In the middle of the third millennium, the ruling Akkadian elite introduced new traditions into Sumer which resulted, among other things, in a wide-ranging harmonization of their own gods with those of the Sumerian pantheon. A complete Sumerian-Akkadian syncretism, however, did not apply for all deities. During the reign of the Akkadian kings, a shift in influence between two important deities of the Sumerian pantheon occurred as the moon-god Nanna/Suen rose to prominence, displacing the sun-god Utu/Samas. Discovering when this shift took place is difficult to pinpoint because Sargonic Sumerian religion is poorly documented. Also, convincing archival data are only available from the time of Naram-Suen.

In the following I will argue, with examples taken from official art, that this shift most likely happened during the reign of Naram-Suen, when a new imperial ideology is discernible from visual imagery, showing the king assuming the role of the sun-god. Utilizing Ur III textual sources I will also demonstrate that the three gods shown on the seal drawn as Fig. 1 are depicted with their cult places: Enki/Ea in the Abzu, Utu/Samaš in the fields, probably in an open-air shrine, and Nanna/Suen on the ziggurat, signifying — contrary to mainstream scholarly opinion — that ziggurats already existed in Sumer prior to the Ur III period.

The seal analysed below is from Ur and cut in mature Akkadian style, reflecting the status quo of religious awareness at the time when it was engraved. A highly interesting scene is depicted, showing the sun-god and the moon-god in attitudes of adoration in front of the enthroned Enki/Ea. The seal-cutter used a variety of components that were in vogue at this time, mixing them with antiquated elements in order to emphasize the moon-god’s higher rank. He indicated the sun-god’s reduced status, for example, by attiring him in “old-fashioned” headgear, while the moon-god and Enki/Ea wear “modern” headgear. The craftsperson chose specific iconological elements to transform these abstract ideas into visual images.

Akkadian cylinder seals, such as that depicted in Fig. 1, are considered one of the high points of Mesopotamian craftsmanship. Their broad palette of motifs executed in an elaborate naturalistic and vivid style has long attracted the attention of researchers. Yet their importance for the analysis of material culture, as well as for our understanding of ancient social and religious concepts, has often been undervalued by scholars. In this paper I shall be taking a multi-layered approach, analysing the seal in its textual, historical and socio-political context. Since seals consist of complex networks of figurative and non-figurative images used as pictorial systems of communication for transmitting information through signs, they are excellent tools for research that can produce far-reaching results, especially when contemporary written sources are silent.

Three divine protagonists

Over the years, seal Fig. 1 has intrigued various researchers. E. Porada, for instance, devoted an article to it (Porada 1960) while H. Frankfort dealt with it in the subchapter “Marduk before Ea” in his seminal work, Cylinder Seals (Frankfort 1939: 102 f.). These and other studies have tended to be narrowly focused on particular aspects of this seal. In addition, the significance of its provenance has usually been overlooked.

The seal, fitted with copper caps and given the find number U. 9750, was unearthed in grave PG 699 in Ur and is currently kept in the Iraq Museum in Baghdad. Besides pottery, this seal lay among other burial objects such as gold and silver ear-rings, beads, a dagger, a pin, an axe, rings and bracelets. These precious grave goods indicate that a high-ranking person must have

1"Almost everything pertaining to the Sargonic period is a matter of controversy" (Westenholz 1999: 18). For an overall view of the Akkadians and their culture, see Westenholz 1999.

