(A) Lugal-zagesi’s vase inscription (Uruk, 24th c. BC)
To Enlil, king of all lands,

When to Lugal-za-ges-i, king of Uruk, king of the Land, ishib priest of An, lumah priest of Nisaba, child of Bubu, ruler of Umma, lumah priest of Nisaba, the one looked upon favourably by An, king of all lands, chief governor of Enlil, the one given wisdom by Enki, nominee of Utu, chancellor of Suen, general of Utu, provider of Inana, the child born by Nisaba, nourished on rich milk by Ninhursagna, the man of Mesh-sagga-Unuga, the servant reared by Ningirim, the lady of Uruk, chief steward of the gods, Enlil, the king of all lands, gave the rule over the Land, made the Land obedient to him, placed all the lands at his feet, made them submit to him from east to west, then he made the roads passable for him from the Lower Sea along the Tigris and the Euphrates to the Upper Sea.

As Enlil made him a man without opponent from east to west, all the lands lay down contentedly thanks to him, the Land made merry thanks to him, and the sovereigns of Sumer and the rulers of all lands bowed down before the territory of Uruk towards the princely divine powers because of him.

At that time, while Uruk passed the days in joy, Ur raised his head high like a bull; while Larsam, Utu’s beloved city, made merry, Umma, Shara’s beloved city, lifted its great horns; while the territory of Zabala cried out like a ewe reunited with (its) lamb, Kian raised its neck high.

At the morning and evening meals, Lugal-za-ges-i, king of Uruk, king of the Land, provided lavish food offerings and libated sweet water for Enlil, his master, in Nippur (saying):

‘May Enlil, the king of all lands, by all means pray to An, his beloved father on my behalf, so that he may extend my life, the lands may lie down contentedly thanks to me, the people may spread wide as the grass thanks to me, the udders of heaven may be ready (to be milked) thanks to me, and the people experience prosperity thanks to me! May they not revoke the good fate determined to me, so that I remain the foremost shepherd forever!’

He dedicated this (vase) to Enlil, his beloved master, for his well-being.

(B) Iri-kagina 5 (Lagash, i.e. 24th c. BC)
✓ The leader of Umma set fire to the boundary levees.
✓ He set fire to the Antasura. He seized all its precious metal and lapis lazuli.
✓ He looted the great temple of Tirash.
✓ He looted the Abzu-banda.
✓ He looted the pedestal of Enlil and the pedestal of Utu.
✓ He looted the Ahush. He seized all its precious metal and lapis lazuli.
✓ He looted the E-babbar. He seized all its precious metal and lapis lazuli.
✓ He looted the high temple of Ninmah in Tirkug. He seized all its precious metal and lapis lazuli.
✓ He looted the Bagara. He seized all its precious metal and lapis lazuli.
✓ He set fire to the Dugru. He seized all its precious metal and lapis lazuli.
✓ He looted the Abzu-ega.
✓ He set fire to the temple of Ġatumdug. He seized all its precious metal and lapis lazuli. He destroyed all its statues.
✓ He set fire to Inana’s oval E-ana. He seized all its precious metal and lapis lazuli. He destroyed all its statues.
The vase inscription of Lugal-zagesi and the history of his reign
Gábor Zólyomi, CEU-IAS seminar, 23 January 2013

- He looted the Shagepada. He seized all its precious metal and lapis lazuli.
- In Henda he tore down all the canopies.
- In Kieša, he looted the temple of Nindara. He seized all its precious metal and lapis lazuli.
- In Kinunir, he set fire to the temple of Dumzid-abzu. He seized all its precious metal and lapis lazuli.
- He set fire to the temple of Lugal-Uruba. He seized all its precious metal and lapis lazuli.
- He looted the E-engura of Nanshe. He seized all its precious metal and lapis lazuli.
- In Sagub, he looted the temple of Ama-geshtin. He seized all her precious metal and lapis lazuli from (the statue of) Ama-geshtin, and threw (the statue) in (the temple’s) well.
- He tore out the barley of all the cultivated fields of Ningirsu.

Having raided Lagash, the leader of Umma surely committed a sin against Ningirsu! He raised a hand against him, (and that hand) must be cut off! Iri-kagina, the king of Girsu, is not capable of punishment. May Nisaba, the personal god of Lugal-zagesi, the ruler of Umma, take the responsibility for the punishment!

