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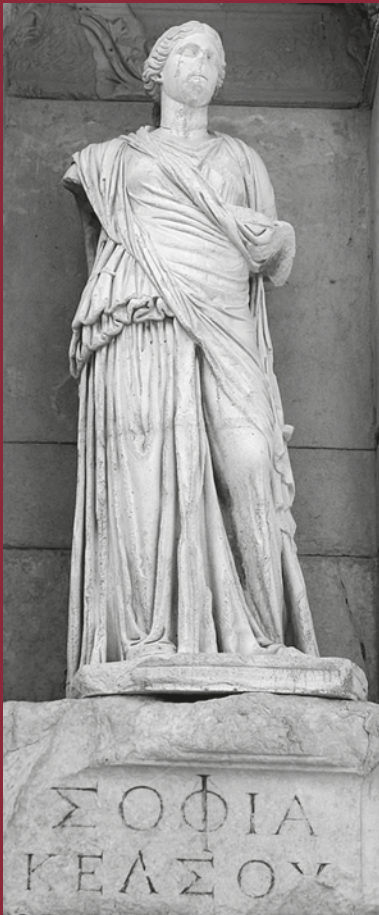
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Representing  
the Wise

A Gendered  
Approach

Proceedings of the  
1<sup>st</sup> Melammu Workshop,  
Lille, 4–5 April 2016

Edited by Stéphanie Anthonioz  
and Sebastian Fink

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Proceedings of the 1<sup>st</sup> Melammu Workshop, Lille, 4–5 April 2016

Edited by Stéphanie Anthonioz and Sebastian Fink

= Melammu Workshops and Monographs 1

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# Female Sages in Akkadian Literature

Saana Svärd

## 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The topic of female sages in Akkadian literature is a vast one. Defining “female,” defining “Akkadian literature” and defining “sage” are all topics which could easily yield several scholarly articles. Thus, I will start this article by delineating its scope.

As far as the question of gender is concerned, in this article I subscribe to the idea that gender is separate from biological sex and that it is socially constructed. The process of gender construction can be observed in many ways, but here I concentrate on two of them. First, gender is constructed in culturally significant narratives, such as the Gilgamesh Epic. Narratives are one of the most powerful ways by which individuals and communities create their identities. By portraying men and women in a certain way as actors in a narrative, narrators participate in the gender construction process. Second, gender is created in everyday interactions between individuals. Such interactions are often simple, such as financial transactions or the actions of a scribe. Nonetheless, texts attesting to these interactions can illuminate the process of gender construction on a more concrete level of social reality than culturally significant narratives.

In this article, I will look at gender from both of these perspectives in the light of three case studies. I will first present an example of a literary figure, a female sage in the Gilgamesh Epic. Second, I will examine the figure of the Neo-Babylonian queen mother Adad-guppi, who is presented in a long Neo-Babylonian inscription as a wise counselor to her son the king. Finally, I will discuss female sages in the social reality of first-millennium Mesopotamia. In this article, I concentrate on female gender, but it should be remembered that the mechanisms of gender construction are not limited to female gender alone.<sup>2</sup>

The corpus of “traditional Akkadian literature” covers roughly the years 2300–100 BCE and includes such genres as myths, wisdom literature, legends, incantations, laments for people and deities, and praises to deities in many different forms (such as hymns, prayers, love poems and dedicatory inscriptions). It is difficult to draw a line between these genres and the literature relating to practical aims (such as omen collections, divination manuals, prophecy, mathematical and astronomi-

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Johannes Bach for discussions on the topic of narratives in Mesopotamia, Sebastian Fink for his feedback, and finally Albion M. Butters for improving the English of the article. I also gratefully acknowledge funding support from the Academy of Finland for the writing of this article.