2Fig. 1 was drawn by the author. Its scale, roughly 2:1, is based on Legrain’s photograph (Legrain 1929: No. 76). See Woolley 1934: PI. 215 No. 364; Boehmer 1965: Fig. 488. In the very same grave, lapis-lazuli seal U. 9751 was found, consisting of two registers filled with striding herbivores (Woolley 1934: PI. 212 No. 298).
been laid to rest in grave PG 699. Unlike the pottery, seal U. 9750 can be more precisely dated with the help of iconography, as demonstrated below.\(^4\)

Seal Fig. 1 was cut with a flat tool which did not allow fine curved lines. Nor did the seal-cutter pay careful attention when cutting, for example, straight horizontal lines. Thus, the importance of seal Fig. 1 does not lie in its craftsmanship but in the extraordinary depiction itself which one would expect of a high-ranking person: three gods are shown with specific iconological features, two of which have other figures associated with them. In the centre of the scene, a god is enthroned in a chamber surrounded by water; streams of water issue from his shoulders; plants are positioned above these streams. The god is attired in a flounced garment and wears headgear consisting of a pair of large horns with the tips converging in the middle, over which two smaller pairs of horns arise. This specific type of headgear provides a valuable tool for dating the seal because it is attested for the first time in Naram-Suen’s reign, which is, therefore, the \textit{terminus post quem} for when this seal was engraved.\(^5\)

A kneeling “hairy” figure \textit{en profil} and holding a gate-post faces the god from whom the water streams. Placed behind the kneeling figure is a monster with a lion’s head and a snake’s body, covered in scales, with forelegs.\(^6\) Like the “hairy” figure, the monster also faces the enthroned god, forming a contextual unit with the god in the water chamber.

The enthroned god presents a point of reference for the two standing gods. The god next to the enthroned deity wears a short flounced skirt and the same headgear as the enthroned one. Rays issue from his left shoulder but — most probably due to a lack of space — not from his right one. In his right hand he holds a long stick that terminates in what appears to be a cow’s tail. He ascends a stylized mountain on top of which stands a lightweight structure.

\(^4\) The grave itself and its two seals were dated by H. J. Nissen as Middle Akkadian, the pottery as from the Early Akkadian to the Neo-Sumerian periods while the other finds were classified as ranging from Middle Akkadian to Neo-Sumerian (Nissen 1966: 174).

\(^5\) For different types of headgear and their chronology, see Boehmer 1972-5: 432; 1967: 278. According to Porada 1960: 116, the seal was cut during the reign of Šar-kali-šarrī, but unfortunately she does not provide any criteria for her proposed dating.

\(^6\) Porada 1960: 117, interprets the monster as “a lion with upcurving wings”. A snake’s body, however, is clearly visible on the seal; furthermore, there is no logical connection between the alleged wings and the monster’s body. The identity of this monster is open to conjecture. According to Wiggermann 1989: 126, dragon types “may have legs, and sometimes leonine heads”. As a consequence “lions” (pirig/labbu) and \textit{muš}-dragons cannot always be distinguished from one another.
Another god is placed next to the ascending god, with rays radiating from both his shoulders. He is attired in a pleated skirt and in his left hand holds a curved serrated blade. In contrast to the other deities, this god's headgear consists of three pairs of upright horns attached to a cone. This is the "old-fashioned" style of headgear worn by deities in Akkadian times prior to Naram-Suen. One of this god's legs rests on the shoulder of a small kneeling god who wears the same type of headgear — but with only two instead of three pairs of upright horns, indicating his inferior position. The god with the "old-fashioned" headgear is framed on each side by a reed bundle. From the iconological point of view it is clear that these are not pairs of wings as some scholars have suggested (see fn. 6) but rather reeds bound together by horizontally wound rope — a man-made construction.

Setting sun, rising moon and an Akkadian ziggurat

At the present state of research, the identification of the three deities is free of controversy. The enthroned god is Ea/Enki, indicated by the presence of the streams of water, and his servant, the kneeling "hairy" figure holding a gate-post, is a laḫmu (Wiggermann 1992: 153).

The second god, with his serrated blade, commonly identified as a saw, and long pleated skirt, is martial in character; the rays emanating from his shoulders clearly denote his solar quality. This is the sun-god Utu/Samaš. On seal Fig. 1 he stands at the edge of the scene and is defined by "old-fashioned" headgear, indicating his lower rank. Interestingly, on seals commonly characterized as mature Akkadian, such as seal Fig. 1, the sun-god is never depicted wearing the type of headgear that was in vogue for major gods at that time, such as Ea/Enki. The kneeling god, upon whose shoulder Utu/Samaš has placed his foot as he ascends into the sky, could be reminiscent of one of the minor gods who holds a gate open for the rising sun-god, an image frequently depicted on Akkadian seals. Moreover, on seal Fig. 1 the sun-god does not rise between two mountains — in contrast to numerous seals from the Akkadian period — but from a field. We will refer to this below.

