

Dedicatory Inscriptions of the Ur III Period in Light of Cuneiform Sources

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Abstract

This research investigates "Dedicatory Inscriptions of the Ur III Period" in light of cuneiform sources, aiming to deconstruct the structural relationship between the cuneiform text and its archaeological medium. The study begins by examining the linguistic and conceptual connotations of "dedication," distinguishing between architectural dedication—associated with the construction and renovation of temples—and votive dedication, which pertains to gifts presented to deities and kings.

Furthermore, the study dedicates a distinct section to examining and analyzing the primary materials upon which these inscriptions were recorded, classifying them into stone, metal, and wooden materials, while highlighting the most significant artifacts bearing dedicatory inscriptions from the Ur III period.

To provide the study with an empirical, applied character, selected specimens of dedicatory inscriptions by the dynasty's kings (such as Ur-Namma, Shulgi, and his successors) were compiled and analyzed. The study has yielded a series of conclusions, most notably that the writing medium was an integral part of the text's religious and political message, and that the linguistic ingenuity within the dedicatory formulae reflected the strict administrative centralization that characterized the Ur III period.

Keywords: Cuneiform Writings, Specimens, Deities, Temples, Statues.

1- Research Problem

The present study addresses a significant gap in the scholarship on the dedicatory inscriptions of the Ur III Dynasty, which have frequently been examined either as purely historical texts or as linguistic documents, often without integrating an analysis of the material media upon which they were inscribed or tracing the semantic development of the concept of dedication itself. This issue may be articulated through the following central question:

To what extent did the material diversity of writing supports—such as bricks, clay cones, stone objects, and metal artifacts—contribute to the construction and expression of the political and religious ideology of the

kings of the Ur III Dynasty? Furthermore, how can the Sumerian dedicatory expressions *mu-na-du₃* and *a mu-na-ru* illuminate the evolving relationship between the king, the state, and religious institutions, particularly in the context of the emergence of royal deification?

2. Objectives of the Study:

This study seeks to achieve the following academic objectives:

- **Conceptualizing Dedication:**

To identify and analyze the linguistic and ideological connotations of vows, offerings, and dedication within Mesopotamian thought during the Ur III period.

- **Classification and Characterization of Writing Materials:**

To investigate the physical and functional properties of the materials employed for dedicatory inscriptions (including brick, clay, and stone) and to explain the rationale behind the selection of particular media according to the religious or political significance of the text.

- **Philological and Epigraphic Analysis:**

To provide an analytical reading of selected inscriptions and dedicatory terminology from the inscriptions of Ur III rulers in order to trace both continuity and change in conventional inscriptional formulae.

- **Linking Materiality and Text:**

To demonstrate how the form and material of the inscription carrier served the intended purpose of the dedicatory text, whether designed for deposition within building foundations as a means of ensuring divine protection or for display within the innermost sacred spaces of temples.

3. Significance of the Study

The significance of this study derives from the following considerations:

- **Methodological Integration:**

The study offers an integrated analytical framework that combines material archaeology with textual and terminological analysis, an approach that is essential for a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of Mesopotamian civilization.

- **Historical Specificity of the Ur III Period:**

The Ur III Dynasty represents an unparalleled stage of administrative and linguistic development. Consequently, the examination of its dedicatory inscriptions provides valuable insights into the politicization of religion and its instrumental role in reinforcing state centralization and royal authority.

First: The Meaning of Dedication in Language and Terminology

1- Dedication in the Linguistic Sense

The Arabic term *takrīs* (dedication or consecration) is derived from the root *karasa*, meaning sanctification and blessing. It is said that a building is *kurrisa* when its foundations are established, and that an object is dedicated when it is assigned to a specific purpose. Likewise, the expression "to dedicate oneself to something" denotes devoting oneself entirely to a particular cause or activity. In religious usage, a priest consecrates a church by dedicating it to the service of God and bestowing a formal blessing upon it⁽¹⁾.

2- Dedication in the Terminological Sense

In English, dedication or consecration is expressed by the term *Consecration*, which refers to the formal dedication of a person, place, object, or institution to a special purpose or sacred service. Literally, the term signifies an association with that which is holy or sacred. Consequently, individuals, locations, and objects may all be consecrated, although the concept is interpreted and applied differently across religious and cultural traditions.

The term derives from the Latin *consecrare*, meaning "to dedicate," "to devote," or "to make sacred." A close synonym is *sanctification*, while its conceptual opposite is *profanation*. Consecration may therefore be defined as the act through which a person or object is separated from ordinary or profane use and permanently devoted to the sacred through prayers, rituals, and ceremonial practices.

Although nearly all cultures and religions possess some form of purification or dedication rite, the concept of consecration has been particularly associated with the traditions of Christianity and Judaism⁽²⁾.

In ancient Mesopotamian civilization, the concept of dedication assumed intertwined religious, political, and ideological dimensions. It was not limited to the consecration of individuals or objects to the gods; rather, it encompassed the offering of buildings, temples, statues, tools, commemorative objects, and various construction materials as votive gifts dedicated to divine powers. Acts of dedication were closely associated with the pursuit of divine favor and protection, the assurance of the permanence and prosperity of royal and architectural achievements, and the perpetuation of the donor's or ruler's name within both religious and collective memory. Consequently, Mesopotamian dedicatory inscriptions should not be viewed merely as commemorative records; rather, they constitute ideological documents that reflect the nature of the relationship between humans and the gods on the one hand, and between political authority and religious institutions on the other.

Second: Materials Used in Dedicatory Inscriptions

The materials upon which Sumerian dedicatory inscriptions were executed during the Ur III period varied according to both the availability of raw materials and the social and political status of the individual responsible for the dedication. In general, these inscriptions were engraved on a wide range of stones, metals, and, to a lesser extent, wooden objects. The following examples illustrate the principal materials employed for this purpose.