<sup>2</sup> For more on gender, methodology and Assyriology, see Svärd, 2016 and Svärd/Garcia-Ventura, 2018.



cal texts, etc.). Another grey area includes the royal inscriptions, which were texts celebrating the glorious deeds of the ruling king. A complete overview of all genres will not be given here, especially since the genres I mention are merely helpful labels, assigned from the perspective of modern research. From the Akkadian point of view, these genre lines are blurred, to say the least, and there are many compositions which do not neatly fall into one of these modern categories.<sup>3</sup> For the purposes of this article, I have chosen two sample literary texts, namely the Gilgamesh Epic and the Adad-guppi inscription. Additionally, I will discuss women and wisdom in the light of first-millennium non-literary sources.

## 2. Mother Ninsun in the Gilgamesh Epic

Much of the scholarship that surrounds the fragments, different versions and recensions of the Gilgamesh Epic is not relevant for this article. To give a very brief overview, the earliest Sumerian and Akkadian stories of Gilgamesh first became a unified storyline in the Old Babylonian version of the epic (around 1700 BCE), followed later by the so-called Standard Babylonian version, which is mostly known from copies dated to the Neo-Assyrian era.<sup>4</sup>

The Gilgamesh Epic, with its long history of redaction and multiple layers of meaning, cannot be conflated into one easy narrative with a single simple purpose or audience. Nonetheless, a point worth making is that the epic was a popular piece in ancient times, just as it is today. In comparison to other Akkadian literature, which tends to be more formulaic, the Epic of Gilgamesh engages the modern reader fully. As so elegantly stated by Tzvi Abusch: “Its study draws us into an orbit that is engaging and thrilling, for it is a literary work of fantasy and history that centers on some of the very existential issues with which we ourselves grapple.”<sup>5</sup> The ancient audience of these stories must have included both men and women, considering the wide circulation of the different forms of the epic and the obvious popularity it enjoyed through the centuries. However, considering the prevalence of male scribes in Mesopotamia, it is clear that the image of gender presented therein is directed from the male point of view. It is thus not surprising to find women functioning as supporting actors in the epic. Already one of the major topics of the epos, the “bromance” between Gilgamesh and Enkidu precludes any leading role for women.<sup>6</sup>

Here I concentrate on the topic of female sages in the work. There are three clear figures of female sages or counselors in the Gilgamesh Epic: the prostitute (*ḥarimtu*) Šamhat; Šiduri, the tavern-keeper (*sābītu*); and Ninsun, the divine

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<sup>3</sup> For an introduction to the problems of defining authorship in Mesopotamia, see Foster, 1991 and Halton/Svård, 2018: 30–34. For a comprehensive anthology of Akkadian literature, see Foster, 2005.

<sup>4</sup> Abusch, 2015: 2–9. See also the comprehensive edition of the epic in George, 2003.

<sup>5</sup> Abusch, 2015: 1.

<sup>6</sup> Harris, 2000: 120.

mother of Gilgamesh. The role of Šamhat is to teach the wild-man Enkidu about the ways of the civilized world. Šiduri, the tavern-keeper, counsels Gilgamesh in his quest to find eternal life, exhorting the joys of the ephemeral human condition.<sup>7</sup> Thus, it seems that Šiduri and Šamhat both are upholding traditional values of the society, emphasizing the importance of family and civilized customs.<sup>8</sup>

Gilgamesh's divine mother, the wise goddess Ninsun, is chosen for specific analysis here as her role parallels that of the queen mother Adad-guppi, which will be the next case study in this article. In the epic, Ninsun acts as an interpreter for her son's dreams. The dreams of Gilgamesh, as well as the interpretation given to them by his mother, paint Enkidu as a strong companion, who will always have Gilgamesh's back and who will be accepted as a son of Ninsun. The dreams foretell of their love for each other and Enkidu's position as the only one who could ever be his equal. In the epic, Ninsun is the ideal mother, helping her son in his quest. She is also an expert dream interpreter, a role which was given to women elsewhere in Mesopotamian literature as well. The role of dream interpreter was not an exclusive province of women in Mesopotamia (even within the Gilgamesh Epic, Enkidu also takes the role of a dream interpreter), but it does seem to be one of the few fields of divination in which women did participate.<sup>9</sup>