Lastly, we come to the third god, who is ascending a stylized "mountain". His identity can be established with the help of a mature Akkadian seal found in a grave in Nippur (Fig. 2). This seal shows the enthroned Enlil with two of his sons — the weather-god and the moon-god.
our context it is of importance that the moon-god — who carries a scimitar over his shoulder and is identified by headgear topped by a crescent — stands between two mountains. Placed at his side is a tripod terminating in bull’s hooves and adorned with a kind of pennant. From the iconography of the moon-god on the Nippur seal it is clear that both the sun-god and the moon-god were depicted rising between two mountains. This has led to a re-evaluation of deities on Akkadian seals formerly identified with the sun-god (Braun-Holzinger 1993: 126 f.; Collon 1995: 372). What does this mean for our seal? Based on his solar qualities, the staff which he clutches in his hand and the fact that Ur (which was the find spot of seal Fig. 1) was the moon-god’s main cult-centre in Sumer, the ascending deity is most probably Nanna/Suen.

As we have seen, the seal-cutter assigned different ranks to all three gods on seal Fig. 1. In the hierarchy, Enki/Ea, the patron of Eridu, stands above the other two deities. Placing Enki/Ea at the focal point of the seal, despite Ur being the city of the moon-god Nanna/Suen, indicates that Eridu theology formed the foundation for the religious scheme behind the seal’s depiction. Eridu was situated only twenty kilometres from Ur and by tradition was the oldest city in Sumer. Enki/Ea was important for the agricultural cycle, where irrigation began in January/February when the first seedlings appeared after a period of inactivity. According to Sumerian belief, Enki/Ea is enthroned in the Abzu which is furnished with “hairy ones” and snakes, as can be seen on the seal.

Ranked next in the hierarchy is the moon-god, attired in the same type of headgear as Enki/Ea. Although on seal Fig. 1 the moon-god and the sun-god are shown rising, in reality the positioning of the sun-god behind the moon-god (plus the sun-god’s “old-fashioned” headgear) symbolically indicates the moon ascending over the sun. The hierarchical triad shown on seal Fig. 1 is also found in personal names which, in general, reflect the official local pantheon: among the gods included in Sargonic names from Northern Babylonia during the reigns of Naram-Suen and Šarrukín, Ea and Suen commonly occur — Šamaš, however, only sporadically.

While Enki/Ea is depicted in his abode, the Abzu, the sun-god and the moon-god are placed in different cultic settings. First, let us look at the moon-god and his most famous cult site, the ziggurat. Examining these two will demonstrate that a ziggurat is in all probability depicted on seal Fig. 1.

The most prominent feature in ancient Ur was the ziggurat, located in the western corner of the north-eastern end of the temenos. The ziggurat was apparently of special importance as the place of worship for the moon-god since no lower temple of the moon-god has yet been unearthed. Moreover, the significance of the ziggurat’s position for Ur’s cultic topography is evident when surveying certain features of the Ur cultic entity which are oriented towards the ziggurat. According to general scholarly opinion, Ur-Namma, the founder of the Third Dynasty of Ur, was

15 The moon-god rising from the mountains is the subject of various hymns, cf. Hall 1985: 516: “The gate of Suen is a mountain great”; see also “born of the mountains” (ibid. p. 493).

16 Contrary to this, Porada 1960: 123, identifies this god with the warrior god “Amal”, while Boehmer 1965: 84, interprets both standing celestial deities as two aspects of the sun-god.