1- Stone

Stone was among the most widely used materials in the production of statues and other inscribed objects in Mesopotamia. Although stone resources were not abundant in southern Mesopotamia, rulers

and kings invested considerable effort in importing high-quality stone from its principal sources in neighboring regions. Various types of stone were employed in the manufacture of royal statues bearing dedicatory inscriptions, as well as foundation stones, cylinder seals, mace heads, and votive vessels. Among the most important of these stone types was diorite.

- Diorite

Diorite is an igneous rock characterized by its dark, often blackish-gray color. In Sumerian texts it is designated as *NA₄ ESI*, while its Akkadian equivalent is *uṣû*⁽³⁾. Owing to its hardness, durability, and prestigious character, diorite was extensively utilized in the production of statues throughout Mesopotamian history.

Archaeological discoveries have yielded several important sculptures carved from this stone, including the statue of Entemena, ruler of the First Dynasty of Lagash. From the Akkadian period, the statue of King Rimush⁽⁴⁾ was likewise fashioned from diorite⁽⁵⁾. During the Neo-Sumerian period, particularly under the Second Dynasty of Lagash, King Gudea⁽⁶⁾ demonstrated a marked preference for diorite and employed it extensively in the production of his well-known statues.

Similarly, the kings of the Ur III Dynasty commissioned statues made of diorite, among them King Shulgi and King Shu-Sin. The selection of this material was not merely practical but also symbolic, reflecting permanence, royal prestige, and the desire to ensure the enduring preservation of both the monument and its dedicatory inscription.

-Limestone

Limestone is attested in Sumerian as *NA₄ NA.PAR* and corresponds to the Akkadian terms *abnu pīlu* or *pīlu*⁽⁷⁾. It is a sedimentary rock commonly known as limestone and occurs abundantly in the region of modern-day al-Muthanna Governorate in southern Iraq. These deposits likely constituted one of the principal sources of stone used in the construction and artistic production of Uruk and neighboring cities⁽⁸⁾.

Limestone was extensively employed in the manufacture of statues during the Early Dynastic period. Indeed, the earliest known statue bearing a cuneiform inscription, dating to the Early Dynastic II period and belonging to King Khartu, was carved from this material. Likewise, the statue of Me-Annesi, son of Enannatum and one of the rulers of Lagash, was fashioned from limestone. The use of this stone continued into the Ur III period, as evidenced by the discovery of a limestone statue of King Ibbi-Sin (2028–2004 BCE)⁽⁹⁾, the last ruler of the Third Dynasty of Ur.

-Alabaster

Alabaster is designated in Sumerian as *NA₄ NIR.MUS.GIR* and corresponds to the Akkadian term *parūtu*⁽¹⁰⁾. It is a variety of gypsum (calcium sulfate) characterized by a compact, fine-grained texture and a predominantly white color often streaked with pale yellowish hues⁽¹¹⁾. Due to its relative softness and aesthetic appearance, alabaster was widely used in the production of statues, vessels, and various dedicatory objects throughout Mesopotamian history.

-Red Carnelian

Red carnelian is a semi-precious stone distinguished by its considerable hardness, attractive coloration, and lustrous appearance, qualities that made it highly valued in ancient Mesopotamia. In Sumerian it is referred to as *NA₄ GUG*, while the Akkadian equivalents include *samtu*, *santu*, and *sandu*⁽¹²⁾. Owing to its rarity and aesthetic appeal, carnelian was frequently employed in the manufacture of luxury objects, beads, seals, and prestigious votive offerings, thereby serving not only decorative but also symbolic and social functions⁽¹³⁾.

2- Metals

Metals constituted some of the most important materials utilized by the ancient Mesopotamians in the production of statues, votive objects, and inscribed artifacts. Their widespread use played a significant role in technological advancement, artistic development, and the flourishing of Mesopotamian civilization. Among the most prominent metals employed for dedicatory purposes were gold and bronze.

- Gold

Gold is designated in Sumerian by the term *KU.GI*, corresponding to the Akkadian *ur̄u* ("gold")⁽¹⁴⁾. Although no complete gold statues have thus far been recovered from archaeological contexts, numerous textual references attest to the use of gold in the manufacture of royal and divine statuary in ancient Mesopotamia. In several instances, regnal year names were commemorated by the production and dedication of golden statues to the gods and their installation within temples.

A notable example is provided by Warad-Sin, king of Larsa, whose third regnal year was named after the dedication of a golden statue. The year-name inscription reads:

MU 1 UR UDU ALAN KU.GI IR dEN.ZU E dUTU I.NI.IN.KU₄.RE⁽¹⁵⁾

"Year in which he brought his personal statue of gold and copper into the temple of the god Šamaš."

Evidence from the Ur III period further indicates the use of gold for dedicatory objects bearing inscriptions associated with various kings of the dynasty. Although such objects were generally smaller than monumental statues, they nevertheless demonstrate the prestige and sacred value attributed to gold within royal and religious contexts.

-Bronze

Bronze is referred to in Sumerian by the term *ZABAR*, corresponding to the Akkadian *šiparru*. Owing to its durability and suitability for casting, bronze was widely employed in the production of statues, weapons, ritual implements, and dedicatory objects. The material occupied an important position in Mesopotamian artistic and religious traditions and was frequently selected for objects intended for long-term preservation within temple contexts⁽¹⁶⁾.

3- Wood

Wood is denoted in Sumerian by the sign *GIŠ* and corresponds to the Akkadian term *išru*⁽¹⁷⁾. Statues fashioned from wood are comparatively rare in the archaeological record because wood, as an organic

material, is highly susceptible to decay and deterioration. Unlike stone and metal, it rarely survives prolonged exposure to environmental conditions.

