

Complex Genealogies in Mesopotamia: From Mesilim to Tukultī-Ninurta I

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Abstract. *The current article examines four case studies of complex genealogies in Mesopotamia from the 3rd and 2nd millennia BCE. The first three case studies are focused on the complex genealogies used by 3rd millennium BC kings in the Early Dynastic Period III, in Lagaš II, and in the period of 3rd Dynasty of Ur. The fourth case study deals with Assyrian king Tukultī-Ninurta I (1242–1206 BCE).*

Rezumat. Autorii examinează patru studii de caz al unor genealogii complexe din Mesopotamia din mileniile III-II a.Chr. Primele trei cazuri se concentrează pe genealogiile complexe folosite de regii din mileniul al III-lea a.Chr. în Epoca Dinastică Timpurie III, în Lagaš II, și în perioada celei de-a treia dinastii din Ur. Al patrulea studiu de caz se ocupă cu regele asirian Tukultī-Ninurta I (1242–1206 a.Chr.).

Keywords: Complex, Genealogies, Mesopotamia, Sumer, Assyria, Mesilim, E-anatum, Gudea, Tukultī-Ninurta I, divine origin.

1. Introduction

This article outlines four case studies of complex genealogies in Ancient Mesopotamia. The first three case studies are devoted to the complex genealogies used by 3rd millennium BC rulers in the Early Dynastic Period III, in Lagaš II (Gudea and his dynasty), and in the Ur III period. The last and fourth case study will focus on Tukultī-Ninurta I, a Middle Assyrian ruler of the 2nd millennium BC who turned Assyria into an imperial power. In all cases we will look at rulers with “complex genealogies” transcending the usual mother-father concept for a variety of reasons. Our general impression is that special people tend to have special genealogies. In the conclusion we will summarize the main strategies and main outlines of complex genealogies in ancient Mesopotamia.

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1.1. Divine origin

The genealogies of Ancient Mesopotamian rulers have a tendency to be quite complex; they have been discussed in several earlier studies, with the focus on different aspects of genealogies. These studies discuss the underlying conception of parenthood, the religious-ideological use that specific rulers made of such concepts, and the special childhood of rulers in general.³ Besides their natural parents, some Sumerian and Akkadian rulers also mention divine ancestors.⁴ In the case of Gudea of Lagaš, they even claim to have had no human father and no human mother (Gudea Cylinder A iii 6–8).⁵

Such a claim is obviously based on the assumption that the ruler's predecessors or parents were gods or divine creatures.⁶ From that we can easily conclude that the ruler himself also had divine status as he inherited his divinity from his parents. However, most Mesopotamian rulers did not make such claims. With a few exceptions, Mesopotamian rulers did not use the classifier of divinity *diğir*⁷ ('divine', 'god') in front of their name or had themselves portrayed with the horned crown (the visual classifier of divinity).⁸ One of the few exceptions is the Old Akkadian king Narām-Sīn (23rd century BC) who declared himself a god,⁹ but in his surviving inscriptions we find no claim of him being the offspring of divine ancestors.

2. Early Dynastic period III

2.1. Awan and Kish

Mesilim

The first instance we want to discuss comes from Mesilim (Mesalim) of Awan (ca. 2600/2500 BC) (ED III) who also was recognized as *lugal Kiš*, "king of Kish"¹⁰, which means that he was hegemon over the northern part of Sumer. The inscription reads:

³ E.g. WILCKE 1989, 557–71; FINK 2013, 81–107; PONGRATZ-LEISTEN 1997, 75–108; WILSON 1977; BOCK 2012.

⁴ For a discussion of the divine selection of the ruler before birth see BOCK 2012, 4–28.

⁵ See discussion below.

⁶ SJÖBERG 1972, 87–112.

⁷ See, e.g., SELZ (2008, 15): "The divine classifier, the *DIĞIR*-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. However, in the third millennium the use of the *DIĞIR*-sign for marking divine names is still somewhat restricted."

⁸ On the topic of divine kingship in Mesopotamia see contributions in BRISCH 2008 and BRISCH 2013.

⁹ SAZONOV 2007, 330–333; FARBER 1983, 67–72.

¹⁰ MAEDA 1981, 1–17.

me-selim (DI) lugal-kiš dumu-^rki^ŋ-áḡ-^dnin-ḥur-sağ̄

Me-silim, King of Kish, beloved son of Ninhursaḡ.¹¹

Here Mesilim is clearly called child (dumu) of the goddess Ninhursaḡ. Without more context it is hard to give a convincing interpretation of the actual nature of the mother-child relationship of the king to this goddess, but it obviously expresses a very close relationship whether we interpret this statement in a biological or metaphorical way. In one way or another, Mesilim was definitely the child of Ninhursaḡ.

