MULTILINGUALISM IN ANCIENT CONTEXTS

Perspectives from
Ancient Near Eastern
and Early Christian
Contexts

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8

THE USE OF SUMERIAN AND AKKADIAN DURING THE AKKADIAN PERIOD The Case of the “Elites”

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8.1 INTRODUCTION

In the 3rd millennium BCE Mesopotamia there were two major languages in use: Sumerian, a language isolate with no demonstrable “genetic” relationship with any other known language, and East Semitic Akkadian. By the Neo-Sumerian period at the end of the 3rd millennium BCE, evidence shows that Northwest Semitic Amorite was also in use. In this chapter, the use of Sumerian and Akkadian in southern Mesopotamia, or Babylonia, will be discussed. Babylonia can be further divided into the north representing Akkad, and the south representing Sumer.¹

8.1.1 Historical Background

The period under discussion is the Akkadian period (ca. 2334–2150 BCE). The Akkadian period was preceded and succeeded by two “Sumerian” periods, the Early Dynastic period (ca. 2900–2334 BCE) and the Neo-Sumerian period (2157–2004 BCE).² The Akkadian Empire³ was founded by Sargon of Akkad, or Sargon the Great, in around 2334 BCE and it lasted for about two centuries until it fell around 2150 BCE to the Gutians, who were painted as barbarians in the ancient sources.⁴ The first five

- 1 As Piotr Steinkeller, “Early political development in Mesopotamia and the origins of the Sargonic Empire”, in *Akkad the first world empire: Structure, ideology, traditions*, History of the Ancient Near East Studies V, ed. Mario Liverani (Padova: Sargon, 1993), 107 points out, “[w]hen dealing with the early history of Mesopotamia, it is of crucial importance to distinguish, within Lower Mesopotamia, between the upper and lower sections of the alluvium or, to use historical terminology, between southern and northern Babylonia.” While not the focus of this chapter, there were differences in the use of language between Sumer and Akkad, as briefly indicated below.
- 2 The term “Neo-Sumerian” is preferred to the Third Dynasty of Ur or Ur III period, not because it suggests some Sumerian revival, but because it is more inclusive of other dynasties of some importance during the period, such as the Second Dynasty of Lagaš/Lagaš II. When Ur III is used in this chapter, it refers specifically to the Third Dynasty of Ur.
- 3 The Akkadian Empire has been celebrated as the “First World Empire” by, for example, Mario Liverani, “Akkad: An introduction”, in *Akkad the first world empire: Structure, ideology, traditions*, History of the Ancient Near East Studies V, ed. Mario Liverani (Padova: Sargon, 1993), 1-10. There is though debate over how to define an ancient empire, and Liverani, “Akkad: An introduction”, 3-4 has himself outlined the problems with the classifier of “empire” as it applies to the Akkadian Empire. Benjamin R. Foster, *The Age of Agade: Inventing empire in ancient Mesopotamia* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), 80-3 has defended the term “empire” as it applies to the Akkadian Empire. At the very least, Jerrold S. Cooper, “Paradigm and propaganda: The dynasty of Akkade in the 21st century”, in *Akkad the first world empire: Structure, ideology, traditions*, History of the Ancient Near East Studies V, ed. Mario Liverani (Padova: Sargon, 1993), 12 notes that it served as a prototype for “future dynasties in (1) its scope and power, through the unification of Babylonia and control of the periphery; (2) its elaboration of an imperial bureaucracy; and (3) its new conception of royalty that included, amongst other things, the deification of the king”. While the debate of what constitutes an empire, and whether the Akkadian Empire was indeed the first empire, falls outside the scope of the present discussion, the term “Akkadian Empire” is used here to follow convention.
- 4 See, for example, Peeter Espak, “The Establishment of Ur III Dynasty: From the Gutians to the

rulers of the dynasty, its most prominent rulers, were Sargon, Rimuš, Maništušu, Naram-Sin and Šarkallišari. There are limitations to our understanding of the Akkadian Empire and the Akkadian period. As Westenholz stated, “[a]lmost everything pertaining to the Sargonic [i.e., Akkadian] period is a matter of controversy”.⁵ Likewise, Liverani has catalogued “the inventory of our ignorance” about the Akkadian dynasty.⁶ The capital city of Akkade has not been located,⁷ and the palaces of the rulers and the temples, along with their archives, have therefore not been uncovered. There are also few sites which can be considered “Akkadian”,⁸ and the objects from the period which we have at our disposal for research are generally not from their original context.⁹

Despite these limitations, it is generally accepted that the Akkadian Empire was the first empire in the sense that the Akkadian kings ruled over people of different religions, different cultures, and different languages.¹⁰ The heartland of the Akkadian Empire, Akkad in the north, appears to have been predominantly monolingual, while

Formation of the Neo-Sumerian Imperial Ideology and Pantheon”, in *Kings, Gods and People: Establishing Monarchies in the Ancient World*, Acta Antiqua Mediterranea et Orientalia 4, AOAT 390/4, eds. Thomas R. Kämmerer, Mait Köiv & Sazonov Vladimir (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2016), 77-90 for negative references to the Gutians in Neo-Sumerian sources. Contrary to the ancient view of the Gutians, they had likely been living in Mesopotamia for some time and may even have ruled some cities during the decline of the Akkadian Empire, which was brought about due to the growing weakness in its internal administration, see for example Daniel E. Roiter, “An Indo-European God in a Gudea inscription” *NABU*, 3.38 (2013): 66-69, 68.

- 5 Aage Westenholz, “The Old Akkadian Period: History and culture”, in *Mesopotamien: Akkade-Zeit und Ur III-Zeit*, OBO 160/3, eds. Pascal Attinger & Markus Wäfler (Freiburg/Göttingen: Universitätsverlag/Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999), 18.
- 6 Liverani, “Akkad: An introduction”, 6-9.
- 7 See Westenholz, “The Old Akkadian period”, 31-4 for more on the location of Akkade.
- 8 See Foster, *The Age of Agade*, 50-80 for a list and discussion of these sites.
- 9 See for example Prudence O. Harper & Pierre Amiet, “The Mesopotamian presence”, in *The royal city of Susa: Ancient Near Eastern treasures in the Louvre*, eds. Prudence O. Harper, Joan Aruz & Françoise Tallon (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1992), 162-8 for Akkadian-period objects discovered at the Elamite capital of Susa. These objects had been taken to Susa as booty by the Elamite ruler Šutruk-Nahhunte I towards the end of the 2nd millennium BCE.
- 10 See also Rebecca Hasselbach, *Sargonic Akkadian: A historical and comparative study of the syllabic texts* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2005), 6, “[t]he internal politics of the Sargonic kings were characterized by an attempt at centralization. This is reflected in an increasing standardization of weight systems, the calendar, art, in the centralization of the economic system – although these efforts were not as successful as in the Ur-III period – and also in the uniformity of the writing system and language” (my emphasis).