Nevertheless, textual and archaeological evidence confirms the use of wood in Mesopotamian sculptural production. Among the most significant examples is a foundation figurine associated with King Ur-Namma⁽¹⁸⁾, the founder of the Third Dynasty of Ur. Such wooden foundation figures were commonly deposited within the foundations of temples and public buildings, where they served both symbolic and ritual functions connected with the protection and perpetuation of the structure⁽¹⁹⁾.

Third: Organization of Dedicatory Inscription Formulae

A. The Introductory Formula (Preamble)

The introductory formulae employed in dedicatory inscriptions varied from one historical period to another. During the Ur III period, however, the majority of dedicatory texts followed a relatively standardized structure, typically beginning with the name of the deity to whom the object was dedicated, followed by the name of the king together with his royal titles, and concluding with the dedicatory statement itself⁽²⁰⁾.

A noteworthy feature of Ur III royal inscriptions is the deification of the kings. Beginning with the reign of Šulgi and continuing under his successors, royal names were frequently preceded by the divine determinative (*digir*), a practice that signified the king's divine status within official royal ideology and reflected his elevated position in the eyes of his subjects⁽²¹⁾.

An illustrative example of the introductory formula found in the dedicatory inscriptions of the Ur III kings is the following text:

- ^dNanna
2. *lugal-a-ni-ir*
3. ^dIbbi-Sin
4. *Digir-kalam-ma*
5. *Lugal-kala-ga*
6. *Lugal-Uri₅^{ki}-ma*
7. *Lugal-an-ub-da-limmu₂-ba-ke₄*
8. *Nam-ti-la-ni-še₃*
9. *A mu-na-ru*⁽²²⁾

Translation

“To the god Nanna, his lord, Ibbi-Sin, the god of the land, the mighty king, king of Ur, king of the four quarters of the world, dedicated (this) for the preservation of his life.”

This inscription exemplifies the principal structural components of Ur III dedicatory formulae: the invocation of the deity, the identification of the royal donor, the enumeration of royal and divine titles, and finally the dedicatory expression. Together, these elements served not only to record the act of dedication but also to communicate the ideological relationship between the king and the divine realm, thereby reinforcing royal legitimacy and piety.

B- Dedicatory Verbal Forms

The corpus of texts examined in this study reveals the occurrence of more than one verbal form employed to denote the act of dedication, offering, or consecration. Each of these forms carries a specific semantic nuance, although they are broadly associated with the dedicatory sphere. The principal forms may be summarized as follows:

1. A.MU.RU

This is the most frequently attested verbal form used in dedicatory inscriptions. It is documented from the Early Dynastic period through to the end of the Old Babylonian period. Semantically, it conveys the meanings “to dedicate⁽²³⁾,” “to vow,” or “to offer.” Its Akkadian equivalent is associated with *šarāku* (“to present, to dedicate”), derived from the verb *šarāku(m)*⁽²⁴⁾.

2. DIM

This form denotes the meaning “to make” or “to fashion⁽²⁵⁾.” Its Akkadian equivalent is *i-pu-šu*, derived from the verb *epēšum* (“to make, to create”). In dedicatory contexts, the verb does not merely indicate physical production but may also imply the act of commissioning or ritually producing an object for divine purposes. This form is attested, among other instances, in inscriptions on a statue of King Ibši-Sin, one of the rulers of the Ur III Dynasty⁽²⁶⁾.

Fourt: Examples of Dedicatory Inscriptions from the Ur III Period

1. Dedicatory Inscriptions on Semi-Precious Stones:

In ancient Mesopotamia, carnelian was referred to as the “stone of the eye,” a designation that may reflect a belief—paralleled in later traditions—in the protective and beneficial properties attributed to the stone, particularly its ability to ward off the evil eye and safeguard its bearer.

Due to its high value and prestige, carnelian was frequently used for inscribed objects, including dedicatory inscriptions addressed to Mesopotamian deities. Among the most notable examples from the Ur III period is a dedicatory inscription engraved on a carnelian bead, dedicated to the life of King Šulgi. The inscription reads as follows:

1. ^dNin-lil
2. nin-a-ni
3. Šulgi
4. nita-kal-ga
5. lugal-Uri^{ki}-ma
6. lugal-ki-en-gi-ki-uri-ke₄
7. nam-ti-la-ni-še
8. a mu-na-ru⁽²⁷⁾

Translation

“To the goddess Ninlil, his lady, Šulgi, the mighty man, king of Ur, king of Sumer and Akkad, dedicated (this bead) for the sake of his own life.”

This inscription exemplifies the standard structure of Ur III dedicatory formulae, combining divine invocation, royal titulature, and the dedicatory verb concluding the text, thereby reflecting both the religious and ideological dimensions of royal dedication practices.

Another dedicatory inscription is attested on a carnelian object, dedicated to the goddess Ninlil by King Šulgi for the life of his daughter *nin-TUR.TUR-mu*. The inscription reads as follows:

1. ^d*Nin-lil*
2. *nin-a-ni*
3. Šulgi
4. *nita-kal-ga*
5. *lugal-Uri₅^{ki}-ma*
6. *lugal-ki-en-gi-ki-uri-ke₄*
7. *nam-ti-la-ni-še*
8. *u nam-ti*
9. *nin-TUR.TUR-mu*
10. *dumu-ki-ag-ag-na-še*
11. *a mu-na-ru*
12. *lu mu-šar-ra-ba*
13. *šu bi-ib-uru₁₂-a*
14. *nin-mu*
15. ^d*Nin-lil-ke₄*
16. *nam ha-ba-da-ku₃-re⁽²⁸⁾*

Translation

“To the goddess Ninlil, his lady, Šulgi, the mighty man, king of Ur, king of Sumer and Akkad, for his own life and for the life of his beloved daughter, Nin-TUR.TUR-mu, he dedicated (this object). As for whoever erases this inscription, may my lady, the goddess Ninlil, curse him.”

