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Studies on the
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of Ancient Syria

Edited by Paolo Matthiae

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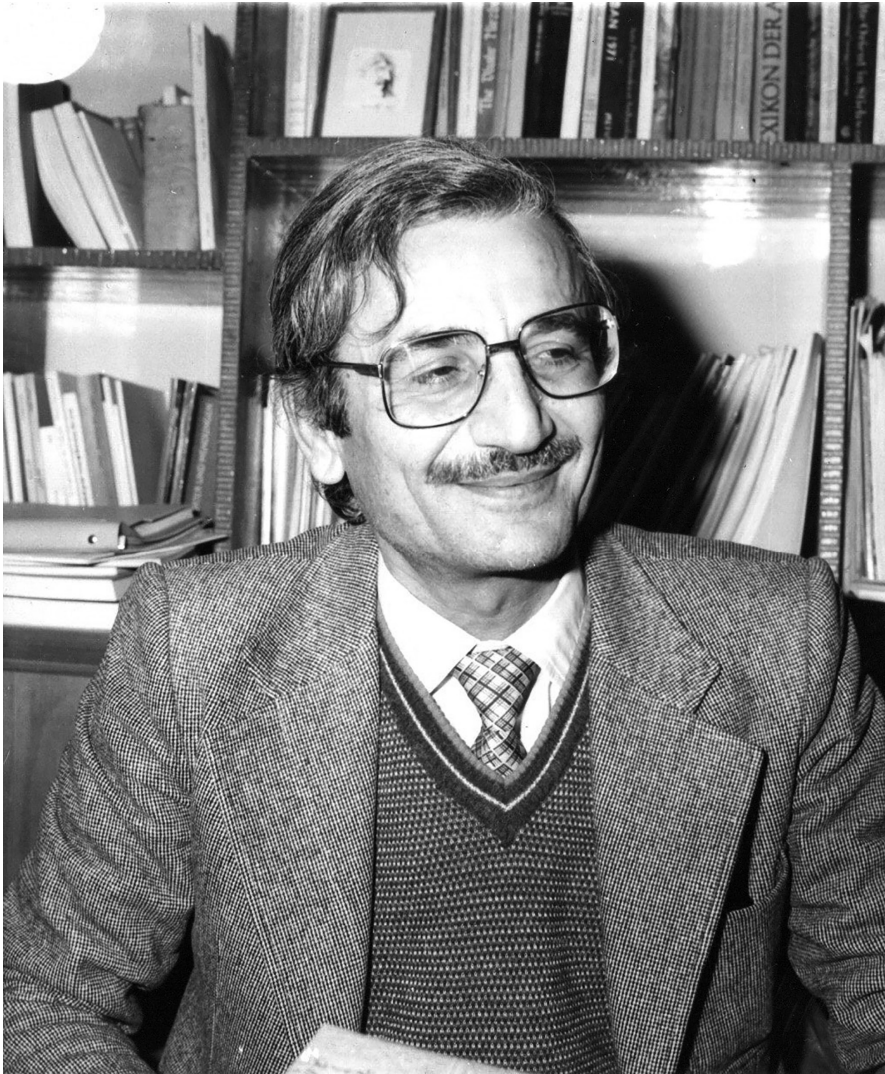
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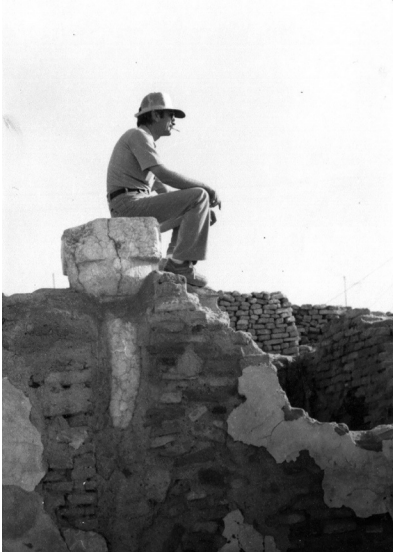
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This issue of *Studia Eblaitica* is dedicated to the memory of Qassem Toueir

(Deir ez-Zor September 23rd 1936–Damascus May 10th 2021)

Our tribute to Qassem Toueir in images



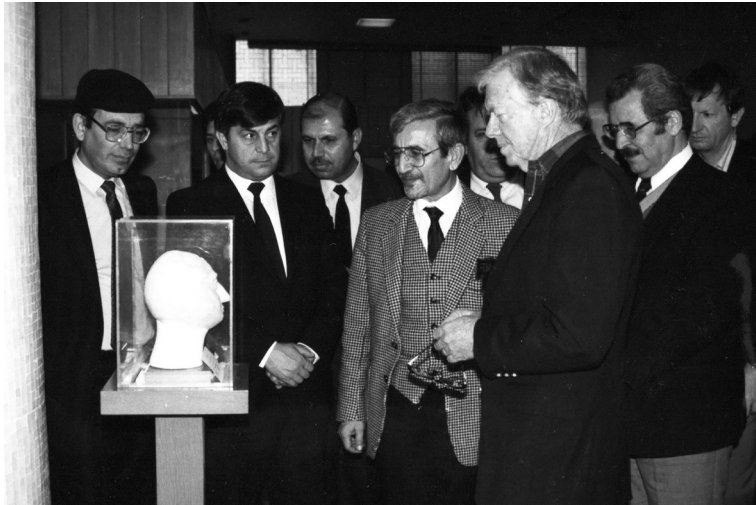
On the excavation



With Dr Najah el-Attar, when she was Minister of Culture of the Syrian Arab Republic



With Queen Sofia of Spain at the Expo of Seville in 1992



With the former United States President, Jimmy Carter,
at the Archaeological Museum of Aleppo



With Mrs and Dr Adnan Bounni
(standing behind them)



With Claude F.A. Schaeffer-Forrer at Lattakia



From left to right:
Paul Garelli, Edmond
Sollberger, Paolo
Matthiae, Qassem Toueir
and Nassib Saliby, during
a visit to Syria of the
International Committee
for the Study of the Texts
of Ebla



With Paolo and Gabriella
Matthiae, and a member
of the Italian Expedition,
at Ebla



In the garden of the National Museum of
Damascus, with a statue from Ebla



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Kingship, Cosmos and Cult of the Ancestors in Ebla: Some New Perspectives

In his research about the features and functions related to kingship, Dario Sabbatucci identified as the most important among them the principle of “cosmicization” (turning something into “cosmic” as opposed to “chaotic”, i.e. neatened, given sense, meaning and value) – both in a chronological and in a spatial perspective. This is a pivotal cornerstone of symbolic systems in ancient times: in fact, it is the main device to build a collective identity in a community, creating a linear concept of time (and with it the notion of history too) and turning wilderness into inhabitable, cultural space. This theoretical model seems to fit even for the city of Ebla (Tell Mardikh) during the second half of 3rd millennium BC. In particular, this work focuses on some specific elements of Ebla’s religious thought and practices, such as the cult of the ancestors and the kingship renovation rituals. These rituals not only stress the connection between kingship and time and space perception, but also play a fundamental role in defining the sacred geography of 3rd millennium BC Syria and in building a new political landscape of the territory, though no longer as a set of isolated villages but as a kingdom.¹

1. Premise

Kingship is by far one of the most important and durable social institutions in ancient times. It is no surprise that the development of this concept is deeply rooted in the symbolic thought of ancient cultures, often holding a prominent role in the cultural representation of reality. Since at least Frankfort’s seminal work on the subject,² the idea of a “cosmic” dimension of kingship in the Ancient Near East has taken hold on scholarship: from an ideological standpoint, the main roles of the king were to act as a mediator between the human and divine sphere and to preserve cosmic balance, that is taking care of the conservation of order over chaos. In the last decades, scholarship³ has focused rather on the idea of divine kingship, the political implications of such a conception and the ways it was used to convey and exercise power and control over territory and people. Dario Sabbatuc-

1 This work is an extended and significantly revised version of a paper I wrote during the studies for my MA degree in Venice. I am deeply indebted to Lucio Milano, who first disclosed to me Ebla and its archives, to Amalia Catagnoti for her invaluable insights and corrections on the first draft of this article and to Gianni Marchesi, who provided me with some of the material I worked with. All extant errors are of course my own.

