REFLECTIONS ON THE TRANSLATABILITY OF THE NOTION OF HOLINESS

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Even while I was still a student in ancient Near Eastern languages, the question of whether the notion of the "holy" is an adequate concept to apply to ancient Near Eastern religions, their world view and their cult always simmered in the back of my mind.[1] Although I cannot treat the question in a comprehensive way in this article, I would like to take this opportunity to raise a few questions regarding the complicated aspect of the translatability of cultures.[2] It is with real pleasure that I dedicate these considerations to Simo Parpola who, like myself, passionately pursued the question of how to approach ancient Near Eastern religions.

My approach is twofold. First I survey some examples of former Biblical and ancient Near Eastern scholarship tackling the issue in order to sensitize the reader to the problem. In a second step I will take the microscopic venue and discuss the Sumerian words dadag and ku(-g) especially in the context of temple building to show how the perception and conception of the temple changed over time in the history of Mesopotamia.

While "holiness" has been a topic of considerable interest in Classical and Biblical studies in the last decades, scholars of Near Eastern studies have only very recently dealt with this issue. However, as often happens, ancient Near Eastern research has followed the model set by biblical scholarship failing to recognize that studies of cult in ancient Israel, for instance, were at least in part evaluated negatively in German Protestant thought.[3] In Biblical studies, the topics of cult and "holiness" were closely connected with the Book of Leviticus, a translation of cultic norms

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[2] Budick & Iser 1996, Rubel & Rosman 2003.

[3] Studies on cult in ancient Israel and Judah have found sympathetic reflections mainly in Roman Catholic thought, and, as advanced by Ph. P. Jenson, "a second factor which encouraged a negative evaluation of the cult (or certain aspects of it) is to be found in the Bible itself, above all in the prophetic criticism of the cult," see Jenson 1992: 16–17.

into literature.[4] Until recently, at the lexical level, Old testament scholars stuck to the traditional rendering of "holy' for *qōdeš*, "profane" for *ḥōl,* "clean" or "pure" for *ṭāhôr*, and "unclean" or "impure" for *ṭāmēʾ* thereby already introducing through their translations the modern dichotomy of "sacred" and "profane."[5] H. Ringgren justified this translation with the following comment:

> Im AT sind *qōdeš* (heilig) und *ḥōl* (profan) einander ausschließende Begriffsinhalte (vgl. Lev. 10,10; Ez. 44,23); sie beruhen auf allgemein menschlicher Erfahrung, so daß deren Unterschiedlichkeit bzw. Gegensätzlichkeit auch in der religions-wissenschaftlichen Forschung unbestritten geblieben ist.[6]

He refers exclusively to scholars representing the phenomenological approach to the study of religion such as M. Eliade, G. van der Leeuw and K. Goldammer, completely ignoring later venues pursued in the studies of religion. Ringgren's statement is indicative of the status of those studies at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries when scholarly approach and religion as a belief system were supposed to have the same common object: God, the numinous, the holy. With this phenomenological approach the "object of religion" and "the object of the scholarly approach" were supposed to be identical, and the scholarly approach entered into either an affirmative or a competitive relationship with religion itself.[7]

The problem of the "holy-profane" dichotomy, however, is not only restricted to the translation of the terms *qōdeš* and *ḥōl*; rather, and this is crucial, it is a modern construction which has been anachronistically read into the sources of the Old Testament and the ancient Near East at large. This concept was by no means developed by the authors themselves, as can be clearly seen from the evidence available from the attestations of these terms: the root *qōdeš* and its derivates are found 842 times whereas the root *ḥōl* appears only seven times in the whole Old Testament, and only once in the Book of Leviticus. Rather, the emphasis in the Book of Leviticus is clearly on the concept of purity and cleanliness, and not on the dichotomy "holy-profane." Old Testament scholars preferably refer to a specific passage of the book of Ezekiel to justify their approach of distinguishing between the "holy" and the "profane": "They (the levitical priests) shall teach my people the difference between the holy (*qōdeš*) and the common (*ḥōl*), and show them how to distinguish between the unclean (*ṭāmēʾ*) and the clean (*ṭāhôr*)" (Ezek 44:23). Taken out of context, this passage supports very well the scholarly construct of the "holy and the profane." However, the entire paragraph about levitical priests is dedicated to cultic prescriptions such as specific clothing, eating and drinking taboos, observing the cultic calendar, i.e. cultic prescriptions to be observed just temporarily when

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4   The literature is vast, for a good introduction into the question of literary reception of ritual see Fabry & Jüngling 1999, Douglas 1999.

5   Ringgren 1989: 1179–1204, esp. 1181; Jenson 1992: 40; Milgrom 2000: 1530.

6   Ringgren 1989: 1181.

7   For this problem see the various articles by Gladigow (1988, 1992 and 1996).

entering the temple and ministering to the service for Yahweh. It also deals with the definition of the priestly status within society, i.e., with the distinction between the males of priestly lineage and all others in the priest's household, male and female, and thus articulates primarily the privileges of the priestly class.[8] It shows that the discourse on what is *qōdeš* or *qōdeš qodašīm* is not only about the sanctuary and the cultic service itself, but it is a "rhetoric charged with social significance."[9] The theological discourse on the preparations for the ritual agenda "contributes to the realization and communication of status differences of individuals and groups."[10]