According to the rather scant evidence we can rely on today, Awan was a powerful state. In Mesilim's time it controlled large territories in Sumer, especially around Kish. Mesilim was probably an Elamite who originated from Awan.¹² He ruled over northern areas of Sumer, and perhaps his sphere of influence reached into the South.¹³ Even the city-state Lagaš in southern Sumer somehow recognized his sovereignty, as we see in texts from Lagaš that mention Mesilim as a mediator in the conflict between Lagaš and its neighbouring city-state Umma.¹⁴ Dietz Otto Edzard concluded that Mesilim was a well-known early-dynastic ruler whose fame is even reflected in proverbs, however the scarcity of sources does not allow us to claim him as an historical figure.¹⁵

Despite all this uncertainty, we can state that Mesilim was a famous and powerful ruler and that his extraordinary power was expressed by this divine genealogy¹⁶ and his special relationship to Ninhursaḡ.

2.2. Lagaš

From the late Early Dynastic period (ED IIIb) the most informative and most numerous royal inscriptions come from Lagaš which was ruled by one dynasty in this period. The first ruler of this dynasty was Ur-Nanshe, and Uru-KA-gina—the correct reading of his name is disputed—was the last Early Dynastic ruler of Lagaš.¹⁷ Inscriptions from this dynasty document the ongoing conflict with the neighbouring city of Umma.¹⁸

¹¹ RIME 1, Me-silim E1.8.1.3, p. 71, lines 1–4.

¹² HINZ 1977, 70.

¹³ Concerning Elamite-Sumerian relations see SELZ 1990, 27–43; POTTS 1982, 33–55.

¹⁴ RIME 1 En-metena E1.9.5.1, p. 195, Col. i 1–12. LIVERANI 2014, 112.

¹⁵ EDZARD 1997, 74.

¹⁶ REISMAN 1970, 21: “The practice of claiming divine parentage, without denying the human, originated in the Old Sumerian period. The first Mesopotamian ruler to claim divine parentage in his own royal inscription was Mesalim of Kiš, who styled himself as the ‘beloved son of Ninhursag’.”

¹⁷ RIME 1, 77–290; CRAWFORD 1977, 192–197.

¹⁸ For a reconstruction of this conflict between Lagaš and Umma see COOPER 1983.

E-anatum

E-anatum¹⁹ (2450–2425 BC) was first among the rulers of Lagaš who supposedly claimed to be of divine origin. In one of the most famous inscriptions from Early Dynastic times, the so-called Stele of the Vultures, E-anatum describes himself as the perfect king, designed by the gods in order to take revenge for the misdeeds of the neighbouring city of Umma.

[^dn]in-[ĝír]-sú-[k]e₄ [a]-^re^γ-[an]-na- túm -[ma] [šà-g]a [šu b]a-ni-du₁₁
 [The god Ni]n[gir]su [imp]lanted the [semen] for E-[a]natum in the [wom]b.²⁰

In the same inscription we also read about other ‘family’ connections between E-anatum and the gods:

^dnin-ḥur-sáğ-ke₄ ubur-zí-da-né ^rmu^γ-[na-lá]

The goddess Ninhursáğ [offered him] her wholesome breast.²¹

é-an-na-túm a-šà-ga-šu-du₁₁-ga- ^dnin-ĝír-sú -ka-da ^dnin-ĝír-sú mu-da húl

The god Ningirsu rejoiced over E-anatum, semen implanted in the womb by the god Ningirsu.²²

These phrases from a lengthy and sophisticated inscription of E-anatum (*E-anatum E1.9.3.1*), along with several instances from other inscriptions, demonstrate that E-anatum claimed to be of divine origin because he stated that the god Ningirsu, main protector of Lagaš, procreated him. E-anatum constantly accentuated in his inscriptions that his power was justified by the most important Sumerian gods Enlil, Ningirsu and Inanna.²³ No less important is the fact that E-anatum was *nourished with wholesome milk by the goddess Ninhursáğ* (ga-zi-kú-a ^dnin-hur-sáğ-ka-ke₄).²⁴ To be nourished with the milk of a goddess is a recurring motif in Mesopotamian Royal Inscriptions. Gebhard Selz recently traced the history of this idea of “adoption by breast-feeding” from Ancient Mesopotamia up until modern times.²⁵ The divine origin of E-anatum is also expressed when he states that he was *chosen in the pure heart by the goddess Nanše*²⁶ or given a pleasant name by the goddess Inanna.²⁷

¹⁹ WINTER 1986, 205–12.

²⁰ RIME 1, E-anatum E1.9.3.1, p. 129, col iv 9–12.

²¹ RIME 1, E-anatum E1.9.3.1, p. 129, col iv 27–29.

²² RIME 1, E-anatum E1.9.3.1, p. 129, col v 1–5.

²³ See e.g. RIME 1, E-anatum E1.9.3.6, col i 10–col ii 2; E-anatum E1.9.3.1, col iv 18–19.

²⁴ RIME 1, E-anatum E1.9.3.1, p. 150, col. ii 5–6.

²⁵ SELZ 2018.

²⁶ RIME 1, E-anatum E1.9.3.4, p. 144, col i 6–8.

²⁷ RIME 1, E-anatum E1.9.3.6, p. 150, col ii 7–8.

