



MARI THEOMORPHISM

INTIMATION OF SACRALITY IN THE ROYAL CORRESPONDENCE

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In a recent volume that is helpfully posted on the web (Brisch 2008), a number of scholars have dealt with the confluence of religion and power across a number of cultures.¹ Those who discussed the Mesopotamian context were intrigued by the evidence that occasionally living kings assumed divine powers, among them the incarnation of divine attributes, the assumption of eternal life (albeit beyond the earthly stage), the capacity to reshape mortal destinies, the charisma to impose their will, and the acceptance of human adoration. What was implied by divine kingship does remain a constant issue in most of these essays, the criteria and elements for defining divine kingship having a major impact on any assessment. There is a propensity to limit the manifestation to such periods as Agade and Ur III, when kings built or defended empires.² To compensate for the dearth of administrative documents on divinized monarchs, there is continued reliance on richly decorated court poetry in which sentiments and phraseology emulate what is found in hymns and myths. Yet

¹ Although I do not cite them, the essays in this volume reveal a new level of sophistication in analyzing the evidence and developing criteria by which to engage the many issues. In addition, these articles may be consulted for their rich bibliography: Gebhard Selz ('Divine Prototypes'), Piotr Michalowski ('The Mortal Kings of Ur: A Short Century of Divine Rule in Ancient Mesopotamia'), Irene Winter ('Touched by the Gods: Visual Evidence for the Divine Status of Rulers in the Ancient Near East'), Erica Ehrenberg ('Dieu et Mon Droit: Kingship in Late Babylonian and Early Persian Times'), and Clemens Reichel ('The King is Dead, Long Live the King: The Last Days of the Šu-Sin Cult at Ešnunna and Its Aftermath'). A useful discussion on some of these issues, especially as they concern the variety of anthropomorphic manifestations, is in Hamori (2008).

D. Charpin has also broached the issue in a review-article (2006, 155–56) where he offered these remarks, 'À Mari sous Zimri-Lim, les traces d'une divinisation royale sont minces: pas d'onomastique basilophile, pas de déterminatif devant le nom du roi. On doit cependant rappeler la formule qui figure à la fin de plusieurs lettres: «que mon seigneur agisse en fonction de son statue d'altesse (*elūtišu*) et de roi». La même formule est attestée avec *ilātum* «divinité» au lieu de *elūtum*'.

² 'Much has been made of early Mesopotamian divine kingship, but if the analysis presented here stands, its significance has been highly overstated. The phenomenon had a short shelf life, perhaps no more than a decade or so under Naram-Sin, and just over sixty years during the time of Ur III kings' (Michalowski 2008, 41).

there is also the realization that Mesopotamians did not set a sharp distinction between palatial and celestial powers. Consequently, a most relevant question for us to ask is: What is at stake when a king was treated as divine?³

In this brief paper dedicated to the memory of a much missed colleague, Bibek Hruška, I sample the evidence from a category of documents not often plumbed for its contribution to this subject: the letters exchanged among the elite of the Mari age.⁴ The material I present is illustrative rather than comprehensive; yet its conclusions should be worth keeping in mind, for it brings modest evidence that may, in fact, complicate our capacity to establish criteria, temporal or spatial, about what might be meant when rulers were deemed touched by godhood.⁵

The King's Divinity

I open on a letter Yasim-El sent to his king Zimri-Lim. Yasim-El was posted at the court of a vassal, Atamrum of Andarig; but he also participated in the many intrigues taking place in the region, sending many reports and advice to this king. In *ARM* 26 402, he quotes the following grievance by a man named Tarḫiya:

As for me, was I retained in Andarig for my pleasure? Did my lord not donate me to Atamrum? But when lord handed me to Atamrum, I told my lord, 'My lord should install an agent (*ḥazannum*)' and he answered me, 'What kind of agent is there that I can install? It is you who is acting as agent'. I now hear from my sources that 'Yamama will be given to another person. What offenses could I be committing against my lord that he should be considering giving to another person a maidservant whom he had (once) given to me?

³ Cooper (2008), 263, has pungent questions: 'What were the perks of divine kings? What difference did it make in how the ruler perceived his role vis-à-vis his subjects, and how those subjects perceived and behaved toward the ruler?'

⁴ I avoid analyzing commemorative documents, especially those of Yahdun-Lim, where the vocabulary attached to rulers readily draws on that to deities. For these documents, see Frayne (1990), 602–08, and my study of one of them (1990). Likewise, I do not analyze the highly emotive bilingual letter a scribe addressed to Zimri-Lim; see *LAPU* 16 22. Its reverse is a plea for diverse favors, in a style that emulates literary texts that address gods no less than kings. As such it matches other literary appeals couched as letters, such as those found at Rimalḫ; see especially *OBTR* 150 translated in Foster (2005), 223–24, and studied in Foster (1993). (Admittedly, requests by administrators can verge on the hyperbolic, see *FM* 9 52, 59.)

The obverse of this bilingual letter, however, is a huge double invocation sequentially addressing Zimri-Lim first as the beloved of the gods, from whom he sustains all greatness, and then as the wise conqueror who brought peace and justice to his land. It is obvious that this is indeed the main focus of the text and it may well be that Durand is correct (p. 110) that it was issued to commemorate the birth of Zimri-Lim's heir, hence the guarantor of dynastic continuity. Similarly commemorative is the Epic of Zimri-Lim. While it is in the process of publication, what has been cited from it shows that it poached heavily on hymnal language.

⁵ Admittedly, we have no letter in the Mari archives that approaches the dithyramb Abi-milku of Tyre crafted about pharaoh (*EA* 147, 149); but he was writing to a ruler who presented himself as a deity; see *CAD* Š/2, 266 (*šēlu*). In Egyptian hymns, the aroma of the deities is that of Punt; see Žabkar (1980), 127–29.

We do not as yet have any other attestation for Tarḥiya. That he was donated (*qāšum*) has led Birot to initially think he was a woman (sub *ARMT* 14, 262). Normally slaves and war captives of both sexes can be donated; yet Tarḥiya, who is a man, does not give the impression of being a slave, since he complains about losing a maid the king had once given (*nadānum*) to him. Tarḥiya may once have had standing in Mari but when we meet him he was in permanent exile to Andarig. Bitter about his fate, Tarḥiya loses caution and presumes to advise the king on installing a *ḥazannum* for Andarig. The OB *ḥazannum* is a resident-agent of a major power in local court. Since Zimri-Lim is hardly likely to post there someone he is abandoning to a vassal or that any *ḥazannum* posted there would not know his own charge, I am presuming that line 14 is sarcastic. In fact, the irony can be highlighted by translating the phrase ‘Why don’t you act as agent?’⁶ But Tarḥiya misses the king’s ironic jab and, faced with the potential reassignment of his handmaid Yamama, can only have felt mistreated by a frivolous king.

