

Investigating a Proposed Archaic Pantheon: Reflections on Steinkeller 1999

1.0 Introduction: Ancient Mesopotamia is often and justifiably praised for its innovative contribution to civilization, although culturally, strong conservative and even traditionalist trends are notable. In a persuasive discussion on the Mesopotamian conceptual world, Stefan Maul demonstrated that the Sumerian and Akkadian words for “front” also carry the connotation for “earlier time/ past”¹ while words for “future” correlate with words for “back, behind”.² For the Babylonian then, the past was before him and faced him, while the future was conceptually less discernible, unraveling out of sight and behind a person (so to speak). Naturally for a society with such a temporal alignment, Mesopotamia’s interest in its own past was “omnipresent” and royal reforms were not attempts to reach for the future, but attempts to align the land with orders and norms thought to have been established at some stage in primeval history.³

It should be no surprise then that "the historical urban tradition of later Mesopotamian societies" is firmly rooted in the developments of the Uruk period,⁴ that the iconographic

¹ Maul 1997:1. Akk. *pānātu*; *pānītu(m)*, *pānū* Sum. *i gi*

² *ibid.* i.e. Akk. *warkû(m)*, (*w*)*arītu(m)* (from (*w*)*arkatu(m)* “back, behind”). Sum. *e g e r*, *m u r g u*, *b a r*: “rear, backside.”

³ *ibid.* pg 2

repertoire of Mesopotamia until the demise of the Neo-Babylonian empire was guided by Uruk period convention (Frankfort 1958 / Kantor 1984), or that the scribes who wrote out the archaic texts set the trend for the following millennia (Liverani 2007).⁵ The expectation may therefore be set for conservative and consistent Mesopotamian theology having roots in Uruk period religion.⁶

This paper undertakes to examine the proposals of Steinkeller 1999 which were presented in his essay *On Priests, Rulers, and the Sacred Marriage: Tracing the evolution of Early Sumerian Kingship*.⁷ While occupying a minor portion of the paper, these proposals are nevertheless radical and potentially pivotal in Mesopotamian studies should they be confirmed. In sum, and selectively, they are: **i)** Goddesses dominated the Uruk period pantheon – “It appears quite certain that the earliest pantheon was dominated by females.. most [Uruk period] city-states (or proto-city states) had goddesses as their titular divine owners.”⁸ **ii)** “Enki was undoubtedly head of the [Uruk period] pantheon...” Conspicuously absent at this time was Enlil as “Enlil was a secondary development in the Sumerian pantheon.”⁹ **iii)** A “twin capital” phenomena is observable in early Sumerian city layout, wherein the earlier religious capital was owned by a goddess, and a nearby younger political center arose under the patronage of a male god, often the son of the goddess.¹⁰ And **iv)** over time, a younger generation of male gods, chiefly war gods, gained increasing importance representing “a masculinization of the Sumerian pantheon.”¹¹

⁴ following Algaze forthcoming, pg.2

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ Lambert 1975 pg. 191 comments: “The names and characters of these city-owning gods and goddesses are not of course known for the earliest times, but in historical times there is so strong a conservatism in such matters that it may be suspected that they had not changed since prehistoric times.” However, Espak concludes in 2010 (pg. 238): “...contrary to widely shared opinion, the religious thinking of Mesopotamia reflects continuous change.”

⁷ The paper was originally read during the Second Colloquium on the Ancient Near East in Japan “The City and it’s Life” May 22-24 1996, and subsequently published in the volume “Priests and Officials in the Ancient Near East” 1999.

⁸ Steinkeller 1999: 113

⁹ *ibid.* For Enlil see note 36.

¹⁰ *ibid.* pg. 115

¹¹ *ibid.*

While in recent decades the field of Mesopotamian studies has seen an upturn in the study of pantheon, specifically local pantheons,¹² which provide welcome compliment to the field's engaging if somewhat sporadic monograph studies, Steinkeller's hypothetical sketch of an early pantheon stands alone.

A proper response to this very bold and sweeping picture of Sumerian religion at its most formative stages would require, in the ideal circumstance, a prolonged and concentrated effort by one of the field's more prolific scholars – and in this regard, it's unfortunate that Steinkeller has never expanded on his initial 1999 statements, as had been promised.¹³ With a somewhat more humble pedigree, this paper will nonetheless attempt to array a selection of Steinkeller's theory alongside a selection of the core textual evidence and scholarship, in an effort to demonstrate that while key sources do not fail in supporting Steinkeller's proposals (at least, in certain regards), they neither necessitate the full scope of this vision.

In order to make this point, the question of goddesses in prehistory will be taken up (1.0); Although there are clear reasons why notions of the Uruk period pantheon and Uruk period religion remain hypothetical, evidence from that period will be considered with an emphasis on the textual and glyptic evidence(3.0); No suggestion of radical change can fairly be supported without consideration of the conservative aspects of Mesopotamian theology (4.1) or the insightful or persuasive perspective of previous scholarship – here several key suggestions by W.G. Lambert are weighed against the evidence (4.2); the gender distribution of the Old Babylonian and Early Dynastic temple hymns will be considered (4.3); Finally, in (5.0) through to (5.3), the pantheon of the city of Lagaš is examined – not only does this locality represent the best documented administration at the dawn of significant literary record, but it also is one of Steinkeller's more important type cases.

¹² See Selz 1995 (Early Dynastic Lagash); Pomponio and Xella 1997 (Ebla); Myers 2002 (Sippar); Beaulieu 2003 (Neo-Babylonian Uruk); Such-Gutierrez 2003 (third-millennium Nippur) and 2005–6 (third millennium Adab); Richter 2004 (Old Babylonian period).

¹³ Steinkeller 1999 pg. 113 n.35

2.0: Goddesses in Prehistory:

Given the inherent difficulties involved with any discussion of Uruk period religion (see 3.0 below) it may be hoped that data from the Paleolithic or Neolithic periods would provide some clues. Indeed, Peeter Espak, in his recent study of the god Enki,¹⁴ enthusiastically mingles the topic of the Uruk period pantheon with some of the more predominant views in goddess studies: “The highest power pictured seems to be a goddess..probably the goddess Inanna. This kind of picture of the universe is however attributable to a wide range of archaic religions and societies.”¹⁵ For the image of the mother-goddess as focal point of early religions, Espak is particularly indebted to the work of Marija Gimbutas, whose work he qualifies overall as “convincing.” This conviction is further demonstrated by the author’s later conclusion “due to a lack of written sources, the only certain conclusion is that the female fertility goddess certainly was honored in farther areas of the Near East, and that the goddess was seen as a symbol of earth as a fertile entity.”¹⁶ As these comments lead into to the authors endorsement of Steinkeller 1999 on pg. 218, these ideas are worth qualifying.

Consideration of recent discourse on the subject makes it clear that goddess studies rest on anything but solid ground. Lucy Goodison and Christine Morris, editors of *Ancient Goddesses: the Myths and the Evidence*, explain that an intense controversy divides the study of the Mother Goddess in prehistory; recent decades have seen the birth of the “goddess movement” thanks in part to a stream of books by non-specialist authors, artists, psychotherapists, feminists and amateur historians.¹⁷ It’s apparent that the academic world provided much of the backdrop for this phenomena: James Frazer’s *The Golden Bough* (1911-

¹⁴ Espak 2010: *The God Enki in Sumerian Royal Ideology and Mythology*. Tartu University Press.