17 Stamped bricks found throughout the city of Ur mention that Amar-Suen built for Enki “his beloved Abzu” (Frayne 1997, 260–2 No. 15); bricks with the same inscription were discovered at Eridu. According to the Ekišnugal Hymn Enki created Nanna’s Abzu and established its purification rituals, cf. Ekišnugal Hymn 56 (Green 1975: 162): “shrine abzu, lofty dais of Ur” (Hall 1985: 401), and Nanna’s rise is described as “when he comes out of the darkened mountains, he stood like Utu (stands) at noon” (Hall 1985: 488).

18 See also an Old Akkadian mythological composition from Ebla, which was in all probability composed in Sippar, documenting how Ea was more important than Šamaš (Lambert 1989). Ea’s prominent position in Akkadian culture is evident as well from the Maništusu Obelisk, see Westenholz 1999: 78 f.

19 According to Nanna hymns it is clear that Nanna took on aspects of the sun-god when his temple is described as “the temple which arises like (?) the sun” (Hall 1985: 401), and Nanna’s rise is described as “when he comes out of the darkened mountains, he stood like Utu (stands) at noon” (Hall 1985: 488).

20 See also Fischer, forthcoming 2002. Please note that an analysis of the archaeological evidence of the ziggurat at Ur and elsewhere is not the subject of the present paper. However, high terraces with steep sides were already in existence from the Ubaid period on. “Archaic” high terraces have been excavated in Eridu, beginning with Level XI (Ubaid), see Heinrich 1982: 28 Fig. 60. For high terraces in Uruk see Stlrenhagen 1999: 170, and Heinrich 1982: 63 Fig. 80. It should also be remembered that when Woolley cut into the west corner of the ziggurat terrace (Woolley 1939: 6), Uruk-period clay cones were found, providing evidence of cultic continuity on a monumental scale.
the first to build a ziggurat at Ur. It has long been suspected, however, that predecessors of the Ur III ziggurat existed, but conclusive archaeological proof has yet to be established. Based on iconography and analogy, though, seal Fig. 1 can be taken as an example of a depiction of a ziggurat located at Ur towards the end of the Akkadian period.

A shrine planted on top of a “mountain” (i.e. a ziggurat) is indicated by the names and metaphors that ancient Mesopotamians provided for temples of patron deities, such as “House that reaches to heaven like a great mountain”. The craftperson of our seal could have, therefore, used the scale-like ornamentation to denote an abstract, stylized mountain for the actual ziggurat. In addition, this artificial mountain consists of different stages — clearly indicated by horizontal lines — placed one on top of the other. From an iconological point of view, it is highly likely that a lightweight building, for instance a reed shrine (eš-gi), and not a temple made of brickwork, was placed upon the uppermost terrace. Reed shrines have been documented as cult places for various gods during the Ur III period. Since we do not have applicable Akkadian ritual texts from Ur we have to rely on documents which supply parallels for the seal’s cultic scenery and provide further information about the relationship between both the celestial deities depicted on our seal. Consulting Ur III texts in order to analyse a seal scene from the mature Akkadian period is fruitful, for both periods share strong political, religious and ideological ties.

At this juncture, a text from Ibbi-Suen’s seventh year of reign (UET III No. 235) is of major importance. The text is a balanced account and refers to offerings that took place at midnight on the fifth day of the first month of the akiti festival during the harvesting season. The passage runs: animal offerings “for Nanna, after the god had returned to the shrine (4Nanna-šē eš gi4-ām); one goat for Utu and a sheep [offered in (?)] the [. . .] field (1 maš siskūr 4Utu [. . .], 1 udu siskūr a-sā x [. . .])”. In addition, offerings for Nanna at the akiti house (4Nanna-šē sā ·ki-ti) and further animal offerings, booked at Ur (ša Uri₄₁,k₁-ma), are mentioned. This text highlights offering activities during the akiti festival for Utu in a field and for Nanna at his main shrine at Ur — most likely at the ziggurat since no lower temple has been found. The akiti festival’s most prominent protagonist was Nanna. It was a celebration of Nanna’s visible superiority over Utu in the sky, especially in the seventh month (Cohen 1993: 140 f.). The two akiti festivals fell within a period between the equinoxes — in spring and autumn — when the sun and the moon are in competition with each other for time in the sky. In addition, placing the moon and sun gods together on seal Fig. 1 conveyed a cosmic message which was also reflected in the cultic calendar. From celestial omens of the first millennium we know that a full moon was defined as when the moon and the sun were seen together. Textual sources from the late third millennium give evidence of

