

'IDOLS OF THE KING': ROYAL IMAGES AS RECIPIENTS OF RITUAL ACTION IN ANCIENT MESOPOTAMIA

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Abstract

Far from being mere reminders or representations, sculptural images of rulers in ancient Mesopotamia were subject to complex rituals of consecration, installation, and maintenance, as a result of which they were deemed to be living manifestations, empowered to act and speak on a ruler's behalf. These rituals may be seen as "rituals of constitution" insofar as through their performance the objects were brought into and maintained in being. Both sculptures and related texts reflect continuous practice in Sumerian tradition from the middle of the third millennium B.C.E. to well into the second millennium. Later Assyrian and Babylonian documents suggest that many aspects continued to the middle of the first millennium B.C.E. Concentrating here on the period, ca. 2100-2000 B.C.E., it can be demonstrated that consecrated images were intended to be placed in temple sanctuaries or in funerary chapels. It can also be shown that in the course of this period, as rulers were elevated to divine status, royal images were introduced into worship in temples dedicated to the living ruler. This fact suggests that ritual and cultic practice, however traditional in format and however apparently unchanging, in fact co-varies with socio-political change.

Nowhere is the power of sacred images more evident than in the energies required to argue against them in biblical texts: from the prohibition against the making and worship of images in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:4-5) to the passionate denunciations of Isaiah (30:22; 44:9-20; 46:6) and Ezekiel (23:30), reiterated in Psalm 115, I Corinthians 8:4, and throughout the exegetical literature (see Jacobsen 1987b; Camille 1989). Yet, for cultural traditions in which image-oriented cults represented the primary focus of religious worship, the images were not merely the "work of human hands," having "mouths, but speaking not, having eyes, but seeing not" (Psalm 115:4-5); nor were they reducible to the matter of which they were made (as in Isaiah 44:15). Rather, through a process of ritual transformation the material form was animated, the representation not standing for but actually manifesting the presence of the subject represented. The image was then indeed empowered to speak, or to see, or to act, through various culturally-subscribed channels.

This is certainly the case with both divine and royal images in ancient Mesopotamia, insofar as we can reconstruct cultic practice from



Figure 1 Gudea B, seated Dedicated to god Ningirsu Found at Tello (ancient Girsu), in palace courtyard Diorite, ht 0.93 M (Louvre, AO 2)

archaeological and textual remains. For this reason, having used the word "idol" in the play of the title of this study, I shall not refer to it again. It is important to keep our distance from the essentially pejorative term, which suggests mis-/displacement of investment in the *re-presentation* in lieu of an *absent* referent. Instead, I propose to focus upon images as manifestations, pursuing, on the one hand, the series of ritual actions addressed to the empowerment and maintenance of such images, and, on the other, the consequences of their empowerment. While one naturally thinks of this process with respect to images of divine figures, I shall concentrate rather on the class of royal images, for which we have considerably more evidence in Mesopotamia, and which in fact provide significant information about the sacred domain through inscriptions that attest to their role therein.¹

Our concern with the meaning and role of royal images in ritual practice begins with a reading of the Sumerian texts inscribed directly on statues of the Mesopotamian ruler, Gudea of Lagash, ca. 2100 B.C.E. (fig. 1) and his son and successor, Ur-Ningirsu (figs. 3 and 4). These texts tell us that each statue was dedicated to a particular deity in the Mesopotamian pantheon. They also state that the statue was intended to be placed in a temple or shrine, provided with messages to be communicated to the god through direct discourse. Each was to be the recipient of regular offerings.²

Documents pertaining to both earlier and later royal images suggest similar purposes. With recent evidence that the reigns of Gudea and Ur-Ningirsu overlapped the beginning of the important Third Dynasty at the neighboring city-state of Ur (Steinkeller 1988), it becomes all the more interesting to incorporate data related to the Ur III rulers in our picture.

By including this paper in a collection of studies of "Art in Ritual Context," I assume membership of these royal statues in a category called "art," although there is no word for art in either Sumerian or Akkadian, the languages of ancient Mesopotamia, nor is there a term specifically designating sculpture. Rather, the Sumerian term *alam*³ (Akkadian *šalmu*)⁴ seems to mean simply "image," and while used directly to refer to these works in the inscriptions themselves (as in Statue B, Col. I:3, called *alam* Gudea, "image of Gudea"), it is also used to refer to any representation, whether in relief, in the round, or painted.⁵ Nevertheless, that there is a category for "image", and that we can attest to targeted goals in representation (e.g., "a statue whose appearance represented my own features"), suggests that at least some of the criteria for "art"—a class of affective objects to which are applied standards of correctness—were operative in Mesopotamia and justify our use of the term as an analytic category.

These affective images of rulers, then, were animated by a series of ritual acts and incantations and served by priestly functionaries. Thus,

they existed throughout their viable lifetime in what I would argue to be a ritual context. Recent persuasive conceptions of ritual as operative in secular as well as sacred domains notwithstanding (e.g., Moore and Myerhoff 1977:3-4), our understanding of the nature and role of ritual in culture has proceeded essentially from studies of the nature and role of religion. Debates of the past twenty-five years in anthropology over a definition of religion as a system of beliefs (Geertz 1966:4) *vs.* a system of institutions and behaviors (Spiro 1966:96) are largely unproductive for our purposes. Once one accepts the necessary role in religion of some non- or supra-human agency to which or whom sanctity is imputed (see Goody 1961; Spiro 1966; Rappaport 1971), then what emerges is a conjunction of beliefs and behaviors in which ritual is the major mode of expression, permitting communication between such agencies and the human domain.

The nature of ritual has itself been the subject of exhaustive debate (recently summarized in Kelly and Kaplan 1990). Neither space nor the goals of the present paper permit a lengthy exposition of conflicting (functionalist, Marxist, cognitive) positions here. Most useful for our purposes are the views of Rappaport (1971:62-3), who sees ritual as a set of conventional actions performed at regular intervals fixed by clock, calendar, or circumstance, having affective, emotional value, and through which is communicated information concerning physical, psychological, or social states. Another useful definition is that of Kelly (1988:40,41,52), who argues against dividing components of ritual into the real *vs.* the symbolic, and who, then, sees ritual as "conventional form set within systems of meaning." In his view ritual includes both practice and discourse, both behavior and belief.

To the extent that "religious belief involves a prior acceptance of authority" (Geertz 1966:25), and that ritual practice engages power dynamics in the exercise of, or acquiescence to, that authority or its representative (cf. Holdredge 1990; Bourdieu 1991:126), religious ritual becomes an arena in which political leaders not only may but *must* function, if they are to establish and maintain their own authority. In the play of Rappaport's conundrum ("authority being contingent upon sanctity...[and]...sanctity being contingent upon authority" [1971:72]) is summarized a pattern of political engagement characteristic of ritual action that has been observed by many historians and anthropologists. Much of the literature has concentrated upon explicitly royal rituals, such as coronations, court ceremonials, and funerary practices (cf. Giesey 1960; Fortes 1968; Kuper 1972; Cannadine & Price 1987; Kertzer 1988; Bloch 1989). In the Mesopotamian case we are dealing not with rituals engaged in by the physical person of the ruler—although these are certainly attested—but with rituals addressed to images of rulers, images that were introduced as actors into the sacred space of the god and received worship themselves.