¹⁵ Espak 2010 pg. 215

¹⁶ Espak 2010 pg. 216

¹⁷ Goodison and Morris 1998 pg. 6

15) “set a mould by focusing on the relationship, in various cultural settings, of a maternal divinity and a male son-consort: the Great Goddess and the Dying God... this template influenced perceptions of Greek religion and even of prehistoric cultures, such as the Bronze Age ‘Minoan’ civilization.”¹⁸ Sigmund Freud’s presentation of the sexual feelings of a male child for his mother and Jung’s assigning the Great Mother “transcendental status as an eternal archetype” helped secure terms like “Mother Goddess” and “Great Goddess” as legitimate archaeological terminology, and it was against this backdrop that James Mellaart’s excavations at Catal hoyuk (1967) and Marija Gimbutas’ European excavations (1974) were published.¹⁹

And yet, Lynn Meskell raises serious objections and reservations regarding Gimbutas’ effect on goddess studies to date; most importantly, she raises objections to the handling and interpretation of one critical dataset, the figurine collections of southeast Europe:

"As part of a gynocentric uganda [sic], female figurines have been considered largely to the exclusion of male and sexless examples (Gimbutas 1971b; 1974; 1986; 1989a; 1989b; 1992; Gimbutas et al. 1989), this selection shaping the vision of a single, omnipresent female deity. Her position is clear: male divinities were not prominent before the Indo-European invasion (see van Leuven 1993: 84). Many are undeniably female. Many are also male, androgynous, zoomorphic or indeterminate (see Marinescu-Bilcu 1981; Hodder 1990; Milojkovic 1990; Pavlovic 1990; Talalay 1993); these are dismissed."²⁰

Also arguing against Gimbutas’ finding for the “supremacy of the mother” based on this dataset, is a new appreciation of diversity within Paleolithic and Neolithic figurines – recent quantitative analyses has taken stock of large numbers of male or androgynous figurines, so that “no source can affirm that more than 50 per cent of the imagery is recognizably female.”²¹ In line with this finding is the recent re-examination of the archaeological data from Catal Hoyuk by Hodder and Meskell.²² Their intention was to bring to light the phallogocentric symbolism of

¹⁸ Goodison and Morris 1998 pg. 7

¹⁹ *ibid.* pg. 8

²⁰ Meskell 1995 pg. 2

²¹ Tringham and Conkey 1998 pg. 27

the site against “the widely held assumption that the early agriculturalists in the Middle East emphasized the female form, fertility, and fecundity.”²³

In addition to the “traditionally underplayed” significance of the phallic imagery found at the site, the study suggests that the most frequent Neolithic artistic theme was in fact the depiction of carnivorous species: “lions, foxes, boars, bears, snakes, scorpions, spiders and raptors”; but most persuasive is their conviction that the famous Catal hoyuk image of the naked woman sitting on a pair of felines was “an isolated find” - indeed the number of clearly female figures “is small (40 out of 1,800 so far discovered).”²⁴

2.1 Discussion - Implications for Mesopotamian Studies:

It is apparent that the current state of goddess studies is in considerable flux insofar as the Paleolithic and Neolithic periods are concerned. As influential and long held interpretations of key datasets are revised and overturned, it seems that socially motivated gender studies would have little justification in Mesopotamia. Lambert writing in 1987 noted that “goddesses in the high position of patrons of towns are much more common than women as rulers of the same towns.”²⁵ In any case, Steinkeller’s proposals must be considered on their own merits, and weighed against data from Mesopotamia.

3.0: Uruk Period Religion:

As Guillermo Algaze recently observed, the last decade of Assyriological studies have

²² Hodder and Meskell 2011

²³ Hodder and Meskell 2011 pg.1

²⁴ *ibid.*

²⁵ Lambert 1986 pg. 128; Further, writing in the same volume, Irene Winter notes in Mesopotamian art, women’s roles are “relatively few when compared with many other ancient cultures,” nor do they feature often in the epic literature – goddesses however are an exception. (see Winter 1987 p. 189).

seen some fairly significant shifts in the overall view of the Uruk period: i) following the work of Henry Wright and Eric Ripley (2001), the temporal depth of the period has been re-assessed as covering most of the 4th millennium; ii) parallel and comparable urban developments have been discovered at Tell Brak and Khirbat al-Fakhar in Syria, proving the ‘Uruk phenomena’ was not limited to the south; and iii) somewhere in the middle of the 4th millennium southern polities began to dramatically outpace competitors resulting in the emergence of southern Mesopotamian colonies in the north and in Iran.²⁶

Concentrating mainly on the evidence from seals and tablets it may be said that the current evidence for the Uruk period pantheon is intriguing if decidedly limited. In 1988 K. Szarzynska presented a study of seven divine emblems which appear in the glyptic and plastic arts of the Uruk period – they are attested in Uruk itself and to lesser extent in other early cities (Tell Agrab, Kisura, Tutub and Ur). Of these seven, the emblem MUŠ₃ (ATU 208/9) is known to stand for Inanna while ŠEŠ (which the author sees variously as ATU 248, 244/5, and 246) has been identified with the cult of the moon god Nanna. Szarzynska stated: “the hypothesis that all reed symbols represented deities (at least during the archaic period and in particular regions) seems possible.”²⁷ Ten years later, her one time student, Piotr Steinkeller, suggested that the archaic NUN emblem can be identified with Enki, on the basis of (among other things) it’s appearance, and also Enki’s numerous literary associations with trees.²⁸

Turning to the textual evidence, it may be unexpected to note that the time honored divine determinative, the DINGIR-sign, is only partially employed in the Uruk period. P. A. Beaulieu reports that of the 134 instances of the name Inanna (= MUŠ) in the Uruk IV/III administrative texts, only 58 occur with divine determinative.²⁹ The archaic texts attest

²⁶ Algaze *forthcoming* pg. 3

²⁷ See Szarzynska 1988; in her 1996 study, Szarzynska explores the depictions of 10 archaic standards preserved on seals and in the archaic script; some of these standards consisted of a divine emblem (such as were examined in 1988) affixed to a shaft, and tend to confirm the conviction that divine symbolism is involved.

²⁸ Steinkeller 1998 pg.88 n.8

to four distinct forms of Inanna: Inanna-kur “Inanna of the netherworld,” Inanna-ḫ úd “Inanna of the morning,” Inanna-sig “Inanna of the evening,” and Inanna-Nun.³⁰ Interestingly, Beaulieu suggests that the latter epithet may well reflect a development which seems evident in the archaeological records and the myths of later periods – the growth of the Uruk theology over that of Eridu: “The title Inanna-NUN would thus reflect the political demise of Eridu in the 4th millennium and the triumph of Inanna of Uruk who captured the me’s from Enki..”³¹ Further, P. Michalowski sees the specialized spelling of Enlil’s name as UD.GAL.NUN in some Early Dynastic texts as conveying a similar political message.³²

3.1 *Summary and Discussion:*

Given these modest yet appreciable advances in the study of early religion it may be expected that scholars are close to describing an archaic Uruk pantheon – outside of these initial observations however, little textual evidence exists to inform of the archaic pantheon, as Robert Englund comments: “It remains a matter of speculation why, given the very strong impact the Sumerian pantheon exercised on the scribal choice of literary and lexical themes of the Fara period, we have no evidence of gods in the archaic lexical tradition, let alone in possible literary compositions.”³³ Given this situation, when it comes to the important contribution of literary and lexical evidence, the first vestiges of a solidified Mesopotamian pantheon make their appearance “in the EDIII A tradition of god lists, UD.GAL.NUN literature and temple

²⁹ Beaulieu 2003:103. For the inconsistent use of the DINGIR sign in the early ED period, see G. Selz 2008 pg. 15

³⁰ *ibid.* 104. Note 5 on this same page makes the observation that the presence of the morning and evening aspects of Inanna in the archaic period would likely invalidate Jacobsen’s hypothetical translation of Inanna (d.nin.an.ak) as “lady of the date cluster.”

