⁶ Woolley 1934: 36, 63, 73-74.

⁵⁷ Katz 2003: 102.

⁵⁸ Selz 2015: 400-401.

*lyre and sang out no lament.*⁵⁹ This text fragment brings a clear message that the *balag* played an important role in the funerary cult performance.

Conclusions

It seems that texts related to pile of corpses studied individually without any insight into the iconography are inconclusive if one wishes to get some better insight into the construction details of battlefield tumuli. A strongly pronounced difference in character the two piles of corpses depicted on the Stele of the Vultures reflects the ancient attitude to corpse treatment in the context of war. The material presented in this article suggests the existence of two different categories of post-battle tumuli: the first one, made out of enemy corpses, without any sealing, exposed to defilement in order to deprive the enemy of a proper burial and stress the territorial and military power of the victorious army, and second one, heaped up to honor one's own casualties.

In the light of comparative evidence, the latter can be reconstructed as follows (Fig. 3): a heap regular in shape, of approx. 3.5 m high (depending on the battle requirements) made of corpses of one's own warriors, encircled by a brick foundation layer featuring a kind of reinforcement made of twigs or tree branches; this 'frame' overlaid the mass of dead bodies mixed and covered with a layer of earth to constitute the core of the heap; the burial was doubly secured against any defilement with a shell covering made of clay; at least in some cases it could have been surrounded by a moat; the barrow could have been also provided with a special drainage system or openings of a religious character, through which funerary offerings such as water and beer, flour etc. were dispatched to the Netherworld in order to feed the dead relatives fallen in battle.

Finally, the discussed material prompts one to conclude that specific funerary furnishings like the so called 'Standard' of Ur, may have been adorned with well-thought iconography, reflecting not only the theatre of war but also the specific funerary rituals connected with warfare and the afterlife.

Abbreviations

- CAD – A. L. Oppenheim/E. Reiner et al. (eds.). *The Assyrian Dictionary of the University of Chicago* (Chicago 1956 ff)
- CDA – J. Black, A. George, N. Postgate (eds.). *A Concise Dictionary of Akkadian* (Arbeiten und Untersuchungen zur Keilschriftkunde, Band 5, Weisbaden 2000, 2nd printing = SANTAG

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⁵⁹ Cohen 2005: 52-53; See Edzard 1997: 32, Gudea Statue B, col. v: 1-4.

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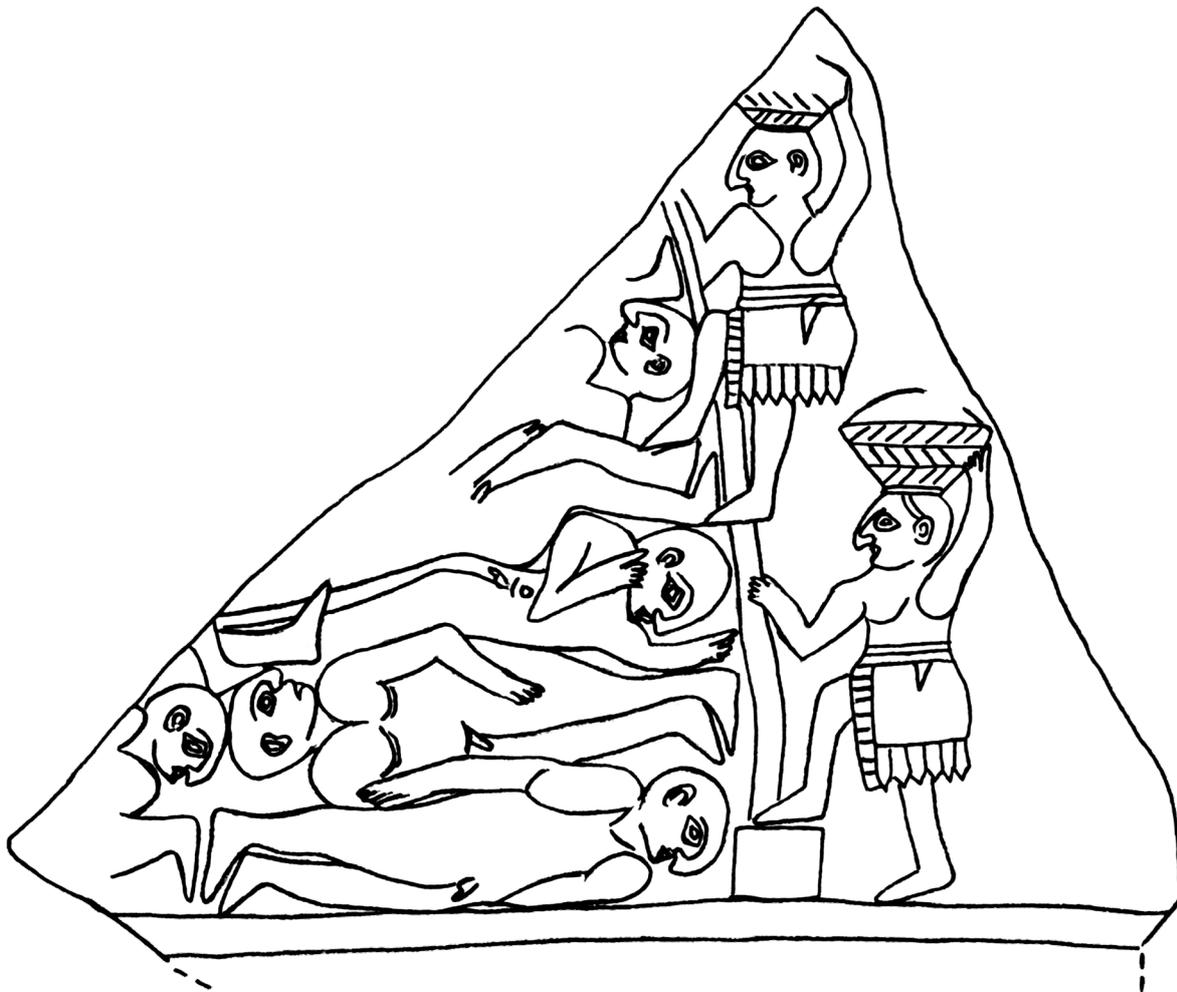