Sumer in the south was increasingly bilingual,¹¹ a situation which Woods has called “asymmetrical bilingualism”.¹²

8.1.2 Language Use in southern Mesopotamia during the 3rd millennium BCE

The earliest written documents date from the Uruk period in the second half of the 4th millennium BCE, but the script was pictographic and the language therefore uncertain. However, the earliest texts in which we can identify the language were written in Sumerian, and it is most likely that the language of the earliest texts was also Sumerian.¹³ Sumerian continued to be used in southern Mesopotamia throughout the 3rd millennium BCE, with Akkadian arising as a dominant language towards the end of the Early Dynastic period in the northern part of Babylonia and being used increasingly until it replaced Sumerian as the primary language.¹⁴ Contact between Sumerian and East Semitic dialects (Akkadian and Eblaite) began at least as early as the beginning of the 3rd millennium BCE.¹⁵

Both Sumerian and Akkadian were used during the Akkadian period, and traditionally it was thought that Sumerian had ceased to be used as a spoken language by the Neo-Sumerian period.¹⁶ However, private documents from this period written in Sumerian, as well as onomastics demonstrate that Sumerian was still a living language – at least in the south – during the end of the 3rd millennium.¹⁷ It then ceased to be used as

- 11 Hannes D. Galter, “Cuneiform bilingual royal inscriptions”, in *Language and culture in the Near East*, Israel Oriental Studies XV, eds. Shlomo Izre’el & Rina Drory (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 25 differentiates between bilingualism as an individual attribute, “a person speaking two or more languages to about the same degree of perfection”, and bilingualism “as a cultural and historical phenomenon”, which is “characterized by the simultaneous use of different languages within a certain cultural area”. The latter is the type of bilingualism dealt with in this chapter.
- 12 Christopher Woods, “Bilingualism, scribal learning, and the death of Sumerian”, in *Margins of writing, origins of cultures*, OIS 2, ed. Seth L. Sanders (Chicago: The Oriental Institute, 2006), 92.
- 13 For a brief introduction to the emergence of writing during the 3rd and 4th millennia BCE, see for example Jon Taylor, “Administrators and scholars: the first scribes”, in *The Sumerian world*, ed. Harriet Crawford (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 290-304. For the emergence of cuneiform writing, see also Christopher Woods, “The emergence of cuneiform writing”, in *A companion to ancient Near Eastern languages*, ed. Rebecca Hasselbach-Andee (Hoboken: Wiley Blackwell, 2020), 27-46.
- 14 Gábor Zólyomi, “Akkadian and Sumerian language contact”, in *Semitic Languages: An international handbook*, Handbook of Linguistics and Communication Science 36, ed. Stefan Weninger (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011), 397.
- 15 Zólyomi, “Akkadian and Sumerian language contact”, 396.
- 16 For a brief summary with previous literature, see Christopher Woods, “Bilingualism, scribal learning, and the death of Sumerian”, 92.
- 17 There are of course issues with using personal names to predict spoken language. As Joan Oates, *Babylon* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1986), 23 points out, according to the onomastic data during the Early Dynastic period, “a ‘Sumerian’ queen of Kiš, Ku-Baba, who reigned around 2400 BCE, was succeeded by her ‘Semitic’ son, followed by his son, a ‘Sumerian’”.

a primary language by the Old Babylonian period (ca. 1894–1595 BCE) in the first half of the 2nd millennium,¹⁸ although by this period it was a prestige language and language of learning.¹⁹ The situation in the south during the latter part of the 3rd millennium BCE is reflected not only in the surviving texts of the period, but also in mythological narrative. In *Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta*, set in the Early Dynastic period but composed in the Neo-Sumerian period, the south is described as “eme ha-munki-en-gi” meaning “many-tongued Sumer”.²⁰

8.1.3 The “Elites”

In this chapter, the term “elites” is used because there were two broad groups of elites during the Akkadian period. These were the religious elite, including priests and temple personnel, as well as the safeguarders of “culture”; the second – the secular elite, being royalty, governors, administrators, and military officers. There was of course some overlap between these two groups of elites, but on the whole these two groups used language or languages differently. This discussion will focus specifically on the literature produced by these two groups which, although personal and at times intimate, was likely meant for public consumption. Therefore private documents such as letters, and economic and administrative documents will not be discussed.²¹ Instead,

However, according to Woods, “Bilingualism, scribal learning, and the death of Sumerian”, 94–6, Sumerian personal names during the Neo-Sumerian period reflect innovations which could only be based on changes in the vernacular.

- 18 For a detailed discussion on the evidence for the use of Sumerian during the Neo-Sumerian period, see Woods, “Bilingualism, scribal learning, and the death of Sumerian”.
- 19 Zólyomi, “Akkadian and Sumerian language contact”, 397.
- 20 Jerrold S. Cooper, “Sumerian and Akkadian in Sumer and Akkad”, 246. See also ETCSL 1.8.2.3 line 142. ETCSL = The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, online at <http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/>. Herman Vanstiphout, *Epics of Sumerian kings: The matter of Aratta*, Writings from the Ancient World 20 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 65 translates this line as “twin-tongued Sumer”.
- 21 It is noted though that the language use in these documents differs from those under discussion in this chapter. For example, Foster, *The Age of Agade*, 13 notes that officials “often wrote to each other in Akkadian, but when they wrote to the king they preferred Sumerian”. Foster also notes that some notables who were likely Sumerian first-language speakers wrote in Akkadian as they may have felt it to be more prestigious. Language use on the periphery of the Akkadian Empire is also likely to have been different. For example, Tar’um-Agade, a daughter of Naram-Sîn, was the queen of Urkesh where Hurrian appears to have been the dominant language. For more on Hurrian, see Dennis R. M. Campbell, “Hurrian”, in *A companion to ancient Near Eastern languages*, ed. Rebecca Hasselbach-Andee (Hoboken: Wiley Blackwell, 2020), 203–19. For more on Tar’um-Agade, see Giorgio Buccellati & Marilyn Kelly-Buccellati, “Tar’um-Agade, daughter of Naram-Sin, at Urkesh”, in *Of pots and plans: Papers on the archaeology and history of Mesopotamia and Syria presented to David Oates in honour of his 75th birthday*, eds. Lamia Al-Gailani Werr, John Curtis, Harriet Martin, Augusta McMahon, Joan Oates & Julian Reade (London: NABU, 2002), 11–31. The current discussion, however, focusses specifically on language use in Babylonia, and the periphery therefore falls outside its scope.