In his analysis, Tzvi Abusch has suggested that Gilgamesh has features of a crown prince figure rather than those of a kingly figure. His overall arrogant attitude in the epic could "(...) exemplify attitudes that may be characteristic of royal youngsters but which lead to failure in rulers."<sup>10</sup> He also sees the importance of Gilgamesh's mother in the narrative from this perspective. Although I find the overall argument of Abusch convincing, and an interesting lens through which the narrative can be viewed, I disagree with his assessment that Gilgamesh is listening to the advice of his mother because of his youth.<sup>11</sup> The relationships between kings and their mothers in the social reality of Mesopotamia attest to the important role of mothers of kings as counselors and stout supporters of their sons, even

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<sup>7</sup> In the Standard version Šiduri's role is shortened, but in the Old Babylonian version Šiduri gives a long passage of sage advice relating to the importance of earthly joys. It seems that in the Old Babylonian version it is Šiduri, not Uta-napishtim, who counsels Gilgamesh and makes him see the futility of his quest for immortality (Abusch, 2015: 7). To quote the Old Babylonian version: "The life that you seek you never will find: when the gods created mankind, death they dispensed to mankind, life they kept for themselves." And: "But you, Gilgamesh, let your belly be full, enjoy yourself always by day and by night! Make merry each day, dance and play day and night! Let your clothes be clean, let your head be washed, may you bathe in water! Gaze on the child that holds your hand, let your wife enjoy your repeated embrace!" (George, 1999: xxxvi, xliii.)

<sup>8</sup> Harris, 2000: 124.

<sup>9</sup> Harris, 2000: 106–107, 121. Another field of divination where women were active was prophecy; see Nissinen, 2013.

<sup>10</sup> Abusch, 2015: 174.

<sup>11</sup> See Abusch, 2015: 174–175.

including adult and seasoned kings. The mythical evidence as well suggests that the role of women as counselors, especially in royal households, was not uncommon.<sup>12</sup> These themes are further discussed in the next two sections.

### 3. Queen mother Adad-guppi

I next move closer to Mesopotamian social reality by introducing the case of the pseudo-biography of Adad-guppi, the mother of the Neo-Babylonian King Nabonidus (556–539 BCE). This literary example will offer an opportunity to reflect on the figure of a semi-fictive female counselor.

This inscription is almost completely written from the first-person perspective, but the ending of the text clearly indicates that the narrative was composed after Adad-guppi's death.<sup>13</sup> Although she did not compose the text herself, the unknown author or authors present Adad-guppi as a woman of importance and as someone to whom a new literary composition could be attributed.<sup>14</sup> The text was written on two steles as part of the restoration project of the temple of Šin in the city of Harran. This is why it can be dated to the year 547 BCE.

The text opens by introducing the purported author, Adad-guppi. Then the readers are reminded of the destruction of the city of Harran in 610 BCE. Adad-guppi's faithful service to the gods, Šin in particular, is recounted next. The narrative emphasizes that the god Šin agrees to return to Harran, having been moved to answer the plea of Adad-guppi, his faithful servant. Even more, Šin will help Adad-guppi's son to achieve kingship, in order for him to reestablish the god's temple in Harran. This is predicted in a dream of Adad-guppi, where she speaks with Šin.<sup>15</sup>

“When in my dreams his hands were set (upon me), Šin the king of gods spoke to me thus: ‘The return of the gods is because of you. I will place the dwelling in Harran in the hands of Nabonidus your son. He will construct Ehulhul and make perfect its work.’ [...] I was attentive to the word which Šin, the king of gods spoke and indeed I saw it (happen)!”

Later, the inscription reiterates Adad-guppi's loyal worship and recounts how she introduced her son to the court.

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<sup>12</sup> For some examples, see Harris, 2000: 100–104, 113–116.

<sup>13</sup> Beaulieu, 1989: 68 argues that the inscription “was in all probability set up at Harran several years after her death by Nabonidus to commemorate the rebuilding of Ehulhul, the temple of Šin.”

<sup>14</sup> An interesting parallel to this unique text can be found in a Luwian stele of the wife of Taitas, as already noted by Beaulieu, 1989, 77. See also Fink, 2014: 247. The text is translated in Klingler, 2011: 76.

