

ANGELIKA BERLEJUNG

# Divine Secrets and Human Imaginations

*Orientalische Religionen  
in der Antike*

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**Mohr Siebeck**

# Orientalische Religionen in der Antike

Ägypten, Israel, Alter Orient

## Oriental Religions in Antiquity

Egypt, Israel, Ancient Near East

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Angelika Berlejung

# Divine Secrets and Human Imaginations

Studies on the History of Religion and Anthropology  
of the Ancient Near East and the Old Testament

Mohr Siebeck

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*Für meinen Mann und unsere Katzen*



## Preface

The articles in this anthology are grouped around two themes: Divine Secrets and Human Imaginations. The first topic is mainly about cult images of gods or about divine attributes. These articles have been written over the years following my dissertation (1998), which had dealt exclusively with the production and initiation of cult images in the Ancient Near East and the biblical anti-iconic polemics. The topic “cult images of gods,” however, covers much more than that, so that it was necessary to examine additional aspects in the years to follow. The first part of this book now compiles these articles, completes or rewrites them, to round up the picture: They deal with the production, initiation, use and function, the abduction, repatriation and the replacement of divine images, their appearance, and again and again about the many facets of the theology of cult images. These images created and symbolized community, meaning, legitimation, loyalty, identity, hegemony, protection and order and were the center of the cultural memory of a culture, its traditions and its religious symbolic system. They also were the center of the temple cult, which was the focus of the economic and social system of ancient cities. Thus, the gods, physically present in their cult images, were of economic and socio-political, rule-stabilizing, religious-political and symbolic importance which cannot be underestimated. Part I of this volume attempts to illuminate various aspects of this complex topic.

Part II deals with human imaginations, human constructs and constructed memories, which assign meaning to the past or to things or experiences that are beyond human control. Probably for this very reason death, crisis and love have inspired the human fantasy enormously. Thematically, several aspects of the human condition are examined, such as the ideas associated with death or dealing with enemies and catastrophes. The latter can also be part of collective memory, so that the topics of constructed memories, of the media of remembrance created by a culture, but also the strategies of deliberate forgetting or reassignment of meanings belong here. This section concludes with the human imaginations concerning utopias and transformations, with the last great human dream, the purpose-free, unconditional and passionate love, forming the outlook.

The articles presented here were written in the years between 1998 and 2020. They have all been revised without exception, updated and provided with the most relevant recent literature. Since Assyriology has made remarkable progress in these years by re-editing texts, joins and the identification of hitherto unknown parallel texts, outdated text editions have been replaced, where worthwhile, by current editions (e.g., RINAP or etcsl). Especially articles with Assyriological parts have changed significantly in this respect. Unless otherwise noted, the translations are always my own. In some cases (no. 1, 2, 6, 7, 9, 10, 15 and 17) comprehensive changes were necessary, so that in fact



completely new articles were created, which clearly exceed the old German templates in terms of source material and content. In this anthology, this revision is indicated by the fact that these articles were given modified titles compared to the former German-language articles. In addition, no. 1, no. 8, no. 9 and no. 15 are each combinations of a published and an unpublished article, whereas no. 5 is a completely unpublished article that fits well into the collection.

I wish to thank the job students Christian Swistek, Hannes Neitzke, Juliane Stein and Jan Turck, for their help in converting the German articles into word files and revising the quotation systems, and Ole Depenbrock and Helene Lindner for compiling the indices. I am indebted to the professional team of the Mohr Siebeck publishing house in Tübingen for their supports and to my extremely efficient assistant Felix Hagemeyer for preparing the camera-ready copy. My special thanks go to Dr. Stephen Germany, who translated the articles (except no. 5) with enormous expertise and empathy. If there are any “germanisms” or mistakes left, they are of course all mine.

The book is dedicated to my husband and my cats, who always stood at my side or sat on my keyboard. They were my inspiration and motivation and did not hesitate to make clear when it was time to relax.

Angelika Berlejung  
Heidelberg 2021

# List of First Publications

## I. Divine Secrets

### 1. Divine Secrets and Human Imaginations: On Cult Images in Mesopotamia in the First Millennium B.C.E.

Partly originally published as: Geheimnis und Ereignis. Zur Funktion und Aufgabe der Kultbilder in Mesopotamien, JBTh 13 (1998 [1999]), 109–143.