2 Frankfort 1948.

3 e.g. Brisch 2008; Hill, Jones and Morales 2013; Anagnostou-Laoutides 2017.

ci⁴ instead identified as one of the pivotal functions of kingship as an ideological construction the principle of “cosmicization” (turning something into “cosmic” as opposed to “chaotic”, i.e. neat, give sense, meaning and value) – both in a chronological and in a spatial perspective. One point is worth stressing: while the idea of a cosmic role of kingship belongs to the perception of the social group who produced it (emic perspective) and to the sphere of symbolic meaning, that of cosmicization instead acts on another level. It is a label used by the observer (etic) to define the process of giving symbolic meaning to something. Thus, it is not about the cultural meaning *attributed* to kingship directly by the social actors involved, but especially about kingship as a cultural device deployed to build and convey not only political aims, but also symbolic meaning.

This work will try to analyse some textual sources through the theoretical lens of the cosmicizing function of kingship, sometimes using comparative material, proposing a new synthesis about its role in Eblaite ideology and religion. This approach does not mean to subversively reevaluate the interpretations already formulated on the basis of available archaeological and epigraphic evidence, nor to present a more suitable hermeneutical model which is *tout court* better. The aim is rather to problematize some particular issues of symbolic and religious thought in pre-Sargonic Ebla, not in order to disavow the results obtained by specialized disciplines, but eventually (and hopefully) to deepen, integrate and expand those results.

Kingship had of course a pivotal role also in the religion of Ebla during the period of the royal archives (24th century BC). Indeed, Ebla’s polytheism seems to assign to kingship significant prominence, as it is attested by the vast number of rituals dealing, in one way or another, with the king and the royal family, by the highly ritualized routine involving this institution, and by the relevance of the royal ancestors and gods such as Kura or Išḫara, which were tightly linked to the king and its role⁵. In the last decades an ever-increasing amount of scholarship has provided a solid background in a historical-religious perspective, with an investigation of the fundamental aspects of the Eblaite religious system such as the divine entities, their personalities and functions, the organization of the *pantheon*, the complexity of the ritual economy, the cultic component and the role of the different cult operators⁶. As Sallaberger points out, this vast amount of scholarship

4 Sabbatucci 2000.

5 For a state-of-the-art treatment about Kura see Sallaberger 2018. For Išḫara “of the king” see *Archi* 2015: 677–682. For a broader discussion on the topic of kingship in Ebla, see Pitard 1997; Stieglitz 2002b: 215–222; *Archi* 2015: 123–142.

6 Many studies on individual deities and rituals by A. *Archi* covering a timespan from 1979 up to the 2010s have been collected in the 7th volume of the SANER series (*Archi* 2015). This volume also includes a convenient bibliography with all *Archi*’s publications about Ebla up to 2015 (pp. xvii–xxiv). For convenience, when possible, I will make reference to this volume in the footnotes; every bibliographical reference to the original articles can be found there. Pomponio and Xella 1997 is a comprehensive cross survey about Eblaite divine names in the

has made clear that, at least as far as religious tradition is involved, Ebla seems to be more embedded in the West-Semitic cultural fabric traceable e.g. in Late Bronze Age Ugarit (16th–13th cent. BC) than in Old Babylonian Mari (19th–18th cent. BC). At the same time, the geopolitical landscape of the Early Bronze Age Syro-Mesopotamian area and the Eblaite scribal culture, which shows a significant presence of the Mesopotamian tradition especially in lexical and literary texts, also allow for comparisons with this other “eastern” cultural reservoir⁷. This is the reason why the trajectories of comparison will be directed primarily along these directions in trying to elucidate some facets of the Eblaite conception of kingship.

2. King Lists: History and “Cosmicization” of Time

According to Sabbatucci, the first documentation of each people that can be fully defined as “historical” (i.e. the conscious product of a people which *tells* its own history, and not just the inert testimony of an existence distant in time) is closely linked to the onset and the conceptualization of kingship as an institution⁸. In the Ancient Near East this conceptualization came to be expressed through the Sumerian word BALA (Akk. *palû*), meaning a “term” or a “period” of time during which a ruler or a city exercised their power⁹. Royal prerogatives attribute to a historical man, the king, the ability to determine time, and determination becomes documentation of events in a chronological order¹⁰. These documents include acts that begin to be, in fact, dated by the name of the king in charge and lists of kings which allowed the identification of the succession of periods of time, and thus a chronological linear sequence¹¹. Therefore, the pivotal function of kingship and

written sources; Mander 2005 is a first attempt at an encompassing analytic approach to Ebla religion. Several other works will be quoted in what follows.

7 See Mander 2005: 9–10. Sallaberger 2018: 108–109. But cf. e.g. Archi 2015: 656–675 on the impossibility to identify the Eblaite god Ḫay(y)a (𒀭En-ki) with Mesopotamian Ea/Enki; this should warn in advance that caution is always in order when applying a comparative approach.

8 See Sabbatucci 2000: 118.

9 See von Dassow 2012: 118. She maintains that originally BALA/palû denoted a turn in a rotating office or duty, and then the duration of such turn (cf. CAD P: 74 #4).

10 Cf. Sabbatucci 2000: 253.

11 The best-known example is maybe the so-called “Sumerian King List”, which records sequences of rulers for each city and organizes these sequences together “in linear fashion, as if each followed the preceding one in temporal succession” (von Dassow 2012: 119). The literature about the Sumerian King List is unmeasurable. For an updated view concerning several issues see Marchesi 2010. This is not to say that the succession of rulers was the only criterion used to take account of “linear” time. Under the Sargonic Dynasty years were named after relevant events which happened during them; in Aššur they took the names of the holders of the *limmu* office. However, the succession of rulership (of kings, cities or even groups of people) was the most relevant reference for chronology, and for sure the institution of kingship produced “historical” documentation wherever it has been adopted; cf. von Dassow 2012: 118–120.

the documentation connected to it was to “cosmicize” (i.e. to order, to provide order and meaning) the time shared by a social community; the king was not simply the ruler of a nation or its representative before the gods of the *pantheon*, but substantiated its very time and thus allowed its existence in time. This interpretation of the king lists of course does not rule out the explanation that envisions them as tools for political propaganda; on the contrary, it can significantly back up this view¹². It is clear that, since the king showed himself as the beating heart of a city or a nation, through these lists he also proposed an ideological agenda with the aim to legitimize his function as ruler, to reiterate his role and the right to exercise his power, both internally and in relation to foreign political and social realities. Kingship stands out among any other governmental office or role for the principle of hereditariness. Each king who ascends the throne ushers a new era, adding it to previous eras, all linked together by the bond that binds the successor king to the predecessor king. This bond and this succession distinguish the royal institution from any other kind of authority. Thus, it follows that the principle of hereditariness must have been one of the most important tools for legitimizing the exercise of authority and power. Kingship is first of all an inheritance: one is king because he legitimately succeeded the previous king¹³.

The city of Ebla in the period of the royal archives (24th century BC) fits well into this scenario about kingship and “historical” documentation. A tablet with a list of seventy-one names was found in the Royal Palace G (L.2586); the text on it (TM.74.G.120) is split into two parts¹⁴. The first one shows the name of the last recorded king of Ebla, *Iš₁₁-ar-da-mu*, followed by ten other kings’ names in reverse chronological order¹⁵: these names correspond to the ten names listed in another

12 Archi 2001: 8 states that “many, if not all, of the king-lists stemming from the ancient Near East had a political or propagandistic intent”; this is undisputable. Cf. von Dassow 2012: 121.

13 See Sabbatucci 2000: 118, 227. For examples in the West-Semitic world see Ishida 1977: 18–25; Stieglitz 2015: 227. This is not the place to address the debate on the nature of Eblaite kingship and the dispute involving G. Pettinato. My position should be clear since my very approach to the matter. About the dispute, see Mander 2005: 94–113.