this chapter will focus on religious poetry and on royal inscriptions.²² As Oppenheim states, “[b]ilingualism in Mesopotamia in specific periods and regions may be viewed either in terms of mutual intelligibility between Sumerian and Akkadian, in terms of teaching and research, or in linguistic preferences for specific themes and topics.”²³ This discussion will then investigate if there was a preference in language use in the types of literature produced by the two groups of elites.

8.2 RELIGIOUS WORKS

8.2.1 The Works of Enheduanna

According to Foster, the only poetry which survives from the Akkadian period is the religious poetry of Enheduanna.²⁴ The earliest author in history who is known by name, Enheduanna was Sargon’s daughter, and was installed by him as en-priestess of Nanna-Sîn at Ur.²⁵ She is traditionally credited with the composition of six works, all written in the Sumerian language. These are the *Temple Hymns*, also known by its opening line e-u-nir, a collection of 42 hymns addressed to temples in southern Mesopotamia;²⁶ three works relating to Inana, these being *Inana B*, or *The Exaltation of Inana*, also

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- 22 See Andrew George, “Babylonian and Assyrian: A history of Akkadian”, in *Languages of Iraq, ancient and modern*, ed. J. Nicholas Postgate (London: BSAOS, 2007), 32 for a full list of the range of documents written in the Akkadian language, although not all types are known from or were produced during the Akkadian period. Royal inscriptions are usually classified by their inscriptions as either standard, building, votive, weight or seal inscriptions according to the typology constructed by William W. Hallo, “The royal inscriptions of Ur: A typology”, *Hebrew Union College Annual* (1962): 1-43.
- 23 A. Leo Oppenheim, *Letters from Mesopotamia: Official, business, and private letters on clay tablets from two millennia* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1967), 26.
- 24 Foster, *The Age of Agade*, 206.
- 25 For more on Enheduanna, see for example Adam Falkenstein, “Enĥedu’anna, die Tochter Sargons von Akkade”, *RA* 52/2 (1958): 129-31; and Joan Goodnick Westenholz, “Enheduanna, en-priestess, hen of Nanna, spouse of Nanna”, in *DUMU-E2-DUB-BA-A: Studies in honor of Åke W. Sjöberg*, Occasional Publications of the Samuel Noah Kramer Fund 11, eds. Hermann Behrens, Darlene Loding & Martha T. Roth (Philadelphia: University Museum, 1989), 539-56. See also most recently Klaus Wagonsonner, “Between history and fiction – Enheduanna, the first poet in world literature”, in *Women at the dawn of history*, eds. Agnete W. Lassen & Klaus Wagonsonner (New Haven: Yale Babylonian Collection, 2020), 38-45.
- 26 For a full treatment in English, see Åke W. Sjöberg & E. Bergmann, “The collection of the Sumerian Temple Hymns”, in *The collection of the Sumerian Temple Hymns*, Texts from Cuneiform Sources III, eds. Åke W. Sjöberg, E. Bergmann & Gene B. Gragg (Locust Valley: J.J. Augustin, 1969), 3-154. For an in-depth, but popular, study, see Betty De Shong Meador, *Princess, Priestess, Poet: The Sumerian Temple Hymns of Enheduanna* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2019).

known by its opening line *nin-me-šara*,²⁷ *Inana C* or *in-nin ša-gur-ra*,²⁸ and *Inana and Ebih* or *in-nin me-huša*,²⁹ *Nanna C*, a *balbale* to *Nanna*,³⁰ and a fragment of Ur III date.³¹ Despite all of these texts except *Inana and Ebih* bearing Enheduanna's name, there is debate over their authorship. Foster argues that the "highly individual style, autobiographical and historical content, certain spellings and usages, and ancient subscripts to manuscripts of her works naming her as author favor ascribing at least the three long poems [i.e., those relating to Inana] to her and perhaps the collection of hymns as well, though with later additions".³²

De Shong Meador, from a psychoanalytical perspective, similarly believes that "the consistent poetic voice in the work, along with several appearances of her actual name in the hymns and poems attributed to her, is evidence enough of her genuine authorship".³³ On the other hand, arguments against her authorship are usually based on orthography, and on the dating of the extant manuscripts. While these arguments are often based on one work, they are used to support the notion that Enheduanna did not write any of the works ascribed to her. For example, all the extant manuscripts of *Inana B* date to the Old Babylonian period, around 600 years after Enheduanna lived, and, according to Black, Cunningham, Robson and Zólyomi, the linguistic features of

- 27 For a full treatment of this text in English, see William W. Hallo & Johannes J. A. van Dijk, *The Exaltation of Inanna*, Yale Near Eastern Researches 3 (New York: AMS Press, 1968), and for a full treatment in German see Annette Zgoll, *Der Rechtsfall der En-ĥedu-Ana im Lied nin-me-šara*, AOAT 246 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1997). See also ETCSL 4.07.2 for a transliteration and English translation, and see Foster, *The Age of Agade*, 331-36 for an English translation.
- 28 For a transliteration and English translation of this text, see ETCSL 4.07.3. See also Åke W. Sjöberg, "in-nin ša-gur4-ra: A hymn to the goddess Inanna by the en-priestess Enĥeduanna", *ZA*, 65 (1975), 161-253 for a full treatment of this poem and Foster, *The Age of Agade*, 336-41 for an English translation.
- 29 For a French translation and commentary of this narrative, see Jean Bottéro & Samuel Noah Kramer, *Lorsque les dieux faisaient l'homme: Mythologie mésopotamienne* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1989), 219-29. For a full study in French see Pascal Attinger, "Inana et Ebih", *ZA*, 88 (1998), 164-95, and for a translation and commentary in German see Pascal Attinger, "Innana und Ebih", in *Texte aus der Umwelt des Alten Testaments, Neue Folge, Band 8. Weisheitstexte, Mythen und Epen*, eds. Bernd Janowski & Daniel Schwemer (Gütersloher: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2015), 37-45. See also ETCSL 1.3.2 for a transliteration and English translation, and Foster, *The Age of Agade*, 341-47 for an English translation.
- 30 Or more accurately a hymn to Ekišnugal, the temple of Nanna in Ur. See Mark Glenn Hall, "A study of the Sumerian moon-god Nanna/Suen", Unpublished PhD Dissertation (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1985), 764-75 for a full treatment of this poem. For a transliteration and English translation, see Westenholz, "Enheduanna, en-priestess, hen of Nanna, spouse of Nanna", 552-5.
- 31 For a transliteration and English translation, see Westenholz, "Enheduanna, en-priestess, hen of Nanna, spouse of Nanna", 555-6.
- 32 Benjamin R. Foster, "Authorship in cuneiform literature", in *The Cambridge handbook of literary authorship*, eds. Ingo Berensmeyer, Gert Buelens & Marysa Demoor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 13.
- 33 De Shong Meador, *Princess, Priestess, Poet*, 248.

