

THE MORTAL KINGS OF UR: A SHORT CENTURY OF DIVINE RULE IN ANCIENT MESOPOTAMIA

PIOTR MICHALOWSKI, UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Assyriologists are at a disadvantage whenever the subject of divine kingship comes up. The issue is not an old one, but it has its lingering ghosts, James Frazer and Edward Evans-Prichard, and it has its favorite haunting ground, the continent of Africa and the island of Madagascar. Ever since Frazer delineated the problem in 1890, the focus of investigation has been on Africa, and the definition has encompassed three central components: duality, regicide, and the mediating role of the king. Of the three, regicide has been the most contentious issue, but it is one that is hardly important outside of the Africanist debates. Moreover, as Kasja Ekholm Friedman (1985: 250) has written, some have viewed divine kingship as “an autonomous symbolic structure that can only be understood in terms of its own internal symbolic structure.” Writing about the Lower Congo (Friedman 1985: 251), she undertook to demonstrate that “it is a historical product which has undergone transformations connected to the general structural change that has turned Africa into an underdeveloped periphery of the West.” Here, I follow her example and attempt to locate the eruptions of early Mesopotamian divine kingship as historically defined phenomena, rather than as moments in a developmental trajectory of an autonomous symbolic structure.

Most studies of the early history of Mesopotamian kingship concentrate on the development of a specific figure in text and art; the underlying notions are social evolutionary, and the methodology is philological, often relying on etymology and the study of the occurrence and history of lexical labels, as summarized well in a recent article by Nicole Brisch (forthcoming). Much of it is disembodied from a consideration of political and symbolic structures. Thus, for example, the Sumerian terms *en*, *lugal*, and *énsi* are seen by some to have very different symbolic histories and function; in fact, they are just different local words for “sovereign,” the first one originally used in the city of Uruk, second in Ur, and the third in the city-state of Lagash. These quasi-synonyms were remodeled within the context of centralized states as part of new political and symbolic languages. Thus, in the Ur III kingdom, around 2100 B.C., there was only one *lugal* in the world, and that was the king of Ur. In poetic language he combined both the status of *en* and of *lugal*, that is, he was characterized by “sovereignty of Ur and kingship of Uruk,” and all his governors were *énsi*, as were all foreign rulers. Like all inventions, this one played with tradition, but it has to be understood not in evolutionary perspective, but within the context of a new language of empire.

Divine kingship has had a similar fate. Although there has been no thorough investigation of the concept since Henri Frankfort’s inspired, but now dated monograph (1948), recent studies that mention the phenomenon in passing tend to stress its antecedents and to treat it philologically, rather than as a historical symbolic phenomenon. I argue that episodes of divine kingship were not the apex of a long developmental pattern, but were historically determined

events. All kings are sacred and mediate between sacred and profane, but not all kings are gods.

As far as one can determine, the earliest Mesopotamian divine ruler was Naram-Sin (2254–2218 B.C.), the fourth king of the Dynasty of Agade (2334–2154 B.C.).¹ Very little is known of this event; the monarch's divine status is indicated by representational attributes otherwise reserved only for gods and goddesses: a divine classifier before his name, and by the addition of a horned crown in visual representations. His sacred elevation is described in just one royal inscription, which states:

Because he secured the foundations of his city (Agade) in times of trouble,² his city requested of Ishtar in Eana, of Enlil in Nippur, of Dagan in Tuttul, of Ninhursanga in Kesh, of Ea in Eridu, of Sin in Ur, of Shamash in Sippar, and of Nergal in Kutha, that (Naram-Sin) be made a god, and then built his temple in the midst of (the city of) Agade.

This unique statement provides us with the *only* explicit contemporary view of the divinization of Naram-Sin, and its singular nature only serves to draw attention to the limitations of our sources of information. The initiation of the act is attributed not to the king himself, but to the citizens of his city, and is apparently granted in reward for saving the state from an insurrection that nearly toppled it. The phrase translated here as "secured the foundations" is used here for the first time in Mesopotamian history, but will become, in Sumerian as well as Akkadian, a major ideological concept depicting the security of the state and the crown. Moreover, this is done with the approval of all the main divinities of the Akkad kingdom, in Mesopotamia and in Syria as well. It is important to observe that Naram-Sin was not made the god of the whole territory, but of his city Agade, and thus, by implication, joined the goddess Ishtar-Annunitum as divine city ruler, and possibly as her consort.³ One would like to illustrate this relationship by means of a well-known representation of the couple (Hansen 2002), but there is a good chance that it is simply a forgery. From the passage cited above we learn that Naram-Sin's elevation to city god took place after the Great Rebellion that nearly cost him his kingdom, and which became the best-remembered event of his reign. The length of his reign as well as the chronological placement of this revolt are both uncertain, but one can be fairly certain that Sargon's grandson spent less than two decades as a god on this earth (Åge Westenholz 2000).⁴ No details of his cult have survived, but it would seem that the last part of his reign, that is, the period during which he was venerated as the god of Agade, was also a time when the king applied himself to supporting the cults of other deities in various cities of his realm, as argued by Åge Westenholz, something that he had not seen fit to do earlier in his reign. It is

¹ On the period in general, see Åge Westenholz (1999). Wilhelm (1982: 16) considers the possibility that the Hurrians had such an institution earlier, based on an etymology "god" of the Hurrian word for "king" (*endan*). Buccellati and Kelly-Buccellati (1996: 75) repeat this and make a similar, if cautious suggestion; all of this is based on etymology and a broken seal impression.

