

A COMPANION TO THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

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CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

Divine and Non-Divine Kingship

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"Kingship everywhere and at all times has been in some degree a sacred office" (Evans-Pritchard 1962: 210). Some kings, of course, are more sacred than others. In the world of the Ancient Near East, the most prominent examples of this are the kings of Egypt. Throughout the course of ancient Egyptian history, kings were generally accorded some form of divine status (O'Connor and Silverman 1995). In ancient Mesopotamia attributions of divinity to kings were rather more restricted, both in time and space. The phenomenon was limited to certain kings in southern Mesopotamia in the millennium from the twenty-second to the twelfth centuries. Despite this, divine kingship in Mesopotamia generated an impressive amount of source material. We possess inscriptions in which kings claimed divine status, administrative records that registered cultic offerings to their divinity, and literary texts that featured divine kings, both legendary and historical.

But what did the ancient Mesopotamians mean by these honors? Our understanding of the word "god" is conditioned by the monotheistic traditions of Western societies. The term carries connotations of omnipotence and uniformity. As a polytheistic society, however, ancient Mesopotamia knew a multiplicity of divine beings that fulfilled a wide variety of different roles (Lambert 1957-71; Van Dijk 1957-71). Moreover, we must try to explain why in Mesopotamia, unlike ancient Egypt, some kings were considered gods and others were not.

From our perspective, it is not easy to accept that a king's subjects could both be rational and, at the same time, have truly believed him to be a god. Given the level of literacy in ancient Mesopotamia, the texts illustrating any form of kingship were the product of a very small segment of the population. Nor was it a homogenous one. In the third millennium, the very highest administrative officials could be literate (Visicato 2000: 233-9). Most of our Old Babylonian literary tablets are the school exercises of trainee scribes whose ultimate role in society is obscure (Tinney 1998). Most of our first millennium literary and "scientific" tablets are the product of a sophisticated and exclusive scholarly elite (Parpola 1983; Rochberg 1993). The literary nature of much of our evidence renders the concept of divine kingship even more suspicious. Surviving Old Babylonian administrative and commercial letters,

contemporary with the bulk of our literary evidence for divine kingship, treated the king as a purely human figure.

But the experience of kingship on any level could not be monolithic. It would be unlikely for a king to experience the institution in exactly the same way as his predecessors, his advisors, or his subjects. We can only analyze those experiences recorded by scribes on tablets recovered. If we wish to posit what those scribes really believed or how the experience of kingship would have been articulated by other, non-literate, members of society, we can only do it through these extant scribal copies.

My focus will be confined to the two periods of Mesopotamian history with the richest intellectual legacies: the Old Babylonian period (2004-1595 BCE) and the first millennium BCE. Not only do they provide much evidence for kingship; they also differed significantly in how they characterized the institution. Kingship was regularly treated as divine in the Old Babylonian corpus and as non-divine in the first millennium one. In considering first the literary portrayals of the cosmic role of kingship and then the possible political contexts, I seek to illuminate rather than solve these problems. Mesopotamian visions of kingship, no matter how fanciful they may seem to us, reveal native understandings of the processes and problems inherent in the constitution of legitimate authority. At the same time, they deepen our comprehension of the sociology of ancient Mesopotamian politics. They give some indication of the political phenomena that stimulated native reflection and the manner in which they did so.

Intellectual experiences of power in ancient Mesopotamia were underlain by fears of royal violence. Contrasting visions of kingship highlight different ways of confronting this problem. Old Babylonian characterizations of the divine king imply that the king had to make a crucial contribution to cosmic order. He had either to restrain his innate tendency to unleash violence on his own people or, more positively, conform to a tightly circumscribed mode of correct behavior. An important way of conveying the behavior required was to characterize the king in terms of more traditional deities. Explicitly he was equated with the god Dumuzi and compared to the sun god. Dumuzi was the spouse of Inana, the fearsome goddess of love and war. His alluring charms provided a means of channeling her potentially destructive power into more constructive uses. The sun god was the divine patron of justice. Just as significant as these positive models, however, was an implicit contrast to the war god Ninurta. Unlike the latter, the king had to avoid using the awesome violence at his disposal against his own homeland.