### 2. Refreshed Cultic Kisses: Forms of Encounter between Gods and Humans.

Partly originally published as: Kultische Küsse. Zu den Begegnungsformen zwischen Göttern und Menschen, WO 29 (1998), 80–97.

### 3. Emergency Measures: Ancient Near Eastern Reports on Postwar Temple Cults.

Originally published as: Notlösungen – Altorientalische Nachrichten über den Tempelkult in Nachkriegszeiten, in: U. HÜBNER/E.A. KNAUF (eds.), Kein Land für sich allein. Studien zum Kulturkontakt in Kanaan, Israel/Palästina und Ebirñari für Manfred Weippert zum 65. Geburtstag (OBO 186), Fribourg/Göttingen 2002, 196–230.

### 4. “Gods Who Dwell in Hiding/Secrecy”: Critical Cases in Ancient Near Eastern Temple Theology.

Originally published as: “Götter, die im Verborgenen wohnen”. Problemfälle der altorientalischen Tempeltheologie, in: A. MEINHOLD/A. BERLEJUNG (eds.), Der Freund des Menschen, Festschrift für Georg Christian Macholz zur Vollendung des 70. Lebensjahres, Neukirchen 2003, 109–123.

### 5. *Previously unpublished*: The Makeover, Restitution, Repatriation and Return of the Gods in First Millennium Mesopotamia.

### 6. From One Theology to Many Theologies in Babylonia.

Partly originally published as: Theologie in Babylon? – Theologien in Babylonien!, in: K. SCHMID/M. OEMING/A. SCHÜLE (eds.), Theologie in Israel und in den Nachbarkulturen, Beiträge des Symposiums “Das Alte Testament und die Kultur der Moderne” anlässlich des 100. Geburtstags Gerhard von Rads (1901–1971), Heidelberg, 18.–21. Oktober 2001 (Altes Testament und Moderne 9), Münster 2004, 105–124.

### 7. Cultic Reforms: Innovation as Restoration in Uruk and Yehud. Observations on Processes of Transformation in Ancient Near Eastern Societies.

Partly originally published as: Innovation als Restauration in Uruk und Jehud. Überlegungen zu Transformationsprozessen in vorderorientalischen Gesellschaften, in: E.-J. WASCHKE (ed.), Reformen im Alten Orient und der Antike (ORA 2), Tübingen 2009, 71–112.

8. **The Reduction of Complexity: The Theological Profile of a Deity and its Iconographic Expression – The God Aššur in First-Millennium B.C.E. Assyria as a Case Study.**

Partly originally published as: *Die Reduktion von Komplexität. Das theologische Profil einer Gottheit und seine Umsetzung in der Ikonographie am Beispiel des Gottes Aššur im Assyrien des 1. Jt. v. Chr.*, in: B. GRONEBERG/H. SPIECKERMANN (eds.), *Die Welt der Götterbilder* (BZAW 376), Berlin/New York 2007, 9–56.

9. **Human Sin and Divine Sanction: The Ethics of Divine Justice in Ancient Near Eastern and Old Testament Texts.**

Partly originally published as: *Sin and Punishment. The Ethics of Divine Justice and Retribution in Ancient Near Eastern and Old Testament Texts*, *Interpretation* 69.3 (2015), 272–287.

## II. Human Imaginations

10. **The Metaphor of the Bird and the Discourse on Life and Death: Life and Death according to the Imaginations of the Israelites.**

Partly originally published as: *Tod und Leben nach den Vorstellungen der Israeliten. Ein ausgewählter Aspekt zu einer Metapher im Spannungsfeld von Leben und Tod*, in: B. JANOWSKI/B. EGO (eds.), *Das biblische Weltbild und seine altorientalischen Kontexte* (FAT 32), Tübingen 2001, 465–502.

11. **Images of the Dead – Images for the Living: Life and Death in the Iconography of Ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt and Palestine.**

Originally published as: *Bilder von Toten – Bilder für die Lebenden. Sterben und Tod in der Ikonographie des Alten Orients, Ägyptens und Palästinas*, in: A. BERLEJUNG/B. JANOWSKI (eds.), *Tod und Jenseits im alten Israel und in seiner Umwelt. Theologische, religionsgeschichtliche, archäologische und ikonographische Aspekte* (FAT 64), Tübingen 2009, 199–253.