these sources are 18th-century BCE Sumerian and show no traces of Old Sumerian.³⁴ However, Zgoll argues for the authenticity of *Inana B* as a work of Enheduanna on the basis of text-critical, orthographic, leximatic-semantic, literary-historical, and historical considerations.³⁵ Similarly, Civil suggests that *Inana C* dates to the Isin-Larsa period (ca. 2004–1763 BCE) and that, at this time, “Enheduanna” was used as a generic name for the en-priestesses of Nanna-Sin.³⁶ In his view, Enheduanna being named as author of the work(s) was a case of pseudepigraphy. However, several en-priestesses of Nanna-Sin during this period are known by name,³⁷ and these en-priestesses appear to have had some esteem in their own rights. This would argue against Civil’s hypothesis. Lambert suggests a “ghost-writer” wrote the works usually attributed to Enheduanna.³⁸ Lambert’s argument that the distinctive style of the works attributed to Enheduanna may indicate that they are all by a single author, but that this author may have been a courtier rather than Enheduanna herself is sound. However, his claim that “[t]he lady is claimed as the lú-dub-KA-keš-da of the Sumerian Temple Hymns, but we know they antedated her, so at the most she was editor” is misleading.³⁹

The extant manuscripts of the *Temple Hymns* are from the Neo-Sumerian and Old Babylonian periods,⁴⁰ and therefore postdate Enheduanna. Lambert is presumably referring to the early dynastic *Zame Hymns*, which are often viewed as forerunners of the *Temple Hymns* and, as such, demonstrate a continued tradition, but not necessarily continued texts.⁴¹ Bahrani, on the other hand, argues that Enheduanna is the author of

34 Jeremy Black, Graham Cunningham, Eleanor Robson & Gábor Zólyomi, *The literature of ancient Sumer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 316.

35 Zgoll, *Der Rechtsfall der En-ĥedu-Ana im Lied nin-me-šara*, 179–84.

36 Miguel Civil, “Les limites de l’information textuelle”, in *Studies in Sumerian civilization: Selected writings of Miguel Civil*, Barcino Monographica Orientalia 7, ed. Lluís Feliu (Barcelona: Institut del Pròxim Orient Antic, 2017), 677.

37 For a list of known en-priestesses see Penelope N. Weadock, “The giparu at Ur”, *Iraq*, 37/1 (1975): 127–8. Weadock lists Ninzianna, Enannatumma, Enmegalanna, Enšakiag-Nanna and Enanedu as en-priestesses after the Neo-Sumerian period. For the depiction of en-priestesses in the visual culture from the Akkadian to Isin-Larsa periods, see Claudia E. Suter, “Between human and divine: High priestesses in images from the Akkad to the Isin-Larsa Period”, in *Ancient Near Eastern art in context: Studies in honor of Irene J. Winter by her students*, Culture and History of the Ancient Near East 26, eds. Jack Cheng & Marian H. Feldman (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 317–58.

38 See William G. Lambert, “Ghost-writers?” *NABU*, 3.83 (2001): 77 where the suggestion is for the works of Enheduanna in general, and William G. Lambert, “Review: The Exaltation of Inanna by William W. Hallo & Johannes J. A. van Dijk”, *BSOAS*, 33/2 (1970): 384 where the suggestion is specifically for *Inana B*.

39 Lambert, “Ghost-writers?” 77.

40 Michael P. Streck, “Tempelhymnen(sammlung) ([collection of] temple hymns)”, *RIA*, 13 (2011–2013): 581.

41 See for example Peeter Espak, “The Transformation of the Sumerian Temple Hymns”, in *Literary Change in Mesopotamia and Beyond, and Routes and Travellers between East and*

the works ascribed to her, and that those who argue against her authorship do so based on sexist grounds, “Enheduanna is also clearly recorded as the author of a number of poetical works, but her authorship has been likewise doubted on grounds of gender. This doubting of the written word is exceptional in a philological methodology that is otherwise heavily dependent on the laws of positivist empirical evidence”.⁴² However, it still remains that there are no manuscripts of her purported works dating to the Akkadian period, and that if she was the original author, the extant manuscripts likely differ from the originals.⁴³

In short, there is no debate that a daughter of Sargon by the name of Enheduanna was en-priestess of Nanna-Sîn at Ur during the Akkadian period, but there is debate over whether she is the author of the works ascribed to her. The matter of her authorship is relevant in this case because, if she did write these works, there can be no doubt that their original manuscripts date to the Akkadian period. As such, they would constitute religious poetry written in the Sumerian language from the Akkadian period. As the daughter of Sargon, sister of Rimuš and Maništušu and aunt of Naram-Sîn, she was inarguably a member of the Akkadian royal dynasty, and for this reason it may be surprising that she wrote exclusively in Sumerian. However, the reason for this may be precisely because the works were religious.⁴⁴

8.2.2 Possible Minor Works

While Foster states that the works of Enheduanna constitute the only poetry which survives from the Akkadian period,⁴⁵ there is evidence that other works may have

West. Proceedings of the 2nd and 3rd Mellammu Workshops, Mellammu Workshops and Monographs 2, eds. Rocío Da Riva, Martin Lang & Sebastian Fink (Münster: Zaphon, 2019), 18 n.13 for the *Zame Hymns* as the forerunners of the *Temple Hymns*. See also Julia M. Asher-Greve and Joan G. Westenholz, *Goddesses in Context: On Divine Powers, Roles and Relationships and Gender in Mesopotamian Textual and Visual Sources*, OBO 259 (Fribourg / Göttingen: Academic Press Fribourg/Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), 60, who call the *Zame Hymns* and *Temple Hymns* “comparable”. For the *Zame Hymns*, see now Manfred Krebernik & Jan J.W. Lisman, *The Sumerian Zame Hymns from Tell Abū Šalābīḥ: With an Appendix on the Early Dynastic Colophons*, dubsar 12 (Münster: Zaphon, 2020).

