

# Gender and methodology in the ancient Near East

Approaches from Assyriology and beyond

Stephanie Lynn Budin, Megan Cifarelli,  
Agnès Garcia-Ventura, Adelina Millet Albà (eds.)





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## Preface and Acknowledgements

Gender studies, including women's studies, masculinities' studies, and queer theory, have grown considerably in the last decades, influencing new fields of studies in the Humanities and Social Sciences. Ancient Near Eastern studies are no exception to this trend, as evidenced by the richness of the contributions included in this volume.

In light of this scholarly movement, the IPOA—the Institute of Ancient Near Eastern Studies of the University of Barcelona (Spain)—sought to publish a compilation of essays dealing with gender studies in the Ancient Near East in the series *Barcino. Monographica Orientalia*. At the same time, the success of the “First Workshop on Gender, Methodology and the Ancient Near East” held in Helsinki in October 2014 encouraged the organizers (Agnès Garcia-Ventura [IPOA, University of Barcelona] and Saana Svärd [University of Helsinki]) to launch a second conference to be celebrated in 2017. As a result of this agreement, the IPOA hosted the second workshop and organized it in cooperation with the Centre of Excellence in “Changes in Sacred Texts and Traditions” (University of Helsinki, Finland). The event, which took place in Barcelona on February 1–3, 2017, featured over thirty communications, a poster session where six posters were presented, and a projects panel where nine new and ongoing projects were discussed among the participants. The event was well attended and consisted of a group of about 90 participants, of whom 46 were speakers and poster presenters carrying on their research in universities from 12 countries, namely Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Holland, Italy, Japan, Malta, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America.

As the editors of this volume we want to thank first all the participants for engaging in fruitful debates and for sharing their research during the event. Second, we want to thank those institutions and research groups and projects which made possible both the present volume and the conference with their financial support. The conference benefitted from the funding provided by the Academy of Finland, the Centre of Excellence in “Changes in Sacred Texts and Traditions,” and the research project “Construction of gender in Mesopotamia from 934 to 330 BCE” (both of the University of Helsinki, Finland), as well as the Faculty of Philology and the Master's Degree in Ancient Cultures and Languages (both of the University of Barcelona, Spain). With regard to the present volume we appreciate the financial support provided by several entities and research groups of the University of Barcelona, namely the Faculty of Philology, the master's degree in Ancient Cultures and Languages coordinated by Ernest Marcos, the research project “JEWNE, Testimonies about Jewish-Christian Communities in the Near East (5<sup>th</sup>–12<sup>th</sup> centuries)” lead by Francisco Del Río (Ref. FFI2016-80590-P) and the research project “Los dialectos lúvicos del grupo

anatolio en su contexto lingüístico, geográfico e histórico” lead by Ignasi-Xavier Adiego and Mariona Vernet (Ref. FFI2015-68467-C2-1-P).

The volume in your hands is the result of the collaborative work done by four participants of the second workshop who volunteered to make this publication project a tangible reality. Adelina Millet Albà (director of the series including the current volume) and Agnès Garcia-Ventura (co-organizer of both the Helsinki and Barcelona workshops), both of the IPOA of the University of Barcelona, want to thank especially the other two editors, namely Stephanie Lynn Budin and Megan Cifarelli (Manhattanville College), for their hard work to improve the quality of the volume by reviewing content and checking the language for all papers written by non-native English speakers. Needless to say, all articles have undergone a scrupulous review process.

Regarding the style of the volume, transliteration conventions and the orthography of ancient names have not been systematically standardized, in order to respect the choices of the various authors. Accordingly, we gave those authors discussing Hebrew terms total freedom to choose whether they wanted to include transcription or not. The style of Sumerian, Akkadian, and Egyptian terms, however, has been standardized: Akkadian and Egyptian are in italics while Sumerian appears in expanded spacing.

