

DIVINE KINGSHIP IN THE THIRD DYNASTY OF UR:
METHODS OF LEGITIMIZING ROYAL AUTHORITY IN ANCIENT MESOPOTAMIA

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ABSTRACT

DIVINE KINGSHIP IN THE THIRD DYNASTY OF UR: METHODS OF LEGITIMIZING ROYAL AUTHORITY IN ANCIENT MESOPOTAMIA

by Jeffrey DuPont

Although the kings of ancient Mesopotamia were in most periods considered to be merely human, albeit with important ceremonial and religious functions, for a relatively brief period near the end of the third millennium BCE the kings of the Third Dynasty of Ur deified themselves, claiming to be gods. This short period of divine kingship served as part of a larger overall program of state centralization designed to concentrate power within the hands of the ruling family. This thesis examines the methods that the kings of this period used to communicate their divinity to their subjects by analyzing evidence from royal inscriptions and titles, literary texts, cylinder seals, monumental art, and religious rituals. The primary pattern found after examining this evidence is that the kings of the Third Dynasty of Ur tended to proclaim their divinity most explicitly via media that were generally restricted to the elites of society, while media that reached a larger audience tended to be more conservative in depicting the divinity of the king.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	vi
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. HISTORIOGRAPHY	6
III. PRECURSORS TO UR III DIVINE KINGSHIP	16
IV. NARAM-SIN	26
V. DIVINE KINGSHIP IN THE THIRD DYNASTY OF UR	30
VI. ROYAL INSCRIPTIONS AND TITLES	34
VII. ROYAL HYMNS	41
VIII. LITERARY REPRESENTATIONS OF THE KING'S DIVINITY	46
IX. ARTISTIC REPRESENTATIONS OF THE KING'S DIVINITY	53
X. RITUAL REPRESENTATIONS OF THE KING'S DIVINITY	60
XI. CONCLUSIONS	69
BIBLIOGRAPHY	78

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- ANET Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament
- CAD The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago
- ETCSL The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature
- RIME The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia: Early Periods

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Unlike the pharaohs of ancient Egypt, the kings of ancient Mesopotamia were not generally considered by their subjects to have been divine figures. While the Pharaoh was Horus in life and Osiris in death, an immortal source of stability for his people and for the cosmos as a whole, the kings of Mesopotamia traditionally occupied a much more modest position vis-à-vis the divine sphere. Although the prehistoric origins of Sumerian kingship are difficult to trace and beyond the scope of this paper, it is certainly the case that by the beginning of the 3rd millennium BCE the king was an integral part of many religious rituals in his role as head of state, functioning in a sacred capacity as primary mediator between the human and divine worlds. Despite this religious importance, however, he was considered to be in his essence human and not divine. Beginning with the deification of Naram-Sin of Agade (ca. 2254–2218 BCE) and later with the kings of the Third Dynasty of Ur (ca. 2113–2004 BCE), this traditional relationship between kings and gods began to change.¹ Naram-Sin is the first Mesopotamian king known to have claimed explicit divine status for himself, based on his use of the cuneiform sign *dingir*, denoting divinity, placed as an unpronounced determinative character before the writing of his name. The practice reached its height during the Ur III period, with the kings of that time not only claiming to be gods, but in fact establishing temples specifically dedicated to the cultic service of the figure of the divine king. Most interesting of all, however, is the fact that the practice of divine kingship barely outlived the end of the Ur III kingdom. Although some trappings of divinity remain in later generations, by and large the situation completely reverted to

¹ As a matter of consistency with the prevailing usage among scholars today, the Middle Chronology for the history of Mesopotamia will be employed throughout this paper.

a more traditional sacred (as opposed to divine) role for the king by the time of Hammurabi's accession to the throne of Babylon, ca. 1792 BCE.

The purpose of this paper will be to examine in more detail the development of the unusually brief phenomenon of divine kingship in Mesopotamia, with a particular focus on the Ur III period. The adoption of the trappings of divine rule by the kings of the Third Dynasty of Ur was an intentional change in royal ideology, one that achieved a uniquely new form of kingship by playing with old traditions concerning the sacred role of the king. The Ur III kings redefined kingship in their empire by drawing on a variety of disparate traditions: the so-called "sacred marriage" ceremony (itself an expression of the traditionally liminal state of Mesopotamian kings with regard to the divine and human spheres), the tales of heroic Gilgamesh and other legendary figures, the self-deification of Naram-Sin of Agade not long before their time, and many others. This reinvented ideology of divine kingship was expressed in a variety of forms, each meant to speak to different political and social factions within the Ur III kingdom. Ultimately, the various representations of divine kingship, through inscription, hymn, literature, and cultic service, worked together to promote a program of centralization that concentrated power in the hands of the king and the royal family, in a way and on a scale that had not been seen before in Mesopotamia.

In order to illuminate the various ways that the Ur III kings promoted their divine kingship ideology, it will be necessary to marshal evidence from a variety of sources. The divine kingship ideology was not invented out of whole-cloth, but rather comprised a number of subtle changes to otherwise traditional Sumerian practices. Some of these changes, viewed on their own, might seem insignificant, yet when analyzed together it becomes clear that they form mutually-reinforcing strands of an interlocking web meant to communicate a hegemonic ideology of royal

power and state centralization. The evidence that I will examine in this paper includes purely textual sources such as royal inscriptions, literary compositions, and royal praise poetry, as well as visual representations of the ruler both in monumental art and on the ubiquitous cylinder seals of the Sumerian bureaucracy.² In addition, I will examine representations of the king and his divinity within the context of religious ritual, both the case of the sacred marriage and also the establishment of temples dedicated to the worship of the statue of the living king. By looking at each type of evidence both individually and also in concert with the others, I hope to highlight the different ways that the Ur III kings communicated their ideology of divine kingship to different parts of their population. In particular, I argue that the representations of the king that were the most private in their audience, and generally restricted to the most elite groups of society, tended to be most explicit in their statements of the king's divine nature. On the other hand, representations that were aimed at a larger audience tended to be more conservative in their portrayal of the king, focusing on general exaltation of the ruler and praise of his majesty and superiority rather than on outright proclamations of his divinity.

It is important before we proceed any further to pause and spend some time reflecting on the basic terms of our study; what exactly do we mean by "divine kingship," and how might this concept differ from previous forms of kingship in ancient Mesopotamia? More to the point, what

² It is important to note here that, strictly speaking, a distinction cannot always be drawn between textual and visual sources; many statues and reliefs bore written inscriptions, after all, as did some cylinder seals. However, in the case of the monumental art the percentage of the population that was able to read these inscriptions was quite small, and thus for a significant number of people the artistic representations of the king were the only aspects of these compositions that were relevant to them. In the case of the cylinder seals, although the officials that made use of them were literate, the images of the seals would have been visible to a much greater segment of the population because of their common use in economic transactions. For the purposes of this study, I will thus treat the visual representations of the king as a separate category despite the fact that some were also inscribed, since for many people the artistic representation of the king was the only aspect of the composition to which they would have access.

exactly defines the difference between divine kingship and its close relative, sacred kingship? For it must be noted that although the Third Dynasty of Ur marks the point in time when the greatest concentration of attributes and practices surrounding divinity was systematically applied to the kings, there remains no doubt that the kings of Mesopotamia enjoyed a special relationship with their gods as far back as Early Dynastic times (ca. 2900–2334 BCE), and probably in the preceding Uruk period (ca. 4100–2900 BCE) as well.

Traditionally, scholars have marked a division between, on the one hand, a sacred kingship that comprised the norm for Mesopotamian civilization, and on the other a relatively short period of divine kingship marked by the application of the *dingir* sign to the royal name. However, the use of the *dingir* sign is not enough by itself to indicate a true ideology of divine rule. The culture of ancient Mesopotamia in virtually all periods evinced a strong sense of respect for their ancient heritage, and many modes of royal representation became stylized and lost something of their original ideological force in later generations. In the case of divine kingship, after the fall of the Ur III dynasty many Old Babylonian (ca. 2017–1595 BCE) and Kassite (ca. 1570–1155 BCE) kings of Mesopotamia continued to write *dingir* before their royal names, but the practice had become nothing more than a traditional title and symbol of stature, while the practical ideology of kingship reverted to a more traditional understanding of the relationship between kings and gods.³ The use of the *dingir* sign by Naram-Sin and his Ur III successors represented the pinnacle of Mesopotamian divine kingship not only because it explicitly attributed divinity to the named ruler, but also because during their reigns they actively promoted the idea of their divinity through multiple means, including public art and ritual

³ Piotr Michalowski, "The Mortal Kings of Ur: A Short Century of Divine Rule in Ancient Mesopotamia," in *Religion and Power: Divine Kingship in the Ancient World and Beyond*, ed. Nicole Maria Brisch (Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2008), pg. 40.

worship. Thus, I would argue that true divine kingship consisted not only of the use of the *dingir* determinative, but also of the idea that the kings were considered to be living gods and actively worshipped as such.

CHAPTER II

HISTORIOGRAPHY

Although a great deal has been written both about kingship and about religion in the ancient Near Eastern world, a relatively small amount of scholarly output has been devoted specifically to studying the deification of kings in Mesopotamian history. Certainly part of this is due to the fact that the phenomenon was quite short-lived, but nevertheless one might expect that more coverage would have been given to the subject over the years given the fact that the temple and the palace were two of the dominating institutions of the Mesopotamian world. Until quite recently, the consensus among scholars has been that divine kingship in Mesopotamia was nothing more than a brief anomaly, a quirk of history that, interesting as it may be, was ultimately ephemeral and had no lasting impact and little relevance for the study of Mesopotamian history on a larger scale. Before looking at the Ur III kings themselves, I would like to briefly trace the origins of this idea and the factors that led to its widespread adoption, and then also to show how this traditional notion of the importance of divine kingship in Mesopotamia has begun to change in recent years. In particular, I will examine the role Henri Frankfort's seminal work *Kingship and the Gods* played in shaping the scholarly discussion of this subject.

Some of the earliest attempts at a synthesis and analysis of the textual and archaeological material relating to the role of Mesopotamian divine kingship began to appear at the beginning of the 20th century.⁴ Although a great deal of productive work resulted from these studies, they were

⁴ Notable early works include Édouard Dhorme, *La religion assyro-babylonienne: conférences données à l'Institut Catholique de Paris* (Paris: J. Gabalda et Cie, 1910) and René Labat, *Le caractère religieux de la royauté assyro-babylonienne*, diss., Université De Paris (Paris: Librairie D'Amérique et D'Orient, 1939). Major English works dealing with issues of Mesopotamian

in many respects contradictory and, particularly in the case of the earlier works, hampered by the limited understanding of the relatively few Sumerian sources available at the time. The trend among many of these early attempts was to approach divine kingship through the lens of comparative religion. Additionally, a certain tendency towards viewing culture from both a phenomenological and an evolutionary perspective predominated, as was the intellectual fashion of the time. Ivan Engnell's *Studies in Divine Kingship in the Ancient Near East* offers the most fully-developed example of this line of reasoning, marshaling evidence from Egypt, Mesopotamia, and the Levantine coast in support of arguments attempting to show that kingship throughout the entirety of the ancient Near Eastern world conformed to a pattern wherein the king was a divine figure whose sacred and ritual functions ensured the fertility of the land and the continued prosperity of the people.⁵ Although such a generalizing position would not be accepted today, in its quest for a broad theorem that sought to describe the *zeitgeist* of the Near Eastern religious mentality it was quite representative of its era.

This approach changed decisively with the publication of *Kingship and the Gods* in 1948.⁶ With this monumental work, Frankfort successfully overturned the conventional wisdom of his time, instead describing a Near Eastern world in which each civilization was defined by its unique characteristics, despite certain common elements. Although traces of phenomenology and evolutionary thinking certainly are still evident in his work, he nevertheless made great strides

divine kingship include S. H. Hooke and Aylward M. Blackman, *Myth and Ritual: Essays on the Myth and Ritual of the Hebrews in Relation to the Culture Pattern of the Ancient East* (London: Oxford University Press, H. Milford, 1933) and A. M. Hocart, *Kingship* (London: Oxford University Press, 1927).

⁵ Ivan Engnell, *Studies in Divine Kingship in the Ancient Near East*, diss., Uppsala Universitet, 1943 (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells boktr., 1943). See particularly pg. 16-38 for his ideas as they are applied to Mesopotamian kingship.

⁶ Henri Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods: A Study of Ancient Near Eastern Religion as the Integration of Society & Nature*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948).

towards a more modern view, seeking to understand the local and temporal particularities within the ancient Near Eastern world rather than searching for an elusive “core” underlying and animating all ancient Near Eastern civilizations. One could say that Frankfort took the study of Mesopotamian kingship and religion an important, even definitive step away from comparative-historical notions (in the tradition of Spengler and Toynbee), and towards a more modern form of analysis.

In contrast with the methods employed by his predecessors, Frankfort approached his subject from the perspective of Egyptology and Assyriology, rather than from the perspective of comparative religious studies. The core thesis around which he builds his argument is the idea that the function of the king in both ancient Egypt and ancient Mesopotamia was the continual maintenance of the harmony between the world of human society and the rhythms of the divine realm (that is, the rhythms of the natural world within which human society operated). However, despite identifying a core similarity between Egyptian and Mesopotamian kingship (the king’s role as mediator between the human and divine spheres), Frankfort’s work focuses not so much on these similarities, but rather on fundamental differences in the way that this function was carried out. Simply put, Frankfort emphasizes that Pharaoh was considered a divine being in his very nature, while Mesopotamian kings were fully human and merely served as a conduit between the human and divine realms.⁷ This is a stark contrast to the views of his predecessors, who tended to emphasize the similarities, rather than the differences, between ancient Near Eastern civilizations. More directly relevant to the study at hand, Frankfort also established the view that Mesopotamian divine kingship (specifically Naram-Sin and the Ur III kings) was a historical anomaly, a mostly meaningless blip on the historical radar. In fact, Frankfort argued

⁷ Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods*, pg. 3.

strenuously that true divine kingship never even existed in Mesopotamia, instead preferring to dismiss or argue away whatever evidence for the practice that he did find.

Frankfort's notions about the relationship between Mesopotamian kings and their deities were revolutionary in their time. He himself notes the novelty of his position when he writes:

The deification of Mesopotamian kings is generally treated as if the use of the divine determinative before the names of some of them were quite unequivocal; the conflict of this usage with the prevalent trends in Mesopotamian thought is ignored, and the divine character of Pharaoh is quoted as an illuminating parallel... An extreme case of the neglect of the individual nature of distinct civilizations is presented by Ivan Engnell... [He] forces one single pattern upon the extensive material which he has collected, thus destroying the rich variety of pre-Greek thought in the name of "comparative religion."⁸

In this statement, Frankfort quite clearly spells out for us the stark difference between his approach and that of his contemporaries; after taking Engnell to task, he then goes on to level the same objection at the works of Hooke, Hocart, and others.⁹ Rather than approach his subject from a comparative perspective, Frankfort works carefully from the Sumerian and Akkadian texts, treating Mesopotamian society as a distinct culture that must be understood on its own terms rather than as part of a larger Near Eastern cultural whole. Beginning with an examination of the historical roots of Mesopotamian kingship in earlier forms of "primitive democracy" (an idea first coined by Thorkild Jacobsen), Frankfort proceeds to detail the forms, functions, and theological underpinnings of Mesopotamian kingship ideology.¹⁰ He makes a compelling case that the deification of kings in the Egyptian manner was never the norm in Mesopotamia, from the Early Dynastic era all the way until Neo-Babylonian times (ca. 625–539 BCE). Ironically, it is Frankfort's determination to treat the Mesopotamian world as a single cultural unit with a

⁸ Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods*, pg. 405 note 1.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Thorkild Jacobsen, "Primitive Democracy in Ancient Mesopotamia," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 2, no. 3 (July 1943), pg. 159-72.

single ideology of kingship that leads not only to his great achievement (realizing that Mesopotamian kings were not, generally, considered divine), but also to his severe misunderstanding of the divine Naram-Sin and his Ur III successors.

