

DE GRUYTER

*Marten Stol*

# WOMEN IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

DE  
G



Marten Stol

**Women in the Ancient Near East**



Marten Stol

# **Women in the Ancient Near East**

---

Translated by Helen and Mervyn Richardson

**DE GRUYTER**

ISBN 978-1-61451-323-0  
e-ISBN (PDF) 978-1-61451-263-9  
e-ISBN (EPUB) 978-1-5015-0021-3



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 License. For details go to <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

A CIP catalog record for this book has been applied for at the Library of Congress.

**Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek**

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available on the Internet at <http://dnb.dnb.de>.

Original edition: Vrouwen van Babylon. Prinsessen, priesteressen, prostituees in de bakermat van de cultuur. Uitgeverij Kok, Utrecht (2012).

Translated by Helen and Mervyn Richardson

© 2016 Walter de Gruyter Inc., Boston/Berlin

Cover Image: Marten Stol

Typesetting: Dörlemann Satz GmbH & Co. KG, Lemförde

Printing and binding: cpi books GmbH, Leck

☺ Printed on acid-free paper

Printed in Germany

[www.degruyter.com](http://www.degruyter.com)

# Table of Contents

**Introduction — 1**

**Map — 5**

**1 Her outward appearance — 7**

- 1.1 Phases of life — 7
- 1.2 The girl — 10
- 1.3 The virgin — 13
- 1.4 Women's clothing — 17
- 1.5 Cosmetics and beauty — 47
- 1.6 The language of women — 56
- 1.7 Women's names — 58

**2 Marriage — 60**

- 2.1 Preparations — 62
- 2.2 Age for marrying — 66
- 2.3 Regulations — 67
- 2.4 The betrothal — 72
- 2.5 The wedding — 93
- 2.6 Marriage and magic — 110

**3 The marriage gifts — 112**

- 3.1 General remarks — 112
- 3.2 The bride-price — 117
- 3.3 The dowry — 134
- 3.4 Gifts from the man — 145

**4 The family — 147**

- 4.1 Impotence — 148
- 4.2 Children — 152
- 4.3 The mother — 155
- 4.4 Bereavement — 159
- 4.5 Childlessness — 160
- 4.6 Repudiation of a childless wife — 163

**5 A second wife — 165**

- 5.1 A slave-girl — 168
- 5.2 Initiating the transaction — 170

## **VI — Table of Contents**

- 5.3 The second wife in the Old Assyrian period — **182**
- 5.4 The second wife in later periods — **188**
- 5.5 The position of the second wife when the first wife is ill — **191**

### **6 Concubines — 193**

### **7 Marriage between equals — 200**

### **8 Marriage to a slave — 205**

### **9 Divorce — 209**

- 9.1 In Babylonia — **210**
- 9.2 In Assyria — **216**
- 9.3 In the Neo-Babylonian period — **220**
- 9.4 In Syria — **223**
- 9.5 Motives for divorce — **223**
- 9.6 Predictions — **230**
- 9.7 Reconciliation — **232**

### **10 Adultery — 234**

- 10.1 Women who initiate adultery — **235**
- 10.2 Were both lovers treated equally? — **239**
- 10.3 Caught in the act — **243**
- 10.4 Punishment — **244**
- 10.5 Accusations of adultery — **245**
- 10.6 The Mother of Sin — **250**
- 10.7 An adulterous princess? — **250**

### **11 Rape — 254**

- 11.1 Slave-girl — **255**
- 11.2 Unmarried girl — **258**
- 11.3 Married woman — **261**
- 11.4 The locations — **263**
- 11.5 In myths — **264**
- 11.6 The right of the first night — **265**

### **12 Incest — 268**

- 12.1 Promiscuity — **268**
- 12.2 Incest — **270**



- 13      The widow — 275**
- 13.1      Poor widows — 278
- 13.2      Arrangements made for widows in wills — 282
- 13.3      Powerful widows — 284
- 13.4      Remarrying — 288
- 13.5      Cohabiting — 290
- 13.6      Widows with children — 292
  
- 14      Levirate marriage — 296**
  
- 15      Women's rights of inheritance — 300**
  
- 16      Women-trafficking under the guise of adoption — 304**
- 16.1      The Old Babylonian period — 304
- 16.2      Nuzi — 306
  
- 17      Women robbed of their freedom — 311**
- 17.1      Security for a man's debts — 311
- 17.2      The woman as guarantor — 319
- 17.3      Imprisoned for murder — 323
- 17.4      The sale of children in time of need — 324
- 17.5      Dedicated to a temple — 326
- 17.6      Prisoners of war — 331
  
- 18      Women and work — 339**
- 18.1      Working outside the home — 341
- 18.2      Weavers — 344
- 18.3      Grinding flour — 350
- 18.4      Women as musicians and singers — 353
- 18.5      The female innkeeper — 363
- 18.6      Scribes — 367
- 18.7      The female doctor — 371
- 18.8      Wailing women — 372
- 18.9      Women involved in childbirth — 375
- 18.10      Business women — 381
- 18.11      Women's seals — 387
- 18.12      Women as witnesses — 389
  
- 19      The witch — 391**

<b>20</b>	<b>Prostitution — 399</b>
20.1	Where she worked — <b>399</b>
20.2	Dressed for work — <b>405</b>
20.3	Slave-girls — <b>409</b>
20.4	The risk of pregnancy — <b>410</b>
20.5	Forced into prostitution — <b>413</b>
20.6	Marriage — <b>414</b>
20.7	Social esteem — <b>416</b>
<b>21</b>	<b>Temple prostitution — 419</b>
21.1	Internal evidence — <b>419</b>
21.2	The <i>kezertu</i> — <b>422</b>
21.3	Devaluing old titles — <b>426</b>
21.4	Income — <b>426</b>
21.5	Goddess and whore — <b>427</b>
21.6	A wild celebration — <b>435</b>
<b>22</b>	<b>Her physical life — 436</b>
22.1	Physiology — <b>436</b>
22.2	Menstruation — <b>438</b>
22.3	Diseases — <b>441</b>
22.4	The old woman — <b>451</b>
22.5	Dead and buried — <b>456</b>
<b>23</b>	<b>The court and the harem before 1500 BC — 459</b>
23.1	The Sumerians — <b>461</b>
23.2	Ebla — <b>464</b>
23.3	Funerals — <b>471</b>
23.4	The Old Akkadian period — <b>475</b>
23.5	The kingdom of Ur III — <b>476</b>
23.6	The Old Babylonian period — <b>487</b>
<b>24</b>	<b>The court and the harem after 1500 BC — 512</b>
24.1	Babylonia — <b>512</b>
24.2	Assyria — <b>514</b>
24.3	Nuzi — <b>518</b>
24.4	The Hittites and Egypt — <b>519</b>
24.5	Ugarit — <b>526</b>
24.6	The Neo-Assyrian period — <b>529</b>
24.7	The Neo-Babylonian period — <b>548</b>

- 24.8 The Persian period and later — 552
- 24.9 Arab queens — 554
- 25 Priestesses — 555**
- 25.1 The high priestesses — 555
- 25.2 Priestesses in Mari — 578
- 25.3 Priestesses in the Old Assyrian period — 580
- 25.4 Priestesses after the Old Babylonian period — 581
- 26 Old Babylonian convents — 584**
- 26.1 Words for a ‘nun’ — 586
- 26.2 The *nadītu* — 587
- 26.3 Inauguration — 590
- 26.4 High status — 594
- 26.5 Duties — 597
- 26.6 Care in old age — 600
- 26.7 The demise of the convent — 601
- 27 Married holy women — 605**
- 27.1 The *nadītu* of Marduk the god of Babylon — 605
- 27.2 The holy woman, the *qadištu* — 608
- 27.3 The *kulmašītu* — 615
- 28 Soothsaying — 617**
- 28.1 Dreams, prophecy and ecstasy in Mari — 620
- 28.2 Prophecy in Assyria — 623
- 29 Women and worship — 627**
- 29.1 Offerings for the dead — 628
- 29.2 Making intercession — 631
- 29.3 The woman and her goddess — 638
- 29.4 The mourning for Tammuz — 640
- 30 The Sacred Marriage — 645**
- 30.1 Poetry — 647
- 30.2 The reality of the situation — 650
- 30.3 The function of the ritual — 652
- 30.4 The Assyrian period and later — 655
- 30.5 The demise of goddesses — 657

**31 The Middle Assyrian law-book about women — 662**

**32 The value placed on women — 683**

32.1 Positive views — **683**

32.2 Negative views — **685**

32.3 Women compared with men — **690**

**Bibliography — 692**

**Indexes — 693**

# Introduction

We are about to see a long line of very different women passing before our eyes. One of them is shuffling along, but another is sashaying around across stage. They are all to be found in the pages of this book, from the lowliest slave to the powerful queen. They are linked primarily by their distinctive biology, by what sociologists call their ‘sex’ rather than their ‘gender’ which indicates their place in society. So we have chosen ‘Women’, not ‘Woman’ of the Ancient Near East as our title, for their roles are far too diverse to use a singular noun. The richest sources of the Ancient Near East are found in Babylonia, Mesopotamia, so we will concentrate on them.

Babylon was the most important town of what used to be called the land of Mesopotamia. That name is derived from Greek to signify a land ‘between two rivers’, those being the Tigris and the Euphrates. This area corresponds to present-day Iraq and the eastern part of Syria. It was here that we find the first evidence of cuneiform script, developed first by the Sumerians, and perpetuated from around 3100 BC until far into the Greek period, which began in 330 BC. Scribes normally used a reed to impress cuneiform signs on tablets of soft clay. We also have royal inscriptions, where the achievements of the ancient kings were recorded for posterity by being chiselled out in the same script on stone monuments. The material adduced in this book relies on that vast body of documents from thousands of years ago. They themselves were written over a period of almost three thousand years. Scholars have published hundreds of thousands of them already, and tens of thousands of others are waiting in museum drawers for the attention of today’s specialist researchers. And we know that there are countless more still underground waiting to see the light of day. A recent survey, limited to the published archival texts, estimated that at present we have available for study 246,000 texts from Babylon and Assyria containing some 10,000,000 words. This amounts to twice as many known for ancient Egyptian. Only in ancient Greek has more writing survived, most of it coming from thousands of Greek papyri recovered from the sands of Egypt.<sup>1</sup> As for cuneiform, we have still 100,000 more texts from archives, earlier and written in Sumerian, containing up to three million words. That makes the 305,500 words in the Hebrew Bible sound no more than a handful of mustard seeds.

In ancient Mesopotamia the cuneiform script was the standard mode for transmitting the culture of the time, a culture which remained relatively stable. In the

---

1 M. P. Streck, ‘Großes Fach Altorientalistik: Der Umfang des keilschriftlichen Textkorpus’, Mitteilungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft zu Berlin 142 (2010) 35–58.

earliest period, from 3100 to 1000 BC, it wielded great influence in neighbouring countries. In this way script and language played a similar role then to that played by English today. One famous example is how the Epic of Gilgamesh became widely known internationally. Scribes, such as those at Meggido in Israel and at Boghazköy, the capital city of the Hittites in central Turkey, copied out the text on clay tablets in distant scribal centres far removed from one another. In this book we shall cite cuneiform sources from the heartland as well as from the peripheries of Mesopotamia, and show how material from the Bible can sometimes complete the picture we draw. From 1000 BC Aramaic became more important as a language of communication. But what we know from Aramaic is relatively little because Aramaic documents were written on wood, parchment or paper. Unlike clay they are all perishable materials and they have vanished into oblivion.

Sumerian was written in cuneiform script until it more or less died out in 2000 BC. It persisted only as a literary language to record Sumerian traditional culture, as Latin did in Europe in the Middle Ages. From 2000 BC onwards Akkadian was used. This is a Semitic language closely related in form but not in time to Classical Hebrew and Classical Arabic, as well as to Aramaic and Phoenician. Akkadian can be divided into two dialects: Babylonian was spoken in the south of the land and Assyrian was spoken in the north. When writing Akkadian the scribes continued to use the Sumerian cuneiform signs, much as Japanese texts today use Chinese characters. Akkadian eventually slowly died out itself under pressure from Aramaic and Greek. The last vestiges of Sumerian and Akkadian and of the cuneiform script are scholarly tablets written by astronomers or priests towards the end of the era. The light was extinguished; darkness and silence prevailed, until 'in our time', from the middle of the nineteenth century, excavations started in Mesopotamia. They gave us the keys to decipher cuneiform and Assyriology assumed a place in the humanities.

In ancient Mesopotamia there was a social separation of the sexes, just as often happens today. Men were considered very differently from women, and women from men. Virtually all the documents that survive were written by men, and many of them concern only men. But in family archives we discover the names of actual women and learn about when they were married, and widowed, and how they fared in everyday family crises. Marriage is an important theme in this book. In archives from the palaces we find references to queens and princesses surrounded by servants, but women of lower status did ordinary work themselves. There were women from just about every rank and position, and nothing could be done about this. A Sumerian proverb goes:

At the time of the harvest, at the most precious time,  
 Glean like a slave girl, eat like a queen.  
 My son, 'Glean like a slave girl, but eat like a queen',  
 That is how it should be indeed!<sup>2</sup>

Sometimes women get to speak for themselves. Very occasionally we find a longish text in which a woman talks about her private life. There is an account by the mother of King Nabonidus about her experiences. But this was written after her death, and the words attributed to her are traditional, so that text is described as a 'pious deception'. A few literary-minded women composed poetry about their lives but these examples are rare. Inscriptions naming women who offered gifts to the gods were short and formal in style and were written by men. We come closer to real life when reading statements made by women during proceedings in court cases. There are some wonderfully fluent letters written by women, but here we must take into account the conventions of a professional letter writer who would have written down neatly what the woman told him. We learn also about women and their attributes from art and iconography.

We broach a sensitive subject which has enjoyed different phases of development in modern times<sup>3</sup>. The first feminist phase in writing women's history restricted itself to collecting and presenting material about women. Until that moment that was a forgotten element of history, indeed an element forgotten from half the history of humanity. The second phase was more explicitly critical, focusing attention on the various ways in which patriarchy has become entrenched in human societies past and present and has informed the basic assumptions of those societies. How had a patriarchal society emerged? Had there not been long ago a tradition of matriarchy embodied in the gentle mother goddess? Should not Assyriologists, dealing with the oldest known strata of history, be able to shed light on these questions? The third phase questioned all our ideas, saying at best they were based on reconstructions, so that even an 'objective' observation of 'facts' was to be doubted. That was a wise insight and marked the beginning of what is an ongoing progress.<sup>4</sup>

The reader will soon discover that everything in this book aims to collect facts, which are of basic importance to feminist historical criticism no matter which of these frameworks inform their work. This is not a wrong approach, for

---

<sup>2</sup> B. Alster, *Wisdom of ancient Sumer* (2005) 79, The Instructions of Šuruppak, 131–133.

<sup>3</sup> M. van de Mieroop, 'Gender and Mesopotamian history', chapter 5 in his book *Cuneiform texts and the writing of history* (1999) 138–160.

<sup>4</sup> More in S. Svärd, *Women and power in Neo-Assyrian palaces* (2015), the introductory chapters 1–2.

when Els Kloek was interviewed about her book, *Vrouw des huizes. Een cultuurschiedenis van de Hollandse huisvrouw* (2009), she said

Some people think that I do not do enough theorizing. Women's historians are always busy doing that. But I am more interested in the stories. What is nice about the history of women is that you are revealing the hidden side of the past.<sup>5</sup>

Theorising should not precede facts. Even so we need to remember that it is hard to find narratives in ancient Mesopotamian documents, and therefore our ideas of the reality of that period are necessarily limited.

I know of no other such comprehensive treatment of women in Ancient Babylonia and further afield in Mesopotamia. I have presented an outline of what material is available and how it has been interpreted by modern scholars. The sources for the quotations I have presented in the text and relevant scholarly literature for these and other remarks are given in footnotes. A selection of important books for further reading, including monographs or research papers from academic authors can be found at the end of the book. The various chapters of the book were prepared during the time that I was working at the Free University in Amsterdam and in the Netherlands Institute for the Near East in Leiden.

I owe much to my wife Roos Stol-van Wijngaarden who transposed the footnotes from the original edition to this book and helped me out in various ways in preparing the manuscript. Professor Martha T. Roth (Chicago) kindly gave me the permission to reproduce her authoritative translation of the Middle Assyrian Laws in Chapter 31. Her translations of other law-books were gratefully adopted.

The Dutch version of this book (2012) was translated into English by Helen Richardson-Hewitt and her husband Professor Mervyn Richardson who have been living in the Netherlands since a long time. This has been a considerable task, far exceeding our expectations. Moreover, when they went through the text, they came across opaque passages, inconsistencies, and even errors. They made thoughtful observations and suggestions which led to many revisions. In the edition of the Assyrian laws (Chapter 31) Mervyn took the initiative of introducing every section by a summary. My gratitude to both of them knows no bounds.

Finally, I thank Dr. John Whitley, Project Editor at Walter de Gruyter, for his good advice.

---

<sup>5</sup> *Historisch Nieuwsblad*, February 2010, p. 22.





Map



# 1 Her outward appearance

## 1.1 Phases of life

The different phases of a person's life have often been described. One of the seven Greek sages, Solon, wrote a poem dividing human life into ten stages, each of seven years, called 'the ages of life'. Another work, ascribed to the famous Greek expert in medicine Hippocrates, advanced the similar but more elegant theory of 'hebdomads', seven stages of seven years each. After the first stage, when the 'child' had experienced 'the expulsion of teeth', he proceeded in turn to become a boy, a youth, a young man, a man, an older man, and at last an old man. A girl's life after dentation develops in another direction, but the Ancients paid no attention to that.<sup>1</sup> The Babylonian sages do not seem to have been interested in producing such a scheme. Only once do we find their scholars speculating about the phases of human life. At forty years old, you are in the bloom of life (*lalûtu*); at fifty, your days are 'short', meaning that if you died at fifty your life was short; at sixty, you reached 'manhood' (if we read the word as *meṭ-lu-tu*) or 'authority' (if we read *be-lu-tu*); at seventy, your days are 'long'; at eighty, you have reached 'old age' (*šibûtu*); and at ninety, 'advanced old age' (*littûtu*).<sup>2</sup>

We find other estimations offered elsewhere in the Ancient Near East. In the Bible, according to the well-known verse of the Psalmist, we are told

Seventy years is the span of our life, eighty if our strength holds (Psalm 90:10).

The prophet Isaiah predicted a new age when one could expect to live to reach a hundred:

He who dies at a hundred is just a youth, and if he does not attain a hundred he is thought accursed (Isaiah 65:20).

In an earlier chapter God is said to have fixed a maximum age for mankind:

---

<sup>1</sup> The Jewish theologian Philo summarised both theories; see the translation and commentary by D. T. Runia in his *Philo of Alexandria, On the Creation of the Cosmos according to Moses* (2001) 74 f. (§ 104 f.), 278–281. This theory of the hebdomads ('septenaries') was rejected by Salmasius and Thomas Browne; see Sir Thomas Browne's *Pseudodoxia Epidemica*, ed. Robin Robbins, vol. I (1981) 343 f., vol. II 936.

<sup>2</sup> STT 2 400:45–47, with C. Wilcke, 'Familiengründung', 217 f. (see p. 692), and A. Malamat, AFO Beiheft 19 (1982) 215b; B. Böck, *Die babylonisch-assyrische Morphoskopie* (2000) 30b.

My Spirit will not remain in a human being forever; because he is mortal flesh he will live only for a hundred and twenty years (Genesis 6:3).

We note that this maximum happens to be the same known to the Sumerians, a subject to which we shall return in Chapter 22 when discussing elderly women.

From the details in the countless records of workers in temples and large businesses, to whom food was distributed according to their ages, we can see what differentiations were made according to the various stages of a person's life. We can estimate how long people actually lived. Lists dating to the Third Dynasty of Ur (usually referred to as the Ur III period which lasted from 2100 until 2000 BC) record that each month ten litres of barley was given to small children aged 1–5, fifteen litres to those aged 5–10, and twenty litres to adolescents (one girl in this group already had a child) aged 10–15. In some of these texts and also in older ones there are references to suckling infants, literally 'children of the breast'.<sup>3</sup> Those over 15 were considered adult. These women received a minimum of thirty litres of barley per month, men sixty litres and a minimum of forty litres, and the elderly twenty litres. So men received twice as much food as women, and that was always the case in Babylonia. This is a huge difference, even allowing for the fact that women need fewer calories than men. In Chapter 18 we shall return to this when discussing women and work.<sup>4</sup>

In Chagar Bazar in the Old Babylonian period (2000–1500 BC) distinctions were made in the harem between a suckling infant, a small girl (Sumerian *munus.tur.tur*), a girl (*tur.munus*), an older girl (*munus.tur* or *tur*) and a woman (*munus*).<sup>5</sup> Lists of food for personnel in the Middle Babylonian administration include rations for a suckling infant, a small child (*guruš.tur.tur*), an adolescent (*guruš.tur*, Akkadian *batūlu*), an adult who was the head of a family (*guruš*), and an elderly person. Both men and women appear in those lists.<sup>6</sup> A much later account of people who had been deported to the region of Haran in Assyria in about 700 BC lists a suckling infant, a weaned child (*pirsu*), children as tall as 3, 4, 5 or 6 half-els (= half-cubits), a female adolescent (*šaḥurtu* or *batūssu*) and a 'pupil' (*talmidu*).<sup>7</sup>

<sup>3</sup> H. Waetzoldt in: M. A. Powell, ed., *Labor in the Ancient Near East* (1987) 132–135; AOF 15 (1988) 34 f., 41. Cf. also L. Milano in: *Il pane del re* (1989) 80; I. J. Gelb, JNES 24 (1965) 230–243, esp. 238–240.

<sup>4</sup> M. Stol, 'Ration', RIA XI/3–4 (2007) 264–269 § 3. Old Assyrian documents show that men received at least 30 litres of wheat or barley per month, while women and slave girls received 20 litres; J. G. Dercksen, AOF 35 (2008) 93 n. 11.

<sup>5</sup> D. Lacambre, *Chagar Bazar (Syrie)* III (2008) 256–259.

<sup>6</sup> J. A. Brinkman, *Studies F. R. Kraus* (1982) 1–4.

<sup>7</sup> F. M. Fales, *Censimenti e catasti di epoca neo-assira* (1973) 119–122; SAA XI (1995) p. xxx–xxxiv; cf. M. T. Roth, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 29 (1987) 732 f., 735.

The half-el as a measurement of height here is equivalent to 20–25 cm, the same as a span.<sup>8</sup> The height of child-slaves was also usually measured in half-els.<sup>9</sup> Using the word ‘pupil’ as a category of age is at first sight surprising, but a related word (*limmūdim*) occurs in later Hebrew literature<sup>10</sup> also apparently to denote someone about to become an adult. It was, of course, always applied to boys.

Apart from this detailed categorisation there were more common words for boy and girl. In Babylonian we have two words derived from the root ‘to be little’: *ṣuḥāru* for a boy and *ṣuḥārtu* for a girl. In Assyrian *ṣa/uḥurtu* and *batūssu* were used.<sup>11</sup> In a letter to his son the king of Assyria wrote:

The girls (from the harem) of Yaḥdun-Lim, whom I gave to you, those girls have grown up ...  
People have told me, ‘They are women’.<sup>12</sup>

Here we have clear textual evidence that when a girl became a woman, it was something to be noticed in Assyria and Babylonia, just as in our own culture. Later, in the Neo-Babylonian period, Akkadian uses *nārtu* or *nu’artu* for a girl. These nouns are cognate with comparable Hebrew words: *na’arāh*, ‘girl’, and *na’ar*, ‘boy’.<sup>13</sup> Therefore we consider them to be loanwords from West Semitic, the language group to which Hebrew belongs. Girls like this were often married off. They may have had a low social status and it has been suggested that they already had children and were possibly prostitutes. According to a recent study the word essentially describes a woman who is not married. In time this word for someone who was single, perhaps because it had unfavourable overtones, became obsolete, and *batūltu* was revived as the normal word for girl.<sup>14</sup> That was the word used for a marriageable virgin, a subject to be discussed later in this chapter.

In Babylonian an adult woman is called a *sinništu*, a remarkable word, with no cognate in other Semitic languages. In later Assyrian the word *issu* is used for a

---

**8** K. Radner, *Die neuassyrischen Privatrechtsurkunden als Quelle für Mensch und Umwelt* (1997) 131 f.

**9** In sale contracts from the Middle Babylonian onwards; see H. P. H. Petschow, *Or. NS* 52 (1983) 144 n. 8.

**10** ‘Pupil’ is meant literally; Radner, *Die neuassyrischen Privatrechtsurkunden* (1997) 152. Cf. L. Gulkowitsch, *Die Bildung von Abstraktbegriffen in der hebräischen Sprachgeschichte* (1931) 19 n. 2.

**11** Radner, *Die neuassyrischen Privatrechtsurkunden* (1997) 149–155.

**12** ARM I 64:7–12

**13** M. T. Roth, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* (=CSSH) 29 (1987) 739–746; confirmed by W. Farber, *Schlaf, Kindchen schlaf!* (1989) 55 f. Cf. R. Borger, *Mesopotamisches Zeichenlexikon* (2004) 371.

**14** C. Wünsch, *Urkunden zum Ehe-, Vermögens- und Erbrecht aus verschiedenen neubabylonischen Archiven* (2003) 3–6.

‘wife’<sup>15</sup> and this could well be Semitic for it can easily be related to Hebrew *’iššāh*, ‘woman’. In texts from the western periphery of Mesopotamia we occasionally find the word *hiššā*, which could have arisen under West Semitic influence.<sup>16</sup> The Akkadian word *aššatu* ‘woman’ (with a subsidiary form *aštu*) is also related and always has the special meaning ‘wife’. Italian *moglie*, ‘wife’ is similarly derived from Latin *mulier*, ‘woman’. In Sumerian we have *munus*, ‘woman’, with *nunus* in *eme.sal*, the women’s language.<sup>17</sup> This language raises a most interesting subject to which we shall return at the end of this chapter.

According to the book of Genesis the first woman Eve was ‘built’ from one of Adam’s ribs (Genesis 2:21 ff.). Earlier Assyriologists turned to Sumerian to explain this motif. They cited a Sumerian myth in which someone had a problem with his rib (Sumerian *ti*) and was cured by a goddess Ninti (*nin.ti*), who was specially created to help. While Sumerian *nin* means ‘lady’ Sumerian *ti* is a homonym, meaning both ‘rib’ and ‘life’. Although *nin.ti* as the name of the goddess could mean ‘the lady of the rib’, it is more likely to mean ‘the lady who gives life’. We should note that in Hebrew the meaning of the name Eve is connected with the word for ‘life’, but through Sumerian it can be connected with ‘rib’ and with ‘life’. This was an interesting thought, but one that is not mentioned nowadays.<sup>18</sup> An Egyptologist, who was unaware of this idea but had a similar flash of inspiration, pointed out that Egyptian *imw* was a homonym meaning ‘rib’ and ‘clay’. He thought that some confusion had arisen in the tradition, and that Eve should have been made of clay.<sup>19</sup>

## 1.2 The girl

As a woman grew up her role in society changed. This is illustrated by the way the goddess of healing describes her advance from being a daughter to becoming the wife of a god:

I am the daughter, I am the bride (*kallatu*), I am the first wife (*hirtu*), I am the head of the household (*abarakkatu*), the wife (*aššatu*) of the god Pabilsag.<sup>20</sup>

15 Radner, *Die neuassyrischen Privatrechtsurkunden* (1997) 126, with lit.; Borger, *Mesopotamisches Zeichenlexikon* (2004) 346–8, is critical of her suggestions.

16 M. Guichard, *Florilegium Marianum II* (1994) 251, note a.

17 W. H. Ph. Römer, *Hymnen und Klagelieder in sumerischer Sprache* (2001) 220, on 116.

18 S. N. Kramer, *History begins at Sumer* (1959) 146. For the myth, see P. Attinger, *ZA* 74 (1984) 30:265 f.

19 H. Goedicke, ‘Adam’s rib’, in: *Studies Samuel Iwry* (1985) 73–79.

20 W. G. Lambert, *Or. NS* 36 (1967) 120:65 f.

There is currently much interest in the attitude to children of former generations. We often assume that in bygone centuries children were seen as tiny adults, but historians now question if childhood was always recognised as such. Sadly we have very little information about the child in the Babylonian world, and absolutely nothing about girls.

Children played with skipping-ropes, dolls, knuckle-bones, bows and arrows, and practised a sort of hockey,<sup>21</sup> while better-off boys went to school. The goddess Ereškigal complained,

I never knew the play of maidens, I never knew the romping of children.<sup>22</sup>

Here the innocent ‘romping’ (*dakāku*) of the little ones is contrasted with the suggestive ‘playing’ of the bigger girls (the verb there has possible erotic overtones). In a love-song Dumuzi, the lover of the goddess Inanna, sings,

My girlfriend was dancing with me in the square, she ran around with me, playing the tambourine and the recorder. With her sweet chants she sang for me. While rejoicing I passed the day there with her.<sup>23</sup>

We also know of a young man who played a small lyre (*sammû*) in the town square while a young girl danced (*mēlultu*) to it.<sup>24</sup> In the Gospels, in a poetic passage, which must originally have been heard in Aramaic, a similar scene is evoked:

We piped for you and you would not dance. We lamented, and you would not mourn (Matthew 11:17; cf. Luke 7:31).<sup>25</sup>

Here the children are first playing for ‘weddings’ and then for ‘funerals’.<sup>26</sup> In Babylonia the same combination was also well-known:

At the calling ... he can do a dance perfectly. At the song of lamentation he beats his breast.<sup>27</sup>

**21** B. Landsberger, WZKM 56 (1960) 117–129; WZKM 57 (1961) 22f.; edited by A. Draffkorn Kilmer, AOF 18 (1991) 9–22; Line 16 says: ‘I can do the games of girls’ (*e-le-i mi-lu-la ša ba-tu-la-a-ti*) followed by examples, but these are badly preserved.

**22** ‘Nergal and Ereškigal’ V 2–4, 18–20; O. R. Gurney, AnSt 10 (1960) 122. Childhood play in general: B. R. Foster in: K. Radner, E. Robson, *The Oxford handbook of cuneiform culture* (2011) 125.

**23** Y. Sefati, *Lovesongs in Sumerian literature* (1998) 187:15–18.

**24** Ḫulbazizi; dissertation I. L. Finkel (1976) 102f., lines 125 f.

**25** Matthew 11:17; par. Luke 7:32. Cf. Matthew Black, *An Aramaic approach to the Gospels and Acts*, 3rd edition (1967) 161.

**26** J. Jeremias, *Die Gleichnisse Jesu*, 9th edition (1977) 160 f.

**27** A. D. Kilmer, AOF 18 (1991) 10:14–15.

In Sumerian incantations, a woman (representing Inanna) laments by shouting *ilu*, and a boy (representing Dumuzi) by shouting *ilulamma*.<sup>28</sup> On the occasion of an outbreak of the plague, a pleading lament was sung to Nergal, the god of plague and death, to spare humankind, animals and specifically the children:

Lord, do not tread in the place for playing. Do not drive the children away from the place for playing. Do not come into the place where the strings are playing. Do not drive away the young singer.<sup>29</sup>

An Old Babylonian oath, apparently referring to teenagers, mentions ‘the young man in the street’ and ‘the young woman playing’.<sup>30</sup> A thousand years later the text became garbled as ‘the young man at play’ and ‘the young woman in her bedchamber’.<sup>31</sup> It has been observed that teenagers acted without restraint on the streets. In the laws the streets are portrayed as a place where a woman’s honour is endangered.<sup>32</sup>

To describe someone who is marriageable or nubile, Akkadian can use the word *muštenû*, ‘changed’. This change from childhood to adulthood indicated sexual maturity, and this was an important rite of passage in the ancient Semitic world. In Judaism it occurs when a child is twelve years old, when a boy becomes a *bar mišwāh*, ‘a son of the law’. Jesus was said to have been able to talk intelligently with the leaders in the temple at the age of twelve (Luke 2:40–52). We should note that ‘knowledge’ can be equated with sexual maturity. Verbs with the basic meaning ‘to know’, such as Hebrew *yādaʿ*, Sumerian *zu*, and Akkadian *idû* and *lamādu*, are all used with both meanings.<sup>33</sup> Although some modern English versions of the Bible still translate the Hebrew verb literally, following the Authorized Version (King James Version) of 1611, and describe a man as ‘knowing’ his wife, the sexual connotations are obvious. In the Gilgamesh epic Enkidu is depicted as a wild creature who only became civilized after he ‘knew’ a kindly woman intimately.

<sup>28</sup> G. Conti, MARI 8 (1997) 254 (YOS 11 47:8 f.), 258:6 f., 260 rev. 1 f. (from Nippur).

<sup>29</sup> H. Zimmern, ZA 31 (1917–1918) 114 ff., 20–23; SAHG 83 no. 15.

<sup>30</sup> YOS 11 11:8–9, 19:9–10.

<sup>31</sup> BAM 6 574 iii 29 with N. Veldhuis, OLP 21 (1990) 28, 38.

<sup>32</sup> S. Lafont, *Femmes* (1999) 110.

<sup>33</sup> M. Malul, *Knowledge, control and sex* (2002) 233–236.



### 1.3 The virgin

To show when a young woman is ‘ready for a man’ a Sumerian song uses rather explicit language, stating that her breasts have enlarged and her pubic hair has grown.<sup>34</sup> It was hoped that she was still a ‘virgin’, a subject which needs much further consideration. It has been suggested that the Akkadian word *batūltu* might not mean a virgin, but rather is an indication of a girl’s age, something like a teenager. It has also been suggested that the related Hebrew word *b<sup>e</sup>tūlāh*, traditionally translated ‘virgin’, can definitely indicate a virgin in a legal context. That Hebrew *b<sup>e</sup>tūlāh* can really mean virgin has been demonstrated,<sup>35</sup> and the same can be said for Akkadian *batūltu*.<sup>36</sup> This is an obvious inference from Biblical law, where it is said that an Israelite high priest ‘is to marry a woman who is still a virgin’ (Leviticus 21:13). A Babylonian woman testified before a temple official ‘My husband NN has taken me for his wife as a virgin (*batūltu*)’ which in this context means that she was ‘pure’ (*ellu*) and that she had entered marriage respectably, as a *batūltu*.<sup>37</sup> The same word ‘pure’ seems to refer to virginity in a letter by King Tušratta to Pharaoh, when he writes ‘The wife of my brother whom I gave is pure, and my brother should know this’ (cited in Chapter 24).

The word need not mean ‘virgin’ and ambiguity arises. In daily life the word was carelessly used to mean a young girl who was marriageable, a general indication of a girl’s age. In Neo-Babylonian marriage contracts all the ‘virgins’ who were married off by their parents were young girls, and a different word was used for older women who remarry.<sup>38</sup> Similarly, when Assyrian contracts record the sale of a *batūssu* (Sumerian *sal.tur*) the state of her virginity is certainly not a matter of paramount importance. A modern commentator has remarked that ‘the concept recognises only women of a marriageable age’.<sup>39</sup> The semantic development of the Akkadian word may be compared to the German *Jungfrau*, which literally means a young girl and indicates an adolescent or teenage girl, but which was later used exclusively for ‘virgin’.<sup>40</sup> In order to specify that a girl has pre-

34 SRT 5:39–45 with Wilcke, ‘Familiengründung’, 242f.

35 K. Engelken, *Frauen im Alten Israel* (1990) 5–43.

36 C. Locher, *Die Ehre einer Frau in Israel* (1986) 117–192; M. T. Roth, CSSH 29 (1987) 739–743.

37 OIP 122 no. 36:7 with M. Jursa, ZABR 14 (2008) 29. More on this declaration at the end of Chapter 25.

38 M. Roth, CSSH 29, 743f.

39 B. Faist, StAT 3 (2007) 444, on no. 16:5.

40 M. Tsevat, ThWAT I (1972) 874–877, art. *Betūlā*.

served her virginity we find phrases such as ‘the unopened one’, ‘one who has not known a man’ or ‘one not known’.<sup>41</sup>

Modern scholars take this question a step further. They suppose that the transition to motherhood was more important than the loss of one’s virginity, and that the loss of virginity was frowned on more from a legal than from a moral standpoint. A girl’s future husband had an exclusive right to the one to whom he was betrothed. In this respect it could be concluded that premarital relations between them were allowed.<sup>42</sup> But this goes too far and cannot be true. While it is absolutely clear that in the Ancient Near East great value was attached to virginity in itself, we never find this expressed explicitly. There is a passage in the Assyrian Law Book, but one which is only half-preserved, which appears to describe a virgin losing her virginity. This passage will be discussed in Chapter 11 when discussing the rape of an unmarried girl.<sup>43</sup> Later we shall also see that it was essential for the lawyers to establish that penetration had actually occurred. In a Babylonian collection of explanations of dreams we find evidence that a girl is expected to be a virgin when she marries. The text states that if a man has dreamt that someone ‘[...] with his daughter’ (the verb is a matter of speculation since the tablet is broken), then ‘he shall suffer loss’. The verb is usually restored in such a way to show that the loss the father would suffer was the fact that he would never be able to obtain a bride-price for a daughter who had been deflowered.<sup>44</sup>

In Sumerian, where *ki.sikil* means both ‘young woman’ and ‘virgin’, we find the same ambiguity. The literal meaning of the Sumerian word is something like ‘the pure one’. It occurs simply as *sikil* in a treaty from Ebla, but later the word ‘good’ often was added, and so it remained.<sup>45</sup> Later in Akkadian texts *ki.sikil* occurs as a Sumerogram for *ardatu* ‘young woman’, but sometimes it clearly has to be interpreted as ‘virgin’. Some bilingual Sumerian-Akkadian texts add a description to indicate this specifically.<sup>46</sup> In some medical texts a potion is prescribed in which the body hair of a young woman is to be included:

---

41 B. Landsberger, *Symbolae M. David II* (1968) 57 f.

42 E. Cassin, ‘Virginité et stratégie du sexe’, in her *Le semblable et le différent* (1987) 338–357; supported and elaborated by K. van der Toorn, *BiOr* 46 (1989) 429 f., together with an explanation of the Middle Assyrian Laws, § 55–6.

43 Middle Assyrian Laws, A § 55, with C. Locher, *Die Ehre einer Frau* (1986) 128 f.; E. Otto, *ZAW* 105 (1993) 157–159.

44 DIŠ LÚ KI SAL.DUMU (?) ... [...] ZI.GA TU-bi, MDP XIV 55 iii 9 (Pl. VI), with the explanation by J. Bottéro, *La Mésopotamie* (1987) 151.

45 H. Behrens, *Enlil und Ninlil* (1978) 117 ff., ad 38 ff. The Old Akkadian Love Charm speaks of two women (dual forms), ‘both good *wardatums*’, *MAD* 5 8:6–7.

46 CAD A/2 242b; Behrens, 117. This may have inspired Landsberger, 58, to translate ‘Jungfrau’.

hair from a young woman (*ki.sikil*) and hair from a young man (*guruš*) who has never known a woman.<sup>47</sup>

Poetic parallelism can be applied here, meaning that the qualifying statement on the second element ('who has never known') also applies to the first element. So we conclude that the hair required had to come from a virgin.

Important information is to be found in collections of predictions (or *omina*) about the future, mostly based on the results of inspections of sheep livers. But dreams and abnormal events were also seen as full of potential significance. One pertinent example involves two consecutive predictions:

If a skink is walking about on top of a pregnant woman, that woman will have a male child.  
If a skink is walking about on top of a young woman, a prominent person will marry that woman.<sup>48</sup>

The second woman, denoted as *sal.guruš.tur*, is unlikely to have been anything other than a virgin in view of the high status of her expected husband. Furthermore, a parallel passage uses the word *ki.sikil* instead of 'young woman',<sup>49</sup> the same term that is used in threats at the end of the laws of King Lipit-Ištar,

May the young men of his city be blind, may the young maidens (*ki.sikil*) of his city be barren.<sup>50</sup>

Because other texts describe this young woman *sal.gurus.tur* and *ki.sikil* as lying in the bosom (*úr, sūnu*) of her husband, we would translate the Sumerian as a 'young woman' who is not necessarily a virgin.

A unique ritual prescribes how the king can remove some taint of sin by making a 'young woman' pregnant. She is taken away beyond the borders of the land and possibly there gives birth to his child. The thought appears to be that in the sperm of the king the slur has been removed far away. It is natural to assume that the girl he impregnated was a virgin.<sup>51</sup> In the Gilgamesh epic the hero rather brutally 'does not leave the girl to her husband' (I:76). Perhaps this refers to a sovereign having the right to demand the first intercourse with a girl, presumably again a virgin. With one text reading 'young woman' and a variant from Ugarit

<sup>47</sup> STT 1 57:18; AMT 46, 5:4. Cf. STT 1 57:25 (cf. also 54).

<sup>48</sup> S. M. Freedman, *If a city is set on a height* II (2006) 212 Tablet 33:110–111.

<sup>49</sup> CT 38 39:18 f., with diss. S. M. Moren (1978) p. 262:42.

<sup>50</sup> M. Roth, *Law collections from Mesopotamia* (1995) 39 rev. iii.

<sup>51</sup> W. R. Mayer, *Or. NS 57* (1988) 145–164, with the explanation by S. M. Maul, *Zukunftsbewältigung* (1994) 78. In the related letter SAA X 209 the same word qualifies the girl.

reading ‘little bride’, it appears that the precise meaning of the original Sumerian word was no longer properly understood.<sup>52</sup>

An exhaustive study by J. S. Cooper has concluded that Sumerian and Akkadian had no specific word to indicate a virgin.<sup>53</sup> What happened in practice was that every girl was supposed to be a virgin before her marriage, and therefore there is some confusion in translating the word *batūltu*, ‘marriageable girl’. In this connection it must not be overlooked that there is no word for ‘virgin’ in ancient Egyptian<sup>54</sup> but that does not lead to the conclusion that they attached no value to the idea.<sup>55</sup> While seeking to answer the question of why a woman should enter into marriage as a virgin Cooper suggests that there may be two logical motives for such behaviour in a patriarchal society. One would be to prevent young people looking for a partner and experimenting together. The other would be that enforced chastity is good practice for chaste behaviour later in marriage. This in turn ensures that a husband can be sure that the children his wife bears are his own.<sup>56</sup> This reasoning is a little far-fetched. According to Cooper (supported by two feminists), there is an oppressive reality behind this, in that the man by his demand for virginity wished to exert his control over the woman.<sup>57</sup> More subtly J.-J. Glassner sees that authority is expected from the man and purity from the woman. This is symbolised by her wearing the veil, receiving the death penalty for adultery, and the role of the virgin in magic rituals.<sup>58</sup>

The Akkadian word *ardatu*, ‘young woman’, occurs only in literary texts and cannot be defined precisely. This applies also to the corresponding Hebrew word *‘almāh*.<sup>59</sup> In general we find the word *guruš*, ‘young man’, linked with *ardatu*.<sup>60</sup> C. Wilcke has surmised that *ardatu*, an older word, was replaced by *batūltu* in the second millennium.<sup>61</sup> If some credence is given to an old Babylonian commentary, which distinguishes *ardatu* as a woman ‘who suffers from vaginal bleeding’ from *sinništu* as a woman ‘whose blood is always seen in her pregnancy’,<sup>62</sup> then

---

52 D. Arnaud, *Corpus des textes de la bibliothèque de Ras Shamra-Ougarit (1936–2000) en sumérien, babylonien et assyrien* (2007) 131 no. 42:12 (*kal-lat še-eḫ-ra*).

53 J. S. Cooper, ‘Virginity in ancient Mesopotamia’, *CRRAI* 47/1 (2002) 91–112.

54 Likewise B. Groneberg in: Th. Späth, B. Wagner-Hasel, *Frauenwelten in der Antike* (2000) 5.

55 Cooper, 105.

56 J.-J. Glassner in: B. S. Lesko, *Women’s earliest records* (1989) 75–77.

57 E. Enresfelder in: B. Schmitz, *Waren sie nur schön?* (1989) 43; E. Brunner-Traut, *Saeculum* 38 (1987) 325.

58 K. Engelken, *Frauen im Alten Israel* (1990) 39 n. 138.

59 About this category of women see Engelken, 44–73.

60 Already in Ebla; *ARET* 5 3 v 1 (7 *guruš* next to 7 *ār-da-du*).

61 ‘Familiengründung’, 216 n. 1.

62 SpbTU I 39:7 f.

*ardatu* may mean a young woman who has not yet had children. The Old Babylonian form of the word is *wardatu*, with a corresponding masculine noun *wardu*, 'slave'. So there the word may indicate subservience.

In Old Assyrian letters we find three references to a ritual performed by the father of a girl who 'had grown up'. He set her on the knee of the god Assur and 'seized the foot' of his personal god. This is interpreted as a ceremony marking the time when his daughter reached sexual maturity. She has now become ready for a man and perhaps an oath was also sworn.<sup>63</sup> The command, 'place the girl on Assur's knee!' in letters exchanged between Pušu-ken and his wife seems to refer to the consecration of their daughter Aḫaḫa. We know that she became a *gubabtu*, 'priestess',<sup>64</sup> which was a vocation for a virgin.<sup>65</sup> The role of the woman as a wife, mother, widow and old woman will be covered later.

## 1.4 Women's clothing

### 1.4.1 Dress

Sumerian literary texts indicate that the difference between women and men can be seen from far away. Women wore their clothing 'to the left', whereas men dressed 'to the right'. In the cult of the goddess of love (Sumerian Inanna, Akkadian Ištar) the roles of men and women could be interchangeable, because she 'made a man into a woman' and 'a woman into a man'. This may allude to different forms of dress.<sup>66</sup> But wearing the clothing of the opposite sex is strictly prohibited in the Bible:

No woman may wear an article of man's clothing, nor may a man put on a woman's dress; for those who do these things are abominable to the Lord your God (Deuteronomy 22:5).

It has been suggested that the background to this verse was to prohibit any involvement with the orgiastic heathen cult of the goddess of love, where such

<sup>63</sup> BIN 4 9 and CCT 3 20, end (= C. Michel, CMK (= LAPO 19) [2001] nos. 304, 307); see H. Hirsch, AfO Beiheft 13 (1972) 70; K. R. Veenhof, *Schrijvend Verleden* (1983) 93, on MAH 16209.

<sup>64</sup> P. Garelli, RA 59 (1965) 156 f., on MAH 16209. Cf. Veenhof (previous note) and K. Hecker, Or. NS 47 (1978) 406 note 14.

<sup>65</sup> K. Balkan does not view this rite as an alternative for marriage, such as being dedicated to the god Assur; K. Balkan, *Kaniššumar* (1986) 6.

<sup>66</sup> Å. W. Sjöberg, ZA 65 (1975) 223–225; J.-J. Glassner in: *Nippur at the Centennial* (1992) 81–83.

interchange of clothing was required.<sup>67</sup> That changing sex was always bad in normal life can be seen from the words of a curse upon someone who may break a contract:

May Ištar, the great lady, turn his manhood into the state of a woman!<sup>68</sup>

The Sumerians well knew that it was the prerogative of Ištar to accomplish such a thing.<sup>69</sup>

It was not for nothing that the woman wore her clothing ‘to the left’. The left side was always associated with the woman, and right with the man. A man’s divine guardian accompanied him on the right, and a woman’s on the left. This is alluded to in a wish expressed in a letter:

May my Lord and my Mistress not fail to protect you on the right and on the left!<sup>70</sup>

This fits in with the Babylonian and Greek idea that during pregnancy a boy lies on the right in his mother’s womb and a girl on the left,<sup>71</sup> which accords with a generally accepted principle that ‘right = male = favourable’ while ‘left = female = unfavourable’.<sup>72</sup> Modern physiological studies of the brain show that the rational function can be located to the left and the intuitive to the right.

More can be said about dress.<sup>73</sup> It is often thought that there was no difference in the clothing of men and women,<sup>74</sup> and a study of clothing in Mari in the Old Babylonian period confirms this. Any question about different clothing for men and women amounted only to the matter of size.<sup>75</sup> Much later the Persians, though belonging to a very different culture, appear also to have adopted unisex dressing.<sup>76</sup> For a long time it was assumed that a *nahlaptu*, ‘over-garment’ was worn

67 W. H. Ph. Römer, *Studies M. A. Beek* (1974) 217–222.

68 P.-A. Beaulieu, *The pantheon of Uruk during the Neo-Babylonian period* (2003) 366:15–17.

69 M. Malul, *Aula Orientalis* 10 (1992) 53–55.

70 AbB 11 106:5–7.

71 M. Stol, *Zwangerschap en geboorte in Babylonië en de Bijbel* (1983) 79; *Birth in Babylonia and the Bible* (2000) 274b, ‘Right-Left’. In general see R. Needham, *Right and Left. Essays on dual symbolic classification* (1973).

72 Cf. also Stol, *Zwangerschap*, 79 n. 476 (lit.); *Epilepsy in Babylonia* (1993) 36, ‘Hand of the Goddess’.

73 In general see C. Michel, M.-L. Nosch, *Textile terminologies in the Ancient Near East and Mediterranean from the third to the first millennium BC* (2010).

74 H. Waetzoldt, art. ‘Kleidung’, § 10a, *RIA* VI/1–2 (1980) 24 f.

75 J.-M. Durand, *ARM* 30 (2009) 12–14.

76 H. Koch, *Es kündigt Dareios der König ... Vom Leben im persischen Großreich* (1992) 244, 250.

only by men. But in an Old Assyrian marriage contract a woman who is 'lying and cheeky' is threatened that her *nahlaptu* will be snatched from her back.<sup>77</sup> A text from Nuzi speaks of 'a garment for women'.<sup>78</sup> A survey of the clothing depicted in Old Sumerian art shows that men wore one particular costume and women another. For the man there was a type of toga, and for the woman a shoulder garment.<sup>79</sup> It was usual for women to wear brooches. In the Early Dynastic period a woman typically wore a shawl over her head.<sup>80</sup> Sumerian women could have shoes with special decorations.<sup>81</sup>

One ritual describes what someone must do to entrust his sins to the ancestral spirit of his father. A doll was made to represent this spirit, and its head was wrapped in a 'woman's garment'. After the purification was completed he had to replace this garment with a 'clean cloth'. Evidently the 'woman's garment' removed the stain, which could refer to a sanitary towel.<sup>82</sup> A woman who only received a small dowry from her father would sometimes be given,

two garments with which she could be clothed, two head scarves (*paršigu*) with which she could be covered.<sup>83</sup>

Here we are told that the one reason for giving her garments was to clothe her body and the other to cover the head. For this the verb *apāru* is used, from which the noun (*h*)*upurtu* 'wig' is derived. A comprehensive inventory of items in a dowry also includes underwear, but these items cannot yet be specifically identified, despite persistent efforts of curious modern scholars.<sup>84</sup> What we do know is that the very last thing a decent lady would remove was her *dīdu*, an item that was possibly secured with a clasp called a *šillū*. Any man who opened that

---

**77** C. Michel in: J. G. Dercksen, *Anatolia and the Jazira during the Old Assyrian period* (2008) 223 n. 77. This agrees with J.-M. Durand, *ARM* 30 (2009) 13 f. In the Neo-Babylonian period this was again a woman's garment; F. Joannès, *TEBR* (1982) 291 no. 78:19.

**78** *JCS* 46 (1994) 106 f., line 4, with *SCCNH* 8 (1996) 315.

**79** E. Strommenger, 'Mesopotamische Gewandtypen von der frühsumerischen bis zur Larsa-Zeit', *Acta Praehistorica et Archaeologica* 2 (1971) 37–55; Typ 8 and 9. Under Typ 6 (Schal), 8 (Schultergewand), 13 (Zweizipfliges Schalgewand), and 14 (Einzipfliges Schalgewand) we have garments for women; and under Typ 7 (Cape) for men. Now see C. E. Suter, 'Who are the women in Mesopotamian art from ca. 2334–1763 BCE?', *Kaskal* 5 (2008) 1–55.

**80** G. Marchesi, *Lumma in the onomasticon and literature of ancient Mesopotamia* (2006) 21 n. 82. At that time men and women had the chest partly bared.

**81** P. Paoletti, 'Footwear in the third millennium BC', *Studies P. Attinger* (2012) 271–290; *CUSAS* 6 (2011) 193b.

**82** *KAR* 178 vii 35–41 with R. Labat, *HMA* (1939) 100.

**83** *PBS* 8/2 252:1 f.

**84** S. Dalley, *Iraq* 42 (1980) 69 f. The central word is *sūnu* A, 'lap', B (a piece of clothing) (CAD).

clasp had gone too far, a subject to which we shall return in Chapter 2 where the wedding is discussed. There are several references to women being buried in a special garment, secured with a belt to which little rings from shell or bone were attached.<sup>85</sup>

To strip a woman of her clothing has always been seen as degrading. It happened to the goddess Ištar when she had to descend into the Underworld. The expression ‘in her nakedness’ was used metaphorically to describe a woman who is destitute and without possessions. For a man the corresponding expression is ‘in his emptiness’,<sup>86</sup> but in Middle Assyrian texts women are also said to ‘go away in their emptiness’. In the Bible there is a moving description of the degradation of the ‘women of Zion’ (Isaiah 3:16–26). This involved stripping them of all their items of adornment, including their clothing. The passage ends by showing that while Zion’s gates ‘mourn and lament’ one of them will be ‘stripped bare’ and ‘sit on the ground’ (v. 26). On the fringes of the Babylonian world the expression ‘men shall send her away (or she shall go away) in her nakedness’ indicated that a woman would be driven away from the house without any possessions. This threat appears in legal texts from Nuzi.<sup>87</sup> Marriage contracts from Emar in Syria refer to a man’s wife by name with the clause,

If my wife goes after a strange man she has to lay her dress on the chair, and then she can go wherever she wants.

In Ugarit a similar threat is directed to men:

He shall lay down his coat on the door jamb and he shall go off into the street.<sup>88</sup>

This not only meant that he had to leave without possessions, but that he had to relinquish the family.<sup>89</sup> There is a view that saying a woman would have to submit to the disgrace of having to undress was not just a threat but in fact this is what actually happened.<sup>90</sup> It is a rash thought, and an unlikely one in the light of the

---

**85** A. Spycket, ‘Le rôle funéraire des ceintures à anneaux de coquille’, in: *Mélanges H. Limet* (1996) 141–147.

**86** The word ‘naked’ is used in Old Babylonian letters; see CAD E 320 f., *erû* adj.; AHw 241b, *erišši-*. In the Hana contract BRM 4 52 we see ‘nakedness’ (woman) next to ‘emptiness’ (man). Note that Old Assyrian *erûm* means both ‘naked’ and ‘empty’; AHw s.v. *erium*.

**87** E. Cassin, RA 63 (1969) 136–139.

**88** J. Huehnergard, RA 77 (1983) 30 f.

**89** M. Malul, *Studies in Mesopotamian legal symbolism* (1988) 93–97; K. van der Toorn, *Family religion in Babylonia, Syria, and Israel* (1996) 45 f.

**90** Malul, 122–138.



Emar texts. In the words of a myth, poor women (described as those without husbands) possessed only one garment.<sup>91</sup>

Clear differences between male and female dress appear in rituals.<sup>92</sup> In magic texts some prescriptions require male and female dolls to be made, which of course needed to look different. These had various attributes,<sup>93</sup> including different clothing and even different eye colouring.<sup>94</sup> The matter of colour also arises in an exhaustive prescription which requires red items for the man, but for the woman they have to be made of wool and so were possibly white.<sup>95</sup> Prognoses concerning whether a boy or a girl would be born to a pregnant woman were sometimes based on red or white colourings on the mother's body.<sup>96</sup> In one incantation an unborn child in its amniotic fluid was compared to an item of a boat's cargo: if it were cornelian it would be red, and therefore a girl; if it were lapis lazuli it would be azure blue, and therefore a boy.<sup>97</sup> By way of comparison it has been noted that in Egypt the bodies of men were represented as reddish-brown in colour and those of women yellowish-brown,<sup>98</sup> or roughly red and white.<sup>99</sup> In ancient Greece, at Corinth, patients who had been cured of an illness offered clay models of body parts to the god Asklepios. For men these were coloured red, and for women white.<sup>100</sup>

---

**91** 'The Descent of Inanna into the Netherworld', 39, 181; TUAT III/3 (1993) 465, 473.

**92** I. Winter in Durand, *La Femme* (1987) 196 n. 33 (half-naked in the third millennium).

**93** W. Farber, *BID* (1977) 213 A iii 3–5.; a man has a golden reed-staff, and a woman two golden earrings.

**94** SpbTU II 105 no. 21 Rs. 15–17; a man has 'a garment of 1 day' and *sarriqu*-coloured eyes; a woman has a multicoloured garment and *teqqû*-daubed eyes. For a description of a female puppet see D. Schwemer, *Akkadische Rituale aus Hattuša* (1998) 102f., with a drawing, p. 65; see also W. Farber, *ZA* 91 (2001) 253–263. For a male puppet with a red garment see J. Scurlock, *Magico-medical means of treating ghost-induced illnesses in ancient Mesopotamia* (2006) 540 no. 230:2.

**95** SpbTU III 68 no. 69 § 32–33. For more passages see CT 23 20 ii 18–20 (*TuL* 152f.; J. Scurlock, *Magico-medical means* [2006] 203 no. 13); KAR 178 left, vi 38 (*TuL* 155); KAR 227 i 25 f. (*TuL* 125 f.). Cf. J. Bottéro, *ZA* 73 (1983) 178 and 180 n. 99.

**96** M. Stol, *Birth in Babylonia and the Bible* (2000) 194, on (2).

**97** Stol, 62.

**98** G. Robins in: B. S. Lesko, *Women's earliest records* (1989) 108.

**99** E. Brunner-Traut, *Saeculum* 38 (1987) 314, who explains that 'white' indicated that a woman would live indoors.

**100** A. Krug, *Heilkunst und Heilkult. Medizin in der Antike* (1985) 144.

### 1.4.2 The veil

The question sometimes arises about whether women in Babylonia and Assyria wore a veil.<sup>101</sup> What is certain is that a girl had a veil put on her head at her marriage. In Sumerian lawsuits we encounter the ‘covering’ of the woman. A cap was laid on her head and this was done shortly before her marriage.<sup>102</sup> It was a once-only symbolic act, and the custom was probably that her husband should take it off on their marriage night. The Akkadian expression ‘veiled bride’ (*kallatu kut-tumtu*) supports this idea. In one ritual the high priestess of Emar was ‘veiled like a bride’.<sup>103</sup> All these instances concern veiling for a wedding,<sup>104</sup> and they echo similar practices elsewhere. This is why Rebecca ‘took her veil and covered herself’ (Genesis 24:65) when Isaac her future husband was approaching. In commenting on the idea that seeing the face of the veiled bride implied attaining a degree of intimacy with her it has been said:

The unveiling of the bride ... was a cardinal element of ancient wedding ceremonies, and it has even been suggested that the familiar Biblical use of the word ‘know’ to denote sexual relations referred originally to the bridegroom’s coming to know the features of his bride by lifting her veil before the consummation of the marriage. The Arab bridegroom, we are told, often sees his bride’s face for the first time on that occasion, and in Turkey, the present which he then gives her is known explicitly as ‘the gift of the seeing-of-the-face’.<sup>105</sup>

T. Abusch includes these observations in his treatment of a well-known passage from the Old Babylonian version of the Gilgamesh epic.<sup>106</sup> When Gilgamesh meets the barmaid Siduri, who was living on her own, he said to her:

---

**101** K. van der Toorn, ‘The significance of the veil in the Ancient Near East’, *Studies Jacob Milgrom* (1995) 327–339. At the end of this section we shall discuss the opinion of S. Démare-Lafont, ‘À cause des anges. Le voile dans la culture juridique du Proche-Orient ancien’, in *Studies Maryse Carlin* (2008).

**102** A. Falkenstein, NSGU 2 (1956) 37 no. 23:10; 43 no. 26:7.

**103** D. E. Fleming, *The installation of the Baal’s high priestess at Emar* (1992) 23:61, with p. 187 f. The text is *Emar VI/3* 328 no. 369:64.

**104** When mourning, Gilgamesh ‘covered his face like a bride’ (Gilg. VIII 59). The veil was also adopted in mourning rituals, ‘covering the head with a cloth’; A. Löhnert, *Wie die Sonne tritt heraus* (2009) 311 f. The Sumerogram DUL ‘to cover’ can be equivalent for the Akkadian verb *pasāmu* ‘to veil’ and also for *katāmu* ‘to cover’.

**105** See T. Abusch in: *Studies W. W. Hallo* (1993) 6a, quoting T. H. Gaster. A. Zgoll, *Die Kunst des Betens* (2003) 64, draws attention to the fact that this unveiling also occurred in Greece in the fifth century BC, known as *anakalūpsis*.

**106** T. Abusch, *op. cit.*, 1–14.

Now, landlady, I have seen your face.

These words may indicate an intimate encounter with this mysterious woman. Similarly mysterious was Calypso, the bedfellow of Odysseus, whose name (Greek *kalupto* 'to cover') could be interpreted as meaning 'the veiled one'. In the Old Babylonian version of the Gilgamesh epic there is a sinister passage about the sexual misconduct of the hero taking advantage of a bride-to-be in Uruk.

Before the king of Uruk, the metropolis, before the lover, the net which men ... is opened, and he impregnates the intended wife.

The context of this passage suggests that the 'net' (*pūgu*) is in fact the veil she was wearing for her marriage night.<sup>107</sup>

Before the marriage of the king of Mari to a princess from Aleppo there was a veiling procedure. Messengers from Mari went to Aleppo and placed veils (*kutummū*, plural) on the head of the princess:

We have hastened, and the bridal gift (*biblu*) which our master made us bring we have brought inside, and the veils we have laid on the daughter.<sup>108</sup>

This historical detail shows that it was the family of the future husband who provided the veil. A veil was also used at a marriage in Ebla in Syria around 2350 BC.<sup>109</sup> In the list of expenses when Princess Ma'ud was married off to Ruzi'il, the son of Durdulum, there is a reference to three garments for Ruzi'il. After that we read:

Then oil was poured over the head of Ma'ud. Ma'ud received a long garment (*peplos*), an orange (?) veil. The house of Durdulum.

This shows that it was the father of the bridegroom who paid.<sup>110</sup> What is new is that here ointments are mentioned together with the veil. The removal of a veil is depicted on a Hittite vase, dating from ca. 1550 BC, found in Turkey at the village of Bitik, near Ankara. A man and a woman are shown seated opposite each other

**107** A. R. George, *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic I* (2003) 188.

**108** AEM 1/1 106 no. 10:12–15. For a succinct comment see F. Abdallah in: Durand, *La Femme* (1987) 14; for a more detailed one see Durand, AEM 1/1 (1988) 103 f.

**109** M. V. Tonietti, in 'Symbolisme et mariage à Ebla. Aspects du rituel pour l'intronisation du roi', *Memoriae Igor M. Diakonoff* (2005) 251, and J. Pasquali, *ibidem*, 174. 'Veil' in Ebla: PAD.túg, *gú-du-mu*.

**110** Pasquali, 175, NABU 2009/11 [3]; Tonietti, 251 n. 33 (TM.75.G.1326; unpublished).

in a room.<sup>111</sup> With his right hand just beside her forehead the man lifts up her veil, which may have been orange in colour, and with his left hand he passes a drink to her. The veil appears to be part of the garment which encircles her whole body. The large robe is reminiscent of the Greek *peplos*, a garment for women well attested at Ebla.<sup>112</sup>

In these regions it appears that the veiling ceremony formally established a marriage, comparable to a formal engagement.<sup>113</sup> But in an Old Assyrian marriage contract a woman is described in precisely the opposite way. It is said that her head was ‘open’ (*qaqqassa pati*), therefore not veiled, meaning that the woman was essentially sold off by her family.<sup>114</sup> Another possible reason why she was not veiled is the statement that ‘her price’ had not yet been paid.<sup>115</sup> In a letter from that region we read that a paternal uncle had wanted to ‘lay the veil’ (*pussunu*) on a difficult girl, which may have been a general expression for marrying the girl off.<sup>116</sup>

The Akkadian verb *katāmu*, ‘to cover’ was used when describing the special rituals for a wedding. But it is important to note that women were veiled in normal everyday life, and then the verb *pasāmu* was used. It is quite conceivable that women in Assyria, Ebla and Aleppo, that is to say in the north and the north-west, always went around veiled after their marriage. For Assyria this seems most probable because of a long paragraph in the Middle Assyrian Laws (to be translated in Chapter 31) which shows that wearing a veil on the street seems to have been a privilege, and the law set out who was entitled to that privilege and who was not (§ 40).<sup>117</sup> Those who could wear the veil were free women, a concubine in the company of her mistress, and a priestess who was married. But an unmarried priestess, a prostitute or a slave could not wear a veil. They walked bare-headed on the street. If anyone saw a slave or a prostitute wearing a veil, they

---

111 M. Tsevat, JCS 27 (1975) 239. Photos in J. M. Sasson, *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East I* (1995) 559; E. Akurgal, *Anadolu Kültür Tarihi* (1997) 131–133. Drawing in W. Orthmann, *Der Alte Orient* (1975) p. 434 fig. 139. See M. Schuol, *Hethitische Kultmusik* (2004) 57 n. 99.

112 J. Pasquali, 173–176.

113 B. Groneberg, ‘Haus und Schleier in Mesopotamien’, in: T. Späth, B. Wagner-Hasel, *Frauenwelten in der Antike* (2000) 1–16.

114 E. Bilgiç, *AKT I* 77:3–4, after J. G. Dercksen, NABU 1991/28, with R. Rems, WZKM 86 (1996) 358.

115 K. van der Toorn, *Studies Jacob Milgrom* (1995) 333 f.; S. Démare-Lafont, *Studies Maryse Carlin* (2008) 241.

116 AKT III 80:22–24 with C. Michel, ‘Un témoignage paléo-assyrien en faveur du port du voile par la femme mariée’, NABU 1997/40; RIDA 84 (2006) 161.

117 G. R. Driver, J. C. Miles, *The Assyrian Laws* (1935) 129; H. Waetzoldt, RIA VI/3–4 (1981) 202, art. ‘Kopfbedeckung’ § 10.

had to report it straight away to the authorities and the punishments were severe. A veiled prostitute was given fifty strokes of the cane. Pitch was also poured on her head in what has been described as a 'mirror punishment', where pitch was applied instead of a veil. The person who brought her for judgement could take possession of her clothes, but no-one could take her jewellery.

It is possible that this veiling was practised only in the north, and then perhaps only in a particular period.<sup>118</sup> The Hittites were probably familiar with veiling. In § 198 of the Hittite Laws we read that a man could grant forgiveness to his adulterous wife:

He may spare the life of his wife, but then he must spare the life of her lover also and he shall cover her head.

The text actually reads 'his' head, which must be a mistake. The intention was that the woman should be allowed to continue her life, decently veiled.<sup>119</sup> It is reminiscent of the Middle Assyrian Law § 41, which shows that a man could make his concubine his lawful wife:

He shall assemble five or six witnesses and he shall veil her.

Pictures of deported women from countries to the west of Mesopotamia provide further evidence of veiling.<sup>120</sup> Isaiah predicts an ignominious end for the 'daughter of Babylon', when she will suffer various indignities including the removal of her veil:

Take the handmill, grind meal, remove your veil, strip off your skirt, bare your thighs, wade through rivers, so that your nakedness may be seen, your shame exposed (Isaiah 47:2f.).

The 'women of Zion' who were degraded earlier in the book may have suffered a similar fate:

The Lord will smite with baldness the women of Zion, the Lord will make bare their foreheads' (Isaiah 3:17).

---

**118** See M. Tsevat, JCS 27 (1975) 238, note. This practice was exceptional and just a temporary ruling of the police in Assur (thus P. Koschaker). J. Assante, UF 30 (1998) 32–4, 52f., sees in this veiling 'an anomaly', and thinks that married women could decide for themselves to remain unveiled. S. Lafont, *Femmes*, 462, suggests that an Assyrian woman was free to veil herself or not; in § 40 no punishment is mentioned for her.

**119** M. Tsevat, 'The husband veils a wife (Hittite Laws, §§ 179–98)', JCS 27 (1975) 235–240. H. A. Hoffner, *The laws of the Hittites* (1997) 157, 226 is in agreement.

**120** J. Reade, CRRAI 47/II (2002) 559 f., 'Veiling'.

Some other translations suggest worse humiliation. While the wearing of the veil was normal for a decent woman in Israel, Isaiah may have thought that the same was true for Babylon, but this has yet to be proved.

There are other indications that women remained veiled. One is in a legend about the victories of Sargon of Akkad, who claims to have humiliated or maltreated the men of Alašia (Cyprus), saying that ‘I covered their head like a woman.’<sup>121</sup> Another is in a medical text, written in Assyrian dialect,<sup>122</sup> about a woman in labour, stating that ‘she is not veiled and has no shame (*būštu*)’. In a letter from Mari a woman is told, ‘Cover your head and leave’. This could mean that women in Mari had to be veiled outside the home,<sup>123</sup> which would correspond with the statement in the Koran:

O prophet, say to thy wives, and thy daughters, and the womenfolk of the believers, that they let down part of their mantles (*jalābīb*) over them; that is more suitable for their being recognised and not insulted. Allah is forgiving, compassionate’ (Qur’an 33:59, Richard Bell translation).

From the above discussion it can be seen that there was a development in the use of the veil. Originally it was worn only at a marriage ceremony, but later, from the Middle Assyrian period onwards, wearing a veil became the normal dress for a married woman. But in fact we know really very little about veiling, and there appears to be only one text discussing it, the Middle Assyrian law § 40. This sole reference cannot be used as proof that § 40 marks a turning-point in the history of veiling.<sup>124</sup> Moreover regional variations need also to be considered. Prostitutes are supposed to have been veiled, and their veil may well have been different from that of respectable women in design or length or colour. But for this there is no proof.

As yet we do not know any Sumerian word for veil.<sup>125</sup> Perhaps there were no veiled women in southern Iraq between 3000 and 2000 BC. Similarly for Ba-

121 J. G. Dercksen, JEOL 39 (2005) 109 § 4:53–55.

122 W. G. Lambert, Iraq 31 (1969) 31:45.

123 ARM 2 113:5f.; 10 76:8f., with N. Ziegler, *Le Harem de Zimrî-Lîm* (1999) 7 n. 17. See further Batto, *Studies on women at Mari*, 39, Römer, *Frauenbriefe* (1971) 48, Tsevat, JCS 27 (1975) 238 n. 12. J.-M. Durand, LAPO 18 (2000) 467 note b, thinks it concerns a marriage.

124 Thus S. Démare-Lafont, ‘À cause des Anges. Le voile dans la culture juridique du Proche-Orient ancien’, in O. Vernier, *Études d’histoire du droit privé en souvenir de Maryse Carlin* (2008) 235–253; esp. 236 f., 244, 248.

125 Nothing in H. Waetzoldt, ‘Kopfbedeckung’, RIA VI/3–4 (1981) 202 § 10, ‘Schleier, Bedeckung des Gesichts’.

bylonia south of Assyria, we have no proof of veiled women there either.<sup>126</sup> Only during a wedding did the father of the bride or her brother place a veil on her head, which the bridegroom later ceremonially removed in the bride's room. In Syrian Emar it is possible that a married woman could be recognised by a distinctive hairstyle. An adoption contract envisaged the possibility that an adopted daughter may in the future *qaqqada lišbir*, 'to style the hair (?) on her head', and then 'become pregnant and bear children'. The meaning of *lišbir*, a verbal form governing *qaqqada*, 'head', is uncertain but it is probably to be derived from the verb *šepēru*, 'to style the hair'.<sup>127</sup>

Some goddesses are said to veiled. 'The veiled one of the goddesses' was an epithet of Nanaya, who was known to be rather erotic.<sup>128</sup> The temple where Ulmašitum lived was called 'the Maš-house, the dwelling-place of her veil'.<sup>129</sup> This meaning of this expression is still obscure. In Emar, a different cultural region, a ritual states that during a procession the face of the god Dagan was temporarily veiled.<sup>130</sup> In the same region the high priestess was veiled (literally 'covered') for her consecration 'like a bride'.<sup>131</sup> In a ritual from Ebla in Syria, much further away in time, a veil was placed on the queen seven times.<sup>132</sup>

Another item of clothing used in a ceremony to symbolize the arrangement of a marriage is hinted at in a letter from Mari. In the face of divine judgement a slave girl declares:

My mistress spoke thus: 'After my lord Zimri-Lim had thrown the flap of his garment over me ...'

After this the text is broken.<sup>133</sup> Two scholars have been reminded here of Ruth's request to Boaz:

---

**126** See van der Toorn for a different view. J.-M. Durand, AEM 1/1 (1988) 103 f., also assumes that the Babylonian woman was veiled but his argumentation is not good. M. Civil, *Aula Orientalis* 1 (1983) 47: 13, is not clear. Cf. Wilcke, 'Familiengründung', 283. Veils are not portrayed in art, see Tsevat, 237 n. 11–12.

**127** D. Arnaud, *Aula Orientalis* 5 (1987) 233 no. 13 (ME 121); we follow his interpretation.

**128** R. Borger, *Die Inschriften Assarhaddons Königs von Assyrien* (1956) 77 § 49:1; now G. Frame, RIMB 2 (1995) 187, and RINAP 4 (2011) 276. More: Waetzoldt, 'Kopfbedeckung', 202.

**129** D. R. Frayne, RIME 4 (1990) 673:26.

**130** D. E. Fleming, *Time at Emar* (2000) 92 f., on p. 248–251 (*Emar VI/3* no. 373).

**131** D. E. Fleming, *The installation of Baal's high priestess at Emar* (1992) 23:61, with p. 187 f. (*Emar VI/3* no. 369:64).

**132** J. Pasquali, NABU 2009/11. The word 'veil' is *gū-du-mu*, *ma-ga-da-ma-tum*, in which one recognizes *katāmu* 'to cover'. In Mari the veil was called a *kutummu*.

**133** AEM 1/1 530 no. 251:15–18.

Spread the skirt of your cloak over me, for you are my next-of-kin (Ruth 3:9).

The Hebrew word here translated ‘cloak’ literally means ‘wing’ and could refer to a loose flap of garment. It is widely thought that by performing this gesture Boaz would formally express his willingness to marry Ruth. The prophet Ezekiel envisages the Lord addressing Jerusalem metaphorically as a mature young woman:

I spread the skirt of my robe over you and covered your naked body (Ezekiel 16:8).

The Hebrew word ‘wing’ is used here also, and the expression is used again to symbolize marriage.<sup>134</sup> K. van der Toorn sees in the performance of this act a variant of the veiling procedure, and develops the thought that the man, either by applying the veil to her or by enfolding her in his garment, shows that the woman now belongs to him.<sup>135</sup> Furthermore, the man now has the responsibility of feeding and clothing his wife.<sup>136</sup> So the veiling becomes in the first place a ‘symbol of appurtenance’, and the woman comes to belong to a new family. Of secondary importance is the fact that the veiling gives her a social status, marks her chastity, and additionally suggests her beauty.<sup>137</sup> Men would be very curious to see what was hidden. The accepted view, that the veil was primarily a symbol of modesty and chastity is the one to be preferred and is amply attested. An Assyrian woman in labour is described thus:

She is not veiled and has no shame (*būštu*).

Isaiah equates the pulling off of a veil with ‘making bare her foreheads’ (3:17). When Rebecca saw her future husband Isaac approaching in the distance, ‘she took her veil and covered herself’ (Genesis 24:65). That was no legal act, but simply one of modesty and decency.

---

**134** S. Lafont, NABU 1989/45; K. van der Toorn, *Studies Jacob Milgrom* (1995) 334 f., who also refers to Ezekiel 16:8.

**135** For a similar identification and explanation see C. Wilcke, ‘Familiengründung,’ 283.

**136** Van der Toorn, *Family religion in Babylonia, Syria and Israel* (1996) 45. The expression ‘providing with victuals’ (*epēru*, note 15) is a wrong interpretation of *apāru* ‘to cover the head’.

**137** *Family religion*, 42–45. For a more elaborate discussion see *Studies Jacob Milgrom* (1995) 327–339. M. V. Tonietti accepts the theory of her ‘signe d’appartenance’; *Memoriae Igor M. Diakonoff* (2005) 252.



### 1.4.3 Symbols

Certain symbols in Babylonian literature and art are typical of the woman. In literature the wooden spindle (Sumerian *giš.bal*, Akkadian *pilakku*), which was also the emblem of the goddess Ištar, and the hair-clasp (*giš.kirid*, *kirissu*), both figure in this way.<sup>138</sup> Sometimes a *šiddu* (a rug?) is also mentioned together with the spindle and the hair-clasp.<sup>139</sup> In a very old incantation from the Fara period (2600 BC) a spindle (*bal*) and a clasp (*tab*) are objects used by a woman, while what may be a boomerang (*illar*, the meaning of this word is very uncertain) and some other wooden weapon (*tukul*) were for the man.<sup>140</sup> The pin used to fasten a garment, a sort of toggle-pin (*tudittu*), was also an item for women.<sup>141</sup> A Sumerian hymn refers to 'a pure hair-clasp, with lapis lazuli stones, a comb in the feminine style'.<sup>142</sup> In an incantation the female demon Lamaštu receives a series of items from different craftsmen: from the smith what may be rings (*semēru*) for her hands and feet; from the goldsmith a ring (*inšabtu*) for her ears; from the lapidary coral for her neck; from the carpenter a comb, a spindle, a toggle-pin, and a hair-clasp.<sup>143</sup>

A Canaanite myth describes the goddesses Anat and Aširtu (Asherah) as holding a spindle.<sup>144</sup> We also find the spindle as a symbol of the woman alongside the bow as the symbol for the man elsewhere in the Ancient Near East.<sup>145</sup> It

---

**138** Spindle: S. Parpola, LAS, Comm. (1983) 315f., on no. 308:11; J. Oliva, NABU 1993/98. Hair-clasp: Å. W. Sjöberg, ZA 65 (1975) 224f., n. 15; M. Civil, JNES 33 (1974) 333f.; W. Farber in *Studies Erica Reiner* (1987) 96–99.

**139** AHW s.v. *šiddu* II ('ein Werkzeug'), 'ribbon (?)', CAD Š/2 408b. W. Farber: 'Stoffballen'; 'rug' in his final edition *Lamaštu* (2014) 158f. (I 197). In descriptions of male (§ 32) and female (§ 33) puppets: SpbTU III 68 no. 69.

**140** M. Krebernik, *Die Beschwörungen aus Fara und Ebla* (1984) 36, Beschw. 6, (c); with p. 44–46; G. Cunningham, *Deliver me from evil* (1997) 74.

**141** H. Klein, ZA 73 (1983) 272–275, 280. Cf. CT 23 20 ii 18–20 (TuL 152f., J. Scurlock, *Magico-medical means*, 203 no. 13).

**142** E. Flückiger-Hawker, *Ur-Namma of Ur in Sumerian literary tradition* (1999) 120, Ur-Namma A:111.

**143** SpbTU III 118 no. 84:72–75, with W. Farber, ZA 79 (1989) 229, and his *Lamaštu* (2014) 270.

**144** KTU 4 II 3 with *Textes ougaritiques* I (1974) 197.

**145** J. C. Greenfield, Erets Israel 14 (1978) 76. For an image of a sitting woman with a spindle (Susa) see E. Porada, *Ancient Iran* (1965) 68; M. Roaf, *Cultural Atlas of Mesopotamia and the Ancient Near East* (1966) 130; P. Bienkowski, A. R. Millard, *Dictionary of the Ancient Near East* (2000) 320. The so-called 'sceptre' of onyx is a spindle according to E. Völlig; *Das Vorderasiatische Museum. Staatliche Museen zu Berlin* (1992) 130 no. 68, with MDOG 130 (1998) 197–221. In Palmyra: E. Cussini, *Studies F. M. Fales* (2012) 163 (n. 5). In general see H. A. Hoffner, 'Symbols for masculinity and femininity', JBL 85 (1966) 326 ff. His translation 'mirror' is wrong.



**Fig. 1:** A woman has wound wool round her left arm and is working the spindle with both hands to spin the thread. Behind her stands a servant with a fan. The meaning of this scene, and especially the fish on the table, is not clear. It is said that the woman is spinning the thread of human life. From the acropolis of Susa; 800 BC. Mastic. Height 10 cm. *Musée du Louvre, Paris.*

was the woman who carried the wool to be spun around her left arm or around a stick known as a distaff. After separating a coarse thread with her right hand that held the spindle, with a twirling movement she would set the spindle in motion to begin spinning (Figure 1). In Hittite the distaff and the spindle often typify femininity.<sup>146</sup> Women were often depicted on grave reliefs carrying a spindle and a mirror.<sup>147</sup> A ‘soldier’s oath’ refers contemptuously to female dress, specifically to the spindle and distaff.<sup>148</sup> It should also be noted that two Hittite goddesses of

<sup>146</sup> Hoffner, 331, 333; RIA XII/5–6 (2010) 430 §5. M. Ofitsch, *StBot* 45 (2001) 478–498: *hulali*-‘Spinnrocken’, Greek *èlakatè*, Latin *colus plena*, next to *huesa*-‘Spindel’, Greek *atraktos*, Latin *fusis*.

<sup>147</sup> D. Bonatz, *Das syro-hethitische Grabdenkmal* (2000) 79–82, ‘Rocken und Spindel’, 82–85, ‘Spiegel’.

<sup>148</sup> First Oath, §9; in W. W. Hallo, *Context of Scripture I* (1997) 166. More in K. van der Toorn, *Sin and sanction in Israel and Mesopotamia* (1985) 84.

fortune would metaphorically use their spindle to spin 'the years of the king'.<sup>149</sup> This is a clear though little-known parallel motif to the three Greek goddesses of fortune (the Fates, also called the *Moirai*), Clotho, Lachesis and Atropos, who spun the thread of life for every person.

In a fictitious Sumerian letter it was a token of peace when

the woman holds spindles and needles, wandering on whatever roads they wish.<sup>150</sup>

In a Phoenician inscription from Asia Minor a sovereign says that his land was safe so that

a woman with spindles (*plkm*) would go out alone with the help of Baal and the gods.<sup>151</sup>

In Turkey,

still today (...) women are a feature of the South Anatolian landscape, wandering around with a spindle in their hand. At the same time, with their left hand they twist the threads, which are then to be spun by the spindle in their right hand. This can quite easily be kept in motion by the ring on the top of the spindle. The material to be spun is either slung over their left arm or over a piece of wood, which they carry held securely under their left arm. The thread runs from there over their left hand to the spindle. This piece of wood, a distaff, in Hittite was called a '*hulali*'.<sup>152</sup>

It was the custom in ancient Rome for girls who were getting married to carry with them *colus compta et fusus cum stamina*, 'a neatly wound distaff and a spindle with thread' (Pliny VIII 194). In the Bible the virtuous housewife is praised because

she holds the distaff (*kišōr*) in her hand, and her fingers grasp the spindle (*pèlèk*) (Proverbs 31:19).

In the Talmud, Rabbi Eliezer records a Jewish tradition that

the wisdom of the woman only lies in the spindle (Bab. Yoma 66b).

This was the one sphere where women are seen to show their expertise. As his proof text he cites 'Every woman with the skill spun' (Exodus 35:25, REB), which

---

**149** G. Frantz-Szabó, *RIA* X/5–6 (2004) 324 'Papaja'; M. Ofitsch, *StBoT* 45 (2001) 478–498, with explanations of Greek and other parallels.

**150** P. Michalowski, *The correspondence of the kings of Ur* (2011) 370, 374, line 10.

**151** Azatiwada, king of Adana. From Karatepe; *KAI* 26 A 5, with E. Lipinski, in: K. R. Veenhof, *Schijvend Verleden* (1983) 48.

**152** N. Oettinger, *StBoT* 22 (1976) 65.

appears in the more literal KJV as ‘And all the women that were wise-hearted did spin with their hands’.

In one of Esarhaddon’s treaties those who break trust are cursed in these terms:

May the gods, whose names are listed on this clay tablet, whirl you round like a spindle, may they make you like women before the face of your enemies.<sup>153</sup>

The speed with which a spindle turns is alluded to in a simile:

A false accuser rolls his eyes like a spindle.<sup>154</sup>

Spinning could be done while seated.<sup>155</sup> A relief from Susa shows a woman seated at a table (it even had a fish on it) spinning with a spindle and with wool wound around her left arm (Figure 1).<sup>156</sup>

In the Bible the house of Joab was cursed with horrible illnesses and effeminate sons:

May the house of Joab never be free from running sore or foul disease, nor lack a son fit only to ply the distaff or doomed to die by the sword or beg his bread! (2 Samuel 3:29).

The expression ‘fit only to ply the distaff’ was translated in the KJV as ‘leaneth on a staff’ which was discussed by M. Malul. He has shown that there is no question of a ‘staff’ being referred to here, but that the word *pèlèk* refers to a ‘spindle’, and so more modern translations have something like ‘holds a spindle’ (NRSV). That Joab’s household would include effeminate men would not have been unusual. Babylonian lists of personnel sometimes include a man ‘who carries the distaff (*pilakku*)’ to indicate homosexuals who had a part to play in cultic rituals.<sup>157</sup>

The mirror was another distinctive attribute for a woman.<sup>158</sup> As early as the Hittite reliefs we see goddesses holding a mirror, and ordinary women do the same

---

153 SAA II 56 no. 6:616 f.

154 B. Alster, *Wisdom of Ancient Sumer* (2005) 69 Instr. Šur. 65.

155 E. Porada, *Ancient Iran* (1965) 68 fig. 43; see also note 146. For a fish lying on a table on a Neo-Assyrian cylinder seal see O. Keel, C. Uehlinger, *Altorientalische Miniaturkunst* (1990) 44 Abb. 48. For a woman seated with spindle from 2500 BC, from the temple of Dagan in Mari see M. al-Maqdisi, *Schätze des alten Syrien: die Entdeckung des Königreichs Qatna* (2009) 216. For another woman, an Aramaean, with a spindle see I. Seibert, *La femme dans l’Orient ancien* (1974) plate 56 (Marash).

156 Cf. G. Dalman, *Arbeit und Sitte in Palästina V* (1937) 43, 54.

157 M. Malul, *Aula Orientalis* 10 (1992) 49–67.

158 S. L. MacGregor, *Beyond hearth and home. Women in the public sphere in Neo-Assyrian society* (= SAAS 21) (2012) 114–116.

in later art from Syria. This can also be seen on Middle Assyrian cylinder seals, where a woman lifts a mirror while seated on a throne.<sup>159</sup> Naqi'a, an Assyrian queen of Aramaic descent, is depicted with a mirror, but this symbolism is exceptional in Assyro-Babylonian art.<sup>160</sup> The goddess Ašratum, consort of Amurru, the god of the Western Steppes, is shown holding a comb and a mirror.<sup>161</sup> While the mirror may seem to have been a 'western' symbol of femininity, it is probably not. There is a seal from Nuzi, to the east of the Tigris, with a woman with a mirror in each hand.<sup>162</sup> The goddess Ištar in Uruk also had a golden mirror which sometimes had to be repaired in the workshop.<sup>163</sup>

#### 1.4.4 Jewellery

Literary texts describe exhaustively the jewels and rings of the goddesses and women. These descriptions have even been called an obsession. Jewellery naturally showed off wealth and opulence as well as beauty and attractiveness. Particularly attractive stones were thought to help fertility.<sup>164</sup> But the evidence of literature may have been removed from reality.<sup>165</sup> We do know that a woman received jewellery whenever she married, and this had legal implications which will be discussed in Chapter 3. What is interesting here is the nature of the ornaments. One text states that she received silver rings, for her hands and her feet, weighing twenty or thirty shekels of silver (1 shekel = 8 grams), two shekels of gold 'in her ears', and in addition large toggle-pins for her clothing weighing ten shekels.<sup>166</sup> Some records of costly gifts to women summarise the precious items. Two lists summarise the items by weight.

---

**159** T. Ornan, CRRAI 47/II (2002) 471f.

**160** A. Parrot, J. Nougayrol, Syria 33 (1956) 149; Louvre catalogue *Babylone* (2008) 131; S. C. Melville, *The role of Naqia/Zakutu in Sargonid politics* (1999) 15 (in note 21 other opinions).

**161** A. Livingstone, *Mystical and mythological explanatory works of Assyrian and Babylonian scholars* (1986) 61 BM. 34035:11; S. Ackerman, JNES 67 (2008) 1–30.

**162** Ornan, 472 fig. 16.

**163** K. R. Nemet-Nejat, 'A mirror belonging to the Lady-of-Uruk', *Studies W. W. Hallo* (1993) 163–169, with a survey of mirrors in the Ancient Near East and Egypt.

**164** J. G. Westenholz, 'Metaphorical language in the poetry of love in the Ancient Near East', CRRAI 38 (Paris 1992) 381–387.

**165** In general see K. R. Maxwell-Hyslop, *Western Asiatic Jewellery c. 3000–612 B. C.* (1971).

**166** YOS 8 141:9–12. For another enumeration of rings and gemstones see YOS 12 157:2–10. See the next note.

60 shekels: silver ring; 5 shekels of gold: from (?) her ears; 1 shekel: a silver signet ring.  
6 shekels of gold: from (?) her ears; 1 shekel of gold for her neck; 2 hand (?) rings of silver,  
their weight is four shekels; 4 signet rings of silver, their weight is four shekels.<sup>167</sup>

#### 1.4.4.1 Bracelets and anklets

Rings worn on the wrists and ankles are referred to in Sumerian texts as *ḥar*, and in Babylonian as *šewīru* (later *semēru*). Mostly they were of silver and, according to Ur III texts, often weighed five shekels (40 grams).<sup>168</sup> One can assume that this represented a fixed value of silver and so they could have functioned as a fixed means of payment. This was a theory advanced by M. A. Powell, who took as evidence the spiral-formed rings now in museum collections.<sup>169</sup> He and his predecessors think that parts of these rings could be broken off. The broken pieces had a standardised silver value so that payments for a desired amount could be made.<sup>170</sup> The texts themselves teach us that the weight was certainly not always exact and it is thought that the rings were not counted but weighed when concluding a transaction. Rings remained a currency until well into the Persian era.<sup>171</sup> There are indications that occasionally other jewellery could be used as payment, such as a signet ring (*unqu*) or a toggle-pin.<sup>172</sup>

Silver rings weighing five shekels appear to have been standard, but rings of ten shekels also turn up regularly. Such rings for the hand were once called ‘large’.<sup>173</sup> Occasionally on special occasions we read of women receiving ‘two hand rings – twenty shekels in weight’, which suggests that they wore rings each

<sup>167</sup> S. Dalley, *Iraq* 42 (1980) 69 no. 10:4–6, resp. BE 6/1 84:3–6. Also CT 8 2a:1–3, CT 45 119:3–6, MDP 28 536:6–10. Toggle-pins are rarely inserted in the lists: Maekawa, ASJ 8 (1986) 345, MDP 28 536:10, YOS 8 141:11 (*tudittu*), YOS 12 157:2 (IGI.DŪ).

<sup>168</sup> We also know of golden rings, see ARM 21 223:28 f.; ARMT 22 313:1, 5; ARMT 23 p. 508 no. 535 iii 9; R. M. Whiting, AS 22 (1987) 39, on line 4; VAS 22 86:12. Photos in the catalogue *Sumer-Assur-Babylon* (Hildesheim 1978) no. 80. Others were made of iron with a golden ‘opening’ (*bābu*): H. Limet, MARI 3 (1984) 193 f. Of bronze: VAS 22 84:18, DCS 115:13; of stone: ARM 21 223:36 (NA4 *tak-ka-si*).

<sup>169</sup> M. A. Powell, *Festschrift L. Matouš* II (1978) 211–243. Five shekels as the norm: p. 213 f.

<sup>170</sup> Powell, 222; W. W. Hallo, *BiOr* 20 (1963) 138b; E. Sollberger, *JCS* 10 (1956) 23b; P. Paoletti, *Der König und sein Kreis. Das staatliche Schatzarchiv der III. Dynastie von Ur* (2012) 139, 307.

<sup>171</sup> M. Pfisterer, *Ein Silberschatz vom Schwarzen Meer. Beobachtungen zum Geldumlauf im Achaimenidenreich* (2000) 73–5, Tafel XVII.

<sup>172</sup> TCL 1 147:9 (Old Babylonian), resp. H. Klein, *ZA* 73 (1983) 277 f. (Old Assyrian).

<sup>173</sup> Hand rings of 5 and 10 shekels together: Sh. Sanati-Müller, *Baghd. Mitt.* 21 (1990) 164 no. 113:6–9. Two foot-rings, each 7 1/2 shekels: ARM XXI 219:19. ‘Large’: ARMT 22 p. 496 no. 322:27.

weighing ten shekels.<sup>174</sup> An Old Babylonian reference to rings possibly concerns a wedding:

Two hand rings of silver, their weight twenty shekels of silver, a present for the daughter of Ur-Nanna, who was 'given' to Apil-Kubi.<sup>175</sup>

When greater weights are mentioned the text refers not to one ring but to the total weight of several rings. The possessions of religious women were often summarised by weight. In lists of the gifts they received from their father or someone else, immediately after any fields and slaves, we find what is described as her 'ring silver', with amounts from ten to sixty shekels (60 shekels = 1 mina).<sup>176</sup> Such a woman from the convent would often pay with 'her ring silver', which was her private possession.<sup>177</sup> The amounts varied greatly and once we find the high amount of ten mines of silver.<sup>178</sup> An Old Assyrian text speaks of a number of 'rings for my hand' with a weight of sixty shekels of silver.<sup>179</sup> These rings may have been given to women on particular occasions. The so-called 'silver ring texts' from the Ur III period record the giving of rings to high-ranking men and women by the court. They were issued by the royal treasury located in Drehem, 10 km. from Nippur.<sup>180</sup> Men received silver rings at all kinds of occasions. The women who were bestowed with gifts (like rings) all lived at the court, but the queen was the only one to receive signet rings made of gold. More will be said in Chapter 23 when we discuss the court of the Ur III empire.

---

**174** 'Two' or 'pairs' of rings are often mentioned; Hallo, BiOr 20, 138a.

**175** YOS 5 207:47–49, cf. lines 30–33 (two rings, 18 1/2 shekels; again a marriage). More: YOS 12 376:1–2 (almost 10 shekels) (marriage); TCL 10 17:15–17 (after a birth). Cf. G.Th. Ferwerda, SLB 5 (1985) no. 25:5, 26:2 (hand ring of 11 shekels for the daughter).

**176** PBS 8/2 105:11 (62 1/2 shekels), ARN 29:2, CT 45 79:16 (60 sh.), CT 47 30:11 (30 sh.), CT 8 5b:6 (30 sh.), CT 6 33a:10 (10 sh.).

**177** In sale contracts; in the letter AbB 7 19:20.

**178** In SFS 10:22 a girl receives from her father 10 minas of silver which, however, is not qualified as 'her ring silver'. Extremely high is the 'ring silver' in L. Waterman, BDHP 28:13 (10 minas). Other high amounts are 20 shekels (CT 8 35b:7), 30 shekels (CT 6 20a:19).

**179** L. Matouš, *Studies F.R. Kraus* (1982) 269 f.

**180** P. Michalowski, 'The Neo-Sumerian silver ring texts', SMS 2/3 (April 1978) 6. They were given *silim.ma*, '(in order to) welcome', E. Sollberger, JCS 10 (1956) 23 no. 10:3, with note; cf. *silim* in AUCT I 276:11 f. (with C. Wilcke, *Studies W.L. Moran* [1990] 474 n. 46, who thinks of a positive outcome of a river ordeal), and in *inūma išlimu*, 'after birth', in TCL 10 17:17, Rftin 52:6 (?). For rings for women see Michalowski nos. 6:1–4 [= Sollberger no. 11], 8:1–2.

We must point out here that on Assyrian reliefs men are shown wearing rings on their wrists. Those with rosettes look like wrist-watches, but those rosettes actually represent Ištar, the goddess of war, to be equated with Venus.<sup>181</sup>

#### 1.4.4.2 Earrings

In a letter a girl complains that

they have robbed me of my earrings and my silver ring.

Later this is referred to collectively as ‘the jewellery (*šukuttu*) of the girl’.<sup>182</sup> King Tušratta of Mitanni sent toggle-pins, earrings (all made of gold) and a jar of good oil as a present to his sister in Egypt, who had been married off to the Pharaoh (see Chapter 24).<sup>183</sup> Earrings (*inšabtu*) which have been found are made of gold, which confirms the texts which state that gold is used for ear ornaments, such as ‘x shekels of gold, from her ears’ (Figure 2).<sup>184</sup> One earring weighed six shekels.<sup>185</sup> In rituals a magic female doll could also be given a golden earring.<sup>186</sup> The Israelites during the Exodus melted down earrings to make the Golden Calf at Mount Sinai (Exodus 32:2). In Ugarit the word possibly used for them means ‘pendants’ (*šūqallālu*).<sup>187</sup> Golden dolls represented a guardian angel (*lamassu*) and these have been found hanging on an earring. A Sumerian text identifies one example weighing two shekels (16 gram) as ‘for the earring (with a) *lamassu* of (King) Amar-Sîn’.<sup>188</sup> Golden and silver earrings have been found, and some are large golden rings. On one golden, three-lobed earring, measuring 3 by 4 cm, there is an inscription of King Šulgi. He dedicated the ring to his deceased mother, who

---

**181** B. Hrouda, *Die Kulturgeschichte des assyrischen Flachbildes* (1965) 58, with Tafel 9; B. N. Porter, *Studies S. Parpola* (2009) 216.

**182** ARM 10 114.

**183** EA 17:41–45.

**184** E. Szlechter, TJAUB (1963) 11 with n. 1; also TLB I 229:12 (2 shekels of gold). For photos of golden earrings see catalogue *Sumer-Assur-Babylon* (Hildesheim 1978) no. 89; *Das Vorderasiatische Museum* (1992) 158 nos. 99, 100 – J. G. Dercksen, *Anatolica* 41 (2015) 42f. (Old Assyrian).

**185** 1 shekel (BAP 7:9), 2 shekels (PBS 8/2 166 iii 10, TLB 1 229:12, YOS 8 141:12), 4 shekels (Riftin 66), 5 shekels (CT 45 119:3, MDP 28 536:8, Dalley, *Iraq* 42 69 no. 10:5), 6 shekels (UMM H 41:10 with Wilcke, *Studies F. R. Kraus* [1982] 459, BE 6/1 84:3).

**186** W. Farber, BID (1977) 212f., 5; D. Schwemer, *Akkadische Rituale aus Ḫattuša* (1998) 146. The male puppet gets a *šuru* made of silver.

**187** PRU III (1955) 182 RS 16.146+161:2. That list begins with items for the queen’s head; her ‘city crown’ (see below) follows.

**188** Catalogue *Babylon. Wahrheit* (2008) 316 Abb. 235; the text S. Kang, SET II no. 119.





**Fig. 2:** Earrings are mostly made of gold. These come from the rich Middle Assyrian 'Grave 45' in Assur. Height 3 cm, length 4 cm. *Vorderasiatisches Museum, Berlin*.

was elevated to divine status posthumously, to be the goddess Geštinanna.<sup>189</sup> In a much earlier period, in Ebla, earrings were used to set a standardised value.<sup>190</sup> Men wearing earrings in many different shapes are well-known in Neo-Assyrian art.<sup>191</sup> Earrings of a standard weight, like other rings, could be used as currency.<sup>192</sup>

#### 1.4.4.3 Nose-rings

Nose-rings were not known as an ornament in the Babylonian world. The word for them is *šerretu* but it seldom occurs, and when it does it is in texts concerning the 'West', i.e. Syria. In the Old Babylonian period Yasmaḥ-Addu, the Assyrian

**189** P. Amiet, M. Lambert, RA 67 (1973) 159–161; H. Steible, FAOS 9,1 (1991) 212 Šulgi 70.

**190** A. Archi, Eblaitica 1 (1987) 116; cf. 69 n. 24 (*bu-di*); see also H. Waetzoldt apud H. Klein, ZA 73 (1983) 279. For earrings with a fixed value see I. J. Gelb, OIP 104 (1991) 296b s.v. PI.

**191** M. E. L. Mallowan, *Nimrud and its Remains I* (1966) 65 fig. 28; 100 fig. 45; SAA VII (1992) p. 36, 50, 70; Hrouda, *Kulturgeschichte*, 55, Tafel 8. The Assyrian word *qudāšu* means 'ring'. In related Semitic languages this is the word for 'earring'.

**192** A. Archi, Eblaitica 1 (1987) 116 n. 9.

viceroy of Mari, married the daughter of the king of Qatna, from further west, situated 50 km north-east of Homs in modern Syria. The father of the bridegroom, the king of 'Assyria', wrote letters to his son about the bride-price (*terḫatu*) which had to be paid, and which had to bear a good relation to the dowry (*nidittu*) which the family of the bride would contribute. The value of the dowry was fixed at four talents of silver, that is 14,400 shekels.<sup>193</sup> It is striking that 7.2 minas (= 470 shekels) had to be spent by the bridegroom on a nose-ring (*ṣerretu*) and silver rings (*šewīru*). Evidently that was expected in Qatna. But this is also reminiscent of the Middle Assyrian laws concerning jewellery (*dūmaqū*), when the man 'laid' these on his wife and they became her property (§§ 25, 26, 38). The woman was then still living in the house of her father. We have established that in Assyria it was the custom for the bridegroom to give jewellery to his bride, which may have consisted of a nose-ring and a silver ring.<sup>194</sup> However we never find the nose-ring listed among gifts for a bride in Babylonia or in Mari.

It is interesting that we find the combination 'nose-ring and rings' not only in the much later Persian period but also in the patriarchal narratives of the Bible.<sup>195</sup> Abraham's servant had to find a wife for his son Isaac. He met Rebecca at the well and meanwhile had taken

a gold nose-ring weighing half a shekel, and two bracelets for her wrists weighing ten shekels, also of gold (Genesis 24:22).

Rebecca went home with this jewellery on her wrists (see verse 30), for the servant had already put the 'ring in her nose' and 'the bracelets on her wrists' (verse 47, 'al in Hebrew means 'on'). Her brother Laban and her father Bethuel agreed to the match and more presents were given to Rebecca, her brother and her mother. We note that the role of her father Bethuel is minimal, for grammatically it is only her brother Laban who 'replied' (in verse 50). The Hebrew *nèzèm* 'ring' evidently means a nose-ring here, like *ṣerretu* in the Mari letters. The word *nèzèm* is also used in a proverb, to refer to a ring in a pig's nose:

Like a gold ring in a pig's snout is a beautiful woman without good sense (Proverbs 11:22).<sup>196</sup>

**193** ARM 1 46:27–31 with J.-M. Durand, MARI 4 (1985) 403–405; LAPO 18 (2000) 171 f. no. 1006.

**194** Thus also Durand, 405.

**195** From the Persian period we have a marriage contract mentioning one nose-ring (*karallu*) together with two rings (*semēru*), all in silver, see F. Joannès (NABU 1989/1); for those in the Bible see M. Anbar, UF 6 (1974) 442–444; M. Stol, ZA 76 (1986) 123 n. 7, where he overlooked the work of Anbar.

**196** *Nèzèm*, however, is a ring in the ear in Genesis 35:4 and Exodus 32:2–3; cf. perhaps Proverbs 25:12. In Ebla: G. Pettinato, MEE 2 (1980) 31 and 83; A. Alberti, OrAnt 20 (1981) 44, on r. III 10; H. Waetzoldt in *La lingua di Ebla* (1981) 372 f.

The word for 'bangles' in Hebrew is *š<sup>e</sup>mīdīm*, and they are often mentioned in the same breath as nose-rings:

I adorned you with jewellery: bracelets on your wrists, a chain around your neck, a ring in your nose, pendants in your ears, and a splendid crown on your head (Ezekiel 16:11–12).

Descriptions of Arab women, sometimes from photographs, will include their nose-rings:<sup>197</sup>

Arabian beauties adorned their ears with earrings ... They often decorated their noses with a large thin nose-ring (*khezâm*), like the one which Abraham's slave gave to Rebecca when he came to court her for Isaac. These rings are still commonly to be found among the bridal gifts of the Bedouin tribes. As Lady Blunt relates, Arab women liked to play with this ring, pushing them backwards and forwards in their pierced nostrils while they were talking.<sup>198</sup>

#### 1.4.4.4 Finger-rings

In the Old Babylonian period a ring (Akkadian *unqu*, Sumerian *š<sup>u</sup>.gur*) was sometimes qualified as being 'for the finger', and once we have a much fuller description:

A signet ring for the finger made of iron; the middle part is mounted in gold and contains a seal made of two pieces of lapis lazuli.<sup>199</sup>

These rings were used as signet rings. They weighed only one shekel, lighter than bracelets and more often made of gold. Iron was still rare in this period. It is possible that the Old Babylonian finger-ring marked the status of the woman who wore it. Whenever a daughter was dedicated to a deity she received such a ring,<sup>200</sup> and two lists of gifts for a girl getting married include that ring.<sup>201</sup> It could be likened to the *anulus pronubus* of ancient Rome, the precursor of the modern engagement

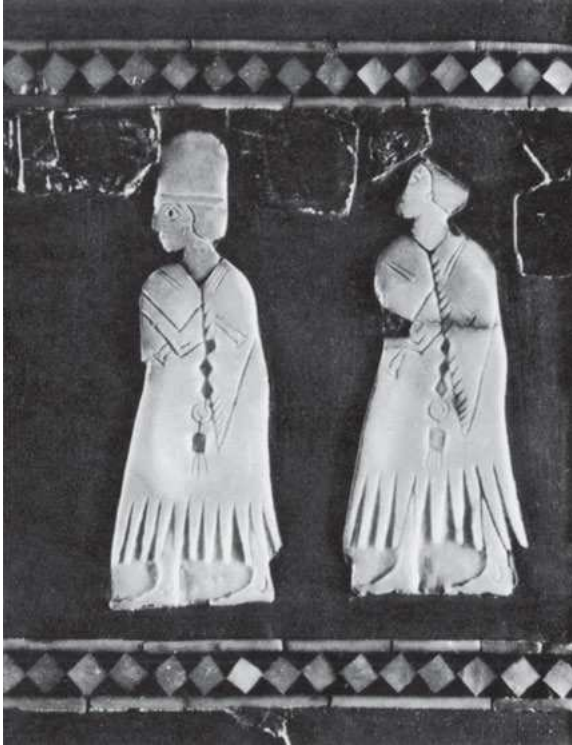
<sup>197</sup> G. Jacob, *Das Leben der vorislâmischen Beduinen nach den Quellen geschildert* (1895) 48.

<sup>198</sup> M. von Oppenheim, *Vom Mittelmeer zum Persischen Golf II* (1900) 123 f., writes about 'Ohren- und Nasenringe'. Wives of the rich had a 'Nasenbrosche', on the left or right side of the nose.

<sup>199</sup> ARMT 23 507 no. 535 i 8, cf. iv 32 ('1 signet ring of the finger, golden, in which 1 pea-shaped ... of lapis lazuli', for a woman'); no. 540:4' ('1 lapis lazuli seal of a signet ring of the finger'); CT 45 119:5 with C. Wilcke, ZA 74 (1984) 172 ('1 signet ring of iron which is ... in gold, of her finger'); CT 4 5:23 (signet ring of agate, *šuba* stone).

<sup>200</sup> J.-M. Durand in: G. del Olmo Lete, *Mythologie et religion des Sémites occidentaux I* (2008) 407 f., A. 1186.

<sup>201</sup> CT 4 18b:1, read <un>-qá-am; UET 5 636:2 (1 shekel of silver).



**Fig. 3:** A toggle-pin can be seen on women's garments in the early periods. This frieze from Mari shows two women wearing toggle-pins, and many such pins with an eye have actually been found. 2500 BC. Mother of pearl, schist, ivory. Height 52,6 cm. National Museum, Damascus.

ring. Perhaps a primaeval Mediterranean custom lies behind the presentation of this ring. Originally it would have been used as currency to pay for the marriage, and later it was used symbolically as *pignus fidei* 'a pledge of good faith'. The church took over this custom.<sup>202</sup> The use of the finger ring became much more widespread in the late period in Babylon, and men used their signet rings as seals in legal procedures by impressing them into the soft clay of a tablet.

#### 1.4.4.5 Toggle-pin

Now and then we find among the gifts to women a large pin or clasp called a *tudittu*, which used to be thought of as an item of jewellery to wear on the breast (Figure 3). Now it is clear that it is a pin with a hole in it, known as a toggle-pin. In German it is called a *Gewandnadel*, or more precisely *Knebelnadel*

<sup>202</sup> Karl Gross, *Menschenhand und Gotteshand in Antike und Christentum* (1985) 212–219.

or *Verschlussnadel*, and was to hold together the flaps of an outer garment.<sup>203</sup> A thread on the inside of the garment is knotted through the eye of the pin, which locks the pin to the garment. The finding of these pins show that they were used throughout two millennia, until ca. 1000 BC. One or two pins could be attached to a garment and placed crosswise on the breast or on the shoulder. Usually it was a gold or silver pin, and it sometimes had a precious stone on the head. A particularly beautiful example was found at Terqa, one to be compared with an Old Babylonian description of the jewels belonging to a goddess from Qatna, and one mentioned in an Amarna letter. The thread for fastening the pin was sometimes decorated with a golden sun, set with lapis lazuli, or with pearls and fruits of alabaster and lapis lazuli.<sup>204</sup> A lamentation refers to a 'toggle-pin of gold and silver with a bison on top' (Ur-Nammu A 121). Pendants of pearls, amulets and cylinder seals have been found in excavations. The toggle-pin was used only by women. A Hittite text shows that it could symbolise the woman. An Old Assyrian text mentions it when describing the repudiation of an insolent wife:

She will go away when her toggle-pin is snatched off.

When that happened, all her clothes would drop to the ground and she would have been symbolically stripped of all her possessions.<sup>205</sup> The toggle-pin fell into disuse after 1000 BC, when the *fibula*, the direct forerunner of our safety pin, became common. It originated in the west, in Cyprus, in the thirteenth century BC and spread to Babylonia in the eighth century BC.<sup>206</sup> After its disappearance from regular use the toggle-pin was restricted to rituals and on images of goddesses.<sup>207</sup>

---

**203** H. Klein, 'Tudittum', ZA 73 (1983) 255–284; W. Farber, *Studies Erica Reiner* (1987) 96–98. In Ebla *bu-di*; A. Archi, ZA 92 (2002) 188 (not: earring).

**204** Klein, 270 f. (with n. 93), 284. Illustrations: 'Nadel', RIA IX/1–2 (1998) 70; catalogue *In Syrië. Naar de oorsprong van het schrift* (Brussels, n. d.) 63 (on garments), 269 nos. 342–343 (two pins); P. Amiet, *Elam* (1966) no. 246 (pins). Cf. *Das Vorderasiatische Museum* (1992) 147 no. 89 'Keulenkopf und Gewandnadeln' (from Assur). Other pins: catalogue *Babylon. Wahrheit* (Berlin 2008) 314 (fibula).

**205** C. Michel in: J. G. Dercksen, *Anatolia and the Jazira during the Old Assyrian period* (2008) 223 n. 76.

**206** The articles 'Fibel' in RIA (1957) and the *Biblisches Reallexikon* (1977). Examples of the *fibula*: I. Seibert, *La femme dans l'Orient ancien* (1974) plate 58.

**207** Klein, 258, cf. R. Sack, ZA 69 (1979) 44 f.

#### 1.4.4.6 Necklaces

Many necklaces have been found.<sup>208</sup> People apparently liked variety: we have no simple strings of beads on a strand, but alternating gemstones, gold medallions, pearls, tiny amulet-like figures and even cylinder seals.<sup>209</sup> A necklace from Dilbat has pendants in the form of symbols of the gods and little figures of guardian deities, apparently intended to ward off evil. Perhaps this was the purpose of all necklaces. The chains called ‘jewels (*dumāqū*) of the kings’ had the same purpose.<sup>210</sup> Inventories from Mari describe in detail the items used for this sort of jewellery.

#### 1.4.4.7 Diadems

The metal diadems which ladies of distinction sometimes wore on their heads were called ‘cities’ (Figure 4).<sup>211</sup> They represented the city wall with its crenellations. We know of one which belonged to an Old Akkadian lady of the court and of others belonging to two Assyrian queens. They will be mentioned later when describing court life in Ugarit and Assyria. This metaphor of a ‘city’ occurs in the Mishnah when prohibiting a woman from wearing a ‘city of gold’ on the Sabbath (Sabbat VI.I).<sup>212</sup> This arises from the time when the *pürgos* was associated with the heathen Syrian goddess Atargatis.<sup>213</sup>

#### 1.4.4.8 Gifts

A man could give his wife a gift of jewellery on any occasion he wished. When the wife of King Šu-Sin bore him a child, both of them burst forth in cheerful antipho-

**208** See, e. g., the catalogue *Sumer-Assur-Babylon* (Hildesheim 1978) nos. 71–78, 90, 92–94.

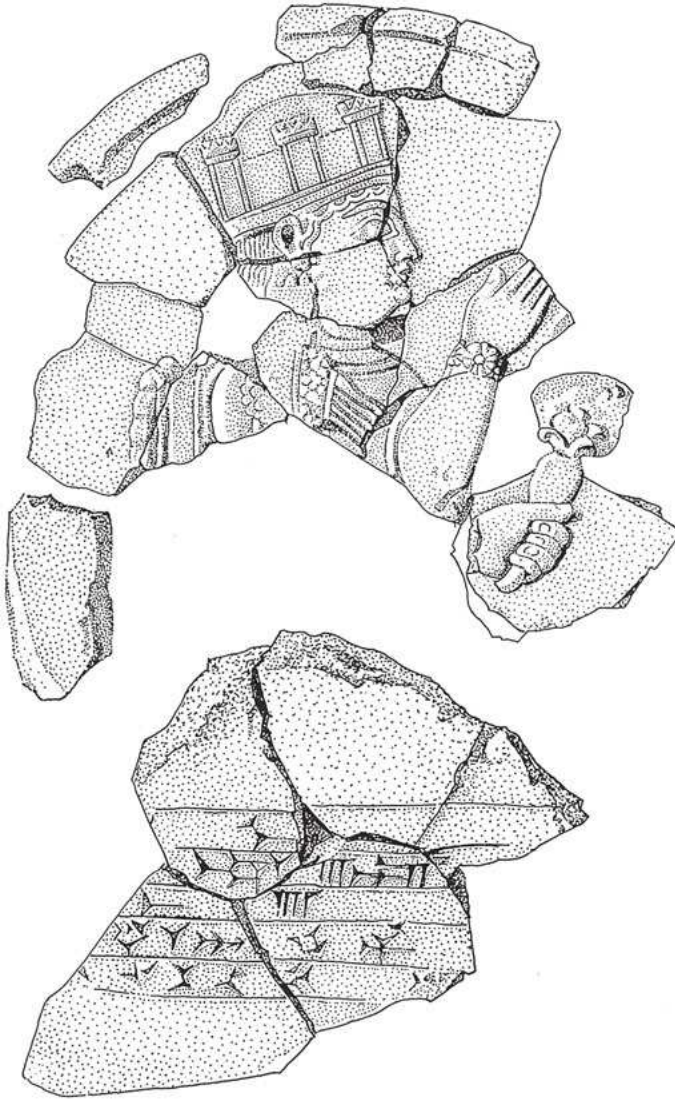
**209** K. R. Maxwell-Hyslop, *Jewellery* (1971); Klaudia Limper, *Uruk. Perlen. Ketten. Anhänger* (1988). Illustrations in colour: *Das Vorderasiatische Museum* (1992) nos. 17 en 22 (Uruk; simple), 72 (Babylon), 96–98 (Assur, Gruft 45), 123 (Assur); the catalogue *Babylon. Wahrheit* (2008) p. 250, 315 (Babylon); L. Woolley, *Ur of the Chaldees*. Revised and updated by P. R. S. Moorey (1982) 172 (Ur, tomb of Pu-abi); *Sumer-Assur-Babylon* (Hildesheim 1978) nos. 71, 74.

**210** Cf. U. Magen, *Assyrische Königsdarstellungen* (1986) 54 f.

**211** P. Calmeyer, ‘Mauerkrone’, *RIA VII/7–8* (1990) 595 f.; J. Börker-Klähn, ‘Mauerkronenträgerinnen’, in: *Assyrien im Wandel der Zeiten* (1997) 227–234, Tafel 12–16 (she found parallels among the Hittites); *SAA VI* (1991) p. 70 (on a tile); M. Stol, *Studies R. D. Biggs* (2007) 233, *ālum* ‘city’. Old Akkadian: Börker-Klähn, p. 229 (Aman-Eštar). For a photo of Queen Aššur-šarrat (= Libbāli-šarrat) of Ashurbanipal with this crown see P. Bienkowski, A. Millard, *Dictionary of the Ancient Near East* (2000) 237. See Figure 4.

**212** S. M. Paul, ‘Jerusalem – city of gold’, *IEJ* 17 (1967) 259–263.

**213** J. L. Lightfoot, *Lucian, On the Syrian Goddess* (2003) 22–26.



**Fig. 4:** Assyrian queens wore a crown shaped like a crenellated city wall, a style of diadem later worn by Aramaean goddesses. Here Libbali-šarrat, the spouse of King Ashurbanipal, as portrayed on her stela from the royal city of Assur, is wearing one. Ca. 650 BC. Limestone. Height 56 cm. *Vorderasiatisches Museum, Berlin.*

nal singing. She thanked him for his presents of a golden pin, a seal of lapis lazuli (lazurite), a golden ring and a silver ring.<sup>214</sup> There are indications that the gold pin was attached to the seal as a single item.<sup>215</sup> W. W. Hallo interpreted the golden pin (Sumerian *bulug*) as ‘a characteristic part of the marriage gift’. Agate stones from a necklace were found at Uruk with inscriptions stating that King Šu-Sîn had given them as presents to Ti’amat-bašti and Kubatum, his concubines (*lukur*).<sup>216</sup>

#### 1.4.4.9 Jewellery of princesses

Queens and other rich women loved necklaces with lapis lazuli beads and requested them as presents.<sup>217</sup> Of course any princess would have received a large store of jewels, as we know from the summaries of the contents of a dowry which a princess brought with her to Ebla.<sup>218</sup> In Mari the term *nidittu*, ‘gift’ was used,<sup>219</sup> and the jewels found included gold medallions, strings of pearls with gold fasteners, rings, vases and pins. The word for pearls meant literally ‘little kidneys’ and the word for ‘coriander seed’ was used for small gold beads. A short summary of the jewels (*šukuttu*) of the harem-dweller Beltani lists

1 necklace of little kidneys of *papardillû* stone, having 12 little kidneys of *papardillû* stone; 13 scorpions’ tails with a golden opening; 1 necklace with cylinder seals with 6 seals; 7 cylinder seals with a golden opening; 1 ... of gold; 1 golden medallion; 6 ...- and finger-rings of gold; 6 arm rings ... of gold; 2 pins of gold; 4 ... – and foot-rings of silver.<sup>220</sup>

There is a long list of gifts which the king of Mitanni sent to the Pharaoh of Egypt (see Chapter 24).<sup>221</sup> Then there are the special jewels worn by goddesses, listed on

**214** SRT 23:11–12 with B. Alster, ‘Sumerian love songs’, RA 79 (1985) 140 f.; Th. Jacobsen, *The harps that once* (1987) 95; *Essays M. H. Pope* (1987) 58–60.

**215** W. W. Hallo in: L. Gorelick, E. Williams-Forte, *Ancient Seals and the Bible* (1983) 11. Cf. SRT 31:31 f. (as metaphor), with Alster, 146 (kešda), Jacobsen, 98 resp. 61 (dim ‘pillar’); Y. Sefati, *Bar-Ilan studies in Assyriology* (1990) 52 (not bulug, but dim ‘figurine’).

**216** IRSA 156, III 4m-n; E. Braun-Holzinger, *Mesopotamische Weihgaben* (1991) 368 P 16–17.

**217** S. Dalley, *Mari and Karana* (1984) 106–108.

**218** P. Fronzaroli, *Mélanges H. Limet* (1996) 51–68, attempts to identify the objects.

**219** Notably in ARM 21 219 and ARMT 22 322, summarized by B. Lafont in Durand, *La Femme* (1987) 118 f. Also D. Charpin, ‘La dot de la princesse mariote Inbatum’, in: *Muhibbe Darga armağan* (2008) 159–172 (the objects in ARM 9 20 and ARMT 31 27). Cf. the discussion ‘La joaillerie’, by J.-M. Durand, ARMT 21 (1983) 222–242; see further his article about a medallion in MARI 6 (1990) 125–158.

**220** ARMT 25 353.

**221** A. H. Podany, *Brotherhood of kings* (2010) 222–224.



temple inventories.<sup>222</sup> We now know that a number of pearl necklaces that have been found were in fact votive offerings to Ištar,<sup>223</sup> who had a particular pearl (*erimmatu*) as her symbol.<sup>224</sup>

#### 1.4.4.10 Archaeological finds

More light is shed on these and other items of finery with which a woman liked to adorn herself from the study of iconography and the results of archaeological excavations. Finds from graves are particularly important. One of the most important is the grave of Queen Pu-abi, dated to around 2600 BC. This is one of the royal graves of Ur, famous for the beautiful treasures found there, and notorious for the presence of human sacrifices.<sup>225</sup> The skeletons of Pu-abi and a servant have been found. What is interesting for our purposes is the jewellery interred with Pu-abi.<sup>226</sup> On her head was a head-band with golden leaves and rings, and she also had necklaces,<sup>227</sup> and a lazurite seal.<sup>228</sup> The remains of five men and sixty-eight women were found in what has been called the Great Death Pit. The women had been buried, still adorned with gold, silver, lapis lazuli and cornelian. We will refer to these royal burials again in Chapter 23, concerning the court and the harem.

Excavations at Assur for the Middle Assyrian period revealed a burial chamber under a house in the immediate vicinity of the temple of Ištar. Above the grave was the archive room of the high official Babu-aḥa-iddina and his wife.<sup>229</sup> He maintained international contacts and we have the draft of a letter to him written by the king of the Hittites. The last two bodies to be placed in the chamber were one that was definitely female and another that was possibly female.<sup>230</sup> The bones of the woman are surrounded by many jewels as well as utensils, including

**222** W. F. Leemans, *Ishtar of Lagaba and her dress* (1952).

**223** *Das Vorderasiatische Museum* (1992) 63 no. 17 (2800 BC).

**224** Cf. H. Klein, *ZA* 73 (1983) 277, and particularly 'The Descent of Inanna'; *TUAT* III/3 (1993) 463:20 (Sumerian).

**225** L. Woolley, *Ur of the Chaldees*. Revised and updated by P. R. S. Moorey (1982) 64–78 (grave RT 800). *Sumerian art illustrated by objects from Ur and Al-'Ubaid* (The British Museum, 1969) 14–18.

**226** Woolley, 75, 77.

**227** *Sumerian Art*, 19 (Plates Ic, VIII, IXb); Woolley, 172. Grave RT 1237.

**228** M. Roaf, *A cultural atlas of Mesopotamia and the Ancient Near East* (1966) 84 f.

**229** O. Pedersén, 'Gräber und Archive in mesopotamischen Wohnhäusern – besonders Gruft 45 in Assur und Archiv des Babu-aḥa-iddina', in: *Von Uruk nach Tuttul. Festschrift für Eva Strommenger* (1992) 163–169. See also J. N. Postgate, *CRRAI* 30 [Leiden] (1986) 176.

**230** H. Müller-Karpe, 'Assur, Gruft 45 (Assyrien)', in: *Frauen des 13. Jahrhunderts v. Chr.* (1985) 71–89, with illustrations and a colour photo on Tafel 9–10, after p. 96. See also the illustrations in

combs and alabaster vases.<sup>231</sup> Some of these will have been imported for they have Egyptian motifs. A comb and an ivory vase have engravings which fit the international style of the time. A merchant was buried in Grave 20, where strings of beads were found. This grave dates back to the earlier Old Assyrian period.<sup>232</sup>

The ancient Assyrian capital Calah (modern Nimrud), dating back to the eighth century BC, was the focus of British excavations in the 1950s. But in the 1980s Iraqi excavators discovered the graves of queens containing 157 objects, including a crown, a diadem, a pair of anklets, several arm rings, necklaces and 79 golden earrings.<sup>233</sup> What was very striking was the golden headdress, in the form of a palm tree with short hanging cords, each of which terminates in a golden pomegranate. It will be described further in Chapter 24.

From a grave in Babylon came a golden armband, a simple gold earring, three vases and a beautiful necklace with semi-precious stones in many colours, alternately large and small, with eight golden pearls.<sup>234</sup> A particularly interesting item is a mould used for making items of jewellery to a standard pattern, such as rings and pins (Figure 5). Many such moulds have been found into which molten precious metal was poured for items of a particular size.<sup>235</sup>

---

*Das Vorderasiatische Museum* (1992) 152–158 nos. 94–100; R.-B. Wartke, 'Die Backsteingruft 45 in Assur', *MDOG* 124 (1992) 97–130.

**231** W. Nagel, 'Mittelassyrischer Schmuck aus der Gruft 45 in Assur', *Acta Praehistorica et Archaeologica* 3 (1972) 43–55; R.-B. Wartke, 'Les objets de parure de la tombe no. 45 à Assur', in: A. Caubet, *Cornaline et pierres précieuses* (1999) 317–340.

**232** J. Aruz in: P. O. Harper, *Discoveries at Ashur on the Tigris* (1995) 44–62 (Grave 20), 80–97 (Grave 45); M. H. Feldman, *BASOR* 343 (2006) 21–43 (Grave 45).

**233** M. S. Damerji, 'The second treasure of Nimrud', in: *Near Eastern Studies dedicated to H. I. H. Prince Takahito Mikasa in the occasion of his seventy-fifth birthday* (1991) 9–16; M. S. Damerji, *Gräber Assyrischer Königinnen aus Nimrud* (1999).

**234** *Das Vorderasiatische Museum* (1992) 133 no. 72.

**235** Examples: *Das Vorderasiatische Museum* (1992) 145 no. 86 = W. Orthmann, *Der Alte Orient* (1975) plate 123, a; J. E. Curtis, J. E. Reade, *Art and Empire* (1995) 175 no. 178. Cf. R.-B. Wartke, 'Vorderasiatische Gussformen aus den Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin', *Forschungen und Berichte* 20–21 (Berlin 1980) 223–258; S. Eichler, *Tall al-Hamidiya* 2 (1990) 303 Abb. 85; 231 with Plate 14 (after p. 232) (Tell Brak); H. Klein, *ZA* 73 (1983) 263.



**Fig. 5:** Moulds for making needles, and a fish, a bird and a sheep as pendants, and a rosette. Assur. Limestone. Height 7 cm. *Vorderasiatisches Museum, Berlin*.

## 1.5 Cosmetics and beauty

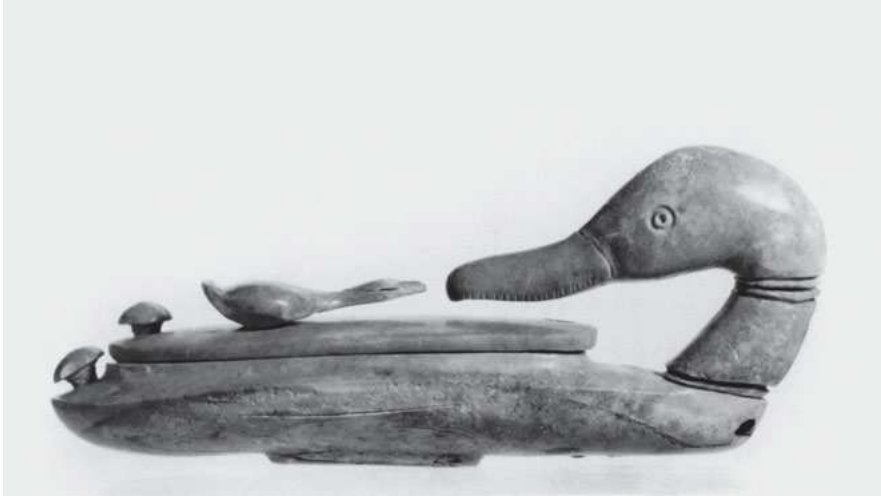
The cosmetics a woman used for her make-up was as important as her jewellery to accentuate her beauty.<sup>236</sup> The goddess of love, Inanna or Ištar, wore something called ‘Man, come, come!’,<sup>237</sup> which referred both to an item of jewellery on her breast and the application of *kohl* to blacken her eyelids. In the Sumerian song cycle about her and her friend, the shepherd called Dumuzi or Tammuz, we are given the sequence in which she applied her make-up.<sup>238</sup> She washed herself, scrubbed herself with soap, anointed herself with good oil, put on her royal attire, applied *kohl* to her eyelids, tied up her hair, put a golden ring on her hand, and fastened on a string of lapis lazuli beads around her neck. There is nothing unusual about all this. For blackening the eyelids *kohl* was used. In that period it would have been made from lead, and it was applied with a little spatula (Figure 7).<sup>239</sup>

<sup>236</sup> U. Winter, *Frau und Göttin* (1983) 305 f.

<sup>237</sup> Winter, 309, who refers to C. Wilcke, *RIA* V/1–2 (1976) 81b; see the Sumerian text ‘Descent of Inanna to the Netherworld’, *JCS* 5 (1951) 2:23.

<sup>238</sup> SRT 5:3–18, Y. Sefati, *Love songs in Sumerian literature* (1998) 135 f. Similar is K. Volk, *Die Balag-Komposition Ūru àm-ma-ir-ra-bi* (1989) 92 Tafel 19:64–72.

<sup>239</sup> N. Wasserman, ‘Piercing the eyes. An Old Babylonian love incantation and the preparation



**Fig. 6:** In Western Asia they kept ointments and cosmetics in containers shaped like a backwards looking duck, in Egyptian style. They are made of ivory. Sometimes the duck has one or two young on its back. In Babylonia such ducks were used as weight stones. Kamil el Loz, Lebanon. Length 16,1 cm. *Institut für Vor- und Frühgeschichte und Vorderasiatische Archäologie, Saarbrücken.*

People thought then (in Kuwait some still think) that it helps you to see more clearly.<sup>240</sup> For decorating the face a substance usually translated as ‘amber’ was used.<sup>241</sup> Arab women still use henna to dye their hair, nails, fingers and toes an orange-yellow colour. But henna was unknown in Mesopotamia at that time. In Egypt it is not recorded until 180 BC, when it is referred to as *kofêr*, probably ‘ointment’, the word taken over into Greek as *kupros*.<sup>242</sup> In the Bible henna blossom is mentioned in love songs (Song of Solomon 1:14). The standard equipment given to a woman on her marriage included a bottle of costly oil (*šikkatu*). The ‘vanity sets’

of kohl’, *BiOr* 72 (2015) 601–612. Photo of a spatula with explanation: M. Stol, *Phoenix* 31 (1985) 55. See also the catalogue *Babylon. Wahrheit* (2008) 313 Kat. 307 Abb. 229.

<sup>240</sup> M. Stol, *Mélanges A. Finet* (1989) 165 f. Cf. E. Cassin, art. ‘Kosmetik’, in *RIA* VI/3–4 (1981) 214–218.

<sup>241</sup> Cassin, 217 f.

<sup>242</sup> L. Renaut, ‘Recherches sur le henné antique’, *JNES* 68 (2009) 193 ff.; *Journal des médecines cunéiformes* 10 (2007) 47 f. (contra J. Scurlock). The Ugaritic word *kpr* in *KTU* 1.3 II 1–3 (Ba’al en ’Anat) has been identified as henna by J. C. de Moor, *UF* 17 (1986) 220 f., contradicting *Textes ougaritiques* I (1974) 157.



**Fig. 7:** An ivory spoon, found in the Assyrian royal palace at Calah, used for applying *kohl*, a cosmetic for the eyes. There is a ‘hand’ at its tip. The Rabbinic tractate *Kelim* describes such a spoon as having a ‘hand’ and a ‘rod’ at either end. Length 13 cm.

from a boudoir which have been found include pots for ointment.<sup>243</sup> One of these from Ugarit was shaped like a duck rotating its head, and others like this have been found in the western periphery (Figure 6). The shape is Egyptian in style.<sup>244</sup> In Sumerian the word *hili* and in Akkadian the word *kuzbu* mean ‘sex appeal’. An important factor for a woman was to have a luxuriant head of hair. To attract the attention of King Šu-Sin of Ur a woman sang in Sumerian:

My hair is lettuce, well supplied with water, my hair is ..., well supplied with water, its locks are plaited together. The attendant has ... them high, she has done my hair in the gazelle style (?) ...<sup>245</sup>

The text then becomes technically more and more difficult to translate, but she must have looked splendid. In the royal graves in Ur Queen Pu-abī had golden leaves and branches on her head, possibly the ornament described as ‘orchard’ in Sumerian literary texts.<sup>246</sup> The chief butler of King Šulgi dedicated a stone ‘wig’ to a guardian deity, which was probably designed to be placed on her statue. In the inscription he called the object ‘the *hili* of her femininity’ (Figure 9).<sup>247</sup> The myth entitled ‘Enki and the World Order’ says at the beginning that the young woman has *hili* on her head (34). Some advice in a letter about a woman who was intending to flee included the suggestion, ‘Do change her clothing and her wig’,<sup>248</sup> but the advice was not followed, and she was recognized in the city square in Akkad

<sup>243</sup> A. Westenholz in: A. Archi, *Circulation of goods in non-palatial context* (1984) 27, referring to OIP 88 226 f. and n. 86; the photo in the catalogue *Sumer-Assur-Babylon* (Hildesheim 1978) no. 82, ‘Toilettenbesteck und Etui’ (Ur).

<sup>244</sup> Catalogue *In Syrië. Naar de oorsprong van het schrift* (Brussels, n. d.) 291 no. 431.

<sup>245</sup> Y. Sefati, *Love songs in Sumerian literature* (1998) 360–4; ANET, third edition (1969) 644. Totally different Th. Jacobsen, *The harps that once* (1987) 93 (pubic hair and sex).

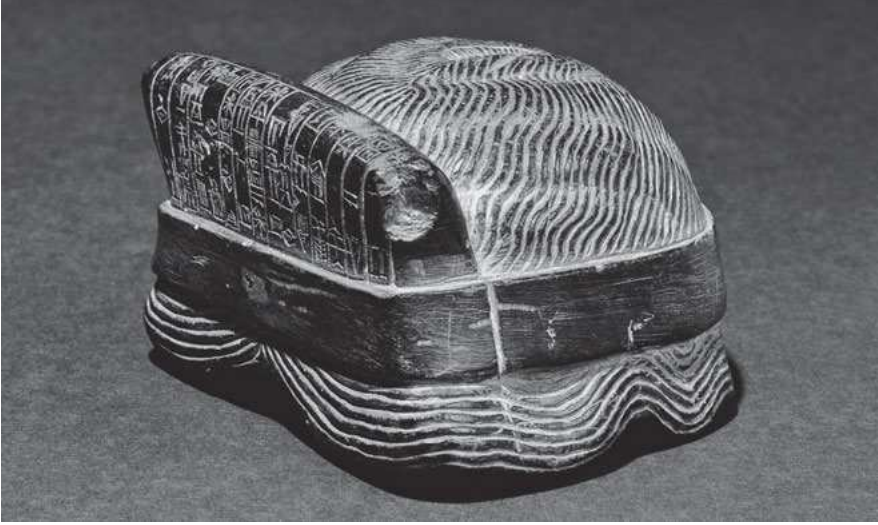
<sup>246</sup> J. van Dijk, HSAO (1967) 253 f.

<sup>247</sup> Šulgi, inscr. 29. Photo in Iraq 22 (1960) Plate XXII, b, with Wiseman, p. 168.

<sup>248</sup> *Florilegium Marianum* IX (2007) 282 no. 71:22–30.



**Fig. 8:** A wig from Ebla. Wigs were placed on life-sized statues of women. Dark green steatite. 2300 BC. Height 30.3 cm; width 23.8 cm. *Aleppo Museum.*



**Fig. 9:** Inscription on model of a wig: 'For the protective goddess (*lamassu*), his mistress, for the life of Šulgi, the mighty man, the king of Ur, Bau-ninam, the cupbearer of Ur-Ningirsu, the beloved priest, *en* of Nanše, has made the jewel for her womanhood.' Rear view. 2000 BC. Steatite. Dimensions 9 × 9 × 6 cm. *British Museum, London.*

and seized. Evidently each area had its own fashion. It was suggested that the Sumerians were bald-headed, and wore a wig to prevent lice. What is known is that the men participating in cult worship were bald,<sup>249</sup> but we do not know if they removed body hair, as the Romans and the Arabs did.

The ladies loved wigs. The goddess Inanna put on a wig when she was adorning herself.<sup>250</sup> Statues which have been excavated wear wigs of steatite, and they sometimes include an inscription (Figure 9).<sup>251</sup> A god could wish for a certain sort

**249** Th. Jacobsen in: M. Mindlin, *Figurative Language in the Ancient Near East* (1987) 3. We do not know whether epilation was practised, though a commentary seems to refer to it (*suhatu gullub*). Epilation was one of the five pre-Islamic institutions accepted as belonging to the 'natural religion' (*fitra*) of Islam; see J. Wellhausen, *Reste arabischen Heidentums* (1927) 167, 'Die Beschneidung, das Scheren der Pubes, das Auszupfen der Achselhaare, das Schneiden der Nägel, und das Stutzen des Schnurrbarts'. The Romans viewed epilation of men and women as a token of civilisation; cf. Juvenal VI 10 (originally man was *horridior*).

**250** 'The Descent of Inanna to the Netherworld', 18; see TUAT III/3 (1993) 462, with note.

**251** M. Stol, 'Perücke', *RIA X/5–6* (2004) 435. Photos of wigs made of stone: E. A. Braun-Holzinger, *Mesopotamische Weihgaben* (1991) 373f., with Tafel 24 = P. Bienkowski, A. Millard, *Dictionary of the Ancient Near East* (2000) 137, 'Hair dressing'; S. N. Kramer, *Le mariage sacré à Sumer et à Babylone* (1983) 116. In texts: A. R. George, *Babylonian Topographical Texts* (1992) 412f.

of wig (*pursāsu*) as a votive offering.<sup>252</sup> A woman's hair was evidently thought to be an attractive feature,<sup>253</sup> with which many would still agree. The apostle Paul was aware of this when he warned

Therefore a woman must have the sign of her authority on her head, out of regard for the angels (1 Corinthians 11:10).

It is the Greek word *exousia* that is translated here as 'sign of authority'. In the KJV we find a more literal translation 'power', but what Paul really meant by the word no-one really knows. An Assyrian curse directed towards attractive features of young women and men specifies,

The locks of your young women, the ... of your young men, may the dogs and swine drag around in the city square of Assur under your very eyes.<sup>254</sup>

The word for 'locks' (*sissu*) is unique here and is cognate with the Hebrew word *šīṣit*, 'lock of hair'. The wars of the kings of Mari often involved plundering and pillaging, and one letter gives particular instructions for women to be stripped of 'what is on their heads' as well as of their clothes, silver and gold.<sup>255</sup>

When we pose the more general question of what made a woman beautiful in the Mesopotamia mind we must pay heed to lyrical expressions of feeling. In general these were rather vague.<sup>256</sup> The adulation of women in Sumerian literary art involved a preference for two sets of images. The first set derived from horticulture and included garden produce: fruit, such as the apple, and the lettuce, which we mentioned earlier. We do not know what associations these images were meant to evoke, but according to W. G. Lambert in his study of these metaphors the underlying idea seems to be 'the luscious, natural attractiveness of fruit'.<sup>257</sup> Th. Jacobsen thinks that salad leaves and spring grass symbolize pubic hair, and so he produces rather candid translations of Sumerian love songs.<sup>258</sup> It is cer-

252 RA 61 (1967) 23:4 with D. O. Edzard, *Annäherungen* 4 (OBO 160/4) (2004) 546.

253 In general see J. Börker-Klähn, art. 'Haartracht', in RIA IV/1 (1972) 1–12; cf. R. Boehmer, ZA 79 (1989) 278–283.

254 K. Watanabe, Baghd. Mitt. 3 (1987) 166 f., VTE 481–483; see a further explanation by K. Deller, Or. NS 53 (1984) 83.

255 ARM 1 8:31–33 with N. Ziegler, *Florilegium Marianum* IX (2007) 285.

256 J. Bottéro in: P. Grimal, *Histoire mondiale de la femme* I (1965) 168.

257 W. G. Lambert in: M. Mindlin, *Figurative Language* (1987) 27–31, in his article 'Devotion: the languages of religion and love'.

258 Th. Jacobsen, *The harps that once* (1987) 93 f.; cf. his *The treasures of darkness* (1976) 45, bottom. Pubic hair can be taken as a sign that a girl was marriageable, see Jacobsen in H. Goedicke, J. J. M. Roberts, *Unity and Diversity* (1975) 83.



tainly the case that songs like this focus on particularly outstanding characteristics of the genitals without inhibition, even though this may strike some modern readers as rather coarse. It should be carefully noted that we hear nothing about breasts, buttocks or other curves of the body such as the neck. Nevertheless, a scholar from Rome thought he was able to detect an allusion to the décolleté in the Sumerian expression ‘her broad throat’.<sup>259</sup>

The second set of sexual images involves precious stones. They symbolise the woman as a perfect gem, for she would always be seen wearing precious stones to accentuate her beauty.<sup>260</sup> The most important gem was the *šuba*, which was threaded on to a chain. Joan Westenholz derives two meanings from these precious stones. In reality they are beautiful, because the bride is decked out in them, and metaphorically, because the *šuba* symbolizes fertility and sexuality. All in all many readers will have some difficulty appreciating the full aesthetic force of these eulogies.

As already stated much attention is paid to the sexual organs, especially in poetic entreaties designed to arouse love. Consistently recommended for attention is ‘my urine genital’,<sup>261</sup> and the female ‘vessel’ gives rise to some rich terminology in the ancient Sumerian-Babylonian dictionaries. Lexemes there are arranged according to semantic fields, synonyms and parts.<sup>262</sup> A Babylonian commentary explaining the word *hurdatu* states,

*hurdatu*: the pudenda of a woman, as in ‘Stretch out your hand and stir our *hurdatu*’.

The sentence cited comes from the Gilgamesh Epic, where Ištar invites the hero to approach her (Gilgamesh Epic VI 69), so the citation is deemed to be enlightening here. The commentary goes on to reach the expression *hurri dādu*, ‘the hole for the sweetheart’:

<sup>259</sup> J. van Dijk, HSAO (1967) 253.

<sup>260</sup> J. G. Westenholz, ‘Metaphorical language in the poetry of love in the Ancient Near East’, CRRAI 38 [Paris] (1992) 381–387. In earlier scholarship a verb which was thought to mean ‘to plough’ was seen as a crucial, blunt description of sexual union. We now know that that verb means ‘to string’ or ‘to thread’ beads.

<sup>261</sup> MAD 5 8:15f. with J. and A. Westenholz, Or. NS 46 (1977) 203; C. Wilcke, ZA 75 (1985) 198:19. H. Hirsch, AfO 42–43 (1995–96) 139f., examined the occurrences of pubic hair and bodily fluids in love songs and love charms.

<sup>262</sup> J. S. Cooper, CRRAI 47/I (2002) 106, Excursus A; M. Civil, *Studies E. V. Leichty* (2006) 58; J. G. Westenholz, *Nippur at the centennial* (1992) 301 (n. 12). J. S. Cooper traces the hymen in CRRAI 47/II (2002) 99f., 106.

Secondly: my *hurdatu* = my thick head of hair; thirdly: my *hurdatu* = the hole for the sweet-heart.<sup>263</sup>

The female organ is also celebrated in songs. In Sumerian hymns Inanna boasts that hers is ‘like the sickle of the new moon, full of sex appeal’.<sup>264</sup>

In some temple inventories a ‘golden pubic triangle’ is listed, and such objects have actually been found in the temple of Ištar at Assur.<sup>265</sup> As well as objects resembling pudenda archaeologists have found penis models.<sup>266</sup> Shells are also a symbol for female genitals.<sup>267</sup> The pubic triangle is modelled in clay, and was the original cuneiform logogram for ‘woman’.<sup>268</sup> Rituals for the cult of Inanna-Ištar occasionally refer to the object:

I am giving you the pubic triangle of lapis lazuli, the star of gold, attributes of your divinity.<sup>269</sup>

From Assur we have an object made of lead, an inverted triangle representing the female genitals, on which there is a votive inscription. The object dates from around 1850 BC, is 17 cm high, and was found at the temple of the goddess.<sup>270</sup> The inscription reads:

When Sargon was ruler of Assur, Ḫattitum, the wife of Enna-Dagan, dedicated (this) to the Ištar of Assur. For the life of her husband, for her (own) life and for the life of her child(ren) she brought in the *téš*.

This means that she brought it into the temple. It would seem that the *téš* denotes the votive offering. The Akkadian word *bāštu* corresponding to the Sumerian *téš*

**263** M. Civil, JNES 33 (1974) 332:40–42; TUAT NF 5 (2009) 176. Cf. ‘the pleasure of my wife’ among parts of the lower belly; CUSAS 12 (2010) 157, 10:1.

**264** K. Volk, *Inanna und Šukaletuda* (1995) 186.

**265** SLB I (1) 1:2, 26 (= TLB 1 69); more in RIA IX/1–2 (1998) 49 § 5, ‘Votives’.

**266** J. Black, A. Green, *Gods, demons and symbols of ancient Mesopotamia* (1992) 152, on the right (drawing); K. Oberhuber, *Die Kunst des alten Orients* (1972) 94 Abb. 79 (photos). In the catalogue *Babylon. Wahrheit* (2008) 317 f., Abb. 237, Kat. 327, ‘Sechs Anhänger in Form männlicher und weiblicher Genitalien’. ‘Bei magischen Handlungen zur Erlangung der Potenz’. Discussion: F. A. M. Wiggermann, ‘Nackte Göttin. A’, RIA IX/1–2 (1998) 46 f., 49 § 5, ‘Votives’.

**267** R. Pientka, CRRAI 47/II (2002) 509 f., ‘Muschel und Vulva’.

**268** K. van der Toorn, BiOr 43 (1986) 499, ‘pubic triangles and related representations’ (also in the texts); F.A.M. Wiggermann, RIA IX/1–2 (1998) 49b (cancel BAM 3 203:9); J.-J. Glassner, *Écrire à Sumer. L’invention du cunéiforme* (2000) 218. In Syria: U. Winter, *Frau und Göttin* (1983) 309, Abb. 322–324.

**269** W. Farber, BID (1977) 130:6. Cf. 128:8, with p. 157 f.

**270** J. Jakob-Rost, H. Freydank, AOF 8 (1981) 325–357, with Tafel XXIII–XXV; K. Deller, OrAnt 22 (1983) 13–15; TUAT II/4 (1988) 497.



**Fig. 10:** The 'Lady of Uruk'. On this hollow stone mask the groove on the skull suggests a wig. The eyes and the eyebrows would have been inlaid with coloured material. It is amazing that this work of art could have been made before 3000 BC. Marble. Height 21 cm. *Iraq Museum, Baghdad.*

is often translated as 'dignity' and is used of both men and women. It is also translated as 'pleasure' or 'vitality'.<sup>271</sup> F. A. M. Wiggermann thinks that it should here be understood as *pars pro toto* to describe a naked woman.<sup>272</sup> Whichever explanation is preferred, the pubic triangle, indicated by Sumerian *téš* and Akkadian *bāštu*, here characterises the giver as a woman. The reason for this dedication is not known. It is clear from the familial context that all the models of genitalia which were found do not necessarily indicate wild sexual extravagances. The art of the period includes many clay figurines of naked women which gives the impression that these naked women emphasised some exotic aura. Perhaps a goddess is being referred to.<sup>273</sup> This is a subject to which we shall return in Chapter 21. By contrast, the beautiful head of a woman from the earliest period, a mask from Uruk in 3000 BC, is sober and respectable (Figure 10).<sup>274</sup>

<sup>271</sup> F. A. M. Wiggermann, 'Nackte Göttin', *RIA IX/1-2* (1998) 46 f., §2.

<sup>272</sup> In K. van der Toorn, *BiOr* 43 (1986) 496 f.; *JEOL* 29 (1985-86) 28 f. (with drawings); *RIA IX/1-2* (1998) 46 f.

<sup>273</sup> Thus U. Winter, *Frau und Göttin* (1983), with the review by K. van der Toorn, *BiOr* 43 (1986) 493-499. In general: F. A. M. Wiggermann and C. Uehlinger, 'Nackte Göttin', *RIA IX/1-2* (1998) 46-64.

<sup>274</sup> M. Roaf, *A cultural atlas of Mesopotamia and the Ancient Near East* (1966) 6.

## 1.6 The language of women

Hearing a woman from the lowlands of the Tigris and the Euphrates speaking may have caused some surprise. Certain Sumerian women spoke their own special dialect, called by the Sumerians Emesal. The term is often translated ‘women’s language’ but it means literally ‘thin (or fine) language’.<sup>275</sup> This language occurs exclusively in literary texts usually when women are speaking, and in proverbial anecdotes which are probably intended to be pithy expressions. An exchange of abuse between two women in Emesal verges on the style of such anecdotes. We will return to this in the last chapter 32 of this book, on how women were esteemed.<sup>276</sup> Furthermore, this was the language used by the men known as *gala* who were assigned to duties in the cult. They performed at funerals and as lamentation singers in the temples. Some think they may have been eunuchs.<sup>277</sup> Ritual laments in Emesal were sung in temples right up to the Greek period.<sup>278</sup> In the Middle Babylonian period the need was felt to compile a small dictionary of Emesal. It was a time when they wanted to make creative use of Sumerian, which by then had become a dead language, long since fallen into disuse. This ‘dictionary’ is formatted in three columns, one for Emesal, another for standard Sumerian, and another for Akkadian translations. It begins with a list of names of gods.

Assyriologists often doubt that Emesal should really be identified as a language used by women, and prefer to see in it a ‘refined language’ with distinctive pronunciation. As such it would be comparable to the Dutch dialect of The Hague as spoken in Wassenaar or ‘Oxford English’.<sup>279</sup> It has been suggested that the language might have had a characteristically raised speaking tone.<sup>280</sup> Rather Emesal should be seen as the dialect of a certain group of society, a ‘sociolect’, not a separate language. Social groups who distinguish themselves by an exclusive pronunciation can then exist as independent, isolated entities within a community.<sup>281</sup> Most recent studies prefer to describe Emesal as a ‘genderlect’.<sup>282</sup> But

---

**275** M. K. Schretter, *Emesal-Studien* (1990); W. H. Ph. Römer in: *Liber Amicorum A. Weijnen* (1980) 290–302; Y. Sefati, *Love songs in Sumerian literature* (1998) 53–55, with G. Rubio, *JAOS* 121 (2001) 269–271.

**276** Schretter, 74–76.

**277** Contra: G. Rubio, *JAOS* 121 (2001) 270.

**278** Schretter, 92 ff.

**279** Schretter, 6.

**280** D. Shehata, *Musiker und ihr vokales Repertoire* (2009) 83–85, 88, writing about the lamentation singers (*gala*).

**281** After N. S. Trubetzkoy, followed by Schretter, 119, 122, 140.

**282** G. Whittaker, ‘Linguistic anthropology and the study of Emesal as (a) women’s language’, *CRRAI* 47/II (2002) 633–644.

this would indicate that women lived relatively separate lives, and there is no evidence for this in ancient Sumer.<sup>283</sup> It is clearly a literary dialect, so we can assume that in daily life Sumerian women spoke standard Sumerian. A parallel situation has been pointed out in classical Indian drama, where men spoke Sanskrit and women and people of lower castes spoke Prakrit.<sup>284</sup> To take this further, we should be aware that we do not know where the Sumerian language itself originated. Perhaps we should look more closely towards India, because that was the home of Dravidians, bound by caste and sociolect.<sup>285</sup> We also note that among a number of other peoples, for example in Siberia and South America, women's languages are attested.<sup>286</sup>

A few Sumerian words can be quoted to illustrate briefly how sound changes in Emesal applied to vowels and consonants. The vowels *e* and the *i* of the standard language were readily replaced with *a*, and the consonant *m* was replaced with *ng*. Examples of Emesal words compared to those in standard Sumerian are *ħaz* = *ħiz* 'lettuce'; *eneng* = *inim* 'word'; *zeng* = *sum* 'to give'. Emesal *m* corresponds to standard *ng*: *mal* = *ngal*, 'to be'; *dimmer* = *dingir*, 'god'. Some words occur only in Emesal (the standard Sumerian equivalent is a different word): *mula* 'man, person' (= *lu*); *gašan* 'mistress' (= *nin*); *mudna* 'husband' (= *nitadam*). Perhaps these standard words were taboo for the woman.<sup>287</sup> For Akkadian, a Semitic language, there was no such special dialect. However, we do have one very emotional letter, composed in shorter than normal sentences, from a woman who often added *-i* to her words. Perhaps this was the effect of her excitement, and the words she dictated were written just as she said them by a professional scribe.<sup>288</sup>

---

**283** Despite Schretter, 122f.

**284** Pointed out by F. Hommel and A. Falkenstein. See Schretter, 5, 105. For a useful parallel see G. Whittaker, CRRAI 47/II (2002) 638 f.

**285** M. C. Shapiro, H. F. Schiffman, 'Social dialectology', in their *Language and Society in South Asia* (1983) 150–176.

**286** Schretter, 107–115. See also Paula Weideger, *History's mistress* (1985) 49–52 (summarizing H. Ploss, *Das Weib*); Susanne Günthner, Helga Kotthoff, *Von fremden Stimmen* (Suhrkamp Verlag).

**287** Cf. I. Keckskeméti, *Die Frauensprache als Tabu im Oirotischen?* (= *Studia Orientalia* 43/8) (1973).

**288** AbB 10 4 with F. R. Kraus (he studied this *i*) in *Symbolae F. M. Th. de Liagre Böhl* (1973) 253–265; on our letter p. 265.

## 1.7 Women's names

Whether in Sumerian or Babylonian, a person's name often embodied a good relationship with a deity. With Sumerian names it is mostly impossible to distinguish men's from women's names. Typical elements of Sumerian women's names are *geme* 'slave-girl' (the woman is called the 'slave' of a god), *nin* 'mistress', *hili* 'sex appeal'.<sup>289</sup> Sumerian names are also not very expressive.

The vast majority of Sumerian names are 'objective' in the sense that for the most part they express a fact or an idea of general significance without referring to a particular subject.<sup>290</sup>

Babylonian women's names can be easily distinguished from men's.<sup>291</sup> One pattern for a female name has the name of a goddess followed by some beneficial status, such as she is my mother, or my protector, or my happiness.<sup>292</sup> At school boys practised writing the names of people and women's names were treated separately.<sup>293</sup> Women's names often contained the name of a female goddess and a feminine verbal form (which was actually incorrect grammatically) indicated a female name,<sup>294</sup> as did elements such as 'sister' and 'slave-girl'. It is said that in the Kassite period the names of women suddenly became more pious in content, and perhaps the women themselves did too. A few names were formulated as prayers.<sup>295</sup> A pattern of thought which fits in with an old theory is that in this period people had a greater awareness of sin. But that was just as strong in the earlier period.

The names of women reflecting their social class need special mention. Princesses and ladies of the court had names with a political message, such as 'The country is glad' (Tariš-matum), 'Bow down, O land' (Kunši-matum), 'The sceptre endures' (Tabur-ḫaṭṭum), 'The sceptre is firm' (Takun-ḫaṭṭum).<sup>296</sup> The king of Mari received a message from the harem of his daughter with the following oracle about the baby of a concubine:

<sup>289</sup> Cf. D. A. Foxvog, *Studies Anne Draffkorn Kilmer* (2011) 61–63, 93f.

<sup>290</sup> H. Limet, *L'anthroponymie sumérienne* (1968) 62.

<sup>291</sup> J. J. Stamm, *Die akkadische Namengebung* (1939) 122–126; M. Stol, *SEL* 8 (1991) 207–209. Names of (female) slaves: M. Stol, 'Sklave. Altbabylonisch' § 3; in *RIA* XII/7–8 (2011) 565.

<sup>292</sup> I. Nakata, 'A study of women's theophoric personal names in the Old Babylonian texts from Mari', *Orient* 30–31 (1995) 234–253.

<sup>293</sup> P. Gesche, *Schulunterricht in Babylonien im ersten Jahrtausend v. Chr.* (2000) 97–102.

<sup>294</sup> D. O. Edzard, *ZA* 55 (1962) 113–130. The same is true for Ebla; see P. Fronzaroli, 'La formation des noms personnels féminins à Ebla', in: Durand, *La Femme* (1987) 63–73; esp. 68 (a).

<sup>295</sup> J. J. Stamm, 124, 161; see K. van der Toorn, *From her cradle to her grave* (1994) 23.

<sup>296</sup> P. Michalowski, *JAOS* 95 (1975) 717, 719; J.-M. Durand, *MARI* 3 (1984) 127–133.

Concerning the daughter of T.: In my dream there was a man standing and he said, 'The little one, the daughter of T., must be called Tagid-nawûm.'

The name she chose means 'The land of nomads has changed for the better', and the king would have been pleased with the suggestion made in the dream.<sup>297</sup> Nuns had pious names such as 'The wish of (the goddess) Aya' (Erišti-Aya). A slave girl was called 'I look to her eyes' (Anaṭṭal-iniša), expressing attentiveness to her mistress, and 'I wish her to be healthy' (Aššumiya-libluṭ), expressing goodwill. In a number of cases it is clear that names were not given at birth, but marked a change of status, such as when a woman became a slave.<sup>298</sup> Slave-girls served as nurses at the court of Mari and had names like 'May my father continue'. By giving the nurse such a name ensured that the little children in her care when addressing her all the time simultaneously pronounced a blessing for their father.<sup>299</sup> The name of one girl reflects some apparently pitiful circumstances. She was adopted by her father and mother, on the payment of a 'dowry' of five shekels, with the name Ali-abuša, 'Where is my father?'<sup>300</sup> She must have been an orphan, who came into the possession of a couple, and was then sold on in service.<sup>301</sup>

Some women's names refer to their husbands, such as 'My husband is my happiness (*bāštu*)', or 'She is important to her spouse'. It could be supposed that these were names they chose to use after a marriage had been concluded. Similarly a princess called 'She found the king of her heart' is unlikely to have had this name before her marriage.<sup>302</sup> There were very few names that could be given either to a man or to a woman, but one example is Sîn-nada, 'Sin is praised'.

**297** ARM 10 94 = AEM 1/1 480 no. 239 rev. 4–10 with J.-M. Durand, MARI 3 (1984) 127–9. Kunši-mā-tum = Sumerian Kur-gam.ma.bi; see P. Michalowski, *The correspondence of the kings of Ur* (2011) 339 f., cf. Kur-giṛ.ni.šè (Ur III).

**298** M. Stol, *Annäherungen* 4 (OBO 160/4) (2004) 910 n. 1961.

**299** N. Ziegler, *La Harem de Zimrî-Lîm* (1999) 109. In another context: D. Charpin, NABU 2003/2.

**300** CT 8 50a:3 (VAB 5 183). The name 'Where is her father?' (Ali-abuša) can be that of a posthumous child born from free persons; see Chapter 13, about the widow.

**301** BIN 7 173; F. R. Kraus, JCS 3 (1951) 113, did not realise this.

**302** J. J. Stamm, 273; the Old Akkadian princess Tuta-šar-libbiš.

## 2 Marriage

In the Near East, then and now, the most important event ever to happen to a girl was entering into a bond of marriage. Our survey of the life of the woman in Mesopotamia will have to give priority to this, for it was a life-changing event. We will see what customs were followed for the wedding and what status the married woman held in society. There almost all the girls were married.

We have had to scrape together information from diverse sources. There were law books and contracts dealing with marriages and divorces. There were also administrative documents with the expenses for a marriage. There were even love songs about the 'sacred marriage' of the king with the goddess of love. It is important to remember that these documents are to be dated over a period of at least 3000 years and come from a broad area of Mesopotamia and beyond. Many variations in time and place can be expected. The marriages of gods are a feature of Sumerian myths, but they make shamelessly direct approaches to each other, so what was true for them is not likely to have been usual in everyday life. It was a feature of mythological prehistory that everything was being tried out for the first time.<sup>1</sup>

Marriage is part of an ideal society. The king of Assyria received from a high official a lyrical report on the prosperous state of affairs in his kingdom:

The old dance, the young sing, women and girls are happy and merry, women marry and put on earrings, they bear sons and daughters and their births are easy.<sup>2</sup>

It was the destiny of women to marry and bear children. This was also the advice given to the dishevelled bachelor Gilgamesh by the barmaid Siduri:

Let your clothes be clean, your head washed. Bathe in water. Observe the little boy who takes your hand. Let your wife always delight in your lap. That is the des[tiny of mankind].<sup>3</sup>

A Sumerian blessing runs:

May Inanna let a wife with hot hips lie down with you. May she present you with sons with broad arms. May she search out a place of happiness for you (Sumerian Proverbs 1.147).

---

**1** For a survey see H. Limet, 'Les déesses sumériennes. Femmes modèles, modèles de femmes', *Acta Orientalia Belgica VII* (1992) 131–145.

**2** SAA X 226:16–21.

**3** A. R. George, *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic* (2003) 278 iii 10–14 (Old Babylonian).



Hot hips may indicate fertility. A sexually aroused woman would apparently get pregnant more easily.<sup>4</sup> A proverb states:

My field is like a woman without man, for there is no-one to work it.<sup>5</sup>

We learn the phases of the normal life of young women from a rather negative picture painted of the behaviour of female demons. They are frustrated and dangerous because they have not experienced the normal destiny of a woman.

The maiden is like a woman who never had intercourse.  
 The maiden is like a woman who was never deflowered.  
 The maiden never experienced sex in her husband's lap.  
 The maiden never peeled off her clothes on her husband's lap.  
 The maiden's clasp no nice looking lad ever loosened.  
 The maiden had no milk in her breasts; only bitter liquid exudes.  
 The maiden never climaxed sexually, nor satisfied her desires in a man's lap.<sup>6</sup>

According to the Gilgamesh epic Enkidu was allowed to see into the underworld and discover how the departed souls were faring.

'Did you see the woman who had not given birth?'  
 'I saw her.'  
 'How does she fare?'  
 'Like a useless (?) pot she is discarded with force, no man takes pleasure in her.'  
 'Did you see the young man who had not exposed the lap of his wife?'  
 'I saw him.'  
 'How does he fare?'  
 'He is finishing a hand-worked rope, he weeps over that hand-worked rope.'  
 'Did you see the young woman who had not exposed the lap of her husband?'  
 'I saw her.'  
 'How does she fare?'  
 'She is finishing a hand-worked reed mat, she weeps over the hand-worked reed mat.'<sup>7</sup>

These people are always frustrated, and it would be better for them if they were enjoying married life. This view is endorsed by a proverb,

A married man has everything that he needs, but an unmarried man has to sleep in straw.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>4</sup> M. Stol, *Birth in Babylonia and the Bible* (2000) 6.

<sup>5</sup> W. G. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* (= BWL) (1960) 232f.

<sup>6</sup> M. J. Geller, *Afo* 35 (1988) 14, 29–35; J. S. Cooper, *CRRAI* 47/1 (2002) 92; *TUAT NF* 4 (2008) 126f. For more examples of such a negative picture, see G. Leick, *Sex and eroticism* (1994) 220–224.

<sup>7</sup> A. R. George, *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic* (2003) 764f., 775, c–e; iii 10–14.

<sup>8</sup> B. Alster, *Wisdom of Ancient Sumer* (2005) 88, Instr. of Šuruppak 185f.

## 2.1 Preparations

Babylonians never undertook any new ventures without first having their future foretold. For example, if a man was going on a journey for business he would first have the liver of a young sheep inspected by the diviner who would advise him what to expect. Entering into a marriage needed similar forethought and arranging for a liver to be examined was an obvious precaution. The detailed report on one such inspection was encouraging:

The omen is favourable, for a marriage (*aḥuzzatu*).<sup>9</sup>

While the prospects for this planned marriage had relied on extispicy, a cheaper method would have been to examine the patterns made by oil poured ('thrown') on water:

If you carry out the oil test before a marriage, you throw for the man and the woman, each separately.

If they still go together, the intention is that they be married.

If they still go together but that of the man is dark, the man will die.

If that of the woman is dark, the woman will die.<sup>10</sup>

When King Esarhaddon planned to marry off his daughter to Bartatua (= Protothyas) the king of Scythia (Iškuza) according to the terms of a vassal treaty, he had a liver inspection carried out and presented the diviner with this question:

If Esarhaddon, the king of Assyria, gives the princess in marriage to him, will Bartatua the king of Iškuza speak true and honourable words of peace to Esarhaddon the king of Assyria in sincerity? Will he adhere to the treaty ...?<sup>11</sup>

A manual for judging a person's inner qualities links their outward appearance (physiognomy) to their behaviour. Predictions were given based on these observations. Now and again something is said about personality. This manual was probably mainly used to see whether someone could be taken into service. The chapter about women is called 'If a woman has a big head', which is the first sentence of that section. It could help to form a judgement about whether or not to marry a girl without taking risks. Some of the formulas that occur, such as

<sup>9</sup> VAS 24 116:45f. with W. R. Mayer, *Or. NS* 56 (1987) 247.

<sup>10</sup> G. Pettinato, *Die Öhlwarsagung bei den Babyloniern II* (1966) 62, 68:14.

<sup>11</sup> I. Starr, *Queries to the Sungod* (1990) 25 no. 20:4–9, with p. LXII.

‘the house (of her husband) that she enters’ or ‘she lives in’, reflect more on her ‘family’ than on herself, but a woman’s physical appearance is often mentioned.<sup>12</sup>

If the veins on her hands lie across, then she will make the house that she enters poor.

If her hands, both right and left, are ‘open’, then she will walk around radiant. She will make the house where she lives happy.<sup>13</sup>

The predictions in this manual are mostly unfavourable. Now and then the bridegroom is mentioned.

She will ruin whoever marries her.

More favourable was

Her husband will have approval, (there will be) pleasure.

Exceptionally we find

If she is looking around constantly, then her husband will often sleep with a married woman.<sup>14</sup>

It was important to know if she was going to produce children, and if she did, what would be their future. This depended on how her breasts and navel looked, but other features also played their part.<sup>15</sup>

If a woman’s hands are narrow, then she is moody.

If they are tall, then she will be rich, she is a lucky one.

If they are short, then she will be poor.

If her hands are holding her belly, then she will not have an easy childbirth.

If the elbows of a woman are hairy, then she will be annoying.

If her fingers are short, then the house she enters will become poor.

If her toes are short, then she will be successful and happy.

If her fingers are very large, then whatever she takes in hand will not succeed.

If they are small, then whatever she takes on will succeed.

---

**12** For the two formulas, see B. Böck, *Die babylonisch-assyrische Morphoskopie* (2000) 58 f.; the end of this chapter (with note 249).

**13** Böck, 159:134, 115.

**14** Böck, 167:231.

**15** Böck, 157:101–104 (hands), 98 (elbows); 159:121 f. (fingers and toes), 129–133 (fingers and fingertips); 167:233 (long toes); 163:184–186 (lower belly). For the breasts see 161:156–172; the navel: 163:188–196; for the complete text see TUAT NF 4 (2008) 41–47; see further Chapter 22.

If they are very fat, then she is a witch.

If they are thin, then she is bad-tempered.

If the fingertips of a woman are very fat, then she is a witch.

If the toes of a woman are long, then she will 'build' the house; she will grow old, she is a lucky one.

If a woman has white hair on her lower belly, then contentment.

If she has red hair, then she will become a widow.

If she has black hair, then her descendants will be unlucky.

The man's appearance gave rise to another set of portents. If a man has a lot of hair on the right of his forehead, 'a woman will be given to a man'. But if it is on the left, a man will be given to a woman. If he has much hair on both left and right sides, 'they will both love each other and grow old: contentment'. If he has a lot of hair everywhere equally distributed, 'they will not love each other'.<sup>16</sup>

An Assyrian manual gives examples of the questions that can be asked of the gods about future family life. It begins with the question of whether the wedding gift (*šūbultu*) from the man would be welcome, and goes on to ask if only girls would be born, which would make him angry. We know that there was another section, which is now lost, about a second wife. Finally there were questions about childbirth and a pregnant wife who became ill.<sup>17</sup> Manuals about favourable and unfavourable days are called hemerologies. In these we find that days 5 and 6 of the second month (Ayyaru) were favourable. It was good to get married on day 5 or day 6: 'Let him get a wife; he will grow old'; but extra benefit would come for day 6: 'he will feel comfortable'.<sup>18</sup> An excerpt from one handbook was found in a family archive, so members of that household must have consulted it. From actual marriage contracts and related texts we see that they deliberately choose a 'good' day. The contracts are never dated on unfavourable days.<sup>19</sup>

Despite these precautions marriage remained an adventure. A Sumerian proverb says:

He married for pleasure. When he thought it over he divorced (SP 2.124).

One wisdom text is a long dialogue weighing up the pros and cons of all kinds of decisions a man must take. That is why it is called 'The Dialogue of Pessimism'.

<sup>16</sup> Böck, *Morphoskopie* (2000) 84 ii 118–121; for more cases see CRRAI 47/II (2002) 306.

<sup>17</sup> W. G. Lambert, *Babylonian oracle queries* (2007) 88–91 no. 12. The first question was also discussed by S. Greengus in: T. Abusch, *Riches hidden in secret places. Ancient Near Eastern studies in memory of Thorild Jacobsen* (2002) 133 f.

<sup>18</sup> S. Lieberman in *Studies W. L. Moran* (1990) 324 f.

<sup>19</sup> C. Waerzeggers in *Festschrift Karel van Lerberghe* (2012) 658.

A slave advises his master, who wants to 'love a woman', to go ahead for good will come of it.

'Yes, love, my lord! Yes, love! The man who loves a woman will forget trouble and affliction.'

But when his master hesitates to follow his advice the slave instantly changes tune, sounding like a thoroughgoing misogynist

'No, slave, I will not love a woman',

'Do not love, my lord! Do not love! A woman is a pitfall, a pitfall, a hole, a ditch. A woman is a sharp dagger that cuts a man's throat.'<sup>20</sup>

Pieces of folk wisdom with warnings against womankind are found in Sumerian proverbs. One which is much quoted says:

Marry a wife according to your choice (SP 19, C 4).

To this can be added,

Have children to your heart's content (SP 1.146),

Do not marry a wife who has come from a feast (SP 11.150).

An older version makes it clear that everything that this woman is wearing belongs to someone else; she is dressed in borrowed plumes.<sup>21</sup> Some are like riddles, very difficult to understand.

In what way are the early shepherd, the early farmer, the man who in his youthful years married a wife like each other? (SP 19, G 7).

But others are absolutely explicit,

(As for) the daughter of a poor man, nobody values her vulva.<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> W. G. Lambert, *BWL* (1960) 146:47–52; B. R. Foster, *Before the Muses II* (1993) 816, VI.

<sup>21</sup> W. Sallaberger, *Studies Jeremy Black* (2010) 311 f.

<sup>22</sup> OECT I plate 13 i 8, B. Alster, *ZA* 82 (1992) 200, on 10.

## 2.2 Age for marrying

Martha Roth has demonstrated that a girl married between the ages of 14 and 20 and a man between 26 and 32.<sup>23</sup> Ancient Greek and Roman sources show this was also the situation further west around the Mediterranean Sea.<sup>24</sup> This has consequences for our view of family life. Because the men were older and died earlier than their wives, there must have been many widows. In Greece a man was thought to be old in his sixtieth year. If his son married when he was thirty, he would in a sense replace his father.<sup>25</sup> The relatively old Greek laws from the city of Gortyna on Crete (ca. 450 BC) in their last stipulation indicate that a girl could be married off when she was 12 or older. The Jewish Mishnah, from the beginning of our era, states that a boy of 18 is suitable for marriage (*huppā*) (Aboth V 25).<sup>26</sup> The early Greek poet Hesiod makes the following comment in his ‘Works and Days’ (695–701):

Take your wife into the house when you are the right age, neither very much short of thirty years nor much beyond that: that is marrying time. Let a bride be four years past puberty; let her marry in the fifth. Marry a virgin in order that you may teach her devoted ways, and marry especially one who resides near you, after looking carefully at all things around you, lest you marry a source of laughter for the neighbours.<sup>27</sup>

A Middle Babylonian text tells how a merchant ‘took’ a girl who was a half-el tall from her parents with the intention of giving her as a bride (*ana kallūti*) for his youngest son.<sup>28</sup> As her bride-price (‘her silver’) two beautiful garments worth two shekels of gold were given to each of her parents. Really the girl was worth more, but instead of the ‘rest of her silver’ the buyer promised to take care (*zanānu*) of her. She was therefore still a child that had to be supported for some time. An Assyrian text speaks of a girl who was ‘two half-els’ tall and who was likewise given as a bride. Another bride was ‘four half-els’ tall.<sup>29</sup> For a boy the minimum

---

**23** M. T. Roth, ‘Age at marriage and the household: a study of Neo-Babylonian and Neo-Assyrian forms’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* (= CSSH) 29 (1987) 715–747, esp. 737.

**24** W. K. Lacey, *Die Familie im Antiken Griechenland* (1983) 109 f.; F. Kirbihler in: F. Briquel-Chattonnet, *Femmes* (2009) 54 n. 4. Roth, 721, 737 is still relevant.

**25** Lacey, 109.

**26** For more see J. Fleishman, ‘The age of legal maturity in Biblical law’, *JANES* 21 (1992) 35–48.

**27** As translated by D. W. Tandy, W. C. Neale (1996).

**28** J. A. Brinkman, *MSKH I* (1976) 383 no. 9; with C. Wilcke, ‘Familiengründung’, 244, and H. Petschow, *Or. NS* 52 (1983) 145 n. 8.

**29** *CTN II* 219 with J. N. Postgate, *Iraq* 41 (1979) 96; *CTN III* 47 = *TUAT NF* 1 (2004) 75.

age of 10 years old applied in cases of necessity, the *legitima aestas*.<sup>30</sup> It is difficult to imagine such tiny children getting married, so these situations may have essentially been betrothals. A letter says that a girl had already been formally promised to the ‘son of a citizen’ ‘since she was small’.<sup>31</sup> In a myth we find the unburdening of the heart of a tender young goddess in the words,

My vessel is too small, I do not know how to ... My lips are small, I do not know how to kiss  
(‘Enlil and Ninlil’, 30 f.).<sup>32</sup>

A Sumerian proverb says that a wife should not be very young:

Unlike a donkey, one does not marry a three-year-old wife (SP 2.81).

## 2.3 Regulations

As one would naturally expect, we find details about making arrangements for a nuptial contract, but we must make an important proviso. At first sight our sources appear to be trustworthy, with objective facts about the normal state of affairs. However, that is not the case. S. Greengus has shown that the agreements made about a marriage must in general have been made orally, even though the law books speak of a ‘contract’. So it must have been a matter of a binding oral arrangement.<sup>33</sup> But the written contracts are our only sources, and these were issued because of unusual circumstances which required a written record. Such circumstances pertained usually because of financial pressure, the position of the first wife, or the inheritance rights of certain children. Even if we read nothing apparently unusual in these contracts, there might have been a special reason for later defending someone’s interests by means of a written statement. This may also hold true for the Ur III texts.<sup>34</sup> Independently of the work of Greengus, the observation has been made that something similar can be detected in the Aramaic marriage contracts from Elephantine. They were possibly drawn up on behalf of already existing children. For Old Assyrian and Egyptian written contracts special circumstances are suspected.<sup>35</sup>

---

**30** Middle Assyrian Laws § 43, with Fleishman, *JANES* 21 (1992) 35–48.

**31** *AbB* 12 63:6–8.

**32** J. S. Cooper, *CRRAI* 47/1 (2002) 97.

**33** S. Greengus, *JAOS* 89 (1969) 505–532, specifically 514b.

**34** Greengus, 512, 524.

**35** C. Wilcke, *ZA* 66 (1976) 197 (note 3); B. Porten, *Archives from Elephantine* (1968) 208.

J. Paradise has read marriage acts from Nuzi from the same viewpoint. By assuming that the stated stipulations arose precisely because of exceptional circumstances, he was able to reconstruct what would have been the more usual course of events.<sup>36</sup> Then he could proceed to form a first impression of what would have been common law.

(1) Once the fathers of the bride and bridegroom had come to an agreement the couple would go to live with the family of the man.

(2) The man could take another wife if his present wife had no children.

(3) A man had the right to take a concubine.

(4) A man could downgrade his wife and raise the status of a concubine.

(5) A man could divorce his wife even if she had borne him children.

(6) The oldest son received a double inheritance.

This was the law that had to be observed in Nuzi, but they are rules which did not necessarily apply anywhere else.

Greengus later looked at ethnological literature, e.g. concerning marriage in China, and established that setting up a marriage required a number of consecutive phases.<sup>37</sup> For Mesopotamia he suggested the following phases.

(1) A preliminary search (deliberative stage), for which some examples will be given below.

(2) Actions taken to arrange the wedding (prenuptial stage), which could be called the betrothal.

(3) The wedding (the nuptial stage).

(4) The man and wife living together (the connubial stage).

(5) The birth of a child (the familial stage).

These various phases, including any expenditure for a marriage (to be discussed later), fit in with those listed by Paradise. Because Greengus and Paradise restrict themselves to the earlier periods, marriage contracts from Assyria and Babylon in the later first millennium BC and from the surrounding areas must also be examined.

---

<sup>36</sup> J. Paradise, JCS 39 (1987) 6. We refer to p. 6 (our 1), p. 11 (2), p. 12 (3), p. 13 en 15 (4, 5), p. 18 note 55 (6). See now N. Pfeiffer, SCCNH 18 (2009) 373 f., particularly on the role of the person who takes the initiative to arrange a marriage.

<sup>37</sup> S. Greengus, 'Redefining "inchoate marriage" in Old Babylonian contexts', in T. Abusch, *Studies Thorkild Jacobsen* (2002) 123–139 (see note 17). See his note 7 for the Akkadian terminology.



### 2.3.1 Marriage in Assyria<sup>38</sup>

Each one of the few contracts we have seems to fit one particular case. So the general opinion is that marriages were normally arranged orally. We can distinguish three groups of written contracts: between members of the elite; marriages with temple slave-girls; and the marriage of poor girls treated as a sale. The girl received a gift from her father (*nundunû*), on her marriage or later, and this counted as her inheritance.<sup>39</sup> The objects given are enumerated precisely in a fixed order. For an Old Assyrian woman the toggle-pin was the sign of her married status, and it was snatched from her if she was renounced.<sup>40</sup>

In the earlier Middle Assyrian laws (ca. 1100 BC) almost sixty paragraphs are about women. They are recorded on Tablet A, which deals entirely with women. Existing traditions about women and the law are here deliberately assembled together. Broadly speaking the following themes are treated: theft and healing (§1–6); beating and other violence (§7–11); sexual offences (§12–24); marriage law (§25–49); more criminal law (§50–59). The punishments in this law book are often severe. The ‘eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth’ principle was applied. In addition ‘mirroring punishments’ were envisaged, as when the hands of a thief would be chopped off. The married woman had to suffer under these laws as she was seen as the possession of her husband. The most infamous example will be dealt with in Chapter 11 dealing with rape (§55). This law-book can be seen as the fiercest of all those known in the Ancient Near East, even though we regularly find examples of the same judgements for women and the same treatment of them elsewhere. For example, the man is free to associate with unmarried women, but the woman is allowed no such freedom. The Assyrian law-giver aspired to equality in punishment as his ideal, and that was surely a noble intention.<sup>41</sup> In Chapter 31 a translation of this law-book will be given.

---

<sup>38</sup> K. Radner, *Die neuassyrischen Privatrechtsurkunden* (1997) 157–171.

<sup>39</sup> Radner, 163 f.

<sup>40</sup> B. Kienast, *AOF* 35 (2008) 48, 51 (AKT 3 51:10 f.).

<sup>41</sup> G. Cardascia, ‘Les valeurs morales dans le droit assyrien’, *Hommage à Guillaume Cardascia* (1995) (= *Méditerranées* no. 3) 161–170.

### 2.3.2 Marriage in later Babylonia

During this period contracts were often formulated in the form of a dialogue between two parties, where the lesser party made an offer and the superior party accepted it. A common request is,

Give me your daughter, let her be my wife!<sup>42</sup>

The contracts always raise the matter of a dowry which the wife would bring with her. Therefore the contract is usually called the ‘tablet of the dowry’ and rarely the ‘tablet of being a wife’.<sup>43</sup> The dowry remained hers and was passed on down the female line. Protests could arise about the removal of a family possession and for this reason there is sometimes a note stating that an interested party was present. This is a well-known phrase in Neo-Babylonian documents and mostly it is a woman who ‘was present’. Her silent approval was expressed in this way.<sup>44</sup> The dowry was recorded in the contract. It is possible that at this time the married woman wore a pendant (*zibu*) round her neck, perhaps one shaped like a shell to represent the womb.<sup>45</sup>

### 2.3.3 Marriages of Jews in Babylonia

The Jews that had been taken into exile in Babylonia were granted permission by Cyrus to return to Jerusalem in 539 BC. However, many remained behind and the Babylonian Talmud was produced by their descendants a thousand years later. In five marriage contracts Jews, recognisable by their names, who had remained in Babylon are mentioned. The agreements are drawn up in Akkadian and follow Babylonian formulations. But in one case an archaic format is used, which probably derives from Aramaic traditions. These include the ceremonial phrase for a divorce ‘She is not (my) wife’, the binding of the payment into the hem of the garment, and the Aramaic word *zindu*, ‘provision’. The marriage was carried out in the fifth year of Cyrus in the ‘Jewish city’ (*āl Yahudu*), evidently a Jewish colony

---

<sup>42</sup> Survey in M. T. Roth, *Babylonian marriage agreements 7th-3rd centuries B. C.* (1989). Marriage in the Greek (Seleucid) period: G. J. P. McEwan, ‘Family law in Hellenistic Babylonia’, in: M. J. Geller, H. Maehler, *Legal documents of the Hellenistic world* (1995) 20–36.

<sup>43</sup> C. Wunsch, *Urkunden zum Ehe-, Vermögens- und Erbrecht aus verschiedenen neubabylonischen Archiven* (2003) 1f.; Roth, 26 n. 83.

<sup>44</sup> Roth, 21–23.

<sup>45</sup> C. Waerzeggers, M. Jursa, *ZABR* 14 (2008) 12, 30.

in Babylon. The few witnesses had Jewish names.<sup>46</sup> The main characters may well have been Jews as well, but we notice that in Jewish contracts from a later generation people had already adopted Babylonian names, implying their adherence to local gods. Two contracts stipulate that anyone who broke the contract was threatened with punishments from the heathen gods. These were precisely the customs that Ezra and Nehemiah raged against. Later, in the Persian period and in the Greek period, literary texts would carry a superscription, such as ‘May it be successful, by the god NN (and the god/goddess NN)’. In just ten contracts, four of which concern marriage, such a wish is expressed. This is reminiscent of the formula ‘In the name of our Creator’ on Palestinian-Jewish marriage contracts (*k<sup>e</sup>tubbāh*) from a thousand years later found in the old synagogue of Cairo.<sup>47</sup>

### 2.3.4 Marriage outside Mesopotamia

In the second millennium cuneiform script was used all over the Near East, and Akkadian was an international language until 1200 BC. So texts concerning marriage from outside Babylonia but written in Akkadian deserve attention. The language used can sometimes be understood only with difficulty, containing loanwords from the local languages. An example of this is the word for bride-price in Hurrian, *wadurrānni*, used instead of Akkadian *terḫatu* in Alalaḫ.<sup>48</sup> These marriage documents belonged to family archives, found in Nuzi, east of Assyria (near modern Kirkuk), and in Alalaḫ, and in Emar near Aleppo.<sup>49</sup> In these cities attention was also paid to the status of the persons involved. One was called a ‘citizen of Ḫanigalbat’, i.e. an inhabitant of the kingdom of Mitanni. A question arising in negotiating a marriage was whether the interested party was a citizen (a ‘son’ or ‘daughter’) of a particular city. We know of a marriage ‘according to the daughters of Emar’, and of someone treated ‘as a daughter of Arrapha’.<sup>50</sup> A contract from

<sup>46</sup> K. Abraham, ‘West Semitic and Judean brides in cuneiform sources from the sixth century BCE’, *Afo* 51 (2005–06) 198–219; *TUAT NF* 1 (2004) 90 f.

<sup>47</sup> M. Roth, *JSS* 33 (1988) 1–9.

<sup>48</sup> I. Márquez-Rowe, *W. H. van Soldt, Aula Orientalis* 16 (1998) 132 f.

<sup>49</sup> C. Niedorf, *Die mittelbabylonischen Rechtsurkunden aus Alalaḫ (Schicht IV)* (2008) 158–174, ‘Eheverträge’, 265–299, the texts. For Emar see G. Beckman, ‘Family values on the Middle Euphrates in the thirteenth century B. C.’, in: M. W. Chavalas, *Emar* (1996) 57–79, esp. 68–71; J. J. Justel, ‘Women and the family in the legal documents of Emar’, *Kaskal* 11 (2014) 57–84. For Nuzi see N. Pfeiffer, ‘Das Eherecht in Nuzi: Einflüsse aus altbabylonischer Zeit’, *SCCNH* 18 (2009) 355–420.

<sup>50</sup> A. Skaist, *BiOr* 56 (1999) 125 f., on Beckman, *TVE* no. 61. In general see C. Zaccagnini, ‘Citizenship’, in: R. Westbrook, *A history of Ancient Near Eastern law I* (2003) 578–580.

Alalaḫ demands that the status of a patrician (*mariyannu*) be guaranteed to the children.<sup>51</sup> Sometimes a marriage was arranged with a Hittite or a Babylonian.<sup>52</sup>

## 2.4 The betrothal

In discussing the first phase of marriage, which could be called ‘the betrothal’, it is best to begin with an apparently insignificant Old Babylonian text:<sup>53</sup>

Adad-bani has weighed out to Lipit-Ištar and Itu-alimma, her mother — for the status of *kallatu* he chose (her) for marriage for Ubarum, his son — 5 shekels of silver as bride-price.

Witnesses are named at the end of the text. Although the formulation of the writer was clumsy, inserting what is logically the first clause of his narrative in the second position of his sentence, we see from this text that three factors coincide: the father choosing (*hiāru*) the bride; the status of the bride (*kallūtu*); the payment of the bride-price, or the first installment of it.

There it was the father who made the choice. Did young people growing up really have any chance to make their own choice, or was everything arranged by their parents? The texts about daily life show that the parents were the ones involved. Normally it would be the father who acted. But if he had died the mother or a brother would act, and that seems to happen surprisingly often. An inflammatory Sumerian proverb rejects a brother from having a role to play.

Girl, do not let your brother choose for you! Whom do you choose?<sup>54</sup>

There was a problem at court in Babylon at the time of King Cyrus. A girl was given in marriage by her brother, but her father was not aware of this arrangement. This decision was reversed by the judges, who declared,

If the girl is seen with the man she shall be branded as a slave.<sup>55</sup>

---

<sup>51</sup> AT 91 with Niedorf, *Die mittelbabylonischen Rechtsurkunden aus Alalaḫ*, 158, 164, 265 ff. (33.1); TUAT NF 1 (2004) 135 f.; E. von Dassow, *SCCNH* 17 (2008) 277–280; J.-J. Justel, *SEL* 25 (2008) 43.

<sup>52</sup> D. Arnaud, *Semitica* 46 (1996) 12 *ME* 155:11–13 (from Tell Mumbaqaṭ = Ekalte).

<sup>53</sup> *YOS* 12 457.

<sup>54</sup> *SP* 1.148.

<sup>55</sup> Cyrus 311, 312 with F. Joannès, *Rendre la justice en Mésopotamie* (2000) 206–208.

One document states that a girl who is seen with a man, or is taken away by him with threatening words, without her protesting or saying, ‘Tell this to his father’, will be branded as a slave. This sounds like an attempted elopement.<sup>56</sup>

In the songs about the romance between Inanna, the goddess of love, and the shepherd Dumuzi, a completely different atmosphere prevails. Th. Jacobsen, commenting on their courtship, says that ‘they are lightweight stuff, popular ditties’ of a genre that probably really existed.<sup>57</sup> These dialogues were playful and sometimes teasing. The woman frequently speaks of herself as ‘we’.<sup>58</sup> They were republished by Y. Sefati, *Love Songs in Sumerian Literature* (1998). Because he mostly gives different titles from those of Jacobsen we shall give both, while following the interpretation of Jacobsen. In one of the songs Inanna tells her sister of the love awakened in her for Dumuzi (‘The Sister’s Message’; ‘The Bed of Love’). However she avoids the bold advances of Dumuzi and tells him that he should address his proposal of marriage to her mother (‘The Wives of Women’; ‘Love by the Light of the Moon’). It is interesting that in the myth of Enlil and Sud we see the same train of events. Enlil becomes overfamiliar with Sud, who directly turns her back on him. Then Enlil approaches her mother through a messenger.<sup>59</sup> The role of the mother of the bride is striking. The same myth later speaks separately about the sister of the bride. We hear nothing about fathers, which may have to do with the structure of this sort of story. In them the protagonists are the two lovers, the mother of the girl and the messenger of the young man.<sup>60</sup> Elsewhere in the Dumuzi songs we see that parents on both sides have made the arrangement. Those tell us that Inanna knows nothing about it. So she complains about Dumuzi, who is now so suddenly demanding, secure as he is in the knowledge of what has gone on. He answers that his father is now in a certain sense her father too, and in this way he goes down the whole list of other family members (‘The New House’; ‘The Lovers’ Quarrel’). In another song Inanna’s brother Utu tells her that linen sheets will be made and eventually the plot unravels. When asked

---

56 Cyrus 307 with F. Joannès, ‘Amours contrariées’, NABU 1994/72; Ktama 22 (1997) 125.

57 Th. Jacobsen, *The treasures of darkness* (1976) 27–32; *The harps that once* (1987) 1–23. Now supported by B. Alster, ASJ 14 (1992) 2f. See also G. Leick, *Sex and eroticism* (1994) 66–79.

58 S. M. Paul, ‘The “plural of ecstasy” in Mesopotamian and Biblical love poetry’, *Studies J. C. Greenfield* (1995) 585–597. By this ‘a woman gave ardent and passionate articulation to her highly charged sensuous state’.

59 M. Civil, JAOS 103 (1983) 43 ff.

60 Cf. H. L. J. Vanstiphout, ‘Un carré d’amour sumérien, or ways to win a woman’, in Durand, *La Femme* (1987) 163–178. He points out the problem (p. 171, 176) and writes about the resistance against the marriage by the ‘female lineage’, represented by the mother. Asking the mother is seen again in the Dumuzi texts; see also B. Alster, ASJ 14 (1992) 19:23.

who will be lying with her, Utu replies that it will be Amaušumgalanna, meaning Dumuzi. And then she replies gladly that this was ‘the very man of my heart’ (‘Bridal Sheets’; ‘The Bridal Sheets and the Chosen Bridegroom’). If one compares these songs with the legal texts and the few letters which we have several features stand out: the uninhibited individuality of the characters; the absence of fathers; no mention of the bride-price during the exchange of gifts; and the house of the girl as the only location for the action.<sup>61</sup> The comment has been made that the songs between Inanna and Dumuzi are the expression of the experience of women. They embody a ‘tender, sensual sexuality’. From a later period only the titles of other love-songs are known, sometimes inspired by Ištar and Dumuzi/Tammuz.<sup>62</sup>

Are all these love songs purely literary? Probably not. One suspects that set phrases, such as ‘I would like to join your family’, said by the girl, and ‘I would like to plough the field’, gasped by the boy, have been taken from life.<sup>63</sup> These songs show that women had more say in the matter than we might think from other texts. The songs were finally given a place in the rituals of the Sacred Marriage. One is reminded of the playful dialogues in the Song of Solomon.<sup>64</sup>

We will now examine the legal texts which deal with betrothal. In the Sumerian period of Ur III the future bridegroom or his father made a short declaration under oath in these terms:

By the king (I declare), ‘Surely I have taken A, the daughter of B, as my wife’.

This has been described by German scholars as the *Eheabsprache*, the ‘marriage agreement’.<sup>65</sup> As is already clear from the wording, the ‘bespoke’ girl is validated as the wife. Within the Old Babylonian legal context she was directly known as a ‘wife’ even when she was just betrothed. In English the term ‘inchoate marriage’ is used for a marriage which is just beginning (Latin *inchoare*). C. Wilcke suggests that this is a concept from Germanic law, *Ehe in der Schwebe*, ‘marriage hanging in the balance’. P. Koschaker in 1917 still unashamedly used the typically European word *Verlobung*, ‘betrothal’, which has much to recommend it, if it is

<sup>61</sup> M. M. Fritz, *Und weinten um Tammuz. Die Götter Dumuzi-Ama’ušumgal’anna und Damu* (2003) 308–314.

<sup>62</sup> J. A. Black, ‘Babylonian ballads: a new genre’, *JAOS* 103 (1984) 25–34.

<sup>63</sup> B. Alster, *ASJ* 14 (1992) 2f., 43f.; for ‘ploughing the field’ see note 5.

<sup>64</sup> J. Klein, Y. Sefati, ‘“Secular” love songs in Mesopotamian literature’, *Studies S. M. Paul II* (2008) 613–626.

<sup>65</sup> Wilcke, ‘Familiengründung’, 245f.

correctly defined and put into context, as he did.<sup>66</sup> In the Old Babylonian period it was the custom to seal the betrothal by drinking beer. This ceremony (*kirru*) usually marked the conclusion of other agreements, such as taking on a lease.<sup>67</sup> It could be called a reception, but was not compulsory.<sup>68</sup> There are indications that in the Ur III period beer was also drunk when the wedding gift was given.<sup>69</sup>

According to the laws of Ešnunna a girl could not become a man's wife without the permission of her father.

If a man 'took' a man's daughter without having first asked her father and mother, and neither provided a reception (*kirru*) nor drew up any contractual agreement with her father and mother, even if she has already lived for a year in his house, she is not his wife (§ 27).

Greengus has shown that there need not be a written contract (*riksātu*, literally 'a binding'). Later he says specifically that the contractual agreement seeks to establish the new status of the future married couple.<sup>70</sup> We understand from this law that a marriage was only legal if it had been carried out according to the rules. This is clear from other law books also.<sup>71</sup> The Hittite laws differentiate a betrothal to a girl and binding her in marriage (§ 28–9). The former can refer to a child while the latter can involve the payment of a bride-price.<sup>72</sup>

A situation described in one text concerns a woman who has had intercourse with one particular man, as well as some others, without any marriage agreement. Her family declared this before the judge:

We have never given our sister S. to a husband. She went out on the town and N. had sex with her, along with many others. He never made any contract concerning her, nor did he establish a ... for her, nor did we receive a bride-price for her.<sup>73</sup>

We see here that with no agreement made and no bride-price paid no marriage was formalised.

---

<sup>66</sup> P. Koschaker, *Rechtsvergleichende Studien zur Gesetzgebung Hammurapis Königs von Babylon* (1917) 130 ff., § 9. Later on he fully agreed with 'inchoate marriage'; ArOr 18/3 (1950) 226.

<sup>67</sup> F. R. Kraus, JEOL 16 (1959–62) 24 f.

<sup>68</sup> In T. Abusch, *Studies Th. Jacobsen* (2002) 130–132 (see note 17).

<sup>69</sup> ASJ 4 (1982) 66 no. 9, kaš.dé.a nam.mí.ús.sá, with C. Wilcke, ZA 78 (1988) 13 n. 49.

<sup>70</sup> *Studies Th. Jacobsen* (2002) 134–136.

<sup>71</sup> J. Fleishman, *Studies J. Klein* (2005) 481–484. He discusses LU § 11 (written contract), LE §§ 27–8, CH § 128 (always *riksātu*).

<sup>72</sup> TUAT I/1 ('Rechtsbücher') (1982) 102, with Balkan, 7 f.

<sup>73</sup> K. R. Veenhof, *Festschrift C. Wilcke* (2003) 315 f., lines 28–34.

Having examined a few cases of betrothal it should be remembered that these were undoubtedly not normal situations, so we do not understand everything. An Old Assyrian text, which appears to be a betrothal contract, strangely involves two women who are making an agreement about their ‘daughter’. Ewanika, the first woman, has an indigenous name, and the second woman, Adi-matum, has an Assyrian name. The father may have died and these women were his two widows.<sup>74</sup>

Ibni-Sîn, son of Ennam-Assur, will wed the daughter of Ewanika and Adi-matum. If they give their daughter to another (?), E. and A. shall pay Ibni-Sîn two minas of silver. If Ibni-Sîn marries the daughter of a native person here (*nuâ'u*) and does not marry their daughter, Ibni-Sîn shall pay to E. [and A. two minas] of silver. He (?) may give the girl (*šuḫartu*) to wherever he (?) wishes.

We also have an Old Babylonian betrothal contract.

Concerning ‘the marriage relation’ (*emûtu*) contract that Ištar-lamassi and Sîn-abušu have agreed to (*annam apālu*), that the son of Nannatum should marry their daughter, in the presence of thirteen persons. They have drunk beer to the value of a third of a shekel of silver. They have used a litre of oil with which to anoint themselves.<sup>75</sup>

The drinking and anointing at the end of this text most probably refer to the *kirru*, ‘reception’. It is striking that as legal signatories of the contract first the woman Ištar-lamassi is named, and only later is the man named. Afterwards the girl is specifically referred to as ‘her’ daughter. The woman Ištar-lamassi ‘and her mother’ and the man Sîn-abušu appear next to one another in the list of those present. Their own expenses would need to be taken into account, and this was not a list of witnesses. We read ‘Ištar-lamassi and her mother’, so women arranged this marriage. The man Sîn-abušu may have been a brother or an uncle.

### 2.4.1 Becoming related by marriage

In what we have called an Old Babylonian betrothal contract the term *emûtu*, ‘marriage relation’ was used. It is derived from the word *emu*, ‘father-in-law’ or sometimes ‘son-in-law’.<sup>76</sup> In Sumerian the terminology for family relations is

<sup>74</sup> V. Donbaz, *Keilschrifttexte aus den Antiken-Museen zu Stambul* II (1989) no.55; cf. W. C. Gwaltney, JAOS 112 (1992) 336. For the last line read [*a-šar l|i-bi-šu i-d[a-an]*].

<sup>75</sup> E. C. Stone, *Nippur neighborhoods* (1987) Text 34, with D. Charpin, RA 84 (1990) 11f.

<sup>76</sup> F. R. Kraus, *Vom mesopotamischen Menschen der altbabylonischen Zeit und seiner Welt* (1973) 50; R. M. Whiting, AS 22 (1987) 55, on no. 12:29.



very complicated, so much so that an attempt was once made to cut the Gordian knot by suggesting that the words *urum* or *murum* could cover all the relatives of the man, and the word *ušbar* could cover all the relatives of the woman.<sup>77</sup> It seems that in Akkadian *emu* could also have such a general meaning, and it could indicate any family member by marriage. A text from Nippur speaks of ‘the little *emu*’, whenever the father of the bridegroom is meant, and so ‘the great *emu*’ may have been the father of the bride.<sup>78</sup> For *emu* we can loosely use the word ‘brother-in-law’, and so show that in Akkadian the abstract concept of *emūtu*, ‘marriage relationship’ implied ‘a relationship by marriage with two families’.<sup>79</sup> An Akkadian letter from Tell Taanach in Palestine supports ‘entering into marriage’ as a similar expression to ‘becoming related by marriage’, lit. ‘to make (a man) son-in-law’ (*ḥatanūta epēšu*). These expressions are found also in an Assyrian letter from a merchant from Anatolia. The related Hebrew word *ḥatan* means ‘son-in-law’.<sup>80</sup>

It seems appropriate now to mention that *aḥuzzatu* is yet a third word for marriage, derived from the word *aḥāzu*, ‘to take’. It occurs chiefly in Middle Babylonian. The Middle Assyrian laws speak of it in a way that seems to indicate a marriage with a woman who is no longer a virgin, in particular a widow.<sup>81</sup> But it is unlikely that there was a separate word for this situation.

#### 2.4.2 Betrothed princesses

The betrothal of a princess was a special occasion and naturally exceptional preparations were made. Letters and documents from Mari show us something about how two royal marriages were arranged. These were the marriages of Yasmaḥ-Addu to the daughter of the king of Qatna, far away in the west, and of Zimri-Lim to the daughter of the king of Yamḥad, the region around Aleppo. It is noticeable that in both cases at first the girl is not named, being referred to as ‘the

<sup>77</sup> P. Steinkeller, JCS 32 (1980) 24 note 6. In general see Å. W. Sjöberg, *Studies A. Falkenstein* (HSAO) (1967) 219–231, cf. M. Civil, JNES 31 (1972) 222b; Wilcke, WdO 4 (1968) 156; ‘Familiengründung’, 220 ff.

<sup>78</sup> Wilcke, ‘Familiengründung’, 230–232.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. also J. J. Finkelstein, RA 61 (1967) 131. The Tell Taanach text compared with EA 89:18 (*imūtu*) is the principal witness. Cf. also Kraus, *Vom altmesopotamischen Menschen*, 48, on *salūtu*, ‘Verschwägerung’.

<sup>80</sup> A derivation from this abstract word *emūtu* ‘marriage’ may be ‘the bed of your [fem.] *ḥamūtu*’ (perhaps an archaising form of *emūtu*); E. Porada and J. A. Brinkman, AfO 28 (1981) 75 no. 32 (GIŠ. NĀ *ḥa-mu-ti-ki*).

<sup>81</sup> K. Abraham in: R. Westbrook, *A history of Ancient Near Eastern law I* (2003) 536 (n. 69).

daughter of King NN'. Furthermore, the marriage was arranged by a high official from far away, by procuracy. That is also how Abraham sent his servant to make arrangements for a bride for his son Isaac (Genesis 24). Sometimes it is difficult to distinguish which letters refer to which of the two marriages. From the dossier about the marriage of Zimri-Lim there is a passage which seems to indicate that gifts were distributed to the most important people, her father Yarim-Lim, her mother Gašera, and the bride herself, Šibtum. The high official wrote,

After we had gone back, I made ready the sheep that had earlier been left for the sacrifice of the daughter, the rest of the sheep which remained in my possession.

In addition: 1 gold arm ring, six shekels in weight; 1 *saqqu* garment; 1 best-quality *uṭuplu* garment; 5 second-rate *uṭuplu* garments; 21 normal second-rate garments; 100 ...-sheep, sheep with a fat tail, and birds; for Yarim-Lim.

1 finely made garment; 2 gold earrings weighing 2 shekels (each); 2 gold earrings weighing one shekel (each); and also 20 sheep; for Gašera.

1 garment from Marad; 4 gold earrings weighing two shekels each; for the daughter, Šibtum. This latter gift was enough, just like the previous one. The face of Yarim-Lim beamed. He said, 'Your previous present, what more can I do?'.<sup>82</sup>

More is known about the marriage of the daughter of the king of Qatna. She was called Bēltum, a word meaning literally 'mistress', which suggests that either she would become queen or that she already had the status of a spouse, to be addressed as 'My Lady'.<sup>83</sup> In Mari the word has both meanings. The king of Qatna described how the two families had grown closer through matrimony:

My flesh and my loins (?) I have given into your lap. Furthermore, this house has changed into your house. Write to me about what desire you have and I shall give it to you.<sup>84</sup>

The father of the bridegroom, King Samsi-Addu of Assyria and Mari, wrote to his son about what it would cost.

I take the girl, the daughter of Išḫi-Addu, for you. The house of Mari has a name and the house of Qatna has a name. To give too low a bride-price is scandalous. Five talents of silver as the bride-price will be given to Qatna.<sup>85</sup>

<sup>82</sup> D. Charpin, 'The "matrimonial mission" to Aleppo', in: K. Radner, E. Robson, *The Oxford handbook of cuneiform culture* (2011) 257–260. The quote is AEM I/1 108 no. 11:15–36.

<sup>83</sup> J.-M. Durand, MARI 4 (1985) 398–403; MARI 6 (1990) 276–295; J. M. Sasson, *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East II* (1995) 880.

<sup>84</sup> MARI 6 (1989) 282 A. 3158:9–14.

<sup>85</sup> ARM 1 77:8–13 with MARI 4 (1985) 403; LAPO 18 (2000) 169 f. no. 1005.

Administrative texts document the journey the bridegroom took to greet his bride, from place to place.<sup>86</sup> These indicate that on the sixth day of the ninth month olive oil was purchased for Queen Ama-duga ‘when the bride from Qatna had been brought here’.<sup>87</sup> A cortège (*hudušu*) accompanied her.<sup>88</sup> Whenever she arrived at the palace, she had difficulty settling in. The girl had gone outside to dance and had become sick. Her unusual behaviour was blamed on the nurse she had brought with her.<sup>89</sup> More will be explained about these circumstances in Chapter 23.

A princess who was married off to a foreigner received the title of ‘bride’. A vassal king wrote to Zimri-Lim of Mari,

You have given the girl, the bride, to this house, and now I have set up your gods, and I have obtained a victory (?). So may you rejoice.<sup>90</sup>

The princess came with all her local gods. This was how Jezebel managed to bring her gods into the court of her husband, King Ahab (1 Kings 16:31–33). In an inscription on the seal of such a princess she is described as having three titles: the daughter of Sumu-El, king of Larsa; the bride (daughter-in-law) of a local king; and the wife of his son, the heir apparent.<sup>91</sup> From earlier times there are also examples of royal women described as ‘the bride’ of a king.<sup>92</sup> Sumerian administrative texts mention the ‘bride’ of the city governor or commandant.<sup>93</sup>

### 2.4.3 Anointing at the betrothal

The cuneiform texts also speak of anointing the woman, but do not make clear whether this was done at the betrothal or during the wedding ceremony. In any case it would have been different in different regions. Everything points to the fact that in the north and in the west the girl was anointed at her betrothal, but that this custom was not known in Babylon itself. Evidence for this comes from

**86** MARI 6, 276; D. Charpin, *Florilegium Marianum V* (2003) 146 (year of Ikuppiya).

**87** D. Charpin, MARI 3 (1984) 96 no. 90.

**88** MARI 6, 283 A. 1224:7.

**89** AEM 1/2 no. 298.

**90** ARM 28 27: 6–11.

**91** OECT 13 7, 12, with D. Charpin, NABU 2002/39; A. Goddeeris, ZA 97 (2007) 60 f.

**92** Bara-irunu, ‘bride of Il, king of Umma’, J. Cooper, SARI I (1986) 93 f.; Taram-Uram, ‘bride of Ur-Nammu (king of Ur)’, M. Civil, Or. NS 54 (1985) 41 vii 10.

**93** W. W. Hallo, HUCA 29 (1958) 79; C. Wilcke, ‘Familiengründung’, 291 f., n. 115; P. Michalowski, ‘The Bride of Simānum’, JAOS 95 (1975) 716–719.

the so-called Amarna letters, where it appears that princesses in foreign parts could be anointed by a messenger from the bridegroom's family. Anointing from a distance gave the girl the status of someone who had now been betrothed.<sup>94</sup> The Hittites also observed this tradition. In a letter which Queen Puduḥepa received from Pharaoh Rameses II he writes about pouring out 'good oil' on the head.<sup>95</sup> In a letter from Ugarit we read that the ointment for a princess was kept in 'her horn' in the land Amurru.<sup>96</sup> Ointment being kept in a horn is attested elsewhere.<sup>97</sup>

Ointments are mentioned in particular in letters sent by the kings of the kingdoms of Mitanni and Babylonia to the Pharaoh.<sup>98</sup> After promising to give the Pharaoh a woman to marry, they ask him to send a messenger to 'pour oil on her head (*qaqqadu*)'. The following passage is very revealing:

The very first time, I said to the messenger, 'Of course I will give her'. When your messenger came the second time, oil was poured on her head, and when I received her bride-price, I gave her.<sup>99</sup>

It is striking that the bride-price (*terḫatu*) was given here precisely on the occasion of the anointing. This appears to fit in with the passages from administrative texts from Ebla a thousand years earlier. The site of Ebla is located near Aleppo in modern Syria. In documents from there we read amongst reports of gifts of clothes a remark about 'pouring out oil on the head', in particular for women named in the text, and indeed 'on the day of the present (*nimusa*)'. This Sumerian word means a gift given on the occasion of a wedding. A particular 'day' is named after this and that must have been the day of celebration. This could have been either the day of the betrothal or the day of the wedding. A. Archi identifies *nimusa*, 'present' with the bride-price, the *terḫatu* of the Amarna letters, and concludes that it must have marked the betrothal. We have here a similar situation to the one in the letter cited above.<sup>100</sup> Another opinion is that it is the marriage that we are

<sup>94</sup> W. L. Moran, *Les lettres d'El Amarna* (1987) 87 n. 7 (in EA 11, 29, 31).

<sup>95</sup> KUB 3 63:15 with E. Edel, *Die ägyptisch-hethitische Korrespondenz aus Boghazköi I* (1994) 134 no. 51, with II 210; S. Lafont, *Revue historique du droit français et étranger (RHD)* 73 (1995) 486 (n. 46).

<sup>96</sup> KTU 2.72:29–31; TUAT I/5 (1985) 505f.; *Festschrift M. Dietrich* (2002) 554, but the situation for this action is not clear.

<sup>97</sup> CAD Q 138b, *qarnu* 4. 'Horn as container, rhyton' is mainly Old Assyrian.

<sup>98</sup> Pharaoh Amenophis III to a king of Arzawa; EA 31:14, with TUAT NF 3 (2006) 194 f.

<sup>99</sup> EA 29:22f. The other passages are EA 11:17 f. (Babylonia) and 31:11–14 (Arzawa); see P. Artzi in Durand, *La Femme* (1987) 26 sub 5. The first fundamental discussion was by B. Landsberger, *Symbolae M. David II* (1968) 79–81.

<sup>100</sup> A. Archi, *Studi Eblaiti II* /2–3 (1980) 21; for an English translation see *Biblical Archaeologist* 44/3 (1981) 14; cf. S. Greengus, *HUCA* 61 (1990) 63 f.

concerned with here and that the Sumerian word means ‘marriage’.<sup>101</sup> However, we have shown that the day of the betrothal may be just as applicable, and there is some indication that the veil was put on the girl at the same time.<sup>102</sup>

This information has all come from sources in the west. But to the north of Babylonia was Assyria, and § 42 of the Middle Assyrian laws reads,

If a man pours oil on the head of a woman of the *aṭlu* class on the occasion of a holiday, or brings dishes on the occasion of a banquet, no restitution shall be made.

We hear nothing about the exchange of wedding gifts, but here we are confronted with two ceremonies which set the seal on the betrothal, the pouring of oil, and a meal. It is assumed that the crockery (*huruppātu*) was comprised of pitchers with drink in them, comparable to the beer used in Old Babylonian times on the occasion of a *kirru*, ‘reception’.<sup>103</sup> The next section of these laws mentions this as well and examines the problem of what to do if the betrothed man should later die (§ 43). Then the family would do their best to find another man in the family for the girl for as long as it took. It is said that the anointing also occurred in ancient Sumer and is mentioned in the texts concerning the ‘reforms’ of Urukagina.<sup>104</sup>

Much has been written about the meaning of the anointing ceremony. The best theory is that anointing symbolised a change of status. It was a purification rite done in preparation for the change.<sup>105</sup> The high priestess in Emar was anointed on her installation.<sup>106</sup> The anointing of kings in Israel is also attested as a practice. As a custom in the west it was also mentioned in a letter from Mari, where a prophet speaks in the name of the weather god Adad:

I made you turn back to the th[rone of your father’s house]. I gave you the weapons with which I have fought the Sea. I anointed you with the oil of my ... so that no one shall stand against you.<sup>107</sup>

---

**101** G. Pettinato in: H. Waetzoldt, H. Hauptmann, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft von Ebla* (1988) 304–308; M. G. Biga in: Durand, *La Femme* (1987) 45 with n. 18, 21. *Archi*, *Eblaitica I* (1987) 121, also translates the word as ‘wedding’.

**102** M. V. Tonietti, *Memoriae Igor M. Diakonoff* (2005) 250 f. note 33: for the veil together with anointing the head see TM.75.G.1326; also J. Pasquali, *ibidem*, 175; NABU 2009/11 [3].

**103** B. Groneberg in: Th. Späth, B. Wagner-Hasel, *Frauenwelten in der Antike* (2000) 6 n. 19.

**104** C. Wilcke, *Early Ancient Near Eastern law* (2003) 62 f.; Urukagina inscr. 6 ii 15–31, where the ‘wedding’ is indicated by pouring out an aromatic product on the head (22).

**105** D. Pardee, *BiOr* 34 (1977) 17b, with a full discussion of all passages.

**106** D. E. Fleming, *The installation of Baal’s high priestess at Emar* (1992) 177–179. On p. 10:2 and p. 49 the central word (*pūru*) was misunderstood as ‘the lots(?)’ but it should have been ‘the bowl (with salve)’. See W. Sallaberger, *ZA* 86 (1996) 144 f.

**107** J.-M. Durand, *MARI* 7 (1993) 45 rev. 1–6, with p. 53. The Sea (*têmtum*, Hebrew *tehôm*) is the sea-monster, named in the Bible as Leviathan.