Thomas Podella,[11] when referring to the term *ḥōl*, adduced connotations such as "ungebraucht," as in the context of cultivation of a vineyard (Deut 20:6; 28:30), or "unbearbeitet," in the case of stones set up for an altar for Yahweh (Exod 20:25), and introduced a wider semantic frame into the lexical studies. He emphasized the connection of the term *ḥōl/ḥll* to the Akkadian *elēlu* – "to be pure, to be free, to purify, to become free" – and to the Hittite *ḫalali*-, "to purify." However, *ḫalali*-, a Luwian loanword in Hittite language is semantically closer to Hittite *parkui*- "clean" than to *šuppi*- "pure" and is used to qualify cathartic rituals.[12] On the other hand, *ḥll* can be used to describe a transgression of the cultic law serious enough to have resulted in the extreme penalty (Exod 31:14; Lev 22:9; Num 18:32), and attestations such as Ezek 22:26[13] again illustrate that *qdš* and *ḥll* are used as antonyms. However, we must not necessarily assume that this antinomy should automatically be translated into "holy" – "profane." Biblical research, obviously, was premised on the fundamental distinction between "purity" and "holiness," rather than on a distinction between "pure" and "impure," which, however, is not only the central theme of the Book of Leviticus and Num 1–9 but also applies to later Jewish tradition. Like the Biblical tradition the *mishna* conceptualizes phases or states of separateness with regard to the absolute holiness of God. More recently also J. Milgrom[14] and Saul M. Olyan[15] while building on Mary Douglas' the holiness/wholeness paradigm as laid out in *Purity and Danger*[16] seek to account for the relationship between beauty and wholeness and completeness and thus profoundly alter and refine the approach to the question of holiness.

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[8]   Olyan 2000.
[9]   Olyan 2000: 36.
[10]   Olyan 2000: 36.
[11]   Podella 2000: 1572.
[12]   Puhvel 1991: 13.
[13]   "Its priest have done violence to my teaching and have desecrated (Harper Collins: "profaned") my holy things; they have made no distinction between the holy and the common, neither have they taught the difference between the clean and the unclean, and they have disregarded my sabbaths, so that I am desecrated (Harper Collins: "profaned") among them."
[14]   Milgrom 1991: 721.
[15]   Olyan 2008.
[16]   Douglas 1966: 41–57.

In Assyriology, it was this distinction between "holy" and "pure" which E. Jan Wilson adopted as the starting point for his research on the Mesopotamian material:

> While modern religions in our Western societies often do not strictly differentiate between purity and holiness as religious concepts – even to the point that these two terms are most interchangeable in our current contexts – we should not assume that there was no sharp delineation in ancient religion, without first proving that to be the case. Indeed, recent investigations in the field of Israelite religion have brought the distinction between purity and holiness into clearer focus, and we must ask whether that cannot be done for the Sumerian and Akkadian religions.[17]

Wilson here refers to the study of "Graded Holiness" by Jenson which investigates the different dimensions of holiness. Jenson, however, in his more or less structural approach, distinguishes between the "spatial dimension," the "personal dimension," the "ritual dimension" and the "dimension of time," as conveyed by the prescriptions of the Book of Leviticus. Jenson's work leads him to a definition of a graded theological concept of holiness and purity according to the hierarchy of God, temple, priestly personnel, and ordinary people, an approach which in fact turns out to be rather fruitful for cross-cultural comparisons. Wilson objects, however, that on the lexical level the Hebrew words *qōdeš* as a noun and *qadōš* as an adjective do not overlap and therefore defines "holiness" as an absolute quality which does not admit gradations,[18] returning to the dichotomy of "holy" and "profane" by trying to restrict the terms Sumerian KÙ / Akkadian *ellu* to the realm of the divine and the Sumerian SIKIL / Akkadian *ebbu* to physical reality, suggesting for the latter a connotation equivalent to the Hebrew *ṭāhôr*.[19] Although he refers to the existence of other Sumerian terms related to the concept of purity, such as šen, dadag, zalag, laḫ, and sikil, he elides their nuances and implicitly limits himself to the investigation of "religious texts."[20] He refers to the anthropological approach submitted by Mary Douglas,[21] but his own approach remains rather firmly lexical – and therefore philological.[22]

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[17]   Wilson 1994: 1.
[18]   Wilson 1994: 87–88.
[19]   Wilson 1994: 45.
[20]   Wilson 1994: 41.
[21]   Wilson 1994: 60–64.
[22]   The narrowness of a purely philological approach has been already pinpointed by G. Buccellati (1973: 19) and W. G. Lambert (1973: 355). The limitations of the narrowly philological approach were already apparent in the investigations of the Indologist and linguist F. Max Müller in the 19th century, who, by comparing different cultures on the basis of their use of language, formulated the model of a common "Urreligion," thus initiating the discipline of Comparative Religion (Klimkeit 1997) and the philologicalization of the scholarly discipline of history of religion, while ignoring sociological, ethnological, psychological and cultural-anthropological dimensions (Gladigow 1996).

Wilson's narrow approach inevitably led him into misinterpretations such as the assertion that the Sumerians possessed a concept of holiness different from that of the Semites. By mapping his philological conclusions onto the diverse approaches of the studies of religion across almost a century separating W. Robertson Smith from M. Douglas, his own methodological approach remains eclectic and vague, a fact also criticized by B. Hruška[23] in his review. Unfortunately, however, Blahoslav Hruška, himself ends by taking refuge into the category of the numinous – qualified by the *mysterium tremendum* and the *mysterium fascinans* – in order to define the meaning of the Sumerian ku(-g) and the Akkadian *ellu*, and, consequently, succumbing to a definition of religion which makes empathy the precondition of understanding. This venue in the studies of religion had been essentially shaped by F. Schleiermacher during the Romantic era in his "Reden über Religion."[24] It has shaped especially German religious scholarship right up to the present.[25] I quote from the end of Hruška's review:

> Die Sumerer kannten, verehrten und fürchteten kein 'Heiliges', sondern nur die konkreten Gestalten von Göttern und Dämonen und deren Symbole und Attribute (göttliche Gegenstände). Ihre religiöse Scheu wurde durch die positiv und negativ wirkende numinose Kraft des Göttlichen (me, ní) hervorgerufen.[26]

There have been studies that pursued a different venue and looked more closely at the notion of purity linked with the sphere of the divine. The first pioneering methodological approaches to the subject of purity in Mesopotamia were those of Karel van der Toorn; first in the introduction into his edition of the *šigû*-prayers.[27] There he focused on the ethical concepts behind rules of conduct and the transcendental basis of the moral order, as represented in sources from Israel and Mesopotamia. The social rules that preserve the social order formed the basis of his approach; only secondarily did he dedicate himself to integrate them into the religious system. Underpinning van der Toorn's concept is the assimilation of Israel into the social environment of Mesopotamia. But such a contextualization of Israel obscures many vital differences between the two traditions. And so, van der Toorn looks upon purity, impurity, and sin mainly from an ethical viewpoint, and abstains totally from treating the Sumerian evidence, which, as will be shown, is indispensable for a proper understanding of the Babylonian-Assyrian tradition and its concepts of purity and purification.