Tarḥiya’s disgrace might explain Yasim-El’s sympathy, for in his world anyone might share that unhappy fate. Recognizing the king’s capacity to make arbitrary decisions, Yasim-El approaches the matter gingerly. He relays Tarḥiya’s grievance, claiming fear of reproach for not doing so, but then ends his note with an unexpected turn of phrase.

It is normal for administrators and diplomats to end their reports on such sentiments as *annūtam la annūtam bēli līpuš/lišpuram*, ‘my lord should do/write me whatever he wishes’. When they convey delicate news, they may push for action by declaring their confidence in the king’s judgment, *bēli ša šarrūtišu lištāl/līpuš*, ‘my lord should act/reflect according to his kingship’.⁷ They may bolster their expectation further by broadening the king’s authority. Thus, in reporting prophecies that demand a difficult royal decision, Sammetar writes, *bēli lištālma ša šarrūtišu rabūtim [gal] līpuš*, ‘my lord should reflect and act according to his great kingship’ (*ARM* 26 199:55–56).⁸ Somewhat similar in vein is *bēli ša elūtišu u šarrūtišu līpuš* (A.1593) where *elūtum* seems to be coined by the writer to convey ‘majesty’.⁹ We have choices on how to translate this phrase: It may suggest an increase in authority, with the king acting out of majesty no less than royalty. Or it may act as nominal hendiadys (Wasserman 2003, 5–16), with the king being imagined as operating out of ‘his exalted royalty’.

šarrūtum u ilūtum

However, in his letter about Tarḥiya Yasim-El ends differently, *bēli ša šarrūtišu u ilūtišu līpuš*, ‘my lord should act according to his royal and divine prerogatives’ (ll. 33–34). The sequence suggests a fuller investment of authority in the king than what we see

⁶ In his edition of this text, Joannès considers Tarḥiya as a *ḥazannum*.

⁷ See further Durand (1991), 60–65.

⁸ The phrase ‘great kingship’ is surprisingly scarce; see *CAD* S, 8b [*šabātu*], applied to Halab in Hittite texts. The adjective occurs as a Sumerogram or in Akkadian; see Durand (1991), 63, n. 142. On its use in A.1093 see below.

⁹ *AHw*, 210b (*elūtu*), cites the phrase *šubūt elūti/ilūti*; see also 1107a (*šabātu[m]*).

above, leapfrogging majesty and moving from kingship to divinity.¹⁰ It is reasonable to imagine that here too we have an example of a nominal hendiadys; if so, we will need to assess whether Yasim-El is reaching for ‘divine kingship’ or for ‘royal godhood’. Practically speaking there may be little difference between the two as far as flattery is concerned. It is possible, however, that in sequencing two separate spheres of authority, one earthly the other celestial, Yasim-El is advancing contrasting arguments. As a king, Zimri-Lim was within his prerogative to order Tarḥiya to Andarig, for kings can advance as well as retreat career.¹¹ As a god, however, Zimri-Lim might relent and treat Tarḥiya with compassion.

In his comments to Yasim-El’s letter, Joannès (*ARM* 26/2, 255) cites an interesting variation on the above phrase. A Yaminite leader, Hammi-Ištamar, urges the king to act ‘according to his great kingship and his divinity (*bēlī ša lugal-ti-šu rabūtum u ilūtīšu līpuš*).¹² We might compare this sentiment to an expression used by Šadum-labua of Ašnakkum. Occupying a throne once held by his assassinated brother, he writes Zimri-Lim an impassioned declaration of loyalty (*ARM* 28 103). In *ARM* 28 102 he speaks of his days in Mari, likely as an apprentice prince. He promises to share his host’s table and recalls this before the text breaks, ‘My lord had me to serve him, as befits his royalty and his majesty (*bēlī kīma šarrūtīšu u rabūtīšu [ina pānišu uš]tazizzanni...*).’ It is possible, here again, to treat the phrase, as a hendiadys (Kupper: ‘en fonction de sa grande royauté’, *ARMT* 28, 150); but if so, we should not miss observing that *rabūtum* is commonly applied to the majesty of deities.¹³

ilūtum

There is yet a more refined version of the concept, wherein *ilūtum*, ‘divinity’, references a king and so allows focus on a heavenly sphere that alone is worthy of a ruler. In A.1544, the king is advised to ‘act in accordance with his divine prerogatives (*bēlī ša ilūtīšu līpuš*)’ and in A.2145 (both cited in *ARMT* 26/2, 223), Itur-asdu (then posted at Naḥur) urges the king to act according to his divinity, *bēlī ša dingir-ti-šu līpuš*. The variation in spelling is important, for the Sumerogram makes it less likely that Mari high officials (and their scribes) are invoking a West Semiticism in which ʔlōhūm, god(s) can also refer to individuals such as Moses, Pharaoh, or the dead Samuel

¹⁰ The difference in sequence makes it unlikely that we are dealing with equivalent phraseology, even if *elūtum* and *ilūtum* seem close enough for confusion; see already Charpin (*ARM* 26/2, 223, n. r) and Durand (1991), 63.

¹¹ For another protest against an assignment see A.3926 (Villard 2001, 114 and n. 694): ‘... I have been transferred four times, while they were not. My lord should consider not transferring me to Tuttul. It is true that my lord took me out from his “fold” (*tarbašum*); if my lord dislikes me and wishes not to see me, he should transfer me to my lord’s palace in Ekallatum so that I may remain in that palace *ana kuššūrim*. Or else, my lord could send me back to my post in my lord’s fortress [Dūr-Yasmaḥ-Addu/Yaḥdun-Lim]. I can never live in Tuttul. My lord should consider these matters’.

¹² A.1093, *ARM* 26/2, 255; the attribution is courtesy of J.-M. Durand.

¹³ *CAD* R, 57–58. The OB phrase *kīma rabūtum* can express a sentiment equivalent to ‘kindly please’ and is so used in OB. However, the sequence as found in Šadum-labua’s note makes it clear that something more consequential is at stake.