---

22 On the other hand, Heinrich considered a ziggurat with stages at regular intervals prior to Ur-Namma unlikely, because Ur-Namma would have built an old-fashioned structure instead of a modern one (Heinrich 1982: 144). Heinrich’s statement is an argumentum e silentio because the Ur III kings took the kings of Akkad as their role models for imperial ideology.

23 It has been assumed that a staged tower existed in Lagāš during the reign of Gudea (Suter 1997). For another perspective see also van Ess 2001: 325 f. It should be noted that the author merely dismisses the possibility of ziggurats existing in the Akkadian period without offering any evidence to support her claim.

24 Cf. Gudea Cyl. B xxiv 9 (Edzard 1997: 101). See also George 1993: 110 No. 480: “House, skillfully-built mountain” (ē-ṣur-sag-galam(-ma) which is documented in Ur III offering lists and refers to Enil’s cella on the ziggurat at Nippur; for further evidence see ibid. pp. 100 f.)

25 Heinrich 1982: 144, however, interprets this construction as an “Altāřchen”. Because of its proportions, a “small altar” seems to be very unlikely.


27 When taking the chronological overlap of both dynasties into consideration, P. J. Huber (Huber 1999–2000: 71) determined, based on eclipses mentioned in omen texts, that the first year of Ur-Namma’s reign fell approximately in the year 2146 BC. Ur-Namma would have therefore been a contemporary of Su-Durul, the last documented king of Akkade.

28 See Cohen 1993: 409 f.; Hall 1985: 336; Sallaberger 1993/2: Table 61a. Unlike Cohen and Hall, Sallaberger 1993/1: 180 with fn. 847, argues that Nanna returned to the akiti house in Gaēš after rites in the field around Gaēš had been performed.

29 Cf. also Cohen 1996: 15, who points out that the major festivals in Ur marked turning points in the duration of the moon’s appearance in the sky in relation to that of the sun, creating a calendar whose cardinal points were approximately the equinoxes and the solstices.

30 I would like to thank S. M. Maul for this observation.

31 Cf. Hunger 1992: 230 No. 405, which is a report sent by a Neo-Babylonian scholar: “If the moon and sun are in opposition: the king of the land will widen his understanding; mercy and well-being are for him. I.e., on the 14th day the moon and the sun are seen together”.

---
festival activities during the full moon.\textsuperscript{32} Could seal Fig. 1 embody the abstract idea of an Akkadian ritual during a full moon similar to the akiti in the Ur III period? Moreover, Enki/Ea, who occupies the central position on seal Fig. 1, also played a role within the Ur cultic calendar attested in Sargonic times where the month of the “Eating of the Male gur-fish of Enki” was dedicated to this god.\textsuperscript{33} Additionally, Enki was part of the Ur III akiti festivals of the first and seventh months at Ur: balanced accounts document animal offerings for Enki (Sallaberger 1993/1: 223). This is evidence for the close connection between Ur and the cult of Enki in Eridu.

