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Private Commemorative Inscriptions of the Early Dynastic and Sargonic Periods: Some Considerations

1 The Materiality of Inscribed Commemorative Objects

The types of inscriptions investigated in this paper are well-known to all who are acquainted with Near Eastern and other ancient or antique cultures. The focus here is upon the message and on the interrelations between the devotee, the message and the medium, which will allow for some very general conclusions on formal and functional aspects of personalized offerings in early Mesopotamia.¹ The social relations that are made obvious through inscriptions, between people and the objects they donated, may be termed the materiality of these objects.² The contrasting of private and royal points to similarities as well as differences in the practice of having objects inscribed for different purposes; including offering inscribed gifts to gods and to temples. There are, furthermore, inscribed objects without explicit mention of a deity or a temple, found in religious settings; and other objects still, which appear to be commemorative objects dedicated to deities, but which have been encountered in funerary contexts. Some of these are also of interest to this investigation, as they bear witness to a tradition of personalization of objects—linking an individual to his or her material surroundings. Included in this survey are objects personalized by means of writing. Exempted are regular cylinder seals, which do not contain a clause on the seal being offered to a divinity, as well as inscribed stone weights.³

This brief article represents the current state of the collection of data. A more comprehensive investigation of the material is under way, and will take into consideration

¹ This paper represents a first step in a much larger survey of non-royal commemorative objects and their inscriptions, to be published in the future by the present author. I am grateful to the organizers of the workshop for having invited me, and to the participants for valuable suggestions made during the sessions. A debt of gratitude also goes to Kamran V. Zand, Heidelberg, who read and commented upon an earlier version of the paper, and to the anonymous reviewer. The basis is made up chiefly by standard treatments of Early Dynastic and Sargonic inscriptions both with a textual and archaeological focus. Chief among these are: Steible 1982a and 1982b; Gelb/Kienast 1990; Braun-Holzinger 1991; Frayne 1993; Kienast/Sommerfeld 1994; and reviews like Bauer 1985a, 1985b; Marzahn 1987; Krebernik 1991. Additions were made from more recent text publications.

² See, e.g. Evans 2012, 5–6, 110, with further literature given in note 8, on p. 209.

³ For regular inscribed cylinder seals, see Rohn 2011; for inscribed weights from the period involved, see Powell 1987–1990, 508 § V.

other facets of the objects, their production and distribution over time and space, both regionally and locally, as well as other aspects of the language and writing contained in the inscriptions than those accounted for here.

As has been noted by Anne de Hemmer Gudme in the introduction to her *Before the God in this Place for Good Remembrance*, a definitive study of votive practice has yet to be written, despite the fact that the phenomenon is well-attested over time and in many cultures.⁴ Gudme's study focuses primarily on votive practice as illustrated in the Hebrew Bible, and in particular on epigraphic and archaeological material from Mount Gerizim, about 45 kilometres north-northeast of Jerusalem, but is commendable for its general applicability to more ancient Near Eastern materials. It will be referred to in the following to illustrate the practice of offering inscribed objects.

1.1 Commemorative, Votive or Dedicative?

Some words on the usage of the term 'commemorative' in this paper might be in place, as it may help to place the subject matter in a broader perspective and to underscore the intersection between the material object and the materiality of the inscribed message. The use here of the term commemorative, in contrast with Gudme's use of 'votive' is intentional, in that it allows for a further subdivision of the Mesopotamian material into objects which were expressly presented to a deity for the benefit of the agent him- or herself (votive), or a third party (dedicatory). But it also allows for inclusion of pieces which include the name of a person and a formula of offering, but without explicit mention of a recipient.

The salient point in the use of 'commemorative' is that it focuses on the life of the object after it had been placed in the context where it would see practical use. But it also incorporates the material aspects of procurement of raw materials and the whole production process for which the devotee could take credit. The object, then, was a lasting reminder of the person as well as the whole chain of interrelated events that led to the object's placement, presumably most often in a cultic context.

The notion of commemoration also encompasses the few known independent tags or tablets accompanying objects which may have been uninscribed, and where the former transmitted the desired message. This notion also allows for inclusion of building inscriptions which share a number of traits and formulae with votive and dedicatory inscriptions, but which represent more substantial investments of time and effort into an object consecrated for use by its divine owner.⁵

⁴ Gudme 2013, 2. An excellent introduction to the subject, the materials, object types and inscriptions is given in Braun-Holzinger 1991, 1–25.

⁵ See van Driel 1973a, 99, where the author opines that "building inscriptions left by Mesopotamian kings are dedicatory inscriptions when they deal with constructions meant for the gods"; that is, they

Gudme in her investigation departs from two main assumptions: the central concept is that votive practice, broadly defined as gifts to the gods, is the practice of giving gifts to deities in order to establish or maintain a relationship that is seen as being mutually beneficial for both deity and worshipper. The nature of the durable object, including the votive inscription, further emphasizes this aspect by lending the worshipper a lasting material presence in front of the deity, acting as a memento of the gift.⁶

The use of the term votive is not unproblematic in itself, as definitions tend to waver between literal interpretations of the term, and its Latin etymology, implying the fulfilment of a vow made previous to the offering. On the other end of the spectrum, the term is sometimes used inclusively, to denote just about any object found in a cultic context.⁷

The main Sumerian verb used in donations of movable objects, including persons, to gods and temples during the third millennium BCE is *a-ru*,⁸ and for objects from the northern floodplain during the ED period *sa₁₂-rig₉* is employed. Both correspond to Akkadian *šarākum*.⁹ The case marking the recipient is the dative, *-ra* in Sumerian,¹⁰ which due to its syntactic placement and for orthographic reasons is often left unexpressed in the object chain, but which often appears in the verbal prefix chain. Inscriptions in Akkadian often use the preposition *ana* ‘to, for’. Both the Sumerian and the Akkadian formulae basically express that a gift is given for the benefit of the intended recipient. Other verbs which occur as main verbs in ED commemorative inscriptions are the rare occurrences of *dù*, ‘to erect’,¹¹ and *dím* ‘to create’.¹² In the Sargonic period, *a-ru* is the only verb found in votive and dedicatory inscriptions which feature a finite verb.

No distinction in the choice of verb is found separating the rare anonymous—yet inscribed—donation from those which are personalized, whether votive or dedicatory.¹³ This may be taken to imply that the donation of a non-personalized item was

involve a stated purpose benefitting directly someone other than the devotee or, here, builder.

6 Gudme 2013, 3.

7 See Gudme 2013, 6–8. One may compare the opinions of Brinkman 1979, 56 n. 179 and Grayson 1980, 156–157 n. 80, where Grayson opted for an etymologically defined interpretation of the term votive.

8 See Braun-Holzinger 1991, 1, for a handy overview of the terminology.

9 CAD Š/2, 40–48. See also Marchesi/Marchetti 2011, 156 n. 9, for the use of *sa₁₂-rig₉*, as an “Akkadogram”.

10 Thomsen 2001, 313.

11 Steible 1982b, 282–283 (AnUr 7); Braun-Holzinger 1991, 252 (St 71), on an ED IIIa Ur statue in connection with the manufacturing (tu) of a statue for the goddess Damgalnuna and the building of (her) temple.

12 Steible 1982a, 266 (Ent. 76); Braun-Holzinger 1991, 310 (W 9); Steible 1982a, 361 (AnLag. 6); Steible 1982b, 345 (Anonym 10); Braun-Holzinger 1991, 255 (St 85).

