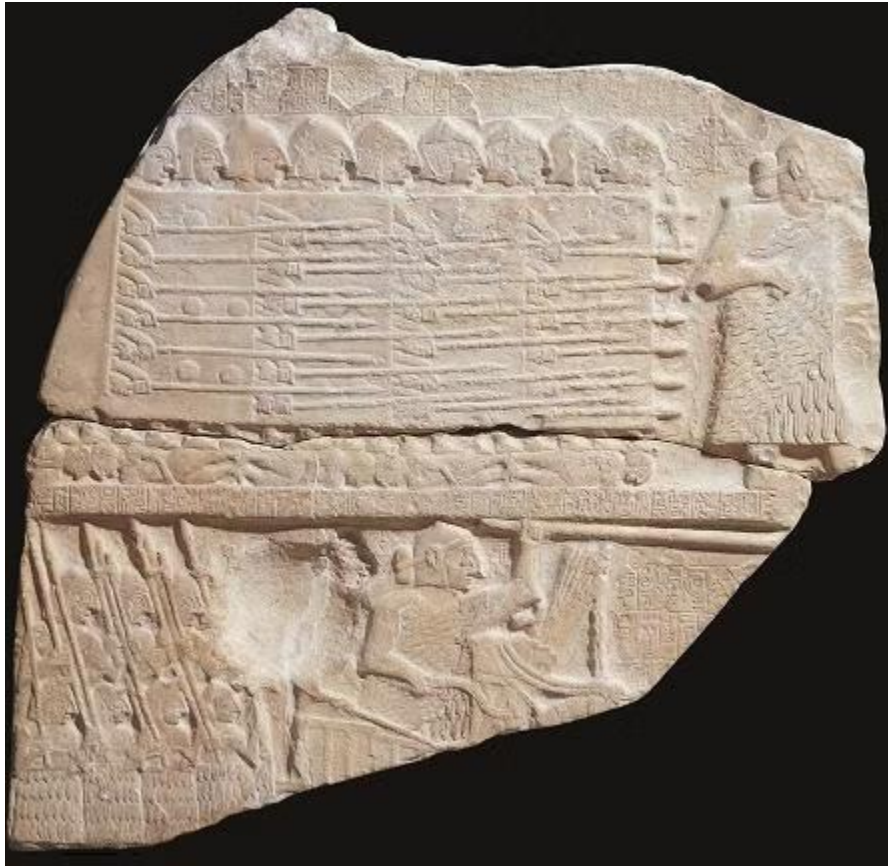


Translations of the Vulture Stele and the Eannatum Boulder

By Jerald Jack Starr. This page originally appeared in SumerianShakespeare.com.

Hint: press the CTRL key when clicking on a link to make it display in a separate tab.)



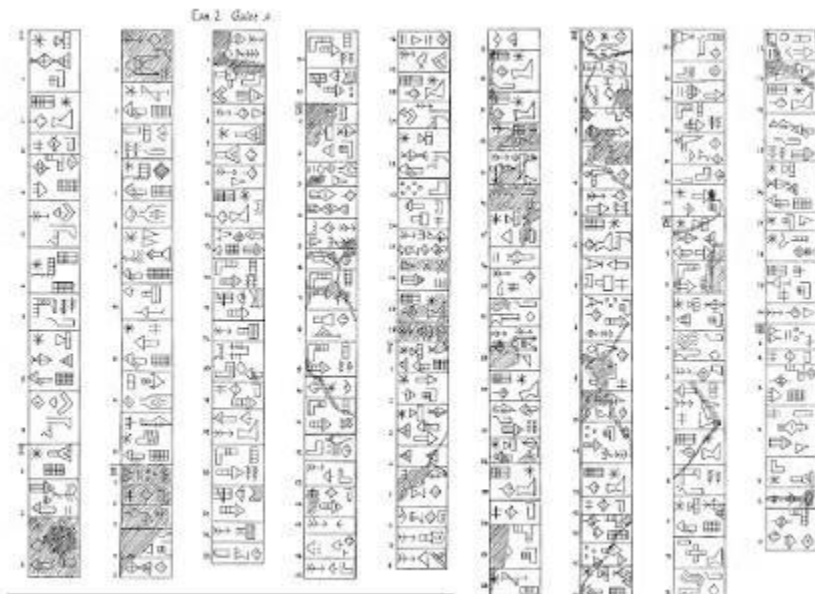
The Vulture Stele.