<sup>15</sup> All translations of this text in the current article are quotations from Halton/Svärd, 2018: 168–174. For a recent German translation that includes a complete bibliography of the text and a commented score based on all available sources, see Schaudig, 2001.

“(Thus, altogether for) 68 years I revered them with all my heart. I guarded their watch [and] I made Nabonidus (my) son, my offspring, serve in front of Nebuchadnezzar, son of Nabopolassar and Neriglissar, king of Babylon and day and night he guarded their watch and he constantly and repeatedly did whatever pleased them. He established my name excellent before them.”

Here we see her working actively in guiding her son by making him part of the royal court. At the same time, the passage outlines the mutually beneficial relationship between mother and son, as the son also promotes his mother in the court.

The lines that end the first-person account are the culmination point of the inscription:

“They (Nebuchadnezzar and Neriglissar) elevated me (socially by treating me) like a daughter, (like) their offspring. Afterwards fate carried them away. No one among their children or among [their] people or their high officials whose possessions and wealth increased because they raised them (in high positions) – (not one of them) set the incense offering for them. (On the other hand), I indeed, every month, ceaselessly in my good clothes I made funerary offerings of oxen, fattened sheep, bread, beer, wine, oil, honey and all kinds of fruits of the garden. I established lavish strewn offerings of sweet-smelling fragrance as their regular offerings, and I set it before them.”

After this passage, the first-person narrative ends. The last paragraph of the text states that Adad-guppi died on the ninth regnal year of her son. The text describes a funeral with appropriately lavish mourning rituals, and it finishes the narrative by urging the audience to worship *Sîn*.

This inscription had many purposes. It glorified the hegemony of *Sîn*, the moon god, gave testimony of royal piety,<sup>16</sup> and perhaps served as a “plea that nobody forget to bring funerary offerings to her.”<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, the text can be seen as a kind of wisdom text, teaching the audience that worship of gods leads to good things in this life.<sup>18</sup> However, what I see as the most important point in this text is that it establishes Nabonidus’ right to rule on the basis of his blood ties to his mother.<sup>19</sup>

The statement in the text that Adad-guppi was like a daughter to the previous kings and took charge of offerings for the deceased kings is crucially important for this interpretation. These offerings were traditionally part of the duties of the

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<sup>16</sup> See Beaulieu, 1989: 74.

<sup>17</sup> Beaulieu, 1989: 79.

<sup>18</sup> Longman, 1991: 101–103. Beaulieu suggests that this text could have connections with the so called “*narû*-literature” (Beaulieu, 1989: 209). On *narû*-literature, see further, for example, Haul, 2009.

<sup>19</sup> Halton/Svård, 2018: 169.

direct offspring of the deceased, usually the eldest son and heir. As a king, Nabonidus was an usurper, and it is not a coincidence that this text does not mention his father at all. It is Adad-guppi who is the mediator between Nabonidus and Šin; the text emphasizes her extraordinary piousness at every turn. She is presented as the wise counselor who guides her son to kingship, together with Šin.<sup>20</sup>

Adad-guppi's role parallels the role of Ninsun in the Gilgamesh Epic in a remarkably close way. Adad-guppi, like Ninsun, interprets dreams, divines the correct course of action for her son, and helps him with her wise council. Considering the extraordinary cultural significance of the Gilgamesh Epic, I do not believe that this parallelism occurs by mere chance. Instead, the format of inscription easily lends itself to expressing such roles of royal mothers, which fit with the cultural preconceptions of motherhood, femaleness and their relationship to kingship.

Remarking on the potential correlation between the role of Ninsun in the Gilgamesh Epic and the social reality of Mesopotamia, Rivkah Harris wonders if the epic tells us something about real families and the important relationship between sons and mothers.<sup>21</sup> Ninsun is a purely fictional character and evidence of Adad-guppi's role in the social reality of the Neo-Babylonian court is non-existent. Nonetheless, Harris' speculation raises an important question: what was the relationship between fictional Mesopotamian narratives and the social reality of the time? This theme will be further explored in the next section.