En-anatum I

E-anatum's successor En-anatum I also mentioned several times that he was *nourished with wholesome milk by the goddess Ninhursaĝ*.²⁸ En-anatum I presented himself as a ruler who *had been chosen in the pure heart by the goddess Nanše*,²⁹ a typical expression of divine favour. The statement that he was *given a pleasant name by the goddess Inanna*³⁰ might refer to his throne name, however we have no information on how this name was selected during that period; this expression nonetheless suggests that the name, considered to be an integral part of a person,³¹ was chosen by the priests or prophets of Inanna. When he called himself *son of god LUGAL-URUxKAR*³² a clear genealogical relationship was expressed.

En-metena

En-metena (son of En-anatum I) also followed this tradition. He stressed his family ties with the gods and used more or less the same expressions as his father and his uncle E-anatum I, but in addition to that he declared himself to be the son of goddess Ĝatumdu(g):

dumu-tu-da-^d ǵá-[t]ùm-du₁₀
Son born by the goddess Ĝatumdu(g).³³

Several other gods contributed to his just reign and equipped him with various things necessary to be a just ruler. So, he states that Enlil granted him the sceptre and that Enki granted him wisdom.³⁴ En-metena, like his predecessors, also mentioned that he was the beloved *son of the god LugalxURUxKÁR*³⁵ and that he was *nourished with wholesome milk by the goddess Ninhursaĝ* (ga-zi-kú-a ^dnin-hur-saĝ-ka-ka).³⁶ He additionally designates himself as the *chosen brother of the powerful master the god Nin-dar-a* (šeš-pà-da-^dnin-dar lugal-uru₁₆-na (KI)).³⁷ We can conclude that En-metena inserts himself into a whole network of divine relatives.

²⁸ RIME 1, En-anatum E1.9.4.2, p. 171, col i 8–9.

²⁹ RIME 1, En-anatum E1.9.4.1, p. 171, col i 10–11.

³⁰ RIME 1, En-anatum E1.9.4.6, p. 176, col i 10–11.

³¹ On the concept of the name in Mesopotamia see Radner.

³² RIME 1, En-anatum E1.9.4.1, p. 171, col i 7–8.

³³ RIME 1, En-metena E.1.9.5.22, p. 226, lines 9–10.

³⁴ ESPAK 2015b discusses this god in detail.

³⁵ RIME 1 En-metena E.1.9.5b, p. 206, obv ii 7–obv iii 1.

³⁶ RIME 1 En-metena E1.9.5.18, p. 222, col i 7'–8'.

³⁷ RIME 1 En-metena E1.9.5.20, p. 225, lines 10–12.

En-anatum II

From En-anatum II, son and follower of En-metena, we only have one short inscription. He died at a young age and only ruled for a very short period of time. However, in this inscription En-anatum II describes himself as *warrior of god Enlil, chosen in her heart by the goddess Nanše, chief executive for the god Ningirsu*.³⁸ In this one inscription he uses no universalistic expressions and does not accentuate his divine origin either but we see no reason to suggest, given the scarcity of sources, that he did not nevertheless behave in keeping with the older tradition.

Lugal-anda

Lugal-anda continued the tradition of the divine origin of rulers of Lagaš in accentuating that he was a *son of Baba ([d]umu-tu-da-[^d]ba-ba₆)*.³⁹ He additionally mentioned that he was *chosen in her heart by the goddess Nanše*.⁴⁰

2.3. Uruk and Umma

The power of the city-state Uruk culminated in the second half of the 24th century BC when Lugal-zagesi (originally king of Umma) also became king of Uruk and conquered a substantial part of the Sumerian south. From the Lugal-zagesi period we have several royal inscriptions and some of them are quite profound and detailed.⁴¹ Lugal-zagesi used ideas already evoked earlier in Lagaš by E-anatum and En-metena, calling himself a *son born by goddess Nissaba and nourished with wholesome milk by the goddess Ningursaĝ*.⁴² Lugal-zagesi, in whose inscriptions we find clear claims of world-dominion and universalistic rule,⁴³ also claimed to be of divine origin. This ideology of universal kingship was taken up by Sargon of Agade who defeated Lugal-zagesi and established the world's first Empire in Mesopotamia.

This short survey of the Early Dynastic evidence has demonstrated that the divine genealogies of kings are already present in the very first inscriptions from Mesopotamia that provide more detail than just the name of a king. Kings designate themselves as children and brothers of divine beings and stress their close relationship to the gods. However, we do not know how ancient these ideas are; it is hard to discern any sense of development in these

³⁸ RIME 1, En-anatum II E.1.9.6.1, p. 238.

³⁹ RIME 1, Lugal-Anda E.1.9.8.2, p. 242, col. i' 6'-7'.

⁴⁰ RIME 1, Lugal-Anda E.1.9.8.2, p. 242.

⁴¹ RIME 1, 433–438.

⁴² RIME 1, Lugal-zage-si E.1.14.20.1, p. 435, col i, 1–29.

⁴³ See FINK 2016, 57.

early texts as it is only in the Early Dynastic Period III that they start to become more detailed and reflect the royal ideology in written form. The exceptionally long and detailed texts of the Stele of the Vultures display a highly complex and sophisticated ideology of rulership that, we can say to a very high degree of certainty, was not developed from scratch for this text but was only documented in writing here for the first time.