(Ringren 1974). Another *ilūtum* reference comes from late in Zimri-Lim's reign (ZL10'). His agent Ḥabdu-malik was charged with a delicate mission to set peace between Atamrum of Andarig and Hammurabi of Kurda. At stake was whether Išme-Dagan continues to make trouble. Failure to rein him in could compromise the reputation of all involved. Ḥabdu-malik writes, 'I have (or he has) sent his young servant to my lord. I worry lest my lord in his anger will write him hurtful words. As my lord makes his decision, let him write him his soothing words. In view of the report I have sent my lord, my lord should reflect in accordance with his divinity (*bēli ša ilūtišu lištāl*) and write him what needs to be written to him' (ARM 26 391:62–69).

But the juiciest extract comes from A. 450 (ARMT 26/1, 378 and n. 13), a letter posted by Šidqi-epuḫ: 'My lord has assigned me this important task, but I am not equal to it, much as when God summons a human being. As for me, a maggot at the base of a city wall, my lord touched my chin, as per his divinity, and moved me among gentlemen (*bēli ša ilūtišu suqī ilputma ana awīlē uterranni*).'¹⁴ Here, the contrast between divinity and humanity is sharply set (*kīma ilum awīlūtam inabbu*), allowing Šidqi-epuḫ to deftly establish a parallel between the divine acts and that of a king who can emulate divinity. The maggot simile is there for a quick reversal and the imagery of the touch that transforms may remind some of Michelangelo's inspired quickening of Adam. In these statements, flattery is obvious and it borders on obsequiousness.¹⁵ Yet, there is also honesty, of the kind we readily meet in prayers addressing gods. Lemaire (1996, 431), in fact, connects Šidqi-epuḫ's panegyric with diverse biblical prophetic calls, in which the accent is on humility in the face of demanding commission. We may therefore presume that it comes from a man who feels overwhelmed by the great charge being imposed on him.

Except that we know a bit more about the circumstances of this letter. Of individuals named Šidqi-epuḫ, we may single out a bureaucrat in charge of oil supplies in Zimri-Lim's first years. He may be the same person who resurfaces a decade later, practically at the dusk of Zimri-Lim's reign (2nd half of ZL 11'), as successor of Yasimsumu, the *šandabakkum*-accountant in the Mari palace.¹⁶ Šidqi-epuḫ's personality can

¹⁴ The attribution is courtesy of J.-M. Durand. A crucial sequence in this fragment was clarified in Veenhof (1989). Durand (ARM 26/1, 378–79 and 379, n. 19) discusses 'touching the chin' as a symbol of delegating authority and cites *AbB* 2 154 (= *CT* 29 23), 'Instead of coming to his help, telling him, "don't worry" and touching his chin, you simply took his maidservant as distress'. See also ARM 26 423:46 (figurative; kings 'touch the chin of the land') and ARM 26 423:53, 'Go ahead, you [he?] will refuse Zimri-Lim's help and the king of Ešnunna will prepare a large support army. He will not worry about seizing the edge of his garment, his knees will not touch the ground, he will make him reach his goal; he will touch his chin'. For *ana awīlē turrum*, see Erra 4:56: to instill awe in people, Ištar had male actors and singers behave as women (*zīkrūssunu uterru ana simišūti*, *CAD Z*, 117a).

¹⁵ Durand, ARM 26/2, 378, n. 12, 'Plusieurs documents de Mari recourent à un ton d'une obséquiosité et d'une flagornerie telles que l'image que nous faisons des monarchies amorrites syriennes en sortira certainement bouleversée, une fois ces documents publiés'.

¹⁶ Durand (*FM* 7, 143) suggests that he might have been in the Aleppo region in the intervening years. He might also have worked in Dēr, a Mari possession (*FM* 3 16 = *LAPO* 18 1180; likely also ARM 6 39 = *LAPO* 16 145).

be reconstructed from fragments. In one he is a sharp-tongued bureaucrat who does not hesitate to denounce a colleague (*FM* 7 43); in another, he ignores the request of an *abu bītim* (*FM* 3 16); and in a third he even dismisses a queen's order (*ARM* 10 16 = *LAPO* 18 1158). In the same letter in which he labels himself a 'maggot at the base of the wall', Šidqī-epuḫ demands land in Mišlan equivalent to what had been allotted to his predecessor, Yasim-Sumu. A quarter of it had already been ceded to the deceased's family. As do many others appealing to kings and gods, Šidqī-epuḫ evokes debt and hunger as he argues to fill the deficit.¹⁷

ilum

Hesitantly, I offer potentially direct applications of divinity to the king. Adulation may well lead officials to declare, 'Towns, earth and heaven belong only to my lord' (*ARM* 2 55 = *LAPO* 17 705; see *ARM* 10 3 = *LAPO* 18 1194); but the allusion to divinity cannot be missed. Despairing over loss of property, a Yaṣīb-Addu writes to the king (*ARM* 26 445), 'All the servants of my lord know that I held land in Qattunan. But now God spoke and the possessor of right is turning back to his right (*inanna ilum iqbīma bēl kittim ana kittiṣu ittur*). Now, if it pleases my lord, he should give me a field in Qattunan, so that I could be counted among my lord's servants at the River Bank. Me, I am not an *unreliable* servant, but am your loyal servant and your farmer. My lord ought not to account among all (others)! A property of my lord truly I am (*lū sikilti bēliya anāku*). My lord should not deny me a field'. The letter dwells on *kittum* (truth, justice, loyalty), a dispensation available to gods no less than kings. How Yaṣīb-Addu lost his property is revealed in a statement (quoted above) of such ambiguity that diverse interpretations have been promoted. The original editor (S. Lackenbacher) thinks it has to do with an *andurārum*, the cancellation of binding commercial agreements.¹⁸ But gods do not initiate such actions; kings do, generally on coming to power. Durand thinks it may have to do with the restoration of the Lim dynasty; but this letter may have been sent to Yasmaḫ-Addu. Heimpel (2003, 372) wonders if the clause implies that a divine oracle is confirming the writer's claim. Given that Yaṣīb-Addu proclaims himself his king's possession (*sikiltum*), it may be plausible, that *ilum* here alludes to the king and we are dealing with a metaphoric expansion of royal power. It would not hurt to imagine here an intentional blurring of demarcations. Moreover, I can also place in this context the many occasions in which the god of the king is credited with success vassals achieve in distant lands, the implication being that the king's own charisma played a role in unleashing supernatural powers otherwise unavailable to mere subordinates.¹⁹

¹⁷ For this portion of A.450, see *LAPO* 17, 534 and *MARI* 8, 756–57.

¹⁸ Charpin (1990) is a basic article on the subject, with bibliography. See also Durand in *LAPO* 18, 256–58.