Before giving a translation of the Vulture Stele, it is a good idea to begin with a translation of the "Eannatum Boulder." It serves as a useful prologue for the Vulture Stele, and it has many of the lines that are missing from the stele due to damage. The translation is from the Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative, [CDLI P222400](http://CDLI.P222400). For some reason the CDLI deleted their translations of the Eannatum Boulder and the Vulture Stele (below). This page is one of the few places where the translations are available.



The **Eannatum Boulder**, in the Louvre Museum. Photograph courtesy of Trevor Eccles.

----- Click on any of the images to enlarge them.



The inscriptions on the Eannatum Boulder. These inscriptions occur on other boulders.

Note: The CDLI uses the current spelling of Eannatum (with one "n").

[...] = damaged text { } = explanatory comments

For Ningirsu,

Eanatum, the ruler of Lagash,
nominated by Enlil,
given strength by Ningirsu,
chosen by the heart of Nanshe,
fed wholesome milk by Ninhursaga,
called a good name by Inanna,
given wisdom by Enki,
beloved by Dumuzi-abzu,
trusted by Hendursag,
beloved friend of Lugalurub,
son of Akurgal, the ruler of Lagash,

for Ningirsu, {the city of} Girsu he restored.
The walls of the Holy City he built for him.
For Nanshe, the {city of} Nigin he built.

By Eanatum
Elam, the awesome mountain range,
was defeated,
and its tumuli {burial mounds} he heaped up.
The Standard of Uru, though by its ruler
it had been set up at the head (of it),
he defeated it,
and its tumuli he heaped up.
Umma he defeated, and its 20 tumuli
he heaped up.
To Ningirsu, his beloved field, the Gu'edena,
he returned.

Uruk he defeated.
Ur he defeated.
Kiutu he defeated.
Iriaz he destroyed,
and its ruler he killed.
Mishime he destroyed.
Arua he obliterated.

Before Eanatum,
the one nominated by Ningirsu,
all the lands trembled.

In the year that the king of Akshak rose up,
Eanatum, the one nominated by Ningirsu,
from the Antasura of Ningirsu
Zuzu, the king of Akshak,
all the way back to Akshak he smote,
and he obliterated it.

At that time, Eanatum,
Eanatum being his own name
while his Tidnu(?) name is Lumma,
for Ningirsu a new canal he dug,
and “Good Like Lumma” he named it.

Eanatum, a man subject to the word of Ningirsu,
because Eanatum, the ruler of Lagash,
by Inanna was loved,
together with the rulership of Lagash
the kingship of Kish she gave to him.

Before Eanatum, Elam trembled,
and the Elamite he sent back to his land.

Kish trembled before him.
The king of Akshak he sent back to his land.

Eanatum, the ruler of Lagash,
the subjugator of the many foreign lands of Ningirsu,
Elam, Subartu, and Uru
via the Carp Water (canal)
he defeated.

Kish, Akshak, and Mari
via the Antasura of Ningirsu
he defeated.

For Ningirsu
the Good Like Lumma (canal)
he placed alongside,
and he presented it to him.
Eanatum, given strength by Ningirsu,
the dam of the Good Like Lumma (canal)
with 3600 gur-measures (containing) 2 UL (each) of bitumen
he built.

Eanatum, a man subject to the word of Ningirsu,
whose (personal) god is Shul-MUSHxPA,
the palace Tirash he built for him.

He is the son of Akurgal, the ruler of Lagash,
and his grandfather was Ur-Nanshe,
the ruler of Lagash.