This inscription is particularly significant, as it extends the dedicatory formula beyond the royal person to include a close family member, thereby illustrating the extension of protective and votive concerns within Ur III royal ideology. Moreover, the inclusion of a curse formula against any potential erasure reflects the strong ideological emphasis on textual permanence and the sacred status of inscribed objects.

A further example is provided by a dedicatory inscription attributed to Aman-eili, wife of the ruler of Lagash, inscribed on a carnelian object dedicated to the life of King Ibbi-Sin. The text reads:

1. ^d*Baba*
2. *nin-a-ni-ir*
3. *nam-ti*
4. *Ibbi-Sin-ka-še*

5. *Aman-eili*
6. *dam-Ur-Nanna*
7. *Ensi₂*
8. *Lagaša^{ki}-ka-ke₄*
9. *a mu-na-ru⁽²⁹⁾*

Translation

“To the goddess Baba, her lady, for the life of Ibbi-Sin, Aman-eili, wife of Ur-Nanna, governor of Lagash, dedicated (this object).”

This inscription reflects the participation of elite women in dedicatory practices, indicating that votive activities were not exclusively restricted to kings but also extended to members of the royal and administrative elite.

A final inscription is preserved on another dedicatory object belonging to the Ur III corpus:

1. *^dNanna*
2. *lugal-a-ni-ir*
3. *^dIbbi-Sin*
4. *digir-kalam-ma-na*
5. *lugal-kal-ga*
6. *lugal-Uri^{ki}-ma*
7. *lugal-an-ub-da-limmu-ba-ke₄*
8. *nam-ti-la-ni-še*
9. *a mu-na-ru⁽³⁰⁾*

Translation

“To the god Nanna, his lord, Ibbi-Sin, the god of his land, the mighty king, king of Ur, king of the four quarters of the world, dedicated (this object) for his own life.”

This text reaffirms the standard structure of Ur III dedicatory inscriptions, while also reflecting the ideological framework of divine kingship and the centrality of personal and royal well-being within the dedicatory act.

2-Dedicatory Inscriptions on Statues

A considerable number of dedicatory inscriptions from the Ur III period have been identified on statues of royal figures belonging to the dynasty. The scribes responsible for these inscriptions generally adhered to a standardized formula, similar to that employed on other dedicatory media used by the Sumerians, including stone, metal, and other votive objects.

An illustrative example is provided by the following inscription:

1. *^d[ig]-alim*
2. *dumu-ki-ag*

3. ^d*Nin-girsu-ka*
4. *[lu]gal-a-ni*
5. ^d*Šulgi*
6. *nita-kal-ga*
7. *lugal-ŠES.AB.KI-ma*
8. *lugal-ki-en-gi-ki-uri-ke₄*
9. *nam-ti-la-ni-še*
10. *a mu-na-ru⁽³¹⁾*

Translation

“To the god Ig-alim, the beloved son of the goddess Ningirsu, his lord, Šulgi, the mighty man, king of Ur, king of Sumer and Akkad, dedicated (this statue) for his own life.”

The above inscription, discovered at the site of Tello (ancient Girsu), is dedicated to the life of King Šulgi and addressed to the god Ig-alim.

A further dedicatory inscription is attested on a statue excavated at the city of Ur, likewise dedicated to the life of King Šulgi. The text reads as follows:

Column I

1. ^d*Nanna*
2. *[lu]gal-a-ni*
3. ^d*Šulgi*
4. *[ni]ta-kal-ga*
5. *[lu]gal-Uri₅^{ki}-ma*
6. *[lugal-ki]-[en]-[gi-ki-uri-ke₄]*

Column II

1. *nam-ti-la-ni-še*
2. *a mu-na-ru*
3. *alan-ba*
4. ^d*Nanna bad-(x)-mu*
5. *mu-bi-im⁽³²⁾*

Translation

Column I:

“To the god Nanna, his lord, Šulgi, the mighty man, king of Ur, king of Sumer and Akkad.”

Column II:

“For his life he dedicated (this statue). He named this statue: ‘Nanna is my fortress.’”

This inscription demonstrates not only the standard dedicatory formula but also the practice of assigning ritual or symbolic names to statues, thereby reinforcing their ideological and protective function.

A further dedicatory text is inscribed on a small statue offered by the daughter of the ruler of Lagash for the life of King Šulgi. The inscription reads:

1. *^dLamma-TAR-sir-sir-ra*
2. *ama-^dBaba*
3. *nin-a-ni*
4. *nam-ti*
5. *^dŠulgi*
6. *nita-kal-ga*
7. *lugal-Uri₅^{ki}-ma*
8. *lugal-ki-en-gi-ki-uri-ka-še*
9. *ha-la-^dLamma*
10. *dumu-Lu-Giri₁₇-zal*
11. *ensi₂*
12. *Lagaša^{ki}-ka-ke₄⁽³³⁾*

Translation

“To the goddess Lamma-TAR-sirsir, the exalted Lamma, the mother of the goddess Baba, her lady, for the life of Šulgi, the mighty man, king of Ur, king of Sumer and Akkad, Hala-Lamma, daughter of Lu-Girizal, governor of Lagash, dedicated this small statue.”

