

**The Development of Royal Insignia  
in Early Mesopotamia**

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Dec. 14<sup>th</sup> 2013

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# The Development of Royal Insignia in Early Mesopotamia

1.0 **Introduction:** The image of the earliest kings of ancient Mesopotamia is one obscured not only by the sands of time, but by the complexities of early multi-ethnic societies which were the first to undergo the transition from pre-urban tribalism to the early urbanism of the Uruk period, to the warring city-states of the Early Dynastic period and on. Playing a pivotal role in all of this were these early rulers whose elusive image, wherever identifiable, is of paramount importance to the study of the development and emergence of early civilization itself.

In terms of the available media, foundation figurines, stelae and rock reliefs were reserved for royal deeds and offer some of the most unequivocal images of the early ruler. These items also tend to preserve well. Statues, wall-plaques, cult vessels etc. were variously donated by the elite or, in some cases, by royalty, but the identity of the figures depicted on these items often presents difficulties in the early periods. Cylinder seals are an additional medium which were available to the wider circle of urban society; seals contribute significantly to the discussion of the Uruk period ruler, but are of negligible use for the same study in the Early Dynastic period (see 3.0).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Following C. Suter's discussion of available media, Suter 2012 pg. 204

The paper to follow is not meant as a reference work and cannot exhaustively present and discuss a wide array of the available evidence – instead, a selection of art pieces lending themselves to an iconological study of the development of royal insignia will be considered. This study is also not meant as a review article, however the recent publication of Gianni Marchesi and Nicolo Marchetti, *Royal Statuary of Early Dynastic Mesopotamia* (Marchesi/Marchetti 2011), as vital and provocative a study as it is, will be followed closely, compared with and against the evidence, and discussed in the conclusion (4.0).

**Table 1 – Headwear of the Mortal and Divine**



**1a:** Boehmer RIA 4 pg. 431 - frühdynastisch



**1b:** Amiet 1961 1221



**1c:** Boehmer RIA 4 pg. 431 - frühdynastisch



**1d:** Asher-Greve 1995/96 pg. 185



**1d:** Art of the First Cities #128



**1e:** Art of the First Cities #33/ Amiet 1961 1355

## 1.1 Introductory Concerns: The AGA-circlet and the MEN-crown

One of the clear difficulties in discussing the imagery of kingship in early Mesopotamian contexts is the difficulty in discerning ruler from deity. The problem derives in no small part from undeveloped visual insignia that would distinguish a divine being from a royal; most importantly, the MEN (= horned crown) is not attestable in earliest contexts. Julia Asher-Greve states that it is only with the onset of the ED II through Akkadian periods and beyond that a visual formula for signifying the divine was developed, a formula centered on the horned crown.<sup>2</sup> This finding is in agreement with Boehmer's seminal discussion of the horned crown, wherein he states that divine headwear, consisting simply of two horns, first appears in the "Mesilim" period (roughly, ED II. See *table 1a* of which *table 1b* is a suggestible example).<sup>3</sup>

Much can be gained from discussing divine and royal headwear together, as insignia to be compared and contrasted. When the headgear of early rulers is described at all it is sometimes described as a headband or as headgear, but the item is perhaps best understood as a *circlet* constructed from either silver or other precious metals, or with a "wood or reed core covered with cloth, inlay or sheet metal."<sup>4</sup> Asher-Greve has convincingly argued that the Sumerian men-crown is to be identified with the divine horned crown,<sup>5</sup> while the aga-circlet, signifying the royal equivalent, is never horned.<sup>6</sup> From the early ED II period the divine headdress evolved

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<sup>2</sup> Asher-Greve 1995/96 pg 183; A related phenomenon in the textual world is the inconsistent use of the dingir as a divine determinative in the late Uruk and early ED periods, see Beaulieu 2003 pg. 103 and Selz 2008 pg. 15

<sup>3</sup> Boehmer RIA 4 pg. 433: "Die ältesten Belege für die H. finden sich in der Kunst der Mesilim-Zeit (Wrüh~ dyn. II). Neben einfachen Hörnern, die hier erstmalig menschenartigen Wesen aus dem Kopf wachsen und sie so als Götter erkenntlich machen (z. B. I), kommen Kronen auf mit pflanzlichen Elementen in der Mitte (z. B. 2 FD IIIa)

<sup>4</sup> Asher-Greve 1995/96 n.21 – The author argues for the interpretation of the circlet over the head band by noting that Sumerian verbs involved in putting on the men or the aga always amount to "placing" and not "binding" the item on the head.

<sup>5</sup> Asher-Greve 1995/96 - Evidence cited is mainly textual including ED economic texts mentioning the dedication of men-crowns to deities (pg. 183), texts which place the item on the heads of gods (pg. 185) and an analysis of the adjectives used for men-crowns (which place them in the divine sphere) (pg. 185).

<sup>6</sup> Asher-Greve 1995/96 pg. 185

from a set of simple horns (*table 1a*) to a mes-crown with a rounded circlet and cap which was strong enough to keep the horns upon the head (*table 1c*);<sup>7</sup> further, in the ED IIIa period, pieces of vegetation and other elements were added to the basic circlet to form the developed divine headdress (the men-crown: *table 1d*).<sup>8</sup> These observations operate in tandem with the Asher-greve's core suggestion: that the "aga is the basic circlet, the "diadem" that can be worn either alone, together with, or as part of (rim) the men-crown."<sup>9</sup> Following this interpretation, the divine headdress amounts to a more or less heavily modified royal circlet.

It is not until the art of the late ED/early Akkadian period on the limestone disk of Enheduanna (*table 1d*) that scholars can be relatively certain, on the basis of textual evidence, that they are definitely looking at an aga-circlet.<sup>10</sup> While the headwear that Enheduanna wears here is sometimes termed a 'cap' with a distinctive 'rolled brim,' a close inspection of the top of Enheduanna's head above the band of material reveals what are (arguably) waves of hair, suggesting that the headwear is again a circlet, the aga circlet, as described by Asher-Greve.<sup>11</sup> A wall plaque from the ED levels of the gippar at Ur (*table 1e*) has been compared stylistically to the scene on the *Disk of Enheduanna* - and, on the grounds of the position of the main figure, her clothing, and the scene unfolding around her, Irene Winter has convincingly argued that the iconography of the Akkadian period disk is essentially a continuation of ED period themes.<sup>12</sup> She further postulates, based on the evidence of the plaque and a similar scene on an ED

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<sup>7</sup> It's tempting to see this as a move toward the further anthropomorphic image of the divine.

<sup>8</sup> Asher-Greve 1995/96 pg. 184 - the author believes the additional elements are a lion head/mask, a visual code for "splendor" and "awe."

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.* pg. 186

<sup>10</sup> Following I. Winter 2010 pg. 69, whose n.20 provides the following justification for the this assertion: "On this, see J. Renger, "Untersuchungen zum Priestertum in der altbabylonischen Zeit," ZA 58 (1967) 110-188 and esp. p. 126 and note 100; also Hallo and van Dijk, *Exaltation*, Nin-me-šar-ra, 1. 107: aga-zi/nam-en-na, "the true cap/the sign of (appropriate to) en-ship", in Enheduanna's hymn to Inanna."

<sup>11</sup> The point is explicitly stated by the author herself, Asher-Greve 1995/96 pg. 186

<sup>12</sup> Winter 2010 pg. 70: "The plaque falls clearly into a stylistic group of ED III votive tablets, as, for example, from Tello, where another nude male priest pours a libation before a seated figure identifiable by attributes as the goddess Ninhursag (fig. 3).<sup>27</sup> These plaques are surely pre-Akkadian; yet their contents clearly mirror that of the disk."

cylinder seal, that the office of the en priestess actually extended back into the ED period.<sup>13</sup> The conviction that this line of *entu* priestesses, best known from Akkadian period documentation and on,<sup>14</sup> is in some way derivative and/or connected with the traditional office of the male en of Inanna (an office which at times exercised both secular and religious functions) has been favored by some scholars.<sup>15</sup> Further, the suggestion that the rulers of Uruk were en priests who traditionally wore a circlet very similar to Enheduanna's is not new,<sup>16</sup> and together with hair length and beard, headwear will be considered of particular diagnostic value in the proceeding discussion.