12. **Continuity and Variability of a Purification Ritual following Contact with a Corpse in Num 19 and at Qumran: Observations on the Dynamics of Ritual Change.**

Originally published as: *Variabilität und Konstanz eines Reinigungsrituals nach der Berührung eines Toten in Num 19 und Qumran*, *ThZ* 65.4 (2009), 289–331.

13. **False Prophetesses: On the Demonization of Women in Ezekiel 13:17–21.**

Originally published as: *Falsche Prophetinnen. Zur Dämonisierung der Frauen von Ez 13:17–21*, in: M. OEMING (ed.), *Theologie des Alten Testaments aus der Perspektive von Frauen* (Beiträge zum Verstehen der Bibel 1), Münster 2003, 179–210.

14. **The Memory of Assyria in Nahum 2:4–3:19.**

Originally published as: *Erinnerungen an Assyrien in Nahum 2,4–3,19*, in: R. LUX/E.-J. WASCHKE (eds.), *Die unwiderstehliche Wahrheit. Studien zur alttestamentlichen Prophetie*, Festschrift für Arndt Meinhold (Arbeiten zur Bibel und ihrer Geschichte 23), Leipzig 2006, 323–356.

15. **Disaster and Relief Management in Ancient Israel/Palestine, Egypt and Mesopotamia: Towards a Cultural History of Catastrophe.**

Partly originally published as: *Disaster and Relief Management in Ancient Israel/Palestine, Egypt and the Ancient Near East/Katastrophen und Katastrophenbewältigung im Alten Israel/Palästina*, in

Ägypten und im Alten Orient, in: A. BERLEJUNG (ed.), *Disaster and Relief Management/Katastrophen und ihre Bewältigung* (FAT 81), Tübingen 2012, 3–38.

**16. Signs of Connectedness and the Media of Memory: Religio-historical and Theological Observations on Deut 6:6–9 and Related Texts.**

Originally published as: *Zeichen der Verbundenheit und Medien der Erinnerung. Zur Religionsgeschichte und Theologie von Dtn 6,6–9 und verwandten Texten*, in: A. BERLEJUNG/R. HECKL (eds.), *Ex Oriente Lux, Studien zur Theologie des Alten Testaments, Festschrift für Rüdiger Lux zum 65. Geburtstag* (Arbeiten zur Bibel und ihrer Geschichte 39), Leipzig 2012, 131–165.

**17. Against the Joy and Forgetting in Exile: Observations on Ps 137.**

Partly originally published as: *Wider die Freuden und Vergesslichkeiten des Exils. Überlegungen zu Ps 137*, in: A. KRÜGER ET AL. (eds.), *Ich will dir danken unter den Völkern. Studien zur israelitischen und altorientalischen Gebetsliteratur, Festschrift für Bernd Janowski zum 70. Geburtstag*, Gütersloh 2013, 265–287.

**18. What is “Ashdodite”? Observations on Neh 13:23–24 and Zech 9:6.**

Originally published as: *Was ist eigentlich “Aschdodisch”? Überlegungen zu Neh 13,23–24 und Sach 9,6*, in: H. JENNI/M. SAUR (eds.), *Nächstenliebe und Gottesfurcht. Beiträge aus alttestamentlicher, semitistischer und altorientalischer Wissenschaft für Hans-Peter Mathys zum 65. Geburtstag* (AOAT 439), Münster 2016, 13–25.

**19. Gardens, Islands and Cities in the Clouds: Spatial Utopias in the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near East.**

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**20. “Man and Woman, and Woman and Man Reach Up to the Godhead’s Span”: Eroticism and the Utopia of Transformations in the Song of Songs.**

Originally published as: *“Mann und Weib und Weib und Mann reichen an die Gottheit an”: Erotik und die Utopie der Verwandlungen im Hohen Lied*, in: D. BINDRIM/V. GRUNERT/C. KLOSS (eds.), *Erotik und Ethik. Sexualität in der Welt der Bibel, Festschrift Manfred Oeming* (Arbeiten zur Bibel und ihrer Geschichte 68), Leipzig 2020, 131–1



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## Abbreviations

All abbreviations used in this volume follow “The SBL Handbook of Style” (1999); concerning Ancient Near Eastern studies, see the list of abbreviations of the “Reallexikon der Assyriologie und Vorderasiatischen Archäologie” (2015); for abbreviations in Egyptology, see “Lexikon der Ägyptologie” (1975–1992).