The content of the volume is structured in three sections. The first is devoted to Assyriology and Ancient Near Eastern archaeology. It includes most of the contributions and mirrors the main aim of both workshops: bringing together scholars in these fields of study to enable joint work and discussion. However, this volume includes as well chapters devoted to Egyptology, and to Ancient Israel and Biblical Studies, fields which correspond to the second and third sections of this compilation. The aim of including them in the volume and in the second workshop was to enrich the debates and to enable academic exchange with neighbouring fields of study. This initiative was so successful that these fields encompass, together, about one third of the total contributions.

Last but not least, the four editors of the volume, acting as spokeswomen of the participants in the workshop, are delighted to announce that this volume is dedicated to our colleague Ann K. Guinan. As chance would have it, Ann celebrated her 70<sup>th</sup> birthday in February 2017 while we were all together sharing lectures, meals, and fruitful discussion at the University of Barcelona. Taking advantage of that serendipity sparked the proposal to dedicate this work to her. Ann has always been a brilliant scholar committed to the engendering of Assyriology, and thus we hope she will enjoy this modest tribute which aims to contribute as well to current debates in gender studies. We hope that Ann, as well as all of you, readers, enjoy reading these contributions as much as we did as editors!

Stephanie Lynn Budin, Megan Cifarelli, Agnès Garcia-Ventura and Adelina Millet Albà  
New Jersey, New York and Barcelona, November 2018

# 1. Assyriology and Ancient Near Eastern Archaeology

## 1.1. Bodies, Gender and Sexuality



# Politics of the Body Productive: Agriculture, Royal Power, and the Female Body in Sumerian Sources

M. Érica Couto-Ferreira<sup>1</sup>

## 1. *Introduction*

The present paper has its start in the article “‘Let me be your canal’: Some Thoughts on Agricultural Landscape and Female Bodies in Sumero-Akkadian Sources”, which was recently published in the volume honouring Miquel Civil’s 90<sup>th</sup> birthday. During the Second Workshop on Gender celebrated in Barcelona, I had the chance to present and discuss the preliminary results with fellow colleagues. It then became obvious that the breadth of the topic was far greater than I had first suspected, and worth exploring. It is with the intention of expanding the subject that I here present a further elaboration of those preliminary conclusions.<sup>2</sup> In “‘Let me be your canal’”, I focused on the imagery employed in cuneiform texts to describe the female body (more specifically, Inanna’s genitals as they are presented in two Sumerian compositions) in terms of agricultural landscape,<sup>3</sup> where I concluded that: “the reading of Inanna’s body is strongly informed by landscape and environment, more specifically, by the domesticated environment. Images present the female genitals as a landscape subjected to anthropization, based on man-made spaces that need to be managed and constantly cared for so as to ensure productivity.”<sup>4</sup>

If in that case I stuck to the analogies established between female genitals and particular features of the agricultural landscape (canals, fields, furrows, threshing floors, embankments, and so on), it is my intention now to deal specifically with the connections between reproductive female bodies, on the one side, and the domination of landscape and resources exercised by royal power visible in the documents from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Dynasty of Ur, on the other. I plan to map out the connections cultural elites made in order to

1. CEPOAT, Universidad de Murcia and Seminar für Assyriologie, University of Heidelberg. Contact: erica.coutoferreira@gmail.com.

2. See Couto-Ferreira (2017) for the particulars of the discussion.

3. The texts discussed were *A Balbale to Inanna as Nanaya (Inanna H)*, segment A, 21–26; and the witness Ni 9602 of *Inanna and Dumuzi P* (Sefati 1998: 218–235).

4. Couto-Ferreira (2017: 66).

present reproductive female bodies in terms of environment to be tamed; and how these connections were rooted in royal discourses and propaganda regarding resource management and land control. I argue the images of the king who tames, domesticates and imposes his will to make the land fertile and productive are largely framed in terms of reproductive capacities of women, implying that the male should properly manage the female body so as to turn it into a fecund plot.

## 2. *A Fragile Ecosystem*

Sumerian (and for that part, also Akkadian) compositions show a deep concern for ordering and balance. Mythological texts are the most obvious in this sense, but there are many others that reflect similar interests. Rituals, for instance, serve for the most part to ensure a present state of balance, to restore a previous equilibrium, or to create one anew. Even administrative texts that, with their minute notation of work to be done, goods to be gathered and/or distributed, show a deep concern to avoid losing economic control over land maintenance and management.