M. Geller[28] in his review of van der Toorn's book rightly draws attention to the fact that the equating of the Sumerian term níg-gig / Akkadian *ikkibu* with

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23   Hruška 2000, see also his article on the Eninnu (Hruška 1999).
24   Schleiermacher 1879.
25   Kohl 1988: 237, Gladigow 1997.
26   Hruška 2000: 188.
27   van der Toorn 1985.
28   Geller 1990.

the Hebrew *tōʿēbāh* "abomination," which W.W. Hallo renders as "taboo,"[29] appropriately describes the context of níg-gig in the Sumerian proverbs. He demonstrated that the use of these terms goes far beyond the cultic or ethical range, being also attested as a description of judicial or social failure. These latter aspects prove to be of invaluable importance for our correct understanding of purification rituals and the cult at large.

In a second approach Karel van der Toorn[30] presented a preliminary sketch of the concept of purity in the religious traditions of ancient Mesopotamia elucidating the process whereby religious etiquette was patterned onto the customs governing social relations. Here, too, the cultural codes of Mesopotamia are seen in their larger context by comparing them with those of Israel and early Islamic tradition. His investigation results in the very important observation that the state of purity or impurity is linked to specific situations, as, for example, to a cultic relationship to the gods, and that it should not be defined as an absolute reality.[31] Furthermore, he emphasizes the material aspect of purity the physical and aesthetical quality of which is proper to the gods.[32] According to his view, it is this aesthetical dimension which requires the respect of the divine expressed in the patterns of the social code and its protocols, as for example ablutions, shaving, clean clothes, as well as abstinence from certain foods when entering the presence of the gods. Conversely, physical defects and deformation disqualify a man for divine service.[33] In this context belongs also the temporary impurity caused by menstruation or childbirth which the Babylonians considered having a polluting effect.[34] Van der Toorn concludes that the rules of social practice are transferred to the cultic plane, thus expressing the respect of the supplicant. However, whether the attitude of the people of Mesopotamia toward the divine can be described as being "naive",[35] and whether a lack of spirituality and transcendentalism empties Mesopotamian cultic actions of their symbolic value[36] remains more than questionable and reflects an evolutionary approach to the history of religion.

By contrast, G. Cunningham prefers to stress the symbolic aspect of purification rites destined to remove a "symbolic form of impurity or defilement" in his article on Sumerian incantations.[37] However, he makes an interesting comparison between purification rites and the tripartite structure of the *rites de passage* as developed by A. van Gennep, consisting of stages of separation, transition and aggregation,

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[29]   Hallo 1985: esp. 39–40; see, however the remarks in Cavigneaux & Al-Rawi 1995: 35.
[30]   van der Toorn 1989.
[31]   van der Toorn 1989: 342.
[32]   van der Toorn 1989: 343.
[33]   van der Toorn 1989: 347.
[34]   van der Toorn 1989: 348–351.
[35]   van der Toorn 1989: 355.
[36]   van der Toorn 1989: 355.
[37]   Cunningham 1998.

and defines purification as symbolizing the first of these three stages, separation.[38] This qualification certainly is only valid for rituals of a very simple structure and does not apply to complex cathartic rituals encompassing all these three stages. Cunningham's article, also dealing with the profane and the sacred as opposite categories, is mostly dedicated to the question of how Sumerian incantations provide an elision between what he calls "the temporal domain" and the "divine domain." The value of his contribution lies in the fact that he does not assume defilement and sin to be identical.[39] In his monograph based on the priestly source in the Old Testament, D.P. Wright[40] compared purification rituals in Israel, Anatolia, and Mesopotamia but limited himself to a presentation of the different methods of eliminating the impure. Stefan Maul[41] presented an extensive commentary on the *dromena*, i.e. the actions of purification rituals, particularly on the *namburbû*-rituals, which he had edited, but he neither offered a discussion of the concept of purity in Mesopotamia nor of the terminology used in cathartic texts used to describe the concepts of purity and impurity.

The most fruitful study has come not from the field of Assyriology but from a Hittitologist, Gernot Wilhelm,[42] in part because Hittite texts are very often more explicit in laying out the concepts implied in ritual action, and, consequently, offer a valuable source for both the concepts of order and purity in Mesopotamian thought. The Hittite material clearly elucidates the ancient notion of purity in its distinction – made in regard to the king – between the "body politic" and the "body natural," as shown by Frank Starke.[43] This is again reflected in the Hittite ritual language, which, in the context of the purification of the king, may differentiate between *šuppi-* ("sacred") associated with the "body politic," and *parkui-* "*pure*" associated with the "body natural."[44] As demonstrated by Theo van den Hout the "purity" of the king may be defiled by a "sacrilege" resulting from the "physical uncleanness of humans who have not washed themselves properly or of animals."[45] Wilhelm in his article, emphasizes the concrete and substantial aspect of impurity or dirt which can be "abgewischt," "ausgekämmt," "abgeleckt," or "abgefegt."[46] The detrimental substances keep their negative effect and have to be disposed of in a professional ritualized way, either by being burnt or thrown into water, or by being brought into the land of an enemy, the desert or the mountains.[47] Water plays a central role in eliminating the impure *materia*, as shown by a passage from a cathartic ritual

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[38] Cunningham 1998: 43.
[39] This point has been treated at large by Klawans (2000).
[40] Wright 1987.
[41] Maul 1994.
[42] Wilhelm 1999.
[43] Starke 1996: 172.
[44] van den Hout 1998: 2.
[45] van den Hout 1998: 2 n. 5.
[46] Wilhelm 1999: 198.
[47] Wilhelm 1999: 199.

