

RELIGION AND POWER
DIVINE KINGSHIP IN THE
ANCIENT WORLD AND BEYOND

edited by

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King Naram-Sin of Akkad in horned tiara near a mountain summit, with soldiers. Rose limestone stele
(2230 B.C.E.). Originally from Mesopotamia, found in Susa, Iran. 200 × 105 cm.

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THE DIVINE PROTOTYPES*

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In this paper I argue that our usual dichotomy of a human versus divine class is not very helpful in understanding the concept of early divine kingship. In the past, this rather rigid categorization, as well as the general distinction between a sacred versus a divine kingship, rather hampered our understanding of the underlying Mesopotamian concepts. I suggest instead that the concept of prototypes, as formulated by the cognitive sciences and anthropology with special emphasis on various “practices,” can help improve our understanding of the role of divine kingship and various sanctification processes in early Mesopotamian history. If we further apply the notion of gradience to the concept of divinity, the riddle of “divine or sacred kingship” may become less puzzling.

In jenen Tagen, so sagt man, lebte Prometheus, von dem man glaubt, er habe Menschen aus Lehm geformt; sein Bruder Atlas, der zur gleichen Zeit lebte, wurde als großer Astrologe betrachtet; Atlas Enkel, Merkur, war ein Weiser, kundig vieler Künste. Deshalb wurde er aus eitlen Irrtum seiner Zeitgenossen nach seinem Tode unter die Götter versetzt.

Erzbischof Ado de Vienne, *Etymologiae*;
Patrologiae cursus completus, series Latina CXXIII, 35

1. PROTOTYPE THEORY AND THE EARLY MESOPOTAMIAN ORGANIZATION OF THE WORLD OF KNOWLEDGE

The hypothesis underlying the following remarks is that the prototype theory, as developed by Rosch, Lakoff, and others and which in the last decades influenced research in cognition and semantic linguistics, can provide a useful incentive for a better understanding of parts of Mesopotamian culture.¹ In fact, our Aristotelian approach toward categorization and hierarchization

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¹ In this context I may simply remark that Rosch’s notion of a given prototype being defined as the best or most representative member of a given category comes not without problems. I quote here briefly from a 2003 article of A. Giannakopoulou, where she states that “[G.] Kleiber [*Prototypensemantik* (trans.), Michael Schreiber (1993)], argues that the prototype should be regarded as a cognitive representation, which is generally associated

with a particular word and serves as the reference point for categorization. Therefore, the meaning of a given word is not defined by a concrete prototype, but rather by the mental representation of the prototype. This mental picture is not necessarily the representation of a realistic example of a given category, but rather an abstract entity that involves some combination of related typical features.

These typical features, if considered as prerequisite for the creation of an abstract representation, maintain the idea of the internal structure of a lexical category as a family resemblance structure. Therefore, meanings may cluster or overlap due to the underlying semantic structures. In which case, meanings that show a degree of overlapping involve more structural weight than those that serve as peripheral members of a given category. The mental representation of a prototype, then, should

may sometimes turn out to be misleading. To the scholars of ancient Mesopotamian culture it is well known that the application of a *tertium non datur* does not fully match the indigenous Mesopotamian classification procedures which are so well documented.² We can observe here that, with some regularity, Mesopotamian classification shows fuzzy boundaries between classes. Nevertheless, classification was a crucial endeavor for the Mesopotamian scholars. As Miguel Civil stated: “the whole of [ancient Mesopotamian] ‘science’ consists in the enumeration and classification of all natural and cultural entities” (Civil 1995: 2305).

As is well known, lists and classification patterns form the core of the Mesopotamian heritage. Niek Veldhuis has argued that they were used, perhaps even developed, for the purpose of teaching and labeled them therefore as “educational.”³ In reassessing the thematic scope of the earliest lexical texts compared with the traditional labels, Veldhuis provided the following table:

Table. 2.1. Thematic Scope of Earliest Lexical Texts (from Veldhuis 2006, 188)

<i>Subject</i>	<i>Lexical List (conventional label)</i>
numbers	“grain” (<i>Word List D</i>)
grain and grain products	“grain” (<i>Word List D</i>)
fish	fish
birds	birds
domestic animals	animals
wood and wood products	wood
dairy products	vessels
containers	vessels
textiles	vessels
metals	metals
persons	<i>Lu A</i> ; officials
place names	cities
time indications	“plant”

Veldhuis has further demonstrated that the subjects of these lists match to a great degree the contemporary economic/administrative spheres. He explicitly noted that names of gods and persons are virtually missing, as are “wild animals, stars, and rivers ...; [they] are of little use in this administrative system and they are absent from the lexical lists” (Veldhuis 2006: 187–88). Therefore these lists do not reflect the whole “world” and are of lesser use for any description of “basic level categories” in a Roschian sense, as the author and others had previ-

exhibit the greatest degree of overlapping. It could be argued that within category resemblances meaning is not equally distributed among the constituents so that the components — the smaller segments of meaning — can serve different degrees of meaning and are of unequal importance.”

² On a theoretical level I would like to refer to recent research into fuzzy logical structures; see, for example, Jantzen 2006.