14 Four names in the second section are not readable due to physical gaps in the tablet.

15 TM.74.G.120 obv. I 1–6; II 1–5. Archi traces the reason of the reverse chronological order of this first part to the usage of a mnemonic technique linked to an older oral stage of tradition: “[...] it is not surprising that a list of ancestors stemming from oral tradition should have a reverse chronological order” (Archi 2001: 4; cf. Archi 2015: 522–523). This seems possible, and indeed likely, in particular if we trust the interpretation that this is an exercise that should have been submitted to the attention of the city scribal school. However, the scope of this reversal seems deeper than a pure matter of mnemonics. The role of culture in temporal cognition is a much-discussed matter; recent research has once again highlighted how conceptualizations of time are dependent (at least partially) on cognitive processes that are culture-specific, thus always reflecting a given *Weltanschauung* (see e.g. Ellen 2016: 125–150; cf. von Dassow 2012: 122). The same inversion principle we find in TM.74.G.120 is also found embedded in other sources that provide pieces of information about the conceptualization of chronology and time in the Ancient Near East: “The past represents that portion of time that one has in front of him, before his eyes (*igi, pānū*): *pāna* ‘preceding’, *pānātu* ‘past’. This concept

document (TM.75.G.2628 = *ARET* VII 150, found in Archive L.2769)¹⁶, which will soon be discussed, and are followed by fifteen other names. Since elsewhere offerings are given to some of these (e.g. *I-bi-ni-li-im*, *Sa-[gi]-s[u]*)¹⁷, as it occurs also in *ARET* VII 150, it seems likely that they are kings too, like the previous ones in the list and that they too are arranged in reverse chronological order¹⁸. These are followed by the toponym Ebla (rev. IV 5: *ib-la*, without the geographical determinative *ki*) and six additional names; thus, “the mention of Ebla [...] seems to divide the document into two parts, but the passage which precedes [...] remains obscure [...]. Then there appear six names not otherwise known”¹⁹. This first part, therefore, is a list of (at least) twenty-six people, identified as the kings of the city of Ebla: a king list in all respects. The second part, on the other hand, it’s another name list where names are organized according to a criterion related to their initial element. Since these names are seldom attested elsewhere, it has been convincingly proposed that this is an exercise in a school textbook rather than a list of people that had actually existed²⁰. The text found in TM.75.G.2628 (= *ARET* VII 150) is another list, which shows the names of ten kings identical to the sequence of the ten names following *Iš₁₁-ar-da-mu* in TM.74.G.120²¹. The fact that these are kings’ names is made clear by the presence of the Sumerogram en (Eblaite *mal(i)kum*)²². As in TM.74.G.120, they are arranged in reverse chronological order. A second part includes a list with offerings of sheep for six deities organized in pairs plus two single deities. In the final part the toponym [*da*]-*ri*-[*i*]*b^{ki}* (*ARET* VII 150 rev. IV 2) makes its appearance; this term designates the “residence” of the kings listed above²³, and it seems to be the location of a real mausoleum dedicated to the

[...] is shared also by the Indo-Europeans. From I.E. *per* [...] Greek *peran*, “on the other side”, comes Latin *prior*, *primus*, *pristinus*. The future follows the individual and, in this way, lies behind him” (Archi 2001: 4; cf. Archi 2015: 523, fn. 4; Maul 2008: 15–24). This concept matches with the “cosmicizing” function over time that the king lists were supposed to have and their implicit purpose of legitimizing the right to rule attesting a hereditary succession or divine ancestry; it makes sense to use the present reality as a starting point to go back to conditions that preceded and determined it, i.e. “historically” founded it. These two hypotheses do not collide, since they make reference to different levels of human experience: declarative memory as an innate human quality in the first case and ideological elaboration, which can be investigated as a historical and cultural fact, in the second. Thus, there is no exclusive relationship between the two views, but rather they can be mutually integrated.

16 For a synoptical view of TM.74.G.120 and TM.75.G.2628 (= *ARET* VII 150) see Archi 2015: 17; for a detailed overview of both texts see Bonechi 2002: 53–64.

17 Respectively TM.74.G.120 rev. III 4 and rev. III 6; cf. *ARET* XI 1 rev. IV 2, 5.

18 Cf. Archi (ed.) 1988: 213.

19 Archi (ed.) 1988: 214.

20 See Archi (ed.) 1988: 214; Bonechi 2002: 55; Archi 2015: 522–523.

21 After the finding of the missing tablet fragment (on which there were no signs) the part of the text with the ten sheep that was previously integrated to fill the gap in the headless text was removed. See Archi 2001: 2.

22 See Archi 2001: 2.

23 They are in fact *al₆-tuš*; *ARET* VII 150 rev. III 3. Cf. Archi 2015: 531, 538.

deceased kings involved in cult practices (or at least some of them). The proposed location for this place is Atareb, about thirty kms north of Ebla²⁴. Each of the names is preceded by the Sumerogram dingir separated from the name; it is therefore not a simple determiner, but a different case: “god-of”. Building on this observation, Archi²⁵ maintains that they are deified dead kings, discarding another translation hypothesis by Pitard, who had instead assumed that it could designate the patron deity of each king²⁶. Stieglitz and Biga follow Archi on this same path²⁷.

The concept of “divinization” – i.e. the act of attributing divine features and traits to the deceased king – however, seems ambiguous at the least and its use without proper *caveats* wouldn’t do justice to the complexity of Ebla’s religious system. The fact that the qualification of dingir is not associated to the kings’ names by means of the determinative, as in the case of gods, but separately (e.g. dingir *A-dub-da-mu*, dingir *I-šar-ma-lik*²⁸ vs. ^dNI-da-bal’ (KUL), ^dRa-sa-ap, ^dGu-la-

24 Archi 1988a: 106; cf. Archi 2015: 530–531. For the hypothesis that this could also be the location of the tombs of three kings see Archi 2001: 5–6; Archi 2017: 301.

25 Archi 1988a: 106–107; Archi 2001: 2.

26 Pitard 1997: 406. It might be worth noting here that in the West-Semitic world terms expressing divinity could also be used in close semantic proximity to the spirits of the deceased. Apart from the case of dingir in this specific usage at Ebla, Ugaritic *’ilm rbm* expresses the idea of the divine or deified ancestors (Del Olmo Lete and Sanmartín 2014: 47; cf. Wyatt 2007: 62–66); in a hymn to Shapash set within the Baal Cycle the terms *’ilm* and *mtm*, “dead”, are found in parallelism (KTU 1.6 VI: 48; see van der Toorn 2018: 278, fn. 27); in RS 94.2518 the twenty-six names of the dead and divinized kings follow the formula: dingir ^mPN, where “each entry consists of the logogram for ‘god’ [...], followed by the single vertical wedge used as a determinative for human males [...], then by the name itself” (Pardee 2002: 209, fn. 39; cf. Archi 2015: 523). Biblical Hebrew אלהים, whose meaning is usually “God” as a title or “gods” in the plural, is also used to designate the spirits of dead people, either collectively or for an individual: Is 8,19: “Should not a people consult their אלהים, the dead, on behalf of the living?”; cf. also, Ex 22,7-8.27; in 1Sam 28,13 the medium of Endor invokes Samuel from the dead, and he rises as אלהים. In his comprehensive study on this term, Burnett stresses its polysemy due to semantic flexibility, as it came to express different kinds of supernatural beings (Burnett 2001: 57.60; cf. Slivniak 2005. About the problem of the relation between אלהים and תרפים see generally van der Toorn 2018: 271–288). A possible explanation for this proximity of divinity and the state of being dead may be found in the etymology for the word *’il* <Egyptian *3w, “to be old” and the original use of אלהים to designate the spirits of the ancestors (Hodge 1971). However, this etymology is highly unlikely (TDOT 1: 244). Akkadian texts do not seem to show such a remarkable semantic overlapping between dingir/*ilu* and the terminology used for the dead (see CAD I–J: 91–103, esp. 102 #6), even if sometimes *ilu* is found in connection with ghosts and spirits; see van der Toorn 2018: 278, fn. 26. For a convenient summary about the cult of the dead in Old Assyrian sources, in Nuzi and in Emar see van der Toorn 2018: 284–288. One may also think about the Sumerian loanword in Enūma Elish IV.120, DINGIR.UG₅.GA *dingiruggū*, “dead god” (see Talon 2005: 55, 109, 113), but it is clear that this expression is used to stress Kingu’s defeat and his removal from the divine status (cf. Ps 82, 6–7), and not an actual connection with the netherworld.

27 Stieglitz 2002b: 215–222; Biga 2015: 108. Pasquali 2014: 56–58 analogously translates the expression dingir-dingir *ma-lik-tum-ma-lik-tum* (TM.75.G.2598 rev. II 11–15; TM.75.G.10167 obv. I 26–II 2) as “reines décédées et divinisées après leur mort”; cf. Archi 2015: 545–546.