The sacred character of the royal image in Mesopotamia is not without its parallels elsewhere. Marin's important study (1988) of Louis XIV, for example, emphasizes the role of the royal portrait as a sacerdotal object, at the same time as it represents a historical personage (Louis) and an exemplar of a class or institution, namely, the king. However, the particular combination of ritual action, sacrality, and imagery in Mesopotamia is distinctive. The historical circumstances of Mesopotamia in the late third millennium B.C.E. introduce constraints and conditions that cannot be excluded from an account of ritual practices related to royal images.

This brings us to the issue of context and the argument of Kelly (1988:40) and Kelly and Kaplan (1990:139) that ritual systems must be seen as historical phenomena. Insofar as ritual has been understood as the repetitive performance of highly conventionalized form, studies of ritual have tended to assume conservatism and hence continuity in both form and meaning over time. However, as Kelly notes, rituals are also performed at concrete moments, in specific places, by agents with historical identities. He not only contends that ritual form can change (often in the face of public assertions of unchanging tradition and denials of historical agency); he also argues that ritual as performed in real time and real space is itself history-making to the extent that it serves to fix social relations. Indeed, to have any understanding of ritual at all, it is necessary to consider "the historical construction and reconstruction of ritual systems, and also the crucial role of ritual in praxis" (1988:54).

I believe the Mesopotamian case has something to contribute to this discussion. First, in a long diachronic sequence it provides evidence for a tradition of consecration of Sumerian royal statues over a period of at least 500 years. Second, it documents some major shifts that emphasize the possibilities of creative change in ritual practice. And third, it provides evidence for concomitant shifts in political organization, which permits us to argue for both a reflective and an affective role for ritual. In addition, the specific series of ritual acts that served to animate and maintain royal (and also divine) images in Mesopotamia permit us to distinguish a subset of ritual activities that I would call "rites of constitution," that is, rituals without the performance of which the object would not be what it has been designed to be.

The statues of Gudea of Lagash remain the most complete documentation we have of the ritual processes associated with royal imagery; however, they stand neither at the beginning nor the end of the sequence. Votive statues with brief labelling texts identifying rulers, as well as texts describing the making and care of statues, are known from at least the Early Dynastic Period, ca. 2500 B.C.E. These include examples from Gudea's own state of Lagash (cf. Spycket 1981: figure 54; Steible 1982: Urnanše 24). A few inscribed statues and textual

references to others now lost are also preserved from later dynasties of Ur, Isin, and Larsa that bracket the turn of the third to the second millennium (see for example, Civil and Zettler 1989; Steible 1991: Šulgi 25,26,27; Ibbisu'en 3). Nevertheless, it is the Gudea material that represents the point of departure, because the corpus of inscriptional as well as sculptural finds together enable us to reconstruct the meaning and function of these images.

The city-state over which Gudea ruled was one of the most important of early Mesopotamia. Its territory was considerable, including several satellite cities and towns, of which the site of Tello (ancient Girsu), where the statues were found, was one of the largest (Falkenstein 1971:676). Girsu was the center of the cult of the god Ningirsu, tutelary deity of the state, and temples to that god and other related deities were prominent in the town, many of them built or reconstructed by Gudea himself. Throughout his reign, which can be documented for at least 11 years (though it may have been longer),⁶ Gudea consistently took the title *ensi* ("governor" or "steward" in Sumerian) rather than *lugal* ("king"). This practice does not suggest any diminished status, however. It can be shown that different city-states in ancient Mesopotamia had different traditions in nomenclature, with a consistent preference throughout the historical sequence in Lagash for the term that emphasized the ruler's stewardship vis-à-vis the tutelary deity, who in title at least was the primary ruler of the state. Thus, Gudea as *ensi* was at the top of his state's administrative hierarchy, entirely comparable to rulers called *lugal* in other states, such as Ur. Indeed, in at least one inscription of Gudea's reign (Falkenstein 1971:677), he is actually referred to as "king." I mention this practice because only those individuals (or their wives) who did stand at the top of their respective hierarchies seem to have inscribed their statues. It is important for our purposes to establish equality between rulers despite any differences in their public titles. For this reason, I prefer to call all such individuals "rulers" without specifying the titles they themselves assume.

Unfortunately, virtually all of the statues of Gudea uncovered in legitimate excavation at Tello were found in a secondary context. They were gathered in antiquity to stand in the courtyard of the palace of a ruler of the second century B.C.E. (cf. fig. 2; see also the discussion in Parrot 1948:152-6).⁷ Nevertheless, each inscribed figure names the deity to whom the image was dedicated, and in several cases we are told that, and where, the statue was intended to be placed in the deity's temple.

The inscribed statues also include in their dedications a description of the bringing of the highly prized diorite stone (*na4 esi*) from a land to the southeast, the creation of the image, the name given to the image (in which is contained some positive aspect of Gudea to be kept