³ Veldhuis 2006. In this article Veldhuis demonstrates that the recently much-discussed “Tribute List,” renamed by him as “Word List C,” “is an exercise designed for beginning students in order to tackle the new technique of writing.”

ously assumed.⁵ It seems more promising, therefore, to turn to the so-called “determinatives” or — better — graphemic classifiers in cuneiform writing, in order to get an impression of early Mesopotamian “basic level classification.”⁶

2. CLASSIFYING THE DIVINE

Despite the fact that no early list of deities has been detected so far, it is clear that the concept of divine was perceived as forming such a basic category. In light of “prototype research,” the question may be posed, what, by the ancient Mesopotamians, was considered to have been “the best example” of the “divine”? The divine classifier, the DIĜIR-sign, is attested already in the earliest texts from Uruk, and the interpretation that the sign originated as a pictorial representation of a star is generally accepted.⁷ However, in the third millennium the use of the DIĜIR-sign for marking divine names is still somewhat restricted. Besides the considerable reluctance to add the divine classifier to syllabically written names of Semitic deities,⁸ there are also other instances where the classifier is missing. First of all, the primeval deities, as attested in the texts SF 23, 24 and the parallel from UET VII,⁹ lack the divine classifier (I return later to the seeming exceptions AN.INANNA and AN.NISSABA). Second, we note certain divergences in local traditions: the synopsis of SF 57 and IAS 46, 47, 53 provided by Mander (1986: 106–08) shows that, in the Fāra texts, in contrast to Abū Šalābīkh, the divine classifier is lacking in several divine names. I mention here ÚR×UD, ŠU.KI.GAL₂; nin-gal, il_x(KIŠ-la), Ú.ŠUL(-ME)-NANNA(-E) (Fāra: ^dŠUL-nanna), Ú.ŠUL.NANNA, ^rGIŠ^l+KAK.GAL₂ URU[?] È GIŠIMMAR KI (Fāra: ^dGIŠIMM[AR].x [Š]), SUMAŠ.NU (Fāra: ^dGUDU₄), TUM.MA (Fāra: ^didigna[?]), EN.TI, sùd (Fāra: ^dRAD), LU:ÚB.KU₆, na:rú, gal-x (Fāra: ^dPA.GAL.URU×X), nu-saġ (Fāra: ^dNU.SAĜĜA), nu-MUŠ.DU, ŠITA.MU.KISAL. Even more astonishing is the fact that the well-known fire-god gi:bil and the mother goddess li₉:si₄ are lacking the divine classifier in all these texts, whereas in other lists the expected writing ^dgi:bil (kù) and ^dli₉-si₄ are attested. Inconsistent is also the writing of the deified Urukean king Lugalbanda. Roughly a century later both deified heroes, Lugalbanda and Gilgameš, are consistently marked with the DIĜIR-sign. However, even in the late Early Dynastic texts from Lagash a smaller number of deities are still written without the divine classifier.¹⁰

Returning to the late Uruk situation, the different names for Inana-k, the Lady of Heaven, in offering lists from Uruk, namely ^dinana(-k)-húd “Morning Inana-k,” ^dinana(-k)-sig “Evening Inana-k,” and ^dinana(-k)-nun “Princely Inana-k,” show, by comparison with later philological data, that these are names for a different manifestation of Inana-k as the planet Venus. As a result, there can be little doubt that the astral aspects of Inana-k date back as far as the Uruk IV period. Hence, astral phenomena might provide good candidates for the “best

⁵ At the same time, Veldhuis draws our attention to the fact that the archaic lists attest “an intellectual and speculative background ... although the intellectual effort builds on the need of an administrative system, not on theology” (Veldhuis 2006: 189).

⁶ To a certain extent they nevertheless do correspond to the thematic grouping of the Lexical Lists.

⁷ There are, however, traces that the star icon mingled with another iconic depiction, that of a blossom or a bud, which art historians usually name “rosette”; see Moortgat-Correns 1994 and Böck 1994. The “rosette” is one of the major religious symbols referring to vigor or

the power of life, and in Mesopotamia it was used in this meaning right down to the Neo-Assyrian period.

⁸ Compare Roberts 1972. Note, however, that the group of (Semitic) astral deities was most important (Roberts 1972: 57).

⁹ See Mander 1986: 108–10.

¹⁰ Compare Selz 1995 s.v. en-ki, ^(d)ÈŠ-ir-nun, ^dgibil₆, ^(d)giríd^(ki), lugal-kur-dúb(!), (lum-ma), Mí.U₈-sig, nun-ki, ud₅?-kù, ^(d)utu, za-ba₄-ba₄, ^(d)za-ra. The cultic objects alan, balaġ, du₆, na-rú-a, and ub₅-kù are, in contrast to later sources, never marked by the DIĜIR-sign.

examples” of the category of the divine. We may further add that for this early period nothing definite can be said about a possible representation of Inana-k in anthropomorphic guise.¹¹ Some historians of religion would argue that the celestial phenomena might only reflect a sub-category of the concept of divine, or, as Jan van Dijk has argued, the *diġir-an-na* “the deities of heaven” must be supplemented by the *diġir-ki-a* “the deities of earth.”¹² This hypothesis refers to deified concepts of vital energies, the forces of life behind all natural phenomena. The assumed differentiation according to the divine habitat makes it indeed doubtful if the celestial bodies are correctly considered as prototypes for the divine class. However, it is beyond question that the astralization process did deeply influence religious thought at the time of the invention of writing.

Another, iconic, classifier for deities appears only centuries later. It is the horned crown as a marker of divinity, or rather a divine attribute. First attested in the Early Dynastic II period, the horned crown shows in its earliest attestations a pictographic insertion of some vegetable symbols, perhaps ears of barley, and a kind of bull’s mask depicted between the *en face*-turned horns of the crown. The horned crown therefore symbolizes the vigor of life and reproduction and links the concept of divinity specifically to agriculture and cattle breeding. Accordingly, it relates the depicted deities to the animal and vegetal forces of life. We should note, however, that at its beginning the horned crown was evidently not regularly applied when a deity was depicted, much in the same way as the *DIĠIR*-classifier was not used with the name of every deity. Thus a figure wearing a horned crown surely represents a deity, but the lack of it does not necessarily point to a human being represented.

3. CATEGORIZATION AND FUZZY BORDERS OF CATEGORIES

So far, when discussing the perception of the deified heavenly versus the natural phenomena, I have described combined categories, which together may form a new prototype. The combined categories of the habitat and the divine are, of course, not “basic level categories,” and it may remain disputable how much we can deduce from these “secondary prototypes” for any possible identification of the prototype “divine.” We should, however, keep in mind that a prototypical structure underlies every category. However, as there might be a prototype of the combined category “white wine,” the use of the color term “white” here says little about prototypical color terms. It is not a simple set of features by which prototype categories can be described, and even the number of such features may vary in a given category, inasmuch as the “Mesopotamian locust bird” (*bir₅ / buru₅^{mušen}*) has no feathers, or that other birds cannot fly.¹³

Later Mesopotamian traditions show an awareness of the problem of determining rigid categorical borders. Most important in our context is the myth of *Atra-hasīs*, where humankind’s first ancestor, the first human created by the gods, is accordingly named *Ila-we-e-I-la* “god-human.” I would even suggest that this expression might reflect a third-millennium tradition with the notion of a partially divine status of its leaders,¹⁴ their functional divinity, to which I return below.

