

Piotr Steinkeller

# **History, Texts and Art in Early Babylonia**

---

Three Essays

**DE GRUYTER**

ISBN 978-1-5015-1330-5  
e-ISBN (PDF) 978-1-5015-0477-8  
e-ISBN (EPUB) 978-1-5015-0475-4  
ISSN 2161-4415

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

A CIP catalog record for this book has been applied for at the Library of Congress.

**Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek**

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie;  
detailed bibliographic data are available in the Internet at <http://dnb.dnb.de>.

© 2017 Walter de Gruyter Inc., Boston/Berlin  
Printing: Hubert & Co. GmbH & Co. KG, Göttingen  
♻️ Printed on acid-free paper  
Printed in Germany

[www.degruyter.com](http://www.degruyter.com)

# The Divine Rulers of Akkade and Ur: Toward a Definition of the Deification of Kings in Babylonia

When Alexander had defeated Darius and taken over the Persian empire he was very proud of his achievement. Feeling himself raised to the level of divinity by the good fortune which had now overtaken him, he sent an introduction to the Greeks to vote him divine honors. This was ridiculous; he could not acquire on demand from the rest of mankind what nature had not endowed him with. The cities passed various decrees, and the Spartans resolved as follows: "Since Alexander wishes to be a god, let him be a god."

Aelian, *Varia Historia* Book 2.19

## 1 Preface

This essay discusses the deification of living kings in ancient Mesopotamia, a phenomenon involving two, nearly consecutive episodes of brief duration. Lasting together no more than 120 years, these two experiments occurred toward the end of the third millennium BC, during the Sargonic and Ur III periods respectively. The briefness of this phenomenon becomes even more apparent when one considers that the political history of ancient Mesopotamia is textually documented over a period of three millennia – if not significantly longer.

This topic has attracted a good deal of attention during the last decade or so. Here one should single out the collection of papers from a conference held in 2007 at the University of Chicago's Oriental Institute, which addressed the question of the divine kingship in Mesopotamia and other parts of the ancient world (Brisch 2008). There subsequently appeared articles by Nicole Brisch (2013), Talalay Ornan (2013), and Anne Porter (2013), which likewise take up the subject of Mesopotamian divine kings.

A common thread that runs through these recent discussions is the tendency to minimize the exceptionality of the divination of the Sargonic and Ur III kings, or, in other words, to relativize it. Many of these authors find evidence, either before or after the two episodes in question, of allegedly similar expressions of the divinity of rulers. According to those views, the divination of the Sargonic and Ur III kings was but a more radical manifestation of a trend that was an integral part of the politico-religious ideology throughout the history of ancient Mesopotamia. In particular, scholars such as Gebhard Selz (2008), Irene Winter (2008: 81), and Talalay Ornan (2013) think that, already in Pre-Sargonic times, one finds prefigurations or foreshadowings of the divine ruler. The evidence cited

in support of this contention are the epithets used by certain Pre-Sargonic kings, which allegedly describe them as being “born” by various deities. As argued by Selz (2008: 20), these epithets “testify to a certain divinity of these kings.” Tallay Ornan (2013: 572) is even more assertive about this point, stating that the Pre-Sargonic written sources from Lagaš portray kings as being divine. While not going that far, Walther Sallaberger (1999: 153) submits that the use of such epithets makes the Pre-Sargonic ruler practically a member of the divine family.<sup>291</sup>

Anne Porter takes an even more radical position on the question of divine kings. In an article that denies the very existence of the Sargonic empire (2013),<sup>292</sup> Porter also questions the historicity of Naram-Suen’s deification. This — sorry to say — misinformed, confused, and pretentious piece might perhaps be excused as an unfortunate foray of a misguided archaeologist into the matters of history. At the same time, while extreme in its conclusions and even bizarre at times,<sup>293</sup> Porter’s opinions in many respects are symptomatic of some of the current thinking about the divinization of kings in Babylonia. For this reason, it will be instructive to quote the basic premise of her article:

Although there is by no means unanimity, there is a general acceptance of the idea that Naram-Sin was indeed deified during his life time ... I am not of such opinion. Naram-Sin’s apotheosis to godhead may be challenged on a number of fronts, not least of which is its incompatibility with indigenous conceptions of what was possible and was permissible in this regard. Moreover, each detail of the evidence – the precise meaning and usage of the divine determinative, dingir; the origins and chronology of its application to Naram-Sin; the historicity of the one direct allusion to Naram-Sin’s divinization; and the significance of the horned cap he wears on the Victory Stele – is insecure. (2013: 602)<sup>294</sup>

---

**291** “Der Herrscher ist Kind, Geliebter, Bevorzugter, Erwählter, Beschenkter der Götter in Inschriften ab altsumerischer Zeit, steht damit den Göttern bis hin zur Einbindung in die Familie nahe.”

**292** Porter even denies the existence of Sargonic territorial expansion. See especially *ibid.* 609: “royal inscriptions registering campaigns in an area do not mean those areas were necessarily incorporated into the kingdom – they do not even mean there were campaigns!” Although it is likely that most of the foreign lands conquered by Sargon and his successors were never incorporated into Babylonia, with the Sargonic kings retaining only a loose control of those territories, their interest there being mainly of a commercial nature, to claim that they never campaigned in the periphery is absurd. Even a cursory reading of the Sargonic historical records (as edited, e.g., in RIME 2) shows that this view is patently wrong.

**293** This pertains particularly to Porter’s idea that, rather than conquering foreign lands, Sargonic rulers were merely marking their presence there, by gifting their monuments and other artifacts to those lands (meaning that there was no territorial expansion of any sort).

**294** In agreement with her general thesis, Porter also questions the divinity of Ur III kings (2013: 599 n. 4).



One reads this exposé with disbelief, since no reputable scholar working today in the field of third-millennium history, religion, and culture would seriously question the fact of Naram-Suen's deification. Moreover, no insecurity attaches to any of the points raised by Porter: the use of the divine determinative DINGIR in reference to mortal kings; the facts and the historical background of Naram-Suen's deification; and the significance of the divine crown he wears in two of his representations. As generally accepted, all of these are solidly established and well-understood facts. Porter's only valid observation is that Naram-Suen's deification was incompatible with the existing ideology. But it was precisely *because it violated the very order of things* that Naram-Suen's godship constituted such a revolutionary (as well as highly controversial) politico-religious development. See in detail below pp. 123–124, 130–131.

That such opinions could be voiced in this time and age is surprising, demonstrating how little is known in terms of factual information about the phenomenon of deified kings in the field of Mesopotamian studies. This situation calls for a systematic examination of the evidence bearing on this issue. Hence the present study.

Before I get down to my task in earnest, however, some general observations about the divine kingship are necessary. To begin with, throughout recorded history kingship – any kingship – always had an element of sacredness attached to it, in that kings universally were believed to share a special relationship with the divine realm. As the renowned anthropologist Edward Evans-Pritchard has put it, “kingship everywhere and at all times has been in some degree a sacred office” (1962: 210). Evans-Pritchard then goes on to cite the famous medieval maxim which says: *Rex est mixta persona cum sacerdote*. This sacred dimension of the royal office is usually described by the term “sacrality.” Sacrality, however, is fundamentally different from the phenomenon of divine kingship.<sup>295</sup> In fact, it will be correct to say these are two different *ontological* categories. If I am allowed to make a glib analogy, to be a divine king is like being pregnant: you either are pregnant or you are not. And this is why certain individuals, exceedingly rarely and under very specific historical circumstances, chose, for political rea-

---

<sup>295</sup> A classic study of the sacrality of kingship is Kantorowicz 1957. In reference to the political theology of medieval times, Kantorowicz argued that the king was believed to have two separate bodies: a mortal body as well as a spiritual one (or a body politic). The latter served as a vessel of the sacred dimensions of his office and was transcendent, in that it could be passed on to his successors. The ruler's divine attributes were especially prominent in France, where kings were thought, among other things, to have the ability to cure scrofula with a touch of their hands (Giesey 1997).

sons, to be divine, their motivation being to place themselves in a completely separate category, to be entirely different from everybody else.

## 2 The Question of the Alleged Divinity of Pre-Sargonic Rulers

As for the evidence that gave rise to the speculation about the divine status of Pre-Sargonic kings, there indeed survive several examples where a ruler is said to have been a child “born” (tud-da) by a deity:

En-an-na-tum<sub>2</sub> dumu tud-da <sup>d</sup>Lugal-Urub<sub>1</sub>(URUxEŠ<sub>2</sub>) (*male deity!*) (RIME 1 170–173

En-anatum I 2 ii 7–8; 187–188 15 i 14–15; 189 17 i 6–7)

En-mete-na dumu tud-da <sup>d</sup>Ga<sub>2</sub>-tum<sub>3</sub>-dug<sub>3</sub> (RIME 1 226 En-metena 22:9–10)

Lugal-an-da dumu tud-da <sup>d</sup>Ba-u<sub>2</sub> (RIME 1 242–243 Lugal-anda 2 i' 6'–7')

Lugal-zag-ge-si dumu tud-da <sup>d</sup>Nisaba (RIME 1 433–437 Lugal-zagesi 1 i 26–27)<sup>296</sup>

While the Sumerian verb tud means “to give birth,” it also has a more general sense of “to create” and “to form.” In fact, tud is used to describe the process by which a stone statue is sculpted.<sup>297</sup> It is apparent, therefore, that in the above examples tud-da is to be translated as “formed” or “created.”

<sup>296</sup> See also <sup>d</sup>Ba-<sup>1</sup>u<sub>2</sub> ... Uru-ka-gi-na nam-sipad-še<sub>3</sub> mu-tud, “Bau formed/created Urukagina to be the shepherd (of Lagaš)” (Steible 1982: 354–355 Urukagina 51:1–2).

<sup>297</sup> In the Pre-Sargonic inscriptions from Lagaš, tud is regularly used in reference to the manufacture of statues, both of humans and deities. For the examples, see Steible 1983: 333–334. Gudea's statues also were made through the process of tud. See Statue B and passim in the inscriptions on his statues. Otherwise, statues are said to be “fashioned,” where the verb dim<sub>2</sub> (*banû* or *epēšu*) is used. It is possible that tud refers specifically to the carving of stone statues, a process that perhaps was viewed as more natural than the manufacture of statues by overlaying (see below), and therefore conceptually akin to the formation of a child in the womb. In fact, all of Gudea's statues are made of stone. It is also important that these statues are invariably described as made of *stone* (na): <sup>na4</sup>esi im-ta-e<sub>3</sub> alam-na-ni-še<sub>3</sub> mu-tud, “he brought down diorite and made it into a stone statue of himself” (Statue A iii 1–3; Statue C iii 15–17; Statue H ii 6–8; Statue K ii' 3'–5'). That alam-na-ni represents /alam-na-ani/ rather than /alan-ani/ (as commonly thought) is shown by the examples where the element na clearly is not a resuming complement of alam: alam-na inim-še<sub>3</sub> im-ma-dab<sub>5</sub>, “he installed the stone statue (in order to convey) instructions” (Statue B vii 47–48); alam-na-e mu-tud, “he formed a stone statue” (Statue I v 1–2). Moreover, in most instances the statement in question reads alam-na-še<sub>3</sub> mu-tud, “he made (the diorite) into a stone statue” (Statue B vii 12–13; Statue D iv 17 – v 1; Statue E viii 19–20; Statue G iii 3–4; Statue Z i' 4'–5'). As it happens, Gudea actually emphasizes the point that one of his statues was made of stone: alam-e u<sub>3</sub> kug-nu za-gin<sub>3</sub> nu-ga-am<sub>3</sub> u<sub>3</sub> uruda-nu u<sub>3</sub> an-na-nu zabar-nu kin-ga<sub>2</sub> lu<sub>2</sub> nu-ba-ga<sub>2</sub>-ga<sub>2</sub> <sup>na4</sup>esi-am<sub>3</sub>, “this statue is not of silver; and it is not of lapis; nor is it of copper or tin (bronze) or (arsenic) bronze; nobody overlaid it through the (standard) manufacture; it is of diorite!” (Statue B vii 49–53). A similar statement appears in

More fundamentally, this issue must be seen within a context of the Sumerian views about human creation. As the Sumerians imagined it, the true mother of all humanity, kings and commoners alike, was the birth-goddess, variously known as Ninhursag, Ninmah, Nintu, and Gatumdug. It was this goddess who planted the human seed in the womb, subsequently formed the fetus, and eventually brought about the child's birth. The birth-goddess would finally determine the child's destiny. While the birth-goddess presided over the conception and birthing *ex officio* so to speak, various other goddesses could appear in these roles as well. See the following example, involving the grain-goddess Nisaba<sup>298</sup>:

a dug<sub>3</sub>-ga šag<sub>4</sub>-ga gar-ra-me-en  
u<sub>3</sub>-tud-da šag<sub>4</sub>-ga-a peš-peš-a-me-en  
ama dumu-ni ki-ag<sub>2</sub> sum-sum-mu-de<sub>3</sub>

You (Nisaba) place sweet seed in the womb,  
having formed it, you make it fat,  
(in order) that you may give to the mother her beloved child.  
("Išbi-Erra E" lines 49–51; a hymn to Nisaba)

Accordingly, the claims of having been "created" or "given birth" by a particular deity are simply reflections of the fundamental belief that all humans owe their creation and birth to a divine agency. Among the various data that bear out this point one may single out an Old Babylonian birth incantation, where the birth-goddess is described as a creatrix and midwife of all humanity: *wa-aš-ba-at-ku-'um*<sup>1</sup> [ša]-'ab'-su-tum ba-ni-a-at [r]i-mi-i-im ba-ni-a-at ka-li-i-ni, "there sits by you

---

two inscriptions of Puzur-Inšušinak (Gudea's contemporary), which likewise are found on stone statues: *ù-la KUG.BABBAR ù-la URUDU DUL<sub>3</sub>-su a-bi-lum* (for *awilum*) *a-na a-mu-te ù-la e-bi-iš*, "it is not of silver or copper; nobody made it for overlaying?" (MDP 2 63 ii 1–6; MDP 14 20 ii 2'–6'). The manufacture of standard statues, which consisted of a wooden core overlaid with metals and semiprecious stones, is regularly described by the verb *dim<sub>2</sub>*, "to fashion." The term for overlaying/inlaying is *gar/ga<sub>2</sub>-ga<sub>2</sub>* (Akkadian *šakānu*).

The idea that statues (especially the cultic ones) were "born" finds reflection also in Akkadian, as shown by an inscription of Esarhaddon, which says that the statues of several deities "were correctly born" (*ki-niš im-ma-al-du-ma*), a statement referring to their faithful ritual restoration (RINA 4 103–109 no. 48:87). Cf. Walker and Dick 1999: 116–117. One encounters closely similar concepts in ancient Egypt, where "The statues were not made, but 'born.' This was not said only in the case of the creator god Ptah; in royal inscriptions, 'to bear' is practically a technical term for the fashioning of a cult statue, but even simple craftsmen or artisans say of themselves that they 'bore' the statues of deities or the deities themselves. The profession of sculptor was designated 'one who makes live,' that is, 'quickener' ..." (Assmann 2001: 46).

**298** Among other goddesses performing same functions were Gula and Nungal. See Steinkeller 2016: 12 n. 40.

(i.e., the pregnant woman), the (divine) midwife, the creator of the womb, the creator of us all” (YOS 11 86:18–20). In the same vein, Ninhursag is called “mother of all children” (ama dumu-dumu-ne) (Gudea Statue A i 3).

That the statements about divine parenthood of rulers are but poetic metaphors is best illustrated by the evidence of Gudea’s inscriptions.<sup>299</sup> In Cylinder A iii 6–8, Gudea, while paying a visit on the goddess Gatumdug in his efforts to garner support for the rebuilding of Ningirsu’s temple Eninnu, addresses her in the following words:

ama nu-tuku-me ama-mu ze<sub>2</sub>-me  
a nu-tuku-me a-mu ze<sub>2</sub>-me  
a-mu šag<sub>4</sub>-ga šu ba-ni-dug<sub>4</sub><sup>300</sup> unu<sub>6</sub>-a i<sub>3</sub>-tud-e

<sup>299</sup> Referring to these sources, Claudia Suter has recently argued that they “imply a certain degree of [Gudea’s] divinity by claiming divine parenthood on the one hand, and by assimilation to gods on the other” (2010: 522). As I am demonstrating in the following, the references to Gudea’s divine parentage are purely figurative. Neither is there any evidence of Gudea’s “assimilation” to deities. Here Suter thinks specifically of Gudea’s personal god Ningišzida, asserting that “Gudea’s relationship with Ningišzida as portrayed in his inscriptions bordered on partial or virtual identity” (ibid. 507). This is also incorrect. To be sure, Gudea shared an intimate connection with Ningišzida, and sometimes compared himself to Ningišzida, but this close relationship was simply a function of the role that personal gods played vis-à-vis their human charges. Both in texts and in art, the two figures – the human Gudea and the divine Ningišzida – are rigorously and consistently kept apart from one another. For the visual demonstrations of this point, see **figs. 24 and 25**. As I note in Essay 1 p. 32 n. 46, in my view, Suter fundamentally misunderstands the nature and historical significance of Gudea’s ideology.

<sup>300</sup> The precise meaning of šu ... dug<sub>4</sub> in this context is difficult to pin down. The basic sense of this verb is “to treat with a hand,” hence “to handle” or “to manipulate.” Akkadian lexical sources equate šu ... dug<sub>4</sub> with *lapātu*, “to touch.” Correspondingly, the verbal noun šu-dug<sub>4</sub>-ga, which appears in similar contexts (e.g., Ur-“Namma C” line 111; “Sargon Legend” Segment B line 54), corresponds to *liptu*, “touch.” See lugal šu-dug<sub>4</sub>-ga-ni-me-en = *šar-ra-am li-pi-it qā-ti-šu ia-ti*, “me (Samsu-iluna), the king, the ‘touch’ of his hand (i.e., of Šamaš)” (RIME 4 374–378 Samsu-iluna 3:26 (Sumerian) = 3:34–35 (Akkadian)). Significantly, there are many other examples where various kings are described as *liptu* or *lipit qāti* of deities (CAD L 201 *liptu* meaning c). CAD op. cit. translates *liptu* in such contexts as “creation.” However, it is unlikely that the construction a-ø šu ... dug<sub>4</sub> should be translated “to create seed (in the womb),” since a reference to engendering rather is expected. In view of the parallel construction a šag<sub>4</sub>-a ... gar, “to place seed in the womb” (see “Išbi-Erra C” line 49, quoted above), I would rather think that a-ø šu ... dug<sub>4</sub> describes some form of the manipulation of the seed, such as perfecting it or simply touching, or perhaps even the action of implanting it in the womb.

I have no mother – you are my mother!

I have no father – you are my father!