## I. Divine Secrets



# Divine Secrets and Human Imaginations

## On Cult Images in Mesopotamia in the First Millennium B.C.E.

### 1. Introduction

There are not many occasions when the secrets and mysteries of the gods and the human imagination are so closely interwoven as in the theme of images of gods. Divine images are on the one hand shaped by human imagination constructing a visualization of the invisible in image (and word), but on the other hand, these divine images – visually (and verbally) produced and displayed in various historical, cultural and ritual contexts – in turn became models that moulded human imaginations and expectations. In Egypt,<sup>1</sup> Asia Minor,<sup>2</sup> Syria, Mesopotamia, Palestine,<sup>3</sup> Greece and Rome<sup>4</sup>, thus in all parts of the Ancient world, divine images were a fundamental element of religious practice and formed an integral part of the language, communication, imagery, metaphors, sign inventory and symbolic universe of the religious communities.<sup>5</sup> Divine images were visual constructions of the divine, powerful visual media of religious and intellectual communication. The materially produced and shown divine images had – on the social level – to be recognized and accepted as divine representatives by a society and incorporated into a ritual framework. Divine images that were accepted as such and received cultic veneration, became *cult* images.<sup>6</sup> They were considered to be the earthly representatives and material manifestations of the gods. In order to be accepted as a cult image in society *and* by the gods, the cult images had to

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<sup>1</sup> LORTON, Theology; ROBINS, Cult Statues.

<sup>2</sup> POPKO, Gott.

<sup>3</sup> On Mesopotamia and Palestine see BERLEJUNG, Theologie.

<sup>4</sup> On divine images in Greece and Rome (and the interdependency between divine image and human imagination in Graeco-Roman antiquity) see the contributions in the anthology edited by MYLONOPOULOS, Divine Images; STEINER, Images; SCHEER, Gottheit.

<sup>5</sup> On the “encoding” of religious symbolic systems, see STOLZ, Hierarchien, 56f.

<sup>6</sup> On the differentiation between divine images and cult images in Greece see MYLONOPOULOS, Divine Images, 8f. Mylonopoulos, *ibid.*, 6–12 discusses 1) position, 2) appearance and 3) cult involvement as possible approaches to define cult images and to differentiate them from votive or divine images. However, at the end of his study he assumes that it is impossible and even methodologically problematic to draw sharp lines. Style, size and material are not conclusive. Instead he observes a fluidity between divine, cult and votive images, a position that is shared by the present author.

- (1) have a supernatural origin,
- (2) pass a consecration ritual,
- (3) pass installation rituals and take a seat in a sacred space (temple *cella* or side-chapel, open air sanctuary, cave or enclosure)
- (4) be integrated into ritual activities and take over several roles and functions.

Being the center of the cultic activities, the statues were – like human beings – washed, anointed, adorned, dressed, touched, kissed, addressed, provided with food and drinks, carried in processions, deported as hostages and booty or buried.

It is only the latter point (4) in Mesopotamia's urban centers in the first millennium B.C.E. (excluding Egypt, Syria and the other areas) which will be in the focus of this essay. However, some introductory remarks and a short summary on points (1–3) have to be given, as they form the basis for everything that follows.

### 1.1. *The Appearance of Cult Images*

Cult images<sup>7</sup> were considered as the bodies of divine beings who shared materiality, physicality and vulnerability with humanity. In their visual construction of the divine, the priest-artists often chose the anthropomorphic, the theriomorphic or symbolic shape demonstrating the wide range of possibilities for the visualization of the invisible. These possible appearances led to a certain degree of visual ambiguity. Images of anthropomorphic deities without context are (and were in Antiquity perhaps as well) often difficult to differentiate from images of mortals (especially the king) and shared with them the same proportions, a strongly idealised physical appearance and the physiognomy. The faces usually were very unspecific and surely no portraits.<sup>8</sup> The common features and differences between the iconography of deities and kings become mainly evident in constellative pictorial works as in (*fig. 1*), when a deity (perhaps god Aššur)<sup>9</sup> and the Assyrian king are depicted together: they share the same physiognomy, reciprocal signals of affection, beard and hairdo. Their different status is only indicated by the paraphernalia and dresses (deity with crown and weapons while the king is bareheaded and unarmed), gestures (deity holding the bow and rising the right hand for blessing while the king is depicted in a typical devotion gesture), the different floor line/standing level and in this special case the hierarchic scaling.