In contrast, in much of the first millennium material the most that could be expected of the all-too-human king was self-restraint. Any cosmic order had to exist in spite of the king's inherently violent nature. In terms of the varying social experiences of power, we may note significant correlations - without claiming direct lines of causation - between these modes of imagining kingship and specific aspects of the political experience of kingship in the two periods. The Old Babylonian period stood at the beginning of a dual, long-term process of territorial integration and elite differentiation; the first millennium stood at its end. By the later period, literate urban elites tended to conceptualize their political privileges in opposition to the

royal administration rather than through it. Therefore, it is perhaps not surprising that visions of a kingship crucial to cosmic order were more common in the Old Babylonian period.

The Intellectual Experiences of Power

Throughout Mesopotamian history, the legitimacy of kings was conceptualized in terms of their closeness to the divine world through divine descent, divine favor, marriage to a goddess, or superhuman stature. All these themes were already alluded to in one of our earliest royal inscriptions, the so-called Stele of the Vultures in honor of Eanatum of Lagash (2450 BCE). His birth and upbringing were described in superhuman terms:

The god Ningirsu implanted the seed for Eanatum in the womb and...rejoiced over him. The goddess Inana accompanied him, proclaimed him "Worthy in the Eana-temple of Inana of the Ibgal-shrine," and set him on the special lap of the goddess Ninhursag. Ninhursag offered him her special breast. Ningirsu rejoiced over Eanatum, the seed implanted in the womb by Ningirsu. Ningirsu laid his span upon him, for (a length of) five forearms he set his forearm upon him: (he measured) five forearms, one span (2.75 meters). Ningirsu, with great joy, gave him the kingship of Lagash. (After Cooper 1986: 34)

Such themes were characteristic of celebrations of the king throughout Mesopotamian history. But the innovation of according the king himself divine status first occurred some time in the middle of the reign of Naram-Sin of Akkad (2254–2218 BCE), and its origin was dramatically described in one of his inscriptions:

Naram-Sin, the mighty, king of Akkad – when the four quarters together revolted against him, through the love which Ishtar showed him, he was victorious in nine battles in one year, and the king whom they had raised (against him) he captured. In view of the fact that he had protected the foundations of his city from danger, (the citizens of) his city requested from Ístar in Eana, Enlil in Nippur, Dagan in Tuttul, Ninhursag in Kesh, Ea in Eridu, Suen in Ur, Šamaš in Sippar, and Nergal in Kutha, that (Naram-Suen) be (made) the god of their city, and they built within Akkad a temple (dedicated) to him. (Frayne 1993: 113–14)

At the heart of this deification was the writing of the king's name with the determinative for "god." This practice was in regular use down to the end of the Kassite period (Seux 1980–3: 170–1). Other markers of royal divinity were more restricted in time. Akkad, Ur III, and Old Babylonian kings were described in epithets as gods. Ur III and Old Babylonian kings had hymns written in their honor. Ur III kings received religious offerings in their own lifetime (Klein 1981: 29–36; Kraus 1974: 241–50; Römer 1965: 55–7; Sallaberger and Westenholz 1999: 153–4).

For much of this period there is little evidence of any native reflection on divine kingship. Fortunately, the concept suffuses many of the compositions preserved on

Old Babylonian literary tablets. We can contrast this with the non-divine kingship presented in the first millennium corpus. Crucial to each vision of kingship was how the balance of responsibility for cosmic order was distributed between the king and the divine world.

Divine Kingship in the Old Babylonian Period

Old Babylonian literary tablets implied that the divinity of the king reflected the vital role he had to play to ensure an ordered cosmos in the face of divine unpredictability. The texts, however, registered an underlying unease at having to rely on the king's ability to restrain his own destructive tendencies. Looking at how divine government was portrayed, I will focus on four themes: the nature of the divine regime itself, primeval acts of creation that provided a charter for all subsequent cosmic order, individual divine decrees dealing with specific issues, and the way in which human institutions derived their inspiration from the divine world.

As legitimate sovereignty in the material world of ancient Mesopotamia was always envisaged as monarchic, it might be expected that sovereignty in the divine world would be too. But surprisingly in the Old Babylonian literary tablets there was no clear head of the divine pantheon. Supreme cosmic power was held by both the sky god, An, and the patron deity of the city of Nippur, Enlil, with little attempt to harmonize this apparent discrepancy. Cosmic sovereignty was imagined in terms of a number of gods rather than one alone: a dyarchy of An and Enlil together; a triumvirate of An, Enlil, and Enki, the god of wisdom; a tetrarchy of An, Enlil, Enki, and a mother goddess, either Ninmah or Ninhursag; or the totality of all the gods meeting in assembly.