² Bassetki Statue (E2.1.4.10; Frayne 1993: 113–14) 20–57: *ši in pu-uš-qi-im* SUHUŠ.SUHUŠ IRI.KI-*li-su ú-ki-nu*. On this text and the divinization of the king, see Farber 1983.

³ Hence his title DINGIR a-ga-dè^{ki}, "god of Agade," that alternates with LUGAL a-ga-dè^{ki}, "king of Agade," in

some inscriptions. Contrast this with the title dingir (zi) kalam-ma-na, "(effective) god of his land," borne by the kings of Ur and by Ishbi-Era, the first king of Isin.

⁴ Åge Westenholz makes a good argument concerning the placement of the "great rebellion" within the reign of Naram-Sin, but he is too invested in the concept of a shorter reign for the king. The Ur III version of the Sumerian King List, the closest thing we have to a contemporary account, is quite precise: it assigns fifty-four years and six months to the Agade monarch (Steinkeller 2003: 272, 22'–23').

by no means clear if divinization is part of a restructuring of royal self-representation, or if it is but one symptom of the revival of central authority in a time of state crisis. Because of uncertainties concerning the chronology of his reign, and of the ordering of his surviving inscriptions, it is difficult to correlate acts such as divinization with other changes.

Apparently, Naram-Sin's short time as a god on earth was singular and was neither inheritable nor contagious. His son and successor Sharkalisharri (2217–2193 B.C.) did not aspire to divine status, and neither did his petty successors, who ruled Akkad as the empire crumbled around them. Briefly stated, the divine classifier is absent in Sharkalisharri's year names, except in broken passages where it has been restored by modern editors. A survey of his inscriptions shows that the classifier was also restored by later Mesopotamian copyists of his texts; in contemporary texts it is present in only one inscription, and in dedicatory seals of some of his more enthusiastic servants.⁵

The kingdom of Akkad fell soon after Sharkalisharri's reign, and after a short period of city-state particularism and foreign occupation, the land was reunited under the Third Dynasty of Ur, which ruled Mesopotamia between 2112 and 2004 B.C. (Sallaberger 1999). The founder of the dynasty, Ur-Namma, established his new capital in the city of Ur, but his family probably came from Uruk. Uruk remained important for the next century; it was a ceremonial center and was under rule of the royal family, unlike all other major cities, which were run by state-appointed governors (Michalowski 1987). When Ur-Namma began his state-creation activities, both the north and south of Babylonia were under the rule of ancient Iran. His first order of business was military, but he seems to have handled these matters rather quickly, and then moved on to organize the state and initiate an array of building activities in the major cities of his realm. During his short reign, the founder of the dynasty initiated and perhaps even completed at least four massive multi-level temples (ziggurats) in the most important cities of his realm: Ur, Eridu, Nippur, and Uruk. Such works must have provided fiscal and structural benefits to local elites, but they also refashioned the physical environments of the cities. Wherever one stood, even outside the city walls, one's gaze was attracted to the ziggurat — a symbol of royal patronage and royal mediation between the human and transcendent spheres. But the gods were not placated, and less than eighteen years into his reign, Ur-Namma was mortally wounded while leading his troops in battle.

No comet presaged this death, but by Mesopotamian standards this was a cosmic tragedy. In three millennia of documented history only two kings are known to have been killed in war, Ur-Namma (around 2100 B.C.) and Sargon II of Assyria (722–705 B.C.), fifteen hundred years later. Violent royal death meant only one thing — sin and divine abandonment. Such events, just as military defeats and ends of dynasties, were precipitated by the gods and goddesses, who turned their backs on their favorites and simply walked away. The demise of the Assyrian Sargon led to years of inquiry into the causes for such radical divine displeasure, inquiries pursued by sons who followed him on the throne (Tadmor, Landsberger, and Parpola 1987). No documentation of this kind has survived from the time of Ur-Namma's successors, but we do have a very different, and in its own way even more interesting, composition on the matter: a long poem detailing the king's death and his journey and reception in the netherworld (Flückiger-Hawker 1999: 93–182). It is important to know that this poem is unique; there is

⁵ Sharkalisharri was an adult when he came to the throne, as he is already attested as a high official during his father's reign. A survey of his inscriptions reveals the following (+/- = presence or absence of the divine classi-

fier: 1. *Year Names*: never, except in passages restored by scholars; 2. *Royal inscriptions*: a. contemporary monuments/objects +2/-5; b. contemporary seals/sealings +3/-11; c. later copies: +4/-1).