It is you who *manipulated* my seed in the womb! It is you who formed me in the “womb”!<sup>301</sup>

Clearly, this statement is a rhetorical compliment that was meant to dispose Gatumdug favorably to Gudea. Rather than to deny his human ancestry, Gudea simply emphasizes the fact that his *real* mother – like that of entire humanity – is Gatumdug.<sup>302</sup> The metaphoric nature of Gudea’s words is confirmed by the concluding section of Cylinder B, where the goddess responsible for Gudea’s birth is alternatively identified as Nin-sumun. Moreover, in the same passage Gudea is described as a “child” of Ningišzida, his personal god:

dingir-zu <sup>d</sup>Nin-giš-zi-da dumu-KA An-na-kam  
dingir-ama-zu <sup>d</sup>Nin-sumun<sub>2</sub>-na ama-gan numun zi-da  
numun-e ki-ag<sub>2</sub>-am<sub>3</sub>  
ab<sub>2</sub> zi-de<sub>3</sub> mi<sub>2</sub> ba-tud-da-me  
mes zi ki-Lagaš<sup>ki</sup>-[ta?] e<sub>3</sub>-a  
<sup>d</sup>Nin-gir<sub>2</sub>-su-ka-me ...  
[G]u<sub>3</sub>-de<sub>2</sub>-a [d]umu <sup>d</sup>Nin-giš-zi-da-ka

Your personal god indeed is Ningišzida, grandson of An;  
your mother-goddess<sup>303</sup> indeed is Nin-sumun, the progenitrix<sup>304</sup> of true seed,  
the one who loves seed.

You are the one who was gently formed / given birth by the faithful cow (i.e., Nin-sumun);  
You are the legitimate hero who has arisen from the land/territory of Lagaš.

**301** Cf. Gu<sub>3</sub>-de<sub>2</sub>-a unu<sub>6</sub> mah-a tud-da <sup>d</sup>Ga<sub>2</sub>-tum<sub>3</sub>-dug<sub>3</sub>-ga-kam, “Gudea, the one formed by Gatumdug in the great ‘womb’” (Cylinder A xvii 3–14); (Gudea) dumu tud-da <sup>d</sup>Ga<sub>2</sub>-tum<sub>3</sub>-dug<sub>3</sub>-ke<sub>4</sub> (Gudea Statue D i 17–18). I assume that unu<sub>6</sub>, “temple’s dining hall,” also “Holy of Holies,” is here a poetic description of Gatumdug’s womb, which is identical with the innermost part of her temple. Similar imagery is found in the “Keš Temple Hymn” lines 77–78, which describe Ninhursag/Nintu as a huge dragon residing in the temple’s “heart/womb” (šag<sub>4</sub>) and carrying on procreation: “Ninhursag is a great dragon, she sits in its midst; Nintu, the great mother, keeps on giving birth (there)” (tud-tud mu-un-ga<sub>2</sub>-ga<sub>2</sub>).

As I suggest in Essay 1 p. 33 n. 49, the Gudea passage in question may be a direct borrowing from the inscription of E-anatum describing his birth and rearing (which I cite below). On the other hand, it is clear that the same passage was later utilized for the purposes of the OB composition known as “Rulers of Lagaš.” See Essay 1 pp. 42–43.

**302** Note that these words are a continuation of Gudea’s praise of Gatumdug as the one who creates life for the whole nation: “when you cast your eye upon the nation, fertility is created by itself; when you cast your eye on a faithful young man, you (immediately) extend his life” (Cylinder A iii 4–5).

**303** As far as I know, the term dingir-ama, which clearly means “mother-goddess” or “birth-goddess,” is attested only here.

**304** ama-gan corresponds to Akkadian *ālittu* (CAD A/1 340–342).

You are the one of Ningirsu! ...  
 Gudea is a child of Ningišzida.  
 (Cylinder B xxiii 18 – xxiv 7)

For these conclusions, it is significant that the agency behind the engendering and birth of a child could be *male* deities as well. We have already seen that the creation (tud-da) of En-anatum I of Lagaš was attributed to the god Lugal-Urub.<sup>305</sup> Similarly, the Larsa king Kudur-mabuk identifies Nergal as the “creator of my head.”<sup>306</sup> And, in a passage describing the creation and rearing of E-anatum, Ningirsu is credited with his engendering<sup>307</sup>:

[<sup>d</sup>Ni]n-[gir<sub>2</sub>]-su-[k]e<sub>4</sub> [a] 'E<sub>2</sub>'-[an]-na-tum<sub>2</sub>-[ma šag<sub>4</sub>-g]a [šū b]a-ni-dug<sub>4</sub> ... (Inana) <sup>d</sup>Nin-hur-sag-ra du<sub>10</sub> zi-da-na mu-ni-tuš <sup>d</sup>Nin-hur-sag ubur zi-da-ni 'mu'-[na-la<sub>2</sub>] E<sub>2</sub>-an-na-tum<sub>2</sub> a šag<sub>4</sub>-ga šū dug<sub>4</sub>-ga <sup>d</sup>Nin-gir<sub>2</sub>-su-ka-da <sup>d</sup>Nin-gir<sub>2</sub>-su mu-da-hul<sub>2</sub>

“Ningirsu *manipulated* the seed of E-anatum in the womb ... (Inana) put (him) on Ninhursag’s trusting knee; Ninhursag gave him her genuine breast. Ningirsu rejoiced over E-anatum, the seed *manipulated* in the womb by Ningirsu.”

(RIME 1 126–140 E-anatum 1 iv 9 – v 5)

Male deities are implicated in the creation of kings also in the sources from later periods. In this way, Enlil is identified as the one who formed Šulgi in the womb and facilitated his birth:

e<sub>2</sub> dug<sub>3</sub>-ga <sup>d</sup>Nanna dumu nun-ne<sub>2</sub> nig<sub>3</sub> al ba-ni-dug<sub>4</sub>  
 en-ne<sub>2</sub> šag<sub>4</sub>-tur-še<sub>3</sub> gal<sub>2</sub>-la-na lu<sub>2</sub> zi mi-ni-u<sub>3</sub>-tud  
<sup>d</sup>En-lil<sub>2</sub> sipad a<sub>2</sub> kalag-ga-ke<sub>4</sub> mes-e pa bi<sub>2</sub>-e<sub>3</sub>  
 dumu nam-lugal barag-ge<sub>4</sub> he<sub>2</sub>-du<sub>7</sub> Šul-gi lugal-am<sub>3</sub>

**305** En-anatum I enjoyed a special relationship with Lugal-Urub, an avatar of Dumuzi and the chief deity of Patibira. This is shown by the fact that, according to one of En-anatum’s inscriptions (RIME 1 180–181 En-anatum I 9 ii 13 – iii 4), it was Lugal-Urub who had granted the kinship (nam-lugal) of Lagaš to him.

**306** <sup>d</sup>Nergal i-lum ba-ni qā-aq-qā-di-ia (RIME 4 267–268 Kudur-mabuk 2:44–45). The Sumerian equivalent of *bāni qaqqadi* is dingir-sag-du<sub>3</sub>, “the creator of the head,” which appears in Falkenstein 1949: 216 line 24 (<sup>d</sup>Marduk sag-du<sub>3</sub>-zu, referring to Samsu-iluna). Note further the common onomastic patterns DN-*bāni* and *Ibni*-DN, in which male deities usually are invoked. Cf. also the use of *šiknu*, “creation,” in an inscription of the early OB ruler of Malgium named Ipiq-Eštar: <sup>d</sup>I-pi-iq-Eš<sub>4</sub>-tār LUGAL šī-ki-in <sup>d</sup>En-ki <sup>d</sup>Dam-ki-na (RIME 4 669–670 Ipiq-Eštar 1:1–2). For further examples of similar figurative expressions describing OB kings, see Falkenstein 1949: 212–214.

**307** As I suggest in Essay 1 p. 33 n. 49, this passage may have served as a model for Gudea Cylinder A iii 6–8, which I quote above. For the meaning of the construction a-ø šū ... dug<sub>4</sub>, see above n. 300.



Nanna, the princely son, had made a request in the “sweet house”;  
 (in response) the Lord (i.e., Enlil) formed the right man in the womb that was there,  
 Enlil caused the shepherd of strong arms, the hero, to emerge,  
 the child suitable for kingship (and) dais – it indeed was king Šulgi!  
 (“Šulgi G” lines 17–20)<sup>308</sup>

Similarly, Šulgi’s father Ur-Namma is described as a “touch” or “creation” of Nanna,<sup>309</sup> while Rim-Sin of Larsa is said to have been a “child formed by lord Nergal with greatness from the womb on.”<sup>310</sup>

The idea that the creation of all human beings ultimately happens in the divine realm is common to all religions, even monotheistic ones. Thus, in an Egyptian hymn to Aten, the first monotheistic deity in recorded history, Aten is given the following characterization:

Creator of seed in women,  
 You who makes fluid into man,  
 Who soothes him with that which stills his weeping,  
 You nurse him in the womb.  
 (Pritchard 1969: 370)

A similar statement is found in the Quran, where Allah is said to be the one “who shapes your bodies in your mothers’ wombs as he pleases” (Sura 3, 3<sup>rd</sup> verse). In the same way, Christians call God their “father” and “creator,” without ever claiming any real filial relationship with Him.

As is made clear by this evidence, the Pre-Sargonic data in question do not even remotely indicate a divine status of kings, not even in some incipient form. They merely imply, in a highly poetic and figurative way, that these rulers enjoyed an especially close and intimate relationship with the divine realm, a fact that is fully consistent with their constituting a link between the divine and human societies. Because of this, they were imbued, as typical of royalty in general, with more “sacrality” than other humans.<sup>311</sup> However, there is no in-

<sup>308</sup> The interpretation of this passage follows essentially Sallaberger 1997: 155 and n. 36.

<sup>309</sup> šu-dug<sub>4</sub>-ga-e <sup>d</sup>Nanna-a-me-en (“Ur-Namma C” line 111). In line 24 of the same composition, it is claimed that Ur-Namma was “fashioned” by Nintu: <sup>1d</sup>Nin<sup>1</sup>-tur-re ga<sub>2</sub>-e mu-un-dim<sub>2</sub>-dim<sub>2</sub>-en.

<sup>310</sup> dumu u<sub>3</sub>-tu-ud-da en <sup>d</sup>Nergal-ta šag<sub>4</sub>-ta nam-gal-ta (Halla 1991: 382–386 line 14).

<sup>311</sup> For this obvious explanation, see already Frankfort 1948: 299–301. Referring to the passage from Cylinder A, in which Gudea calls Gatumdug his real father and mother (see above p. 112), Frankfort observes that “the unrealistic projection of both parents in one divine person accentuates the figurative meaning of the expressions.” He then goes on to discuss similar figurative phrases in Old Babylonian and Neo-Assyrian sources, concluding that “when it is said that the gods form the royal child in the womb of its mother ‘with their own hands,’ it is clear that they

dication that they ever aspired after divine status, nor that they claimed to be descended from gods. Here it must be emphasized that this kind of rhetoric was part of the ideology of kingship throughout Mesopotamian history, both in Babylonia and Assyria.<sup>312</sup>

These conclusions about the Pre-Sargonic kingship are corroborated by the evidence of the contemporaneous art, where there is even less indication of the “divinity” of kings. As I will show later, the Pre-Sargonic rulers actually went out of their way to avoid any suggestion of their distinctiveness from the rest of the population, to the point that, in art, even their institutional connection with the divine realm — namely, the fact they functioned as the earthly representatives of gods — finds no expression whatsoever.

The only form of deification that the Pre-Sargonic kings of southern Babylonia might have expected (or hoped for) was the posthumous one. It is theoretically possible that, as part of the cult of former rulers and high priests, which was characteristic of early southern Babylonia (see Essay 1 pp. 30–31), some of those rulers may have been deified after their death. However, we lack any certain evidence of this. To be sure, this form of deification was later afforded to Gudea (Suter 2013).<sup>313</sup> But this may have been an innovation, which possibly was influenced by the deification of the Sargonic kings. Because of this, Gudea’s case cannot be projected back to Pre-Sargonic times.<sup>314</sup>

---

are distinguished from his physical parents. The Mesopotamian king was a mortal marked – and to some extent changed – by divine grace ... the numerous other texts in which Mesopotamian kings are called the ‘sons’ of gods do not imply that they are divine” (ibid. 300–301).

**312** As shown by the following examples: *anāku Aššur-bāni-apli binūt Aššur u Ninlil ... ša Aššur u Sin bēl agē ... ina libbi ummišu ibnū ana rē’ūt māt Aššur*, “I am Assurbanipal, the creation of Aššur and Ninlil ... whom Aššur and Sin, the Lord of the Crown, ... created in the womb of his mother for the shepherdship of Assyria” (Streck 1916: 2 i 1–5); *ištu ibnanni bēlu Erua* (<sup>d</sup>*Er-ū-a*) <sup>d</sup>*Marduk ibšimu nabniti ina ummu*, “after the Lord (and?) Erua created me (and after) Marduk formed my features within my mother” (VAB 4 122 i 23–25; Nebuchadnezzar II).

**313** With the evidence presently available, Gudea was the only Lagaš ensik that had been granted this honor.

**314** As is suggested by the personal name *Sar-ru-GI-ī-lī*, “Sargon is my Personal God,” which appears in “Maništušu Obelisk” Side A xii 8 (OIP 104 124), Sargon may have been venerated posthumously as a deity. This certainly was the case in Ur III times. See PDT 1 506:5–6, which records offerings, made in Nippur, for <sup>d</sup>*Na-ra-am-dSuen* and <sup>d</sup>*Sar-ru-gin<sub>7</sub>*<sup>in</sup>. Another Sargonic king that was afforded this honor after his death is Maništušu, offerings for whom are mentioned in the Ur III sources from Umma (spelled <sup>d</sup>*Ma-iš-ti<sub>2</sub>-su* or <sup>d</sup>*Ma-an-iš-ti<sub>2</sub>-su*; UTI 3 1834:8; BPOA 6 1176:8, 1395:4; etc.). These sources also mention a hamlet or town called <sup>d</sup>*Ma-an-iš-ti<sub>2</sub>-su* (RLA 7 355; UTI 5 3416:10), where a temple of Maništušu appears to have been situated. This settlement is documented already in Sargonic times: *Ma-an-iš-t[i-s]u<sup>ki</sup>* (OIP 14 114:11). Cf. also the Umma personal name *Ur-dMa(-an)-iš-ti<sub>2</sub>/ti-su* (UTI 3 1829:7; UTI 5 3375:1; etc.).



The final point that deserves a comment in this connection is the kingship of Late Uruk times. As I wrote in Essay 1 pp. 29–30, there are possible indications that the en of Uruk, the presumed leader of Uruk's political organization in that period, may have enjoyed the status of a demigod. If so, the character of his office would have differed quite considerably from that of Pre-Sargonic ensiks. However, neither surviving art nor texts offer any indication that this official was believed to be a deity (or that he was worshipped as such).

### 3 Historical Context of the Divination of Kings in Babylonia

Perhaps the biggest deficiency of many of the recent evaluations of Babylonian divine kingship is that they treat this issue in complete abstraction from its historical context. In my view, this is a serious error, since the deification of kings in Babylonia must be seen as a specific historical development, which can be comprehended only if one considers the political circumstances of the period in question. These evaluations also fail to pay proper attention to the Sumerian ideology of kingship, which too is absolutely necessary if one wants to obtain a full measure of the phenomenon of divine kings.

Therefore, I will begin with a brief description of the political and socio-economic conditions in Babylonia during Early Dynastic times. Although one could perhaps anchor this account in the Late Uruk period, our data are too scant and uncertain to allow any conclusions about the political organization at that time. The only point that appears to be certain is that, already at that early date, the South supported a system of city-states. See Essay 1 p. 26.

As I argued repeatedly in the past, central to the understanding of the dynamics of the Early Dynastic history is the realization that, during that period, southern Babylonia, which was mainly inhabited by the Sumerian population, differed very significantly from Babylonia's northern part, which was home to a Semitic ethnic group speaking the language later known as Akkadian or Babylonian. In fact, before the advent of Sargon and his dynasty, these two regions embraced radically different cultures and religions, and followed largely independent trajectories of socio-political development.

The key characteristic feature of the southern system was the institution of city-states, whose origins, as I noted earlier, probably belonged to the Late Uruk period. In its classic form, the southern city-state was a clearly demarcated territorial unit, comprising a major city, the state's capital, and the surrounding countryside, with its towns and villages. The city-states bordered contiguously on one another, along the permanent, divinely sanctioned borders. There was little, if any, neutral space between them.

According to the southern political theology, the city-state was “owned” by the extended divine family. The main god, the head of the family, was the de facto proprietor of the entire state. At the same time, he – together with his spouse and children – owned as his exclusive domain the capital city and its surroundings. Junior deities controlled smaller domains, centered upon towns and villages. In this arrangement, gods were considered to be the true owners of all the resources belonging to a given state, most importantly, of all its agricultural lands.

The divine families of all the city-states were united into one very large extended family, with Enlil, god of Nippur, occupying the position of *paterfamilias*.<sup>315</sup> Because of his rank, Enlil exercised lordship over the whole South. In this role, he served as an arbitrator in conflicts, especially border disputes, between individual city-states.

As such, the Pre-Sargonic South formed a well-ordered, highly balanced system in which each deity was assigned his or her specific role to play and owned a particular earthly domain. Perhaps the most extensive presentation of this view is found in the composition “Enki and the World Order.” As narrated by this source, which likely is a veiled apotheosis of the “perfect” Ur III state, the god Enki carves up Babylonia among several deities, putting them in charge of various specialized tasks. As a result, he creates a perfect, frictionless system, which is free of conflict and strife, and where everybody has his own place, lives in harmony with his neighbors, and prospers accordingly.

This system was institutionalized, in that the pantheon was believed to form a single political body, at whose top stood an executive committee, which consisted of four or seven of the most important deities. As imagined by the Sumerians, all the members of the pantheon gathered at the end of the calendar year in a place called Ubšu-unkina in Nippur. This general assembly, called unkin in Sumerian and *puḫru* in Akkadian, collegially drew detailed plans for the next year, or, as the Sumerians described it, they “determined destinies” for the coming year. Such decisions, which had to be unanimous, were implemented by the two chief executive officers of the pantheon, An and Enlil. Occasionally, the divine assembly held special, ad hoc meetings, to render decisions for the cases of truly extraordinary importance. Good examples of such cases are the respective deifications of Naram-Suen and Šulgi (see below pp. 123–126) and the construction of the Eninnu, the temple of Ningirsu in Girsu (see below and Steinkeller

---

<sup>315</sup> This role is assigned to Enlil already in an inscription of En-metena of Lagaš (RIME 1 194–199 En-metena 1), as well as in an even earlier literary text of Kišite origin (ARET 5 3 i 6–ii 2, ii 8–iii 2).

2016: 14). The annual gatherings of the pantheon were essentially concerned with the shape of the future on a cosmic scale (or with the “big picture,” to put it differently), without intruding on the internal operations of city-states. The decisions in that regard were the prerogative of their respective divine owners, who “determined destinies” on the local level, so to speak.

From a political perspective, the single most important fact about this ideology is that it viewed the South as a closed system, with the assumed existence of permanent, divinely sanctioned borders between the individual city-states.<sup>316</sup> Obviously, this tenet rendered any form of territorial expansion in the South exceedingly difficult.<sup>317</sup> Even more importantly, it made the notion of a united South theoretically impossible. As we shall see later, these ideological constraints presented a major obstacle toward unificatory efforts, eventually leading to the remedy of divine kinship.