quoted by Wilhelm.[48] The verbs used for purification with water are *parkunu-* and *šuppijaḫḫi-* and thus refer to the concrete, material as well as the immaterial – the religious, ethical, moral – aspects of cathartic rituals. Wilhelm concludes that the term *šuppi-* has to be interpreted as meaning "ritually clean," instead of providing it with some kind of numinous connotation.[49] Hence, the difference lies in the material aspect of cleanliness and ritual purity, a distinction which is of essential importance for our investigation. The most important conclusion drawn by Wilhelm in his article is that the Hittites did not develop a dichotomy "holy versus profane;" rather, their conception is dominated by the categories of "pure" and impure."[50]

The discussion shows that any study of "Holiness" must include the crucial question of whether the opposition between the sacred and the profane, as postulated by Mircea Eliade[51] and the search for the manifestation of the "holy" are valid for a Mesopotamian history of religion, and whether a distinction between "holiness" and "purity" is the only fruitful one to pursue. If we understand Mesopotamian religion more broadly as a system of symbols[52] and a system of communication with a specific function and meaning for their producers and recipients,[53] we must seek for other categories to describe the divine and the institutions, symbolic actions and concepts that relate to it.[54]

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[48] KUB 43, 58 obv. I 40–49 quoted on p. 200.

[49] Wilhelm 1999: 203–204.

[50] Wilhelm 1999: 204–205.

[51] Eliade 1959.

[52] Geertz 1973.

[53] Gladigow 1988: 33.

[54] No research has been devoted to the ritual of building the temple and the concepts of order and purity connected to it. Richard E. Averbeck does focus on the structure of the building ritual as described in the cylinders of Gudea (Averbeck 1987), thereby trying to isolate the meaning and function of every ritual step. This analysis is preceded by a large section dedicated to the methodological study of ritual by historians of religion and anthropologists. However, as has already been pointed out by Claudia E. Suter, Averbeck's definition of ritual extends into many episodes which one should interpret as narrative events of the story, "while his 'structural analysis' does not proceed beyond a very detailed description of the linear sequence of the text" (Suter 2000: 79). Suter, on the other hand, also taking Gudea as a case study, aims at establishing the correlation and interrelationship between text and image. She compares the themes of verbal and visual narratives and throws their considerable differences into high relief. S. Lackenbacher focused exclusively on the reports of the Assyrian kings and their literary structure from the beginning up to the time of Tiglath-pileser III (Lackenbacher 1982), offering a thorough study of the formulae used to describe the building of a temple, but dedicates only a short chapter to the consecration of the temple. A similar literary-critical and formal approach characterizes the work of V. Hurowitz (Hurowitz 1992), who, although incorporating the inscriptions of Gudea from the end of the third millennium and the Neo-Babylonian kings, examines the literary structure of the Mesopotamian building reports only in light of a possible reconstruction of the reports for the erection of the temple of Jerusalem. He explicitly forgoes any discussion of the foundation rites, and thus automatically excludes an analysis of the concepts of purity connected to them. Claus Ambos, in his recent study of the building ritual, restricts himself to rituals dating from the first millennium BCE (Ambos 2004).

To make this case, I will begin with the temple as a key symbolic motif, exhibiting a wealth of metaphors that illustrate these concepts and scrutinize more closely the Sumerian and Akkadian terminology used to qualify its building materials and to describe its segregation by means of purification rites and extispicy as well as the temple as a whole.[55] The following questions remain to be considered: what does the temple stand for or symbolize? What were the concepts or, one might say, the patterns of interpretation, orientation and action, which materialized in the architectural structure of the temple? Focusing on the temple encourages thinking about the "meanings and significance of space and those related concepts that compose and comprise the *inherent spatiality of human life*: place, location, locality, landscape, environment, home, city, region, territory and geography."[56] It also stimulates thoughts about hierarchy and generating the self and the other. All these are important questions which cannot be tackled in this context.[57]

Here I can only focus on one question, namely what defines the segregated and sacred quality of the temple and what language is used to denote that status. I will start the discussion with scrutinizing the meaning of the Sumerian term dadag used in describing the quality of the loam pit from which to take the clay to fabricated the first "fated brick" and the ones that follow to build the temple, and the meaning of the term ku(-g) used to describe the quality of all kinds of animate and inanimate objects related to the temple. In his edition of the Gudea texts dealing with temple construction, D.O. Edzard[58] chose to translate the term ku(-g) with "bright," "shining," "pure," and "brand-new" according to the context, instead of using the traditional translation "holy" or "sacred." This contextual translation has been contested by J.S. Cooper, who prefers to retain the traditional rendering "sacred" or "holy."[59] Similarily, C. Suter in her review on Edzard's edition commented: "The translations of kù with 'shining,' 'brand-new,' 'flaming,' are intriguing, if questionable; the semantic range of this term still requires further study."[60] This

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[55] In the studies of the Ancient Near East, much research has been done on the rituals surrounding the construction of a temple (Borger 1973, Ambos 2004), including archaeological and philological investigations of foundation deposits (Rashid 1965, Ellis 1968, Wiggermann 1992), and much has been written on the Sumerian and Akkadian terminology describing the temple and its different parts (George 1993a, Edzard 1997b, Dunham 1986). Indeed, a whole book has been published on the ceremonial names of temples collected by the ancients in the form of lists (George 1993a and 1992), and much has been said about their cosmological functions (George 1992, Pongratz-Leisten 1994), a discussion spurred by texts which combine the ritual accompanying a restoration of a temple with a cosmological narrative, see Thureau-Dangin 1975: 44–47, Heidel 1942: 65–66; see further the Seleucid text SpTU 4 141 edited by E. von Weiher (1993); recently commented on by Dietrich 2000 and Ambos 2004.

[56] Soja 1996: 1.