Another dedicatory inscription is preserved on a small statue of brown stone housed in the Berlin Museum, dedicated to the life of King Ibbi-Sin. The text reads:

1. *^dNin-DAR-a*
2. *lugal-uru*
3. *[lugal]-a-ni-ir*
4. *[nam]-ti*
5. *^dIbbi-Sin*
6. *lugal-kal-ga*
7. *lugal-Uri₅^{ki}-ma*
8. *lugal-an-ub-da-limmu-ba-ke₄*
9. *Ur-Ningirsu*
10. *EN.ME.ZI.AN.NA*
11. *sennu (ME.AD.KU)*
12. *en-ki-ag-^dNanse-ke₄*
13. *mu-na-dim⁽³⁴⁾*

Translation

“To the goddess Nindara, the great lady, his mistress, for the life of Ibbi-Sin, the mighty king, king of Ur, king of the four quarters of the world, Ur-Ningirsu, the beloved priest of the goddess Nanše in the temple EN.ME.ZI.AN.NA, fashioned (this statue).”

Finally, another dedicatory inscription is recorded on a small statue presented by the priest Ur-Ningirsu for the life of King Ibbi-Sin. The text reads:

1. *^dNin-marki*
2. *nin munus-gi-sa*
3. *nin-a-ni*
4. *nam-ti*
5. *^dŠulgi*
6. *nita-kal-ga*
7. *lugal-Uri₅^{ki}-ma*
8. *lugal-an-ub-da-limmu-ba-ke₄*
9. *Ur-Ningirsu*
10. *EN.ME.ZI.AN.NA*
11. *en ki-ag-^dNanse-ka*
12. *a mu-na-ru⁽³⁵⁾*

Translation

“To the goddess Ninmarki, the lady adorned with jewels, his mistress, for the life of Šulgi, the mighty man, king of Ur, king of the four quarters of the world, Ur-Ningirsu, the beloved priest in the temple of the goddess Nanše, dedicated this small statue.”

3-Dedicatory Inscriptions on Earrings

In this context, the term “earring” refers to a form of ornamental jewelry worn on the ear. It includes both upper ear ornaments and lower lobe earrings, with the latter being attached specifically to the earlobe. Earrings (plural: earrings) thus represent a category of personal adornment used in Mesopotamian material culture.

Within the Ur III corpus, a golden earring was dedicated to the goddess Geshtinanna by King Šulgi⁽³⁶⁾. The relevant inscription reads as follows:

1. *^dGeshtin-an-na*
2. *dumu-ni*
3. *^dŠulgi*
4. *nita-kal-ga*
5. *lugal-Uri₅^{ki}-ma*
6. *lugal-ki-en-gi-ki-uri-ke₄*
7. *nam-ti-la-ni-še*
8. *a mu-na-ru⁽³⁷⁾*

Translation

“To the goddess Geshtinanna, his daughter, Šulgi, the mighty man, king of Sumer and Akkad, dedicated (this earring) for his own life.”

This inscription illustrates the extension of dedicatory practices beyond monumental objects and architectural elements to include personal luxury items such as jewelry. It further reflects the intimate relationship between royal ideology, divine affiliation, and material expressions of piety during the Ur III period.

Analytical Note: Jewelry as a Medium of Royal Dedication

The inclusion of jewelry within the corpus of dedicatory objects in the Ur III period reflects an important extension of the dedicatory system beyond monumental architecture and large-scale votive artifacts. Objects such as earrings, pendants, and other items of personal adornment were not merely luxury goods; rather, they functioned as highly symbolic offerings that mediated the relationship between the royal household and the divine sphere.

In this context, jewelry assumes the status of a “personal votive gift,” in which material value, aesthetic refinement, and symbolic meaning converge. The dedication of such objects to deities underscores the integration of royal identity with acts of piety, whereby even intimate and personal possessions are transformed into instruments of religious expression and ideological representation. Consequently, these artifacts reveal that dedicatory practice in the Ur III period was not limited to public or monumental displays of devotion, but also extended into the sphere of personal royal belongings, thereby reinforcing the pervasive nature of religious ideology in both public and private dimensions of kingship.

4- Dedicatory Inscriptions on Vessels:

The term “vessel” is commonly used by archaeologists as a general designation for containers employed in the storage of foodstuffs and liquids. These vessels exhibit considerable variation in form, size, and manufacturing materials across different historical periods. They are characterized by diverse rims, openings, and surface treatments. In some cases, vessels take zoomorphic forms or are decorated with sculptural elements, such as composite figures combining avian and leonine features, or representations of snakes, gazelles, and other animals. In other instances, they are embellished with vegetal motifs or anthropomorphic designs⁽³⁸⁾.

Within this category, the following inscription from the reign of King Ur-Namma is particularly noteworthy:

1. *⁴Bilgames*
2. *EN.DIM.GIG.KI*
3. *lugal-a-ni*
4. *Ur-Namma*
5. *nita-kal-ga*
6. *lugal-Uri₅^{ki}-ma*
7. *lugal-ki-en-gi-ki-uri-ke₄*
8. *u₄ e₂^{-d}Nanna*
9. *mu-du-a*
10. *nam-ti-la-ni-še*
11. *a mu-na-ru*
12. *lu mu-šar-ra-ba*
13. *šu bi-ib-ur-a*

14. ^d*Bilgames-e*

15. *nam ha-ba-da-ku₅-e*⁽³⁹⁾

Translation

“To the god Gilgamesh, mighty lord, his master, Ur-Namma, the mighty man, king of Ur, king of Sumer and Akkad, when he built the temple of the goddess Nanna, dedicated (this vessel) for his own life. As for whoever erases this inscription, may Gilgamesh curse him.”

This inscription illustrates the integration of building activities and votive dedication, linking royal construction projects with divine patronage and protection, while also reinforcing the authority of the written word through curse formulae directed against potential erasure.

Another dedicatory inscription is attested on a marble vessel dedicated to the life of King Šulgi. The text reads:

1. ^d*Šara*

2. *nir-gal-an-na*

3. *dumu-ki-ag-^dInanna*

4. *lugal-a-ni*

5. *nam-ti*

6. ^d*Šulgi*

7. *nita-kal-ga*

8. *lugal-ŠES.AB.KI-ma*

9. *lugal-an-ub-da-limmu-ba-ke₄*

10. *lu-^dNanna*

11. *dumu Su-era*

12. *dam-gar-ke₄*

13. [...]