Among the wealth of cuneiform sources dealing with stability and order there is a powerful discourse that pervades the three millennia of Mesopotamian written history. This discourse regards the activities of political-religious powers revolving around the kings' responsibility of guaranteeing order, prosperity, and abundance for the land. From the times when the Uruk Vase was produced to the late first millennium BCE, political power has seen in agriculture and land exploitation a key component of its power and control-directed discourses.<sup>5</sup> A recurring theme in Sumerian literary sources regards the contrast between a primeval time when lands were barren, water escaped control, and agriculture was unknown; and a later time when sources were put to fruition. The composition *The rulers of Lagaš*, for example, depicts the moment just following the flood and the institution of "rulership" (nam-en<sub>x</sub>-si), when agriculture is not yet established.<sup>6</sup>

"However, he (i.e. man) did not do any work. He became smaller and smaller, his mother (?), his sheep died (?) in the sheepfold. In those days, because the water of Lagaš was held back, there was

5. Asher-Greve (1997: 438–442) has briefly dealt with the Uruk Vase and its relation to abundance. On her part, Irene Winter (2003) has explored the textual and, most prominently, figurative instances where the Neo-Assyrian king presented himself as the provider of abundance. Dealing with the figurative repertoire, she notes that the images of abundance that can be seen in art make use primarily of images taken from the agricultural and vegetable world. What's more, Neo-Assyrian kings also tended to present themselves as farmers (ENGAR / *ikkaru*), just as the Neo-Sumerian royalty did, as we are about to see. It is worth noting that royal elites also draw from other sources to build up, sustain and legitimate their exercise of power: architecture and building, war and booty, god-related ancestry, etc.

6. Sollberger describes the composition as "rank[ing] among the works of didactic literature dealing with the origin and development of civilization" (Sollberger 1967: 279), as *Enki and the world order* and *The exploits of Ninurta*, to cite two examples, do. See also eTCSL 2.1.2 for the edition of the text. For the role of water in cosmogonic and world creation narratives, as well as the fundamental role it plays in producing abundance for the land, see Lisman (2013). For a recent overview on water management in Mesopotamia in the long run, and its economic and social importance, see Rost (2017).

famine in Ĝirsu. Canals were not dug, the embankments and ditches were not cleaned.<sup>7</sup> The large arable tracts were not (...), there was no water to irrigate abundantly all the cultivated fields: the people relied on rain; Ezina did not make dappled barley grow, the mouth of the furrows were not yet opened, they bore no yield; the high plain was not ploughed, it bore no yield.” (*The rulers of Lagaš*, 17–31)

Similarly, previous to the vanquishing of the monstrous Azag by Ninurta, the land was dominated by famine and unproductivity. Waters ran freely and without control, the irrigation system was unserviceable, and nobody practiced agriculture.

“At that time, the good water coming forth from the earth did not pour down over the meadows. The cold water (?) spread everywhere, and the day when it began to ..... it brought destruction in the mountains, since the gods of the land were subject to servitude, and had to carry the hoe and the basket. This was their corvée work. People called on a household for the recruitment of workers. The Tigris did not bring up its flood in its fullness. Its mouth (lit. “tail”) did not finish in the sea, it did not carry fresh water. No one brought (?) offerings to the market. The famine was hard, as nothing had yet been born. No one yet cleaned the little canals, the mud was not dredged up. No one yet drew water for the fertile fields, ditch-making did not exist. People did not work (?) in furrows, barley was sown broadcast.” (*The exploits of Ninurta*, 334–346)<sup>8</sup>

The defeat of Azag leads to the ordering of stones, mountains, and mountain water, which will make it possible to put resources to service.<sup>9</sup> However, the order so obtained requires constant human effort to keep it functioning. In fact, tragic events such as war and military invasions have catastrophic effects, since they disrupt order, making society plunge into famine and deprivation. In the *Lament for the destruction of Ur*, the destruction of the city causes cattle not to multiply, foxes to invade the urban territory, and fields to remain wild, thus emphasizing the idea that an uncontrolled environment left to itself leads to famine:

“In its midst no flowing water is carried, its tax-collector is gone. In the fields of my city there is no grain, their farmer is gone. My fields, like fields from which the hoe has been kept away (?), have grown tangled (?) weeds. My orchards and gardens that produced abundant syrup and wine have grown mountain thornbushes. My plain that used to be covered in its luxurious verdure has become cracked (?) like a kiln.” (*Lament for the destruction of Ur*, 269–274)<sup>10</sup>

7. Note that the term *dun* “to dig” also applies to the acts Enki performs with his penis in canals and ditches, according to the composition *Enki and Ninhursagā*. The connections between digging canals, ploughing fields, and sexual intercourse are well established in ancient Mesopotamia (Tinney 1999: 35–36; Stol 2000: 1–2; Stol 2008: 137–138; Couto-Ferreira 2017: 56–57).

8. See van Dijk (1983) and eTCSL 1.6.2 for the full edition of the text.

9. *The exploits of Ninurta*, 334–367.

10. eTCSL 2.2.2; Jacobsen (1987: 447–477); Samet (2014). Note also that in the composition *Death of Ur-namma*, 22–30 (Ur-Namma A), with the king’s death, fields stop producing grain and pasture.

In all these and other compositions (*Rulers of Lagaš*, *The exploits of Ninurta*, *Enki and the world order*, *The debate between hoe and plough*, *The song of the hoe*,<sup>11</sup> etc.) prosperity is secured through the digging and cleaning of canals (*Rulers of Lagaš*, 50–63), the setting of ploughs and oxen (*Enki and the world order*, 318–333),<sup>12</sup> the tilling and irrigation of fields, the harvesting and piling up of cereal and vegetables (*The exploits of Ninurta*, 362–364), as well as other key economic activities such as the fabrication of bricks and the breeding of cattle, which become core tasks for the sustainability of society. These compositions emphasize the fundamental role agriculture and water management play in the ordering of the world and the creation of social stability, as well as the need for constant agricultural work to ensure life in the country. Just as deities bring order to the world and establish agriculture as the basis for human life and social reproduction, so the king, as representative of that same divine order, is the individual in charge of securing prosperity and abundance. In fact the king, as guarantor of prosperity, is frequently called *en gar* “farmer”.<sup>13</sup> In this effort to secure crops, manual work and the use of tools are fundamental: the pickaxe, the spade, the earth basket, the hoe, and the plough mean life for the land.<sup>14</sup>

In the description of Enki ordering the world and establishing agriculture as a primary life-giving resource, there is a significant passage where ploughing of the land is described in terms of explicit sexual terminology: the term to describe how the hoe penetrates the earth is *ĝiš<sub>3</sub> dug<sub>4</sub>* “to perform (with) the penis”, which is the same expression used for Enki’s sexual activities in *Enki and Ninhursaga*, for instance. Besides, what the hoe penetrates is the *agarin<sub>4</sub>*, a term for “matrix”.<sup>15</sup> It clearly shows how sexuality, reproduction and agriculture are culturally entangled, how images shift from one domain to the other and, most importantly, how human fertility and land productivity are part of a larger cosmological discourse regarding order, stability, perpetuity, and survival:

“The great prince fixed a string to the hoe, and organised brick moulds. He penetrated the matrix like precious oil.” (*Enki and the world order*, 335–336)

### 3. The King, Promoter of Fertility

In dealing with the composition *The coronation of Ur-Namma* (also known as *Aba munbale*), Steve Tinney concluded that the Sumerian composition was built upon and emphasized “the association

11. For *The debate between hoe and plough*, see eTCSL 5.3.1; for *The song of the hoe*, see eTCSL 5.5.4.

12. *Enki and the world order*, 318–333 and *passim* in the composition. Enki, following the command of Enlil, brings prosperity for both people and gods by providing order, setting boundaries, establishing agriculture, cattle-breeding, construction of buildings, textile production, childbirth, etc., and attributing each activity to an Anuna god or goddess. Within this narrative of order, kings are chosen by the gods to ensure abundance (*Šulgi F*, in Lämmerhirt 2012). See also *The rulers of Lagaš*, 50–63.