None of these versions of divine government came with strong connotations of stable cosmic order. The sky god An was something of a cipher. Enlil certainly wielded force, but tended to do so in a destructive manner such as unleashing either the flood as in Atra-hasis or barbarian invaders as in Cursing of Agade (Foster 1993a: 158–201; Black et al. 1998–: 2.1.5). Enlil could be characterized more in terms of his absence from human life than his presence. The composition called Enlil and Ninlil imagined ordered human life in the city of Nippur as possible only when Enlil vacated the city (Black et al. 1998–: 1.2.1). As a team, An and Enlil's word was often characterized as unchangeable, but some contexts suggested it was both unfathomable and erratic.

In a similar manner, Old Babylonian depictions of divine actions at the dawn of time did little to suggest a settled cosmos. Neither of the putative heads of the pantheon, An or Enlil, was shown creating ordered space in the manner familiar to us from Yahweh's actions at the beginning of the Biblical book of Genesis. In the Song of the Hoe Enlil was depicted as separating heaven from earth (Black et al. 1998–: 5.5.4). But his only contribution to social and cultural order was to create that most versatile of implements, the hoe. This gave humanity the potential to create its own social and cultural order, but by no means guaranteed it. The efforts of other gods at primeval organization were more far-reaching, but essentially flawed. Both

Enki and his realm, the Abzu, the mythological subterranean ocean of fresh water, were closely associated with the qualities of intelligence and rational thinking. They would therefore obviously have had a role to play in any conception of cosmic order. Indeed, in Enki and the World Order, Enki organized the primeval world and delegated the responsibility for each facet of that organization to a specific deity (Black et al. 1998-: 1.1.3). However, he subverted his own efforts by assigning the wilful goddess Inana the role of negating all that he had achieved. Ninurta, the son of Enlil, imposed order on foreign lands in the poem the Exploits of Ninurta, but achieved no such imposition on the homeland itself (Black et al. 1998-: 1.6.2). Atra-hasis began with junior deities working the land (Foster 1993a: 158–201). Their work, however, was unfinished as they went on strike and their task was left to be completed by human hands.

Generally lacking imagery of either a steady hand on the tiller or primeval organization, Old Babylonian literary texts commonly presented the idea of cosmic order in terms of *divine decrees*. Their promulgation was usually termed “decreeing a destiny.” On rare occasions these decrees were visualized as a finite and predetermined set recorded on the “Tablet of Destinies” possessed by one of the major gods. More regularly, they were presented as a set of ad hoc declarations in response to particular events or prompted by petitions (George 1986; Polonsky 2002: 73–168).

In Old Babylonian thought divine inspiration of human institutions was encapsulated in the concept of the *m e*, the divine archetypes that underlay all aspects of civilized life. They could originate with An or Enlil, but more fittingly they were generally associated with Enki and the Abzu, the source of divine wisdom. One of the major agents of their transfer from the Abzu to the human realm was the goddess Inana. The process of transfer was celebrated in some detail in the composition Inana and Enki, which described how she brought the *m e* to her spouse Dumuzi and her city Uruk (Black et al. 1998-: 1.3.1). While Inana’s explicit associations with the *m e* were constructive, her reputation for irrational behavior imbued her conveying of the *m e* with an ominous air. Furthermore, descriptions of the *m e* in human contexts often stressed the fragility of their integrity (Farber-Flügge 1973: 150–2).

The implications of these divine contributions to cosmic order were not comforting for humanity. The cosmos was characterized as an unpredictable and dangerous place. Humanity’s worst fears found expression in both the provoked and unprovoked anger of the gods. While offerings to the gods represented humanity’s fulfillment of its cosmic role, pleasing the gods was by no means simple. In Atra-hasis Enlil became hostile to humanity simply because the din of everyday life prevented him from sleeping (Foster 1993a: 158–201). He sent plague, famine, and drought to reduce humanity’s numbers. Each time, through the advice of Enki, people were able to target their offerings to the gods best able to alleviate their suffering. When Enlil finally coerced the rest of the gods into unleashing the ultimate divine weapon, the flood, even Enki was rendered powerless to intercede. He was able to arrange for only the survival of a single human family, that of Atra-hasis, the Babylonian Noah.