¹¹ See also Seidl 1976–80: 87.

¹² Van Dijk 1957–71: 535 f. J. van Dijk named the latter group “chthonic deities,” a term which might be misleading.

¹³ In fact, combined categories do pose some difficulties inasmuch as they do not necessarily encapsulate the

meaning of each one of its constituents directly and individually.

¹⁴ It is tempting to contrast this with the Neo-Assyrian account of creation VS 24, 92, where the gods created first the *lullū-amēlu* “ordinary human,” supplemented in a second creational act by the king (*šarru*), the *māliku-amēlu*.

4. BEYOND NATURAL PHENOMENA

Even if we interpret both aforementioned groups of deities (the heavenly and the earthly divinities) as secondary categorizations or sub-classifications with blurred borders, we have to take into account that, according to prototype theory, category membership can be realized in terms of gradience. Furthermore, from these categorizations all deities are excluded who do not refer to natural phenomena. Nevertheless, such deities do play a major role in the first god lists attested about five hundred years after the earliest texts from Uruk, for example, the god lists from Fāra and Abū Ṣalābīkh.¹⁵ I am not thinking here of such divine entities as the “deified” animals, which would still fit into the described dynamistic notion of the divine; rather I mean the many gods’ names which refer to “social phenomena” or which reflect social structures. As proposed in 1997, the pertinent names may be grouped as follows:¹⁶

- I. Divine/deified emblems and paraphernalia¹⁷
- II. Deified professions or offices¹⁸
- III. “Cultural achievements or properties”¹⁹

It is of course not the fault of the ancient Mesopotamians that we have difficulties in understanding why divine qualities are attributed to such names, or why they were classified as belonging to the category of the “divine.” I propose to see behind this categorization a process of objectification which some would prefer to call sanctification. What does this mean? I am convinced that such objectification processes are everywhere and, indeed, belong to the basic features of thought. This does not necessarily imply that thought must be understood in an objectivist way as a manipulation of abstract symbols, which receive their meaning only via conventional correspondences with things in the external world. Instead I suggest, following and paraphrasing Lakoff 1987, that thought grows out of bodily experience, that it is imaginative, employing metonym, metaphor, and synecdoche, and that thought has “gestalt properties” and is hence “ecological” in the sense that it is related to the structure and meaning of the conceptual systems.²⁰

¹⁵ Compare Krebernik 1986; see also Mander 1986 and Selz 1997: 170–79.

¹⁶ For the following groups and a discussion of the respective names, see Selz 1997: 173–76.

¹⁷ For example, “the Crown,” “the Headband or Turban,” “the (Deified) Crown (is) a ‘Protective Goddess,’” “the Lady (of) the Crown (is) a ‘Protective Goddess,’” “the Princely Ring(?),” “the Staff (of) the Leader,” “the Stag-Door”/“Aurochs-Door,” “the Lapis Lazuli Necklace,” “the Stele,” “the Nose-Rope,” “the Lady Birth-Brick (is) a ‘Protective Goddess,’” “the Saw(?),” “the Holy Foundation Peg,” “the Emblem,” “the Lady Scepter,” and simply “the Scepter.”

¹⁸ “A (Divine) Seaman(?),” “the Expert (of) the Temple(?),” “the Brick-Maker (of) the Temple(?),” “the Lord (of(?)) the Granary,” “the Temple-Cook(?) (of) Uruk,” “a Leading Person in the Dairy Industry,” “the Leader of the Land (Sumer)(?),” “the Princely Gudu-Priest(?),” “the Righteous Exorcist,” “the True Baker/Cook (of) Uruk,” “the Function/Office/Lord (of) the

Abzu,” “the High Esteem(?),” “the Princeliness(?),” “the ‘Lady (of(?) the) Plough,” “the Lady, the Leading Person of the Pen,” “the Lady (of(?)) the Granaries,” “the Lady Barmaid,” “the Lady (of(?)) the Chisel,” “the Lady Jeweler,” “the Woman (of) the Sheep-Pen,” “the Gardener(?),” “a Priest(?) of Uruk,” “the Tax Collector,” “the (Divine) Chariot-Fighter(?) (of) Uruk,” “the Overseer (of) Uruk,” “the Wet-Nurse / Kindergartner,” “the (Divine) Writer,” “the Shepherd,” etc.

¹⁹ “The Bee’s Wax,” “the Incense,” “the Burning Reed, the Fire,” “the Warming Fire, the Roasting,” “the Brazier,” “the Kettle,” “the Torch,” “the Pot,” “the Ex-voto(?);” to this group also “the Lord: Statue,” “the Radiance,” “the ‘Me’ (of) the Lady(?),” “the Lady of the (Social) Group(?),” and others could be added.

²⁰ See Lakoff 1987: xiv f. He further remarks, “Thought has an *ecological structure*. The efficiency of cognitive processing, as learning and memory, depends on the overall structure of the conceptual system and on what the concepts mean.”