13 The only anonymous votive object featuring a verbal form known to the present writer is Steible 1982b, 197 (AnAdab 10); Braun-Holzinger 1991, 93 n. 357 and 123 (G 47), a stone bowl offered to the

perceived as having the same general function as an object featuring the name of the donor or an indirect object in favour of whom the object was donated.¹⁴ But the inscription added an extra social dimension; it served as a memento of the donation itself. It placed part of a person, his or her name, in the proximity of the receiving deity. And, furthermore, the object served as a distinguishing social marker visible to those with access to the place where the object was deposited or to those who happened to witness the introduction of the object to the temple.¹⁵

With regards to dedicatory inscriptions, it is of course no use speculating whether a person benefitting from the donation was supposed to be present during the introduction of the object into the temple.

1.2 Commemorative Inscriptions

The textual genre of commemorative inscriptions has a long tradition of treatment within studies of ancient Near Eastern cultures and languages. When used for modern didactic purposes, texts termed royal inscriptions are commonplace in textbooks. The royal inscriptional material tends to have a readily discernible structure and often report on specific incidents; informing their later peers and other future readers about royal deeds and accomplishments. Acts are framed by an ideologically motivated language bearing on matters of descent, ascendancy, divine favour, and of the royal imperative of upholding culture by founding, renovating and providing for cultic installations. Seen from a modern perspective, royal commemorative inscriptions therefore serve many different purposes, and are often key for our understanding of chronology, relative lengths of individual rulers, and the geographical extent of a dynasty's influence. They are therefore quite ideal as tools for teaching, as they are formulaic and open for studies of cultural phenomena and historical processes. By comparison, not a single private commemorative inscription features in any of the published monographs intended for use in teaching elementary Sumerian.¹⁶

temple traditionally read *é-sar*. See photograph in Wilson 2012, pl. 66a. Other examples include only the name of the temple or the deity to whom an object had been donated.

14 So, e.g. van Driel, 1973b, 68.

15 See Gudme 2013, 30–36. In 1st millennium Babylonia, there are examples of votive tablets composed by young scribes as part of their education. In one example, potentially due to the tender age of the apprentice scribe, the tablet was sent into the temple with the aid of a porter. See George *apud* Civil 2010, 274–278.

16 A brief survey produces the following results of the number of “royal” inscriptions vis-à-vis other text types: Gadd 1924, 16 royal inscriptions vs. 11 literary texts; Volk 1999, 29 royal inscriptions vs. 15 legal and administrative texts; Hayes 2000, 44 royal inscriptions vs. 15 letters, legal and administrative texts. Royal is here used in a loose sense, as some texts in the aforementioned books are made up by seal inscriptions or clay bullae.

The earliest commemorative inscriptions dedicated by private individuals date to the Early Dynastic I–II period and are preceded by inscriptions on stone documenting ownership of parcels of land, which are not included in the present survey.¹⁷ Commemorative inscriptions share a basic function with the *kudurrus* in that they are directed at a future audience; and sometimes inscriptions documenting ownership of land parcels are found on statues, which form one of the basic material object categories on which commemorative inscriptions are found.¹⁸ The *kudurrus*, however, serve a legal-documentary purpose, while commemorative inscriptions focus on a person or a group of persons related by kinship or profession, and his/her/their motivations for offering or dedicating an object. In most cases a deity is mentioned; but in some, only the name of a temple in which the object was deposited is featured.¹⁹ The object material and type is decided upon, acquired, personalized, inscribed and deposited, and then presumably left to fulfil its purpose in a non-private context.

1.3 Limitations

The focus here is on inscriptions commissioned by private individuals, as far as these may be identified in the material. Bearing this in mind, some limitations are by necessity imposed upon the material. Further work on the sources is at any rate necessary, and this brief article merely hopes to showcase some considerations central to non-royals in their self-expressions.

All inscribed objects treated in the present investigation, unless otherwise stated, belong to the Early Dynastic and Sargonic periods. As far as can be ascertained they were all commissioned by private individuals. Inscriptions too damaged for assessing their private nature have been excluded completely. A more precise dating of objects is sometimes found in discussions, but in the charts below, the only distinction made is between Early Dynastic and Sargonic objects and inscriptions.²⁰

17 See, e.g. the inscribed statue Steible 1982, 201 (AnAgr. 4); with a discussion by Marchesi/Marchetti 2011, 164–166.

18 See, e.g. the statue of Lupad of Umma, Zervos 1935, pl. 97, and the treatment, Gelb/Steinkeller/Whiting 1991, 72–74; and, with references to other relevant literature, Huh 2008, 276.

19 Here Early Dynastic Adab stands out from the rest with quite a few of the older inscriptions referring not to a divinity as recipient of the object, but only to the é-sar-temple. In some cases, the name of the temple appears to be the only thing inscribed, lacking even the name of the devotee(s). Compare the remark by Gudme 2013, 12: “In all instances we are dealing with a gift dedicated to a deity [...]”. The Adab material must be seen against the background of the specificities of early Mesopotamian religious consciousness where temples enjoyed widespread veneration, as seen from, e.g. the composition of the Sumerian Temple Hymns (Sjöberg/Bergmann 1969), and in scores of personal names (Stamm 1939, 85, 90–93; Andersson 2012, 203).

20 On the problems of paleographic dating of Early Dynastic inscriptional material, see Marchesi/Marchetti 2011, 119.

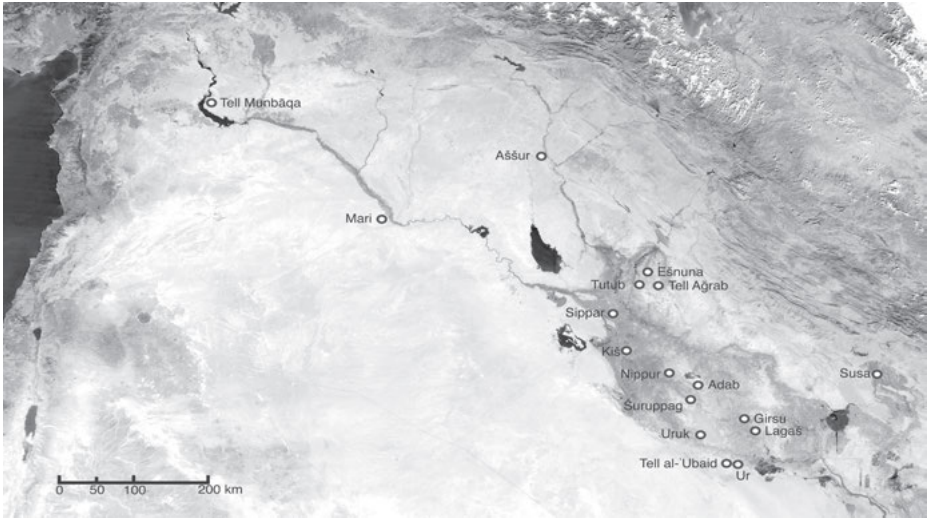


Fig. 1: Find-spots for Early Dynastic and Sargonic Period private commemorative inscriptions.

The denomination ‘private’ includes also queens, who may or may not have been born into royal families; either in a lineage parallel to the incumbent ruler, as a cousin or other relation, or as a daughter of a royal lineage from another (city-)state. Royal children are consistently excluded, however, though it is not always known whether

they were born before or after their father’s ascendancy to the throne in cases where the father represented the first exponent of a new lineage. One can not, of course, be entirely certain that high-ranking officials who appear in the inscriptional material did not, in fact, belong to a royal lineage, especially where damaged inscriptions are concerned.