Cult images were often statues in the round that stood in the *cella* upright in some kind of “frozen movement” or were enthroned on a seat. They can sometimes be characterized as static with a frontal perspective directed to the viewer, communication and interaction partner. They were placed on a pedestal in order to perform with the raised position their superiority above any human being. This position in the *cella* seems to be paralleled by royal audiences when the king is placed in front of the back wall of the

<sup>7</sup> On the terminology see BERLEJUNG, *Theologie*, 62–79.

<sup>8</sup> On the appearance of the Mesopotamian cult images see BERLEJUNG, *Theologie*, 35–52. MAUL, *Image*, 1–3 focuses on a strictly anthropomorphic conception of the gods in Mesopotamia (rooted in creation myths), however strengthens (*ibid.* 8–11) correctly the point that there was a wider range of possibilities for the conceptualization of the divine.

<sup>9</sup> BERLEJUNG, *Reduktion* (English version no. 8 in this volume).

throne room on a pedestal or throne receiving courtiers, delegations and subjects face to face. Kings as well as deities signal with this frontally facing position their positive affection and willingness to communicate.



fig. 1: Neo-Assyrian stone relief (35x30cm) from Aššur (8/7<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E.) depicting the Assyrian king in front of his god, perhaps Aššur (British Museum, London BM 115694). Source: MADHLOOM, Chronology, pl. LX no. 5.

The mythological narrative context that belonged to a deity was created in the *cella* by the decoration of the seat, the pedestal, further iconic elements on the walls, doorposts, gates and in the courts. Also, the name (see below), material, clothes or jewellery of a cult image could encode and communicate selected elements of mythological narratives: One piece of jewellery whose theological interpretation is known is the fly-shaped jewellery that is often mentioned in the context of the goddess Belet-ili. The shape of the jewellery certainly goes back to the role of the goddess in the Flood story. When the gods gathered like flies around the sacrificer Utnapishti, it was Belet-ili who lifted aloft her lapis lazuli fly jewellery and swore an oath that the disaster would not be forgotten and that Enlil, as the initiator of the flood, would be excluded from the incense.<sup>10</sup> In the inventory lists flies are also mentioned as parts of divine necklaces. They symbolize death, the end of the Flood, but above all the escape from a deadly danger and the rainbow.<sup>11</sup>

In addition, the main deity was not alone in its *cella* and temple, but other divine images were there as well who constituted his/her family and divine court household:

<sup>10</sup> Gilgamesh XI 162–169, see also Atrahasis III v 46 and vi 2.

<sup>11</sup> KILMER, Symbolism, 175–180.

the paredros, the divine children and grandchildren, the divine viziers, minister, advisors, heralds, doorkeepers and messengers.



fig. 2: Neo-Assyrian stone relief depicting the deportation of Marduk holding his spade. Source: LAYARD, *Monuments of Nineveh I*, 67A.

The statues could hold in their hands specific iconographic attributes as indicators of their divinity or special theological profile (see Marduk holding his spade on *fig. 2*). However, these can also be very unspecific, as e.g., the rod and ring in Mesopotamia, that is a signifier of the aura of sacredness without pertaining to any specific god. The same is true for animals combined with the anthropomorphic image, because bulls and lions as symbols of power and sovereignty can be combined with nearly any deity. Thus, attributes and animals *could be* intended to be a kind of visual caption, but they did *not necessarily have to be*. They were often ambiguous and therefore could not always be considered a reliable sign for identifying deities. Furthermore, it must be remembered that a deity at all times exceeded its manifestation in its cult image. Divine presence was always possible parallel to the cult image in the form of stars, natural phenomena, architectural elements of the temples, standards, symbols and emblems; furthermore, a deity could easily be present simultaneously in several cult images in different temples in the city, country or empire. Deities even seem to have been able to occupy multiple forms in multiple places simultaneously and, in some cases, multiple forms in the same place. There were the multiple manifestations of one single deity and still the unity of the manifold.