To his credit, Frankfort at least attempts to deal with the issue of the (admittedly short-lived) phenomenon of divine kingship in Mesopotamia. Recognizing the challenge that the problem presents for his characterization of Mesopotamian kingship, he devotes an entire chapter to the subject. His basic conclusion can be summed up as follows: the primary impetus for the use of the divine determinative before the name of a king, as well as the associated worship of statues of divine kings, can be best explained in light of the ceremonies surrounding sacred marriage, in which a king would be temporarily wedded to the goddess Inanna/Ishtar in the course of the New Year's celebration. However, Frankfort steadfastly maintains that the kings were not accorded any sort of status that might be considered truly divine or on par with the deities of the Mesopotamian pantheon.¹¹ In contrast to more modern perspectives, Frankfort is not willing to seriously consider that for a period of time conceptions of kingship in Mesopotamia may have changed (or attempts may have been made to change them); rather he is intent on viewing kingship ideologies as more or less static throughout the entire historical period of Mesopotamian civilization, a perspective that shares some of the same phenomenological and evolutionary notions that plagued his predecessors. Despite this shortcoming, however, *Kingship and the Gods* fundamentally changed the scholarly conversation regarding the relationship between Mesopotamian kings and their gods, and Frankfort's views dominated the discussion until recent times.

¹¹ Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods*, pg. 295-312.

It is interesting to note that, for many years after the publication of *Kingship and the Gods*, scholars produced very little work that dealt directly with the issue of divine kingship in Mesopotamia for many years. Certainly in the aftermath of its publication it took time for scholars to absorb the full weight of his insights into the nature of kingship in Mesopotamia, but generally none of this work addresses specifically the issues of divine kingship. Of course many publications in the ensuing decades dealt with concerns of the king and palace and their relationship with god and temple, but Frankfort's general view that divine kingship was a brief phenomenon that did not reflect prevailing trends in Mesopotamian kingship became the standard interpretation. While it is true that over time more and more scholars became willing to admit, unlike Frankfort, that the Ur III kings did in fact lay claim to a divine status that went beyond the norm and may have approached true divine kingship, they generally followed Frankfort in treating the era as short-lived and relatively meaningless given the overall trajectory of Mesopotamian kingship.

One exception to this trend is Philip Jones' article, "Divine and Non-Divine Kingship," which was included in the highly-regarded survey work *A Companion to the Ancient Near East* in 2005.¹² However, Jones' arguments rely upon a mistaken understanding of what constituted divine kingship in ancient Mesopotamia. In Jones' conception, the mere presence of the *dingir* determinative before a king's name means that he was thought of as divine and his rule should be considered an instance of divine kingship, a view which is clearly at odds with the notion of true divine kingship requiring a vibrant, functioning ideology that I argue for in this paper.

¹² Philip Jones, "Divine and Non-Divine Kingship," in *A Companion to the Ancient Near East*, ed. Daniel C. Snell (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2005), pg. 330-42.

Interestingly, Jones himself tacitly acknowledges the limits of his inadequate definition of divine kingship when he writes:

This practice [writing of the *dingir* determinative before the name of the king] was in regular use down to the end of the Kassite period... Other markers of royal divinity were more restricted in time. Akkad, Ur III, and Old Babylonian kings were described in epithets as gods, Ur III and Old Babylonian kings had hymns written in their honor. Ur III kings received religious offerings in their own lifetime...¹³

As we can see, once other factors aside from the use of *dingir* are taken into account, Jones' own study admits of the fact that full-fledged divine kingship was a much more restricted phenomenon than he would have us believe. Ultimately, Jones' entire paper really has little to do at all with divine kingship; although Jones has a great deal to say about the development of ideas regarding sacred kingship, he tacitly admits that true divine kingship was a remarkably brief phenomenon.

The relative lack of scholarship dealing seriously with divine kingship in Mesopotamia, however brief it may have been, ended dramatically with the 2008 publication of *Religion and Power: Divine Kingship in the Ancient World and Beyond*, a collection of papers originally presented at a conference held at the University of Chicago in 2007. Due to its nature as an anthology of conference proceedings, the book presents a wide variety of perspectives on the subject, although as the subtitle suggests there was a careful and quite intentional inclusion of non-Assyriological perspectives, both from different disciplines (art history, anthropology), and also from different time periods and locales (which included, among others, ancient China, the Roman Empire, and the Maya). Nevertheless, the papers of many prominent Assyriologists share a number of common themes. Jerrold Cooper describes this similarity when he comments,

¹³ Ibid., pg. 332.

“...both Michalowski and Winter stress that unlike kings in Egypt, Mesopotamian kings were not inherently divine. Rather, divine kingship in Mesopotamia was a historically contingent phenomenon.”¹⁴ This idea of divine kingship being “historically contingent” marks the beginnings of a shift in research into Mesopotamian divine kingship. As Winter and Michalowski argue, divine kingship should no longer be viewed as a historical oddity, at odds with a greater overall trend within the development of Mesopotamian royal ideologies. Rather, divine kingship should be viewed as an important, if brief, phenomenon deserving of study in its own right. The search for the factors that affected these historical contingencies leading to divine kingship is one of the main areas of inquiry throughout the book, with ideological purposes or imperial ambitions being only two of the more common suggestions that contributors put forth.

Because of its direct relevance to the current study, it will be worthwhile to highlight here Piotr Michalowski’s contribution to *Religion and Power*, “The Mortal Kings of Ur: A Short Century of Divine Rule in Ancient Mesopotamia.” In this article, Michalowski lays out the argument that the kings of the Ur III period very deliberately claimed a level of divine status that went beyond the normal parameters of Mesopotamian notions of kingship. Michalowski argues that the thrust of this ideological change originated with Shulgi, the second king of the dynasty, as part of a great program of state centralization and re-organization that he undertook following the untimely death of his father, Ur-Namma. Michalowski makes a compelling case that a certain set of historical forces led to Shulgi’s adoption of a more robust divine kingship ideology, and that the institution was not able to outlast the Third Dynasty of Ur, at least as a vibrant and functional political tool, because many of those forces no longer obtained.

¹⁴ Jerrold Cooper, "Divine Kingship in Mesopotamia, A Fleeting Phenomenon," in *Religion and Power: Divine Kingship in the Ancient World and Beyond*, ed. Nicole Maria Brisch (Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2008), pg. 261.

I will look more closely at Michalowski's work later, as his arguments largely redefine the intellectual terrain for anyone seeking to write about Ur III divine kingship. However, there are a few interesting discrepancies between Michalowski's work and the work of other contemporary scholars that suggest fruitful areas for further study, areas which I hope to explore in this paper. For example, Michalowski claims that Ur-Namma was not divinized by his son Shulgi after his death, while Irene Winter states the exact opposite about him in her article "Touched by the Gods: Visual Evidence for the Divine Status of Rulers in the Ancient Near East."¹⁵ This sort of contradiction may stem from the fact that Michalowski deals mainly with textual references to the Ur III king, while Winter is explicitly dealing with visual representations. However, this clear difference of opinion on Ur-Namma's divine status exposes the fact that there is still a great deal of interpretive work to be done. Much of this work can be pursued in areas such as defining exactly where the line between a divine and a sacred king was, what the difference between textual and iconographic depictions of Ur III rulers might reveal, and how to interpret claims that some kings have divine lineage even though their names are not found written with the *dingir* determinative.

It is exactly these murkier issues regarding the line between divine and sacred kingship, and the historical factors that led the Ur III kings to cross that line, that this paper will seek to investigate further. The works of Michalowski and Winter (among others) have shown that, despite divine kingship never having become the norm in ancient Mesopotamia, it need not therefore be relegated to the status of a historical footnote. Rather than dismissing it for not

¹⁵ Michalowski, "Mortal Kings of Ur," pg. 37, and Irene Winter, "Touched by the Gods: Visual Evidence for the Divine Status of Rulers in the Ancient Near East," in *Religion and Power: Divine Kingship in the Ancient World and Beyond*, ed. Nicole Maria Brisch (Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2008), pg. 77.

fitting into an evolutionary paradigm that would seek to understand the overall trajectory of Mesopotamian ideologies of kingship, divine kingship can be studied on its own merits; divine kingship was a unique and fascinating episode in a civilization that constantly sought to mediate a compromise between innovative solutions to pressing social problems on the one hand, and a profound respect for tradition and a long sense of cultural memory on the other.

CHAPTER III

PRECURSORS TO UR III DIVINE KINGSHIP

As we have already discussed, the ideology of divine kingship that the Ur III kings espoused was not a new invention of their own time, but rather it drew from earlier traditions. One should not view the Ur III kings as catapulting themselves into the divine sphere, but rather as taking the final, decisive steps at the culmination of a longer process whereby Mesopotamian kings had been moving closer to the divine sphere for centuries. I do not mean to suggest here a return to an evolutionary model of Mesopotamian kingship; these final steps were by no means the natural, inevitable outcome of a monolithic historical process. Rather, I am simply affirming the fact that the adoption of a robust divine kingship by the Ur III kings, historically conditioned as it certainly was, nevertheless would not have been feasible were it not for a long tradition of closeness between the kings and the gods. Although prior to the Third Dynasty of Ur only Naram-Sin had made use of the *dingir* determinative when writing his name, the language and cultural apparatus necessary for expressing divine kingship were already quite old by the time that the Ur III kings asserted their own divinity.

Prior to the founding of the Akkadian Empire by Sargon, grandfather of Naram-Sin, the various cities of Mesopotamia lived more or less independently of each other as individual socio-political entities despite a shared common culture, much like the city-states of classical Greece. The ideology of kingship up until that time was based on the notion that the king ruled the city as the steward of the chief god, who was the true king and master of the city and whose temple was both the economic and the political hub of the community.¹⁶ Thus it is no surprise to find that,

¹⁶ For further elaboration of this idea, see Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods*, and also Piotr Steinkeller, "On Rulers, Priests and Sacred Marriage," in *Official Cult and Popular Religion in*

beginning with the Late Uruk period (ca. 3400–3100 BCE), we find a great deal of evidence suggesting that the earliest rulers of the Sumerian city-states were important religious officials.

In his article “On Rulers, Priests and Sacred Marriage,” Piotr Steinkeller begins by discussing the “man in the net kilt” of the celebrated Warka Vase.¹⁷ He argues that:

...the royal figure of Uruk art bore the title en, which in Sumerian means ‘lord’ or ‘ruler.’ Moreover, he is thought to have resided within the complex of Eanna in a building called gipar... a sort of proto-palace. And finally, it is assumed that, when exercising the religious aspect of his office, the ‘man in the net kilt’ ranked as a human consort of Inanna.¹⁸

Steinkeller then proceeds to amass a large amount of evidence, both textual and archaeological, drawn from a variety of sites dating throughout the Late Uruk and subsequent Jemdet Nasr (ca. 3100–2900 BCE) periods in order to support his argument that, “the institution of enship enjoyed general acceptance among the Sumerians during the archaic age. To put it in even stronger terms, enship apparently was the original form of Sumerian kingship.”¹⁹ As Steinkeller argues, the essentially religious basis of Sumerian kingship appears to date from the earliest strata of Sumerian culture, and all evidence indicates that in the ensuing centuries the rulers of the

the Ancient Near East: Papers of the First Colloquium on the Ancient Near East - the City and Its Life Held at the Middle Eastern Culture Center in Japan (Mitaka, Tokyo), March 20-22, 1992, ed. Eiko Matsushima (Heidelberg: Winter, 1993), pg. 103-37.

¹⁷ Steinkeller, "On Rulers, Priests and Sacred Marriage," pg. 104-111.

¹⁸ Ibid., pg. 105.

¹⁹ Ibid., pg. 111. It is important to note that three different Sumerian words were used to designate the rulers of the various city-states: en, ensi (or ensik), and lugal. A great deal has been written regarding the details of these terms, their nuances, and the different ways in which they communicated ideas about the ruler. In addition to Steinkeller’s article referenced here, the reader is also directed to William W. Hallo, *Early Mesopotamian Royal Titles: A Philologic and Historical Analysis* (New Haven, CT: American Oriental Society, 1957). Although Steinkeller here calls enship the earliest form of kingship, I will strive to maintain the standard convention of using the word king only to translate the Sumerian word lugal. In any case, and perhaps thankfully, by the time we reach the period of the Ur III rulers the title used is invariably lugal.

Sumerian city-states maintained and even further bolstered their claims to divine sanction, cultivating a special relationship with their gods.

Evidence of this intimate relationship between the rulers and the gods can be found in an analysis of one of the most difficult and fascinating features of Mesopotamian culture, the sacred marriage. From what can be reconstructed of it, the sacred marriage appears to have been associated with the New Year's festival, and involved an elaborate ritual re-enactment of the marriage between Inanna, Sumerian goddess of sex and war, and her divine husband, Dumuzi the Shepherd. Designed to promote the fertility of the land and the continued prosperity of the people, the sacred marriage appears to have somehow culminated with an act of ritual sex between the Inanna and the ruler, who in this situation incarnated the person of Dumuzi. However, due to the relatively meager evidence we have from the early periods of Sumerian history, and the great difficulties scholars have encountered in interpreting the evidence, opinions vary widely as to the exact details of the ceremony. For example, some scholars deny that any actual sex took place during the ritual, while others imagine that a priestess or perhaps the queen took on the role of Inanna and copulated with the king as Dumuzi.²⁰ Scholars also disagree regarding the essential purpose of the ritual, some arguing that its goal was fertility of the land, others downplaying the fertility aspect and instead suggesting that it served to reinforce societal conventions revolving around traditional marriage values.²¹ Because of the extremely

²⁰ For the idea that a high priestess or the queen took part in the ritual, see Thorkild Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness: A History of Mesopotamian Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), pg. 39. For the idea that the participant was some other sort of priestess, such as the *lukur* priestess, see Samuel Noah Kramer, *The Sacred Marriage Rite; Aspects of Faith, Myth, and Ritual in Ancient Sumer*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969), pg. 93. For the opinion that the rite entailed no actual sex at all, see Steinkeller, "On Rulers, Priests, and Sacred Marriage," pg. 133.

²¹ The fertility aspect of the sacred marriage is emphasized by both Jacobsen, *The Treasures of*

fragmentary evidence regarding the sacred marriage, as well as the long chronological period over which the evidence is spread, the study of the sacred marriage is fraught with dangers for even the careful researcher; it is not within the scope of this paper to examine in any detail its intricate history. Rather, I would like simply to examine the evidence for the longevity of this practice and the complex of beliefs associated with it.

Clearly the existence of the sacred marriage suggests an important closeness between the person of the king and the goddess Inanna. The very idea that the king, even if only within the context of a certain ritual time and place, could take on the role of a god and thereby copulate with a goddess implies that the king occupied a position vis-à-vis the divine sphere that was far beyond that enjoyed by average human beings. The greatest concentration of evidence regarding the sacred marriage dates to the Ur III period, and we will examine it in more detail later. The kings of the Ur III period clearly made careful use of the traditions surrounding the sacred marriage as part of their promotion of the ideology of divine kingship. However, there is ample evidence to suggest that elements of the sacred marriage existed well before the Ur III period.