42 Zainab Bahrani, *Women of Babylon: Gender and representation in Mesopotamia* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 116.

43 See for example Foster, “Authorship in cuneiform literature”, 17, “[b]ecause Mesopotamian literary works were copied and edited by scribes and their pupils over many generations, there are almost no instances of a text known as it left the hand of the author”. See also Westenholz “The Old Akkadian Period: History and culture”, 76: “[h]er works are only known to us in Old Babylonian copies; and naturally doubts have been raised whether these represent her *ipsissima verba*. It is of course possible that some alterations have occurred, as they have to other works in the long process of scribal transmission; yet their substance is without a doubt authentically her own.”

44 For more, see the Concluding Remarks.

45 Foster, *The Age of Agade*, 206.

existed. For example, royal hymns are known from the Neo-Sumerian period, and five lines survive of a possible Sumerian language hymn of praise to Maništušu, suggesting that such hymns may have existed during the Akkadian period.⁴⁶ Steinkeller suggests that the Akkadian language compositions *Naram-Sin and Erra* and *Elegy on the Death of Naram-Sin* may represent such royal praise poems,⁴⁷ but these survive only as Old Babylonian versions, which, according to Westenholz, reveal “the highly evolved Old Babylonian hymno-epic poetic style”.⁴⁸ In other words, these are not Akkadian period compositions. The evidence for poetry written in the Akkadian language from the Akkadian period is therefore speculative. The longest composition written in the Akkadian language with any poetic features is a love incantation from Kiš.⁴⁹

8.2.3 The Sumerian King List

A final work which needs to be mentioned is the *Sumerian King List* (hereafter SKL), a pseudohistorical document which chronicles the early rulers of southern Mesopotamia in succeeding dynasties, centred around different locations. It is also sometimes referred to as the *Chronicle of the Single Monarchy*⁵⁰ because of the way that power is transferred from dynasty to dynasty and from location to location.⁵¹ While the oldest extant version of the SKL dates to the Neo-Sumerian Ur III period, there is some evidence for an older Akkadian period version which may have been

- 46 Aage Westenholz, *A third-millennium miscellany of cuneiform texts*, CUSAS 26 (Bethesda: CDL Press, 2004), 202, CUSAS 26.270, translated by Gianni Marchesi as “The king reached the foreign lands; Naramsin, the king’s eldest son, spread the great net over it”.
- 47 Piotr Steinkeller, *History, texts and art in early Babylonia: Three essays*, SANER 15 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), 133 n. 357.
- 48 Joan Goodnick Westenholz, *Legends of the kings of Akkade: The texts*, Mesopotamian Civilizations 7 (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 191. See Westenholz, *Legends of the kings of Akkade*, 189-201 for *Naram-Sin and Erra*, and Westenholz, *Legends of the kings of Akkade*, 203-20 for *Elegy on the Death of Naram-Sin*.
- 49 For a transliteration, translation and commentary on this incantation, as well as previous literature, see most recently Nathan Wasserman, *Akkadian love literature of the third and second millennium BCE*, LAOS 4 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2016), 242-6. See also Benjamin R. Foster, *Before the muses: An anthology of Akkadian literature* (Bethesda: CDL Press, 2005), 66-8, and with minor changes, Foster, *The Age of Agade*, 232-3 for a less strict translation which perhaps better captures the sense of the incantation.
- 50 See for example Jean-Jacques Glassner, *Mesopotamian Chronicles*, Writings from the Ancient World 19 (Atlanta: SBL, 2004), and Jean-Jacques Glassner, “La date de la composition de la chronique de la monarchie une”, in *An experienced scribe who neglects nothing: Ancient Near Eastern studies in honor of Jacob Klein*, eds. Yitschak Sefati, Pinhas Artzi, Chaim Cohen, Barry L. Eichler & Victor A. Hurowitz (Bethesda: CDL Press, 2005), 138-41.
- 51 For the *editio princeps* see Thorkild Jacobsen, *The Sumerian King List*, AS 11 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1939). While still the most thorough study of the SKL, it is now somewhat outdated. For a discussion on the historicity of the SKL, see Gianni Marchesi, “The Sumerian King List and the early history of Mesopotamia”, in *Ana turri gimilli: Studi dedicati al Padre Werner R. Mayer, S.J. da amici e allievi*, Quaderni di Vicino Oriente V, eds. Mario G. Biga & Mario Liverani (Roma: Università degli Studi di Roma, 2010), 231-48.

written in Akkadian.⁵² According to Steinkeller, this “original version appears to have differed significantly from the later redactions, in that it centered on the dynasty of Kiš as a direct predecessor of the Sargonic kingdom. In other words, it propagated the idea of a single northern monarchy, which commenced in Kiš at the dawn of history, and later continued in Akkade with Sargon and his successors”.⁵³ What this means is that the original Akkadian version of the SKL, if such a version existed, argued for the legitimacy of the Akkadian kings, and their dominion over Babylonia. This idea finds correspondence in the meaning of Sargon’s name, “rightful king”,⁵⁴ which suggests that he was not originally considered the true or legitimate ruler. A notable aspect of the SKL is that it has no theological element – deities are not considered responsible for the transferral of kingship from one city-state to another, this is instead the consequence of military action.⁵⁵ This ties the SKL, and particularly the possible Akkadian period Akkadian language original, to the royal inscriptions of the Akkadian rulers.

