

THE CULT OF DEAD KIN IN ASSYRIA AND BABYLONIA

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Introduction

Assyriologists have long been aware of the evidence for a cult of the dead in Assyria and Babylonia, but there is at present, to the writer's knowledge, no systematic study of the subject.¹ She has therefore examined the evidence relating to the cult of the dead, and attempted to compare the attitude towards dead kin shown in the cult with what we know of relations between living kin and of concepts of descent.² In this study, comparisons are occasionally made with other societies not culturally connected with Mesopotamia. The writer's interest here lies in the application of social anthropology to the study of Mesopotamian society. Traditionally anthropologists have studied the type of society formerly called "primitive", now more often called "small-scale" or "pre-industrial". Ancient Mesopotamia was not a society of this type, but a peasant society, with a comparatively elaborate technology and a wide field of social relations, at least among the power-holding groups. Social anthropologists have only recently begun to study peasant societies.³ It will be appreciated that the writer has no formal training in social anthropology, and that this attempt is, therefore, highly tentative.

The factors determining the existence and importance of a cult of dead kin in a society have not been clearly revealed by comparative study. Scheinfeld has indeed shown that all societies that have such a cult have also the institution of inheritance of property,⁴ but the evidence examined by him does not permit the conclusion that inheritance is a precondition for the existence of a cult of deceased kin.

The Non-royal cult

There is a notable lack of specific evidence relating to the cult of deceased kin among the people of Babylonia and Assyria, as compared with the evidence for the

Abbreviations throughout are those of R. Borger, *Handbuch der Keilschriftliteratur* (1967), and W. von Soden, *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch*.

¹ Cf. B. Meissner, *BuA I* (1920), 425-9; E. Ebeling, *Tod und Leben bei den Babyloniern und Assyriern* (1931); A. Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels* (1946), Ch. III; H. W. F. Saggs, "Some Ancient Semitic Conceptions of the Afterlife," *Faith and Thought* 90 (1953), 157-82; A. Parrot, *Le "Refrigerium" dans l'Au-delà* (1937).

² M.Phil. thesis, *Ancestry and Descent in Mesopotamia from the Old Babylonian to the Neo-Assyrian Periods* (University of London, 1971; unpublished). The following is a revised version of Ch. IV of this study.

³ E.g. (in general) R. Redfield, *Peasant Society and*

Culture, Chicago, 1956; E. R. Wolf, *Peasants* (Foundations of Modern Anthropology Series, ed. M. D. Sahlins), New Jersey, 1966; (specific societies) China—M. Freedman, *Family and Kinship in Chinese Society*, California, 1970; *Lineage Organisation in South-Eastern China* (LSE Monographs in Social Anthropology, No. 18), Athlone Press, 1958; Japan—C. Nakane, *Kinship and Economic Organization in Rural Japan* (LSE Monographs in Social Anthropology, No. 32), (1967); India—S. C. Dube, *Indian Village*, London, 1955; Turkey—P. Stirling, *Turkish Village*, London, 1965.

⁴ D. R. Scheinfeld, *A Comparative Study of Ancestor Worship* (Unpublished London University MA Thesis, 1960), Ch. IX, especially pp. 179-83.

royal families (pages 122 ff. below). Most of the available evidence comes from the incantations accompanying expiatory rituals used by the exorcists, the *āšīpu* and the *mašmašu*,⁵ to avert the harmful effects of ghosts on their kin and others.⁶ Such sources, referring to neglect of the cult as a cause of persecution by ghosts, often provide valuable indirect evidence for the practice of a regular cult, besides expressing attitudes towards and concepts of the ghosts of dead kin (a subject for which omens and personal names also provide evidence). Unfortunately these sources give very little evidence of specific details of this regular cult, or the extent of its obligations in terms of numbers of generations, a crucial point which is discussed on page 118 below.

Terminology of the Cult

The ghost of a dead person was known as *eṭemmu* (GIDÌM).⁷ Just as the Mesopotamian cult of the gods entailed the provision of their “physical” needs, particularly the provision of regular meals placed as offerings in front of their images, so also the ghosts of the dead required provision of their needs. The person responsible for the care of a ghost was known as a *pāqīdu* (LÚ.SAG.ÈN.TAR), literally “one who takes care of or attends to,” and seems in most cases to have been a relative of the deceased. If a ghost’s needs were not met, it would wander the earth and haunt the living.

The incantation texts, in summarizing the forms of neglect that may have led a ghost to haunt the living, often provide indirectly a list of the essential services given by the *pāqīdu*. These seem to have included “making funerary offerings” (*kispa kasāpu*), “pouring water” (*mē naqū*), and “calling the name” (*šuma zakāru*); e.g. gidim lú.ki.nu.túm.ma hé.me.en gidim lú.sag.èn.tar nu.tuk.a hé.me.en gidim lú.ki.sè.ga nu.tuk.a hé.me.en gidim lú.a.dé.a nu.tuk.a hé.me.en [gidim] lú.mu.pād.da nu.tuk.a hé.me.en—*lu-u e-ṭim-mu la qeb-rù* KI.MIN (= *at-tú*) *lu-u e-ṭim-mu šá pa-qi-da la i-šú-ú* KI.MIN *lu-u e-ṭim-mu šá ka-sip ki-is-pi la i-šú-ú* KI.MIN *lu-u e-ṭim-mu šá na-aq me-e la i-šú-ú* KI.MIN *lu-u e-ṭim-mu šá za-kir* šu-me *la i-šú-ú* KI.MIN, “Whether you be the ghost of one unburied, or whether you be the ghost who has none to take care of him, or whether you be a ghost who has none to make him a funerary offering, or whether you be a ghost who has none to pour out water for him, or whether you be a ghost who has none to call his name”.⁸