In *The Treasures of Darkness*, his classic analysis of ancient Mesopotamian religion, Thorkild Jacobsen argues that fertility myths associated with Dumuzi and Inanna formed the most basic foundation upon which the grand edifice of Mesopotamian piety was later built. Indeed, he argues that many of the mythological traditions surrounding Dumuzi and Inanna date

Darkness, and also Kramer, *The Sacred Marriage Rite*. In contrast, the idea that the primary function of the ritual was to strengthen norms regarding traditional marriage is found in Jerrold Cooper, "Sacred Marriage and Popular Cult in Early Mesopotamia," in *Official Cult and Popular Religion in the Ancient Near East: Papers of the First Colloquium on the Ancient Near East - the City and Its Life Held at the Middle Eastern Culture Center in Japan (Mitaka, Tokyo), March 20-22, 1992*, ed. Eiko Matsushima (Heidelberg: Winter, 1993), pg. 81-96.

back to preliterate times, at least to the Uruk period and perhaps even earlier.²² One text that offers some interesting evidence for the early existence of the sacred marriage is a section of a longer poem relating Inanna's elation during her preparations for the coming wedding:

The maiden, singing, sends a messenger to her father. Inana, dancing from joy, sends a messenger to her father: Let them for me into my house, my house. Let them into my house, my house for me, the queen. Let them for me into my *ġipar* shrine. Let them erect for me my flowered bed. Let them spread it for me with herbs like translucent lapis lazuli. For me let them bring in the man of my heart. Let them bring in to me my Ama-ušumgal-ana. Let them put his hand in my hand, let them put his heart by my heart. As hand is put to head, the sleep is so pleasant. As heart is pressed to heart, the pleasure is so sweet.²³

This brief passage offers an interesting clue that suggests the existence of some form of sacred marriage that predates the Ur III period. Most importantly, although the text is clearly referring to the god Dumuzi (here referred to by another of his names, Ama-ušumgal-ana), it suggests that the marriage bed will be placed in Inanna's house; specifically, it will be placed in the *ġipar*, the very building (the Giparu) that Steinkeller noted was the "proto-palace" of the en of Uruk, the religious and political ruler who we have seen functioned as "the consort of Inanna."²⁴

Of course, the difficulty in using this text as evidence for the existence of the sacred marriage in ancient Uruk arises from the fact that the text itself was not recorded until hundreds

²² Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness*, pg. 23-74.

²³ ETCSL 4.08.20, lines 35-47.

²⁴ The association between Inanna, the Giparu, and the office of en is well known, but complicated nonetheless. From the CAD entry for "*ġipāru*" we read that the word has, "an original meaning "storehouse (for food)"... As storehouse the *ġipāru* served as the place of the fertility rite of the "sacred marriage" and thus as the residence of the human partner in the rite, the *enu* or *entu*. In cities where the *enu* had political as well as religious functions (e.g., Uruk and Aratta), the *ġipāru* took on functions of a palace." The original derivation from the meaning of "storehouse for food" is even more intriguing given Jacobsen's ideas that Inanna originated as the goddess, or "numen" of the storehouse, whose power was immanent whenever the storehouse was filled with the foodstuffs that the community relied on to survive the lean winters and summers (see Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness*, pg. 135-143 for more on his understanding of Inanna and her origins).

of years after the period in which Jacobsen would locate the roots of the mythology and ritual upon which it draws. Jacobsen argues that it preserves much older traditions in part based on what he noted as the “intransitive” treatment that the text gives to its divine actors, as opposed to a “transitive” form of divinity that Jacobsen argues became more common in the later phases of Mesopotamian religious development.²⁵ In addition, we have already noted the correspondences between the ideas regarding the wedding of Dumuzi and Inanna as present in this text and the position of *en* that Steinkeller argues is the original form of Sumerian kingship. Such correspondences suggest that traditions surrounding sacred marriage, or at least the mythological basis for this rite, predate the Ur III period by a considerable amount of time. Finally, as further corroboration of the importance of sacred marriage to the kings of ancient Mesopotamia we can point to the existence of other Early Dynastic rulers outside of the city of Uruk who also claimed the title of spouse of Inanna. Mesanepada of Ur (reigned ca. 25th century BCE) is identified on a seal as, “spouse of *nugig*,” a possible reference to a common epithet of Inanna.²⁶ In addition, Eannatum, *ensi* of Lagash (reigned ca. 25th century BCE), refers to himself on the Stele of the

²⁵ Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness*, pg. 9-11 and 25-27. Jacobsen’s “intransitive” conception of the gods stresses their passive presence in the numinous forces of the natural world; thus the “intransitive” conception of, for example, Nidaba simply portrays her as the force or power that animates grain, without endowing her with much agency as an individual divine actor. In contrast, the later “transitive” conception of divinity stresses the active role of the gods, such as Marduk’s role in the creation of the world as portrayed in Atrahasis. Note, for example, that in this text Inanna is having many things done for her (intransitive), rather than acting for herself (transitive).

²⁶ The meaning of the Sumerian word NU.GIG (Akkadian *qadištu*) is quite unclear; the CAD entry for “*qadištu*” simply defines her as “a woman of special status,” but both Cooper, “Sacred Marriage and Popular Cult,” pg. 83 and Steinkeller, “On Priests, Rulers, and Sacred Marriage,” pg. 118 suggest that she may somehow be related to Inanna.

Vultures as “the beloved spouse of Inana.”²⁷ The practice is continued by Naram-Sin, who in addition to claiming divinity for himself also claims the title, “husband of Inanna-Anunitum.”²⁸

Although a great deal about the sacred marriage remains up for debate among scholars, it is clear that, although our most detailed evidence for the practice dates from Ur III times, it certainly appears to have its roots in much earlier practices. At least since the late Uruk period, our evidence suggests that the rulers of Uruk claimed a special relationship with the goddess Inanna that went beyond the boundaries of what normal humans were allowed. Jacobsen suggests that fertility rites such as the sacred marriage were fundamental in shaping later religious practices throughout Sumer, and by the late Early Dynastic period kings from Lagash and Ur were also claiming special status as the spouse of Inanna. In order to complete the picture that we have painted showing the closeness of kings to the divine even prior to the advent of divine kingship proper, we will now briefly examine the tradition of kings that claimed divine descent.

Starting with the First Dynasty of Lagash (ca. 2500-2300 BCE), we observe a trend among the kings of that dynasty towards claiming divine parentage.²⁹ Thus, we read from Eannatum’s Stele of the Vultures that:

The god Ningirsu implanted the semen for Eanatum in the womb... The

²⁷ Cooper, “Sacred marriage and Popular Cult,” pg. 83, although it is worth noting that Cooper recognizes some dissenting opinions preferring an alternative reading that would not have the phrase “beloved spouse of Inana” apply to Eannatum but rather to some other figure.

²⁸ Steinkeller, “On Priests, Rulers, and Sacred Marriage,” pg. 118 note 45.

²⁹ References to the rulers of Mesopotamia according to their various dynasties (First Dynasty of Lagash, Third Dynasty of Ur, etc.) reflect the practice of using the *Sumerian King List* as a standard for modern references to Sumerian kings, despite its inaccuracies. Thus, references to certain dynasties may not correlate to actual ruling families, for example. *The Sumerian King List* will be examined in more detail later in this paper, since its composition quite probably dates to the Ur III period and it plays an important role in promoting the hegemonic ideology of the Ur III kings.

Goddess Inanna accompanied him... and set him on the special knee of the goddess Ninhursag. The goddess Ninhursag offered him her wholesome breast. The god Ningirsu rejoiced over Eanatum, semen implanted in the womb by the god Ningirsu.³⁰

Clearly, although he never adopted the use of the *dingir* sign before his own name, this passage could from one perspective be interpreted as an explicit claim on the part of Eanatum to a divine nature. In a similar vein, we read that Lugalzaggesi (ca. 2359—2335 BCE), a ruler of Uruk who was conquered by Sargon of Akkad, was referred to in one of his inscriptions as the, “son born by the goddess Nissaba, nourished by the wholesome milk by the goddess Ninhursag.”³¹ The same phrase, “nourished by the wholesome milk by the goddess Ninhursag,” is also claimed by Enmetena (ca. 25th century BCE), ruler of Lagash and son of Eanatum.³²

This claim to divine parentage extended to making the ruler a part of the divine family proper. Thus, because of his divine parentage, we see Enmetena claim the title, “chosen brother of the powerful master the god Nin-DAR-a.”³³ Finally, turning to the period between the collapse of the Akkadian Empire and the later rise of the Ur III dynasty, we see a more detailed familial relationship with the gods expressed in the inscriptions of Gudea, ruler of Lagash (ca. 2144—2124 BCE). Thus we see Gudea call to Ningirsu, chief god of the city of Lagash, saying, “I want to build up your house for you, I want to make it perfect for you, so I will ask your sister, the child born of Eridug, an authority on her own, the lady, the dream-interpreter among the gods, *my divine sister* from Sirara, Nanše, to show me the way.”³⁴ Later Gudea is addressed by the gods, who proclaim that, “Your god, Lord Ningîšzida, is the grandson of An; your divine mother

³⁰ RIME 1.9.3.1, col. iv, 18–col. v, 5.

³¹ RIME 1.14.20.1, col. i, 26–27.

³² RIME 1.9.5.18.

³³ RIME 1.9.5.20.

³⁴ ETCSL 2.1.7, lines 39–51, emphasis mine.

is Ninsumun, the bearing mother of good offspring, who loves her offspring; you are a child born by the true cow. You are a true youth made to rise over the land of Lagaš by Ninġirsu; your name is established from below to above.”³⁵ Again, like Eannatum, Gudea appears here to be laying the basis for a claim of divine nature, even though he never takes the *dingir* sign for himself either.

All of this evidence suggests that, in the centuries leading up to the Ur III period, kings had already laid a great deal of the ideological groundwork that would support a sophisticated ideology of divine kingship. Indeed, I am inclined to agree with Gebhard Selz when he opines that, “the process of deification of the ruler started prior to Narām-Sîn.”³⁶ In fact, I would take the argument a step further and argue that, in fact, the process of defication of the ruler *continued after* Naram-Sin, as well. Although Naram-Sin’s use of the *dingir* determinative is the event that traditionally marks the advent of divine kingship in Mesopotamia, all of the evidence just presented suggests that many kings prior to Naram-Sin were making statements that could be interpreted as claims to divinity. Also, as we have already discussed, simply making use of the *dingir* sign is not enough to constitute true divine kingship; from the Old Babylonian period onwards it became merely a formalized bit of royal titlature, devoid in a practical sense of any claims to divinity. On the other hand, the Ur III kings succeeded in making use of all of the various claims to divinity we have so-far referenced (the *dingir* determinative, the sacred marriage, claims of divine ancestry), as well as many other ideological tools intended to accentuate more or less strongly the divine status of the ruler. Moreover, they were able to use

³⁵ ETCSL 2.1.7, lines 1337–1354.

³⁶ Gebhard J. Selz, “The Divine Prototypes,” in *Religion and Power: Divine Kingship in the Ancient World and Beyond*, ed. Nicole Maria Brisch (Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2008), pg. 20.

these various strategies, working in tandem and within the context of a coherent ideological program, to promote a singular vision of centralized bureaucratic and royal power. To borrow a phrase from modern political parlance, the Ur III kings were able to keep a variety of different media outlets “on message” in a way that nobody prior to them had been able to. It is this critical mass of divine claims, and particularly their employment in such a coordinated manner, that sets apart the divine kingship of the Ur III period. In order to best appreciate the role that divine kingship played in the overall scheme of Ur III political discourse, it will be useful now examine the use of divine kingship by Naram-Sin. By comparing the methods of Naram-Sin with those of the later Ur III rulers, we will be able to further understand the mechanisms of Ur III divine kingship and the ways in which they built upon the traditions of their predecessors.

CHAPTER IV

NARAM-SIN

History remembers the Akkadian Empire (ca. 2334–2154 BCE) as the first in a long line of territorial states that would come to dominate ancient Mesopotamia. To be sure, other would-be conquerors preceded the Akkadian kings, notably Eannatum of Lagash and later Lugalzagesi of Umma, two rulers who, as we have already noted, made use of claims to divine parentage. However, even the Mesopotamians themselves remembered the rulers of the Akkadian Empire as the first, and in some sense greatest, epitomes of what it meant to be “King of Sumer and Akkad.” In Mesopotamian literature, Sargon, founder of the dynasty, was remembered as an exemplary king and a mighty warrior. On the other hand, the literary composition *The Curse of Agade* remembers Naram-Sin as a stubborn king whose hubris incurs Enlil’s wrath and the subsequent downfall of the empire to the Gutians, nomadic invaders from the Zagros Mountains to the north.³⁷ However, this portrayal of Naram-Sin is more political propaganda than fact (although we will have occasion to examine it more closely later), and the reality is that Naram-Sin ruled during a time of relative prosperity as king of the largest territorial state of its age. What, then, can we make of the fact that Naram-Sin became the first king in Mesopotamian history to explicitly elevate himself to divine status?

The evidence for Naram-Sin’s self-deification is unequivocal. First, as we have already discussed, in numerous inscriptions the *dingir* determinative denoting divinity is written before his name. More interestingly, we also have the Bassetki Statue, which bears the following inscription regarding Naram-Sin:

³⁷ For an overview of later Mesopotamian thought concerning Sargon and Naram-Sin, see Joan Goodnick Westenholz, *Legends of the Kings of Akkade: The Texts* (Winona Lake (Indiana): Eisenbrauns, 1997), pg. 251-60.

Narām-Sîn, the mighty, king of Agade, when the four quarters together revolted against him, through the love which the goddess Aštar showed him, he was victorious in nine battles in one year, and the kings whom they (the rebels[?]) had raised (against him), he captured. In view of the fact that he protected the foundations of his city from danger, (the citizens of) his city requested from Aštar in Eanna, Enlil in Nippur, Dagān in Tuttul, Ninhursag in Keš, Ea in Eridu, Sîn in Ur, Šamaš in Sippar, (and) Nergal in Kutha, that (Narām-Sîn) be (made) the god of their city, and they built within Agade a temple (dedicated) to him.³⁸

As Michalowski points out, this is the only contemporary description of the deification of Naram-Sin that we possess, and there are a number of interesting things that we can learn from it.³⁹ Most strikingly, Naram-Sin does not simply make the claim that he is divine and leave it at that, but rather he connects his ascension to divinity with a specific historical event—the defeat of a rebellion or incursion of some sort that was significant enough to endanger the capital city itself.⁴⁰ Further, it was not he himself who sought divinity, but rather the people of Agade who beseeched the great gods of the Mesopotamian pantheon, begging them to confer divinity upon him. This strongly suggests that Naram-Sin did not view his divinity necessarily as something that could be passed on to his children, but rather it was an attribute that he himself earned; this is confirmed by the fact that his son Shar-Kali-Sharri was not considered divine and his name is not, except for a few unusual cases, designated with the *dingir* sign.⁴¹ Finally, we learn from this inscription that Naram-Sin dedicated a temple to himself in his capital city of Agade. His statue

³⁸ RIME 2.1.4.10.

³⁹ Michalowski, “Mortal Kings of Ur,” pg. 34.

⁴⁰ Unfortunately, because archaeologists have to date not yet found the remains of the city of Agade, a great deal of textual information relevant to the study of the Akkadian Empire remains to be corroborated by archaeological evidence. Presumably, the study of the remains of this great city might be able to shed light on the exact nature of the conflict that precipitated Naram-Sin’s deification.

⁴¹ Michalowski, “Mortal Kings of Ur,” pg. 35 notes that *dingir* is usually only present in passages of Shar-Kali-Shari inscriptions and texts that have been restored by modern editors or Mesopotamian copyists, although he allows that the determinative was used by “some of his more enthusiastic servants.”

presumably received worship in this temple just as the statue of any other god would; Michalowski suggests that perhaps he joined Inanna-Anunitum as the tutelary deity of Agade, possibly as her consort.⁴² However, there is no indication that Naram-Sin spread the cult of the ruler beyond the borders of the city of Agade itself. As we will see later, this practice stands in direct opposition to that of his Ur III successors, who promoted the cult of the divine ruler throughout their realm.