Some have linked anointing with communal eating and drinking, creating a new bond together. It was seen as a token of hospitality when you were being received by another family.<sup>108</sup> However, this would not apply to the anointing of kings or priests, nor to the freeing of a slave attested in Ugarit. During a wedding ceremony the guests anointed themselves,<sup>109</sup> or a woman would anoint the bride to cleanse her face, both actions of practical significance.<sup>110</sup>

#### 2.4.4 The bride

On several occasions already we have encountered the concept of the bride. She appears in the Sumerian survey of family members in ages from young to old: a little child, a marriageable girl (*ki.sikil*), a marriageable boy (*guruš*), a bride (*é.gi<sub>4</sub>.a*), a small boy (*tur bàn.da*, probably a betrothed man), an old man (*abba*), an old woman (*umma*).<sup>111</sup> The usual Sumerian word for bride is *é.gi<sub>4</sub>.a*, which means literally ‘she who has changed house’.<sup>112</sup> In Akkadian the bride is called *kallatu*. This title was mostly used when she was getting married and during the first period after her marriage. It can be used proleptically, before the wedding in anticipation of the event.<sup>113</sup> Probably she was considered to be a *kallatu* until her first child was born.<sup>114</sup> §18 of the Laws of Ešnunna, as will be shown later, and §46 of the Middle Assyrian law-book, indicate this. In Old Babylonian texts the word is also a sort of title. F. R. Kraus saw her not as the bride of her husband but of his family. It is striking that always there was only one person addressed as bride.<sup>115</sup> According to another theory this word for bride was reserved for the wife

**108** M. Malul, *Studies in Mesopotamian legal symbolism* (1988) 175 f.

**109** UET 5 636:9–11 with Malul, 166 f.; E. C. Stone, *Nippur neighborhoods* no. 34 rev. 9; 1 litre of (sesame) oil each time.

**110** ‘Enlil en Sud’ 147 with C. Wilcke in: Durand, *La Femme* (1987) 184.

**111** In the Sumerian debate ‘The Heron and the Turtle’ (12–18); G. Gragg, *AfO* 24 (1973) 60; W. W. Hallo, *The Context of Scripture* I (1997) 571.

**112** Cf. *igi.gi<sub>7</sub>*, ‘to change the appearance’, M. Civil, *AfO* 25 (19) 70a. B. Landsberger, *Symbolae M. David* II (1968) 49 ff., and J. J. Finkelstein, *JAOS* 86 (1966) 355–362, surmised that the expression was to be taken literally to mean ‘the deflowered one’.

**113** F. R. Kraus, *Vom mesopotamischen Menschen der altbabylonischen Zeit und seiner Welt* (1973) 53, in his observations on the ‘Schwiegertochter’ (p. 50–55).

**114** J. Bottéro in: P. Grimal, *Histoire mondiale de la femme* I (1965) 187 (top). M. Stol has supplied the proof in *Studies A. Skaist* (2012) 133 f.

**115** C. Wilcke in Ziegler, *Le Harem* (1999) 45 n. 268.

of the oldest son.<sup>116</sup> One can also imagine that there would only be one married couple who could stay on in their parents' house until the first child was born.

The harem at Mari had eleven 'daughters of the king', seven 'brides' (*kallatu*), fifteen 'slave-girls of the king' (probably concubines).<sup>117</sup> An important sheikh complaining about the nomads said,

'They have removed as booty sons and daughters, my 'brides' (*kallatu*) and my servants'.<sup>118</sup>

By this he meant his family and their staff. Elsewhere the elders of the city of Urkiš tried to redeem a 'bride' taken hostage with the silver which her husband had brought along.<sup>119</sup> A man from Emar sold his 'bride' as a slave. This may possibly mean that it was a newly married woman without children.<sup>120</sup> The 'bride of the house' often received letters full of information about household provisions.<sup>121</sup> She was the recently married wife who managed the home.

A Sumerian proverb states that a bride who had come recently into the family could be a nuisance,

The pleasure of a daughter-in-law is anger (SP 3.44).

Another Sumerian describes a father travelling through the desert,

The waterskin is a man's life. The sandals are a man's eye. A spouse is a man's supervisor. A son is a man's shade. A daughter is man's head-covering (?). A daughter-in-law is a man's devil.<sup>122</sup>

Devils were known to wander around in the desert. A troublesome daughter-in-law figures in a letter:

When you had left, there was no talk of her ... and insults (?). But now, for eight months she has been refusing to live (here). She quarrels and regularly goes back at night to her father's house, and I keep hearing bad things, and she will not listen to me.<sup>123</sup>

---

**116** Thus F. R. Kraus, 53 f.

**117** Ziegler, 45, with an extensive footnote.

**118** J.-M. Durand, *Amurru* 3 (2004) 120 A. 2730: 43–45.

**119** M. Guichard, *Florilegium Marianum* II (1994) 254 f. no. 125.

**120** D. Arnaud, *Aula Orientalis* 5 (1987) 231 no. 12 ME 117.

**121** S. Greengus, *OBTI* nos. 5–7. This title again in *VAS* 7 185 ii 5, etc.

**122** B. Alster, *Proverbs of Ancient Sumer* (1997) 245, Collection 19 Section C 7.

**123** C. Michel in *CRAI* 40 (1996) 287 n. 3, with K. R. Veenhof, *Archivum Anatolicum* 3 (1997) 365 f.

We have already seen that there were surprisingly young brides. Little girls could be bought for money with the intention of giving them over later to a husband. In this event the girl was also called a bride. Assyrian texts use this idiom also.<sup>124</sup> In Emar and Nuzi a marriage broker would buy these tender brides and the future husband would later pay the bride-price of forty shekels of silver, the normal price. The broker would keep most of this, about thirty shekels, and the rest would go to the poor family of the girl.<sup>125</sup>

In other Semitic languages words cognate with Akkadian *kallatu* also mean bride. It is preserved even in Yiddish *kalle*.<sup>126</sup> The etymology of the word presents a problem. It cannot be linked to a verb, but it can be associated with nouns which mean 'garland', such as Akkadian *kulūlu* and *kilīlu*,<sup>127</sup> Syriac *k'īlā*, and Arabic *iklīl*.<sup>128</sup> It is possible that the word for bride was a primitive noun, and because of her garlanding the word for the special garland was derived from it.<sup>129</sup> Perhaps the root of the verb *kll* indicates something round<sup>130</sup> and the married woman may have worn a sort of band on her head. In Sumerian times a piece of cloth rolled round the head is mentioned (*tūg.šu.gur.ra*).<sup>131</sup> Such a cloth fits in with two Old Babylonian passages, according to which the girl who is given in marriage is 'dressed' and 'receives a head-covering', using the verbs *labāšu* and *apāru*.<sup>132</sup> A Middle Assyrian contract mentions a newly wed woman as 'clothed and bound up'.<sup>133</sup> In

124 K. Radner, *Die neuassyrischen Privatrechtsurkunden* (1997) 142–144. In CTN II 219 we have a 'bride' who is 4 half-els tall.

125 B. Lion, 'Filles à marier à Emar et à Nuzi', NABU 2001/74. For more about such practices see Chapter 17.

126 Hebrew *kallā(h)*.

127 H. Waetzoldt, 'Ring, Reif', in art. 'Kopfbedeckung', § 6.a, RIA VI/3–4 (1981) 199.

128 Another obscure word, read as *kalāla* in the Qur'an, seems to have this meaning (Surah 4:12 and 176); see David S. Powers, *Studies in Qur'an and Hadith: the formation of the Islamic law of inheritance* (1986) 21–49. He translates 4:12b as 'If a man designates a daughter-in-law or wife as heir, and he has a brother or sister, each one of them is entitled to one-sixth (...)'. This verse implies that there were no parents or children to inherit.

129 Cf. the derived verb *kullulu* in R. Borger, BiOr 28 (1971) 19b, SAL.É.GI4.A (= *kallatu*) *uk-tal-[lal]* (p. 11 iii 17), 'Die Braut wird bekränzt (?)' (p. 16a), ihren [Mann] wird sie verehren'; cf. Wilcke, 'Familiengründung', 282.

130 This may suit the verb *šuklulu* 'to complete, to perfect'.

131 A. Falkenstein, NSGU I (1956) 101 f.: a woman who does not wish to marry says to the rejected man, 'Unter Eid beim König sollst du zu mir nicht sprechen (und) meine Haube sollst du an dein Haupt nicht führen'; H. Waetzoldt, art. 'Kopfbedeckung', § 8.d, RIA VI/3–4 (1981) 201.

132 AbB 1 30:23 f. with B. Landsberger, *Symbolae M. David* II (1968) 98 n. 1; PBS 8/2 252:1 f.; CT 48 51:8 (*ana labšūssa u aprūssa iḥussi*). Cf. CT 45 119:8 f. with C. Wilcke, ZA 74 (1984) 176.

133 VAS 19 37:10 f. with J. N. Postgate, Iraq 41 (1979) 93 (*labulta u rakilta*).



illustrations we often see women with a band around their heads.<sup>134</sup> One cannot rule out the possibility that every woman, whether married or not, had something on her head. All this concerns the ‘bride’ after her wedding. These head coverings are not to be confused with the veil.

#### 2.4.5 Betrothal time

The length of time a betrothal lasted is not known. For young girls who were married off when they were still very small, it could last for quite a while. Texts from the middle of the second millennium BC suggest four months, or seven years, or even ten years.<sup>135</sup> A Neo-Babylonian marriage contract ended with the announcement that the girl would go to live with her father for another two years. It is a postscript written in the left-hand margin.<sup>136</sup> We know that a man lived for four months with his in-laws in another town, but that was probably shortly before the wedding.<sup>137</sup> Perhaps we assume that the betrothed each stayed on living in their homes, but that was not necessarily always the case. R. Westbrook sees a difference between the ‘standard inchoate marriage’ and the ‘status of the bride’ (*kallūtu*). In the latter case the girl went to live in the house of her father-in-law at the time of the betrothal. Westbrook assumes that they must have been very young.<sup>138</sup> The father-in-law now ‘took’ (*aḥāzu*, ‘to take control of’) the girl until the bridegroom ‘took’ (‘married’) her later. Regarding the couple being together, we have only a lyrical speech by Dumuzi to Inanna before their wedding:

Tell your mother some tale! Let us be dallying in the moonlight! Let me spread for you the pure sweet couch.<sup>139</sup>

Much could happen in the betrothal period. A paragraph in the laws of Hammurabi discusses the possibility that the father of the bridegroom might rape the bride living in his house, before or after his son had ‘known’ her (§ 155–6). A myth shows that at this time female friends of the girl could discourage her from mar-

---

**134** J. Börker-Klähn, art. ‘Haartrachten’, RIA IV-1 (1972) 1–12. cf. 4b, Abb. 8, ‘Haar liegt unter einem Schleier mit angearbeitetem Stirnband’.

**135** C. Wilcke, ‘Familiengründung’, 250, note, and 251, bottom (MB); 274 f. (OB).

**136** C. Wunsch, *Urkunden* (2003) 14 no. 3.

**137** UET 5 636:39.

**138** Westbrook, *Old Babylonian marriage law* (= OBML) (1988) 34–36, 48.

**139** C. Wilcke, WdO 4 (1968) 154 f., Th. Jacobsen, *The harps that once* (1987) 11 (‘The Wiles of Women’).

rying, and that people could go back on their decision to marry.<sup>140</sup> A bridegroom swears:

I am your son-in-law. I shall not step inside the house of a stranger.<sup>141</sup>

That means that during his betrothal he will not go after other girls. An Old Assyrian text stipulates a time limit for a marriage to be completed.

If he does not come within two months and shows no attention to his wife, she shall be given to another husband.<sup>142</sup>

#### 2.4.6 Breaking the contract

At the time of the betrothal both parties were bound to the agreement. The payment of the bride-price implies a claim on the father of the bride.<sup>143</sup> Still there was the possibility of breaking the engagement. An Old Akkadian contract stipulates at the end of a lawsuit, under an oath on the king's life, that someone shall not 'come back' to the woman N., and before witnesses he declares,

N. shall wed the husband of her heart. In that I shall not hinder her.<sup>144</sup>

According to one Sumerian text breaking a betrothal contract was punishable with a fine. A promise had been made before witnesses, and the judges decided that the father of the bridegroom should pay a mina of silver to the girl.<sup>145</sup> In a lawsuit a problem is examined where the woman is 'married' (betrothed), but the mother of her husband for three months 'had not let her come into the house'.

140 J. Klein, *Studies R. Kutscher* (1993) 100 n. 12.

141 NRVN 5 with C. Wilcke, 'Familiengründung', 246.

142 M. Ichisar, RA 76 (1982) 171, TCL 4 67:13–18. Others state that she is married but not supported by the man; R. Rems, WZKM 86 (1996) 365 (n. 24); C. Michel, RIDA 84 (2006) 162. C. Michel also discusses AKT I 76, where a fine could be meant, one incurred for breaking up the betrothal for another woman.

143 Wilcke, 256: 'Aus der Zahlung der *terḫatum* resultiert kein Recht auf die Braut, sondern nur ein Anspruch gegen den Brautvater'.

144 BIN 8 164 with D. O. Edzard, *Sumerische Rechtsurkunden* (1968) no. 85; M. Yoshikawa, *Studies Å. W. Sjöberg* (1989) 589 (n. 6). C. Wilcke: the last words of the man's oath strongly point to the woman as the initiator of the divorce; in *Early Ancient Near Eastern law* (2003) 62, 66.

145 H. Neumann, TUAT NF 1 (2004) 2f.

They subsequently separated. No punishment was reported. Possibly the mother was a widow who wanted to be supported by her son.<sup>146</sup> A young man was getting married and declared before the court that an earlier agreement between him and another father-in-law about marrying another girl had come about ‘without the knowledge of his father and mother’ and the engagement was therefore broken. We see here that the mother also had a voice in the matter.<sup>147</sup>

§ 29 of the laws of Lipit-Ištar reads as follows:

If the young son-in-law enters the house of his father-in-law, having ‘done’ the bride-price, but having later been sent out, and his wife having been given to his friend, then the bride-price which he had brought shall be doubled, and his friend shall not marry that wife.

Two remarks arise from this law. On the one hand the family of the bride breaks off the engagement and pays double. That double is the normal sanction if one does not pay back a loan on time. Twice the purchase price serves as the penalty clause.<sup>148</sup> On the other hand the girl might not be married off to the ‘friend’ of the man. This friend was certainly a ‘best man’, so someone directly involved in the marriage. The law found that he might not profit from his position, thus adopting a moral viewpoint. The Laws of Hammurabi have similar requirements and add that the friend of the bridegroom spoke ill of him (§ 160–161).

But a woman could also terminate an agreement. In the record of a lawsuit the judges of a city to the east of the Tigris fined a woman ten shekels of silver, because she had evidently broken an agreement. The hem of her garment was cut off as a sign of separation. The man could not demand that she had ‘the status of (his) wife’, and the woman could not say to him ‘You are my husband’ (the wording is asymmetrically formulated). It is noteworthy that the father of the woman did not make an appearance. He may have died. The woman paid a third party, possibly the father of the rejected bridegroom.<sup>149</sup> If in the ten shekels of silver a fine was included, then that would indeed be the ‘double’. Half of that, five shekels, fits in with my theory that the bride-price was paid in instalments, and in general this amounted to five shekels for the first instalment.

An Old Babylonian text from Larsa gives more interesting information.<sup>150</sup> In the family of the young woman Burtum there was a row and ‘they had approached’

---

**146** M. Sigris, *Studies J. C. Greenfield* (1995) 614 f., Tablet 4; B. Lafont in: F. Joannès, *Rendre la justice en Mésopotamie* (2000) 44 no. 4.

**147** NSGU II no. 15.

**148** Wilcke, WdO 4 (1968) 159; cf. M. Stol, *Een Babylonier maakt schulden* (1983) 5 with n. 17.

**149** Greengus, OBTI 25, with Wilcke, ‘Familiengründung’, 287 f.

**150** YOS 8 141 with Wilcke, ‘Familiengründung’, 288 f., n. 108.

a certain man called Talimum. Then Burtum rejected her family and ‘went after Şilli-Aḥuya’, a third party who married (*aḥāzu*) her. We learn further on in the text that the family had said to Şilli-Aḥuya that he could not marry her. Evidently the betrothal was broken off in this way and they tried to give the girl to Talimum. But in this situation she had possibly obtained the right to a marriage with Şilli-Aḥuya, and she was free to follow this first choice. The lawsuit is primarily concerned with the gift which Şilli-Aḥuya gave to his wife. The gift was a large one and was composed like a dowry (*nudunnû*). As such it really contained what a father ought to give to his daughter. Her angry father had of course not done it and now she was getting it from her husband. An interesting point is that the man added household goods from his family possessions and his brothers were unable to object to this, on the grounds of a decree of the king. Our text sets out to record the gift properly in writing, before witnesses, including two ‘wives’, who may possibly have been the wives of the brothers.

The letters of Assyrian merchants in Asia Minor show that there was a certain freedom to withdraw from a marriage promise. We hear of an adult man who ended his arrangement. In a lawsuit he was addressed by her family:

You made a promise to our father. Come here and marry your wife.

His answer was:

Certainly I made a promise to your father but you did not give me a belt for my loins, as befits brothers-in-law. Moreover you did not invite my brothers. Time was going on (lit. ‘the days were growing less’) and I have grown old and I have married another citizen, a lady from Assur. I cannot marry your sister.

A later letter between the brothers begins, ‘Our sister has become large’, and goes on to discuss the problem of how they can collect money to ‘give her to a husband’. Possibly the first marriage had already been arranged when she still was a child. Their parents appear no longer to be alive.<sup>151</sup> With regard to another ‘girl (*suḥārtu*) who had become large’, her brother says to another fellow,

Come here and marry (*aḥuz*) my sister in Kaniš.

---

<sup>151</sup> S. Çeçen, *Archivum Anatolicum* 1 (1995) 58–61 no. 6, with 56 f. no. 4; see now TUAT NF 1 (2004) 55 f., 56. Cf. K. R. Veenhof in: L. Marti, *La famille dans le Proche-Orient ancien* (2014) 357 (n. 74).

But the man he addresses, in fact the betrothed, says,

Let her (just) stay there (...). Go and give your sister to a husband wherever you like.

Then a statement from the court is demanded. Before witnesses it is stated that the man is renouncing his right to the girl. We do not know the consequences of these testimonies. It is conceivable that the engagement was terminated and the price paid was never refunded, but this price is not explicitly mentioned.<sup>152</sup> We can conclude that the girl had been married off at a very young age. Another letter shows that a girl was also given the freedom to say ‘no’. The author of the letter puts it to his betrothed in Assur that he could certainly marry a wife from his city in Anatolia. But the girl should consult her father.<sup>153</sup> And rightly so, for, who knows, presents might already have been given.

Because the betrothed woman was called a ‘wife’ it can be difficult to distinguish a text concerned with breaking an engagement from one about the divorce of a couple who had been definitely married. When scholars thought a divorce had occurred, they translated the expression *ul aḥḥaz*, which means literally ‘I shall not take’, not as ‘I shall not marry you’ but as ‘I shall no longer be married to you’.<sup>154</sup> One text records the interrogation of a man who wanted to be free of the woman to whom he had been committed but she wanted to stay. It begins with a list of eight personal names who did the questioning.

In the presence of these witnesses they questioned A. ‘Is this woman your wife?’ He declared, ‘Hang me on a peg. Yes, dismember me. I will not marry her’ (or: ‘stay married to her’). Thus he said. They questioned his wife and she answered, ‘I love my husband’. Thus she answered. He, however, refused. He knotted up her hem and cut it off. They questioned him. ‘Should a woman, who has come to live in the house of your father and whom your ward knows as your wife, simply go away just like that? Make her situation the same as when she moved in with you’.<sup>155</sup>

It seems that here the statements have been recorded with the emotion of the occasion. The man gets his way. He knots the hem of the woman’s clothing and cuts it off as a symbolic act of separation. The men presiding give their verdict,

---

152 K. Balkan, ‘Betrothal of girls during childhood in Ancient Assyria and Anatolia’, in *Kaniššurwar. A tribute to Hans G. Güterbock* (1986) 1–8; esp. 4 f. For minor corrections see *Belleten* 200 (1987) 427.

153 BIN 6 104 with Balkan, 7, and K. R. Veenhof, *Schrijvend Verleden* (1983) 92 f.

154 C. Locher, *Die Ehre einer Frau* (1986) 244 f.

155 CT 45 86 with K. R. Veenhof, ‘The dissolution of an Old Babylonian marriage according to CT 45, 86’, RA 70 (1976) 153–164, and C. Wilcke, ‘Familiengründung’, 286 f.

to restore her to the situation she was in before the unhappy cohabitation, which must have meant he suffered financial loss. It seems he had already paid the bride-price when the girl came to live with his family. This decision fits in with §159 in the laws of Hammurabi:

If a man who has the gift (*biblu*) brought to the house of his father-in-law, and who gives the bride-price, should have his attention diverted to another woman and declare to his father-in-law, 'I will not marry your daughter', the father of the daughter shall take full legal possession of whatever had been brought to him.

In an Old Babylonian deposition before witnesses the one party states,

You have not given me (the house) as the bride-price.

Then the other retorts,

I shall not marry your daughter. Tie her up and throw her in the river.

To treat a woman like this is the punishment for adultery. Were the negotiations about a coming marriage broken off because adultery was suspected?<sup>156</sup>

Finally, a betrothal could be ended by what R. Westbrook calls 'frustration', circumstances beyond one's control.<sup>157</sup> In §17 of the Laws of Ešnunna, according to the standard translation by M. Roth, the possibility of the prospective wife or the prospective husband dying before preparations for the marriage were completed is envisaged, and in such circumstances any silver received would revert to the surviving widow or widower:

Should a member of the *awilu*-class bring the bride-price to the house of his father-in-law, and if either should go to his or her fate, the silver shall revert to the original owner.

Roth translates the following clause (§18) as being concerned with the death of one partner of a couple who are already married:

If he marries her and she enters his house and then either the groom or the bride goes to his or her fate, he shall not take out all that he had brought (*wabālu*), but only its excess shall he take.

---

<sup>156</sup> D.I. Owen, R. Westbrook, ZA 82 (1992) 202–207, with D. Charpin in: F. Joannès, *Rendre la justice en Mésopotamie* (2000) 92f. no. 48.

<sup>157</sup> OBML, 47.

Westbrook delved deeper into these laws, and in a subsequent article developed an alternative view.<sup>158</sup> He thinks that the two people referred to in §17 are the bridegroom and the father of the bride, and it is one of them who had died. They are after all the only ones named. Common law determined that it was possible for the girl to marry the brother of the dead man, by levirate marriage. Westbrook establishes that these two provisions belong to the context of commercial laws and that they are based on financial concerns. The laws preceding §17 stipulate that the agreements are null and void and that must mean here that the conveyance of money or goods has become invalid. But §18 remains difficult. I suspect that the unexpected word ‘bride’ means there that the woman who married young as yet had no children. Only if she had a child would everything be paid and the marriage would be permanent. The apodosis ‘he shall not take out ...’ can mean two different things. (1.) If ‘he’ refers to the father of the bride, he will not get back the dowry (supposedly *biblu*, ‘bridal gift’, a noun related to the verb *wabālu*). If this had only been partly paid he could keep the remainder. (2.) If ‘he’ refers to the father of the bridegroom, only a part of the bride-price could have been paid and in that case he could keep the remainder.<sup>159</sup>

A few contracts speak about a situation where circumstances are beyond the control of either party. One text concerns the relatively simple case when the betrothed man dies. It begins by listing the quantity of household goods (*numātu*) belonging to Belessunu that her father Ibni-Amurru had ‘brought inside the house of Ili-usati, the beer-brewer for Ibni-Adad, his son, and given to her’. This was the dowry. But after Ibni-Adad died the goods were returned:

He sent his clay tablet to Ili-usati concerning the transporting of the household goods and in agreement with his clay tablet he gave (the household goods) into the keeping of S., the son of Ibni-Amurru.

The father of the bride probably acted in a businesslike way to try to retain the dowry safely. He gave it to his son, a brother of the bride. Perhaps the girl was young and her brother was charged with looking after it.<sup>160</sup> Problems of adultery and rape during the period of betrothal will be covered in chapters 10 and 11.

---

**158** ‘A death in the family: Codex Eshnunna 17–18’, *Israel Law Review* 29 (1995) 32–42. Reprinted in R. Westbrook, *Writings II* (2009) 127–137.

**159** Full discussion by M. Stol in *Studies A. Skaist* (2012) 134.

**160** S. Dalley, *Edinburgh* no. 15; cf. HG 6 1736 and Dalley, *Iraq* 42 (1980) 67 f.; Westbrook, *OBML*, 47b, 92a. A second text is not clear, see Rittin 48, with Westbrook, *OBML*, 42, 47b; see now Westbrook, *Israel Law Review* 29 (1995) 34 f.

### 2.4.7 Cohabitation

In the Laws of Ešnunna we find

If a man marries the daughter of another man without the consent of her father and mother, and moreover does not conclude the nuptial feast (*kirru*) and the contract for(?) her father and mother, should she reside in his house for even one full year, she is not a wife' (§27, after M. Roth).

Referring to this outcome, even after a year of living together, H. Petschow established that a marriage without the permission of the parents (let us assume the couple were consumed with love) was certainly possible, even if the woman did not have the legal status of 'wife'. He is surprised that we hear nothing about any parental power over the girl.<sup>161</sup> Her age or social status could play a role (possibly she was immoral), but the laws are silent on this. Marrying 'without asking father and mother' was not usual, though widows and divorced women were independent (*sui iuris*) and as such would not have to rely on parental consent. The Assyrian laws state that living with a widow for two years grants her the status of full wife:

If a man has married (*aḥāzu*) a widow, without any contract having been drawn up with regard to her, she lives in his house for two years, then she is a wife (*aššatu*); she may no longer go away (*ašû*) (§34).

An Old Babylonian legal textbook draws an almost idyllic picture of a family, where the wife, a 'holy woman' (a sort of prostitute), is taken in from the street by a divorced man 'out of love'.<sup>162</sup>

From the Neo-Babylonian period we know of six wedding ceremonies attended by children who already belonged to the couple. One states that

The seven-year-old daughter of (the woman) R. who has not yet had (a contract) sealed concerning her, [whom she] bore to Š., is the daughter of Š.<sup>163</sup>

In another case three children were listed as being already born and then the bridegroom accepted his paternity.<sup>164</sup>

<sup>161</sup> H. P. H. Petschow, 'Außereheliche Lebensgemeinschaften?', NABU 1990/118.

<sup>162</sup> MSL 1 (1937) 99–101, Ai VII iii 7–21. Cf. Landsberger, *Symbolae M. David* II (1968) 87; Wilcke, 'Familiengründung', 244.

<sup>163</sup> Roth, *Marriage agreements*, 17 f.; quote from no. 30.

<sup>164</sup> Roth, 117 no. 38.



## 2.5 The wedding

Often wedding customs, even in different cultures, have remarkably similar features. In 1944 a comparative study was set up to investigate the folklore surrounding the wedding in the Mediterranean region. The Aryan author was inclined to trace back customs from the Near East to ancient Greece.<sup>165</sup> The material he assembled in that study contained usages we know or suspect to have been observed also by the Babylonians. One such, the bathing of the bride, appears to be widely known.<sup>166</sup> Another intriguing feature is the ‘crown’, which was set on the bride’s head by the Greeks, and which was used later in the Syrian church (*k<sup>e</sup>lilā*) at betrothals, and much later on by Muslims also.<sup>167</sup> With Muslims the wedding celebrations last seven days, which was also the case in the Old Testament.<sup>168</sup> That study further dealt comprehensively with the marriage procession, veiling, showering with small items, virginity, and singing songs. An echo of these songs can perhaps be found in couplets associated with the Sumerian Sacred Marriage.

We do not know much about weddings in ancient Mesopotamia, but there are a few relevant passages in literary texts. Th. Jacobsen has reconstructed the events of an ordinary wedding on the basis of a text describing the sacred marriage ritual.<sup>169</sup> The bridegroom would appear with his wedding gifts, food and delicacies, at the door of the house of the bride’s parents and ask to be admitted. Sumerian songs tell how the man makes a necklace, into which he sets precious stones and pearls ‘like seeds’, in preparation for the sacred marriage. That was thought to be a metaphor for intercourse, particularly when the verb ‘to plough’ occurred, but in fact ‘to plough’ here indicates the threading of the beads,<sup>170</sup> so that idea must be rejected. The bride, who had already bathed, dressed and adorned herself, would open the door to him. Her opening the door was the symbolic action which made the marriage valid, according to Jacobsen. After that, the bride and groom would each be separately escorted to the bride’s room, where

---

**165** W. Heffening, ‘Zur Geschichte der Hochzeitsgebräuche im Islam. Ein Beitrag zur Volkskunde der islamischen Länder’, in: R. Hartmann, H. Scheel, *Beiträge zur Arabistik, Semitistik und Islamwissenschaft* (1944) 386–422.

**166** Heffening, 392–394. The apostle Paul may allude to this bathing when saying, ‘Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for it, to consecrate and cleanse it by water (*tōi loutrōi toū hūdatos*) and word’ (Ephesians 5:26–27).

**167** Heffening, 395–398.

**168** Heffening, 413–416.

**169** In H. Goedicke, J. J. M. Roberts, *Unity and Diversity* (1975) 65, based on SLTNi 35 = Th. Jacobsen, *The harps that once*, 19–23 (‘Dumuzi’s Wedding’).

**170** Y. Sefati, *Love songs in Sumerian literature* (1998) 202f., on 195 DI I:25–28.

intercourse would take place. On the following morning the bridal couple would preside at a rich banquet. More details about this banquet will be given in Chapter 3 where wedding gifts are discussed. Here it is appropriate to mention a Sumerian duet between Inanna and Dumuzi which was sung at these occasions. He and a choir of ‘best men’ sing about the food and drink which they have brought: beer, barley, bread and meat. Inanna answers briefly in ‘women’s language’. Possibly this duet has been taken from life and the bride and groom identify themselves with Inanna and Dumuzi.<sup>171</sup>

In Mari the idea of a wedding was expressed by *ḥadāšu* (*ḥudušu*) and in a later period *ḥašādu* was used in connection with the Sacred Marriage. It appears to be a West Semitic word, from the root *ḥ-d-š*, which has the basic meaning ‘to be new’. The bride may possibly have been called ‘the new one’. The expression ‘men of the *ḥadāšu* (*ḥudušu*)’ were members of the wedding procession. It is striking that on this occasion clothes were shared out, a practice later sustained in the Middle Babylonian period.<sup>172</sup> This is reminiscent of Samson, who arranged a celebration meal for his fiancée in Timna, in which thirty companions participated. He gave them a riddle, and if they found the answer he would give them ‘thirty lengths of linen and thirty changes of clothing’ (Judges 14:10–14).

It seems that a special table was used on these occasions, the *paššūr sakkî*. In Old Babylonian Nippur the oldest son always inherited the table.<sup>173</sup> In the Old Babylonian version of the Gilgamesh epic a man says,

They have invited me to the ‘house of marriage’. It is man’s destiny to choose a bride. On the table of the *sakkû* I will pile up the merry food of the ‘house of the father-in-law’.<sup>174</sup>

A song says,

We often practised bridehood (*kallūti*) in the upstairs room, in the bedroom (...); we practised loving together (*tartami*) in the yard and in the barn.<sup>175</sup>

171 S. Mirelman, W. Sallaberger, ZA 100 (2010) 177–196.

172 J.-M. Durand, LAPO 18 (2000) 180. For clothes see ARM 23 375; 24 65; J. Aro, *Mittelbabylonische Kleidertexte* (1970) 13 ff. no. 3 (*ḥadašūtu*, 100); see further C. Wilcke, ‘Familiengründung’, 230–234; J. A. Brinkman, *Post-Kassite Babylonia* (1968) 122; H. Freydank, OLZ 69 (1974) 557; B. Landsberger, *Symbolae M. David II* (1968) 105 (top), for a princess.

173 E. Prang, ZA 66 (1976) 16; Landsberger, *Symbolae David II*, 83 n. 1. The *sakkû* (Sum. *zà-gú-lá*) was the place of honour, according to W. Sallaberger, *Der kultische Kalender Ur III-Zeit I* (1993) 220 n. 1051.

174 A. R. George, *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic I* (2003) 178 f., OB II 149–153.

175 W. G. Lambert, MIO 12 (1966) 54:12–15.

The mention of the upstairs room seems to focus on wedding behaviour, and the other places on a secret *tête-à-tête*. A few generations ago the haystack was the obvious place for such high jinks.

Other literary texts show how long a wedding lasted. In the Atram-ḫasis myth a tale is told about how marriage was first instituted and how childbirth followed later. A bed was erected, and then the ‘wife and her husband make love (lit. ‘choose each other’)’. According to the myth, this introduces ‘nine days of pleasure’, apparently the same as the duration of the wedding celebrations. At that time Ištar, the goddess of love, was called Išḫara.<sup>176</sup> During the Assyrian sacred marriage of the god Nabû and the goddess Tašmetu, the statues of the two gods stayed in a bedroom for six days, from day 5 to day 10. Similarly for the Babylonian marriage of Nabû and Nanaya, they stayed from day 11 to day 17 in the first month.<sup>177</sup> According to the Gilgamesh epic, Enkidu and the wench were ‘six days, seven nights’ together (I:194). Nergal and Ereškigal were together for the same length of time.<sup>178</sup> This fits in with the number of days for a marriage celebration traditionally taken in the Middle East.<sup>179</sup> What is more, it is comparable to the traditional seven-day period of mourning.<sup>180</sup>

There are indications that in Palestine and Morocco, people liked to celebrate weddings at certain quiet times of the year. S. Greengus pointed this out and made the connection with the sacred marriage of the goddess Baba in Lagaš. Most of the documents on which the so-called ‘marriage gifts’ were recorded were dated from the eighth month, the month of the autumnal New Year, and in the spring.<sup>181</sup> But designating these as the normal times for weddings seems rather speculative.

---

**176** Atram-ḫasis I 299–304 with W. von Soden, ZA 68 (1978) 68 f. For the bed erected for Išḫara see Gilg. P v 22 f. (= OB II 196; A. R. George, *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic* I [2003] p. 178), cf. Gilg. II ii 44 (= II p. 109 in ed. George).

**177** For the Assyrian marriage see ABL 366:13–15 with TUAT NF 3 (2006) 149 no. 4.16; E. Matsushima, ASJ 9 (1987) 138 and 141 (bottom). For Babylonia see C. Waerzeggers, *The Ezida temple of Borsippa* (2010) 129 f. B. Meissner used only sources like these in his reconstruction of wedding practices; BuA I (1924) 403.

**178** B. R. Foster, *Before the Muses* I (1993) 411 (11.), 423 (iv 8–13, vi 34–41).

**179** J. Morgenstern, *Rites of birth, marriage, death and kindred occasions among the Semites* (1966) 107–111. Cf. his notes 180, 220.

**180** For example, the lyre was played during seven days and nights of mourning (‘The Curse of Agade’, 199 f.); and the mourning after the death of King Šulgi lasted seven days; see P. Steinkeller, *Studies P. Machinist* (2013) 461; also more in D. Katz, *Studies T. Abusch* (2010) 116. In Southern Iraq also there are seven days for a wedding and seven days for mourning; W. Thesiger, *The Marsh Arabs* (1964) 185 (chapter 20). See also W. W. Hallo, *Studies H. Tadmor* (1991) 158 f., MAARAV 7 (1991) 180 f.

**181** S. Greengus, HUCA 61 (1990) 73 f.

### 2.5.1 The best men

We refer to the friends of the bridal couple as the ‘best men’ (or in German *Brautführer* and in French *paranymphe*). In Sumerian they were the *kuli*, ‘friends’, friends of each other and friends of the bridegroom. The bride had her own attendants, the *nimgir.si* (in Emesal *libirsi*), ‘those who blow the horn’, often called ‘heralds’.<sup>182</sup> The corresponding Akkadian term is *susapinnu*, which was taken over into Aramaic as *šōšbin*.<sup>183</sup> In ethnographic literature many other ‘best men’ such as these can be found. They are included in reports of tribal marriages in Syria and Morocco as recorded by Wetzstein and Westermarck. This evidence helps us to fill in the scant details over the bride’s attendants in cuneiform texts. Rabbinic sources also help, all of which were of use to M. Malul.<sup>184</sup> Being a best man seems to have been considered an honourable duty, for which one could actually be paid. This is referred to in a short passage from a text from Ugarit as the ‘silver for the best man’ (*kasap susapinnūti*). Often the best man was armed, for he was supposed to protect the bride against both natural and supernatural enemies.<sup>185</sup> The indigenous Babylonian dictionaries likewise suggest that he carried a sword on his lap.<sup>186</sup> There is a cylinder seal from ca. 2400 BC with the image of a woman who is sitting with her legs spread on top of a supine man (Figure 11). There is no need for us to explain here what she was doing. A hero with a raised dagger stands beside them holding on to the woman’s arm. Scholars have not known what to make of this scene, but now we can understand it perfectly.<sup>187</sup> There are widespread reports from people in the Middle East that on the first wedding night they believed a demon would threaten the married couple. In the apocryphal book Tobit that devil was identified as Asmodaeus (Tobit 3:8).<sup>188</sup> In the Song of Songs we read that ‘sixty of Israel’s picked warriors’ stood round Solomon’s bed,

---

**182** H. Behrens, *Die Ninegalla-Hymne* (1998) 130.

**183** S. Greengus, JCS 20 (1966) 68a; S. Kaufman, AS 19 (1974) 94. For the terminology in Arabic (*zāff*), see C. Wilcke, WdO 4 (1968) 160.

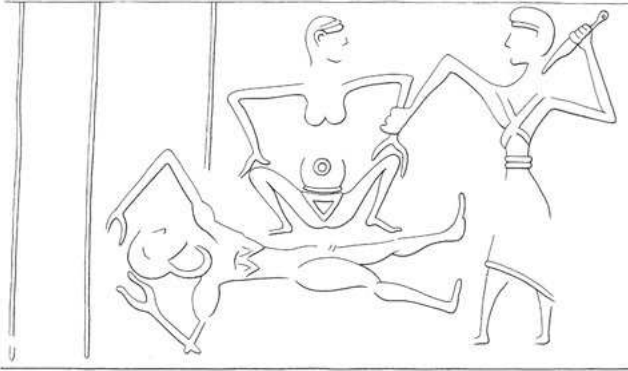
**184** M. Malul, ‘Susapinnu. The Mesopotamian paranymphe and his role’, JESHO 32 (1989) 241–278; see also the remarks of L. Sassmannshausen in his article on the herald, Baghd. Mitt. 25 (1995) 181 f.

**185** Malul, 261 f.

**186** Malul, 257, 271.

**187** U. Winter, *Frau und Göttin* (1983) 348, with Abb. 345, at the end of the book; P. Toscanne, RA 7 (1909) 61 (‘a punishment for adultery’); RIA IV/4–5 (1975) 262 no. 24; XII/5–6 (2010) 423 fig. 7. For the inscription see W. G. Lambert, RIA VII/1–2 (1987) 154b.

**188** For the story, see K. van der Toorn, *From her cradle to her grave* (1994) 71.



**Fig. 11:** A woman is seated on a man, and a hero with sword drawn protects them both. He may represent the best man. 2400 BC. Old Akkadian cylinder seal. *Musée du Louvre, Paris.*

All of them skilled swordsmen, all expert in handling arms, each with his sword ready at his side against the terrors of the night (Song of Songs 3:7–8).<sup>189</sup>

The best man was responsible for the chastity of the bride, and Malul sees him as her guardian.

It may also have been the duty of the best man to see that intercourse had taken place. Sometimes he himself was even present to witness it. A blood-stained garment, the proof of deflowering the virgin, would have to be displayed,<sup>190</sup> and it may have been his duty to display it.<sup>191</sup> In Deuteronomy 22:17 that garment proving a new bride's virginity was called a *simlāh* in the Hebrew Bible, but in Aramaic, in the Targum, it was a *šūšippā*.<sup>192</sup> In Akkadian was a cloth named *šusippu* from which the Aramaic word was derived.<sup>193</sup> However, we have no evidence from Babylonia that this entire scene ever took place.<sup>194</sup>

**189** S. Krauss, 'Der richtige Sinn von "Schrecken in der Nacht"', HL III, 8', in: *Occident and Orient. (Moses) Gaster Anniversary Volume* (1936) 323–330, esp. 325, 327. On the dangers of the first night see Otto Böcher, *Dämonenfurcht und Dämonenabwehr* (1970) 128–130.

**190** For the blood-stained garment see also C. Locher, 189 f.

**191** Malul, 264–266.

**192** Malul, 277.

**193** A. van Selms, hesitatingly; Malul, 275 f.; contrast J. S. Cooper, CRRAI 47/I (2002) 94 n. 30 (the word is Sumerian).

**194** In the Jewish tradition the problems in establishing virginity were well-known. They occur in a commentary from the Dead Sea scrolls; see J. H. Tigay, 'Examination of the accused bride in 4Q159: forensic medicine at Qumran', JANES 22 (1993) 129–134. For Morocco, see S. Naamane-Guessous, *Au-delà de toute pudeur* (1988), chapter 3.

A huge amount of trust was placed in the best men, especially if they did spend the first night in the same bedroom as the bride.<sup>195</sup> That was the time for crazy things to happen. Literary texts from Sumer show that a best man could go astray.<sup>196</sup> The god Marduk punished someone for ‘secretly going to the bride of his best man (*ibru*, lit. ‘his friend’)’.<sup>197</sup> The laws of Lipit-Ištar anticipate the situation where the father-in-law chases away the bridegroom and gives his daughter to the best man, a procedure which of course was not allowed. There could be no wedding at all and the banished bridegroom would have double the bride-price paid back to him (§ 29).<sup>198</sup> We find the same judgement prescribed in the later laws of Hammurabi (§ 161). There another note was added to the effect that the best man had maligned the bridegroom and had himself been the agent in driving him away. He would not be allowed to marry the girl, for what he had done was morally offensive. He was after all not faithful to his friend the bridegroom. C. Wilcke sees this as the establishing of a moral principle, that of ‘loyalty’. The same moral rule can be seen in other laws. A young married man (*guruš*) who has relations with a ‘prostitute of the street’ may perhaps divorce his wife, but may certainly not marry that prostitute (Lipit-Ištar § 30).<sup>199</sup> Hammurabi also assumes that a man will be faithful in marriage (§ 142). He violates this trust by ‘going out’ and by deeply humiliating his wife. Lawyers find these instructions regarding ‘loyalty’ interesting, because this principle evidently also applied to the man.

In a more recent study Wilcke suggests that we should see the best men as suitors, the lovers who compete for the hand of the girl. According to the myth about the marriage of Inanna and Dumuzi each of them brings along gifts fitting to his trade. The shepherd Dumuzi with his splendid dairy products was then chosen.<sup>200</sup> But this explanation conflicts with everything we know: they all bring along gifts and those of the bridegroom are of course the ones most acceptable.

---

195 C. Wilcke, ZA 59 (1969) 78 (top); S. Greengus, JCS 20 (1966) 68b, 70b, with n. 102a.

196 Malul, 256, 265.

197 Šurpu IV 6; also copied in a later litany, see E. Reiner, JNES 15 (1956) 136:84.

198 C. Wilcke, ZA 59 (1969) 74 f., WdO 4 (1968) 153.

199 Wilcke, 161 f.

200 Wilcke, ‘Familiengründung’, 275–279. Cf. the translation by Th. Jacobsen, *The harps that once* (1987) 20 f., ‘Dumuzi’s Wedding’; Sefati, *Lovesongs*, 286 ff.

### 2.5.2 Expenses

In a few texts we can read of the expenses necessarily incurred in arranging a marriage. The one most discussed is an Old Babylonian list from Ur, in which the father of the bride has recorded the costs he incurred.<sup>201</sup> The family of the bridegroom lived in Larsa, a different city, and they travelled across for the occasion.<sup>202</sup> His father and mother were also present. This summary of expenses may have been used later to work out a financial settlement between the two families. Greengus has classified the first group of expenses under seven phases incurred at the ‘prenuptial’ stage of negotiations.

I. Gold, a ring and clothing, ‘a present from (or ‘for’) Aplum’.

One generally assumes that this was a present from the father-in-law for Aplum who was the bridegroom. The Ebla texts speak of a ‘present’ (*nīg.ba*) that was the counterpart of the marriage gifts of the bridegroom. In our text such a ‘reciprocal’ gift would be suitable.<sup>203</sup> There is a finger ring (*unqu*) on the list, which elsewhere would have been put on the finger of a woman who had married recently. One possibility is that the father-in-law paid for this ring and that Aplum could slide it onto the finger of his bride. One can imagine that a part of the bride-price given by the father of Aplum could be given directly in this way as a ‘present’ to the bride.

II. At the ... of a pin (?): best oil for the gods.

It is unlikely that the ‘pin’ here was for securing the girl’s chastity, although the pin did play such a role elsewhere. The writer is interested in the price of the oil.

III. ‘On the day that they brought the gift (*biblu*) here, they anointed themselves with a litre of best oil.’ The expenses for the food and the oil follow, and there is talk of a purification (?)<sup>204</sup> of a table.

---

**201** UET 5 636 with S. Greengus, ‘Old Babylonian marriage ceremonies and rites’, JCS 20 (1966) 55–72; B. Landsberger, *Symbolae M. David* II (1968) 77; C. Wilcke, ‘Familiengründung’, 269–275; D. Charpin, *Le clergé d’Ur* (1986) 66–69. The name of the father of the bride was Kü-Ningal, according to D. Charpin.

**202** A passage in an Old Assyrian letter also suggests that the wedding took place in the house of the bride’s father; K. R. Veenhof in: L. Marti, *La famille dans le Proche-Orient ancien* (2014) 346 f.

**203** S. Greengus, HUCA 61 (1990) 62–65.

**204** According to D. Charpin, it is the purification (*takpirtu*, line 17) of the table. The offering (?) table *paššur sakkī* according to K. van der Toorn, *From her cradle to her grave* (1994) 67.

This points to a communal meal that the father had to pay for.

IV. 'When Šat-Ilabrat and Ea-lamassi [two women] came here:' a sheep, beer and best oil.

V. 'On the day that PN, his father, came here to Ur:' food was brought to him.

VI. 'His mother came to Ur:' a sheep, beer and flour.

VII. 'At the gate of (god) Enki his mother ...(?), and they brought her bread, beer and a (certain kind of) sheep.'

What the mother did in this phase is not well preserved, but the verb may have been *pašāru*, meaning 'to redeem' something. This is reminiscent of an Arabic sacrifice, the *ḥeliyye*, performed to 'redeem' the bride. The bridegroom slaughters a ewe for the purpose and the spell said over it 'redeems' the bride. J. Morgenstern assumes that this removes the 'taboo' so that intercourse can take place safely.<sup>205</sup>

If, as Greengus says, all the expenses under I – VII were incurred in the 'pre-nuptial' stage they all occurred within a short space of time. He sees four main stages.<sup>206</sup>

I–II concern presents sent by the father of the bride and unspecified offerings;

III concerns the arrival of the bride-price from the bridegroom's side, with a few presents for third parties;

IV–VI concern the arrival of the family of the groom in Ur;

VII concerns the mother of the groom performing a ritual.

The following phases VIII – XI concern the 'nuptial' stage, the wedding, and phase XII marks the beginning of the 'connubial' stage.

VIII. 'When they bathed: beer for the reception (*kirru*).'

One assumes that this refers to the bathing of the bride during the wedding, but this is not certain. Furthermore one is inclined to think of a bath just before intercourse, but only after phase X is it reported that the man has entered the house of his father-in-law.

IX. 'When they went back and forwards:' beer and a certain sheep.

X. 'On the day he entered my house: a sheep worth two shekels (of silver) was slaughtered, sixty litres of flour was baked, two vats of beer were drawn off.'

<sup>205</sup> J. Morgenstern, *Rites of birth, marriage, death and kindred occasions among the Semites* (1966) 112–115.

<sup>206</sup> *Studies Th. Jacobsen* (2002) 129 f., 138 (see note 17).



This points to a real celebration, the wedding.

XI. 'For four months he kept coming to my house and every day ten litres of bread, twenty litres of beer, a vat of beer was his daily food.' After this, the totals over the four months are calculated.

This daily food was much more than was needed by one person. We assume that the bridegroom was accompanied by his friends, the best men. It is a problem to know the purpose of a period of four months. It could well have been a period of waiting for a pregnancy.<sup>207</sup> But this raises the question of whether these four months came before or after the wedding.

XII. 'When he took her with him (verb *tarû*):' oils for the use of the woman, a sheep, flour and beer.

This refers to the departure of the married couple to Larsa. The expression 'taking her with him' probably is the fixed phrase for taking the bride home, *in domum deductio*.

XIII. 'PN came here from Ur and brought him (beer, bread, oil).'

XIV. 'For two garments of the second ...'

Another rather mysterious list of expenses comes from Old Babylonian Sippar. There the expenditure noted was assumed to be for the entry of a girl into a nunnery.<sup>208</sup> But it has rather more to do with a wedding, mainly because there is mention of a bride-price. It begins,

On the day that I placed the ring (<*un*>-*qâ-am*) of Šamaš on her hand: twenty litres of beer from the brewery.

This putting on of the ring is not really recognisable from elsewhere. The following lines mention a piece of meat on 'the twentieth day, when pouring out the *kirru*', a word translated earlier as 'reception'. The 'twentieth' was the day of the god Šamaš, one on which travelling was not allowed.<sup>209</sup> Further on, our list speaks of 'the day when she is taken away (*tarû*)', which must have been after

---

**207** K. van der Toorn, *From her cradle to her grave* (1994) 73, cf. 66. Some scholars saw a parallel in the 'Besuchsehe' of Arab Bedouins.

**208** CT 4 18b with R. Harris, *Studies A.L. Oppenheim* (1967) 114–116; C. Wilcke, 'Familiengründung', 232 n. 28; M. Stol, *JESHO* 38 (1995) 139 n. 109.

**209** M. Birot, *ARMT* 14 (1974) 215.

the twentieth. The bride was taken away by the man, and in connection with this we read about one and two-thirds shekels of silver ‘from her bride-price’. This amount is exactly one-third of five shekels, which was half the standard amount. It is possible that at this time a new instalment of the bride-price was paid. A third text concerned with expenses lists barley, oil, beer and bread and ends with, ‘various receipts which I gave regularly because of the girl; she came in without clothing’. That girl must have been very poor.<sup>210</sup>

Lists of expenses from other periods also involved marriages. An Old Assyrian document states that ‘our sister shaved her head for the goddess Ištar’, and lists items for those invited for the ceremony: a belt and shoes; foodstuff; animals; clothing; drinking straws and wine; and much more, from woollen fleeces to sacks of chaff.<sup>211</sup> One difficult text is from Middle Babylonian Nippur concerning clothing exchanged between families in Babylon and Nippur.<sup>212</sup> Three Assyrian texts mention quantities of silver, tools, clothing and food, and calculate everything in silver. The families lived in different cities.<sup>213</sup>

### 2.5.3 Intercourse

The couple had sexual intercourse during their wedding days. The Semitic expression ‘to lie with’ is rather direct. In Nuzi part of the bride-price was paid out at ‘the lying’.<sup>214</sup> The law-books and some legal texts use euphemisms, such as ‘to lie in the bosom’, ‘to know’ and ‘to learn’.<sup>215</sup> A prohibition on extra-marital relations mentions ‘that of man and woman’, ‘kissing the lips’ and ‘lying in the bosom’ to describe the sex act.<sup>216</sup> ‘Touching (both) cheek(s)’ seems to be another circumlocution, or ‘to take off the loin-cloth’. ‘Touching’ is mentioned in the context of ‘bringing home’ the ‘wife’, but otherwise it is a sin, which causes illness.<sup>217</sup> Possibly it originally applied to the situation where the bridegroom took off the bride’s

---

**210** PBS 8/2 175.

**211** J. G. Dercksen, AOF 35 (2008) 96–98.

**212** Published by J. Aro; see note 172.

**213** J. N. Postgate, Iraq 41 (1979) 99–103. The first text qualifies the goods as *zu-bu-la-nu-u*.

**214** J. Fincke, SCCNH 7 (1995) 13–17.

**215** Cf. S. M. Paul, ‘The shared legacy of sexual metaphors and euphemisms in Mesopotamian and Biblical literature’, CRRAI 47/II (2002) 489–498; F. A. M. Wiggermann, RIA XII/5–6 (2010) 411 §1.2.

**216** M. Anbar, RA 69 (1975) 120 f.

**217** Touching (*lapātu*) the cheek: M. Stol, *Études Paul Garelli* (1991) 339 (on VAS 18 77); JEOL 32 (1990–92) 45 (n. 16) (TAG TE = *lipit lēti*). Taking off the loin-cloth (*túg úr-ra si.g*): C. Wilcke, *Festschrift J. Krecher* (2014) 502 f.

veil and touched her cheek. Biblical Hebrew uses the verbs ‘to know’, ‘to come to’ and ‘to uncover one’s shame’ (*gillā ‘erwā*). Hymns and songs about Sacred Marriage make clear that intercourse was central to the marriage. Dumuzi is said always to be on his way to the exquisitely extolled ‘loins’ of Inanna, and there is much about the bed which was made ready for them (see Chapter 30). Nothing could be clearer said than that the purpose of this union between the goddess and the king was to foster fertility and welfare in the nation.<sup>218</sup>

Ur III texts sometimes mention ‘the placing of the bed’ (*nā.gub.ba*) for the ‘bride’ of the city governor, during which sheep were sacrificed. An Old Babylonian text speaks of gifts ‘when they lay in their bed’. C. Wilcke highlights these passages and sees in them ‘a comparative openness surrounding the act of marriage’.<sup>219</sup>

We know extremely little about the first time the couple came together, and we have to grope in the dark.<sup>220</sup> Intercourse took place in or at the house of the parents of the bride. The room used for this may have been called the ‘marriage bedroom’ (*bīt emūti*).<sup>221</sup> In Hebrew a corresponding separate room (or tent) was called a *huppā*. This is also known to the Arabs, and in the Middle East the married couple stayed in this room for seven days.<sup>222</sup> J.-M. Durand has tentatively suggested that when the Middle Assyrian laws mention *huruppātu* they refer to this ‘tent’; against this suggestion is the fact that this refers to a meal at the betrothal, and ‘dinner ware’ would be a better translation.<sup>223</sup> The Gilgamesh epic allows us a glimpse into the bedroom. Speaking about the right of the first night of the hero we read,

For the king of Uruk, the metropolis, for the lover, the ‘net’ of people is opened (...). He impregnates the intended wife.<sup>224</sup>

---

**218** According to Th. Jacobsen, the older songs petition for a blessing for one product (the date palm) and the later songs refer to all products of the land; *The treasures of darkness* (1976) 32–47; the date palm occurs in the Uruk text.

**219** D. R. Frayne, *BiOr* 42 (1985) 19f.; Wilcke, ‘Familiengründung’, 291f. A house (probably meaning a room) is arranged for the bride of the governor of Hamazi; AUCT III 84; cf. *Catalogo Torino* I no. 261.

**220** Wilcke, ‘Familiengründung’, 281.

**221** S. Greengus, *JAOS* 89 (1969) 524 n. 92 (at the place of the bride); J. J. Finkelstein, *RA* 61 (1967) 131–134 (the room).

**222** Hortense Reintjes, *Die soziale Stellung der Frau bei den nordarabischen Beduinen unter besonderer Berücksichtigung ihrer Ehe- und Familienverhältnisse* (1975) 40–42.

**223** *AEM* 1/1 (1988) 115 note 68; NABU 1995/49 (*urpatu*).

**224** *Gilg.* P iv 14–24; see now A. R. George, *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic* (2003) 178f., OB II 149–159.

What is meant here by the opening of the ‘net’ (*pūgu*)? It could refer to a tent, used for intercourse, such as the modern Marsh Arabs use in Southern Iraq. This would accord with the ‘marriage bedroom’ used by Syrians, which was ‘woven’.<sup>225</sup> Another explanation sees it as referring to someone opening the ‘thigh’ (*pūqu*), which has inspired some bewildering translations. Some have also thought it refers to the veil. One educated guess explained that the ‘curtain’ is a lightly veiled reference to the hymen.<sup>226</sup> We can twist and turn as much as we want but these problems remain the secrets of the bedchamber.

Some importance was attached to the technique of the deflowering, as we see from a declaration under oath, originally written in Sumerian but copied in the Old Babylonian period. The end of the text is broken.<sup>227</sup>

Kania, the son of Yâ, has taken Taturam-Ištar, the daughter of Ilam-minam-epuš, to be his wife. He has sworn the oath by the king. He has opened the pin of her ‘not-being-known’. If ever Kania says to his wife Taturam-Ištar ‘You are not my wife’, he must pay ten shekels of silver. And if Taturam-Ištar ...

The opening (or releasing) of the pin of her ‘not-being-known’ (*nu.mu.un.zu.na*) refers to taking her virginity and fits with the literary adjuration referring to ‘a young woman, whose pin (*dalla*, *šillû*) no young man has opened’. In the preceding passages her virginity is indicated by other phrases.<sup>228</sup> This line can be compared with the loosening (?) of the *partheniē zōnē* in Homer (Odyssey XI 245). An indirect instance is found in the Old Babylonian period concerning women in a nunnery. If a ‘nun’ passed on property to an heir, sometimes the phrase ‘the pin (*šillû*) is placed in the wall’ is used, meaning that the property is available and unmortgaged.<sup>229</sup>

More needs to be said about the man’s declaration under oath that he had opened the girl’s ‘pin’. Why would a man make this declaration in an otherwise normal contract? A legal explanation of the text was given by C. Locher. We expect the man to declare that his new wife is a virgin. But this oath sworn by

**225** G. Widengren, *Religionsphänomenologie* (1969) 236, 238 (*qeṭar genōnā*).

**226** D. O. Edzard, *OLZ* 62 (1967) 591 (a tent); D. A. Foxvog, *Studies Å. W. Sjöberg* (1989) 171a (the thigh): ‘The loin(s) of the people are opened to (both) the lovers. He will lay with the fated wife – he first, the husband after’; A. R. George, *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic* I (2003) 188 (the veil); H. L. J. Vanstiphout, *Het epos van Gilgameš* (2001) 236 n. 155 (the hymen).

**227** TIM 4 48 with C. Locher, *Die Ehre einer Frau* (1986) 195–202. Cf. F. A. M. Wiggermann on ‘dress pins’, *RIA* XII/5–6 (2010) 421 § 6.4.

**228** S. Lackenbacher, *RA* 65 (1971) 136, lines 22–24; M. J. Geller, *AfO* 35 (1988) 14:33; see S. Greenus, *Studies Th. Jacobsen* (2002) 138 n. 50.

**229** M. Malul, ‘On nails and pins in Old Babylonian legal praxis’, *ASJ* 13 (1991) 237–248.

the king is a promissory oath, not an assertory oath confirming a past event. In marriage contracts from the Ur III period the oath by the king was normal. One assumes that the man promises not to renounce his wife, and that if he does, he will pay her ten shekels. The sentence about virginity is, coming after this, something new and seeks to prevent anyone ever saying that the girl was not a virgin. The man himself put his seal on the clay tablet, which functioned as a sort of signature. It is possible that the man was compelled to make this declaration to protect the woman against any further accusations from his side on the basis of which he could easily be rid of her. Locher compares Deuteronomy 22:13–19 with this, which forms the theme of his book. The other clauses in the text are standard and simply dot the *i*-s and cross the *t*-s in favour of the woman. It all leads to the conclusion that this is no ordinary marriage contract, but a declaration made later about the girl's virginity.

Earlier on we said that virginity was important. It plays a major role on the first marriage night, at the moment of truth. A Sumerian lawsuit gave a man the right to divorce after his wife had explained that a stranger had slept with her without anyone knowing of it.<sup>230</sup> An alternating duet between Inanna ('my sister') and her lover Dumuzi ('my brother') begins and ends with exuberant praise for the physical excellence of each partner. This song will certainly have played a role in the celebration of the Sacred Marriage. In the middle of the song Inanna insists,

Brother, swear to me that you have never laid a hand on a strange woman.

In answering he had to place his right hand on her pudenda and his left on her head.<sup>231</sup> The practice of making an oath at the same time as touching the pudenda also occurs in the Bible. The patriarchs Abraham and Jacob had a predilection for this,

The servant put his hand under his master Abraham's thigh and swore that oath (Genesis 24:9; cf. 47:29).

Virginity was a matter of importance also in the Middle Assyrian period. A man adopted a girl, and promised not to treat her badly, not to dishonour (?) her, and

---

**230** ITT 3/2 5286 with Locher, 203–208.

**231** Y. Sefati, 'An oath of chastity in a Sumerian love song (ŠRT 31)', *Studies P. Artzi* (1990) 45–63; 'The womens's oath', Sefati, *Love songs in Sumerian literature* (1998) 128–131. Th. Jacobsen takes this text to be a 'tavern sketch'; for V. Haas it is 'ein erotisches Schenkenspiel'. Both note the stress on praise for the beer of Inanna.

later to give her to a husband. In exchange for this he would be able to receive the bride-price. It seems as if everything was set up to marry off the girl as a virgin.<sup>232</sup> A difficult Old Babylonian text points out that even her future husband would have to stay away from her. A certain man, E., had a girl as a pledge for a debt of her mother, and swore in the temple ‘not to approach and not to take (*aḥāzu*) her’. The mother then swore by King Rim-Sîn,

I shall ‘keep’ my daughter for E. for five, ten years, and give her to him in marriage.<sup>233</sup>

#### 2.5.4 Completion

There comes a time when all the arrangements have all been completed and the marriage can be considered to be a fact. But to determine when this has happened various events need to be considered.<sup>234</sup>

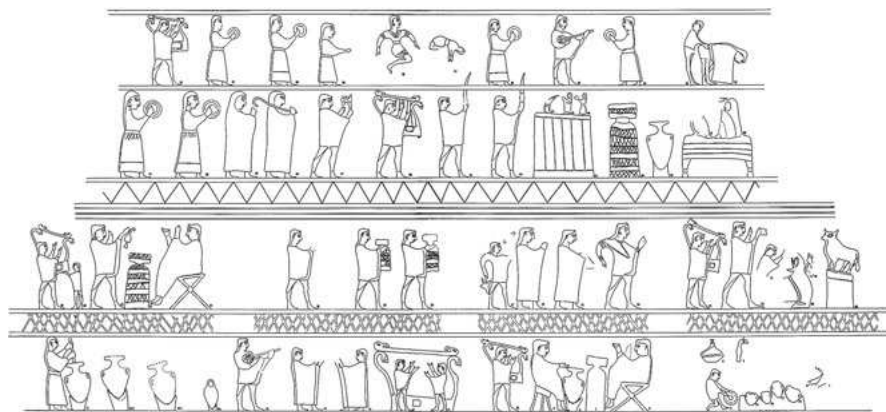
1. The most obvious climax to the preparations will be the first act of sexual intercourse to mark the consummation of the marriage. Most lawyers agree with this criterion. From a legal point of view a husband takes over the authority over his wife from her father. This is the idea expressed by *aḥāzu*, lit. ‘to take’, the most frequently used word for ‘to marry’ in Akkadian. But, as we have just seen, that verb is also used with the harsher sense of ‘to seize’. In a broken betrothal it is used in a more abstract sense, ‘I shall not take her’, which clearly means ‘I shall not marry her’. Sexual intercourse, as we have shown above, was an important element to consider. The Laws of Hammurabi show that sexual intercourse could take place when the girl was still living in the house of her father-in-law, and he ‘knew her’ before the bridegroom did (§ 155–156). Such a circumstance raised a problem. Sociologists recognise that through the act of intercourse a woman gains a new status. It has a similar sacramental function in the Sacred Marriage, and also in the tradition of a king taking over his opponent’s harem and occupying it himself.<sup>235</sup> A Hittite vase dating from 1600 BC from Inandik has pictures of what must surely be a wedding (Figure 12). It is certainly a festive occasion depicted in four registers and includes much music-making. Beginning at the

<sup>232</sup> KAJ 2 with Locher, 224–231. In VAS 9 192–193 (Locher, 209–215) the meaning of not ‘touching’ a girl given to a husband is not clear.

<sup>233</sup> YOS 8 51 with Locher, 216–223; S. Lafont, *Femmes* (1999) 266 f.

<sup>234</sup> Westbrook, OBML, 48–53, ‘II. Formation’; Westbrook, *A history of Ancient Near Eastern law I* (2003) 44–46.

<sup>235</sup> M. Malul, *Knowledge, control and sex* (2002) 301–305.



**Fig. 12:** Images on a vase from the Hittite temple at Inandik. A wedding is depicted, beginning at the bottom with the preparations and ending at the top with its consummation. 1600 BC. Height 82 cm, diameter 43 cm. *Museum of Anatolian Civilisations, Ankara.*

bottom we see people setting out jugs and cooking pots, while musicians play on two lyres. In the next register a man whom we assume to be the king is the protagonist, and a bull is being sacrificed to the bull-god. The third register portrays a temple with a bed coloured red and white on which apparently two figures are sitting. We think this is the king removing the veil from the queen. In the fourth register at the top we can see acrobats performing and instrumentalists playing the lyre, the cymbals and the lute. At the end a man stands close behind a woman who is leaning forward exposing her bare backside. Sexual intercourse in the dog position is a frequent motif in art and is almost certainly what we have here.<sup>236</sup>

We add that in the holy city of Mecca attention was also focused on *dukhla*, ‘penetration’.<sup>237</sup>

2. It has also been suggested that the crucial moment for acknowledging a marital relationship was when the bride-to-be opened the door as her husband-to-be approached. Dumuzi is allowed in by Inanna in songs about the sacred marriage

<sup>236</sup> M. Schuol, *Hethitische Kultmusik* (2004) 56 f. with Tafel 3 no. 9. For a drawing by M. Kutkan see J. M. Sasson, *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East I* (1995) 559; P. Bienkowski, A. Millard, *Dictionary of the Ancient Near East* (2000) 203.

<sup>237</sup> C. Snouck Hurgronje, *Mekka in de tweede helft van de negentiende eeuw. Schetsen uit het dagelijks leven. Vertaald en ingeleid door Jan Just Witkam* (2007) 347, 363–367.

(Th. Jacobsen).<sup>238</sup> The Akkadian expression ‘calling at the house of the father-in-law’ reflects an expectant young man standing in front of a closed door waiting to be allowed to enter. Therefore the sentence, ‘He called at the house of his father-in-law and he got a son and a daughter’ would really mean that he got married and had children.<sup>239</sup> But another interpretation of the expression would be that relations had deteriorated between the parties involved; the bride-price had been paid but the bridegroom demanded his right of recompense.<sup>240</sup>

3. The act of bringing of the gift (*biblu*), and subsequently removing of the veil being worn by the young woman<sup>241</sup> can also be seen as significant moments.

4. Then we have to consider the significance of the recitation of a ceremonial formula (*verba solemnia*), such as are attested in contracts for adoption and divorce, according to S. Greengus.<sup>242</sup> In Assyrian law a man could declare ‘She is my wife’, but we have only indirect support for a declaration like ‘You are my wife’ or ‘You are my husband’ in a marriage ceremony.<sup>243</sup> Roman law used the phrase *ubi tu Gaius ego Gaia*, ‘Wherever you are Gaius, I am Gaia’.

5. P. Koschaker has argued that a marriage was solemnised when the woman was taken to the house of her husband. When she had entered the *in domum deductio* had occurred. He saw an analogy between the *traditio puellae*, ‘handing over of the girl’, and the transfer of goods that had been bought. Obviously his theory works for a marriage which was regarded as a sale, though no-one really believes the two transactions were the same. For a girl living in her father-in-law’s house the *in domum deductio* had already taken place, but the marriage was still not completed, as we can see from the Laws of Hammurabi (§§ 155–156).

6. In Syria to the west and Assyria to the north the bride was veiled for the wedding. Perhaps in these regions the wearing or lifting of the veil marked the

---

**238** Jacobsen, *The treasures of darkness* (1987) 35 f.; *Unity and Diversity* (1975) 65; S. Greengus, JAOS 89 (1969) 521 n. 78 (Sumerian é.e gù-dé). Cf. J. C. de Moor, UF 11 (1979) 649 f., on the opening of the door by the groom, a subject Westbrook omits.

**239** UET 6/2 402:8 f. with D. Charpin, *Le clergé d’Ur* (1986) 326.

**240** Thus Wilcke, ‘Familiengründung’, 273. For earlier discussions see R. Yaron, *The Laws of Eshmunna* (1988) 191–198; F. R. Kraus, RA 68 (1974) 112.

**241** Durand, AEM 1/1 (1988) 103.

**242** Thus Greengus, JAOS 89 (1969) 514–520.

**243** Suggested by literary texts; see Greengus; T. Abusch, *History of Religions* 26 (1986) 149, who refers to an article on such phrases in Hosea 2:15.



defining moment.<sup>244</sup> This would be the reason the betrothed princess from Qatna, who travelled to Mari, already had the title *bēltu*, ‘lady’. In an Assyrian law we see that a man in the presence of ‘five, six friends’ could place the veil on his concubine and then said ‘She is my wife’ (§ 41). On the Hittite vase from Bitik which we mentioned in Chapter 1 the man is lifting the woman’s veil with his right hand, and this was the very reason why the vase was made. In the same period and in similar circumstances the veil was removed on the vase from Inandik which we mentioned earlier in this chapter.

### 2.5.5 Afterwards

After the wedding the man took his wife home. According to the manual about favourable and unfavourable days the best time to do this would be from the first to the third month. There we read that in months I and III, ‘He will feel good’; in month II ‘his family (lit. ‘his house’) will grow’. There are other predictions for these months but the tablets are too badly broken to read. The tenth and eleventh months were also favourable but others may have been less so.<sup>245</sup> A king who gave his new wife a new name with a beautiful meaning chose ‘Šulgi is my ornament’, so it can be assumed ordinary wives were similarly forced to have names such as ‘My husband is my happiness’.<sup>246</sup>

The sister of the man played a special role when he was married. She was addressed in Sumerian as *erib* by the new bride and she had the task of showing the new arrival around the house. The best support for this comes from the myth of the marriage of Enlil to Sud, where his sister Aruru (Ninmah) did just this.<sup>247</sup>

A married man could first move in to live with his father-in-law and then later go to live together as a couple independently. Jurists in Germany speak of *Eintrittsehe* when the father of the bride makes arrangements for the couple to live in his house, but they find evidence for this practice only in the Ur III period.<sup>248</sup> The Middle Assyrian law-book speaks about a woman who still lived ‘in the house of her father’ and ‘her husband came in regularly’ and he gave her a present that she could later use when she would be a widow (§ 27). These two people were married

<sup>244</sup> B. Groneberg in: Th. Späth, B. Wagner-Hasel, *Frauenwelten in der Antike* (2000) 5 f.

<sup>245</sup> R. Labat, *Un calendrier babylonien des travaux des signes et des mois* (1965) 130–133 § 62–3.

<sup>246</sup> K. Radner, *Die Macht des Namens* (2005) 29.

<sup>247</sup> C. Wilcke, ‘Die Schwester des Ehemannes’, in Durand, *La Femme* (1987) 179–187.

<sup>248</sup> A. Falkenstein, NSGU I (1956) 106 f.; J. Hengstl, ‘Die neusumerische Eintrittsehe’, ZSS 109 (1992) 31–52, who notes vestiges in Old Babylonian law-books; H. Sauren, *Studies W. W. Hallo* (1993) 204 n. 19.

according to the law. A manual of physiognomy sometimes speaks of a woman with the words, ‘whenever she enters the house (of her husband)’, or ‘the house in which she lives’.<sup>249</sup> In Nuzi this practice also occurred if a man adopted a son and let him marry his daughter, a subject to which we shall return in Chapter 4, when discussing childlessness. In the Old Testament we can also read of situations when a man moved in with his father-in-law. Jacob moved in with Laban, and Moses with Jethro. There is a Biblical verse which could be intended to express God’s command to humanity for a man to live together with his wife:<sup>250</sup>

That is why a man leaves his father and mother and attaches himself to his wife, and the two become one (Genesis 2:24).

Enough has been said on this subject.<sup>251</sup>

## 2.6 Marriage and magic

Demonic force, such as the spirit of a dead person who could not rest, was often felt to be the source of illnesses. People imagined that the spirit of the dead person had chosen (*hiāru*) the invalid to be his bride. It was an unholy marriage which had to be annulled, and there was a magic ritual to perform which would arrange for a formal divorce. To satisfy the spirit the man would symbolically be married to someone else and supplied with marriage presents. For an epileptic the partner chosen in the ritual was a pig. Dolls were used to represent the invalid and the demon. They had to be dressed in particular clothing before the divorce ceremony was followed by a new marriage ceremony: if it was uncertain that the person had become sick through being possessed by and married to a demon, that marriage had to be arranged first, to prepare the scene for a divorce and a new marriage. Some marriages were symbolised by knotting together the hems of the garments of the partners, and for divorces this knot was cut away. There are different variants of this ritual.<sup>252</sup> There were also Aramaic and Jewish magic ceremonies for

---

**249** B. Böck, *Die babylonisch-assyrische Morphoskopie* (2000) 58 f. For ‘she enters’ see pp. 155:51, 54, 62, 69; 159:121, 124, 134; for ‘she lives’ see pp. 155:55–58, 61, 64 f.; 157:73 f.; 159:115; 167:226.

**250** C. H. Gordon, ‘*Erēbu* marriage’, SCCNH 1 (1981) 155–160.

**251** B. Groneberg in: Th. Späth, B. Wagner-Hasel, *Frauenwelten in der Antike* (2000) 7 f.

**252** KAR 66 with M. Stol, *Epilepsy in Babylonia* (1993) 99–101; D. Schwemer, *Akkadische Rituale aus Hattuša* (1998) 59–62, with W. Farber, ZA 91 (2001) 256 f., lines 20 f. (lying in bed with him for three days), 46 f. (‘You are her husband, she is your wife! You take her and go away!’). For an example see TUAT NF 5 (2009) 140.

this divorce. Such formulas could be written on incantation bowls. They had to be recited against the demon, who was generally female, such as Lilith. This was the formula used also for a normal Jewish divorce (*get*).<sup>253</sup>

In magical procedures one even could resort to adultery. A man suffering from the effects of evil was seen as tainted and his smear had to be cleansed. Among the rituals to accomplish this we find this remedy.

He must go into another house and spend the night there. He must approach a strange woman. At dawn the next morning he must send the woman away.

The verb 'to approach' clearly means more than it says, for the idea was that he could rid himself of the smear by ejaculating his semen. In a related Assyrian ritual the king is required to sleep with a virgin for the same reason, and afterwards has the girl sent away across the border of his territory.<sup>254</sup>

---

253 S. Shaked in: T. Abusch, K. van der Toorn, *Mesopotamian Magic* (1999) 175 ff.

254 S. M. Maul, *Zukunftsbewältigung* (1994) 78 with 493:76 f.

## 3 The marriage gifts

We have already shown that in the absence of special circumstances written contracts for a marriage were not drawn up. The contracts which were drawn up were written with the intention of safeguarding financial interests. We must assume that there were special circumstances surrounding the marriage contracts we have and we have to search to find what those were. The issue is usually financial, in particular gifts which were transferred, and this will be the subject of this chapter. It is not an easy topic and the reader may wish to skip this chapter and proceed to the more accessible chapter 4 about the family.

### 3.1 General remarks

We have to distinguish between the terms ‘bride-price’ and ‘dowry’. The bride-price was given by the family of the man to that of the bride, but the dowry was given to the girl by her father. Although the expression ‘bride-price’ is emotionally charged, carrying overtones of a bride for sale, we have to make do with it, and consider later the idea of conceiving marriage as a commercial transaction.

The best-known Babylonian term for a bride-price is *terḫatu*, which the ancient word-lists equate with Sumerian *nimusa*. The two words may be equivalent but intrinsically they can describe different things. The bride-price can be compared with Ugaritic *mhr*, Hebrew *mohar*, and Arabic *mahr*. Moreover the root of *terḫatu* and the root of *mohar* occasionally occurs as a verb meaning ‘to obtain by marriage’.<sup>1</sup> Sumerian *nimusa* means literally ‘that which belongs to the son-in-law (*musa*)’ showing that from their point of view it was a contribution from the man.<sup>2</sup> It was a significantly different gift from the Old Babylonian *terḫatu*, which was an amount of silver, since the Sumerians gave foodstuff and objects.<sup>3</sup> We prefer, therefore, to more cautiously speak of ‘marriage gifts’.

The most complete list of these marriage gifts occurs in the rather unusual context of being offered to the Sumerian goddess Baba at the New Year’s festival in Lagash. These were to celebrate the sacred marriage between the god and goddess of the city. Gudea, the city governor of Lagash, says that he has expanded

---

<sup>1</sup> Hebrew *mhr*, R. Yaron, ZSS 109 (1992) 91, on Exodus 22:15; Ugaritic *trḫ*, A. F. Rainey, Or. NS 34 (1965) 18.

<sup>2</sup> S. Greengus, ‘Bridewealth in Sumerian sources’, HUCA 61 (1990) 25–88.

<sup>3</sup> C. Wilcke, *Early Ancient Near Eastern law* (2003) 61 n. 186.

this number of traditional gifts, though we have not yet been able to identify precisely what all of them were.

Two fattened bulls, two fat sheep, ten fattened sheep, two lambs, seven baskets of ripe dates, seven bowls of ghee, seven palm hearts, seven bundles (?) of figs, seven baskets of ...-dates, fourteen flowerheads of the date palm, fourteen baskets of cucumbers, one ... bird, seven ...-birds, fifteen geese, seven ...-birds, sixty small birds in fifteen cages, sixty carp in thirty nets, forty bundles of turnips, seven bundles of ...-reeds' (Gudea Statues E and G).

It looks as if this was an all-inclusive list, since others are shorter but feature many of the same items.<sup>4</sup> In the myth about the marriage of the god Martu the father of the bride demanded cows and calves, sheep and lambs.<sup>5</sup>

Among marriage gifts for mortals we often come across bulls and goats in texts from Ebla and the Ur III period.<sup>6</sup> The preparation of these cost time and energy.<sup>7</sup> But these sources do not relate to an outlay by private individuals. We do not find the father of the bridegroom acting but it was organised as it were by the state.<sup>8</sup> Many of the wedding gifts were despatched from the state depository of Puzriš-Dagan.<sup>9</sup> Why this happened is still not clear. On a few occasions hundreds or even thousands of animals are mentioned.<sup>10</sup> That brings us to the question of whether these were despatched for one magnificent banquet, or were just accumulated to the possessions of whoever received them. When fattened animals are mentioned a grand banquet comes to mind, and that is more likely to celebrate a wedding than a betrothal. Crowds of people may have taken part in an official wedding of the state, and all the guests would of course have been high-ranking.<sup>11</sup>

We may assume that during an ordinary wedding overindulgence depended on one or two sheep presented by the bridegroom's family. The Sumerian-Babylonian dictionaries only mention sheep as a marriage gift (*níg.dé.a = biblu*) and sheep are always present in lists of wedding presents.<sup>12</sup> The Old Babylonian list

---

4 Greengus, 48 f., 51 f.

5 'The Marriage of Martu' 90–111, with J. Klein in I. L. Finkel, *Sumerian gods and their representation* (1997) 107 f., 115.

6 Greengus, 36–46, 61–65, 88.

7 Greengus, 34 f., 49.

8 Wilcke, 'Familiengründung', 254.

9 M. Sigrist, *Drehem* (1992) 198 f.

10 In Ebla at the marriage of a princess 3290 animals; A. Archi, *Eblaitica* 1 (1987) 121 f.

11 Greengus, 64 f., 70 f.

12 Wilcke, 252.

of wedding expenses from Ur also has many sheep, to be eaten at the wedding feast.

An Old Akkadian text has sheep, silver, clothing, a pig, oil, malt, wool, dried fish, and sandals for a *terḫatu*. In the Ebla texts a ‘present’ (*níg.ba*) consisting of clothing, silver and jewellery was given as something distinct from the marriage gift.<sup>13</sup> In the Old Babylonian period some care was taken to achieve a balance between the presents of the two families. A Sumerian proverb says,

What has the young man brought? What has the father-in-law released (*búr*) for it?<sup>14</sup>

There are a few other expressions for the presents given to the family of the bride. The Sumerian word *níg.dé.a* means literally ‘what is poured out’, and *mu.pà.da* means literally ‘mentioning the name’.<sup>15</sup> The two words occur together, possibly as incidental presents, in the myth of the marriage of Enlil and Sud. C. Wilcke supposes that the former refers to foodstuff and the latter to valuables.<sup>16</sup> In a letter about the marriage of Zimri-Lim, the king of Mari, and a princess from Aleppo, the gifts for her father, her mother, and herself, are listed in descending amounts.<sup>17</sup> The king of Aleppo had earlier insisted on sending a singer,<sup>18</sup> and there were extra presents apart from the bride-price and the dowry.

The foodstuff given as a marriage gift was probably intended for the wedding celebrations, so we wonder how a *betrothal* was celebrated, if indeed there had been a betrothal. The occasion of an Old Babylonian betrothal was when the bride-price was paid and the girl assumed the status of a ‘wife’. It was all rounded off by drinking a toast (*kirru*). When the Laws of Lipit-Ištar speak of bringing the *nimusa*, ‘marriage gift’, the context is the same as when the Laws of Hammurabi speak of bringing the *terḫatu*, ‘bride-price’. The Sumerian of the Laws of Lipit-Ištar belonged to a time when Akkadian was being spoken.<sup>19</sup> The Akkadian material also points to the betrothal as an independent ceremony.

From a letter from the dossier about a marriage between Mari and Aleppo we can see that the *wedding ceremony* began when the *biblu*, ‘gift’, was brought. The

<sup>13</sup> Greengus, 65 f. (Old Akkadian), 62–64, ‘counter-gifts’ (Ebla).

<sup>14</sup> SP 1.169 with Wilcke, see J. Renger, *Or. NS* 42 (1973) 272 n. 45, end; Greengus, 72.

<sup>15</sup> Greengus, 77–83.

<sup>16</sup> Wilcke in: Durand, *La Femme* (1987) 180, n. 8. M. Civil: ‘bridal gifts’ – ‘personal presents’. Wilcke, ‘Familiengründung’, 252; Greengus, 77–79. The first word *níg.dé.a* (in Akkadian *biblu*) is not attested in § 15 of the laws of Ur-Nammu; read *nimusa*; Wilcke, *Festschrift J. Krecher* (2014) 542 n. 176.

<sup>17</sup> AEM 1/1 (1988) 102, on 108 no. 11.

<sup>18</sup> AEM 1/1 98 no. 9.

<sup>19</sup> Greengus, 46 f., did not realise this.

grandmother of the princess was on the point of death (she died just three days after the gift had been brought) which meant that the wedding arrangements had to be hurried along. The envoy from Aleppo wrote,

Therefore we hurried and brought in the gift (*biblu*) which our master had sent us. We also laid the veil on the girl. Three days after we had brought in the gift, S. died.<sup>20</sup>

Here it was the bringing of the gift and the veiling of the girl that solemnised the wedding. Wilcke saw the link between the gift and the wedding. He cited a letter mentioning clothing, providing a headdress for the girl, and the bringing the gift.<sup>21</sup> A much later text speaks of bringing the gift (*šūbultu*) to the place where the wedding was held (*bit emūti*).<sup>22</sup> This must refer to the same custom but with different terminology.

According to two Old Babylonian letters from Northern Mesopotamia giving the bride-price clinches the deal. There it was the proof that an imprisoned woman was not a slave but married, and therefore had to be freed:

This woman is not a slave. She has been taken for a bride-price.<sup>23</sup>

After the Sumerian Ur III period, during the subsequent Old Babylonian period, we hardly ever hear of such marriage gifts. All we have is the *terḫatu*, ‘bride-price’. We use the word price because it was nearly always paid in silver. In the earlier Sumerian texts the phrase *kù.dam.tuku*, ‘silver to acquire a bride’ is rare.<sup>24</sup> This could indicate that the Sumerians did not think of marriage as a commercial transaction, while the Akkadian-speaking Semites did. But looking for cultural differences between the Sumerians and the Semitic Babylonians in such distinctive customs is questionable.<sup>25</sup> P. Koschaker certainly pointed to a deep difference between Sumerian and Semitic marriage law, as expressed in the bride-price and

<sup>20</sup> AEM 1/1 103 with 106 no. 10:12–19.

<sup>21</sup> ‘Familiengründung’, 261–264; cf. AbB 1 30:21–26.

<sup>22</sup> Craig, ABRT I 4:2–7 = W. G. Lambert, *Babylonian Oracle Questions* (2007) 88 no. 12. Compare the translation ‘present (sent by the bridegroom to the bride)’, MSL 5 (1975) 12 𒄩𒄩 I:39. Furthermore M. Anbar, UF 6 (1974) 443, on ARM 1 54:7, 10 (but here *šūbultu* has a more general meaning).

<sup>23</sup> ARM 28 no. 36 with p. 36; 173:5–16. A litigation from Sippar shows that a relationship ‘without contract’ and without ‘receiving the bridalprice’ is not valid; K. R. Veenhof, *Festschrift C. Wilcke* (2003) 315 f., lines 32, 34.

<sup>24</sup> NSGU I 105; Wilcke, ‘Familiengründung’, 253; Greengus, HUCA 61, 85. – New is NATN 893, as explained by H. Limet, BiOr 41 (1984) 409: the father-in-law has a claim on the son-in-law, [kù].dam.a ba.an.tuku.

<sup>25</sup> See for the problem Wilcke, ‘Familiengründung’, 253 n. 55; defending Falkenstein, ignored by Greengus, HUCA 61, 69, cf. 65.

the inequality of the woman (this would only apply to Semitic law). But his argument has been rejected forcefully. Just because a text is written in Sumerian it has no bearing on the customs of the time. Sumerian could simply have been chosen as the appropriate language for writing the text.<sup>26</sup> Sumerians and Semitic speakers of Akkadian lived for centuries in a state of symbiosis, which makes it difficult to establish differences between them.<sup>27</sup> Perhaps there really was no essential difference in their customs. It may well be, according to S. Greengus, that the Old Babylonian bride-price was indeed only valued in terms of silver, and in fact it may have consisted of goods. If the bride-price had to be returned any edible goods were deducted, according to later Assyrian law (§ 42–3).

C. Wilcke thinks that over time there were developments. The Sumerian wedding gift took on such proportions and value that it became a gift, which bound the father of the bride to the arrangement. There would have been a measure of reciprocity in the agreement about *do ut des*.<sup>28</sup> It also became the practice to pay part of the wedding gift much earlier than the wedding ceremony itself. This part would have been non-edible elements, more specifically the silver, which would later be recognised as the *terḫatu*. The gifts presented at the time of the wedding were then called the *biblu*.<sup>29</sup> Certainly in later times the wedding gift consisted of both silver and foodstuffs. C. Saporetti has suggested that in Middle Assyrian terminology the ‘contribution’ of the father (*zubullû*) was an all-inclusive term for the bride-price plus the gifts. Then the bride-price was a fixed standard amount and the gift consisted of extras, foodstuff and other items. This extra contribution gave the family of the groom room for manoeuvre, to exceed the standard bride-price either on their own initiative or because of a prearranged agreement.<sup>30</sup>

The etymology of *terḫatu* needs now to be considered. In Ugaritic as well as *trḫt*, ‘bride-price’, we have the verb *trḫ*, ‘to marry’. It is in the myth of the marriage of Nikkal and Yariḫ, the moon god.<sup>31</sup> Yariḫ begins by saying,

Give Nikkal, so that Yariḫ will marry (*trḫ*) her, so that the Moon may enter his house. And I shall give to her father as a bride-price (*mhr*) a thousand pieces of silver, ten thousand pieces of gold ... My marriage (*htn*) is with Nikkal ... Then Yariḫ married Nikkal.

<sup>26</sup> D. Nörr in: *Studi Emilio Betti* III (1962) 518: at Nippur contracts written in Sumerian, litigations in Akkadian (Old Babylonian).

<sup>27</sup> Greengus, 27, 65, 69, 72.

<sup>28</sup> ‘Familiengründung’, 254–256.

<sup>29</sup> ‘Familiengründung’, 258.

<sup>30</sup> C. Saporetti, *Geo-Archeologia* 1984–2, 44–46. S. Greengus, *HUCA* 61 (1990) 76 f., n. 210, reminds us of the *siblônôth* in Mishnah and Talmud.

<sup>31</sup> KTU 1.24:17–33 with *Textes ougaritiques* I (1974) 393–395.



All the subsequently promised presents will not be translated here. What then follows is a detailed description of how the scales to weigh the bride-price were set up by his family members. The Ugaritic verb *trḥ*, ‘to marry’, can be seen as the root of the Akkadian noun *terḥatu*, ‘bride-price’. Similarly Ugaritic *mhr*, ‘bride-price’ is reflected in Hebrew *mohar* and Arabic *mahr*, ‘bride-price’, and *ḥtn*, ‘marriage’ is reflected in Hebrew *ḥatan*, ‘son-in-law’. We also have one occurrence in Ugaritic of *mtrḥt*, ‘married woman’ which is almost certainly related to the unusual Akkadian word *marḥitu*, ‘a married woman’.

### 3.2 The bride-price

Old Babylonian texts only speak of a *terḥatu*. They are reasonably clear, but an unusual early text may also refer to a slave. Normally the amount for the bride-price was calculated in silver. The highest amount found is in that same early text, forty shekels of silver.<sup>32</sup> High amounts are more frequent in the early Old Babylonian period. All in all we can suppose that normally the payment amounted to five or ten shekels.<sup>33</sup> Twice we have the statement that ‘the complete bride-price’ has been paid.<sup>34</sup> This would seem to indicate that the bride-price could be paid in instalments, perhaps five shekels at the betrothal and ten at the wedding, making fifteen shekels in total. The amount agreed may have been linked to the going price for a slave-girl. A young girl would cost five shekels, a woman ten to fifteen shekels, and an adopted child five to seven shekels. Bride-prices were higher, twenty or thirty shekels, in the time of Hammurabi, but that was a time when the price of slaves was also rising strongly.

These high sums were only mentioned in specific texts, and N. Pfeifer detects in them a distinct form of marriage.<sup>35</sup> In the case of a nun, and only in that case, the bride-price has to remain ‘sewn into her hem’, and is ‘given back’ to her husband.<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, it can be assumed that it remained the property of the woman. Pfeifer identifies the hem as the hem of an undergarment round the woman’s ‘private parts’. The silver was her own private capital, and hidden where no-one else had access. She could keep it in reserve if ever she found herself alone. It was a large amount which guaranteed enough to support her. Her dowry

---

<sup>32</sup> VAS 8 4 with *Studies A. Skaist* (2012) 157 f.

<sup>33</sup> M. Stol in *Studies A. Skaist*, 140–152.

<sup>34</sup> CT 48 48:16–7; 56:7.

<sup>35</sup> N. Pfeifer, ‘Das Eherecht in Nuzi: Einflüsse aus altbabylonischer Zeit’, *SCCNH* 18 (2009) 355–420, esp. 366, 380, 399–403.

<sup>36</sup> M. Malul, *Studies in Mesopotamian legal symbolism* (1988) 188, 189 f.

(or trousseau) was also mentioned, which she could decide (or perhaps she was obliged) to bequeath to her own children. These would have been adopted not biological children since she was a nun.<sup>37</sup> Finally we note the exceptionally high bride-prices paid by Old Babylonian kings. In the Mari texts we find five or eight talents (1 talent = 60 minas), but we find also six minas.<sup>38</sup>

S. Greengus states emphatically that in these cases the bride-price must in reality have consisted of various goods the value of which was converted into silver. That is confirmed in a Mari text by the details of a royal bride-price transferred for Šibtum. There are listed ‘jewellery, pins, vases, ..., clothes, three bulls, one hundred cows, thousands of sheep’, but for each entry the equivalent value in silver is given,<sup>39</sup> so that the total value can be calculated in silver. In Mari it was also possible to work out the total value of the dowry, the counterpart of the bride-price. A text from Kisurra speaks of ‘four minas of silver, one hundred sheep and a slave-girl’ as the bride-price.<sup>40</sup> A letter from Sippar, unfortunately not published in its complete form, appears to speak of three minas.<sup>41</sup> On one occasion a field is given as a ‘present’ for a woman.<sup>42</sup> A sheikh from the tribe of the Benjamins gave King Zimri-Lim a few dozen sheep as a bride-price for his sister.<sup>43</sup>

In the Old Assyrian period, the bride-price was called ‘the price’ and was paid out at the wedding.<sup>44</sup> Once a father gave his sons animals, four asses, two oxen and fifteen sheep, ‘for the wedding’.<sup>45</sup>

C. Saporetti suggests that our presumption that the bride-price was a fixed amount, which could be calculated in silver in the Old Babylonian period, also applied to the Middle Assyrian period.<sup>46</sup> In the Middle Assyrian laws an unmarried rapist had to marry the victim and pay ‘triple the silver as the value of a virgin’ (§ 55), which indicates a fixed amount. In the Bible the bride-price (*mohar*) a man must pay for seducing a virgin whom he is obliged to marry was fifty shekels of

---

**37** Discussions about this group of texts: A. van Praag, *Droit matrimonial* (1945) 136–138; R. Yaron, *The Laws of Eshnunna* (1988) 176–179; R. Westbrook, OBML 99 f.; Wilcke, ‘Familien-gründung’, 265 f.

**38** B. Lafont in Durand, *La Femme* (1987) 120, with n. 20. The ‘six minas of the woman’ in ARM 10 75:22.

**39** ARMT 25 616 with Durand, AEM I/1 (1988) 100–102.

**40** B. Kienast, *Kisurra* no. 109:10–14.

**41** V. Scheil, SFS no. 84, ‘Inventaire de donations et dot’.

**42** OLA 21 no. 43.

**43** ARMT 23 nos. 335–336 with Florilegium Marianum IX (2007) 87, 90, 92.

**44** So, without amplification, C. Michel, RIDA 84 (2006) 160 f.

**45** K. R. Veenhof in: M. Stol, S. P. Vleeming, *The care of the elderly in the Ancient Near East* (1998) 148.

**46** *Geo-Archeologia* 1984–2, 45 f. Speculations on the fixed amount on p. 47 f.

silver ('fifty pieces of silver', Deuteronomy 22:29; see also Exodus 22:16, Hebrew verse 15). Hosea paid 'fifteen pieces of silver, a homer of barley, and a measure of wine' for his wife whom he knew was adulterous (Hosea 3:2). This can be converted to roughly thirty shekels. But here a girl was being bought and this may have been the normal bride-price. Note that the compensation due for a slave-girl who was gored to death by an ox was also thirty shekels (Exodus 21:32).<sup>47</sup>

More precise information is available for around the same period from the periphery of Babylonia, from the cities of Nuzi and Emar. The archives of Nuzi cite as the formal price for a woman an ox, an ass, ten sheep, and ten shekels of silver. Other goods could however be used as payment, but their relation to the norm had certainly then been established. Their total value had to convert to forty shekels of silver. That was also the price of a slave-girl.<sup>48</sup>

In Syrian Emar amounts of twenty-five and thirty shekels of silver were mentioned for the bride-price,<sup>49</sup> though sums of ninety or a hundred shekels were also quoted.<sup>50</sup> According to two texts the price of a girl from Emar was twenty-two shekels of silver, or thirty if the value of the goods included was also converted.<sup>51</sup>

Here as elsewhere the money that could be made for a marriageable girl was a coveted source of income for third parties. In Emar we see that a woman was sold off by her two brothers for the standard rate of forty shekels of silver 'as a bride' to a man, who then passed her on to a third man. The arrangement was that the third man would pay forty shekels, which was shared out. The brothers received ten shekels and the 'broker' thirty. In Nuzi we come across this figure regularly.<sup>52</sup> In a disastrous year with high prices, a father with his son became so poor that they had to put themselves under the protection of Z. This person promised that he would let the son marry and if any children should be born of the marriage, the sons would become servants of the king, and Z. would 'give the daughters to

---

47 W. Plautz, ZAW 76 (1964) 301.

48 The price for a male slave was 30 shekels of silver. See on all this C. Zaccagnini in: A. Archi, *Circulation of goods in non-palatial context* (1984) 152f.; RIA VII/5-6 (1989) 425a; E. A. Speiser, Or. NS 25 (1956) 9-15 (4. 'Ceremonial Payment'). A female 'cup-bearer' costed 40 shekels of silver, EA 369, with E. Lipinski, *Šulmu* (1988) 183. In a forced sale of a daughter in Emar the price was 15 shekels of silver, 1 donkey, 500 shekels of copper (meaning somewhat less than 30 shekels of silver); ASJ 13 (1991) 276 no. 17.

49 Bride-price in Emar: 25 shekels, A. Tsukimoto, ASJ 13 (1991) 300 no. 35:17, no. 36:17; 30 shekels, Tskukimoto, ASJ 14 (1992) 292 no. 44:5; D. Arnaud, *Aula Orientalis – Supplementa* 1 (1991) no. 72:13.

50 D. Arnaud, *Semitica* 46 (1996) 9:5. More G. Beckman in M. W. Chavalas, *Emar* (1996) 69.

51 Tsukimoto, ASJ 13 (1991) 276 no. 17 (ca. 30 shekels, see note 48), 277 no. 18 (22 shekels).

52 B. Lion, 'Filles à marier à Emar et à Nuzi', NABU 2001/74. Similar deals are discussed in Chapter 16.

the house of a father-in-law (i.e. give them in marriage) and receive the silver of the bride-price'. In addition Z. and his wife would have to be cared for the whole of their lives by their poor guests.<sup>53</sup>

A curious text was found in Alalakh, a city near Aleppo:

Š. from Luba asked A. for his daughter in marriage and he brought him a present (*nidnu*), as was the custom (*paršu*) in Aleppo. A. became a criminal and as a punishment he was put to death and his 'house' went to the palace.

Š. arrived and the king allowed him to have his 'gift' back, which amounted to six talents of copper and two bronze daggers.<sup>54</sup> Possibly the 'custom of Aleppo' referred to the standard value of the bride-price. The word *nidnu* is surprising and is reminiscent of the Hebrew word *mattan* 'gift', as it occurs in the story about the marriage of Jacob's daughter Dinah (Genesis 34:12). This gift was given in addition to a bride-price (*mohar*).

The same word *nidnu*, 'present', was used in two curious letters from an Old Assyrian merchant from Kaniš in Anatolia to his colleague in Mari. After the offer of copper and three other items as 'a present for you', there follows an order for clothes from Babylon. Then at the end he says,

But if you wish me to say everything that is close to my heart, then let me give a son to you, and you give a daughter to me.

It seems to be setting the seal on a good relationship. The second letter takes a serious step further in this same transaction. It concerns a girl in Mari, who appears to have been called Abulaya, and the boy Sabium:

Persuade (the girl) for me, and my son and I will both set off with presents! Let us make a marriage (*hatanūtu*) agreement!<sup>55</sup>

The laws of Hammurabi mention the possibility of there being 'no bride-price'. The case in point is a married couple with no children, where the man wants a divorce. This should not be seen as an unusual form of marriage, where no bride-price was paid (as P. Koschaker saw it), but that it was possible not to pay a bride-price if no children had been born in the marriage.

<sup>53</sup> M. Sigrist, *Studies R. Kutscher* (1993) 169 no. 2.

<sup>54</sup> AT 17 with C. Niedorf, *Die mittelbabylonischen Rechtsurkunden aus Alalakh (Schicht IV)* (2008) 165, 170, 248 ff. (31.3); TUAT NF 1 (2004) 134.

<sup>55</sup> J.-M. Durand, 'Une alliance matrimoniale entre un marchand assyrien de Kanesh et un marchand mariote', *Studies K. R. Veenhof* (2001) 119–132; LAPO 18 (2000) 181–184.

### 3.2.1 Payment by instalment

An important caveat should be borne in mind when attempting to determine fixed amounts. From ethnology we know that the bride-price could be paid in instalments. Islamic law in the school of Hanafi also supports this principle. When arranging a marriage the first part of the *mahr*, the *muqaddam*, should be paid, and the final part, the *mu'ahhar*, should be paid if it ended in divorce (Qur'an 2: 237). We have already seen that the Old Babylonian texts speak a few times about 'the total bride-price', which suggests the possibility of paying by instalments. This could mean that the five and the ten shekels were paid at the betrothal and the marriage respectively, and that the total amount might be the twenty or thirty shekels sometimes mentioned. The texts from Nuzi indicate that the bride-price was paid in instalments, such as annual instalments of five shekels. Then twenty shekels had to be paid after the first intercourse ('the lying'), and an ox after the birth of a child.<sup>56</sup> After a divorce in Nuzi the man was still required to give his father-in-law five sheep, which was probably part of the bride-price.<sup>57</sup>

There is another explanation possible for these different amounts. The price could depend on the phase of a woman's life or her status. In the Aramaic marriage contracts from Elephantine in Egypt we see that ten shekels was paid for a virgin and five shekels for a divorced woman. There is a difference of opinion about why there was this difference.<sup>58</sup> In Nuzi the price of a woman on her first marriage was forty shekels and on her second, after her husband had died, ten shekels.<sup>59</sup> Was the second price lower because she was no longer a virgin, or because she had had no children? According to the Mishnah, a man should pay on divorce twice as much for someone who was a virgin at marriage as for a divorced woman or a widow.<sup>60</sup> In the modern Middle East much less is paid for a divorced woman or a widow.<sup>61</sup>

---

<sup>56</sup> J. C. Fincke, SCCNH 7 (1995) 13–17 (after the intercourse); K. Grosz, SCCNH 1 (1981) 171 (HSS 13 263), 176 f., Table 5 (the ox).

<sup>57</sup> K. Grosz, *The archive of the Wullu family* (1988) 122 (Gadd 33).

<sup>58</sup> A. Tosato, *Il matrimonio israelitico* (1982) 102 n. 84, who refers to R. Yaron, JSS 3 (1958) 5.

<sup>59</sup> AASOR 16 54 with Grosz, SCCNH 1 (1981) 175.

<sup>60</sup> E. Lipinski, *Šulmu* (1988) 184. Cf. Mishnah, Keth. I, 2.

<sup>61</sup> H. Reintjens, *Die soziale Stellung der Frau bei den nordarabischen Beduinen* (1975) 27.

### 3.2.2 Work as a bride-price

The Old Testament patriarch Jacob had to work seven years for each of his wives, Leah and Rachel (Genesis 29:15–30). His ‘reward’ (*maš̄koret*) was to have the two women. A similar example was the rather excessive demand from Saul made on David. If he wanted to marry Saul’s daughter Michal he would have to bring him a hundred foreskins of the Philistines as a *mohar* (I Samuel 18:25).<sup>62</sup> Then a Middle Assyrian contract states that a man of his own free will can live in a house for ten years with free food and clothing, and at the end of that time ‘they will let him marry a woman’:

He shall take his wife, clothed and bound up (?) and he shall leave.<sup>63</sup>

He earned his livelihood from his work and in the end the household gave him one of their women. A letter mentions a man who must have found himself in a similar situation, after he ‘served for seven years’ for a woman.<sup>64</sup>

### 3.2.3 The right of the son to the bride-price

The family also had the responsibility of thinking about a future marriage. With this in mind money could be set aside as the bride-price, to be used by an unmarried son, who would later marry. The laws of Hammurabi state:

If a man marries wives to the sons he has got but does not marry a wife to his youngest son, when the brothers divide the estate after the father has died, they shall establish (*šakānu*) the silver value of the bride-price for their young unmarried brother from the property of the paternal estate, in addition to his inheritance share, and enable him to marry a wife (CH §166).

§31–32 of the laws of Lipit-Ištar deal with the question of what should happen if the father in his lifetime had given a ‘gift’ to his ‘beloved son’, which the heirs would have no right to, or should have given the bride-price to ‘his son, the older brother’. If the latter were to marry while his father were still alive, what would happen after the father’s death? Unfortunately half of the text at the end has been broken away so we do not know the answer.

---

<sup>62</sup> W. Plautz, ZAW 76 (1964) 303f. (‘Dienstheirat’).

<sup>63</sup> VAS 19 37 with J. N. Postgate, Iraq 41 (1979) 93–95; *Bronze Age bureaucracy* (2013) 16 f.

<sup>64</sup> S. W. Cole, *The Early Neo-Babylonian governor’s archive from Nippur* (1996) 174–176 no. 82.

There are some examples which illustrate this principle. A father gives his son a field of six *iku* ‘to marry a woman’.<sup>65</sup> A field would have cost between two and six shekels per *iku*, and so the value would be between twelve and thirty-six shekels.<sup>66</sup> Someone gave his brother fourteen shekels of silver ‘in order to marry a woman’.<sup>67</sup> Another man ‘assigned and gave’ to his brother a ship with a capacity of ten *kor* ‘for his wedding’.<sup>68</sup> In both cases the father had evidently died and the oldest brother was taking care of the youngest. A deed of inheritance from Nippur indicates that the youngest son would in no way be held responsible for the debt of his father, ‘because he had not yet married a wife’. In this way an amount for his future bride-price was kept reserved for him.<sup>69</sup> A mother gave each of her sons presents, mostly amounts of silver. The first received a specifically named slave and ten shekels of silver. For the second son is stated ‘ten shekels and another ten shekels for S., his brother’, though in fact the text on the envelope reads, ‘the bride-price of the wife whom he has married, for S., his brother’. The third brother received fifteen shekels. One would have expected that the first brother would receive the bride-price for his younger brother who would eventually marry, but that is not what the text says. Not one of a second group of three children (perhaps from a second marriage) was allowed to challenge this.<sup>70</sup> According to a deed of inheritance from Kisurra a son received twenty-eight shekels of silver in the form of rings from his mother as an ‘extra amount’. This was probably intended for a marriage.<sup>71</sup> According to an Assyrian deed of inheritance concerning three brothers, the two married brothers had already received five homers of barley as a bride-price (*zubullū*) and they each owed the youngest two and a half homers.<sup>72</sup>

Provision was sometimes also made for future *dowries*, i.e. what the bride received from her father. An Old Babylonian deed of inheritance lists a number of household utensils, things which would be typical for a father to give his daughter as a dowry.<sup>73</sup> In the Neo-Babylonian period brothers had to look after their sister by giving her a litre of bread every day ‘until they will give her to a husband’.

65 CT 6 37b (VAB 5 212) (*kīma dam aḥāzim*) with Westbrook, OBML, 35 n. 50, 38b, 117.

66 Cf. R. Harris, *Ancient Sippar* (1975) 216; W. Schwenger, MVAG 19/3 (1914) 119 f.

67 AUCT V 36 in Westbrook, OBML, 112b (*ana aššatim aḥāzim*).

68 UET 5 271 (Ur) with Westbrook, 133b (nam.dam.a.ni in.ba.e.en in.ne.sum).

69 TIM 4 4:30–34 with E. Prang, ZA 67 (1977) 221, 230 f.; ZA 70 (1980) 49.

70 Tell Sifr 35:4–5 / 35a:4–6 with D. Charpin, *Archives familiales* (1980) 222 f. and 76; cf. Westbrook, OBML, 126 (translation only). The text on the envelope (35a:5) says *aššatam ša iḥuzu* (pret-erite) which can be translated as ‘the wife whom he could eventually marry’.

71 B. Kienast, *Kisurra I* (1978) 57 f. (§ 79), on no. 90.

72 OIP 79 Plate 82 (Tell Fakharijah) with C. Saporetti, *Geo-Archeologia* 1984–2 p. 44.

73 YOS 5 106:23–29. So here no bride-price.

In addition they had to set aside twenty shekels of silver as her dowry, plus the interest which would accrue.<sup>74</sup>

### 3.2.4 The bride-price goes to the woman

A more-or-less universal development is for at least a part or perhaps the whole of the bride-price to be passed on to the woman.<sup>75</sup> Islam had a modernising influence in this respect, for the Qur'an says clearly: 'Give the woman the bride-price as a gift' (Qur. 4:4). The Akkadian expression for this action was 'to fasten the bride-price into the hem', which means into the hem of the woman's garment.<sup>76</sup> We have already seen that this rule applied already in the Old Babylonian period to nuns who married, and that high amounts were involved. Twenty or thirty shekels was possibly the whole of the bride-price,<sup>77</sup> and the adopted children of the woman could inherit this.

Recently S. Démare-Lafont presented a new proposal.<sup>78</sup> The initiation of a marriage is based on a 'contract' recording the payment of the 'bride-price' obliging the groom to engender children ('une promesse de maternité'). Only when a child is born will the marriage be finalised and become an 'institution'. It is then that the bride-price is returned to the husband automatically, a restitution attested only in Sippar. We have seen earlier in this chapter that such a restitution is rare and may constitute a distinct form of marriage (N. Pfeifer). It cannot be the basis for the general theory now proposed.

This shows how the meaning of the bride-price had begun to change. From the end of the Old Babylonian period it was no longer a disguised price for a woman but a sum of money that the married woman could have in reserve for emergency situations, such as the death or disappearance of her breadwinner. This thought is reflected in the phrase 'to fasten it into her hem'. It was her private possession and the greatest right her husband would have to it would be to enjoy

---

74 C. Wunsch, *Urkunden zum Ehe-, Vermögens- und Erbrecht aus verschiedenen neubabylonischen Archiven* (2003) 48–51 no. 11.

75 Middle East: W. Plautz, *ZAW* 76 (1964) 315 n. 95.

76 H. Petschow, *RIA* III (1968) 321f., in art. 'Gewand'; M. Malul, *Studies in Mesopotamian legal symbolism* (1988) 179–197; *BiOr* 43 (1986) 23–25; R. Westbrook, 'Mitgift', *RIA* VIII/3–4 (1994) 276a.

77 The literature is rich: A. van Praag, *Droit matrimonial*, 136–138; R. Yaron, *The Laws of Eshnunna* (1989) 176–179; R. Westbrook, *OBML*, 99f.; Wilcke, 'Familiengründung', 265f., n. 83.

78 S. Démare-Lafont, 'Le mariage babylonien – une approche historiographique', *ZABR* 18 (2012) 175–190.



its usufruct. During a marriage ceremony, which was acted out in a magical ritual, the bridegroom promised:

I shall fill your lap with gold and silver. You are my wife. I am your husband.<sup>79</sup>

Divorce would have been an emergency situation and Old Babylonian contracts name the amount which the man would have had to pay if he had decided to go down that road. The amount he would have to pay would be almost the same as the top bride-price of the time.

The Middle Assyrian laws may also have stipulated that the bride-price belonged to the woman, but that is still not sure (§ 38).<sup>80</sup> But that was the situation in Nuzi. There part of the bride-price could sooner or later be ‘fastened into the woman’s hem’.<sup>81</sup> However, this is mentioned in only four of the fifty-four marriage contracts we have and the wording is slightly ambiguous.<sup>82</sup> N. Pfeifer takes a different line.<sup>83</sup> The texts state that the woman could always ‘choose the money and go away’. So if she remarried she could keep it, but would lose all claim on the husband’s family possessions. She would have to leave ‘naked’, having only her ‘hem’. In Nuzi she did not even keep her dowry, for that was reserved for her children. But what was in her ‘hem’ was her own. Possibly this rule only applied to wealthy families.

K. Grosz distinguishes two different patterns for giving the bride-price and dowry in Nuzi, which conflict with each other. We have seen that there the bride-price in most cases was received by the brother(s) of the bride. Ethnology shows that in other cultures the bride-price could be used by the family of the bride to help their own sons in turn to marry a wife. This could be the explanation for the situation in Nuzi.<sup>84</sup> The dowry, on the other hand, was the inheritance that the daughter received from her father and which she had to pass on to her children. Grosz thinks that sometimes the bride-price was passed on to the woman and

---

**79** M. Malul, *Studies in Mesopotamian legal symbolism* (1988) 191–193. In the footnotes: the Jewish *mohar* had or acquired the same meaning.

**80** Advocated by G. Cardascia, *Les lois assyriennes* (1969) 193–195; opposed with grammatical argumentation by C. Saporetti, *Geo-Archeologia* 1984–2, 40 (one expects *zakuat*).

**81** K. Grosz, *SCCNH* 1 (1981) 170 f., with Table 3, ‘Indirect dowry payments’; Westbrook, ‘Mitgift’, 278 f.

**82** J. Paradise, *JCS* 32 (1980) 205–207; 39 (1987) 23 n. 66.

**83** N. Pfeifer, ‘Das Eherecht in Nuzi: Einflüsse aus altbabylonischer Zeit’, *SCCNH* 18 (2009) 355–420, esp. 404–409, 416.

**84** Jack Goody; see K. Grosz, 163, 178. Texts: Grosz, 175 ff., Table 5; J. Paradise, *JCS* 39 (1987) 21–23.

became absorbed into the man's possessions, as if it were a dowry.<sup>85</sup> That could happen on the birth of a child. C. Zaccagnini points out that it was generally twenty shekels (half the normal bride-price of forty shekels) which 'was fastened into the hem of the garment'. In his opinion this happened if no dowry had been given.<sup>86</sup> What is much easier to understand is the 'indirect dowry' in Emar (Syria). There the man would 'return the dowry to her'.<sup>87</sup> G. Beckman comments on the bride-price, which he calls 'bridewealth':

The family of the groom pays bridewealth (Sumerian *níg.mí.ús(sa)*, Akkadian *terḫatu*), to that of the bride. Sums of 30, 40, 60, and 100 shekels of silver are attested for the bridewealth. In turn, a portion of this silver is often bestowed upon the girl by her father as the entirety or part of her dowry, a rebate of bridewealth which anthropologists refer to as 'indirect dowry'. Perhaps because of the common utilization of this practice at Emar, there seems to be no terminological distinction between 'bridewealth' and 'dowry' in the texts from this site. That is, the same Sumerogram serves for both types of payment.<sup>88</sup>

From the texts from Ugarit and Alalāḫ in Syria it is clear that the bride-price was the property of the wife. She was allowed to take this with her in the event of divorce.<sup>89</sup> In the Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions everything is confused. Daughters of conquered nations in Asia Minor arrived in Nineveh 'with a considerable bride-price', alternatively translated 'with a considerable dowry'.<sup>90</sup> After this, the word *terḫatu* disappeared from the language. Neo-Assyrian texts simply speak of 'her silver', meaning the price that was paid for her.<sup>91</sup> In the Neo-Babylonian period the word for bride-price completely disappeared as an item of vocabulary.<sup>92</sup>

---

**85** Grosz, 172, 179.

**86** C. Zaccagnini, *Studies E. Bresciani* (1985) 600–602.

**87** J. J. Justel, NABU 2008/67.

**88** G. Beckman in M. W. Chavalas, *Emar* (1996) 69.

**89** Westbrook, 'Mitgift', 279b, § 3.3.3; A. F. Rainey, *Or. NS* 34 (1965) 18; *Handbook of Ugaritic studies* (1999) 475 f.; I. Márquez Rowe in: *A history of Ancient Near Eastern law I* (2003) 709 (AT 92), 725 f. (Ugarit).

**90** R. Borger, *BIWA* (1996) 29 A ii 70, variant F i 73, etc.; with Borger, 29, 216 B § 16.

**91** K. Radner in: *A history of Ancient Near Eastern law II* (2003) 895.

**92** B. Meissner, *BuA I* (1920) 169 f., K. Radner, *Die neuassyrischen Privaturkunden* (1997) 142 (with n. 717). A price is meant in *Nebk.* 101, where a payment is made by giving a slave and 30 shekels of silver. Here a slave-girl, brought up as a daughter, is given into marriage by her 'mother' without a bride-price. See C. Wunsch, *Urkunden* (2003) 6 n. 22. Otherwise G. van Driel: 'For once we might think of a romantic marriage': the young man wants the girl at all price and compensates the 'mother'; in: M. Stol, *The care of the elderly in the Ancient Near East* (1998) 188. See now B. Still, *The social world of the Babylonian priest* (2016) 45.

According to a marriage contract in the Jewish colony of Elephantine a bride-price (*mhr*) of five shekels was simply added to a dowry (*tkwnh*) of twelve shekels and it was augmented further by clothing and household goods brought in by the woman. The bride-price itself was therefore very small.<sup>93</sup>

In cases where a girl had been adopted with the intention of marrying her off, there are a number of instances in Nuzi of someone designated to benefit from any interim usufruct of the bride-price which had been paid. The expression used can be literally translated as ‘he is allowed to eat the silver’. Depositing a woman’s money in this way with a man happened on many occasions, and we know of a case in Emar where a brother once went too far when ‘eating the silver’. He completely used up the bride-price or dowry of four of his sisters and he was accused in court in the presence of the king.<sup>94</sup>

Laban’s daughters Rachel and Leah reproached their father for doing the same. They asked,

We no longer have any share in our father’s house. Does he not look on us as strangers, now that he has sold us and used the money paid for us (lit. ‘he has eaten our silver’)? (Genesis 31:15).

The money they refer to must have been their dowries. That could have been the reason that Rachel stole the family gods (*terafim*). If they were in her possession she and her children would be guaranteed the right of inheriting her father’s wealth.<sup>95</sup> We will see later that we often find evidence of fraud with the dowry in the Neo-Babylonian period.

### 3.2.5 Marriage as a sale

In the Babylonian patriarchal society a woman was transferred from the authority of one man to that of another, from that of her father to that of her husband. Male authority has been accepted as natural until recent times, with the man as the head of the family. In Babylonia that made a woman an item in marriage transactions, and paying a bride-price made the marriage a commercial event. That was

<sup>93</sup> Cowley, AP no. 15 (ca. 440 B. C.), with J. A. Fitzmyer, *A wandering Aramean. Collected Aramaic essays* (1979) 248; cf. 270 n. 15 (10 shekels as bride-price; over 20 shekels as dowry).

<sup>94</sup> J. G. Westenholz, *Cuneiform inscriptions in the Bible Lands Museum. The Emar tablets* (2000) no. 3; TUAT NF 1 (2004) 153 f.

<sup>95</sup> J.-P. Vita, ‘The patriarchal narratives and the Emar texts: a new look at Genesis 31’, in: L. d’Alfonso (etc.), *The city of Emar among the Late Bronze Age empires* (2008) 231–241.

how it used to be, and even now among some contemporary societies people still wish to see it like that.

In the nineteenth century many scholars followed an evolutionist outline of history. Originally society was matriarchal and no bride-price was paid. Presumably that remained the case in matriarchal societies. The transition to a patriarchal society involved carrying off women to marry them. This is what the Romans boasted of (*Raubehē*). Later the woman was often ransomed from the clan by her father by paying a bride-price.<sup>96</sup> Even after marriage had lost the nature of a sale, money still changed hands. In principle that money was paid by the man's family to that of the girl, but many variations were possible. The most significant variant was that the father of the girl could give this price to his daughter as a dowry. J. Goody, who wrote a short description of this, called the 'bride-price' given by the parents of the man or by the man himself to the father of his intended bride an 'indirect dowry' when it was passed on to the woman. Anything else she received from her father was a 'direct dowry'.<sup>97</sup>

A recent survey of ethnological opinion shows that the bride-price is still seen to belong to a certain phase in human societal development.<sup>98</sup> In agnatic societies (both patrilinear and matrilinear) a girl was married off outside the tribe (exogamously) and the bride-price was seen as a compensation for losing her labour. When arable farming was involved, where a woman was considered to be less productive, the bride-price gave the man a right to children, who would mature as valuable workers. Coupled with agriculture was the practice of living with the father's family (patrilocality) and owning private property. This led to the acquisition of several wives and then a wife became an economic asset herself. She became the object in a process of exchange (*Frauentausch*), according to the author. Such an exchange of women borders on a sale, for exchange amounts to a commercial transaction.

Everywhere we find a strong aversion to the thought that marriage was a sale. Sometimes it still is a sale, and the terminology used in many cultures seems to suggest that the idea is accepted. We shall not go further into these arguments but concentrate on what the situation was in Babylonia.<sup>99</sup>

---

<sup>96</sup> P. Gregorius, *Etnologie van de niet-Westerse volken. Verwantschap en huwelijk* (= Prisma Compendia, 17) (1965) 166 (G. A. Wilken); W. Plautz, ZAW 76 (1964) 298.

<sup>97</sup> Jack Goody, *The development of the family and marriage in Europe* (1983) 240 ff., 'Appendix 2. From brideprice to dowry?'

<sup>98</sup> Uwe Wesel, *Der Mythos vom Matriarchat* (1980) 134 ff., 'Brautpreis und Frauentausch'.

<sup>99</sup> In general: Gregorius, 164 ff. (VIII. De Bruidsprijs). Babylonia, latest discussion: N. Pfeiffer, SCCNH 18 (2009) 383–393, 417.

### 3.2.6 The views of a lawyer

In 1917 the renowned German legal historian Paul Koschaker contended that Babylonian marriage was based on a sale. He did not resort to any evolutionary scheme but merely paid attention to the legal process. Gradually criticism of his ideas was voiced, chiefly by A. van Praag (1945), and towards the end of his life Koschaker forcefully repeated his opinion, introducing an important refinement to his argument.<sup>100</sup> He distinguished between two types of sale. Firstly there was the sale or purchase of large objects, such as fields and houses, which normally took place within the seller's own community. In these transactions payment and transfer did not need to take place at the same point in time. The second form of sale, which received most attention, was that of small objects which were often traded between strangers. For these payment and transfer occurred at the same time as a cash payment. Koschaker compared marriage with the first type of sale. Firstly a payment was made, the bride-price, and later the item purchased was transferred, *treditio puellae*, the girl was handed over. In anticipation of these transactions there would have been a promise to marry, the betrothal. In the Hittite Laws, and the old laws of Sweden, a distinction was made between 'promising' and 'binding' the parties to an agreement by the payment of a bride-price. At the beginning and at the end of his article Koschaker says with some emphasis that his interpretation is purely a formal legal explanation, as might be expected from him as a jurist. He sets out the objective legal structure of marriage as being one of sale. This explanation in no way meant that the peoples in question actually regarded the woman like some beast they had bought, or that they would have treated her as such. The modern reader may be assured of this. On the last point the fundamental criticism is the one offered by R. Westbrook, who thinks that 'the mechanics of sale cannot be separated from its function'. All sales implied a transfer of ownership.

Even so, it is easy to see the bride-price like a purchase price. Sometimes the value is demonstrably that of a young slave-girl. The expression the 'price of virgins' occurs in Old Assyrian marriage texts.<sup>101</sup> A girl is transferred by her mother and brothers for the price of fifteen shekels to an Assyrian. He had only to promise that he would not marry a second wife in four important Anatolian cities.<sup>102</sup> Four brothers each give a sister in marriage. With the profit they were

---

**100** P. Koschaker, 'Eheschliessung und Kauf nach alten Rechten, mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der älteren Keilschriftrechte', *ArOr* 18/3 (1950) 210–296.

**101** As in AKT I 77; R. Rems, *WZKM* 86 (1996) 357 f.

**102** C. Michel, *TPK* no. 161.

able to trade (*makāru*, an Akkadian word related to English ‘mercantile’).<sup>103</sup> In one Old Babylonian contract a girl is literally purchased from her father to be a second wife. The price was five shekels of silver, which is exceptionally low for a slave, but matches a standard bride-price.<sup>104</sup> In addition we have a passage in a hymn to the god Ḫendursanga, where the writer speaks of buying a cow, a sheep, a slave, and taking (*tuku*) a wife, all in the same breath.<sup>105</sup> Even in the Gospels buying a field and oxen and marrying a woman are all lumped together (Luke 14:18–20). Performing work instead of paying money, a system not known to Koschaker, was a variant on sale. This last article by Koschaker is hardly ever mentioned but it should be taken to heart.

Only a few scholars agree with Koschaker’s approach. W. Plautz, who studied marriage in the Old Testament, is one who does agree and reinforces once more three points made by Koschaker: he is only concerned with the legal structure; the use of the model for the sale of large objects supposes a higher estimation of the woman; the terminology used for making a sale is not used in marriage negotiations. No-one ever says, ‘I have bought a woman’.<sup>106</sup> Y. Muffs has pointed out that both in Elephantine and Old Babylonian texts we find the comment, after the payment of the bride-price, that ‘the heart’ of the father of the bride was ‘good’, in other words, that he was satisfied. This phrase is well-known in sale contracts and in his opinion it supports the idea that sale was indeed the legal form used in Old Babylonian marriage transactions.<sup>107</sup> We would add that the laws and contracts from this period punish by execution any initiative attempted by the woman to get divorced. She was understood to have been sold, so she could not free herself. B. Landsberger sees the word *terḫatu* as a general expression, the woman’s price, which was paid whenever there was still no actual bridegroom on the scene.<sup>108</sup> Indeed in the case of ‘adoption matrimoniale’ (see Chapter 16) a very young girl was almost bought from her parents on payment of a *terḫatu*. C. Wilcke rejects the cash payment theory but admits that the bringing of presents earlier can perhaps be seen as an expectation of ‘cash on delivery’.<sup>109</sup> He points out that

---

103 *Archivum Anatolicum* 1 (1995) 5, 7 no. 2, with p. 2.

104 CT 8 22b with M. Stol, *Studies A. Skaist* (2012) 140 f.

105 D. O. Edzard, C. Wilcke in: *Studies S. N. Kramer* (1976) 156–161, lines 234–236.

106 W. Plautz, *ZAW* 76 (1964) 311, cf. 317.

107 Y. Muffs, *Studies in the Aramaic legal papyri from Elephantine* (1969) 53–55, 84–86.

108 *Symbolae M. David* II (1968) 93 f. He agrees with Koschaker, although he rejects his subtleties (‘Zuspitzungen’). Cf. R. Yaron, *ZSS* 109 (1992) 66 f.

109 ‘Familiengründung’, 256.

by bringing presents the bridegroom or his father is placing an obligation on the father-in-law (not on the bride herself). Koschaker saw it differently.<sup>110</sup>

The criticisms levelled against Koschaker are based more or less on legal history or sociology. New solutions have been offered in these fields. Disagreement among legal historians was focused chiefly on the original meaning of the bride-price and therefore of the marriage. However all parties freely admit that the bride-price may have developed into something completely different.

First we should examine the criticism by legal historians and the alternatives. We find the longest list of objections, eight in all, in the dissertation of my fellow-countryman, A. van Praag, which he wrote during the Second World War.<sup>111</sup> Others agree with him on many points.<sup>112</sup> A. van Praag refers to the legal principle *non consensu sed re contrahitur*, it is not through agreement but through something concrete that a commitment is entered into.<sup>113</sup> Making an agreement is not enough in itself. There must be something tangible (*res*) which is transferred, however insignificant. The bride-price was originally used for this, and it could deteriorate into a very small amount. In Roman law the phrase used is *nummo uno*, 'for one cent'.<sup>114</sup> The Talmud shows that the bride-price shrank to the symbolic value of one *peruta*.<sup>115</sup> If van Praag is right, we should see the opposite development taking place in Babylonia, with a symbolic amount developing into the full value of a woman. Incidentally, van Praag's idea, that in practice the *pretium virginitatis* was the price of giving up her virginity, is completely wrong.<sup>116</sup>

R. Westbrook also dismissed marriage as a form of sale, but sees an analogy with adoption.<sup>117</sup> The keyword is the 'taking' (*aḥāzu*) of the girl, that is to say, acquiring power over her.<sup>118</sup> She went from the authority of her parents to that of her husband and in the process received the status of a wife (*aššūtu*). In adoption the person is also 'taken' (but then the word used is *leqû*) and there the legal status is also altered, for he becomes a child (*mārūtu*). But only marriage involves the payment of a 'price'. It does not give the purchaser any property, but it does

---

110 ArOr 18/3 (1950) 216 ff., on the 'dingliches Recht des Bräutigams auf die Braut' (not discussed by Wilcke).

111 A. van Praag, *Droit matrimonial* (1945) 138–144.

112 Driver and Miles, *The Babylonian Laws I* (1952) 259–265; Westbrook, OBML, 53–58.

113 *Droit matrimonial* (1945) 146–148; accepted by Driver and Miles, 264 n. 2.

114 R. Yaron, *The Laws of Eshnunna* (1989) 175 f.

115 W. Mehlitz, *Der jüdische Ritus in Brautstand und Ehe* (1992) 141, who refers to Qidd. 1a.

116 R. Westbrook, OBML, 59b. – This supposed *pretium pudicitiae* in the Old Testament is a more widely held idea, rejected by Plautz, ZAW 76 (1964) 299 f., 302.

117 OBML, 58–60; also 84 f.

118 In the West-Semitic world to 'take' into marriage is named *leqû*; M. V. Tonietti in: *Memoriae Igor M. Diakonoff* (2005) 259.

grant the right to ‘take’ her, to have control over her, according to Westbrook. At the same time the parents give up their control. The ‘taking’ itself is a phase yet to come, for at this point what is concerned is only the right to do the ‘taking’. We note that Westbrook’s idea only works for marrying off a young woman out of a family. Whenever an independent woman married, it was as much a matter of status as of contract and there was no question of a bride-price.

W. F. Leemans does not accept Westbrook’s theory. He cannot understand the reason for a payment in the case of adoption, and goes on to say that marriage was an older institution than adoption. Marriage can therefore not have been modelled on adoption. Moreover Leemans thought that sale came later than marriage, so marriage as a sale would also have been impossible. He saw the bride-price as compensation for the loss of labour.<sup>119</sup> E. Lipinski agrees with this view and it is one also expressed by modern ethnologists.<sup>120</sup>

Yet another view is that the bride-price functioned as a ‘security deposit’ during the betrothal period. If the young man were to walk away, he would lose it. This explains the low amount asked.<sup>121</sup> This explanation however only partly works as one would expect the deposit to be given back at the wedding, but this did not happen.<sup>122</sup>

### 3.2.7 The views of an ethnologist

This subject can be explored also through ethnology, especially regarding the importance of exchanging gifts. The bride-price then becomes primarily a gift in exchange for receiving something one wants to possess. Presents have a personal quality and create an enduring relationship, and appropriate reciprocation is expected.<sup>123</sup> In Babylonia this was represented by the bride-price and the dowry. We can say that in principle this approach is perfectly feasible.<sup>124</sup> We saw that the king of Mari sent a present for the bride herself and for her mother in Aleppo. In the Old Testament Abraham’s servant also brought all sorts of things with him

---

119 Tijdschrift voor Rechtsgeschiedenis 69 (1991) 140.

120 E. Lipinski, *Šulmu* (1988) 174, 188.

121 A. Tosato, *Il matrimonio israelitico* (1982) 104 (‘cauzione’). Cf. J. Goody, *Die Entwicklung von Ehe und Familie in Europa* (1989) 256 f.

122 Plautz, ZAW 76, 302, under 2.

123 J. Pedersen and M. Burrows; cf. Plautz, ZAW 76, 306–308.

124 J. M. Renger, *Or. NS* 42 (1973) 265–273; F. M. Fales in: S. Moscati, *L’Alba della Civiltà I* (1976) 206–209; the writings of C. Zaccagnini; M. I. Finley, ‘Marriage, sale and gift in the Homeric world’, in his *Economy and Society in Ancient Greece* (1982) 233 ff.



(Genesis 24). Certainly, when the marriage had lasted for some time, and the man would still be giving presents to his wife (Assyrian *dumāqū*), any evidence that a sale might have been involved is hard to find.<sup>125</sup> Still, the texts show that some attention was paid to the reciprocal value of the gifts. This is precisely the reason that lists of gifts were made, as we see demonstrated in the correspondence between the kings of Western Asia and the Pharaoh.<sup>126</sup> C. Zaccagnini shows that we cannot draw conclusions on the basis of a model where gifts have a purely social function.<sup>127</sup> The texts from Mari are somewhat more specific. We find there two beautifully preserved surveys of the dowry (*nidittu*) which Princess Šimātum received, when she was married off to Ḫaya-sumû, king of Ilan-šura.<sup>128</sup> The values of the goods were in each instance calculated in shekels of silver, so that the total value might be worked out. Here it was almost twelve minas of silver.

This value varied greatly from marriage to marriage. The most costly dowry we know from this period is the one which the king of Qatna gave to his daughter, Bēltum, when she went to marry Yasmaḥ-Addu of Mari. That came to ten talents of silver or 600 minas. Possibly this excluded five talents for the value of her clothes. Calculating the value of the dowry in silver was necessary, for it would be compared with the value of the bride-price which the other family was paying. In this case we know that the bride-price paid for this princess was four talents of silver. This is what King Samsi-Addu said in a letter to his son Yasmaḥ-Addu, the bridegroom.<sup>129</sup>

For this reason in French the dowry is called the *don* and the bride-price the *contre-don*.<sup>130</sup> In general the bride-price was much smaller than the dowry. In Mari it could be half the value of the dowry.<sup>131</sup> We see this also in the marriages of ordinary citizens. We could be speaking here of the first instalment, and the princess counted on a regular stream of presents from her spouse.

Ethnologists have various insights which may help us. We often see that the dowry is really the inheritance of the girl. She received it in this form from her

---

**125** Cf. Plautz, ZAW 76, 316 f.

**126** On the wider context of gifts, reciprocity and the recording of the gifts, see J. J. Janssen, Göttinger Miscellen 48 (1981) 66.

**127** C. Zaccagnini, 'On Late Bronze Age marriages', in: *Studi E. Bresciani* (1985) 593–605; contra F. Pintore.

**128** ARMT 22 322 and ARMT 25 603, with B. Lafont in Durand, *La Femme* (1987) 118 f., 122 f. Portions of them in ARM 31 nos. 27, 28. On the conversion of the value of goods in gold of silver, see F. Joannès, RA 83 (1989) 115. The equivalency gold-silver is normally 4 to 1, but here 5 (or 6) to 1.

**129** ARM 1 46 = LAPO 18 (2000) 171 no. 1006. See W. Horowitz, N. Wasserman, Amurru 3 (2004) 339. They think that a text found in Hazor describes a part of the payments at this marriage.

**130** Lafont, 115 n. 10.

**131** Lafont, 120 n. 20.

father before his death. This allowed the father to determine the extent of his gift, regardless of the value of the bride-price.<sup>132</sup> We see this at work in the later Neo-Babylonian period. However the situation in Nuzi was quite the reverse. There the bride-price was higher than the dowry. K. Grosz points out that in India giving a dowry is customary among rich families and paying a bride-price is common among the poor. The latter may also be a disguise for selling one's own children. In Nuzi giving a dowry was also typically done by the higher classes. For the poor, the bride-price they received was an important source of income. They could not afford a dowry of their own but used some of the bride-price as an 'indirect dowry'. If these poor people had to give a dowry, their profit lay in the difference between it and the bride-price.<sup>133</sup>

It seems that as early as the betrothal some or all of the dowry would be made over to the man. We see this in a few divorces which must be regarded as provoked by a breach of promise. In one case nineteen shekels of silver had to be given back by the man and in another the situation had to be reverted so everyone was in the same position as before.<sup>134</sup> We have seen that the Babylonian law-books speak comprehensively about what should be done with the dowry and the bride-price during the betrothal and the marriage if something went wrong, such as a breach of the agreement, death or childlessness. Van Praag suggests that the following principle applied: as long as no child had been born in the marriage, the wedding gifts could be taken back by the families.<sup>135</sup> The close relation between the bride-price and children is also mentioned in ethnological studies, which led J. Goody to repeat the dictum, 'bridewealth is childwealth'.<sup>136</sup>

### 3.3 The dowry

We shall now pay attention to the gift which the woman received from her father.<sup>137</sup> In Sumerian texts it is called *šusumma*,<sup>138</sup> and in Old Babylonian *nudunnû*, 'gift'.

**132** Jack Goody, cf. K. Grosz, SCCNH 1 (1981) 161–163.

**133** K. Grosz in: A. Cameron, A. Kuhrt, *Images of Women in Antiquity* (1983) 193–206. Grosz views both institutions as mutually exclusive, based on social class differences. Cf. Grosz, *The Archive of the Wullu family* (1988) 21 f.

**134** BE 6/2 47; CT 45 86, according to Westbrook, OBML, 70b. The interpretation of the first case is uncertain: it should not be situated in the period of betrothal.

**135** *Droit matrimonial*, 133.

**136** Uwe Wesel, *Der Mythos vom Patriarchat* (1980) 99, 135. Cf. P. Gregorius, 170, 3.

**137** R. Westbrook, 'Mitgift', RIA VIII/3–4 (1994) 273–283.

**138** S. Greengus, HUCA 61 (1990) 35 n. 48.

We have called it the dowry (German *Mitgift*, French *dot*). Strangely enough the law-book of Hammurabi uses the word *šeriktu* ‘present’, possibly following the terminology found in the laws of Lipit-Istar which has a similar-sounding Sumerian word.<sup>139</sup> The Middle Assyrian laws also speak of a ‘present’ (*širku*).<sup>140</sup>

A number of texts shed light on what was in the dowry. It was chiefly made up of household goods. For a princess who was married off to the son of a high-ranking official in the land of Elam, objects were fashioned in the royal workshops as presents.<sup>141</sup> Items were registered carefully in marriage contracts, which were brought into the house of the other family and had to be recognisable as part of the dowry. Formally the objects were ‘brought into the house of her father-in-law’ and were ‘entrusted’ to her father-in-law. Elsewhere we see that the word ‘to entrust’ is used when fields are entrusted to a woman. It meant that she had the right to the usufruct of the land as long as she lived.<sup>142</sup> In practice neither the father-in-law nor the husband was the owner of the fields. One has the impression that the dowry was handed over all at once. However one text defines ‘a three-year-old cow, six headdresses’ as ‘the rest of the *nudunnû* of the *šugîtu* woman B’. This was to be ‘given to PN, her father-in-law’ within a month, so evidently that was his right.<sup>143</sup> We find the dowry paid by instalments chiefly in Neo-Babylonian texts.<sup>144</sup> This conflicts with the opinion of the sociologist J. Goody, who thought that all of the dowry would have been paid at once by the father directly, not as a phased payment of the bride-price.

Before considering the dowry further, we should give the reader an impression of what a typical dowry might contain. The example given below was a sizeable dowry, given by a rich family and intended for a nun in the service of the god Marduk. These nuns were allowed to marry.

Two (named) slave-girls, 6 shekels of gold as her ear-rings, 1 shekel of gold as her necklace, 2 bracelets of silver weighing 4 shekels, 4 finger-rings weighing 4 shekels, 10 garments, 20 head-dresses, 1 cloth of shorn wool, 2 upper garments, 1 leather bag, 1 ox, 2 three-year-old cows, 30 sheep, 20 minas (10 kg) of wool, 1 copper cauldron of 30 litres, 1 grindstone for fine flour, 1 grindstone for coarse flour, 1 bed, 5 chairs, 1 dressing-case, 1 ... -basket, 1 basket with sundry articles, 1 closed basket, 1 round basket, 60 litres of sesame-oil, 10 litres of

---

**139** P. Koschaker, *Rechtsvergleichende Studien* (1917) 177 ff., and C. Wilcke, *Studies F.R. Kraus* (1982) 440, see this change of terminology as an innovation.

**140** In a law of Ur-Nammu this ‘gift’ (sag-rig<sub>7</sub>), not the dowry but ‘extradotal’, could be given to the married daughter and when she dies, her husband can keep the gift until he marries again; M. Civil, CUSAS 17 (2011) 249 §B8, with 270 f.; C. Wilcke, *Festschrift J. Krecher* (2014) 556 f.

**141** BIN 9 438 with M. van de Mieroop, *Crafts in the Early Isin period* (1987) 108 f.

**142** CT 48 20 rev. 5–10.

**143** CT 48 84 with Wilcke, ‘Familiengründung’, 269.

**144** M. Roth, *Babylonian marriage agreements* (1989) 8 f.

first-rate oil in a flask, 1 table ‘with a head’, 1 ..., 2 combs for wool, 3 hair combs, 3 spoons (for make-up), 2 ... of the loom, 1 container filled with spinning equipment, 1 small pot-rack, 1 woman NN, her sister, 1 NN.

All this is the dowry of Liwwir-Esagila, the nun of Marduk and the *kulmašītu*-nun, the daughter of Awil-Sîn, which Awil-Sîn, her father, the son of Imgur-Sîn, gave to her and had brought into the house of Utul-Ištar, head of the temple of Ištar, for his son Warad-Šamaš.<sup>145</sup>

Mentioning ‘her sister NN’ towards the end of the document was important, for this is the woman who would bear children for the nun. She would have been a simple girl, adopted as a sister just for this purpose, a *šugītu*. We will return to this in Chapter 5, which deals with the second wife.

Part of the dowry could be given in land according to some Sumerian texts.<sup>146</sup> A simple list of silver, slaves and household goods could also conceivably have been someone’s dowry. One Sumerian list ended with the general term ‘gift’, and an Akkadian list summarised it as what the woman had brought to her father-in-law,

This is what Rubatum (a woman) brought into the house of her father-in-law PN.<sup>147</sup>

An Old Babylonian letter from a small town gives the verdict by the judges from the capital city, Babylon, about the restitution of a dowry. The fact that the high court dealt with it and informed a lower court points to a possible appeal to higher authority. The affair is also somewhat unusual. We see the mother of a married woman acting for her, and not her father. Perhaps he had died. The mother, Mattatum, had given the dowry to her daughter and won the case. Possibly her daughter’s husband was also dead and she was reclaiming it from his father.

Speak to Muḥaddūm, ‘Thus say the judges of Babylon: May Šamaš and Marduk keep you in good health! Concerning the lawsuit of Ilišu-ibbišu, son of Warad-Sîn, and Mattatum, we have seen their case and we have initiated proceedings against them according to the regulations of our lord and we have said to return to Mattatum all the dowry (*nudunnū*) that Mattatum had given to her daughter and had brought into the house of Ilišu-ibbišu. We have despatched a soldier with her. Let them give to Mattatum all the slave-girls and the children they (meanwhile) have borne (lit. all that is living which can now be seen)!’<sup>148</sup>

**145** BE 6/1 84 with G. R. Driver, J. C. Miles, *The Babylonian Laws I* (1956) 253, S. Dalley, Iraq 42 (1980) 60 f., C. Wilcke, *Studies F. R. Kraus* (1982) 457 f., TUAT NF 1 (2004) 31. Large dowries: S. Dalley, ‘Old Babylonian dowries’, Iraq 42 (1980) 53–74; L. Barberon, RHD 81 (2003) 8 n. 25.

**146** C. Wilcke, *Early Ancient Near Eastern law* (2003) 64 f.

**147** Sumerian: P. Steinkeller, J. N. Postgate, *Third millennium texts in Baghdad* (1992) no. 7 (term *nig.è.a* = *šūbultum*; *Festschrift B. Kienast* [2003] 561). Akkadian: UET 5 793 (I see this text as a scribal exercise in school).

**148** YOS 2 25 = AbB 9 25.

We learn from ethnology that the dowry also constituted the daughter's inheritance. She received it from her father to take with her and it served her as a form of security for the future. Legally speaking it was a 'pre-mortem inheritance'.<sup>149</sup> A reference to this can be found in the laws of Hammurabi:

If a father awards a dowry to his daughter who is a *šugītu*, gives her to a husband, and records it for her in a sealed document, after the father has died, she will not have a share of the property of the paternal estate (§183).

A 'sealed document' like that may be referred to in another text, about a father and a mother who had given their daughter an amount of household equipment, which she 'had brought into the house of Ili-usati, her husband'. The two sentences that follow, if the text is correctly restored, state, 'They gave her the inheritance (*aplūtu*). Her brothers shall not press a claim'.<sup>150</sup> There is a description of the dowry for L., which ends with 'he (or she) will give the girl L. to a husband'. Evidently the size of the dowry had already been determined long before the girl L. was married off. She had the right to a dowry.<sup>151</sup>

However the power of decision of the woman could be limited. After listing the rich dowry of Geme-Asalluḫi, it was decided that her heirs would be her brother 'and the sons of Geme-Asalluḫi who would come'. The word 'come' is deliberately used. Its meaning is so general that it could also apply to adopted sons. The woman was married, but she had a pious sounding name so she could well have been a nun. In that case she was only allowed to adopt children. The dowry was the inheritance of the woman, but what would happen after her death, was determined from the start. We see that also with an ordinary woman whose husband had died.<sup>152</sup> It is interesting that her father secured in this way an inheritance which would pass through his daughter to the grandchildren. Only then would the 'patrilineal line' be continued.<sup>153</sup>

L. Barberon has drawn attention to the fact that the Old Babylonian dowry was and remained the property of the woman.<sup>154</sup> She was the titular owner and the man was the administrator. If there were problems, as far as possible everything

---

**149** Doubts exist about this; A. van Praag, *Droit matrimonial* (1945) 173f. (contra: Westbrook, OBML, 89f.); F. R. Kraus in *Essays on Oriental laws of succession* (1969) 13f.

**150** K. van Lerberghe, OLA 21 no. 72:22f., *i-na(?) -a[d-di-nu](?) aḫ-ḫu-ša ú-ul i-[...]*.

**151** MHET I 11 (Di 723) with L. Barberon in: F. Briquel-Chatonnet, *Femmes* (2009) 284.

**152** S. Dalley, Edinburgh no. 15. Otherwise Barberon, RHD 81 (2003) 7.

**153** Barberon, 10.

**154** L. Barberon, 'Le mari, sa femme et leurs biens: une approche sur la dot dans les rapports patrimoniaux du couple en Mésopotamie d'après la documentation paléo-babylonienne', *Revue historique de droit français et étranger* (RHD) 81 (2003) 1-14.

went back to the wife or her family, and if there were children, they inherited the dowry. There are three marriage contracts where a second ‘father’ of the woman is mentioned, who was ‘responsible for her affairs’. Possibly he supervised things for her family.<sup>155</sup> Or perhaps he was the biological father of an adopted girl. Barberon noted that the father or the brothers of the woman retained the documents concerning the dowry and took the precaution of keeping the evidence so that they could have the right to claim it back if there were no children.<sup>156</sup>

When a married woman became a mother, she was in a strong position. If her husband left her and the children, he also lost the ‘house and furniture’. Sometimes it happened that the dowry was not mentioned. This appeared to be the case for poor families, and in one instance the man promised to ‘clothe’ his wife.<sup>157</sup> We know several details about the gift which a nun (*nadītu*) received from her father. After her death it would pass to her brothers. If the brothers did not fulfil their responsibilities, such as maintaining their sister, then she was able to decide to dispose of it however she wanted. The laws of Hammurabi give this rule about her possession of real estate and earlier legal texts confirm this.<sup>158</sup>

On the other hand, § 178 said about her father that ‘in the tablet that he records for her he does not grant her written authority to give her estate (*warkatu*) to whomever she pleases and does not give her full discretion’. From this we must deduce that the father indeed had the right to do this. Surely this must then not have concerned an incidental gift but the inheritance.

It is said that in Nuzi the dowry was the inheritance of the daughter, but no evidence has been given.<sup>159</sup> Clauses in wills do indeed give daughters an inheritance, but with the proviso that their children should eventually receive it. The dowry called *mulūgu* could even contain real estate but this could not be sold by her.<sup>160</sup> In the Neo-Babylonian period the dowry remained with the woman, but had to remain as an inheritance within the family.<sup>161</sup>

---

155 Barberon, 8 n. 24; S. Dalley, *Iraq* 42 (1980) 54 (‘a mediator’); Westbrook, *OBML*, 33 f. (‘guardian’); L. Barberon, *Les religieuses et le culte de Marduk dans le royaume de Babylone* (2012) 156, 187 (‘the grandfather’). This ‘father’ is attested in BAP 7:25, 29, CT 48 50:12, 29; CT 48 55:8, 29–30, BM 96982:15 (in Seth Richardson, *The collapse of a complex state* II [2000] 233). More in Chapter 16, note 6.

156 Barberon in F. Briquel-Chatonnet, *Femmes* (2009) 273–288.

157 Barberon, *RHD* 81 (2003) 11 f.

158 CH § 178 f. with R. Harris, *Or. NS* 30 (1961) 163–169.

159 K. Grosz in *SCCNH* 1 (1981) 161–163, and in B. S. Lesko, *Women’s earliest records* (1989) 171.

160 J. Paradise, *JCS* 32 (1980) 200 f., n. 46; 204 f.

161 M. Roth in Lesko, *Women’s earliest records* (1989) 252.

In the Neo-Assyrian period the girl received a dowry (*nundunû*) from her family, and this word was also used for gifts from her husband, which were made later.<sup>162</sup> In fact these presents were her inheritance paid to her while he was alive. The few texts which speak of this wish to determine the nature and value of these presents. One expensive present was made up as follows: gold and silver objects and costly clothing; household items, such as a bronze bed and a copper chair; ‘trifling items’ made of wood or stone.

In the Neo-Babylonian period we hear no more about the price paid for a bride, and the dowry is now the central theme in the marriage arrangements among the rich. A typical dowry consisted of: silver, land, houses, and slaves; household goods, furniture, textiles and jewellery.<sup>163</sup> In a few late texts the value in silver is given item by item. How these lists are made up is somewhat different and is similar to those for Jewish marriages in Egypt.<sup>164</sup> ‘Silver’ can also stand for the value of bonds and even claims in a commercial partnership which might devolve upon the woman.<sup>165</sup>

The husband would have enjoyed any usufruct from the silver, land, houses and slaves, but that could be a risky business. With poor management a man might dissipate his wife’s dowry, by taking certain items, such as slaves and land, and exchanging them for silver.<sup>166</sup> This happened in the family Egibi, as we shall see later. Loans could be made and large sums of money could disappear. Lawsuits were brought by widows with such complaints.<sup>167</sup> As early as in the Old Babylonian period such deceptions used to occur. A woman was imprisoned ‘on account of her father’, because of his debts. When she was released she found that her husband had in the meanwhile taken another wife and had squandered

---

**162** K. Radner, *Die neuassyrischen Privatrechtsurkunden* (1997) 163 f.

**163** M. T. Roth, ‘The material composition of the Neo-Babylonian dowry’, *AfO* 36–37 (1989–90) 1–55; K. Abraham, ‘The dowry clause in marriage documents from the first millennium B.C.E.’, *CRRAI* 38 [Paris] (1992) 311–320, with C. Wunsch, *Urkunden* (2003) 29 n. 6.

**164** Abraham, 312, 315.

**165** G. van Driel, *Phoenix* 38 (1992) 35.

**166** M. T. Roth calls this ‘dowry conversions’. M. Jursa, *Das Archiv des Bel-remanni* (1999) 37, says ‘Mitgiftkonvertierungen’. Cf. Wunsch, *AfO* 42–43 (1995–96) 43a; F. Joannès, *Archives de Borsippa* (1989) 46; CTMMA III (2000) no. 133 (‘instead of the dowry’).

**167** Wunsch, *Urkunden* (2003) 37 f.; Wunsch, *Die Urkunden des babylonischen Geschäftsmannes Iddin-Marduk* (1993) 68 n. 263; M. Roth, *JCS* 43–45 (1991–93) 11–20; *A history of Ancient Near Eastern law* II (2003) 941 f. Another example of a son-in-law with debts: G. van Driel, *Phoenix* 38 (1992) 34.

all her dowry. She demanded it back, and the man admitted the extent of the loss of the dowry, and the marriage was ended.<sup>168</sup>

From the Neo-Babylonian period there is a similar case. In it a widow demanded the return of her dowry from the son of the first wife of her husband. He had lost a great amount. Even the dowry of the first wife had been used up, valued at 1.5 minas. Both women now received compensation from the tiny amount of land and a few slaves belonging to the man, three quarters and one quarter of what remained respectively. The judges decided that he was penniless and so his wife would have to maintain him.<sup>169</sup> This misappropriation of assets where the husband was caught ‘dipping into the till’ must have been a problem throughout the generations. In Emar a brother ‘devoured’ the dowry set aside for his four sisters and was brought before the king for judgement.<sup>170</sup>

However, in the Neo-Babylonian period a part of the dowry called ‘the basket’ (*quppu*) was set aside for the woman alone. It was a quantity of silver, or sometimes gold.<sup>171</sup> Once we hear of ten minas for the woman, of which three were placed ‘in the basket’. The seven remaining were left for the male to deal with.<sup>172</sup> The main household effects consisted of the basket, a bed, a chair, and two stools.<sup>173</sup> The woman could also receive slaves for her own use (the *mulūgu*).

In Borsippa it was women who lent out money. If this was for longer than nine months the interest was 20 % and a security was required. The short-term loans which concerned small amounts were not so strict. One assumes that the women used the money from their dowries for financing these credits.<sup>174</sup>

The dowry in the Neo-Babylonian period was often paid in instalments and the process could last for years.<sup>175</sup> Whenever we read ‘He gave the dowry’, often what is meant is that he promised to give it. Sometimes it is expressed more

---

**168** M. Jursa, RA 91 (2004) 135–145, with F. Joannès, *Rendre la justice en Mésopotamie* (2000) 93–95.

**169** *Rendre la justice en Mésopotamie*, 234–238 no. 173; TUAT NF 1 (2004) 107–109.

**170** J. G. Westenholz, *The Emar tablets* (2000) 9–12 no. 3; TUAT NF 1 (2004) 153 f. Suspicions about similar misdeeds in the Old Babylonian period: Westbrook, OBML, 94a.

**171** M. T. Roth, AfO 36–37 (1989–90) 6–9; R. Westbrook, ‘Mitgift’, RIA VIII/3–4 (1994) 275 § 2.1.5, 281b; C. Wunsch, *Urkunden* (2003) 27 no. 7:10.

**172** C. Wunsch, *Iddin-Marduk I* (1993) 67.

**173** Wunsch, AfO 42–43 (1995–96) 45a, 63 no. 13:15.

**174** F. Joannès, *Archives de Borsippa* (1989) 107; M. Jursa, *Das Archiv des Bel-remanni* (1999) 36.

**175** Paying the dowry in instalments (also apparent from ‘the remainder’ of a dowry): R. Westbrook, ‘Mitgift’, 281a; M. T. Roth, *Babylonian marriage agreements* (1989) 8 n. 40; Roth, JAOS 111 (1991) 22a, 23b, 29–31; C. Wunsch, *Iddin-Marduk I* (1993) 71 f., 79; F. Joannès, *Archives de Borsippa* (1989) 33; H. Petschow, ZSS 76 (1959) 77 n. 127; M. Jursa, RA 97 (2003) 52 n. 30; id., *Das Archiv des Bel-remanni* (1999) 35 n. 110.



clearly as ‘He made a promise’.<sup>176</sup> A mother who was a widow married off her daughter, but she was only actually to receive the dowry ‘if she [bore] a son or daughter’.<sup>177</sup> Perhaps the last instalment of the dowry was paid out on the birth of the first child.<sup>178</sup> It is noteworthy that here the possibility of the birth of a daughter is explicitly mentioned. As long as no children had been born, the dowry belonged in principle to the family of the woman, and had to be given back if she remained childless (C. Wunsch).<sup>179</sup> In this case however the husband of this bride would soon die. She had had no children and so she gave her property back to her mother.<sup>180</sup>

The Neo-Babylonian laws deal with the dowry and what they say accords well with what happened in practice (§ 8–15).<sup>181</sup> We will examine the clauses that are well-preserved. Both parties have to agree with each other on the transfer of wealth and the father of the man may not change the conditions (§ 8). If the father of the bride is reduced to poverty he may lower the amount of the dowry. This is again indirect evidence that the dowry was paid in instalments. It is thought that this was done so as not to disadvantage her brothers (§ 9). § 12 deals firstly with the return of the dowry and the ‘gift’ by the man to the woman who remains childless when her husband predeceases her. The law ends with the possibility that the woman has no dowry and is left alone:

The judge shall examine the wealth of her husband and give something to her in keeping with the wealth of her husband.

A woman could not inherit and therefore this action had to be taken. In § 13 the woman had children and so she enjoyed the usufruct. In § 15 the woman died, the man remarried and had children by both women. The sons of the first wife should receive after his death two-thirds of his wealth, and those from the second marriage one-third. There follows a ruling on ‘their sisters’, but there the clay tablet

---

**176** ‘To give’ meaning ‘to promise to give’: Roth, *Marriage agreements*, 8 n. 40; M. Stol, *The care of the elderly* (1998) 81. M. Roth translates literal ‘he gave’ as ‘he promised to give’. ‘To promise’, discussed by Roth, 8 note 40, now also in in *Akkadica* 122 (2001) 65; the NB law-book § 9 (*qabû*).

**177** VAS 6 95:26 f. with NRVU no. 3, Roth, 54–56 no. 10.

**178** M. Roth in B. S. Lesko, *Womens’ earliest records* (1989) 250.

**179** C. Wunsch in G. Leick, *The Babylonian world* (2007) 245.

**180** NRVU no. 23; Roth, 56.

**181** Roth, *Babylonian marriage agreements* (1989) 29–34. Hardly known among Assyriologists is the broad commentary on the Neo-Babylonian laws, illustrated by examples from daily life, by H. Petschow in *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte, Romanistische Abteilung* 76 (1959) 37–96.

is broken. These laws show sensitivity to the position of the woman and this was characteristic of the Neo-Babylonian period.

A few further details deserve to be mentioned. The dowry could be returned.<sup>182</sup> A woman whose husband had died would marry his brother. She divided her dowry and goods equally between her son and her new husband.<sup>183</sup> A man made his will and gave his wife the usufruct; their two sons inherited what was left after her death. However they had to give their sister a dowry: three minas of silver, four slaves, and household effects. Was this perhaps a standard dowry?<sup>184</sup>

### 3.3.1 The Egibi family

The transfer of the dowry and other items of property can best be exemplified from the archive of a rich family descended from a man called Egibi. From these documents it is possible to follow the family for five generations in the Neo-Babylonian period, for around 100 years, from Nebuchadnezzar to Xerxes.<sup>185</sup> An Egibi of the second generation gave his wife slaves and a field, from which she had the usufruct. He decided that after her death their sons should have everything. She benefited for twenty years from this and on her death the sons divided the legacy. There were two daughters. We know about the dowry of the first, which she received when she married another Egibi. The second was a moneylender and also had other business interests. By now we have reached the third generation and the firm was being directed by Itti-Marduk-balaṭu, the eldest son. He married Nuptaya, a woman from another rich family, the daughter of Iddin-Marduk. We have his archive also.<sup>186</sup> Her dowry was magnificent: 24 minas of silver, slaves and household goods. It is striking that the women who married into the Egibi family brought much wealth with them, whilst the family themselves made a smaller contribution. It may have been an honour and a prestige to marry an Egibi. The 24 minas of silver was paid in instalments to her father-in-law over eight years. He died early and Itti-Marduk-balaṭu took over the family firm. Soon he wrote a will

---

**182** CTMMA III (2002) no. 122.

**183** TCL 12 174 with F. Joannès, *Archives de Borsippa* (1989) 41.

**184** Roth, JCS 43–45 (1991–93) 8 (lines 23–26).

**185** We follow C. Wunsch, ‘Die Frauen der Familie Egibi’, AfO 42–43 (1995–96) 33–63. Succinct is Wunsch in: G. Leick, *The Babylonian world* (2007) 244 f. Cf. the earlier studies by M. T. Roth, ‘The dowries of the women of the Itti-Marduk-balaṭu family’, JAOS 111 (1991) 19–37; Wunsch, *Die Urkunden des babylonischen Geschäftsmannes Iddin-Marduk I* (1993) 78–85; E. von Dassow, CTMMA III (2002) 86–92.

**186** C. Wunsch, *Iddin-Marduk* (1993).

in his own hand, in which he made over all his wealth ‘in the city and in the countryside’ to his wife and their three children.<sup>187</sup> His haste was perhaps necessary because King Cyrus of Persia had occupied Babylon. We know that Itti-Marduk-balaṭu lived for a few years in Persia and in that turbulent time he managed his money wisely by reserving it for his own family.

Nuptaya also once received from her father a third of his wealth by will, and we know that both families worked together in the food trade, dealing in garlic, onions and dates. The couple had two sons and a daughter. A charming letter was written by Itti-Marduk-balaṭu to his mother, in which he asks about the wellbeing of both his in-laws and, at the end, of his children, whom he mentions by name and in order of age.<sup>188</sup> Then Nuptaya died, and her father made another will in which he provided for his own wife, Ina-Esaggil-ramat, a competent businesswoman. She received for her permanent possession the house and fifteen slaves and she probably also enjoyed the usufruct from the remainder. He also arranged that after the death of their grandmother, his wife, his three grandsons and three granddaughters would inherit everything. His claims on the related Egibi family became void after this and we see how the families grew together. There is no mention of the brother of Nuptaya and one assumes that he would have inherited according to the appropriate laws. Women were unable to inherit and for them this sort of ruling is encountered. The daughters of Nuptaya grew up and each received a dowry. They also received gifts from their grandfather’s estate, willed to them. The eldest was now at most twelve years old and her bridegroom was already known. He came from a business family who were family friends. Her dowry was double the normal, which would seem to fit in with the custom of giving the eldest son a double portion of the inheritance. However the girl died and her intended bridegroom was allowed to marry her younger sister. The younger daughter was barely nine years old and received a very small dowry. Her grandmother supplemented it and paid it in three stages – to the bridegroom, of course.<sup>189</sup> The brother of these two girls married Amat-Baba and his wife brought with her a large dowry: thirty minas of silver, five slaves, household goods and a garden. In the ascription only the grandparents on the mother’s side were mentioned, Iddin-Marduk and Ina-Esaggil-ramat. His father may well have been dead and the dowry was passed on to them. Fifteen years later it appeared that the dowry had been traded with or exchanged, and the woman received compensation. The daughter of this couple brings us to the fifth generation. The contract

---

<sup>187</sup> Wunsch, 37b.

<sup>188</sup> CT 22 6 with H. D. Baker, *Festschrift Christopher Walker* (2002) 10.

<sup>189</sup> Thus C. Wunsch, *Iddin-Marduk I*, 71 f.

about her dowry tells that five minas of silver was paid to the bridegroom, and that a field, slaves, and household goods would be paid out ‘on the day when he will marry her’. The last payment would take place nine years later. Notice that the silver was paid first. The mother, Amat-Baba, transferred money from her own dowry to her daughters. Their father was the first witness to this gift. There was also a brother who married, and traded with the dowry of his wife.

### 3.3.2 The dowry of princesses

Married off princesses sometimes received a very large dowry. Princess Šimatum from Old Babylonian Mari received goods worth twelve minas of silver.<sup>190</sup> Her list, and those of other princesses, seemed to be made up of categories of goods in a set order: jewels or semi-precious stones; gold and silver objects; bronze utensils; garments and cloth; wooden furniture; and personnel, which consisted of named slave-girls. The dowry (*nidittu*) for Princess Tizpatum was composed of three minas of silver, six slaves, thirty-three sheep and two cattle. It was paid in two instalments and also converted into silver, a total of four and two thirds minas and one shekel of silver.<sup>191</sup>

Princesses from Asia on their way to Egypt brought amazing gifts with them. The goods are summarized in some Middle Babylonian letters. Gold was expected from Egypt in return for the princess, but also for other services. The begging letters always name the purpose for which they wanted the gold. King Tušratta of Mitanni explained that the required gold (‘unworked’) was intended for the mausoleum of his grandfather, and ‘secondly’ as a bride-price.<sup>192</sup> Many times Egypt is represented as a land with particularly rich reserves of gold. ‘Gold in your country is like dust’, said the king of Assyria. The king of Mitanni wrote twice, ‘In the land of my brother, gold is as plentiful as dust’.<sup>193</sup> Egypt seems to have been a byword for such riches. From the other side, Mitanni and Babylonia could offer lapis lazuli and horses with waggons as presents.<sup>194</sup> The dowry (*mulūgu*) was composed chiefly of beautiful things and they are listed on large clay tablets, sometimes divided into four columns. There are many objects we cannot identify.

---

**190** ARMT 22 322 and ARMT 25 603; now ARM 31 27, 28. A lengthy discussion of two dowries (ARM 9 20; 31 27): D. Charpin, ‘Le dot de la princesse mariote Inbatum’, in: T. Tarhan, *Muhibbe Darga armağan* (2008) 159–172.

**191** ARM 9 246 with L. Marti, NABU 2003/40.

**192** EA 19:43–58.

**193** EA 16:14, 19:61, 20:52.

**194** P. S. Vermaak in: G. Leick, *The Babylonian world* (2007) 521f.

That was difficult even at that time also and that is the reason why after many a strange word the translation is added in Egyptian.<sup>195</sup>

There is a list of horses, waggons, whips, lances and many, many articles of war, summarised in these words:

These are the presents for the marriage (?), everything which Tušratta, king of Mitanni gave to Nimmureya [Amenophis III], king of Egypt, his brother and son-in-law. At the time when he gave Taduḥepa, his daughter, to Egypt, to Nimmureya in marriage – then he gave all of this.

What sort of presents were they? What would a princess do with a war chariot? It is supposed that the Pharaoh had paid it earlier as a bride-price for the princess, but that now everything was being returned to him as an ‘indirect dowry’.<sup>196</sup> We saw that this was usual in Nuzi. Sending the caravan back and forwards seems to us rather exaggerated and we should see it rather as just one present within the exchange of many others.<sup>197</sup> Was it compensation for too great a quantity of gold, paid by the Pharaoh as a bride-price?

### 3.4 Gifts from the man

Hammurabi determined that a man could always give his wife real estate and other property. If this is set down in writing, after the death of the man his sons may not claim the inheritance, but his wife ‘may give her legacy to her favourite son’. This way it stayed in the family (§ 150). A man could give jewellery to his wife, and in the Middle Assyrian period she could keep this if he divorced her without a reason.<sup>198</sup> In Assyria a man gave silver, furniture and various objects as a present (*nundunû*) to his wife who was a devotee of the goddess Ištar.<sup>199</sup> The Neo-Babylonian laws spoke of the possibility that the man might have given his wife a gift (*širiktu*). If the man were to die and there were no children, she could take this gift and the dowry (§ 12).

A marriage between Egyptians, carried out in Susa in Persia, with the contract recorded on a clay tablet, mentions a generous gift by the man to his father-in-law, called a *biblu*. To reciprocate there was a dowry (*nudunnû*) with cloth-

---

**195** EA 13, 25.

**196** W. L. Moran, *Les lettres d’El Amarna* (1987) 136, on EA 22 iv 52. He follows F. Pintore.

**197** C. Zaccagnini in *Studi E. Bresciani* (1985) 596 f.

**198** Westbrook, ‘Mitgift’, 278b.

**199** StAT 2 184 (= A. 310) with K. Radner, *Die neuassyrischen Privatrechtsurkunden* (1997) 164.

ing and household goods. Both the bride-price and the dowry were valued at a hundred shekels.<sup>200</sup> Such a gift on the part of the bridegroom was rare at this time and it can be attributed to Egyptian customs.<sup>201</sup> But a text from Sippar also speaks of the *biblu*, jewels to the value of seventy shekels of silver, given by the bridegroom and placed on the bride by his mother. The text includes the phrase, ‘apart from the dowry of five minas which they have received’.<sup>202</sup> So a dowry had preceded this gift.

---

**200** F. Joannès, RA 78 (1984) 75; M. T. Roth, *Babylonian marriage agreements* (1989) nos. 34 f. with p. 11f. The structure of the text reminds one of Egyptian law, see K. Abraham, ‘The dowry clause in marriage documents from the first millennium B. C. E.’, in: D. Charpin, F. Joannès, CRRAI 38 [Paris] (1992) 311–320.

**201** E. Lipinski sees in it West-Semitic customary law; *Transeuphratène* 4 (1991) 68 f.

**202** C. Waerzeggers, *Akkadica* 122 (2001) 65–70; K. Abraham, *AfO* 51 (2005–06) 204 f.

## 4 The family

At the beginning of the Chapter 2, on marriage, we saw how much a happy family life was appreciated. That was why the innkeeper Siduri recommended this to the hero of the Gilgamesh epic. However, before delving into the Babylonian family life, we must investigate some preliminary conditions.

When the time comes for a couple to start a family, what are they going to do? Just climbing on to the couch is not enough (Figure 13). Some very careful thought will be needed beforehand. The sexually intimate relationship between a man and a woman is one of the themes of a large Babylonian handbook known as *Šumma ālu*. This text is a compilation predicting the significance of almost anything anyone will experience in a lifetime. Various aspects of human behaviour are itemised towards the end, and tablets 103 and 104 are concerned with the things that can happen during sexual intercourse. Tablet 103 (only partly preserved) describes a man ‘going’ to a woman and explains the consequences of adopting different positions for the act. One sentence states:

If a man goes to her crotch: restraint will overcome him; he will be in a bad mood.<sup>1</sup>

Often specific rituals are prescribed, ‘so that the (predicted) evil may not come near him’.<sup>2</sup> Tablet 104 concerns odd situations in the bedroom and begins with this statement:

If a man approaches an older woman he will have quarrels daily.

By now it has become clear that this manual is concerned with a man having sex with any willing woman and not only with his legal sweetheart. These situations are beyond the scope of this chapter so they will be passed over speedily.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, nothing will be said about some suggestive clay models of bedroom scenes and the like which have been found.<sup>4</sup>

---

1 KAL 1 107 no. 35:18; see further the translations by A. K. Guinan in: W. W. Hallo, *The Context of Scripture I* (1997) 425 nos. 45–48.

2 A. K. Guinan, *CRRAI 47/I* (2002) 187 f.

3 J. C. Pangas, *Aula Orientalis* 6 (1988) 211–226. For some examples see Guinan, *The Context of Scripture I*, nos. 49–51; see also Guinan, ‘De houding ten aanzien van seksualiteit in Mesopotamië: Akkadische gedragsomina’, *Phoenix* 25 (1979) 68–81.

4 N. Cholidis, *Möbel in Ton* (1992) 141–172, Tafel 39–42. On p. 167–169 there is a discussion on the scenes cast in lead found at Assur. It is possible that this position is described in the handbook, as translated by Guinan (no. 46, with n. 74): ‘If a man “goes” to a woman lying on her back and



**Fig. 13:** A married couple from Nippur. 2600 BC. Limestone. Height 14,5 cm. *Iraq Museum, Baghdad.*

## 4.1 Impotence

For a man hoping for heirs, and all men entertained that hope, any questions of impotence needed to be treated seriously. One possible explanation of this affliction suggested that it was the result of sorcery or of the wrath of the gods and they had specific rituals with incantations to be conducted as a remedy.<sup>5</sup> But natural causes could also be blamed, such as when a man

---

her feet go around the back of his neck: wherever he goes, god, king and noble will be agreeable'. An exhaustive survey of human intercourse visualised in art, with numerous positions that can be adopted, is described by J. S. Cooper, *RIA* IV/4–5 (1975) 259–269, 'Heilige Hochzeit'.

<sup>5</sup> R. D. Biggs, 'The Babylonian sexual potency texts', *CRRAI* 47/1 (2002) 71–78. Biggs edited the texts in his book *ŠĀ.ZI.GA. Ancient Mesopotamian potency incantations* (1967). For the magic by which the Hittites countered this problem see D. Schwemer, *Phoenix* 49 (2003) 18–21; the texts were translated in M. W. Chavalas, *Women in the Ancient Near East* (2014) 262–265.



through old age, or through a ‘blow’, or through ‘fierce heat’, or because of ‘the reversing of the warchariot’, is in a diminished state to come to a woman.

‘In order that he may regain his virility and go to a woman’ it is prescribed that he drink a concoction made from seven plants, bring a frankincense offering to the goddess Ištar, and recite an incantation seven times. He must drink the potion for three days and on the fourth day he will be better.<sup>6</sup> A Sumerian anecdote describes an old man complaining that his physical strength is failing, saying

My manly strength has left my loins like a runaway donkey. My black mountain produces (white) plaster. My mother has sent a man from the woods to me and he inflicts me with numb hands.

The following remark is probably something about a reduced sense of smell, and then the text continues:

My teeth, which could chew hard things are no longer able to chew hard things. My urine used to break forth as a strong stream but now ...

He complains that his son had not fed him and the young slave-girl he had hired had treated him badly. When the king heard of it he consulted a wise woman who said:

Sire, if only the old man would marry a young woman ... the old man would get his manliness back and the young woman would get the status of a matron.

Accordingly the king spoke to a girl, and she did not say no, but then the text is broken so we shall never know whether the man felt better.<sup>7</sup> The same prescription was devised for King David in the later years of his life:

King David was now a very old man, and, though they wrapped clothes around him, he could not keep warm. His attendants said to him, ‘Let us find a young virgin for your majesty, to attend you and take care of you; and let her lie in your arms, sir, and make you warm.’ After searching throughout Israel for a beautiful maiden, they found Abishag, a Shunamite, and brought her to the king. She was a very beautiful girl. She took care of the king and waited on him, but he did not have intercourse with her (1 Kings 1:1–4).

---

<sup>6</sup> Biggs, *Potency incantations*, 52 (AMT 88,3).

<sup>7</sup> B. Alster, ‘The old man and the young girl’, *Wisdom of ancient Sumer* (2005) 384–390; R. Harris, *Gender and aging* (2000) 55–57; A. Gadotti in Chavalas, *Women*, 65–67.

A Sumerian literary text recounts a conversation between a bird-catcher and his wife. Apparently he had become a little drunk and was having trouble setting up his equipment, so she tells him:

Fowler, let your net be drawn up, let the bird rise!<sup>8</sup>

She could well be using sexually suggestive language here as she advises him to get on with the job.

To relieve frustration one could turn to reciting an incantation such as this:

Let the wind blow! Let the mountains [quak]e!, Let the clouds gather! Let the moisture fall!  
Let the donkey swell up! Let him mount the jenny! Let the buck get an erection! Let him again and again mount the ... young she-goat. At the head of my bed is tied a buck! At the foot of my bed is tied a ram!<sup>9</sup>

But others are more direct, with no obtuse references to randy animals.

Let my potency be flowing river water! Let my penis be a (taut) harp string, so that it will not slip out of her!<sup>10</sup>

Incantations like these would have been recited at the same time as conducting a simple ritual. These rituals often involve using two powdered minerals, magnetic haematite and iron. These materials have a natural strong power of attraction which made them particularly suited for the activity they were intended to promote. The ancient directions require each of them to be mixed with oil separately. The haematite paste was then spread over the man's navel, and the iron paste over the woman's.

You crush magnetic iron ore, you mix (it) with *pūru*-oil. You recite the incantation seven times. You apply (it) to his navel. You crush iron, you mix (it) with *pūru*-oil. You recite the incantation seven times over (it). You apply (it) to the woman's navel. The man and the woman [will find satisfaction] together.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> SP 21 Section A 5, with B. Alster, 'The fowler and his wife', 371 f.; V. Haas, *Babylonischer Liebesgarten* (1999) 136 f.

<sup>9</sup> Biggs, *Potency incantations*, 33 no. 14:1–6; for full translations see TUAT II/2 (1987) 274; B. R. Foster, *Before the Muses II* (1993) 886; Chavalas, *Women*, 107 f.

<sup>10</sup> Biggs, 35 no. 15:14–16; Foster, 884.

<sup>11</sup> Biggs, 22f. no. 6:14–17.

Another text prescribes that a couple should make these mixtures of haematite and iron in oil, and with one the man would smear his penis and the woman her genitals.<sup>12</sup> The man could ensure his virility by simply wearing the magnetic haematite in a leather pouch around his neck,<sup>13</sup> or he could smear his penis, his breast and his hips with it.<sup>14</sup> In order to retain his virility, the man is recommended to wear around his neck a leather bag containing the blood of a male partridge and a bristle from a sexually aroused pig.<sup>15</sup> A Sumerian proverb, which was passed on to the Babylonians, shows a general awareness of such intimate foreplay, by reminding everyone that however carefully one prepared things may go wrong. The literal translation is:

What has never yet happened: the young maid did not break wind on her husband's lap.

But English prefers to avoid such double negatives, the proverb can be rendered as

It always happens that the young maid will break wind into her husband's lap.<sup>16</sup>

This sense of humour, dating back to the beginnings of human history, four thousand years ago, resonates with what can be heard in school playgrounds today.

Often married couples are represented in a genial manner. More formally one limestone sculpture from Nippur (2600 BC) shows a seated man and woman with fixed expressions (Figure 14). Their hands are clasped together on her lap. The style is archaic.<sup>17</sup> By contrast terracottas from Old Babylonian Lagash and Ur (1800 BC) are more lively, with the man and woman standing facing each other about to embrace (Figure 15).<sup>18</sup> We rarely see the king and queen pictured together.

---

**12** Biggs, 33 no. 14:15–17, with TUAT II/2 (1987) 274; Biggs, 18 no. 2:9–11; 42 no. 23:14–16; 63 LKA 98:13–16.

**13** Biggs, 52 AMT 66,1:9–10; 61 LKA 95:22; 62 LKA 96 rev. 8–9; 66 STT 280 i 55.

**14** Biggs, 17 no. 1:18 f.

**15** T. Abusch, D. Schwemer, *Corpus of Mesopotamian anti-witchcraft rituals* I (2011) 104, 112 no. 2:4.

**16** SP 1.12 with J. S. Cooper, CRRAI 47/I (2002) 98 f.

**17** W. Orthmann, *Der Alte Orient* (1975) plate 20 with p. 164; J. M. Sasson, *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East* IV (1995) 2473. Similarly in Mari (2500 B. C.), in the catalogue *Land des Baal. Syrien – Forum der Völker und Kulturen* (1982) 74 no. 65. The heads of both the man and the woman are broken off, see *Festschrift B. Groneberg* (2010) 193 Abb. 6 (Mari).

**18** Orthmann, plate 184a with p. 302 (Lagash); J. Reade, *Mesopotamia* (1991) 81 fig. 90 (Ur).



**Fig. 14:** A married couple from Lagash. 1800 BC. Terracotta. Height 11 cm. *Musée du Louvre, Paris.*



**Fig. 15:** On what may be a votive offering to achieve a fertile marriage is portrayed a couple drawing closer together on a bed. Susa, 1500 BC. Terracotta. Height 12.8 cm. *Teheran Museum.*

## 4.2 Children

The arrival of children raises a subject which the Sumerians knew only too well:

Marrying is a human affair; getting children is a matter for the gods (Sumerian Proverbs 1.160).

How many children did a family normally have? The delightful relief of Ur-Nanše, the ruler of Lagash (Figure 16), shows him in two different settings. In the upper register he is standing erect, as the builder of a temple with a worker's basket on his head. In the lower register he is seated and holding a beaker. The eleven people with him, including eight children depicted on a smaller scale, are named in the inscription. Facing him in the upper register, from left to right we have



**Fig. 16:** Ur-Nanše, ruler of the city of Lagash, shown standing with a basket on his head, as builder of a temple, and sitting with a beaker in his hand, when his work was complete. The twelve persons surrounding him are all identified by name, and his eight children are depicted smaller. 2500 BC. Limestone. Height 40 cm. *Musée du Louvre, Paris.*

Abda, daughter; Akurgal, son; Lugalezen, son; Anikura, son; Mukurmušta, son.

Opposite him in the lower register are three more sons, and there are also three officials. His heir and successor was his son Akurgal.<sup>19</sup>

An administrator of the mountain people, the Gutium, dedicated a relief

for the life of S., his king, the life of his wife (and) children.

<sup>19</sup> J. S. Cooper, *Sumerian and Akkadian royal inscriptions I. Presargonic inscriptions* (1986) 22f. (Urn. 20); for a photo see *Ktéma* 22 (1997) fig. 18a, with p.72. On the images: L. Romano in: L. Marti, *La famille dans le Proche-Orient ancien* (2014) 183–192.

A few damaged figures with captions have been preserved, including his wife and two sons.<sup>20</sup> One prominent Sumerian boasts of belonging to a well-heeled family.

My mother is a matronly lady who has built her house; ten slaves work for her. My father is a general, a judge of the king. My brothers are soldiers of the king, each commanding fifty men. My sisters stand like doors in the respectable women's quarters.<sup>21</sup>

From Old Babylonian inheritance records we see that up to eight adult children could inherit. On average it was three children,<sup>22</sup> and in the better-off families six to eight.<sup>23</sup> Pušu-ken, a merchant from Assyria, had four sons and one daughter.<sup>24</sup> From a myth about the underworld we understand that the prevailing attitude among fathers was to have as many children as possible. It can be summarised as 'the more sons the better', with seven being the highest number (Gilgamesh XII 102–117). In a handbook with predictions derived from human births we come across a short treatise on what will happen if a woman bears multiple births at one time. Here the maximum of children is eight.<sup>25</sup> A Sumerian proverb takes pity on a mother who has given birth to them.

A mother who has given birth to eight youths lies down in weakness (SP 2.141).

When the names of members of families who were deported are listed the numbers are not necessarily reliable. Some individuals could have been away at the time, for families were quickly broken up with different members moving around to work in different places.<sup>26</sup> From the Middle Assyrian period we have a brief account of some 200 Hurrians who were deported from the northern uplands and put to work building the new royal city of Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta. They

---

**20** FAOS 7 (1990) 297 f., RIME 2 (1993) 251; for a photo see P. Amiet, *L'art d'Agadé* (1976) 111 no. 65.

**21** K. Volk, *Saeculum* 47 (1996) 193.

**22** According to a full presentation given by L. Battini in L. Marti, *La famille dans le Proche-Orient ancien* (2014) 14–21. According to K. Reiter three to four children (as heirs) in Old Babylonian texts; in: K. R. Veenhof, *Houses and households in Ancient Mesopotamia* (1996) 263 n. 8.

**23** I. J. Gelb, *OLA* 5 (1979) 63–65, 75.

**24** K. Hecker, *Or. NS* 47 (1978) 406. Elsewhere five sons and one (unmarried?) daughter, or six sons and at least two daughters; K. R. Veenhof in Marti, *La famille*, 349.

**25** A. R. George, *CUSAS* 18 (2013) 260 f. Giving birth to four or five boys is unfavourable; to four or five girls is favourable; to three boys and two girls, or three girls and two boys, is unfavourable; to five or six boys is unfavourable; to five or six girls is favourable; to six children is favourable, but to seven or eight is unfavourable; some manuscripts give nine as the maximum; E. Leichty, *TCS* 4 (1970) 44 Tablet I 131.

**26** B. Lion, *Ktéma* 22 (1997) 110–118. Most of these lists are not yet published; Lion, *Amurru* 3 (2004) 217–225.

were split into forty families, some of whom owned a few slaves. It is remarkable that of the children there were 35 girls and 57 boys. One assumes that the older girls had already left to marry into another family. Some of the women recorded as the head of the family were described as widows. For one of them we are even told the sequence in which her five children were born: three sons, a daughter, then another son. Some men had two wives. Each mother had on average 2.22 children.<sup>27</sup> Families deported by the Assyrians hundreds of years later normally had less, on average only 1.43 children. In modern Lebanese villages we are told the average is 3.7 children.<sup>28</sup> A Neo-Babylonian slave belonged to a family consisting of both parents, three boys and one girl.<sup>29</sup>

It was usually the father who made an offering for the wellbeing of the family, but sometimes the mother was involved.<sup>30</sup> A particularly interesting votive offering from a woman from Assur for the wellbeing of her husband and children was made of lead, an inverted triangle representing the female genitals. We described it in Chapter 1 when discussing make-up. Referring to the votive offering as a *téš* she dedicated it with the following inscription:

for the life of her husband, for her own life and for the life of her child(ren) she brought in this *téš*.<sup>31</sup>

The genital triangle identifies the donor as a woman. Why does the mother of a family make an offering of such intimacy for the health of her family? The answer is simple: it is a fitting gift for the goddess of love, Ištar.

### 4.3 The mother

In the Instructions of Šuruppak a father gives his son wise advice.

You shall not speak untruthful words to your mother: these engender hatred! You must not ... in your mouth the words of your mother (or) the words of your god. The mother is like Utu (the sun god); she brought forth mankind. The father is like a god; his word is trustworthy. The advice of the father ought to be respected!<sup>32</sup>

<sup>27</sup> VAS 19 6 with H. Freydank, AOF 7 (1980) 89–117.

<sup>28</sup> F. M. Fales, *Censimenti e catasti di epoca neo-assira* (1973) 117.

<sup>29</sup> F. Joannès, *Ktéma* 22 (1997) 126 (BIN 1 120).

<sup>30</sup> G. Gadaut in: Briquel-Chatonnet, *Femmes* (2009) 237.

<sup>31</sup> K. Deller, *OrAnt* 22 (1983) 13–15; TUAT II/4 (1988) 497. For illustrations see AOF 8 (1981) Tafel XXIII–XXV.

<sup>32</sup> C. Wilcke, *ZA* 68 (1978) 211, Instr. Šur. 258–263; TUAT III/1 (1990) 66:256–261; B. Alster, *Wis-*

A Sumerian proverb runs in a similar vein:

A child should behave with modesty toward his mother. He should take old age into consideration.<sup>33</sup>

The child must owe the same respect to his older brother or sister as to his father and mother.<sup>34</sup> Before Gudea could build a temple, peace and harmony had to rule in his city, symbolised by the statement:

The mother does not shout at her child; the child does not answer his mother back (Cyl. A xiii 3–5).

However in practice things were different. A Sumerian proverb (SP 1.157):

A disorderly son, his mother should not have given birth to him, his god (= father) should not have created him.

One hymn describes the opposite situation in the same words as an example of prevailing social disorder.<sup>35</sup> A proverb says:

As for a chattering maid, her mother has silenced her. As for chattering young man, his mother could not silence him.<sup>36</sup>

In a letter a mother warns her daughter:

Wherever daughters always answer their mothers with spiteful remarks, ... so in view of your words your slave-girls will always hear that I am not their mistress.<sup>37</sup>

Family rows between a mother and a daughter-in-law were attributed to the wrath of offended gods.<sup>38</sup>

---

*dom of ancient Sumer* (2005) 98 Instr. Šuruppak 265–270. ‘The words of your god’: the ‘god’ is probably her husband (K. van der Toorn); possibly confirmed by ‘your father, your god’ in a Sumerian lullaby; M. Jaques, *Studies Å. W. Sjöberg* (2014) 65:11. – J. Klein, *Studies Adela Berlin* (2013) 16, did not take this into account.

**33** B. Alster, *Proverbs of ancient Sumer I* (1997) 324. Respecting one’s older brother follows.

**34** Alster, *Wisdom of ancient Sumer*, 86 Instr. Šur. 172–4. Also in the ‘Nippur Lament’, 287. This was the accepted opinion; Th. Jacobsen, *Before philosophy* (1949) 217. The reverse situation is described in the Nanše Hymn; W. Heimpel, JCS 33 (1981) 92f., line 170.

**35** W. Heimpel, JCS 33 (1981) 92f., Nanše Hymn, lines 168 f.

**36** SP 1.185.

**37** AbB 6 188:5–9.

**38** Šurpu II 20–26.



In a Sumerian message, written in a literary style, a son named Lu-dingira writes that he wanted to give some reassurance to his mother in Nippur. It was to be delivered by a messenger to whom were given five important ‘signs’, significant information to enable him to identify the mother.<sup>39</sup> (1) Her name was Šat-Ištar, a woman who cared for her household well and who served the goddess Inanna. (2) She looked as dazzling as precious metal, to be compared with jewels, like an alabaster statue. (3) She was like a well-watered garden with trees and fruit. (4) She enjoyed going to feasts, singing and dancing. (5) Everything around her smelled good. In conclusion Lu-dingira says that his mother could be compared to

A phial made from an ostrich shell, filled full with prime oil.<sup>40</sup>

The five signs may have been formulated like a riddle. It is remarkable that the text was transcribed and translated into Akkadian and Hittite, and a copy was even found in Ugarit. Evidently people could identify themselves with this text in praising the attractive attributes of their own mothers.<sup>41</sup> The identity of the woman referred to in the text is uncertain. G. Leick thinks she was an important courtesan of Ištar at court,<sup>42</sup> but S. N. Kramer and J. S. Cooper take her to be Inanna (= Ištar), the goddess herself. Cooper compares the second and third ‘sign’ with two Biblical passages (Song of Solomon 5:10–16; 4:12–15). We should note, of course, that there is no element of eroticism in this tribute to the mother.<sup>43</sup> A. Gadotti has shown that many qualities attributed to the mother are in other texts those of the goddess Inanna in her maternal role. So the text praises both the mother and Inanna.<sup>44</sup> As we shall see later (Chapter 29), Ištar/Inanna was particularly revered by women.

Lu-dingira, the son, also wrote two laments, which has led J. van Dijk to surmise that his three compositions were ‘mystagogic’ and played a role in the Dumuzi cult.<sup>45</sup>

---

**39** M. Civil, ‘The “Message of Lú-dingir-ra to his mother” and a group of Akkado-Hittite “proverbs”’, *JNES* 23 (1964) 1–11; Th. Kämmerer, *Šima milka* (1998) 164–169; M. Çığ, S. N. Kramer, ‘The ideal mother: a Sumerian portrait’, *Belleten* 40 (1976) 403–421 (a new manuscript); H. Vanspighout, *Eduba. Schrijven en lezen in Sumer* (2004) 253–258.

**40** S. N. Kramer in D. Schmandt-Besserat, *The legacy of Sumer* (1976) 19–21.

**41** J. Puhvel, *Archivum Anatolicum* 2 (1996) 61–66.

**42** G. Leick, *Sex and eroticism* (1994) 153–156.

**43** J. S. Cooper, ‘New cuneiform parallels to the Song of Songs’, *JBL* 90 (1971) 157–162.

**44** A. Gadotti, ‘A woman most fair’, in: *Studies D. I. Owen* (2010) 115–129 (with a new edition of the text).

**45** *Studies A. Falkenstein* (HSAO) (1967) 253; van Dijk in his chapter in J. P. Asmussen, *Handbuch der Religionsgeschichte* (1971) 494.

The mother of Gilgamesh was the goddess Ninsumun (Ninsun), who was the spouse of the passive Lugalbanda, probably a human being with an enhanced status.<sup>46</sup> Gudea and the kings of Ur also claimed Ninsumun as their mother, even as their natural mother who had suckled them with her milk. These are of course literary clichés, as we shall see later in Chapter 30, on the sacred marriage. Gilgamesh learned that despite his divine origin he would never be immortal.<sup>47</sup> As his mother, Ninsumun intercedes with the sky god Anum and the sun god Šamaš for her royal sons, and when Ur-Nammu dies she laments his sudden death. We read in a Sumerian proverb (SP 2.158),

(In) a palace, one day a mother gives birth, the next day a mother is lamenting.

Fathers never utter lamentations.<sup>48</sup>

More prosaic are letters from sons to mothers. More than once a son will ask for clothes, which probably have to be made specifically for him. A son far away in Aleppo made such a request to his ‘mother and mistress’ in Sippar. One mother refused the request because her son had behaved badly towards his father.<sup>49</sup> A son whose mother was a wealthy business woman, the wife of the head of the province, complained that he was not receiving enough clothes. He was possibly at school and writing the letter himself.<sup>50</sup>

While the gentlemen’s clothes improve year by year, you make my clothes cheaper year by year. By scrimping and saving on my clothes you have become rich! While wool is being consumed in our house like bread, you have made my clothes always cheaper. The son of Adad-iddinam, whose father is a servant of my father, has two new garments to wear, but you keep getting upset over just one garment for me. While you gave birth to me, his mother got him by adoption, but you do not love me in the way that his mother loves him.<sup>51</sup>

Some Sumerian literary texts describe the life of boys going to school, including one incident when a boy arrived late and had to face the wrath of his teacher:

<sup>46</sup> J. Klein, ‘The Mesopotamian hero and his mother’, *Studies Adele Berlin* (2013) 11–28.

<sup>47</sup> A. Cavigneaux, F. N. H. al-Rawi, *Gilgameš et la mort* (2000) 28:79, 31:169, with 41–43, 56; Klein, 20 f.; A. Zgoll, *ZA* 96 (2006) 124.

<sup>48</sup> Klein, 21–28. Cf. *Gilgamesh Epic* III 43–57.

<sup>49</sup> AbB 13 74, 103.

<sup>50</sup> For the parents see M. Stol, ‘Šamaš-ḫāzir’, *RIA* XI/7–8 (2008) 616 f.

<sup>51</sup> AbB 14 165, after F. R. Kraus, *JEOL* 31 (1989–90) 48.

When I got up in the morning, I looked at my mother and said to her, ‘Mother, give me my breakfast; I want to go to school!’ Then my mother gave me two loaves out of the oven and I satisfied my hunger before her eyes. Then my mother gave me two more loaves to take with me and I went to school.

The late start for breakfast made him late for school and he was scolded by the teacher.<sup>52</sup>

#### 4.4 Bereavement

We have two texts lamenting the death of a partner. One is a difficult and partly fragmentary text in Sumerian concerning a man from Nippur mourning his wife Nawirtum.<sup>53</sup> He is the same Lu-dingira who composed the song of praise to his mother mentioned earlier, and who also composed a lament on the death his father.<sup>54</sup> The lament ends with these words of consolation:

Your ways shall not be forgotten. Your name shall be called upon!  
 The sin of your household shall be destroyed. Your punishment shall be released!  
 Your husband shall live and he shall have valor and reach old age.  
 Fate shall be beneficent to your children, good health will be established for them.  
 Your household will prosper, in its future there will be plenty.  
 The god Utu shall bring forth light for you from (in) the Netherworld and you shall drink clean water.  
 Ninkura shall be at your side, she shall lift you high.  
 As for the evil storm that befell you, that same one shall return beyond the horizon.  
 A malevolent curse shall be uttered against the *galla*-demon who brought his hand upon you.  
 As for the good maiden who lies in splendor like a bull, this is a bitter lament!

It was all certainly literary fiction. The second lament is Assyrian, and it concerns a woman who has died in childbirth. It is a song consisting of responses between a man and a woman, in which the vowels are sometimes lengthened, suggesting plaintive intonation. The man begins:

---

<sup>52</sup> W. H. Ph. Römer, *TUAT* III/1 (1990) 70:18–22.

<sup>53</sup> S. N. Kramer, *The Sumerians* (1963) 208–217, ‘Second Elegy’. We follow the edition and translation by A. Gadotti, *JAOS* 131 (2011) 203. For a new digitalised translation see [www.etcdsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk](http://www.etcdsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk), text 5.5.3. – Line 61: Sumerian *igi-šè du* is a calque of Akkadian *ana pani alāku* ‘to prosper’; CAD A/1 318a (d); Old Babylonian in AbB 3 52:21, cf. KUB 37 188:3.

<sup>54</sup> H. Vanstiphout, *Eduba* (2004) 258–263 (on the father).

Why are you cast adrift like a boat midstream? Your thwarts are in pieces! Your mooring rope is cut! With your face veiled, you cross the river of the city Assur.

The woman answers:

How could I not be cast adrift? How could my tows not be cut? On the day I bore fruit, how happy I was. Happy was I. Happy my husband. On the day of my labour pains, my face became overcast. On the day I gave birth, my eyes became cloudy. I prayed to Belet-ili with my hands opened: 'You are the mother of those who gave birth, save my life!' When Belet-ili heard this, she veiled her face: 'You [...] why do you keep praying to me?'

The text is broken here but at the end we read:

[In] those days I was with my husband. I was living with him who was my lover, when death crept stealthily into my bedroom. It brought me out of my house. It separated me from my husband. It set my feet on the ground from which I shall not return.<sup>55</sup>

## 4.5 Childlessness

An expression used by the Babylonians if there were no descendants was *kinūnu belū*, '(the fire in) the hearth is extinguished'.<sup>56</sup> Ideally there should be boys among the children born into a family. Otherwise, according to a good patriarchal viewpoint, things had gone wrong. Various strategies could be deployed for achieving acceptability by procuring acceptable (i.e. male) children. If a man had no children he could take a second wife, a subject to be discussed in Chapter 5.

If the only children were all daughters, feminists lead us to believe that there is a biological 'fault in the man'. We listen with embarrassment. If that were so then even resorting to polygamy would not help. But the Babylonians could not have known that. There were some marriages in which only daughters were born, and in these circumstances exceptional provisions were made in the law of inheritance. In Chapter 15 we will return to this. If there were only daughters, a father could continue the family line by 'adopting' a son-in-law into his own family and letting him marry his daughter. Such a son-in-law takes on the same status as a son, and consequently he becomes the heir apparent. Contracts have been found

---

<sup>55</sup> M. Stol, *Birth in Babylonia and the Bible* (2000) 140 f.; J. Scurlock in Chavalas, *Women*, 134 f.

<sup>56</sup> A similar imagery can be seen in 2 Samuel 14:7, where a widow compares her only son with a glowing coal: 'If they do this, they will stamp out my last live ember and leave my husband without name or descendant on the earth'.

for adoptions of this kind.<sup>57</sup> In Sumer such an adopted son lost his right to inherit from his original family, and this gave rise to lawsuits.<sup>58</sup>

Two different procedures were followed for these adoptions of sons. In the one the initiative was taken by the family of the woman, and in the other it was the family of the man.<sup>59</sup> When the family of the daughter takes the initiative her father ensures that the son-in-law will not take another wife, and that ownership of the family property is secured for his daughter and his grandchildren. In the two texts showing that the father took the initiative, he himself made the deal with the son-in-law. The son-in-law was already quite old and may well have already benefited from an inheritance from his own father. There is no mention in the texts of any failure in the woman to produce children. In Nuzi, where Hurrian traditions are known, Wullu was adopted in this way and his duties were described in detail. After the adopting father's death he would become the *ewru*, the head of the family.

Adoption document. Našwe, son of A. adopted Wullu, son of Puḫi-šenni, as his son. As long as Našwe lives, Wullu shall give him food and clothing, and when Našwe dies, Wullu shall be his *ewru*. If Našwe should (later) get a son, then he and Wullu should share the inheritance between them, but the son of Našwe should take the gods of Našwe. But if Našwe has no son, Wullu himself should take the gods of Našwe. And Našwe gave his daughter Nuḫuya in marriage to Wullu. If Wullu should take another wife, he shall lose Našwe's fields and houses. If anyone breaks the agreement, he shall pay a mina of silver and a mina of gold.<sup>60</sup>

From another text we learn that the adoptive son Wullu died but grandfather Našwe survived him and in his will he granted his grandchildren the right of inheritance.<sup>61</sup>

When the family of the bridegroom takes the initiative the deals were arranged by the two fathers. Much attention was paid to possible childlessness and an arrangement was made for taking a concubine. Either the man could choose one, or the wife would bring in a girl called a 'Lullûbite', a slave girl from the land of Lullubum. But if he were to take another woman without having any good reason, such as his wife's infertility, then the state would confiscate his possessions.<sup>62</sup>

---

57 J. Klíma, ArOr 18/3 (1950) 157–160 (in connection with succession); C. H. Gordon goes too far in his 'Erēbu marriage', SCCNH I (1981) 155–160.

58 A. Falkenstein, NSGU I (1956) 106 sub (a).

59 J. Paradise, JCS 39 (1987) 25–33.

60 R. H. Beal, JCS 35 (1983) 119 n. 26 (on Gadd 51; see K. Grosz, *The archive of the Wullu family* [1988] 44 ff.).

61 Grosz, 44 ff.

62 Paradise, 28–31. One example is HSS 5 67, see also ANET 220 (3).

Two adoptions of this type have been found recently at Emar. In the one a father adopted a man for his eldest daughter but made her the ‘son and heir’. The couple were obliged to provide for the parents. Not only was the son-in-law not allowed to take another wife, but if his first wife died he would have to marry one of her sisters. Evidently there were only daughters in the family and everything was being done to safeguard the continuation of the family line.<sup>63</sup>

Among the Hittites marriages involving the adoption of a son are well attested. Kings practised it to ensure lineal succession. The adopted son was called an *anti-yant* and his father even received a ‘bride-price’, which in this case was in fact a ‘bridegroom’s price’.<sup>64</sup> It was also practised in a Hittite ‘land grant’, when an elder child, a son, became a priest and his only sibling was his sister. His father adopted a son as a husband for his daughter and he may perhaps have received a house.<sup>65</sup>

In Emar we see one and the same father making an arrangement twice. First his daughter was named as ‘man and woman’, which meant that she could act independently. However this did not appear to give a satisfactory guarantee that she would remain independent and that the family capital would remain within the family. Therefore he also adopted a son, and made them both marry. The man had to support his father-in-law and mother-in-law and subsequently he could inherit. In another case the children inherited from the daughter. Sometimes provisions were made in case the daughter should die. Then the man would have to marry her sister. If the adopted couple did later get sons, all the sons would inherit equally. This was clearly an arrangement between equal parties. The man must certainly have been glad not to have to pay the bride-price.<sup>66</sup> Sometimes adoption was used as a way of getting out of financial difficulties. One adopting father was apparently in debt, with liability for a ‘price’ of 80 shekels.<sup>67</sup>

The instances in Nuzi are like those in Emar, where the son-in-law would have equal shares in the inheritance with the children born later. In one case there were already boys in the family, but it was thought desirable that the eldest daughter should have a protector, so a man was adopted as a husband for her. The adopted son-in-law now belonged completely to the family of his wife. Even

---

**63** D. Arnaud, *Textes syriens de l'âge du Bronze récent* (1991) no. 72. Also *Emar* VI.3 no. 29.

**64** Beal, 117–119.

**65** TUAT I/3 (1983) 208 f. (*Landschenkungsurkunde*). Cf. N. Bellotto, ‘L'adozione con matrimonio a Nuzi e Emar’, *Kaskal* 1 (2004) 129–137, esp. 131.

**66** Bellotto, 132–134 (*Aula Orientalis* 5 p. 14, TS 72). She does not agree with Grosz, who assumed that the adoptee had not been the firstborn within his original family, and had had himself adopted in order to get a larger inheritance in his new family.

**67** *Emar* VI/3 29 with Bellotto, 134.

so in Nuzi one man managed to transfer the wealth to his own family.<sup>68</sup> One father found a most elegant solution to his problem. Since he had produced only daughters he married a second wife who had only sons. He adopted her sons and married them to his daughters.<sup>69</sup> This sounds like an entrepreneurial merger.

## 4.6 Repudiation of a childless wife

Three of the laws of Hammurabi consider the possibility of repudiating a childless wife.

If a man intends to divorce his first-ranking wife who did not bear him children, he shall give her silver as much as her bride-price and restore to her the dowry that she brought from her father's house, and he shall divorce her (§ 138).

If there is no bride-price, he shall give her 60 shekels of silver as a divorce settlement (§ 139).

If he is a commoner, he shall give her 20 shekels of silver (§ 140).

The word for 'first-ranking wife' (*hīrtu*) is unusual. It is the feminine counterpart of masculine *hāwiru* in § 135, and indicates the woman to whom the man was first married. Evidently the woman was thought to be infertile. Since she could not be blamed for this, she had the whole of her own dowry returned to her, which would have been managed by the man. Moreover she received the value of the bride-price, which had already been paid to her family before the wedding. That means the man's family would have paid this twice, although it is possible that the bride-price had not yet been paid in full. The arrangement found in § 159 is comparable, where it is stated that if a man cancelled a betrothal he lost the bride-price plus all that he had brought (i.e. the *biblu*, 'gift') to his father-in-law's house.

If we assume that the bride-price was five or ten shekels of silver, then for a man who paid it twice his and his family's losses would have amounted to twenty shekels of silver at most. But the fine in § 139 amounts to considerably more than this, sixty shekels of silver. It is also much more than the twenty shekels so often agreed in divorce contracts. So the figure of twenty shekels in § 140 seems more reasonable for what had to be paid by a *muškēnu*, the Akkadian word for an 'commoner', 'ordinary citizen'. The word is often taken to mean a person in a lower social class and translated 'serf'. But F. R. Kraus took it to mean a normal citizen who was not attached to the palace, and therefore not employed by the

---

<sup>68</sup> Bellotto, 130f.

<sup>69</sup> HSS 19 19 with Z. Ben-Barak, *Inheritance by daughters in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (2006) 129–132.

state. The evidence from divorce contracts seems to refer to ordinary citizens and would thus confirm the opinion of Kraus. However a problem remains, because it is evident here that the intended amount is double the amount of the bride-price. Perhaps the bride-price for ordinary citizens was fifteen shekels and for the higher social classes (*awēlu*) thirty shekels (§ 139).

The sentence 'there is no bride-price' in § 139 suggests a general possibility that marriages could be arranged without paying a bride-price. Another possibility would be that payment was postponed until the birth of the first child. This fits the situation in § 138–139 where the wife is childless.



## 5 A second wife

The subject of a man taking a second wife raises questions about whether polygamy was practised and whether there were plural wives. Kings were certainly polygamous and surrounded themselves with a harem. Political marriages with foreign princesses made the setting-up of a harem a matter of national importance. However we will reserve this subject for Chapters 23 and 24, which concern the Court.

A prominent man in the society with which we are concerned could have two wives, his own little ‘harem’. A Sumerian governor had children by his first and his second wife, the *lukur*.<sup>1</sup> In the Ur III texts we read of women who were called ‘the little wife’ of a high-ranking man. Such a person is assumed to be a second wife.<sup>2</sup>

We know that an Old Babylonian high official named Sammetar had a wife in his house in the capital city Mari and a second in the city of Zurubban.<sup>3</sup> In the city of Kaḥat the deputy governor had three wives who are named on a list of people deported to Mari.<sup>4</sup> A relief in an Assyrian palace of Sennacherib shows a man with two women seated opposite him between the high reeds of the marshes (Figure 17). They were fleeing and the artist wanted to indicate that the man with his two wives was an eminent person.<sup>5</sup> But not only did kings, generals and important functionaries have two wives,<sup>6</sup> it happened also in the lower echelons of society. In Emar a man was exonerated from his debt of a hundred shekels of silver because B. paid it for him. Before the elders of the city of Uri he declared:

---

1 J. L. Dahl, *The ruling family of Ur III Umma* (2007) 59 f., 75.

2 M. Sigrist, *Dreheim* (1992) 231 f.

3 F. van Koppen, *Florilegium Marianum VI* (2002) 295 f. For another man at the court of Mari with two wives see N. Ziegler, *Le Harem de Zimri-Lîm* (= *Florilegium Marianum IV*) (1997) 7, 211 no. 33:1–6; N. Ziegler, *JCS* 51 (1999) 58b; see also J.-M. Durand, *LAPO* 18 (2000) 263 (two important women in the harem).

4 S. Dalley, *Mari and Karana* (1984) 109, on RA 65 (1971) 62 v 20:3; now J.-M. Durand, *MARI* 8 (1997) 652, Liste D v 17.

5 J. Bottéro in: P. Grimal, *Histoire mondiale de la femme I* (1965) 191; H. Frankfort, *The art and architecture of the Ancient Orient* (1954) plate 99; E. Strommenger, *Fünf Jahrtausende Mesopotamien* (1962) 235; J. Reade, *Assyrian Sculpture* (1983) 41; *SAA XVIII* (2003) p. 142. For a drawing see A. Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East II* (1995) 584 fig. 38. For monogamist prisoners of war in art see *SAA V* (1990) p. 118 = *SAA XI* (1995) p. 99; R. D. Barnett, *Sculptures from the North Palace of Ashurbanipal at Nineveh (668–627 B. C.)* (1976) plate XVIII.

6 A. Millet Albà, *Chagar Bazar (Syrie) III* (2008) 242 f.



**Fig. 17:** A man hides with two women from Assyrian soldiers patrolling a marsh in southern Iraq. 620 BC. Relief in the palace at Nineveh. *British Museum, London.*

I myself, with my two wives [and goods], have on my own initiative entered into the service of B. as a slave.<sup>7</sup>

A list of deported Hurrian families from the Middle Assyrian period records men with two wives.<sup>8</sup> We read of an archer and his two wives, a son, a daughter, and a small child at the top of two lists of wages from that period. These were not large families. It is possible that the reason a second wife was taken was because of the childlessness of the first wife.<sup>9</sup> This happened very often, as we shall see.

In principle, marriage was still monogamous. The family, in sociological terms the nuclear family, consisted of a man, a woman and a number of children. But the image of a monogamous family could be distorted by childlessness, and it was this that was generally the reason for taking another wife. This is the

<sup>7</sup> *Emar VI*/3 215.

<sup>8</sup> H. Freydank, *AOF* 7 (1980) 98.

<sup>9</sup> S. Jakob, *Die mittelassyrischen Texte aus Tell Chuēra in Nordost-Syrien* (2009) nos. 69:1–3, 70, 71.

generally accepted view in Assyriology. However, there is one point that is important to note. We have just seen that bigamy was normal in the higher echelons of society. This was also the case in the north (Assyria, Nuzi) and the west (Alalāḫ). In Assyria the law distinguished between the ‘foremost wife’ and the ‘lesser wife’ (§ 46). These terms may refer to a man’s first wife who had died and then to one he had subsequently married. According to this law it appears that the second wife was younger than the first, for in fact there was a possibility that she might marry the first wife’s son. There are few other indications for the existence of two differently ranked wives. Now and then in Babylon mention is made of a ‘slave-girl’ which is probably a reference to the second wife within the family. What her legal status was, we do not know.<sup>10</sup>

We see in Assyria that the concubine (*še’irtu* and *esirtu*) was also someone distinguished from a wife. At Alalāḫ in the West it seemed to raise no problems that a man could have two wives and possibly also a slave-girl to produce children for him. We presume that in these regions a man could take a second wife without having first to claim that his first wife was childless. Marriage was still essentially monogamous in the sense that the first wife held first position.

The reasons for taking a second wife deserve further thought. It was the responsibility of the woman to produce children. Taking on a second wife to bear children was a widespread occurrence in the ancient Near East. In Old Babylonian texts the first wife was called *ḫirtu*, ‘the chosen one’, and in Sumerian, according to the laws of Lipit-Ištar, she was called *dam nitadam*. The name for the second wife was *šanītu*, ‘the second one’. In Lipit-Ištar (§§ 24, 28) we find the Sumerian term *dam egir.ra*, ‘the one afterwards’, possibly meaning someone who came later, with a variant term *dam.2.kam.ma*, ‘wife number two’. In this case it is possible that the first wife had died and that the man married again. Once in the laws of Hammurabi the first wife is called *rabītu*, ‘the great one’, and she produced the children (§ 158).<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> M. Stol, ‘Sklave. B. Altbabylonisch’, § 11, *RIA* XII/7–8 (2011) 570.

<sup>11</sup> Scholars have thought of a scribal error for *murabbītu* in § 158. G. Cardascia assumes that the *rabītu* is the first wife and the *šanītu* the second; *WdO* 11 (1980) 12 n. 22. The first wife is named *ḫirtu* in *CH* § 170, but in the same section *amtu* can mean a slave-girl, not the second wife. In Ugaritic *att* (the first wife) is found next to *ššlmt* (the second wife, lit. ‘she who completes’), see A. Rainey, *Or. NS* 34 (1965) 16; S. Lafont, *Femmes* (1998) 223.

## 5.1 A slave-girl

The most widely known way to have a second wife was to bring in a slave-girl. In the Bible we see that the childless Sarai offered her husband Abram her Egyptian slave-girl Hagar:

Take my slave-girl; perhaps through her I shall have a son (Genesis 16:2).

She gave Hagar to Abram as his wife after almost ten years of childlessness. As the Bible story develops we are told that she was an upstart slave-girl and developed ideas about herself above her station. That was not a unique situation, for we see a slave-girl (*šiphā*) getting the better of her mistress (*g<sup>e</sup>birā*) cited in the book of Proverbs as one of the problems that could cause chaos in the world.

Under three things the earth shakes, four things it cannot bear: a slave becoming a king, a fool gorging himself, a hateful woman getting wed, and a slave supplanting her mistress (Prov. 30:22–23).

A slave-girl would take on a more elevated position if she bore children. Her status was sometimes recognised with a new contract. Old Babylonian marriage contracts state that such a girl would be a man's 'wife' and his wife's 'slave-girl', maintaining the higher position of his first wife.<sup>12</sup> In an anecdotal speech a slave who had become a second wife in this way said,

I am a slave-girl and I have no authority over my mistress. Let me go and pick my own husband.<sup>13</sup>

The laws of Ur-Nammu consider the repercussions when a man took the initiative in 'making the slave-girl just like her mistress'. Whoever then insulted her would have to go and wash out his mouth:<sup>14</sup>

If anyone should utter a curse against the slave-girl of a man, who has been made (equal to) her mistress, then his mouth should be rubbed with a litre of salt (§25).

<sup>12</sup> J. J. Finkelstein, YOS 13 (1972) p. 15 f.

<sup>13</sup> B. Alster, *Proverbs of ancient Sumer I* (1997) 247, Coll. 19 Section D 11; 326 UET 6/2 386.

<sup>14</sup> A. Falkenstein in C. Wilcke, *Das Lugalbandaepos* (1969) 182; *Studies Th. Jacobsen* (2002) 319 f.; see H. Neumann in Durand, *La Femme* (1987) 135–137. Previously it was thought that a slave-girl put herself on a par with her mistress and was punished. – Now C. Wilcke, *Festschrift J. Krecher* (2014) 546 § 30'.

The following law deals with someone striking a slave, but the passage about the punishment has been broken off. Was she a slave-girl who had been promoted to be the wife, or was she a concubine? Slave-girls could sometimes also be concubines, as we shall see in Chapter 6.

In the Old Assyrian period a childless wife could buy a slave-girl on her own initiative.

If she has not produced a descendant for him within two years, she shall herself buy a slave-girl and as soon as she later produces a child for him, she may sell her to whomsoever she wishes.<sup>15</sup>

We often see in the Old Babylonian period that the second wife is from humble origins and is evidently a slave. Even so, she may not be sold.

One instance of this is a marriage in Sippar in the time of King Immerum. We learn from this text that the second woman is of lowly birth and that her fertility has already been proven.<sup>16</sup> The text is concerned with a certain Warad-Sîn, the son of Ibni-Sîn, who had married a girl named Ištar-ummi. He was a wealthy man and the text comes from his archive. Ištar-ummi is a typical slave's name, and the phrase 'is her name' after the name itself is an addition often found with the names of slaves. It is stated that the girl was the daughter of Buzazum and Lamassatum, and on the clay envelope in which the text was wrapped her mother L. is said to be a nun (a *nadītu*, of the god Šamaš). One assumes that the girl had at some time been adopted as a daughter by the couple, B. and L. She was taken in marriage out of their custody by Warad-Sîn, undoubtedly as his second wife. He paid forty shekels of silver as her 'bride-price' and he also gave them a slave, specified by name. This was exceptional. The price given is higher than we know from elsewhere and the gift of a slave was also unprecedented. According to the envelope, the parents of the bride could not complain against or make any demands on 'Ištar-ummi and her children', which is surprising. It is conceivable that the children already existed. We know of a similar case from a contract for a marriage, where the first wife had the name of a nun and the second was called her 'sister'. There mention is made of the children of the second wife, 'which had been or would be born' (they were regarded as being the children of both women).<sup>17</sup> We learn from this that a second wife with children could be married. This woman was seen as being fertile, which she would have to be when taken

---

<sup>15</sup> ICK I 3. We shall translate this text in full later.

<sup>16</sup> VAS 8 4–5 (VAB 5 32), discussed by M. Stol in *Studies A. Skaist* (2012) 157 f.