The rule over the city-state was exercised by an official called *ensik*.<sup>318</sup> Although the *ensik*’s office was predominantly secular in nature, it included certain ritual roles as well. This form of kingship was based on the principle of divine election rather than on descent. In other words, it focused on the *ensik*’s office, and not on his lineage. Although in practice a hereditary principle prevailed, in that the *ensik*’s office usually was transferred from father to son, as the political theology had it, this official was elected by the divine owner of the city-state. He also needed to be divinely re-appointed each year.<sup>319</sup>

The most characteristic feature of the *ensik*’s position was that its holder functioned as an earthly representative of the deity, taking care of the human and other resources of the city-state on the latter’s behalf. In this relationship,

---

**316** The existence of such borders is explicitly stated in various third millennium sources. Especially important here is one of En-metena’s inscriptions (RIME 1 194–199 En-metena 1), an inscription of Giššag-kidug of Umma (RIME 1 372–374 Giššag-kidug 2), and the “Cadastre of Ur-Namma” (RIME 3/2 50–56 Ur-Namma 21 + Steinkeller 2011: 25–28 nos. 20–21). See further RIME 2 280–283 Utu-hegal 1–3.

**317** This is best illustrated by the history of the border dispute between Lagaš and Umma (Cooper 1983b). For over five generations if not much longer, these two city-states fought repeatedly over a strip of agricultural land separating them. Neither of them, however, ever succeeded to absorb its neighbor, due mainly to the recognition of the sanctity of the divinely drawn borders.

**318** For this official, see Essay 1 p. 28. Some Pre-Sargonic rulers used instead the title of *lugal*, “master” or “king.” *lugal* is a purely secular designation, which emphasizes the ruler’s political and military powers. For this title and the ways in which it differs from *ensik*, see Steinkeller 1999a: 112.

**319** For the evidence illustrating the *ensik*’s election, see below p. 125 n. 335, 135 n. 362, and Steinkeller 2016: 13–14.

the ensik acted very much like a steward managing the estate belonging to an absentee owner. For this reason, “steward” is probably the best approximation of ensik’s functional meaning.<sup>320</sup> A closely similar concept is conveyed by the epithet “shepherd” or “vicar” (sipad, *re’û*), which is another designation of the southern ruler, and which, for all practical purposes, served as his alternative title. In fact, “shepherd” was the quintessential image of the head of the southern city-state. The power of this image was such that – unlike ensik, which was abandoned as a royal title in the beginning of the second millennium – sipad continued to serve as a favored epithet of kings, both in Babylonia and Assyria, till the very end of the cuneiform civilization.

Since the focal point of the southern kingship was the ruler’s office, and not his person and lineage, the ensik, as he appears in written sources, is invariably a generic type. Although this official shares a special relationship with the gods (which was due entirely to the peculiarities of his office), in all other respects he is just like any other member of the temple community. The only characteristics that set him apart from the rest of the society are his exceptional devotion and obedience, thanks to which he obtained divine favor. When he is depicted in art, he invariably assumes the standard posture of piety, which conjures up the image of a humble servant or shepherd.<sup>321</sup> See **figs. 19–22**. He never wears any regalia (though he undoubtedly used them in real life), or any special attire for that matter, that would visually distinguish him from his contemporaries. In spite of his intimate connections with the divine realm, he is never portrayed in the company of gods.<sup>322</sup> Neither is he ever shown as officiating over ritual activities.<sup>323</sup> Without the inscriptions identifying him as a ruler, we would never suspect that he is a royal figure.<sup>324</sup>

---

**320** As defined by *Online Etymology Dictionary*, “steward” was “the title of a class of high officers of the state in early England and Scotland, hence meaning ‘one who manages affairs of an estate on behalf of his employer.’” For a possible etymology of ensik, see Appendix 1 pp. 103–104.

**321** Cf. the epithet sipad sun<sub>3</sub>-na, “humble shepherd,” which was used by the kings of Isin (see, e.g., RIME 4 47–48 Lipit-Eštar 1:2).

**322** Occasionally, humans are depicted as approaching enthroned deities, but the latter invariably are the representations of divine statues. See Essay 1 p. 29 no. 34.

**323** As I point out in Appendix 1, the iconography of the archaic en of Uruk differs significantly in these respects, since the en is shown in Inana’s company, and he routinely is involved in ritual activities.

**324** Ornan 2013: 572 observes (correctly) that this visual imagery is devoid of “themes relating to the king’s divine pedigree.” This fact should have made her more cautious about finding such indications in texts.

Turning now to the socio-political realities that existed during the same time frame in the North,<sup>325</sup> the most striking fact here is that this region never developed a system of independent city-states even remotely comparable to that of the South. On the contrary, there is convincing evidence that, during the Early Dynastic period (2900–2350 BC), the North formed a single territorial state, which was governed by the city of Kiš. While Kiš remained the usual focal point of this state, it appears that, on some occasions, its center of power moved to Mari in the middle Euphrates valley and Akšak in the Diyala Region. The magnitude of the political power wielded by Kiš (especially during the ED I and ED II periods) is reflected in the fact that the title of the “king of Kiš” eventually became a generic designation for the authoritarian and hegemonic form of kingship.<sup>326</sup>

The reason why the North followed this particular path of development probably finds explanation in the “mobile pastoralist”<sup>327</sup> background of its population. As a consequence, these early Semitic dwellers of northern Babylonian, best defined as “Proto-Akkadians,” had a markedly different society, which was characterized by the presence of tribal organization and the importance of lineages. As one may conjecture from the examples of other Mesopotamian peoples that shared similar ethnic and social origins (the Amorites, the Arameans, and the Arabs), the northern kingship was based on descent, and had a distinctive form of kingship, which was strong, authoritarian, and expressly secular in character. As such, it sharply contrasted with the southern notions of rulership, which, as I described earlier, assigned to the ensik much more circumscribed and politically weaker a role, and saw him as a partly religious functionary as well.

Having offered these characterizations of the southern and northern systems, I will now sketch a brief outline of the historical developments that led to the two episodes of royal deification.

As far as the events may be reconstructed, the ED I and ED II periods were marked by the political domination of Kiš, which not only controlled northern Babylonia and the Diyala Region, but also succeeded in establishing a hegemony over certain areas in the South (Nippur, Adab, Umma, and Šuruppak). This picture underwent a significant change in the ED IIIa period, when a number of southern city-states formed a coalition against Kiš. This coalition, which was led by Uruk, seems to have defeated and even sacked Kiš (Steinkeller 2014b).

---

<sup>325</sup> For a detailed discussion of this issue, see Steinkeller 1993a; 2013a: 142–151.

<sup>326</sup> For this title, see most recently Steinkeller 2013a: 145–146.

<sup>327</sup> For this concept, see Frachetti 2008: 17 with further literature.

From then on, Kiš would no longer be an active player in the politics of the South.

During the final phase of the Early Dynastic period (ED III b) several Sumerian rulers attempted to achieve a limited political hegemony over the southern city-states. The first such attempt, apparently, was undertaken by E-anatum of Lagaš, who assumed the prestigious title of the “king of Kiš” (RIME 1 145–149 E-anatum 5). Two generations later, a ruler of Uruk by the name of En-šakušana, campaigned against Kiš and Akkade (RIME 1 429–430 En-šakušana 1; A. Westenholz 1975: 115). It is conceivable that En-šakušana harbored the ambitions of placing the entire South under his rule, as reflected in his adoption of the title “king of the Land,” in which “Land” means southern Babylonia.<sup>328</sup>

The most successful among these early unificatory efforts was that by Lugal-zagesi of Uruk, who appears to have effectively brought the South under his rule. Importantly, Lugal-zagesi also conquered Kiš, thus putting an end to the Kišite domination of northern Babylonia. It is unlikely, however, that Lugal-zagesi ever succeeded in turning his possessions into a uniform centralized state. Given the existing ideological constraints, such a step would have been too radical for a southerner to contemplate. At best, Lugal-zagesi could only claim to be a *primus inter pares* among the southern ensiks.

As it happened, the person who managed to capitalize on Lugal-zagesi’s achievement was, not unexpectedly, a northerner. His name was Sargon, and he hailed from the obscure town of Akkade, which was probably situated in the neighborhood of modern Baghdad.

After he had conquered northern Babylonia together with its traditional political center Kiš, Sargon then confronted Lugal-zagesi. In the ensuing war Sargon faced and overcame a formidable coalition of southern city-states led by Lugal-zagesi, after which he became the master of the South as far as the Persian Gulf. This accomplishment was followed by a phase of foreign conquests, as a result of which the first empire in history was created.

The reigns of Sargon and his two immediate successors, Rimuš and Maništušu,<sup>329</sup> constituted the formative stage of the empire. During that period, the empire acquired its physical shape, but little if any effort was made to turn it into a fully articulated system. These early Sargonic kings also failed to develop a comprehensive imperial policy. In this, they were largely prevented by the continuing opposition of the southern city-states, which had only reluctantly accepted the rule of Akkade, revolting against it at every opportunity.

---

<sup>328</sup> For this title, see below p. 126 and n. 337.

<sup>329</sup> The sequence of these two rulers remains uncertain. See Essay 1 p. 14.



The greatest of those revolts took place during the reign of Naram-Suen, Sargon's grandson. The rebellion was originally confined to Kiš, but it quickly spread to the South, eventually enveloping the whole empire. Having fought "nine battles in one year," Naram-Suen, almost miraculously, emerged victorious from this ordeal, defeating the rebels and restoring the empire to its former borders.

It was this experience, no doubt, that convinced him of the pressing need to strengthen the fabric of the empire. This goal was largely dependent on the prior settling of the "southern question." Naram-Suen's solution was to elevate himself to the divine plane. By becoming a god, he placed himself above all the Sumerian ensiks, thereby providing a justification for the universal character of his rule that was antithetical to the southern concepts of kingship.

It is characteristic that the deification of Naram-Suen was carried out strictly within the framework of the city-state ideology. Since to be a god meant the possession of an earthly domain, the divine Naram-Suen needed to have one too. And for Naram-Suen the choice of domain was obvious: he became the god of Akkade, by then the capital of the empire.

As we are told by one of his inscriptions,<sup>330</sup> this was accomplished by the unanimous decision of the key members of the pantheon, in response to a request made by Akkade's population. Thankful to Naram-Suen for having protected their city during the Great Rebellion, they appealed to the chief gods of Sumer and Akkad to make him god of Akkade:<sup>331</sup>

On account of the fact that he had protected/strengthened the foundations of their city in difficult straits, (the people of) his city requested from Inana in Eana, from Enlil in Nippur, from Dagan in Tuttul, from Ninhursag in Keš, from Enki in Eridu, from Suen in Ur, from Šamaš in Sippar, (and) from Nergal in Kutha, that he be (made) god of their city, and (ac-

---

**330** This inscription appears on the so-called "Bassetki Statue," which, in its present condition, consists of a massive round base on which a naked male figure (of which only the lower half survives) is depicted in a seated position. Between the legs of this figure there is the lower section of what assuredly was a gatepost. Porter 2013: 606–607 suggests that this is a representation of Naram-Suen, but, without any doubt, this is a *la-ha-ma* (Akkadian *lahmu*), the "hairy one," who was one of Enki's attendants. A close visual parallel is provided by an Old Akkadian seal (Frankfort 1939: pl. 18 fig. k), which depicts a kneeling *la-ha-ma*, who holds a gatepost. In my opinion, there is a high probability that this object formed part of the furnishings of a temple of Naram-Suen (either in Akkade or in some other city).

**331** The same protocol is followed in the beginning section of Gudea's Cylinder A, where, in order that Ningirsu may obtain a new house, the population of Lagaš needs first to petition Enlil, the head of the pantheon, assuring him that everything in Lagaš indeed is in a perfect condition, and that Ningirsu is fully deserving of such a reward. Only when Enlil grants his permission the project may be undertaken. See Steinkeller 2016: 14.

cordingly) they erected his temple in the midst of Akkade.  
(RIME 2 113–114 Naram-Suen 10:20–56)

All that this solution accomplished, however, was to transfer the problem from the human to the divine level; in the new scheme it was now the god of Akkade who had become a contradiction, for the importance he assumed far outstripped his standing in the pantheon. Another consequence of Naram-Suen's becoming the god of Akkade was the ascent of Akkade to the position of the religious capital of Babylonia. This development unavoidably affected the position of Nippur and its chief god Enlil, putting Naram-Suen in direct conflict with the ruling circles of Nippur, which, understandably, must have felt threatened by Akkade's increased significance. The echoes of this conflict can be detected in the composition "The Curse of Akkade" (see in detail Essay 1 pp. 79–80; Liverani 2002: 156–157). The dissatisfaction with Naram-Suen's deification, which certainly existed at Nippur, and which probably was felt also among the managerial elites of other southern city-states, may have even been one of the factors (though minor at best) that contributed to the eventual demise of the Sargonic empire.

The divine status so earned by Naram-Suen was subsequently held by his son Šar-kali-šarri, the last great king of the Sargonic dynasty.<sup>332</sup> There is no evidence that either of Šar-kali-šarri's two successors, Dudu and Šu-Durul, ever presumed to be divine.

Following the collapse of the Sargonic empire, and a passage of roughly one hundred years, during which the South reverted to its traditional condition of political fragmentation, Babylonian rulers embarked on another unifying scheme. The impulse this time came from the South, where, at around 2100 BC, an ensik of Ur named Ur-Namma succeeded in putting both the South and the North under his rule.

In so doing Ur-Namma began what is known as the Neo-Sumerian or the Ur III period – the latter name referring to the dynasty's original seat and the fact that it was the third such entity stemming from Ur. The true greatness of the dynasty came with Šulgi, Ur-Namma's son and successor. During the second decade of Šulgi's reign, there began a phase of territorial expansion, which led to the formation of a mini-empire. These foreign conquests were accompanied at home by a massive program of political, economic, and administrative reforms, which transformed Babylonia into a highly centralized, patrimonial state.

---

<sup>332</sup> In spite of some contrary claims (e.g., Michalowski 2008: 35; Brisch 2013: 41), Šar-kali-šarri's divine status is not in doubt. This is demonstrated most emphatically by his titulary, for which see below p. 136.



Alongside these institutional changes, there came about various ideological transformations, the most momentous of which was the deification of Šulgi. This event can approximately be dated to Šulgi's twentieth regnal year, when his name began to be provided with a semantic indicator DINGIR, "deity." How this was accomplished – at least on the divine plain – is described in considerable detail in one of the hymnal compositions glorifying Šulgi ("Šulgi P").<sup>333</sup> Unfortunately, the beginning lines of this composition are not preserved. When the text becomes intelligible, Nin-sumun and Lugal-banda (who, as we shall see later, were afforded the status of Šulgi's divine parents subsequent to his divination) seem to be discussing Šulgi's future. Nin-sumun then undertakes to execute An's order, which, apparently, was to find a deserving ruler for Sumer. Having examined the whole nation, she identifies Šulgi as the fitting "shepherd," elevating his head among all the people. She then brings this happy news to the Ubšun-unkina, the residence of An and the place where the most important destinies were determined, reporting the results of her search to An and recommending to him that Šulgi be made "shepherd" of the Land. After An accepts this recommendation and bestows his blessings on Šulgi, Nin-sumun installs Šulgi as king at Ur, praising him and offering additional blessings. Finally, in recognition of Nin-sumun's efforts and as her reward, the general gathering of the divine assembly proclaims Šulgi's godship, causing him to rise like Utu over the Land. The particularly relevant passages of this composition read as follows:

ud-ba nin-mu inim An-na-ke<sub>4</sub> ba-gub<sup>334</sup>  
<sup>d</sup>Nin-sumun<sub>2</sub>-na-ke<sub>4</sub> dam!-a-ni kug <sup>d</sup>Lugal-banda<sup>da</sup> nam ba-da-an-tar!-re!  
 sizkur-ra-na mu-da-an-'kuš<sub>2</sub>'-u<sub>3</sub>  
 An kug-ra Ub-šun-kin-na-ka si mu-na-ni-in-sa<sub>2</sub>  
 a-a-mu An lugal dingir-re-ne-me-en<sub>3</sub>  
 kalam nig<sub>2</sub> dagal-la igi mu-ni-il<sub>2</sub>  
 sag-gig<sub>2</sub> u<sub>8</sub>-gim lu-a-ba  
 Šul-gi gu<sub>2</sub> sag-ba ma-in-i[n?]-'zi? sipad' zi-bi he<sub>2</sub>-am<sub>3</sub><sup>335</sup>

<sup>333</sup> For an edition and discussion of this composition, see Klein 1981b: 41–41.

<sup>334</sup> I assume that inim ... gub has a similar sense as the construction inim-a ... si<sub>3</sub>, "to be assigned to (lit: to be placed in) an order (of a deity)." See lu<sub>2</sub> inim-ma si<sub>3</sub>-ga <sup>d</sup>Ba-u<sub>2</sub>-ke<sub>4</sub> (Gudea Statue B i 14–15 and passim in Gudea's inscriptions).

<sup>335</sup> This line echoes Gudea's Statue B iii 4–11, where the selection of Gudea by Ningirsu as the "shepherd" of Lagaš is described. As I argued elsewhere (Steinkeller 2016: 13 and n. 46), there existed a belief that, on the New Year's, the chief deity selected (or re-appointed) his earthly representative from among the entire population of the city-state that gathered (symbolically) for this occasion. As part of this procedure, personal gods would lift the heads of their charges above the crowd (sag zi-(g)), in order that the chief deity could take notice of them. It is likely

At that time Milady stood up (to execute) An's order.  
 Nin-sumun together with her husband Lugal-banda determined (Šulgi's) destiny;  
 she attended to his offerings (i.e., offerings/prayers made on Šulgi's behalf).  
 She (then) directed her way straight to An in the Ubšu-unkina.  
 (Nin-sumun addresses An:) "Oh my Father, master of all the gods!  
 I have scanned the Land in all its breadth  
 (and), from among its black-headed people who are numerous as sheep,  
 from among the gathering of all their heads, I have raised Šulgi. May he be their legitimate  
 shepherd!"  
 (Segment A lines 7–14)

<sup>d</sup>A-nun-na dingir gal-gal-[e-ne]  
 ki nam tar-ra-ba mu-da-'sug<sub>2</sub>'-[sug<sub>2</sub>-ge-eš]  
 nam-sipad Šul-gi-ra nig<sub>2</sub>-ul-li<sub>2</sub>-[a-še<sub>3</sub>] pa 'e<sub>3</sub>' ma-[ni-in-ak-ke<sub>4</sub>-eš]  
 Šul-gi si-sa<sub>2</sub> dingir-ra-[ne-ne-še<sub>3</sub>]  
 kalam-ma <sup>d</sup>Utu-gim ma-ni-in-'e<sub>3</sub>'-[eš]

(Nin-sumun speaks:) "The great Anunakene gods stood up together  
 at the place where destinies are determined,  
 (and), on my account, they made manifest the shepherdship of Šulgi for all time;  
 they caused Šulgi, the righteous one, to rise in the Land like the Sun God in order to be  
 'their (i.e., of the people)' god."<sup>336</sup>  
 (Segment C lines 56–59)

So says the official theology. But what were the real facts behind this development? In my view, it is certain that in deifying himself Šulgi drew directly on the example of Naram-Suen. However, learning from the negative reactions that the deification of the Sargonic kings had provoked, he did it in a considerably more diplomatic and nuanced way. First of all, in his new divine form Šulgi refrained from associating himself with any particular city-state, becoming instead an abstract – and therefore less offensive – “god of his Land” (dingir kalam-ma-na).<sup>337</sup> Moreover, he claimed familial connections with the divine fam-

---

that a similar selective process is described here. I assume that gu<sub>2</sub> sag-ba /sag-bi-ak/ means “the gathering/totality of their heads,” with gu<sub>2</sub> corresponding to *napharu*.