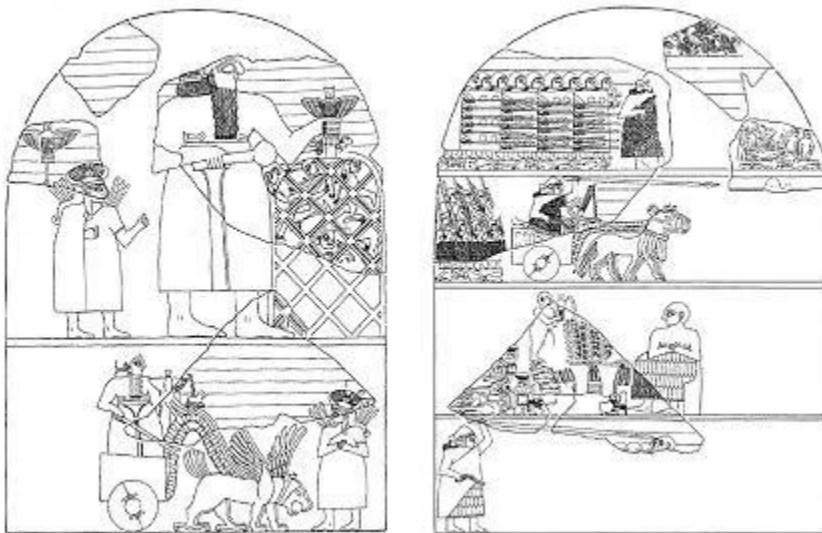
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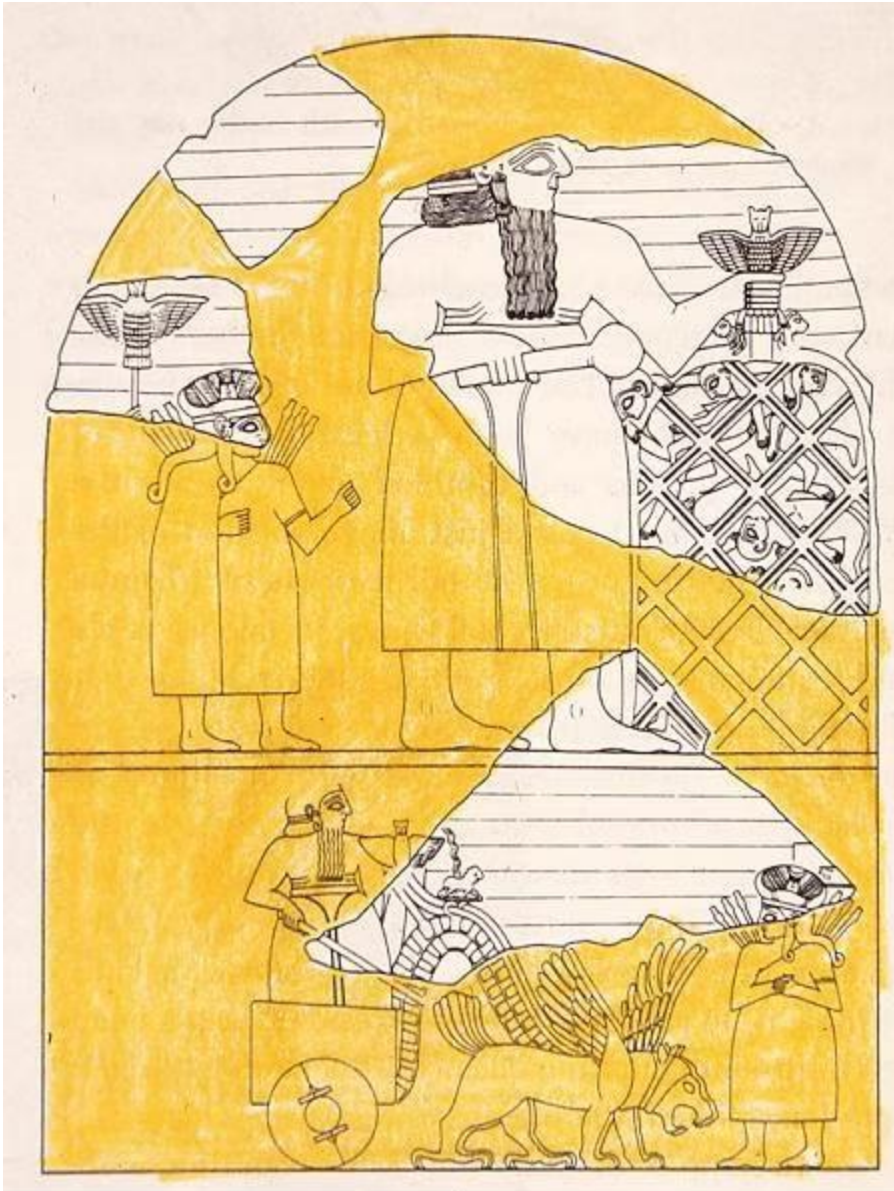
The **vultures** on the Vulture Stele.