14. *a mu-na-ru*⁽⁴⁰⁾

Translation

“To the goddess Šara, the exalted one among the gods, beloved son of Inanna, for the life of Šulgi, the mighty man, king of Ur, king of the four quarters of the world, Lu-Nanna, son of Su-era, the merchant, dedicated (this vessel) ...”

A further dedicatory inscription is preserved on a marble vessel dedicated to the life of a king of the Ur III Dynasty whose name is not preserved. The text reads:

1. [*lugal-Uri₅(?).^{KI}(?)-ma*]

2. [*lugal-an]-ub-[da-limmu-ba-ke₄*]

3. [*nam-ti]-la-ni-še*

4. [*a mu-na-ru*]

5. [*lu mu-šar]-ra-na*

6. [*šu bi-i*]*n-ur*

7. [*mu-ni bi-ib-sa*]*r-e-a*

8. ^dUtu
9. [lugal(?)]-Zimbir.^{KI}-ra-ke₄
10. [numun]-a-ni
11. he-eb-til-e⁽⁴¹⁾

Translation

“For the life of the king of Ur, king of the four quarters of the world, he dedicated (this vessel). As for whoever erases the inscription of the king and writes his own name in its place, may Šamaš, the god of Sippar, destroy his offspring.”

A final dedicatory inscription is recorded on a stone vessel dedicated by the daughter of King Ur-Namma for the life of her father. The text reads:

1. ^dNin-gal
2. nin-a-ni
3. nam-ti
4. ^dUr-Namma
5. nita-kal-ga
6. lugal-Uri₅^{ki}-ma
7. lugal-ki-en-gi-ki-uri
8. ad-da-na-še
9. En-nirgal-anna
10. en-^dNanna
11. dumu-ki-ag-ni
12. a mu-na-ni⁽⁴²⁾

Translation

“To the goddess Ningal, his lady, for the life of Ur-Namma, the mighty man, king of Sumer and Akkad, her father, En-nirgal-anna, priest of the god Nanna, her beloved child, dedicated (this vessel).”

5- Dedicatory Inscriptions on Mace Heads

Mace heads constitute an important category of ceremonial and symbolic objects in ancient Mesopotamia. Their forms and dimensions varied considerably across different historical periods. Typically, a circular perforation or central hole was drilled through the upper part of the mace head in order to secure a wooden or metal shaft. The mace itself may be defined as a weapon or emblematic object consisting of a handle or shaft—usually made of wood or metal—topped with a solid stone or metal head. In some cases, these heads were carved into zoomorphic forms, such as lions, gazelles, or serpents, while others were decorated with vegetal motifs or abstract ornamental designs⁽⁴³⁾.

Within the corpus of Ur III dedicatory inscriptions, several examples are attested on mace heads. One such inscription, dated to the reign of King Ur-Namma, reads as follows:

1. ^d[Nan]na
2. lugal-a-ni

3. *Ur-Namma*
4. *[nita]-kal-ga*
5. *lugal-Uri₅^{ki}-ma*
6. *lugal-ki-en-gi-ki-uri-ke₄*
7. *[nam-ti]-la-ni-še*
8. *[a] mu-na-ru⁽⁴⁴⁾*

Translation

“To the goddess Nanna, his lady, Ur-Namma, the mighty man, king of Ur, king of Sumer and Akkad, dedicated (this mace head) for his own life.”

Another dedicatory inscription is recorded on a mace head discovered at Susa, likewise dedicated to the life of King Šulgi. The text reads:

1. *^dNin-uru-a-mu-DU*
2. *nin-a-ni*
3. *nam-ti*
4. *^dŠulgi*
5. *nita-kal-ga*
6. *lugal-Uri₅^{ki}-ma*
7. *nin-kisal-še*
8. *Ur-Nigin-mu*
9. *ga-eš₈-a-ab-ba-ka-ke₄*
10. *a mu-na-ru⁽⁴⁵⁾*

Translation

“To the goddess Nin-uru-amudu, his lady, for the life of Šulgi, the mighty man, king of Ur, Nin-kisal-še and Ur-Nigin-mu, merchants of the sea, dedicated (this mace head).”

A further dedicatory inscription is engraved on a mace head dedicated to the life of King Šulgi. The text reads:

1. *^dMeslamta-e-a*
2. *digir-a-ni*
3. *Lu-Nimgir-ke₄*
4. *nam-ti*
5. *Šulgi-še*
6. *a mu-na-ru⁽⁴⁶⁾*

Translation

“To the god Meslamta-ea, his deity, Lu-Nimgir dedicated (this mace head) for the life of Šulgi.”

6- Dedicatory Inscriptions on Seals

The seal, known in Sumerian as *kišib*⁽⁴⁷⁾ (often preceded by the sign *NA₄*, indicating stone materials), represents one of the most important administrative and symbolic objects in ancient Mesopotamia. Its Akkadian equivalent is *kunukku*, and the corresponding verbal form is *kanāku*⁽⁴⁸⁾, meaning “to seal.” Seals functioned not only as instruments of authentication in administrative contexts but also as objects carrying strong ideological and dedicatory significance⁽⁴⁹⁾.

Within the Ur III corpus, several dedicatory inscriptions are attested on seals, as illustrated by the following examples.

1. *^dNin-gišzida*
2. *lugal-a-ni*
3. *nam-ti*
4. *^dŠulgi*
5. *nita-kal-ga-ka-še*
6. *Ni-kalla*
7. *sipa udu-niga-ke₄*
8. *a mu-na-ru*⁽⁵⁰⁾

Translation

“To the god Ningishzida, his lord, for the life of Šulgi, the mighty man, Ni-kalla, the shepherd of fattened sheep, dedicated (this seal).”