8.3 ROYAL INSCRIPTIONS

8.3.1 Early Dynastic Period Royal Inscriptions

The Akkadian royal inscriptions differed from early Sumerian dynastic royal inscriptions in a number of ways. During the Early Dynastic period, the royal inscriptions tended to be short dedications, usually naming the ruler, the city over which he ruled, the object or temple dedicated, and the deity to whom it was dedicated.⁵⁶ There are only a handful of longer inscriptions, particularly from Lagaš, but also from Umma, Uruk, Kiš, and Mari. Those from the southern cities of Lagaš, Umma and Uruk are written

52 See Glassner, *Mesopotamian Chronicles*, 95-6; Glassner, “La date de la composition de la chronique de la monarchie une”, 138-41; Piotr Steinkeller, “An Ur III manuscript of the Sumerian King List”, in *Literatur, Politik und Recht in Mesopotamien: Festschrift für Claus Wilcke*, *Orientalia Biblica et Christiana* 14, eds. Walther Sallaberger, Konrad Volk & Annette Zgoll (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2003), 281-3; Steinkeller, *History, texts and art in early Babylonia*, 36, 40-2.

53 Steinkeller, *History, texts and art in early Babylonia*, 37.

54 Translated as such by, for example, Gwendolyn Leick, *Who’s who in the ancient Near East* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 141. See though also Wagensooner, “Between History and Fiction”, 41 who translates Sargon’s name as “the just king”, and see also Westenholz, “The Old Akkadian Period: History and culture”, 34 who translates it as “the king is true (to his word)”.

55 Marchesi, “The Sumerian King List and the early history of Mesopotamia”, 234.

56 For the royal inscriptions of the Early Dynastic period, see Douglas R. Frayne, *Presargonic Period (2700–2350 BC)*, RIME 1 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008). See also Horst Steible, *Die altsumerischen Bau- und Weihinschriften*, FAOS 5 (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1982). For royal inscriptions from the Early Dynastic until Old Babylonian periods, see Eva Andrea Braun-Holzinger, *Mesopotamische Weihgaben der frühdynastischen bis altbabylonischen Zeit*, HSAO 3 (Heidelberg: Heidelberg Orientverlag, 1991).

in Sumerian, while those from the northern cities of Kiš and Mari are in Akkadian. The longer Sumerian inscriptions include texts recounting various construction works, such as the building of temples, canals, storehouses and such like. The so-called Reform Texts from the reign of Urukagina/Uruinimgina ostensibly attempt to achieve a higher level of social equality and freedom, but were more likely meant to curtail the power of the religious elite.⁵⁷ Military victories, including boundary disputes, are also recounted, although these are fairly rare.⁵⁸ Interestingly, an inscription from Lagaš from the reign of Urukagina/Uruinimgina recounts a military attack by Lugalzagesi against Lagaš, but Lugalzagesi's own account details his reign of peace and stability rather than the military incursions themselves.⁵⁹ The far fewer longer Akkadian inscriptions recount the purchase of land and military successes.

8.3.2 Akkadian Period Royal Inscriptions

8.3.2.1 Content

In comparison, the inscriptions from the Akkadian period deal primarily with military victories, although dedications and building projects are still included, as are land grants.⁶⁰ Indeed, Foster states that the “most significant innovation of Akkadian commemorative prose was the triumphal inscription on a monument occasioned by a military victory ... texts that were solely motivated by triumph in battle”.⁶¹ These monuments include victory stelae, as well as statues, and the iconography on these

57 For these Reform Texts, see Frayne, *Presargonic Period (2700–2350 BC)*, 248–275, RIME E1.9.9.1–3. They have been called the Reform Texts because they list “various reforms carried out by URU-KA-gina to correct abuses that apparently had been perpetrated by earlier rulers of Lagaš”, Frayne, *Presargonic Period (2700–2350 BC)*, 248, and they therefore aimed at social reform. There is debate over the reading of Urukagina/Uruinimgina's name. The present discussion follows the more recent trend of using both names, as for example Gebhard J. Selz, *Sumerer und Akkader: Geschichte, Gesellschaft, Kultur* (München: C.H. Beck Verlag, 2005), 17, “Uru-inimgina/Iri-KA-gina”; Gianna Marchesi & Nicolò Marchetti, *Royal statuary of Early Dynastic Mesopotamia*, Mesopotamian Civilizations 14 (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 244, “Uru'inimgina, Urukagina”, and who also transcribe the name as “Eri'enimgennâk”.

58 For more on the longer inscriptions on Early Dynastic statuary, see Renate M. van Dijk-Coombes, “Portrait of a ruler: The portrayal of Ur-Ningirsu in statuary and inscriptions”, *JSem*, 26/1 (2017): 376. The most notable boundary dispute during the Early Dynastic period is that between Lagaš and Umma, for more of which see Jerrold S. Cooper, *Reconstructing history from ancient inscriptions: The Lagash-Umma border conflict*, SANE 2/1 (Malibu: Undena, 1983).

59 See Frayne, *Presargonic Period (2700–2350 BC)*, 276–9, RIME E1.9.9.5 for Urukagina/Uruinimgina's inscription, and Frayne, *Presargonic Period (2700–2350 BC)*, 433–7, RIME E1.14.20 for Lugalzagesi's inscription.

60 For the royal inscriptions from the Akkadian period, see Douglas R. Frayne, *Sargonic and Gutian Periods (2334–2113 BC)*, RIME 2 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993); Ignace J. Gelb & Burkhard Kienast, *Die altakkadischen Königsinschriften des dritten Jahrtausends v. Chr.*, FAOS 7 (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1990).

61 Foster, *The Age of Agade*, 210.

constituted another form of communication.⁶² The statues were often surmounted on bases which were also inscribed and carved with scenes of the defeated enemy rulers. These statues were set up in public places such as Ekur, the temple of Enlil in Nippur, the religious capital of Babylonia. Although few of these Akkadian statues have survived in any way near complete, the inscriptions which adorned them survive on copies of texts from the Old Babylonian period.⁶³

8.3.2.2 Language Use

Another difference in royal inscriptions between the Sumerian Early Dynastic period and the Akkadian period is the use of language. Most but not all of the Early Dynastic inscriptions are in Sumerian; those in Akkadian are from city-states in the north. During the Akkadian period, Akkadian, for the first time, becomes the language of official inscriptions.⁶⁴ According to Frayne in the introduction to his *Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia Early Periods: Sargonic and Gutian Periods (2334–2113 BC)*, the majority of royal inscriptions during the Akkadian period were written in Akkadian, “a minority are known in bilingual (Sumerian and Akkadian) versions, and a handful are in Sumerian alone”.⁶⁵ This may be somewhat misleading. The Sumerian inscriptions are dedications to an Akkadian king by another individual, or legends on seals, and are not royal inscriptions in the sense that they are official inscriptions recording the actions or achievements of the king. The only exception may be from the reign of Naram-Sin, although the attribution of this inscription to him is uncertain.⁶⁶ There are therefore no royal inscriptions written in the Sumerian language from the