13. In *Enki and the world order*, 318–324, Enki sets ploughs, yokes and teams of oxen, and has the king put in front of it all. Note that ploughs (*ĝiš<sub>3</sub>apin*) are sometimes equated to male genitals (Lambert 1987: 30). Further ideas linking women and women’s bodies to agriculture and fertility can be found in the Sumerian composition *The message of Lu-dingira to his mother*, 32–29.

14. See, for instance, *The rulers of Lagaš*, 54–55 and *Enki and the world order*, 318–324.

15. The line reads: *agarin<sub>4</sub>-e i<sub>3</sub>-ĥe-nun-na-gin<sub>7</sub> ĝiš<sub>3</sub> im-ma-an-[dug<sub>4</sub>]*. The term is semantically associated with both the female genitals (*šassūru*) and motherhood (*ummu*, *bāntu*), according to Antagal B 85–88 (Cavigneaux et al. 1985: 192). See also Arnaud (1996, esp. 134) and Steinert (2013: 13, fn. 36), with previous bibliography.



between animal fecundity and human sexuality”,<sup>16</sup> in which the act of digging canals was equated to penetration and sexual intercourse. In his survey, Tinney mentions *en passant* other texts where Neo-Sumerian royalty is presented providing agricultural prosperity. Such a text is *Ur-Namma G*, where the king is presented as farmer. He digs and ploughs just as Enki does in the compositions *Enki and the world order* and *Enki and Ninhursaga*, and thus causes abundance, plenty and life:

“Ur-Namma, may the people flourish in prosperity under your rule. You (?) ..... the plough and good barley, and your cultivated fields will be rich. You (?) ..... trees, seeds, good barley, the plough, and the fields. You (?) ..... the plough and good barley ..... King, cultivate the fields with oxen, and your cultivated fields will be rich; Ur-Namma, cultivate the fields with them, and your cultivated fields will be rich. The oxen will make (?) your cultivated fields good; your cultivated fields will be rich.” (*Ur-Namma G*, 9–15)<sup>17</sup>

Coated in similar language, the *Lipit-Eštar A* hymn, 43–47 states:

“I am he who makes an abundant crop grow, the life of the Land. I am a farmer, piling up his grain piles. I am a shepherd making butter and milk abundant in the cow-pen. I am he who makes the fish and birds grow bigger in the marshes. I am a river of plenty, bringing flowing water.”<sup>18</sup>

This plethora of references to irrigation, cultivation and land fruition are the basis for the construction of a number of sexual-reproductive and genital metaphors, as I argued in previous works.<sup>19</sup> It is interesting, in fact, that in one particular instance of the Inanna-Dumuzi’s narratives, the sexual union of both deities is said to guarantee the abundance of crops. The passage makes clear that the scenes concerning the beautifying of the body, courtship, and sexual union in the Inanna and Dumuzi cycle are but a part of a larger process aiming at securing fertility:

“The holy embrace (?) ..... fresh fruits (?) and shoots ..... as she arises from the king’s embrace, the flax rises up with her, the barley rises up with her. With her, the desert is filled with a glorious garden.” (*Inanna and Dumuzi P*, segment C, 7–11)<sup>20</sup>

In this light, the agricultural vocabulary of irrigation and ploughing is, or can be, used in contexts where sexual intercourse is meant in order to convey a message deep with meaning and social implications: that sexually active bodies are meant not only to enjoy sexuality, but most importantly, to produce and be a part of the dynamics of abundance.

16. Tinney (1999: 37).

17. See eTCSL 2.4.1.7.

18. See eTCSL 2.5.5.1.

19. Couto-Ferreira (2017).

20. In fact, this fragment is but the following up, after a break, of the textual sections of *Inanna and Dumuzi P* that I analyzed in Couto-Ferreira (2017: 55–56). See also *A balbale to Inanna (Dumuzi-Inanna O)*, 8–21 for more agricultural-based images of abundance, such as barley growing in furrows.