Any discussion of Mesopotamia's first divine ruler would be incomplete without a short examination of the Victory Stele of Naram-Sin. Commissioned to commemorate his victory over another tribal people from the Zagros known as the Lullubi, the stele was installed in Sippar, where it remained (presumably) on public display until it was taken by an Elamite king to Susa as war booty in the 12th century BCE. Made of pink sandstone, the Stele depicts Naram-Sin standing victorious at the head of his army, part-way up a mountain, with the defeated Lullubi leaders lying helplessly before him. Two stars, presumably representing the gods, are depicted close overhead. The stele bears an inscription, but it is badly fragmented.⁴³ Note particularly that on this particular monument, Naram-Sin's name is written without the *dingir* determinative. However, there are nevertheless a number of factors about the composition that emphasize the divine nature of Naram-Sin: first, he is depicted wearing a horned crown, traditionally, an iconographic signifier used to represent divinity; second, he is depicted as noticeably larger than the other soldiers in his army, indicating a state of physical perfection; and third, the presence of the stars above him may suggest a close affinity between the king and the divine celestial

⁴² Ibid., pg. 34.

⁴³ RIME 2.1.4.31.

bodies.⁴⁴ It is interesting to note that this depiction of the divine Naram-Sin especially emphasizes his power in war and his prowess as head of the army, a depiction of the king that mirrors the Bassetki inscription's celebration of Naram-Sin's successful military campaign in defense of the city of Agade. Taken together, this could suggest that for Naram-Sin the quality that most defined him as a divine king was his military prowess, an idea that would harmonize with the inability of his divinity to be passed on to his heirs. Perhaps Shar-Kali-Sharri had been expected to earn his own divinity in battle as well?

Ultimately, there is surprisingly little that we know about the self-deification of Naram-Sin. While the evidence clearly shows that at some point during his rule he went from being a mortal king to being considered a living god, from all appearances it seems that this was intended to be a unique transformation that applied to him only. The fact that his divinity was predicated on a set of heroic deeds and apparently not hereditary suggests that a full-fledged ideology of divine kingship of the sort that could sustain a dynasty's hegemonic claims was not yet developed under Naram-Sin. We have no way of knowing how his claim of divinity was received in his own time, and thus it is difficult to determine whether it served or hindered his political objectives. This contrasts sharply with the employment of divine kingship by the Ur III kings; for them the ideology of divine rule was clearly meant to serve the state and promote the power and longevity of the ruling family. Thus, although it drew on some of the practices that Naram-Sin pioneered (especially the use of the *dingir* sign to denote the divinity of the king), the Ur III divine kingship must be seen as the refinement and perfection of Naram-Sin's ideas, not merely as their successor.

⁴⁴ Winter, "Touched by the Gods," discusses the importance of the horned crown, and Selz, "Divine Prototypes," advances ideas regarding Naram-Sin's size and his association with the stars in the composition.

CHAPTER V

DIVINE KINGSHIP IN THE THIRD DYNASTY OF UR

Having examined the evolution of Mesopotamian divine kingship up until the time of Naram-Sin, we arrive at last at the heart of our inquiry, divine kingship as it was conceptualized and practiced during Ur III times. At this point, it will be helpful to examine in more detail Piotr Michalowski's "The Mortal Kings of Ur: A Short Century of Divine Rule in Ancient Mesopotamia," as that particular essay has established the basis for all recent attempts to deal with this subject.⁴⁵ In his article, Michalowski argues that the untimely death of Ur-Namma (the founder of the Ur III dynasty) while leading his troops in battle created a political crisis for his son and successor, Shulgi, and that it was within the context of managing this crisis that Shulgi forged the ideological edifice that grew into Ur III divine kingship.⁴⁶ As Michalowski describes the situation, "Violent royal death meant only one thing – sin and divine abandonment,"⁴⁷ and the resulting blow to the new dynasty's legitimacy produced exactly the sort of crisis that led to Shulgi's innovative reformulation of divine kingship. Based on his analysis of Shulgi year names, Michalowski suggests that the first 20 years of his reign were characterized by extensive cultic and building programs meant to shore up the ideological legitimacy of his rule, while from year 21 until the end of his long reign, most year-names record Shulgi's military exploits.⁴⁸ As

⁴⁵ Tammi Schneider, *An Introduction to Ancient Mesopotamian Religion* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 2011), is an excellent example of the prevalence that Michalowski has achieved in discussions of Ur III divine kingship. In her chapter about the relationship between kings and their gods, she relies heavily on Michalowski's interpretation in the course of describing the Ur III divine kings.

⁴⁶ Michalowski, "Mortal Kings of Ur," pg. 36.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pg. 35.

⁴⁸ The chronological system of the ancient Mesopotamians involved designating each year by a name that recorded a significant event that took place during that year. These year-names have proven to be a useful tool for reconstructing the chronology of the various eras of Mesopotamian

Michalowski puts it, “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.”⁴⁹ However, more important for the study of Ur III divine kingship, Michalowski points out that year 21 represents another important first as well: it is the first time that Shulgi’s name as written is preceded by the *dingir* sign, denoting his divinity.

What is unique about Shulgi’s deification, and one thing that sets it apart from Naram-Sin’s, is the fact that he devised a system that allowed for not only his own divinity, but also for the divinity of his entire royal line, thus ensuring that the hegemonic benefits of the ideology would continue to serve his successors as well. As we will examine more closely later, Shulgi chose to express his divinity by appropriating his family’s origins in the city of Uruk and depicting himself as the spiritual successor of Uruk’s legendary king and hero, Gilgamesh. By doing so, he was able to associate himself with Gilgamesh’s semi-divine parentage, as a child of the goddess Ninsumuna.⁵⁰ Further, he was able to appropriate Gilgamesh’s symbolic status as a figure that “embodied the central paradox of divine kingship: the inevitable death of kings.”⁵¹ Among many other reforms that took place during his reign, Shulgi presided over a systematic process of editing, redaction, and canonization of the vast Sumerian literary corpus, leading to the production or finalization of such works as *The Curse of Agade* and the *Sumerian King List* in addition to many heroic tales of Gilgamesh. Because the monopolization of the technology of writing and the production of written works functioned as one of the primary means of royal

history, as well as providing a great deal of evidence useful in reconstructing the events of the reigns of kings or dynasties that are otherwise poorly attested in the historical record.

⁴⁹ Michalowski, “Mortal Kings of Ur,” pg. 36.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pg. 36-37.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pg. 37.

control, Shulgi's program of literary reform was one important way in which he promulgated a hegemonic ideology of divine kingship among the literate classes of his kingdom.⁵²

This literary justification of divine rule was not meant merely to stroke Shulgi's ego, of course. As many scholars have noted previously, the adoption of divine status by Shulgi and his successors was part of a carefully orchestrated and integrated program of centralization and bureaucratic reorganization.⁵³ As Michalowski puts it, during his reign Shulgi's reforms included "...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."⁵⁴ Shulgi's deification was merely one facet of this larger program that served to concentrate power and authority, both material and ideological, in the hands of the royal family. As might be expected then, according to Michalowski, the later collapse of this central bureaucracy led indirectly to the collapse of divine rule itself; once the conditions of centralized power and authority were removed and "city-state localism" was restored, kingship in Mesopotamia returned to its roots as sacred but not divine.⁵⁵ Thus the entire edifice of divine rule was, as Cooper called it, "historically conditioned," for only that specific set of conditions was able to sustain the whole structure.

⁵² Ibid., pg. 38.

⁵³ Two notable studies that discuss this program of centralization undertaken by the Ur III kings are Piotr Steinkeller, "The Administrative Organization of the Ur III State: The Core and the Periphery," in *The Organization of Power: Aspects of Bureaucracy in the Ancient Near East*, ed. McGuire Gibson and Robert D. Biggs (Chicago, IL: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1991), and Piotr Michalowski, "Charisma and Control: On Continuity and Change in Early Mesopotamian Bureaucratic Systems," in *The Organization of Power: Aspects of Bureaucracy in the Ancient Near East*, ed. McGuire Gibson and Robert D. Biggs (Chicago, IL: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1991).

⁵⁴ Michalowski, "Mortal Kings of Ur," pg. 38.

⁵⁵ Ibid., pg. 41-42.

As we have already pointed out, Michalowski's interpretation of the rise of divine kingship during the Ur III period has quickly become the current definitive word on the subject, and indeed I can find no significant reasons to disagree with his basic outline of Shulgi's rise to power and assumption of divine rule. My goal here is not to contest Michalowski's conclusions, but rather to examine more closely the details of Shulgi's ideology of divine kingship. In particular, I will focus on the various ways that Shulgi and his successors communicated the notion of their divinity to their subjects, and what the differences between these various means of communication can tell us about the details of Ur III divine kingship. One principal goal that I hope to achieve through this investigation is the demonstration that Ur III kingship was not a single monolithic ideology, but rather it comprised a number of different expressions of royal power, each designed to communicate in a different way to a different group of people. In fact, although at first look many of these statements could appear to be contradictory, a close examination reveals that together they form a coherent web of communication emphasizing the transcendent authority of the ruler despite their apparent incongruities.

CHAPTER VI

ROYAL INSCRIPTIONS AND TITLES

The first place we will look for evidence regarding Ur III divine kingship is the royal inscriptions of the period. As Michalowski pointed out, Shulgi year 21 was the first year name to include the divine determinative before the king's name, and it is the employment of this sign and other royal titlature that we will examine first. The relevant year name reads in full, "The year the god Ninurta, the great 'field-manager' of the god Enlil, pronounced an oracle in the temples of the gods Enlil and Ninlil, (and) [Divine] Šulgi, king of Ur, put in order the fields (and) accounts, the sustenance of the temple of the gods Enlil and Ninlil."⁵⁶ Interesting to note in this inscription, aside from the use of the *dingir* sign, is the reference to Shulgi merely as "king of Ur." The same simple title, "king of Ur," is attested in many building inscriptions that lack the divine determinative before Shulgi's name.⁵⁷ This can be contrasted with building inscriptions, dating from both before and after his adoption of the *dingir* sign, that refer to him using the formula, "Šulgi, mighty man, king of Ur, king of Sumer and Akkad."⁵⁸ These inscriptions are written in Sumerian, and bear a traditional Sumerian title (lugal-ki-en-gi-ki-uri = "King of Sumer and Akkad") that undoubtedly reflects the growing power and stability of the king's rule.⁵⁹ Notably,

⁵⁶ RIME 3/2.1.2 (21a); for this inscription as well as many that follow, I have intentionally added the word "Divine" in brackets in order to emphasize to the reader that the *dingir* sign is present in the Sumerian text, even though the translation given by Frayne does not explicitly include it.

⁵⁷ RIME 3/2.1.2.8 and 3/2.1.2.10.

⁵⁸ For examples without *dingir*, see RIME 3/2.1.2.25 and 3/2.1.2.29; for examples with *dingir*, see RIME 3/2.1.2.11–13.

⁵⁹ The differences between the Sumerian and Akkadian populations of Mesopotamia have engaged scholars for decades; while at one time the so-called "Sumerian Problem" regarding where exactly the Sumerian-speaking population hailed from was considered a major question, most scholars today consider it to be relatively inconsequential. Akkadian is a Semitic language, related to Aramaic, Hebrew, and Arabic, while Sumerian is an agglutinative language that does not fit into any known language classification used today. Whether the Sumerian-speaking

the use of the *dingir* determinative is never seen in Akkadian inscriptions bearing a different, traditionally Akkadian kingship formula: “Šulgi, the mighty, king of Ur and king of the four quarters.”⁶⁰ However, beginning in the 27th year of his reign, this traditional Akkadian formula “king of the four quarters” is written in a Sumerian year name as, “The year [Divine] Šulgi, mighty man, king of the four quarters, destroyed Simurru, the year after this.”⁶¹ The same formula is seen, again in Sumerian, on four weight stones, a diorite statue, and a carnelian bead.⁶² The expression “King of the four quarters” is a particularly interesting choice here because it was also adopted by Naram-Sin during his rule, in contrast with the title “king of the universe” that was used by Sargon and his sons Rimush and Manistushu. Reinhard Bernbeck has suggested that Naram-Sin intentionally broke with tradition as a way of further asserting his divinity, and it is possible that the use of this title by Shulgi serves a similar function.⁶³ Of course, it is also possible that Shulgi made use of the title specifically because of its association with

population of Mesopotamia was native to the region or came as immigrants or conquerors at some point in the prehistoric past, certainly by the time of the dawn of recorded history the Sumerian-speaking and Akkadian-speaking populations of the region had become heavily assimilated to each other, and the region as a whole was functionally bilingual. The Ur III kings were the last major territorial state in Mesopotamia to make use of Sumerian as the language of government, but that does not necessarily imply a strong anti-Akkadian sentiment on their part; the Akkadian- and Sumerian-speaking peoples of the region had long since functioned as a single socio-cultural entity.

⁶⁰ For examples without *dingir*, see RIME 3/2.1.2.23, 3/2.1.2.27, and 3/2.1.2.29; the only Akkadian inscription bearing the *dingir* sign—3/2.1.2.25—is a reconstruction of the text that I would argue inaccurately places the divine determinative where it is not otherwise attested in Akkadian building inscriptions of Shulgi’s reign.

⁶¹ RIME vol. 3/2, pg. 91-92 discusses this provisional year name in a section dealing with the use of Shulgi’s royal titles both in Akkadian and in Sumerian.

⁶² RIME 3/2.1.2.50–53 and 3/2.1.2.57–58.

⁶³ Reinhard Bernbeck, “Royal Deification: An Ambiguation Mechanism for the Creation of Courtier Subjectivities,” in *Religion and Power: Divine Kingship in the Ancient World and Beyond*, ed. Nicole Maria Brisch (Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2008), pg. 162. Bernbeck advances the interesting idea that the reference to the “four quarters” suggests a spatial arrangement of the cosmos that emphasizes the centrality of the king, a subtle but important shift that fits with the overall program of centralization pursued by the Ur III kings.

Naram-Sin and his deification, lending support to the idea that at least part of Shulgi's program of self-deification was intentionally modeled after Naram-Sin's own divinity.

After the death of Shulgi, the essential divine nature of the king seems to be completely established, and all of his Ur III successors use the *dingir* determinative before their names. More interesting is the development of the royal titles over the course of the Ur III dynasty. Beginning with the reign of Amar-Suen, the traditional Sumerian title, "king of Sumer and Akkad," is completely replaced in both Sumerian and Akkadian inscriptions with the Akkadian title, "king of the four quarters." Amar-Suen also adds a reference to Enlil and Nippur to his title, with the standard inscription from his reign reading, "[Divine] Amar-Suena, the one called by name by the god Enlil in Nippur, supporter of the temple of the god Enlil, mighty king, king of Ur, king of the four quarters."⁶⁴ The standard title of Amar-Suen's successor, Shu-Sin, used a similar formula: "[Divine] Šu-Sîn, beloved of the god Enlil, the king whom the god Enlil lovingly chose in his (own) heart for the shepherdship of the land and of the four quarters, mighty king, king of the four quarters."⁶⁵ Finally, the last king of the dynasty, Ibbi-Sin, makes his claims of divinity extremely explicit by using as his standard title, "[Divine] Ibbi-Sîn, god of his land, mighty king, king of Ur, king of the four quarters."⁶⁶

Clearly, beginning with Shulgi and continuing throughout the reigns of his successors, there is a progressive development of the royal titles that can basically be traced as follows: (1) Shulgi adopts the *dingir* sign before his name, and then begins to transition away from the Sumerian "king of Sumer and Akkad" and towards the Akkadian "king of the four quarters;" (2) Amar-Suen adds a reference to his election by Enlil and patronage of Enlil's temple in Nippur; (3)

⁶⁴ As an example of Amar-Suen's title, see RIME 3/2.1.3.5.