**336** The divine status that Šulgi acquired in this way is also reflected in the name he was given on this occasion: šul an-ne<sub>2</sub> zu dingir-re-ne, “Youth whom An made known among the gods,” i.e., the one who was recognized as a god (“Šulgi P,” Segment C line 39).

**337** For the specifics of this title, see below p. 152. When used in this context, kalam describes the territory of southern Babylonia, meaning “native land,” thus being practically identical with Ki-en-gi = Sumer. Characteristically, it is never used in reference to “foreign” lands. The use of kalam as a term for southern Babylonia is documented first in late ED times, in the title lugal kalam-ma, which was borne by the Uruk rulers En-šakušana (RIME 1 429–430 En-šakušana 1:5) and Lugal-zagesi (RIME 1 433–437 Lugal-zagesi 1 i 5).

ilies of the most important southern cities, thereby legitimizing his claim to their individual kingships.<sup>338</sup> There are also indications that the Ur III kings underwent separate coronations in those cities, in an effort to placate the local elites and to recognize, at least symbolically, their earlier history as independent seats of royal power.<sup>339</sup>

By virtue of having become a god – and the one linked familially to the chief deities of Babylonia at that, Šulgi could now claim to be the absolute owner of the temple-estates and other economic resources nominally belonging to the gods. This move, which was *the* single most important development of his reign both politically and economically, and which had no antecedents in Sargonic times,<sup>340</sup> put Šulgi in control of all the holdings of arable land in Babylonia. From now on, arable land could only be held via the system of royal fiefs or benefices, which were granted by the king to his subjects (among whom counted even the members of his immediate family) in exchange for corvée labor and other services.<sup>341</sup> Obviously, this expanded the powers of the divine king enormously.

After the end of the Ur III period, deification of kings was briefly practiced by the Isin dynasty, which, at least from the perspective of the aspirations of its rulers, was the heir and a direct continuation of the Ur III empire. But, since the kings of Isin controlled only some portions of the South, never succeeding in imposing their rule on northern Babylonia, their deification manifested itself only

---

**338** For a systematic discussion of these developments, see below pp. 141–150.

**339** Based on the evidence of economic documents, Jacobsen (1953: 36 n. 2) suggested that the Ur III kings were crowned successively in Nippur, Ur, and Uruk. This is confirmed by literary sources, especially the hymns of Šulgi. The hymn “Šulgi E” lines 9–10 implies that this occurred at Eridu as well: sig<sub>4</sub> Eridug<sup>ki</sup>-ga-ta aga zi ak-me-en / Unug<sup>ki</sup>-ta suh za-gin<sub>3</sub> keš<sub>2</sub>-ra<sub>2</sub>-me-en, “I was provided with a legitimate crown in the brickwork of Eridu; in Uruk, a lapis lazuli diadem was tied (around my head).” For the “lapis lazuli diadem” as an attribute of the en of Uruk, see Steinkeller 1998: 93–95. However, I am not aware of any data that would point to the coronations at Girsu/Lagaš and Umma, which, from the economic point of view, were the largest and richest provinces in the South, and therefore also the most important ones politically.

**340** Due, apparently, to the different land-tenure practices and traditions that existed in northern Babylonia, in the South Naram-Suen and Šar-kali-šarri rather privatized the temple-held arable land, turning it into royal and private individual estates (Steinkeller 1999b: 350–358).

**341** See Steinkeller 2013d. Very similar policies were institutionalized by the deified Inka rulers. “By declaring that they owned everything, the Incas devised a rationale that gave people access to their traditional lands only in return for labor duty ... many people did not happily digest the idea that they could use their ancestral lands only by the grace of the Inka” (D’Altroy 2002: 265).

on the symbolic level, being completely devoid of its former political dimensions.<sup>342</sup>

By the time when Babylonia had become united again, which happened around 1750 BC during the reign of Hammurabi of Babylon, the political, cultural, and religious distinctions that had existed earlier between the Sumerian South and the Akkadian North had disappeared, with Babylonia having become a single nation, which spoke one language and embraced the same Sumero-Babylonian culture and religion. Therefore, when Hammurabi successfully brought both halves of Babylonia under his rule, there simply was no need for him to engage in any ideological games – such as the presumption of a divine status – to justify his universal rule.<sup>343</sup> Characteristically, none of the later rulers of Babylonia and Assyria claimed to be divine either – or, as far as we know, made any attempts to achieve such a status. This fact makes it certain that the deification of kings was not an evolutionary development within the Babylonian politico-religious ideology per se that was, in a Hegelian sense, historically necessary. On the contrary, both the briefness of this phenomenon and the fact it was associated with very particular circumstances prove that it constituted an isolated and unique occurrence within Mesopotamian history, whose causes were situation specific and purely political.

This, in short, is my assessment of the question of divine kings in ancient Mesopotamia. As a matter of fact, most of this interpretation may be found in an article of mine published twenty-five years ago (Steinkeller 1992). However, since it appeared in a publication somewhat peripheral to Assyriology, that article tends to be overlooked, especially by younger scholars.

---

**342** Following the Isin dynasty, the only Babylonian ruler who may have aspired to divinity was Rim-Sin of Larsa, as indicated by the determinative DINGIR that is occasionally attached to his name. It is possible that Rim-Sin considered himself to be the heir of Isin (which he had conquered and absorbed in the middle of his reign), thus adopting the Isin practice. As I note below pp. 153–154, similar claims were made by a number of peripheral kings, who ruled immediately or shortly after the fall of the Ur III empire.

**343** To be sure, the subsequent history of Babylonia was not free of further attempts by the South to recover its political independence. The most important event of this nature was its revolt under Samsu-iluna, which was followed by the establishment of the First Sealand Dynasty. However, by that time, the cultural distinctiveness of the South (in particular, its characteristic ideology of kingship) had effectively ceased to exist.

## 4 Specifics of the Divination of Sargonic and Ur III Kings

I will now proceed to discuss specific data that demonstrate and illustrate the divinity of the Sargonic and Ur III kings. Such a review is necessary, since much of this evidence is either disputed, misunderstood or simply unknown to the scholarship at large.

A view that prevails in literature is that the main way in which the divinity of Mesopotamian kings was expressed and propagated among the population at large was the addition of the sign DINGIR, “god,” to royal names.<sup>344</sup> This was the standard method of marking the members of the divine class on the level of text. The names of Naram-Suen and Šar-kali-šarri indeed show a DINGIR sign attached to them. The same was true later of Šulgi and his successors, as well of the rulers of the dynasty of Isin. But, while this scribal device is a useful hint for the modern scholar, it was of secondary importance at best for the actual manifestation of the rulers’ divinity, since, as a general rule, written sources were inaccessible to the majority of the society, and thus they played an exceedingly limited role in spreading the idea of the rulers’ divinity. As a matter of fact, during the reigns of Naram-Suen and Šar-kali-šarri the use of this marker was optional. This is demonstrated by the fact that, in the majority of texts composed after Naram-Suen’s deification, the DINGIR sign is lacking in his name. And the same is true of the sources written under Šar-kali-šarri.

As generally agreed, another indication of the ruler’s divinity, at least in the case of the Sargonic kings, is a horned crown, which, like the DINGIR sign, was an exclusive attribute of deities. In fact, Naram-Suen is depicted wearing such a crown on two objects, which I am going to discuss later. However, since Babylonian artwork was usually confined to the sacred locales that were accessible to but a few individuals, this attribute too played only a marginal role in propagating the divinity of kings.

Here it needs to be emphasized that, in ancient Mesopotamia – as was the case in other ancient civilizations – the primary means of politico-religious propaganda were not texts but public ritual and monumental architecture, the latter taking the form of temples and palaces, and various public buildings of utilitarian nature, such as city walls and other types of defensive structures (Baines 1989; Trigger 1990; Steinkeller 2015c: 203–204). Indeed, public ritual, state pageantry, and monumental architecture were a glue that kept together many of the traditional kingdoms, both of ancient and more recent times, as in the case of

---

<sup>344</sup> See, e.g., Ornan 2013: 570: “The paramount indicator of divine royal status in Mesopotamia was the addition of the cuneiform sign *dingir*.”

the so-called “theater-states” of Southeast Asia (Geertz 1980).<sup>345</sup> It has been argued that also the Maya polities were essentially “theater-states,” in which the ideology of kingship was played out in the arena of ceremonial centers, through the performance of festivals and rituals. As Arthur Demarest writes in reference to the Maya, “Classic period energies and resources were lavishly expended on this monumental display and architecture. Art, artifacts, and monuments provided the stages for the ideological spectacles directed by these holy lords” (2004: 207).

Because of these comparative analogues, one can be confident that the manner through which the divine status of the Sargonic and Ur III kings manifested itself most immediately and palpably was ritual. As I wrote earlier, we are lucky to have an ancient description of how the deification of Naram-Suen came about (see above pp. 123–124). According to that account, Naram-Suen assumed the status of the god of the city of Akkade. This is not just a poetic image or a figure of speech. To be a deity in Mesopotamia meant to have a regular divine cult. That cult focused on a temple, in which the deity’s statue was housed and afforded daily veneration. The text in question tells us that there indeed was a temple of the divine Naram-Suen in Akkade. It is known that similar temples existed in other cities as well. A tablet from Girsu in southern Babylonia (ITT 5 9289), which dates to either Naram-Suen or Šar-kali-šarri, locates a temple of the god of Akkade in that city. Interestingly, this document also mentions the temples of Annunitum and Ištar, the former deity being an avatar of Ištar in her martial form, with whom, as I will show later, Naram-Suen was particularly closely associated:

	(beg. destr.)
obv. 1')	azlag <sub>3</sub> (GIŠ.TUG <sub>2</sub> .PI.KAR.D[U])
2')	4 šu-ut e <sub>2</sub> An-[nu]-ni-tim
3')	6 šu-ut e <sub>2</sub> <sup>a</sup> Ištar(INANA)
4')	10 la <sub>2</sub> 1 [š]u-ut é ĩl(DINGIR)-A-g[a]-dê <sup>[(ki)]</sup>
	(rest destr.)
rev.	(beg. destr.)

---

**345** “The driving aim of higher politics was to construct a state by constructing a king. The more consummate the king, the more exemplary the center. The more exemplary the center, the more actual the realm” (Geertz 1980: 124). In its radical form, Geertz’s analysis, which focuses on the ideology to the exclusion of the material dimensions of power, appears to be applicable only to the incipient manifestations of states, such as, e.g., Babylonia of Late Uruk times and archaic Egypt. In the case of more developed polities (such as the Sargonic and Ur III empires), the politics of kingship and the strategies of state-building undoubtedly were shaped by economic considerations as well.

- 1') i<sub>3</sub> zi-ga
- 2') mu URUxA
- 3') im-ma-kam  
(space)
- 4') Gir<sub>2</sub>-su<sup>ki</sup>-a
- 5') nig<sub>2</sub>-ŠID-bi ba-ak  
(rest destr.)

[x] fullers,  
 4 (fullers) – those of the temple of Annunitum,  
 6 (fullers) – those of the temple of Ištar,  
 9 (fullers) – those of the temple of the God of Akkade,  
 [...]  
 The expended oil  
 in the year of ...,  
 the previous year.  
 In Girsu  
 this balanced account was made.<sup>346</sup>

That the cult of the divine king was a countrywide phenomenon is further indicated by a group of Sargonic sources that appear to stem from the site of Umm el-Hafriyat, situated ca. 28 km east of Nippur.<sup>347</sup> These documents, which in all likelihood belong to the reign of Šar-kali-šarri (A. Westenholz in Milano and A. Westenholz 2015: 16), mention a number of individuals designated as the “servants of the God of Akkade” (ARAD<sub>2</sub> *Īl-A-ga-de<sub>3</sub><sup>ki</sup>*).<sup>348</sup> Included among them are two scribes and a farmer.<sup>349</sup> Unless this designation is simply a more flowery

---

**346** A. Westenholz thinks that the temples in question were situated in Akkade (Milano and Westenholz 2015: 20). Although such a possibility cannot completely be ruled out, the fact that the transaction took place in Girsu, and that it involved low-ranking fullers, makes it quite certain that the locus of these temples indeed was Girsu. If these workers resided in Akkade, the reason why their oil provisions were recorded in a tablet from another city would otherwise be difficult to account for.

**347** For the evidence, see A. Westenholz in Milano and A. Westenholz 2015: 13–15. Based on one of the tablets from this group (CUSAS 27 212 rev. 5'), Westenholz further suggests that the ancient name of Umm el-Hafriyat was Maškan-Ili-Akkade.

**348** Cf. CT 50 148 ii 5 (probably from Lagaš), which lists a “man of the God of Akkade” (lu<sub>2</sub> Dingir-A-ga-de<sub>2</sub><sup>ki</sup>).

**349** Dug<sub>4</sub>-ga-ni DUB.SAR DUMU DINGIR-gu<sub>2</sub> DINGIR-KA-me-ir '2' ARAD<sub>2</sub> *Īl-A-ga-de<sub>3</sub><sup>ki</sup>* (CUSAS 27 206:24–27); LUGAL-KA DUB.SAR ARAD<sub>2</sub> *Īl-A-ga-de<sub>3</sub><sup>ki</sup>* (ibid. 203:8–9, 205:12–13); Puzur<sub>4</sub>-Lu-lu ARAD<sub>2</sub> *Īl-A-ga-de<sub>3</sub><sup>ki</sup>* (ibid. 202:10–11); Ur-su ENGAR šu *Īl-A-ga-de<sub>3</sub><sup>ki</sup>* (ibid. 201:16–17). In addition, CUSAS 27 148 identifies a number of persons collectively as šu-ut ARAD<sub>2</sub> *Īl-A-ga-de<sub>3</sub><sup>ki</sup>*. Note that this tablet also mentions two “servants of god Nergal of Cutha” (ARAD<sub>2</sub> <sup>d</sup>Nergal Gu<sub>2</sub>-du<sub>8</sub>-a<sup>ki</sup>) (lines 12–14).



way of saying that they were servants of the king, it is likely that these persons worked for a local temple-household of the God of Akkade.<sup>350</sup>

The cult of the divine kings of Ur took manifested itself in similar ways – and here our evidence is incomparably more extensive and informative. Beginning with Šulgi, the Ur III kings were provided with temples, not only throughout Babylonia, but also in the conquered periphery. In Babylonia, such temples are known to have existed in the cities of Girsu, Umma, Urusagrig, and Ešnunna, as well as in many of the local southern towns (Sallaberger 1999: 54; Pitts 2015: 41–53).<sup>351</sup> In the periphery, they are documented at Susa,<sup>352</sup> Urbilum,<sup>353</sup> Neber-Šu-Suen,<sup>354</sup> and Duhduli.<sup>355</sup> The temples of divine kings were routinely provided with their statues, which served as a focal point of their worship (Brisch 2006; Pitts 2015). There is copious evidence that such statuary was often installed and venerated also in the shrines belonging to other deities.

In addition, festivals celebrating their divine status were established. Those were of such cultic importance that they even gave names to the months of the official Ur III calendar.<sup>356</sup>

A particularly interesting development of this period is the phenomenon of hymns composed in honor of divine kings, a privilege otherwise reserved for

---

**350** In either case, these sources, as likely dating to Šar-kali-šarri's reign, provide an additional proof of this ruler's divine status.

**351** At Ur, Šulgi seems to have been worshiped in a building called E<sub>2</sub>-hur-sag. This may have been his palace originally. As suggested by "Temple Hymns" lines 119–134, where the E<sub>2</sub>-hur-sag is identified as a temple of Šulgi, following Šulgi's death this structure was turned into his temple. It is characteristic that no temples of deified kings are documented at Nippur, where their presence probably would have been too offensive to Enlil and his cult.

**352** e<sub>2</sub> alam <sup>d</sup>Šu-<sup>d</sup>Suen kar Šušin<sup>ki</sup> du<sub>3</sub>-de<sub>3</sub>, "(issues of oils) to erect a temple of Šu-Suen's statue at the quay of Susa" (TCTI 2 3390:1–7; ŠS 5/i).

**353** 32 ur<sub>2</sub> <sup>gis</sup>u<sub>3</sub>-suh<sub>3</sub> ... e<sub>2</sub> <sup>d</sup>Šu-<sup>d</sup>Suen-ka Ur-bi<sub>2</sub>-lum<sup>ki</sup>-še<sub>3</sub>, "32 beams of pine ... for the temple of Šu-Suen in Urbilum" (SAT 1 377:1–8; ŠS 7/-).

**354** e<sub>2</sub> alam <sup>d</sup>Šu-<sup>d</sup>Suen ba-ab-šeš<sub>4</sub> šag<sub>4</sub> Ne-be<sub>6</sub>-er-<sup>d</sup>Šu-<sup>d</sup>Suen, "(x oil) was used to anoint the temple of the statue of Šu-Suen in Neber-Šu-Suen" (Nisaba 15 359:1–6; ŠS 6/1); ki-gal alam lugal šag<sub>4</sub> Ne-be<sub>6</sub>-er-<sup>d</sup>Šu-<sup>d</sup>Suen ba-ra-ab-du<sub>8</sub>, "(x bitumen) was used to caulk the pedestal of the king's statue in Neber-Šu-Suen" (Nisaba 15 368:1–7; ŠS 6/iii).

**355** alam Šu-<sup>d</sup>Suen-ka <sup>de3</sup>Duh-hu-li<sub>2</sub><sup>ki</sup>-še<sub>3</sub> gin-na, "(expenditures of foodstuffs) when the statue of Šu-Suen was sent to Duhduli" (RTC 390:1–3; no year).

**356** The "festival of Šulgi" (ezen <sup>d</sup>Šul-gi) gave the name to the seventh month of the official Ur III calendar (eighth month since year Šu-Suen 4). This month-name was also incorporated into the local calendars of Girsu/Lagaš and Umma. The "festival of Šu-Suen" (ezen <sup>d</sup>Šu-Suen), which appears to have been created in year Šu-Suen 3, gave name to the ninth month of the official calendar. For the "festival of Šulgi," see Pitts 2015: 118–122.



gods. Although it cannot be excluded that such hymns existed already in Sargonic times, no certain examples of them survive.<sup>357</sup> The overwhelming majority of the Ur III compositions of this type are devoted to Šulgi (Klein 1981a; 1981b; Michalowski 2016), making it certain that the origin of this literary genre was intimately connected with the divination of kings. Here it is characteristic that nearly all of Šulgi's hymns focus entirely on his person. As such, they have commonly been classified as "praises" of Šulgi. Similar compositions were written in honor of Šu-Suen and Ibbi-Suen, but those are much less numerous. Also, they are properly hymns addressing particular deities, which merely intercede on the king's behalf. Compositions of the latter type continued to be written for the kings of Isin, and even those of Larsa. Although there also survives a group of hymns devoted to Ur-Namma (Flückiger-Hawker 1999), most of them undoubtedly were composed following Ur-Namma's death, and probably also as a retroactive reflection of Šulgi's deification.