no other Sumerian literary work on the death of kings. Indeed, it seems that this subject was strictly taboo, and royal demise is never mentioned directly but only alluded to by means of euphemisms.⁶

Royal disaster nearly toppled the young state, but the new king Shulgi (2094–2047 B.C.) managed to hold it together, and this must have been quite an undertaking. Historical sources inform us that he had to face enemies from abroad, and we can surmise that at the same time he needed to repair the ideological foundations of the kingdom, to resist the centrifugal forces that were always there, as local elites were always ready to resist centralization, and would use any opportunity to revert to city-state localism. The second king of Ur ruled for forty-eight years, a long stretch by ancient standards, so it seems that his efforts were successful, and that he managed to pacify the divine wrath that had destroyed his father. How he achieved this is not easy to ascertain, but some clues may be found in the narrative that can be read from the year names that were used to date documents from his reign.⁷

The year names tell a story. They do not describe all the events of Shulgi's reign, but they bring to the fore salient moments, events that were deemed worthy of remembrance and celebration. This story is striking: the first half of the reign, years 1 through 20, mostly reference cultic activities; moreover they concern the central ceremonial cities of the state: Ur, Nippur, and only once Uruk. Years 10 and 11 digress to claim control of strategic border towns on the north and east, but the only significant foreign involvement is the marriage of a princess to the king of the powerful Iranian state of Marhashi. Year name 21 marks a significant new trend: military involvement in the highlands to the east. From now on, until the king's death toward the end of his 48th year, Shulgi's scribes will date almost all the documents in the land with commemorations of military expeditions. It took twenty years of extensive cultic, ceremonial, and organizational activity to secure the foundations of his rule, to overcome the ideological crisis begotten by the curse on his father, and to bring him to the point where he could venture securely into foreign lands, without fear of rebellion at home. There were wars, but this topic was not considered proper for consistent year naming until now. But year name 21 also reveals another radical new development: the name of the sovereign will from now on be preceded by the cuneiform sign for "god," an unpronounced classifier that informs all readers that Shulgi and his successors are no mere mortal kings — they are divine — although, significantly, this divinization was never applied retroactively to his father Ur-Namma.⁸

How does a king become divine? Shulgi may have drawn on the precedent of Naram-Sin (Cooper 1993), but we should keep in mind that the Akkadian king's time as a god was rather brief and had ended more than two generations before the revival of this notion in the middle of the reign of the second king of Ur. It is clear that Shulgi's intentions, as well as the very nature of the new ideology that he and his entourage developed, were not simply antiquarian. Rather, they came as a culmination of the decades of reconstruction that was necessary in the wake of his father's violent death. In order to create his new identity, Shulgi reached back to his family's Uruk origins and inserted himself into the heroic past. The figure of Gilgamesh (George 2003), sired by the union of a mortal royal hero Lugalbanda and the goddess Ninsumuna, provided the perfect model: Shulgi could reflect himself in this poetic mirror by becoming Gilgamesh's brother. Lugalbanda and Ninsumuna became his metaphysical parents,

⁶ There is also an Old Babylonian Akkadian language "Elegy on the Death of Naram-Sin"; it is not clear which Naram-Sin, of Akkad or Eshnunna, is being lamented (J. G. Westenholz 1997: 203–20).

⁷ A full study of the year names of the Ur III kings is long overdue. For now, see Frayne 1997: 92–110.

⁸ It is possible that Shulgi's life as a god began earlier; see Sallaberger 1999: 152.

assuring his divinity. There were practical moves that came with this, most importantly the infusion of the power of the Crown into the social, cultural, and above all economic world of the temples, which at this time were massive fiscal organizations. But a dynasty requires continuity and cannot survive by means of a hegemonic ideology that is only good for one generation. Shulgi could not simply become a god, as the illusion would disappear at the moment of his death, leaving his successor without symbolic power. The unique symbolic status of Gilgamesh provided the answer as an ancestor who embodied the central paradox of divine kingship: the inevitable death of kings. Shulgi was worshipped in temples — and so would be his successors — but for the literate classes his divinity was played out in four of the five Gilgamesh poems that we know from later times, although there are other such compositions that did not survive from the Ur III literary world.⁹ Together with other tales of mythical Uruk heroes, they illustrated the central metaphors of Ur III royal self-representation: the achievement of eternal fame by means of eastern conquests, conflict, and intimacy with the divine world, wisdom, control over life and death, and, finally, confrontation and management of royal demise. It is obvious, and in some cases even demonstrable, that the versions at our disposal have been remodeled by generations of redactors, and that enigmatic allusions to contemporary events, many of which could no longer be understood, were altered or even eliminated. Some residues remain, including a reference to an Ur III princess, whose name would have meant nothing to the teachers and students in eighteenth-century B.C. schools (Michalowski 2003). Such traces suggest that in their original form the heroic poems, unlike contemporary royal hymns, carried some oppositional messages within the context of a more complex meditation on the social and cosmic role of kings. The documentation that has come down to us offers a stark contrast between the times of the Ur III dynasty and their Sargonic predecessors, who had to face continual rebellion within their realm. One could speculate that the patrimonial state established by Ur-Namma was also quite fragile, but that dissent was erased from the historical record by the self-congratulatory mask of the propaganda of success. The imperfect heroic images in the epic poetry offer a different portrait of the divine and omnipotent rulers of ancient Ur.