⁶⁵ For Shu-Sin's title, see RIME 3/2.1.4.21.

⁶⁶ RIME 3/2.1.5.5 is an example of Ibbi-Sin's standard title.

Shu-Sin adds reference to his role as shepherd of the people; (4) Ibbi-Sin does away with the claim to divine election by Enlil and instead simply calls himself “god of his land.” The evolution of this elaborate system of royal titles may reveal something of the development of Ur III divine kingship.

First, both Shulgi’s elevation of himself to divine status through the use of the *dingir* sign and also his progressive adoption of the Akkadian title “king of the four quarters” indicate the first steps towards an expansive understanding of kingship that encompasses the whole earth. Shulgi is striving to emphasize his supreme role as king, and his centrality within all the regions of the inhabited world. When Amar-Suen adds the references to Enlil and Nippur, he also appears to be accomplishing two purposes. First, it is possible that he is explicitly trying to placate a traditional Sumerian faction based around the city of Nippur, which had in many ways been the religious capital of Sumer for generations.⁶⁷ More relevant in terms of accentuating the divine nature of his rule, Amar-Suen explicitly claims in his title that he was “chosen by Enlil,” thus giving his rule further divine sanction and suggesting that the greater gods of the Sumerian pantheon supported the dynasty’s assumption of divine status. To be fair, Amar-Suen was not the first king to claim election by Enlil—Shulgi also claimed his kingship to be divinely appointed by Enlil.⁶⁸ However, the incorporation of this claim into the royal title is nevertheless noteworthy. Shu-Sin does little to change this basic title, although he adds a reference to his role as “shepherd” of the people, a traditional Sumerian metaphor for kingship.⁶⁹ Again, this addition to the royal

⁶⁷ This same desire to placate a “conservative” Sumerian element of the kingdom may lie behind the composition of *The Curse of Agade*: see Jerrold S. Cooper, *The Curse of Agade* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), pg. 5-12.

⁶⁸ See ETCSL 2.4.2.07.

⁶⁹ As an example of another ruler using shepherdship as a metaphor, see for example ETCSL 2.3.2.

title serves to accentuate the power and central importance of the ruler. Ibbi-Sin makes the most dramatic break with the traditions of his forbears, entirely forsaking reference to Enlil and patronage of his temple in Nippur, and abandoning Shu-Sin's reference to the shepherd metaphor. Rather, by calling himself "god of his land," Ibbi-Sin could be seen as making the claim that he no longer requires the ongoing approval of Nippur and Enlil, because he is himself a god and his divinity is sufficient to stand on its own. Seen in this light, Ibbi-Sin's title takes the largest step towards full divine status since Shulgi first adopted the *dingir* sign. Of course, the dynasty ends with Ibbi-Sin, and therefore it is hard to argue that his change in title was received well by his subjects. Nevertheless, by looking at the development of the royal title over time, we can discern a clear progression towards more and more elaborate titles that continually seek to emphasize the centrality of the king in all lands, the support that the king's divinity receives from Enlil, and the guidance the ruler provides his people as their shepherd. The culmination of this progression sees Ibbi-Sin proclaiming the divinity of the king in a new way that had not before been seen in Mesopotamia, more explicit even than the use of the *dingir* sign.

Turning to an analysis of how these various titles and inscriptions might have fit into a larger program of state centralization, it is important to bear in mind which members of society might have actually been able to see and understand them. Most of the building inscriptions that bear these titles would have been written on bricks or door sockets to commemorate of the construction projects, and other dedicatory inscriptions would have been put on various statues that were then dedicated to the temples of the gods. It is thus unlikely that any "average" person would have ever seen them, and even if they had, only a very small percentage of the population was literate and could have been able to make sense of what they were seeing. Rather, these inscriptions were likely seen primarily by more or less elite temple scribal personnel. Moreover,

since the *dingir* sign was itself unpronounced, even if the inscriptions were ever read out loud, the divine nature of the king would not have been readily apparent to the listeners. This further highlights the fact that the intended audience for these inscriptions was relatively small. It is unclear how often the full title of the king would have been used outside of these sorts of inscriptions and other formal matters of state—was his formal title regularly recited or known by the common people of his kingdom? This seems doubtful. Again we see that the use of the *dingir* sign, as well as the elaboration of the royal titles in various inscriptions, was primarily meant to represent the divinity of the king to the literate classes of scribes, priests, and officials who comprised the Ur III bureaucracy. The representation of the king's divinity was first and foremost a matter to be understood by those closest to him, the officials who ran the day-to-day operations of state. These officials would have then interacted on a more or less frequent basis with the "common" people of the kingdom, and the ideology would have diffused downwards from the elites.

The communication of the king's divinity to the literate classes was the most important aspect of the divine kingship ideology of the Ur III state, because as long as the priests, scribes, and bureaucrats were sufficiently incorporated into the program of divine rule, we may assume that for the most part the illiterate classes would follow suit. That is not to suggest that the illiterate classes were unimportant, or that the rulers did not try to inculcate a sense of the majesty of the ruler in the minds of all of their subjects. Rather, it is simply an acknowledgement of the fact that the lower classes had comparatively little political or economic power, and thus they did not need to have a detailed understanding of the functioning of divine kingship in order for the system to work. Rather, it was the elites of society who had to accept the divinity of the ruler in order to facilitate Shulgi's program of centralization. In order to promote the acceptance

of divine kingship among the elites, the king used a great many other avenues aside from having his name written with the *dingir* determinative. One way that the ideology was promoted, as we have just seen, was the accumulation of more and more grandiose royal titles. However, the transmission of the ideology to the elite classes took many forms, both overt and subtle. Next we will turn our attention to royal hymns, a method of ideological transmission that still made use of the written *dingir* sign, but that displayed more nuance than the relatively blunt instrument of royal inscriptions and titles.

CHAPTER VII

ROYAL HYMNS

As with the titles and inscriptions we have just examined, it is somewhat difficult to determine exactly how many people would have been familiar with the royal hymns of the Ur III period. Many of these hymns took the form of poetry praising the prowess of the ruler in various fields of human endeavor, and were presumably meant to be sung or chanted along with musical accompaniment. It is unclear whether these would have been performed in the palace or as part of various temple functions or public festivals, and it is also unclear how many times a given composition might have been performed, and before how large an audience. Nevertheless, it is safe to assume that a somewhat larger percentage of the population might have been exposed to the hymns than would have been exposed to any given royal inscription, although probably these people would still have belonged primarily to the elite classes. Like most of the royal inscriptions, the royal praise hymns of the Ur III period generally wrote the name of the king using the *dingir* sign, and thus his divinity would have been readily apparent to whoever was actually reading the hymn. However, because of their poetic structure, the hymns were able to express a great deal more depth regarding the person of the king than the brief inscriptions are able to.

The Ur III period produced a florescence of literature, and the royal hymns of the era stand the test of time as masterpieces of Sumerian poetry. In particular, the royal hymns of Shulgi were both the most numerous (scholars have identified more than twenty hymns dedicated to Shulgi) and the most sublime. As Jacob Klein notes, “The Shulgi hymns represent the finest examples of this literary genre; the royal hymns of later generations, with few exceptions, seem to be colorless imitations, in form and content, of hymns introduced by the

poets of Shulgi.”⁷⁰ A number of Shulgi’s hymns address issues surrounding the king’s divinity; themes include his miraculous birth, his relationship with the deified kings of Uruk (including Gilgamesh), and his participation in the sacred marriage as spouse of Inanna.⁷¹ As an example of Shulgi’s praise hymns, we will examine in some detail excerpts from Shulgi B, a praise poem that offers interesting details regarding the theology of Shulgi’s divine kingship.

Shulgi B is written in the first person, as though the king himself is speaking, and consists of a long recitation of the king’s superlative mastery of virtually all areas of human endeavor. Repeating throughout the composition and serving to separate and punctuate the various detailed sections in praise of Shulgi is the refrain, “Let me boast of what I have done. The fame of my power is spread far and wide. My wisdom is full of subtlety. Do not my achievements surpass all qualifications?”⁷² In between each of these refrains, Shulgi extols his prowess in activities ranging from hunting to music to mastery of foreign languages. The language of the poem makes clear to the listener that the king is clearly superior in every way to any other person, such as when the king writes regarding his prowess in extispicy (divination based on reading omens found in animal entrails): “In the insides of just one sheep I, the king, can find the indications for everything and everywhere.”⁷³ Obviously, the primary purpose of such a poem is to make known to the listener the absolute supremacy of the ruler, on a level that places him far above that of ordinary human beings and on a par with the gods themselves.

Beyond this effusive praise, however, Shulgi B also contains within it a complex rumination on the divine nature of the king himself, one that on the surface appears contradictory

⁷⁰ Jacob Klein, "Shulgi of Ur: King of a Neo-Sumerian Empire," in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, ed. Jack M. Sasson, vol. 2 (New York, NY: Scribner, 1995), 849.

⁷¹ Ibid., pg. 849-850.

⁷² ETCSL 2.4.2.02.

⁷³ Ibid., lines 131-149.

but that actually begins to lay out a notion of divine conception that might have helped bridge the theological gap between traditional Mesopotamian ideas of sacred kingship and the new, powerful divine claims of the Ur III kings. At the beginning of the poem, Shulgi claims that, “I am a king, offspring begotten by a king and borne by a queen.”⁷⁴ This claim is apparently meant to bolster his fame in the eyes of his listeners, but nevertheless it appears to undermine the very divine claim which the praise poem itself substantiates. In contrast to this claim of human parentage, a few lines later, the poem reads:

I sow fear and confusion in the foreign land. I look to my brother and friend, youthful Utu, as a source of divine encouragement. I, Šulgi, converse with him whenever he rises over there; he is the god who keeps a good eye on my battles. The youth Utu, beloved in the mountains, is the protective deity of my weapons; by his words I am strengthened and made pugnacious.⁷⁵

Here we see the king claiming that the sun-god Utu is his brother, and he converses with the god as an apparent equal. The picture becomes even more confused when Shulgi writes that, “Wherever I direct my steps, I always achieve something; when I return from the desert, I always bring something more for her -- for Ninsumun, my own mother, I am her son of five things, of ten things.” Here we see Shulgi directly contradict his earlier reference to his human parents, calling the goddess Ninsumun his mother as well. How is the listener meant to understand Shulgi’s familial relationship with these gods in light of his previously established humanity? Is his claim of participation in the divine family simply meant to be taken metaphorically?

The answer to our dilemma is found later in the poem, where we find the following interesting passage:

I bestow joy and gladness, and I pass my days in pomp and splendor. But people should consider for themselves -- it is a matter to keep in one's sights -- that at the

⁷⁴ Ibid., lines 11-20.

⁷⁵ Ibid., lines 39-51.

inescapable end of life, no one will be spared the bitter gall of the land of oppression. But I am one who is powerful enough to trust in his own power. He who trusts in his own exalted name may carry out great things. Why should he do less? Since it was for my true mother Ninsumun that my mother together with her actually bore me to bestow joy and gladness, lovingly she cherished my unborn fruit. She did not endure scandal from anyone's mouth. Before she released her little one, this lady passed her time in my palace in the greatest joy.⁷⁶

Here we arrive at the theological heart of Shulgi's claim to divine nature. Evidently he is suggesting that his human mother and his divine mother worked together to birth him, but it is notable that, when referencing the two of them at once, he makes sure to call Ninsumun, the goddess, his *true mother*. Even more interesting, this claim of joint human and divine conception is made within the context of a comment regarding the inescapability of death (the inevitable "land of oppression"), with Shulgi suggesting that he alone among men need not fear this fate, for he is one that can "trust in his own power." As Michalowski suggested, Shulgi's deification involved explicitly associating himself with Gilgamesh, the hero whose epic tale involves a confrontation with the specter of human mortality, as a method of counteracting the political difficulties associated with his father Ur-Namma's death. Perhaps then it is not at all surprising to find the most explicit statement of Shulgi's divine nature at exactly the point in the hymn where he most directly confronts the issue of mortality, and its implications for the sovereign.

As was discussed earlier, it is unclear how many people may have been familiar with this specific hymn. However, the theology of divine conception that it presents is very important for understanding the basis that Shulgi tried to construct for the divine dynasty that he established. Certainly it is not difficult to imagine that ideas such as this must have been circulating among the elite of the Ur III kingdom, verbally if not always written down. In addition, it is at least possible that some of these poems were used to help teach new scribes in the Ur III schools. By

⁷⁶ Ibid., lines 175-189.

establishing his divine nature in this way, Shulgi is creating for himself a justification for divinity that does not rely on his own personal deeds, mighty as those deeds were claimed to have been. This is of course a stark contrast to the deification of Naram-Sin, which was based on the specific actions of the ruler and was thus not able to be transferred to his children in the same way that this genealogical deification worked for Shulgi and his successors. This hymn, and others like it, moved beyond the simple assertion of the king's supremacy and divinity, as we saw in the royal inscriptions, and began instead to provide a coherent ideological basis for a divine kingship that would survive to become a hegemonic dynasty.

CHAPTER VIII

LITERARY REPRESENTATIONS OF THE KING'S DIVINITY

As we have already discussed, the use of the *dingir* sign when writing the name of the king generally only served to demonstrate the king's divinity to the literate upper classes of Ur III society. In addition, it is difficult to determine how many people, literate or not, would have been exposed to recitations of the king's titles, inscriptions, or royal hymns. While these outlets certainly served to communicate the ideology of divine kingship to the scribes and bureaucrats who comprised the elite of the kingdom, they may have done so in a somewhat piecemeal and unreliable fashion. In order to properly inculcate a sense of the divine majesty of the ruler into their servants, the Ur III kings had to go beyond mere statements of their divinity in hymns and inscriptions; they made use of their own education system in order to promote an ideology that was favorable towards a strong, centralized government centered on the person of the king. In order to accomplish this, the Ur III kings engaged in the program of literary compilation and canonization that we have alluded to already. It is time that we took a closer look at the literary output of this period, and examine exactly how it fit into the overall ideology of divine rule.

We have already touched on the role of the Gilgamesh stories and their importance for the new state. Although the full-fledged Gilgamesh Epic as known from later Akkadian sources had not yet been compiled, various epic tales surrounding the hero of Uruk and his deified forbears Enmerkar and Lugalbanda were still studied in a systematic order by the scribal students of the Ur III era; in fact, many of the Sumerian poems about the great hero may have been written (or at the least edited) at this time.⁷⁷ These tales served both to present a coherent picture

⁷⁷ For a discussion of the ways that Shulgi and his successors made use of the scribal schools to promote the divine kingship ideology, see Klein, "Shulgi of Ur," pg. 846, 855.

of a mighty king whose deeds were larger than life, and also to familiarize students with the basic model for understanding divine Shulgi and his peculiar hybrid divine-human status. In particular, it is noteworthy that Shulgi claimed his divine descent from the goddess Ninsumun, and not from any divine father; this parallels Gilgamesh, whose divine mother was also Ninsumun.⁷⁸ In fact, it may even be possible that the description of Gilgamesh as two-thirds god and one-third man in the later Akkadian Epic of Gilgamesh grew out of the close connection that the Ur III kings encouraged between themselves and Gilgamesh.⁷⁹ The family relationship between Shulgi and Gilgamesh was highlighted in many of the Shulgi hymns, where Shulgi consistently addresses Gilgamesh by calling him, “my brother and friend.”⁸⁰ This familial connection to Gilgamesh was also projected backwards into the past, with Shulgi’s father Ur-namma being made to say, “I am the creature of Nanna! I am the older brother of Gilgameš;! I am the son borne by Ninsumun, a princely seed! For me, kingship came down from heaven! Sweet is the praise of me, the shepherd Ur-Namma!”⁸¹ The use of the Gilgamesh tales by the Ur III kings as a source of legitimacy for their claims of divinity is clearly one of the pillars upon which they built their ideology of divine kingship, and the teaching of these tales in the scribal schools, even when they did not directly reference the king, certainly served to reinforce this idea.