Inscribed objects from Elam and Mari are as a rule not included among the primary materials, apart from the odd instance when an object is likely to have been transported to Susa in more recent times, but will sometimes be referred to for comparisons. Ebla has so far yielded no inscribed commemorative objects.²¹

Early Dynastic		Sargonic
14	Mace heads	8
3	Metal weapons	3
10	Plaques	2
1	Cylinder seals	2
38	Statues	1
113	Vessels	14

Fig. 2: Most common commemorative object types according to period.

²¹ I am grateful to Alfonso Archi for confirming in a personal communication the lack of such materials at Ebla.

2 Manufacture of the Commemorative Objects

At present, only little apart from the techniques applied can be said concerning the manufacture of commemorative objects during the third millennium BCE. For the most part, it is not known whether objects were produced to order, or whether clients normally chose a ready-made object from a selection in a craftsman's workshop.²²

2.1 Procurement of Raw Materials and Production Process

The inscription on a plaque of bituminous stone offered by a high official from ED Ġirsu states that the devotee played a part in securing the raw materials for the object, and could then influence the production process.²³ In another, damaged inscription on a statue, there is talk of something being brought from the 'Cedar Mountain',²⁴ which could well be an indication of where the raw material had been procured. Two other interesting instances are formed by a stone vessel and a votive cylinder seal offered by stone cutters, *bur-gul*, who may themselves have been involved in at least parts of the production of the objects.²⁵ As may a pair of stonemasons, *zadim*, whose inscribed stone offerings are preserved.²⁶

An inscribed, crudely finished clay foot may represent an object which had a bearing on the wishes of the devotee; very likely asking to be healed from an affliction.²⁷ The poor quality of craftsmanship indicates that there is a high possibility of the object having been produced by a non-skilled person; such as the scribe who added the inscription or by a person who had it made, and then took it to a scribe to have it inscribed.

²² See Braun-Holzinger 1991, 2 with footnote 14 for evidence pointing to offerings of used metal daggers to the gods. Some general considerations on the origins of commemorative pieces can be found in Braun-Holzinger 1991, 11–13.

²³ Steible 1982a, 266 (Ent. 76); Braun-Holzinger 1991, 310 (W 9).

²⁴ Frayne 2008, 33–34 (E1.1.9.2001, seen in transliteration only).

²⁵ Gelb/Kienast 1990, 385 (Varia 19); Braun-Holzinger 1991, 355 and pl. 23 (S 4). Neither inscription features a remark like *mu(-na)-dím*, 'he fashioned (it for DN)'.
²⁶ Steible 1982b (AnLag. 15); Braun-Holzinger 1991, 42 (K 2), is an inscription on a mace head by a lapidary, whose father is also qualified as such. For another example, see footnote 35, below.

²⁷ George 2011, no. 9. P. Steinkeller, who edited the text, suggested that the inscription *a-na ma-ši-AK* be read in Sumerian, in a way that implied a question from the devotee, "what should I do regarding myself?", *a-na mu-a-b-ši-(a)-k-e(n)*. The inscription would be without any 3rd millennium parallel. This type of anatomical object, is, however, well-known and the body parts pictured are many and varied, and are commonly understood as representing an afflicted part of the body; something that is very much in line with Steinkeller's interpretation, see further Gudme 2013, 15–16.

Tradesmen, *dam-gâr*, are attested as devotees in seven likely cases, all from the ED period. In two further cases, the devotee is the son of a *dam-gâr*.²⁸ Without overinterpreting this slight evidence, it is reasonable to assume that a trader had an insider's knowledge of goods moving in from abroad, and that the raw material for the finished product could have been selected at an early stage in the process. In some cases involving traders one might even assume that the material had been brought from abroad by the devotee himself in the line of exercising his profession. The fact that not a single *dam-gâr* appears in the published material dating to the Sargonic period is probably due to find circumstances, as the available number of commemorative inscriptions from the period is small compared to that of the preceding period.²⁹

Drafts for inscriptions on stone or metal are rare in the periods under scrutiny here.³⁰ A few royal inscriptions from ED IIIb Ġirsu and Lagaš have been suggested to be exercise pieces.³¹ In the private sphere, one piece presents itself as a potential draft: an unfinished building inscription of unknown provenience, probably meant to



Fig. 3: Inscription on fragmentary stone bowl from Sippar (after de Meyer 1980, pl. 27 no. 38).

be placed on a brick or a cone, but which might also represent an exercise.³² Another interesting example is shown in fig. 3; an inscribed ED IIIb stone bowl found during Rassam's soundings at Sippar where the name of the devotee was incised twice; the first time with demonstrably less ease than the second. The professional denomination 'scribe' was written only once.³³

If Rassam's soundings indeed were carried out at the site of the Ebabbar, the main temple in Sippar, as suggested by Aage Westenholz,³⁴ then the bowl was once dedicated there, regardless of the lack of a divine name and despite the repetition of the personal name.

²⁸ Steible 1982b, 194 (AnAdab 4); Braun-Holzinger 1991, 122 (G 38), ED IIIb Adab votive stone bowl; and Steible 1982b, 225–226 (Urenl 1); Braun-Holzinger 1991, 128 (G 76), ED IIIb Nippur dedicatory bowl mentioning Ur-Enlil, *énsi* of Nippur.

²⁹ See Foster 1977, 34 with footnote 34 and 36 with footnote 56, for examples of tradesmen making deliveries or payments of goods, animals and silver to the temple or state institutions.

³⁰ See for comparison, the draft version on a potsherd of an Old Babylonian mirrored cylinder seal inscription from Adab, Wilson 2012, 113 and pls. 28e and 110a.

³¹ See Biggs 1976, 36; Cooper 1980; and Cooper 1986, 24–25 (La 1.6).

³² George 2011, 8–9 and pl. 7, no. 8.

³³ de Meyer 1980, pl. 27 no. 38: *ur-dsu-da¹*, *ur-dsu-da*, [dub]-sar; Braun-Holzinger 1991, 139 (G 146, "Versuchsstück?").

³⁴ Westenholz 2004, 599–600 with footnotes 5–6.

2.2 Reworking and Reuse of Commemorative Objects

In exceptional cases, a private individual is known to have donated more than one object.³⁵ Provided that the donations did not take place simultaneously, the opportunity for comparisons offer themselves. In a pair of ED IIIb inscriptions—one votive inscription on a stone plaque, the other a dedicatory inscription on a statue (fig. 4)—a certain Urakkila states his name and title, among other things. The key issue is the fact that the inscription on the statue has been edited at some point, altering the professional denomination.³⁶ As Braun-Holzinger remarks, there are reasons to assume also that the style of clothing worn by the person had been altered at some point;³⁷

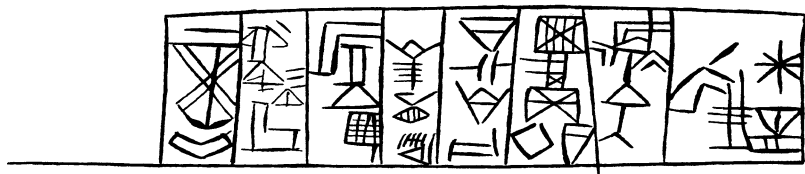


Fig. 4: Inscription on statue of Urakkila. Altering of title visible in line 7, second from the left (after Wilson 2012, 156).

and it could well be that this coincided with the change in titles of Urakkila. As both objects were dedicated to the same deity, Ninšubur, and supposedly deposited in her temple, it is clear that the statue could be removed and the inscription reformulated so as to comply with the upward-mobile Urakkila after his career change. The plaque, a fixture not so easily removed from the temple in which it had been deposited, kept the original formulation.