³¹ Beaulieu 2003 pg.105 n. 9

³² Michalowski 1998 pg. 241; cf. Espak 2010 pg. 60 n. 114

³³ Englund, Bauer & Krebernik. 1998 pg.102 – that this ‘dark age’ continues into the ED period is evidenced by Lambert’s complaint that for the first part of the third millennium “the names of many places and the names and genders of their gods are simply not known” (Lambert 1986:128).

hymns.”³⁴

4.0 *Pantheon and Gender at the Dawn of Literature:*

The discovery in the 1960s of cuneiform tablets at the site of Tell Abu Salabikh represents “the only significant group of cuneiform texts of the mid-third millennium B.C to be discovered in Mesopotamia since the finds of the Deutsche Orient-Gesellschaft at Fara (ancient Shuruppak) in 1902 and 1903.”³⁵ For scholars convinced that until the end of the third millennium cuneiform texts were solely concerned with administrative texts and word lists and the like, the literature from Abu Salabikh prompted an enthusiastic reassessment. In the words of Robert Biggs: “..the Fara and Abu Salabikh tablets seem to represent the first great flowering of Sumerian literature and the culmination of the archaic Sumerian tradition of scholarship.”³⁶

In the space below, consideration will be given to the godlists, temple hymns and mythological literature of the Early Dynastic period.

4.1 *Signs of Conservatism within Early Dynastic and later Mesopotamian Literature:*

In considering the feasibility of Steinkeller’s suggestions, essentially, that sometime between the Uruk/Jemdat Nasr period and the advent of Early Dynastic literature a fundamental change occurred in the pantheon, the question of reasonable expectation might be raised. Lambert’s expectation (mentioned above in note 5), was that given the conservatism demonstrable in the theology of historic times, the names and characters of the city gods and

³⁴ Robert Englund, personal communication August 2012.

³⁵ R. Biggs OIP 99 pg. 28

³⁶ *ibid.*

goddesses would not have changed from prehistoric times;³⁷ and so, going from the Sumerian literature of the Ur III/Old Babylonian periods (the material best known to most modern scholars and readers), how familiar are the main themes of ED cosmology and theology? Or, in other words, how consistent and conservative are these aspects of Sumerian religion?

Already in 1944 S. N. Kramer was able to isolate sections of the Old Babylonian narratives such as *Gilgamesh, Enkidu and the Netherworld* and *The Creation of the Pickaxe*, among others, to demonstrate that according to the cosmology of that period, the primeval sea begot the cosmic mountain consisting of AN and KI; and that subsequently, Enlil divided AN (heaven) and KI (earth).³⁸ Importantly, Enlil's basic role in Sumerian cosmology seems wholly confirmed and consistent within Early Dynastic materials: it is evident that the UD.GAL.NUN texts already attest to Enlil's separating heaven and earth in a line from OIP 99 113:iii 1-3: "ud.gal-nun, an unu-ta bad, ki an-ta bad (= den-lil an ki-ta bad ki an-ta bad)."³⁹ More specific still are lines 5-9 of the same text, which Krebernik translated: "Enlil, lord Nunamnir, the En, his utterance cannot be altered, separated Heaven from Earth, separated Earth from Heaven."⁴⁰

Further, the zà-mì hymns from ED Abu Salabikh (see 4.2 below) begin with a particularly lengthy praise of Nippur and its patron deity, which Lambert translated as follows:

*"In the city that grew with heaven, that embraces heaven, Nippur,
the bond of heaven and underworld: Enlil, the great mountain,
Enlil, the lord, the noble Namnir, the lord, whose command is not
reversed, is not confounded, Enlil, seed which the noble
established, spoke praise of/concerning the great gods (as
follows)."*⁴¹

³⁷ Lambert 1975 pg. 191

³⁸ See S.N. Kramer 1944, *Sumerian Mythology*. pgs. 36-41

³⁹ Michalowski 1998 pg. 239 n.2

⁴⁰ Krebernik 1998, p.321, n. 805. c.f. Wang 2011 pg. 100

⁴¹ Lambert 1976 pg. 230. c.f. Wang 2011 pg. 99

Scholars have moved away from translating and interpreting that in the lower lines Enlil spoke the praises in favor of the mirror opposite: that the gods spoke the praises to Enlil.⁴² But Enlil's eminence among the gods, and the theme of Nippur as bond between heaven and earth, *dur-an-ki*, are already discernable in this passage. Xianhua Wang's recent monograph study of the god Enlil emphasizes that, already in the ED period, Enlil's position of prominence is evident; it can be seen in the Kesh temple hymn, an OB text also extant in a copy from ED Abu Salabikh, which begins with a prologue describing Enlil as the "princely lord" coming forth "in kingship" as would a ruler.⁴³

Turning to a few brief but intriguing supplementary examples of the thematic consistency of the ED to OB periods, Szilvia Sovegjártó in her 2011 master's thesis for Jena University has produced an excellent rendition of an ED *Ama'ušumgal* myth, which is preserved on tablets from Ebla and Abu Salabikh.⁴⁴ Familiar themes within this composition include the bull of heaven (lines 1-8), the tamarisk as divine building material and as divine mediator (lines 3-5),⁴⁵ and the temple as cosmic mediator between heaven and the netherworld.⁴⁶

While these select examples of the conservatism evident in the Mesopotamian mythology of historic times may only go some of the way to countering proposed fundamental changes in late prehistory, the evidence of Enlil's prominent position in early literature may more directly challenge recent positions that the god was a late arrival from Ebla.⁴⁷

⁴² Examples given are Westonholz 2000 pg. 49, Krecher 1992 p. 293, Krebernik 1998 p. 389 n. 713. c.f. Wang 2011 pg. 99

⁴³ Wang 2011 pg. 96

⁴⁴ Sovegjártó 2011 pg. 22; the tablets are **E1**: TM.75.G.2657 + 1529365 (= ARET 5 20) + 11383 + 11384 + 11385 (= Archi 1992, pl. 7-8) **E2**: TM.75.G.2658 + 2663 + 266866 + 11264 + 11266 + 11278 (= ARET 5 21) + 5626 + 11250 (= Archi 1989, 124-125)67 + 5633 + 12575 (= Archi 1994, pl. 1 fig. 1) **S**: AbS-T245 [IM 70173] (= IAS 278)

⁴⁵ Besides being the literal bones of the gods, the tamarisk is a known purifier from the incantation lore, according to G. Cunningham's 1997 study, it purifies by mediating the space between divine and mundane words. The scenario given here wherein An is said to be in the branches of the tamarisk while the bull's feet are like/from the tamarisk' (lines 3-5) is similar to Krabernik 1986 #19, where again, An is said to be in the branches of the tamarisk with the enki and ninki deities being at its roots. These seem likely to be allusions to a cosmic notion of divine mediation between realms.