This inscription demonstrates that dedicatory practices were not restricted to kings or elite officials, but also extended to professional groups such as shepherds, reflecting a broader social participation in votive traditions during the Ur III period.

Here is another example:

1. *^dNuska*
2. *sukkal-mah*
3. *^dEnlil-la*
4. *lugal-a-ni*
5. *nam-ti*
6. *^dŠulgi*
7. *nita-kal-ga*
8. *lugal-Uri₅^{ki}-ma*
9. *lugal-ki-en-gi-ki-uri-ka-še*
10. *Ur-^dNinibgal*
11. *Ensi₂*
12. *Nibru-^{ki}*
13. *dumu Lugal-engar-du₁₁*
14. *Ensi₂*
15. *Nibru-ki-ka-ke₄*
16. *a mu-na-ru*⁽⁵¹⁾

Translation

“To the god Nuska, the exalted vizier of Enlil, his lord, for the life of Šulgi, the mighty man, king of Ur, king of Sumer and Akkad, Ur-Ninibgal, governor of Nippur, son of Lugal-engardu, governor of Nippur, dedicated (this seal).”

This inscription highlights the administrative elite’s participation in dedicatory practices; particularly high officials associated with major cult centers such as Nippur.

Dedicatory Cylinder Seal from Lagash:

1. ^dMeslamta-ea
2. lugal-a-zi-da
3. Lagaš^{-ki}-ke₄
4. nam-ti-il
5. Šulgi-nita-kal-ga
6. lugal-Uriš^{ki}-ma-ka-še
7. Ki-lu-la gu-za-la
8. dumu Ur-Bagara-ke₄
9. mu-na-dim kišib-ba
10. lugal-mu-gištu-ni-sa₆-ga-ka-ni
11. ga-an-ti-il
12. mu-bi⁽⁵²⁾

Translation

“To the god Meslamta-ea, the rightful king and protective force of Lagash, for the life of Šulgi, the mighty man, king of Ur, Ki-lu-la, throne bearer, son of Ur-Bagara, fashioned this seal for him. The name of this seal is: ‘O king, let me live through your wisdom and goodness.’”

This text demonstrates the ideological dimension of seal production, where even the naming of the object itself becomes part of the dedicatory and symbolic framework.

Another Example:

1. ^dMeslamta-ea
2. lugal-a-ni
3. nam-ti Šulgi-ka-še
4. Ur-^dEN.ZU
5. dumu U-U
6. a mu-na-ru⁽⁵³⁾

Translation

“To the god Meslamta-ea, his lord, for the life of Šulgi, Ur-Sin, son of U-U, dedicated (this seal).”

Overall, these inscriptions demonstrate that seals in the Ur III period were not merely administrative tools but also highly meaningful votive objects embedded within the broader system of royal ideology, social hierarchy, and religious devotion.

7- Dedicatory Inscriptions on Clay Cones:

Clay cones represent one of the most distinctive categories of foundation deposits in ancient Mesopotamia. They were widely used across different historical periods and have been recovered in large quantities from various cities of the region. Typically, these objects were placed beneath door thresholds, at building corners, or within the foundations of walls. Their primary function was commemorative, intended to perpetuate and monumentalize the construction activities of kings.

Within this context, the following inscription is preserved on a clay cone dedicated by the daughter of King Ur-Namma for the life of her father:

1. *⁴Nin-gal*
2. *nin-a-ni*
3. *nam-ti*
4. *Ur-Namma*
5. *nita-kal-ga*
6. *lugal-Uriški-ma*
7. *lugal-ki-en-gi-ki-uri*
8. *ad-da-na-še*
9. *en-Nirgal-anna*
10. *en-⁴Nanna*
11. *dumu-ki-ag-ni*
12. *a mu-na-ru*⁽⁵⁴⁾

Translation

“To the goddess Ningal, his lady, for the life of Ur-Namma, the mighty man, king of Ur, king of Sumer and Akkad, her father, En-Nirgal-anna, priest of the god Nanna, her beloved child, dedicated (this object).”

-General Conclusion

The present study has demonstrated that dedicatory inscriptions of the Ur III period constitute a complex and highly structured system that extends far beyond the simple recording of votive acts. Through the analysis of inscriptions on diverse media—including stone statues, vessels, jewelry, seals, mace heads, and clay cones—it becomes evident that the dedicatory tradition functioned as an integrated cultural mechanism combining material culture, linguistic expression, and ideological construction.

One of the principal findings of this study is the remarkable consistency of the dedicatory formula across different object types. Despite variations in material and function, most inscriptions follow a stable structural pattern: invocation of the deity, identification of the royal or dedicating figure, enumeration of royal titles (when applicable), and the dedicatory clause (*a mu-na-ru*, *a mu-na-dim*, etc.). This formulaic

stability reflects not only scribal convention but also the standardized ideological framework of Ur III kingship, in which the act of dedication served as a formalized expression of loyalty to the divine order.

At the same time, the study has shown that the choice of material was never arbitrary. Stone, metal, precious stones, vessels, and architectural elements each carried distinct symbolic and functional values. High-status materials such as gold, diorite, and carnelian were reserved for objects of exceptional ideological significance, often associated with the king's life, divine favor, or royal family members. In contrast, clay cones and foundation deposits reflect a more architectural and territorial dimension of royal ideology, embedding the king's presence into the physical structure of temples and buildings.