The unpredictability of unprovoked divine displeasure was well illustrated by the figure of Inana herself. In Enki and the World Order she was characterized as the power that could overturn any cosmic order (Black et al. 1998-: 1.1.3). Further-

more, Inana’s involvement also lent a degree of contingency to conceptions of the divine inspiration underlying human institutions.

The two modes of divine anger, provoked and unprovoked, were both found in *Cursing of Agade* (Black et al. 1998-: 2.1.5). King Naram-Sin attempted to gain a favorable omen to build a temple to Inana in his city of Akkad. Enlil, however, reacted with only silent displeasure. This set in train a course of events that led ultimately to the invasion of the land by the barbarian Gutians. Naram-Sin resolved to destroy Enlil’s temple. In retaliation, Enlil sent the barbarian hordes to obliterate the city of Akkad.

The nature of divine government and its implications required other means of countering the vagaries of the cosmos. There were numerous hymns to deities and temples that attempted to prompt a wide variety of gods and goddesses to exert their influence on their fellow divinities on humanity’s behalf. More strikingly, they used the figure of the king to evoke cosmic order. This provided the intellectual context for the king’s divinity. The nuances of the king’s role were conveyed by a subtle set of comparisons both positive and negative with various traditional deities.

The active aspect of his role in preventing the provocation of divine wrath involved a delicate balance. He had to ensure that human actions did not displease the gods and that the temples were provisioned without exercising undue force on his own subjects. This dilemma was reflected in comparisons of the king with two gods. The king was associated with the sun god (Polonsky 2002: 436–9, 471–529). This was expressed by Hammurabi (1792–1750 BCE) in the prologue to his law code:

At that time, Anu and Enlil, for the enhancement of the well-being of the people, named me by my name, Hammurabi, the pious prince, who venerates the gods, to make justice prevail in the land, to abolish the wicked and the evil, to prevent the strong from oppressing the weak, to rise like the sun god over all humankind, to illuminate the land. (Roth 1997: 76–7)

The sun god was the divine judge. The sun god provided a role model for how the king should positively contribute to human order. Furthermore, the royal hymns often alluded to successful provisioning as a reason for the gods to reward the king with a good fate. It was the sun god who was imagined as presiding over the divine assembly as it met to pronounce its satisfaction or dissatisfaction with human actions through the medium of the innards of a sacrificed sheep (Polonsky 2002: 224–39).

Implicitly, however, a comparison of the king with an even more powerful deity loomed over Old Babylonian royal depictions. The warrior god Ninurta was often acclaimed as “king” in mythological texts. Furthermore, while contemporary royal inscriptions rarely alluded to royal warfare, Ninurta’s role of terrorizing or oppressing foreign lands was one for which many royal hymns frequently lauded the king. However, in the composition *Ninurta’s Return to Nibru*, Ninurta’s return from victories abroad caused a cosmic crisis as he toyed with challenging his father Enlil for supreme power (Black et al. 1998-:). The exercise of force and violence that was so necessary to deal with enemies abroad would only lead to chaos if turned upon the homeland (Jones in press).

The king's task was to prevent enemies from harming the homeland by either destroying or subduing them. But the fragility of the king's position in the face of external threat was conceptualized through his relationship with Inana. The king incarnated Dumuzi, the divine consort of Inana herself, and married the goddess in the sacred marriage ceremony. Most obviously, the power and capriciousness personified by Inana rendered the position of any spouse, divine or human, precarious (Jones 2003).