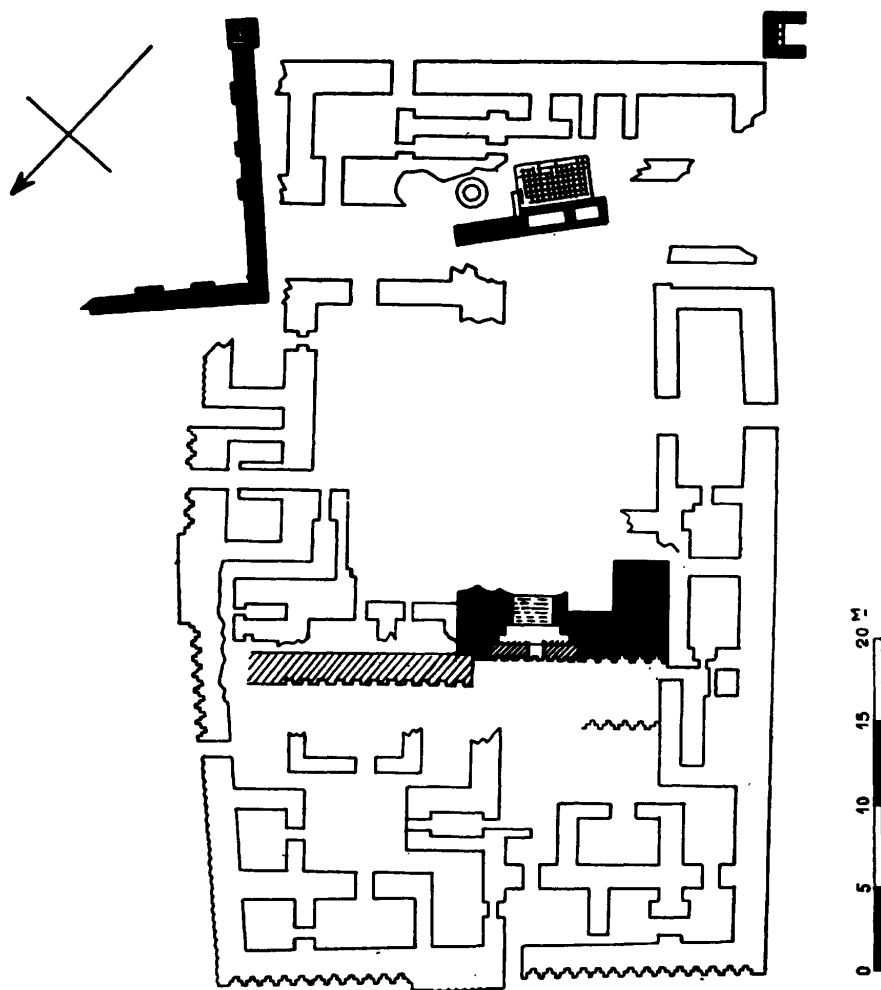


Figure 2. Plan, palace of Adad-Nadin-Aḫḫe (2nd c. B.C.E.), with part of foundations of Gudea temple (ca. 2100 B.C.E.) in dark, solid lines, visible in courtyard. Tello, Mound A. (= Parrot 1948: Figure 33b).



Figure 3. Ur-Ningirsu, son of Gudea, standing. Dedicated to the god Ningišzida. Found at Tello during clandestine excavations of 1924. Gypseous alabaster; ht. 0.46 M. (Louvre, AO 9504).

in mind before the god), and a record of the statue being brought into the temple. In the most complete text, that of the seated Statue B (see fig. 1), we are told specifically that the image is to be set up in a shrine associated with libations (the *ki-a-nag*) within the temple of the god Ningirsu. We are given a list of foodstuffs, regular offerings (*sa₂-du₁₁*) from the temple stores with which the image is to be provided in perpetuity (cf. Steible 1991: SB.7.10-20, 55; 1.8-12). In this text, as the image is brought into the temple, Gudea the *ensi* gives the command (literally, "puts the word") to Gudea the *alam*: "Image, to my lord [the god Ningirsu], speak!" (7.21-25). He then proceeds to enumerate his pious deeds so they may be communicated to the god. At the end of the recitation we are told that he (Gudea) installed the image (in order) that it recite his words/perform his command. (7.47-48).

Implicit in this passage is the understanding that in the course of its making the statue has undergone a process of animation in order to be able to engage in direct discourse with the deity. Here we may begin to investigate the ritual actions associated with these and related statues. Circumstantial and direct evidence from the statuary inscriptions, plus evidence available from other texts, suggests three points at which the images are the recipients of ritual attention: (1) rituals of making or consecration; (2) rituals associated with passage of the image into the temple and installation in the shrine; and (3) placement and ritual maintenance of the installed image.

RITUALS OF MAKING OR CONSECRATION

A primary clue to the animated nature of these royal images is contained in the texts of the Gudea and Ur-Ningirsu statues themselves (e.g., Figs. 1, 3, 4 & 7). Whereas cult paraphernalia, stone stelae, and even protective stone gateway lions are described with the standard Sumerian verb for making [*dim₂*], a different verb [*tud*] is used to refer to the making of the statues.⁸ This distinction is not unique to the Gudea dynasty; it can be demonstrated both earlier (Steible 1982: Urnanše 24) and later (Steible 1991: Šulgi 26.13; Lugirizal 1.rs.1) in Sumerian texts, continuing into the first millennium B.C.E. with the Akkadian equivalent *walādu* (cf. B.N. Porter n.d.:5), and is used *only* when stone images of human or divine figures are involved. The verbs used designate birth. Indeed, on one of the Gudea statues dedicated to the goddess Ninhursag, who is associated with birth and fertility, the goddess is referred to by epithet as "Divine lady of birth [*dingir nin.tud*], mother of the gods" (Steible 1991: SA 3.5-6). And when Gudea himself is provided with the epithet: "Legitimate son [*dumu tu-da*] of the god Gatumdu", it is expressed through the verbal form that

indicates physical birthing (SB 2.16-17). When Gudea says of Statue B that he brought precious diorite from the land of Magan and created of it his image [alam-ni-še₃ mu-tud], the engendered and animate nature of the image is evident.

Far more explicit information about the ritual process of animation undergone by images upon their physical completion is to be found in bilingual texts in Sumerian and Akkadian of later Babylonian and Assyrian origin (see Smith 1925; Ebeling 1931:esp. 100ff.).⁹ Although the Sumerian version is concerned with the making of divine rather than royal images, the statue [alam] is described not as having been "made" on earth, but as having been "born" in heaven, using a form of the verb tud (Tablet 4, line 23a in the Assyrian version; Smith 1925:obverse lines 3-4, for the Babylonian). At the same time, it is made clear that the mere physical form of the image is not sufficient. One of the incantations to be recited in the course of the ritual is called "Sacred/pure image [alam.ku] *perfected* by a great ritual" (Smith 1925: Rev.48; emphasis mine), which emphasizes the role of the ritual process for completing the image.

Starting out in the workshop where the image was made and then proceeding outdoors to the riverbank, the image was subject to a series of ritual actions over the course of a night. In a penetrating analysis Peg Boden has suggested that the action recapitulates a birth the next morning.¹⁰ The ritual actions are accompanied by incantations of which only the first line is given. Presumably, the officiating priests would have known the complete texts of each. In the Assyrian bilingual version the rituals serve to "open the mouth" of the image (Sum. ka.duḥ-ḥa; Akk. *pīt pī*; cf. Tablet 4, ll. 14-15), thereby rendering it vital.