The wretched state in the underworld of the ghost who has no *pāqīdu* is described in *Gilgamesh* XII, as follows: *šá e-ṭim-ma-šú pa-qi-da la i-šú-ú ta-mur a-ta-mar šu-ku-la-at di-qa-ri ku-si-pat a-ka-li šá ina su-qi na-da-a ik-kal*, “‘Have you seen him whose ghost has no *pāqīdu*?’ ‘I have seen (him). He has to eat the dregs of the pot and scraps of food that are thrown down in the street’”.⁹ The terms *kasāpu* and *kispu* (also *kipsu*, logogram KI.SÈ.GA) refer to the funerary cult in general. References to *nāq mē* occur also in curses, often on kudurru,¹⁰ and a blessing in a Babylonian grave inscription

⁵ See E. Ritter in *AS* 16, 299–321; *CAD* A/2, s.v. *āšīpu*.

⁶ A number of these incantations have been collected and published by E. Ebeling, *TUL*, 1. Teil: Texte, especially pp. 122–56, “Beschwörungen und Riten gegen Totengeister”.

⁷ Further, the word *arūtu* has sometimes been translated as “shade”, but probably means a pipe

through which libations were passed to graves. See A. Sjöberg, *AS* 16, 63 f.

⁸ *CT* 16, 10 v 5–14.

⁹ R. C. Thompson, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, p. 70 and pl. 58, ll. 153–4.

¹⁰ For examples see *BR* 8/7, 44 ll. 4–5; *MDP* 2, p. 110 vii 10; *BBS* 8, iv 20; 9, ii 19; *CH*, Epilogue xxvii 37–40.

shows the importance of fresh water to the dead, *i-na e-la-ti šum-šu li-id-mi-iq i-na ša-ap-la-ti e-ti-im-mu-šu me-e za-ku-ti li-il-tu-ú*, “above may his name be well, below may his ghost drink clean water”.¹¹ We may note also Aššurbanipal’s account of his opening of the tombs of Elamite kings and removing their remains to Assur; *e-tim-me-šu-nu la ša-la-lu e-me-ed ki-is-ši na-aq* A^{meš} *ú-za-am-me-šu-nu-ti*, “I inflicted restlessness on their ghosts. I deprived them of funerary offerings and pourers of water”.¹²

The invocation of the name (*šumu*) of the deceased appears to have been an important part of the regular cult.¹³ The emphasis placed on the name may be compared with the frequently attested desire of kings at all periods for their names to be preserved in writing.¹⁴ This latter means of preservation of the personal name after death was only very rarely available to private persons,¹⁵ so that before the LB period and the development of the widespread use of ancestral family names, there is reason to suppose that invocation in the funerary cult was the only means available to most people to perpetuate their names after death. The recurring use of *šumu*¹⁶ in expressions of the hopes invested in offspring, especially in personal names, omens, curses and blessings, suggests that the need for a *pāqidu* to keep the name of the individual alive after his death may have been an important element in the desire for offspring. References in omens and curses to potential offspring as *nāq mē* and *zākīr šumu*¹⁷ confirm this suggestion. The so-called “substitute-names” (*Ersatznamen*)¹⁸ describing the new member of the family as a substitute for a deceased member provided another means of preserving the identity of the recently deceased.

Attitudes towards Dead Kin

In expiatory rituals references to offering praise to ghosts, as to gods, occur,¹⁹ but this may not have been a regular part of the cult. As a member of the world of spirits the ghost of a dead person was, however, felt to have superhuman powers comparable with those of demons, with which ghosts are sometimes listed as malevolent powers in the incantation texts.²⁰

The superhuman powers of ghosts were believed to be used to affect the living. Occasionally a prayer is explicitly directed to obtaining the intercession of family

¹¹ VS I 54 14–18 and duplicates (written on clay balls in OB script, but in MB language).

¹² M. Streck, *VAB* 7, 56 vi 75.

¹³ E.g. *CT* 16, 10 v 14, quoted above, and comparable texts published by Ebeling, *TuL*, 122–56. See also VS I, 54 ll. 15–16. Invocation of the names of the gods was, of course, a regular part of their cult in Mesopotamia, as elsewhere. For its significance in the Old Testament, see B. S. Childs, *Memory and Tradition in Israel* (1962), 12–14.

¹⁴ E.g. *CH*, Epilogue xxvib 18 33–8; *A/O* 12 (1937/9), 365 f; *KAH* II, 58 l. 94 f.; *OIP* 2, 98 l. 94; see also *mušaru* (*AHwb*, s.v.).

¹⁵ E.g. *AKA* 388 ff; *BBSt* 34. A name inscribed on a cylinder seal might enjoy a similar durability.

¹⁶ The concept of *šumu* is inadequately expressed by “name”, embracing as it does the sense both of “reputation” and “identity”. It sometimes has the meaning of “male posterity, son”. See W. Schulz,

“Der Namensglaube bei den Babyloniern”, *Anthropos* 26 (1932), 895–928.

¹⁷ See n. 10 above.

¹⁸ See J. J. Stamm, *MVAeG* 44, 278–306.