28 ARET VII 150, respectively obv. I 7, obv. II 4.

du²⁹) shows that there was not a complete and total assimilation of the deceased kings into the *pantheon*; these entities retained their own specificity³⁰ and there was an operational distinction between the deceased rulers and the gods of the pantheon, stemming from a perception of the two categories of extra-human entities as distinct and different³¹. The use of the terms “deification” or “divinization” could therefore generate misunderstandings and ambiguities. In evaluating the ideological operation of divinization from a modern perspective, one comes to believe that the qualities of a god (transcendence of worldliness and humanity) have been attributed to a king (a human individual, perishable and in this specific case also deceased). The reasons and motivations of such an attribution might be investigated by the means of anthropology or psychology, stating that “the remembrance of ancestors has its roots in man’s yearning for divine protection, and, of all tutelary deities, ancestors were always closest to him and his family”³². Of course, a universal, anthropological reason rooted in human nature is a viable explanation, but it could be usefully integrated if we considered kingship and its functions as outlined before: the king substantiated the nation by “cosmicizing” time, providing an uninterrupted shared chronological framework in which the very nation could recognize itself. In a polytheistic mindset, the concept of divinity encapsulated the idea of an immortal, non-perishable entity that reflected a superordinate stability over human events. This can be seen for example in relation to Kura: in his role as the City-God of Ebla, he “represented the city and its state in both an eternal and powerful, supra-human form”³³. Overlapping the principles of kingship and divinity in the *personae* of deceased kings meant that divine features were attributed to the nation itself, whose existence came to belong to a super-human dimension and was legitimized by a paradigmatic, meta-historical foundation. Thus, the deification of (deceased) kings acted in such a way as to provide super-human protection and sustenance to the nation³⁴, but also to legitimize, justify and consequently found the same national reality. Assuming therefore that we cannot speak uncritically of deification of royal ancestors, this leaves an unsolved question about how within Eblaite polytheism this overlapping of

29 *ARET* VII 150, respectively obv. III 8, obv. IV 4, rev. I 2. The most common reading of ^dNI-da-KUL is ^dA₅-da-bal; see Archi 2015: 678. Cf. Matthiae 2010: 99–100. However, Stieglitz 2002a: 211 proposed to read it as ^dA_x-da-nu₅ and compared this name to the Ugaritic ‘*Adānu*’.

30 Curiously enough, following this criterion ^dsa-mi-ù (*ARET* IX 17 rev. II 4, figuring also in TM.74.G.120) would be the only king to be fully included in the Eblaite *pantheon*. Whether this could attest an actual assimilation to the proper gods is still debatable: it could be a theophoric name and therefore a case of homonymy. In any case, however, this reflects the fact that all the other rulers, even when their names are preceded by the logogram dingir, were not included in the *pantheon*. Cf. Archi 2001: 6.

31 On this point see also Archi 2015: 523, fn. 6 and the literature mentioned there.

32 Archi 2001: 11. Cf. Archi 2015: 499.

33 Sallaberger 2018: 118. Cf. Sabbatucci 2000: 193.

34 See Archi 2015: 499–500. Cf. the role of various classes of deified kings in Ugarit (*rpum*, *mlkm*, *inš ilm*) in Wyatt 2007: 64–65.

functions occurred. A tentative answer to this question may be glimpsed in the so-called *Ebla Royal Rituals* (ERR).

3. Historical Legitimation: Hereditariness and (divine) Ancestry

The right to rule needs an always iterated legitimation, which is produced in two parallel, mutually integrating ways: a. historical legitimation, when it stems from the dynastic principle (often but not necessarily bound to *ius sanguinis*); b. meta-historical legitimation, when the authority to rule leans on a principle that goes beyond human agency and the historical level. Since, with the exception of Egypt, the Ancient Near East did not know a routinized and long-term institutionalized idea of divine kingship, the belief in its divine origin as a grant given by the gods generated the problem of its continuous re-establishment and the need for an ever-present perpetual divine endorsement³⁵. If the principle of hereditariness appears to be poorly defined (as in Ebla)³⁶ or absent, the need for meta-historical legitimation becomes even more urgent and decisive, in particular at the most critical moment of the transfer of authority. This ideology of power and succession is expressed through the rhetorical tool of apologetics³⁷ and the language of a reconfirmation, a renewal of the right to rule. Authority must be continuously and repeatedly “founded”: this happens by means of the ritual action³⁸. Unfortunate-

35 Cf. Ishida 1977: 6–25; Bernbeck 2008: 157; Stieglitz 2015: 221.

36 The information we possess about the circumstances and the conditions of the succession to the throne in 3rd millennium BC Ebla is scarce: “The throne passed from father to son during the last three generations [that is: Iš₁₁-ar-da-mu, son of [Īr]-kab-[d]a-mu, son of [I]g-ri-[i]š-[h]a-lam]. It is unknown, however, if this rule held also for the former kings or if, as in certain dynasties, the crown passed instead from an elder brother to a younger brother, and only later to a younger generation” (Archi 2001: 11).

37 See recently Knapp 2015, who convincingly argues against Hayim Tadmor’s hypothesis about the *Sitz im Leben* of Ancient Near Eastern apologetic texts in conjunction with the appointment of a successor to the throne. Apologetics, envisioned as a rhetorical tool embedded in texts and not as a stand-alone literary genre, appears instead to be used to serve imminent political and ideological aims.

38 We do not possess any certain evidence of a periodical ritual re-enthronement of the king in Ugarit; the details about the New Year festival are still unclear; it is safe to say though that its main focus must have been the celebration of the harvest and not the renewal of kingship, human or divine (see Pardee 2002: 56–58; cf. Petersen 1998: 32–33). In Ancient Israel we find the Autumn Festival and the annual re-enthronement of YHWH as king in the Jerusalem Temple. Since Mowinkel’s *Psalmstudien II* (SNVAO 1922) literature has constantly mushroomed on the subject; for a recent overview and arrangement of scholarship see Flynn 2014: 1–34, 36–45; cf. Petersen 1998: 15–31. In the broader Ancient Near Eastern context one can think of the *akītu* festival in Babylon, during which the recitation of the *Enūma Elish* and ritual activities framed the legitimation of royal authority; see Petersen 1998: 86–91; Ballentine 2015: 31–39. During the Ur III/Isin dynasties ritual renewal of kingship (*nam-lugal*) seems to be linked to the mythical tale of the sacred marriage between Inanna and Dumuzi (correspondent to the *lugal* in the divine sphere): here too as in *ARET XI* 1–2 we find the three elements of kingship, marriage/fertility and the netherworld. See Alster 1999: 832–834; Sabbatucci 2000:

ly, very little information about the Eblaite mythical narratives can be retraced to date from available epigraphic or archaeological evidence; however, this is not the case for ritual practices. The *ERR* are an extraordinary source of information, though not always clear³⁹. These three texts (*ARET XI 1, 2, 3*)⁴⁰ depict ritual practices carried out in significant moments, the marriage of the royal couple and the following enthronement. In particular, the first one (*ARET XI 1*) seems to have been written on the occasion of the wedding of king Irkab-damu with an unidentified queen and their coronation, while the second (*ARET XI 2*) was written for the same occasion, but in this case the rulers were King Iš'ar-damu and Queen Tabūr-damu⁴¹. There are many similarities between them, so much so that they can be synoptically compared. The third one (*ARET XI 3*) on the other hand is much shorter, and could be a summary of *ARET XI 2*, or some sort of handbook or outline to be consulted containing the very core of the ritual procedures, applicable and adaptable to different occasions⁴².

The ritual, after the entrance of the queen in the city, included a long pilgrimage in Ebla's territory which lasted several days, with stops in some locations and many offerings to the gods and the dead ancestors (both sacrificial and not). In addition to the royal couple and high-ranking officers, the procession also included the statues of two gods: Kura and Barama, his bride; they appear more frequently than any other god, they are given the highest number of offerings and

257; Bertolini 2020: 50–51, 231; cf. Sallaberger 2018: 125 and fn 50. Indeed, Pasquali 2019: 2–3 shows how in the *ERR* funerary and nuptial symbolisms are deeply intertwined. In Egypt, one does not have to look further than the Sed-festival, a “rejuvenation ritual” for the king that also renewed his bond with the divine sphere. See Wilkinson 1999: 181–184.

39 As Capomacchia rightly points out, “le nostre deduzioni su questi documenti sono fortemente condizionate dalle cognizioni estremamente ridotte riguardo alla dislocazione dei centri di culto, alla loro utilizzazione rituale, alla sfera di azione delle divinità destinatarie delle offerte, nonché, naturalmente, al patrimonio mitico eblaite a noi ancora ignoto” (Biga and Capomacchia 2012: 25). Cf. Sallaberger 2018: 108.

40 For the equivalence with inventory numbers and the exact discovery locations in Locus 2769 (Palace G) see Fronzaroli 1993: xv–xvi. To this list must now be added the newly published fragments in Fronzaroli 2020: 162–166.

41 See respectively Fronzaroli 1993: 21, 72, which provides further literature. For more recent literature see Bonechi 2016: 53, fn 3. Archi 2016: 7 has reasserted the opinion that the *maliktum* of *ARET XI 1* is to be identified with Kešdudu.