## 2.0 The "Man in the Net-skirt" as Divinity:

No comprehensive discussion of the image and ideology of the Early Dynastic ruler can proceed without addressing the question of possible visual forerunners in the Uruk and Jemdat Nasr periods. It is often agreed that just such a forerunner exists in the figure termed variously the "Priest-king,"<sup>17</sup> the "En"<sup>18</sup> or simply "the man in the net-skirt."<sup>19</sup> Known mainly from

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<sup>13</sup> *ibid* pg. 71: "Yet, considering the findspot of this plaque in the giparu and the presence of female participants in the ritual, as well as the striking parallels with the Enheduanna disk, a case could be made for suggesting that this plaque, too, shows an en-priestess, or en-priestesses, both before the shrine and in the presence of Nanna.." ; the cylinder seal is given as fig. 4, an ED III piece from Umma (?) VA 3878

<sup>14</sup> See Hallo 1957 pg. 10 for a list of early EN+DN names: Enheduanna (daughter of Sargon of Akkad); En-menanna (daughter of Naram-sin of Akkad); En-annipadda (daughter of Ur-Ba'u of Lagash); En-nirgalanna (daughter of Ur-Nammu of Ur); En-mahgalanna (?); En-tunzianna (?); En-annatumma (daughter of Ishme-Dagan of Isin); En-shakiag-Nanna (daughter of Sumu-ilum of Larsa); En-an(ni)edu (daughter of Kudur-mabug of Emutbal)

<sup>15</sup> See for example Steinkeller 1999 pg. 125 – in noting the presence of female priestly consorts of the god in Ebla (which predate Enheduanna) and in Mari, he makes the alternative suggestion that female priestly consorts were a Northern (Semitic) custom, brought by the Sargon to the South, where a Sumerian custom of male priestly consorts already existed. Interestingly, Steinkeller suggests that this new line of female priestly consorts in the south adopted the status of en, previously reserved for the male priests of Inanna and this suggestion is reinforced by the observation that outside of this office, the Sumerian word en is applied exclusively in male names (n. 76). Steinkeller is aware of the contradiction here posed by the Winter's observations (see n. 12 above), but suggests that the Ur wall plaque (*table 1e*) depicts not an en priestess, but a zirru priestess (Steinkeller 1999 n. 78); this suggestion is perhaps to be doubted.

<sup>16</sup> See Asher-Greve 1995/96 pg. 186



some 30 stone artifacts from the fourth millennium B.C., this figure is typified by a beard, a “round headdress” and a long skirt.<sup>20</sup> In the long history of the interpretation of the relevant artworks, and reflected in the terminology applied to this figure, consensus would indicate that this “Priest-king” (hereafter: P.K.) should be seen as representing a mortal ruler. All of this has been challenged recently by G. Marchesi and N. Marchetti 2011, and their assertion that the P.K. iconography represents not a mortal ruler, but a divine figure.<sup>21</sup>

The idea that the P.K. figure actually represents a divinity is not entirely new however. A similar line of interpretation was discussed in van Buren 1939/41,<sup>22</sup> in fact, the two streams of interpretation seem to align in their essentials.<sup>23</sup> The essentials of this position can be sketched as follows:

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<sup>17</sup> As in Steinkeller 1999 pg. 104; Hansen 2003 pg. 24; Amiet 1972, *Glyptic Susienne*, 2, Mémoires de la Délégation Archéologique en Iran, Mission de Susiane, 43, Paris, p. 77

<sup>18</sup> As in Schmandt-Besserat 1993

<sup>19</sup> As in Strommenger, E., 1964. *Art of Mesopotamia*, New York, p. 384

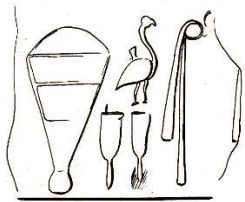
<sup>20</sup> Schmandt-Besserat 1993 pg. 201. She further elaborates that these 30 artifacts include: “4 statuettes, a stela, a stone vessel, the so called “Blau monuments”, about twenty cylinder seals and sealings, two small carved stone plates and lastly, an ivory knife handle (?)”

<sup>21</sup> See *Royal Statuary of the Early Dynastic Period*, G. Marchesi/N. Marchetti 2011, pgs. 186-196

<sup>22</sup> E. Douglas Van Buren, Religious Rites and Ritual in the Time of Uruk IV—III. *AfO*, 13. Bd. (1939-1941), pp. 32-45; however, van Buren seems to have already developed these interpretations in the course of her earlier work on associated symbolism with the “Priest-King,” specifically the wheat stalk (which she took to be an ear of corn.) She concludes not only that the man in the net skirt is a divinity, but more specifically that he is Dumuzi, the spouse of Inanna. See: The Ear of Corn. *Analecta Orientalia XII*, 1935, pp. 327 - 35;

<sup>23</sup> That van Buren’s work isn’t cited in Marchesi/Marchetti 2011 is surprising given the agreement between the two on these points; however, Ernst Heinrich’s 1936 *Kleinfunde aus den archaischen tempelschichten in Uruk* is referred to by both publications and may contain the germ of some of these notions.

**Table 2 – the “Priest-king” figure as divine**



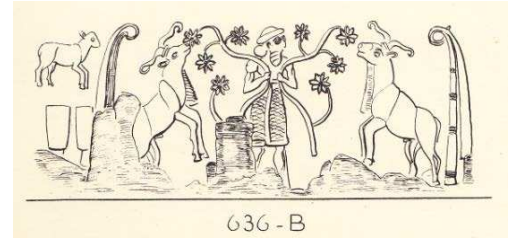
650

**2a:** Amiet 650



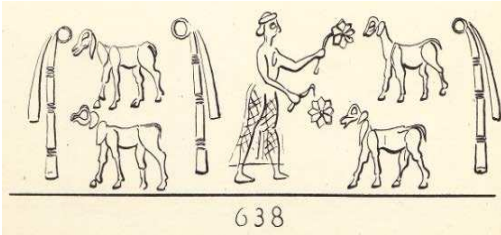
648

**2b:** Amiet 648



636 - B

**2c:** Amiet 636 (The “Preusser” seal)



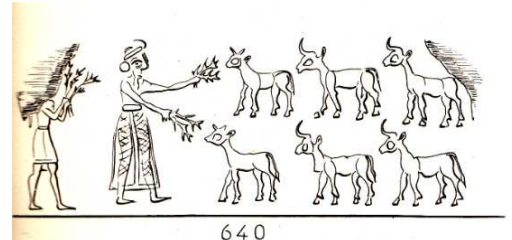
638

**2d:** Amiet 638



639

**2e:** Amiet 639



640

**2f:** Amiet 640

- i) *Duplication of Offerings:* Based on the observation that in Uruk period iconography offerings are generally depicted in pairs “two stones, two dishes, two baskets filled with fruit, and two theriomorphic vases” van Buren suggested that this is evidence for a pair of deities, both of whom were receiving these offerings.<sup>24</sup> She gives a scene from a seal from Uruk showing two stone vessels and a theriomorphic crane as an example (*table 2a above*). Similarly, Marchesi/Marchetti 2011 note: “The constant duplication not only of the symbol of In’anak but also of all the offerings, notably the baskets, vases and rhyta, is undoubtedly peculiar and may indicate that these are intended for two individuals, namely, the “goddess” and the “priest-king.”<sup>25</sup>
  
- ii) *Corn ear/Wheat stalk as emblem of the male deity:* The notion of a divine pairing is projected (rightly or wrongly) onto the two figures appearing at the culmination of the scene on the Warka vase, just before the ring posts. Part of the next observation is contingent on the identification of the female figure<sup>26</sup> situated by the ring-posts as divine rather than mortal. While the headdress of the female figure is unfortunately broken away on the Warka vase, van Buren draws attention to a crudely cut seal from Uruk which appears to depict the female figure wearing a horned cap (*figure 1*

<sup>24</sup> van Buren 1939/41 pg. 36

<sup>25</sup> Marchesi/Marchetti 2011 pg. 190

<sup>26</sup> Most commonly this female figure is discussed in the context of the top register on the Warka vase, where she stands in front of two “ring-posts” or “Schilfringbündel,” symbols which visually situate her before the temple; but the same or similar female figure appears with ring-posts in seal art from the Uruk period.

*below*); a feature also apparent on a second seal from Uruk (*figure 2*).<sup>27</sup> Together with other considerations, but focusing on the horned headdress, she takes this figure to be divine and later evidence may be referenced in support of this position.<sup>28</sup> In nine scenes from Uruk period seals the P.K. appears together with an object which is generally interpreted to be an ear of barley;<sup>29</sup> in eight of these scenes he holds the ear of barley;<sup>30</sup> in four of the scenes with the barley, he is paired with the “goddess” figure.<sup>31</sup> In her analysis of this imagery, van Buren has explained the “ear of corn” motif (= ear of barley) as the symbol of the male deity, sometimes carried by the deity himself (the P.K.) and as the male counterpart of the Goddess’ ring-post symbolism.<sup>32</sup> Scenes such as that given in *table 2b* are conducive to such an interpretation and Marchesi/Marchetti 2011 have similarly suggested: “the constant association of [the ear of barley and the ring-post] indicates that the ear of barley is not merely an offering but instead some kind of emblem.”<sup>33</sup> They further nuance their suggestion by proposing that “two forms of In’anak are represented, with their respective insignia: one is male wearing a net skirt, and the other is female.”<sup>34</sup>

- iii) *Late divinization of the feeder of herds*: The P.K. is attested in the role of feeder of the herds in the well known Preusser seal from Uruk and in various related seal imagery: Marchesi/Marchetti list Amiet 636 (the Preusser seal), 638, 639, 640 as examples (*table 2c,2d,2e,2f*.) The authors advance their proposal with the observation that the feeder: “appears to be typically divine in its sporadic attestations in later Mesopotamian iconography.”<sup>35</sup> Convincing examples of this are not provided by the authors,<sup>36</sup> although presumably the stone relief found at the temple of Aššur demonstrates this theme: a mountain god (possible the god Aššur?) holds two branches toward a pair of goats (*figure 3*), much as in the Preusser seal.