While these texts are known only in late, first millennium B.C.E. copies, they clearly preserve kernels of much older material (Civil 1967:211). A text of the last ruler of the Ur III dynasty, Ibbi-Su'en, from Ur, attests to this ritual in the third millennium in the king's account of his dedication of a gold vessel or basin to be used in the bathing festival of the moon-god Nanna in the "place of the mouth-opening ritual" (Steible 1991:Ibbisu'en A9-10.17-27).¹¹ Furthermore, buried in economic texts of the Ur III period (ca. 2050 B.C.E.) from Tello are references to provisions for performances of the "mouth-opening" ritual to statues of the deceased and now-deified Gudea. These references both attest to the ritual and also suggest that it was repeated after the initial consecration, presumably as renewal.¹²

In the Babylonian version of the mouth-opening ritual (Smith 1925: line 53) the statue's eye—always prominent in Sumerian sculpture (see fig. 3)—is also ritually opened. Once the mouth has been opened, the image may be offered food to eat (Tablet 4,l.19). Once the eye is opened, the incantations that follow, "In your going forth..." and "Image born in heaven..." (Smith 1925: ll.53-54), suggest that the statue is now fully

animate. There follows a plea directed to the image itself not to *stay* in heaven, but to "Enter the form...." (Smith 1925:11.56-7).¹³ This I understand to be the final invocation of the essence of the deity into the image. Another late bilingual text actually states that "the image without the mouth-opening ritual [ka-nu-duh.u3.da] cannot smell the [offered] incense" (CAD Ş, 1962:78). This last reference makes absolutely clear the process of enlivening effected by the mouth-opening ritual and the animate presence henceforth in the image. Considering the verb used for their creation and their subsequent animation, a similar presence must have been called into the images of rulers as well, and this manifest essence was most likely reflected in inscriptions that make a point of describing such images as endowed with the ruler's own features (cf. Frayne 1990: 67, vi.6'-10').¹⁴ Finally, one quite explicit reference comes from a text of about 100 years after Gudea, in which a ruler of Larsa states concerning a votive image, "Having entered the temple, may it [the *alam*] be a living thing in the temple!" (Frayne 1990:195.v.3'-4'), thus making clear the animate nature of the non-divine figure as well.

RITUALS OF INSTALLATION

Upon animation, the image can be both fed and adorned. At this point it is ready to be brought to the temple, where special offerings and ritual acts accompany its entrance into the sanctuary. The late Assyrian and Babylonian bilingual texts discussed above deal with the entrance of images of divinities into the temples, however, since we know that the royal statues were also placed in the temple (cf. discussion below), we may infer that they, too, underwent some special ceremony to mark this transition into sacred space.

In the Babylonian version of the mouth-opening ritual, once the deity has been invoked into the image, it is brought in procession to the temple, accompanied by incantations related to the process of transit (Smith 1925:1.59). At the gate of the temple offerings are made, and the god is led into the shrine (Smith 1925:11.60-61). The installation is complete only when the deity (the image) is placed upon a throne, covered by a canopy, a repetition of the ritual of the washing of the mouth has been performed, and the god has been fed in the new abode (Smith 1925: 61-65). From this point on, the god is treated as a living person, fed, adorned, and cared for with rites and actions appropriate to daily and festival worship (cf. Oppenheim 1964:184). This ritual of installation, including the transition from outside to inside the shrine, seems to illustrate Turner's (1969:94ff.) concept of liminality in the crossing of the threshold. Unfortunately, however, of the rituals

associated with images, both royal and divine, it is the one least well-documented in the literature.

Nevertheless, it is useful to signal this important juncture in the hope that further evidence may become available. The phrase used in our late Babylonian text, "taking the hand of the god" (Smith 1925:60), is one known from other texts to indicate procession of the divine image (cf. Black 1981:56). It seems appropriate to suggest as a working hypothesis that royal statues introduced into the temple would have been subject to rituals of installation, just as the divine images were. There is evidence that some kings of the period actually underwent highly ritualized coronations and consecration in the temple when they assumed office (cf. Klein [1991] for Šulgi of the Third dynasty of Ur. We also know that on occasions such as the installation of a new chief priest or priestess (en) in the cult of a deity, sacrifices were made at the temple gate to mark the initial entrance of the new functionary (Arnaud 1986). If we put this fact together with the suggestion of Renger (1967:120) that the occasion of the installation of a new en-priestess may also have been the occasion of the setting up of her statue in the temple, we may leave open a similar possibility for the installation of at least some royal images as well. In any event, that the entrance of the statue into the temple was part of the formulaic account on all of the inscribed Gudea images and is emphatically referred to in many texts describing the making of royal statues¹⁵ does suggest that the installation was both distinct from and the culmination of the process of making such images. And since neither the deity as image nor the living ruler was fully installed until enthroned and attended by ritual activities, we may also argue for a similar ritual process upon the occasion of the installation of the royal image.

PLACEMENT AND RITUAL MAINTENANCE OF THE INSTALLED IMAGE

The most eloquent reference to a non-divine image in the temple is the one cited above in a text of Sin-iqišam of Larsa, who ruled in the early 2nd millennium. He declares that the votive image, once brought in, should be a living thing in the temple (Frayne 1990: 195.v.3'-4'). Other sources suggest that there were at least three places where royal statues would have been installed in early Mesopotamia: (1) the god's shrine, (2) the *ki-a-nag*, literally, the "place of libation", or funerary chapel, to the deceased ruler, and (3) during the Ur III period, in a shrine to the living ruler.

Placement of worshippers' statues in shrines is attested in Mesopotamia from the Early Dynastic period (see Winter 1991:64). The multiple images of Gudea with their various dedications suggests that

the ruler would have been represented not just in the shrine of the dominant deity but in each important shrine. Later, when Ur had hegemony over Gudea's state of Lagash, a text found at Tello records offerings to three images of the king Šu-Sin: one each in the temples of the principle Lagash deities, Ningirsu and Baba, and one for a temple dedicated to Šu-Sin himself (de Genouillac 1910:793). If this pattern were repeated in every major city-state over which Ur had hegemony, as well as within the capital city of Ur, then there must have been a huge number of such images for each reign.¹⁶ That we have relatively few preserved may well be because many were made of precious metals and would have been subject to later appropriation and melting for re-use.¹⁷

Steible (1988) has pointed out that the ten diorite statues of Gudea found gathered in the later palace in Tello seem to go in pairs: one seated and one standing image per deity. Only the chief god Ningirsu has four: two standing and two seated. The standing images, with only one exception (Statue A), have their inscriptions contained on the back (Statues C, E, G and K), as does the statue of Gudea's son, Ur-Ningirsu (fig. 4). This pattern is quite remarkable when contrasted with known seated images, whose inscriptions tend to be either on the front of the skirt or circle the statue front and back (see Statues B [fig. 1], D [fig. 7], F, H, and I). When this observation is put together with evidence that the *seated* position indicates dominant status in Mesopotamian representations (cf. Winter 1987:71), and that rulers in the presence of the deity are shown standing before the seated god,¹⁸ then we may suggest that it is most likely the *standing* Gudea images that were placed before the divine image in the god's shrine.