#### 4. Wise women in the social reality of the Neo-Assyrian Empire

We have seen in Sections 2 and 3 how the mother is presented as a counselor to her son the king in the narratives of the Gilgamesh Epic and the Adad-guppi inscription. In this section, I move on to the level of social reality by examining the piousness of the mother of the king and her role as a counselor to her son – this time in the Neo-Assyrian court. I draw from the Neo-Assyrian textual evidence regarding queens in general, but I specifically discuss Naqi'a, the mother of King Esarhaddon. She is the best known of all Neo-Assyrian royal women, and her piousness and her role as a counselor to her son are clearly portrayed in the texts.

I define piousness here as “religious wholesomeness” for an individual who was in the favor of the gods and who fulfilled her/his place in society according to their plan. There are several indications of such connotations regarding Neo-Assyrian queens. In a remarkable letter, the son of the Neo-Assyrian King Esarhaddon reports that he was chosen as the crown prince because of his mother's righteousness (SAA 10 188). Furthermore, the title of a queen in a funerary ritual is found as “the daughter of righ[teousness]” (SAA 20 34). In both cases, the relevant word is *kīnūtu* (‘loyalty,’ ‘righteousness’). In the famous case of Naqi'a, even her name refers to purity (Naqi'a, ‘pure’). Sarah Melville has explained this by pointing out that the mother of the king, by definition, must be righteous to

<sup>20</sup> See further, Halton/Svård, 2018: 168–174, especially 169.

<sup>21</sup> Harris, 2000: 128.

have produced the king, who was ideologically the champion of order.<sup>22</sup> Thus, the son and the mother guarantee each other's piousness and purity. This dynamic can be clearly seen in the Adad-guppi inscription as well.

Regarding cultic activities, there is evidence of royal women being involved in the administration of rituals and cult, but little direct evidence of their involvement in the rituals as actors.<sup>23</sup> There is, however, text SAA 20 52, which describes religious practices in Assur. One passage therein refers to the queen (rev. col. iv 52'–54'): "May the queen enter into the presence of Aššur in the main room whenever she wishes?" An extispicy was made and it was favorable." If the queen (in this case, possibly the queen of Assurbanipal, Libbali-šarrat) had access to one of the most sacred spaces of the realm, it strongly implies that she engaged in some kind of cultic or ritual action there. Furthermore, in the case of Naqi'a there is also iconographical evidence of her piety, as she is shown in a fragment of a bronze relief together with the king participating in a ritual.<sup>24</sup> Other unique references to her role in the religious sphere include that she received a number of prophecies supporting her son's reign and that her image was deposited in temples alongside that of her son.<sup>25</sup> Clearly, documenting the piety of Naqi'a was important for the royal ideology of the period.

Moving to the second topic, the Neo-Assyrian queen as a counselor, there is evidence that Naqi'a was a close confidante of the king and acted on many occasions on his behalf, or possibly on behalf of the royal dynasty. On several occasions, Naqi'a's actions parallel the actions of the king. Especially noteworthy in this respect is her building inscription (usually the exclusive province of the kings), where she commemorates building a palace for her son the king in Nineveh. Furthermore, one finds scholars writing to her in the same courteous tone as to the king. There are indications of her reach in the military and political arena as well: we know Neo-Assyrian queens had military contingents in their service, and on one occasion Naqi'a apparently received a letter requesting troop reinforcements to Babylonia. Naqi'a is especially well known because of the so-called "Zakûtu Treaty" (SAA 2 8) where she, under her Akkadian name Zakûtu, makes Assyrians swear loyalty to her grandson Assurbanipal as the new king after the death of Esarhaddon. Finally, a piece of direct evidence of her role as counselor to the king is a letter from him addressed to his mother (SAA 16 2), in which he confirms her authority on a matter "concerning the servant of Amos." The king writes: "just as the king's mother commanded, in the same way I have commanded. It is fine indeed, as you said." Finally, from the point of view of female sages, it is significant that in a letter to King Esarhaddon the mother of the king

<sup>22</sup> Melville, 2004: 55–57. See also Svärd, 2015: 59–60.