Aside from the tales of Gilgamesh and perhaps the royal praise hymns, two other literary compositions, the *Sumerian King List* and *The Curse of Agade*, date from this period, and both of them served to uphold the basic ideas regarding the nature of kingship that the Ur III kings were

⁷⁸ See, for example, ETCSL 5.5.4.

⁷⁹ The Epic of Gilgamesh, tablet ii line 1; ANET pg. 73.

⁸⁰ For examples, see ETCSL 2.1.2.03–04 and 2.1.2.15.

⁸¹ ETCSL 2.4.1.3, lines 111–115.

attempting to inculcate in their subjects.⁸² The relationship between the *Sumerian King List* and royal ideology is well known, and was first worked out by Thorkild Jacobsen over 70 years ago. Essentially, the *Sumerian King List* presents a mostly unreliable account of kings and dynasties in Mesopotamia dating back to before the mythical Flood. The composition presents kingship, which is said to have “descended from heaven” (i.e., the gods), as passing consecutively from city to city—each city in turn thus exercises hegemony over the whole of Mesopotamia as the divinely-sanctioned king. In fact, Jacobsen showed this to be patently false; rather, throughout most of Mesopotamia’s history there were a great many city-states all of relatively modest size, vying with one another for local rule. As Jacobsen demonstrated, in order to present the conception of a unified kingship that the *Sumerian King List* purports to show, the author of the text, who worked from at least some reliable local sources, presented various dynasties that ruled at the same time in consecutive fashion instead, while omitting other dynasties entirely, splicing together pieces of various local king lists in order to complete his composition. The purpose of this process, of course, was to promote an ideology of kingship that would legitimate the right of the kings of a single city to rule a large territorial state that encompassed many previously independent cities at once. To be sure, the *Sumerian King List* does make reference to the divine

⁸² The classic work on the *Sumerian King List* is Thorkild Jacobsen, *The Sumerian King List* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1939). Note also Piotr Steinkeller, “An Ur III Manuscript of the Sumerian King List,” in *Literatur, Politik und Recht in Mesopotamien: Festschrift für Claus Wilcke*, ed. Walther Sallaberger, Konrad Volk, and Annette Zgoll, *Orientalia Biblica et Christiana* 14 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2003), 267-92. Steinkeller’s publication of an Ur III example of the text proves that the *Sumerian King List* in fact dates from Ur III times, rather than from the subsequent Isin-Larsa era, as some scholars have argued. For an up-to-date work on *The Curse of Agade*, readers are directed to Cooper, *The Curse of Agade*.

rulers of the Ur III dynasty, inscribing their names using the *dingir* sign.⁸³ More importantly, however, it served as an important means of cultivating within the literate classes an ideology that would be amenable to the program of centralization that accompanied the deification of the Ur III kings.

The Curse of Agade is somewhat more difficult to analyze than the straightforward, if historically inaccurate, *Sumerian King List*. The text relates the rise and fall of the Akkadian Empire of Sargon and his successors, taking a didactic tone that paints Naram-Sin in a very negative light, the cause of his empire's downfall because of his decision to oppose the god Enlil and sack his temple in Nippur. Enlil then brings about the destruction of Naram-Sin and his reign by sending the barbarous Gutians against him and his capital city of Agade. The title refers to the conclusion of the text, which relates a curse pronounced by the assembly of the gods on Agade, ensuring its everlasting ruin. On the surface, this text appears to offer little that might support a program of centralization and divine kingship; indeed, it might even be seen as problematic due to its highly critical perspective on Naram-Sin, the only other ruler aside from the Ur III kings to have proclaimed himself divine. However, a closer inspection reveals a number of aspects of the text that coincided nicely with the magnification of royal power that the Ur III kings pursued.

First, it must be pointed out that the basic ideology of kingship that is presented in *The Curse of Agade* coincides with the ideology found in the *Sumerian King List*. The poem begins with the gods bestowing kingship upon Sargon and his city Agade, and it ends with the gods removing it by means of the Gutian invaders; this clearly parallels the basic ideology of the

⁸³ ETCSL 2.1.1; note that, although the Ur III-era text published in Steinkeller, "An Ur III Manuscript of the Sumerian King List," ends with the reign of Shulgi (whose name is written using *dingir*), it is reasonable to assume that as other kings of the Ur III dynasty were added to the list their names possessed the *dingir* sign as well.

Sumerian King List, in which kingship over the whole land first descends from heaven, and is then passed from one city to the next in turn. Thus we read the opening lines of the poem:

After Enlil's frown
Had slain Kish like the Bull of Heaven,
Had slaughtered the house of the land of Uruk in the dust like a mighty bull,
And then, to Sargon, king of Agade,
Enlil, from south to north,
Had given sovereignty and kingship—
At that time, holy Inanna built
The sanctuary Agade as her grand woman's domain,
Set up her throne in Ulmaš.⁸⁴

It is interesting to note that this same understanding that kingship was passed from city to city in turn, at the whim of divine favor, still held currency at the end of the Ur III period. In a letter written near the end of the reign of Ibbi-Sin (the last Ur III king) to his rival Ishbi-erra of Isin, the king complains that, "At the moment, Enlil hates me, and he hates his son Sin; he is giving Ur to a foreigner."⁸⁵ Certainly the composition of *The Curse of Agade* and its use as a teaching tool in Ur III schools helped to establish this understanding of kingship, an understanding that served to bolster the kings' legitimacy in ruling such a great territory.

Related to this idea that the kings ruled their territory because of the favor of the god Enlil, we see that it is exactly Naram-Sin's intentional opposition to Enlil and his destruction of Enlil's temple in Nippur that lead to the fall of Agade. Partly because of this focus on the traditional Sumerian religious center, the general consensus among scholars is that the poem was in fact probably originally written at Nippur.⁸⁶ This exaltation of Nippur, and of a traditional Sumerian piety more generally, is particularly interesting when seen in the context of the analysis of Ur III royal titles given above. In particular, it appears at least possible that Amar-

⁸⁴ Cooper, *The Curse of Agade*, pg. 51 (lines 1-9).

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pg. 29.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pg. 7.

Suen added the phrases, “the one called by name by the god Enlil in Nippur, supporter of the temple of the god Enlil,” to his royal title not only to support his claim to have been divinely appointed king by Enlil himself, but perhaps specifically to distance himself from the sort of disrespect of Nippur and Enlil that Naram-Sin is charged with in *The Curse of Agade*. It is possible that there was a concerted effort at this time to placate the elites at Nippur, and to align the Ur III dynasty with traditional aspects of Sumerian culture—it is during the Ur III period that we see the return to Sumerian rather than Akkadian as the language of state, for example. *The Curse of Agade* was thus a product of the Neo-Sumerian renaissance as much as it was an overt attempt by the Ur III kings to assert their hegemony.

It is in this light that we might perhaps best make sense of the otherwise difficult fact that the Ur III kings drew on the example of Naram-Sin in helping to craft their own divine kingship, while at the same time they lay the blame for the downfall of the Akkadian Empire squarely at his feet. This ambivalence towards Naram-Sin took various forms; for example, Joan Westenholz, in the context of a discussion regarding Ur III memories of the Sargonic kings, makes note of the fact that although Naram-Sin was worshipped as a divine king after his death (as were the other kings of his dynasty), during the Ur III period his name was generally written without the *dingir* sign, while the names of other Akkadian rulers (Sargon and Manistushu) were written with the divine determinative.⁸⁷ Despite the fact that they followed in Naram-Sin’s footsteps as divine kings, and despite the fact that they too ruled a large kingdom that encompassed many previously independent city-states, the Ur III kings had a clear interest in demonstrating the flaws of their divine imperial predecessor: doing so helped legitimize their own right to rule. As Cooper notes,

⁸⁷ Joan Goodnick Westenholz, "Memory of Sargonic Kings under the Third Dynasty of Ur," in *On the Third Dynasty of Ur: Studies in Honor of Marcel Sigris*, ed. Piotr Michalowski (Boston: American Schools of Oriental Research, 2008), pg. 255.

summarizing an interpretation of *The Curse of Agade* first made by Krecher, “It served to provide a demarcation between a recent period of great Mesopotamian power when the government seat was in the north (Agade) and the present period of great power when the government seat is in the south (Third Dynasty of Ur).”⁸⁸ Cooper reports another, complementary idea offered by M. Lambert, who suggests that *The Curse of Agade* very intentionally portrays the collapse of Naram-Sin’s reign as stemming from an error on the part of the ruler that could have been avoided if he had acted differently. This serves to deflect attention away from the idea that the empire fell specifically because of the territorial ambitions of the dynasty; by attributing the fall of Agade to Naram-Sin’s hubris, the Ur III kings subtly legitimate their own imperial ambitions.⁸⁹ Seen in this light, *The Curse of Agade* may have in fact been one of the Ur III rulers’ most subtle uses of the literary corpus as a tool for promoting the concentration of power in the hands of the divine king.

⁸⁸ Cooper, *The Curse of Agade*, pg. 8.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

CHAPTER IX

ARTISTIC REPRESENTATIONS OF THE KING'S DIVINITY

As we have seen, the Ur III kings made extensive use of written works in order to promote the ideology of divine kingship and royal power in general. Royal inscriptions began to incorporate the *dingir* sign beginning with Shulgi, and a profusion of ever-more-elaborate royal titles served to emphasize the power and dominion of the sovereign. Hymns praising the might and majesty of the ruler were composed, not only to extol the superior prowess of the king in virtually every arena of human activity, but also to provide detailed theological justifications explaining in detail exactly how the king came to be divine. Finally, the power of literature was put to work, with scribes of the period producing works that accentuated the power and divine right of the kings to rule such a large empire, even when they did not explicitly refer to the divinity of the king as such. All of these methods of ideological transmission were designed to reach the elite of society, the scribes and temple personnel who staffed the complex bureaucracy of the Ur III kingdom.

However, the written word was not the only way that the kings communicated their power to their servants. In addition to explicit claims of divinity made via the written word, the kings went to great lengths to communicate their power and their divine status to the elites of society via artistic representation. These representations took the form both of large, public pieces of monumental art, and also of cylinder seals—the ancient bureaucrat's equivalent of a signet ring, used regularly in the context of economic transactions of all sorts. Before looking at the representations of the king in monumental art, I will first examine these everyday cylinder seals, perhaps one of the most pervasive methods that the kings made use of in their quest to legitimize their divine rule.

Cylinder seals were a very old technology by the time of the Ur III period, and the types of scenes that were depicted on them were more or less standardized by that point. The basic cylinder seal was made from a small piece of stone, with an image carved in relief upon its surface. The full image would become visible when the seal was rolled across wet clay; this was done as a way of “signing” official shipments of goods as well as documents such as letters and economic records. The iconography employed in the production of cylinder seals was standardized to a large degree, with variations on a limited array of artistic motifs recurring often in the seals dating from various periods. Richard Zettler has done an extensive analysis of the artistic motifs employed on Mesopotamian cylinder seals from the Early Dynastic period through the Old Babylonian era, with an emphasis on correlating changes in artistic motifs over time with Mesopotamian dynastic change.⁹⁰

Of particular note for the present study is a shift away from scenes depicting combat between various combinations of men, animals, and fantastic creatures towards more scenes depicting a person standing in front of a seated figure, usually a god but sometimes a human king. The former scenes, which Zettler calls “contest” scenes, dominated Early Dynastic cylinder seals, but over the course of the Old Akkadian period Zettler noted the appearance of the latter form, which he dubbed the “presentation” scene based on his understanding that the seated figure represented the god Shamash (Sumerian Utu), sitting on a throne.⁹¹ By about half-way through Shulgi’s reign, presentation scenes begin to outnumber contest scenes among Ur III cylinder seals. According to Zettler’s interpretation of the presentation scenes, the image of the petitioner

⁹⁰ Richard Zettler, "Dynastic Change and Institutional Administration in Southern Mesopotamia in the Later Third Millennium BCE: Evidence from Seals and Sealing Practices," in *Regime Change in the Ancient Near East: From Sargon of Agade to Saddam Hussein*, ed. Harriet Crawford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pg. 9-35.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pg. 30-32.

being presented before Shamash/Utu represented the ritual determination of his fate: “At his rising Shamash summoned the divine and human assemblies and sat in judgement, leading to the decree of fate by deities responsible, usually An, Enlil, or Enki.”⁹² Based on an analysis of early examples of presentation scenes that clearly depict the petitioner carrying a kid intended for sacrifice and divination, Zettler argues that the presentation scenes emphasize the power of the gods to determine the fate of the petitioner.⁹³

The development of sealing imagery that most interests us is a variant of the presentation scene that first appears during the reign of Shulgi. While the standard presentation scenes depicted the petitioner (and often his or her personal god, as well) in front of a seated Shamash/Utu, a relatively small number depicted the petitioner in front of the seated figure of the king, who is identifiable by his distinctive rolled-brim hat.⁹⁴ This variant of the presentation scene was relatively rare, and apparently restricted in use to only the highest officials of the Ur III court; in fact, some of these king-presentation seals suggest that they were personally given to high officials by the king himself, as their inscriptions read, “he [the king] gave to his servant.”⁹⁵ The substitution of the king in place of the god Utu is particularly significant; in discussing Ur III divine kingship Zettler notes that, “The promotion of imagery depicting the determination of destiny/fate, a ritual evoking the king’s centrality as both human and divine actor, might have been in conformity with such an expanded notion of divine kingship.”⁹⁶ In addition, I would point out that the presentation of these seals directly by the king to his closest advisors and highest officials clearly seems to have been designed to promote the close dependency of these

⁹² Ibid., pg. 15.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid., pg. 29.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid., pg. 30.

officials on the charismatic person of the divine king himself. The implication is clearly that the machinery of government did not function in and of itself, as an autonomous bureaucratic system, but rather it depended at its highest levels on the direct relationship between the divine king and his officials. One cannot help but to draw the comparison with the famous pronouncement attributed to Louis XIV, “L’etat c’est moi.”

Aside from their representation on cylinder seals, the kings of the Ur III period were also depicted on monumental works of art. In fact, these monumental representations of the king may have been some of the most public of all the methods of ideological transmission, perhaps visible to a larger selection of the population than only the elite classes who were the object of most of the communications we have examined so far. With this public visibility in mind, it is all the more striking to find that in their monumental artwork the kings of the Ur III period were decidedly more conservative than Naram-Sin had been. Instead of depicting its subjects as larger-than-life heroes wearing the horned crown reserved for divinities, the monumental art of the Ur III kings hews closely to established Sumerian norms that depict the king in deference to the gods. Of course, this is all the more noteworthy because Naram-Sin’s Victory Stele would presumably have still been visible in Sippar.⁹⁷ In monumental art, then, unlike in hymn, title, or inscription, the Ur III kings choose to depict themselves as merely human.