Another object that may exhibit secondary editing is an ED IIIb bowl found at Nippur (fig. 5).³⁸ It features two individual inscriptions commissioned by a pair,

³⁵ E.g. Steible 1982b, 239–240 (AnNip. 24); Braun-Holzinger 1991, 132 (G 100), 311 (W 13), a limestone bowl and a gypsum plaque dating to the ED IIIa, featuring the same four-line inscription with the goddess NinsAR as recipient and the chief stone mason (zadim-gal) Lumma as the devotee. It is of interest here to note that the skill of carving demonstrated by the aforementioned plaque has been characterized by Donald P. Hansen “it seems not unfair to say that the carving represents some of the best work for plaques of this kind and gives a good indication of the style of the [ED IIIa] period”, (Hansen 1963, 164; with photo on pl. VI).

³⁶ See already Westenholz *apud* Steible 1982b, 187–189 (Bar. 1), comm. to line 4; and Westenholz 2012, 155–156, with references to previous literature, and photos, pls. 99 and 112–113. The inscription is reproduced here courtesy of Aage Westenholz and Inger Jentoft.

³⁷ Braun-Holzinger 1991, 242 (St 9): “eventuell wurde ein unfertiges Stück umgearbeitet oder während der Arbeit das Konzept geändert”.

³⁸ Steible 1982b, 227–228 (AnNip. 2); Braun-Holzinger 1991, 129 (G 79).

husband and wife. The original inscription features fully framed writing cases in a straight column; the second has only line dividers, with the beginning of the lines drifting continuously upwards, toward the rim of the bowl. Obviously the spouse was not going to let the gift be donated without having both persons' names inscribed, and thereby the formula expressing the purpose of the donation was also changed ever so slightly.³⁹

Disregarding the Nippur bowl, the Urakkila statue inscription—along with the

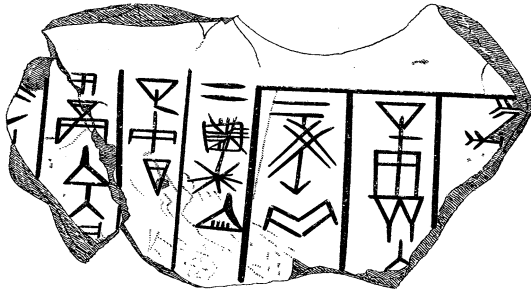


Fig. 5: Inscription on stone bowl from Nippur featuring the inscription of a husband and a wife. Husband's inscription on the right, with writing cases. Wife's addition to the left, with line dividers (after Hilprecht 1896, no. 98).

possible reworking of the look of the person depicted—poses a specific problem bearing on the function of the donated object, in that it presupposes continuous access to some objects, and a conceptual flexibility concerning the objects presented to gods. This Sumerian example is in contrast to interpretations of evidence from adjacent areas and cultures, at least where *access* to the objects after dedication is concerned.⁴⁰ Further possible indications of continued access to objects donated to a deity are

formed by two fragmentary inscribed bowls from the Early Dynastic cemetery at Ur.⁴¹ It is of course not entirely clear whether the persons buried with these vessels were indeed the original devotees; but the fact that these objects were encountered in a funerary, as opposed to a cultic, context, is worthy of note.

³⁹ The top inscription features the formula 𒀭 nam 𒀭-[ti], dam dumu-n[a-šè], a mu-ru, “for the life of his/her spouse and child(ren) (s)he offered (this vase to DN)”; while the bottom one has ája-bá-ra-an-na, dam-né, h́é-ti-l[a-šè], [a] 𒀭 mu 𒀭-[ru], “Ajabara’ana, his/her spouse, for a ‘let live(gift)’ (s)he offered (this vase).” There is no second mention of the deity whose name is unfortunately broken off in the top inscription, along with the name of the primary devotee. The inscribed objects found in the same spot as this vase mention Ninlil, Enlil and Nintinuga.

⁴⁰ See Gudme 2013, 12, on the comparison between sacrifices and votive offerings: “Whether it is destroyed by fire, cast into a bog or put on display in the sanctuary the votive object is equally ‘spent’ from the point of view of the votary and just as irretrievable as if it had been burnt.”

⁴¹ One of these, a grey steatite bowl was said by the excavator, Sir Leonard Woolley, to have come “from a plundered P/B grave”, Woolley 1955, 203 (U 19241). The other, a shard of a limestone bowl, is noted as having come “from the gravesite at 5 m. depth”, Gadd/Legrain 1928, 71. For the inscriptions, see Steible 1982b, 281 (AnUr 4) and 282 (AnUr 6); Braun-Holzinger 1991, 141 (G 155, G 157), respectively. Did the owners die during the time of a restoration of the shrines in which the bowls were normally kept? The information is too scanty to draw any definitive conclusions.

Certain objects had more than one life. In particular—but surely not exclusively—one might think of objects connected with important personas of the past, linking the contemporary viewer or user to the history of the object itself. An object made of a material like stone, if treated with care, can last for centuries, and thus the persons coming into contact with the object, the processes and contexts in which it was produced and in which it had seen use, all add to the object's biography.⁴² An example of this is the bowl bearing a four-line inscription of Narām-Su'en of Akkade, later appropriated and re-inscribed by a daughter of Šulgi, ME-Enlil, a century or so afterwards, and found in Isin-Larsa-period layers of the Gipar at Ur.⁴³ It is probably relevant to note that neither ME-Enlil's nor Narām-Su'en's inscription featured the name of a divinity, and that neither featured a finite verb. Other objects which were reinscribed include those taken as booty during military campaigns, which demonstrates a different use of historical materials.⁴⁴

There are, so far, no clear third-millennium examples of such appropriated objects once presented to deities by private individuals being reinscribed and presented by another person to another deity in another city.⁴⁵

3 The Written Message

Commemorative inscriptions are not flawless in any respect. Writing is often unwieldy and distributed over a surface that is very different from the smooth and malleable clay of clay tablets.

3.1 Script

The persons performing the task of putting to writing the message on an object were with all likelihood not part of the scribal, educated elite of the cities, but craftsmen used to working with metal or stone.⁴⁶ This may sometimes lead to confusion as

⁴² See, e.g. Gosden/Marshall 1999 for a discussion of this phenomenon.

⁴³ Braun-Holzinger 1991, 161–162 (G 213D), and 188 (G 358), with previous literature.

⁴⁴ E.g. Steible 1982b, 295 (Enšak. 2), inscriptions on stone bowl fragments found at Nippur, stated to have been brought from a conquered Kiš; and Kienast/Sommerfeld 1994, 283–284 sub voce šallatum. See other royal examples in Goodnick-Westenholz 2012.

⁴⁵ Steible 1982b, 260 (AnNip. 63); Braun-Holzinger 1991, 137 (G 129), a stone bowl from ED IIIb Nippur, is probably rather a royal than a private inscription. No personal or divine name is preserved. The remaining lines begin toward the very end of the inscription; lines 1'–2': bur maḥ ṛ ma ṽ-[rī^{ki}-ta?] mu-na-ta-e₁₁, na-m-ti-la-n[i-... rest broken]. Compare Steible 1982a, 247–248 (Ent. 32), ii 3'–4': bur maḥ, kur-ta mu-na-ta-e₁₁; and comment by Braun-Holzinger 1991, 100.

⁴⁶ For some thoughts on this matter, see Klein 1986, 7. On mu-sar and gab-sar, the titles of the professionals performing the engraving, see Westenholz 1987, 36, note to no. 11 ii 12.

to which sign is really intended. Writing found on stone objects is sometimes very superficial, with signs scratched into stone at varying depths, making some stand out less clearly than others. To a modern editor, this can sometimes bring about the dismissal of certain signs as mistakes;⁴⁷ or reading scratches as intentional signs.⁴⁸ On the opposite side of things, a thin gold sheet found at Adab carrying an inscription mentioning Narām-Su'en of Akkade is a fine exception.⁴⁹ The signs are impressed into the elastic surface of the piece with such skill, and with the heads of wedges so clearly visible, that it may have been inscribed by a regular scribe.