¹⁹ *The god/lamassum of the lord*: 'the god my lord came to my aid (*tappūti illikma*)' (*ARM* 28 98: 12); similarly A.1931, cited in Charpin (1999), 126, n. 53; 'the *lamassum* of my lord saved me' (*ARM* 28 105: 23'); 'Your god is showing his love for me; he gave me comprehension, and the matter of these men came out...' (*ARM* 28 52: 6'–7'); 'He went, the god of my lord, and handed (the

Sacral Acts

It will be noticed that I have organized the above material as if reflecting a development in the concept of divinity as attached to the king. Even if we succeed in setting these citations in a chronological scheme, the implication must be resisted. In fact, it would be too much to imagine that in the relatively short span of Zimri-Lim's reign (to which most of the extracts can be assigned) such a progression could have been articulated. Nor is it realistic to imagine that administrators awaited demonstration of prowess before apotheosizing their king. Zimri-Lim's poets, in fact, began composing his epic within months of his arrival to the throne, giving him supernatural powers. So I come back to another version of the question posed above: what do correspondents of the Amorite age have in mind when they write of their king's divinity?

None of the kings of OB Mari inherited his seat directly from a ruling father (although Zimri-Lim came back to one) and none delivered a throne to a son (who was Sumu-Yamam is still debated). None of the Mari kings attached a dingir sign to his name; none received one after his death and none had a father who was recalled theophanically. Occasionally we do find administrators who incorporate the names of a living king within theirs, even labeling them 'my god'. Thus, a majordomo of Samsi-Addu is named Samsi-Addu-ilī and a physician was named Samsi-Addu-tukultī. There is a Yaḥdun-Lim-ilī cited in footnotes (Durand 1984, note 24). Astonishingly enough, there is a Babylonian general named Zimri-Lim-šadûni in a fragment of a list that badly needs collation (*ARM* 22 42: 15'). What to make of these references is difficult to say.²⁰

In contrast, the Mari records do not give evidence of shrines that were dedicated to living kings, although sacrifices are offered to the spirits (*lamassātu*) of Agade kings (Sargon and Naram-Sin, *FM* 3 4), to the *eṭemmum* ('ghost') of Yaḥdun-Lim (*ARM* 3 40 = *ARMT* 26 221), and to the spirit of the dead at *kisṣum*-memorials.²¹ There is a sense that the king may own protective spirits (*lamassātu*, *šēdū*) that can come to the aid of

king's) enemy over to him' (*ARM* 26 202: 12–13); 'May the god of my lord walk by our side so that we can carry out a splendid exploit for our lord' (A.3881: 11'–13' = *FM* 2, 322); '... the god of my lord extracted me from the claw of the Elam viceroy' (*ARM* 28 44: 19–20; Terru of Urkiš to Zimri-Lim); troops of Yatar-Ami of Carchemish went after some folks in Irride, 'They found them and arrested them. It is truly your god who has arrested them' (*ARM* 28 19: 13'–15'). Many other examples from allies, vassals, and administrators: *ARM* 26 542 (God of the lord needs to calm the land before harvesting its timber); *ARM* 27 25 (God of the lord calmed the land to complete the census); *ARM* 27 61 (God of the lord helps Qattunan's governor find an escapee); *ARM* 26 108 (God of the lord protects); *ARM* 26 190, 208, 379, 386; *ARM* 28 98 (God of the lord helps achieve victory or is called upon to achieve it).

²⁰ See already Charpin (2006), 156, and Durand (1984), 129–33.

²¹ The last was for such personalities as Addu-duri, possibly the mother or aunt of Zimri-Lim (*MARI* 2, 197, n. 12) or, generically, to *mālikū*, deceased members of the royal family, about which see, most recently, Jacquet (2002). The purpose of the *kisṣum* is made clear from such passages as *AbB* 13 21 in which a man whose son disappeared laments, 'I kept making funeral offerings for him as if he were dead', *kīma mītim kisṣam aktassiṣṣum*. On funerary terminology, see Ghouti (1991).

administrators and generals.²² Such pronouncements do not differ much in objective from others that invoke the help of the gods (generically, *ilum*), of named gods (such as Dagan, Iturmer, Addu, Šamaš), the ‘god of the father’ (that is, of the dynasty), or the king’s personal god.²³ They likewise conjure up supernatural powers attached to the king and as such they remind of the *adū* of NB rulers that are called upon to assure the completion of oaths (*CAD A/1, adū B, 134–5*). What is interesting about the epistolary documentation is that it includes notices in which correspondents allude to the supernatural capacity of the king. I allocate them to those that cover the sensory spectrum and to those that recall the king’s bounty.

The King’s Body

Aura: The King’s Radiance

In the literature there is a broad variety of terms for a glow, brightness, rays, or sparks that emanate from the gods, clothing them in a radiance that inspires fear and dread (Winter 1995, 2572–75; Ataç 2007). Especially in Assyrian literary documents, this emanation is applied to kings. In the Mari letters we meet with limited examples. In the same Addu of Halab oracle that is cited above, there is a reference to Addu providing Zimri-Lim with oil from his own *namrurrū*, making it impossible for the enemy to resist his onslaught. In one of obsequious moments, Išme-Dagan begs Hammurabi for troops, citing his own respect for the glorying of his lord (*nawār bēliya anāku a²³ader*) that in the context can only refer to Hammurabi’s saving brilliance (*ARM 26 384: 25’*).

Sight: The King’s Gaze

Yakun-dir, having arrived newly to his throne in Tarmanni of Idamaras (Guichard 2007), writes to Zimri-Lim to ascertain about his status, ‘My lord looked at me with a kind gaze, determining my destiny’ (*ARM 28 122: 4–5*). The language in both clauses draws on theological imagery. The gaze of a deity is beneficial, creating dignity and power (*CAD B, 143a*). Determining the destiny is normally a divine act, as a visit to *CAD Š/3, 12* (sub *šmtum*) would confirm. But Yakun-dir is trying to keep hold of territory that is coveted by others, and as in the best appeals to deities, there is strong

²² Administrators: *ARM 6 12 = LAPO 17 823*; generals: *ARM 2 50 = LAPO 17 601, ARM 2 130 = LAPO 16 336*.

²³ Examples are many, among them:

The gods of allies: (Hammurabi of Babylon and Zimri-Lim) help them achieve victory (*ARM 28 1: 5’–6’*: ‘Our gods Dagan and Addu set enmity between the leaders of Elam and Ešnunna. [Everyone] is scared of them [the lands]; but God [NB] is doing them in...’)