Non-Divine Kingship in the First Millennium

The idea that the cosmos was not predetermined and that order required a degree of royal intervention was not absent from first millennium tablets. However, texts extant from this period were dominated by a very different attitude toward cosmic order. Our most commonly attested literary text from this period is the Epic or Poem of Creation (Foster 1993a: 351–402). This commemorated the primeval evolution of the cosmos that culminated in the victory of Marduk, patron deity of Babylon, over the forces of chaos led by Tiamat, the personification of the sea. For this action, the rest of the gods acknowledged the suzerainty of Marduk. This rise of Marduk was widely reflected in other first millennium texts and was paralleled in the north of Mesopotamia by the figure of Assur, the patron god of Assyria. This reflected the increased political importance of the cities these gods personified. However, especially in the case of Marduk, these new gods represented not only new rulers of the cosmos, but also a new type of supreme cosmic authority. According to the Epic of Creation, cosmic order was not a random entity, but rather something determined by Marduk in primeval times. After defeating Tiamat, Marduk created an ordered cosmos by dividing her carcass. In such a cosmos divine decrees and the me were redundant concepts. Divine decrees were imagined as a completed set of proclamations inscribed on the "Tablet of Destinies" that was seized by the victorious Marduk. The role of the me was fulfilled by Marduk himself. As the offspring of Ea, it was he who represented divine power in human cultural achievements.

Marduk was not merely a replacement for Enlil at the head of the pantheon. He was a new kind of chief god altogether, one who could impose order on his fellow gods for the benefit of humanity. Moreover, to praise this new kind of leader, the Epic of Creation consciously redeployed motifs prominent in Old Babylonian evocations of order to celebrate the new order.

The motifs of the sun, provisioning, and marriage were reused in the poem to characterize Marduk in a manner reminiscent of the divine king in Old Babylonian compositions. At the first appearance of Marduk in the poem his grandfather, An, the sky god, acclaimed him in solar terms as:

The son Sun god, the son Sun god,
The son, the sun, the sunlight of the gods. (Foster 1993a: 357)

Second, the king's old task of provisioning the gods was attributed to the new divine figure:

When the gods had given kingship over to Marduk
They said to him expressions of goodwill and obedience,
"Henceforth, you shall be the provider for our sanctuaries." (Foster 1993a: 382)

The third motif, marriage to a fearsome female figure, was redeployed more elliptically. Whereas Inana, Istar in Akkadian, the spouse of the king in Old Babylonian thought, was the most prominent goddess in first millennium texts, she was never referred to by name in the Epic of Creation. The only terrifying female figure in the Epic of Creation was Tiamat. Marduk's cosmic ascension was based on defeating her in battle, not marrying her. Nevertheless, his relationship to Tiamat had conjugal undertones. Marduk acknowledged the legitimating qualities of marrying Tiamat. He merely disagreed with her choice of the obscure figure of Qingu as her spouse and hinted that this was an honor that should have been his:

You named Qingu to be spouse for you
Though he had no right to be, you set him up for chief god. (Foster 1993a: 375)

The sexual undertones of the relationship between Marduk and Tiamat were fully brought out in a Neo-Assyrian cultic commentary that described Marduk as the one "who [defeat]ed Tiamat with his penis" (Livingstone 1989: 94).

From this perspective, what needed explaining in history was disorder, not order. In the poem Erra and Ishum cosmic crises were explained as the result of Marduk's periodically withdrawing from the world (Foster 1993a: 771–805). Without his restraining hand, chaos ensued. The poem itself focused on the occasion when Marduk left the rampaging fire-god Erra in charge. The poem also reinterpreted the flood as due not to the noise of mankind, but as the result of a previous absence of Marduk.

The other prominent way of conceptualizing disorder involved the king. Replaced by Marduk as the regulator of cosmic order, the king was no longer treated as divine. Outside of royal inscriptions he was often seen as an explicitly problematic figure; his actions were usually destructive of cosmic order. Historiographic texts could depict the king as a danger to civilized life. For example, the so-called Weidner Chronicle presented early Mesopotamian history as a series of royal transgressions against Marduk and his city:

By his exalted command, Marduk took away sovereignty from the horde of Gutium and gave it to Utuhegal. Utuhegal the "fisherman" laid his evil hand on Marduk's city, and his corpse was carried away by the river. Marduk gave sovereignty over all lands to Šulgi, the son of Ur-Nammu, and the latter did not carry out Marduk's rites perfectly; he profaned the purification rituals, and his sin... Amar-Suena, his son, altered the great bulls and the (sheep) sacrifices of the New Year Festival of Marduk's temple. Goring by an ox was foretold for him, and he died from the "bite" of his shoe. (Al-Rawi 1990: 10)

A late first millennium text sets out in detail the supposed atrocities of an otherwise obscure eighth century king, Nabu-šuma-iškun, against Babylon:

Year by year Nabu-šuma-iškun increased the killing, pillaging, murdering and forced labor upon them. In one day he burned alive 16 Kuthians in the Zababa Gate which is in Babylon. He carried off the sons of Babylon to Syria and Elam as gifts. He expelled the sons of Babylon, their wives, their sons, and their slaves and settled them in the countryside. The quarter of the sons of Babylon... he heaped into a mound and a ruin and turned it into royal property. (Cole 1994: 235-6)

At a cultic level, both regular rituals, such as the New Year festival, and irregular ones, such as the Substitute King ritual, emphasized the dangers to cosmic order posed by the king. Thus, the New Year Festival, the major state religious ceremony of the first millennium Mesopotamian calendar, culminated in the king's appearing stripped of his insignia of office before the statue of Marduk (Black 1981; Pongratz-Leisten 1999b). The king was seen as fit for renewed office not because of any positive qualities, but rather because he refrained from exhibiting negative ones, as he recited:

I did not sin, lord of the countries. I was not neglectful of your godship. I did not destroy Babylon; I did not command its overthrow. I did not... the temple of Esagil, I did not forget its rites. I did not rain blows on the cheek of a subordinate... I did not humiliate them. I watched out for Babylon; I did not smash its walls. (Sachs 1969: 334)

The Substitute King ritual was carried out in response to the most ominous of astronomical phenomena, a solar or lunar eclipse. This represented so extreme a sign of divine displeasure at royal misdeeds that only the king's death would assuage the divine anger. To avoid this fate, a substitute would take on the outward trappings of royalty for a few months before being ritually slain (Bottéro 1992b: 138-55; Parpola 1993c).

Characterizations of the king's divinity on Old Babylonian tablets implied a very different cosmic role from his non-divine first millennium counterpart. What correlations to this contrast can we see in contemporary political life?

The Social Experiences of Power

For any complex society the set of social concerns that find articulation in cultural products and the way that they do so are unpredictable. Most of our texts that directly illustrate royal relations with a king's subjects were the internal records of palace or temple administrative hierarchies. But civic institutions provided social experiences of political power that fit with the imaginative experiences identified above even though civic institutions were relatively less well documented (Van De Mieroop 1999b). I will first examine the ways in which the king intervened in the civic life of his subjects. I will then turn to the long-term sociological processes that illuminate the differences between the projections of royal intervention to a cosmic level found on Old Babylonian tablets and those on first millennium ones.

Royal intervention in civic life

Throughout Mesopotamian history the sources regularly highlighted the king's role as the head of extensive palace or temple administrative hierarchies. At the core of royal authority, however, was the king's representation of his community's sense of self. He provided one means of transcending internal jurisdictional and property divisions and mobilizing resources from the whole community. A king's intervention in the lives of his subjects was mainly of two kinds: *judicial and fiscal*. Judicially the king was the highest court of appeal. Fiscally the king had the right to exact contributions from the citizens, both in kind and in labor. At the same time, a number of those citizens expected such extractions to be canceled. This could be done either retrospectively, through the cancellation of arrears owed, or prospectively, through the grant of exemption from future exactions. In the case of prospective exemptions, the king could have been credited with either acting on his own volition or merely confirming divine will or immemorial custom.

There were significant differences in these civic experiences of royal power between the Old Babylonian period and the first millennium. Old Babylonian cities looked to their kings to cancel their obligations both retrospectively and prospectively. Thus, for retrospective exemptions we possess a number of references in Old Babylonian sources to the king's "establishing justice." From extant texts of the actual decrees, we can see that this action canceled private debts, debt bondage, and arrears of taxes owed to tax farmers. The costs of the tax cancellation were borne by the crown rather than the tax farmer (Charpin 1990). In prospective exemptions we have a number of royal claims to innovative exempting. The kings of Isin, for example, were especially careful of the feelings of the most prestigious cities in their realm. Thus the prologue to the Laws of Lipit-Ishtar boasted of reducing their forced labor burdens:

At that time, I liberated the sons and daughters of the city of Nippur, the sons and daughters of the city of Ur, the sons and daughters of the city of Isin, the sons and daughters of the lands of Sumer and Akkad, who were subjugated by the yoke(?), and I restored order. (Roth 1997: 25)