<sup>17</sup> BAP 89 with R. Harris, JNES 33 (1974) 365 f. One of a group of three texts which we shall discuss later under 'A marriage to two sisters'.

as a second wife. Reverting to the high bride-price, we note that the bride was valuable for two reasons. She had shown that she was fertile and furthermore she had brought children to the marriage. This would explain why the bride-price was high. Possibly a slave was given in exchange for the children. It is conceivable that this slave would be later adopted by the couple on condition that he would care for them in their old age. That was something that often happened.<sup>18</sup>

One gets the impression that second wives came from humble parentage. Their simple names already indicate this.<sup>19</sup> Possibly they were handed over on payment of a bride-price by destitute parents. In those circumstances the ‘bride-price’ seems more likely to have been a ‘woman’s price’, an idea which can be supported with textual evidence. A woman ‘takes’ a girl like this from her father and mother and pays ‘the full bride-price’. This was done with the intention of avoiding having to make later payments, because there was probably some concern that the bride-price had been really very low. The girl was to be a ‘slave-girl’ for this woman, but for her husband Warad-Sîn ‘she was a wife’. The girl had to share in the likes and dislikes of the woman. But if ever she ‘made her heart sick’ she could immediately be sold, after she had been marked as a slave by shaving off her hair.<sup>20</sup> The inferior status of this girl, who was after all a free woman, is surprising. Did her parents in fact sell her? Or is this a clause in divorce law which aims to mark the low status of this woman within marriage?

## 5.2 Initiating the transaction

Sometimes the man took the initiative in procuring a second wife, at other times a married couple would act together, and sometimes the woman took the initiative.

### 5.2.1 The man

A man took the initiative in a contract from the early Old Babylonian period. He paid twenty shekels of silver to the father of the girl named U.<sup>21</sup> But his spouse named Q. had been the wife of the man for a long time.

On the day that U. is not in harmony with Q., Q. may sell U.

---

<sup>18</sup> M. Stol, *The care of the elderly in the Ancient Near East* (1998) 83.

<sup>19</sup> M. Stol, *Studies A. Skaist* (2012) 141, 145, 151 f., 160–162.

<sup>20</sup> CT 48 48 with collations by Westbrook.

<sup>21</sup> L. Waterman, BDHP 39 (HG 6 1420).

Since it is nowhere explicitly stated that the new woman is the second wife, it is surely more plausible to think that the man was merely buying a slave for his wife. The clause about lack of harmony only makes sense when applied to a relationship between two wives. Moreover, it was a drastic punishment to be sold. We can only understand it here by assuming that the girl was, or had become, a slave. Evidently she had been sold by her father, who desperately needed the bride-price. Perhaps the sum of twenty shekels was precisely the debt the father owed, and he owed it to the buyer.

According to a modern reconstruction of an archive from Emar, an exorcist entered a second marriage with a widow with one son. He adopted her son and fathered three more children with her. When the adopted son started a dispute with him about property from his mother's dowry he and the other three children were disinherited. The eldest son of the exorcist, by his principal wife, was appointed as sole heir.<sup>22</sup>

### 5.2.2 A married couple

A text where a man and wife as a married couple acted together states that a girl was 'bought' (the verb used has a crude connotation) by them from her father.<sup>23</sup> She was then the 'spouse' of the man and the 'slave' of the woman. If she did not recognize the latter as her mistress, she could sell her as a slave. The second part of the text has the standard terms for a normal sale. The price was five shekels of silver, then the lowest amount for a bride-price. The name of the girl, Šamaš-nuri, suggests that she was a slave-girl.<sup>24</sup> It is noteworthy that in such cases it is a man or a married couple acting as the the parties in a sort of sale, and we have other similar examples.

<sup>22</sup> Y. Cohen, *The scribes and scholars of the city of Emar in the Late Bronze Age* (2009) 151–154.

<sup>23</sup> CT 8 22b (VAB 5 77) with Stol, *Studies Skaist*, 140 f. Cf. CT 48 84, which lists a cow and six head-dresses, the remainder of a dowry (*nudunnū*) of a *šugītu*, which is to be given to her father-in-law (*emu*); Wilcke, 'Familiengründung', 269.

<sup>24</sup> R. Harris, *Ancient Sippar* (1975) 338; perhaps she had been adopted as his daughter by her (new) father.

### 5.2.3 The woman adopts a sister

Fairly often we read of a wife ‘adopting a sister’, meaning that she took the initiative in bringing into the family a second wife. This remarkable legal process was used in the Old Babylonian period for recruiting a second wife.<sup>25</sup> One example comes from Isin. The wife of a man adopted a woman ‘for sistership’ (*ana athūti*),<sup>26</sup> and then paid her parents five shekels as ‘the bride-price’, and gave this girl, this new ‘sister’, to her own husband to marry. Afterwards there follows a grammatically confusing clause, where feminine singular pronouns are used alternatively to refer to the first wife and to the ‘sister’ to show that whatever happens to the one will also happen to the other.

Whoever marries her, shall also marry her; whoever leaves her, shall also leave her.

This solidarity was what being a ‘sister’ involved, a subject which we will look at again shortly. If the man were to divorce his first wife, then she could ‘take the hand of A., her sister, and go away’. If she herself wanted to leave, she lost the house, land, and goods and had to pay twenty shekels of silver. The strong position of the wife is evident in this text. She was also independent of her husband in her dealings. Here in the case of a divorce there was no question of punishment by throwing her from a tower or casting her into the river (see Chapter 9). The second wife seemed in practice to be owned by her for good. She was called Ali-abi, ‘Where is my father?’, which suggests that she was an orphan.

There are other marriage contracts where the second wife was called the ‘sister’ of the first but where there is no mention of an adoption. Even so, this must have been the background to the marriage. Two sisters were married and a bride-price was paid for each of them.<sup>27</sup> It was recorded that the second of the ‘sisters’ within the marriage was the slave of the first. This points to the fact that it was impossible to have two wives of equal standing within a marriage. Legal scholars focus attention on the theory that ‘to take’ (*leqū*) in these texts must be the technical term for ‘to adopt’. The text just referred to coming from Isin and concerning adoption as a sister, was not really an adoption, because the silver paid to the parents was called the ‘bride-price’. K. R. Veenhof proposed that ‘to

<sup>25</sup> K. R. Veenhof, *Mélanges A. Finet* (1989) 185f.

<sup>26</sup> BIN 7 173 with F. R. Kraus, JCS 3 (1951) 113–115. Cf. also UET 5 87.

<sup>27</sup> TIM 4 47, 49. Note that here a second wife is taken in marriage and that the marriage with the first wife is recapitulated and reconfirmed. For another similar marriage see J. Oelsner, OLZ 88 (1993) 502, HS 2388: ‘Ehevertrag’, where Ali-aḫatum, wife of M., gives Narubtum and her sister Amertum into marriage; to be published by Anne Goddeeris as TuM NF 10 no. 3.



take’ meant no more than that, and we should not read into the verb the meaning ‘to adopt’ or ‘to buy’.<sup>28</sup> This restrained observation is reminiscent of R. Yaron’s opinion about the word *aḥāzu*, a difficult term for legal scholars to interpret, but which he understood to mean the ‘taking’ of the bride. He convincingly showed that here again not too much should be read into the word.<sup>29</sup> In other texts where a woman was adopted as a sister we read that the first wife could sell her if she said, ‘You are not my sister’. One can imagine that in a normal relationship between sisters something like this could clearly not happen. This clause must have been inserted to indicate the restricted status of the new sister.

Besides this, as we have seen above, in these contracts we can find a clause envisaging a ‘joint divorce’: ‘whoever leaves her shall also leave her’.<sup>30</sup> R. Westbrook states that this clause was there for the protection of the second wife against the first, to prevent the second wife from being divorced at the instigation of the first.<sup>31</sup> One could also say that the first wife was protected. Veenhof gives a better explanation: ‘It prevents the husband from divorcing the older, childless *nadītu*, while staying married to the younger mother of his children’.

In general, when we see the words ‘sister’ and ‘parents’, we should take into account the fact that a poor girl or slave-girl would have been adopted by her ‘parents’ with the intention of later marrying her off as a second wife. What lies behind this must be the rule that marriage could only legally be contracted by free persons. The adopted woman was free, though she may really have been a slave. That is seen from a letter saying,

The woman is not a slave. She was taken by means of a bride-price.<sup>32</sup>

The adoption process was necessary to make her a completely free woman. Some names for the second wife indicate that she was given this new name on the occasion of her marriage, such as ‘She is my sister’, and ‘I have acquired a sister’.<sup>33</sup>

But what is the sense in creating such a ‘sister bond’? R. Westbrook thinks that we should assume they are natural sisters. Both sisters brought a dowry with them and the children which were born belonged to the two sisters. As such those children could inherit from both of them. That applied also in the case of adop-

<sup>28</sup> Veenhof, *Mélanges Finet*, 186 f.

<sup>29</sup> R. Yaron, ZSS 109 (1992) 55 ff.

<sup>30</sup> *āḥissa eḥḥassi ēzibša izzibši* (14–15). Cf. CAD E 422a (3.c.) and TIM 4 49:6 f.; UET 5 87:11 f. Veenhof, *Mélanges Finet*, 187a: ‘clause of solidarity’.

<sup>31</sup> OBML, 105 f.

<sup>32</sup> ARM 28 36:8–11.

<sup>33</sup> TIM 4 47, 49 with M. Stol, *Studies A. Skaist* (2012) 162.

tion: children from the second sister could inherit from the childless first sister. Whenever the second natural sister was called the ‘slave’ of the first, she had not received any dowry. Westbrook says elsewhere that a second wife could only be adopted as a ‘sister’ after she had given birth to her first child.<sup>34</sup> I feel that this is all rather speculative.

K. R. Veenhof suggests that ‘by adopting the secondary wife as sister ... a relation of kinship was created which went beyond ownership and constituted the nearest approach to real motherhood.’ In a story in the book of Genesis Rachel, who had not conceived, tells her husband Jacob:

Here is my slave-girl Bilhah. Lie with her, so that she may bear sons to be laid upon my knees, and through her I too may build up a family (Genesis 30:3).

Veenhof continues, saying that such a story shows that ‘by having the secondary wife give birth “on the knees” of the first wife, the latter’s motherhood and acceptance of the new-born as her child could be visualized. The same goal could be reached by taking as secondary wife a natural sister of the first wife.’<sup>35</sup> We will return to the subject of ‘sisters’ when we discuss the *šugîtu*.

#### 5.2.4 A marriage to two sisters

A well-known group of three Old Babylonian texts give some slight hint as to how a marriage to two ‘sisters’ developed.<sup>36</sup> They relate to a time in the reign of King Apil-Sîn, in Sippar. In the first text we see a man marrying a woman. Judging from her name, Taram-Saggil, ‘She loves Esagil’ (i.e. Marduk’s temple), she must have been a nun (*nadîtu*) of Marduk (see Chapter 27). In the second text the same man enters into a marriage with the same Taram-Saggil and also with Iltani, the daughter of Sîn-abušu.<sup>37</sup> The second woman is clearly the ‘second wife’, as can

<sup>34</sup> Westbrook, 106a, with 103b, 104b, on BAP 89.

<sup>35</sup> K. R. Veenhof in *Mélanges A. Finet*, 186a.

<sup>36</sup> TCL 1 61 (Apil-Sîn year 6), CT 2 44, BAP 89; their sequence is reconstructed. See R. Harris, ‘The case of three Babylonian marriage contracts’, JNES 33 (1974) 363–369; cf. R. Harris, *Ancient Sippar* (1975) 319 f.; S. Greengus, HUCA 46 (1975) 23 f.; Westbrook, OBML, 79a, 83, 103, 104b, 110b; Veenhof, *Mél. Finet*, 185a; R. Pientka, TUAT NF 1 (2004) 27 f. (BAP 89); L. Barberon, *Les religieuses* (2012) 153 f., 231–233. The earliest discussion was by Th. G. Pinches, *The Old Testament in the light of historical records* (1902) 174; only two texts were known to him.

<sup>37</sup> In the one text her father has the name Šamaš-našir, but in the other his name is shortened to Šamšatum (BAP 89:3). For the existence of two fathers, see Chapter 3, note 155, Chapter 16, note 6.

be seen from a series of degrading duties stipulated for her to do. The text can be regarded as typical of such a situation.<sup>38</sup>

(As for) Taram-Saggil and Iltani, the daughter of Sîn-abušu, Warad-Sîn took them both in marriage. If Taram-Saggil and Iltani should say to their husband, 'You are not my husband', they will throw them from the tower. And if Warad-Sîn should say to Taram-Saggil and Iltani, his wives, 'You are not my wife', then he will forfeit his house and chattels. In addition Iltani must wash the feet of Taram-Saggil, and carry her chair to the house of her god. Iltani shall share Taram-Saggil's antipathies and share her sympathies. She may not open her seals. She will grind ten litres of barley flour and offer it. (Names of witnesses)

At the end of this text, as usual, are the names of the witnesses. It raises several points for discussion. The most important is that if there was a divorce the man would lose his house and chattels. In both the laws of Ešnunna (§ 59) and the laws of Hammurabi (§ 137) this was the case whenever there were children in the marriage. Therefore it seems reasonable to suggest that Iltani had at least one child at the time the contract was issued. This would explain the extreme level of punishment for the man, and also the demeaning duties showing the inferior position of Iltani. Taram-Saggil wanted no insubordination. This ruling was in her favour and the contract came from her archive.

All the duties stipulated for Iltani deserve comment. Washing the feet is a duty quite commonly stipulated for slave-girls to do for mistresses. Carrying the chair refers to carrying a chair for a nun to the temple of Marduk.<sup>39</sup> That the 'sister', the adopted second wife, had to exhibit the same antipathy and sympathy as the first wife was seen as a sign of submissiveness.<sup>40</sup> Sometimes the expression occurs that both have to 'go in and out' at the same time, an expression perhaps related to the work expected of them.<sup>41</sup> Slaves, of all people, were not allowed to open the seals of storage rooms, an action which is apparent in a Sumerian literary legal text. To grind ten litres (= one *sūtu*, 'a seah') was the expected daily workload for a slave-girl.

The third text also concerns Warad-Sîn marrying the two women, and now they are both named as daughters of the same father, Šamšatum (= Šamaš-našir), previously named specifically as the father of Taram-Saggil, so now they are

<sup>38</sup> CT 2 44 (VAB 5 4).

<sup>39</sup> W. Sommerfeld, *Der Aufstieg Marduks* (1982) 31 n. 1.

<sup>40</sup> L. Barberon, *Les religieuses et le culte de Marduk* (2012) 230–232, lists all her duties. For the broader context see R. Yaron, *Journal of Juristic Papyrology* 15 (1965) 173–175.

<sup>41</sup> Westbrook, 109 f.

sisters with the same father. Here, an earlier marriage contract is reviewed. The short first sentence reads,

Iltani is the sister of Taram-Saggil.

This presumably means that she had now been adopted as a sister by Taram-Saggil. One of the witnesses in this text is named as *Sîn-abušū*, and he could be her biological father showing his tacit agreement. Then there follows this statement:

The children, as many as are born and will be born, are the children of them both. If she should say to Iltani, her sister, 'You are not my sister' [then she will take the hand of her] children [and go away].<sup>42</sup>

After the break in the text (the middle section is missing) we read about the other, second, wife:

[If ...] sa[ys] 'Y[ou are not my sister]', she will shave off her hair and sell her. If Warad-Sîn should say to his wives 'You (two) are not my wives', he will pay sixty shekels of silver. And if they say to Warad-Sîn their husband, 'You are not our husband', they will be bound and thrown into the river.

In an earlier text we read that they would be thrown from the tower. The names of the witnesses are given. This text also needs further consideration. The fine levied on the man was twice as much as in the first contract. Perhaps this was because there are now two women. Our text explicitly states that there are children, but for some reason or other the man's possessions are not here forfeited. One hypothesis, which seems plausible, is that Iltani already had a child when she took on the role of second wife, and that Warad-Sîn was the biological father. In any case her fertility had been proven.

---

<sup>42</sup> We owe this correction to Westbrook. This expression is attested elsewhere in the context of sister relationships. We there see that if the husband separates from his wife, she is allowed to take the hand of her adopted 'sister', his second wife, and leaves (BIN 7 173); if the husband wishes to separate, the *nadītu* of Marduk takes the hand of her sister, the second wife, and 'goes out' (TIM 4 47). Also regarding a holy woman, a *kulmašītu*, 'on the day that a husband marries her, she will take the hand of her husband and enter the house of her husband', CT 8 50a (Westbrook, 120a). The adoption document PBS 8/2 107:20–21 is not clear. In VAS 18 114:19–20 a mother adopted and raised a girl and her husband has no authority over her. If the man wishes to separate, the mother 'takes the hand of her daughter and goes away'. A correction is required in line 9: read (the man) *ul uwakka[l]*; thus AHw, CAD.

In our third text, agreements made earlier are repeated. A new factor here is what would happen to Iltani and the children. This third step was perhaps taken when Iltani became pregnant by Warad-Sîn. Then Taram-Saggil intervened, adopted her as her sister and assured herself of all the progeny. The third text also had her interest at heart.

### 5.2.5 The woman adopts a daughter

A holy woman (*qadištu*) of the god Adad, who adopted a girl ‘as a daughter’ (*ana mārūti*), paid her parents ‘the bride-price’ and ‘gave’ her to her husband. This can only mean that the adopted girl became the second wife, whereas the first woman did not or was not allowed to have children. The man was therefore married to wife and (fictive) daughter at the same time.<sup>43</sup> Elsewhere a woman ‘takes’ (perhaps meaning that she adopts) a daughter for her husband, pays the full ‘bride-price’ to her parents, and the woman becomes a ‘slave’ for her.<sup>44</sup> Is the slave-girl also her adopted daughter? The comment in a letter about the ‘adoption’ of a princess from Mari is difficult. She, like her sister Kirûm, is the wife of a foreign ruler. To her father she writes:

You yourself ‘gave’ me as a daughter and male heir.<sup>45</sup>

### 5.2.6 The brother

On one occasion we see the wife’s brother providing a second wife. He ‘gives’ her.<sup>46</sup> The clauses of the contract all show her to have an inferior position to the first wife, named Eriš-Sagila, and at the end we read,

Even if she should bear ten children, they are the sons of E.

<sup>43</sup> CT 48 57 with Westbrook, 103b.

<sup>44</sup> CT 48 48 with Westbrook 104a.

<sup>45</sup> ARM 10 95:5f. (= LAPO 18 [2000] 437f. no.1225, ‘M’as-tu donnée en adoption?’), cf. J.-M. Durand, MARI 3 (1984) 166.

<sup>46</sup> CT 48 67. At the beginning two lines are missing, including the name of the second wife (colated by Westbrook).

We conclude from this that the family of a married woman saw it as their responsibility to see that one way or another children would be born in the marriage, and this would explain why the brother acted as he did.

### 5.2.7 The *šugîtu*

We discussed earlier the marriage of a second wife who was adopted as the ‘sister’ of the first. The title *šugîtu* for such a ‘sister’ is a special case. When the Laws of Hammurabi call the sister of the first wife a *šugîtu* it seems that this refers to an actual biological sister. Possibly the concept of *šugîtu* was originally restricted to and only suitable for a second wife who was recruited from the same family, so that a young man married two related sisters. A section in the Laws of Hammurabi envisages a family with a *šugîtu* as well as a nun, *nadîtu*. The clause about giving the dowry of the *nadîtu* is followed by one for the *šugîtu*.

If a man does not award a dowry to his daughter who is a *šugîtu* and does not give her to a husband, after the father dies, her brothers shall award to her a dowry proportionate to the value of the paternal estate, and they shall give her to a husband (§ 184).

Earlier it was assumed that the *šugîtu* was a sort of priestess, which would fit into this context. Now we take her to be the sister of the *nadîtu*, who for one reason or another did not go with her sister. The law makes clear that this *šugîtu* will marry in the end.

Much has been written about the etymology of the word *šugîtu*.<sup>47</sup> My suggestion is that it can be explained as a word basically meaning an ‘old woman’. It could be derived from Sumerian *šu.gi<sub>4</sub>.a*, defined as Akkadian *šibtu* ‘old woman’, and *šugîtu* could be used as a taboo word, designed to mislead the demons, to keep them far away from the young mother and her child. In fact the function of the *šugîtu* was precisely that, a young woman there to bear children.

This institution seems already to have played a role in the legend about the struggle between Gilgamesh and *Īuwawa*. Gilgamesh offered him Enmebaragesi, his ‘big’ sister, as a wife (*dam*), and his ‘little’ sister, Peštur, as his second wife (*lukur*).<sup>48</sup> The name of the younger sister is Peštur meaning ‘Mouse’. It is hardly a coincidence that the Akkadian name Perurutu, also meaning ‘Mouse’, is often

<sup>47</sup> Wilcke, Jacobsen; see Veenhof, 187b.

<sup>48</sup> A. Shaffer, JAOS 103 (1983) 309–313; = lines 139, 143 as numbered by D. O. Edzard, ZA 80 (1980) 188; 81 (1991) 211f.; TUAT III/2 (1993) 546 f. Edzard translates *lukur* as ‘concubine’.

is the name of a *lukur*, already attested in Ur III Nippur.<sup>49</sup> A. Shaffer has said that Enmebaragesi must have been a priestess. So this would be a nice parallel to the Old Babylonian situation: a nun and an ordinary woman from the same family. In the Late Old Babylonian texts the second wife of the husband of a nun, called the *nadītu* of Marduk, was also called a *šugītu*, but it can be proved that this sisterhood was fictitious and that she was adopted.<sup>50</sup> Such a *šugītu*, who received a dowry, and for whom a bride-price was paid, is not often mentioned (Chapter 27).

The nun *nadītu* was a woman who lived in a convent and was not allowed physically to have any children herself, though she could adopt them (see Chapter 26 on convents). Only a *nadītu* of the god Marduk was allowed to marry, but not to bear children herself (thus scholars like R. Harris and L. Barberon; see Chapter 27).<sup>51</sup> The second wife, who could have children with the husband of this *nadītu*, was called the *šugītu*.<sup>52</sup> The Laws of Hammurabi do not deal with the second wife in a normal marriage, but do mention her in relation to this *nadītu*.

If a man marries a *nadītu*, and that *nadītu* gives a slave-girl to her husband, and thus she provides children, but that man then decides to marry a *šugītu*, they will not permit that man to do so, he will not marry the *šugītu*.

If a man marries a *nadītu*, and she does not provide him with children, and that man then decides to marry a *šugītu*, that man may then marry the *šugītu* and bring her into his house: that *šugītu* should not aspire to equal status with the *nadītu* (§§144–145).

We see here clearly how a *nadītu* could provide descendants. One way that she herself could give her husband a slave-girl, and he would have children by her. Those children would count as children of the *nadītu*. Another way was for her husband to take the initiative in marrying a second wife, who would have children by him. This was a free woman, sometimes a ‘sister’ of the *nadītu*. The laws say that it was forbidden to use both methods (§144). Only if the *nadītu* produced no children by a slave-girl or by some other means (such as adoption) could the man go on to take the initiative himself and take another wife (§145).

49 M. Such-Gutiérrez, *Beiträge zum Pantheon von Nippur im 3. Jahrtausend I* (2003) 164–166.

50 M. Stol, *Studies A. Skaist* (2012) 147, 153, 156 f., 159, 161; Barberon, *Les religieuses*, 227–232.

51 J. Renger, *ZA* 58 (1967) 174 f.

52 Renger, 175; R. Harris, *Ancient Sippar* (1975) 317, 319, 321; C. Wilcke, *ZA* 74 (1984) 170–180. Note that in Nippur Geme-Ekuritum, the *ereš.dingir* of the god Lulal, had a son, together with her husband, but we assume that this was not a biological son; see TIM 4 13:28 f. with E. C. Stone, D. I. Owen, *Adoption in Old Babylonian Nippur* (1991) 39 (there translated ‘and Warad-ilišu, their son’).

R. Westbrook has considered the status of the slave-girl in §144. Was she a concubine or a second wife?<sup>53</sup> The laws that follow seem to treat her as a slave-girl:

If a man marries a *nadītu*, and she gives a slave-girl to her husband, and she then bears children, after which that slave-girl aspires to equal status with her mistress since she had given birth to children, her mistress shall not sell her. She shall place upon her the slave-hairlock, and she shall reckon her with the slave-girls.

If she does not bear children, her mistress shall sell her (§§146–147).

In fact these laws already give the answer to Westbrook: the slave is not a concubine but had the higher status of a second wife. Her punishment was always to be ‘put back’ into the role of a slave. Her status oscillated between freedom and slavery.

Sometimes it is apparent that children were really born to the second wife. A *nadītu* of the god Šamaš gave her inheritance to a nephew, but specified that a portion should be given to Šat-Aya and to Ana-yašim-damqat and her children, both those she has borne or shall bear. Ana-yašim-damqat was a slave’s name, meaning ‘She (= ‘my mistress’, or the goddess Aya) is good to me’. This means that we have here a *nadītu* and her slave-girl.<sup>54</sup> What follows is another example of the children of a nun produced by a slave-girl.<sup>55</sup> A brother gave a woman to his sister Eriš-Sagila (probably a *nadītu* of Marduk) to serve her. Among the duties the woman had to do were, for example, to carry her chair to the temple and to wash her feet. Then we read:

Even if she should bear ten sons, they are the sons of E.

There is no mention here of a husband.

The *šugītu* was supposed to be called the ‘sister’ of the *nadītu*.<sup>56</sup> That does not mean any more than that she had been adopted as a sister. There are a few texts which enumerate the content of the dowry, there meaning what the *nadītu* received from her father. After all the objects listed sometimes a woman is named as a *šugītu* and/or her sister. Such a text was given in Chapter 3, concerning

<sup>53</sup> OBML, 107.

<sup>54</sup> CT 47 47:23–26 with M. Stol, *The care of the elderly in the Ancient Near East* (1998) 99 f. Note that Šat-Aya must be a *nadītu* of Šamaš, not Marduk; Barberon, *Les religieuses*, 11 note 11.

<sup>55</sup> CT 48 67 with OBML, 125, and L. Barberon, *Les religieuses*, 228 n. 1241. According to her, the *nadītu* (of Marduk) was not yet married at this moment.

<sup>56</sup> Harris, *Ancient Sippar* (1975) 321. Now proved by CT 45 119 rev. 6, as suggested by Wilcke, ZA 74, 177 (*ana aṭḥūtiša ilqe?*).



wedding gifts. She is then part of the dowry and even at that point destined to ensure the birth of children. She could not be the biological sister.<sup>57</sup>

One man is said to have married two sisters, the first of whom was a *nadîtu* of the god Marduk. The second sister had an inferior rank to the first (*wurruḍat*), had to share her sympathies and antipathies, wash her feet, carry her chair and ... (?). Then there follow clauses concerning divorce. When she is abandoned by the man, the first 'sister' shall 'take the hand' of the second sister and 'leave'. If the first sister wants to break up the marriage, she will be bound and thrown into the river. We see that the second sister had no active role to play. Both sisters had the same father and mother, but the *šugîtu* would certainly have been a poor girl adopted by them. The text ends with the interesting statement that the father had received 'ten shekels of silver, the bride-price for his daughters', that is two times five shekels.<sup>58</sup>

Two texts show that, together with the *nadîtu* of Marduk, the man E. received one of her nieces, from a younger generation, as *šugîtu*. Then, 21 months later, he received another niece, from a different mother. The first extra wife was 'given' to the *nadîtu* by her mother and brothers, 'to marry E. along with her' (*ana ittiša E. aḥāzim iddinūši*). The second was recruited (*leqû*) by the *nadîtu* of Marduk herself for her husband.<sup>59</sup> We should not assume that the man now had three wives, but it could be that an earlier one (the *nadîtu* or the *šugîtu*) had died or was infertile. Assyrian contracts show that after two years of childlessness the man had a right to reject her.

It is interesting to see here that the second wife was chosen from within the first wife's own family. That brings us back to the question of whether the 'sisters' could have been real, natural sisters, with adoption being an emergency measure.<sup>60</sup> I think that this was indeed the norm, a norm reminiscent of the levirate, which should preferably not be explained by the equal right of inheritance for the children, as Westbrook thinks. Here something more primitive is at play, concerned with the ties of blood, and a family who knew they were responsible for producing descendants when their daughter was unable or not allowed to bear children. It seems that it was precisely within the convent tradition that this institution existed. The sister, who was indeed allowed to bear children, was the com-

57 R. Westbrook, RIA VIII/1-3 (1994) 276b 'Mitgift' § 3.2.3; CT 8 2a:12; BE 6/1 84:30; CBS 1214:17 (see Wilcke, ZA 74, 170 f., n. 3 and 5). The *šugîtu* at the end of the list: Barberon, *Les religieuses*, 228 (1.2).

58 TIM 4 47; also in TIM 4 49. In BM 97159 again 10 shekels for two women (Veenhof, *Mél. Finet*, 185 n. 10).

59 Veenhof, *Mél. Finet* (1989) 183-187, Texts B and C.

60 On the adoption of the sister see Veenhof, 185a.

panion of the childless *nadītu*. When no biological sister was available, a woman from humble origins could be adopted.<sup>61</sup>

It is curious that the *šugītu* could be given a new name by the *nadītu* of Marduk; she had had a rather common name before being renamed. This was a pious name, such as ‘The wish of Esagila’, or ‘Zarpanitum is my angel’, a name derived from an association with the temple of Marduk and his wife Zarpanitum. But there were also names in which the word ‘to laugh’ occurred, such as ‘She laughs towards her city’. Names like this do not occur in other situations. It may be that this one had something to do with the joy at the birth of children, just as Sarah laughed at the birth of Isaac (Genesis 21:6). After all, this was the very reason that the second wife was taken on.<sup>62</sup>

One clause in Hammurabi’s laws concerns sending the *šugītu* away.

If a man should decide to divorce a *šugītu* who bore him children, or a *nadītu* who provided him with children, they shall return to that woman her dowry and they shall give her one half of (her husband’s) field, orchard, and property, and she shall raise her children: after she has raised her children, they shall give her a share comparable in value to that of one heir from whatever properties are given to her sons, and a husband of her choice shall marry her (§ 137).

A woman with children was well protected by Babylonian law. This law is a reflection of the two possibilities spoken of in §§ 144–145, but there they were in the opposite order: a slave-girl organized by the *nadītu* produces children, or a *šugītu* does. While they are being brought up the woman has the right to any profit from the inheritance.

### 5.3 The second wife in the Old Assyrian period

The second wife features much in Old Assyrian society, when the Assyrians were living in one of the thirty trading colonies in Anatolia, modern Turkey, in particular in the city of Kaniš, 20 km north-east of Kayseri. Some 23,000 clay tablets have been excavated there, most coming from the period 1890–1850 BC. Caravans with donkeys (camels had not yet appeared) travelled back and forth to the city

---

<sup>61</sup> Such an adoption seems to be the basis of the marriage contracts CT 48 55 (at the end of line 9 read nu-bar = *kulmašītu*), PBS 8/2 252, and Veenhof, *Mélanges A. Finet*, 181–183, Text A (which Veenhof says may relate to the adoption of an orphan). For the humble origins of the *šugītu*, see Stol in *Studies Skaist*, 161 f., Barberon, *Les religieuses*, 234.

<sup>62</sup> Stol, *Studies Skaist*, 161–163.

of Assur (in modern Iraq), where members of their family were also living. They were separated by a distance of 1200 km, a journey which took six weeks. The contracts from Kaniš show that a man could have two wives, one in ‘the country’ (i.e. Anatolian colony), and one in ‘the city’ (i.e. Assur).<sup>63</sup> This was not yet the case for the first generation of colonists. Pušu-ken lived in Kaniš and his wife Lamassi lived in Assur.<sup>64</sup> C. Michel thinks that such ‘bigamy’ was not normal, but that it was dictated by circumstances. If after two or three years no children had been born he could bring in a genuine slave-girl, but she did not make him a bigamist. Where there were two wives, the difference in rank was indicated. The first was known as the ‘wife’ or the ‘spouse’ (*aššatu*), and the second was called ‘the slave’ (*amtu*), or sometimes ‘the holy woman’ (*qadištu*). The second wife lived ‘alongside’ (*šaḫāt*) the first. Even if she were called ‘the slave-girl’, she was not really a slave. It was an expression designed to show her inferior position.<sup>65</sup> Moreover, it was not only the indigenous Anatolian women that were called the slaves of their Assyrian husbands.<sup>66</sup> The order of rank did not depend on where the woman lived but the sequence of the marriages. The wife of a first marriage, even one that happened in Anatolia, was called the ‘wife’. Assyrians in particular in a later generation could more easily marry first in Anatolia.<sup>67</sup> Some scholars have formalised the terminology to mean that the first wife was called the ‘wife’ (*aššatu*) in the city and in the colony, but that the second wife was called the ‘holy woman’ in the city and the ‘slave-girl’ in the colony (K. R. Veenhof; C. Saporetti).<sup>68</sup>

We shall translate a few of these contracts. The first concerns a man who takes a woman with him on a journey to two places in Asia Minor.

Puzur-Ištar has taken Ištar-lamassi, the daughter of Aššur-nada as a ‘slave’ and he will lead her off to Purušhandum or to Ḫattum, (the destination of) his journey, and he will let her return to Kaniš with him. If he should leave her, he will pay five minas of silver. If she should

<sup>63</sup> C. Michel, ‘Bigamie chez les Assyriens au début du II<sup>e</sup> millénaire’, RHD 84 (2006) 155–176; B. Kienast, ‘Altassyrisch *amtum* = “Zweitfrau”’, AOF 35 (2008) 35–52.

<sup>64</sup> K. Hecker, Or. NS 47 (1978) 405 f.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. B. Kienast, *Das altassyrische Kaufvertragsrecht* (1984) 94 f., sub 1; K. R. Veenhof, *Studies R. D. Biggs* (2007) 302 f., showing that it was less easy for her to divorce. A ‘slave-girl’ who was infertile could not take another woman to bear her children and her children did not have full rights; C. Michel, RHD 84 (2006) 167 f., 172.

<sup>66</sup> K. R. Veenhof in: H. Nissen, J. Renger, *Mesopotamien und seine Nachbarn I* (1978) 151 f. Sometimes the two titles are confused, within one text; Michel in: J. G. Dercksen, *Anatolia and the Jazira during the Old Assyrian period* (2008), 214 f.

<sup>67</sup> In general see C. Michel, ‘Les Assyriens et leurs femmes anatoliennes’, in: Dercksen, 209–229.

<sup>68</sup> See also the scheme in R. Rems, WZKM 86 (1996) 364 f.; K. R. Veenhof in: R. Westbrook, *A History of Ancient Near Eastern Law I* (2003) 452.

leave him, she will pay five minas of silver. Apart from his wife (*aššatu*) in the city of Assur, he will not take (*aḥāzu*) a second wife. If Ištar-lamassi does not ‘see’ a child (*šerru*) within three years, he will buy a slave and ‘take’ her. Aššur-nemedi, Anina and her mother gave her.<sup>69</sup>

This man already had a ‘wife’ living in Assur and now he takes a second wife, called a ‘slave-girl’. K. R. Veenhof thinks that this ‘slave-girl’ is there to satisfy the emotional needs of the man in a far country. Another scholar even speaks of ‘love’ in this sort of case.<sup>70</sup> That a man had such needs is illustrated again in a letter sent by a lonely man to his wife:

I am alone. Nobody is supporting me. Nobody places a table in front of me. If you do not come with my servants, I shall marry a Waḥšušanish woman in Waḥšušana.<sup>71</sup>

A man was allowed to take along (*redû*) the second wife on his trading journeys. Sometimes the cities they would travel to are named in marriage contracts.<sup>72</sup> This meant that in those cities he was not allowed to have any other sweethearts. Two partners were enough. It seems that a ‘slave-girl’ was duty-bound to make these journeys.<sup>73</sup>

One contract is clearly worded and concerns a man in Anatolia who marries a woman there, but who was already betrothed to a girl in Assur.

He may take her with him wherever he wishes. He shall not marry a second one in Kaniš or let her live alongside her. He shall not marry a daughter of Assur and a daughter from ‘the country’ (...). In the city (Assur) he may marry the daughter of Dada.<sup>74</sup>

That he should not marry a second ‘wife’ reflects the standard phrase *aššatam šanîtam ula eḥḥaz*.<sup>75</sup> C. Wilcke reminds us that the contracts precisely stipulated exceptions, which would mean that two ‘wives’ were indeed allowed, but that in this particular case they were forbidden.<sup>76</sup> Indeed, after this phrase the contracts

<sup>69</sup> Prag I (1998) 83 f. I 490; see earlier J. Lewy, HUCA 27 (1956) 6–8; K. Hecker, Or. NS 47 (1978) 408 f., n. 30.

<sup>70</sup> Veenhof, 152; Hecker, 412.

<sup>71</sup> BIN 6 104:15–17 with C. Michel, CMK no. 397; RIDA 84 (2006) 170; B. Kienast, AOF 35 (2008) 43 f.

<sup>72</sup> C. Michel, RHD 84 (2006) 166; Michel in Dercksen, 215 f.

<sup>73</sup> K. R. Veenhof, *Studies R. D. Biggs* (2007) 302.

<sup>74</sup> C. Michel, P. Garelli, *Anadolu Medeniyetleri Müzezi* 1995, 298 Kt 94/k, 149.

<sup>75</sup> R. Rems, WZKM 86 (1996) 361 f.

<sup>76</sup> C. Wilcke, ZA 66 (1976) 197 n. 3.

dealt with the possibility of the man marrying a second wife. If he did he would have to pay a fine.<sup>77</sup>

Life was not simple for a woman in Anatolia. If she did not accompany the man on trade journeys there was the possibility of contact through letters. One ‘slave-girl’ complained:

You have left me behind in Purušḫandum and I actually escaped death, but you never enquired about me. I came, but in Kaniš you ignored me, and for a year you have not taken me to bed. You wrote to me from Timilkya: ‘If you do not come here you will no longer be my “slave-girl” ...’. After Timilkya you left for Kaniš with the message, ‘I am coming within fifteen days’. Instead of fifteen days you stayed there a year. From Kaniš you wrote, ‘Go up to Ḫattum’. Today I will have been staying in Ḫattum for a year but in your messages you never once mention my name.<sup>78</sup>

Another text is a marriage contract in which two women are involved and the possibility of childlessness is discussed.<sup>79</sup>

La-ḳipum married Ḫatala, the daughter of Enišru. La-ḳipum shall not marry a second spouse ‘in the country’. In the city he can marry a ‘holy woman’ (*qadištu*). If within two years she has acquired (*rašû*) no offspring (*lîpu*) for him, she herself shall buy a slave-girl and as soon as this girl later gets a child (*ša-ra*) for him, she can sell her wherever she wishes. If La-ḳipum should leave her, he shall pay her five minas of silver. And if Ḫatala should leave him, she shall pay five minas of silver.

Three women have a role to play: the first wife, the second wife, and in the case of childlessness a slave-girl bought by the first wife if she herself was infertile. We could say that the slave functioned as a surrogate mother. It should be noted that also in a Neo-Assyrian contract a very independent lady at the court promised that she herself would provide a slave-girl in the case of childlessness.<sup>80</sup> If a man is married to an infertile second wife (‘slave-girl’), he can also himself buy a (genuine) slave-girl.<sup>81</sup> A man was only allowed to have one wife per location. In our text the ‘wife’ was in the colony and the ‘holy woman’ was in the city of Assur. Anatolia was called ‘the country’, but in another text the expression used is ‘in the field he may not marry a second wife’.<sup>82</sup>

<sup>77</sup> EL no. 1 (= TCL 4 67) (a fine of 1 mina); AKT I 76 (a fine of 5 minas).

<sup>78</sup> C. Michel, RHD 84 (2006) 170 (n. 56).

<sup>79</sup> ICK I 3 with H. Hirsch, Or. NS 35 (1966) 279 f., Hecker, 409 n. 34 (‘DAM or GEME in the erasure’); also in ANET (1969) 543a (4); Michel, RHD 84 (2006) 162 f., 164 f., 167.

<sup>80</sup> J. N. Postgate, FNALD no. 14. See further Chapter 7, ‘Marriage between equals’.

<sup>81</sup> C. Michel, Ktema 22 (1997) 106.

<sup>82</sup> AKT I 76.

One example of marriage to a second wife or ‘slave-girl’<sup>83</sup> concerns a girl obtained by the husband A. for fifteen shekels.

(As for) her brothers, her mother, no-one shall come back to A. about this. A. may not marry a wife in Puruṣḫattum, Waḫšušana, Durḫumit or Kaniš. His wife he may take with him wherever he wishes.

This girl is referred to as his ‘wife’ on the envelope, but on the tablet itself the word used is *amtu*, ‘slave-girl’. This woman must have been an Anatolian ‘slave-girl’ and she had to travel with him. Sometimes the second wife was not called a ‘slave-girl’ but a ‘wife’, and she participated in commercial activities.<sup>84</sup>

After a husband had died in Assur his second wife (an Anatolian) fought for her interests and those of her daughter, but in vain.<sup>85</sup> We do not know much about the relationship between the first and the second wife, but it could have been a strained one. We have a sealed letter sent to Assur by a husband with this address on the envelope, ‘To Ištar-ummi, his “slave-girl”, and Š.’, and at the end is a plaintive kind of postscript:

Please, please, do not be so annoying!

In this emotional letter he writes:

Why do you still write so angrily? Whom do I have but you? (...) Please, please, get on your way and come here with the first caravan, together with A. and S.! Do not leave the little one behind! And if you need money, ask A. for one or two shekels of silver! If you really love me, get on your way and come here! This wife (*aššatu*) whom I have married, is hatching plans against you.<sup>86</sup>

He had married his first wife, a she-devil, in Anatolia, and his second, his true love, later in Assur. It would seem that another woman in Assur had a good relationship, since she writes,

For the ‘slave-girl’ from Kaniš a garment (...); I will always love your ‘slave-girl’ from Kaniš.<sup>87</sup>

<sup>83</sup> C. Michel, *Tablettes paléo-assyriennes de Kültepe I* (1997) no. 161a.

<sup>84</sup> J. G. Dercksen, *The Old Assyrian copper trade in Anatolia* (1996) 122.

<sup>85</sup> Michel, RHD 84 (2006) 172.

<sup>86</sup> P. Garelli, RA 51 (1957) 5–9 HG 75; CMK no. 396; RHD 84 (2006) 172f.; B. Kienast, AOF 35 (2008) 42 (c).

<sup>87</sup> M. T. Larsen, *The Aššur-nādā archive* (2002) 107 no. 72:8–9, 28–29 (BIN 4 88).

The next document includes the word *qadištu* translated ‘holy woman’, which is a problematical title for women and in Chapter 27 it will be discussed fully. In the Old Assyrian period it is used for a wife and a new text shows that the title is found in other cities besides Assur.<sup>88</sup>

Šu-Sîn has married Etari, the sister of Ennam-Aššur. Her head is ‘open’ (*qaqqassa pate*). He shall not have a ‘girlfriend’ living alongside her. He shall not marry a ‘holy woman’ in Kaniš or Niḫriya. If on account of (*ana*) their sister anyone, whether it be her husband or an Anatolian or even a son of Assur, shall seize her on account of debt, then Ennam-Aššur, her mother, and Puzur-Šadûm will ‘cleanse’ Šu-Sîn. Her price has not been paid. If he should leave her, he shall pay two minas of silver. If she should leave him, then they shall pay two minas of silver.

The names of the witnesses are at the end. In the first half of the text the woman is described as having ‘her head open’, meaning that she was not veiled. This expression also occurs in the Middle Assyrian laws and refers to prostitutes and to ‘holy women’. If they married they would have to wear a veil. Let us therefore assume that Etari is a ‘holy woman’ (perhaps from Assur). Then it becomes clear why he must not marry a second ‘holy woman’. In the previous contracts we saw that a man could only marry one wife of each sort. We also saw that an Assyrian in Kaniš might marry a second woman to satisfy his emotional needs. The ‘holy woman’ would have been enough for this and that explains why he could not have a ‘girlfriend’ besides her. The expression ‘her price has not been paid’ refers to the bride-price, so it is hardly a legally valid marriage. This looks like a cohabitation contract.

What really happened when a man ‘abandoned’ a second wife is illustrated by the following text.<sup>89</sup>

Pilaḫ-Ištar abandoned Walala, his ‘slave-girl’, and she was satisfied with her divorce ... silver. In this case those acting were Pilaḫ-Ištar, Walala, Šat-Ištar, her mother, Nunu and Amur-Aššur, her brothers beside her, and they swore the oath by Assur, the oath by Ana, the oath by the ruler, that they would not come back at Pilaḫ-Ištar, his son, or whoever. If they do come back, they will pay ten minas of silver. Regarding Lamassi, his daughter, whenever Pilaḫ-Ištar goes to the city (= Assur) he shall take her with him. They are satisfied (with the payment) for her upbringing and her food. They will demand nothing (more) from him.

<sup>88</sup> AKT I 77 with E. Bilgiç, *IX. Türk Tarih Kongresi*, II. Cilt (1990) 430–432; J. G. Dercksen, NABU 1991/28. Note that *ša-wa-tám* = *še’itam*, ‘girlfriend’.

<sup>89</sup> ICK I 32 with J. Lewy, *HUCA* 27 (1956) 3–5; C. Saporetti, *Geo-Archeologia* 1984–2, p. 37; B. Kienast, *AOF* 35 (2008) 48–50.

The divorce settlement of the ‘slave-girl’ Walala was paid and the agreement stated that her mother and brothers had nothing more to demand. The man could take the daughter born of the union with him to Assur and he had paid the cost of her upbringing and food. It is noteworthy that in one of the texts mentioned earlier the ‘slave-girl’ again had her mother and two other people as ‘givers’.<sup>90</sup>

## 5.4 The second wife in later periods

### 5.4.1 Nuzi

The texts from Nuzi often state that a man may not have a second wife if the first one had given birth to children (*šerru*). That does not mean that in general in Nuzi a second wife was forbidden. The family of the woman only wanted to exclude the actual possibility and so protect the wife and her children. If the woman appeared to be infertile, then the man could indeed take a second wife. The woman or her family would see to that.<sup>91</sup>

One contract protected the married woman strongly and stated that if she bore children the man ‘could not take a second wife, nor even a concubine’.<sup>92</sup> Sometimes the only problem was not producing sons. That was written only in the contracts drawn up between the brother of the bride and the bridegroom himself.<sup>93</sup> One text records a decision for a childless woman to take ‘a woman from the land of Lullubû as a wife’ for her husband and any children would have to obey her.<sup>94</sup> This woman must have been a slave-girl from the hill country.

### 5.4.2 Alalah

In Alalah a man married two wives, but reserved the right to marry a third one if no child was born.<sup>95</sup> Two wives would have been normal in the west, as seen in Deuteronomy 21:15. The story of Hannah and Peninnah in 1 Samuel 1 also assumes

<sup>90</sup> Michel, *Tablettes paléo-assyriennes de Kültepe I*, no. 161.

<sup>91</sup> J. Paradise, JCS 39 (1987) 7 f., 28 f.

<sup>92</sup> JEN 435 with TUAT NF 1 (2004) 61 f. ‘Concubine’: *ḫelaḫelu*.

<sup>93</sup> Paradise, 9.

<sup>94</sup> HSS 5 67:19–22 with K. Radner, *Die neuassyrischen Privatrechtsurkunden* (1997) 165 (n. 865).

<sup>95</sup> AT 91:29–31 with TUAT NF 1 (2004) 135 f.; C. Niedorf, *Die mittelbabylonischen Rechtsurkunden aus Alalah (Schicht IV)* (2008) 265–275; AT 92 with W. W. Hallo, *The Context of Scripture III* (2002) 251 f.; Niedorf, 275–283.



this to be normal. Two other texts from Alalakh grant a period of seven years for the woman to produce a child. If in that time she has no child, the man may marry a second wife.<sup>96</sup> Setting a time limit for producing children, after which a man may marry a second wife, is confined to the north and the west of the region. In Assyria two years was allowed, but in Alalakh it was seven or ten years.

In the Bible Sarai brought in Hagar as a second wife for Abram after staying ten years in Canaan (Genesis 16:3). In the Mishnah a man should be concerned if after ten years he had no children, and should then look for a solution. But no mention is made of a second wife: the privileges of the patriarchs no longer applied (M. Yebamot 6:6).

### 5.4.3 Assyria

In the Neo-Assyrian period a marriage of equals involving taking a second wife was not acceptable. This is clear from the statement,

If he marries a second woman in addition, then he shall place five minas on top of her dowry and give it (to her).

This implies that it is possible that they then divorce and that he gives her the dowry plus this fine. The legal wife is a ‘holy woman’ of Ištar of Arbela, and therefore it is stated that neither her husband nor her brothers had legal authority over her.<sup>97</sup> Another text states,

If he should marry a wife in addition, then she shall take all that she had acquired and go and depart.<sup>98</sup>

About this marriage it was noted that this woman must have been a princess. The special word ‘to acquire’ applies to presents from the king, and the clay tablet was found in the palace, beside the sarcophagus of a woman.<sup>99</sup>

When a high-ranking lady at the court gave her daughter S. in marriage, it is stated:

---

<sup>96</sup> AT 93 with *The Context of Scripture* III, 252; Niedorf, 284–288; AT 94 with I. Mendelsohn in: *Studies S. W. Baron* (1959) 354 f.; Niedorf, 289–295.

<sup>97</sup> StAT 2 164, end; A. 2527 in Radner, *Die neuassyrischen Privatrechtsurkunden* (1997) 166.

<sup>98</sup> CTN II 247:6–10, with K. Radner.

<sup>99</sup> K. Deller, ‘Heiratsurkunde einer assyrischen Prinzessin’, NABU 1991/105. Deller’s suggestion was rejected by S. Svärd, *Women and power in Neo-Assyrian palaces* (2015) 87 n. 418.

If S. does not become pregnant and does not bear a child, she shall take a slave-girl as a replacement for herself. In this way she shall bring forth sons. The sons will be her sons. If she loves (her), she shall protect her. If she hates (her), she shall sell her.<sup>100</sup>

#### 5.4.4 Neo-Babylonian era

In the Neo-Babylonian period the possibility of a second wife is mentioned in marriage contracts.<sup>101</sup>

On the day that N. shall marry a second woman, he shall give to T. (his wife) a mina of silver.

This compensation for the first wife is a new development, and a completely new practice is found in another text. It adds that ‘she shall go wherever she wishes’. Such freedom had not been afforded before to the first wife.<sup>102</sup>

Some contracts mention ‘a second wife above her’, and indicate that the second wife may never attain the status of the first.<sup>103</sup> This becomes clear in the variant formula, ‘On the day that he marries a second wife, N. remains the most important (literally: the great) wife’.<sup>104</sup> The two following sentences are intriguing: ‘On the day that (the woman) FN is seen with a male person, on the day that (the husband) PN lets another woman live (in the house) alongside FN’. Unfortunately what follows is not clear.<sup>105</sup>

A contract from the second year of Nebuchadnezzar concerning a man who had no children by his wife includes this plea to the father of another girl:

There is no son of mine. I wish for a son. Give me Kullâ, your daughter. Let her be my wife.

That took place and she became his wife. Then follows the provision that should the first wife (*maḥrîtu*) nonetheless have a son, she would inherit two thirds of the

**100** Postgate, FNALD no. 14 with A. K. Grayson, J. Van Seters, Or. NS 44 (1977) 485f. We will return to this ‘equal marriage’ in Chapter 7.

**101** M. Roth, *Babylonian marriage agreements* (1989) 12f., speaks confusingly of ‘another woman’ and once of ‘the second wife’. K. Abraham, AfO 51 (2005–06) 202f., is clearer.

**102** Roth, *Babylonian marriage agreements*, 89 no. 25:14–16, 43 no. 4:10–13.

**103** Roth, 13 (n. 51).

**104** C. Wunsch, *Urkunden zum Ehe-, Vermögens- und Erbrecht aus verschiedenen neubabylonischen Archiven* (2003) 21 no. 5 rev. 2–4, with p. 22, 24.

**105** Roth, 65 no. 15:3–8.

estate.<sup>106</sup> This ruling is analogous to the provision in § 15 of the Neo-Babylonian laws: the sons of the first marriage would receive two thirds, and those of the second marriage (after the first wife had died) would receive one third.

In the Laws of Hammurabi a different regulation applied:

The sons shall not divide the property according to their mothers. They shall take the dowries of their respective mothers but the property of their father's house they shall divide equally (§ 167).

## 5.5 The position of the second wife when the first wife is ill

Illness could compel a man to take a second wife.<sup>107</sup> We know laws and a few legal judgements which allow the man, in the case of illness to take this step. But then the rights of the first wife must be protected. One is inclined to think here of illnesses which prevent pregnancy but nothing points to this. In a Sumerian text a widow remarries, but is struck by the demon *á.sàg*. She gives her husband permission to marry a named slave-girl, and adds:

I myself wish to receive a fixed allowance of barley and wool.

This proviso was made before the judges and the ration was granted to her for life, or possibly 'while she was living in the house of her husband U.'<sup>108</sup> A. Falkenstein considers that, as a consequence of the illness, the *debitum coniugale* (an expression apparently used by the prudish professor to mean sexual intercourse) had become impossible. However, there are strong indications that this demon caused a certain sort of paralysis, and it is noteworthy that only women are affected by this demon, a subject to be taken up again in Chapter 22, about diseases.<sup>109</sup>

A woman with a son and married to a man, became ill with 'the attack of the god'. She went to the judges and they granted that the couple should divorce. Her son, recognizing that he was not the man's son, promised to make no claims on the field, house or hereditary office.<sup>110</sup>

**106** VAS 6 3 (NRVU 1), Roth, no. 3; cf. B. Meissner, BuA I (1920) 405.

**107** R. Westbrook, OBML (1988) 77 f.

**108** A. Falkenstein, NSGU II (1956) no. 6, and Band I, 115 f. B. Lafont in: F. Joannès, *Rendre la justice en Mésopotamie* (2000) 45 no. 5.

**109** M. Stol, *Epilepsy in Babylonia* (1993) 143, with n. 99.

**110** BE 6/1 59 (VAB 5 232).

In the Laws of Hammurabi this subject is also taken up.

If a man marries a woman, and later *lahbu*-disease seizes her and he decides to marry another woman, he will not divorce his wife whom *lahbu*-disease seized: she shall reside in quarters he constructs and he shall continue to support her as long as she lives.

If that woman should not agree to reside in her husband's house, he shall restore to her her dowry that she brought from her father's house, and she shall depart (§§ 148–149).

No-one has yet been able to identify the disease known as *lahbu*, but it may possibly refer to a skin disease.<sup>111</sup>

An older law of Lipit-Istar places these (later) laws in a context.

If the (first) wife of a man changes in appearance, or is paralysed, then she shall not depart from the house. If her husband marries a healthy wife, then the later wife shall take care of the (first) wife (§ 28).

An alternative translation of the final clause would be, 'he shall take care of the later wife and the first wife'.<sup>112</sup> Since Hammurabi must have been familiar with the regulation of his predecessor, his provision that the sick woman may divorce the man can be seen as an innovation.<sup>113</sup>

---

<sup>111</sup> Stol, *Epilepsy*, 143; M. Stol in I. L. Finkel, M. J. Geller, *Disease in Babylonia* (2007) 11 f.

<sup>112</sup> M. Civil, *Studies B. Landsberger* (1965) 2 f., with Civil, AfO 25 (1974–77) 70a.

<sup>113</sup> J. Fleishman, *Studies J. Klein* (2005) 484 f. I do not understand why he states that it is another innovation in Hammurabi to say that she cannot be sent away.

## 6 Concubines

In the previous chapter we saw that that a man could have a concubine and he could have children by her. In effect this is what the patriarch Abraham did when he took Keturah as ‘another wife’ in addition to his second wife Hagar (Genesis 25:1). When Laban gave his two daughters to Jacob, he gave them both a slave-girl, Zilpah for Leah and Bilhah for Rachel. Later the still childless Rachel gave Bilhah to Jacob saying,

Lie with her, so that she may bear sons to be laid upon my knee, and through her I too may build up a family.

Later Leah gave Zilpah to Jacob (Genesis 29:21–30:13). In Babylonia a man normally chose a concubine for himself. A commercial letter concerned with buying many goods including a slave-girl expresses a wish to have proof of that woman’s fertility, with this last request.

Take for my lap one slave-girl, who is good-looking and has given birth to one or two children.<sup>1</sup>

Further west a slave-girl could attain a high status, particularly one who bore children. One such is commemorated on a Judaeen grave inscription dated ca. 700 BC for a man and his slave-girl.<sup>2</sup>

In Akkadian only one word, *esirtu*, which etymologically means ‘a woman imprisoned’, can unambiguously be translated as ‘concubine’. In Assyria and the surrounding regions some women are designated by this term. In Nuzi it occurs in a clause in a marriage contract:

He shall not marry a second wife; he shall not take a concubine (*esirta la isser*).

This suggests that apart from marrying a second wife other procedures were possible in that society for a man to raise his family.<sup>3</sup>

In Sumer and early in Babylonia there was no specific word for concubine. In Sumerian literary texts the closest we find is the expression ‘little wife’ who is distinct from the spouse. In a lullaby we read that the whole family should be happy with the husband:

---

<sup>1</sup> A. al-Zeebari, ABIM no. 20:82.

<sup>2</sup> KAI 191 with TUAT II/4 (1988) 558 f. with n. 2 (a).

<sup>3</sup> HSS 9 24:8 f.; cf. C. H. Gordon, AnOr 12 (1935) 171, J. Paradise, JCS 39 (1987) 12 with n. 35.

May his spouse be happy with him,  
 May the child be happy with him,  
 May the little wife rejoice in his arms,  
 May the child grow up at his good knee.<sup>4</sup>

And in a lament we read:

The mother does not seek out her child,  
 The father does not say, 'My spouse!',  
 The little wife does not rejoice on his lap,  
 The children do not grow up at his knee.<sup>5</sup>

In other literary texts it is the spouse who is said to be on her husband's lap.

An Old Assyrian agreement with a 'holy woman', a text mentioned earlier when discussing the position of the second wife, excludes the possibility of the husband acquiring any 'girlfriend'.<sup>6</sup>

Šu-Sin has married Etari, the sister of Ennam-Aššur. Her head is 'open' (*qaqqassa pate*). He shall not have any girlfriend live alongside her. He shall not marry a 'holy woman' in Kaniš or Niḥriya.

The word 'girlfriend' can mean 'concubine'. A letter from Mari shows that King Yaḥdun-Lim thought so much of his girlfriends that he segregated his regular wives and made them live completely separately. They had to leave the palace. A second letter makes clear that these girlfriends were singers.<sup>7</sup> A Sumerian-Akkadian dictionary equates the word *še'itu*, 'girlfriend', with the word for 'little wife'<sup>8</sup> and the 'travelling-wife' (*dam kaskal*). There we also find mention of 'the little wife of the merchant', perhaps a girlfriend for his business trip.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>4</sup> S. N. Kramer in ANET (1969) 652, lines 35–38.

<sup>5</sup> P. Michalowski, *The lamentation over the destruction of Sumer and Ur* (1989) 36:12–15, with p. 72. See further H. Neumann in Durand, *La Femme* (1987) 134 f.

<sup>6</sup> AKT I 77.

<sup>7</sup> MARI 4 (1985) 406 A. 2548:13–17, MARI 6 (1990) 291–294 with LAPO 18 (2000) 175f. no. 1011 (A. 4471); N. Ziegler, *Florilegium Marianum IX* (2007) 36 f.; cf. B. Groneberg, NABU 1989/74. J.-M. Durand recognised that *še'it bābim* indicates such a person, which he translated as 'compagne de voyage'; AEM 1/1 (1988) 531 no. 252:4, 15; also Durand in: G. del Olmo Lete, *Mythologie et religion des Sémites occidentaux I* (2008) 408, 534. The translation of W. Heimpel, 'woman next door', is more likely.

<sup>8</sup> PSD B 84 f., *bān.da* 'secondary wife' (lit.). In 'The Lamentation over Sumer and Ur', 14, *dam TUR* is certainly 'young woman', because it occurs with a normal family life in the background.

<sup>9</sup> *Emar VI/4* (1987) 165 no. 569:10.

A variant of this Sumerian expression is ‘the travelling *lukur*’. In the Ur III period a *lukur* was a second wife. Kings could have female companions for a journey. It is recorded that Šulgi had two, Ea-nišu and Šulgi-simti.<sup>10</sup> Nanaya-ibsa was the ‘beloved travelling-wife’ of King Bur-Sin.<sup>11</sup> These ladies were not concubines but the favourite wives of the king, whom he always wanted to have with him, even on his official tours.

The Middle Assyrian laws prohibit any man taking a woman married to someone else on a journey unless he is her father, her brother, or her son. If he does,

The man shall swear that he did not know that she was a married woman. Furthermore he shall give two talents of tin to the woman’s husband (§ 22).<sup>12</sup>

Sometimes Babylonian sources mention a slave-girl by whom a man has had children. This girl was not his second wife. As we have seen already, the second wife was a ‘slave-girl’ for his first wife, and a ‘wife’ for the husband. The definition of ‘wife’, as found in the laws of Hammurabi, depended on the existence of an oral or a written agreement (§ 128). So what would have been the status of a woman without such an arrangement in place? She could well have been described as a concubine, but the Babylonians would not have understood the term in this way. The Babylonian view of such women was that they were slaves. In this chapter we are concerned with slave-girls as concubines, not with situations where a married woman would go to live with another man and even have children by him (§ 134–136), or a widow would go to live with a man.<sup>13</sup> But why women sometimes did this will be discussed elsewhere.

Law-books were chiefly concerned with the legal status of a man’s children who had been born by a slave-girl. The laws of Hammurabi provide for the adoption of such illegitimate ‘sons’.

---

<sup>10</sup> J.-P. Grégoire, RA 73 (1979) 190 f., Šulgi inscr. 53c, 56b; M. Civil, Or. NS 54 (1985) 41 iii 8–9; the husband of this woman is called a *mudna*.

<sup>11</sup> Inscr. 3 (lukur ki.ág.kaskal.la.ka.né); RIME 4 (1990) 71.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. J.-M. Durand, AEM 1/1 (1988) 513. A connection has been seen with Abraham’s wife Sarai, who was considered unmarried both by Abimelech and the Pharaoh. There is also a link with the MA laws, A § 22, but nothing suggests that she was a ‘travelling wife’. See M. Weinfeld, *Mélanges M. Delcor* (1985) 431–436.

<sup>13</sup> See the few relevant remarks of H. Neumann, in his article on marriage, concubinate and bigamy, in Durand, *La Femme* (1987) 134 f.

If a man's first wife (*hirtu*) has borne him sons, and his slave-girl has also borne him sons, and during his lifetime the father says 'My sons!' to the sons that the slave-girl bore and he reckons them with the sons of the first spouse, then, after the father has died, the sons of the first wife and the sons of the slave-girl shall divide the family property equally. The inheriting son, the son of the first wife, shall choose and take a share first (§ 170).

The following paragraph (§ 171) deals with a father who has not said 'My sons!'. In that case they cannot share the inheritance, but the slave-girl and her sons are freed after the man has died. We know of an actual case where the father adopted only his eldest son.<sup>14</sup>

A Sumerian text is also concerned with this problem:

An oath made by the king: The slave U. shall be freed and be made 'as the son of one man'.

This has been explained as an adoption of someone born from his father's relationship with his slave-concubine.<sup>15</sup> In another Sumerian text 'his father' frees his slave and acknowledges him as his son. The slave's biological mother must have been a concubine.<sup>16</sup>

The laws of Lipit-Ištar describe different situations when men subsequently marry women with a lower social status, from lower to the lowest. First it refers to 'the later wife', who would have been the woman he married after his first wife had died (§ 24). Then it is concerned with a man who has had children both by his wife and by a slave, and who freed the slave and her children (§ 25). In the end there is a clause concerning a man who married a prostitute (§ 27).<sup>17</sup> In all these cases the legislator was concerned about the rights of inheritance of the children of the different mothers. According to the laws of Hammurabi a slave-girl with children who, as a result of debts incurred by her man, had been transferred to someone else, now has to be redeemed (§ 119).

A man who became particularly fond of his concubine could elevate her status, as suggested by a prediction in a liver omen:

The slave shall be as powerful as his master,

with the variant version

<sup>14</sup> CT 8, 37d (VAB 5 12); Westbrook OBML, 11 f.

<sup>15</sup> NSGU I 93 and 94, on no. 75:5–8.

<sup>16</sup> C. Wilcke in: M. Stol, S. P. Vleeming, *The care of the elderly in the Ancient Near East* (1998) 53 f.; TUAT NF 1 (2004) 4 f.

<sup>17</sup> A new edition of § 24–27 offers C. Wilcke, *Festschrift J. Krecher* (2014) 592–595, § f34–f37.



As for the slave-girl, her master shall love her and make her as powerful as her mistress.<sup>18</sup>

According to an omen, which links her to a disrespectful pig, that is something to be feared.

If a pig should enter its owner's bedroom, then the concubine will come into the house of her master.<sup>19</sup>

The reference in the laws of Ur-Nammu (§ 25) to the slave-girl who is made 'equal to her mistress' and who should not be offended possibly means a concubine. This fits with our earlier discussion of the slave-girl in relation to the second wife (Chapter 5).

More now can be said about the important position held by the Assyrian *esirtu*. Earlier scholars, before World War II, thought from the literal meaning of the word that these girls really were prisoners-of-war.<sup>20</sup> Certainly this did happen at Nuzi, where men took foreign slave-girls from the land of Lull(ub)û to get children by them. Stipulations in contracts from Nuzi show that a woman who failed to produce children for her husband could be demoted to the rank of concubine. For this sometimes a Hurrian word, *ḫelaḫelu*, was used. The stipulations are explicit:

If N. bears a child, then H. may not take another wife besides N., nor make her a concubine.  
If N. does not bear a child, then H. may take another wife.<sup>21</sup>

In the Assyrian laws the *esirtu* is one of the women who had to veil herself in the street (*ina rebīti*). It applied to 'the concubine who went out on the street with (her) mistress', and to 'the holy woman who had married a husband'. But a prostitute never had the right to wear a veil (§ 40). The law is followed by one which applied to a man who married a concubine:

If a man veils his concubine, he shall assemble five or six of his comrades and he shall veil her in their presence. He shall say, 'She is my wife'. She is his wife. A concubine who is not veiled in the presence of lads (*šābu*), whose husband has not said 'She is my wife', is not a wife. She is a concubine. If a man has died and there are no sons from his veiled wife, then the sons of the concubine are the sons. They shall take the inheritance (§ 41).

---

**18** CT 20 39:10 = U. S. Koch, *Secrets of extispicy* (2005) 92f. A 10.; cf. Veenhof, *Mélanges A. Finet* (1989) 186a with n. 13. Westbrook, OBML, 105b, speculates on 'the possibility of the husband divorcing his first wife because he prefers the second'.

**19** A. R. George, RA 85 (1991) 146:6b; see CAD A/2 s.v. *asirtu*.

**20** Refuted by B. Landsberger, AfO 10 (1935–36) 144 ff.

**21** J. Paradise, JCS 39 (1987) 12f. with n. 37.

Here it can be seen that to be elevated to the status of a wife was essentially a public event. There was no anointing ceremony, as there would have been at a betrothal. But a formal declaration was required, ‘She is my wife’, which is comparable to that for an adoption. In Mari a soldier, with a slave-girl who already had a child, wanted to ‘take her to wife’, but he was not allowed to do so.<sup>22</sup>

A text from Tell Brak describes the son of a concubine who was set free in the presence of King Tušratta of Mitanni. He became a citizen of the land of Ḫanigalbat and his mother was allowed to go with him.<sup>23</sup> In Ugarit a high-ranking man had sons by three different women of different classes. One was the daughter of the king; there were also the *šrdt*, his freeborn (?) wives; and finally he had his slaves. A gentleman like that must have had two or three wives.<sup>24</sup>

The harem (to be discussed in Chapter 24) would be teeming with concubines, so there we shall resume the discussion of the *esirtu*. In lists of people from Ebla the court lady (*dam*) was often followed by the concubines.<sup>25</sup> In a treaty the king of the Hittites permitted the king of Mitanni to take concubines besides the queen, who was his own daughter, on condition that no other woman should be higher in rank than his daughter.<sup>26</sup> In Nuzi a prince had nine concubines in addition to his one wife. They are all named in lists of food allocations, and the varying size of the allocations suggests that the women had a corresponding order of rank, possibly based on the number of children they had produced. In a separate text one of the concubines was named as ‘the wife’.<sup>27</sup>

In the royal harem at Mari they were called girlfriends,<sup>28</sup> and we saw that there they were also ‘the singers’.<sup>29</sup> But this does not necessarily mean that all singers were concubines. In Nuzi the women in the harem (*esirtu*) were also involved with singing and music, and they came from abroad, from Babylonia and Ḫanigalbat.<sup>30</sup>

---

22 AEM 1/2 538 no. 547.

23 N. J. J. Illingworth, *Iraq* 50 (1988) 99–105 no. 23; cf. SCCNH 15 (2005) 41–56.

24 *A history of Ancient Near Eastern law* I (2003) 726 (RS 94.2168); J. J. Justel, *UF* 40 (2008) 445–452 (‘polygyny’); D. Pardee in: W. H. van Soldt, *Society and administration in ancient Ugarit* (2010) 94–100.

25 *Thesaurus Inscriptionum Eblaicarum* A/1 (1995) 41, *a-si-ra-tum*, translated, however, as ‘female prisoner’.

26 E. F. Weidner, *PDK* (1923) 18:60–62; G. Beckman, *Hittite diplomatic texts*. Second edition (1999) 44.

27 G. Wilhelm, *Das Archiv des Šilwateššub* 3 (1985) 24 f.; M. A. Morrison, *JCS* 31 (1974) 4–8.

28 J.-M. Durand, *AEM* 1/1, 513; B. Groneberg, *NABU* 1989/74; S. Lafont, *RA* 91 (1997) 110 f. A. 1945:5 (*šawitum*).

29 N. Ziegler, *Florilegium Marianum* IX (2007) 36 f.

30 W. Mayer, *Nuzi-Studien* I (1978) 113.

What is also relevant to this discussion is something we shall deal with later in Chapter 30, concerned with sacred marriage. There we shall see that the god Nabû in Borsippa not only had his Nanaya but visited two girlfriends.

## 7 Marriage between equals

We cannot get away from the impression that the woman contributed little at the payment of the bride-price. She was more or less the object of the transactions. However, we do know of a number of contracts concerning marriage which show the woman more actively involved. One woman who married a priest contributed nineteen shekels of silver herself, according to a contract drawn up in Sumerian. The fine to be applied if either party should take the initiative to divorce was to be the same.

If in the future E. should say to A., his wife, 'You are not my wife', then he shall give back the nineteen shekels of silver and pay thirty shekels of silver as divorce money. And if A. should say to E., her husband, 'You are not my husband', then she shall forfeit the nineteen shekels of silver and she shall pay thirty shekels of silver.<sup>1</sup>

Two characteristics have been cited to define a marriage on equal terms. One is that there is no statement about paying a bride-price and the other is that the same conditions apply to both parties in the case of divorce. We will return to this question in Chapter 9, about divorce. Here it is sufficient to state that any woman who, after the bride-price had been paid and in normal, balanced circumstances, dared to say to her husband, 'You are not (any longer) my husband', would be threatened with the death penalty.

A marriage where the woman is under the authority of the man has been described as a marriage with *manus*. The term *manus* and the associated legal practice are found in the Institutes of Gaius (I 108–113) as a feature of early Roman law. Concerning Babylonian practice P. Koschaker distinguished between marriages with *manus* and those without *manus*. He used the term *Muntehe*, which means literally 'coin-marriage' and is a concept in Medieval German law.<sup>2</sup> Most Babylonian marriage contracts and laws concerning marriage certainly suggest that this was the usual practice, where a contract to marry was similar to a contract for sale. While Koschaker admits that there is some overlap between both forms of marriage, his critics say they cannot be differentiated, except that different attitudes to divorce are evident.<sup>3</sup> We call it a 'marriage with parity' when both man and wife have equal rights. Koschaker also refers to *muntfreie Ehe*, 'marriage without coins', a form well attested among the Assyrians (in the Old, Middle and

---

<sup>1</sup> BE 6/2 40 with C. Locher, *Die Ehre einer Frau in Israel* (1986) 248 f.

<sup>2</sup> R. Westbrook, 'Muntehe', *RIA VIII/5–6* (1995) 425 f.

<sup>3</sup> Westbrook, *OBML*, 79 f.; O. R. Gurney, *Studies F. R. Kraus* (1982) 94.

Neo-Assyrian periods) and also in Syria (in Alalāḥ and Emar).<sup>4</sup> E. Lipinski sees this as a West Semitic tradition, which is to be traced back to earlier practices in Alalāḥ and Ḥana and which to some extent also had influence in Egypt.<sup>5</sup> Again this is a subject to which we will return later, when discussing divorce. In these cases the man was forbidden to take a second wife without some compelling reason. If this should happen, then the second wife would have to be the ‘slave-girl’ of the first wife, a situation we saw pertaining in Chapter 5 concerning the second wife.

Parity in marriage may not necessarily have been codified in traditional law, but everything depended on the social position of the woman. We see women belonging to the upper echelons of society, for example, in the Old Assyrian merchant colony, where wives took an active part in business administration.<sup>6</sup> One marriage between two Anatolians, Z. and K. was subject to unique conditions:

The house belongs to both of them. Whether they become poor, or whether they become rich, it is theirs in common. If Z. leaves K., they shall both divide the house. When they die, H. and P. will receive the house’.<sup>7</sup>

Such parity is comparable to usual present-day conditions of marriage. Those marriages seem to have been between rich families where certain financial interests were pertinent. J. Paradise has correctly divided into two categories the marriage contracts from Nuzi. In some the family of the bride took the initiative, and in others this fell to the family of the groom. Each guarded their own interests and provided their own clauses in the contract.<sup>8</sup> Paradise shows that the family of the woman could stipulate that the man could not take a second wife, provided his wife appeared to be fertile. If there were no children, then the woman could not be demoted to the level of a concubine. The children born to the woman had to inherit, even if there were children by another woman. In fact there are only three contracts from Nuzi in which the family of the man laid down the conditions, but they say nothing about the birth of children.

---

<sup>4</sup> Locher, 197; C. Niedorf, *Die mittelbabylonischen Rechtsurkunden aus Alalāḥ (Schicht IV)* (2008) 161, 167, 169.

<sup>5</sup> Locher, 276 f.

<sup>6</sup> K. R. Veenhof, *Iraq* 39 (1977) 113; idem, in: H. J. Nissen, J. Renger, *Mesopotamien und seine Nachbargebiete I* (1982) 152, showing that it is found also in marriages with Anatolian women.

<sup>7</sup> KTS II 6 = AKT I 21, with C. Michel in: K. R. Veenhof, *Houses and households* (1996) 292; Michel in F. Briquel-Chatonnet, *Femmes* (2009) 256 n. 11.

<sup>8</sup> JCS 39 (1987) 1–36.

Much criticism has been levied against Koschaker's distinction between marriage with *manus* and marriage without. One mistake to be avoided in this criticism is to think that in a marriage without *manus*, the woman would continue to live in the house of her father.<sup>9</sup> Even so, it has to be admitted that two forms of marriage are attested. They are possibly separated geographically, with the Sumerian south being more liberal than the Akkadian north, and the more severe 'northern' form eventually disappearing.<sup>10</sup> An early Middle Assyrian marriage contract is an example of such a marriage:

Š. (...) and B. (...) have by mutual agreement spoken together of marriage. Š. (is) her husband and B. (is) his wife. In the country and in the city they will 'fear' [= care for] each other. If Š. should say, 'You are not my wife', then he shall pay thirty shekels of silver; and if B. should say, 'You are not my husband', she shall pay thirty shekels of silver (followed by the names of five witnesses and the date).<sup>11</sup>

C. Saporetti assumes that the woman here was an independent widow.<sup>12</sup> Such financial parity is referred to in the Middle Assyrian laws (§ 35). The phrase 'in the country and in the city' refers to the countryside and the city of Assur, and is reminiscent of the phrase 'in the field and in the city' in Old Assyrian marriage contracts, which distinguishes the land of Anatolia from the city of Assur.<sup>13</sup> A 'holy woman' in Emar organised a marriage for her daughter(s), and there the fine stipulated for either party in case of divorce was sixty shekels of silver.<sup>14</sup>

A woman enjoying complete freedom is nicely illustrated in an Assyrian contract from ca. 650 BC.<sup>15</sup> A mother was marrying off her daughter and a dowry was specified. If the man initiated divorce twice the amount of that dowry would have to be given back, but the woman could leave the man without any repercussions. This mother was not just one in a crowd, but a high-ranking lady of the court marrying off her daughter to an eminent official. The groom probably was the chief

<sup>9</sup> A. van Praag, *Droit matrimonial assyro-babylonien* (1945) 181; G. Cardascia, *Les lois assyriennes* (1969) 64. Koschaker made such a comment about § 33 of the Assyrian law-book.

<sup>10</sup> Westbrook, 79 f., 83 f. According to B. Lion this is confirmed by new texts; 'Divorces du nord et du sud', NABU 2001/97.

<sup>11</sup> TIM 4 45 with (among others) W. Röllig, WdO 5 (1969) 129 f.; see also K. R. Veenhof in: *Studies F.R. Kraus* (1982) 363 n. 4.

<sup>12</sup> C. Saporetti, *The status of women in the Middle Assyrian period* (1979) 14, 19.

<sup>13</sup> In ICK I 3 also 'country' vs. 'city' (*mātum* vs. *ālum*).

<sup>14</sup> *Emar* VI/3 no. 124.

<sup>15</sup> ND 2307 = Postgate, FNALD no. 14 = TUAT NF 1 (2004) 75–77 no. 6; see J. N. Postgate, *Iraq* 41 (1979) 97 f.; K. Radner, *Die neuassyrischen Privaturkunden* (1997) 159, 164–166; also R. Zadok, *BASOR* 230 (1978) 57 f.; S. Svärd, *Women and power in Neo-Assyrian palaces* (2015) 104 f., 164 f., 234 nos. 16–19 (with related texts).

tailor at the court. The high social status of both parties explains these special conditions.<sup>16</sup> In contrast we have contracts from the same period where brides were sold by their impoverished parents.

Amat-Aštarti, the governess (*šakintu*) of the New Palace of Calah, has given Šubetu, her daughter, to Milki-ramu, the son of Abdi-Azuzi. This is the dowry which she gave to her: [a long list of items of jewellery, clothing and household goods follows]. If Šubetu does not become pregnant (and) does not bear (a child), she shall take a slave-girl (and) put her as a substitute in her place. (In this way) she shall bring sons to the world; the sons are her sons. If she should love (the slave-girl), she shall shelter her. If she should hate (the slave-girl), she shall sell her. If Šubetu should hate Milki-ramu, she shall give up (the dowry). If Milki-ramu should hate his wife, he shall give double (the dowry) to her.<sup>17</sup>

At the end the names of seven witnesses are given and the date. Because the names of all three of the parties in this contract are Phoenician, R. Zadok has suggested that here Aramaic or Phoenician or Hebrew law is reflected rather than Assyrian law. Nevertheless, the stipulations about the slave-girl are reminiscent of those in an Old Assyrian contract.<sup>18</sup>

Two Neo-Assyrian marriage contracts state that the woman was not responsible for the debts of her husband. One possibly concerns a princess, but only these two clauses can be read:

If A. marries a woman in addition to her, she shall take all that she had acquired and go and leave. If A. should borrow silver, the woman has nothing to do with this.<sup>19</sup>

In a will from Old Babylonian Ḫana, in which a man assigns an inheritance to the children of his wife, the stipulations for divorce on terms of parity are clear. This particular will is often called a ‘marriage contract’ because it contains divorce clauses in it. In fact it is a will which established a person’s destiny (*šimtu*), according to the Akkadian term that was used. The document reads thus:

Kikkinu the son of Abaya during his life has ‘destined the destiny’ of Bitti-Dagan, his wife. Kikkinu is her husband; Bitti-Dagan is his wife. If Kikkinu, her husband, should say to Bitti-Dagan, his wife, ‘You are not my wife’, then he shall go empty out of his house; they shall bring (?) him to the cattle of the palace. And if Bitti-Dagan, his wife, should say to Kikkinu,

<sup>16</sup> There are four Neo-Assyrian examples of marriages between equal partners, ‘Eheschließungen zwischen gleichberechtigten Partnern’; see Radner, *Privatrechtsurkunden*, 165 f. (where A. 2527 = StAT 2 no. 164).

<sup>17</sup> J. N. Postgate, FNALD (1976) p. 106 f.

<sup>18</sup> ICK I 3 with H. Hirsch, Or. NS 35 (1966) 279 f.

<sup>19</sup> CTN II 247 with commentary by Postgate; K. Deller, NABU 1991/105; K. Radner, *Die neo-assyrischen Privatrechtsurkunden* (1997) 166.

her husband, 'You are not my husband', she shall go out naked; they shall put her upstairs in the upper story of the palace. The sons of Bitti-Dagan who she bears (or 'has borne') to Kikkinu, her husband, shall 'eat' a portion of the inheritance of the house of Kikkinu, her husband ...<sup>20</sup>

Only a few texts are known to have come from Ḫana (modern Deir ez-Zōr). This one is unique in that these penalty clauses are attested nowhere else. It has been suggested that the text is a model of a marriage with parity. But even though the marriage partners were of equal status, they still seem to have been dependent on the palace. The penalty on the husband is hardly to be taken literally, but rather to mean that he will carry out the chores. Some scholars suggest that the punishment for the woman was intended to be literally carried out, while others take the phrase to mean the she will be put on show. Perhaps there was a prejudice that the very request for divorce by the woman implied some suspicion of adultery, which is why she was exposed to ignominy.<sup>21</sup>

In the Neo-Babylonian period, marriage did not involve parity. A curious exception to this is to be found in a few Babylonian texts found at Susa in Persia, where the conditions for divorce are the same for both partners. But these concern marriage between Egyptians, and in Egypt marriage with parity was possible.<sup>22</sup>

---

**20** BRM 4 52; cf. P. Koschaker, JCS 5 (1951) 118 f.; E. Lipinski, *Jewish Law Annual* 4 (1981) 17 f.; S. Lafont in: *Hommages à Romuald Szymankiewicz* (1998) 544–546.

**21** S. Lafont, *Femmes* (1999) 86, who follows Westbrook, 'Adultery'; see Chapter 10, note 1.

**22** M. T. Roth, *Babylonian marriage agreements* (1989) 14, 108–113 nos. 34–35; C. Wunsch, *Urkunden zum Ehe-, Vermögens- und Erbrecht aus verschiedenen neubabylonischen Archiven* (2003) 36 n. 3.



## 8 Marriage to a slave

In our discussion on the second wife (Chapter 5) we saw that a slave-girl could be introduced into a childless marriage as a second wife. According to the terminology of Old Babylonian laws for marriage contracts, in contracts formulated to favour the first wife, she became, the ‘wife’ of the man and the ‘slave-girl’ of his wife. Legally it is absurd to use ‘the wife’ to express the relationship between this second wife and the man, for he was as much her master as her husband. This had led R. Westbrook, usurping a term from psychiatry, to suggest that

this woman is a ‘split personality’, leading to a conflict between ‘property law’ and ‘family law’. Surely the children would not later inherit their own mother as a slave!<sup>1</sup>

According to the laws of Hammurabi, if during his lifetime the man recognised her children as his own they would have a right of inheritance. If he did not do this, they would not have such a right, but after his death the slave-girl and her children would be set free (§§ 170–171). The laws of Lipit-Ištar state that if the children of a slave are freed they do not inherit (§ 25).

We learn most about this question from the collections of laws on marriages with a slave or a slave-girl. Ur-Nammu (§ 5) deals with the marriage of a slave to a free (dumu-gi,) woman who had the duty to provide one son in the service of his master. The right of inheritance for the son was established, and then we read,

No son of a free woman will become a slave without the acquiescence of the king.<sup>2</sup>

The woman’s children would not become slaves without the permission of the king. This is in line with an Ur III text where a slave of a brewer begets a boy with a free woman and the brewer frees both father and son.<sup>3</sup> Hammurabi (§ 175) also considers a slave who marries a free woman and the marriage results in children. The owner of that slave may not claim the children as his slaves.

---

<sup>1</sup> R. Westbrook, ‘The female slave’, in: V. H. Matthews, *Gender and law in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East* (1998), esp. 233 f., 237 f.: ‘Where the property and family interests in her person were located in different persons, the law employed a subtle jurisprudential device: her legal personality was split between them, the two parts being governed by property and family law respectively’.

<sup>2</sup> C. Wilcke, *Festschrift J. Krecher* (2014) 495, 535 f.; Westbrook, 225 n. 25; M. Civil, CUSAS 17 (2011) 237, 246. C. Wilcke, 496–498, sees in the last line a general rule and prefers ‘king’ to ‘(his) master’ (thus M. Civil).

<sup>3</sup> NSGU II no. 177:17–20 with Wilcke, 524 f.

What kind of woman would marry beneath her station in life? One such was U., whose father had died and whose widowed mother, L., was having to manage the family affairs. U. became the wife of a slave called N. who belonged to his master A. Then A. promised that neither he nor his children would claim the children of U. as their own. The widow L. placed her seal on the contract showing her approval of the marriage of her daughter to the slave. Although this marriage occurred in a city beyond the borders of the kingdom of Hammurabi the procedure accords with that in CH § 175.<sup>4</sup> It could be a procedure based on common law, to which CH § 176 was supplemented as a revised clause by Hammurabi himself. It happens repeatedly that the terms of an additional and new law are outlined after first describing the situation accepted as normal.

When a slave-girl was married to a free man, she was said to be clothed and provided with a covering on the head.<sup>5</sup> This may be seen in a marriage contract. The girl S. was given in marriage by a nun, her two brothers and their mother.<sup>6</sup> Evidently the father was dead. The bridegroom not only took her formally in marriage, but also promised ‘to provide her with clothing and a head covering’ (*ana labšūssa u aprūssa*). This would seem to be compensating for the lack of any dowry. The girl is probably a slave-girl. However, the full bride-price is paid and divorce arrangements are stipulated, all typical of a marriage between free people. Had her adoption as a free woman by the husband already happened?

Another contract concerns an important man from Sippar, I. He ‘took with him’ from her mother a girl with a baby to marry his slave Š., and the mother received the bride-price. But what is different in this contract is the fact that

the children whom she (the girl) and Š. have and will have, and their household goods which they will acquire, are the property of I.

This seems harsher than § 175 or § 176 where the owner would receive only half of the inheritance after the slave died.<sup>7</sup> In our text the owner of the slave could make his own conditions to suit himself, certainly when dealing with a poor mother.

<sup>4</sup> M. Jursa, ‘Zu Edubba 1, 10’, NABU 1994/65, with D. Charpin, AfO 44–45 (1997–98) 346.

<sup>5</sup> In the letter AbB 1 30:23–25 with B. Landsberger, *Symbolae M. David* II (1968) 98 n. 1 (*lu-di-in* in line 25: *nadānum* here means ‘in die Ehe geben’). See also Chapter 2, ‘The bride’, the end, with note 132.

<sup>6</sup> CT 48 51 with Westbrook, OBML, 122f., Stol, *Studies A. Skaist*, 149. She was just a poor girl, according to L. Barberon, RHD 81 (2003) 11f.

<sup>7</sup> CT 48 53 with R. Westbrook, OBML, 67 f., 123; M. Stol, *Studies A. Skaist* (2012) 140. See Westbrook in: V. H. Matthews, *Gender and law* (1998) 226 n. 28.

In Nuzi a dispute arose with two brothers after their father had given a slave-girl to their younger brother, T. The matter was brought to court, with T. claiming that,

My father H. was ill and lay in bed and my father took my hand and spoke to me as follows: 'My older sons have married wives, but you are unmarried. Therefore I herewith give you Z. as your wife.'

The judges asked for witnesses, who were presented and verified his story. Then the brothers had to swear an oath, but they shrank away from doing that, with the result that 'the judges gave Z., the slave-girl, to T'.<sup>8</sup>

Slave-girls could have the reputation of being so insolent. A Sumerian proverb has two juxtaposed sentences. The first suggests that the husband of a slave-girl is forced to keep silent,

He, whose words are few, his wife is a slave-girl,

Then we find what are apparently the domineering words of a slave-girl.

My words make me equal to the man.<sup>9</sup>

In an Akkadian book of wisdom we find,

Honour no slave-girl in your house. She must not dominate your bedroom like a wife.<sup>10</sup>

A difficult sentence in a short Sumerian letter is,

The slave-girl whom L. has married may not be secured by a lead through her nose. She is the slave of D.<sup>11</sup>

There are fewer references to marriages between slaves. Ur-Nammu (§ 4) is concerned with a slave who marries a slave-girl on his own initiative and even if his master releases him, 'he may not leave the house'.<sup>12</sup> In the Neo-Assyrian period

<sup>8</sup> AASOR 16 no. 56.

<sup>9</sup> B. Alster, *Proverbs of ancient Sumer I* (1997) 159, SP 7.44–45, with Akkadian translations.

<sup>10</sup> *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* (1960) 102:66 f.; TUAT III/1 (1990) 166. In the context of warnings against slave-girls; B. R. Foster, *Before the Muses I* (1993) 329:66–71.

<sup>11</sup> E. Sollberger, TCS 1 no. 158, with B. Kienast, ZA 72 (1982) 32 f.

<sup>12</sup> C. Wilcke, *Festschrift J. Krecher* (2014) 491–495 (commentary), 535 (edition).

marriages between slaves were well-known.<sup>13</sup> A group of three contracts concern an owner who buys a slave-girl to marry (*ana issūti*) one of his slaves.<sup>14</sup> The Hittite laws record some conditions for marriages between slaves and free people, and also for a slave who married a slave-girl (§ 31–34).

A slave-girl could easily become pregnant. This could have consequences, as seen in a letter (perhaps from a nun) advising a woman about the possibility of adopting the future child of a slave-girl, B.

With regard to the matter of B., about whom I spoke to you in these terms, ‘Whether her child is a boy or a girl, is it I that will have to adopt it?’, why do you not write to tell me anything of your views?<sup>15</sup>

To avoid such a situation arising, the advice of a Sumerian proverb should have been heeded,

Do not have any sexual intercourse with your slave-girl; she will neglect you (?).<sup>16</sup>

---

**13** K. Radner, *Die neuassyrischen Privatrechtsurkunden* (1997) 169.

**14** J. N. Postgate, *Iraq* 41 (1979) 95–97.

**15** AbB 7 141.

**16** B. Alster, *Wisdom of ancient Sumer* (2005) 66 Instr. Šur. 49. It should be noted that Akkadian *šelû* ‘to neglect’ is attested only in Neo-Babylonian.

## 9 Divorce

An agreement between two parties to marry was an arrangement with financial implications. It follows that a subsequent divorce would also have serious financial consequences. That is why, directly after discussing marriage, we now begin to consider divorce. In many ways divorce mirrors marriage, as we have seen when examining marriages based on parity between equal partners.

The subject of divorce is mentioned as early as the time of the rulers of the Sumerian city of Lagash (2500–2300 BC). In his Reforms the city ruler Urukagina wished to correct two abuses in the divorce procedures of his time:<sup>1</sup>

If a man was divorcing his wife, the city ruler would take five shekels of silver for himself and the grand vizier one shekel of silver for himself.

If a man poured *kohl* on the head, the city ruler would take five shekels of silver for himself and the chief adjutant would take one shekel of silver for himself.

We can say nothing further about these abuses, except that evidently high officials lined their own pockets by laying down their own fees, and that divorce and the act of pouring on *kohl* (perhaps marking a betrothal) were apparently public events.<sup>2</sup>

Some documents recording lawsuits from the Ur III period (2100–2000 BC) also deal with cases of divorce, and there also it must have been a public event.<sup>3</sup> The verb ‘to leave’ is used to mean that the man had initiated a separation, in the same way as with Urukagina. If he ‘left’ without a reason then he had to pay ‘divorce money’, usually sixty shekels of silver, the equivalent of one mina. According to the laws of Ur-Nammu,

If a man divorces from his first-ranking wife, then he shall pay a mina of silver (§9).

Two laws about separating from a widow follow. The basic fine was a half-mina of silver (§10), but in certain circumstances the fine could be waived.

If a man lay in the bosom of a widow without a written contract, then he shall not pay any silver (§11).

---

<sup>1</sup> H. Steible, FAOS 5/I (1982) 316 Ukg. 6 ii 15–21; J. S. Cooper, SARI I (1986) 76 f.; M. Lambert, RA 50 (1956) 174 f. § 18; B. Hruška, ArOr 41 (1973) 119, Aussagen III 20–21.

<sup>2</sup> Pouring *kohl* (šembī dé) could refer to an embellishment at the betrothal, according to Cooper, 77 n. 5.

<sup>3</sup> A. Falkenstein, NSGU I (1956) 107–109.

## 9.1 In Babylonia

Later, in the Old Babylonian period, we see that the details were more complicated. Some come from passages about divorce in a ‘Textbook for Lawyers’, a text full of standard legal phrases, with the Sumerian formula in the left column and a corresponding Akkadian translation in the right.<sup>4</sup>

If a wife hates her husband and says to him, ‘You are not my husband’, then they shall throw her in the river.

If a husband says to his wife, ‘You are not my wife’, then he shall pay thirty shekels of silver.

The verb ‘to hate’ in Akkadian can be understood as a technical term meaning ‘to divorce’. A fuller expression, ‘to hate and to leave’, is found in texts from Alalah. In Hebrew and Aramaic the meaning of the verb may have been similar. In the Bible a verse referring to a man who loves his first wife but hates his second wife could be understood to mean that he puts the second wife in second place (Deuteronomy 21:15). Modern Bible translations often avoid ‘hated’ in favour of milder translations (RSV: ‘disliked’; REB: ‘unloved’). The verb seems not to imply any strong emotion but only disinclination. He simply does not find her nice and no longer cares about her.<sup>5</sup>

In the laws of Hammurabi the meaning of the verb ‘to hate’ was somewhat different again. From a legal point of view it specifically described a subjective feeling for which there was no objective reason. This meaning is also alluded to in Deuteronomy when dealing with a woman who is divorced twice. On the first occasion her husband had reason to divorce her. But her second husband ‘hated’ her, though he had no reason for divorcing her except generally disliking her (Deuteronomy 24:1–4).<sup>6</sup> Later the verb came to be used for ‘to divorce from’. It is used in this way in Aramaic contracts from the Elephantine community in Egypt, where the term ‘the silver of hating’ was used for the fine payable on divorce.<sup>7</sup>

The ‘Textbook for Lawyers’ gives a surprisingly severe punishment for a woman, death by drowning. This punishment may also be stipulated in contracts, in case a marriage ends with divorce, as well as its variant, ‘they shall throw her from the tower’. Since the subject of the verb is impersonal we assume that it was not the husband but people from the community who carried out this punish-

<sup>4</sup> B. Landsberger, MSL 1 (1937) 103 Tafel VII iv 1–12.

<sup>5</sup> C. Locher, *Die Ehre einer Frau*, 296–299. He contrasts ‘to hate’ with ‘to love’ in CT 45 86.

<sup>6</sup> Explained by R. Westbrook, OBML, 81a; and in more detail in Scripta Hierosolymitana 31 (1986) 399–402 (= *Writings R. Westbrook II* [2009] 399 ff.).

<sup>7</sup> Locher, 297 n. 225 f. The well-known example in Aramaic is AP 15:23; see ANET (1969) 223.

ment. It is probable that the community also decided on the method of execution. A broken betrothal also led to the involvement of ‘the local district’ (*bābtu*).<sup>8</sup>

But we never read anywhere that these punishments were actually carried out. So today’s legal historians prefer to take a more humane view and question if the punishments were ever any more than threats.<sup>9</sup> In the laws of Hammurabi (§§ 129; 133b; 143) the same punishment is prescribed for an adulterous woman, so it is suggested that drowning was threatened only in cases of adultery.<sup>10</sup> R. Westbrook, describing the measure as ‘draconian’, says:

The use of a special mode of death in the contractual penalties looks like a deliberate attempt to equate divorce with adultery.<sup>11</sup>

Perhaps any Babylonian husband whose wife wanted a divorce would naturally suspect infidelity, or at least a desire for infidelity. You can almost hear him thinking, ‘Why else would she want to leave me unless there was someone else?’ For a divorced woman to go back to live alone in her community would hardly have been possible. This suggestion is supported by occasions in Neo-Babylonian documents when the punishment was execution with ‘the iron dagger’, to be discussed later. P. Koschaker’s idea that the scribe perhaps carelessly copied this old formula<sup>12</sup> more or less fits with what Westbrook says in his book about marriage in the Akkadian-speaking North:

It may even be that divorce by the wife was unheard of and unthinkable in their practice.<sup>13</sup>

No woman could initiate proceedings for divorce or separation.

This was also the basic reasoning of D. Nörr, in a relatively unknown article devoted to the question of whether the woman had the right to divorce.<sup>14</sup> According to Nörr she did not have that right, and this was also the case in all early systems of justice. In the contracts we find either that there was no mention of the possibility of divorce, or if the possibility was recognised it was immediately rejected by stating that draconian punishments would ensue. With regard to this second possibility Nörr adds that there was a fundamental option of rec-

<sup>8</sup> On the ‘district’ see Locher, 300–303.

<sup>9</sup> A. van Praag, *Droit matrimonial*, 197, bottom.

<sup>10</sup> Falkenstein, NSGU I, 109 n. 6; M. San Nicolò, art. ‘Ehebruch’, RIA II (1938) 300a.

<sup>11</sup> OBML, 83b.

<sup>12</sup> JCS 5 (1951) 118.

<sup>13</sup> OBML, 84a.

<sup>14</sup> D. Nörr in *Studi in onore di Emilio Betti* III (1962) 505–526.

ognising a state of formal separation, established by the wife stating, ‘You are not my husband’. This was a point of particular importance for Nörr, who was a lawyer,<sup>15</sup> and his view is supported by contracts in which equal punishments are prescribed for a husband and a wife who divorce. It represents a further step towards a woman having the right to divorce, and in such a situation she enjoyed the same right as the man, identified in Chapter 7 as a ‘marriage with parity’. We can see that there was a range of judgements in cases of divorce, demonstrating that a marriage with parity enables a free agreement between both parties to sort out the possible consequences of a divorce.

Nörr suggests regarding them merely as set phrases. Although he offers no proof for this,<sup>16</sup> he provides a new explanation of §§ 141–143 of the laws of Hammurabi, which seem to offer support. For Hammurabi the basic principle was that a woman had no right to divorce, but the king could exercise discretion. According to § 142 if the wife had behaved well and her husband had behaved badly the community (*bābtu*) could grant the woman permission to divorce. We shall deal with these laws more closely later when discussing motives for divorce.

The idea that throwing someone into the water referred to a woman stepping into the river to undergo judgement by the river god in an ordeal is attractive but unlikely.<sup>17</sup>

We conclude that we have to take the clause at its face value, without proposing some unusual situations or adducing arguments from a historical background. It is not for nothing that exactly this formula stands in the ‘Handbook for Lawyers’, and it is reminiscent of punishments in contracts threatening to sell the woman as a slave if the question of divorce arises.<sup>18</sup> It is clear that the woman in these cases had been entirely subordinated. This makes Koschaker think that these must have been marriages with *manus*, reasoning that if the ‘purchased’ goods just walked away, the ‘buyer’ would have suffered ‘loss’. Note that both the punishments referred to above are recorded even for religious women, although their position was surely higher than purchased goods.<sup>19</sup>

A text from early Old Babylonian Sippar concerning a woman and the possibility of divorcing threatens that she will be ‘pushed from the tower’. That particular woman appears formerly to have been a slave but, after having been adopted by a man and a woman (a nun), she was given in marriage. Her position would

---

<sup>15</sup> Nörr, 513 f.

<sup>16</sup> Nörr, 519.

<sup>17</sup> B. Groneberg, NABU 1989/73; S. Lafont, *Femmes* (1999) 48–55.

<sup>18</sup> BE 6/2 48; PBS 8/2 252; cf. CH § 141.

<sup>19</sup> Noted by Westbrook, OBML, 83a, about the three texts CT 2 44, BAP 89, TCL I 61 (see Chapter 5); see also Nörr, 516, 519.



certainly have been subordinate, and the bride-price for her, forty shekels of silver and a slave, was unusually high. This text was mentioned earlier in Chapter 5 concerning the second wife. There was no way of allowing her to get it into her head to depart.<sup>20</sup> Such a punishment may have applied only if the woman did not enjoy a completely free status. Possibly it is true that in older times this was the law applicable to all women, which would be supported by the occurrence of the phrases ‘they will throw her in the river’ or ‘they will push her from the tower’, indicating the public nature of the ritual.<sup>21</sup> One short text recounts how a betrothed man demands his bride-price back from his father-in-law, telling him,

I will not marry your daughter. Tie her up and throw her in the river.<sup>22</sup>

This seems like exaggeration. He seems to have been indirectly accusing his betrothed of adultery by demanding this punishment.

In the scribal schools boys learned to write correct legal formulas for marriages without parity and for other arrangements. One clay tablet from a school has a series of model contracts including a marriage contract containing the clause that the man and the woman alike had to pay one mina of silver if one were to say, ‘You are not my wife’, or the other, ‘You are not my husband’.<sup>23</sup> That contract was drawn up in Sumerian, and it is assumed that marriages with parity were preferred in the south.<sup>24</sup>

Demonstrating the fact of a divorce could be linked with making a formal gesture. In the Sumerian period a woman who wanted nothing more to do with her marriage ‘brushed her marriage with a garment’ to be free of it. There were also other circumstances in which a person ‘brushed with a garment’.<sup>25</sup> In later texts from the second millennium, in the countries surrounding Mesopotamia, in the ‘periphery’, a woman would leave her garments on a bench and depart. This is clearly a symbolic act, a gesture to contrast with the veiling at the beginning

**20** VAS 8 4–5 with M. Stol, *Studies A. Skaist* (2012) 157 f.

**21** B. Groneberg proposed to see in ‘the tower’ the family or clan, meaning that the woman was expelled by her kinfolk; Groneberg in: Th. Späth, B. Wagner-Hasel, *Frauenwelten in der Antike* (2000) 9, cf. 3 (‘the tower’ has this meaning in Nuzi). However, ‘tower’ never has this meaning in Old Babylonian.

**22** D. I. Owen, R. Westbrook, *ZA* 82 (1992) 205 FLP 1340:35–39; with S. Lafont, *Femmes* (1999) 57 f., and D. Charpin in: F. Joannès, *Rendre la justice en Mésopotamie* (2000) 92 f. no. 48.

**23** H. Neumann, ‘Prozeßführung im Edubba’a. Zu einigen Aspekten der Aneignung juristischer Kenntnisse im Rahmen des Curriculums babylonischer Schreiberbildung’, *ZABR* 10 (2004) 71–92.

**24** C. Wilcke in: B. Hrouda, *Isin-Išān-Baḫriyāt* III (1987) 104, 106 IB 1515+ i 8–15.

**25** Sum. túg úr; NSGU I, 108, cf. 79; H. Petschow, in art. ‘Gewand’, *RIA* III (1957) 321b.

of the marriage.<sup>26</sup> In the Old Babylonian period and later we find various references to ‘cutting through the hem’ (*sissikta batāqu*), a ceremonial act performed appropriately in public. In one case the original witnesses to the marriage were present for the occasion.<sup>27</sup> It was the man who made the cut and one assumes in general that in so doing he renounced any claim he had on the woman.<sup>28</sup> Koschaker sees here a change of status, though this is unlikely.<sup>29</sup> Westbrook thinks that in the Old Babylonian texts this act was performed only in special circumstances, in particular when the man was allowed to retain the dowry. He reached this conclusion because he wanted to distinguish between the declaration ‘You are not my wife/husband’, the *verba solemnia*, and the act of cutting.<sup>30</sup> The handbooks containing legal formulas concerning marriage do not mention the *verba solemnia*. All we find is,

He began to hate her; he has cut off her hem; he has weighed out the divorce money; and he has tied it up in her lap; he has made her leave the house.<sup>31</sup>

The magical rite intended to ‘divorce’ a patient from a disease described at the end of Chapter 2 imitates this procedure for a divorce.

This brings us to the divorce money (*uzubbū*), a noun occurring in Sumerian and Akkadian texts derived from the verb ‘to leave’ (*ezēbu*). This was the most important compensation for the woman and the amount was determined according to the contract. Occasionally alimony was mentioned.<sup>32</sup> The man had to pay divorce money if he had said ‘You are not my wife’ without good reason. The amount to be paid is of significance. Two or three times in the Ur III period we see one mina of silver (sixty shekels) mentioned, but one text has forty shekels and another ten shekels.<sup>33</sup> The laws of Ur-Nammu from that period fix an amount of ‘sixty shekels if a man is leaving his first-ranking wife; thirty shekels if he is leaving a widow’ (§9–10). In a lawsuit one ‘deserted’ woman who demanded

<sup>26</sup> K. van der Toorn, *Family religion in Babylonia, Syria, and Israel* (1996) 45–47.

<sup>27</sup> J. J. Finkelstein, WdO 8 (1976) 237; CT 45 86. Now also in ARM 10 33:24, with MARI 3 (1984) 170 n. 56: ‘He cut off my hem in the presence of kings’.

<sup>28</sup> M. Malul, *Studies in Mesopotamian legal symbolism* (1988) 197–208; cf. RIA III (1957) 321a. For the passages see R. Westbrook, *A history of Ancient Near Eastern law I* (2003) 388 n. 82.

<sup>29</sup> JCS 5 (1951) 115b.

<sup>30</sup> OBML, 69 f., contra K. R. Veenhof; for his reaction see *Festschrift B. Kienast* (2003) 702 f.

<sup>31</sup> MSL 1 (1937) 99 Tafel VII ii 49–iii 3; cf. M. T. Roth, *Law collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor* (1979) 50, SLHF iv 12–16.

<sup>32</sup> For a survey of the options see Westbrook, 78. Alimony: 79b; see note 40.

<sup>33</sup> NSGU I, 108. An Old Akkadian text mentions seven shekels as divorce money (tak<sub>4</sub>.a.kam); STTI 169 ii 5–7.

ten shekels of silver promised that she would not ‘file a complaint’ against her ex-husband.<sup>34</sup> In Old Babylonian texts the word *uzubbû* is not usually stated but the amount to be paid is. The handbook for legal formulas mentions ‘half a mina’ or thirty shekels of silver.<sup>35</sup> The amounts in the contracts vary from ten to sixty shekels of silver.

One is inclined to relate the amount of the divorce money to that of the bride-price (*terhatu*).<sup>36</sup> For this it is relevant to refer to the Laws of Hammurabi:

If a man intends to divorce his first-ranking wife who did not bear him children, he shall give her silver as much as was her bride-price and restore to her the dowry that she brought from her father’s house, and he shall divorce her. If there is no bride-price, he shall give her 60 shekels of silver as divorce money. If he is a commoner, he shall give her 20 shekels of silver<sup>37</sup> (§§ 138–140).

The explanation of these laws by G. R. Driver and J. C. Miles is correct.<sup>38</sup> They suppose that a man leaves his wife ‘capriciously’, without any proper motive such as her being unable to have children. That man would lose the bride-price he had paid, as we see also in § 159. Here the settlement is made between the father of the bride and the man, as with an ‘inchoate marriage’, a betrothal.

§ 159. If a man, who has the marriage gift (*biblu*) brought to the house of his father-in-law and who gives the bride-price, has been looking lasciviously at another woman and has said to his father-in-law, ‘I will not marry your daughter’, the father of the daughter shall carry off whatever had been brought to him.

The legislator may have assumed that a bride-price of thirty shekels of silver had been paid, so a fine on divorce was similarly thirty shekels of silver. Law § 156 is also relevant, where a man had to pay thirty shekels of silver to the ‘daughter-in-law’ whom he had at home and with whom he had had intercourse. She had not yet had intercourse with his son.

The husband had to pay the fine in silver, but sometimes a more severe punishment was applied on divorce, when ‘he lost house, (field) and household chat-

<sup>34</sup> NSGU II no. 20; F. Joannès, *Rendre la justice en Mésopotamie* (2000) 47 no. 8; TUAT NF 1 (2004) 3.

<sup>35</sup> MSL 1 (1937) 103 Tafel VII iv 8–12.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. G. R. Driver, J. C. Miles, *The Babylonian Laws I* (1956) 297.

<sup>37</sup> In the light of §§ 9–10 of the laws of Ur-Nammu, one is inclined to translate in CH § 140 ‘If she is a commoner’ (*šumma muškēnet*). Then the parallelism is elegant: 60 shekels for the first-ranking woman, 20 for a second-ranking woman or a widow. However, in the Laws of Hammurabi only male common citizens are always featured as alternatives.

<sup>38</sup> *The Babylonian Laws I*, 296–298; cf. Westbrook, OBML, 71 f.

tels'.<sup>39</sup> Two well-known lawsuits state that the man must give 'alimony' to his divorced wife in the form of food and clothing, but the background to those cases is not known.<sup>40</sup>

## 9.2 In Assyria

Evidence for divorce in the Old Assyrian period comes only in texts from the trading colony in Asia Minor.<sup>41</sup> These seem to show that both Assyrian and foreign Anatolian partners had equal rights, at least according to what is stipulated in the contracts. For the neighbouring Hittites divorce was not difficult to arrange according to § 26 of the Hittite Laws.<sup>42</sup> In Chapter 7 we saw the same parity in the Middle Assyrian period for marriages between equals: one of the parties had to pay thirty shekels of silver on divorce. An Old Assyrian contract stipulates twenty shekels of silver payable by one of the parties, and the man also promises not to marry a second wife.<sup>43</sup> The Old Assyrian word for divorce money is *ezibtu*, and it could, for example, amount to 6½, 15 or 60 shekels of silver.<sup>44</sup>

However in one marriage contract we find a clause stating that, in the event of 'desertion', the offender must pay five minas of silver. That makes 300 shekels, and it would have been a considerable sum to have to pay. It is comparable to a fine to be discussed a little later, which was levied on someone coming back with further demands after a divorce had been officially concluded. The contract, in which Assur is referred to as 'the city' and Anatolia as 'the field', gives much useful detail about the case:<sup>45</sup>

---

**39** CT 2 44 (marriage with two sisters); PBS 8/2 155 (marriage with a widow with sons; both parties forfeit the house, the field and date-palm orchard); YOS 15 73 (plus 30 shekels silver).

**40** Alimony: VAS 8 9–10; VAS 18 1 (belongs to VAS 18 101); Westbrook, OBML, 79b, 134 f.

**41** K. R. Veenhof in: R. Westbrook, *A History of Ancient Near Eastern Law I* (2003) 453 f.

**42** R. Haase, AOF 22 (1995) 279.

**43** CCT 5 16a with K. Deller, Or. NS 27 (1958) 62 f., and P. Garelli, JSS 3 (1958) 300 f.

**44** V. Donbaz, *Studies Tahsin Özgüç* (1989) 83–85; TuM NF 1 21e:8 (see CAD E 431a); cf. the 10 1/2 shekels in L. Matouš, ArOr 41 (1973) 309 I 513:7. EL 3 (= TCL 4 122) distinguishes the divorce money (no amount is mentioned) from the fine of 5 minas. For a survey see R. Rems, WZKM 86 (1996) 356–361. In TCL 1 242 each party pays 2 minas; TUAT Ergänzungsband (2001) 30 f.; see also C. Michel in J. G. Dercksen, *Anatolia and the Jazira during the Old Assyrian period* (2008) 222 (n. 71).

**45** ICK I 3 with ANET (1969) 543.

L. married H., the daughter of E. In ‘the field’ he may not marry a second wife, but in the city he can marry a ‘holy woman’. If she (H.) has not given him heirs within two years, she shall herself buy a slave-girl and later, after this person has borne him a child, he (she?) may sell her wherever he (she) wants. If L. divorces her, he shall pay five minas of silver and if H. divorces him then she shall pay five minas of silver.

The names of four witnesses are at the end. The main characters are known from other documents. E. was an Anatolian who had married off his daughter to an Assyrian merchant. There are three letters referring to the woman H. as a married woman.<sup>46</sup> The amount to be paid on divorce was so high that it effectively acted as a prohibition. A man who married a widow would also expect a demand of five minas if he decided to divorce her. This was a high amount but here it can be regarded as a real punishment

I. married A. In ‘the field’ he shall not marry a second wife. If he (still) marries (her) and leaves her, then he shall pay five mina of silver’. (The text concludes with the names of three witnesses and the man’s seal impression).<sup>47</sup>

It is noteworthy that many of the contracts applying to Anatolians, after stipulating the duty to pay, add the clause, ‘and on the plain (*edēnu*) they shall kill (*dāku*) him’.<sup>48</sup> Sometimes ‘to kill someone’ can be understood to mean ‘to beat someone up’. These are threats.

We now look at instances when a marriage had actually ended in divorce. In Old Assyrian texts there are two expressions for divorce, ‘to leave, desert’ (*ezēbu*) and ‘to separate’ (*parāsu N*). A few contracts concerning divorce show that in Assyria distinctive formulations could be used, as can be seen in the following example:<sup>49</sup>

Ḫarnašarna and Ḫanaḫana (are) husband and wife. They have left each other. The one shall not come back (with a demand) to the other. Whoever does come back shall pay five minas of silver and on the plain they shall ‘kill’ him (names of witnesses).

<sup>46</sup> K. R. Veenhof in: H. J. Nissen, J. Renger, *Mesopotamien und seine Nachbarn* (1982) 150 f.; C. Michel, CMK (2001) 501 f.

<sup>47</sup> AKT I 76 with C. Michel in F. Briquel-Chatonnet, *Femmes* (2009) 256.

<sup>48</sup> R. Rems, WZKM 86 (1996) 359 f. For paying 1 mina and ‘killing’ see TCL 4 100 with ZA 82 (1992) 213.

<sup>49</sup> L. Matouš, *Kappadokische Keilschrifttafeln mit Siegeln aus den Sammlungen der Karlsuniversität in Prag* (1984) Nr. 36. For more see P. Garelli, *Les Assyriens en Cappadoce* (1963) 68 f., n. 2; V. Donbaz, *Studies Tahsin Özgüç* (1989) 80 f., 83–85.

Severe punishments were routinely recorded in these contracts, but it is not clear whether paying was an alternative to death.

There was always the likelihood of an Assyrian merchant divorcing an Anatolian woman. After residing in the colony for 15 or 20 years any merchant may want to go home to Assur.<sup>50</sup> Then the divorced partners were completely free.

She is allowed to go wherever she wants, either to an Anatolian, or to an (Assyrian) merchant. He is allowed to marry the wife of his heart.<sup>51</sup>

Any children could possibly be shared, with the woman receiving alimony for feeding them and bringing them up.<sup>52</sup>

The record of a decision by the ‘management’ of a trade colony in a divorce suit between an Assyrian and an Anatolian woman is of interest.<sup>53</sup>

The trading colony of Kaneš has pronounced a judgement, and Aššur-ammārum, the son of Ennum-Aššur, has left Zibezibe, the daughter of Aššur-beli; his wife. And Aššur-ammārum has given to Zibezibe, his wife, her divorce money. And Aššur-ammārum will (be able to) fetch his three sons. Zibezibe shall not come back at Aššur-ammārum or his three sons (date).

This shows that the woman could keep the sons until the husband had paid the divorce money, and then a public judgement was necessary. In the end the children went to their father. In a divorce between indigenous Anatolians, the children stayed with the mother.<sup>54</sup> It was sometimes difficult to divide up the chattels afterwards and there were lawsuits about this.<sup>55</sup>

To conclude this section we cite a passage from an Old Assyrian letter about a marriage that was about to ‘break down’.<sup>56</sup> The woman lived in the colony and her husband in Assur. Her sister, a priestess, lived there too. In this letter to the woman the sister reports on the tense situation at home. On the envelope we read: ‘To Šalimma, the wife of Irma-Assur’. But in the letter she refrains from writing the man’s name, obliquely referring to ‘the man’.

---

**50** Michel in: J. G. Dercksen, *Anatolia and the Jazira during the Old Assyrian period* (2008) 222–225.

**51** H. Sever, *Studies S. Alp* (1992) 484:7–12, stresses the equal rights of the Anatolians.

**52** K. R. Veenhof in: L. Marti, *La famille dans le Proche-Orient ancien* (2014) 347.

**53** EL 276 (= J. Lewy, TuM NF 1 21e).

**54** Rems, WZKM 86 (1996) 359.

**55** Veenhof, *Archivum Anatolicum* 3 (1997) 379; TCL 4 100 with J. Hengstl, ZA 82 (1992) 212–220.

**56** K. R. Veenhof, ‘Sisterly advice on an endangered marriage in an Old Assyrian letter’, *Studies R. D. Biggs* (2007) 285–303. We follow Veenhof’s translation of lines 27–49.

You have brought me into conflict with the man. He tells me: ‘Since, not being my slave woman (i.e. his second wife), she refuses to come here, you must not mention her name again to me (i.e. plead for her), or you will no longer be my sister (i.e. sister-in-law).’ Why are others ruling your children and your household, while you are staying there? Please, do not make your children perish, and do not estrange me from the man’s house. If you see a possibility to come, get ready and leave for here before the man gets different ideas ... Since you had not come, he felt very unhappy, and for five days did not leave his house. If you are looking for another husband, write me so; I wish to know it. If not, get ready and leave for here. If you do not come you will bring me into conflict with the man, and you will make your children perish, and I, I will never mention your name again; you will no longer be my sister, and you must not write to me anymore.

This is the end of the letter, and from it we learn that the person addressed was a free woman, not a subordinated second wife, and that either partner of the marriage was free to end it.

In general it can be seen that a woman had great, if not complete, freedom in Old Assyrian marriages. This more or less accords with the findings of E. Lipinski, who examined the extent to which a woman could take the initiative in divorce.<sup>57</sup> He considers the severe penalties of the Old Babylonian period, such as the woman being condemned to death, as ‘exceptional’. In contracts from the North and the North-West (from Assyria, Ḫana, Alalah, and those more recently found in Emar) he has discovered that the partners were equal. He lays some emphasis on the right of the woman to divorce if her husband should take a second wife, saying that ‘the husband’s entering into a bigamous marriage amounts to an initiative of divorce, with the consequent heavy financial arrangements at his charge, exactly as in the contracts from Elephantine.’<sup>58</sup> Indeed this is evident in the Aramaic contracts from Elephantine and also in Greek documents from Egypt from a later period. Lipinski concluded that the liberal marriage law in Elephantine and in late Egyptian society was not inherited from Egyptian culture itself but was imported from views in the Semitic world.<sup>59</sup>

After this discussion of the apparently humane aspects of Assyrian marriage law, reading § 37 of the Middle Assyrian law-book comes as a shock:

---

<sup>57</sup> E. Lipinski, ‘The wife’s right to divorce in the light of an Ancient Near Eastern tradition’, *Jewish Law Annual* IV (1981) 9–27.

<sup>58</sup> Lipinski, 24. The wife in the Assyrian example from Kalḫu (referred to in his note 82: CTN II 247) is a princess, according to K. Deller, *NABU* 19991/105. Deller’s suggestion was rejected by S. Svärd, *Women and power in Neo-Assyrian palaces* (2015) 87 n. 418.

<sup>59</sup> See also Lipinski, ‘Marriage and divorce in the Judaism of the Persian period’, *Transeuphratène* 4 (1991) 63–71, and his remarks in *BiOr* 68 (2011) 266 f.

If a man leaves his wife he shall give her in accordance with what he wishes. If he gives her nothing, in accordance with what he wishes, then she shall go away empty.

One gains the impression that this law was formulated to obviate the need to follow an established female-friendly practice, and the payment of divorce money which had existed should not necessarily become the norm. This law makes no mention of the dowry, which was possibly given back.

Two texts from Nuzi relate to an adopted woman who has been married off against her will. In the first, while in position at the city gate, she complains,

Why do you give me in marriage to M., a blind man? Let me leave M. and give me in marriage to A.

And that happens at the city gate. In the second text another woman declares, 'I hate my husband'. The marriage is then annulled and the bride-price returned. Nothing is known about the background.<sup>60</sup>

In the Neo-Assyrian period the daughter of a high-ranking woman easily obtained her divorce. She simply demanded this in an agreement.<sup>61</sup> A lawsuit from Assur indicates that a man seeking divorce had to agree on a settlement with his father-in-law, and neither of them could object to remarriage.<sup>62</sup>

### 9.3 In the Neo-Babylonian period

Neo-Babylonian marriage contracts mention divorce only as a possibility for the husband. In this period the term used was *muššuru*, 'to allow (the woman) to go'. In some cases we find a powerful punishment prescribed when linked with adultery:

If the wife is found with another man, she shall die by the iron dagger. If the man allows her to go (*muššuru*) and wants to marry another woman in preference to her place, he shall pay her six minas of silver and she shall go to her father's house (or 'and he shall send her to her father's house').<sup>63</sup>

<sup>60</sup> AASOR 16 no. 31 with W. Farber, ZA 75 (1985) 217, and IM 73254; N. Pfeiffer, SCCNH 18 (2009) 374 f.

<sup>61</sup> K. Radner, *Die neuassyrischen Privatrechtsurkunden* (1997) 159–161, 'Ehescheidung'.

<sup>62</sup> Radner, 160 f., VAT 9745.

<sup>63</sup> Roth, *Babylonian marriage agreements*, 92 no. 26:10–15, with TUAT NF 1 (2004) 90 f., where Jews are mentioned; for a variant see Roth, 44 no. 5:10–16.



According to M. Roth the reference to the iron dagger indicates that the death penalty should be enforced relentlessly, whereas older law-books show that a man was entitled to forgive his wife for adultery and so she would be allowed to live. That concession is denied here. The iron dagger may refer to an official instrument of execution.<sup>64</sup> But in fact this is the only clause in Neo-Babylonian marriage contracts where it is implied that the woman took the initiative in seeking divorce. There is furthermore a parallelism in the clauses dealing with the man and the woman, for both mention ‘another person’ as a lover or as a wife. The petition for divorce arises because another person is implicated, because of infidelity. We cannot infer more from this parallelism than the inequality of the outcome. G. van Driel attempted to show that in texts where the dagger is mentioned, the women were of a lower social class: they had no dowry; one was an unmarried mother; they were often called ‘a girl (*nu’artu*)’, a term having the meaning of an unmarried woman (discussed in Chapter 1); the woman could possibly have been a prostitute.<sup>65</sup>

Scholars stress that killing the woman should be contrasted with punishing the man with an immensely high fine, five or six minas of silver. Other cases of sky-high fines indicate that the risk of breaking a contract should be avoided at all costs, otherwise both parties would be irreparably ruined. Applying the death sentence to the wife could also be explained as ensuring that all children should be legitimate, and therefore she must never embark on casual affairs. In the Neo-Babylonian period people had become more aware of the question of having legitimate descent and heredity in families; some of them had an ancient pedigree.<sup>66</sup> It was a time when the ancestor of the family was always mentioned, sometimes specifying his profession, and so one understands why a legitimate birth could be contested.<sup>67</sup> If this was the motivation, we can accept that the threat of being executed with the dagger was very real. The high fine for the man was reasonable if it enabled the repudiated woman to receive a substantial sum of money to stay alive.<sup>68</sup>

The threat of death by the dagger is reminiscent of the Old Babylonian punishment of throwing the woman in the river. In both cases the man’s punishment

---

<sup>64</sup> M. T. Roth, “‘She will die by the Iron Dagger’”. Adultery and Neo-Babylonian marriage’, *JESHO* 31 (1988) 186–206.

<sup>65</sup> G. van Driel in: M. Stol, S. P. Vleeming, *The care of the elderly in the Ancient Near East* (1998) 192f.

<sup>66</sup> C. Wunsch, *Urkunden zum Ehe-, Vermögens- und Erbrecht aus verschiedenen neubabylonischen Archiven* (2003) 3f., 6f.

<sup>67</sup> OIP 122 no. 36 with C. Waerzeggers, M. Jursa, *ZABR* 14 (2008) 10–13.

<sup>68</sup> K. Abraham, *AfO* 51 (2005–06) 203 n. 11.

was limited to paying the divorce money. The same questions we posed regarding the severe punishments documented for the Old Babylonian period now recur. Were these punishments actually enforced or were they threats based on a traditional formula? Whatever the answer, the evidence shows that Neo-Babylonian marriages were not with parity, for the wife was subject to more severe conditions than her husband.

The dagger has led P.-A. Beaulieu to a surprisingly different interpretation of the punishment. He prefers to translate the verbal form *ta-ma-ta* not as derived from ‘to die’ but from ‘to be cursed’. This means that as a consequence of her infidelity her punishment is that ‘she shall be cursed on the iron dagger’, for at that time people would swear on a dagger.<sup>69</sup>

It would be interesting to know what happened in the Neo-Babylonian period when no third party was involved, when a man and woman simply stated that they wanted to terminate the marriage, a possibility not to be excluded. As to the iron dagger, we could adopt a similar sort of reasoning as with possible death by drowning in the Old Babylonian period, taking it as an exceptional circumstance, and for that reason envisaged in only some contracts.<sup>70</sup>

Now we can check what happened in practice from a fragmentary text from the Persian period in the reign of Darius. It is the record of a lawsuit outlining the course of proceedings for a woman’s divorce. She reproached her husband that he had ‘given and eaten’ the dowry which she had received from her father (meaning that he had been a wastrel and ‘sold and spent’ it). All she had retained was the house and field and there were many creditors who had their eye on repossession. The man had told her, ‘There is nothing that I can give to the creditors or to you as food. Go wherever you like!’ Both of them went their own ways, but the problem for the woman was that she was no longer supported.<sup>71</sup> In other texts protests were made against the way that the man had made attempts to use the dowry, for example by pawning it.<sup>72</sup> In the discussion about the dowry in Chapter 3 we saw how a husband’s risky transactions could easily fritter it away.

---

<sup>69</sup> P.-A. Beaulieu, ‘Women in Neo-Babylonian society’, *Bulletin of the Canadian Society of Mesopotamian Studies* 26 (1993) 7–14, esp. 11a, with 14 n. 22.

<sup>70</sup> R. Yaron, *ZSS* 109 (1992) 76; see further Nörr and Westbrook.

<sup>71</sup> C. Wunsch, *Urkunden* (2003) 32–39 no. 8.

<sup>72</sup> Wunsch, 37 f.

## 9.4 In Syria

In Alalakh men and women were equally entitled to a divorce to end their marriage. 'If I. should hate N. and keep driving her away, she shall keep the bride-price of a 'young girl' (*nimusa ša SAL šuḫārti ikla*), take all that was granted to her (*wadduši*) from her father's house, and leave'. If 'the young girl' 'pulls his nose', she shall give back the bride-price, take all that she had brought there from her father's house, and what had been granted to her (*wadduši*), she shall take and leave.<sup>73</sup> For a wife 'to pull the nose' must have had roughly the same significance as for a husband 'to hate' her. It was probably a symbolic act which would lead to divorce. In nearby Emar divorce was as simple for the woman as for the man, with one or the other party paying sixty shekels of silver as divorce money.<sup>74</sup>

## 9.5 Motives for divorce

One readily assumes that in a marriage with parity the husband or the wife could seek divorce without providing reasons. But this was not always the case, as can be seen from an Aramaic marriage contract with parity which ends with the stipulation '(there will be) no suit or process'.<sup>75</sup> Several motives for requesting divorce could be adduced.<sup>76</sup>

Motives for the husband:

- the wife was not a virgin<sup>77</sup>
- the wife had committed adultery<sup>78</sup>
- the wife had refused to have intercourse<sup>79</sup>
- the wife had contracted a serious illness; but then the wife's rights were protected, according the law-books, inasmuch she was allowed to continue to live in the house<sup>80</sup>

<sup>73</sup> AT 92:6–14 with C. Niedorf, *Die mittelbabylonischen Rechtsurkunden aus Alalakh (Schicht IV)* (2008) 275–283 (33.2).

<sup>74</sup> *Emar VI/3* no. 124.

<sup>75</sup> AP 15, with Lipinski, 21 f.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. Locher, 286–289, 'Eheverfehlungen'.

<sup>77</sup> Falkenstein, NSGU I (1956) 108 f. (no. 205:21–25).

<sup>78</sup> Westbrook, OBML, 75–77.

<sup>79</sup> NSGU I, 109 (no. 22:9–11).

<sup>80</sup> NSGU II 8 f. no. 6 (á.zág); CH § 148 (*laḫbum*); CL § 28; Westbrook, OBML 77 f.; BE 6/1 59 (VAB 5 232 *kišitti ilim*), 'an attack by a god', and the judges permit her new husband to leave her. See Chapter 5, at the end.

- the wife had uttered slander (?)<sup>81</sup>
- the wife was lying and bullying<sup>82</sup>
- the wife was a gadabout and had belittled her husband, she was bent on her own gain, and ‘scattered the house’ (Laws of Hammurabi § 141, § 143)<sup>83</sup>

Motives for the wife:

- the husband had refused to have intercourse (?)<sup>84</sup>
- the husband was a gadabout and had belittled the wife (Laws of Hammurabi § 142)
- the husband was guilty of ill-treatment (?)<sup>85</sup>
- the husband had committed a crime<sup>86</sup>
- the husband had been absent for a prolonged period (a recurring theme in the law-books).<sup>87</sup>

### 9.5.1 Ill-treatment by the husband and impudence by the wife

The consequences for a husband who had abused his wife can be illustrated by a letter sent to the queen a city state.

Do not keep on writing about B. That woman does not want to stay here with (her) husband. Let her take her children and go to the house of her brother-in-law (*yabamu*) (...). A., her husband, keeps on ill-treating her (*buzzu'u*) and I am concerned about her complaints. This woman is dear to me.<sup>88</sup>

---

**81** BE 6/2 58:4 (*māgirtum*; Locher, 254).

**82** C. Michel in: J. G. Dercksen, *Anatolia and the Jazira during the Old Assyrian period* (2008) 223 n. 76, 77.

**83** CH § 141 with S. Greengus, HUCA 40–41 (1969–70) 38 n. 11. This behaviour fits that of a gadabout; I do not agree with interpreting *wašiat* as ‘(she) decides to leave (the house)’, in Westbrook, OBML, 76b.

**84** W. W. Hallo and others reject this interpretation of BE 6/2 58:7, defended by Locher, 255 f. (*nu-un'-zu-ša-ma ù bu-zu-úh-ša*). The half-Sumerian nu.un.zu-ša is very uncertain, but note the similar nu.mu.un.zu.na in TIM 4 48:7, Locher, 195. An alternative will be given in note 89.

**85** NSGU II 267 no. 169 with Greengus, JAOS 89 (1969) 532 n. 142. The complaints by princess Kīrūm in Mari, in Chapter 23, are also apposite here.

**86** M. Jursa, RA 91 (1997) 134–145, with L. Barberon, RHD 81 (2003) 5 (OB); AT 17 with W. W. Hallo, *The Context of Scripture III* (2002) 251 (Alalah).

**87** OBML, 86–88.

**88** OBTR 143.

A lawsuit from Nippur refers to E., a husband accused of ill-treatment and of something else also.<sup>89</sup> So far that word cannot be translated, though it is stated that the old women would have to examine this case.

The bronze weapon of (the god) Ninurta took its position in the city district and its old women took their positions. But they could not establish that A. had spoken insults against E. They did establish that E. had done ... to her and had treated her badly. Afterwards E. spoke as follows: 'Even if you should pin even more on me than now, I will not marry her. And even if they hang me, I will pay the silver.'

One assumes that the insults to the woman were the basis of her accusations and that they appeared to be true. Some interpret 'done ... to her' as unacceptable intercourse, which is why the old women were detailed to conduct an internal inspection (*inspectio ventris*). That was a fantasy favourably entertained by some pre-war specialists in cuneiform law, the *Keilschriftrechtforscher*, but the word may simply be a more general word for 'to harass', and the old women were involved because they were familiar with the domestic situation. There was no hesitation by the husband admitting what he had done. He wanted at all costs to end the betrothal or the marriage. They had agreed on a marriage with parity, on her initiative, but he had now become dissatisfied with that arrangement, so he was willing to pay the divorce money required.

In one particular Old Assyrian marriage contract the couple preferred to allow their marriage to continue, even if circumstances arose that would normally lead to divorce.

Ili-bani: his wife is Tataya. If he should treat her badly, he may not leave her; he shall pay thirty shekels of silver to Tataya. If she becomes too saucy (?) and he has 'seen' her (like this), then she may not leave him; Tataya shall pay thirty shekels of silver to Ili-bani.<sup>90</sup>

The ill-treatment was certainly related to domestic violence. The sauciness of the wife could have been literally translated as 'he receives *šillatu*'. In Babylonian this expression means 'to receive an insult', but in Assyrian it appears to refer to a physical act. The context suggests that whatever she did she was behaving impudently. Because the two families involved in this marriage also had financial obligations to each other divorce was unthinkable.<sup>91</sup>

<sup>89</sup> BE 6/2 58 with W. W. Hallo, *Origins* (1996) 247–250; *The Context of Scripture* III (2002) 269 ('slandering and abusing her'); S. Lafont, *Femmes* (1999) 253–256, 497 f.; J. J. Finkelstein, WdO 8 (1976) 239 n. 4. They derive *nu-un<sup>3</sup>-zu-ša* in line 7 from an Akkadian verb like *nuzzû*; CAD N/2 357b. Another opinion in note 84.

<sup>90</sup> K. R. Veenhof, *Archivum Anatolicum* 3 (1997) 358 f.

<sup>91</sup> Veenhof, 357–381.

Another Old Assyrian text provides for a husband who might ‘become extravagant’ (*šamāḥu*) and leave his wife. If so, he would have to pay sixty shekels of silver. If the wife should become impudent she would then have to leave the house after having had her toggle-pin pulled off. From this it can be seen that for a woman to wear a toggle-pin, which her husband had fastened on her breast, marked her as his wife.<sup>92</sup>

### 9.5.2 Gadabouts

In Hammurabi § 141 the wife ‘who is bent on gadding about’ is heading for abandoning her husband through her behaviour. Such ‘gadding about’ does not imply loose morals (as perhaps is the case in the following sections) but financial misconduct.<sup>93</sup>

§ 141. If the wife of a man who is residing in the man’s house should decide to leave, and she appropriates goods, ‘squanders’ her household, or belittles her husband, they (perhaps the city district) shall charge and convict her; and (1) if her husband should declare his intention to divorce her, then he shall divorce her; neither her travel expenses (?), nor her divorce money, nor anything else shall be given to her. (2) If her husband should declare his intention not to divorce her, then her husband may marry another woman and that (first) woman shall reside in her husband’s house as a slave-woman.

Because this is not a formal divorce the punishment is not so severe. The two following paragraphs concern a woman who divorced formally. She ‘hated’ her husband and made the formal statement, ‘You are no longer married to me’. § 142 concerns the man who is a gadabout,<sup>94</sup> and § 143 the woman.<sup>95</sup>

If a woman ‘hates’ her husband, and declares, ‘You will no longer be married to me’, her circumstances shall be investigated by the authorities of her city district; and if she is circumspect (*naṣrat*) and without fault, but her husband is a gadabout and belittles her greatly, that woman will not be subject to any penalty; she shall take her dowry and she shall depart for her father’s house.

If she is not circumspect but is a gadabout, ‘squanders’ her household, and belittles her husband, they shall cast that woman into the water (§§ 142–143).

<sup>92</sup> B. Kienast, AOF 35 (2008) 46–48; for the toggle-pin see pp. 48 and 51 (AKT 3 51:10 f.).

<sup>93</sup> OBML, 76 f.; Locher, 284 f.

<sup>94</sup> A. Tosato, *Il matrimonio israelitico* (1982) 194 f., ‘to respect’ [note 11: attested in KAJ 7, TIM 4 45], pointed out that ‘fearing’ each other in Middle Assyrian contracts must indicate normal and decent behaviour by the couple, in contrast to that of a gadabout.

<sup>95</sup> In detail Locher, 290–303.

The wife who ‘hates’ her husband is simply one who wants to leave him without any valid reason for divorce. Everything points to the fact that §§ 141–143 concerned a married woman living in the house of her husband. In her comprehensive argument about these laws S. Lafont showed along other lines that here indeed a married woman was the party in question.<sup>96</sup> As is usual with divorce, we see that it was ‘the district’ which made its own judgement. The wife’s punishment in § 141 was one of humiliation, she became a slave, but in § 143 she faced a death sentence because she had not been circumspect.

When comparing § 142 and § 143, we note the wife’s explicit attitude of ‘hatred’ and her formal utterance that ‘You will no longer be married to me’. This last phrase corresponds to those in contracts saying ‘You are not my husband’, with the consequence of death by drowning. Possibly Hammurabi agreed to this severe punishment only if the wife’s utterance could be linked with her not being regarded as a ‘circumspect’ person, restricting the death penalty to such a special case. In § 142 the wife is given the possibility of divorcing from a bad man, in which a humane approach towards reform can be seen.<sup>97</sup> All in all this is a fine example of Hammurabi expressing his dissatisfaction with the cruelty of a traditional law and attempting wise mediation. According to D. Nörr it did not work, for in his opinion the woman had no right to initiate divorce until the Neo-Babylonian period.<sup>98</sup>

It is worth noting that one reason a wife could give for requesting divorce was that she had been ‘greatly’ (*magal*) belittled by her husband (§ 142), while it was sufficient for a husband more simply to claim to have been belittled by his wife, without adding ‘greatly’ (§ 143).

An example of a man who left his family is found in a text from Mari.<sup>99</sup> This was the musician Lipit-Enlil, whose father was also a musician, and who was employed at the palace of King Samsi-Addu. He had fled to Mari, to the palace of the viceroy, Yasmaḥ-Addu, accompanied by a colleague and bringing his instrument with him. Yasmaḥ-Addu was commissioned to arrest them and send them back, but the viceroy appears to have been disinclined to do that. Possibly he enjoyed hearing the music at court, for we know he was someone who liked the good life (see further Chapter 23, about the court of Mari). In Mari Lipit-Enlil had

<sup>96</sup> S. Lafont, *Femmes* (1999) 48–55. Thus also M. Malul, Or. NS 60 (1991) 282, contra Westbrook.

<sup>97</sup> D. Nörr made a similar observation; see Locher, 275; R. Yaron, ZSS 109 (1992) 77. Locher criticises the thesis that the formula ‘You are not my husband’ in the contracts has a meaning identical with ‘I will not marry (you)’ in § 142 (Locher, 310).

<sup>98</sup> Nörr’s judgment of Assyrian texts is simplistic, for we now have more evidence.

<sup>99</sup> N. Ziegler, *Florilegium Marianum* IX (2007) 158 ff. no. 36, with p. 233–236.

complained that ‘My people are detaining me’, and Yasmaḥ-Addu heard the reaction of his chief of music, who told him:

For the past four years he was able to support his people and (then) he got up and left. I have brought his wife and children to the palace and up to the present they have received regular rations of barley, oil and wool. Lipit-Enlil (once) had entrusted himself to (our) protection and I took him on (then) and gave him a house and the wife of the musician A. (i.e., his widow). He used up everything I gave him and he has got up and fled. I have summoned his wife in the presence of the messenger of my lord and asked, ‘Where are the slaves, the cattle and sheep which your husband left with you?’ She replied, ‘He left absolutely nothing with me.’ Out of respect for my lord I am sending here his wife, so that my lord can question her about what he left her.

This man was clearly something of a Bohemian, an artiste who went his own unique way. In a later document we read that he worked in the palace administration – he had a child at that time.

### 9.5.3 Misconduct by the woman

There were several ways in which women’s misbehaviour is described, one of which is ‘scattering the household’. In a Sumerian letter a woman protests that she has certainly not done this.<sup>100</sup> According to a Sumerian proverb,

A wasteful woman who lives in the house is worse than all the demonic illnesses (SP 1.154).

Another wise saying was,

A woman with her own possessions lets the house go to rack and ruin.<sup>101</sup>

In an Old Babylonian letter we read of a mother and her son who are both described as scatterers:

The scatterer B. (...) has scattered the ingredients for the beer brewery. Yes, she has made your ‘neck hit the ground’. Her son had already been a ‘scatterer’ like this and he squandered the wool.<sup>102</sup>

---

**100** D.I. Owen in: *Studies Cyrus H. Gordon* (1980) 197–199; W. W. Hallo, *The Context of Scripture III* (2002) 295; TUAT NF 3 (2006) 15–17.

**101** B. Alster, *Wisdom of ancient Sumer* (2005) 93 Instr. Šur. 220; TUAT III/1 (1990) 64:221.

**102** AbB 7 187.



Adultery combined with theft was of course absolutely deplorable, a subject reserved for Chapter 10, where a relevant lawsuit will be discussed.

Perhaps the most heinous crime was murder. In the report of a lawsuit in the city of Nippur, about a man who had been killed by a gang of three, the wife of the murdered man concealed the crime by failing to report it. According to customary law this was as bad an offence as the murder itself. These were the established facts and the case then proceeded to another stage. The king sent the case to the city assembly, where two different opinions were expressed. Three members of the assembly proposed that it was the woman who had in effect killed her husband by keeping quiet. They then added, ‘What has she, a woman, done to deserve to be put to death now?’ But most members of the assembly pointed out further information established as fact, that the problem began because she had belittled her husband, and his ‘enemy’ became aware of it. This raised the question, ‘Why did she not keep her mouth shut about him?’ They thought that she was more culpable than the murderers themselves. They were of the opinion that a woman like that who had a low opinion of her husband would give information to his enemies for them to strike him. Here we have two conflicting views, the moderate standpoint of the minority and the hard line taken by the majority. That it was common at the time to begin legal discussions with opposing viewpoints can sometimes be seen in the law-books. The polarised opinions in this particular lawsuit became so well-known that it featured in the syllabus of the scribal schools, with several copies of the text having been found.<sup>103</sup> It is possible that § 153 of Hammurabi is a sequel to this case:

If a man’s wife has her husband killed on account of (her relationship with) another male, they shall impale that woman.

This situation can be linked to a prediction in one of the liver omens, which says, ‘The wife of the man shall have her husband murdered’, and since the person who requested the prediction of the liver omen was in fact the said husband, he must have been completely taken aback.<sup>104</sup>

---

**103** Th. Jacobsen, ‘An ancient Mesopotamian trial for homicide’, in: Jacobsen, *Toward the image of Tammuz and other essays on Mesopotamian history and culture* (1970) 193–214; W. H. Ph. Römer, ZAW 95 (1983) 332f.; Locher, *Die Ehre einer Frau*, 102–104. Much has been written about this murder more recently, including M. T. Roth in: V. H. Matthews, *Gender and law in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East* (1998) 175–181; H. Neumann, ZABR 10 (2004) 79–82. We follow the new interpretation by R. Westbrook, *Studies Joan Goodnick Westenholz* (2010) 195–200.

**104** J. Nougayrol, RA 63 (1969) 150, on 25.

A marriage would end more or less automatically when the wife was found to have been guilty of adultery. She was put to death, with no mention of a formal divorce. It was therefore superfluous for such a clause to be put into marriage contracts. The duty to be faithful was self-evident. Even so, in Neo-Babylonian contracts the possibility of adultery is envisaged, as we have seen above.

As soon as there were children it became much harder for a man to leave his wife without reason. It is sufficient here to cite one of the laws of Ešnunna, even though the final sentence cannot be restored with confidence.<sup>105</sup>

If a man sired children but divorces his wife and then marries another, he shall be expelled from the house and any possessions there may be, and he shall go after the one whom he loves (?). [His wife] shall succeed to the house (§59).

A divorced woman who had not been the guilty party could remarry,<sup>106</sup> as can be seen in a particularly interesting circumstance described in a letter.<sup>107</sup>

Since his mother was divorced, another man had married her, and in the house of her later husband she gave birth, and she swore thus: 'It is truly to you that I have borne him'.

The woman is apparently emphasising that the child was fathered by him. Later in the letter a slave is mentioned and then a saying is quoted: 'A father with sons does not adopt a slave'. Possibly it is the legitimacy of the newborn that is at stake, for as the son he would later be responsible for caring for his father.

## 9.6 Predictions

Snakes were sometimes seen at a house, and this was considered to be an omen, a portent of divorce. The particular behaviour of the snake was a sign of the seriousness of the prediction, the mildest indicating some irritation between husband and wife: 'If a snake hangs above the entrance of the outer door, vexation between man and wife'.<sup>108</sup> More seriously, if a snake were to fall down, land between the husband and wife, and then escape, then divorce or even death was predicted. A snake simply appearing near a husband and a wife together was another omen predicting divorce, as when a snake was seen when the couple

---

**105** With R. S. Falkowitz, RA 72 (1978) 79 f.; Westbrook, OBML, 72–74.

**106** R. Yaron, ZSS 109 (1992) 69 f.

**107** AbB 14 207, cf. M. T. Roth in *Studies B. L. Eichler* (2011) 77–88.

**108** S. M. Freedman, *If a city is set on a height II* (2006) 124 rev. 3 f.

were talking, which signified that ‘they will separate and leave’.<sup>109</sup> A further step takes us to other ominous reptiles.

If a woman sees a lizard which a snake is carrying, then the woman will be married to the husband of a friend. If a man sees a lizard which a snake is carrying, then the man shall marry another woman.<sup>110</sup>

In both omens it is the man who takes the initiative.

Part of the text known as *Šumma ālu*, a handbook of predictions, is also concerned with divorce. In the second half of one of the chapters various forms of human behaviour are correlated with predictions of divorce. The first half of the chapter is about sexual behaviour and the second half about behaviour during the divorce process.<sup>111</sup> The situations as described are taken from real life and are most informative. Although the predictions seem curious today they are thought-provoking and show how various situations were assessed, as can be seen from this translation:

If a man leaves his (first) wife (*hīrtu*), lifelong discomfort; always quarrelling for him; his days will be short.

If *ditto*, and he regularly gives her food, people will listen to what he says.

If *ditto*, and she stays living in his house, he will have constipation (?) (*kiširti bilti*).

If *ditto*, and he comes back to her, he shall die in about a year.

If *ditto*, and he keeps on looking for her inheritance, he will have piercing pain.

If *ditto*, and another man marries her, he shall bear the punishment of the god.

If *ditto*, and he strangles her, he shall be burnt to death.

If *ditto*, and he attacks her with sorcery, the weapon of the god shall remove him.

If *ditto*, and he shows her in the people’s assembly (?), the god shall not accept his prayer with raised hands.

If *ditto*, and he marries the wife of another man who is (still) alive, he shall die from the oppression of the god.

If *ditto*, and he has affairs, hunger shall seize him.

If *ditto*, and he marries the wife of a man who is (already) dead, his handiwork (?) shall not succeed.

If *ditto*, and he slanders (her), (the god) Ninurta besieges him.

If *ditto*, and he acts annoyingly, his heir shall not rescue his family.

The text continues with omens about a man who disliked his wife. This he demonstrated by annoying her, letting her starve, after she dies marrying another

<sup>109</sup> Freedman, 38 ff. Tablet 23:29–34; also Tablet 23:112–115 (p. 48) for more cases.

<sup>110</sup> Freedman, 170 Tablet 32:51 f.

<sup>111</sup> CT 39 45:39–52. See for the first half A. Guinan, *Phoenix* 25 (1979) 68–81.

woman, causing her death, abandoning her repeatedly, three times or even as many as eight times.

A few times remarriage by the man or the woman is here an option. We learn from the Sumerian laws of Ur-Nammu that a divorced woman had to wait six months before she could be married.

If a man has married a wife and he divorces his wife, (only) after she has waited six months, the woman can marry the husband of her heart.

M. Civil comments: ‘The purpose of the law is to ensure that she is not pregnant by the former husband, and that he cannot lose a son.’<sup>112</sup>

## 9.7 Reconciliation

There was general unease when a man and woman became estranged and separated and people felt it would naturally lead to disaster. That is why among the rituals against bad omens we find some intended to bring reconciliation. They were known under the title, ‘Releasing, to make a man and wife who are distant approach one another’.<sup>113</sup> These rituals could apply to any people who had lost one another, but priority is given to divorced couples. Such a ritual for the sun god was carried out in a remote location after having brushed the area clean. A linen cloth was hung between the man and the woman (perhaps a symbol of their separation), and then three pots were broken. A prayer to the gods Šamaš (the sun god) and Marduk was recited three times, in which the gods were praised because they ‘bring together the scattered people, they let those approach each other who were at a distance’; they were praised also for bringing fugitives, hostages, and captives back to their city, and for giving a young man to a young woman. Two other noteworthy sentences in the prayer are ‘Leading back the deserted wife to her husband, O Šamaš and Marduk, depends on you’, and ‘Purge out the sadness from our hearts and give us to each other; make our life long’. After the prayer the hems of the garments of the husband and the wife were tied together and then a concluding formula was declaimed:

The married couple have been led back together; the two married partners led back to their people; the deserted ones; the hostages; the kidnapped; the distant; and the absent.

---

**112** M. Civil, CUSAS 17 (2011) 249 §B7, with p. 270; C. Wilcke, *Festschrift J. Krecher* (2014) 555f. (§b7), with p. 512f.

**113** S. M. Maul, *Zukunftsbewältigung* (1994) 409–414.

Finally we draw attention to two magic rituals a woman could use to bring her ‘enraged’ husband back to her. With the first one she would utter a prayer to the goddess Ištar, ‘she who shames the wise women, makes resentful women loving, and sends the enraged husband back to his in-laws’.<sup>114</sup> With the second she would ask ‘that I might not sleep (alone)’, and ‘that I might be loved’. She accompanied these utterances with a symbolic gesture holding a little boat made of iron in one hand and a magnetic stone (perhaps haematite) in the other, which would naturally be attracted to each other.<sup>115</sup> A Sumerian incantation from an earlier period requires the man to form two sets of seven clay pellets. After moistening the pellets he throws them between the woman’s breasts, and then ‘the wife will come to you’.<sup>116</sup>

To end this chapter on divorce I quote a Sumerian proverb which echoes ones of today. The saying,

He wed for his pleasure; when he thought about it, he divorced (SP 2.124)

may be compared to ‘Marry in haste, repent at leisure!’, or ‘Heiraten in Eile, bereut man mit Weile’, or ‘T is haest getrouwt, dat lange rouwt’.<sup>117</sup>

---

**114** STT 2 257 with W. Farber, ‘Ištar und die Ehekrise’, *Festschrift B. Groneberg* (2010) 73–85. Cf. T. Abusch, *Babylonian Witchcraft Literature* (1987) 132 n. 95; E. Reiner, *JNES* 26 (1967) 192; translated by J. Scurlock in Chavalas, *Women*, 108 f., K. van der Toorn, *From her cradle to her grave* (1994) 74.

**115** V. Scheil, *RA* 18 (1921) 21 ff. no. 17 with CAD M/1 142a (the little boat). Cf. M. J. Geller in: S. Parpola, *CRRAI* 47/1 (2002) 132 n. 23 f.; translation by Scurlock, 109.

**116** N. Wasserman, *Festschrift B. Groneberg* (2010) 333.

**117** G. van Tussenbroek, *Amsterdam in 1597* (2009) 133.

## 10 Adultery

Adultery is a specific form of infidelity. A Babylonian would have defined adultery as ‘consensual sexual intercourse by a married woman with a man other than her husband’. The behaviour of the woman is crucial in this definition. One might assume that a Mediterranean man might have intercourse with any other woman, unless the woman was married. But such conduct was always unseemly for a woman, married or not.<sup>1</sup> Young men were warned to avoid such a situation.

You should not laugh with a young married woman. This causes a great amount of gossip,

or

My son, do not sit in a room together with a married woman.<sup>2</sup>

In the Assyrian law-book the word *nâku* specifically refers to extra-marital sexual intercourse. According to N. Heeßel the word must have carried overtones of shame as it is always used with reference to immoral behaviour.<sup>3</sup> This may be true in most cases, but the word basically means ‘to have intercourse’ in some laws (§ 12, 17, 23), and certainly in an incantation to be recited at the birth of a child,

In the waters of intercourse, the bone was created.<sup>4</sup>

Adultery and infidelity mostly takes place consensually. This can be inferred from a Sumerian proverb,

An unfaithful rod suits an unfaithful vessel (SP 1.159).

But mutual consent needs to be proved. The ancient law-books of Mesopotamia also speak of someone forced into extra-marital sex, a subject reserved for our discussion of rape in the next chapter.

---

**1** Thus R. Westbrook at the beginning of his article ‘Adultery in Ancient Near Eastern Law’, *Revue biblique* 97 (1990) 542–580 (= *Writings R. Westbrook I* [2009] 245–287). In general see M. San Nicolò, art. ‘Ehebruch’ in *RIA II* (1938) 209–302; S. Lafont, *Femmes* (1999) 29–91.

**2** B. Alster, *Wisdom of ancient Sumer* (2005) 63 Instr. Šur. 33–34.

**3** N. Heeßel in: A. Imhausen, *Writings of early scholars in the Ancient Near East, Egypt, Rome, and Greece* (2010) 178–180. According to B. Landsberger the elementary verb *nâku* is used here because this law-book was a scientific work and not meant for everybody; *MAOG 4* (1928–29) 321.

**4** M. Stol, *Birth in Babylonia and in the Bible* (2000) 11 (top). B. Landsberger: *nâku* ‘koitieren’, AHw: ‘beschlafen’.

An appropriate law to begin with is found in the Hittite law-book, where three circumstances for an adulterous relationship are specified.

If a man should take a (married) woman in the mountains, it is the fault of the man and he is killed. If however he takes (her) in the house, it is the fault of the woman. The woman is killed. If the husband catches (them both) and kills her, there is no problem (§ 197).

C. Saporetti explains that the woman taken ‘in the mountains’ was a victim of a man’s violent action, which amounts to rape. The woman taken ‘in the house’ would be seen to have seduced her partner and accordingly put to death. In the third case both parties consented to the adulterous act, and the husband would have killed her as her punishment for consenting.<sup>5</sup>

## 10.1 Women who initiate adultery

Men are not blamed for looking at women. The Babylonians had a special word for such watching, ‘to look lasciviously’ (*balāṣu*).<sup>6</sup> In Hammurabi’s laws a betrothed young man is looking lasciviously at another woman and subsequently tells his father-in-law ‘I will not marry your daughter’. His only punishment is that he loses whatever had been brought to the girl’s father (§ 159). In a self-imprecation in a treaty one of the two partners wishes, to his disadvantage, ‘when I am looking lasciviously at a married woman, may another marry her’.<sup>7</sup> Women, however, are immediately open to suspicion for no more than turning their heads. After a woman had been betrothed or married to a man she was described by Babylonians as *naṣrat*, ‘circumspect, chaste’, in contrast to being a gadabout.<sup>8</sup> That a woman’s first inclination to bad behaviour can lead to worse can be seen from the semantic development of word for a gadabout, into that for a prostitute in later Aramaic and Modern Hebrew.<sup>9</sup> It is derived from the verb *waṣû*, ‘to go out’, and thereby shows her to be ‘a woman who has a reputation for going out’.

<sup>5</sup> C. Saporetti, *Studia G. Pugliese Carratelli* (1988) 237–241.

<sup>6</sup> Although this meaning is not in the dictionaries, it was repeatedly stressed by R. Borger; most recently in his *Babylonisch-assyrische Lesestücke*, third edition (2006) p. XIV; BiOr 65 (2008) 439, on CAD P 54, *palāsu* II/2 (‘starren’).

<sup>7</sup> J. Eidem, *The royal archives from Tell Leilan* (2011) 395, 403 no. 3 v 31 (copy on p. 598). I read *bi-li-iṣ inājā*, not *pilis* (but the syntax is not clear).

<sup>8</sup> A. Finet, *Symbolae F.M.Th. de Liagre Böhl* (1973) 137–143; J.J. Finkelstein, JAOS 86 (1966) 362f.

<sup>9</sup> Finkelstein, 363 n. 29; J. Preuss, *Biblich-talmudische Medizin* (1911) 563, 565; Finet, 142 n. 23, end.

In the Ancient Near East it was thought (and even still now it is widely thought) that the initiator of any act of adultery was the woman. Literary texts tend to lay the guilt on women for being the instigators and proverbs warn men about her advances.<sup>10</sup> A very well-known example is the Biblical story of Potiphar's wife, who tried to seduce Joseph in Egypt (Genesis 39). A particularly colourful passage in the Bible is Proverbs 7, where a young simpleton is seduced by 'the adulteress, the loose woman'. While her husband was on a journey she solicited him on the street and offered her bed smelling of myrrh, aloes and cassia, justifying herself by assuring him that earlier in the day she had paid her vows by making a sacrifice and an offering. This rather surprising remark will be explained later, in Chapter 21. In the Qur'ān the woman is portrayed as full of ruses (*kayd*) and her fatal, bewitching attractiveness (*fitna*) was something to be feared (Surah 12, 23–34).<sup>11</sup> In traditional Islam the woman is relegated to a position of complete subservience. This reduces her marriage to the status of a sale, where love is no more than sexual gratification, *eros*. This is what makes the woman a danger, according to European scholars.<sup>12</sup> In the Near East guilt for adultery, or for any sort of extra-marital cohabitation, is always in principle laid on the woman. According to the Bedouin she should never assent to acting thus.

Chaste women are most often to be found among the Bedouin, where courting is unknown. If an illicit sexual relationship is discovered the woman is put to death by her husband or brother, and the man never incurs punishment. The Bedouin, with profound common sense say, 'If she does not want it, he cannot have it'.<sup>13</sup>

Babylonian handbooks on soothsaying have several predictions about a woman being unfaithful, but only a few about the man.<sup>14</sup> The Akkadian word for the secret lover literally means 'he who enters stealthily' (*muštarriqu*). Some omens derived from the appearance of a sheep's liver create an unusual, almost anecdotal, atmosphere.

---

**10** F.M. Fales in S. Moscati, *L'Alba della civiltà I* (1976) 224; G. Steiner, 'Die *Femme fatale* im alten Orient', in: Durand, *La Femme* (1987) 147–153.

**11** Thus S. Guth, *Liebe und Mannesehre* (= Islamkundliche Untersuchungen, Band 122) (1987) 24–26.

**12** Guth, 1–45.

**13** 'Si la femme ne veut pas, l'homme ne peut pas'; A. Albert Kudsi-Zadeh, *Le Comte Carlo de Landberg chez les Bédouins. Récits arabes* (1970) 25 f.

**14** For citations see CAD N/1 197 f., s.v. *nāku* 'to have illicit sexual intercourse, to fornicate'; see also J.-J. Glassner, CRRAI 47/I (2002) 163a; U. Koch-Westenholz, *ibidem*, 307 f.



A man's wife will have her husband murdered.

A man's wife will constantly write to her secret lover, 'Kill my husband and marry me!'

A man's wife will become pregnant by another man.<sup>15</sup>

Men's wives will be slept with and stalk other men.<sup>16</sup>

Adultery was condemned as morally reprehensible.<sup>17</sup> References in literary texts and rituals show that certain acts, such as 'approaching the wife of a colleague', 'going secretly to the wife of his friend',<sup>18</sup> and 'sleeping with the wife of another man', were grievous sins needing formal purification.<sup>19</sup>

At the end of Chapter 9, about divorce, we mentioned a lawsuit concerning a murder, where the wife of the murdered man had remained silent. We cannot say whether intended or actual adultery was behind it. Another lawsuit, which also served as an example in the schools, was certainly a case of adultery. A married woman was accused of a series of increasingly serious misdemeanours: she had broken into the provisions room, had secretly made a hole in the barrel of sesame oil, and was then discovered in bed with a man. When her husband caught the pair of them he tied them up together, and they were punished by being publicly beaten up and humiliated. The king had her dragged around the town. What follows is an unclear statement about divorce money.<sup>20</sup>

Erra-malik has taken in marriage Ištar-ummi, the daughter of Ili-asū. In the first place she broke into his storeroom. In the second place she made an opening in his oil jar and covered it up with a cloth. In the third place he caught her upon a man. He tied her to the body of the man on the bed. He carried her to the assembly. Because she was caught with a man

---

15 U. Koch-Westenholz, *Babylonian liver omens* (2000) 105f. A 5–6; A. R. George, *CUSAS 18* (2013) 234:30f. with p. 244a. The liver has a 'hole' suggesting alienation between man and wife; see M. Stol, *Birth in Babylonia and the Bible* (2000) 103; cf. 'the hole' in YOS 10 14:6f.; see below, under 'Punishments'.

16 E. Reiner, *RA 69* (1975) 95f.

17 A humiliating description of an adulterous man ('the man lying with the wife of a man') can be found in Sumerian wisdom literature; B. Alster, *Wisdom of ancient Sumer* (2005) 368f., 'The Adulterer'.

18 Šurpu II 48, IV 6; S. Lafont, *Femmes* (1999) 32f.

19 W. G. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* (1960) 119:3f.

20 J. van Dijk, *ZA 55* (1963) 70–77; S. Greengus, 'A textbook case of adultery in Ancient Mesopotamia', *HUCA 40–41* (1969–70) 33–44; H. Lutzmann, *TUAT I/3* (1983) 198; J. van Dijk, *Or. NS 39* (1970) 99–102; S. Lafont, 'Sanctions sociales et peines infamantes dans le droit de la famille au Proche-Orient ancien', in: *Hommage à Romuald Szramkiewicz* (1998) 550–554; S. Lafont, *Femmes*, 37–41, 308f., 494f.; W. W. Hallo, *The Context of Scripture III* (2002) 311; H. Neumann, *ZABR 10* (2004) 85–88. The explanation that the woman was punished by dressing her up as a *kezertu*, a prostitute (M. Roth, S. Lafont) cannot be correct. The *kezertu* was a temple prostitute and not a whore.

upon her the assembly decided to ... the divorce money ... They shaved her pudendum. They pierced her nose with an arrow. The king handed her over to be led around the city. It is a decision of the king. Išme-Dagan-zimu was the deputy.

S. Lafont has said that it is very likely that the woman would have been lynched in the city.<sup>21</sup> This text was intended to be instructive for schoolboys of that time, boys typically full of imagination. Messing up the housekeeping and infidelity seem to have been considered typical weaknesses of feminine misbehaviour.<sup>22</sup>

The judgement of the king was advisable whenever a death penalty was threatened, and in this way situations of unrestrained revenge were avoided.<sup>23</sup> According to another model lawsuit a woman who had been caught in the arms of a named man was impaled.<sup>24</sup> It is striking that in all three lawsuits the king declared his assent to the punishment. These cases could be examples of the application of royal judgements. We can read between the lines and say that it was better to let the king decide than to begin a personal vendetta. There is an unusual passage in an Old Babylonian letter, in which a woman who was clearly betrothed explained how she was almost led astray, and the 'husband' was declared innocent.<sup>25</sup>

The wife of Sîn-iddinam absolved (?) (*ipšur*) herself of guilt in the following manner. 'Before Sîn-iddinam married (*aḥāzu*, lit. 'to take') me, I agreed with father and son. When Sîn-iddinam went away from his house, the son of Asqudum sent me a message: 'I want to marry (*aḥāzu*) you'. He kissed my lips, he stirred my vessel, but his rod did not enter my vessel. I thought this: 'I shall not do anything wrong against Sîn-iddinam, who has done no wrong to me'. In my house I have done nothing improper.

The law-books carefully consider the status of a woman who behaved in this way, to determine if she was indeed a wife. Some paragraphs in the laws of Ešnunna aim to formulate a definition of a 'wife' and a 'married woman' (*aššatu*) specifically to establish whether or not adultery had been committed:

<sup>21</sup> Lafont, *Femmes* (1999) 40 f.

<sup>22</sup> H. Neumann in H. Barta, *Recht und Religion* (2008) 42 f., who incorrectly explains the opening of the oil jar as ceremonial.

<sup>23</sup> Neumann, 39 f.; Neumann, *Festschrift R. Haase* (2006) 32–34.

<sup>24</sup> UET 5 203 with F. R. Kraus, *WdO* 2 (1955) 131 f., S. Greengus, *HUCA* 40–41, 42 n. 26, D. Charpin, *Le clergé d'Ur* (1986) 471; Lafont, *Femmes*, 67 f., 73, 495.

<sup>25</sup> AEM 1/2 (1988) 423 f. no. 488:29–40, with S. Lafont, *NABU* 1989/44; *Femmes*, 56; L. Marti, *NABU* 2001/76; J. S. Cooper, *CRRAI* 47/II (2002) 96 f.

§27. If a man married (*aḥāzu*) the daughter of a(nother) man without the consent of her father and mother, and moreover did not arrange with her father and mother the (nuptial) feast (*kirru*) or the contract, even though she has resided in the house for one full year, she is not a wife (*aššatu*).

§28. If he ... did arrange the contract and the (nuptial) feast for her father and mother and he married her, she is indeed a wife. On the day she is seized in the lap of a(nother) man she (or: he) shall die, she (or: he) shall not live.

We see a similar construction in the laws of Hammurabi.

§128 If a man married a wife but did not draw up a contract for her, she is not a wife.

§129a. If a man's wife was seized lying with another male, they shall bind them and throw them into the water.

Both law-books agree that if a woman who is cohabiting and who has no contractual obligation has intercourse with another man, she may not be treated as adulterous.<sup>26</sup>

## 10.2 Were both lovers treated equally?

That §129a is the first part of a clause of a section in the laws of Hammurabi (§§ 129–136) covering the duty of a woman to maintain conjugal fidelity, the theme of this chapter. It continues by offering a chance for the wife to escape punishment.

§129b. If the wife's 'master' allows his wife to live, then also (*u*) the king shall allow his 'slave' to live.

In principle both parties in the adulterous relationship were put to death, but this clause shows that the usual punishment may need to be modified. A closer examination shows that the legislator wants first to establish the standard punishment in §129a, and then to show that there was a possibility of an element of clemency. The deceived husband could forgive his wife for what she had done, and that is stated in other law-books. Hammurabi here wanted to determine that the adulterous man could likewise be allowed freedom if the wife was pardoned, and that is something new in §129b. Primarily of course it was to offer equal treatment to both parties that this innovation was prompted. So why are the king and his 'slave' mentioned? This is not an easy question to answer. The word slave could

---

<sup>26</sup> H. P. H. Petschow, NABU 1990/81, end.

be used here to mean that the man in question was a royal subject, a subordinate person. The legislator wished for equality in the treatment of two ‘slaves’ by their respective overlords: the husband was the ‘master’ of his wife, as the king was the master of his subject.

In the Hittite Laws (§ 198) we also find the rule that the king could make the final decision to show mercy to both parties guilty of adultery, once the cheated husband had brought both offenders to the palace gate.

§ 198. If he (the deceived husband) brings them to the palace gate and says, ‘My wife shall not die’, he can spare his wife’s life, but he must also spare the lover. Then he may veil her. But if he says, ‘Both of them shall die’, they shall ‘roll the wheel’. The king may have them killed or he may spare them.

Veiling here is the affirmation of the marriage. The treatment of wife and lover are symmetrical.<sup>27</sup> This was not the only instance in those laws where the king had such a right according to that law-book.<sup>28</sup>

Modern legal historians have attempted to find the reasoning behind treating both lovers equally. It could have been a wish to be ahead of any game of deception a colluding couple were playing. A situation could be envisaged where a married couple might arrange to seduce a man so that he would be punished by execution, while the woman would escape with her husband granting her a pardon. But the last requirement of the law § 129b obviates resorting to such a malicious game.<sup>29</sup> I find this construction cleverly thought out, but there is no proof for it. The essential modernising element of reform in this law appears to be that the woman was not the only one to be punished, but that she and her lover were punished equally. That both parties should be punished equally appears also to have been an underlying principle of the Middle Assyrian laws.<sup>30</sup>

Other law-books also raise the problem of what to do to the man. This was raised as early as the time of Ur-Nammu.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>27</sup> M. Tsevat, JCS 27 (1975) 235–237.

<sup>28</sup> R. Westbrook, *Revue biblique* 97 (1990) 555.

<sup>29</sup> Westbrook, 551, 554 f. (it is explicit in the Cretan laws of Gortyna). Driver and Miles and Cardascia (*Les lois assyriennes*, 119) also speak of ‘collusion’.

<sup>30</sup> G. Cardascia in: *Hommage à Guillaume Cardascia* (1995) (= Méditerranées no. 3) 169 f.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. C. Locher, *Die Ehre einer Frau in Israel* (1986) 333–336. One manuscript offers ‘the man (lú) shall kill that woman’ which must be an error; C. Wilcke, *Studies Th. Jacobsen* (2002) 313. This reading was taken seriously (with an artificial explanation) by Th. Jacobsen, *Studies R. Kutschera* (1993) 75 f. M. Civil assumes that the woman is betrothed, as in the preceding § 6. His translation of the verdict is different: ‘(if) he (the prospective husband) kills the woman, he will be set free’; CUSAS 17 (2011) 246, 257. Now C. Wilcke, *Festschrift J. Krecher* (2014) 537.

§ 7. If the wife of a man (*gurus*) on her own initiative should follow some other man (*lú*), and she should lie in his lap, then that woman shall be put to death; that male person (*nita*) shall be released.

Here we can assume that the fornicator was not aware that the woman was married, because she was behaving like a prostitute in her allurements, and so he saw no harm in following her. The act may not have occurred in the place where they lived, a circumstance more clearly described in the Middle Assyrian laws, where we again see a woman taking the initiative:

§ 13. If a married woman should leave her house and go to a man where he lives (and) he should sleep with her, while he knows that she is a married woman, they shall put to death the man and the wife.

§ 14a. If a man should sleep with a married woman, whether in a tavern, or on the street, then they shall do to the man who slept with her according to the way that the husband says should be done to his wife.

§ 14b. If he does not know that she is a married woman and sleeps with her, then he is innocent; the husband shall prove the charges against his wife and do to her as he wishes.

The circumstances described in § 13 are generally accepted as constituting a case of adultery, in that it occurred consensually in the house of another man. Modern commentators attach much weight to the fact that the woman left her house and assume that her husband was absent for a long time. This is trying to read too much into the text. As in § 129 of Hammurabi, first the procedure for a normal, obvious case of adultery is described, and this is a step towards the procedure in cases about which it was more difficult to form a judgement. Again, the equal punishment for both parties described in § 13 reflects the wisdom of the legislator. The reason the man was punished was because he had deceived the woman's husband and violated a husband's exclusive rights to his wife. Moreover, the woman's behaviour was a public scandal, so § 13 demands that they shall kill them both. Her husband could not help her out.

What follows in § 14 is a milder case of adultery. It is perfectly understandable for a man to think that a woman he met in the shadier districts of a town, even though in fact she was married, was to all intents and purposes a prostitute. Here the legal criterion is whether or not he knew she was married. On that basis a guide was given to the deceived husband about what level of punishment was merited. Why in § 14a did the community not step in to decide the level of guilt? The legislator may have been reticent because one could not know how that woman ended up in the disreputable area of town. The husband could have been allowing his wife to work in a brothel or on the street, meaning that there would have been an element of collusion between husband and wife. For this scenario the law protected the man, applying the same principle as in § 129 of the laws of

Hammurabi but formulated more abstractly. Essentially whatever happened to the woman must also happen to the man. The situation in which a man knew nothing about a woman he had met being married is clearly outlined in § 14b. That man should therefore be pronounced innocent.

For the sake of completeness we now give a translation of § 15, although to explain it is not simple.

§ 15. If a man seizes a(nother) man with his wife, (and) they show that he was the one, (and) can prove it, then they shall put them both to death; he himself has no guilt. If they both are caught and brought before either the king or the judges, (and) it can be shown that he is the one and it can be proved, then if the husband of the woman kills his wife, they shall also put the man to death; but if he cuts off his wife's nose, then he shall make the man a eunuch and they shall slash his whole face. But if [he lets] his wife [go free], then [they] shall (also) [let] the man [go free].

In my interpretation the husband is the first to catch the couple and later other people do the same. The latter is indicated by the passive verbal form, in the dual, 'they are both caught and brought', a grammatical subtlety not seen before. The action of the husband was a first step which led to the second, that other people discovered the adultery. They bring both offenders to face justice, and the law seeks to establish equal treatment for both the man and the woman.<sup>32</sup>

This law-book has a little more about starting up a relationship with a woman who appears to be married. In those paragraphs a man takes a woman to travel with him, the woman admits a strange woman into the house, or she moves in with another man. In all these cases the crucial point was whether the man knew that the woman was married (§ 22–24).

Having seen how the Assyrian laws expected both parties involved in the adultery to be treated equally, it is time to return to Hammurabi. The text of § 130 actually deals with a rape, a subject to be discussed in the next chapter, but Hammurabi includes it here with the laws about adultery.

§ 130. If a man pins down a man's virgin wife who is still residing in her father's house, and they seize him lying in her lap, that man shall be killed; that woman shall be released.

Here we have a betrothed girl, who had the status of a married woman even though she was still living at home. In his treatment of the subject Hammurabi moves from the one extreme (a guilty woman) to the other (an innocent virgin), passing over any intermediate cases.

---

<sup>32</sup> R. Westbrook, JCS 55 (2003) 96a, gave up his earlier interpretation in *Revue biblique* 97 (1990) 553.

### 10.3 Caught in the act

The phrase ‘establishing his guilt’ probably amounts to the same as ‘being caught in the act’, a situation with consequences which need further discussion.<sup>33</sup> In order to establish the truth of such claims we often encounter the motif in ancient literature of immediately summoning witnesses. A colourful tale in the *Odyssey* concerns Hephaestus, the smith of the gods, who finds his wife Aphrodite in bed with Ares. He immediately throws a net over the pair of them and brings in everybody to see what had been happening (VIII 295–366), provoking the gods to a bout of Homeric laughter:

an uncontrollable (*asbestos*) laughing broke out among the blessed gods when they saw the tricks of the clever Hephaestus (326 f. and 343).

Calling witnesses is also prescribed in the book of Deuteronomy and in the Roman laws of the Twelve Tables.<sup>34</sup> An even closer parallel in place and time is found in a letter from Mari:<sup>35</sup>

Wariya the merchant has come to me saying, ‘I have taken by surprise a servant of the palace, a guard, with my wife. I have bound them together with a rope and made them leave to meet you. Furthermore, the people who seized them with me are my witnesses.’ I have looked into the matter of the woman ...

After this the text is broken, but the guilty pair were caught unawares and actually bound together. Witnesses to the event will be required. This is so similar to the binding of the couple referred to in a model lawsuit which we translated earlier,

He seized her on a man, he bound her to the body of the man in bed and carried them to the community assembly.

---

**33** For being ‘caught in the act’ the following remarks by Dr Polak about nineteenth-century Persia are apposite. ‘Ertappt ein Mann seine Frau *in flagrante delictu*, so dürfte er sie, streng genommen, tödten. Da aber der Beweis mittels Zeugen sehr schwer zu führen, ja nach der Forderung Ali’s: *Necesse est videre stylum in pixide*, kaum möglich ist, zieht man die Scheidung vor; selbstverständlich muß dann die Frau den Ansprüchen auf ein Heirathsgut entsagen’. J. E. Polak, *Persien. Das Land und seine Bewohner. Ethnographische Schilderungen I* (1865) 215.

**34** Deuteronomy 17:6 f.; Twelve Tables VIII 12, 13, according to Cardascia, *Les lois assyriennes*, 121, though no specific cases of adultery are mentioned there.

**35** AEM 1/1 (1988) 524 M. 5001; LAPO 18 (2000) 239 f. no. 1064; S. Lafont, *Femmes* (1999) 38.

## 10.4 Punishment

That adultery was strictly prohibited is shown by the fact that anyone found guilty was condemned to death. The laws of Hammurabi and contracts from his time speak of execution by drowning or being thrown from a high tower.<sup>36</sup> An Old Babylonian liver omen says:

If the left lobe looks like a ... and there is a hole in it, then the wife of a man will be slept with and her husband will seize her and will kill her.<sup>37</sup>

Examples we gave earlier were model lawsuits written in schools in which the woman would be treated humiliatingly by shaving half of her head or her pubic hair, or be impaled.<sup>38</sup> In §15 of the Middle Assyrian Laws we saw that provision had also been made for something milder than the death penalty.

And if he should cut off the nose of his wife, then he should change the man into a eunuch and they should slash his face.

Legally speaking these two punishments can be described as symmetrical. For a wife to have her nose cut off is alluded to in a rather obscure Old Babylonian love incantation.

The wives hate their husbands, (so) cut off her lofty nose, lay her nose under my foot.

From this we can conclude that it was a punishment which was actually carried out.<sup>39</sup> Neo-Babylonian contracts threaten death by the ‘iron dagger’ (as noted in Chapter 9, about divorce). In the New Testament stoning was designated as the punishment for an adulterous woman, but Jesus challenged the Pharisees to carry out that punishment on one occasion.

Let whichever of you is free from sin throw the first stone at her (John 8:7, REB printed after John 21).

---

<sup>36</sup> G. R. Driver, J. C. Miles, *The Babylonian Laws I* (1956) 495.

<sup>37</sup> YOS 10 14:6 f.

<sup>38</sup> Shaving her hair: M. Civil, CUSAS 17 (2011) 262 f. Impaled: UET 5 203:17 with D. Charpin, *Le clergé d'Ur* (1986) 471 (nam.giš.dim.šè).

<sup>39</sup> C. Wilcke, ZA 75 (1985) 200:47–49. V. Haas, *Babylonischer Liebesgarten* (1999) 66–69, 187 n. 280, investigates the matter of cutting off the nose of a woman and refers to such ‘marginalised women’ in the cult of Ištar of Nineveh among the Hittites.



Although, as we have seen, there was a possibility of being reprieved from execution, clemency was not always granted. The expression ‘she shall die, she shall not live’ in the laws of Ešnunna cited earlier means that there would be no possibility of reprieve.<sup>40</sup>

Extra-marital intercourse was thought to be a cause of illness, since illness was a consequence of sin.<sup>41</sup> One diagnosis in a medical text attributes lumps appearing on pale flesh to the moon god Šin.

If he is covered from head to foot in red lumps and his body is ‘white’, he was found with a woman in bed; it is the Hand of Šin.

If the flesh was ‘black’ the diagnosis was the same. Other related omens speak of ‘red’ flesh, and then it was the Hand of Šamaš the sun god. Other diagnoses attribute white lumps to the sun god, red ones to the moon god and black ones to Ištar.<sup>42</sup> Another text reads,

If his illness repeatedly leaves him in the middle watch of the night, he has approached a(nother) man’s wife: the Hand of Uraš.<sup>43</sup>

## 10.5 Accusations of adultery

### 10.5.1 The rules

In ancient Near Eastern literature a woman is often accused of adultery but the accusation may have arisen from gossip. A false accusation led to the standard rule that the accuser would be punished with the same punishment that his victim would have received. This principle is analogous to *ius talionis*, well-

---

**40** Contra Yaron (p. 260 f.; attested in Laws Ešnunna §12, 13, 28), who viewed it as just style (‘negated antonym parallelism’). The phrase is now also attested in M. Ghouti, *Florilegium Marianum* [I] (1992) 63:25 (*amat ul aballuṭ*), R. Labat, MDP 57 245 v 5 (*qāt Šulak ul TI.LA UGx-at*). The prophecy to King Hezekiah, Isaiah 38:1 and 2 Kings 20:1, has similar reverberations.

**41** N. Heeßel in: A. Imhausen, *Writings of early scholars in the Ancient Near East, Egypt, Rome, and Greece* (2010) 178–180. He points out that modern objective views of ‘venereal diseases’ contrast with the negative connotations the Babylonians had towards them.

**42** TDP 28 Tablet III 91–95, including variations in the colour of boils or the skin; see further CAD M/1 119a, sub f; see also G. Wilhelm, *Medizinische Omina aus Hattuša* (1994) 44 f.; N. P. Heeßel in: S. M. Maul, *Assur-Forschungen* (2010) 177 (n. 74).

**43** Heeßel, *Babylonisch-assyrische Diagnostik* (2000) 198 Tablet XVII:32.

known from the Bible as ‘an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth’.<sup>44</sup> So it is striking to note that any false accusation of adultery is an exception to this general rule. Adultery by a woman was punished by death, and we have seen in the law-books that the punishment for the man who was her accuser was much less severe in comparison; see also Deuteronomy 22:13–21. The only exception is the story of the famously chaste Susannah. When she was falsely accused by the elders they were put to death.<sup>45</sup> The man who made a false accusation a law of Lipit-Īštar had only to pay a penalty.<sup>46</sup>

If (anyone) shall say of the virgin daughter of a man ‘she knows the rod’, and it is established that she does not know the rod, then he shall pay ten shekels of silver (§ 33).

Elsewhere in the law-book the Sumerian word *lá* is used for a formal ‘accusation’ (§ 17), while here it is simply the verb ‘to say’ that is used, so it could be just a matter of scandalmongering. The fine demanded for accusing a married woman of adultery was twenty shekels according to Ur-Nammu § 14, so this was only half as much.

Two possible reasons come to mind to explain the mildness shown to a scandalmonger. One is that the legislator was counting on the fact that the adulterous woman would be pardoned, which would have ensured that the death penalty was not automatically demanded. The other is that a woman was always punished more severely than a man.<sup>47</sup> C. Locher has studied this problem exhaustively and concluded in favour of the second possibility, that favouritism was shown to the man.<sup>48</sup> By setting out the laws it becomes clear that their tone supports Locher’s conclusion. People evidently accepted the tendency to gossip about the chastity of married women, which was encouraged by a constant mistrust of the female sex. Women were obliged to do their best to defend their reputations.

The relevant clauses in the laws of Hammurabi are §§ 131–132.<sup>49</sup>

---

**44** H. P. H. Petschow, ‘Altorientalische Parallelen zur spätrömischen calumnia’, ZSS 90 (1973), 27 f., 32. In general see S. Lafont, *Femmes*, 237–288. B. Landsberger showed that one could earn money by making false accusations and detected an increase in that bad habit; *Symbolae M. David II* (1968) 55.

**45** C. Locher, *Die Ehre einer Frau in Israel* (1986) 377.

**46** For a detailed discussion see Locher, 326–329. C. Wilcke: the woman proves that ‘she did not know the rod’; *Festschrift J. Krecher* (2014) 597 f. §g44 (= § 33).

**47** Locher, 323, 376.

**48** Locher, 376 f. It is in Chapter V, p. 315–380, that Locher first looks for the *talio* principle elsewhere in the law-books and then surveys the articles about accusations of adultery.

**49** Locher, 347–352.

§ 131. If her husband accuses his own wife (of adultery), although she has not been seized lying with another male, she shall swear (to her innocence by) an oath by the god, and return to her house.

Here the woman is accused by her own husband. The ‘oath by the god’ spoken by the woman of course contained the declaration that she had never slept with another man. In the laws of Hammurabi people often resorted to this sort of ‘purification oath’, if they had no recourse to natural means to prove their case.<sup>50</sup> We note here that the burden of proof rested with the woman. The house to which she could return was that of her father, so she could go back to her own family. Part of a man’s purification oath has been found. The text is badly broken but one sentence says,<sup>51</sup>

I did not sleep with her; my rod did not enter her vessel.

These words echo those of a girl, quoted earlier from a letter from Mari: ‘his rod did not enter my vessel’.

The Hebrew Bible records a similar accusation by a man made out of jealousy (Numbers 5:11–31).<sup>52</sup> To prove whether the woman was guilty or innocent depended on her drinking bitter water in an elaborate ritual. At the end we read:

No guilt will attach to the husband, but the woman must bear the penalty of her guilt (Numbers 5:31).<sup>53</sup>

In a law of Hammurabi we read:

§ 132 If a man’s wife should have a finger pointed against her in accusation involving another male, although she has not been seized lying with another male, she shall submit to the divine River god for her husband.

Here accusations of the woman’s unchastity are made by third parties. The woman was pointed out apparently as the result of gossip rather than being for-

<sup>50</sup> In a fragmentary litigation a woman declares under oath, ‘No man, except NN, has lain with me’; NSGU II no. 24.

<sup>51</sup> PBS 5 156 with Locher, 140. In general: Locher, 350 (top).

<sup>52</sup> Sophie Démare, ‘L’interprétation de Nb. 5, 31 à la lumière des droits cunéiformes’, in: Durand, *La Femme* (1987) 49–52; Locher, 351 f., n. 131 (with literature); Lafont, *Femmes*, 274–276. She compares Deuteronomy 22:13 ff. There it was possible to present physical evidence and no-one had to resort to an ordeal.

<sup>53</sup> Démare and others assume that the man is the woman’s lover.

mally accused in court.<sup>54</sup> Again the burden of proof rested on the woman and again a divine confirmation was required. However it was not enough for her simply to swear an oath, but she had to submit to an ordeal, to follow a risky procedure to discover the verdict of the god. In Babylonia the usual technique to determine the divine will was to make her jump into the river, since the river was regarded as a god. Someone who drowned in this ordeal was considered to have been pronounced guilty by the river god. The same regulation appears in the older Sumerian laws of Ur-Nammu, showing that the woman did not always drown:<sup>55</sup>

If someone (*lú*) accuses the wife of a man (*guruš*) of lying in (someone's) lap, but the River has declared her pure, the man who accused her shall pay twenty shekels of silver (§ 14).

In the Middle Assyrian laws we read:<sup>56</sup>

§ 17. If a man says to (another) man: 'People sleep with your wife regularly', (but) there are no witnesses, then they shall make a binding agreement, they shall go to the River god).

§ 18. If a man, whether in secret or during a quarrel, says to his colleague: 'People sleep with your wife regularly. I shall prove it myself', (but) he cannot prove this (and) he does not prove it, then they shall beat him with forty strokes; he shall do the king's service for one full month. They shall ... him; moreover he shall give one talent of tin.

### 10.5.2 In practice

Two Sumerian texts show the reactions to these accusations. In the first the wife admits adultery:

U. was married to his wife, K., and U. said that K. without his knowledge had lain with a strange man, but refused to confirm this by an oath. K. however acknowledged his statement and she was divorced.

It is remarkable that the husband was afraid to make an assertive oath, yet his allegation still carried weight. This situation may have been similar to some in the Netherlands in years past, when courts heard 'the great lie'. There adultery had

---

<sup>54</sup> Locher, 327 f., 349 f., 373 f., attempted to discover the difference between 'Verleumdung' and 'falsche Anschuldigung' in the law-books. He found it only in CH § 127 and 132, where 'Verleumdung' is meant.

<sup>55</sup> Locher, 336–338.

<sup>56</sup> Locher, 356–365.

long been counted as the only ground for divorce, and even if it had not occurred it was admitted. This admission by the wife may have been similar, opening the way for a mutually acceptable divorce. Perhaps we are giving too modern an interpretation. It has also been suggested that the woman had this affair before her marriage and that her husband later ascertained that she was no longer a virgin, a problem known in Old Testament times and dealt with in Deuteronomy 22:13–21.<sup>57</sup>

In the second text a wife claims she has been faithful, declaring under oath that no-one except [another] U. has slept with her.<sup>58</sup> Possibly she had been accused of adultery. This oath then fits in with § 131 of the laws of Hammurabi, which we translated earlier, under the rules accusing a woman of adultery.

The River as the arbiter of divine judgement occurs in an Old Babylonian letter concerning the wife of Yarkab-Addu, the king of a small state called Zalmaqum. Various accusations had been made against this woman and the river god would have to determine whether what had been said was true or whether it was slanderous.<sup>59</sup>

Has your mistress carried out any sorcery against Yarkab-Addu, her lord? Has she brought a word out of the Palace to outside? Or has another opened the thighs of your mistress? Has your mistress acted (anything) against her lord?

Evidently these accusations, sorcery, telling secrets, and unfaithfulness, typify the misdeeds one may suspect of a married woman, and only divine judgement by ordeal could give a verdict.

That not every wife accused of a crime like adultery was timid can be seen from a proverb cited in an Assyrian letter.

That sinful woman at the judges' gate has a bigger mouth than her husband.<sup>60</sup>

---

<sup>57</sup> NSGU II no. 205:18–26 with Locher, 203–206.

<sup>58</sup> NSGU II no. 24 with Locher, 205, 350; F. Joannès, *Rendre la justice en Mésopotamie* (2000) 46 no. 6.

<sup>59</sup> AEM 1/1 (1988) 528 no. 249:37–41 with p. 512 and J.-M. Durand, 'Les accusations d'adultère', in: G. del Olmo Lete, *Mythologie et religion des Sémites occidentaux I* (2008) 532–535.

<sup>60</sup> ABL 403:14 f. with A. L. Oppenheim, *Letters from Mesopotamia* (1967) 117 no. 116. This translation fits with what follows in the letter, but the interrogative sentence of V. Chamaza, *Die Omnipotenz Assurs* (2002) 385 f., does not fit.

## 10.6 The Mother of Sin

More information about adultery comes from a little-known mythological story. The goddess Inanna sentences a slave-girl to death. She is called Ama-namtaga, a name meaning ‘the mother of sin’. It can be assumed that she had begun a relationship with Dumuzi, the lover of Inanna. When she returned to the underworld, Inanna became particularly angry because she saw Dumuzi celebrating and very little concerned about her ‘death’. Dumuzi had clearly just begun to enjoy himself with this ‘mother of sin’ when Inanna arrived to interrupt proceedings. The goddess handed her over to the public to be lynched, something that may well have sometimes happened in the real world.<sup>61</sup>

## 10.7 An adulterous princess?

A story which did actually happen is recorded in documents about the daughter of the Amorite king, Bentešina.<sup>62</sup> Her mother was a Hittite princess, known by her title of Great Lady. King Ammištamru II (1260–1235), the king of Ugarit, was married to this woman, but we have no record of her name. The first document in the dossier is a declaration of divorce, which shows that the king of the Hittites, entitled ‘My Sun’, was all-powerful at the time.<sup>63</sup>

---

**61** K. Volk, *Die Balag-Komposition úru àm-ma-ir-ra-bi* (1989) 60 f.; M. E. Cohen, CLAM II (1988) 592; Th. Jacobsen, *The harps that once* (1987) 24–27. Discussions: Volk, 48–54; S. Lafont in: *Homages à Romuald Szramkiewicz* (1998) 554; *Femmes* (1999) 32; Th. Jacobsen, *Toward the image of Tammuz* (1970) 206; J. Maier, CRRAI 47/II (2002) 345–354. G. Leick, *Sex and eroticism in Mesopotamian literature* (1994) 212–216, gave another explanation: since Dumuzi is not mentioned, it is not adultery, but a transgression of taboos. Still, K. Volk shows that much evidence points to Dumuzi.

**62** For the texts, with introduction, see W. H. van Soldt, ‘Een koninklijke echtscheiding te Ugarit’, in: K. R. Veenhof, *Schrijvend Verleden* (1983) 150–159; S. Lackenbacher, *Textes akkadiens d’Ugarit* (2002) 108–126; *Handbook of Ugaritic studies* (1999) 477, 680 f.; S. Lafont, *Femmes* (1999) 35–37; K. Spronk, ‘Vals beschuldigd? Achtergronden bij de scheiding en verdwijning van een Ugaritische koningin uit de dertiende eeuw voor onze jaartelling’, in: C. Houtman, *De leugen regeert ...* (2004) 96–116.

**63** PRU IV (1956) 126 f. RS 17.159 with van Soldt in: Veenhof, *Schrijvend Verleden*, 151 f. no. 1; Lackenbacher, 116 f.; Spronk, 102 no. 4. A good photo of the tablet, sealed by the king, was published in the Belgian catalogue Ph. Talon, K. van Lerberghe, *In Syrië. Naar de oorsprong van het Schrift* (no year) 290.

In the presence of My Sun Tudḫaliya, the great king, the king of the Hittites:

Ammištamru, the king of Ugarit, took the daughter of Bentešina, the king of the Amorites, to wife. (Afterwards) 'she sought sickness of the head for him'. Ammištamru, the king of Ugarit, left the daughter of Bentešina for ever. Let the daughter of Bentešina take with her everything that she brought into the house of Ammištamru. Let her go away from the house of Ammištamru. All that Ammištamru has stolen, the Amorites must confirm under oath and Ammištamru will give it back to them in full.

Utrišarrumma is in Ugarit the successor to the throne. If Utrišarrumma should say, 'I am going after my mother', let him leave his cloak on a stool and depart, and Ammištamru shall appoint another of his sons as successor to the throne. If Ammištamru comes to die and Utrišarrumma (would) make his mother queen again in Ugarit, then he must leave his cloak on a stool, (and) go away wherever he wishes, and My Sun shall then appoint another of the sons of Ammištamru to be king.

In the future the daughter of Bentešina may not claim her sons, daughters or sons-in-law. They will stay with Ammištamru. If she does make any claim, this tablet will invalidate her (claim).

The tablet is sealed with the seal of King Tudḫaliya. We do not know what the expression about 'sickness of the head' means, which the king blamed on his wife. It could be that she had a headache, or she was perplexed, or she was racking her brain to solve some problem or other. In any case, it is clearly a metaphorical expression. What we do know is that the king her husband wanted to divorce her and this meant that she was free to leave and take her possessions with her. The clause about her son, the crown prince, is striking. We understand from this that she must have had adult children, for he was old enough to have his own opinion. Setting down one's cloak on a stool was a symbolic gesture, meaning that someone was leaving the family. Widows who went to remarry also did this. The woman's brother, Šaušgamuwa, was the king of the Amorites at that time, and it was to him that she fled. Other documents in the dossier show that she suddenly became a victim of her actions when the Hittite king, also a member of the family, became involved. He demanded that she be extradited. Accordingly she was imprisoned and her brother offered to hand her over to Ugarit:<sup>64</sup>

Today Šaušgamuwa, the son of Bentešina, the king of the Amorites, spoke thus to Ammištamru, the son of Niqmepa, the king of Ugarit. 'Well then, as for your wife, the daughter of the Great Lady, who has committed a great sin against you, how long must I keep guarding your sinner? Well then, take the daughter of the Great Lady and do with her as you wish. If you wish, kill her; if you wish, throw her in the sea; or do whatever you wish with the daughter of the Great Lady.'

---

64 PRU IV 142 RS. 17.228 with van Soldt, 155 no. 8; Lackenbacher, 123 f.; Spronk, 103 no. 5.

These were his words (...). Now Šaušgamuwa, the son of Bentešina, king of the Amorites, has seized the daughter of the Great Lady, who has committed a sin, and given her into the hands of Ammištamru, the son of Niqmepa, the king of Ugarit. And now Ammištamru, the son of Niqmepa, king of Ugarit, shall deal with the daughter of the Great Lady as he wishes. Also Ammištamru, the son of Niqmepa, king of Ugarit has given 1400 pieces of gold to Šaušgamuwa, the son of Bentešina, the king of the Amorites. If Šaušgamuwa, the son of Bentešina, king of the Amorites, comes and says to Ammištamru, the son of Niqmepa, the king of Ugarit, 'This gold is (too) little. Give me more gold', then this tablet shall invalidate (his claim).

The seal of Šaušgamuwa, the son of Bentešina, king of the Amorites.

So we see from judicial agreements and a few letters that the woman had committed 'a great sin'. In fact 'great sin' is also the expression used in the Hebrew Bible for adultery (Genesis 20:9); in an Akkadian preceptive hymn 'Grievous (*kabtu*) is the guilt of him who has intercourse with (another) man's wife'.<sup>65</sup> It could be said that she had betrayed her husband and her country, but there could have been other circumstances prevailing.<sup>66</sup> The threat of punishing her by throwing her into the sea certainly suggests adultery, for it is reminiscent of the way Old Babylonian women who wanted to divorce were thrown into the river. Eventually the princess was indeed killed. The high sum offered to the king of Ugarit must have certainly been in compensation for her death. Other documents from the dossier call it 'blood money'.

We are still at a loss to know what wrong she had done. According to the first document translated above, the act of divorce, nothing serious was mentioned. Adultery has been supposed, with the phrase 'sickness of the head' intentionally used to mask the truth. In a broken passage, the citizens of Ugarit say: 'She let your noblemen ... go inside and she laughed with them regularly'.<sup>67</sup> Here the word 'laugh' suggests flirting and may be a euphemism for sexual intercourse. But K. Spronk has pointed out that she was unlikely to have been flirting with everyone on such a grand scale and thinks that the woman was being falsely accused in this dossier. Another letter was subsequently found which provides us with fresh information, but the end is broken.

---

<sup>65</sup> S. Lafont, *Femmes* (1999) 36f. The hymn: W.G. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* (1960) 119:3–4, with B. R. Foster, *Before the Muses II* (1993) 628.

<sup>66</sup> Lackenbacher, 113.

<sup>67</sup> PRU III 43 RS. 16.270:23–25 with van Soldt, 154; Lackenbacher, 118f.; Spronk, 100 no. 1 with p. 111.



Yabninu went to the king of Amurru and he took with him a hundred pieces of gold and a wall-hanging for the king of Amurru. And he took oil in his horn and poured it over the head of the daughter of the king of Amurru. Whatever sin ... my mother ...'<sup>68</sup>

Is this a gesture of forgiveness and the beginning of a new marriage for the sinful woman? That harks back to §198 of the Hittite Laws.<sup>69</sup> Taken altogether these documents provide us with enough basic material for a detective story.

---

**68** RS 34.124 (KTU 2.72) with Spronk, 108 (no. 15); G. del Olmo Lete, J. Sanmartín, *Festschrift M. Dietrich* (2002) 553–558.

**69** S. Démare-Lafont, 'A cause des Anges. Le voile dans la culture juridique du Proche-Orient ancien', in: O. Vernier, *Études d'histoire du droit privé en souvenir de Maryse Carlin* (2008) 249. Her restorations of the last lines (following D. Pardee) are uncertain.

# 11 Rape

What is called ‘rape’ in English is known by a variety of different terms in other European languages: *viol* in French, *Vergewaltigung* in modern German (*Notzucht* in older German) and *verkrachting* in Dutch. Whatever word we use it is universally acknowledged to be a crime.<sup>1</sup> Whenever we speak of it we immediately think that it occurred ‘against her will’. In a Sumerian wise saying it is referred to in the most direct terms as

Do not commit violence of the penis on a man’s daughter. The inner courtyard will get to know of it.

A later Akkadian version reads

You shall not rape the daughter of a man with violence (*ina šaggāšti naqābu*). The community assembly shall get to hear of you.<sup>2</sup>

The law-books are almost our only source of information about what happened in practice.<sup>3</sup>

A remark is appropriate here about what could be meant by the word violence. In certain laws M. Civil has suggested that the Sumerian word (*á.gar*) is concerned with trickery rather than violence, so ‘deception’ would be a better translation.<sup>4</sup> In Exodus 22:16 we indeed read ‘When a man seduces a virgin who is not yet betrothed’, the Hebrew verb that is used is *pātāh* (pi.), ‘to persuade’, and in the Mishnah in the chapter about rape a distinction is made between ‘seduction’ (*pātāh*) and ‘overpowering’ (*’ānas*). Because seduction is seen as deceptive different fines apply.

A seducer pays three amounts, a violent man four. A seducer pays for humiliation, for devaluation and then also the fine; a violent man must pay over and above this for the pain (Keth. III, 4).

---

1 G. R. Driver, J. C. Miles, *The Assyrian Laws* (1935) 36–61; J. J. Finkelstein, *JAOS* 86 (1966) 355–372; B. Landsberger, *Symbolae M. David* II (1968) 43–65; R. Yaron, *The Laws of Eshnunna* (1988) 278–285. Note that an omen predicts that an enemy country can be raped (*nāku*) ‘like a woman’; A. R. George, *CUSAS* 18 (2013) 119:38, with p. 122a.

2 B. Alster, *Wisdom of ancient Sumer* (2005) 69 Instr. Šur. 62.

3 R. Haase, ‘Die Vergewaltigung einer Frau in Rechtscorpora des Alten Orients’, *ZABR* 15 (2009) 56–64. For the sequence of the MA laws see E. Otto, *ZAW* 105 (1993) 162.

4 M. Civil, *CUSAS* 17 (2011) 256 f.

The fine to be levied was the one of fifty shekels of silver referred to in Deuteronomy 22: 28–29.

Independently E. Szlechter argued that the Akkadian equivalent (*dâšu*) means both violence and deception,<sup>5</sup> and deception also means the act was perpetrated ‘against her will’.<sup>6</sup> C. Wilcke opposes the opinion that *á.gar* and *dâšu* refer to deception and maintains that violence is meant.<sup>7</sup> As to the Akkadian verb *dâšu*, recently published texts from Mari confirm the two meanings seen by Szlechter and in some passages ‘to intimidate’ fits the context, especially in the expression *ina awātim dâšu*, ‘to exert verbal pressure’, in contrast to ‘to exert force (*ina emūqim*)’.<sup>8</sup> We will translate *á.gar* by ‘to intimidate’.

The Bible story about the rape of Tamar, a princess in David’s palace, by her brother Amnon is recounted in three phases in 2 Samuel 13:7–14: first he does not listen to her voice, then he rapes her (the verb ‘*nh* really means ‘to humiliate’), and finally he lies with her.

In Akkadian the verb *naqābu*, which literally means ‘to pierce’, is exclusively used in contexts of rape. It is cognate with the Hebrew verb *nāqab* with the same meaning, from which is derived the abstract noun *nēqēbā*, ‘female’, as used in the phrase ‘male and female He created them’ (Genesis 1:27). In cases of rape the Mesopotamian law-books are interested in deciding first whether the woman was betrothed or married, and then whether she was really raped against her will.

## 11.1 Slave-girl

Scholars think that when a slave-girl was raped at that time it was immaterial to decide whether she had agreed to sex or not. The only point to be taken into account was that the crime had reduced the value of the girl and the owner should be compensated.<sup>9</sup> The law-book of Ur-Nammu required that it was necessary to prove that the perpetrator had deceived her. The law of Ur-Nammu states:

5 M. Civil, *Mélanges M. Birot* (1985) 78, CUSAS 17 (2011) 257a; E. Szlechter, RA 61 (1967) 114 f.; S. Lafont, *Femmes* (1999) 94.

6 Lafont, *Femmes* (1999), distinguishes them in the ‘La séduction’ (p. 93–132) and ‘Le viol’ (p. 133–171).

7 C. Wilcke, *Festschrift J. Krecher* (2014) 499–502.

8 ‘Intimidate by words’: AEM 1/1 (1988) 82 no. 5:15; MARI 7 (1993) 199, ARM 14 104+:16, with Durand, LAPO 16 (1997) 559, ‘intimider’. By force: PSD A/1 51a. The substantive *dašātu* (in recently published Mari texts) exclusively means ‘treachery’.

9 Finkelstein, JAOS 86, 360a; Yaron, 281.

If a man should intimidate and deflower the slave-girl of a man, then he shall pay five shekels of silver (§ 8).

Compare this with the law-book of Ešnunna.

If a man should 'pierce' the slave-girl of a man, then he shall pay twenty shekels of silver, but the slave-girl remains her owner's (§ 31).

If the slave-girl had been the intended bride of a free man, she would be treated in the same way as an ordinary girl.<sup>10</sup>

The size of the payment varied greatly, and the amount to be paid must first be compared with the going price for a slave-girl. Although these prices differed greatly, when averages are calculated, the payments seem to have been roughly in line with the full price. In the time of Ur-Nammu a male slave could be bought for about ten shekels of silver, and a female for five to six.<sup>11</sup> In the Old Babylonian period, when the laws of Ešnunna were written, the prices were higher, and later they rose further, to between fifteen and thirty shekels of silver.<sup>12</sup> We conclude with a little caution that the compensation for the deflowered slave-girl was about the same as her sale price. Another aspect to be taken into account here is the fact that adults cost more than young slaves, and that the compensation to be paid for young girls was greater than their notional value. In the laws of Ešnunna the compensation for a slave who had been killed was set at fifteen shekels (§ 55), so the twenty shekels for the woman cited above from § 31 was a considerable sum.<sup>13</sup> Virginity was a costly commodity. It has been proposed that the number written on the clay tablet was actually forty shekels of silver, and that is why it has sometimes been assumed that this particular slave-girl was intended to be married off to a free man.

The statement 'but the slave-girl remains her owner's' at the end of Ešnunna § 31 would preclude the rapist claiming the girl for himself, seeing that he had made a compensatory payment. We see two reasons for the inclusion of this clause. On the one hand, since the fine was more than the notional purchase

---

**10** H. Petschow considers this for LE § 31; *Symbolae M. David* II (1968) 138 n. 3 ('bereits die Konkubine ihres Herrn oder als solche bestimmt oder zur Verheiratung ... an einen Dritten vorgesehen'). Cf. Landsberger, *ibidem*, 55 n. 1.

**11** A. Falkenstein, NSGU I (1956) 88–90 (about children: p. 85); P. Steinkeller, *Sale documents of the Ur-III-period* (1989) 135–138.

**12** Thus Steinkeller, 138; R. Harris, *Ancient Sippar* (1975) 341–343; C. Wilcke, WdO 8 (1976) 280 f., from Abi-ešuh on, notably for the prices for women.

**13** That slave was killed by a wild ox, but for a similar case in the Bible the compensation was thirty shekels (Exodus 21:32).

price it acted as a disincentive for him to purchase her, though he might have had the right to do so. On the other hand, it contradicted the obligation of a rapist to marry his victim, a common provision to be discussed later in this chapter.

An unusual text, which was used as a copying exercise in Sumerian schools, describes a lawsuit about such an occurrence.<sup>14</sup>

Lugal-melam, the son of M. has seized Ku-Ninšubur, the slave-girl of Kuguzana, brought her to a storehouse and deflowered her. After he had deflowered her, Kuguzana, her owner, appeared in the assembly of Nippur and stood before them. He said, 'L. has seized my slave-girl, brought her into the storehouse and deflowered her'. Lugal-melam appeared. He said, 'I do not know his slave-girl. I have not deflowered her'. His witnesses took the stand. They confirmed this. The assembly of Nippur appeared. They said, 'Because he deflowered the slave-girl without (permission from) the owner, Lugal-melam must pay thirty shekels of silver to Kuguzana, her lord'. The assembly have pronounced their verdict on this matter.

Here the payment imposed was even higher than that mentioned earlier. J. J. Finkelstein suggested, possibly correctly, that a degree of punishment was factored into it for not admitting the guilt and for precipitating a formal lawsuit.<sup>15</sup>

Two phrases in this text need to be commented on further. Evidence about illicit sexual intercourse always records where the incident happened, and here it was important to say that he 'brought her into the storehouse'. The location was an invariable element for proving guilt.<sup>16</sup> That is why Daniel asked for the specific tree to be indicated under which the fair Susannah is supposed to have sat. That the verdict includes the fact that the incident happened 'without permission from her owner' echoes the phrase said about a girl in Ešnunna §26, 'without permission from her father and mother'. B. Landsberger thought that this permission conversely applied to the phrase used when the rightful parties (her husband, her parents, or her owner) 'knew' how the woman was going to be treated. According to him, they could have prompted the woman to behave in this way to earn money from it, a subject to be discussed later. Finally, we should bear in mind that C. Locher considers that this lawsuit was a specimen case, not an actual event which led to legislation. He assumes that there was a case like this behind Deuteronomy 22:13–19, and he reconstructs it as such.

---

<sup>14</sup> Finkelstein, JAOS 86, 359 f.; Landsberger, *Symbolae M. David II* (1968) 47–49; Locher, *Die Ehre einer Frau* (1986) 94–107. Cf. M. T. Roth, JAOS 103 (1983) 282 (3.); M. Civil, CUSAS 17 (2011) 255 f.

<sup>15</sup> JAOS 86, 360a.

<sup>16</sup> *Symbolae David II* (1968) 61 n. 1.

## 11.2 Unmarried girl

The rape of an unmarried girl is raised in a school text containing some dark paragraphs of Sumerian law:<sup>17</sup>

§ 7. If he should deflower the daughter of a man on the street, (and) her father and her mother do not know it (?), he says ..., (and) her father and her mother shall give her to him in marriage.

§ 8. If he should deflower the daughter of a man on the street, (and) her father and her mother know it (?), (and) the rapist denies that he knew ..., he shall go [and stand] in the gate (?) of the god ...

This text gives the impression that by standing on the street the girl is acting like a prostitute and that the unsuspecting man cannot be reproached. Landsberger thinks that, because the parents in § 8 ‘know’, it means that they have put the girl to prostitution.<sup>18</sup> It may be surprising that the man in another case according to § 7 was still allowed to marry her. This is however the solution in the Middle Assyrian laws and elsewhere, where we find a comprehensive range of locations listed.

§ 55. [If a man, – (regarding) the daughter of a] man, a virgin [who] lives [in the house] of her father, her [...] is not besmirched (?), [her narrow]ness<sup>3</sup> has not been opened, she is not married, and no demand has been made on the house of her father – (if) the man has forcibly seized the girl and raped her, whether in the middle of the city, or on the plain, or at night on the street, or in a shed, or at a city festival celebration, then the father of the girl shall take the wife of the man who has slept with the girl and give her to be raped. He shall not send her back to her husband. He shall take her. The father shall give his violated daughter to her violator in marriage. If he has no wife, then the man who slept with the girl shall give a ‘triple’ of silver, the price of a virgin, to her father. Her violator shall marry her. He shall not reject (?) her. If the father does not wish it, then he shall receive the silver, a ‘triple’ for a virgin. He shall give his daughter (in marriage) to whomsoever he wishes.

§ 56. If a girl should give herself to a man, then the man shall swear the oath and they shall not take action against his wife. The man who slept with her shall give a ‘triple’ of silver, the price of a virgin. The father shall do with his daughter as he wishes.

The first law is couched in difficult language.<sup>19</sup> We follow the school of thought which understands ‘not besmirched’ as indicating that the girl was of a premen-

<sup>17</sup> YOS 1 28 § 7–8 (‘a, b’) with M. T. Roth, *Law collections from Mesopotamia*, 44. See Landsberger, 51; Finkelstein, 358, 363–365; Römer, ZAW 95 (1983) 326 f.; Lafont, *Femmes*, 113–116.

<sup>18</sup> *Symbolae David II*, 64.

<sup>19</sup> Locher, 128–154, who discusses the physiological terminology for ‘virgin’ and rape; also E. Otto, ZAW 105 (1993) 157–159.

strual age. By ‘the narrowness not yet opened’, the following phase of life would be indicated, and then there follows ‘not married’. The Mishnah speaks of raped girls from their third year of life (Keth. I, 3; III, 1 etc.). The list of places where rape could occur is not intended to define particular locations but to mean anywhere at all. That the wife of the violator should be penalized is a form of *ius talionis*, ‘an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth’, which we also find elsewhere in these laws. G. Cardascia remarks angrily:

It is not enough, to say that the wife is subordinate to her husband: she is no more than a part of him and the guilty person is punished in her, just as though he had been punished in his own body through mutilation. As far as we know no other ancient law renders a free person so totally deprived of his/her personality.<sup>20</sup>

Before we become really angry, it is good to read what B. Landsberger says. He sees the whole Assyrian law book as one for ‘Assyrian Professors’. That is to say it is a law-book which takes a simple statute and then expands it with supplementary circumstances, such as the physical condition of the girl and the location of the crime. Landsberger counters our anger thus:

The abuse and enslavement of the completely innocent wife of the rapist are highly sophisticated and the worst possible barbaric act. However, it appears to be the invention of the Assyrian lawgiver.<sup>21</sup>

So the barbarity is only theoretical, expressed as a possibility, as a Professor of law may have felt he had the right to do. It has been argued that similar rather theoretical casuistry is to be found in ancient Near Eastern laws dealing with how to act in cases of violence leading to *abortus provocatus*.<sup>22</sup> Cardascia in a later article showed that the Assyrian legislator by giving this punishment, to be inflicted on the wife of the rapist, accords with the rules of the *ius talionis* (see end of Chapter 31).<sup>23</sup>

Enforced marriage was a well-known solution for these situations in ancient law so that the honour of the girl could be saved.<sup>24</sup> It is documented in Biblical law.

---

<sup>20</sup> *Les lois assyriennes* (1969) 79. Cf. Locher, 151 f.

<sup>21</sup> *Symbolae David* II, 56, 63.

<sup>22</sup> J. J. Finkelstein, *The Ox that Gored* (1981) 19 n. 11.

<sup>23</sup> G. Cardascia in his article ‘Les valeurs morales dans le droit assyrien’, *Hommage à Guillaume Cardascia* (1995) (= Méditerranées no. 3) 161–170, esp. 169.

<sup>24</sup> Locher, 152 f.

When a man seduces a virgin who is not yet betrothed, he must pay the bride-price for her to be his wife. If her father refuses to give her to him, the seducer must pay in silver a sum equal to the bride-price for virgins (Exodus 22:16–17).

That he may not later renounce her is made plain in Deuteronomy 22:29.

A much older parallel which illustrates this principle was discovered some time ago. It was a treaty from 2400 BC between the cities of Ebla and Abarsal which unexpectedly has two clauses about sexual relationships. G. Pettinato thinks that the first concerned adultery with a married woman (*dam guruš*), where garments and cattle make up the fines. The second one is about a young virgin (*sikil*), which Pettinato translates as,

If a virgin is concerned, they shall observe carefully her behaviour and (listen to) the explanations of those two and he shall marry her (§ 19 [2]).<sup>25</sup>

More recently D. O. Edzard has commented on the text and thinks that it refers to normal situations that arise when people are travelling to another country. It is the payment for providing excessive and lavish hospitality, and could be entitled 'A good night in Abarsal'. This is his translation:<sup>26</sup>

§ 40. Someone sleeps with a woman (from the household) of a man; he will give a ...-garment, a ... -cloth (and) three cattle.

§ 41. If that young woman agrees (and) confirms (this), he will ... about her, he will marry her.

A case that possibly occurred in real life relates to an accusation that the mayor of Nuzi abused his power, including a complaint that he had slept (*nâku*) with a woman. This seems like rape, but he denied doing it.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup> G. Pettinato in: *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft von Ebla* (1988) 305. Literature in Eblaitica 2 (1990) 59 f.

<sup>26</sup> D. O. Edzard in: *Quaderni di Semitistica* 18 (1992) 208. S. Lafont agrees, *Femmes* (1999) 43 n. 52, 76, 82, 95, 486; see also P. Fronzaroli, *ARET* 13 (2003) 54 no. 5 § 61–63, with p. 72.