[57] Some of these aspects will be treated in my forthcoming book on *Cosmology, Mental Mapping and Kingship in Mesopotamia*.

[58] Edzard 1997a.

[59] Cooper 1999: 700.

[60] Suter 1998: 70.

debate shows that there is further need for basic research on the topic of "holiness" in connection with the temple and the observations submitted below should be considered a first approach in the venue.

The meaning of dadag, traditionally translated as "pure, clean,"[61] has been elucidated by Annette Zgoll,[62] who identified its legal character by interpreting it as "to cleanse somebody of something" as "to justify, to vindicate somebody." However, depending upon the context, whether legal or cultic, she still prefers to distinguish these contexts in her translation, creating the following nomenclature, for which one example of each is given below:[63]

1. attribute to šà
Gudea Cylinder B 13:4–5

  en-zi šà-dadag-ga-ke₄ / ᵈSuen-e me-bi an-ki-a im-mi-diri-ga-àm
  "Der rechte Herr, von strahlendem Herzen, Suen ist es, der seine (des Eninnus)
  ME in Himmel und Erde übergroß gemacht hat."

2. dadag in the legal context: "to cleanse" in the sense of "to justify, to vindicate"
Temple Hymns 264

  šà-zu i₇-lú-ru-gú lú zi dadag-ge
  "(Uruku.g), dein Inneres ist ein Ordalfluß, der den "rechten" (= unschuldigen,
  rechtschaffenen) Mann reinigt."

3. dadag in the cultic context "shining" in the sense of "cultically pure"
Temple Hymns 374

  é me gal-la du₈ sikil-la šu-luḫ dadag-ga
  "Haus der großen ME, der reinen Plattform, der strahlenden Reinigungsriten."

The first example, chosen by Zgoll from the Gudea inscriptions, might appear to be the most difficult to interpret since the more frequent expression šà-ku(-g) could suggest that dadag is being used merely as a synonym for ku(-g); both terms in this context are traditionally translated as "holy." However, scrutinizing the larger "Wortfeld" of the divine heart (šà-ku(-g)), out of which the divine word (inim-ku(-g)) is spoken, it becomes obvious that this expression is used in contexts where the divine word in the sense of divine decision is of inherently authoritative importance for the fate of the king, the temple or the land – a fact that

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[61] Edzard 1997a: StC col. iii 1; StE col. iii 5, col. iv 1; StF col. iii 6 even prefers to transcribe ᵁᴰ.ᵁᴰ instead of ᴅᴀᴅᴀɢ; so does Farber-Flügge 1973: 154, 163.
[62] Zgoll 1997: 368–369.
[63] Zgoll 1997: 368.

leads Zgoll to translate inim-ku(-g) as "Wort das Zukunft / Schicksal bestimmt"[64] or "schicksalsbestimmend."[65] Zgoll already pointed to the fact that in this context another attribute might be added, that is, nu-kúr-ru "irrevocable."[66] In what follows I would like to illustrate the meaning of ku(-g) in connection with šà ("heart") and inim ("word") with some examples taken out of building hymns dating to the time of Urnamma, contemporary of Gudea, and Šulgi, Urnamma's successor on the throne.

The first example is in the introduction to the hymn Urnamma B, describing the process that led the god Enlil to choose Urnamma as the builder of his future temple at Nippur.

Urnamma B:7–10

7 šeg$_{12}$ é-kur-ra-ke$_4$ me àm- ur
8 kur-gal ^{d}en-líl-le é-kur èš-m[a]ḫ-a-na u$_4$-gin$_7$ kár-kár-[d]è
9 šà inim ĝál kù zi-dè si-a-ni nam-DU
10 sipa ^{d}ur-^{d}namma-da é-kur-ra sag an-šè íl-i-da á-bi mu-u$_8$$^!$-da-ág[67]

> "The ME are traced out for Ekur's brickwork. To make them shine forth like daylight for Ekur, his magnificent shrine, Great Mountain, Enlil – his heart filled with authoritative and rightful thoughts[68] was moved to (do so) – commissioned shepherd Urnamma to make Ekur lift its head heavenward."

This authority of Enlil's decision is taken up again in line 40 where the expression nu-kúr-ru is now used to describe its irrevocable character:

Urnamma B:40[69]

^{d}nu-nam-nir du$_{11}$-ga eš-bar-zi nì nu-kúr-ru gá-me-en
"I am Nunamnir, whose commands and rightful decisions are irrevocable."[70]

A similar wording may be found in the royal hymn Šulgi G, which provides an account of Šulgi's birth and coronation in the Ekur, linking the king's right to the throne already to his origin rather than only to the rites of passage of his ascension.[71] However, right before that account the author has inserted the wording of an oracle spoken by Enlil anticipating Šulgi's rebuilding of the Ekur in Nippur.

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[64] Zgoll 1997: 78.
[65] Zgoll 1997: 79.
[66] Zgoll 1997: 79.
[67] Flückiger-Hawker 1999: 189.
[68] Flückiger-Hawker 1999: 189 has "filled with splendid and proper *notions*."
[69] See further Urnamma B l. 46.
[70] Flückiger-Hawker 1999: 194 has "I am Nunamnir whose proper utterance and decision are immutable."
[71] Klein 1991.

Šulgi G, lines 9–12 (CT 36, pls. 26–27)

9   gal bí-du₁₁ šà-ga-ni i₇-ma a-na-àm túm-a-bi
10   inim-kù-ga-na ʟíʟ làl-ĝar-ra-bi é-ta nam-ta-è
11   nì-bi nì-kù-ga-àm nì-šen-nam me-é-kur-ra-kam
12   sig₄-zi-nam-tar-ra abzu-sa-dúr-ra nì-kal-kal-la-àm

9   "He spoke a great thing. What is it, that his heart, the mighty river, has
        brought?
10   The hidden secret (lit. the cosmic subterranean water) of his authoritative
        word he brought out from the temple,
11   that matter was an authoritative matter, a pure matter, a ᴍᴇ of the Ekur,
12   it was the authentic fated brick of the Abzu of the solid banks, something
        of extreme importance."