<sup>27</sup> Both seals were first published in Heinrich 1936 – on S. 16 Heinrich describes the female figure as a priestess impersonating a goddess, despite recognizing her horned headdress (s. 29). Short of calling it a horned cap, Marchesi/Marchetti 2011 pg. 190 refer to this as a “two pointed tiara.”

<sup>28</sup> van Buren 1939-41 pg. 37; As already noted in above (1.1) the mark of divinity ED II phase amounts to little more than two horns (*table 1a*), and divinities sporting two horns seem to be attestable still in the ED period (see Amiet 1961 1218, 1219, 1220, 1221).

<sup>29</sup> See Amiet 1961 637, 639, 642, 645, 647, 648, 649, 651, 652

<sup>30</sup> Amiet 1961 637, 639, 645, 647, 648, 649, 651, 652

<sup>31</sup> Amiet 1961 647,648,649, 651

<sup>32</sup> van Buren 1939-41 pg. 39; that she further sees this as the prototypical Tammuz is further interpretational step not explored here, see n.22 above.

<sup>33</sup> Marchesi/Marchetti 2011 pg. 190

<sup>34</sup> *ibid.* pg. 195

<sup>35</sup> Marchesi/Marchetti 2011 pg. 192 with n. 29.

<sup>36</sup> The suggestion on pg. 192 n. 29 that the representation of deities feeding caprids is attestable in seal art seems unconvincing – for example, Amiet 1219 from the ED period does show a seated humanoid figure with horns (likely a divinity), and yet, the caprid in question is being fed by a figure on the opposite side of the scene, without horns and whose interpretation as a divinity is doubtful.

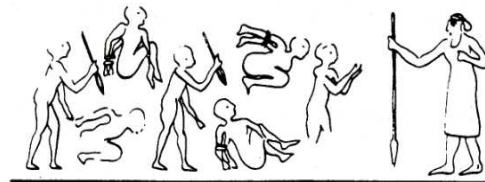
## 2.1 The “Man in the Net-skirt” as Ruler:

By far, the more normative view of the P.K. figure is that he represents the figure of the ruler, the king, or more specifically, the En of Uruk. With the perspective of Denise Schmandt-Besserat’s convincing work *Images of Enship*,<sup>37</sup> the following discussion will endeavor to compare, to contrast and, if the imagery calls for it, to contradict the proposals discussed in 2.0 above. For Schmandt-Besserat, the art from Uruk reveals aspects of the first state leadership. The images carved on the various monuments provide information on two aspects of Enship, they “depict the Priest-king’s paraphernalia” and they “identify activities associated with the Enship.”<sup>38</sup> The following points are key to this argument:

**Table 3 – the “Priest-king” figure as ruler/En**



**3a:** Schmandt-Besserat 1993 fig. 10<sup>39</sup>



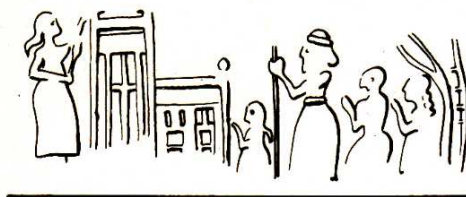
**3b:** Schmandt-Besserat 1993 fig. 14



**3c:** Schmandt-Besserat fig. 15b/ Amiet 1961 637



**3d:** Schmandt-Besserat fig. 16



**3e:** Amiet 1961 Pl. 13 bis A



**3f:** Amiet 1961 637

<sup>37</sup> D. Schmandt-Besserat, 1993. *Images of Enship in Between the Rivers and Over the Mountains: Archaeologica Anatolica et Mesopotamica Alba Palmieri Dedicata* eds. M Frangipane, H. Hauptmann, M. Liverani, P. Matthiae, M. Mellink. [Roma] : Dipartimento di Scienze Storiche Archeologiche e Antropologiche dell'Antichità, Università di Roma "La Sapienza" pgs. 201-220

<sup>38</sup> Schmandt-Besserat 1993 pg. 210

<sup>39</sup> Schmandt-Besserat 1993 fig. 10 – “Cylinder seal impression on a clay envelop holding token showing the En seated in a boat holding two prisoners [sic] by a leach, Choga Mish, Iran.”

- i) *Distinctions of Appearance:* Schmandt-Besserat's careful observations effectively distinguish the P.K. figure from other persons appearing in Uruk period art. Noting that in statuary, the P.K. may appear without kilt (in the nude) but not without his headdress, the author sees the headdress as his most important identifier: "The En had a special attire that included a round headdress and a long skirt with a heavy belt, whereas the other Sumerians were bare-headed and wore short kilts."<sup>40</sup> The En bore a long beard, whereas other males in Urukian art were beardless; he had "long hair rolled in a bun at the back of the head, while his subjects had their heads shaven or, exceptionally, wore a pony tail."<sup>41</sup> In line with the convention of oversized Early Dynastic rulers,<sup>42</sup> Schmandt-Besserat finds the most noteworthy feature of the "En" was his size: "In all scenes, whether standing or sitting, the ruler appears as a towering figure, taller than his subjects (*table 3a*). Only the goddess Inanna and, in rare instances, the En's special attendant, were featured equal in statue."<sup>43</sup>
- ii) *Distinctions of action:* Perhaps reflecting more directly on the question of the divine versus the mortal P.K. are considerations of his behaviour and sphere of action. Schmandt-Besserat has identified the following distinct categories of action which include **A) the warrior:** two seals depict the P.K. engaged in hostile action, attacking foreigners with a bow,<sup>44</sup> or controlling defeated enemies (?) with a nose rope (*table 3a*). Interestingly, both seals were found in Elam.<sup>45</sup> **B) Dispensing justice:** Scenes depicting the P.K. with downward pointing spear standing before bound individuals have been interpreted as a battle scene of sorts; in the scene depicted in *table 3b* however, Schmandt-Besserat points to the shaven heads of the bound prisoners as a visual cue that these are bound Sumerians, not foreigners. They receive punishment which she suggests is capital punishment.<sup>46</sup> **C) Hunting and Mastering animals:** Known from a carving on a basalt boulder, the earliest of its type in the ANE,<sup>47</sup> the "lion hunt" stele shows the king hunting lions. This motif has widely been recognized as an integral aspect of the royal ideology of Mesopotamian kingship.<sup>48</sup> **D) Feeding the Herd:** As already noted above, the P.K. is depicted as the feeder of the herds, an act which Schmandt-Besserat sees as the king playing the

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<sup>40</sup> *ibid.* pg. 211

<sup>41</sup> *ibid.* pg. 211

<sup>42</sup> See for example Ur-Nanshe's family wall plaque (AO 2345, Aruz 2003 #30), or the "peace" side of the Standard of Ur (BM 121201, Aruz 2003 #52).

<sup>43</sup> Schmandt-Besserat 1993 pg. 211

<sup>44</sup> See Amiet 1961 #659

<sup>45</sup> Schmandt-Besserat 1993 pg. 214

<sup>46</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *ibid.* pg. 202 - see Amiet 1961 #611

<sup>48</sup> Pollock 1999 pg. 184

“good shepherd.”<sup>49</sup> The author includes a fifth example of such imagery not listed by Marchesi/Marchetti 2011, another cylinder seal scene in which the P.K. feeds the ear of barley to the herd (*table 3c*).<sup>50</sup> E) *The Priest*: Perhaps most important for Schmandt-Besserat’s argument, and no less pertinent for his general identification as a mortal, are scenes in which the P.K. appears in actions that are interpretable as religious, priestly activities. The author suggests that he may be seen in “procession” by boat (*table 3d*) and by foot (*table 3e*). While it may be plausible that the former is perhaps a divine statue undergoing riverine transport, this is surely not the case with the P.K. leading a procession by foot. In like manner, *table 3f* is a scene depicting the P.K. carrying an offering to the temple.<sup>51</sup>

## 2.2 Discussion and Possible Impacts of the Uruk Period Iconography:

In the preceding sections two nuanced and inspiring, and yet mutually exclusive, lines of interpretation have been sketched. The theory of a divine P.K. figure has the advantage of explaining the typically paired offerings, and it suggests a plausible explanation for the frequent pairing of the P.K. and goddess figures. Against this, however, the theory of the P.K. as ruler/En is not just plausible but convincing. It convinces by virtue of its ability to account for, and to explain, a greater portion of the relevant imagery than the alternative. In fact, while the imagery of *table 3* is all but incompatible with a divine P.K., the imagery of *table 2* does not strongly argue against a ruler/En. For the purposes of this paper, the latter explanation will

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<sup>49</sup> Schmandt-Besserat 1993 pg. 215

<sup>50</sup> The fact that this seal art is readily accessible (i.e. in Amiet 1961 #637) suggests that this image was a deliberate omission on the part of the Marchesi/Marchetti. The symbolism involved is in obvious analogy with the of “feeder of the herds” glyptic (i.e. Amiet 1961 636, 638-640) a point underscored by the fact that the seal, like the Preusser seal, was capped with a cast metal goat. As will be noted below, however, the fact that the P.K. is feeding his “emblem” to the goats here argues against the authors statement that “the ear of barley is not merely an offering” (p.190) and may have been the reason for its omission.