For pedagogical as well as structural reasons, these Sumerian heroic poems were never joined into one master narrative, although they were studied in sequence in the eighteenth-century B.C. schools, ending with the emotionally powerful poem that opens with the deathbed scene and then describes the decease and burial of the great hero Gilgamesh and his descent into the netherworld, where he continues to reign as a king (Veldhuis 2001). This text also ennobles the city of Uruk while at the same time explains the lack of a pilgrimage site for Gilgamesh. By divine intervention the Euphrates dries up, his son constructs an elaborate stone tomb, and after the dead king is laid to rest there, the river comes to flow again, forever covering his resting place. His shade may rule the underworld, but in earthly terms he is reborn in the figure of Shulgi and his successors. As a corollary, his immortality is textual, expressed by the survival of his name and deeds in poetry.

Shulgi's transformation and reinvention was a carefully managed affair. As I have already mentioned, his biological father, Ur-Namma, whose fate lay so heavily upon the son, was *never* retroactively divinized, so that the break was well marked. In literature this found expression in the concomitant all-encompassing reinvention of the written tradition, which was now firmly reoriented to represent a new form of charismatic rule designed to overcome the ideological

⁹ I discuss the "epic" tradition in this context in Michalowski, in press; note that I exclude "Gilgamesh and Akka" from the debate.

crisis precipitated by the martial death of the founder of the dynasty. The centralized, patrimonial state run from Ur required a well-regulated and well-trained bureaucracy that could be held accountable for all fiscal and organizational activities. Writing was the instrument by which the Crown exercised oversight and control, as documented by the hundred thousand or so published administrative documents from the period. The hearts and minds of these literate servants had to be molded through schooling that not only taught them writing skills but also indoctrinated them into the ideological aspirations of the new state. Although contemporary evidence is still sparse, it appears that sometime under Shulgi the masters of the royal academies literally wiped clean the literary slate and discarded all but a few of the old compositions that went back to Early Dynastic times, that is, more than half a millennium earlier. They kept most of the basic pedagogical tools such as word lists, but discarded virtually all the old narratives, replacing them with materials written in honor of the contemporary ruling house.

Some of this also found expression in a composition that we call the Sumerian King List (Jacobsen 1939; Edzard 1980: 77–84), a largely fictional genealogical enumeration of cities — and dynasties — that ruled Mesopotamia since time immemorial, when “kingship descended from the heavens.” Now that Piotr Steinkeller (2003) has published an Ur III exemplar of the text, we can be fairly certain that it was composed under that dynasty, most probably during Shulgi’s reign. This oldest manuscript that we have ends with the reign of Ur-Namma, and then the scribe added a subscript: “May my king, divine Shulgi, live a life of never-ending days!” Much can be said about this salutation, but I will let that bide. In this text there were no divine kings before Shulgi, even Naram-Sin’s assumption of the status is suppressed, and he is deprived of his hard-earned determinative: in this text the divine status of the new king of Ur is unique!

But there is more. In the middle of his reign Shulgi instituted a number of major structural reforms; in economic terms this meant the subjugation of large temple estates under some form of state supervision, the creation of production and redistribution centers, initiation of major public works, as well as the standardization of bureaucratic means of control (Steinkeller 1987). Local elites were incorporated into the patrimonial royal family by means of intermarriage, and the system of local government was revamped to serve the center. A large standing army took a central role in government activities, and a novel system of taxation included military colonists in areas of the eastern periphery. One of the new redistribution centers, Puzrish-Dagan, was used for elaborate royal gift giving to elites (Sallaberger 2003–04); indeed, it appears that at this time ritual gift giving was a royal monopoly. The cult of the living king spread throughout the state: we know of his temples in Umma, Girsu, KLAN, and in the capital of Ur, where he was worshipped, while still alive, as Shulgi-dumu-Ana, “Shulgi-son-of-the-Heavens (or: of An).”¹⁰ And to the heavens he did return, for, unlike his mortal father Ur-Namma, divine Shulgi returned to the heavens (or, to An) upon his demise, as we know from an economic document that mentions this ascent (Wilcke 1988). Thus, as Nicole Brisch has pointed out to me, upon his departure from the earth, kingship ascended back where it had come from in the Sumerian King List, which began, in most versions, with the words “When kingship descended from the heavens...” Presumably, it went back only to be bestowed upon the successor. Kings come and go, but divinely sanctioned kingship is eternal.