⁴⁶ As in, for example, the Gudea Cylinders, when e-ninnu is called the mooring post of the land, connecting heaven and earth.

⁴⁷ See Steinkeller 1999 n. 36; Michalowski 1998. However, Edzard 2003 issues philological objections to these assertions (c.f. Wang 2011 pg.20)

4.2 *Clan Structure within the Theology of the Early Dynastic Period:*

Even after the publishing of the Abu Salabikh texts W.G. Lambert described the earliest (historical) pantheon not in terms of matriarchy, but in terms of a “unity of culture” existing between state religions (plural), in that “the deities of the various cities were related to each other in a generally accepted scheme like members of a clan, for which the Olympians offer the closest parallel.”⁴⁸ Also interesting is Lambert’s characterization of the ancestor gods “the most senior gods were provided with ancestors of more than six generations, but these forebears were not major members of the pantheon..” The question then may be asked, does the ED literature attest to a clan type structure within the divine pantheon?

An ED mythological text from Girsu, AO 4153/Ukg. 15, deals with a primordial era before the creation of the universe - the following lines represent column ii.⁴⁹

1. *An, the En, was standing (there) as a youthful man.*
2. *An-Heaven and Ki-Earth were "resounding" together.*
3. *At this time the Enki-and the Nunki-gods did not (yet) live,*
 4. *Enlil did not (yet) live,*
 5. *Ninlil did not (yet) live*

Besides the obvious, that certain familiar cosmogonic principals involving An and Ki were already present in the ED period, the text implies that sometime after the AN-KI universe

⁴⁸ Lambert 1975 pg. 192. The author adds “It is not a coincidence that most of the major deities of the Sumerian pantheon were within three generations, which is precisely the state of affairs at any given time within a human clan.”

⁴⁹ Translation from Ake Sjöberg 2002 pg. 231; Michalowski 1998 pg. 239 makes note of the provenance of the table being Girsu.

formed, the ancestors of Enlil, the Enki and Ninki gods, came into being. The Enki and Ninki deities (who are in some translations understood to be in the plural, thus forming a group of Enkis and Ninkis)⁵⁰ are well known from later tradition as the ancestors of Enlil. While it seems that the seven generations are not named in ED texts as they are in the Death of Gilgamesh, an UD.GAL.NUN text mentions both that “Enki and Ninki bore seven” and that they “... bore Enlil.”⁵¹

The Early Dynastic god lists⁵² provide some fascinating insights into the theological situation despite numerous complexities. While the organizational principals of the later god lists were mostly “theological or mythographic” those from Fara and Abu Salabikh were organized according to i) entries that share a sign in common; ii) entries that exhibit some phonetic resemblance and iii) entries that share a basic conceptual or semantic association.”⁵³ According to G. Rubio’s recent analysis, of the 297 fully preserved names from the Fara list and the 235 fully preserved names of the Abu Salabikh list, only 80 of those names are common to both lists (with 28 names being spelled differently): see *fig. 1*:

<i>Fāra God List (SF 1)</i>	<i>Abū Ṣalābīḫ God List (IAS 82–90)</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ca. 600 names • 421 names preserved • 297 fully preserved 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ca. 430 names • 306 names preserved • 235 fully preserved
Names that are identical in both lists: 52	
The same names spelled differently: 28	
Identical sequences of names: 3	

Fig. 1 – Adopted from Rubio 2011

⁵⁰ Michalowski 1998 pg. 231

⁵¹ OIP 99 114 - for translation see Lambert OA 20 (1981) pg. 25; Espak 2010 pg. 120

⁵² For the Fara godlist see Krebernik 1986; For the Abu Salabikh god list Alberti 1985; Mander 1986.

⁵³ Rubio 2011 pg. 99

While regional differences in pantheon are to be expected, Rubio’s astute calculations also make distinctions about the local pantheon as well. Specifically, there are three discernable pantheons in each locality: a scholarly pantheon evident in the lexical god lists and literary texts, an official (or royal) pantheon evident in offering lists, cultic texts and royal inscriptions, and thirdly, theophoric personal names found in the administrative texts which “bear witness to both mainstream tendencies of the official cult and the individual preferences of popular religion.”⁵⁴

Rubio demonstrates this principal by analyzing the Fara texts in each category finding that of the 56 deities mentioned in the known Fara offering lists,⁵⁵ only 26% correlate with deities mentioned in the Fara godlist; only 12 deities attested in theonyms appear in all sources.⁵⁶ These findings demonstrate the importance of distinguishing text type and pantheon type within ED localities.

Peter Espak examined data from both Fara and Abu Salabikh and came up with the following arrangements of the chief gods, as they occur in key texts:

TEXTS	Pos. 1	Pos. 2	Pos. 3	Pos. 4	Pos. 5	Pos. 6	Pos. 7	...
SF 5-6	^d en-lil	^d en-ki	^d gibil6	^d nin-kin=nir	^d ama-ušum-gal	^d nisaba		...
SF 7	^d en-lil	^d inanna	NUN	^d sùd	^d gibil	^d lama	^d nanna	...
SF 39 VII-VIII	Enlil	Enki	Nanna	Inanna	Gibil	Ašgi	Nergal	...
SF 1, 1-19	an	^d en-lil	^d inanna	^d en-ki	^d nanna	^d utu	^d AN. MEN _x	...

⁵⁴ Rubio 2011 pg. 107

⁵⁵ In example, SF 5/6; sometimes interpreted as a godlist (Krebernik 1986:167)

⁵⁶ Rubio 2011 pg. 107

OIP 99, 82, 1-9	[an?]	[^d en- lil?]	[^d nin- KID]	[^d e]n- k[i]	[^d na]n[na]	^d inanna	^d [IN]- ANNA	...
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Fig. 2 – adopted from Espak 2011 (Abbreviated.)

Espak determines from this data that there are different traditions at work in the ED theology – some list An first (SF 5/6, SF 7, SF 38) while others list Enlil first (SF 1, OIP 99:82) which he attributes to a lack of overall imperial pantheon etc.;⁵⁷ while this cannot be ruled out entirely, Rubio sees SF 5/6 not as a godlist but as an offering list while the nature of SF 7 is uncertain and SF 38 is an UG.GAL.NUN text.⁵⁸ Therefore, at least in the case of the former text, the differences may actually be explained by the nature of the text (an offering list, which reflects the theology of the official cult rather than that of the scholars.)

More interesting in the course of the present discussion however are two tablets (SF 23 and OIP 99:82) which are part of the god lists of Fara and Abu Salabikh and which record an almost identical list of ancestor gods, beginning with the Enki and Ninki deities.⁵⁹ Taken together, the ancestor gods are attested (at the very least) in ED mythology (Ukg. 15), in ED godlists (SF 23 and OIP 99:82) and in an ED incantation⁶⁰; this seems to be good support for Lambert's notion of pantheon in this period as being something like a human clan.

4.3 The Gender Characteristics of the Temple Hymns in ED and OB periods:

The (OB) Temple Hymns:

⁵⁷ Espak 2011 pg. 49

⁵⁸ Rubio 2011 pg. 106 n.41; The author is following Mander 1986. For SF 7 and SF 39 see Biggs OIP 99 pg. 37

⁵⁹ Espak 2011 pg. 48

⁶⁰ Krebernik 1984 #19 : in this incantation the Enki and Ninki deities are associated with the roots of the tamarisk.

