circumstances, the objects as well as the behaviors often remain to be repurposed for use in new circumstances and in the service of new exigencies and ideologies.

For reflective elaborations on the use of material media to presence the divine pantheons of ancient Southwest Asia, the clearest examples come from the large and powerful empires of Mesopotamia and Egypt, where multiple texts preserve descriptions of special rituals referred to as the *mīs pî*, "washing of the mouth," and the *pīt pî* (or *wpt-r*), "opening of the mouth," that transformed human-made divine images into heaven-born deities (Boden 1998; Berlejung 1998; Walker and Dick 1999, 2001; McDowell 2015). While there are many references to these rituals across the Akkadian corpora, the prescriptive ritual texts themselves are limited to a few surviving Akkadian fragments that all date to the first millennium BCE. The number and order of the incantations and the ceremonies differ between the surviving fragments, but the core of the process was the ceremonial washing of the mouth, which purified the image for contact with the deity, and the ceremonial opening of the mouth,[5] which actually enabled the image to breathe, smell, eat, and drink (Walter and Dick 1999, 151). Both the secondary references to the ritual and the ritual texts themselves use language related to gestation, birth, and manufacturing as part of a two-day ritual process that transitioned the deity into the cultic image.[6]

According to the version of the ritual from Babylon, on the first day, the image is set within an orchard while a tamarisk trough representing the divine womb (the *buginnu*) was filled with water (representing Ea's semen), gold, silver, oil, carnelian, lapis lazuli, and tamarisk.[7] After a series of "mouth washings," the image and the *buginnu* were left to "gestate" overnight. The mouth, ears, heart, and mind were understood to be operative to some degree at this point, but on the second day, the *buginnu* was placed on a birthstone before a panel of artisan deities who were petitioned to enable the image to eat, hear, and breath.[8]

[5] The opening of the mouth could also be performed for images representing living kings and other persons (Walker and Dick 2001, 13).

[6] Hurowitz (2003, 150–53) and McDowell (2015, 69–80) agree with Boden (1998, 101–5) against Berlejung (1998, 137–41) and, to some degree, Walker and Dick (1999, 21), that birth provides an overarching conceptual framework for the rituals, although manufacturing terminology also features prominently.

[7] A separate "holy-water basin of mouth-washing" was filled with "an assortment of precious metal, gems, oils, wood, salt, syrup, and ghee" (McDowell 2015, 55). McDowell (2015, 74–80) criticizes Berlejung's (1998, 137–41) rejection of the birthing framework on the grounds that she conflates this basin with the *buginnu*.

[8] See McDowell 2015, 72: "Its creation is attributed, ultimately, not to human craftsmen but to a group of creator-gods who, through a collaborative effort, form the divine embryo which then gestates overnight while divine powers are transferred to the materials collected in the tamarisk 'womb.' On the following day, the god is 'born' on the brick of *Bēlet-ilī* and its mouth is washed a final time, allowing for its initial life-giving breath. With its