Eannatum leading his men to victory. They march over the bodies of their enemies. The stele commemorates Lagash's victory against the neighboring city of Umma. Lagash and Umma had a long on-going struggle that lasted for many generations as they battled for possession of the Guedena, the fertile fields that lay between the two cities. For a history of the conflict, see [War: Umma and Lagash](#).



Line drawing of the Vulture Stele. Click on the drawing to enlarge it. See magnified views of the [front](#) and [back](#) of the stele.

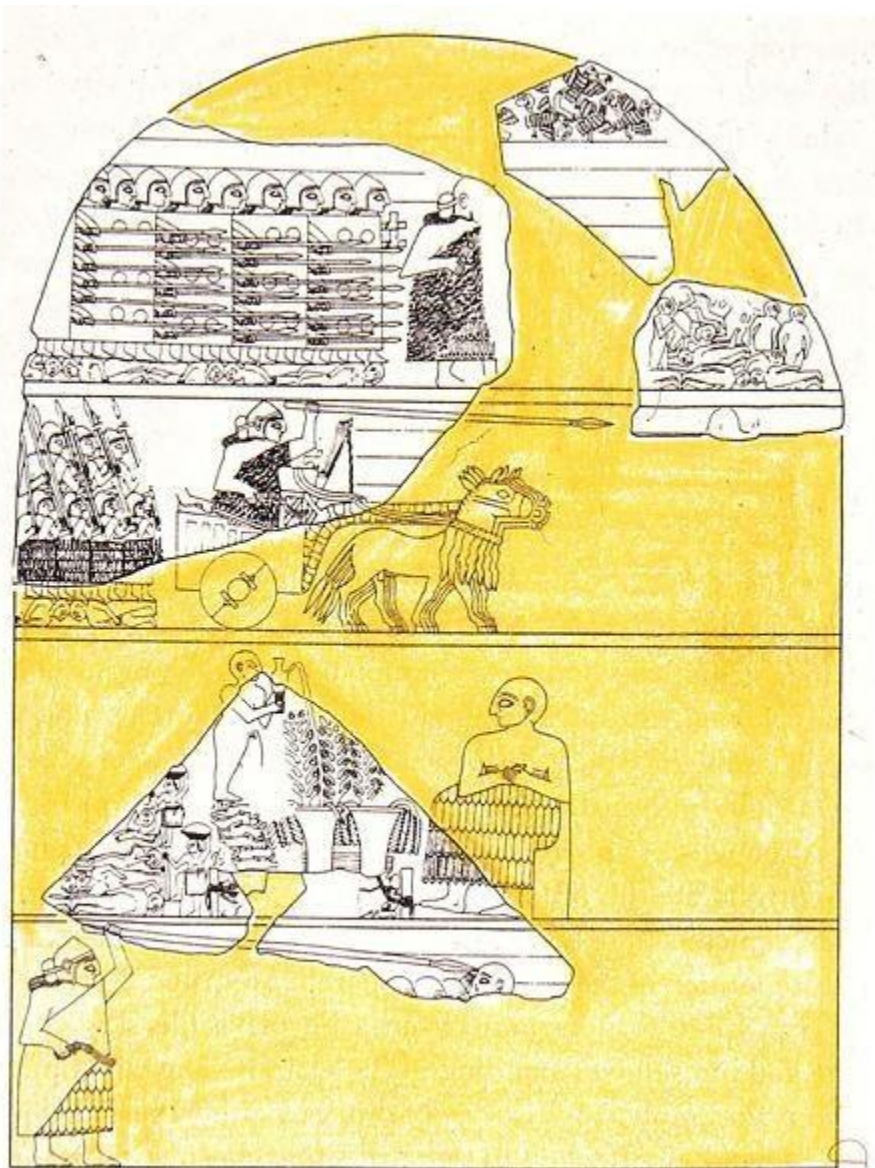


Vulture Stele, obverse. The shadowed portions of the stele are the parts that are missing. On the front of the stele is the war god Ningirsu holding a net full of captives. Using a mace, he strikes the head of a prisoner who is struggling to escape. The net is held shut by [Anzud](#), the lion-headed eagle, the god of storms. He was the "animal familiar" of Ningirsu, and thus symbolized war. Anzud is also represented as a battle standard on both registers. Inanna, the war goddess, appears with Ningirsu on both registers. Eannatum thus attributes his victory to the gods.