<sup>27</sup> AASOR 16 no. 4 (SMN 13) with B. Lion in: F. Joannès, *Rendre la justice en Mésopotamie* (2000) 160 f. no. 117.



### 11.3 Married woman

We have references to the rape of wives, that is to say married or betrothed women, both of whom had the same legal status. In 1981 this law of Ur-Nammu was discovered:

§ 6. If a man intimidates the wife of a man, who is still a virgin, and deflowers her, then the male person shall be put to death.<sup>28</sup>

This wife was a virgin, by which we understand that she was as yet only betrothed. The law which follows concerns a woman who really was married (she is not said to be a virgin) and decides to commit adultery.

The laws of Ešnunna deal with both rape and deliberate cohabitation. The paragraph about rape says,

If a man has brought the bride-price for the daughter of a man, and someone else, without asking her father and mother, abducts her by force (*mašā'u*) and 'pierces' her, then it is 'a lawsuit of life'; he shall die (§ 26).

The next law concerns someone who married a daughter without any formal request to her parents, but it does not have any element of violence:

Even if she has already lived a year in his house, she is not a wife.

This situation has been interpreted as an abduction with the woman's consent, which amounts to an elopement, and many a Semitist has compared it to a form of Arab marriage involving the kidnap of one's bride. That is something that could easily have taken place in the ancient Near East.<sup>29</sup> This is typical of nineteenth-century thinking: the primitive bride-kidnapping (*Raubehe*) would have been followed by marriage by purchase (*Kaufehe*). Proof of the former practice was seen in ceremonies which still existed, where the bride hits out and walks away. This gesture is also explained as a last demonstration of her chastity.<sup>30</sup> In the laws of Ešnunna, as in the Middle Assyrian laws § 55–56, after the clauses on rape (§ 26), the possibility of the girl having consented is raised (§ 27). The law-

---

**28** M. Civil translates: 'If a mans seduces with guile a betrothed woman not yet married and takes her into (his) household, this man will be killed', CUSAS 17 (2011) 246b, with p. 255–257. 'Takes her into (his) household' is an emendation; the text offers 'deflowers her'.

**29** R. Yaron, *The Laws of Eshnunna* (1988) 279 n. 91; Landsberger, *Symbolae David* II, 64 f.

**30** Josef Henninger, *Die Familie bei den heutigen Beduinen Arabiens und seiner Randgebiete* (1943) 28–30.

book of Hammurabi puts things in the opposite order to that of Ur-Nammu and after adultery comes the following:

§ 130. If a man pins down another man's virgin wife who is still residing in her father's house and they seize him lying with her, that man shall be killed; that woman shall be released.

The verb *kabālu* D, translated here as 'to pin down', appears literally to mean 'to paralyse'. We find in the laws of Hammurabi also references to a father of a betrothed son lying with his future daughter-in-law (§ 155–156). These come under the heading of incest, which we shall discuss in the following Chapter 12.

The Middle Assyrian laws have something to say about the rape of married women.

§ 12. If a married woman goes in the town square (and) a man seizes her (and) says to her, 'I want to sleep with you', (but) she does not assent, she is circumspect, (and) with violence he seizes her (and) sleeps with her – whether they find him on the married woman or witnesses prove that he has slept with the woman – he shall be put to death; there is no punishment for the woman.

This is the only law in which it is clear that intercourse took place against the will of the woman. The next two paragraphs are about a woman in the town square who leads the man astray. Why do we read that the woman is in the town square? Elsewhere in the law-book this indicates that she was behaving like a prostitute. However, scholars argue that something else is shown here. Supposedly there was an element of chance in the rendezvous, and no scheming by the woman is insinuated. I think that we should see the reference to the town square in the same murky light shown in that other law, not a place where a lady should be on parade. This regulation is intended as a general warning to stay away from a married woman, even if you find her in the town square and you think you could take advantage. This fits in with § 14, where a married woman loiters in a drinking house, but nonetheless you must keep your hands in your pockets. Landsberger has pointed out that this is precisely the principle hammered home in the law: 'It is a strong piece of "professors' law", demanding that any potential delinquent makes sure that the woman he fancies is not married'.<sup>31</sup> Landsberger does not mention our law, but his argument fits in well with it.

The first section of § 16 of the Middle Assyrian laws is not completely preserved. It appears to concern a married woman who seduces a man 'with the ... of her mouth'. The woman was punished by her husband at his discretion, but

---

<sup>31</sup> *Symbolae David* II, 63 n. 1.

there was no punishment for the man she seduced. Cardascia thinks that there was nothing more in the seduction than some kissing (the word is supplemented by him) and not intimacy. The second part of § 16 continues the story and here the man becomes frisky and rapes the provocative housewife.

§ 16b. If he uses violence to sleep with her, they shall show that he was guilty of it (and) they shall prove it of him; then his punishment will be like that of the wife of the man.

That punishment could involve mutilation, as in § 15.

## 11.4 The locations

The laws often take into consideration the place where the incident happened, which Landsberger calls ‘crime-scene casuistry’. No reason for distinguishing different locations is found except in Deuteronomy 22: 23–27, which makes a betrothed girl guilty if she was seduced in the city, where she could have shouted for help. But if it happened in the field she was innocent, for calling for help would have been in vain. A Hittite law links up well with this.

§ 197. If a man should take a (married) woman in the mountains, it is the fault of the man and he is put to death. If however he takes (her) in the house, it is the fault of the woman; the woman is put to death. If the husband catches (the two of them) and beats them to death, there is no problem.

This means that we need now to discuss in more detail what was said about adultery at the beginning of Chapter 10. C. Saporetti explains that an incident in the mountains means that there was violent behaviour by the man and it counted as rape. An incident in the house refers to a woman who is seducing a man. The third situation would be a case of adultery, desired by both him and her. It was thought that the woman could have defended herself quite well enough at home by calling for help, which is what the wife of Potiphar did.<sup>32</sup> The Bedouin show ‘deep common sense’, according to Count C. de Landberg, saying that a woman is never obliged to have intercourse against her will, on the assumption that she restricts herself to the women’s quarters and never goes to isolated locations.

Within the city there were various places where rape might occur. For a girl or a married woman it could be on the street; for a married woman it was the drinking house or the square; and for a slave-girl it was the storehouse. The Middle Assy-

---

<sup>32</sup> Yaron, *The Laws of Eshnunna*, 280 n. 95.

ian law § 55 lists the danger spots for a virgin: the middle of the city, the field, at night in the square, in a shed, or at a fair. In Deuteronomy an incident in the city implied guilt, and one in the field implied innocence. There must have been other places that were dangerous for girls. A storage building occurs three times: the storehouse, a shed, and a warehouse (in § 55, and in a letter).<sup>33</sup> Attending a fair (literally, a festival in the city) was also dangerous and is reminiscent of the wise Sumerian advice: ‘Never trust a woman at a fair’.<sup>34</sup> In a speech by Demosthenes the marketplace and the workplace were pointed out as being places of dubious repute.<sup>35</sup> Because locations were not said to be relevant for married women one might suppose that unmarried or betrothed girls had greater freedom of movement, despite all the attendant dangers of the time, and that married women were confined to the house. We have already said that in any allegation of rape it was important to say where it happened.

A queen of the Hittites, Puduḫepa once had a nasty dream.

In a dream a number of young men wanted to take the queen behind the bath house. The queen promised (the deity) in her dream one bath house made of gold.<sup>36</sup>

What would Sigmund Freud have made of that?

## 11.5 In myths

In Sumerian myths we find the motif of a raped goddess.<sup>37</sup> In ‘Enki and Ninḫursag’ the god Enki violently raped his daughters in sequence.<sup>38</sup> When he approached the last one, Uttu, he seduced her by dressing up as the gardener and she appeared to agree. The action-packed sequel was explained as a failed union. As his punishment Enki was stricken with all sorts of illnesses. In another myth Enlil made his daughter Ninlil pregnant to the anger of her mother.<sup>39</sup> On the first occasion he used force, and subsequently he disguised himself twice to

<sup>33</sup> TCL 1 10 (the warehouse *ganīnu*) with Landsberger, *Symbolae David* II, 45f.; cf. 61 n. 1. Charpin, *Le clergé d’Ur* (1986) 471 also mentions the roof (Sum. *ūr*; either ‘roof’ or ‘lap’).

<sup>34</sup> B. Alster, *Wisdom of ancient Sumer* (2005) 92 Instr. Šur. 208; SP 11.150.

<sup>35</sup> Demosthenes 59, 67, cited in G. R. Driver, *The Assyrian Laws* (1936) 45 n. 3.

<sup>36</sup> A. Mouton, *Rêves hittites* (2007) 261f., 264 Texte 98 ii 5–10 (= 37–41). See the earlier comment by A. L. Oppenheim, *The interpretation of dreams in the Ancient Near East* (1956) 227b.

<sup>37</sup> A. Gadotti, ‘Why it was rape: the conceptualization of rape in Sumerian literature’, *JAOS* 129 (2009) 73–82.

<sup>38</sup> Gadotti in M. W. Chavalas, *Women in the Ancient Near East* (2014) 38–40.

<sup>39</sup> Gadotti, 30–33.

seduce her.<sup>40</sup> Gods were born as a result of his exploits. Enlil was also punished, and was called an unclean person and banished from the city, though in the end everything comes right for him. Were these punishments for rape (by violence or seduction) or for incest? Being banished from the city was required by the laws of Hammurabi for a father who had been lying with his daughter (§ 154). Another instance involved the goddess Inanna. As she lay resting under a tree she was seized by a gardener, a human. As a result the land suffered dreadful punishments and the gardener was condemned to execution. Even so that gardener remained famous as the person who had discovered how to cultivate the date palm, the backbone of the economy of Southern Iraq. Some see in this the reflection of the conflict between the gardener representing Southern Sumer and the northern kingdom of Akkad, with Ištar (Inanna) as its patron deity in the twenty-third century BC.<sup>41</sup>

## 11.6 The right of the first night

History has many examples of rulers who requisitioned women. In the Old Testament Abraham's wife Sarah was threatened by the kings of Egypt and Gerar (Genesis 12:11 f.). David also resorted to this mean trick to get Bathsheba to his side (2 Samuel 11:4). The most crude practice of it is referred to by the three word Latin term, *ius primae noctis*, 'the right of the first night'. In feudal medieval society various reports say lords had this right, called *droit de cuissage*. Comic operas in the eighteenth century still made jokes about it, as in Mozart's opera *The Marriage of Figaro*. In our opinion this is a form of rape.

To avoid any possible misunderstanding, when a Roman Catholic work about moral theology in the Middle Ages refers to this right, at least when it was carried out by priests, it was quite different. It was a type of tax given by newly married couples to the priest for removing the duty of being chaste during the first few nights of marriage, known as the 'Tobias nights'. At that time this was how newly weds obtained their *ius primae noctis*. Rulers required a similar sort of payment from their vassals when they married.<sup>42</sup>

---

<sup>40</sup> J. S. Cooper, JCS 32 (1980) 180.

<sup>41</sup> K. Volk, *Inanna und Šukaletuda* (1995).

<sup>42</sup> D. Gerardus Oesterle, *Consultationes de jure matrimoniali* (1942) 7–11, based on J. J. Raep-saet, *Les droits du Seigneur* (Ghent 1817). More scholars have denied the existence of this right; A. Boureau, *The Lords's First Night* (Chicago 1998).

Did this *ius* exist in Mesopotamia? In the Old Babylonian version of the Gilgamesh epic there is a description of how Gilgamesh stormed around in his city of Uruk, and the following line is cited as an example of it happening:<sup>43</sup>

He slept with the intended woman: he came first, the husband afterwards.

When later his friend Enkidu heard this he turned pale, and we do too, but people said that this was the will of the gods, and Gilgamesh's destiny. The wife was even destined for it (*aššat šimātīm*). Some modern scholars see in this custom an early form of the sacred marriage between a god and a goddess, to be enacted on earth between a ruler and a woman. In this situation the woman bore the special name of the goddess of love, Išḫara. The woman who happened to be chosen for this role must have felt honoured and not dishonoured. The poet would have assumed that the custom was later modified and a priestess was selected to act.<sup>44</sup>

Fifteen hundred years after this the Greek writer Herodotus narrates a very disturbing story about ancient Babylon.

The most terrible custom of the Babylonians is as follows. Every native woman once in her life had to sit down in the sanctuary of Aphrodite and have intercourse with a stranger. Many women thought it beneath their dignity to submit themselves to someone else. Because they prided themselves on their wealth, they drove to the sanctuary in covered waggons, and waited in them, while a great number of servants came after them. Most went about doing it in the following manner. In the area devoted to Aphrodite there were many women sitting with a garland of ribbons on their heads. Some came to join them and others left. Between these women were very straight paths, and strangers walked along these paths and chose someone. Once a woman had come and sat there, she could not leave to go back home until a stranger had thrown money into her lap and had had intercourse with her outside the temple. When he threw the money he had to say, 'I call on the goddess Mylitta'. Mylitta was the name that the Assyrians gave to Aphrodite. The sum of money might be of any amount. There was no way that she could refuse it. She was forbidden because the money was consecrated. She went with the first man to throw money at her, and she was not allowed to refuse anyone. When the intercourse had taken place and she had discharged her holy duty to the goddess, she went back home, and from that day onwards they might give her as much money as they wanted but they would never get her again. All the women who were blessed with beauty and a tall figure could quickly go back, but the ugly had to stay there a long time because they could not fulfil the holy law. Yes, some had to stay there even for three or four years. In a few places in Cyprus a similar custom persists (I 199)

<sup>43</sup> Gilg. P iv 32–34, now A. R. George, *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic I* (2003) 178:160.

<sup>44</sup> Thus W. von Soden, ZA 71 (1981) 103–106. J. Tigay, *The evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic* (1982) 176, 182f., is more cautious. According to J.-J. Glassner, ZA 80 (1990) 67, there was no religious ceremony.

Did things really happen in this way? Most scholars, beginning with Voltaire, think that Herodotus was mistaken and that he did not properly understand what happened in the ceremonial sacred prostitution of the god of love, Ištar.<sup>45</sup> It is assumed that women did this because only in this way could they pay off pledges they had made to the temple.<sup>46</sup> In Chapter 21 we will see that temple prostitution actually existed and at the end follows a partial explanation of this story. Others, mostly from outside the field of Assyriology, think that Herodotus was possibly right.<sup>47</sup> That is an idea that has led to Babylon being characterized as a fornicating whore, as found in the New Testament:

Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, who has made all nations drink the wine of God's anger roused by her fornication (Revelation 14:8).

Finally we note some information from a Greek manuscript about new brides in Africa.

Among the Nasamones in Africa there is a custom that brides on their first marriage night have sex with all their guests. They receive presents from them. But afterwards it happens only with the bridegroom.<sup>48</sup>

A woman would have to do this only once in her life, so it is interesting to note that in the administrative texts about sacred prostitution in Sippar from the Old Babylonian period, about one thousand years before Herodotus, the names of the participants are recorded only once. Would they perhaps also ...?<sup>49</sup> We will revisit Herodotus in chapter 21, when discussing the Goddess and the Whore.

---

**45** B. Meissner, BuA II (1925) 435; J. Bottéro, *La Mésopotamie* (1987) 229. G. Wilhelm presented an overview of opinions in *Studies W. L. Moran* (1990) 505–524.

**46** K. van der Toorn, *From her cradle to her grave* (1994) 99–101. More in Chapter 21, 'Income'.

**47** F. Cumont, *Oriental religions in Roman Paganism* (1911) 246–248, n. 41; G. van der Leeuw, *Religion in essence and manifestation* (1938) 230 f. (Chapter 29, 1); W. Baumgartner, ArOr 18/1–2 (1950) 81–83, sub 5, reprinted in his *Zum Alten Testament und seiner Umwelt* (1959) 296–298; W. G. Lambert, JEOL 15 (1957–58) 196.

**48** *Paradoxographus Vaticanus 27*, translated by R. Ferwerda, *Phlegon van Tralles. Wonderbaarlijke verschijnselen* (2004) 129.

**49** J. S. Cooper in his article 'Prostitution', RIA XI/1–2 (2006) 19b.

# 12 Incest

## 12.1 Promiscuity

Our discussion now proceeds to the subject of incest, a practice known from the earliest history of mankind, when the hordes of people abandoned themselves to promiscuity. At any rate this was asserted in the nineteenth century, and Karl Marx adopted the idea.<sup>1</sup> Out of this wild mess there slowly developed polygamy, and from this came strictly monogamous marriage. As well as polygamy some claim to have found polyandry, both in very old historical sources and present-day societies. Arabists who have studied that problem<sup>2</sup> suggest that modern communities feel this gives a measure of freedom to monogamous marriage.<sup>3</sup> Older sources, such as Strabo, Chinese travelers, and the commentator Al-Buḥārī, speak of polyandry particularly in South Arabia (Arabia Felix). Strabo states,

One woman is for everyone, and the man who comes in first, after first leaving his staff in front of the door, has intercourse (XIV. 4.25).

That this actually happened is confirmed by an inscription from South Arabia in which two men thank the god Almaqa for the five boys and the one girl whom they fathered by the same woman. This is not the only text with similar content to have been found there.<sup>4</sup> In some Roman inscriptions two men and a woman are said to make a vow to each other.<sup>5</sup>

For our purposes it is interesting to note that the Sumerian city ruler Urukagina prohibited polyandry under the reforms he conducted in ca. 2320 BC. The relevant texts are difficult to translate, but the passage which interests us can be translated as follows:<sup>6</sup>

---

1 Friedrich Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State: in the light of the researches of Lewis H. Morgan* (1884).

2 J. Henninger, 'Neuere Forschungen zum Problem der Polyandrie in Arabien', in: *Meqor Hajjim. Festschrift für Georg Molin* (1983) 127–153. See the earlier article from 1954, 'Polyandrie im vorislamischen Arabien', in: Henninger, *Arabica Varia* (1989) 305–338; see also Hortense Reintjes, *Die soziale Stellung der Frau bei den nordarabischen Beduinen* (1975) 48–52.

3 L. Vajda in Henninger (1983) 128.

4 W. W. Müller, 'Sabaäische Texte zur Polyandrie', *Neue Ephemeris für die Semitische Epigraphik* 2 (1974) 125–138.

5 J.-J. Glassner, *CRRAI* 47/1 (2002) 161f.

6 Ukg. 6 iii 14–24 ('Plaque Ovale'), as translated by J. S. Cooper, *Sumerian and Akkadian royal inscriptions I. Presargonic inscriptions* (1986) 27. See B. Hruška, *ArOr* 41 (1973) 121f., *Aussage* III 28.



If a woman speaks ... disrespectfully to a man, that woman's mouth is crushed with a fired brick, and the fired brick is displayed at the city-gate. Women of former times each married two men, but women of today have been made to give up that crime.

Every translation of this passage is different, but the words 'the women of that time had two husbands' were certainly there, even though the rest is uncertain.<sup>7</sup> It is generally accepted that the abuse referred to was polyandry. W. von Soden suggested that the high taxes on marriage at that time prevented the women from formally divorcing, so in practice they lived with another man as divorcees.<sup>8</sup> That is certainly one opinion, but an alternative is to understand the word *za.áš.da* not as 'abuse' but as 'debtor's bondage'. If so it means that because of debts the woman had fallen into the power of the second man, the creditor.<sup>9</sup> C. Wilcke thinks that the situation concerned a widow who remarried and thus had had two husbands in total.<sup>10</sup> In any event the rights of the woman were restricted. J.-J. Glassner thought of the abuse as being connected with the *ius primae noctis*, meaning that the woman had sexual intercourse with two men, one after the other. He also thought that adultery may have been permitted.<sup>11</sup>

We arrive on firmer ground when we see how the king of the Hittites expected his vassal to behave towards one of his daughters. Huqqana, an important tribal chieftain in a relatively small community without its own king in the mountains of Armenia, had been given a daughter of the Hittite king, so that the good ties between them would be more firmly established. That could have been the end of the matter, but subsequently there are some established rules in the relevant document about how Hittite women should be treated. These rules were to apply in this instance.<sup>12</sup>

This sister, whom I, My Majesty, have given to you in marriage, has many sisters from her own family and her clan. They belong to your clan (?) because you have received their sister. For the land of the Hittites it is an important rule that a brother does not take his sister or

---

7 B. R. Foster, *JESHO* 24 (1981) 233.

8 Hruška, 122, referring to W. von Soden in *Propyläen Weltgeschichte* I (1961) 546; J. Bauer, *Annäherungen* 1 (OBO 160/1) (1998) 557. Contra: H. Steible, *FAOS* 5/II (1982) 163.

9 As suggested by J. S. Cooper in *Sumerian and Akkadian royal inscriptions* I, 77 f., n. 9; R. Westbrook, *WZKM* 86 (1996) 455.

10 C. Wilcke, *Early Ancient Near Eastern law* (2003) 59 f. He translates the beginning as follows: 'If a woman has uttered a curse against a man they shall shut her mouth with a brick' (53 n. 142).

11 Glassner in: B. S. Lesko, *Women's earliest records* (1989) 79 f., with comments by others on p. 91–94; *CRRAI* 47/1 (2002) 161b.

12 V. Haas, *Das Reich Urartu* (1986) 24; G. Beckman, *Hittite diplomatic texts*. Second edition (1999) 31 f. § 25–28; J. Klinger, *TUAT NF* 2 (2005) 107–112 § 29–32; Y. Cohen, *Taboos and prohibitions in Hittite society* (2002) 79–93.

his cousin. It is not allowed. Whoever does that in Hattuša shall not remain alive but shall be put to death. Because your country is unaware of this: it is there a right that a brother can take his own sister or cousin. In Hattuša it is not allowed. If a sister of your wife or a relative of the sister of your wife (?) or a cousin comes to your house, give her something to eat and drink. Eat and drink, both of you and have pleasure. But you may not desire to take her ...

Somewhat further on in the text, the suspicious king makes further demands.

Be careful with a woman in (my) palace. Whatever sort of woman she is, whether a free woman or the slave of a lady, you may not approach her and you may not come near her. Be careful with her. ... If you see a woman in the palace, jump far over to the side and give her plenty of room to pass ...

Then a nasty example from history is quoted.

Who was Mariya and why did he die? Did not the slave of a lady draw near, and did he not look at her? But the father of My Majesty saw it from his window and caught him and said, 'You there, why are you looking at her?' That was the reason he died. The man died because he only looked from afar. So be careful.

Yes, the Hittites were strict as regards incest and clauses § 189–196 in their law-book concern this specific subject.

## 12.2 Incest

For the Babylonians there were specific circumstances in which incest was prohibited.<sup>13</sup> The laws of Hammurabi (§ 157) say that if a mother has sex with her son after the death of his father both will be burned to death, the ultimate punishment for Babylonians. The clause § 154, by contrast, says that if a father has sex with his daughter he will be banished from the city. G. Cardascia has noted how much more leniently the father was punished.<sup>14</sup> He also points out that chapters of comparable laws in the Bible (Leviticus 18 and 20) do not deal at all with a relationship between a father and his daughter, suggesting that people originally took a rather relaxed attitude to that situation. In the same vein the ancient laws deal equally laxly with intercourse between an uncle and a niece, a father-in-law

---

<sup>13</sup> See in general S. Lafont, *Femmes* (1999) 173–236.

<sup>14</sup> G. Cardascia, 'Égalité et inégalité des sexes en matière d'atteinte aux moeurs dans le Proche-Orient ancien', *WdO* 11 (1980) 7–16; reprinted in *Hommage à Guillaume Cardascia* (Méditerranées no. 3) (1995) 197–207; see also *RIA* V/1–2 (1976) 144–150, 'Inzest'.

and a daughter-in-law, and a stepfather and a stepdaughter. In certain circumstances a son could marry the wife of his dead father if she was his stepmother, but he could not marry his father's first wife, his biological mother (Hammurabi § 158; Middle Assyrian laws § 46). While sexual relations between an aunt and her nephew were not allowed, there appeared to be no problem in allowing them between an uncle and his niece, showing that a man but not a woman could instigate the affair. This opens a new vista. It seems to reinforce the prejudiced attitude that a woman should always be passive. From this we can deduce that a man was allowed to have a relationship with a woman of lower standing, a younger woman or a second wife.

Ill omens (*prodigia*) that presaged the fall of Babylon also take up this theme, such as when

a man approached his mother, or his sister, or his daughter, or his mother-in-law, or a bull approached an ass, or a fox approached a dog, or a dog approached a pig.<sup>15</sup>

These omens do not constitute morally reprehensible actions but are clearly to be regarded as unnatural occurrences.

Omens about human behaviour include references to incest, although unfortunately the texts are badly broken.

[If a man goes to his mother-in-law], he shall not [be] in a good mood.  
 [If a man goes to the ... of his w]ife, his god and his goddess [...] shall not forgive him.  
 If a man goes to the daughter of his brother, wherever he goes there will be shortages.<sup>16</sup>

In this case it was possible to take steps to avoid the consequence of one's action:

So that the (calamity) does not reach him, say 'God, my strength!' [and the (calamity) shall not approach him].  
 If a man goes to the daughter of the daughter of his brother, he shall lay his hand on what is not his; he shall profit; his family will [be rich].<sup>17</sup>

In the last instance the thought is that he has violated another man's property but he was rewarded for doing so. We note that these omens refer to relationships with distant family members and the predictions were not always scathing; some

<sup>15</sup> CT 29 48:14 f., following A. Guinan in: L. Ciralo, J. Seidel, *Magic and divination in the Ancient World* (2002) 36, 38.

<sup>16</sup> KAL 1 107 no. 35 rev. 5, 7, 11.

<sup>17</sup> CT 39 43:3-4 and 6, with duplicate KAL 1 no. 35 rev. 11-14 (from *Šumma ālu* Tablet 103); A. K. Guinan in: W. W. Hallo, *The Context of Scripture* I (1997) 425, nos. 47, 48.

are even favourable. A general remark: when the text says that the man ‘goes’ to the woman this is possibly just what it means to say, because in Akkadian a different verb, ‘to approach’, is used to indicate full sexual contact.

Liver omens sometimes suggest some irregularity in sexual relationships. One possibility was that the gall bladder could be ‘biting’ the liver, and that would be a sign that ‘a man has gone to his own daughter’ or ‘he has gone to his mother’. It is possible that the connection was made because of the assonance of the verb ‘to bite’ (*našāku*) with ‘to kiss’ (*našāqu*). Normally omens were concerned with what would happen in the future, but these relate an event that has already happened. Intercourse with animals or corpses is also mentioned, but this is outside our subject. It is thought that the liver inspection had to confirm an already existing suspicion.<sup>18</sup> Intercourse with a mother or sister could be the cause of symptoms of illness. The diagnosis of an illness in the medical textbook makes it a punishment ascribed to the ‘hand’ of a god.

If his loins are ‘struck’, (it is) the Hand of Šulak; he has approached his sister; (or) the Hand of (the moon god) Sîn; it shall last a long time and he shall die.<sup>19</sup>

Dreams could be interpreted as predictions and those in which someone approached gods, priestesses, the queen, various men, a corpse, and wild animals were exhaustively discussed. We have only four fragments on this subject and it may be coincidental that close relatives hardly feature in them.<sup>20</sup> In another fragment anxious dreams were discussed and there we read about approaching ‘my mother who brought me into the world, my mother-in-law, my sister’.<sup>21</sup> Recently a text was published with this group of predictions:

If he (in his dream) approaches a woman in the house of a god, then this man shall remain living to a great old age. If he approaches his mother, then he shall go in and out of the gate in good health. If he approaches his sister, then he shall become rich and important.<sup>22</sup>

**18** *Emar VI/4* 285 no. 669:60 f., following J.-M. Durand, L. Marti, *Journal asiatique* 292 (2004) 22 f.; see p. 5 for establishing proof of incest in the past. A new example is a man who has had intercourse with ‘his mother who (is still) bearing children (*wālittu*)’, CUSAS 18 (2013) 300 §11 line 6. See for this text M. Stol, ‘Masturbation in Babylonia’, in *Le Journal des Médecines cunéiformes* 24 (2014) 39 f.

**19** TDP 108 iv 17 (where ‘the Hand of Sîn’ is inadvertently omitted); TDP 58 rev. 25 concerns the mother, but the tablet is broken and the symptoms are unknown.

**20** A. L. Oppenheim, *The interpretation of dreams in the Ancient Near East* (1956) 333 f.; Iraq 31 (1969) 156 f., who failed to realise that UM means *teḥû*, ‘to approach erotically’.

**21** S. A. L. Butler, *Mesopotamian concepts of dreams and dream rituals* (1998) 64:85 f.

**22** E. Leichty, *Studies B. R. Foster* (2010) 226 rev. 14–16.

After that the tablet is broken. It is surprising that the prospects are so favourable. Possibly this is because dreams came from another world, happy and without misgivings.

In primaeval times Phoenician, Hittite and Greek myths relate how incest occurred among the gods. One clay tablet of a creation myth is full of occasions of incest, in a world of shepherds and farmers.<sup>23</sup> People had observed that promiscuity occurred in animal herds, an observation developed in a myth about the shepherd god Dumuzi and his sister. As Dumuzi converses with his sister, intent on seducing her, he points out to her how the animals behaved. But his sister did not understand, and then the text breaks off.<sup>24</sup> Earlier, in the chapter on rape, we referred to Sumerian myths where gods take daughters by violence or by seduction, and that can also be seen as incest. The god Enlil became 'impure' because of this and was banished from the city. That was what happened to the guilty father in the laws of Hammurabi (§150) and banishment meant that one became a pariah.<sup>25</sup>

In the Arabic world marriage between two cousins is seen as ideal. The Patriarchs of the Bible also practised it. Isaac married his cousin Rebecca, and Jacob married two sisters, Leah and Rachel. On that occasion their father Laban is recorded as commenting, 'Since this is from the Lord, we can say nothing for or against it' (Genesis 24:50). In the Apocrypha we read an episode from the life of Tobit. He is supposed to have been in Mesopotamia in the eighth century BC and when he arrived in Media he was told by his father Raphael to marry Sarah, the daughter of his grandfather Raguel. Raphael tells him, 'I know that Raguel cannot withhold her from you or betroth her to another without incurring the death penalty according to the decree in the book of Moses' (Tobit 6:12). Even though Sarah was a blood relative of Tobit, the marriage does take place, and Raguel says to Tobit, 'Receive my daughter as your wedded wife in accordance with the law, the decree written in the book of Moses' (Tobit 7:13). In fact the law to which Sarah's father refers is not to be found in the laws of Moses. It seems that at that time endogamous marriage was part of the common law of the Hebrew tribes, and is now a strategy for Jews to survive in the diaspora.

From the evidence in archives of Babylonian families such marriages do not seem to have been popular, though they are found in the Neo-Babylonian period. No law was formulated, but the practice was seen as a method for families to

---

<sup>23</sup> W. G. Lambert, 'The theogony of Dunnu', *Babylonian creation myths* (2013) 387–395.

<sup>24</sup> Jacobsen, 24; S. N. Kramer, *JANES* 5 (1973) 248; B. Alster, *JCS* 27 (1975) 218f.; V. Haas, *Babylonischer Liebesgarten* (1999) 113.

<sup>25</sup> A. Gadotti, *JAOS* 129 (2009) 80; S. Lafont, *Femmes* (1999) 184–186.

keep their capital intact. In one case, presumably to ensure that the family wealth was preserved, a girl marries one uncle after another on the instigation of her widowed mother.<sup>26</sup> More information about this subject will be found in Chapter 14 when we consider levirate marriage. Although it has long been thought that in this late period marriages were concluded between brothers and sisters, this is incorrect. The idea arose because there was some confusion about different people having identical names.<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> C. Waerzeggers, 'Endogamy in Mesopotamia in the Neo-Babylonian period', in: *Festschrift Christopher Walker* (2002) 319–346.

<sup>27</sup> G. van Driel, *Phoenix* 31 (1985) 46; Waerzeggers, 320 f.

## 13 The widow

Wherever we find widows mentioned in an ancient Near Eastern text we must also think of orphans, children left with no father.<sup>1</sup> There are several well-known verses in the Hebrew Bible which refer to the widow as someone deserving divine protection.

The Lord will pull down the houses of the proud, but maintain the widow's boundary stones (Proverbs 15:25).

Sometimes the words for orphan and widow are set in poetic parallelism.

The Lord is his name, exult before him, a father to the fatherless, the widow's defender (Psalm 68:4b-5a, in Hebrew 5b-6a).<sup>2</sup>

The position of the widow was complex both from a psychological and a social point of view and these verses show that she could easily be threatened by people intent on starting legal proceedings to confiscate her land. The widow belonged to that group in society called in today's world 'vulnerable'.

The Babylonian kings were also aware of this danger and they took on themselves the role of the shepherd who would protect the widow and the fatherless. In their inscriptions they fondly draw attention to this role of theirs, so much so that it becomes a standard element of self-praise.<sup>3</sup> The Sumerian city ruler Urukagina (ca. 2320) had agreed with the god of the city not to hand widows and orphans over to the strong and powerful elements of society.<sup>4</sup> Gudea and Ur-Nammu provided them with similar protection.<sup>5</sup> We also see how the law with regard to widows and orphans was upheld in this way by the Old Babylonian kings Nur-Adad and Hammurabi, as well as the kings in Canaan described in traditional Ugaritic literature.<sup>6</sup> Justice for the widow and orphan was ensured by the gods, in particular by Utu/Šamaš, the sun god. As the god of justice he

---

1 Hebr. *yātôm*; Akkad. *ekūtu* (not only girls; AHw). See 'Waise', RIA XIV/7–8 (2016) 634 f.

2 Cf. also Exodus 22:21–24; see H. A. Hoffner, *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament I* (1971) 308 ff., art. *'almanā*.

3 F. C. Fensham, 'Widow, orphan, and the poor in Ancient Near Eastern legal and wisdom literature', JNES 21 (1962) 129–139; K. van der Toorn, *From her cradle to her grave* (1994) 134–139.

4 Ukg. 4 xii 23–28.

5 Gudea, Statue B vii 42f. (nu.siki, na.ma.kuš); cf. Cyl. B XVIII 6f. Ur-Nammu: laws, Prologue 162–165 (nu.siki, nu.mu.un.kuš); see C. Wilcke, *Festschrift J. Krecher* (2014) 533.

6 Nur-Adad inscr. 7 ii 55–6, in RIME 4 p. 148; Hammurabi, laws, Epilogue xi (= xxivb) 61f. Ugarit: the legends on Keret and Aqhat, KTU 1.16 vi 50; cf. 33.

protected the orphan, the abandoned child and the widow.<sup>7</sup> One rather difficult Sumerian hymn to the goddess Nanše, for which two differing translations have been published, describes how she organised her temple and how she made herself responsible for the widows, the orphans and the poor.<sup>8</sup> A Neo-Babylonian propaganda text, probably referring to King Nabonidus, describes how he would step in to correct injustice.

The rich take everything away from the poor. The governor and the patrician do not support the orphan and the widow in front of the judges. They appeal to the judges, but those do not deliver justice.<sup>9</sup>

A young woman could be described as an orphan if she had lost her husband, father, brother, or other supporting male family member. In a situation like this in the Neo-Babylonian period her mother could act as her representative. Indeed we see mothers and sometimes brothers arranging marriages for such a girl. Her paternal uncle, the brother of her deceased father, played no role at all. There is a theory that the *bit mār banī*, ‘the house of the citizen’, was a special ‘house’ providing protection to women who had been married but found themselves in reduced circumstances,<sup>10</sup> but the idea of such a women’s refuge as a place of safety does not fit in with what we know of that culture. G. van Driel studied the question and demonstrated from the texts that a woman in need could simply seek help at the house of a free citizen. This might have been an emergency solution to her problem, because it might have cost her her freedom. So sometimes women were forbidden to do this.<sup>11</sup>

Finding new accommodation was also a problem for widows.<sup>12</sup> The house of one Sumerian widow was bought by her brother-in-law and given to her, but after his death one of his sons could claim the house for himself. He would get his way as there were no witnesses to the arrangement.<sup>13</sup> In Old Assyrian and

**7** BMS 12:37 with W. R. Mayer, *Or. NS* 62 (1993) 317, 327; ‘Incantation to Utu’, 37 f., see B. Alster, *ASJ* 13 (1991) 44, with 82 (ki.gul.la ‘abandoned child’). Cf. the Nanše Hymn, 165–167, W. Heimpel, *JCS* 33 (1981) 92. God Marduk: T. Oshima, *Babylonian prayers to Marduk* (2011) 356:21.

**8** Heimpel; Th. Jacobsen, *The harps that once* (1987) 125–142.

**9** W. G. Lambert, ‘The King of Justice’, *Iraq* 27 (1965) 5 f., ii 4–6; B. R. Foster, *Before the Muses II* (1993) 763; H. Schaudig, *Die Inschriften Nabonids von Babylon* (2001) 581, 585.

**10** M. T. Roth, ‘Women in transition and the Bit mār banī’, *RA* 82 (1988) 131–138.

**11** G. van Driel, ‘An institutional remedy?’, in: M. Stol, S. P. Vleeming, *The care of the elderly in the Ancient Near East* (1998) 174–178.

**12** According to M. Civil’s interpretation, § 27–29 of the laws of Ur-Nammu discuss this issue; *CUSAS* 17 (2011) 248, with 263b. Radically different is C. Wilcke, *Festschrift J. Krecher* (2014) 545 f.

**13** M. Molina, *Studies G. Pettinato* (2004) 175 f.



Neo-Babylonian wills her accommodation was already arranged.<sup>14</sup> In the Old Assyrian period it was mostly the eldest son who had to look after his mother till the end.

Only I. is responsible for the burial of Puzur their mother, and for the expenses and the loans of Puzur their mother.<sup>15</sup>

The same happened in another family.

As long as she lives she shall dwell in the house of A., and if she becomes fragile (?) A. and her sons shall not chase her away.<sup>16</sup>

Because men were usually older than their wives when they married, marriages were shorter and widowhood was commonplace. We note that there is not even a word for ‘widower’ in Akkadian or in Hebrew. Widowhood was usually occasioned through the natural death of one’s husband but there were occasions when violence played a part, as presaged by omens from extispicy or astrology.

One man shall strike down (*rasābu*) another. People will fall and widows will be numerous. The enemy will inflict a defeat, (and) the land will be full of widows.<sup>17</sup>

Widows were recognised as a social category. Some lists known to have come from Mari have the names of 2500 women from the three provinces who had sworn an oath of allegiance to the king, on open ground outside the city or in a square. They were mostly denoted as the slave-girl of a man (probably this meant his wife), but some were described as widows or holy women.<sup>18</sup> These women would have lived independently. Men swore that same oath of allegiance and it is interesting that here women were required to do so. In Emar we sometimes encounter the phrase ‘She is a widow with the widows’, sometimes followed by ‘She is a divorced woman with the divorced women’.<sup>19</sup> This phrase either indi-

---

14 C. Michel in: J. G. Dercksen, *Anatolia and the Jazira during the Old Assyrian period* (2008) 225; M. T. Roth, JCS 43–45 (1991–93) 9a, 10b, 17, 23a, 26.

15 K. R. Veenhof in: *The care of the elderly in the Ancient Near East* (1998) 141–143.

16 Veenhof, 143f. = Donbaz, *Cuneiform texts from the Sadberk Hanim Museum* (1999) 107–109 no. 28.

17 F. Rochberg-Halton, *Aspects of Babylonian celestial divination* (1988) 209:7, 210 Q:4’; R. Labat, MDP 57 (1974) 137 ii 39f., with p. 154.

18 M. Bonechi, ‘Les serments de femmes à Mari’, in: S. Lafont, *Jurer et maudire* (1996) 97–104. Cf. L. Marti, RA 99 (2005) 111–122, ARM 23 236.

19 W. W. Hallo in S. Parpola, CRRAI 47/I (2002) 212 n. 72; D. Arnaud, *Emar VI/3* 16:26f., 216:11f.; D. Arnaud, *Semitica* 46 (1996) 9:6; *A history of Ancient Near Eastern law I* (2003) 671.

cates that these women could act independently, or refers to the destitute status of these women.<sup>20</sup>

In a lament by a dead king his widow's emotions are described pathetically.

Has my wife not become a widow? She passes her days in lamenting and mourning.<sup>21</sup>

Even more pathetic is a lament of a son for his dead father:

Your wife – her husband is no more – will now always be a widow. She just spins round you[r dead body] like a whirlwind, falls down (?) like a stormy gust. She used to treat you like her adopted child; now her spirit is confused; crippling dread seizes her, as if she was about to bear a child ... she groans like a cow ... and pours forth tears.<sup>22</sup>

### 13.1 Poor widows

According to a recent suggestion the Sumerian word *numunkuš*, 'widow' means literally 'she who has no rest'.<sup>23</sup> That a widow was seen as poor is a standard motif in Babylonian prayers.

The rich man offers a sheep as a sacrifice, the widow a cheap meal offering.<sup>24</sup>

This reminds us of the incident in the Gospels, where Jesus contrasted the large amounts offered to the temple treasury by the rich with 'the widow's mite', referring to 'a poor widow who dropped in two tiny coins, together worth a penny' (Mark 12:41–44). An Old Babylonian letter reporting on the harvest states that even in tragic circumstances the needs of widows were not neglected.

A lion has killed men among our brothers while they were guarding the field. We have brought in seven *kor* of their barley. We have given half a *kor* and two litres of barley to the widow of our brother (or 'widows of our brothers').<sup>25</sup>

<sup>20</sup> S. Démare-Lafont in: L. Marti, *La famille dans le Proche-Orient ancien* (2014) 401f. 'La veuve est soumise aux usages locaux (...) ce qui n'est certainement pas une position enviable.'

<sup>21</sup> 'Ur-Nammu's Death', 166f., in E. Flückiger-Hawker, *Urnamma of Ur in Sumerian literary tradition* (1999) 130.

<sup>22</sup> H. Vanstiphout, *Eduba. Schrijven en lezen in Sumer* (2004) 260.

<sup>23</sup> B. Alster, *Kaskal* 2 (2005) 92; for Akkadian and Sumerian etymologies see J.-M. Durand in G. del Olmo Lete, *Mythologie et religion des Sémites occidentaux I* (2008) 407 n. 81.

<sup>24</sup> E. Reiner, *Šurpu* (1958) 54, on I 10; CAD A/1 363b; T. Oshima, *Babylonian prayers to Marduk* (2011) 388:17f. The meal offering is named *mašhatu*.

<sup>25</sup> A. 904, cited in H. Klengel, *Landwirtschaft im Alten Orient* (1999) 343.

A Sumerian song tells how a widow and an orphan resorted to eating vegetation that was actually sheep fodder.<sup>26</sup> Animal fodder, specifically a plant identified as ‘grass pea’ or ‘vetch’, is also mentioned in a Sumerian proverb to describe a widow’s poverty.

Because I am a widow, grass pea drips down on me like rain the whole day.<sup>27</sup>

Still today the grass pea (*Lathyrus sativus*) is used to feed cattle. In times of famine human consumption can induce ‘lathyrism’, a disease of the nervous system.<sup>28</sup> A liver omen predicts that thirst could also be a problem, and widows would have to pray for help from Adad, the rain god.

The lonely widows will lift their hands to Adad for rain from heavens, but it will not rain.<sup>29</sup>

In the text known as ‘A Debate between the Hoe and the Plough’ the latter boasts:

I fill the storehouses of mankind:  
Even the orphans, widows and the destitute  
Take their reed baskets and glean my scattered grains.<sup>30</sup>

The myth of Enki and Ninḥursag speaks of a widow who spreads out malt on the roof of her house where birds peck at it and fly away (19–21). By contrast, the date palm boasts to the tamarisk in a literary debate that the ‘the orphan, the widow, and the poor fellow’ always have sweet dates in abundance.<sup>31</sup> A sick man in an incantation uses an unusual phrase to describe his complaints:

My flesh is like a dagger, it pricks like ... Its appearance is ‘smoked’ like a widow.

The meaning of this last simile remains obscure.<sup>32</sup>

One prediction in an omen about a widow’s son is something that would probably never occur:

---

**26** The plant *šakir*; M. Civil, *Studies Erica Reiner* (1987) 39:13f.; Y. Sefati, *Love songs in Sumerian literature* (1998) 262.

**27** B. Alster, *Kaskal* 2 (2005) 91–93.

**28** M. Stol, *BSA* II (1985) 132.

**29** A. R. George, *CUSAS* 18 (2013) 296:20–22.

**30** H. Vanstiphout, *Studies Å. W. Sjöberg* (2014) 230 f. (lines 48–51).

**31** C. Wilcke, *ZA* 79 (1989) 178, 183, line 70.

**32** *Studies L. de Meyer* (1994) 82:34.

The son of the widow shall seize the throne.<sup>33</sup>

Being ‘the son of a widow’ is a proverbial expression for being abandoned and left alone. In a Sumerian literary letter a man complains to the king,

My life hangs on a thread; please take my hand! I am a widow’s son, I have no one to take care of me.<sup>34</sup>

‘Son of a widow’ is a general term of abuse. It is used as such in an Assyrian letter to describe the enemy and can be compared to the way ‘son of a bitch’ or ‘bastard’ is used in English today.<sup>35</sup> From the same period a letter from the king shows his desire to care for the widows of fallen soldiers.

Perhaps there is a man who has enslaved a widow or a son or a daughter. Make enquiries and examine the case and set them free.<sup>36</sup>

It is often argued that both the word *almattu* in Akkadian and *’almanā*, its cognate in Hebrew, refer to such vulnerable and impoverished widows. They occur frequently and are usually translated simply as ‘widow’. According to modern scholarship they have a more precise connotation of ‘a poor widow’. But all widows did not have these problems and they would still be referred to as ‘the wife’ of her husband even after he had died.<sup>37</sup> Despite this trend in scholarship A. Tosato insists that the Hebrew word simply indicates the status of being a widow, ‘a woman whose husband has died’,<sup>38</sup> and that there is no question of her necessarily being bereaved without financial support.

In actual fact we seldom find evidence for widows in poverty. A Sumerian song speaks of widows and orphans who work at the harvest, but other women

33 CAD A/1 363b; SpbTU III 152 no. 91:21.

34 P. Michalowski, *The correspondence of the kings of Ur* (2011) 306:26 f.

35 SAA V 217 rev. 8. By contrast see K. Deller, *Or. NS 53* (1984) 74. An obscure man was named ‘the son of a fellow without characteristics, the son of a mother without family’; W. R. Mayer, *Or. NS 59* (1990) 17:24 f.

36 SAA I 21:5–11.

37 A. A. Tavares in: Durand, *La Femme* (1987) 155–162; D. I. Owen, *ZA 70* (1980) 174 n. 12.

38 A. Tosato, ‘Sul significato dei termini biblici ’almānā, ’almānūt (“vedova”, “vedovanza”)', *Bibbia e Oriente* 25 (1983) 193–214. Tosato shows that this idea was inspired by the Assyrian laws (A § 33). There a woman whose husband and father-in-law have died and who has no children is defined as a widow: *almattu šīt*, ‘that woman is a widow’. But ‘that woman may go wherever she wishes’ (p. 197 f., 212) is better. He follows the translation by E. Szlechter. Earlier Driver and Miles, *The Babylonian Laws* (1956) 357 n. 4, were critical of this interpretation.

did the same.<sup>39</sup> A list of food distributions from a temple names a widow who receives only twenty litres per month, and this could have been her means of support.<sup>40</sup> In a register from a Sumerian institution a widow with five children was allowed thirty litres of barley, but even that was not much.<sup>41</sup> The last name on the list of a brewer's personnel is 'Kurîtum, a widow, the wife of Sîn-ereš', and she is the only woman on the list.<sup>42</sup> A widow in Emar 'in this year of calamity' was compelled together with her children to sell ground to pay off a debt of forty-five shekels of silver, but later the children were allowed to buy the ground back for ninety shekels.<sup>43</sup> The terms of the will of another widow from Emar are interesting to read.

Since the death of my husband I have been poor (*muškēn*) and in debt. Not one of the brothers of my husband supports me (literally, 'honours me') or pays off my debts. But now the diviner, Ba'al-malik, supports me and has paid off my debts. I give him my daughter Batta in marriage and I give him my house and all my possessions ... If Ba'al-malik should leave my daughter, he shall have no right to what he has paid off nor to my possessions.

The two debts and the discharging of them were registered. Ba'al-malik was a powerful man in Emar.<sup>44</sup>

Two Neo-Assyrian letters are of interest.<sup>45</sup> The first includes a complaint from the guild (?) of sesame oil pressers about officials who force them into ruin on false pretences when an oil presser dies.

He writes out a false document about a debt ..., takes action against his house, and sells his widow.

Seven examples of this malpractice are given, and the letter ends with the call for better standards in the words of a standard expression in use since Hammurabi.

Do justice to those who were robbed (*ḥablūtu*) and the widows.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>39</sup> CT 58 21:11f. with W. H. Ph. Römer, *BiOr* 50 (1993) 170.

<sup>40</sup> B. Lafont, *TCTI* I 790 iv 10 with *RIA* IX/1–2 (1998) 154 § 7.

<sup>41</sup> C. Wilcke in: *The care of the elderly in the Ancient Near East* (1998) 42.

<sup>42</sup> *PBS* 8/2 172:13.

<sup>43</sup> D. Arnaud, *Aula Orientalis – Supplementa* 1 (1991) no. 65, with C. Zaccagnini, *Or. NS* 64 (1995) 107 no. 18.

<sup>44</sup> *Emar* VI/3 213 with *TUAT* NF 1 (2004) 155 f.; K. R. Veenhof in: *The care of the elderly in the Ancient Near East* (1998) 135 f.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. also K. Radner, 'Witwen', *Die neuassyrischen Privatrechtsurkunden* (1997) 161 f.

<sup>46</sup> *KAV* 197:27–37, 66 f., with J. N. Postgate, *Taxation and conscription in the Assyrian Empire* (1974) 363–367; F. M. Fales in: *Assyrien im Wandel der Zeiten* (1997) 37, 39 f.

The second letter concerns the treatment of war widows and orphans, in which Sargon II wrote that these widows should not be made slaves.<sup>47</sup>

Later (in Chapter 17) we shall look at the women who were robbed of their freedom, and we shall see that poor children could be handed over to a temple. Some ‘widows’ in the Neo-Babylonian period who belonged to the temple of Šamaš at Sippar as dependants (*širku*), sometimes also with their children, were treated in the same way. There they had to make textiles for the temple and they were forbidden to make contact with free citizens (*mār banī*).<sup>48</sup>

### 13.2 Arrangements made for widows in wills

Was anything ever arranged in wills for a widow? A will as we know it was not really necessary, since a man in his lifetime, in the presence of those concerned (*inter vivos*), would make her a gift, often with certain conditions attached. In Roman law this sort of inheritance agreement was called a *pactum successorium*, but there is no support for this practice in modern law. Often a man would appoint his wife as his executor, to act for him after his death until his sons had reached maturity. He could also bequeath a gift to his wife which would revert to his sons after her death. In Emar this gift was called the *kubuddû* and could consist of a few slaves, kitchen utensils, and sometimes a piece of ground.<sup>49</sup> We know of one such long list of household goods which ends with the warning ‘No-one may enter her bedroom’.<sup>50</sup> This gift could easily have come from her own dowry.<sup>51</sup> The arrangements made in a will from Ugarit are slightly different.<sup>52</sup>

From today onwards, in the presence of witnesses, Y. has spoken as follows.

‘I hereby give to P., my wife, everything that I possess (and) everything that P. has acquired with me: my cattle, my sheep, my asses, my slaves, my slave-girls, my bronze bowls, bronze cauldrons, bronze dishes, chest, the field of the son of H. in the R. area.

And of my two sons, Y. the elder and Y. the younger, whoever shall begin a lawsuit against P. and whoever shall disparage P., their mother, shall pay 500 shekels of silver to the king,

<sup>47</sup> SAA I 21 with commentary by F. M. Fales, *Cento lettere neo-assire I* (1983) 82.

<sup>48</sup> M. T. Roth, JCS 43–45 (1991–93) 24 f., ‘Widows supported by the temple’, with G. van Driel in: *The care of the elderly in the Ancient Near East* (1998) 182 f.; F. Joannès, Ktema 22 (1997) 124.

<sup>49</sup> J.-M. Durand, F. Joannès, NABU 1990/70. It cannot be shown that this gift is part of the woman’s dowry.

<sup>50</sup> CAD U/W 252b (c).

<sup>51</sup> G. Beckman in M. E. Chavalas, *Emar* (1996) 72.

<sup>52</sup> S. Lackenbacher, LAPO 20 (2002) 272 f. (RS 8.145); W.H. van Soldt in: S. Lafont, *Trois millénaires de formulaires juridiques* (2010) 113 f.

and he shall lay down his coat on the lock (?) and he shall go out through the door. And whomever of them P., their mother, shall esteem, to him she shall give a gift.’

The tablet ends with the names of five witnesses and the scribe.

Among other examples of donations was a man who gave his wife the house, a slave, a slave-girl, two grindstones, a kettle, two beds, and five chairs. The woman could later give these to whichever of her sons looks after her (lit. ‘fears her’) and contents her.<sup>53</sup> A man gave his wife a (perhaps ‘the’) house, a slave, three slave-girls, a cow, and ten sheep. He appears to sense his death approaching.

As long as she lives, they shall care for her. In the future she shall give it to her favourite son.

Who would look after her? This was clarified in a text dated to the same month, where this man gave both a slave and his wife together to his own wife ‘in sonship’. They had to care for her as long as she lived, and after that they would be ‘free before the sun god Šamaš’.<sup>54</sup> It has been suggested that this expression meant that they were bequeathed to his temple, but it is more likely to have been an expression meaning ‘as free as a bird’. When a man who was succumbing to a ‘serious illness’ made his will he bequeathed to his sons specific items to inherit and he also thought at that time of his daughter. To his wife he gave a gift (*nidittu*) and she had the task of managing his affairs.<sup>55</sup>

The Old Assyrian merchants made complicated wills. Precise instructions were given about what the wife, sons, and daughters would each receive: houses, slaves, gold and silver, and debt claims.

The house in the City (= Assur) is for my wife and she shall receive a share of what silver is available equal to what my sons receive. She is the ‘father and mother’ of the silver, her share. The house, the silver, what she leaves and everything that she has, is for Š. (= the eldest son).<sup>56</sup>

The laws speak of a gift (*nudunnû*) that a man could give (if he so wished) to his wife. It was meant as what used to be known as ‘the widow’s dower’, in French, *le douaire*, which she could put to good use if she were left on her own. It is mentioned in the Laws of Hammurabi.

<sup>53</sup> CT 8 34b = MHET II/1 117, with Westbrook, OBML, 119.

<sup>54</sup> BIN 7 190, 206 with M. Stol, *The care of the elderly in the Ancient Near East* (1998) 93 f.

<sup>55</sup> C. Wunsch, *Urkunden* (2003) 112 no. 34. She does not translate as ‘to manage his affairs’ (5), but as ‘über seinen Nachlaß zu entscheiden’.

<sup>56</sup> K. R. Veenhof in L. Marti, *La famille dans le Proche-Orient ancien* (2014) 348 f.

The wife shall take her dowry, and the gift (*nudunnû*) which her husband had given her and had recorded on a clay tablet, and she shall remain living in the house of her husband. As long as she lives she shall have the usufruct of it. She may not sell it. Her inheritance belongs to her sons (§ 171).

The Middle Assyrian laws show that this gift however still remained the property of her husband, and could even be used as collateral for his debts (§§ 27, 32; see Chapter 31).

In the Ur III period we see a widow and her daughter maintaining possession of a field. Her husband had been able to cultivate it and receive the produce from it as a remuneration for performing a service. They conveyed this right to another man for five shekels of silver, which has been estimated to be enough to live on for a year and a half.<sup>57</sup>

### 13.3 Powerful widows

We should not just associate widows with pathetic stories. Texts from Mesopotamia show that after the death of her husband a widow would carry on with the housekeeping and took the lead in her household until her sons reached maturity and could take over the task from her.<sup>58</sup> The Sumerian law-book of Ur-Nammu states: ‘If a man dies, his wife will act in the house like one heir’; possibly ‘like the first heir’ is meant.<sup>59</sup> Texts from as early as the Old Assyrian period refer to her by saying that ‘She is the father and the mother (*abat u ummat*)’. This was also the case later at Nuzi and Emar.<sup>60</sup> The record of a Sumerian lawsuit shows that a woman who won her case was not bashful, and her husband’s brother, a merchant, learned to keep his hands off the family property for which she was responsible.<sup>61</sup> Even her son was not given an automatic right of inheritance, unless she remarried.<sup>62</sup> Even in the unfriendly Middle Assyrian laws the widow

<sup>57</sup> NATN 258 with H. Waetzoldt, AOF 15 (1988) 33; P. Steinkeller, J. N. Postgate, *Third Millennium texts in Baghdad* (1992) 99 f.

<sup>58</sup> For rich and poor widows see Th. Kämmerer, ‘Zur sozialen Stellung der Frau in Emar und Ekalte als Witwe und Waise’, UF 26 (1994) 169–208.

<sup>59</sup> M. Civil, CUSAS 17 (2011) 252 §E4. C. Wilcke, *Festschrift J. Krecher* (2014) 569: ‘wie (zu) ein(em) Erbsohn gemacht werden’.

<sup>60</sup> C. Michel, RA 94 (2000) 1–10; K. R. Veenhof in R. Westbrook, *A history of Ancient Near Eastern law I* (2003) 459.

<sup>61</sup> D. I. Owen, ‘Widow’s rights in Ur III Sumer’, ZA 70 (1980) 170–184; B. Lafont in F. Joannès, *Rendre la justice en Mésopotamie* (2000) 49–51 no. 10; TUAT NF 1 (2004) 5 f.

<sup>62</sup> E. Sollberger, *Studies S. N. Kramer* (1976) 440 f. no. 5.



had a high status.<sup>63</sup> Among the details in the lists of families deported to Assyria we find some with a widow as the head.<sup>64</sup> Nuzi texts show that ‘fatherhood’ (*abbūtu*) could be transferred by will to widows until the next generation came of age. One father even stipulated,

If my sons do not listen to S. and do not respect her, they will be fettered, they will have the mark of the slave applied and they will be thrown into prison and locked up. S. may not give anything to a strange man. If S. remarries, she must ‘cut off her hem’ and leave.<sup>65</sup>

In the interim she was responsible for keeping the family property together and managing it, including fields, houses, personal possessions, and all the business affairs.<sup>66</sup> That was not an easy task. The man could set out in his will what precisely his wife should do, but the Nuzi archives show that people could become impoverished and the woman would then have to take unusual steps. It seems that in this society a widow still had to have a protector or acquire one, or she had to dispose of her own money.<sup>67</sup>

In Emar an elderly head of the family could nominate his wife, who would shortly become his widow, as the ‘father and mother of the house’.

I hereby declare that the daughter of Y., my wife, is the father and mother of my house. My three sons shall maintain their mother, the daughter of Y. Any of the three sons who does not maintain his mother, the daughter of Y., shall lose his inheritance. She shall strike him on the cheek. She shall throw him out on the street.<sup>68</sup>

We also see that both the wife and the daughter of a man can be designated ‘father and mother of the house’.<sup>69</sup> In a will from Emar a father named his daughter, U., ‘woman and man’,<sup>70</sup> meaning that she would have full authority after his death. We would have expected to see his wife fulfilling this role, but perhaps she had

---

**63** C. Saporetti, *The status of women in the Middle Assyrian period* (1979) 18 f.

**64** VAS 21 6 with H. Freydank, ‘Zur Lage der deportierten Hurriter in Assyrien’, AOF 7 (1980) 89–117.

**65** HSS 19 7 with TUAT NF 1 (2004) 62 f., a will which continues by specifying what must happen for the daughter after the death of her mother, and stating that two sons living abroad would be disinherited.

**66** E. Cassin, ‘Pouvoirs de la femme et structures familiales’, RA 63 (1969) 121–148.

**67** M. A. Morrison, SCCNH 4 (1993) 120–122 (‘Women in the Eastern Archives’), cf. 30 f., 36, 55 f.

**68** Iraq 54 (1992) 103 no. 6.

**69** A. Tsukimoto, ASJ 13 (1991) 285 no. 23:6 f., with commentary. For this text see Th. Kämmerer, UF 26 (1994) 185–187.

**70** For these and more variants of ‘father and mother’, see G. Beckman, *Texts from the vicinity of Emar* (1996) 40, on RE 23: the terminology is perhaps dependent on their age.

died before him. The ‘three sons’ seem really to have been the grandsons of the testator. The tasks of U., the daughter, were detailed.

She shall call on my gods and dead (spirits). As for my three sons, let A., the eldest son, and D. and B. maintain their mother U. Any of my three sons who does not maintain his mother shall not receive his inheritance. As long as their mother lives no inheritance can be claimed. If anyone claims an inheritance he shall not receive an inheritance. They shall pay him sixty shekels, the bride-price for a wife, and he can go wherever he wishes. As soon as their mother dies then my three sons can come in and they can divide equally my house, fields, personal possessions, and anything I have ... And they shall build a house for each other and acquire a wife for each other.<sup>71</sup>

A Neo-Babylonian widow could find herself in a tricky position. One married couple bought a large house in Borsippa, which was paid for with the dowry and some money belonging to the husband. They also borrowed money from a well-known moneylender Iddin-Marduk (at the usual rate of 20 %). Probably because the husband sensed an early death approaching, the couple adopted A. as their son and married him to their only daughter. But when the man died his wife’s brother demanded to have the dowry. The judges decreed that the woman could have her dowry returned, and they assented to the amount of the dowry of her daughter, but the moneylender would have to be repaid. Legally speaking he was the one who had first claim on that money, and it was in his archive that this text recording the judges’ decision was found. The house would surely have to be sold to pay for all this. The woman, her father, and brother all have West Semitic names and it is supposed that they were foreigners. There it would have been the custom for only brothers to have the right to inherit, but that was not the case in Babylonia.<sup>72</sup>

Sons had a responsibility to maintain their mother if she became a widow and husbands would state this explicitly in their wills. We find it expressed also in the Middle Assyrian laws.

§ 46a. If a woman, whose husband dies, does not leave her house when her husband dies, if her husband has not set down anything in writing for her, then she shall live in the house of her sons, if she wishes. The sons of her husband shall feed her. They shall arrange food and drink for her as if she were a daughter-in-law/bride (*kallatu*) whom they loved.

71 J. Huehnergard, RA 77 (1983) 13 f. no. 1, with p. 26 f.; Kämmerer, UF 26, 192–194.

72 Nabn. 356 with G. van Driel, Phoenix 31 (1985) 38 f.; JEOL 29 (1985–86) 56; C. Wunsch, *Iddin-Marduk* (1993) no. 167; F. Joannès, *Rendre la justice en Mésopotamie* (2000) 237–239.

Uniquely here the sons are required to love their mother as if she were their own young wife. This law is followed by one dealing with a 'later wife' who had no sons of her own when she became a widow.

Looking after elderly people by the younger generation is a well-known theme. From a book devoted to this theme we discover how people cared for widows and other old women.<sup>73</sup> In the Laws of Hammurabi we read that the widow

remains living in the house of her husband and has the usufruct of it; as long as she lives she may not sell anything; her legacy belongs to her sons (§ 171).

Three documented instances of maintenance provided for a widow exemplify what happened in the Old Babylonian period.

(1) Three sons make an annual gift to their mother of 750 litres of barley, 5 minas of wool, and 4 litres of lard. She was also given a slave-girl to serve her needs. After she died the inheritance was shared.<sup>74</sup>

(2) Three brothers give their mother a slave-girl

to maintain her, instead of fixed rations of food and wool (...). On the day that a husband shall marry her, the sons shall take the slave-girl.<sup>75</sup>

(3) A daughter gives her mother a slave-girl. As long as the mother lives the slave-girl will maintain her. That could mean that the slave-girl could be hired out. After the death of the mother, the slave-girl shall come back and the daughter

shall receive all that her mother had or would acquire.

This rather businesslike arrangement suggests that the daughter had been adopted by the mother with an eye to a comfortable old age.<sup>76</sup>

Older women were supported also by other family members. An unmarried man cared for his half-sister and her mother, his stepmother. He granted them the right to live in a house, with a pension of five minas of silver, and much more which is listed item by item in a complicated will.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>73</sup> M. Stol, S. P. Vleeming, *The care of the elderly in the Ancient Near East* (1998).

<sup>74</sup> TIM 4 27 with Stol, *The care of the elderly*, 72.

<sup>75</sup> UET 5 95 with Westbrook, OBML, 133.

<sup>76</sup> UCP 10 105 with Stol, 73, 79.

<sup>77</sup> C. Wilcke, ZA 66 (1976) 204–208, with K. R. Veenhof in *The care of the elderly*, 139 f.

## 13.4 Remarrying

We have seen earlier that men died younger than their wives. There must therefore have been many women who became widows. This gave them the important opportunity to marry again, and marry they did.<sup>78</sup> A Sumerian proverb says:

After the death of her husband a widow says, 'What a great number of widows there are! But a man to marry is not to be found'.<sup>79</sup>

When a widow remarried to someone outside the family, that man was called a 'stranger' in Sumerian.<sup>80</sup> We have already seen that in wills arrangements were made to allow for the fact that a widow might remarry. She would then lose all her rights and have to leave the family. That was what was meant by saying that she would have to lay down her clothes, a symbolic action which we discussed in Chapter 9 concerned with divorce.<sup>81</sup> A Sumerian text gives the verdict of the judges about what should happen to the house of a baker who had died and whose wife had married a 'stranger'. They decided that the house should be assigned to the baker's son.<sup>82</sup>

An Assyrian woman shows in her letters found in Old Assyrian Anatolia that she was very unhappy after she had lost her sister and her husband had become ill. The first letter is one she wrote to her parents.

My sister Š. is dead and now A. is sick too. I can take no more ... You are surely my father and lord. You are surely my mother ... If your letter does not come to me quickly, I shall die.

From a later letter, which her father wrote to her from Assur, it seems that in the meantime her husband A. had died and that she had married a local man, which had cost her father a significant expense.

When I gave you to your husband A., I spent five minas of silver. But after your husband A. died, an Anatolian married you and again [I gave five] minas of silver. I and my sons are not important in your eyes. If we had been, then I would have honoured you as a daughter. Since I set out for the City, I have suffered losses, but you did not concern yourself about that.<sup>83</sup>

**78** C. Wilcke, 'Anhang: Die Wiederverheiratung von Witwen', in: 'Familiengründung', 303–313; M. T. Roth, 'The Neo-Babylonian widow', JCS 43–45 (1991–93) 1–26, esp. 4f.

**79** B. Alster, *Proverbs of Ancient Sumer* (1997) 305, 2NT-731.

**80** Wilcke in *The care of the elderly*, 48.

**81** K. van der Toorn, ZA 84 (1994) 51f.

**82** *Studies J. C. Greenfield* (1995) 613f. The same text is in *Studies S. N. Kramer* (1976) 440f.

**83** G. Kryszat, 'Eine Frau mit Namen Zizizi', AOF 34 (2007) 210–218. The second letter is CMK no. 355.

Whatever the circumstances were, this widow had clearly the right to marry again on her own initiative, even though her father begrudged the expense involved.

There are marriage agreements which were concluded by a widow, although that fact is not explicitly stated. In the Old Assyrian period a woman independently decides to marry without making any reference to her father. It is stated that her husband, called ‘the son of NN’, may not marry any second wife. In the event of divorce they would have equal responsibility for a payment of twenty shekels of silver. Then follows the statement that ‘K., the son of A., acted on her behalf’. Evidently he was representing the woman for the purposes of the contract. Impressed on the envelope are the seals of of the new husband and the man, K., as the two witnesses. In Chapter 9 about divorce we described a marriage of a widow from the same region, where the parties had to pay a high fine of five minas if they divorced.<sup>84</sup>

Contracts from Emar refer to remarriage as ‘following a stranger (*zarru*)’ and stipulate that the woman must place her clothing on a chair and leave.<sup>85</sup> Men could record in their wills what their wives could do after their death.<sup>86</sup> They could only remarry if they relinquished all right to possession. A Middle Assyrian contract simply says,

She may not live with a (new) husband. If she does live with a (new) husband, she shall leave empty-handed.

Texts from Nuzi have two forms of words to describe the consequences of remarriage. The first form is,

If she goes to live with a (new) husband, they shall strip the clothes from her and let her go out naked.

One text states that the sons were allowed to do this to her. West Semitic texts often speak of the woman ‘laying down’ her clothes on a seat. The second form involves a special phrase which literally means ‘to choose the hem’:

If she goes out to live together in marriage, she shall ‘choose the hem’ (*qanna nasāqu*) and go out.

---

**84** CCT 5 36, AKT I 76 with C. Michel in: F. Briquel-Chatonnet, *Femmes* (2009) 255 f.

**85** Others translate ‘to follow a criminal’, reading *sarrāru*, not *zāru*. See E.J. Pentiuć, *West-Semitic vocabulary in the Akkadian texts from Emar* (2001) 161 f. (he opts for ‘rival, spouse other than the first one’).

**86** The material from Assyria and Nuzi was collected by C. Wilcke, ZA 66 (1976) 216–218.

This phrase is presumably related to what we saw in Chapter 3 about marriage gifts, where a woman placed her own money in the hem of her clothing.<sup>87</sup> These arrangements were made in case the woman remarried in the future, and one text from Nuzi shows that this really happened.<sup>88</sup>

A declaration which K., the daughter of H., made before these witnesses:

‘In the past A. married me off and received forty shekels of silver from my husband. But now A. and my husband are dead, and as far as I am concerned, A., the son of H. (her brother), took me in from the street and treated me like a sister. He shall marry me off and receive ten shekels of silver from my (future) husband, as his compensation (?).’

Whoever of them shall break this agreement, shall pay a mina of gold.

Tablet written by the entrance to the great gate of Nuzi.

The woman had probably been adopted by A. with the intention of marrying her off. Her father and her brother may have handed her over for this. The brother is now helping her. The woman’s declaration would indicate that she was alone (a meaning to be inferred from taking her ‘from the street’) and agreed to this arrangement. The reason for the low amount of compensation might be that the woman was seen as second-hand, or that she had had no children.

A unique stipulation regarding remarriage designed to protect the honour of the family says,

If a man should sleep with her at the door (= on the street), or should sleep with her in the house of G. (= the deceased husband), then the sons of G. shall kill her.<sup>89</sup>

### 13.5 Cohabiting

According to the law-books it was fairly easy for a widow to cohabit. We find in the Middle Assyrian law-book:

§ 34. If a man has taken a widow, but no binding agreement has been made, and she has lived for two years in his house, then she is his wife. She shall not leave.

The law-books are strict in defining what is meant by a wife. According to the laws of Ešnunna (§ 27) cohabiting, even if it lasts only for one year, still does not

<sup>87</sup> C. Wilcke and others think that the hem is ‘bitten off’ (*našāku*). We prefer to read here with M. Malul and N. Pfeiffer the verb *nasāqu*, ‘to choose’; see SCCNH 18 (2009) 406; contrast C. Wilcke, ‘Familiengründung’, 306–309; S. Lafont, *Hommage à Romuald Szymankiewicz* (1998) 546–548.

<sup>88</sup> AASOR 16 54 with K. Dosch, SCCNH 1 (1981) 175; B. Eichler, *Studies J. J. Finkelstein* (1977) 51.

<sup>89</sup> HSS 19 3 (*nāku*, ‘to sleep with’); N. Pfeiffer, SCCNH 18 (2009) 405 n. 378.

give the woman the status of a wife. But the Middle Assyrian law § 34 deals with a special case of a widow who is cohabiting. According to G. Cardascia, the law protects the woman by allowing her to have the status of a wife after two years of cohabitation, and this is reflected in his translation of the end of the clause: ‘... then she is a wife; she shall not have to leave’.<sup>90</sup> The final verb could however be translated as ‘she may not leave’, meaning she was not allowed to leave, and thereby limiting the freedom of a widow. This would then contrast with the freedom granted to the widow in § 33: ‘she is a widow (or: ‘that widow’), she may go wherever she wants’.

There was a different degree of a man’s relationship with a widow than with an ordinary wife, which can be clearly seen in §§ 9–11 of the Laws of Ur-Nammu. They fix different amounts for a man to pay on the occasion of a divorce. For divorcing an ordinary wife he had to pay sixty shekels of silver, but divorcing a widow would cost him only thirty shekels, and it would be nothing at all ‘if he had lain in a widow’s bosom without any contractual agreement’. That practice we describe as concubinage. That a widow should receive less in a divorce settlement than an ordinary wife was also decreed in the Mishnah. There the payment for a virgin was 200 zuz, but for a widow 100 zuz (Keth. I, 2). If there had been any actuarial calculation behind this it would have been based on the fact an ordinary wife would have been married as a virgin and therefore would have been younger than a widow on the occasion of her divorce, so she would need more money because of her longer life expectancy.<sup>91</sup> It is more likely that a widow was seen as second-hand and worth less than a fresh young girl.

A relationship which took the form of concubinage is covered in the Middle Assyrian law-book.

§ 35. If a widow enters the house of a man, then all that she brings with her shall belong to her husband. And if a man enters the house of a woman, then all that he brings with him shall belong to the woman.

Law-books also concern themselves with what to do for the married woman whose husband has been absent for a long period and may never return, such as a man who had been taken as a prisoner-of-war. These cases seem to be exercises in subtle legal thought and ones which we will pass by.<sup>92</sup>

---

<sup>90</sup> G. R. Driver, J. C. Miles, *The Assyrian Laws* (1936) 217: ‘she has a legal right to remain in his house and cannot be ejected at will as a mere concubine.’

<sup>91</sup> H. Petschow, ZSS 85 (1968) 7.

<sup>92</sup> G. Cardascia, *Les lois assyriennes* (1969) 186–191.

### 13.6 Widows with children

Where could a widow with small children turn for help? Remarrying seemed to be the best option, and such marriages sometimes feature in contracts. However it is never stated explicitly that she was a widow. On the envelope of an Old Babylonian clay tablet there is a description of its contents, ‘The tablet of the marriage of D. and S.’, and both partners have rolled out their seals over the envelope.<sup>93</sup> The text itself states that the man was marrying a woman with three children. By so doing he was adopting the children as his own. The summary on the envelope shows that it was primarily a document for the negotiation of a marriage and not for an adoption. If the man were later to break the agreement, he would have to pay twenty shekels of silver. If the woman and children broke the agreement, they would be sold as slaves. There is no mention of a bride-price and it looks as if the poor woman had seen this marriage as her only way out of a difficult situation. Her two brothers are witnesses, which could mean that her family were reconciled to it. The third child had a very meaningful name, ‘Where is her father?’. Evidently she was given this name because she was born after her father had died. Similar names reoccur, such as ‘I do not know my father’. Marriages of widows with children under these conditions happened occasionally.<sup>94</sup> In another marriage a man paid ten shekels of silver and only the rights of the woman and her children were established. It must have been an agreement to put them both on an equal footing.<sup>95</sup>

An Old Babylonian agreement concerned a woman who already had a son by a man named P., and with this son ‘she entered the house of M.’. So she was a widow who had begun to cohabit. When subsequently she was ‘seized by the seizure of a god’, meaning that she had become seriously ill, she applied to the judges, who ‘pronounced her departure’. That means that she had permission (or was obliged) to divorce. From the rest of the text it would appear that her own son had no right of inheritance in his new surroundings. The son himself said,

I am the son of P. and you are not my father.<sup>96</sup>

---

<sup>93</sup> E. C. Stone, *Nippur Neighborhoods* (1987) Plate 36 no. 1, with E. C. Stone, D. I. Owen, *Adoption in Old Babylonian Nippur* (1991) 49 no. 14. Here nothing is said about the envelope with the seal imprints. It was found in house H; D. Charpin, RA 84 (1990) 3.

<sup>94</sup> Stone and Owen, p. 5, adoption, ‘third group’; Westbrook, OBML, 63.

<sup>95</sup> YOS 15 73 with OBML, 138. In an edition (unsatisfactory) by Stone and Owen, 63 f. no. 27.

<sup>96</sup> BE 6/1 59 (VAB 5 232); cf. M. Stol, *Epilepsy in Babylonia* (1993) 143.



In Chapter 5 we saw that an exorcist in Emar married a widow with a son as his second wife, and that he disinherited all the children he had with her, nominating the son of his principal wife as his sole heir.

In the Neo-Babylonian period a man married a woman, possibly according to the wishes of his father, 'but she bore me no son or daughter'. This woman seemed already to have a child, the son of a man, whose name was given and who was from a respectable family. Was she a widow? The man then asked his father if he could adopt the son of this woman, with the result that he would inherit the temple income (benefices) of the family. The father refused and said that only a biological son could inherit the benefices and the remainder. The widow had wanted to secure the future of her child, but the father's family took precedence.<sup>97</sup>

A text from Emar outlines a very stark situation.<sup>98</sup> A man married a woman who had a daughter. She gave her daughter to her new husband, 'together with her'. It might have been the case that the daughter would only become the second wife on the death of her mother. She also had a son, who was adopted by the man, and joined in marriage to his own daughter, A. This couple had to maintain the parents and their children would be the heirs. If daughter A. were to die, then the father would arrange a new marriage for the son. Another son of the man was disinherited. The Bible certainly does not allow sexual intercourse between blood relatives.

You must not have intercourse with both a woman and her daughter, nor may you take her son's daughter or her daughter's daughter to have intercourse with them: they are blood relations and such conduct is lewdness (Leviticus 18:17; cf. Amos 2:7)

We know of two cases where the situation was reversed, where a widower (though no word for widower was used) with children remarried. The man who must have been a widower with two sons was married to a new wife, and she is mentioned as the first party of the new couple. A contract set out strict punishments if she were renounced by her husband (he would lose his house and sons) or if the sons did not recognise her status as their mother (they would be sold). Here it is the mother who appears to be laying down the conditions. What was the background for this affair?<sup>99</sup> In Old Babylonian Nippur a widower married a woman and gave his three sons to her 'as her heirs'. The sons would later divide their father's pos-

<sup>97</sup> CTMMA III 102 (previously Th. Pinches in *Hebraica* 3). Another similar case is M. J. Geller, *Studies J. C. Greenfield* (1995) 532–537.

<sup>98</sup> W. W. Hallo, 'Love and marriage in Ashtata', in: S. Parpola, *CRRAI* 47/I (2002) 203–216.

<sup>99</sup> YOS 14 344 with D. Charpin, *BiOr* 36 (1979) 191a; OBML, 78b.

sessions according to local rules (the eldest would receive more). If the woman ever denied that she was his wife, she would be sold as a slave. And if the contract was broken all the other parties involved were threatened with sanctions of fines and loss of wealth. The sons had to maintain their new mother with annual allowances of barley, wool and oil. She appears also to have had a right of inheritance, for she lost that if she disowned the boys as ‘her sons’.<sup>100</sup> One wonders about the whole situation. Were the sons already adults? Why was it necessary for her to adopt the sons? Was the woman a divorcée?

The law-books concern themselves with what to do in various foreseeable situations. Do the children still inherit if their father dies? A widow with small children who wanted to remarry had to obtain the permission of the judges, and they would have to assess the wealth of her first husband, something to be reserved for his own children later, as we find in the Laws of Hammurabi.

§ 177. If a widow whose children are still young should decide to enter another’s house, she will not enter without (the prior approval) of the judges. When she enters another’s house, the judges shall investigate the estate of her former husband, and they shall entrust the estate of her former husband to her later husband and to that woman, and they shall have them record a tablet (to make an inventory of the estate). They shall safeguard the estate and they shall raise the young children. They shall not sell the household goods. Any buyer who buys the household goods of the children of a widow shall forfeit his money and the property shall revert to its owner.

We even have a lawsuit where sons make accusations against their mother for the ‘household effects of the house of their father’.<sup>101</sup>

A curious situation is recorded in a Middle Assyrian law.

§ 28. If a woman, a widow, enters the house of a man and she brings her son born after his death (*hurdu*) with her, he grows up in the house of her marriage partner, but a document about his status as (his) son has not yet been written, then he shall not take an inheritance from the house of the one who raised him. He will not be responsible for the interest-bearing debts. He shall take his inheritance from the house of his natural father according to his portion.

Some widows had descendants who eventually developed into a large family bearing her name. The Babylonians had ancestral families from ca. 1200 BC onwards called after their forebear, and on two occasions they are traced back to a woman. She was probably a rich widow. In the line of descent originally

<sup>100</sup> BE 6/2 48 (VAB 5 6) with Stone and Owen, 51 f. no. 16; Westbrook, OBML, 63b, 115 f.

<sup>101</sup> BAP 100 (VAB 5 296).

the woman's name would have been preceded by the feminine determinative, but later we find the masculine determinative before what is clearly a woman's name.<sup>102</sup>

---

**102** C. Wunsch, 'Metronymika in Babylonien. Frauen als Ahnherrin der Familie', *Studies J. Sanmartín* (2006) 459–469.

## 14 Levirate marriage

If after the death of her husband a widow marries her husband's brother it is called a levirate marriage. According to old beliefs it was done only exceptionally and was considered to be incestuous.<sup>1</sup> In Sumerian law it was prohibited. King Ur-Nammu stipulates,

If a man marries the wife of his older brother (after he has died), he will be put to death. If a slave marries his mistress (after his owner has died), he will be put to death.<sup>2</sup>

We might be inclined to view this institution from the point of view of the widow or of the brother, but that is an incorrect standpoint. Rather we should put ourselves in the position of the father of the dead man.<sup>3</sup> As the head of the family it is his task to find a wife for his sons to raise up progeny. If that does not work for the first son because of a premature death, then a second attempt should be made with the second son. It is the interests of the family as a whole, not of individuals, which were considered paramount. The 'bride' (*kallatu*) does not just belong to the bridegroom but she is the bride of the head of the family or of the whole family. Levirate marriage saves the father from paying a second bride price for a second son. The woman will be moved freely from the one to the other.

The Hittites, the Hurrians (in Nuzi), the Assyrians, the Canaanites and the Israelites all practised levirate marriage. It is thought to have been an Indo-European institution introduced by the Hittites.<sup>4</sup> It is mentioned almost exclusively in law-books (Middle Assyrian Laws §§ 30, 33, 43; Hittite Laws § 193; Deuteronomy 25:5–10),<sup>5</sup> and seems to be restricted to the period between 1500 and 1000 BC. The stories of Tamar (Genesis 38) and Ruth in the Old Testament show that 'marriage with a brother-in-law' was an accepted practice. The widow involved is referred to as a *y<sup>e</sup>bāmā*, and a treatise in the Mishnah with that title deals with levirate marriage. The masculine cognate of the Hebrew word has now cropped up in Amorite in an Old Babylonian letter, about a woman who does not want to live with her husband any longer, and wishes to go with her children to the house of her brother-in-law (*bit ya-ba-mi-ša-ma*).<sup>6</sup> But whether the word there actually means 'brother-in-law' we dare not say.

---

1 S. Lafont, *Femmes* (1999) 177 f.

2 M. Civil, CUSAS 17 (2011) 252 §E5–6.

3 G. Cardascia, RHD 37 (1959) 13.

4 C. H. Gordon, *Studies O. Loretz* (1998) 322; *Studies M. C. Astour* (1997) 274.

5 A. Skaist, art. 'Levirat', RIA VI/7–8 (1983) 605–608; but not in the Old Assyrian period, see M. Ichisar, RA 76 (1982) 168–173.

6 OBTR 143:10 with S. Page, Iraq 30 (1968) 94 f.

The Old Testament law says that the woman may not belong to a ‘stranger’ (*zār*), meaning a person outside the family. The Hebrew cognate is found in cuneiform texts from Emar as *za-ya-ri* and possibly also *zarrari*. There a woman ‘follows a stranger’ after the death of her husband. She was allowed to do that, but in consequence she lost all her previous possessions, for property was intended to remain within the family. Perhaps levirate marriage was intended to stop family wealth draining away to a ‘stranger’.<sup>7</sup>

Ariḫalbu, a king of Ugarit ruled out any levirate marriage for his widow, saying that after his death none of his brothers should marry his widow and seize the throne.<sup>8</sup> That may have been an *ad hoc* arrangement.<sup>9</sup>

What happened if there were no *levir* to continue the family is illustrated by what happened to Tamar. Her husband Er had died and his brother Onan was assigned the task.

But Onan knew that the offspring would not count as his; so whenever he lay with his brother’s wife, he spilled his seed on the ground so as not to raise up offspring for his brother (Genesis 38:9).

Her father-in-law Judah took action and had sex with his daughter-in-law. Evidently this was allowed as there were no more possible spouses of her generation left within the family. In the Hittite laws (§ 193) there is an explicit provision for this, and a later manuscript adds ‘there is no offence’.

If a man has a wife, and the man dies, his brother shall take his widow as wife. (If the brother dies,) his father shall take her. When afterwards his father dies, his (i.e. the father’s) brother shall take the woman whom he had.

A case of ‘practical levirate’ is found in the archives of a family from the Neo-Babylonian period.<sup>10</sup> From these we can follow the history of Ea-iluta-bani and Ili-bani from the city of Borsippa between 687 and 487 BC. After the death of any marriage partner the surviving partner would regularly enter into a second marriage with a relative of the deceased partner: with a brother it happened twice,

<sup>7</sup> J. Huehnergard, CBQ 47 (1985) 428–434.

<sup>8</sup> PRU III 76 RS 16.144 with S. Lackenbacher, *Textes akkadiens d’Ugarit* (2002) 288 f.; TUAT NF 1 (2004) 114 f., ‘Leviratsehe in der Königsfamilie von Ugarit?’

<sup>9</sup> W. H. van Soldt in: S. Lafont, *Trois millénaires de formulaires juridiques* (2010) 114 n. 150.

<sup>10</sup> F. Joannès, ‘Un cas de remariage d’époque néo-babylonienne’, in Durand, *La Femme* (1987) 91–96 (cf. J. C. Greenfield, *ibidem*, 78); B. Still, *The social world of the Babylonian priest* (2016) 268. The first marriage is evident from TCL 12 85, the second from TuM NF 2/3 no. 1, the third from Joannès (see next note) 53, 256 L 4716, and TuM NF 2/3 no. 163.

with a sister once, and with a cousin twice.<sup>11</sup> So it happened four times within about thirty years, between 551 and 522. We cannot say that what lay behind these marriages was the custom of levirate, but in practice it is tantamount to it.<sup>12</sup> Endogamy is a better term, a subject we discussed at the end of Chapter 12 about incest. From the transfer of goods, such as the dowry, one rather gets the impression that the intention was to keep the wealth within the two families. In this way one man could accumulate a double dowry from the two sisters whom he had married. They all belonged to the Ili-bani family. Later, after he had died, his brother married his widow, so that the whole family wealth remained undivided in his hands, the only male survivor of his generation.

In another family the head of the family married a woman from the Ili-bani family, he died, and his brother married her in sequence. In the terms of her will<sup>13</sup> she divided her possessions (her dowry) between her own sons by her first husband and the sons of her second husband, who was now head of the family. His uncle also acquired a part of the private property thanks to this will. This giving of presents gave someone a certain freedom to make his own decisions, apart from the undivided family property in which he had a part. This favoured the nuclear family unit over the extended family.<sup>14</sup>

Since the discovery of these marriages, archives from Sippar have been reconstructed and show that within rich families male cousins married female cousins and nieces married uncles.<sup>15</sup>

There was also the practice of *sororate* marriage, where a widower married the sister of his deceased wife. When a young woman died her husband could enter into the same relationship with her younger sister. Cases of this are known from the Persian era. In the first instance the woman had already died before the wedding, and in the second instance her brother made an arrangement for the dowry. But because it was much smaller than that of the first wife ('in the house of my father there is nothing'), the man and his father complained against the brother.<sup>16</sup>

---

11 Noticed earlier by San Nicolò; see now Joannès, *Archives de Borsippa* (1989) 39–44 (the fifth generation); 52–54 (the fourth generation).

12 With San Nicolò, slightly different Joannès in Durand, *La Femme*, 93, 94 f. (3). Many girls are born which is not good.

13 TCL 13 174, Joannès in Durand, *La Femme*, 93; *Archives de Borsippa*, 41.

14 Joannès, 95 f.

15 C. Waerzeggers, 'Endogamy in Mesopotamia in the Neo-Babylonian period', *Festschrift Christopher Walker* (2002) 319–342.

16 C. Wunsch, AfO 42–43 (1995–96) 41 f. The second instance is TCL 12 32, with H. Petschow, ZSS 76 (1959) 80–82.

In Emar we find a sororate marriage which was regulated by contract. A holy woman who already had three daughters took the initiative to marry a man on equal terms in case of a divorce, and she gave her eldest daughter to the man as his (second) wife. If that girl were to die, the man would have to marry her second daughter.<sup>17</sup> In the Bible a sororate marriage with two sisters, both alive, was forbidden (Leviticus 18:18), and the initial infertility of Rachel, the sister of Leah, both of whom Jacob married (Genesis 29 f.), was seen as a punishment from God.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> *Emar* VI/3 no. 124 with TUAT NF 1 (2004) 148 f. For more complicated marriages in the same area involving sisters see AT 91 (Alalah) according to M. Yamada, NABU 2014/92, and W. W. Hallo, 'Love and marriage in Ashtata', CRRAI 47/1 (2002) 203–216 (Emar).

<sup>18</sup> L. Barberon, *Les religieuses et le culte de Marduk* (2012) 233 n. 1260; S. Greengus, *Laws in the Bible and in early Rabbinic collections* (2011) 28.

## 15 Women's rights of inheritance

According to common law, after a woman transferred to the family of her husband she no longer had any right to inherit from the family into which she had been born. The dowry she took away with her could perhaps have been seen as her share of that inheritance. The one difference was that a woman's dowry was seen as a voluntary gift which did not entail any rights. However, in the Old Babylonian period we know that when an inheritance was being shared out, a daughter could receive the same portion as her brothers. We assume that in those circumstances she must have been an unmarried daughter.<sup>1</sup> Once a couple adopted a woman as their daughter and they gave her the income from a temple (benefice) and a house, 'the share of the inheritance belonging to U., their son'. It seems that the son was no longer alive and we see how freely the couple acted.<sup>2</sup> In Old Assyrian wills shares of the wealth were divided equally between sons and daughters, men and women.<sup>3</sup> We see that often it is the single woman who first of all received attention. A merchant detailed what his wife, his eldest daughter (a priestess) and his sons would receive (his wife always kept the house). The widow could put together a similar will later for her sons and daughters.<sup>4</sup> The only known testament of a woman of that period is that of Ištar-lamassi. After her father and her two sons had died, she bequeathed the inheritance to her sole heir, their daughter in Assur, a priestess, with the expenses for funeral arrangements to be deducted.<sup>5</sup> In Emar an unmarried daughter could inherit.<sup>6</sup>

Often a daughter would have an occasional present from her father, but after her death that would have to be passed on to her male family members, her brothers or her sons. The best-known form of such a gift was the dowry which she took with her. These gifts were well-known in the Neo-Babylonian period, but at that time daughters did not inherit.<sup>7</sup> In this period testaments are rare. Normally

---

1 J. Klíma, p. 171 ff., in his article 'La position successorale de la fille dans la Babylonie ancienne', *Archiv Orientální* 18/3 (1950) 150–186; G. R. Driver and J. C. Miles, *The Babylonian Laws* I (1956) 337. Now UET 5 110, where brothers inherit and give to their sister a small part of their father's house and a garden, the amount of her share being about as the same as that of one brother; K. Butz, 'Zwei Urkunden aus dem altbabylonischen Ur, Frauenerbrecht betreffend', *Oriens Antiquus* 19 (1980) 29–35.

2 UET 5 96 with Butz, 33–35 and Westbrook, OBML, 160 n. 5.

3 C. Michel in K. R. Veenhof, *Houses and households in Ancient Mesopotamia* (1996) 293.

4 C. Michel in F. Briquel-Chatonnet, *Femmes* (2009) 35, 157 f. Lamassatum: cf. K. R. Veenhof, *Studies A. Skaist* (2012) 176, 179 f. Cf. T. K. Hertel, *Old Assyrian legal practices* (2013) 339 f.

5 K. R. Veenhof, *Studies M. Stol* (2008) 102, Text A (unpublished), *Studies Skaist*, 172, 176.

6 G. Beckman in M. E. Chavalas, *Emar* 1996) 73.

7 H. Petschow, *ZZS* 76 (1959) 86 n. 149.



the father made gifts to his family during his lifetime, and particularly when he was sick towards the end of his life and 'did not believe that he would recover'. In Old Assyrian we find the expression 'at the gate of death'. These gifts, attested in all periods, are known as *donationes mortis causa*, 'donations in anticipation of death'.<sup>8</sup> Women are often named among the beneficiaries: 'the wives, daughters, grandchildren, and adopted or minor sons of property-owning men, or the children of women whose dowries or inherited property might otherwise revert to the donor's families'.

It was always a problem to know what to do when there were only daughters in the family. Could they receive the inheritance?<sup>9</sup> Here the common-law right, that only men could inherit, had to be disregarded, and this is indeed what happened. Gudea, the city ruler, stated:

From the house that had no son I allowed his daughter to act in the capacity of its son (and heir).<sup>10</sup>

A law of Ur-Nammu reads as follows:

If a man should die while he has no son and heir, then his daughter, who has no husband, shall be his successor.<sup>11</sup>

R. Westbrook pointed out that these circumstances were exceptional. Gudea was writing about the protection of the weak, and Ur-Nammu about the unmarried daughter. In the Bible we find an unusual story illustrating this theme in Numbers 27:1–11. The five daughters of Zelophehad came before Moses and said:

Our father died in the wilderness. But he was not among the company of Korah which combined together against the Lord; he died for his own sin and left no sons. Is it right that, because he had no son, our father's name should disappear from his family? Give us our holding (<sup>h</sup>*huzzā*) on the same footing as our father's brothers (Numbers 27:3–4).

<sup>8</sup> I follow M. W. Stolper in *Studies K. R. Veenhof* (2001) 467 ff.

<sup>9</sup> R. Westbrook, in his book *Property and the family in Biblical law* (1991), discusses inheritance by women at the end of his chapter 'The dowry', see 157–164. – Many articles about this were written by Zafira Ben-Barak and now we have her book *Inheritance by daughters in Israel and the Ancient Near East. A social, legal and ideological revolution* (2006). Of particular interest in this connection is the second part, 'Inheritance by daughters in the Ancient Near East', p. 111–197, but she did not consult modern studies in French or German.

<sup>10</sup> Gudea Statue B vii 44–46 with RIME 3/1 (1997) 36.

<sup>11</sup> Ur-Nammu § B2, CUSAS 17 (2011) 249 with 268; C. Wilcke, *Festschrift J. Krecher* (2014) 552f. The next paragraph, fragmentary, speaks of the rights of her younger sister. – M. T. Roth, *Law collections* (1995) 26, assumed that these were laws of Lipit-Īstar.

Moses consulted God about the problem and received the answer that the following rule should now be applied:

'When a man dies leaving no son, his inherited property (*naḥ<sup>o</sup>lātō*) is to pass to his daughter' (Numbers 27:8).

It was of course considered important for the property of Zelophehad to remain within the tribe. Since he had fathered five daughters, it was felt that there was only a minimal chance that a boy would be born.

We now present a few Akkadian texts showing what actually happened in real life. A father in Syria made a will around 1200 BC and foresaw that sometimes only daughters would survive. He first of all indicated that his wife would be the 'father and mother of my house', and then continues:

And if my son A. should die and has no offspring, then I appoint my daughters as 'wife and husband'. They shall honour my gods and my ancestors. After my death they shall inherit and maintain their mother. And if my son remains alive, he shall marry off his sisters.<sup>12</sup>

Evidently women could finally inherit under the guise of being men.

From the Old Babylonian period we know of an unexpected division into two equal shares of a house between two women.<sup>13</sup> In another text from this period a woman died who had inherited a field and a house as her share of the property. Her daughter sold all of this to a man. It is unclear whether the property was passed down in this way through the female line.<sup>14</sup>

An unusual incident is the case of the princess from Aleppo who demanded from her brother a share in the house because it had been the property of her mother. She therefore had the right of inheritance. The king decided that the brother was allowed to choose first. He chose the upper floor with the roof. The house below was for her. This was a judgement of a true Solomon.<sup>15</sup>

There are a few cases where the daughter was named by the father as the heir without restrictive conditions.<sup>16</sup> In another instance it is stipulated that if her father were to have sons after her, they would inherit everything and the daughter would be given a field and a house.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>12</sup> D. Arnaud, *Semitica* 46 (1996) 12, ME 155 (from Tell Mumbaqaat).

<sup>13</sup> D. Charpin, *Archives familiales* (1980) 73 (TS 18).

<sup>14</sup> S. J. Lieberman, *RA* 76 (1982) 102 n. 21, MAH 15888.

<sup>15</sup> AT 7 with TUAT NF 1 (2004) 130 f.

<sup>16</sup> J. Paradise, 'A daughter and her father's property at Nuzi', *JCS* 32 (1980) 189–207, esp. 190 f.

<sup>17</sup> HSS 19 20 with Ben-Barak, *Inheritance by daughters in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (2006) 141–144.

Below we give the somewhat shortened version of a will from Nuzi. Here a man takes into account the possibility that he will die before his wife, and that his only daughter and no menfolk will administer his estate.<sup>18</sup>

The will of U. He has made a will for Š., his daughter.

These are the words of U.: I have adopted my daughter Š. as a son. Everything, my fields, my houses, my investments, my acquisitions, my slaves and one ..., in the city of A., in the city of U., in the district of T., and in the city of M., all of this, which is written down, in cities and villages, great and small (...), I have given to Š., my daughter, whom I have adopted as a son. These are the words of U.: My wife Ša. I have appointed as a father to my daughter Š. As long as Ša. shall live, Š. shall honour her and care for her. Whenever Ša. dies, Š. shall mourn her and bury her. If Š. is not obedient to Ša., then they shall shackle her, shave the mark of the slave on her head, put her in the workhouse and muzzle her. (...) If Ša., my wife, should go to live with a man, then her brothers shall kill her. My wife shall not give anything away to a strange man.

In the Old Babylonian period Akkadian was used as the written language in Elam, an important country in Western Iran and the direct neighbour of Babylonia to the east. Therefore we include in our survey texts from there. The right of inheritance of women in this country appears to have been unusual.<sup>19</sup> We see that a father gave a house and property to his daughter whilst deliberately excluding his sons. Possibly this property was passed down through the female line. In return he required her to make offerings for the dead, including himself.

As long as I live, she shall feed me. When I die she shall bring the offerings for the dead.<sup>20</sup>

In another text an Elamite woman named her husband as her heir.

You are my husband, you are my son, you are my heir.

He could finally inherit the gift which she herself had received from her father.<sup>21</sup> There is a powerful example where a father states that a field for his daughter must be passed down from daughter to daughter.<sup>22</sup> We know that in the royal house of Elam the succession passed to the descendants of the sister of the ruling sovereign.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>18</sup> E. R. Lacheman, *Sumer* 32 (1976) 116–119 no. 2, with Paradise, 191 n. 12, G. Dosch, *SCCNH* 2 (1987) 77 ff.

<sup>19</sup> Ben-Barak, 181–186. However, P. Koschaker, *ZA* 43 (1936) 231 f., senses nothing unusual.

<sup>20</sup> MDP 23 285.

<sup>21</sup> MDP 28 399.

<sup>22</sup> MDP 23 200:31.

<sup>23</sup> W. H. van Soldt, 'Matrilinearität. A. In Elam', *RIA* VII/7–8 (1990) 586–588. Cf. C. Wilcke, *CUSAS* 17 (2011) 36 f. In the royal family: F. Vallat in: J. M. Sasson, *CANES* 2 (1995) 1029 f.; H. Koch, *TUAT NF* 6 (2011) 282 f.

## 16 Women-trafficking under the guise of adoption

In previous chapters we have pointed to legal provisions which were designed to show the place a woman should hold in society. Often these seemed restrictive but they could also protect a woman's position. We will now investigate how people could use the law to make money by adopting and marrying poor girls, for in a number of contracts a girl is adopted 'as a daughter and a bride'. Her parents would receive a sum of money, sometimes explicitly called a bride-price. Many of these contracts come from Nuzi. This sort of adoption with a view to marriage is called in French *adoption matrimoniale*. It is significant that it had not always been decided beforehand whom precisely the woman would marry later on.

### 16.1 The Old Babylonian period

As early as the Old Babylonian period girls were attracted by the payment of a bride-price.<sup>1</sup> We will compare two texts in which the same person acquires brides for his sons.<sup>2</sup> In the first he and his wife chose (*hiāru*) a girl 'as a wife'. The girl was handed over by her brother and sister and four shekels of silver were paid. There is no mention of her parents, so possibly they had died. She was supposed to marry the son of the house as 'his chosen wife' (*hirtu*). There followed the usual strict clauses on divorce. We also have another text dated a few years later but this was differently formulated. Here this same man agrees with a mother and her son to let another girl 'enter his house as a bride and a daughter', and no future husband is mentioned. This time he paid them five shekels of silver as a bride-price. This text seems then to be a receipt for this payment. One might imagine that this girl was destined to marry the second son, who was not yet of marriageable age. However, we shall see later that in a text from Nuzi, Wullu adopted a girl for marriage to his son 'or to anybody else in the area'. So the same might apply to our second text where the man, like Wullu, could give her to somebody else. We note that no father is mentioned in either of these texts, and there is another 'receipt' about a girl who was adopted ('taken') as 'a bride and daughter' which

---

1 R. Westbrook, OBML, 38f., reviewed by R. Yaron, ZSS 109 (1992) 66. Westbrook says that the status of 'daughter-in-law' gives the adopter the right, to marry her off within his family; the status 'daughter' allows him to give her in marriage to an outsider. Yaron says that *kallatu* means a 'bride', not a 'daughter-in-law'. In all events the man has the right to give the woman to an outsider.

2 CT 8 7b (VAB 5 3; Ammi-ditana 11) and CT 33 34 (HG 6 1419; Ammi-ditana 14); M. Stol, *Studies A. Skaist* (2012) 139–142 (nos. 6, 10).

refers only to her mother. There the mother received three shekels of silver as a bride-price.<sup>3</sup> We also know of a nun (*nadītu*) who adopted a girl from both her parents for five shekels of silver with this condition attached,

She shall treat her well and give her to a husband.<sup>4</sup>

An Old Babylonian contract in which these terms do not occur directly nonetheless concerns an adoption with a view to marriage of a girl called Sabītum. She is described in the first line of the contract as ‘the daughter of Ibbatum’,<sup>5</sup> at first sight an apparently neutral remark, but significant if we assume that this is the way Ibbatum states that he has adopted her as his daughter. Then the text goes on to say,

He has given her in marriage (*ana aššūti*) to the house of Ilšu-ibni, his *ēmu*, for Warad-kubi, his son.

The word *ēmu* generally means ‘father-in-law’ but here he is clearly someone from the wider family of the future in-laws, giving *ēmu* a broader meaning than ‘father-in-law’. After a list of rudimentary utensils that Ibbatum had given to his daughter to take with her to the house of his *ēmu* we read,

Ten shekels of silver, her bride-price, was given to Ibbatum. He kissed [sic] and bound (it) into the hem of Sabītum, his daughter; it was given back (*tur*) to Warad-kubi.

The familiar stern clauses regarding divorce include throwing the woman into the river, and making the man pay twenty shekels of silver. And then we find an unusual clause,

Emuq-Adad, her father, guarantees her affairs (*awātu*).

I have assumed that this second father was her biological father. He was also the third witness.<sup>6</sup> We see then that her original family was also still involved with her

---

<sup>3</sup> L. Waterman, BDHP 72 (HG 6 1418); *Studies Skaist*, 139. The bride-price is 3, not 6 shekels.

<sup>4</sup> CT 47 40; *Studies Skaist* (2012) 142f.

<sup>5</sup> CT 48 50 with Westbrook, OBML, 122. The emendations by Finkelstein in his translation in ANET (1969) 544b are not necessary.

<sup>6</sup> Others are of the opinion that this ‘father’ is a kind of guardian. S. Dalley, Iraq 42 (1980) 54, adduces two more examples of such a second father. Her explanation is that the girl had left the parental home at a very young age and needed a ‘mediator’ *loco parentis*, the second father. Westbrook, OBML, 33b, accepts this. However, one comes across the head of the temple of Šamaš

affairs. Another example of this is the father *Sîn-abušu* acting as a witness to the adoption of his daughter *Iltani* as a sister.<sup>7</sup> Later texts, also from Nuzi, show that a family remained involved in the fate of a daughter who had been given over to someone else out of dire necessity.<sup>8</sup> Elsewhere and still with the same structure, we find the record of the adoption of a girl who was evidently not so poor (she was a priestess) and there again there are the strict clauses on divorce and the ‘second father’. In more texts it is stated that the (biological) father or mother ‘will be responsible for her obligations and misdoings’.<sup>9</sup>

In the Old Assyrian trade colony of *Kaniš* we see something similar among the native Anatolians. A married couple adopted a girl and their son married her. They were all to live together in the house. But if this was not suitable, then the boy’s parents would have to find accommodation elsewhere for the newly married couple.<sup>10</sup> Here there was no profit motive behind the adoption.

## 16.2 Nuzi

In the Nuzi texts this sort of adoption with a view to marriage occurs frequently, including the expression ‘adoption as a daughter’ (*mārtūtu*), which we will discuss first.<sup>11</sup>

### 16.2.1 Adoption as a daughter

A girl could simply be adopted as a daughter for a payment lower than a bride-price. The payment was made only after her marriage, or even on the birth of her first child. Of course there was always the possibility of marrying her off and all the texts mention the advantages of this. Whenever an adopted girl was married

---

as the ‘father’ of an adopted court sweeper in the temple (BM 96982, in Seth Richardson, *The collapse of a complex state II* [2000] 233); cf. M. Tanret, *The seal of the sanga* (2010) 66. Was he really a ‘guardian’? More in Chapter 3, note 155.

<sup>7</sup> In the marriage with two sisters, discussed in Chapter 5.

<sup>8</sup> K. Grosz, *SCCNH 2* (1987) 148–150.

<sup>9</sup> CT 48 55 and CT 48 56 rev. 1–2 (here the mother *ana piḫatiša u gulluliša izzaz*); *Studies Skaist*, 143, 159.

<sup>10</sup> AAA 1:8 with K. Jensen, *NABU 1997/75*; V. Donbaz, *NABU 1997/106*.

<sup>11</sup> K. Grosz, ‘On some aspects of the adoption of women at Nuzi’, *SCCNH 2* (1987) 131–152; G. Cardascia, ‘L’adoption matrimoniale à Babylone et à Nuzi’, *Revue historique de droit français et étranger* (= *RHD*) 37 (1959) 1–16.

off, the adoptive parent received the standard bride-price of forty shekels of silver. He made a profit, but of course that is not declared in these contracts.

Every case was different and the first example is of a brother who had brought up his sister and was now giving her to P. 'as a daughter' for forty shekels of silver, the usual full bride-price. If he (P.) managed to secure a marriage, he could keep fifteen shekels of the amount and the rest (twenty-five shekels) would go to the brother of the girl. She was old enough to marry and the text says that she must be married off to a 'citizen from the land of Arrapha'. Did this mean that she kept the status of a free woman? Some think that it was an attempt to marry off the girl within a higher social class, and that the mediation of P. was desired for this purpose.<sup>12</sup> P. is called the *ḥatānu*, 'father-in-law'.

Often it is clear that the parents of the girl were poor; in a number of cases we see that they are in a dependent position in relation to the adoptive 'parent'. The following stipulations are a stark example of this. The woman T., the daughter of an important man in the palace of Nuzi, adopted S. as her daughter.

If T. wishes, she can give her to a slave and if she wishes, give her to a ... (*taluḥlu*) and if T. also wishes, S. must work as a prostitute. And as long as T. lives, she must maintain her. Even if ten husbands of hers die, T. may marry her off to an eleventh man. If S. breaks this contract and leaves the house of T., she must pay two minas of gold.<sup>13</sup>

A well-known example is the case of the three contracts of Akkul-enni on behalf of his sisters.<sup>14</sup> The first contract says that sister B. was given by her brother Akkul-enni 'as a sister' to H. The second text consists of two parts. The first is a marriage contract between B. and the man H. under normal conditions, organised by Akkul-enni. In this one H. paid the first part of the bride-price, an ox and ten shekels of silver, and the girl received a dowry (*mulūgu*) from her brother. In the second part Akkul-enni gave the other sister K. as a 'daughter' to H. who had to find a husband for her later (she could not become a slave). After intercourse with B., H. had to pay twenty shekels of silver, either in silver or in goods to this value. We assume that this family had run into difficulties after the death of the father, which led to these forced marriages. The third text is a surprise. It is a declaration before the 'elders' about what had happened. Akkul-enni had given the same sister B. in marriage to the same man, H. and received the full bride-price, forty shekels of silver. B. declared that she had been agreeable to this. H. declared

<sup>12</sup> B. Lion, SCCNH 11 (2001) 40, 154–156 no. 39.

<sup>13</sup> AASOR 16 23 with TUAT NF 1 (2004) 60 f.

<sup>14</sup> HSS 5 69, 80, 25 with E. A. Speiser, *New Kirkuk documents relating to family laws* (= AASOR 10) (1930) 59–62; B. Lion, SCCNH 10 (1999) 321, 324.

that he had no claims on sister K. And we read that this happened ‘after being released from debt’. How this all developed is difficult to evaluate, but it seems that in any case everything had turned out well for the family. This was thanks to the intervention of the king with the general pardon from debt.

Once a woman married a man and brought her daughter with her, and the man adopted her as his ‘daughter’.<sup>15</sup> The woman was bringing with her to the marriage a daughter she herself had adopted and reared. Her husband was completely not involved in this and the wife had the right ‘to give the girl to a husband, wherever she thought fit’. If her husband wanted a divorce, the woman would ‘take the hand of her daughter and leave’. However if she wanted a divorce, then ‘he would not give her daughter to her’. He appears to have had authority over her adopted daughter. We could suppose that rearing the girl was a planned investment by the mother, or she may have been a kindly woman who adopted an orphan out of compassion.

All this material leads us to suppose that adopting ‘as a daughter’ concerned under-age girls. This was certain in the case of a baby ‘from the mother’s breast’ who was adopted ‘as a daughter’. The requirement was that the man would rear her and marry her off and ‘he would receive her silver’. That referred to the bride-price. In a second document about the same baby the biological father declared that his wife had breast-fed the child and that he had received payment from the new ‘father’ for her services as a wet-nurse.<sup>16</sup>

### 16.2.2 Adoption as a daughter and bride

The genuine *adoption matrimoniale* occurs when a girl is adopted ‘as a daughter and a bride’ (*mārtūtu u kallūtu*).<sup>17</sup> For this we find a few examples in the Old Babylonian period.<sup>18</sup> Perhaps it applied only to girls who were already of marriageable age. In these transactions, according to the Nuzi texts, the full bride-price was paid, and paid directly. Only in a few cases was this paid in instalments

<sup>15</sup> AASOR 16 55 with Grosz, 138. For a similar arrangement in an Old Babylonian text see VAS 18 114.

<sup>16</sup> D. Justel, NABU 2010/83 (on HSS 19 134 and 86).

<sup>17</sup> Cardascia, ‘L’adoption matrimoniale à Babylone et à Nuzi’ (see note 11); Westbrook, OBML, 38 f. C. Zaccagnini in: R. Westbrook, *A history of Ancient Near Eastern law I* (2003) 588 n. 73, sees no difference between this and the adoption as a sister.

<sup>18</sup> Westbrook, 38 f. More OB texts are S. D. Simmons, JCS 15 (1961) 56 no. 131 (= YOS 14 121); YBC 10873 in Riens de Boer, *Amorites in the early Old Babylonian period* (2014) 458 f., Appendix, no. 7.



or at a later date.<sup>19</sup> It is striking that here the woman was generally destined to marry a slave and the contracts sometimes stipulated that the woman should remain free. As soon as the slave died, she had to marry another one. The intention was in this way to have the woman as a constant worker. These adoptions were not entered into enthusiastically by parents or guardians. A woman at court adopted a girl as a daughter and bride.

She may give her wherever she wishes: be it in marriage to her son, be it to her second son, be it in a marriage in the gate [= city quarter?], (...) but not in marriage to a slave.<sup>20</sup>

The archive of a rich man named Wullu shows that he was someone who procured young girls. The brother of one of these girls, who denied that there had been an adoption, brought a lawsuit against him but was proved wrong. Wullu kept this text in his archive as proof of his innocence. Witnesses confirmed that the arrangement had been made between the girl's father, M., and Wullu.

In our presence M. (the father) gave the daughter A. as an adoptive daughter to Wullu. And in our presence M. said to Wullu: 'You may give my daughter A. in marriage to your son or anyone else in the area, and you can keep the silver'.

Wullu knew how to bring this poor family more and more into his clutches, and later the same brother would insult the son of Wullu by shouting at him 'You are a leper!', an insult that was not accepted and which brought more blame on the brother.<sup>21</sup>

The practice is clearly evident in a Neo-Assyrian text where a girl just 100 cm. (four and a half cubits) tall, was more or less sold by her father 'as a bride'. The editor of the text thought that she was probably intended to be the bride for his son.<sup>22</sup> This is only one of many more agreements of this type.<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> Grosz, 145 (three cases). Cardascia, 6f., stresses the importance of partial payments, an argument for his theory of an 'alternative levirate'.

<sup>20</sup> HSS 9 145 with E. Cassin, *L'adoption à Nuzi* (1938) 312ff.

<sup>21</sup> C. J. Gadd, RA 23 (1926) 151, 148 nos. 35, 28; B. Lion in: F. Joannès, *Rendre la justice en Mésopotamie* (2000) 148–150.

<sup>22</sup> CTN 2 219 with J. N. Postgate, Iraq 41 (1979) 96.

<sup>23</sup> K. Radner, 'Verkauf von Mädchen in die Ehe', 'Verkauf von Verwandten in die Ehe', *Die neoassyrischen Privatrechtsurkunden* (1997) 143f., 167f.

### 16.2.3 Adoption as a sister

The 'sistership contracts' from Nuzi are a special case.<sup>24</sup> In them men adopted women as 'sisters' and married them off. P. Koschaker and others used these texts as an argument for the existence of a fratriarchy and held that in this Hurrian society the brother appears to have been in charge. But now it has been shown that these contracts cannot be used as an argument for this. What was the reason for entering these contracts? It was about trading with the right to marry off a woman and so having the right to the bride-price. That privilege was transferred by her natural brother to someone else, who adopted her as a 'sister', and a woman might well pass in this way a few times from one 'brother' to another. A biological brother would receive in this arrangement a quantity of barley (two homers, two seahs) and his sister would declare that she was whole-heartedly in agreement.<sup>25</sup> Brother and sister would have had to be in great difficulties to take this step. As long as the 'sister' was not married, her contribution as regards work was valued. It could also be a freed slave-girl or a woman 'on the street' who was treated in this way. Clearly these women had a very low social status.<sup>26</sup>

From the Old Babylonian period there is a similar case. A girl with the name 'Where is my father?' was transferred by her father (!) and mother for a payment of five shekels of silver as a bride-price to a woman 'to be her sister'. She must have been an orphan who had first been adopted by this couple (the 'father' and 'mother') and was now being used as a bargaining tool. The woman adopting her gave her directly to her husband as his second wife.<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> B. Eichler, 'Another look at the Nuzi sistership contracts', *Essays J.J. Finkelstein* (1977) 45–59.

<sup>25</sup> HSS 19 68 with TUAT NF 1 (2004) 61.

<sup>26</sup> S. Greengus, HUCA 46 (1975) 15–22; B. Eichler, *Studies Å. W. Sjöberg* (1989) 112f.

<sup>27</sup> BIN 7 173 with F. R. Kraus, JCS 3 (1951) 113–115; M. Stol, *Studies A. Skaist* (2012) 145. Very similar is UET 5 87 with Westbrook, OBML, 103b, 133. We mentioned his text in Chapter 5, notes 26, 30.

## 17 Women robbed of their freedom

On several occasions we read of women who lost their freedom for one reason or another. It could be because a man had incurred debts and pledged the woman as a security, or because a crime had been committed and she acted as a surety, standing bail for him. In times of need daughters were sold as slaves.

### 17.1 Security for a man's debts

A woman could stipulate before her marriage that she would never have to be responsible for the debts of her husband. One of Hammurabi's laws facilitates this (§ 151) and an Old Assyrian marriage agreement arranges this.<sup>1</sup> It occurs similarly in Neo-Assyrian agreements.

If PN borrows silver, then his wife shall not be responsible for it.

If there is a creditor or a litigant, he shall not have control (of her) or approach her.<sup>2</sup>

A man would prefer to start his marriage without debts, even if he had to take out a loan from a third party. An Old Babylonian literary prayer to the moon god on this subject begins as follows:

O Nanna, king of heaven and earth, you, in you do I trust. E., the son of G., has robbed me. Pronounce judgement for me! He had no silver and he approached me and with my silver he paid off his interest-bearing loan. He married (literally, 'he called to the house of his father-in-law'), he had a son and daughter. He did not satisfy me because he never completely paid back my silver.

Some assume that this loan was intended to pay the bride-price, because afterwards he started his family.<sup>3</sup> However, this case seems rather too serious for a bride-price (which moreover was generally paid by the father) and it looks like the repayment of a debt which he had contracted before his marriage.

If a man took out a loan he could offer the women and children of his house as collateral.<sup>4</sup> This sad custom had always existed and we cannot begin here

---

1 AKT I 77:10–17 with R. Rems, WZKM 86 (1996) 357 f.

2 CTN II 247:12 f.; ND 2316:7–10, cited in CAD Š/1 239a; J. N. Postgate, FNALD (1976) 107; K. Radner, *Die neuassyrischen Privatrechtsurkunden* (1997) 158 f.; Radner in R. Westbrook, *Security for debt* (2001) 280 n. 65.

3 UET 6/2 402 with D. Charpin, *Le clergé d'Ur* (1986) 326–328.

4 G. Furlani, 'Familienhaftung', RIA III/1 (1957) 16–19. Only 'F. bei den Hettitern' is relevant, but will not be discussed here.

to describe its history over the course of the three thousand years of cuneiform textual evidence. There are a variety of legal complications, which make this subject a popular one with lawyers. We do not want to deal with this. Even the wife could be a security. In this book we will restrict our study to the women, even though it gives a certain bias in the description of guarantees and securities. The following selections from the rich material available only serve to give an impression. We also take the extreme cases here, which led to the sale of those individuals who were used as securities.<sup>5</sup>

### 17.1.1 Sumerian period

Some orders appear in short letters, either to detain a wife as a security,

Tell H., (and) let him give to A. the wife of U. as a security.

or to release her,

Tell B., (and) let him release the wife of G. One should not come back to this.<sup>6</sup>

A whole family was sold by a judge in Akkad to the city ruler of Lagash, comprising the father (a professional lamentation singer), his wife, his two daughters, and also his brothers.<sup>7</sup> A mother and sisters tried to redeem a girl who had become a slave. The judges refused permission because there was 'no royal decree' (to abolish debts). The woman, Damqat, had been a slave for twenty years and the judges decided that she must remain a slave.<sup>8</sup>

The problems of officials who had for years produced deficits in the state finances were very distinctive. They were held personally responsible and were made bankrupt. An inventory was then made of their possessions. We know of a summary of the possessions of ten defaulting officials. The lists give a wonderful insight into what could be expected to be in a private house, and women were part of that. These are the possessions of the tenth man, described in this order.

---

<sup>5</sup> The main source for this theme is R. Westbrook, *Security for debt in Ancient Near Eastern law* (2001), in which specialists wrote chapters on various periods and countries (including Egypt and Israel). See also the article 'Pfand' in *RIA X/5–6* (2004) 439–455.

<sup>6</sup> TCS 1 nos. 46, 74. For women as 'Schuldhaftlinge' see H. Waetzoldt, *AOF* 15 (1988) 38 f.

<sup>7</sup> D. O. Edzard, *Sumerische Rechtsurkunden* (1968) no. 46, with C. Wilcke, *Early Ancient Near Eastern law* (2003) 56 f.

<sup>8</sup> M. Molina, *Studies G. Pettinato* (2004) 176 f., 179.

Debt: almost 49 *kor* of barley. Possessions: a house, two beds, five chairs, two mill-stones, a wife, three daughters, a mortar.

Most inventories read like this, and we assume that all would have been sold.<sup>9</sup>

We know from merchants' archives that some of them specialised in buying up children, often perhaps from widowed mothers.<sup>10</sup>

### 17.1.2 Old Babylonian period

Wives, slave-girls and children were all sold. The king of Mari wanted to collect a debt to the state from the dike bailiff and the governor of the province mediated in this. The king said,

If he does not want to be put to death, let him pay five minas as ransom money for his life, and then set him free.

Then came the answer.

Let them take away my house and possessions for the palace.

But the house was not enough, so the man came up with the idea of selling his wife.

Let me sell my wife, my slave, and my slave-girl to a merchant's house, and then I will get two minas.

If the value of his cattle were added to this he hoped he would have enough.<sup>11</sup>

In another example a time limit is fixed before the wife is to be sold.

R. guaranteed the payment of six and a half shekels of silver by Y. A., the wife of Y. was given as a security (*mazzazānu*). If he does not pay the silver within two months, then A. the wife of Y. will be sold.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> H. Waetzoldt, M. Sigris, 'Haftung mit Privatvermögen bei Nicht-Erfüllung von Dienstverpflichtungen', *Studies W. W. Hallo* (1993) 271–280. More in ASJ 19 (1997) 81; NABU 2005/74.

<sup>10</sup> H. Neumann in: C. Wilcke, *Das geistige Erfassen der Welt im Alten Orient* (2007) 289 f. (Old Akkadian).

<sup>11</sup> ARM 14 17+ with LAPO 17 (1998) 640–642 no. 829.

<sup>12</sup> ARM 8 71 with TUAT NF 1 (2004) 40.

Evidently there was a long previous history leading to this. R., the guarantor, took over the debt and now the debtor was gaining two months extension from him.

A woman wrote,

I brought up a boy and I thought, ‘Let him grow up to bury me’. Now a creditor (literally, ‘a merchant’) has me in his grasp and says: ‘He has crossed the pestle (of the mortar)’.

This was a symbolic step taken at a sale.<sup>13</sup> It was a pity as the boy had been adopted by the woman with the guarantee that he would look after her later. In the worst case a man could ‘set himself up as a security’ and be sold as a slave.<sup>14</sup>

### 17.1.3 Old Assyrian period

Wives, sons, daughters, and small children, slaves, slave-girls, houses and fields were all ‘bound’ as security for anyone entering into a debt.<sup>15</sup> But a woman could avoid any possibility of this happening by having a clause inserted into her marriage contract.<sup>16</sup> If the wife of a merchant had not done that, she would have had to pay the debts of her husband by ‘scraping together’ all her possessions.<sup>17</sup> If it was not all paid off, then the whole family would have to ‘enter’ (*erēbu*) the house of the creditor as a security (*šapartu*) and ‘he would keep them alive’.<sup>18</sup> A decision made by the body that regulated commerce in Anatolia obligated the husband, if his wife were detained in these circumstances, to maintain her with a monthly sum in copper to buy ‘her food, oil and wood (= firewood)’ and a new garment once a year.<sup>19</sup> There are letters about negotiations for redeeming whole families.<sup>20</sup> From the various accounts it seems that it was mostly slaves and slave-girls who served as securities for debt, though sometimes it was a wife with a daughter or young child.<sup>21</sup>

**13** AbB 9 228:24–32.

**14** *Security for debt*, 73 f. A person sells himself: VAS 13 96; ‘Edict of Ammi-šaduqa’ § 20.

**15** K. R. Veenhof in *Security for debt* (2001) 130 f. (kt f/k 171). On the treatment of the indigenous Anatolians, see C. Michel in: J. G. Dercksen, *Anatolia and the Jazira during the Old Assyrian period* (2008) 222.

**16** Michel in Dercksen, 222 n. 68.

**17** K. R. Veenhof, *Mesopotamia. The Old Assyrian period* (2008) 109.

**18** K. Balkan, *Studies H. G. Güterbock* (1974) 30 f.

**19** *Archivum Anatolicum* 1 (1995) 11 f. no. 5 (= 57 f.); Veenhof, *Mesopotamia*, 109.

**20** J. G. Dercksen, *Studies K. R. Veenhof* (2001) 54 f.

**21** Veenhof, 134–136, Tables 1 (*erubbātu*) and 2 (*šapartu*); C. Michel, *Ktama* 22 (1997) 104 f., ‘Les enfants, garantie d’une dette’.

Hatti and her daughter are the security (*erubbātu*). As long as he does not pay the silver in full back to me, no-one shall come near them.<sup>22</sup>

If the debt was not paid off, they would have been sold.<sup>23</sup> When H. went bankrupt, they 'gave H. his wife and his little children to the creditors'.<sup>24</sup>

People later were well aware that a slave-girl like this had once been a free woman and that it was possible that she would still be redeemed.<sup>25</sup> Redemption could sometimes already have been provided for when a loan was entered into.<sup>26</sup> A mother sold her daughter and would be able for double the price to take (literally 'to seize) her back again. If the girl misbehaved, then she could be sold on.<sup>27</sup> A 'slave-girl' (a second wife?) was sold on for around twenty shekels of silver and a woman and her son stood as guarantors for any claims. K. R. Veenhof assumes that these guarantors were the mother and brother of the slave-girl. They were responsible for what had happened previously. They could 'seize her', or in other words redeem her, for sixty shekels of silver.<sup>28</sup> A text kept in Leiden tells about a man who sold himself and his daughter. The selling price may have been the same amount as the debt. They could be free again if anyone repaid the selling price or if they were badly treated. In those circumstances the amount of the selling price would be given to them. This fits in with the Middle Assyrian law § 39 which states that a girl pledged as a security was kept alive by the creditor and that she would be freed if 'she lived in bad conditions'.<sup>29</sup> We see the same principle applied to a woman (it was always a woman) in the Laws of Hammurabi.

§ 116. If a woman, distrained on account of debt, dies from beating or maltreatment in the house of her captor, then the owner of the distrained woman shall prove this about the creditor. If a free citizen is concerned, they shall kill his son. If a slave of a citizen is concerned, then he shall pay twenty shekels of silver.

---

22 AKT I 44:7–11.

23 Veenhof, 143. For children sold see K. Balkan, *Studies H. G. Güterbock* (1974) 30 f. n. 13.

24 S. Bayram, K. R. Veenhof, *JEOL* 32 (1991–92) 89 f. (kt 88/k 1050).

25 B. Kienast, *Das altassyrische Kaufvertragsrecht* (1984) 151 f. no. 32.

26 Westbrook in: *Security for debt* (2001) 73 f.

27 Kienast, 117–119 no. 10.

28 K. R. Veenhof, *Festschrift L. Matouš* II (1978) 307 n. 32. The text ICK I 19 is now Kienast, 144–146 no. 28.

29 *Festschrift L. Matouš* II (1978) 292–295 (LB 1218). We follow his explanation of the Assyrian law. Otherwise M. T. Roth: 'if she has been saved from a catastrophe'.

#### 17.1.4 Middle Assyrian period

Often it was the wife or the children who were pledged, which are mentioned also in the laws from this period.<sup>30</sup> In Assur Y. lent a homer of barley and an unspecified quantity of lead for twelve months to S.

The wife of S. shall live in the house of Y. as a security. On the day that he hands over the barley, the lead and the interest, he shall have his wife freed.<sup>31</sup>

A quote from another text:

He had his sister (?) arrive, along with the children (*līdānu*).<sup>32</sup>

Once a man sold his wife and daughter to a well-known merchant.<sup>33</sup>

Because of poverty an Assyrian free citizen was obliged to place his daughter in the household of Aššur-rešuya who undertook to support her. Such a situation is envisaged in § 39 of the Middle Assyrian laws. The daughter was allowed to enter a contract of marriage with a slave of Amurru-našir. The couple will be his ‘villagers’ and liable to perform a state service (*ilku*). The marriage contract was deposited in the archive of Amurru-našir but he or his sons could never claim them as slaves. The woman is allowed some extent of freedom.<sup>34</sup> Another Middle Assyrian law discusses the problem of what to do with the marriageable daughter of a debtor who remained in the house of the creditor. If he wants to marry her off, that is allowed only with the permission of her father. Was it the case that the creditor wanted through this marriage to receive the bride-price? If the father was dead, then her brothers could redeem her within the fixed period of one month (§ 48).

**30** C. Saporetti, *Mesopotamia XIII–XIV (1978–79)* 18–20, 23, 38, 72, 77–81. The law is C+G § 2: a creditor keeps in his house ‘the son or daughter of a man’. He is not allowed to sell them.

**31** KAJ 70; C. Saporetti, *The status of women in the Middle Assyrian period* (1979) 10.

**32** Iraq 30 (1968) 184 TR 3021:12 (Plate LXIII).

**33** E. F. Weidner, AfO 20 (1963) 123 f. (VAT 9034), with C. Saporetti, *Assur 14446: la famiglia A* (1979) 79 f., 130 f. Explained by S. Démare-Lafont in: J. Renger, *Assur – Gott, Stadt und Land* (2011) 244 n. 14.

**34** KAJ 7 combined with KAJ 167, following J. N. Postgate, *Bronze Age bureaucracy* (2013) 15–17.



### 17.1.5 Emar

The creditors of a man 'seized his wife and sold her as a slave to B.' for a price of seventy shekels. 'Dead (or) alive, she is the slave-girl of B.'<sup>35</sup> A woman was 'unable to pay off her interest-bearing loans'. She and her daughter entered the creditor's household and there they remained, 'dead (or) alive'.<sup>36</sup> A man, his brother with his wife and daughter became the slaves of M. for seventy shekels.

If anyone in the future comes forward to redeem them, he must give four 'good' women.<sup>37</sup>

A man sold his 'bride' as a slave-girl. What was meant by 'bride'? Perhaps it was his newly married wife without children.<sup>38</sup>

### 17.1.6 Ugarit

In an international treaty about the relations between the merchants of Ura and Ugarit, Ḫattušili III, king of the Hittites, says to Niqmepa, king of Ugarit,

If the silver of the merchants of Ura is a charge on the sons of Ugarit and they cannot pay it back completely, then the king of Ugarit shall give him (the debtor), together with his wives and children, to the merchants of Ura, but the merchants of Ura will have no claim to the houses and fields of the king of Ugarit.

This document was sealed by King Ḫattušili and Queen Puduḫepa.<sup>39</sup>

### 17.1.7 Neo-Assyrian period

When a man contracted a loan it was not unusual for his wife and daughter to become pledges in case the loan were not repaid.<sup>40</sup> A girl, one cubit in height

<sup>35</sup> D. Arnaud, *Aula Orientalis – Supplementa* 1 (1991) no. 26.

<sup>36</sup> A. Tsukimoto, *ASJ* 13 (1991) 300 no. 36. Cf. M. Sigrist, *Studies R. Kutscher* (1993) 167 no. 1 (man, wife and son for a debt of 83 shekels). For more examples of a forced sale of family members see C. Zaccagnini, *Or. NS* 64 (1995) 103 f.

<sup>37</sup> D. Arnaud, *Aula Orientalis* 5 (1987) 229–231 no. 11 ME 120.

<sup>38</sup> Arnaud, 231 no. 12 ME 117.

<sup>39</sup> S. Lackenbacher, *Textes akkadiens d'Ugarit* (2002) 154 f.

<sup>40</sup> B. Faist, *Alltagstexte aus neuassyrischen Bibliotheken der Stadt Assur* (2007) nos. 64 (*maškanūtu*), 67, 84, 107 with note (*šapartu*).

(no-one is ever said to have been smaller) guaranteed a debt of ten shekels of silver. She was not the daughter of the debtor.<sup>41</sup> Some family members were required to stay in the house of the creditor as security for the debt, as what is called in German *Besitzpfand*.<sup>42</sup> On another occasion it was a woman and her daughter who had to stay in the house of the creditor for three years.<sup>43</sup> In other situations the debt had to be paid within ten days before the woman could be ‘acquired and taken away’. This looks like the last phase after protracted legal proceedings.<sup>44</sup> A man and his wife were ransomed, but afterwards had to serve their ‘benefactor’ for their whole lives in exchange for a debt of seventy shekels. In a similar ‘redemption’ document there was a man, his wife and daughter who had to serve the benefactor ‘instead of the interest on the silver’. A widow’s debt was taken over and her son and three daughters would have to serve the new creditor.<sup>45</sup> It is always stated at the end of the document that it was left open for a third party to ‘let them go’ by paying the debt or the interest. In this way a family could pass from hand to hand, but the possibility of redemption suggests that they were not ordinary slaves.<sup>46</sup> The debts of a father who had died had to be paid by the next-of-kin and we see a widow with children being taken into slavery for this reason.<sup>47</sup>

### 17.1.8 Neo-Babylonian period

If a man did not deliver an outstanding debt of barley to the head of the grain silo of the temple of Eanna within seven days,

the woman N. and her child would belong to the possessions of Eanna instead of the barley.

---

<sup>41</sup> SAAB IX (1995) 68 no. 92 (VAT 9686). According to K. Radner they were sold; *Privatrechtsurkunden* (1997) 144 f.

<sup>42</sup> Radner, 368–383. Photos of the obverse sides of two contracts from Assur in which a man gives his wife as a pledge were published by J. Marzahn, B. Salje, *Wiedererstehendes Assur* (2003) 154 Abb. 5 (= StAT 3 nos. 41, 42).

<sup>43</sup> Radner, 369 VAT 19500; and in *Security for debt*, 270 n. 31. Also StAT 3 107.

<sup>44</sup> SAA VI 272.

<sup>45</sup> P. Villard in: F. Joannès, *Rendre la justice en Mésopotamie* (2000) 184 f. no. 134; G. Galil, *The lower stratum families in the Neo-Assyrian period* (2007) 89 f.

<sup>46</sup> *Security for debt*, 282 f. (ADD 77 and 85). A full discussion of all pledged families in this period can be found in Galil, 86–94.

<sup>47</sup> VAS 1 96 with Radner, *Privatrechtsurkunden*, 162 n. 838.

N. was not his own wife, so she must have been his slave-girl.<sup>48</sup> It is interesting to note that at this time we no longer see wives used as a security, though children are.<sup>49</sup> Evidently it was no longer acceptable to dispose of your wife to this extent. It fits in with another custom of that period, when a house and property would be sold ‘while the wife was present’, meaning with her permission. The debtor himself was also not sold in this period.<sup>50</sup>

A slave-girl could be used as security for borrowing money, and would also be physically transferred to the creditor. But the text clarifies that she was not being hired,

There is no question of hiring the slave-girl, there is no interest on the silver.

Instead, the value of her work compensated the creditor for the interest due on the debt. This arrangement, where the provision of a service counts instead of interest, is called *antichresis* (from *chresis* meaning ‘interest’).<sup>51</sup>

### 17.1.9 Greek period

When a man who had a debt of five minas to the ‘people’ of Uruk, he himself, his two brothers, his wife and three daughters of a brother had to serve fifty years (an inordinately long time) and be provided with food and clothing. This debt to the ‘people’ is unique and it has been suggested that this arrangement consists of a promise to fulfil a *leitourgia* on behalf of the community.<sup>52</sup>

## 17.2 The woman as guarantor

If a man had a debt, a woman in his family could guarantee that he would not take flight. She is standing bail (*qātātu*). This seems to have been the oldest form of surety which is known in German as *Gestellungsbürgschaft*. It is clear

---

48 YOS 7 171 with F. Joannès in: P. Briant, *L'archive des Fortifications de Persépolis* (2008) 475.

49 H. Petschow, *Tijdschrift voor Rechtsgeschiedenis* 19 (1951) 51–57; *Neubabylonisches Pfandrecht* (1956) 62–64; M. A. Dandamaev, *Slavery in Babylonia* (1984) 168 f.

50 C. Wunsch in: M. Hudson, M. van de Mieroop, *Debt and economic renewal in the Ancient Near East* (2002) 238, 244.

51 TuM 2–3 115 with F. Joannès, *Archives de Borsippa* (1989) 142. In Assyria: K. Radner, *Privatrechtsurkunden*, 377 f. Two women ‘instead of the interest’ (*kūm rubê*), StAT 2 287.

52 OECT 9 2 with M. Jursa, RIA X/5–6 (2004) 454 ‘Pfand’ G, § 4.

that people of the same household were the ones eligible to stand bail. In the Sumerian period the mother and sister of a slave guaranteed that he would not run away. A married woman did this for her son (?).<sup>53</sup> Women could also guarantee that someone would turn up for work.<sup>54</sup> A man and woman guaranteed that someone would be at the gate of Nippur.<sup>55</sup> An ox at the plough was missing and the wife of the responsible person was arrested.<sup>56</sup> We also see this guarantee in Old Babylonian Uruk and Alalāḫ. The guarantor could have been the mother, the sister or the wife, but a brother could also be the surety and stand bail. The agreement was confirmed by a document sealed by them.<sup>57</sup> One time, the work to be performed was the collecting of lumps of salt in the desert. According to a letter, the salt was not delivered and the wife of the worker was imprisoned.<sup>58</sup> In Nuzi a sister often acted as surety for her brother, seemingly on her own initiative.<sup>59</sup> In Nuzi a man who had to work for ten years in the house of his creditor to pay off a loan promised that in his absence his sons, daughters and wife could be ‘seized’ in order to pay off the debt.<sup>60</sup> In Emar a man was taken as a slave (valued at 47 shekels) and his wife with her son were the surety, which must have been connected with his presence there.<sup>61</sup>

### 17.2.1 As prisoners

Imprisoning women and children was a means of putting pressure on a man to pay a debt. This amounted to putting someone into a debtor’s prison. In the Old Babylonian period this happened frequently and is generally referred to as ‘to distraint’ (*nepû*) someone.<sup>62</sup> The laws of Hammurabi and Ešnunna deal with the

---

<sup>53</sup> *Security for debt*, 50 f. n. 10; H. Sauren, ZA 60 (1970) 72 f.

<sup>54</sup> Sauren, 76, 78, with 84 f.; H. Waetzoldt, AOF 15 (1988) 39.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>56</sup> C. Wilcke, *Studies T. Abusch* (2010) 354 n. 12, 357 n. 26, on 368 viii 7.

<sup>57</sup> Uruk: S. Sanati-Müller, Baghd. Mitt. 20 (1989) 276–305, with D. Charpin, J.-M. Durand, MARI 7 (1993) 367 f. Alalāḫ: AT 21 with B. L. Eichler, *Indenture at Nuzi* (1973) 67 f.

<sup>58</sup> ARM 10 160 = Florilegium Marianum III (1997) 173 no. 16. The woman is a *nipûtum*; see below, under ‘Prisoners’.

<sup>59</sup> B.Kh. Ismail, M. Müller, WdO 9 (1977) 27 f.

<sup>60</sup> Eichler, *Indenture at Nuzi*, 127 f., with *Security for debt*, 233.

<sup>61</sup> J. Huehnergard, RA 77 (1983) 25 Text 5, with *Security for debt*, 244 f. (‘ASJ 35’). For the Neo-Assyrian period see Radner, *Privatrechtsurkunden*, 357–367 (‘Bürge’), who does not refer to this type of security.

<sup>62</sup> Westbrook in: *Security for debt* (2001) 84–90; M. Stol, *Een Babylonier maakt schulden* (1983) 12, 14.

situation which might arise if the person distrained were to die in the house of the creditor (§ 116; § 23 f.). In a few instances the word ‘milling house’ was mentioned as the place where the person was kept,<sup>63</sup> which explains a reference in a Sumerian hymn about the goddess Nanše.

She knows the orphan. She knows the widow. She knows that one person oppresses another. She, the mother of the orphan, Nanše, who cares for the widow, is the one who procures justice (?) in the milling house.<sup>64</sup>

Formulating letters about such situations was one of the exercises for young scribes at school. These exercises assumed that the debt had been paid and that the people must be freed from ‘the prison’.<sup>65</sup>

After your departure on the day that you left for your trade journey, I. came here and spoke thus: ‘I have a claim of twenty shekels of silver on him.’ He distrained your wife and your daughter. Come here and let your wife and daughter come out, before your wife and daughter die in prison through the milling. Please!<sup>66</sup>

In the Old Assyrian period the people imprisoned as sureties were called *kutu’ātu*, a feminine word for good reason. One letter clearly wants to intimidate the debtor with this possibility.

He made the house afraid and took the slave-girls prisoner.<sup>67</sup>

A Sumerian text states that women could be released from imprisonment if they married or became a widow.<sup>68</sup>

If a debt could not be paid, and the imprisonment lasted a long time, it came to be called *kiššatu*, ‘servitude’. This letter is to a man from a woman who calls herself ‘the girl’ and who seems to be his sister.

---

**63** Samson ‘ground at the mill in the prison’. See K. van der Toorn, ‘Judges XVI 21 in the light of the Akkadian sources’, *Vetus Testamentum* 36 (1986) 248–253.

**64** W. Heimpel, *JCS* 33 (1981) 82:20–23. The milling house is a prison for distrained persons (probably women) in the letter AbB 1 137:10.

**65** F. R. Kraus, *JEOL* 16 (1967) 26–29.

**66** UET 5 9 with Kraus, 28 f.; cf. AbB 14 128.

**67** CCT 3 24:41 f. with C. Michel, CMK no. 344. In general see K. R. Veenhof in *Security for debt*, 154 f.

**68** H. Sauren, *ZA* 60 (1970) 75, 85 f.

Since the day that you abandoned me and went away, I work in the house of the creditor for ten shekels of silver. Cold and drought eat my bones. This is servitude. My creditor ... is the master over me. Because of you I have been sold (literally, 'given for silver') and she who looked after your house, your mother, is dead. If you are really my brother and lord, send me two shekels of silver so that I can give it to my creditor and your house will not be lost. Your brothers too must not be lost. Let me care for them.<sup>69</sup>

From the Neo-Assyrian period we have a short text, in which the guarantor ('he who slapped hands', a sign of making a promise) 'seized' the wife of the debtor, and 'brought her into the house of the creditor'. If she were to die or escape, the guarantor was responsible. The text adds at the end that the creditor had legally nothing to do with the seizing. According to the editor of the text, the intention of the action was to put pressure on the debtor.<sup>70</sup>

It was considered deplorable if free citizens fell into slavery and kings took action to put the matter right. When Entemena, an early Sumerian city ruler of Lagash (2400 BC), proclaimed the 'freedom' of his city,

he allowed the mother to go back to her child, he allowed the child to go back to his mother, he brought freedom from interest-bearing loans of barley.<sup>71</sup>

The word freedom here and later means literally 'going back to mother'.

Hammurabi set a maximum period of three years for a 'wife, son or daughter' to work in captivity (§ 117), and he also regulated the fate of slaves (§ 118 f.). A king could step in to 'bring justice', which meant introducing a ruling to cancel debts. A woman was in prison 'on account of her father', meaning on account of his debts, but she was released when 'the king brought justice to the country'. When she discovered that in the meantime her husband had taken another wife and had squandered her dowry, she took action to regain her dowry and her marriage was dissolved.<sup>72</sup> Such a pardoning of debts is attested also in the Greek tradition as *seisachtheia*. In Babylonia it is attested, in Nuzi among the Hurrians, and possibly also under King Darius II of Persia.<sup>73</sup>

<sup>69</sup> AbB 8 100 with F. R. Kraus, *Königliche Verfügungen* (1984) 268.

<sup>70</sup> FNALD no. 49; Radner, *Privatrechtsurkunden* (1997) 364.

<sup>71</sup> Ent. 79 iii 10–iv 5; C. Wilcke, *Early Ancient Near Eastern law* (2003) 21.

<sup>72</sup> M. Jursa, RA 91 (2004) 135–145; D. Charpin in F. Joannès, *Rendre la justice en Mésopotamie* (2000) 93–95.

<sup>73</sup> M. Hudson, M. van de Mierop, *Debt and economic renewal in the Ancient Near East* (2002) 181–189, 212f., 245–247.

### 17.3 Imprisoned for murder

Debts were not the only reason for taking people hostage, for if a crime had been committed, the family members of the perpetrator could be deprived of freedom. C. Wilcke assumes that the word ‘servitude’ (*kiššatu*) refers to this.<sup>74</sup> Two such cases come to mind. In the first, from the Ur III period, the wife and daughters of a murderer were imprisoned. They and what was left of his possessions were handed over to the relatives of the victim. Five years later the women fled, were arrested and claimed that they were not slaves. But the judge harshly said that indeed they were.<sup>75</sup>

The second instance was much later, in the Neo-Assyrian period. People were able to claim financial compensation for a murder victim. If that went wrong, the murderer’s ‘people and his fields’ could be taken as collateral security.<sup>76</sup> An exceptional instance within this system was the delivering up of a woman as compensation for the murder of Samaku. The judges gave the following suggestion:

He shall give the woman K. to Š., the son of Samaku, instead of the blood. He shall wash away the blood in this fashion. If he does not give his wife, they shall kill him on the grave of Samaku.

This woman must have been a free citizen and was possibly the sister of the murderer. The following sentence says that if anyone shall contravene this arrangement, then he shall pay ten minas of silver.<sup>77</sup> In Neo-Babylonian Uruk the mother and sisters of a thief were made temple slaves because of a theft of goats from a temple.<sup>78</sup>

---

<sup>74</sup> C. Wilcke, NABU 1991/16: ‘(deliktisch begründeter) Schuldsklaven-Stand’; *Early Ancient Near Eastern law* (2003) 109: ‘debt-bondage caused by an offence’.

<sup>75</sup> B. Lafont in *Rendre la justice en Mésopotamie* (2000) 64 f. no. 26; C. Wilcke, *Festschrift J. Krecher* (2014) 516 f.

<sup>76</sup> ADD 164:7 with SAA VI 264 and M. T. Roth, ‘Homicide in the Neo-Assyrian period’, *Studies Erica Reiner* (1987) 351–365, esp. 356.

<sup>77</sup> ADD 321 with Roth, 357 f.; Remko Jas, *Neo-Assyrian judicial procedures* (1996) no. 42; P. Villard in *Rendre la justice en Mésopotamie* (2000) 193 no. 142.

<sup>78</sup> M. Jursa, *Iraq* 59 (1997) 99 f. no. 1.

## 17.4 The sale of children in time of need

When a city was under siege a woman may have had to sell her children, usually her daughters.<sup>79</sup> Contracts from Emar, a city on the northern Euphrates, show that this actually happened in the thirteenth century BC. It also happened in the seventh century BC according to texts from Nippur and Babylon.<sup>80</sup> In the contracts from Emar we read that it happened when there was ‘hunger and disaster’ and when ‘the gate was shut’.

Then hunger and disaster overcame the country and the mother did not open the door to her daughter. Then the enemy lay outside the city and hunger arose in the country and three litres of barley became the price for a shekel of silver, sold in secret.<sup>81</sup>

Such high prices when calamity struck were often mentioned in texts from Emar. An Assyrian text refers to a slave-girl saying that she was bought ‘in the year that there was no food, when a litre of barley cost one and a half minas of copper’.<sup>82</sup> Possibly this fact was stated so that in better times the sale could be reversed, or the seller could be protected against later complaints about the abnormally low price. The intention is sometimes implied: ‘Take (the child with you) and keep it alive; she is (now) your girl’.<sup>83</sup> The texts from Emar come from the time of King Pilsu-Dagan and the high prices mentioned also seem to accord with the harsh reality of the time.<sup>84</sup>

A woman from Emar explained that she could not support her children. She had given up her eldest daughter for adoption to a woman called A. and in this way she was able to keep the little ones alive ‘in the year of the disaster’. But A. did not pay the thirty shekels required, so the mother was later forced to sell the four little children, one of whom was still an infant, for sixty shekels. They were named and their feet were impressed in clay for identification. The lumps of clay

---

**79** K. Volk, ‘Von Findel-, Waisen-, verkauften und deportierten Kindern. Notizen aus Babylonien und Assyrien’, in: A. Künz-Lübcke, R. Lux, “*Schaffe mir Kinder ...*”. *Beiträge zur Kindheit im alten Israel und in seinen Nachbarkulturen* (2006) 47–87.

**80** C. Zaccagnini, ‘War and famine at Emar’, *Or. NS* 64 (1995) 92–109; A. L. Oppenheim, ‘Siege documents from Nippur’, *Iraq* 17 (1955) 69–89; G. Frame, *JCS* 51 (1999) 101–106 (Babylon).

**81** Frame, 105 f. (Babylon). In Nippur a price of 6 litres of barley for 1 shekel is mentioned; Oppenheim, 89, 2 NT 300:6–7, 301:11.

**82** J. N. Postgate, *FNALD* 92 no. 8, with Zaccagnini, 95.

**83** Oppenheim, *Iraq* 17 (1955) 87, 2 NT 293:4, 297:8.

**84** S. A. Divon, ‘A survey of the textual evidence for ‘food shortage’ from the Late Hittite Empire’, in: L. d’Alfonso (etc.), *The city of Emar among the Late Bronze Age empires* (2008) 101–109.



with the impressions of their feet were found together with the dossier.<sup>85</sup> Years later their names appear in text colophons, as scribes, but those are different people.<sup>86</sup> Alternatively, in times of need a child could be placed as a foundling, as when ‘in the year of enemies and war, children were thrown on to the square’ and were taken in by other people and adopted.<sup>87</sup> We will not investigate the existence of foundlings any further.<sup>88</sup>

A mother who closes the door on her daughter became a literary motif in descriptions of times of adversity. It occurs in a prophecy and also in a prediction about a woman who is described as ‘pregnant with wind and gives birth to wind’.<sup>89</sup> In the fifth year of the famine described in the myth of Atram-ḫasis

a mother does not open the door to her daughter. The daughter sees the scales of her mother.  
The mother sees the scales of her daughter.

This meant that she had been sold as a slave, which involved weighing the silver paid for her. In the sixth year hunger was so rife that her daughter and her son had to be eaten.<sup>90</sup> Our horror at such a thing should not hide our eyes from the fact that the narration of the episode focuses on the mother and the daughter. Some omens predict cannibalism and eating one’s own children was considered to be a sign of madness.

God Enlil will hang the people’s good sense on a peg and people will devour their infant children.<sup>91</sup>

Hunger could also lead to children being dedicated as oblates (*širku*) of the temple in the Neo-Babylonian period. A widow had to turn to this to solve her problems:

---

**85** *Emar* VI/3 nos. 216, 217, 218–220 (for the footprints), with RA 97 (2003) 180 and TUAT NF 1 (2004) 151 f. In view of the dimensions of the impressions it must have been a baby no more than three months old, a twin of one year (10 cm), and a two years old child (12.5 cm); C. Zaccagnini, *Or. NS* 63 (1994) 1–4. For photos see O. Rouault, *L’Eufrate e il tempo* (1993) 366 f.; for drawings, *Emar* VI/2 p. 670, 747 f.

**86** Y. Cohen, *The scribes and scholars of the city of Emar in the Late Bronze Age* (2009) 132.

**87** *Emar* VI/3 256 with TUAT NF 1 (2004) 147 f.

**88** C. Wunsch, ‘Findelkinder und Adoption nach neubabylonischen Quellen’, *AfO* 50 (2003–04) 174–244.

**89** The prophecy: A. K. Grayson, *JCS* 18 (1964) 20 Text C iii 15 = R. Borger, *BiOr* 28 (1971) 15 iv 15. The prediction: E. Leichty, *The omen series Šumma izbu* (1970) 36, Tablet I 50.

**90** Atram-ḫasis, late version S vi 8–13 (ed. W. G. Lambert, A. R. Millard, p. 112); B. R. Foster, *Before the Muses* (1996) 194 f.

**91** A. R. George, *CUSAS* 18 (2013) 235 rev. 42, with p. 246.

My husband N. has died. When there was famine in the country I branded my sons S. and S. with a star and gave them to the Lady of Uruk. Keep (them) alive and they shall be oblates of the Lady of Uruk.

The authorities were informed of what she had done and they established food rations for them both from the temple of Eanna, with the official confirmation that they would become ‘oblates of the Lady of Uruk’.<sup>92</sup> The branding of slaves was usual. The star that was imprinted on this occasion is a direct reference to the Lady of Uruk, Ištar the goddess of love, later to be equated with Venus, the evening star. We read in the Bible that an Israelite ‘will write the Lord’s name on his hand’ (Isaiah 44:5).

## 17.5 Dedicated to a temple

From most ancient times people have dedicated property and people to temples, but not always in times of hunger. The verb used by the Assyrians to make such a dedication literally meant ‘to allow to go up’, and the word for the dedicated object, in Babylonian *šūlūtu* and in Assyrian *šēlūtu*, was derived from it. Sometimes the word ‘to present’ was used, which was usual in the subsequent Neo-Babylonian period, and then someone who had been dedicated to the temple and had spent his life in service there was called a *širku*, ‘the one presented’, an ‘oblate’.<sup>93</sup> Jars of wine, clothes or crockery were dedicated to the gods in Old Babylonian Mari, as well as women, all part of the booty from conquered cities.<sup>94</sup> At that time old people too were dedicated to the temple, as we shall see in the section of Chapter 22 concerning old women. Why were the temples chosen? They were centres of compassion according to many a hymn to a god or goddess. The temples were also large centres for business, where free labour would always be welcome.

This was being done as early as in the Sumerian period, for we have three long lists of people given as votive offerings (*arua*) to temples from that time.<sup>95</sup> It

<sup>92</sup> YOS 6 154 with Oppenheim, 72, M. A. Dandamaev, *Slavery in Babylonia* (1984) 484 f.; P.-A. Beaulieu, *The reign of Nabonidus* (1989) 202. For more on the selling of children see M. Stol, *Een Babyloniër maakt schulden* (1983) 15; M. A. Dandamaev, *Slavery*, 170–175.

<sup>93</sup> ‘To present’, in Assyrian *šarāku*, in B. Menzel, *Assyrische Tempel* II (1981) T 173, 176 nos. 68:11, 69:9. Once *šrkn* in an Aramaic epigraph, Menzel, T 179 no. 71.

<sup>94</sup> Wine, clothes, crockery: CAD Š/3 264b; ARM 21 97; 23 535, 536; 31 243. Women: ARM 22 64.

<sup>95</sup> I. J. Gelb, ‘The *arua* institution’, RA 66 (1972) 1–31. For a new list see RA 80 (1986) 19–29.

was the richer members of society who offered people, animals and objects, and probably the king who offered captives. 113 women and 59 children, pillaged from a foreign city to the east of the Tigris, were offered to the temple of the goddess Šara in Umma,<sup>96</sup> under the supervision of the governor of Umma. Poor people handed over women in particular to the temple. A shepherd is said to have offered a ‘daughter without a mother’. The temple took in everyone who was offered, young and old and sometimes those who were sick, and set them to work. Possibly a sizeable proportion of the temple personnel consisted of such people, but it would be incorrect to call them slaves. Nothing more can be said on the subject, since all we know is from those lists.

We know much about dedications in the Neo-Assyrian period,<sup>97</sup> when it was usual to offer the temples land, buildings, statues, jewels, livestock as well as people, with the aim of achieving a good and successful life. Women were offered to a female deity. In Neo-Babylonian texts we sometimes see it explicitly mentioned that the offering had been made to the deity, ‘for the well-being of their lives’ (*ana balāṭ napšātišunu*), meaning to secure good health.<sup>98</sup> In Assyrian dedications it happened that the child of a prostitute or a single mother was offered by one or more people.<sup>99</sup> The child was taken after it was weaned, as we see in the following dedication on a clay tablet found in the temple of Nabû at Calah.<sup>100</sup>

To U. and N., the two sons of L., his sister, he gave bread to eat, and he kept them alive. He took them from the breast, brought them up and gave them, free from any claims, to his lord Nabû in Calah. Whoever wants to claim rights to them or snatch them with force from Nabû, may Nabû, the scribe of the world, make his name and descendants disappear from the country, may he curse him with a bitter irrevocable curse, may he command that he does not live one day longer. May the bride Tašmetu, in the presence of Nabû, her consort, say a bad word for him, may she determine for him an unfavourable fate, may she command that he will not feel well mentally or physically.

(All the names of the witnesses are functionaries of the temple, and they include a man who was ‘the head of the dedicated ones’).

---

<sup>96</sup> I. J. Gelb, *JNES* 32 (1973) 75 f.

<sup>97</sup> Menzel, *Assyrische Tempel* I, 23–33; K. Radner, *Die neuassyrischen Privatrechtsurkunden* (1997) 207–211.

<sup>98</sup> YOS 7 17 with Dandamaev, *Slavery*, 472 f.

<sup>99</sup> For the child of a prostitute see Menzel I, 24, no. 2; 28; II T 173 no. 68; SAA XII 92. For the child of a single mother see Menzel I, 24 f., nos. 3–4; II T 167 ff., nos. 65–66; SAA XII 95 f.

<sup>100</sup> SAA XII 95.

Female devotees were known to be in the service of the temple. Those of Ištar of Arbela are the best known, and some of them, men and women, fulfilled the role of prophets. They were dedicated by the kings and will feature again in Chapter 29, about women in divine service.<sup>101</sup> All dedicated offerings had to be bought in, which may imply that these children were sold by their mother. Twice women were implicated in these sales. One was a daughter, who was sold by her father to a woman from the harem of the ‘Old Palace’ as a future votive offering to the goddess Mulissu.<sup>102</sup> The other was a palace lady, who dedicated to Mulissu a woman who was married to a weaver (surely an arranged marriage) with the stipulation that

No creditor of her husband or winner of a lawsuit against him shall be able to assert his right to her. He shall not go near her.<sup>103</sup>

We note that more dedicated women got married and their dowry was described.<sup>104</sup> In a contract for a marriage between Egyptians in Nineveh, divorce cost the woman money, and it was added that ‘the woman and her children would be given as a votive offering to Ištar of Arbela’. Possibly she was a slave who already had children.<sup>105</sup> Our knowledge of Neo-Assyrian marriage is skewed because it is almost limited to these cases.

In the Neo-Babylonian period the major temples had ‘presented ones’ (*širku*) in their service.<sup>106</sup> Dedication to the temple was linked at that time with branding on the underarm. This was also done to animals from the temple herds. The mark of the goddess Ištar in Uruk was a star, to be identified with the planet Venus.

He placed the star (*kakkabtu*) and the brand mark (*arratu*) on her underarm and gave her as *širku* to the Lady of Uruk.

---

**101** Menzel, 25 f.

**102** Menzel II, T 177 f. no. 70.

**103** B. Parker, Iraq 16 (1954) 40 ND 2316, with Menzel I, 25, II 23\* (254); Radner, *Privatrechtsurkunden*, 170 f. (edition), 210 (e); S. L. Macgregor, *Beyond hearth and home* (2012) 9; S. Svärd, *Studies V. Donbaz* (2010) 253, 258.

**104** Menzel, 25 no. 8, 26; Radner, 158, 209 n. 1136 (A. 310 = StAT 2 184, A. 2527 = StAT 2 164).

**105** J. N. Postgate, TIM 11 27–30 no. 14 = SAA XIV 443; Iraq 41 (1979) 98 f.

**106** M. A. Dandamaev, *Slavery in Babylonia* (1984) 469–557, ‘Temple slavery’.

Later the woman was sold illegally.<sup>107</sup> One can imagine that the ‘presented one’ may already have been advanced in years at her dedication, when his or her owners had died. If so, the temple could make little use of her labour.<sup>108</sup> Temples possibly took pity on needy old people.

Many a *širku* was ‘presented’ to the temple, but another word could also be used. When referring to a woman she could be called *zakîtu*, ‘clean’. That was meant to convey that nobody could claim any right of ownership to her. It is noteworthy that this title was reserved for women only and that men were sometimes called ‘the son of NN, a clean one’.<sup>109</sup> Who were these women? Here is an example.<sup>110</sup>

I. of his own free will has given to K., his wife, in a sealed legal document, his slave-girl N. and her children. As long as K. shall live, N. and her children shall serve K. On the day that K. according to fate goes to her fathers (= dies), the governor, the chief, the head of ten and the head of fifty shall have no rights to N. and her children. She is the ‘clean one’ of the Lady of Uruk and Nanaya. You, whoever you may be, who change this arrangement (or) alter it, may Ištar and Nanaya command your demise.

(Witnessed by the highest authorities of Uruk and the temple of Eanna).

Any descendants of a *širku* or a *zakîtu* were given the same low status. The temple slaves did simple work, but some of them were able to hold positions of responsibility. We see most of them working in the fields and in the gardens with their family or alone. Sometimes a temple would hire out a whole family. It is noticeable that there were fewer women than men in service in the temples of Sippar and Uruk. Possibly the women were working on the royal estates.<sup>111</sup>

There was every possibility of things going wrong for these temple slaves, in particular if they fled or disappeared.<sup>112</sup> N., the slave-girl of N., declared,

My lord N. dedicated me to the Lady of Uruk and branded me with a star. My lord N. died and his brother Š., who was the heir, took me from the house of N. and did not give me to Ištar of Uruk. I bore my sons, S. I., and N. in the house of Š.

**107** YOS 6 79 with Dandamaev, 475 f.

**108** G. van Driel in: M. Stol, S. P. Vleeming, *The care of the elderly in the Ancient Near East* (1998) 165.

**109** F. Joannès in: P. Briant, *L'archive des Fortifications de Persépolis* (2008) 469; cf. 466 n. 5.

**110** TCL 12 36.

**111** Joannès, 466 f., 474, 478 f.

**112** Joannès, 476 f.

Then the leaders of the temple ‘saw the star on her underarm’ and ‘entrusted the woman and her children to Š.’ She had to serve him as long as he lived. He could neither desire her nor sell her nor marry her off to a slave. After the death of Š. she became the property of the Lady of Uruk. It is supposed that the owner had arranged in his will that the woman would look after him and his brother. However one reconstructs the situation, the woman was claimed by the temple and also protected.<sup>113</sup>

From pronouncements and lawsuits it would appear that the temple enforced the rights of ownership strictly on these people. Children of devotees gained the same status as their parents through birth and became the property of the temple.<sup>114</sup> These devotees could not be sold.

N., the daughter of E. the coppersmith, a devotee of Ištar of Uruk, her father E. has had a text by an alphabet-writer written on her underarm and has sold her in Babylon to an Arab. The said N. was given by the chief judge and the mayor to A. with these words: ‘Give (her) to the authorities of (the temple of) Eanna’. A. received N. in Eanna (and) N. was led before B.

This all took place in the presence of the most important persons in Eanna,<sup>115</sup> and the background needs to be explained. The daughter of the coppersmith was herself also a devotee and was branded with a star. One supposes that the coppersmith had tattooed the name of a fictitious owner in Aramaic, possibly over the star. He then travelled some distance away to Babylon and sold the woman to some Arab whose name is not given. When she was found in Babylon the authorities there took action and put her in the hands of A., an official from Uruk to be returned to where she had come from.

Another case is also relevant.<sup>116</sup> In Babylon there was a slave-girl who had a private owner, and who bore the mark of the goddess of Uruk. How could this be? The owner declared that twenty years earlier she had put the mark on herself. The woman said that her first owner had dedicated her to Nanaya and yet even so had sold her to her present owner. Now the judges had an alphabet-writer come to inspect the underarm, as it appeared to have a tattooed text in alphabetic Aramaic.

---

**113** YOS 7 66 with P. Koschaker, GRÖR (1931) 78 f., Dandamaev, 478 f., A. Kuhrt in: B. Lesko, *Womens's earliest records* (1989) 231 f.

**114** Joannès, 477.

**115** AnOr 8 74 with Dandamaev 537–539, 697 f.

**116** D. Arnaud, RA 67 (1973) 147–156, with F. Joannès, *Rendre la justice en Mésopotamie* (2000) 223–225 no. 166.

He deciphered the underarm of N. and said, 'According to an old text, written long ago on her underarm, it was 'Of Nanaya'. But a second text under the first text said 'Of Ištar'.

The judges questioned the owner.

How has it come about that you bought a slave who was dedicated to Ištar, and branded with a star, but on her underarm is written 'Of Ištar of Uruk' and 'Of Nanaya'?

They reproached him for not having let the judges look into the matter earlier. They decided that the woman and her son should be enrolled with the *corvée* workers of the temple of Eanna and advised the owner to seek redress from the person who had stood as guarantor for the sale.

We have seen earlier that hunger was the reason that children were given over to the temple, with the result that they were dedicated to the Lady of Uruk.<sup>117</sup>

The final case in cuneiform comes from the time of the Arsacids (after 170 BC).<sup>118</sup> Someone with the Greek name Nicanor, the son of Democrates, dedicated a slave-girl of five years old to the gods of Uruk 'to carry out work with clay'. He did this 'for the life of the king, for his own life, the life of the people (of Uruk)'. This case belongs to a group of five dedications of children between five and ten years old (once together with the child's mother) to do this sort of work.<sup>119</sup> Clauses at the end of these dedications prohibit the person presenting the children from selling a child or giving it to someone. This ensured that the devoted child would stay at home and only later, when he had grown up, would go and do heavy work.<sup>120</sup>

## 17.6 Prisoners of war

Kings from the Old Akkadian period (2300–2100 BC) proudly reported their conquests of cities and gave precise numbers of the dead and prisoners of war. From Ur and Lagash there were 8040 dead and 5460 captured, and from Kazalla

---

**117** YOS 6 154.

**118** BRM 2 53 with J. Oelsner in: M. J. Geller, *Legal documents of the Hellenistic period* (1995) 122, 147 f.

**119** G. C. Sarkisian, 'Von der Tempelklaverei im hellenistischen Babylonien', *Iraq* 45 (1983) 131–135. Cf. J. Huijs in: L. Marti, *La famille dans le Proche-Orient ancien* (2014) 613 f.

**120** Koschaker, GRÖR, 80 f.; Sarkisian.

12052 dead and 5864 captured.<sup>121</sup> What happened to the captives in practice is documented in the subsequent Ur III period.<sup>122</sup> When we come to the section of Chapter 18 on weavers we shall see that only women and children were mentioned and that their death rate was high. Some assume that wars were also waged to supplement the workforce.<sup>123</sup> The Mari letters (1800–1760 BC) are very informative about this.<sup>124</sup> They cover a period of continuous conflicts between large and small states.

His troops have conquered the country of Muti-abal. Men, women, boys and girls [they have captured, and their houses] they have torn down and burned with fire.<sup>125</sup>

A prince was reproached by his father, King Samsu-Addu.

You have sent thirty men to bring the booty safely home. Is that really enough? Thirty men to bring back a thousand prisoners of war safely! Let the local workforce take food for fifteen days.

Yes, the prisoners also had to be fed.<sup>126</sup> We have thirty clay tablets from the last two years of the reign of Zimri-Lim of Mari, which deal with the administration of the deportation of 1500 captives from six different places. These are long lists of often foreign names. The families (two to five persons) stayed together. On the basis of these lists it is thought that the quantity of food necessary was estimated, and sometimes the assignment of captives to the control of certain persons or services was documented.<sup>127</sup>

In letters from Mari we can follow the fates of some highly placed women who were living in captivity. It was possible for them to be ransomed from the

---

**121** A. Archi mentions much higher figures in Ebla (like ‘a total of 20,309 dead’); *Studies D. I. Owen* (2010) 29–33.

**122** Cf. G. Ventura, ‘Women, work and war during the Neo-Sumerian period’, in: H. Neumann, *Krieg und Frieden im Alten Vorderasien* (= CRRAI 52) (2014) 345–352.

**123** B. Lafont, ‘Guerres et déplacements de populations en Mésopotamie aux époques sumérienne et amorrite (IIIe-IIe millénaires avant notre ère)’, in: C. Moatti, *La mobilité des personnes en Méditerranée de l’Antiquité à l’époque moderne* (2004) 453–479, esp. 455–458, 473 f. (translations).

**124** N. Ziegler, ‘Kriege und ihre Folgen. Frauenschicksale anhand der Archive aus Mari’, in: H. Neumann, *Krieg und Frieden*, 885–907.

**125** AEM 1/2 (1988) 169 no. 365-bis, rev. 3–5.

**126** ARM 1 43:3–8 with MARI 6 (1990) 568.

**127** Lafont, 465.





**Fig. 18:** After the conquest of Lachish by Sennacherib (701 BC) women with girls were driven away on a wagon. Relief in the palace at Nineveh. *British Museum, London.*

enemy, using merchants as intermediaries. Some treaties allowed merchants to travel abroad.<sup>128</sup>

On reliefs in the Assyrian palaces, a thousand years later, many scenes of military victories are depicted, and there we often see captive women and children being led away, sometimes pursued by soldiers.<sup>129</sup> On a wagon piled high with

<sup>128</sup> For the adventures of captured women, see N. Ziegler, 'Kriege und ihre Folgen. Frauenschicksale anhand der Archive aus Mari' (note 124). The role of merchants: C. Michel, *Amurru* 1 (1996) 410f.; D. Charpin, *MARI* 8 (1997) 376–381.

<sup>129</sup> B. Oded, *Mass deportations and deportees in the Neo-Assyrian empire* (1979) 34, 35 n. 19, with some photos in the rear of the book; P. Albenda, 'Woman, child, and family: their imagery in Assyrian art', in: Durand, *La Femme* (1987) 17–21. There are many illustrations in the series *State Archives of Assyria* (SAA), esp. in volume XI (1995) (see note 144). – Children in booty scenes: Volk in: A. Künz-Lübcke, R. Lux, *Schaffe mir Kinder* (see note 79), 75–81. Children were sold: M. Jursa, *Aspects of the economic history of Babylonia in the first millennium BC* (2010) 226 n. 1316.

loot sat a grandmother, her daughter and grandson.<sup>130</sup> Adult women and younger women are shown piled on to wagons.<sup>131</sup> The relief in his palace showing Sennacherib conquering the city of Lachish during his campaign against Jerusalem has two such scenes (Figure 18).<sup>132</sup> On another relief we see two women, taken as booty from the city of Saḫrina, riding on a donkey, and immediately in front of them are soldiers picking up the severed heads of men. This juxtaposition of scenes suggests that the men may have been slaughtered and that some of their womenfolk captured for the victor's own purposes.<sup>133</sup>

Elsewhere older boys are shown walking along beside adult men, and girls beside adult women. Little children often trudged along beside their parents during the long journey. The infants who could not walk were held tight in their parents' arms or rode on their shoulders.<sup>134</sup> In one scene mothers suckled their children during the long march. One mother was pressing a kiss on the lips of her child. Another was leaning over to give her child a drink from a waterskin (Figure 19).<sup>135</sup> Some scenes show them sitting down and eating.<sup>136</sup> It is as though the artist wanted to produce a variety of snapshots. Quite often the clothing of the captive's own country was portrayed. Women who were taken from Syria all seem

---

**130** R. D. Barnett, M. Falkner, *The sculptures of Assurnasirpal II, Tiglath-Pileser III, Esarhaddon* (1962) plates III–IV with p. 11, Slab 9a, 8a (Tiglath-Pileser III; from Nimrud). The same motif again occurs with Tiglath-Pileser III: see Barnett, plates V–VI; W. Orthmann, *Der Alte Orient* (1975) 318 fig. 99, b. Both slabs join; B. Schmitz, *Waren sie nur schön? Frauen im Spiegel der Jahrtausende* (1989) 146 fig. 61; J. M. Russell, *The writing on the wall* (1999) 91 fig. 30 ('unnamed city'); SAA XI (1995) 96; G. Leick, *The Babylonian world* (2007) 534.

**131** SAA XVII (1995) p. 146.

**132** Scène 1: Oded, *Mass deportations* (1979) plate III; J. E. Reade, *Assyrian sculpture* (1983) 50 fig. 80, with an old drawing p. 47 fig. 66, right side (a small part is visible); J. M. Russell, *Sennacherib's Palace Without Rival at Nineveh* (1991) 164 fig. 84. Scène 2: I. Seibert, *La femme dans l'Orient ancien* (1974) plate 71; O. Keel, *Das Hohelied* (= Zürcher Bibelkommentare AT 18) (1986) 179 Abb. 105 (drawing). Old drawings in J. E. Reade, *Assyrian sculpture* (1983) 48 fig. 68, and Russell, *Palace Without Rival*, 206 fig. 111. A drawing of both scenes following each other is in T. C. Mitchell, *The Bible in the British Museum* (1988) 60–63.

**133** Russell, *Palace Without Rival*, 126 fig. 67; SAA XVII (2003) p. 124. For them being transported on an animal see SAA V (1990) p. 16; XI (1995) p. 109; S. Parpola, R. M. Whiting, *Assyria 1995* (1997) 297.

**134** SAA VII (1991) p. 33; XI (1995) 143.

**135** Albenda in Durand, *La Femme*, 18f., refers to 'an animal skin' which would have been a waterskin; see J. E. Reade, *Assyrian sculpture* (1983) 42; P. Bienkowski, A. R. Millard, *Dictionary of the Ancient Near East* (2000) 92 (Sennacherib).

**136** R. D. Barnett, *Sculptures from the North Palace of Ashurbanipal at Nineveh (668–627 B. C.)* (1976) plate LXIX; SAA V (1990) p. 10, p. 174 fig. 34; P. Bordreuil, *Les débuts de l'histoire* (2008) 211 (photos) = SAA XI (1995) p. 119 (drawing); SAA XI p. 110.



**Fig. 19:** A Chaldaean woman, captured as a prisoner-of-war, gives her child a drink from a leather waterskin. Relief in the palace at Nineveh. 620 BC. *British Museum, London.*

to be lifting the front of their garments with their right hands.<sup>137</sup> It is said that they did that when crossing a river, as stated in one of Isaiah's prophecies about the 'daughter of Babylon', in which he also emphasizes her lewd reputation.

Take the handmill, grind meal, remove your veil.  
Strip off your skirt, bare your thighs, wade through rivers,  
So that your nakedness may be seen, your shame exposed (Isaiah 47:2–3).<sup>138</sup>

<sup>137</sup> Twice on the bronze-faced doors of the palace; A. Schachner, *Subartu* 20 (2007) 296 Tafel 4, with 322 Tafel 30a (Bildstreifen IV nos. 70–73, from Dabigu), 301, with 337 Tafel 45b (Bildstreifen IX nos. 39–36, from Qarqar); cf. 100, Abb. 23 'Merkmal Gefang(ene)5'; descriptions on p. 43, 55. Also in R. D. Barnett, *The Balawat Gates of Ashurnasirpal II* (2008) fig. 6, 38 (R8), 18 (L6), 22 (L8), 24 (R1).

<sup>138</sup> S. M. Paul in: E. B. Firmage, *Religion and law: Biblical-Judaic and Islamic perspectives* (1990) 340f.

The soldiers of Ashurbanipal appear in a gruesome scene forcing their way into the tents of Arabs and apparently cutting open the bellies of pregnant women.<sup>139</sup> This madness can perhaps be understood if one reads the description of their dreadful campaign in the desert.<sup>140</sup> In the Bible the slaughter of infants and the disembowelling of pregnant women occurs as a literary motif.<sup>141</sup> We find it also in a song about the campaign of an Assyrian king, which is generally accepted as a parody:

He ripped open pregnant women, he made little children blind.<sup>142</sup>

Administrative texts also refer to deportations.<sup>143</sup> Lists of people originating from different locations have been published in *State Archives of Assyria*, Vol. XI, together with many illustrations of deported people from Assyrian palace reliefs.<sup>144</sup> A list of people from Que (= Cilicia), punctiliously subdivided, includes women and children.

334 strong men; 38 children five half-cubits tall; 41 children four half-cubits tall; 40 children three half-cubits tall; 28 weaned children; 25 infants. In total: 172 boys.

349 women; 8 women five half-cubits tall; 22 women four half-cubits tall; 49 women three half-cubits tall; 17 weaned female children; 25 female sucklings. In total: 121 girls.

In all: 977 individuals from Que.<sup>145</sup>

Despite the attention to detail, there is an error of 1 in the final total. Perhaps someone was accidentally omitted from one of the subtotals.

When considering what would have happened to these women we need to anticipate Chapter 18, about woman and work, where we shall read about the

---

**139** P. Dubovsky, 'Ripping open pregnant Arab women: reliefs in Room L of Ashurbanipal's North Palace', *Or. NS* 78 (2009) 394–419. Photo: R. D. Barnett, *Sculptures from the North Palace* (1976) plate XXXIII. Other scholars suggested a scene of rape; *SAA II* (1988) p. 47.

**140** M. Weippert, *WdO* 7 (1973) 39–85; R. Borger, *BIWA* (1996) 247 § 73. Other suggestions by Dubovsky, 416.

**141** 2 Kings 8:12, 15:16; Amos 1:13, Hosea 14:1. See M. Cogan, *JAOS* 103 (1983) 755–757.

**142** *LKA* 62 rev. 3 with D. O. Edzard, *Studies A. K. Grayson* (2004) 81–87.

**143** A survey of women taken prisoner in the booty lists gives S. Svärd, *Women and power* (2015) 127–130.

**144** Illustrations: *SAA XI* p. 90, 96, 99, 109, 110, 119, 143, 146. Furthermore, see vols. IV p. 17, 99, 117, 249; V p. 16, 36, 65, 118, 157, 170, 174; VII p. 33; XV p. 2, 10, 104; XVII p. 124; XVIII p. 38, 131, 142.

**145** *SAA XI* 167. A relief shows how the prisoners from Que (Cilicia) had to work in quarries; *SAA IV* (1990) p. 17; M. T. Larsen, *Power and propaganda* (1979) after p. 336 fig. 9.

sort of forced labour imposed on them, such as weaving and milling flour. An Egyptian slave-girl with her three-months-old daughter was sold, possibly captured during Cambyses' campaign in Egypt, one year earlier (525 BC).<sup>146</sup> Unskilled labourers were deployed in building new cities and palaces. In Mari women were identified as accompanying the forced male labourers to prepare their food. One woman had to cook for five men.<sup>147</sup> Some would have a future career as singers and instrumentalists, as we shall see in Chapter 23 when looking at the royal palace of Mari. Reliefs in Assyrian palaces show men and women with musical instruments in their hands. Sennacherib was proud of the fact that he had taken captives from the land of Judah ruled by King Hezekiah and that he had brought to Nineveh 'his daughters, his harem women, his male and female musicians', all actually depicted on his relief.<sup>148</sup> Reliefs in the palace of Ashurbanipal depicting his campaign against the Elamites (653 BC) show that after the conquest of the city of Madaktu Elamite musicians, male and female, accompanied by women and children, greet the Assyrian victors (Figure 25).<sup>149</sup> (For the musical instruments see Chapter 18 where musicians are discussed). Music was exactly what was demanded by the captors of the Judaeans abducted to 'the rivers of Babylon':

On the willow trees there we hung up our lyres,  
For there those who had carried us captive asked us to sing them a song,  
Our captors called on us to be joyful (Psalm 137:2–3).

The Bible refers to the Assyrian and Babylonian strategy of deporting entire populations from their native land and resettling them in designated locations in their own territory. Ten of the twelve tribes of Israel suffered this treatment. As early as in the letters from Mari we read of the king commissioning such an action.

Bring the deportees from A. to the city of B. and intermingle (*balātu*) them with the people of the city.<sup>150</sup>

---

**146** *Cambyses* 334 (524 BC), with M. Dandamacy, *Slavery in Babylonia* (1984) 107 f.

**147** N. Ziegler in: J. Andreau, *La guerre dans les économies antiques* (2000) 24 (A. 562) (*mušākiltu*).

**148** R. Borger, *Babylonisch-assyrische Lesestücke I* (1979) 75 iii 46, with TUAT I/4 (1984) 390. For the male musicians as prisoners on the relief see the catalogue *Babylon* (London 2008) 143 fig. 126.

**149** S. Macgregor, *Beyond hearth and home*, 36–41; eadem, 'Foreign musicians in Neo-Assyrian royal courts', *Studies Anne D. Kilmer* (2011) 137–159, esp. 148–152.

**150** J.-M. Durand, *LAPO* 17 (1998) 312 (A. 4513).

Two Assyrian letters show that such integration had to be achieved by mixed marriages. King Tiglath-Pileser III commanded a group of deported Aramaic men to go and be married to women, but it did not go as easily as envisaged. He was informed that

We have found women, but their fathers will not give them, before they are given silver. Have the men give them silver, so that they may marry.<sup>151</sup>

---

<sup>151</sup> SAA XIX 18 with TUAT NF 3 (2006) 124 f. (Nimrud Letters no. 26).

## 18 Women and work

A modern writer has summarised the daily activities of a woman in the Old Akkadian period comprehensively.

Grinding barley for flour and baking bread in the courtyard oven, going to the river for water balancing the pot on her head, washing clothes in the same river, chatting with neighbors, cooking food over the dung fire, spinning and weaving, nursing her baby (...), taking care of the sick, wailing for the dead, looking around for a suitable wife for her son, preparing for her daughter's wedding (...), and, in old age, giving sage counsel while her daughter-in-law took care of the rest.

But that picture was drawn while acknowledging that there was scarcely any evidence of these activities to be found in the texts. Although the sketch fits in with what is generally imagined about a woman's life in ancient Mesopotamia,<sup>1</sup> I have not yet seen evidence of a jug balanced on the head, and clothes would more often be washed in a canal than in a river. It was always a woman who prepared the food.

Not much is said in the texts about the daily work of a woman. It was the task of the man to provide the raw materials for the housekeeping, the grain, the wool, and the rest. The woman's role was to process this material by grinding, baking, spinning, weaving, or some other appropriate skill.<sup>2</sup> A good woman was described as follows:

The house where there is beer, it is her stand.  
The house where the cooking pot is, her jug is there.  
The house where there is food, she is the great cook.<sup>3</sup>

This can be contrasted with a reproach for a degenerate woman.

She cannot card wool, she cannot spin with the spindle.  
Her hand is no good for working.  
She is lax about going in and going out.<sup>4</sup>

---

1 A. Westenholz in: P. Attinger, M. Wäfler, *Mesopotamien. Akkade-Zeit und Ur III-Zeit* (= OBO 160/3) (1999) 71.

2 Th. Jacobsen, *Studies R. Kutscher* (1993) 73.

3 J. J. A. van Dijk, *La sagesse suméro-accadienne* (1953) 90 f.

4 'Dialogue of Two Women' B 68 f., cited by K. Volk, *Saeculum* 47 (1996) 191, *ZA* 90 (2000) 19; Å. W. Sjöberg, *Studies E. Leichty* (2006) 415 n. 29.

How different from the virtuous woman in the book of Proverbs:

She chooses wool and flax and with a will she sets about her work.  
She holds the distaff in her hand, and her fingers grasp the spindle  
(Proverbs 31:13, 19).

The goddess Inanna tells Dumuzi in a love song that she does not feel like doing housework, which is then followed by a detailed description of how one makes linen cloth, beginning with the flax, and then how to do the carding, the spinning, and the weaving. This sequence is technologically interesting.<sup>5</sup> At the beginning of this book, in Chapter 1, we saw how the spindle was characteristically a woman's work. One text illustrates how easy it must have been for her to prick herself nastily when using it.

A woman who has pricked herself begins to scream. The spindle has stabbed her and stuck in her hand. She goes into all the houses, she appears in all the streets, she shouts, 'Pull it out!'.<sup>6</sup>

Collecting water was also part of her work and at the court in Mari certain women were allocated to this task.<sup>7</sup> Wood was collected by women, or by girls, or by a slave-girl.<sup>8</sup> A store of firewood was always a concern for the housewife, and she needed to be guaranteed her store of wood. An Assyrian merchant had to give his Anatolian wife 'eight minas of copper every month for her food, her oil, and her wood'. A woman from Mari cried for help because she did not have enough, complaining, 'Since I left my husband, I have not enough food or firewood.'<sup>9</sup> In the Bible we read that Joshua required the inhabitants of the city of Gibeon to provide this.

From that day he assigned them to cut wood and draw water (Joshua 9:27).

<sup>5</sup> Y. Sefati, *Sumerian love songs* (1998) 120–127 ('The Bridal Sheets'); 290, 293 iv 14–16 ('Dumuzi's Wedding'). See T. Frymer-Kensky, *Studies Å. W. Sjöberg* (1989) 189.

<sup>6</sup> B. Alster, *Wisdom of ancient Sumer* (2005) 94 Instr. Šur. 226–232; TUAT III/1 (1990) 64; M. W. Chavalas, *Women in the Ancient Near East* (2014) 63.

<sup>7</sup> SAA II 11 no. 2 iv 21; N. Ziegler, *Le Harem* (1999) 105, 112f.

<sup>8</sup> AbB 7 116:21; L. Waterman, BDHP 25:9. In A. Goetze, *Sumer 14* (1958) no. 15:4–9, women are obliged to deliver wood.

<sup>9</sup> J. G. Dercksen, *The Old Assyrian copper trade in Anatolia* (1996) 42 n. 142; now Archivum Anatolicum 1 (1995) 11, 57, 59; ARM 2 113:18 (*šuruptu* 'fuel'); Ziegler, *Le Harem* (1999) 233 no. 59:18 (*šurpu*).



This must have been a humiliation, for we now understand that this was typically women's work, and the menfolk would not like to be doing that. An invading enemy would first encounter 'the women scooping water at the river bank', a circumstance dramatically elaborated in the poetry of the Ugaritic legend of King Keret.

The women gathering wood fled from the fields,  
from the threshing-floors,  
The women gathering straw,  
The women drawing water from the spring,  
from the fountains,  
The women filling (jugs).<sup>10</sup>

## 18.1 Working outside the home

What women did outside the home we learn from the administration archives of the large organisations which had existed in Mesopotamia since the beginning of history. These were concerned chiefly with the businesses of the temple, the king, the matters of state and also of rich individuals. Many women had to do heavy work there, in particular weaving cloth and grinding flour. We can even calculate comparable statistics, mainly from third-millennium Sumerian texts, because the documentation is very detailed regarding the work they did and where they did it. Anything that cost time and money was always accounted for in writing (what we mean by 'money' is 'payments in barley or silver'). Labour costs were calculated per working day or per part of a working day (*pro rata*); the rate varied according to the age of the worker.<sup>11</sup> This letter outlining monthly rates of pay in litres of barley may represent the norm.

20 working women: thirty litres each; 15 working women: half a day each; 3 boys: twenty litres each; 1 boy: fifteen litres; 3 boys: ten litres each; 4 elderly working women: twenty litres each; 1 elderly worker, the gatekeeper: thirty litres. Total barley for them: 1265 litres.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> AbB 5 232:10; Keret, KTU 14 ii ff. (and par.); D. Pardee in *The Context of Scripture I* (1997) 335a.

<sup>11</sup> A. Uchitel, 'Women at work. Pylos and Knossos, Lagash and Ur', *Historia* 33 (1984) 257–282 (esp. 264–274); H. Waetzoldt, 'Die Situation der Frauen und Kinder anhand ihrer Einkommensverhältnisse zur Zeit der III. Dynastie von Ur', *AOF* 15 (1988) 30–44; idem, *CUSAS* 6 (2011) 418 n. 45, 442b (in Girsu); H. Scheyhing, 'Frauen-Kinder-Arbeitsgruppen im é.munus des altsumerischen Lagaš. Eine Statistik ihrer Lebensdaten nach den še.ba-Listen', *WdO* 42 (2012) 187–209.

<sup>12</sup> TCS 1 no. 335.

A modern nutritionist states that an adult man, between 20 and 30 years old and weighing 62 kilos, needs 3337 calories daily. That would correspond to a Babylonian payment of 45 litres of barley per month. A woman of the same age, weighing 52 kilos, needs 2434 calories, corresponding to 33 litres of barley per month.<sup>13</sup> Others suggest other figures, with the calories for a man varying from 2400 to 3822. We should also remember the uncertain factors in converting their measures of capacity into our metric units of weight.<sup>14</sup> Usually men received sixty litres of barley per month and women thirty litres.<sup>15</sup> Of course there are variations, with the lowest quantities attested in Assyria, at Nuzi and Ḫarbu.<sup>16</sup> A woman in Assur wrote to a merchant in Asia Minor:

By paying me twenty litres, they have reduced me to a slave. Slave-girls eat twenty litres and I also eat twenty litres, not to mention the children.<sup>17</sup>

We see that in times of crisis weavers received ten litres of barley and five litres of dates, so any deficit in the barley was made up with dates.<sup>18</sup> The normal ration of 2: 1 for men to women (60 litres:: 30 litres) was generally maintained in all periods except in Middle Babylonian Nippur where it was 3: 2 (60 litres:: 40 litres).<sup>19</sup> The fact that women need fewer calories than men only partly justifies the different allowances. In Ebla wages were paid out in silver. There women received only three shekels per month while men received five or six. From that allowance they may have had to buy basic necessities, such as barley, sesame oil and wool.<sup>20</sup> A clause in the Hittite laws (§ 158) recommends a lower rate of pay for a woman working at the harvest.

If a man hires himself out at harvest time for wages, to bind up the stooks, to load them on to wagons, to stack them in the barn, and to clean the threshing-floor, then his wage shall be thirty bushels of barley for three months. If a woman hires herself out at harvest time, then her wage shall be twelve bushels of barley for three months.<sup>21</sup>

**13** G. G. Aperghis in: J. Andreau, *La guerre dans les économies antiques* (2000) 132, 141.

**14** R. J. van der Spek; see B. Jankóvic in: P. Briant, *L'archive des Fortifications de Persépolis* (2008) 440 f.

**15** M. Stol, 'Ration', *RIA XI/3-4* (2007) 264-269.

**16** C. Kühne in: H. Klengel, J. Renger, *Landwirtschaft im Alten Orient* (1999) 186. See, however, note 23. Variations in Ur III: Waetzoldt, 34 f.

**17** C. Michel, *Ktéma* 22 (1997) 101, 103 f.; CMK no. 375.

**18** Waetzoldt, 43. We observe the same in Lagaba; A. Vandewalle apud D. Charpin in: K. R. Veenhof, *Houses and households in Ancient Mesopotamia* (1996) 226.

**19** H. Torczyner; M. Jursa in Briant, *L'archive* (2008) 388.

**20** A. Archi, *CRRAI* 47/I (2002) 1 f.

**21** R. Haase, 'Zur Stellung der Frau im Spiegel der hethitischen Rechtssammlung', *AOF* 22 (1995) 277-281, at the end. 1 bushel (*parisu*) = a half *kor* = 150 litres.

This difference between the wages of the man and the woman in terms of silver shows that she earned one shekel while he earned three and three-quarters of a shekel. With so much heavy work to be done we can suppose that the women were given lighter tasks and consequently paid less. The Sumerian laws of Ur-Nammu show that female weavers could be hired to do work at harvest time or in winter; for wages of 30 litres in summer and 20 litres in winter.<sup>22</sup>

Barley was only one of the elements needed for sustenance, and processed materials such as flour and bread were also given as payments.<sup>23</sup> Sometimes they were given meat, for there was always an abundant supply of sheep carcasses, or soup.<sup>24</sup> The principal ingredients of soup were goats, bran, meat, salt and herbs.<sup>25</sup> In Egypt workers in the royal tombs were paid with wheat, barley, leavened and unleavened bread, vegetables, fruit and firewood. On special occasions they also received wine, honey, milk, fish, meat, and clothing. In Babylonia apart from food a monthly allowance of sesame oil and an annual allowance of wool could be given. In the Neo-Babylonian period a man is said to have received the generous quantity of 180 litres (one *kor*) of barley a month, which would be a 'ration' of six litres every day. One assumes that 'ration' here amounts to his wages, a payment in natural products with which he could trade,<sup>26</sup> and from which his whole family could live.<sup>27</sup> Women were given five or six days every month free from work, but men were given only two or three,<sup>28</sup> a subject to be discussed further in Chapter 22.

Most of the women are said to be occupied with spinning, weaving or grinding flour, but some were also pressing oil and moving items of equipment including bricks.<sup>29</sup> Sumer was a country full of irrigation canals and women were employed in their upkeep. 'Slave-girls' and weavers used to dig, dredge, repair the dikes, and open the sluices for the irrigation channels. They were also busy in the fields, digging furrows, carrying straw, grass or barley, tying up the sheaves and setting them up vertically, several at a time, as stooks, and winnowing on the thresh-

---

22 C. Wilcke, *Festschrift J. Krecher* (2014) 519 f., 564 (§d7a-b).

23 W. Heimpel, *Workers and construction work at Garšana* (2009) 95; B. Jankóvic in Briant, *L'archive* (2008) 442–444. That workers consumed only barley is improbable. They must also have eaten other foodstuff as well, so the appallingly low number of calories computed by C. Kühne (p. 187) cannot be correct.

24 I. J. Gelb, *JNES* 32 (1973) 82 f.; Heimpel, 91b.

25 Heimpel, 100, 107 f.

26 Jursa and Jankóvic in Briant, *L'archive* (2008) 411 f., 441.

27 Jursa in P. Briant, 390 n. 17, 408 f., 411, 416, 441.

28 Waetzoldt, 36 f.

29 Heimpel, 47.

ing-floor.<sup>30</sup> Their husbands are not mentioned in these records because the activities of men and women were registered separately. One text from the Ur III period mentions sixteen little workers (perhaps they were children) and nineteen wives of workers.<sup>31</sup> Another text may perhaps indicate that free women could be obliged to work, when they would be called ‘slave-girls’. As for their menfolk, they may or may not have received a piece of land from which to sustain themselves.<sup>32</sup>

## 18.2 Weavers

Cloth, clothing, garments and even carpets were woven throughout the region bordering the Mediterranean Sea.<sup>33</sup> This took place in large workshops, but probably work was also carried out in the home on commission. We know this from the administration archives from Pylos in Greece, from representations and models in clay from Egypt, and from Babylonian records. It is obvious to the historian that women were the weavers at that time, though in later periods it was the men who did the weaving and the women who did the spinning (Figure 21). Sumerian weavers were involved in the whole process, and they were chiefly women.<sup>34</sup>

The goddess of weaving was called Uttu, a name possibly related to the word *ettutu*, ‘spider’. She appears towards the end of the important myth of ‘Enki and the World Order’. First Enki created the two rivers and the water systems, then the clouds and the rain, agriculture and cattle, building bricks, meadows and sheep, the distribution of land and finally the law. Then came Uttu, the goddess of weaving. In the ‘Debate between Sheep and Grain’, closely associated with sheep and wool is ‘the thread of Uttu and the handloom’. M. Tanret drew attention to the fact that in that myth ‘nature’ was transformed into ‘culture’, thanks to the art of weaving. The production of clothing was a factor in humanising people. In the Gilgamesh epic primitive Enkidu discovered that only by wearing clothes and covering one’s nakedness did one become human.<sup>35</sup>

**30** ‘The Farmer’s Almanac’ 78–80, ed. M. Civil (1994) 32, 90 f.; A. Salonen, *Agricultura Mesopotamica* (1968) 302–305. Cf. H. Sauren, *Topographie der Provinz Umma* (1966) 73–83. Certain other tasks they did not perform; p. 75, 79.

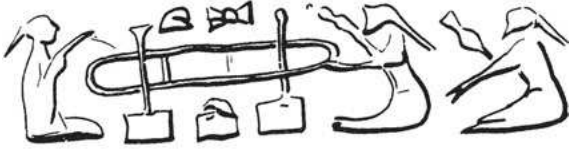
**31** T. Gomi, *ASJ* 3 (1981) 173 no. 169, with A. Uchitel, *CRRAI* 47/II (2002) 621a.

**32** Uchitel, 621–624.

**33** A broad exposition on the manufacture of textiles in the Late Bronze Age is offered by M. van de Mierop, *The Eastern Mediterranean in the age of Ramesses II* (2007) 153–166.

**34** H. Waetzoldt, *Untersuchungen zur neusumerischen Textilindustrie* (1972) 92 n. 9, 94.

**35** M. Tanret, ‘The fruit of the loom. Spinning a yarn about the Sumerian goddess Uttu’, *Studies Julian Klener* (2004) 175–197.



**Fig. 21:** A cylinder seal showing a woman spinning on the right, and weaving on the left. 2600 BC. Serpentine, 18 × 20 cm. *The Newell Collection, Yale University.*

What did Uttu actually do? She was mentioned in rituals involving the spinning of thread, a necessary process for making clothing, such as the headdress a priest received on the occasion of his investiture, a sort of turban.

Uttu took a thread in her hand, Ištar put in order the thread of Uttu, a clever woman perfected the cloth, an old wise woman (*puršumtu*) put it in order ... Uttu, the good woman, the daughter of Enlil who begot her, the beloved daughter of Ea, spun the white wool with her hand, the [thread] which she had made from it, she made into a pure turban, while praying for purity. She handed it over to the fuller of the land and he cleansed the turban with pure water.<sup>36</sup>

In a ritual it was Uttu who spun a black and white magic thread to ward off a curse, though of course that thread was actually woven on earth by mortal women. It had to be wound round the head, hands and feet of the sufferer.<sup>37</sup> Possibly this honourable task was assigned to the elite group of ‘wise old women’ who held a special position as part of their temple income, their benefice.

For the mortal weavers here on earth any heavenly reflections on their cultural task would have lain far beyond their horizons. Their lives were wretched, and their work fit for prisoners-of-war. When King Šu-Sîn announced that he was returning home with rich booty from a campaign, he boasted about doing this and much more.

He blinded the young men in their cities which he had conquered, and he put them to work in the date garden of Enlil and Ninlil and the date garden of the great gods.<sup>38</sup> And the young women he had conquered in their cities he dedicated to the weaving shops of Enlil and Ninlil and the great gods.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>36</sup> R. Borger, *BiOr* 30 (1973) 173 ii 41 ff.; M. J. Geller, *BSOAS* 63 (2000) 332–334; A. Löhnert, *Studies Jeremy Black* (2010) 187.

<sup>37</sup> Šurpu V-VI 144–161.

<sup>38</sup> For blind people see I. J. Gelb, *JNES* 32 (1973) 87; Heimpel, 94.

<sup>39</sup> R. Kutscher, *The Brockmon tablets at the University of Haifa. Royal inscriptions* (1989) 78, 90 iv 15–31. Now *RIME* 3/2 (1997) 304.

From two consecutive lists of captives who received rations of food dated in the fifth year of his successor Amar-Sîn we see how many failed to survive. From an original total of 197 named captives we see that most had died. Of the 167 women on the first list, only 121 were still alive, 46 had died; of 28 children, only 5 were still alive, 23 had died; but two old women were still alive. Among the 121 women who had survived 23 were sick. The second list is dated five months later, and by that time only 39 of the women were still alive. These lists record food distributions, so since they were being given flour and beer, something other than malnourishment was the cause of illness and death.<sup>40</sup>

In addition to the women who had been deported, there were free women working in these workshops as 'slave-girls', probably under duress. A survey of all the weavers working in the five cities of the Sumerian province of Lagash records 6423 women, 109 men, 3141 children and 198 old women. The men acted as workers or fullers to wash the textiles, and they succeeded their fathers into that job.<sup>41</sup>

Many lists of male and female weavers record the food distributed to them. Half the workers attached to 'The Woman's House' in the province of Lagash were weavers. In one establishment there were 4272 weavers and around 1800 children working with them. When the other personnel, the fullers, the porters and the scribes, are added we arrive at a total of about 6200 people.<sup>42</sup> The women worked in groups of twenty, with either a male or a female overseer. They wove wool and sometimes also flax. For high-quality textiles the team consisted of six people.<sup>43</sup> In later years the personnel of the weaving sector of the House increased. There were more rations for the women than the men, fluctuating according to productivity, and women from outside were attached to the workforce. This was a labour market in embryo.<sup>44</sup> We have a large Old Akkadian tablet formatted in more than ten columns recording the wages for personnel over a period of one month. There are 240 textile workers at the top of that list of 585 female and 105 regular male workers. It seems that the women did the main work and the men provided ancil-

<sup>40</sup> TCL V 6039, with Gelb, JNES 32 (1973) 74 f.; B. Lafont in: C. Moatti, *La mobilité des personnes en Méditerranée de l'Antiquité à l'époque moderne* (2004) 457, 473 f. (translation).

<sup>41</sup> A. Uchitel, 'Women at work: weavers of Lagash and spinners of San Luis Gonzaga', CRRAI 47/II (2002) 621–631; K. Maekawa, ASJ 2 (1980) 112.

<sup>42</sup> Waetzoldt, 94.

<sup>43</sup> K. Maekawa, 'Female weavers and their children in Lagash – Pre-Sargonic and Ur III', ASJ 2 (1980) 81–125, especially 87, 101 (a 'gang' of twenty women), 89 f. (flax), 109–111 (high-quality textiles).

<sup>44</sup> R. Prentice, *The exchange of goods and services in Pre-Sargonic Lagash* (2010) 54 f., 63, 66, 68, 92 f., 117 (goods for export).

lary labour. Children are not mentioned on this list, so it could have been a record of labourers in some sort of convent.<sup>45</sup> Where children are listed as helpers it is noticeable that most of them were girls, probably the daughters of the weavers. The sons had probably been taken away. They were called ‘the cut-off young of a weaver’, giving the impression that they had been castrated, though this is not certain. They were put to unskilled work, such as pulling boats on the canals from Lagash to Nippur.<sup>46</sup>

There were different ranks of weavers. In Old Babylonian Chagar Bazar, of the two women with some responsibility for management, one received 100 litres of barley per month, and the other 60 litres. The individual allowance for the main group of 64 women and 9 men was 40 litres, but five women had only 30 litres, two girls had 20 litres, and four children had 10 litres. In another location we see 174 women and 27 men in the main group. There were almost 1000 people in total who worked in producing textiles.<sup>47</sup> Some women who were weavers received a bonus at sheep-shearing time and at New Year.<sup>48</sup> In Mari and other cities the wives of patricians directed big textile workshops at their homes.<sup>49</sup> In an inventory of the personnel of the house of the ‘Amorite scribe’ at Mari, we find 32 weavers and 2 flour-grinders with two children.<sup>50</sup> The weavers must have worked in a workshop and what they produced must have been sold. The two flour-grinders only worked for the needs of the house. A king who removed a weaver, promising two as replacements but did not keep his promise, was confronted with the plea, ‘My house is being ruined; there is no-one to make the clothes’.<sup>51</sup>

In the Middle Assyrian period deported women were again put to work as weavers. A list has all their names (including foreign ones), and the amounts of wool they were given and the clothes they were expected to manufacture. Simple people wore a certain sort of garment, which was mass-produced by specialised weavers. Some weavers were expected to produce two garments a day, but for others it could be up to six. One woman made cloth for tents.<sup>52</sup>

---

45 MAD 1 163 with I. J. Gelb, RA 66 (1972) 3 f., G. Visicato, ASJ 19 (1997) 238 ff. (Group 1).

46 Maekawa, ASJ 2, 81, 112. ‘Castrated’ is unlikely according to D. O. Edzard and J. Bauer, AFO 36–37 (1989–90) 88b (rather ‘absondern’).

47 Ph. Talon, *Old Babylonian texts from Chagar Bazar* (1997) 17–24. In Mari female weavers also received different quantities, depending on their ages: 50, 40, 30 litres; ARMT 23 (1984) p. 554.

48 Waetzoldt, 35 f.

49 D. Charpin in: K. R. Veenhof, *Houses and households in Ancient Mesopotamia* (1996) 223.

50 B. Lion, Amurru 2 (2001) 127:22, 24.

51 Lion, 105.

52 S. Jakob, *Mittellassyrische Verwaltung und Sozialstruktur* (2003) 412–425.

From the Neo-Babylonian period we know that women wove in the temples.<sup>53</sup> Widows worked there and they were forbidden ‘to go and live with a citizen’, meaning that they could not marry and leave. We see that weaving was also carried out at home, for wool was delivered to a person’s house.

Five minas of woven cloth, worth ten minas of wool, the property of the Lady of Uruk and Nanaya, accounted to T. the daughter of B. She shall give the cloth in month 4.

The names of witnesses follow. It is dated in month 10, so that was enough material to last them for six months.<sup>54</sup> In the Apocryphal book of Tobit we see Anna doing the work at home.

At that time Anna my wife used to earn money by women’s work, spinning and weaving (*érithos*), and her employers (*kurioi*) would pay her when she took them what she had done. One day (...) they not only paid her wages in full, but also gave her a kid from their herd of goats to take home (Tobit 2:11–12).

In the Persian period, according to the administration archives from Persepolis from the time of Darius, the quantity of food distributed to men and women did not differ much in the textile industry.<sup>55</sup> Often they received equal quantities, but that could depend on rank. A leading woman received fifty litres of barley plus thirty litres of wine and one-third of a beast from the small livestock. However men mostly received thirty litres of barley a month and women twenty, and in addition they might receive wine and meat. After the birth of a child a woman would receive an increased allowance for five months: twenty litres of grain and ten litres of wine or beer if the baby was a boy, but half that if it was a girl.<sup>56</sup> This fits in with the observation made by Herodotus.

I, 136. After bravery in battle what ranks next as particularly courageous is when someone begets many children, and the one who can point to the greatest number of children, receives presents from the king.

---

53 F. Joannès in P. Briant, *L'archive* (2008) 472f.

54 M. Jursa, *Iraq* 59 (1997) 108 no. 13; F. Joannès in: C. Michel, M.-L. Nosch, *Textile terminologies in the Ancient Near East and Mediterranean from the third to the first millennia BC* (2010) 404. Note ‘one roll (*kirku*) of home-made cloth’, M. T. Roth, *Babylonian marriage agreements* (1989) 108 no. 34:16.

55 H. Koch, ‘Frauen im Achämenidenreich’, *Studies O. Klīma* (1994) 125–141; P. Briant, *Histoire de l'empire perse de Cyrus à Alexandre I* 1996) 444 f.

56 Briant, 448. For this, see also G. G. Aperghis in: J. Andreau, *La guerre dans les économies antiques* (2000) 133.



The loom was positioned horizontally above the ground, kept securely in place with stakes in the ground. Weaving was certainly a profession. In Old Babylonian letters there is at least one request for slave-girls who were weavers.

My girls have died. Have one slave-girl brought to me, and whatever else she may be let her be a weaver.<sup>57</sup>

The administration archives give us an insight into the sequence of tasks necessary to produce the finished cloth.<sup>58</sup> The raw material was wool from the flocks on the grasslands, and the end-product garments known to have been produced in Babylonia. In the Bible we find a reference to that as a stamp of quality, when a man took ‘a coat from Shinar (the name for Babylonia), a beautiful garment’ from the spoils of Jericho (Joshua 7:21). Beautiful robes were the ultimate luxury and were exchanged as gifts between kings.<sup>59</sup> The weaving shops mainly produced cloth from which clothes could be made, but clothes could also be produced there. More than once differentiating cloth from clothes in a text is hard.<sup>60</sup> In the Neo-Babylonian period we find some specialist weavers, such as those who wove multicoloured cloth, and one woman who produced linen garments.<sup>61</sup>

In the weaving workshops where the wool was processed they reckoned to get wool weighing two minas from one fleece of a sheep. The cloth was woven to standard measurements: in the Ur III period a standard length was no bigger than  $7 \times 8$  els (= cubits), in the Old Assyrian period  $9 \times 8$  els, and in Nuzi  $15 \times 5$  els. The weight of a standard length of cloth was six minas overall.<sup>62</sup> Among the mathematical problems set for schoolboys was how long it would take to weave a length of cloth 48 els long, given that a weaver would normally weave a third of an el in a day. The solution was that the work would last for 144 days. That is longer than has been proposed from calculations based on actual practice.<sup>63</sup>

57 OBTR 122:21–24; A. al-Zeebari, ABIM 20:80 f.; AbB 6 4:26, 156:6.

58 H. Waetzoldt, *Untersuchungen zur neusumerischen Textilindustrie* (1972); idem, ‘Die Textilproduktion von Garšana’, CUSAS 6 (2011) 405–454; M. Stol, *Mesopotamien. Die altbabylonische Zeit* (= OBO 160/4) (2004) 965–970.

59 Van de Mieroop, *The Eastern Mediterranean* (2007) 164.

60 Cloths: Michel, Nosch, *Textile terminologies*, 150 (Ebla), 230, 261–264 (Old Assyrian), 406 (Neo-Babylonian).

61 CAD I/J 253 f.

62 C. Zaccagnini, SCCNH 1 (1981) 360 f. Ur III: lengths of three to six metres are attested; Waetzoldt, CUSAS 6 (2011) 411–413.

63 Waetzoldt, *Untersuchungen*, 139.



**Fig. 22:** The grinding room in the palace of Ebla. Barley was ground between a large lower millstone and a cylinder-like upper millstone. Ebla. 2000 BC.

### 18.3 Grinding flour

To grind flour a person had to kneel on the ground and rotate the upper millstone over the lower flat millstone. Excavators at Ebla discovered many millstones in one room, meaning that many women would have all been working there together (Figure 22). One text mentions ninety millers.<sup>64</sup> We also find an account with 950 people in a workshop, but that may include some weavers. The monthly ration could vary slightly.<sup>65</sup> Much information can be gathered from texts concern-

<sup>64</sup> M. G. Biga, *La Parola del Passato* 46 (1991) 302f.

<sup>65</sup> Survey: L. Milano, 'Mühle', *RIA VIII/5–6* (1995) 397–399, §4, 'Work at the mill'.

ing the processing of barley to make flour from the Ur III period.<sup>66</sup> First we have the working time made available by the state, expressed in terms of working days, and the amount of barley to be processed. Then we have an overview of the work actually carried out, in which we see how many workers were actually employed. Calculations show that there were fixed times for processing the barley into specific sorts of flour. The coarser the flour the less time taken to produce it: twenty litres of groats could be ground in a day, but only ten litres of ‘fat flour’, and the rate of production of finer types of flour ranged from 6.66 to 8 litres per day. A particular type of millstone was required to produce a particular type of flour.<sup>67</sup> At the bottom of the tablet we find how many days of work were in deficit or in surplus when compared to the standard production expected. The time needed to produce a given amount of flour could be calibrated in terms of silver, the means of payment used by the merchants. One shekel of silver equated to ninety days of work. It is difficult to track down the fixed exchange values which pertained. These uniform standards were linked to the introduction of weights and the new law-book written by King Šulgi, the so-called ‘Laws of Ur-Nammu’. Converting the rates and calculating them according to fixed standards led to the study of applied mathematics in scribal schools. Later we see the almost proverbial standard of flour to be ground per day equated with an amount of ten litres, one *sūtu* in Akkadian (one *seah* in Hebrew).<sup>68</sup>

According to the administration archives of the temple of Inanna of Nippur it seemed that female flour-grinders worked in ‘the women’s house’, where they received payment in various commodities including wool. Each person was referred to by name and after the name we regularly find the gloss ‘infant boy’ or ‘infant girl’.<sup>69</sup> Outside Nippur on three occasions we find a blind woman grinding barley.<sup>70</sup> It is known that people could be deliberately blinded and then put to work as a flour-grinder or as a weaver or a singer. The blind singer will be discussed later in this chapter.<sup>71</sup> Samson was blinded and then made to grind grain.

Then the Philistines seized him, gouged out his eyes (...) and he was set to grinding grain in the prison (Judges 16:21).

---

**66** H. J. Nissen, *Frühe Schrift und Techniken der Wirtschaftsverwaltung im alten Vorderen Orient* (1990) 86–89, 125–130; R. K. Englund, *Organisation und Verwaltung der Ur III-Fischerei* (1990) 79–90; JNES 50 (1991) 255–280.

**67** AbB 7 19:24.

**68** Milano, 398a; M. Stol, JCS 34 (1982) 154 f.; idem, *Mesopotamien* (note 58), 757 f.

**69** R. Zettler, *The Ur III temple of Inanna at Nippur* (1992) 261, 4 NT 213 i 1–20, with p. 174 f.

**70** W. Farber, ZA 75 (1985) 223 (35) (Chagar Bazar); B. Lion, Amuru 3 (2004) 223 (Mari).

**71** Lion, 223. In general see W. Heimpel, Kaskal 6 (2009) 45 f. (Ur III).

A letter from Mari reads:

Do not sell those men. Have their eyes ‘touched’ and put them to work grinding barley, or have their tongues [cut off], so that no word gets out.

That seems to us barbaric,<sup>72</sup> but perhaps these people were not totally blinded. An Assyrian king made this improbable boast.

I slaughtered their hordes. I blinded 14,000 survivors and took them as booty.<sup>73</sup>

These survivors may have been blinded in just one eye.

In the epilogue to the laws of Ur-Nammu youths are cursed with blindness:

May the young men of his town be blind,  
may the young women of his town be infertile.<sup>74</sup>

In the Neo-Babylonian period we sometimes find women grinding in the ‘flour house’,<sup>75</sup> a house which according to one letter measured 10 × 7.5 metres. Another place where flour was ground was the prison, and there from as early as the Sumerian period it was men who did this.<sup>76</sup> There is some evidence to say that women ground the special types of flour. In this later period women were also put to work to fatten poultry, ducks, geese and pigeons.<sup>77</sup>

One Sumerian text may have been a fragment of a song sung by the grinders as they worked.<sup>78</sup> This work-song is called an *elalu* in Sumerian, and would be comparable with the *alala*, a similar song sung while ploughing and harvesting. In Assyrian royal inscriptions we read that whenever the *alala* rang out over the fields prosperity abounded. By contrast, a proverb shows that it would be preferable not to have to sing the song because there was no millstone available.

As they say, ‘I do not know the work song. If it (the millstone) gets lost, I will not suffer.’

72 ARM 14 78, end, with J.-M. Durand, *LAPO* 18 (2000) 66–68. Cruelty in Mari: D. Bonnetterre, *MARI* 8 (1997) 537–561.

73 RIMA 1 (1987) 184, Shalmaneser I no. 1:73–5, with P. Machinist, *Assur* 3/2 (1982) 18. Cf. H. Freydank, *OLZ* 80 (1985) 233 f. (poor eyesight, ‘sehschwach’).