<sup>23</sup> For Naqi'a's involvement in the religious sphere, see Svärd, 2015: 54–56. For women in Neo-Assyrian temples and cults, see Svärd, forthcoming.

<sup>24</sup> Svärd, 2015: 77–79.

<sup>25</sup> Svärd, 2015: 54–55 and Svärd, forthcoming.

is said to be “as able as (the sage) Adapa” (SAA 10 244).<sup>26</sup>

Regarding other Neo-Assyrian queens, a comparison can be drawn between Naqi’a and an earlier Neo-Assyrian queen, Sammu-ramat, who quite possibly acted as a trusted counselor, or perhaps as a regent for her son.<sup>27</sup> After the time of Naqi’a, a dedication made by a Neo-Assyrian queen (probably Libbali-šarrat) asks that the goddess will make her speech pleasing to the king, which can be understood as referring to her role as a counselor to her spouse.<sup>28</sup>

## 5. Final reflections

Regarding social reality, the discussion on female sages in this article is based on first-millennium evidence, especially in relation to the Neo-Assyrian Empire. Nevertheless, there are indications from other historical periods as well. During much of Mesopotamia’s history, women worked as scribes and authors,<sup>29</sup> as well as experts in some fields.<sup>30</sup> We have some indications that women in general (especially royal women) were perceived as pious and could act as mediators and counselors, both in narratives and in social reality.<sup>31</sup> On a mythic and narrative level in particular, older women are presented as counselors.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, the mothers of kings in Mesopotamian history are attested as counselors and support-

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<sup>26</sup> Svård, 2015: 54–59.

<sup>27</sup> Svård, 2015: 49–51.

<sup>28</sup> Deller, 1983: 22–24. Translation of the whole votive text on a clay tablet: “[For the DN, the gr]eat [Lady], her Lady. [Libbali-šarrat, queen of Assurb]anipal, king of everything, king of Assyria, [she has made it ... of ] red gold [for the life and breath of] Assurbanipal, her beloved, (for) the lengthening of his days, old age of his throne and for herself, for her life, lengthening of her days, stability of her reign. May (the goddess) make her speech pleasing for the king, her spouse, and may she (the goddess) make them grow old together. (This is why) she has made (it) stand and donated (it).” The text is discussed in Svård, 2015: 50, 55, 61, 82, 88, 211.

<sup>29</sup> The oldest references to female scribes come from the Akkad and Ur III periods, and it seems that there was a continuing tradition of training female scribes in Mesopotamia (Lion, 2011). For discussion on female authorship, see Halton/Svård, 2018: 25–36. Overall, we came to the conclusion that: “When one compares the text genres that appear in this volume to the entire generic framework of Mesopotamian texts there are no hulking gaps. There are some genres that do not appear in our collection, such as mathematical texts, omen collections, and astral observations, possibly because women were not educated in these highly specialized fields of knowledge. However, in all other respects nothing stands out as systematically different from the writings of males. In other words, difference is mainly quantitative, not qualitative” (Halton/Svård, 2018: 229).

<sup>30</sup> Women who had some specific type of knowledge which allowed them to give counsel include, for instance, the following (although all are rarely attested): healers, midwives and dream interpreters (Harris, 2000: 154–156); female prophets (Nissinen, 2013); and female perfume makers (Halton/Svård, 2018: 219–224).

<sup>31</sup> Harris, 2000: 98–99.

<sup>32</sup> Harris, 2000: 100–104

ers of their sons.<sup>33</sup> Thus, if we agree with the idea that gender is something that is actively constructed by the actions of individuals, we see that some Mesopotamian women performed their gender as counselors both in social reality and in narratives.<sup>34</sup>