5. PROCESSES OF OBJECTIFICATION AND SANCTIFICATION

The deified professions or offices just mentioned therefore do not simply reflect an intentional and wilful process of sanctification invented for securing the ruling elite's position or to stabilize the structure of society. These items could only be included in the class of divinities because of an existing *prototypical relation to the divine sphere*. In other words, it was the idea, the model or the prototype of the classes "Seamen(?)," "the Temple Experts," "the Brick-Makers(of) the Temple(?)," "the Lords (of(?)) the Granary"; "the Temple-Cooks(?)" (of) Uruk," "Gardeners," "Barmaids," "Tax Collectors," "Overseers," "Wet-Nurses," and so on which qualified them for inclusion in the group of divinities. It is interesting to see that some of these prototypical professions are explicitly personalized. As for the deified items or paraphernalia, the situation has to be judged somewhat differently. Here it is not the office but the item that stands in a synecdochical way for certain concepts: "the Crown," "the Headband or Turban," "the Princely Ring(?)," "the Staff (of) the Leader," "the Nose-Rope" do not only allude to the respective offices and are not only an outward sign for them. Rather, these items were actually thought to contain the respective powers of the respective offices. And, of course, these powers were literally tangible, hence their prototypes qualified also for inclusion in the class of deities. Statements such as that the "crown" and the "staff," the regalia, existed since time immemorial in the heavens / were before the sky-god An, or that "kingship was lowered from heaven to earth" become sensible, even logical. One may still judge such statements as metaphorical, but they are meaningful and precise, much more than wilful traditional literary plays.

It would seem worth following this path and attempting to identify the more precise ideas behind such deified items as "the Lapis Lazuli Necklace," "the Stele," "the Stag-Door" or "the Aurochs-Door," "the Holy Foundation Peg" or "the Emblem." In our context I only remark that, similar to what we observed with the offices, such items were sometimes also personalized, for example, "the Lady Scepter," "the Lady Birth-Brick ((is) a 'Protective Goddess')."

In much the same way, contemporary and slightly later administrative documents focus on officials and offices, not on the persons holding them. Very much like the iconography of this period, the beginning of the third millennium, the images seem to concentrate on prototypes rather than on depicting individuals.²¹ The representations of human beings show a kind of statuary stiffness and rigidity that is usually underlined by paratactic and hypotactic arrangement of the individual figures on a given monument. Even when actions are depicted, their ritualization and formalization can hardly be overlooked. The stress lies on the prototypical situation, the model personality behind which all individuality seems to vanish.

The sort of deified offices and functions just discussed show clear connections with the basic Mesopotamian concept of the "ME" (cf. Selz 2003a: 245–46, 251–54). With this term the Sumerians designated physical and mental objects alike. Prototype theory here has the advantage that there is no distinction between a natural sort of category versus artifact as our Aristotelian training inclines us to suppose. And, as indicated above, to the Mesopotamians apparently all these functions and concepts were not only represented by, but were also inherent in, these objects: for instance, rulership is inherent and contained in substance in royal insignia.

²¹ Compare Selz 2003a. The assumption is certainly plausible that the permanence and ordering displayed by this attitude was of major interest for those who created such objects. However, this statement seems to me as

one-sided as Rosch's remark that human categorization "should not be considered the arbitrary product of historical accident or of whimsy but rather the result of psychological principles of categorization" (1978: 27).

In other words, these objects were not mere “attributes”; they were thought to contain “ideas” materially. The concept of rulership is therefore primarily linked to objects like the scepter and the crown, to the “office,” and only to a lesser degree to the person holding that office.²² A result of such objectification processes was the sanctification of rulership.

At first sight, the fact that the very same period can also justly be termed Sumer’s Heroic Age seems somewhat to contradict this postulated “formalism.” All the heroes, Gilgameš,²³ Lugalbanda,²⁴ and Enmerkar²⁵ were, however, conceptualized as prototypes of rulership and only to a lesser degree — if at all — as historical individuals. They were regarded as prototype rulers who had fulfilled their functions in an exemplary way. I return to this shortly.

6. CLASSIFICATION AND EARLY METAPHORS

It fits very well with our brief outline of prototype theory that in the Mesopotamian classification process we do not only observe an interest in “oppositions”; equally important were the borders of semantic features. An eminent interest in the hierarchization of semantic fields also plays an important role. Numerous texts attest to a rhetorical progression from the more general to a more specific meaning. For example, in royal hymns functional or metaphoric “titles” are regularly enumerated before the individual to whom they are applied is mentioned. A related but more complex example can be found in the first lines of Dumuzi-d’s Dream.²⁶ Dumuzi-d, being afraid of his impending death, cries for his sister Geštinana-k with the following words: “Bring my Geštinana-k, bring my sister! Bring my tablet-knowing scribe, bring my sister, bring my song-knowing singer, bring my sister! Bring my skilful girl, who knows the meaning of words, bring my sister! Bring my wise woman, who knows the portent of dreams, bring my sister! Let me relate the dream to her!” This is more than a fine example of literary technique: it shows also a method of hierarchization. In this case, the goddess’s is the more general feature, whereas the subsequent descriptions guide us to her contextually most specific function: she is the interpreter of Dumuzi-d’s dream.

In the view of the present writer, a similar sort of gradience forms the background of the widely used Sumerian metonymies and metaphors. They are not just similes in the way they are found in modern or even in Akkadian literature;²⁷ they purport a statement of essentiality. The personal name lugal-anzú^{mušen} states that the king under certain circumstances or in certain practices has to be reckoned among the same (sub-)class “thunderbird.”

²² Here we may simply recall the well-known fact that in Mesopotamia permanence has various positive connotations, as can be simply demonstrated by the use of the words *gi-na* // *kīnu(m)* “firm, permanent” as opposed to *nu-gi-na* / *lul* / *lú-IM* // *sarru(m)* “unreliable; false, fraudulent.” The impact of the concept of the sanctification of rulership is demonstrated by the secondary sanctification processes of the Akkade and the Ur III periods.

²³ Already from around 2500, there is a votive inscription to the deified Gilgameš that gives no hint as to how one could functionally distinguish him from other deities of that time. Further, the offerings Gilgameš receives according to the administrative documents of this period

are much the same as those for other deities; compare Selz 1995: 105–06.

²⁴ See Wilcke 1987–90; compare Selz 1995: 160–61; further Westenholz 1997: 264.

²⁵ The hero Enmerkar was never written with the divine determinative and, in contrast to Lugalbanda and Gilgameš, was never venerated. In later literary tradition he was compared with *Narām-Sîn* and similarly ill-famed. For an explanation that the Mesopotamian tradition provides for this, see Westenholz 1997: 264.