62 See for example the Victory Stele of Naram-Sîn, Louvre Sb 4 in Pierre Amiet, *L'art d'Agadé en Musée du Louvre* (Paris: Éditions des Musées Nationaux, 1976), 93-5, Nr 27a-c. For both relief sculpture and sculpture in the round of the Akkadian Empire, as well as the legacy thereof, see most recently Melissa Eppihimer, *Exemplars of kingship: Art, tradition, and legacy of the Akkadians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019). The obelisk of Maništušu, Louvre Sb 20, may constitute a similar monument, although there is no imagery, and the inscription records the purchase of land. For this obelisk, see Pierre Amiet, *L'art d'Agadé en Musée du Louvre* (Paris: Éditions des Musées Nationaux, 1976), 18, Figure 12; and Ignace J. Gelb, Piotr Steinkeller & Robert M. Whiting, *Earliest land tenure systems in the Near East: Ancient kudurrus*, OIP104 (Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1991), 116-40, no. 40. The existence of this obelisk to commemorate the purchase of land is suggestive of similar monuments having existed which recorded victories in battle.

63 For more on these monuments – the statues as well as their bases – and their reconstructions from Old Babylonian texts, see Giorgio Buccellati, “Through a tablet darkly: A reconstruction of Old Akkadian monuments described in Old Babylonian copies”, in *The tablet and the scroll: Near Eastern studies in honor of William W. Hallo*, eds. Mark E. Cohen, Daniel C. Snell & David B. Weisberg (Bethesda: CDL Press, 1993), 58-71. See especially Buccellati, “Through a tablet darkly”, 62, Figure 1 for a visual reconstruction.

64 Or as Westenholz, “The Old Akkadian period”, 33 states, was “elevated to official language of record”.

65 Frayne, *Sargonic and Gutian Periods (2334–2113 BC)*, 3.

66 Ibid., 162-3; RIME E2.1.4.1004.

Akkadian period. Bilingual inscriptions are an identical or “connected” text written in Sumerian and Akkadian versions on the same object.⁶⁷ There are only three bilingual inscriptions from the Akkadian period, two of which are from the reign of Sargon, and the third of which is from the reign of Rimuš.

Following the numbering convention in Frayne’s *Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia Early Periods: Sargonic and Gutian Periods (2334–2113 BC)*, these are Sargon 1, Sargon 11 and Rimuš 18.⁶⁸ These bilingual inscriptions are known only from later copies dating to the Old Babylonian period on the *Sammeltafeln*, tablets with collections of texts, and it is uncertain whether the original Akkadian period objects had bilingual or unilingual inscriptions. The Sumerian versions of the texts are always in the left column, which is usually reserved for the original.⁶⁹ One of the Sargon inscriptions, Sargon 11, has a curse formula in the Sumerian, but not the Akkadian.⁷⁰ These points could suggest original Sumerian or bilingual origin texts. However, there are no bilingual or Sumerian royal inscriptions extant from the Akkadian period itself.⁷¹ Buccellati states that “[t]he copies made by the Old Babylonian scribes were so accurate that these texts still serve as one of the major sources for our knowledge of the Old Akkadian dialect”.⁷² This suggests that if the original inscriptions were unilingual, that language would more likely have been Akkadian. Indeed, Sargon 11, the Sargon inscription with the Sumerian curse formula, is also found as a unilingual Akkadian version.⁷³

67 Following the definition given by Jerrold S. Cooper, “Bilinguals from Boghazköi”, ZA, 61 (1971): 1 n.1.

68 For Sargon 1 see Frayne, *Sargonic and Gutian Periods (2334–2113 BC)*, 9-12, RIME E2.1.1.1; for Sargon 11 see Frayne, *Sargonic and Gutian Periods (2334–2113 BC)*, 27-9, RIME E2.1.1.11; and for Rimuš 18 see Frayne, *Sargonic and Gutian Periods (2334–2113 BC)*, 67-9, RIME E2.1.2.18.

69 Galter, “Cuneiform bilingual royal inscriptions”, 30-1. For a visual representation, see Gelb & Kienast, *Die altakkadischen Königsinschriften des dritten Jahrtausends v. Chr.*, 140 Abb. 12, 12 Abb. 13.

70 Frayne, *Sargonic and Gutian Periods (2334–2113 BC)*, 29, RIME E2.1.1.11 lines 38-48.

71 Galter, “Cuneiform bilingual royal inscriptions”, 30-1; and Lucrezia Menicatti, “Bilingualism and kingship: An analysis of Mesopotamian bilingual inscriptions from the Old Akkadian until the Old Babylonian Period”, Unpublished Master’s thesis (Leiden University, 2019), 4. See also above.

72 Buccellati, “Through a tablet darkly”, 58. For the usefulness and legitimacy of the Old Babylonian copies in the study of Sargonic or Old Akkadian, see also Leonid Kogan & Ekatarina Markina, “R. Hasselbach, Sargonic Akkadian. A Historical and Comparative Study of the Syllabic Texts”, in *Babel und Bibel 3: Annual of Ancient Near Eastern, Old Testament and Semitic Studies*, Orientalia et Classica XIV, eds. Leonid E. Kogan, Natalia Koslova, Sergey Loesov & Serguei Tishchenko (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 555-58.

73 Frayne, *Sargonic and Gutian Periods (2334–2113 BC)*, 30-1, RIME E2.1.1.12. Although Frayne, *Sargonic and Gutian Periods (2334–2113 BC)*, 30 does not believe that this is a separate Akkadian version, “we would not expect to find an original inscription copied twice on one Sammeltafel”.