¹⁰ Sigrist, Owen, and Young 1984: 73/10 (Š45.ix.13). This temple is attested as late as Ibbi-Sin 13 (Legrain 1937: 704:7).

I would argue that Shulgi's appropriation of divine attributes was but one element in this elaborate constellation of activities that constituted a virtual reinvention of his state. Hence his divine status had nothing to do with any autonomous symbolic system; it was but one component in a complex fabric of economic, structural, and ideological reformations that took place in a concrete historical context. Some have seen this as the symbolic apex in the process of state building and centralization of power (Steinkeller 1992), but the arguments made here point in other directions. By the time Naram-Sin became a god, his empire had held together for at least a century. Ur-Namma, like the Akkadian king's successors, had eschewed any notions of divine kingship, as far as we know. It may be pure coincidence that both Naram-Sin and Shulgi took tremendous pains to placate local gods and goddesses, as well as local elites, in the process of self-divinization; all of this did not constitute final steps in the rise to power, but rather took place in the aftermath of almost fatal state collapse. And yet, as we have seen, the notion of royal divinity in no way guaranteed everlasting life for any ruler or any state formation. In the words of J. Cooper (1993: 21), "no Sumerian text that is not an immediate product of the court — royal inscription or royal hymn — holds out any hope that sovereignty is forever."

There is a curious sideshow in this short spectacle of divine kingship. East of Sumer, in the highlands of Iran, some contemporary rulers of the Dynasty of Shimashki likewise adopted the divine classifier in front of their names.¹¹ We know of them primarily from a later list of kings, which survives on a tablet that was found in the city of Susa: the Awan/Shimashki King List (AKL). It is now possible to identify most of these rulers in Mesopotamian documents from the early second millennium, so their historicity is assured. There are a few documents dated to the period and a handful of seals or sealings that mention royal names.

The first five kings of the Shimashki Dynasty were contemporaries of the house of Ur in Mesopotamia. Although apparently related to one another, they did not rule in succession, as the king list would have us believe, but overlapped one another, in charge of different sectors of the so-called Shimashkian state. The details of this complex geo-political order must be left for another occasion; here I only concentrate on the matter at hand.

The second section of the AKL contains the rulers of Shimashki, and it begins with Kirname, fronted by the divine classifier. The names that follow lack this determinative. A similar phenomenon is encountered in the year names of Ebarat; in one case we encounter the classifier, but in the rest we never do. A royal inscription of his grandson Idadu lists three generations of deified Shimashkian monarchs.¹² Thus the first four kings of this dynasty used the divine determinative in their own inscriptions, year names and seals, but not consistently.¹³ All four are also mentioned in Ur III administrative texts, but as is to be expected, without a trace of divinity. Some seal inscriptions include the divine determinative before royal names, but others do not. It is difficult to derive any strong conclusions from this limited and inconsistent set of data. We simply do not know enough about the internal structure, modes of royal self-representation, and world view of the Shimashkian state or confederation. Our own view of these matters is filtered through Ur III data, and thus we see early second-millennium Iran as secondary in importance to Sumer. In reality, it is quite possible that the highland states such

¹¹ On the localization of this land and its history, see Stolper 1982 and Steinkeller 2007.

¹² Steinkeller 2007. One of the two identical copies of the inscription is from Christie's auction house (2001: no. 23).

¹³ Ebarat (Iabrat, Ebarti) took over Susa after the third year of Ibbi-Sin. Three different year names of this ruler survive, but only one uses the divine classifier (de Graef 2004). The classifier is also encountered in a seal of Idadu (Lambert 1979; Steinkeller 2007).

as Anshan, Marhashi, and Shimashki were in essence larger, stronger, and geo-politically more important than its lowland Sumerian neighbor to the west, but this is all distorted by the available textual record. As a result, we cannot determine if this highland royal divinization was merely a symbolic answer to the claims of the kings of Ur, or if was something more profound and culturally significant. The former seems more than likely.