The ritual background of the Ur III and Isin royal hymns appears to be unquestioned. It has been suggested that many of them were composed to commemorate specific political or cultic events (Frayne 1981; 1983; 1998: 24–26). If so, there is a strong possibility that these compositions formed part of staged rituals, during which they were actually recited and perhaps even theatrically enacted.

The dogma of divine kingship affected not only the king's status but also that of his wives. Since these women had become spouses of a god, their standing needed to be upgraded as well. Accordingly, they were afforded the title of *lukur*, which, in the Sumerian pantheon, identified the junior wife of a male deity (Steinkeller 1981: 81–82; Sharlach 2008: 178–179).<sup>358</sup> Importantly, this usage of *lukur* continued in Isin times,<sup>359</sup> to be abandoned subsequently.

---

**357** Possible examples of such hymns are the compositions "Naram-Suen and Erra" and "Elegy on the Death of Naram-Suen," both of which survive in Old Babylonian copies (J. G. Westenholz 1997: 189–220).

**358** This interpretation rests primarily on Gudea Cylinder B xi 3–12, where the seven divine *lukurs* of Ningirsu are identified as *lukur ki-ig-ni* (phonetic for *ki-ag<sub>2</sub>-ga<sub>2</sub>-ni*) ... *dumu-maš imin* <sup>d</sup>Ba-u<sub>2</sub>-me *banda<sub>3</sub><sup>da</sup>* en <sup>d</sup>Nin-gir<sub>2</sub>-su-ka-me, "his beloved *lukurs* ... the septuplets of Ba'u, the junior (wives) of lord Ningirsu." One of those *lukurs*, Hegirnuna, is called "beloved *lukur*" (*lukur ki-ag<sub>2</sub>*) of Ningirsu also in the inscriptions of Urukagina (RIME 1 269–275 Urukagina 3 v 16'–18', 280–281 Urukagina 7:26–28). In the Gudea passage, *lukur* ... *banda<sub>3</sub><sup>da</sup>* obviously stands for *dam banda<sub>3</sub><sup>da</sup>*, which is the usual designation of a junior wife. As a consequence of *lukur* having become a title of the king's junior wife, this term came to be used in reference to the junior wives of commoners as well (Steinkeller 1981: 81–82). Apart from *lukur*, junior wives of the Ur III and Isin kings sometimes are also designated as *lukur kaskal-la-ka-ni*. See, e.g., RIME 3/2 172–173 Šulgi 69:6 and the examples cited in the following note. I assume that, in this title, *kaskal*

A close reading of the Ur III economic documentation reveals that the kings and their immediate families played an exceedingly active role in the cultic life, much of which centered on their own personae.<sup>360</sup> As argued by Audrey Pitts 2015, this phenomenon should almost certainly be attributed to their divine status.

Yet another important aspect of the deification of kings that needs to be mentioned here is the invocation of divine rulers in personal names. Such names appeared for the first time during the reign of Naram-Suen, becoming exceedingly popular under the Ur III kings (Pitts 2015).<sup>361</sup> With the data presently available, 267 patterns of such names may be identified. The names of this type were borne by the members of all social strata, showing that the cult of the divine king was widely practiced, and that it affected the entire Ur III society. In many cases it may be shown that such names were adopted by their bearers late in their life, either in reflection of their particular closeness to the cult of the divine king or because of their association with royal family and the ruling circles more generally. It is likely that this practice reflected popular piety as well, with at least some people naming their children after the divine kings simply because of their authentic feelings for these individuals.

---

has a metaphoric sense, meaning “life’s journey” rather than “expedition/travel” specifically. Thus *kaskal-la-ka-ni* is to be translated as “the one of his life’s journey.” Cf. German *Gefährtin*, “female companion,” which etymologically means “one who rides (with him).” This designation perhaps invokes the image of the Sun God’s never-ending travel. For the identification of the Ur III kings with the Sun God, see below pp. 145–150.

**359** There survive two documented cases of such Isin “junior wives”: <sup>d</sup>Na-na-a-ib<sub>2</sub>-sa<sub>2</sub> lukur ki-ag<sub>2</sub> *kaskal-la-ka-ni*, “Nanaya-ibsa, his (i.e., of Bur-Sin) beloved lukur of his life’s journey” (RIME 4 70–71 Bur-Sin 3:8–9); Nu-ṭu-up-tum lukur ki-ag<sub>2</sub> [*kaskal-l*]a-ka-ni [ama ibi]la-na-ke<sub>4</sub>, “Nuṭup-tum, his (i.e., of Sin-magir) beloved lukur of life’s journey, [mother] of his heir” (RIME 4 98–99 Sin-magir 2:9–11).

**360** For a detailed study of this problem, see Pitts 2015.

**361** There were also geographical names named after divine kings. Sargonic sources mention two such toponyms: (*a-na*) *Maš-gán<sup>ki</sup>-ni-Īl-A-ga-dè<sup>ki</sup>* (CUSAS 27 212:5') and *Dur*(BAD<sub>3</sub>)-*Īl-A-ga-de<sub>3</sub>* (MDP 14 8:17). They became very common in Ur III times. Among the known examples, see <sup>d</sup>Šul-gi-<sup>d</sup>Nanna<sup>ki</sup> (UET 3 75:6), <sup>d</sup>Šul-gi-he<sub>2</sub>-gal<sub>2</sub> (SumRecDreh 22:3), I-šim-<sup>d</sup>Šul-gi<sup>ki</sup> (CT 32 19 i 9, etc.), Ne-be<sub>6</sub>-er-<sup>d</sup>Šu-<sup>d</sup>Suen (Nisaba 15/2 359:6, etc.), and the examples cited in Steinkeller 2013d: 357 nn. 39–41.

## 5 The Titulary of the Divine Kings and Their Familial Connections with the Divine Realm

The divine nature of the Sargonic and Ur III rulers is reflected also in another area, and this is their royal titles. Contrary to what some scholars of philological persuasion may be inclined to think, royal titles are not just rhetorical devices, whose functionality is confined to the level of text. These designations had a physical reality behind them, which was actualized through cultic rituals. To illustrate this point with a concrete example, it appears highly likely that the title *sipad*, “shepherd” or “vicar,” which, as I emphasized earlier, is one of the most potent images of the Sumerian ruler, had its own particular ritual counterpart. As it can be reconstructed, that ritual, which formed part of the New Year festivities, enacted the election of the ruler, by which the divine owner of the city-state chose his earthly representative, his “shepherd,” from among the entire nation.<sup>362</sup> In my view, it is highly likely that the titles borne by the divine Naram-Suen and Šar-kali-šarri found physical manifestation in similar cultic performances.

The first three rulers of the Sargonic dynasty (Sargon, Rimuš, and Maništu-šū) used two titles: “king of Akkade” (*lugal A-ga-de<sub>3</sub><sup>ki</sup>*) and “king of the totality/universe” (*lugal KIŠ*).<sup>363</sup> While abandoning the title of the “king of the totality,” Naram-Suen retained that of the “king of Akkade.” In addition, he created three new titles, all of which were introduced by him subsequent to – and clearly in reflection of – his deification:

---

**362** I base this hypothesis on the descriptions of how this happened on the divine plane. See Steinkeller 2016: 13–14, where the evidence of Gudea’s inscriptions is discussed. My assumption is that there existed a corresponding rite in real life, which symbolized the selection of the “shepherd.” Here note that the selection of the “shepherd of the Land” is also described in “Šulgi E” lines 1–8, where this title is bestowed on Šulgi by Enlil. Similar statements are found in “Šulgi D” line 60 and “Šulgi Q” lines 47–48. And the same phraseology is later applied to Šu-Suen as well: *lugal* <sup>d</sup>En-lil<sub>2</sub>-le šag<sub>4</sub> kug-ge pad<sub>3</sub>-da nam-sipad kalam-ma u<sub>3</sub> AN-ub-da-limmu-ba-še<sub>3</sub>, “king whom Enlil chose in (his) holy heart for the shepherdship of the Land and of the four quarters of the world” (RIME 3/2 322–323 Šu-Suen 12:5–8; also *ibid.* 317–320 Šu-Suen 9 x 9–12). It is likely, I think, that the coronations of Šulgi and other Ur III kings at Nippur involved similar enactments. Another, and even more certain example of such a ritual actualization is the presentation of bridal gifts by Ningirsu to Bau, as described in the inscriptions of Gudea (Statues E and G). Since these sources name *real* gifts, there must have existed a ritual during which Gudea, impersonating his personal god Ningišzida, transported these gifts by boat to Bau’s temple in Urukug.

**363** For this title, see most recently Steinkeller 2013a: 145–146.

- |     |                             |                            |
|-----|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| (1) | <i>il Akkade</i>            | Naram-Suen                 |
|     | <i>il qarrādu Akkade</i>    | Šar-kali-šarri             |
|     | <i>il māti Wari(URI)</i>    | Šar-kali-šarri             |
| (2) | <i>šar kibrātim arba'im</i> | Naram-Suen                 |
| (3) | <i>dannum</i>               | Naram-Suen, Šar-kali-šarri |
| (4) | <i>šar ba'ulāti Enlil</i>   | Šar-kali-šarri             |

Since I have already discussed the title of the “god of Akkade” and its ritual implications, there is no need to dwell on it any further, except to note that, under Šar-kali-šarri, two new forms of this designation were introduced: “heroic god of Akkade,”<sup>364</sup> and “god of the land of Warium.”<sup>365</sup> In the latter title, Uri/Warium is an ancient designation of northern Babylonia and the Diyala Region.<sup>366</sup>

Thus, I move on to the second title, the “king of the four quarters of the world,” which implies universal domination. A related designation, though not as far reaching in its implications, is “king of the subjects (of the lands) of Enlil,” which was introduced by Šar-kali-šarri.<sup>367</sup> A royal statue called “king of the four quarters of the world” is actually mentioned in Ur III tablets.<sup>368</sup> It is very probable, therefore, that there existed a specific ritual action associated with this title, which symbolized a rule over the entire world, and perhaps was similar to that performed as part of the coronation of the Egyptian Pharaoh, during which the new Pharaoh “shot arrows to four cardinal points to symbolize or actualize his mastery of the world, and four birds were released to the cardinal points to carry the news of the accession of the new Horus” (Lloyd 2014: 69).

As for the third title, *dannum*, “the mighty one,” our first reaction is to see in it a fundamentally profane designation. This is suggested by the fact that this adjective emphasizes the ruler’s physicality, and therefore, apparently, his human nature. Paradoxically, however, this title likewise pertains to the king’s divinity. I will return to this problem shortly later.

First, however, I need to discuss another area in which the divinity of kings manifested itself, and that is the ruler’s relationship to other deities. On the theological level, both the Sargonic and Ur III kings established strategic familial links with the pantheon. Already Naram-Suen considered himself to be the

<sup>364</sup> Škš DINGIR UR.SAG A-ga-de<sub>3</sub><sup>ki</sup> (RIME 2 201 Šar-kali-šarri 2005:1–3).

<sup>365</sup> <sup>d</sup>Škš *da-núm* DINGIR *ma-ti* URI<sup>ki</sup> (RIME 2 205–206 Šar-kali-šarri 2012:1–3).

<sup>366</sup> See, most recently, Steinkeller 2013a: 137.

<sup>367</sup> <sup>d</sup>Škš DUMU da-ti <sup>d</sup>En-lil<sub>2</sub> *da-núm* LUGAL A-ga-de<sub>3</sub><sup>ki</sup> *ù ba<sub>11</sub>-ú-la-ti* <sup>d</sup>En-lil<sub>2</sub> (RIME 2 188–189 Šar-kali-šarri 2:1–8); <sup>d</sup>Škš LUGAL *ba<sub>11</sub>-ú-la-ti* <sup>d</sup>En-lil<sub>2</sub> (RIME 2 198–199 Šar-kali-šarri 2001:1–2). Apparently, this title refers to Enlil’s status as the “master of all the foreign lands” (*lugal kur-kur-ra*).

<sup>368</sup> *alan lugal AN-ub-da limmu-ba* (UET 9 366:1–2, 5; Amar-Suen 7/iii; Nisaba 5/1 165).

spouse (*mutu*) of the goddess Ištar, in particular, of her martial avatar Annunitum, whose name means “the one of battle.”<sup>369</sup> Apart from its mentions in Sargonic historical sources, this connection is borne out by a remarkable art object, which was published and extensively studied by Donald P. Hansen (2002; 2003a; 2003b). See **figs. 35–37**.

This object is a fragment of a limestone mould. In all probability, the mould was used to cast a flat roundlet, probably made of gold, which was shaped as a disk crowned with an aureole of eight or nine radial streams or star points. It appears that each of the radial streams depicted a similar scene, which was the submission of a foreign land to Naram-Suen<sup>370</sup> and his divine patron and spouse Ištar-Annunitum. On the preserved fragment of the mould, the divine Naram-Suen is shown seated next to the goddess, with whom he shares the nose-ropes controlling two mountainous countries and their respective gods. As is made certain by the divine crown he is wearing, this representation celebrates Naram-Suen as a divine figure. This point is further underscored by the fact that he and Ištar-Annunitum are depicted as equals. For a detailed discussion of this representation, see Appendix 2.

Apart from sharing a spousal relationship with Ištar-Annunitum, Naram-Suen also claimed to be the son of Enlil, the head of the Sumerian pantheon.<sup>371</sup> In this he was followed by Šar-kali-šarri, who likewise called Enlil “his father” and described himself as Enlil’s “beloved son.”<sup>372</sup> But the deity after whom both Naram-Suen and Šar-kali-šarri had patterned their divine image most immediately was the Mesopotamian Sun God, who was known as Utu to the Sumerians, and as Šamaš to the Akkadians. Among the Mesopotamian gods, the Sun God cut by far the most heroic figure. As the Mesopotamian and some other ancient mythologies imagined it, the nightly progress of the Sun God through the

---

**369** NS *mu-ut* <sup>d</sup>INANA *An-nu-ni-tim* (RIME 2 88–90 Naram-Suen 1 ii 8’–9’); in *ri-ma-ti* <sup>d</sup>INANA *dar-a-mu-su*, “through the love of Ištar who developed love for him” (RIME 2 113–114 Naram-Sin 10:10–13). It is likely that, in adopting Ištar as his spouse, Naram-Suen drew on an earlier, Urukian tradition, which professed that the en of Uruk was a symbolic husband of Inana.

**370** The fact that the two foreign lands referenced in this representation likely are Elam and Marhaši (see Appendix 2) makes it quite certain that the ruler depicted in it is Naram-Suen (rather than Šar-kali-šarri).

**371** [NS] *maḥ-ri-iš* <sup>d</sup>En-lil<sub>2</sub> *a-bi-su* [*u-sa-ri-ib*], “[NS] brought (the captured enemies) before Enlil” (RIME 2 109–111 Naram-Suen 8 v 3–6).

**372** <sup>d</sup>Sar-ga-lī-LUGAL-*ri* ‘DUMU *da-ti-su* ... [*maḥ-ri-iš* <sup>d</sup>En-lil<sub>2</sub>] *a-bi-’su*’ *a-na* Nibru<sup>ki</sup> *è-la-kam al-su i-za-az*, “Šar-kali-šarri, his beloved son, ... goes [before Enlil] in Nippur (and) stands up before him” (RIME 2 194–195 Šar-kali-šarri 6 i 4 – ii 5); <sup>d</sup>Sar-ga-lī-LUGAL-*ri* DUMU *da-ti* <sup>d</sup>En-lil<sub>2</sub> (RIME 2 188–189 Šar-kali-šarri 2:1–2).

Netherworld was unbelievably arduous and of truly heroic character.<sup>373</sup> Equally remarkable was the fact that this *Sol invictus* re-emerged from his daily ordeal unscathed and always in the flower of youth.<sup>374</sup> These feats earned him the titles of ur-sag, “hero,” and šul, “youth” (Woods 2005a), or, as Piotr Michalowski has put it felicitously, “the ever-youthful one” (2016: 22). In fact, these two designations are the most common epithets of the Sun God in Sumerian literature.<sup>375</sup>

That the Sargonic kings thought of themselves as an earthly image of the Sun God is shown by the composition “The Curse of Akkade,” in which it is said that “Naram-Suen rises like the Sun on the holy dais of Akkade”:

---

**373** See Alaura and Bonechi 2012: 23 n. 99: “Si può speculare quindi che ‘eroe (e) primo in rango’ rimandi unitariamente all’oscurità ed alla luminosità, cioè alla pericolosità del viaggio notturno del coraggioso del sole ed alla gloria del viaggio diurno dello stesso dio vittoriosamente uscito dalla notte e dagli inferni.”

**374** Similar characteristics belong to Helios, whose mythology almost certainly had been influenced by that of Utu/Šamaš. Like the Babylonian Sun God, Helios too traversed the sky in a horse-drawn chariot, rising from the river Okeanos in the east, and descending in the land of Hesperides (Evenings) in the west, at the “gates of Helios.” From there, during the night, he was carried back to the east in a golden bowl or bed, which had been made for him by Hephaistos. As described in the proem of Parmenides’ *On Nature*, on his arrival at the “gates [separating] the ways of Day and Night,” the narrator (a double of Helios) is greeted by an unnamed goddess as a *kouros*, “young man.” In a study of this passage, Laura D. Steele suggests a connection between this description and the Akkadian *eṭlu*, an epithet of both Šamaš and Gilgameš, concluding that this “point of similarity is too apt to be coincidental” (2002: 586). For the mythology of Helios, see the useful collection of data at the online site “Theoi Greek Mythology” ([www.theoi.com](http://www.theoi.com)). For the horse-drawn chariot of the Sun God in Babylonian and Hittite mythologies, see Alaura 2011; Alaura and Bonechi 2012.