The Temple Hymns of the OB and ED periods represent an important source of information for the city god structure of early Sumer.⁶¹ Although the Old Babylonian version is known from 35 texts and fragments from the OB period and 2 from the Ur III texts, chiefly from Nippur, it's possible that the data itself may better be understood as representative of Akkadian period temples: scholars involved with the texts see no reason to doubt that the subscript to these texts, which informs the reader that the hymns were written by Enġeduanna, are in any way misleading.⁶² Supporting this likelihood is data attested in individual hymns which could only support an initial date of composition in the Ur III period or earlier. For example, Temple Hymn 14 features Ninazu as the head god of the city of Ešnunna, a position known to have been usurped by Tišpak sometime before the Old Babylonian period.⁶³

In a gender analysis of deities of the 42 Old Babylonian temple hymns W.G. Lambert excludes number 28 (text is broken), numbers 3-6 (since they relate to secondary temples and are not in the same category as the city gods listed in other entries) and number 9 (as it relates to a deified ruler). This leaves a total of 36 deities to consider, 22 of which are male and 14 female “a balance entirely out of line with the holding of power as between men and women in ancient Sumer” as was mentioned above.⁶⁴ In any case, this would mean that goddesses occupy 38% of the temples praised in the OB temple hymns.

The zà-mì Hymns:

In describing the zà-mì temple hymns,⁶⁵ so called because of the repeated use of the

⁶¹ See Selz RLA 14 “Stadtgott”

⁶² Sjoberg and Bergmann 1969 pg.5; the authors further note that some of the sanctuaries named are from northern Babylonia, further speaking to Enheduanna's authorship. (note 2) Further, Cohen noted that the final temple listed is e₂-a-ga-de₃-ki, the temple of A(m)ba in Akkad, the city of the redactor, Enġeduanna. (Cohen JCS 1976, pg.91)

⁶³ ibid pg. 8

⁶⁴ Lambert 1986 pg. 128

⁶⁵ The term “hymns” is used for convenience, although Krecher had pointed out that the extreme brevity of each entry may suggest instead the term “litany”. c.f. Rubio 2011 pg. 102

phrase zà-mì (“praise”), Biggs noted that deities whose cult centers were close to each other tend to be in proximity in the list as well; another type of grouping involves deities who are associated in the myths and epics.⁶⁶ Known from Abu Salabikh only, it has been suggested that the final temple in Giš-gi is also in the city of composition – therefore Giš-gi may have been the ancient name of Abu Salabikh..this would be in analogy with the OB Temple Hymns, which end with a temple in the city of Enheduanna, their composer.⁶⁷ This suggestion cannot be confirmed at present however.

Robert Biggs’ observation that some zà-mì deities can only be found elsewhere in the Fara and Abu Salabikh godlists can now be somewhat qualified by recent analysis: of the 69 deities named, some 42, or 60%, appear also in the Abu Salabikh godlist (with 27 appearing also in the Fara godlist).⁶⁸ As the temple lists document city gods who relate particularly with the royal or official pantheon, a modest 60% agreement with the so called scholarly pantheon of the god lists may not be totally surprising (and is considerably higher than the 23% agreement rate between Fara offering lists to the Fara god list, noted above.)

Turning to the question of the gender statistics in the zà-mì hymns, I am not aware of any existing analysis such as that offered by Lambert for the OB temple hymns. Using a selection of published and unpublished studies however it is possible to address the problem.⁶⁹ Of the 69 zà-mì hymns, scholars have identified the gender of approximately 58 of them while 11 entries remain too obscure or are unreadable.⁷⁰ Allowing for at least a minimal of interpretation, for example, I assume that gods whose names begin with Lugal are male, and

⁶⁶ Biggs OIP 99 pg. 45

⁶⁷ Cohen 1976 pg. 91

⁶⁸ Rubio 2011 pg. 102

⁶⁹ I have made wide use of an forthcoming study on the Gods and Goddesses of the ANE by D. Frayne and J. Stuckey; Entries in RLA 9 and 10 (often by Cavigneaux and/or Krebernik) were very helpful; Biggs own notes to the zà-mì hymns OIP 99 sometimes gave clues; additionally Mamoru Yoshikawa’s personal notes and material for a Sumerian lexicon have been digitized and contain innumerable hints for the study of the Sumerian pantheon. See <http://htq.minpaku.ac.jp/databases/sumer/index-eng.jsp?HEADER=false>

⁷⁰ I would suggest the following as currently unidentifiable deities: ašdud, d.Men, d.Ab.gíd.gíd, d. nin-PISAN, d.Nin.á.NE, d.tu-da, Nin.Ē.kù and whatever deities are meant on lines 147-148, 167-169, 205-206

that amar distinguishes a male god (in view of Black and Green’s translation of amar as “bull-calf”), it seems possible to distinguish 31 male gods⁷¹ listed in the zà-mì hymns against 27 female.⁷² This means that of the 58 zà-mì deities whose gender is discernable, roughly 46% are goddesses.

Caution must be used in interpreting this data however, besides the most obvious issue of the 11 ungendered deities from the list, it should be stressed that many of the deities are little understood and could possibly be misidentified. Furthermore, to say that the 38% goddess figure of the OB temple hymns compared with 46% goddess figure of the zà-mì hymns necessarily means goddesses were less prominent as city patrons of the later period may be incorrect - if the OB hymns (42) had sampled so large a number of cities as their ED counterparts (69), the ratio of goddesses to gods may well have been closer to the earlier figure. Or not. With these reservations aside, it may be tentatively stated that the data offers some loose support for some of Steinkeller’s proposals, and particularly to Heimpel’s statement that “many city-gods were female throughout Babylonia” (see below).

4.4 Summary and Discussion

In the preceding sections, two persuasive observations made by W.G Lambert were weighed against ED evidence. With a view toward the full lifespan of Sumerian literature which now stretches back into the mid-third millennium, and the recognition of persistent, conservative themes throughout (here the example of Enlil’s separation of heaven and earth was used), the possibility of radical change just outside of view may become dubious. Secondly, the

⁷¹ Male Deities: d.Enlil, (d)En te ħ u nu du₁₀, (d)Asal-lú-KAL, d.Nanna, d.Utu, d.Ningal, An, am-gal-nun, ban-kù-lá, (d)GIR.UNUG, d.Zababa, d.ŠĀR X DÍŠ-gi(4), d.Meš-sanga-unug, d.Lugal-bàn-da, d.IM, d. Nin-ildumma, d. Ki-ki-ħ u, d. Nin-ur, d.Šara, d.Ningirsu, d. Nin-gublaga, lugal an dūl du, d.Ninazu, d.Nam.nir, d.BIL.GI, d.En.gal.te, d. Lugal-SAĥ AR-EZEN X AN, d. Lugal-kud-da, d. Dam-mi, d.Amar-engur-na, d. Ama-ušum-gal

