

# Religion at Nippur in the Ur III period

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Nippur was the unrivaled religious capital during the period dominated by the kings of the IIIrd dynasty centered at Ur in nowadays southern Iraq. As the city of the supreme god Enlil it can be considered as the "Mesopotamian Vatican" latest since the Akkad period (c. 2350 BC). The centrality of Nippur at the border between Akkad (North) and Sumer (South) might have triggered the factor of importance of the site. During Ur III times large scale construction programs at the East-mound of the site with the temple of Enlil as well as that of Inanna underlines the importance of Nippur during this period. As Ur III period is considered as a kind of "Sumerian renaissance" it was important for the state ideology to venerate the Old Sumerian gods. Probably building on an ancient custom, the kings of Ur were crowned to be kings of Sumer and Akkad at Nippur. Reconstructed with the help of the Puzrish-Dagan (modern Drehem) texts which were excavated illegally at a site nearby Nippur, the ritual calendar can be reconstructed. Each month a festival was celebrated which was often related to a specific god as, for example, the gu4-si-su (sum.) festival of the second month (c. April/May) which was dedicated to Enlil's son Ninurta who was also known as, lugal gu4-si-su (sum.), "king of the Gusu". One of the most important local religious celebrations was the festival at the nearby site of Tummal (modern Dlehim) with a boat procession to the ancient cultic center of Enlil's wife Ninlil. Additionally, festivals related to agriculture like the seeding (fourth month, sum. shu-numun) were also common. Other important gods at Nippur were the healing goddess Gula/Ninisina in the local form of Nintinuga (sum. "Lady who revives the dead"). Her temple was probably localized by excavations at the northern West-mound.



Date Range: 2100 BCE - 2000 BCE

Region: Ur III core

Region tags: Southern Iraq, Al-Qadisiyah, Southern Mesopotamia

Core region of the Ur III kingdom roughly between 2100 and 2000 BC.

## Status of Participants:

✓ Elite    ✓ Religious Specialists    ✓ Non-elite (common people, general populace)

## Sources

Print sources for understanding this subject:

- Source 1: Source 1: Sallaberger, Walther. Der kultische Kalender der Ur III-Zeit. Untersuchungen zur Assyriologie und Vorderasiatischen Archäologie, Bd. 7. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1993. Source 2: Wang, Xianhua. The Metamorphosis of Enlil. Alter Orient und Altes Testament. Ugarit Verlag, Münster, 2011.
- Source 2: Sallaberger, Walther. Ur III-Zeit. In: Walter Sallaberger - Aage Westenholz, Mesopotamien - Akkade-Zeit und Ur III Zeit. Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis 160/3. Universitätsverlag Freiburg Schweiz - Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht Göttingen, 1999.
- Source 3: Jacobsen, Thorkild. The Treasures of Darkness: A History of Mesopotamian Religion. Yale University Press, 1976.

Online sources for understanding this subject:

- Source 1 URL: <https://www.livius.org/articles/place/nippur/>
- Source 1 Description: Overview of Nippur at Livius.org.

Relevant online primary textual corpora (original languages and/or translations):

- Source 2 URL: <https://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/>
- Source 2 Description: The ETCSL project, Faculty of Oriental Studies, University of Oxford
- Source 1 URL: [https://cdli.ucla.edu/search/search\\_results.php?SearchMode=Text&order=PrimaryPublication&Collection=pennsylvania+museum&Period=ur+iii](https://cdli.ucla.edu/search/search_results.php?SearchMode=Text&order=PrimaryPublication&Collection=pennsylvania+museum&Period=ur+iii)
- Source 1 Description: Corpus of digitized cuneiform documents. Selected period: Ur III.

## General Variables

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### Membership/Group Interactions

Are other religious groups in cultural contact with target religion:

- Yes

Does the religious group actively proselytize and recruit new members:

- Field doesn't know

Does the religion have official political support

- Yes

↳ Is religious infrastructure paid for by the polity:  
– Yes

↳ Are political officials equivalent to religious officials:  
– No

↳ Is religious observance enforced by the polity:  
– Field doesn't know

↳ Polity legal code is roughly coterminous with religious code:  
– Field doesn't know

↳ Polity provides preferential economic treatment (e.g. tax, exemption)

– Yes

Is there a conception of apostasy in the religious group:

– No

### Size and Structure

Number of adherents of religious group within sample region (estimated population, numerical):

– Field doesn't know

Number of adherents of religious group within sample region (% of sample region population, numerical):

– Field doesn't know

### Scripture

Does the religious group have scriptures:

Scripture is a generic term used to designate revered texts that are considered particularly authoritative and sacred relative to other texts. Strictly speaking, it refers to written texts, but there are also “oral scriptures” (e.g. the Vedas of India).