In contrast, first millennium retrospective cancellations were rarely attested, while prospective ones were seen as confirmatory rather than innovative on the king's part. Already in the preceding Kassite period we hear of an institution called *kidenūtu*, meaning "protection," whereby cities claimed to be under divine protection and thus free from royal impositions. During the Neo-Assyrian period we know of Nippur, Sippar, Borsippa, and Babylon in the south and Assur and Harran in the north enjoying these privileges (Reviv 1988). The implications of *kidenūtu* were spelled out in the so-called Advice to a Prince:

If (the king) called up the whole of Sippar, Nippur, and Babylon to impose forced labor on the peoples aforesaid, requiring of them service at the recruiter's cry, Marduk, sage of the gods, deliberative prince, will turn (the king's) land over to his foe so that the forces

of his land will do forced labor for his foe. Anu, Enlil, and Ea, the great gods who dwell in heaven and earth, have confirmed in their assembly the exemption of these (people from such obligations). (Foster 1993a: 761)

The citizens of Babylon, in a letter to their joint Assyrian suzerains Assurbanipal and his brother Šamaš-šum-ukin, loftily claimed that within the limits of their city even a dog shared in these privileges (Pfeiffer 1935: 55–6). Assyrian kings often pandered to the desire of Babylonian cities for tax exemptions, but seem to have garnered little credit for their efforts. Whatever a king's claims, it seems likely that the citizens saw him as simply confirming their traditional privileges. Moreover, these were privileges that were perceived as constantly threatened by a royal potential for intervention that provoked bitter resistance (Brinkman 1984: 22–3; Frame 1992: 35–6).

The term *kidenūtu* itself was not attested after the Neo-Assyrian period. Nevertheless, the basic issue of city autonomy seems to have persisted into later times. Tradition remembered the end of the short-lived Neo-Babylonian dynasty as due to the estrangement between its final king Nabonidus and the citizens of his own capital, conceptualized as royal transgressions against Marduk and his temple (Beaulieu 1989: 149–203; Kuhrt 1990). In contrast to both the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian empires, the Achaemenid and Seleucid regimes were far more comfortable with a decentralized structure in which individual cities and regions could enjoy considerable autonomy (Kuhrt and Sherwin-White 1987).

The social relations in the Mesopotamian state

Old Babylonian civic leaders reacted positively, if nervously, to the king's intervention and acquiesced in the projection of it to the cosmic level, but the first millennium leaders evaluated similar interventions less positively. This was probably due to changes in society. Twin long-term developmental processes of territorial integration and elite differentiation provided the context for literate urban elites' increasing feelings of estrangement from royal government.

Before the Old Babylonian period political developments had seen an oscillation between independent city-states and hegemonies such as the Akkad and Ur III "empires." Under these latter regimes a number of Mesopotamian city-states were subsumed into larger polities. However, there was little in the way of direct rule. Authority was delegated to client princes who, whether local or central in origin, were always liable to rebel or defect. Each city-state retained enough sense of its political identity to reemerge when centralized control lapsed. In the early second millennium, after the fall of the Ur III dynasty, however, we begin to see the emergence of integrated regional states larger than the old city-states. This territorial integration was accompanied by elite differentiation. Thus, within southern Mesopotamia, both Rim-Sin of Larsa and Hammurabi of Babylon resisted leaving significant conquests in the hands of subordinate kings. Although Hammurabi's dynasty only controlled the whole of Babylonia for a short time, its decline saw the region split into two sub-regions rather than fragment back into city-states.

Also a number of Old Babylonian dynasties identified themselves in terms not so much of their capitals as with a specific ethnic group, the Amorites. This people had spread over much of the Near East by the early second millennium transcending the boundaries of the individual city-states (Kamp and Yoffee 1980).

Nevertheless, there seems to have been no deep structural division between king and elites. While Old Babylonian kings themselves may have cultivated an air of ethnic distinction from their urban subjects, they were happy enough to employ them in the administration of their realm. Moreover, by the late Old Babylonian period, if not earlier, the kings of Babylon had essentially "privatized" much of their administrative machinery through a form of tax farming (Charpin 1982; Yoffee 1977: 143–51).

Elite involvement in royal administration in the first millennium was rather different. After the Old Babylonian period the process of territorial consolidation had continued. Southern Mesopotamia came to be seen as a single land with Babylon as its natural center. Similarly, in northern Mesopotamia, the former city-state of Assur became the center of the territorial state of Assyria, "the land of Assur."