Due to the (mis)fortunes of archaeological discovery, we have very few artistic depictions of the Ur III kings on a large scale; the most significant monument of the Ur III period by far is the famous Stele of Ur-Namma.⁹⁸ This stele, probably depicting scenes related to Ur-Namma’s construction of the temple of the moon god Nanna at Ur, is highlighted by an image of

⁹⁷ Winter, “Touched by the Gods,” pg. 77-78.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, pg. 78.

the king standing before the seated figure of the god, receiving from him a rod and ring of coiled rope, symbols which have been variously interpreted over the years but which likely represent the king's power and responsibility to uphold justice in his land.⁹⁹ Similar in tone to the presentation scenes from cylinder seals (those depicting a figure before a seated deity, rather than before the king), the Ur-Namma Stele emphasizes the ruler's humility and subservience to the gods.

Of course, it could be argued that perhaps the representation of Ur-Namma is not as relevant for this discussion, as it was his successor Shulgi who first embarked on the program of royal deification. However, there is considerable disagreement over when the Ur-Namma Stele was actually fashioned, with many scholars arguing that it should actually be dated to the reign of Shulgi rather than that of Ur-Namma.¹⁰⁰ Regardless, there are no other monumental representations of the ruler that would support a conclusion other than that the Ur III kings chose to represent themselves very conservatively in their public art. At best we can make educated guesses as to why this was the case. One possibility, advanced by Irene Winter, is that the intended audience for the monumental art might not have been the viewing public but rather the gods themselves, although Winter does note that this cannot be determined one way or the other.¹⁰¹ In support of this idea, we can point out that Sumerian had three different words for ruler, *lugal*, *en*, and *ensik*, and each suggested a different sort of relationship between the rulers

⁹⁹ For a detailed discussion of the meaning of the rod and ring symbols, see Kathryn E. Slanski, "Mesopotamian 'Rod and Ring': Icon of Righteous Kingship and Balance of Power between Palace and Temple," in *Regime Change in the Ancient Near East: From Sargon of Agade to Saddam Hussein*, ed. Harriet Crawford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 37-59.

¹⁰⁰ Winter, "Touched by the Gods," takes this position.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, pg. 79.

and the gods. Steinkeller addresses this fluid relationship when he remarks on the differences between the titles *lugal* and *ensik*:

The title *ensik*, which has clear religious overtones, defines the status of a ruler in his rapport with the divine owner of the city-state. To use the case of Lagash as an example, a ruler like Eanatum ranks vis-à-vis Ningirsu as an *ensik*, that is, Ningirsu's steward or vicar, whereas, conversely, Ningirsu is the master (*lugal*) of Eanatum and of the whole city-state of Lagash. In contrast, the title *lugal*, when applied to humans, is free of any religious connotations. It describes the position of a ruler in relation to his subjects as their chief political and military leader. In this way Eanatum, though an *ensik* of Lagash vis-à-vis Ningirsu, is a *lugal* of Lagash on the level of socio-political relationships.¹⁰²

In the same way, we might suggest that the kings represented their divinity in their written works and their cylinder seals, methods of representation that were directed at their subjects, for whom they were truly gods. However, in relation to the greater gods of the pantheon, the kings chose to represent themselves artistically in the traditional Sumerian manner as humble servants rather than as fellow gods.

Another possibility is to assume that the monumental art was executed in a more conservative fashion precisely because it was more public than the cylinder seals. The illiterate members of the population, who might not have been as well versed in the details of the divine kingship ideology that was being promoted through hymn and literature among the literate elite, would simply see the king being represented in a traditional fashion that aligned well with representations of rulers from previous eras when they did not claim divinity. On the other hand, the elite of society might have interpreted the apparently conservative art within the context of the divine kingship ideology, perhaps drawing connections between the king's humility before the gods and the doctrine of Enlil's choice of the divine ruler, as expounded in *The Curse of Agade* and the *Sumerian King List*. Such a bifurcated interpretation fits well with Winter's

¹⁰² Steinkeller, "On Priests, Rulers, and Sacred Marriage," pg. 112.

observation that, "...different media may be employed differently in a given period, not necessarily as contradictions, but as carefully choreographed strategies when the communication act has different goals or different audiences within a single socio-cultural-political system."¹⁰³

The apparent disparity between the written representations of the king as divine figure on the one hand and the visual representation of the king as servant of the gods on the other need not be seen as contradictory, but rather as a result of complementary strategies of royal self-representation meant to target different segments of the greater society.

¹⁰³ Winter, "Touched by the Gods," pg. 79.

CHAPTER X

RITUAL REPRESENTATIONS OF THE KING'S DIVINITY

So far we have explored both the written and the visual methods that Ur III kings used to express their divinity and communicate an ideology of centralized royal power. Now, we will turn our attention to the representation and transmission of this ideology in the form of ritual. In particular, two types of ritual served to reinforce the divine status of the Ur III kings: cultic worship of the statue of the living king in the context of a temple, and the enactment of the sacred marriage associated with the New Year's festival. Like the artistic representations of the king, one type of ritual (temple worship) was targeted primarily at the elite classes of society, while the other (sacred marriage) may have been a much more public proceeding. Similarly, both emphasized the central role of the divine king, but the sacred marriage, being more public, seems to have remained closer to tradition, while the cultic service of the statues of the living kings was a new development that more directly demonstrated the divinity of the ruler.

A considerable amount of evidence supports the notion that the Ur III rulers, beginning with Shulgi, built temples to themselves within which cult statues of the king received worship in similar fashion to that rendered to the great gods of the Mesopotamian pantheon.¹⁰⁴ Based on evidence from economic texts, we have references to four temples of Shulgi, in Umma, KIAN, Gu'abba and Girsu; two temples of Amar-Suen, in Umma and Girsu; and five temples of Shu-

¹⁰⁴ Such worship would have involved the provision of clothing, food, and beverages for the divine statues, as well as the performance of a variety of ritual prayers and praise poems. This is similar to the standard forms of worship that Mesopotamian deities received. The real innovation, however, was the worship of the king while he was still alive—the statues of dead rulers were already regularly divinized and worshipped, as we have already seen with the case of the Sargonid kings.

Sin, in Umma, Ur, Adab, Girsu, and Eshnunna.¹⁰⁵ In addition, we find in a year name of Shulgi a strange reference to, “the year Puzriš-Dagān, the house/temple of [Divine] Šulgi was built.”¹⁰⁶ Puzriš-Dagān was a cattle-yard and economic redistribution center located at modern-day Drehem, and it served as one of the economic hubs of the Ur III kingdom. The reference to it here as “the house/temple” of Shulgi seems out of place, but could perhaps be taken to indicate that the complex did incorporate a shrine to the living king in one of its buildings. Notable here is the fact that only one temple dedicated to a king appears to have been located in the capital of the kingdom, Ur, and that not until the reign of Shu-Sin. However, the situation is a bit more complicated than that. First, there is the Sumerian Temple Hymn dedicated to the “Ehursag of [Divine] Šulgi” at Ur—although the Sumerian sign É, meaning house or household, often referred to temples (which were conceptualized as the household of the deity living within), it seems probable in this case that the building referred to is in fact Shulgi’s palace.¹⁰⁷ However, as Winter and others note, the distinction between palace and temple is likely not one that held much meaning for the ancient Sumerians; in fact, Reichel points out that although the design of the building followed the layout of a palace, it was decorated with the niched exterior typical of religious architecture.¹⁰⁸ It is entirely possible that worship of the statue of the living king was performed within this building that straddled the line between temple and palace.

¹⁰⁵ Clemens Reichel, “The King Is Dead, Long Live the King: The Last Days of the Šu-Sîn Cult at Ešnunna and Its Aftermath,” in *Religion and Power: Divine Kingship in the Ancient World and Beyond*, ed. Nicole Maria Brisch (Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2008), pg. 133-134.

¹⁰⁶ RIME 3/2.1.2 (39).

¹⁰⁷ Winter, “Touched by the Gods,” pg. 78. For the full hymn, see Gene B. Gragg, Ake W. Sjöberg, and Eugen M. Bergmann, *The Collection of the Sumerian Temple Hymns*, Texts from Cuneiform Sources 3 (Locust Valley: Augustin, 1969), pg. 24.

¹⁰⁸ Reichel, “The King is Dead,” pg. 133 note 4.

Despite references to so many temples dedicated to the worship of the living king, we have to date uncovered the remains of only one, the temple dedicated to the cult of divine Shu-Sin in Eshnunna.¹⁰⁹ Although we certainly cannot make sweeping generalizations about all of the cults of the divine king on the basis of this single example, a number of interesting and suggestive details merit closer discussion. First of all, a door socket found in the temple bears an inscription that indicates that the governor of Eshnunna, one Ituria, first built the temple:

(For the deified) Šu-Sîn,
whose name had been called
by (the god) Anu,
beloved one of (the god) Enlil,
the king whom Enlil
had chosen into his pure heart
to shepherd the land
and the four world quarters,
mighty king,
king of Ur,
king of the four world quarters,
his (i.e., Ituria's) god:
Ituria,
governor
of Ešnunna,
(has built) his (i.e., Šu-Sîn's) temple
for him.¹¹⁰

In addition to building the temple, it is clear that the governor of Eshnunna played a key role in the performance of the cultic rites. The temple was not a free-standing structure, but rather was connected to a palace, home of Eshnunna's governors at that time and the center of the city government. Reichel even notes the unusual doorway that connected the area of the temple

¹⁰⁹ The original publication of the excavation of the Shu-Sin temple is Henri Frankfort et al., *The Gimilsin Temple and the Palace of the Rulers at Tell Asmar*, vol. 43, Oriental Institute Publications (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1940).

¹¹⁰ Reichel, "The King is Dead," pg. 135-136.

directly to the throne-room of the palace, suggesting that this indicated “a strong connection between the city’s administration and the cult performed at the temple.”¹¹¹

What we find with the Shu-Sin cult at Eshnunna, then, is a temple dedicated to the worship of the living king of a dynasty based in Ur, rather than Eshnunna, and yet the local governor and the city administration first built the temple and then were intimately involved in the performance of the cultic rites, so much so that his palace was connected to the temple itself. Clearly, this practice was meant to assert the hegemony of the divine king in Eshnunna, a city that was far to the north of Ur and thus less open to direct control. In this light, it perhaps makes more sense that there is so little evidence for worship of the living ruler in Ur itself; the primary reason for establishing the cult of the divine king is not religious per se, but rather political. The Eshnunna temple was even oriented along an axis that faced perfectly in the direction of the city of Ur; clearly the focus was on amplifying the majesty and centrality of the kings of Ur in every way possible.¹¹² As Winter suggests, it is entirely possible that “strategies of control including cultic activities directed to the (divine) ruler were more actively deployed in the periphery of the polity, and not, or less so, within the center.”¹¹³

Like literary production and representation in cylinder seals, cultic service directed at the statue of the living king seems to have been primarily meant to influence the elites of society, once again demonstrating that the Ur III kings understood the importance of transmitting their ideology of divine kingship to the literate classes that made up their bureaucracy and governing structure. In contrast, the use of the sacred marriage by Shulgi and his successors seems to be more conservative, a practice which may again reflect the more visible and public nature of the

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid., pg. 149.

¹¹³ Winters, “Touched by the Gods,” pg. 78.

sacred marriage. To be sure, we have precious little information regarding the performance of the sacred marriage, even during Ur III and Isin times when they are most well-attested. In particular, it is difficult to know for sure how public these rituals might have been. Frankfort interprets the rituals as having been part of a major public festival, although in order to reach this conclusion he amalgamates, somewhat anachronistically, the sacred marriage of Ur III times with the later Bel Akitu celebrations of first-millennium BCE Babylon. Thus, he interprets lines of the Babylonian Epic of Creation stating that people “hasten in the street; they seek Marduk, (saying), ‘Where is he held captive?’” and later, “After Marduk went into the mountain the city fell into a tumult because of him, and they made fighting within it,” as being representative of the celebrations surrounding the sacred marriage as well.¹¹⁴ While I am uneasy projecting these first-millennium accounts so far backwards in time, there is certainly a case to be made that earlier traditions surrounding Dumuzi and Inanna became incorporated into the Babylonian Bel Akitu festival of a later era. In addition, a higher level of involvement by the public may be suggested if Jacobsen is right in asserting that the sacred marriage reflects comparatively ancient religious beliefs associated with public festivals surrounding the yearly replenishing of the communal storehouse.¹¹⁵ While it may prove impossible to determine exactly how large the public involvement with celebrations surrounding the New Year and the sacred marriage were, there is enough circumstantial evidence to suggest that awareness of the rites extended to a larger portion of the population than merely the elites of the literate class. As we have seen with the monumental art of the Ur III period, this more public arena of representation seems to have occasioned a more conservative portrayal of the king and his divine role.

¹¹⁴ Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods*, pg. 323-324.

¹¹⁵ Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness*, pg. 25-27.

The evidence for the performance of the ceremony during Šulgi's reign comes from another of his royal hymns, Šulgi X. Within the context of the hymn and ceremony of the sacred marriage that it was attached to, Šulgi takes on the role of Dumuzi, the husband of the goddess Inanna. Thus the hymn refers to the two personalities more or less interchangeably; early on we see the quick change in referent from Šulgi to Dumuzi when we read, "[Divine] Šulgi, the good shepherd, a heart in love, dressed himself in the *ba* garment and put a *hili* wig on his head as a crown. Inana looked at him with admiration and spontaneously struck up a song, singing the words: 'When I have bathed for the king, for the lord, when I have bathed for the shepherd Dumuzid...'"¹¹⁶ Later, we see the references to Dumuzi turn back into references to Šulgi: "When he [Dumuzi] treats me tenderly on the bed, then I will too treat my lord tenderly. I will decree a good fate for him! I will treat [Divine] Šulgi, the good shepherd, tenderly! I will decree a good fate for him!"¹¹⁷ Clearly, in the context of the sacred marriage, the king incarnates the figure of Dumuzi, and the poem easily transitions from referencing one persona to referencing the other, in order to reinforce the singular identity of the two.

However, despite his becoming identified with Dumuzi in the course of the ritual marriage, the status of the king's divine persona remains somewhat confused in the text; in the context of the Sumerian pantheon, Dumuzi is not the son of Ninsumun. However, in the hymn we still read that, "The lady, the light of heaven, the delight of the black-headed, the youthful woman who excels her mother, who was granted divine powers by her father, Inana, the daughter of Suen, decreed a destiny for [Divine] Šulgi, the son of Ninsumun."¹¹⁸ Somehow, the hymn seems to indicate that although Šulgi takes on the role of Dumuzi within the context of the rite,

¹¹⁶ ETCSL 2.4.2.24, lines 9–16.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, lines 33–41.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, lines 42–48.

he nevertheless retains his own divine nature as the peer of Gilgamesh, the son of Ninsumun. How are these contradictions to be resolved?