Textual evidence supports such a reconstruction. In a 1st millennium text the Assyrian ruler Assurnasirpal II tells us that he created his "royal image with a likeness of his own countenance" and placed it before the god Ninurta (Grayson 1976: 679). Even more apt are the lines in a hymn composed for Šulgi of Ur, in which we are told that the king's image, "made brilliant like the heavenly stars," was set up "before the good eyes" of the god Enlil at Nippur (Klein 1991:308). While not all standing images may have been placed in the cella, this fact would certainly account for those images of Gudea and his son on which inscriptions are confined to the back, as presumably the royal image would be situated in a privileged place facing the deity (as in fig. 3) and thus be seen and identified from behind by anyone else in the space (see fig. 4).¹⁹

The function of royal images placed before a god is apparent from the messages embedded in the name given to each image, for instance, "...Ningirsu has decreed a long life for Gudea..." (Statue D, fig. 7; see Steible 1991:SD.5.2-7), and in the command to speak directly to the deity explicit on Statue B. From a text dated to the reign of a late ruler

in Gudea's dynasty, we learn that the deity is entreated to turn an ear to the ruler, that is, respond to him with favor (Steible 1991:Nammahni 1; cf. Winter 1991:66). If a statue of Šulgi holding a libation vessel (Civil and Zettler 1989) is included in the repertoire, then there may also have been instances in which the ruler's image was intended to be performing in perpetuity some of the cultic functions carried out by the living king for the deity (Klein 1991:296; cf. fig. 5).

By contrast the text of the *seated* Gudea Statue B tells us explicitly that the image is to be set in a place designated the *ki-a-nag* (Steible 1991:SB.7.55). The Sumerian refers literally to a place (*ki*) of the pouring (*nag*) of water (*a*), and when mentioned in conjunction with royal names, seems to be associated with libations in memory of deceased individuals. Although not fully understood, the *ki-a-nag* seems to be the locus of funerary activities, in which liquid offerings were made to the deceased (cf. Michalowski 1977:221). At the same time, at the end of Statue B's inscription it is stated that the image was in the Eninnu, which is known to be the principal shrine of the god Ningirsu in Girsu (Steible 1991: SB.7.60-1). Therefore, at least in this case, the place of the ruler's *ki-a-nag* was in the temple.

Such funerary "chapels" are attested from the Early Dynastic period (see Behrens 1987; Bauer 1969) and continue through the Ur III period, during which we have mention of the *ki-a-nags* of deceased Ur III kings by their successors (Michalowski 1977). It makes good sense that such a chapel would house an image of the deceased as a focus for commemorative cultic activity (cf. Spycket 1968:59ff). In this regard, it is important to keep in mind that the Gudea Statue B destined for the *ki-a-nag* is a seated figure (fig. 1). It is therefore possible to suggest that, just as the standing Gudeas were those most likely to have been placed in attendance upon divine images, the seated figures, while equally empowered to speak directly to the gods, would themselves have been the objects of cultic attention.

The purpose of such a cult is clear when we read the aspiration expressed in the inscriptions of Gudea Statues I and P, namely, that his name not be forgotten (literally, "that his name be called") in conjunction with references to the libations poured in the *ki-a-nag*, which are said to open up channels to the underworld, as "Water of the Name-calling" (cf. Steible 1991:64, n. 15).²⁰ In other words, these are rituals of commemoration.

What is not clear is for how long such libations were poured—in perpetuity, for the duration of a particular dynasty, or (in the case of Gudea's dynasty commemorated by the kings of Ur III) for a recent but valued past. In all or any of these cases, it is evident that continuing ceremonies to deceased rulers in the *ki-a-nag* would have functioned on at least two levels. While obviously serving to perpetuate the name of a particular individual, they also, by evoking previous rulers, celebrate

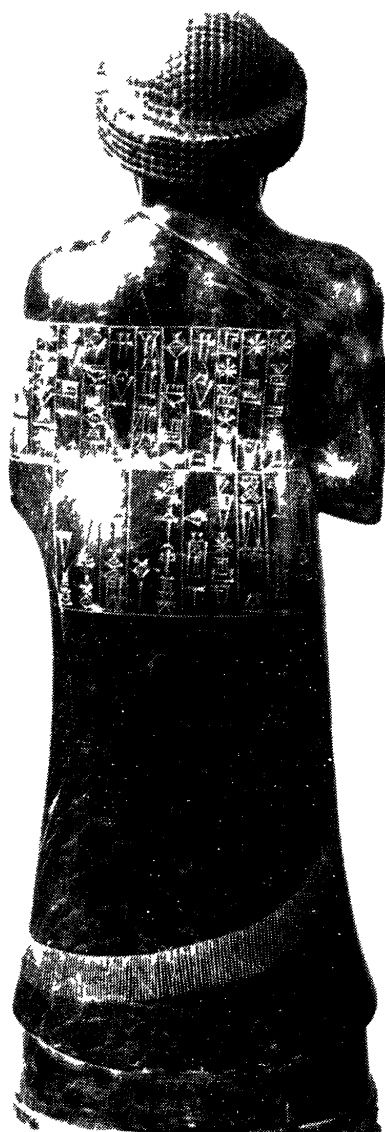


Figure 4 U1-Ningirsu (cf Figure 3), rear view Inscription picked out in white chalk



Figure 5. Stele of Ur-Nammu, first king of Third Dynasty of Ur. Detail, second register. Found at Ur in precinct of the moon-god, Nanna. Limestone; ht. of whole, ca. 3 M. (University Museum, Philadelphia, CBS 16676).

as well a dynasty and/or the very institution of rule. Put this way, it is clear that succeeding rulers would have been heavily invested in these commemorative practices.

From the middle of the reign of Šulgi on, rulers of the Third Dynasty of Ur were deified. The epithet, "god of the land," was added to their royal titulary (Wilcke 1974:179), and they received worship during their lifetime, not just after death. Textual evidence from Tello (Steible 1991:Šu-Sin 13) and an inscribed building excavated at Ešnunna (Frankfort et al. 1940; fig. 6) make clear that temples to the ruler Šu-Sin existed in cities outside of Ur, and it is most likely that shrines to the rulers existed inside the capital as well.²¹

The similarity of the main shrine plan of Šu-Sin's temple at Ešnunna (fig. 6) to the incomplete remains of the facade of a Gudea temple uncovered at Tello within the foundations of the late palace in which so many of the Gudea statues were uncovered (fig. 2) makes it rather tempting to wonder whether Gudea, too, might not have been enshrined during his lifetime. We know that the relatively small seated Gudea B (.93 cm. without head) was destined for the funerary chapel. The colossal seated Gudea D (1M.58 without head; fig. 7), given its scale, is the most likely candidate for occupying a dedicated shrine of its own. It would then have been placed in a niche in the cella not unlike that preserved in the Šu-Sin temple. Against such a reconstruction is the argument (as in Hallo 1990:63) that royal images would only have been in worship during their lifetime in a period when rulers were deified. It must be remembered, however, that at least two Akkadian rulers preceding Gudea had been deified (58), and it is not impossible that practices related to royal statues during that time were maintained by Gudea, whose own practices would then have prefigured those of the kings of Ur to come, as we know was true in other domains (Klein 1989).