**375** Here it may be instructive to note that the mythology and cult of the Sun God were essential ingredients of the ideology of divine kingship also among the Inka (Conrad and Demarest 1984: 107–110, 181–182; D’Altroy 2002: 147). The Inka king, titled *Sapa Inka*, “the only Inka,” and *Inka Qhapaq*, “mighty Inka,” was considered to be a “god” (*Apu*) and the son of Inti, the Sun God. Although solar deities had been worshipped earlier in Andean religions, it was only with the rise of the Inka to power that the Sun God acquired a highly elevated status. The Inka rulers eventually turned his worship into a centerpiece of the official religion, apparently also introducing the symbol of the solar disk. Other places where divine kings were associated with solar deities are Egypt, Rome, and Japan (as well as France under Louis XIV!), to name only the most obvious examples. The popularity of this belief shows that divine kingship was commonly (if not universally) conceptualized through the use of solar analogies, probably because the sun, as all seeing, life-giving, protective, reassuring in its regular movements, and always victorious, epitomized the qualities belonging to a perfect – and so a divine – ruler. It is not by accident, therefore, that solar imagery was applied to rulers throughout Mesopotamian history, and almost as a matter of course, as, for instance, in OB times (Charpin 2013). However, such metaphors fall under the category of royal sacrality, in no way bespeaking the kings’ divinity.



lugal-bi sipad <sup>d</sup>Na-ra-am-<sup>d</sup>Suen-e  
 barag kug A-ga-de<sub>3</sub><sup>ki</sup> -še<sub>3</sub> ud-de<sub>3</sub>-eš<sub>2</sub> im-e<sub>3</sub>,  
 (“The Curse of Akkade” lines 40–41)

However, the best illustration of this point is provided by Sargonic art. Of particular importance here is the famous “Victory Stele” of Naram-Suen, which depicts the divine king while vanquishing his enemies in the Zagros mountains. See **figs. 38** and **39**. As far as I know, it was Claudia Fischer who first suggested that the image of Naram-Suen as depicted on the “Victory Stele” draws on the contemporary representations of the Sun God at the moment of his rising (2002: 131–132).<sup>376</sup> Particularly relevant here are two cylinder seals, both of which belonged to the governor of Lagaš by the name of Lugal-ušumgal. These two seals are dedicated to Naram-Suen and Šar-kali-šarri respectively.<sup>377</sup> See **figs. 40** and **41**.

While the images depicted on Mesopotamian cylinder seals usually are purely decorative, being completely unrelated to the owner of the seal and his occupation and social standing, there is no doubt that, in these two particular cases, the choice of the Sun God was intentional. We can be certain, I think, that Lugal-ušumgal had used the image of the Sun God as a direct reference to Naram-Suen and Šar-kali-šarri, who are explicitly named in the seals’ inscriptions. In other words, the rising Sun God stands here for the divine king.

We need to return now to the “Victory Stele,” in order to take a closer look at Naram-Suen’s body. In her ground-breaking article of 1996, entitled “Sex, Rhetoric, and the Public Monument: The Alluring Body of Naram-Sîn of Agade,” Irene Winter perceptively observed that the manner in which Naram-Suen’s body is depicted on the “Victory Stele” constitutes a complete innovation in Mesopotamian art. As Winter argued, what is particularly novel about this image is the king’s “perfect, alluring, ‘heroic,’ body ... [which] represents a conscious strategy of representation” (1996: 16). Winter then brought attention to Naram-Suen’s title *dannum*, “the powerful one,” offering the following explanation:

This focus on the (male) *potestas* of the ruler as part of the formal title, I would argue, is rendered visually not only by the weapons he carried in hand, but also by the life force/vitality of his perfect and alluring (hence sexually desirable, for which, read “potent”) body. (1996: 17)

<sup>376</sup> For this conclusion see also Suter 2010: 341–342.

<sup>377</sup> Amiet 1976: 115 figs. 83 (AO 24062) and 84 (AO 24065).

The divine kings' physicality is emphasized, even more assertively, on the Hansen roundlet. There, Naram-Suen's bulging musculature makes him appear almost like a body builder. What is even more interesting about this representation is the fact that the foreign gods appearing in it are similarly muscular and beefy. The message is clear: Naram-Suen's body is like that of the gods.<sup>378</sup>

And these are precisely the qualities expressed by the adjective *dannu*, which, apart from meaning "powerful, strong," also carries the connotations of health and youth.<sup>379</sup> This adjective was not used as a royal title prior to Naram-Suen's deification, *except* – and this is important, I believe – in reference to Gilgameš,<sup>380</sup> who, as the ancients believed, was a demigod.<sup>381</sup>

These facts convince me that *dannu* is a marker of Naram-Suen's divinity. Further support for this contention may be sought in the evidence of ancient Greek art. Addressing the question of the anthropomorphic representations of gods in ancient Greece – or, in other words – why did the Greeks depict their

---

**378** A completely different reading of Naram-Suen's body was offered by Porter 2013: 608: "The gods are corporal but ever unseen except in their wooden/silver/stone personae, while Naram-Sin is knowable. He is knowable through his human visibility and he can never therefore be truly god-like no matter his adoption of the insignia of divinity, because his body is unchanged ... in rendering the body of Naram-Sin, he [i.e., the artist] rendered indeed, in its muscular beauty, its humanness and not its otherworldliness." In my view, the significance of Naram-Suen's body is just the opposite.

**379** In the "Ebla Vocabulary" line 825 (MEE 4 292), *dannu* is translated as *silim-ma*, "healthy, sound," literally "be healthy!" It is characteristic that since very early on *silim(-ma)* was consistently associated with the Sun God. For the examples of this association and an extensive discussion of this problem, see Steinkeller 2015a, to which add: 'e<sub>2</sub>-l-ta hul<sub>2</sub>-la-ni nam-ta-e<sub>3</sub> ud agrun(E<sub>2</sub>.NUN)-na-t[a?] / kalam-ma-ni <sup>d</sup>Utu-e<sub>3</sub>-gim silim-ma mu-na-du (for du<sub>11</sub>), "she (i.e., Nin-Isina) emerged joyfully from her house; her Land greets her (lit.: says "Be healthy!) like (one greets) Utu when he rises from his bed chamber" (M.E. Cohen 1975: 609 lines 5 and 7).

**380** In the inscriptions on two Pre-Sargonic maceheads presented ex-voto to divine Gilgameš (George 2003: vol. 1 122 n. 127), Gilgameš bears the title of *lugal kalag(-ga)*, "mighty king." The adjective *kalag-ga* is also used in reference to two Pre-Sargonic rulers, En-anatum I of Lagaš and Giššag-kidug of Umma: *nita kalag-ga-mu*, "my (i.e., of Ningirsu) mighty male" (RIME I 170–173 En-anatum I 2 x 4); *er<sub>3</sub> kalag-ga-ni*, "his (i.e., of Lugal-Urub) mighty servant" (RIME I 182 En-anatum I 10 i 2); *ensi<sub>2</sub> kalag-ga <sup>d</sup>En-lil<sub>2</sub>-la<sub>2</sub>-ke<sub>4</sub>*, "the mighty ensik of Enlil" (RIME I 372–374 Giššag-kidug 2 i 15–16). It is possible that these designations invoke Gilgameš imagery. However, because of their exceptional nature, they do not qualify to be called royal titles proper.

**381** "Two-thirds of him god, one third of him humanity" ("Gilgameš" SB Version, Tablet I line 48). This calculation apparently assumes that Gilgameš's mother, goddess Nin-sumun, was responsible for two-thirds of his genetic material, with his father, the mortal Lugal-banda, contributing the remaining third.



gods as youthful and beautiful human creatures – the classicist Jean-Pierre Vernant offered the following explanation:

Does it mean that for the Greeks the gods were conceived of and represented in the image of human beings? To me it seems the opposite – that the human body became perceptible to Greek eyes when it was in the flower of its youth, when it was like an image or a reflection of the divine. (1991: 159)

Similar conclusions, which draw on Vernant's interpretation, were reached by Louise B. Zaidman and Louise S. Pantel:

The fact that the Greeks sculpted such statues of their gods does not imply a belief that the gods resembled men or had bodies that were in every respect human; what the Greeks did believe was that the beauty, youth or perfection of a real human body evoked qualities of the divine. (1992: 217)

The notion that a perfect human body signaled the sublime qualities of the divine existed also in ancient Egypt. One of the titles used by the Pharaoh was *nefer* (*nfr*), which, as explained by Alan B. Lloyd,

is often translated “good” but whose connotations lie much deeper in that it evokes concepts of youth and pristine strength and power associated with the sun-god as he rises over the eastern horizon in the morning. (2014: 67)

The phenomenon of kings becoming an integral part of the pantheon assumed an even greater dimension in Ur III times. To use a figurative expression, it may be said that the Ur III kings wormed their way into the local panthea, a development that, as I noted earlier, was motivated entirely by political considerations.

In terms of their genealogical orientation, the Ur III kings traced their descent primarily to the mythical, semi-divine kings of Uruk, such as Lugal-banda and Gilgameš. Although it may have begun already under Ur-Namma,<sup>382</sup> it was only during the reign of Šulgi that this development acquired its full formulation.

---

**382** In his original inscriptions, Ur-Namma bears the title of the en of Unug (RIME 3/2 35 Ur-Namma 12:7) and identifies Nin-sumun as “his personal deity” (*dingir-ra-ni*) (RIME 3/2 58–59 Ur-Namma 23:1–2). These facts attest to his connection with Uruk and its pantheon. However, the claims that Ur-Namma was a child of Nin-sumun and Lugal-banda, which are found in the literary compositions devoted to him, obviously are retroactive interpolations. See the discussion below.

The Urukian genealogy of Šulgi was an elaborate theological construct. Growing out of the traditional rhetoric that identified particular deities as the agents responsible for the creation and birth of kings, this theology eventually became a fully-fledged argument about Šulgi's divine parentage. The course of this development may be traced by the comparison of two compositions, "Šulgi D" and "Šulgi P." Although "Šulgi D" may not necessarily be the earlier of the two, it offers a more modest – and therefore probably an earlier – picture of Šulgi's connections with the divine realm, which is still couched in traditional rhetoric:

sipad Šul-gi a-zu [šag<sub>4</sub> ku]g-ga ba-an-ri-a  
 ama ugu<sub>2</sub>-zu<sup>383</sup> <sup>d</sup>Nin-sum[un<sub>2</sub>-ke<sub>4</sub>] mu-u<sub>3</sub>-tud-[en]  
 dingir-zu kug <sup>d</sup>Lu[gal-banda<sub>3</sub><sup>da</sup>] mu-u<sub>3</sub>-dim<sub>2</sub>-e-[en]  
 ama <sup>d</sup>Nin-tur-re [mi<sub>2</sub> zid mu-u<sub>3</sub>-dug<sub>4</sub>-ge-en?<sup>384</sup>]

Oh shepherd Šulgi! When your seed was ejaculated into the womb,  
 Nin-sumun, your creatrix, formed you;  
 holy Lugal-banda, your personal god, fashioned you;  
 mother Nintu [caressed? you].  
 ("Šulgi D" lines 40–43)

That this text reflects an earlier theological situation finds corroboration in one of Šulgi's original inscriptions, which dates to before his deification.<sup>385</sup> There, Nin-sumun and Lugal-banda are identified as Šulgi's "personal deity" and his "master" respectively.<sup>386</sup> Although, in this instance, it is not Lugal-banda but Nin-sumun who is called Šulgi's personal deity, this source demonstrates that, prior to Šulgi's deification, Nin-sumun and Lugal-banda were associated with Šulgi merely as his protective deities, without any suggestion of their being his parents.

This ideological picture changed with Šulgi's deification, when, as a consequence of having become a *bona fide* deity, Šulgi was elevated to the status of Nin-sumun's and Lugal-banda's natural son. This development is illustrated by

**383** The terms ama ugu/ugu<sub>2</sub> and a-a ugu/ugu<sub>2</sub>, whose literal meaning is "mother/father of the head/cranium," appear to derive from the Akkadian *bāni qaqqadi*, for which see above p. 114 n. 306. Note also a ugu<sub>4</sub>(KU)-mu in Gudea Cylinder A x 1. On the basis of these terms, lexical texts erroneously equate ugu/ugu<sub>2</sub>/ugu<sub>4</sub> with *banû* and *alādu* (Ea I 137–138 = MSL 14 184; CAD A/1 288).

**384** This restoration, which follows Klein 1981a: 94, is uncertain.

**385** This is demonstrated by the titles Šulgi is assigned there. For the history of Šulgi's titulary, see in detail below pp. 151–153.

**386** <sup>d</sup>Nin-sumun<sub>2</sub> dingir-mu <sup>d</sup>Lugal-banda<sub>3</sub><sup>da</sup> lugal-mu (RIME 3/2 182 Šulgi 85:10–13).

the hymn “Šulgi P,” which describes the deification of Šulgi. As we have seen earlier, this momentous event occurred thanks to the initiative and efforts of Nin-sumun. Undoubtedly in reflection of Šulgi’s new status, Nin-sumun and Lugal-banda are now presented as Šulgi’s real parents:

Šul-gi amar kug tud-da-mu-me-en<sub>3</sub>  
 a ‘dug<sub>3</sub>’<sup>d</sup>Lugal-banda<sub>3</sub><sup>da</sup>-me-en<sub>3</sub>  
 ur<sub>2</sub> kug-mu-a mu-ni-ib<sub>2</sub>-bulug<sub>3</sub>-en<sub>3</sub>  
 ubur<sub>2</sub> kug-mu-a nam ma-ra-ni-tar ...  
 a-a ugu<sub>4</sub>-zu ‘dLugal-banda<sub>3</sub>’<sup>da</sup>-a  
 šul an-ne<sub>2</sub> zu dingir-re-ne mu-še<sub>3</sub> ‘mu’-ri<sub>2</sub>-in-sa<sub>4</sub>

(Nin-sumun speaks:) “Oh Šulgi, you are my holy calf born of me,  
 you are the sweet seed of Lugal-banda.

I reared you on my holy lap,

I determined your fate at my holy bosom ...

Lugal-banda, your creator,

named you ‘Youth whom An made known among the gods.’”

(Segment C lines 22–25, 38–39)

The tenet of Šulgi’s being a natural son of Nin-sumun<sup>387</sup> and Lugal-banda in turn permitted his identification as a brother of Gilgameš (Klein 1976; Michalowski 2008: 36; Woods 2012: 79). This point is elaborated most extensively in the hymn “Šulgi O,” where Šulgi is repeatedly called the “brother and friend” of Gilgameš (Segment A lines 50, 86, 139, Segment D line 6),<sup>388</sup> and where he meets Gilgameš in person, praising the latter’s strength (nam-kalag) and “heroism” (nam-ur-sag), as well as his manifold military feats. As demonstrated by this and other literary sources whose origins belong to Ur III times, Gilgameš was one of Šulgi’s favorite role models.<sup>389</sup>

Once this genealogy had been firmly established, it was then retroactively assigned to Ur-Namma, clearly with an objective of bolstering Šulgi’s divine status still further. From now on it was claimed that it was already Ur-Namma who

**387** Šulgi is called son of Nin-sumun also in “Šulgi X” line 47, “Šulgi O” Segment A line 29, and “Šulgi Q” line 43.

**388** See also Šul-gi ... šeš ku-li-ni en “Bil<sub>3</sub>-ga-mes in “Šulgi D” line 292.

**389** This is also reflected in the various stories about Gilgameš, which were composed in Ur III times. The allusions to Šulgi as a *Doppelgänger* of Gilgameš are particularly obvious in “Gilgameš and Akka” and “Gilgameš and Huwawa.” In the latter composition, Version A line 20, Utu calls Gilgameš a dumu-gir<sub>15</sub>, “native son,” which is probably a play on Šulgi’s name, “Local/native youth” (Steinkeller 2005b: 309).

descended from gods. The fullest presentation of these views is found in the composition “Ur-Namma C”<sup>390</sup>:

a!-mu šag<sub>4</sub> kug-ge ba-ri-a-ta ...  
<sup>d</sup>Nin-tu tud-'tud<sup>1</sup>-a <mu->un-gub-bu!  
 šag<sub>4</sub> ama-mu <sup>d</sup>Nin-sumun<sub>2</sub>-ka-ta  
 nam-tar-ra sag<sub>5</sub>-ga ma-ta-e<sub>3</sub>

After my seed was ejaculated in the holy womb ...  
 Nintu accompanied my birthing,  
 from the womb of my mother Nin-sumun  
 a propitious destiny came out for me.  
 (lines 43–49)

šu-dug<sub>4</sub>-ga-e <sup>d</sup>Nanna-a-me-en  
 šeš <sup>d</sup>Bil<sub>3</sub>-ga-mes gu-la-me-en  
 [dumu t]ud-da <sup>d</sup>Nin-sumun<sub>2</sub>-ka-me-en numun nam-en-na-me-en

I am a creation of Nanna,  
 I am the elder brother of Gilgameš,  
 I am a child born by Nin-sumun, I am the seed of en-ship.  
 (lines 111–113)

In agreement with the above, in “Ur-Namma A” line 16 Nin-sumun is called ama lugal-la, “mother of the king.”<sup>391</sup> The secondary nature of this theology is proved by the fact that, like Šulgi before his deification, in his original inscriptions Ur-Namma too refers to Nin-sumun merely as his personal deity.<sup>392</sup>

The Ur III kings invented yet another divine genealogy for themselves, which independently linked them with Uruk and its deities. This genealogy, an antecedent of which probably existed already in Sargonic times (see above p. 136), was derived from the fact that the Ur III kings were holders of the ancient office of the en of Uruk.<sup>393</sup> This made them symbolic and ritual spouses of Inana as well. Based on this connection with Inana, they could consequently claim to be the latter-day apparitions of Dumuzi, a lover/husband of Inana, and possibly one

**390** There is no doubt that this self-laudatory hymn was composed following Ur-Namma’s death, through the use of various materials pertaining to Šulgi.

**391** Note also that Ur-Namma is called dumu tud-da <sup>d</sup>Nin-sumun<sub>2</sub>-ka ‘emedu<sub>2</sub>(AM.A.TU)’ ki-ag<sub>2</sub>-ga<sub>2</sub>-ni in “Ur-Namma Laws” 37–40 (= RIME 3/2 47). This may be a later interpolation as well.

**392** <sup>d</sup>Nin-sumun<sub>2</sub> dingir-ra-ni (RIME 3/2 58–59 Ur-Nammu 23:1–2).

**393** See Steinkeller 1999a: 105 and n. 4. Note also that in the hymn “Šulgi D” line 387 Enlil grants to Šulgi en-ship (nam-en nam-lugal-la ud sud-da nam-še<sub>3</sub> gu<sub>2</sub>-mu-ri<sub>2</sub>-ib<sub>2</sub>-tar<sup>ar</sup>), where the en-ship of Uruk undoubtedly is meant.

of the mythical archaic rulers of Uruk (see Essay 1 p. 29–30). The identification with Dumuzi in turn made them the brothers of Dumuzi's sister Geštinana.<sup>394</sup>

The figure of Dumuzi was one of the characteristic images of the divine king (Woods 2012: 88–89). The adoption of Dumuzi for these purposes must have been motivated, at least in part, by the fact that, very much like Gilgameš, Dumuzi too had a mixed, partly divine and partly human nature.<sup>395</sup> As such, Dumuzi constituted a perfect model for the divine king. In literature, the Ur III and Isin rulers are often compared to Dumuzi or even identified with him. This point is particularly clear in the hymn “Šulgi X” lines 1–73. When Šulgi arrives in Uruk to pay a visit to Inana, Inana joyfully receives him as the “shepherd Dumuzi” (su<sub>4</sub>-ba du<sub>5</sub>-mu-zi-de<sub>3</sub>), recalling the pleasurable moments the two spent in each other's company in the past. On account of those good times, she then determines destiny for Šulgi, bestowing upon him the “legitimate shepherdship of all the foreign countries,” and vouching her active support on the battlefield — this time, however addressing him as “shepherd Šulgi.”<sup>396</sup>

It appears that Dumuzi mythology occupied an especially important place in the beliefs about the afterlife of divine kings. There is compelling evidence for the existence of a notion that, following his death, the king continued his existence by becoming an immortal star. Since Dumuzi had an astral form, that belief likely was based on Dumuzi's own history (Steinkeller 2013b: 462–463, 472–473). As speculated by this author, there may have even existed a special ritual, which symbolized the transition of the dead king from the netherworld to his astral position in the sky (Steinkeller 2013b).