42 For an early discussion about the linguistic aspect of these texts, their contextualization in Eblaite chronology and the identification of the characters acting in the rituals see Fronzaroli 1992: 178–193. After the first edition of the texts in Fronzaroli 1993 the literature on the subject has been significantly expanding. Some sources led some scholars to believe that these rituals were not annually recurring celebrations, but took place only on specific occasions, including the royal wedding and the enthronement; see Biga and Capomacchia 2012. Sallaberger 1996: 144 fn. 13 proposed a different order for the tablets, namely XI 1–3–2, interpreting XI 3 as a text composed as a series of additions to be integrated in XI 1, and XI 2 as the reworked complete ritual; this opinion however did not gain much credit. In one of the most recent discussions on the texts, Bonechi seems to agree with Sallaberger on this point (Bonechi 2016: 53, fn. 6).

they seem to be divine projections of the human royal couple; in fact, in certain moments during the *ERR* their statues undergo the same treatment as the king and queen: “(When) Kura and Barama arrive at the mausoleum, Kura and Barama enter (their) chamber. And (there) they remain. And the king enters his chamber. And the queen enters the (same) chamber” (*ARET XI 1* §§ 56-59)⁴³. “During (their) stay at the è *ma-tim* (of *Bí-na-úš^{ki}*), that of the rites of seven days, the 4 emblems of the lineage are woven for the gods ^d*KU-ra* and his ^d*Ba-ra-ma* and for the Ebla rulers” (*ARET XI 2* § 98)⁴⁴. A “god of kingship”⁴⁵ implies a representation of human kingship in the divine world, i.e. a conceptualization of divinity as overseeing and protecting that particular sphere of human existence; therefore Kura is not the “king of the gods”, or at least not in his quality as god of kingship: primacy over the gods and kingship are two distinct features⁴⁶. Given their role, the widespread presence of Kura and Barama seems meaningful to define the function of these rites. Capomacchia⁴⁷ points out that both texts refer, in one case, to the black colour of the oxen that is to be offered to Kura (*ARET XI 1* § 26; *ARET XI 2* § 26). In many cultures, the black animal is reserved as an offering for entities connected to the chthonic dimension and the underworld. Moreover, the locality of *NENAŠ*, seat of the é *ma-dím*, the royal mausoleum (lit. “house of the dead”), which is for sure linked to the underworld, seems to be associated with the cult of Kura⁴⁸: this suggests that Kura not only supervised the ruling sovereign (and the royal couple in connection with Barama), but also extended his control over the link between the living sovereign and the deceased kings. Thus Kura (and his paredra) linked the

43 See also the parallel passage in *ARET XI 2* §§ 59–62.

44 For this translation, see Bonechi 2016: 66 and fn 90. On the term *sa-ba-tum* (“week”, “moon phase”) its etymology and its role in the *ERR*, see Catagnoti 2019: 26–29.

45 Or “god of the king”, *dingir en?* Matthiae 2010: 97 deems the identification of Kura and the *dingir en* very likely. See Archi’s survey on the subject in Archi 2015: 541–543. Cf. Archi 1988a: 109–112.

46 This idea would be much strengthened if Kura actually belonged to the generation of “younger” gods, making it difficult to envision him as an Enlil- or El-type god (Sallaberger 2018: 127–128; *contra* Pomponio and Xella 1997: 248; Matthiae 2009: 701–702; Matthiae 2010: 96–97). Archi’s remarks notwithstanding (Archi 2015: 501–502, 585–589), it seems that Kura shared at least some features of the warrior-god type; see Sallaberger 2018: 109–110, 133–134 and cf. Bonechi’s proposal to read the name *š_u-ra* as a name of the “young” god Hadda of Ḫalab (*tuš_{ra}/tu’ra* “victoire (guerrière), arme victorieuse” < **tš_r/tš_r*) based on the alternation between *š_u-ku-ra-* in two personal names (Bonechi 1997: 499–501). Even if this proposal was ruled out by Archi (Archi 2015: 586 and fn. 48), it must be taken into consideration though that in the *ERR* Kura and Barama are related to bull horns and skin (cultic *paraphernalia*): Bonechi 2016: 69, fn. 116 stresses how this applied also to Hadda and his paredra (cf. Archi 2015: 504–506). Primacy over the *pantheon* (distinct from supervision over kingship) could rather be the feature of an as-yet unidentified god known only as ^d*BE dingir-dingir-dingir* (“Lord of the gods”). See Archi 2017: 296–297.

47 Biga and Capomacchia 2012: 24–25.

48 See Ristvet 2011: 9, fn. 7; Archi 2015: 533–534. Cf. also Matthiae’s remarks about a chthonic connotation of Kura in Matthiae 2009: 701–702.

gods of the pantheon and the royal dingir of the ancestors: this supports the hypothesis of distinct conceptualizations of these two classes of extra-human beings.

The first stage of the pilgrimage took place in a location called “Waters of Mašad, the one of Nirar”, where “the king and queen sit on the thrones of their fathers” (*ARET XI 1 § 21; ARET XI 2 § 21*). The same thing also happens at the last stop of the pilgrimage in the *é ma-dim* of NENAŠ. Moreover, at each stop along the journey various offerings are given to the deceased kings of Ebla, as well as to some gods; this also happens during the seven-day rites following the entrance in the mausoleum. A cult does not necessarily presuppose a divine being for a beneficiary: there are examples of cults of cultural heroes or, indeed, ancestors. If we also take in consideration the evidence from *ARET VII 150*, these rituals seem to be part of an articulated cult of the royal ancestors. On this specific occasion, these figures act as guarantors of the stability of the ruling couple: they witness for and certify the durability of the lineage and the legitimation of the dynastic right⁴⁹. The ritual action of sitting on the throne of the fathers appears extremely meaningful on a symbolical level. It is above all a “historical” reconfirmation: the king and the queen, occupying the place of their fathers, rule as their descendants⁵⁰. Moreover, not only the ancestors had existed in the past and are now deceased: they are perceived as dingir (although we cannot speak of a complete assimilation to the *pantheon*), and their characterization as such extends the legitimacy of royal authority on a meta-historical level, certifying the continuity of kingship from the divine realm to the human one⁵¹. This characterization as dingir allows to perceive

49 The preservation of lineage as an aim of the rituals could stand out even more if the ritual weddings described in *ARET XI 1–2* were intra-dynastic (maybe cousin marriages), as it is likely. See Biga and Capomacchia 2012: 21; Bonechi 2016: 54, fn. 11.

50 Alternatively, according to Biga 2007–08: 266, fn. 81, this may be a hint to see this as a *kispu* ritual. Even if this were true, it would not automatically rule out the idea of a claim to descentance, nor it would explain the repeated action of sitting on the fathers’ thrones. Also, Biga makes reference to the *kispu* of Samsi-Addu at Mari, which had unique features different from a regular *kispu*, so much so that Porter claims it is “a state ritual, conducted in a state context, not for people whom Samsi-Addu claimed as his own forebears, but for the forebears of the state, that is, for the dead of the throne room” (Porter 2012: 270, emphasis hers).

51 Stieglitz 2015: 221 maintains that the five-part royal titulary of the Ugaritic deceased king Niqmaddu in the colophon of *KTU 1.6 VI: 54–58* served a similar aim; cf. also Wyatt 2007: 58–62. The cult of the ancestors at Ebla extended beyond royal legitimation: regular offerings were made on the graves of ancestors to ensure protection. Notably, *ARET VII 150* presents striking similarities in its structure with a list of dead and “divinized” kings from Ugarit (RS 94.2518); if we are to trust Pardee’s hypothesis that this text might make reference to ancestors honored in a *kispu*-like ritual (Pardee 2002: 193, 203–204), this might also be the case for *ARET VII 150*; cf. Biga 2007–08: 266–267. However, we do not have any extant irrefutable evidence for such a rite being celebrated at Ebla. See Archi 2015: 499–500; 538–541 and the important remarks in Porter 2002: 5–6. For a detailed discussion about the offerings in these rituals, see Milano and Tonietti 2012: 55–62. The practice of “feeding the dead” (not just royal ancestors) was common in the West-Semitic world; see the convenient summary in Bloch-Smith 1992: 108, fn. 1.

them as eternally present, and thus to envision them as active guarantors of royal authority.