In any case, during Ur III and in the subsequent Isin and Larsa periods we have extensive records not only of ritual libations but food offerings to royal images in both temples and funerary chapels (Bauer 1969; Kutscher 1974; Wilcke 1974:n.57; Lafont and Yildiz 1989: 791,875, 973; Civil and Zettler 1989; Frayne 1990:192.iv.1-8, 196.v.12'-16';). Indeed, the Ur III rulers continue to allocate offerings to images or the *ki-a-nag* of Gudea and his dynasty in Girsu (Tello) after the Ur dynasty takes over (Perlov 1980; Lafont and Yildiz 1989:791,886,985,1021-2; Nies 1920:39).

These offerings, consisting variously of breads, beer, meat, fish, milk, cheese, clarified butter, honey, and dates, replicated offerings made to the gods (Steible 1982: Urnanše 24, 26). Some rations were provided daily, others at the new and full moon and at particular festivals (Oppenheim 1964:187; Lafont & Yildiz 1989:875,973). They were often accompanied by gifts of clothing, jewels, and other objects

(Bauer 1969; Civil and Zettler 1989). Again, the text of Gudea Statue B is most explicit. The very first column, separated from the rest of the text, describes the beer, bread, and grains that are to be provided the image (alam-Gudea) in the ki-a-nag as regular offerings (sa₂-du₁₁) in perpetuity from the stores of the Ningirsu temple (Steible 1991:SB.1.1-20). This practice, as Steible has noted (1988), echoes Early Dynastic practice as preserved on a statue inscription of an earlier ruler of Lagash (cf. Steible 1982: Entemena 1).

Statues of rulers set in gods' shrines also received food offerings, according to Early Dynastic period texts (Bauer 1969:III) and later, Neo-Babylonian texts of the 6th century B.C.E. (Beaulieu 1989:133ff.). Since royal images within the gods' shrines were called upon to be no less animate than those of the gods whom they faced, obviously they too required provisions.

That provisioning was not merely a secular enterprise is suggested by the fact that included in the temple personnel was a specific office, that of the gu_{du}₄-priest, charged with the care and feeding of the image (J. Westenholz, personal communication; see also Oppenheim 1964:187). In addition "kitchen" facilities for temples are referred to in texts as providing provisions for the gods (Frayne 1990:141-2), and actually have been found adjacent to at least one major shrine (Trumpelmann 1990), along with offering tables within the temple complex (Jacobsen 1989:85). The sacred nature of the offerings is further suggested by the timing of offerings at important junctures of the lunar calendar and festivals, including the festival days of the kings represented (cf. Lafont and Yildiz 1989:875; Genouillac 1910:5271, and cf. endnote 8). As with the food provided to the image at consecration, then, the daily and festival provisioning of the image would have been a fundamental part of ritual activity.

Thus, textual references to ritual activities marking the moments of consecration, installation, and the subsequent maintenance of the royal image in Mesopotamia demonstrate that from the moment of creation, the image was indeed enmeshed in a ritual context that continued throughout its existence. While details of this have been known for some time within ancient Near Eastern studies, the entire sequence has not, to my knowledge, been put together as a framework for understanding Mesopotamian sculpture. This focus on a ritually consecrated and maintained image may be seen as one of the Mesopotamian contributions to the broader study of royal ritual in general.

The presence of the royal image as votary in the god's sanctuary both speaks to a need for the god's munificence and also testifies to a special relationship between the ruler and the divine. It makes manifest a ruler's privileged mediating role between the gods and the people, a status sanctioned in the Mesopotamian cosmology. At the same

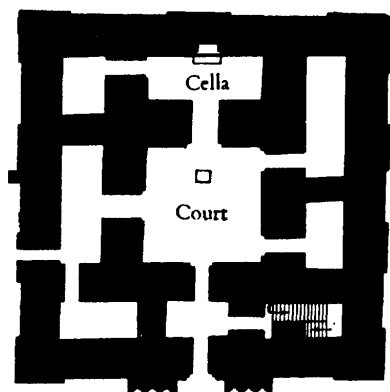


Figure 6. Plan of temple to Šu-Sin, fourth king of Third Dynasty of Ur (ca. 2030 B.C.E.). Tell Asmar (ancient Ešnunna). (=Frankfort et al. 1940: Pl. II).



Figure 7. Gudea D, seated. Dedicated to the god Ningirsu. Found at Tello in palace courtyard. Diorite; ht. 1.58 M. (Louvre, AO 1).

time, I would also argue that the royal image is affective, and serves to reinforce the hierarchical order that privileges the ruler through its very presence in the shrine. The ruler's image in the god's shrine is not only the result of his special status, it also works to establish that special status. Similarly, the maintenance of a funerary cult of deceased rulers not only serves to perpetuate the memory of a particular individual but it also emphasizes the continuity in, and the essential role of, the institution of rulership by virtue of the focusing of resources and ritual attention carried out by subsequent rulers.

From ca. 2100 to ca. 2010 B.C.E., within the Ur III period, royal images were introduced into worship during the lifetime of the ruler. This shift in ritual practice occurs parallel to the deification of the ruler in that period. I have argued elsewhere (1987) that elevation to divine status is a function of the development of the nation-state and the need of the ruler to rise in status above previously equal rulers of once autonomous city-states now under the hegemony of a single center. If so, then it may be proposed that the concomitant increase of ritual contexts for royal images co-varies with, and indeed serves, this increase in royal status. To the extent that the ruler, as embodied in his image, is in worship, he is also inscribed in the world order at a level above that of any other mortal, giving him and the institution of rulership authority sanctioned by and answerable to the gods.

With Kuper (1972), Kelly (1988:54), Bell (1990:310) and others, then, I would argue that evidence for change in ritual processes over time (here, for example, the introduction of a divine ruler's image into direct worship) must be seen in relation to other historical phenomena (in this case, the capture of power by the ruler elsewhere in the society). In fact, the Mesopotamian situation during the Third Dynasty of Ur seems to exemplify the discursive relationship between ritual-in-politics and politics-in-ritual (Kelly and Kaplan 1990:141).

The linkages existing among politics, power, ritual practice, and religion have been underscored often (Holdredge 1990; Bell 1990; Abélès 1988; Kertzer 1988; Price 1984). Indeed, for Mesopotamia, Barbara N. Porter has argued that there are few ways to talk about politics other than in religious terms.