As a rule, the earliest known examples of commemorative inscriptions do not demonstrate any differences in the execution of sign forms between private and royal inscriptions. But it is interesting to note that during the Sargonic period, the absolute majority of private commemorative inscriptions feature the special, “archaizing” appearance of the sign *lugal* with a rounded “back”, as commonly used by the Sargonic kings in their own inscriptions.⁵⁰ This indicates the possibility that, at times at least, some form of standard or preference for writing specific signs can be assumed.

3.2 Orthography

Bearing in mind that the basis of this contribution comprises textual witnesses from more than half a millennium, only a few points on orthography relevant to the investigation will be commented upon. A fuller investigation needs to take the royal inscriptional material into consideration to a higher extent, as well as texts of other genres for comparison.

⁴⁷ Compare Luckenbill 1914, pl. 1 and Luckenbill 1930, pl. 2, where the reading of line 5 differs between the two editions. The first edition should be given precedence over the second.

⁴⁸ As in the ED IIIb Uruk votive vase inscription by princess Megirimta, daughter of Lugalkisalsi, presented to the deity NE.DAG. An oblique scratch between the signs DINGIR and NE has been interpreted as intentional in some treatments. Moreover, the statement by Banks 1904, 62–63, that the vase should have borne an earlier, erased inscription has been refuted by close inspection and close-up photo of the object. See comment and overview of previous literature in Frayne 2008, 424 (E1.14.15.3), and photo on <http://www.themorgan.org/collections/works/writteninstone/>. For an interpretation of the function of NE.DAG and an Ebla correspondence, see Andersson 2013.

⁴⁹ Gelb/Kienast 1990, 111 (Narāmsîn B 9); Braun-Holzinger 1991, 378 (Varia 10). Photo in Wilson 2012, pl. 40a.

⁵⁰ This applies both to the sign *lugal* when used as a title, and as part of the name of Šarkališarrē. Exceptions are formed by the inscription on an alabaster bowl, Gelb/Kienast 1990, 118 (Šarkališarrī B 2); Braun-Holzinger 1991, 164 (G 225, “Duktus altertümlich”); and on a limestone plaque, Gelb/Kienast 1990, 297–299 (Gutium 4); Braun-Holzinger 1991, 314 (W 23). Add to these latter two also the clay copies of original dedicatory inscriptions of a saġa of Zabala, edited in Marchesi 2011. For the monumental paleography of the sign *lugal*, see Foster 1985, 24–25.

Like contracts, commemorative inscriptions were designed to fulfil an enduring function; in the case of the latter, bearing witness to the pious behaviour of a particular person over time. Diakonoff remarked in the mid-1970s that the contracts from Early Dynastic IIIa Šuruppak (Fara) tend to contain fuller writings of verbal chains compared to the, presumably, contemporary administrative records from the same site.⁵¹ And M. Lambert, writing about the same group of documents remarked that the contracts often left out grammatical components that were, however, incorporated in the personal names featured in those texts.⁵²

Personal names were evidently abbreviated in different economic contexts. Persons appearing in the documentation of an institution, archive or dossier could sometimes figure with fuller writings of names which were in other cases, within the same archival context, abbreviated.⁵³ Closer study of the commemorative inscriptions indicates that, as far as can be ascertained from contemporary documents, names are not written out in fuller forms than is the case generally in economic archival documents.

3.3 Written Representations of the Devotees

Filiations and professional titles occur with such regularity, that it may be possible to see these as identifying markers of the individuals in relation to their respective social and professional context,⁵⁴ which reminds of the use of filiations and titles in administrative circumstances. But the question as to whom these identifying markers were meant to be seen by, the devotee's contemporaries, the divinity to whom the object was dedicated, or by both, is a question that does not hold much promise of ever receiving a definitive answer.

The table above recounts professional denominations encountered as qualifying more than two individuals in the private inscriptional material. As related earlier, tradesmen, *dam-gâr* or *dam-gârgal*, are found as devotees in seven likely cases, with two further instances being an object offered by a son of a *dam-gâr*. All cases date to the ED period. During this time, other professions that feature more often than other professional denominations include temple administrators, *saġa* or *saġa-maḥ*—whose families are also found in the material.⁵⁵ Other professions

⁵¹ Diakonoff 1976, 105–106.

⁵² M. Lambert 1971, 45 with footnote ****. See also Andersson 2012, 62 with footnote 310; 146.

⁵³ See Andersson 2012, 62–64. For an abbreviation in a Sargonic period private archive, see Westenholtz 1987, 61 note to no. 44 ii 1, and compare Andersson 2012, 139 with footnote 777.

⁵⁴ For a detailed discussion of gender and professional titles occurring in Early Dynastic statuary from Mari, Nippur and the Diyālā area, and their bearing on social identities, see Evans 2012, 179–202.

⁵⁵ E.g. Steible 1982b, 250–251 (AnNip 46); Braun-Holzinger 1991, 135 (G 114), ED IIIa Nippur, AK-ni, wife of 'Ilum-'alšu *saġa*; Steible 1982a, 275 (Enz 2); Braun-Holzinger 1991, 241 (St 4), Geme-Bau,

Early Dynastic		Sargonic
7	saĝa /-maḥ	3
4	dub-sar /-maḥ	6
7	dam-gār /-gal	–
–	šabra é	5
4	sa ₁₂ -suĝ ₅	–
4	sukkal /-maḥ	–

Fig. 6: Occupations of devotees according to period. Each individual devotee counted only once.

two different inscriptions, copied onto a clay tablet.⁵⁹ The importance of the office of saĝa is apparent from the combination of the saĝa title with that of énsi during the Sargonic period.⁶⁰

encountered are land recorders, sa₁₂-suĝ₅, and a form of civil servant, the sukkaḥ or sukkaḥ-maḥ. Scribes, dub-sar, appear as devotees in four inscriptions.

In the Sargonic period, there are no tradesmen attested in the corpus of commemorative inscriptions. Instead, the most commonly encountered professional groups are scribes or scribally trained individuals, and administrators of royal and temple households, like the šabra é, in Akkadian *šāper bētim*.⁵⁶ Such educated professionals sometimes belonged to the very top echelons of Sargonic society.⁵⁷ The temple administrator saĝa is still well-attested in the material, considering the relative dearth of Sargonic inscriptions compared to Early Dynastic ones.⁵⁸ One saĝa of the Early Sargonic period, furthermore, is attested with

3.4 Object Specifications and Object Names

In some cases the inscriptions make overt reference to the object itself. When that is the case, it is interesting to see where the object itself is mentioned. In about half of the instances, it is found at the very beginning of the inscription. This applies to

daughter of Enentarzi, saĝa of Ninĝirsu. For the father and grandmother of a saĝa from ED IIIb Uruk, see further below, with footnote 76.

⁵⁶ An example combining the two titles of dub-sar and šabra é is known, Gelb/Kienast 1990, 106–107 (Narāmsîn B 2); Braun-Holzinger 1991, 259 (St 98).

⁵⁷ For Classic Sargonic Nippur, see Westenholz 1999, 51.

⁵⁸ A daughter of a saĝa, ME-šuni, is represented with a metal bowl found in a hoard of precious objects at Tell Munbāqa, Gelb/Kienast 1990, 384 (Varia 18); Braun-Holzinger 1991, 167 (G 242).