<sup>51</sup> The offering depicted in this case is a theriomorphic (animal shaped) vessel, an item also appearing on the Warka vase within the area which (by the relative position of the ring posts) is deemed to be temple space. Schmandt-Besserat 1993 pg. 216 interprets the scene as a ceremony of “gift giving of the gods.”

therefore be preferred.<sup>52</sup>

Favoring the P.K. as ruler interpretation also means that the removal of this important iconography from the stream of traditional Mesopotamian royal iconography is not a necessary nor a foregone conclusion.<sup>53</sup> In fact, the iconographic system of the Early Dynastic ruler is sometimes termed “an inherited” one, repeating many of the action motifs carried out in the iconography of the ruler of Uruk – the ruler as celebrated warrior, masterful hunter, and as supreme priest (while art in the ED period adds the motif of the ruler as builder and architect.)<sup>54</sup> But did the early ruler’s distinctions of appearance, his personal visual identifiers, his royal insignia, carry over and influence rulers the appearance of the classic period of Sumerian civilization, the E.D. period? This question is taken up in the discussions to follow.

### **3.0 Royal Iconography in the ED period: Introduction**

In 1.0 the primary media for royal art in the Early Dynastic period were listed (foundation figurines, stelae, and rock reliefs were the preserve of royals, while statues, wall plaques and cult vessels are variously donated by royals or, often, by the elites.) Before proceeding further, a note on the cylinder seals of the ED period is warranted. Unlike the seals of Uruk period, the glyptic of this period does now lend itself to the study of royal

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<sup>52</sup> In forming these conclusions I would like to thank Prof. Irene Winter for her insights (personal communication Nov. 7<sup>th</sup> 2013) also Prof. Paul-Alain Beaulieu who pointed out that the lion hunt and distributing justice (over bound prisoners) imagery is not in keeping with the divine art of Mesopotamia – neither are attendants shown carrier the trailing garments of Mesopotamian divinities as on the Warka vase (personal communication Nov. 7<sup>th</sup> 2013). For a related suggestion, see C. Suter 2012 pg. 207, who suggests that the servant may be carrying a supplementary garment to be donated to the god (a practice that Suter states is known from ED times). I have further benefitted from the advice and consultation of Ryan Winters (personal communication Nov. 10<sup>th</sup> 2013).

<sup>53</sup> It would be wrong to label Marchesi/Marchetti’s detailed arguments as “foregone” conclusions – they nevertheless state (p. 195): “If we accept that the “priest-king” must be identified with a deity, this makes it easier to explain why his image left no traces in royal iconography, which developed.. only from the mid-Early Dynastic period onward..”

<sup>54</sup> Hansen 2003 pg. 22

iconography: from the ED I period Piedmont, Brocade and “animal” style seals lack interpretable data in this regard.<sup>55</sup> Another theme of ED glyptic, the contest scene, features mainly animals, bull-men, and nude heroes in combat, but not royals.<sup>56</sup> Additionally, the important banquet scene makes its appearance in the glyptic of the ED period, however, while royals may conceivably be depicted in some of these scenes, the cut of these seals is crude and abstract so that little can be gleaned about clothing, hairstyle or insignia if present – or even if a royal is meant at all (see *fig. 7*).<sup>57</sup> For these reasons the artwork of the ED cylinder seals will go largely undiscussed in the present study. Instead, the theme of banqueting will be examined in the more vivid imagery of the ED wall plaques (3.2 below)

### **3.1 Royal Iconography in the ED Period: Transitional Pieces**

Two carved and inscribed schist objects known as the Blau monuments (*fig. 4*), which are sometimes termed the Blau obelisk or “chisel,” and the Blau plaque or “Scraper,” lack definite provenance and dating criteria (due to their origin on the art market). Generally, they are thought to date to the Jemdat Nasr period<sup>58</sup> or possibly (on paleographic grounds) to the ED I period.<sup>59</sup>

As some of the earliest inscribed art pieces anywhere and since they contain imagery which is clearly in line with the Uruk period iconography, the Blau monuments offer significant opportunities to nuance these enigmatic motifs. The inscription has been analyzed by Gelb,

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<sup>55</sup> Marchesi/Marchetti 2011 pg. 89

<sup>56</sup> Collon 1987 pg. 27

<sup>57</sup> A representative study of Early Dynastic banqueting scenes can be seen in Amiet 1961 #1152-1200

<sup>58</sup> Hansen 2003 pg. 22

<sup>59</sup> Marchesi/Marchetti 2011 pg. 194 n. 38 gives Damerow and Englund 1989:137 in connection with the suggestion that the date of the Blau monuments should be dated on paleographic grounds to the archaic texts of Ur SIS 8-4 levels.



Steinkeller and Whiting (*OIP 104 - 1991*) and has been classified as an early land tenure document, recording the exchange of land for goods such as wool, silver, goats and beer.

- Obv. 1) 5(bùr) gán U<sub>3</sub>.SAL Nin-GÍR.ĤA.  
RAD(ATU-850)  
2) GI<sub>4</sub>.RAD  
3) ĤA.ÚR.LAK-131  
4) ALAM.NE.PAB.KÍD?.GÍR.DU  
5) engar èš

*(Transcription from the Blau monument – OIP 104 pg. 43)*

While the monuments are generally said to have been found “near Uruk”<sup>60</sup> analysis of the inscriptional evidence points to another possibility. On the basis of their interpretation of line three, ĤA.ÚR.LAK-131 (=ĤA.ÚR.RAD), as an archaic toponym of modern day Tell Uqair, Gelb et. al propose the actual provenance of the Blau monuments may have been this site.<sup>61</sup> Interestingly, they interpret engar èš (line 5) as meaning roughly ‘high official in charge of the agricultural sector of the temple household’ and suggest that the man wearing the typical P.K. attire on the obverse<sup>62</sup> is likely to be identified as this engar èš official of Tell Uqair.<sup>63</sup> This would have interesting implications for the spread and adaptation of royal insignia, and it would also necessitate that the P.K. imagery should be seen less in terms of the fashion of one individual and more in terms of the image of a ruler type.<sup>64</sup>

The second Blau monument, the so called “plaque” or “chisel” is again rich in

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<sup>60</sup> Hansen 2003 pg. 39

<sup>61</sup> OIP 104 pg. 40-41

<sup>62</sup> This figure wears a long skirt, beard and rounded headwear. Note however that his skirt is not the typical net pattern but a plain skirt. The variation between plain or net-skirt pattern is apparent already in the Uruk period iconography as the “lion hunt” stele the skirt is again plain. It is impossible to explain the significance behind this variation if there is any, therefore with Schmandt-Besserat 1993, the length of the skirt will be considered diagnostic.

<sup>63</sup> OIP 104 pg. 41 - Interestingly, the official seems to be holding a theriomorphic vessel as the P.K. does in *table 2f* – if this is not Uruk art, it is art from Tell Uqair which resembles the Urukian motifs very closely.

<sup>64</sup> On this point I am grateful to Ryan Winters for comments to the same effect (p.c. Nov. 10<sup>th</sup> 2013).

iconographic intrigue and enigma: on the obverse a figure matching the P.K. (or the engar èš) appears to be holding what is sometimes called a “wooden pestle”;<sup>65</sup> on the reverse a bald figure with no headwear and wearing a long net-skirt is depicted, about whom Schmandt-Besserat has remarked: “It is not clear if he is the usual acolyte of the bearded individual or another official.”<sup>66</sup> This is perhaps another indicator that the royal headwear is significantly more diagnostic than the hair style or clothing.

**Table 4 – Royal Statuary of the ED Period**



**4a:** Marchesi/Marchetti 2011 Cat. 1



**4b:** Marchesi/Marchetti 2011 Cat. 2



**4c:** Marchesi/Marchetti 2011 Cat. 3



**4d:** Marchesi/Marchetti 2011 Cat. 4



**4e:** Marchesi/Marchetti 2011 Cat. 9



**4f:** Marchesi/Marchetti 2011 Cat. 7

<sup>65</sup> Marchesi/Marchetti 2011 pg. 193 n. 37

<sup>66</sup> Schmandt-Besserat 1993 pg. 206

### 3.2 Royal Iconography in the ED period: Inscribed Royal Statuary

Given the nature of the evidence recovered to date, a complete discussion of the developing image of royal statuary is inevitably one that meets with great difficulties. The earlier part of the ED period has been termed a period of “invisibility” when it comes to royal imagery,<sup>67</sup> and there are no instances of reliably identifiable ED I royal statuary. It is only in the ED II period that the custom of inscribing royal statuary begins, and since royal statues are indistinguishable from that of non-royals of this period, it is only by virtue of the inscriptions that a ruler can be identified at all in the early periods.<sup>68</sup> Identification of early royal statues thus proceeds mainly on epigraphic grounds. Following Marchesi/Marchetti 2011, the statuary of *table 4* can be detailed as follows:<sup>69</sup>