Eannatum, the son of Akurgal, claimed that his "divine father" was the war god Ningirsu. His name is a tribute to Inanna, the goddess of war. The E-anna was her most important temple. As described in the translation below, "she called him a good name." E-anna-tum means "Befitting the E-anna (temple)." Eannatum was born to be a warrior.

The Louvre, where the stele is kept, has the goddess on the front of the stele misidentified as Nanshe, rather than her sister, Inanna. Nanshe is a water goddess associated with fertility and social justice. Inanna is a war goddess who is usually portrayed with maces behind her, as shown above.

According to the inscriptions, Ningirsu came to Eannatum in a dream and told him to commence the war with Umma, assuring him of victory. Ningirsu was not just the god of war, he was also the patron deity of the city of Lagash. The front of the stele is meant to show that Eannatum's war with Umma was sanctioned by the gods.



Vulture Stele, reverse.

On the back of the stele, Eannatum leads his troops to victory on foot and in a chariot. On top, vultures feed on the enemy dead. In the second register, Eannatum's soldiers attack in a phalanx formation, trampling the bodies of their enemies. They are identically armed and equipped with spears, battle axes, shields, and copper helmets. At this period of history, copper was scarce, so swords were not used by the infantry. The spots on the shields are the identifying insignia of the army, to make the soldiers recognizable on the battlefield. The soldiers attack in a tight, disciplined formation, with many men acting as a single unit. This is not a chaotic melee of individual warriors engaged in single combat that is typical of the more primitive forms of ancient battles. The Vulture Stele, along with the Standard of Ur, is the world's first depiction of organized "modern" warfare. On the right, [enemy bodies](#) pile up before the onslaught of Eannatum's army while the enemies who are still alive run away in full retreat. It looks as if [one of them](#) is actually climbing over the mound of his dead and dying comrades in a mad scramble to escape. The enemies are shown naked to symbolize their abject defeat.

In the second register, Eannatum attacks in a chariot. His chariot is equipped with maces, javelins, and a battleaxe. He charges into battle wielding a sickle sword in one hand and a giant spear in the other. These details are best seen in a [separate picture](#). There has been some debate on whether or not the curved weapon is actually a sickle sword. It is composed of three strips banded together with metal straps, which seems like an unlikely construction for a sword. In any case, it serves the same purpose, being a curved weapon that is used for striking and slashing. The drawing shows the chariot as a two-wheel vehicle, but it is in fact a four-wheel vehicle, like the chariots on the Standard of Ur, because it carries two passengers. The arm of another soldier (driver) is shown in the damaged area behind Eannatum.

The stele shows Eannatum leading his men into combat. This not just a propaganda ploy meant to imply that he is a great warrior, it reflects the story told in the inscriptions:

They fought each other,
and towards Enanatum
a man shot an arrow.
He was penetrated by the arrow,
but he broke it off.

He then continues the attack at the front of his men. This proves that Eannatum personally led his men into combat. He wasn't the kind of general who directed the battle from the safety of the rear lines.

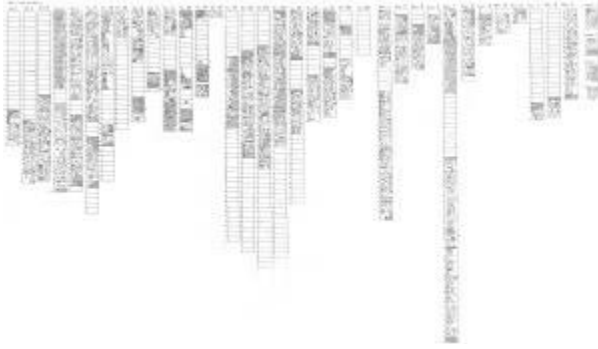
In the third register, Eannatum presides over the funeral rites of the men. A naked priest (Sumerian priests were often portrayed naked) pours libations from a spouted vessel onto a row of plants (perhaps date palms, symbolic of victory) watering them to overflowing. [A bull](#), lying on the ground and tied to a stake, is about to be sacrificed in thanksgiving to the gods.

Though it's been said Eannatum is presiding over the funeral rites of his men, the funeral is actually for the enemy dead. The scene shows men with baskets of soil on their heads having to climb [ladders](#) in order to dump the dirt on top of the bodies. It's highly unlikely that Eannatum would portray such a gruesome reminder of the high cost of his victory. Instead, the scene depicts a story told by the inscriptions on the Vulture Stele: "Umma he defeated, and its 20 tumuli [burial mounds] he heaped up." By conducting the funerary rites, Eannatum is being properly respectful to the enemy dead. After all, they are fellow Sumerians.