First of all, it is important to bear in mind the ambiguity and context-specific nature of Sumerian royal roles and titles, as discussed previously. Just as a king could be lugal in relation to his people at the same time as he was ensik in relation to his god, so too we can imagine that Shulgi was concurrently the son of Ninsumun to his subjects and still Dumuzi in relation to Inanna. Moreover, I would argue that the public nature of the sacred kingship ritual also played an important part in understanding Shulgi's dual role as Dumuzi and also son of Ninsumun. The sacred marriage appears to have had a special connection with the city of Uruk, and we have already seen that the Ur III kings tried to highlight their ties to the historical heroes of Uruk, in particular Gilgamesh, as part of their program of self-deification. Another aspect of their appropriation of Uruk tradition is their assumption of the title "en of Uruk" and husband of Inanna, a fact that Steinkeller suggests was specifically necessary in order for them to partake in the ceremony of the sacred marriage.¹¹⁹ The fact that our most detailed documentation of the sacred marriage comes from exactly the Ur III period and one of its immediate successors, the First Dynasty of Isin, may not be an accident of archaeological discovery at all, but may instead reflect the fact that these rites gained a renewed preeminence during an era that intentionally invoked the traditions of the past (and especially of Uruk) as part of its overall ideological program of self-legitimization.¹²⁰

Seen in this light, it only makes sense that the king's representation during a relatively public festival meant to evoke memories of more or less ancient Sumerian traditions would

¹¹⁹ Steinkeller, "On Priests, Rulers, and Sacred Marriage," pg. 130.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

remain quite conservative. Aside from the reference to Shulgi as the son of Ninsumun, the hymn associated with the sacred marriage does not appear to contain any grandiose proclamation of royal divinity, but rather presents the king exactly the way the rites would suggest, as the incarnation of Dumuzi, the husband of Inanna. The same appears to have been true for Shu-Sin, who is referred to in one of his royal inscriptions as the, “beloved spouse of Inanna.”¹²¹ That said, in the course of reinvigorating ancient traditions, the Ur III kings nevertheless did so with a keen eye towards magnifying their own stature. First of all, it obviously fits well with the program of a divine king to support the practice of a traditional ritual that would see the person of the king take the role of the spouse of a goddess. Moreover, the Shulgi hymn gives indications that the entire ritual was infused with a sense of the majesty and power of the royal figure—in addition to ensuring the fertility of the land in the coming year the king himself also receives a number of divine blessings from Inanna. Thus we see the goddess extol the king by saying, “You are one who is entitled to hold high his head on the lofty dais. You are one who is worthy of sitting on the shining throne. Your head is worthy of the brilliant crown. Your body is worthy of the long fleecy garment. You are worthy of being dressed in the royal garb.”¹²² Similarly, later in the poem the god Utu addresses the king:

King, eloquent and good-looking, mighty hero, born to be a lion, young wild bull standing firm in its vigor, valiant one, unrestrained in his strength, who tramples great mountains underfoot: you have subdued the heroes of the foreign lands, you have trampled upon all the foreign rulers, you have established your name to the ends of the world.¹²³

The customary interpretation of this hymn is that it was composed specifically in order to be incorporated into the liturgy of the sacred marriage itself. If this supposition is true, then the

¹²¹ RIME 3/2.1.4.1, col. i, 37–39.

¹²² ETCSL 2.4.2.24, lines 49–73.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, lines 80–102.

magnification of the figure of the king is clearly of paramount importance, and becomes intimately tied in with the ritual's greater purpose of ensuring the fertility of the land in the coming year. Here we see an excellent example of the sort of public demonstration of royal ideology that the monumental art also exhibited. While the king does not overtly discuss his divinity in any significant way, he uses the context of a traditional ritual to present a vision of himself that focuses on his power, similar in fashion to the way that the Ur-Namma Stele emphasized the figure of the ruler even as it presented him in the traditional posture of humble service before the gods. Moreover, just as with the Ur-Namma Stele, it is probable that the interpretation of this ritual might have been different among the literate elite than it was among the popular masses. It seems likely that the elite of the king's government would have been much more open to understanding the nuances of divine ideology that were being expressed in the hymn, even as it was incorporated into a traditional religious ritual.

CHAPTER XI

CONCLUSIONS

In the course of our examination of Ur III divine kingship, we have seen that the exaltation of the figure of the divine king was expressed to his subjects through a variety of channels. The references to the divine king comprised a range of expressions that, taken together, paint a picture of the ideology of divine kingship that the Ur III kings attempted to promote in concert with their economic and bureaucratic programs of centralization. In general, it may be useful to analyze the various ways that divine kingship was expressed by considering two different aspects of their composition: the mode through which they communicated meaning (written, visual, or ritual), and the subset of the population to which any given type of representation might have been restricted (public versus non-public).

First, the representations of the divine king may be examined based on whether or not they communicated something about the divine king through the use of the written word, or instead made use of non-verbal tools of communication such as visual representation and religious ritual. This forms the basic division through which we have examined the various types of evidence available to us: written depictions of the divine king included the king's written name (with the associated *dingir* sign) in the form of inscriptions, the elaboration of royal titles, royal hymns composed in praise of the king, and the construction of a cohesive literary corpus emphasizing hegemonic kingship. Visual representations included depictions of the king on cylinder seals, particularly in the form of presentation scenes before the figure of the seated king, and also monumental works of public art that depicted the figure of the king. Finally, ritual representations of the divine king included the worship of the statue of the living king in temples

throughout the kingdom, and also the ritual enactment of the sacred marriage in which the king becomes the spouse of the goddess Inanna.

These three types of representations did not function in isolation. Rather, they comprised a tapestry of meaning that referenced each other and were mutually reinforcing; thus we see the hymn Shulgi X being written using the dingir sign and incorporating the theology of divine kingship by referring to Shulgi as the son of Ninsumun, but at the same time the hymn was likely read aloud during the enactment of rituals associated with the sacred marriage. In this case, the two forms of representation, written and ritual, function together and reinforce each other even as they communicate different messages. The ritual of sacred marriage communicated the general power of the king, and highlighted his special role as intermediary between the divine and human spheres, ensuring the ongoing fertility of the land. At the same time, the hymn itself directs attention to the power of the king and the blessings his rule receives from the gods. Thus the combination of ritual and written representations of the king serves not only to ensure the fertility of the land for another year, but also to reestablish the divine basis for the rule of the divine king.

In addition to sorting the representations of divine kingship by the modes of their transmission (written, visual, and ritual), they may also be examined in terms of the section of the population to which they primarily communicated. To be sure, the elite of the kingdom were the target of the vast majority of royal representations, with only the monumental art and the sacred marriage seeming to have been intended for a more public role. However, even within the confines of the elite, different types of representation of the divine king were used to reach different groups. The most private and personal representations were found on the cylinder seals that the king presented to the highest officials of the court. These seals depicting the king in the

role of the god Shamash/Utu determining the fate of his subjects were clearly meant to reinforce a strong ontological distance between the highest court officials and the figure of the divine king, emphasizing the role of the charismatic leader in a very personal way. Another relatively private, and also relatively explicit, method of communicating the divine nature of the king was in the writing of his name using the *dingir* sign. Because this sign was unpronounced, it would generally have only been able to communicate the divinity of the ruler directly to the person reading the text, but not to others in the room who heard the text read aloud. Finally, the worship of the divine figure of the living king, perhaps the most explicit statement of the divinity of the ruler, was as far as we can tell restricted primarily to rituals performed by the ruling class of the society, particularly the governors of the various cities of the realm (as in the case of Ituria, governor of Eshnunna). Thus we observe the pattern in all of these types of representation that the depictions of the king that were most restricted in terms of their audience were also the most explicit in terms of their references to the king's divine status and powers.

Moving to a somewhat less private sphere, but still operating mainly within the class of literate scribes and officials, we see parallels between the references to kings in hymns and poetry on the one hand and the progressive accumulation of royal titles on the other. To be sure, in both cases there remain explicit references to the divinity of the king; Ibbi-Sin goes so far as to call himself the "god of his land," while the Shulgi hymns established the theological basis for the divinity of the royal line by describing the divine conception and birth of the king as the son of the goddess Ninsumun. However, in both of these forms of representation, the focus is not on explicit claims of royal divinity but rather on the more general exaltation of the king. The hymns of praise routinely depict the king as a superhuman figure obviously on par not with other human beings but with the gods themselves. Similarly, the royal titles emphasize the centrality of the

king, his expansive dominion, and his association with the divine sphere by referring to him as “the one called by name by the god Enlil” and “king of the four quarters.” Here we see our pattern continued: while still restricted primarily to the literate elite, the royal hymns and titles had a somewhat larger audience than did the cylinder seals and the cultic service of the king’s statues, and thus they focus less on the overt divinity of the king and more on extolling his superhuman attributes and expansive dominion.

Finally, we come to the least private means of communicating the ideology of kingship: public monumental art, public ritual in the form of the sacred marriage, and public literary production. As has been said already, there is a great deal of doubt regarding exactly how public any of these forms of communication would have been. Certainly the literary corpus was disseminated primarily in the scribal schools, although it is reasonable to assume that stories about Gilgamesh and *The Curse of Agade* had some currency among the general populace as well. Moreover, monumental art may have been on public display, but surely in locations frequented most often by members of the upper classes of society. Finally, due to the scarcity of sources, it is difficult to determine just how large the New Year’s celebration of the sacred marriage may have been, despite indications that it had roots in earlier public festivals of fertility. Despite all this, there is every reason to believe that, of the methods of royal representation we have examined so far, these three were by far the most public; certainly more people must have been exposed to these aspects of culture than were exposed to the exclusive cylinder seals of the highest officials.

The pattern we have delineated, in which the most private representations of the king seem to have been the most explicit in proclaiming his divinity, is perhaps most evident when we examine these relatively public depictions of royal ideology. In the case of literature, the literary

corpus of the Third Dynasty of Ur was not meant to detail the divine nature of the king at all, but rather to promulgate a general ideology of kingship that promoted the maintenance of the large territory of the Ur III state. Both in the case of monumental art and also in the sacred marriage, as we have seen, the emphasis was not on proclaiming the divinity of the king at all, but rather on representing the king in accordance with traditional modes of Sumerian art and ritual, modes that grew originally in the context of sacred kingship rather than divine kingship. As we have observed, the primary reason for this conservatism in public royal ideology was that the kings no doubt recognized the relative importance of inculcating an appreciation of their divine kingship in their officials and bureaucrats, while such a nuanced understanding of the king's divinity was simply not needed among the general populace. Clearly, the Ur III kings went to great lengths to proclaim and reinforce their divinity in the minds of those closest to them, while in terms of the greater public they were content to rely primarily on traditional modes of self-representation that exalted the figure of the king without explicitly proclaiming his divinity.

One issue that we have addressed only tangentially is the question of why divine kingship was adopted by the Ur III kings in the first place. Although we have established that divine kingship served as part of a greater economic and socio-political system designed to empower the ruler and centralize government power, an analysis of its function alone does not directly answer this question. Michalowski has suggested that both Shulgi and Naram-Sin turned to divine rule as a response to a crisis that threatened their legitimacy to rule; in Naram-Sin's case he proclaims his divinity following the successful suppression of internal rebellion, while in Shulgi's case it comes as a response to the crisis precipitated by the death of Ur-Namma in battle. The problem with this hypothesis, however, is that both of these conditions must have arisen many times throughout Mesopotamian history, yet only here do we see the kings turn to the propaganda of

divine rule in order to bolster their legitimacy. Mesopotamian history is replete with records of rebellions both large and small, including the internal instability that eroded the territory of the Ur III kingdom during the reign of Ibbi-Sin only a few decades after the death of Shulgi. Regarding the death of a king, the only recorded instances of royal death refer to the death of Ur-Namma and to the death of the Assyrian king Sargon II.¹²⁴ However, it seems patently absurd to suggest that over the course of the nearly three millennia of recorded history from Mesopotamia, only those two kings ever died in battle while leading their armies; much more likely is the assumption that cases of it were simply not recorded because the subject was so taboo.¹²⁵ If none of these other rebellions or royal deaths precipitated a turn towards royal deification in order to shore up the legitimacy of the monarchy, how then do we understand Naram-Sin and the Ur III kings?

The answer lies, I would argue, in the very idea that divine kingship was “historically conditioned.” In other words, these crises were not sufficient in and of themselves to produce a turn towards divine kingship, but rather at these particular moments in history they interacted with other social factors in order to produce this unique outcome. It is important to keep in mind that at the time of Naram-Sin, the idea of a territorial state in Mesopotamia was a very new thing. Prior to that point, the city-states of Mesopotamia had lived more or less independently of one another, each city the possession of its own tutelary deity and ruled by a *lugal*, *en*, or *ensik* that acted, theoretically, on the deity’s behalf. However, with the rise of the Akkadian Empire of Sargon, an ideological disconnect occurred between the traditional conceptions of kingship and the new reality that one city now ruled over many. It is not hard to imagine that this ideological

¹²⁴ Michalowski, “Mortal Kings of Ur,” pg. 35.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

problem, which afflicted the Third Dynasty of Ur as much as it did the Akkadian Empire, did as much to precipitate the turn towards divine rule as did the specific crises faced by Naram-Sin and Shulgi. In fact, it is worth pointing out that it was not the founders of these large territorial states, Sargon and Ur-Namma, who began the turn towards divine rule—presumably they were more than occupied simply with the military process of conquest. Rather, it was the first major successors to these kings, Naram-Sin and Shulgi, who inherited a large territory and were forced to grapple with the ideological implications of ruling over many cities at once.¹²⁶

The same analysis might also suggest some potential solutions to the interesting conundrum of why divine rule tapered off quickly after the collapse of the Ur III state. Certainly there is a great deal to recommend Michalowski's interpretation, which argues that the deification of the kings created significant religious difficulties by undermining the traditional sacred role of the king. By moving fully into the divine sphere, and away from a traditional sacred position that allowed them to serve as an intermediary between the human and the divine, the Ur III kings inadvertently hampered their own authority as religious figures.¹²⁷ Thus, although the forms of divine rule were continued for a time, notably by the Ur III kings' immediate successors in Isin, they eventually lost their potency; instead, symbols such as the writing of the king's name with *dingir* became traditional royal titles devoid of any practical religious implications. In addition to this basic interpretation, I would argue that it is also possible that the peoples of Mesopotamia came to accept, at least in principle, the idea of large territorial states, and over time these political conglomerations became less problematic. It is

¹²⁶ Although Naram-Sin was Sargon's grandson and two kings, Rimush and Manistushu, held the throne prior to him, both were short-lived and ineffective rulers, leaving the solution to the problem up to Naram-Sin.

¹²⁷ Michalowski, "Mortal Kings of Ur," pg. 41.

noteworthy that, despite the relative political fragmentation of most of the succeeding Old Babylonian period, the Ur III literary corpus (which was so carefully designed to promote attitudes favorable to large states ruled by a single king) continued to be the basis of the scribal curriculum. The kings of later periods did retain some of the trappings of divine kingship, which helped them to maintain an elevated status as masters of large territories. Moreover, new methods of legitimating royal authority were developed—for example, the various kings of Amorite descent, such as Hammurabi of Babylon and Zimri-Lim of Mari, began to reference their human kinship lineages and Amorite tribal affiliations as an integral part of their royal self-representation.¹²⁸ These developments helped create a situation in which large territorial states were no longer ideologically problematic in the way they once were, and thus one of the major historical conditions that had necessitated the development of divine kingship was removed.

The ideas proposed here regarding the specific historical conditions that helped bring about the brief florescence of divine rule during the Ur III period are only hypotheses; indeed, we likely will never be able to pinpoint in detail all of the forces that helped create the right historical moment for divine kingship to emerge in Mesopotamia. What I hope to have accomplished with this paper is the much more modest goal of detailing the ways that kings represented the ideology of divine kingship to their subjects. These various representations were transmitted through a variety of means, and each of them acted in concert with the others to promote an overall conception of the king as a divine ruler. This was an orchestrated program that encompassed written, visual, and ritual expressions of the divine king, and each mode of representation transmitted the ideology of divine kingship in a different way to a different subset

¹²⁸ Dominique Charpin, D. O. Edzard, and Marten Stol, *Mesopotamien: Die Altbabylonische Zeit* (Fribourg: Academic Press, 2004), pg. 234.

of the population. The representations of the king that were restricted to the most elite groups of society tended to be most explicit in their statements of the king's divine nature, whereas those representations that were aimed at a larger audience tended to be more conservative in their portrayal of the king, focusing on general praise of the king rather than on outright proclamations of his divinity. Taken together, however, these different means of communication help us understand the complex workings of a highly centralized and surprisingly nuanced state that refashioned traditions of kingship in quite innovative ways in the service of the divine king.

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