If the visualization of the divine was purposefully constructed in ambiguous appearances and ambivalent attributes, the idea does not seem to be farfetched that the priest-artists had a deeply iconic understanding of the visual construction of the divine, however, that their constant rejection of specificity could be an expression of their attempt to shape human imagination and to sharpen it for the basic problem: the visual construction of the divine is only a limited attempt to unveil the hidden. Behind the ambiguous form of the cult images stood the contemplation of the multiplicity of the one and the unity of the manifold. It also mirrors, that “Functions, contexts, and identities of cult

images indeed appear to have been more fluid than modern scholarship tends to acknowledge.”<sup>12</sup>

### 1.2. *The Supernatural Origin of the Divine Body*

The roles and functions that cultic images took on in their religious context can only be understood in light of the “theology of cultic images,” which was the basis and interpretive framework for all of the ideas and expectations that were associated with these statues. This theology can clearly be profiled in Mesopotamian written sources.

The starting point for this differentiated theology, which is attested *inter alia* in various royal inscriptions, letters and ritual texts from the first millennium B.C.E.<sup>13</sup> and beyond, was not the consecration of the divine image (point (2) above), but already its production or even the moments *before* the procedure concretely got started.

The basic idea was that there had to be an intact and essential connection between a cultic image and a deity. There had to be a very special relationship of origin (*Ursprungsbeziehung*) between statue and god, which was constituted and established during the supernatural production process of the image. This relationship of origin linked the statue to its deity from the very beginning and became subsequently the basis for the statue’s and the god’s future relationships of actions (*Handlungsbeziehungen*) with humans and the other gods. The connection was initiated by the deity and established at the time the statue was made. As soon as a deity wanted to be present in a cultic image, it had to “commission” its production through a revelation or similar means to the king (mainly in Assyria) or the priests (mainly in Babylonia) and to cooperate with the artisans. According to the prevailing theology, the affected god himself or a God superior to him had to choose the time of manufacture, the place of the workshop, the person of the king, the names of the craftsmen, the materials and the appearance of the cult image. Thus, the divine revelation and the divine initiative stood at the beginning of the creation of each image. The cooperation of the gods was not limited to their initiating testimony of will but they were also involved in the subsequent individual steps of the manufacturing of the statue. The intentions and the will of the gods structured the following actions in the workshop of the temple.

The deity of the future image and the god of wisdom, Ea (or his hypostases, the artisan gods Ninildu, Ninagal, Ninkurra, Ninzadim and Kusigbanda), had to accompany and support the human craftsmen making the image and, if questions on some details arose, provide assistance through oracles.<sup>14</sup> The artisan gods worked together with the craftsmen, providing them with inspiration and know-how, since it was assumed that their work could only succeed with divine participation. The concrete processing of the materials and making of the statue was framed at the beginning and its very end with purification rituals indicating that the craftsmen were involved in a cultic act.<sup>15</sup>

The notion that the production of the image was less a technical matter and more a life-creating act is shown by the frequent allusions to the concept of birth (*tud/alādu* N

<sup>12</sup> MYLONOPOULOS, *Divine Images*, 16.

<sup>13</sup> For the sources, see the overview in BERLEJUNG, *Theologie*.

<sup>14</sup> See MCEWAN, *Request*, 58–69, Text Ash.1923.749; BERLEJUNG, *Theologie*, 118f; BERLEJUNG, *Handwerker*, 146–149.

<sup>15</sup> BERLEJUNG, *Theologie*, 173.



“to be born”)<sup>16</sup> and that the workshop bore the programmatic name “house of life-giving power” (*bīt mummu*).<sup>17</sup> Ea, the god of wisdom, who stood alongside the craftsmen in various hypostases, was of such importance in the production of a cultic image that he could be called its “father.”<sup>18</sup> The cult image always was created by the gods (*banû*); the human artisans worked (*epēšû*) only on it.

The participation of the artisan gods and of the god for whom the image was being made ensured that the image was in contact with the world of the gods from the very beginning of its creation and a living being. The supernatural origin of the image constituted its essential connection to its deity, i.e., its relationship of origin. The deity and the image were and remained essentially connected, such that the deity was literally present in its image. However, it would be a misunderstanding to reduce the deity to its statue and to identify them, because the deity could withdraw its presence at any time and was much more than its statue.