⁵⁹ Marchesi 2011.

⁶⁰ For a Classic Sargonic Nippur example, see Westenholz 1987, 28. For Classic Sargonic Adab, and late Early Dynastic period Lagaš and Umma saĝa-officials acting as or becoming énsis, see references in Andersson 2012, 40–41 with footnote 195 and 41.

bowls, bur,⁶¹ bur umbin,⁶² and a mace head $\text{š}i\text{š}ku\text{g}_x(\text{lum})$,⁶³ which are all written at the very beginning of the text where one would normally expect a divine name. A few objects, in contrast, mention the object type where it could be expected, further on in the inscription. The objects are a votive dagger handle which features the sign $\text{g}i\text{r}$ after the name of the devotee and his father, but before the name of the recipient deity;⁶⁴ a stone vessel featuring the word nig ‘bowl’ after the broken name and title of a person, before the name of the deity to whom it was offered;⁶⁵ a mace head $\text{š}i\text{ta}(-\text{d}i\text{m}-\text{ma})$;⁶⁶ a votive seal of speckled stone, $ki\text{š}ib\text{ piri}\text{g}-\text{g}u\text{nu}$, written after the name of the recipient;⁶⁷ and a statue dedicated by Narām-Su’ēn’s major domo Šu’ā(i) š-takal, which has the term for image, $d\text{u}l$, just before the main verb.⁶⁸ In inscriptions on ED III Mari statues both placements are found, but the placement after the name of the devotee predominates.⁶⁹

By comparison, not a single royal inscription which preserves mention of the medium places it at the beginning of the text. The instances when objects are mentioned at the very beginning of texts should perhaps be taken as evidence of the importance to the devotees of the act of presentation to a god or goddess. The phenomenon of topicalization is well-known in Sumerian inscriptions with regards to the deity who stands as receiver of the object or deed commemorated in the inscription.⁷⁰ The difference here is that it is the direct object that pushes its way to the fore.

One may thus contrast this placement of the object at the head in some of these private inscriptions with the regular placement in royal inscriptions, closer to the predicate toward the end of the inscription in inscriptions from ED IIIb onwards.⁷¹

It was not common for private individuals during the periods inspected here to provide an object with a name. A statue from the Adab area carries in the final paragraph, after the verbal phrase, an addition which bears on the functionality of the

61 Steible 1982b, 247 (AnNip. 39); Braun-Holzinger 1991, 134 (G 107), ED IIIa Nippur.

62 Lambert 1976, 191; Foster 1991, 184 no. 6; Braun-Holzinger 1991, 150 (G 192), ED IIIa–b, unknown provenience.

63 Gelb/Kienast 1990, 372 (Varia 4); Grégoire 2000, pl. 171 (Ashm 1937–650); Braun-Holzinger 1991, 51 (K 39), MS-CS Kiš.

64 Gelb/Kienast 1990, 372 (Varia 5); Grégoire 2000, pl. 171 (Ashm 1937–651); Braun-Holzinger 1991, 91 (MW 19), CS Kiš. Inscription is mirrored.

65 George 2011 no. 1, ED IIIa, unknown provenience. The use of nig for ‘bowl’ is unusual. For the rationale of the reading, see Bauer 1987–1990, notes to 120 II 3K and 146 IV 2.

66 Krebernik 1994, 5–12, with comments on the term(s) $\text{š}i\text{ta}(-\text{d}i\text{m}-\text{ma})$, 11–12.

67 Braun-Holzinger 1991, 355 and pl. 23 (S 3), MS-CS, unknown provenience.

68 Gelb/Kienast 1990, 106–107 (Narāmsin B 2); Braun-Holzinger 1991, 259 (St 98), CS Susa.

69 See overview in Kienast/Sommerfeld 1994, 273–275 (*šalmum*), writing $d\text{u}l$.

70 An overview of the syntactic structures of third millennium royal inscriptions is Klein 2010. For the phenomenon of topicalization, see his references on p. 173, n. 6.

71 E.g. the references collected by Braun-Holzinger 1991, 100 (citing G 7, 8, 10, 62, 129; 107 and 192 private). For a Sargonic example, see Gelb/Kienast 1990, 98 (Narāmsin 13); Braun-Holzinger 1991, 160–161 (G 208); bur in line 5 is certain.

statue, x-šùd-[d]è arḥuš tuku, mu-bi “Have mercy through (my) prayers, is its name”.⁷² The damaged dedicatory section at the beginning of the inscription mentions Meskigal, who served as governor of Adab in late Early Dynastic and Early Sargonic times; it furthermore preserves a dedicatory phrase mentioning the offering as benefitting the devotee’s wife and children. The name of the devotee himself is damaged, and there is no visible title or filiation. The only other clear example of a private inscription mentioning the name of an object is a statue from Mari, offered by a royal cupbearer.⁷³ In both these examples, the name of the statue is placed at the end of the inscriptions, after the finite verb.

After the Sargonic period, named commemorative objects are increasingly often associated with private individuals.⁷⁴ But the rule for southern Mesopotamian Early Dynastic and Sargonic objects is that they are either offered by rulers or their immediate next of kin, or dedicated for the life of the ruler.⁷⁵

3.5 Motivation: Occasion and Intention

The occasions on which commemorative objects were commissioned by private individuals are as a rule not expressed. A statue from ED IIIb Uruk is an exception, where it is said that the father and grandmother of Aka, a saĝa of the god Utu, had offered the statue out of reverence at the time when Ninimma called or appointed Aka.⁷⁶ Royal inscriptions, on the other hand, may, as has been alluded to above, mention that an object had been taken as booty during a campaign to remote lands or even further to home. Since building activities are sometimes mentioned not only on foundation deposits, the inscriptions on other objects may allude to provisioning for the local cults, in keeping with the traditional tasks for a ruler.

If the occasion is most often left unexpressed in private inscriptions, the wishes that accompany the objects are very often expressed. The term for an ‘ex-voto’ gift was related to the concept of prolonging one’s life and presence before a god, as can be seen in the term used for votive objects from this time on, ga-ti-la, originally a frozen verbal clause in the first person, ‘let me live’, ‘may I live’, or the like.⁷⁷ The verb ti has

⁷² Frayne 2008, 33–34 (E1.1.9.2001, seen in transliteration only); following in essence Frayne’s rendering of lines ii 1’–2’.

⁷³ Gelb/Kienast 1990, 19–20 (MP 25); Braun-Holzinger 1991, 246 (St 32).

⁷⁴ See list in Radner 2005, 43–59.

⁷⁵ Behrens/Steible 1983, 235–236, sub voce mu I, 6.; 282, sub voce sa₄, 1.; Kienast/Sommerfeld 1994, 150 sub voce mu-(šè)-sa₄.

⁷⁶ Steible 1982b, 339–340 (AnUruk 1); Braun-Holzinger 1991, 253 (St 75). As Bauer has remarked (1985a, 150, with references) -e in the personal name on lines 5 and 10 is to be read *-šè. Photo and copy in Falkenstein 1963, pls. 5–6, 1.

⁷⁷ The term is exclusively used in direct connection to the devotee him- or herself, never in connection with other persons, as could be expected from the etymology of the word.

a decided overtone of linking a person to a certain locus since the verb is equated not only with the Akkadian verb *balātu* ‘to live’, but also with *ašābu* ‘to dwell’.⁷⁸ The sense and usage of the term is then very much in keep with the idea of commemoration; serving to prolong the memory of a person in the presence of the recipient by means of a personalized, offered object.