During the Third Dynasty of Ur, there was no regular cult of the sun-god Utu/Šamaš in the capital; only a few attestations mention cultic activity for him,\textsuperscript{34} among them a text (\textit{UET III} No. 267) that lists the sun-god along with other deities whose main cults were outside Ur (Cohen 1996: 13). In contrast to this, “the place of Utu” (ki-\textsuperscript{4}Utu) played an important role in the Ur III period for the enthronement of high priestesses. It has been convincingly argued (Richter 1999: 210 f.) that terms constructed by using ki + a deity of astral or atmospheric character most likely refer to an open-air shrine,\textsuperscript{35} which would mean that ki-\textsuperscript{4}Utu is the sun-god’s open-air shrine. This ties in neatly with seal Fig. 1, where the sun-god Utu/Šamaš ascends from a man-made reed structure, which is most probably a cult place, perhaps the ki-\textsuperscript{4}Utu, of the sun-god located in the fields.\textsuperscript{36}

In Akkadian and Ur III theology, Utu/Šamaš was a son of Nanna/Suen. This concept of the father-son relationship might have been formed during the later phase of the Akkadian period, when it is clear from textual and visual sources that the sun-god was lower in rank than the moon-god.\textsuperscript{37} It is puzzling, however, that according to Ur III sources Utu was never worshipped together with his father — even at Ur — although it was very common for father and son to receive offerings together, such as Nanna and his father Enlil in Nippur. Interestingly, the sun-god was frequently listed for offerings in the palace together with the goddesses Inanna and Ninegal,\textsuperscript{38} indicating that the sun-god was of special importance for royal ideology. This will be examined in the next section.

The sun king

In the existing god lists that have come down to us, the sun-god Utu/Šamaš is never awarded a supreme rank. He is only poorly attested during the Akkadian period and during the reign of the Ur III kings, based on evidence from Ur and Nippur, where he was one of the “minor” gods.\textsuperscript{39} In this section we will examine the prospective reasons for the sun-god’s lower position. Intimately connected to this is the shift of importance between the sun-god and the moon-god and a new imperial ideology which is for the first time perceptible during the reign of Naram-Suen,\textsuperscript{40} when the king transforms himself into a divine being.

The Sumerian sun-god Utu, it should be pointed out, did not always have a secondary status. Utu is, for instance, well represented in the pre-Sargonic period, especially in the mythological tradition of the early kings of Uruk. Several old Sumerian kings speak of Utu as “their king”. The Sumerian King List names Meskiaggaser, a ruler of the First Dynasty of Uruk, as a “son of Utu”. In Sargonic Uruk a temple for Utu existed for which an administrator worked.\textsuperscript{41}
Furthermore, Lugalzagesi of Uruk, who was defeated by Sargon of Akkade, referred to himself in royal inscriptions as the one “named by Utu”. In addition, he considered himself a grand-vizier of Suen and a military governor of Utu, emphasizing Utu’s martial quality. With his omnipresent rays illuminating all, the sun-god was also the dispenser of justice and protector of the existing order throughout all periods.

These dynamic qualities must have appeared immensely attractive to a king seeking the tools and symbols that would assist him in justifying and expanding his rule. Naram-Suen was the first Mesopotamian ruler to have his name written with the divine determinative. This new concept of divine kingship was carried on by the Ur III kings beginning with Šulgi. Moreover, Naram-Suen (beloved of Suen) was the first to include the theophoric element Suen in his throne name. One of the most impressive objects of Mesopotamian representative art is associated with the name of this remarkable king — a stela commemorating Naram-Suen’s victory over the Lullubeans, epitomizing imperial ideology and the king’s own divine status. On this stela the king dominates a mountainous scene, striking an ascending pose similar to that usually adopted by the sun-god on Akkadian seals.

Standing gods on Akkadian seals are, in general, of martial character, a characteristic now taken over by the standing king. On his shoulder Naram-Suen carries one of the pre-eminent weapons of the day, the composite bow and, significantly, he is adorned with a horned helmet. In having himself thus depicted he was ranking himself with or perhaps even above Sargon, the founder of the Akkadian dynasty, who was merely depicted holding a mace (Orthmann 1975: No. 99a). Indeed, Naram-Suen’s horned helmet removes him from the earthly sphere as he takes on the status of a divine hero.

Of special importance is that Naram-Suen’s victory stela was originally erected in Sippar — most likely in Šamaš’s temple — prior to its removal in the second millennium by the Elamites.