In a joint act of creation, the craftsmen and their patron deities produced the cultic image, which was understood as a living body<sup>19</sup> that corresponded to the human body.<sup>20</sup> The connection of the cultic image to the world of the gods as well as to the human world was expressed not only through the cooperation of divine and human artisans in its creation but also through the connotations of the materials that were used for composite statues, such as fine woods, gold and silver plating and inlays of precious stones. These were not simply everyday materials, but were said to have special qualities that brought together the three cosmic dimensions of vertical space: Thus, wood that was used for a cultic image ideally came from a tree that connected the sky, the earth and the underworld,<sup>21</sup> and the stones and precious metals were also ascribed with supernatural qualities.<sup>22</sup>

Apart from the rituals that accompanied the cultic correct making of a divine image in the temple workshop, the making of a cultic image held a prominent place in Mesopotamian royal ideology, since the presence of a god, manifested through its cultic image, bore witness to the god’s attention to the reigning king and showed the king’s rule to be legitimate and divinely sanctioned. Thus, several kings claim to have been chosen for fulfilling the divine command to create a cultic image by commissioning the craftsmen to do so. The king also financed such an undertaking and coordinated the labour and acquisition of materials.<sup>23</sup> According to some royal inscriptions, kings could exert

<sup>16</sup> On these relationships, see BERLEJUNG, *Theologie*, 135–141. In this regard my differentiating argumentation has been misunderstood by HUROVITZ, *God*, 150f.

<sup>17</sup> CAD M II 198; AHW 672; BERLEJUNG, *Theologie*, 89–93.

<sup>18</sup> For example, in the context of the washing-of-the-mouth ritual, see K6324+ etc. 61.63 par. in BERLEJUNG, *Theologie*, 438; WALKER/DICK, *Induction* (2001), 41f.

<sup>19</sup> On the embodiedness of the gods, see GLADIGOW, *Gottesvorstellungen*, 40; BERLEJUNG, *Theologie*, 36 with n. 193.

<sup>20</sup> On the earliest appearance of anthropomorphic cultic images, see SPYCKET, *Statuaire*, 77–90; SEIDL, *Kultbild*, 314–319, esp. 318f; RENGER, *Kultbild*, 307–314, esp. 308; DIETRICH/LORETZ, *Jahwe*, 16–20; BERLEJUNG, *Theologie*, 35 with n. 191.

<sup>21</sup> GURNEY/HULIN, *STT* 199 etc. i 30–36 = WALKER, *Material*, 63 = BERLEJUNG, *Theologie*, 439; WALKER/DICK, *Induction* (2001), 116/120.

<sup>22</sup> BERLEJUNG, *Theologie*, 117–134.

<sup>23</sup> BERLEJUNG, *Theologie*, 94–103; BERLEJUNG, *Handwerker*, 151–153.

their influence and determine the iconographic decoration.<sup>24</sup> Since the king's actions were a fulfillment of the divine will, the obedient king could expect divine blessing for his involvement.<sup>25</sup>

Thus, it can be summarized: A basic parameter that constituted a significant aspect of the visual construction of the divine was that what was seen and made on earth during the making of a divine image was only the material, however, not the relevant part.

### 1.3. The Consecration Ritual and the Installation of the Image in the Temple

In my dissertation from 1998, I have shown all the details of the “Theology of Cult Images,” which were based on the texts that refer to the production and consecration of cult images. Since then little has changed in the textual basis, the Mesopotamian *mīs pî* ritual. Although the long-awaited critical text edition of the ritual by C. WALKER and M.B. DICK was published in 2001, my own transcription and translation of the ritual from 1998 was already based on my own collations in London, Geers' copies from Heidelberg, and the comparison with the preliminary manuscript of the critical text edition, which Prof. C. WALKER had kindly made available to me for my dissertation. His preliminary manuscript from the nineties and the edition based on it, which he presented in 2001 together with M.B. DICK, differ only in minor details and occasional deviations in line counting, which do not change anything about my overall interpretation of the ritual and my evaluation for the theology of cult images. Despite the fact that in the meantime further parallels have been identified for individual tablets of the *mīs pî* ritual and its incantations,<sup>26</sup> this has remained the case until now (2020). In this respect, the statements made in 1998 are still valid, which are summarised in the following section.