To the extent that the Ur III king is a god, he has been introduced into the religious (and political) domain with a new status. As the statues of Šulgi of Ur holding a libation vessel or sacrificial animal demonstrate, in the god's shrine he may still be a performer, but he is also now a recipient of worship. His divinization confers sanctity. As Rappaport argues (1971:69), sanctity confers "the quality of unquestionable truthfulness...to unverifiable propositions," and "people are more likely to accept sanctified messages than unsanctified ones as true." While there would be little dispute that the expanded context for the ritual treatment of royal images was reflective of sociopolitical

change in the Ur III period,²² I believe it is essential to underscore that such practice is also affective. Since the king is now divine, he has his own temples and images in worship; but equally, since the king has his own temples and images in worship, he is now divine. The practice itself functions as a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy. The worship of rulers (hence of royal images) in Ur III becomes one way not only of demonstrating, but of establishing (cf. Bloch 1989:198) royal authority as beyond challenge.

In all of the contexts in which royal statues functioned (particularly when in worship in their own shrines), I see their presence as part of a larger strategy, namely, the introduction of the ruler into, and the appropriation of, ritual space hitherto belonging to the god. Presence in the god's shrine constitutes power; it permits direct access to supra-human authority. Presence and service in the funerary chapel concentrates power through an investment of resources and attention that underscores not only the person but the institution of which the person was a representative. Presence in a shrine dedicated to the ruler himself confers power commensurate with the gods, thereby significantly increasing the position of the ruler in the social hierarchy.

What may be particular to the Mesopotamian situation is the power vested in the image of the ruler, the *alam-lugal*, as it takes its place in the various ritual contexts outlined above. Identified by likeness, inscription, and name *as* the ruler,²³ empowered and instructed *by* the ruler, ritually consecrated to *be* the ruler, the image plays upon representation and manifestation, man-made and heaven-born. At issue, therefore, is not only the relationship of ritual and politics to power, but that of representation to power, or what Marin (1988:6) has referred to as the power of presence both of and in the image. With the Gudeas in particular, to see the image merely as a substitute for the ruler, as has often been suggested, denies the levels of careful constructedness according to appropriate physical form (cf. Winter 1989) and consecration according to appropriate ritual action that together transform inert material into the animate subject, Gudea. The nature of the ritually empowered royal image is such that it brings signifier (the statue) and signified (the ruler) together in the same vehicle/sign, either to stand before a similarly manifest deity or sit itself in receipt of votive service.

As Marin has shown for the portraits of Louis XIV (1988:13), the Mesopotamian royal image is (1) the particular historical personage whose features it resembles and on whose body the name may be inscribed (Gudea); (2) the representative of a class, "ruler" (*ensi* of Lagash); and (3) a sacred, animate entity identical with its referent. As such, the royal image stands as the absolute embodiment of the ruler. Indeed, as Marin argues (8), the ruler is absolute *only* in his images.

The rituals of consecration, installation, and maintenance that differentiate Mesopotamian (and other) "manifestations" from European (and other) "representations" further intensify three simultaneous representational identities cited above, and underscore the *absolute* aspect of the image. I would distinguish the particular rituals I have described here from both rites of passage and rites of institution (Bourdieu 1991:117). Rather, they may be seen as rituals of *constitution* that first bring the image into "being" through its animation, then maintain that being. These rituals of constitution provide the context in which the Mesopotamian royal image exists and functions. They are constitutive insofar as by their performance (cf. Tambiah 1985) they constitute the object of the ritual's focus: in this case, the manifestation within the material form: in this case, the manifestation within the material form. They give the image its life—and its power.

The unusually long historical sequence of ritual practice associated with images in Mesopotamia permits us to document both continuity and change. Continuity in Sumerian practice is attested from the Early Dynastic period (ca. 2500 B.C.E.) through the Ur III period (ca. 2000 B.C.E.) and into the succeeding dynasties of Isin and Larsa in the early second millennium B.C.E. Akkadian texts of the later Assyrian and Babylonian periods show that many of these practices were still in place well into the mid-first millennium (see Porter, n.d.; Beaulieu 1989), extending the over 500-year Sumerian sequence into a pan-Mesopotamian sequence covering a period of some 2000 years.

I have concentrated in the present article on Sumerian material in the period at the end of the third millennium B.C.E., around the time of Gudea of Lagash, for that is when the best confluence of texts and archaeological finds happens to occur. The partly contemporary and immediately subsequent period of the Third Dynasty of Ur marks an important change, albeit short-lived. There was an increase in the places for images of rulers—adding independent royal shrines to gods' shrines and funerary chapels. This increase in venue can be correlated with social and political developments that culminated in the equally short-lived elevation of the ruler to divine status. The agency of the ruler in consciously and singularly manoeuvring strategic changes should not be over-valued, however. As Bourdieu has noted (1991:126), "The belief of everyone, which pre-exists ritual, is the condition for the effectiveness of ritual." Clearly, Mesopotamian belief included notions of ritual efficacy and of matter as the physical vehicle for manifesting essence.²⁴ In this belief system the royal (as well as the divine) image was born, lived, and was maintained in a constant ritual context of service and attendance. It has been the task of the present article to gather evidence that would demonstrate this claim to have been the case and at the same time to engage the recent literature on royal ritual through the introduction of the royal image, ritually constituted to *be*

the ruler. By arguing further that these images were affective as well as reflective, it is suggested that they served as the loci of a set of values and relationships, political no less than religious, around which functioned the entire Meso-potamian state.²⁵

NOTES

¹While we do have some information about divine images from religious and economic texts, especially in the later periods, and will draw on some of that data below, it is the royal images that are both attested in texts and found in the archaeological record. The reasons for this are many. Foremost, it would appear, is the fact that divine images were often made of wood, which would not be preserved, or of precious metals, which would have been subject to capture and re-use. It is certainly the case, as noted by Oppenheim almost 30 years ago (1964:183), that "the role and function of the divine image in [Mesopotamian] civilization have never been considered important enough to merit a systematic scholarly investigation." It is my hope eventually to address this problem. The present inquiry into better-attested royal images should provide a foundation for such an undertaking.

²For the most complete text, that on Statue B (fig. 1), see Steible (1991:156-179).

³It is conventional to set Sumerian words in bold type.

⁴Akkadian terms are conventionally underlined.

⁵Here I differ from the Chicago Assyrian Dictionary, which "translates" *šalmu* = *alam* as "statue in the round, relief, drawing, figurine, likeness, constellation". Rather, I would say the term is used in reference to all of these media without distinguishing one from the other, because in fact it means "representation" or "image."

⁶The dates of Gudea have recently been opened to discussion. Falkenstein (1971), Steible (personal communication), and others think it likely he reigned as long as 20 years. It now appears that Gudea's rule in Lagash had to overlap the Third Dynasty of Ur by at least 10 years, perhaps more (cf. Steinkeller 1988). This conclusion will have important consequences for our understanding of the special relationship of the kings of Ur to Lagash and the funerary cult of Gudea. If indeed Gudea did rule some 20 years, then tentatively ca. 2120-2100 now seem the most likely years of his reign.