(C) Sargon 1, 1–80 (Agade, 24th c. BC)
Sharrukin, king of Agade, commissioner of Inana, king of the world, ishib priest of An, king of the Land, chief governor of Enlil, conquered the city of Uruk and demolished its city-walls.

He fought with Lugal-zagesi, king of Uruk, captured him, and took him to the gate of Enlil in a neck stock.

Sharrukin, king of Agade, fought with the leader of Ur and defeated him. He conquered his city and demolished its city-walls.

He conquered the temple of Ninmarki, and demolished its walls. From Lagaš until the sea he conquered all lands, all of them, and washed his weapons in the sea.

He fought with the leader of Umma and defeated him. He conquered his city and demolished its city-walls.

Enlil made Sharrukin, king of the Land, a man without opponent, and gave him (all the people) from the Upper sea to the Lower sea. From the Lower sea, the citizen of Agade exercised rulership.

(1) A. Westenholz (1977), ‘Diplomatic and commercial aspects of temple offerings as illustrated by a newly discovered text’, Iraq 39, 19–21 (pp. 19–20).

“In his third year in office, Urukagina had sensed the threatening danger, the thunderclouds that were gathering in Umma. He tried to stave off the impending catastrophe by diplomacy. He and his wife embarked on a goodwill mission by donating sacrifices to the principal gods of Umma and Nippur. The offerings were made in Nippur because Enil, the chief god of that city, held the key to the kingship of all Sumer and had bestowed it on Lugalzagesi, the ambitious ensi of Umma. The offerings may even have been brought on the occasion of Lugalzagesi’s coronation in Nippur.

As we all know, Urukagina failed miserably in his attempt to reach a peaceful understanding with Lugalzagesi. Maurice Lambert, has plausibly suggested that the king of Umma made such excessive demands as a condition for peace that Urukagina had to refuse. The war then dragged on for the next four years, apparently with mixed success for both sides: it severely strained the economy of Lagaš, but Lugalzagesi could not break the resistance and win a decisive victory. In exasperation, he made a savage attack on a number of relatively unprotected sanctuaries and temples which he plundered and burned. The old cities Uruku and Kinunir had no strategic significance since they lay much farther away than Girsu, both from Umma and from Uruk. Uruku had been abandoned as a residential city since ED II and was a purely ceremonial centre. Yet Lugalzagesi ruthlessly destroyed it all.

Such an attack on the unprotected sanctuaries was surely something that Lugalzagesi could have done all the time if he had wanted to. That he did not do it earlier in the war shows
that he only made the attack as a last resort, when everything else had failed.

The immediate effect of this stunning blow was probably similar in many ways to that of Sargon II’s surprise attack on the Urartian holy city Musasir. Urukagina was forced to capitulate. It seems that many people in Lagas thought that Urukagina himself was in some way responsible for the disaster — otherwise the author of the famous account of the destruction would scarcely have found it necessary to say so categorically that Urukagina was guilty of no wrongdoing. After all, he had meddled extensively with the cult, and had in this and other ways presumably made many enemies who would see the destruction as a divine punishment. Urukagina was accursed.

On the other hand, Lugalzagesi would have only scant occasion for enjoying his victory. His attack on the defenceless temples and sanctuaries must have been widely regarded as an unforgivable sacrilege, and doubtless he was told so in no uncertain terms next time he appeared in Nippur. It is perhaps no accident that Lagas is passed over in complete silence in Lugalzagesi’s long inscription. And when Lugalzagesi had been defeated by Sargon, and both Lagas and Umma were made provinces of the Sargonic Empire, all the lands which Urukagina had lost were restored to Lagas — much as the statues which Sargon II had taken in Musasir were returned the following year.

“An energetic and ambitious ensi of Umma, Lugalzagesi, marched against Girsu, took it and destroyed it, thus avenging two centuries of defeat. On the shoulders of the city, an unknown scribe sat later to write a lamentation which has come down to us. ... But the curse had no immediate effect. After Lagash, Lugalzagesi took Uruk and established himself as king of that city. He then proceeded to conquer the rest of Sumer and apparently succeeded. Indeed, on a vase dedicated to Enlil in Nippur he claims conquests embracing the whole of Mesopotamia as well as Syria. ... It is difficult to believe that Lugalzagesi possessed in fact such an empire. Perhaps this is no more than a piece of grandiloquence; perhaps the King of Uruk has managed to obtain the submission or the alliance of the Semites of Mari, who, in turn, might have held the Semites of Syria under their political influence.”