The format of the stele suggests there may have been two battles, one in front of the city during the siege, and one inside of the city after it was taken by storm. The bottom register shows Eannatum reaching across with a long spear and stabbing someone in the face. The person is drawn larger than the other men to indicate his greater importance. This is probably the king of Umma, "Usurdu, by name," and thus is symbolized his death.



The soldiers on the Vulture Stele, partially restored. Click on the picture to see the image in its original condition.



The inscriptions on the Vulture Stele

Translation of Eannatum's Vulture Stele from [CDLI P222399](#).

Obverse (front): Note: The CDLI uses the current spelling of Eannatum (with one "n").

[...]
... its subsistence rations he {the king of Umma} reduced.
Its grain rent he took away.
The king of Lagash
[...]

In the ... of ...
the ruler of Umma, an aggressive act
he committed against it,
and into Lagash, up to its frontier
he pressed.

Akurgal, king of Lagash,
son of Ur-Nanshe, king of Lagash,
[...]

The ruler of Umma
an aggressive act he committed against it,
and into Lagash,
because of its own possessions,
up to its frontier he again pressed.

The ... Lion
of the Heart of the Princely Way,
Ningirsu, in his (own) voice

he made a claim(?) within the wind:
Umma
my settled grasses, my own possessions,
in the field of the Gu'edena,
Lagash
shall ... its
Lord Ningirsu,
the hero of Enlil,
...
he does proclaim(?).

Ningirsu
the semen of Eanatum
in the womb he did implant.
[...]
he rejoiced over him.
Inanna took a place at his side.
For “the Eanna of Inanna
of the Great Oval He is Fitting”
she named him,
and Ninhursaga, on her right knee,
she had her seat him.
Ninhursaga her right breast
she extended to him.
Over Eanatum, the one whose semen
was implanted in the womb by Ningirsu,
Ningirsu rejoiced.
Ningirsu, his span he laid upon him.
Five cubits it was,
his span he laid upon him.
Five cubits, one span!

Ningirsu, with great joyfulness,
the kingship of Lagash
he gave to him.

The ... of the god ...,
Eanatum, the mighty, proclaims:
It is an enemy land because of him!
For Eanatum, the name by which Inanna
had called him, (namely) “For the Eanna

of Inanna of the Great Oval he is Fitting,”
I have set(?) as the name of him.
His name in heaven and earth.

[...]
Eanatum, one having strength,
nominated by Ningirsu,
Eanatum,
that it should be established as an enemy land because of him,
as an eternal thing,
he proclaimed.
“The ruler of Umma, where has he (ever) been appeased?
With ... men ...
the Gu'edena, the beloved field of Ningirsu,
he has been able to exploit.
Let him be cast down!”

By An, numerous ...
[...]
after him
they followed.

To him who lay sleeping,
to him who lay sleeping,
he came to stand by his head.
To Eanatum, him who lay sleeping,
his beloved king, Ningirsu,
came to stand by his head. {Ningirsu is speaking to Eannatum in a dream}
[...]

“Umma, like Kish, (It's believed that the Akkadian king of Kish was allied with Umma)
shall therefore wander about,
and by means of ones seized by anger(?)
shall surely be removed.
On your right side, Utu {the sun god}
I shall let come forth upon you.
On your forehead
[...]
I shall let be bound upon you.”

Eanatum
[...]

him I shall smite,
and their myriad corpses
I shall make stretch to the horizon.
Umma ...

[...]

They shall raise a hand against him,
and in the heart of Umma
they shall kill him.

Usurdu, by name, {Usurdu is probably the name of the king of Umma}
[...]

They fought each other,
and towards Enanatum
a man shot an arrow.

He was penetrated by the arrow,
but he broke it off(?). {This shows that Eannatum personally led his men into combat}
In front of them he made noises with ...

A man of the wind ...

[...]

Eanatum, in Umma
like a destructive storm of rain
he left behind a deluge.

[...]

Eanatum,
a man of just words,
had a border territory
from Umma marked off,
and under the control of Umma
he left it.
He erected a stele in that place.

The ruler of Umma

[...]

Umma he defeated,
and twenty tumuli for it
he heaped up there.