The god of the father: Sumu-lanasi to Zimri-Lim (*FM 6 18*): ‘The god of your father brought you into the throne of your father. But when I arrived to my father’s house, Yumraš-El was ruling in my town. I respected you and did not force him out from my throne. Now the god of my lord Zimri-Lim is strong and brought me into the throne of my father’s house. As in previous days my father paid allegiance to your father Yaḥdullim, I shall pay allegiance to you.’ The contrast between the god helping Zimri-Lim and the one helping Sumu-lanasi is worth noticing, as it personalizes the divine power inherent in a reigning king.

For *the god of the king* see n. 19 above.

intimation of *quid pro quo*: Were he to be assigned cities taken by a neighbor, he would not fail to send Zimri-Lim a *nēbeḫum*. The appeal is rehearsed in another note (*ARM* 28 121), with similar expectation, ‘my lord determined my destiny and I/he did not know (it)’. An official writes regret that his illness prevents him from coming to the king, for he would gaze on his lord’s face as if thirsting for the face of Šamaš (*ezibma pān bēliya ša kīma pān Šamaš ušammu ataplusam*; *ARM* 26 282: 11–13).

Touch: The King’s Feet

Paying homage to deities by kissing the feet of the statue they inhabit is a gesture by no means confined to the Mari archives. It is an act of devotion and humility that reflects faith in the power of the divine to affect life. In the Mari record, kings are invited to do so at local shrines, often accompanied by sacrifices. As illustration, we have *ARM* 3 8 (= *LAPO* 17 801) in which governor Kibri-Dagan of Terqa invites his king to Dagan’s temple there where he might ‘kiss the foot of Dagan who loves him’.²⁴ Kissing the foot of a king obviously emulates this commitment. We read about it in statements by vassals when announcing plans for travel to meet the king, as does Kabiya of Kaḫat, ‘I myself plan to come and kiss the feet of my lord’ (*ARM* 28 124). By performing the act of fealty, the vassal acquires good-will and might therefore proceed with requests. This is implied in *ARM* 26 349 in which a person whose name is partially lost writes, ‘I want to enter my home and go to kiss the foot of my lord’ before setting his ‘complaint at the ring of the lord’. The last statement is obscure, but it might indicate that the whole process is done before a *statue* of the king that had been sent to the vassal. If so, then the equation between god and king is more conspicuous.

In other contexts, the kiss simply is a sign of loyalty: A major personality (Yasim-Dagan) shares this tidbit with the king’s secretary, ‘... through the guardian spirit of my lord, I have not built a household. Now if I keep well and kiss the foot of my lord in good health: (this is) my household; if otherwise, God will do his will’ (A.4215 = *LAPO* 16 65). It can also be a sign of acceptance of a lord’s authority (A.2976+, Charpin 1994, 347–51). We also read that the kiss can be offered in gratitude for influencing the outcome of an omen, as this note from an official in (northern) Dēr implies: ‘In this district there is (an omen) for prosperity. My lord should be pleased. The diviner Išmaḫ-Samas ought to go to kiss my lord’s feet’ (*ARM* 26 247: 32–37).²⁵

²⁴ That Kibri-Dagan issues this invitation for ulterior motives (he wants the king to bring along an *uḡbaltum*-priestess he is too busy to himself fetch — see *ARM* 26 178–79) does not alter the piety of the act: in this case, it was a religious act without being cultic. Queen Dam-ḫuraši invites her lord to do the same so that good things could happen to him (*ARM* 10 62 = *LAPO* 18 1119). For more invitations to pay respect to Dagan, see *ARM* 3 17 = *LAPO* 18 976.

²⁵ In a stunning admission of fealty, Išme-Dagan’s delegates tell Hammurabi, ‘our lord is stretched like a mat under [your feet]’ (*ARM* 26 384: 44’–45’). There is a fine passage about this act of homage in a Shemshara tablet (Eidem 2001, 130–32): sub-vassal (Wani) writes a vassal (Kuvari) of Samsi-Addu, ‘I paid much attention to the words my father posted to me. These words were fine. As you have gone to my lord intending to kiss my lord’s foot, I am now ready to go to my lord and kiss his foot. The elite of the land will go with me. They (will kiss) my lord’s foot and hear the word from my lord’s mouth’.

Smell: The King's Fragrance

Deities (and saints) emit an evocative fragrance. Queen Mutemwiya knew that it was Amon-Ra (albeit in the form of her husband) who was implanting Amenhotep III in her womb because of the divine scent soaking her bedchamber.²⁶ After making a request, an agent (*šākinum*) of Zimri-Lim, likely living in a distant place (Carchemish?), writes (M.8426+ = Ziegler 1996), 'My lord had wiped his hands on the fringes of my garment and I can now smell the sweet aroma of my lord throughout my house' (*bēlī qātēšu ina qaran šubātiya ušakkilma eriš bēliya ṭābam ina bītiya eššin*). The scene evoked here recaptures ceremonies that took place when kings hosted vassals and guests. Among other gracious acts, kings distributed garments, in some cases likely from the king's own wardrobe and so carrying his scent, much like what took place during the elaborate durbar-ceremonies of Moghul India.²⁷ The notion is developed elsewhere by Timlû, a Kurda woman who may have served as wine-keeper for Zimri-Lim's queen, Dam-ḥuraši. Timlû reminds Addu-duri about past connections before stating: 'Send me a *šabattum*-cloth and a turban from your own head. I wish to smell the fragrance of my lady so that my dying heart may revive.'²⁸

Taste: The King's Sweetness

I have not been able to locate reference to taste (flavor rather than discernment) as a sense associated with deities, although the table of the gods is always rich in dishes and drinks that may be shared with kings. Nonetheless, a simile by the same unknown agent who wrote M.8426 (above) may draw on theomorphic equivalence. The presence of his king was so stark that the owner of the house (see above) that was drenched in the king's aroma had only to think of his lord for the taste of fine wine to fill his mouth (*u annānum ḥissat šumi ša bēliya kīma karān simim ṭābat*). Because *ḥissat šumi* is also a euphemism for 'gift' (*CAD Š/3*, 289–90), there may be more to this statement than is obvious.