Inscriptions that feature the name of the devotee often bear a votive purpose clause, *nam-til-ani-šè/-da* ‘for his/her (own) life’, or a dedicatory purpose clause *nam-ti PN(-ak)-šè/-da* ‘for the life of person so-and-so’, and quite regularly spouse and children are also mentioned.⁷⁹ This phraseology is attested from at least the beginning of the ED IIIb onwards. A single inscription from ED IIIb Ur seems to express the dedicatory sense without inclusion of a nominal compound including the verb *ti* ‘to live’;⁸⁰ and an ED IIIb inscription from Lagaš uses the noun *zi* instead of *nam-ti*, with no discernible semantic differentiation.⁸¹

Only once are a parent and siblings mentioned in such a connection, in a Classic Sargonic building inscription on a cone. The passage is phrased as if the deity had already granted long life for the builder and his kin. There is no votive formula, since the text commemorates the building of a temple.⁸²

Not a single anonymous inscription bears the *nam-ti*-clause, and it is highly unlikely that such an example will ever be found in the future due to the phraseology and the innate logical reference to a named devotee. The functionality of the gift, as expressed by both object and inscription, was intimately linked to the person offering it, and, when inscribed, both the offered object and its accompanying inscription served to commemorate the act of offering.

In a number of cases, persons unrelated to the devotees are also mentioned, as primary or even as sole beneficiaries of the positive effects triggered by the act of donation. The latter is the case with an inscribed ED IIIb mace head dedicated for the life of Enanatum, ruler (*énsi*) of Lagaš, lord (*lugal*) of the devotee, Barakiba,

78 Behrens/Steible 1983, 121, sub voce *ga-ti-la*, with references; and Bauer 1972, 479.

79 In one ED IIIb Nippur inscription on a stone bowl, it is likely that the devotee left out an overt reference to himself, but mentioning the offering as having been performed for the life of his spouse and offspring, Steible 1982b, 232 (AnNip. 8); Braun-Holzinger 1991, 130 (G 85). Balke 2006, 97–98, has argued that the variants, with comitative *-da* or terminative *-šè* should be seen as complementary strategies of linking the offered object to the devotee and other beneficiaries, with little, if any difference in semantic nuance.

80 Steible 1982b, 274–275 (Aan. 3); Braun-Holzinger 1991, 140 (G 150). There is hardly any room at the beginning of line 4’ to house *nam* and *ti*, even if they were written one above the other as is the case with the signs *zi* and *KA* in the following line.

81 Donbaz 1997, 46 B: 1’–2’ [...] *zi dam* ‘*dumu-ne-ne*¹-šè, a *mu-na-šè-ru* “for the life of his wife and children, he dedicated (this dagger)”, following the translation of Donbaz, who, however, read the quite clear sign *zi* as [na]m-ti. For *zi* corresponding to Akkadian *napištu*, see e.g. CAD N/1, 296–297.

82 George 2011, 15–17, and pl. 10, no. 13; following Steinkeller’s treatment of the text.

the *sukkal*.⁸³ Judging from the available evidence, it is most often—if not always—a matter of persons with a higher relative rank in society than the devotee him- or herself. When a superior is mentioned as a beneficiary, that person's name seems always to be in the primary position, before any other beneficiaries, including the devotee him- or herself. In two instances, the relation between devotee and a secondary beneficiary is unclear.⁸⁴ Below is a diagram illustrating the relative distribution of votive and dedicatory purpose clauses expressly stating for whose benefit the object had been offered in Early Dynastic and Sargonic commemorative inscriptions.

As can be readily seen from the above, it was more common in Sargonic times to dedicate objects for the express benefit of someone. Just under a third, 31 per cent of all Sargonic inscriptions, feature a votive or dedicatory clause mentioning an offering made for the lives of one or more persons, as against just under 21 per cent in Early Dynastic times. It should be remembered, though, that such formulae are found only toward the end of the Early Dynastic period, and that a higher percentage of Early Dynastic commemorative inscriptions are damaged in critical places.

Judging from the extant material, it appears to have been more common in the Sargonic period to dedicate an object to a superior. Six out of eleven inscriptions from the period featuring a votive or dedicatory clause for the lives of one or more persons

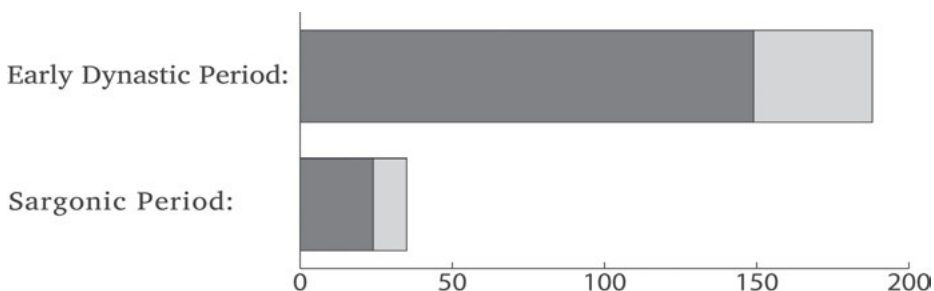


Fig. 7: Proportions of inscriptions mentioning an offering for the life of one or more persons (light grey) in relation to inscriptions lacking such formulae (dark grey), according to period. Total number of inscriptions, Early Dynastic period 188 inscriptions; Sargonic period 35 inscriptions.

⁸³ Steible 1982a, 190–191 (En. I 19); Braun-Holzinger 1991, 42 (K 1). See correct reading of personal name of devotee in Bauer 1985a.

⁸⁴ A Sargonic inscription on a bowl from Nippur offered by a chief scribe, a *dub-sar-maḥ*, mentions as primary beneficiary the *saḡa* of Enlil, Urunabadbi, in secondary position himself, in tertiary position a person not further qualified, Ama'abzi, and in quaternary position his wife and child(ren), Gelb/Kienast 1990, 108–109 (Narāmsin B 5); Braun-Holzinger 1991, 163 (G 222). An even less clear example is offered by the inscription on a mace head, Gelb/Kienast 1990, 384 (Varia 17); Braun-Holzinger 1991, 50 (K 37), which has a person Uruna dedicating the mace for the life of Ezi. Neither person is further qualified, and no deity is indicated. The provenience of the latter piece is unknown.

carried a dedicatory formula mentioning the king, someone loosely characterized as the *lugal* of the devotee,⁸⁵ or a superior of the devotee;⁸⁶ amounting to roughly 17 percent of all known private inscriptions from the time. The corresponding figure for inscriptions from the Early Dynastic period mentioning the life of a *lugal* or an *énsi* in a dedicatory clause is just over five per cent, or ten inscriptions in total. Another nine Sargonic period inscriptions make explicit mention of the name of the king, often in a clause expressing the devotee's relation to the king as 'his servant', *warassu*. The name of the king is only mentioned outside of a dedicatory context in four Early Dynastic inscriptions, all by queens then referring to their husbands.⁸⁷

The figures for both periods of inscriptions mentioning the dedication for the life of a spouse and/or offspring lies around eight and a half percent of the total number of inscriptions.