⁷² Female deities: d.Nin-unug, d.Inanna, d.Dam-gal-nun, d.Nin-um, d.Nin-bí-lu-lu, d.Nin-tu, lamma d.Nin-sun, d. Nisaba, d. Ašnan, d. Gá-tùm-dùg, d.Nanše, d.ENGUR, Nin-ab-KID-KID, d. Lamma-ša(6)-ga, d.Nin-girim, d.Nin-mar, d.Nin-kas-si-din, d.Inanna, d.Nin-zadim, d.Nin-sar, d.Sùd, d.Nin-in, d.Me-dím-túm, d. NU-NUNUZ-du₁₀, d.Nin-al-sul, d.Nin-NAGAR, ama d.Li8-si4

strong presence of the Enki and Ninki ancestors in ED literature seems argue for Lambert's 'clan structures based on the human model' as an organizing principal in Mesopotamian theology; this in itself does not preclude a earlier pantheon dominated by females, but if the pantheon follows human models to the extent of mirroring clan structures, would a female dominated pantheon not necessitate the suggestion of a social matriarchy in the archaic period? Lastly, in 4.3 the gender statistics of the OB and ED temple lists were analysed. While the earlier data does indeed show a higher ratio of female city gods, caution should be exercised given the ambiguities of these hymns, and the larger sampling pool of the earlier hymns versus the later ones. While the data may go some of the way toward supporting the notion of a near equality among the sexes of the city gods, nothing about it seems indicative that the ratio may, at one time, have tipped farther and into the realm of female dominance.

5.0 The City and Pantheon of Lagaš

In selecting the city-state of Lagaš for consideration there are numerous advantages. First of all, an unusually rich cache of Early Dynastic administrative texts has been excavated in the area; as well, the local pantheon has been subject to an extended and admirable study by Gebhard Selz.⁷³ Secondly, the theological history of the Lagaš state (an amalgamation of neighboring villages the most important of which were Lagaš proper, Girsu, and Nina) is intricate and complex, often inviting scholarly speculation.⁷⁴

In 2002 Wolfgang Heimpel grappled with an old philological issue, that being, the question of the element NIN in the names of both male and female gods. In the process, the

⁷³ See Gebhard Selz 1995. *Untersuchungen zur Götterwelt des altsumerischen Stadtstaates von Lagash*. Philadelphia.

⁷⁴ An example of this complexity can be seen in the cultic calendars of ED Lagash: M. Cohen (1993) has identified some 30 distinct month names local to the area, when one would usually expect 12. The explanation is that several of the Lagaš districts observed their own distinct calendars – this creates an abundance of data and (unfortunately) considerable confusion for modern scholars.

author addressed the question of goddesses in prehistory and, independent of Steinkeller, came to following statement:

“Just as women become chairmen, so male gods may have moved into positions formerly held by female gods. These were conceivably positions of city-gods, which may have been occupied by females as a rule in prehistoric times. It is noteworthy that many city-gods were female throughout Babylonia and especially in the conservative territory of Lagaš: Gatumdu of Lagaš City, Ninmar of Gu’aba, Nanše of Nina, Dumuzi-Abzu of Kinunir. Male were Ningirsu of Girsu, Lugal-Uruba or Urub, and Nindara of Kiesa. If we could penetrate the dark long stretches of time before ED III, we might find that city-gods were originally all female and that males entered such positions as time went by.”⁷⁵

Among the many questions raised here, it might be asked: was Lagaš a conservative city? On the political level, while rulers of ED Lagaš never used the archaic title *en*, deceased *ensiks* and members of their immediate families were designated as *en*, perhaps “reflecting the tradition that the archaic rulers of Sumer, to whom the *ensiks* of Lagaš undoubtedly traced their real or imagined descent, had borne the title of *en*.”⁷⁶ While in terms of pantheon, Espak recently studied the lists of deities preserved on the Royal Inscriptions of Eanatum and his successors Enanatum and Enmetena; of the 20 exemplars considered by the author, all 7 of the Eanatum inscriptions list Enlil first, followed soon after by Nanše and Ningirsu. Yet 2 of 4 Enanatum inscriptions mention the Lagaš gods in first position and 6 of 9 Enmetena inscriptions have the Lagash gods in first position instead of Enlil. This data may be interpreted as supporting Heimpele’s characterization of the Lagash theology as conservative, in this case, the return of prestige to the local pantheon over and above national trends. At least in the case of the official pantheon of course.

However, just because a locality may be given to some measure of conservatism does not entirely exempt its religion from the forces of internal political developments and

⁷⁵ Heimpele 2002 pg. 158

⁷⁶ Steinkeller 1999 pg. 110

syncretism, and here the work of G. Selz is crucial (5.3 below). Consideration should also be given to some of the more important gods of Lagaš, their genealogy and their holy sites.

5.1 Holy Cities, Political Cities, and “Twin Capitals”:

As highlighted at the start of this paper, one of Steinkeller’s key reasons for proposing an early pantheon “dominated” by goddesses is his observation of what he calls a “phenomena of twin capitals” observable in early Sumerian city layout wherein there was “a political center and, usually in its close vicinity, a religious capital.” Examples given are Girsu and Lagaš, Umma and Zabalam, Adab and Kesh, Nippur and Tugal, and “possibly” Ur and Nipur “(Tell ‘Ubaid).”⁷⁷ The exact nature of the proposed connection between these twin capitals is explained below and here Steinkeller’s words are quoted in full for the sake of accuracy:

“Now, the religious capital was generally the earlier of the two and had a goddess as its divine owner. The examples here are Lagash (Gatumdug), Zabalam (Inanna), Kesh (Ninhursag), Tugal (Ninhursag), and Nipur (Ninhursag). In contrast, the deities associated with the political centers were male, usually being sons of the goddesses in charge of the religious capitals. The examples of such gods were Ningirsu, Shara, Ashgi, Ninurta, and possibly Nanna.”⁷⁸

So Lagash under Gatumdug is the religious capital and Girsu under Ningirsu is the political capital. Qualifying this statement is certainly no easy task, especially for readers and commentators lacking Steinkeller’s philological skill, grasp of Sumerian, and ability to peruse the all important administrative and economic texts relevant to each of these sites. However, through use of existing scholarship focusing on these same sources, it can be said that,

⁷⁷ Steinkeller 1999 pg. 113

⁷⁸ *ibid.* pg. 115

intriguingly, the scribes of Lagaš did in fact have a term to designate the “holy city” (perhaps Steinkeller’s “religious capital”): *uru-kú*.⁷⁹ Against the proposed scenario however, is that, in the time of Gudea, this term was connected with *Girsu* (and not Lagash), and G. Selz states that ED evidence supports this as well; further, Selz notes that when Lugalzagesi attacked and destroyed sanctuaries in Lagaš and Nina, the sanctuaries of Girsu seem to have escaped destruction, reinforcing the conviction that Girsu was in fact *uru-kú*.⁸⁰

Additionally, Selz draws attention to the fact that rulers of the state of Lagaš nearly always called themselves “*ensí-* or *lugal-lagaš^{ki}-(sa)*” “prince” or “king of Lagaš.” This leads him to state: “Lagaš was the political center of the proto-historic Lagaš state.”