In the following passages we will turn to another prominent document dealing with Mesopotamian kingship, namely the *Sumerian King List*.

2.4. Divine origin of the kings in the Sumerian King List

The *Sumerian King List* is a famous text, highly relevant to our understanding of the way Mesopotamians understood their history, which describes how kingship passed from city to city and from king to king. We discuss it here because it presents information on the earliest kings of Mesopotamian history. This information obviously does not need to be historically accurate and, as we will see below, the list confronts the modern historian with several problems that cannot be easily solved if we want to use it as a straightforward historical source. The text originated in the third millennium and the oldest manuscript evidence comes from Ur III times but, as is the case with many texts, it was not only copied but also changed and altered over time. A new edition of the texts might provide us with new insights concerning the history of its changes.⁴⁴

At the beginning of the *Sumerian King List* it is described how kingship came down from heaven, therefore making it clear that history starts when the first king enters the scene:

(i)[nam].lugal an.ta.e₁₁.dè.a.ba [Eri]du^{ki} nam.lugal.la Eridu^{ki} Á.lu.lim
 lugal<.àm> mu 28,800 i.ak Á.làl.gar mu 36,000 i.ak 2 lugal mu<.bi>
 64,800 íb.ak Eridu^{ki} ba.šub nam.lugal.bi Bàd.tibira^{ki}.šè ba.de⁴⁵

When kingship had come down from heaven, kingship (was) at [Eri]du⁴⁶. At Eridu, Alulim <was> king; he reigned 28,800 years; Alalgar reigned 36,000 years; two kings reigned 64,800 years. Eridu was abandoned; its kingship was taken to Bad-tibira.⁴⁷

Here we have no complex genealogies, but one can clearly see how this text is structured: kingship arrives at or moves to a city; then one or more kings are listed with the length of their individual reigns; and at the end the total number of kings and the lengths of their reigns are given. These abnormally long reigns have given rise to several inferred explanations as we have no explicit ancient explanations for them. In the context of the present paper it might come as no surprise to the reader that we argue that these early kings

⁴⁴ The standard edition of this text is still Jacobsen 1939. A new edition by Gösta Gabriel is in preparation.

⁴⁵ GLASSNER 2004, 118, SKL, i lines 1–9.

⁴⁶ For more on Eridu see ESPAK 2015a, 53–70.

⁴⁷ GLASSNER 2004, 119.

were considered semi-divine beings—kings with supra-human life spans might just be closer to the gods than contemporary kings. However, this remains mere speculation as the text does not indicate anything to this effect in its first section. The first ruling period (five cities and eight rulers) in SKL ends with the flood and is summarized in the following way:

uru.ki.meš 8 lugal mu<.bi> 385,200^{sic} íb.ak a.ma.ru ba.ùr <<ra ta>> egir
a.ma.ru ba.ùr.ra.ta nam.lugal an.ta.e₁₁.dè.a.ba Kiši^{ki} nam.lugal.la⁴⁸

Five cities; eight kings ruled 385,200^{sic} years. The flood swept over. After the flood had swept over, when kingship had come down from heaven, kingship (was) at Kiš.⁴⁹

To us the introduction of the flood seems to be the perfect dividing line between mythological and historical times, but the author had other plans for his text. While the numbers are clearly lower than before the flood they are still far from being realistic in the first dynasties after the flood. However, it is remarkable that information regarding filiation is only given in the part after the flood. At least in this regard, the flood is a divider.

The *Sumerian King List* informs us about several kings of Uruk (1st Dynasty of Uruk) which are all mythological figures from today's perspective. These kings—Meskiagasher, Dumuzi and Lugalbanda—were predecessors of the most famous king of Uruk: Gilgamesh.⁵⁰ The names of these kings were frequently written with the determinative for a divinity in the literary texts that mention them. However, the king with the most interesting genealogy, Meskiagasher, has no diğir-sign in front of his name despite the fact that according to the text he is the son of the sun god Utu:

É.a[n.n]a.k[a Mes.ki].ág.ga.[še.er dumu] dUtu e[n.àm lugal].àm mu
32[4] ì.ak [Mes].ki.ág.ga.[še.er] ab.ba ba.an.ku4 ḥur.sag.šè ba.e₁₁⁵¹

In Ea[nn]a, [Mes-ki']ag-ga[šer, son] of Utu, was lo[rd (and)] was king]; he reigned 32[4] years;
[Mes-]ki'ag-ga[šer] entered into the sea and disappeared⁵²

While it is not entirely clear what is described here—the SKL might be describing a popular story at this place that is lost to us—the way of Meskiagasher reminds us about his father's way, as the sun sets in the sea and its journey was often associated with twin-mountains that mark the path of the sun. In the next lines the first “human” genealogy is given as Enmerkar is called the son of Meskiagasher:

⁴⁸ GLASSNER 2004, 120, SKL, i lines 35–41.

⁴⁹ GLASSNER 2004, 121.