²⁶ I use Alster’s 1972 translation.

²⁷ See Streck 1999 and compare Selz’s 2003b review.

7. DIVINE KINGSHIP, DUMUZI-D AND “SACRED MARRIAGES”

In Ancient Mesopotamian studies the topic of “divine kingship” has somehow gone out of fashion. Even Rene Labat’s attempt to differentiate a concept of divine kingship from sacred kingship has not had many followers. The related concept of the sacred marriage rite, more precisely the somehow problematic marriage between an earthly ruler and a goddess, met with increasing scepticism. This applied especially to the related but somewhat fantastic theories of A. Moortgat, whose 1949 book *Tammuz* was heavily criticized for its biased interpretation or even disregard of data, in short for its methodological flaws.²⁸ The discussions concerning the concept of the Mesopotamian sacred marriage rite center around the actors’ assumed identity, with interpretations reaching from more “realistic” (king, cult personnel), through “symbolic,” to purely “fictional” were recently summarized by Lapinkivi (2004, especially pp. 69–77)²⁹ and Cancik-Kirschbaum (2004).

Dumuzi-d, according to the Sumerian King List, is not only the name of one or two semi-mythological early rulers, but became in later literary tradition also a designation of a role, a metaphor, or a prototype essential for the conception of Mesopotamian rulership. The connection of the Dumuzi-d theme to the so-called sacred marriage is much discussed and both are intimately linked to the concept of sacred kingship. I cannot give here an evaluation of all pertinent sources, as that should be a historian’s task. I just mention, more or less at random, a few facts connected with the postulated divinity of Early Dynastic rulers,³⁰ in order to demonstrate that the process of deification of the ruler started prior to Narām-Sîn: Ur-Nanše(-k), the founder of the Lagash I dynasty, states in one of his commemorative inscriptions that a certain Ur-Nimin³¹ was chosen by an omen as “husband (of the Goddess) Nanše.” It seems likely that this refers exactly to this sort of “sacred marriage” mentioned above.³² I leave aside here the more speculative interpretations of the “Royal Tombs of Ur” with their astonishing mass burials. The divine childhood of the Early Dynastic rulers from the city-state of Lagash who call themselves “engendered by the god Ninġirsu,” “child borne by the deity NN,” or “nourished with the pure milk of the goddess Ninġursaġa,” testify to a certain divinity of these kings. Indeed they were (thereafter) considered as belonging to the family of the gods, as En-metena’s title “chosen brother of (the god) Nindar” clearly demonstrates. A different but related concept of the ruler’s deification is attested by the Stele of Narām-Sîn, where he is depicted with a horned crown, the above-mentioned iconic sign of a deity. Of similar relevance to our topic is an Old Akkadian limestone mold, on which the deified Narām-Sîn is depicted in an intimate scene sitting opposite the astral deity Ištar shown in her warlike aspect (fig. 2.1). Both divinities are sitting on a platform on the top of a tower, above a group of mortal and divine prisoners whom Ištar is restraining by nose-ropes.³³

²⁸ Compare, for example, the review of Gurney 1962.

²⁹ It seems, however, quite evident that Moortgat’s notions influenced Lapinkivi’s 2004 study on “The Sumerian Sacred Marriage,” especially when he relates this “marriage” to the “concept of the soul and its after-life”; compare also Gurney 1962.

³⁰ For a more extensive account of the sources, see Selz (in press).

³¹ The assumption that Ur-Nimin is a variation or a different way of writing the ruler’s name Ur-Nanše-k can-

not be confirmed; compare Steinkeller 1999: 118–19 with nn. 41–42.

³² I refer the reader to the most recent treatments of the sacred marriage by Lapinkivi 2004 and Cancik-Kirschbaum 2004. Also important are the earlier critical remarks by Renger 1972–75, Cooper 1993, and the somewhat speculative reconstruction of the ritual in Steinkeller 1999: 129–36.

³³ See Aruz 2003: 206 no. 133.

The famous Bassetki Inscription attributes Narām-Sîn's divinity to the demand of the inhabitants of several cities he saved in a time of hardship, apparently successfully defending them against an enemy coalition. The deification of king Šulgi-r after his twentieth regnal year certainly draws on this tradition, but the connection of his death with the ascension to heaven was entirely unexpected. The result of this ascension was apparently that Šulgi-r was transformed into a star, a fate that also was ascribed to his father Ur-Namma-k. We may simply add here that this transformation of a deceased ruler into a star, his "becoming a star," is also well attested in the sources of classical antiquity.³⁴

This process of deification seems related to a concept called euhemerism, after the Greek philosopher Euhemeros, who taught that the gods are deified heroes. Indeed this sort of euhemerism is attested in the mid-third millennium for the legendary rulers of Uruk, Gilgameš and Lugalbanda. They were, a relatively short period after their deaths, incorporated into the official cultic pantheon.

I cannot give an account here of the various other features that support the notion of a sacred kingship in ancient Mesopotamia. The various election and coronation ceremonies mentioned in different sorts of texts probably do reflect ancient rituals, even when the actual performances are difficult or impossible to reconstruct. Here I cannot avoid returning to the question of the sacred marriage (rite). I believe that in this ritual the ruler did — somehow — perform the role of Dumuzi-Ama'ušumgalana-k. A certain parallelism to divine marriages attested in the Neo-Sumerian period — where they actually were somehow performed — is well established: those of the deities Ningirsu and Baba and Nanše and Nindar apparently have a tradition reaching back to the first half of the third millennium. An Old Sumerian deity of the Dumuzi-d type may help to improve our understanding of the relationship between the earthly and the divine. The ruler E'anatum calls himself "the best man (ku-li) of the god ^dlugal-URU×GANÁ-tenû, the beloved husband of Inana-k."³⁵ The deity ^dlugal-URU×GANÁ-tenû (another common transliteration is Lugal-URU×KÁR) is a Lagashite Dumuzi(-d) figure playing an important role in the inscriptions of Enanatum I. This ruler (and En-mete-na) does not only claim to be the "child begotten by Lugal-URU×GANÁ-tenû,"³⁶ he even claims to have received the kingship of Lagash and all foreign lands out of the hands of this god. We note that other inscriptions do attribute exactly these deeds to the state-god Ningirsu-k.³⁷ What, then, about the intimate relationship between Dumuzi-d and the king, attested elsewhere, or our interpretation of the king as a Dumuzi-d figure (in given contexts)?