Steinkeller’s notion of twin capitals is fascinating and seems to be a confirmable structure within the Lagaš state on a general level; in terms of specifics, it must be admitted that Lagaš turns out to be a rather bad example of the proposed scheme, in that Girsu was the religious center (not the political) and Lagaš the political center (not the religious). Still, this situation may not weaken the proposal overly much, at least if Selz’ recent endorsement is any indication – writing in the new edition of RLA he remarks: “Seit der Fruhzeit findet sich oft ein Gotterpaar an der Spitze eines lokalen Pantheons* (Steinkeller 1999 114 f.)”⁸¹

5.2 *Ninurta, Nanše and Genealogy:*

Nanše was undoubtedly an important goddess in the Lagaš state. She had sanctuaries in Lagaš proper and in Girsu, but her main sanctuary and seat of power was in Nigin (also read as Nenua or Nina). Confirming the connection between the deity and her seat is the writing of

⁷⁹ Selz 1990 pg. 118

⁸⁰ *ibid.*

⁸¹ Roughly translated: “Since early times one often finds a pair of gods at the top of local pantheons (Steinkeller 1999 114).” See Selz, Statdgott (2011). Outside of Espak 2010, this is the only time the theological ideas in Steinkeller 1999 have been addressed, that I’m aware of.

Nigin^{ki}, as explained by Veldhuis:

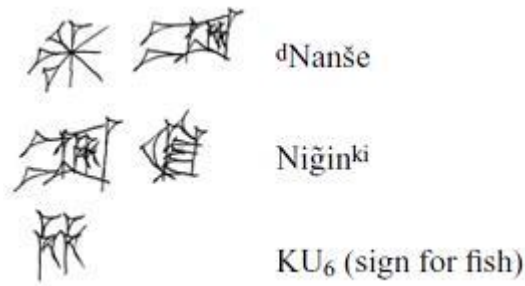


fig 3. adapted from Veldhuis 2004

As is apparent above, Nigin was written with the Nanše sign which was AB+KU₆ (the signs for sanctuary and for fish) plus KI;⁸² this is also indicative of one of the deities main attributes as she was the goddess of fish and fowl. She was surrounded by her family and entourage and her husband (Nindara) and daughter (Nin.MAR.KI) and the divine supervisor of her estate (Hendursaga) may have had separate sanctuaries in Nigin.⁸³

The importance of Nanše within the Lagaš state seems confirmed by the fact that month 1 of the ED Lagaš calander/s was marked by the festival of Nanše and was known as ^{iti}ezem-še-gu7-dNanše.⁸⁴ The celebration of the festival of Nanše spanned three days in Nigin, the first day involved offerings to Nanše, her family and retinue; during the last two days offerings were made to Nanše alone. Due to additional travel times, pilgrims from Lagaš and Girsu may have devoted 6 or 7 days in total to the festival.⁸⁵

⁸² Veldhuis 2004 pg. 18

⁸³ ibid.

⁸⁴ Cohen 1993 pg, 44. The author is able to identify this as the first month as text DP 131 records that the buru-maš distribution occurred in the month of Nanše, something known to occur in the first month of the calander.

Lying approximately 28 km to the northwest was Girsu, the seat of the god Ningirsu. Typically seen as the head god of the Lagash pantheon, Ningirsu is often invoked in the political discourse of the time: for example, Enannatum and Uruinimgina “call the boundaries of their territory the ‘limits of Ningirsu’ and any destruction of their land was a sin against their god.”⁸⁶ Further, in territorial disputes with neighboring Umma, the ancient scribes phrased the standoff as being between the gods Ningirsu (Lagaš) and Šara (Umma).⁸⁷ His early importance is indicated by a building dedication associated with the founder of the historic Lagaš dynasty, Ur-Nanše; in this unique composition the Enki and Ninki gods are asked to sanctify the reeds (likely) forming part of the ritual structure of Ningirsu’s shrine in Girsu.⁸⁸

Scholars have, since the time of A. Falkenstein, drawn attention to the fact that apparent genealogical discrepancies exist in the Lagaš pantheon, which point to the existence of differing local traditions and to the likelihood of syncretism.⁸⁹ An important question has arisen as scholars examine the names of temples throughout the region: in Giršu, there was the ^dnanše(-šeš(-e)-gar(-ra)), one reading of which is “sanctuary, placed beside the (Nanše’s) brother”; and in Girsu there was the corresponding (é-)nin(-né)-gar(-ra) meaning “(sanctuary,) placed beside the (i.e. Ningirsu’s) sister.”⁹⁰ To Selz, these genealogical relations between temples seem “somewhat artificial.” There appears to be, in the author’s opinion, a notable lack of connection between the gods of Nigin and Girsu in the earliest evidence, and this leads Selz to suggest the sister-brother relationship between Nanše and Ningirsu was innovation that followed “coalescence between the originally independent cities of NINA [Nigin] and Girsu.”⁹¹

Given that Nanše is typically understood as being the daughter of Enki⁹² and Ningirsu is

⁸⁵ Cohen 1993 pg. 45

⁸⁶ Leick 1991 pg. 131

⁸⁷ Van die Mieroop 2004 pg. 49

⁸⁸ Espak 2010 pg. 17

⁸⁹ Selz 1990 pg. 112

⁹⁰ Selz 1990 pg 119 #34

⁹¹ *ibid.* pg 121 #45/46

generally taken to be the son of Enlil, the brother-sister relationship could reasonable be seen as artificial - however, while Ningirsu is certainly called the “son of Enlil” in the Gudea cylinders, Wang contends that for the early period evidence in lacking for the parentage of Ningirsu; he disagrees with Selz’ position that the title ur-sag-^dEn-líl-(lá) literally “the hero of Enlil” can be taken (along with other indicators) as supporting Selz’ notion of Ningirsu as verifiably the son of Enlil in the ED period.⁹³

In fact, Wiggerman 1992 states that Ningirsu was the son of Enki in this period, seeing the depictions on the silver vase of Entemena as indicative of this: they are a set of ibexs (Enki) under an *anzû*, a set of stags (Ninhursag) under an *anzû*, and a set of lions (Ningirsu) under an *anzû*.⁹⁴ At present the evidence for the genealogical connection between Nanše and Ningirsu, real or political, is tenuous at best however.

5.3 From Goddess to God in the Early Dynastic Lagaš Pantheon?

Finally, the question of possible correlations with Steinkeller’s idea of a younger generation of emerging male political gods (to paraphrase page 115) should be addressed, and here Ningirsu was one of the proposed examples.⁹⁵ As has been seen above and will again be borne out below, questions of this god’s origins and theological nature are anything but simple.

The most important observations in this regard are again to be found in the work of Selz during the course of his study of the development of the pantheon of Lagaš (ASJ 12 1990). He

⁹² Veldhuis 2004 pg 24. Veldhuis states that she is usually said to be the daughter of Enki; She is called the “child of eridu” in the Gudea Cylinders (Espak 2010 pg. 46); on rare occasions she is said to be the daughter of Enlil (i.e. in Enki and the World Order).

⁹³ Wang 2011 pg. 138. Wang further disagrees that the Enlil’s epithet Enlil-ab-ba-dingir-dingir-ré-ne “father of all the gods” necessarily means that he was specifically entails that Enlil was father of Ningirsu in Particular (despite being found on some Lagashite inscriptions; and he disagrees that the Girsu temple É-ad-da “house of the father” is necessarily a temple of Enlil, signaling his parenting of Ningirsu. For these suggestions see Selz 1995 Untersuchungen zur Götterwelt des altsumerischen Stadtstaates von Lagash. Philadelphia.