“... competition for dominance that resulted in the formation in late ED III of larger political units: the state of Lagash itself included the centres of Girsu and Nina in addition to the eponymous city …; Umma its hostile neighbor, also included the important town Zabala; to the west and south of Lagash, Uruk and Ur were united under the rule of Lugalkiginedudu shortly before 2400, and expanded later to absorb the whole state of Umma as well. This move effectively isolated Lagash, and perhaps contributed to its eventual defeat .... The culmination of the struggle came with Lugalzagesi, ruler of the Uruk-Ur-Umma unit, who eventually claimed lordship of the entire region. With lengthy phrases and elaborate epithets, he presented himself as appointed by the patron-deities of various conquered cities to rulership of the land, set over the whole country by the head of the Sumerian pantheon, Enlil of Nippur, and claiming to control the road ‘from the Upper Sea (Mediterranean) to the Lower Sea’ (the Gulf). The bitter sentiments of the defeated king of Lagash, Uru’imingina, now reduced to ruling, a mere rump state at Girsu, are also preserved:”

“... process of conquest and unification came to an end at the close of the Early Dynastic period, when the king of Umma, Lugalzagesi, conquered Ur and Uruk and then defeated Uru’imingina of Lagash, thus taking control over the entire south of Babylonia. True, he may have overstated his accomplishments in his own inscriptions, in which he claimed control from the Upper to the Lower sea, that is he Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf. But certainly the extent of his power reached beyond the traditional borders of a single city state.”
The vase inscription of Lugal-zagesi and the history of his reign
Gábor Zólyomi, CEU-IAS seminar, 23 January 2013

“Lugalzagesi, who controlled Uruk, Umma, and several other southern cities, acted as the focus of opposition to Sargon, and the latter claimed that he captured ‘fifty governors ... and the king of Uruk’, a victory that clinched his control over the entire region.”


“At the very end of the Early Dynastic, in the third year if the last independent ruler of Lagaš, UruKAgina, we happen to know that his wife sent an extensive offering of different kinds of fish to Nippur. This is obviously some move in the complex diplomatic game of the time, and underlines the potential role of a religious centre in the realm of secular politics. This comes out much more clearly in an almost contemporary inscription found on a great number of stone bowls excavated at the central shrine of Enlil .... Its presentation of the ideology surrounding the events is so precise as to make it worth quoting in full. Here, at its most explicit, is the formal ideology of Sumerian politics: Lugal-zagesi, who originated from Umma, tells us that as a result of his military or political prowess he has achieved the domination of Sumer, expressed as being given the Kingship of the Land by Enlil; hence his dedication of these of these bowls to him at Nippur.

We know very little more of the events led to Lugal-zagesi’s rise; he seems to claim to have marched from the Gulf to the Mediterranean. He mentions only a few of the traditional cities of The Land, and we are unable to assess the significance of the omissions: were they not, at the time of the inscription, under his control, or is the list very selective? One city he does not mention is Lagaš, where ironically his activity is best attested, in the shape of a sack of temples in the countryside which was the subject of a lamentation condemning him and exonerating UruKAgina, the ensi Lagaš at the time.


“[Lugalzagesi’s inscription] was inscribed on no less than sixty-four different vases. The vases may have represented some kind of ritual offering in honor of Lugalzagesi by those allied with him, and it is possible that the title ensi of Umma is deliberately avoided. In any case, the appearance of high ranking foreign officials as allotment holders at Zabala in texts dated to the seventh year of Lugalzagesi’s ensiship is a clear indication that the accumulation of powers which led his hegemony over Sumer as a whole is already underway by this time. Indirectly, it also suggest that this hegemony may be due more to diplomacy than to military conquest, an inference that is supported by the intricate network of titles recorded in the Lugalzagesi votive inscription .... In the end, however, all of this evidence serves not so much to provide answers to our questions as to point up our ignorance of this important, transitional era in Sumerian history.”