4. Meta-Historical Foundation: Renewal and Purification

The iterated act of sitting on the thrones of the fathers is not the only founding device of royal authority. It also needs a meta-historical legitimation: only in this way the order of the world, with its norms and values, can be built, and the nation envisioned as non-perishable despite the passing by of historical eras. In the first place, in fact, the renewal of the royal couple seems to depend directly on divine intervention: “And we wait for the presence of the Sun-goddess [^dUtu]. When the Sun-goddess rises, the invoker invokes [and] the complainers intone the lamentation, that of the goddess Nintu [^dTU], *ti-’à-ba-nu*. And ‘he who makes things shiny’ asks (to make them shiny). And Nintu makes Kura shine (as) new, Barama (as) new, the king (as) new and the queen (as) new” (*ARET XI 1 §§ 62-65*)⁵². The goddess Nintu⁵³ ritually renews both the divine royal couple and the human en and *ma-lik-tum*, by means of what could be called some sort of “investiture”. The symbolic order involved is vertically oriented, from top to bottom, and it is expressed through an image of light⁵⁴. The presence of the solar goddess Utu is also significant, as it could harmonize a cyclical perception of time linked to the sky and to the movement of celestial bodies and its conceptualization in a linear fashion, developed with the enthronement of

52 Parallel passage in *ARET XI 2 §§ 65–68*. For ^dUtu as a female goddess see Archi 2015: 679–680. For a proposed translation and an analysis of the difficult verbal form *ti-’à-ba-nu* see Pasquali 1996: 112–113.

53 The goddess ^dTU is linked to marriage and childbirth. Cfr. Pomponio and Xella 1997: 331–333; Bonechi 2016: 61–62, 69, fn. 106; Sallaberger 2018: 127. The royal wedding is indeed a crucial moment in the *ERR*; Bonechi is undoubtedly right in emphasizing the notion of fertility and asserting that it was the groom who paid a bride-price to the future queen and her family, and not the other way around (Bonechi 2016: 54–59). Fertility is for sure one of the focuses of the rituals, but the notions of enthronement and renewal are far from being “incorrect and unnecessary” (Bonechi 2016: 69 and fn. 108); his position about the rituals overall is reductionist to say the least and cannot be accepted, especially after Pasquali’s remarks and the parallels between *ARET XI* and several administrative texts that he highlighted; see Pasquali 2019: 3–8; cf. also Sallaberger 2018: 115, fn. 20. This is not to say that the notion of fertility (and maybe a wish for the queen’s pregnancy) did not play a role in the rituals: preservation of the lineage and its continuity is necessary for a “historical” legitimation of kingship; fertility must have been one aspect of a wider symbolical landscape involving also the spheres of death, the cult of the ancestors and the legitimation of the right to rule. Cf. also Mander 2005: 43–44 about Išhara and her connection with both motherhood and royalty. The fact that sacred marriage was a component of royal ideology also in Ugarit (see Wyatt 2007: 66–68) and the present work are further confirmations of the complexity of the *ERR* ideology.

54 Fronzaroli 1993: 42 suggests that this procedure involved the use of a “cosmetic oil” (cf. *ARET XI 1 § 9*) which represented the visible mark of Nintu’s intervention and action. If this is the case, one could compare the anointment of the queen’s head at the outset of the royal wedding, to seal the marriage agreement (*ì-giš/al-a/sag/ma-lik-tum/gar*, *ARET XI 1 § 3*; cf. Bonechi 2016: 54–59; Pasquali 2019: 1–3).

the new king⁵⁵. After the “investiture” both the royal couples, divine and human alike, are really “new”⁵⁶, sacredly renewed through the ritual, together with their function as guarantors of the established order and the survival of the nation. This also concurs with the processional movement as a component of ritual procedure: “The ritual movement of the royal characters and divine effigies out of the inhabited area involves [...] an interruption of the normal order of time and existence that affects therefore the whole structure of the human group that is involved in it, and it is carried out generally in order to renew and re-found the values and institutions with which that group identifies”⁵⁷.

Capomacchia’s understanding of the rituals is likely the best fitting; she envisions as purification rituals the estrangement of the goat (*ARET XI 1 § 54*; *XI 2 § 57*), the sprinkling of the mausoleum (*ARET XI 1 §§ 66.73*; *XI 2 §§ 56.69.77*), the sprinkling of the sovereigns’ heads, which are “washed” (*ARET XI 1 § 103*), and the veiling of the queen during the seven-day rituals in the *é ma-dim* (*ARET XI 1 §§ 79–80*; *XI 2 §§ 83–84*). All these actions concern the royal characters, which

55 Cf. Sabbatucci 2000: 256–258. This dual dimension in the perception of time might also be implied by its scanning during the ritual. Catagnoti 2019 persuasively argues that the *ERR* followed the quadripartition of the Early Syrian lunar month, subdivided into four seven-day (*circa*) periods, according to the moon phases: *gibil* (New Moon Phase); *sa-ba-tum maḥ* (Growing Moon Phase); *sa-ba-tum ga-ab-li-tum/ga-bi-li-a-tum* (Intermediate Moon Phase); *sa-ba-tum a-ḥè-/ḥir-tum* (Final/Accomplished Moon Phase). This also clarifies the chronological development of the ritual: the activities in the first quarter took place in Ebla, while the ensuing three quarters refer to activities carried out only once they arrived at *NE-na-áški* (see Catagnoti 2019: 28).

56 *gibil*: *ARET XI 1 rev. V 17–20*, *ARET XI 2 rev. V 4–7*. Cf. Archi 2015: 117. That this ritual indeed provided ideological justification for the gain and the exercise of power by the king seems to be confirmed even by the administrative text *MEE 7.34 rev. XVII 7’–8’*: *su-da₃?-lik’? en*, “(on the occasion of) the king’s attaining sovereignty”, referring to the same year as *ARET XI 2*. See Archi 2017: 301 and the survey on administrative texts in Pasquali 2019. Cf. Bonechi 2016: 53, fn. 5.

57 Biga and Capomacchia 2012: 23. The *ERR* were not of course the only instance in Ebla to feature the idea of renewal. Indeed, this idea was a central element of the cult (Archi 2015: 501) and found expression in several celebrations and festivals. A regular festival was celebrated in *NE-naš*, which featured, beside the delivery of a *pallium* to the goddess ^d*Ga-na-na*, a “dressing” (*sa-da-bi-iš*) of the king and the queen to commemorate the royal wedding; see Archi 2015: 519, 533–534. The need for a “renewal” is also perceived in the annual ritual involving the offering of one mina of silver to restore the silver “head” of Kura (1 *ma-na kù:BABBAR SAG KÙ:BABBAR* ³*ku-ra*; see Archi 2015: 736–741; cf. Mander 2005: 45–46; Sallaberger 2018: 125–126) and of course in the New Year festival dedicated to Kura around the spring equinox, which also likely had the aim to renew the office of kingship; see Sallaberger 2018: 124–125. Indeed, it has been proposed that these two rituals might be connected, and the offering of the silver mina might occur during Kura’s annual festival (Archi 1996: 49), but unfortunately we do not have any certain textual evidence for this. However, the head of Kura must have been some kind of ritual focal point if it is also featured in the *ERR* (*ARET XI 2 § 115*) along with some kind of headgear (*ARET XI 1 § 13 = 2 § 16*) that marked him “as a ruler or simply as a deity” (Sallaberger 2018: 131; cf. Fronzaroli 1993: 26; Pomponio and Xella 1997: 240 #205 TM.75.G.2508).

represent the established order and the human community that recognizes itself in that order: consequently, the purification needed for their renewal and re-foundation turns out to be that of the whole community⁵⁸. Ultimately, the removal from a historical setting obtained by means of the ritual acts as a promotion of the mundane action rather than a permanent sacralization of reality: king and queen, when renewed in their authority, remain *en* and *maliktum*. They do not absorb divine features in full and keep themselves linked to the human sphere, where they can fulfil their roles as rulers. Rather, as it has been shown, it was the *dingir* of royal ancestors that bridged the ontological gap between human and divine and allowed society to interface with the gods of the pantheon: this said, the assertion of the king and queen's divine ancestry is all the more relevant.

5. Procession of the *maliktum*, Path of the Ancestors: "Cosmicizing" Space

Romulus founded the city of Rome by tracing furrows in the ground, thus defining the *pomerium*, a boundary consecrated to the gods. Those furrows marked and delimited the inner space of city order (*mundus*, i.e. cosmos) in opposition to the outer space⁵⁹. The "cosmicizing" function of the king is envisioned not only over time but also over space⁶⁰. In the ANE, the notion of a cosmic/civilized world as opposed to an outside haunted by the forces of chaos is well known and is clearly reflected in ritual practices, often involving the king⁶¹. It is the king's role to assign delimitations to an indistinct space and in doing so to make it accessible to people. Within the "cosmicized" space stands the system of values, norms and symbolic codes that defines a community and allows its existence.