Despite the suggestive evidence of women acting as counselors, there are also implications that this was not always simple. Two good examples present themselves: First, the daughter of King Zimri-Lim writes to her father in a letter from the Mari palace archive and asks him to listen to her: “And now, even if I am a woman, my father and lord should listen to my words. What I regularly send my father are words from the gods.”<sup>35</sup> There are, of course, numerous examples in Mesopotamian letters which demonstrate that when giving advice to the king, it is best to offer it as politely as possible (see, for example, “In this matter the king should listen to [his se]rvant,” in SAA 10 196). What makes this letter different is the explicit attention paid to the gender of the letter sender. The phrase “even if I am a woman” clearly evokes the need for special justification (not needed for the king’s male subjects) in the case of a woman giving advice. Second, similar self-awareness of a woman’s potential lack of credibility can be seen in two very unusual oracular queries (SAA 4 321, 322) where the female writer is seeking knowledge regarding a report that there will be a rebellion against King Assurbanipal. Both queries end with an exceptional *ezib* formula: “Disregard that a woman has written it and placed it before you.”<sup>36</sup> These text examples indicate the existence of tension when women were using their voice in the sphere of politics or divination. Such hesitancy, however, is nowhere to be seen in the Epic of Gilgamesh or the Adad-guppi inscription. The relationship of fictive or semi-fictive narratives to the social reality is complex. Such indications of hesitancy in texts relating to social reality might indicate instances where the situation of women “performing their gender” as female counselors was challenging.

One should also consider the fact that the topic of women acting as counselors only occurs rarely in Mesopotamian material. An interesting question is, why did some women perform their gender in this way while most did not? The answer to this relates to the intersectional approach to gender. According to intersectional principles, an analysis of gender needs to take other factors, such as status and

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<sup>33</sup> Some examples are found in Harris, 2000: 113–114.

<sup>34</sup> In other words, gender is not something that “exists”; it is something that is “done.” See Svård, 2016, where the discussion is largely based on West/Zimmerman, 1987 and West/Zimmerman, 2009.

<sup>35</sup> LAPO 18 text no. 1223 (ARM 10 text no. 31). Translation is from Sasson, 2015: 114, n. 233. Discussed in Urbano, 2018.

<sup>36</sup> The *ezib* formulas are often present in oracular queries and their aim is to negate any mistakes or problems that might have occurred during the oracular proceedings. For more about the oracular queries as a genre, see the introduction to SAA 4; for more about these two texts in particular, see Svård, 2015: 125–126.



age, into consideration. This begs the question, was a woman's ability to give advice connected with age or a special connection with the divine (see the daughter of Zimri-lim above, as well as the female prophets), or perhaps with scribal learning? All of these could have been factors, but since the focus of this article has been on women close to the king, here we find a strong link between the high social status of the woman and her ability to act as a counselor. However, it seems highly improbable that femininity was constructed in the same way across the geographically and chronologically variegated "Mesopotamian culture." When we talk about female sages in the ancient Near East, we are actually talking about myriad femininities (and other identities) that were being constructed.<sup>37</sup>

To sum up, the three case studies in this article strongly suggest that the role of mother as a counselor and "sage" for her son the king was well established both on the level of narrative creation of gender and on the level of social reality in first-millennium Mesopotamia. Regarding other eras and other women than mothers of the kings, the evidence is suggestive but more detailed studies are needed.

### Abbreviations

- LAPO 18 Durand, J.-M., 2000 : *Les documents épistolaires du palais de Mari, Tome III*. Littératures anciennes du Proche-Orient 18. Paris: Éditions du Cerf.
- SAA 2 Parpola, S. / Watanabe, K., 1988: *Neo-Assyrian Treaties and Loyalty Oaths*. State Archives of Assyria 2. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press.
- SAA 4 Starr, I., 1990: *Queries to the Sungod: Divination and Politics in Sargonid Assyria*. State Archives of Assyria 4. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press.
- SAA 10 Parpola, S., 1993: *Letters from Assyrian and Babylonian Scholars*. State Archives of Assyria 10. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press.
- SAA 16 Luukko, M. / Van Buylaere, G., 2002: *The Political Correspondence of Esarhaddon*. State Archives of Assyria 16. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press.
- SAA 20 Parpola, S., 2017: *Assyrian Royal Rituals and Cultic Texts*. State Archives of Assyria 20. Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project.

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<sup>37</sup> See further on gender, methodology, and Assyriology: Svård, 2016 and the articles in the edited volume Svård/Garcia-Ventura, 2018.

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