Some years ago M. Krebernik published an article on the "Protohistory of Dumuzi" (Krebernik 2003). In discussing the meanings of the names of the "deities" Ama-ušumgal and Ama-ğeštin, he proposes that these names were originally just ordinary Sumerian personal names and must be kept apart from other divine names. Tentatively, but rather convincingly, Krebernik interprets Ama-ğeštin as "the mother is grape-sweet" or the like. By way of parallelism, I suggest that Ama-ušumgal means something like "the mother has the power of

³⁴ For a fuller treatment of this concept, compare Selz 2000.

This tradition, first explicitly attested in Ur III sources, may not have come out of the blue. If we look at the much-discussed victory stele of Narām-Sîn, where the ruler as a warrior fighting in the hostile mountains is separated just by an empty space from the emblem of the heavenly deities Sîn, Šamaš, and Ištar — Moon, Sun,

and Venus — one might get the impression that the ruler himself here is approaching, but not yet incorporated into, the celestial sphere.

³⁵ Ean. 1, rev. vi 6–9.

³⁶ In another inscription, En-metena-k claims to be "the child borne by (the goddess) Gatumdu-g" (Ent. 25 9:10).

³⁷ Cf. Selz 1995: 188 f. 210 f. 231. 236 251. 297 f.

a dragon,” the referent being in both cases some divinity, not the name-bearer himself. In Early Dynastic Lagash the name of a deity Ama-ušumgal is attested as an epithet of Lugal-URU×GANĀ-*tenû* and ušumgal // *ušumgallu* is attested as a sort of royal epithet from Šulgi-r down to Neo-Babylonian times. Krebernik further noted that the forms ^d(ama-)ḡeštin-an-na-k or ^dama-ušumgal-an-na-k occur only in later sources. The reason for this is probably an attempt to demonstrate in writing that these beings were now counted among the (heavenly) gods because they became immortal by their deeds, much in the same way as it is attested for Ur-Namma-k and Šulgi-r centuries later. The element an-na “heavenly” makes it very clear that these beings were somehow elevated not only to “the honors of the altar” but also to the *di superi*. In sum, we see that in this deification process the same principles were applied as we observed in the astralization process of the divine in the Uruk period.

Clear are also the astral connections in the pre-posed divine epithet kù-g, “bright, shining,” best attested with the Venus-star Inana-k. A similar astral interpretation is suggested here for writings of deities such as AN-^dNISSABA, AN-^dMAR.TU, and AN-^dINANA.³⁸ Such additional markings became possible or even necessary as soon as spreading use of the divine classifier AN overshadowed its reference to the celestial bodies.

8. HUMAN OR DIVINE?

I now turn to some examples where the notion of difference between the class of deities and the class of humans is blurred. In the ritual contexts two Old Sumerian queens of Lagash are not called by their proper names but bear a sort of religious title. In such contexts òim-tur, the wife of the ruler En-entarzi, is designated NI-a-a,³⁹ and bará-nam-tar-ra, Lugal-anda’s influential queen, PAP.PAP (or simply munus “woman”).⁴⁰ Both titles are also well attested in personal names: especially remarkable here are TITLE-ama-da-rí “TITLE (is) the eternal mother” or TITLE-diḡir-ḡu₁₀ “TITLE (is) my deity.” The titles are in a position where otherwise theophoric elements occur. The clear consequence arising from this observation is that the titles en, nin, and lugal in personal names do not necessarily refer to high-ranking humans. This conclusion is supported by numerous personal names of this type, where the choice of a deity’s name or of a title seems somewhat arbitrary. This ambiguity seems to be intentionally making use of a certain fuzziness of the respective prototype categories.⁴¹ That in the name of a statue of the ruler Lugal-anda, ^dnin-ḡir-su-ḡir-nun-šè-nu-kúš alan-lugal-an-da, the deity’s names are supplemented by the title lugal is then easily explained. I would even argue that a discussion of who is depicted as the central figure on the obverse of the Stele of Vultures, the god Ninḡirsu or the ruler E’anatum, finds its explanation here. It is the ruler in a divine role: as triumphant he, the king, is transgressing categorical boundaries.⁴²

A consideration of two similar votive plaques of Ur-Nanše, however, forces us to modify these statements. On one plaque the ruler is shown to carry the working basket, so giving an iconographic account of his building activities. In the text of a fragment from another plaque,

³⁸ See J. van Dijk 1957–71: 536, who writes in this context that the “Zweiteilung führt dazu, daß oft die gleiche Gottheit eine astrale und eine chthonische Erscheinungsform hat”; compare also Krebernik 1986: 192. That ^{AN}nin-unug in Fāra II 23:13 or AN.AN-dumu-saḡ in Fāra II 1:20’ belong to this group is doubtful.

³⁹ Compare Selz 1995: 212.

⁴⁰ Compare Selz 1995: 273–74.

⁴¹ We note that the etymology of Inana-k’s name as *nin-an-ak “Lady of the Heaven” or “Heavenly Mistress” provokes a similar explanation.