⁵⁰ We cannot claim this king as an historical figure. For an edition of the standard Babylonian Gilgamesh epic and an overview of the earlier tradition see GEORGE 2003; see also EMELIANOV 2015; SAZONOV 2019, 209–215.

⁵¹ GLASSNER 2004, SKL, ii 46–iii 6, p. 121.

⁵² GLASSNER 2004, 121.

En.me.kár(!) dumu Mes.ki.á[g.ga.še.er] lugal Unuki.ga lú U[nu^{ki}]
 mu.un.dù.a lugal. à m mu 420 ì.ak ^dLugal.bàn.da sipa mu 1,200 ì.ak
^dDumu.zi šuku_x uru.ki.ni Ku'ara^{ki} mu 100 ì.ak⁵³

Enmekar, son of Mes-ki'a[g-gašer], the king of Uruk, the one who founded Ur[uk], was king; he reigned 420 years; the divine Lugal-banda, the shepherd, reigned 1,200 years; the divine Dumuzi, the fisherman, whose city was Ku'ara, reigned 100 years⁵⁴

We can clearly see that the early kings in the SKL oscillate between humans and gods, although we do not always understand the scribes' reasoning. For example, we are at loss to explain why certain kings are deified (their name is preceded by a *dīgir*-sign) and some others, like Meskiagašer with a clear divine origin, are not.

To sum up: we have seen that in the city-state of Lagaš—which, remarkably, is missing from the SKL—and in the SKL itself exceptional genealogies play an important role. Kings are often designated as children of gods, are breast-fed by goddesses, are the brothers of gods, and they enjoy the special support and favour of the gods.

3. Lagaš II: Gudea and its dynasty

The texts of Gudea and his dynasty (Lagaš II) provide us with a lot of material concerning complex genealogies. The lengthy texts of Gudea, especially his Temple Hymns, are often seen as the high point of Sumerian literature and were used to define the standard for the Sumerian language.⁵⁵

3.1. Pirig-me

From Pirig-me (22nd century BC), son of Ur-Ningirsu, we have only one inscription. Pirig-me is mentioned therein as *chosen in the heart of Nanše, named by Ningirsu, child born of Ninsun* (šàg-pa₃-dà-^dnanše-ka-ke₄ mu-pà-da-^dnin-ğír-su-ka-ke₄ dumu-tu-da ^dnin-sún-ka- ke₄)⁵⁶ It seems that Pirig-me was the first ruler in Post-Sargonic Lagaš (Lagaš II) to claim that he had divine origin, as he accentuated that he was a “*child born of Ninsun*”.

⁵³ GLASSNER 2004, SKL, iii 7–16, p. 121.

⁵⁴ GLASSNER 2004, 121.

⁵⁵ The first modern grammar of Sumerian was based on Gudea's texts. See FALKENSTEIN 1949.

⁵⁶ RIME 3/1, Pirig-me E3/1.1.2.1, lines 10–15.

3.2. Ur-Bau

The next ruler of Lagaš was Ur-Bau (ruled ca. 2157–2144 BC) who designated himself in several inscriptions as *child born of Nin-agala* (*dumu-tu-da-dⁿnin-á-gal-ka-ke₄*).⁵⁷ Ur-Bau represented himself as a divine ruler whose mother was the goddess Ninagala:

I, Ur-Bau, ruler of Lagaš, child born of Ninagala, chosen in the heart of Nanše, to whom Ningirsu gave strength, whom Bau called by a favourable name, to whom Enki gave wisdom, the one assigned to the orders of Inanna, beloved slave of Lugal-U., the beloved of Dumuzzi-abzu.⁵⁸

Ur-Bau basically copied E-anatum, En-metena and other Pre-Sargonic rulers of Lagaš by using such bynames and epithets as *child born of Ninagala, chosen in the heart of Nanše, the one assigned to the orders of Inanna, beloved slave of Lugal-U., the beloved of Dumuzzi-abzu and to whom Enki gave wisdom.*

3.3. Gudea⁵⁹

The city-state of Lagaš reached the peak of its prosperity and power during the reign of Gudea (2144–2124 BC). In his article on Gudea Vladimir Emelianov points out that there are various problems concerning the genealogy of this king: “*The status of Gudea is difficult to determine. He was a god of Lagash, but lower than Ningirsu in status. His name is unique and means the position of the prophet of Ningirsu. He had only divine parents, and he named two mothers: Gatumdug and Ninsun.*”⁶⁰

According to Emelianov’s hypothesis, Gudea held the status of a city god and a prophet of Ningirsu because he was the offspring of a divine marriage.⁶¹ This seems to be a possible ritual background for all these claims about divine ancestors and would provide us with an explanation of why the kings could state such things that were obviously somehow accepted by the public. In *Statue B* of Gudea we find the following:

Col. ii 4-19-iii 111) Did Gudea, who has a “treasured” name, ruler of Lagaš, shepherd chosen in the heart of Ningirsu, whom Nanše regarded in a friendly manner, to whom Nin-dara gave strength, the one keeping to the word of Bau, child born of Gatumdu, to whom Ig-alim gave prestige and a lofty sceptre, whom Sul-šaga richly provided with breath of life, whom Ningišzida, his (personal) god, made stand out gloriously as the legitimate head of the assembly — when Ningirsu had directed his meaningful gaze on this city, had chosen Gudea as

⁵⁷ See, e.g., RIME 3/1, Ur-Bau E3/1.1.6.1, lines 7–8; Ur-Bau E3/1.1.6.2, lines 6–7; Ur-Bau E3/1.1.6.5, Col i, lines 7–8.