⁷Some nine or ten statues or parts thereof were recovered from the palace courtyard. An additional ten figures are known. Several, along with the figure of Ur-Ningirsu (figs. 3 and 4), seem to have been the fruits of clandestine digging at Tello in 1924. The authenticity of some others has been questioned (Johansen 1978:29 *et passim*). Since these latter do not substantially change or add to the points I shall make below, I will confine my discussion to works whose origins have not been questioned.

⁸See, for example, Steible (1991:Gudea SB.6.9-10 and 17-18); compare with 7.10-13; Ur-Ningirsu II.6.

⁹These texts were restudied in the Ph.D. dissertation of Christopher Walker and are being prepared by him for publication. I am grateful to have seen copies of the texts in the files of the Philadelphia Sumerian Dictionary, and to have had an occasion to read through the texts with Markham Geller of the University of London in 1988.

¹⁰I am most grateful to Ms. Boden, a graduate student at Johns Hopkins University, for having shown me a copy of her paper, which draws upon Arnold van Gennep's *Rites of Passage* to suggest the metaphorical birthing of the image through ritual.

¹¹Here I am grateful to Piotr Steinkeller, Harvard University, and Åke Sjöberg, University of Pennsylvania, for their reading of line 25 as *ki dub-sen-e ka!-duh-hu-ba*.

¹²Noted by Civil (1967). Further references (generously provided by Piotr Steinkeller) in Ur III texts from Tello, record that the offerings provided for the *ka-duh-ha* of the Gudea images occur in each case in the 3rd month, suggesting that it was performed regularly and annually (see, for example, de Genouillac 1910:6927, dated to the second year of *Su-Sin*).

¹³For the last portion I am indebted to the reading of Peg Boden.

¹⁴While we cannot suggest anything like true portraiture for Mesopotamian statues, it has long been pointed out that the chin and broad face of Gudea (cf., for example, Winter 1989:figure 2) and the resemblance of his son, Ur-Ningursu (fig. 3) seem too consistent to be merely idealized form and must contain some referent to actual features. Perhaps the best way to understand this is as "signature elements" that signal salient aspects of the individual and thus are tied to his or her person, while still retaining an overall idealized general form of face or body.

¹⁵The lines stating that the image was "created" are always followed by the giving of a name to the image and then the final statement: "[and] into the temple [e₂-a] he [Gudea as agent] brought [literally, entered] it [mu-na-ni-ku₄]." Compare Steible (1991: Gudea SA 4.4). Frayne cites similar formulae for statues of later kings of Larsa (e.g., 1990: Sin-iddinam 12.13-15).

¹⁶For example, for one of the early Ur III rulers, Šulgi, at least three inscribed stone statues are known, two from Ur, the third of uncertain provenance (cf. Steible 1991: Šulgi 25, 26; Civil and Zettler 1989:27).

¹⁷Texts of the reign of *Su-Sin* of Ur tell us that the ruler had his statue made of the gold he brought home as booty from a victorious military campaign (Kutscher 1989:73). A slightly later ruler from Larsa recorded 14 bronze statues brought into Nippur in a given year, along with three gold thrones and gold statues of two deities (Frayne 1990:192f.). Many year-names of rulers similarly record events including the presentation of gold and/or bronze images, none of which has ever been found.

¹⁸As on Gudea's own cylinder seal and on a detail of the stele of Ur III ruler, Ur-Nammu (fig. 5).

¹⁹Texts describing some royal images of the Isin-Larsa period (early 2nd millennium) clearly state that they were intended for the temple courtyard (cf. Frayne 1990:67,86). At least one of these explicitly describes the king holding a votive goat for sacrifice (67, vi.8', comparable to a known statue of Sulgi of Ur holding a kid; Barrelet 1974: figure 3a). Placement in the temple courtyard for such images makes perfect sense, since we know animal sacrifices were conducted outside the cella (Arnaud 1986). Within the cella, or indeed in the courtyard as well, one may imagine that it could get rather crowded with images of successive rulers, and there must have been some protocol for ceding pride of place to the figure of the reigning ruler. A glimpse of intention to the contrary is seen in some of the curse-formulae related to statues that claim a place in perpetuity. An example is recorded at the end of the 3rd millennium by a ruler of Larsa for the cult center of Nippur. He instructs any future king not to displace a statue from its dedicatory location, nor to place it in a storehouse, and certainly not to stand his own statue in that place (Frayne 1990: Sin-iqisam 1). Similarly, a text of Amar-Sin of the Third Dynasty of Ur curses any man who changes the place of his (Amar-Sin's) image, or tears out its socle (Steible 1991: Amarsu'en 3).

²⁰The desire or need to be remembered is even more explicitly stated in a text of Hammurabi, ruler of Babylon in the early 2nd millennium, which describes a part of his building program. The text is preserved in two copies and ends with a statement of the consequences of his building: "My good name, [which] like [that of] a god [is] to be said daily [and] which for all times should never be forgotten in the mouth of the people, truly I established [it]" (cf. Frayne 1990:336, lines 75-81.)

²¹Wilcke (1974:179-80 and notes 51 and 57) points out the possibility of temples to Sulgi in Girsu, Umma and Ur, and cites offerings to four statues of the founder of the Ur III dynasty, Ur-Nammu.

²²Kertzer (1990:350) has reviewed the issue of the relationship between political change and ritual change in the legitimization of authority.

²³Many of the statues are identified by a brief label on the shoulder, for instance, "Gudea, ensi of Lagash" (Steible 1990:Statues A and E), then given a ritual name in the longer text inscribed over the body, for example, " 'My lady [the goddess Baba], you have raised me up! Grant me life! On the appointed day have I built [your temple], ' is its (the statue's) name" (Steible 1990:Statue E.9.1- 4).

²⁴A number of texts state explicitly that when the ruler is well-received by the god, the reward is not his alone. Abundance of harvest, good health and prosperity are assured for his people (e.g., Gudea cylinder A: Jacobsen 1987:A.9.1-18). That these are all official and public state texts does not necessarily imply that the sentiments expressed were not also popularly held to be true. Only in cases where there is evidence to show the division between popular sentiment and political assertion (as in Porter, n.d.) can we speak of propaganda or rhetoric as distinct from belief.

²⁵I am grateful to a number of individuals for their part in providing stimuli, sources, help and criticism, particularly H. Behrens, P. Boden,

M. Civil, M. Geller, R. C. Hunt, Barbara A. Porter, Barbara N. Porter, A. Sjöberg, P. Steinkeller. In addition, although the present article does not pursue comparative materials, I should like to acknowledge the extraordinarily enabling experiences I have had in discussing related issues and in observing ritual treatment of images in India, particularly in the Radharamana Temple of the Sri Caitanya Prema Sansthana, Vrindaban, and to thank specifically Kapila Vatsyayan, Srivatsa Goswami, and Asim Krishna Das for their generosity of time and resources. I would not have sought much of the Mesopotamian evidence had I not been prepared by current Hindu practice.

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