– Yes

↳ Are they written:

– Yes

↳ Is there a story (or a set of stories) associated with the origin of scripture:

– Yes

↳ Revealed by a high god:

– No

↳ Revealed by other supernatural being:

– No

↳ Inspired by high god:

– No

↳ Inspired by other supernatural being:

– No

↳ Originated from divine or semi-divine human beings:

– Yes

Notes: Originally Enmerkar was a human king but he was deified during Ur III times.

Reference: Black Zólyomi Robson Enmerkar and the lord of Aratta: translation

↳ Originated from non-divine human being:

– Yes

Notes: Originally Enmerkar was a human king but he was deified during Ur III times.

## Architecture, Geography

Is monumental religious architecture present:

– Yes

Notes: Ziggurats, temples on terraces, highly walled temple precincts.

↳ Size of largest single religious monument, square meters:

– Square meters: 13750

Notes: Excavated parts of the main court including the incompletely excavated part of a forecourt to the Southeast.

Are there different types of religious monumental architecture:

– Yes

↳ Tombs:

– Yes

↳ Temples:

– Yes

↳ Altars:

– Yes

↳ Devotional markers:

– Yes

↳ Mass gathering point [plazas, courtyard, square. Places permanently demarcated using visible objects or structures]:

– Yes

↳ Other type of religious monumental architecture:

– Yes [specify]: Ziqqurrats as special but not obligatory features of a main temple

Is iconography present:

– Yes

↳ Where is iconography present [select all that apply]:

– Only religious public space

– Some public spaces

↳ Are there distinct features in the religious group's iconography:

– Yes

Notes: Glyptic iconography shows most of the further elaborated beings and symbols.

↳ Eyes (stylized or not):

– Yes

↳ Supernatural beings (zoomorphic):

– Yes

↳ Supernatural beings (anthropomorphic):

– Yes

↳ Supernatural beings (abstract symbol):

– Yes

↳ Portrayals of afterlife:

– Yes

↳ Aspects of doctrine (e.g. cross, trinity, Mithraic symbols):

– Yes

↳ Humans:

– Yes



Other features of iconography:

– Yes

Are there specific sites dedicated to sacred practice or considered sacred:

– Yes

Notes: For example Tummam, cult site of Ninlil, was the goal of yearly processions from Nippur and there is also located the ki-a-nag place of Urnamma, the founder of the Ur III dynasty.

Are pilgrimages present:

– Yes

Notes: Tummam, the cult site of Ninlil, was the goal of yearly processions from Nippur

## Beliefs

### Burial and Afterlife

Is a spirit-body distinction present:

Answer “no” only if personhood (or consciousness) is extinguished with death of the physical body.

Answering yes does not necessarily imply the existence of Cartesian mind/body dualism, merely that some element of personhood (or consciousness) survives the death of the body.

– Yes



Spirit-mind is conceived of as having qualitatively different powers or properties than other body parts:

– Field doesn't know

Belief in afterlife:

– Yes

Reincarnation in this world:

– No

Are there special treatments for adherents' corpses:

– Yes



Interment:

– Yes

Are co-sacrifices present in tomb/burial:

– Yes

↳ Animal co-sacrifices present:  
– Yes

Are grave goods present:

– Yes

↳ Personal effects:  
– Yes

↳ Valuable items:  
– Yes

↳ Some wealth (some valuable or useful objects interred):  
– Yes

↳ Other grave goods:  
– Yes

Are formal burials present:

– Yes

↳ Family tomb-crypt:  
– Yes

↳ Domestic (individuals interred beneath house, or in areas used for normal domestic activities):  
– Yes

↳ Other formal burial type:  
– Yes [specify]: Ki-a-nag, commemoration place for kings as for example Urnammas at Tummal.

## Supernatural Beings

Are supernatural beings present:

– Yes

↳ A supreme high god is present:

– Yes

↳ The supreme high god is anthropomorphic:  
– Yes

↳ The supreme high god is a sky deity:  
– Yes

↳ The supreme high god is chthonic (of the underworld):  
– No

↳ The supreme high god is fused with the monarch (king=high god):  
– No

↳ The monarch is seen as a manifestation or emanation of the high god:  
– No

Notes: The monarch is on power by the will of Enlil and therefore also crowned first at Nippur then at Ur.