74 CUSAS 17 (2011) 246 g 16 f., 252b.

75 F. Joannès in: P. Briant, *L'archive des Fortifications de Persépolis* (2008) 470–472.

76 F. N. H. al-Rawi, *Nisaba* 24 (2009) no. 5.

77 Jursa and Joannès in Briant, *L'archive* (2008) 390 n. 16, 474.

78 M. Civil, ‘The Song of the Millstone’, *Studies J. Sanmartin* (2006) 121–138.

The Sumerian song pictures the need to create friction between the millstone and the harder stone on which it has to be rotated, and both are needed. Both appear again in a myth about stones, where they are given their place in life in primeval times. The god Ninurta decreed that ‘an insignificant, weak person’ (that was the woman flour-grinder) would be given to the stone ‘to fight the hunger in the land’.<sup>79</sup>

## 18.4 Women as musicians and singers

Female musicians include both singers and instrumentalists. The singers were called *zammiru*, derived from the Semitic word *zamāru*, ‘to sing’, and the instrumentalists were called *nāru*, derived from the Sumerian word *nar*. We group these musicians together since the instrumentalists are also regularly depicted singing.<sup>80</sup> A Sumerian proverb says,

A musician (*nar*) with good breathing — that is a real musician (SP 2.57).

There are also illustrations of singers without an instrument.<sup>81</sup> On one side of the Standard of Ur found in the royal tombs of Ur are scenes of life in times of peace, and on the other side there are wartime scenes. On the right of the top row of the peacetime section is a man standing with a lyre, and behind him we can make out a woman who is perhaps a singer (Figure 23).<sup>82</sup> On two Old Sumerian reliefs we see a woman with a lyre and a man with a harp.<sup>83</sup> In the royal tombs of Ur the women were holding lyres. It seems that women played the lyre and men the harp (Figure 24). A seated, beardless man (though it could be a woman) is playing a

<sup>79</sup> The proverb: CUSAS 2 (2007) 29 f. with Civil, 122; M. W. Chavalas, *Women in the Ancient Near East* (2014) 86. The myth is *Lugale*, lines 448–462 (Civil, 133 f.).

<sup>80</sup> D. Shehata, *Musiker und ihr vokales Repertoire. Untersuchungen zu Inhalt und Organisation von Musikerberufen und Liedgattungen in altbabylonischer Zeit* (2009) 30.

<sup>81</sup> ‘Sänger, Sängerin’, in der Bildkunst, RIA XI/7–8 (2008) 503–506. For a singer visibly singing see Joan Rimmer, *Ancient musical instruments of Western Asia* (1969) plate XIV, b; M. Schuol, *Hethitische Kultmusik* (2004) Tafel 35 no. 84 (in the middle, with his hand at his throat).

<sup>82</sup> Rimmer, *Ancient musical instruments*, frontispiece; J. Reade, *Mesopotamia* (1991) 52 fig. 51; D. P. Hansen in: R. Zettler, L. Horne, *Treasures from the Royal Tombs of Ur* (1998) 44–47, 54 (grave PG 779). Drawing in A. Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East I* (1995) 35 fig. 2.

<sup>83</sup> W. Orthmann, *Der Alte Orient* (1975), plates 82, 83 (‘Weihplatte’); Schuol, *Hethitische Kultmusik*, Tafel 27 nos. 67, 68.



**Fig. 23:** A scene which represents peacetime. A man is playing a lyre with eleven strings; the woman behind him must be a singer. She has the same hairstyle as the singer Ur-Nanše from Mari. The ‘Standard of Ur’. Ur. 2600 BC. Mosaic made of shells, lapis lazuli and limestone. Height 5 cm. *British Museum, London.*



**Fig. 24:** A votive plaque showing a woman playing a lyre. A similar plaque shows a man playing a harp. Gypsum. Height 24.6 cm. Nippur. *Iraq Museum, Baghdad.*



**Fig. 25:** After being beaten by the Assyrians in 653 BC, the Elamites greet their new viceroy. Their rulers bow before him. The men and women parading behind include eight playing an upright harp, two a double flute, and one a tambourine. They are followed by fifteen women and children clapping in accompaniment. In the river below the corpses of those killed in the battle can be seen floating along. Nineveh palace relief. *British Museum, London.*

vertical harp.<sup>84</sup> This type of harp was held in the lap, the string arm horizontal, the box upright in front of the player's chest.<sup>85</sup> Reliefs in the Assyrian palaces show women with such a harp and men plucking a horizontal harp with a plectrum.<sup>86</sup> A palace relief of King Ashurbanipal shows subjugated Elamites greeting

<sup>84</sup> H. Frankfort, *The art and architecture of the Ancient Orient* (1954) plate 59, B; Orthmann, *Der Alte Orient*, plate 185, a; Schuol, *Hethitische Kultmusik*, Tafel 30 no. 74; S. N. Kramer, *Le mariage sacré* (1983) 101. On an Old Babylonian terracotta a man is playing the horizontal harp; Kramer, 192.

<sup>85</sup> Rimmer, *Ancient musical instruments*, 21; the horizontal harp is described on p. 30 f.

<sup>86</sup> Reliefs: A. Moortgat, *The art of ancient Mesopotamia* (1969) plates 287, 288; SAA III (1989) 15 fig. 4 (= Rimmer, *Ancient musical instruments*, plate XII).

him while playing musical instruments and singing (Figure 25). We follow the description of the scene by S. Macgregor.<sup>87</sup>

Five male instrumentalists, six female instrumentalists, and then six women and nine children who appear to be clapping to the music. Seven of the eleven instruments played by the male and female musicians are vertical harps. Vertical harps were clearly a popular instrument throughout the centuries in the ancient Near East, perhaps because they had the largest pitch-range of any musical instrument. The other musical instruments in the Elamite procession are one horizontal harp, two divergent double pipes and one cylindrical drum. The horizontal harp appears to be a gender-specific musical instrument and is only played by male musicians.

Men, often accompanied by the harp, sang the laments which were part of the cult liturgies. Many terracottas show a woman playing a tambourine, holding it with both hands across her chest.<sup>88</sup> Women often danced to the accompaniment of a tambourine or framed drum. An ivory ointment box (*pyxis*) from the palace of Calah shows three women with a double flute, tambourine and a sort of zither (Figure 26).<sup>89</sup> In third-millennium art we sometimes see a drum, almost the size of man, a kettledrum, being played either by a man or by a woman.<sup>90</sup> Old Babylonian texts associate women with the instrument *tigi*, a drum or tambourine.<sup>91</sup> From a Sumerian song about Dumuzi and Inanna:

My girlfriend was dancing with me in the square, she ran around with me, playing the tambourine (*ùb*) and the recorder (*giš PA*), her chants, being sweet, she sang for me.

---

**87** S. L. Macgregor, 'Foreign musicians in Neo-Assyrian royal courts', *Studies Anne D. Kilmer* (2011) 137–159, esp. 148–152 (good photos with an old drawing of the scene). Neo-Assyrian music: S. L. MacGregor, *Beyond hearth and home. Women in the public sphere in Neo-Assyrian society* (= SAAS 21) (2012) 29–54; this scene: p. 36–41.

**88** M.-Th. Barrelet, *Figurines et reliefs en terre cuite de la Mésopotamie antique* (1968) nos. 340–364; *Sumer–Assur–Babylon* (Hildesheim 1978) no. 108.

**89** J. E. Curtis, J. E. Reade, *Art and Empire* (1995) 150 no. 121; Rimmer, *Ancient musical instruments*, plate VII, a. Drawing in S. Emerit, *Le statut du musicien dans la Méditerranée ancienne* (2013) 26.

**90** N. Ziegler, *Florilegium Marianum IX* (2007) 74 (the *alû*); Moortgat, *The art of ancient Mesopotamia*, plates 199 (drawing; Schuol, *Hethitische Kultmusik*, Tafel 30 no. 73), 200.

**91** D. Shehata, *Musiker*, 40–44.





**Fig. 26:** Ivory ointment box (*pyxis*) from the Assyrian palace at Calah  
Three women are playing a double flute, a tambourine and a sort of zither.  
*British Museum, London.*

These verses suggest that the girl is playing the instrument *uppu* and the boy is dancing (*mēlulu*).<sup>92</sup> This scene is known from terracottas where a woman is playing and a boy is squatting or dancing (Figure 27).<sup>93</sup>

The lute was played only by men on joyful and informal occasions. On an earthenware disc two female dancers are depicted with two smaller men with a lute in between them, and behind them are three seated monkeys.<sup>94</sup>

It is not easy to distinguish beardless men from women. On a relief of Sennacherib we see two priests, without beards and wearing pointed hats, holding horizontal harps, parading from left to right, and three figures who could be women. One of these three holds a tambourine, another a cymbal (?) and another a tambourine.<sup>95</sup>

<sup>92</sup> Y. Sefati, *Sumerian love songs* (1998) 186 f., lines 15–17.

<sup>93</sup> Catalogue *Das vorderasiatische Museum Berlin* (1992) 103 no. 47.

<sup>94</sup> Orthmann, *Der Alte Orient*, plate 186, b with p. 303; *Sumer–Assur–Babylon*, no. 109; Schuol, *Hethitische Kultmusik*, Tafel 32 no. 78.

<sup>95</sup> A relief in two parts: D. Collon in: K. Watanabe, *Priests and officials in the Ancient Near East* (1999) 24, 41 f., figs. 28 f. Drawings: C. J. Gadd, *The Stones of Assyria* (1936) Pl. 22 (after p. 104, with p. 176); Moortgat, *The art of ancient Mesopotamia*, 154 fig. 109.



**Fig. 27:** A terracotta showing a woman with lyre on the left and a man with a tambourine on the right. 1800 BC. Terracotta. Height 13.7 cm; width 10.4 cm. *Vorderasiatisches Museum, Berlin*.

A statue from the court of King Iblul-II of Mari (2500 BC) shows the leader of the musicians<sup>96</sup> with the inscription,

For Iblul-II, king of Mari, Ur-Nanše, the great musician, has dedicated his statue to the goddess Inanna- ...<sup>97</sup>

---

<sup>96</sup> Moortgat, plate 68 f.; Orthmann, *Der Alte Orient*, plate 24 with p. 165 f.

<sup>97</sup> J. S. Cooper, *Sumerian and Akkadian royal inscriptions I* (1986) 88 f., Ma 5.2.



**Fig. 28:** Statue of the prominent singer and musician in Mari Ur-Nanše, looking like a woman. 2350 BC. Gypsum. Height 26 cm. *National Museum, Damascus.*

He is sitting on a reed hassock and holds his arms stretched out in front of him, so probably he was once holding an instrument (Figure 28). He has a man's name and refers to the statue as 'his', but it has to be said that the depiction of his face and chest is extremely effeminate. How should this be explained? In the temples those singing the laments sang in what was called in Sumerian 'women's language' (*emesal*, see Chapter 1) and there was uncertainty about their gender. Sometimes they were married and had children. This depiction may reflect that situation.<sup>98</sup> Instrumentalists had a higher status than singers, as seen in a letter from Mari:

---

<sup>98</sup> N. Ziegler, *Florilegium Marianum IX* (2007) 7–9; F. N. H. al-Rawi, *ZA* 82 (1992) 180–185 (a direct connection with music).

Out of 42 young women there are 24 young women who stand in the great orchestra, and the rest, 18 young women, are singers.<sup>99</sup>

At the courts of Ebla, Ur and Mari male musicians were highly regarded, and possibly they were also composers.<sup>100</sup> However much their performances may have been appreciated, musicians did not enjoy high status in society.<sup>101</sup> In the court of Mari the females were slaves and in the Ur III period they could be made to work as weavers. We shall refer again to this in Chapter 23, about the harem of Zimri-Lim. King Samsi-Addu instructed his son, the viceroy of Mari, that the female servants of a king subjugated earlier, who had in the meanwhile grown up, should be brought to the harems of the two palaces of the viceroy, where they should receive music lessons.<sup>102</sup> In Mari female musicians were selected from the women taken captive. In the time of King Zimri-Lim a confidant of the king supervised them. He selected them and in addition mediated in attracting foreign princesses to be brides. He was obviously a connoisseur of fine women. Women chiefly played the lyre, and the men performed in the music academy (*mummu*). In a letter we read that they learned to sing ‘incantations which were good for the health of the king’.<sup>103</sup> Learning to play music was not easy. King Šulgi boasted that he had mastered all the techniques, but for us it is not easy to appreciate what specifically he would have had to learn.<sup>104</sup> We know of two contracts to ensure that a young person receives a musical education.<sup>105</sup> Only men could perform in the cult worship.<sup>106</sup>

In returning to the parts played by women we quote from a royal inscription in which a king proudly states how he honoured a goddess with musicians.

I installed in the temple two hundred *tigi* players, a great orchestra, melodious music (lit. ‘sound’) which is in keeping with her great divine status.<sup>107</sup>

---

**99** Ziegler, 109 no. 17:16–18.

**100** W. Sallaberger, JEOL 38 (2003–04) 56 (Ur III); Ziegler, 77 f.; R. Pruzsinszky, WZKM 97 (2007) 342 n. 42.

**101** Pruzsinszky, 343 n. 43; eadem, in Emerit, *Les statut du musicien*, 42f.

**102** ARM 1 64 with LAPO 16 (1997) 91 no. 15.

**103** Ziegler, 215 no. 51:19–21.

**104** Th.J. H. Krispijn, *Akkadica* 70 (1990) 1–27.

**105** BE 8 98 with H. Petschow, RIA VI/7–8 (1983) 570 § 6 (a girl?); M. J. Geller, ‘Music lessons’, *Festschrift B. Kienast* (2003) 109–111 (a man).

**106** J.-M. Durand in: G. del Olmo Lete, *Mythologie et religion des Sémites occidentaux* I (2008) 387 f.

**107** Takil-ilussu of Malgium, on the temple of Ulmašitum; Ziegler, 13 n. 37.

It is likely that singers would have been there too. Whenever women captured in the North are mentioned, they had to be trained to become a ‘Subarean ensemble’, which could certainly mean that they sang in Hurrian, their local language.<sup>108</sup> Amorite musicians are also mentioned. Teaching instrumental and vocal skills at school was not always crowned with success, and one student was given a bad report.

Even though he had the lyre with him, he knew no music. He lags behind his classmates and does not know how to sing softly and loudly.<sup>109</sup>

A Sumerian ritual at the beginning of the building of a house prescribes that seven bricks must be put in place and that seven boys and girls must sing a special song.

O brick, may a good future be ordained! May the deity show his good favour towards you!  
Brick, bring joy! Brick, bring well-being!<sup>110</sup>

From Middle Babylonian Nippur we have a group of texts about the treatment of sick singers, which we will discuss later (see Chapter 22). It appears from one of the letters that the girls ‘had to go and sit for instruction’. In the letters from Mari this indicated a music lesson, and so we assume instrumentalists and singers are referred to here.<sup>111</sup>

A girl could marry or become trained as a musician. On the left edge at the end of letter from Palestine written in bad Akkadian we find such a request.

Regarding your daughter, we are well informed about her well-being and that she is growing up. Will you let her be trained as a singer, or give her to a man?<sup>112</sup>

A Canaanite word is used here for ‘singer’, *šārūtu* (cf. Hebrew *šir* ‘song’), and the word for ‘man’ is *bēlu*, literally ‘lord’ (cf. Hebrew *ba‘al*, the same word used by Sarah to speak of Abraham, traditionally translated as ‘my lord’, cf. KJV). While the two prospects outlined here for the future of the young woman may be appealing, modern scholars have looked more closely at the signs on the clay tablet for ‘singer’. Now they prefer to interpret them as meaning ‘silver’ which could be used to pay a ransom, and translate the girl’s options differently.

**108** ARM 10 126:17; LAPO 18 (2000) 349–351 no. 1166.

**109** Dialogue 2:94–6 with Th.J. H. Krispijn, Phoenix 38,3 (1992) 26.

**110** A. Cavigneaux, *Uruk. Altbabylonische Texte* (1996) 63 f. no. 122.

**111** Not just ‘girls’. See I. Sibbing Plantholt, ZA 104 (2014) 172a. The letter is BE 17 31:10, with TUAT NF 3 (2006) 114.

**112** Ta’annek Letter 2; ANET (1969) 490; CAD Š/2 144 s.v. *šārūtu*.

Let him give her for a ransom or give her to a man.<sup>113</sup>

It is a pity that the old explanation which sounded so intriguing has gone.

An Old Babylonian note refers to a blind candidate for a music teacher.<sup>114</sup>

After the 18<sup>th</sup> day of the tenth month they brought before me the woman Šinunutum, who was blind, so that I could teach her music.

We know of an occasion when a girl with this same name from the far North was sold.<sup>115</sup> This name is different from others in her own language, and we may suppose that she received it in Babylonia, where it would be the name of a bird, possibly a swallow. Were the eyes of a swallow blinded to stimulate her song? Was this the reason for giving the singer this new name?

We know of blind musicians as well as blind weavers from lists of names from earlier times.<sup>116</sup> In Nuzi blind people and musicians are listed together in the same list.<sup>117</sup> Blind boys and girls were trained as musicians and in Mari they are included in lists of musicians who had special teachers.<sup>118</sup> From the same city we know of a letter in which a command is given to 'let the eyes fall asleep', referring to ugly (?) children. Apparently the intention was to blind them and these children may then have been trained as singers or musicians.<sup>119</sup> It is common to find references to singers and musicians who were blind elsewhere. In the Odyssey Demodocus performed when he was blind (VIII 44) and Homer himself was also blind. It is also said that 'in ancient China musicians were commonly blind.'<sup>120</sup> According to the myth of Enki and Ninmaḥ, being a singer was the destiny of those born blind. The gods Enki and Ninmaḥ happened to be drunk, and they created out of the clay by mistake seven people with a defect. They challenged each other nevertheless to find a purpose for these freaks and they succeeded. The second person was born blind and he was given the destiny of becoming

**113** W. Horowitz, T. Oshima, *Cuneiform in Canaan* (2006) 130 f. (new copy on p. 218).

**114** E. Szlechter, TJA (1963) 151; cited in CAD A/1 177b.

**115** YOS 13 382.

**116** MAD 1 253 = W. Sommerfeld, *Die Texte der Akkade-Zeit. 1. Das Dijala-Gebiet: Tutub* (1999) 66 f. no. 14; W. Heimpel, KASKAL 6 (2009) 46 n. 6 (Ur III).

**117** W. Farber, ZA 75 (1985) 218 (26).

**118** Mari: N. Ziegler, *Les musiciens et la musique d'après les archives de Mari* (= Florilegium Marianum IX) (2007); eadem in: *The Oxford handbook of cuneiform culture* (2011) 306. For girls taken prisoner see B. Lion, Amurru 3 (2004) 223, bottom. In general see J. C. Fincke, *Augenleiden nach keilschriftlichen Quellen* (2000) 67.

**119** Ziegler, 21–23. The letter (Ziegler, 22f.) is AEM 1/2 no. 297.

**120** I. J. Gelb, *Studia Orientalia* 46 (1975) 59 f.

a musician.<sup>121</sup> The sixth person to emerge from their fingers was a woman who could not bear children, and they decided that she should go and work in the women's house as a weaver. The seventh had 'neither penis, nor womb' and so became a eunuch, assuming we have deciphered the cuneiform correctly.<sup>122</sup>

## 18.5 The female innkeeper

A Babylonian dictionary in which professions were listed mentions women functioning as doctors, scribes, hairdressers, and bakers; one is said to prepare fish sauces (*garum*) and another is a perfumer. A second list includes an old woman, someone who sweeps the courtyard, a hairdresser, a cook, a scribe, and a brewer.<sup>123</sup> But in practice things were different.<sup>124</sup> The laws of Hammurabi dealt with women in 'free professions' such as an innkeeper, the landlady (*sābîtu*), a wet-nurse, and there were still more. It is noticeable that female cooks rarely occur in the texts.

The woman as a brewer or landlady, sometimes referred to as an innkeeper or an ale-wife, deserves special attention. Women often brewed beer at home, and we have examples from the Old Assyrian, the Sumerian and the Neo-Babylonian periods.<sup>125</sup> In Sippar a father gave his daughter, who was a nun, various items including 'a large house, half a brewery, and a shop'.<sup>126</sup> A Sumerian myth tells that in idyllic times of yore

the widow would spread the beer-malt out on the roof, without any bird in the sky pecking at it.<sup>127</sup>

In the Neo-Babylonian period a slave-girl received enough raw materials to start a brewery.<sup>128</sup> A dealer in date beer at that time wrote this to his brother and sister.<sup>129</sup>

---

**121** 'Enki and Ninmaḥ' 63–65 with W. H. Ph. Römer, TUAT III/3 (1993) 393 f.; D. Shehata, 'Der blinde Musiker', *Musiker*, 36–39.

**122** 'Enki and Ninmaḥ' 72–78 with Römer, 395.

**123** MSL 12 (1969) 58, OB Proto-Lu 705–708; 66, MDP 27 194. The occupations of women in another list are not clear, see p. 65 f.

**124** R. Harris, *Gender and aging* (2000) 105–108.

**125** C. Michel in: J. G. Dercksen, *Anatolia and the Jazira during the Old Assyrian period* (2008) 218; M. Stol in: L. Milano, *Drinking in ancient societies* (1994) 179 n. 240.

**126** R. Harris, *Ancient Sippar* (1975) 20 f.

**127** 'Enki and Ninḫursag' 19 f.; P. Attinger, ZA 74 (1984) 8.

**128** Stol in Milano, 179 f.

**129** CT 22 40 with M. Jursa, NABU 2006/1, TUAT NF 3 (2006) 161 f.

First he addresses the woman:

My heart rejoiced because you are pregnant. (...) Sell beer for a mina of silver. Furthermore it is the command of the king that no marked silver can be given. Accept (only) refined silver.

The brother gets instructions about brewing beer, specifically on adding the hop used at that time. We see here that while the man is in charge of brewing the woman is in charge of sales. Occasionally things went wrong in such an establishment.

'I shall bring someone for you who makes good beer.' He brought a woman with him who had spoiled ten jugs of mixed beer. Moreover she brewed beer that was as sour as mandrake root.<sup>130</sup>

The art of brewing had a patron goddess called Ninkasi, 'the mistress who fills the mouth', and in a hymn to her the brewing process is described.

There were male and female professional brewers. The woman was known as a *sābītu*, the feminine form of *sābū*, the man's title.<sup>131</sup> She acted chiefly as the landlady selling it at the front of the house, while he was probably brewing the beer at the back. People would become intoxicated there, and a lullaby uses such a simile to picture a little baby drowsing off

Little one, let sleep fall on you as it does to the drinker of wine, as it does to the 'son' of the landlady (= her regular customer).<sup>132</sup>

There was a low level of morality on those premises,<sup>133</sup> and in Chapter 20 about prostitution we will discuss the kind of person who carried on their profession there. A medical text attributed problems of the head, neck, breast and stomach to visiting such taverns,<sup>134</sup> and Hammurabi took measures to stifle the spread of crime there.

§ 109. If there should be a woman innkeeper in whose house criminals congregate, and she does not seize those criminals and lead them off to the palace authorities, that woman innkeeper shall be killed.

<sup>130</sup> JCS 9 (1955) 105 no. 111; TUAT NF 3 (2006) 35 f.

<sup>131</sup> M. Worthington, 'Schankwirtin', RIA XII/1-2 (2009) 132-134.

<sup>132</sup> W. Farber, *Schlaf, Kindchen, schlaf!* (1989) 34:8-11.

<sup>133</sup> J.-J. Glassner, CRRAI 47/I (2002) 158.

<sup>134</sup> TDP 20:32f. (the terminology is obscure).



Another reason for giving the tavern a bad reputation is that some magic rituals require contaminated material to be deposited in or at the door of a tavern, and other rituals say how a demon is to be shaped and the model placed under an overturned brewing vat. Moreover, Hammurabi wrote,

If a *naditu* or an *ugbaltu* (*ereš.dingir*) who does not reside within the convent should open a tavern or enter a tavern for some beer, they shall burn that woman.

Traditional scholarly opinion has supposed that these women were forbidden from entering a tavern because the tavern was a place with a bad reputation, and I agree with that supposition. An alternative modern view is that this law prohibits rich nuns, those living outside the convent, from investing their money in ‘opening’ a tavern, and in particular they should not profit from the sale of beer. This law has its place between others dealing with economic offences, which would mean that competition with the poor, especially single women who were trying to earn a little as a landlady, was regarded as fraudulent.<sup>135</sup> This is an original thought, but because the death penalty by burning applied in particular to those who broke a religious taboo, that fits in better with the earlier explanation.<sup>136</sup>

An amulet used to hang in an Assyrian tavern, with an incantation to the goddess Ištar. The landlord asked her to grant that his business should profit.<sup>137</sup> An old woman is said to be in a tavern ‘settled near the beer’.<sup>138</sup> Ištar preferred to be in this environment, as we shall see in a later chapter. In a Sumerian song she is referred to as Inanna, with the Akkadian title *sābītu*, ‘landlady’.

She is a landlady, her beer is good! Just as good as her beer is her vessel! How good is her beer! Thinned with water — how good is her beer!<sup>139</sup>

You can almost hear the rowdy crowd bawling out this drinking song, especially if you remember that we are using the word ‘vessel’ in our translation in an attempt to maintain some decency in this book. In fact the word does not allude to any vessel for beer. In the word lists from Ebla the landlady is identified as a prosti-

---

**135** M. T. Roth, *Festschrift J. Renger* (1999) 445–464.

**136** S. Franke, *ZABR* 6 (2005) 4–6; L. Barberon, *Les religieuses et le culte de Marduk* (2012) 112 n. 667.

**137** S. M. Maul, *Zukunftsbewältigung* (1994) 101–106.

**138** Th. Jacobsen, *Toward the image of Tammuz* (1970) 349 (= SAHG no. 15).

**139** Y. Sefati, *Love songs in Sumerian literature* (1998) 345 (ŠRT 23:19–22). In another song she says, ‘My vessel is wet’ (CT 58 13:3, according to B. Alster).

tute,<sup>140</sup> so it is not surprising that the hero Gilgamesh was advised by Siduri the ‘landlady’ to enjoy life.<sup>141</sup>

A clay tablet marked out with twenty squares is a Babylonian board game. On the reverse side the meanings of landing on different squares is explained. Two of them concern a woman in the beer-house:

If the throw “Swallow” lands on a square marked with a rosette, a woman will love those who linger in a tavern. Regarding their team, well-being falls to them.

But if the throw does not land there,

A woman will reject those who linger in a tavern. Regarding their team, as a group well-being will not fall to them.<sup>142</sup>

There are five possible areas where the outcomes may be good or bad, which can be summarised as follows: success with women and general well-being, or not; sufficient supplies of food, or starvation; sufficient supplies of fine beer, or a lack of it; sufficient supplies of meat, or a lack of it. It has been suggested that this is ‘a game being played in a tavern by freebooting soldiers who placed bets to see who was to pay for the food and drink and any warmer entertainment that might be on offer in the establishment’.<sup>143</sup>

Another aspect of the landlady’s business was to procure barley to brew her beer. Hammurabi states:

§ 108. If a woman innkeeper should refuse to accept grain for the price of beer but accepts silver measured by the large weight, thereby reducing the value of beer in relation to the value of grain, they shall charge and convict that woman innkeeper and they shall cast her into the water.

Some sort of cheating was going on here, but we know too little about the techniques to be able to judge what sort of offence it really was.<sup>144</sup> The landlady also used to lend out jars of beer. Hammurabi (§ 111) fixed the amount of barley to be repaid after the harvest to cover the debt, which implies that it was possible

140 Å. W. Sjöberg, *Festschrift J. Renger* (1999) 545.

141 R. Harris, *Studies W. L. Moran* (1990) 224 f.

142 I. L. Finkel, *Ancient board games in perspective* (2007) 21a, 29a, lines 11–15.

143 Finkel, 23b.

144 For the latest attempts see G. W. W. Müller, *Festschrift R. Haase* (2006) 21–26, with the reaction of R. Haase, *WdO* 37 (2007) 31–35, whom we follow here. See on CH § 108–109 also S. Lafont, *Femmes* (1999) 418–424, ‘La cabaretière’.

to fiddle the books.<sup>145</sup> In the Old Babylonian period the landlady was also the person appointed to issue small loans,<sup>146</sup> but after that time she is not mentioned in the texts.

## 18.6 Scribes

There are almost 600 cuneiform signs adapted from the older Sumerian writing system. Any sign may indicate more than one concept, a syllable from the sound of the word, or a whole word or word phrase. To write this script demanded special skills and the system is admittedly difficult to understand for someone used to reading and writing an alphabet. An astrologer recognised this in a letter to the king of Assyria when he said,

In the marketplace one hears nothing about the art of writing.<sup>147</sup>

It has long been thought that only a few people had mastered this script, but that idea must now be reconsidered.<sup>148</sup> Of course there were many who could not read, even among the leading figures in society, and the text of an Old Babylonian letter was often said to be ‘heard’, in other words to be read aloud. Other letters were to be ‘seen’, and C. Wilcke has shown that those were read by the addressee. Estimates suggest that of the almost 600 cuneiform signs known, in the Old Babylonian period it was enough to know 82 signs, and in the Old Assyrian period 68 would have been enough. In the first millennium the script became more complex and an Assyrian had to know at least 112 signs to indicate 79 different syllables and 33 logograms.<sup>149</sup>

Could women write?<sup>150</sup> Many of the Old Assyrian merchants could write themselves and their wives also. Their wives would archive and access tablets

---

**145** Already King Ur-Nammu of Ur issued similar rulings; M. Civil, CUSAS 17 (2011) 251 §D9; C. Wilcke, *Festschrift J. Krecher* (2014) 566.

**146** F. R. Kraus, *Königliche Verfügungen in altbabylonischer Zeit* (1984) 178–181 §16–18, with p. 249, 256. – A woman issues beer for harvesters; K. van Lerberghe, CUSAS 29 no. 111.

**147** SAA VIII 338:7.

**148** C. Wilcke, *Wer las und schrieb in Babylonien und Assyrien* (2000); D. Charpin, *Lire et écrire à Babylone* (2008) = *Reading and writing in Babylon* (2010).

**149** D. O. Edzard, ‘Keilschrift’, RIA V/7–8 (1980) 561b; S. Parpola, *Festschrift W. Röllig* (1997) 321 n. 17.

**150** R. Harris, ‘The female “sage” in Mesopotamian literature (with an appendix on Egypt)’ in: J. G. Gammie, L. G. Perdue, *The sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (1990) 3–17, especially 5–10. That article discusses mainly female intellectuals.

and sometimes wrote letters in their own hand. Twice women made mistakes in an emotional letter, and then corrected it before the clay hardened, but female professional scribes are not mentioned.<sup>151</sup> One imagines that Babylonian nuns in the convent could write but there is no direct evidence for this.<sup>152</sup> An archive of a 'holy woman' and her brother found in a ceramic container included school texts.<sup>153</sup> A letter written by Princess Kirûm was a cry for help in a personal style. It was written in her own hand or by someone close to her and not from the chancellery and it was full of mistakes (more about her in Chapter 23).<sup>154</sup> We also know of an Old Assyrian cry for help from a woman in an unusual script saying:

I. has thrown me out of the house and I am sitting outside. If you do not care for me, then who else will? You are my brother. I. has treated me badly.<sup>155</sup>

A Neo-Assyrian letter reproaches a princess for not being more diligent in learning to read and write.

The word of the daughter of the king to Libbali-šarrat: Why do you not write your clay tablets and why do you not read your texts?<sup>156</sup>

We will see later that Princess Enĥeduana wrote poems and Princess Ninšatapada wrote literary letters,<sup>157</sup> giving herself her full title, 'female scribe (?), priestess of Meslamtaea, daughter of Šin-kašid, the king of Uruk.'<sup>158</sup> It is thought that there were other Sumerian women who were authors. Among these were Kubatum, who addressed a love song to King Šu-Šin, Waqartum, who composed a lament for her husband Ur-Nammu, and the wife of Šulgi, who crooned a lullaby to her little son.<sup>159</sup> In the Ur III period there were only two women with the title 'female scribe'

151 K. R. Veenhof, *Phoenix* 51,2 (2005) 118 f.; G. Kryszat, *AOF* 34 (2007) 217 f.; R. D. Biggs, *WZKM* 86 (1996) 47; C. Michel in: F. Briquel-Chatonnet, *Femmes* (2009) 262–269.

152 Wilcke, *Wer las und schrieb*, 29 f.

153 F. N. H. al-Rawi, S. Dalley, *Old Babylonian texts from Sippir* (2000) 5 f., with L. Barberon in F. Briquel-Chatonnet, *Femmes* (2009) 279 f.

154 J.-M. Durand, *MARI* 3 (1984) 167–169.

155 R. D. Biggs, 'A woman's plaint in an Old Assyrian letter', *WZKM* 86 (1996) 47–52.

156 SAA XVI 28, TUAT NF 3 (2006) 145 f.; A. Livingstone, *ZA* 97 (2007) 103–105.

157 R. Harris, *Gender and aging* (2000) 103–105.

158 W. W. Hallo in *Études P. Garelli* (1991) 383:16–18.

159 Hallo, *Origins* (1996) 266 f.

(not: ‘author’). The meaning of one personal name is ‘The queen is a scribe’. But is this queen a goddess?<sup>160</sup>

In mythology Geštinana, the sister of Dumuzi, is said to ‘know the clay’, meaning that she knew how to write. Dumuzi had a dream and on awakening asked,

Bring me Geštinanna, bring me my sister, my scribe who knows the clay, my singer who knows the songs, my young lady who knows the meaning of words, my wise woman who knows the meaning of dreams. I want to tell her this dream.<sup>161</sup>

In Old Babylonian legal agreements someone said to be a professional scribe is often mentioned at the end of the list of witnesses and just occasionally we come across the name of a woman with the title ‘woman-scribe’.<sup>162</sup> These transactions concern women in the convent of Sippar and there was regularly a female scribe present there. We now know the names of eighteen of them, one of whom may have been the daughter of a scribe.<sup>163</sup> In another community of women, the harem of Mari, we encounter seven to nine female scribes. In the same way as male scribes they were given scholarly Sumerian names, which in practice were often garbled.<sup>164</sup> One scribe was part of the dowry of a princess.<sup>165</sup> We know of a few Old Babylonian school texts at the end of which we find written, ‘the hand of the female scribe’. Most of these were lists of Sumerian syllabic or logographic signs to be learned, but one was a difficult Sumerian didactic poem, evidently written by a woman who had had a broad education.<sup>166</sup>

In the Assyrian period some scribes were given the title A.BA, which S. Parpola translated as an ‘ABC-man’, meaning someone who could write alphabetically. The Aramaic alphabet began with the same letters as the Greek alphabet (and as such was like our own alphabet), and Aramaic had become the language for

---

160 H. Waetzoldt, *RIA* XII/3–4 (2009) 263, ‘Schreiberinnen’.

161 ‘Dumuzi’s Dream’ 20–25 with TUAT II/1 (1986) 28.

162 D. Charpin, *RIA* XII/3–4 (2009) 267 f., ‘Les femmes-scribes’.

163 J. Renger, *ZA* 58 (1967) 157 f.; B. Lion, ‘Dame Inanna-ama-mu, scribe à Sippar’, *RA* 95 (2001) 7–32. In this early period the title ‘scribe’ was not yet preceded by the sign ‘woman’. In general see Lion, ‘Les femmes scribes à Sippar’, in: F. Briquel-Chatonnet, *Femmes* (2009) 289–303.

164 N. Ziegler, *Le Harem de Zimri-Lîm* (1999) 91 f.

165 Šima-ilat, female servant of Šimatum; ARM 22 322:58. Cf. ARM 30 433, M. 5723:27. Cf. ‘toggle-pins for the female scribes of the young woman’, ARM 25 442:13 with ARM 30 142. It has been suggested that the princess from Qatna brought with her her own female scribe, Ištar-šamši; J.-M. Durand, *MARI* 4 (1985) 419. A female scribe in the harem bore this name.

166 B. Lion, E. Robson, ‘Quelques textes scolaires paléo-babyloniens rédigés par des femmes’, *JCS* 57 (2005) 37–54.

international communication. We know of a female A.BA with the Aramaic name Attar-paltī, who was linked to the palace of the queen in the Assyrian capital Calah.<sup>167</sup> From a list of the personnel of a harem we also know of a writer designated as 'Ar[...]'. Whether this means she was 'Aramaic' or 'from Arpad' remains in doubt.<sup>168</sup> From the first millennium these are the only two female writers discovered. Two Assyrian requests were laid before the gods calling for a liver inspection to be carried out to answer the question of whether or not an uprising was planned against King Ashurbanipal. These requests added this sentence:

Pay no attention to the fact that a woman has written it and put it before you.<sup>169</sup>

The phrase 'pay no attention ...' seeks to remove any irregularity from the ritual. In this case the precaution taken shows us that women could certainly write this sort of text, but that only men, i.e. priests, were allowed to carry it out.

Two thousand scribes from the Neo-Babylonian period are known by name, but there are no women among them. Whether they wrote on parchment or papyrus is guess work, since no parchment has survived.

The patron deity of writers was the Babylonian god Nabû, but in the Sumerian period it was Nisaba, a goddess, who had this function. Sumerian literary texts often end with the eulogy *Nisaba zà.mí*, 'Praise be to Nisaba'. This goddess was often called 'the surveyor (*šassukatu*) of heaven and earth', and a hymn refers to 'the faithful woman, mighty scribe of the heavens, surveyor of Enlil'.<sup>170</sup> A Sumerian myth says that she had the measuring sticks and rulers in her hand.

She must demarcate the limits, draw the borders. She is truly the scribe of the land of Sumer.<sup>171</sup>

This is understandable when one realises that surveying the land was an important subject at school. An outline of the school syllabus asks a series of questions.

Can you multiply and divide? Do you know the reciprocal numbers and coefficients? Can you make balances and computations? Can you calculate payments and total working hours, shares of an inheritance, and demarcate fields?<sup>172</sup>

---

**167** CTN III nos. 39, 40; CAD T 151a.

**168** SAA VII 24 rev. 2 with B. Landsberger, *Festschrift W. Baumgartner* (= *Vetus Testamentum*, Suppl. 16) (1967) 203.

**169** SAA IV nos. 321 f. with S. Svärd, *Women and power* (2015) 125 f.

**170** W. W. Hallo, CRRAI 17 [Brussels] (1970) 124:12.

**171** 'Enki and the World Order' 411–415; TUAT III/3 (1993) 416.

**172** Å. W. Sjöberg, ZA 64 (1975) 144 Examenstext A 27; Th.J. H. Krispijn, *Phoenix* 38,3 (1992) 29.

From the archives of King Lipit-Ištar a hymn states that Nisaba ‘led his finger across the clay’ and gave him the instruments of the surveyor.<sup>173</sup> As a divine scribe Nisaba also figures in the underworld.<sup>174</sup> We will not go further into this subject now, but simply draw attention to the fact that in the later period there is no longer any mention of the goddess as a female scribe. Other goddesses also disappear, a subject to which we shall return in Chapter 30, at the end of the discussion of sacred marriage.

## 18.7 The female doctor

Two professional experts are referred to in Babylonian medical texts. One was the *āšīpu*, a scholarly man from a prominent family, who mediated between the sick person and the enraged god. His professional title is best translated as ‘conjurer’. He performed rituals, reciting incantations often in the defunct but time-honoured Sumerian. A female conjurer is an unthinkable idea. Then there was the doctor (*asū*), who must have been a man of practical experience, familiar with healing herbs and folk medicine, and on a few occasions we come across a female doctor.<sup>175</sup> In the Ur III period the doctor Ubartum has a female name,<sup>176</sup> and in Ebla a female doctor attends to the needs of the ladies there together with her assistant (*dam*).<sup>177</sup> At the court of Mari we see two such women listed as servants of the queen-mother or of a priestess. Undoubtedly they were occupied solely with the care of women, and as such can be considered the world’s first recorded gynaecologists.<sup>178</sup> In an Old Babylonian list a woman doctor receives the barley purchased for the ‘women’s house’ in the land of Larsa, and she is followed by a midwife.<sup>179</sup> Both these people will have been working in a feminine environment. Among the Hittites we also find mention of a female doctor.<sup>180</sup>

---

173 Lipit-Ištar hymn B:20–24; TUAT II/5 (1989) 683.

174 A. R. George, *The Epic of Gilgamesh* II (2003) 851 f., on Gilg. VII 204.

175 Proto-Lu 705, MSL 12 (1969) 58.

176 M. Sigrist, *Texts from the Yale Babylonian Collection; Sumerian archival texts* III (2000) no. 1316, with JCS 52 (2000) 134b.

177 Ebla: *Thesaurus Inscriptionum Eblaicarum* A/1, 1 (1995) 45 f. (a.zu<sub>5</sub>.mī); H. Waetzoldt in *Ebla 1975–1985* (1987) 368; F. d’Agostino, *Studies P. Fronzaroli* (2004) 139 f.

178 N. Ziegler, *Le Harem de Zimrî-Lîm* (1999) 29.

179 TCL 10 107:26–30.

180 H. Otten, ‘Ärztin im hethitischen Schrifttum’, in: H. Otten, C. Rüster, *Studies Nimet Özgüç* (1993) 539–541.

The goddess of medicine, Gula, was a woman, accompanied by a dog. Sometimes she was called Ba'u, who in Sumerian literature had the epithet 'the great doctor of the people (literally, 'the black-headed ones')'.<sup>181</sup> Some personal names include her name, such as Gula-asaut, 'Gula is the doctor', Ba'u-asitu, 'Ba'u is the doctor', and Ummi-asuti, 'My mother is my doctor' (where the reference may be to her divine mother).<sup>182</sup> In a hymn by Gula, she says of herself,

I am the daughter, I am the bride, I am the wife and I am the head of the household.<sup>183</sup>

These phases of the life of the growing woman may indicate that women were intended to take on the role of helping the sick, as Gula did.

## 18.8 Wailing women

It is shown in myths that women cry more readily than men and this is also because of their greater compassion.<sup>184</sup> There is evidence that in Sumerian literary texts two different words are used for the weeping of women.<sup>185</sup> One is what we could call sobbing, and the other suggests the rolling of tears over the cheeks which stain the face. Possibly this meant that their tears made their make-up run. The woman 'whose cheeks looked bad' because of 'running' was someone who was not married and unhappy.<sup>186</sup>

At any time of sorrow a woman was expected to break into a lamentation, mostly intoning sounds like Ooh! Ooh!.<sup>187</sup> 'Anyone who has heard a traditional ululation in an Arab village called *walwala* will understand something of the repugnance of the prophet Ezekiel to the sound. It is usually a bloodcurdling moaning, alternating with heart-rending cries, such as 'O, my husband! O my

**181** W. H. Ph. Römer, *SKIZ* (1965) 236:6 (hymn B of Išme-Dagan); Å. W. Sjöberg, *TCS* 3 (1969) 105, on 268 (temple hymn to Bau).

**182** A. Rositani, *Rim-Anum* (2003) 120 no. II, 10:9; P.-A. Beaulieu, *Or. NS* 67 (1998) 173 ff.; H. Limet, *Mélanges A. Finet* (1989) 110 f. no. 14:1,10.

**183** W. G. Lambert, *Or. NS* 36 (1967) 120:65; B. R. Foster, *Before the Muses* II (1993) 494.

**184** T. Frymer-Kensky, *In the wake of the goddess* (1992) 36–38; R. Harris, *Gender and aging* (2002) 99 f.

**185** A. R. George, 'How women weep?', *CRRAI* 47/I (2002) 141–150.

**186** SpbTU II (1983) 45 no. 7:4 with M. J. Geller, *AfO* 35 (1988) 15, line 37. The meaning 'running (down)' (*qiddatu*) has not been recognised before.

**187** D. O. Edzard, 'Exclamations', *Sumerian grammar* (2003) 167–170; H. Vanstiphout, *Epics of Sumerian kings. The matter of Aratta* (2004) 141, 'The Return of Lugalbanda' 79, 81; *TUAT* III/3 (1993) 515. The Sumerian word for lamentation is *a.nir*.



father! O my son! O my glory! Ah! That husband! Ah! That boy!'. M. Dijkstra commenting on Ezekiel 8:14 says that 'these cries were repeated ceaselessly, accompanied by rhythmical drumming and often carried out by professional wailing women.' It is no wonder that in Sumerian myths it is the goddesses who perform the wailing laments. In songs accompanied by the *balag* instrument (lyre?) they bewail the temples that had been destroyed.<sup>188</sup> Even the male wailers who participated in cult worship had female traits and regularly lamented in the women's language *emesal*.<sup>189</sup> The Sumerian lament in the women's language harks back to this custom.<sup>190</sup> Others could also join in a lamentation, such as the one for a suffering man which was sung by 'the wise one, his friend, companion, mother, sister, wife and the skilful singer'.<sup>191</sup>

In Ebla wailing women, denoted by combining the cuneiform signs for eye and for water, in Sumerian the verb for 'to weep', performed at funerals. In Eblaite they were called *rāzimātu*, cognate with the Arabic root *r-z-m* in the verb 'to weep' or 'to howl (of animals)'.<sup>192</sup> A Sumerian wailing woman was called 'a mother of crying' (*ama.ér*).<sup>193</sup> When the head of their company had died, the weavers working in his shops 'beat their breasts' during nine and half days.<sup>194</sup> At the court of Mari mourning lasted for three days. It was reported, following the death of King Samsi-Addu, that

the land has been mourning for three days; they weep and you have made them shout loudly.<sup>195</sup>

When a young prince died, the wailing women received a great deal of barley, possibly because the period for mourning would last for three months.<sup>196</sup> The word *bakkîtu*, 'wailing woman', means literally 'she who weeps', but an onomatopoeic alternative *lallaritu*, 'spluttering', also occurs. Gilgamesh said,

I shall weep for my friend Enkidu myself, I shall complain bitterly like a *lallaritu* (VIII 45).

**188** D. Shehata, *Musiker und ihr vokales Repertoire* (2009) 247 f.

**189** Frymer-Kensky, *In the wake of the goddesses*, 36–38, 43 f.

**190** J. S. Cooper, JCS 58 (2006) 39–45.

**191** 'Man and his god' 60–67; S. N. Kramer, *Vetus Testamentum*, Suppl. 3 (1955) 174–179.

**192** J. Pasquali, P. Mangiarotti, NABU 1999/7. Also *munabbîtu*, A. Archi, ZA 92 (2002) 184–186.

**193** U. Gabbay, CUSAS 6 (2011) 68–70; A. Löhnert in: M. Jaques, *Klagentraditionen* (2011) 48 f. Wailing women in Assyrian art: S. Schroer, *ibidem*, 95 n. 48.

**194** H. Waetzoldt, CUSAS 6 (2011) 406b, 443b.

**195** ARM 4 61:5–8 with D. Charpin, *Studies M. Stol* (2008) 83.

**196** ARM 9 175 with M. Ghouti, NABU 1991/27, Charpin, *Studies Stol*, 84.

A lament sounded like *ulili* in Sumerian and *lallarati* in Akkadian.<sup>197</sup> A Sumerian word for a female singer is *ulili*, Akkadian *zammirtu*. The Middle Assyrian harem regulations say that when someone dies the women had to ‘weep according to the royal rule’.<sup>198</sup> Professional wailing women are well attested in the Near East and are referred to in a legend from Ugarit.

The wailing women enter his palace, mourning women his courtyard. Those who slash their skin bemoan Aqhat the hero.<sup>199</sup>

Mourning customs also included tearing out the hair, scratching the eyes, nose, ears and hips until they bled, and flinging off or rending one’s garments. This was chiefly done by women, but Gilgamesh did the same when he mourned for Enkidu (VIII 61–64).<sup>200</sup> In the book of Jeremiah ‘wailing women’ and ‘wise women’ were summoned to raise a lamentation (Jeremiah 9:17–22) which includes the line,

Death has climbed in through our windows and entered our palaces (verse 21).

Usually the Semitic word for wailing women is derived from the verb ‘to wail’, but here Biblical Hebrew uses a word which indicates the singing of a dirge (*qina*), so it is a controlled chant, not wild screaming. We know of female singers of laments from the third millennium who sang to the accompaniment of the lyre and were high-ranking individuals.<sup>201</sup> Cult liturgies were sung by men, who exhibited a certain deviant behaviour and expressed themselves in the dialect known as women’s language, and this persisted for the next two millennia. It is possible that we can see such a man in the remarkable statue of Ur-Nanše from Mari. He had feminine features and was possibly a *castrato*, as was mentioned earlier.<sup>202</sup> Male and female singers of laments performed at a funeral accompanied by a lyre.<sup>203</sup> A catalogue of lamentations, entitled ‘37 clay tablets of the art of lamenta-

**197** M. E. Cohen, *The canonical lamentations of Ancient Mesopotamia* I (1988) 179 b+73. Cf. A. Shaffer, *Studies W. W. Hallo* (1993) 209 f.

**198** M. T. Roth, *Law collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor* (1995) 197 f. (Enlil-narari).

**199** ‘Danel and Aqhat’ 172 f.

**200** B. Alster, ‘The mythology of mourning’, *ASJ* 5 (1983) 1–16; M. M. Fritz, *Die Götter Dumuzi-Ama’ušumgal’anna und Damu* (2003) 344 f.; P. Lapinkivi, *Ištar’s descent and resurrection* (2010) 71 (n. 202).

**201** J. G. Westenholz, *Legends of the kings of Akkade* (1997) 236; A. Westenholz, *Mesopotamien. Akkade-Zeit und Ur III-Zeit* (see note 1), 72 n. 344. Sumerian SAL.BALAG.DI, Akkadian *šarrīhtu*. See also M. M. Martos, *Aula Orientalis* 9 (1991) 143 f.

**202** N. Ziegler, *Les musiciens et la musique d’après les archives de Mari* (2007) 8.

**203** Gudea, Statue B v 1–4; D. Shehata, 104–106, ‘Die Klagefrau: ama-er<sub>2</sub>-ra’.

tion of (the goddess) Belet-ili', lists the titles by their first lines. Among them are songs which were sung by wailing women in the service of the mother goddess, such as 'Woe! Her temple!', "'Woe!" they said, "Woe!" they said', and 'The labour of the house'.<sup>204</sup> Naming compositions by their first words was a common practice in the ancient Near East. In the Hebrew Bible the names of the books follow this pattern, so Genesis is called *b<sup>e</sup>rēšīyt*, 'in the beginning'.

One text says that at the inauguration of priestesses in Emar a wailing woman (*nugagtu*) would perform.<sup>205</sup> There are no known illustrations of wailing women from Babylonia. However, those depicted on the sarcophagus of King Ahiiram of Byblos constructed in around 1200 BC have bare upper bodies. Some of them are touching their breasts and others have their hands in their hair.<sup>206</sup> In 1930 C. A. Ariëns Kappers, a Dutch brain specialist travelling in the Middle East, was allowed to perform a craniometry on that king!<sup>207</sup>

## 18.9 Women involved in childbirth

Women were called on when children were born. At the court in Ebla, the woman known as the 'milk-breast', meaning a wet-nurse, together with the midwife (*muwallidu*) are mentioned.<sup>208</sup> The midwife has the title *šabsutu*, a word derived from Sumerian (*šà.zu*) which possibly meant 'who knows the inner parts'.<sup>209</sup> The mother goddess Mama was called 'the wise one' (cf. French *sage-femme*, Dutch *vroed-vrouw*) to indicate that she was a midwife. The Sumerian midwife (*nu.gig*) had 'duties not limited to parturition but extending all through the pregnancy, administering the physical preparations and care given to pregnant women in traditional societies'. A myth says 'Her activities and everything pertaining to women is something that no man should see'.<sup>210</sup> From literary texts we know

**204** A. Shaffer, *Studies W. W. Hallo* (1993) 209, with Shehata, 335 f. A song of this genre remains unpublished.

**205** D. E. Fleming, *The installation of Baal's high priestess at Emar* (1992) 20:48, with p. 104, 173.

**206** The reliefs on its short sides; E. Porada, *JANES* 5 (1973) 368 f.; E. Rehm, *Der Ahiiram-Sarkophag* Teil 1.1 (2004) 49–51, 'Schmalseiten'; photos in Teil 1.2 (2005) Tafel 1, 4.

**207** C. A. Ariëns Kappers, *Reiziger in breinen. Herinneringen van een hersenonderzoeker* (2001) 166 f.; more in the Dutch version of this book (2012) 464, note 193. For the full description see his *An introduction to the anthropology of the Near East in ancient and recent times* (1934) 50, with the more cautious identification 'the male skull from Byblos'.

**208** F. Pomponio, *Vicino Oriente* 5 (1982) 207–209. Cf. *JCS* 42 (1990) 189.

**209** Much in 'Midwifery and nursing', M. Stol, *Birth in Babylonia and the Bible. Its Mediterranean setting* (2000) 171–192.

**210** M. Civil, *CUSAS* 17 (2011) 281–284. The myth is 'The marriage of Sud', 154; *JAOS* 103 (1983) 57.

that it was she who ‘counted the months’, ‘opened the womb’, and ‘wiped down the baby’. In an Assyrian ritual performed by men, unexpectedly a female singer exclaims, ‘The goddess Šeru’a has just given birth!’. She will represent a midwife, who would in everyday life announce a birth by shouting aloud.<sup>211</sup>

The babies could be fed with breast milk from women other than their mother (Figure 29a). These were the wet-nurses, called in Akkadian *mušēniqtu*, ‘she who suckles’, from the verb *enēqu*, cognate with Hebrew *yānaq*, ‘to suck’.<sup>212</sup> They were paid a ‘suckling wage’, lasting for between two and three years. Usually it was paid in barley, oil and wool, though sometimes in silver.<sup>213</sup> This woman was often mentioned together with her husband, who together must have been a poor couple. Sometimes it was a slave-girl. In Alalaḫ wet-nurses are often noted as being in receipt of ‘the allocation of barley from the king’. They were therefore on the ‘payroll’.<sup>214</sup> In Ebla the court wet-nurses received cloth and wool, and a shroud when they died. The wet-nurses of the king and of the queen held this honourable title for their whole lives.<sup>215</sup> It must have been a distinction to have been a wet-nurse at this time. One was named on an Old Akkadian cylinder seal.

Timmuzi, head of the household, and Daguna, the wet-nurse of her daughter.

The signs meaning ‘wet-nurse’ were ‘mother-milk-eat’, and she probably received that cylinder seal as a present. The seal is illustrated with two women being led by a goddess to a greater goddess sitting on a mountain, probably the mother goddess Ninḫursag.<sup>216</sup> A Sumerian saying seems to exaggerate their importance.

The wet-nurses determine the lot of her kings in the women’s quarters.<sup>217</sup>

**211** B. Menzel, *Assyrische Tempel* II (1981) T 35, 37 no. 24 v 24; misunderstood by S. Svärd, *Women and power* (2015) 121 n. 603; TUAT NF 4 (2008) 91:23–25. This shouting: Civil, 282 n. 138.

**212** H. Schneider-Ludorff, ‘Die Amme nach den Texten aus Nuzi’, *SCCNH* 18 (2009) 479–489, with an informative general introduction.

**213** Stol, *Birth*, 181–190; K. R. Veenhof, *Studies L. de Meyer* (1994) 148.

**214** F. Zeeb, *Die Palastwirtschaft in Altsyrien* (2001) 506–511.

**215** M.-G. Biga, ‘Les nourrices et les enfants à Ebla’, *Ktéma* 22 (1997) 35–44.

**216** J. Nougayrol, *Syria* 37 (1960) 209–214; W. G. Lambert in: R. Merhav, *Treasures of the Bible lands* (1987), Hebrew section, no. 24; A. Westenholz, *Mesopotamien. Akkade-Zeit* (see note 1), 72f., fig. 8, b.

**217** B. Alster, *Wisdom of ancient Sumer* (2005) 98 Instr. Šur. 264.



**Fig. 29a:** A woman feeding her child. *Louvre, Paris.*

There are indications that a ‘holy woman’ (*qadištu*) or her servants could feed babies, since they were regarded as professional (Chapter 27). In the Middle Babylonian period we see a young woman acting at least twice as a wet-nurse for a low wage. She was probably a slave-girl.<sup>218</sup> A Neo-Babylonian contract describes a father hiring out his own daughter as a wet-nurse, or she hires herself out for her services and he is the witness.<sup>219</sup> We can only guess at the status of the girl. She suckled the child at her own home. Once a baby of three months was delivered to her. The contract states:<sup>220</sup>

**218** L. Sassmannshausen, *Beiträge zur Verwaltung und Gesellschaft Babyloniens in der Kassitenzeit* (2001) 100a.

**219** C. Wunsch, *AfO* 50 (2003–04) 211–214, ‘Exkurs: Ammenverträge’, 221 Text 5, 237–240 nos. 19–21. The father: BE 8 47; also BM 27960, according to the catalogue of the British Museum (vol. III p. 163).

**220** Wunsch, 238 no. 20.

N., the daughter of NN, for a period of two years shall have the daughter of A., from the Egibi family, to live with her for suckling. A. shall give N.: each year 1 garment, 1 shekel of silver; each month 1 litre of salt, 1 litre of water cress (= the ingredient for red mustard), 1 jar of oil; each day 2 litres of flour, 4 loaves, 1 litre of date beer.

The first witness was the father of N. The scribe was a cousin of A.; both belonged to the rich Egibi family. The payment was comparatively generous.

Medical texts discuss problems arising when the breast is ‘thin’, ‘has bitterness’, and ‘has been struck (by some supernatural cause)’. A wet-nurse was forbidden to have sexual intercourse since it was seen as detrimental for the child. According to Greek papyri it would sour the milk, an idea perpetuated for centuries. It even occurs in handbooks from the sixteenth century and in Prussian laws. Hammurabi (§ 194) speaks of other difficulties that could arise in the three years of employing a wet-nurse.

If a man gives his son to a wet-nurse and that child then dies while in the care of the wet-nurse, and the wet-nurse had contracted to care for another child without the consent of his (= the dead child’s) father and mother, they shall charge and convict her, and, because she contracted to care for another child without the consent of his father and mother, they shall cut off her breast.

People thought earlier that the wet-nurse secretly substituted another baby for the dead one. It is more likely that feeding two babies at the same time was forbidden. In Greek papyri we also see that it was forbidden to ‘nurse at the breast at the same time as nursing another child’ (*parathèlazō*). French law also opposed *la nourrice cumularde*, ‘the accumulating wet-nurse’.<sup>221</sup> Boys who had had the same wet-nurse (in Akkadian described as those who ‘had eaten the same breast’) had a special bond and were known as ‘suckling brothers’.<sup>222</sup>

Another problem was that the baby could be exchanged for another and so obtain the status of a slave. We know of lawsuits about this. If the wage for feeding was not paid, the wet-nurse might take away the baby and the laws of Ešnunna (§ 32) sought to prevent this:

If a man gives his son to be suckled, to be brought up, but he does not give the barley, oil, and clothing for three years, then he shall pay ten shekels of silver for the rearing of his son and take his son away with him.

<sup>221</sup> G. Cardascia, ‘La nourrice coupable. § 194 du Code de Hammurabi’, *Revue de l’association Méditerranées* 3 (1995) 209–230; S. Lafont, *Femmes* (1999) 415–417, 424–427.

<sup>222</sup> Stol, *Birth*, 190.

In the royal palace of Mari people had other concerns.<sup>223</sup> The wet-nurses of the little princes lived mostly outside the palace and received their ration of oil separately. In a letter we read:

The son of (Sheikh) S. must be suckled in his house, but the son of (Sheikh) D. must be suckled in the house of a private individual.

Wet-nurses travelled with their charges, and we know what food they were given for the journey.

I thought to myself: 'It is not suitable to have babies travelling on a litter, in a bed, without their wet-nurses travelling with them. How do you keep them under control? Will they not take to crying?' (...) Therefore I thought, 'I will have them ride in a wagon and have their wet-nurses travel with them. Five oxen must pull the wagon.'<sup>224</sup>

Whenever the child was weaned and no longer needed to be suckled it was cared for by a children's maid (*tarîtu*, 'she who takes it with her').<sup>225</sup> What was characteristic of this children's maid was that she carried the child in a special cloth. There was always the fear that the dreaded demon Lamaštu might 'seize the young man on the street, the young woman at play, the little one on the shoulder of the nursemaid'.<sup>226</sup> Another characteristic of this woman was that she 'sang a lullaby'. The word for lullaby in Sumerian is *oo-ah*, the sound intended to make the child go to sleep. We know a Sumerian lullaby, intended for a little prince, in a lofty style, with benedictions for his later life, including the following passage:

Come then, O sleep! Come then, O sleep! Come then to my little son, O sleep! Let his eyes fall shut! Stroke your hand over his shining little eyes and his chattering little tongue! Do not let the chatter disturb his sleep!<sup>227</sup>

Crying children made the demons angry, so therefore there were incantations to quieten them.<sup>228</sup>

---

**223** N. Ziegler, 'Nourrices et sevrage', *Ktema* 22 (1997) 51–53.

**224** J.-M. Durand, *AEM* 1/1 (1988) 123 n. 20 (A. 3892); I. Arkhipov, *CRAI* 53/1 (2010) 414 f.

**225** Stol, *Birth*, 190–192.

**226** YOS 11 19:9–11 (p. 25 f.).

**227** P. Michalowski, *The lamentation over the destruction of Sumer and Ur* (1989) 72, on 16 (literature; his 'wetnurse' is wrong); Stol, *Birth*, 211. The Sumerian lullaby: ANET (1969) 651 f.; H. Vanstiphout, *Eduba. Schrijven en lezen in Sumer* (2004) 265–269. Two more lullabies: M. Jaques, *Studies Å. W. Sjöberg* (2014) 61–72.

**228** Stol, *Birth*, 211–213.



**Fig. 29b:** Cylinder seal with an inscription: ‘Seal of Zamena, nurse of Uqnîtum’. Queen Uqnîtum, seated, has a child on her lap which Zamena holds both by the hand and the wrist Urkiš, 2300 BC.

The nursemaid of the queen at the court of Urkiš had two cylinder seals with the inscription ‘Zamena, the nursemaid of Uqnîtum (the queen)’. We know this from the seal impressions (Figure 29b). The queen is depicted seated and has a child on her lap. In front of her stands Zamena, who is holding the child by the wrist.<sup>229</sup> In Mari this nursemaid of the little princes had the intimate title of ‘mother’ and a princess from Qatna who had been married off, took her ‘mother’ with her to far-off Mari. We shall say more about this in Chapter 23 about the court in Mari. A princess from Mari, married off to a king, was allowed to take a woman with her ‘for motherhood’. In letters princesses were concerned about the welfare of their ‘mother’.<sup>230</sup> Tabura was first the wet-nurse of a little prince and then later his ‘mother’.<sup>231</sup> People maintained the bond with her in later life, and we know of a letter to the king in which a priestess complains:

I have been injured here. Do wipe my tears away. S. has injured me in that he has taken away my nursemaid and now she lives in his house. If my lord had taken her, and if she but lived in the house of my lord, I should be satisfied. Now S. has injured me. Well then, if you indeed have brought light to the whole country, bring light for me also. Give me my nursemaid, and I will pray for you before Addu and Ḫebat.<sup>232</sup>

<sup>229</sup> G. Buccellati, M. Kelly-Buccellati, *Afo* 42–43 (1995–96) 21–23.

<sup>230</sup> G. Bardet, *ARMT* 23 (1984) 72–74 (nos. 84, 423).

<sup>231</sup> Ziegler, *Le Harem* (1999) 68.

<sup>232</sup> *ARM* 10 92:7–23.



In Emar a child was assigned a ‘mother’ like this.<sup>233</sup>

The names of the nursemaids at the court of Mari often began with ‘My father’, as in ‘My father is my happiness’ (or ‘my light’), and ‘May my father live for ever’. The father here meant the king himself, and so whenever the children called their nursemaids at the same time they pronounced a blessing on the king.<sup>234</sup> A happy thought! In the Middle Assyrian period ‘Ḫiḫḫi, the king’s nursemaid’ received barley as a gift.<sup>235</sup>

## 18.10 Business women

We know more about the rich people of society because their family archives were preserved for posterity. The women in these circles had a superior position and were addressed as ‘Madam’. It all began very early on. A woman appeared as a trader in two of the oldest written texts from Mesopotamia (ca. 3000 BC).<sup>236</sup> The script is archaic and beside the text there are illustrations of the main characters, a man and a woman. There are several other people present and possibly they are receiving food. A ceremonial meal was normal in those ancient times when transferring immovable property, and also at a wedding. Most scholars think it is a sale transaction illustrated here, but C. Wilcke thinks it is a wedding. Let us take a closer look at these two documents.

The first document is a pair of stones from the collection of Mr. Blau, comprising an obelisk and a flat stone (the ‘plaque’) (Figure 30). On the flat stone a man and woman look at each other, with the man holding a staff. Some experts are of the opinion that this staff takes the form of a phallus, and indeed the upper part looks uncannily like that if you look at it for long enough. So this may have been a wedding scene.<sup>237</sup> A series of foodstuffs and objects are listed and these would

<sup>233</sup> Emar VI/3 nos. 186, 187, with NABU 1989/8.

<sup>234</sup> Ziegler, Ktema 22, 52; *Le Harem* (1999) 108 f. The child of a slave-girl was given the name ‘May my father live long’, which will have referred to her owner; D. Charpin, NABU 2003/2.

<sup>235</sup> VAS 19 40:6, 16.

<sup>236</sup> On the legal entitlement of women in these very old texts, see J.-J. Glassner, *BiOr* 52 (1995) 12 f.; C. Wilcke, *Early Ancient Near Eastern law* (2003) 64 f. In later Old Sumerian texts: Glassner in: B. Lesko, *Women’s earliest records* (1987) 83–86.

<sup>237</sup> ‘Blau monuments’: photos in W. Orthmann, *Der Alte Orient* (1985) plate 74a, with p. 184; I. J. Gelb, *Earliest land tenure systems in the Near East* (1989) nos. 10–11, plates 11–12 (also drawings), with C. Wilcke, *Early Ancient Near Eastern law* (2003) 64. He does not discover in it a phallus but a pestle in ZA 86 (1996) 31. Cf. L. Milano in: M. Liverani, *I diritti del mondo cuneiforme* (2008) 91–102. See also J. Asher-Greve in: S. Schroer, *Images and gender. Contributions to the hermeneutics of reading ancient art* (2006) 45–47.



**Fig. 30:** An inscribed stone (from the private collection of Mr Blau). A man holding a staff faces a woman. It has been suggested that they are making a marriage agreement, but probably they are transferring property. 3000 BC. Slate, 16 cm. *British Museum, London.*

have been appropriate for a wedding feast. The current interpretation sees the man as the purchaser and the woman as the seller.<sup>238</sup> She is the one to whom the man hands the so-called phallus and commentators see in that a pestle handed over as the symbol of the completion of the sale, symbolised in later times by a pestle. There is reference to five *bur* of land (around 31 hectares) on the obelisk with an illustration of a man offering a goat on the reverse. On the reverse of the flat stone we see a large man standing opposite two crouching fellows with the pestle. It is thought that he was a public figure who was ratifying the sale. The two fellows could be those who were buying the land and the larger man was in charge.

The second document, the obelisk of Ušumgal, has four sides and if one compares the left side with the right a man and woman can be seen looking at each other. The main character is Ušumgal, and so far as the text is decipherable Wilcke reads the words ‘bride’s attendant’, ‘oath’, ‘deflower’. Evidently oaths were being taken that everything was in order as regards the woman’s honour – if

<sup>238</sup> We follow L. Milano in Liverani, 92–102.

Wilcke has deciphered correctly.<sup>239</sup> Again other scholars see in her the seller and in him the buyer. The man is standing opposite a building and possibly has a clay nail in his hand. He apparently wants to stick this into the wall, an action which had also been a symbol of a completed sale from ancient times. The fields are described as having a total circumference of 160 hectares.

What was the conclusion? The readings ‘bride’s attendant’ and ‘deflower’ are contested. We who are not experts stick to the idea that we see women here playing a leading role, probably selling large pieces of land. In these illustrations the women are crouching plump figures. That image is at any rate corrected by a splendid portrait of a distinguished lady from that time, which was found in Uruk. It is a mask made of marble.<sup>240</sup>

There is abundant material available to prove that in all periods some women among the elite were legally entitled to enter into a contract themselves. Even in an early period, around 2500 BC, a woman sold a house to another woman including 57 m<sup>2</sup> of land.<sup>241</sup> We shall write later about the royal courts, and then it will be clear how independent and rich the queen was. Of women in the Old Akkadian period it is said that ‘women did not have to lead secluded lives. From the queen down to ordinary citizenry, women, whether married or unmarried, Sumerian or Akkadian, were free to participate in public life on a par with men and mingling freely with men. (...) Roughly 5 percent of the cylinder seals belonged to women. Could women do the things men did, and on an equal basis? – our current definition of the emancipated woman. The answer is: yes, but few did. The rest are mostly invisible in our sources.’<sup>242</sup> We know of the archive of a wealthy married couple where the lady managed the income from extensive estates and dealt in wool and metal, while the gentleman managed the herds of animals, taken out to graze by the herdsmen. Other women invested under their own names.<sup>243</sup>

In the Old Assyrian period (1890–1850 BC) we see women managing businesses in the home base of Assur. Their activities are well documented in the

---

**239** Ušumgal stela: Orthmann, plate 74 b-c; Gelb, no. 12, plates 13–17; A. Moortgat, *The art of ancient Mesopotamia* (1969) plates 31–34 with C. Wilcke, *Early law*, 63; cf. Wilcke in: K. Volk, *Erzählungen aus dem Land Sumer* (2015) 204 n. 5 (‘Ehegelöbnis am Tor’). Also J. Asher-Greve in Schroer, *Images*, 47 f.

**240** H. Frankfort, *The art and architecture of the Ancient Orient* (1954) plate 7; Moortgat, *The art of ancient Mesopotamia*, plate 26 with p. 16a. In this book Figure 10, in Chapter 1.

**241** J. Krecher in: W. Fikentscher, *Entstehung und Wandel rechtlicher Traditionen* (1980) 336 (D. O. Edzard, *Sumerische Rechtsurkunden* no. 29). ‘Women participate very frequently in sale transactions, both as buyers and sellers’; I. J. Gelb, OIP 104 (1991) 17b.

**242** A. Westenholz, *Mesopotamien. Akkade-Zeit* (see note 1), 70–73, ‘Women’.

**243** B. R. Foster, *Umma in the Sargonic period* (1982) 77 f.; Foster in Durand, *La Femme* (1987) 54.

correspondence with her husband and others in the Assyrian trade colony of Anatolia.<sup>244</sup> In chapter 5 we described the background to this when we examined the second wife of the man in Anatolia. Such women stayed at home and contributed to the family trade by themselves producing cloth, which they sent to their husbands, brothers and sons in exchange for precious metal and jewels. Take for example Šimat-Ištar, who stayed at home with children and slaves and led the work in the textile industry, to export cloth to Anatolia. In addition she invested in houses.<sup>245</sup> Weaving of cloth took place at home, with all the women of the household, including children and slave-girls, in the workshop. A merchant gives precise instructions from Anatolia in a letter.<sup>246</sup>

Puzur-Aššur spoke thus to Waqqurtum: A. is on his way to you with a mina of silver under my seal. The tax has been added; the duties paid. The fine cloth which you sent to me – you must make cloth like this and send it to me with A., then I intend to send you half a mina of silver (= as the payment for each length of cloth). Have them comb one side of the cloth, but not shave it smooth. The weave must be close (= with a nap). In contrast to the previous cloth that you sent me, for this cloth you must use an extra mina of wool per length, but it must remain thin. The other side should be only lightly (?) combed; if it is still hairy, it should be shaved, like the cloth for a chiton. As regards the Abarnian cloth which you sent me, you must not send it to me again. If you want to make one, make it like the one I wore over there. If you cannot manage to make fine cloths, I assume they can be bought plentifully over there, so buy and send them to me. A finished length of cloth, if you are going to make one, should measure nine cubits in length and eight cubits in breadth.

This business woman had her own work capital and was careful with it. She represented her husband in carrying out business transactions in Assur. Sometimes her husband made an agreement with a customer and sent the duplicate of this to his wife as a check. She paid taxes or debts and collected payments due. She also complained about lack of money, as we can see from what is written about the business of Innaya, the merchant. His wife stayed in Assur and deputised in the business. She was the mother of his five sons, who were also in the trade. Rings served as money there. She wrote this letter to her husband, and in it she possibly exaggerates:<sup>247</sup>

<sup>244</sup> We follow C. Michel, CMK (2001) 421–425. The correspondence of women: p. 419–511.

<sup>245</sup> J. G. Dercksen, *The Old Assyrian copper trade in Anatolia* (1996) 108 f.; K. R. Veenhof, 'Houses in the ancient city of Assur', *Studies D. J. W. Meijer* (2011) 211–231.

<sup>246</sup> TCL 19 17 with K. R. Veenhof, *Schrijvend verleden* (1983) 84; C. Michel, CMK (2001) 444 no. 318.

<sup>247</sup> Michel, CMK 466 no. 344.

Speak to Innaya: thus says Taram-Kubi.

You had written to me, 'The hand and finger-rings which are there you must have guarded. They have to be used for your food.' In reality you sent me thirty shekels of gold brought by I. Where are the rings you were going to leave for me? When you left you did not leave one shekel of silver for me. You plundered the house and took (everything) out of it. After you left there was a severe famine in Assur. You did not leave me a single litre of barley. I had repeatedly to buy barley for our food (...). What sort of demands are those that you repeatedly write to me? We have nothing to eat. Really, we too could repeatedly make demands. What I have in hand I have scraped together and sent to you and today I live in an empty house. Now is the season. Take care that you send me the amount that my cloths are worth, the silver that you have available, and then I can buy ten measures of barley.

In order to send cloth to Asia Minor, they had to make contracts with several carriers, who often added extra lengths of cloth to their convoy and would not accept a small consignment of goods. On many occasions women would complain that they could not find a carrier. Some women entrusted their cloth to a merchant as a *tadmīqtu*, 'on loan to get the best price possible'. He would sell it in Asia Minor and keep the profit for himself, while the women could be sure of the sale price. Sometimes women could not satisfy the requests of their husbands in Asia Minor. Their complaints concern the putting together of the shipments, the measurements of the cloth and its quality. In addition the correspondence concerned sending objects needed in the various offices in Asia Minor. Beautiful presents were sometimes sent to Assur. Of course the woman had to care for the house and its inhabitants. She paid much attention to serving the gods correctly and was afraid of the angry spirits of the dead. These women must have had strong personalities.

But the men had their own concerns too.

Protect the second wife ('slave-girl') and the child; pay heed to the wife and have the expenses refunded.

I do not know whether my second wife and the little girl are dead or not. You are my brothers. If they are alive, I will refund you their expenses.

You are our brother; protect our slave-girls and your children.<sup>248</sup>

A merchant is reproached by his wife and reacts:

Why has your heart changed so much and why do you belittle me? As if I (only) loved money and not our family, you and my brother!<sup>249</sup>

---

**248** C. Michel, *Ktama* 22 (1997) 100.

**249** KTK 18 with M. T. Larsen, *Studies K. R. Veenhof* (2001) 279 n. 24, and more references to the emotions of women on p. 285.

It was a hard world and a woman sighs in a business letter:

You have heard that mankind is bad. One stands ready to swallow up the other.<sup>250</sup>

One wonders what this international trade would have been without these women. Dutch women also had such a special status according to Hugo de Groot in his *Vergelijking der gemeenebesten* (1603):

Women carried on business with just as much perspicacity as men. It was not enough for them just to look after the children and do the housework. No, if their husband was away, they managed his money, they sold wares, they kept the books and travelled from one city to another.<sup>251</sup>

No specific business women of the Neo-Assyrian period, a thousand years later, are known to us, but we see that women could initiate litigation at that time.<sup>252</sup>

The administration of an estate with 164 personnel near Mari shows that Madam was possibly the wife of a well-known merchant. She controlled two female cooks, two women supervising the household, two water carriers, three personal assistants, 35 weavers, two women without a title, two men, and various girls and infants.<sup>253</sup> Of course, managing the weaving of the cloth was her most important activity. There were now and then problems. The ambassador of Mari to the court of King Hammurabi in Babylon wrote to his wife:

Regarding the cloth for my garments, which you are making, I have said to you once, twice, the lengths of cloth must be one cubit longer than now. With the cloths you make I am shabby. With this letter I am sending you the cloth from this country and you will see.<sup>254</sup>

Was the 'long' fashion in Babylon different and nicer?

Within the Neo-Babylonian Egibi family we can follow the fortunes of the woman called Ina-Esagila-ramat for 64 years.<sup>255</sup> She was the wife of Iddin-Marduk and her texts belong to his archive. She must have reached the age of more than eighty years and remained active into her final years, when she took out a lawsuit against a grandson and favoured a granddaughter. She herself was from a well-off family and brought with her a considerable dowry, consisting of slaves and

<sup>250</sup> Michel, CMK (2001) 433 no. 306:3–6. Cf. 'mankind has become bad', no. 187:20.

<sup>251</sup> E. M. Kloek in: H. M. Beliën, *Gestalten van de Gouden Eeuw* (2005) 250.

<sup>252</sup> B. Faist in: J. Renger, *Assur – Gott, Stadt und Land* (2011) 255 n. 29 ('prozessfähig').

<sup>253</sup> ARM 9 27 with N. Ziegler, *Le Harem* (1999) 19 f.

<sup>254</sup> ARM 10 173:11–18 with LAPO 18 (2000) 411 no. 1210.

<sup>255</sup> C. Wunsch, *Die Urkunden des babylonischen Geschäftsmannes Iddin-Marduk*. (1993) 66–72.

household utensils and ten minas of silver, three of which were her own nest egg ('the basket'). One assumes that her husband had profited from it. She transacted business for her husband, but also independently extended considerable credit. Her father-in-law had emancipated a slave on condition that he gave him food and clothing, which meant that he would support him in his old age. Directly after the contract was drawn up, the man fled. The daughter-in-law stepped in, with her daughter:

She honoured him; she respected him; she cared for him and regularly gave him food, oil and clothing.

The emancipation was reversed and the slave became the property of the ladies. Evidently he had been caught.<sup>256</sup> We have recounted more about the women of the Egibi family in Chapter 3 about marriage gifts. Another lady from this time specialised in buying slaves.<sup>257</sup>

In the myths we see the goddesses at home as competent managers bearing the title *agrig*, 'head of the housekeeping'.<sup>258</sup> Although the book of Proverbs has many warnings about strange women, everything comes right in the end with Chapter 31 about the 'virtuous woman' (literally 'the woman of strength'), who manages an estate.

## 18.11 Women's seals

Two more aspects of the public role of the woman remain to be discussed of which the first is their use of seals. Herodotus (I 195) wrote about Babylonia in the Persian period that 'everyone has a signet ring'. In the earlier periods people had seals in the shape of a little cylinder, which could be rolled against the wet clay of the freshly written clay tablet, a cylinder seal. There was a representation carved into it and quite often the inscription gave the name of the owner. These were almost always men, but high-ranking women also had their own seals, sometimes with female figures depicted on them. To judge if a seal belonged to a woman depends on it having an inscription.<sup>259</sup> Queen Šibtum of Mari received a letter from her husband in which he asked her to seal goods 'with your seal, that

---

<sup>256</sup> Wunsch, no. 211.

<sup>257</sup> C. Waerzeggers, 'The records of Inšabtu from the Naggāru family', AfO 46–47 (1999–2000) 183–200.

<sup>258</sup> T. Frymer-Kensky, *In the wake of the goddesses* (1992) 35 f.

<sup>259</sup> G. Gadaut in: F. Briquel-Chatonnet, *Femmes* (2009) 234–236.

is engraved with the words “Šibtum, daughter of Yarim-Lim, wife of Zimri-Lim”. It is conceivable that she had several seals and that he was asking her to use the one on which he himself was named.<sup>260</sup> How goods could be sealed with her seal we read in a surprising letter from the king to her about storing garlic. It is also surprising because we see some of the minor details with which the king was busying himself. Garlic was the normal food in the south, grown in the date orchard, so perhaps it was rarer in Mari.<sup>261</sup>

I keep hearing that the right time for garlic has come. Alert S. to this and get him to harvest the garlic. I want to receive ten homer of garlic in a dried state. When the garlic is dry, get it from him and have it stored in thirty-litre jars and seal them with your seal. However if the garlic is not dry, have them dry it on the roof of the sanctuary, but have the roof sealed off with your seal.

In Mari and Karanâ the wives of highly-placed diviners had their own businesses and so needed a cylinder seal. One from Mari reads, ‘Yamama, the daughter of Yaḥdun-Lim, wife of Asqudum’; another, from Karanâ, reads ‘Iltani, the daughter of Samu-Addu, wife of Aqba-ḥammu’. Both were daughters of a king.<sup>262</sup> In Chapter 23 about the court and the harem we give further examples of princesses with inscribed cylinder seals.

We regularly see seal impressions on clay tablets which have no inscription, but the name of the owner is written beside the impression; sometimes this is a woman’s name. If anyone had no seal they could impress their finger nail on the tablet, and alongside such an impression on a Neo-Assyrian tablet we read, ‘fingerprint of A., the wife of B., the third man (on the war chariot), the bearer of a shield’. She is identified as one of those who were selling a house.<sup>263</sup> In the Sumerian period the style of women’s seals was no different from that of men’s.<sup>264</sup> The only exception was that of the wife of a governor, which showed two women standing in a reverential position opposite a goddess. The inscription reads, ‘Ninḫilia, the wife of Akalla, the governor of Umma’.<sup>265</sup>

**260** ARM 10 119 with D. Charpin, NABU 1998/78. Her seal in a repair shop: ARM 32 (2012) 268 M. 18472:12.

**261** ARM 10 136 with LAPO 18 (2000) 336 f. no. 1157.

**262** D. Charpin in: G. D. Young, *Mari in retrospect* (1992) 62.

**263** SAA VI 142. In general see P. Villard in F. Briquel-Chatonnet, *Femmes* (2009) 311 n. 57.

**264** G. Gadaut; R. Mayr, ‘The depiction of ordinary men and women on the seals of the Ur III kingdom’, CRRAI 47/II (2002) 359–366; otherwise I. Winter in Durand, *La Femme* (1987) 190. See also F. Weiershäuser, ‘Die bildliche Darstellung königlicher Frauen der III. Dynastie von Ur und ihre sozialpolitische Aussage’, in: S. Schroer, *Images and gender* (2006) 263–279.

**265** JCS 26 (1974) 111 Seal B; Schroer, *Images and gender*, 70 fig. 17.



In the Old Assyrian period women closely involved in a transaction would seal the envelopes enclosing contracts or letters.<sup>266</sup> In most cases their names were not mentioned on the envelope and there was no difference in their style of sealing from that of men.<sup>267</sup> From the Old Babylonian period we know of cylinder seals belonging to nuns (*nadītu*) from Sippar and elsewhere. In the inscriptions on them sometimes after the name of the woman comes the title ‘*nadītu* of Šamaš’ and always the words ‘servant of (the gods) Šamaš and Aya’. They are not different in style from men’s seals.<sup>268</sup> Two letters from Mari concern a princess asking her father for a seal.

Let my lord, the Star, have sent to me a cylinder seal of lapis lazuli with my name on it. Every time I write, no one will despise me and will say, ‘There is no impression of her seal’.<sup>269</sup>

## 18.12 Women as witnesses

Women could give evidence in lawsuits, in particular those alleging the ill-treatment of a woman by a man or transactions within a convent.<sup>270</sup> It is noteworthy that women almost never appear on the list of witnesses at the end of a written contract. This is not surprising. The word ‘witness’ (*šību*) means primarily ‘old man’, ‘the elder’, and suggests the ‘elders’ sitting at the city gates. They were the ones who formally dealt with lawsuits, one imagines, and women were not present there.

In the Old Akkadian period a woman is hardly ever a witness, even when only women were active.<sup>271</sup> In Old Babylonian Sippar women witness only documents drawn up in the convent. On two documents we find a blank space between the names of the men and the women. One has seven male witnesses and fifteen female witnesses; the other six male, five female, and a female scribe. In both cases a woman is marrying off her adopted daughter.<sup>272</sup> The men, mostly the authorities of the temple or the convent, come first, but on two occasions the list was headed by two king’s daughters, who were in the convent at Sippar, and they

**266** K. R. Veenhof, *Mesopotamia. The Old Assyrian period* (2008) 109 f.

**267** C. Michel in: F. Briquel-Chatonnet, *Femmes* (2009) 258–262.

**268** G. Colbow, *CRRAI 47/1* (2002) 88–90.

**269** ARM 10 96 rev. 7–12 with LAPO 18 (2000) 438 no. 1225, with no. 1226.

**270** BE 6/2 58; the quotes in CAD Š/2 396a.

**271** A. Westenholz, *Mesopotamien. Akkade-Zeit* (see note 1), 70.

**272** CT 6 26a; CT 48 52.

impressed their seals.<sup>273</sup> When a slave-girl (*kazirtu*) was sold, five women, two men and a scribe witnessed the event.<sup>274</sup> A nun dedicated to Ninurta in Nippur carried out some business transactions and here too women were the witnesses.<sup>275</sup> Outside Sippar there are only a few instances of a woman as a witness. When a woman hired out her son for three months, the first witness was a merchant and the third a woman, 'NN, wife of NN'. An infant belonging to a single mother was adopted and the penultimate witness was a woman.<sup>276</sup>

In Kaniš it is the wife, the daughter (a priestess) and a son of one of the partners to the contract who once are listed as witnesses.<sup>277</sup> No female witnesses are known in Middle Assyrian times.<sup>278</sup> In a few Neo-Assyrian contracts a woman appears as a witness.<sup>279</sup> Some contracts from the Neo-Babylonian period, after the description of the transaction and before the list of witnesses, state 'in the presence of the woman NN', or 'with the consent of his wife NN', showing that she had been present and had agreed to the terms of the contract.<sup>280</sup>

---

**273** CT 47 47 (with seal 1 and 2); PBS 8/2 207 (with only female witnesses). See M. Stol, *Festschrift J. Oelsner* (2000) 461 n. 27.

**274** CT 48 28.

**275** TIM 4 10:25–29.

**276** Riftin 35:13; UET 5 93:29.

**277** M. T. Larsen, *Kültepe Tabletten VI-a* (2010) no. 207:29–32.

**278** N. Bellotto, *Studies F. M. Fales* (2012) 67.

**279** B. Faist in: J. Renger, *Assur – Gott, Stadt und Land* (2011) 255 n. 30.

**280** P. Koschaker, *Babylonisch-assyrisches Bürgerrechtsrecht* (1911) 201–207; *ina ašābi*, CAD A/2 391b, 408b (lit.), *ina milki*, CAD M/2 69 (3).

## 19 The witch

People believed that illness or death could be explained as a consequence of witchcraft. When medical texts give it as the cause of illness they refer to it as ‘the hand of man’, even though in most cases the witch was a woman. Law-books usually claim it was a man who was responsible, but that is because the terminology used in the laws only takes the man into account. In the handbook against witchcraft, *Maqlû*, both wizards and witches are addressed to cover all eventualities. Nevertheless, ordinary people imagined the perpetrator to be a woman, and the Neo-Babylonian laws say that a woman is concerned with witchcraft (§ 7). It is dealt with in § 47 of the Middle Assyrian laws, in the same section as other regulations referring to women, though there provision is made for it to be initiated by ‘either a man or a woman’. The penalty for this crime was always death. One liver extispicy gave this prediction:

A witch will keep collecting dust from a man’s foot. They will seize her and put her to death.<sup>1</sup>

In the oldest laws of Israel we read,

You must not allow a witch to live (Exodus 22:18).

Actual examples of witchcraft are sometimes referred to in letters and always concern women.<sup>2</sup> On one occasion seven witches were responsible, and a letter says that ‘many’ were sent to the king. A woman who ‘had given a drink to the son of her husband and killed him’ was accused of being a witch.<sup>3</sup>

Making women everywhere generally responsible for practising witchcraft exposes a widespread prejudice against women. Rabbi Hillel says on this subject in the Mishnah,

Much meat, many worms. Many possessions, much worry (variant: lawsuits). Many maids, much fornication. Many servants, much theft. Many women, much witchcraft (Aboth II, 7).

The reason why women were seen as witches in all cultures reflects the social inequality between the sexes. The position of the woman was marginalised and

---

1 A. R. George, CUSAS 18 (2012) 234:28.

2 Y. Sefati, J. Klein, ‘The role of women in Mesopotamian witchcraft’, CRRAI 47/II (2002) 569–587; D. Schwemer, *Abwehrzauber und Behexung. Studien zum Schadenzauberglauben im alten Mesopotamien* (2007) 118–127. More: *ibidem*, p. 140–146, 161–163.

3 Schwemer, 125–127.

there was prejudice against her.<sup>4</sup> Witches were mostly supposed to be older women, dominant individuals, women who took the initiative. They no longer needed to behave as subordinates.<sup>5</sup> Another modern theory is that anyone plotting evil would consult women skilled in witchcraft.<sup>6</sup>

A Sumerian legend concerning Enmerkar and Ensuhkešdanna, the city rulers of Uruk and Aratta, both of whom claimed the sacred marriage with Inanna, confirms that women made better witches than men. Ensuhkešdanna of Aratta informed his colleague in Uruk that he was superior and therefore the true bridegroom of Inanna. Both of these gentlemen boasted about their intimate adventures with the goddess and attacked each other with black magic. Ensuhkešdanna from Aratta sent to Sumer a male magician who made the cows and goats in the livestock enclosures stop giving milk and their young starve. Then on a bank of the Euphrates, at the request of the herdsmen, the 'old woman' Sagburu appeared as a sorcerer. She and that magician measured each other up. They both threw fish-spawn into the river and the man fished out a carp. Then the woman pulled out an eagle, which seized the carp and made off with it to the mountains. Afterwards the man pulled a ewe with a lamb out of the water, but the woman sent a wolf which ran off with it to the wide plains. The test was repeatedly carried out, the man producing edible animals and the woman countering by conjuring up animals of prey. The man lost and the woman reproached him for his first spell against the livestock, stopping their supply of milk in the cult of Inanna. That was a grievous sin and he had to be put to death. The city ruler of Aratta now acknowledged the supremacy of the ruler of Uruk.<sup>7</sup>

According to popular belief the moon could be drawn down with witchcraft, for an Assyrian letter exclaims that 'their women will draw down the moon' to display their evil power.<sup>8</sup> Greeks and Romans believed that the Thessalian women were similarly evil, and depicted the fact on a Greek vase (Figure 31).<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> G. Leick, *Sex and eroticism in Mesopotamian literature* (1994) 229f. See also Schwemer, 139, 249, 275.

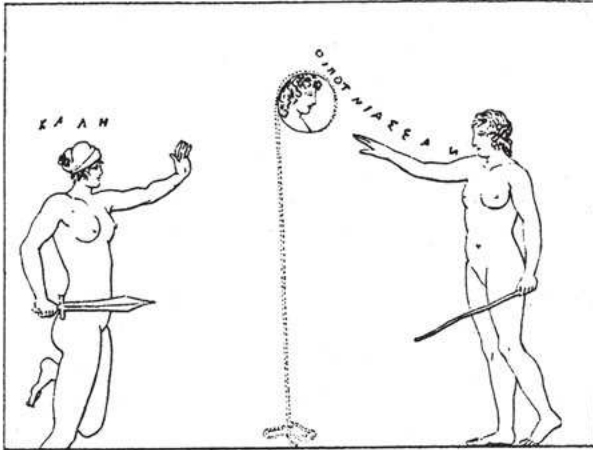
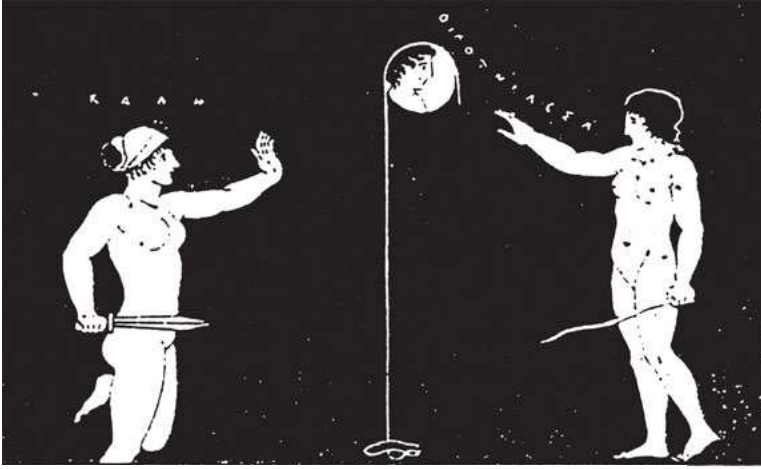
<sup>5</sup> J. Henderson in: R. Harris, *Gender and aging* (2000) 95–97.

<sup>6</sup> R. Westbrook, *Festschrift R. Haafse* (2006) 50f.

<sup>7</sup> A. Berlin, *Enmerkar and Ensuhkešdanna. A Sumerian narrative poem* (1979); H. Vanstiphout, *Epics of Sumerian kings. The matter of Aratta* (2004) 23–48.

<sup>8</sup> SAA XVI 63 rev. 26f.

<sup>9</sup> M. Stol in: D. J. W. Meijer, *Natural phenomena* (1992) 259, 277 fig. 1; E. Reiner, *Astral magic in Babylonia* (1995) 97–101. A Babylonian witch is described as being able 'to let a star descend from heaven'; T. Abusch, D. Schwemer, *Corpus of Mesopotamian anti-witchcraft rituals I* (2011) 276:52, 285. Nunpiriggaldim, the legendary 'sage' of King Enmerkar of Aratta, brought down (the planet) Venus from heaven into the temple Eanna; this was his sin; E. Reiner, *Or NS. 30* (1961) 4:10–13.



**Fig. 31:** A Greek vase (now lost) showing Thracian witches who were supposed to be able to draw down the moon, a technique referred to in an Assyrian letter.

Inexplicable illness was blamed on witchcraft, and causing someone to die through witchcraft was called ‘slitting someone’s throat’. Medical texts in which illnesses caused by witchcraft are described concern combinations of certain symptoms: headache, dizzy spells, joint pain, paralysis, deafness, stomach ache, depression, anxiety and perplexity, slobbering, phlegm, bleeding gums, impotence, alienation from one’s surroundings.<sup>10</sup> Someone has said that women had

<sup>10</sup> Schwemer, *Abwehrzauber* (2007) 167.

a hand chiefly in causing problems of digestion and potency, for it was a woman who always prepared the food for a man and also was seen to be lusting after him. So one should be on one's guard lest indigestion arise from bewitched food and impotency from sex with witches.<sup>11</sup>

While no-one knew a witch personally the consequences of witchcraft were visible everywhere and caused accusations to abound. The law-books examined what was false. One regulation about this is to be found in the Sumerian law-book of Ur-Nammu (§ 13). It is striking that there a sum of silver was a sufficient penalty for accusing someone falsely, but later the death penalty became standard.<sup>12</sup> In the much later laws from Assyria (Chapter 31) witchcraft was punishable by death and the law examined the matter in more detail about what to do if you heard of someone involved in witchcraft and if the eye-witness could say 'I saw it myself' (§ 47). In Babylonian times the judgement of the gods was determined through the process of the ordeal. The laws of Hammurabi begin with how to establish the truth of accusations of murder (§ 1) and of witchcraft.

§ 2. If a man charges another man with practising witchcraft but cannot bring proof against him, he who is charged with witchcraft shall go to the divine River, he shall jump into the divine River. If the divine River should overwhelm him, his accuser shall take full legal possession of his estate. If the divine River should clear that man and he should survive, he who made the charge of witchcraft against him shall be killed; he who submitted to the divine River shall take full legal possession of his accuser's estate.

If a case was difficult or could not be proved, one could either swear an oath or undergo the process of the ordeal to determine a judgement by the god. In Mesopotamia the ordeal meant that the accused would jump into the river and swim a good distance or walk in the hope of getting out again in one piece. This divine judgement was well-known in Mesopotamia, Syria (Carchemish) and Anatolia, and it was mostly associated with accusations which could not be proved. These would appear to be accusations such as those we come across in the letters from the royal archive at Mari, where divine judgement is sought for accusations of adultery, witchcraft, and the betrayal of state secrets. For a woman accused there of all of this the River determined whether the slander was true, according to a passage already translated and discussed in Chapter 10 about adultery.

---

<sup>11</sup> T. Abusch in: I. L. Finkel, *Disease in Babylonia* (2007) 150–153. He is also of the opinion that the woman adopts the methods of a healer, including the anointing and the like.

<sup>12</sup> C. Wilcke, *Festschrift J. Krecher* (2014) 539 f.

There is a second example of an ordeal in Mari.<sup>13</sup> A woman declares first under oath that

My daughter has not practised any witchcraft against H. That woman has not given H. bewitched wood, either in the gate or elsewhere, nor has she made him eat [witchcraft] either in bread, or food, or beer, or anything else.

We know of a witch who spat into food to bewitch it. An ordeal followed and the woman drowned.

She fell into the middle of the divine River and she died; she was not absolved (by the River god).

It is striking that bewitched food and drink were served up so often, which makes us think of deliberate poisoning, which is indeed what it may have amounted to.<sup>14</sup>

Omens envisaged the possibility that a woman wanted to harm her husband or someone else by witchcraft. One liver omen predicted,

If the left split looks as if it were the cuneiform sign 𒄩A, the woman will bewitch her husband.<sup>15</sup>

A medical magic text prescribes a preventative for the husband. He would have to wear a leather pouch containing certain items round his neck as a talisman against the threat,

So that the machinations (witchcraft) of a woman do not strike her husband, so that the sin of the father and mother does not touch him: seed of the tamarisk, phlegm from the wild melon; (packed) in leather.<sup>16</sup>

In a letter from Mari we read of a princess who sent her lord herbs with magic properties.

Regarding the herbs of black magic (*kišpū*), which Šimatum sent to my lord, the story is true, it is not a lie. Let my lord check the story.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>13</sup> AEM 1/1 (1988) no. 253, the reverse side.

<sup>14</sup> J.-M. Durand in: G. del Olmo Lete, *Mythologie et religion des Sémites occidentaux* I (2008) 535 f., 'Les accusations de sorcellerie'; 617 f.

<sup>15</sup> CT 20 43 i 4; U. S. Koch, *Secrets of extispicy* (2005) 108.

<sup>16</sup> SpbTU II 112 no. 22 iv 7 f.

<sup>17</sup> AEM 1/2 (1988) 76 no. 314:26–30.

What was this about? Scholars think that this woman wanted to kill her rival at court, her sister Princess Kirûm.<sup>18</sup> Later the writer of the letter said that by slandering ‘my lord’ she had been severely punished by the god, so that she gnawed her fingers and became subject to epileptic fits.

The god of my lord ‘reached’ her and made her gnaw her fingers and she has regular fits of epilepsy.<sup>19</sup>

Possibly these and other accusations, made by a husband or other close family members, were attempts to eliminate an unpleasant person.<sup>20</sup> In the Hittite sources women at court might be suspected of having had a hand in the sickness or death of an eminent personage.<sup>21</sup> The best-known case is that of King Muršili II (ca. 1300 BC), who said of his stepmother, the last wife of his predecessor, a Babylonian princess, that she was supposed to have killed his dear wife by witchcraft. Oracles permitted him either to kill her or to depose her from any priestly office. The king chose the latter.<sup>22</sup> It is striking that to combat black magic among the Hittites it was not a man but ‘the Old Woman’ who was appointed for the task. There are indications that she was sometimes suspected of using her knowledge of the black arts against other people.<sup>23</sup>

The witch had a great deal of power. Gods could prompt the witch to perform black magic.<sup>24</sup> One ritual was intended to ‘reconcile a seriously ill person with his (personal) god and goddess’ and directly afterwards mentions that it would ‘jerk the witchcraft out of his body’. So such sorcery was the result of the wrath of the gods.<sup>25</sup> The witch could alienate a person from his god, with the result that he turns against him. The man’s fate could even be altered for the worse in this way, with all the attendant consequences.<sup>26</sup> The handbook against black magic is called *Maqlû*, ‘burning’. In it the witch is portrayed as someone who accuses

**18** Schwemer, 122. J.-M. Durand surmises that in this way she wishes to invalidate the oath embodied in a treaty; NABU 2004/41; in *Mythologie et religion des Sémites occidentaux* I, 536, 618.

**19** AEM 1/2 71 no. 312:36–39.

**20** S. Lafont, *Femmes*, 242.

**21** Schwemer, 259–263. The king’s sister Ziplantawiya performing sorcery against the royal family: translation by B. J. Collins in M. W. Chavalas, *Women*, 255–260.

**22** S. Lafont, *Femmes* (1999) 242. The source: S. R. Bir-Nun, *The Tawananna in the Hittite kingdom* (1975) 186 f.; H. A. Hoffner, JAOS 103 (1983) 187–193; Y. Cohen, *Taboos and prohibitions in Hittite society* (2002) 150–155 (in col. iii). See Schwemer, 261.

**23** Schwemer, 260, 275. Translations of texts: B. J. Collins in Chavalas, *Women*, 246–255.

**24** D. Schwemer, 149.

**25** Schwemer, TUAT NF 5 (2010) 131:9 f. (= KAL 2 no. 24).

**26** Schwemer, 150, 154.



her victim in court. In the ritual she is eventually sentenced and burned herself. She was thoroughly destroyed,<sup>27</sup> and the patient and his house were purified. This ritual is written on eight clay tablets containing about a hundred spells. A ninth tablet describes the ritual. It was carried out at the end of the fifth month, when the spirits of the dead came up in the night and in the early morning.<sup>28</sup> In this later period (after 1000 BC) superhuman characteristics were attributed to the witch and she was seen as a danger to general well-being. This handbook functioned also as outlining a ritual to protect the state from her power and to cleanse away any taints in society. The witch with her fierce false tongue now had the characteristics of a diabolical figure. T. Abusch has shown how she was able to unleash the wrath of the gods on her victim.<sup>29</sup> This image of the witch fits with the Biblical image of the devil, who was also presented as an accuser ('Satan') and who became increasingly powerful.<sup>30</sup>

The Neo-Babylonian law-book contains an entry which has been badly transmitted and is impossible to understand properly.

§7. As for a woman who 'purifies' witchcraft or makes 'purification' on the field of a man or on the street or in a ship or in an oven or wherever else, of the trees which she has 'purified' she shall give threefold the yield to the owner of the field. If she has 'purified' in a ship or in an oven or somewhere else, she shall give threefold the shortfall that has occurred on the field.

One suggested explanation is that the law 'seems to be directed against the woman who wants to pour out defiled (bewitched) water over someone's field or in front of his door'.<sup>31</sup>

Finally we note that the prophet Isaiah condemned the daughter of Babylon for spells and sorcery during the Exile, saying she could expect

loss of children and widowhood, despite your many sorceries, all your countless spells (Isaiah 47:9).

He then goes even further by daring her to

<sup>27</sup> M. Stol in: C. Houtman, *De leugen regeert ... Valse beschuldiging in de Bijbel en de wereld van de Bijbel* (2004) 130–132.

<sup>28</sup> T. Abusch in: G. Leick, *The Babylonian world* (2007) 379–385. For a full translation of Maqlû see TUAT NF 4 (2008) 128–186.

<sup>29</sup> T. Abusch, *Mesopotamian Witchcraft. Toward a history and understanding of Babylonian witchcraft beliefs and literature* (2002) 14, 27 ff. Summarised by Leick, 374 f.

<sup>30</sup> Stol in Houtman, 134 f. Now T. Abusch, *The magical ceremony Maqlû* (2015).

<sup>31</sup> K. van der Toorn, *From her cradle to her grave* (1994) 114.

persist in your spells (*hêbêr*) and your many sorceries (*kêšêf*), in which you have trafficked all your life (Isaiah 47:12).

Earlier the prophet Nahum had lamented over Nineveh, the capital city of Assyria, claiming that the massacre she had suffered was a result of her harlotry and sorcery,

all for the persistent harlotry of a harlot, the alluring mistress of sorcery (*kêšêf*), who by her harlotry and sorceries beguiled nations and peoples (Nahum 3:4).

These two cities were always a byword for whoring in antiquity and this charge was persistently held against them.

## 20 Prostitution

In the New Testament the city of Babylon is personified as the mother of whores.

Written on her head was a name with a secret meaning: ‘Babylon the great, the mother of whores and of every obscenity on earth’ (Revelation 17:5).<sup>1</sup>

When discussing the Right of the First Night at the end of Chapter 11, we saw that Herodotus also contributed to this idea. But at this point let us see whether in reality it is one that can still be considered reasonable to maintain.<sup>2</sup>

In Sumerian the usual word for prostitute has two elements, *kar.kid*, a combination of ‘harbour’ and ‘to work’.<sup>3</sup> In Akkadian the word that is used is *ḫarīmtu*, which literally means ‘a woman who is separated’. It is derived from a root etymologically related to that of Hebrew *ḫerem* ‘excommunication’ and Arabic *ḫarīm* ‘harem’. The idea of her being separated should be understood as referring to her social isolation, although prostitutes were an accepted fact of life.

### 20.1 Where she worked

The significance of the Sumerian term suggests that a woman involved in *kar.kid* would go to the harbour to work. A prostitute was often described as the one ‘standing on the street’, but in lists we find other descriptions for ladies of that profession, including those ‘standing on the quayside’, ‘walking over the quay’, ‘walking through the city’, ‘walking across the bank’, ‘walking through the (irrigated) fields’, and ‘with a pointed sandal’.<sup>4</sup> All of these indicate behaviour demonstrated outdoors. According to the Nuzi texts a woman who stood on the street was there because she had no family ties.<sup>5</sup> In Sumer and Babylonia the woman on the street would easily be taken for a prostitute. This is demonstrated in a myth where the god Enlil treated young Sud as such when he saw her stand-

---

1 In Revelation 17:5 the Greek accent determines whether *pornōn* denotes a female or a male prostitute. The Vulgate avoids the problem by translating it with the Latin word meaning ‘fornications’; see R. Borger, *Theologische Rundschau* 52 (1987) 48–50.

2 J. S. Cooper, ‘Prostitution’, *RIA* XI/1–2 (2006) 12–21.

3 M. Civil, *RA* 70 (1976) 198–190; M. A. Powell, *Studies I. M. Diakonoff* (1982) 317; W. G. Lambert, ‘Prostitution’, in: V. Haas, *Außenseiter und Randgruppen* (1992) 138, 157.

4 J. Taylor, *Or. NS* 70 (2001) 217 f., 29–36 (cf. Proto-Lu 713–724; *MSL* 12 [1969] 59). See Cooper, ‘Prostitution’, 15a.

5 S. Greengus, *HUCA* 46 (1975) 20 f.

ing there.<sup>6</sup> Being on the street would have been a factor when judging allegations of rape, for we saw in Chapter 11 that the relevant laws attached importance to establishing the place where such an incident took place. In the Bible Tamar is described as standing by the wayside to wait for customers (Genesis 38:14) and in the Book of Proverbs the same location is mentioned as typical (Proverbs 7:6–23). We also note that the fact that prostitutes received their takings in the city squares was seen as sufficiently ignominious to use as a curse against a vassal king who dared to break a treaty.

May Mati-ilu become a whore, his soldiers women. Let them receive [their wages] in their city square like a whore.<sup>7</sup>

Particular features of the physiognomy of the liver of a sacrificial sheep would persuade the diviners to interpret them as predicting that even a princess might have to live as a prostitute:

If the small bones of the *singangurītu*, the right side, are perforated, then the daughter of the king shall go whoring.<sup>8</sup>

As yet we are not able to identify what part of the sheep was being examined, but it was explained by the Babylonians themselves as the *ḫamurītu*, a word which sounds like *ḫarīmūtu* ‘whoring’. The Babylonians took associations based on assonance very seriously indeed. The perforations may have suggested to the diviners that a way had been opened for the princess to go outside.

According to a manual on human behaviour there were various consequences for a man who chanced to meet a prostitute on the street.<sup>9</sup>

If a man comes across whores, his wish shall be fulfilled.

If an unclean whore encounters him, his wish shall not be fulfilled.

If he touches her breast, he is free.

Some of these expressions need some further comment. That ‘his wish shall be fulfilled’ is a standard phrase widely used in predictions. ‘An unclean whore’ refers to a woman who is menstruating, a situation that does not bode well for the

<sup>6</sup> M. Civil, JAOS 103 (1983) 46b.

<sup>7</sup> For the curse in the treaty see SAA II 12 no. 2 v 9 f.

<sup>8</sup> YOS 10 47:69. In line 65 it is a married woman who is ‘going out for harlotry’; for the context see J.-J. Glassner, CRRAI 47/1 (2002) 163a.

<sup>9</sup> F. Köcher, A. L. Oppenheim, AfO 18 (1957–58) 76 Text B:25–6. Cf. J. Bottéro, *Annuaire* 1973–74, 99.

man. But ‘if he touches her breast’, apparently a primitive ritual, it means that he will ward off any evil that may come his way. The first line implies that a chance meeting with an easy woman was to be considered to be a favourable omen. A similarly favourable omen is found in a handbook of divinations about sicknesses, which predicts that a man who has been ill for a long time will eventually recover if he ‘sees’ his daughter or a prostitute.<sup>10</sup> Possibly he saw the woman in his dreams. Of course, this was all matter for ancient scholarly speculation rather than wisdom shared by the masses.

Passages in literary texts stereotype the prostitute as a woman loitering at the city wall, not an area regarded as respectable.<sup>11</sup> It fits in well with the Biblical story of Rahab the whore who, having taken in the spies at the walls of Jericho allowed them to escape.

She then let them down through a window by a rope, for the house where she lived was on an angle of the wall (Joshua 2:15).

We have seen that an inn where beer was flowing was not a respectable place for ‘nuns’ to enter. There must have been a thin line separating it from a brothel. The Sumerian word for a brothel literally means ‘the abode of the lady’ (*éš.dam, bīt aštammī*) but is often translated as ‘tavern’.<sup>12</sup> A Sumerian epic includes the line ‘the harlot who goes to the brothel, who makes the bedroom a delight.’<sup>13</sup> The Sumerian proverb ‘A princess cannot avoid a whorehouse’ must be a joke (SP 6.5). We find the whore and the drinking-house often mentioned in the same breath. In a Sumerian-Eblaite dictionary the Sumerian word for whore is translated in two different ways, first as ‘a brewer of beer’ (*sābītu*) and then as ‘a gorgeous woman’.<sup>14</sup> The goddess Ištar knew that that was the place to go to get a man’s attention.

If I sit in the door of the drinking-house, I am the whore who knows the man.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>10</sup> N. Heeßel, *Babylonisch-assyrische Diagnostik* (2000) 311 Tafel 28:36 f.

<sup>11</sup> Gilg. VII 117, etc.; CAD M/1 237a; MSL 12 (1969) 83 Fragment IV:5 (*ša manzāzi*).

<sup>12</sup> In syllabic Sumerian ka-ki-da-aš-ta-am (= kar.kid é éš.dam), ZA 83 (1994) 180:47. In general see V. Haas, ‘Schenken und Dirnenhäuser’, *Babylonischer Liebesgarten* (1999) 93–110.

<sup>13</sup> H. Vanstiphout, *Epics of Sumerian kings* (2004) 114, ‘Lugalbanda in the Wilderness’, 174.

<sup>14</sup> Å. W. Sjöberg, *Festschrift J. Renger* (1999) 545. It is also possible to read the signs as *za-ne-tum*, cognate with Hebrew *zōnēh*, ‘whoring’, but this is not likely.

<sup>15</sup> K. Volk, FAOS 18 (1989) 196 Tafel 21:25 f., with comm., p. 219 f.; Old Babylonian, *ibidem*; also M. E. Cohen, JAOS 96 (1986) 606; CLAM II (1988) 581 c+443 f. with 597.



**Fig. 32:** Eroticism in the tavern. Many terracotta objects have been found with this scene of a man approaching a woman from behind, while she drinks her beer from a pot by sucking it through a straw. Ca. 1700 BC. Terracotta. Height 8,9 cm. *British Museum, London.*

It was also the place where transsexuals and the like could be found.<sup>16</sup> Some scenes on terracotta objects show a woman sipping beer from a jug through a reed straw while a man copulates with her from behind, something that could easily have happened in a drinking-house (Figure 32).<sup>17</sup> This may be why Hammurabi prohibited highly placed religious persons from entering a ‘beer-house’ (§ 110). According to a model contract a prostitute could get her drinking-house back if a man married her.<sup>18</sup> What may have been such a drinking-house was excavated outside the city of Susa. It measured 28 × 16 metres and had a central courtyard surrounded by many rooms, all of which contained a clay beer vat placed centrally or in a corner of the room. The plastered walls of the rooms may all have been decorated with depictions in clay of naked women, of which no less than two hundred were found.<sup>19</sup>

Music and dancing took place here, as seen on Old Babylonian terracottas. One shows a woman with a lyre and a man with a tambourine which may be an

<sup>16</sup> M. Malul, *Aula Orientalis* 10 (1992) 54 n. 38.

<sup>17</sup> J. Assante, *CRAAI* 47/II (2002) 29–36. A photo in *Phoenix* 56,1 (2010) 45.

<sup>18</sup> *MSL* 1 (1937) 97 Tafel VII ii 25.

<sup>19</sup> L. Trümpelmann, ‘Eine Kneipe in Susa’, *Iranica Antiqua* 16 (1981) 43; V. Haas, *Babylonischer Liebesgarten* (1999) 97–99. The obscene terracotta objects: U. Winter, *Frau und Göttin* (1983) 346–354; there are many illustrations in the back of the book; M. Silver, *UF* 38 (2006) 649–652; F. A. M. Wiggermann, *RIA* IX/1–2 (1998) 49 f.

innocent scene,<sup>20</sup> but another is a real display of a woman with a tambourine and a man with a lute leaping up and down. She firmly grasps his penis as they look at each other over their shoulders mischievously.<sup>21</sup> There are some bawdy songs on a clay tablet which were called ‘ballads’ by the editor, or ‘a new genre’, while others refer to them as ‘lovesongs’. In such lyrics the goddess Ištar is sometimes praised.<sup>22</sup> This Sumerian saying (or joke) with its allusion to a musical instrument called the *tigidla* seems to fit the atmosphere:

The jester’s bitch: bread rations (are) for her mouth,  
but the shaft of the *tigidla* (is) for his anus.<sup>23</sup>

A late story written in Sumerian concerns a man who ‘had no god’, perhaps ‘an unlucky chap’, who married a manumitted slave-girl of ill repute. He, together with his daughter, a temple prostitute, joined the girl in making music and chanting. This lasted only for six months and fifteen days, by which time he had lost everything, wandering the streets, having been ‘plucked’. That is what one could expect of slave-girls.<sup>24</sup>

In three different Neo-Babylonian economic texts we read of an investor offering to provide a woman with the contents for a drinking-house, including the beds, in return for an annual interest payment of 20 %. One text lists ‘four beds, two chairs, a table, and a vat of beer’. The woman involved, the dependant of a rich family, is named in two of the texts as Išhunnatu, a really luscious name meaning ‘bunch of grapes’, one which seems to suit her wonderfully.<sup>25</sup>

A prostitute could ply her trade most easily at night, a time when it was known that respectable women such as housewives would not allow themselves to frequent the streets

---

**20** Catalogue *Das Vorderasiatische Museum* (1992) 103 no. 47; R. Opificius, *Das altbabylonische TerrakottarelieF* (1961) no. 581. Drawings: RA 48 (1954) 174 fig. 76, and J. Bottéro in: P. Grimal, *Histoire mondiale de la femme I* (1965) 209; H. Klengel, *Kulturgeschichte des alten Vorderasien* (1989) 207 fig. 82.

**21** M. Barrelet, *Figurines et reliefs en terre cuite*, no. 591; M. Schuol, *Hethitische Kultmusik*, Tafel 32 no. 77.

**22** J. A. Black, *JAOS* 103 (1983) 25–34. Cf. *TUAT NF* 7 (2013) 63–65.

**23** SP 5.124 with P. Michalowski in: R. Prusinzski, D. Shehata, *Musik und Tradierung. Studien zur Rolle von Musikern bei der Verschriftung und Tradierung von literarischen Werken* (2010) 223 f.

**24** M. T. Roth, ‘The slave and the scoundrel’, *JAOS* 103 (1983) 275–282; B. Alster, *ZA* 82 (1992) 195–201. Cf. D. Shehata, *WZKM* 97 (2007) 521–529. Unreliable slave-girls: W. G. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* (1960) 102 f.

**25** F. Joannès, *NABU* 1992/64, 89. The name: J. Hackl, *WZKM* 103 (2013) 161.

At night there are no housewives (*emiqtu*), at night no married woman impedes you.<sup>26</sup>

J.-J. Glassner portrays the qualities that mark a good housewife in her home but not a whore on the street rather sagaciously.

The wife is known not for her beauty or femininity but rather for her faithfulness and fertility.<sup>27</sup>

In a Sumerian incantation we find a complicated and curious procedure to obtain the favours of a girl by magic, although after reading it we are left to wonder if simpler ways could not have been found.<sup>28</sup> The love-struck man would take fat from cows, put it into a bowl, and then throw it on the ribcage of the woman. He did this so that ‘the girl does not block the opened door for me, not thrust away her wailing child, but chase after me.’ The girl is identified as ‘the daughter of Inanna’, the goddess of love, who seems to have been her guardian deity, and she is described in most glowing terms.

The beautiful girl, who stands in the street, the girl, the whore, the daughter of Inanna, the girl, the daughter of Inanna, who stands in the drinking-house, she is a cow brimming with fat, brimming with cream, the cow, the abundant vulva of Inanna, the mighty barn of Enki. When she is sitting the girl is a luxuriant garden of apple trees. When she is lying she casts a shadow by ... joy. She casts a shadow by the branch of a cedar.

The text goes on to mention that the man is left with a problem that will not simply be solved by the gods of magic, as noted by M. J. Geller. His problem is that ‘she strikes the breast of the young man as if with a reed’, which refers to his pangs of love, a well attested ‘illness’ in the ancient world. It can be cured only if she ‘does not block the opened door’ for him, the ultimate purpose of the procedure.<sup>29</sup> A landlord in Assur used an Akkadian incantation to bring prosperity to his drinking-house. In the second part of that text the goddess Ištar (= Inanna) is invited to participate in voluptuous practices.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>26</sup> W. G. Lambert in: H. Goedicke, *Unity and diversity* (1975) 108 Section 1:6–8.

<sup>27</sup> J.-J. Glassner, *CRRAI 47/I* (2002) 162a.

<sup>28</sup> A. Falkenstein, *ZA 56* (1964) 113–129; W. H. Ph. Römer, *TUAT II/2* (1987) 208–210; M. J. Geller, *CRRAI 47/II* (2002) 135–139.

<sup>29</sup> Geller, 129–139.

<sup>30</sup> *KAR 144* with W. Farber, *TUAT II/2* (1987) 280. New edition by S. V. Panayotov, ‘A ritual for a flourishing bordello’, *BiOr 70* (2013) 286–309.



## 20.2 Dressed for work

The Middle Assyrian laws (§ 40), as we saw in Chapter 1, prohibited whores from being veiled. They may have worn a kind of scarf as worn by the goddess Ištar (*aguḥḥu*).<sup>31</sup> Lexical lists state that a prostitute was recognisable by her ‘pointed sandal’.<sup>32</sup> She also wore the necklace of Ištar, which may have been like some necklaces found during Dutch excavations in Syria. On those reconstructed necklaces are threaded shells, representing female genitals, and models of penises.

Now the necklace chains themselves used suggestive shells, with little models of penises swinging at the sides. This conveyed unmistakably a signal about any woman tarted-up in this way, not to say ‘I am a married woman’, but rather ‘I am available for anyone’. Men did not wear necklaces, certainly not ones like these.<sup>33</sup>

The jewellery of the prostitute in the Middle Assyrian laws (§ 40) could well have included something similar.

The woman known as a *kezertu* was almost certainly a prostitute. She was noted for her distinctive hairstyle and functioned as a hierodule, a servant in the temple of Ištar (temple prostitution is a subject reserved for Chapter 21). When ‘the virgin daughter of Babylon’ is addressed in Isaiah 47 she is invited to ‘remove your veil, strip off your skirt, bare your thighs’.

In the Gilgamesh Epic we are given an erotic glimpse into a prostitute stripping herself for action. Her name was Šamḥat, meaning a provocative or gorgeous woman, and in fact a nickname for a prostitute. The passage describing Enkidu’s encounter with her is the only one we have from cuneiform literature describing such a woman at work. In his English translation of the epic published in 1946, A. Heidel, a Lutheran cleric from Chicago, resorted to Latin for a particularly racy passage, but nowadays less modesty is demanded.

Šamḥat let loose her skirts.  
 She bared her sex, and he took in her charms.  
 She showed no fear, she took in his scent.  
 She spread her clothing, and he lay upon her.  
 She treated the man to the work of a woman.

<sup>31</sup> M. Malul, *Aula Orientalis* 10 (1992) 56 n. 52; W. G. Lambert in: M. Mindlin, *Figurative language* (1987) 29.

<sup>32</sup> MSL 12 (1969) 59 Proto-Lu 715; 83 Fragment IV:6, ‘whose shoes ...’ (Bogh.).

<sup>33</sup> F. A. M. Wiggermann, *Phoenix* 56 (2010) 51 f.; with photos. For a woman wearing a necklace with her hands beneath her breasts see p. 54.



**Fig. 33:** Statue of a nude woman, inscribed on the back by King Aššur-bel-kala (1073–1056 BC): 'I have made these statues in the provinces, cities, and guesthouses for laughter'. Limestone. Height 94 cm. *British Museum, London.*

His 'love' caressed and embraced her.

For six days and seven nights Enkidu, erect, did couple with Šamḫat.  
(Gilgamesh I 188–194)

The statue of a naked woman found in the temple of Ištar in Nineveh, made of basalt and 94cm in height, is a torso something like the Venus de Milo (Figure 33). On it is a curious inscription stating that it had been commissioned by King Aššur-bel-kala (1073–1056 BC) to be sited in the provinces, cities and guest houses (*ubruṭe*) 'for the sake of laughter'.<sup>34</sup> The word 'laughter' implies sexual pleasure in Akkadian. The same is true for Biblical Hebrew, where the verb 'to laugh' is closely connected etymologically with the name Isaac. Now while Isaac

<sup>34</sup> RIMA 2 (1991) 108 no. 10 with R. Da Riva, E. Frahm, *AfO* 46–47 (1999–2000) 177b; Wiggermann, *Phoenix* 56, 47 f. (photo and translation). For illustrations see, e.g., W. Orthmann, *Der Alte Orient* (1975) Abb. 170; with p. 295. For a similar statue from the Ištar temple in Nineveh see Iraq 55 (1993) 47 fig. 10.

was living in Gerar it is clear that he was doing more than laughing with his wife Rebecca when King Abimelech managed to peep at the pair of them.

But when they had been there some considerable time, Abimelech the Philistine king looked down from his window, and there was Isaac caressing his wife Rebecca (Genesis 26:8).

In the Authorized Version he was said to be ‘sporting’ with her and more recent translations using different words usually take a similar view. One modern version that prefers to translate literally is the New English Bible, but more often than not a more explicit verb is chosen, e.g. ‘fondling’ (New Revised Standard Version, Jewish Publication Society) or ‘caressing’ (The Revised English Bible). Knowing this wider semantic range of the verb ‘to laugh’ leads naturally to the conclusion that King Aššur-bel-kala wanted his statue to stimulate not just ‘laughing’, but also sporting, and fondling, and caressing, and all that goes with it. She could be taken for an ancient pin-up girl in stone, and similar suggestive statues may have been positioned in other temples of Ištar throughout the kingdom.<sup>35</sup>

Because prostitutes are named in lists of food rations from the same Middle Assyrian period, F. A. M. Wiggermann has proposed that prostitution flourished then as a state institution.<sup>36</sup> After all, it was the same in a much earlier period, for now and again prostitutes are named in Sumerian lists of food rations, showing that they were palace employees in ancient Šuruppak. Also at that time prostitutes were associated with drinking-houses.<sup>37</sup>

A few texts speak about the fees a prostitute could expect for her services. The lascivious goddess Nanaya is mentioned in a Sumerian song positioning herself against a wall, apparently preparing for *coitus a tergo*.

If I stand against the wall, it is a shekel.  
 If I bend over, it is one and a half shekels of silver.  
 Don't dig a canal! I am your canal.  
 Don't plough a field! I am your field.  
 Don't look for moist ground! I am your moist ground.

Those who know about these things consider the higher fee for her second position very expensive, even though she was a goddess.<sup>38</sup> The phrase ‘to dig a canal’

<sup>35</sup> F. A. M. Wiggermann, ‘Nackte Göttin. A’, RIA IX/1–2 (1998) 48 § 4.

<sup>36</sup> Phoenix 56 (2010) 47, 54. More evidence gave J. Llop in: L. Marti, *La famille dans le Proche-Orient ancien* (2014) 450 (prostitutes ‘of working age’ mentioned with their child or fathers or brothers), cf. 446 (MVA 10:8–10).

<sup>37</sup> J.-J. Glassner, CRRAI 47/I (2002) 154–157.

<sup>38</sup> Å. W. Sjöberg, JCS 29 (1977) 17 a:17–20, with p. 24, and B. Alster, *Studies W. W. Hallo* (1993) 15, with a correction by P. Attinger, NABU 1998/40.

is here used metaphorically for to copulate. Some scholars allow their imagination to run along these lines when reading hymns of praise for kings who boast about the canals they dug.<sup>39</sup> For a prostitute at Nuzi, who did her work in her parents' house and figured in a lawsuit, a piece of pork meat (*kurkuzannu*) was said to be a reasonable recompense.<sup>40</sup> But, in another superficially similar circumstance, but one which is not necessarily fundamentally related, the goddess Ištar is insulted when Enkidu throws her a piece of meat from the Bull of Heaven (Gilgamesh VI 161). In the Bible Judah pays Tamar with a kid (Genesis 38:17), and a proverb speaks of paying with a round loaf (Proverbs 6:26).<sup>41</sup> Enkidu wished that the whore should be rewarded with riches.<sup>42</sup>

A proverb about an effeminate man addressing a woman presents us something of a puzzle.

When an effeminate man came into the drinking-house, after he had raised his hands, he said, 'The payment for the matchmaker (?), let it be like this: You [feminine] the half, I the half'.<sup>43</sup>

Raising one's hands can indicate an attitude of prayerfulness but here it has been suggested that it is a gesture of submission. The effeminate man could be a homosexual, a male prostitute or a eunuch. The woman to whom he speaks and who receives half the fee may be a prostitute or the goddess Ištar, and a fifty-fifty split may allude to bisexuality.

Some prostitutes would have had quite a reasonable position in society. In the Sumerian period we know that they were officially entitled to food rations from a state institution and that they received just as much barley as other recipients.<sup>44</sup> One was even given a field from which to support herself. In lists of professions we find after the lamentation priest the holy woman, the midwife and the prostitute in sequence.<sup>45</sup> In the Middle Assyrian period their names and pro-

---

**39** S. Tinney, 'Ur-Namma, the canal-digger', JCS 51 (1999) 31–54.

**40** JEN 397 with A. Fadhil, *Studien zur Topographie Arrapĥe* (1983) 250b; cf. 236 and D. O. Edzard, ZA 75 (1985) 141 f.

**41** P.-R. Berger, ZAW 99 (1987) 101.

**42** Gilgamesh VII 157 f.

**43** W. G. Lambert, BWL (1960) 218 iv 3–5; 339 f.; W. Röllig, *Das Bier im Alten Mesopotamien* (1970) 56; M. I. Gruber, UF 18 (1986) 146; C. Saporetto, *Abolire le nascite* (1993) 95 f. – W. Burkert, *Kleine Schriften*. II. *Orientalia* (2003) 125, is garbled and wrong.

**44** F. Pomponio, 'gēme-kar-kìd: The Sumerian word for 'prostitute'', *Oikumene* 5 (1986) 63–66; C. Wilcke, *Early Ancient Near Eastern law* (2003) 53 n. 143.

**45** F. Pomponio, G. Visicato, *Early Dynastic administrative tablets of Šuruppak* (1994) 62 no. 6 vii (WF 74), with p. 29, 244. The last person (sa.ĥur, *saĥurum*) appears in a lexical text after the prostitute and the landlady; MEE 4 (1982) 430 VE 1430.

fessions are recorded in the lists of institutions which distributed food rations to their workers. Some of the prostitutes were denoted as ‘palace workers’.<sup>46</sup> In the Neo-Assyrian period to be a prostitute was a recognised profession.<sup>47</sup>

From as early as the Old Sumerian period we have a text saying that a prostitute also performed as a singer.<sup>48</sup> A Middle Assyrian list for a brothel names twelve ‘singers (*zammārtu*) from the house of prostitutes’ who sang to the king and received 29 litres of barley apiece as a gift, and that was a generous wage.<sup>49</sup> A woman in the Neo-Babylonian period, who had a child while she held the position of a singer (*nārūtu*), has been regarded as a prostitute,<sup>50</sup> but the word could also mean that she was just a girl.

### 20.3 Slave-girls

It is assumed that slave-girls could be set to work as prostitutes, for we know that in the Old Sumerian period lists of payees include those known as ‘slave-prostitutes’.<sup>51</sup> We have a text about a man who adopts the son of such a ‘slave-prostitute’ from what will have been a local palace.<sup>52</sup> It should be remembered that at this time the word ‘slave-girl’ can indicate any dependent woman, not necessarily a slave. A wisdom text from that same period warns against buying a prostitute, for ‘she has a mouth with sharpened teeth’.<sup>53</sup> The alleged examples cited from the Neo-Babylonian period are obscure.<sup>54</sup> In Ugarit a slave-girl E. was freed from prostitution (*kid.kar*) by an official from the house of the queen. To free her he poured

---

46 S. Jakob, *Mittelassyrische Verwaltung* (2003) 559–561, followed by a discussion about her as described in the Middle Assyrian laws.

47 SAA XII 83 rev. 12. Deported in SAA V 24:11.

48 J. S. Cooper, *RIA XI/1–2* (2006) 16; Pomponio, *Oikumene* 5 (1986) 66.

49 MARV IV 59:15–20 with J. Lopp, *BiOr* 60 (2003) 405; in Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta. Wiggermann, *Phoenix* 56 (2010) 43 ff., discusses ‘travelling *carabetières*’, with illustrations.

50 BM 64026 with G. van Driel in: M. Stol, S. P. Vleeming, *The care of the elderly in the Ancient Near East* (1998) 192 (n. 59).

51 Pomponio, *Oikumene* 5 (1986) 63 f.

52 MVN 11 16 with W. H. Ph. Römer, *BiOr* 41 (1984) 412.

53 B. Alster, *Wisdom of ancient Sumer* (2005) 83 Instr. Šur. 154. In the oldest version she is a ‘slave-prostitute’; RA 70 (1976) 189.

54 M. Dandamaev, *Slavery in Babylonia* (1984) 132–136. The central passages in Nabn. 679, 682, Nebk. 409 (= BRL III [= IV!]:28!) are problematical; the other texts are too general. The explanations of A. Kurth in B. S. Lesko, *Women’s earliest records* (1989) 232 f., 235, should be corrected. Dandamaev’s story about temple prostitution (p. 132–136) does not fit; see AfO 46–47 (1999–2000) 180 n. 173.

oil on her head in the presence of witnesses, and then ceremonially declared that she was ‘as pure as the pure sun’. Anointing always signified a change of status. The same text tells us that she was married off to a man for twenty shekels of silver.<sup>55</sup>

Far removed from Babylonia and Assyria was a man in Carchemish who drew up his will in front of the king, naming his daughter D., a whore (*ḫarīmtu*), as ‘the father and mother of his house’. She duly received clothing, jewellery, and two slave girls. He adopted his two other daughters as ‘sons’, which might mean that they could be treated as sons when it came to dividing the inheritance. Both would be responsible for caring for his daughter D., ‘their father and mother’.<sup>56</sup> This woman must have had a high status in view of the riches bequeathed to her, so it is surprising to see her referred to as a whore. Perhaps here the word should be translated differently. It may be that far away from Babylonia the word *ḫarīmtu* retained its literal meaning, ‘a woman set apart’. In Biblical Hebrew a ‘devoted woman’ (*qedesā*) is also called a ‘whore’ (*zōnā*) in the story of Judah and Tamar (Genesis 38). This is a subject to which we shall return in Chapter 27 when discussing the Babylonian ‘holy’ woman, *qadištu*.

## 20.4 The risk of pregnancy

Becoming pregnant was the most probable risk factor in this line of business, but it may not always have been a misfortune. The Middle Assyrian laws about *abortus provocatus* include a severe punishment (an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth) for a man who beats a whore so that she has a miscarriage: ‘He will be beaten, stroke for stroke, and he will compensate her for the child she has lost’ (§ 52). It seems that a child was one of the few possessions this woman could expect to have, someone to look after her in her old age, and it is not unusual to find a son or a daughter of a whore mentioned in a document.<sup>57</sup>

A related text comes from the Old Babylonian period about a woman who ‘went out on the town’, an expression describing morally loose behaviour. The child she had conceived should have been conscripted by the state and forced to

<sup>55</sup> PRU III 110f. with S. Lackenbacher, LAPO 20 (2002) 332f., TUAT NF I (2004) 113, W. H. van Soldt in: S. Lafont, *Trois millénaires de formulaires juridiques* (2010) 117. – J. J. Finkelstein, ANET (1969) 546 no. 16, is no more up to date.

<sup>56</sup> *Emar* VI/3 no. 33 with Th. Kämmerer, UF 26 (1994) 187–190.

<sup>57</sup> Sumerian: M. Civil, RA 70 (1976) 190; Old and Middle Babylonian: VAS 9 192:21 (VAB 5 36); TIM 4 33:16, ‘the daughter of the prostitute’, with no proper name mentioned; I. M. Diakonoff, ZA 75 (1985) 54, on social decline; J. A. Brinkman, *Studies E. V. Leichty* (2006) 32.

do the labour imposed on the family of his father. But in this case, the woman's family claimed that his paternity could not be proved now that she had died.

We did not give Š., our sister, to a husband. She went out on the town and NN had intercourse with her as well as many others. But he did not make any contract concerning her, he did not enter into any binding agreement with her, and we received no bride price for her.<sup>58</sup>

The judge pronounced a verdict in their favour.

One married couple adopted 'a male infant' from a single woman, who may perhaps also have gone 'out on the town'.<sup>59</sup> A text from the Assyrian period relates how the brothers of a fallen woman raised such a child and presented the child to the temple.

As for D., the child of N., their sister, that she brought into the world by her whoring, they reared and presented to Ninurta, their lord, as a gift.

They added that the child would be 'available for service and obligatory duties in the temple of Ninurta'.<sup>60</sup> It is likely that many of the children of single mothers thus dedicated could have come from such a background. The formula for a dedication like this was given in Chapter 17, concerning women robbed of their freedom. One child, born to a prostitute, was transferred by his grandfather for adoption for ten shekels of silver. Another text shows that this woman was subordinated to her father and brothers.<sup>61</sup>

From the Neo-Babylonian period we have two deeds of settlement for rearing such a baby. In the first a grandparent is again involved. It concerned a three-month-old child entrusted to the care of the two highest authorities of the temple of Ebabbar at Sippar, and they in turn passed him over to his grandmother.<sup>62</sup>

With regard to Š<sub>2</sub>, the 'son of three [months]', whom Š<sub>1</sub>, the daughter of N. brought into the world as a whore, Š<sub>3</sub>, the administrator of the temple Ebabbar, and M., the highest priest [of Sippar], have bro[ught] [him] to Š<sub>4</sub>, the mother of his mother. He shall grow up before her face.

58 K. R. Veenhof, *Festschrift C. Wilcke* (2003) 315f., lines 28–34.

59 UET 5 93. I. M. Diakonoff sees her as a prostitute; JESHO 38 (1995) 92.

60 Child of a prostitute: Menzel, *Assyrische Tempel* I, 24 no. 2; 28; II, T 173 no. 68; SAA XII 92.

61 TIM 11 15:4. Cf. K. Radner, *Die neuassyrischen Privatrechtsurkunden* (1997) 140 (n. 707), 148 n. 746. A father refers to his daughter as a prostitute; STAT 3 (2007) 168 no. 111:8.

62 CT 55 154 with F. Joannès, *Ktema* 22 (1999) 125 f.

This intervention by the authorities is food for thought. The woman could not have been a slave since the name of her father is given, so we think that she was employed in the temple.

The second baby had already been given a name, Dannu-aḥḥe-ibni. He was also the son of a whore, but he was entrusted to the care of his uncle. This deed of adoption came from Uruk,<sup>63</sup> and it included this request from the brother of the child's mother.

Give me your seventeen-day-old son and I will rear him! Let him be my son!

That means he adopted the boy and then, since he had a son already, he 'registered' him as his second son. Both boys would serve Ištar 'the Lady of Uruk' and the king. While we do not know what that would have entailed, it is reminiscent of the first text, in which the authority over the child devolved to the temple of Sippar. Some further provisions were made for his future, dependent on whether or not his mother Baltâ remained a prostitute.

Dannu-aḥḥe-ibni shall grow up before his face, as long as Baltâ practises prostitution. On the day that Baltâ enters the house of a free citizen (= 'marries someone'), he shall give one third of a shekel of silver in exchange for the feeding and rearing of Dannu-aḥḥe-ibni; bread, beer, salt, watercress, oil, clothing for Baltâ.

The phrase 'grow up before the face' also occurred in the Sippar text, where a grandmother was to look after the child. Here the adoptive parent was the child's maternal uncle and he was expected to look after him. The other explanation could be that the child would grow up with his mother and that the adoptive parent would reimburse her for her expenses if she married. Only then would he have his son at home with him. M. T. Roth thinks that the brother was a pimp, and the free citizen was another pimp. Recently someone argued that the person to pay the compensation was the free citizen. He did not necessarily marry the woman but simply acquires the mother and her son. Then the stipulation about serving the goddess and the king would not make sense. What is clear from this is that it was possible for a prostitute to marry.

---

<sup>63</sup> AnOr 8 14 with M. San Nicolò, *ArOr* 7 (1935) 16–22, and *Babylonische Rechtsurkunden des 6. Jahrhunderts* (1960) no. 4; Dandamaev, *Slavery* (1984) 132; Joannès, *Ktéma* 22 (1999) 125. An alternative explanation is given by M. Roth, *RA* 82 (1988) 132–134; see also A. Kuhrt in: *Women's earliest records* (1989) 235 f. (n. 93). Lastly C. Wunsch, *AfO* 50 (2003–04) 195 f.



## 20.5 Forced into prostitution

When looking for the factors that drove women into prostitution we come to realise that some girls were forced into it. In a contract from Old Babylonian Nippur a lady adopted the girl Apirtum from her father and mother and paid one and a third shekels of silver ‘to bring her up’. The girl would work as a prostitute and provide bread for her new mother. That woman was clearly planning care for her old age. If the girl were ever to say, ‘You are not my mother’, the woman could sell her, and if the woman were to say, ‘You are not my daughter’, then she would have to pay ten shekels of silver, thus losing what she would have been paid for bringing her up. It could also mean that she was annulling her adoption and that she would have no right to any repayment for what she had spent.<sup>64</sup>

A comparable transaction comes from the Middle Babylonian period when gold was used as currency.<sup>65</sup> A lady, I., paid seven shekels of gold to adopt Eṭirtum, and then ‘she shall either give her to a husband, or make her a prostitute’. She could not make her a slave, but if she did, the girl could return to her family. Clauses follow concerning the girl’s obligation to care for the woman in her old age and for making funeral offerings after she had died.

As long as I. lives, Eṭirtum must honour (= ‘care for’) her. When I. dies, Eṭirtum, her daughter, must pour out water for her.

The following clauses list the sanctions if this agreement is broken.

In Nuzi there was a similar kind of adoption. A brother gave his sister to a woman, who was allowed to marry her off to a slave or to some other unidentifiable person. Alternatively she could force her to become a prostitute. It is also stated that ‘even if ten of her husbands die, she will marry the eleventh’.<sup>66</sup> We know of other girls who married after first being prostitutes. This unusual edict from Nuzi is particularly remarkable.

This is the old edict concerning the personnel, the palace slaves and the palace dependants. Thus: – No one, whether a servant or dependant of the palace, may without permission from the king force his daughter to serve as a beggar (?) or a prostitute. Whoever forces his daughter (to do this), they shall take him into the palace.

<sup>64</sup> BE 6/2 4; see E. C. Stone, D. I. Owen, *Adoption in Old Babylonian Nippur* (1991) 54 no. 20.

<sup>65</sup> BE 14 40 with W. G. Lambert in V. Haas, *Außenseiter*, 134 f.

<sup>66</sup> AASOR 16 23 with TUAT NF 1 (2004) 60 f. and G. Wilhelm, *Studies W. L. Moran* (1990) 519. Wilhelm discussed here everything known to him about prostitution at Nuzi.

It is generally agreed that no moral judgement lay behind this provision, but rather the crime is thought to be withdrawing one's labour from the palace.<sup>67</sup> Girls who were dedicated to the goddess Ištar (the subject of temple prostitution will come later) could also end up as prostitutes.

## 20.6 Marriage

That it was possible to marry a prostitute we know from two parts of formulas in a legal handbook for notaries:

He lifted her from her status as a prostitute from the street. He married her in her status as a prostitute. He returned her drinking-house to her. He let her enter his house.<sup>68</sup>

After that he took a holy woman from the street. He married her in her status as a holy woman out of love for her.<sup>69</sup>

Subsequently the latter happy couple adopted a foundling baby together, brought him up and let him learn the trade of a scribe. But pleasant outcomes like this would not have been frequent occurrences, and so this may be just a fanciful and romantic story, thought up at school as a witty text for practising writing.

After dealing with the marriage of a slave-girl who has children in § 26, the Laws of Lipit-Ištar move on to the subject of this chapter:

§ 27. If the wife of a man does not bear him sons, but a prostitute on the street does bear him sons, then he shall give this prostitute rations of barley, oil and wool. The son borne by the prostitute to him is his son and heir. The prostitute shall not live together in the house with the first wife while his wife is alive.

By contrast the slave girl in § 26 could have lived with her child in the house. Another clause in this law-book shows how people should be cautious about such relationships.

---

<sup>67</sup> AASOR 16 51 with Wilhelm, 519 f.; M. T. Roth, *Law collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor* (1995) 195 f. Cf. CAD E 73 s.v. *ekûtu*. Wilhelm explains *ekûtu* as 'Bettlerei(?)'; for an alternative view see B. Menzel, *Assyrische Tempel I* (1981) 30 f. (*êqûtu*: the woman may reside in the *bit êqi*).

<sup>68</sup> MSL 1 (1937) 96 f. Cf. S. Greengus, *HUCA* 46 (1975) 21, note.

<sup>69</sup> MSL 1, 99 f.

§ 30. If a man, who has a wife, is married by<sup>70</sup> a prostitute on the street and the judges have told him not to return to the prostitute, but afterwards he leaves his first-ranking wife, he shall pay her the divorce settlement. He may not marry that prostitute.

One assumes that in this case no children had been born, but that there may have been a complaint by the wife about the man's escapades and the community recognised that she was an injured party. Earlier we showed that gaining a divorce was easier for a man, but here moral limitations come into play.<sup>71</sup>

Two legal verdicts from a later period shed some light on this matter. One is an Old Babylonian lawsuit in which a Šat-Marduk, apparently a prostitute, swears under oath to have no more sexual relations with an ex-partner.

As regards Aḫuni, given that I am not retaining him, nor am I bound to him under oath, he shall not return (to me), and he shall not say [= suggest] to me 'the man and woman's thing', and he shall not kiss my lips, and I shall not allow him 'the man and woman's thing'. If he invites me to lie in his bosom, then I shall surely report it to the elders and the mayor. If people should see me near (him), then they shall surely treat me as if I had shown contempt for (this) oath by (the name of) the king.

Then the man swore an oath confirming his agreement.

I shall not go to her and I shall not say to her 'the man and woman's thing'.

Here the focus is only on the sexual act. It is not a case of divorce, but gives another example of how the community supervised its members.<sup>72</sup> A very different explanation for this litigation has been proposed by J. M. Sasson. He sees Šat-Marduk as an independent woman who does not wish to engage in a sexual relationship. L. Barberon has subsequently pointed out that in view of her name she could be a nun (*nadîtu*) of Marduk. We shall return to this holy woman in Chapter 27 and see there that nuns took great care to guard their chastity.<sup>73</sup>

The second verdict is a Middle Babylonian text and more difficult to understand. A man, who appears to have been seduced by a woman in an inn, contin-

**70** Following C. Wilcke, *Festschrift J. Krecher* (2014) 596 n. 410 (§f40).

**71** C. Wilcke, *WdO* 4 (1968) 161 f., 'Treuepflicht'. More: R. Westbrook, 'The enforcement of morals in Mesopotamian Law', *JAOS* 104 (1984) 753–756.

**72** M. Anbar, *RA* 69 (1975) 120–125 (BM 13912), according to the interpretation of Westbrook, 754; also translated in F. Joannès, *Rendre la justice en Mésopotamie* (2006) 95 f. no. 50; *TUAT NF* 1 (2004) 38.

**73** L. Barberon, *Les religieuses et le culte de Marduk dans le royaume de Babylone* (2012) 27 f., 110 f.

ued going around with her so much that it led to a divorce. His brother stepped in and brought the woman before the judge, and she promised that the man would no longer pass ‘the corners of her bed’. Evidently the brother was standing up for the honour of the family.<sup>74</sup> The prostitute may have actually imprisoned the man’s wife to force her to divorce him.<sup>75</sup> From the Neo-Babylonian period we know of a marriage contract where the bride was instructed to terminate any previous relationship she may have had with the words, ‘Block the foot of a man and be my wife’.<sup>76</sup> In the Gilgamesh Epic Enkidu addresses Šamḥat with words to show that a relationship with a prostitute could lead to divorce.

May a married woman, a mother of seven, be deserted [on your account!]<sup>77</sup>

## 20.7 Social esteem

To have an insight into how prostitutes were generally regarded in society we should remember that popular sayings quoted in wisdom literature frown on any contact with them.

Never marry a prostitute; her husbands are legion! Neither an *ištaritu*, called after a goddess (?), nor a *kulmašitu*, who is approached by many, will support you in your difficulties, but will make fun of you in your quarrels. With her there is no respect or modesty.

The word ‘legion’ is used to express an impossibly high number, for what is written is actually the sign for the numeral 3600, the highest number of the Babylonian sexagesimal system. A variant text includes a supplementary sentence.

The house that she entered will be scattered. Whoever marries her has no stable life.

The ‘scattering of the house’ was also something to be feared if you married a slave.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>74</sup> UET 7 8, according to Westbrook, 755f. See C. Wilcke, ‘Familiengründung’, 229 n. 18; K. E. Slanski in: Westbrook, *A history of Ancient Near Eastern law* 1 (2003) 503f., 516.

<sup>75</sup> Thus Slanski.

<sup>76</sup> M. T. Roth, *Babylonian marriage agreements* (1989) 39 no. 2, with Roth, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 29 (1987) 743f.

<sup>77</sup> Gilgamesh VII 161 with Lambert, 131.

<sup>78</sup> *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* 102:72–77 with Lambert in: *Außenseiter*, 132f.; W. von Soden, TUAT III/1 166. The variant: line 80, after W. von Soden with G. Steiner in his article ‘Die *femme fatale* im alten Orient’, in: Durand, *La Femme* (1987) 147–153, esp. 149.

Even so, prostitution was an accepted phenomenon, and the experiences of Enkidu with Šamḫat can be taken as archetypes. It was she, the whore *par excellence*, who taught him about sex. Once accomplished, he was transformed from his customary behaviour as a wild animal into a specimen of humanity. To acquire knowledge, both sexually and educationally, was something expected of everyone, and morality had no role to play in this story. Later, when Enkidu had to face death, he cursed the one who had humanised him.

She shall live in filth and haunt the slums, surrounded by drunkards.

The god Šamaš stepped in to show Enkidu that this was an unreasonable attitude. Although that curse could never be undone there was some counterbalancing blessing which would follow. It would be that high-ranking people shall love her and she shall richly receive their gifts, so in fact this would make her more like a courtesan.<sup>79</sup> In this way the advantages and disadvantages of the world's oldest profession were being traced back through mythology far into prehistoric times.

Today, on the one hand, it is supposed that an ancient Babylonian would have had nothing against prostitution and may even have thought that it had a cultural value. The idea is based on a Sumerian myth in which the oldest profession was included in a list of the cultural elements (*me*) belonging to the goddess of love, 'sexual intercourse, kissing, whoring.'<sup>80</sup> On the other hand, according to standard phraseology in literary texts, whores and transsexuals lived on the margins of society. The main purpose of sex was to raise children, and that was far from the intentions of these lasses.<sup>81</sup>

In general it is assumed that the Sumerian term *kar.kid* (Babylonian *ḫarimtu*) indicated a prostitute, but J. Assante, whose view is shared by many others, holds a totally different opinion.<sup>82</sup> She sees the terms as a title for a woman who stands outside the patriarchal milieu and goes her own way, alone and self-sufficient.

---

<sup>79</sup> Lambert in Haas, *Außenseiter*, 127–131. Curses: Gilg. VII 102–132. Blessings: VII 151–161. Cf. K. van de Toorn, *From her cradle to her grave* (1994) 105.

<sup>80</sup> G. Farber-Flügge, *Der Mythos Inanna und Enki* (1973) 57, 107f., nos. 37–39; J.-J. Glassner in: *Nippur at the Centennial* (1992) 63.

<sup>81</sup> J. Bottéro, 'L'amour libre et ses désavantages', in his *Mésopotamie* (1987) 224–240. Bottéro is too optimistic about prostitution ('amour libre') as a cherished cultural heritage (p. 233). He is also too positive about the appreciation of homosexuality; cf. Lambert in *Außenseiter*, 146f., on de Middle Assyrian laws A § 19–20, and M. Stol, *Studies R. D. Biggs* (2007) 236 n. 21.

<sup>82</sup> J. Assante, 'The *kar.kid* / *ḫarimtu*, prostitute or single woman? A reconsideration of the evidence', UF 30 (1998) 5–96. A similar approach is found in I. M. Diakonoff, 'Women in Old Babylonia not under patriarchal authority', JESHO 29 (1986) 225–238.

The word *ḥarīmūtu* indicates the status of an independent woman, her class within society, and not her profession. Any woman, whether virgin or whore, could attain this status. On many occasions she acquired it through her mother, meaning that her mother was also independent, a divorcee or a widow.<sup>83</sup> Her sexuality was thereby liberated, not channelled as it would have been with married women or priestesses. Literary texts emphasise this freedom, so that there the word whore is appropriate. But when ordinary people are called *ḥarīmtu* the word whore is not appropriate. An ordinary woman who ‘goes out’ is no whore, but she is simply leaving her family to be free. If she is ‘on the street’ it is not for any ulterior motive. All kinds of people went on the street, for it was a fun place to be and afforded an opportunity to enjoy the freedom of the day. The drinking-house was the place where people could relax with a beer under the surveillance of the landlady, a place where single women in particular liked to go.<sup>84</sup> But after the Old Babylonian period Assante agrees that things changed and there was a ‘radical shift in attitudes towards independent women’. She develops her theme using data only from literary texts, and the texts we have cited in this chapter are much more wide-ranging.<sup>85</sup> Assante gives a good survey of the material she has selected and her argument, as far as it goes, is forceful. But her opinion needs to be reconciled with what has been said above. It would be great if she were right.<sup>86</sup>

---

**83** How did you become a *ḥarīmtu*? See Assante, 15–21, 25, 28 f., 35, 82 f.

**84** Assante, 24, 48–50 (going out), 27, 47 f., 50, 52 (the street), 67–73 (the drinking-house).

**85** Assante, 53 ff.; 57, 63 (‘social intolerance’), 84.

**86** She was criticised by M. Silver, ‘Temple/sacred prostitution in Ancient Mesopotamia revisited’, *UF* 38 (2006) 631–663. He is mainly concerned with temple prostitution and shows how Greek temples earned money by this.

## 21 Temple prostitution

Whether or not temple prostitution actually existed in Mesopotamia has been a widely discussed issue in academic circles. Points of view differ so vastly that some find evidence for it everywhere, and others detect it nowhere.<sup>1</sup> It all begins with tales in Herodotus, Lucian and the church fathers, writing in Greek about women in Babylonia or Phoenicia, who on one occasion in their lives offered their services in a temple. There are other Greek stories about temple prostitution going on regularly in Cyprus and Sicily, for example, but these are of less concern to us. We have already outlined the narrative of Herodotus about the rite of the first night, at the end of Chapter 11, when discussing rape. Even if that account is true, it concerned only a rite of passage, an initiation into marriage.<sup>2</sup>

### 21.1 Internal evidence

A tablet from Nuzi records that a girl, on account of her father's debt, was to be dedicated to the goddess Ištar and used 'for whoredom'.<sup>3</sup> This confirms that cultic prostitutes really did exist. That this girl from Nuzi should be dedicated in this way was stated in the words of a curse made at the statue of King Kapara in Tell Halaf, the king of a small independent Aramaean kingdom.

Let him burn his seven sons before the god Adad.

Let him consign (*luramme*) his seven daughters to Ištar as whores (*ḫarimtu*).<sup>4</sup>

---

1 No temple prostitution existed according to D. Arnaud, J. Assante, M. I. Gruber, B. Menzel, M. van de Mieroop, J. G. Westenholz; in general see B. Menzel, *Assyrische Tempel* II (1981) 27\* f. (note 308); J. S. Cooper, *RIA* XI/1-2 (2006) 18-20, §9, 'Sacred prostitution'; J. G. Westenholz, 'Heilige Hochzeit und kultische Prostitution im Alten Mesopotamien. Sexuelle Vereinigung im sakralen Raum?', in: *Wort und Dienst. Jahrbuch der Kirchlichen Hochschule Bethel*, Neue Folge 23 (1995) 43-62; M. van de Mieroop, *Cuneiform texts and the writing of history* (1999) 151-153.

2 The literature is abundant; see G. Wilhelm, *Studies W. L. Moran* (1990) 511 n. 36, 524 n. 98. The story can also be found in Strabo, *Geography* XVI.1.20; see further U. Winter, *Frau und Göttin* (1983) 334 ff.; F. Cumont, *Oriental religions in Roman paganism* (1956; originally 1911) 118 f., 246-248; K. van der Toorn, *From her cradle to her grave* (1994) 107; J. L. Lightfoot, *Lucian On the Syrian Goddess* (2003) 325 ('the story in Lucian cannot be true'); J. S. Cooper, 'Sex and the temple', in: K. Kaniuth, *Tempel im alten Orient* (2013) 49-57 (objects in art).

3 G. Wilhelm, 'Marginalien zu Herodot Klio 199', *Studies W. L. Moran* (1990) 505-524, esp. 517, 523. Julia Assante presents another explanation: an 'independent woman' who had stood bail and now has to work for the goddess; *UF* 30 (1998) 60 f.

4 Wilhelm, 513 f.; B. Menzel, *Assyrische Tempel* I (1981) 27-29; K. Radner, *Die neuassyrischen Privatrechtsurkunden* (1997) 211 f.

It has been pointed out that Tell Halaf lies in a region dominated by Aramaean culture, and that this inscription, dating from between 1000 and 850 BC, is older than the texts to be discussed later. It has also been suggested that these were barbaric foreign customs, perhaps Aramaean or perhaps Anatolian.<sup>5</sup> The terminology however is Assyrian, and standard punishments in Neo-Assyrian contracts, listed among many others in long Assyrian formulas, include burning the oldest son and the oldest daughter and dedicating (*uššuru*) people to the temple. One such can be quoted here, which threatens anyone intending to break the agreement with dire consequences, including an obligation to give male *kezrus* and female *kezertus*.<sup>6</sup>

He must place one mina of silver and one mina of gold in the lap of the god Ninurta who resides in Calah. He must tie four white horses securely to the feet of the god Assur. He must bring in four ...-coloured horses to the feet of Nergal. He must eat one mina of plucked wool. He must drink a jar full of sludge from the tannery. He must burn his eldest son before the face of Sîn. He must burn his eldest daughter before the face of Belet-[šeri]. They must scatter thirty litres of mustard seed from the gate of Calah to the gate of the centre of Assur and he must pick that up with the tip of his tongue completely, the whole thirty litres. He must dedicate (*uššar*) seven male oblates (?) and seven female oblates (?) for Adad who dwells in Kurba-il. He must give seven *kezrus* and seven *kezertus* to Ištar who dwells in Arba-il. He must restore the purchase price tenfold to the owner. He is not allowed to win the lawsuit that he would begin.

There has been much discussion of these vicious punishments, including the idea that burning sons should not be taken literally. A more elaborate phrase says that the action is carried out together with various aromas, so it could refer to the dedication of persons to the temple, a most fitting occasion for incense – not a person – to be burned.<sup>7</sup> Another suggestion has been that these formulas were taken over from a different culture, and that in Assyria itself they amounted to no more than empty threats. It must be said that the long list of punishments sounds exaggerated and one must wonder whether they were all actually imposed.

<sup>5</sup> Menzel I, 28 f., II 24\* (263), 27\* (301).

<sup>6</sup> CTN 2 no. 17:25 f., 30–32, cf. 15:25 f.; Menzel II, T 211 no. 257; Radner, *Privatrechtsurkunden* (1997) 189–194 (punishments), 211–219 (dedications).

<sup>7</sup> M. Weinfeld, 'The worship of Molech and the Queen of Heaven and its background', *UF* 4 (1972) 133–154, esp. 144 ff.; see earlier K. Deller, *Or. NS* 34 (1965) 385. He discusses the parallel in 2 Kings 17:31: The Sepharvites burnt their children as offerings to Adrammelech (= Adad-milki) and Anammelech (= Anat-milki), the gods of Sepharvaim.



For us it is the women who are of interest.<sup>8</sup> King Kapara spoke of ‘whores’, and these later Assyrian passages of the dedication of what are possibly male and female ‘oblates’ (BAR), and the ‘giving’ of male *kezrus* and female *kezertus* to the temple. The latter would fit with the cult of Ištar, where both men and women were present and men and women could interchange roles. In her temple there were men who dressed as women. What exactly the word BAR (*uššuru*), ‘oblate’, signifies we do not know, for it occurs only in Kurba-il in the service of the pair of deities Adad and Šala. The word *kezertu* can be derived from the verb *kezēru*, to have a particular hairstyle. It is not easy to prove that they were in fact prostitutes, but the gloss in a Babylonian word list suggests this: ‘*kezertu*: a female travelling companion, prostitute, woman of the street’.<sup>9</sup> The only way to explain the phrase ‘to hand over to Ištar as whores’ in the curse of Kapara is by sacral prostitution. One could suggest that this is the only place where this use applies, but the parallelism of phrases concerning ‘whore’ and *kezertu* is so strong that we are obliged to consider sacral prostitution in Assyria and its Aramaean neighbours.<sup>10</sup> The god Adad and the goddess Ištar had these women in their service.<sup>11</sup> We know of ‘sons of *kezertus*’, reminiscent of sons of whores, fatherless lads who were dedicated to the service of a deity.<sup>12</sup>

It is appropriate here to mention a few passages where the ordinary prostitute and the priestesses of the goddess of love are spoken of together in the same breath. This is seen most clearly in literary texts. In the Sumerian text ‘The Curse of Akkad’ they are cursed.

May the whore hang herself in the door of her drinking-house, may your mother the *nu.gig*, and your mother the *nu.bar* kill their child(ren).<sup>13</sup>

In Akkadian the priestesses *nu.gig* and *nu.bar* were called *qadištu* ‘holy woman’ and *kulmašitu*. Various other Sumerian texts mention these two but omit the deprecatory term ‘whore’. There are no indications that the *nu.gig* and the *nu.bar* were low-class prostitutes. On the contrary *nu.gig* was a respectable lady, as we shall see in Chapter 27 about the *qadištu*. My conclusion is that in the ‘The Curse of Akkad’ she is listed with the whore because all three women had Ištar as their guardian deity, not because they were occupied with the same work.

<sup>8</sup> Menzel, *Assyrische Tempel I*, 27–33; Wilhelm, 513 f.; Radner, 217–219.

<sup>9</sup> *Emar VI.4* (1987) 190 no. 602:345–350.

<sup>10</sup> This is also the opinion of K. Radner, hidden in footnote 1193 on p. 218.

<sup>11</sup> D. Schwemer, *Wettergottgestalten* (2001) 598–600. He, too, is in favour of temple prostitution.

<sup>12</sup> J. N. Postgate, *Neo-Assyrian royal grants and decrees* (1969) 102, to 3’; SAA XII 68 rev. 28.

<sup>13</sup> Ed. J. S. Cooper (1983) p. 240 f., lines 244 f.

More telling is the line in the Akkadian Gilgamesh epic (VI 158), where we read,

Ištar assembled the courtesans (*kezertu*), prostitutes (*šamḫatu*) and harlots (*ḫarimtu*).

In the Erra Epic, where it is concerned with the destruction of the city of Uruk, we find something similar said about the depraved cult servants of Ištar.

As to Uruk, the dwelling place of Anu and Ištar,  
a city of *kezertus*, of strumpets and whores,  
whom Ištar deprived of husbands and has left them to themselves,  
the Sutiāns, men and women, yelled.  
They rouse up Eanna, the cult actors and singers,  
whose manhood Ištar turned into womanliness  
in order to strike people with religious awe,  
those who carry a dagger and a razor, a scalpel and a flint knife,  
who transgress taboos to delight Ištar's heart (Erra Epic IV 52–58).

This grants us a glimpse into the dark orgies of Ištar's domain, and perhaps refers to castration. Since we are not concerned with men in this book we shall not discuss this further. We have already seen that a wisdom text warns against three women, the whore, the woman of Ištar (the *ištaritu*) and the *kulmašitu* (Chapter 20).

One of the laws of Hammurabi (§ 181) refers to the dedication of a daughter to a god to become 'a *nadītu*, a *qadištu*, or a *kulmašitu*'. These must have been recognised possibilities for the daughters of respectable citizens, to ensure that the girls maintained their right of inheritance. They would not have been poverty-stricken children, destined to earn their crust in a dishonourable way. The hierarchy for such priestesses, with *ereš.dingir* as the highest, then *nadītu*, *qadištu*, and *kulmašitu*, is echoed by the sequence in which they are listed in Hammurabi § 181.<sup>14</sup>

## 21.2 The *kezertu*

The laws make no mention at all of the *kezertu*. The word implies that this woman had a distinctive hairstyle, since the verb *kezēru* means to dress one's hair in a particular style. She does not occur explicitly in earlier Sumerian texts, but she

---

<sup>14</sup> M. Stol, *Festschrift J. Oelsner* (2000) 465 (Lipit-Ištar § 22; Wilcke, *Festschrift J. Krecher*, 591 § e30); D. O. Edzard, *ZA* 55 (1962) 105.

does implicitly. The hymn about the sacred marriage of King Iddin-Dagan and Inanna has a summary of the cult personnel of the goddess, including ‘the girl, the *šugîtu*, with her hair tied in a bow (?)’.<sup>15</sup> That phrase describing the hairstyle is given as an equivalent for *kezêru* in old word lists of the time. So we conclude that as early as this (ca. 1900 BC) women with this distinctive hairstyle were walking around the temple of the goddess of love.

It has been suggested that depictions of a *kezertu* can be seen on Old Babylonian terracotta reliefs, artefacts and statuettes of women, sometimes naked, with a particular hairstyle.<sup>16</sup> The hair is parted centrally, and to the left and to the right it tumbles in waves down to the shoulders in one great tress. There are bands in the hair. In the same period these *kezertu* women occur in the temple administration lists of the goddess Nanaya in Uruk and Kish.<sup>17</sup> The *kezertus* were active in Uruk in later texts. It seems that the wives of important citizens in Old Babylonian Kish had the responsibility for ‘rites’ to be carried out by these women, for which an amount of silver had to be paid. This group of texts can be compared with a similar group from Sippar, where rites were performed in the temple of the goddess Annunitum, including ‘the role of the whore’ (*ḫarīmūtu*). Most of those texts are yet to be published.<sup>18</sup> In Sippar men played this role, and women that of the *rēdūtu*, ‘the role of the suitor (lover)’ (or: the soldier?).<sup>19</sup> We have a list of eleven prostitutes (*ḫarīmtu*) supervised by the First Lamentation Singer,<sup>20</sup> which gives me the impression that these women in Sippar and the *kezertus* in Kish were

15 W. H. Ph. Römer, SKIZ (1965) 130:70 (ki.sikil šu-gi4-a sag.ki gú.lá.e); cf. Römer, TUAT II/5 (1989) 664: ‘die jungen Mädchen, die šu-gi4-a, mit Zopf versehen (?)’; Th. Jacobsen, *The harps that once*, 117: ‘maidens and crones, curling their hair (as harlots)’.

16 F. Blocher, *Untersuchungen zum Motiv der nackten Frau in der altbabylonischen Zeit* (1987) 231; cf. the description, 35 f. C. Michel thinks a woman on a cylinder seal from Mari could have been a *kezertu*; in: S. Lafont, *Jurer et maudire* (1996) 120.

17 M. L. Gallery, Or. NS 49 (1980) 333–338; J. Spaey, Akkadica 67 (1990) 1–9; Blocher, 225–230; Lambert in *Außenseiter*, 132, 137; N. Yoffee, JESHO 41 (1998) 312–343; Yoffee, *Myths of the archaic state* (2005) 123–127; J.-J. Glassner, CRRAI 47/I (2002) 159–161.

18 The terminology used is *ḫarīmūtu*, and *ninda ḫarīmti*, ‘prebend of the harlot’. M. Tanret, K. van Lerberghe, ‘Rituals and profits in the Ur-Utu archive’, in: J. Quaegebeur, *Ritual and sacrifice in the Ancient Near East* (1993) 435–449. For other texts see CT 48 45:2–3, with M. L. Gallery, Or NS 49 (1980) 334; K. van Lerberghe, MHET I 65:10, 14, 24; 66:19; the letter 78:9, 15; cf. AfO Beiheft 19 (1982) 280–283; see also M. Silver, UF 38 (2006) 655 f.

19 According to the letter *rēdūtu* means ‘following’, but *rēdū* means ‘soldier’. See J. S. Cooper, RIA XI/1–2 (2006) 18b. Sumerian SAL.UŠ is connected with prostitution, but is this prostitution among men? See J. Bauer, *Altorientalische Notizen* no. 30 (1985).

20 CT 4 15c with R. Harris, *Ancient Sippar* (1975) 332 (the references in her note 120 are wrong); M. Tanret, K. van Lerberghe, 441 f. There a male *ḫarīmu* is mentioned. In a Neo-Assyrian list of workers a prostitute is followed by the son of a palace maid and a farmer, SAA XII 83 rev. 12.

the ones involved in sacred prostitution. The women who organized this were respectable ladies who participated in these temple services, providing them with a source of income, a kind of benefice.<sup>21</sup>

In the palace of Mari we find these *kezertu* women in the harem, and as such not playing a role in the cult. It is striking that there they are explicitly mentioned in ration lists for oil, ‘so much oil for the *kezertu* women’, but they are not named individually though the other harem women are. On two occasions they are mentioned in connection with childbirth, and we know that some of them performed as singers.<sup>22</sup> From another source we know that these singers curled their hair in a particular way.<sup>23</sup> These could have been women in the service of Ištar who were staying temporarily in the harem, or they could have been pensioned off there because of their advanced age. That their names are not mentioned points to their low status in society. This sort of woman was not mentioned when the laws of Hammurabi deal with nuns and priestesses. The king was evidently not interested in them, for they were regarded as having a low position in society. This is illustrated by a sale contract for ‘a slave-girl, Anaṭṭal-iniša, a *kazertu*’, who was sold for the relatively small sum of eleven shekels of silver.<sup>24</sup> In Mari a princess requested ‘a girl, a *kezertu*, and good-looking (*nawru*)’, captured from a recently conquered palace.<sup>25</sup>

According to B. Menzel, who prefers not to believe in sacral prostitution, the Assyrian *kezertu* indicated a particular class of person, not a profession, and specifically a class of men and women occupied in the service of Ištar. As such they would be involved in a variety of tasks, including singing, playing instruments, dancing and performing tricks.<sup>26</sup> But even those who deny the existence of temple prostitution admit that a *kezertu* could have worked as a prostitute in some way

---

**21** Lists of women in Kish indicate that the ladies had a supervisory role (YOS 13 111–112). A typical list begins with the note ‘One woman’ followed by a female name, meaning that the woman supervised one named temple prostitute; once two prostitutes (2 SAL *kezertu*) are named (112:13).

**22** N. Ziegler, *Le Harem de Zimrî-Lîm* (1999) 87 f.; *Florilegium Marianum IX* (2007) 50; Durand, *MARI 4* (1985) 389, 390; idem, in: E. Levy, *Le système palatial*, 85.

**23** M. T. Roth, *JAOS* 103 (1983) 276:24, with B. Alster, *ZA* 82 (1992) 201 (‘His daughter U. curled her hair, she sang sweet songs, playing the role of a dancer’); also D. Shehata, *WZKM* 97 (2007) 521–529. Note the existence of a female singer with curled hair, nar-igi-suḫur-lá, *MSL* 12 (1969) 56:646.

**24** CT 48 28.

**25** ARM 10 140:16, 28 with LAPO 18 (2000) 372 no. 1184; cf. *MARI 4* (1985) 389 (n. 38).

**26** B. Menzel, *Assyrische Tempel I* (1981) 28 f., 33. She links these people with the ‘house of *ēqu*’ who, however, in Nuzi are associated with harlotry; perhaps they were beggars; see G. Wilhelm, *Studies W. L. Moran* (1990) 520 n. 78.

or other.<sup>27</sup> They admit, for example, that in the passages cited above from the Gilgamesh Epic and the Erra Epic she was associated with strumpets. It could be that this woman developed into a real temple prostitute in the first millennium BC.

As for her hairstyle, the idea that such a woman had ribbons in her hair comes from Herodotus, something which is also mentioned in the apocryphal Letter of Jeremiah, which is regarded as an independent source.<sup>28</sup>

The women sit in the street with cords (*schoinia*) round them, burning bran for incense; and when one of them has been drawn aside by a passer-by and she has lain with him, she taunts her neighbour, who has not been thought as attractive as herself and whose cord has not been broken. Everything to do with these idols is a sham. How then can anyone suppose them to be gods or call them so? (Baruch 6:43–44).

W. Baumgartner and others take this observation seriously to show that at the very least the reference is to temple prostitution.<sup>29</sup> Indeed we now see that the hairstyle detailed in these later texts must have been linked to a woman such as a *kezertu*.

According to the Sumerologist M. Çığ, the significance of wearing a headscarf in modern Turkey is comparable to that of the headdress of a Sumerian prostitute, presumably referring to a *kezertu*. A press report reported her as claiming that ‘Islamic-style head scarves date back more than 5000 years, several millennia before the birth of Islam, and were worn by priestesses who initiated young men into sex’. She was convicted of slander, but in 2006 she was acquitted. Did the whistle-blower responsible for bringing matter to court really know the academic evidence behind the claim M. Çığ was making?<sup>30</sup>

A woman of the temple called an *ištarītu* who is not often mentioned arouses suspicion about what she was doing when it is said ‘an *ištarītu*, who is named after a god(dess) (?), a *kulmašītu*, who is approached by many people’. We have no idea what function the *ištarītu* was expected to fulfil, but since the name means ‘a woman of Ištar’, it has more than once been suggested that this was a girl who had grown up in the temple of this goddess.<sup>31</sup> We shall not go into this further.

---

<sup>27</sup> Cf. now C. Wilcke, ZA 75 (1985) 196 f.

<sup>28</sup> There is a remark about priests in the brothel in verses 9–11.

<sup>29</sup> W. Baumgartner, *Zum Alten Testament und seiner Umwelt* (1959) 296–298, 326 (originally in ArOr 18, 1950).

<sup>30</sup> See also J. Schmidt, BiOr 67 (2010) 17.

<sup>31</sup> J. Bottéro, *Mésopotamie* (1987) 229.

### 21.3 Devaluing old titles

It can be seen that over time less and less interest came to be shown in distinguishing the roles of women in the cult. Later Babylonian dictionaries and word lists lump terms together, so that the ‘holy woman’ (*qadištu*) is equated with the strumpet (*šamuhtu*) and also with the nun (*nadītu*), and the *kezertu* is called a whore.<sup>32</sup> In fact in the Old Babylonian period the nun (*nadītu*) was a fine chaste woman, but in later texts she appears to adopt more questionable behaviour. It may well be relevant that the Old Babylonian word for her ‘convent’ (*gagû*) recurs much later in Syriac as *gaguya’a* to mean ‘prostitute’<sup>33</sup> In a later fictitious bawdy letter a *nadītu* and a *kulmašitu* address a man with the invitation ‘I have opened for you my vulva, strike my clitoris’.<sup>34</sup> An omen speaks of there being in the city countless women known as *kulmašitu*, *qadištu*, *nadû* or *nadītu*,<sup>35</sup> by which whores must have been indicated. The meaning of old terms had been devalued, with their original meanings forgotten. It even results in the word *nadû*, an artificially coined masculine form of *nadītu*, for a man with such a function, a word that had never existed before. A later text describes women ‘of insight’ as

*entus* (?) who guard (?) the truth (at home) with their husbands; *nadītus* who keep the womb alive with wisdom; *qadištus* who bring purification with water.

Had all these women really become midwives?<sup>36</sup>

### 21.4 Income

Was the motivation for temple prostitution just letting love be purchased to boost the temple coffers, or to conduct a ritual performance, a piece of theatre? After all, Ištar had men in her service who played various sexual roles.<sup>37</sup> A comparison has been made with the *dēvadasi*, women in India from the twelfth century onwards who were adept in musical entertainments, lasses who were always available as

<sup>32</sup> Lambert in *Aufsenseiter*, 138 f. (Malku I 129–135, Explicit Malku I 82–87; ed. I. Hrůša [2010] 39, 153 f., 204, 282); cf. Gruber, UF 18 (1986) 148.

<sup>33</sup> G. R. Driver, *The Babylonian Laws* II (1956) 200; S. Kaufman, *The Akkadian influences on Aramaic* (1974) 51.

<sup>34</sup> A. K. Grayson, JAOS 103 (1983) 145 f.

<sup>35</sup> V. Haas, *Aufsenseiter*, 42 f., lines 115–118; S. Freedman, *If a city is set on a height* I (1998) 36, Tablet I 136–139.

<sup>36</sup> Lambert, 143 f.

<sup>37</sup> Cooper, RIA XI/1–2 (2006) 19 f., § 10, ‘Male prostitution’.

temple servants, but at the same time known to be available for sexual sport. Their earnings went to the temple.<sup>38</sup> Did the earnings of our girls also end up in the temples in Babylonia? D. Arnaud thinks not, but suggests that the temple supported lower personnel 'of questionable morality, in close relationship with groups who were on the point of being delinquent. They were all frequently engaged in prostitution without it resulting in any income whatsoever for the sanctuary'.<sup>39</sup> At the beginning of this chapter we surmised that the *kezertus* of the goddess Nanaya were paid for their services. A proverb about copulating with a man says,

Let me lie with you. Let the deity enjoy his share.<sup>40</sup>

This could refer to a payment destined for the god. There are two passages in the Old Testament which show that in certain circumstances 'a whore's wages' (*ètnan*) could benefit the temple treasury (Deuteronomy 23:18–19; Micah 1:7). K. van der Toorn suggests that we should see here incidents of temple prostitution, perhaps for women who had made a vow to the temple but could not keep their word, and were made to honour their vow in this unusual way. A few other sentences in the Bible (such as Proverbs 7:14 and Deuteronomy 23: 17–18) refer to the 'strange woman' who needed money in order to pay off her vow. Van der Toorn thinks that the far-fetched tale of Herodotus, that every woman would become a prostitute once in their lives, can possibly be explained as a misunderstanding of discharging a vow. In other words, it refers to occasional prostitution.<sup>41</sup>

## 21.5 Goddess and whore

We have already seen that the goddess Ištar portrayed herself as a whore.

Whenever I stay in the doorway of the drinking-house, I am the whore that the man knows.<sup>42</sup>

---

**38** Cooper, 19a.

**39** *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 183 (1973) 114 f. J. G. Westenholz, 262, agrees.

**40** *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* 227 ii 27 f., with p. 231 (bilingual). 'His share (?)': Sum. *zi.ga*; Akkad. *ša nisiḫti* (a temple tax).

**41** K. van der Toorn, *From her cradle to her grave* (1994) 97–102, 109; idem, 'Female prostitution in payment of vows in Ancient Israel', *JBL* 108 (1989) 193–205.

**42** Some scholars take the word *mu.lu* here to mean 'rod' or 'penis' in the Sumerian womens' language Emesal and not 'man': 'I am the whore that the rod knows'; cf. CAD Š/2 69 f.; see now K. Volk, *FAOS* 18 (1989) 196 Tafel 21:25 f., with comm., 219 f.; M. E. Cohen, *JAOS* 96 (1986) 606; *CLAM* II (1988) 581 c + 443–4, 597.

But in the same context of hymnody she has completely different functions, such as the goddess of war. We see a similar ambivalence in many other texts. One Sumerian passage lists a number of sanctuaries of Inanna which are all called drinking-houses, with good reason.<sup>43</sup> In the myth recounting the descent of Inanna to the netherworld her eye-salve is named ‘Let him come! Let him come!’. The toggle-pin on her chest is named ‘Come, O man! Come!’. Pins like this have been found with heads decorated with two figures closely embracing.<sup>44</sup> Earlier (in Chapter 20) we mentioned a landlord who referred to the goddess in an incantation to ensure the welfare of his inn, and these lines from a Sumerian hymn also associate her with the drinking-house.

Inanna, harlot, you set out to the drinking-house (...)  
 My lady, you dress yourself in just one garment like a nameless person,  
 You put around your neck the egg-shaped beads of a harlot,  
 You seize a man from the drinking-house ...  
 Inanna, your seven paranympths are bedding with you.<sup>45</sup>

A hymn of praise to Iṣtar has the following lines:

Gather together for me the men of your city,  
 And let us go to the shade of the city wall.  
 Seven on her neck, seven on her hips,  
 Sixty plus sixty are satisfied by her vessel.  
 The men become exhausted, but not Iṣtar:  
 ‘Men! Set upon my fine vulva!’

The refrain for the hymn is most fitting: ‘Pleasures are the foundations of the city’. There are many other verses in this hymn with suggestive content.<sup>46</sup> When necessary the insatiable Iṣtar would find satisfaction from the animal kingdom. On some occasions in Sumerian texts ‘she is lying with the horse’. When she asked Gilgamesh to marry her he reminded her of that.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>43</sup> W. H. Ph. Römer, *Or. NS* 38 (1969) 110.

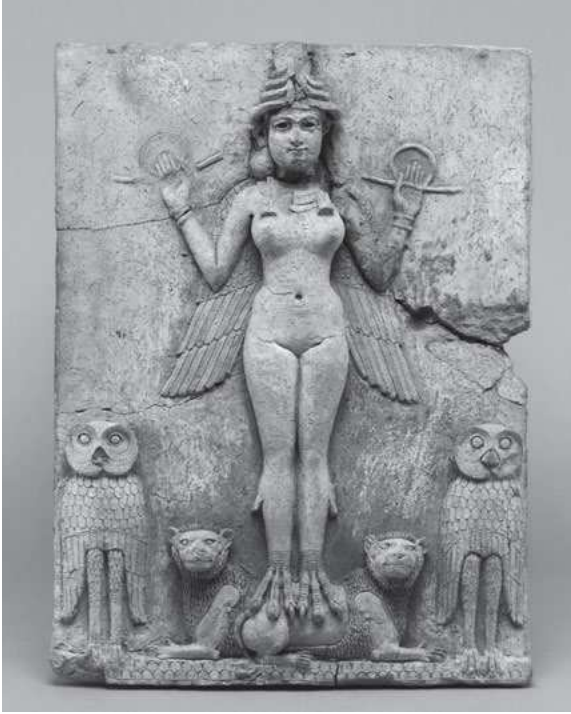
<sup>44</sup> *JCS* 5 (1951) 6:109 f.; *TUAT* III/3 (1993) 469; F. A. M. Wiggermann, *Phoenix* 56 (2010) 53 (with illustrations).

<sup>45</sup> H. Behrens, *Die Ninegalla-Hymne* (1998) 35:105, 111–115. Cf. ‘The harlot who goes out to the tavern, who makes the bed a delight’, H. Vanstiphout, *Epics of Sumerian kings* (2004) 114:174 (‘Lugalbanda in the Wilderness’).

<sup>46</sup> W. von Soden, *Or. NS* 60 (1991) 339–342. Now B. R. Foster, ‘Iṣtar will not tire’, *Before the Muses* II (1993) 590; V. A. Hurowitz, ‘An Old Babylonian bawdy ballad’, *Studies J. C. Greenfield* (1995) 543–558.

<sup>47</sup> Also in H. Behrens, *Die Ninegalla-Hymne* (1998) 30:60, preceded by her love for the dog; in the Gilgamesh Epic it is the lion (VI 51 f.). Cf. J. S. Cooper, *RIA* XI/1–2 (2006) 17 f.; more examples in M. Civil, *JAOS* 120 (2000) 675b, to line 61.





**Fig. 34:** ‘The Queen of the Night’ (formerly known as the Burney Relief). It has been generally assumed that the woman represents the goddess Ištar or the demon Lilith, but now it is thought that she could also be the goddess of the underworld. Some think the object is a forgery. Traces of colour are visible. Baked clay. Height 50 cm. *British Museum, London.*

You loved the horse, famed in battle.  
 To him you have allotted whip, spurs and lash.  
 To him you have allotted a seven league gallop.  
 To him you have allotted muddy water to drink.  
 To his mother Silili you have allotted perpetual weeping (Gilg. VI 53–57).

What is known as the Burney Relief in the British Museum is often said to represent Ištar as a whore (Figure 34).<sup>48</sup> In the centre is a naked woman with horns on her head, identifying her as a goddess, standing on two lions, a typical stance for Ištar. Under her horned crown we see a fringe of hair, and hair was a sign of a woman’s sex appeal. A stone model of a woman’s ‘wig’ is inscribed ‘female sex

<sup>48</sup> H. Frankfort, *The art and architecture of the Ancient Orient* (1954) plate 56 (‘Lilith’); D. Collon, *The Queen of the Night* (2005). We follow the explanation by Th. Jacobsen in M. Mindlin, *Figurative Language* (1987) 1–11. On similar images of an unclothed goddess, see J. E. Curtis, ‘Ladies of easy virtue’, in: *Études Agnès Spycket* (1996) 89–95. Stark examples from Old Babylonian Larsa are in the catalogue *Babylone* (Paris 2008) 89 f.; more discernable in A. Caubet, P. Pouyssegur, *The Ancient Near East* (1997) 186 f.; also W. Orthmann, *Der Alte Orient* (1975) plate XIV with p. 303.

appeal'.<sup>49</sup> On the relief she holds up both hands showing that she is carrying 'the staff and the ring'. These were interpreted as instruments for measuring the land and therefore signs of peace (Th. Jacobsen).<sup>50</sup> Around her neck she wears a necklace, possibly made from particular egg-shaped jewels. A Sumerian text says these are the gems that hang round the neck of a whore.<sup>51</sup> She is winged on left and right and has bird's claws for her feet. Owls sit low on the ground to her left and her right. The owl may have been a figure for the goddess herself, with the name Kilili. A similar winged goddess with outspread arms often appears in art and one assumes that this was the way in which they portrayed Ištar as a 'winged storm demon', at least in the Old Babylonian period.<sup>52</sup>

There are ongoing discussions about the Burney Relief. Some think it is not genuine. Others think that the female figure is the goddess of the underworld, as indicated by the drooping wings and the nocturnal owls.<sup>53</sup> Then there are others who say that Venus is portrayed there as the evening star, and that she is enjoying watching the amorous adventures of the night.<sup>54</sup> Because she looks like a demon the woman in this relief was identified with Lilith, the dangerous demon of Jewish magic folklore. More speculatively it has been said that Ištar here represents the soul of mankind. From below it is unclean and belongs to the goddess of the underworld, but from above it is pure and has risen again, an interpretation deriving from how Gnostic texts and Jewish mysticism imagined the path of the soul.<sup>55</sup>

The image of a female head staring out from a window with a vague smile has a similarly speculative explanation (Figure 35). Well over a hundred examples were found in the lands of the Ancient Near East. The image occurs on ivory plaques for furniture in Phoenician art, something popular among Assyrian imports.<sup>56</sup> In Antiquity people became mesmerised by this mysterious woman, and Ovid and Plutarch recount the myth about her. A young man fell in love with a girl. But she was unwilling. So he took his own life. Even when she saw the

<sup>49</sup> Šulgi inscr. 29:11 (hi.li nam.mi.ka). See Figure 9 in Chapter 1.

<sup>50</sup> They do not belong to the emblems of the orgiastic cult of Ištar, including the spindle and fly-shaped beads; S. Parpola, *LAS Commentary* (1983) 315 f., on no. 308 (= SAA X 92).

<sup>51</sup> Jacobsen, 5 f.; BE 31 12:17.

<sup>52</sup> B. Groneberg, *Lob der Ištar* (1997) 126–128, with plates XXXVIII–XL. In Chapter 20 on prostitution we saw that a prostitute wore a necklace strung with evocative shells and phallusses.

<sup>53</sup> D. Collon, *The Queen of the Night* (2005). Cf. Collon, 'The Queen under attack. A rejoinder', *Iraq* 69 (2007) 43–51; contra: P. Albenda, *NABU* 2008/47.

<sup>54</sup> B. André-Salvini, catalogue *Babylone* (Paris 2008) 88 f.

<sup>55</sup> P. Lapinkivi, *Ištar's descent and resurrection* (2010) 38–41.

<sup>56</sup> U. Winter, *Frau und Göttin* (1983) 296–301, with Abb. 307–314; W. Fauth, *Aphrodite Parakypitousa. Untersuchungen zum Erscheinungsbild der vorderasiatischen Dea Prospiciens* (1966).



**Fig. 35:** A woman looks out of a window. A decorative element on furniture from the palace of Ashurnasirpal II (883–859 BC) in Calah. Ivory. *British Museum, London.*

funeral procession passing her window she was unmoved. The goddess of love disapproved of her attitude and turned her into stone on the spot. That is the woman in the window.<sup>57</sup> According to the Bible Queen Jezebel from Phoenicia was a hated figure in Israel, and the story of how she was thrown out of a window on the command of Jehu is recorded with much gusto.

Then Jehu came to Jezreel. When Jezebel heard what had happened she painted her eyes and adorned her hair, and she stood looking down from a window. As Jehu entered the gate she said, 'Is it peace, you Zimri, you murderer of your master?' He looked up at the window and said, 'Who is on my side? Who?' Two or three eunuchs looked out to him, and he said, 'Throw her down.' They threw her down and some of her blood splashed on to the wall and the horses, which trampled her underfoot (2 Kings 9: 30–33).

<sup>57</sup> Ovid: *Metamorphoses* XIV 698–764 (Anaxarete). Plutarch: *Moralia: Erôtikos / Amatorius*, 20, end (766D), in M. Cuvigny, *Plutarque. Oeuvres Morales* X (1980) 94.

Scholars mostly take that woman to be the goddess of love. She was revered in the city of Salamis on Cyprus as ‘The Aphrodite who leans over face forwards (*parakypitousa*)’. Daniel Wyttenbach in the eighteenth century showed that such posturing in a window was regarded as an unseemly habit. In fact the Babylonian Ištar was sometimes referred to in Sumerian as ‘The one who hangs out of a window’ to indicate someone with loose morals. Her Akkadian name Kilili means that she is the goddess of the night,<sup>58</sup> but it is unlikely that the respectable woman on the ivory plaques, smiling innocently in the window, was the same. The decorated legs of the throne of Ashurbanipal, on which he sat with his consort, show two women in a window beside each other, a scene which must have been significant in its context. Those images of women in the window, whoever they were, must have been auspicious. E. Rehm concluded that they offered some protection (*apotropaion*) and the window was part of the palace.<sup>59</sup>

There are very many other objects which are associated with this goddess. One example is a scene of copulation cast in lead, known in German as ‘Die pornographischen Bleiplaketten’, which is often used as an illustration in books.<sup>60</sup> It was an object which would have come from the temple of Ištar, where the deed could have been performed on an altar. This idea has been rejected.<sup>61</sup> However, it has been noted that stone seats such as the one on which the woman is lying can also be found in temples, an observation which is hardly significant.

We have hundreds of terracotta plaques or figurines from the Old Babylonian period exemplifying an artistic motif which scholars refer to as ‘Die nackte Frau’, a naked woman raising her hands under her breasts.<sup>62</sup> We even have a pottery baking mould for bread from Mari with this motif. What does this woman represent? People like to see in her a symbol of eroticism or fertility, and as such she is supposed to represent the goddess of love. That is possibly not true. Attention has been drawn to the fact that this woman does not give the impression of being provocative, she simply stares at you. It has been suggested that she represents a

---

58 H. Behrens, *Die Ninegalla-Hymne* (1998) 127; R. Da Riva, E. Frahm, *AfO* 46–47 (1999–2000) 178. Cf. W. G. Lambert, *Studies F.R. Kraus* (1982) 194 ii 18–20, ‘Kilili, who peers into bedchambers, leaned malevolently out of the window (and) heard him’. For a prostitute named Ama-ab-é-ta, ‘Mother from the window of the house’, see M. Silver, *UF* 38 (2006) 647 n. 12.

59 E. Rehm, ‘Abschied von der Heiligen Hure. Zum Bildmotiv der “Frau am Fenster” in der phönizisch-nordsyrischen Elfenbeinschnitzkunst’, *UF* 35 (2003) 487–519.

60 Catalogue *Das Vorderasiatische Museum Berlin* (1992) 151 f., no. 93.

61 Winter, 350; J. Scurlock, *NABU* 1993/20; J. G. Westenholz in: *Wort und Dienst* (see note 1), 60 f.: found in a palace, outside Assur. The many objects of art so often adduced are not helpful according to J. S. Cooper in: K. Kaniuth, *Tempel im alten Orient* (2013) 52–54.

62 Catalogue *Land des Baal. Syrien – Forum der Völker und Kulturen* (1982) 108 f. no. 93 (right side).

guardian deity (*lamassu*). F. A. M. Wiggermann sees dignity (*bāstu*) in her, which may well be a possibility,<sup>63</sup> but others think rather of ‘good fortune’. Most commentators are agreed that she is a goddess. It has further been suggested that the clay or metal models of vulvas which are commonly found have *pars pro toto* the same significance.<sup>64</sup> Most ‘naked women’ figures have been found in private quarters, so often that they may reflect popular notions of piety.<sup>65</sup> All of them radiate positive vibes as a sort of amulet.<sup>66</sup> The figure appears on cylinder seals for a short period of seventy years. We can only guess about what function they had there, but note that many of such seals which are inscribed belonged to women.<sup>67</sup>

There are also items that depict the female pudendum, mostly in the form of a downward pointed triangle. A number were found in temples with clay phalluses. They are pierced, which may indicate that they were worn threaded on a string.<sup>68</sup> In Chapter 4 about the family we discussed the inscription from Assur in which a woman dedicated a pudendum for the well-being of her family. That would have been an appropriate offering for Ištar, and only a woman could make such an offering. It is said that particular shells made of blue lapis lazuli symbolised the goddess’s vulva in the myths surrounding her.<sup>69</sup> The necklace of the whore consisted of shells and clay phalluses.

Copious praises for the ‘vessel’ of Inanna occur in songs of debauchery confirming the idea of salacious associations. In Gwendolyn Leick, *Sex and Eroticism in Mesopotamian Literature* (1994), Chapter 9 is wholly devoted to ‘Inanna rejoicing in her vulva’. Much more can be found in this adult book, but for the sake of brevity and to spare our blushes here we will not repeat what she says.<sup>70</sup>

It is certainly possible that the goddess had different names in her diverse hypostases. The name Nanaya crops up frequently in love songs and incanta-

**63** F. A. M. Wiggermann, JEOL 29 (1985–86) 28 f.; J. Asher-Greve in: S. Schroer, *Images and gender. Contributions to the hermeneutics of reading ancient art* (2006) 150–153, 160 f.

**64** Wiggermann, ‘Nackte Göttin. A’, RIA IX/1–2 (1998) 46 f., 49 § 5, ‘Votives’.

**65** C. Uehlinger, RIA IX/1–2 (1998) 57 f.

**66** K. van der Toorn, BiOr 43 (1986) 495–499, in his review of the book by U. Winter.

**67** D. Collon, *Catalogue of the Western Asiatic seals in the British Museum. Cylinder seals III* (1986) 131 f., ‘The Nude Goddess’. An Old Babylonian cylinder seal from Qatna has an introduction scene picturing a naked woman on a socle; she may have had a mediating role between god and man; M. al-Maqdisi, *Schätze des alten Syrien: die Entdeckung des Königreichs Qatna* (2009) 183.

**68** J. S. Cooper, BiOr 36 (1979) 329, on W. Farber, BID (1977) 157 f.

**69** S. Maul in: V. Haas, *Außenseiter*, 161, 165 (on the Akkadian version of ‘The Descent of Ištar’, 112). Cf. A. L. Oppenheim, Or. NS 32 (1963) 407–410.

**70** See also V. Haas, *Babylonischer Liebesgarten. Erotik und Sexualität im Alten Orient* (1999), especially the chapter ‘Die Liebesgöttin Inana-Ištar’.

tions for potency.<sup>71</sup> She clearly represents fleshly desire. The problematic *kezertu* women served her. We know of a woman called Nanaya-šamḫat, ‘Nanaya is provocative’,<sup>72</sup> and as we have seen earlier *šamḫatu* is also a word for ‘strumpet’.

Išḫara as the hypostasis of Ištar is completely different from Nanaya. She is the goddess who helps in a marriage. Her symbol is the scorpion and we often see a scorpion depicted in bed-scenes,<sup>73</sup> so she seems to have favoured marital relationships. With this can be contrasted the scenes in a drinking-house, where a man copulates from behind with a woman drinking beer. A line from an incantation picks up this contrast between Nanaya and Išḫara.

What Ištar did for Tammuz, what Nanaya did for her lover (*ḫā'iru*), what Išḫara did for her husband (*mutu*; variant *almanu*).<sup>74</sup>

Although we spoke of a hypostasis we now note cautiously that Nanaya and Išḫara were always differentiated from Ištar.

The separate names of these goddesses with the distinct qualities associated with them relates to the ambivalent qualities associated with Ištar. Ištar/Inanna is a goddess of opposites, simultaneously aggressive and tender, representing both war and sex. The aggressive element was excluded when presenting her as Nanaya or Išḫara. She was also the planet Venus, who was feminine as the evening star and masculine as the morning star.<sup>75</sup> These contrasting qualities continue to be the subject of discussion among historians of religions.<sup>76</sup> Ignorance forbids us to intervene in that discussion.

---

71 TUAT II/5 (1989) 741f., A 49; B 6, 9; 744 i 24, 746 iv 6; 749:27; Wilcke, ZA 75 (1985) 200–204:45, 84, 94, 98; Sjöberg, JCS 29 (1977) 16–27; in potency incantations.

72 In D. Arnaud, BBVOT 1 no. 23, with C. Wilcke, *Festschrift W. Röllig* (1997) 414, and AbB 14 184:5.

73 E. Douglas van Buren, Or. NS 13 (1944) 5f. (‘She was the bride who presided over the consummation of marriage ...’); Winter, *Frau und Göttin*, 355.

74 R. D. Biggs, TCS 2 (1967) 44 no. 25, with comments.

75 I. Wegner, *Gestalt und Kult der Ištar-Šawuška in Kleinasien* (1981) 41, 46.

76 H. L. J. Vanstiphout, ‘Inanna/Ishtar as a figure of controversy’, in: H. Kippenberg, *Struggles of the Gods* (1984) 225–238; J. Bottéro, ‘La femme, l’amour et la guerre en Mésopotamie ancienne’, in: *Poikilia. Études offerts à Jean-Pierre Vernant* (1987) 165–183; R. Harris, ‘Inanna-Ishtar as paradox and coincidence of opposites’, *History of Religions* 30 (1991) 261–278; U. Winter, *Frau und Göttin* (1983) 217–238 (notably on the ‘virgin’ goddess Anat).

## 21.6 A wild celebration

In Babylon at the beginning of the fourth month a remarkable feast was celebrated. When parts of the description of that ritual and a few of the songs were published the editor described them as love songs. Ištar was often mentioned and the tone was debauched. We now know the background.<sup>77</sup> Marduk, the god of Babylon, had a respectable goddess as a wife, but to her annoyance he had an affair with Ištar. That motif echoes Hera and Zeus with his endless girlfriends. While the wife sat downstairs inside the house, up on the roof Marduk was occupying himself with his girlfriend. The songs are slanging-matches, full of reproachful statements expressed in coarse language. Her rival tells Ištar that ‘You are made of silver’, implying that people had to pay for her services. She continues,

Into your vessel, which you so much rely on, into it I shall let a dog go, and tie the door shut.  
Into it I shall let a raven go, and he shall make a nest there.

And in similar vein,

O vessel of two fingers, why do you still sow discord?

Commentators suspect that these words were sung at a rather licentious street festival, some kind of ribald carnival, and it continued to be celebrated until the Arsacid period. The well-known description of Herodotus with which we began this chapter, of Babylonian women turning to prostitution once in their lives, possibly also had elements seen in this festival. For Herodotus the chief personality was the goddess Mylitta, a name to be identified with Mulissu by which Ištar must be meant. The fact that women have a ‘garland of ribbons round their heads’ is reminiscent of the hairstyle of the *kezertu*. Perhaps this feast was an occasion for the men of Babylon to go outside with hussies.<sup>78</sup> This exuberance displayed at the beginning of the month can be contrasted with the sombre mourning for Tammuz, the beloved of Ištar, at the end, but for this we must wait until Chapter 29.

---

<sup>77</sup> Discovered by D. O. Edzard; see now G. Leick, *Sex and eroticism in Mesopotamian literature* (1994) 239–246. The inventory of the songs published by J. A. Black fits this festival well; ‘Babylonian ballads: a new genre’, *JAOS* 103 (1983) 25–34.

<sup>78</sup> R. Da Riva, *E. Frahm, AfO* 46–47 (1999–2000) 178–181.

## 22 Her physical life

In the first chapter we saw how a young girl grew up, played, and reached an age when she had to accompany her mother to work. Now it is time to see what happened to her in adulthood, the beginning of her periods, her child-bearing years, and her old age. Physical risks were always threatening, especially diseases and death. How to deal with illness was a big problem in the ancient world, both for men and women. We shall concentrate on gynaecological matters, beginning with girls about to be married and ending with women's funeral arrangements.

### 22.1 Physiology

The Babylonian handbook of 'physiological omens' was a compilation of physiological observations and their significance for a person's life, for it was thought that distinctive features of the human body predicted a particular outcome.<sup>1</sup> It describes the whole body, from top to toe, and we are spared no abnormalities of colour or texture. All the details listed could be found on people in good health, and none are seen as symptomatic of an illness. One of the two chapters devoted to women<sup>2</sup> begins with 'If the head of the woman is large', and the other with 'If the ... of her head turns to the right'.<sup>3</sup> Another text speaks of 'a grain' appearing all over her body, which might be a way of indicating freckles.<sup>4</sup> These omens primarily predict one's prospects of becoming rich or poor, especially for men. For women the predictions relate to their future husbands, their behaviour within a new family, and domestic happiness. Much attention is given to a woman's fertility and her potential for child bearing on the basis of features of her navel. One omen says,

If her navel lies deep, she is fertile.

---

**1** It has been said that a pale face and dark lips are female physical features of rage and fear; D. Schwemer, *WdO* 41 (2011) 185:5f. with p. 187. But in fact these are proverbial expressions for fear in men and women; A. R. George, *The Gilgamesh Epic I* (1983) 240.

**2** B. Böck, *Die babylonisch-assyrische Morphoskopie* (2000) 148–173. Summaries: p. 27f., 38a ('Idealbild'). The fragment CT 20 22, 82–3-23,115 is lacking. For a new translation of Böck, 152, 156–170 (lines 4–7, 90–261), see TUAT NF 4 (2008) 41–47.

**3** Known only from the catalogue in I. L. Finkel, *Studies A. Sachs* (1988) 152, A 82–84.

**4** Böck, 230–233.



The literal meaning of the word translated ‘fertile’ is ‘someone who bears’.<sup>5</sup> Characteristics of personality could also be determined on the basis of a woman’s physiology<sup>6</sup> Often these were related to her behaviour within the family, that she would be honest, active, bright and cheerful, or unreliable, disruptive, depressive, unfaithful; she might even be a witch. When choosing a girl to marry it was advisable to know facts like these, and those we mentioned in Chapter 2 about marriage, under the heading, ‘Preparations’, can be supplemented here.

If the lines on her hand are interwoven, whoever marries her shall ...

If the lines on her hand are open, this woman [will be] bright and cheerful.

If the lines on her hand are many, she will impoverish anyone who marries her.

If the lines on her hand on the right are open and on the left sunken (?), whoever marries her shall have grievous cares.<sup>7</sup>

If there is a grain on the right of her neck, she will become depressed.

If there is a grain on the left of her neck, a guardian deity shall [bestow] wealth and well-being on her.<sup>8</sup>

It seems to have been good for a woman’s distinctive feature to be ‘on the left’. Normally, ‘left’ is associated with ‘not good’ and with ‘woman’, but here it seems that by combining two ostensibly negative ideas, ‘left’ and ‘woman’, they reached a positive outcome. In another handbook the physical abnormalities of women from a city presage national disaster.

If in a city the women have beards, then calamity shall seize the land.<sup>9</sup>

Old, ugly women were not liked if we are to believe the remark of an overseer in the harem at Mari about nomad women who had been captured.

The Benjaminite woman, your gift, is old. What (use is she)?

The Amorite women that S. brought here are all cold and old. There is not a single (suitable) woman among them.<sup>10</sup>

---

5 Böck, 164:193.

6 U. Koch-Westenholz, CRRAI 47/II (2002) 308b.

7 Böck, 156:106, 108, 109, 113.

8 Böck, 232:30 f.

9 S. Freedman, *If a city is set on a height* I (1998) 36 Tablet I 153.

10 N. Ziegler, *Florilegium Marianum* IX (2007) 215 no. 51:28 f.; 218 no. 52 rev. 8–11; cf. IV (1999) 118, 216 (Amorite singers).

## 22.2 Menstruation

Before discussing women who really are ill, something needs to be said about the relevance attached to a woman's monthly periods.<sup>11</sup> According to the myth of Enki and Ninḫursag, in the ideal mythical dawn of time there was no illness or old age, and menstruation was apparently unknown. The idea is expressed indirectly in the sentence 'The girl (*ki.siki*) did not wash' (line 26). It could possibly also be referred to in Babylonian medical texts when a woman is said to be 'stricken by a (or 'the') weapon'.<sup>12</sup> Once in the handbook of 'physiognomy' we find, 'This woman shall die the death by the weapon'.<sup>13</sup> Men who were ill and began to bleed are also sometimes said to have been struck by the weapon. An incantation from the Sumerian period tells us that the demon Samana ('The Red One') apparently prevented a girl from 'loosening her months', while he prevented a young man from doing something else (the text is broken).<sup>14</sup> The words used in Biblical Hebrew for a sanitary towel are *dāwā* and *bēgèd 'iddim*.<sup>15</sup> Among the Akkadian words are *sagû* and *ulāpu*, sometimes identified as 'cloth for one day'.<sup>16</sup> The Sumerian expression, 'grimy clothing', stands figuratively for anything eliciting feelings of disgust.<sup>17</sup> A more explicit term for sanitary towel was *kannu*. It is found in a ritual for a pregnant woman, who is instructed to 'wear the amulet a hundred days after her towel has passed from her (?)'.<sup>18</sup>

**11** K. van der Toorn, *From her cradle to her grave* (1994) 51–55.

**12** See CAD K 53a; for other instances, see R. D. Biggs in: L. Vattini and P. Villard, *Médecine et médecins au Proche-Orient ancien* (2006) 42f., 'Menstruation'. A liver omen has 'A woman shall die (?) by the weapon', TIM 9 80 rev. 29 ('shall die': *i-UD-ma-at*). Note that BAM 1 99:19, 27, 42 distinguishes bleeding in a woman who is 'struck by the weapon' from a woman who is affected by *naḫšātu*. – 'Her illness' may refer to menstruation; see below, 23.3.1.

**13** Böck, 155:46.

**14** J. Nougayrol, ArOr 17/3–4 (1949) 213:12f. (du<sub>8</sub> ITU.ITU); for the man: ZAG.ŠÚ.ŠÚ; now I. L. Finkel, *Festschrift R. Borger* (1998) 73f.

**15** *Dāwā* (Isaiah 30:22, REB: 'foul discharge'; NRSV: 'filthy rags'), *bēgèd 'iddim* (Isaiah 64:5, REB: 'filthy rag' (verse 6); NRSV: 'filthy cloth'), but these modern translations delicately mask the real meaning.

**16** M. Malul, BiOr 43 (1986) 28 n. 53, 31; K. van der Toorn, *From her cradle to her grave* (1994) 53. Cloth for one day: W. Farber, ZA 91 (2001) 258 n. 10; idem, *Lamaštu* (2014) 76, I 48.

**17** Å. W. Sjöberg, JCS 25 (1973) 140, on 163; K. Volk, *Inanna und Šukalletuda* (1995) 185f. (a bandage). 'Sanitary towel' is too modern; see A. Garcia, 'Sanitary towels in Ur III administrative texts?', *Aula Orientalis* 31 (2013) 235–248. She does not discuss the Sumerian word *nig.darā* in literary contexts.

**18** F. Thureau-Dangin, RA 18 (1921) 165 rev. 12, as explained in CAD E 388a (*ša qa-mi-šú ittiqšu*). For *kannu*, see CAD K 157a, (d), 'bandage used by women'; also in LKA 9 rev. 13.

A menstruating woman could be referred to as someone who was *musukkatu*, ‘unclean’, an adjective echoing the noun *asakku*, ‘taboo’,<sup>19</sup> and menstrual blood was regarded as dangerous.<sup>20</sup> To avoid any danger when preparing magical prescriptions using the body hair of a woman, she must either ‘never have known a man’ or have passed the menopause<sup>21</sup>. The word *musukkatu* also refers to a woman after childbirth.<sup>22</sup> The ‘milk of an unclean woman’, meaning a mother’s milk shortly after she had given birth,<sup>23</sup> was sometimes used as a medicine. The urine of an ‘unclean woman who had borne a son’ was also used.<sup>24</sup> From a letter we learn that a woman had to keep away from her husband for five to six days after giving birth, probably the time when she was regarded as ‘unclean’.<sup>25</sup> Menstruating women in the archives of Mari had to leave the palace and live elsewhere for five or six days, because ‘the gods were strong in the palace’. This phrase could recall that the palace had originally been a temple.<sup>26</sup> After that time she would be clean again.

Today the slave-girl of the king (a concubine) has become clean and has entered the palace.<sup>27</sup>

A regulation in an Assyrian harem also stipulates temporary exclusion.

When the offerings arrive, the court-lady ‘who may not be approached’ may not come in before the face of the king.<sup>28</sup>

At the end of a ritual intended ‘to obtain the favour of a god or goddess for a man’, a man was prohibited from touching an unclean woman.<sup>29</sup>

---

19 K. van der Toorn, ‘La pureté rituelle au Proche-Orient ancien’, *Revue de l’histoire des religions* 206 (1989) 339–356, notably 348–351.

20 J. Milgrom, *JANES* 22 (1993) 107.

21 AMT 46, 5, cited CAD A/2 243a; STT 1 57:18 (a virgin, male or female); BAM 6 575, cited CAD Š/2 126a (pubic hair of an old woman).

22 H. Behrens, *Enlil und Ninlil* (1978) 150–157, 170 (the city gate).

23 N. Wasserman, RA 90 (1996) 3:5 (together with the milk of a female donkey).

24 BAM 5 476:11.

25 AEM 1/1 (1988) 111 no. 13:17, with 105 (n. 59).

26 J.-M. Durand in: G. del Olmo Lete, *Mythologie et religion des Sémites occidentaux* I (2008) 561–563.

27 Ziegler, *Le Harem* (1999) 232 no. 59:4 f., with p. 18 n. 103.

28 M. T. Roth, *Law collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor* (1995) 200 § 7; E. F. Weidner, AfO 17 (1954–56) 276 *Satzung* 7:47.

29 R. Labat, *Semitica* 3 (1950) 11 ii 13.

According to an omen text, if ‘prostitutes’ crossed the path of a man, ‘his wish shall be fulfilled’. The text then continues by saying that if there is a prostitute who is ‘unclean’ (*musukkatu*), his wish shall not be fulfilled, but if he touches her breast, ‘he is free’. The reasoning here may be that the man would have become unclean through contact with the menstrual blood, and that breast-milk would remove any stain of guilt.<sup>30</sup> A man who only touched an unclean woman in passing would become unclean himself for six days.<sup>31</sup> A priest who had to carry out a ritual should not defile himself with dirty water on the street, and he would also become unclean ‘if he met a woman whose hands were not good’, or ‘if he saw a young girl with unwashed hands’.<sup>32</sup> Similarly pious, law-abiding Jews or Muslims are careful not to take the hand of a woman. Women were not allowed to work on temple constructions lest they menstruate and pollute the building.<sup>33</sup> Records from the Ur III period calculating how many days women actually worked include ‘days of sitting’, allowing for an absence of six days per month. Men had only three days a month free.<sup>34</sup> Egyptian documents also appear to take this into account, though there is some difficulty in associating the Egyptian word *ḥsmn* with the same general meaning as Akkadian *naḥšātu*, ‘bleeding’.<sup>35</sup>

A myth describes how the young girl Ninlil, when asking a wise old woman for advice, is told,

The river is purifying, every woman bathes in it.

The girl had evidently begun to have periods showing she had become nubile. In Nippur the name of the ‘pure (= purifying) river’ was Isalla.<sup>36</sup> We have a map of the city of Nippur, drawn on a clay tablet, where one of the gates is labelled ‘Gate of the Unclean Women’. It opened on to the Euphrates and it could have been the place where ritual washing took place.<sup>37</sup> An Old Babylonian text, referring to ‘the regular service’ of this gate, mentions ‘the copper vessel’. That may have been

**30** AfO 18 (1957–58) 76b, Text B 25f., with J. Bottéro, *RIA* VII/3–4 (1988) 208.

**31** KAR 300 rev. 6 = KAL 1 114 no. 39 rev. 6; restore: *ul* [KÜ] (= *elil*).

**32** K. van der Toorn, *From her cradle to her grave* (1994) 51f.; now C. Walker, M. Dick, *The induction of the cult image in Ancient Mesopotamia* (2001) 211, 224:8f.

**33** This is Th. Jacobsen’s interpretation of Gudea, Statue B iv 5; see *Studies W.L. Moran* (1990) 235 n. 7.

**34** B. Lafont, *NABU* 1987/45; H. Waetzoldt, *AOF* 15 (1988) 36f.

**35** Y. Koenig, *Journal asiatique* 273 (1985) 7f.; J. Toivari-Viitala, *Women at Deir El-Medina* (2001) 162–168. P. J. Frandsen has no doubts, see ‘The menstrual taboo in ancient Egypt’, *JNES* 66 (2007) 81–105.

**36** H. Behrens, *Enlil und Ninlil* (1978) 65, on lines 4, 15.

**37** M. Stol in: *Annäherungen* 4 (= *OBO* 160/4) (2004) 672.

a basin for washing onself.<sup>38</sup> Later texts record that in Nippur ‘unclean women went out’ on the second day of the second month.<sup>39</sup>

It can be noted in passing that Biblical law regarded a mother as unclean after giving birth,<sup>40</sup> but she was unclean longer after producing a daughter than a boy (Leviticus 12: 1–5). The Hittites, for unexplained reasons, purified a baby boy at the beginning of his third month, and a girl at the beginning of her fourth.<sup>41</sup> Where that idea arose may lead to suspicions.

I have discussed elsewhere the difficulties a woman may have in bearing children.<sup>42</sup> A mother in the intertestamental period is driven to remind her son of how much she had done for him.

Son, take pity on me, who carried you nine months in the womb, nursed you for three years, reared you and brought you up to your present age (2 Maccabees 7: 27).

Another woman, who produced three children in nine years, may have avoided other pregnancies through two or three years of breastfeeding.<sup>43</sup>

## 22.3 Diseases

Women’s illnesses are sometimes described in some detail.<sup>44</sup> A slave-girl became ill after she had been hired.

For six days her insides were in order and for two days she was sick as a dog.<sup>45</sup>

Letters from Nippur describe singers suffering from coughs and discuss what to do about them.<sup>46</sup> In recent scholarship these women are regarded simply as

---

**38** ARN 103 iv 32, bala.gub.ba ká.gal ú.zú.e.ne urudu.šen. See also PBS 8/1 99 iii 16 f. Compare A. Cavigneaux, *Uruk* (1996) 32 no. 59.

**39** A. R. George, *Babylonian topographical texts* (1992) 154:19, with p. 448, and OECT 11 69+70 i 23 § 7, with George, *ZA* 80 (1990) 158, and F. Reynolds, *BiOr* 53 (1996) 91, on 313.

**40** M. Stol, *Birth in Babylonia and the Bible* (2000) 205 f.

**41** TUAT NF 5 (2009) 186.

**42** M. Stol, *Birth in Babylonia and the Bible* (2000).

**43** M. T. Roth, *Studies Å. W. Sjöberg* (1989) 481 ff., line 21 (= OIP 122 no. 38).

**44** R. Labat, ‘Frauenkrankheiten’, *RIA* III (1957) 109.

**45** AbB 13 66:8 f.

**46** M. Worthington in: A. Attia, *Advances in Mesopotamian medicine from Hammurabi to Hippocrates* (2009) 58 f. For the latest translations see E. Ritter, *Studies B. Landsberger* (1965) 317 f. (a selection); S. Parpola, *LAS, Commentary* (1983) 492–496 (all). The name of the physician is not Mukallim, but Šumu-libši.

girls, but that is not right, a subject already broached in connection with music in Chapter 18. Perhaps they suffered from vomiting, abscesses (lit. ‘fire’) on the chest, and fever (lit. ‘heat’). A provisional translation for some of these passages can now be given. In one the physician Šumu-libši describes treating a girl with a fever.