The important feature to be noted in these passages is that ku(-g) denotes the
decision of Enlil which owing to its origin is inherently the divine. Its divine nature
is furthermore emphasized by means of its juxtaposition with the ᴍᴇ that represent
the institutions, cultural achievements and divine forces which fuel and maintain
the cosmic, cultic, political and social order. The divine word is directly linked with
this dynamic process, thereby automatically acquiring the authoritative character of
inalterability and integrity, a reason for me to prefer the translation "authoritative"
or "irrevocable," instead of "schicksalsbestimmend." And it is the vigilance of this
integrity and order that determines the creation of the fated brick and that qualifies
it as being zid as "authentic" from the Abzu.

By scrutinizing the contexts of the term dadag it becomes obvious that it is
not just used as a synonym, but adds an additional connotation to the significance
of authority which is its legal character as exemplified by the river ordeal that was
used as means for finding justice. The successful transformative outcome of the
river ordeal qualified the accused for reintegration into society.

This transformative effect also applies to the third category of the use of dadag
in a clearly cultic context qualifying the washing rites or purification rites, termed
šu-luḫ.[72] The šu-luḫ purification ritual often stands in close proximity to giš-ḫur
"plan, concept" or to the ᴍᴇ[73] and qualify the cultic specialist for the enactment of
his duties.

The various nuances of dadag translated by Zgoll with "rein", "gerechtfertigt",
"kultisch in Ordnung" all imply a transformative effect brought about either by
purification rites or extispicy and might include a legal aspect in the sense of "being
vindicated or qualified in the sense of transformed for performing cultic duties."

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[72]   See Zgoll's example no. 3 and *The Lament for Sumer and Ur* ETCSL 2.3.3: 447, for instance.
[73]   Farber-Flügge 1973: 116.

The question, however, is of how to read the sign UD.UD, which may be both zalag and dadag. Thus J. Black[74] in his translation of the myth *Lugalbanda in the Mountain Cave* ll. 379–380 chose the following interpretation:

á sikil-la ki zalag-zalag-ga-bi	"he made the shining place of pure strength,
bará ᵈsuen-na u₄-gim mi-ni-in-ri	the altar of Suen, ... like daylight."

In this context the altar represents a finished architectural unit and the reading of UD.UD-ga as zalag-ga has some probability since temples or their architectural parts might be qualified as *namru* in later Assyrian and Babylonian texts.[75] What is more, the likening of its appearance to daylight (u₄-gim) speaks in favor of zalag/ *namru*. The question, however, is whether already at this time such emphasis was put on the outer appearance of the temple rather than the correct ritual performance during the building ritual. The following references taken out of the inscriptions of Gudea suggest that, toward the end of the third millennium the idea of purity to be provided was a major theme, a reason why I choose to read UD.UD-ga as dadag-ga:

Gudea Statue C ii 20 – iii 5[76]

20	ĝá-ù-šub-ba	"He drew a design in the shed of the
21	ĝiš ba-ḫur	brick mold,
22	ka-al-ka	at the loam pit he let shine the
23	ùri ba-mul	standard."
Col. iii		
1	im-bi ki-dadag-ga-a	"Its clay he mixed at a place (declared
2	im-mi-lu	to be) pure (by extispicy).
3	sig₄-bi	Its brick he formed at a purified place."
4	ki-sikil-a	
5	im-mi-du₈	

The same wording is also attested in Statue E col. iii 1–8. What immediately catches the eye is the fact that in this description of the preparations for the building the author omits the extispicy undertaken to confirm his rightful choice of the loam pit or to express its qualifications for the building procedure, as described at length in Gudea's building hymn. Nevertheless how does the author succeed in providing the reader with all the necessary information? In my view he does so by choosing the term dadag to evoke the transformed quality of the place where the brick clay is going to be mixed. Gudea's building hymn elaborates at length on the fact that the site from which the clay was to be taken had to be determined by means of

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[74]   Black 1998: 154.
[75]   For references see CAD N/1: 240–241, s.v. *namru* 1a.
[76]   Edzard 1997a: 39.

performing extispicy and to be turned clean by means of purification rites. The specific meaning of dadag suggests that it is no accident that the author of Gudea's cylinders uses it just in this context, since extispicy was understood to be a judicial act (*dīnu*) of the sun-god.

This legal connotation may be further gleaned from a passage of Urnamma B in which King Urnamma in his knowledge to proceed correctly is described as follows:

> Urnamma B 11:13
> di zu en geš[tú daĝal]-la-kam ĝišù-šub-ba si àm-mi-in-sá
> "The one who knows the judgment (rendered by the performance of extispicy),
> who is the lord of broad wisdom, prepared (lit. set in order) the brick mold."[77]

In either case, whether one accepts the first assumption that dadag is used because mention of the extispicy has been omitted, or the second possibility, that dadag evokes the fact that the site for mixing the clay has been cleansed by purification rites to qualify it for the manufacturing of the first brick to follow, the purity of the site is brought about by ritual means, not original in nature. This links the meaning of dadag to sikil "clean," which describes the state of cleanliness or purity achieved by washing rites.