#### 4. *Productive Bodies, Cultivated Lands: Some Final Thoughts*

Female fertility, that is, the female capacity to bear healthy children, forms part of a broader idea of prosperity that encompasses wealth, well-being and equilibrium for the land, the individuals, the gods, and the cosmos. It is not surprising, therefore, that in Sumerian lamentations and other similar texts regarding the destruction of cities and the tearing of social order, women stop bearing, cattle become infertile, and fields stop producing crops. On the same grounds, when the harvest is abundant, the silos become full, patients recover from their maladies, and women bear healthy children.<sup>21</sup> The vocabulary of reproduction both in Sumerian and Akkadian is largely based on agricultural concepts (*n u m u n* / *zēru* “seed, offspring”; *g u r u n* / *inbu* “fruit”), and *The song of the hoe* accounts for a mythical background narrating the birth of humankind from the earth, just as plants sprouting out of the furrow.<sup>22</sup> The association survives even in later times: a Late Babylonian ritual aiming at avoiding miscarriage and securing pregnancy, makes use of orchards and palm trees in the performance with the intention of making the foetus thrive.<sup>23</sup>

At a political and religious level, the order kept by royal power mirrors that established in creation by the gods. In the same way, in the realm of social dynamics the female body encloses and reproduces in itself that very same policy and “ideology” of order: if the land must be productive in order to secure subsistence both to humans and the gods, so the bodies should equally be productive so as to secure family enlargement and social reproduction and continuity. As I pointed out elsewhere, the terms and expressions used in the description of both female genitals (*id<sub>2</sub>* “canal”, *a-ša<sub>3</sub>* “field”, *kislah* “threshing floor”, *ab-sin<sub>2</sub>* “furrow”, *du<sub>6</sub>* “elevation”) and sexual encounter (*id<sub>2</sub> dun* “to dig a canal”, *ur-ru<sub>11</sub>* “to plough”) are, for the most part, the same recurring in mythological accounts regarding the birth of agriculture, the securing of resources, and the political discourses on the capacities of kings to make the land prosper. However, this strong cultural discourse regarding women’s bodies is implicitly, more than explicitly, stated.

Taking all this into consideration, we may ask next what do the metaphoric correlations between agriculture and female fertility tell us about the ways female bodies, as vehicles of sexuality and reproduction, were culturally trained to comply with this idea of abundance and prosperity. What’s more, if the king is presented as the one guaranteeing fertility for the land, who is then responsible for human female fertility? To what point are males envisioned as kings responsible for the irrigation and ploughing of female bodies? Hopefully, these and other questions will be explored and followed up in future works.

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21. Robert Biggs (2000: 12) quotes an astrological omen published by Hermann Hunger that states that “empty storage bins will become full; the harvest of the land will prosper; there will be recoveries from illness in the land; pregnant women will carry their babies full term”.

22. See eTCSL 5.5.4.

23. For a full discussion, see Couto-Ferreira (2013).

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# Being Sardanapallus: Sex, Gender, and Theory

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## 1. *Introduction*

Writing about gender and sexuality in premodern cultures serves as a lesson in humility, as few fields of study so completely expose the dominant concerns of the times or the biases of the investigator. Modern sexual cultures are in a constant state of flux and, as a result, theories of sex and gender and histories of sexuality are particularly volatile. However natural our fashions appear in the moment, the markers of a time only emerge once that moment has passed. The biases, assumptions, predilections and prejudices not only characteristic of the period but specific to the investigator become visible as the moment recedes into history.

The subject of sex and gender in the cultures of ancient Mesopotamia poses a specialized problem. From the time of the biblical and classical authors, commentators have been drawn to the idea of Babylon and Assyria and used the two empires as a tool of social criticism. Fixed in scholarly and cultural imagination and as old as history itself, more or less, is the association of Babylon and Assyria with unbridled sexuality. The ancient Near East is our erotic other—always outside the norm, it provides images on which to project the issues of the moment.