¹⁹ E.g. *KAR*, 227 iii 13: *ú-[ša]r-rih-ku-nu-ši ú-[kab]-bit-ku-nu-ši*, “I have praised you, honoured you”, etc. Cf. *CAD*, s.v. *kabātu*, 6a. Note also the OB PN *Ešemmu(m)-rabi* “the-Ghost-is-Great” (*VS* 13 103; *YOS* 8 172 5). Like demons, ghosts are sometimes given the determinative for the divine, e.g. *KUB* 29, 58 iv 2; *ZA* NF 11 (1939) 202; *ilu(m)* “god” is used in some “substitute-names” to describe the dead relative of whom the new baby is a replacement, e.g. *I-tūr-ilum*, “The-God-has-returned” (*EBPN* 112a). The meaning may be compared to “of blessed memory”; cf. *divus* in Roman tomb inscriptions.

²⁰ See especially *AHwb*, s.v. *etemmu(m)*.

ghosts in favour of the supplicant, e.g. *ina u₄-mi an-né-e IGI* ^dUT[U] ^dGIŠ.GÍN.[MAŠ] *i-ziz-za-nim-ma di-ni di-na EŠ.BAR-a-a KUD-sa . . . a-na a-ru-ti-ku-nu A^{meš} ka-su-ti lu-uq-qi bul-liṭ-ṭa-an-ni-ma dà-li-li-ka lud-lul*, “On this day stand before Šamaš and Gilgamesh (Gods of the Underworld), judge a judgment, decree a decree . . . I will pour cool water down your water-pipes; cure me that I may sing your praises”.²¹

Far more common are texts which show the ghosts of the dead as malevolent. Such references are particularly frequent in the incantation literature, which includes in the traditional repertory of diagnoses of causes of ill-health the persecution either of a “strange ghost” (*eṭemmu ahú*) with nobody to care for him or of ghosts of the sufferer’s own kin, e.g. *GIDÌM a-hu-ú ina hur-ba-te iṣ-bat-su*, “A strange ghost has seized him in a waste place”; *šumma LÚ ŠU GIDÌM AD-šú u AMA-šú DIB.DIB-su*, “If the hand of the ghost of his father or mother has seized a man . . .”; *ip-qid-an-ni ana GIDÌM BAR-i mur-tap-pi-du šá la i-šú-ú ni-šu-[tu]*, “She handed me over to a strange, roaming ghost who had no family”; *GIDÌM IM.RI.A-šú DIB.DIB-[su]*, “A ghost of his kin has seized him”.²² Presumably any ghost was potentially harmful, and though it is never explicitly stated that ill-will of one’s own family ghosts was due to neglect of their rites, the psychology behind this kind of ritual suggests that the factor disturbing the relations between the man and his dead kin was some ritual or moral omission, as in the case of misfortune attributed to an unlucky action affecting living kin or a deity.²³

The appearance of a family ghost was an ominous event, almost always foreboding disaster, e.g. *šumma ina É LÚ GIDÌM IGI BIR -ah É*, “If a ghost appears in a man’s house (it means) the breaking up of the house”.²⁴

The emphasis on propitiation of ghosts of kin apparent in these texts may not have been so prominent in the regular cult, but the evidence of these propitiatory rituals suggests that the attitude towards dead kin was affected by projections of tensions between living kin, and in particular between the householder and his heirs. Such tensions are evident in most societies in varying degrees,²⁵ and may be explained in psychological or in social terms.²⁶

The Extent of the Cult

Direct evidence of the kin who were *officiants* in the funerary cult is of an ideal, generalized type. The most precise list of possible kin responsible for the care of a ghost is in a text, where the neglected ghosts are addressed (by the god Marduk) in the following terms: *lu-u šá ŠEŠ [u NIN la ti-šá]-a lu-u šá IM.RI.A [u IM.RI.A la ti-šá]-a lu-u šá DUMU u [DUMU.MÍ la ti-šá]-a lu-u šá IBILA na-[aq A^{meš} la ti-šá]-a*, “Whether (you be) one who has no brother or sister, or one who has no family or relatives,

²¹ *KAR*, 227 iii 14 f., 24 f. In OA texts there are references to the invocation of ghosts by female necromancers in order to foretell the future. (e.g. *TGL* 4, 5 l. 5).

²² *KAR*, 184 r. (!) 11; *ibid.*, r. (!) 23; *BRM* 4, 18 l. 7; *AMT*, 54, 3 r.9.

²³ Expressed in Akkadian by the terms *māmitu* or *arnu/annu*. These basic concepts of Mesopotamian religion are very difficult to interpret. References to *māmitu* and *arnu/annu* relating to kin are frequent in incantation texts, e.g. *Šurpu* III 1-8; *KAR*, 178 vi

35-52.

²⁴ *CT* 38, 26 l. 23; note the following section.

²⁵ See M. Fortes, “Pietas in Ancestor Worship”, *JRAI* 91 (1961), 166-81; *id.*, *Time and Social Structure* (1970) (mainly on the Tallensi); M. Weber, *The Religion of China* (1951; Eng. Trans.); G. M. Carstairs, *The Twice-Born* (1957) (on the Hindus of Rajasthan).

²⁶ I.e. in terms of the relations between father and son in the inheritance system (see below). The two explanations are, of course, not mutually exclusive.

or one who has no son or daughter, or one who has no heir to make libations of water".²⁷ Many texts refer to the ghost as a "strange ghost" (*eṭemmu ahū*), perhaps meaning one who had no connections in the place where he died.²⁸ Others simply refer to the absence of a *pāqīdu*, *kāsīp kispi*, *nāq mé*, *zākīr šumi* or "anybody" (*mammāna*) to perform these functions.²⁹

The evidence suggests then that the duties of the funerary cult could be performed by any surviving close kin. Affines, including husbands and wives, are never explicitly mentioned, and may have been excluded.³⁰ That women could take responsibility for the funerary cult, though not necessarily participate in it (it may have been possible to pay for a *pāqīdu* to perform the duties), is shown by references to *ahātu*, "sister" and *mārtu*, "daughter" in the text quoted above³¹ and elsewhere,³² as well as by the evidence for the royal cult discussed below. Nothing is known of the roles of the individual members of the household in the cult. References to chairs³³ in this connection suggest that the offerings took the form of a meal, possibly shared by the living family, but there is no direct evidence.