Hearing: The King's Name

Invoking the names of gods, in prayers and in the cult, is essential to worship. The call not only invites them to answer pleas, but it permits gnostic appreciation of their mysteries. Too, performers can invoke names in declaiming the heroic deeds of gods. Itur-asdu writes the king from Naḥur, 'Regarding Hitte, the young singer who was once at the service of Ašqur-Addu (of Karana) but now serves Ibal-Addu (of Ašlakka): This man is an experienced declaimer (*awīlum šū mādiš muštāwū*) and is appropriate for service before my lord. My lord ought to send Ibal-Addu a personally sealed order

²⁶ See also 2 Cor. 2:14–17.

²⁷ The relevant citations in the *CAD Š/3*, 219b indicate that *šukkulum* is an act of kindness when done by superiors (tears) or humility when it is done to kings (using beards to wipe their shoes or feet).

²⁸ 1 *šabattam u 1 parsikkam ša qaqqadiki šūbilim ereš bēlīya lūšenma libbi mītu liblut*, *ARM* 26 240:8'–14' = *ARM* 10 117 = *LAPÖ* 18 1101. Somewhat similar are the pronouncements of Abi-milku of Tyre that are cited above.

so that this man can be led here and declaim the glory of my lord (*bēlī lištawwi*). A local leader requests (*FM* 9 4) a songstress who can invoke the king's reputation (*ana šumikama zukkurim*; see EnEl vi: 165–166, *CAD* M/2, 35a).²⁹

The King's Bounty

The King's Gifts

At all periods, Mesopotamian kings (and their servants) presented images of themselves as well as other votive offerings to the gods, many of them inscribed. There are many reasons for these devotional acts, not least of which is to have an active presence before the god. Besides statues of themselves, Mari kings offered a number of deities a variety of such gifts, among them weapons (*kakkum*), emblems (*šurīnum*), lion figures (*nēšum*), drums (*lilissum*), twin-vessels (*tū'amū*), bags (*nādum*), and the like (Charpin 1984, 1987). Thrones (and footstools) were particularly favored, as we know of work on a number of them (Soubeyran 1984).

Similarly, kings offered vassals many gifts; but especially as a covenantal act, they furnished them with decorated thrones and footstools upon which they would sit in testimony of their allegiance as well as with ceremonial robes (*lubuštum*) that are worn as symbols of their devotion. Ibalpiel of Ešnunna writes Zimri-Lim, '... Now I am conveying to you a great [...] throne, symbol of kingship; sit on it, so that those kings who surround you could see and realize how Ešnunna is indeed your great ally' (Charpin 1991, 153: iii: 28–37; *LAP* 16 281). The act may not be religious; yet it was certainly invested with religious significance, not just because gods are there to enforce covenants, but also because of the awesomeness of the king's own sacrality (see below). Moreover, the public nature of the act must be observed by all, concretizing the metaphor for accession to the throne of the father, here no doubt the overlord rather than just the flesh-and-blood predecessor. The entire process is meant to convey ownership, the ruler of a vassal.

Other documents supplement our information on what was dispatched. Zimri-Lim's envoy to Babylon quotes from a letter Atamrum of Andarig sent Hammurabi, 'Šu-Ištar and Marduk-mušallim, servants of my father, have reached me, bringing news of my father. I paid intense attention to the news that my father sent me and I was delighted when I saw the gifts that my father sent me via the men — clothes, ceremonial garment, wig, throne, etc. I have worn the clothes and the ceremonial garment; I have sat on the throne my father sent me and shall keep offering prayers for my

²⁹ The king can also 'open the ears' (*uznam epēšum/petūm*; that is, 'quicken the wisdom') of a vassal victimized by enemies trying to hoodwink him (*īnam kalāmum*); see *ARM* 28 153, 154, on which see Durand (2005), 63–65. Ibal-Addu writes (*ARM* 28 52:6'–15'), 'Your God is showing his love to me. He gave me comprehension (he opened my ear), and the matter of these men came out. I arrested Tašbir and two elders with him. I questioned these men and I jailed an apprentice scribe. Because he knew the jailer, this apprentice scribe escaped, moving into Ašnakkum'.

father. As regards the oath-taking protocol that my father sent me; in this tablet there are no surplus deities or words and I have no desire for additional gods or words. In this protocol is written, you must be hostile with my enemies and at peace with my allies' (*ARM* 26 372: 49–59).³⁰

The King's Protection

Gods are there to protect those who support, love, and fear them. They accomplish their protection from a distance. The same notion is conveyed in a note that Šidquanasi, a Carchemish high official who doubled as Zimri-Lim's agent in Carchemish, writes (*ARM* 26 531: 19–29), 'My lord [ZL] wrote to me, "At the gate of your palace take up my cause in all matters". You must know that you are my lord. It is my pleasure. I am engaged in all matters to act for my own welfare; but you are my lord: may your protection be upon me' (*u atta bēli qātka eliya lū ummudat*). The language recalls similar expressions attached to Ištar (*CAD* E, 144b). A similar nuance is attached to the 'shadow' (*šillum*) of gods and kings. Courtiers gather their livelihood under it.³¹ In the same category can be ranged the many references to kings acting as parent to a vassal. The imagery is legal: vassals are adoptees ('sons') of (political) parents; but it draws readily also from theological discourse, where kings are raised by deities. Minimal references may suffice. Reaching the throne at Carchemish, Yatar-Ami can say (*ARM* 26 537: 2'–9'), 'My father Aplahanda has not died; he still lives. Zimri-Lim is my father and Yatar-Ami is truly your son. Hold him in your hand and in order for him not to feel that his father has indeed died, speak candidly with him' (see also *ARM* 28 18). Similar are the passages in which vassals hold on to the fringes of their suzerain's garment, the imagery being of children steadying their steps (*qaran šubat [x] šabātum*, with lexical variation and occasionally with opposite consequence when using *wuššurum* and *batāqum*).³² We might also notice that the child evocation is also striving for physical proportions, with the vassal proportionally smaller than the suzerain, and so paralleling the ratio of deity and worshippers when displayed on artistic reliefs.

³⁰ The gifts may include weapons, palanquins, chariots, and little souvenirs (*zikir šūnim*); see A.230 (cited at *ARM* 26/2, 157, n. 103; Hammurabi to Iškur-Addu of Karana); *ARM* 28 166 (Zimri-Lim to Hammurabi of Kurda); *ARM* 26 370: 43'–53' (likely Hammurabi to Išme-Dagan). A disappointed Šubram writes Zimri-Lim that as he sat on his golden throne (likely a gift from Zimri-Lim), everyone paid him homage except for the people of Qirdaḥat who boycotted the ceremony. The influence of the overlord may not always do the trick.