Eanatum, wept over with sweet tears (of joy)
by Shul-MUSHxPA, {Eanatum's personal god}

Eanatum,

[...]

Eanatum, for Ningirsu
obliterated many foreign lands.
Eanatum to Ningirsu, his beloved field
the Gu'edena, he returned.

[...]

The fields by his side,
the interest-bearing places
of Ningirsu,

[...]

The Emah

[...]

he erected a stele.

[...]

of Ningirsu,

Eanatum

[...]

of Ningirsu,
his (personal) god Shul-MUSHxPA,
the field Bara

[...]

the field ...,
the field Gesugga,
the field ...,
the field ...,
the field ...,
the field ...,
the field ...,
the field ...,
the field ...,
the field ...,

[...]

Eanatum, the one nominated by Ningirsu,
he returned it to him.

To the ruler of Umma {Enkale is now the new king of Umma}

Eanatum, the great casting-net of Enlil
he gave to him, and had him swear by it.

The ruler of Umma to Eanatum does swear:

“By the life of Enlil,
king of heaven and earth,
the fields of Ningirsu

I shall exploit as an interest-bearing loan.
I shall operate the levees up to the spring,
and forever and ever(?)
over the boundary territory of Ningirsu
I shall not cross.
To its levees and irrigation ditches
I shall not make changes.
Its steles I shall not smash to bits.
On a day when I may cross over it,
the great casting-net of Enlil,
king of heaven and earth,
by which I have sworn,
upon Umma
may it fall from the sky!"

Eanatum was furthermore very clever.
Two doves they were,
he put kohl on their eyes
and spread cedar (resin) on their heads.
For Enlil, king of heaven and earth,
toward Nippur in the Ekur
he released them. {to carry the promises to Enlil}

{Eannatum doesn't believe the king's oath, so he makes him swear it again to the other gods.}

"To Enlil, my king,
over what he has declared
and what he has reiterated,
the ruler of Umma
as one having come back with a claim,
if he shall impede it,
or produce a claim (about it),
on the day when these words he may alter,
the great casting-net of Enlil,
by which he has sworn,
upon Umma
may it fall from the sky!"

{Many repetitious lines omitted, as the oath is repeated for the other gods; Ninhursag, Enki, Suen, Utu, and Ninkî}

Reverse (back):

Eanatum, king of Lagash,
given strength by Enlil,
fed wholesome milk by Ninhursaga,
called a good name by Inana,
given wisdom by Enki,
chosen by the heart of Nanshe
the powerful mistress,
the subjugator of many foreign lands
of Ningirsu,
the beloved of Dumu-abzu,
nominated by Hendursag,
beloved friend of Lugaluru,
beloved husband of Inanna.

Elam and Subartu,
the lands of timber and goods,
he defeated.
[...]
... he defeated.
Susa he defeated.
The Standard of Uru,
though by its ruler,
it had been set up at the head (of it),
he defeated it.

[several lines missing]
... he defeated,
and Arua he obliterated.
The ... of Sumer,
Ur he defeated.
[19 lines missing]
who the Gu'edena had returned,
Eanatum,
[19 lines missing]
who for Ningirsu had erected it,
[19 lines missing]
and that by his mind becomes known,
the king of Kish,

[column missing]

The stele, its name

is not that of a man, rather its name says:

Ningirsu, the Lord, the Crown of Lumma,

is the Life of the Lion of the Plain Canal.

The stele of the Gu'edena,

the beloved field of Ningirsu,

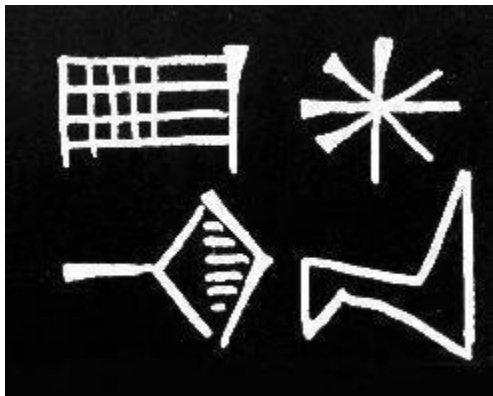
which Eanatum to Ningirsu had returned,

he erected for him.

Edge:

Eanatum, the subjugator of many foreign lands of Ningirsu.

Eanatum, the subjugator of all the foreign lands of Ningirsu.



E2-an-na-tum2