The evidence of propitiatory rituals shows that all close kin, male and female, could be recipients of the cult. Individual relatives mentioned in the incantations are parents, siblings and grandparents.³⁴ An "alien ghost" (*eṭemmu ahū*) could be propitiated by inclusion with his victim's own kin in the cult.³⁵

Some texts use all three terms for the kin of an individual: *kimtu*, *nišūtu* and *salātu*. Whatever the technical meanings of these terms, the use of all three argues against any restriction of the range of dead kin who could affect an individual's life.

It has been assumed³⁶ that the duties of the funerary cult were closely bound up with the process of inheritance. Evidence in support of such a connection may be seen in a few curse formulae from late second millennium kudurru inscriptions in which the heir and a term clearly meaning the person responsible for the funerary cult are listed and apparently equated with the more usual terms for offspring in such contexts, such as *išdu*, *šumu* and *zeru*, e.g. *ap-la-am na-aq me-e li-ki-im-šu-ma*, "May (Ninurta) deprive him of an heir, a pourer of water"; *IBILA-šu na-qa A^{meš}-šu li-še-li*, "May (Ninurta) make him forfeit his heir, his pourer of water"; *IBILA ú [na]-aq A^{meš} a-a ú-šar-ši-šu*, "May (Ninurta) cause him not to acquire an heir, a pourer of water".³⁷ A Babylonian omen text makes the same connection: *nīc*.

²⁷ *Afo* 19 (1959/60), 117, ll. 7-10.

²⁸ See *KAR*, 184, quoted above, p. 118, n. 22.

²⁹ E.g. *KAR*, 227 iii 28 f.: *at-ta gidim la ma-am-ma-na-ma ša qé-bé-ra ú sa-ki-ra la te-šu-ú*; *CT* 23 18 ff. 7 f.

³⁰ Note, however, that queens participated in the royal cult at certain periods (see below, page 123).

³¹ *Afo* 19 (1959/60), 117 (see above, n. 27).

³² E.g. *BE* 14, 40 l. 14 f. (see below, page 120, n. 39).

³³ E.g. *MSL* 5 (Hh IV) 157, l. 93: *giš.gu.za gidim = ku-us-su-ú e-ṭim-me*; *RA* 28 (1931), 19: *giš.gu.za gidim = ku-us-su-ú e-ṭim-tum (?)*; see also A. Salonen, *Die Möbel des alten Mesopotamiens* (1963), 41.

³⁴ E.g. *KAR*, 227 iii 9-10: (*gidim*) *AD.MU AD.AD.MU AMA.MU AMA.AMA.MU ŠEŠ.MU NIN.MU kim-ti-ia ni-šu-ti-ia u sa-la-ti-ia ma-la i-na ki-tim šal-lu*, "(Ghost of) my

father, my father's father, my mother, my mother's mother, my brother, my sister, my kin, family and relatives, as many as are lying in the earth." The terms for grandparents must be influenced by stylistic symmetry, as it is unlikely that in a society with patrilineal inheritance the maternal grandmother would be an important relative and not the paternal grandmother or maternal grandfather.

³⁵ *LKA*, 83 l. 4 f.: [*m*] *u-ka it-ti e-ṭim-me az-kur mu-ka ina ki-is-pi az-kur*, "I have invoked your name with the ghosts, I have invoked your name in the funerary offering."

³⁶ E.g. B. Meissner, *BuA* I, 427-9; P. Haupt, *BA* 10/2 (1927), 75; P. Koschaker in E. Ebert, *Reallexikon der Vorgeschichte* III, p. 115, s.v. *Erbrecht*.

³⁷ *MDP* 2, 110, vii 9-11; *BBSI* no. 8, iv 20; no. 9, ii 18 f.

TUK^{meš} IBILA *za-kir* MU TUK-*ši*, “It means wealth—he will have an heir, one to call his name”.³⁸

A Middle Babylonian adoption contract treats the duties of the funerary cult as a continuation of the duty to respect and take care of the parents: *a-di ina-UNUG.KI-ri-šat ba-al-ta-tu 'e-ti-ir-tum i-pa-al-la-ah-ši ina-UNUG.KI-ri-šat i-ma-at-ma 'e-ti-ir-tum DUMU.MÍ.A.NI me-e i-na-aq-qí-ši*, “As long as I. (the adopter) lives, E. (the adoptee) shall revere her; when I. dies, E., her daughter, shall pour water for her”.³⁹ This document does not mention inheritance, and as there are very few published MB family law documents, it is impossible to judge whether the right of the adoptee to inherit is implied in the phraseology. That the adopter had some property is shown by the stipulation that, should she make her adopted daughter into a servant, she shall lose her paternal estate.⁴⁰

Certain adoption documents written in Akkadian, but originating from areas outside Babylonia, make an explicit connection between inheritance and funerary duties, e.g. a document in which a man leaves all his property to his daughter, conditionally: *ba-al-ta-ku-ma a-ka-la ta-[na-di]-i-na mi-ta-ku-ma ki-is-pa ta-ka-si-[pa]*, “In my lifetime you shall give me food; when I die, you shall make funerary offerings for me”.⁴¹ Certain Nuzi documents (e.g. *HSS* 19, 11 l. 24, etc.) stipulate that the adopted heir shall perform a mourning ceremony upon the death of his or her adoptive parent.