↳ The supreme high god is a kin relation to elites:  
– No

↳ The supreme high god has another type of loyalty-connection to elites:  
– Field doesn't know

↳ The supreme high god is unquestionably good:  
– No

Notes: Enlil was deciding the "great deluge" in the gods assembly.

↳ Other feature(s) of supreme high god:  
– Yes [specify]: Leader of the gods assembly.



↳ The supreme high god has knowledge of this world:

– Yes

↳ The supreme god's knowledge is restricted to particular domain of human affairs:

– No

↳ The supreme high god's knowledge is restricted to (a) specific area(s) within the sample region:

– No

↳ The supreme high god's knowledge is unrestricted within the sample region:

– Yes

↳ The supreme high god's knowledge is unrestricted outside of sample region:

– Yes

↳ The supreme high god can see you everywhere normally visible (in public):

– Field doesn't know

↳ The supreme high god can see you everywhere (in the dark, at home):

– Field doesn't know

↳ The supreme high god can see inside heart/mind (hidden motives):

– Field doesn't know

↳ The supreme high god knows your basic character (personal essence):

– Field doesn't know

↳ The supreme high god knows what will happen to you, what you will do (future sight):

– Yes

↳ The supreme high god has deliberate causal efficacy in the world:

– Yes

- ↳ The supreme high god can reward:
  - Yes
- ↳ The supreme high god can punish:
  - Yes
- ↳ The supreme high god has indirect causal efficacy in the world:
  - I don't know
- ↳ The supreme high god exhibits positive emotion:
  - Yes
- ↳ The supreme high god exhibits negative emotion:
  - Yes
- ↳ The supreme high god possesses hunger:
  - Yes
- ↳ Is it permissible to worship supernatural beings other than the high god:
  - Yes
- ↳ The supreme high god communicates with the living:
  - Yes
  - ↳ In waking, everyday life:
    - Field doesn't know
  - ↳ In dreams:
    - Yes
  - ↳ In trance possession:
    - Field doesn't know
  - ↳ Through divination practices:
    - Yes

- ↳ Only through religious specialists:
  - Yes
- ↳ Only through monarch
  - No
- ↳ Other form of communication with living:
  - No
- ↳ Previously human spirits are present:
  - Yes
- ↳ Human spirits can be seen:
  - Field doesn't know
- ↳ Human spirits can be physically felt:
  - Field doesn't know
- ↳ Human spirits exhibit positive emotion:
  - Yes
- ↳ Human spirits exhibit negative emotion:
  - Yes
- ↳ Human spirits communicate with the living:
  - I don't know
- ↳ Non-human supernatural beings are present:
  - Yes
- ↳ These supernatural beings can be seen:
  - No
- ↳ These supernatural beings can be physically felt:
  - Yes

- ↳ Non-human supernatural beings have knowledge of this world:
  - Yes
    - ↳ Non-human supernatural beings have knowledge restricted to particular domain of human affairs:
      - Yes
    - ↳ Non-human supernatural beings have knowledge restricted to (a) specific area(s) within the sample region:
      - Field doesn't know
    - ↳ Non-human supernatural beings have knowledge unrestricted within the sample region:
      - No
    - ↳ Non-human supernatural beings have knowledge unrestricted outside of sample region:
      - I don't know
    - ↳ Non-human supernatural beings can see you everywhere normally visible (in public):
      - Field doesn't know
    - ↳ Non-human supernatural beings can see you everywhere (in the dark, at home):
      - I don't know
    - ↳ Non-human supernatural beings have other knowledge of this world:
      - Field doesn't know
- ↳ Non-human supernatural beings have deliberate causal efficacy in the world:
  - Field doesn't know
- ↳ These supernatural beings have indirect causal efficacy in the world:
  - I don't know
- ↳ These supernatural beings exhibit positive emotion:
  - Yes

- ↳ These supernatural beings exhibit negative emotion:
  - Yes
- ↳ These supernatural beings possess hunger:
  - Yes
- ↳ These supernatural beings possess/exhibit some other feature:
  - I don't know
- ↳ Mixed human-divine beings are present:
  - Yes
- ↳ Does the religious group possess a variety of supernatural beings:
  - Yes
- ↳ Organized by kinship based on a family model:
  - Yes
- ↳ Organized hierarchically:
  - Yes

### Supernatural Monitoring

Is supernatural monitoring present:

This refers to surveillance by supernatural beings of humans' behaviour and/or thought particularly as it relates to social norms or potential norm violations.