However, the deity whom Šulgi and his successors adopted as their primary divine image was the Sun God. In this they clearly emulated the Sargonic rulers. Since the Sun God happened to be Inana's brother, this made the divine king a brother-in-law of the Sun God. In fact, Šulgi repeatedly claims to have been Utu's “brother and companion” (see below). This genealogical link further cemented the connection of the Ur III kings with Uruk and its pantheon.<sup>397</sup>

---

**394** nin<sub>9</sub>-mu <sup>d</sup>Geštin-an-na (“Šulgi E” line 21); <sup>d</sup>Geštin-an-na nin<sub>9</sub> lugal-la-ke<sub>4</sub> (“Šulgi P” Segment C line 43). Interestingly, Šulgi calls himself “son” of Geštinana in an inscription dating to before his deification (RIME 3/2 163 Šulgi 62:1). As I suggested many years ago (1981: 78), this inscription may refer to Šulgi's real mother, SI.A-tum, who, as there are reasons to believe, was posthumously venerated as a deity <sup>d</sup>Geštin-an-na SI.A-tum.

**395** Cf. Essay 1 pp. 29–30.

**396** It is clear that, at least in the Ur III and Isin periods, the royal title of sipad, “shepherd,” was consistently associated with Dumuzi.

**397** For the role of Utu in the Uruk pantheon and his connections with the Ur III kings, see the extensive discussion by Woods 2012. As Woods demonstrates, the mythological kings of Uruk were solar heroes in their own right. This is shown by the fact that both Mes-kiag-gašir and

Indeed, the Sun God figures very prominently in the Ur III royal hymns, especially those of Šulgi. We have already seen (above pp. 125–126) that, as part of his deification, the gods “caused Šulgi, the righteous one, to rise in the Land like the Sun God in order to be [their (i.e., of the people)] god”:

Šul-gi si-sa<sub>2</sub> dingir-ra-[ne-ne-še<sub>3</sub>]  
kalam-ma <sup>d</sup>Utu-gim ma-ni-in-<sup>e</sup><sub>3</sub>-[eš]  
 (“Šulgi P,” Segment C line 59)

Sun God imagery is applied to Šulgi also in the following passage:

uru-mu <sup>d</sup>Utu-gim ba-ta-e<sub>3</sub>-en šag<sub>4</sub>-ba bi<sub>2</sub>-la<sub>2</sub>  
E<sub>2</sub>-temen-ni<sub>2</sub>-guru<sub>3</sub> me ki us<sub>2</sub>-sa  
gug-a nam-nun-ni mu-ni-ib<sub>2</sub>-si-nam  
I rise over my city like Utu, I suspend myself in its midst;  
Etemen-niguru, the place established by the divine forces,  
I fill with (the radiance of) princely carmelian.  
 (“Šulgi C” lines 25–27)

Elsewhere, the Sun God is described as Šulgi’s “brother and companion,” as well as the one who provides him with strength:

šeš ku-li-mu šul <sup>d</sup>Utu-am<sub>3</sub>  
ki zi-šag<sub>4</sub>-gal<sub>2</sub>-la-ka igi mu-na-ni-du<sub>8</sub>  
<sup>d</sup>Šul-gi-me-en dalla e<sub>3</sub>-bi-a inim mu-un-da-bala-e-en  
dingir igi sag<sub>9</sub> me<sub>3</sub>-ga<sub>2</sub>-a-kam  
šul <sup>d</sup>Utu kur-ra ki-ag<sub>2</sub> <sup>d</sup>Lama <sup>giš</sup>tukul-ga<sub>2</sub>-a-kam  
inim-ma-ni-še<sub>3</sub> ga-mu-un-kalag-ge la ga-mu-un-ne<sub>3</sub>?-e  
me<sub>3</sub> giš giš-e la<sub>2</sub>-a-ba <sup>d</sup>Utu ga<sub>2</sub>-ar ma-an-e<sub>3</sub>,  
My brother and companion indeed is the ever-youthful Utu;  
he gazed upon me! at the place where the life force (is created);  
I am Šulgi, I exchange words with him at his brilliant rising;  
he is the god (who casts) an auspicious eye on my battles;  
(during my campaigns) in foreign lands the ever-youthful Utu shows love for the protective

---

his son Enmerkar are called sons of Utu (ibid. 81). It appears that most of this mythology was an invention of the Ur III period. This particularly concerns Mes-kiag-gašir, whose name is an implausible mixture of Sumerian and Akkadian: “Beloved Hero, the Strong One.” This artificial formation is based on the names like Erra-gašir, where *gašru*, “strong, heavy,” is also a by-name of Nergal (Steinkeller 1987: 165–166; 1990: 58). However, some elements of it may have been older. Apart from the data cited by Woods 2012: 93–94, there is the fact that already the Sargonic kings cultivated a connection with the Sun God. It is possible, therefore, that this notion harkened back to an earlier time.

deity of my weapon;  
 by his command I become stronger; I ...  
 when the weapons join in battle, Utu comes out for me (as helper).  
 (“Šulgi B” lines 40–46)

The Sun God is also credited with granting the “kingship of the Land” to Šulgi:

<sup>d</sup>Utu lugal nig<sub>2</sub>-si-sa<sub>2</sub> a zi-de-eš<sub>2</sub> tum<sub>2</sub>-ma  
 šen-na dalla mu-na-ni-in-e<sub>3</sub> sipad zi Šul-gi-ke<sub>4</sub>  
 am gal an kug-ta šul <sup>d</sup>Utu izi-gar-gim ga<sub>2</sub>-ga<sub>2</sub> ud kalam-ma igi-gal<sub>2</sub> ...  
 Šul-gi-ra <sup>d</sup>Utu-u<sub>3</sub> 'nam'-lugal kalam-ma mu-na-an-sum

Utu, the king of justice,  
 made Šulgi glorious on the battle field, the one who is fit be the legitimate seed, the one  
 who is the legitimate shepherd.  
 The great wild bull, the ever youthful Utu, the one who like a torch sets (light) in the sky,  
 who makes light/day visible in the Land ...  
 Utu granted to Šulgi the kingship of the Land.  
 (“Šulgi Q” lines 5–11)

šul <sup>d</sup>Utu sipad šag<sub>4</sub>-ge bi<sub>2</sub>-i<sub>3</sub>-pad<sub>3</sub>  
 Šul-gi sipad zi lugal mu he<sub>2</sub>-gal<sub>2</sub>-la<sub>2</sub> nam-še<sub>3</sub> tar-ra-am<sub>3</sub>  
 sipad zi <sup>d</sup>Utu-u<sub>3</sub> nam tar-ra-ra  
<sup>d</sup>En-lil<sub>2</sub>-le eš<sub>3</sub>-e Nibru<sup>ki</sup>-ta sag-e-eš<sub>2</sub> mu-ni-rig<sub>7</sub>

The ever youthful Utu chose the shepherd in (his) heart.  
 For Šulgi, the legitimate shepherd, the king, years of abundance were destined (by Utu).  
 To the legitimate shepherd, the one granted destiny by Utu,  
 in the shrine of Nippur Enlil granted (the years of abundance).  
 (“Šulgi Q” lines 45–48)<sup>398</sup>

The hymns of Šulgi are replete with references to his youth, heroism, strength, and physicality. While these descriptions primarily draw on the Sun God imagery, they also invoke the representations and characterizations of Gilgameš and Naram-Suen. Particularly common here are the references to Šulgi as “mighty” (kalag-ga) and “hero” (ur-sag). An epithet that is uniquely Šulgi’s own is

**398** The association of the divine kings with the Sun God is also reflected in the existence of personal and geographical names in which these rulers are likened to the Sun God. See <sup>d</sup>Šul-gi-Ša-am<sub>3</sub>-ši (ITT 2 728 i 4; AnOr 1 248:6; Nisaba 22 158:13; etc.) / <sup>d</sup>Šul-gi-<sup>d</sup>Utu-mu (BPOA 6 746:2; TCTI 2 3999:4; etc.), <sup>d</sup>Amar-<sup>d</sup>Suen-<sup>d</sup>Utu-mu (L’uomo 62 iii 13; BPOA 5 135, 138 Talon-Vanderroost 1 rev. viii 31), <sup>d</sup>Šu-<sup>d</sup>Suen-<sup>d</sup>Utu-mu (MVN 16 607:4), and <sup>d</sup>Šul-gi-<sup>d</sup>Utu<sup>ki</sup> (TCL 2 4688:4; RIME 3/2 213–214 Šulgi 2028:6). Note also Amar-Suen’s title dingir zi <sup>d</sup>Utu kalam-ma-na (RIME 3/2 262–264 Amar-Suen 16:10–11).



“youth” (šul), which, apart from being Utu’s designation, plays on Šulgi’s own name, whose meaning is “Local/native youth.”<sup>399</sup> Offered below is a selection of the most representative descriptions of this type:

‘šul<sup>1</sup> ‘Utu-u<sub>3</sub> sag-ki zalag-ga-ni mu-ši-ib<sub>2</sub>-zi-zi-[(x)]  
 ‘Šul<sup>1</sup>-gi sipad zi Ki-en-gi-ra-ra nam mu-ni-[ib<sub>2</sub>-tar-re]  
 [ugal] ka gun<sub>3</sub>-gun<sub>3</sub> igi sag<sub>9</sub>-sag<sub>9</sub>,  
 ur-sag kalag-ga pirig-še<sub>3</sub> tud-da  
 sumun<sub>2</sub> tur nam-šul-ba gub-ba  
 lipiš tuku ne-ni-e nu-keš<sub>2</sub>-ra<sub>2</sub>

The ever youthful Utu raises his bright forehead (and)  
 determines destiny for Šulgi, the legitimate shepherd of Sumer:  
 ‘Oh [king] of flowery mouth and beautiful face!  
 You indeed are a mighty hero, the one born to be a lion,  
 a young wild bull, the one who stands in the prime of youth.  
 a brave one, the one whose strength cannot be restrained.  
 (“Šulgi X” lines 80–85)

kalag-ga-mu mu-bi a<sub>2</sub> bi<sub>2</sub>-su<sub>3</sub>-ud ...  
 ‘Šul-gi dingir nam-guruš-a sag-kal eren<sub>2</sub>-na-me-en ...  
 ‘Šul-gi nir-gal<sub>2</sub> usu gal-gal-la-me-en  
 kalag-ga-me-en ...  
 anše eren<sub>2</sub>-na-mu zi-bi nu-mu-e-da-šub-be<sub>2</sub>  
 šeš ku-li-mu šul ‘Utu-gim  
 zag-še<sub>3</sub> pirig-gim sug<sub>2</sub>-sug<sub>2</sub>-ge-ga<sub>2</sub>  
 anše sahar la<sub>2</sub> ug-gim sig<sub>4</sub>-gi<sub>4</sub>-a-ga<sub>2</sub> kuš<sub>7</sub> sag<sub>9</sub>-ga-bi-me-en  
 dur<sub>3</sub><sup>ur3</sup>-gim kas<sub>4</sub>-a ne<sub>3</sub>/ne-mu nu-silig-me  
 kas<sub>4</sub>-ta e<sub>3</sub>-a-me-en dug<sub>3</sub> nu-kuš<sub>2</sub>-u<sub>3</sub>-me-en  
 nam-te nu-gal<sub>2</sub>-me-en išiš-a gud-gu<sub>4</sub>-ud-me-en

The fame of my strength is spread far ...  
 I am Šulgi, the god of manliness, the leader of soldiers ...  
 I, Šulgi, am a prince of immense bodily power,  
 I am mighty ...  
 The spirit of the donkey team (pulling my wagon) never subsides for me.<sup>400</sup>  
 Like my brother and companion Utu I stride forward like a lion.  
 I am a fine coachman of the dust-raising donkeys that bray like lions.

**399** See above n. 389.

**400** This and the following two lines invoke the image of Utu as he drives in his wagon pulled by a team of donkey stallions. See ni-is-ku EREN<sub>2</sub> mu tuku EREN<sub>2</sub> ‘Utu ki-ag<sub>2</sub>, “the famous team of steeds, the beloved team of Utu” (Gudea Cylinder A xiv 25); EREN<sub>2</sub> kug ‘Utu sag bala-e-dam, “(it was) as if the (donkeys of the) holy team of Utu were tossing their heads” (ibid. xix 16). For a discussion of the Gudea passages and other data bearing on the team of the Sun God, see in detail Alaura and Bonechi 2012: 14–16. Cf. also Bonechi 2010; 2011; Alaura 2011.

When I run like a stallion, my strength does not cease.  
 When I finish the run, my knees are not tired.  
 I have no fear. I dance with joy.  
 (“Šulgi B” lines 53, 81, 119–120, 122–128)

kalag-ga nam-ur-sag-ga<sub>2</sub> tum<sub>2</sub>-ma ...  
 nam-ur-sag-zu-u<sub>3</sub> pa he<sub>2</sub>-e<sub>3</sub>-e<sub>3</sub>  
 nam-kalag-ga-zu-u<sub>3</sub> mi<sub>2</sub> dug<sub>3</sub> he<sub>2</sub>-e

(Oh Šulgi) the mighty one, the one fit for heroism ...  
 may your heroism shine fourth,  
 may your might be sweetly praised!  
 (“Šulgi D” lines 4, 16–17, 38–39, 63–64)

Šul-gi-ra nam mu-ni-ib<sub>2</sub>-tar-re  
 lugal nam gi<sub>4</sub>-ri<sub>2</sub>-ib<sub>2</sub>-tar<sup>ar</sup> nam dug<sub>3</sub> gu<sub>2</sub>-mu-ri-ib<sub>2</sub>-tar<sup>ar</sup> ...  
 nam-ur-sag nam-še<sub>3</sub> gu<sub>2</sub>-mu-ri-ib<sub>2</sub>-tar<sup>ar</sup>

(Enlil) determines destiny for Šulgi:  
 ‘Oh king, I will determine a destiny for you! I will determine a propitious destiny for you!  
 I will determine heroism as your fate!  
 (“Šulgi D” lines 383–386)

<sup>d</sup>Suen-e E<sub>2</sub>-kiš-nu-gal<sub>2</sub>-ta  
 nam-ur-sag nam-kalag-ga nam-til<sub>3</sub> nig<sub>2</sub>-dug<sub>3</sub> sag-e-eš rig<sub>7</sub>-ga  
 Suen in Ekišnugal  
 presented (Šulgi) with heroism, might, and sweet life.  
 (“Šulgi A” lines 96–97).

Šul-gi sipad zi Ki-en-gi-ra-ke<sub>4</sub>  
 šeš ku-li en <sup>d</sup>Bil<sub>3</sub>-ga-mes  
 nam-kalag-ga-na mu-ni-in-i-i  
 nam-ur-sag-ga<sub>2</sub> mu-ni-in-pad<sub>3</sub>-pad<sub>3</sub>-de<sub>3</sub>  
 Šulgi, the legitimate shepherd of Sumer,  
 extols the might of his brother and companion Gilgameš,  
 he avows his heroism.  
 (“Šulgi O” lines 49–52)

sipad a<sub>2</sub> kalag-ga-ke<sub>4</sub> mes-e  
 (Šulgi), the shepherd of strong arms, the young hero.<sup>401</sup>  
 (“Šulgi G” line 19)

---

**401** For the full context, see above p. 114–115.

That the youth and strength were expected – and perhaps even required – attributes of the divine king is also reflected in the references to Šulgi as a “runner,” particularly in the hymn “Šulgi A,” whose central theme is the superhuman run that Šulgi performed, within one day, between Nippur and Ur and back. Although this “run” may have had a very prosaic, practical *Sitz im Leben* (Steinkeller 2010: 380–382), it cannot be excluded that it had a ritual dimension as well. Significantly, the same feat was later replicated by another divine king, Išme-Dagan of Isin.<sup>402</sup> Therefore, it is possible that such running performances were meant to demonstrate the king’s physical prowess. Here one is reminded of the Heb Sed festival, as part of which the Egyptian Pharaoh was required, usually after thirty years of his reign, to run a race in order to prove that he was still physically fit for the office – and probably also to demonstrate his continued possession of the “divine” essence (Kees 1912; Frankfort 1948: 79–88; Uphill 1965). As defined by Frankfort, the objective of this festival was “a true renewal of kingly potency, a rejuvenation of rulership *ex opere operato*”<sup>403</sup> (1948: 79).

The identification of the Ur III kings with the Sun-God may be discerned also in Ur III art. On the whole, the image of the divine king is much more restrained than in the Sargonic period, no doubt to make his divinity more palatable and less “in-your-face.” The king usually assumes a posture of piety, which, without any doubt, is a direct borrowing from the imagery of Gudea of Lagaš.<sup>404</sup> See **figs. 42, 44–46**. He no longer sports a divine crown. Instead, he wears a brimmed cap (*Breitrandkappe*) that is an attribute of Gudea as well, but which, in actuality, is a historic reference to the garb worn by the archaic rulers of Uruk.<sup>405</sup> It is characteristic that he is never accompanied by royal insignia or any other attributes of kingship, which makes him, like Gudea, practically indistinguishable from the rest of the human society. In at least one instance, however, the king is depicted as an unmistakable solar figure. The image in question appears on a

---

**402** See RIME 4 36–38 Išme-Dagan 8. In line 5 of this text, Išme-Dagan is described as a “mighty male with the muscles and body of a lion, mighty youth who spreads fright” (*guruš kalag sa su pirig šul kalag ni<sub>2</sub> gal<sub>2</sub>-la*).

**403** “From the work done” or “through the rite performed,” referring to the Catholic doctrine that says that divine grace can only be conferred by a sacrament.

**404** Suter 2015: 517–522 labors to find in these representations features indicative of Gudea’s divine status, discovering “allusions to a certain degree of divinity in Gudea’s images” (*ibid.* 519). However, these findings are completely illusionary, since Gudea iconography is totally devoid of any suggestions of his divinity. On the contrary, this imagery *insists* on the point that Gudea was a human figure.

**405** See Essay 1 pp. 26, 34. During the Ur III period, this type of cap appears for the first time in the representations of Gudea and Ur-Namma. See Boese 1973: 15–21.

cylinder seal that was presented by Šulgi to his daughter Geme-Ninlila. See **fig. 43**. There, Šulgi assumes a triumphal pose that matches closely that of the Sun-God on the Sargonic seals of Lugal-ušumgal I discussed earlier (see above p. 139 and **figs. 40** and **41**).

While the representations of the king as a pious worshipper predominate,<sup>406</sup> we know from historical texts that there existed Ur III victory steles, on which the divine kings were depicted as warriors, but no certain examples of those are extant. There survives, however, an uninscribed rock relief of this nature that can almost certainly be attributed to one of the Ur III kings, in all likelihood to Šulgi. This particular monument, which depicts a standing royal figure vanquishing enemies, is situated at the Darband-i Gawr pass, in the southeastern section of the Qara Dagħ range of southern Kurdistan (Edmonds 1925; Boese 1973; Eppihimer 2009: 261–262). See **fig. 47**. Importantly, this region was one of the areas where Šulgi campaigned extensively, eventually incorporating it into the Ur III empire. The connection between this relief and the iconography of the Ur III kings is indicated particularly convincingly by the fact that the figure in question wears a brimmed cap that is the same as the headgear of Ur-Namma and his followers.<sup>407</sup> See **figs. 42–46**. Another suggestive clue for this attribution is the modeling of his beard, which is identical with that of Ur-Namma's, as depicted on the stela from Ur (see **fig. 42**).