- i) **EDII:** (*table 4a*) Inscribed with the name ḪAR.TU, lugal of PA.GAR. Found at level 1 of Šara temple at Tell Agrab. (*table 4b*) Tun’ak “Ginak” , ensi of unknown city. Provenance unknown. (*table 4c*) “Nebo” (ruler’s actual name is Urlammarak) , ensi of AN.PA[x] (location unknown) or of <sup>d</sup>PA[x] (unknown deity). Acquired on the art market.<sup>70</sup>
- ii) **ED IIIa:** (*table 4d*) Epa’e, lugal of Adab. Acquired on the art market, however its inscription suggests that it may originally have stood in the Inanna temple at Adab. (*table 4e*) Enmetena, ensi of Lagash. Found at Ur in the Neo-Babylonian temple of Sin, but according to its inscription, the original context was the temple of Ellil which was built by Enmetena at Nigen.<sup>71</sup>
- iii) **ED IIIb:** Lugalдалu of Adab. The statue is dedicated to the Ekiri temple at Adab – its head was found in temple area of Tell V.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Marchetti/Marchesi 2011 pg. 212; on pg. 196 the author states that outside of [*table 4a/b/c*] and a royal statue modelled to look more archaic than it is (Marchetti/Marchesi 2011 cat. 11) he knows of no statuary that recognizably represents rulers in the art of the ED I and II periods. That said, the author is willing to speculate about possible candidates for ED I royal statuary, namely, the “Abu” statue from Eshnunna, see pg. 140; Cat. 13

<sup>68</sup> Marchesi/Marchetti 2011 pg. 212 for the period of the first inscribed statues; for the statement that ED II royal statuary with non-royal statuary of the period, see pg. 130

<sup>69</sup> *Table 4* represents 6 of the better preserved inscribed royal statuary pieces– the authors discuss 11 examples in all, most of which are fragmentary in comparison to the 6 presented here.

<sup>70</sup> Adapted from Marchesi/Marchetti 2011 pgs. 130-135, 150-153, 164-179.

<sup>71</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> *ibid.*

In examining the royal statuary of the ED period it is immediately noticeable that these items consistently lack the circlet of the archaic ruler, or indeed, headwear of any kind. It is possible that the loose hair style of the ED II statuary may be a direct result of this lack, and the unbound locks flow over the shoulders; in different contexts long haired rulers, both earlier and later, are shown with hair bound in a “bun” or “chignon.”<sup>73</sup> It is a known Mesopotamian convention that the king in the temple is portrayed without headwear of any sort,<sup>74</sup> and as all extent ED exemplars are demonstrably from a temple context (when provenance is known at all) the same convention may be in effect here.<sup>75</sup> That statue was intended to stand in the temple is also a likely factor in the uniform posture of the ED statuary: exemplars in this period uniformly appear with hands folded in with an attitude suggestive of piety or supplication (when hands are still intact).

It is much more difficult to explain or to chart the changing hair styles, facial hair styles and clothing which appear to undergo significant developments throughout the period. General trends in clothing style are discernible to modern scholars although the evolving stylization of royal statuary does not conform to periodizations that derive, ultimately, from the developments of pottery. Furthermore, the progression of ED fashion does not appear to have been linear. Already in 1939 Henri Frankfort recognized that there was “no complete change in fashion between Early Dynastic II and III such as our statues in the later style (where shaven faces and bald heads form a strong majority) would lead us to postulate.”<sup>76</sup> More recently, Marchesi/Marchetti 2011 state that ED IIIa statuary from the Diyala region are “to a significant degree, close to the style of the Early Dynastic II.”<sup>77</sup> and further “the tufted skirt, although it

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<sup>73</sup> Some art commentators have seen the headgear of the Uruk ruler, for example, as a fillet ‘that holds the hair back.’ See Jean M. Evans in *Art of the First Cities* pg. 39 – see 4.0 below

<sup>74</sup> My gratitude to Prof. Clemens Reichel for explaining this convention to me in the presence of a statue of Assurnasirpal II, Nov. 2013. The statue of this late Assyrian king provides an excellent example of the bare headed Mesopotamian king situated (originally) in the temple.

<sup>75</sup> This situation goes some of the way toward explaining why such statuary is difficult to distinguish from non-royal statuary in the ED II period, and impossible in the ED I period before inscriptions were employed.

<sup>76</sup> Frankfort 1939 pg. 49

had already appeared in the ED II period for female garments, is rare in this period, being mainly consistent of male clothing in the Early Dynastic IIIb.”<sup>78</sup> It would follow then that while *table 4d* (ED IIIa) looks back to the style of the ED II (*table 4a/b/c*) with the fringed and tasseled skirt, *table 4e* (ED IIIa) looks ahead to the tufted skirt (or *kaunakes*) of *table 4f* (EDIIIb). The significance of the first appearances of the tufted skirt will be further nuanced in 3.3 below.

In terms of hair and beard style, the difficulty of discerning a single stylistic trajectory lead Frankfort, perhaps with some frustration, to speculate: “One wonders whether the hair was natural or whether, perhaps, in view of their priestly functions, some rulers shaved their head and face and, in deference to secular tradition, wore wigs when they exercised secular functions.”<sup>79</sup> A full examination of the problematic development of royal hair styles lies outside the scope of this paper, however the topic is briefly revisited in section 4.0.

For the purposes of comparison, *fig.5* presents three examples of non-royal statuary from the Diyala region in the ED II period. All three come from the Square temple at Eshnunna and again, exhibit physical traits comparable, or identical, with those of the royal statuary of the same period. These include a hair style parted in the middle and hanging over the shoulders, a long beard with a ‘wavey’ quality indicated by successive rows of incision, and a long fringed and tasseled skirt (the tassel is visible only from the rear); the posture of some of the non-royal statuary is interesting as the hands are not only folded across the chest (as in the royal statuary) but in some cases seem to be holding a cup (*fig. 5a and 5c*). These cups have been discussed in terms of the symbolism of banqueting, a visual metaphor common among the elites of the ED

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<sup>77</sup> Marchesi/Marchetti 2011 pg. 93

<sup>78</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> Frankfort 1939 pg. 49 – The author carries his idea to the golden helmet of Meskalumdug, and noting that the item had holes around the edges for a lining, states “It must have served a living person, perhaps in lieu of a wig.” (pg. 50). Interestingly, an unproven ‘stone wig’ from the ED period has been purchased and displayed by the British Museum (BM 1994.6620.1), and may be grounds for a re-examination of Frankfort’s suggestions. Thanks to Prof. C. Reichel for his comments on this piece.

period;<sup>80</sup> it is possible that this is what is intended with the folded hands of the royal statuary, with the cups having been lost at some point or, possibly, not included in the originals.

Finally, no sketch of the ED ruler carved in the round should neglect at least some mention of the foundation figurines (which are nevertheless, categorically different than royal statuary). This medium of small scale anthropomorphic pegs (with human like upper bodies and peg shaped lower bodies) spans a long stretch of the Sumerian period and were deposited in antiquity in the substructures of temples. Caution must be used in discussing these items as even early peg figures are variously divine and human, and not all exemplars depict the king.

Commentators have tended to be descriptive rather than interpretive about the peg figurines found at Tell K at Lagash (*fig. 6a*) and so while noting that “big horns” are present on their heads,<sup>81</sup> the exact nature of these divinities is often elusive.<sup>82</sup> Fortunately, a report of the excavation of 7 similar copper figurines from the Ibgal temple of Inanna at Lagash (reign of Enannatum) has removed any doubt, as inscriptional data accompanying the figurines explains that they are in fact styled in the likeness of Shulutula, the personal god of Enannatum (*fig. 6b*).<sup>83</sup>

The actual number of early foundation figurines that can be identified as royal is quite small then, with the strongest exemplar being that of Lugalkisalsi, found at ED IIIb Uruk (*fig. 6c*). Van Buren comments about this figure “the absence of horns, the mark of divinity, the

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<sup>80</sup> Marchesi/Marchetti 2011 pg. 90

<sup>81</sup> The configuration of the horns on the copper foundation pegs of Enmetena are quite interesting: they appear to consist of a band (or circlet) upon which two horns protrude (*fig. 6a*) This simple two horned headgear looks back to the ED II period (*table 1a/1b*).

<sup>82</sup> See for example van Buren 1931 pg. 1-10; Ellis 1968 is fairly opaque on these issues (see pgs. 52-54.) Generally, these authors describe the divine peg figurines as the guardian spirits of the temple, the spirit of the door-post, etc.