The fact that cleanliness has to be produced either by means of purification or extispicy explains the equation of both terms primarily with the Akkadian *ebbu* and distinguishes it from the word ku(-g), "pure" equated with the Akkadian *ellu*. The term ku(-g) occurs as a component in terms for metals such as silver (kù-babbar) and gold (kù-sig$_{17}$), and, therefore, in contrast to sikil and dadag it denotes a state that is inherently pure. Owing to its association with metals, it describes a shining and lustrous quality[78] that characterizes anything associated with the divine, the cultic equipment such as the kettle[79] included and extends to the food offerings,[80] the priestly office[81] as well as the prayers[82] addressed to the deities. The fluid notion of the divine[83] as attested in early lists that list deified professions, offices, cultural achievements, and cultic equipment[84] might explain the choice of the qualifying adjective ku(-g) to indicate the inherent sacredness of anything related to the god. The nuances in meaning can be seen at best in the context of reestablishing the

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[77]   See Flückiger-Hawker 1999: 190 for a similar interpretation of the passage.
[78]   Winter 1994.
[79]   *The Lament for Eridu*, ETCSL 2.2.6: 86 urudšen kug; see also Green 1978.
[80]   *The Lament for Nippur*, ETCSL 2.2.4:58 šukur$_2$ šub-šub-ba kug-kug-ga-bi.
[81]   *The Lament for Sumer and Ur*, ETCSL 2.2.3: 447 us-ga kug.
[82]   *The Lament for Ur*, ETCSL 2.2.2: 351 šita kug-ga.
[83]   *The Shaping of the Divine and Divine Agency* is a larger project of mine that has been supported by the Institute for the Advanced Study, Princeton with an NEH grant during the academic year 2007–08.
[84]   Selz 2008.

sacredness of the temple as described in the city laments. Once the gods have spoken their verdict that the enemy might be expelled, the king might proceed to restore the temple and its cult which had been scattered and desecrated by the enemy:

> garza kúr-re íb-sùḫ-a šu ḫul b[í-íb-dug₄-ga-àm]
> me íb-bir-a-bi ki-bi-šè in-gar-ra-àm
> šu-luḫ érim-e šu bi-in-lá-a-ba
> kù-ge sikil-e-bi
> inim kù nu-kúr-ru-da-ni in-na-an-dug₄-ga-àm

> "The rites which the enemy disordered and dese[crated],
> Along with the scattered rituals, he has put back in their place!
> The cleansing rites which the enemy had put a stop to,
> That they sanctify (=re-establish divine status) and purify again
> He (Enlil) has given him (Išme-Dagan) his irrevocable, unchangeable word."[85]

The interesting emphasis made by the author of the *Nippur Lament* is that the purification rites beyond cleansing (sikil) can re-establish the sacred status (ku(-g)) formerly lost through desecrating acts of the enemy. Note that it is by the divine pronouncement of the chief god Enlil that the purification rites regain their effectiveness. An emphasis on the outer appearance and lustrous sheen of the temple accounts for the synonym za-gìn which may be used instead of ku(-g).[86]

Whether we can still assume a conscious choice regarding terminology in the Old Babylonian period when a large repertoire of mythopoeic texts became standardized, remains questionable. In the wake of the discussion laid out above one could translate a passage from *Enki and the World Order* as follows:

238	[kur] dilmunki-na mu-un-sikil mu-un-dadag	"He (Enki) cleansed and declared the land of Dilmun to be pure.
239	[d]nin-sikil-la zag-ba nam-mi-in-gub	He placed Ninsikila in charge of it."

These lines, indeed, read like an etiology for the name of Ninsikila, the "Lady of the Pure/Purified (Place)". Furthermore, the wording of the text suggests that it is only through divine choice and agency that the land of Dilmun is turned into a pure place.

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[85] Tinney 1996: 108–109 ll. 167–171, Tinney translates the last line: "He has given him his sacred, unchangeable decision!"
[86] *The Lament for Eridu*, ETCSL 2.2.6: C 6 é-kur za-gìn-na.

This interpretation is harder to maintain for the mythopoeic text of *Enki and Ninḫursaga*,[87] of which three Old Babylonian versions survive[88] showing the following variants in the terminology denoting the sacredness of Dilmun:

1	A	[uru^ki kù(-kù)-g]a-àm e-ne ba-àm-me-en-zé-en	"The cities are resplendent, you are the ones to whom it is allotted.
	B	uru^ki kù-kù-ga-àm e-ne ba-me-en-zé-en	
2	A	[kur Di]lmun^ki kù-ga-àm	The land of Dilmun is resplendent.
	B	kur Dilmun^ki kù!?-ga-àm	
3	A	[ki-en-gi k]ù-ga e-ne ba-àm-me-en-zé-en	Sumer is resplendent, you are the one to whom it is allotted.
	B	ki-en-gi kù-ga e-ne ba-me-en-zé-en	
4	A	[k]ur Dilmun^ki kù-ga-àm	The land of Dilmun is resplendent.
	B	kur Dilmun^ki kù-ga-àm	
5	A	kur Dilmun^ki kù-ga-àm kur Dilmun sikil-àm	The land of Dilmun is resplendent, the land of Dilmun is declared to be pure.
	B	kur Dilmun^ki kù-ga kur Dilmun^ki šen-na	
6	A	kur Dilmun sikil-àm kur Dilmun dadag-ga-àm	The land of Dilmun is purified, the land of Dilmun is sanctified."
	B	kur Dilmun^ki sikil-la kur Dilmun^ki kù-ga	

The variants that occur in the tablets from Nippur and Ur are invaluable in their information regarding the correspondence of certain terms discussed so far. The text starts with an overall statement declaring the inherent purity of the land of Dilmun by means of conflating terms that denote the result of cleansing (sikil / variant: šen) and purification or other transformative actions (dadag / variant: ku(-g)). The term ku(-g) still seems to represent an umbrella term while expressing the dominating notion of inherent purity and pristine quality under which the terms denoting the transformative action of cleansing and purification are subsumed.

Later sources show a preference for the term *ellu* to describe the building materials for the temple and the temple itself, and one wonders what might have prompted this change in terminology. Two possibilities come to mind: (1) a conflation of the terms ku(-g) and dadag occurred with the translation of Sumerian into Akkadian texts as could be observed for other cases,[89] and (2) Babylonian and Assyrian

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[87] Attinger 1984.

[88] PBS 10/1, 1 (Nippur), UET 6, 1 (Ur) and TCL 16, 62 (unknown provenance).