The ritual of the royal wedding in Ebla (*ARET XI 1* §§ 1-9; *ARET XI 2* §§ 1-19) provides for the queen to follow a path with different stops and ritual practices to be performed at different stages. This trail leads her from outside the city walls to the temple of Kura⁶². After leaving her father's house and spending the night camped outside the city, the following morning – after an offering to the sun-goddess and

58 See Biga and Capomacchia 2012: 26. Cf. also Sabbatucci 1978: 412–413.

59 The most relevant ancient sources about the foundation of Rome are found in Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita Libri* CXLII, I; Plutarch, Βίοι Παράλληλοι. Θησεύς και Ῥωμύλος; Dionisius of Halicarnassus, Ῥωμαϊκή Αρχαιολογία I-II. Most significantly, even in the Romulus' tradition coexisted the two elements of divine ancestry from his father Mars and from Aeneas, son of Aphrodites (through the Alban dynasty) and the direct legitimation by the divine sphere (through an omen). For the harmonization of these two traditions and its cultural significance see Rodriguez-Mayorgas 2010.

60 This royal function stands out in the Latin world when one looks at the etymology of the term *rex*: "Il rex romano è connesso col *regere* (segnare, cosmicizzare); poi governare" (Sabbatucci 2000: 255).

61 See Ambos 2013: 245–258, esp. 252–254.

62 For a detailed reconstruction of the itinerary see Ristvet 2011: 9–11; 2015: 40–44; Archi 2015: 514–518; Sallaberger 2018: 120–121.

the anointing of her head – she enters the city, probably through the south-eastern gate, and heads towards the *má-ra-sum*, an open space near the Temple of the Rock⁶³: “the bride’s literal passage into Ebla echoes the *rite de passage* which is at the heart of this text, her transformation into Ebla’s rightful queen”⁶⁴. The entrance into the city, i.e. the passage from a “foreign” outer environment to a new city order characterized by its own values and norms, could take on an even more precise symbolic value if we consider the *má-ra-sum* as a cultivated field⁶⁵. The first stop of the future queen corresponds to the most immediate control over the territory and its products, that is the cultivation and allotment of the land, which on a conceptual level corresponds to a “cosmic” space, otherwise uncontrollable and unusable. After a

63 This temple can be identified with the temple of Kura, as maintained by Matthiae 2009, which also deals with the problem of the two Kura temples in Ebla (cf. also Matthiae 2010: 97; Bonechi 2016: 68, fn 103, who provides further literature on the subject); alternatively, the temple of Kura must have been located in the *sa.za_{ki}*, a palace district used for public functions, near Palace G (see Archi 2015: 740; Sallaberger 2018: 119–120 and fn 34; but cf. Bonechi 2016: 68).

64 Ristvet 2011: 9. Cf. Ambos’ interesting remarks about the intersection between status and movement in the ritual space in the *bīt salā’mē* ritual and his use of A. van Gennep’s theory about the rites of passage (Ambos 2013: 250–251). The transitional status of the queen at this time is also marked by the ritual dressing which was carried out before she entered the temple; even if the exact implications of this action escape us (e.g. the meaning of the red color) clothes are a strong marker of identity, used to build and reinforce cultural and social constructs, especially when the clothing is performed in a ritual setting. For a survey on clothes and textile production in Ebla, see Archi 2015: 311–320. Among the vastity of anthropology scholarship about the topic, see Batten 2010 which includes many references to the Ancient Near East. As for some parallels in the West-Semitic world, suffice it here to say that Ps 93,1 has *YHWH* “clothed (כָּבַד) in majesty” during his enthronement and that ritual acts of clothing and anointing go side by side in the Priestly Source (P); see Lewis 2020: 619–629. With this in mind, it is tempting to see the double investiture of the queen (by anointing and clothing) also as an actual entitlement to officiate the cult in the temple, even though both are best understood within the wedding symbolism. See Pasquali 2005: 165–184, esp. 171–174; cf. Pasquali 1996: 111–113; Pinnock 2016: 191, fn 29, which provides further literature.

65 See *ARET XI 2* §9–13; Fronzaroli 1993: 74, 159–160 reads it as “campo lavorato”, *mahrāt-um* < **hri*. Cf. Mander 2005: 107, fn. 458; Bonechi 2016: 58, fn 37. The reference to the *má-ra-sum* is missing in XI 1; however, the spatial contrast between outside and inside may also be stressed by the use of the word *bur-ti* (*ARET XI 1* obv. II 25) to designate the position of the queen before her entrance in the city for the royal marriage. If Fronzaroli is right in proposing *bur-ti* < **būr* “fallow, uncultivated land”, then the expression must also imply “il passaggio, di evidente valore simbolico, da un terreno incolto al campo coltivato” (Fronzaroli 1993: 24; cf. Bonechi 2016: 58, fn. 35). The symbolical opposition between an inner and an outer space is found elsewhere in Ebla. In her survey about ritual circumambulation, Catagnoti brings to attention the colophon of two administrative texts (TM.75.G.2377 and TM.75.G.2379) mentioning the *šu-mu-nigin* of the god ^d*A₅-da-bal*; her proposals to read *mu-du* as “to enter” and *i-ti-bù* as a form *yitbù* < *tabā’um* “to get up, arise, set out” are tempting, since we would find an antonymy between an input and an output movement in a ritual context which featured a procession and lamentations, as in the *ERR*. See Catagnoti 2015: 137. On the *šu-mu-nigin* cf. also Archi 2015: 615–624. On the cultivated land as “cosmic space” in Mesopotamia cf. Ambos 2013: 252–253.

ritual dressing, the future queen enters the Temple of Kura and bids offerings to several gods (*ARET XI 1* § 18); in this way, she is not only welcomed in the symbolic order shared by the city community, but she is also given the possibility to actively intervene in it, thus contributing to build the very order where she is being welcomed. To this extent, she begins to fulfil the royal function; most of the offerings in fact are given to Kura and Barama, the divine royal couple, which is the projection in the extra-worldly sphere of the human royal couple⁶⁶. The processional path therefore seems to follow two parallel lines: on the one hand the concrete moving of the queen from the outside towards the city centre; on the other hand the progressive admission into the symbolic system of the community: the entrance into “cosmicized” space (a cultivated field), the characterization of her function as royal through the link with the gods of kingship and the temple of Kura, the assumption of an active role in the symbolic system by undertaking sacrificial activity. It would therefore seem that even in pre-Sargonic Ebla the perception of spaces was characterized by a deep symbolic meaning, closely linked to the notion of kingship.

After the royal wedding, in the second section of *ARET XI 1* and 2, the long enthronement ritual of reconfirmation and renewal of royal authority is described; it consists of a long pilgrimage that leads the procession of the king, queen, other officers and ministers and the effigies of Kura and Barama from the city to *NE-na-áš^{ki}* (*NENAŠ*), seat of the royal mausoleum⁶⁷. This small site has been tentatively identified with the modern Binniš, located about 20 kms northwest of Ebla⁶⁸. As Ristvet rightly points out, if this identification is correct “it is likely that the other places mentioned in the coronation ritual are also situated between Binish and Ebla, not far from the city”⁶⁹. The mentioned places are, in order: the Waters of Mašad (*ARET XI 1* obv. VII 10; *ARET XI 2* obv. VIII 24), Irad (*ARET XI 1* obv. XIII 9), Uduḥudu (*ARET XI 1* obv. XIII 24; *ARET XI 2* obv. XVI 10), Niap (*ARET XI 1* obv. XIV 14) and finally *NENAŠ*. The Waters of Mašad (where the rulers sat on the throne of their fathers) and *NENAŠ* have been discussed above; at each stage offerings were given to gods or deceased kings, whose names match the ones in the king lists (TM.74.G.120 and *ARET VII 150*)⁷⁰. The space used for the pilgrimage was therefore marked by a series of places connected with the worship of gods and deceased ancestors. This scenario fits in well with the image of the Syrian landscape towards the end of the 3rd millennium BC, which was “scattered with shrines in the open air, where stood betyls and memori-

66 Cf. Pomponio and Xella 1997: 245; Sallaberger 2018: 122–124. In this sense, the *ERR* indeed attain a “cosmic” scale, but not in the sense implied by Archi, which writes about the “union between the male and the female principles which was renewed in heaven as on earth” (Archi 2015: 517).