⁴² A similar idea is expressed by Steinkeller when he writes: “The ruler of Girsu ... became ... Ninḡirsu’s earthly *alter ego*” (1999: 116).

however, it is not the ruler but the god Šul-utul who is said to carry the basket for temple building. What sort of relation, if any, existed between this god and the ruler? Was it just “a bit of humorous scribal fantasy,” as J. S. Cooper suggested? As this may not be excluded, in the light of the present arguments it is easier to connect these observations with the intimate relationship between the ruler and his family god. I have argued that the god Šul-utul may be considered as a trans-individual part of the ruler or any other (male(?)) member of that family. According to a “logic of essentialism” (*Substanzlogik*), the god may even be regarded as a mere “double” of Ur-Nanše.⁴³

A rather problematic passage from the famous account of Lugalzagesi’s plundering of Lagash at the end of URU-KA-gina’s reign may support this interpretation. In this inscription URU-KA-gina depicts himself as victim of the outrageous and sacrilegious deeds of the Ummaite ruler Lugalzagesi. The inscription concludes with the statement: lugal-zà-ge-si, ensí umma^{ki}-ka diġir-ra-ni ^dnissaba-ke₄ nam-dag-bi gú-na hé-íl-il. Most scholars interpret the verbal form in a causative-factitive sense and translate the passage approximately as “May Nissaba(-k), Lugalzagesi’s, the ruler of Umma’s deity, make him carry this sin on his neck.” Recently, C. Wilcke has observed that there is no grammatical indicator that points toward such a causative interpretation, and indeed there is neither a locative nor a dative infix (Wilcke 2007: 221 n. 45). The resulting translation, “Nissaba-k ... may carry this sin on her(!) neck,”⁴⁴ seems impossible from the viewpoint of Mesopotamian religious history. Instead, I would argue that — similar to its Akkadian equivalent *našû(m)* — *íl* has also the basic meanings “to raise, to lift (upon), to load (upon).” Therefore the passage means that Nissaba(-k) may load the sin of Lugalzagesi on his(!) shoulder, that is, may not spare him the severe consequences of his deeds. Consequently, there is no need to assume an unparalleled function for Lugalzagesi’s deity, one not attested anywhere else. The passage is, however, an additional example of the intimate relationship between the (family) deities and a person’s self.

With the help of the Old Sumerian paradigm outlined above we are also able to improve our understanding of the role of Gudea’s family god, Nin-ġišzida-k. Following Gudea Statue C, his god Nin-ġišzida-k follows the bridewealth that Nin-ġirsu-k brings to his divine consort Baba, much in the same way as Gudea might have done in an actual ritual performance. The following passages corroborate this interpretation. In Statue E we read: “(The aforementioned items) are the bridal gifts for Baba for the new house which Gudea, ruler of Lagaš, the house-builder has added (to the former provisions),”⁴⁵ and “he let enter his god Nin-ġišzida-k to Baba in the temple in the Holy City with them (the bridal gifts).”⁴⁶

Let us compare this with a passage from Cylinder B 23: 18–24:⁴⁷ “Your (i.e., Gudea’s) god is Nin-ġišzida-k, the grandson of An; your mother goddess is Ninsuna-k, the mother giv-

⁴³ See my article for a reconstruction of the Mesopotamian concept of personal identities (2003a). As noted there, my argumentation shows parallels to earlier ideas of Winter, published in a highly stimulating 1992 article. Focusing on the images, she argues as follows: the ruler’s statues have “three simultaneous representational identities ... [which] underscore the absolute aspect of the image” (p. 35). These identities are: “(1) the particular historical personage ...,” (2) the representative of a class “ruler” ..., and (3) “a sacred, animate entity identical with its referent” (p. 34). The difference from the present argument is simply due to the different focus, for example, person versus image!

⁴⁴ Wilcke 2007: 220: “Des Lugalzagesi ... Göttin Nisaba soll diesen Frevel ... auf ihrem Nacken tragen.” This translation implies in fact that the goddess, much in the same way as her protégé, should bear the punishment for his sacrilegious deeds!

⁴⁵ Stat. E 7:15–21.

⁴⁶ Stat. E 8:11–15.

⁴⁷ diġir-zu ^dnin-ġiš-zí-da dumu-KA-an-na-kam / diġir-ama -zu ^dnin-sún-na ama-gan-numun-zi-da / numun-e ki-áġ-àm / áb-zi-dè MUNUS(-)ba(-)tu(RÉC 144)-da-me / mes-zi ki-lagaš^{ki}-[ta/a] è-a // ^dnin-ġír-sú-ka-me / ... / ... / ... / ... / [g]ù-dé-a [d]umu-^dnin-ġiš-zí-da-ka / [n]am-ti [h]a-mu-ra-sù.

ing birth to true seed (offspring), who loves her seed (offspring), you are (the one) who the true cow has born, the true mes-tree / youth arisen from Lagaš region, the (one) of Nin-ġirsu-k ... O Gudea, son of Nin-ġišzida-k, may for you your life be prolonged.”

Here the birth of Gudea is described with words reminiscent not only of the Old Sumerian paradigm of the ruler's divine birth, but especially of similar passages in the literature of Ur III royal hymns. There, Lugalbanda, Ninsuna-k's spouse and the father of Gilgamesš, is holding Nin-ġišzida-k's place. Elsewhere in his inscription Gudea calls himself “child born by Gatumdu-g,” once he names the goddess Nanše as his mother.⁴⁸ The explanation for this puzzle seems to be that Gudea is referring to different divine prototypes. By mentioning Ninsuna-k as his “mother” he alludes to the concept of the mother goddess per se, Ninsuna-k (and Ninhursaġa), and he places himself in Gilgamesš's position. By mentioning Gatumdu-g, a (local) Lagašite form of the mother goddess, he establishes himself as heir of divinity or — as later texts would put it — as “god of the land.”

In literature and in art we have many examples that establish the parallel roles of rulers and gods. Let us have a look at a statement found in an Old Babylonian copy of a Šū-Su'en text, edited by M. Civil in Šū-Sîn's Historical Inscriptions: Collection B (Civil 1969: A 12: 7–11): “Towards Tummal sailed he (= Šū-Su'en) with Enlil and Ninlil.”⁴⁹ The interpretation seems clear enough: the king sailed with the (statues of) the gods to this sanctuary. D. R. Frayne, however, provided a different translation: “Towards the canebrake ... the god Enlil, together with the goddess Ninlil sailed” (Frayne 1997: 318). Indeed, such an interpretation seems not to be excluded. In other literary texts, for example, in the hymn Šulgi-r R, the deities are indeed pictured as acting persons.⁵⁰ Of course, we might think of statues perceived as “living beings,” but an interpretation that the sources allude to the king's and his wife's circumstantial divinity is in the light of the Old Sumerian evidence quite likely.