Fig. 1. Burial scene from the lower reverse register of the Stele of the Vulture
(Drawn by M. Paszke; Jastrow 1915: Pl. XLVIII, Fig. 2)

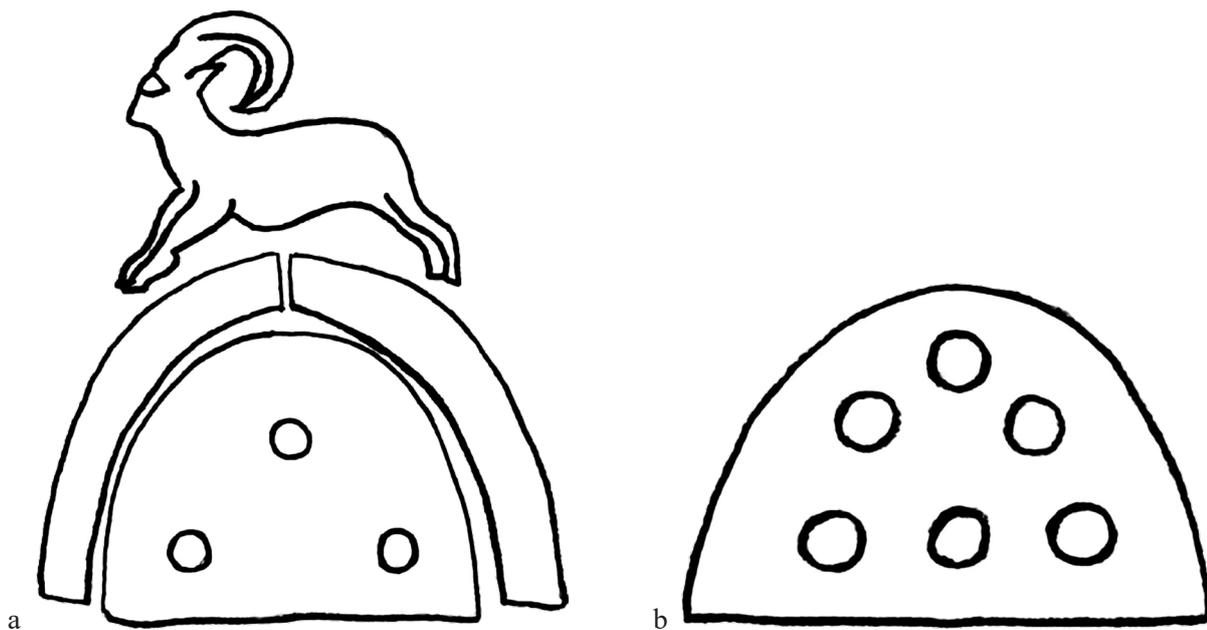


Fig. 2a. Detail of the right side of the 'Standard' of Ur (Drawn by M. Paszke; Reade 2003: 100, Fig. 52).
Fig. 2b. The missing object from the left side panel of 'Standard' of Ur published originally by C.L. Woolley
(Drawn by M. Paszke; Woolley 1934: Pl. 93)