In the evening fever gripped the daughter of Muštalu and in the morning I made her drink a remedy. Her fever is evenly distributed, but both her feet are cold. Earlier she was coughing, but now [no longer].<sup>47</sup>

Another letter records how a physician changed his remedies as a girl’s symptoms developed. He was concerned lest her illness change to ‘the Hand of the Curse’, one that was no longer acute but chronic, one regarded as caused by supernatural power.

The daughter of Muštalu is coughing without vomiting. After I had given her a mixture ... to drink, she coughed up phlegm and ... Now she always gets colic. After I had [given] her a mixture for colic [to drink], she drinks it regularly. What is missing is the ... -plant and grape-juice. Let my lord bring [her] to me so that I can regularly give her mixtures. It must not change to the Hand of the Curse.<sup>48</sup>

A similar ‘hand’ afflicted a woman in the harem at Mari, which meant a prominent diviner had to announce to the king the results of an extispicy.

According to the command of my lord, I have carried out an extispicy concerning Šattamkiyazi. The extispicy which I carried out (revealed) the Hand of Ištar of Radana, with regard to Ekallatum. The goddess is bringing pressure to bear on her. As long as she is going to Ekallatum her illness will not pass.<sup>49</sup>

Here the extispicy identified the ‘Hand’ which was causing the sickness and gave a prognosis of how to make it pass. The woman herself wrote a letter to the king about her illness.

I have offered a sheep to Ištar of Radana and the liver omens were bad. Today I went off to Saggartum and have been sick from the day that I set out. Once, twice, I made the (offertory) prayer. It is the Hand of Ištar of Radana. My lord knows that the Hand of Ištar of Radana rests heavily upon me. Today, if it is the wish of my lord, let him have this illness examined by extispicy.

<sup>47</sup> BE 17 32:7–14 with Ritter, 318 b (not: PBS I 2, no. 32), Parpola, 493.

<sup>48</sup> PBS 1/2 72:18–26 with Ritter, 317 f., Parpola, 495 f.

<sup>49</sup> AEM 1/1 (1988) 222 no. 83.

There is another matter. If it is the wish of my lord, allow me to go and bring a sacrifice to Ištar of Radana and let me see her face, (...) kiss her feet.<sup>50</sup>

The Hand of Ištar occurs in another letter to the king from around the same time.

But Š., your slave-girl, has become ill and I have carried out the extispicy and I have removed the Hand of Ištar. Now she has become peaceful. All is well with her. And with the boys, your sons, all is well too.<sup>51</sup>

It seems that women were especially susceptible to the Hand of Ištar, and in Chapter 29, about women and divine worship, we shall see that they had a special bond with this goddess.

Kibri-Dagan wrote two letters to his master, the king of Mari, reporting that a princess, a high priestess of the god Dagan, had recovered from an illness. In one he said,

Kunši-matum has become sick but she has recovered. I had an extispicy done about her state of health. The predictions were good. My lord must not trouble himself in any way.<sup>52</sup>

In the other he said,

Kunši-matum has been ill for four days and I myself (thought), ‘It could be the (harmless) illness *ḥašū* which has overtaken her for one or two days. So until today I have not written to my lord. Now [my lord should know this].<sup>53</sup>

Such references identify particular women who fell ill. From Mari we also know that an epidemic broke out there in the harem, and more will be said about this in Chapter 23 under the heading, ‘Predicaments’. If one’s wife became chronically sick that could constitute a legitimate reason for a divorce, as we saw at the end of Chapter 5 about the second wife.

When the mother of Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, was sick, it was established by extispicy that it was the hand of the god Iqbi-damiq that was responsible. This god is otherwise unknown but his name means ‘He spoke and it was good’, which explains why the outcome was favourable.<sup>54</sup> A scholar at the court, who had carried out ten rituals from handbooks, including one against ‘being

<sup>50</sup> ARM 10 87 with J.-M. Durand, LAPO 18 (2000) 491.

<sup>51</sup> J. Eidem, *The Shemshara Archives*. 1, *The letters* (2001) 104 no. 34:14–20.

<sup>52</sup> ARM 3 63 with LAPO 16 (1997) 309 no. 176.

<sup>53</sup> ARM 3 64 with *ibidem*, no. 175.

<sup>54</sup> SAA IV 190 with M. Worthington in: Attia, Buisson, *Advances in Mesopotamian Medicine*, 66 f.

cursed', reported that, after the queen had undergone ten healing rituals, all was now well.<sup>55</sup> Several letters from this period show that women were treated by the court doctor.<sup>56</sup>

Medical texts ostensibly deal with men, but tacitly also with women.<sup>57</sup> The only circumstances when a difference was made between men and women concerned the therapy for treating loss of hair. This was probably because women were expected to have a profuse growth of hair.<sup>58</sup> On rare occasions different treatments are prescribed for a man and a woman.<sup>59</sup> When the demon called The Weakener had caused an illness, a man would have to be anointed nine times and a woman seven times.<sup>60</sup> On the odd occasion we are told that similar symptoms in men and women arose from different causes. A man who 'places his hands on the head and cannot get them down again' was afflicted by the Hand of Lugal-irra and Meslamtaea. But for a woman suffering the same it was the Hand of the Lord of the Roof, the one causing epilepsy.<sup>61</sup> Some diagnoses and prognoses are followed by an explicit instruction that 'for a man or a woman this means the same'. These involved the development of sexual diseases, which were ascribed to the Hand of Ištar. We note that much later in Europe Venus was thought to be responsible for inflicting venereal disease.<sup>62</sup>

A Sumerian letter in a literary format was supposedly sent by a woman to Nin-tin-uga, the goddess of healing.<sup>63</sup>

---

55 ABL 549, SAA X 201 with S. M. Maul, *Zukunftsbewältigung* (1994) 30. There are more letters about her illness. For further description and the historical context see S. C. Melville, *The role of Naqia/Zakutu in Sargonid politics* (1999) 82–85.

56 N. P. Heeßel in: B. Heiningen, R. Lindner, *Krankheit und Heilung. Gender-Religion-Medizin* (2006) 13 (SAA X 200 f., 244, 293; SAA XVI 26 f.).

57 N. P. Heeßel, 'Der verschwiegene Unterschied. Die Geschlechtsdifferenz in medizinischen Texten aus dem Alten Mesopotamien', in: B. Heiningen, T. Lindner, *Krankheit und Heilung* (2006) 9–24.

58 BAM 5 498 iii 1, 499 ii 7 ('Incantation: a woman's hair is falling out').

59 BAM 6 555 ii 15 (lung disease); STT 2 285:25 (disease unknown).

60 J. V. Kinnier Wilson, *Iraq* 19 (1957) 41 ND 4368 vi 7 (= CTN IV 72).

61 TDP 214:11 and 90:24 with Heeßel in Heiningen, 19.

62 TDP 170:9, 178:7, 9 ('disease by love'); 172:30 ('Hand of Ištar'); to be contrasted with the older version of this handbook: STT 1 89:203f. with M. Stol, *Epilepsy in Babylonia* (1983) 97 ('curse'), 214 (sun-heat). In general see V. Haas, 'Venerische Krankheiten', *Babylonischer Liebesgarten* (1999) 110f.

63 Sumerian Letters, Coll. B:17 with W. H. Ph. Römer, TUAT II/5 (1989) 715–717; B. Böck, AOF 23 (1996) 3–23. We follow the latest edition by A. Kleinerman, *Education in early 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC Babylonia* (= SEpM 19) (2011) 171–173.



Say to Nin-tin-uga, efficacious steward of the Ekur, physician of the homeland; repeat to the lady whose incantations cure the populace, whose spell has healed the people, to the compassionate lady, reviver of persons, lover of prayer; to the relenting, the merciful, who hears my petitions: You care for the living and the dead, great healer of cripples. Thus says Inannakam, daughter of Enlil-amah, your servant:

Having taken to bed for the second time, I went through much woe and I do not know its course. My lady, someone built a house for me, but I can only sit furtively. My acquaintances and dear ones have abandoned me. I have no one who enquires about me. Since it is enough for me, too much for me, I am truly desperate.

If it is my lady's will, may she cause the Azag demon that is in my body to be torn out of my flesh. May she stand my feet on the path of life. Furthermore, as I am her servant (and) the courtyard sweeper of her temple, I will serve her, (and) as soon as I am well, I will name my lady, 'Healer of Cripples'.

This name for the goddess of healing, Nin-tin-uga, means 'the mistress who makes the dead live', but she is finally addressed as the healer of cripples.<sup>64</sup> The reference to 'the dead' means those threatened with a terminal illness. This patient was a woman with muscle problems which she attributes to the demon Azag (*á.zág*), a name meaning 'to strike the side'. Cattle are also known to have suffered from this disease. Azag is mentioned again when the queen of Larsa dedicated a stone water-font to the goddess Inanna, for the life of her husband, the king, but chiefly for her daughter. On another occasion she dedicated nine bronze milk cups,

in order to make the *šahal*-disease leave her eyes, to banish the dangers of sickness, to pass on the Azag demon that is in her body to one who does not revere him, and to preserve her life.<sup>65</sup>

Azag may refer to an illness prevalent among women,<sup>66</sup> and one that justified taking a second wife.<sup>67</sup> Even so, according to a Sumerian proverb a profligate woman was considered to be a worse affliction than this illness (SP 1.154). A dedicatory inscription has a similar type of praise for the goddess.<sup>68</sup> In the Gospels we read of a woman

---

<sup>64</sup> 'Great healer of cripples' (10) is a free translation. An alternative is 'binds up (the cripple)'. The god Damu does this to the 'muscle' of the 'crippled', according to a bilingual text which refers to 'Damu, who knots the broken muscle'; DT 48:7–8; E. Ebeling, *Tod und Leben* (1931) 156. Medical texts also mention this (*šer'ānu batqa kašāru*).

<sup>65</sup> RIME 4 (1990) 303 no. 23 and A. R. George, CUSAS 17 (2011) 113 f. no. 53.

<sup>66</sup> M. Stol, *Epilepsy in Babylonia* (1993) 143, with n. 99.

<sup>67</sup> A. Falkenstein, NSGU II (1956) 8–10 no. 6.

<sup>68</sup> Bur-Sîn, RIME 4 (1990) 72 no. 2001:3.

possessed by a spirit that had crippled her for for eighteen years. She was bent double and quite unable to stand up straight (Luke 13:11).

That woman seems to have had similar muscle problems, which were similarly attributed to a supernatural cause. The most striking thing is that social alienation is an important element in these complaints. People shunned the handicapped. Illness led to isolation and could drag a person down emotionally. The patient felt deserted by gods and men. Some of these complaints may have been psychosomatic, but let us leave that matter alone for the moment.<sup>69</sup>

### 22.3.1 Gynaecology

A few Babylonian medical texts are specifically dedicated to diseases which typically affect women,<sup>70</sup> and they are covered in separate chapters of the Diagnostic Handbook (see below). The final lines of a chapter in a therapeutic handbook concern a woman who did not ‘see’ ‘her illness’ and give a prescription of medicinal herbs to stop the illness becoming worse. It may have been concerned with a girl’s first menstruation. The following chapter begins with the problem of an adult woman whose ‘blood is blocked and her blood is not seen’.<sup>71</sup> In an Old Sumerian incantation the demon Samana (‘The Red One’) is made responsible for the absence of ‘the months’.<sup>72</sup> A much more common problem featured in these texts was how to stop unwanted bleeding, and there are many prescriptions for staunching the blood. Medical texts deal with bleeding from the nose as well as the vagina. In the latter situation a tampon composed of *materia medica* had to be inserted into the vagina.<sup>73</sup> One incantation for staunching bleeding in women makes a comparison with damming fast flowing irrigation water in the channels

---

69 M. Stol, ‘Psychomatic suffering in ancient Mesopotamia’, in: T. Abusch, K. van der Toorn, *Mesopotamian Magic* (1999) 57–68.

70 M. Stol, ‘Gynaecology’, in his *Birth in Mesopotamia and the Bible* (2000) 203f. Translations: B. Böck, ‘Konzeption, Kontrazeption, Geburt, Frauenkrankheiten’, *TUAT NF 5* (2009) 107–114; J. Scurlock, ‘Obstetrics and gynecology’, *Sourcebook for Ancient Mesopotamian medicine* (2014) 245–257, 571–619; ‘Medicine and healing magic’, in: M. W. Chavalas, *Women in the Ancient Near East* (2014) 101–143. Bleeding: U. Steinert, *Sudhoffs Archiv 96* (2012) 64–94.

71 SpbTU I 59:12–14 with F. Köcher in: *Festschrift Heinz Goerke* (1978) 33 n. 20; *TUAT NF 5* (2009) 110.

72 J. Nougayrol, *ArOr 17/3–4* (1949) 213:12, with A. Falkenstein, *SAHG* (1953) 214 (‘da er der Jungfrau die Monatsblutung behindert hat’). See above, note 14.

73 As in *BAM 3* 236:15–17.

between field plots.<sup>74</sup> The same image is used elsewhere for bleeding ‘from the nose of a young man, from the vagina of a young woman’, which is

like a channel not contained by its dykes, like a brewing barrel whose bung [has burst], like a water-skin whose cords are not strong (and) fastenings not reliable.<sup>75</sup>

Older Sumerian incantations appear to employ the same imagery.<sup>76</sup> After 450 BC, when the signs of the zodiac began to be used, astrologers identified particular signs as the best time for treating an illness. When the sun was standing in Capricorn was a favourable period in which ‘to staunch the blood of a woman’.<sup>77</sup> The same principle was applied by Greek astrologers.

The first medical problems a newly married girl would encounter were linked to infertility and pregnancy.<sup>78</sup> Medical texts referring to ‘a woman who does not bear a child’ prescribe a herbal remedy.<sup>79</sup> To determine whether a girl was pregnant involved inserting a prepared tampon and examining the colour it later acquired.<sup>80</sup> A Babylonian commentary uses the word *naḥšātu* for a woman’s condition to cover the separate theme of bleeding in pregnancy. To cure this the navel and the opening of the vagina were anointed, or amulet stones were hung around her hips, or she underwent a magic ritual in a secluded place and she recited a penitential prayer three times. All this was linked with the recitation of an incantation to Ištar. The text continues with more practical instructions, including applying *materia medica*.<sup>81</sup> Treatments for other problems during pregnancy are also given. One therapeutic text considers a variety of symptoms that may ensue after a woman becomes pregnant or gives birth, including attributing blame to the demon Lamaštu.

If a woman is pregnant and is distended by wind, Lamaštu has seized her. You shall let her sniff the dust of a copper bell.

**74** Badly preserved; BAM 3 235:10–13, dupl. 236 rev. 1–9; is reminiscent of SpbTU II 130 no. 25.

**75** SpbTU IV 32 no. 129 iv 11–27, with BAM 3 244:41–43.

**76** Stol, *Birth in Babylonia and the Bible*, 125 n. 100.

**77** BRM 4 19:18, 20:27, with A. Ungnad, AfO 14 (1944) 274 and 259; survey on top of p. 280. See for these texts E. Reiner, *Astral magic in Babylonia* (1995) 108–110; M. J. Geller, *Melothesia in Babylonia* (2014) 27–46.

**78** Stol, ‘Infertility’, in his *Birth in Babylonia and the Bible*, 33–37; J. Scurlock in Chavalas, *Women*, 121–135.

**79** KADP 2 v 47 f. Cf. STT 2 284 rev. 2, 7.

**80** E. Reiner, ‘Babylonian birth prognoses’, ZA 72 (1982) 124–138; Stol, *Birth*, 37; Scurlock, 119 f.

**81** Stol, *Birth*, 203. For herbal remedies for problems during pregnancy see Stol, ‘Plants of Birth’, in his *Birth*, 52–55.

If a woman gives birth and her body is full of pockmarks, her anus has ‘fallen’, so you shall anoint a twig of willow in oil, and you shall have her drink (it) in beer.<sup>82</sup>

Making a sick person sniff copper dust appears to be an element of popular folklore, for elsewhere in this text a prescription for a pregnant woman was said to be vernacular, that it was orally transmitted (*šum’ūtu*), suggesting that it was a ‘hearsay’ remedy.

A text which is known only from a photograph is the ‘Manual of gynaecology’ (Figure 36). It is a collection of many prescriptions, forming a compendium of medical complications known to afflict pregnant women and women in confinement. It was drawn up by someone who was clearly a master of his art and passages from it would have been dictated. The subjects covered include infertility, miscarriage, and much else. There is even a pregnancy test involving urinating on barley seeds, a technique attested in Egyptian, Greek and later sources. It also deals with an internal illness, as yet unidentified, called *alluttu*, ‘crab’. That is the same word that is used for ‘Cancer’ as a sign of the zodiac, and could possibly be the origin of the name cancer.<sup>83</sup> There are other medical texts which give advice about a difficult birth.<sup>84</sup> We also have a prescription for inducing an abortion.<sup>85</sup> It is little wonder that there is a Sumerian proverb which says,

To be sick is good; to be pregnant is bad; to be pregnant and sick is very bad (SP 1.193 f.).

### 22.3.2 Venereal disease

Gossip among modern scholars is the chief reason for interpreting some implicit references in this way. Often omens give diagnoses that are unusual or unexpected, such as one concerning a chaste priestess:

The *entu* shall die because of the sickness of intercourse (*niktu*).

In a handbook of predictions from liver omens we read that a massive number of deaths, an epidemic affecting large groups of men and women, will occur:

<sup>82</sup> Stol, *ibidem*; cf. Scurlock, 110 f. (Bloating’). For the demon *Lamaštu* attacking mother and child see W. Farber, *Lamaštu* (2014) 153 I 69 f.; 179 II 156–158; Scurlock, 114–119, 126 f.

<sup>83</sup> I. L. Finkel in: *Babylon. Myth and reality* (2008) 200 fig. 189 (BM 42313+). Parts are cited by I. L. Finkel in *Studies W. G. Lambert* (2000) 171 n. 32.

<sup>84</sup> Stol, ‘Difficult labour’, in his *Birth*, 129–134; Scurlock, 128–135.

<sup>85</sup> Stol, *Birth*, 41 f.



**Fig. 36:** Clay tablet, a compendium of medical complications in pregnancy and childbirth, including infertility, miscarriage, pregnancy testing and a disease called ‘crab’ (as yet unidentified). The fragments have been assembled I. L. Finkel. Babylon, 500 BC. *British Museum, London.*

Dying in the army. Dying in the convent.

By amalgamating these two communities a scholar from Berlin proposed that venereal disease broke out with the army in the convent. This is how a rumour can spread.<sup>86</sup> A Czech scholar considered a magic ritual to combat various diseases which affected the head, the eyes, the muscles, the teeth, and stomach cramp. According to the text these afflictions were brought around by the wind. But he noted that unexpectedly two priestesses were affected and imagined that they

<sup>86</sup> The liver omen YOS 10 17:88 with V. Haas, *Babylonischer Liebesgarten. Erotik und Sexualität im Alten Orient* (1999) 64.

were probably engaged in sacred prostitution and this had led to an outbreak of venereal disease. A Swiss scholar discussing the same text later expressed surprise at the appearance of the nuns, but he was unaware of the views of the Czech scholar. What is true is that on two other occasions priestesses were mentioned in connection with miscarriages.<sup>87</sup>

### 22.3.3 Prognoses from the Diagnostic Handbook

The details mentioned above come from therapeutic handbooks, which can be compared with details from the Diagnostic Handbook. It gives diagnoses and prognoses for those who are sick based on particular symptoms. These statements are known as ‘medical omens’. The handbook ends with chapters on pregnant women (36–40) and on babies (41). I have already published elsewhere a translation of chapters 36 and 37, which are well-preserved.<sup>88</sup> Chapter 36 clearly deals with the healthy pregnancies and chiefly concerns whether the woman can expect to give birth to a boy or a girl. It begins by noting a seemingly pallid appearance on the forehead.

If the upper side of the forehead of a pregnant woman is pallid (literally, greenish yellow), then her offspring is male; he will ...

What will happen to this boy we do not know because we cannot translate the verb in the apodosis. By contrast, if the upper side of the forehead is bright we are told that ‘her offspring is female’ and, according to a variant reading, that ‘she shall become rich’.

The text then proceeds to note the complexion of the point of the nose, and then attention is paid to the breasts. First we learn that the colour of her nipples can predict whether or not the woman will have a normal pregnancy. The ‘openings’ that are referred to in §§ 3–10, 14, and 15 are explained by specialists as ‘die Öffnungen der Milchkanäle’, but this supposes that the Babylonian gynaecologist examined the woman with a microscope. After this, features on the gastric region and the belly are listed. At last the legs and feet are discussed but they are treated rather differently.

<sup>87</sup> J. Prosecký, *Šulmu* (1988) 287–299 (see p. 616); A. Cavigneaux, *ZA* 85 (1995) 184–195, esp. 193 f.

<sup>88</sup> M. Stol, ‘The Diagnostic Handbook on pregnant women’, in his *Birth*, 194–203.

If a pregnant woman steps to the right, she is pregnant with a male (child).  
 If she steps to the left, with a female (child).  
 (...) If to the right and the left, there are twins' (94–95, 98).

It could be that they thought, as the Greeks also thought, that a boy lay on the right of the mother's womb and a girl on the left. The ordered progress of featuring the body from the top down is interrupted by noting abnormal phenomena.

If a pregnant woman keeps on vomiting, then she will not complete her pregnancy.  
 If dark blood flows out of her nose, then she shall not stay alive during her pregnancy.  
 If she throws light blood out of her mouth, then she shall die together with her foetus (81–83).

At the end of chapter 36 and the beginning of chapter 37 the subject of sexual relations during the ten (!) months of pregnancy is raised, with most of the predictions relating to whether the woman will live or die. The train of thought at this point is not clear. The subject of a sick pregnant woman is raised in chapter 37. Often demons were thought to be responsible, and we are regularly told that 'she shall die'. Only the first line of chapter 38 is preserved. The mention of 'her water' here certainly means the amniotic fluid. All that remains of chapter 39 is the commentary on its first lines, showing that the text was now concerned with what happened during childbirth. It begins,

If a woman is distended during labour and belches, she shall die.<sup>89</sup>

The final chapter, which is well preserved, considers paediatric illnesses, with various symptoms, various supernatural causes (including sorcery), and various outcomes.

## 22.4 The old woman

We have already broached the subject of old age at the beginning of this book when we described the different stages to be marked in someone's life on earth. The maximum lifespan of 120 years recorded in Genesis 6:3 can be compared with what was foreseen in Mesopotamian culture. This idea occurs also in a Sumerian myth, according to a later bilingual Sumerian-Akkadian version found in Emar (Syria), which includes further observations.

---

<sup>89</sup> SpbTU I 40.

The days of a human being come closer. Indeed, day by day they become fewer. Indeed, month by month they become fewer. Indeed, year by year they become fewer. Indeed, the 120 years of a human being is ‘taboo’, from the beginning of humanity until now, as long as a human being lives.<sup>90</sup>

The Akkadian expression for an approaching death is ‘the days are nearby’. The meaning of ‘taboo’ is not immediately obvious, but it seems to mean the absolute maximum number of years. Moses is said to have reached the age of 120 in fine fettle before he died, ‘his sight undimmed, his vigour unimpaired’ (Deuteronomy 34:7). The ancient Egyptians thought 100, or ideally 110, was the most one could hope for, and Joseph in Egypt reached 110.<sup>91</sup> That 120 years was a maximum in Sumerian thought could well be linked to their using 60 as a base for counting higher numbers. Whether anyone actually reached such an age is doubtful, even if we consider evidence from ancient Greece and Rome.

In fact the average age at death, assuming that the person had escaped the dance of death in childhood, was considerably higher than twenty or thirty. T. W. Gallant demonstrated that research on skeletons in Attica showed that the average age at death in that area was around 40. By contrast R. Duncan-Jones arrived at a life expectancy of between 50 and 55 for those aged 20 and 35 respectively in the city of Rome.<sup>92</sup>

An examination of the bones of ordinary Hittite skeletons show that they died before reaching 35, while those from the upper classes of society reached from 60 to 80 years old. King Ḫattušili III lived to be over 70 and the age of his wife Puduḫepa when she died has been estimated as between 82 and 90.<sup>93</sup> The queen mother Aḫat-milki of Ugarit died when she was about 90.<sup>94</sup> The wife of a ruler in Anatolia (ca. 1100 BC) claims on her stela

On account of my justice I lived one hundred years.<sup>95</sup>

---

**90** D. Arnaud, *Emar VI/4* (1987) 368 no. 771:21–26, with J. Klein, ‘The “bane” of humanity: a lifespan of one hundred twenty years’, *ASJ* 12 (1990) 57–70. J. S. Cooper: ‘Rather than translating *nig-gig = ikkibu* as “bane” (Klein) or “abomination” (Alster), I prefer to understand it in this context as an absolute limit, beyond which a human life is not allowed to extend’; *Studies A. D. Kilmer* (2011) 42 n. 11.

**91** Klein, 69 n. 45. More precisely A. Malamat, *Afo Beiheft* 19 (1982) 222 n. 6, end.

**92** H. W. Pleket in: H. F. J. Horstmanshoff, *Pijn en balsem, troost en smart* (1994) 147 f. Based on T. W. Gallant, *Risk and survival in ancient Greece* (1991) 20 f.; R. Duncan-Jones, *Structure and scale in the Roman economy* (1990) 96–99.

**93** L. Cunchillos, *Textes ougaritiques II* (1989) 382 f. (in 1215 BC she was 82 years old); Th. P. J. van den Hout in: J. M. Bremer, *Hidden futures* (1994) 55 (ca. 90 years).

**94** W. H. van Soldt, *JEOL* 29 (1985–86) 70; *Handbook of Ugaritic studies* (1999) 641 f.

**95** J. Klinger, *TUAT NF* 6 (2011) 76 (in Hittite Luwian, country Watasatini).



We are able to follow the career of one man for over forty years,<sup>96</sup> and we know that women could reach a similar age. Some of the nuns in the convent at Sippar were active for a period of 25 or even 55 years.<sup>97</sup> Within families there were many widows, suggesting that women lived longer than men. It is a known biological fact that women in general live longer than men, so husbands usually die before their wives.<sup>98</sup> It has been observed, however, that this naturally happens because men were older than women when they married.

Among the Greeks any woman over 40 was considered to be old and this may well have been the Mesopotamian view.<sup>99</sup> The Greeks rather cuttingly defined a woman as old

if she could no longer be described as fertile or erotic, if she had stopped having children, and thus ceased to be of any interest to the men of the household.<sup>100</sup>

We can follow the story of an Assyrian slavegirl from the moment she was sold as a child, just 4½ cubits tall, until she was sold as a *paršuntu*, an old woman. By then she would have been only 30 years old, and she must have had a hard life.<sup>101</sup>

In Sumerian *abba* means ‘old man’, and *umma* means ‘old woman’.<sup>102</sup> That word sounds very similar to *ummu*, the Common Semitic word for ‘mother’, found in Akkadian and Arabic. Any woman ‘who has ceased bearing children’ was certainly considered to be old. A letter from Pharaoh Ramesses II to the king of the Hittites refers to a woman of 50 or perhaps 60 years old, for whom no-one could concoct herbs to make her conceive and bear children.<sup>103</sup> When referring to the menopause a woman is said to have ‘stopped bearing children’, or more concisely, she is a *pāristu*, ‘a woman who has stopped’.<sup>104</sup> At that time of life she would be asked to conduct magical rituals on the sick, probably because there was no longer any risk of uncleanness.<sup>105</sup> This is hinted at in a Sumerian proverb.

---

**96** D. Charpin, *Le clergé d'Ur* (1986) 242 (Lu-Dumuzida, the *ababdū*).

**97** R. Harris, *Studies A. L. Oppenheim* (1964) 122 f.; J. Renger, *ZA* 58 (1967) 166–168.

**98** R. Harris, *Gender and aging* (2000) 213 n. 19.

**99** Harris, 212 n. 7.

**100** Cited by Harris, 88.

**101** K. Radner, *Die neuassyrischen Privatrechtsurkunden* (1997) 172 f.

**102** B. Alster, *Dumuzi's Dream* (1972) 90; H. Behrens, *Enlil und Ninlil* (1978) 74 f.; I. J. Gelb, *JNES* 43 (1984) 272.

**103** M. Stol, *Birth in Babylonia and the Bible* (2000) 58 f.

**104** E. Reiner, *ZA* 72 (1982) 129; R. Harris, *Gender and aging* (2000) 88 f.

**105** MDP 57 246 vi 21; AMT 66,9:2; more in CAD P 167b.

The goat speaks in the manner of a (wise) old woman, but behaves in the manner of an unclean one.<sup>106</sup>

Old women were regarded as wise, and *umma* often carries those overtones in Sumerian. It is she who gives advice in myths.<sup>107</sup> A prominent old woman had the title of *puršumtu*, a word to be traced back to Sumerian showing that she was presumed to be wise.<sup>108</sup> In Sumerian literature old women interpreted dreams,<sup>109</sup> a skill the mother of Gilgamesh possessed. In an Old Assyrian text from Kaniš an old woman is also known as an interpreter of dreams.<sup>110</sup> They could be expected to know more about the supernatural world than younger folk. Such a Hittite Old Woman knew all the techniques for oracles and played a big role in performing magical rituals for others, a service for which she was paid. In Chapter 28 we shall show that women were often regarded as clairvoyant.

At this advanced age it seems that it was preferable for them not to consider sexual activity. A woman speaking in a Sumerian proverb makes the point pathetically.

My vessel is good, but according to my family it is all over as far as I am concerned.<sup>111</sup>

This old woman may well be looking back on a life of 'easy virtue'. To have sex with an old woman was thought to be ominous, and you 'would have daily quarrels'.<sup>112</sup> You should only kiss an old woman if the ritual for the eclipse of the moon in the fifth month prescribed it.<sup>113</sup>

The care of the old devolved to their children. This was a duty inculcated in the fifth commandment,

Honour your father and your mother so that you may enjoy long life in the land which the Lord your God is giving you (Exodus 20:12).

But if there were no children someone else would have to do it, and regularly we see that a slave (or slave-girl) had been adopted on condition that they would serve their master and his wife until they died. The Greeks called such a regu-

**106** SP 1.153 with H. Behrens, *Enlil und Ninlil* (1978) 153 f.

**107** Behrens, 74 f.

**108** R. Harris, 100–103; PSD B 188 f. (*puršumti ṭēmi*).

**109** 'Dumuzi's Dream', 24; TUAT II/1 (1986) 28.

**110** ATHE 57:2f.; H. Hirsch, AfO Beiheft 13/14 (1972) \*29, on p. 72.

**111** W. G. Lambert, BWL (1960) 242, 248 iii 14–16; B. R. Foster, *Before the Muses* (1996) 341.

**112** CT 39 43 K. 3134:6 (= Tablet 104:1).

**113** CT 4 5:19. Also in the calendar text CT 51 161:25.

lation *paramonè*.<sup>114</sup> In Mesopotamia from time immemorial the word literally meaning ‘to fear, honour’ was used for serving one’s parents, which implied ‘to take care of’ them. As early as in the Old Babylonian period even a single woman could have such an ancillary supporter. The woman who ‘cleansed’ two women before the god Šamaš did so to ensure that after her death they would obtain their freedom.<sup>115</sup> The two women were referred to as her ‘daughters’, but one of them clearly had the name of a slave-girl. From this we assume that after they had been procured they were adopted as daughters. They were required to look after their ‘mother’ as long as she lived, and the document expressly states at the end that no family member can make claims on them later. It is interesting to note that this ‘mother’ had also adopted another woman to look after her, but the woman had been married off. That was another contingency plan for old age, for a young married couple would be able to look after an old woman.<sup>116</sup> In Emar a married couple stipulated that their slave-girl would ‘fear’ them, and that after their death she would be ‘freed before Šamaš’. Their own son was denied any claim to her, but she would not be allowed any inheritance herself.<sup>117</sup>

It was also possible for an elderly woman to be dedicated to a temple. In a letter from Mari a lady expressed her concern about what would happen to the woman who had been caring for her, as a nurse. She does not want her to be treated as a ‘gift’, but would prefer that she be dedicated. What would be involved in treating an old person as a gift is obscure.

Speak to my lord, These are the words of Aḥassunu, your servant. ‘May my lord be attentive to the case of my old nurse ... I have heard, “Your old nurse has been noted down as a gift”. I became fearful and watchful about this. I say this to my lord, “I hope they will not give her away as a gift.” Furthermore, “Does she not do the work required of her?” May my lord be attentive and do whatever is suitable for her old age. Yes, my old nurse spoke to me. “I hope they will not give me away as a gift. Pay attention to this and write to your lord so that they let me walk away.” If my lord is going to dedicate my old nurse, may my lord then send me a duplicate of the clay tablet, and I shall have peace of mind. In any case, may my lord write to me, “I have dedicated your old nurse. Do not be worried!”, then I shall be very happy.’<sup>118</sup>

**114** P. Koschaker, GRÖR (1931) 74–83, discusses Neo-Babylonian examples.

**115** J.-M. Durand correctly observes that being freed before Šamaš expresses full freedom; in his words ‘être libre comme l’air’; RA 97 (2003) 172–176. Otherwise M. Stol, who thought that they were going into the cloister of the god and pointed out the contrast between ‘she belongs to Šamaš’ and ‘she belongs to herself’; *The care of the elderly in the Ancient Near East* (1998) 84, compare 94, 111.

**116** CT 8 29a. The other text is CT 6 26a, with Stol, *The care of the elderly*, 111 f.

**117** G. Beckman, *Texts from the vicinity of Emar* (1996) 45 RE 27.

**118** ARM 10 97 with LAPO 18 (2000) 419 no. 1215. An old man as ‘gift’ may not be desired, see ARM 10 57 with LAPO 18, 284 no. 1102.

Old women working in the Ur III period were less fortunate. In a list of food rations we find a woman needing enough for her six daughters and a grandchild. These old women received rations for only half a period of work.<sup>119</sup>

## 22.5 Dead and buried

As now so then, old age was inevitably followed by death. For this subject our chief evidence comes from burials, in particular the funerary artifacts found in graves. In Chapters 23 and 24 about the court and the harem we shall discuss the royal graves of Ur and those of the Assyrian queens from Calah (Nimrud), but here we shall consider the graves of less important people. Lists of expenses and an occasional letter show that mourning rituals were carried out for two days after someone died.

The expenses incurred for the funeral of a distinguished woman from the Ur III period are found in a number of lists. She was Geme-Lama, the wife of the governor of the province of Lagash and also a priestess of the goddess Bau.<sup>120</sup> Carpenters were paid for making her coffin and a new wheel for the bier was required. Two meals were offered on each of the two days of mourning, first at home, and later in a chapel, accompanied by lamentations. On the third day her last meal was offered to her in her tomb. Then the ‘spirit of the dead one’ passed to the underworld. The record of the funeral costs of a princess of the same time has a note suggesting that in those first two days she still had ‘wind’, before becoming ‘the spirit of the dead one’.<sup>121</sup> After her funeral such a highly placed individual continued to be well looked after. The chapel built at the site of her grave was known as ‘the place for the drinking of water’. Every month she was given an offering of food and drink. After her death, at new moon and full moon, a priestess of Bau deceased earlier received regular monthly deliveries from a beer brewer, and on three other occasions in the year, at the feasts for the gods Lisin, Dumuzi and Bau. At the feast of Dumuzi, in the sixth month, the ‘chair’ of the deceased was carried on a five-day journey to the city of Uruk.

The only letters we have about a funeral are Old Assyrian. They concern the widow of Kunilum, her first husband. After he died she married a native Anato-

---

119 H. Waetzoldt in: M. A. Powell, *Labor in the Ancient Near East* (1987) 137 n. 140, 141.

120 B. Jagersma, ‘The calendar of the funerary cult in ancient Lagash’, *BiOr* 64 (2007) 289–307. The sources: Wu Yuhong, *JAC* 26 (2011) 36–39.

121 D. Katz, ‘The naked soul’, *Studies T. Abusch* (2010) 107–120.

lian, and he paid the costs of her funeral.<sup>122</sup> She had two sons and a daughter from her first marriage to Kunilum, and the daughter had become a priestess in Assur. With the Anatolian she had no children. It was a relationship that seems to have been less important. Her adult sons died at the same time as their mother, which may be explained by assuming that there was a serious epidemic in Kaniš. At the time of her death a female relative of the widow wrote a letter to the widow's daughter in Assur.<sup>123</sup>

Alas! Your mother and both my nephews have died. Just before your mother's death we sent for three merchants and we visited your mother. While she was still alive your mother opened her money chest in the presence of the three merchants and they saw every shekel of silver, the money that was there. She gave you 2¼ shekels of gold and 8 shekels of silver. She gave 37 shekels to Iliya, my nephew. She gave 20 shekels of silver to Ilabrat-bani. While your mother was still alive Iliya was thrown into prison. After he had paid out all his ready money, the Anatolian who had married your mother and to whose daughter Iliya was married, paid the costs of the funeral. After the Anatolian had received his expenses, for the mourning ceremonies for both your mother and your brothers, 27 shekels had been spent.

Iliya had probably been imprisoned because of debt.

The mother's will confirms the bequests referred to in that letter. It is the only Old Assyrian will we have made by a woman. After Kunilum died she must have taken his place as the head of her family. Her Anatolian husband had advanced a considerable amount for her funeral and after these costs had been settled, the daughter in Assur would receive the rest as her inheritance. The letter is part of a large dossier devoted to this funeral. It shows that the main costs were for the lamentations performed by professional women for the mourning rituals, and also for transporting the 'chair' on which the corpse was seated. Additional expenses were for the meals and the beer. Another letter tells us more.<sup>124</sup>

After the sons of Kunilum had died, people came in, both to mourn them and to transport the chair of their mother and the chair of our 'nephews'. 19½ shekels of silver were paid both for their mourning and for the chair of their mother and also to the Anatolian on account of Iliya for his debt of 7½ shekels. The rest of the silver shall go to his sister, the daughter of Kunilum, to the City.

---

**122** K. R. Veenhof, 'The death and burial of Ishtar-lamassi in Karum Kanish', in: *Studies M. Stol* (2008) 97–119.

**123** Veenhof, 107f., text B.

**124** Veenhof, 113, text F.

Usually in the Ancient Near East the dead were buried under the floor of their house. According to an Old Babylonian letter a woman was buried in this way by her sister.

Her sister took her and buried her in her house.<sup>125</sup>

Small Old Babylonian texts recording the death of a member of the personnel sometimes refer to a woman. One such document is precisely dated to the second year of Samsu-iluna, day 13 month 3:

After day 12 month 3 Bettâ died. She was buried on day 13 month 3.<sup>126</sup>

Other documents concern a slave-girl, a woman who had been captured, and a cook.<sup>127</sup> Some documents simply list the names of those who had died, and others those of personnel who had fled. All this typified good administrative practice.

---

**125** AbB 1 140:23–25.

**126** S. Dalley, *Edinburgh* no. 21, with TUAT NF 1 (2004) 38.

**127** ARMT 22 75; ARMT 23 551; *Florilegium Marianum* IV (1999) 223 no. 43.

## 23 The court and the harem before 1500 BC

One of the most interesting institutions of the traditional Middle East is the harem. European gentlemen have long been deadly curious about the life styles that sheikhs and pashas adopted in that secret domain. That was how they found the opportunity to get to know those 1001 erotic stories emanating from the harem.<sup>1</sup> The Persian king was said to have had at his disposal 360 concubines for his bed, enough to occupy him afresh for a whole year.<sup>2</sup> In the Bible we are granted a peep into the Persian ‘house of women’ in the second chapter of the book of Esther. But Joan Goodnick Westenholz has now poured a bucket of cold water over extending those ideas of such European gentlemen to ancient Babylonia. She has demonstrated that their concept of the harem has been coloured by Islamic practices and European fantasies, whereas in Babylonia and Assyria the women were not so strictly isolated. Even so, excavations at a palace in Mari have revealed an area which has been identified as the women’s quarters and could be referred to as ‘the corner’ (*tubqu*).<sup>3</sup> This chapter and the next will show, in the words of S. Parpola writing on the Assyrian harem, that the harem ‘in every essential respect resembled later oriental (Sassanian, Abbasid and Ottoman) royal harems’.

According to the condemnatory narrative in 1 Kings 11:3, King Solomon is reputed to have had 700 ‘princesses’ (*šārôt*) and 300 ‘concubines’ (*pilagšim*). Most of Solomon’s marriages to these princesses will have been political alliances, for in the Ancient Near East it was normal for a king to marry off his daughter to a friendly monarch for political advantage. Some such alliances were so important that a king would commemorate the event with a year name. Before 1500 BC Babylonian years were not numbered consecutively, but named by a formula commemorating an event in that year or the one preceding.<sup>4</sup> Such a name appears in the Syrian city of Alalakh:

The year of Ammi-takum the king, when he chose (*hiāru*) the daughter of the ‘man’ of Ebla to marry his son.<sup>5</sup>

---

1 Read the phantasies in Montesquieu, *Lettres persanes* (Amsterdam, 1721).

2 D. Lenfant, *Les Histoires perses de Dinon et d'Héraclide* (2009) 270 ff.

3 J. G. Westenholz in her review of the book J.-M. Durand, *La Femme* (1987), in *JAOS* 110 (1990) 513–516; with N. Ziegler, *Le Harem de Zimrî-Lîm* (1999) 5–8; M. van de Mieroop, *Cuneiform texts and the writing of history* (1999) 146–151.

4 Surveyed by W. Röllig, ‘Politische Heiraten im Alten Orient’, *Saeculum* 25 (1974) 11–23; also ‘Heirat, politische’ in *RIA IV/4–5* (1975) 282–287. More in notes 168, 190, 302.

5 D. J. Wiseman, *The Alalakh Tablets* (1953) no. 35:8–12.

From time to time a short reference to such a marriage appears in routine administrative documents concerning the receipt and despatch of gifts.<sup>6</sup> A list of household goods from Isin includes a ‘present to Libur-niaš, daughter of the king, when Išdum-kin, son of Ḫuba-simti, the vizier [of Elam] married her’.<sup>7</sup> Old Babylonian letters suggest that a familial relationship arose between states through these marriages. In Šušarra the king said,

Either give me your daughter or let me give my daughter to you. Give now your daughter to my son, for the family relationship (*salūtu*) must not be broken off.<sup>8</sup>

Another letter says that ‘Uruk and Babylon are one house’, a situation which was confirmed with a marriage.<sup>9</sup>

Until recently the earliest evidence for this custom was in documents from the Ur III period, but we now have earlier evidence in the Ebla texts. Smaller states in particular needed to secure a more powerful ally to which they could bind themselves in this way. Even a large kingdom like Egypt did not shy away from the practice in the time of expanding international contacts (1500–1200 BC), but they included the proviso that Egypt must never marry off one of its own princesses.<sup>10</sup> According to W. A. Ward,<sup>11</sup> there would hardly have been a harem in Egypt, because the kings normally had a monogamous marriage, and women had the same rights as men. Even so we know from a depiction in a grave at Amarna that one area in the palace was naturally reserved for women.<sup>12</sup> The Assyrian king who claimed to have abducted ‘the daughter’ of King Ḫadi’ani at Damascus from his palace ‘with her extensive dowry’<sup>13</sup> appears to have embarked on a forced marriage.

**6** For Ebla see M. G. Biga in: Durand, *La Femme* (1987) 45–47.

**7** BIN 9 438 with M. Van de Mieroop, *Crafts in the early Isin period* (1987) 108 ff.

**8** J. Eidem, *The Shemshara Archives 1. The letters* (2001) 131 no. 74:31–38.

**9** Röllig, *Saeculum* 25, 14.

**10** Röllig, 19 (explicit in EA 4:6).

**11** W. A. Ward, ‘Reflections on some Egyptian terms presumed to mean “harem, harem-woman, concubine”’, *Berytus* 31 (1983) 67–74; cf. Ward in: B. S. Lesko, *Women’s earliest records* (1989) 40–43.

**12** ‘Harim’, ‘Harimsdame’, *Lexikon der Ägyptologie* II/6 (1976) 982–987. The depiction: O. Keel, *Das Hohelied* (1986) 255 Abb. 145.

**13** RIMA 3 (1996) 240 Shalmanezer IV no. 1:8–9.



## 23.1 The Sumerians

In Sumerian the expression meaning ‘the house of women’, *hay-mi*,<sup>14</sup> appears to indicate an entire complex of rooms. These may be the ‘private rooms for mothers and young children’.<sup>15</sup> As such it is different from the *maštaku*, the equivalent word in Akkadian, which rather means a room for a woman. Goddesses lived there as well as ordinary mortals. In literary texts we find passages showing that a ‘girl’ (*ki.sikil*, *ardatu*) who lived in this room could be dragged out of it as well as being subject to other barbarities.<sup>16</sup> Sometimes there is a reference to a girl in the bedroom (*uršu*). That meant the place for young girls as well as married ones, a room associated with weddings.<sup>17</sup> But the same word is also used for the marital bedroom.<sup>18</sup> Middle Babylonian letters speak of repairs to the ‘houses of the women’, meaning the rooms where they lived.<sup>19</sup>

There are indications that even in the earliest times a separate ‘women’s house’ would have existed. In the Old Babylonian period it could function as a house of refuge, though we know no more details.<sup>20</sup> It has been suggested that in the third millennium a distinction was made between ‘the house of the wife’ (*é.dam*) and ‘the big house’ (*é.gal*), which was for the man,<sup>21</sup> but again we know very little more. The male official who supervised the women’s house was known as the *rá.gab*.<sup>22</sup> But at the end of the prologue to the laws of Lipit-Ištar we encounter the ‘house of the father’ and ‘the house of the brothers’, who had to perform a corvée.<sup>23</sup>

---

**14** Written *é.mi*; sometimes *a.mi*; *ama*-. J. Krecher, *Sumerische Kultlyrik* (1966) 110–112; WdO 18 (1987) 13 n. 26; J. Bauer, AfO 36–37 (1989–90) 84b; to be pronounced as *hajmi* according to Bram Jagersma, *A descriptive grammar of Sumerian* (2010) 48.

**15** P. Michalowski, *The Lamentation over the destruction of Sumer and Ur* (1989) 76–78. Later on the word also means ‘storage room’. See also J.-M. Durand, *Journal des Savants* 1980, 254 n. 3.

**16** S. N. Kramer in: Durand, *La Femme* (1987) 107 ff. (*ki.sikil* and *dumu.bandā*); CAD M/1 393a.

**17** Erra IV 111 (young girls are killed there); W. G. Lambert, MIO 12 (1966) 54 rev. 12f. (‘the *maštaku* laments, the bedroom weeps, where we used to do the bridal work’). In the ‘Descent of Ištar’ the young man is desolate in his room, *kummu*, and the woman lies on her side (CT 15 46 rev. 9f.). The *éušbar* = *bit emūti* of the man corresponds to the *maštaku*; Krecher, *Sumerische Kultlyrik*, 111.

**18** K. Watanabe, Baghd. Mitt., Beiheft 3 (1987) 42, sub 11 (*uršu bit ḥammūti*).

**19** BE 17 66:23, PBS 1/2 44:3.

**20** Cf. M. Stol, *Studies in Old Babylonian history* (1976) 10 n. 3; CAD S 292b.

**21** J.-J. Glassner in Lesko, *Women’s earliest records* (1989) 87 ff.

**22** M. Stol in *Studies Pascal Attinger* (2012) 332f.

**23** D. O. Edzard, ZZB (1957) 96 n. 469.

The inhabitants of the house, the women of court, can be traced back in history as far as the legends of prehistoric times. In ‘The Death of Gilgamesh’, a Sumerian myth, not only are ‘beloved’ women from his harem mentioned, but also other personnel, including his ‘wife, children, favourite wife (*dam.tam*), little wife, singer, cupbearer.’<sup>24</sup> In the Sumerian King List, which was drawn up in 1850 BC, where history is divided into successive dynasties (‘kingships’), Queen Kubaba from the city of Kish, a legendary female figure occurs.

The kingship was transferred to Kish. In Kish Kubaba, the beer-brewer, she who laid the foundations of Kish, became king. She reigned for a hundred years.

Later ‘Kish was beaten by the weapon’. It was normal to have a king, and the tradition that Kubaba exceptionally became the queen was perpetuated in some associated predictions in liver divination. It was thought that certain configurations on the sheep’s liver could be linked to events from her time, and her later descendants could draw lessons from this for their own time. The earliest such omen is from the Old Babylonian period, more than a thousand years after the time when Kubaba was reputed to have been queen.

Omen of Kubaba, ‘Arise, O corpse! Accept the [bow (?)]’.

In time the meaning of the original text was not immediately clear, so another thousand years later in a commentary we find explanatory glosses.

Omen of Kubaba, the beer-brewer, ‘Arise (and) accept the bow of battle’.

Kubaba was evidently known as a brave warrior. There are also other ‘omens of Kubaba’ giving her different epithets, such as ‘she who rules the country’, or ‘she who seized the kingship’.<sup>25</sup> Her omen is connected with the birth of a hermaphrodite, an inauspicious event.

If an androgyne is born, with both rod and vagina, omen of Kubaba, who ruled the country. The country of the king shall be ruined.

---

<sup>24</sup> A. Cavigneaux, F. N. H. al-Rawi, *Gilgameš et la mort* (2000) 22 N3:1–3 (= S. N. Kramer, BASOR 94 [1944] 8, B:1–3); 35, 59 M:262 f. For Sumerian *dam.tam.ma*, see M. Civil, JAOS 103 (1983) 63, on 139.

<sup>25</sup> I. Starr, JCS 29 (1977) 159; U. Koch-Westenholz, *Babylonian liver omens* (2000) 401 ff. n. 925.

Possibly the uncertain sexuality of the baby was seen as opening the possibility of a woman becoming king.<sup>26</sup> The next omen derives from the fact that a scrotum was missing in an androgyne, and this predicts that ‘a courtier shall rule the land.’ The courtier, literally ‘the son of the palace’, may well have been a eunuch. Eunuchs could rise to become powerful. In Assyria and Persia some even attained kingship.<sup>27</sup> One chronicle states that Kubaba received the kingship of the world from Marduk, but this is clearly anachronistic since Marduk was a much later god in Babylon.<sup>28</sup> Historically speaking all this can be treated as rubbish, the result of a millennium of rambling about old folk-stories.

Ur-Nanše, ruler of the city of Lagash (ca. 2500 BC), is depicted on a relief with his fine family, a wife and eight children, with everyone’s name recorded, including the girl Abda. Some high functionaries are included in the group.<sup>29</sup> Here at this time we find nothing suggesting polygamy or a harem. We also have a stele of Ur-Nanše, dedicated to the mother goddess (?), with the king in the upper register and two women sitting opposite each other in the lower register. One is his wife and the other his daughter, and their names are inscribed on their clothing. They will have had some function in some ritual or other.<sup>30</sup> Even so, we may make the general observation that in the third millennium BC women were often portrayed, leading one art historian to describe this period as ‘the golden century of women’.<sup>31</sup>

We become much better informed about the ‘house of women’ with the last city rulers of Lagash (ca. 2370–2350 BC).<sup>32</sup> In this period the expression certainly does not mean a harem, but rather the location for a large business enterprise, including the real estate managed by the wife of the city ruler. Two of the women who fulfilled this function were named Dimtur and Baranamtara, and there are about 1800 texts on the subject written over a period of about thirteen years.<sup>33</sup>

**26** SAA VIII 241 with K. Radner, *Festschrift M. K. Schretter* (2005) 551.

**27** C. Ambos, *Studies S. Parpola* (= StudOr 106) (2009) 5 ff.

**28** A. K. Grayson, ABC (1975) 148 Chronicle 19:42–45; Iraq 52 (1990) 9 rev. 9–13.

**29** Ur-Nammu no. 20. E. A. Braun-Holzinger, *Mesopotamische Weihgaben* (1991) 308, W1 (lit.); J. S. Cooper, SARI I (1986) 22 ff. See Chapter 4, Figure 16.

**30** Ur-Nammu no. 50. Photo in W. Orthmann, *Der Alte Orient* (1975) plate 85; drawing and discussion by J. Asher-Greve in: S. Schroer, *Images and gender* (2006) 60 fig. 8.

**31** J. Asher-Greve; in Schroer, 41–81.

**32** We follow the summary by M. van de Mierop in: Lesko, *Women’s earliest records* (1989) 54 ff.; cf. 63 (the workers); idem, *Cuneiform texts and the writing of history* (1999) 155–157 (the land area here comprises 4583 hectares. A. Deimel computed ‘almost 4500 ha’; J. Bauer, *Annäherungen* 1 (= OBO 160/1) [1998] 534).

**33** *Annäherungen* 1, 532–555.

Originally only fifty people were working there but it grew and grew until in the time of Urukagina about 700 individuals were employed.<sup>34</sup>

It has been calculated that the country, in which agriculture dominated the economy, comprised a land area of 4465.5 hectares. Documents relating to barley stretch from the time it was sown to the time it was used for processing flour and beer. Canals were dug for irrigation and transport, and there was also a fishery. Women worked as weavers in weaving sheds. Goods were imported from abroad. These achievements had all been made under the leadership of the queen. A sweeping change took place in the second year of Urukagina. Quite suddenly he began to refer to himself as the king, rather than *ensí*, ‘the city ruler’, and he referred to the House of Women as the ‘House of Bau’. Bau was the patron goddess of Lagash. This reflected the religious reforms he had introduced, for he wanted to give back to the city gods the land held by the city ruler, his wife, and his children. Many texts from this period have led scholars to think of Lagash as a ‘temple city’. In fact the ruler (and his wife) always remained in authority. After his reforms nothing changed in what work had to be done each day.

## 23.2 Ebla

The archives found at Ebla, in Syria, south of Aleppo, date from 2300 BC, when it was at the zenith of its political strength. All these documents had been stored in the palace archives. They cover the reigns of four kings during the last fifty years of the kingdom. Išar-Damu was the last king and he reigned for 36 years. We know what happened at Ebla from undated lists of payments of clothing and precious metal objects often made for important people. Sometimes a list records why the gift was made. The efforts of Italian scholars engaged in studying the original tablets in the museum of Idlib (Syria), combining texts and finding matching fragments, are slowly creating a more complete picture.<sup>35</sup> We can distinguish between the characteristic Sumerian terminology for men (*guruš*) and women (*dam*). Everyone received their rations on a monthly basis, usually as barley and oil, but women never received any beer or other alcoholic drink.<sup>36</sup> According to one text there could have been as many as 1200 or 1500 people employed in the palace, of whom 330 were women. Another text names a total of 200 people at

---

<sup>34</sup> K. Maekawa in: K. R. Veenhof, *Houses and households in ancient Mesopotamia* (1996) 171.

<sup>35</sup> M. G. Biga, *Amurru* 1 (1996) 43 ff.; Or. NS 72 (2003) 345–367. Women in Ebla: A. Archi, ‘The role of women in the society of Ebla’, *CRRAI* 47/1 (2000) 1–9.

<sup>36</sup> L. Milano, *ARET IX* (1990) 323–343, esp. 340.

court.<sup>37</sup> By linking these figures to the highest numbers attested, 5716 people (*nase*), 3037 of whom lived in Ebla itself and the rest in surrounding communities, it has been estimated that the total number of inhabitants was between 14,000 and 17,000.<sup>38</sup> Often ladies (*dam-en*) are mentioned, meaning women at the court of the ruler (*en*).<sup>39</sup> These are mostly named in lists of allowances of barley and textiles, and we assume that the size of a woman's allowance reflected her rank in society. From one list we can extract the following data.<sup>40</sup> The queen mother and the queen are followed by 23 ladies who received the *zara*, an expensive woven cloth; 19 of them lived in the palace at Ebla and the rest in two other cities. Then there were four sisters of the queen mother and Princess Ma'ud. Fourteen 'old women and wet-nurses' received simpler clothing. The wet-nurses were often old themselves, and would have lived at court for their whole lives. The highest-ranking women received gold and silver pendant earrings as well as the *zara*-cloth.<sup>41</sup> There are two other lists which can be used for comparison. In the one 26 women receive an allowance of *zara*-cloth, while a group of 20 and another group of 51 women and two 'youngest sons' receive ordinary cloth. In the other text, 53 women receive good ordinary cloth and 108 women ordinary cloth. Among this last group are two temple women, a female cupbearer, some daughters of the king, 23 wet-nurses, and 15 ointment-makers.<sup>42</sup>

The queen held the highest position. Among the other women at court were the concubines, each called *dam-en* 'a lady for the monarch'. Lists show three classes of high ranking women: the queen, a group of 20 concubines and another group of 22 concubines.<sup>43</sup> Other wives lived in palaces outside Ebla. When one of them was transferred outside Ebla she was given materials and clothes to take with her.<sup>44</sup> Calculations show that over a period of four or five years the king fathered ten sons by his concubines and one by his queen.<sup>45</sup> The wet-nurse (*ga.du<sub>3</sub>*) also had a significant position at the court and she is sometimes men-

---

37 Milano, 333.

38 A. Archi in: H. Waetzoldt, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft von Ebla* (1988) 137.

39 H. Waetzoldt, 'Frauen (*dam*) in Ebla', in: *Ebla 1975–1985* (1987) 365–377 (for the figures see p. 373 ff.); M. G. Biga, 'Femmes de la famille royale d'Ebla', in: Durand, *La Femme* (1987) 41–47; M. G. Biga, 'Donne alla corte di Ebla', *La Parola del Passato* 46 (1991) 285–303. Cf. P. Mander, *Oriens Antiquus* 27 (1988) 1–73; Biga and F. Pomponio, *JCS* 42 (1990) 179–201, *passim*.

40 Biga, *Ktema* 22 (1997) 39 (TM.75.G.10150).

41 Biga in: *La Femme*, 42; 'Donne', 299, 301.

42 A. Archi, *Amurru* 1 (1996) 101.

43 Waetzoldt, 376 with 368 n. 14; A. Archi in: *Eblaite personal names and Semitic name-giving* (1988) 245.

44 Biga, 'Donne', 296.

45 Biga, 297; *Ktema* 22 (1997) 42.

tioned together with the midwife.<sup>46</sup> Eight wet-nurses are said to have fed three boys and five girls.<sup>47</sup> The activities of Kišadu, the wet-nurse of the last king, can be traced in administrative texts for twenty years. To mark the occasion of the marriage of the boy she had suckled she received an allowance of *zara*-cloth and a silver earring weighing twenty shekels. But when she died she received only a simple shroud,<sup>48</sup> although later she was given the special title ‘wet-nurse of the king’. She also had a son herself, and he was once given an allowance of cloth. The names of the wet-nurses of the earlier kings are also recorded. They all lived their whole life at the court.<sup>49</sup> In the Old Akkadian period holding such a position entitled them to possess a cylinder-seal.<sup>50</sup>

The word for queen in Eblaite is *maliktu*, clearly linked to the West Semitic word for king, *malku*. Like the queen mother she naturally had her own house.<sup>51</sup> The texts show her busy dispatching goods and offering gifts made of metal to the gods.<sup>52</sup> She brings offerings to all the important gods in Ebla and neighbouring locations and participates in the cult of the dead.<sup>53</sup>

We know of two protocols for a marriage of a king who was already on the throne. Foreign guests arriving from Emar joined the celebration lasting several days. There was a procession to the temples and the queen participated in certain cultic duties.<sup>54</sup> Once this ritual had been completed her name could be recorded in official documents. Tabur-Damu was listed only then by name with the title *maliktu*, more often being referred to simply by her title.<sup>55</sup>

A marriage was an occasion for distributing presents.<sup>56</sup> First precious items (always the same) were given to the bride herself. A princess who became a priestess also received such gifts.<sup>57</sup> Some scholars claim to have identified with certainty what these precious items were. At her wedding Princess Itimud received many precious items as a ‘gift’ as well as objects of practical use. Gifts of clothing

---

46 M. G. Biga, ‘Enfants et nourrices à Ebla’, *Ktéma* 22 (1997) 35–44.

47 F. Pomponio, *Vicino Oriente* 5 (1982) 207–209; Biga, *Ktéma* 22, 42.

48 *Ktéma* 22, 40.

49 Biga, ‘Donne’, 297 ff.; *Ktéma* 22, 38–40; Archi, *Amurru* 1 (1996) 79 ff.

50 A. Westenholz, *Annäherungen* 3 (= OBO 160/3) (1999) 72 ff., fig. 8, b (Daguna).

51 Biga, ‘Donne’, 286.

52 P. Mander, ‘The function of the *Maliktum*’, in: *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft von Ebla* (1988) 261–266. F. Weiershäuser, *Die königliche Frauen der III. Dynastie von Ur* (2008), discusses the court at Ebla in separate excursuses.

53 Biga, ‘Donne’, 290–294.

54 Weiershäuser, 191 ff.

55 Biga, *Or. NS* 72 (2003) 356, 358; *Amurru* 1 (1996) 48.

56 For presents and occasions see A. Archi, ‘Jewels for the ladies of Ebla’, *ZA* 92 (2002) 161–199.

57 J. Pasquali, *Il lessico dell’artigianato nei testi di Ebla* (2005) 15–20.

were given to the ten concubines of the king, a princess and nine princes.<sup>58</sup> The birth of her first son was celebrated lavishly and commemorated in a year name. The queen and her female personnel all received presents on this occasion, as did the little infant himself.<sup>59</sup> When, a few years later, a daughter was born a considerable number of presents were similarly distributed to important people within the court and beyond.<sup>60</sup> In general every important birth was an occasion for presents, even when a princess who had been married off to a friendly monarch produced a child.<sup>61</sup> We know that the queen owned land and she possibly managed the textile industry. At her death she received similar gifts to those she had been given at her marriage, including clothing, jewels, spinning utensils, combs, mirrors, and ointment.<sup>62</sup> During her funeral, gifts were offered at the graves of others who had died before her.<sup>63</sup>

The queen mother (*ama.gal.en*) also seems to have played a role in these ceremonies, for the name of Dusigu recurs in the lists referred to above over a period of twenty years.<sup>64</sup> She maintained international contacts, possessed her own chariot with its team of donkeys, travelled around and gave presents in her own right. She was in charge of the cult of the dead. Dusigu began her life at court as a girl in the harem (*dam-en*). Although she had never been queen herself she succeeded in securing the kingship for her son. She saw her chance when the king's first wife died young and probably childless, by arranging for her son to be next in line. Once he acceded to the throne she was automatically given the title 'mother of the king'. She may well have been the one who arranged for her son to marry Tabur-Damu, who at that time was still a young woman.<sup>65</sup> Once the marriage was finally arranged she consulted a diviner and received a favourable omen from the liver he had examined.

Dusigu as queen mother was a powerful woman. She always seemed to be playing a central part in the administration of the court, so much so that it was only after her death that the actual queen, her son's wife, was named first in administrative lists.<sup>66</sup> The clothes and precious metal objects which were sent as

---

<sup>58</sup> ARET II 31 with A. Archi, ZA 92 (2002) 162, followed by translation and discussion.

<sup>59</sup> Biga, Amurru 1, 50; ARET IV no. 7 §1–32.

<sup>60</sup> Biga, 62; Weiershäuser, 187, 189.

<sup>61</sup> Biga, 66, 69 ff.

<sup>62</sup> Archi, ZA 92 (2002) 173–178; Biga, Or. NS 72 (2003) 350.

<sup>63</sup> Biga, 353.

<sup>64</sup> JCS 42 (1990) 188.

<sup>65</sup> Archi; Biga, Amurru 1, 24, 40, 76. For new discoveries in the museum see Biga, NABU 2010/23.

<sup>66</sup> Biga, 'Donne', 287 ff.

gifts to her grave are listed in detail.<sup>67</sup> When two statues of women were found beside each other in 2007, one a small seated woman and the other a larger woman standing opposite her, it was supposed that the seated figure represented Dusigu, the queen mother, now deceased, and the standing figure her daughter-in-law, the queen, doing obeisance to her.<sup>68</sup>

When princesses were married off to rulers of important cities abroad they took with them their own personnel. On one occasion 17 or 22 ladies accompanied a princess as she left.<sup>69</sup> A few years before its demise, Ebla, aided by the kings of Nagar in north-eastern Syria and Kish in southern Iraq, had been victorious over the kingdom of Mari. Afterwards Princess Tagriš-Damu was sent to be the wife of the crown prince of Nagar, and similarly Princess Kešdut to be the wife of the crown prince of Kish. The list of the presents given within the court on the marriage of Kešdut has survived,<sup>70</sup> but only clothing is mentioned, with the women receiving *zara*-cloth. These presents were given to the members of the royal house of Ebla, including the powerful minister Ibbi-Zikir, who had led the campaigns against Mari. The concubines in palaces in the six cities were also allocated their share. Despite all this, Ebla fell a little later as a result of actions precipitated by the kingdom of Mari.

The fortunes of the princesses after they had left Ebla were recorded and presents were sent whenever news was received of births, marriages and deaths.<sup>71</sup> One princess was married off to a country named Burman, where she became queen (*maliktu*) and later bore a daughter.<sup>72</sup> Presents were sent to the king and queen of Mari, Iblul-II and Paba, who had indigenous Sumerian titles (*lugal* and *nin*), different from those in Ebla.<sup>73</sup> When the queen of Manuwat died Ebla sent clothing and gold objects there.<sup>74</sup> We have corresponding texts recording marriages in Ebla of foreign princesses who had been sent there.<sup>75</sup> A number of women from 'abroad' lived in the palace.

Twenty of the musicians resident at court are denoted as top-class men and between ten and twenty as ordinary musicians. Of the women twenty were top-class and twenty ordinary. Mari was known for producing a special style of

67 A. Archi, ZA 92 (2002) 178 (no. 11); Biga, Amurru 1, 49; Or. NS 72 (2003) 357, 363.

68 P. Matthiae, ZA 99 (2009) 270–311; F. Pinnock, JCS 67 (2015) 4 f., 'The Queen's standard'.

69 Biga in Waetzoldt, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft von Ebla*, 169 ff.

70 A. Archi, *Studies Jeremy A. Black* (2010) 1–9.

71 Biga, Amurru 1, 63–72; Weiershäuser, 266–268.

72 Biga and Pomponio, JCS 42, 180 n. 4.

73 F. Pomponio, NABU 1989/114.

74 Biga, Amurru 1, 45.

75 Biga in Durand, *La Femme*, 45–47; Mander, *Oriens Antiquus* 27, 32 ff.



music, and performers proficient in that style were brought from there to Ebla.<sup>76</sup> Twenty dancers are listed.<sup>77</sup> Much information about the women who worked in the palace comes from ration lists. One concerned with the distribution of wool shows that the quality and colour of the wool was correlated with the rank of the worker. The supervisor ('the big woman') received better wool than the ordinary ('small') women and girls, and slave-girls were seldom mentioned. The occupations of these women were indicated but not all of them can be identified.<sup>78</sup> A female cook and a baker (*apîtu*) are easy to identify but the function of an *asiratu* remains a mystery. Other lists sometimes speak of weavers (including weavers of linen) and women employed in grinding grain in the town of Buzuga.<sup>79</sup>

### 23.2.1 A royal ritual from Ebla

Not all the texts found at Ebla were administrative ones, such as those listing goods. The incantation for the success of a difficult birth can be described as more or less literary. There are three important rituals in which the king and queen played the main roles. They are written in a curt, telegraphic style, in a difficult mix of Sumerian and the native Semitic language of Ebla, so decipherment is difficult. Nevertheless the main sequence of events is clear.<sup>80</sup> The first ritual centres on King Irkab-Damu, the second on King Išar-Damu and Tabur-Damu, his wife. We can understand this last ritual best because the expenses relating to it are recorded in the administrative lists, where some names are also mentioned.<sup>81</sup> That ritual took place in the fifth month, and was rather complex since it concerned the marriage of the king and queen and their 'accession' (*mallugu*).<sup>82</sup> This

---

76 M. G. Biga, 'La musique à Ebla', in: *La musique au Proche-Orient ancien* (= Dossiers Archéologie 310, février 2006) 24–31; A. Archi, *Eblaïte personal names and Semitic name-giving* (1988) 271.

77 Biga, 'Donne', 301 ff.

78 Biga, 'Frauen in der Wirtschaft von Ebla', in: Waetzoldt, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft von Ebla*, 159–171.

79 L. Milano, ARET IX (1990) nos. 44, 57, with p. 338, 347 f.

80 P. Fronzaroli, ARET XI (1993). Important comments were made by A. Archi in Amurru 1, and by M. V. Tonietti in *Memoriae Igor M. Diakonoff* (2005) 251–261. The same ritual was published at about the same time by G. Pettinato, *Il rituale per la successione al trono ad Ebla* (1992), with an extensive commentary and a chapter by P. Pisi on the religious aspects; see also Pettinato, *La città sepolta. I misteri di Ebla* (1999) 316–327, 363–367. His opinions differ from those of P. Fronzaroli and others.

81 Notably TM.75.G.1730; M. G. Biga, *Vicino Oriente* 8/2 (1992) 3–11.

82 For this Semitic word see P. Fronzaroli, *Mélanges H. Limet* (1996) 54 n. 13.

king married her only in the tenth year of his reign, possibly because she had only then reached adulthood. She did not take the title *maliktu*, ‘queen’ until after this marriage ceremony.<sup>83</sup>

The ritual began (according to the oldest version) with him collecting her from her father’s house and she followed instructions about what she should wear ‘on the day of her wedding (*nimusa*)’. Sacrifices were brought in sequence to the gods, to the sun goddess first. Then oil was poured over her head, a bridal anointing. She offered clothing, jewels and costly vases to various gods. Together they made an offering to Kura and Barama, the god and goddess of Ebla, and then they travelled through various cities in the kingdom, accompanied by Kura and Barama. The four black oxen hauling their waggons are described in detail. Much time was spent in the city of Binaš, the site of the mausoleum of the ancestors, the ‘house of the dead’ (*bīt mâtim*), and probably to be identified with the modern village of Binish. A ritual purification of the site involved selecting a male goat, setting a silver ring round its neck and driving it off to the plain of Alini (§57). That ceremony closely resembles what was done to the scapegoat in Leviticus 16:21.<sup>84</sup> Offerings were presented to the local god and three ancestors. The couple would spend the night there together, but in separate rooms (§61–2, 86). On the following morning ‘the king and queen would come out and sit on the thrones of their ancestors’. The expenses associated with these events is listed as ‘in Binaš, on the day of the accession to the throne (*mullugu*) by the king and queen’.<sup>85</sup> The mother goddess Nintu ‘shows off a new Kura, a new Barama, a new king, a new queen’ (§68). Then ‘the dressing assistant pronounces the blessing, she clothes the queen with a veil: her face and hands’. This veil will have covered the whole of the upper body, and an illustration of a woman dressed like this has been preserved.<sup>86</sup> She, ‘the woman of Binaš’, covered the queen seven times, while the king and queen were seated (§82–84). Over a period of seven days three rituals were carried out for the three ancestors. The word used for this period of seven days, *sapatu*, is derived from the numeral seven; that word may perhaps be linked with the Hebrew word *šabbāt*, ‘sabbath’, although the Hebrew word is not derived from the numeral seven. After all this the royal couple returned to Ebla where the

<sup>83</sup> A. Archi, *Amurru 1* (1996) 26 (with n. 7), 76.

<sup>84</sup> Fronzaroli, *Mélanges H. Limet*, 54 ff.; Tonietti, 258 n. 67.

<sup>85</sup> Archi, note 7.

<sup>86</sup> J. Pasquali in: C. Michel, M.-L. Nosch, *Textile terminologies in the Ancient Near East and Mediterranean from the third to the first millennia BC* (2010) 176 ff. A photo is in the catalogue *Ebla. Alle origini della civiltà urbana* (1995) 317 no. 95. On the Bitik vase (see Chapter 1, The Veil) the veil covers the entire body.

king and queen spent the night apart in the temple of Kura (§ 118–119).<sup>87</sup> Sacrifices were brought, and blessings pronounced, and two new statues of the gods were brought to the temple. A banquet followed.

It is noticeable that in this ritual combining marriage with kingship most attention is paid to the queen. She received beautiful new, red clothes to mark her change of status, making it a kind of investiture. A later ritual for the dedication of a priestess from Emar has her similarly wearing red garments.<sup>88</sup> So this ritual, attested in Syria a thousand years later, can be traced back to Ebla, even though Ebla had no such priestesses. Other cities had them, as we shall see, but at Ebla possibly the queen fulfilled that role. In Chapter 30 about sacred marriage we shall come back to this subject.

### 23.3 Funerals

The exciting discoveries in the so-called Royal Tombs of Ur, from around 2600 BC, tell us much about the funerals of queens from this early period. According to their tradition, the first dynasty of Ur began with King Mesanepada. A seal belonging to his wife was found here, inscribed ‘Ninbanda, the queen, wife of Mesanepada’, and we also have an imprint in clay of his own seal.<sup>89</sup> These graves are famous for their rich contents, but equally infamous for the evidence they show of human sacrifice, which merits further discussion.<sup>90</sup>

What was found were the bodily remains of many individuals who must all have died at the time of the principal burial. Some archaeologists assumed they were poisoned, pointing fancifully to a bowl from which they were supposed to have drunk the poison. Recently, two skulls were subjected to CT scans and forensic analysis. A blunt force trauma could be observed which had produced circular holes 30 mm in diameter. The victims had been felled with a sharp instrument, probably a copper battle axe. Their corpses were subsequently heated, embalmed with mercury sulphide (cinnabar), dressed and laid ceremonially in rows. Cin-

---

**87** The basis is the third ritual, § 28–29. Pettinato thinks that both of them sleep together (see § 60).

**88** J. Pasquali, M. V. Tonietti, in: *Memoriae Igor M. Diakonoff* (2005) 172–174, 260 ff.

**89** R. L. Zettler, L. Horne, *Treasures from the Royal Tombs of Ur* (1998) 21, 76, 82.

**90** For a fresh evaluation see L. Marchesi, ‘Who was buried in the royal tombs of Ur? The epigraphic and textual data’, *Or. NS* 73 (2004) 153–197. For a survey of the finds see J. M. Asher-Greve, *Frauen in altsumerischer Zeit* (1985) 139–145, ‘Frauengräber’; see also J. Bauer, *Annäherungen* 1 (1998) 561–563. An earlier, popular, survey was given by G. Roux, ‘La grande énigme du cimetière d’Ur’, in: J. Bottéro, *Initiation à l’Orient ancien* (1992) 60–78.

nabar was a known preservative in other ancient cultures and the practice of preserving corpses by heating them was known at the royal tombs in Qatna and Calah (Nimrud). 'At some time following the death of Ur's king or queen, perhaps days or weeks after the royal entombment, which probably took place on the third day after death, the attendants were killed, preserved and dressed, and their bodies purposefully arranged in a *tableau mort* in the royal tomb to continue their service in the netherworld'.<sup>91</sup> Two types of grave can be distinguished: a 'tomb' made of brick with a few skeletons, and a 'pit' with many skeletons. For Grave PG 789 the tomb had been plundered but the pit was undisturbed. In it were the skeletons of six men, with their copper helmets, and two waggons with their two drivers. Further along there were 54 skeletons, mostly women, two of whom had a lyre. Many books reconstruct the scene just before the mass killing in a drawing.<sup>92</sup> In Grave PG 1237, 'The Great Death Pit', there were five men, 68 women, and many grave goods. The only parallel known, where human sacrifice accompanied a funeral, is from 2700 BC at Kish, a grave with five human skeletons, with waggons and draught animals. A similar custom is known in Egypt, but only during the First Dynasty. Herodotus states that the same custom was practised at the funerals of Scythian kings (IV 71–2), a statement confirmed from a grave in Ukraine dating to the fourth century BC. The ritual can be regarded as widespread, for we know that such ghastly interments occurred in Nubia, Sudan, Central and West Africa, China, Panama and the Andes.<sup>93</sup> What is striking is that this is the only time when this custom was known in Mesopotamia. Earlier we discussed the harem of Gilgamesh in the Sumerian myth 'The Death of Gilgamesh', and the context shows that his tomb was in the bed of the Euphrates. It is now thought that his whole court may have been buried with him,<sup>94</sup> but not all agree with this explanation of that passage.<sup>95</sup>

In Ur seventeen large graves were found with many costly grave goods. These included a liberal scattering of exotic materials, including lapis lazuli from northern Afghanistan, cornelian from Iran or the Indus valley, calcite from eastern Iran and Afghanistan, obsidian, copper and silver from Asia Minor, and gold from

---

91 A. Baadsgaard a. o., 'Human sacrifice and intentional corpse preservation in the Royal Cemetery of Ur', *Antiquity* 85 (2011) 27–42.

92 Zettler, Horne, 23, 33–38.

93 Zettler, Horne, 29 ff.

94 A. Cavigneaux, F. al-Rawi, *Gilgameš et la mort* (2000) 7; C. J. Gadd, 'The spirit of living sacrifices in tombs', *Iraq* 22 (1960) 51–58; Ph. Abrahams, *Ktama* 30 (2005) 96 f.

95 Marchesi, 156–161. He also refutes the theory that priestesses of the moon god (*en*) were buried here as well.



**Fig. 37:** Three cylinder seals were found in the grave of Queen Pu-abi, PG 800, all depicting a banquet scene. One, found on her right arm, had the inscription, 'Pu-abi, Qu Ur, 2600 BC. Lapis lazuli. Height 5 cm. *British Museum, London.*

Egypt,<sup>96</sup> all fashioned into splendid objects. The most significant find was from Grave PG 800,<sup>97</sup> where a woman of around forty years old had been bedecked with much golden jewellery around her head and over her thorax. The garland of golden leaves on her head was surrounded by gold and silver bowls (Figure 38). Her seal identifies her as Pu-abi, the 'queen' (*nin*).<sup>98</sup> On the seal she has three companions for a banquet scene in which food and drink are depicted (Figure 37). Further laboratory studies in museums on the remains of her diadem show that there had been worked into it 10,506 very small stones of lapis lazuli, a task that would have taken about 2500 hours. Much lapis lazuli was found in this grave.<sup>99</sup> In the pit there were 21 skeletons, a sledge with oxen, and a chest, perhaps containing clothes. Ten women with musical instruments, including the famous lyre,<sup>100</sup> had been laid out in two rows. Sir Leonard Wooley, the excavator, when he discovered this treasure in 1928, decided to telegraph the news to America in Latin, possibly to avoid drawing the attention of the local mafia:

TUMULUM SAXIS EXSTRUCTUM LATERICIA ARCATUM INTEGRUM INVENI REGINAE SHUBAD, VESTE GEMMATA, CORONIS FLORIBUS ... ISQUE INTERTIS DECORAE MONILIBUS POCULIS AURI SUMPTUOSAE. WOOLLEY.

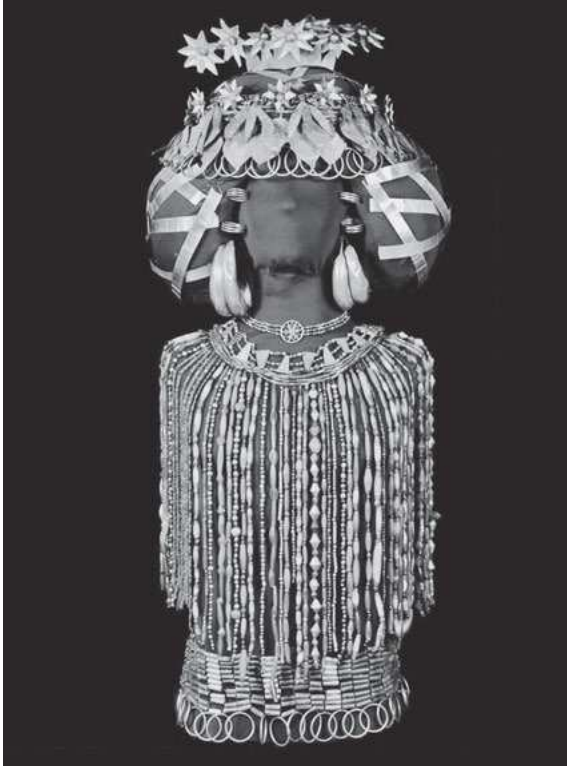
<sup>96</sup> Zettler, Horne, 5.

<sup>97</sup> Zettler, Horne, 34 ff., 66 (cosmetic box), 89–102 (jewels), 127–134 (bowls).

<sup>98</sup> M. Roaf, *A cultural atlas of Mesopotamia and the Ancient Near East* (1966) 84 ff.; E. Klen-gel-Brandt, *Mit sieben Siegeln versehen* (1997) plate 19 (in colour).

<sup>99</sup> M. Casanova in: *Studies Jean Bottéro* (2009) 295.

<sup>100</sup> Cf. [T. C. Mitchell], *Sumerian Art. Illustrated by objects from Ur and Al-Ubaid* (1969) 14–18.



**Fig. 38:** Headdress and jewellery of Queen Pu-abi, according to the most recent reconstruction (2009). *University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Philadelphia.*

The original telegram is now kept in the archives of the museum of the University of Pennsylvania to which a handwritten translation has been added:

I found the intact tomb, stone built and vaulted over with bricks of queen Shubad adorned with a dress, in which gems, flower crowns and animal figures<sup>1</sup> are woven, and some magnificent with jewels and golden cups.<sup>101</sup>

Texts dated a few centuries later from Lagash provide more information about the burials of important women. P. Steinkeller noticed that Urtarsirsira, the son of the city ruler Lugalanda, had made an inventory of the grave gifts for his wife Nineniše,<sup>102</sup> with costly items including beautiful household articles. It is striking

<sup>101</sup> Zettler, Horne, 17.

<sup>102</sup> DPM 75 with J. Zarins in: R. H. Meadow, *Equids in the Ancient World* (1986) 183; P. Steinkeller, *Iraq* 52 (1990) 21 n. 29; D. T. Potts, *Mesopotamian civilization. The material foundations* (1997) 222, in the chapter 'Mortuary practices'.

that it lists ‘one slave-girl, one sledge of boxwood and one pair of she-asses’. This is directly comparable with the sledge of Pu-abi. The slave-girl was perhaps a human sacrifice. There are other texts that show that mules were presented as grave gifts in these early times.<sup>103</sup> In the much later Gilgamesh Epic, Ištar promised Gilgamesh:

I shall hitch up for you a waggon of lapis lazuli and gold (...). You shall harness the storm demons as powerful mules (VI 10–12).

This sounds a delightful promise, but it refers to his burial, and is therefore an invitation to attend his own funeral. Gilgamesh was wise enough to realise her intent and rejected the offer.<sup>104</sup> The funeral of Baranamtarra, the wife of the city ruler Lugalanda, involved 177 slave-girls, 92 lamentation singers, and 48 ‘wives of elders (?)’, who participated on two consecutive days at the ‘place of mourning’ (*ki.ḫul*).<sup>105</sup>

## 23.4 The Old Akkadian period

Not much is known about the court in the Old Akkadian period (2300–2100 BC). Sargon conquered Sumer from his city of Akkad and established the dynasty that followed.<sup>106</sup> Usually the queen of Akkad had the title *nin*, Sumerian for ‘mistress’, but once the Akkadian word *rubātu* ‘sovereign’s wife’ is used. We know most about a queen who had been given the delightful name of Tuta-šar-libbiš, ‘She has found the king of her heart’. A group of texts describes a journey by members of the court who were possibly going to Nippur to take part in the dedication of the princess Tuta-*napšum* (‘She has found life’) to be a priestess (*en*) of Enlil. On the seals of her servants, the scribe and the head of the ‘house’, she is shown as seated with the servant standing respectfully facing her. Her usual title was ‘queen’, but once she was called ‘the beloved of the king’<sup>107</sup> Princess En-ḫedu-ana,

**103** Zarins, 164–193.

**104** This is the interpretation of T. Abusch, *History of Religions* 26 (1986) 153 ff., who gives thoughtful footnotes.

**105** VAS 14 137 (= AWL 66) and TSA 9; see Y. Rosengarten, *Le concept sumérien de consommation* (1960) 184 ff., n. 3; J. Bauer, *Annäherungen* 1 (1998) 558–560; A. C. Cohen, *Death rituals, ideology, and the development of early Mesopotamian kingship. Toward a new understanding of Iraq’s Royal Cemetery of Ur* (2005) 157–162; M. Maiocchi in: L. Milano, *Mangiare divinamente* (2012) 15, 26 f.

**106** Weiershäuser, 195–199, 256–259.

**107** FAOS 7 (1990) 44; RIME 2 (1993) 198–200. For illustrations of the seal of Dada see P. Amiet, *L’art d’Agade* (1976) 35; S. Schroer, *Image and gender* (2006) 68 fig. 16.

the daughter of King Sargon, was a significant personage at this time.<sup>108</sup> She was a priestess (*en*) of the moon god of Ur and also a poetess. In her poems the goddess Inanna/Ištar is praised. There is some suspicion that such praise was politically motivated, since Ištar was the goddess of the kingdom of Akkad that had eclipsed old Sumer, now subject to Akkad. The hymns of this princess attempted to give a theological foundation to the prominent position of the goddess. Ištar was the daughter of the Sumerian moon god and had now become the goddess of the kingdom of Akkad. One hymn begins with the meaningful invocation, ‘Sovereign Lady of the World’. When riots broke out this princess had to flee, even though she had a right to her office, as she explained in a poem. We have a picture of her and the poems attributed to her were recopied until the Old Babylonian period. Princess En-ḫedu-ana will reappear in Chapter 25, about the High Priestesses.

Excavations in Eastern Syria at the city of Urkiš have produced seal impressions of Queen Uqnītum and her staff. On the seals, which have inscriptions as well as iconography, the queen is seen accompanied by lyre players or with a little boy on her lap. The wet-nurse Zamena has a little boy on her lap and the cook is busy in the kitchen.<sup>109</sup> It is surprising to have found in that place a seal impression naming Taram-Agade, the daughter of Naram-Sin, king of Akkad: ‘Naram-Sin, king of Agade. Taram-Agade, his daughter.’ Since her name means ‘She loves Akkad’, when Akkad is far away from Urkiš, she had perhaps been married off to this distant northern state.<sup>110</sup>

### 23.5 The kingdom of Ur III

Between 2100 and 2000 the capital city of Ur was teeming with ‘queens’ and princesses.<sup>111</sup> In 1990 the general consensus was that there were more than ninety princes and princesses, but by 2008 this had risen to closer to a hundred.<sup>112</sup> King Šulgi had more than twenty sons who held important posts. It is useful first to

<sup>108</sup> Weiershäuser, 249–254.

<sup>109</sup> G. Buccellati, M. Kelly-Buccellati, *AfO* 42–43 (1995–96) 10, 15, 20, 22; S. Schroer, *Images and gender*, 65 ff. See Figure 29 in Chapter 18.

<sup>110</sup> G. Buccellati, *Studies David Oates* (2002) 11–31.

<sup>111</sup> F. Weiershäuser, *Die königlichen Frauen der III. Dynastie von Ur* (2008). For earlier surveys see M. Van de Mieroop in: Lesko, *Women’s earliest records*, 58–60; M. Sigrist, *Drehem* (1992) 357–363; W. Sallaberger, ‘Die Königsfamilie: Frauen und Kinder’, in: *Mesopotamien. Akkade-Zeit und Ur III-Zeit* (= *Annäherungen* 3) (= OBO 160/3) (1999) 182–186.

<sup>112</sup> D. I. Owen in J. Klein, *ZA* 80 (1990) 26 n. 37; cf. D. I. Owen, *BiOr* 49 (1992) 443. E. Sollberger in 1955 knew of only 54 princesses.



establish the names of the kings from this dynasty. Ur-Nammu's son was Šulgi, and his sons were Amar-Sîn, Šu-Sîn and Ibbi-Sîn. The relationship between Amar-Sîn and Šu-Sîn is complicated and the latter seems to have been jointly reigning with his brother from an early stage.<sup>113</sup> All the information about this royal house comes from the administration documents of the kingdom, about 100,000 texts consisting of receipts and expenditures. There are occasional short notes to indicate the reason for a particular transaction. These clues are currently being systematically categorised and compared with each other in order slowly to build up a more complete picture. Many texts concern animals used as sacrifices. Others mention gifts which the women at court received or distributed on particular occasions.<sup>114</sup> Whenever they had to go on journeys to perform religious duties the associated costs were documented. There was much more going on there at the time.

We get an impression of the unbelievable wealth at court from the administrative documents of the bureau where income was redistributed.<sup>115</sup> This was the royal treasury, found not far from Nippur, where basic materials such as metals, hides, gemstones, and broken objects were brought. In workshops valuable artistic objects were made, and then distributed by messenger to high-ranking men (such as military or foreign delegates) and women (those resident at court). Men would usually receive hand rings and shoes and women golden signet rings and vessels (for the queen) or jewelry (for the *lukur*).<sup>116</sup> To goddesses pairs of silver rings of ten shekels each or vases and ornaments were dedicated.<sup>117</sup> Often the queen was instrumental in all this. On one occasion she remunerated a messenger who had conveyed her greetings (*silima*) with two silver rings as an audience gift.<sup>118</sup> Among the presents dedicated to deities many were given to the goddesses of healing, Gula at Umma, Nin-Isina at Isin, and Nintinuga at Nippur.<sup>119</sup> The texts suggest that this goddess undertook ceremonial boat trips and sometimes there is a reference to a diseased person. Most probably when a member of the royal family became ill they hurriedly gave these goddesses a votive object to ensure

---

**113** F. Pomponio, 'Le sventure di Amar-Suena', SEL 7 (1990) 3–14. However, see also H. Waetzoldt, BiOr 30 (1973) 68.

**114** Weiershäuser, 116 ff., 161 ff.

**115** W. Sallaberger in: *Annäherungen* 3 (1999) 240–252; P. Paoletti, *Der König und sein Kreis. Das staatliche Schatzarchiv der III. Dynastie von Ur* (2012).

**116** Paoletti, 305–311, 'Die geschlechtsspezifische Verteilung der königlichen Geschenke'.

**117** Paoletti, 238 ff., 345.

**118** The queens: Paoletti, 276–279; the rings: 411; JCS 10 (1956) 30 no. 10.

**119** Paoletti, 251–256.

recuperation. Queen Abi-simti was involved.<sup>120</sup> The royal house maintained a special devotion of the health goddesses.<sup>121</sup> An object made of obsidian (*šurru*) was part of the equipment of the goddess. It was a stone with sharp edges to be used when she practised surgery and is referred to in an incantation as ‘obsidian, the blade of Gula’.<sup>122</sup> In the Bible circumcision was performed with obsidian (*šor*) (Exodus 4:25).

Originally in these documents the queen was simply called ‘the wife’ (*dam*) of the king. But after the 21st year of his reign Šulgi assumed for himself a divine status. Then she was given the title *nin*, ‘mistress, queen’, possibly pronounced as *ereš*, and this continued.<sup>123</sup> Sometimes in texts from Ur ‘the place of the queen’ (*ki.nin*) is referred to as well as ‘the place of the king’. It used to be thought that this indicated that she had a separate dwelling in Uruk, the old patriarchal city of the kings of Ur, but on closer examination we see that it may also refer to other towns where the queen might happen to be.<sup>124</sup> After a king had died, his widow could still retain her title, as when Abi-simti kept the title *nin* during the reign of her son Šu-Sin. A wife of a king also held the title *lukur*,<sup>125</sup> something that began after King Šulgi’s year when he considered himself divine.<sup>126</sup> He had four or five women with the title *lukur*, which is actually the title of the second wife of a deity. Why the king would call his wife *lukur* is difficult to understand. Perhaps it was to draw a parallel between himself and the deity, whose first wife beside him was divine, but who also had a series of ‘second wives’ on earth, in convents. The words *lukur* in Sumerian and *nadîtu* in Akkadian refer to such a nun. One supposes that the divine Šulgi saw the goddess Inanna of Uruk as his primary wife, an idea to be derived from the sacred marriage ceremony, so that any earthly spouse was appropriately referred to as his *lukur*.<sup>127</sup> What is difficult to understand is that private persons also had a *lukur*.<sup>128</sup> Sometimes administrative texts distributed barley from ‘the house of the great *lukur*’.<sup>129</sup> A recent discussion

---

120 Paoletti, 255

121 Paoletti, 346.

122 SAT 3 1277 with Paoletti, 252, 254 f., 345 f. The incantation: YOS 11 14 rev. 5, with p. 23.

123 P. Michalowski, JCS 28 (1976) 169–172; P. Steinkeller, ASJ 3 (1981) 81.

124 J. Renger, RIA IV/6–7 (1975) 442, ‘Hofstaat’, § 24; J. van Dijk, SGI II (1960) 49. For other cities see Weiershäuser, 169–176.

125 J. L. Dahl, *The ruling family of Ur III Umma* (2007) 17–19.

126 W. Sallaberger, *Annäherungen* 3 (1999) 182; T. M. Sharlach, *Studies M. Sigrist* (2008) 178 ff. Cf. M. Such-Güterriez, CRRAI 54 [Würzburg] (2012) 327–345.

127 Steinkeller, ASJ 3 (1981) 81, with n. 47.

128 Sallaberger, 182 ff.; Sharlach, 179 n. 11.

129 JCS 23 (1970) 97, on no. 5:2; JCS 46 (1994) 19. All are dated to Šulgi years 32–33.

understands *nin* to mean the status of being the queen, and *lukur* to mean the personal relationship between the king and his wife.<sup>130</sup> It has been thought that *lukur* referred to concubines, but that was wrong, since any wife of the king might be entitled *lukur*. A more elaborate title was ‘the *lukur* of the journey’ referring to a wife whom the king was so fond of that she was allowed to go with him on his official travels.<sup>131</sup> The king of Ur’s travels included many ceremonial boat journeys to sanctuaries. We have already pointed out in Chapter 5 that Old Assyrian merchants took a ‘journey woman’ with them for their pleasure.

The king of Ur was identified with Dumuzi, the herdsman and lover of the goddess Inanna, who was identified with the planet Venus. When the king died, as Dumuzi he was supposed to ascend to heaven where he shone like a star, just like Venus.<sup>132</sup> Geštinana was Dumuzi’s sister. They had a strong bond because she had been willing to take her brother’s place in the netherworld where he was confined for six months of every year. Waqartum, the first queen of Ur, was associated with Geštinana to whom she probably turned to pray for her family. During her life she revered a statue in the temple named Geštinana-Waqartum, and after she died at about the age of seventy the cult was continued by a younger generation.<sup>133</sup> Her husband was King Ur-Nammu who is said to have died suddenly according to the lament over the sudden death of Ur-Nammu, a text which could well have been written by her, since the tone is deeply personal and the emphasis is placed on the misfortune of a widow.<sup>134</sup> Another woman in the house of Ur-Nammu arrived as a result of his diplomatic marriage to the daughter of Apil-ken of Mari. She lived at court as his ‘bride’ and at that time received a new name, Taram-Uram, ‘She loves Ur’, which was clearly politically motivated.<sup>135</sup> She was later given in marriage to Šulgi and became the mother of Amar-Sîn. In the throne-room of Amar-Sîn libations were poured for four kings, his ancestors, the line beginning with Ur-Nammu and this king of Mari, as grandfather.<sup>136</sup>

**130** Weiershäuser, 240. The *lukur* addresses Šulgi as *mudna*; M. Civil, Or. NS 54 (1985) 41 iii 12.

**131** Weiershäuser, 239; G. Leick, *Sex and eroticism in Mesopotamian literature* (1994) 147 ff.

**132** P. Steinkeller, ‘How did Šulgi and Išbi-Erra ascend to heaven?’, in: *Studies P. Machinist* (2013) 459–476.

**133** F. Weiershäuser, CRRAI 54 [Würzburg] (2012) 347–355. The cult had its origins in Lagash.

**134** CRRAI 17 [Brussels] (1969) 86.

**135** M. Civil, Or. NS 54 (1985) 41 vii; earlier see M. Civil in RA 56, 213; J.-M. Durand, MARI 4 (1985) 156.

**136** J. Boese, W. Sallaberger, ‘Apil-kin von Mari und die Könige der III. Dynastie von Ur’, AOF 23 (1996) 24–39.

Šulgi was his successor, and his wife was proclaimed as *Šulgi-simti*, meaning 'Šulgi is my jewel', for the last years of his reign, from his 32nd to his 48th regnal year.<sup>137</sup> She must have died soon after him, for in the first year of Amar-Sîn, his successor, she is given 'a place, where they pour out water'. That would mean a place where libations were made for the dead.<sup>138</sup> She was addressed as Queen (*nin*) and My Lady (*nin.ga*) as well as *lukur*. Šulgi-simti supported the cult of Belat-Šuḥnir and Belat-Terraban, a pair of goddesses otherwise hardly known in the cult but honoured far away from Ur, in Ešnunna, to the east of Baghdad. It seems obvious that Šulgi-simti herself originated from there and brought her goddesses with her when she left. She would have been a foreign princess whom the king married in the interests of international diplomacy.

In one particular group of texts, labelled by M. Sigrist as 'La "Fondation" Šulgi-simti', she figures large.<sup>139</sup> These texts concern the deliveries of livestock, pigs and birds, which she had authorised to be despatched to her by high officials in the kingdom, and more surprisingly by the wives of some of these officials. At least 20% of those supplying the goods were women from the royal family. The ducks and pigeons were intended for Šulgi-simti herself for her meals, but cattle were designated as sacrifices for her two deities as well as other gods, mostly female ones. This business activity seems to be like that at Puzriš-Dagan, which was the centre of a national network for distributing of goods (chiefly animal sacrifices) and had been set up by Šulgi in year 39 of his reign. That there were so many sacrifices was because the king and queen wished to honour the gods liberally, hoping in this way to secure the pleasure of the gods and to guarantee the well-being of the country. Within the cult of the important gods the concubines had no such part to play.

We see that Queen Šulgi-simti industriously played her part in the female side of this pious business. She joined in a celebration for women for the goddess Inanna, called 'The boat of heaven',<sup>140</sup> and she also had many other tasks within the cult, such as celebrating rituals for the moon god on the first, seventh and fifteenth days of every month, with mourning rituals at the end of every month.<sup>141</sup>

**137** Weiershäuser, 31–105.

**138** W. Sallaberger, *Der kultische Kalender der Ur III-Zeit* 1 (1993) 18 ff., 25; 42–48. P. Steinkeller, *ASJ* 3 (1981) 78 f.; S. T. Kang, *SETDA* I (1972) 263–267 (= *BIN* 3 3–5); M. Sigrist, *Drehem* (1992) 222–246. Her predecessor must have been Geme-Sîn, wife (dam) of Šulgi (P. Michalowski, *JCS* 28 [1976] 169–172).

**139** Sigrist, *Drehem* (1992) 222–246; Sallaberger, *Annäherungen* 3 (1999) 253–260.

**140** Weiershäuser, 66–68, 206.

**141** We note that her successor, Queen, participated in a ritual on the last day of the month, not on the first day; Weiershäuser, 181; Wu Yuhong, *JAC* 27 (2012) 120–124.

Ceremonial bathing was part of this ritual. It was intended to protect the king from catastrophe during the inter-mensual moonless nights, traditionally considered to be dangerous.<sup>142</sup>

A remarkable circumstance at the death of Šulgi has been established. When he died three of his wives, including the most prominent, Šulgi-simti, disappeared at the same time, and in the first year of his successor they received offerings for the dead. In the ‘grave of Šulgi’ at Ur excavators found seven bodies. It has been suggested that they might have been murdered, or died from an infectious disease, or it was accepted that royal women would die at the same time as their husbands.<sup>143</sup> The latest theory is that there must have been a bloody rebellion around the time of the death of Šulgi in which his wives and sons perished and a side branch of the royal family took over power. His successor, Amar-Sîn, an outsider, married Šulgi’s widow Abi-simti. The next two kings were sons of Šulgi whom he had fathered with his wives: Ibbi-Sîn with Šulgi-simti and Šu-Sîn with Abi-simti.<sup>144</sup> An original and radical proposal is that Šulgi-simti and Abi-simti are two names for the same wife, who was renamed after the death of Šulgi.<sup>145</sup>

The relationship between the next queens and Amar-Sîn and Šu-Sîn was complicated. That affected their wives, *Abi-simti* in particular,<sup>146</sup> who was the wife of Amar-Sîn and survived him. Babati, the brother of Abi-simti, held three high positions, including that of general of Maškan-šarrum and governor of the province of Awal, both of which are places in Iran. Abi-simti called herself ‘the mother of Šu-Sîn’, so her brother Babati would have been the uncle of King Šu-Sîn.<sup>147</sup> The kingdom under Amar-Sîn and Šu-Sîn possibly owed much to this evidently powerful woman, according to the opinion of R. M. Whiting.

Because her own gods, Dagan, Išhara and Ḫaburitung, came from Syria, we assume that Abi-simti herself came from there. But that does not fit in with any link with Iran. Half of her ritual texts concern rites at the end of every month, designed to ward off the possible bad effects of the disappearance of the moon for the three unlucky inter-mensual moonless nights. This short period was the time

---

**142** Weiershäuser in: S. Schroer, *Images and gender* (2006) 270 ff.

**143** P. Michalowski, ‘The death of Šulgi’, *Or. NS* 46 (1977) 220–225; cf. *JCS* 31 (1979) 171–176 (on Geme-Ninlila); critical observations were made by W. W. Hallo, *Studies H. Tadmor* (1991) 157 ff.

**144** P. Michalowski, *Studies P. Machinist* (2013) 289–320.

**145** Wu Yuhong, Wang Junna, ‘The identifications of Šulgi-simti, wife of Šulgi, with Abi-simti, mother of Amar-Sin and Šu-Sin, and of Ur-Sin, the crown prince, with Amar-Sin’, *JAC* 27 (2012) 99–130.

**146** Weiershäuser, 105–150.

**147** R. M. Whiting, *JCS* 28 (1976) 178–182; cf. the seal inscription PDT II 1200. A later corrupt copy: C. B. F. Walker, *JCS* 35 (1983) 91–96.

when the spirits of the ancestors were venerated,<sup>148</sup> a task which could be undertaken by women (see further Chapter 29 where the woman in divine worship is discussed). Abi-simti was also the mother of Šu-Sîn, the successor to Amar-Sîn, and she conducted this ritual during his nine-year reign. When this son of hers died she also disappeared, directly gaining ‘the place where water is poured out’. So she also died at the same time. Afterwards Geme-Enlila, the wife of Ibbi-Sîn, his successor, assumed her role in the ritual.<sup>149</sup> It is important to remember that two powerful queens evidently disappeared at the same time as their kings, Šulgi-simti at the death of Šulgi, and Abi-simti at the death of her son Šu-Sîn.<sup>150</sup>

The wife of Šu-Sîn, *Kubatam*, has become a well-documented figure in scholarly research.<sup>151</sup> On an agate stone set in a chain was an inscription dedicating it to her and describing her as ‘the beloved wife of Šu-Sîn’.<sup>152</sup> Elsewhere she is called *nin* ‘the queen’. During her lifetime offerings were made to her statue.<sup>153</sup> Unusually, we even have a Sumerian song alluding to the birth of a child to Šu-Sîn, which may possibly have been composed by one of his wives. It begins like this:

She is clear, she has given birth! She is clear, she has given birth!  
The queen is clear, she has given birth! Abi-simti is clear, she has given birth!  
The queen is clear, she has given birth!  
My clothbeam which, as it aspired to,  
made a good job of the cloth, my Abi-simti,  
And my warpbeam which, as it aspired to,  
got warp on, my queen Kubatam.<sup>154</sup>

From the text of the song it is not clear who is actually speaking, the king or a woman of the palace. Perhaps in the first lines it is Abi-simti who announces the birth of the child of the king and Kubatam. Some parts are composed in *eme.sal*, women’s language. What it possibly means to say is that Abi-simti had indeed given birth to Šu-Sîn earlier, and now Kubatam presented him with a child.

---

148 Weiershäuser, 120–125.

149 Sallaberger, ‘Abi-simti und Geme-Enlila: Schwarzmontag’, *Der kultische Kalender der Ur-III-Zeit* 1 (1993) 60–63.

150 Whiting, 182; Sallaberger, 61.

151 Weiershäuser, 153–164.

152 E. A. Braun-Holzinger, *Mesopotamische Weihgaben*, 368, P (= Perle) 17; H. Steible, *Die neu-sumerischen Bau- und Weihinschriften* 2 (1991) 273 no. 23.

153 Steinkeller, *ASJ* 3 (1981) 80.

154 See Y. Sefati, *Love songs in Sumerian literature* (1998) 344–352 (‘The ideal lover’); cf. Th. Jacobsen in: *Essays M. H. Pope* (1987) 57–60; idem, *The harps that once* (1987) 95–96 (‘The First Child’); B. Alster, *RA* 79 (1985) 138–142; and the interpretation of G. Leick, *Sex and eroticism* (1994) 113–116. The most recent interpretation was given by M. Widell, *JNES* 70 (2011) 289–302.

The verses about the loom and the weaver's beams with the warp and weft are unclear, but perhaps refer metaphorically to weaving together the developing child. A similar metaphor is found in Psalm 139:15, where the poet claims to have been 'embroidered' in his mother's womb. What then follows in the song is somewhat clearer. The young mother says she is happy with the golden pin, the seal made of lapis lazuli, and the rings which she had received from 'the lord, my Šu-Sîn' and she speaks enthusiastically about him and his attractiveness in the last lines of the song:

My Šu-Sîn, who made me happy, my Šu-Sîn, beloved of the god Enlil, my king, the god of his country.

We know of a woman named Kubatum who was the 'nanny of the king', and scholars have concluded that she is the same young mother in this song. They have reconstructed a fine career for her, progressing from a children's maid to the queen.<sup>155</sup>

The wife of Ibbi-Sîn was called *Geme-Enlila*. Someone with the same name, the *lukur* of Ninurta, was called the daughter of Šu-Sîn and Kubatum. If, as has been assumed, both names refer to the same person, it would mean that Ibbi-Sîn was married to his sister. A better solution is to assume that two different women had the same name.<sup>156</sup>

In some religious festivals the wives of kings or governors took a leading role.<sup>157</sup> Inasmuch as queens and concubines could own landed estates, manage weaving centres, and have their own private staff, they could become so important that men viewed them as their 'brother'.<sup>158</sup>

A king had several wives,<sup>159</sup> as many as six according to one text.<sup>160</sup> On a stone of red agate belonging to Ea-niša she identifies herself as the *lukur* of King Šulgi. Seals and other inscriptions also describe her as the 'lukur-of-the-journey'

---

**155** Weiershäuser, 154 ff. Earlier see M. Sigrist, RA 80 (1986) 185. B. R. Foster, SEL 2 (1985) 37–42, could not have known that the ladies Rabbatum and Kubatum (in his lines 4–5) were probably wet-nurses. Date: Šu-Sîn 4. Note that the translations of Sigrist and Weiershäuser, with their 'nourrice' and 'Amme', are wrong; this woman does not breast-feed. UM+ME(.ga.lá) = 'wet-nurse', UM.ME.da (emeda) = 'nurse'.

**156** Michalowski, ASJ 4 (1982) 136 ff.; W. Sallaberger, ZA 82 (1992) 134, on PDT II 1056; Weiershäuser, 165.

**157** W. Sallaberger, *Annäherungen* 3 (1999) 185.

**158** Weiershäuser, 103, 148 (textiles), 208 (staff), 209 ('brother').

**159** Weiershäuser, 'Nebenfrauen', 201–240. For the scheme king – queen – *lukur* see p. 201; also Sallaberger, *Annäherungen* 3, 183.

**160** Michalowski, ASJ 4, 133–136; M. van de Mieroop, Or. NS 50 (1986) 148.

of Šulgi, and on one seal she is depicted as paying homage to Šulgi,<sup>161</sup> with an inscription saying she was given it by the king:

Šulgi, the strong man, king of Ur, king of the four corners of the world, gave (this) to Ea-niša, his *lukur*-of-the-journey.

A necklace found during the excavations in Uruk, had 22 stones of cornelian and 13 of agate strung on a silver wire and set in gold (Figure 39). On one of the agate stones was an inscription showing that a wife of Šu-Sîn had owned the necklace:<sup>162</sup>

Tiamat-bašti, the beloved *lukur* of Šu-Sîn, the king of Ur.

She came from far-off Nineveh, with her own goddess Šawuška, and therefore her marriage had also fostered a political alliance. Beside it lay another necklace strung on golden wire, with a stone inscribed with the name of Queen Kubatum, ‘the beloved *lukur* of Šu-Sîn’.<sup>163</sup>

A stone in the shape of an eye, made of agate, dates to the time of the last king of Ur. On it is a dedication to the goddess Bau on behalf of the king by the wife of a provincial ruler:

To Bau, her mistress, for the life of Ibbi-Sîn, Aman-ili, the wife of Ir-Nanna, the governor of Lagash, has dedicated (this).

Bau was the goddess of the city of Lagash.<sup>164</sup>

**161** For the agate stone see A. Pohl, *Or. NS 16 (1947) 464 ff.*, Plate XXXIII. For seals see P. Steinkeller, *RA 73 (1979) 190*, with J.-P. Grégoire, 190 f.; R. H. Mayr, D. I. Owen, *Festschrift G. Pettinato (2004) 149 no. 1, 152 ff.*, 167; for lit. see Weiershäuser, 207 n. 901. For a copy of an inscription see M. Civil, *Or. NS 54 (1985) 41 iii 7–9*; see further Weiershäuser, 206–211.

**162** J. Boese in: W. Orthmann, *Der Alte Orient (1974) plate 123, b*, with p. 212 ff.; *Mesopotamische Weihgaben (1991) 368 P 16*; Steible, *Die neusumerischen Bau- und Weihinschriften 2 (1991) 272 no. 22*. Studied by C. Wilcke, *Drevnij Vostok 3 (Jerevan 1988) 21–26, 225–227*; NABU 1990/36; Weierhäuser, 226–228. For the inscriptions see A. Cavigneaux, *Uruk (1996) 209 nos. 315–317*.

**163** *Mesopotamische Weihgaben (1991) 368 P 17*. Both necklaces P 16 and 17 are extensively covered by K. Limper, *Uruk. Perlen. Ketten. Anhänger. Grabungen 1912–1985 (= AUWE 2) (1988) nos. 140 (Kubatum), 141 (Tiamat-bašti)*.

**164** W. G. Lambert, *Iraq 41 (1979) 44* with plate XIV, bottom right.





**Fig. 39:** Necklace of Queen Tiamat-bašti with an inscription: 'Tiamat-bašti, beloved consort (*lukur*) of Šu-Sîn, the king of Ur'. Thirteen pearls of agate are mounted in gold, and twenty-two of cornelian are strung on a silver thread. This necklace was found intertwined with that of Queen Kubatum. 2000 BC. Maximum length 4.1 cm. *Iraq Museum, Baghdad.*

### 23.5.1 Princesses from Ur

The birth of a child (a son?) was greeted at court with presents and offerings.<sup>165</sup> A particularly informative text from the time of King Amar-Sîn (year 4) lists twelve princesses, undoubtedly including some who would have been daughters of his predecessor Šulgi. Some are referred to as ‘the wife’ of a prominent official. Their names are followed by the names Kinat-Nunu and Kubatum, two royal nannies,<sup>166</sup> a court position which is often mentioned. These women all had Akkadian names. Often we find an ayah of a named princess, and sometimes of ‘the king’. Rabbatum progressed from being the wet-nurse of Simat-Ištaran to her ayah, one year later.<sup>167</sup>

Princesses were to be married off to foreign monarchs, generals and high priests or officials.<sup>168</sup> King Šu-Sîn married off his daughter (‘he gave her as a bride’) to someone in the land of Simanum. He then relates how these regions revolted and ‘drove his daughter away from her residence (*é.ki.tuš*)’. In the war that followed he subjected Simanum, Ḫabura and their territories and had his daughter return to her residence.<sup>169</sup> The year name for his third year commemorated this campaign. His daughter was given the domineering name, Kunši-matum, ‘Submit, O land!’, a name also given later to a princess in Mari. A later king of Isin married off his daughter to Anšan (Persia) and she had a name with similar political overtones, Matum-niattum, ‘The land is ours’.<sup>170</sup> Administrative texts dated to year 1 of Šu-Sîn name this Princess Kunši-matum as the ‘bride’ of Aribatal, the ‘man’ of the land of Simanum. But she had gone there years earlier with his father Pušam and had evidently been living as ‘the bride’ before Aribatal was the monarch. She lived there with this title for twelve years, and is last mentioned in year 2 of Šu-Sîn. Princess Tabur-ḫattum, ‘May the sceptre endure’, was ‘the bride’ of Ur-Iškur, the ruler of Ḫamazi for at least seven years.<sup>171</sup> So a princess who was married off retained this title of ‘bride’, as we saw earlier with the bride

<sup>165</sup> Sallaberger, *Annäherungen* 3, 185.

<sup>166</sup> CTMMA I 17 ii 5–55 with M. Sigrist, RA 80 (1986) 185; H. Neumann, JNES 53 (1994) 62.

<sup>167</sup> Steinkeller, ASJ 3 (1981) 90; M. Sigrist, *Drehem* (1992) 361: the nurse of the king; see also P. J. Watson, *Birmingham* I no. 77:2. On ME (Simat)-Ištaran, see Sallaberger, 59 ff.

<sup>168</sup> P. Michalowski in: M. Gibson, R. D. Biggs, *The organization of power* (1987) 58 ff.; W. Sallaberger, *Annäherungen* 3, 159–161, ‘Heiratspolitik zur Ur III-Zeit’; Weiershäuser, ‘Politische Ehen’, 260–266.

<sup>169</sup> M. Civil, JCS 21 (1967) 29–31; Wilcke, NABU 1990/33.

<sup>170</sup> F. Vallat, NABU 1996/87.

<sup>171</sup> Weiershäuser, 263 ff.; P. Michalowski, ‘The Bride of Simanum’, JAOS 95 (1975) 716–719. For the situation in Simanum, see J. Klein, ZA 80 (1990) 22.

of Ur-Nammu. In the Old Babylonian period a seal of a princess married off in this fashion would describe her as ‘the bride’.<sup>172</sup> Princesses were married off to foreign monarchs. But in the Ur III period many married high officials, such as chancellors and generals in the provinces, a subject we will not elaborate on here.<sup>173</sup>

Princess Šat-Sîn, a daughter of Šulgi, owned estates. In the time of Šu-Sîn we find her in Kakkulatam, but her land was in the province of Girsu, far away from that city. At this time she appears to have taken a new name, Šat-Šu-Sîn, ‘the one belonging to Šu-Sîn’.<sup>174</sup> Another woman in Šulgi’s court, Ninkala, also owned land, and on one occasion had the title *nin* ‘queen’.<sup>175</sup> A town near Sippar in the Old Babylonian period is called ‘House of the Daughter of Šulgi’, suggesting that an estate here had belonged to a princess.<sup>176</sup> Princess Simat-Ištaran from Garšana had estates in or near three major Sumerian cities and a village was named after her. She was married to a general.<sup>177</sup> Some princesses are known only by their names, names without a face or biography.<sup>178</sup>

What life was like for women at court we do not know. The musicians and singers produced songs for celebrations, at the dedication of a statue or at the appearance of the new moon. Their names are often Akkadian, such as the singer Šî-šarrat, ‘She is the queen’, referring to the goddess Šara. We read this name in a document which can be taken to be her death certificate, for such documents did then exist.<sup>179</sup>

## 23.6 The Old Babylonian period

We know little of the harems of the major empires in the Old Babylonian period, Larsa, Isin, and Babylon (2000–1500 BC).<sup>180</sup> We have the cylinder seal of a wife of King Rim-Sîn with the simple inscription: ‘Beltani, daughter of Ḫabannum, wife

**172** OECT 13 nos. 7 and 12; Šat-Sîn, the daughter of Sumu-El, king of Larsa, married to Ibni-šadû.

**173** Weiershäuser, ‘Der innenpolitische Bereich’, 264–266; P. Michalowski in: *The organization of power* (1987) 58 ff. For a prince who marries into the family of a temple official see R. Kutscher, *Tel Aviv* 11 (1984) 184.

**174** Kutscher, 183–187; K. Maekawa, *ASJ* 14 (1992) 200 ff.; Michalowski in: *The organization of power*, 59 n. 18; it is not discussed by Weiershäuser.

**175** Weiershäuser, 211–226; K. Maekawa, *ASJ* 9 (1987) 102 ff.; 104–109.

**176** *RGTC* 3 (1980) 66.

**177** M. Such-Gutiérrez, *RIA* XII/7–8 (2011) 505.

**178** R. Pruzsinszki, *WZKM* 97 (2007) 342–349, ‘Die Sängerinnen des Königs’.

**179** R. Pruzsinszki, *WZKM* 97 (2007) 342–349, ‘Die Sängerinnen des Königs’.

**180** Life at the Old Babylonian court: D. Charpin in *Mesopotamien. Die altbabylonische Zeit* (= *OBO* 160/4) (2004) 248–258.

of Rim-Sîn, the king of Larsa'. On the seal he is depicted in the usual devout pose of a king in the presence of his guardian goddess.<sup>181</sup> The laws of Hammurabi refer to the *sekretu* (written *zikrum*), a harem woman, in connection with the eunuch, both of whom were allowed to adopt a son (§ 192–193). In another text a *sekretu* is associated with 'the house of the eldest son', probably the crown prince.<sup>182</sup> In two Sumerian tales the king seeks the advice of a *sekretu* who clearly lives at the court.<sup>183</sup> Elsewhere she is mentioned among palace personnel as 'the woman providing shadow' for the king,<sup>184</sup> An omen prediction links the word *sekretu* with an unusual term *sikru*. Since both words are cognate with the verb *sekēru*, 'to enclose', here *sikru* must have been the harem, the place where the women were enclosed:

Nanaya will let the *sekretu*, the darling of the king, go outside from the *sikru*.

In a variant it is the king who ousts the *sekretu* from the *sikru*.<sup>185</sup> Omens predicted unexpected situations, and here we see the lascivious goddess Nanaya sending the most striking of these ladies out on the street. In Neo-Assyrian inscriptions she was named after the queen, sometimes again with the formal designation 'the darling of the king'.<sup>186</sup> By definition 'the darling of the king' is the lady in the palace who was his favourite concubine. She may have been a lady of means because one omen prediction says 'a *sekretu* will die and her heritage will devolve on the palace'.<sup>187</sup> Generally, a *sekretu* was any woman confined to the harem.<sup>188</sup> In the court of Mari she had a low status within the personnel. She can hardly have been more than a servant.<sup>189</sup>

There were foreign princesses in the harem as a consequence of political marriages.<sup>190</sup> A daughter of Hammurabi was married off to the king of Ešnunna,

---

**181** Photo: E. Klengel-Brandt, *Mit sieben Siegeln versehen* (1997) 74 Abb. 64. Inscription: RIME 4 (1990) 301 ff.

**182** CUSAS 29 no. 139; cf. M. Gallery, *Afo* 27 (1980) 11 n. 53.

**183** In 'The Old Man and the Girl' (mentioned in the discussion of impotence in Chapter 4) and 'The three ox-drivers from Adab'; A. Gadotti in: M. W. Chavalas, *Women in the Ancient Near East* (2014) 65–68.

**184** Sumerian SAL an-dùl; *Mélanges H. Limet* (1996) 118 ii 11, with p. 125 (= *sekretu*).

**185** YOS 10 46 iv 49 f.; variant in JCS 63 (2011) 73:1. Cf. CAD N/1 342b.

**186** A. Fadhil, *Baghd. Mitt.* 21 (1990) 461:6, with p. 467. A combination frequent in astrological omens.

**187** YOS 10 26 iii 31 (variant *sekertu*), CUSAS 18 (2013) 160:12b, with p. 165a.

**188** S. Parpola, *Studies F. M. Fales* (2012) 614 f.

**189** N. Ziegler, *Le Harem* (1999) 83–86.

**190** B. Lafont, *Amurru* 2 (2001) 312–315, 'Les alliances matrimoniales', with surveys and discussion.

but a few years later Hammurabi conquered that region and flooded the city. We know more about the two opposing northern powers, Assyria (which then had its capital at Ekallatum) and Mari. First we note that there were marriages between equals in this power struggle, on the one axis between Ekallatum and Qatna (in the West, Syria), and on the other between Mari and Aleppo. Then there were often marriages between unequal partners, as when King Zimri-Lim of Mari married his daughters and sisters off to various kings of territories in the north, to keep whatever power they exerted under his own control. But he did not arrange marriages with the superpowers in the south, such as Babylonia, even though Hammurabi was his ally. This was possibly because the Babylonians belonged to a different group of tribes, the Benjaminites, Sons of the South, whereas Zimri-Lim was a Son of the North.<sup>191</sup>

A letter from Šušarra includes some apprehensive concerns that the Assyrian king Samsi-Addu was once able to include a clause in a state treaty saying that he would give their whole land to a foreign princess as a bride-price. He had written to the father of the princess:

I want to make a golden statue of you and of me, where the one is holding the neck of the other tightly. I want to give you my daughter and as the bride-price for my daughter (*šarrākūtu*) I want to give you the land of Šušarra.<sup>192</sup>

It is interesting that a statue seals this pact. Possibly such a statue was found in Ebla. A later historical-literary text tells us that an evil king of Babylon offered his harem women to two foreign lands as a gift.<sup>193</sup>

### 23.6.1 Mari

The Old Babylonian kingdom of Mari, between 1800 and 1760 BC, needs to be discussed separately, for from there we have so much information on the harem, dating from the last twenty years of independence before Hammurabi conquered

<sup>191</sup> D. Charpin, J.-M. Durand, RA 80 (1986) 171 ff.; Lafont, 314.

<sup>192</sup> J. Eidem, *The Shemshara archives*. 1. *The letters* (2001) no. 71 (= SH. 891), with B. Lafont, Amurru 2 (2001) 313 n. 415. Here the special word for 'dowry' (*šarrākūtu*) which is used elsewhere to describe female slaves as part of the dowry; M. Stol, *Studies A. Skaist* (2012) 163.

<sup>193</sup> RIMB 2 (1995) 121 iii 44: 'He adorns his harem lady (SAL.ŠĀ.Ē.GAL-šu) and gives (her) as a present (*ana šalmanūti*) to the land Ḫatti (= Syria) and Elam.' Cf. S. W. Cole, ZA 84 (1994) 220–252.

the city.<sup>194</sup> During the excavations of the palace an area called by the excavators ‘La Seconde Maison’, was the harem.<sup>195</sup> It was in an isolated corner, which possibly explains why it was called *tubqu* ‘the corner’, although more formally it was referred to as ‘The house of the women’. It had its own entrance door, which was guarded by females inside and by males outside. These functionaries are named in ration lists. The meaning of the names of the men include ‘Let there be order’, ‘Keep the word of the king’, ‘Support them more than the gods’, where ‘them’ refers to the women in the harem.<sup>196</sup> A letter gives instructions for assigning rooms to men and women. The king’s women are referred to generally as ‘the slave-girls of my lord’ and they had rooms deep inside the palace, an area known as ‘guarded’ or ‘secret’. Such a designation makes it explicit that the harem was a closed area, corresponding semantically to the Arabic term *ḥarīm*.<sup>197</sup>

Those living there were provided with regular allowances of sesame oil, and on occasions also wool. For some reason barley is not mentioned, though this was certainly distributed in other harems. The women at Mari may simply have been issued with prepared food directly from the kitchens.<sup>198</sup> Ration lists in the archives of the harem of Ašnakku record only beer, showing how one-sided the available documentation can be.<sup>199</sup> The order in which the names are listed and the quantity of oil allowed indicate the relative positions of the women in the harem. We have lists from the harems of three successive kings. The list of King Yaḥdun-Lim is short but includes the names of the women’s fathers, probably kings or sheikhs.<sup>200</sup> One of the royal daughters would later marry a high official, the diviner Asqudum. We see a similar marriage between a diviner and a princess in the town of Karanâ, also from this period.<sup>201</sup> There are 22 lists from the time of Yasmaḥ-Addu, the Assyrian viceroy, from which we can see how in the course of time the order of precedence among the women changed. From the time of King Zimri-Lim we have a long list of allocations of oil and wool.<sup>202</sup> These last two

**194** For the harems of all the kings of Mari see J.-M. Durand, ‘Les dames du Palais de Mari à l’époque du royaume de Haute-Mésopotamie’, *MARI* 4 (1985) 385–436. Zimri-Lim: N. Ziegler, *Le Harem de Zimrî-Lîm* (= *Florilegium Marianum* IV) (1999). For a popular survey see B. Lafont in: J. Bottéro, *Initiation à l’Orient ancien* (1992) 170–183.

**195** Durand in: E. Levy, *Le système palatial* (1987) 80–89; Durand, Margueron, *Journal des Savants* 1980, 253–280.

**196** Ziegler, *Le Harem*, 16, 110–116.

**197** Ziegler, *Florilegium Marianum* IX (2007) 32–35 no. 3 with note (8).

**198** Ziegler, *Le Harem*, 25–27. The other harems are those of Ebla and Arrapha.

**199** A. Millet Albà in: *Chagar Bazar (Syrie)* III (2008) 44–61, 238–279, ‘Le harem de Sin-iqīšam’.

**200** Durand, 431.

**201** D. Charpin in: G. D. Young, *Mari in retrospect* (1992) 62; cf. *MARI* 4 (1985) 456.

**202** Edited by N. Ziegler, *Le Harem* (1999).

kings, viceroy Yasmaḥ-Addu and Zimri-Lim, were enemies, but it is striking that their lists are very similar in structure and have the same names in them.<sup>203</sup> We now know that all three kings simply took over the harems of their predecessor. This happened also in the conquered city of Ašlakkâ, where Zimri-Lim discovered three harems previously conquered by its king.<sup>204</sup> To take possession of the harem was an important symbol of having seized power over a city, as is shown in the Old Testament when rebellious Absalom was given such advice, which he immediately followed:

Absalom said to Ahitophel, ‘Give us your advice: how shall we act?’ Ahitophel answered, ‘Lie with your father’s concubines whom he left in charge of the palace. Then all Israel will come to hear that you have given great cause of offence to your father, and this will confirm the resolution of your followers.’ So they set up a tent for Absalom on the roof, and he lay with his father’s concubines in the sight of all Israel (2 Samuel 16:20–23; REB).

We can follow in texts from Mari how the conquered harem with its personnel was integrated. The names of a few women listed can be linked to letters saying what happened to them.<sup>205</sup> The women from the conquered harem were kept together as a group,<sup>206</sup> but captured priestesses were treated more carefully.<sup>207</sup> The career of Dam-ḥuraši was typical. She was a princess from Qatna, to the west near Damascus, and the daughter of King Amud-pi-El. His name has been equated with that of ‘Amraphel, king of Shinar’, one of the kings in conflict with Abraham (see Genesis 14:1). She became the wife of the Assyrian Yasmaḥ-Addu and at court was referred to as *Bēltum* ‘the Mistress’. Zimri-Lim drove Yasmaḥ-Addu from Mari and took over Dam-ḥuraši as his first wife, thus maintaining a good diplomatic relationship with Qatna. As king you had to think of everything. He also married Šibtum, the daughter of the king of Aleppo to the north, who was similarly referred to as Beltum. By her energy she became increasingly important and gave birth to twins, a boy and a girl.<sup>208</sup>

If we examine the lists of the names under Yasmaḥ-Addu and Zimri-Lim more closely, we see that both begin with deities whose statues were evidently in the

---

**203** For a survey see Ziegler, 33–38.

**204** Durand, 389. This custom, with new data, was discussed by N. Ziegler, ‘Le harem du vaincu’, RA 93 (1999) 1–26. See also Durand, CRRAI 38 [Paris] (1992) 109. Ašlakkâ: B. Lion, Amurru 3 (2004) 218.

**205** P. Marelli, ‘Esclaves et reines’, Florilegium Marianum II (1994) 115–129.

**206** Ziegler, *Le Harem*, 36–38.

**207** Durand, LAPO 18 (2000) 347 ff.

**208** Durand, LAPO 18, 264 ff., 295–299. He now identifies the *bēltum* from Qatna with Dam-ḥuraši. Cf. Ziegler, RA 93 (1999) 8 ff.

harem and were worshipped there. For Zimri-Lim there are two female deities, and for Yasmaḥ-Addu first of all the god Dagan and then four goddesses. Only after this are the women listed. We note here that women who had come from abroad, and now had become queens in Mari, could bring their own gods with them and honour them. In the Hebrew Bible Jezebel, the wife of Ahab, did the same, bringing with her her Baal idols.<sup>209</sup> This was the reason that a king from the North wrote to Zimri-Lim,

You have given a bride to this house and now I have installed your gods.<sup>210</sup>

### 23.6.2 The harem of Yasmaḥ-Addu

Among the leading women of the Assyrian viceroy Yasmaḥ-Addu was a group of three, which included the queen. The first woman was *Kunši-matum*, a priestess. She was not always mentioned in the lists, for she lived away in the city of Terqa, where she would pray in the temple of Dagan for the welfare of the family. This she did as the daughter of King Samsi-Addu and the sister of Yasmaḥ-Addu, fulfilling a religious obligation placed on certain royal daughters. It is noteworthy that after his conquest of Mari Zimri-Lim retained her as a priestess.<sup>211</sup> The second wife, the queen, was referred to as *Bēltum*, which was not her personal name but her title, literally ‘Mistress’. This was the usual designation for a queen in the Old Babylonian period, and the Sumerian word *nin*, ‘queen’, could also mean ‘mistress’.<sup>212</sup> This *Dam-ḥuraši*, queen of Yasmaḥ-Addu, was certainly foreign, a princess from far-off Qatna. From a number of letters we can trace how this marriage was arranged by the respective fathers of the bride and the groom. Other texts document how the bride made the long journey, travelling through the northern regions to reach Mari.<sup>213</sup> The third woman in the group was *Ama-duga*, a Sumerian name meaning ‘Good mother’. She was the wife of King Samsu-Addu of Assyria and the mother of Yasmaḥ-Addu. She came to Mari with two other women to live with her son as queen mother, and she continued to live there as the head of the household after Zimri-Lim took control.<sup>214</sup> From her seal impressions we learn

<sup>209</sup> Ziegler, 6 ff.; *Le Harem*, 40 ff.

<sup>210</sup> ARM 28 27:4–9 with p. 35 (on Šibtum).

<sup>211</sup> Durand, MARI 4 (1985) 389 ff., 396–398.

<sup>212</sup> Durand, 402. *Dam-ḥuraši* and Šibtum were also called Beltum at the time of Zimri-Lim.

<sup>213</sup> Durand, 398–407; also in MARI 6 (1990) 276–295; N. Ziegler, *Florilegium Marianum IX* (2007) 149–151.

<sup>214</sup> Durand, 395, 408–412; Ziegler, *Le Harem*, 98 ff.



that one of her titles was ‘the slave-girl of Samsi-Addu’, and another ‘the slave-girl of Zimri-Lim’, the conqueror who had kept her on in service.<sup>215</sup>

A second group of three women may have been concubines, according to J.-M. Durand, for the real wife, the queen, was Beltum. All three were probably from noble families and were transferred from the harem of the earlier king, Yaḥ-dun-Lim.<sup>216</sup> The first of these was Izamu, who dedicated a statue to Ištar. In the inscription she identifies herself as ‘the musician, who embellishes the prayer of her lord Yasmaḥ-Addu’. These words may mean that she ‘embellishes’ the prayer with music or singing. As the wife of Yasmaḥ-Addu she led a choir, and continued to do so in the harem of Zimri-Lim.<sup>217</sup> The list does not indicate the positions each woman held. All we have are their names preceded by the amount of oil they were allowed. Nevertheless, the identification of the women is reasonably certain, and in the harem texts of Zimri-Lim the function of each group is indicated.

The most important woman at court may well have been *Adad-duri*, most probably the queen mother, the mother of Zimri-Lim.<sup>218</sup> After her death Queen *Šibtum* assumed that position. She is named in letters and in administrative texts, from which we learn that her duties extended to arranging for deliveries of oil for the lamps in her house. She employed a large staff, and from her estates she granted loans of great quantities of barley for food. Because some of these loans had not been paid back when she died they were passed over to Princess Inibšina, who herself had many similar claims. Debtors who still had debts to repay included a merchant and two goldsmiths, important members of society, and also cities in the countryside. After some years the palace took action and sent in the bailiff to recover the debts.<sup>219</sup> Princesses seem not to have owned property in their own right. What property there was consisted of agricultural land (from various provinces), gardens, livestock, domestic goods, barley and personnel.<sup>220</sup>

Adad-duri was responsible for the production of costly crockery for the temples. A receipt for oil for the ‘offering for the dead of the kings’ is authenticated with her seal,<sup>221</sup> and she herself brought offerings. She also reported to the king prophetic dreams she had had and told him about the visions other people

---

**215** D. Charpin in: G. D. Young, *Mari in retrospect* (1992) 64 ff., 67.

**216** Durand, 412 ff.; cf. 393.

**217** Ziegler, *Le Harem*, 76–78. ‘Embellishing (*mudammīqatu*) the prayer’ occurs in MARI 3 (1984) 56 no. 7:5. See Chapter 29, note 28.

**218** Ziegler, 50 ff.; J.-M. Durand, LAPO 18, 273–295.

**219** D. Charpin, CRRAI 51 [Chicago] (2008) 3–16.

**220** For surveys see F. van Koppen, *Florilegium Marianum VI* (2002) 324–327.

**221** *Florilegium Marianum III* (1997) 207, 220 no. 30.

had had (see Chapter 28). That she followed political developments with care and concern can be seen from this cautious warning she gave to the king:

Previously my lord spoke to me like this: 'I always set out in accordance with omens favourable to me'. Must my lord now again set out in accordance with omens favourable to him? Let my lord not fail to take care of himself.<sup>222</sup>

She is worried about her son the king setting out on a military campaign relying on the good omens. She wanted him nevertheless to be cautious. His confidence in her ability to get things done is shown in a letter asking her to get some new stables built.

To Adad-duri: thus says your lord. I hear more and more about the white horses of Qatna: these horses are good! Have a stable built on the day that you peruse this letter, in the yard of the Coloured House, near the gate (...), so that there is shade to shelter from the heat of the day (?). Have them cut (reeds) so that the horses can lie on it and feed them with barley.<sup>223</sup>

At this time horses from the high north, used chiefly for the speedy transmission of messages, were still a curiosity. White horses provoked considerable interest and a central part of the palace was rebuilt to house them.

### 23.6.3 The harem of Zimri-Lim

Living in the harem of Zimri-Lim were the women of the royal family and their young children, singing girls, domestic staff, and the male and female guards. In the list of women who had sworn allegiance are nine princesses, eight wives of the king, singing girls, domestic staff, sentinels and other personnel.<sup>224</sup> After the names of the two goddesses we find those of three ladies from the house of Zimri-Lim, Inibšina, Adad-duri and Dam-ḥuraši. Adad-duri was the mother of the king but, since she no longer appears in the later, larger list, she may have left to live on her own.<sup>225</sup> Dam-ḥuraši was the wife of Zimri-Lim. Then come the names of eight daughters and five wives, followed by those of the singing girls.<sup>226</sup>

<sup>222</sup> ARM 10 54:8–18 with LAPO 18 (2000) 280 no. 1097.

<sup>223</sup> ARM 10 147 with LAPO 18, 290 ff. no. 1110; for the location see D. Charpin, *Hammurabi de Babylone* (2003) 146 ff.

<sup>224</sup> N. Ziegler, *Le Harem*, 8, 19 (no. 31).

<sup>225</sup> Thus Durand in E. Levy, *Le système palatial* (1987) 87. For her death, see note 218. For the wives of Zimri-Lim, see Ziegler, 44 ff., 52–59.

<sup>226</sup> Ziegler, 125 ff. no. 1; earlier T. 313, with Durand, 409.

A later text is fuller, listing the function of the women after each group of names.<sup>227</sup> It begins similarly with two goddesses followed by Inibšina, here called ‘the priestess of Adad’. Like Kunši-matum in the harem of Yasmaḥ-Addu, the first woman is again a priestess. There then follow the names of eight ‘daughters of the king’, the princesses. These princesses must have been adults. Three come from the harem of Yasmaḥ-Addu. It is interesting to note what was ahead for these princesses, for they were mostly married off to petty kings in the land of Ida-maraš to the north.<sup>228</sup> This is a subject which will be more fully discussed later. This list continues with six names with no further description, but in fact we know that they were all royal wives.<sup>229</sup> We have a seal impression of one of them, Yataraya, where she calls herself the ‘slave-girl of Zimri-Lim’, but does not give the name of her father. This short identification contrasts with the fuller titles on the seal of Queen Šibtum, ‘Šibtum, daughter of Yarim-Lim, wife of Zimri-Lim’. This shows her to be a higher-ranking ‘spouse’, leaving the epithet ‘the slave-girl’ for a lower wife.<sup>230</sup> Some ‘slave-girls of the king’ were high-ranking concubines, entitled to receive a sheep from the food offerings as food. The musician Izamu held this title.<sup>231</sup>

After these we find the names of ‘greater’ and ‘lesser’ *musicians*. The word *nāru*, ‘musician’, can mean an instrumentalist (as it did at Mari) or a singer.<sup>232</sup> At one time there were 600 women in the harem, each named, recipients of oil, with about 200 of them musicians. They had the status of slaves.<sup>233</sup> In the ‘house for lyre players’ there were 36 women. Only women played the lyre.<sup>234</sup> The women belonging to the harem of Yasmaḥ-Addu were chiefly musicians. He enjoyed music and his music teacher called himself his ‘friend’.<sup>235</sup> The lists of women were frequently followed by ‘female teachers’ (*mušaḥizātu*), who probably gave music lessons. A music teacher also had the job of selecting women

**227** Ziegler no. 3; earlier M. Birot, RA 50 (1956) 57–72 (‘TEM IV’); cf. Durand, MARI 4, 390.

**228** B. Lafont, ‘Les filles du roi de Mari’, in: Durand, *La Femme* (1987) 113–123; B. F. Batto, *Studies on women at Mari* (1994) 37 ff.

**229** Durand indicates that they were occasionally qualified as *kallatu*; MARI 4 (1985) 156 n. 45; MARI 6 (1990) 291 n. 52; Ziegler, 45 ff.

**230** Charpin in G. D. Young, *Mari in retrospect* (1992) 73. On Yataraya: Ziegler, *Le Harem*, 56 ff.; Durand, LAPO 18, 356.

**231** ARMT 23 251:4, 302:2, with p. 248 ff.; MARI 4 (1985) 412 n. 172 (Izamu).

**232** Ziegler, *Florilegium Marianum IX* (2007) 17. Cf. Chapter 18, ‘Musicians’.

**233** Ziegler, *Le Harem*, 173 ff. no. 13; N. Ziegler in: *La musique au Proche-Orient ancien* (= *Dossiers Archéologie* 310, février 2006) 33 ff.

**234** Ziegler, *Le Harem*, 94–96; *Florilegium Marianum IX* (2007) 49, 79.

**235** Ziegler, *Le Harem*, 125 ff. nos. 1–2, etc.; Durand, MARI 4, 390.

for the harem.<sup>236</sup> Some of them were blind.<sup>237</sup> It seems from a letter that people deliberately ‘made the eyes go to sleep’ for them to perform. There is more on this subject in chapter 18 on women and work. Occasionally clothing was given to female musicians.<sup>238</sup> Captured women could become musicians or weavers, and the queen, Beltum, sometimes selected them.<sup>239</sup> We have two letters concerning such selection. In one Zimri-Lim instructs Queen Šibtum to examine the women from top to toe, to ensure that there is not a single blemish on anyone selected, before passing them on to the music teacher.

Choose thirty weavers from them, good ones, who have no blemishes (?) from their nails to the hair of their heads, and entrust them to Warad-ilišu. Warad-ilišu must teach them to become a Subarean music group. Furthermore their location must be changed. Watch how they are fed so that their features do not change!<sup>240</sup>

First and foremost then these musicians had to look beautiful and not necessarily to have a good singing voice. This is confirmed in letters from Warad-ilišu, their director, who reported to the king thus:<sup>241</sup>

As for the musicians, about whom my lord wrote to me, their work is not being neglected. Constantly, from dawn till the time of the evening meal they carry out their work in my presence. For every woman [...] one instructor.  
Among them are beautiful young girls and also first-class musicians.

Captured musicians would be brought to the palace by boat.<sup>242</sup>

Let my lord bring a boat to that place and assign a trusted eunuch to lead them here. If this does not work, then I have seen in the house of Išar-Lim a ... and that is secured as a workplace. Let them stay there. Moreover there are instructors in the area and there are also small lyres for them.

Our director took a pride in his work and disliked it if one of his pupils was hauled out of the class by the king.<sup>243</sup>

---

**236** Ziegler, *Florilegium Marianum IX* (2007) 207.

**237** Ziegler, 21, ‘Musiciens aveugles et voyants’. For example p.109 no.17:10, 21 (16 girls and 2 blind girls).

**238** Ziegler, *Le Harem*, nos. 22–24 (p. 193–195).

**239** N. Ziegler, RA 93 (1999) 19; Ziegler, *Florilegium Marianum IX* (2007) 42 ff., ‘Les musiciennes comme butin de guerre’.

**240** ARM 10 126:11–21; cf. no. 125; Ziegler, *Florilegium Marianum IX*, 169.

**241** *Florilegium Marianum IX*, 183 nos. 39, 42, with p. 168 ff.

**242** No. 38.

**243** No. 41.

‘[Of the musicians who] are learning to play the small lyre, there are three whom my lord has promised to (the king of) Hazor. If they recruit [these] from those girls, then the ensemble shall be broken up’.

Ensembles (*šitru*) could consist of anything from seven to thirty musicians.<sup>244</sup> Those from Mari must have been especially talented, for a friendly king sent 30 shekels of silver to Zimri-Lim to have one sent to him:

‘Let my father provide me with a beautiful, competent singing girl, whom I can keep with me.’

Since the going price for a slave-girl was just 15 shekels, he was willing to pay twice as much for a good musician.<sup>245</sup> Listed in the harem of the ruler of an Assyrian city were, in addition to family members, two groups of female musicians, 10 accomplished singers and 23 ordinary ones.<sup>246</sup>

The lower-ranking personnel worked chiefly in the kitchens as cooks, chefs (some for pastry), and flour-grinders.<sup>247</sup> When one kitchen princess died this was noted precisely on a clay tablet, with the date and the name of her supervisor and the impression of a seal. It amounts to an official death certificate, and such documents were quite common and were necessary for good administration.<sup>248</sup> Other personnel were ‘the sweepers of the yard’ (actually lady’s maids), water-carriers, and the women called *sekertu* (meaning ‘locked up’) and *kezertu* (who had a special way of curling their hair).<sup>249</sup> There were also female scribes, two of whom wrote the lists of items of food in the kitchen for ‘the king’s table’. Their two different styles of handwriting are distinguishable on the clay tablets they wrote.<sup>250</sup> Each of the two queens of this period (Dam-ḥuraši and Šibtum) had more than fifteen female servants in the harem.<sup>251</sup>

Excavations in *Isin* have produced ration lists of barley for the personnel of the harem, including for those ‘women who swept the yard’, who washed the

---

**244** Florilegium Marianum IX, 13 f.

**245** ARM 28 86:24–28. More Mari letters show that foreign kings wished to have female singers; AEM 1/1 (1988) 98 no. 9:17–34; Ziegler, 37–42, nos. 4 f.

**246** A. Millet Albà in *Chagar Bazar (Syrie)* III (2008) 46 no. 65.

**247** Ziegler, *Le Harem*, 101–104, 136 ff.

**248** Ziegler no. 43 (p. 223).

**249** Ziegler, 83–91.

**250** Ziegler, 91 ff., 106.

**251** Ziegler, 92–94, 96–98; no. 3 (p. 135).

hands, who cared for the body ('the hairdressers'), and who played the lyre, and for their infants and older children.<sup>252</sup>

We also know about a harem in the city of *Ašnakku*, modern Chagar Bazar, in north-eastern Syria, which was excavated by a British and Belgian team.<sup>253</sup> On his cylinder seal the ruler of the city, *Sîn-iqīšam*, is denoted as 'the servant of Samsi-Addu', who was the king of Assyria. The city ruler had two wives and a harem, which is documented on lists of those living there eligible to receive an allowance of beer. His first wife is named first, and his second wife occurs in a sequence of lists over several years. She had started as a girl, placed towards the bottom of an early list, but later we see her in the middle of the list and finally in second place. By that time she had given birth to two sons, and this may possibly have justified her high status.<sup>254</sup> In this harem there were also accomplished and ordinary ('greater' and 'lesser') female singers. Some of the names show they were boys or men and the editor of those lists suggested that anyone in a harem could be described as a 'female singer'. We should also consider the possibility that *castrati* were involved.<sup>255</sup>

There may have been *eunuchs* in the harem, suggested at Mari by the term *gerseqqû*, meaning a menial servant often present at court.<sup>256</sup> The literal meaning of this word in Sumerian could indicate someone 'with a beaten foot', with foot being a euphemism for the penis and testicles. But this is speculation. Perhaps the singers described thus were *castrati*.<sup>257</sup> J.-M. Durand proposed that they were servants, who had been sired by the king to the women in his harem, and subsequently castrated.<sup>258</sup> A modern novelist similarly assumed this about the eunuchs of the Assyrian court.<sup>259</sup> Certainly there were eunuchs in the later Assyrian courts, a subject to which we shall return when we discuss the court of the Middle Assyrian period (Chapter 24).

After children were born in the harem of Mari,<sup>260</sup> five litres of best-quality oil was given to the mother. Normally she was allowed two litres of ordinary oil each month. The mothers were the 'slave-girls' of the king or 'singers' and one takes it

---

252 C. Wilcke, 'Personal eines Enlil-bāni-Palastes in Isin', *Festschrift B. Hrouda* (1994) 303–314.

253 Millet Albà in *Chagar Bazar*, 238–279, 'Le harem de Sîn-iqīšam'.

254 Millet Albà, 251–254.

255 Millet Albà, 244.

256 Ziegler, 9–11; *Florilegium Marianum IX* (2007) 23.

257 Ziegler, nos. 9:17, 10:5.

258 Ziegler, 20, 23.

259 N. Guild, *The Assyrian* (1988) 17–23; mentioned and approved by J. Reade, *Studies S. Parpola* (2009) 252.

260 Ziegler, 29.

for granted that the king was the father. In a few cases it can be shown that he was resident in the palace 39 weeks before the birth.<sup>261</sup> No wet-nurses were found in the harem but children's nannies are named, who could have been the children's wet-nurses when they were younger. Many names of the children give a positive message about their father: 'May my father increase'; 'My father is my light'; 'May my father live long'.<sup>262</sup> Names given to women could possibly refer to their function as midwives. In the harem of Yasmaḥ-Addu we encounter Ištar-šuklulim, 'O Ištar, make perfect'. The name Rubaya is reminiscent of the midwife Rabbatum from the Ur III period.<sup>263</sup> We would add further that the most recent harem text from Mari also gave the names of three young princes: Yagid-Lim, Ḥadni-Addu, and Yaḥdun-Lim.<sup>264</sup>

According to these lists there were 44 women in the harem of Yasmaḥ-Addu, but those in the harem of Zimri-Lim towards the end numbered 232, though earlier there had been even 260 or 381. The highest number recorded is 515.<sup>265</sup> The enormous growth in numbers could be the result of taking in women who were the spoils of war, such as those listed as 'brought here from Kaḫat'. At the conquest of this town they were taken and brought into the harem. Over five years the population of the harem doubled. It was full to overflowing.

#### 23.6.4 Predicaments

Disease could spread rapidly in such a densely inhabited environment.<sup>266</sup> Letters from women speak of infectious diseases, for which patients had to stay in a separate room, without any contact with other inmates.<sup>267</sup> We repeat here the following instructions given by King Zimri-Lim to Queen Šibtu.<sup>268</sup>

<sup>261</sup> N. Ziegler, *Ktama* 22 (1997) 46–49.

<sup>262</sup> Ziegler, 108 ff.

<sup>263</sup> In the list of occupants of the harem, MARI 4, 388, they are nos. 24–26; see pp. 395, 418 ff.

<sup>264</sup> Ziegler, 68 ff.; no. 13 i 25–27 (p. 174); earlier D. Charpin, MARI 4, 338 with n. 227 (T. 408). They were clearly named after their royal ancestors.

<sup>265</sup> Ziegler, *Le Harem*, 19.

<sup>266</sup> Durand, 86; Ziegler, 28 ff.

<sup>267</sup> Ziegler, 28 ff., 'Les maladies'; Durand, MARI 3 (1984) 143–149, 'Maladies'. A list of quantities of oil distributed to twelve 'ill' harem ladies is ARMT 23 606 = Ziegler no. 19 (p. 190–192).

<sup>268</sup> ARM 10 129 with Durand, 143–145; AEM 1/1 (1988) 547 ff.; LAPO 18 (2000) 345 no. 1164; cf. E. Neufeld, 'The earliest document of a case of contagious disease in Mesopotamia (Mari Tablet ARM X, 129)', *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society* 18 (1986) 53–66.

Speak to Šibtu, thus says your lord: 'I have heard that Nanna is sick from a wound, but lives in close contact with the palace and mixes with the other women. Now you must give some strict orders, that nobody shall drink from the cup from which she drinks, nobody shall sit on the chair she sat on, and nobody shall lie on the bed she lies on. She may not mix with the other women. This wound is infectious.

The word translated as 'infectious' at the end of the letter literally means 'to catch', suggesting the outbreak of fire. Other letters from Mari give similar sorts of instructions for women in this position. One adds that the woman had to live in a separate room into which no-one could enter. To know 'whether she will die or live', an extispicy of a liver had to be performed, which resulted in the warning that 'other women one by one will fall ill with this wound, so let only this woman die alone.' Perhaps they were sometimes killed.<sup>269</sup> Another letter, from a courtier to the king, reads as follows.<sup>270</sup>

Speak to my lord; thus says Tillani-ḥesud, your servant: 'Attazur, the slave-girl of Ḫuššutum, has become full with the wrath of the god, so I have had this woman leave the palace. Have the lamentation priests come here and purify the palace.'

One assumes that 'the wrath of the god' was an expression for a dreadful illness that made the palace unclean. A small group of Middle Babylonian letters from Nippur speaks of all sorts of illnesses of the 'singing girls'. However there was no harem there and the girls would certainly have been attached to the temple.<sup>271</sup>

How did the king manage this reservoir of penned-up femininity? A few nice passages in letters tell us something about exceptional situations. The young petty king Yasmaḥ-Addu was warned by his father not to behave like the earlier king Yaḥdun-Lim. 'Yaḥdun-Lim thought so much of his girlfriends, that he set his wives apart and let them live outside the palace. And hopefully you will not let the daughter of (King) Išḫi-Addu live outside like that. If her father were to get to hear of it, then he would become embittered.'<sup>272</sup> In another letter he wrote that this royal daughter must live in the palace and be well supplied with oil and meat. He puts it like this: 'Yaḥdun-Lim loved his singing girls; therefore he had his wives Gabêtum and Yamḥad live outside.'<sup>273</sup> So singers were his girlfriends.

<sup>269</sup> ARM 10 130 with AEM 1/1, 547 ff. Cf. also ARM 10 14.

<sup>270</sup> AEM 1/1 (1988) 579 no. 279 with p. 548.

<sup>271</sup> S. Parpola, LAS, Commentary (1983) 492–494.

<sup>272</sup> Durand, MARI 4, 406. Earlier in: *Receuil G. Dossin* (1983) 325 (A. 2548).

<sup>273</sup> Durand, MARI 6 (1990) 290–294.



The warning to Yasmaḥ-Addu must have been necessary, for as viceroy he regularly received a lecture from his father about his behaviour, with this recrimination:

You are a youngster, you are no real man (*eṭlu*). Is there really no hair on your cheek? How long have you not been managing your household?

We have a rough version of the text with which his son made a plaintive response.<sup>274</sup> One recrimination is of special interest:

Your brother has won a military victory here, but you, you lie there among the women. But now, whenever you go with the troops to Qatanu, be a man (*awīlu*) then. You too should make a great name for yourself in the campaign for Qatanu, as your brother has made a great name for himself.<sup>275</sup>

Must we take the statement that he was lying among women literally? It has been said that it simply means general laxity rather than actively exploiting the harem. That would be the reason for the call to be a ‘man’.<sup>276</sup> It is also possible that by women is meant the musicians, showing that he was more interested in the music than the women themselves. However, in one letter a brother of Yasmaḥ-Addu reproaches him:

The hot wind and the cold had never struck your face (...) and as soon as father and mother saw your face and you fell out of the vagina, another vagina received you here.<sup>277</sup>

These coarse remarks of his brother imply that his escapades began directly after he was born, rolling from the one vagina into the other. Possibly he was alluding to some proverbial expression. In our remarks about sexuality we pointed out that in love songs sentiments could also be expressed extremely explicitly. Yet another letter concerns Yasmaḥ-Addu’s decadence, including a propensity to ‘mix’.

Together with the courtiers you began to be extravagant and to squander goods. But you are not small any more. (...) They came to you to ‘mix’, to go to the premises of the woman innkeeper to play.<sup>278</sup>

---

**274** ARM 1 73:43–45 to which ARM 1 108, 113 is a response; cf. Durand, MARI 5 (1987) 173–177.

**275** ARM 1 69 rev. 8–16; cf. MARI 4 (1985) 313:35 ff. for an improved treatment.

**276** B. F. Batto, *Studies on women at Mari* (1974) 34 n. 81.

**277** P. Marelli, *Mélanges Michel Fleury* (= Florilegium Marianum I) (1992) 117:32–37; TUAT NF 3 (2006) 58 ff.

**278** ARM 1 28:11–19 with LAPO 16 (1997) 65 ff.; I. L. Finkel, *Ancient board games* (2007) 23 (n. 16).

It is not hard to imagine that the games they played when mixing involved some promiscuous behaviour.

What was life like for these women? We know a considerable amount about it thanks to the letters they wrote. Some concerned matters of organisation, but others could also turn to political questions and become emotional. This happens particularly in letters from princesses who had been married off to foreign kings. Later we will describe the sad case of Princess Kîrûm. In principle two possibilities awaited a king's daughter. She could be married off by their father, or be dedicated to a god as a priestess, a subject to be discussed later in Chapter 25.<sup>279</sup> Much is written about women in the first category and their correspondence is available in translation.<sup>280</sup>

Queen Dam-ḥuraši, also called Beltum, 'the Lady', came from Qatna, near Damascus. Her father wrote amicably to her future husband, Yasmaḥ-Addu: 'I have given my flesh and loins into your bosom and this house has become your house; the house of Mari has become my house'.<sup>281</sup> She made a long detour along the northern fringe of the Syrian desert, going first to Emar. There barques were made for her and her retinue which drifted down to Terqa, not far from Mari,<sup>282</sup> to be met by her bridegroom. He had earlier had a nasty dream and told it to her escort: 'The dream which I saw was unsettling; we must be afraid that the Suteans will seize Dam-ḥuraši and you and say "We will not let them go (...)". The liver diviners were called to give an independent judgement.<sup>283</sup> The texts concerning arrangements for the final leg of the journey describe the meals to be eaten on the way. It is striking that such a large group, around seventy women (called *nîru*), belonged to the retinue, and it is thought that these were the travelling companions of the bride.<sup>284</sup> With them was her royal nanny, and that went down badly in the court of Mari. The king received a letter: 'The nanny of the Lady, who has come from Qatna: yes, that woman has reared the Lady since she was small and she knows her habits. They would surely have had to separate her from the Lady on the day that the Lady left Qatna. They sent her along with the Madame

---

**279** Durand, MARI 4, 397, 400 (Erišti-Aja), 415; Batto, *Women*, 79 ff. For Baḥlatum, daughter of Zimri-Lim, see Lafont in: Durand, *La Femme* (1987) 120. The kings of Mari and Karanâ had a daughter who was a nun (*nadîtu*) in the cloister of Sippar; S. Dalley, *Mari and Karana* (1984) 104–106.

**280** J.-M. Durand, 'La correspondance féminine', in his *Documents épistolaires du palais de Mari* (= LAPO 18) (2000) 259–504.

**281** J.-M. Durand, MARI 6 (1990) 282 A. 3158:9–12.

**282** Durand, MARI 6, 285 ff.; AEM 1/1 (1988) 116 no. 16.

**283** AEM 1/1, 466 no. 225 with Florilegium Marianum IX (2007) 149 ff.

**284** B. Lafont, *Mélanges M. Birot* (1985) 163, 167.

to Mari, but she has no idea of the customs of the palace. Through the agency of this unreliable woman, who is assisting my Lady, while the bolts of the palace were shut, she (the young queen) let out the singers to go to the temple of Ištar. In the courtyard of the Coloured House the heat struck her and since that day she has been ill. But my lord must not worry, for her illness has become milder than before.’ The advice which followed was for the king to send in ladies of some standing (*puršumtu*) to assist her.<sup>285</sup>

Indeed the evidence from Mari shows that the nurse was well-known there. Her title was ‘mother’ (*ummu*), which we have translated as ‘nanny’.<sup>286</sup> It is not certain whether this was always the woman who had looked after a princess from her childhood. Princess Naramtum was married off by Zimri-Lim to a petty king and had a nursemaid assigned to her.<sup>287</sup> The ties sometimes appear closer, as when Princess Aḥassunu complained to Yasmaḥ-Addu that they wanted to give away her ‘mother’.<sup>288</sup> Another princess raised the point that they were detaining her nurse.<sup>289</sup> In one case it can be proved that the wet-nurse of Prince Yagid-Lim later became his nursemaid and was called ‘mother’.<sup>290</sup> We have seen just such a development in the career of Rabbatum from the Ur III period.

Much can be said about the *queen* in Mari. It was normal in high circles for a married man to have two wives and this also applied to the king.<sup>291</sup> As far as Zimri-Lim was concerned, we hear first about Dam-ḥuraši, and later much more about Šibtum.<sup>292</sup> The first wife was taken over from his predecessor Yasmaḥ-Addu. The latter, Šibtum, achieved a high position and her name, ‘The old woman’ appears to have been an honorary title.<sup>293</sup> She was the daughter of Yarim-Lim, the king of the allied territory of Yamḥad, with Ḥalab (Aleppo) as its capital.

---

**285** AEM 1/2 (1988) 26 no. 298, with MARI 6 (1990) 276; TUAT NF 3 (2006) 72. For a photo of the tablet see M. al-Maqdisi, *Schätze des alten Syrien: die Entdeckung des Königreichs Qatna* (2009) 67. Durand, MARI 4 (1985) 419 (top), gives suggestions for the identities of the women whom Beltum had brought along.

**286** Discovered by Durand, MARI 4 (1985) 414 ff.; for details see G. Bardet, ARMT 23 (1984) 72–74.

**287** ARMT 23 no. 84, dupl. no. 423. ‘B., from the women of the House of Yarim-Lim, for the ‘motherhood’ of Naramtum, daughter of the king, who was given (in marriage) to Šarriya, king of Eluḫtum.’

**288** ARM 10 97 with MARI 4, 413 ff. Von Soden’s correction of ‘old age’ has not been seen or accepted; he reads in line 22 *ša šu-ši-ša lipuš* (Or. NS 49 [1980] 211).

**289** ARM 10 no. 105.

**290** N. Ziegler, *Le Harem*, 68.

**291** Durand, LAPO 18 (2000) 263; A. Millet Albà in: *Chagar Bazar (Syrie)* III (2008) 242 ff.

**292** N. Ziegler, ‘Šibtum’, RIA XII/5–6 (2010) 441–443.

**293** Durand, MARI 3 (1984) 164 n. 20. He suggests that the birth of a son gave her this status; up till then Zimri-Lim had only daughters.

A group of letters casts light on how this marriage was arranged.<sup>294</sup> In Chapter 2 about betrothal and marriage we referred to them, and here we look at the letter in which the father of the bride requires ‘that the household utensils of my daughter be deposited in her house, that my daughter live with her husband, but that she may go out for five or six days to pay attention to her house’.<sup>295</sup> Evidently the queen had her own ‘house’. Ama-duga and ‘The Mistress’ also had their own house, such as the remains of a small palace found on the site Chantier A. J.-M. Durand has suggested that this is where she regularly stayed during the five or six days of menstruation.<sup>296</sup> Whenever Zimri-Lim was away, Šibtum was in control and corresponded with him. Many letters from her have been preserved concerning domestic and economic affairs.<sup>297</sup> She also made official visits throughout the kingdom, but she did not go with him when Zimri-Lim made the long journey to far-off Ugarit, for which he preferred to take his wife Yataraya.<sup>298</sup>

It has been noted that in the West (Syria and Palestine) the role of the queen was great. We saw this when we considered the ritual surrounding the marriage of the king and queen in Ebla. Mari and the small kingdoms to the north and west of it all belonged to one cultural circle and the same applied there. A princess, the daughter of Zimri-Lim, went to Karanâ to practise her ‘royalty’, but did not automatically become ‘queen’ (*šarratu*). It is conceivable that that title was only awarded on the birth of a prince.<sup>299</sup> It was the secret wish of Princess Kirûm, who had been married off, to have this status too, as she wrote to her father in Mari.

I am sending you the lady Alla along with this letter. May my Star, my father and my lord, pay good attention to her report, but do not tell anybody else. May my father and my lord allow me to take my place on the seat of a queen. Do not cause me sorrow. I trust in you alone.<sup>300</sup>

A similar situation is revealed by the palace archives from Karanâ (or Qaṭṭara), the site of a much smaller kingdom which was excavated by the British. The queen there was Iltani and her correspondence reveals her concerns about the burdensome details of daily organisation. Because everything was on a relatively smaller scale the lines of command were shorter, and she also had the respon-

**294** Durand, AEM 1/1 (1988) 95–117, ‘La mission matrimoniale’.

**295** AEM 1/1, 111 no. 13:14–19.

**296** AEM 1/1, 104 ff.

**297** Ziegler, *Le Harem*, 54–56; Durand, LAPO 18 (2000) 166, 298 ff., 304–356.

**298** Ziegler, 30–32, ‘Voyages de femmes du harem’.

**299** Durand, MARI 3 (1984) 164; MARI 6 (1990) 277; LAPO 18 (2000) 262 ff.

**300** ARM 10 34 rev., with LAPO 18, 437 no. 1224.

sibility for the production of woven goods. We shall have more to say about her later. A letter from the city of Andariq in the far north shows that a queen once took over the reins of state when her husband was absent.<sup>301</sup> The caravans of the Assyrian merchants passed this city; we discussed the wives of the merchants in Chapter 18, about women and work. Merchants enjoyed free passage, but they had to announce their journeys beforehand. A caravan of 300 people and 300 donkeys moved from Assur, via Ekallatum (on the Tigris), to Karanâ, where thirty people and sixty donkeys split off and went to Andariq. There they were detained, because they had not announced that they were coming. When ‘the lady, the wife of (King) Atamrum’ was requested to release them, she replied: ‘When the message came from the city of Assur to you, that these men would travel through the interior of your country, why did I not get this message? Or why did you not yourself write to me about their passage to the north? I want to know (things like this). Today Atamrum, the king of this country, is not at home. He is staying in Babylon. But this country belongs to Zimri-Lim, my lord. When I held the men, I wrote to Zimri-Lim. Is it proper to release the men over the head of my lord, Zimri-Lim? As long as no decision about the men comes from my lord, those men will not pass through the gates.’ We see here that the small kingdom of Andariq was subservient to Zimri-Lim of Mari. The queen was wise not to take the decision herself, for the merchants were Assyrians, who at that time were hostile.

### 23.6.5 Princesses who were married off

Daughters of Zimri-Lim were married off to foreign rulers.<sup>302</sup> The preparations for marriages like this can be traced from the other side in the case of Šibtum from Aleppo, who became the wife of Zimri-Lim.<sup>303</sup> Intermediaries travelled back and forth and at a certain point in that foreign land far away they covered the girl with a veil. These officials were called ‘messengers of the wedding’ (*mār šipri ḥadāši*).<sup>304</sup> The exchange of the dowry by the father of the bride for the bride-price paid by the bridegroom was an important occasion. We have letters from King Zimri-Lim in which the preparations for the marriage to Šibtum are recorded.

**301** AEM 1/2 (1988) 333–336 nos. 432f. For a discussion, see note 309.

**302** J.-M. Durand, MARI 4 (1985) 335; ‘Les alliances matrimoniales’, MARI 6 (1990) 276–301; ‘Les marriages’, LAPO 18 (2000) 165–184. Earlier see B. Lafont in: Durand, *La Femme* (1987) 113–120; S. Dalley, *Mari and Karana* (1984) 151–153.

**303** F. Abdallah in: Durand, *La Femme*, 13–15; Durand, AEM 1/1 (1988) 95–117; P. Villard, MARI 7 (1993) 315 ff., 325–328; Florilegium Marianum V (2003) 191 ff.

**304** Lafont, 116 ff.; Durand, AEM 1/1, 112.

She was referred to as the ‘daughter of the king’ without mentioning her name. The chief choir master and the liver diviner of the court travelled backwards and forwards to Aleppo, where the princess lived with her father and mother. They brought the bride-price with them, which is described on a separate tablet as blocks of lapis lazuli and many jewels, with hundreds of heads of cattle.

In Aleppo the veil was laid on her, but then her grandmother, the queen mother,<sup>305</sup> died there, and this meant a delay of fifteen days. The journey to Mari did not go well. A letter records that ‘Many women will go with the Lady and the women who go are delicate. But (as for) the route taken on this journey, the desert is harsh, not to be negotiated at this time (...). In the spring or in the autumn they must take this route (...). In the coming month there will still be ten or five days of cold weather and the Euphrates will be full of water.’<sup>306</sup> By the following year she had reached Mari and then her father sent large presents, probably the dowry.

These princesses expected to become the *šarratu*, ‘the queen’ in the foreign country, a title that was unusual in Babylonia.<sup>307</sup> Some minor states were close by and others far away, and the lot of the women in their courts can be followed from the letters they wrote home. The sister of Zimri-Lim reported enthusiastically: ‘Adal-šenni, my lord, is fine. He has put his large palace at my disposal and treats me reasonably well. Two hundred women, singers or weavers or kitchen staff work for me and do what I say.’ It seems as if this is the total workforce for the whole harem. We suspect that the ‘singers’ functioned also as concubines. In the harem were two daughters of conquered kings, who were very annoying. ‘They irritate me by saying: “Your brother, your flesh and blood, is doing well, but [he sends you] nothing”. They keep coming back to it. I say to them: “Both of you will see all of what my brother provides for me”. Now, because of their insults provide me with a present that pleases me; humiliate [them]’. The queen and the harem came to a bad end when another king conquered their kingdom and the two princesses were forced to transfer to a new location, for a second time.<sup>308</sup>

Some of these princesses who were married off were allowed to be fully in control of the palace, in particular when the king, their husband, was away on a journey.<sup>309</sup> One named Tizpatum was able to demand political or military requests. But in the letters from women who had to content themselves with an

---

**305** AEM 1/1, 105 no. 10 = TUAT NF 3 (2006) 73 f.

**306** AEM 1/1, 113 no. 14:7–11, 19 f., 24–27.

**307** Durand, MARI 6, 277.

**308** P. Marelli, MARI 8 (1997) 455–459; TUAT NF 3 (2006) 74 f.; Ziegler, 42.

**309** Ibbatum, wife of Atamrum of Andariq: Durand, LAPO 18, 445–454. Cf. note 301.

inferior position, there was much complaining.<sup>310</sup> ‘He is not kind to me and has not given me a single slave-girl to wash my feet.’<sup>311</sup>

Inib-šarri was first married off by the father of Zimri-Lim to an old king who died two years later. Directly after this it was to Ibal-Addu, the king of Ašlakkâ, who promptly paid her bride-price. It was clearly a political marriage, that would only last for five years. The man was a rebel, which she reported to her father, and her husband banished her to the city of Naḥur.<sup>312</sup> Zimri-Lim mediated: ‘Go! Take the road to your house. It is certainly not proper. Cover your head and go away’.<sup>313</sup> She does this and in Ašlakkâ she meets another queen of his. Then we hear the following cry of distress: ‘The wife of Ibal-Addu, she is the queen and that woman still gets all the contributions from the city of Ašlakkâ and (other) cities. But he lets me live in a corner and lets me grab my cheeks like a mad woman. He eats and drinks in the company of that woman.’ However her husband reacted reassuringly: ‘I shall send away the other woman to the city of H. and she (Inib-šarri) may fully take over her throne and her country.’<sup>314</sup> Later Zimri-Lim would take over the city and his texts record the booty he pillaged.

Tizpatum was married off to Ili-Ištar, the king of Šunâ, and the dowry was paid in two instalments.<sup>315</sup> She had a worrying time there when the enemy invaded. She wrote home:

If my lord really loves the city of Šunâ and his servant Ili-Ištar, send quickly a hundred men here and a trusted man and save the city and your servant. Otherwise the enemy will take over the city. Now they are paying attention to my husband and think about me “How now? He is married to a daughter of Zimri-Lim and his attention is directed to Zimri-Lim”. May my father and lord be mindful of this.

Later she had to write another letter about what had happened:

When I was given (in marriage) in the land of Šunâ and after the enemy had carried me away as captive to Ekallatum, I [wrote] twice to [my lord] that he [should let] me [leave] Ekallatum. I am writing now for the third time to my lord with my complaint. [...].

**310** Naramtum, wife of Šarraya, king of Eluḫut: J.-M. Durand, LAPO 18, 454–457.

**311** ARM 10 29:15 ff.; Durand, LAPO 18, 451.

**312** M. Guichard, ‘Le remariage d’une princesse et la politique de Zimri-Lim dans la région du Haut Habur’, RA 103 (1999, not published until 2011) 17–30.

**313** ARM 10 74 with Ziegler, 43 ff., 76; ARM 2 113; Guichard, 26 n. 46.

**314** Ašlakkâ: ARM 28 68:9–13. For the whole affair see J.-M. Durand, LAPO 18, 462–471.

**315** Durand, LAPO 18, 457–462 (the letters nos. 1239, 1240); L. Marti, NABU 2003/40 (the dowry).

One solution in such a case would have been to give a ransom, but on this occasion we do not know the outcome.

The experiences of Princess *Kirûm* in the city of *Ilan-şurâ* were very unpleasant.<sup>316</sup> She had been given in marriage there to the king, *Ḥaya-sumû*, two years after her sister. This was regarded as an honour, as stated in a letter:

Since Samsi-Addu died, there are four strong kings. But a daughter of *Yaḥdun-Lim*, two women, they did not marry. And now you have married a daughter of my lord, two women!<sup>317</sup>

After a few years internal rows and political changes led to Princess *Kirûm* going home. The letters that their father *Zimri-Lim* received show that there was tension, eventually leading to a divorce from *Kirûm*, his second daughter. Her story gives us the opportunity of a peep into the private rooms of the palaces and see the way things panned out.<sup>318</sup>

It was like this. At the beginning of his reign *Zimri-Lim* had married off his daughter *Šimatum* to this king. We have a list of the items in her dowry. One of his intentions, though unacknowledged, was that she should act as a kind of spy, for we see her passing on important information to her father. About two years later his daughter *Kirûm* followed. The reason why is not clear. It is thought that the first daughter may have been infertile, which gave him the right to her sister, although it is questionable if this obligation pertained in political marriages. Rather it would have been an important diplomatic gesture for one to give a second daughter after the first. Or *Ḥaya-sumû* was given this second daughter to thank him for his military aid to *Zimri-Lim* during the conquest of the important city of *Ašlakkâ* in the region. The latest opinion is that ‘*Zimri-Lim* gave his second daughter to the same vassal in order to get a better grip on his politically volatile son-in-law’.<sup>319</sup> *Kirûm* writes to her father as ‘My Star, my father, my lord’. This is an unusual form of address. Perhaps this daughter played a special role in their family life. She writes also that she will bring offerings to ‘the gods of my father’. *Kirûm* seems to have been quite a character, for she asked her father to let her sit ‘as queen on the throne’.<sup>320</sup> Her letters show how her relationship with her sister and her husband deteriorated. It is thought there may have been friction because

---

**316** Durand, *LPO* 18, 427–445; Ziegler, 64; D. Bodi in: L. Marti, *La famille dans le Proche-Orient ancien* (2014) 275–289.

**317** *AEM* 1/2 (1988) 57 no. 303:20–24.

**318** J.-M. Durand, ‘Les femmes de *Ḥaya-sumu*’, *MARI* 3 (1984) 162–180; D. Charpin, *AEM* 1/2 (1988) 43–46.

**319** Bodi, 277.

**320** *ARM* 10 113:21–22 and 34 rev. 9–10.



of the childlessness of the older sister. In addition to these supposed growing tensions there were differences in political opinions.

The arrival of the army of the kingdom of Elam into the area gave rise to contrasting opinions in the palace, with two parties divided about being for or against Elam. It is thought that Šimatum was for and Kirûm was against. Kirûm was supported in this opinion by the ‘ambassador’ from Zimri-Lim, Yamšûm, whose letters on the subject were found at Mari. He describes Šimatum plainly as a witch:

‘As regards the herbs for black magic, Šimatum had these brought to my lord. This matter is correct. It is not untrue.’<sup>321</sup> This woman also slandered Zimri-Lim and for this reason suffered from epileptic fits: ‘the god of my father has “reached” her and made her gnaw at her fingers, she has regular fits of epilepsy’.<sup>322</sup> Kirûm repeats in two letters how she was spoken to first by her husband and then by her sister, and contemplated suicide, which Yamšûm reiterated, ‘I am going to jump from the roof’.<sup>323</sup> Kirûm had staff and they were taken away. She wanted to go home to Mari. All these letters were written on unusually shaped clay tablets and appear to be in a local vernacular.<sup>324</sup> Kirûm seems to be deliberately avoiding having her messages written by the official scribes preferring in her own style to send out secret messages. She was helped in this by a confidant Yarim-Dagan, who reported orally back to Mari. Then there followed a huge row, described in a letter<sup>325</sup> according to which she inveighed against her husband Ḫaya-sumû, eliciting from him this vehement response: ‘in the presence of the kings (sheikhs?) I will cut through my hem.’ That action was a symbolic act indicating that he was divorcing her. There followed some correspondence about how she would have to be brought back to Mari. It seems that Zimri-Lim and his wife Yataraya wanted to come themselves to get her.

## 23.7 Queen Iltani

Another queen from the same period was called Iltani, and she was the wife of Aqba-ḫammu, the king of Karanâ (or Qaṭṭara) in the north. The inscription on her seal reads:

---

**321** AEM 1/2, 76 no. 314:26–29.

**322** AEM 1/2, 71 no. 312:36–39.

**323** Charpin, AEM 1/2, 46 n. 114; M. Stol, NABU 2007/13, on suicide.

**324** Charpin, *Mélanges A. Finet* (1989) 31–40; cf. J.-R. Kupper, NABU 1992/105.

**325** ARM 10 33 with Durand, MARI 3, 169 ff.; cf. the letter on p. 178 ff.

Iltani, daughter of Samu-Addu, wife of Aqba-ḥammu.

They were subservient to Hammurabi of Babylon and for that reason invoked blessings in the name of his god Marduk. When her archive was excavated it showed that her court was considerably smaller than the one in Mari.<sup>326</sup> She wrote about her house-keeping, how to manage slaves, and buy in supplies of garlic, beer, wine, oil, and fish. A particularly interesting letter from this dossier shows that they used ice to keep drinks and other products cool. Snow was transported in the night from the mountains and stored in a special building, about which other Mari letters give more details.<sup>327</sup> The king reported to Iltani: 'Have them open (the cellar of) ice of Qaṭṭara and the Goddess. You and Belassunu must regularly drink from it. And have them carry out good checks on the ice.'<sup>328</sup> It is possible that this refers to a ritual for women, where cool wine (?) was ceremonially drunk.

The most important responsibility for the queen was her weaving shed. She received the wool from an agent from which cloth would be produced. Fifteen women and ten men spun and wove there. When her husband wanted some clothes he wrote to her:

'Many clothes (...) I want to have brought to Babylon. Send me clothing quickly, first or second quality (...) as many as there are. The clothing here, as many items as there are, I have collected and they are not sufficient'.<sup>329</sup>

He could be remarkably grumpy as can be seen from her reaction in this letter:<sup>330</sup>

To my lord. thus says your slave-girl Iltani:

About the letting go of the cattle, sheep and donkeys belonging to T., my lord wrote thus to me: 'If you cannot let go the cattle, sheep and donkeys belonging to T. I shall cut you down twelve times'. That is what my lord wrote to me. Why did my lord write my death sentence to me? Yesterday I spoke to my lord: 'His cattle and his sheep are being grazed in Yašibatūm by his own herdsman, who had kept them earlier'. I said this to my lord. Now, may my lord command that they take his cattle and sheep out of Yašibatūm. If I have taken anything whatever of the cattle and sheep, then let my lord punish me. Would I ever lay my hand on anything at all and take it without the consent of my lord? Why did my lord write my death sentence to me?

**326** S. Dalley, *Mari and Karana* (1984) 101–104.

**327** J.-M. Durand, *LAP0 16* (1997) 289–295, 'La construction de la glacière'; 313–315, 'La glace'.

**328** S. Dalley, *OBTR* 79.

**329** *OBTR* 70. Cf. S. Dalley, 'Old Babylonian trade in textiles at Tell al Rimah', *Iraq* 39 (1977) 155–159; Dalley, *Mari and Karana* (1984) 51–54.

**330** *OBTR* 158.

She received letters from two sons. The first reported:

All is going well for me. I arrived safely in Babylon. Hammurabi turned a friendly face to me. After this letter (back again) to Karanâ! Be happy!<sup>331</sup>

The second son begins with loving words, but wants something done:<sup>332</sup>

To my mother Iltani. Thus says Yasitna-abum your son. May Šamaš and Marduk for my sake let my mother live forever! My mother thought of me and my heart revived. Now, [send me] a letter about your well-being. Revive my heart. As soon as I see your letter, the storms of Adad will be forgotten and my heart will revive! The boy that my mother had sent to me is very young. This boy will not (be able) to support me; I have to support him! If I go on a journey, scarcely two litres of bread as my daily food is brought after me. Let my mother send a boy to me, who can bring ten litres of bread behind me and who really helps me (literally: takes my hand).

She had a sister who lived in Assur and thanks to the caravans they had contact with each other. Her sister keeps looking out for a necklace of lapis lazuli for her, but she has not found anything. Then she complains about her food:

Do you know that I receive a limited ration of food? In Assur barley and oil are dear. Your son S. comes here regularly but never brings me a little present. You do not honour me in the house where I stay. As you know, I receive a limited daily ration of food. Provide me with barley and oil.<sup>333</sup>

One wonders in which ‘house’ the sister was residing.

Other people wrote begging letters to the queen.<sup>334</sup>

You have lived in Ešnunna and have never thought of me nor cheered my heart. Now you live in Karanâ and among all my brothers there is no-one, whom you have not thought of. Never have you ever thought of me with one trifle or cheered my heart. I am not writing this to you lightly, I am writing because you have never thought of me. Ask around and they will say that my lord has certainly thought of me.

---

**331** OBTR 135.

**332** OBTR 152.

**333** OBTR 120.

**334** OBTR 119.

## 24 The court and the harem after 1500 BC

### 24.1 Babylonia

For the Late Bronze Age (1500–1200 BC), which follows the Old Babylonian period, the documentation available within Babylonia is scant. We know much more about Assyria, the kingdom of the Hitittes, the cities of Syria such as Ugarit and Emar, and the city of Nuzi in the mountainous countryside east of the Tigris. From those places much can be said about women at the court.

Kassite kings were now living in Babylonia. They made gifts of land to princes and high-ranking persons which are recorded on beautiful black ‘boundary stones’ decorated with reliefs. One states that a woman, Ḫunnubat-Nanaya, received from her father, King Meli-šipak (1186–1172), 320 hectares of arable land and 24 hectares of land suitable for gardens, together with three villages, which enjoyed tax-free status. At the end of the text we read that the king bought extra land for his daughter from the governor of the Sealand. On the relief above the text the goddess Nanaya is shown seated grandly on a throne. In front of the goddess the king stands holding the hand of his daughter, a smaller figure standing behind him and carrying a harp (or lyre), being introduced to the goddess. An incense burner stands between these two people and the goddess. Perhaps the daughter was in the service of Nanaya and the income from the land she had been given accrued to her temple.<sup>1</sup>

We mention here in passing a kind gesture shown by the king of Elam, the largest kingdom to the east of Babylonia, at about this time.<sup>2</sup> We have a precious stone he gave to his daughter bearing the inscription *yaspu*, ‘jasper’. But modern experts have identified the mineral as chalcedon, which could be the material described by Pliny as the ‘heavenly blue jasper’ from Persia (XXXVIII 37 §115). The iconography shows the enthroned king holding the stone in his hand and facing a much smaller girl. The inscriptions says,

I, Šilḫak-Inšušinak, enlarger of the kingdom, brought this stone from Purališ. I had it wrought with care, placed it here and gave it to Baruli, my beloved daughter.

---

<sup>1</sup> MDP 10 (1908) 87–94, pl. 11–13; photo in the catalogue *Babylon. Wahrheit* (2008) 221 Abb. 149 with 227 Kat. 142; I. Seibert, *La femme dans l'Orient ancien* (1974) plate 51. See K. E. Slanski, *The Babylonian entitlement narûs (kudurrus)* (2003) 43 (photo), 48, 174, 258.

<sup>2</sup> E. Sollberger, JCS 19 (1965) 31 f.; P. Amiet, *Elam* (1966) 445 no. 340; I. Seibert, *La femme*, plate 42. With W. Henkelman, RIA XII/5–6 (2010) 494 § 1.4.

Kassite kings often married off their daughters to the pharaoh in Egypt. In Chapter 2 we saw that messengers mediated such a contract and that the girl could be anointed in Babylon as a token of her betrothal. In far-off Armenia a curious carnelian cylinder seal was found in a grave. It was inscribed with Egyptian hieroglyphs identifying the owner as ‘the great one from the land of Sangar, Kurigalzu’.<sup>3</sup> Kurigalzu II was a Kassite king, and Sangar was the word Egyptians used to mean Babylonia. That name resembles Shinar as used in the Hebrew Bible, also to mean Babylonia. The seal depicts a seated ruler with a young woman standing in front of him. The two are offering something to each other. Stylistically it is a Syrian imitation of an Egyptian artistic style, apparently to represent the marriage of the Babylonian king to a princess from the West. Similarly Egyptian in style is a fragment of an alabaster vase from Ugarit showing King Niqmaddu with a woman. How could the cylinder seal of Kurigalzu II have reached Armenia? Probably it was a precious item of booty that became an object for trade. That was probably also how a Babylonian cylinder seal came to be found in a grave in Etruria, Italy, where it would surely have been seen as possessing magical power.

During the long period following the Kassite kings a handbook about abnormal births and their meaning for the future, based on earlier sources, was compiled. A special section concerned ‘a woman of the king who has given birth’, detailing the significance of features to be observed on babies born at court.<sup>4</sup> The birth of a child with severe defects (*izbu*), a deaf or mentally retarded child, one who had teeth at birth, or a beard, predicted doom for the royal family. Twins, whether identical twins or a boy and a girl or even two girls, were a good sign. There would be happiness for the mother, no opponents for the king, and a quiet and undisturbed life for the people. The handbook is less positive about common people having twins. A queen of Mari was overjoyed, in line with the handbook, and she wrote to the father,

I gave birth to twins, a boy and a girl. Let my lord rejoice!<sup>5</sup>

When a snake was born or a child with a face like a lion good news would follow: no adversaries and the king would be strong. At the end of the section there is a long passage about a child born with six fingers or six toes. If they occurred on the right hand or right foot the prospects for king and country would be bad. But on the left it meant the enemy would be defeated or the royal family would survive

<sup>3</sup> D. Collon, ‘The Metsamor Seal’, *Studies D.J. W. Meijer* (2011) 27–37.

<sup>4</sup> E. Leichty, *The omen series Šumma izbu* (1970) 70–72, Tablet IV 47–61.

<sup>5</sup> Twins: M. Stol, *Birth in Babylonia and the Bible* (2000) 208 f.

until they were old. These predictions follow a rule that if two negative features concur (six digits, and on the left) there would be a positive outcome. The predictions about such features in common births follow the same rule.<sup>6</sup> The last line refers to a baby with six fingers and six toes, which leads to the prediction, ‘the prince will conquer the land of an unknown enemy’. The Bible also refers to a man with such a deformity.

In yet another campaign in Gath there appeared a giant with six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot, twenty-four in all. He too was descended from the Rephaim (2 Samuel 21:20).

## 24.2 Assyria

### 24.2.1 The Middle Assyrian period

The so-called harem edicts from Assyria are a rich source of information about women in the Ancient Near East. Rather than edicts they are in fact instructions for conduct in the harem of the palace at Assur. These instructions (*riksu*) had been formulated by successive kings and then Tiglath-Pileser I (1114–1076 BC) made a compilation of them, beginning with Assur-uballit I (1365–1330). They comprise some 23 instructions preserved on four specimen texts. All the tablets are badly damaged, especially the sections for the older edicts.<sup>7</sup> Infringing these regulations incurred severe punishment, including the death penalty. Corporal punishment could amount to mutilation. The male officials include the courtier (*mazziz pānī*), the ‘eunuch of the king’ (*ša rēš šarri*), and the ‘doctor of the inner quarters’ (*asû ša bētānu*), who was in charge of the eunuchs.

Unfortunately much of the text of these edicts has been lost and we cannot really understand them fully. G. Cardascia has provided a summary of them.<sup>8</sup> The

---

<sup>6</sup> A comparison of royal and common births: the births of retarded or deaf children is always negative (Leichty, I 52f., 63; IV 48f.), the birth of a snake is a bad sign for a commoner (I 16). Six fingers or toes: III 54–60 (commoners), IV 57–61 (royals).

<sup>7</sup> Edition: E. F. Weidner, ‘Hof- und Harems-Erlasse assyrischer Könige aus dem 2. Jahrtausend f. Chr.’, AfO 17 (1954–56) 257–293. Cf. A. K. Grayson, *Assyrian Royal Inscriptions* I (1972) 46 ff., §§ 304–306, §§ 335–341 (on deaths in the royal household), § 517, §§ 681–683 (prohibition on giving presents), §§ 850–859, §§ 905–912 (quarreling and cursing), §§ 928, 989; vol. II (1976) §§ 184–193 (access and contacting). A full English translation will be found in M. T. Roth, *Law collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor* (1995) 195–209. She does not mention the translations by A. K. Grayson.

<sup>8</sup> In ‘Gesetze’, RIA III/4 (1966) 287b. We add here the § number used by Grayson.

harem was where the queen mother, the wives of the king (*aššāt šarri*), known as the ‘ladies of the palace’ (*sinnišātu ša ekallim*), the ‘other women’ (*sinnišātu mādātu*), and the simple servant girls lived. It was the subject of countless regulations and instructions. This confined world was often prey to tensions, even leading to disputes and quarrels.<sup>9</sup> Curses<sup>10</sup> uttered while scolding someone were severely punished (edicts 10–15; § 911–912) and witnesses to these scenes were obliged to tell (edict 21; § 189, 192). Eunuchs who were permitted entrance to the apartments of the women were not able to have a conversation with them, in the course of duty, unless under the supervision of the head of the palace (edict 9; § 906–910). That could only take place at a distance of seven paces from the female they were talking to, who had to be suitably dressed (edict 21; § 191). Culpable relations with a woman from the harem would lead to the punishment of the guilty party and his helpers (edict 19; § 989). The women of the palace were forbidden to give their slaves gold, silver or precious stones (edict 5; § 682–683). The wives were allowed to punish their servants, but this freedom, under the supervision of the king, did not extend to granting life or condemning to death (edict 18; § 928). Married women in the service of the palace could not leave the building, not even on their days off, without the permission of the king (edict 3; § 517).

Martha T. Roth has translated these edicts, some of which will be quoted here:<sup>11</sup>

Edict 7: When the time for making sacrifices draws near, a palace woman who is menstruating (lit.: unapproachable) shall not enter into the presence of the king.

Edict 19: If a palace woman [and a ... (man)] are standing by themselves, with no third person with them, whether [they are behaving] in a flirtatious manner [or in a serious manner (?)], they shall kill them.

<sup>9</sup> Thus Weidner and Cardascia. M. van de Mieroop, *Cuneiform texts and the writing of history* (1999) 148 f., sees in ‘these peculiar views on the group behaviour of women’ the reflection of a modern wrong stereotype of the harem. This is not correct. One observes in the laws indeed suspicion, spying, eavesdropping, etc. This reflects the mistrust of women by the Assyrians.

<sup>10</sup> *Šum ili ana masikti zakāru*, ‘to invoke the name of a god for blasphemy’, means ‘to curse’, reminiscent of the third commandment in the Decalogue, ‘You must not make wrong use of (*nāšā laššāw*) the name of the Lord your God’, Exodus 20:7. Cf. M. Stol, *Studies R. D. Biggs* (2007) 240 f. (*šum ili šūlū*).

<sup>11</sup> Concordance of the edicts translated here: Edict 7 = Grayson I § 856, Edict 19 = § 989 (summarised), Edict 21 = Grayson II §§ 189–191.

The next section says that anyone witnessing the event and failing to declare what they saw will also be punished, by being thrown into an oven, which the Bible says Daniel was subjected to in Babylon (Daniel 3:20 f).<sup>12</sup>

Edict 21: Either royal eunuchs or court attendants or dedicatees (*širku*) – if a palace woman sings, or quarrels with her colleague, and he stands by and eavesdrops, he shall be struck 100 blows, they shall cut off one of his ears.

[If] a woman of the palace has bared her shoulders and is not covered with (even) a *kindabašše*-garment, and she summons a court attendant, [saying: ‘... come] hither, I wish to give you an order’, and he turns around to speak with her – he shall be struck 100 blows. The eyewitness who denounces him shall take his clothing; and as for him, they shall tie (only) sackcloth (*sāgu*) around his waist.

If a court attendant wishes to speak with a palace woman, he shall approach no closer to her than seven paces.

The edicts tell us most of what we know about life in the harem. In a few letters we see the queen travelling with an entourage of different women in six coaches.<sup>13</sup> We should note that in astronomical texts a particular constellation of six stars is denoted as ‘The women in the palace’.<sup>14</sup>

We also encounter the following strange story. Once a slave-girl of a lady of the court called Kuršiptu, ‘Butterfly’, found a baby in the river and called it ‘Monkey’ (*paġû*).<sup>15</sup>

H., the slave-girl of Kuršiptu, the lady of the palace of Assur-iddin, lifted up Naru-eriba, ‘Monkey’, out of the river and brought him up. He is her son. Anyone who resorts to law with complaints against him shall give six sons (and) let him go. By the command of the gods, people cannot take Monkey with violence (*puāgu*).

The name Naru-eriba means ‘The river has given (a child) as a replacement’. That name was given to the foundling as a formal declaration establishing that the child was hers and would remain hers. Four gods were invoked as witnesses to

<sup>12</sup> This punishment is mentioned in an Old Babylonian letter, AbB 9 197; comments by M. T. Roth in: E. Lévy, *La codification des lois dans l'Antiquité* (2000) 15 f. For Neo-Babylonian evidence, see F. Joannès, *Festschrift J. Oelsner* (2000) 206–209; S. Lafont, *Ktéma* 30 (2005) 107–116; the article ‘Feuertod’ in *RIA III/1* (1957).

<sup>13</sup> E. Cancik-Kirschbaum, *Die mittellassyrischen Briefe aus Tall Šēḫ Ḥamad* (1996) no. 10, with J. N. Postgate, “Queen” in Middle Assyrian, *NABU* 2001/40.

<sup>14</sup> E. F. Weidner, *RIA III* (1957) 81a, e. (SAL.ŠĀ.É.GAL.MEŠ). A Sumerogram used at the time of Nebuchadnezzar (Neo-Babylonian), to be discussed later in this chapter.

<sup>15</sup> S. Franke, G. Wilhelm, ‘Eine mittellassyrische fiktive Urkunde zur Wahrung des Anspruchs auf ein Findelkind’, *Jahrbuch des Museums für Kunst und Gewerbe Hamburg* 4 (1985) 19–26; K. Volk in: R. Lux, *Schaffe mir Kinder* (2006) 52 f.



this (dated) document, and there was no obvious opponent to the decision. The child was subsequently renamed Monkey, an unusual type of personal name. The whole affair is most unusual. Finding a child by chance in the river is a motif which appears in the story of Moses, who was found by the daughter of the pharaoh. It also appears with Sargon, who was fished up as a baby by the water-carrier Aqqi. We shall return to this story in Chapter 25, about priestesses, since his mother was a high priestess. This event is recorded again on a clay model of a leg which is to be compared with clay models of the feet of newborn babies. This was discussed in Chapter 17, about women who were deprived of their freedom resulting in children having to be sold. According to an adoption text a foundling was grasped by the foot which was measured and its size recorded. The content of our text is particularly remarkable in the reference to divine witnesses, the strange meaning of the two personal names, as well as the legendary motif. It would be easy to take it as fictitious. A similar ostensible fantasy of a legal document is a Neo-Assyrian sale-contract for a piece of barren ground at the entrance to the underworld made between birds.<sup>16</sup>

### 24.2.2 Eunuchs

Courtiers and eunuchs require further discussion. The literal meaning of the title for the courtier, *mazziz pāni*, is ‘one standing at the face’, i.e. in the presence of the king. The title *ša rēši* literally means ‘one of the head’, simply indicating that he stood by the head of the king. In Assyriological circles there has been a dogged struggle going on about whether he was really a eunuch. He must have been a eunuch according to an incantation to curse a demon:

May your seed dry up like (the seed of) a *šut rēši* who does not father children.

Furthermore, the Hebrew word for eunuch, *sarīs*, is derived from *ša rēši*, and Isaiah compares him to ‘a barren tree’ (Isaiah 56:3). In Aramaic the word is *srs*, and an Aramaic seal inscription identifies Pan-Aššur-lamur as the *srs* of Sargon.<sup>17</sup> Assyrian texts sometimes make a contrast between our official and ‘the one with the beard’, i.e. someone who has not been castrated. A seal impression shows a man without a beard standing before the king, and on reliefs from the royal palace there are similar attendants. In the edicts ‘courtier’ and ‘eunuch’ are used

<sup>16</sup> ADD 469, SAA VI 288; B. R. Foster, *From distant days* (1995) 375.

<sup>17</sup> A. Fadhil, *Baghd. Mitt.* 21 (1990) 481, bottom.

almost interchangeably.<sup>18</sup> Eunuchs were high-ranking officials. The Bible records a meeting between the apostle Philip and a high ranking official from the royal court of Ethiopia who had been visiting Jerusalem (Acts 8:26–40).

This man was a eunuch, a high official of the Kandake, or queen, of Ethiopia, in charge of all her treasure (Acts 8:27).

While sitting in his chariot he had been intent on reading Isaiah 53, but he may not have read as far as Isaiah 56:3, quoted above.

### 24.3 Nuzi

From this same period come texts from the kingdom of Arrapha, a kingdom in Eastern Assyria, near modern Kirkuk.<sup>19</sup> The king was a vassal of the great kingdom of Mitanni out on the western border. The archives from the city of Nuzi, covering the years 1450 till about 1330 BC, show that in various cities the king had a palace and a harem and various queens.<sup>20</sup> Those queens would have been women owning large estates producing income for themselves. Judging from the land allocated to the queen in Arrapha, she was more important than the queen in Nuzi.<sup>21</sup> In one harem there were 31 women, and in another there were 35, and possibly there were many more. Earlier in this book we called these harem women ‘concubines’ (*esirtu*). Their names occur in lists of singers and they are sometimes explicitly designated as ‘female harem-singers’ (*esrētu nu’ārātu*).<sup>22</sup> One list begins with female singers associated with two foreign countries, Akkad and Ḫanigalbat, and those from Akkad (= Babylonia) have native Hurrian names from which we can surmise that they sang in a foreign style.<sup>23</sup> Earlier we saw that in the women’s quarters at Mari professional singing and instrumental music were an ongoing occupation. Some singers worked with flax.<sup>24</sup> The two young princes and four princesses, probably born from the concubines, grew up in the

**18** For eunuchs at the time of the harem edicts see S. Jakob, *Mittelassyrische Verwaltung und Sozialstruktur* (2003) 82–92 (beardless in the illustration on p. 87).

**19** W. Mayer, ‘Die königliche Familie’, *Nuzi-Studien I* (1978) 104–120.

**20** Cf. E. Cassin, ‘Les reines’, in: P. Garelli, *Le palais et la royauté* (1974) 378–381, 390.

**21** Mayer, 110 f.

**22** B. Lion, *SCCNH 18* (2009) 677–679.

**23** Lion, *CRRAI 54* [Würzburg] (2012) 537 f.

**24** R. Pruzsinszki, *WZKM 97* (2007) 343 n. 43.

harem, and some princesses became priestesses (*entu, ereš.dingir.ra*), and were appointed to various cities in this role.<sup>25</sup>

The archive of the crown prince Šilwa-Tešub shows that he had one wife and seven harem women. The wife conducted her own business affairs and possessed herds of livestock. The sister and the mother of the prince also lived in the palace. His son Tatip-Tilla was already married. His other sons were probably the offspring of the harem women.<sup>26</sup> In Nuzi there was a ‘house of the harem women’ (*bīt esrēti*).<sup>27</sup>

As for the household of the queen we know that she owned large estates, and that she conducted trade through her merchants, issuing loans of grain and sometimes large quantities of bronze. She owned her own granaries, from which were issued month by month considerable quantities of grain to be used for all kinds of purposes. Chiefly it was used to feed the people in the palace, from young princes to slaves, and in addition to that the manual staff in the workshops. The smaller your food ration the lower your position on the social ladder. The horses, the fowl and the dogs were given barley. Grain was also issued for offerings at religious ceremonies. Seed-grain was loaned to the farmers.<sup>28</sup>

Very little of interest can be said about the harem personnel. One man was known as the *taluhlu*, a mysterious Hurrian term thought to mean a eunuch.<sup>29</sup>

## 24.4 The Hittites and Egypt

Of the women in the courts of the west in the period 1400–1200 BC in Syria and Anatolia much can be said. Pieces of correspondence mention the marrying-off of princesses in this region, extending from the kingdoms of Mitanni and the Hittites (in Turkey) to Egypt. Political marriages were important, particularly during the time of international contacts between the great kingdoms of the time, the Hittites, Egypt, Babylonia, Assyria and Mitanni. For our purposes the relations between the Hittites and Egypt are most relevant,<sup>30</sup> when the Hittite queen mother *Puduhepa* played a great role.<sup>31</sup> In a letter to Pharaoh Ramesses II she boasts of

<sup>25</sup> K. Deller, A. Fadhil, *Mesopotamia VII* (1972) 193–213; cf. Mayer, 119, *Lion*, 539.

<sup>26</sup> M. A. Morrison, ‘The family of Šilwa-Tešub *mār šarri*’, *JCS* 31 (1979) 3–29.

<sup>27</sup> HSS 14 153:26 (left edge).

<sup>28</sup> We follow Cassin in P. Garelli, *Le palais et la royauté* (1974) 379.

<sup>29</sup> C. Zaccagnini, *OLZ* 85 (1990) 41 f.; the man is accompanied by dogs.

<sup>30</sup> P. J. H. Houwink ten Cate, ‘The Hittite dynastic marriages of the period between 1258 and 1244 BC’, *AOF* 23 (1996) 40–75.

<sup>31</sup> J.-L. Cunchillos in *Textes ougaritiques II* (1989) 376 f.

her successes, and even claims high status because ‘I receive every daughter of a great king as a daughter-in-law.’<sup>32</sup> Who was this powerful woman?<sup>33</sup> She grew up in Cilicia, a Hurrian environment, as the daughter of a priest of Ištar. She was later discovered by King Hattušili III, when he was returning from the battle near Qadeš (1275) during his campaign against Egypt. He fondly recalls the event thus:

At the behest of the goddess I took Puduḫepa, the daughter of P., the priest, for my wife: we joined (in matrimony) [and] the goddess gave us the love of husband (and) wife. We made ourselves sons (and) daughters.

On another occasion he says:

I took her not just hoping for the best, but at the instigation of the goddess I chose her. The goddess pointed her out to me in a dream.<sup>34</sup>

They are depicted together on a large relief on a rock face near Firaktin (Cilicia) with captions in hieroglyphs. They are making libation offerings, he to the storm god and she to his consort Ḫepat.<sup>35</sup> After Hattušili III had seized the throne from his cousin U. his cousin fled to Egypt. Describing her first experiences as queen Puduḫepa says

When I entered the royal household, the princesses I found in the household also gave birth under my care. I [raised] them and I also [raised] those whom I found already born. I made them military officers.<sup>36</sup>

Were these the offspring of concubines? Despite his weak health her husband reached the age of 74, a fact we may attribute to his dear wife: we know of her prayers and vows to the gods on his behalf. She was very innovative in the style of composition of her religious texts. Her seal impressions occur frequently on state documents, which are almost always sealed by both the king and the

---

**32** G. Beckman, *Hittite diplomatic texts*. Second edition (1999) 131–135 no. 22E, § 9.

**33** Puduḫepa: J.-L. Cunchillos, *Textes ougaritiques* II, 363–421; H. Otten, *Puduḫepa. Eine hethitische Königin in ihren Textzeugnissen* (1975); H. Müller-Karpe, ‘Puduḫepa, Königin von Ḫatti’, in: *Frauen des 13. Jahrhunderts v. Chr.* (1985) 56–70; ‘Puduḫepa’, *RIA* XI/1–2 (2006) 106–110. For her titles see M.-J. Seux, *RIA* VI/1–2 (1980) 159 f. § 65.

**34** Th.P.J. van den Hout in: W. W. Hallo, *The Context of Scripture* I (1997) 202 § 9. In a dream: A. Mouton, *Rêves hittites* (2007) 92 (KBo VI 29 i 18–21).

**35** W. Orthmann, *Der Alte Orient* (1975) plate XLI with p. 428; *RIA* XI/1–2 (2006) 108 f. Drawing: Müller-Karpe, 57 Abb. 25.

**36** Beckman 134, § 11.

queen.<sup>37</sup> She negotiated for the exchange of princesses with neighbouring rulers and with the kings of Babylonia, Assyria and Egypt. Two daughters were married off to Pharaoh Ramesses II, who would write to the king and queen addressing them as ‘my brother’ and ‘my sister’. His wife Naptera (Nefertari) wrote a letter describing the presents she had given, a gold necklace with twelve strings weighing 88 shekels, two garments of fine linen (*byssus*) and ten linen gowns.<sup>38</sup> In a letter to Ramesses the writer (either the king or the queen of the Hittites) lamented the fact that the pharaoh had ‘not begotten a son for me’. Possibly their daughter had only produced a girl.<sup>39</sup> Egypt once complained that a princess they had expected had not come so Puduḥepa had to explain why in a long letter. She said the assembling of the dowry had been delayed because of a fire in the treasury and because the evil cousin U. had given the remaining goods to the temple. To confirm her story she says:

Because U. is with you, just ask him if this is true.

She wonders if Egypt is not being greedy, sarcastically pointing to its relative wealth.

Does my brother then possess absolutely nothing? Only if the Son of the Sun god and the Son of the Storm god, the Sea, possess nothing, will you also (possess nothing). My brother, I could enrich you at my own cost, but that is unworthy.

Once the caravan had been drawn up, there was still no barley to feed man and beast on the journey to Egypt,<sup>40</sup> which would last a whole month. Ramesses was so proud at taking in his Hittite princess that he had the marriage depicted in five separate places, Karnak, Elephantine, Abu Simbel and two sites in Nubia.<sup>41</sup> He let it appear as if ‘the great ruler of Ḫatti’ (meaning the king of the Hittites) had been cantankerous before finally deciding to allow her to go:

---

**37** M. E. Balza in: M. Liverani, *I diritti del mondo cuneiforme* (2008) 396 f., 399; Müller-Karpe, 60 Abb. 29.

**38** Beckman 129, no. 22B.

**39** E. Edel, *Die ägyptisch-hethitische Korrespondenz aus Boghazköi I* (1994) 230 no. 110 rev. 5 f.

**40** Beckman, 131–137, with M. van de Mierop, *The Eastern Mediterranean in the age of Ramesses II* (2007) 223–226.

**41** J. F. Borghouts, ‘Ramses II en de Hittieten. Stèles over een huwelijksalliantie in de 13<sup>e</sup> eeuw voor Chr.’, in: K. R. Veenhof, *Schrijvend verleden* (1973) 16–24. For the historical context see M. Liverani, *Or. NS* 59 (1996) 211–217.

The sky gives no water in our area. All the countries are disposed to be hostile and challenge us together. Let us get rid of our possessions, in which my eldest daughter takes the lead.

Events on the journey are also described.

They passed many mountains, and difficult ravines. (...) Then His Majesty became aware of how beautiful her face was, a first among women. (...) [They] fixed [her name] as the Royal Lady, Ma'at-Nefroe-Re. (...) They let her live in the palace of the king and she accompanied the ruler daily.

Her new name meant 'She who has seen the beauty of the god Re'. Later there followed a second princess and people looked back proudly at this glorious event. A depiction of the princess on a relief at Abu Simbel includes her father in Hittite dress behind her as he approaches the pharaoh.<sup>42</sup> The event became a legend, and a thousand years later a story is told of a king of the land of 'Bachtan' giving his daughter to Ramesses in tribute,<sup>43</sup> which included an almost literal copy of the old royal inscription

She was extraordinarily beautiful, according to how the king felt, more than anyone. In this way her title was fixed as 'Great spouse of the king, Nefroe-Re'. As soon as His Majesty arrived in Egypt, everything was done for her that would always have been done for a royal spouse.

Later the second daughter of the king of Bachtan, called Bentreš, became ill and he asked for an Egyptian doctor. Other letters refer to Hittites asking for medical help from Egypt.

After the death of her husband Puduḫepa was active for another twenty years, and then she placed her seal beside that of his successor.<sup>44</sup>

Marriages with princesses also occur in other correspondence between the Egyptian pharaoh and friendly rulers from 1356–1333. These are the Tell el Amarna letters which were found in that village in Egypt. They were written in Akkadian, the *lingua franca* of the day, a little like English is today, on clay tablets. From these we can reconstruct the procedures observed.<sup>45</sup> First the hand of the princess

---

<sup>42</sup> C. Desroches Noblecourt, *Ramses II. La véritable histoire* (1996) 339; photo: M. van de Mierop, 227.

<sup>43</sup> M. Lichtheim, 'The legend of the possessed princess ("Bentresh Stela")', in: W. W. Hallo, *The Context of Scripture I* (1997) 134–136.

<sup>44</sup> Müller-Karpe (note 34), 69 Abb. 33.

<sup>45</sup> Following P. Artzi in: Durand, *La Femme* (1987) 23–26. For an extensive discussion see F. Pin-tore, *Il matrimonio interdinastico nel Vicino Oriente durante i secoli XV-XIII* (1978).

was asked for. Then, often after much shilly-shallying, it was agreed that the princess be given. Negotiating the bride-price, dowry and other gifts followed. Finally a representative of the bridegroom (the pharaoh) would come to pour oil over the head of the princess before setting out with her on the journey to Egypt. There she would be received with acclamation and presents would be distributed.<sup>46</sup>

A letter from the pharaoh to the king of Arzawa says:

With this letter I send you my messenger I. (to say), ‘Show me the daughter that they are offering to My Majesty in marriage’. And he shall pour out oil on her head. Also with this man I am sending a substantial purse with gold of exceptional quality.

That was his first present, and he promised to send ceremonial garments and the bride-price later:

We will come again to you and bring the bride-price for your daughter.<sup>47</sup>

A scarab from Egypt has this inscription concerning Keluḫepa the daughter of Šuttarna II, ruler of Naharina, that is the Land of the Two Rivers, Mesopotamia:

The wonder that was brought to His Majesty, the daughter of Šuttarna, the ruler of Naharina, Keluḫepa, (and) the women of the harem, 317 women.<sup>48</sup>

That was a long journey with a long caravan that they undertook in 1381, going all the way from Mesopotamia to Egypt.

The Amarna archives include the dossier on *Tušratta*, king of Mitanni. He married off his daughter Taduḫepa to Pharaoh Amenophis III (1403–1364), whose throne name Neb-ma’at-Re was transcribed into cuneiform as Nimmuriya.<sup>49</sup> The excessively polite style of his letters can easily make him seem longwinded. Almost every present he sent is described in his letter, but the pharaoh speaks about his own generosity rather differently:

These things which I had brought to you are nothing and my brother must not be annoyed. I have had nothing brought. These things which I have had brought I had brought without any problem. But if my brother gives the woman whom I want and has (her) brought here and I see (her), then I shall have this all brought to you tenfold (EA 27:14–18).

---

<sup>46</sup> EA 29:28 ff.

<sup>47</sup> EA 31:11–16, 22 with H. A. Hoffner, *Letters from the Hittite kingdom* (2009) 273–277 no. 95.

<sup>48</sup> C. Blankenberg-van Delden, *The large commemorative scarabs of Amenhotep III* (1969) 18, 129–133 (D 1); A. Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East I* (1995) 217; A. H. Podany, *Brotherhood of kings* (2010) 196 f. (with photo).

<sup>49</sup> Podany, *Brotherhood*, 217–231.

The marriage was arranged by representatives of both rulers, who travelled to and fro. We saw such travelling also in the negotiations for the marriage of Zimri-Lim in Mari to Šibtum in Aleppo. In his last letter (EA 29) Tušratta seems to look back on the past. His father had refused six times before he gave a princess, but he himself had immediately agreed to the request. The princess was received joyfully in Egypt and looked splendid.

As soon as Nimmuriya saw her he was delighted (...) and he made this day a feast for his country.

In many a way the letter expresses the natural wish of the father:

May Ištar and Amon make her like what my brother wishes.

Of course it was expected that the girl would be beautiful. One pharaoh complains to a Babylonian king that ‘the girl that he gave me is not beautiful’ but his reproach was refuted. In addition the young woman should be ‘adult and nubile’.<sup>50</sup>

According to one letter the goddess Ištar wished to travel from Mitanni to Egypt.

Thus spoke Ištar of Nineveh, the ruler of every land: I wish to go to Egypt, to the land that I hold dear, and I wish to come back.

As her statue began its journey, the pharaoh was exhorted to receive her well, and Tušratta justifies making these arrangements.

Ištar is my deity for me. Should she not be the deity for you?’

He suggested in another letter:

We are one. The Hurrian land and the Egyptian land are one together and support each other.

Ištar may have given her blessing to this political move.<sup>51</sup> Tušratta, of course, wants to receive gold from Egypt, much gold, even a statue of solid gold repre-

---

<sup>50</sup> EA 1:80, 3:8.

<sup>51</sup> EA 23 with EA 24 § 15. Photo: M. van de Mieroop, 109 (showing additional lines in Egyptian script in ink). Podany opens her book with an interesting fantasy on the journey of the goddess, with photo (p. 3–9).



senting himself and the princess. He had already worked out a fine dedicatory inscription for his daughter's statue. What he actually received eventually were wooden statues overlaid with gold leaf, and that he felt was inadequate.<sup>52</sup> One letter composed in Hurrian, his mother tongue, was 495 lines long and is most revealing.<sup>53</sup> He claims to have given ten times more than his father (§ 24) and regrets that he had received so little back from Egypt.

My brother has not made it equal (§ 25).

Then he gives a reassurance about the princess:

The wife of my brother whom I gave is pure, and my brother should know this (§ 32).

The presents, described in detail on separate clay tablets, included weapons for the pharaoh (EA 22) and the dowry (*mulūgu*). There were 1500 objects, some destined for the personnel, 270 women and 30 men, which she evidently took along (EA 25). Other princesses were transported in five wagons and once we read of an escort of three thousand men (EA 11:22, 24).

When the pharaoh refused in principle to give away a daughter himself it elicited this reaction from the king of Babylon:

My brother, when I wrote about marrying your daughter, you wrote to me: 'Since time immemorial no daughter of the king of Egypt has ever been given to anyone whomsoever'. Why not? You are after all a king! You can do what you want. Who could say anything to you if you were to give away a princess? When I heard the report, I wrote: 'There must surely be grown-up daughters, beautiful women, to be found. Just send me then a beautiful woman as if she were your own daughter. Who is to say, 'She is not the daughter of the king'?<sup>54</sup>

Once when the Egyptian kingdom had sunk very low the queen sent a messenger to the Hittites saying:

My husband is dead and I have no sons. But according to reports you have many sons. If you give one of your sons, he will become my husband. I shall never choose one of my servants to be my husband ... I am afraid.

<sup>52</sup> EA 29:136–147, EA 27:32–34, EA 24 § 25, end (89–106).

<sup>53</sup> EA 24 with G. Wilhelm, TUAT NF 3 (2006) 180–190.

<sup>54</sup> EA 4 with W. H. van Soldt, Phoenix 47 (2001) 63.

A Hittite prince indeed set off but never arrived. It has been supposed that he was murdered on the journey.<sup>55</sup> A legendary story from around 1300 fits into this context. It concerned an Egyptian prince who fled to Nahrin, the Land of the Two Rivers, and married a princess who was shut up in a tower.<sup>56</sup> He had fled because a prediction had been made that he would be killed by three animals. When they duly appeared the princess fended off the threat of death by a snake. But then came a crocodile ... Here the record of the narrative is lost. Could his fate yet be altered? We shall never know.

When the daughter of the Hittite king was married off to the king of Mitanni, the official treaty makes it clear that the status of the daughter was clearly delineated.

Prince Šattiwaza shall be king in the land of Mitanni and the daughter of the king of the Hittites shall be queen in the land of Mitanni. Concubines (*ešrētu*) are permitted for you, Šattiwaza, but no other woman shall be greater than my daughter. You shall not permit any other woman to be her equal and no-one shall sit beside her. And you shall not demote my daughter to second place. In the land of Mitanni she shall have the position of queen.<sup>57</sup>

## 24.5 Ugarit

The queens of Ugarit owned land and were active in business life (1200 BC).<sup>58</sup> Queen Šarelli conducted extensive official international correspondence, with men as well as women.<sup>59</sup> A list of the personal possessions of Queen Aḥat-Milku includes her jewels, vases, cloth, furniture, and more.<sup>60</sup> In addition there was a 'city of gold' weighing 215 shekels. Possibly this was a crown with crenellations, which was also worn much later in Assyria by the queens of Ashurnasirpal II,

<sup>55</sup> Van Soldt, 63 f.