<sup>83</sup> See Hansen 1992 pg. 208 - the excavators careful attention to detail, context, and inscriptional data allow for the positive identification of most of the early foundation pegs from Lagash as divine – something which is not entirely clear (despite the horns!) due to the posture of prayer/supplication assumed by these figurines (not expected in a divine figurine, except perhaps, a minor divinity acting in the role of personal god.)



word “lugal” inscribed on the shoulder may imply that the king dedicated his own image.”<sup>84</sup> If this is the case, it is interesting to note the long hair and beard in the style of the ED II kings, another strong indicator of the non-linear progression of hair and beard style.<sup>85</sup> It was thus the case that either the image of the ruler, or that of his personal god, animated the foundation pegs used to pin down the foundations of ED temples.<sup>86</sup>

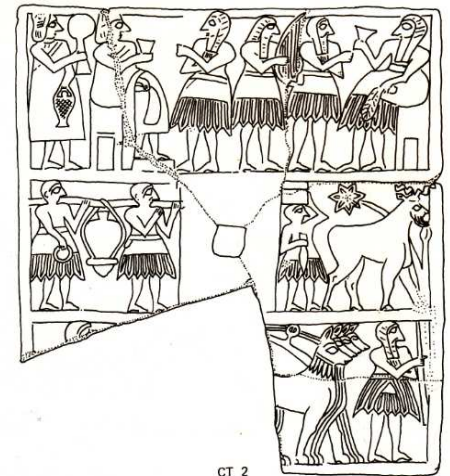
**Table 5 – Plaques and wall-plaques**



**5a:** Schamndt-Besserat 1993 fig. 10 <sup>87</sup>



**5b:** Boese 1971 T8 – *Stele fragment*



**5c:** Boese 1971 CT 2



**5d.** *Art of the First Cities* #32



**5e:** Boese 1971



**5f:** *Art of the First Cities* #52 - *detail*

<sup>84</sup> van Buren 1931 pg. 10

<sup>85</sup> Following Frankfort 1939 pg. 49

<sup>86</sup> As noted by Hansen 2003 pg. 31

<sup>87</sup> Schmandt-Besserat 1993 fig. 10 – “Cylinder seal impression on a clay envelop holding token showing the En seated in a boat hold prisoners [sic] by a leach, Choga Mish, Iran.”

### 3.3 Royal Iconography in the ED period: Plaques and Wall-Plaques

An important limestone plaque carved in relief comes from the ED I period<sup>88</sup> and was found (although not *in situ*) at the temple of Ningirsu at Girsu (*table 5a*).<sup>89</sup> The plaque, known as the *figure aux plumes*, depicts a central figure sporting a distinctive plumed headdress, a beard (difficult to discern), and a long net skirt. The figure holds what may be interpreted as “the first of three colossal maces.”<sup>90</sup> The inscription which surrounds the figure on all sides has been classified as another of the early land tenure documents and is treated in *OIP 14*. The authors suggest a reading of AG.EN.NAM for a group of signs which occurs five times on the obverse, and while AG may have been a personal name, the Sumerian NAM.EN is a royal title with equivalencies to the Akkadian *bêlūtum* “lordship.”<sup>91</sup> The identity of the *figure aux plumes* than may suggestibly be this AG.EN.NAM.<sup>92</sup>

Looking more specifically at the figures distinctive headwear, Rita Dolce has rejected the description of plumes/feathers and interprets instead that the circlet worn by the figure is decorated with wheat stalks or vegetation of some kind – according to this line of interpretation, we are looking at an ancient form of the royal circlet, one that suggestibly served as a model for

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<sup>88</sup> There is no agreement about the date of the plaque however: Krebernik 2002 n.12 gives the plaque, the *figure aux plumes* a date of ED I while others prefer a date of ED II. c.f. Marchesi/Marchetti 2011 pg. 91 n. 318

<sup>89</sup> The piece is often called a plaque (i.e. Hansen 2003 pg. 68) although it lacks the perforated centre of the wall plaques of later ED Lagash. Alternatively, it might be described as a “stone tablet” (OIP 104 pg. 66). Either way, the exact function of the piece under either designation is not understood. The identification of Tell K as the temple of Ningirsu was made in Parrot, *Tello* pg. 56

<sup>90</sup> This is the description given to the objects by Marchesi/Marchetti 2011 pg. 195 n. 44 – they use this to further their interpretation that the figure, like the P.K. of Uruk contexts, is divine: “The tradition of attributing colossal weapons to the deity in this sacred area [Tell K] continues also in phases 4 and 5 with, respectively, the mace-head of Mesalim and the spear head of Lugalnamniršumma.”

<sup>91</sup> OIP 104 pg. 67

<sup>92</sup> This suggestion cannot be substantiated further on the basis by the evidence from the plaque itself unfortunately – it is at least no less likely than the suggestion made in van Buren 1939/31 pg. 43, who stated: “In the inscription the name of the god Ningirsu is mentioned more than once and there is a reference to his temple E-Ninnû. It must therefore be the god himself who is portrayed holding one of the pair of great maces erected at the entrance to his sanctuary.”



the divine crown of the ED IIIa period (which also features barley/vegetation – *table 1d*).<sup>93</sup>

The identification of *Table 5b* as a wall-plaque is controversial, as is its dating, which is sometimes given as ED IIIa.<sup>94</sup> It comes from Girsu. On the left holding a banqueting cup, a seated goddess wears an ED IIIa style two horned crown with a central piece and possibly barley/vegetation (compare with *table 1c*); given Dolce's insightful hypothesis about the development of divine crowns from that seen on the *figure aux plumes*, it is tempting to see barley stalks dangling from the headdress of this goddess; however, the latter idea can be ruled out upon comparison with the long hair of female deities and mortals in the period.<sup>95</sup> To the right of the goddess is the figure of a ruler with long hair and beard; he clubs a bound prisoner, reminding one of the famous scene in the *Stele of Vultures* (see below). Interestingly, he wears the ruler's circlet with hair bound and raised in a knot or chignon.

It must be admitted that the large majority of ED wall-plaques are uninscribed and contain either non-royals, or figures that cannot be positively identified as royals. The ED II period was a period of increased wall-plaque dedications by the elites, who chose to portray themselves as the lead participants in rich banquets – a typical mode of artistic expression for the ED period in general. In the cases of *table 5c* and *5d* (from ED II Khafaje and ED IIIa Khafaje, respectively) we have two examples of such banqueting scenes. In both cases, the male presiding over the banquet wears the smooth fringed skirt typical of the ED II period and which is still seen in the ED IIIa, but the hairstyle changes to from unshaved to shaved in these particular examples. Although they are generally described as elites or nobles, it is interesting to

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<sup>93</sup> Dolce 1997 pgs. 1-3

<sup>94</sup> Boese 1971 pg. 199 gives the dating of "Ur 1" (=ED IIIa) – he classified the item as a wall plaque (Boese 1971 pg.199); Marchesi/Marchetti 2011 pg. 44 n.115 argue that there is no trace of a central hole, and that it is too thick (9 cm) to be a plaque. However it seems doubtful that enough of the plaque survives to attest to a central perforation (if there was one), further the raised rim of the piece resembles that seen on the wall-plaques (*table 5c-5f*) recommending Boese's original classification.

<sup>95</sup> The hair is close to that on the well known *Vessel Fragment with an image of a goddess*, Art of the First Cities #36; it is more or less identical to the hair of Ur-Nanše's wife and daughter seen on the Stele of Ur-Nanše from al-Hiba (Suter 2012 fig. 10.2)

note that the banqueters appear larger than their servants, a convention generally (but perhaps incorrectly) ascribed to the ruler alone.<sup>96</sup>

Turning for a moment to the subject of the banquet itself, evidence for these ritual celebrations comes not only from art but also from written records and from the archaeological evidence of the pottery involved. Some 660 solid-footed goblets, identified as banqueting vessels, have been found dating to the ED I phase of the temple of Abu in Eshnunna.<sup>97</sup> That banqueting took place inside the temple, at least some of the time, is further indicated by cylinder seals depicting figures who celebrate a banquet in the proximity of a schematic temple façade; here, the temple façade symbolizes that they were drinking inside the temple.<sup>98</sup> Lizia Romano, who studied banqueting in the early periods, explains that the occasions for banqueting were varied: while large public festivals such as the malt festival of Ningirsu and Nanshe in Lagash may have included large public banquets, in other cases secular banquets hosted by the king may have been reserved for the elites. Interestingly, Romano suggests here that “perhaps only the elite’s members could drink inside the temple or use lavish metal vessels religious act was performed with clay pots by common citizens.”<sup>99</sup>

A particularly important banquet occurred at the inauguration of the temple, as is indicated by the imagery of *table 5e*, an early ED IIIa example of an inscribed wall-plaque known as the “Ur-Nanše family plaque.” In the lower register the banqueting ruler is depicted attended by his sons and by his personal cup bearer.<sup>100</sup> In the upper register the ED

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<sup>96</sup> See also n. 42 above. Interestingly, C. Suter 2012 pg. 215/ 2000 pg. 211 regards the banquet scene in the top register of *table 5c* as celebrating a military victory due to the chariot, and she describes the banqueters in the top register as a “royal couple.” While it is tempting to imagine that we have many more ruler figures than can be positively identified in the uninscribed plaques, inscribed wall plaques seem mainly to be non-royal - C. Suter 2012 pg. 205 states: “Early Dynastic donors of dedicatory objects include a large number of non-royals of diverse professions who hardly ever mention an association with the ruler..” It is also possible that oversizing may actually have been symbolic of prestige rather than royalty, and on this point note that Schmandt-Besserat states that already in the Uruk period, the personal attendant of the En sometimes appears larger than normal Sumerians (see 2.2 above, Schmandt-Besserat 1993 pg. 211).

<sup>97</sup> Romano 2012 pg. 270

<sup>98</sup> Romano 2012 pg. 271, gives as example Amiet 1961 #1158, 1164

<sup>99</sup> *ibid.* pg. 274

ruler is shown fulfilling one of his most essential roles: carrying the dirt for the first brick on top of his head, the king appears as the builder of the divine abode, and the one who guarantees of the cult.