67 For a detailed reconstruction of this ritual see again Ristvet 2011: 9–12; Archi 2015: 528–530; Ristvet 2015: 41–42.

68 See Winters 2019: 344; cf. Bonechi 1991: 69. On the pivotal role played by *NE-na-áš^{ki}* during the royal wedding rituals see also Archi 2015: 528–530.

69 Ristvet 2011: 12.

70 See Archi 2001: 5.

als worshipped by locals, and destinations for pilgrimages⁷¹. The many references to royal ancestors in the rituals stress the link between the symbolic perception of space and the royal function, as also do the rituals of renewal of kingship, which touched these particular places.

This link between kingship and symbolic perception of space is strengthened by the praxis of naming settlements with the name of an eponym (founder or ancestor) or because a specific place had given birth to an illustrious individual⁷². We have plenty of examples for this at Ebla, so much so that “it is fairly common for Eblaite personal names to correspond to geographic names⁷³. In this regard, it is also interesting to point out that in the middle of the list in TM.74.G.120 we find the toponym Ebla (rev. IV 5: *ib-la*, lacking the geographical determiner)⁷⁴ splitting the preceding section with the names of the kings from the list of unidentified names that follows. The name of the city is preceded (and thus, in chronological terms, is followed) by *KUL-ba-nu*, the name of the first known Ebla king. If the perceived reality was that the city was born along with kingship, then (from an ideological standpoint at least) kingship must have had a pivotal role in the paradigmatic foundation of the city itself as the dominant centre in the region. This founding function did not stop there but expanded to Ebla’s “chora”: the name *KUL-ba-nu* is comparable to the name of the well-known village *KUL-ba-an*^{ki}⁷⁵. It should not be forgotten that in Mesopotamia the rise of kingship as the primary social institution corresponded to the development of urbanization. Even if in mythological narratives the foundation of cities is ultimately due to divine initiative, their origin goes side by side with the establishment of kingship⁷⁶.

Ultimately it seems that the symbolic function of the king was not limited to the “cosmicization” of time in a linear fashion; rather, it also included space, in organizing an articulated sacred topography and geography: any space which was the “king’s

71 Biga 2015: 109. See also Biga’s convenient surveys about the geographical horizon of the Eblaite kingdom and the shaping of a political and cultural landscape (Biga 2014a: 93–110; Biga 2014b: 259–267).

72 See Archi 2001: 8 for examples; cf. Wyatt 2007: 64, fn 44 who envisions the possibility that in Ugarit the *rapi’uma* might have been eponymous figures.

73 Archi 2001: 8. Cf. Archi (ed.) 1988: 214, fn 27.

74 The defective grammatical construction does not seem to be a problem if we take in consideration that in the texts, we find several cases in which a toponym is not followed by *ki*, even if we just look at *ib-la*. See e.g. *ARET XV 12 obv. X 2 1 dul₃^{lug2} ib-la 1 aktum^{lug2}*; *XV 36 obv. VI 8 1 dul₃^{lug2} ib-la 1 aktum^{lug2} 2 nig₂-bar-du*; cf. also *ARET XII 1003 obv. III’ 5’-6’*. Moreover, if we accept that TM.74.G.120 is a scribal exercise, as said above, a notation such as *ib-la^{ki}* could be due to an error of an inexperienced scribe. I owe these useful remarks to Amalia Catagnoti.

75 See Archi 2001: 8; 2015: 540–541. In line with this scenario, one could think that *ib-la* in TM.74.G.120 separated the name of the kings who exercised royal authority over the territory before the city was founded, and those who ruled afterwards. However, this is highly unlikely, since the scribe followed for organizing the section following *ib-la* a criterion related to the initial element of the words, and not the (inverse) chronological order.

76 See Postgate 1994: 94–98; Anagnostou-Laoutides 2017: 26.

space” (his burial place, birthplace, the city of Ebla itself, the kingdom, and consequently also every place involved in the pilgrimage described in *ARET XI 1* and *ARET XI 2*) was also a sacred place as were the temples of the gods. They were “cosmicized” places, opposed to the uncertainty of the outside, the foreign space, the space of symbolic dis-order opposed to the values and norms that characterized the existence and the actions of the community. This feature of kingship also helps to explain and justify the purpose of political propaganda that these rituals had: control and modification of the landscape, both symbolic and concrete, has always been one of the main ideological interfaces between the rulers and the people. The movement within the city or its surroundings was an opportunity for the rulers to reconfirm their control over the kingdom, showing the splendour of their power and thus obtaining visibility⁷⁷. In addition, the ritual pilgrimage was used to identify the political and territorial reality of Ebla as homogeneous and unitary. In short, as a proper kingdom: “This royal procession to cult centres outside of cities constructed a new form of political landscape, one of kingdoms, not isolated villages”⁷⁸. In the Early Bronze Age Syrian setting, control over the land as a means to assert political authority and legitimacy was intimately linked with the control of genealogies, likely a legacy of social practices developed in a setting of mobile pastoralism⁷⁹. The pilgrimage of the *ERR* in a sort of “ancestor-based” political landscape shows that these two facets were indeed one and the same. These rituals clearly were not just an *instrumentum regni*, but in their function of legitimizing the exercise of power by the rulers they could easily become a means to guard the kingdom and to convey political messages.

6. Final Remarks

Sabbatucci’s investigation about kingship has identified and outlined the principle of “cosmicization” – both chronological and spatial – as its primary function, and its pivotal role in the symbolic thought of a community. Kingship is responsi-

⁷⁷ Cf. *Archi* 2017: 304–305.

⁷⁸ *Ristvet* 2011: 11. This of course does not imply that the enthronement rituals were the only occasion used to convey these ideological messages; the king and other royal family members travelled on a regular basis to cult places throughout the kingdom to make offerings, especially during periodical celebrations such as e.g. the festival of ‘Adabal of ‘Amadu or Rašap of Dunebu. See *Archi* 2017: 296–301; cf. *Archi* 2015: 615–624. Such a political need must have been all the more crucial considering the hegemonic role of Ebla as capital city of a large regional state and the frequent war episodes during the reigns of Irkab-damu and Iš’ar-damu in the second half of 24th century BC. See *Archi* 2015: 7–12, 435–437.

⁷⁹ See *Porter* 2002: 26–27 and *Peltenburg*’s valuable remarks about the intersection between political ideology, burial customs and cult in Early Bronze Age Syria; he argues that the development towards socio-political complexity did not follow the southern Mesopotamian paradigm but involved cultural strategies such as the appropriation of shared past and memory, i.e. rituals for the ancestors and the “concealment” of their burial places (see *Peltenburg* 2007; cf. *Archi* 2015: 538–541). On several archaeological aspects concerning the cult of the ancestors at Ebla see *Matthiae* 2012.

ble for the linear conception of time, and it is a necessary means for the sustenance of the nation and the building of a collective identity. Moreover, on a spatial level it creates a cosmic “enclosure” by separation from a chaotic outside that provides the community with an inhabitable space to live in and allows for a scenario of political ecology to exist, envisioning landscape and territory as cultural expressions. Thus, kingship is indeed one of the primary lenses through which to examine a civilization⁸⁰, and this stands also true for the ancient city and state of Ebla.

In fact, as textual evidence from the royal archives has shown (king lists: TM.74.G.120; TM.75.G.2628 = *ARET* VII 150 and the *ERR* texts: *ARET* XI), this scenario seems coherently fitting in the specific historical context of 24th century BC Ebla. In particular, this work addressed some specific facets of symbolic and religious thought: the cult of the ancestors and the rituals of renewal of kingship. The conceptualization of kingship seems to match with other data we possess about Eblaite polytheism. Kingship’s connection with the articulated cult of the deified royal ancestors is functional for the “historical” legitimation of the right to rule, reaffirming the dynastic principle and providing continuity for it from the divine to the human realm. The ritual renewal of kingship by the hands of the gods, which provides the “meta-historical” legitimation, is an expression of the widespread need for renewal that can also be seen in several other ritual practices and celebrations. Similarly, the “cosmicization” of space and the outlining of a political landscape are also visible elsewhere throughout the cult apparatus.

Comparative material (especially from the Ugaritic texts) has helped in highlighting some shared cross-cultural conceptions, but the Eblaite conceptualization of kingship also shows some distinctive peculiarities in continuity with cultural strategies stemming from an earlier Syrian setting, especially the tight connection with the ancestors and the use of burial places to define space and control over it. Thus, kingship ideology in Ebla and its “cosmicizing” function – both relating to hereditaryness and to royal space – is a fitting conceptualization harmonizing more ancient customs with the taking over of the royal institution.

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80 Cf. Anagnostou-Laoutides 2017: 26.

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