



GUTIANS

GUTIANS, name used in ancient Mesopotamian texts to refer to a variety of people, mostly from the Zagros mountain area.

In the astronomical and astrological literature of the first millennium B.C.E. from Babylonia (modern southern Iraq), the four cardinal points were indicated with the terms Amurru, Akkad, Elam, and Subartu. The last term was used interchangeably with the term Gutium, and referred to the north or the east (Rochberg-Halton, pp. 51-55). The point of view reflected was from the south of Babylonia, and modern scholars (e.g., Potts, pp. 121-22) usually state that Gutium was located in the Zagros mountains to the east of Babylonia and the north of Elam. Already the fluctuation of the direction indicated and the variation of names suggest, however, that the geographical location of Gutium was not fixed and depended on the context. The same is true for the term Subartu (Michalowski, 1986) with which Gutium was closely related. Both terms were taken from the names of people perceived to have lived in lands adjacent to Mesopotamia. The geographical name Gutium, and the indication of people as Gutians, is attested in the Mesopotamian record from the mid-third to the late first millennium B.C.E. It is highly improbable that the name Gutians always referred to the same group of people and Gutium to the same region. Evidence from the second and first millennia mostly suggests an eastern location from a Mesopotamian point of view, but we cannot say that this was true earlier when the Gutians were most important in Mesopotamian history.

The Gutians as a people appear first in mid-third millennium sources from



Babylonia under the Akkad dynasty (ca. 2350-2200 B.C.E.). They are depicted as raiders who disrupt agricultural life (Michalowski, 1993, pp. 27-8), and in later tradition are blamed for the fall of the Akkad dynasty. It is uncertain that they truly were responsible for this and that they invaded Babylonia. More likely Gutians took advantage of the political difficulties of the Akkadian kings to gain a political foothold in some cities (Glassner, pp. 46-50). *The Sumerian King List*, an early second millennium record of early kings of Babylonia and the lengths of their reigns, indicates the existence of a Gutian dynasty after the Akkadian one, with twenty-one or twenty-three kings, depending on the manuscript, and a duration of about one hundred years (Jacobsen, 1939, pp. 116-21). An early second millennium tablet contains copies of royal inscriptions on three statues set up by the Gutian king Erridu-pizir in the religiously important city of Nippur (Kutscher, pp. 49-70). This indicates that such rulers indeed existed and that their memory was not erased later on. The *Sumerian King List* provides too many names for the Gutian kings to have ruled in succession, however, and probably different cities were under contemporaneous Gutian rulers. Simultaneously some cities were under native control. The Gutian presence in Babylonia probably did not last more than fifty years (Hallo, pp. 713-14), after which they were expelled by a native king of Uruk called Utu-hegal. Like many other foreign groups that temporarily exercised political control in parts of Babylonia, they did not leave an imprint on the culture or the language. The Gutian language is primarily known from some personal names and only one of their gods is known from a list of divine names (Hallo, p. 719). They are always portrayed in extremely negative terms: They do not perform proper religious rites (Grayson, p. 149) and abuse the people of Babylonia by taking away the wife from the husband, the child from the parent (Frayne, pp. 284-93). One literary text from the early second millennium calls them “(of) human face, dogs’ cunning, monkey’s build” (Jacobsen, 1987, p. 368). We can thus conclude that for a while parts of Babylonia were politically controlled by people called Gutians, who were perceived as foreign and barbaric by the native population. Where they came from is not clear.

The terms Gutium and Gutians continued to be used in texts from northern and southern Mesopotamia during the second and first millennia. Often they refer to a region or people from the Zagros mountains, and are found together with other equally vague terms, such as Subartu and Lullumu. The persistent use of what must by then have been considered an ancient name was the result of the ideology that time stood still outside Mesopotamia’s borders and



that no change took place there. Thus the term Gutian has no value as indication of a specific people and merely suggests uncivilized people from the Zagros. Any hostile group could be called Gutian. The Assyrian royal annals use the word Gutians when they refer to Iranian populations otherwise known as the Mannaeans or the Medes (Parpola, p. 138). The negative image persists: In the fifteenth century the Babylonian king Agum-kakrime calls them “a barbarous people” (Reiner, p. 80). The seventh-century Assyrian king Assurbanipal accuses Gutians of assisting the rebellious Babylonians (Luckenbill, p. 301), while the sixth century Babylonian king Nabonidus stated that they destroyed the temple at Sippar (Oppenheim, p. 309).

In the first millennium Gutium could be used as a geographical designator to refer to all or part of the Zagros region north of Elam, interchangeably with other terms. When Cyrus II The Great (q.v.) attacked Babylonia in 539 B.C.E., he did so with the help of Ugbaru, Nabonidus’ governor of the land of Gutium (Oppenheim, p. 306). In this context the term seems to refer to a large region east of the Tigris River which Cyrus used as a launching pad for his invasion. Ugbaru was probably the Gobryas (q.v.) reported by Xenophon to have switched allegiance to Persia and to have led the army against Babylonia (Briant, pp. 51-52).

While many references to Gutians and Gutium can be collected (Hallo), they do not allow us to write the history of a people or a country. The Mesopotamians used the terms in a variety of ways, depending on the context. At times they may have had a particular region and people in mind, at other times they used the terms to indicate diverse non-Mesopotamian lands or peoples.

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