Rituals such as mouth-opening and naming transferred a statue from the class of material objects to that of the divine.⁵¹ Afterwards they were not only able to transmit prayers and offerings, but also to receive them. It is the same principle we observed already: by ways of objectification and due to the fuzzy borders of categorization they could be included in both groups, either that of artifacts or that of living beings. And since, I would suggest, all living beings share in a gradient way features of divine prototypes, they could have been included in one of these categories.

8. COMPOSITE IDENTITIES

I have argued elsewhere for an emic “Mesopotamian concept of a person as a composite being.”⁵² Initially, I developed these ideas on the basis of A. L. Oppenheim's remarks on “Mesopotamian psychology,” where he concluded that the “protective ‘spirits’ in Mesopotamia are individualized and mythologized carriers of certain specific aspects of one basic phenomenon, the realization of the self, the personality, as it relates to the ego from the outside world and, at

⁴⁸ Compare Falkenstein 1966.

⁴⁹ Sallaberger 1993: 142: “Zum Tummal Röhricht ... fuhr er (= Šū-Su'en) Enlil und Ninlil.”

⁵⁰ Compare Sallaberger 1993: 141 f.; see also Wilcke 2002 (Šulgi-r F).

⁵¹ The mouth-opening and mouth-washing rituals recently attracted considerable interest; see Dick 1999, espe-

cially Walker and Dick 1999. Similar rituals are widely attested, not only in ancient Egypt, but also in modern India. Compare Waghorne 1999; Hardenberg 1999, and especially Davis 1997.

⁵² See Selz 2003a.

the same time, separates one from the other.”⁵³ Because a human’s identity is of composite nature, it is easy to see that under certain circumstances humans could be transferred to the class of gods. And, if for various reasons a ruler is considered of outstanding personal qualities, the perception of him being a divine figure becomes almost unavoidable. The question why this track was not pursued any further in the Old Babylonian period cannot be dealt with here. It is, however, evident that the concepts of rule must have changed considerably at this time.

9. CONCLUSIONS

Using models of the prototype theory, one could also say that humans shared features with other prototypes and therefore might be included in various categories.⁵⁴ One might object to such formulations and insist that such statements do not add very much to common descriptions of such features as “metaphors” or “mythologies.” Bound to our cultural prejudices, however, such notions still carry an overtone of purely mythological, almost fantastic and nonsensical (priestly), speculations. In my opinion, such an understanding is far too abstract; in early Mesopotamia thought seems much more concrete and precise. It was based on experience, and reasoning was less concerned with possible contradictions than with collecting *possible* “true” explanations: the more a Mesopotamian knew and could say about his world, the greater was his wisdom. Needless to say, the empirical concepts do not correspond to ours, therefore studies of Mesopotamian classification processes are of great importance.

Finally, I return to our central topic, the problems of sacred kingship. Understanding the problem of divine or sacred kingship was, until recently, severely hampered by the fact that the data were reviewed under the premises of our Aristotelian-based scientific classification system. The *tertium non datur*, the so-called binary logic, may have created discussions not always appropriate to our sources.

There can be little doubt that in the third millennium Mesopotamian kings could have had — in varying degrees — divine status. There are several reasons for this: starting from the concept of a human being of a composite nature, the ruler’s connection to “eternal,” hence deified, functions, which in the course of history became a separate sub-class of deities or secondary divine prototypes, contributed much to his perception of a divine being. This sort of functional divinity need not have been a ruler’s prerogative. In varying degree it seems to have affected other members of the ruling elite: priests and holders of other comparable offices, but especially the royal couple (and family) possessed some kind of functional divinity. This concept had, without doubt, a ritualistic corollary, even when our pertinent information is scarce, difficult to interpret, and almost restricted to the upper stratum of the society.

One gets the impression that the ancient Mesopotamians were, in some way, aware of the fact that their explanations had the status of “models,” that they were cognitive constructs. It did not bother them that their deities were natural and social phenomena and living beings and, at the same time, they were hypostasised in numerous statues in various cult places. We cannot avoid the conclusion that the Mesopotamian kind of empiricism was basically different from our own; other cultures may have fewer problems with that. An important corollary of this is

⁵³ Oppenheim 1964: 199–200; compare Abusch 1999, especially 105 ff.; quote from pp. 106 ff. This differs widely from the position of Edzard 1993: 203 ff., who also summarizes a number of unsolved problems related to the “personal god.”

⁵⁴ This may also help us understand a salient feature of Mesopotamian material culture. The composite character of many objects, made of different materials, anchors them in a categorial network, in a semantic field of various prototypes.

the insight “that our successful concepts and theories can never be claimed to be the only ones that work — and therefore they cannot be claimed to be ontologically true.”⁵⁵

What I try to demonstrate in this paper is that such concepts as the prototype theories have a salient explanatory force when applied to textual and material data of the earlier Mesopotamian periods.⁵⁶ I do not claim to be an expert in cognitive linguistics nor in the history of religion, but I am convinced that many attempts should be made to cross the traditional borders of our specific field. Concepts like the reconstructed prototype concepts of Mesopotamian thought did not simply die out, nor are they restricted to a specific, almost forgotten culture. They are still lingering around, not only in contemporary India, even though they may be modified they are nevertheless influential.



Figure 2.1. Narām-Sîn Shown in Same Position as Ishtar. After Aruz 2003: 206 no. 133

⁵⁵ Von Glasersfeld 1999: 285.

⁵⁶ In cuneiform studies I know of just one attempt to make use of prototype theory and folk taxonomies (cf.

Brown 1984) for the analysis of the lexical texts by Wapnish 1984. To the best of my knowledge she had absolutely no followers.

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