⁵⁸ RIME 3/1, Ur-Bau E3/1.1.6.5, COL i, lines 4–12, Col ii, lines 1–3.

⁵⁹ On Gudea see RIME 3/1; SUTER 2000; SUTER 2012, 57–88; SUTER 2013, 309–324; VACÍN 2011a, 253–275.

⁶⁰ EMELIANOV 2016, 74.

⁶¹ EMELIANOV 2016, 63.

the legitimate shepherd in the land, and when he had selected him by his hand from among 216,000 persons...⁶²

This shows that Gudea had a close connection to the main gods of Lagaš and here he presents Gatumdu as his mother.⁶³ Gudea was the first Mesopotamian king to compare himself to the divine hero Gilgameš (Bilgames), anticipating the later Neo-Sumerian (Ur III) king Šulgi⁶⁴ (2093–2046 BC):

[^dGI]Š.BÍL-ga-[m]ès(!?)-da mú-a

Grown as tall as Gilgameš.⁶⁵

4. Ur III

We have several examples of basically all Ur III kings, but we will focus on the most prominent and famous king of this dynasty: Šulgi. He was also often represented as a king who had divine origin (however he had biological parents and his father was the founder of the Ur III dynasty Ur-Namma).⁶⁶ Additionally, Šulgi was deified during his lifetime.⁶⁷

King Šulgi called himself son of “Geštinanna” (^dgeštin-an-na dumu-ni Šul-gi).⁶⁸ He is the “son born of Ninsumun” (dumu u₃-tud-da ^dnin-sumun₂-kam-me-en),⁶⁹ which we also find in Šulgi O (sipa-^dšulgi dumu-^dninsúna-ka).⁷⁰ We have several texts that mention Šulgi as a brother or a son of the sun god Utu⁷¹, and also as brother of Gilgameš (šeš-gu₅-li-ĝu₁₀ ^dgilgameš₂-gin₇).⁷²

From the texts discussed so far we can clearly see that these complex genealogies were present in Sumer from ED III to the time of Šulgi. However, we can then ask ourselves if this tradition of affiliating the king with the gods is bound to southern Sumerian tradition or if this kind of ideology is present all over Mesopotamia. We therefore look northwards towards Assyria for our final case study.

⁶² Statue B – RIME 3/1, Gudea E 3/1.1.7.STB: Col. II 4–19–Col. III 1–11.

⁶³ See also SUTER 2013.

⁶⁴ See, e.g., ETCSL transliteration, c.2.4.2.03, *A praise poem of Šulgi* (Šulgi C), Segment A, lines 106–107: “Like my brother and friend Gilgameš, I can recognise the virtuous and I can recognise the wicked.”

⁶⁵ Cyl. B – RIME 3/1, Gudea E3/1.1.7.CylB, col. xxiii, 16.

⁶⁶ KLEIN 1976, 271.

⁶⁷ Concerning Šulgi, e.g., SAZONOV 2008, 84–107; DI LUDOVICO 2014, 481–493; OBO 160/3, 152–154; VACÍN 2011b.

⁶⁸ RIME 3/2: Sulgi E312.1.2.62, lines 1–3.

⁶⁹ A praise poem of Šulgi (Šulgi A), ETCSL translation, t.2.4.2.01.

⁷⁰ KLEIN 1976; 276f., line 29.

⁷¹ A praise poem of Šulgi (Šulgi A) – ETCSL, transliteration: c.2.4.2.01, line 79 (last visited 15.03.2019).

⁷² See ETCSL transliteration: c.2.4.2.03, *A praise poem of Šulgi* (Šulgi C), Segment A, lines 106–107. A similar statement is found in ETCSL, c.2.4.2.15 Šulgi O (A praise poem of Šulgi), Segment A, lines 85–86.

5. Assyria: A new manner of Divine affiliation? God as stepfather and stepbrother

In Assyria we find the first broader evidence for complex genealogies in the inscriptions of Tukultī-Ninurta I⁷³ (r. 1242–1206 BC), one the most powerful and prominent kings of the Middle Assyrian Empire. His claims and ambitions are reflected in his numerous campaigns in all directions, in his royal propaganda, his royal titles and epithets, and in the foundation of a new capital for the Assyrian Empire.⁷⁴

5.1. The case of Tukultī-Ninurta I

Tukultī-Ninurta I not only claimed to be of divine blood but also, as earlier kings had done before him,⁷⁵ to have the status of the son of the god Enlil.⁷⁶ But there is one important difference compared to previous kings: while Šar-kali-šarrī (as divine king⁷⁷) and Lipit-Eštar (I Dynasty of Isin) claimed to be sons of Enlil (Ninurta), Tukultī-Ninurta I did not explicitly claim divine ancestry “by blood”. According to the “Tukultī-Ninurta Epic” his relationship to Enlil was rather based on divine selection and adoption than on actual family ties:⁷⁸