– Yes

- ↳ Supernatural beings care about taboos:
  - Yes
- ↳ Sacred space(s):
  - Yes
- ↳ Sacred object(s):
  - Yes

- ↳ Supernatural beings care about murder of coreligionists:
  - Field doesn't know
- ↳ Supernatural beings care about murder of members of other religions:
  - Field doesn't know
- ↳ Supernatural beings care about murder of members of other polities:
  - Field doesn't know
- ↳ Supernatural beings care about sex:
  - Field doesn't know
- ↳ Supernatural beings care about lying:
  - Yes
- ↳ Supernatural beings care about honouring oaths:
  - Yes
- ↳ Supernatural beings care about laziness:
  - Field doesn't know
- ↳ Supernatural beings care about sorcery:
  - Yes
- ↳ Supernatural beings care about non-lethal fighting:
  - Field doesn't know
- ↳ Supernatural beings care about shirking risk:
  - Field doesn't know
- ↳ Supernatural beings care about disrespecting elders:
  - Field doesn't know
- ↳ Supernatural beings care about proper ritual observance:
  - Yes

↳ Supernatural beings care about performance of rituals:  
– Yes

↳ Supernatural beings care about conversion of non-religionists:  
– No

↳ Supernatural beings care about economic fairness:  
– Yes

↳ Supernatural beings care about personal hygiene:  
– Field doesn't know

Do supernatural beings mete out punishment:

– Yes

↳ Is the cause or agent of supernatural punishment known:  
– Yes

↳ Done only by high god:  
– Yes

Notes: Enlil decides over the deluge as the fate of humanity within the divine assembly of the Ekur.

↳ Done by many supernatural beings:  
– No

↳ Is the reason for supernatural punishment known:  
– Yes

↳ Done to inhibit selfishness:  
– No

↳ Other [specify]  
– Yes

Notes: To shut up the noise of people the deluge is brought over the world by Enlil.

Do supernatural beings bestow rewards:

– Yes

↳ Is the cause/purpose of supernatural rewards known:

– Yes

↳ Done by many supernatural beings:

– Yes

### Messianism/Eschatology

Are messianic beliefs present:

– No

### Norms and Moral Realism

Are general social norms prescribed by the religious group:

– Yes

Is there a conventional vs. moral distinction in the religious group:

– No

## Practices

### Membership Costs and Practices

Does membership in this religious group require celibacy (full sexual abstinence):

– No

Notes: It is generally suggested that the naditu (Akk.)/ lukur (sum.) priestesses were expected to be sexually abstinent or at least to get no children. Although definite proofs only exist for the following Old Babylonian period.

Does membership in this religious group require constraints on sexual activity (partial sexual abstinence):

– Yes

↳ Monogamy (males):

– Yes

Notes: According to the Codex-Urnamma a penalty is due to be paid by a man violating the marriage of another man.



↳ Monogamy (females):

– Yes

Notes: Following the Codex-Urnamma it was expected that married woman would get punished for adultery. Even only an accusation by the husband would lead to a river ordeal of the wife.

↳ Other sexual constraints (males):

– No

↳ Other sexual constraints (females):

– Yes

Notes: It is generally suggested that the naditu (Akk.) priestesses were expected to be sexually abstinent or at least to get no children.

Does membership in this religious group require castration:

– No

Does membership in this religious group require fasting:

– No

Does membership in this religious group require forgone food opportunities (taboos on desired foods):

– Field doesn't know

Does membership in this religious group require permanent scarring or painful bodily alterations:

– No

Does membership in this religious group require painful physical positions or transitory painful wounds:

– No

Does membership in this religious group require sacrifice of adults:

"Adults" here referring to an emic or indigenous category; if that category is different from the popular Western definition of a human who is 18-years-old or older and who is legally responsible for his/her actions, then please specify that difference in the Comments/Sources: box below.

– No

Does membership in this religious group require sacrifice of children:

"Children" here referring to an emic or indigenous category; if that category is different from the popular Western definition, please specify that different in the Comments/Sources: box below.

— No

Does membership in this religious group require self-sacrifice (suicide):

— No

Does membership in this religious group require sacrifice of property/valuable items:

— No

Does membership in this religious group require sacrifice of time (e.g., attendance at meetings or services, regular prayer, etc.):

— Field doesn't know

Does membership in this religious group require physical risk taking:

— No

Does membership in this religious group require accepting ethical precepts:

— Yes

Does membership in this religious group require marginalization by out-group members:

— No

Does membership in this religious group require participation in small-scale rituals (private, household):

— Yes



What is the average interval of time between performances (in hours):

Performances here refers to small-scale rituals.

— Field doesn't know

Does membership in this religious group require participation in large-scale rituals:

I.e. involving two or more households; includes large-scale "ceremonies" and "festivals."