There is no decisive evidence of the use of household shrines in Mesopotamian society. It has been suggested that references to *kinūnu belū*⁴² “extinguished brazier” in OB legal texts are evidence of the practice of a domestic cult linked with inheritance. This interpretation seems to be based solely on analogies with practices in certain strongly patrilineal societies with effective lineage groups, such as pre-Classical Greece and Rome, where domestic ancestor worship was explicitly symbolic of family continuity, and the first duty of the household head was to keep alive the flame at the household shrine. There is no evidence that the *kinūnu* was a shrine, like the *focus* of the Romans. In some contexts *kinūnu belū* simply describes an unoccupied house; in others it describes patrimonial land, and appears to refer to an interruption of the line of inheritance, e.g. HA.LA PN₁ DUMU PN₂ *ša ki-nu-un-šu bé-lu-ú-ma* PN₃ DUMU PN₂ *ù DUMU.MEŠ PN₄ a-hi-šu i-zu-[zu]*, “The portion of PN₁, son of PN₂ whose brazier is extinguished, PN₃ son of PN₂ and the sons of PN₄, his brother, have divided”; IO IKU A.ŠÀ *ši-bi-it UKU.UŠ [ša?] a-lik i-di-ia ša ki-nu-un-šu bé-lu-ú URU.KI id-di-nam-ma*, “10 iku of land, holding of a *redū*-soldier, which belonged to a fellow of mine, whose brazier was extinct, the City gave to me”.⁴³ This use of the brazier to symbolize the continuity of the household is not sufficient to prove the existence of a family cult centred on the hearth in Mesopotamia.⁴⁴

³⁸ F. R. Kraus, *TBP*, no. 7 obv. 11.

³⁹ BE 14, 40 ll. 11–15.

⁴⁰ *a-na É AD.DA.NI uš-ši*, ll. 9–10.

⁴¹ *MDP* 23, 285 ll. 15–16.

⁴² See P. Koschaker, loc. cit. (n. 35); *RA* 11 (1914), 29–42; G. R. Driver and J. C. Miles, *BabL.* I, 329 f.

⁴³ BE 6/2, 123 ll. 3–7; *CT* 6, 27b ll. 14–17.

⁴⁴ On the Roman cult see N. D. Fustel de

Coulanges, *La cité antique*, (1900) I, Ch. VII. Fires which must not go out are mentioned as part of the cult of the gods (*BRM* 4, 6 18; *KUB* 37, 61 12'). See also LB references to bonfires in the streets of Uruk on a religious festival, (*RAcc*, 76 ll. 35–45, 79 ll. 35–39; and to a festival *Ka-nu-né ABL* 49 r. 13; cf. 15; 50 7. On (d) *Kinūnu*, a hearth deity, see I. J. Gelb, *NPN*, 306 f. For a discussion of *kinūnu belū* see

Evidence suggesting a special ceremonial role of the eldest son in the OB period⁴⁵ cannot conclusively be connected with the funerary cult. It has been suggested above that the funerary cult was a mechanism both for the perpetuation of the identity of an individual after his death and for the alleviation of tensions, anxiety and guilt experienced on the death of a relative.⁴⁶ The tensions between adjacent generations may be expected to have affected the householder and his sons, who were to inherit his property and in some cases his status, more than other household members. It would not be surprising, therefore, to find that the moral pressure to observe the funerary cult would be strongest on sons who had recently succeeded their fathers, and this deduction is supported by the evidence given above.

It must be emphasized that there is absolutely no evidence of the cult being observed for ascendants further back than the grand-parents among private persons. In societies where ancestors for some generations back are honoured, the cult generally entails the coming together for worship of groups of kin larger than the domestic group,⁴⁷ and is one of the ways of maintaining solidarity within lineage groups.⁴⁸

There is no evidence of the existence of lineage groups in Assyrian or Babylonian urban society, though there is some evidence that large land-owning lineage groups composed of a number of related households may have been quite common in Mesopotamian society before 2000 B.C.⁴⁹ The West Semitic dynasties of Hammurapi in Babylonia and Šamši-Adad in Assyria, while preserving traces of their tribal origins in their common genealogical traditions,⁵⁰ do not appear to have been accompanied by an influx of West Semitic people sufficient to alter the social structure of the countries they ruled.

B. Landsberger, *ZDMG* 69 (1915), 526. For a month *Kinūnu* at Nuzi see *ArOr* 10 (1938) 62; cf. J.-M. Kupper, *RA* 41 (1947) 174; S. Langdon, *BMSC*, 29; C.-F. Jean, *RES* 10 (1941) 129. For a possible reference to an ED rite of oil-burning and a doubtful etymology of Sum. *ibila*, "heir" as "the one who burns oil", see F. Thureau-Dangin, *AO* I (1899), 271; *RA* 10 (1913), 93 ff. (based on Gudea, Statue B 7, ll. 44-6; Cylinder B, 18).

⁴⁵ I.e. references to *paššūr sakki* (written *giš. BANŠUR ZAG.GÚ.LA*, "ceremonial tray", which occurs only as part of the preferential portion of the eldest son in partition documents, e.g. *BE* 6/2, 26 I 15; 32 3; 43 3. See R. T. O'Callaghan, *JCS* 8 (1954), 137-41.

⁴⁶ Personal anxiety in the face of death, irrespective of other tensions, may well have contributed towards this. Such anxiety is a theme of the Epic of Gilgamesh (see A. Heidel, op. cit. (n. 1)).