In the meantime, however, something important has changed in the chronological classification of the text witnesses, which up to now all originated from the first millennium B.C.E.: S.M. MAUL was able to identify VAT 10038, a Middle Assyrian tablet (place of discovery: royal palace in Aššur, which can be regarded as the oldest text witness of the *mīs pî* ritual and its incantations.<sup>27</sup> It is one of the central incantations of the second day, which was spoken in the garden: “When the god was created, when the pure statue was completed”.<sup>28</sup> The middle Assyrian text has in lines 93a–d some “*Sondergut*,” however, these lines were already known from another incantation of the

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<sup>24</sup> On the appearance of the image of Šin in Harran/Ehulhul and the decoration of his pedestal with a horned lion-dragon and wild bulls (made by Nabonidus according to Assurbanipal's example), see SCHAUDIG, *Inschriften*, 419f n. 540; SEIDL, *Kultbilder*, 99–105.

<sup>25</sup> BERLEJUNG, *Theologie*, 103f.

<sup>26</sup> See SHIBATA, *Nimrud Manuscript* (incantation of the second day, to be recited three times in the garden to the Sungod: “Go, delay not!,” fourth tablet of the series *mīs pî*), see BERLEJUNG, *Theologie*, 241–243.461–463; WALKER/DICK, *Induction* (2001), 171–175.

<sup>27</sup> Sumerian references to mouth opening rites first appear in Ur III texts. During the third month of the Ur III calendar, a mouth opening was performed on the statue(s) of (the deceased and deified) Gudea. It is not clear whether these references describe the same ritual which is attested in the *mīs pî* ritual tablets from the first millennium.

<sup>28</sup> MAUL, *Reste*, Anhang; WALKER/DICK, *Induction* (2001), 135–144; BERLEJUNG, *Theologie*, 231ff.449–451.

second day (“As you grew up ...”).<sup>29</sup> Thus, the first millennium version of the ritual inserted these lines to another incantation of the ritual that was recited in a slightly later stage of the ritual. However, the setting still remained the same (second day and garden). The postponing (in the first millennium version) of these lines that refer to the eating of the image fits better into the logic of the progress of the ritual that activated the senses of the divine statue.<sup>30</sup> Thus, the re-arrangement of these lines could be the result of a later intentional reworking of the ritual.

A cultic image that had been correctly produced was ready to be purified through the washing-of-the-mouth ritual (*mīs pî*) and brought to life.<sup>31</sup> This complex ritual lasted two days and brought the new cultic image to different ritual stations (workshop, river bank, garden and the god’s temple), where a total of fourteen (or, in the Nineveh version, seven) washing- and opening-of-the-mouth rituals were performed. A variety of purification rituals and mouth-washings (*mīs pî*) ensured that the statue was freed of all impurities that had arisen through its production on earth in the workshop. The ritual separated the cultic image from everything that could evoke its earthly past (human craftsmen, tools, materials) and made it into an image that was created exclusively by divine action. Repeated mouth-opening (*pīt pî*) ceremonies served to activate the image’s senses, such that after the ritual the image was the deity’s earthly body. The image actually manifested the presence of the subject represented. After this final transformation of the material image, the physicality of the divine body came into focus. The deity entered into its practical field of action and made contact with the world and the other gods; it was now able to perceive, to act and react, communicate and consume. The following ritual actions included the investiture and enthronement of the cultic image, which was brought from the garden into the temple *cella* in a ceremonial procession.

The washing-of-the-mouth ritual, which contained multiple rites of separation, transformation and integration – that is, not *one* rite of passage but *several* rites of passage – was the prerequisite for a cultic image to be accepted into the community of the gods. Thus, the ritual integrated the cult image among gods and the deity in the image among humans. Together, the cultically correct ritual production of the image through divine participation and the *mīs pî* ritual ensured that the cultic image was connected to its deity from the very beginning of its existence. This is the basis for the theology of presence, which was especially important when the invisible gods took over their functions and activities and took up residence in their temples in the form of their visible images. As soon as the image was installed in its home, the temple, its presence signalled the beginning of the interaction and communication between the human and divine spheres.

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<sup>29</sup> BERLEJUNG, *Theologie*, 237f.455:16–19; WALKER/DICK, *Induction* (2001), 162f:16a–19b.

<sup>30</sup> See the overview in BERLEJUNG, *Theologie*, 248f (Garten B).

<sup>31</sup> For detailed treatments of this ritual, see WALKER, *Material*; BERLEJUNG, *Washing*, 45–72; BERLEJUNG, *Theologie*, 178–283; WALKER/DICK, *Induction* (1999); WALKER/DICK, *Induction* (2001).

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