In Early Dynastic times, rulers could also offer objects for the express benefit of their own lives. Some 20 different inscriptions on several dozen objects are known, commissioned by ED IIIb rulers of Lagaš, Nippur and by Lugalzagesi, Umma and Uruk.⁸⁸ In one single instance, the Lagaš ruler Enmetena dedicated a vase in Nippur for the sake of his own life, for the life of the city of Lagaš, and for the life of someone or something, which is unfortunately broken away.⁸⁹ This unique instance may be compared to inscriptions from the early second millennium BCE, where the inclusion of a city's name in such formulations is found more regularly.⁹⁰

In the Sargonic period, dedications of objects for the sake of the life of the king thus saw a proportional increase in relation to the number of private commemorative objects known from this period. Adding the number of references to the king outside of dedicatory phrases, the numbers rise drastically. Even when taking into account the unevenness in distribution of such formulae in the preceding period, toward the end of Early Dynastic times, the geographical distribution of objects throughout the

85 The only inscription not mentioning an incumbent king of Akkade is Gelb/Kienast 1990, 297–299 (Gutium 4); Braun-Holzinger 1991, 314 (W 23), dedicated for the life of the prince ŠaraTiGuBišin, the devotee's 'lugal'. For the identity of ŠaraTiGuBisin, see Westenholz 2009–2011.

86 See reference to the Nippur bowl in footnote 84, above.

87 It is interesting to note that the Early Dynastic material from Mari reflects the Sargonic usage of mentioning the name of the king. See Gelb/Kienast 1990, 9–14 (MP 8–10, 12–15), inscriptions on six statues and a single vase (MP 10). Worthy of note is of course the fact that other, more anonymous ED inscriptions might originally have contained references to incumbent rulers in damaged parts of the inscriptions, or rulers who have not yet been identified as such in complementary sources. For a list of identified and proposed ED rulers, see Marchesi/Marchetti 2011, 118–128.

88 E.g. Steible 1982a, 189–190 (En. I 18); Steible 1982b, 226–227 (Urenl. 2), 299–301 (Lukin. 2).

89 Steible 1982a, 247–248 (Ent. 32); Braun-Holzinger 1991, 116–117 (G 8).

90 For Assur, see, e.g. Grayson 1987, 14 (A.O.31.1, Šalim-aḫum), 23–25 (A.O.33.3, Erišum I). Probably also to be restored on page 43 (A.O.34.2, Ikūnum), following Grayson. Compare also the inscription of Ilum-mūtappil of Dēr mentioning the life of his land, Frayne 1990, 678–679 (E4.12.2.2). See generally Galter 1998, 14–17 on this type of formula during the early second millennium BCE.

Sargonic empire hints at an increased focus on the king's own persona. Sargonic kings themselves, however, never presented objects to deities for the express sake of their own life. That this Early Dynastic Sumerian tradition and phraseology ought to have been known by the Sargonic kings is evidenced by the fact that people in close contact with the Sargonic court dedicated objects for the sake of the king's life.⁹¹

Manfred Krebernik has presented arguments for reading two passages on an Old Babylonian tablet containing copies of two original inscriptions commissioned by Rīmuš, in a way that would provide a unique example of a motivational factor in a Sargonic royal inscription.⁹² The two passages read in the same manner:

a-na, ^den-líl, ša-lí-mi-šu, a mu-ru

Krebernik suggested that the word in the third line of the passage could be understood as a noun augmented by the terminative ending /iš/, followed by the possessive pronominal suffix 3ms -šu. Earlier interpretations favoured an interpretation of *ša-lí-mi-šu* as an apposition to the name of Enlil, *šalimīšu*; a nominal formation which bears on Enlil's support for Rīmuš.⁹³ Krebernik, on the other hand, wanted to raise doubts as to the identity of the noun underlying the orthography, suggesting instead an interpretation of *šalimīš-šu* (*šalimīš-šu*), „für sein Wohl“?, indicating a purpose that is otherwise not expressed in the Sargonic royal corpus.⁹⁴ Examples of the terminative ending /iš/ with possessive pronominal suffixes are not very common in Sargonic Akkadian texts but show a preference for expressing the double sibilant sequence /šš/ explicitly.⁹⁵ The choice of an interpretation must be seen in light of the more common orthography and the fact that not a single instance of a phrase recording that an object was donated by a Sargonic king for the purpose of (prolonging) his own life is known; neither in original inscriptions of Sargonic kings, nor in later copies of their inscriptions. Hence, the earlier interpretations seem better suited for understanding this phrase correctly.

⁹¹ A good example is furnished by the previously mentioned statue inscription of Narām-Su'en's major domo, Šu'ā(i)š-takal, Gelb/Kienast 1990, 106–107 (Narāmsīn B 2); Braun-Holzinger 1991, 259 (St 98).

⁹² Krebernik 1991, 141, note to Rīmuš C 1: 86 and C 6: 698.

⁹³ Poebel 1914, 191: “Enlil, his ally”; Hirsch 1963, 54 (Rīmuš b 1): “Enlil, seinem Helfer (?)”; 64 (Rīmuš b 7): “Enlil, seinem «Helfer»”; Sollberger/Kupper 1971, 101 (IIA2b), 103 (IIA2d): “Enlil, (le dieu) qui lui accorde son amitié”; Gelb/Kienast 1991, 193 (Rīmuš C 1): “Enlil, seinem Helfer”; and 208–209 (Rīmuš C 6): “Enlil, seinem “Helfer””; Franke 1995, 136, column 2 (“DN(D)+App.”), and discussion p. 138.

⁹⁴ Krebernik's suggestion was taken up by Frayne 1993, 49 (E2.1.2.4); 54 (E2.1.2.6), who put the phrase in cursive script but removed the questionmark “for his well-being”.

⁹⁵ Hasselbach 2005, 181, with examples. For a pair of examples from later copies of original Sargonic inscriptions, see Kienast/Sommerfeld 1994, 265 sub voce *qātum*.

4 Conclusions

This preliminary study has shown that the Mesopotamian material in many respects can be compared to commemorative materials from other places and periods. It also underlines the need for a more intensive study of these sources. The following represents only a few details which have been the focus of the present study.

The evidence from Mesopotamia is in keep with observations from elsewhere, that the purpose of inscribed offerings is to prolong the presence of a person in front of a deity, thereby extending the benefits given in return over time. The Sumerian word for 'ex-voto' gift, *ga-ti-la*, relates to ideas of life as well as physical presence and so in itself aptly summarized the ideas behind the offering of gifts to gods.

A few objects indicate possible reworking of the inscriptions, and in the case of a statue from the Adab area, the object ought reasonably to have been removed from the place where it had originally been deposited. The implications are interesting but the practice may be considered unique. Other inscriptions indicate re-use of inscribed or uninscribed pieces; though how common this practice was at any given period is difficult to say. It does indicate, however, that in Mesopotamia, commemorative objects could have several lives, and that the functionality of the re-donated piece was considered to be no less than when it was originally donated.

A few significant differences between private and royal inscribed offerings include the placement of the signifying noun relating to the object itself, which may sometimes appear at the beginning of private inscriptions; in contrast to its placement in royal inscriptions.

The occasion on which an object was presented to a god is rarely alluded to. But the motivation for presenting objects for the sake of prolonging one's own life, or the lives of others, including that of a superior or of one's spouse and offspring, is evident from the ED IIIb period onwards. While this practice is seen also in Early Dynastic Sumerian inscriptions, it is in all likelihood never explicitly stated in Sargonic period royal inscriptions.

This latter practice of dedicating objects on behalf of others has a clear bearing on the materiality of the inscribed objects. In a number of cases, the donation of objects served to underline and strengthen social bonds between individuals; be it within the family or between subordinates and their superiors. This was done within a framework of the religious superstructure which guided many other aspects of communal and individual life in the Ancient Near East. A further subdivision of commemorative objects into votive and dedicatory serves to pinpoint the inscriptions in which the relations between individuals and their surroundings are brought to the fore. These inscriptions may, then, add more to our understanding of the social relations of individuals in these societies, and the means at their disposal to express and strengthen social bonds.

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