[89] The case can be made for all Sumerian terms denoting the aspect of growing in cosmogonies which in bilinguals are rendered with the Akkadian term *banû* "to create, to shape" see Pongratz-Leisten, *Cosmology, Mental Mapping and Kingship*, forthcoming.

authors of the royal building inscriptions would rather emphasize the brilliant and shining appearance of the temple. It seems that eventually the lustrous sheen of the completed temple is more important to them than the ritual performance. Some examples must suffice to illustrate the case. While King Marduk-apla-iddina II (721–710, 703 BCE), when reporting on his restoration of the shrine of Ningišzida in Eanna refers to the performance of prayers, lamentations(?) and invocations at the moment when the new foundations (UŠ₈/*uššū*) are laid down, he particularly stresses the final product: the temple with its top raised high and reveted with what we should probably interpret as glazed bricks (SIG₄.ḪI.A/*libnāti ellēti*):

27   URU₄.MEŠ-*šú ina te-me-qí ik-ri-bi u la-ban ap-pi id-di-ˈmaˋ* GIM *kin-né-e ú-kin-m*[*a*]
28   *i-na* SIG₄.ḪI.A *el-le-ti r*[*e*]-*ši-šú ul-li-ma ú-ˈnamˋ-me-ra* GIM *u₄*-[*mi*]

> "With prayers, lamentations and invocations he laid its foundations (anew) and made (them) as firm as a mountain. He raised its top with shining (=glazed?) bricks and made (it) as bright as daylight."[90]

It seems that this phraseology represented some kind of a template, since it is not only attested in several other inscriptions by the same king but also occurs much later in one of Esarhaddon's building inscriptions that commemorates his renovation of Enirgalanna, the cella dedicated to the goddess Ištar.[91]

Among all the kings of the Babylonian and Assyrian periods, the Babylonian king Nabonidus (555–539 BCE) probably elaborated the most on his works of building and restoring temples in Babylonia and Assyria. However, while he reports in great detail on his correct ritual performance during the building ritual and on the various precious materials he used for his building, he does not elaborate on the inherent sacred quality of the temple by using qualifying adjectives. Rather, again it is the lustrous appearance of the inner and outer walls destined to evoke the presence of the divine that comes to the fore. One example of inscription commemorating his restoration of the temple for the moon god Sîn must suffice to illustrate this:

> kù.babbar *ù* kù-si₂₂ é.gar₈^meš-*šu ú-šal-biš-ma ú-šá-an-bi-iṭ* ᵈutu-*ši-niš*
> "With silver and gold I decorated its walls and let it shine like the sun."[92]

His expression "to let shine like the sun" (*šunbuṭu*) is already attested during the reign of the founder of the Babylonian dynasty, Nabopolassar.[93]

Already in the Old Babylonian period royal building inscriptions extend the notion of purity and sacredness beyond the temple proper. So does the author of

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90   Gadd 1953: 124, ll. 27–28; RIMB 2 B.6.21.1.
91   Esarhaddon, RIMB 2 B.6.31.16:11–15.
92   Quoted after Schaudig 2001: 419, ii 13.
93   See references in CAD N/1: 23, s.v. *nabāṭu* 4.

Warad-Sîn's (1834–1823 BCE) inscription reporting on the rebuilding of the city wall of Ur while emphasizing the choice of a pure place and the terrifying aura emanating from the walls, tropes formerly reserved for the temple.[94] So does much later Sargon II (721–705 BCE) after his victory over Marduk-apla-iddina, when he reigned over Babylonia for the last years of his reign and, in addition to performing the *akītu* festival in Babylon also took care of restoring its city walls:

11b	*ú-šal-bi-in-ma*	"He had bricks made and constructed
12	*a-gur-ru ki-ru* KÙ-*tim*	a quay-wall of baked bricks fired in
13	*ina kup-ru ù* ESIR	a (ritually) pure kiln, (laid) in (both)
14	*ina* GÚ ÍD *pu-rat-ti*	refined and crude bitumen, along the
15	*ina qé-reb an-za-nun-ze-e*	bank of the Euphrates River in deep
16	KAR *ib-ni-ma*[95]	water."

The most artful account of the city wall linking the above and the below on the cosmic vertical axis is, however, given by Nabopolassar (625–605 BCE) in his building inscription commemorating his repair of the city walls of Babylon.[96] A discussion of this inscription is beyond the scope of this article. I mention this royal inscription as a further example of the use of the city walls as synecdoche for the city and the temple which also entailed the transfer of tropes employed to describe the building process and the rituals connected with it. Rather than an inflationary use of imageries the transfer of these tropes reflect the Mesopotamian world view as conveyed in the creation accounts in which the temple and the city originate with the gods. Consequently, the mythopoeic approach to the temple and the city calls into question our modern distinction between the temple and whatever lies outside its precinct. Although architectural features and ritual speak in favor of a notion segregating the temple from the rest of the urban landscape, these text passages should remind us of the fluid notion of the sacred.

To conclude, the difference between Sumerian, Babylonian and Assyrian sources does not lie in the concept of holiness but in the rhetoric linked with particular text categories in particular historical periods. Royal inscriptions, as shown above, rather than emphasizing the divine choice of the place and the king, and focusing on the purity of temple itself either by means of cosmic imagery such as rooting in the fresh water ocean (*apsû*) or by introducing qualifying adjectives as it is still the case in Gudea's building hymn, shift the emphasis to the king's performance as builder, architect and caretaker of the cult. The inscriptions now particularly stress the king's observance of following the ancient ground plan, since the temple was thought to have been founded in ancient times, and adherence to mythic tradition

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[94]   RIME 4 E4.2.13.21: 80–95.
[95]   RIMB 2 B.6.22.1.
[96]   Al-Rawi 1985, Beaulieu 2000 and 2003.

was mandatory. Furthermore they bring the king's ability to obtain the most precious materials to adorn the appearance of the temple to the fore. His familiarity with the correct performance of the purification rituals enacted to sanctify the temple shapes the image of the king as being in command of religious activities. While formerly temple hymns such as the *Kesh Hymn* declare the temple as the stronghold against chaos, during the second and first millennia BCE, the agency of the king replaces the temple as key metaphor for the social and cosmic order.