⁹⁴ Wiggerman 1992 pg. 160. The author indicates that he follows the work of Falkenstein AnOr 30 91

⁹⁵ Steinkeller 1999 pg. 114

notes that the traditional reconstruction portrays Ningirsu as the “lord of Girsu” (as of course the name itself implies) but also his status as “the nucleus of the Lagaš pantheon” is assumed; he adds that these perceptions rely heavily on sources from the reign of the ED ruler Uru’iningina or from the reign of Neo-Sumerian ruler Gudea.. however on investigation of earlier sources Selz finds that this image of Ningirsu becomes “rather dubious”;⁹⁶ The early evidence, he suggest, attests to Nanše as holding more power in Lagaš, and gives part of a votive inscription of Entemena as an example:

*“When Nanše entrusted him (= Entemena) the kingship of Lagaš
(and) Ningirsu had called him by name”*

(Ent. 26: 13-16)

Selz comments here: “One realizes immediately that here the goddess Nanše performs a task usually ascribed to Ningirsu..the bestowal of the kingship of Lagaš on Entemena.”⁹⁷ In this regard it’s also interesting to note, once more, the order of the deities listed in the royal inscriptions of Eanatum, Enanatum and Entemena. Above under 5.0, it was pointed out that under the later two kings, Nanše and Ningirsu tended to precede Enlil in the official pantheon evidenced in these lists; a possible correlation with Selz observations here is that of the 17 times the pair feature in these lists, 12 times Nanše precedes Ningirsu as indicated in section B. of the chart below:

⁹⁶ Selz 1990 pg. 118

⁹⁷ ibid.

	A. Times Nanše and Ningirsu head the list (over Enlil)		B. Times Nanše precedes Ningirsu	
Eanatum	0 of 7	0%	2 of 6	33%
Enanatum	2 of 4	50%	4 of 4	100%
Entemena	6 of 9	66%	6 of 7	85%

fig. 4 – summary of data from Royal Inscriptions.

Nanše precedes Ningirsu in 2 of 6 occurrences for Eanatum, but in 4 of 4 times for Enanatum and 6 of 7 times for Enmetena (with 2 listings being excluded from this last group as they feature Ningirsu’s name multiple times.)⁹⁸ In keeping with the suggestion that the inscriptions of the second two kings were more conservative for placing the Lagashite gods in first position, they also place Nanše in front of Ningirsu 100% of the time, and 86% of the time, respectively. If Selz’ notion that Nanše was originally the more important god is correct, this further detail would mark an even more conservative spirit.

Of the several themes W. Heimpel explores following his deliberations on the enigmatic nature of the element nin,⁹⁹ is the theme of change from female to male divine supremacy in Girsu.¹⁰⁰ The author bases this suggestion primarily on observations that in the inscriptions Gudea and other rulers of this period, Bau is called “Lady of the Holy City” while “Ningirsu is never related to the holy city as it’s king or lord.” The author admits that Ningirsu is connected with holy city in an ED inscription of Eanatum, but finds one example

⁹⁸ The data considered here has again been isolated in Espak 2010 pg. 50, drawn ultimately from the RIME series.

⁹⁹ These points were articulated by Heimpel in the provocatively titled article “The Lady of Girsu” , Fs. Jacobsen, 2002. Heimpel’s main issue is that the sign nin, traceable to the earliest stage of writing, includes a representation of the female pubic triangle, a fact which has confounded attempts at explaining male names which include this element such as Ningirsu, Ninurta, Ninazu etc.

¹⁰⁰ One of these themes was his “social-historical hypothesis” which was quoted almost in full in 5.0 above. Expressed in one paragraph and consisting – essentially – of the suggestion that, as there seem to have been many female city gods in the early period, certainly numerous in the state of Lagaš, males may gradually have overtook their positions. Thus Ningirsu “the lady of Girsu” became the male god Ningirsu(?) Unfortunately Heimpel is woefully brief and does not correlate with Steinkeller here.

unconvincing. It might be argued however, that the evidence presented, Gudea era inscriptions, seems rather inadequate to make the case that Bau was originally the patron of the Holy city, only to be overtaken by Ningirsu at some point (as a change from female to male divine supremacy would entail).

For one thing, Selz has suggested that Bau, as daughter of An, became the spouse of the local god at Girsu as a result of the influence of Uruk in the proto-historical period;¹⁰¹ Therefore, from a very early point the shrines of both Ningirsu and Bau (and their offspring) could be found in Girsu, and offering lists attest to the fact that both deities received their offerings there.¹⁰² That Bau was frequently hailed in connection with the holy city in a relatively late period in Sumerian history doesn't seem particularly convincing as an argument against the Ningirsu's dominant position in Girsu.

6.0 Conclusion and Discussion:

At this point the proposals identified in the introduction of this paper should be recalled and weighed against the proceeding. In regards to point **i**) Goddesses dominated Uruk period pantheon:¹⁰³ it may be admitted that there are no source materials from the Uruk period capable of qualifying that statement; short of that, the temple hymns of the ED and OB periods were analyzed in the discussion to **4.3** (above). The data considered, while possibly supporting a notion of equality of the sexes among the city gods, seems to fall short of suggesting the (possibly imaginative) assertion of a female dominated pantheon. In the more specific situation of the local Lagaš pantheon, however, there seems to be reasonable grounds for suspecting that

¹⁰¹ Selz 1990 pg. 123

¹⁰² *ibid.* pg. 122

¹⁰³ The full quote here is "It appears quite certain that the earliest pantheon was dominated by females.. most [Uruk period] city-states (or proto-city states) had goddesses as their titular divine owners." Steinkeller 1999 pg. 114

Ningirsu overtook Nanše as the high god of the state, a development which may have derived impetus from the rising influence of Nippur.

Point **ii)**, that Enki was original head god of the pantheon and Enlil was a late arrival but testified in Ebla, was not addressed in this paper for the most part, but in **4.1** the centrality of Enlil within Mesopotamian cosmology already in ED literature was felt to go some of the way in arguing against this. Further objections have been raised on philological grounds (i.e. Edzard 2003. see note 46 above.)

Concerning points **iii)** and **iv)** the formation of the Twin Capitals phenomena and the rise of a younger generation of male gods in the political centers, it was noted in the preceding section that of the 5 city pairs given by Steinkeller as type cases displaying this phenomena, the example examined here, Lagaš/Girsu, seems to be a fairly bad fit: not only is the younger male god patron of the holy city (religious center) Girsu, but his mother Gatumdug is patron of Lagaš proper – the political center. Further, it seems he may have overtaken the prerogative not of Gatumdug, but of Nanše, his sister (who it seems, may really have been his sister).

With all that said, it must be remarked that Steinkeller's suggestions find some basic validity within the sources and further studies into a larger sampling of the author's specified datasets may find that some of the imperfections noted above are tolerable. In this regard, Selz has suggested that the datasets from Adab and Fara are particularly promising.¹⁰⁴ The contention of course will always be with what levels of interpretation and imagination are permissible – in a field all but stagnating when it comes to the matter of archaic religion, Steinkeller's bold sketch represents a rare flash of innovation.

Whether we agree with any of the positions taken, one can hope at least one thing will be accomplished: the renewal of interest and inquiry into one of Mesopotamia's great enigmas, its early religious history.

¹⁰⁴ G. Selz – personal communication, August 2012.

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**Investigating a Proposed Archaic Pantheon:
Reflections on Steinkeller 1999**

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