Naram-Suen’s message to the people of his land, which must have been a provocation to the established priesthood, was clear: the stela’s purpose was not to worship Šamaš but to celebrate Naram-Suen as the new victorious sun-god of his realm. No longer a human being, he has boldly assumed the attributes and status of the sun-god himself. His subjects even requested, according to the inscription on the well-known statue from Bassettki (Frayne 1993: 113 f. No. 10 II. 24 and 49), that Naram-Suen “be (made) the god of their city”, Akkade. Although the Sumerian kings had always considered themselves conduits between the earthly and the divine they had never, as far as we know, taken the profound step of seeing man as a god himself.

Naram-Suen was not the only Akkadian king who played with an image of himself as the sun-god. A seal mentioning Naram-Suen’s son Šar-kali-sarri, which was owned by Lugal-usumgal, a governor of Lagaš, shows a figure in a martial pose, a weapon on his left shoulder as he grips its shaft in his left hand (Fig. 3). This weapon has been overlooked by researchers. Since there is

43 Naram-Suen also adorned himself with the innovative titulatary lugal ki-ib-tam ar-ba-im which was also used by Ur III kings (Sumerian: lugal-an-ub-da-limmu-ba).
44 For an overall view of this stela see Bändter 1995, especially p. 179 referring to Naram-Suen taking the sun-god’s stance.
45 For the king as a divine hero see Fischer 2000: 317.
46 Nissen 1986: 193, considers Naram-Suen’s self-deification an attempt to deprive the local priesthood, which was the strongest opponent of centralized power, of their economic basis, by transforming himself into a city god.
48 AOT b. 390 (sealing); Fig. 3 was drawn by the author, its scale identical with Delaporte 1920: Pl. 9 No. 7T. 106. “AOT b. 390” is the only fragment on which the anthropomorphic figures are preserved. This fragment shows an adoration scene of mediocre quality depicting a worshipper, most likely with a sacrificial animal, and a supporting goddess in a pleated garment. There are no traces of the standing figure’s headdress visible from which one could plausibly reconstruct multiple headgear as has been done in a drawing published in Delaporte 1920: 12. Upon closer examination, it is apparent that this figure wears a short martial garment. It should be noted that, as Delaporte points out (ibid. p. 12), “Les deux personnages de gauche sont en partie restituées d’après le premier sceau de l’ishak-kou”. Cf. also Boehmer 1965: Fig. 432, which is a photomontage consisting of two other fragments (Delaporte 1920: Pl. 9 Nos. 8 and 9) that were combined with AOT b. 390, even though none of the three fragments shares the same fracture lines. For the seal inscription see Frayne 1993: 200 No. 2004, and Gelb and Kienast 1990: 46 S-32: i Šar-kali-sarri (without divine determinative) / the mighty / king / of Akkade // ii Lugal-usumgal / governor / of Lagaš / your servant. For Lugal-usumgal’s earlier seal mentioning Naram-Suen (name with divine determinative), cf. Boehmer 1965: Fig. 431; Delaporte 1920: Pl. 9 Nos. 2-4 T. 105; Gelb and Kienast 1990: 42 S-13; Frayne 1993: 165 f. No. 2004. The seal depicts an adoration scene with a worshipper and a female messenger deity in front of a major god with multiple
a strong link between the king referred to in the seal inscription and the depiction, it could very well be that Šar-kali-šarrī appropriates the sun-god's image, too. He is also presented as a “heroic god of Akkade” in an inscription on one of the seals of Lugalgiš, an official. The sun-god's diminished position resulting from this transformation is reflected by two roughly cut seals which were apparently owned by two different high priestesses of Utu. Both seals date to the late Akkadian period. The position of these two high priestesses was not prestigious enough for high-quality seals to be placed with them in their graves.