Further support for the originals being only in Akkadian is found in the second Sargon inscription, Sargon 1, in which captions of images of defeated rulers which were on the original monument are included in the Akkadian version but omitted in the Sumerian.⁷⁴ This suggests these captions would originally have only been in Akkadian. Sumerian was the language of learning and prestige during the Old Babylonian period, and a translation into the Sumerian language during this period is therefore not unfathomable. However, the only clear example of Sumerian being added to an authentic Akkadian inscription is on a Neo-Babylonian copy of an inscription of Šarkališarri.⁷⁵ Krecher suggests that, while the two versions (Sumerian and Akkadian) of the bilingual inscriptions almost always match each other literally, they are independent texts of each other.⁷⁶ Menicatti argues extensively for two separate origin texts based on differences in content, morphological elements, phraseology, and syntactical structures,⁷⁷ and concludes that “the Old Babylonian copies likely originated from separate independent texts, although very similar in contents and phrasing, which were combined during their tradition. Therefore, these inscriptions are not original bilinguals”.⁷⁸

While the bilingual inscriptions may suggest that there were Sumerian language royal inscriptions during the Akkadian period, none of these have survived to the present day. Akkadian therefore appears to have been the conventional and official language for royal inscriptions during the Akkadian period. Although Sumerian language royal inscriptions may also have been produced and have not survived, this does not appear to have been the norm.

8.3.2.3 *The Focus on the King*

The Akkadian royal inscriptions may therefore originally have been written only in Akkadian, and as mentioned above, these inscriptions focused on military victories, and on the achievements of the Akkadian kings. The Akkadian royal inscriptions further differ somewhat from the earlier Sumerian royal inscriptions in that they (the Akkadian inscriptions) begin with an invocation to the king, even when they are dedications to a specific deity. The Sumerian royal inscriptions invariably begin by naming the deity. This language convention is well-illustrated in two royal inscriptions of Šulgi, the second king of the Third Dynasty of Ur. These two texts commemorate

74 Frayne, *Sargonic and Gutian Periods (2334–2113 BC)*, 12, RIME E2.1.1.1 captions 1-3.

75 Sometimes incorrectly categorised as a fourth bilingual inscription from the Akkadian period. See Frayne, *Sargonic and Gutian Periods (2334–2113 BC)*, 191-2; RIME E2.1.5.4.

76 Joachim Krecher, “Interlinearbilinguen und sonstige Bilinguentypen”, *RIA*, 5 (1976-80): 126.

77 Menicatti, *Bilingualism and kingship*, 4-23.

78 *Ibid.*, 23.

the building of the E-sikil temple of the god Tišpak (Akkadian) or Ninazu (Sumerian) in Ešnunna.⁷⁹ The Akkadian inscription begins by recounting Šulgi's names and titles, while the Sumerian inscription begins by naming Ninazu. In the Akkadian period the ruler therefore becomes the primary focus of the royal inscriptions, rather than the deities. While in the Akkadian period this may have been an ideological convention, in the succeeding Neo-Sumerian period it has become a language convention.

8.4 CONCLUDING REMARKS

From the above discussion it becomes evident that Akkadian was used for royal inscriptions during the Akkadian period. Similarly, if an Akkadian period version of the SKL existed, it may have been written in the Akkadian language, although this is speculative. The SKL focuses on kingship as a secular, dynastic institution and may therefore be closer aligned to the royal inscriptions in terms of purpose and ideology than it is to the poetry of the era. If Enheduanna is the original author of the works ascribed to her, then these works were written in Sumerian during the Akkadian period. The five lines of the royal praise hymn, if this is what they constitute, were also written in Sumerian. This leads to the following question: why was Akkadian used for royal inscriptions or works dealing with royalty, and not religious poetry, and why was Sumerian used for religious poetry, but not secular works? The suggestion offered here is that this question may be answered by looking at the intended audience for each group of works.

The intended audience for the religious works would have been the religious community, and, more importantly, the deities to whom the works were addressed. Many of these deities were thought to inhabit cities in the south – the bilingual area where Sumerian was the traditional language, and where there is a tradition of poetry and religious works in the Sumerian language. For example, Enheduanna was the en-priestess of Nanna-Sîn at Ur and wrote devotional poems to Inana at Uruk. Both Ur and Uruk are cities in the south. It follows then that religious literature would have been written in the Sumerian language, and that perhaps, at least during this broader

79 For the Akkadian text, see Douglas R. Frayne, *Ur III Period (2112–2004)*, RIME 3/2 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 135-6, RIME E3/1.1.2.27, and see Frayne, *Ur III Period (2112–2004)*, 136-7, RIME E3/2.1.2.28 for the Sumerian inscription. Tišpak succeed Ninazu as the city-deity of Ešnunna, but, as stated by Frans A.M. Wiggermann, “Transtigridian snake gods”, in *Sumerian gods and their representations*, CM 7, eds. Irving L. Finkel & Mark J. Geller (Groningen: Styx Publications, 1997), 36, “there is not much difference between the two”, and they could be identified with each other during this period. For Ninazu and Tišpak, see Wiggermann, “Transtigridian snake gods”, 35-9. For more on Ninazu see Frans A.M. Wiggermann, “Ninazu”, *RIA*, 9 (1998–2001), 329-35, and for more on Tišpak see Marten Stol, “Tišpak”, *RIA*, 14 (2014), 64-6.

period, Sumerian was envisaged as “the language of the gods”. Sumerian was therefore the logical language for these religious texts.

The royal inscriptions detail the achievements of the Akkadian kings, primarily their military achievements. The objects bearing these inscriptions were dedicated to or set up in temples and were intended for the view of the deities to whom they were dedicated. It could then be assumed that they should have been written in Sumerian. However, these inscriptions were also, and perhaps more importantly, intended for the view of later rulers.⁸⁰ These rulers would have been their Akkadian descendants, the Akkadian dynasty speaking the Akkadian language. Akkadian was therefore the logical language for these texts.

The elites of the Akkadian Empire were the first in recorded history to employ bilingualism in their written culture. It is unclear whether this bilingualism was a conscious expression or an unconscious experiment. In general, royal inscriptions were written in Akkadian, while Sumerian was used for religious poetry. The Akkadian language became the dynastic, official language of Imperial Akkad, while Sumerian was the traditional language of prestige and learning. In this way, the Akkadian period set the scene for the use of these two languages by the elites for roughly the next two millennia.

80 For the audience of royal inscriptions, see Ariel Bagg, “Where is the public? A new look at the brutality scenes in Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions and art”, in *Making pictures of war: Realia et imaginaria in the iconology of the ancient Near East*, Ancient Near Eastern Archaeology 1, ed. Laura Battini (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2016), 60-2. Although Bagg discusses the audience of Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions, his arguments apply for Mesopotamian royal inscriptions from all periods. See especially Bagg, “Where is the public?” 62, “the royal inscriptions, specially the narrative accounts, were intended for the gods and the future rulers, probably at least in some cases also for the elite [i.e., the political elite] as a kind of self-indoctrination”.