It is particularly owing to the inscription that the identity of the king is known: Ur-Nanše, the founder of the first dynasty of Lagash. Given that the banquet scene in the lower register features a ruler with no royal headwear (again, possibly due to the setting within the temple)<sup>101</sup> and given that oversizing was possibly a convention used by powerful elites not just royals, there seems to be little visual evidence for the royalty of this figure. On close inspection however, there is a difference which may be more diagnostic: unlike his family and attendants, Ur-Nanše wears the tufted skirt. It has been pointed out that while the tufted skirt would become common place among males of different rank in the ED IIIb,<sup>102</sup> in the ED IIIa it seems to have been the reserve of particularly important persons, in this case, the ruler.<sup>103</sup> *Table 5f* shows a detail of the “peace” side of the “*Standard of Ur*” showing the same convention, a ruler in tufted skirt presides over a banquet attended by officials of lower rank who wear the fringed skirt.

In light of the prestige of the tufted skirt in this period, it is interesting to note that Abda, Ur-Nanše’s daughter, who is depicted in the top register to his immediate right, wears the same material. Asher-Greve suggests that Abda was a high priestess as she “stands out not only in size and by the leading position vis-à-vis her brothers, but also wear a dress and headscarf made of the same ornate fabric as the king’s kilt, like high priestesses of later periods.”<sup>104</sup> Presumably her headwear, unlike that denoting the secular power of the ruler, was deemed to be appropriate in the house of the gods.

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<sup>100</sup> Hansen 2003 pg. 31 notes that the inscriptions on the skirts of Ur-Nanše’s sons represent “one of the first Sumerian works in which the secondary figures are distinguished by inscriptions, marking a step in the evolution of more complex forms of narrative clarification.”

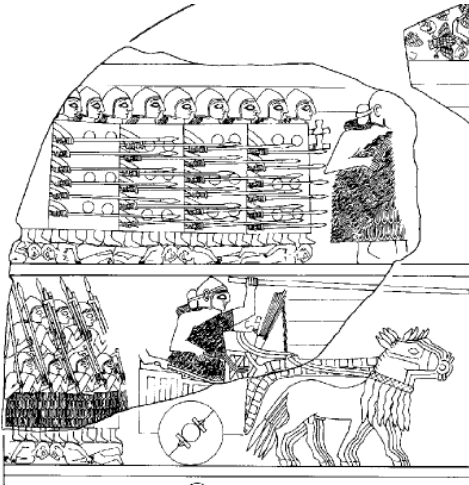
<sup>101</sup> See n. 74 above.

<sup>102</sup> See discussion 3.2 above; c.f. *Art of the first Cities* #28, #52

<sup>103</sup> see description *Art of the First Cities* #52 (pg. 98-100)

<sup>104</sup> Asher-Greve 1985 pg. 90-92. c.f. C. Suter 2012 pg. 212

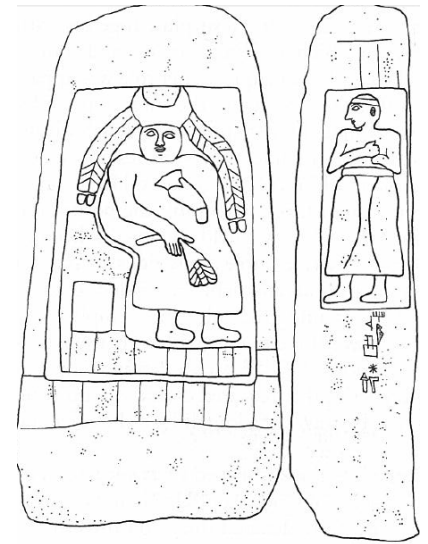
**Table 6 – The Stele of Vultures and relevant art**



**6a:** Winter 2012 pg. 45 #8



**6b:** Winter 2012 pg. 42 #3



**6c:** Suter 2012 10.2



**5d:** Marchesi/Marchetti 2011 Pl 56.4



**6e:** (=table 5b above)

### **3.4 Royal Iconography in the ED period: The Stele of Vultures and its Missing Insignia**

The (partially) reconstructed *Stele of Vultures* is composed of 6 fragments found at the site of Girsu. It dates to the ED IIIa period and it is probable that it originally stood in the temple precinct of Ningirsu (Tell K).<sup>105</sup> The historical background and significance of the *Stele of Vultures* for the ED city-states Lagash and Umma is well known and needs no repeating here.<sup>106</sup> Focusing than on the image of the ruler, *table 6a* is a reconstructed drawing

<sup>105</sup> Winter 2010 pg. 27

representing a large fragment from the top left of the reverse side of the stele. The king is shown at war, first leading a charge from his chariot (lower register) and then on foot leading a line of soldiers (upper register). The king's appearance and dress are some of the first instances of their type in recovered art from this period. The chignon is unusual in the ED IIIa period but not unique<sup>107</sup> – the combination of the chignon and the tufted garment covering one shoulder has been described as the attire of the ruler in battle,<sup>108</sup> and the seal of ED IIIb ruler Ishqi-Mari, mace in hand, is another example (*table 5d*).

Turning to the matter of the large upper register of the obverse which is partially preserved (*table 6b*), the scene has unfortunately been the subject of ongoing debate and the issue is a familiar one: are we looking at a deity or a ruler?<sup>109</sup> One of the more authoritative voices to argue that this figure should be interpreted as divine is that of Irene Winter, who makes the following observations: **i)** The central figure can be seen grasping an emblem which is affixed to a large net filled with enemies - the emblem, an anzud over lions, is the divine insignia of Ningirsu; suggesting the divinity of the central figure is the fact that there are no examples of a royal grasping a divine emblem in Mesopotamian art (if this is in fact a deity).<sup>110</sup> **ii)** Winter is able to convincingly demonstrate, by references to parallel iconography some of which is inscribed, that the goddess depicted behind the large central figure with ED IIIa mes-crown and three maces on each shoulder, is Ninhursag, the mother of Ningirsu. The association between the two is used to reinforce the author's identification of the figure as

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<sup>106</sup> For an extensive discussion of the historical context and its impact on the imagery depicted see for example Winter 2010 pg. 23

<sup>107</sup> see n. 79 above. The chignon is also observable on the helmet of Meskalamdug, the ED IIIb statue of Ishqi-Mari, and the stele of Sargon in the Akkadian period.

<sup>108</sup> See Jean M. Evans, *Art of the First Cities* #88

<sup>109</sup> Winter 2010 pg. 8 n. 20 lists for example: Perkins, who calls him Eannatum ("Narration," 58), vs. Frankfort, who calls him Ningirsu (*Art and Architecture*, 158), as does Anton Moortgat, *The Art of Ancient Mesopotamia* (London and New York, 1969), 63.

<sup>110</sup> Winter 2010 pg. 9; although it may be wondered if images of divine standards being carried by humans would qualify as an exception here. See for example for example Amiet #658, a pre-dynastic seal from Kisurra in which human figure carry standards, which are essentially divine emblems affixed to long poles. See discussion in Szarzynska 1996.

Ningirsu himself.<sup>111</sup>

It is worth recognizing at this point that the ambiguous status of the figure on the obverse stems in large degree from the unfortunate break that starts around the hairline – presumably, were he divine, he would wear a horned crown and there are images from this period in which a male deity sports a similar horned crown to what the goddess wears in this scene, as would be expected.<sup>112</sup>

There is reason to doubt that a horned crown was originally depicted however: *table 6e* (discussed above as *table 5b*) is a fragment of a plaque coming from ED IIIa Girsu, and was actually found at Tell K, the same area as the fragments of the *Stele of Vultures*. Interestingly, the figure wears the ruler's circlet (as mentioned above), sports a very similar hair and beard style and clubs an enemy in the presence of a goddess who is suggestibly the same goddess as shown on the obverse of the *Stele of Vultures*, Ninhursag. However, in this case, the presence of the ruler's circlet precludes any notion of divinity based on analogy with the goddess nearby. *Table 6c* is a drawing of portion of the *Stele of Ur-Nanše* from al-Hiba. Opposite the enthroned goddess stands Ur-Nanše who, despite his shaven head, again wear the ruler's circlet; this one depiction offers what is likely one of the best chances to view what is really intended by with the ruler's aga-circlet, unobstructed by hair, chignon, beard etc. and on a medium (the stele) which frequently depicts the ED ruler with full insignia (unlike the statuary for example.) Also interesting is Ur-Nanše's distinctive skirt with curved central inseam, a skirt also worn by the central figure on the obverse of the *Stele of Vultures*, and arguably by the ruler in *table 6c* as well.

Taken together, the behaviour (clubbing bound prisoners with a mace) clothing (distinctive curved inseam skirt) and the distinctive long beard and hair style are attestable on

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<sup>111</sup> Winter 2010 pg. 10

<sup>112</sup> For example, two ED IIIa wall-plaques from Nippur depict the male deity wearing a crown of very similar configuration as that of the goddess on the *Stele of Vultures*: see Boese 1971 N 8 and N 11

one or another royal images from contemporary Lagash/Girsu. In analogy to these ruler figures, the partially preserved headwear of the figure on the *Stele of Vultures* was likely meant as the ruler's circlet. It is hoped that these observations will add legitimacy for the interpretation that it is Eannatum himself who is pictured on the obverse of the stele. The presence of Ninhursag in the scene, and perhaps also the ruler's boldness (?) in gripping a divine emblem, is also explainable by the well known line from the inscription on the stele itself, wherein the ruler takes a step *towards* self-deification: [When he was born] "the goddess Inanna accompanied him, named him 'The One Worthy of the Eanna of Inanna of the Ibgal,' and set him on the true lap of the goddess Ninhursag. Ninhursag [offered him] her true breast."