The Akkadian concept of the king as the sun-god was carried on by the kings of the Third Dynasty of Ur. Šulgi, the most prominent king of this dynasty, was regarded by his people as the sun-god, which is made abundantly clear from a seal that was owned by a governor of a site called “Šulgi (is) the sun-god” (Šul-gi-šUtus). His successor, Amar-Suen, referred to himself in a royal inscription as the “true god, sun-god of his land”. Moreover, Amar-Suen is the first Ur III king who had the theophoric element Suen in his throne name, reinforcing the inseparable bond between Ur’s celestial and earthly kings. Seal impressions preserved from Ibbi-Suen’s reign at the end of the Ur III period are reminiscent of visual imagery from Naram-Suen’s stela representing the king as a divine hero striking the sun-god’s pose. They show the standing king attired in a short garment which he normally wears in a martial context.

The close bond between the king and the sun-god was continued by the Babylonian king Hammurapi who calls himself “sun-god of Babylon” in the prologue of the Codex Hammurapi. The contextual connection between both is reflected in the Assyrian custom of writing the word king (sarru) as the number twenty, a type of cryptography for the sun-god Utu/Samas. Behind this lies the Mesopotamian idea that the king appears to his subjects as the sun-god and in this guise leads them along the rightful path (Maul 1999a: 303 f.), just as the sun maintains the harmony of the universe by its continual reappearance and by keeping to its own unwavering path across the sky.

The Assyrians and Babylonians saw a connection between the sun, which maintains order within creation, and the earthly social order (Maul 1999b: 202, 206 f.). The king appropriated this headgear and probably rays emanating from his shoulders. Above the inscription panel of the last inscription line in the first column, there is an eagle which is missing from all the published drawings of this seal. I discovered its existence when examining the seal impression at the Louvre.

50 See Woolley 1934: Pl. 214 No. 338 (U. 11452, PG 986); ibid. No. 339 (U. 11458, PG 1003); lapis lazuli with gold caps; in the same grave a contest seal was found (U. 11457, ibid. Pl. 213 No. 317). Both seals show a female worshipper in front of a seated person; it is hard to tell whether the enthroned figure wears headgear or not; seal inscription: en šUtus.
53 For this imagery see Fischer 1998: 241 f.
54 On the relief of the stela (Orthmann 1975: No. 181), however, the king and the sun-god are represented, indicating that the line between the earthly and heavenly spheres is blurred.
responsibility for the harmonious functioning of the socio-political structure. A source of charismatic power and the yoke binding social values together, he vividly symbolized the cosmic order. He became the living image of the sun-god, presenting himself as the god of his subjects.

From god to man

In taking on the accoutrements of the sun-god, Naram-Suen enhanced his own importance while concomitantly diminishing the sun-god’s significance, a victory in a broader sense of man over the gods. The symbolism of a martial god of justice was the perfect role model for a king. Just as the sun spread light and harmony, so the king desired to spread justice in a harmonious reign. Upon subjugating a people, taking over the attributes of the sun-god must have been most useful for a king such as Naram-Suen, a power move against the priesthood — a further example of the profound social, religious and political transformations brought about by the Akkadians.

Every system of visual communication poses problems of coding and interpretation. This paper has offered a possible explanation of a seal rich in cosmic-religious and political complexity. The aim was also to provide impetus for other researchers to explore the themes presented here or to offer their own interpretations, hopefully utilizing a dual approach that makes use of both archaeological and textual evidence.

One may anticipate arguments against some of the interpretations presented within this paper. To date, for example, no archaeological evidence has been found proving the existence of ziggurats in the Akkadian period. But given the visual imagery on seal Fig. 1 with its staged structure, the textual evidence, plus the grandiose nature of the Akkadians themselves, it would not be surprising if they had built such monumental structures.

Although the moon-god rose in importance as the sun-god weakened, by the end of the Third Dynasty of Ur the moon-god, too, began fading into the twilight. Nanna/Suen as the celestial representation of centralized power was no longer needed. This is, perhaps, the ultimate legacy of the Akkadians, a culture which produced men bold enough to dare to equal themselves to the gods.55

References


---

55 I am indebted to S. M. Maul, R. de Maaijer and D. Strenhagen for reading through the manuscript and commenting on it. Special thanks go to M. Browne.