It is striking, nevertheless, that divine kingship lost its force when divine Kindattu defeated Ur's last ruler, divine Ibbi-Sin (2028–2004 B.C.), and took him in chains to Anshan, in modern-day Fars, where his remains still lie buried, if we are to believe ancient sources. In Mesopotamia, kingship passed over to Isin, a city north of Ur, and its new king, Ishbi-Erra (2017–1985 B.C.), played a complex ideological game, balancing innovation with purposeful imitation of Ur III traditions, portraying himself as the legitimate successor to their line (Michalowski 2005). In titulature, at least, he retained claims of divinity, but it is impossible to determine how deep this all went. Other Isin successors imitated much of the royal ceremonial of their Ur III models, but there is little evidence for the cult of living kings, and the concept seems to have been alien to other contemporary local rulers who sprung up after the collapse of the Ur III state.¹⁴ To be sure, in poems that to various degrees mimicked or paid homage to the old works dedicated to Ur-Namma and Shulgi, Babylonian kings of the succeeding period carried the divine determinative before their name, but there is little other evidence to suggest that they were consistently worshipped as gods: they were not worshipped in their own temples, nor did they have their own cultic personnel. There is much that we do not know about these matters, but it appears that by now the royal application of the divine determinative was traditional, like most of the titles they bore in texts, but was not meant to signify the kind of heavenly status that was claimed by their Ur III predecessors. These kings were sacred, but not truly divine. The one exception to this appears in the short and relatively insignificant reign of king Naram-Sin of Eshnunna in the eighteenth century B.C., who, for reasons that we cannot recover, apparently assumed both the name and some of the ideological trappings of the great ruler of Akkad (Reichel, this volume).

Perhaps the best example of the poetic representation of the sacred mediating role of an early Old Babylonian ruler is embedded in a hymn that celebrates the goddess Inana (Venus) in her astral role as the morning and evening star, also known under the names Ninsiana and Ninegala. The fourth king of the Isin Dynasty, Iddin-Dagan, takes the role her lover Dumuzi, who is here referred to as Ama'ushumgalana.¹⁵

In the River Ordeal Temple of the black-headed people, the assembled population
Established a chapel for Ninegala.
The king, as if he were a god, lives with her there.¹⁶

...

She bathes (her) loins for the king,
She bathes (her) loins for Iddin-Dagan.
Holy Inana bathes with soap,
And sprinkles the floor with aromatic resin.

¹⁴ For the first king of Isin, see above.

¹⁵ Iddin-Dagan Hymn A, lines 170–72 and 183–94. The text was edited by Reisman 1970; see also Reisman 1973 for a published translation.

¹⁶ Others would translate “who is a god.” There is only one comparable use of dingir-àm known to me, albeit

in different semantic and syntactic context: Instructions of Shuruppak 267–69 (Alster 2005: 98) ama ^dutu-àm lú mu-un-ù-tu ab-ba dingir-a[m (x)] mu-un-zalag₂-e ab-ba dingir-àm inim-ma-ni zi-da “A mother gives one life, just as the Sun, a father brightens [x] just as a god, a father’s word is true, just like that of a god.”

The king then approached (her) holy loins with head raised high,
 Iddin-Dagan approached (her) loins with head raised high,
 He approached Inana's loins with head raised high,
 Ama'ushumgalana takes to the bed with her,
 And praised her holy loins.
 After the holy-loined queen had stepped into the bed,
 After holy-loined holy Inana had stepped into the bed,
 She made love with him there on her bed:
 "O Iddin-Dagan, you shall be my beloved!"

I have cited the full passage to provide a flavor of the ritual context. If my translation is true, Iddin-Dagan assumes the role of a god only in the context of the union with the Inana; his sacred character allows him to perform this role and touch the heavens and her loins, but otherwise he remains mortal and fully human and a denizen of the mundane world, even though when his name was written, it was often ceremoniously preceded by the divine determinative. I think the passage speaks for itself.

Much has been made of early Mesopotamian divine kingship, but if the analysis presented here stands, its significance has been highly overstated. The phenomenon had a short shelf life, perhaps no more than a decade or so under Naram-Sin, and just over sixty years during the time of the Ur III kings. The details of all this are hard to pin down, and the trajectory of its short history difficult to trace; for example, we can detect some intensification of royal worship during the reign of Shu-Sin (2037–2029 B.C.), Shulgi's second successor, but the contours of the changes are hard to sketch (Brisch, forthcoming). In the more than three thousand years of written Mesopotamian history, this is but a short moment, although there is a possibility that a rather different form of divine kingship may have taken root in Assyria in the first millennium B.C. (Machinist 2006).

There are reasons to suspect that the divine claims of the kings of Ur were consciously rejected by subsequent generations, but one can only find vague traces of the process. Some of this was liberating, and its benefits are still felt today, as without the abandonment of divine royal attributes we would not have the Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic in the form that we know it (Michalowski, in press). The reasons for this development are never stated explicitly, but can be inferred from the very nature of Mesopotamian kingship. I would propose that Shulgi's invention, or reinvention, of this ideology might have been right for its time and may have played a central role in the political theater of the day, but its future was hardly assured, as the new vision of royalty clashed with a central component of the institution, namely its sacral character. There is a paradox here, as the notions of divine and sacred kingship are often misconstrued as one and the same thing. Mesopotamian kings, similar to monarchs in many other times and cultures, were, first and foremost, mediators between the mundane and transcendent orders. Brute force aside, all other royal attributes derived from this function. Kings were beyond category; they did not combine human and divine aspects, rather they existed above and beyond this fundamental classificatory distinction. When Shulgi — and Naram-Sin before him — moved over to the divine sphere, he disrupted the liminal state of being that provided him with the power to mediate between the heavens and the earth. The new state required a meditation on the dual nature of the divine king, who albeit it a god, nevertheless would have to leave the earth, for only death could lead him to the heavens. This had the undesired consequence of accentuating the mundane nature of the king, even as he claimed membership in the company of those who existed in the transcendent world, and as result, paradoxically, divinization undermined the sacral nature of kingship. As long as the Ur dynasty was in power, political contingencies and institutional developments made up for this imbalance, as the familial nature of