Furthermore, the inclusion of jewelry and personal objects within the dedicatory corpus reveals an important expansion of votive practice into the sphere of private and intimate royal possessions. This phenomenon indicates that dedicatory ideology was not limited to public monuments or state-sponsored constructions, but also permeated personal and familial domains, thereby reinforcing the totalizing nature of religious expression in Ur III society.

From a philological perspective, the study highlights the significance of verbal forms such as *mu-na-ru* and *mu-na-dim*, which function as key indicators of dedicatory action. These forms not only express physical acts of offering or construction but also encode ideological meanings related to kingship, divine legitimacy, and the permanence of royal memory. The frequent presence of curse formulas against the erasure of inscriptions further emphasizes the ancient Mesopotamian concern with textual permanence and the sacred status of written expression.

In conclusion, dedicatory inscriptions in the Ur III period should not be understood merely as commemorative texts or administrative records. Rather, they represent a multilayered communicative system in which materiality, language, religion, and political ideology converge. They articulate the relationship between king, deity, and society, while simultaneously inscribing this relationship into durable objects designed to transcend time. Consequently, the Ur III dedicatory corpus provides a fundamental key for understanding the ideological foundations of Mesopotamian kingship and the role of writing as a vehicle for constructing and preserving sacred and political order.

- **Footnotes:**

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- 2- George, George Nazir, *The Great Dictionary of Theological and Ecclesiastical Terms*, Beirut, 2nd ed., 2017, p. 35.
- 3- Al-Me'marei, Raad Salem Mohammed Jassim, *Stones and Minerals in Mesopotamia in Light of Cuneiform Sources*, Master's Thesis (unpublished), University of Mosul, 2006, p. 44. See also: Black, J., and others, *A Concise Dictionary of Akkadian*, Wiesbaden, 2th, ed., 2000, (CDA) , P.429.
- 4- Rimush: Son of Sharrukin of Akkad, he ruled for nine years during the period (2278-2270 BC). King Rimush spent most of his reign suppressing rebellions and military campaigns. See: Al-Najafi, Hassan, *Dictionary of Terms and Figures in Ancient Iraq*, Baghdad, p. 175.
- 5- Frayne, D, *Ur 3 Period (2112- 2004 B.C)*, RIME, Vol.3/2, Toronto, 1997.
- 6- Gudea: The twelfth king of the second dynasty of Lagash and its greatest king ever, he ruled for (20) years during the period (2144-2124 BC). His rule was characterized by the flourishing of sciences, arts, knowledge, construction and urban works. See: Al-Najafi, Hassan, op.cit, p. 86.

- 7- Damerow , p , Sigrist , M, Mesopotamian , Year Names Neo-Sumerian and Old Babylonian Date Formula, 2001, p.63.
 - 8- CDA , P.274.
 - 9- Abi-Sin: He is the son of King (Shu-Sin) and the last king of the Third Dynasty of Ur. He ruled for (25) years during the period from (2027-2003 BC). His rule was characterized by political instability and the secession of many provinces from Sumerian influence. See: Al-Najafi, Hassan, op.cit, p. 99.
 - 10- CDA, P267.
 - 11- Al-Me'marei, Raad Salem Mohammed Jassim, op.cit, p. 69.
 - 12- CDA, P.267.
 - 13- Al-Me'marei, Raad Salem Mohammed Jassim, op.cit, p. 69.
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 - 17- Ismail, Khalid Salem, "The Significant Signs in Cuneiform Writings", Rafidain Arts Magazine, Issue 38, 2004, p. 204.
 - 18- Ur-Nama: King (Ur-Nama) is considered the founder of the Third Dynasty of Ur (which ruled for 108 years from 2112-2004 BC). See: Al-Najafi, Hassan, op.cit, p. 99.
 - 19- Rashid, Subhi Anwar, Sumerian Foundation Statues, Baghdad, 1980, p. 44.
 - 20- RIME, Vol.3/2.1.2.56; Steible, H., Die Neusumerischen Bau-und Weihinschriften, Vol. II, (SNBW), Stuttgart, 1989, PP. 93-94.
 - 21- Abdul Wahed, Hassanein Haider, Cuneiform Writings on Seal Prints of Officials in the Third Dynasty of Ur, Baghdad, 2023, p. 16.
 - 22- RIME , Vol.1.3/2.1.5.5.; Steible, H., op. cit, p.284;
- Mahmood, M. A., Unpublished Jewelry from Haditha Dam Basin Rescue Project site (Tilbis Island, Jidaida, and Jaraa Wall), Athar al-rafedain Journal, Vol.11, No.2, 2026, pp. 41-60, <https://athar.uomosul.edu.iq/index.php/athar/article/view/55947> .
- 23- Labat, René, Dictionary of Cuneiform Signs, translated by Father Albert, Walid Al-Jader and Khaled Salem Ismail, reviewed by Dr. Amer Suleiman, Baghdad, 2004, p. 151.
 - 24- Ipid, p. 151.
 - 25- CDA ,P.360.
 - 26- CDA , P.75.
 - 27- REMI , 3/2.1.2.60.
 - 28- REMI , 3/2.1.2.88, Wilke, C., Das Lugalbandaepos, (ZA), Wiesbaden, 1968, P.219.
 - 29- REMI ,3/2.1.5.2004.
 - 30- REMI , 3/2.1.2.55.
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 - 32- REMI , 3/2.1.2.2012.
 - 33- REMI , 3/2.1.5.2005.
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 - 35- Khalil, Layal Ismail Al-Hilali, The Jewelry on Assyrian Sculpture Scenes, Master's Thesis (Unpublished), University of Mosul, 2008, p. 5.
 - 36- REMI , 3/2.1.2.62.
 - 37- Al-Muhammad, Saad Nouri Ahmed Abdul Qader, Cuneiform Writings on Pots in Ancient Iraq, Master's Thesis (Unpublished), University of Mosul, 2009, p. 4.
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