— No

Notes: There is no information that it was obligatory to participate in both "ceremonies" and "festivals".

Are extra-ritual in-group markers present:

E.g. special changes to appearance such as circumcision, tattoos, scarification, etc.

– Yes

↳ Tattoos/scarification:  
– Field doesn't know

↳ Circumcision:  
– No

↳ Hair:  
– Yes  
Notes: Priests were shaved for ritual cleaning.

↳ Archaic ritual language:  
– Yes  
Notes: Emesal can be seen as a ritual dialect which was mainly limited to ceremonies in Ur III times.

## Society and Institutions

### Levels of Social Complexity

The society to which the religious group belongs is best characterized as (please choose one):

– A state

### Welfare

Does the religious group in question provide institutionalized famine relief:

– Yes

Is famine relief available to the group's adherents through an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– No

Does the religious group in question provide institutionalized poverty relief:

– Yes

Notes: Most probably poorer people can give children to temples which is sometimes indicated in the personal name of the individual.

Is poverty relief available to the group's adherents through an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

— No

Does the religious group in question provide institutionalized care for the elderly and infirm:

— Yes

Is institutionalized care for the elderly and infirm available to the group's adherents through an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

— No

### Education

Does the religious group provide formal education to its adherents:

— Yes

*Notes:* Only elites had access to formal education. The temple as a place of learning is not proven but finds of stray inscriptions from the Ekur temple could lead to such a conclusion.

### Bureaucracy

Do the group's adherents interact with a formal bureaucracy within their group:

— Yes

Do the group's adherents interact with other institutional bureaucracies:

— Yes

### Public Works

Does the religious group in question provide public food storage:

— Yes

Is public food storage provided to the group's adherents by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

— No

Does the religious group in question provide water management (irrigation, flood control):

— Yes

Is water management provided to the group's adherents by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– No

Does the religious group in question provide transportation infrastructure:

– No

Is transportation infrastructure provided for the group's adherents by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes

### **Taxation**

Does the religious group in question levy taxes or tithes:

– Yes

Are taxes levied on the group's adherents by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– No

### **Enforcement**

Does the religious group in question provide an institutionalized police force:

– Field doesn't know

Do the group's adherents interact with an institutionalized police force provided by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Field doesn't know

Does the religious group in question provide institutionalized judges:

– Yes

Do the group's adherents interact with an institutionalized judicial system provided by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes

Notes: The existence of the "Lawcode of Urnamma" could suggest an independent judicial system.

Does the religious group in question enforce institutionalized punishment:

– Yes

↳ Do the institutionalized punishments include execution:

– Yes

↳ Do the institutionalized punishments include corporal punishments:

– Yes

↳ Do the institutionalized punishments include seizure of property:

– Yes

Does the religious group in question have a formal legal code:

– Yes

Notes: "Lawcode of Urnamma" could be seen as a formal legal code or at least as a precursor of such a code.

## Warfare

Does religious group in question possess an institutionalized military:

– Yes

↳ Does the religious group in question have the power to conscript:

– Yes

↳ Does the religious group in question maintain a full-time military corps (e.g. Swiss Guard):

– Yes

↳ Does the religious group in question maintain a standing army:

– Yes

## Written Language

Does the religious group in question possess its own distinct written language:

– No

Notes: With Emesal it possesses only a distinct dialect of Sumerian.

Is a non-religion-specific written language available to the group's adherents through an

institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes

Is a non-religion-specific written language used by the group's adherents through an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes

## Calendar

Does the religious group in question possess a formal calendar:

– Yes

Notes: The Nippur Calendar is mainly connected to the local cult. See Cultic Calendar as reconstructed by Sallaberger 1993.

Is a formal calendar provided for the group's adherents by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes

Notes: The Drehem calendar exists beside the Nippur calendar.

## Food Production

Does the religious group in question provide food for themselves:

– Yes



Please characterize the forms/level of food production [choose all that apply]:

- Fishing
- Pastoralism
- Small-scale agriculture / horticultural gardens or orchards
- Large-scale agriculture (e.g., monocropping, organized irrigation systems)

Is food provided to the group's adherents by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes



Please characterize the forms/levels of food production [choose all that apply]:

- Gathering
- Hunting (including marine animals)
- Fishing

- Patoralism
- Small-scale agriculture / horticultural gardens or orchards
- Large-scale agriculture (e.g., monocropping, organized irrigation systems)

## Bibliography

### Entry/Answer References

Reference: Black Zólyomi Robson Enmerkar and the lord of Aratta: translation