³¹ *ARM* 2 28 (*LAPO* 17 830): 29, '... so that I could thrive under my lord's shadow, *ina šilli bēliya napištam lursi*'; *ARM* 5 46 (*LAPO* 16 166): 12, 'there are no fatteners or fattening under my lord's shadow, *ina šilli bēliyama māri u mārūtam ul išu*'. A high priestess nicely combines deity and rulers when writing in *ARM* 10 3 (*LAPO* 18 1194): 22': 'Here is what I keep praying to Dagan, "May Yasmaḥ-Addu be healthy so that I can prosper under his shadow (*u anāku ina šillišu ludmiq*)".'

³² For a developed review of these issues see Lafont (2001), 232–38 (on king as father), 257–59 (on grasping fringes of a garment).

The King's Weapon

Much has been written on an oracle in which Addu of Aleppo tells Zimri-Lim about sending him a weapon with which the god had defeated the Sea (*FM* 7 38 = A.1968 = *MARI* 7, 53–54).³³ That the dispatch went beyond imagery is confirmed by a notice about its storage in Zimri-Lim's Terqa (*FM* 7 5).³⁴ Grasping a weapon offered by gods is a venerable topos. It is featured from the Third Millennium on (see *CAD* K, 54a) and is invoked in documents, both Assyrian (for example, *CAD* K, 296–97) and Babylonian (for example *CAD* N/2, 180a). The subject need not be developed here; but we might take note of a letter ascribed to Yarim-Lim of Aleppo in which he threatens to use the 'galling weapons of Addu and of Yarim-Lim' neatly fusing divine and regal weapons (A.1314 = *LAP*O 16 251). Presumably, the king carries these weapons when on a campaign, accompanied by other divine paraphernalia, diviners, and flocks of sheep for divination.³⁵

The King's Justice

Šewirum-parat (Šewrum-pirite) had been a member of Yasmaḥ-Addu's harem, likely a musician.³⁶ Early in Zimri-Lim's reign, she was moved elsewhere, likely to Saggartum. From there she writes her achingly sad note (*ARM* 10 92 = *LAP*O 18 1211):

Without me hearing your order, you handed me to this place. I am being wronged here, so you must wipe away my tears. Sin-mušallim has wronged me by taking away my nanny and she is now part of his household. Now had my lord taken her so that she joined his household, I would have been pleased. Sin-mušallim has simply wronged me. Now, since you have spread light all over the land, please do it for me too. Give me my nanny and I shall bless you before Addu and Ḫebat. May my lord not keep this woman from me. (Even) here, I am your handmaid — totally yours! Stamp your name on me.

³³ 'I had given all the land to Yaḥdun-Lim and by means of my weapons, he had no opponent. But when he abandoned me, I gave to Samsi-Addu the land I had given him. Then when Samsi-Addu [...] I wanted to bring you back. I brought you back to your father's throne and I handed you a weapon with which I battled against Sea. I rubbed on you oil from my numinous glow so that no one could stand up to you. Now listen to my only wish: Whenever anyone appeals to you for judgment, saying, I am aggrieved, be there to decide his case and to give him satisfaction. This is what I desire of you...'

³⁴ Sumu-Ila writes to Zimri-Lim, 'The weapons of Addu of Halab have reached me and I have them stored at the temple of Dagan in Terqa. I will do whatever my lord writes me'. The plural for weapons is clear in this text, contra the previous one cited. Durand plausibly restores meš in *FM* 7 38:2'.

³⁵ The 'mouths' of these weapons were opened in ceremonies that activated their sacrality; see *ARM* 23, 335–38; *CAD* P, 446–47.

³⁶ For notices about her, see *LAP*O 18, 412–15. Durand (1985), 415–16, thinks she was turned into a priestess somewhere north. Because of the mention of Sin-mušallim, a high official in Saggartum with a history of shenanigans (Lion 2001, 182), I rather think she was moved to the Saggartum palace when Zimri-Lim took over Yasmaḥ-Addu's harem. The fact that Zimri-Lim is cited in the address suggests that it was early in his reign.

The tone of this note is certainly obsequious; but it is also defiant. Victimized at the place she was sent, Šewirum-parat turns the onus on the king. Sin-mušallim may have acted high-handed in taking her nanny from her; but it is the king who must resolve the problem. He must do so because ultimately Sin-mušallim is abusing Zimri-Lim when wronging a woman who is utterly the king's; he must act because he will earn blessings, but also because he is divine in his capacity to force light (hence truth) on human activity, restoring justice and harmony.³⁷

The King's Regenerative Powers

Historians of religions argue whether or not the concept of resurrection of the human body was ever at stake in the ancient world before the Persian and Hellenistic periods. Death was final, a notion nicely captured by a thought attributed to a Yaminite king (Sumudabi), 'This is what our lord wrote to us. Is a man who dies of thirst ever revived when thrown in a river? Once (he/the gods?) finish taking account, a dead man can never revive' (*ARM* 26 171:14–15). Continuity of a line that might face extinction due to calamities (war, plagues, natural catastrophes, sterility) is a major theme in Mesopotamian literature; but we also read about personal attempt to evade death by storming heaven (Etana), by arresting aging (Utnapishtim in Gilgamesh), by partaking divine fare (Adapa), by regaining youth (potential in Gilgamesh), or (in Egyptian lore) by reincarnating (Bata in *The Two Brothers*, Ahwere in the Setne Khamwas tales). In the Mari correspondence, we read above all about revival when at the point of death. The relevant verb is *balāṭum*, 'to live', often contrastively juxtaposed to *māṭum*, 'to die'. In the Rimaḥ archives, there is this note from Yasitna-abum, a highly imaginative scribe who writes to his (mother) queen Iltani (*OBTR* 152): 'My mother has thought of me and my heart was revived. Do send me a note about your welfare ... and so revive my heart. Once I take a look at your letter, forgotten are the storms of Addu and my heart is revived.'³⁸ Cited above is *ARM* 26 240 in which a Kurda woman writes to the king's close relative that her heart revives by smelling her lady's turban. A remarkable avowal comes from Tamarzi of Tarmanni, a vassal with many woes who can nevertheless chart his revitalization as if already transpired (*ARM* 28 145:6'–11'): 'Because of my lord's sagacity and because of my lord's power with which he turned the whole land to his side, my gray hair has turned black, I have become vigorous, my heart is now incomparably young, and my fame is reverberating throughout Idamaraš.'

³⁷ The phrase *nūram šakānum* occurs in *ARM* 28 21:17–21, with a god responsible for bringing peace to a troubled country (*inūma ilim nūram ana mātim ištaknu iṣṣī* (giš.há) *mala ša abī iqabbiam ušabbalam*). The *CAD* (N/2, 329b) unnecessarily treats this phrase in our passage metaphorically, 'provide joy'.