<sup>56</sup> 'The Doomed Prince', W. K. Simpson, *The literature of ancient Egypt. An anthology of stories* (2003) 75–79.

<sup>57</sup> E. F. Weidner, *Politische Dokumente aus Kleinasien* (1923) 18:59–62; G. Beckman, *Hittite diplomatic texts*. Second edition (1999) 44 § 7.

<sup>58</sup> W. H. van Soldt, 'The queens of Ugarit', *JEOL* 29 (1985–86) 68–73; idem, *Studies in the Akkadian of Ugarit. Dating and grammar* (1991) 12–19. For queens in the West, see also the footnotes in P. Bordreuil, *CRAIBL* 1984, 420–422 (Ugarit, Mari, Hittites, Egypt). W. von Soden suggested that the word *zubultu* in the Mari texts corresponds to Ugaritic *zblt* 'queen', but collation showed that the word does not exist, see *MARI* 2 (1983) 119 f., on nos. 30:4, 32:4.

<sup>59</sup> W. G. E. Watson, *Handbook of Ugaritic studies* (1999) 696–700.

<sup>60</sup> J. Nougayrol, *PRU* 3 (1955) 182–186.

Sennacherib and Ashurbanipal.<sup>61</sup> It was also typical of the crown of ‘the Syrian Goddess’, a feature which we mentioned in Chapter 1, speaking about diadems.

### 24.5.1 The queen mother

That the queen mother was often influential at court<sup>62</sup> is a particularly striking recurring phenomenon in the history of the Ancient Near East.<sup>63</sup> It is not just a phenomenon of the West. She was able to retain her title after her husband’s death. In ancient Israel she was known as the *gēbīrā*. She can often be seen working behind scenes and at times even in front of them.<sup>64</sup> More than once she acted to the detriment of the oldest son of the king, who was first in the line of succession, but may have been another mother’s son. Solomon as the son of Bathsheba managed to secure the kingship, displacing the first son Adonijah. In Assyria similarly the younger son Esarhaddon was helped by his mother Naqi’a to be the successor of his father. This is just one of the examples known from cuneiform texts. Sometimes the queen mother acted as regent for a time. Later evaluations could offer religious or other grounds to legitimate what had happened. S. C. Melville concluded that ‘a woman was only important if she produced an heir and he became king. Strong women in Assyria were therefore the queen mothers rather than the wives of the king.’<sup>65</sup> More modern mothers of the court have also fought for their children and grandchildren,<sup>66</sup> as in the Netherlands when Amalia van Solms exerted herself on behalf of Willem II and Willem III, who later became the glorious king of England.<sup>67</sup>

**61** PRU 3, 183 on Ligne 4. For Ashurnasirpal see J. E. Reade in: Durand, *La Femme* (1987) 139 f. (fig. 1); cf. SAA VI (1991) 70 (uncertain); for Sennacherib see ‘Naqi’a’ in Parrot, *Syria* 33 (1956) 149 f.; for Ashurbanipal see ‘Aššur-šarrat’ in M. Streck, VAB 7/1 (1916) p. CCXVIII, J. E. Reade, *Iraq* 34 (1972) 92 (perhaps also worn by a king). See Figure 4 in Chapter 1.

**62** For the queen mother see M. V. Tonietti, ‘De *l’ama-gal* en d’Ebla à la *Valide Sultan* ottomane. L’importance de la “mère du roi” dans le Proche-Orient depuis la plus haute antiquité’, in: X. Faivre, *Jean Bottéro et la Mésopotamie* (2009) 261–274; G. Pettinato, *Semiramis. Herrin über Assur und Babylon* (1988) 211–214; Durand, *LAPO* 18 (2000) 266.

**63** Z. Ben-Barak, ‘The Queen consort and the struggle for succession to the throne’, in: Durand, *La Femme* (1987) 33–40; S. C. Melville, *JAOS* 124 (2004) 53–55.

**64** In general see H. Donner in: *Festschrift J. Friedrich* (1959) 105–145; Z. Ben-Barak, ‘The status and right of the Gebira’, *JBL* 110 (1991) 23–34.

**65** Ben-Barak in Durand, *La Femme* (1987) 36.

**66** B. Otzen, ‘The promoting mother. A literary motif in the Ugaritic texts and the Bible’, *Vetus Testamentum, Suppl.* 50 (1993) 104–114.

**67** E. M. Kloek in: H. M. Beliën, *Gestalten van de Gouden Eeuw* (2005) 265 f.

From as far back as the third millennium we can read about Dusigu, a queen mother in Ebla. She was always named first in the lists, and when the young queen (*maliktu*) died she herself assumed control. The boy who became king was only between three and seven years old, so she took charge with the support of her minister Ibrum. She used the title ‘Great mother of the ruler’ for twenty years and had her own ‘house’.<sup>68</sup> The queen of Ur, Abi-simti, who had possibly come from Syria, also remained in the public eye.<sup>69</sup> Queen Gašera in Old Babylonian Aleppo kept her title of queen after the death of King Yarim-Lim, and the new king named Hammurabi (not the more famous Hammurabi of Babylon) had to take serious note of the decisions she made.<sup>70</sup> The mother of King Zimri-Lim of Mari, Adad-duri, had a ‘house’ and possessions,<sup>71</sup> and it was she who also cared for the ancestors.<sup>72</sup>

Among the Hittites the queen mother was called the *tawananna*.<sup>73</sup> It is interesting to observe the career of a Babylonian princess who was allowed to marry Šuppiluliumaš I (1350–1322), the Hittite king.<sup>74</sup> The kingdom of Mitanni in Syria lay between his kingdom and Babylonia and he wanted to conquer that territory. To cover his back he courted the friendship of the Babylonians by organising this marriage. The Babylonians made a condition that she should become his principal wife, and that the wife he already had, the mother of his five sons, was to be relegated into second place. The new wife took on the title *tawananna*. On documents her seal is placed beside that of the king in Ugarit with the caption:

The seal of Šuppiluliumaš, the great king, king of the land of the Hittites, loved by the Storm god. The seal of the *tawananna*, the great queen, daughter of the king of Babylon.

After her husband’s death from plague she continued to reign and held all power. When Muršili, one of the five sons, later became king he recorded the story, looking back with rancour at her domineering actions. He attributed the death of his wife to witchcraft on the part of his jealous and wicked mother-in-law. A modern commentator from Australia thinks Muršili was right. The *tawananna* was formally exiled, but nobody dared to do away with this princess from Babylonia.

---

**68** M. V. Tonietti concentrates on Dusigu.

**69** F. Weiershäuser, ‘Exkurs 1: Die Mutter des Königs in Ebla’, in: *Die königliche Frauen der III. Dynastie von Ur* (2008) 150–153, cf. 182, 186 f., 271 f.

**70** D. Charpin, *Akkadica* 78 (mei-augustus 1992) 8.

**71** N. Ziegler, *Le Harem de Zimri-Lîm* (1999) 50 f.

**72** D. Duponchel, *Florilegium Marianum III* (1997) 207.

**73** Sh.R. Bin-Nun, *The tawananna in the Hittite Kingdom* (= THeth. 5) (1975); G. Beckman, ‘Tawan(n)anna’, *RIA XIII/5–6* (2012) 488–490.

**74** T. Bryce in G. Leick, *The Babylonian world* (2007) 505–507. See Figure 4 in Chapter 1.

I gave her a house. She wants for nothing. She has water and bread. Everything is on hand for her. She lacks nothing. She is alive. She looks with her own eyes at the Sun of the heavens.<sup>75</sup>

Another example was Puduḥepa, who remained at the Hittite court as a formidable matron, not just while her husband Hattušili III was alive but also twenty years after his death. We spoke of her earlier. In Carchemish the queen mother busied herself with a lawsuit.<sup>76</sup> In Ugarit the queen mother was called queen till her death, and that may also have been the custom elsewhere.<sup>77</sup> We shall discuss at some length later how the the Assyrian queen Naqi'a acted in favour of her son and grandson.

## 24.6 The Neo-Assyrian period

As we step into the first millennium we return to Assyria. Information flows in rich streams from the archives of the Assyrian courts at Calah and Nineveh in modern Northern Iraq.<sup>78</sup> The women here at court do not necessarily belong to the harem of the king. They might have been part of the household of the queen or of the crown prince, who resided in the 'House of Succession', together with his wife, 'the Lady of the House'. Among his personnel he had a 'supervisor of the women of the crown prince'.<sup>79</sup> We find that the women in the Assyrian women's residences are categorised in various ways: older women who had lived with an earlier king; female family members of the king, including his aunts and widows who had no male guardian; women from the court of a conquered king; attendants on a foreign princess who had been sent to Assyria to be a bride; dependants of foreign hostages; women who were placed by their families in the palace in the hope of securing favour.<sup>80</sup> At this time marriages with foreign princesses were

<sup>75</sup> H. A. Hoffner, 'A prayer of Muršili II about his stepmother', *JAOS* 103 (1983) 187–193.

<sup>76</sup> D. I. Owen, *Studies J. C. Greenfield* (1995) 573–584.

<sup>77</sup> W. H. van Soldt, *JEOL* 29 (1985–86) 72; J.-M. Durand, *MARI* 6 (1990) 277.

<sup>78</sup> S. Parpola, 'The Neo-Assyrian royal harem', *Studies F. M. Fales* (2012) 613–626; S. L. MacGregor, *Beyond hearth and home. Women in the public sphere in Neo-Assyrian society* (= SAAS 21) (2012), Chapter III, 'Palace women'; S. Teppo, 'The agency of the Neo-Assyrian women in the palace', *Studia Orientalia* 101 (2006) 381–240; S. Svärd (the same person as S. Teppo), *Women and power in Neo-Assyrian palaces* (= SAAS 23) (2015).

<sup>79</sup> Svärd, *Women and power*, 90 f. The supervisor: F. M. Fales, *ZA* 83 (1983) 243 Text 11:6, after the collation in AfO 42–43 (1995–96) 95b.

<sup>80</sup> S. C. Melville on p. 40 in her article 'Neo-Assyrian royal women and male identity: status as a social tool', *JAOS* 124 (2004) 37–57.

again negotiated as a political expedient.<sup>81</sup> S. Dalley has proposed the striking idea that Assyria and the kingdoms of Israel and Judah (Jerusalem) enjoyed many years of friendship through such arrangements made with King Uzziah and King Manasseh.<sup>82</sup> She thinks that Queen Yabâ would have come from Jerusalem for Tiglath-Pileser III, and similarly Queen Athaliah for Sargon II. They were both buried in one sarcophagus, a subject to which we shall return. We read in the Bible of a woman named Athaliah, the daughter of Omri the king of Israel, who was married off to the king of Judah. If S. Dalley is correct, then Athaliah, the wife of Sargon, could have been the mother of King Sennacherib, and Hebrew would have been spoken in the court of Sennacherib. She thinks that perhaps that is how the general of his army was able to speak at the walls of Jerusalem to the people in Hebrew (Isaiah 36:11). Others find this difficult to believe.

#### 24.6.1 The women of the harem

We can now examine the court in greater detail.<sup>83</sup> In this period the harem was called ‘the house of women’, as it was in Mari a long time before. In the Assyrian dialect it is called *bēt isâte*, a reconstructed phrase. The Assyrian palace at Calah has been excavated but no separate building for the women (a ‘harem’) can be identified, leading to the statement in modern sociological terminology that ‘There is no indication that the (Assyrian) palaces were organized along gender lines’.<sup>84</sup> A most respectable woman in the harem was denoted as SAL.Ē.GAL, a Sumerogram meaning ‘woman of the palace’. In Assyrian the word would have sounded something like *issi ekalli* or *issēkalli* (or *ša ekalli*). In Hebrew it appears as a loanword *šēgāl* ‘queen’, a shortened form of *sēgallu*.<sup>85</sup> One assumes that this term denotes the queen, about whom we shall have more to say later. All other women in the harem were named *sekretu*, Sumerian SAL.ERĒN.Ē.GAL ‘female

<sup>81</sup> SAA II (1988) p. XIX f.; Macgregor, *Beyond the hearth and home*, 69 f.; Svärd, *Women*, 88.

<sup>82</sup> S. Dalley, ‘Yabâ, Atalyâ and the foreign policy of late Assyrian kings’, SAAB 12 (1998) 84–98; ‘The identity of the princesses in Tomb II and a new analysis of the events in 701 BC’, in: J. E. Curtis, *New light on Nimrud* (2008) 171–175.

<sup>83</sup> In 1996 P. Garelli perused the Neo-Assyrian texts in vols. I–XII of ‘State Archives of Assyria’ (SAA) and summarised the data on women in his ‘Les dames de l’empire assyrien’, in: J. Prosecký, *Intellectual life of the Ancient Near East* (1998) 175–181. More recently see S. Teppo, ‘The agency’ (see note 79) and her *Women*.

<sup>84</sup> D. Kertai, *The architecture of Late Assyrian royal palaces* (2015) 247, cf. 7 f., 45 f., 245. S. Svärd drew similar conclusions for Calah; see her *Women*, 111–118; it was no Ottoman harem: 91, 110.

<sup>85</sup> J. N. Postgate; S. Parpola, ‘The Neo-Assyrian word for “Queen”’, SAAB 2 (1988) 73–76; R. Borger, *Mesopotamisches Zeichenlexikon* (2004) 346–348.

personnel of the palace'. The Akkadian word *sekretu* means literally 'a closed up woman' (i.e. one closed up in the palace), similar to the literal meaning of the Assyrian *esirtu* 'concubine'. It has been translated as 'harem woman', but a broader meaning, 'palace woman', is better. S. Svärd in her recent book studies the *sekretus* as the higher ranking 'court women', distinguishing them from the other palace women.<sup>86</sup> This word for a lady of the harem, *sekretu* comes from the Babylonian dialect, and we have seen that she is attested in the Old Babylonian period (Chapter 23).

Whenever women from foreign palaces were taken captive, they were spoken of as 'his palace women'. The carrying off of harem women is a common theme in Assyrian accounts of conquests, and it is also mentioned in predictions. About the defeat of the enemy we read in a letter:<sup>87</sup>

The king, my lord, will reduce his country, and his concubines will enter into the possession of the king, my lord. The king, my lord, can be glad.

Ashurbanipal (668–627) defeated his rebellious brother in Babylon and his reliefs show him proudly leading away fourteen men and nine women as prisoners. The captions mention 'his palace women (*sekretu*), his eunuchs, and his battle troops.'<sup>88</sup> These women, 'wives, daughters, palace women' came from very different places, with other languages and cultures.<sup>89</sup> King Sennacherib reported on Hezekiah of Jerusalem:

His daughters and his palace women, male and female singers, I had brought to Nineveh behind me.<sup>90</sup>

In Isaiah 37 no mention is made about whether this actually happened as a result of his siege of the city.

At the court of Sargon II (721–705) the members of the royal family were symbolically represented. The king was a lion or a bull; the grand vizier, his brother, a dromedary or the sign omega; the king's wife Atalia was a scorpion, and she was

<sup>86</sup> S. Teppo, *Stud. Or.* 101 (2006) 405 f.; Svärd, *Women*, 105–109.

<sup>87</sup> SAA X 351 rev. 9–11.

<sup>88</sup> In general see the survey in Svärd, *Women*, 127–130, cf. CAD S 216a.

<sup>89</sup> J. Novotny, 'Daughters and sisters of Neo-Hittite and Aramaean rulers in the Assyrian harem', *Bulletin of the Canadian Society of Mesopotamian Studies* 36 (2001) 175–184. Ashurbanipal: J. Novotny, C. E. Watanabe, *Iraq* 70 (2008) 110 fig. 9, 119 with n. 30 (their clothing), 123–125.

<sup>90</sup> E. Frahm, *Einleitung in die Sanherib-Inschriften* (1997) 57:8, 59:58. In general see S. Teppo, *SAAB* 16 (2007) 265.

thus associated with the constellation Scorpio and the goddess Išhara.<sup>91</sup> During the reigns of his successors the stamp-seal of the king shows him attacking a lion. That of the queen shows her with her husband and a scorpion; a simplified bureau seal was used in the office of the queen's textile factory, also with a scorpion.<sup>92</sup> On the seal of the crown prince he is symbolized by a Y-shaped marking. Other members of the harem also had the scorpion as a symbol. The scorpion appears on their vases, mirrors and cylinder seals. Two alabaster vases from Egypt, belonging to Queen Tašmetum-šarrat, have the scorpion symbol with an inscription (see below). K. Radner has suggested that the reason why the scorpion was the symbol of the harem and chiefly of the queen is that it is known to carry its young on its back and defend them fanatically, an ideal image for motherhood. More probably the scorpion is to be associated with the goddess Išhara, the goddess of marital love, who had the scorpion as her symbol. For this reason H. D. Galter sees the scorpion representing the queen as 'the Mother of the Land'.<sup>93</sup>

Lists of names of women and their duties from Nineveh include 107 singers. One list mentions singers from distant lands: Aramaic women, women from Ethiopia and Tyre, and from Arpad and Ḫatti (Syria).<sup>94</sup> It has been suspected that some women became involved in intrigue at court. We will see later that according to modern scholarship Queen Tašmetu-šarrat has become a prime suspect when they were investigating the murder of Sennacherib. Some letters in the archives of Nineveh show women involved in intrigue, but we can say little more. Certainly some were witches.<sup>95</sup>

### 24.6.2 The management

A high-ranking male official of the queen at the court of Assyria and later Babylonia was known as 'the *mašennu* of the house of the queen'.<sup>96</sup> In Babylonia he

<sup>91</sup> Z. Niederreiter, *Iraq* 70 (2008) 59–62, 65, 82, 85. The scorpion: Macgregor, *Beyond the hearth and home*, 73–77; Svärd, *Women*, 67 f., 74 f.; W. Meinhold, *Ištar in Aššur* (2009) 242 f., 251.

<sup>92</sup> K. Radner in: P. Briant, *L'archive des fortifications de Persépolis* (2008) 487–506. Cf. S. Herbordt, *Neuassyrische Glyptik des 8.-7. Jh. v. Chr.* (1992) 137 f. The Y-shaped cross was called an *išpallurtu* (SAA X 30:3 f.).

<sup>93</sup> *Tydskrif vir Semitistiek/Journal for Semitics* 16/3 (= CRRAI 50) (2007) 646–671.

<sup>94</sup> SAA VII no. 24 with Svärd, *Women*, 121–123; earlier B. Landsberger, *Festschrift W. Baumgartner* (1967) 202 f. In art: S. L. Macgregor, 'Foreign musicians in Neo-Assyrian royal courts', *Studies Anne D. Kilmer* (2011) 137–159.

<sup>95</sup> Svärd, *Women*, 137 f., 139, 168 (intrigues), 138 n. 654, 169 (witches).

<sup>96</sup> Assyria: Gabbī-ilāni-Assur LÚ.IGI.DUB šá É SAL.É.GAL in Calah; Baghd. Mitt. 24 (1993) 244. For Babylonia, see below.



came high on the list of the great functionaries of the realm. Perhaps he was the treasurer controlling all the finance. Far better known is the *šakintu*, ‘the governess’, the woman supervising the Assyrian harem.<sup>97</sup> She had her own administrative staff and her own wagon pulled by draught animals with drivers. As head of the household she was chiefly occupied with financial matters (lending and borrowing) and buying in slaves and slave-girls. One woman with this title, Aḫi-ṭalli, had previously been a court woman (*sekretu*), but was now ‘the governess of the Central City (harem) of Nineveh’.<sup>98</sup> Another, Amat-Aštarti, had a West Semitic name and independently married off her daughter to the chief tailor (?) with conditions that she herself dictated.<sup>99</sup> The Assyrian kings had many palaces, sometimes two in one city. They had 23 different royal harems in five cities. One text lists the monthly rations of bread and beer for women in those at Arbela (50 women), Kalizi (144 women), Adian and Kasappa. Each woman received nine litres per day.<sup>100</sup> Some of their governesses came from far-away from the heartland, and there was more than one in the major cities.<sup>101</sup> One text identifies three palaces where 13 women held such appointments and 145 weavers were working.<sup>102</sup> On average there would have been fifty to a hundred women there, including twenty weavers.<sup>103</sup> We can deduce their tasks from what had been brought in, wool, flax and goat hair. Of course there were also dozens of singers.<sup>104</sup>

At modern Nimrud the British excavated the archive of ‘the governess of the house of the queen of the Review Palace at Calah’.<sup>105</sup> It was in a closed-off wing of the palace, denoted by the excavators as Area S. She functioned there as the housekeeper for the queen and she had her own secretary. Other texts speak of a governess in the women’s residence in the city of Kilizi, near modern Kirkuk. A letter reports the rebuilding of this ‘house of the queen’.<sup>106</sup> These governesses

**97** S. Teppo, ‘The role and the duties of the Neo-Assyrian *šakintu*’, SAAB 16 (2007) 257–272; Stud. Or. 101 (2006) 395–400; Svärd, *Women*, 91–104, 232–239, Appendix C.

**98** In SAA VI no. 93 rev. 3f. In no. 88 she is *sekretu* (see the note). A full title in Calah was ‘the governess of the house of the queen of the Review Palace of Calah’; Svärd, *Women*, 94 (CTN 3 34:5–7).

**99** Svärd, 104 f., 164 f. Discussed here in Chapter 7, on marriage between equals.

**100** ND 2803; S. Parpola, SAAB 17 (2008) 71.

**101** Svärd, 92–94. In each of four provincial capitals there were between 50 and 100 women and 20 weavers working; Parpola, *Studies Fales*, 618, with Svärd, 101 n. 495, 234 no. 14 with n. 864 (the text is ND 2803).

**102** SAA VII 23, with p. XIX.

**103** Teppo, SAAB 16, 267. More in Svärd, *Women*, 100–102. Cf. S. Parpola, *Studies Fales*, 618 f.

**104** Macgregor, *Beyond the hearth and home*, 30 f.; Svärd, *Women*, 121–123.

**105** S. M. Dalley, J. N. Postgate, *The Tablets from Fort Shalmaneser* (= CTN 3) (1984) 9–14; CAD Š/1 165 f.; cf. M. Heltzer in Durand, *La Femme* (1987) 87–89.

**106** J. N. Postgate in art. ‘Kilizu’ in RIA V/7–8 (1980) 592 f. The letter is SAA XVI 111.

were chiefly engaged in financial affairs.<sup>107</sup> On account of their high status distinguished ladies of court also had a governess in their service who had the title 'slave-girl of the king'.<sup>108</sup> This lady of the court was so important that a prince wrote to his father:

B., the 'slave-girl of the king', is very sick. She does not eat a bite. Let my lord the king give the command that a doctor may come here and look at her.<sup>109</sup>

This title *šakintu* 'the appointed one', the governess, can possibly be traced in the Hebrew word *sōkenet* describing Abishag, the Shunamite, a young girl who was appointed to the task of keeping King David warm in his old age. She may well have been intended as a concubine for David, for she was said to have been extraordinarily beautiful. Moreover, David's wicked son Adoniah wanted Abishag as his wife (1 Kings 2:17), which was a trick to seize control of the harem and thereby the throne. However, perhaps this function and its title was not taken over from Assyria but was a native, western institution, possibly found in Ugarit.<sup>110</sup> It is also possible that a later Bible writer projected an Assyrian loanword from his own time back to the time of David. It is striking to think that in the terminology of the harem three Assyrian loanwords may have existed in Hebrew, governess (as outlined here), the word for eunuch (*sarīs*), and the word for queen (*šēgāl*).

### 24.6.3 The queen

Now to the queen herself. We have already seen that in earlier periods she was referred to as the mistress (Beltum). The word for queen that might have been expected is *šarratu*, the feminine form of *šarru*, 'king'. But that title is reserved for foreign queens and goddesses.<sup>111</sup> We saw earlier that the general term 'the woman of the palace' in the Assyrian dialect (*sēgallu*) was always used for 'queen'.<sup>112</sup> Another Sumerian title for the queen was SAL.KUR, 'the woman of the palace'.<sup>113</sup>

**107** Dalley, 13; Pečirkova, ArOr 63 (1995) 11; SAA VI nos. 81–95.

**108** Svärd, *Studies V. Donbaz*, 250–260; *Women*, 102f. (she is named 'the maid of the king', 104, 167f.).

**109** SAA XVI 26 with F. M. Fales, *Lettere dalla corte assira* (1992) 130 f., 166 f. (no. 51).

**110** Heltzer in Durand, *La Femme* (1987) 89 f.

**111** M.-J. Seux, RIA VI/1–2 (1980) 160 § 66.

**112** J. N. Postgate, S. Parpola, 'The Neo-Assyrian word for "Queen"', SAAB 2 (1988) 73–76.

**113** S. C. Melville, JAOS 124 (2004) 47, 52, does not translate the word as 'queen' but as 'consort'. Svärd, *Studies V. Donbaz*, 251f., argues that SAL.KUR refers to the queen only.

One assumes that the son of the queen was also the designated successor to the throne.<sup>114</sup> Palaces of the queen are attested in the cities Ekallate, Kilizi and possibly in Arbail (Erbil). Households of her governesses are found in many more places.<sup>115</sup> We have a letter describing the distribution of some revenues in sequence among palace dwellers. The queen received as tribute 3 mines of silver, 2 tunics, and 3 togas, and as a gift 10 mines of silver, 5 linen garments, and 5 togas. The tribute for the crown prince, recorded after that, is the same. The queen was immensely rich.<sup>116</sup>

Depictions of queens are rarely found.<sup>117</sup> When referring to the queen of Ugarit we noted that the crown of the Assyrian queen was sometimes shaped like a city wall with crenellations. The wife of Ashurbanipal is depicted like this, both on a stela and on the famous drinking scene in a garden (Figure 40).<sup>118</sup> There King Ashurbanipal is depicted lying high up on a couch with his spouse sitting low down on a chair and gazing at him while raising a goblet. The queen has all the attributes of a lady in her position.<sup>119</sup> Behind her is the garden and almost hidden in the trees hang the heads of the conquered Elamites. Before this time no queen had been depicted with the king. The Assyrians may have adopted the idea of portraying them together from seeing such portraits in Egypt when engaged in military activity there.<sup>120</sup> A few Assyrian queens became powerful personalities and we will treat them individually.

---

**114** M. Streck, VAB 7/1 (1916) p. CCXX; Dalley, CTN 3 (1984) 11; M. Liverani, CRRAI 19 [Paris] (1974) 336.

**115** Svärd, *Women*, 71. Arbail in CTN 3 87: Svärd, 97 n. 474, 110 n. 541.

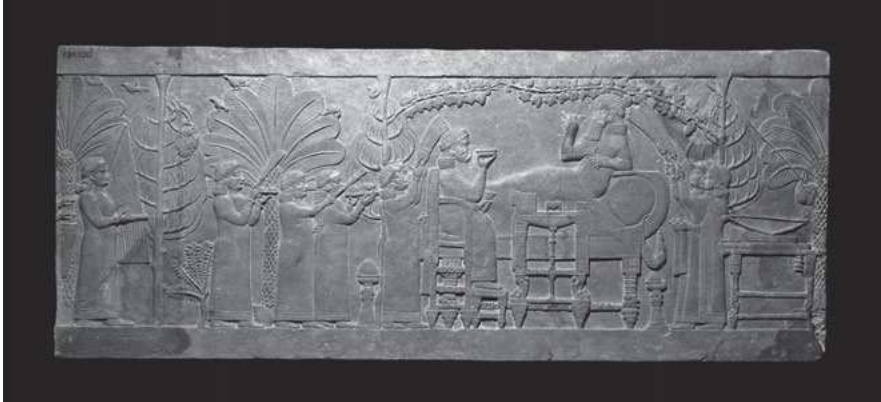
**116** SAA I 34:14–17. The wealth of the queen: Macgregor, *Beyond the hearth and home*, 58–61, 67.

**117** Svärd, *Women*, 74–80, ‘The Queen’s image’. T. Ornan, ‘The Queen in public: royal women in Neo-Assyrian art’, CRRAI 47/II (2002) 461–477, with earlier examples.

**118** For the head on a stela see W. Andrae, *Das wiedererstandene Assur* (1977) 83. For the drinking scene see SAA VII (1992) p. 109. Note that serious doubts have been raised about the identities of the two royal women. The stela was too damaged to warrant an identification. The woman in the drinking scene must be Naqi’a, according to A. Roobaert in *Festschrift Karel van Lerberghe* (2012) 499–506. For a full reconstruction of the garden scene see D. Collon in S. Emerit, *Le statut du musicien dans la Méditerranée ancienne* (2013) 29.

**119** Macgregor, *Beyond the hearth and home*, 88–93; B. Musche, ‘Ashurbanipal banqueting with his queen?’, NABU 1999/10.

**120** S. Dalley, *Esther’s revenge at Susa* (2007) 106–108.



**Fig. 40:** Ashurbanipal and his wife celebrate victory over the Elamites (646 BC)  
On this relief the queen is wearing the crenallated diadem representing a city. In the trees behind them (not visible here) hang the heads of the vanquished. Relief in the palace at Nineveh. *British Museum, London.*

#### 24.6.4 Queen Semiramis

The most famous name of a queen for the modern layman is Semiramis, a name transferred into Greek from Aramaic Sammu-ramat. She lived in the eighth century BC,<sup>121</sup> a time when Assyrian kings had to reckon with powerful governors in the provinces, whose spheres of influence were not well delineated. As queen mother Semiramis was an accomplished player in the games of politics. But first let us see what the Greeks had to say about her. Herodotus speaks of two famous queens, Semiramis and Nitokris. The only comment he makes on Semiramis is that she had been responsible for the installation of dikes (I 184). According to later stories Semiramis was born from a union between a mortal man and the goddess Derketo from Ashkelon. Her first husband was a general with strategic insight, who conquered a town in far-off Bactria. Later she was married to the Assyrian king Ninus and bore their son named Ninias. After Ninus died she reigned alone for 42 years. She founded Babylon and adopted a lascivious lifestyle, even practising incest. She selected lovers for a one-night stand and directly afterwards had them murdered. Such libertine behaviour was regarded in Greek and Roman eyes as typical of the effeminate East. A modern French writer

<sup>121</sup> L. R. Siddall, *The reign of Adad-nirāri III* (2013) 86–100; R. Rollinger, ‘Semiramis’, *RIA* XII/5–6 (2010) 383–386; R. J. L. Lightfoot, *Lucian On the Syrian Goddess* (2003) 351–357 (on chapter 14); G. E. E. De Breucker, *De Babyloniaca van Berossos van Babylon* (2012) 405 f.

takes her to be an archetype of the femininity associated with Ištar of Nineveh, in whom love and aggression were combined. He began his essay by characterising her Greek name as ‘four syllables, both sweet and sharp, cherished in memory’.<sup>122</sup> But nowadays it is clear that nothing in these stories makes sense.

What is the truth behind these stories? The book which G. Pettinato dedicated to her was derided in German as fanciful (*romanhaft*). That was an unjust assessment of an excellent book, fluently written and without footnotes. Pettinato was very much inclined to attribute the initiative for all the most important changes to Semiramis, such as spreading the worship of the god Nabû, and encouraging sympathy for Babylonia in Assyria.<sup>123</sup> She clearly had a special bond with her son Adad-nirari III (830–783). First she was a mother concerned for her young son,<sup>124</sup> and then the strong woman behind his achievements.<sup>125</sup> Royal inscriptions mention mother and son together. The beginning of a stela found in Turkey explicitly links her with Adad-nirari III and Shalmaneser III.

Boundary stone of Adad-nirari, the king of Assyria, of Sammu-ramat, queen of Šamši-Adad (V), king of Assyria, mother of Adad-nirari (III), the strong king, the king of Assyria, daughter-in-law of Shalmaneser (III), king of the four corners of the world.<sup>126</sup>

That stela narrates that she and her son crossed the Euphrates, at the request of the king of Commagene, to establish the border between his kingdom (Kummuḫ) and Gurgum in Cilicia. The mother was here called ‘a daughter-in-law’, and we shall see later that Queen Naqi’a also called herself the daughter-in-law of the father of Sennacherib. In this way these women legitimated their position in controlling the succession. The boundary stone states that the mother and her son served together. This was also suggested by the inscription of the governor of Calah who dedicated statues

for the life of Adad-nirari, king of Assyria, his lord, and for the life of Sammu-ramat, the lady of the palace, his mistress.

---

**122** ‘Quatre syllables à la fois douces et piquantes, amies de la mémoire’, Roux, 198–202 (see the next note), who seems to follow W. Eilers.

**123** G. Pettinato, *Semiramis. Herrin über Assur und Babylon. Biographie* (1988); he was criticised by S. Timm. Cf. also G. Roux, ‘Sémiramis, reine mystérieuse d’Orient’, in: J. Bottéro, *Initiation à l’Orient ancien* (1992) 184–204.

**124** L. R. Siddall in L. Marti, *La famille dans le Proche-Orient ancien* (2014) 497–504.

**125** Svärd, *Women*, 49–51.

**126** ‘The Pazarcik Stela’, now RIMA 3 (1996) 205 no. 3.

In Assur two rows of steles, some belonging to earlier queens, were found. One of them was hers.<sup>127</sup> She called herself ‘the wife of Šamši-Adad’ on an agate jewel.<sup>128</sup> It was earlier established that Semiramis acted as regent for the then very young Adad-nirari III. The Greek sources support this although Berossos, the most important source, formulated it rather vaguely. Eusebius, transcribing the tradition, records that

After these years Berossos also reported on the rule of Semiramis over Assyria.<sup>129</sup>

Opinions have changed. Even though it is still possible to believe that Semiramis held power in the first years, more dated texts containing forms of address are needed for proof.<sup>130</sup>

#### 24.6.5 Queen Naqi’a

Sennacherib (704–681) had at least three wives and seven children. He was murdered by his sons, presumably those of his first wife, which is possibly why on her stele in Assur her name has been made unrecognisable.<sup>131</sup> His second wife was the powerful Naqi’a, the mother of Esarhaddon (680–669), his successor.<sup>132</sup> The third wife, Tašmetum-šarrat, seems to have been a late love.<sup>133</sup> In her inscriptions Naqi’a refers to herself as ‘the daughter-in-law of Sargon’, who was, as the father of Sennacherib, indeed her father-in-law. Naqi’a is an Aramaic name meaning ‘the Pure’ (cf. Latin *Clara*), but she often acted using her second name Zakûtu, an Akkadian translation of ‘pure’. This second name implied that her son had a

**127** RIMA 3, 226f. nos. 2001–2. Photo: J. Marzahn, B. Salje, *Wiedererstehendes Assur* (2003) 21 Abb. 2.

**128** Catalogue *Babylon. Myth and reality* (2008) 104 fig. 83.

**129** F. Jacoby, FGH IIIC (1958) 384 (25), De Breucker, *De Babyloniaca*, 246, F 5a (only in an Armenian translation); cf. P. Schnabel, *Berosos* (1923) 186–188, 194 ff.

**130** W. Schramm, ‘War Semiramis assyrische Regentin?’, *Historia* 21 (1972) 513–521; contra: Pettinato, 39–42, 230 f; cf. J. Bonquet in A. Théridès, *Archéologie et philologie* (1986) 183 f.; S. Timm, *WdO* 24 (1993) 56 f., 62 f.

**131** Frahm, *Einleitung Sanherib-Inschriften*, 3 f.; S. C. Melville, *The role of Naqia/Zakutu in Sargonic politics* (1999) 17–19; J. E. Reade, *Studies M. T. Larsen* (2004) 463.

**132** S. C. Melville, *op. cit.*; M. P. Streck, ‘Naqi’a’, in *RIA IX/3–4* (1999) 165; *PNA 2/II* (2001) 929 f.; A. K. Grayson, *Cambridge Ancient History*, second edition, III/2 (1991) 138 f.; Macgregor, *Beyond the hearth and home*, 95–122; Svärd, *Women*, 53–60.

**133** Melville, 18.

pure, unblemished pedigree.<sup>134</sup> Her sister also had an Aramaic name, *Abi-rami*.<sup>135</sup> It may be significant that all three kings, Sargon II, Sennacherib and Esarhaddon, maintained such tender contacts with the Aramaeans and it is thought that they may have originated from there, perhaps from the city of Haran.<sup>136</sup>

Naqi'a is often mentioned along with King Esarhaddon, her son. When Sennacherib was murdered, Naqi'a advanced the accession of her son, although he was not the eldest. When, after a war, this aim had been achieved, Naqi'a showed her influence again by building a palace for her son and having him take up residence there.<sup>137</sup> It was not usual for a woman to have a secular building erected. She then acquired the title of 'queen mother', which in her case meant much more than the words themselves. In two inscriptions where she is dedicating objects on behalf of her son, she speaks confidently of 'my reign'.<sup>138</sup> It is clear that at this time she was acting on her own initiative and it is probable that she and her son wanted to rebuild good relations with Babylon, after its devastation by an infuriated Sennacherib.<sup>139</sup>

What lay behind the building of the palace was a desire for continuity, chiefly to ensure that the correct son was accepted as the successor. Naqi'a was shocked at the murder of Sennacherib. It had been initiated by a son who had been passed over. Her son Esarhaddon had to flee to Haran. She herself sought comfort by consulting Aḥat-abiša, a prophetess of Ištar of Arbela, for an oracle.<sup>140</sup>

I am the mistress of Arbela. Because you turned to me with the words 'People to the right and left thou hast taken to thy bosom, but my own family, the fruit of my belly, thou lettest wander over the steppe'. Now do not fear! The kingship is yours. Power is yours. – From the mouth of Aḥat-abiša, from Arbela.

King Esarhaddon regularly had his servants and vassals swear an oath in which they assented to his son and successor, Ashurbanipal. Naqi'a herself was involved in this succession. In a treaty she compelled Esarhaddon's brothers to support the succession of her grandson, Ashurbanipal. One assumes that this duty was immediately forced upon them after the death of Esarhaddon and that the text

<sup>134</sup> S. C. Melville, *JAOS* 124 (2004) 56, who points at the 'righteousness' (*kēnūtu*) of a deceased queen in SAA X 188 rev. 3; see S. Svärd, *Women*, 45, 59, 84.

<sup>135</sup> SAA VI 252.

<sup>136</sup> E. Leichty, *Studies R. D. Biggs* (2007) 189–191.

<sup>137</sup> R. Borger, *Asarhaddon* (1956) 115 f. § 86, with dupl.; now RINAP 4 (2011) 316.

<sup>138</sup> ADD 645 with K. Deller, *Oriens Antiquus* 22 (1983) 20–22. Queen Libbali-šarrat also spoke of her 'reign' (*palū*); Svärd, *Women*, 81 f.

<sup>139</sup> R. Borger, *ARRIM* 6 (1988) 6 f. She was Esarhaddon's deputy or proxy in Babylon; Svärd, *Women*, 58.

<sup>140</sup> K. Hecker, *TUAT* II/1 (1986) 59 K. 4310 v 12–25; S. Parpola, *SAA IX* (1997) 9 no. 1; Melville, 28.

was composed in this short time frame. The mother of Ashurbanipal was already dead, so his grandmother had to step in.<sup>141</sup> A letter from this period appears to say that the spirit of the mother who had recently died ‘blessed’ the affair.<sup>142</sup> The importance of Naqi’a can be seen in this short passage,

[the decision of the mother of the king] is as steadfast as that of the gods. What you bless is blessed, what you curse is cursed.<sup>143</sup>

Elsewhere there is also the remark,

The mother of the king is as wise as Adapa.

Adapa, a mythical character, was renowned for his wisdom.<sup>144</sup> It is peculiar that Naqi’a was sometimes addressed as ‘my lord’ as if she were a man.<sup>145</sup> She had a statue of herself made in Haran.<sup>146</sup> A letter states that gold had to be delivered ‘for the statue of the king (and) for the statue of the mother of the king’.<sup>147</sup> In the archives we have found no letters to the queen, only to her, the queen mother. Lists of personnel give a little insight into her extensive household.<sup>148</sup> From the reference to ‘the city ruler of Laḫīru, of the house of the queen mother’ we conclude that she had property in the city of Laḫīru, on the border with Elam. Elsewhere we read of ‘the mayor of the village of the queen, the man of Laḫīru’.<sup>149</sup> The queens had landed estates and the income from these probably defrayed the cost of the court. It goes without saying that she, like queens in other times, had her own textile industry.<sup>150</sup>

**141** ABL 1239 with S. Parpola, JCS 39 (1987) 163–170; now SAA II no. 8.

**142** LAS 132 rev. 7 = SAA X 188. According to Parpola, LAS, Commentary, 120.

**143** LAS 230 = SAA X 17; Melville, 32 f., 75.

**144** LAS 184 rev. 7–9 = SAA X 244; Melville, *ibidem*.

**145** Svärd, *Women*, 82 f.

**146** SAA XIII 188 rev. 8–13 with p. XIV.

**147** SAA XIII 61 rev. 3–4 with B. Menzel, *Mesopotamia XXI* (1986) 223 f.; Svärd, *Women*, 54 f.

**148** Boncquet, 193 f.; SAA VII 5; etc.

**149** ADD 301 = SAA VI 255 (year 678) and ADD 472 rev. 15 = ARU 101:34 f. (year 668). For the location of Laḫīru see K. Deller, JESHO 30 (1987) 26–28; J. MacGinnis, *Festschrift C. B. F. Walker* (2002) 179 f.; R. da Riva, *Der Ebabbar-Tempel in Sippar* (2002) 80–84. There may have been more cities or countries with this name. – In 2 Kings 19:13 and Isaiah 37:13, instead of the traditional translation ‘the kings of ... the city of Sepharvaim ...’ more modern versions have ‘the kings of ... Lahir, Sepharvaim ...’ (cf. REB) where ‘of the city’ (*lā-īr*) is interpreted as this toponym. Many scholars identify that Biblical name with Laḫīru.

**150** Svärd, *Women*, 100–102; Radner, *Studies Fales*, 693 (Nineveh); in P. Briant, *L'archive des fortifications de Persépolis* (2008) 501 (dockets).





**Fig. 41:** Bronze relief showing Naqi'a, the queen mother, holding a mirror in her left hand, standing behind her son King Esarhaddon or her grandson Ashurbanipal. She was the powerful woman at court. Her name and the mirror are Aramaean. Ca. 670 BC. Bronze. Height 33 cm. *Musée du Louvre, Paris.*

A relief in bronze shows Naqi'a standing in an attitude of prayer behind Esarhaddon (Figure 41). She is participating in a dedication ceremony in Babylon when the gods were being returned. Normally the mother of the king would not have taken such a prominent position.<sup>151</sup> She holds a mirror which from the Aramaic

<sup>151</sup> For the bronze relief see A. Parrot, J. Nougayrol, 'Asarhaddon et Naqi'a sur un bronze du Louvre (AO. 20.185)', *Syria* 33 (1956) 147–160; J. Börker-Klähn, *Alt Vorderasiatische Bildstelen* (1982) 213f. no. 220; Melville, 15, 25f., 47–52; Borger, *ARRIM* 6 (1988) 6f.; Macgregor, *Beyond the hearth and home*, 109–118; Svärd, *Women*, 77, 79.

West is a typical symbol for a woman.<sup>152</sup> Furthermore a seal impression possibly shows her standing behind the king, who is honouring a goddess.<sup>153</sup>

### 24.6.6 Other queens

We turn to Sennacherib's wife, Tašmetu-šarrat, whom he describes as

the queen, my dear wife (*hirtu*), and whom the mother goddess has made above all other women with a perfectly beautiful figure.

He built for her a 'palace of love (*ru'āmu*), joy and rejoicing'. Behind the veil of this formulaic language some detect a young, beautiful woman, one with whom Sennacherib fell madly in love in his old age.<sup>154</sup> Others ascribe this praise as befitting the eminent status a queen of Assyria had with this king. Her stamp seal which has been found shows a scorpion hovering over her and the king.<sup>155</sup> Egyptian alabaster vases inscribed with her name are now in museums at Istanbul and Berlin.<sup>156</sup> We lose all trace of her after the murder of her husband. It has been suggested that she was the mother of the two brothers who murdered Sennacherib. The three of them had been bypassed by Naqi'a and wished to intervene in her machinations. But they failed, and the deliberately damaged stela of a queen was in fact hers, a victim of a *damnatio memoriae*, so is the suggestion.<sup>157</sup> Naqi'a must have been the driving force behind the concentration of power to her own family. She, like the crown prince, even had her own standing army.<sup>158</sup> The magnates of the empire must also have resented such changes and they must have rebelled against Sennacherib and Esarhaddon.<sup>159</sup>

---

**152** Parrot, Syria 33, 149. For the mirror as typical among Aramaean women see Chapter 1, 'Symbols', at the end. S. Svärd sees in the mirror a symbol of femininity referring to the goddess Ištar (Mulissu); *Women*, 77, 79.

**153** For the seal impression see J. E. Reade in Durand, *La Femme* (1987) 144 f., with S. Herbordt, *Neuassyrische Glyptik des 8.-7. Jh. v. Chr.* (1992) 138.

**154** R. Borger, 'König Sanheribs Eheglück', *ARRIM* 6 (1988) 5 f.; cf. p. 10:32–33; now RINAP 3/2 (2014) no. 40:44; and Melville in M. W. Chavalas, *Women in the Ancient Near East* (2014) 233 f.

**155** K. Radner, 'The seal of Tašmetum-šarrat, Sennacherib's queen, and its impressions', *Studies F. M. Fales* (2012) 687–698, esp. 692 f. For a drawing of the seal see Iraq 70 (2008) 61 fig. 10.

**156** The vases of Tašmetum-šarrat: W. Andrae, *Das wiederstandene Assur* (1977) 231 Abb. 207; J. Marzahn, B. Salje, *Wiedererstehendes Assur* (2003) 141, Abb. 2, 3, with Frahm, *Einleitung Sanherib-Inschriften*, 184; OIP 2 (1924) 152, XVI; now RINAP 3/2 no. 2002.

**157** Radner, *Studies Fales*, 694 f.; Svärd, *Women*, 52 f.

**158** Macgregor, *Beyond hearth and home*, 66; Svärd, 63.

**159** Radner, 692 f., followed by Svärd, 67, 73.

From this period we have a lively letter from the eldest daughter of Esarhaddon to the wife of her brother Ashurbanipal, written when he was still awaiting his future in the House of Succession. She regrets that the young woman had not learned industriously to read and write.<sup>160</sup>

Message from the king's daughter to Libbali-šarrat:

Why don't you write your tablet and do your homework? If you do not, they will say, 'Is this the sister of Šerua-eṭerat, the oldest daughter of the House of Succession of Aššur-etel-ilani-mukinni, the great king, mighty king, king of the world, king of Assyria?' And you are the daughter-in-law, the lady of the house of Assurbanipal, the great crown prince of the House of Succession of Esarhaddon, king of Assyria!

This long royal name is the official name of Esarhaddon that he was given by his father Sennacherib. By using it in this letter the writer wants to make an impression. By quoting long titles the addressee is alerted to her high status as 'the Lady of the House' and the intention is that this obliged her to make an effort.

Finally we must recall the wife of Ashurbanipal.<sup>161</sup> As we have mentioned, she appears with him on a relief, toasting the victory over the king of Elam. Despite all these attractive achievements of the women at court, we are brought back to reality when we hear that people could pray only for men, 'for the king, the crown prince and all his brothers, as many sons as there are'.<sup>162</sup>

#### 24.6.7 The queen and burial in Assyria

One queen died during her husband's reign, Ešarra-ḫammāt, the wife of Esarhaddon. The event was considered significant for her death and was even included in the official chronicle for the last month of 672 BC, but without recording her name. The king made a mausoleum for her in the royal city of Assur and a rota for presenting regular offerings was established. It is thought that she was the mother of Ashurbanipal and his rebellious brother.<sup>163</sup> From a letter we are led

<sup>160</sup> SAA XVI 28, TUAT NF 3 (2006) 145 f.; A. Livingstone, *ZA* 97 (2007) 103–105, who claims that 'there is no evidence for rivalry and court intrigue'; P. Villard in F. Briquel-Chatonnet, *Femmes* (2009) 313–315; Svärd, *Women*, 88 f.

<sup>161</sup> J. Novotny, J. Singletary, 'Family ties: Assurbanipal's family revisited', *Studies S. Parpola* (= *Stud. Or.* 106) (2009) 167–177.

<sup>162</sup> SAA X 246 rev. 3–6.

<sup>163</sup> K. Radner, 'Ešarra-ḫammāt', *PNA* 1/II (1999) 406 f. Novotny, Singletary, *Studies Parpola*, 174–176, are more cautious. There exists an eye-stone inscribed with her name, although normally only the names of kings are displayed on them; W. G. Lambert, *RA* 63 (1969) 65 f.

to understand that her spirit, grateful for the honour that she had received from Ashurbanipal, appeared to him and blessed him, saying, ‘May his descendants rule Assyria.’ It continues, ‘Honouring the gods brings forth good. Honouring the gods of the Netherworld gives back life.’<sup>164</sup>

Other letters have possible allusions to this funeral, and a ritual for the dead where women played the leading role may have taken place at the burial of this queen.<sup>165</sup> The corpse was displayed before the cremation ceremony began. Palace women shouted to each other ‘Come here, you will bury the palace woman, your daughter’. The day of the cremation was later. Possibly there followed still later a three-day-long purification ritual for the king in the ‘House of Mourning’.<sup>166</sup> Other scholars prefer an earlier interpretation, that the ritual was for a prince to be healed. We will come back to this in Chapter 29, about the mourning of Tammuz by women. Both theories assume it has funerary associations, either with the queen or with Tammuz, which explains the academic confusion.

Traditionally kings and their loved ones were buried in the ancient royal city of Assur, in the ‘House of the Kings’.<sup>167</sup> There several monuments were found: 137 stelae, set in two long rows, with the name of an important person chiselled into each of them. They were found in 1903 at the fortification wall of Assur and are known in German as the *Stelenreihen aus Assur*. The row to the north has the names of kings, the one to the south those of high-ranking officials, covering 700 years, from the fourteenth to the seventh century. Three stelae with the names of women on them continue the row of kings. After the last king, Ashurnasir-pal II, come Sammu-ramat (Semiramis), an unknown wife of Sennacherib (the inscription was effaced), and the last in the row was Libbali-šarrat, the wife of Ashurbanipal.<sup>168</sup> Here (and elsewhere) the queen wears a crenellated diadem on

**164** SAA X 188 rev. 7–10; Novotny, *Studies S. Parpola*, 174 f.; Svärd, *Women*, 46 f.

**165** K. 164, first edited by W. von Soden, ZA 45 (1939) 42–61; S. Parpola, SAA XX 34 with Svärd, *Women and power* (2015) 45 f., 226 no. 11. Cf. Parpola, LAS, Commentary (1983) 7 (commenting on what is now SAA X 9), 120 (on SAA X 188 rev., the appearance of the ghost), 190 f. (on SAA X 233, the ritual), 194 (on SAA X 234), but K. Radner, ‘Ešarra-ḫammāt’, PNA 1/II (1999) 406 f., does not mention this connection. K. Deller and A. R. Millard agree with Parpola in Baghd. Mitt. 24 (1993) 232. Another explanation of the ritual was given by J. Scurlock, RA 86 (1992) 53–67 (see Chapter 29, on Tammuz).

**166** Parpola, LAS, Commentary, 194 (on SAA X 234, combined with the chronicle), combined with Commentary, 191.

**167** Cf. J. McGinnis, SAAB 1 (1987) 8, for the scant data. For ‘House of Kings’ see V. Donbaz, *Studies Sedat Alp* (1992) 119–125; K. Deller, A. R. Millard, Baghd. Mitt. 24 (1993) 232.

**168** W. Andrae, *Das wiedererstandene Assur* (1977) 81–84, 145–151; Pettinato, *Semiramis*, 33–38; J. E. Reade, ‘The historical status of the Assur stelae’, *Studies M. T. Larsen* (2004) 455–473, esp. 463 f.

her head, modelled on the city wall. It is unclear why these three women merited a stela. The stelae seem not to be grave monuments but were erected during the lifetime of the men and women. According to the latest theory, the monuments were removed from temples and transferred to be near the city wall.<sup>169</sup> The stelae are not decorated and not all are inscribed. Still, a depiction of Queen Libbali-šarrat can be seen on her stela,<sup>170</sup> with the inscription:

Statue of Libbi-ali-šarrat, queen of Ashurbanipal, the king of the world, the king of Assyria.<sup>171</sup>

To our surprise the graves of two queens were found not in Assur but in Calah (modern Nimrud). That city was founded by Ashurnasirpal II (883–859) and lay some 30 km south of Mosul on the Tigris. When it was constructed as the new capital, the city wall, a palace and temples had to be built. Both graves were found under the floor of rooms in the living quarters of what is called the Northern Palace, underneath Room 57 of the queen's palace. These graves were undisturbed and contained splendid golden objects.<sup>172</sup> In April 1989 the tomb under room 49 was opened (Tomb II). In the antechamber was a stone plate (35 × 35 × 20 cm) with an inscription of Queen Yabâ:

By the name of Šamaš, Ereškigal (and) the Anunnaki, the great gods of the Netherworld! Yabâ, the queen: destiny overtook her in death and she went to the path of her ancestors. Whoever, in the future, be it a queen who sits on the throne, or a palace lady, the favourite of the king, removes me from my tomb, or puts anybody else with me, who lays his hand upon my jewellery with evil intent, who breaks open the seal of that tomb:

Above (on earth), under the rays of the sun, let his spirit roam outside in thirst. Below in the Netherworld, when libations of water are offered, let him not receive any beer, wine or meal together with the Anunnaki as a funerary offering. May Ningišzida (and) Bidu, the great door-keeper, the great gods of the Netherworld, afflict his corpse with a restless soul, in all eternity.

**169** P. A. Miglus, *ZA* 74 (1984) 133–140.

**170** Andrae, 83 Abb. 59.

**171** Not 'Aššur-šarrat', as one frequently sees. K. Radner, *Die Macht des Namens* (2005) 124; J. Börker-Klähn, *Alt Vorderasiatische Bildstelen* (1982) 55 f. § 191, 60 § 211, 217 no. 227. See Figure 4 in Chapter 1. For another image on a relief see SAA XVI (2002) p. 22 (with the crenellated crown).

**172** J. and D. Oates, 'Tombs, wells and riches', Ch. 3 in *Nimrud. An Assyrian imperial city revealed* (1981) 78–104; Macgregor, *Beyond the hearth and home*, 78–82. For the rich grave gifts see several chapters in J. E. Curtis, *New light on Nimrud* (2008). For the inscriptions see F. N. H. al-Rawi, 'Inscriptions from the tombs of the queens of Assyria', *ibidem*, p. 119–138; for an older edition see A. Fadhil, *Baghd. Mitt.* 21 (1990) 461–482; see also B. Lion in X. Faivre, *Jean Bottéro et la Mésopotamie* (2009) 282–285.

The chamber itself (275 × 230 × 140 cm) was dominated by a stone sarcophagus (230 × 90 × 100 cm) containing two skeletons, one smaller than the other. Yabâ's curse had proved ineffective in preventing what she had feared may happen: actually her successor (Atalia) had been placed beside her in death. Both women were between 30 and 35 years old, but the one was laid in the sarcophagus a long time after the other, probably between 20 and 50 years later. Golden bowls buried with them have the names of Yabâ, Banîtu and Atalia. One of the skeletons is probably that of Yabâ (IIB), and the other (IIa) of Atalia. That skeleton shows that the bones had been heated over a prolonged period to a temperature of 150–250° C, possibly as a temporary measure to conserve the corpse. On the skeletons were fragments of the dark blue garments, embossed with several gold rosettes and beads, from the funerary garb. An impressive amount of gold jewellery was also found there, including a solid gold crown set with rosettes, a diadem of woven gold thread with filigree work inset with semi-precious stones, a few pairs of golden cloissoné bracelets and anklets inlaid with turquoise, and a few chains with pendants and ear ornaments, all examples of perfect workmanship.

The names of the three queens, Yabâ, the wife of Tiglath-Pileser III (744–727),<sup>173</sup> Banîtu, the wife of Salmaneser V (726–722), and Atalia, the wife of Sargon II (721–705), are found on four golden bowls, a box keeping cosmetics, and a mirror. They are all given the title 'lady of the palace'. On a bowl of Yabâ is added 'spouse' (*altu*).<sup>174</sup> What are all these objects belonging to three women doing in this coffin? S. Dalley pointed out that Banîtu means 'the beautiful one' in Akkadian and she assumes that in Western Semitic the name Yabâ means the same. In fact it should really be read as Yapâ, like the Jewish family name Jaffé and the city of Jaffa or Joppe. If she is correct both names refer to the same woman, in the way that Naqi'a and Zakûtu both meant 'the pure one', two names for one queen. Dalley sees Yabâ and Atalia as princesses married off from Jerusalem, as we mentioned earlier. She says that a few of the grave gifts look like Jewish *tefillin*, so may have been part of a dowry.<sup>175</sup>

Perhaps the team of German scholars who were to examine those skeletons were struck with the curse of Yabâ. Before they left for Iraq Professor K. suffered twice from a heart attack. In addition the mother of Dr. W., who was expected to

---

173 On a bowl from Phoenicia with Egyptian motifs. It was dated to the tenth century, so at the time it was already antique; D. Wicke, 'Die Goldschale der Jabâ – eine levantinische Antiquität', ZA 100 (2010) 109–141.

174 Curtis, 136–138, 244 f. ('carinated bowls').

175 S. Dalley, SAAB 12 (1998) 83–98 (the *tefillin*: 95 f.); Dalley in Curtis, 171–175; Melville, JAOS 124 (2004) 45. The identification of Yabâ with Banîtu has been accepted by S. Parpola; *Studies F. M. Fales* (2012) 621 f.; similarly Svärd, *Women*, 40 f.

look after her children, fell down the stairs and broke her leg. If that were not enough, the wife of S. became so seriously ill that she had to undergo an operation, recovering just in time for S. to leave for Iraq.<sup>176</sup> Curses or not, they overcame these setbacks and once they had reached Iraq their examinations revealed that in the cranial cavity of the bodies there were signs of inflammation. That could indicate suffering from migraine or meningitis. Among the gifts were amulets inscribed with incantations against a disease, one that 'seizes the temple/forehead'. Inflammation of the frontal cavity or sinusitis has been diagnosed in other remains and can be regarded as a common illness in such cold, draughty palaces.<sup>177</sup>

The second tomb (Tomb III) was found under the floor of room 57, to the south of the first one. It was a vaulted brick crypt with an antechamber and a grave chamber. In the antechamber was a treasure trove of more than four hundred objects, including many made of gold and encrusted with jewels, and a golden crown.<sup>178</sup> Of special interest is the golden seal of an otherwise unknown woman, Ḥamâ. The inscription reads,

Belonging to Ḥamâ, the palace lady of Shalmaneser (III), king of the land of Assyria (858–824), daughter-in-law of Adad-nirari (II) (911–891).

This was another woman of the harem with an Aramaic name, like those of Samu-ramat and Naqi'a. She is shown praying to the goddess of healing. Behind the figures a scorpion can be seen, the symbol of the harem.<sup>179</sup> In the antechamber were three bronze coffins shaped like a bath. In two of them there were skeletons of women with children (one was a foetus). There were grave gifts with the skeleton in the third coffin. As well as the cylinder seal of a eunuch there was a golden bowl belonging to the powerful governor Šamši-ilu, so possibly the skeleton, of a man of between 55 and 65, was his. It is thought that these coffins were deposited in the antechamber much later than the date of death.<sup>180</sup> The grave chamber contained a large sarcophagus (238 × 132 × 125 cm). There were no human remains, but some fragments of cloth, three small bronze coffins with human remains and gifts were found. Two largely identical texts were inscribed on the lid of the stone sarcophagus and on a stone tablet, which was slightly damaged round the edges. The text on the tablet (26 short lines) extends the text on the sarcophagus by nine lines, with a second curse and a wish for the protection of the deceased.

---

**176** Curtis, 141.

**177** Curtis, 132–134, 147 f.

**178** Curtis, 105 f.

**179** Curtis, 136, 155 f.

**180** Curtis, 144–147, 161–169.

Of Mulissu-mukannišat-Ninua, queen of Ashurbanipal II, king of Assyria (858–824), (and) of Shalmaneser III, king of Assyria (858–824). In future no-one shall bury here a concubine or queen (and) remove this sarcophagus (*arānu*) from its place.

The curses are then followed by,

The daughter of Aššur-nirka-da'in, chief cupbearer of Ashurnasirpal II, king of Assyria. Anyone who later removes my seat from in front of the spirits of the dead, may his spirit receive no food. Let someone later clothe me in a garment, anoint me with oil, offer sheep.<sup>181</sup>

This sarcophagus was clearly intended for the queen of Ashurnasirpal II. She survived her husband and kept her title of queen under his son and successor. So it would have been during his reign that her burial took place. This is indicated by a brick inscription found in the tomb, copying the words used by Shalmaneser III when speaking about the building of the temple tower (*ziggurat*) of Calah.<sup>182</sup> Therefore this brick inscription was not written specifically for this grave chamber. The sarcophagus was empty which suggests that neither any taboo nor the powerful curses prevented tomb robbers from intruding. The bronze coffins there show that the burial chamber was used later, because the stylistic elements are typical of the eighth century and should be dated as such. We should add that much earlier a grave was found at Calah of someone who must have been a princess. Beside her skeleton a famous jewel was found, the Nimrud Jewel. In this same setting a marriage contract was found which K. Deller linked with this high-born lady.<sup>183</sup>

## 24.7 The Neo-Babylonian period

Not much is known about princesses and queens in the Neo-Babylonian period except for the mother of King Nabonidus. His predecessor, Nebuchadnezzar II (604–562), had three daughters living in Uruk to the south, possibly the city where the dynasty originated. The eldest was Kaššaya, who possessed landed estates and was probably married to the aristocrat Neriglissar. He later became king. The details we glean from cuneiform texts confirm the information given by Berossos, who relates in Greek how King Neriglissar (559–556), the son-in-law

---

<sup>181</sup> Curtis, 124.

<sup>182</sup> Curtis, 126.

<sup>183</sup> M. E. Mallowan, *Nimrud and its remains* I (1966) 114 f. (grave DD), with Iraq 33 (1971) 102–105; Macgregor, *Beyond hearth and home*, 77 f. The marriage contract is CTN 2 247 with K. Deller, NABU 1991/105. Deller's suggestion was rejected by Svärd, *Women*, 87 n. 418.



of Nebuchadnezzar, had murdered the rightful successor and seized the crown himself.<sup>184</sup> This first successor, Amil-Marduk, known in the Bible as Evil-Merodach, reigned for only one year. Neriglissar married off his daughter Gigitu to the head of the temple in Borsippa, a town with links to Babylon. This man was the son of the earlier governor of the city. The marriage took place on the first day of Nisan, the first month, and in the first year of the reign of the king. Neriglissar had violently usurped the throne and in this way wished to secure the support of the grandees of Borsippa. Perhaps the marriage was a reward for their support.<sup>185</sup> In any case, the king used a marriage to oblige powerful families and clans.

A list of the most important office-holders in the household of Nebuchadnezzar speaks of ‘Ardiya, the chief (*mašennu*) of the harem’ and ‘Bel-uballit, the scribe of the harem’. The word harem is written as a Sumerogram with the literal meaning ‘the house of the woman in the palace’.<sup>186</sup> Nebuchadnezzar is famous for the ‘*Hanging Gardens of Babylon*’, which the Greeks counted among the Seven Wonders of the World.<sup>187</sup> He constructed sloping terraces planted with trees for his princess Amytis. She was a Mede, and homesick for the green countryside of her native land. We do not know anything of her background, and everything in this story is legendary. A more restrained narrative comes from the Babylonian scholar Berossos, transcribed by Flavius Josephus.<sup>188</sup> Later explanations are detailed and chiefly tell us the technical details of constructing the gardens. The pillars on which the terraces rested were hollow and filled with earth, so that the roots of the large trees would not become stunted. All these stories come from the time of Alexander the Great or shortly afterwards, so it is possible that they were first told by his companions who would have been able to see them for themselves. A problem arises when we note that Herodotus, writing earlier, made no mention of these gardens in his description of Babylon. When Babylon was excavated archaeologists had difficulty in identifying any construction with them with any degree of certainty. We do know that Assyrian and Babylonian kings had

---

**184** P.-A. Beaulieu, ‘Ba’u-asitu and Kaššaya, daughters of Nebuchadnezzar II’, *Or. NS* 67 (1998) 173–201.

**185** *Nerigl.* 13 with R. Sack, *ZA* 68 (1978) 136; M. T. Roth, *Babylonian marriage agreements* (1989) 49 no. 7; C. Waerzeggers, *The Ezida temple of Borsippa* (2010) 72.

**186** M. Jursa in B. Jacobs, *Der Achämenidenhof* (2010) 70. The main source is R. Da Riva, *ZA* 103 (2013) 203, 213 vi 4–6 (= E. Unger, *Babylon* [1931] 285 iv 5–6) (É SAL.ŠĀ.É.GAL). Unpublished texts mention the governess, *šakintu*; Jursa, 70 f. n. 22. In a literary text: SAA III 84 no. 34:40–45.

**187** R. J. van der Spek, *Studies M. Stol* (2008) 302–313 (in ancient traditions, including Berossos); G. E. de Breucker, *De Babyloniaca van Berossos van Babylon* (2012) 517–522, comm. on F 9a-H; S. Dalley, *The mystery of the Hanging Garden of Babylon* (2013).

**188** ‘The so-called *kremastos paradeisos*’; Josephus, *Contra Apionem* I 141; De Breucker, 258 f.

a penchant for laying out great parks, and for one such a project Sennacherib dammed a river, built an aqueduct and collected unusual plants. Perhaps the tradition of fine parks which he established in Nineveh became transformed into the descriptions of the Hanging Gardens of Babylon.<sup>189</sup>

The aged mother of the last king of Babylon, Nabonidus (555–539), had an Aramaic name, *Adda-guppi*. A cuneiform inscription, which was later built into the paving of the great mosque at Haran in southern Turkey, purports to be her autobiography. It focuses on her persistent devotion to the moon god Sîn in Haran.<sup>190</sup> She claims to have reached the age of 104 and to have moved in the court circles of the last kings of Assyria and the kings of Babylon who came after them. We assume that she was a lady of court in the time of Nebuchadnezzar and that her son must have been aged around 60 when he became king. He claimed to have been elevated to this position in spite of himself. Possibly his son Belshazzar was the true usurper, once he had obtained prominence. It seems significant that mother and son were both involved in the worship of the moon god Sîn in the city of Haran, which remained as the cult-centre for the moon god.<sup>191</sup> In her inscription Adda-guppi says that in the 16th year of Nabopolassar the moon god left his city, meaning that his temple was destroyed, and that she had placated the angry god by mourning, ‘clad in a torn garment’. Sîn had called Nabonidus to the throne, and he undertook the rebuilding of the temple of Sîn in Haran. In gratitude Sîn gave the mother a very long life:

From the time of Ashurbanipal, the king of Assyria, to the ninth year of Nabonidus, the king of Babylon, the son who came forth from my loins, for 104 years Sîn kept me alive with the fear that he had placed in my heart. As for me, the sight of my eye was clear, my understanding was excellent, my hand and foot were healthy, my words were precise, my food and drink pleased me, I felt good and my heart was lively. I saw my grandchildren as far as the fourth generation and I was satisfied with old age (Column ii 26–34).

After a break in Column iii the inscription goes on to speak of Nabonidus himself. His mother died in the ninth year of his reign and her funeral was most elaborate. Guests came from all corners of the kingdom for seven days of mourning, after which everyone shaved their heads and headed homewards. This fits in more or less with a passage in the Chronicle of Nabonidus about his ninth year:

---

**189** This is the thesis of Dalley, *The mystery of the Hanging Garden of Babylon*. (2013); cf. her earlier articles in: *Assyrien im Wandel der Zeiten* (1997) 19–24; *Iraq* 56 (1994) 45–58. Her theory was rejected by A. M. Bagg, *BiOr* 71 (2014) 487–492; cf. Bagg, *Assyrische Wasserbauten* (2000) 198–207.

**190** H. Schaudig, *Die Inschriften Nabonids von Babylon* (2001) 500–513; A. L. Oppenheim, *ANET* (1969) 560–562; K. Hecker, *TUAT* II/4 (1988) 479–485.

**191** T. M. Green, *The city of the Moon God. Religious traditions of Harran* (1992).

On the fifth day of the first month the mother of the king died at Dur-karašu on the banks of the Euphrates, above Sippar. The Crown Prince and his army were three days in mourning. A wailing ceremony (*bikîtu*) was organised. In the third month there was a wailing ceremony for the queen mother in Babylon.<sup>192</sup>

Where she was buried was a secret.

What should we make of this pseudo-autobiography? We know that Nabonidus worshipped the moon god which gave him problems with the priests of Marduk, the god of Babylon. His mother must have come from Haran, the cult-centre of the moon god, and she would have been brought up in that tradition of worship. She claims to have been at court with successive kings of Assyria and Babylon, where Nabonidus must have lived. The mother does not name the father of her son, which has given rise to the theory that she was an unmarried priestess (*entu*). Some then deduce that she was indeed an Assyrian princess, since princesses of the Assyrian court functioned in the role of priestesses.<sup>193</sup> She claimed to have been successful at court, but how exactly her son rose to power we have absolutely no idea.

Herodotus provides much information about *Nitocris*, a Babylonian queen who is supposed to have lived five generations after Semiramis (I 185–187). She diverted the Euphrates, constructed a reservoir and built a bridge in Babylon, building works accomplished by Nebuchadnezzar II.<sup>194</sup> She was called the mother of Labynetos, a name which could perhaps refer to Nabonidus. This, with the intervening five generations, would fit with her being Adda-guppi, according to W. Röllig.<sup>195</sup> We are also told that King Darius opened the grave of Nitocris, which fits with the fact that the grave of Adda-guppi was concealed. The folk memories conveyed by Herodotus must necessarily be treated as confused, for the name Nitocris occurs elsewhere in his writing as that of an Egyptian queen (II 100). His stories are hopelessly muddled. Today the Greek traditions about Semiramis, the hanging gardens, and Nitocris are not to be treated at face value for establishing historical facts. The reconstruction of the possible backgrounds to the traditions is best left to the specialists.

---

192 A. K. Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian chronicles* (1975) 107, Chron. 7:13–15.

193 This is the theory of W. Mayer, 'Nabonids Herkunft', *Festschrift W.H.Ph. Römer* (1998) 245–261. But it was rejected by H. Schaudig, *Die Inschriften*, 10 n. 21. For the mother see also P.-A. Beaulieu, *The reign of Nabonidus* (1989) 67–79.

194 Cf. J. A. Black, Northern Akkadian Project Reports I (1987) 24 f.

195 W. Röllig, 'Nitokris von Babylon', *Festschrift Franz Altheim I* (1969) 127–135; M. P. Streck, 'Nitokris', *RIA IX/7–8* (2001) 590 f.

## 24.8 The Persian period and later

According to the Greeks Persian queens lived in immeasurable luxury. We need not here retell their stories,<sup>196</sup> but we must mention indigenous contemporary sources, in particular the official administration documents on clay tablets from Persepolis from the time of Darius (522–486) written in Elamite. They are often duplicate copies of orders that had been issued. Four women of the royal family are shown to have owned palaces with landed estates, and what is noted most is their expenses for food and wine provided for their official journeys. Once we find the expenses incurred for a reception for 2000 guests.<sup>197</sup> The income to defray these outgoings came from the royal revenues. Their workshops had anything from 20 to 489 employees producing manufactured goods for these queens. The Persian kings toured through their empire. They had palaces in several cities where luxurious banquets were served, as we know from Greek sources. The subjugated countries had to take care of the catering, as some archives in Babylonia demonstrate. In 528 BC King Cambyses visited Abanu in southern Iraq where the temple of Eanna in Uruk had to take care of the food. From their ‘house of flour’ the women who used to grind the barley and the cumin were sent to Abanu to do this work in the local palace.<sup>198</sup> Another archive sheds light on the corvée work done in Borsippa and Babylon (named *upiyāta*): the ingredients were collected, processed and sent by boat to Susa, one of the Persian capitals in nearby Elam. A member of the business house Egibi organised and financed all this and women did the milling in Babylon.<sup>199</sup>

Herodotus, Plato and later Greek writers mention land in conquered territory that was given to these women, and the profit accruing was for the ladies, for their ‘belts, veils and shoes’.<sup>200</sup> The belt is referred to in another text, when Xenophon reported that his army north of Aleppo had reached the River Chalos (Qoweik), which was

---

**196** P. Briant, *Histoire de l'empire perse de Cyrus à Alexandre* (1996) 289–297, in the chapter ‘Gens et vie de cour’. Much about women at court can be found in M. Brosius, *Women in ancient Persia 559–331 BC* (1996).

**197** H. Koch, ‘Frauen im Achämenidenreich’, *Studies O. Klíma* (1994) 134–141.

**198** G. Tolini, ‘Les repas du grand roi en Babylonie: Cambyse et le palais d’Abanu’, in: X. Faivre, *Et il y eut un esprit dans l’homme. Jean Bottéro et la Mésopotamie* (2009) 237–254. The milling: 240, 245f.

**199** G. Tolini, ‘Les ressources de la Babylonie et la table de Darius le Grand (522–486)’, in: C. Grandjean, *Le banquet du monarque dans le monde antique* (2013) 145–162. The milling: 161.

**200** Briant, 474–476, 1040f. (lit.).

full of large tame fish, which the Syrians regarded as gods, and they did not allow anyone to harm them, nor the doves. The villages where they lived belonged to Parysatis, given for the belt (*eis zōnen*) (*Anabasis* 1.4.9).

One modern scholar accounts for the name by proposing that the villages had been given to the woman as a ‘morning gift’, a present given to the bride after her belt had been undone on the wedding night.<sup>201</sup> That the estates were used for producing veils and shoes must have been Greek imagination based on a misunderstanding. At Nippur in Babylonia we also know there were fields and gardens belonging to Parysatis. Recently it was shown that she owned other land near Babylon, and we can follow her fortunes through the archives for about thirty years.<sup>202</sup> A member of a family of merchants called Murašu was in charge of daily administration and settled the accounts with her representative, a Jew named ‘Mattanya (Mattani-Yāma), the servant (or slave) of Ea-bullissu, the employee of Parysatis (Purušatu)’ (between 420–419).<sup>203</sup> On his return journey in 401 Xenophon travelled through ‘the villages of Parysatis, of the mother of Cyrus (the Younger) and of the king (Darius II)’. These were on the Tigris near Assur (*Anabasis* II.4.27), so she had villages there also.

The energetic leadership of Alexander the Great heralded the arrival of the Greeks to follow the Persians. But unexpectedly he died in Babylon in 323 BC. Afterwards the Seleucid Dynasty took power in this area. One cuneiform text from 236 mentions the queen of Seleucus IV, Laodice. She and her sons gave land in the vicinity of Babylon to the cities of Babylon, Borsippa, and Cutha. A tithe of the revenues (10 %) was to go to their temples.<sup>204</sup> Her death is recorded in an official almanac listing daily observations of the moon and planets and recording unusual events. Babylonian scholars had been keeping such records since 740 BC. For the seventh and ninth days of the fourth month of the year 181 we read:

A rumour about Laodice (*Ludiqê*), the wife of Seleucus (*Seluku*) in Babylon: Fate has dragged off the queen. Mourning and lamentation have been organised.<sup>205</sup>

**201** G. Cardascia, ‘La ceinture de Parysatis: un *Morgengabe* chez les Achéménides?’, *Études P. Garelli* (1991) 363–369; repeated in *Hommage à Guillaume Cardascia* (1995) 137–146; see also H. Koch, 138 f.

**202** M. Jursa, M. W. Stolper, ‘Parysatis’, *RIA* X/5–6 (2004) 351; Stolper, *Studies E. V. Leichty* (2008) 463–472.

**203** Cardascia, ‘La ceinture’, 364 (A), 368 f.; Briant, *Histoire*, 476.

**204** CTMMA IV (2014) 213–227 no. 148.

**205** A. J. Sachs, H. Hunger, *Astronomical diaries* II (1989) 385 no. -181 rev. 7–12; G. F. del Monte, *Testi dalla Babilonia Ellenistica* I (1997) 70.

## 24.9 Arab queens

The earliest of the ancient records mentioning the queens of the Arabs is the Biblical story about the queen of Sheba, who visited Solomon (1 Kings 10:1–13), but others are regularly mentioned in Assyrian royal inscriptions.<sup>206</sup> One queen, Telḥunu, was carried off to Nineveh and her daughter who grew up there was later appointed as queen by King Esarhaddon.<sup>207</sup> The Assyrians reckoned that such a woman had remarkable abilities and could become a priestess (*kumirtu*) or a wise woman (*apkallatu*).<sup>208</sup> We know from other sources that the Arabs did have queens from time to time, including the famous Zenobia, the queen of Palmyra (267–271 AD). The queens of some Arsacid kings (250 BC–AD 224) are mentioned in the date formulas which may reflect their important position.<sup>209</sup> For a period of sixteen centuries we know the names of about twenty Arab queens, but why that institution should have been established is unclear.<sup>210</sup> It certainly had nothing to do with the daughter of a sheikh, who is reported to have taken a leading role in the struggle against the Bedouin.<sup>211</sup>

---

**206** S. W. Cole, OIP 114 (1996) 54; I. Eph'al, *The ancient Arabs. Nomads on the borders of the Fertile Crescent 9<sup>th</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> centuries B. C.* (1982) 249b, in the Index under 'Arabs: queens'.

**207** Eph'al, 127 f.

**208** M. Cogan, *Imperialism and religion* (1974) 18; R. Borger, Or. NS 26 (1957) 9 f.

**209** J. Huijs, 'Images of Parthian queens', in: L. Marti, *La famille dans le Proche-Orient ancien* (2014) 605–642.

**210** N. Abbott, 'Pre-Islamic Arab Queens', AJSL 58 (1941) 1–22; E. A. Knauf, *Ismael* (1989) 4 f., 24 f. n. 105.

**211** U. Winter, *Frau und Göttin* (1983) 238; e.g., A. Jaussen, *Coutumes des Arabes au pays de Moab* (1907, 1948) 174 f.

## 25 Priestesses

In this chapter we take up a new subject, namely the role of women in religious worship. We will begin at the top of the scale, with the priestesses, and end with the ordinary housewife in chapter 29. We know much about the particular responsibilities the ‘religious women’ held because they occupied important positions and their activities are well documented.<sup>1</sup> They were highly placed women whom we reverently call priestesses since they played a role in the cult worship. In the Old Babylonian period there were other women whom we call nuns. They had religious tasks, such as praying and perhaps making offerings for the dead,<sup>2</sup> and often lived in special building complexes. Because we call them nuns, the place where they lived as a group we naturally call a convent. They had no (biological) children (see Chapters 26 and 27).

### 25.1 The high priestesses

#### 25.1.1 The *entu*

The Akkadian word *entu* for a priestess is evidently a feminine form modelled on the Sumerian word *en*, ‘lord’. In Sumerian and older Akkadian she was referred to as an *en* and *enum*, a masculine form.<sup>3</sup> It is thought that around 3000 BC *en* was the Sumerian title of the ruler of the city of Uruk, the man beside Inanna, the patron goddess of the city. They met together in the Gipar, her dwelling in the city. Five hundred years later, in the Old Akkadian period, the highest priestess of the moon god in Ur took on that masculine title, and this must have been a deliberate revival of an institution.<sup>4</sup> She was also called the ‘son’ of her father, and some-

---

1 For a survey see J. G. Westenholz, ‘Women of religion in Mesopotamia: the high priestesses in the temple’, *Canadian Society of Mesopotamian Studies Journal* (= CSMSJ) 1 (2006) 31–44.

2 R. Harris, *Studies A. L. Oppenheim* (1964) 108, rejects the word ‘priestess’ because in the texts she does not find ‘specific religious prescriptions’ or ‘sacerdotal functions’; cf. p. 121, and *Ancient Sippar* (1975) 303 n. 1. This depends on the definition of ‘priestess’. See also L. Barberon, *Les religieuses et le culte de Marduk dans le royaume de Babylone* (2012) 1 n. 1. In the entry ‘Priester’ in *RIA X/7–8* (2005) only high priestesses (p. 622f., 626–628) and the ‘nun’ (633f.) are discussed.

3 Akkadian *enu*, CAD E 179. It clearly indicates a woman in the omen ‘the *e-nu-um* will be subjected to sexual intercourse (*šuḥḥû, nâku*)’. See also D. Charpin, *NABU 2004/78*. The masculine form reminds one of masculine *zikrum*, by which the court woman *sekretu* was meant.

4 P. Steinkeller in: K. Watanabe, *Priests and officials in the Ancient Near East* (1999) 103–137; see B. Lion, ‘Sexe et genre (2). Des prêtresses fils du roi’, in: F. Briquel-Chatonnet, *Femmes* (2009) 165–182.

times the ‘brother’ of her brother.<sup>5</sup> Her masculine titles perhaps perpetuate a tradition. On the other hand, it has been proved that in Old Sumerian the word ‘son’ could also mean ‘daughter’, and that word possibly was perpetuated as an archaism.<sup>6</sup> Still other commentators prefer the idea that the masculine noun indicated her independent status.

The *entu* priestess served a male god, and was sometimes called his ‘wife’.<sup>7</sup> In Ur, when she first became a priestess, with the title *en* (*entu*), she was given a new, pious, Sumerian name, which always began with the element *En*.<sup>8</sup> The male priests, who served the goddesses, also had the title *en*.<sup>9</sup> Year 8 of Ur-Nammu was called ‘The year that a son of Ur-Nammu was chosen as the *en* of Inanna in Uruk by liver extispicy.’ Kings liked to call themselves the *en* of the city of Uruk. Possibly all they meant by this was to suggest that they were the *en* of the goddess Inanna of Uruk, but only King Anam stated this explicitly.<sup>10</sup> The kings of Isin called themselves the *en* or even the ‘husband’ of Inanna of Uruk.<sup>11</sup> The kings of Ur III and Isin in hymns refer to themselves as having the status of an *en* alongside their status as a king. Šulgi, when serving the gods Enlil and Ninlil during their evening meal in this capacity, is shown clad in a special garment.<sup>12</sup>

As for the women, we note that outside Mesopotamia in early times they also could become the wife of the god. In Ebla in Syria, south of Aleppo, we know of four princesses who were appointed as ‘the wife of the god’ (*dam dingir*). They were in the service of the god Idabal, in his temple in the town of Luban, not far from Ebla.<sup>13</sup> When Princess Tinib-Dulum set out to go there she bore the title ‘the sister of the king’. In fact she was the daughter of the previous king, Irkab-Damu. She took with her in her luggage clothes, jewels, household items and small pieces of furniture. Five princes and many officials accompanied her with presents for the priests. After a few years the princess left and returned to Ebla. There she had previously had the same position in the service of the Kura, the god of Ebla. She

5 En-ane-du, on her seal; RIME 4 (1990) 257.

6 Lion, ‘Sexe et genre (2)’, 177.

7 J. Renger, ZA 58 (1967) 146 f. § 56 (nin.dingir). For ‘wife’ (*dam*), see below.

8 For a discussion of such *En*- names see D. O. Edzard, ZA 53 (1959) 15–18.

9 Renger, 133 § 35, 143 (nin.dingir both of gods and goddesses); idem in: *Le temple et le Culte* (= CRRAI 25) (1975) 112. The exception is the male *en*, serving the male god Enlil in Nippur (Ur III, OB); J. G. Westenholz, *Nippur at the Centennial* (1992) 304, 306; M. Sigrist, *Les sattukku dans l’Ešumeša durant la période d’Isin et Larsa* (1984) 161.

10 Steinkeller, 130. For a survey see M.-J. Seux, *Épithètes royales* (1967) 396.

11 Renger, ZA 58, 126 n. 95, 133; D. O. Edzard, ZZB (1957) 77 f.

12 J. Klein, *Studies H. Tadmor* (1991) 298 (Šulgi G 50–52), with a complete survey in n. 31.

13 A. Archi, ‘The high priestess, *dam-dingir*, at Ebla’, *Festschrift O. Loretz* (1998) 43–53; F. Weiershäuser, *Die königliche Frauen der III. Dynastie von Ur* (2008) 245–249.



was succeeded by Ammaga.<sup>14</sup> At that same time Sargon, the king of Akkad (ca. 2300 BC), appointed his daughter as an *entu* priestess of the god Nanna, the moon god, in the temple at Ur. In doing this he started a tradition which would persist until the middle of the Old Babylonian period. And then, more than a thousand years later, it would be revived by King Nabonidus. His daughter lived in Ur in the Gipar, a kind of convent. Another convent, also called the Gipar, lay outside Ur and has been excavated.<sup>15</sup> In Ur it was traditional for the moon god Nanna to be served by this priestess, who had to be a daughter of the king. By appointing his daughter as priestess there he satisfied his political aim of controlling the city of Ur.<sup>16</sup> Conquerors, as we shall see, did not have the effrontery to remove the priestess who had been installed.

This cult was not confined to Ur. Not far away, in Ga'eš, King Amar-Sîn, as 'the beloved son of Nanna', established a convent for Nanna called the Gipar in the temple of Karzida. This he did 'for the first time in history' and 'he caused En-aga-zi-ana, his beloved priestess (*en*), to enter there'.<sup>17</sup> The celebration ceremonies of her investiture lasted from day 23 to day 30 of the harvest month.<sup>18</sup> Six years later she died and three months afterwards her successor took over.<sup>19</sup> The year Amar-Sîn 9 is named 'The year that En-Nanna-Amar-Sîn.ra-ki.ág was installed as *en* of Nanna of Karzida'.<sup>20</sup> Other priestesses functioned similarly for other gods in other cities. Now and again we shall refer to them but we shall concentrate on the priestesses of Nanna in Ur.<sup>21</sup>

---

**14** Archi, 46–48. Previously the name was read as Sanibdulm.

**15** Renger, ZA 58, 128 f., 130 n. 134, 139 n. 213 (nin.dingir). For the Gipar in Uruk see A. Falkenstein, Baghd. Mitt. 2 (1963) 33 (of Niši-inišu, the *ereš.dingir* of Lugalbanda, daughter of King Sîn-kašid); Weadock, 124 f.

**16** Išbi-Erra of Isin; Renger, ZA 58, 118 f.

**17** H. Steible, FAOS 9,2 (1991) 231–234, Amar-Suen 8.

**18** J. G. Westenholz, CSMSJ 1, 35b.

**19** W. Sallaberger, JCS 47 (1995) 18 f.; ZA 82 (1992) 132 f., on FAOS 16 no. 767.

**20** This was confirmed by a text recording a sacrifice made 'on the day when En-Nanna-Amar-Sîn-ki.ág-ana was installed as priestess of Ga'eš'. Date: 14 XII Amar-Sîn 8. See P. Michalowski, JCS 42 (1990) 119 f.; Westenholz, CSMSJ 1, 35b.

**21** Important articles include E. Sollberger, AfO 17 (1954–56) 26–29, 45 f., who thought they were all known; P. N. Weadock, 'The *Giparu* at Ur', Iraq 37 (1975) 101–128; see also M. van de Mieroop, Ur (1992) 115–117.

### 25.1.2 In Ur

The *entu* in her convent at Ur brought renown to that city. In the Old Akkadian period the priestess of the moon god Nanna (or *Sîn*) in Ur had two additional titles. First she was a *zirru*, a Sumerian combination of cuneiform signs alluding to the name of the moon god. The word *zirru* indicated a female bird, and we know that the wife of the moon god, Ningal, was also called *zirru* ‘hen’. So we conclude that this priestess was the earthly representative of the moon goddess.<sup>22</sup> It would be going too far to identify the priestess as an apotheosis of the goddess herself.<sup>23</sup> Later this title disappeared in favour of the simpler ‘*entu* (or *en*) of Nanna’.<sup>24</sup>

From the Old Akkadian period we have two depictions of an *entu*. The first is a limestone relief, 26 cm in diameter, of En-*hedu-ana*, the priestess at Ur (Figure 42). It was found in her convent, the Gipar.<sup>25</sup> It shows two bald figures, probably servants, standing behind a larger figure of a woman wearing a sort of turban on her head. She will have been the priestess, the *en*, who in texts is said to have worn a tiara (*aga*). Her dress has tiers of pleats, which could be described as a flounced robe, the French *robe à volants* or the German *Falbelgewand*. It was typical clothing for someone holding her position. Another priestess, En-*ana-tuma*, is shown on a statue in a seated posture wearing the same garment.<sup>26</sup> Here a completely (?) naked man stands in front of her pouring out a libation. He was probably the priest assigned to this ritual. The cultic illustration within the disk has precise parallels in those from the older Early Dynastic period. One of these was found in the Gipar. This shows that within Akkadian culture Sargon was perpetuating an

<sup>22</sup> Å. W. Sjöberg, JCS 29 (1977) 16, on rev. 14 (Ningal is the *zirru*); J. G. Westenholz, *Studies Å. W. Sjöberg* (1989) 541–544 (*zirru* in the myth is a female bird, a hen; Nanna is the male bird, *ubi*). For the most recent discussion see: H. Steible, FAOS 9,1 (1991) 151 f.; A. Zgoll, *Ein Rechtsfall der En-*hedu-ana** (1997) 301 f.

<sup>23</sup> This was said of En-*hedu-ana*. By contrast see W. Heimpel, JNES 30 (1971) 232b.

<sup>24</sup> In the Ur III period Tulid-*šamši* is named as both *en* <sup>d</sup>Nanna and *en* <sup>d</sup>EN.ZU; NATN 36, seal impression, with T. Gomi, OLZ 80 (1985) 151; MVN 8 115:2; PDT 555 rev. iv 11–13, with S. A. Picchioni, *Oriens Antiquus* 14 (1975) 164 f.

<sup>25</sup> W. W. Hallo, J. J. A. van Dijk, *The exaltation of Inanna* (1968), frontispiece; A. Moortgat, *The art of ancient Mesopotamia* (1969) Plate 130; P. Amiet, *L'art d'Agadé au Musée du Louvre* (1976) 14 f.; I. J. Winter in: Durand, *La Femme* (1987) 189–201 with fig. 1; J. G. Westenholz, *Studies Å. W. Sjöberg* (1989) 540a; E. A. Braun-Holzinger, *Mesopotamische Weihgaben* (1991) 375 f., *Varia* 5; Dana Bänder, *Die Siegesstele des Naramsîn und ihre Stellung in Kunst- und Kulturgeschichte* (1995) 151–155. The widely reproduced images of this disk rely on reconstruction. For the broken pieces as they were found see Expedition 20/1 (Fall 1977) 29.

<sup>26</sup> J. Asher-Greve, F. Weiershäuser in: S. Schroer, *Images and gender* (2006) 53 fig. 4 (statue), 68 fig. 15 (seal of Tutanapsum), 265 f.



**Fig. 42:** An alabaster disk, reconstructed from fragments, showing Princess Enheduana, priestess of the moon god of Ur and a poetess, as a large figure at the centre. In front of her is a priest libating and on the back side is her inscription. 2300 BC. Diameter 27 cm, thickness 8 cm. *University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Philadelphia.*

older Sumerian tradition.<sup>27</sup> A modern commentator has admired the way in which En-*hedu-ana* is depicted on the relief, saying ‘her nose is sharply aquiline, the features intent and intelligent, and the bearing determined and individualistic.’ Also depicted is an altar, which was for An, the god of the sky, as we see from the inscription on the back of the relief:<sup>28</sup>

En-*hedu-ana*, the *zirru*, the wife of Nanna, the ‘son’ of Sargon, king of Kish, built a low [altar] in the [temple of Inanna]-Zaza of Ur. She called its name ‘The altar, the table of An’.

The second depiction of an *entu* is of one named Tuta-napsum, the *entu* of Enlil at Nippur. She is shown on the seal of Aman-Estar, who identified herself as her ‘servant girl’. She is offering the priestess a hook attached to a cord, but what it is and what it would be used for we do not know.<sup>29</sup> The long hair of the priestess is gathered into a bun.<sup>30</sup> Some texts give further details of the clothing, the head-dress and the throne of the *entu*.<sup>31</sup> We note that Tuta-napsum, a daughter of King

<sup>27</sup> This is the explanation of I. J. Winter in: Durand, *La Femme*, esp. p. 196 (with fig. 4. Cf. fig. 2, the upper register).

<sup>28</sup> FAOS 7 (1990) 64 f., Sargon A 1 (with the later Old Babylonian copy C 15, p. 190); RIME 2 (1993) 35 f.

<sup>29</sup> J. G. Westenholz, *Nippur at the Centennial* (1992) 302 f. Cf. FAOS 7, 41 Siegellegende 12, RIME 2, 175; P. Steinkeller, NABU 1993/9; D. Charpin, RA 91 (1997) 93a (the inscription). For a photo see AOF 10 (1983) 215; for a drawing see S. Schroer, *Images and gender* (2006) 68 fig. 15.

<sup>30</sup> F. Blocher, *Die nackte Frau in altbabylonischer Zeit* (1987) 36 f. (‘langes Haar und Wulstring’).

<sup>31</sup> Renger, ZA 58, 126–128. For her attire in art see Westenholz, CSMSJ 1, 36 f. (here note 1).

Naram-Sîn, was the *entu* of Enlil in Nippur, not in Ur. Her father had installed his daughter in Nippur, the religious centre of his country, which can be interpreted as a new political initiative on his part. Sargon acted similarly with Ur.<sup>32</sup> Naram-Sîn had his other daughter En-men-ana installed as priestess at Ur with the title ‘wife of Nanna’.<sup>33</sup> It is unlikely that there was always an *entu* in Nippur.<sup>34</sup>

These priestesses lived in the Gipar, a building complex which we have called a convent. A relief found there may show an *entu*, with her face forward, performing a sacrifice. Other women are behind her in procession.<sup>35</sup>

As well as the Gipar in Ur excavations have been made at the temple of the wife of the moon god, Ningal, adjoining the Gipar.<sup>36</sup> In the Ur III period that complex was almost square (79 × 76.5 m) and enclosed with a thick wall. Sometimes it seems that the word Gipar refers to the whole complex of buildings.<sup>37</sup> We have a much later building inscription of En-ane-du, the daughter of Kudurmabuk, the sister of King Rim-Sîn. In laboured Sumerian she reports the reconstruction of her dwelling place, the Gipar.<sup>38</sup> For the temple of Ningal a king boasted that he had built a ‘bedroom’ (*agrun; á.ná.da*), which would have been where the sacred marriage of the moon god was consummated.<sup>39</sup> The priestess En-ana-tuma dedicated to Ningal a statue of herself, 25 cm high and made of diorite (Figure 43). The room of the temple where it was found is called the ‘bedchamber’.<sup>40</sup>

For Ningal, the queen (*égi*) with the raised head, whose divine powers are without equal, the wise advisor, fit for her status as queen, for her mistress: En-ana-tuma, the *en* beloved of Nanna, the *en* of Nanna in Ur, ‘son’ of Išme-Dagan, king of Sumer and Akkad, brought this statue into her bedchamber. For her life she has dedicated it to her.

**32** Tuta-napsum: ‘Tūtanapšum’, RIA XIV/3–4 (2014) 223 f.

**33** FAOS 7, 273 Naram-Sîn C 16; RIME 2, 145 f.

**34** J. Klein in Durand, *La Femme* (1987) 104, on Šulgi G.

**35** I. J. Winter in Durand, *La Femme*, 193 fig. 2; J. Asher-Greve, *Frauen in altsumerischer Zeit* (1985) pl. XXVIII no. 557; eadem, in: S. Schroer, *Images and gender* (2006) 61.

**36** P. Weadock; D. Charpin, *Le clergé d’Ur* (1986) 192–223. That the temple is located next to the convent can be seen in ‘The Ur Lament’, 353 (Th. Jacobsen, *The harps than once*, 470).

**37** J. A. Brinkman, *Or. NS* 38 (1969) 337 f., n. 2.

**38** Charpin, 199–206; RIME 4 (1990) 299–301 Rim-Sîn I no. 20.

**39** RIME 4, 143 f. Nur-Adad no. 4; Weadock, 117 f.; Charpin, 196 f., 213.

**40** RIME 4, 44 Išme-Dagan no. 13, with the introductory remarks by D. R. Frayne. It was found in room C. 22. The bedchamber was identified as room C. 28; Westenholz, CSMSJ 1, 40b. For an illustration and description of the statue see: H. Frankfort, *The art and architecture of the Ancient Orient* (1954) plate 57; A. Moortgat, *The art of ancient Mesopotamia* (1969) Plate 183; p. 65b; for a drawing, see J. Black, A. Green, *Gods, demons and symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia* (1992) 138 fig. 113 (but it has been ‘spoilt by modern restoration’ according to Moortgat).



**Fig. 43:** A seated statue of the *entu* En-ana-tuma, a princess from Isin, living in Ur. It was possibly found in her bedchamber. Her dress is the same as that of her predecessor En-ĥedu-ana. Diorite; height: 25 cm. 1750 BC.

*University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Philadelphia.*

What would happen when this priestess died? How would she be buried? A text from Ur describes the funeral gifts at the burial of the *en* at Ga'eš. First there was the golden crown (*aga*), which is followed by five other golden objects. After a break in the text we read, 'on the day that she was laid to rest, it was laid beside her'. The crown was a mark of the status of the king and also of this priestess.<sup>41</sup> The inscription of En-ane-du mentioned the location of the tombs of her predecessors called 'the hall which brings sorrow'. Because they had been neglected and were no longer pure she purified a large sacred space and surrounded it with a wall, and then placed guards at it.<sup>42</sup> The graves of her predecessors, to whom

<sup>41</sup> W. Sallaberger, 'Eine reiche Bestattung im neusumerischen Ur', JCS 47 (1995) 15–21 (UET 3 335).

<sup>42</sup> RIME 4, 300 Rim-Sin I no. 20:34–43; Westenholz, CSMSJ 1, 40 f.; Th. Richter, *Untersuchungen zu den lokalen Panthea Süd- und Mittelbabyloniens in altbabylonischer Zeit* (1999) 370.

libation offerings were brought, were beneath the residence of the priestess. The dead lived on in the statues to which the offerings were brought.<sup>43</sup> A letter was found in Ur from Kudurmabuk, a sheikh and father of two kings of Larsa.

I want to have the statue of the *en* of Nanna overlaid with gold. I am sending S. and the goldsmiths to you. As soon as you see this sealed letter of mine I want you to take action.<sup>44</sup>

A number of graves in Ur from the Early Dynastic period (2600–2500 BC) show that, at the same time as the person whose grave it was had died, many other women and men were put to death. These were the human sacrifices we mentioned earlier in Chapter 23. Donkeys harnessed to waggons had also been buried with several harps and model ships. These became known famously as the ‘Royal Tombs of Ur’, which were also discussed earlier, at the end of Chapter 1. However a lesser known alternative explanation has been constantly advanced, that these were the graves of *entu* priestesses. This explanation has received fresh support following a new interpretation of the grave finds,<sup>45</sup> which pointed out a difference between the cylinder seals of the men and of the women. The men’s seals had scenes of fighting and the women’s seals had scenes of banquets. Could this lead to identifying who had been buried there? Sumerologists contended that a song of the priestess En-*hedu-ana* speaks of burying the dead with their servants.

O Lady! The harp of lamenting has been laid on the ground.  
Your ship of weeping is left behind on hostile shores.  
With my holy song they shall die.<sup>46</sup>

This theory, however, rests on shaky ground.

It may be that in Ur various priestesses were alive at the same time. Direct evidence comes from a text listing the votary offerings of the royal family. Two of the donors were *entu*.<sup>47</sup> It was generally assumed that the older one had

<sup>43</sup> Weadock, 104, 109; Charpin, 204, 208; Renger, ZA 58, 119f., 141; B. Lion, *Jean Bottéro et la Mésopotamie* (2009) 281.

<sup>44</sup> UET 5 75 with D. Charpin, *Le clergé d’Ur* (1986) 43f.

<sup>45</sup> P. R. S. Moorey, Expedition 20 (1977) 24–40; also in his additions to the chapter on the ‘royal tombs’ in L. Woolley, P. R. S. Moorey, *Ur of the Chaldees* (1982) 51–103.

<sup>46</sup> Lines 97–99. W. W. Hallo, J. van Dijk, *The exaltation of Inanna* (1968) 27, with p. 58. A. Zgoll, *Der Rechtsfall der En-*hedu-ana** (1997) 12, translates line 99 thus: ‘Wegen meines schicksalsbestimmenden Liedes – muß ich sterben? (variant: ‘werden sie sterben’)’. In K. Volk, *Erzählungen aus dem Land Sumer* (2015) 347: ‘Oder muß ich sterben, weil ich mein schicksalsbestimmendes Lied angestimmt habe?’

<sup>47</sup> Weadock, 104. Cf. Westenholz, CSMSJ 1, 37, 39.

been pensioned off, which gave rise to the thought that there came a time when these women could no longer fulfil their function of physically consummating the sacred marriage. Modern cognoscenti of bedroom practices suggest this in guarded terms.<sup>48</sup> Certainly priestesses did grow old. En-ane-du was installed in Year 8 of Warad-Sîn, and her building inscription comes from some thirty years later, for she speaks of her brother Rim-Sîn in terms which fit Year 29 of his reign.<sup>49</sup>

Kings from outside Ur who had political influence would appoint an *en* of their own to be there. One example is Ur-Bau, the city ruler of Lagash, whose daughter was appointed there, as can be seen from various vases dedicated to her found in the Gipar.<sup>50</sup> King Išme-Dagan of Isin similarly appointed his daughter En-ana-tuma as a 'ziru, entu of Nanna' in Ur.<sup>51</sup> Her inscriptions have been found on bricks all over the Gipar, which would indicate she had undertaken extensive building work.<sup>52</sup> Pieces of her alabaster disk found around the seated statue of En-ana-tuma indicate that she was familiar with the disk of her predecessor En-ḫedu-ana, and it is possible that she had had a transcript made of its inscription.<sup>53</sup> According to one text she built a chapel for the sun god 'for the life of Gungunum' and for her own life.<sup>54</sup> Gungunum had been the king of hostile Larsa, and we observe that the king's daughter from Isin still remained as priestess under this king of Larsa. After thirty years, in the reign of Abisare of Larsa, she died. Afterwards sacrifices for the dead were brought to her and to a person named En-megal-ana.<sup>55</sup> We thought we knew the names of all the priestesses of Nanna and that on average they had served for long periods. En-ana-tuma appears to have lived for a hundred years.<sup>56</sup> Now a previously unknown priestess, En-megal-ana, has appeared and so there could have been others also. From two of these priestesses, En-ḫedu-ana and En-ane-du, who adopt a high literary tone in their inscriptions, we hear about the tasks they were required to perform.

---

48 C. J. Gadd, *Iraq* 13 (1951) 30; Weadock, 104 f.

49 Gadd, 35: the victories of Rim-Sîn; his name now is prefixed with the determinative for 'god' before his name.

50 H. Steible, *FAOS* 9,1 (1991) 150, with E. A. Braun-Holzinger, *ASJ* 19 (1997) 4.

51 Years 2–3; Renger, *ZA* 58, 119 n. 42. See Th. Richter, *Untersuchungen* (1999) 364–366.

52 *RIME* 4, 29–31 Išme-Dagan nos. 3–4. Weadock, 108: 'The builder of this *giparu* was Enannatumma'.

53 R. McHale-Moore, 'The mystery of Enheduanna's disk', *JANES* 27 (2000) 69–74.

54 *RIME* 4, 116 Gungunum no. 2. Gungunum Year 1 coincides with Year 2 of Išme-Dagan's successor Lipit-Eštar (M. Stol, *SOBH* [1976] 30). Išme-Dagan reigned 20 years.

55 H. Figulla, *Iraq* 15 (1953) 111 nos. 35–36; 176 nos. 60–63; cf. M. van de Mieroop, *Ur* (1992) 116; D. Loding, *JCS* 28 (1976) 234 no. 3, citation cited from *UET* 1 224.

56 Sollberger, *AfO* 17, 25. He did not see that the Figulla texts are offerings for the dead; corrected in Weadock, 104.

### 25.1.3 En-ḥedu-ana

En-ḥedu-ana, the daughter of Sargon of Akkad (Figure 42), speaks about herself in very elevated language.<sup>57</sup> She has to conduct purification rituals, bring sacrifices in certain months, sing cheerful songs, share a bed with the moon god, look after the temple and compose poetry. She had been appointed by Sargon and was still in her prime during the reign of Naram-Sîn, three kings later. Her writings can be dated to that time,<sup>58</sup> of which a good number of literary works survive, all in Sumerian. In two of these she writes in the first person.<sup>59</sup> Almost all of them praise the goddess of war and love (in that order). The background to this is that her father Sargon had advanced this goddess as the most important goddess of Akkad. In Sumerian she was called Inanna and in Akkadian Ištar. Sargon's descendants perpetuated his memory by calling his dynasty 'the one of Ištar'. In the legend she becomes infatuated with Sargon. The most informative work by En-ḥedu-ana is known as the *Ninmešara*.<sup>60</sup> Much of this text is difficult to translate but an outline can be given. After praising Inanna above the other gods, En-ḥedu-ana, as the *entu* in Ur surrounded by the Sumerian speaking population of the South, says:

Indeed, I entered the holy Gipar for you. I, the *entu* priestess, I, En-ḥedu-ana, I carried the basket, I sang a cheerful song. But now the offering for the dead is brought, as if I had never lived there (66–69).

It had become dark all around her, and she announced abruptly that this had been caused by Lugal-ane. From other sources we know that he was a Sumerian who had rebelled against King Naram-Sîn. Clearly it was he who had chased this princess from her convent. First she turns for help to her own god, the moon god Nanna, but he does nothing.

My Nanna does not care to help me (...). He allows me to go out of the house, he lets me fly out of the window like a sparrow, my life has wasted away (...). He robbed me of my crown of office as priestess, he gives me a sword and dagger (100–108).

---

57 J.G. Westenholz, 'Enḥeduanna, En-priestess, Hen of Nanna, spouse of Nanna', *Studies Å. W. Sjöberg* (1989) 539–556.

58 S. Franke, *Königsinschriften und Königsideologie* (1995) 195, advances the opinion that the Ištar ideology emerged only at the time of Naram-Sîn. Later tradition ascribed it in retrospect to Sargon.

59 'Ninmešara' 67, 81; 'Innin šagurra' 219.

60 A. Zgoll, *Der Rechtsfall* (1997); in K. Volk, *Erzählungen aus dem Land Sumer* (2015) 339–350. Earlier see W. W. Hallo, J. J. A. van Dijk, *The exaltation of Inanna* (1968). For another translation see S. N. Kramer in ANET (1969) 579–581.



She asks Inanna to persuade An, the god of the heavens, to help. Inanna does bring salvation and finally in a gesture of reconciliation she greets Nanna and Ningal, her parents.<sup>61</sup> En-ĥedu-ana breaks out in a song of praise to Inanna, focussing on her aggressive characteristics one by one, and after each one we hear the refrain 'It is yours. Let it be known'. Those two short sentences sound like a battle-cry, which can be confirmed from the tradition of an event in a campaign by Sargon in which the defeated rebels shouted out 'It is yours, o Ištar!' The poetess of the Ninmešara introduces this passage with the remark that those words were not spoken by Nanna (122), thereby implying that Inanna is more important than Nanna. It is possible that earlier (unclear) passages esteem this goddess even more than An, the god of heaven worshipped in Uruk. This elevation or exaltation of Ištar, raising her position among the deities, means that this whole poem can be called without hesitation a statement of a new theology.

A second composition by our poetess reports a military expedition of Inanna against her enemies in the mountainous land of Ebeĥ, east of the Tigris. The event itself (it probably alludes to an actual conflict) is theologically defined and legitimised in this poem.<sup>62</sup> A third composition is another poem in praise of Inanna. In all three works Inanna is portrayed as the goddess of war, not of love.<sup>63</sup> The last important work of En-ĥedu-ana is a set of hymns for 42 temples in Sumer. This can be seen as an exposition of a kind of systematic theology. These temples may have been those conquered by Sargon, but that is a question which we will not go into now. At the end of the temple hymns she claims that what she had written no-one had written previously.

The compiler of this clay tablet is En-ĥedu-ana. My king, what is created, no man has created.<sup>64</sup>

Since no king ever wrote his own songs, and certainly not in the first person, this could be expected also to apply to a princess. That is why it has been suggested that the poems of En-ĥedu-ana could well have been written by a ghostwriter.<sup>65</sup> In the last line we can see that she calls herself the compiler of the text, not the composer. She may have been an editor of already existing texts. Others take an even stronger view that anonymity was normal in ancient literature and think that these songs were later constructions attributed to her, especially when pos-

<sup>61</sup> Lines 148–151 with C. Wilcke, WZKM 68 (1976) 85.

<sup>62</sup> C. Wilcke in: A. Finet, *La voix de l'opposition en Mésopotamie* (1973) 56 f.

<sup>63</sup> Edition by Å. W. Sjöberg, ZA 65 (1975) 161–253.

<sup>64</sup> A translation in Dutch by H. Vanstiphout, *Eduba. Schrijven en lezen in Sumer* (2004) 123–133.

<sup>65</sup> W. G. Lambert, NABU 2001/83.

sible anachronisms are identified.<sup>66</sup> What a pity! These views rob us of the name of a talented poetess.

#### 25.1.4 En-ane-du

En-ane-du, a princess from Larsa, is the last *entu* we can identify. After her there is no further reference to that position. She identifies herself as the priestess of Nanna and Ningal, the jewel of the temple of the moon god, called to carry out the purification rituals. She prays for the life and victories of her brother, King Rim-Sîn, and she concludes with an exhaustive description of how she reconstructed her residence, the Gipar.<sup>67</sup> In evaluating the significance of the office of these priestesses, emphasis is laid on the fact that En-ane-du made intercession for the life of her brother, the king, and stretches out her hand (lines 20–22). This intercession then is crucial for her role. En-Ninsumun-zi, the daughter of King Lipit-Ištar, also did this as the *ereš.dingir* priestess of Nin-gubalag at Ur.<sup>68</sup> In Karzida, the intention of King Amar-Sîn in building the Gipar there was to prolong his own life.

Amar-Sîn, who through this makes his days long, has built (this) for his life.<sup>69</sup>

Later we shall see how Kunši-matum also prayed for her king at Mari. Intercession was what was expected of every woman, as we shall see in Chapter 29.

#### 25.1.5 Other high priestesses

Another title for the *entu* priestess of equal importance was *ereš.dingir.ra*. Tuta-napsum was called *ereš.dingir*, which probably means ‘the lady of the god’, as well as *en*.<sup>70</sup> Even now it is often assumed that the title should be read as *nin*.

---

<sup>66</sup> P. Michalowski in: J. S. Cooper, G. Schwartz, *The study of the Ancient Near East in the 21<sup>st</sup> century* (1996) 183–185. M. Civil assumes that ‘Inanna and Ebeḫ’ was composed during the Larsa period. J.-J. Glassner in: F. Briquel-Chatonnet, *Femmes* (2009) 219–231, also has doubts on her being the author.

<sup>67</sup> D. Charpin, *Le clergé d’Ur* (1986) 200–206; RIME 4, 299–301.

<sup>68</sup> RIME 4, 56 Lipit-Eštar no. 6:22; Charpin, 220 f.

<sup>69</sup> H. Steible, FAOS 9,2 (1991) 230 Amarsuen no. 6; cf. 233 no. 11.

<sup>70</sup> J. G. Westenholz, *Nippur at the Centennial* (1992) 302; Steinkeller in: K. Watanabe, *Priests and officials*, 121. For the title NIN/*ereš.dingir*, see also A. Falkenstein, AnOr 30 (1966) 2 n. 8;

*dingir(.ra)*, but there are strong indications that in this expression the Sumerian sign *nin* was pronounced as *ereš*. To be up-to-date we shall use *ereš.dingir.ra* in this book. She held the same rank as an *entu*. It was a title associated with other gods than the moon god, for we often find an *ereš.dingir* of Adad, the rain god.<sup>71</sup> They were princesses from east of the Tigris, daughters of King Sîn-abušū. In Nippur there was a man in the service of ‘the *ereš.dingir* of Adad, daughter of the king’.<sup>72</sup> King Sîn-kašid of Uruk appointed his daughter Niši-inišu in his own city of Uruk as the *ereš.dingir* of Lugalbanda, his ancestor, ‘for his (own) life’, and he built ‘the pure Gipar’ as her official residence.<sup>73</sup> As priestess she served Lugalbanda and his wife Nin-sumun, the indigenous gods of Uruk.

Another princess, a daughter of a king of Uruk, became *ereš.dingir* of Meslamtaea in the neighbouring city of Durum. After Rim-Sîn of Larsa had conquered Uruk she sent a letter to him, still holding on to her position, in which she calls herself a writer.<sup>74</sup> So she had the same literary abilities as En-ḫedu-ana, the *entu* in Ur, and we shall have more to say about her when we discuss the *entu* of Uruk.

We said earlier that the *entu* was given a new, official name in Sumerian beginning with *En-*, but the *ereš.dingir* did not.<sup>75</sup> It must be significant that in the later literary tradition, when there were no longer *entu* priestesses, the *entu* of the moon god was referred to as *ereš.dingir(.ra)*.

A third priestess, sharing the same rank as the other two, was the *égi-zi* (Akkadian *engišîtu*). Like the others she was chosen through extispicy from inspections of liver, and she could be a princess. There are some indications that the high priestess in the city of Isin was an *égi-zi*.<sup>76</sup>

The fourth title for a priestess was *ugbaltu*, an Akkadian word but one which is hardly ever found written phonetically. The most important instances occur in predictions of the coming death of a priestess based on liver inspections. They predict that either an *entu*, an *ereš.dingir*, or an *ugbaltu* will die. One unusual omen says:

---

Renger, ZA 58 (1967) 135 n. 168. Renger equates the Sumerian title with Akkadian *entu*; similarly J. G. Westenholz. Later in this chapter, discussing the daughter of Nabonidus, we will see that later school traditions do not make any difference.

71 Renger, ZA 58, 136.

72 Renger, 136 n. 180; J. F. Robertson, *Nippur at the Centennial* (1992) 184 n. 26 (CBS 7435).

73 RIME 4, 455 Sîn-kašid no. 9.

74 W. W. Hallo, *Études Paul Garelli* (1991) 387:16; cf. Renger, ZA 58, 137 f.

75 Renger, 140, on top.

76 J. G. Westenholz, JNES 52 (1993) 293–295. Earlier see G.Th. Ferwerda, SLB V (1985) 28 f. For the *égi-zi* see M. Stol, *Festschrift J. Oelsner* (2000) 464 n. 49; P. Steinkeller, *Studies J. Klein* (2005) 301–310.

An *entu* will die, an *ugbaltu* will be appointed; variant: not be appointed.

Because it is an *ugbaltu* that succeeds an *entu* here it is supposed that the *ugbaltu* is lower in rank.<sup>77</sup> A document from Susa states that a woman who ‘has entered the status of an *ugbaltu*’ received a slave-girl as a gift.<sup>78</sup>

All these three titles, *en*, *egi-zi* and *ugbaltu* (which is perhaps equivalent to *ereš.dingir*) occur in the myth of Atram-ḫasis, the man who survived the Deluge. In that myth they were women who had not been allowed to bear children. The creation of mankind had resulted in a population explosion. The earth had become overcrowded because of enthusiastic procreation so the gods thought something had to be done to stop it. One of the measures they resorted to was the command to

Establish the women, the *ugbaltu*, *entu*, *engiṣitu* (i.e. *égi-zi*). Let them be taboo and thus stop children being borne.<sup>79</sup>

This was how Babylonia obtained these three childless priestesses.

In the Old Babylonian period we encounter the *nadītu*, usually translated as ‘nun’. The literal meaning of that title is ‘fallow field’, suggesting the woman was childless. Because the terms *ereš.dingir*, *dam*, *lukur*, and possibly *ugbaltu* are from time to time used interchangeably, a degree of confusion inevitably arises.

### 25.1.6 Investiture

J. G. Westenholz distinguishes three stages in the ordination ritual of the priestesses, whether as *en* or as *ereš.dingir*. (1) The selection through divination, separating her from the profane world. (2) The novitiate during which she had to become familiar with the rituals (there is no evidence for this ‘liminal period’). (3) The incorporation of the priestess into the sacred world, culminating in her enthronement.<sup>80</sup> The best known occasions for a king appointing his own daughter to be the priestess of an important god is the appointment of the *entu* of the moon god in Ur. As to the first stage, a few passages in literary texts show three persons designated as priests by liver extispicy, two men, the *lú.maḥ* and the *išib*,

<sup>77</sup> Stol, 462 f., with notes 39, 43.

<sup>78</sup> MDP 28 400:1–3, *A-la-a-bi a-na ug-ba-bu-tim te-ru-ub-ma*. See CAD Q 157, U/W 37.

<sup>79</sup> W. G. Lambert, A. R. Millard, *Atra-ḫasis* (1969) 102 III vii 6–9.

<sup>80</sup> Westenholz, CSMSJ 1, 35 f.

and one woman, the *ereš.dingir*.<sup>81</sup> In Ur they were the *lú.maḥ* and the *entu* and the *ereš.dingir*.<sup>82</sup> From many other sources we know that liver extispicy was performed whenever a princess was appointed as a high priestess. En-ḫedu-ana said that she was ‘chosen’ (*pād*) ‘for the pure rites’.<sup>83</sup> Around 2000 BC kings report such decisions based on liver extispicies in their year names.<sup>84</sup> There may be a time delay between choosing a priestess and inaugurating her, and a woman may be enthroned several years after her selection (the third stage), a fact that can also be deduced from a sequence of year names. A girl destined for this role may be viewed from a higher standpoint, as when En-ane-du testified that ‘from the sacred mother’s womb’ she had received ‘the position of *en*, the noble position of the heavens’.<sup>85</sup> A badly broken stela dated to King Ur-Nammu shows in its upper register a small-sized female sitting on the lap of a god. W. W. Hallo takes her to be the *entu* priestess with the god Nanna at her enthronement.<sup>86</sup>

This ritual was continued during the early half of the Old Babylonian period. A later example of this procedure is found in a year name from the reign of Zimri-Lim in Mari.

Year that Zimri-Lim dedicated a daughter to Addu of Appan.

In an administrative text we read that four garments and four slave-girls were given as a gift (*nidittu*) ‘to Darkatum, the *ereš.dingir.ra* of Adad’. It is thought that this was a gift from her father at her dedication. The name Darkatum could be an Amorite word for ‘young child’, in which case the dedication may have taken place at the beginning of her life.<sup>87</sup> A man similarly gave a present like this to the *entu* of the moon god in Tuttub.<sup>88</sup> In those parts the *nidittu* usually meant the

**81** B. Alster, ASJ 13 (1991) 45, Incantation to Utu, 46; ‘The Death of Ur-Nammu’, 78. See also the Hēdursanga hymn, 74 f., ‘They installed the *en* in the Gipar, they enthroned (dab.bé) the *ereš.dingir* by extispicy’ (*Studies S. N. Kramer* [1976] 148).

**82** Šulgi, hymn B 135 f. with Römer, TUAT II/1 (1986) 20: ‘dass der *en*-Priesterin ein Loblied gespendet, sie für das Gipar inthronisiert (dab.e) werde, dass der *lú-maḥ*-Priester, die *ereš.dingir*-Priesterin ins reine Herz berufen (šà.kù.ga pād.da) (werde)’. We do not know to which god this *ereš.dingir* belongs.

**83** Westenholz, *Studies Sjöberg*, 544b (1).

**84** Renger, ZA 58, 123–125; A. L. Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia* (1964) 213, 367 n. 47 (also in other cultures).

**85** RIME 4 (1990) 300.

**86** W. W. Hallo, *The world’s oldest literature* (2010) 477–479 (previously in *Studies J. Klein* [2005] 148–150).

**87** ARM 22 154 with ARM 30 (2009) 304; J.-M. Durand, NABU 2006/49.

**88** D. Charpin, NABU 2004/78.

dowry a girl would receive from by her father, and this would mean then that she was given as a bride to the god.

### 25.1.7 Flawless

Of course priestesses and nuns living within the convent and outside had to lead a pure life. If they did not they would be severely punished. In Hammurabi's Laws we read:

If a nun (or) a priestess (*lukur ereš.dingir*) who does not reside within the cloister should open a tavern or enter a tavern for (some) beer, they shall burn that woman (CH § 110).

A similar punishment awaited an *entu* who stole temple possessions: 'they will seize her and burn her'.<sup>89</sup> Burning the offender symbolised the idea that the crime had been thoroughly purged so that no taint remained. All of these women were expected to lead flawless and chaste lives. The title *ugbaltu* may be etymologically linked to the word *ikkibu*, 'taboo', a woman who was untouchable and would not give birth. In a judicial decision where the authorities declare the status of a woman, that 'She is an *ugbaltu*', we read that the gentlemen involved 'would bear responsibility to the palace for a sin of the nun (*nadîtu*) which happened in their city'. The woman was not allowed to have children, and the sin she committed was her having sex.<sup>90</sup>

A later religious text reports specific sins that had been committed:

He went to the *ereš.dingir* of his god, he went to the wife of his friend.<sup>91</sup>

It was supposed that aphasia could be a consequence of simply kissing a priestess:

If his tongue is bound and he cannot speak, he has kissed the priestess of his god.<sup>92</sup>

A fragmentary law of King Ur-Nammu can be reconstructed as follows: 'If someone sleeps with a high priestess (*ereš.dingir*), the high priestess and that man will be

<sup>89</sup> This is written on a liver model made of clay; CT 6 1–2; Renger, 131 n. 137.

<sup>90</sup> CT 48 44:3 with M. Stol, *Festschrift J. Oelsner* (2000) 465 f. Another explanation gives L. Bar-beron, *Les religieuses*, 110.

<sup>91</sup> E. Reiner, JNES 15 (1956) 136:84. In Šurpu IV 7 'to visit unwittingly the daughter of his god' is a sin.

<sup>92</sup> TDP 62, Tablet VII 19.

burned.<sup>93</sup> Traditions from the Old Babylonian period onwards found it scandalous if someone slept with an *entu* or made her pregnant.<sup>94</sup> Predictions suggest that it would certainly have been possible for the head of the temple or a regular pious visitor to do just that,<sup>95</sup> but in reality I think this may never have happened. It was even considered evil to dream of such an encounter, ‘to approach an *ereš. dingir*’,<sup>96</sup> for this would result in illness:

If his stomach rises and his abdomen is hard, if he is cold and (then) warm, he has approached the priestess of his god. Within 31 days he shall be freed from it and be cured.<sup>97</sup>

Another medical text ascribes three disorders of the testicles to such inadmissible intercourse, one of which says:

If his testicles are swollen and his rod is covered with pimples, then he has approached the priestess of his god.<sup>98</sup>

We read in a late astrological omen that

The priestesses will sin against their spouses (*hā'iru*).

It is a surprise to note that they could be married, and that seems to be a later development in the texts.<sup>99</sup> Possibly it refers to the *nadîtu* of the god Marduk in Babylon, who in the Old Babylonian period was married but not allowed to have children. It is not certain that this institution still existed later, so whenever we read this prediction after a gap of a thousand years it is possible to think that this old tradition was thoughtlessly written off. A late liver omen fits in well by suggesting a deliberate way to avoid pregnancy:

**93** C. Wilcke, *Festschrift J. Krecher* (2014) 539 § 12.

**94** Stol, *Festschrift Oelsner*, 461 f.

**95** CAD N/1 198a (2.) s.v. *nāku* ‘to have (illicit) intercourse’; Renger, 131.

**96** A. L. Oppenheim, *The interpretation of dreams in the Ancient Near East* (1956) 291 n. 168, on 334 K 6768 x+7, K 6705:6 (UM = *teḥû*).

**97** TDP 112, Tablet XIII 24 f.

**98** M. J. Geller, BAM 7 (2005) 252 no. 49 ii 27, 29–31 (= TDP 136:62, 65–67). For the translation of line 30 (= 66) see J. Scurlock, B. R. Andersen, *Diagnoses in Assyrian and Babylonian medicine* (2005) 235 f.

**99** ACh Adad XVII:17, dupl. ACh Suppl. 2, LXX:24. The priestesses remain faithful to their husbands (*hā'iru*): KAR 321:5 with B. R. Foster, *Before the Muses II* (1993) 770. For more on unfaithfulness see CAD Š/3 207b *šuhû* A, 2.

The priestess shall allow herself to be slept with from behind in order not to become pregnant.<sup>100</sup>

In the Atram-ḫasis myth we read that three categories of women might not have children, mentioned earlier:

Let them be taboo and in this way stop bearing children.

En-ḫedu-ana called herself ‘the pure (*dadag*) en of Nanna’,<sup>101</sup> so it is certainly possible to take this to mean that all these women took a vow of chastity.<sup>102</sup>

This lends perspective to the famous, though much later, legend about the birth of King Sargon. He was born of an irregular relationship and was placed as a foundling by his mother. This is what the Vestal Virgin Rea Silvia, the mother of Romulus and Remus, also did. Sargon, using the word *enetu* to refer to his mother’s position, says of himself:<sup>103</sup>

I am Sargon, the mighty king, the king of Akkad. My mother was an *enetu*, my father I did not know. The brothers of my father lived in the mountains. My city is Azupiranu which is situated on the banks of the Euphrates. My mother, the *enetu*, became pregnant with me. She brought me into the world in secret. She put me in a little reed basket. She smoothed my door over with pitch. She launched me into the water in a river so that I could not get out of it. The river lifted me up and brought me to Aqqi, the water hoister. Aqqi, the water hoister, brought me up by dipping in his bucket. Aqqi, the water hoister, adopted me as his son and brought me up. Aqqi, the water hoister, set me to work in his garden. During my work in the garden Iṣtar became fond of me and I was king for [5]5 years.

This mysterious narrative about the birth of Sargon possibly indicated that he was illegitimate. What happened to his mother was precisely what she as *entu* (here *enetu*) had been warned about so much. That the goddess Iṣtar fell in love with him was a statement of political significance, for she then became the goddess of Akkad. We saw this when discussing the songs of his daughter, En-ḫedu-ana. The gardener in our legend has mythological echoes, for in one myth Šukalletuda, the gardener, laid violent hands on Iṣtar, and in the Gilgamesh epic we read that

**100** CT 31 obv. (!) i 10 f., etc.; CAD N/1 198a (3.), Q 255 f.

**101** ‘Ninmešara’, 120 (*dadag*).

**102** J. J. Finkelstein, JAOS 90 (1970) 246, rejected such a vow and thought that such women could get children by accident. Cf. Chapter 26 note 11.

**103** B. Lewis, *The Sargon Legend: a study of the Akkadian text and the tale of the hero who was exposed at birth* (1980) 24 f. It is possible that the form *enetu* instead of *entu* was inspired by Old Akkadian *en-na-at* (of Enlil), the title of Tuta-napsum.



Ištar fell in love with Išullani, the gardener (VI 64–70).<sup>104</sup> She had a penchant for gardeners.

Do the texts show whether or not these priestesses did have children? Even though Šulgi claims in a hymn to be the son of an *entu* from Nippur that must be read as political literary fiction.<sup>105</sup> There are no useful details available about the *entu*.<sup>106</sup> Children were known to have been born to the *ereš.dingir*.<sup>107</sup> One was ‘Ummi-waqrat, daughter of the *ereš.dingir* of Lugalgudua’.<sup>108</sup> Her name means ‘My mother is costly’, so perhaps she had been adopted and been given this name by her adopting mother, the *ereš.dingir* herself, as significant. Were other children also adopted? Adoption of children and adults was quite common. A nun (*nadītu*) could not bear children herself. This also applied to women belonging to the god Marduk, even though they were allowed to be married (see Chapter 27). What was the common practice? It seems that what was considered wrong in these texts was sex, with children as a consequence.<sup>109</sup> Since the title *ereš.dingir* no longer had a specific meaning in later legends these may have been pure fantasies or practices from later centuries.

We may now return to the reality of a thousand years earlier. In Old Babylonian Sippar the brother of a nun (*nadītu*) who had had a baby later adopted that child ‘as a son’. The first three witnesses to the document were her other brothers. The baby was said to have been coarsely ‘pulled from its mother’s womb’ but had now grown to three years old. The nun paid for the child’s nourishment. This nun may have unexpectedly given birth and given her baby to a wet-nurse and paid her. Later her family took pity on the little one, after it had survived the first three risky years. In another case a nun gave her daughter to a married couple to breast-feed

---

**104** Hallo, van Dijk, *The exaltation*, 6; Wilcke in *La voix de l'opposition* (1973) 62f.; Gilg. VI 64–70 with T. Abusch, *History of Religions* 26 (1986) 166–170.

**105** J. Klein in Durand, *La Femme* (1987) 97–106. Perhaps the hymn does not speak at all of an *entu*; S. N. Kramer *apud* Klein, note 19.

**106** Renger, ZA 58, 131, 141; Charpin, *Clergé*, 218 note 5 (RIME 4, 44 f. Išme-Dagan no. 14, Abba); Westenholz, CSMSJ 1, 39a (dumu en-na, etc.). Those in Nuzi may have had children, see K. Deller, A. Fadhil, *Mesopotamia* 7 (1972) 196 f. However, their main argument, from Text 13, fails; G. Wilhelm, NABU 1992/ 55.

**107** An *ereš.dingir* of Nin-šubur has a son; Tell Sifr 65:6, cf. 64:6 f. (Renger, ZA 58, 138 f., n. 206). Similarly one of Lulal, married to a man with a prebend (TIM 4 13:28 f.). Both gods are low in status (household gods), which may also have affected the status of their personnel.

**108** PBS 8/2 204:8–10.

**109** Within the context of the vicissitudes of these priestesses there are Old Babylonian omīna which speak of wrongdoings of ‘the wife of the head of a temple’, who regularly steals temple property (*asakku*) and is killed; J. Nougayrol, RA 44 (1950) 29.

for three years, but perhaps this girl had been adopted as a baby.<sup>110</sup> Whatever the circumstances such arrangements seem to have been accepted as evidently normal, possibly public. Chastity may not have been so much valued after all. Perhaps the problem was that a nun could not legitimise her child.

### 25.1.8 The *entu* in Ur at a later period

We return to the *entu* in Ur, but at a later period, when the Sumerians had disappeared. It is possible that the Gipar in Ur was destroyed by Samsu-iluna together with the rest of the city in his Year 11. Kurigalzu began reconstruction work and changed much of the city lay-out.<sup>111</sup> A later king called himself the ‘son-in-law of the sickle moon’, which may hark back to the old ideology of the priestess as the moon goddess.<sup>112</sup> Two sarcophagi from the Assyrian period, perhaps from the time of Sargon II, are shaped like baths. It is thought that they were for these priestesses.<sup>113</sup>

The following activity of King Nabonidus (555–539 BC) is significant. He honoured the moon god and resumed some of the ancient traditions. He described how his daughter was called to the sacred office. It all began on 26th September 554 BC when there was an eclipse of the moon (called Nannar, *Sîn*). That event, according to an astrological handbook, pointed to selecting a priestess. A series of liver extispicies confirmed this and indicated that the priestess should be his own daughter:<sup>114</sup>

When Nannar requested a high priestess, the Son of the Prince showed his sign to the inhabited world, the Bright Light manifested his reliable decision.

To Nabonidus, king of Babylon, provider for (the temples) Esagil and Ezida, the reverend shepherd, who shows concern for the sanctuaries of the great gods, Nannar, the lord of the (lunar) Crown, who bears the signal for all peoples, revealed his sign concerning his request for a high priestess.

On the thirteenth of Elul, the month of the works of the goddesses, the Fruit became eclipsed and set while eclipsed. ‘*Sîn* requests a high priestess’ was his sign and decision.

**110** K. R. Veenhof, *Studies L. de Meyer* (1991) 151 (text B).

**111** P. Weadock, *Iraq* 37 (1975) 111; Brinkman, *Or. NS* 38 (1969) 317 f.; idem, *MSKH I* (1976) 216 ff. nos. 27–37; C. B. F. Walker, *CBI* nos. 62–68.

**112** Walker, no. 73, with lit. Cf. J. A. Brinkman, *Post-Kassite Babylonia* (1968) 137 n. 821.

**113** Weadock, 112; J. E. Curtis, *New light on Nimrud* (2008) 163–165.

**114** YOS 1 45:1–25. For a translation and discussion see: Erica Reiner, *Your thwarts in pieces, your mooring ropes cut* (1985) 1–16 (followed here); H. Schaudig, *Die Inschriften Nabonids von Babylon und Kyros' des Großen* (2001) 373–376.

As for me, Nabonidus, the shepherd who reveres his divine majesty, I reverently heeded his reliable order, and I became concerned about this request for a high priestess. I sought out the sanctuaries of Šamaš and Adad, the patrons of extispicy, and Šamaš and Adad, as usual, answered me a reliable Yes, wrote a favorable omen in my extispicy, the omen pertaining to the request for priestesses, the request of the gods to man.

I repeated the extispicy for confirmation and they answered me with an even more favourable omen. I made an extispicy inquiring about a daughter born to one of my relatives, but they answered me No. For a third time I made an extispicy, inquiring about my own daughter, and they answered me with a favourable omen.

I heeded the word of Šin, the supreme lord, the god my creator, and the verdict of Šamaš and Adad, the patrons of extispicy. I installed my own daughter as high priestess and gave her the name En-nigaldi-Nanna.

The passage in the astrological handbook referred to can be located. It says:

If in the month of Elul, in the third watch of the night, the moon (is eclipsed), then Šin is asking for a priestess.<sup>115</sup>

We also know a passage in a handbook of liver extispicies referring to the part of a sheep's liver known to them as 'the stand' which says:

If in the middle of the stand there is a cross, then Šin shall ask for a priestess (*ereš.dingir*); alternatively, an eclipse of the moon.<sup>116</sup>

Her fine Sumerian name, En-nigaldi-Nanna, formulated in the old style, means 'the priestess, the desire of the Moon god'. Nabonidus regretted that the old rituals for this office (*enūtu*) had been forgotten and no-one now knew how to conduct it. But he was fortunate to find help after excavating an ancient stela to be dated to the reign of Nebuchadnezzar I (1124–1103 BC).

The agreed time came along and the doors were opened for me. I looked and saw the ancient stela of Nebuchadnezzar, the son of Ninurta-nadin-šumi, an earlier king from before my time. The likeness of the priestess was depicted on it. They noted down her finery, clothing and jewels, and they had them brought to the House of Giparu. I saw the ancient clay tablets and writing boards and I acted according to what had been done earlier.

This discovery enabled Nabonidus to set up the cult of the moon god once again. Some modern scholars doubt that this and other finds claimed by Nabonidus

---

**115** Reiner, 15 n. 8; eadem, *Astral magic in Babylonia* (1995) 76 f.; P.-A. Beaulieu, *The reign of Nabonidus* (1989) 128. Now: F. Rochberg-Halton, *Aspects of Babylonian celestial divination: The lunar eclipse tablets of Enūma Anu Enlil* (1988) 133, Tablet 17, Part II, §VI.4.

**116** G. Frame, ARRIM 5 (1987) 8 f., line 11.

were genuine.<sup>117</sup> Another magnificent discovery occurred when they were digging up trees while carrying out reconstruction works at the Gipar:

I saw the house, identified its foundations. I saw written on them the names of the ancient kings who had preceded me. I saw the ancient inscription of En-ane-du, the priestess of Ur, the daughter of Kudurmabuk, the sister of Rim-Sîn, king of Ur, who had restored the foundations of the House of Giparu and had surrounded with a wall the resting-place of the earlier priestesses beside the House of Giparu.

It does seem that Nabonidus really found the inscription of En-ane-du which we know about, for the brief summary he gives is accurate as far as concerns content. He must have copied everything precisely to build the house of his daughter beside the Gipar and he had the bricks inscribed:

I, Nabonidus, the king of Babylon, guardian of Esagila and Ezida, have made the House of Giparu, the house of the priestess, within Ur, for Sîn, my lord.<sup>118</sup>

That building has been excavated and was identified as such.<sup>119</sup> There then follows a description of how his daughter was purified and presented to Sîn and Ningal and brought into the Gipar, followed by an expansive description of the offerings presented, the priests and the lesser temple servants who were appointed. The text closes with a prayer to Sîn, which ends:

May Ningal, the great mistress, speak good words before you (the priestess). May En-nigaldi-Nanna, my own beloved daughter, endure in front of you (the gods Sîn and Ningal). May her word be resolute. May her deeds please you. May they contain nothing sinful.

By speaking good words Ningal interceded with her husband Sîn for the priestess. What the function of the priestess herself was is not made clear. For Nabonidus, the moon god was the most important god. In fact it would seem that for him he was the only god. Appointing his daughter as the priestess of Sîn was primarily an act of piety. King Nabonidus had another daughter who was appointed to the ancient city of Sippar with her own house and staff.<sup>120</sup>

**117** M. A. Powell, ZA 81 (1991) 30; cf. J. A. Brinkman, *Post-Kassite Babylonia* (1968) 114. Nabonidus legitimised his deeds by referring to the past; Th.G. Lee, RA 87 (1993) 136.

**118** For the bricks see Schaudig, *Die Inschriften Nabonids*, 341 f. – J. A. Brinkman, Or. NS 38 (1969) 338: the house was named Edublalmaḫ and it was rebuilt by Sîn-balassu-iqbi; cf. Weadock, 113.

**119** Weadock, 113; W. Orthmann, *Der Alte Orient* (1975) p. 285 no. 88 (= p. 286, left, top). The name of the priestess given here, 'Bel-šalti-nanna', is an old error for En-nig.al.di-Nanna.

**120** C. Waerzeggers, NABU 2004/103.

We will now leave the office of the priestess of Ur and look at her colleagues in other cities.

### 25.1.9 In Uruk

Sîn-kašid, king of Old Babylonian Uruk, reported that he built the Gipar for his ‘beloved daughter, the *ereš.dingir* of Lugalbanda, who was installed for his life’.<sup>121</sup> Lugalbanda was the legendary father of Gilgamesh, who had now been elevated as a god. The actual title given to the woman here is not *en*, but it must have carried the same weight. She was required to pray ‘for his life’. Near Uruk was the city of Durum, and a Sumerian tradition developed that the crown prince was installed as governor of Durum, so that it became the royal city. This tradition was perpetuated in the Old Babylonian period, the time when a woman called high priestess (*ereš.dingir*) of its god Meslamtaea appears in texts. She was also a daughter of King Sîn-kašid of Uruk.<sup>122</sup> What is remarkable is that we have a literary text written by this woman. She identifies herself with an imposing Sumerian name Nin-šata-pada, ‘the Lady called from the mother’s womb’ as the writer of the text. She was a poet. The cities of Uruk and Durum had been conquered by Rim-Sîn, the king of hostile Larsa, and in a letter she addresses Rim-Sîn. He is praised twice in long-winded introductory phrases, and then she describes the battle, how the army of Uruk ‘lowered its horns like a wild bull’ against the might of Larsa, ‘a city as high as a mountain’. That is how ‘with your great strength you seized its king.’ But Rim-Sîn was applauded because he spared the population. No plagues broke out.

Orphan and widow went about on the luxuriant grass, they sojourned on the meadowy banks.

Finally she comes out with her request. For five years she has not seen her city. In shrill tones she laments her imprisonment. Abandoned, she feels old and slandered. She pleads for the city of her ‘family’, Durum, to be restored to its past glory.

---

<sup>121</sup> RIME 4 (1990) 455.

<sup>122</sup> W. W. Hallo, ‘The royal correspondence of Larsa: III. The princess and the plea’, in: *Études Paul Garelli* (1991) 377–388; N. Brisch, *Tradition and the poetics of innovation: Sumerian court literature of the Larsa dynasty (2003–1763 BCE)* (2007) 81–87, 245–261.

## 25.2 Priestesses in Mari

In her seal inscription the priestess Inibšina in Mari<sup>123</sup> calls herself the ‘wife’ of the god Adad, but in texts she is called an *ereš.dingir*. She was the daughter of Yaḥdun-Lim, an earlier king of Mari, but she remained in her office during the regime of the Assyrian viceroy of Mari. The priestess remained secure to fulfil her sacred task. She received food daily from the palace and had a country residence with a large staff, including eleven bearers for her sedan chair. An inventory of her possessions includes jugs and other household items, personnel, fields and gardens, and cattle.

When the Assyrian king Samsi-Addu conquered the western territories, the land along the banks of the Euphrates in Syria, he made a point of installing his daughter as the ‘wife of Dagan’ at that god’s temple in Terqa, on the Euphrates.<sup>124</sup> He had taken this city from the king of Mari as well as Mari itself. His daughter was given the name Kunši-matum, meaning ‘Bow down, O land!’ as a proclamation that things were going to change.<sup>125</sup> We have a letter from this woman to her brother Yasmaḥ-Addu, whom his father had installed as viceroy in Mari. She defended herself against accusations that she did not look after the possessions in her house well. But she does not forget to state what she was really expected to do:

‘I am the one who prays for you before Dagan.’

Then she finishes by saying:

This is what I always pray for you before Dagan, ‘May Yasmaḥ-Addu yet prosper, and may I myself have a good life in his shade’.<sup>126</sup>

Zimri-Lim would later conquer Mari but he allowed Kunši-matum to remain in her office. The governor of Terqa wrote him a few letters from which it seems that she was sick, that he was having omens read by liver extispicy, and that the result was

**123** N. Ziegler, *Le Harem de Zimrî-Lîm* (1999) 46–49.

**124** J.-M. Durand, *MARI* 4 (1985) 396–398. The title *dam* ‘Dagan is attested in ARMT 23 199:5, cf. Durand, note 69. Earlier see Renger, *ZA* 58, 147 f.; B. F. Batto, *Studies on women at Mari* (1974) 79–92.

**125** For this court name, see the end of Chapter 1. A similar name is Kanšassum-matum (Charpin, *Festschrift J. Renger*, 107); Sumerian *kur-giri.ni.šè*, H. Limet, *L’Anthroponymie sumérienne* (1968) 92, 446.

**126** ARM 10 3 with Durand.

favourable. It seems that this priestess in Terqa had the title *ugbaltu* in Akkadian. The governor of Terqa wrote about the building of her house:<sup>127</sup>

About the house where the *ugbaltu* of Dagan shall live, I have had omens read and for the earlier house of the *ugbaltu* my omens were correct. Moreover the god answered me with approval and I began to set that house in order and to inspect it for cracks. In that house the *ugbaltu*, whom my lord Dagan shall lead, shall live.

In a second letter he comes back to this decision. In that old house there lived various craftsmen and it cannot be arranged otherwise. Furthermore the building was not suitable for its intended purpose, because it was adjacent to the cake bakery of the palace which would have emitted unpleasant smells. Again they turned to the god through liver extispicy. Again this gave a positive answer. When he goes on in the letter to say, ‘that house is good for the *ugbaltu* to live in’, his meaning is not clear, so possibly he refers to another house. The king asked the governor to come and collect the young woman from Mari. But he could not leave his work so he wrote:

May my lord be good enough to come (himself). And let him come and kiss the foot of Dagan, who loves him. I myself must finish my work. I cannot come.<sup>128</sup>

It is clear that this *ugbaltu*-priestess was the only one of her kind and that she had a central function in the kingdom. It is possible that the title was held by other single women in surrounding regions of Babylonia, such as Terqa and Susa. This fits the fact that in northern Assyria they had the title *gubaltum*, Sumerian *ereš.dingir*, which we shall discuss in the next section.

At the beginning of this section we noted that Inibšina could have been the ‘wife’ or the *ereš.dingir* of the god Adad. We know of many women called *ugbaltu* and *ereš.dingir*, who were priestesses of the god Adad in Kulmiš and of other gods. So these were not solitary individuals. Some of them were registered as captives of war after the overthrow of Ašlakkâ in the north.<sup>129</sup> They are named in two lists as belonging to various gods, Dagan, Adad, Šîn, Šamaš and Kulmiš.<sup>130</sup>

<sup>127</sup> Durand, AEM 1/1 361 ff., nos. 178 f.

<sup>128</sup> ARM 3 8 with Batto, 80 f. The priestess indicated here is called SAL.TUR *ugbaltum* (6).

<sup>129</sup> Batto, 81–86. The situation has been clarified by the article of P. Marelli, *Florilegium Marianum* II (1994) 115–129. In the letters these women are referred to as NIN.DINGIR.RA.MEŠ, and in the lists by as dam (or dam.meš) of a god.

<sup>130</sup> Kulmiš is here a god. One assumes that Kulmiš in ‘Adad of Kulmiš’ is a place, but the determinative for ‘place’ (ki) never appears; RGTC 3 (1980) 144. M. Stol suggested that the priestess *kulmašitu* owed her title to Kulmiš (in his 1976 dissertation, thesis VIII).

They had too high a status to be listed simply as weavers among the captives. The daughters of the king of the conquered city, Ibal-Addu, are also listed as having been earlier dedicated by their father as priestesses, ‘the wives of Adad’ and the ‘wives of Kulmiš’. One of the daughters, a young girl, was a *šugîtu*, a second wife who produced children for her husband.<sup>131</sup> When still king, Ibal-Addu had asked his new wife to respect his mother, his spouse, and the *ugbabtus* in the palace.<sup>132</sup>

## 25.3 Priestesses in the Old Assyrian period

In the Old Assyrian trade correspondence with Anatolia a *gubabtu*-priestess is mentioned on thirty occasions.<sup>133</sup> She was the oldest daughter of a merchant and had remained unmarried. She lived in Assur and had her own house, so there was no question of her living in a convent. A letter gives instruction to ‘place the girl (*šuḫartu*) in the bosom of Assur’,<sup>134</sup> an expression which seems to mean dedicating her to religious duties, but we know nothing of what those duties were. Elsewhere we read,

The girl has now become very adult. Get ready and leave. Place her in the bosom of Assur and grasp the feet of your god.

Possibly dedicating one’s daughter sometimes involved fulfilling a pledge.<sup>135</sup>

The title she held is not often mentioned except in the context of inheritance. She was granted a share with her brothers and much attention was paid to the rights of this unmarried daughter. In one text she received much more than her brothers, and furthermore every year they had to give her six mines of copper and a portion of meat at a sacrificial feast.<sup>136</sup> She took part in commercial business and we have various letters from these women.<sup>137</sup> She bore great responsibility for her family. In Chapter 9 about divorce in Assyria we referred to a letter to Šalimma in which this priestess gave advice on an urgent matter. When she received ‘the

**131** ARM 10 124:4f.; LAPO 18 (2000) 353f. no. 1170.

**132** ARM 10 170:9–11 with M. Guichard, RA 103 (1999) 24 n. 36.

**133** C. Michel, ‘Les filles de marchands consacrées’, in: F. Briquel-Chatonnet, *Femmes* (2009) 145–163.

**134** Michel, CMK no. 306; Michel, ‘Les filles’, 154.

**135** CMK no. 307:38–40, with lit.

**136** W. von Soden, WdO 8 (1976) 211–217; C. Wilcke, ZA 66 (1976) 202f.

**137** K. R. Veenhof, *Mesopotamia, The Old Assyrian period* (2008) 104, 107f.; idem, *Studies* R. D. Biggs (2007) 287 (Ummi-Išḫara); Michel, CMK, 438–446 (Aḫaḫa).



golden gods of her father' they were perhaps the statues of her ancestors.<sup>138</sup> One priestess, after the death of her parents and her brothers, as the sole survivor of her family received the whole legacy, which amounted to 2¼ shekels of gold and a seal.<sup>139</sup> That might have been the weight of the statues of the household gods and her father's seal. The possession of that seal could be a subject of dispute when an estate was divided.<sup>140</sup>

## 25.4 Priestesses after the Old Babylonian period

The institution of an *entu* was also known in the Hurrian kingdom of *Arrapha*.<sup>141</sup> The title clearly refers to a princess in lists and letters. She lived in a 'house' in important cities such as Apenaš and Azuḫinni, where she was in charge of priests and horses.<sup>142</sup>

Returning to Syria in the thirteenth century BC, to *Emar* on the banks of the Euphrates, south of Carchemish, we find an important ritual describing the procedure for the dedication of a high priestess.<sup>143</sup> It was a place where the religious practices of Canaanites, Hittites and Babylonians met. Five versions of the ritual exist which differ only slightly from each other, although some scholars have thought the differences warrant thinking of them as rituals for different occasions. Here the high priestess (*ettu*) belonged to the 'Storm god', possibly called Baal or Hadad. She seems to have held her position for the whole of her life, for at the end of the ritual we read what had to happen after her death. Her dedication can be seen as a rite of passage, having all the trappings of a wedding, including an anointing. Earlier, when discussing betrothal in Assyria and the Amarna letters, we noted that anointing was a typically western custom. We list some of

**138** I. Albayrak, *Studies M. T. Larsen* (2004) 12f., lines 14–19; 14:17–24; cf. Hecker, *ibidem*, 286:18, 'die Götter(amulette) unseres Vaters', with p. 290.

**139** K. R. Veenhof, *Studies M. Stol* (2008) 106, 110.

**140** Veenhof, 106 n. 33; Hecker, *Studies Larsen*, 291f.

**141** K. Deller, A. Fadhil, 'NIN.DINGIR.RA/*entu* in Texten aus Nuzi und Kurruḫanni', *Mesopotamia* 7 (1972) 193–214. Cf. G. Wilhelm, *NABU* 1992/ 55, on Text 13.

**142** Deller, 205, 208.

**143** D. Schwemer, *TUAT NF* 4 (2008) 231–239. D. E. Fleming, *The installation of Baal's high priestess at Emar. A window on ancient Syrian religion* (1992); for a summary of his work see M. W. Chavalas, *Emar* (1996) 88–90; cf. D. Schwemer, *Wettergottgestalten* (2005) 556–561. For an independent approach see M. Dietrich, 'Das Einsetzungsritual der Entu von Emar (Emar VI/3, 368)', *UF* 21 (1989) 47–100; for criticisms on Fleming see M. Dietrich, 'Altsyrische Götter und Rituale aus Emar', *Biblica* 76 (1995) 239–249; see also the review by W. Sallaberger, *ZA* 86 (1996) 140–147.

the more important events from this complex ritual, including the shearing of the hair on the second day, which is something new.<sup>144</sup>

Day 1: The girl was selected from the elite class of her people, possibly by casting lots.<sup>145</sup> The first anointing, in her father's house, and purification took place.

Day 2: She was taken in procession to the temple of the Storm god. In the courtyard her hair was shorn. She was anointed again and then returned home.

Day 3: Preparations for the installation were made, including offerings.

Day 4: There were processions to various holy places, offerings and meals. The installation (*malluku*) included receiving rings and a headdress of red wool as the insignia of her function.<sup>146</sup> Afterwards she returned home.

Days 5–11: A seven-day celebration culminated on the last day when she was dressed as the bride of the Storm god and led in procession. Her two brothers carried her on their shoulders back home. Her sister washed her feet. She was presented with a bed, a chair and a footstool by the elders, and in the temple she lay down on the bed.

Much more could be said about this ritual. The statue of the goddess Ninkur was placed in a grave in the house of the father of the priestess on Day 3, and left there until Day 11, when it rose again. There were many sacrifices made to various gods and the elders of Emar, not the king, presided. The ritual deserves further study but that is a separate matter. This priestess was the most important one in the city. She was more important than another priestess, the *maš'artu*, for whom we also have a ritual.<sup>147</sup>

In the *Neo-Babylonian* period a priest ('temple-enterer') was required to be blameless, physically and morally, before he could be 'shaven', i.e., consecrated. He also had to be of respectable descent. Three or four texts dating from the sixth century show that this implied that his mother ought to be 'pure' (*ellu*).<sup>148</sup> In one particular case the mother declared that she had been married as a virgin. When her legitimacy had been confirmed, she was given a pendant (*zību*) which she

**144** For shearing and anointing see Fleming, 177–182.

**145** For selection by casting lots see Fleming, who translates the word *pūru* (2) as 'lot'. 'Vase' or 'bowl' would also be possible. M. Dietrich takes it to be a vase for ointment. W. Sallaberger, 144 f., also takes it to be a vase and finds a parallel in the coronation ritual of Ebla.

**146** 'Red appears to be the dominant colour among the accoutrements of *en*-ship, at least of the priestess of Enlil'; Westenholz, CSMSJ 1, 37b.

**147** D. Arnaud, *Emar* VI/3 no. 370, with Fleming, 209 ff.

**148** C. Waerzeggers, M. Jursa, 'On the initiation of Babylonian priests', *Zeitschrift für Altorientalische und Biblische Rechtsgeschichte* 14 (2008) 1–35. Note that the 'purity' of Queen Naqi'a probably refers to her legitimate status (Chapter 24 note 135).

had to convey to her son, a priest, once when he was grown up. ‘This makes a *zibu* appear as an object somehow linked symbolically to marriage and perhaps to the maternal line. It might conceivably signify legitimacy of descent in that it was an object passed on from the parents of the mother to the mother [i.e., their daughter] on the occasion of her legally recognised marriage.’<sup>149</sup> We are surprised to see how physical and important the maternal line was. One is reminded of the post-Exilic Jewish rule of matrilineal descent (*partus sequitur ventrem*), not yet visible in the Hebrew Bible but fitting the attitude of the books Ezra and Nehemiah. At the end of their list of legitimate priests follows a remark on ‘the line of Barzillai who had married a daughter of Barzillai and went by his name’ (Ezra 2:61–63, Nehemiah 7:63–65). Men in this line were not admitted because they were not found in official lists. Note that they descended from women (which was not the problem).

It is a huge leap to reach the late *Greek* period, and there in the cult we now find women mentioned, but mostly men take the lead. A nun is mentioned and a woman and her daughter belong to the College of Exorcists. Earlier it had been a male privilege for members from old families to carry out cultic functions in the temple as prebends. They were allocated a certain number of days of service in the temple each year. When these duties were devolved to their heirs fewer and fewer days per year were prescribed. In the Neo-Babylonian period, if no adult male was available a woman assumed the responsibility. In the Greek period a woman could buy these rights, to ensure that she obtained the right to function in the temple on particular days of the year from one period to the next. Women particularly favoured taking the role of ‘temple-enterer’ (*ērib bīti*), baker and slaughterer.<sup>150</sup> This would have been unthinkable in earlier times, although then the right could be inherited through women. Furthermore we hear of a female ‘leader of the singers’ in the temple of Babylon, but other titles remain strange and difficult to translate. The women who received food rations in the temple of Esagila were probably the wives of temple servants.<sup>151</sup> Nowadays, even after two thousand years of Christendom, the struggle for women to be ordained, for the woman to take a major role among the religious hierarchy, persists.

---

**149** Jursa, 32.

**150** C. Waerzeggers, *The Ezida temple of Borsippa* (2010) 92–94; G. J. P. McEwan, *Priest and temple in Hellenistic Babylonia* (1981) 117–120; P. Corò, *Prebende templari in età seleucide* (2005) 99 f.

**151** M. Jursa, *Festschrift C. B. F. Walker* (2002) 107 f.; T. Boiy, *Late Achaemenid and Hellenistic Babylon* (2004) 235, 271; P. Cleancier in F. Briquel-Chatonnet, *Femmes* (2009) 321–332.

## 26 Old Babylonian convents

Up to this point we have repeatedly spoken of one highly placed priestess who was often a princess. Usually she had the Sumerian title *en*, but frequently *ereš.dingir* was used. In the Old Babylonian period we find instead a plethora of other women devoted to religion. Most conspicuous are those who lived as a group in convents, each in her own house. Such a woman was called in Sumerian a *lukur*, Akkadian *nadītu*, for which we shall use the term ‘nun’. Much of what we know about these women comes from sections of their archives found mainly in Sippar, but where this sort of institution originated we are not sure.<sup>1</sup> In the early Sumerian period we see a group of nine important women, each a *lukur*, and all married with children.<sup>2</sup> In the Ur III period they were the concubines of a king or another dignitary. At the same time in Umma several *lukurs* were occupied in the service of the goddess Šara. These may have been destitute women.<sup>3</sup> One list divides them into two groups, one of 33 and the other of 21, with one woman leading each group. A note on one of the women named says ‘fled’. Probably they were unmarried, but they were not slave-girls. In contrast to these poor nuns in the ‘holy city’ of Nippur in the same period we know of a ‘house’ belonging to Geme-Enlila, the daughter of the king. She was obviously upper class and was a *lukur* of the local god Ninurta, an office to which she may have been dedicated shortly after birth.<sup>4</sup> Every temple will have had its own *lukur*. It was the kings of the First Dynasty of Babylon who first instituted a convent with nuns, putting an end to the thousand-year old Sumerian tradition of appointing a princess as *ereš.dingir*. The kings of Babylon and of other kingdoms sent their daughter to the convent at Sippar.

Other religious women, to be discussed later in Chapter 27, did not live in convents and were not constrained to remain unmarried. One had the title ‘*nadītu* of Marduk of Babylon’, where the translation ‘nun’ can be misleading, for she was married but not allowed to have a child. We know that the *nadītu* of the god

---

1 T. M. Sharlach, ‘Priestesses, concubines, and the daughters of men: disentangling the meaning of the word *lukur* in Ur III times’, *Studies Marcel Sigrist* (2008) 177–183.

2 P. Steinkeller, *ASJ* 3 (1981) 85; Sharlach, 178; M. Such-Gutiérrez, *CRRAI* 54 [Würzburg] (2012) 328 n. 8.

3 Sharlach, 180–183; A. L. Oppenheim, *AOS* 32 (1948) 76–78; I. J. Gelb, *JNES* 32 (1973) 75 f., 92 (as booty of Amar-Sin given to the god); A. Uchitel, *Historia* 33 (1984) 270–272; T. Scharlach in: H. Crawford, *Regime change in the Ancient Near East and Egypt* (2007) 69; L. Barberon, *Les religieuses et le culte de Marduk* (2012) 95 n. 564.

4 M. Such-Gutiérrez, *Beiträge zum Pantheon von Nippur im 3. Jahrtausend* 1 (2003) 164–166, cf. idem, *CRRAI* 54, 328 f.; Sharlach, 179.

Marduk, a married woman, could arrange for a surrogate mother (*šugîtu*) to bear children for her. In the Code of Hammurabi we read that this option was open to any *nadîtu*. Although earlier scholars accepted that such a *nadîtu* was married,<sup>5</sup> in fact we do not have a single marriage contract for a *nadîtu* of Šamaš, so most scholars now assume that these sections in the Code of Hammurabi refer only to the *nadîtu* of Marduk.<sup>6</sup> However there we know of one *nadîtu* of Šamaš who gave her inheritance to a nephew, and she further specified that a portion should be given to two women named as Šat-Aya and Ana-yašim-damqat ‘and her children, those she has borne or shall bear’. Šat-Aya is frequently attested as the name of a *nadîtu* of Šamaš, and Ana-yašim-damqat is a slave’s name meaning ‘She is good to me’ (referring to her mistress or to the goddess Aya). This means that we have here a *nadîtu* of Šamaš and her slave-girl who is expected to bear children.<sup>7</sup> This situation gives rise to an unexpected problem and here we tread on new ground. Furthermore, in two texts a second wife (once described as a *šugîtu*) is associated with a *nadîtu* of Šamaš, not Marduk.<sup>8</sup> In the first, the *nadîtu* had obviously died and her husband had ‘taken’ her house, her inheritance, and given this, together with two slaves and household utensils, to 𒀭., ‘the *šu-gi*, his wife’. Her two sons were at the same time appointed as her heirs.<sup>9</sup> This conflicts with L. Barberon’s thesis that the *šugîtu* is associated with only the *nadîtu* of Marduk. In some texts that mention a *šugîtu* it is not certain that a *nadîtu* of Marduk is involved.<sup>10</sup> There is more evidence. Some mothers are known to have been *nadîtus* of Šamaš, and their babies can be said to have been ‘torn from the womb’, meaning an abnormal birth (see Chapter 25, under the heading ‘Flawless’).<sup>11</sup> The full implications of

5 G. R. Driver, J. C. Miles, *The Babylonian Laws I* (1956) 293–296, 366 f.; J. Renger, ZA 58 (1967) 160 f.

6 R. Westbrook, OBML, 107 f.; Barberon, 146 f.

7 CT 47 47:23–26 with M. Stol, *The care of the elderly in the Ancient Near East* (1998) 99 f. For Šat-Aya as a *nadîtu* of Šamaš see Barberon, *Les religieuses*, 11 note 11.

8 BE 6/1 95 (VAB 5 203) and K. R. Veenhof, *Mélanges A. Finet* (1989) 181 f., Text A (correct ‘Marduk’ to ‘Šamaš’ in the translation). Here a brother plays a role, as in the related text BM 96998, published by Veenhof in *Festschrift C. Wilcke* (2003) 313–332. Cf. M. Stol, *The care of the elderly in the Ancient Near East* (1998) 82; *Studies A. Skaist* (2011) 160.

9 Note these two corrections to BE 6/1 95: [*ap*]-*lu-ut Amat-Mamu* ... [*ša*] by F. R. Kraus in lines 8–9, and [*mu-u*]-*s-šà* ‘her husband’ in line 10 by Veenhof; both recorded in *Mélanges Finet*, 181 n. 2.

10 OLA 21 no. 73 with Barberon, 24.

11 J. J. Finkelstein, ‘*šilip rēmim* and related matters’, *Studies S. N. Kramer* (1978) 187–194, does not accept that the *nadîtu* was chaste; see also Chapter 25, at the end of the section ‘Flawless’. For the alleged vow of chastity, S. J. van Wyk wrote, ‘Attributing to the *nadîātu* sexual acts or abstinence from sexual acts does not add to our understanding of their role and position in society, but rather reveals biased presumptions and the superimposing of present-day sexual taboos and

these facts still need to be worked out.<sup>12</sup> The child born to a *šugîtu* may have been adopted by the *nadîtu* or by someone else, such as her brother, which happened in one of the texts.

## 26.1 Words for a ‘nun’

In the Old Babylonian period far and away the most common word used for a nun was *lukur* in Sumerian or *nadîtu* in Akkadian. In the preceding Ur III period the *lukur* was the second wife of a king or of a high-ranking official, but now it had taken on a new meaning. The Sumerian sign for *lukur* can be interpreted as a combination of ‘woman’ and ‘rite’ (*me*).<sup>13</sup> The Akkadian word *nadîtu* is explained as a woman who could not have or was not allowed to have children. We find the title mostly in Sippar and Nippur, where they served Šamaš and Ninurta, the gods of those cities. Other titles occasionally used for the very same woman were *dam*, ‘the wife of a god, *ereš.dingir*, ‘the lady is a god’ or ‘the lady of a god’, and *ugbabbu*, ‘the woman under taboo’, which we discussed in the last chapter.<sup>14</sup> The most general term for a woman dedicated to a male god was *ereš.dingir*, which could always be used. The title *dam* ‘wife’ is a variant of this. Intrinsically they both indicate the close link with the god. The title *lukur*, originally ‘second wife’, was perhaps used if a god as well as a goddess was involved. In Sippar when a young woman entered (*erēbu*) a convent this would have been interpreted as a sort of marriage to the god. She was to be the second wife of Šamaš, whose first wife, the ‘bride’ (*kallatu*), was the goddess Aya. It would also explain why this nun was given the Sumerian title *lukur*.<sup>15</sup> This explanation may not apply to wives of Ninurta and Nergal. In some places only the title *ugbabbu* occurs.

---

sexual behaviour onto classes of women who did not fit the mould of the wife/mother’; in her ‘Prostitute, nun, or “man-woman”: revisiting the position of the Old Babylonian *nadiātu* priestesses’, *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 41 (2015) 95–122, esp. 113.

<sup>12</sup> K. R. Veenhof, ‘Two *šilip rēmim* adoptions from Sippar’, *Studies L. de Meyer* (1994) 143–157; cf. M. Stol, *Birth in Babylonian and the Bible* (2000) 127 f.

<sup>13</sup> Barberon, *Les religieuses*, 199 (n. 1131). A nun is involved in ‘the rite (*me*) of Ištar, the Queen of Sippar’ in AbB 1 72:12; note the word *paršū* in line 18.

<sup>14</sup> M. Stol, ‘Titel altbabylonischer Klosterfrauen’, *Festschrift J. Oelsner* (2000) 457–466. Confusion reigns in R. Harris, *Ancient Sippar* (1975) 313 f.

<sup>15</sup> According to the reasoning of P. Steinkeller, *ASJ* 3 (1981) 84 f., n. 47. R. Westbrook reaches the same conclusion following other lines of argument; *OBML* (1988) 66a.

## 26.2 The *nadîtu*

The best documentation for these nuns comes from the archives of Šamaš in Sippar, an ancient city on the Euphrates 30 km. south of Baghdad. At the end of the nineteenth century the convent of Sippar was first imperfectly excavated by Rassam, and then later more thoroughly by Scheil. The result of those digs and subsequent illegal excavations were that a mass of texts from the ancient archives came into the possession of the museums of today.<sup>16</sup> The site of Sippar can be split into two cities, distinct but quite close to one another, which are now called Tell Abu Habbah and Tell ed-Der. In ancient times various names were given to these two cities.<sup>17</sup> Both ‘Sippar of Šamaš’, the local god, and ‘Sippar of Yaḥrurum’, the local tribe, refer to Abu Habbah. Texts locate the convent in Sippar-Yaḥrurum.<sup>18</sup> It had an international reputation, for letters from Mari mention ‘Sippar with the convent’.<sup>19</sup> The complex of buildings was surrounded by a wall, within which each nun had her own small house. There they lived and acted independently.<sup>20</sup> We have a round clay tablet on which the ground floor plan of one of these houses, ‘the house in the convent [of Lam]assatum, [daughter of Bele]ssunu’, is drawn schematically. The plan would have been drawn for an occasion when the property was the subject of a sale or a legacy. Precise measurements are given (Figure 44) for the two rooms, one larger than the other, occupying a total surface area of 52½ square metres. From other texts we know that houses in the convent varied in size from 12 to 72 square metres.<sup>21</sup> Often we read in deeds of inheritance that a woman may have had two houses, one within and one outside the convent, for example in ‘Great Sippar’.<sup>22</sup>

The gate-keepers of the convent, possibly an honorary function, are often named as witnesses in contracts of sale, hire or lease.<sup>23</sup> A number of these contracts were drafted by female scribes, appointed specifically to the convent, and

---

16 Harris, *Ancient Sippar* (1975) 303 f., 306; Renger, *ZA* 58, 156–158. Many texts on nuns were found in the archives of their families living outside the convent; L. Barberon in F. Briquel-Chatonnet, *Femmes* (2009) 273–288.

17 D. Charpin, ‘Sippar: deux villes jumelles’, *RA* 82 (1988) 13–32.

18 Charpin, 20 f. (citing BE 6/1 109).

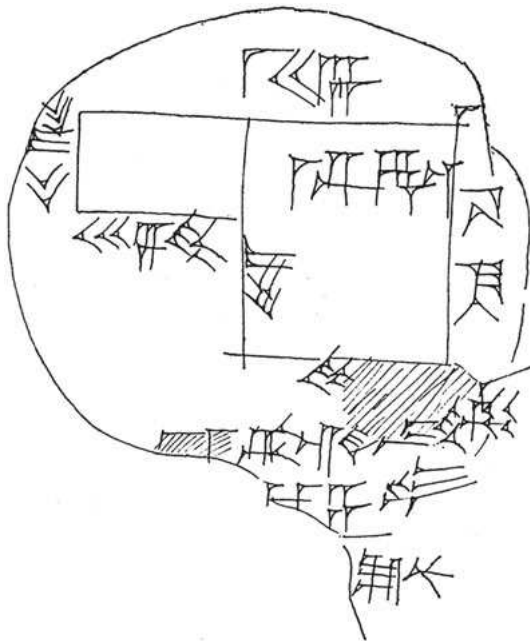
19 Charpin, 18 n. 25.

20 H. Waetzoldt in: K. R. Veenhof, *Houses and households in Ancient Mesopotamia* (1996) 147 n. 10, end.

21 J. Nougayrol, *RA* 73 (1979) 79 AO 20339, with D. Charpin, J.-M. Durand, *RA* 75 (1981) 102.

22 Great Sippar: CT 47 63:17 and 19; E. Szlechter, *TJDB* (1958) 11 MAH 15.913:11 and 14. See also R. Harris, *Studies A. L. Oppenheim*, 131; Charpin, *RA* 82, 20 f.

23 B. Lion, *RA* 95 (2001) 28 f.



**Fig. 44:** The ground floor plan of a house in the convent of Sippar drawn on a clay tablet. The lengths of the walls of the two rooms are aggregated in *el*-units. The top line reads  $60 + 20 + 5 = 85$ . The total area is noted in *sar*-units (1 *sar* = 36 sq.m.) plus subdivided *gin*-units (8 *gin* = 1 *sar*). With the large room being  $1\frac{1}{3}$  *sar*,  $7\frac{1}{2}$  *gin*, the surface area amounts to  $52\frac{1}{2}$  sq. m. At the bottom of the tablet the diagram is described as ‘a house of the convent ...’, and it would have been used for the official documentation of a transaction involving sale, gift or inheritance. *Musée du Louvre, Paris*.

they appear as the final witness.<sup>24</sup> The most important functionary was the overseer of the *nadītus*.<sup>25</sup> On occasions two or three overseers were in office at the same time, so perhaps the women were divided into different groups. In the early period a woman could be the overseer (until Hammurabi put a stop to it) and we know the names of five female overseers. The male overseer sometimes shared his task with his sister. It was a position to be kept in the family and some successive members of one family can be traced as holders of that office.<sup>26</sup> A similar

<sup>24</sup> B. Lion, ‘Les femmes scribes de Sippar’, in: F. Briquel-Chatonnet, *Femmes* (2009) 289–303.

<sup>25</sup> In the early period *ugula níg lukur/na-di-tum*, e.g., JCS 30 (1978) 235, 245 Text E:32. On cylinder seal inscriptions PN *ir níg DN*; VAS 8 85; M. Anbar, M. Stol, RA 85 (1991) 36, on 10.

<sup>26</sup> The cylinder seal of the first overseer, the ancestor, is unusual in that the king is present; M. Tanret, *The seal of the sanga* (2010) 85–87. The seal of the ancestor Bur-Nunu: 159 f., 186b; two



organisation obtained in the convent of Zababa at Kish.<sup>27</sup> The convent in Nippur had a Sumerian name, ‘the place of the *lukur*’. Nippur was the ancient Sumerian ‘holy city’ and was a special case. Although some of the personnel there had different titles the ‘gate-keeper’ was named.<sup>28</sup>

We know of two lists of guests attending a ritual feast at Nippur. The person in highest authority over the city (*gú.en.na*) is named first. Directly after him are the names of thirty or forty nuns, which may have been all the nuns in Nippur or just one group of them. One of the lists continues with the high priestesses of three gods and the priestesses of the mother goddess. Women seemed to play the chief role in this ritual feast. It is possible that the *gú.en.na* named first had authority over the nuns and he was the one who would receive important guests at the feast.<sup>29</sup>

In Sippar there was a close bond between the convent and Ebabbar, the ‘White House’, the temple of Šamaš and Aya. The nuns there identified themselves as ‘servant of Šamaš’ or ‘servant of Aya’, or of both deities.<sup>30</sup> In Sippar the king of Babylon seems gradually to have assumed more and more control over the convent. One indication of this is that the heads of the convent used to identify themselves on their cylinder seals as ‘servant of Ebabbar’, but during the reign of Hammurabi they became a ‘servant of Hammurabi’.<sup>31</sup> The same went for the heads of the temples. Later we shall see how Samsu-iluna, Hammurabi’s successor, dealt with the convent.

People aimed to keep their real estate within the family. That may have been one reason why housing unmarried daughters in convents arose as an institution.<sup>32</sup> It would have been a matter of great importance for rich families to ensure that property did not pass on to their in-laws. Any property of a daughter in the convent would pass generally to her brothers, or a woman would name the daughter of her brother as the heiress.<sup>33</sup> But this is a one-sided

---

overseers: CT 45 28 rev. 14–15; 92 iv 1; three overseers: CT 8 37a:16–18. For the personnel of the convent see in general Harris, *Ancient Sippar*, 189–199.

**27** VAS 18 32, where the witnesses are two overseers and a gate-keeper; see H. Klengel, JCS 23 (1970) 129; the same persons are named in YOS 13 325:31–35.

**28** Renger, ZA 58, 170 §90; F. Huber Vulliet, *Studies Jeremy Black* (2010) 137.

**29** Huber Vulliet, 127 f., 130, 132, 145.

**30** Barberon, *Les religieuses*, 16–18.

**31** R. Harris, ‘On the process of secularisation under Hammurabi’, JCS 15 (1961) 117–120.

**32** R. Harris, *Studies A. L. Oppenheim* (1967) 109; *Ancient Sippar* (1975) 307; in: B. S. Lesko, *Women’s earliest records* (1989) 152 f.; Renger, ZA 58, 161.

**33** Harris, 124 f. (‘aunts and nieces’). Her strongest example is CT 47 63 where we follow three generations. See also the summaries by F. R. Kraus in: *Essays on the Oriental laws of succession* (1969) 13–17; C. Janssen, Northern Akkad Project Reports 5 (1991) 10.

view.<sup>34</sup> It is abundantly clear that the prime motivation for sending a daughter in the family to the convent was religious. She was there to pray for the family, to intercede and intermeditate with the gods, as we shall show a little later in this chapter.

The religious title by which a family referred to a daughter could be *nadītu*, *kulmašītu*, or *qadištu*,<sup>35</sup> but the significance of these differences is unclear.<sup>36</sup> Daughters in one particular family were known either as a *nadītu* or a *kulmašītu*, and the daughters of the son as a *nadītu* of Šamaš or a *nadītu* of Marduk.<sup>37</sup> The pedigree of a family of lamentation priests from Sippar has daughters who became a *nadītu* of either Šamaš or Marduk, while their brother was the overseer of the *nadītus* of Šamaš. In other branches of the family we see lamentation priests with their sister as a *nadītu*. The head of the lamentation priests was married to a *qadištu*.<sup>38</sup>

### 26.3 Inauguration

The ritual at which a *nadītu* was dedicated was called *nišītu*, ‘dedication’.<sup>39</sup> On two occasions we find that a diviner was a witness to the occasion, which could mean that he was there to perform an extispicy, as was done in Sumerian times when the *eresš.dingir* was selected.<sup>40</sup> The *nadītu* received a large dowry (*nudunnû*) from her father or family,<sup>41</sup> and she was generally given a special name connecting her to Šamaš and Aya, such as ‘Gift of Aya’, ‘Wish of Šamaš’, ‘His favourite’,

**34** Barberon, 179 f., who notes ‘l’importance de la prière’ when writing on the *nadītu* of Marduk, 204–206. Contrast S. J. van Wyck, ‘The *nadītu*’s economic functions refute the emphasis on the religiously-destined life as the sole purpose for the institution’, in her ‘Prostitute, nun, or “man-woman”: revisiting the position of the Old Babylonian *nadīātu* priestesses’, *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 41 (2015) 95–122, esp. 116.

**35** All three occur in CT 48 3:9–10.

**36** Harris, 126; Renger, ZA 58, 152 n. 291. The *ugbaltu* mentioned by him is a ‘wife (dam) of Šamaš’. J. J. Finkelstein, *Studies S. N. Kramer* (1976) 191 f., n. 9; see now L. Barberon, *Les religieuses*, 143–145.

**37** R. Harris, Or. NS 38 (1969) 135, 137. Gurrudum had two daughters, one a *nadītu* and the other a *kulmašītu*, and a son; see CT 48 5.

**38** L. Dekiere, *Studies L. de Meyer* (1994) 139.

**39** As noted by C. Wilcke, *Studies F. R. Kraus* (1982) 439, 441, 447, and mainly attested in the dedication of a *nadītu* of Marduk; see Barberon, *Les religieuses*, 189–199. Not dedicated ‘shortly after her birth’ as was said by some scholars; Barberon, 195–197.

**40** Barberon, 193. The diviner is Ibni-Šamaš, in CT 8 2a rev. 8 (= 35), BE 6/1 84:46.

**41** Wilcke, 445 ff. The much older texts from Ebla also refer to a ‘present’ for ‘the wife of the god’ in the city Luban, see *Memoriae Igor M. Diakonoff* (2005) 178. In Mari it was a ‘bridal gift’ (*nidittu*), ARM 30 (2009) 304 (ARM 22 154).



**Fig. 45:** Statue of a woman praying. Found in a temple at Tell Asmar (Ešnunna). Limestone, 37 cm high. 2900–2600 BC. *The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.*

or ‘Our mistress’.<sup>42</sup> One was called ‘She loves my convent’.<sup>43</sup> The cylinder seal of a *nadītu* usually identifies her as the ‘slave-girl of Šamaš and Aya’,<sup>44</sup> a typical epithet for a *nadītu*. A name like Lamassani, ‘Our Guardian Deity’ implied that she would pray for her family,<sup>45</sup> since that name is cognate with the word *lamassātu*, the statues placed in the temple to intercede with the temple god or goddess (Figure 45).<sup>46</sup> The word ‘wish’ often occurs in these names. It was a key word in the inscription of Nabonidus, where the god Sîn wished for an *entu*

<sup>42</sup> Harris, 116 f.; 126–128; Renger, ZA 58, 153 § 64.

<sup>43</sup> J.-M. Durand in: *Mythologie et religion des Sémites occidentaux I* (2008) 405.

<sup>44</sup> In the inscriptions on their cylinder seals; see also AbB 1 34:4.

<sup>45</sup> K. R. Veenhof, BiOr 25 (1968) 197 f.

<sup>46</sup> K. van der Toorn, *Family religion in Babylonia, Syria, and Israel* (1996) 114, as can clearly be seen in the year name 29 of Ammi-ditana; see B. F. Batto, *Studies on women at Mari* (1974) 105 n. 32.

(see Chapter 25). A unique passage concerning the *nadītus* in Sippar occurs in an unusual letter from Mari, where the god wishes for a throne and a nun. It is a letter written by an ‘answerer of Šamaš’, the sun god, to Zimri-Lim, the king of Mari. The ‘answerer’ was someone recognised as having the status of a prophet. In this letter he seeks to communicate the will of the gods, and his first prophecy is particularly interesting.

Thus says Šamaš, ‘I am the lord of the land. As quickly as possible have them bring to Sippar, the city of life, a large seat for my glorious dwelling and your daughter, whom I desired from you’.<sup>47</sup>

Sippar was subject to the king of Babylon, and not Mari, so the convent must have been an international institution. A *nadītu* from Kish remembered her inauguration as a day of joy.

When I saw you, I was delighted by your arrival ... just as I was when I entered the convent and got to see the face of my mistress.<sup>48</sup>

We have a report of the expenditure incurred when such a young girl (*ṣuḫartu*) entered the convent.<sup>49</sup> The heading states that it concerned the ‘gift’ (*biblu*), here the gift taken to a brother and his sister, that is to say the father and the aunt of the girl. We see how the father’s line is followed. The aunt was certainly a *nadītu* herself who already lived in a convent. She will have had a special relationship with the girl and it is obvious that years later she would name the girl as her heiress on condition that her niece would look after her in her old age. That was the custom. There follows a list of the various gifts, but although we can transcribe the words we do not understand precisely what they were or who gave them. Possibly they came from the convent.<sup>50</sup> Every gift had its value calculated in terms of silver, amounting to a total value of 4 2/3 shekels and 15 grains of silver. That was why the text was written. Some expenses directly related to her

47 A. 4260, now AEM 1/1 (1988) 417 no. 194. See Barberon, *Les religieuses*, 194.

48 AbB 10 4:7–12.

49 PBS 8/2 183 (obverse and reverse should be changed) with Harris, *Studies A. L. Oppenheim* (1967) 110–114; R. Westbrook, OBML (1988) 65 f.; C. Wilcke, ‘Familiengründung’, 262. See also Renger, ZA 58, 153 f. § 65; Harris, *Ancient Sippar* (1975) 200 f., 308. Some discussions about ceremonies associated with *nadītus* mention ‘sprinkling’ (*issalḫu*, JCS 2 [1948] 77 no. 6:8), but in fact the verb is *salā’u*, ‘to suffer from a chronic disease’. Another error which is often repeated is referring to ‘the thread (*qū*) of Šamaš’ in CT 4 18b:1, whereas a better reading is <un>-*qā-am*, ‘the ring of Šamaš’.

50 Thus, with hesitation, Wilcke, ‘Familiengründung’, 262 f.

inauguration, ‘the day that the girl entered’ the convent, including the barrels and the fish.<sup>51</sup>

We know of three evidently religious occasions in the convent or temple when expenses were incurred. The first ceremony was for ‘the seven days of *sebūt šatti*’, an autumnal feast in the seventh month. It can be seen as a counterpart to the Jewish days of feasting and atonement which was also observed in the seventh month.<sup>52</sup> The second ceremony was ‘the day of destiny of the *nadītus*’. This could well be the occasion when offerings were presented to the dead, and as such would be a counterpart to All Souls’ Day for the convent women. It would also fit in with the observance of remembrance of the dead held in the fifth month, *Abum*.<sup>53</sup> The third ceremony was held in the tenth month, *Ṭebetum*, and was known as ‘the day of *Ṭebetum* of the *nadītus*’, evidently a festival in which the women took part.<sup>54</sup>

A nun would receive extra gifts at a festival. Some contracts stipulated that they should be provided with food at three or as many as six ceremonies per year.<sup>55</sup> In older texts the three festivals are specified by name.<sup>56</sup> Six festivals would mean one every two months. One text suggests that these gifts were seen as a payment for their services for *Šamaš*.

In the temple of *Šamaš* at six festivals [a leaseholder] shall provide her with twenty litres of ‘fat flour’ and a piece of meat.<sup>57</sup>

---

51 Another text suggests that the woman was given ‘the ring of *Šamaš*’ and that the bride price was paid, perhaps to the convent (CT 4 18b; see note 49, end). Another possibility is that here we have expenses for a normal wedding; see the discussion on the passage in Chapter 2, under ‘Expenses’.

52 A. Cavigneaux, V. Donbaz, ‘Le mythe du 7.VII. Les jours fatidiques et le Kippour mésopotamiens’, *Or. NS* 76 (2007) 293–335.

53 C. Wilcke, *Isin–Išān Baḫrīyāt* III (1987) 105 n. 1; K. Radner, *Die Macht des Namens* (2005) 86 (n. 406).

54 MHET II/4 470:12: ‘three festivals of *Šamaš* in the month *Ṭebetum* (= month X)’. For rituals for the dead in the tenth month see M. Stol, *NABU* 2008/1.

55 There is no evidence that she handed on to the temple what had been given to her, as suggested by A. L. Oppenheim, R. Harris, F. Pomponio; cf. J. Renger, *ZA* 58, 159 f. §73.

56 Harris, *Studies Oppenheim*, 130, *Ancient Sippar*, 199, 229–231. Six festivals are rare; in CT 45 11:27, Riffin 39:10–12; see also G. Mauer, *Das Formular der altbabylonischen Bodenpachtverträge* (1980) 116–121. The only named festivals attested in the early texts are *elūlu*, *nabrū*, and *ayāru*. The Neo-Babylonian ‘Cruciform Monument’, a forgery, also names three festivals for the god: *ḫumṭu*; the fifth month (*Abum*); the eighth month; *JEOL* 20 (1967–68) 65:323–326. Two transactions of nuns mention ‘the month of the festival, the month *Abu*’, see *VAS* 8 28:8, 47:9.

57 Riffin 39:10–12.

## 26.4 High status

These women were recruited from distinguished circles and were often rich.<sup>58</sup> Some were even princesses: daughters of the king of Babylon; a daughter of a king of Mari; and Ruttum, a daughter of Hammurabi, probably the king of Kurda.<sup>59</sup> They lived in the convent in Sippar, like Amat-Šamaš, the sister of the future king of Karanâ. She is possibly the second witness in a transaction, named immediately after Iltani, the daughter of King Šin-muballit of Babylon.<sup>60</sup> Some nuns came from other cities, including one from Dilbat, though the convent of Zababa in Kish was closer.<sup>61</sup>

Nuns bought property, hired out houses or slaves, leased out fields and date plantations, and gave out silver on loan.<sup>62</sup> Some had their estates managed by a steward. Princess Iltani had shepherds working for her to look after her flocks. Like all wealthy women she also had her weaving mills.<sup>63</sup> A *nadîtu* had to perform her own corvée, but we do not know much about this.<sup>64</sup> She quite often paid with silver ‘from her hand ring’, meaning her own money, possibly in the form of rings of a standard weight.<sup>65</sup>

Women could not in general act as witnesses, though within the convent that did happen whenever they were making internal agreements. At the end of a document men (often officials of the convent) would appear as the first witnesses followed by the women, occasionally demarcated by a line on the tablet. Now and again a female scribe wrote these documents. A group of school texts was found

---

**58** Renger, *ZA* 58, 150–153; S. Lahtinen, *The nadîtu as business woman* (2011).

**59** W. Tyborowski, ‘The daughters of the kings of Babylon and their role in the Old Babylonian economy and society’, in: P. Charvát, P. M. Vlčková, *Who was king? Who was not king?* (2010) 59–70; Harris, 123; Barberon, *Les religieuses*, 66 f. It is possible that there was only one princess Iltani, the daughter of Šin-muballit, and that her estate was continued after her death; M. Stol, ‘Prinzessin Iltani’, *SEL* 4 (1987) 3–7. For Princess Ruttum see Tyborowski, 60; also MHET II/2 204, 209, cf. 441.

**60** M. Stol, *Festschrift J. Oelsner* (2000) 461 n. 27.

**61** Coming from Dilbat: Renger, *ZA* 58, 169 § 84; from Mankisum: MHET II/4 493:4; Karanâ (Qaṭṭara): OBTR 134; Marad: Šat-Aya, daughter of Ḫalum-biumu, F. N. H. al Rawi, S. Dalley, *Old Babylonian texts from the private houses at Abu Habbah, Ancient Sippar* (2000) 119 no. 113:8; cf. p. 126; see also Barberon, *Les religieuses*, 175 n. 1033.

**62** Harris, *Ancient Sippar*, 310–312.

**63** Harris, *Studies Oppenheim*, 132–134; Renger, *ZA* 58, 161–166 (who later withdrew the calculation he gave on p. 162). There was also Adad-mušallim, ‘steward of the convent’, ensi ša é gá.gi4.a (CT 45 60:2).

**64** CH § 40 with Renger, *ZA* 58, 166 § 81.

**65** *ZA* 58, 161; Harris, *Ancient Sippar*, 316.

which had come from the house of a nun. From this C. Wilcke concluded that the nuns could read and write (see Chapter 18, under ‘Scribes’).<sup>66</sup>

It was expected that the nuns would be looked after by their families but that did not always happen. A letter from a *nadītu* from Kish includes a veiled threat in an effort to ameliorate her situation.

A *nadītu* who is not supported by her brothers in her awkward position may give her legacy to whomsoever she will.

Without such a clause the brothers would have been the legatees.<sup>67</sup> In practice this rule of inheritance applied to any unmarried daughter. A *nadītu* writing from the city of Lagaba threatens to go to the king because she is hungry, recourse to which she would certainly have been entitled in the reign of Samsu-iluna.<sup>68</sup>

Erišti-Aya wrote from Sippar a series of emotive letters to her father, the king of Mari, addressing him as ‘my star’, ‘my sun’, and saying that, although she prayed constantly in the temple of Ebabbar, she had received nothing from him. She called herself an ‘emblem’, thus comparing herself to a sacred item in the temple, and implying that she had a function like that of the *lamassātu*, the interceding statues. She begins her letter by praying for him in the name of her Lord and Mistress, Šamaš and Aya in Sippar.<sup>69</sup> She had even dedicated a golden sun-disk and rings ‘for his life’.<sup>70</sup>

To my Star, thus says Erišti-Aya:

May my Lord and my Mistress protect you for my sake, as if you were the heaven and the earth! You have just sent to me a slave and a slave-girl. The slave-girl died here. In the family am I not the emblem that prays? Why am I not cared for? Why do I get no food and clothes from your house? My food and clothing, what my father and my brothers gave me, let them give that (again). I must not suffer hunger.<sup>71</sup>

In Karanâ, Aqba-ḥammu was the king and Iltani was the queen. She received a letter from her sister from the convent at Sippar to say that she had to be cared for by those supporting her.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>66</sup> D. Charpin, *Reading and writing in Babylon* (2010) 41 with 271 n. 39, with a reference to Wilcke.

<sup>67</sup> AbB 10 6:28–32.

<sup>68</sup> AbB 3 19.

<sup>69</sup> See the informative chapter ‘Erišti-Aya, a *nadītum*’ by B. F. Batto, *Studies on women at Mari*, 93–107. For the letters by Erišti-Aya (ARM 10 nos. 36–43) see J.-M. Durand, ‘Le dossier d’Erišti-Aya’, LAPO 18 (2000) 390–402.

<sup>70</sup> For the dedication of the sun-disk and rings see ARM 10 40 rev. 7–10 (Durand, 397 no. 1198).

<sup>71</sup> ARM 10 36 with Durand, 394 f. no. 1196.

<sup>72</sup> OBTR 134.

To Iltani, my sister, thus says Amat-Šamaš, your sister:

May my Lord and my Mistress grant you eternal life for my sake! Earlier when Aqba-ḥammu came here to Sippar, I esteemed him highly, as was fitting for my status as a *nadītu*, and he too esteemed me especially highly. He also said this to me. 'After I have gone back to Karanâ, write to me and I will have anything you need sent to you in a fully laden ship. Pray for me to your Lord.' Well, I wrote and he entrusted two boys to me. But you, you never think of me. You never have a jar of good oil sent to me and you never say to me, 'Offer it to your Mistress and pray for me.' That is how you are. What do you take me for? Does not a slave-girl, who daily washes the feet of her lord, care for her sister? But you do not.

Furthermore, the slaves that my father gave me have grown old. I am sending thirty shekels of silver with this letter to the king ... Have him bring me slaves, who have recently been captured and are tough. I am also sending to you as a present ... minas of first quality white wool for a wig and a basket of shrimps.

Princess Erišti-Aya, whose earlier letter showed that she had a poor relationship with her father in Mari, also evidently had a difficult relationship with her mother.<sup>73</sup> She had sent her mother a gown as a present but then her mother sent it back to her. She writes rather beratingly to 'the Lady, my mother'.

Why have you not put on my gown but sent it back to me? You have heaped abuse and scorn on me. I am the daughter of a king. You are the wife of a king. You and your husband (apart from ...) put me in the convent. You treat soldiers well with what they receive of the booty. So then treat me well too, so that my Lord and my Mistress will respect you in the eyes of the city and its inhabitants.

Her remark 'you and your husband put me in the convent' may not have been casual and gives pause for thought. She possibly was not a willing entrant into the convent. Referring to her father as 'your husband' could also be taken as a disrespectful remark. In any case, she appears to be reproaching them for what they had done.

All these women were not rich. Some had run up debts and surrendered their possessions to a rich colleague in exchange for an agreed lifetime allowance of food, oil and wool. Such an agreement was usual, but when it was concluded *in extremis* the correlation of the promised allowance and the value of the inherited property was disproportionate. Other texts refer explicitly to the 'interest-bearing debt' of a woman who needed such an allowance.<sup>74</sup> According to one text from the time of Hammurabi a destitute conventual who became chronically ill was

<sup>73</sup> ARM 10 43 with Durand, MARI 4 (1985) 400; contrast LAPO 18 (2000) 400–402 no. 1202. On lines 12–20, see Durand, MARI 3 (1984) 170 n. 58; K. R. Veenhof, RA 76 (1982) 133–135; M. Stol, ZA 76 (1986) 123 n. 7. In line 14 perhaps read *ezub la n[īdittim]*, collated by Durand.

<sup>74</sup> M. Stol, *The care of the elderly in the Ancient Near East* (1996) 69 f.



handed over to a carer, with the convent providing the necessary finance from her property.<sup>75</sup>

Lamassi, the daughter of Yapuḫum, became ill, and Ḫuzalatum supported her in her illness, and the convent had pity on Lamassi and gave her to Ḫuzalatum to care for: 1 millstone for ‘fat flour’; 2 ship’s chairs; 1 bed; 1 basket. All this Lamassi, the daughter of Yapuḫum, gave to Ḫuzalatum, the daughter of Sumu-araḫ. They swore an oath before Šamaš, Aya, Marduk and Hammurabi.

The agreement was authenticated by three witnesses.

## 26.5 Duties

What were the religious duties expected of a *nadītu*? When discussing the subject of ‘Inauguration’ we saw that she was expected to participate in a number of ceremonies. The introductions and the conclusions in letters suggest that her dominant occupations consisted of pious activities and making intercessions. A daughter writing to her father speaks about her prayers to Šamaš and Aya, her Lord and Mistress:

I still pray to my Lord and my Mistress for you with washed hands.<sup>76</sup>

Another example follows the same lines.

I always pray to my Lord and my Mistress for your life at the morning and the evening sacrifices. I have heard of your illness and I am worried. May my lord and my mistress not cease to protect you on the left hand and on the right. Every day by the lamp (?) I pray for you to the Queen of Sippar. To whom else but you should I direct my attention? My attention is directed towards you as it is to my Lord and my Mistress.<sup>77</sup>

Again in another letter a daughter assures her father that she is praying for him to ‘the Queen of Sippar’, alluding to Ištar or Annunitum.

May your good health be lasting before Šamaš and Ištar, the Queen of Sippar.

<sup>75</sup> L. Waterman, BDHP 42 (HG 6 1735); R. Harris, JESHO 6 (1963) 155. This Ḫuzalatum is also attested in AbB 7 20:6 f.

<sup>76</sup> AbB 11 60:25–28.

<sup>77</sup> AbB 11 106:1–3. Cf. AbB 13 96:8–10. There was also a *man* who promised ‘to pray for you to Šamaš, in the evening and the morning’, AbB 3 22:10–11.

She follows this with a request for provision to be made for a ceremony for that goddess.<sup>78</sup> Although the last eight lines of another letter are lost, what has been preserved demonstrates a particularly pious tone of voice.<sup>79</sup>

Speak to my father, thus says Lamassani:  
 May my Lord and Mistress always keep you alive for my sake. May things go well for you. May you be healthy. May your guardian deity want for nothing. May your prosperity be lasting before my Lord and my Mistress. May you never lack a guard for your prosperity and life. May the city where you live protect you because of the glory (?) of my Lord and my Mistress. My attention is directed towards you as it is towards my Lord and my Mistress.

Earlier we gave a translation of the letter of Amat-Šamaš to her sister, Queen Iltani, in which she said the king had asked her to ‘pray to your Lord’. The queen expected that she would ‘bring an offering to your Mistress and pray for me’.<sup>80</sup> From this we may conclude that she would pray to a god for a man and to a goddess for a woman.

Most letters like this show that in exchange for their prayers pious women were provided with what is termed a *piqittu*, ‘provisions’, food and slaves, and they could expect some special extra gifts on the three festivals of Šamaš.<sup>81</sup> Nevertheless, complaints about being ‘hungry’ were common, as we read in the letter of Erišti-Aya to ‘my Star’.<sup>82</sup> In a letter from Sippar two *nadītu*s complained that they were ‘hungry’. The solution was to give them a field, ‘so that they will pray for me’. That was evidently their reward.<sup>83</sup>

The onset of illness produced special needs. One *nadītu* who was ill sent a letter with some silver to pay for sheep she needed to have an extispicy performed.

May Ištar, my Mistress, let you grow old for my sake. They sent me here sick and I did not have any sheep for the liver extispicy. With this letter I am sending three shekels of silver to you with my servant Ibni-Marduk. Find three *šuppu*-sheep and send them to me. I will pray to Ištar for you.<sup>84</sup>

**78** AbB 1 72:10 f.

**79** AbB 11 105. Harris, *Studies Oppenheim*, 120–122, gives more prayers by nuns.

**80** OBTR 134:15, 21.

**81** The verb *paqādu* ‘to take care of, to provide with food’ is attested with this meaning in ARM 10 nos. 36, 39, 40, discussed by Batto, *Studies on women at Mari*, 96; OBTR 134:17, 26.

**82** Batto, 106 n. 44; ARM 10 36.

**83** AbB 7 59.

**84** AbB 7 166.

She supposed her illness would be explained by resorting to an extispicy with a sheep's liver, but for this a special type of sheep was required. By acquiring these for her the addressee would benefit from her intercessions. A nun from Mari requested sheep from 'my lord' for an offering, for it was now her turn to perform that duty.<sup>85</sup> A letter from a nun of Nergal to her father suggests that she had been dedicated so that her father could have good health, but since entering the convent she herself had not felt well. She begins her letter with the standard greeting and then continues about feeling unwell.

Regarding me, may Nergal keep you alive for ever. Since the day that you presented me to Nergal for your life, I have not felt well for one single day.

She pressed for some material help, and threatened that if it did not come a bailiff would appropriate her property and oust her from her house and she could never return there.

He will take my house and make me leave through the door. I shall not have a god to let me go back. Ur and Larsa will hear of it and jeer at you.<sup>86</sup>

After the death of King Yaḥdun-Lim his second wife had been taken into the harem of his successor, the Assyrian Yasmaḥ-Addu. Her letter to him is so overflowing with pious intercessions that J.-M. Durand thinks he had placed her in the convent of the god Dagan.<sup>87</sup>

I always pray for you to Šamaš and Dagan. May Dagan take away your cares. Leave for Mari in good health. May Ištarat, your mother, your goddess, give you the government and the throne. On my behalf, be healthy and well. Come to Mari in good health. I myself want to pray for you always and be glad.

The mother of Yasmaḥ-Addu had written to him that this 'king's daughter' should not be without luxuries (*šukuttu*) and he responded to say that he had given her five slave-girls, two sheep, four large lambs and household goods. Possibly when a woman entered the convent she would bring such a gift for the god.

Some letters refer to ceremonial tasks a *nadītu* was required to perform, one of which involved sacrifices.

**85** ARM 10 15 with LAPO 18 (2000) 408 no. 1208 and J.-M. Durand in: G. del Olmo Lete, *Mythologie et religion des Sémites occidentaux I* (2008) 404 f.

**86** AbB 6 140 with L. Barberon, *Les religieuses* (2012) 197.

**87** ARM 10 1 with LAPO 18 (2000) 421 no. 1216; J.-M. Durand in *Mythologie et religion des Sémites occidentaux I* (2008) 400 f.; the correct citation is M. 7420 (MARI 6, p. 296); see further Durand, MARI 6 (1990) 295.

Give three lambs of yours so that they can lay down my food-offering in the ‘house’ of my Mistress and the ‘house’ of the family gods. I am now sending thirty litres of flour. They should then be able to feed the ‘house’ of my Mistress and the ‘house’ of my family gods.<sup>88</sup>

In a related letter someone who can be assumed to be a nun was responsible for ‘the sacrifice for the dead at the end of the month, of your family, throughout the whole year’.<sup>89</sup> In other letters in that group we read about the ‘hearth of Marduk’, which suggests that this may have been a domestic ritual.<sup>90</sup>

## 26.6 Care in old age

Nuns could live to a ripe old age, and from archives we can follow the lives of some of them for periods of 25 or even 50 years.<sup>91</sup> Such longevity may be attributed to a good diet, childlessness, or protection within the convent from epidemics outside. Strangely no-one has yet thought of attributing it to the effectiveness of their prayers.

The duties of looking after a woman in the convent in the evening of her life naturally fell first on her close family. In general her fathers and her brothers were primarily responsible until she died, and then commemorated her afterwards. A prayer for the ancestors shows that the nuns were the only women mentioned in the family tree.<sup>92</sup> Some nuns organised care themselves for their old age through their ‘children’, even though a *nadītu* of Šamaš was not allowed to have children herself, and there were no indications that she had a husband, and one assumes that she led a chaste life. In fact in earlier times she was known as the wife (*dam*) of Šamaš, and she was regarded as married to him.<sup>93</sup> In this situation she could adopt children, particularly girls who were already adult, with the intention of having them look after her in her old age.

<sup>88</sup> AbB 2 116:7–11. ‘Feeding’ the gods is also mentioned in the related letter AbB 1 106:27.

<sup>89</sup> AbB 1 106:17–19.

<sup>90</sup> The theme in other related letters is the ritual of ‘the hearth’ (KI.NE) in Babylon (AbB 1 113, AbB 5 267, AbB 7 154–160). For a possible significance of the hearth see K. van der Toorn, *From her cradle to her grave* (1994) 40. In view of the many personal names with the element Marduk the writer seems to have been a *nadītu* of Marduk, possibly living in Babylon and writing to someone in Sippar.

<sup>91</sup> Harris, 122 f.; Renger, ZA 58, 166–168. In an example from Kish we can follow Dan-eressa over fifty years; M. Stol, SEL 4 (1987) 6 n. 7.

<sup>92</sup> K. Radner, *Die Macht des Namens* (2005) 86.

<sup>93</sup> R. Westbrook, OBML (1988) 65 f.

A *nadītu* of Šamaš often chose to adopt a niece who was also in the convent as her daughter, and then this niece had the duty of caring for her new mother. A nephew who was adopted became the nun's heir, but she kept for herself the usufruct of her estates.<sup>94</sup> There are dozens of texts describing these procedures, all carefully stored in the family archives.

A more unusual procedure was to arrange a marriage between two dependants, so that the married couple would take on the responsibility of caring for a nun in the final years of her life. The relevant texts sometimes include the verb 'to purify' to mean to give freedom to the intended bride so that she could marry.

Ana-Aya-uzni is the daughter of Salimatum. Salimatum purified her and married her to Belšunu, the son of Nemelum. Ana-Aya-uzni is pure (= free). No-one has any claim on Ana-Aya-uzni.<sup>95</sup>

The name Ana-Aya-uzni means 'My ear is (directed) towards Aya' and was a typical name for the slave-girl of a nun. Only a nun could be so persistently attentive to Aya. From the start of this short text it is made clear that this slave-girl was freed by her owner Salimatum and adopted as a daughter. Her owner, certainly a nun, now arranged for her to marry a man called Belšunu. According to common law the new couple were obliged to look after their parents, in this case the mother. The ones who could no longer lay any claims against the bride were certainly the brothers of the nun who had freed her slave. After all, they were the men who would inherit from their sister and official documentation forestalled any objection from them that a slave-girl had disappeared from the list of chattels in their sister's estate.

## 26.7 The demise of the convent

Eventually the convent came to an end. From a survey of the texts from Sippar known in 2012 calculations show that there were 230 nuns there before Hammurabi came to the throne, 300 during his reign, and 140 subsequently. The documentation available for this period is abundant and clearly shows a decline.<sup>96</sup> A letter to the authorities of the city of Sippar from King Samsu-iluna, Hammu-

<sup>94</sup> M. Stol, *The care of the elderly in the Ancient Near East* (1998) 84–109, 'Unmarried women: nuns'.

<sup>95</sup> CT 2 33 (VAB 5 31).

<sup>96</sup> Barberon, 62–68. Data on the decline under the last kings were collected by S. Richardson, *Studies B. R. Foster* (2010) 329–339.

rabi's successor, mentions abuses. We know of that letter from transcripts made fifty years after it was originally written. It must have been regarded as setting an important precedent to stop abuse recurring.<sup>97</sup> Possibly it amounted to a royal decree that was to remain valid for Samsu-iluna's successors, which is why later transcripts were made.<sup>98</sup>

The letter mentions two abuses, followed by instructions from the king himself. The first abuse was this.

The people of Sippar had allowed their daughters to enter the convent but had given them no food. They became hungry and rations were provided from the storehouses of 'my lord' (i.e. by the king himself). Even now those people from Sippar allow their daughters to enter the convent.

The king orders,

I decree that a *nadītu* without any provision may not enter the convent. Furthermore, if a *nadītu* of Šamaš lives in the convent without her father and her brother giving her any food or making a written declaration for her, I decree that pressure should be placed on her father and brother to make a written declaration before allowing her to enter the convent.

The king added that the declaration had to be written down in the presence of the authorities of the city and of the convent. Evidently the situation was regarded as an emergency and the State took action by opening the royal storehouses. The instructions of the king compelled the authorities to set down in writing the duties of the father and the brothers and to have the document witnessed.

The second problem involves a *nadītu* of Šamaš whose family had fallen into debt and their creditors sought recompense from her.

Mar-Šamaš, a man from Sippar, owed a debt of silver to the judge Awil-Sîn. Because he did not pay back the silver, he seized Mar-Šamaš and said to him, 'If you hold on to your possessions and I receive nothing from you, then I shall take the slave from your daughter, the *nadītu*, who lives in the convent.'

The king decreed that the *nadītu* bore no responsibility for such a debt.

---

<sup>97</sup> C. Janssen, 'Samsu-iluna and the hungry *nadītums*', Northern Akkad Project Reports 5 (1991) 3–39; D. Charpin in: F. Joannès, *Rendre la justice en Mésopotamie* (2000) 86–88 no. 43; M. T. Roth in: E. Lévy, *La codification des lois dans l'Antiquité* (2000) 23–27.

<sup>98</sup> S. Lafont in: B. M. Levinson, *Theory and method in Biblical and Cuneiform law. Revision, interpolation and development* (1994) 97–100.

A *nadītu* of Šamaš, to whom her father and her brother give food, and about whom they have made a written declaration, and who lives in the convent, is not [responsible] for interest-bearing debts or the corvée of her family. Her father and her brothers [shall carry out] their own corvée. (...) As for a creditor who seizes a *nadītu* of Šamaš on account of the interest-bearing debt or corvée of her father or brothers, that man is an enemy of Šamaš.

The case of the debt of silver was a single occurrence and was followed by a general word of instruction: a *nadītu* in a convent is not responsible for debts and is not required to perform the corvée.

Here we see the specific circumstances which gave rise to two laws. Similar specific events must have triggered many of the laws of Hammurabi.<sup>99</sup> In both these cases the *nadītu* was granted a new status in law and became an independent woman, if it could be proved that she had received her inheritance when she entered the convent.<sup>100</sup> We know from another letter that taking over the slave of a nun provoked a protest from the head of the *nadītus* who complained to the chief of the canal district.

Why do you detain Liwwira-ana-ilim, the slave of a *nadītu* of Šamaš? He is not a citizen of the city of Kullizum. He is not the son of a citizen. He is the slave of a *nadītu* of Šamaš. Let him go free, so that the *nadītu* of Šamaš does not address herself to the king. (...) Is the convent there to be plundered?<sup>101</sup>

The head was working in this function during the reign of Samsu-iluna.<sup>102</sup>

Such cases are evidence for the declining importance of the convent. For centuries it had been accepted that the father, and after his death the brothers, would look after a conventual. That was set out in the laws of Hammurabi, but now it seems it did not always happen. Ultimately, at the end of the Old Babylonian period, after the fall of Babylon, the institution of ‘nuns’ and a ‘convent’ had disappeared for good. The discovery of the letter referring to nuns who were left hungry has prompted an investigation into the later history of the convent, with the suggestion that the convent and its officials practically never appear again after Samsu-iluna.<sup>103</sup> In fact that is incorrect. The institution did disappear for good but only after another hundred years. It is noteworthy that the convent as an

---

<sup>99</sup> C. Janssen, 10 f.

<sup>100</sup> S. Lafont, 99.

<sup>101</sup> AbB 1 129.

<sup>102</sup> The same head of the *nadītus* wrote a letter about women who were hungry, and that fits in with Samsu-iluna’s letter; AbB 10 25.

<sup>103</sup> Richardson in *Studies B. R. Foster*, 329–346.

institution sprang up in the Old Babylonian period and flourished only for a few centuries under the benevolence of royal supervision.

Shortly after the Old Babylonian period we hear of a convent and *nadītu* in Uruk<sup>104</sup> and much later a *nadītu* plays a role in a Neo-Babylonian ritual.<sup>105</sup> Although words for nuns were preserved in the literary tradition the real meaning of the words was not properly understood. This can be seen in a gloss to the word *nin.dingir* (*ereš.dingir*) in a dream omen.

If he approaches a *nin.dingir* = if he approaches the daughter of his god.<sup>106</sup>

In Chapter 20 we mentioned the devaluation of old honorific titles. The *nadītu* is mentioned in a much later hymn where she is associated with midwifery. At that time, she herself was supposed to be the mother of dead children, an unexpected idea given her reputation for chastity in the Old Babylonian period.<sup>107</sup> In a fictitious bawdy letter a *nadītu* and a *kulmašītu* are portrayed offering themselves to a man with a particularly lewd invitation.

I have opened for you my vulva. Strike my clitoris!<sup>108</sup>

The *nadītu* and her holy colleagues even appear as a group of witches in late anti-witchcraft texts.<sup>109</sup> Much later in Syriac we find the word *ggwh*, a cognate of *gagû* ‘convent’, meaning ‘whore’. In Neo-Babylonian Sippar we read that the ‘Daughters of Ebabbar’ were venerated, a phrase which could refer to statues of *nadītus* from some thousand years earlier which were still standing in the temple. That is certainly possible, for we know that a statue of King Sargon continued to be venerated there.<sup>110</sup>

**104** S. Dalley, CUSAS 9 (2009) p. 6; in nos. 29 and 54 (lukur *šimri*).

**105** JCS 43–45 (1991–93) 98 iii 101, with Barberon, *Les religieuses*, 204.

**106** A. L. Oppenheim, *The interpretation of dreams in the Ancient Near East* (1956) 291a, 334 × + 7–8. The sign UM stands for Akkadian *teḥû*, ‘to approach’, here ‘to approach sexually’; J.-M. Durand in J. Bottéro, *RIA* IV/6–7 (1975) 460 § 4.

**107** For her as a midwife see M. Stol, *Birth in Babylonia* (2000) 172. For her stillborn children (*kūbu*) see W. Farber, *Lamaštu* (2014) 266 Ug III:8, 295:11 f., 328; SpbTU I 44:67 and parallels.

**108** A. K. Grayson, *JAOS* 103 (1983) 145 f.

**109** D. Schwemer, *Abwehrzauber und Behexung* (2007) 76 f.

**110** J. N. Postgate and J. Oates in: J. MacGinnis, *Letter orders from Sippar* (1995) 152 n. 61.



## 27 Married holy women

There were other women who devoted their lives to religion but did not live in a cloister. They were similarly required to behave modestly (Hammurabi's Laws § 110). They were married but, as far as we know, they did not become pregnant and bear children. One such woman was the *nadītu* of the god Marduk of Babylon (not of Sippar), another was the *qadištu*, the 'holy woman', and another the *kulmašītu*. Regarding terminology it should be noted that the laws of King Lipit-Ištar of Isin and King Hammurabi of Babylon group together several titles of holy women. In so doing they wish to be comprehensive, summarising the different titles current in the various sanctuaries in their kingdom, all of which indicate a holy woman who was forbidden to have children.<sup>1</sup> The Sumerian *ereš.dingir* (previously read *nin.dingir*), a combination of signs meaning 'the lady of the god', stands for any holy woman.<sup>2</sup> Sometimes, however, a cloistered woman such as 'the *nadītu* of the cloister' or 'the secluded woman' (*sekretu*) is specified (CH § 180).

It is commonly assumed that motherhood was taboo for these married women while virginity was not an issue, but that idea should be questioned. The arguments are based on omen predictions which speak of the abnormal sexual practices of a holy woman, from which it is assumed that they were permitted to have sex.<sup>3</sup> However, omen predictions rarely reflect the norm. For example, some seem to favour homosexuality, which was taboo.<sup>4</sup> So we should not exclude the idea that these women had a duty to be chaste.

### 27.1 The *nadītu* of Marduk the god of Babylon

Women were first appointed to this function under the kings of the First Dynasty of Babylon. This dynasty, which included the famous King Hammurabi, stemmed from 'Amorite' tribes, who may have found the concept of a Sumerian high priest-

---

1 L. Barberon, *Les religieuses et le culte de Marduk dans le royaume de Babylone* (2012) 110 (top), 144 n. 827. The titles in Sumerian are: *ereš.dingir*, *lukur*, *nu.gig*; in Akkadian: *ugbaltu*, *nadītu*; others are *zikrum* (= *sekretu*) and *é.gi<sub>4</sub>.a* (= *kallatu*); M. Stol, *Studies J. Oelsner* (2000) 465.

2 On example is Yaḥilatum *ereš.dingir ša Šamaš*, who must be a *nadītu* of Šamaš, see CT 6 22a:13, with Stol, *Studies Oelsner*, 460 (n. 21–23), cf. n. 25; for another example see p. 461 (n. 27). We also have Beletum, the *ereš.dingir* of Marduk of Babylon, who was a *nadītu* of Marduk, JCS 23 (1971) 124:9, 11, 22 (= VAS 18 18); and Melulatum the *ereš.dingir* of Annunitum, a *kulmašītu*, Barberon, 68, 73 no. 27.

3 Most recently see Barberon, 111, 182.

4 M. Stol, *Studies R. D. Biggs* (2007) 236 n. 21.

ess linked with the divine kingship abhorrent.<sup>5</sup> They preferred to appoint several different women to be a ‘priestess’ of their own god Marduk, and named them all a *nadîtu*. In the preceding chapter we translated that word as ‘nun’ but in this context it is less appropriate since this ‘nun’ was married. The *nadîtu* of Marduk must have been an innovation, and now we can say much more about her thanks to a new book by Lucille Barberon, who says: ‘According to daily life texts, a *nadîtu*, married to a man, could only be a *nadîtu* of Marduk; the other *nadîtu*s, whether dedicated to Šamaš, to Ninurta, to Zababa or to Sîn, were by definition celibate, being the spouses of a god.’<sup>6</sup> The Laws of Hammurabi is the only lawbook which gives the rules for religious women and a number of those laws concern this *nadîtu*. The king wished to secure her position and that of the second wife who lived with her.<sup>7</sup> Originally she was a woman resident in the capital of the kingdom, Babylon, but soon we find her living elsewhere. Her presence in other cities coincides with the growing expansion of the empire. These women belonged to the elite.<sup>8</sup> We can closely follow one of them in Sippar where she and her family acquired landed property in newly developed agricultural land with canals named after a Babylonian king and a princess.<sup>9</sup> She served Marduk, the god of Babylon, and his wife, Zarpanitu. On her cylinder seal she is named the ‘servant’ of the divine couple.<sup>10</sup> She called them ‘my Lord’ and ‘my Mistress’ in her correspondence and her name or the names of her servants often were named after them or after their temple in Babylon, Esagil.<sup>11</sup> The dedication of one of them took place in the temple of Annunitum in Sippar<sup>12</sup> and letters show that their pious devotion was like that of the nuns in Sippar, discussed in the previous chapter. They too prayed for their family.<sup>13</sup> They were required to perform ceremonial tasks and would go with their ‘chair’ to the ‘house’ of their god Marduk. We gather from a clause in marriage contracts that it was the second wife who always had to carry this chair.<sup>14</sup>

What were her duties in the temple? A group of texts from Sippar associates married women with the performance of a ritual (*parša epēšu*), which imme-

---

5 Barberon, *Les religieuses*, 108 f.

6 Barberon, 146.

7 Barberon, 145 f. Only in §182 is the *nadîtu* of the Marduk of Babylon mentioned explicitly, but Barberon, 146–148, associates more laws with her: §§ 137; 144–147; 179.