- 16' *ina (AŠ) ši-mat ^dNu-dím-mud ma-ni it-ti šir* (UZU) *ilāni* (DINGIR.MEŠ) *mi-na-a-šu*
- 17' *ina (AŠ) purussū* (EŠ.BAR) *bēl mātāti* (EN KUR.KUR) *ina (AŠ) ra-a-aṭ šas/turri* (ŠÀ.TÙR) *ilāni* (DINGIR.MEŠ) *ši-pi-ik-šu i-te-eš-ra*
- 18' *šu-û-ma sa-lam ^dIllil* (BE) *da-ru-ú še-e-mu pi-i niše* (UN.MEŠ) *mi-lik māti* (KUR)
- 20' *ú-šar-bi-šu-ma ^dIllil* (BE) *ki-ma a-bi a-li-di ar-ki mār(i)* (DUMU) *bu-uk-ri-šu*⁷⁹
- 16' By the fate (determined by) Nudimmud (= Ea), his (= Tukulti-Ninurta's) mass is reckoned with the flesh of the gods. 17' By the decision of the lord of all the lands, he was successfully cast into/poured through the channel of the womb of the gods. 18' He alone is the eternal image of Enlil, attentive to the voice of the people, to the counsel of the land. 20' Enlil raised him like a natural father, after his firstborn son (= Ninurta).⁸⁰

⁷³ MACHINIST 1976, 455–482; SAZONOV 2011, 235–276; LAMBERT 1976, 85–94.

⁷⁴ See SAZONOV 2016a, 63–100; CIFOLA 2004, 7–15; SAZONOV 2011, 235–276.

⁷⁵ Even the earlier Akkadian king Šar-kali-šarrī claimed to be the beloved son of Enlil, and thereby identified himself with Ninurta: Šarkališarrī 2: *^dŠar-kà-lí-LUGAL^{rī} DUMU da-dl-šu ^dEn-líl da-núm LUGAL A-kà-de^{ki} ... “divine Šar-kali-šarrī, beloved son of Enlil, mighty king of Akkad”* (FAOS 7, 114–115; RIME 2, Šar-kali-šarrī E2.1.5.2, pp. 188–189).

⁷⁶ SIMKÓ 2013, 115–118; Емельянов 2008; RIME 4, Lipit-Eštar E4.1.5.3, S. 51, ll. 27–29) [^d]li-pi₂-it-eš₄-tar₂ nun za-a-še₃ ġal₂-la dumu ^den-lil₂-la₂-ke₄ – “I am, Lipit-Eštar, son of Enlil”. FAOS 7, 114–115; SAZONOV 2007, 325–342.

⁷⁷ BRISCH 2013, 37–46.

⁷⁸ FOSTER 2005, 301–302, lines 15'–20'; SAZONOV 2016a, 8; SAZONOV 2007, 325–342.

⁷⁹ MACHINIST 1976, 465.

⁸⁰ MACHINIST 1976, 465–466; see also LAMBERT 1957, 51, ll. 8–15.

This text describes how Tukultī-Ninurta I was “*cast into/poured through the channel of the womb of the gods.*” He was also raised by Enlil “*like a natural father, after his firstborn son.*”. The fact that it is explicitly stated that Enlil raised him “*like a natural father*” (*ki-ma a-bi a-li-di*) proves that Enlil was in reality not seen as the natural father of the king. Only through this act of adoption did Tukultī-Ninurta I become the son of Enlil, and at the same time the brother of the god Ninurta (Lipit-Eštar was described as “Ninurta” himself).⁸¹

The case of Tukultī-Ninurta I could be described as a new manner of divine affiliation/origin because before Tukultī-Ninurta I no Assyrian, Babylonian, Sumerian or Akkadian kings had clearly developed this concept of being the “*adoptive son*” of a god (in this case the adoptive son of Enlil). We cannot rule out that this was the underlying assumption in all the statements discussed above but, as far as we know, this is the first instance in which it is made explicit that the king is the “*adopted*” child of the god. Thanks to this process of adoption Tukultī-Ninurta I became the earthly incarnation of Enlil, “he who is the eternal image of Enlil, attentive to the people’s voice, the counsel of the land.”⁸²

It is not entirely clear, however, how we should explain this development. E-anatum and Šulgi both mentioned divine and natural parents. Therefore, they support their claim to kingship with two different genealogies: one based on the gods and one on their human fathers. The ruler of Lagaš, Gudea (22nd century BC), mentions several times that he is the “*child born of goddess Gatumdu*”.⁸³ Tukultī-Ninurta I, however, places strong emphasis on his bloodline, as we will show below.