#### 4.0 Conclusions:

In the preceding analysis of the developing image of the Mesopotamian ruler in the early periods, emphasis has been placed on the importance of the royal insignia, and particularly on the circlet, which has such importance in the interpretation of uninscribed art. Often without such insignia the difficulty of distinguishing deity from ruler, and ruler from noble is unavoidable. Acknowledging both Asher-Greve's (1.1) and Dolce's (3.3) suggestions about influence of the aga-circlet on the development of the divine men-crown, the survival and persistence of the ruler's circlet throughout early Mesopotamian history has been postulated.

In sections 2.0 through 2.2 the question of the nature of the priest-king of Uruk period artwork was taken up. Based on the fact that the P.K. as ruler is (arguably) capable of explaining all the relevant art, and the P.K. as divine is clearly not, the interpretation of the ruler in Urukian art was favored. Schmandt-Besserat's persuasive findings which suggest that ruler is already acting as the En seem justifiable – on this point it is interesting to note that the simple

headwear of the P.K. resembles quite strongly that of the aga-circlet of Enheduanna (as discussed 1.1). Whether it is the same type of headwear or not may depend on whether the item is open topped (like a circlet) or covered (like a cap), something very difficult to discern on the surviving depictions – some commentators have termed it a “fillet which binds the hair.”<sup>113</sup> Given the hairstyle often worn by the P.K., which Schmandt-Besserat terms to be “rolled in a bun,” the question as to whether the origin of the Early Dynastic chignon may, like the ruler’s circlet, have its first attestations here in the Uruk period is an interesting one.<sup>114</sup> A careful examination of this issue lies outside the scope of this paper however.

Section 3.1 presented the possibility that by the Jemdat Nasr period the royal insignia of Uruk had spread as far as Tell Uqair; this would make wide spread adaption of this insignia by later rulers more plausible.

The evolving style of ED royal statuary was discussed in section 3.2: While hair and clothing of the early statues is an interesting study in its own right, all royal statuary of the period lacks the royal circlet that would help chart the evolution of this insignia – it was hypothesized that this lack may correspond to the fact that these statues originally were intended to stand in the temple, wherein it was a convention that Mesopotamian rulers appear without headwear. In a sense, the study of ED royal statuary, which is often indistinguishable from non-royal statuary (if not for inscriptional data), offers little meaningful, diagnostic information.

Sections 3.3 through 3.4 have discussed plaques, wall plaques and royal stele which also present problems of interpretation, as definitive royal insignia is again lacking in many

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<sup>113</sup> For example, Jean M. Evans *Art of the First Cities*, pg. 39 discussing the early statuary from Uruk. See further Marchesi/Marchetti 2011 pg. 188 n. 5 – clearly the nature of the headwear is controversial, but the authors list Amiet 1986: 34, Moortgat 1949: 29 and Boehmer 1980-83:203 as among those classifying the headwear of the P.K. as “like the band that can clearly be on the later *Figure aux plumes*.”

<sup>114</sup> The suggestion was apparently made already by Frankfort 1939b pg. 22: “during the Early Dynastic times [the ruler] wear his hair in the same fashion as on the Uruk seals..[in which] the bearded and skirted figure..wear his long hair tied in a knot at the back of the head.” c.f. Marchesi/Marchetti 2011 pg. 188 n. 5



cases (whether by design such as in the case of wall plaques, or by accident as in the case of broken items such as the *Stele of Vultures*.) By the evidence collected in this brief survey the ruler's circlet was not often depicted in ED art. However its appearance on the *figure aux plumes*, and on the plaques and stelae of ED IIIa Lagash/Girsu, especially on Ur-Nanše's stele, is by no means insignificant, and proves that the ruler in the proper contexts continued to be distinguished by a simple circlet not unlike that of the ruler of Uruk, and again, not unlike that worn by the En priestesses.

In their masterfully researched and richly notated volume, Marchesi and Marchetti have produced a work that is indispensable for the study of ED royal statuary, and also for the plethora of early artworks that inform this study. By interpreting the Uruk period art as devoid of ruler figures, the authors follow an interpretative path which leads them to conclude on this topic: "Early Dynastic IIIb witnessed the appearance of elaborate clothes and hairstyles worn by the highest officials of the administration as symbols of their rank. We do not yet find the insignia or distinctive headwear denoting kingship that appear as early as the Late Akkadian period."<sup>115</sup> However in light of the evidence discussed above it is hoped that the royal circlet, and its possible status as the traditional and continuous royal insignia from the Uruk period forward, will be considered a viable topic for further research.

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<sup>115</sup> Marchesi/Marchetti 2011 pg. 215

## List of Figures



*Fig. 1* – W 14778g, Uruk (adapted from Heinrich 1936 tafel 18)



*fig. 2-* W 14772c 2, Uruk (adapted from Heinrich 1936 tafel 18)



*fig. 3* – VA Ass 1358 stock photo. See further Andrae 1931 Pl. 1; Parrot 1961 Abb, 9; Moortgat 1967 Pl. 236; ANEP 528; Keel 1978 Abb. 62



*fig. 4* - The Blau Monument



**5a** – Frankfort 1939 #4

**5b** – Frankfort 1939 #5

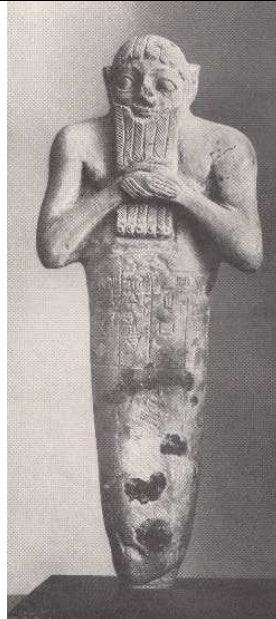
**5c** – Frankfort 1939 #6

fig. 5 - Non-royal sculpture from the ED II Diyala region



**6a**— Foundation peg of Enmetena (van Buren 1931 #4/5)

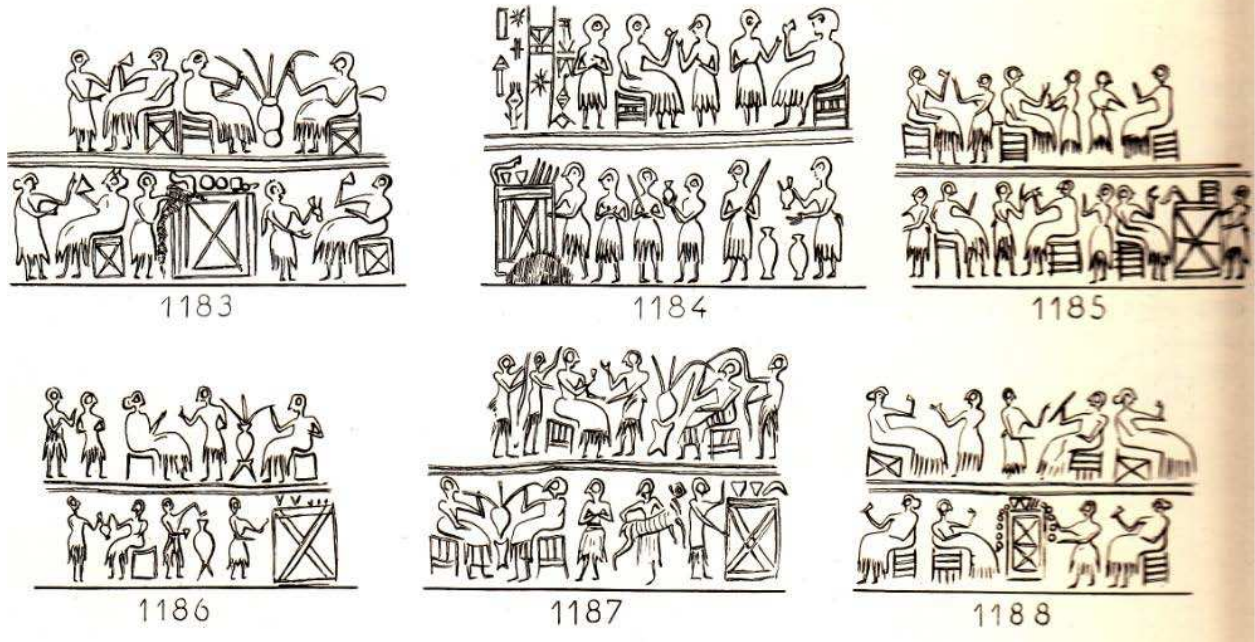
**6b** — Foundation peg of Enannatum, the god Shulutula (Hansen 1992 pg. 208)



**6c** — Foundation peg of Lugalkisalsi (van Buren 1931 #9)

*fig. 6* Early Dynastic foundation pegs





*fig. 7* Typical Early Dynastic Banqueting scenes (Amiet 1980 #1183-1188)

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