³⁸ Dalley/Walker/Hawkins (1976), 125. In a letter to the queen's private secretary, Yasitna-abum writes (*OBTR* 151:9–18): 'You never inquire about my well being and you never suggest to my lady how to benefit me so that my lady has not revived my spirit by sending me good wishes. If you had kept doing nice things in my lady's presence, they would have answered you.'

Rhetoric or Belief?

Sometimes early in Zimri-Lim's brief reign, Addu-duri wrote her king (*ARM* 26 238 = *ARM* 10 51 = *LAP0* 18 1095): 'Iddin-ili, the high priest of Iturmer had a dream. This is what he said, "In my dream, Belet-biri stood to say the following, 'kingship (*šarrūtum*) is his brickmold, dynasty (*palūm*) his fortress. Must he keep climbing a (siege) tower? He should protect himself?'"'. Now then, my lord must strive to protect himself.' The king, in fact, was just then hitting his stride, having subjugated the Upper Country, tamed tribal enemies (Yaminites, twice), and escaped Ešnunna's clutches. The oracle he received through Addu-duri was positive, despite the spin she placed on it, for Iturmer's priest was visited by the goddess Belet-biri to reassure Zimri-Lim of a rule and a future so stable that he would no longer need an assault weapon. His own reign will be the brick for the imposing structure that his dynasty will become. By no means was he a god; yet he had achieved a version of divine permanence.

The correspondents cited above undoubtedly sought rewards when they hyperbolically flattered rulers; it is even possible that kings recognized sycophancy even as they wallowed in it;³⁹ yet, the pronouncements sampled in this study come to us from such a diverse array of writers and the sentiments they express cover such a broad range, that we may err if we doubt their sincerity. Correspondents need not be theologically confused to merge belief and rhetoric and rulers need not be divine to partake of sacrality. In a milieu in which gods were presented anthropomorphically as kings, kings readily acquired emblems of divinity, such as the crown, the scepter, the dais, the throne, and on occasion the horned crown.⁴⁰ They may therefore be presented theomorphically and may even acquire theopathic characteristics.⁴¹

That much seems evident; less so is whether these theomorphic characteristics are attached to the office of the king (*šarrūtum*), to his dynasty (*palūm*), or to him individually. If they are bound either to his kingship or dynasty, the debate will then be why in some instances a king will continue to hold them long after his throne is occupied by another or after his body has decomposed, whichever comes first.

³⁹ Obsequiousness is as old as kingship. For Neo-Assyrian examples, see Parpola (1983), xix (on *LAS* 57, 117, 184, 229, 38, and 45). In Mari *tubbum* is construed with *pām* (mouth) to connote flattery and with *libbum* when aiming for a favorable consequence.

⁴⁰ The Old Babylonian kings of Mari might have seen the statue of Puzur-Ištar, with a horned tiara, and recognized from his inscription that he was a *gīr.nita* rather than king and that he did not attach a *dingir* sign to his name. For the statue, see Spycket (1981), 240–45, and pl. 166; for the inscription see Frayne (1997), 445–46. I have my doubts that the horns were added in the Neo-Babylonian times, as suggested by Blocher (1999).

⁴¹ From these perspectives, it is well to keep in mind Irene Winter's insight as delivered at the *Divine Kingship in the Ancient World* conference (2008, 80), 'There was *no* historical phase within the Mesopotamian sequence in which the ruler was not closely aligned by ascribing birth, attributes, or privileges with the gods'. On the blurring of demarcation between heavenly and divine rule, Selz remarks (2008, 25), 'Because a human's identity is a composite nature, it is easy to see that under certain circumstances humans could be transferred to the class of the gods. And, if for various reasons a ruler is considered of outstanding personal qualities, the perception of him being a divine figure becomes almost unavoidable'. The problem here is that many kings might be thought superior by their courtiers even when we assess them as otherwise.

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Ancient Near Eastern Studies in Memory of Blahoslav Hruška

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface	ix
Bibliography of Blahoslav Hruška JITKA SÝKOROVÁ & LUDĚK VACÍN	1
Blahoslav Hruška: An Appreciation JITKA SÝKOROVÁ	31
An Excerpt from a Sumerian Myth Mentioning Enlil BENDT ALSTER	45
On Sheep, Sumerians and the Early State PETR CHARVÁT	49
IOS 6 225: A Dispute about a Sesame Delivery MUHAMMAD A. DANDAMAYEV & CORNELIA WUNSCH	61
Die Keilschrifttexte der Bayerischen Staatsbibliothek München GERTRUD & WALTER FARBER	73
Divination or Medicine? MARKHAM J. GELLER	91
The Book of Esther: Revealing or Re-Veiling the Identity? MARKĚTA HOLUBOVÁ	97
The Structure of the Egyptian Pantheon JIRÍ JANÁK	119
Piling Up Barley Sheaves: A Study of SU ₇ –DU ₈ and ZAR ₍₃₎ –SAL ₍₄₎ KAZUYA MAEKAWA	129
VAT 5057: Eine fara-zeitliche Kaufurkunde JOACHIM MARZAHN	145
Aramäisches <i>equ</i> „Holz“ im keilschriftlichen Brief aus Tyros und <i>eq</i> in der aramäisch-keilschriftlichen Uruk-Beschwörung CHRISTA MÜLLER-KESSLER	155
Einige neusumerische Texte aus dem Verwaltungsbereich der Textilproduktion von Umma HANS NEUMANN	159

The Official Called ŠU.I (<i>gallābum</i>) in the Latter Part of the Old Babylonian Period LUKÁŠ PECHA	169
The <i>abbuttu</i> and the Alleged Elamite ‘Slave Hairstyle’ DANIEL T. POTTS	183
Mari Theomorphism: Intimation of Sacrality in the Royal Correspondence JACK M. SASSON	195
Zur Holzwirtschaft im altsumerischen Lagaš GEBHARD J. SELZ	213
An Old Babylonian List of Objects MARTEN STOL	247
Gudea and Ningišzida: A Ruler and His God LUDĚK VACÍN	253
Die Vermittlungsaufgabe des LÚ ^d U nach hethitischen Quellen ŠÁRKA VELHARTICKÁ	277
Der Mythos Enlil und Ninlil: Vom Schrecken des Kanalbaus durch Stadt und Unterwelt ANNETTE ZGOLL	287
Indices	301

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