⁴⁷ E.g. traditional Chinese society, where up to forty generations of ancestors might be worshipped by up to ten thousand people. See M. Freedman, "Ancestor Worship and the Transmission of Family Authority" in R. Firth, *Social Organization* (1967); M. Weber, *The Religion of China* (Eng. trans., 1951). The length of time for which the cult of a dead relative was observed may well have varied in

Mesopotamia from household to household. Little is known of the frequency of the rites. References to *ūm kispi*, "the day of the funerary offering" as the name of the 29th day of the month (*RA* 16 (1919), 152; *MSL* 5 (Hh 1), 23 l. 196; *LSS* VI, 141 ff.; cf. *KAR*, 184 obv. 28: *ina UD.3.KÁM UD.29.KÁM e-nu-ma GIDIM uš-taš(!)-še-ru*, "On the third day (or?) the 29th day, when the ghosts are mustered" may refer only to the royal funerary cult, which, like all ceremonies relating to the king, had public significance, and which is known to have been a monthly ceremony.

⁴⁸ It is not known whether groups larger than the household met for the cult. Mourning ceremonies (Akk. *bikitu*) may also have provided an occasion for the gathering of relatives. This is suggested by *LKA* 70 i 3-4. There is evidence that kin were ideally buried close together (*CT* 23, 18 ff., 26, 28).

⁴⁹ The main evidence is the Obelisk of Maništusu (published *MDP* 2, 1 ff. and Pls. 1-10). See for interpretation I. J. Gelb, *MAD* 3, 181; also I. M. Diakonoff, *Sale of Land in Pre-Sargonic Sumer* (Moscow, 1954).

⁵⁰ See J. J. Finkelstein, *JCS* 20 (1966), 95-118 for the connections between the Genealogy of the Hammurapi Dynasty and the Assyrian King List. See also W. G. Lambert, *JCS* 22 (1968), 1-2.

In the period of the Kassite rulers of Babylonia evidence exists of corporate land-holding lineages of considerable size, occupying areas of the Babylonian realm to the east of the Tigris, which appear to have been partially integrated into the administrative system,⁵¹ but their political role may well have been the outcome of the Kassite conquest of Babylonia, and many of them may have been of Kassite ancestry.⁵² The first millennium saw the assimilation of the Aramaeans into Assyrian and Babylonian society, including a wholesale settlement of Chaldaean tribes in the south. There is, however, no certain evidence that their tribal structure affected the structure of Babylonian society, though there is a little evidence of a greater interest in descent during this period, and of ascription to lineage in naming. Before this period there is very little sign of consciousness of ancestry among commoners.⁵³ The above evidence accords with the evidence of a funerary cult of very limited extent.

The Royal Funerary Cult

Evidence for the royal funerary cult is sparse and dispersed in time, but the various references are consistent in showing that it extended to more than two generations of ascendants. Evidence known to the writer comes almost entirely from the OB, NA and LB periods.

The OB evidence reflects the cultural traditions of the "Amorites". "The Genealogy of the Hammurapi Dynasty"⁵⁴ is a genealogy of the ancestors of Ammišaduqa of the First Dynasty of Babylon. The list purports to stretch back over a number of generations, and contains 27 names, the earliest eponymous. The summary adds the females of the line DUMU.MÍMEŠ LUGAL, "daughters of kings", and the following lines show that the list was drawn up for purposes of the funerary cult: *a-wi-lu-tum ka-li-ši-in iš-tu* ^UUTU.È.A *a-du* (!) ^UUTU.ŠÚ.A *ša pa-qi-dam à sa-hi-ra-am la i-šu-ú al-ka-nim-ma an-ni-a-am a-ak-la an-ni-a-am ši-ti-a a-na am-mi-ša-du-gá DUMU am-mi-di-ta-na LUGAL KÁ.DINGIR.RA^{k1} *ku-ur-ba*, "All persons from the rising of the sun to the setting of the sun, who have no-one to tend or remember⁵⁵ them, come eat this, drink this (and) bless Ammišaduqa, son of Ammiditana, king of Babylon". This comprehensiveness is comparable with that of the propitiatory rituals discussed above, and the inclusion of all untended dead, and also of the Babylonian equivalent of the Unknown Soldier,⁵⁶ illustrates a belief in the numerous forces which might affect the king's well-being.*

⁵¹ See J. Brinkman, *JESHO* 6 (1963), 233-42. For the sources (mainly kudurru inscriptions) see L. W. King, *BBSI* (1912); and P. X. Steinmetzer, *Die babylonischen Kudurru (Grenzsteine) als Urkundenform untersucht* (1922).

⁵² The ancestral names of the lineages include Akkadian, Kassite and West Semitic types.

⁵³ See *TCL* 7, 43 ll. 5-6; *OECT* 3, 61 ll. 21-2; *BE* 14, 39 ll. 6-10; *BBSI* 10 r1. For LB ancestral names see W. G. Lambert, "Ancestors, Authors and Canonicity", *JCS* 11 (1957), 1-14; idem, "A Catalogue of Texts and Authors", *JCS* 16 (1962), 59-77; D. B. Weisberg, *Gild Structure and Political Allegiance in Early Achaemenid Mesopotamia (TNER I, 1967)*, esp.

77-85; A. Ungnad, "Babylonische Familiennamen", *Ar. Or.* 12 (1935), 319-26 (cf. "Das Haus Egibi", *AFO* 14 (1941), 57-64); K. L. Tallqvist, *Neubabylonisches Namenbuch* (1905); and the name lists in J. N. Strassmaier, *Babylonische Texte*, IV 40-68; VII 15-28.