the patrimonial state and new economic opportunities, including privileges related to the royal cult, motivated elites to support this ideology. Although there is much that we simply do not know, it does not appear that any of this survived after the collapse of the Ur state. Once all these conditions were gone, kingship reverted to its familiar nature and the monarchs of Mesopotamia were safe to be sacred once more.

Seen in this light, the institution of divine kingship in early Mesopotamia appears to have been highly overrated by modern scholarship, undoubtedly a reflection of tacit fascination with Frazier and his successors. All told, the truly functioning life of the phenomenon amounted to no more than about eighty years in aggregate. The times may have been short, but they were eventful, and perhaps by framing royal self-divinization within the complex shifting roles of ritual, politics, and symbolic representations in specific historical circumstances, we may arrive at a better understanding of the complex dynamics of power in ancient polities.¹⁷ Historicized and freed from being understood as an autonomous symbolic structure, divine kingship becomes interesting once again.

¹⁷ Important, in this respect, are the observations of Feeley-Harnick 1985: 306–07.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alster, Bendt
2005 *Wisdom of Ancient Sumer*. Bethesda: CDL.
- Buccellati, Giorgio, and M. Kelly-Buccellati
1996 "The Seals of the King of Urkesh: Evidence from the Western Wing of the Royal Storehouse AK." *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* 86: 65–103.
- Brisch, Nicole
Forthcoming "The Priestess and the King: The Divine Kingship of Šu-Sin of Ur." *Journal of the American Oriental Society*.
- Christie's
2001 *Christie's Fine Antiquities: Wednesday 25 April 2001. Sale Code: ANT-9088*. London: Christie's South Kensington.
- Cooper, Jerrold S.
1993 "Paradigm and Propaganda: The Dynasty of Akkad in the 21st Century." In *Akkad: The First World Empire*, edited by Mario Liverani, pp. 11–23. History of the Ancient Near East 5. Padua: Sargon.
- de Graef, K.
2004 "Les noms d'année du roi simashkéen Ebarat I°." *Akkadica* 125: 107–08.
- Edzard, Dietz Otto
1980 "Königslisten und Chroniken. A. Sumerisch." *Reallexikon der Assyriologie* 6: 77–86. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.
- Farber, Walter
1983 "Die Vergöttlichung Narām-Sins." *Orientalia*, n.s., 52: 67–72.
- Feely-Harnick, Gillian
1985 "Issues in Divine Kingship." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 14: 273–313.
- Flückiger-Hawker, Esther
1999 *Urnamma of Ur in Sumerian Literary Tradition*. Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis 166. Freiburg: University of Freiburg; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- Frankfort, Henri
1948 *Kingship and the Gods: A Study of Ancient Near Eastern Religion as the Integration of Society and Nature*. Oriental Institute Essay. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Frayne, Douglas R.
1993 *Sargonic and Gutian Periods, 2334–2113 BC*. The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Early Periods 2. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
1997 *Ur III Period, 2112–2004 BC*. The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Early Periods 3/2. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Friedman, Kasja Ekholm
1985 "'... Sad Stories of the Death of Kings': The Involvement of Divine Kingship." *Ethnos* 50: 248–72.
- George, Andrew R.
2003 *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic: Introduction, Critical Edition, and Cuneiform Texts*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Hansen, Donald
 2002 "Through the Love of Ishtar." In *Of Pots and Plans: Papers on the Archaeology and History of Mesopotamia and Syria Presented to David Oates in Honour of His 75th Birthday*, edited by Lamia Al-Gailani Werr, John Curtis, Harriet Martin, Augusta McMahon, Joan Oates, and Julian Reade, pp. 91–112. London: NABU.
- Jacobsen, Thorkild
 1939 *The Sumerian King List*. Assyriological Studies 11. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Lambert, W. G.
 1979 "Near Eastern Seals in the Gubelkian Museum of Oriental Art, University of Durham." *Iraq* 41: 1–46.
- Legrain, Leon
 1937 *Business Documents of the Third Dynasty of Ur*. Ur Excavations, Texts 3. Philadelphia: The University Museum; London: British Museum.
- Machinist, Peter
 2006 "Kingship and Divinity in Imperial Assyria." In *Text, Artifact, and Image: Revealing Ancient Israelite Religion*, edited by Gary M. Beckman and Theodore J. Lewis, pp. 152–88. Brown Judaic Studies 346. Providence: Brown Judaic Studies.
- Michalowski, Piotr
 1977 "Durum and Uruk During the Ur III Period." *Mesopotamia* 12: 83–96.
 2003 "A Man Called Enmebaragesi." In *Literatur, Politik und Recht in Mesopotamien: Festschrift für Claus Wilcke*, edited by Walther Sallaberger, Konrad Volk, and Annette Zgoll, pp. 195–208. *Orientalia Biblica et Christiana* 14. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.
 2005 "Literary Works from the Court of King Ishbi-Erra of Isin." In "An Experienced Scribe Who Neglects Nothing": *Ancient Near Eastern Studies in Honor of Jacob Klein*, edited by Yitschak Sefati, Pinhas Artzi, Chaim Cohen, Barry L. Eichler, and Victor A. Hurowitz, pp. 199–212. Bethesda: CDL.
 In press "Maybe Epic: The Origins and Reception of Sumerian Heroic Poetry." In *Epic and History*, edited by David Konstan and Kurt A. Raaflaub. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Reisman, Daniel David
 1970 Two Neo-Sumerian Royal Hymns. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania.
 1973 "Iddin-Dagan's Sacred Marriage Hymn." *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 25: 185–202.
- Sallaberger, Walther
 1999 "Ur III-Zeit." In *Mesopotamien: Akkade-Zeit und Ur III-Zeit*, edited by Walther Sallaberger and Åge Westenholz, pp. 119–414. *Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis* 160/3. Freiburg: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
 2003–04 "Schlachtvieh aus Puzriš-Dagān: Zur Bedeutung dieses königlichen Archivs." *Jaarbericht ex Oriente Lux*: 45–62.
- Sigrist, Marcel; David I. Owen; and Gordon D. Young
 1984 *The John Frederick Lewis Collection*, Part 2. Materiali per il vocabolario Neosumerico 13. Rome: Multigrafica Editrice.
- Sommerfeld, Walther
 2000 "Naram-Sin, die 'Große Revolte' und MAR.TU.ki." In *Assyriologica et semitica: Festschrift für Joachim Oelsner anlässlich seines 65. Geburtstages am 18. Februar*