A comparison of the Darband-i Gawr relief with the “Victory Stele” of Naram-Suen makes it apparent that the former is a direct reference to the Stele or, more likely, to the whole genre of Naram-Suen's rock reliefs that undoubtedly had existed, but did not survive to our times.

The conclusion that the deification of Šulgi was a strategic move meant to accomplish a specific political objective – which, as I argued earlier, was the unification of Babylonia – is borne out by the history of the Ur III royal titulary as well. While reviving the Sargonic title of *dannum*, “the mighty one,”<sup>408</sup> the founder of the dynasty Ur-Namma coined for himself a completely new title, which was

**406** Cf. Frankfort's assessment (in reference to the “Ur-Namma Stele”): “the stele, like the seal designs, illustrates the same absorption in ritual which distinguishes the art of Gudea from that of the Akkadians” (1954: 102–104).

**407** For this and other arguments in favor of the Ur III date of this relief, see Boese 1973: 15–21. For its attribution to Šulgi, see Boese 1973: 48; Suter 2010: 335.

**408** In Sumerian sources, this title appears as *nita kalag-ga*, “mighty male,” or *lugal kalag-ga*, “mighty king.” The first version of this title was used by Ur-Namma, Šulgi, and Amar-Suen. The second, which appears for the first time under Amar-Suen, was subsequently used by Šu-Suen and Ibī-Suen. The Akkadian sources employ *dannum* instead (RIME 3/2 Šulgi 23, 25, 29, 33).

“king of Sumer and Akkad.”<sup>409</sup> The duality of this title is striking, since it shows that, in spite of Ur-Namma’s having assumed unquestioned power over the two halves of Babylonia, a degree of political and cultural separateness between the South and the North had still existed at that time, and this situation needed an official acknowledgment, in titulary and probably also on the ritual level. This title continued to be used by Šulgi in the beginning of his reign. However, as soon as he assumed divinity (which, as noted earlier, happened around the twentieth year of his reign), he abandoned this title completely. Nor was this title used by his successors.<sup>410</sup> Instead, Šulgi re-introduced Naram-Suen’s title of the “king of the four corners of the world.”<sup>411</sup> He also created a new title, the “god of his Land.”<sup>412</sup> Under Amar-Suen, this title acquired two further elaborations, “true god of his land”<sup>413</sup> and “true god, the Sun-God of his Land.”<sup>414</sup> In these epithets, the “Land” obviously means a united Babylonia – or at least an *idea* of united Babylonia, since, as I noted earlier, the real creation of a Babylonian nation took place only three centuries later. But that goal would not have been possible without the unificatory policies of the Sargonic and Ur III kings.

---

**409** lugal Ki-en-gi ki-uri-ke<sub>4</sub> (RIME 3/2 35 Ur-Namma 12:9; et passim); LUGAL *ma-at Šu-mé-ri-im ù A-ka-di-im* (RIME 3/2 144–146 Šulgi 38:5–6, Akkadian version).

**410** However, beginning with Šu-ilišu (RIME 4 18–19 Šu-ilišu 3:3), this title was revived by the kings of Isin.

**411** lugal AN-ub-da limmu-ba (RIME 3/2 151 Šulgi 47:4; et passim); LUGAL *ki-ib-ra-tim ar-ba-im* (RIME 3/2 132 Šulgi 23:4–6; et passim). Immediately following the fall of the Sargonic empire, this title was adopted by a Gutian king named Erridu-pizir (RIME 2 221–223 Erridu-pizir 1 i 14–18, ii 16–20, iii 11–15, 223–225 Erridu-pizir 2 iii 3’–7’, iv 5–9). It was later also used by Utuhegal of Uruk (RIME 2 281 Utuhegal 1:5; et passim), as well as by Puzur-Inšušinak, the last ruler of the Awan dynasty and the contemporary of Ur-Namma, clearly in reflection of his own “imperial” ambitions (Steinkeller 2013c: 296). This title is also assigned to Ur-Namma in “Ur-Namma D” line 37, but this clearly is a later interpolation. Following the Ur III period, it was used by Išbi-Erra (RIME 4 10 2006:3) and Išme-Dagan (RIME 4 31–32 Išme-Dagan 5:4).

**412** dingir kalam-ma-na (RIME 3/2 160–161 Šulgi 58:4, 368–369 Ibbi-Suen 1:2; et passim). Sometimes this title appears as dingir kalam-ma (e.g., RIME 3/2 384–385 Ibbi-Suen 2007:2), which probably is an abbreviation. In Akkadian texts, it is written DINGIR *ma-ti-šu* (RIME 3/2 140–141 Šulgi 33:2). This title is similar to Šar-kali-šarri’s title “god of the land of Warium” (see above pp. 135–136). Therefore, it may have been patterned after it. In literary sources, Šulgi is also called <sup>d</sup>Lama kalam-ma, “protective deity of the Land” (“Šulgi G” line 23). Similarly, Ur-Namma says that “in me, the lands of Sumer and Akkad have a protective deity” (ma-da Ki-en-gi ‘Uri’ <sup>d</sup>Lama mu-un-da-an-tuku; “Ur-Namma C” line 50). These designations suggest a more circumscribed version of divinity, thus further confirming the markedly understated nature of Šulgi’s deification. A related title, “master of his land” (lugal kalam-ma-na / *be-al ma-ti-šu*), was later used by Išbi-Erra and Šu-ilišu of Isin.

**413** dingir zi kalam-ma-na (RIME 3/2 264–265 Amar-Suen 17:10).

**414** dingir zi <sup>d</sup>Utu kalam-ma-na (RIME 3/2 262–264 Amar-Suen 16:10–11).

And the notion of the divine ruler was an instrumental element of those strategies.

The Ur III royal titulary also includes epithets that reference the earlier-discussed familial links between the divine kings and the divine realm. Thus Amar-Suen calls Inana his “beloved wife,”<sup>415</sup> while Šu-Suen applies the same designation to Annunitum, the avatar of Ištar in her martial apparition.<sup>416</sup> A different genealogical connection with Inana is documented in two inscriptions of Šu-Suen stemming from Umma and dedicated to Šara, Umma’s chief god. There, Šu-Suen calls himself “son of Šara” and identifies Šara as “Inana’s beloved child.”<sup>417</sup> These epithets reflect a local Umma theology, according to which Inana was Šara’s mother. But it remains unclear how Šu-Suen’s descent from Šara had been established.<sup>418</sup> Similar reference to a local theology is found in one of the inscriptions of Šulgi, where he describes the goddess Ningal as “his mother.”<sup>419</sup> This genealogy probably rested on the argument that Šulgi was Inana’s “husband.” Since Inana was the daughter of Nanna and Ningal, this made Šulgi Ningal’s son-in-law.

Following the end of the Ur III dynasty, various rulers of the lands that had been conquered and incorporated into the Ur III empire claimed divinity. Among those one may list Zardamu and Tišatal of Karahar,<sup>420</sup> Ipiq-Eštar and Takil-ilissu of Malgium,<sup>421</sup> Nidnuša of Der,<sup>422</sup> Iddin-Sin and Zabazuna of Šimurru,<sup>423</sup> and

---

**415** <sup>d</sup>Inana nin me<sub>3</sub> dam ki-ag<sub>2</sub>-ga<sub>2</sub>-ni (RIME 3/2 258–259 Amar-Suen 13:1–3). This inscription deals with the construction of Inana’s gi<sub>6</sub>-par<sub>4</sub> at Uruk, and so this epithet undoubtedly alludes to Amar-Suen’s spousal relationship with Inana. Further, note that Amar-Suen is called Inana’s “beloved” (ki-ag<sub>2</sub>) on a seal of one of his officials (Zettler 1987: 60 fig. 1). While such epithets are missing in Šulgi’s original inscriptions, he is linked with Inana in this manner in literary sources. See, e.g., “Šulgi A” line 82, where he calls Inana his “spouse” (nitalam-mu ki-sikil <sup>d</sup>Inana). The spousal relationship with Inana was later claimed by many of the kings of Isin. For the examples, see Steinkeller 1999a: 106 n. 4.

**416** <sup>d</sup>An<sup>1</sup>-nu-ni-tum dam-a-ni (RIME 3/2 330–331 Šu-Suen 20:1–2).

**417** <sup>d</sup>Šara<sub>2</sub> nir-gal<sub>2</sub> An-na dumu ki-ag<sub>2</sub> <sup>d</sup>Inana ad-da-ni (RIME 3/2 326–327 Šu-Suen 16:1–5, 327–328 Šu-Suen 17:1–5).

**418** Logically, this would mean that Šu-Suen was the son of Šara and Nin-ura, but there is no independent evidence of this. This genealogy perhaps is the evidence that, as I suggested earlier, the Ur III kings systematically inserted themselves into the divine families of all the major (former) city-states.

**419** <sup>d</sup>Nin-gal ama-ni (RIME 3/2 160–161 Šulgi 58:1–2).

**420** RIME 3/2 452–453.

**421** RIME 4 669–674.

**422** RIME 4 676 Nidnuša 1:1. The same probably was true also of Anum-mutabbil of Der (RIME 4 677–679). Since the names beginning with An- do not take the divine determinative DINGIR, this

Yabrat/Ebarat, Kindattu, and Idattu of Šimaški.<sup>424</sup> Most of them also used the title of the “mighty king.”<sup>425</sup> Zardamu of Karahar is an especially interesting case here. In his seal, Zardamu is called the “Sun God of his Land; beloved of Nergal, his (personal) god; Annunitum (is) his mother; ... mighty king, king of Karahar, king of the four quarters of the world; husband of Ištar.”<sup>426</sup> A spousal relationship with Ištar/Inana may have also been presumed by Nidnuša, Anum-muttabbil, and Idattu, who identified themselves as “beloved of Inana/Ištar.”<sup>427</sup>

Since the titles and epithets borne by these kings obviously are borrowings from the Ur III royal titulary, they are informative about the latter phenomenon as well. Even more importantly, they and the fact that these individuals thought it desirable to seek divinity demonstrate how real and pervasive the nature of the Ur III divine kingship must have been, even in the periphery of Babylonia.

Similar inference can be made from the fact that some of the records left by these peripheral rulers are rock inscriptions.<sup>428</sup> As such, these materials implicate the existence of a significant repertoire of Ur III (and probably also Sargonic) inscriptions of this type, which, like the titulary found in them, must have served as models for the records in question.

## 6 Was Naram-Suen’s Deification Inspired by a Foreign Example?

As we have seen earlier, the deification of Naram-Suen was a radical development, which violated the basic principles of the relationship between the human and divine societies, especially as concerns the place that the ruler was expected to occupy in this scheme. As the notion of the divine king was completely incongruous with the traditional Sumerian ideology, it must have

---

would not have been reflected in writing. A similar case is Anubanini of Lullubum (RIME 4 704–706 Anubanini 1:1), who may have claimed divinity as well.

<sup>423</sup> RIME 4 708–716.

<sup>424</sup> Steinkeller in George 2011: 21–22 no. 18:1–3’; Michalowski 2008: 39.

<sup>425</sup> Here belong Zardamu, Takil-ilissu, Nidnuša and Anum-muttabbil of Der, Iddin-Sin and Zabazuna of Šimurru, and Annubanini of Lullubum.

<sup>426</sup> <sup>d</sup>Za-ar-da-mu / <sup>d</sup>UTU *ma-ti-šu* / *na-ra-am* / <sup>d</sup>Nergal / *ì-lì-šu An-nu-ni-tum* / *um-ma-šu* / ... LUGAL *da-núm* / LUGAL Kara<sub>2</sub>-har<sup>ki</sup> / ù LUGAL / *ki-ib-ra-tim* / *ar-ba-im* / DAM <sup>d</sup>INANA (RIME 3/2 453 Zardamu 1:1–21).

<sup>427</sup> *na-ra-am* <sup>d</sup>INANA (Nidnuša and Anum-muttabbil), *ki-ag<sub>2</sub>* <sup>d</sup>Inana (Idattu).

<sup>428</sup> The surviving records of this type belong to Iddin-Sin of Šimurru (RIME 4 708–714 Iddin-Sin 1–4) and Anubanini of Lullubum (RIME 4 704–706 Anubanini 1).



been felt particularly offensive in the South. But even in northern Babylonia, where the kingship was stronger and more expansive in its claims, the divine king likely was perceived as an alien figure. As I argued earlier, there is every reason to think that Naram-Suen's deification was the response to a concrete political problem, and that it was invented quite suddenly. But how did Naram-Suen come up with this solution? Since, in my view, this could not have been suggested to him by any particular tenet of the existing Babylonian ideology, a possibility exists that his deification was inspired by a foreign example. Historically, divine kingship is an exceedingly rare phenomenon.<sup>429</sup> In the third millennium Near East and the immediately adjoining regions, one cannot find any documented cases of it *except* in one place, and that is Egypt. Given the geographical extent of the Sargonic expansion, which reached as far as northern Syria and Anatolia, we can be confident that the Sargonic kings were well informed about Egypt and its customs and culture. Such information certainly was available at Ebla, which, in the period just before Sargon, enjoyed commercial and diplomatic exchanges with Egypt.<sup>430</sup> This was even more true of the Levant, where Sargon may actually have campaigned,<sup>431</sup> and where Akkadian traders undoubtedly came into contact with their Egyptian counterparts. Needless to say, however, the proposition that Naram-Suen modeled his rulership after the Egyptian Pharaoh, while attractive and inherently possible, is not provable in any way or fashion.

Similar outside inspirations may have been at play in the Ur III period as well. As I wrote elsewhere (Steinkeller 2013b), the Ur III ideas about the after-life of the divine king match so closely the Egyptian ones that, also in this case, one cannot but think of the possibility of an Egyptian influence. But here too this must remain an unprovable supposition.

There is yet another area where an impact of Egypt on Babylonia may be considered, and this time perhaps even with some confidence. As we have seen earlier, the Ur III period (and, conceivably, the Sargonic period as well) saw the first examples of rock reliefs, which depict the king defeating his enemies. During the third millennium, such representations did not exist in Greater Mesopotamia prior to the Ur III kings, nor do we find examples of them in Iran and Anatolia. But rock reliefs glorifying rulers are documented in Egypt since

---

<sup>429</sup> Possehl 1998: 264 thinks that early kings "are often deified, or allowed to flirt with notions of human deification. From the point of view of the citizenry, the deification of one's king might be thought of as the deification of oneself." Neither of these assertions is correct.

<sup>430</sup> Biga 2012; 2014.

<sup>431</sup> One of the places Sargon claims to have reached is Yarmuti (RIME 2 27–29 Sargon 11:23), which may fairly confidently be identified with the later Yarimuta near Byblos.

Early Dynastic times. Of particular interest here is a group of rock reliefs from Wadi Maghareh in the southwestern Sinai, which were left by the various rulers of the Third, Fourth, and Fifth Dynasties.<sup>432</sup> As generally agreed, these reliefs commemorate the mining expeditions those rulers sent to the Sinai in search of turquoise and copper. Some of these reliefs depict the Pharaoh as a vanquisher of enemies. See **fig. 48**. In this iconic image, which is a hallmark of Egyptian art at least since Narmer's time, the Pharaoh faces right, as does Naram-Suen on the "Victory Stele." In other respects, however, the scene differs substantially from that depicted on the Stele, as the Pharaoh smites a single enemy with his mace, while Naram-Suen stands in a pose of victory, trampling over two dead combatants. This makes it unlikely that the Wadi Maghareh reliefs could have served as *direct* models for the Stele and similar Babylonian materials. But they might have provided a *general idea* of such an image, as well as of this particular genre of display monuments.

An objection could be raised perhaps that Sinai may have been too far for the Babylonians to visit. It is possible, however, that similar early Egyptian rock reliefs existed also in Lebanon. Some of the Pharaohs who left their monuments in Wadi Maghareh (Sneferu and Khufu of the Fourth Dynasty and Djedkare of the Fifth Dynasty) are known to have sent expeditions to Lebanon to procure cedar, and so they might have left similar commemorative marks in that region as well. If such rock reliefs existed, none of them have come down to us. But we know that this form of commemoration was practiced in the Levant in later times. The classic example here is the site at the Nahr el-Kalb estuary north of Beirut, where a large group of ancient rock reliefs is situated. Those include three inscriptions of Ramses II, as well as a number of Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian ones. Clearly, Nahr el-Kalb served as an international showcase place, where kings demonstrated their mastery over the Levant and its trade routes, and where ideological messages, both written and visual, were advertised and exchanged.

## 7 Final Thoughts

A divine mortal is a contradiction in terms, of course. Just think of the interpretational problems that Jeshua the Nazarene has created! We will never know what the Sumerians and Akkadians really thought of the *divus* Naram-Suen. But, since

---

<sup>432</sup> These are Sanakht, Djoser, and Sekhemkhet of the Third Dynasty, Sneferu and Khufu of the Fourth Dynasty, as well as some Fifth Dynasty kings (Mumford 1999).

people are not stupid (even those who lived in third millennium Mesopotamia), it is fair to assume that few of them ever bought the idea of his supposed godship. However, this is beside the point. The objective of Naram-Suen's deification was not to make people believe in it, but to create a socio-political reality in which he could lawfully be placed above everybody else, kings and commoners alike. Parallels of such developments – even in modern times – abound. One that immediately comes to mind is the North Korean theocracy. It is alleged that the Dear Leader Kim Jong Il, son of the Great Leader who had founded the modern dynasty, was born on the sacred Mount Baekdu, on the same spot as Tangun, the son of a bear woman and the founder of the first Korean kingdom in 2333 BC – and so just around the time when Naram-Suen became a living god.<sup>433</sup>

I close by quoting the comments about divine kingship made by someone with a personal experience of it (a North Korean refugee who fled to China in 2003):

It's not that people really believe all this propaganda about Kim Jong-un, that he's a God, and need someone to tell them otherwise or show them another way of thinking. North Koreans are people, and they aren't stupid. In the North Korean system, you have to praise Kim and sing hymns about him and take it seriously, even if you think it's only a shit narrative. That's the block, you see? It's not that people are brainwashed and think he's God. These are things that people know, but they don't dare to challenge. (Richardson 2015)

---

**433** According to official North Korean literature, the birth of Kim Jong-il “was heralded by a swallow and caused winter to change to spring, a star to illuminate the sky and rainbows to spontaneously appear” (“Mind-boggling ‘Facts’ about Kim Jong-il,” *Herald Sun*, Melbourne, December 19, 2011). The North Korean ruler “is everywhere. Nothing passes his notice. He is a scientific genius (especially Kim Jong-il), and a stupendous general. His ‘on the spot guidance’ guarantees ‘bumper harvests,’ military glory, and the universal happiness of the Korean people” (Buruma 2015).