⁵⁴ Published by J. J. Finkelstein, loc. cit. (n. 50). See also A. Malamat, *JAOS* 88 (1968), 163-73; W. G. Lambert, *JCS* 22 (1968), 1-2.

⁵⁵ The *sāhirum* is perhaps the equivalent of the *zākīr šumi* of other texts.

⁵⁶ UKU.ÚŠ *ša i-na da-an-na-at be-li-šu im-gu-tu*, "the soldier who fell in the service of his lord" (l. 35).

The fullest evidence of the royal funerary cult comes from Mari. A number of administrative texts list rations *ana kispim ša šarrāni*. The staple foods listed were similar to those for the king's own meals.⁵⁷ The plural *šarrāni* suggests that several generations at least were included in the cult, but there is no direct evidence of its extent. References in letters indicate that the presence of the reigning king was important, possibly essential; there is no evidence as to whether other members of the royal family took part.

A number of texts suggest that there was a regular monthly ceremony (e.g. *a-n[a k]i-[is-pi-i]m [š]a LU[GAL]^{meš} ša 1^{te}[¹la-hi]-im*, “for the funerary offering for the kings of the month of Lahum”; [*a-na*] *ki-is-pi-i[m ša LUGAL^{meš} ša 1^{te}]¹la-hi-im*⁵⁸), and that it took place at the provincial centre of Terqa (e.g. *u₄-um ki-is-pi-im a-na ter-qa^{k1} a-ka-aš-ša-dam*, “On the day of the funerary offering I shall arrive at Terqa”).⁵⁹ An interesting letter to Zimri-Lim reports that the god Dagan has sent a message through one of his prophets (*muhhūm*) instructing the king to make a funerary offering to the ghost of his father, Iahtun-Lim: *ki-is-pi a-na i-te₄-em-[mi-im] ša ia-ah-du-un-[i-im] li-ik-ru-bu*.⁶⁰

The NA evidence suggests that the inclusion of more generations of ancestors in the royal cult than in the non-royal was characteristic of Mesopotamian society, even if the long patrilineal genealogy of the OB period was a nomadic innovation. Aššurbanipal mentions the funerary cult of former kings, which had fallen into disuse.⁶¹ The stele of the NB king Nabonidus from Harran⁶² gives details of the cult of previous kings (possibly Assyrian⁶³) by his mother (worded in the first person) and of his own attention to her burial. The inscription shows that the cult could at that time be performed by non-kin and by a woman.⁶⁴ It states that none of those whom duty or gratitude should have led to attend to the cult did so: *ma-na-ma ina DUMU^{meš}-šū-nu u man-ma ni-šū-t[ú-šū-nu] u LÚ.GAL^{meš}-šū-nu šá i-nu-ma ri-ši-šū-nu ul-lu-ú ina bu-šu-ú ù NÍG.GA ú-at-tir-šū-nu-tú la iš-tak-kan-šū-nu-[tu] qut-rin-nu*, “Not one among their children nor among their relatives or their high officials, whom when they gave them preferment (lit. “raised their heads”) they loaded with riches, ever

⁵⁷ See M. Birot, *ARM* 9, Commentary, 283 ff.

⁵⁸ *ARM* 9, 221 ii 1–2; 225 l. 6 f. Cf. I Sam. 20: 5, 18–29 which refers to a festival at the court of Saul on the New Moon, at which time David had to return home for yearly household sacrifices (I Sam. 20: 6, 29).

⁵⁹ *ARM* 1, 65 ll. 5–7. Terqa may have been the original seat of the dynasty. See B. Landsberger, *JCS* 8 (1954), 35 n. 26. Cf. also *IAK* 26, nos. 5 and 6.

⁶⁰ *ARM* 3, 40 ll. 16–18. Babylonian administrative documents and letters also record deliveries of food for funerary offerings, e.g. OB: *JCS* 11 (1957) 36 no. 27; *VS* 16, 51 l. 5; *VAB* 6, 80 6; *YOS* 2, 30 l. 14; *TCL* 1, 7 l. 12; MB: *PBS* 2/2, 8 ll. 1 and 9; cf. *ATR* 119b.

⁶¹ M. Streck, *VAB* 7, 250 ll. 1–5; *a-di ki-is-pi na-aq A^{meš} a-na GIDIM^{meš} LUGAL^{meš} DU-ut ma[h-ri-ia] šá šub-tu-lu ár-ku-us a-na DINGIR u a-me-lu-tum ana úš^{meš} u TI^{meš} MUN DÜ-uš am-me-ni GIG HUL lib-bi È-u hu-lu-uq-qu u rit-ku-sa(?) KI-ia*, “I made arrangements for the funerary offerings and libations for the ghosts of my

royal predecessors, which had fallen into abeyance; I did good to god and man, to dead and living. Why are sickness, sorrow, loss and expense always connected with me?”

⁶² See B. Landsberger, *In Memoriam Halil Edhem I* (1947), 115–51, for transliteration, translation and discussion of this text; For the text see H. Pognon, *Inscriptions sémitiques*, No. 1, Pls. 11–13.

⁶³ See Landsberger, loc. cit., 143 and n. 2.