1997, edited by Joachim Marzahn and Hans Neumann, pp. 419–36. *Alter Orient und Altes Testament* 252. Münster: Ugarit-Verlag.

Steinkeller, Piotr

- 1987 “The Administrative and Economic Organization of the Ur III State: The Core and the Periphery.” In *The Organization of Power: Aspects of Bureaucracy in the Ancient Near East*, edited by McGuire Gibson and Robert D. Biggs, pp. 19–41. *Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization* 46. Chicago: The Oriental Institute.
- 1992 “Mesopotamia in the Third Millennium B.C.” In *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 4, edited by David Noel Freedman, pp. 724–32. New York: Doubleday.
- 2003 “An Ur III. Manuscript of the Sumerian King List.” In *Literatur, Politik und Recht in Mesopotamien: Festschrift für Claus Wilcke*, edited by Walther Sallaberger, Konrad Volk, and Annette Zgoll, pp. 267–92. *Orientalia Biblica et Christiana* 14. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.
- 2007 “New Light on Šimaški and Its Rulers.” *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* 97: 215–32.

Stève, M.-J.

- 1989 “Des sceaux-cylindres de Simaški?” *Revue d’Assyriologie* 83: 13–26.

Stolper, Matthew W.

- 1982 “On the Dynasty of Shimashki and the Early Sukkalmahs.” *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* 72: 42–67.

Tadmor, H.; Benno Landsberger; and Simo Parpola

- 1989 “The Sin of Sargon and Sennacherib’s Last Will.” *State Archives of Assyria Bulletin* 3: 3–51.

Veldhuis, Niek

- 2001 “The Solution of the Dream: A New Interpretation of Bilgames’ Death.” *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 53: 133–48.

Westenholz, Åge

- 1999 “The Old Akkadian Period: History and Culture.” In *Mesopotamien: Akkade-Zeit und Ur III-Zeit*, edited by Walther Sallaberger and Åge Westenholz, pp. 17–117. *Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis* 160/3. Freiburg: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- 2000 “Assyriologists, Ancient and Modern, on Naram-Sin and Sharkalisharri.” In *Assyriologica et semitica: Festschrift für Joachim Oelsner anlässlich seines 65. Geburtstages am 18. Februar 1997*, edited by Joachim Marzahn and Hans Neumann, pp. 419–36. *Alter Orient und Altes Testament* 252. Münster: Ugarit-Verlag.

Westenholz, Joan Goodnick

- 1997 *Legends of the Kings of Akkade: The Texts*. Mesopotamian Civilizations 7. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns.

Wilhelm, Gernot

- 1982 *Grundzüge der Geschichte und Kultur der Hurriter*. Grundzüge 45. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft.

Wilcke, Claus

- 1988 “König Shulgis Himmelfahrt.” *Münchener Beiträge zur Völkerkunde* 1: 245–55.