5.2. The Human Parents of the King

Tukultī-Ninurta I proudly accentuated his royal bloodline in many of his royal inscriptions, also representing his genealogy, declaring that his father Shalmaneser I was a king in Assyria, and declaring that his grandfather king Adad-nārārī I was king as well:

- 1) ^mGIŠ. *tukul-ti^dnin-urta* MAN KIS MAN KUR *aššur*
- 2) MAN *dan-nu* MAN *kib-rat* 4 *ni-šit aš-šur*
- 3) ŠID *aš-šur* MAN *šá ep-še-tu-šu*
- 4) UGU DINGIR. ME *šá AN KI i-tí'-ba-ma*
- 5) *kip-pát tu-bu-qa-at* 4
- 6) *a-na is-qi-šu iš-ru-ku*
- 7) *i-na kib-ra-tì ul-te-li-tu-ma*
- 8) *kúl-la-at la ma-gi-ri-šú qa-su*
- 9) *ik-šu-du sa-bit KUR.KUR KÚR.MEŠ mu-re-piš*

⁸¹ SIMKÓ 2013, 115–118; Емельянов 2008.

⁸² FOSTER 2005, 301–302.

⁸³ See, e.g. Statue D – RIME 3/1, Gudea E.

- 10) *mì-is-ri MAN dan-nu na-mad DINGIR.MEŠ GAL.MEŠ*
 11) *NUMUN be-lu-ti šá iš-tu ul-la-a*
 12) *SANGA-su-nu i-na é-kur ù šá-pi-ru-su-nu*
 13) *i-na kiš-šat UN.MEŠ ^dBAD*
 14) *ú-šer-bu-ú a-na-ku*
 15) *[apil ^m] ^{r̄d̄}šul-ma-nu-MAS MAN KIŠ MAN KUR*
 16) *aš-šur [apil ^madad-É]RIN.TÀH MAN KIŠ MAN KUR aššur-ma*

l-16) Tukulti-Ninurta, king of the universe, king of Assyria, strong king, king of the four quarters, chosen of Aššur, vice-regent of Aššur, the king whose deeds are pleasing to the gods of heaven (and) underworld and to whom they allotted the four corners of the earth, (the king whom) they allowed always to exercise rule in the (four) quarters and who conquered all those who did not submit to him, capturer of enemy lands, extender of borders, strong king, loved one of the great gods, of lordly lineage whose priesthood in Ekur and whose rule over all people the god Enlil from of old made great, I, son of Shalmaneser (I), king of the universe, king of Assyria; son of Adad-nārārī (I) (who was) also king of the universe (and) king of Assyria.⁸⁴

6. Concluding remarks

The evidence from different periods (Early Dynastic III, Lagaš II, Ur III and Middle Assyrian) we have discussed here demonstrates how divine genealogies were used by rulers for over 1000 years. These claims to be the son of a god, to be chosen by the gods, and to be nourished with the milk of a goddess can all be seen as expressions of the close relationship of the ruler to the gods.

As discussed above, a king's claim of divine origin could be connected with the highly disputed institution of sacred marriage. If, as Emelianov suggested, the ruler is an offspring of such a ritual then the ruler's real biological parents who participated in this ritual somehow represented the gods, and it is for that reason that it could be said that he only had divine parents, as in the case of Gudea. But this does not explain rulers like Šulgi who was deified, who accentuated in his royal inscriptions that he was the son of Ur-Nammu, and who also claimed divine origin by mentioning that his mother was the goddess Geštinanna and that he was the brother of the son-god Utu and the divine Gilgameš. It seems therefore to be the case that there was no contradiction in the eyes of Mesopotamian kings in having two fathers—one human and one divine.

The question remains of how to explain this continuity of what we call the complex genealogies of kings. One fact that should not be underestimated is that in ancient Mesopotamia temples and palaces were filled with old inscriptions. Many monuments and texts seem to have been accessible for very long periods of time and scribes, most probably

⁸⁴ RIMA 1, Tukulti-Ninurta I A.0.78.2: 1-16.

also the scribes of royal inscriptions, liked to copy and study older texts as sources of inspiration.⁸⁵ Therefore, motifs from older texts could always come into fashion again if someone—maybe even the king himself—decided that it would be fitting to adopt the ways of the kings before him.

On the other hand, these ideas about the divine or semi-divine nature of the king were surely present in the teachings and discussions of Mesopotamian intellectuals and it seems probable that such ideas about the special nature of the king were always present, a view evidenced by literary texts such as the Gilgameš epic.

Nevertheless, even if the nature of the king remains the subject of continuous debate by Mesopotamian intellectuals and the answer to this question is thus subject to change, the underlying problem remains the same. Tukultī-Ninurta I explicitly mentions his biological human father and grandfather and stresses the fact that he was adopted by Enlil and became his “appointee” (*šakin Enlil*).⁸⁶ However, Šulgi and other kings of Ur III also mentioned their biological human fathers and at the same time they accentuated their family relations with the gods, never mentioning that they were adopted by a male god, as we see with Tukultī-Ninurta I. We can only speculate that human genealogy had become more important in the time of Tukultī-Ninurta I, an assumption supported by the fact that Assyria was basically ruled by the offspring of one family until the end of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, indicating a strong dynastic lineage in Assyria.

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⁸⁵ MAUL 2012.

⁸⁶ See, e.g., ZAIA 2018, 207–217.

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