8 Barberon, 174–176. One was the daughter of a general; VAS 18 18:9 f.

9 Barberon, 151–153. In Sippar-Amnanum, where they were to stay (p. 176 f.).

10 Barberon, 251 f. A seal was found in her (?) grave; Barberon, 100 f.

11 For her correspondence, see Barberon, 14 f. For names, 8–12.

12 Barberon, 184, cf. 143.

13 Barberon, ‘L’importance de la prière’, 204–206.

14 Barberon, 19, 23, 230 f.

diately suggests to us these were the married nuns of Marduk, or perhaps the married holy women (*qadištus*) or the *kulmašitus* (to be discussed presently) were also involved.<sup>15</sup> Some rituals have to do with sacred objects, but others are obscure.<sup>16</sup> Two, the rituals of ‘friendship’ (*ru’ûtu*) and ‘sutorship’ (*redûtu*), may have involved sexual acts and ‘prostitution’. If that is true, the ladies would have been responsible only for organising the ritual and they would have left other women, such as the *kezertu*, to do the work. For more details see what we said in Chapter 21 on temple prostitution.

These women were married and lived at home, not in a cloister. Since bearing children was taboo for them, they adopted two strategies to get children. They could adopt a baby or attract a second wife for their husband.<sup>17</sup> That second wife could be adopted as the ‘sister’ of the *nadītu*.<sup>18</sup> Hammurabi gave her the special title of *šugîtu* and protected her rights (§ 182).<sup>19</sup> In most respects she had the same position as the second wife of any Babylonian man,<sup>20</sup> and so we discussed the *šugîtu* earlier in Chapter 5.

The title *šugîtu* was not exclusively used in the context of the *nadītu* of Marduk. In a letter from Mari she is contrasted with the *ereš.dingir* of the god Adad.<sup>21</sup> We saw at the beginning of Chapter 26 that in Sippar a *nadītu* of Šamaš could also be accompanied by a *šugîtu*, a second wife.

Towards the end of the First Dynasty of Babylon, after the reign of King Ammi-ditana, this holy woman was called both the *nadītu* of Marduk and the *kulmašitu* of Annunitum.<sup>22</sup> This syncretism may have benefited Marduk, for we know that the *nadītu* of Marduk was dedicated in the temple of Annunitum,<sup>23</sup> or it could be seen as a mark of a general decline of the empire.

---

15 Barberon surmises that the women were *ugbabtus* or *nadītus* of Marduk (202f.). But the *qadištu* named Ilša-ḫegal also ‘performs the ritual’ (*parša epēšu*); Di 1804:21–24, known only from quotes in RA 86 (1992) 33 n. 34; Barberon, 202 n. 1149.

16 Barberon, 199–204; for her sexual services see p. 203.

17 Barberon, 225–232. For more on the second wife see Barberon, 19 f., 23 f.

18 Barberon, 232 f.

19 This is what Barberon said in her discussion of the *šugîtu*; 19–21, 81–83, 227–232.

20 Barberon, 148.

21 ARM 10 124:5–8 with LAPO 18 (2000) 353 no. 1170, mentioned in passing by Barberon, 61 n. 329.

22 Barberon, 68–73, 107.

23 Barberon, 140–143.

## 27.2 The holy woman, the *qadištu*

In the Old Babylonian period we find the *qadištu*, a kind of woman who did not live in a convent. The root of the word (Semitic *q-d-š*) means ‘holy’,<sup>24</sup> from which we have the verb ‘to make holy, to sanctify’, and so we translate the noun as ‘holy woman’. The etymological link between the verb and the noun is made explicit in a letter from Mari, where a father sanctified (*qadāšu*) a ‘holy girl’ and devoted (*našû*) her to be a ‘holy woman’.<sup>25</sup> It seems that even as a child the girl had already been given a ‘holy’ status, and so in sanctifying her her father was confirming that fact. On the other hand, syntactically the adjective ‘holy’ with ‘girl’ could be interpreted as proleptic, to show that she was ‘a girl and a holy woman of the future’. Perhaps the particular daughter to be dedicated was decided by age, the second or third to be born. In the previous chapter we saw that different daughters in one family became different types of nun.

In Sumerian we find a woman called a *nu.gig* (or *mu.gib* in Emesal, their women’s language), meaning ‘untouchable’.<sup>26</sup> Babylonians identified two different religious women as such, the *qadištu* and the *ištarītu* (‘she who belongs to Ištar’). When the early Sumerian king Mesanepada of Kish called himself ‘the husband of the *nu.gig*’, he probably referred to Inanna herself, for that is more likely than that he would have called himself the husband of Inanna’s priestess, the holy woman.<sup>27</sup> Inanna was often entitled ‘the *nu.gig* of the (god of) the heavens’.<sup>28</sup> The Babylonian title *ištarītu*, ‘she who belongs to Ištar’, fits the priestess well, and she was known to be able to make bird-like sounds of a certain tone in the cult.<sup>29</sup> In that later period a *nu.gig* could also indicate a woman holding a high position here on earth.

24 M. I. Gruber, ‘Hebrew *qedēšāh* and her Canaanite and Akkadian cognates’, UF 18 (1986) 133–148; J. Westenholz, Harvard Theological Review 82 (1989) 245–265.

25 A. 1186, *inūma šuhartam qadištam abuša uqaddišuši u ana qadištīm iššuši*, cited by D. Charpin, AfO 36–37 (1989–90) 94a; for the full letter, see note 36. Boys could also be dedicated; Charpin, 106b, *quššudu*.

26 A. Zgoll, ‘Inana als nugig’, ZA 87 (1997) 181–195.

27 IRSA (1971) 41 f.; J. S. Cooper, SARI I (1986) 98; Zgoll, 192.

28 D. O. Edzard, ZA 55 (1962) 104 f.; A. Falkenstein, ZA 56 (1964) 120; Å. W. Sjöberg, TCS 3 (1969) 123; C. Wilcke, RIA V/1–2 (1976) 80 f.; J.-J. Glassner, CRRAI 47/I (2002) 152 f. Note the woman with her title Erišti-Erra *nu.gig-an.na*, BIN 7 163:1 f.

29 A. Berlin, *Enmerkar and Ensuĥkešdanna* (1979) 74.

### 27.2.1 In the service of the rain god Adad

For the Babylonians the *nu.gig* on earth was the *qadištu*, ‘the holy woman’. She was often dedicated to the god Adad and sometimes to his wife, the goddess Šala. This holy woman sealed her texts with the seal of Adad.<sup>30</sup> The personal name *Ilša-ḫegal*, ‘Her god is riches’, seems to have been used exclusively for this holy woman. The god referred to in her seal inscription was the rain god Adad.<sup>31</sup> Adad figures in the names of many holy women and in those of their fathers, as in *Adad-nuri*, ‘Adad is my light’.<sup>32</sup> It is possible that ‘the holy woman of Adad’ was an innovation from the Old Babylonian period. Adad was a god from the West, where the people were dependent on rainwater. A hymn to Marduk was found in the archive of a holy woman. It has references to a cosmic battle, a mythological motif from the West.<sup>33</sup> A man whose own name included Adad dedicated his daughter to his god.

Beltani is her name. Her father Ibni-Adad has devoted (*našū*) her as a holy woman to his god Adad.

Two specific clauses follow, one that she should receive as large a legacy as her brother, and the other that someone should be given to her as ‘her son’, possibly to care for her in her old age. The first witnesses were the moon god and the sun god.<sup>34</sup>

A letter from Sippar refers to a holy woman receiving income from the temple.

E., the holy woman, is no stranger to (our) house. The benefice of the ‘seals of Inanna, Queen of Sippar’ is in her hands.

It must have been an honour to receive such a benefice.<sup>35</sup> Probably she had to take care of the precious seals in the temple.

<sup>30</sup> F. N. H. al-Rawi, S. Dalley, *Old Babylonian texts from private houses at Abu Habbah, Ancient Sippar* (2000) 17: seal impressions picturing Adad are on nos. 31, 35, 36.

<sup>31</sup> *Ilša-ḫegal nu.gig* in MHET II/6 895:13, PBS 8/2 218:4; as ‘servant of Adad and Šala’ on TCL 1 157; she is the mother of Ur-Utu in Sippar (see further below).

<sup>32</sup> J. Renger, *ZA* 58 (1967) 179–184. Now also Šat-Adad in a model contract about her; C. Wilcke in *Isin–Išān Baḫriyāt* III (1987) 104 f.

<sup>33</sup> L. Barberon in F. Briquel-Chatonnet, *Femmes* (2009) 280.

<sup>34</sup> E. Grant, *Smith College Library* no.260, with C. Wilcke, *Studies F.R. Kraus* (1982) 446; D. Schwemer, *Wettergottgestalten* (2001) 318; Barberon, *Les religieuses*, 185.

<sup>35</sup> MHET I 74:11–14.

We have already cited the letter from Mari which appeared to say that this woman had been dedicated by her father. A little further on in the letter<sup>36</sup> we read that at her dedication (*našû*) the woman received a man as a gift to be her slave, ‘instead of her finger ring (*unqu*) and her legacy (*nihlatu*)’. The holy woman would usually have received a ring and a legacy. From this J.-M. Durand understands that this woman had freedom of movement and did not live in a convent. She was an independent woman, without any man supervising her. The god to whom she was dedicated was the family god who guaranteed her free status. The ceremony took place within the family circle or the clan. Durand says that, if there were no sons, she would have been able to perpetuate the cult of her ancestors. He thought the ‘nuns’ in Sippar and Nippur would have enjoyed the same independent status in the convents and outside. That, he concluded, would mean ‘there were no *religieuses*’. His daring theory is based on this letter, and it will clearly apply to this holy woman. We saw that she was dedicated to the god Adad, and that the name of that god often appeared in her name and in her father’s name. Adad will have been the family god, with the woman fulfilling a specific duty in his temple, and she was therefore some sort of priestess. But she lived in ‘the (family) house’ and not in the convent.<sup>37</sup> The holy woman received her food from the ‘house’ and not from a convent.<sup>38</sup> One of them had a sister who was a nun (*nadîtu*) with whom she would share the inheritance.<sup>39</sup> Because we know there was a male ‘head’ of the *qadištus* they constituted a distinct group.<sup>40</sup>

The rest of the letter is full of interest and so we will not withhold it from our readers. It is addressed to the king. The writer states that after the death of her father, the slave of the holy woman had himself been adopted as a son by somebody. But he stole his mistress’s goods and gave them to his adoptive father, comprising a cow, 11 sheep and 2400 litres of barley. If that holy woman owned so much she can hardly be described as poor. She demanded an explanation.

You are my slave! Let the one who snatched you away from me come here.

---

**36** A. 1186, translated by J.-M. Durand in: G. del Olmo Lete, *Mythologie et religion des Sémites occidentaux* I (2008) 407–410, 565; J. M. Sasson, *From the Mari archives* (2015) 265.

**37** But note that in ARM 10 59 rev. 4 f. a holy woman is dedicated to Annunitum who never is a family goddess. K. van der Toorn, *Family religion in Babylonia* (1996) 71 (n. 23), assumes that she was the personal goddess of Ur-Utu.

**38** AbB 10 8:12, Riffin 131, VAS 7 183 i 18, etc., YOS 13 425.

**39** MHET II/1 105, 110.

**40** OECT 13 58:5, 6.

The man arrived and was asked a direct question.

Is it fitting that I should authorise the adoption of the slave of a holy woman, someone not of free birth?

The problem was not immediately solved and so a request was made to the king.

Let my lord consider his lawsuit! It is not right that a free woman, a holy woman, should be disadvantaged. The man is a slave, not someone who is free-born.

This is the kind of problem an independent woman may encounter, for after the death of her father she would had to stand alone.

The holy woman could be a high-ranking woman, sometimes married to an important man. A good example of this is Ilša-ḥegal, the wife of the First Lamentation Singer in Sippar.<sup>41</sup> It is probable that she was not allowed to have children and so she often adopted children for her husband. These children were possibly the sons of his concubines. For the monthly rations of food the wife and the concubines were listed beside each other, so it is thought.<sup>42</sup> There are two texts in which a *qadištu* formally adopted a girl with the intention of 'giving her to her man' as a second wife.<sup>43</sup> In the first, she had given the girl (her niece) to her own husband with the following stipulation:

She shall wash her feet. She shall carry her chair after her to the temple of Adad. She shall not be forward (?) and she shall not approach her husband in her presence.

### 27.2.2 Holy women of lower standing

The picture is less favourable for women dedicated to a god other than Adad. Two incantations from the Old Babylonian period concerned with winning a woman's love mention her, together with the well-known 'nun' *naditu*, and the woman with the styled hair, the *kezertu*, probably a temple prostitute. It seems

<sup>41</sup> K. van Lerberghe, MHET I (1991) no. 66; C. Janssen, RA 86 (1992) 32 (n. 33).

<sup>42</sup> L. Barberon, NABU 2005/89, on Ilša-ḥegal.

<sup>43</sup> CT 48 57 with Westbrook, OBML, 103b, 124; Wilcke, 'Familiengründung', 261 n. 68; L. Barberon, NABU 2005/89; *Les religieuses* (2012) 20. Another holy woman adopts a girl in order to give her in marriage later, YOS 14 121 with S. D. Simmons, JCS 15 (1961) 56 no. 131 (Tarmaya nu.gig). A third text is A. Goddeeris, *Tablets from Kisurra* (2009) no. 230.

that a holy woman might attract a lover,<sup>44</sup> which gives us further food for thought. Incidentally, the appearance of the nun in this erotic context already in the Old Babylonian period is highly surprising. According to a handbook with legal formulas from Nippur, a holy woman could be married from off the street and could directly breast-feed a child.<sup>45</sup> Remarkably she is often associated in the Old Babylonian period with the birth of a child, when she apparently functioned as a paid midwife.<sup>46</sup> She could also function as a wet-nurse, breast-feeding children for payment. In a letter one Ilša-ḫegal was paid for breast-feeding.<sup>47</sup> Highly placed holy woman would not have done this themselves, but they led an institution where children were suckled.<sup>48</sup> It has been suggested that they or the *ištaritu* suckled the Assyrian princes, which seems a cute idea: ‘We know that Assyrian princes were entrusted as infants to temples of Ištar, almost certainly to be suckled and nursed by hierodules who impersonated the motherly aspects of the Goddess.’<sup>49</sup>

This all fits in with the mythical story of the first birth of humankind.

Let the midwife be glad in the house of the holy woman.<sup>50</sup>

In another myth the mother goddess is assigned the ‘role’ of the holy woman. There it was said no man ought to see her activities.<sup>51</sup> In an abnormal situation they were connected in literary texts with infant deaths. In ‘The Curse of Akkad’ we read:

May your mother *nu.gig*, your mother *nu.bar*, kill their children.<sup>52</sup>

44 A. R. George, *Babylonian literary texts in the Schøyen Collection* (= CUSAS 10) (2009) 68 f., lines 12–14, and YOS 11 87; Barberon, 181 n. 1057.

45 MSL 1 (1937) 99 f.

46 M. Civil, CUSAS 17 (2011) 281–283: ‘the *nugig* was a midwife, with duties not limited to the parturition but extending all through the pregnancy’; Barberon, *Les religieuses*, 183, 207 f.

47 AbB 1 6:23, 26. In the archive of a holy woman a suckling contract was found, which was possibly an exercise made in school; Barberon in F. Briquel-Chatonnet, *Femmes* (2009) 280.

48 K. van der Toorn, *From her cradle to her grave* (1994) 84–86; M. Stol, *Birth in Babylonia and the Bible* (2000) 186–188.

49 S. Parpola, SAA IX (1997) p. XXXIX with p. IC, note 174.

50 Atram-ḫasis I 290.

51 M. Civil, JAOS 103 (1983) 57:154, with p. 65b (W. G. Lambert).

52 Line 241; J. G. Westenholz, Harvard Theological Review 82 (1989) 258 f. For more examples of these women wilfully killing babies, see R. Borger, AOAT 1 (1969) 4:11, §III; A. Cavigneaux, ZA 95 (1985) 193 f.; M. E. Cohen, *The canonical lamentations of Ancient Mesopotamia I* (1988) 274:14, 299:23 (Akkadian [*ummu išta*]ritu *ummu kulmašitu*); M. J. Geller, *Evil Demons* (2007) 116 Tablet 4:151; 119 Tablet 5:22 (the *qadištu*).



The role of the *qadištu* outside Babylonia and at later periods is unclear. In any case she did not have the high status that Lady Iša-ḫegal of Adad had in Sippar. We have already come across her uncertain role as second wife in the Old Assyrian period in Chapter 5. In that culture it is evident that she was a woman of proven fertility and that would seem to be the chief reason she was taken on. The fact that her fertility had been proven meant that she was no longer a virgin, so not a first-class partner. According to the Middle Assyrian laws she was not veiled, though a respectable woman would have been.

A holy woman whom a husband has married is veiled on the street. And whomever a husband has not married goes bare-headed on to the street. She may not be veiled.

Similarly a slave-girl and a prostitute were not veiled (§ 40).<sup>53</sup> In Syria the holy woman is mentioned in a curse.

May a holy woman set up the ancestors' stele in his house.

This could be a disdainful reference to a prostitute.<sup>54</sup>

In Emar in Syria we find a holy woman who already had three daughters. When she married a man she stipulated that he had to marry her eldest daughter. If that daughter died, it would be the turn of the second daughter.<sup>55</sup> At first sight this could mean that the man was married to both the mother and the daughter. But it could mean that the marriage to the oldest daughter would take place only after the mother had died.

In Emar the holy woman is also a respected daughter whose father indicated in his will that she would be 'the father and the mother' after his death and would have the right of inheritance.<sup>56</sup> Possibly therefore the situation in Syria was different. We have seen that also in Syria the word *ḫarīmtu* can scarcely have the meaning of prostitute, since a man who called his daughter a *ḫarīmtu* expected her to be 'father and mother of his house'.<sup>57</sup> Here we are far away from Babylonia. The literal meaning of *ḫarīmtu*, 'a woman set apart' (as in Arabic *ḫarīm*) may be more relevant here.

<sup>53</sup> For veiling, see Chapter 1, The Veil.

<sup>54</sup> *Ekalte* II 61:27 f. with L. Marti, NABU 2006/58.

<sup>55</sup> *Emar* VI/3 131 no. 124, TUAT NF 1 (2004) 148 f., cf. Durand, RA 84 (1990) 58.

<sup>56</sup> G. Beckman, *Texts from the vicinity of Emar* (1996) 76, on RE 57:4; A. Tsukimoto, ASJ 13 (1991) 285 no. 23 (together with her mother). For a holy woman who inherits, see *Ekalte* II 76.

<sup>57</sup> *Emar* VI/3 no. 33 with Th. Kämmerer, UF 26 (1994) 187–190.

In later periods the *qadištu* appears only in rituals singing laments.<sup>58</sup> It has been suggested that she was ‘a hierodule who served in fertility rites and as a wet-nurse, and she was most probably also working in (cultic) prostitution’, but there is no proof for this.<sup>59</sup> She could also be thought of as a witch. In later incantations the nuns, *kulmašitus* and ‘holy women’ from the Old Babylonian period were called witches one after the other. At that time there were only three words for classifying a woman active in a cult, and everything points to the fact that some of the women were ‘witches’ working in the underbelly of society, possibly in temple prostitution.<sup>60</sup>

Some Bible scholars have shown a lively interest in these dark ladies. In Hebrew the word for a ‘holy woman’ is *q<sup>e</sup>dešā*, and in Genesis 38 she is also called *zōnā*, ‘whore’. In the narrative about Judah and his daughter-in-law Tamar we read how she positioned herself as a whore at the roadside, in such a way that it was enough to convince Judah that she was a whore. In English Bible translations (Genesis 38:14 f.) it seems that she donned a veil and then she covered (?) herself, but the meaning of this last verb depends on the interpretation of the *hitpa’el* theme of the Hebrew root ‘-l-p. One Hebrew dictionary refers to the suggestion that the verb really meant to perfume oneself. Nevertheless, the story makes it clear that Judah could not see her face, not even when they were having sex together. This is surprising enough in itself, but we should also remember that there is a problem with the traditional translation of the verb, since it would not have been expected for a whore to veil herself. It certainly contradicts what is said in the Assyrian laws.<sup>61</sup> When he realised his mistake Judah called her ‘the holy woman’ (*q<sup>e</sup>dešā*) (21 f.). To understand the problems in the narrative the following theory can be proposed. A *q<sup>e</sup>dešā* was a married woman who was prohibited from having children. By acting as a prostitute she had the chance to become pregnant, but to remain anonymous she would have to cover herself with a veil. Though well-meaning this theory can at best be regarded a desperate stab in the dark. Why Tamar seduced her father-in-law is discussed in Chapter 14 about levirate marriage. She had the right to offspring from him and a lawyer interprets her action as *bonus dolus*, ‘a good deception’.

<sup>58</sup> KAR 154 with M. Gruber, UF 18 (1986) 139–141.

<sup>59</sup> S. Parpola, LAS, Commentary (1983) 182f. Ištar is called both ‘whore’ and *qadištu*, but this does not prove that the *qadištu* was a prostitute. The translation ‘the holy Ištar’ is preferable.

<sup>60</sup> D. Schwemer, *Abwehrzauber und Behexung* (2007) 76 f. On the *ištaritu*, see S. L. Macgregor, *Beyond hearth and home* (2012) 10–12 (in the periphery; a witch).

<sup>61</sup> As observed by G. von Rad (see Westenholz, Harvard Theol. Review 82, 247) and by Oswalt (see Gruber, UF 18, 144 n. 53).

### 27.3 The *kulmašitu*

The *kulmašitu* is often linked with the *qadištu*. Both titles occur together in the fixed Sumerian phrase *nu.gig nu.bar*, Akkadian *qadištu kulmašitu*, where *nu.bar* stands for *kulmašitu*. A Sumerian literary letter says that neglecting to ‘install the *qadištu* and the *kulmašitu* in the places of the gods’, a reference to maintaining service in the temple, amounts to barbarianism.<sup>62</sup> In the Old Babylonian period the *kulmašitu* was a ‘nun’ with full rights. There were various men who were ‘head of the *kulmašitus*’, one of whom was called the ‘servant of Hammurabi’, indicating that he fulfilled duties for the state.<sup>63</sup> He is named in a list among lament singers and ordinary singers.<sup>64</sup> This might be appropriate since we know that a *qadištu* had a distinctive singing voice. The etymology of *kulmašitu* is obscure,<sup>65</sup> but it could be linked to the name of a city and mean ‘a woman from Kulmiš’. Kulmiš in the Mari texts is where Adad had priestesses (*ereš.dingir.ra*), and Adad was also linked to the high-ranking *qadištus*. It was Adad, not Ištar, who was primarily associated with these women, and as the rain god Adad can be equated with the West-Semitic rain god Baal.

Both the *qadištu* and the *kulmašitu* are mentioned in incantations. One listing the phases of human life places them after the infant, the menstruating girl and the young man, so it is logical to suppose that these women were physically mature. The text states that adolescents were unable to perform the physical functions expected of them because of an affliction of Samana, the Red Demon.<sup>66</sup> D. Arnaud, referring to this passage, discusses the *nu.gig* but his comments apply equally to the *nu.bar*. He says, ‘Perhaps the references to the *nu.gig* in an incantation against the Red Demon should be understood to mean that she was hindered in her profession. It could mean the loss of milk or something similar.’<sup>67</sup> The *kulmašitu* was proficient in suckling for she was known to possess a ‘mother’s breast for seven’ (‘Sumerian Temple Hymns’, 390). Although the meaning of this expression is opaque, but it seems to be a poetic reference to an abundant supply

<sup>62</sup> W. W. Hallo in: *Studies F. R. Kraus* (1982) 98:24 (var. in TCL 16 56:1).

<sup>63</sup> CT 48 53, seal 2 (Šamaš-liwwir); for more see K. R. Veenhof, JEOL 35 (1987–88) 35; also in MHET II/3 427 case rev. 4 (sic).

<sup>64</sup> OLA 21 no. 4:6. Cf. S. Richardson, TLOB 51:9.

<sup>65</sup> A *kulmašu* is now known from a royal inscription and can be associated with music: ‘I installed a *k.*, two hundred women *tigū*-players, (to perform) great music’; RIME 4 (1990) 674:51–57. For the *kulmašitu* and music see D. Shehata, *Musiker und ihr vokales Repertoire* (2009) 100.

<sup>66</sup> J. Nougayrol, ArOr 17/3–4 (1949) 213f., lines 11–15; see ZA 57, 118; I. L. Finkel, *Festschrift R. Borger* (1998) 72–76.

<sup>67</sup> Revue de l’Histoire des Religions 183 (1973) 114.

of mother's milk, and that her breast was like 'the seven-nippled vessel', i.e. a jug with seven openings.<sup>68</sup> A much later incantation mentions a sick *qadištu* and a sick *ištarītu* showing that they were prone to specific illnesses,<sup>69</sup> illnesses which may have been related to breast-feeding. We have already seen that in abnormal circumstances both of them could 'kill' their 'children' (Curse of Akkad, 241), which could have been a consequence of bad breast-feeding. Later texts suggest that the *kulmašītu* enjoyed a measure of sexual liberty. In Chapter 20 about prostitution we recalled a wise warning against the 'woman of Ištar' and the *kulmašītu*:

Do not trust a *kulmašītu* who is approached by many.<sup>70</sup>

At the end of Chapter 26 we saw how the status of the Old Babylonian prude *nadītu* was forgotten by later generations and how her role was misinterpreted. The same obtains for the 'holy woman' and the *kulmašītu*. In his study on prostitution W. G. Lambert presents the evidence on these and other titles in earlier and later periods. Most references date to the later first millennium or are found in ill-informed lexical equivalents.<sup>71</sup> One example is a handbook with a chapter on omina about a city. It says that in a city such ladies can be 'numerous' and here even male *nadītus* are mentioned (*nadû*). Clearly this is a thoughtless concatenation of ancient words stupidly expanded.<sup>72</sup>

---

**68** A. Falkenstein, ZA 56 (1964) 120, followed by J. Renger, ZA 58 (1967) 187; as opposed to Sjöberg, TCS 3 (1969) 123b (a jar with seven teats). For such vessels see D. Pickworth in *Studies A. D. Kilmer* (2011) 195–205.

**69** J. Prosecký suggested they were venereal diseases; *Šulmu* (1988) 287–299.

**70** *Babylonian wisdom literature*, 102:74 with p. 314 (*ša qé-reb-ša ma'-d[a]*); W. von Soden *apud* D. O. Edzard, ZA 55 (1962) 107 n. 79 (*qerbu*); now TUAT III/1 (1990) 166 (*qerēbu*).

**71** W. G. Lambert, 'Prostitution', in: V. Haas, *Außenseiter und Randgruppen* (1992) 127–157.

**72** S. M. Freedman, *If a city is set on a height I* (1998) 36 f., Tablet I 136–139, cf. Haas, *Außenseiter*, 41 f.

## 28 Soothsaying

Before the Great Flood the gods revealed two techniques to mankind for predicting the future. One was to inspect ‘oil on water’, and the other to inspect ‘the liver, the clay tablet of the gods’.<sup>1</sup> The latter refers to liver extispicy, since the gods were believed to inscribe their will on that ‘clay tablet’ of flesh. Extispicy was regarded as an important scientific exercise in Babylonia and experts had a library full of handbooks at their disposal. Such experts had to be able to read. In later texts the one who practised liver extispicy was mentioned together with the *šā’ilu*, ‘the enquirer’, meaning someone who enquires about the will of the gods. Such a man was also expert in explaining smoke omens, the shapes and movements of smoke rising from burning incense.<sup>2</sup> The patterns made by oil poured over water could also lead to ominous interpretations. From Sumerian texts it seems that dreams could be explained by such soothsaying by this *šā’ilu*, and even more by a *šā’iltu*, his female counterpart, words that are often translated as an oneiromancer. These enquirers did not carry out scientific mantic but rather interpreted everyday phenomena of various forms, almost like fortune-tellers. They may also have sought contact with the dead. None of this required the practitioner to be able to read or write. Here women were able to demonstrate their talents. When Princess Kirûm from Mari complained to her father that he did not listen to her warnings she used explosive language.

Now really, although I am a woman, my father and my lord must take heed of what I say. I regularly pass on the words of the gods to my father. Come here, stay in Naḥur and do everything that the gods will reveal to you.<sup>3</sup>

When using the expression ‘although I am a woman’ what she will have meant is ‘precisely because I am a woman’. The witch exemplifies a very different side of this power of womankind, for she misused this gift in order to do harm.

While the male enquirer scarcely ever occurs in everyday texts, only being thoughtlessly mentioned in literary phrases together with the expert in liver extispicy,<sup>4</sup> the female enquirer, the *šā’iltu*, occurs fairly often, so we know more

---

1 W. G. Lambert, *Festschrift R. Borger* (1998) 152:7f., 13f.; I. Starr, *The rituals of the diviner* (1983) 55.

2 A. L. Oppenheim, *The interpretation of dreams in the Ancient Near East* (1956) 222f.; D. Charpin, *Le clergé d’Ur* (1986) 382–386.

3 ARM 10 31 rev. 7–13 with LAPO 18 (2000) 435 n. 1223. The same explanation was given by M. Guichard, RA 103 (1999) 19 n. 1.

4 See CAD Š/1 109–112 on male and female ‘enquirers’.

about her. The interpreter of dreams was often a woman.<sup>5</sup> Some of the most telling incidents are passages in Old Assyrian letters where the distressed parties turn to female enquirers.<sup>6</sup> One reads as follows:

The girls of Puzur-Ištar and Ušur-ša-Assur have become ill and have almost died. We turned to the enquirers. Thus said the deity: ‘Take away from her the temple goods without delay!’ Towards the summer we may be ready.

Their failure to give back property belonging to the gods was the reason being given for their sickness.<sup>7</sup> Illness was often why a soothsayer was asked for advice. A man wrote to his sister complaining of a sick ‘heart’, probably meaning a stomach disorder.

Since I went to Waḥšušana, my heart has been sick five times. Ask the enquirer and have the reply sent here.<sup>8</sup>

The third example is a letter in which two women in Assur had consulted among others the *barītu*, female diviners, to know whether Imdilum should be asked to return to ‘the City’, i.e. to Assur.<sup>9</sup>

Speak to Imdilum. Thus say Taram-Kube and Šimat-Aššur. We consult here the enquirers and the *barītu* and the spirits of the dead with this result. ‘Assur is busy warning you. You love silver. You hate life.’ Can you not (come) to the City to oblige Assur? Please, come here as soon as you have read this letter and appear before the god Assur and save your life. – Why do you not send me the takings for my cloth?

Imdilum was behaving like a miser. In the last sentence he was asked to hand over the silver, the takings for the cloth he had sold. The women writing this letter had manufactured this cloth in their workshops and wanted to see the money for it. The warnings from the god Assur may have come in their own dreams.<sup>10</sup> They threaten him by explaining that Assur has disapproved of Imdilum. There is also a warning from the spirits of the dead, from which it can be assumed that those who made enquiries with the spirits of the dead were known for their skills

---

5 Oppenheim, 221–225.

6 H. Hirsch, AfO Beiheft 13/14 (1972) 72; C. Michel in: *Old Assyrian studies in memory of Paul Garelli* (2008) 193 f.

7 KTS 25 with K. R. Veenhof, *Schrijvend Verleden* (1983) 87 no. 8 with 89 f.; C. Michel, CMK no. 325.

8 BIN 6 93:16–23. CMK no. 333 translates: ‘j’ai eu cinq fois (l’occasion de) me mettre en colère’.

9 TCL 4 5 with M. Ichisar, *Les archives cappadociennes du marchand Imdilum* (1981) 342; CMK no. 348.

10 BIN 6 179:18–20, ‘our dreams are not favourable; the god Assur warns you’.

in necromancy. In the Bible (1 Samuel 28) we read of the witch of Endor, also a woman, who summoned the spirit of Samuel from the dead.<sup>11</sup> We know that writing a letter like this was effective, for other texts tell us that Imdilum paid what he owed.<sup>12</sup>

It may not be fortuitous that so much about the activities of these women is found in the Old Assyrian texts. The Assyrians were living in a colony in Kaneš, in Asia Minor, a region where it had always been traditional for women to practise the arts of prediction. Her opinions appear to have counted even more than those of an official exorcist. In the later Hittite texts the ideogram used to refer to her means literally ‘the old woman’, but in practice it must have meant a ‘skilful woman’. Much later Greek inscriptions from this area refer to them as ‘female doctors’ (*iatrînai*).<sup>13</sup> One Old Assyrian letter seems to mention an ‘old woman, the enquirer from Kaneš’.<sup>14</sup> The Assyrians could have been making use of local expertise, but this sort of tradition must also have existed in their own country, though there it was less conspicuous.

Women were known to be prone to have dreams and to have the gift of interpreting them. Images are supposed to mean more to women than spoken words, but ancient accounts contradict this.<sup>15</sup> In a myth Dumuzi has a dream which is interpreted by his sister. She was called an ‘old woman’ (*umma*), but here again the word can also mean a skilful woman.<sup>16</sup> A giant appeared to Gudea in a dream, winged and flanked by lions, who commanded him to build a house for him. A mysterious scene ensues, in which Gudea turns to his mother Nanše, ‘the seer of the gods, the ruler of countries, the mother, the interpreter of dreams’.<sup>17</sup> She explains to him that it was her brother Ningirsu who commissioned him to build the temple of Eninnu. In the temple of Nanše there were women in service who had predictive dreams.<sup>18</sup> Similarly it is the mother of Gilgamesh who explains his mysterious dreams for him. In the Gospel record the wife of Pilate at the time

---

11 Another aspect of spirits of the dead can be seen in the letters CMK nos. 323, 324, ‘we are badly treated by the demons (*utukkū*) and the spirits of the dead (*eṭemmū*)’.

12 L. Matouš, *Studies F. R. Kraus* (1982) 269 f. Cf. P. Garelli, *RA* 56 (1962) 193.

13 B. Benedetti, ‘Nota sulla salŠU.GI ittita’, *Mesopotamia* XV (1980) 93–108. He first connects the word with the *šugētu*, ‘eine Laienpriesterin’, but then admits that ‘old woman’ is perfectly possible.

14 *ATHE* 57 with Benedetti, 107 n. 54.

15 Oppenheim, 221 f.; K. van der Toorn, *From her cradle to her grave* (1994) 127 f.; N. Veldhuis, *Religion, literature and scholarship: the Sumerian composition ‘Nanše and the Birds’* (2004) 26–29.

16 Benedetti, 98 n. 22.

17 Gudea Cyl. A iv 12–13 with Römer, *TUAT* II/1 (1986) 25.

18 Veldhuis, *Religion*, 26–29, ‘Nanše as Dream Interpreter’. For female dreamers in her service see H. Waetzoldt, *NABU* 1998/60; W. Heimpel, *ibidem*, 77.

of the trial of Jesus was another woman who was receptive to having a prophetic dream.<sup>19</sup>

The process of deliberately evoking dreams is known as incubation. The oldest evidence for this is a text about a dream interpreter sitting at the head of a woman who is lying on a bed.<sup>20</sup> An early Sumerian cylinder seal shows a woman lying on her back on a bed with people waiting around the bed. This has been explained as an incubation seance,<sup>21</sup> but it is more often explained as the scene of a woman in childbirth.<sup>22</sup>

## 28.1 Dreams, prophecy and ecstasy in Mari

Several reports of dreams that had to be reported to the king come from the archives in Mari (ca. 1800–1760). There we also read of women experiencing a state of ecstasy, something seen as divine inspiration and a way of communicating information from the gods. One particularly striking letter, with a report from a woman about dreams and ecstasy, was written by the queen mother to the king. She begins by mentioning the ‘end of your family’, referring to events a little earlier when the royal house of Mari had disappeared for a time. There had been an interregnum by the Assyrians but afterwards the old dynasty came back again. Even so, the writer of this letter anticipated great danger.

Speak to my lord: thus says Addu-duri, your slave-girl. Since the end of your family I have no longer seen a dream such as this. The omens that I received then were (like) these. In my dream I went inside the temple of Belet-ekallim, but Belet-ekallim is not there! Also the statues which stand in front of her are not there! Moreover, when I saw this, I began to cry. This dream came in the first watch of the night. I (dreamed) once again and Dadâ, the head of the temple of Ištar-Bišra, stands in the doorway of Belet-ekallim and a strange voice keeps on shouting as follows: ‘Turn back, Dagan. Turn back, Dagan!’ He shouts thus all the time.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Van der Toorn, *From her cradle*, 126.

<sup>20</sup> J.-M. Durand in: G. del Olmo Lete, *Mythologie et religion des Sémites occidentaux I* (2008) 193, referring to his edition of the text in *Quaderni di Semitistica* 18 (1992) 151–159.

<sup>21</sup> J. M. Asher-Greve, ‘The oldest female oneiromancer’, in: Durand, *La Femme* (1987) 27–32.

<sup>22</sup> A. Westenholz, *Annäherungen* 3 (= OBO 160/3) (1999) 72f., fig. 7; L. Battini, *Médecine et médecins au Proche-Orient ancien* (2006) 14.

<sup>23</sup> ARM 10 50 = Durand, *AEM* 1/1 (1988) 478 f. no. 237; with p. 400, 460; W. Heimpel, *Letters to the king of Mari* (2003) 267 f.



We first have a dream about a goddess who had left her temple. But because it occurred in the first watch of the night it was thought to have no predictive meaning. Such insignificant dreams were merely ‘seen’; those that were meaningful were ‘watched’.<sup>24</sup> On one occasion permission to check the truth of a dream by liver extispicy was refused because it concerned a dream ‘seen’ in the first watch of the night.<sup>25</sup> A second more significant dream followed, in which Dadâ, the deceased head of the temple, appeared. Records of dreams often mention those who had died.<sup>26</sup> A strange voice kept on shouting ‘*tūra Dagan*’, ‘Turn back, Dagan!’. This could reflect concern about Dagan being absent and pleading with him to return. Alternatively *Tūra-Dagan* may be the name of a person. The name belonged to an earlier ruler of Mari. Whatever the opaque phrases mean the letter clearly has a very ominous tone. The queen mother goes on to recount the utterances of an ecstatic woman who was discouraging the king from going on a campaign, but if he stays in Mari she would promise to continue to ‘answer’ (i.e. to prophesy) for him.

An ecstatic woman stood up in the temple of Annunitum and (spoke) as follows: ‘O Zimri-Lim, do not go on campaign! Stay in Mari and I myself shall keep on answering.’ My lord must not neglect looking after himself. With this letter I have a hair and a piece of clothing of mine, personally sealed by me, brought to my lord.

The woman the queen mother refers to was a *muḥḥû*, translated as an ‘ecstatic’, a sort of prophet whose manner of behaviour was unpredictable. One *muḥḥû* in a fit of madness is said to have devoured a lamb while it was still alive. They used figurative and opaque expressions in their oracles, and were usually associated with a particular temple and a particular god.<sup>27</sup> The *muḥḥû* in this text warned the king to stay in Mari. Her promise to keep on ‘answering’ meant she would continue to reveal to him the will of the god. The hair and piece of clothing, distinctly personal attributes, will be used to confirm the visions by liver extispicy. W. Heimpel thought that the hair and clothing were those of the ecstatic woman, and that the queen mother writing this letter had mistakenly called them ‘mine’.

<sup>24</sup> Durand, AEM 1/1, 456: ‘to see’ (*amāru*) a dream is different from ‘to watch (and take notice of)’ (*naṭālu*) a dream which is meaningful.

<sup>25</sup> AEM 1/1, 306 no. 142, end.

<sup>26</sup> Durand, 461 f.

<sup>27</sup> Durand, 386–388, 398. He prefers French ‘fou’ as the best translation of *muḥḥû*. Devouring the lamb is similar to Greek *sparagmos*; see Durand, 434 no. 206 with M. C. Astour, UF 24 (1992) 1 f.; M. Anbar, *Studies R. Kutscher* (1993) 2 f.; Durand, *Studies M. Darga* (2008) 232.

The ecstatic promised that she would keep on ‘answering’ the king. By this she meant she would use some other form of inspiration than dreams and ecstasy. The profession of an ‘answerer’ is best translated as a ‘prophet’, a person similarly attached to a deity and entrusted with determining the divine will, which would be disclosed in a written report. Possibly this message would have clarified the general results of liver extispicy, for the prophet would provide an answer clearly tailored to the prevailing situation.<sup>28</sup> How these answers were procured is usually not stated, although we know that incubation and a potion were involved to stimulate an inspired prophecy.<sup>29</sup> In the examples of prophecies which were later confirmed by liver extispicy, the god of the prophecy ‘was present in the omen of liver extispicy’.<sup>30</sup>

One of the many ‘prophetic letters’ involves a high priestess warning the king about a message from a prophetess.<sup>31</sup>

Today a prophetess (*qammatu*) of Dagan of Terqa came here and spoke as follows: ‘The words of peace of the man of Ešnunna are deception! Under the straw there is water flowing! But I will catch him in the net that he is knotting. I shall lay waste his city and I shall raze to the ground his ancient possession.’

The king was advised not to enter the city without liver extispicy.

Several other individuals were said to have been inspired by an ecstatic experience or a dream, and they were not all professional practitioners. Men as well as women were involved, contradicting the general preconception that women are particularly susceptible to such inspiration.<sup>32</sup> Some passages in letters show that men and women were equally involved. With both the masculine and the feminine noun for ‘answerer’ we read that ‘whatever they say to me I shall have it conveyed to my lord’, and potions could be given ‘to a man or a woman’.<sup>33</sup>

**28** Thus Durand, 386. Cf. D. Charpin, *Florilegium Marianum VI* (2002) 30.

**29** For incubation see Durand, 461; also in G. del Olmo Lete, *Mythologie et religion des Sémites occidentaux I* (2008) 456 f. For the potion see Durand, 392; AEM 1/1, 435 no. 207:5–7, ‘I gave a male and a female signs to drink. I asked, and the prediction was very good for my lord’. – Are the man and the woman professionals?

**30** ‘The “answerers” said this to me; in addition to that, (the god) always is present in the extispicies’; B. Lafont, RA 78 (1984) 9:29 f.; cf. p. 12, sub e; see now *Florilegium Marianum VII* (2002) 139.

**31** ARM 10 80; LAPO 18 (2000) 403 no. 1203.

**32** My own investigations show that both men and women were involved. For a different view see A. Lemaire, ‘Les textes prophétiques de Mari dans leurs relations avec l’ouest’, *Amurru 1* (1996) 427–438, esp. 437.

**33** Lafont, lines 35 f., AEM 1/1, 435 no. 207:5.



**Fig. 46:** The goddess Ištar of Arbela depicted as a warrior on a stela dedicated to her by an Assyrian governor. She appeared in a dream to a priest of King Ashurbanipal, who recalled: 'Ištar who lives in Arbela came in. To the right and to the left she lifted quivers. A bow she kept on her arm. She had a drawn sharp sword to deliver battle'. Red breccia. Height 121 cm. *Musée du Louvre, Paris.*

## 28.2 Prophecy in Assyria

Immediately after the Old Babylonian period there must still have been prophets and prophetesses but we know little about them.<sup>34</sup> From a later period, from the royal archives of Esarhaddon (680–669 BC), we have records of particular prophecies, most of which came from women. Several were recorded on clay tablets and archived.<sup>35</sup> Most were attributed to the aggressive goddess Ištar whose temple was in Arbela, modern Erbil (Figure 46). The gods were speaking through the mouths of the prophets, their servants. Their names are given with their prophecies. Some are described as 'a prophet' (literally, 'someone who is shouting', *raggimu*), or an

<sup>34</sup> B. Lion, 'Les mentions de "prophètes" dans la seconde moitié du II<sup>e</sup> millénaire av. J.-C.', *RA* 94 (2000) 21–32.

<sup>35</sup> S. Parpola, *Assyrian prophecies* (1997); K. Hecker, 'Assyrische Prophetien', in: *TUAT* II/1 (1986) 56–68.

ecstatic, or one devoted to a god.<sup>36</sup> In fact they were usually women: of the thirteen individuals identified nine were prophetesses (*raggimtu*),<sup>37</sup> and other texts referring to shouting out prophecies involve only women.

Every one of their prophecies were favourable, a *Heilsorakel* in the terms of Old Testament theology. Most of the prophecies and dreams from Mari and Assyria were favourable and strengthened the resolve of the king. According to the Bible, that was a mark of false prophets. We suspect there was a degree of political manipulation applied to the messenger. The prophetesses felt they could not (or may not have been allowed to) utter any negative opinion. Alternatively the archivist may have been selective in deciding to register only positive reports. These prophecies may well have had a propaganda role to play, addressing the people over the head of the king.<sup>38</sup> Oracles like this were sometimes cited in letters. During a time of unrest an attempt to silence a troublemaker relies on divine authority.

Ištar of Nineveh and Ištar of Arbela has said, 'Whoever is not loyal to the king, my lord, we will tear him out of the land of Assyria.'<sup>39</sup>

This is only an isolated citation from a prophecy found in a letter. The so-called collections of prophecies retain typical colourful and cryptic expressions, framed in a colloquial Assyrian dialect. One reason why they were not always understood was that they were uttered in hysteria, and the images evoked have no parallels in the literary tradition.<sup>40</sup> Enemies were once described as insects, and esoteric words expressed in another oracle demand further explanation.<sup>41</sup>

One of the reports to Esarhaddon is relatively easy to understand.

[Esarhadd]on, the king of the lands, do not fear! Of what wind that blew against you have I not broken the wings? Your enemies roll like ripe apples before your feet. I am the great mistress. I am Ištar of Arbela, who lays your enemies at your feet. On which of the words that I

**36** Listed in the Vassal Treaties of Esarhaddon are: the one who shouts out a prophecy (*raggimu*), the ecstatic (*maḥḥū*), and the one who asks about the word of the gods (*mār šā'ili amat ili*), SAA II 33 no. 6:116 f.

**37** Parpola, p. XLVIII.

**38** K. van der Toorn, *Revue biblique* 94 (1987) 92. Adad, as god of Aleppo, calls on the king to give justice to the unjustly treated (*ḥablu*) man or woman; B. Lafont, *RA* 78 (1984) 10:53 f.; *Flori-legium Marianum* VII, 139.

**39** SAA X no. 284 rev. 6–8.

**40** Durand discovered a literary tone in the early oracles from Mari; *AEM* 1/1, 406. Neo-Assyrian prophecies show influences by literary texts; P. Villard in F. Briquel-Chatonnet, *Femmes* (2009) 315 f.

**41** K. 833 rev. 3–5; Parpola, 39 no. 7.

spoke to you can you not build? I am Ištar of Arbela. I shall flay your enemies. I myself will give them to you. I am Ištar of Arbela. I go in front of you and behind you. Do not fear. If you suffer cramp, I suffer pain; I shall stand up and sit down (beside you). – From the mouth of Ištar-la-tašiyat, from Arbela.<sup>42</sup>

Another report gives Esarhaddon prophetic statements from three different deities, from Marduk, the god of Babylon whose cult Esarhaddon wanted to reinstate, from Ištar of Arbela, and a final remark from Nabû, the son of Marduk.

Fear not, Esarhaddon! I am Marduk, who is speaking to you. I watch over the beams of your heart. When your mother brought you into existence, there were always sixty great gods standing with me. They always guarded you. The god Sîn on your right side, the god Šamaš on your left. Sixty great gods stood around you. They girded your loins. Do not trust a man! Raise your eyes and look to me. I am Ištar of Arbela. I reconciled Assur with you. When you were small, I chose you out. Do not fear. Praise me. Which was the enemy who blew against you while I kept silent? Verily, the later ones (shall be) like the earlier ones. I am Nabû, the lord of the stylus. Praise me! – From the mouth of Bayâ, from Arbela.<sup>43</sup>

These prophecies clearly supported the king in his aspirations, leading us to suspect that the inspiration of the prophetesses of Arbela may have been influenced by court politics. In Chapter 24 we quoted an encouraging message sent to Naqî'a, the queen mother, concerning her son Esarhaddon, about the Assyrian court. But letters sometimes refer to oracles which would evoke despair, calling for opposition against the king of Assyria. One from a woman, a slave, on behalf of the god Nusku, foretells success for an imposter named Sasî.

The word of Nusku sounds as follows: 'The kingdom belongs to Sasî! The name, the seed of Sennacherib, I shall destroy.'<sup>44</sup>

During a dangerous eclipse of the moon a substitute king called Damqî was placed on the throne. After a critical period of a hundred days this substitute king and his 'queen' would normally have been killed. That did happen to Damqî, but another letter describing their burial tells us more.

I have heard, that before these ceremonies a prophetess prophesied. She spoke to Damqî, 'You will take on the kingship.' The prophetess also said to him in the national assembly, 'I have shown the ... of my lord and delivered (it/him) to you'.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>42</sup> K. 4310 i 5–30; Parpola, 4 f., Hecker, TUAT II/1 (1986) 56 f. The 'prophet' is here a man.

<sup>43</sup> K. 4310 ii 16–40; Parpola, 6 no. 1.4; Hecker, 57 f.

<sup>44</sup> ABL 1217 rev. 4 f.; SAA XVI 59.

<sup>45</sup> LAS 280 = SAA X no. 352:22 – rev. 4.

Although a prophetess had announced that the substitute king was to take over the reign of the king, we see from the letter that apotropaic rituals had been performed to prevent this happening, for it ends, 'The rituals succeeded well. Indeed, my lord can be glad.'

## 29 Women and worship

The texts do not say very much about the daily home life of the average Babylonian, and nothing at all about the day-to-day affairs of the housewife. Letters were mostly about important affairs and so there were no pressing reasons for her to be involved. It remains unclear what role the ordinary woman would have played in religious worship since whatever she did was taken for granted. We know little about how a woman experienced her belief and the rituals.<sup>1</sup>

But occasionally we do hear something about a woman's personal religious tasks and devotions. In answer to the question, 'Why does she go outside?' in an Old Babylonian letter we read,

She is going out to the house of some god or other.

Such behaviour was not approved of, for 'outside' may have been a reference to outside the city.<sup>2</sup> Through the streets of the city of Ur archaeologists identified what they called little 'chapels', places where women may have brought offerings or where they prayed.<sup>3</sup> In a Sumerian proverb a man complains about being neglected by his particularly pious wife and his mother.

My wife is surely in the chapel, my mother by the river, and I shall die of hunger.<sup>4</sup>

One woman expressed her gratitude in devotional terms.

Both my hands should be full of incense for the god who let me see your face.<sup>5</sup>

We know of only one prayer formulated by a woman, in which a mother prayed ceaselessly to Šamaš for her son who had been taken captive.<sup>6</sup>

---

1 A good survey was given by Karel van der Toorn in his book *From her cradle to her grave. The role of religion in the life of the Israelite and the Babylonian woman* (1994), reviewed by J. M. Asher-Greve, NIN 1 (2000) 119–124. The original Dutch edition was *Van haar wieg tot haar graf. De rol van de godsdienst in het leven van de Israëlitische en de Babylonische vrouw* (1987), reviewed by D. C. Snell, BiOr 46 (1989) 125 f.

2 AbB 9 225:17–27.

3 Van der Toorn, *From her cradle*, 95.

4 SP 1.142 with van der Toorn, 94.

5 AbB 9 228:7–10 with CAD Q 324b.

6 *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* 134 Šamaš Hymn 134.

## 29.1 Offerings for the dead

This is a subject about which we know somewhat more. In some wills the testator stipulated that a woman was obliged to bring offerings for the dead after his death. One man from Susa solemnised the obligation he was placing on his daughter by presenting her with two clods of earth from the front and the back of the land he owned.

Before his death he broke a clod of earth from in front and from behind and gave it to Narubtu his daughter. 'As long as I am alive, you will feed me, and when I am dead, you will bring offerings for the dead (*kispu*) for me.'<sup>7</sup>

In a later period in a deed for the adoption of a daughter in Nippur we read,

As long as Ina-Uruk-rešat remains alive, Eṭirtum shall serve her. Whenever Ina-Uruk-rešat dies, Eṭirtum, her daughter, shall pour out water for her.

This expression similarly indicates making an offering for the dead.<sup>8</sup> Here it applied to a ritual at home, because the dead were generally buried under the house. At the end of every month water was poured down into the earth through a tube, but there is no suggestion that this was a task specifically for women. It so happens that this was the case for the two examples we know of, but that was because the woman was the beneficiary. We see the same ritual also in Nuzi.<sup>9</sup> Similarly in a will from Emar in Syria a father, having named his daughter as 'woman and man', meaning that she would be the heir with all the associated rights and obligations, follows this with an obligation for her to venerate him and his family after death.

She shall call to my gods and my dead.<sup>10</sup>

But normally it was a man's sons who 'would look after the gods and the dead of their father'.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>7</sup> MDP 23 285 with A. Tsukimoto, *Untersuchungen zur Totenpflege (kispum) im alten Mesopotamien* (1985) 53; A. Skaist in B. Alster, *Death in Mesopotamia* (1980) 124.

<sup>8</sup> BE 14 40:11–15 with Tsukimoto, 79.

<sup>9</sup> J. Paradise, SCCNH 2 (1987) 210 f., on YBC 5142: 'She (= the heiress) shall venerate my gods and my spirits of the dead'. For a broad discussion see K. van der Toorn, ZA 84 (1994) 42–47 (the son), 53 (sometimes a daughter).

<sup>10</sup> J. Huehnergard, RA 77 (1983) 13 Text 1:8, with p. 27 f.

<sup>11</sup> M. Sigrist, JCS 34 (1982) 243:25–27. K. Radner also stresses that the role of women in taking care of the dead in these texts may be due to special situations. But she holds out the possi-



We have some evidence that princesses and queens brought offerings for the dead. This happened as early as 2500–2300 BC at Lagash, where Baranamtarra, the wife of the city ruler, made a journey (or joined something like a formal procession) lasting several days to make offerings to the gods and to her male and female ancestors.<sup>12</sup> Performing this ritual was an important element of religious ceremonial. Another example, from the Ur III period, is more uncertain. There a group of texts was found which register the times when Abi-simti contributed her offerings for the days at the end of each month when there was no moon. Abi-simti was the wife of King Amar-Sîn and the mother of his successor Šu-Sîn. A princess would bring her offerings on the 15th day of every month, but Abi-simti brought hers on the 28th and 29th days. It has been assumed that misfortune could be expected in these dark, moonless nights and by bringing her offerings at this time she would make the gods favourably disposed.<sup>13</sup> But we must bear in mind another possibility, that she was making offerings for the dead. Yet another example comes from the Old Babylonian period. On the 16th day a princess received a milk product ‘for the washing ceremony, the offering to the dead of the steppe and the water of Šamaš’.<sup>14</sup> What these expressions really mean is not at all clear. The Ur III texts mentioned earlier connected offerings on the 15th day and also those on the 28th and 29th days with this washing. At Mari, a delivery of oil for an offering to the dead on the first and sixteenth day every month was confirmed by the seal impression of the queen mother Addu-duri. She played a role in the cult of the goddess Deritum, probably the family god of her tribe, the Ben-Sim’al, the ‘Sons of the North’. Evidently it was she who took care of the ancestors.<sup>15</sup>

In Old Assyrian letters the spirits of the dead are mentioned. Half of those letters came from the wives or sisters of merchants.<sup>16</sup> They had remained at home

---

bility that women in the periphery of Babylonia had this role; *Die Macht des Namens* (2005) 76 n. 354.

12 J. Bauer, *ZDMG Suppl.* I/1 (1969) 112; more extensively see T. Kobayashi, *Orient* 20 (1984) 45 f.

13 W. Sallaberger, *Der kultische Kalender der Ur III-Zeit* 1 (1993) 60 f. The texts: Yuhong Wu, Junna Wang, *Journal of Ancient Civilizations* 27 (2012) 120–124, with another interpretation (farewell and welcome ceremonies for the moon god, 121).

14 TIM 5 68 with J. van Dijk in *Studies A. Falkenstein* (HSAO) (1968) 240 f.; Tsukimoto, *Totenpflege*, 143–145.

15 D. Duponchel, *Florilegium Marianum III* (1997) 207, with 220 no. 30. For Dēritum, see p. 39. A letter from Uruk shows that a woman was supposed to take care of the offerings for the dead (*kispu*) for her father; A. Cavigneaux, *Uruk. Altbabylonische Texte* (1996) 43 f. no. 82:6 (= AbB 8 88); Tsukimoto, 54.

16 C. Michel, ‘Femmes et ancêtres: le cas des femmes d’Aššur’, in: F. Briquel-Chatonnet, *Femmes* (2009) 27–39.

in Assur where the corpses of their ancestors, interred under the floor of the family houses, had to be honoured. The power attributed to them can be seen from the fact that ‘our gods and the spirits of our fathers’ are invoked as witnesses together in the same breath in their letters. Veneration of one’s ancestors was widely practised in the Ancient Near East. The women would have been apprehensive, for neglecting to give enough attention to those spirits could provoke them to wrath and as a consequence illnesses would be spread.<sup>17</sup> Because their husbands travelled for such a long time so far away in Asia Minor, staying on friendly terms with the spirits became a priority. Even so, there is no evidence that the task of venerating the dead was only for women.

The mother of King Nabonidus in her autobiography recounted that she had always honoured the kings of Babylonia during her long life.

Later fate took them away. No-one among their children or their families or the magnates (in the kingdom) (...) arranged anything for them, not even an incense offering. However without fail and wearing my beautiful garment I bring for them each month cows, fat sheep, loaves, beer, wine, oil, honey and all sorts of garden fruits as offerings to the dead. Abundant wave-offerings of good fragrance I have been arranging and setting down for them.<sup>18</sup>

Here a woman is making offerings to the dead, but apparently in exceptional circumstances. We also know that in ancient Rome it was usual for the daughter of the house to assist her father in making offerings to the family gods.<sup>19</sup>

Did women who had died also receive offerings? Princesses certainly did. A prayer made when commemorating the ancestors concludes with a general invitation for everyone who had died to share in the offerings.

The soldier who fell during the campaign of his lord, the sons of kings, the daughters of kings, all people from the rising to the setting sun who had no-one to care for them or take an interest in them, come here and eat this and drink this! (This is) the blessing of Ammi-saduqa, the son of Ammi-ditana, the king of Babylon.<sup>20</sup>

From Sippar we have a similar sort of prayer.<sup>21</sup>

---

**17** C. Michel, ‘Les Assyriens et les esprits de leur morts’, in: *Old Assyrian studies in memory of Paul Garelli* (2008) 181–197, especially ‘Femmes et fantômes’, 196 f.

**18** H. Schaudig, *Die Inschriften Nabonids von Babylon* (2001) 507, 512 iii 11–23. The text distinguishes the incense offering (*qutrinnu*) from the wave-offering (*surqinnu*).

**19** Virgil, *Aeneid* VI 72; Tibullus I 10:24. A peasant woman brings offerings to the gods of the family at New Moon; Horace, *Odes*, III 23.

**20** J. J. Finkelstein, *JCS* 20 (1966) 96 f.

**21** C. Wilcke, *ZA* 73 (1983) 49–54; K. van der Toorn, *Family religion in Babylonia, Syria, and Israel* (1996) 52–55.

For thee, O Šin, god of heaven and earth, I pour out water in libation freely for the family of Šin-našir, the son of Ipiq-Annunitum, so that they may eat their bread and drink their water.

The list of ancestors which then follows includes women: five *nadītus*, two wives, and a wife who had apparently remained childless. There was a principle that the family was responsible for the welfare of these women who had died. But a woman who had married and had left the family was disregarded.<sup>22</sup>

A queen from the Old Sumerian period had a statue of ‘refined silver’ made for her during her lifetime. We know this from an administrative text which notes the payments to the craftsmen who made it.<sup>23</sup> She was the wife of the city ruler Urukagina. Elsewhere we read that the statues of her and Baranamtara, the wife of the earlier city ruler, received offerings just after they were presented to the city goddess Bau. This could be taken to imply that she had been given the status of a goddess, to mediate with the gods on behalf of those who brought offerings to that statue of her, which was made in Year 2 of Urukagina. A little later, in Year 5, monthly offerings were brought for the statues of the daughters of his predecessor. These could have been offerings for the dead.

This is all that can be said, from which we conclude that we know very little about the duties of the housewife concerning rituals.<sup>24</sup>

## 29.2 Making intercession

We have already seen that priestesses and nuns prayed for their family, so it might be thought that this was also a duty for the ordinary woman at home. Now and again we indeed hear in letters about women who pray for others, but men also offered such prayers.<sup>25</sup> One man wrote to his mother begging her to pray for him to have a prosperous business trip abroad.<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> K. Radner, *Die Macht des Namens* (2005) 85 f.; B. Lion in *Jean Bottéro et la Mésopotamie* (2009) 285–287. For the historical context see F. van Koppen in: K. Radner, E. Robson, *The Oxford handbook of cuneiform culture* (2011) 153–155.

<sup>23</sup> G. J. Selz, ‘Eine Kultstatue der Herrschergemahlin Šaša: ein Beitrag zum Problem der Vergöttlichung’, *ASJ* 14 (1992) 245–268.

<sup>24</sup> Van der Toorn, *From her cradle to her grave* (1994) 94 f., collected the little evidence we have.

<sup>25</sup> We follow B. F. Batto, ‘Women in sacrifice and prayer’, *Studies on women at Mari* (1974) 128–134.

<sup>26</sup> AbB 3 60. The title and exact role of the mother (and ‘sister’?) remain mysterious.

To Šunutum, my mother and my mistress, and sister: Thus says Š.: I am well. I am in Awal, I plan to go to Assur soon. Pray for me in order that he (= the god) will make my financial losses little. As for you, may you be well for my sake. As for me, may I be well for your sake. Pray for me in front of your lord.

It often happened that a request was made in a letter to provide some kind of service and that the writer, whether male or female, promised to pray in exchange for providing it. Praying here signified gratitude. The prayer was formulated ‘for the life’ of the other person. Formal introductions to letters often wished ‘an eternal life’ for the addressee, to be supported by the guardian deity. The envelope of an Old Babylonian letter is stamped with the seal of Princess Annabum, who wrote the letter. This same seal impression is seen on receipts and there Annabum is called ‘the daughter of the king’.<sup>27</sup> She begins her letter to her father praying that he will be blessed with good health and a long life.

May the guardian deities of my ... you, my father, and let you become old with your full strength and with a good name, in the palace where you go about. You, my father, may you be well and healthy. May the guardian deity of my ... protect you.

In her letter she asks her father for a favour in connection with some business affair, and promises to continue to pray for him in return.

Then I wish to keep on praying for you, my father.

Although the letter was found in Sippar, Annabum was probably not a nun in the convent there. After all, every daughter was expected to pray for her father’s welfare.

We read that the well-known concubine of King Yasmaḥ-Addu of Mari, Izamu, ‘makes the prayer of her lord with raised hands to find favour’. His prayer would find a favourable reception because she had prayed.<sup>28</sup>

As well as making prayers women brought offerings. We read of ladies from Mari who brought offerings to ‘the god of my father’, or to ‘the gods of my city’. Princess Kirûm wanted her father to arrange for her to be collected in a carriage and promised that she would then ‘bring an offering for the gods of my father’. A ruler was asked to ‘bring your daughter here so that she can placate the gods of

<sup>27</sup> AbB 1 15 with the envelope CT 52 187; R. Pientka, *Die spätaltbabylonische Zeit* (1998) 207 (the seal), 311 f. (the king is Ammi-šaduqa).

<sup>28</sup> Thus RIME 4 (1990) 618. Or: ‘she who embellishes the prayer’; Chapter 23, note 217.

her city and then I want to give her many gifts'.<sup>29</sup> When the word 'offerings' (*nīqu*, verb *naqû*) is used it could mean slaughtering an animal to be sacrificed, or more simply pouring out a drink as a libation. Offerings in these cases were presented to achieve some form of mediation. Therefore they are closely linked to making intercession.

Men may have made their offerings, but in Babylonian religious thought it was a woman who was seen as exceptionally successful in making intercession.<sup>30</sup> This task was assigned to the nuns in the convent, and it is also mirrored in the world of the gods.<sup>31</sup> When one god was asked to put in a good word to another god, one who was more highly exalted, it was often the wife of the great god who intervened. Similarly, the male personal god of a supplicant was called on to be a mediator. This procedure could reflect what happened in the palace, where a supplicant always needed an intermediary to approach the king.

The expressions used by the king of Isin in his prayer to Ninurta are typical.

May your wife, the true Lady of Nippur, whenever she embraces you, put in a good word for Lipit-Ištar daily.<sup>32</sup>

From a later period we have a plea for Tašmetum to mediate with Nabû her husband.

O Tašmetum, mediate for me with your husband, so that he may hear my words.<sup>33</sup>

There is also a most evocative inscription on a Cassite cylinder seal.

O Ninlil, ruler of the lands, put in a good word for me, on your marriage bed, in your bed chamber of pleasure, with Enlil, your beloved.<sup>34</sup>

Sometimes a curse was used to secure the opposite effect.

---

<sup>29</sup> ARM 10 113:17–22; ARM 2 51:18–22.

<sup>30</sup> K. van der Toorn wrote that it was a widow, particularly a pious widow, who interceded in ancient Israel, and cites Judith and Adda-guppi. This cannot be shown to have happened in Babylonia. See K. van der Toorn, 'Torn between vice and virtue: stereotypes of the widow in Israel and Mesopotamia', in: R. Kloppenborg, W. Hanegraaff, *Female stereotypes in religious traditions* (1995) 1–13, esp. 8 f.

<sup>31</sup> R. Harris, *Gender and aging in Mesopotamia* (2000) 98 f.

<sup>32</sup> J. S. Cooper, *The return of Ninurta to Nippur* (1978) 136 f., with other examples from Sumerian literature. For Akkadian see K. van der Toorn, *Family religion*, 137 f.

<sup>33</sup> W. R. Mayer, UFBG (1976) 231 ff.

<sup>34</sup> J. A. Brinkman, AfO 28 (1981) 75 no. 32; cf. Watanabe, 325 (7).

May Aya, the bride, the great woman, speak bad words about him in the presence of Šamaš, for ever.<sup>35</sup>

May Zarpanitum in the bedroom, in the chamber of marriage, utter his doom.<sup>36</sup>

A colophon at the end of a text of instructions on how to make glass ends with a benediction to Nabû for King Ashurbanipal, who had established the library where the document was kept.

May Tašmetum, your great wife, your beloved, who makes intercession for me, when together with you in the luxuriant bedroom, ask you for my life, daily without ceasing.<sup>37</sup>

This could perhaps be an allusion to the Assyrian sacred marriage, where the statues of both these gods were brought together in a chapel.

A goddess could also be a guarantor to avert punishment for sin. A man addressed a letter to ‘my mistress, Ninmug’ to intercede with the god Išum and probably had this letter deposited in her temple.

Išum listens to your speaking. Stand as guarantor for me with Išum for this sin, which I committed. If you will really stand as guarantor, then with a happy face I shall bring an offering and bring a sheep to you. Whenever I praise my Išum, I shall praise you too.<sup>38</sup>

In our discussion of the prayer of *nadîtus* we saw that a small statue (*lamassatu*) in the temple of the god could intercede (Chapter 26, Figure 45). There is a beautiful necklace from Dilbat on which golden praying dolls are attached who would do just that (Figure 47). They had their arms raised crosswise in front of their chests.<sup>39</sup> The verb *karābu* was used for ‘to make intercession’, meaning also ‘to pray to’ and ‘to bless’. So the statue was recognised as ‘the praying one’.<sup>40</sup> This is stated explicitly in a Sumerian inscription. A female family member, perhaps the mother, dedicated a statue to ‘my mistress’, Bau the goddess of Lagash, for the

<sup>35</sup> Inscription of Yaḥdun-Lim v 25–28; RIME 4 (1990) 608:149–152. Later such curses are also found in Assyrian contracts; B. Menzel, *Assyrische Tempel* II (1981) T 168 no. 65:18–20.

<sup>36</sup> E. Matsushima, ASJ 10 (1988) 101 K. 2411 i 28 (= M. Streck, *Asb.* 302f. iv 28); Menzel, *Tempel*, II T 169–172 nos. 66:26 f., 67: 11 ff. All such curses by goddesses were collected by K. Watanabe, *Baghd. Mitt.*, Beiheft 3 (1987) 41 f.

<sup>37</sup> H. Hunger, *Babylonische und assyrische Kolophone* (1968) 106 no. 338:21–24.

<sup>38</sup> Abb 13 164.

<sup>39</sup> Catalogue *Babylon. Wahrheit* (2008) 282 Abb. 195, c, with 315 Kat 315; cf. 316 Abb. 235. Also in the catalogue *Babylone* (Paris 2008) 82 no. 39.

<sup>40</sup> Van der Toorn, *Family religion*, 113 f.



**Fig. 47:** Small golden puppets representing protective deities (*lamassatu*) which could be strung on a necklace. These, which have their arms raised crosswise in front of their chests, would have been suspended on the ears. 1800 BC. Gold. Height 2.5 cm. *Musée du Louvre, Paris.*

life of Prince Nammaḥani. The statue was called the ‘guardian deity’ (*lamma*) and was expected to pray for her.

Here may my mistress lend her ear so that this statue may say my prayer to her.

It has been suggested that the statue was positioned literally close to the ear of Bau, but the expression ‘to lend an ear’ can also be an idiom meaning ‘to pay attention’.<sup>41</sup> In the literary *Message to the Mother*, which we spoke of in Chapter 4 with regard to the family, one of her good characteristics was that she was a ‘statue of ivory’. Probably that meant that she was a guardian deity.<sup>42</sup>

The daughter of a god could also be invoked to try to mediate with her father,

<sup>41</sup> H. Steible, *FAOS* 9,1 (1991) 374 Nammaḥni 1; E. Braun-Holzinger, *Mesopotamische Weihgaben* (1991) 271, St 141 (with lit.); cf. W. Heimpel, *RIA* VI/5–6 (1983) 449 § 5.

<sup>42</sup> F. A. M. Wiggermann, *RIA* IX/1–2 (1998) 47 § 3.

Put in a good word for me with the god, your father.<sup>43</sup>

That happens in a Sumerian hymn of Šulgi when Ninsumun, on the insistence of her husband, the god Lugalbanda, addressed An, her father and god of the heavens. She praised her protégé Šulgi, likening him to a tree with deep roots and in full blossom, and asked An to give him the kingship. By contrast the goddess Geštinana, with a lower status, for her part prayed to Ninsumun on behalf of King Šulgi.<sup>44</sup> Various expressions were used for such mediation, including ‘to put in a good word’. The literal meaning of one expression is ‘to seize fatherhood’ (*abbūta šabātu*), where ‘to seize’ probably referred literally to seizing the hem of the garment of a person, a subservient, imploring gesture.<sup>45</sup> Originally the reference will have been to the mother in a family seizing the garment of the father to appeal to him. This fits the distinction made in Sumerian proverbs where the mother is juxtaposed to ‘the god’, which in that context must mean the father.<sup>46</sup> This idiom was taken over in Aramaic and Hebrew and it also figures in the name of Abbutanitu, ‘Intercessor’, a little known Babylonian goddess.<sup>47</sup>

Women mediating to resolve a situation also appear in the art of the period. In the so-called ‘introduction scene’ on Sumerian and Old Babylonian cylinder seals the owner of the seal stands respectfully at the back and is led by a female goddess to the mighty god (Figure 48).<sup>48</sup> Such an introduction or presentation occurs in the Old Babylonian version of the Gilgamesh Epic, when the wench took the human Enkidu by the hand and ‘led him to the deity’. She went in front of

**43** J. A. Brinkman, AfO 28 (1981) 75 no. 29. See further Watanabe, ASJ 12, 328 f. (III). The moon god Nanna pleads for Šulgi before his parents, see J. Klein in Durand, *La Femme* (1987) 102.

**44** J. Klein, *The royal hymns of Šulgi, king of Ur: Man’s quest for immortal fame* (1981) (= TAPS 71,7) 21 ff. (Šulgi P). For the prayer of Geštinana see p. 24b. For more on intercession see Klein, n. 131. D. R. Frayne, BiOr 40 (1983) 103, calls the text Šulgi P a ‘petitioning hymn’, in which the ‘petitioning deity’ turns to a ‘senior deity’.

**45** K. Watanabe, ‘*abbūta(m)/abbuttu šabātu(m)*. Zur immanenten und transzendenten Interzession’, ASJ 12 (1990) 319–338; see further E. Cassin, *Le semblable et le différent* (1987) 256 n. 58. Examples were collected by W. R. Mayer, UFBG (1976) 230–239. ‘To seize motherhood’ in AbB 7 151 seems to have another meaning; see G. Bardet, ARMT 23 (1984) 72 f.

**46** SP 1.145, 157 with van der Toorn, *Family religion*, 57 (n. 77). See Chapter 4, note 32.

**47** For Aramaic and Hebrew see Watanabe, 335 f. For the goddess see Watanabe, NABU 1990/94 (‘Fürsprecherin’).

**48** A. Moortgat, *The art of ancient Mesopotamia* (1969) 68 f.; Watanabe, 336 (VIII). A. Spycket identifies the female goddess with the guardian deity Lamma/Lamassu; see RIA VI/5–6 (1983) s.v., B. (but see *ibidem*, in A, § 10 for criticisms). See also M. Haussperger, *Die Einführungsszene: Entwicklung eines mesopotamischen Motivs von der altakkadischen bis zum Ende der altbabylonischen Zeit* (1991).





**Fig. 48:** On this cylinder seal the scribe Inim-Šara is introduced to the king by his goddess. The king looks like a god. The inscription: ‘Šu-Sîn, the mighty king, the king of Ur, the king of the four quarters of the world: Inim-Šara, scribe, son of Bašaga’. 2030 BC. Haematite. Height 2,4 cm. *Vorderasiatisches Museum, Berlin*.

him, like the goddess on the cylinder seals, while he followed.<sup>49</sup> On one cylinder seal the interceding goddess is wearing the typical garment for an *entu* priestess.<sup>50</sup> Sumerian lamentations are full of pleas with goddesses to intercede in disastrous events, and they are often addressed as ‘mother’. They can also be capricious and turn away.<sup>51</sup> That a woman was an effective mediator is of course found in early Christian theology, when Mary, the mother of Jesus, is asked to intercede. We also note that the Holy Spirit, known as the Paraclete, an advocate, was often represented in unorthodox circles as female.

We draw attention finally to a remarkable Sumerian literary text emphasising the grace and mercy of the goddess Nungal. In a song of praise to her she is said to be in control of a prison, where she saved from his fate one of the prisoners who had been sentenced to death by arranging for him to be re-educated in the prison. It is no coincidence that Nungal is female.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>49</sup> Seen by J. Renger, *RA* 66 (1972) 190, on *Gilgamesh* P. ii 32f. (= lines 73f. in ed. A. R. George, p. 174), cf. *Gilgamesh* II 36.

<sup>50</sup> M. Tanret, *The seal of the sanga* (2010) 145.

<sup>51</sup> A. Löhnert in: M. Jaques, *Klagetraditionen* (2011) 49–56.

<sup>52</sup> M. Civil, ‘On Mesopotamian jails and their Lady Warden’, *Studies W. W. Hallo* (1993) 72–78; for a new edition see P. Attinger in *Festschrift C. Wilcke* (2003) 15–34.

### 29.3 The woman and her goddess

A woman's personal god before her marriage was the god of her father, actually the family god. Since some letters refer to 'the god of your husband' that was her god after her marriage.<sup>53</sup> A man will begin his letter with a salutation asking for a blessing on the person addressed, first from his city god and then from his personal guardian deity. Women invoked their own gods to bring well-being and blessing.<sup>54</sup> One letter describes a nun praying 'to my Lord' for a man and 'to my Mistress' for a woman. In Sippar Šamaš was the Lord and Aya the Mistress.<sup>55</sup> A letter found in Nippur to a woman includes the salutation,

May Belet-ili keep you in good health.<sup>56</sup>

Belet-ili was the mother goddess, one well able to look after a woman. A supplicant pleads to her,

Accept from me the grain offering. Hear my prayer.

The grain offering was a proverbial expression for what poor women, widows in particular, used to offer. The same prayer could also be directed to the goddess Gula.<sup>57</sup> The formulation of this prayer shows that it belongs to a group of prayers that the king would utter and which sometimes accompanied this humble offering.

In the region of modern Aleppo Old Babylonian court women named themselves 'the beloved' (*narāmtu*) of a goddess.<sup>58</sup> In dedications women preferred to direct their prayers to female deities, in particular to Inanna/Ištar.<sup>59</sup> On the cylinder seal of Princess Annabum mentioned earlier the pious inscription is written in Sumerian as a prayer to Inanna. There are more indications that women worshipped Ištar/Inanna. Most clear is this wish in a lullaby:

---

<sup>53</sup> Van der Toorn, *Family religion*, 75.

<sup>54</sup> Thus R. Frankena; see K. R. Veenhof, *Phoenix* 39 (1993) 180.

<sup>55</sup> OBTR 134:15, 21.

<sup>56</sup> AbB 11 15:18.

<sup>57</sup> BMS 7:17 = W. R. Mayer, UFBG (1976) 452 Gula 1a:80. This interpretation of the prayer was given by K. van der Toorn, *From her cradle* (1994) 138, but he is not aware of its use by the king.

<sup>58</sup> Seal impression on *Alalakh Texts* no. 7 with Ugarit-Forschungen 36 (2004) 56–62; cf. SAL *Ħa-si-am-ja-pa-Ħa-at na-ra-am-ti* 'A-šī-ir-tum [the spouse of the god Amurru] on a seal, D. Colton, *Studies E. Porada* (1986) 59, 67 no. 12. Kings in this 'Amorite' area and in Assyria named themselves 'the beloved' (*narāmu*) of a male god.

<sup>59</sup> G. Gadaut in F. Briquel-Chatonnet, *Femmes* (2009) 236 f., 246.

May Inanna, the lady of women, look at me with her good eye!<sup>60</sup>

One example comes from Old Babylonian reports of the results of liver extispicy, which give precise details about how the liver looked. Sometimes these reports were introduced with a passage giving the reason for performing the extispicy. One introduction shows that it was usual for a woman to give a present to the goddess Inanna/Ištar before a journey. It relates to a lady who had not actually given a present before setting out on her journey and she was anxious to know whether she should still depart and give the present en route. Perhaps she had previously requested a liver extispicy and received an ‘unfavourable’ report, but for some reason or other she wanted to stick with her plan.

(Concerning) the daughter of Asu, because she has not had a present brought to Inanna, can she go to the place where she wanted to go? And can she have the present brought to Inanna during the journey northwards?<sup>61</sup>

Another example from an Old Babylonian letter concerns a man’s wife who wants to travel.

My wife wants to go to Kisurra (?), behind Ištar. Give her half a litre of oil and barley, as much as she asks you for.

After that a couch is also mentioned.<sup>62</sup> A third example concerns Princess Beltum, who commissioned musicians or singers in Mari to take part in a ritual in the temple of Ištar.<sup>63</sup> In Chapter 4, on the family, we saw that an Assyrian woman made a votive offering (a genital triangle in lead) to Ištar of Assur for the benefit of her husband and young children. In the temple of Ištar at Assur a great variety of votive objects was found, including thirteen scorpions, suggesting that the quest for love was a central aim of the Assyrian woman<sup>64</sup>.

If women swore an oath by a female goddess it was usually by Ištar.<sup>65</sup> On an Assyrian cylinder a woman is depicted standing in the temple in an attitude of worship before a goddess, probably Ištar, with male guardian deities standing in

<sup>60</sup> M. Jaques, *Studies Å. W. Sjöberg* (2014) 67:28 f.

<sup>61</sup> F. R. Kraus, *JCS* 37 (1985) 146, 160 no. 17.

<sup>62</sup> A. Goddeeris, *Tablets from Kisurra* (2009) 187 no. 158:4–10.

<sup>63</sup> *AEM* 1/2 (1988) 26 no. 298:44 with *Florilegium Marianum* XII (2011) 63 f. (the *šurāru* ritual).

<sup>64</sup> W. Meinhold, ‘Ištar und die Bevölkerung’, *Ištar in Aššur* (2009) 245–262.

<sup>65</sup> M. Stol, *Annäherungen* 4 (= OBO 160/4) (2004) 661 (Old Assyrian).

front and behind the two figures.<sup>66</sup> The downside to this devotion, as we saw in Chapter 22 about her diseases, was that women at the court suffered under the Hand of Ištar.

## 29.4 The mourning for Tammuz

Women participated communally in the ceremonial mourning for Tammuz, an annual feast for those who had died.<sup>67</sup> Every modern description of this ceremony begins by citing how it was condemned by the prophet Ezekiel.

Next he brought me to the gateway of the Lord's house which faces north; and there sat women wailing for Tammuz. 'O man, do you see that?' he asked me. 'But you will see greater abominations than these' (Ezekiel 8:14 f.).

This heathen horror is attested in Babylonian texts, with Tammuz as a Babylonian god, a name to be identified with Sumerian Dumuzi. It was a mourning ceremony which could be thought of as the Babylonian equivalent of All Souls' Day. It was held at the end of the month of Tammuz, the month named after the god, the fourth month of the year. This month name is still preserved today in the Islamic world where it was adopted from Aramaic.<sup>68</sup> In Babylonia in this month Tammuz was thought to arise from the underworld to the earth. In this ritual he had died and was placed on a bier and a ritual mourning was performed for him and for all the family members who had died, for they were also believed to be present. This was considered the right moment to let Tammuz remove any illnesses from the assembled company and take them back down with him into the earth. This idea is found also in a medical diagnosis.

If a dead spirit or a demon has seized a man, or whatever evil power has seized him and keeps following him, this is its ritual. In the month of Tammuz, whenever Ištar has the people of the land mourn for Tammuz her lover, while the family of the man has gathered, Ištar takes a stand and chooses out men's concerns. She takes disease away and she causes disease.

---

<sup>66</sup> E. Klengel-Brandt, *Mit sieben Siegeln versehen* (1997) 79 Abb. 73.

<sup>67</sup> Van der Toorn, 116 ff.; M. Stol, 'De dood van Adonis in Mesopotamië', in: E. Ibsch, *De literaire dood* (1998) 1–7.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. 'The weeping (*bikîtu*) in Tammuz is for Dumuzi', *ZA* 6 (1891) 256:33, with A. Livingstone, *Mystical and mythological explanatory works* (1986) 256; also J. Bottéro in: S. N. Kramer, *Le mariage sacré* (1983) 178.

After many incantations and ritual actions the patient had to go and lie under the bed where Tammuz was laid out, and then the last rite was administered.<sup>69</sup> This ritual was performed as early as the Middle Assyrian period. There it is said to have been fixed 'in the month of Tammuz, on day 2[8], when Ištar had the people of the land mourn'.<sup>70</sup> We should realise that these texts describe a magic healing ritual for the sick that would be carried out during the mourning ceremony. This was the theme for the last days of the month rather than the mourning of Tammuz itself. On the 29th day a bed was placed for Tammuz to indicate that he was being laid out on a bier. There are indications that the whole ceremony which lasted for three days was called *taklimtu*, literally meaning 'display', or what we would call 'lying in state'. In Egypt in the Greek period, where Adonis was similarly laid out, it was called *deiktèrion*, showing that the Greeks had adopted this ancient Middle Eastern ritual for themselves. In his dialogue *Adoniazousai* the Greek poet Theocritus describes this women's festival as 'those who celebrate the Adonis ritual'.<sup>71</sup>

When we were describing the court in Chapter 24 we mentioned what some consider to be an Assyrian ritual text describing the burial of Ešarra-ḫammat, the wife of King Esarhaddon, but others think that it concerns the burial of a prince. Scholars now think that in this text it was not really a prince but Tammuz who was being laid out. The prince was the one who needed to be healed. Two women played the chief roles in the ritual, the 'daughter' and the 'daughter-in-law' or bride. The 'daughter' would have represented the sister of Tammuz, who on the 28<sup>th</sup> day of the fourth month descended to the underworld, and in this ritual the sister of the prince played that self-sacrificial role. The daughter-in-law was the wife of the prince. A woman had to be used as a substitute and according to the

---

**69** W. Farber, *Beschwörungsrituale an Ištar und Dumuzi* (= BID) (1977) 140:3–7 with J. Scurlock in: M. Meyer, P. Mirecki, *Ancient magic and ritual power* (1995) 97f.; TUAT NF 4 (2008) 116–122; J. Bottéro, *ZA* 73 (1983) 193–196. – It is remarkable that Tablet XII of the Gilgamesh Epic (about Enkidu in the Netherworld) according to the colophon was written on the 27<sup>th</sup> day of the fourth month, in 705 BC. This was shortly after King Sargon II had died in battle, a time of worry for the Assyrians. This dating is hardly a coincidence according to E. Frahm, *NABU* 2005/5; for further speculations see A. R. George, *The Gilgamesh Epic* I (2003) 53f.

**70** Farber, 188. There is no mourning of Tammuz attested in ARM 9 175; see M. Ghouti, *NABU* 1991/27 (contra R. Kutscher and B. Alster in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* [1999] 831a).

**71** For the Babylonian ritual see Farber, 123; Th. Jacobsen in H. Goedicke, J. J. M. Roberts, *Unity and Diversity* (1975) 72. For Adonis see M. Stol, 'Greek *deiktèrion*: the lying-in-state of Adonis', in: *Studies M. S. H. G. Heerma van Voss* (1988) 127f. (with lit.); cf. J. A. Scurlock, *NABU* 1991/3; Mettinger 123. Recently, *taklimtu* has been interpreted as 'display of grave goods'; J. N. Postgate in J. E. Curtis, *New light on Nimrud* (2008) 179; A. Zgoll, *Festschrift J. Krecher* (2014) 628f.

rules of the Tammuz ceremony she had to be burdened with the disease and take it down with her. The patient was indeed a man. It was 'his bed' that was put in position. We know that the time to allow diseases to disappear into the underworld was during the ceremonies of the cult of Tammuz in the fourth month.<sup>72</sup>

The background to the whole ritual is an Akkadian myth about the death of Tammuz, often called 'the Descent of Ištar into Hades', a title devised by German scholars but now to be regarded as out-dated and inappropriate. A late Assyrian version of the text has a wish at the end for the dead spirits to arise and enjoy the smell of incense, suggesting that they burned incense during the performance of the ritual.<sup>73</sup> The myth describes how Ištar was humiliated as she descended into the underworld before she was liberated. This late version of the myth can be traced back to an old story, known from a fuller Sumerian version, 'The Descent of Inanna'. The Akkadian version has been abbreviated in some parts but also has a few additions. This shorter text adopts a lofty style of language but the progression of the narrative is sometimes unclear and the end is abrupt. This myth and ritual was sustained as an integral feature of the religious year, since the death of Tammuz was regarded as the reason for the arid, unfruitful summer season that began with the month of Tammuz. Furthermore, it mentioned the origins of certain priests in Ištar's service and the annual lying in state of Tammuz. Modern exponents get little out of the piecemeal text,<sup>74</sup> giving rise to an abundance of modern literature with ingenious explanations. This applies in particular to the Sumerian version, but that would not interest the Babylonian participant in All Souls' Day. For those worshippers the myth was a sort of lament for the dead, a short preamble to a most important ritual.<sup>75</sup>

Dumuzi/Tammuz, a shepherd, was the lover of the goddess Inanna/Ištar. According to the original myth he had been obliged to become a substitute for the goddess in the underworld on account of his misbehaviour. The Akkadian version is silent about any lapses of Tammuz and makes no mention of any guilt to be

---

72 W. von Soden, ZA 45 (1939) 42–61, with J. Scurlock, 'New light on the mourning rites for Dumuzi?', RA 86 (1992) 53–67. See Chapter 24, note 165.

73 R. Labat, *Les religions du Proche-orient* (1970) 265.

74 The explanation by W. Burkert in: J. Assmann, *Funktionen und Leistungen des Mythos* (1982) 66–68, is not correct. J. Bottéro, *Annuaire 1971–72*, École pratique des Hautes Études, IVe section, p. 79–97, is more realistic. The interpretation of the myth as the journey of the soul, descending into the material world and returning purified, a Gnostic belief, is speculative. See S. Parpola, *Assyrian prophecies* (1997) p. XXXI–IV; P. Lapinkivi, *Ištar's descent and resurrection* (2010) 38, and passim.

75 E. Reiner, *Your thwarts in pieces, your mooring rope cut. Poetry from Babylonia and Assyria* (1985) 48.

attributed to him. His death was viewed as a tragedy, something which provoked the arrival of the summer drought when all vegetation withered.<sup>76</sup> It must date back to an old myth about nature. It was also an element in folklore, alluded to in an Old Babylonian letter by a man who had often escaped death

Now then, why am [I not] like Dumuzi? They killed him at a fixed time (?) in the year [and in the spring (?)] he always came back to the temple of Annunitum.<sup>77</sup>

The myth was taken over in Phoenicia, where the dying god was identified as Baal in Ugarit, Melqart in Tyre and Adonis in Byblos. In the latter half of the twentieth century it was contended that Tammuz would not rise from the dead after the summer, as J. G. Frazer and others had thought earlier. It is now thought that in the Ancient Near East there were no dying gods, only gods who disappeared.<sup>78</sup> But T. Mettinger has argued strongly that the god really did die and came back again after the hot summer.<sup>79</sup> Sometimes he returned after an interval of only three days according to the way that early Christian authors retold the myth.<sup>80</sup>

The lamentations for Dumuzi/Tammuz were handed down from generation to generation. They existed as early as the Old Babylonian period and were often written in *emesal*, the Sumerian woman's dialect.<sup>81</sup> In this early period cheerful love songs about Inanna and Dumuzi were composed, as well as the laments, but they later fell out of circulation. These laments did not belong to the canon of literature, and the worship of Dumuzi/Tammuz in the temples was of marginal importance.<sup>82</sup> In the Sumerian dirges about Dumuzi he was mourned by women:

---

**76** B. Alster s.v. 'Tammuz', in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, first edition (1995) 1575; second edition (1999) 831 f. He pays little attention to Tammuz in the first millennium B. C.

**77** P. Marelli, *Florilegium Marianum I* (1992) 117 A.1146:42–44; TUAT NF 3 (2006) 59; D. Katz, *The image of the Netherworld in the Sumerian sources* (2003) 165 f.

**78** Th. Podella, *Šôm – Fasten* (1989) 35–37. For Adonis see P. Lambrechts, *Over Griekse en Oosterse mysteriëgodsdiensten; de zgn. Adonismysteries* (1954) ('Lucian, *De Dea Syria* 6, confuses Osiris with Adonis'); Lambrechts, 'La 'résurrection' d'Adonis', *Annuaire de l'Institut de Philologie et d'Histoire Orientales et Slaves* 13 (1953) 208–240.

**79** T. N. D. Mettinger, *The riddle of resurrection. 'Dying and Rising Gods' in the Ancient Near East* (2001); idem, 'The Dying and Rising God: the perigrinations of a mytheme', in: W. H. van Soldt, *Ethnicity in Ancient Mesopotamia* (2005) 198–210.

**80** J. L. Lightfoot, *Lucian On the Syrian Goddess* (2003) 310.

**81** M. M. Fritz, ... *und weinten um Tammuz. Die Götter Dumuzi-Ama'ušumgal'anna und Damu* (2003). For example M. E. Cohen, *Sumerian hymnology: The Eršemma* (1981) 70–93; W. H. Ph. Römer, TUAT II/5 (1989) 693–700.

**82** B. Alster in 'Tammuz'. For an Akkadian lament from the late period see W. G. Lambert, *JAOS* 103 (1983) 211–215, where Marduk is supposed to have killed Tammuz; see now B. R. Foster, *Before the Muses II* (1993) 838 f.

by Inanna/Ištar, by his sister and by his mother. Everything points to the fact that the congregation at the end of the month of Tammuz was just for women. They expressed their own emotions in this ceremony in commemorating the sudden death of a young friend as its central motif.<sup>83</sup> The grieving women identified themselves with Ištar. The similar mourning ceremonies in the cult for the young Adonis in Phoenicia were taken over by the Greeks and spread into other regions, including Athens and Alexandria. We read in the Bible that Jephthah, as a consequence of his solemn vow, had to see his daughter tragically put to death as a sacrifice. This was traditionally commemorated every year by subsequent generations of women observing a four-day mourning ritual (see Judges 11:29–40).<sup>84</sup>

The ceremony surrounding Tammuz took place at the end of the fourth month, the time the spirits of the dead were honoured with incense by their families. A variant of the late myth records that the spirits of the dead also appeared in the presence of the sun god Šamaš and Gilgamesh, at the end of the fifth month. After his death Gilgamesh became the judge of the underworld.<sup>85</sup> Certainly the fifth month, Abu, was the month for caring for the spirits of the dead.<sup>86</sup> Perhaps the end of the month of Tammuz was reserved for women, but the month Abu was for everyone, especially for fathers and for other men. When we were discussing the convent in Chapter 26, we saw that the *nadītus* in the convent seemed to celebrate All Souls' Day at the end of Abu.

---

**83** M. M. Fritz, 353–359, 'Damu und Dumuzi als Fokus: Grunderfahrungen im Leben einer Frau?'. He also thinks of the sorrow of a woman over her unfaithful husband, or over her 'egoistic brother' (= Dumuzi).

**84** Van der Toorn, *From the cradle*, 117. He also refers to 'the lamentation for Hadad-Rimmon in the valley of Megiddo', Zechariah 12:11. See also the article of Mettinger mentioned earlier; p. 207.

**85** Tsukimoto, *Totenpflege*, 161–167. For rituals at the end of the fourth and fifth months see W. Farber, *BID* (1977) 123 f., 207 f.

**86** For a new instance in Emar see D. E. Fleming, *The installation of Baal's high priestess at Emar* (1992) 295–301 (*Emar VI/3* no. 452).



## 30 The Sacred Marriage

The concept of ‘sacred marriage’ is a modern scholarly expression based on the Greek institution of *hieros gamos*. But the study of that sort of Greek marriage does not help us to understand things any better.<sup>1</sup> We will begin with Sumer.

The first genuine sacred marriage was between Heaven and Earth, when the male heaven fertilised with rain mother earth and green vegetation sprang up from her. The introduction to a Sumerian literary text describes this primaeval happening more broadly.<sup>2</sup>

An, mighty heaven, impregnated broad Earth,  
He poured into her the heroic seed of Wood and Reed.  
The good seed of Heaven was poured into Earth, the faithful cow.  
Earth, rejoicing over the plant of life, was ready to give birth,  
Earth, luxuriant, sprinkling wine and syrup, carried bounty.  
When Wood and Reed had been born, she shook out the syrup and wine in the barn.

This cosmic marriage is called a *cosmogamy*.<sup>3</sup> A motif on Old Assyrian cylinder seals has been explained as the depiction of this sacred marriage as envisaged in Syria, between the goddess of love and the god of rain. That northern area of the Middle East has always relied on rain for agriculture. The goddess tends to face forward, opening her garment provocatively, opposite a seated god or king. In other representations she can be seen as an interceding goddess (Figure 49).<sup>4</sup> A Neo-Assyrian cylinder seal is comparable (Figure 50). In the upper register two deities meet each other. The god offers the goddess three ears of corn and a dove takes flight out of her hand, signifying a woman’s love (compare Figure 49). In the lower register we see a man ploughing, with another man behind him broad-

---

1 A. A. Avagianou, ‘Hieros gamos in ancient Greek religion: the human aspect of a sacralized ritual’, in: M. Nissinen, R. Uro, *Sacred Marriages. The divine-human sexual metaphor from Sumer to early Christianity* (2008) 145–171.

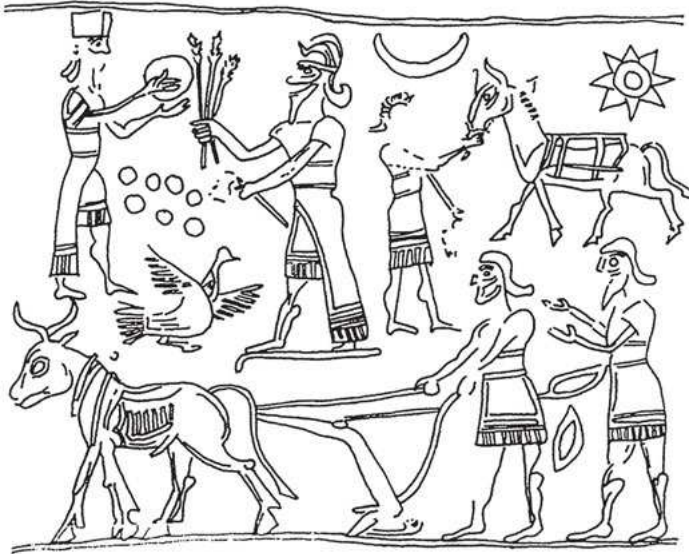
2 ‘The Debate between Wood and Reed’, 6–11. See C. Mittermayer, *Studies P. Attinger* (2012) 252f. On the marriage between heaven and earth see J. G. Westenholz, *Studies T. Abusch* (2010) 294–321.

3 B. Pongratz-Leisten in Nissinen, Uro, *Sacred Marriages*, 44 ff.

4 U. Winter, *Frau und Göttin* (1983) 272–283 (‘Die Göttin die sich entschleiert’, as ‘Mittlerin’, 280); C. Uehlinger, *RIA IX/1–2* (1998) 59–62 with Abb. 7–10 (‘sie öffnet ein schleierartiges Kleid’); O. Keel, Th. Staubli, *Im Schatten Deiner Flügel. Tiere in der Bibel und im Alten Orient* (2002) 71–73 Kat. 64–67 (sacred marriage); D. Collon, *Near Eastern Seals* (1990) 49 fig. 38; B. Brentjes, *Alte Siegelkunst des Vorderen Orients* (1983) 180. She is not facing the man in E. Klengel-Brandt, *Mit sieben Siegeln versehen* (1997) 75 Abb. 68.



**Fig. 49:** Old Assyrian cylinder seal. Cylinder seals from Syria show a goddess opening her garment in front of a god or a seated king. Flying doves symbolise love. They represent Ištar and Adad, the god of rain, whose conjugal love (*theogamy*) guarantees fertility. 1800 BC. Haematite. Height 1.9 cm. *Université de Fribourg*.



**Fig. 50:** The goddess Ištar stands opposite the rain god Adad, with a dove symbolising the love between them. Their marriage brought fruitfulness, suggested below by the farmer ploughing his furrow here on earth. Neo-Assyrian cylinder seal. 9th century BC. *Université de Fribourg*.

casting seed. The sowing of seed can be interpreted as a symbol of fruitfulness on earth, and therefore of a sacred marriage.<sup>5</sup>

This may remind us of a passage where we find a description of Zeus and Hera together in Homer.

The son of Kronos embraced his wife. Beneath them the divine earth produced luxuriant grass and dewy lotus and crocus and hyacinth, thick and soft, a bed that lifted them high up from the earth. On this they lay down and they covered themselves with a beautiful mist of gold. Glistening droplets of dew fell to earth (Iliad XIV 346–351).

### 30.1 Poetry

In Sumer Inanna and Dumuzi had a sort of marriage relationship. Inanna was the goddess of love and war, and the most important goddess of the pantheon. Dumuzi was originally represented as a human shepherd, but also as the ruler of a Sumerian city. Inanna expressed her love for him in a series of songs. As their love developed everyone prepared themselves for their wedding day. These were romantic bucolic songs.<sup>6</sup> The consummation of their marriage was described frankly with one passage showing that in response the plant world began to sprout.<sup>7</sup> Later Dumuzi would die, and there begins the theme of the mourning for Tammuz, which we have already discussed in the last chapter, about women and worship. Such a marriage between a deity and a human is called *hierogamy*, ‘sacred marriage’.

Ceremonially that marriage between Inanna and Dumuzi was re-enacted between the goddess and the Sumerian king. The king, who could be called Ama-*u*šumgal-ana on this occasion, represented Dumuzi. The name of the reigning king and Dumuzi alternated in the songs.<sup>8</sup> In two of them the poet wishes that the goddess Inanna would be greeted with the happy sound of the churning of

---

5 F. A. M. Wiggermann in: R. M. Jas, *Rainfall and agriculture in Northern Mesopotamia* (2000) 201f., 230. Wiggermann thinks that the ploughing refers to the sexual union of both gods. For photos see Keel, Staubli, *Im Schatten Deiner Flügel*, 73 Kat. 69; O. Keel, C. Uehlinger, *Altorientalische Miniaturkunst* (1990) 24 Abb. 13. For a drawing see H. Klengel, J. Renger, *Landwirtschaft im Alten Orient* (1999) 277 Abb. 7.

6 For translations see S. N. Kramer, *Le mariage sacré* (1983) 81–100; Th. Jacobsen, *The treasures of darkness* (1976) 27–47; for a concordance see D. Frayne, *BiOr* 42 (1985) 8f.; also Jacobsen, *The harps that once* (1987) 1–23.

7 PAPS 107 (1963) 505 Ni. 9602 iii 7–11 (= ISET 2 16), with Th. Jacobsen, *Aula Orientalis* 9 (1991) 116; also in his *Treasures of darkness*, 46; Y. Sefati, *Love songs in Sumerian literature* (1998) 225.

8 J. Renger, *ZA* 58 (1967) 133f. § 36.

milk in the dairy. One song says it was Dumuzi who did the churning, and another that it was Išme-Dagan, the king of Isin.<sup>9</sup> Very early in the history of Sumer city-rulers and kings would describe themselves as ‘the beloved husband of Inanna’ (Eannatum of Lagash) or ‘the husband of the *nu.gig* [= Inanna]’ (Mesanepada of Ur). King Naram-Sîn of Akkad was called ‘the husband of Inanna-Annunitum’.<sup>10</sup> In their hymns kings from the following Ur III and Isin periods described in great detail that this entailed the physical union of the king and the goddess on a bed in her residence in the building Gipar.<sup>11</sup> Three clear passages concern this theme. One is the hymn of Inanna, composed for King Iddin-Dagan of Isin in about 1950 BC, which culminates in the consummation on the holy bed and the blessing of the land which followed. This bed is no figment of the imagination. It is referred to in administrative texts, and the bedchamber of Nanna and Ningal, the divine couple associated with the sacred marriage, has been identified in the temple of Ningal in Ur as room C 28.<sup>12</sup>

In the hymn Inanna is praised as the ‘Lady of the Evening’, meaning her epiphany as the evening star, referring to the planet Venus in the evening sky. The ritual did not take place in Uruk as it should have done but in the capital city of Isin. Inanna is therefore identified with the local goddess of Isin. As the evening star she was known as Ninsuana, ‘Red Lady of the Heavens’, a name assonant with Nin-Isin. The hymn consists of nine or ten strophes, the content of which can be conveniently summarised.<sup>13</sup> We assume that Strophes 1–3 concern the monthly feast of the New Moon, and the rest concern celebrations for the New Year.

(1) The goddess is greeted with the exclamation *silim.ma*, ‘Welcome’, a Semitic expression sounding very like Hebrew *shalom* and Arabic *salam*.

(2) She is said to occupy a very elevated position among the most powerful gods, An (the sky) and Enlil. This means that ‘monthly, at the New Moon, so that the holy institutions (*me*) may be perfect, the gods of the land gather around her, the great Anunnaki kneel before her (...) my Lady makes decisions on the country’ (27–32). These decisions were made together with the god Enlil.

<sup>9</sup> J. Klein, *Festschrift W. H. Ph. Römer* (1998) 205–222.

<sup>10</sup> M.-J. Seux, *Epithètes royales* (1967) 173, 388; J. S. Cooper, ‘Sacred marriage and popular cult in early Mesopotamia’, in: E. Matsushima, *Official cult and popular religion in the Ancient Near East* (1993) 83f.

<sup>11</sup> For the allusions to ‘bed’ and ‘lap’ in hymns see W. H. Ph. Römer, *SKIZ* (1965) 147f.; for the Gipar see P. Steinkeller in: K. Watanabe, *Priests and officials in the Ancient Near East* (1999) 132.

<sup>12</sup> J. G. Westenholz, *Canadian Society for Mesopotamian Studies Journal* 1 (2006) 40b.

<sup>13</sup> ŠRT 1 with W. H. Ph. Römer, *SKIZ* (1965) 128–208 (Kapitel IV); D. Reisman, ‘Iddin-Dagan’s Sacred Marriage Hymn’, *JCS* 25 (1973) 185–202; Th. Jacobsen, *The harps that once* (1987) 112–124; Römer, *TUAT* II/5 (1989) 659–673; P. Attinger, *Festschrift J. Krecher* (2014) 11–82.

(3) The exclamation ‘Welcome’ sounds out again, accompanied by musical instruments.

(4–6) The servants in her cult parade past. Among them is a group of men who lacerate their bodies with knives until the blood flows, an important element in the ceremonies of the cult of Inanna/Ištar.

(7) She is worshipped by man and beast and a feast is held.<sup>14</sup>

(8) Inanna blesses the one who is good and punishes the one who is bad.

(9) The people bring offerings and food, evidently for the feast.

(10) The New Year feast. A throne (*bara*) is erected for her as Nin-Egala, ‘the Lady of the Palace’, and the king sits beside her as a god (*dingir.àm*). At New Year, the day of rites, the bed is set up for ‘my Lady’, so that she will take it upon herself to provide life for the country, so that she will inspect the loyal servants, so that the holy institutions (*me*) will be perfect on the day that the moon disappears (167–175). The goddess bathes ‘for the lap of the king’, and then the king goes to ‘her pure lap’, and Ama-ušumgal-ana ‘does the bed’ with her (185–187). That long name was one of those used for Dumuzi, meaning that the king in this situation is being identified with the lover of Inanna. Holy Inanna addresses Iddin-Dagan, ‘You are truly my beloved’ (192). The king organises a banquet for her and a feast for the people. The story ends with Inanna being praised as the *nu.gig*, Holy Lady.

An earlier example of sacred marriage, one from the Ur III period, involves King Šulgi. He describes in a hymn his glorious return from a battle.<sup>15</sup> On the way back to his city of Ur he visits the great Sumerian temples and presents offerings to their gods, possibly freshly claimed booty. Each god he visits blesses him. The first episode of the hymn describes his visit to the temple of Inanna in Uruk. This is in fact a retrospective reference to his sacred marriage with her. On that occasion Šulgi had arrived in his royal boat (*magur*) at the quayside of Uruk-Kullaba. He had entered the temple of Eanna with animals for sacrifice. Inanna had intoned a love song in the woman’s dialect using very explicit vocabulary, reminiscing about being fondled by the king, Dumuzi.

He played with the hair in my lap, laid his hand on my sacred vessel (...), he spoke in bed pleasant words to me (28–34).

<sup>14</sup> For the festive activities, like competitions, see M. M. Fritz, ... *und weinten um Tammuz. Die Götter Dumuzi-Ama-ušumgal’anna und Damu* (2003) 319 f.

<sup>15</sup> Hymns D and X. Hymn Šulgi X (= TLB II 2) looks like the conclusion of hymn D. For a new edition see J. Klein, *Three Šulgi Hymns* (1981) 124 ff. Klein assumes that this passage in the hymn looks back at the marriage and gives no full description (as is commonly assumed). A central point is that Inanna destines Šulgi to be king (p. 126 n. 205).

Then she had determined a good fate for the king, just like all the other gods in the hymn were to do. A third text does not name the king, but in it Inanna invited him longingly to share her bed with her, and the kingship was promised to him with prosperity for his land. This happened on the occasion of the New Moon.<sup>16</sup>

In the same Ur III period a legend was known, in which Enmarkar, the king of Uruk, boasted to a rival that he did not just live with Inanna, like his rival, but that he lay with her in a splendid bed. He did not see her in a dream, but spoke to her whenever he was awake. He could describe the bed and added, that Inanna shouted with pleasure when he visited her.<sup>17</sup> The rival admitted that Enmerkar was indeed the ‘beloved city-ruler (*en*) of Inanna’.<sup>18</sup> Other songs tell of the love of Inanna and Dumuzi and portray similarly erotic scenes. If these count as songs for sacred marriage, then there are still a few more scurrilous passages to add, in which Inanna boasts of the excellence of her sexual organs to ‘Dumuzi the king’ and invites him ‘to plough my wet field’.<sup>19</sup>

### 30.2 The reality of the situation

We can assume that a real bed was prepared for the ceremony but we doubt that the couple really climbed into it. If they did then we must ask who played the role of the goddess. It has been suggested, but without direct evidence, that it was the queen, and this is a subject to which we shall return. It may have been a priestess. Inanna herself had the title *nu.gig*, which we earlier saw was equivalent to ‘the holy woman’ (*qadištu*), but there is no indication at all that this woman was the lucky one. If it was the high priestess, the *entu*, she would have been the daughter of the king, so the relationship would have been incestuous.<sup>20</sup> A better candidate would be the *ereš.dingir*, a priestess who may have been the daughter of a king but not necessarily so. Although we have no facts to confirm this hunch, it is cer-

<sup>16</sup> CT 42 4 with Y. Sefati, *Love songs in Sumerian literature* (1998) 301–311 (DI D<sub>1</sub>).

<sup>17</sup> ‘Enmerkar and Ensuĥkešdanna’, 27–32, 80–99 (ed. Adele Berlin), with Cooper, 82f.

<sup>18</sup> P. Lapinkivi gives a survey of sacred marriages in Mesopotamia from 2700 (Enmerkar) to 1250 BC (Shalmaneser I) in: Nissinen, Uro, *Sacred Marriages* (2008) 18–21. See also P. Steinkeller in Watanabe, *Priests and officials*, 129–137; J. G. Westenholz, ‘Heilige Hochzeit und kultische Prostitution im Alten Mesopotamien. Sexuelle Vereinigung im sakralen Raum?’, in: *Wort und Dienst. Jahrbuch der Kirchlichen Hochschule Bethel*, Neue Folge 23 (1995) 43–62.

<sup>19</sup> Th. Jacobsen in: *Unity and Diversity* (1975) 83 (ISET 2 16); Sefati, *Love songs*, 224 f.

<sup>20</sup> Jacobsen (p. 78 n. 6) mentions a passage in an administrative text which seems to say that ‘Dumuzi is going to the high-priestess (*en*)’; *Orientalia* SP 47–49 no. 344:22–23. Cf. R. Kutscher, *Studies P. Artzi* (1990) 33. Inanna was both *en* and *lagar* in Uruk; ‘The Descent of Inanna to the Netherworld’, 6; TUAT III/3 (1993) 461.

tainly possible that the duty fell to the *ereš.dingir*. It has even been suggested that any son born of this union would be the future king.<sup>21</sup> Gudea of Lagash could be an example of this, for in his prayer to the goddess Gatumdug he says,

I have no mother. You are my mother. I have no father. You are my father. You have received my seed. You have born me in the sanctuary.

That is the evidence for the idea that Gudea was conceived by an *ereš.dingir* in a sacred marriage ceremony.<sup>22</sup> But the language he uses can also be seen as literary exaggeration to show a relationship of intimate trust with the goddess.

There would have been a margin of secrecy about this institution, something that can be compared with the traditional nightly rituals in which a new emperor of Japan indulged when he took office. He is known to have retired to an inner room with two ‘hostesses’, without any more details being given.<sup>23</sup> But it could be that absolutely nothing took place. The songs with their colourful language can be seen as literary fiction. It has been pointed out that we have figurative language to describe the king drinking beer with Utu and An, the Sun and the Sky.<sup>24</sup> The king was certainly seen as the ‘husband of Inanna’, the incarnation of her friend Dumuzi, and at the feast a bed may well have been made ready, but the rest was nothing but poetry.<sup>25</sup> J. S. Cooper tends to the view that the ceremony was indeed carried out once a year, as a confirmation of sacred kingship, to confirm the social bonds between the gods and society, not just for the joy of sex. Cooper does not hazard any opinion on which woman was involved. In his latest contribution he decided not to *chercher la femme* but to conclude that there was no physical marriage. He now thinks differently than he did before. We were misled by those strong metaphors.<sup>26</sup> If it was the queen then we recall that in Chapter 23 about the court and the harem we saw that in Ebla she played an important role in the ceremonial surrounding an accession to the throne, where the marriage bed was part of that procedure. An unexpected clue comes from Girsu in the province of Lagash, where the wife of the governor was the *ereš.dingir* of the city goddess Bau. There ‘the governor and his wife played the roles of Nin-

<sup>21</sup> D. Frayne, with Cooper, 87 f.; W. W. Hallo, with Cooper, 89 f. See also Renger, *ZA* 58 (1967) 144 §50.

<sup>22</sup> A. Falkenstein, *AnOr* 30 (1966) 2f.; Renger, *ZA* 58, 142 n. 224.

<sup>23</sup> Cooper, 95 f.

<sup>24</sup> R. F. G. Sweet, ‘A new look at the “Sacred Marriage” in Ancient Mesopotamia’, in: *Corolla Torontonensis. Studies in honour of Ronald Morton Smith* (1994) 85–104; esp. 102–104.

<sup>25</sup> For the latest discussion see G. Rubio, *JAOS* 121 (2001) 268 f.

<sup>26</sup> J. S. Cooper, ‘Sex and the temple’, in: K. Kaniuth, *Tempel im Alten Orient* (2013) 49–57, esp. 54–56.

girsu and Bau respectively at the rite of the sacred marriage'. We presume that the governor consummated this marriage with his wife.<sup>27</sup> In the state cult the queen also seems to have been the female partner in the sacred marriage, as was suggested more than thirty years ago.<sup>28</sup> Annual gifts for the sacred marriage were recorded by Gudea, the previous city ruler, showing that sacred marriage was a real life event in Lagash.

Various scenes have been interpreted as depictions of the sacred marriage ritual.<sup>29</sup> In the main these are 'banquet scenes' focused on eating and drinking. But those scenes could just as easily represent some other feast. It has also been thought that clay images depicting copulation between a man and a woman may be relevant. Copious numbers of these have been found, most of which depict penetration from behind. These may well have been privately commissioned as aids to fertility. Some involve a number of people, pointing to an orgy of communal intercourse as part of some ceremony, but not necessarily the sacred marriage.

### 30.3 The function of the ritual

Even though we cannot be sure whether or not real sex was involved in this ritual, we would have liked to know what function it played in society, but we do not. There is no single ritual with which the songs can be associated, and there are countless and conflicting opinions on the sacred marriage. One recent book gave an overview of several opinions, including that it promoted agricultural fertility, celebrated a coronation, deified the king and therefore legitimated kingship, obtained a blessing for the king, installed a high priestess, the *entu*, commemorated the mystic union between God and Man, or simply that the hymns and songs were mere court poetry.<sup>30</sup> One hymn clearly suggests the intention of this marriage. Enlil and Ninlil, the divine couple, having built a temple for Inanna, gave King Išme-Dagan to her as her husband, and gave them as their 'present'

---

**27** K. Maekawa in K. R. Veenhof, *Houses and households in ancient Mesopotamia* (1996) 172–174. Gudea, the city ruler of Lagash, and his wife may have celebrated the sacred marriage at the festival of Bau; W. Sallaberger, *Der kultische Kalender der Ur III-Zeit I* (1993) 291.

**28** See W. H. Ph. Römer, 'Einige Überlegungen zur "Heiligen Hochzeit" nach altorientalischen Texten', in: *Festschrift J. P. M. van der Ploeg* (1982), 411–428; esp. 421. This contribution never played any role in the discussions of the sacred marriage.

**29** We follow J. S. Cooper, 'Heilige Hochzeit. B. Archäologisch', *RIA IV/4–5* (1975) 259–269.

**30** Nissinen, Uro, *Sacred Marriages*, 9f.; 33–39; 48f.; 201–205.



the feeding of the gods and their temple. In this way contact between the realm of government and the world of the gods was sustained.<sup>31</sup>

A few aspects of these suggestions deserve closer consideration. First of all we note that although the king is identified with Dumuzi this does not mean he was deified. Dumuzi himself was essentially a human shepherd beloved by the goddess Inanna. As a result he acknowledged himself that he had acquired a superhuman status. In the myth 'Dumuzi's Dream' (206) he says

Old woman! I am not just a human, I am the husband of a deity.

The king also held the special superhuman status of uniting heaven and earth, and had been granted special access to the world of the gods. It has often been said that the rite of sacred marriage symbolised fertility and the king would have wanted to secure this fertility and secured it magically, as when we read 'The sexual congress of the human actors who incarnated divinities acted by sympathetic magic to cause fertility and productivity in all nature'.<sup>32</sup> This gives too great an emphasis on the sexual element.<sup>33</sup> The goddess Inanna never became pregnant, and it has been perceptively noticed that a marriage with her can hardly have symbolised fertility.<sup>34</sup> Alternatively it has been suggested that in this ritual Inanna did not function so much as the goddess of love but as the dominant goddess of the pantheon. By having a direct relationship with her the king ensured the security of his country. It is the maintenance of kingship that was crucial to the ritual, not fertility, as scholars often think. It was about her blessing him, expressed in the establishing of his function, his 'lot', to be the shepherd of his country, and a rich yield from his fields and flocks would follow.<sup>35</sup> It may well have been true that this marriage relationship was confirmed by a physical union during the ritual but that does not put fertility in first place.<sup>36</sup> The Iddin-Dagan hymn clearly states that the ceremony took place on New Year's Day. We also

---

**31** Hymn Išme-Dagan K with Cooper, 90; W. H. Ph. Römer, *Hymnen und Klagelieder in sumerischer Sprache* (2001) 55 ff., lines 36–41.

**32** Th. Jacobsen, *Aula Orientalis* 9 (1991) 116; cf. T. Frymer-Kensky, *In the wake of the goddesses. Women, culture and the Biblical transformation of pagan myth* (1992) 54 (bountiful yields of fields, gardens and streams); 58 f. (the king 'touched by divinity'). The tendency to connect the Uruk Vase with the sacred marriage was rejected by R. F. G. Sweet (contra Th. Jacobsen).

**33** Frymer-Kensky, 56 f.

**34** M. I. Gruber, *Jewish Quarterly Review* 76 (1995) 214 f., in his review of the book by T. Frymer-Kensky.

**35** J. Renger, 'Heilige Hochzeit', *RIA IV/4–5* (1975) 256 f. § 17; somewhat differently J. Klein, *Three Šulgi Hymns* (1981) 126 n. 205.

**36** This was the earlier explanation of Cooper, 91 f.

know that in Lagash the god Ningirsu and the goddess Bau celebrated their marriage on that day.<sup>37</sup> Some say it was not necessary to observe the ritual every year but only when a new king came to the throne,<sup>38</sup> perhaps at his coronation, or during the first year of his reign, or on the first New Year's Day of his reign. It is possible that Ur-Nammu, the first king of the Ur III dynasty, had already observed this ritual, for he spoke about lying down on 'the splendid (*giri*n) bed'. Certainly his son Šulgi observed it, probably when he had himself deified.<sup>39</sup>

The sacred marriage ritual with all its symbolism was limited to a period of about two hundred years, during the reigns of the kings of the Ur III period and the subsequent periods of Isin and Larsa, who adhered to the traditions of the court of Ur.<sup>40</sup> Sumerian royal hymns from the later period of the Amorite kings, such as Hammurabi and Samsu-iluna, stayed true to the ideology of their divine birth, but leave no trace of references to sacred marriage.<sup>41</sup> These kings were no longer regarded as gods.

It is here relevant to observe that in the Gilgamesh Epic (Tablet VI) Ištar proposes marriage to the hero, the king of Uruk. But he rejects her proposal, listing some of her former lovers with whom things had gone badly. This motif can be seen as a reflection of the rejection of sacred marriage. In the sacred marriage ritual it was Inanna who similarly took the initiative. Here, as the goddess of Uruk, she chooses a mortal to be her husband. Such a procedure could conflict with the principle of dynastic succession from father to son to determine the successive kings of Uruk, for Inanna could as easily cast a king away as choose him. Thinking along these lines Gilgamesh refused to take this risk. He rejected Inanna, and his son succeeded him.<sup>42</sup>

---

**37** In Elam we have the month name 'Month of the divine *ereš.dingir*'; S. Greengus, *JAOS* 107 (1987) 228a (only in MDP 23 187:5).

**38** As argued by Renger, 257 § 17; accepted by Römer in *Studies J. P. M. van der Ploeg* (1982) 420 f.; based on the ritual in CT 42 4; but Cooper, 86 f., thinks of it as a confirmation of the kingship.

**39** Ur-Nammu: Frayne, *BiOr* 42 (1985) 16 f. Šulgi: Renger, *RIA* IV/4, 257 § 20.

**40** Iddin-Dagan (see above) and Išme-Dagan at Isin; for Larsa we now have an Akkadian love song for Rim-Šin; YOS 11 24 with J. G. Westenholz, M. Sigrist, *Studies S. M. Paul* II (2008) 667–704. In general see Y. Sefati, *Love songs in Sumerian literature* (1998) 38–49.

**41** A. Falkenstein, *ArOr* 17/1 (1949) 214.

**42** W. Heimpel, *ZA* 82 (1992) 11 f., 17.

### 30.4 The Assyrian period and later

In the first millennium this marriage ritual consisted of nothing more than bringing together the statues of a god and goddess in a cell, the ‘room of the bed’. Going into a garden was also involved.<sup>43</sup> Such a marriage between two gods is called *theogamy*, which brings us back in some ways to the ancient myth of Zeus and Hera. King Ashurbanipal announced proudly how he gave an opportunity to the god and goddess of Babylon to share a bed.

A bed of sissoo-wood, a durable sort of wood, that is overlaid with ... gold and decorated with exquisite precious stones, I skilfully set up an elaborate bed for the Lord (Bel) and my Mistress (Beltiya), for conducting the sacred marriage (*hašādu*), for making love. In Kaḫilisu, the bedroom of Zarpanitum [= my Mistress], which is sprinkled with sensuality, I placed (it).<sup>44</sup>

We have much information about the ritual in this period. Letters to the Assyrian king refer to what was happening and administrators speak of offerings for ‘the bedroom of Mulissu’, the wife of the god Assur, being brought by the king and others.<sup>45</sup> It was carried out each year at a fixed time. We know most about the Babylonian ‘marriage’ between Nabû and Tašmetu in the second month, celebrated in Borsippa and nearby Babylon. In the Neo-Babylonian period Nabû and Nanaya celebrated their marriage for six days in the first month.<sup>46</sup> At this time Nabû also had two divine girlfriends, and he would spend several nights in their temples during this ritual. The best known of these was the one named after a nomadic tribe, ‘the Sutaean’, and the second was called ‘the Aramean’.<sup>47</sup> Do these two goddesses represent the nomadic population of the Empire?

A number of other Neo-Babylonian texts from Sippar speak about bed linen, repairs for ‘the bed’, and ‘the bedroom’. In connection with the god of this city Šamaš there is also talk of ‘the bed’ or ‘the marriage’ (*hašādu*) of the Lady of Sippar (Belet-Sippar), meaning Ištar. The reports about that marriage are all

<sup>43</sup> All the material is in E. Matsushima, ‘Les rituels du mariage divin dans les documents accadiens’, *ASJ* 10 (1988) 95–128. The garden in sacred marriage rituals was discussed in P. Lapinkivi, *The Sumerian sacred marriage in the light of comparative evidence* (= SAAS XV) (2004) 212–226.

<sup>44</sup> R. Borger, *BIWA* (1996) 139 f. *Prisma* T I 46–53; cf. 206 § 5.

<sup>45</sup> SAA VII p. XXXV (3) and 220 s.v. *quršu* ‘wedding night’.

<sup>46</sup> J. N. Postgate, ‘The Bit Akiti in Assyrian Nabu temples’, *Sumer* 30 (1974) 51–74; E. Matsushima, ‘Le rituel hiérogamique de Nabû’, *ASJ* 9 (1987) 131–175; SAA XIII (1998) p. XV f. For Nanaya see C. Waerzeggers, *The Ezida temple of Borsippa* (2010) 129 f.

<sup>47</sup> Waerzeggers, 29, referring to P.-A. Beaulieu.

dated in the eleventh month.<sup>48</sup> King Nabonidus reporting on the rebuilding of the Šamaš temple of Ebabbar in Sippar said to the god,

May Aya, the great bride, who lives in the bedroom, constantly make your face light up, may she daily say good words to you.

The good words to be spoken were intercessions for the people.<sup>49</sup> The god Šamaš seems to have had two marriages here, one with Aya and the other with the Lady of Sippar.

Herodotus suspected that some such affair occurred high in the ‘Tower of Babel’ (I 181 f.).

On the uppermost tower stands a temple and in the temple a large bed is made up, and beside it a golden table. There is in that temple no statue set up and also no person spends the night there, except a native woman who has been chosen out of them all by the god, as the Chaldeans tell, who are priests of this god. They are the same people who claim (but I believe nothing of it) that the god comes to the temple in person and sleeps on the bed.

We do have one reference to the roof of a chapel in the temple tower where a ritual was carried out for Anu, the god of the heavens.<sup>50</sup>

A papyrus from Egypt has an Aramaic text written in Demotic script recounting some legends about the kings of Assyria. It includes an account of a sacred marriage ritual between the king and the goddess Nanaya.<sup>51</sup>

Nanaya, you are my wife. The bed of rushes they have laid down, perfumed fragrances for your nostrils. Our goddess, may you be carried, escorted to your dear one; let them bear you to the dear one. In your bridal chamber a priest sings. Nanaya, bring near to me your lips. We stayed in the morning. We shall stay in the evening. I have stayed with you until evening. (...) My beloved, enter the door into my house. With my mouth, consort of our lord, let me kiss you. (...) Horus-Bethel will lay you on a bedspread, El on embroidered covers.

---

**48** E. Matsushima, ‘Le “Lit” de Šamaš et le rituel du mariage à l’Ebabbar’, *ASJ* 7 (1985) 129–137; F. Joannès, ‘Le lit de Šamaš et le mariage de Bēlet Sippar’, *RA* 86 (1992) 166–168; A. C. V. M. Bongenaar, *The Neo-Babylonian Ebabbar temple at Sippar* (1997) 242f. For more see B. Pongratz-Leisten in Nissinen, Uro, *Sacred Marriages*, 62–66.

**49** 5 R 65 ii 19–20 with Matsushima, 132.

**50** TCL 6 41:14 with M. J. H. Linssen, *The cults of Uruk and Babylon* (2004) 245.

**51** R. C. Steiner in: W. W. Hallo, *The Context of Scripture* I (1997) 322, column XVI.

Blessings follow and the king is able to go and rebuild his ruined city.

A very late implicit allusion to the motif of the sacred marriage is seen when Antiochus IV Epiphanes sought to ‘marry’ (*sunoikein*) Nanaya, stipulating that he wanted the temple treasures as a dowry (2 Maccabees 1:14).<sup>52</sup>

I conclude that the union of the two gods in their bedroom means that the goddess makes intercession with her husband on behalf of the king. A colophon on texts in the library of Ashurbanipal, which we cited in the discussion on intercession in Chapter 29, says this clearly. Of course she was successful in achieving this and the result was blessing for the king and country. Such an act of intercession had to be repeated regularly. From an increasing number of Assyrian songs about the love of the gods for the king which are coming to light we are learning of a female deity who intermediates between the god and the king. Some scholars have proposed that it is God’s love for the king, traditionally for King Solomon, that is alluded to in the Song of Songs. They would, therefore, place that Biblical book in this context.<sup>53</sup>

Could the sacred marriage ritual from the older Sumerian period have had the same meaning? At that time the words in the blessing of the gods were the most important feature of the texts.<sup>54</sup> All these songs deal with the love of the deity for mankind. Such love is best expressed in metaphors, and the most obvious metaphors are erotic ones, as is evident everywhere in the world.<sup>55</sup>

### 30.5 The demise of goddesses

In the third millennium BC many more goddesses can be identified than in the period after 2000 BC.<sup>56</sup> Around 3000 BC, in the Uruk period, goddesses arranged all aspects of life for humans and animals, in particular ensuring fertility and reproduction and securing health and death. We know of Ninḫursag, Nintu and Gatumdug the mother and birth goddesses, Nisaba and Ninsud the grain goddesses, Ninsumun the livestock goddess, Gula the healer, and Ereškigal the goddess of death (Figures 51, 52). Their male counterparts were the god Enki, and

---

52 M. Stol, ‘Nanea’, *Dictionary of Deities and Demons* (1995) 1152–55.

53 M. Nissinen, ‘Song of Songs and Sacred Marriage’, in Nissinen, Uro, *Sacred Marriages*, 173–218. The Assyrian songs: p. 206–208.

54 Pongratz-Leisten, 55 f.

55 P. Lapinkivi in *Sacred Marriages*, 15.

56 T. Frymer-Kensky, ‘The marginalization of the goddesses’, in her *In the wake of the goddesses* (1992) 70–80.



**Fig. 51:** Vase dedicated to a goddess by the city-ruler Entemena. Flower buds sprout from her shoulders, she has spikes in her hair, and she holds the branch of a date palm. She resembles a goddess of vegetation, possibly Nisaba, the goddess of grain, who was no longer venerated after the Sumerian period. 2400 BC. Basalt; height 25 cm. *Vorderasiatisches Museum, Berlin.*

three additional celestial male gods, Sky, Sun and Moon.<sup>57</sup> After the Sumerian period we often see a god taking over the role of a goddess. Nabû followed Nisaba as the god of writing; Ninkasi the goddess of beer-brewing was succeeded by Siraš the god of must. The goddess of the art of incantation and the *primaeva* waters had her functions taken over by Enki/Ea. The function of the mother goddess was subsumed under those of Ištar and the goddess of medicine, Gula. She no longer played any role in the creation of mankind, which was then taken over by Ea.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>57</sup> P. Steinkeller in K. Watanabe, *Priests and officials in the Ancient Near East* (1999) 113–115. We follow him almost literally.

<sup>58</sup> M. Krebernik, ‘Muttergöttin’ § 6.1, *RIA VIII/7–8* (1997) 512.



**Fig. 52:** The mother goddess. The Greek letter omega on the left and the right of this figure represents her womb, and children about to be born squat underneath. Terracotta. Height 10 cm. *Iraq Museum, Baghdad.*

Some of the goddesses even changed sex and became known as male. Even so, in the Sumerian period there were a great many male gods and they were certainly the most important ones in the pantheon.<sup>59</sup> The only prominent goddesses were Ninḫursaga the mother goddess and Inanna the goddess of love. One of the reasons for this change was that a number of Sumerian cities with a goddess as their patron had disappeared.<sup>60</sup> W. Sallaberger sees more in it. He believes that the

<sup>59</sup> P. Michalowski, 'Round about Nidaba: on the early goddesses of Sumer', *CRRAI* 47/II (2002) 413–422.

<sup>60</sup> Thus P. Michalowski; also P. Steinkeller, who thinks of the disappearance of twin Sumerian capital cities, the one political and the other religious (p. 115).



**Fig. 53:** Gula, the goddess of healing, with her faithful dog. A cylinder seal showing the goddess standing with a beardless worshipper. Her Greek counterpart Asklepios was also accompanied by a dog. Gula and Ištar were among the few early goddesses still venerated after the Sumerian period. 700 BC. Cylinder seal. Quartz, sardonyx. 3,4 × 1,6 cm. *British Museum, London.*

world of the gods was portrayed as a reflection of human society. In the Sumerian period the focus was on the household (German *Haushalt* or Greek *oikos*) where the ruler and his wife were in control. There were extensive estates and relatively large businesses belonging to the wife of the city-ruler called ‘the house of the woman’. Nisaba fitted well into this picture as the goddess of writing and grain. But later it was the king alone who decided how to run the state.<sup>61</sup> T. Frymer-Kensky agrees with the view that the change occurs with the transition from small city-states to the larger nation. As a consequence the myth of the sacred marriage disappeared also.

Thus the later kings took part in a ritual that celebrated stability rather than fertility; order rather than union, monarchy rather than renewal. In such a ritual, women and goddesses could have no role other than as the mother to be deposed.<sup>62</sup>

Ištar, the goddess of love and war was an exception. She could be seen in the sky as Venus, goddess of the evening star, but also as the bearded god of the morning

<sup>61</sup> W. Sallaberger, ‘Pantheon A’, § 14, RIA X/3–4 (2004) 305–307.

<sup>62</sup> Frymer-Kensky, 76



star.<sup>63</sup> Over time Gula, the goddess of healing, became identified with her.<sup>64</sup> Gula is depicted on some boundary stones from the end of the second millennium as a well-endowed woman seated on a chair, but on cylinder seals from the first millennium she has become a slim woman standing erect (Figure 53).

---

**63** W. Heimpel, 'A catalog of Near Eastern Venus deities', *Syro-Mesopotamian Studies* 4/3 (1982) 14 f.

**64** S. Dalley, *Esther's revenge at Susa* (2007) 138 f.

## 31 The Middle Assyrian law-book about women

A collection of laws and regulations regarding women from the Middle Assyrian period deserves to be treated separately. This law-book consists of a series of clauses written on a well-preserved clay tablet. It was found beside a gate during the excavations on the city of Assur, which may have been the place where cases were examined and verdicts pronounced. The tablet is unfortunately damaged in parts. It is formatted with four columns on each side, and about a hundred lines in every column of finely written text (Figure 54).<sup>1</sup>

In about 1100 BC older ‘harem edicts’ had been collected by King Tiglath-Pileser I (see Chapter 24) and here also previous traditions about how the law applied to women have been deliberately assembled. This document could be taken as a tractate concerning women and the law, or what in German could be called a *Frauenspiegel*. But we do not find any abstract of principles to guide the law, which could not be expected from a Babylonian or Assyrian law-book. Rather the writers wished to put together the records of a number of different cases with the verdicts given at the time. Perhaps it was designed to concentrate people’s minds on the higher values of justice. Several particularly complex situations are described, so complex that special circumstances must have prevailed and dictated the verdict that was passed.<sup>2</sup>

Individual laws are separated from one another by a horizontal line on the clay tablet. To these sections a sequence of numbers has been given for ease of reference. The number of subjects covered is varied: theft (§§ 1–6); assault (§§ 7–11); sexual offences (§§ 12–24); marriage law (§§ 25–49); other criminal law (§§ 50–59). The text as it stands will have been compiled from older documents, as can be gauged from some aberrant writings and errors. Moreover, in referring to wedding gifts or payments in general we find inconsistent terminology.<sup>3</sup> All this points to different strata in the composition of the law-book. Common law, for which there

---

**1** For a translation with commentary see G. Cardascia, *Les lois assyriennes* (1969); for later translations see R. Borger in: *Rechtbücher* (TUAT I/1) (1982) 80–92; M. T. Roth, *Law collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor* (1995) 153–194, and subsequently revised in: M. W. Chavalas, *Women in the Ancient Near East* (2014) 158–170. For a penetrating study on the purpose and character of this law-book see J. Bottéro in *Annuaire 1966/1967*, École pratique des Hautes Études. IVe section: Sciences historiques et philologiques, 81–110, cf. *Annuaire 1967/1968*, 89–104. For photos see J. Marzahn, B. Salje, *Wiedererstehendes Assur. 100 Jahre deutsche Ausgrabungen in Assyrien* (2003) 95; the catalogue *Babylon. Wahrheit* (2008) 212 Abb. 142; 224 Kat. 138. Each of the columns is 32 cm high.

**2** Bottéro, *Annuaire 1966/1967*, 84 f.

**3** Bottéro, 86 f. (§§ 30–31).

are parallels in Babylonia and Israel, general regulations and actual situations and verdicts will have been used as sources.<sup>4</sup> Textual analysis shows that the last part of the document (§§ 42–59) is really a supplement to the primary text (§§ 1–41) inasmuch as it randomly returns to themes raised earlier and expands them.

The translations given here are those of Martha T. Roth. I thank her most warmly for allowing me to reproduce here her admirable text. When reading it is important to note whether a singular or plural verb form is used when a punishment is described. A singular verb meant that an individual, the injured party, had the right to carry out the punishment himself, but a plural verb meant that it was the responsibility of the community to administer justice. Law-books tended to curtail the right of the injured party to act. The frequently used extravagant phrase that ‘they prove the charges (against him) and find (him) guilty’ seems to be nothing more than a form of words. Others think that it was a case requiring careful argumentation.<sup>5</sup> Some of the laws are discussed extensively elsewhere in this book.

The first sections of the law-book deal with crimes committed by women.

§ 1 is concerned with a woman who steals property from a temple, and it is the deity of the temple who decides her punishment.<sup>6</sup>

§ 1. If a woman, either a wife-of-a-man or a daughter-of-a-man, should enter into a temple and steal something from the sanctuary, and it is discovered in her possession or they prove the charges against her and find her guilty: [they shall perform (?)] a divination (?), they shall inquire of the deity; they shall treat her as the deity instructs them.

In § 2 the normal principle of a family being corporately involved with a crime is suspended for the case of a woman who acts insultingly. She alone will have to face punishment with no claim being made on any other members of her close family. This law may reflect the notion that the woman was subservient. In ancient law it is ‘a heinous injustice’ for an inferior person to insult someone superior (*inuria atrox*, Gaius, Institutes III 225).<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Bottéro, 93–95.

<sup>5</sup> Bottéro, 94 f., 100; C. Locher, *Die Ehre einer Frau in Israel* (1986) 363 f.; S. Lafont, *Femmes*, 439 f. A revolutionary approach is found in R. Westbrook, ‘Evidentiary procedure in the Middle Assyrian laws’, JCS 55 (2003) 87–97, who states that the burden of proof is on the accuser who adduces evidence obtained rationally (with the verb *burru*) or supernaturally (with the verb *kunnu*).

<sup>6</sup> S. Lafont, *Femmes* (1999) 434–445, 475.

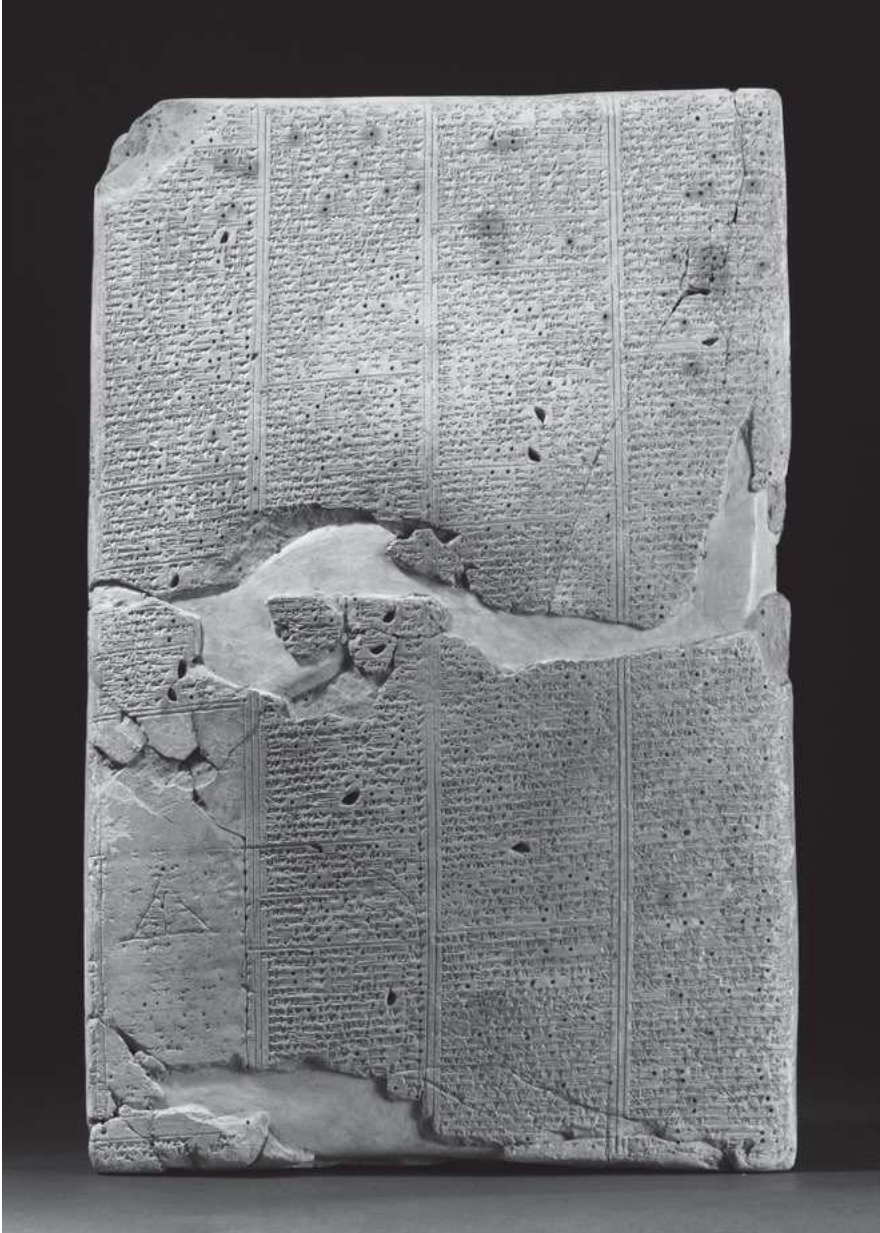
<sup>7</sup> Lafont, *Femmes*, 445–451, 475. According to her, ‘blasphemy’ means insulting the gods, but in practice how they did that is uncertain.



**Fig. 54:** The Middle Assyrian law-book Tablet A, the obverse and reverse sides.

Four columns on the obverse, with the first column on the left, and four columns on the reverse with the last column on the left. Rulings separate individual laws. Assur, 1100 BC. Fired clay.

Height 32 cm. *Vorderasiatisches Museum, Berlin*



§ 2. If a woman, either a wife-of-a-man or a daughter-of-a-man, should speak something disgraceful or utter a blasphemy: that woman bears responsibility for her offence; they shall have no claim against her husband, her sons, or her daughters.

Theft and receiving stolen goods was a well-known theme in law-books. § 3 prescribes the death penalty for a woman who steals goods belonging to her husband when he was indisposed or after his death, as well as for anyone to whom she passes them on. A lesser punishment is prescribed, but one identical for both parties, if her husband was in good health when the theft occurred. The innovation in this law (and in § 4) is that the punishment for the woman and the receiver of the stolen goods is equal.<sup>8</sup>

§ 3. If a man is ill or dead, and his wife should steal something from his house and give it either to a man or to a woman or to anyone else: they shall kill the wife of the man as well as the receivers (of the goods).

And if a wife-of-a-man, whose husband is healthy should steal from her husband's house and give it either to a man or to a woman or to anyone else: the man shall prove the charges against his wife and shall impose a punishment; furthermore, the receiver who received (the goods) from the wife of the man shall give (back) the stolen goods, and they shall impose a punishment on the receiver identical to that which the man imposed on his wife.

If the woman decides to pass on goods she has stolen to one of her slaves or slave-girls, § 4 shows that she can expect to have her ears cut off and the slave can expect to lose his or her nose as well as ears. But if the husband pardons his wife the slave will also be pardoned and what was stolen did not have to be returned. The second section of the law implies that the husband found no guilt in his wife or the slave.<sup>9</sup>

§ 4. If either a slave or a slave-woman should receive something from a wife-of-a-man: they shall cut off the slave's or slave-woman's nose and ears; they shall restore the stolen goods; the man shall cut off his wife's ears.

But if he releases his wife and does not cut off her ears, they shall not cut off (the nose and ears) of the slave or slave-woman and they shall not restore the stolen goods.

§ 5 moves to the situation where a woman has stolen something valuable from someone outside the family. This meant that there had to be some negotiation between the injured party and the woman's husband. We can see that cutting off the nose was a harsher punishment than cutting off the ears.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Lafont, *Femmes*, 305–309, 475f.

<sup>9</sup> Lafont, *Femmes*, 298–300, 476.

<sup>10</sup> Lafont, *Femmes*, 300–302, 476.

§ 5. If a wife-of-a-man should steal something with a value greater than 300 shekels of lead from the house of another man: the owner of the stolen goods shall take an oath, saying, 'If I incited her, saying, 'Commit a theft in my house (may I be struck down).'

If her husband agrees, he shall hand over the stolen goods and he shall ransom her; he shall cut off her ears.

If her husband does not agree to her ransom, the owner of the stolen goods shall take her and he shall cut off her nose.

If the woman decides to deposit allegedly stolen goods outside the family, the one who receives them is implicated in the crime according to § 6.<sup>11</sup>

§ 6. If a wife-of-a-man should place goods for safekeeping outside (of the house): the receiver of the goods shall bear liability for 'stolen property'.

We now move away from the subject of theft to crimes of violence, and § 7 is concerned with a woman who has violently attacked a man.<sup>12</sup>

§ 7. If a woman should lay a hand upon a man and they prove the charges against her: she shall pay 1,800 shekels of lead; they shall strike her 20 blows with rods.

§ 8 continues the theme of a woman attacking a man, and in this case she has damaged a man's testicle when protecting her husband from a violent attack. To understand this law better we should compare a similar Biblical law: 'When two men are fighting and the wife of one of them intervenes to drag her husband clear of his opponent, if she puts out her hand and catches hold of the man by the genitals, you must cut off her hand and show her no mercy' (Deuteronomy 25:11–12). The idea propounded here is that a woman should never do this, even in exceptional circumstances. She will always be punished for doing it and no sympathy is to be shown towards her. The Assyrian law is equally forthright. Her action is seen not just as an assault on the honour of the man but a threat to his potency for engendering children.<sup>13</sup>

§ 8. If a woman should crush a man's testicle during a quarrel: they shall cut off one of her fingers.

---

<sup>11</sup> Lafont, *Femmes*, 302–305, 477.

<sup>12</sup> Lafont, *Femmes*, 329 f., 477.

<sup>13</sup> Lafont, *Femmes*, 330–335, 477; S. M. Paul in: E. B. Firmage, *Religion and Law: Biblical-Judaic and Islamic perspectives* (1990) 335–339. For an opinion on the harm done to the other testis see J. Scurlock, B. R. Andersen, *Diagnoses in Assyrian and Babylonian medicine* (2005) 237, 10.160 (*erimu*, a 'mystery lesion').

And if a physician should bandage it but the second testicle then is affected along with it and becomes ..., or if she should crush the second testicle during the quarrel: they shall gouge out both her [...]-s.<sup>14</sup>

§9 turns to dealing with a man treating a woman with violence and is a natural sequel to the previous law.<sup>15</sup>

§9. If a man lays a hand upon a wife-of-a-man, behaves toward her like a bull, and they prove the charges against him and find him guilty: they shall cut off one of his fingers. If he should kiss her: they shall draw his lower lip across the blade (?) of an axe and cut it off.

§10 states that whether a man or a woman committed a murder both are treated equally when it comes to punishment.

§10. [If either] a man or a woman enters [a man's] house and kills [either a man] or a woman: [they shall hand over] the killers [to the head of the household]. If he so chooses, he shall kill them; or if he chooses to come to an accommodation, he shall take [their property]. And if there is [nothing of value to give from the house] of the killers, [he shall take] either a son [or a daughter ...].

No translation is possible of the fragments that remain of §11, but there is enough to show that it continues the theme of murder.

§§12–18 is a series of laws concerning a woman who has sex outside of marriage.<sup>16</sup> When deciding an appropriate punishment, what was relevant was the place where the offence occurred. §12 deals with rape in the open air and the woman is deemed to be innocent.<sup>17</sup>

§12. If a wife-of-a-man should walk along the main thoroughfare, and a man should seize her and say to her, 'I want to copulate with you!': she shall not consent but she shall protect herself.

Should he seize her by force and copulate with her — whether they discover him upon the wife of the man or witnesses later prove the charges against him that he copulated with the woman — they shall kill the man; there is no punishment for the woman.

<sup>14</sup> M. Roth suggests 'eyes' or 'breasts' as a possible restoration.

<sup>15</sup> Lafont, *Femmes*, 340–343, 477; L. Marti, NABU 2004/33.

<sup>16</sup> For more on adultery and rape see Chapters 10–11.

<sup>17</sup> M. Roth divides this section into two parts, making the grammatical clauses 'she shall not consent but she shall protect herself' as an apodosis to the first part. An alternative analysis is to keep the section united, and consider those grammatical clauses as the continuation of a complex protasis: 'If he should say ... (and) if she does not consent ... and if he should seize her ...' (G. Cardascia and R. Borger). Lafont, *Femmes*, 477 f.



§ 13 deals with an act of adultery in another man's house and prescribes the death penalty for both parties.

§ 13. If a wife-of-a-man should go out of her house and go to a man where he resides, and should he copulate with her knowing that she is the wife-of-a-man: they shall kill the man and the wife.

But if the act of adultery occurs in a public place a punishment chosen by the woman's husband will apply to both parties.

§ 14. If a man should copulate with a wife-of-a-man either in an inn or in the main thoroughfare, knowing that she is the wife-of-a-man: they shall treat the copulator as the man declares his wife is to be treated.

If he should copulate with her without knowing that she is the wife-of-a-man: the copulator is clear; the man shall prove the charges against his wife and he shall treat her as he wishes.

§ 15 prescribes violent punishment or even the death penalty when a husband discovers his wife committing adultery at home.<sup>18</sup>

§ 15. If a man should seize a man upon his wife and they prove the charges against him and find him guilty: they shall kill both of them; there is no liability for him.

If he seize and bring him before either the king or the judges, and they prove the charges against him and find him guilty: if the woman's husband kills his wife, then he shall also kill the man; if he cuts off his wife's nose, he shall turn the man into a eunuch and they shall lacerate his entire face. But if [he releases] his wife, he shall [release] the man.

§ 16 states that a woman who has instigated an adulterous affair will be punished according to her husband's discretion and the man will go free. But if she was an unwilling partner to the crime both parties receive the same punishment.

§ 16. If a man [should copulate] with the wife-of-a-man [... by] her invitation: there is no punishment for the man; the man (i.e., husband) shall impose whatever punishment he chooses upon his wife.

If he should copulate with her by force and they prove the charges against him and find him guilty: his punishment shall be identical to that of the wife of the man.

---

<sup>18</sup> For more on this subject see Chapter 10. There, instead of M. Roth's 'If he seize and bring him ...' we suggested 'If they both (dual) are caught and brought ...'. Cf. Lafont, *Femmes*, 69–72, 478 f.

It was obviously important when making any allegation of adultery to be able to substantiate the truth of that allegation with witnesses. In § 17 it is agreed that there are no witnesses so the god of the flowing river becomes the judge.<sup>19</sup>

§ 17. If a man should say to a man, 'Everyone always copulates with your wife!' but there are no witnesses: they shall draw up a binding agreement, they shall undergo the divine River Ordeal.

But in § 18 we read of someone who claimed to be able to prove the allegation but failed to do so. That resulted in him suffering physical punishment, an obligation to do forced labour, public humiliation by being shaved, and an obligation to pay an exorbitant fine.

§ 18. If a man says to his comrade, either in private or in a public quarrel, 'Everyone always copulates with your wife,' and further, 'I can prove the charges,' but he is unable to prove the charges and does not prove the charges: they shall strike that man 40 blows with rods, he shall perform the king's service for one full month, they shall shave him, and he shall pay 3,600 shekels of lead.

§ 19 is a natural sequel to the previous law but deals with an allegation of homosexuality.<sup>20</sup>

§ 19. If a man in private spreads rumors about his comrade, saying, 'Everyone always copulates with him,' or in a quarrel before people says to him, 'Everyone always copulates with you,' and further, 'I can prove the charges against you,' but he is unable to prove the charges and does not prove the charges: they shall strike that man 50 blows with rods, he shall perform the king's service for one full month, they shall shave him, and he shall pay 3,600 shekels of lead.

When there is proof that a man has committed a homosexual act § 20 states that he will be made to suffer as he had made others suffer.

§ 20. If a man copulates with his comrade and they prove the charges against him and find him guilty, they shall copulate with him and they shall turn him into a eunuch.

<sup>19</sup> Lafont, *Femmes*, 272f., 479. On §§ 17–18: C. Locher, *Die Ehre einer Frau in Israel* (1986) 356–365.

<sup>20</sup> Locher, *Die Ehre einer Frau*, 366–372; J. S. Cooper in T. Abusch, *Riches hidden in secret places* (= *Studies Th. Jacobsen*) (2002) 82–85. The Babylonians (just like the Greeks) considered the passive role in a homosexual relationship as scandalous. In Akkadian that partner was called an *aḫurrû*, corresponding to the English word 'catamite'. That word is derived from Latin *Catamitus*, which in turn was derived from *Ganymede*, the beautiful young shepherd lad whom Zeus could not resist. See A. R. George, *RA* 85 (1991) 160; R. Westbrook, *JCS* 55 (2003) 93f. J. S. Cooper assumes that they were male prostitutes.

§ 21 returns to the subject of an act violence against a woman. One that causes a miscarriage is often featured in law-books.<sup>21</sup>

§ 21. If a man strikes a daughter-of-a-man and thereby causes her to abort her fetus, and they prove the charges against him and find him guilty: he shall pay 9,000 shekels of lead, they shall strike him 50 blows with rods, he shall perform the king's service for one full month.

§ 22 ensures that a traveller should be absolutely sure that any woman he takes as a companion for his journey is not married if he wishes to avoid punishment.

§ 22. If another man — neither her father, nor her brother, nor her son — should arrange to have a wife-of-a-man travel with him: then he shall swear an oath to the effect that he did not know that she is the wife-of-a-man and he shall pay 7,200 shekels of lead to the woman's husband.

If [he knows that she is the wife-of-a-man]: he shall pay damages and he shall swear, saying, 'If I copulated with her (may I be struck down).'

But if the wife-of-a-man should declare, 'He did copulate with me,' [since]<sup>22</sup> the man has paid damages to the man, he shall undergo the divine River Ordeal; there is no binding agreement.

If he should refuse to undergo the divine River Ordeal, they shall treat him as the woman's husband treats his wife.

§ 23 deals with complications that arose when a wife invites another man's wife into her house to have sex with a man.<sup>23</sup>

§ 23. If a wife-of-a-man should take a wife-of-a-man into her house and give her to a man for purposes of copulation, and the man knows that she is a wife-of-a-man: they shall treat him as one who has copulated with a wife-of-a-man, and they shall treat the procuress just as the woman's husband treats his wife the copulator.

And if the woman's husband intends to do nothing to his wife the copulator: they shall do nothing to the copulator or to the procuress; they shall release them.

But if the wife-of-a-man does not know (what was intended) but the woman who takes her into her house brings the man in to her by deceit (?), and he then copulates with her — if, as soon as she leaves the house, she should declare that she has been the victim of copulation: they shall release the woman, she is clear; they shall kill the copulator and the procuress.

But if the woman should not so declare: the man shall impose whatever punishment on his wife he wishes; they shall kill the copulator and the procuress.

<sup>21</sup> Bottéro, *Annuaire 1966/1967*, 95–97, compares § 21 with the Laws of Hammurabi § 209.

<sup>22</sup> Instead of restoring 'since' at this point Cardascia prefers 'although'.

<sup>23</sup> G. Ries, 'Kuppelei', *RIA VI/5–6* (1983) 364–366.

§ 24 makes it an offence for a wife to offer houseroom to another man's wife who wishes to separate from him. We know too little about the society of that time to understand this law as we would like. The 'Assyrian' seems to be viewed as a second-rate citizen, and the fine of one-third (or 'triple') is evidently a fixed penalty.<sup>24</sup>

§ 24. If a wife-of-a-man should withdraw herself from her husband and enter into the house of an Assyrian man, either in that city or in any of the nearby towns, to a house which he assigns to her, residing with the mistress of the household, staying overnight three or four nights, and the householder is not aware that a wife-of-a-man is residing in his house, and later that woman is seized: the householder whose wife withdrew herself from him shall [mutilate] his wife and [not] take her back; they shall cut off the ears of the wife of the man with whom his wife resided.

If he pleases: her husband shall give 12,600 shekels of lead as her value, and, if he pleases, he shall take back his wife.

And if the householder knows that it is a wife-of-a-man who is residing in his house with his wife: he shall give 'triple.' But if he should deny (that he knew of her status): he shall declare, 'I did not know'; they shall undergo the divine River Ordeal. And if the man in whose house the wife-of-a-man resided should refuse the divine River Ordeal: he shall give 'triple.'

If it is the man whose wife withdrew herself from him who should refuse the divine River Ordeal: he is clear, he shall bear the expenses of the divine River Ordeal.

And if the man whose wife withdrew herself from him does not mutilate his wife: he shall take back his wife; no sanctions are imposed.

Unusual situations could arise about gifts that were given on the occasion of an inchoative marriage, especially if circumstances meant that the marriage gifts could be reclaimed. § 27 states that a husband could reclaim those gifts if his wife continued to live at home with her father.<sup>25</sup> § 25 and § 26 deals with problems of inheritance for such a wife when her husband dies. The same situation occurs again in §§ 30–32.

§ 25. If there is a woman residing in her own father's house and her husband is dead, her husband's brothers have not yet divided their inheritance, and she has no son, (as for) whatever valuables her husband bestowed upon her that are not missing: her husband's brothers who have not yet divided their inheritance shares shall take.

As for the rest (of the property): they shall resort to a verdict by the gods, they shall provide proof, and they shall take; they shall not be seized for the divine River Ordeal or the oath.

§ 26. If there is a woman residing in her own father's house and her husband is dead, (as for) whatever valuables her husband bestowed upon her: if there are sons of her husband, they shall take; if there are no sons of her husband, she herself shall take.

<sup>24</sup> Lafont, *Femmes*, 391–396.

<sup>25</sup> G. Cardascia, *Les lois assyriennes* (1969) 64, 154.

§ 27. If a woman is residing in her own father's house and her husband) visits her regularly: he himself shall take any marriage settlement (*nudunnû*) which he, her husband, gave to her; he shall have no claim to anything belonging to her father's house.

§ 28 deals with the rights of inheritance for the child of a widow whose husband had died while she was still pregnant and who had decided to marry another man into whose household that child was born, but her second husband had not formally adopted the child. The rights of the child of that widow needed to be safeguarded.<sup>26</sup>

§ 28. If a widow should enter the house of a man and she is carrying her (dead husband's) posthumous son with her, he grows up in the house of the man who took her (in marriage), but no tablet of his sonship is written: he will not take an inheritance share from the estate of the one who raised him and he will not be responsible for (its) debts; he shall take an inheritance share from the estate of his begetter in accordance with his portion.

§ 29 states that any gift a bride received for her sons should not be passed on to her father-in-law's sons.

§ 29. If a woman should enter the house of her husband: her dowry and whatever she brings with her from her father's house, and also whatever her father-in-law gave her upon her entering, are clear for her sons; the sons of her father-in-law shall have no valid claim. But if her husband takes control (?) of her: he shall give it to whichever of his sons he wishes.

§ 30–31 are two laws which concern the practice known as levirate marriage (see Chapter 14).

§ 30. If a father should bring the ceremonial marriage prestation and present <the bridal gift><sup>27</sup> to the house of the father-in-law of his son, and the woman is not (yet) given to his son, and another son of his, whose wife was residing in her father's house, is dead: he shall give the wife of his deceased son into marriage to his second (younger) son, to whose father-in-law's house he has presented (the bridal gift).

(Even) if the master of the daughter who is (also?) in receipt of the bridal gift does not agree to give his daughter (to the younger son): if the father who presented the bridal gift so pleases, he shall take his daughter-in-law and give her to his (younger) son. Or if he so pleases, as much as he presented, whether lead, silver, gold, or anything not edible, he shall take (back) in the quantities originally given; but he shall have no claim to anything edible.

<sup>26</sup> For Middle Assyrian widows (here and in §§ 33–35) see C. Wilcke, 'Familiengründung', 303–306.

<sup>27</sup> 'Bring the ceremonial marriage prestation and present <the bridal gift>': Akkadian *bibla itta-bal* <*zubullâ*> *izzibil*.

§ 31. If a man should present the bridal gift to the house of his father-in-law, and his wife is dead, but there are (other living) daughters of his father-in-law: if he so pleases, he shall take (in marriage) a daughter of his father-in-law in lieu of his deceased wife. Or if he so pleases, he shall take (back) the silver that he gave; they shall not give (back) to him grain, sheep, or anything edible; he shall receive only the silver.

In § 32 the subject of the wife who continues to live in her father's house is raised again, and makes clear that she is still responsible for her husband's debts after his death.

§ 32. If a woman is residing in the house of her own father and her [...] <sup>28</sup> is given, whether she is taken or not taken into the house of her father-in-law: she shall be responsible for her husband's debts, transgression, or punishment.

§ 33 makes every effort to secure a widow's welfare, even if she has no father-in-law and no sons to protect her.

§ 33. If a woman is residing in the house of her own father, her husband is dead, and she has sons: [... (large gap)]; or [if he so pleases], he shall give her into marriage (*aḥuzzatu*) to her father-in-law.

If her husband and her father-in-law are both dead, and she has no son: she is a widow; she shall go wherever she pleases.

§ 34 makes it clear that even without a binding agreement a widow who lives with a man for two years is to be considered his wife.

§ 34. If a man should take (in marriage) a widow, her binding agreement is not concluded, (but) she resides in his house for two years: she is a wife; she shall not leave.

§ 35 concerns a widow who moved into another man's house and brought her possessions with her. Similarly if a man moved into a widow's house he would also bring his possessions with him.

§ 35. If a widow should enter into the house of a man: whatever she brings with her all belongs to her (second) husband.

And if a man should enter (the house of) a woman: whatever he brings with him all belongs to the woman.

---

**28** Here (§ 32) Cardascia restores *nudunnû* 'marriage settlement', and refers to 'it', not 'she', 'being taken or not taken', but grammatically *nudunnû leqiat* would be irregular.

§ 36 concerns a wife whose husband had left her for some reason or other, but he did not return and she found herself deserted.

§ 36. If a woman either is residing in her father's house or her husband settles her in a house elsewhere, and her husband then travels abroad but does not leave her any oil, wool, clothing, or provisions, or anything else, and sends her no provisions from abroad: that woman shall remain for her husband for five years; she shall not reside with a (second) husband.

If she has sons: they<sup>29</sup> shall be hired out and provide for their own sustenance; the woman shall wait for her husband, she shall not reside with a (second) husband.

If she has no sons: she shall wait for her husband for five years; at the onset of (?) six years, she shall reside with the husband of her choice; her (first) husband, upon returning, shall have no valid claim to her; she is clear for her latter husband.

If he is delayed beyond the five years but is not detained of his own intention, whether because a ... seized him and he fled or because he was falsely arrested and was detained: upon returning he shall so prove, he shall give a woman comparable to his wife and he shall take his wife.

And if the king should send him to another country and he is delayed beyond the five years: his wife shall wait for him; she shall not go to reside with a (second) husband.

And if she should reside with a (second) husband before five years and should she give birth: because she did not wait in accordance with the agreement but was taken (in marriage), her (first) husband, upon returning, shall take her and also her offspring.

While in the previous section there was no implication that the husband had intended to abandon his wife, in § 37–38 he apparently wanted the separation to be permanent

§ 37. If a man intends to divorce<sup>30</sup> his wife: if it is his wish, he shall give her something; if it is not his wish, he shall not give her anything, and she shall leave empty-handed.<sup>31</sup>

§ 38. If a woman is residing in her own father's house and her husband divorces her: he shall take the valuables which he himself bestowed upon her; he shall have no claim to the bridewealth which he brought, it is clear for the woman.

§ 39 shows that a woman who has been made a pledge may be given away in marriage.

§ 39. If a man should give to a husband someone who is not his own daughter, (and) if previously her father had been in debt and she had been made to reside as a pledge: should a

---

<sup>29</sup> The sentence 'they shall be hired out and provide for their own sustenance' may not begin the apodosis but continue the protasis, allowing the apodosis to begin with 'the woman shall wait ...'; see Cardascia and Borger, as opposed to CAD A/1 148b.

<sup>30</sup> Instead of M. Roth's 'a man intends to divorce' an alternative translation would be 'a man leaves'.

<sup>31</sup> For further details see Chapter 9.

prior creditor come forward, he shall receive in full the value of the woman from the giver of the woman (in marriage); if he has nothing to give, he shall take the giver.  
 But if she had been saved from a catastrophe<sup>32</sup>: she is clear for the one who saved her.  
 And if the one who takes (in marriage) the woman either causes a tablet to be ... for him or they have a claim in place against him: he shall [...] the value of the woman, and the giver [...].<sup>33</sup>

§40 concerns veiling. It begins in the style of a regulation which was already accepted and only later are various possible situations described in conditional clauses. The ‘veiled prostitute’ is the first of many other classes of women to be mentioned, which is why it is supposed that the words ‘Assyrian’ and ‘widows’ should be added at the beginning.<sup>34</sup>

§ 40. A wife-of-a-man, or [widows], or [Assyrian] women who go out into the main thoroughfare [shall not have] their heads [bare].

Daughters of a man [... with] either a ...-cloth or garments or [...] shall be veiled, [...] their heads [... (gap) ...] When they go about [...] in the main thoroughfare during the daytime, they shall veil themselves.

A concubine who goes about in the main thoroughfare with her mistress is to be veiled.

A *qadištu*-priestess whom a husband has taken (in marriage) is to be veiled in the main thoroughfare, but one whom a husband has not taken (in marriage) is to have her head bare in the main thoroughfare, she shall not veil herself.

A prostitute shall not veil herself, her head shall be bare.

Whoever sees a veiled prostitute shall seize her, secure witnesses, and bring her to the palace entrance. They shall not take her jewelry; he who has seized her shall take her clothing; they shall strike her 50 blows with rods; they shall pour hot pitch over her head.

And if a man should see a veiled prostitute and release her and not bring her to the palace entrance: they shall strike that man 50 blows with rods; the one who informs against him shall take his clothing; they shall pierce his ears, thread (them) on a cord, tie (it) at his back; he shall perform the king’s service for one full month.

Slave-women shall not veil themselves, and he who should see a veiled slave-woman shall seize her and bring her to the palace entrance: they shall cut off her ears; he who seizes her shall take her clothing.

If a man should see a veiled slave-woman but release her, not seize her, not bring her to the palace entrance, and they then prove the charges against him and find him guilty: they

<sup>32</sup> M. Roth suggests that she may have been helped to avoid this ‘catastrophe’ when someone gave her something ‘in times of famine or crisis with the intention of saving her life’ (in Chavalas 173 note 33). K. R. Veenhof: ‘But if she has been badly provided for, she is free from her provider’; *Festschrift L. Matouš* II (1978) 294. Another attempt to explain this passage was made by M.-J. Aynard, J.-M. Durand, *Assur* 3/1 (July 1980) 24 n. 36.

<sup>33</sup> Cardascia and Borger prefer ‘he shall [pay] the value of the woman, and the giver [shall be acquitted]’.

<sup>34</sup> See further Chapters 1 and 22; see also Bottéro, 86; Lafont, *Femmes*, 461–463.



shall strike him 50 blows with rods; they shall pierce his ears, thread (them) on a cord, tie (it) at his back. The one who informs against him shall take his garments. He shall perform the king's service for one full month.

§ 41 shows that a husband could veil his concubine like a wife.

§ 41. If a man would veil his concubine, he shall assemble five or six of his comrades, he shall veil her in their presence, he shall declare, 'She is my wife': she is his wife.

A concubine who is not veiled in the presence of the people, whose husband did not declare, 'She is my wife': she is not a wife, she is indeed a concubine.

If a man is dead and there are no sons of his veiled wife: the sons of concubines are indeed sons; they shall take the inheritance share.

At this point what appears to be the second part of the law-book begins. What follows can be seen as supplementing the preceding laws. §§ 42–43 discuss restitution after the breaking off of a betrothal, and as such relate to §§ 30–31.<sup>35</sup>

§ 42. If a man pours oil on the head of a daughter-of-a-man on the occasion of a holiday, or brings dishes on the occasion of a banquet: they shall not make restoration (of gifts given).

§ 43. If a man either pours oil on the head or brings (provisions) for the banquet, (and) the son to whom he assigned the wife either dies or flees: he shall give her (in marriage) to whichever of his remaining sons he wishes, from the oldest to the youngest of at least ten years of age.

If the father is dead and the son to whom he assigned the wife is also dead, and there is a son of the deceased son who is at least ten years old: he shall take her (in marriage).

If the sons of the (dead) son are less than ten years old: if the father of the daughter wishes, he shall give his daughter (in marriage to one of them); or if he wishes he shall make a restitution (of gifts given).

If there is no son: he shall return as much as he received, precious stones or anything not edible, in its full amount; but he shall not return anything edible.

§ 44 returns to the person who was the subject of a pledge, first raised in § 39.

§ 44. If a male Assyrian or if a female Assyrian who is residing in the house of a man as a pledge for a debt for as much as his value has been taken for the full value:<sup>36</sup> he may whip (the pledge), pluck out (the pledge's) hair, (or) mutilate or pierce (the pledge's) ears.

<sup>35</sup> For veiling see Chapter 1.

<sup>36</sup> K. R. Veenhof: i.e., who has been definitely acquired by his creditor; *Festschrift L. Matouš II* (1978) 294 f.

§45 returns to the problems raised for a woman when her husband was captured by an enemy, a well-known theme in law-books. The wife who finds herself deserted was raised earlier in §36.<sup>37</sup>

§45. If a woman is given (in marriage) and the enemy takes her husband prisoner, and she has neither father-in-law nor son: she shall remain for her husband for two years.

During these two years if she has no provisions, she shall come forward and so declare; if she is a citizen dependent upon the palace: her [...] shall provide for her and she shall do work for him.

[If she is a wife] of a *hupšū*-soldier: [...] shall provide for her [and she shall do work for him]. And [if she is a wife-of-a-man whose] field and [house ...], she shall come forward [and declare before the judges], ‘[I have nothing] to eat.’ The judges shall question the mayor and the noblemen of the city; they shall give to her, in accordance with the going rate of a field in that city, a field and house for her provisioning for two years; she shall be resident (in that house) and they shall write a tablet for her. She shall allow two full years to pass, and then she may reside with the husband of her own choice. They shall write a tablet for her as for a widow.

If later on her lost husband should return to the country: he shall take back his wife who is taken (in marriage) outside the family; he shall have no claim to the sons she bore to her later husband; her later husband indeed shall take them. The field and house that she gave for full price outside the family for her provisioning, if it is not entered into the royal holdings (?): he shall give as much as was given, and he shall take it back.

And if he should not return but dies in another country: the king shall give his field and house wherever he chooses to give.

§46 returns to the responsibility of her sons to care for their widowed mother, a subject raised in §33. The reference to a bride (or according to M. Roth a ‘daughter-in-law’) means a woman who married but is still without children.<sup>38</sup>

§46. If a woman whose husband is dead does not leave her house upon the death of her husband, if her husband did not deed her anything in writing: she shall reside in the house of (one of) her sons, wherever she chooses; her husband’s sons shall provide for her, they shall draw up an agreement to supply her with provisions and drink as for a daughter-in-law whom they love.

If she is a second (wife)<sup>39</sup> and has no sons of her own: she shall reside with one (of her husband’s sons) and they shall provide for her in common.

<sup>37</sup> The latest interpretation of this section was given by S. Lafont in E. Bourzanel, *Les féodalités* (1998) 580–584.

<sup>38</sup> See further Chapter 13.

<sup>39</sup> M. Roth translates *urkītu* as ‘a second (wife)’; see also Cardascia and CAD A/2 287a. Borger suggests that ‘a later wife’ is a wife the man married later, perhaps after the death of the first wife.

If she (is a second wife and) does have sons, and the sons of the first (wife) do not agree to provide for her: she shall reside in the house of her own sons, wherever she chooses; her own sons shall provide for her, and she shall do service for them.

And if there is among her husband's sons one who intends to take her (in marriage): [...] shall not provide for her.<sup>40</sup>

§ 47 introduces sorcery as a new subject. It was more often a woman than a man who was accused of sorcery.<sup>41</sup> The general rule of law was that sorcery had to be punished by death, and here it is stated that all means possible must be used to prove the sorcery.

§ 47. If either a man or a woman should perform witchcraft and they (the paraphernalia) are found in their possession, and they prove the charges against them and find them guilty: they shall kill the performer of witchcraft.

A man who heard from an eyewitness to the witchcraft that he witnessed the performance of the witchcraft – (an eyewitness meaning one) who said to him: 'I myself saw it' – the hearsay-witness shall go and inform the king.

If the eyewitness should recant what he reports to the king: he (the hearsay-witness) shall declare before the divine Bull-the-Son-of-the-Sun-God, 'If he did not say it to me (may I be struck down)'; he is clear. The king shall interrogate as he sees fit the eyewitness who spoke and then recanted and he shall investigate his matter. An exorcist shall have the man make a declaration on a day when he is purified and then he himself shall declare as follows, 'No one shall release you (plural) from the oath you swore by the king and by his son; you are bound by oath to the stipulations of the agreement to which you swore by the king and by his son.'

§ 48 can be linked with § 44, both of which resume the theme of § 39 in the first part of the law-book. The permission of the family was required if a woman who had been pledged was to be given in marriage.

§ 48. If a man <wants to give in marriage> his debtor's daughter who is residing in his house as a pledge: he shall ask her father<sup>42</sup> and he shall give her to a husband.

If her father does not agree: he shall not give her.

If her father is dead: he shall ask one of her brothers and the latter shall report to her (other) brothers.

If a brother declares, 'I will redeem my sister within one full month' but if he should not redeem her within one full month: the creditor, if he so pleases, shall clear her of encumbrances and give her to a husband; [...] according to [...] he shall give her [...].

---

**40** In the first edition of her translation of the laws (Roth 1995, 172) M. Roth has 'one (...) who is willing to marry her, [it is he who shall provide for her; her own sons] shall not provide for her', similar to Cardascia and Borger.

**41** See further Chapter 19.

**42** The text is not correct.

Very little of the badly damaged § 49 can be translated.

§ 49. [...] like a brother [...]. And if the prostitute is dead: because (?) her brothers declare, ... they shall divide shares [with (?)] the brothers of their mother (?).

The last laws on the tablet can be seen as supplementary to the crimes covered earlier, especially in §§ 1–11. §§ 50–53 raise again the consequences of an act of violence which caused a miscarriage, a theme introduced earlier in § 21.<sup>43</sup>

§ 50. [If a man] strikes [a wife-of-a-man and causes her to abort her fetus, ...]: a wife-of-a-man who [...] and they shall treat him as [he treats] her; he shall make full payment of a life for her fetus.

And if that woman dies: they shall kill the man, he shall make full payment of a life for her fetus.

And if there is no son of the husband of that woman, and his wife whom he struck aborted her fetus: they shall kill the striker for the sake of her fetus.

If her fetus was a female: he shall make full payment of a life only.<sup>44</sup>

§ 51. If a man strikes a wife-of-a-man who does not raise (her children) and causes her to abort her fetus: it is a punishable offense; he shall give 7,200 shekels of lead.

§ 52. If a man strikes a prostitute and causes her to abort her fetus: they shall assess him blow for blow; he shall make full payment of a life.

§ 53. If a woman aborts her fetus by her own action and they then prove the charges against her and find her guilty: they shall impale her; they shall not bury her.

If she dies as a result of aborting her fetus: they shall impale her; they shall not bury her.

If they should [conceal] that woman because she aborted her fetus [...].

The only legible word in § 54 is ‘slave-women’ so it may belong to the theme of what has preceded or what follows in §§ 55–56. These laws return to the theme of rape, raised earlier in § 12 and § 16. § 55 concerns a virgin who is raped, and § 56 one who is complicit to having sex with a man.<sup>45</sup>

§ 55. If a man forcibly seizes and rapes a maiden who is residing in her father’s house, [...] who is not spoken for (?),<sup>46</sup> whose [womb (?)] is not opened, who is not taken (in marriage), and against whose father’s house there is no outstanding claim — whether (the rape occurs) within the city, or in the countryside, or at night, whether in the main thoroughfare, or in a

<sup>43</sup> For § 50 and § 52 see Lafont, *Femmes*, 366–370, 482.

<sup>44</sup> Cardascia and Lafont translated the suffix *-ma* as ‘nevertheless’, but in § 31 it also means ‘only’.

<sup>45</sup> See further Chapter 11. For § 55 see C. Locher, *Die Ehre einer Frau in Israel* (1986) 128–154; E. Otto, *ZAW* 105 (1993) 153–165; Lafont, *Femmes*, 145–157, 483; for § 56 see Locher, 155; Lafont, *Femmes*, 121–131, 483 f.

<sup>46</sup> B. Landsberger translated, ‘[whose body] had not (yet) become unclean’, which is accepted by W. R. Mayer, *Or. NS* 81 (2012) 99, on *urrušu* v. in the CAD.

granary, or during the city festival: the father of the maiden shall take the wife of the copulator of the maiden and give her over to be raped; he shall not return her to her husband, he shall take her (for himself). The father shall give his daughter, she who is the victim of the copulation, to her copulator into marriage.

If he (the copulator) has no wife: the copulator shall give ‘triple’ the silver as the value of the maiden to her father; her copulator shall take her (in marriage); he shall not reject (?) her.

If the father does not desire it so: he shall accept ‘triple’ silver for the maiden, and he shall give his daughter (in marriage) to whomever he chooses.

§ 56. If a maiden should willingly give herself to a man: the man shall so swear; they shall have no claim to his wife; the copulator shall give ‘triple’ the silver as the value of the maiden; the father shall treat his daughter as he chooses.

§§ 57–59, though fragmentary, are clearly formulated in the style of regulations, in the same way as the law about veiling began in § 40. It seems to be a list of legitimate punishments for women and makes a conclusion to this law-book. They may limit the severity of the punishments a husband may administer whenever the phrase ‘as he wishes’ is used. The ‘tablet’ refers to the first part of the lawbook, §§ 1–41.

§ 57. Whether it is a beating or [... for] a wife-of-a-man [... that is] written on the tablet [...].

§ 58. For all punishments[...] cutting off [...] and ... [...].

§ 59. In addition to the punishments for [a wife-of-a-man] that are [written] on the tablet, a man may [whip] his wife, pluck out her hair, mutilate her ears, or strike her; it bears no offence.

The last four paragraphs on the tablet have been erased, before the concluding colophon giving the date: ‘Day 2 of Month II. The official for the year was Saggi’u.’

It will be useful to look at this collection of laws as a whole. On the one hand, some scholars have criticised the laws for their negativity. Applying the *ius talionis*, ‘eye for eye, tooth for tooth’ is unquestionably cruel, and there are other cases where the physical punishment mirrors the original offence. The offender will be treated with extreme severity and become subject to extraordinarily high fines. That a man could punish a woman so harshly according to the last laws shows that women were totally subjugated.<sup>47</sup> On the other hand, others see the *ius talionis* as a straightforward objective standard, a payment in one’s own coin, giving tit for tat, a step forward for ancient law givers. While the total subjugation of the woman is evident in the whole document, we have to remember that it is the product of a patriarchal society where that was the norm. It has to be remem-

---

<sup>47</sup> Bottéro, *Annuaire 1966/1967*, 98 f.

bered that the Assyrians more than other nations were famed for their cruelty. The most extreme humiliation of a woman is the drastic requirement of obliging the wife of a convicted rapist to submit herself to the same crime (§ 55), but that punishment was essentially based on *ius talionis*. We find the same principle applied to family dependants in several of the earlier laws of Hammurabi: a man who causes a miscarriage and the death of the woman has to have his own daughter killed (§ 210); the builder of a new house which collapses causing the death of the owner's son has to have his own son killed (§ 210); a creditor who has seized a person to secure the debt but that person dies because of the creditor's ill-treatment shall also have his own son killed (§ 116).

G. Cardascia, a professional lawyer, detects four principles underlying these laws: only the guilty were punished (*la responsabilité pénale est individuelle*); the perpetrator is guilty since he knew what he was doing (*la responsabilité pénale est liée à une intention délictueuse*); applying *ius talionis* and letting the physical punishment mirror the crime are objective judgements (*l'adaptation objective de la peine au délit*); the perpetrator of the crime and the accomplice are given the same punishment (*culpabilité égale, peine égale*).<sup>48</sup> It should be noted regarding the first principle that the impudent woman is punished alone and does not benefit from having her family share the responsibility for her crime (§ 2). Conversely the wife of the rapist shares the solidarity of her family and is therefore punished by being raped (§ 55). Both women were abandoned to endure their punishments alone.

---

<sup>48</sup> G. Cardascia, 'Les valeurs morales dans le droit assyrien' (1976), reprinted in *Hommage à Guillaume Cardascia* (= Méditerranées 3) (1995) 161–170; see especially 166–169. When he speaks of 'un musée juridique des horreurs' (p. 170) he is not characterising the law-book, and C. Saporetto is wrong on two occasions to ascribe this opinion to him.

## 32 The value placed on women

As we approach the end of our book our readers, both women and men, will have been left with an abundant array of impressions. He may have hoped to find a clear conclusion, and she may have already drawn one for herself. Both will have realised that a woman's life was not an easy one. So this is the place to advance the view of the Babylonians themselves, which means the views of Babylonian men, because we scarcely hear anything from the women.

We have regularly quoted proverbs which always refer to women. Some but not all of them include traditional wisdom. Often they are rather to be seen as pointed utterances or brief anecdotes of an individual displaying his originality. A modern writer, in her book documenting worldwide cultural opinions about women, presents this 'Sumerian' wisdom in an unflattering light.<sup>1</sup> The Babylonian handbook about the physiognomy of women (see Chapter 22) has a passage where good and bad characteristics are distinguished.

She is a troublemaker. She binds together. She has become nubile and is a wastrel. She has become nubile and is honest.<sup>2</sup>

### 32.1 Positive views

We begin with some kindly remarks. In the Gilgamesh Epic the women the hero encounters all help him and advise him in a friendly way. First we have the prostitute who introduced his friend Enkidu into civilised behaviour. Then there was his mother Ninsun (Ninsun), and the innkeeper's wife Siduri on the edge of the world, and the unnamed wives of the scorpion man and of Utanapištim who survived the Great Flood.<sup>3</sup> These women were clearly sensible and wise. In two Sumerian folk tales, a king confronted with a problem asked a woman of the palace to solve it.<sup>4</sup> Older women in particular were regarded as wise, since the

---

1 Mineke Schipper, *Never trust a woman with big feet. Worldwide wisdom about women* (2003) 421, under 'Sumerian'. I could not trace the references she quotes on p. 2 (and 387), 34, 268, 282. A selection of such Sumerian and Akkadian proverbs is given in M. W. Chavalas, *Women in the Ancient Near East* (2014) 60–64, 82–91.

2 B. Böck, *Die babylonisch-assyrische Morphoskopie* (2000) 153:2–6; TUAT NF 4 (2008) 41. For a discussion see J. S. Cooper, CRRAI 47/I (2002) 108.

3 R. Harris, 'Images of women in the Gilgamesh Epic', *Studies W.L. Moran* (1990) 219–230.

4 B. Alster, JCS 43–45 (1991–93) 27 n. 4, 29b; E. Lipinski, 'The king's arbitration in Ancient Near Eastern folk-tales', in: K. Hecker, W. Sommerfeld, *Keilschriftliche Literaturen* (CRRAI 32) (1986) 137–142.

Sumerian word for ‘old woman’ carries such overtones. They are the ones who offer advice in the myths,<sup>5</sup> and they were known to possess gifts of prophecy, as we saw in Chapter 28.

Women were thought to have more compassion than men. We noticed at the end of our discussion on intercession by women in Chapter 29 that the goddess Nungal in a myth showed kindness as warden of the prison. Intercession was a typical feature of a Babylonian woman’s behaviour. A man addressing a letter to ‘my mistress’ draws her attention to ‘the pity of women’ he had expected her to show him and reproaches her for her harshness.

You did not think back to the one day that you encouraged me and exerted yourself for me.  
You did not show the pity of women to me.<sup>6</sup>

Showing compassion was clearly regarded as a feminine quality. In Akkadian the word for ‘pity’ is *rēmu*, cognate with Hebrew *rēhēm*, words which in both languages derive from ‘womb’.<sup>7</sup> In New Testament Greek it is almost always given its literal Semitic equivalent, *splanchna*, ‘entrails’.

Women were also known for showing anxiety. Many women in Mari expressed their worries in letters about the dangers faced by their warfaring men.<sup>8</sup> Adad-duri, the queen mother, told the king of a priest who dreamt that a goddess had declared that the king had no reason to be concerned about his position:

The kingship is his brickmould and the dynasty is his fortress. Why does he still climb the siege towers? Let him take care of himself!

Adad-duri herself added her own advice.

Now my lord must not be lax in looking after himself.<sup>9</sup>

Here we see two anxious women, a goddess in a dream and a lady of the court, both expressing their worries and their hopes that in the end their man would stop fighting.

We referred to another example of Adad-duri’s anxiety in Chapter 23.

---

<sup>5</sup> H. Behrens, *Enlil und Ninlil* (1978) 74 f.

<sup>6</sup> OBTR 150:17–20; B. R. Foster, *Studies W. W. Hallo* (1993) 101 f.

<sup>7</sup> An omen prediction says ‘[the god will give] to the man a warm womb (*šassūram emmam ana awili*)’, CUSAS 18 (2013) 297:29 (§6).

<sup>8</sup> J.-M. Durand in: G. del Olmo Lete, *Mythologie et religion des Sémites occidentaux I* (2008) 598 f.

<sup>9</sup> ARM 10 51; LAPO 18 (2000) 279 f. no. 1095; TUAT II/1 (1986) 90.



It was also thought that women could easily become fearful. A letter from a Babylonian princess to ‘my lord’, the pharaoh, her husband-to-be, consists almost entirely of courtesies, but we also read,

Do not trouble yourself. You will make me sad.<sup>10</sup>

This is also alluded to in a simile to show how fearful the Urartians were when they were beaten, for they were

very afraid before the king, my lord, and they shook and fell silent like women.<sup>11</sup>

The qualities of a mother were highly esteemed, as we saw in Chapter 4 about the family. The compassionate Gula, the goddess of healing in Babylonia, known in Sumerian as Nintinuga, was ‘the one who makes the dead live’.<sup>12</sup>

## 32.2 Negative views

By contrast more than once we find harsh opinions of women expressed. Earlier we referred to a letter citing almost everything a married woman could be blamed for. She could be a witch, tell secrets, or have an extra-marital affair.

Has your mistress carried out sorcery against Yarkab-Addu, her lord? Has she brought a word from the palace outside? Or has another opened the thighs of your mistress? Has your mistress done any evil against her lord?

This is not the only such reference. When it came to an extra-marital affair, which we discussed in Chapter 10 about adultery, she was assumed to have instigated it. Even in the wise laws of Hammurabi she is forced to defend herself against this accusation. That a woman could not be trusted with a secret is found in a Sumerian proverb (SP 1.82).

Whatever is spoken in secret, will be unveiled in the women’s quarters.

A liver omen confirms that this is likely to happen.

<sup>10</sup> EA 12:19–22, after W. von Soden, W. L. Moran.

<sup>11</sup> SAA I 32:14. The voice of a woman is contrasted to the roar of a lion: CUSAS 18 (2013) 294:9 f.

<sup>12</sup> B. Groneberg in G. Leick, *The Babylonian world* (2007) 325 f.

If the ... of the liver is pierced and the kidney is 'loose', a man's wife will reveal a secret regularly.<sup>13</sup>

The same idea comes up again.

A woman shall reveal a secret of the king in the land of his enemy.<sup>14</sup>

Princess Kirûm complained about her husband, the king of Ilanşura, that he had accused her of spilling the beans at court when he said,

'You gossip to my slave-girls and slaves and you tell absolutely everything to your father, and you were the one who handed over to him information about (the city of) Ilanşura.'<sup>15</sup>

In an Assyrian letter we find a reference to loose talk using an expression literally meaning 'to open one's mouth':

Whoever opens his mouth shall ruin us thanks to the 'wisdom' of his wife.<sup>16</sup>

We discussed the question of a woman being a witch, speaking evil, making slanderous and false accusations in Chapter 19.

These are not the only unpleasant derogatory remarks on women. From here and there we glean comments about their propensity for gossip, jealousy, stupidity, stealing and vitriolic argument. Women were known to spread gossip, implied by some metaphorical language in a Sumerian proverb, probably referring to malevolent chatter:

A woman's sword never rusts.<sup>17</sup>

Even beyond the borders of Mesopotamia people believed women were inclined to spread rumours. An Aramaic inscription on a woman's grave in Egypt from the fourth century BC states that she was guiltless of typical female vices.

---

13 U. Koch-Westenholz, *Babylonian liver omens* (2000) 317 no. 59:8.

14 R. Labat, MDP 57 (1974) 61 no. 3:5, with p. 76.

15 MARI 3 (1984) 178 f.; LAPO 18 (2000) 442 no. 1229.

16 KAV 197:50–52 with J. N. Postgate, *Taxation and conscription in the Assyrian Empire* (1974) 365.

17 M. Schipper, *Never trust a woman with big feet* (2003) 268. I could not trace this proverb. This expression is probably a garbled rendering of 'A woman is a sharp dagger that cuts a man's throat', from line 52 in the 'Dialogue of Pessimism', see W. G. Lambert, *BWL* (1960) 146 f. A wisdom text dissuades a young man from buying a prostitute, by saying 'she has a mouth with whetted teeth'; see B. Alster, *Wisdom of ancient Sumer* (2005) 83 Instr. Šur. 154.

She had never done anything bad nor did she make false accusations (*krṣi*) against anyone.

Such declarations of innocence were normal in Egypt before the Last Judgement, and this one echoes Chapter 125 of the Book of the Dead, but it is hardly conceivable that such a statement would be found to commemorate the life of a man.<sup>18</sup> In the New Testament the idea is perpetuated that women can easily spread gossip when the writer of the letter to Titus (Titus 2:3) says he does not expect devout women to be ‘scandalmongers’ (*diábolos*). In a letter to Timothy young widows were identified as particularly prone to such behaviour.

In going round from house to house they would learn to be idle, indeed worse than idle, gossips and busybodies, speaking of things better left unspoken (1 Timothy 5:13).

To avoid this it was recommended that these young widows should remarry. Then perhaps they could be expected to behave themselves more appropriately and adopt the habits of deacons, as described earlier in the letter.

Women in this office must likewise be dignified, not scandalmongers, but sober and trustworthy in every way (1 Timothy 3:11).

A woman’s tendency to jealousy is mentioned in a liver omen.<sup>19</sup>

If the third position is like the barb of a scorpion: out of jealousy the wife of a man shall set his house on fire.

The word used for jealousy literally means ‘the burning of her crotch (*suḫsu*)’, and must refer to sexual jealousy. The expression was particularly unusual and it had to be explained in an ancient commentary.

If you have the word *suḫsu* before you, *suḫsu* = to be jealous (*qenû*). She is jealous and through her jealousy she sets fire to her husband’s house.

It could be that the clue to understanding the explanation of the extispicy was the ‘barb’ that had been noticed on a particular part of the liver. That married wives could become jealous is clear from the reaction of the goddess Zarpanitum to her

<sup>18</sup> KAI 269:2; TUAT II/4 (1988) 577.

<sup>19</sup> Koch-Westenholz, *Babylonian liver omens*, 143 no. 19:84; A. R. George, CUSAS 18 (2013) 235:40, with p. 121 (to 28’), 243 (to 40). Cf. E. Frahm, *Babylonian and Assyrian text commentaries* (2011) 81 f. We now know that the word *suḫsu* does not mean ‘bed’ but a part of the body associated with the genital organs (A. R. George).

husband Marduk who was playing around with Ištar, an incident we mentioned earlier at the end of Chapter 21.<sup>20</sup>

Stupidity is sometimes attributed to women, even goddesses. In a Hittite myth the wife of Appu reproached him that he was not being a successful bedfellow. He reacted angrily, telling her,

You are a woman like other women. You know nothing.

He jumped out of bed, consulted the sun god and fathered a son.<sup>21</sup> In the annals of a Hittite king we have the same accusation of stupidity applied to a woman as if she were a child.

You are a child and you know nothing.<sup>22</sup>

In Chapter 9 about divorce we saw in Old Babylonian laws that women sometimes found themselves tempted to steal. A wisdom text expresses the same idea.

Do not open your heart to your dear wife. If she presses you hard, seal away the presents in your sealed storage room. Do not let your wife get to know the very inside of your purse.<sup>23</sup>

Women were also known to engage in fierce arguments. One genre of Sumerian literature involves dialogue. These conversations involve two people and after each of them had extolled their own good qualities a god decided which of them was right. Some arguments degenerated into torrents of abuse,

She is a huckster, she is flighty, she is an exile (?), she is a nymphomaniac,  
She is quarrelsome, she is a liar, a slanderer, she is a double-dealer, she is worthless.<sup>24</sup>

In other literary genres eloquent slanging-matches also took place. At the Sumerian school people were fond of abusing others. In the text known as ‘Son of a bitch’ someone is sworn at by using choice though coarse terms for character

<sup>20</sup> An Old Babylonian incantation against the ‘fire of the heart’ (izi šà-ga, VAS 17 23) is about jealousy, according to N. Wasserman, *BiOr* 72 (2015) 607 f.

<sup>21</sup> TUAT III/4 (1994) 849.

<sup>22</sup> A. Goetze, *Die Annalen des Muršiliš* (1933) 19 iv 16.

<sup>23</sup> Th. R. Kämmerer, *Šimā milka* (1998) 186:16–19.

<sup>24</sup> ‘The slave girl and the scoundrel’, 5–10; M. T. Roth, *JAOS* 103 (1983) 275. Cf. D. Shehata, *WZKM* 97 (2007) 522; M. P. Streck, ‘Schimpfwort’, *RIA* XII/3–4 (2009) 189–191.

assassination.<sup>25</sup> We also know of an argument between two women who call each other all sorts of names. It comes in two versions, both transcribed from earlier tablets. They are written in the woman's language and their choice of words is exceptional. Sumerologists have hesitated to translate the lingo of these fish-wives. So they have not quite managed to publish the texts, though sometimes a few lines were translated.

If anyone did not know your behaviour, they would see your fine appearance, see your beautiful face, and they would say, 'An (excellent) person'. However, you, your intellect is that of a monkey, your understanding is that of a dog.<sup>26</sup>

Why do you slander the daughter of a citizen, your friend, by calling her 'My whore', and in so doing make her husband leave her?<sup>27</sup>

O bitch, who [runs after] men with her leg raised. The young men do not [sleep] in the district where they live.

Troublemaker who cheats the men of the city. The young women do not sleep in the district where they live.<sup>28</sup>

At a congress of Assyriologists in Helsinki a Sumerologist distributed his own English translation of insults that were thrown. We reproduce his version here.

Ugly, the most unbecoming of women,  
 Green in colour, oozing bad humours,  
 Black like a Meluḥḥan [= a Negro], a dough figurine,  
 A liar, she does not fit the norm.  
 With long hips, bloated stomach, the neck thick, the breasts pendulous.  
 A hairy anus, a narrow vagina, but very long pubic hair,  
 And you pretend to be made like a human being!<sup>29</sup>

Some Old Sumerian clay tablets have come to our notice on which insults are written. The difficult Sumerian was translated into Akkadian around five hundred years later which makes it easier to understand.<sup>30</sup> The first fourteen insults are directed at women and include such sentences as

<sup>25</sup> Å. W. Sjöberg, 'He is a good seed of a dog', JCS 24 (1972) 107–109; H. Vanstiphout, *Eduba. Schrijven en lezen in Sumer* (2004) 247–251.

<sup>26</sup> K. Volk, ZA 90 (2000) 19.

<sup>27</sup> Volk, 18 n. 84.

<sup>28</sup> Volk, 19 n. 92 with Saeculum 47 (1996) 191 n. 80.

<sup>29</sup> Dialogue 5:144–152, after J. Klein.

<sup>30</sup> See M. Civil, R. D. Biggs, 'Early Dynastic Collection of Insults', RA 60 (1966) 5–7; B. Alster, AFO 38–39 (1991–92) 1–51; J. Klein, *Festschrift C. Wilcke* (2003) 135–149.

Let me break her heart, strike her mouth. As your mouth is so is your 'vessel' (2–3).  
 The pieces of silver in it, you do not give back what you have gained (4).  
 She always rolls her eyes. She is a liar for five (5).  
 What is here, she brings there. What is there, she brings here (6–7).  
 Her double tongue, I want to answer you doubly (10–11).

Later there are a few more terms of abuse.

The biggest liar among women, who sticks her nose into everything (65).  
 She belittles herself (66).  
 There she goes. That's the liar going past (74).  
 Mad dog! Farter! A groin which makes the 'rod' wither away! (78).

### 32.3 Women compared with men

In Chapter 1, when discussing women's clothing, and in Chapter 22 we saw that men were associated with the right side and women with the left, corresponding to the generally accepted principle that 'right = male = favourable' as opposed to 'left = female = unfavourable'. It will not come as a surprise that there was a preference for male offspring when children were born.<sup>31</sup>

For a comparison between women and men we must turn to a Sumerian proverb.

The man is cheeky and eats salt things.  
 The woman is cheeky and is dragged through the mud.<sup>32</sup>

Whatever fate awaited the man it is likely to have been more agreeable than the woman's lot. In curse formulas a man is threatened to be changed into a woman by the goddess Ištar:

May Ištar, the great lady, turn his manhood into the state of a woman!<sup>33</sup>

<sup>31</sup> M. Stol, *Birth in Babylonia and the Bible* (2000) 206–208.

<sup>32</sup> SP 1.156. An alternative translation is, '(If) a male is aroused, he eats salt. (If) a female is aroused, she is dragged in the mud'; thus A. Gadotti in: M. W. Chavalas, *Women in the Ancient Near East* (2014) 61.

<sup>33</sup> RINAP 4 (2011) 186 no. 98 rev. 55 f.; P.-A. Beaulieu, *The pantheon of Uruk during the Neo-Babylonian period* (2003) 366:15–17. In Hittite curses, 'May the oath deities make (that) man (into) a woman'; W. W. Hallo, *The context of Scripture I* (1997) 166 §9–10. More in K. van der Toorn, *Sin and sanction in Israel and Mesopotamia* (1985) 84.

More objectively we know that slave-girls cost less than male slaves.<sup>34</sup> It is also clear that women did not enjoy the same rights as men. There were other voices.<sup>35</sup> We mentioned in Chapter 9 a woman who was threatened with execution for keeping silent during a trial for murder in Nippur, but a question was raised of whether to treat her more leniently.

What has she, a woman, done to be put to death?

There are more examples where we should not be too harsh about their views of women's rights. When a woman wanted to marry, her father or her brother made the arrangements. The reason for this could simply have been that she was too young to do it herself. In those days girls married young. However, in the Neo-Babylonian period her mother could act on her behalf. Any physical punishment for a woman was brutal, but those that mirrored the offence could also be brutal for men. The impression we get of brutality against women comes from the Middle Assyrian law-book which is concerned exclusively with women, giving us a one-sided perspective. Even so, when a widow and a widower married they had equal rights according to §35 of that law-book. Yet in a case of adultery the death penalty was prescribed for a woman but not for her lover. This becomes understandable when we take into account that she had brought dishonour on her family. He was an outsider, and she had greater responsibility. Moreover, such behaviour directly compromised her important function of producing the next generation. We said more about the principles underlying these laws at the end of Chapter 31.

In the end a balanced judgement leads us to the conclusion that in ancient society women fared much worse than men. We have seen evidence of this time and time again in this book, with some chapters showing nothing to the contrary. Even in the generally wise laws of Hammurabi women were more severely punished than men.<sup>36</sup> As we come to a close we expect none of our readers to shut this book without uttering a sigh of sadness.

---

<sup>34</sup> M. Stol, 'Sklave', *albab.*, § 6.1, in *RIA XII/7–8* (2011) 567a; K. Radner, *Die neuassyrischen Privatrechtsurkunden* (1997) 248.

<sup>35</sup> M. T. Roth in V. H. Matthews, *Gender and law in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East* (1998) 181–183.

<sup>36</sup> M. T. Roth, *Festschrift J. Renger* (1999) 460; S. Franke, *ZABR* 6 (2000) 13.

# Bibliography

- Z. Bahrani, *Women of Babylon. Gender and representation in Mesopotamia* (2001).
- J. Bottéro, 'La femme dans l'Asie occidentale ancienne. Mésopotamie et Israël', in: P. Grimal, *Histoire mondiale de la femme I* (1965) 155–247.
- F. Briquel-Chatonnet, S. Farès, B. Lion, C. Michel, *Femmes, cultures et sociétés dans les civilisations méditerranéennes et proche-orientales de l'Antiquité* (= Topoi, Supplément 10) (2009).
- A. Cameron, A. Kuhrt, *Images of Women in Antiquity* (1983).
- M. W. Chavalas, *Women in the Ancient Near East. A sourcebook* (2014).
- J.-M. Durand, *La femme dans le Proche-Orient antique* (= Compte-rendu de la XXXIIIe Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale (Paris, 7–10 juillet 1986) (1987).
- S. Lafont, *Femmes, Droit et Justice dans l'Antiquité orientale. Contribution à l'étude du droit pénal au Proche-Orient ancien* (= Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis 165) (1999).
- G. Leick, *Sex and eroticism in Mesopotamian literature* (1994).
- B. S. Lesko, *Womens' earliest records from Ancient Egypt and Western Asia. Proceedings of the Conference on Women in the Ancient Near East. Brown University, Providence. Rhode Island November 5–7, 1987* (= Brown Judaic Studies 166) (1989).
- C. Locher, *Die Ehre einer Frau in Israel. Exegetische und rechtsvergleichende Studien zu Deuteronomium 22, 13–21* (= Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis 70) (1986).
- S. L. Macgregor, *Beyond hearth and home: women in the public sphere in Neo-Assyrian society* (= State Archives of Assyria Studies 21) (2012).
- S. Parpola, R. M. Whiting, *Sex and Gender in the Ancient Near East* (= CRRAI 47/1, II = Proceedings of the 47th Rencontre assyriologique internationale, Helsinki, July 2–6, 2001) (2002).
- A. van Praag, *Droit matrimonial assyro-babylonien* (= Allard Pierson Stichting. Archaeologisch-Historische Bijdragen XII) (1945).
- M. Roth, *Babylonian marriage agreements. 7th-3rd centuries B. C.* (1989).
- S. Svård, *Women and power in Neo-Assyrian palaces* (= State Archives of Assyria Studies 23) (2015).
- K. van der Toorn, *From her cradle to her grave. The role of religion in the life of the Israelite and the Babylonian woman* (1993).
- R. Westbrook, *Old Babylonian Marriage Law* (= Archiv für Orientforschung, Beiheft 23) (1988).
- C. Wilcke, 'Familiengründung im alten Babylonien', in: E. W. Müller, *Geschlechtsreife und Legitimation zur Zeugung* (1985) 213–317.
- N. Ziegler, *Le Harem de Zimrî-Lîm* (= Florilegium Marianum IV) (1999).



# Indexes

## Words, concepts

- abuse 156 f., 688 f.  
accusations 245 f., 686 f.  
adoption 160 ff., 172 ff., 177, 304 ff., 600 f.  
adultery 221, 234 ff., 668 ff.  
anointing 79 ff.  
bathing 47, 93, 100, 649  
betrothal 72 ff., 114  
bigamy 165 ff., 498  
blinded 345, 351 f., 361, 369, 496  
breast-feeding 376 ff.  
bride 16, 79, 82 ff., 479, 486 f.  
bride-price 112, 117 ff., 304 ff.  
business women 380 ff.  
casting-mould 46 f.  
chaste 570 ff.  
childless 160 ff., 185  
children 7, 92, 152 ff., 292 ff., 324 ff., 410 ff.  
children's marriage 66 f., 75, 85, 88, 308  
'city' on the head 42, 535  
clothing 17 ff.  
cohabitation 92, 187, 238 f., 261, 290 f.  
colours 21, 245  
compassion 372, 637, 684  
concubine 180, 193 ff., 465, 495, 677  
convent, cloister 555, 584 ff.  
cousins 273 f.  
death 159 f., 456  
dedication to temple 326 ff., 419 f., 455  
defloration 96 ff., 257  
disease 110, 191 f., 245, 272, 393 f., 441 ff.,  
499 f., 571  
distaff 30 f., 340  
divorce 89, 187 f., 209 ff., 675  
dowry 44 f., 70, 112, 134 ff., 286, 290 f.  
dream 264, 272, 618, 621 f.  
earrings 36 f.  
elderly, care of 287, 454 f., 600 f.  
endogamy 297 f.  
equality 142, 190, 200 ff., 216, 223, 239 ff.,  
674, 681 f.  
eunuch 347, 362, 463, 498, 517 f., 519, 534,  
669 f.  
family 151 ff., 463  
festivals 264, 456, 435 ff., 593, 640 ff.  
finger-ring 39 f., 99, 101  
founding 516 f., 572  
funeral 456 ff., 471 ff., 543 ff., 560, 561 f.,  
640 ff.  
funeral offerings 481, 628 ff.  
games 11  
genital parts 53 f., 105, 404, 433  
girl 10 ff., 258  
goddess, protective 638 ff.  
hair on the head 49 ff., 102  
Hanging Gardens 549  
harem 459 ff.  
harem edicts 514 ff.  
hate 210, 226 f.  
henna 48  
Hittites 250 ff., 519 ff.  
holy woman 187, 608 ff.  
household utensils 135 f., 312 f.  
human sacrifice 419, 472 f., 475, 481, 562  
husband's debts 311, 674  
'husband' of a goddess 648, 653  
impotence 148 ff.  
imprisonment for debt 320 ff.  
incest 264 f., 270 ff.  
inequality 69, 127 f., 221, 227, 239 f., 246 f.,  
270 f., 441, 690 f.  
insolent 225 f., 666  
intercession 591, 597 f., 631 ff.  
intercourse 102 ff., 148  
jewellery 33 ff., 135  
Jews 70, 546, 553  
jus primae noctis 265 ff.  
jus talionis 245 f., 259, 681 f.  
kohl 47 f.  
landlady 362 ff.  
levirate 296 ff., 673 f.  
litigations, exemplary 229, 237 f., 257  
magic and marriage 110, 125  
magnete 151, 233  
make-up 47 ff.

- marriage 62 ff., 469 ff.  
 marriage and politics 62, 459 f., 468, 479,  
     486, 489, 492, 513, 519 ff.  
 marriage as a sale 127 f.  
 marriage gifts 112 ff., 672 ff.  
 marriage, sacred 645 ff.  
 marriageable 12  
 menstruation 258 f., 438 ff., 446  
 midwife 375, 499  
 milling woman 321, 350 ff.  
 mirror 32 f.  
 miscarriage 671  
 mother 155 ff., 379 f.  
 mourning 22, 95, 159 f., 372 ff.  
 murder 229, 323  
 music 198, 227 f., 353 ff., 495 ff., 518  
 Naked Woman 54 f., 432 f.  
 name-giving 58 f., 182, 380, 486, 499, 590 ff.  
 necklace 42, 44, 46, 484 f.  
 New Year festival 95, 112, 647, 649, 653  
 nose-rings 37  
 nuns 584 ff.  
 nursemaid, aya 379, 486, 502 f.  
 old age 451 ff., 550  
 ordeal 212, 248, 394 f., 670  
 outward appearance 47, 62 ff., 436 f.  
 paranympths, best men 87, 96  
 phases of life 7 ff.  
 physician 370 f.  
 pin 19 f., 29, 40 f., 104  
 pledge 311 ff., 675 f., 679  
 polyandry 268 f.  
 polygamy 165 ff.  
 pregnant 21, 63, 101, 446 ff.  
 priestesses 555 ff.  
 princess in cloister 594  
 prisoner of war 154, 331 f., 345, 359 f.  
 prophecy 540, 621 ff.  
 prostitution 399 ff.  
 prostitution in temple 419 ff.  
 pubic hair 13, 14 f., 49, 52 f., 64, 238  
 punishments 210 ff., 217 f., 220 ff., 244 f.,  
     391, 663, 681, 691  
 queen 492, 503 ff., 534 ff.  
 queen mother 467, 493, 527 ff.  
 rape 254 ff., 264 f., 680 f.  
 rations 8, 341 ff.  
 reception, party 75, 100 f.  
 right and left 17 f., 437, 451  
 rings 36 ff.  
 scorpion 434, 531 f.  
 seal 40, 387 ff.  
 second father 138, 305 f.  
 second wife 165 ff., 498  
 sin, the great 252  
 sister marriage 172 ff., 180 ff., 310  
 slave girl 168 ff., 177, 188, 193 ff., 205 ff.,  
     255 ff., 312 ff., 409 f., 691  
 slaves of temples 326 ff., 348  
 soothsaying 617 ff.  
 sororate 298 f.  
 spindle 29 ff., 339 f.  
 spirits of the dead 19, 456, 618 f., 628 ff.,  
     644  
 succession, law of 69, 133 f., 137, 300 ff.  
 surety 311 f., 319 f., 634  
 testament 282 f., 300 ff.  
 toggle-pin 40 f., 69  
 veil 22 ff., 108 f., 115, 187, 197, 676  
 virgin 13 ff., 105, 582  
 wailing women 372 ff., 457  
 weaving 339 f., 344 ff., 383 f., 386, 483, 510,  
     533  
 wedding 93 ff., 114 f.  
 wet-nurse 375 ff., 465 f.  
 widow 155, 275 ff., 674, 678 f.  
 widower 277, 293 f.  
 'wife' of a god 556, 586  
 wife, travelling 194 f., 479, 483 f.  
 wig 49 ff.  
 window, woman at the 430 ff.  
 witch 391 ff., 678  
 witness 398 f.  
 women's house 461, 463 f.  
 women's language 56 f.  
 writing 366 ff., 543, 564 ff., 577

## Gods

Adad 421f., 579f., 609ff., 615, 646  
 Dumuzi (Tammuz) 73f., 97f., 105, 250, 434,  
 479, 640ff., 647ff.  
 Gula 658, 660f.  
 Išḫara 95, 266, 434, 532  
 Ištar 17, 47, 54, 102, 155, 157, 265, 326ff.,  
 365, 401, 405ff., 419ff., 424ff., 442ff.,  
 476, 524, 564f., 572, 608, 623ff., 638ff.,  
 641ff., 649f., 658ff.

Nanaya 330, 407, 423, 433f., 488, 655ff.  
 Nisaba 370, 657f.  
 Uttu 264, 344f.

## Persons

Abi-simti 481f., 528, 629  
 Adad-duri 493f.  
 Adda-guppi 550f.  
 Ama-duga 79, 492, 504  
 Amenophis III 80, 145, 523f.  
 Beltum (Mari) 78, 133, 491ff., 502, 534, 639  
 Dam-ḫuraši 491f., 494, 502f.  
 Dusigu (Ebla) 467f., 528  
 Egibi 142ff., 386f., 552  
 En-ana-tuma 558ff., 563  
 En-ane-du 560f., 563ff.  
 En-hedu-ana 475f., 558ff.  
 En-nigaldi-Nanna 575  
 Eve 10  
 Herodotus 266f., 348, 387, 425, 435, 552,  
 656  
 Iltani (Karanā) 509ff.  
 Izamu 493, 495, 632  
 Judah and Tamar 297, 410, 614

Kirûm 367, 504, 508f.  
 Kubaba 462f.  
 Kubatum 482f.  
 Kunši-matum 58f., 443, 486, 492, 578  
 Nabonidus 548ff., 574ff.  
 Naqi'a 527, 538ff.  
 Nefertari 521  
 Nitocris 551  
 Parysatis 553f.  
 Puduḫepa 80, 264, 519ff.  
 Ramesses II 519, 521f.  
 Sargon of Akkad 475f., 517, 559f., 564ff.,  
 572ff.  
 Sargon II of Assyria 530f., 546  
 Semiramis 536ff.  
 Šibtum 78, 387, 493, 495, 503f.  
 Šulgi-simti 480f.  
 Tušratta 144f., 523f.  
 Yabā 530, 545f.

## Places

Alalah 71f., 120, 126, 167, 188, 201, 219,  
 223  
 Arbela 327f., 540, 623ff.  
 Bitik vase 23f., 109  
 Ebla 80, 260, 285f., 464ff., 528, 556  
 Elam 303f., 317, 512  
 Elephantine 127, 219  
 Emar 119, 126, 162, 283, 317, 324, 581f.  
 Haran 539f., 550f.

Kaniš 120, 182ff.  
 Karanā 388, 509ff., 595f.  
 Laḫiru 540f.  
 Mari 489ff., 578f., 620ff.  
 Nuzi 68, 71f., 121, 125ff., 134, 161ff., 188,  
 201, 285, 290, 303, 306ff., 413f., 518f.  
 Qatna 38, 77ff., 133, 489, 492, 502  
 Sippar 169f., 174ff., 584ff.  
 Ugarit 250ff., 282, 297, 317, 526

## Mesopotamian Words

*amtu* 183

*ardatu* 14 f.

*batūltu* 16

*entu* 555 ff., 581

*ereš.dingir* 422, 566 ff., 570 ff., 578

*ḫarīmtu* 399 ff., 613

*ḫili* 49

*ištarītu* 416, 425, 608, 612, 616

*kallatu* 10, 22, 82 ff., 286 f., 296, 304, 495,  
586

*kezertu* 405, 420 ff., 435, 497, 611

*ki.sikil* 14 f.

*kulmašītu* 416, 426, 579, 607, 615 f.

*lamassu* 36, 51, 433, 591, 634 f.

*lukur* 165, 178 f., 195, 478 f., 480, 483 ff.,  
584, 586

*nadītu* 178 ff., 388, 426, 478, 573, 584 ff.,  
605 ff.

*nin.dingir* 566 f.

*qadištu* 177, 185, 187, 377, 426, 608 ff., 676

*šakintu* 203, 533 f., 549

*sekretu* 488, 530 f., 605

*šugītu* 136 f., 178 ff., 607

*ugbabbu* 567 f., 570, 579 f.