Particularly in the south, however, this consolidation was accompanied by a degree of social differentiation. Kings of Babylonia often claimed different ethnic status from their subjects as Kassites, Chaldeans, Assyrians, Persians, and finally Macedonians. In the later second millennium, both Assyrian and Kassite rulers periodically moved their capitals from traditional urban centers to new cities. Both Tukulti-Ninurta II of Assyria and Kurigalzu of Babylon founded new capital cities that they named after themselves. First millennium rulers tended to have their seats of government in established centers, although both Assur and Babylon were seldom actual centers of government in the first millennium. The Assyrian capital was moved to Kalhu under Assurnasirpal II (883–859 BCE). Sargon II (721–705) mimicked some of his second millennium predecessors and built the entirely new capital of Dur-Sharukin, "Fortress of Sargon." His son and successor Sennacherib (704–681) abandoned this new site and ruled from the old established city of Nineveh. In the south, Babylonia was effectively under Assyrian domination from the mid-eighth century to the late seventh. The situation was reversed and political power was restored to Babylon with the Neo-Babylonian empire. Not only was this period short-lived, it also included the bizarre episode of the last Neo-Babylonian king, Nabonidus, residing in the North Arabian oasis of Tema for a decade and allegedly ignoring the traditional capital. Subsequently, both Babylonia and Assyria were ruled by foreign dynasties, the Persian Achaemenids, and the Greco-Macedonian Seleucids from a variety of cities outside the traditional circle of Mesopotamian capitals: Susa in south western Iran, Seleucia-on-the-Tigris between Assyria and Babylonia, and Antioch in Syria.

The urban elite of the old established cities probably maintained some connections with royal administrations. But mainly they seem to have found expression for their sense of political identity in the priestly hierarchies of their cities' temples. Tellingly, the walls that protected Old Babylonian cities generally had names that glorified kings. By the first millennium, such names usually glorified gods (George 1996: 368–9).

Conclusions

As portrayed by Old Babylonian and first millennium copyists, divine and non-divine kingship represented contrasting ways of conceptualizing the king's role in the cosmos. Divine kingship implied the need for a king to fulfill a specific role. He had to be both the incarnation of the fertility god Dumuzi and the equal of the judicious sun god, while avoiding the violent excesses associated with the god Ninurta. Non-divine kingship implied that his subjects could not ultimately rely on the king to fulfill this latter condition. They would have to seek other, more reliable, cosmic champions, such as the god Marduk.

Neither of these two visions of kingship dominated either period to the exclusion of the other. However, between the two periods, literate urban elites gradually became estranged from royal administration. This sociological process suggests that each vision expressed something fundamental about the contrasting experience of kingship in the two eras.

FURTHER READING

For a survey of traditional kingships around the world, see Grottanelli et al. 1987. Modern scholarship on the sacred aspects of kingship is masterially reviewed in Feeley-Harnik 1985.

For a comparison of Mesopotamian and Egyptian civilizations, see Baines and Yoffee 1998.

For Mesopotamian kingship in general, the only comprehensive monographs, Labat 1939 and Frankfort 1948, are interesting, but dated. More recent short surveys include Edzard 1972-5, Joannès 2001, Lambert 1998, Postgate 1995, Seux 1980-3.

Narrative histories (Kuhrt 1995 and Van De Mieroop 2004) and thematic surveys (Oppenheim 1977, Postgate 1992, and Van De Mieroop 1997a) provide much on the socio-political context of the institution. See also Michalowski 1987. For kingship's ideological context Jacobsen 1946 is idiosyncratic and dated, yet daring. Less ambitious, but more up to date, are Machinist 1976, Zaccagnini 1994, and Liverani 1995.

Much recent scholarship on early Mesopotamian kingship focuses on dichotomies of political versus religious power. See, for example, Heimpel 1992, Steinkeller 1993, 1999b, Selz 1998, along with the classic studies of Jacobsen 1943, 1957. For studies more congruent with the approach adopted in this chapter, compare Michalowski 1983, 1989b, Cooper 1993a, and Liverani 1993b.

Studies of first millennium kingship focus on the relationship of the king to the gods. For Neo-Assyrian kingship, see Liverani 1979 and the controversial studies of Parpola 1993a, 1995. For first millennium Babylonia see Kuhrt 1987 and Pongratz-Leisten 1997.