⁶⁴ The evidence from ED Lagash shows that wives of ensis could perform the rites for former ensis, acting in their capacity as overseers of the temple of Bau, consort of the city god. See A. Deimel, *Or.* 2 (1920), 32–51. The NA funerary ritual (published in transliteration *BA* 2 (1894), 635; Photo. *ZA* NF 11 (1939) 42–61, P. VII; cf. *TuL*, 63–5) mentions the daughter (ll. 29 and 41), the daughter-in-law (l. 4) (i.e. the wife of the crown prince), and queen (*SAL É.GAL*, ll. 40 f.) playing a role in the royal funeral.

offered them incense".⁶⁵ She then describes the rites that she performed for them herself (ll. 12–19): *ia-a-tu ITI-šam-ma la na-pár-k[a-a] i-na lu-bu-ši-ia dam-qu-ú-tú* GUD^{meš} UDU.NÍTA^{meš} *ma-ru-tú NINDA^{h1.a} KAŠ.SAG GEŠ[TIN] Ì.GIŠ LÀL u GURUN KIRI₆ ka-la-ma ki-is-p[i] a-kás-sap-šú-nu-ti-ma sur-qin-nu tah-du-tú i-ri-ši ta-a-bi a-na gi-na-a ú-kin-šú-nu-ti-m[a xx] áš-tak-kan ina mah-ri-šu-un,* “But I every month without interruption in my finest garments made them a funerary offering of oxen, fat sheep, bread, best beer, wine, sesame oil, honey and all kinds of garden produce, and established abundant offerings of sweet smelling incense as a regular due, and placed it before them”.

These are the only references to the burning of incense as part of the funerary cult. The details of the offering show close similarity with the cult of the gods. Possibly the dead kings were represented by their statues, as were the gods. We see from the quoted passage that devout attention to the royal cult meant regular monthly rites.

The NA and LB material seems to show an attitude of reverence towards the dead that is not attested for commoners. In *ABL* 614 an oracle is reported as issuing from the ghost of a dead queen. Unfortunately the obverse of the tablet is too damaged to read, and it is not known which prince is addressed or whose ghost is speaking. The reverse reads (ll. 2–7): *ma⁷-a ina ki-nu-ti-šá aššur⁶ ša-maš ana DUMU.LUGAL-ú-te KUR aššur^{ki} iq-ṭi-bu-ú-ni e-ṭim-ma-šá i⁷-kar-rab-šú ki-i ša šu-ú e-ṭim-mu ip-lah-u-ni ma-a MU-šú NUMUN-šú KUR aššur^{ki} li-bi-lu,* “The gods Aššur and Šamaš ordained me to be the crown-prince of Assyria because of her (the dead queen’s (?)) truthfulness.’ (And) her ghost blesses him in the same degree as he revered the ghost: ‘May his descendants rule over Assyria’ . . .”.⁶⁶ If, as seems likely, a family ghost is giving this blessing, a concept of reciprocity is here illustrated, linking piety towards dead kin on the one hand with the well-being and continuance of posterity on the other.⁶⁷

This attitude of piety towards ancestors is also illustrated in royal inscriptions expressing respect towards monuments of previous kings. Royal graves were, of course, more elaborate than those of commoners, and were provided with inscriptions identifying their occupants.⁶⁸ Sennacherib records that he faced with limestone blocks the brickwork “both of works for the living and of graves befitting the dead” (*ul-tú ši-pir bal-tu-ti a-di KI.MAH si-mat me-tu-tu*⁶⁹). The indignantly pious tone of Nabonidus’s mother is unparalleled in non-royal texts. It must be remembered, however, that it is only for the royal funerary cult that there is evidence of the attitudes of individuals to their dead kin and of the regular cult, as distinct from the propitiatory approach of the standard incantations.

The evidence of a greater degree of piety does, however, accord well with the evidence of the greater extent and regularity of the cult. Various factors may have contributed to this. Ritual obligations of all kinds were more binding on the king,

⁶⁵ Col. iii 8–12.

⁶⁶ See S. Parpola, *AOAT* V/1, 132 for translation.

⁶⁷ The same concept is illustrated by the complaint of Aššurbanipal that his piety has not been rewarded (see n. 61 above).

⁶⁸ E.g. *WVDOG* 65, Pl. 12a (cf. p. 21); Pl. 20 f. (cf. p. 101) and p. 177; W. Andrae, *Das Wiedererstandene Assur*, pp. 136 and 138; *A/O* 13 (1939–40), 215.

⁶⁹ *OIP* 2, 135 l. 18. Note the concern shown for the remains of his ancestors by the Chaldaean king Mero-dach-baladan, who dug their bones out of their graves in the Sealand and took them with him into exile on the other side of the Persian Gulf (*OIP* 2, 85 ll. 8–11). Presumably he feared the kind of treatment from Sennacherib that Aššurbanipal later meted out to the remains of the Elamite kings (see n. 12 above).

whose well-being, felt to depend on the relationship with the national deities, symbolized the well-being of the community. This was particularly true of the Assyrian king, who was high priest of the god Aššur, and whose every action was regulated by the consultation of omens and by ritual protective measures. As mentioned above, even the ancestor cult of the Hammurapi dynasty, with its strong patrilineal emphasis, showed an orientation towards the well-being of the community. A more decisive factor, however, was the greater awareness of ancestors among kings, shown also by references to ancestors in general or individuals by name and by the use of genealogies in royal inscriptions. This awareness was presumably related to the high status of the royal family and to their access to the means of preserving their names for posterity in king lists and on monuments.

Conclusions

The cult of dead kin among the people of Mesopotamia appears to have served a number of functions. Attitudes towards the dead projected the tensions attached to lifetime relationships, and the rituals of the cult seem to have served to relieve those tensions. The cult seems to have been a means of preserving identity after death, but there is no evidence that it was effective beyond living memory. In royal dynasties, however, former kings were remembered by means of a cult that stretched back over many generations as well as by means of written records. But in neither the popular nor the royal cult can any direct link with inheritance or with a special role of the eldest son in inheritance be shown on the available evidence.