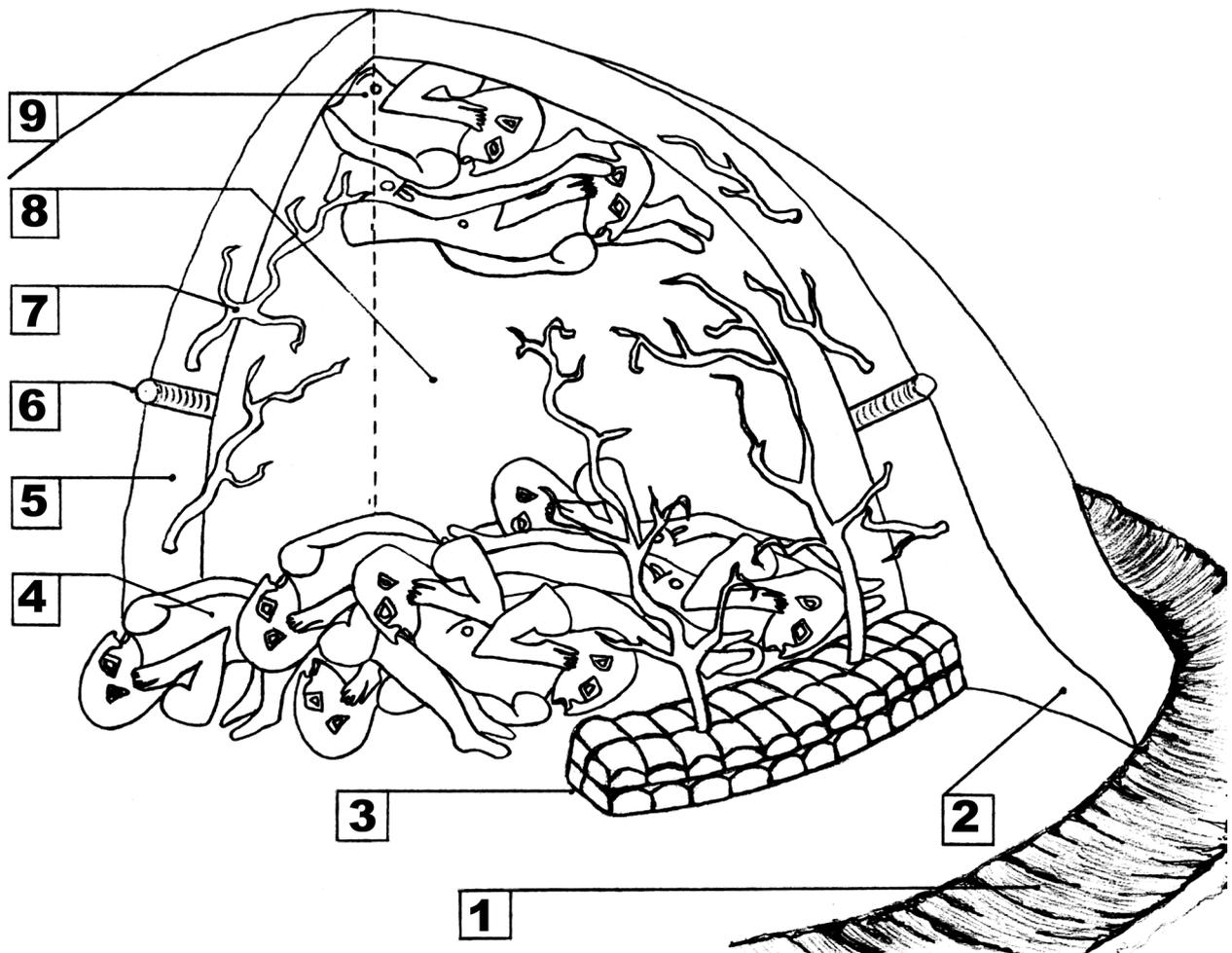


Fig 3. Battlefield burial tumulus reconstruction:

1. Moat (optional),
2. Bottom part of clay slope,
3. Core of barrow lined with brickwork foundation,
4. First corpse layer,
5. Clay shell-covering,
6. Offering drainage,
7. Wooden reinforcement,
8. Core made of mass of corpses, covered and mixed with earth,
9. Uppermost corpse layer.

(Reconstructed and drawn by M.Z. Paszke)