The association of the ancient Near East with sexuality and race was a recurrent theme of 19<sup>th</sup>-century Orientalist discourse and racial theory.<sup>2</sup> The masculine queen Semiramis, who founded the city of Babylon, and the effeminate king Sardanapallus, who presided over the end of the Assyrian empire, were known from classical texts and had an established place in the popular imagination of western imperialist cultures early in the 19<sup>th</sup> century—long before excavations of the Assyrian palaces at Khorsabad, Nimrud, Kuyunjik started producing sculptures and texts. The literary, artistic, and theatrical

1. Babylonian Section, Penn Museum. I would like thank Beth Jewell who patiently read all drafts of this paper and listened while I talked through problems. I would also like to thank Peter Morris who was my collaborator on the first version and continued to provide advice. I am enormously grateful to Megan Cifarelli and Agnès Garcia-Ventura for their insightful comments and editorial assistance.

2. McCall 1998: 188.

productions inspired by these two characters, figures of both gender inversion and race, were indications of their power to speak to the sexual and political issues of the period. Lord Byron's play *Sardanapalus* (1821), and the painting by Eugène Delacroix, *La mort de Sardanapale* (1827), were among the images of Assyria that dominated cultural imagination. However, when the excavations confirmed the historical reality of the Assyrians, public attention was riveted. Both the scholarly community and the general public were eager to know the contents of the cuneiform tablets and as a result the decipherment of cuneiform proceeded quickly.

Both the fields of Sexology and Assyriology originated during the scientific age of the latter half of 19<sup>th</sup> century. At the same time Richard von Krafft-Ebing, an Austro-German psychiatrist and a founding father of the field of sexology, began compiling and cataloguing case studies of pathological sexual desires, early Assyriologists were in the process of cataloguing the British Museum's Kuyunjik Collection, the cuneiform tablets from Aššurbanipal's library at Nineveh. The sexual passages from Gilgamesh and the sex omen tablets from the omen series *šumma ālu* were among the first cuneiform tablets to be identified and published, but their reception into broader academic discourse took a longer, more circuitous route.

## 2. *Sex and the 19<sup>th</sup>-Century City*

The late 19<sup>th</sup> century was a period of scientific innovation, economic expansion, industrialization, and growing nationalism. On one hand, scientific, medical, and archaeological discoveries confirmed the power of rationalism, empiricism, and progress, while on the other, the rapid growth of cities brought an increase of crime, poverty, prostitution, and rampant venereal disease. As the result of the swelling of urban populations an increasingly diverse populace appeared in the city and on its streets. The boundaries of bourgeois, empire-building, elite masculinity were perceived to be under assault. The 19<sup>th</sup>-century city came to represent the corrupting force of modernity and everything that destabilized the old order of small towns and the values embodied in sexual restraint, gender hierarchy, and ethnic homogeneity. The liberal revolutions of 1848 were followed by a period of Jewish emancipation across Europe. Jews left the ghettos, moved to cities, and assimilated into the cultural and economic life, becoming one of the fastest growing and most visible segments of the population. In 1873 the Vienna stock market crashed, triggering financial crises that spread across Europe. The ensuing depression contributed to central European nationalism and deepening anti-Semitism.<sup>3</sup> In both Germany and Austria political parties with anti-Semitic platforms were established.

The rapid social changes created profound cultural anxiety and a crisis of masculinity. While cities always attracted homosexual sub-cultures, 19<sup>th</sup>-century urbanization provided a fertile ground for the proliferation of clubs catering to a variety of sexual tastes and made them visible as never before.<sup>4</sup> The beings that most troubled the European masculine subjective imaginary were the *homosexual*, *the single woman*, and *the Jew* (emphasis mine). Single women—factory workers, prostitutes, widows, shoppers, and women campaigning for political rights—emerged from the private sphere and became participants in

3. Hawes 2018: 99–137.

4. Garton 2014: 173.

the life of the city. All of these “new women” represented a new, unfettered, and threatening feminine sexuality, and the city itself came to be seen as “a woman both desired and feared.”<sup>5</sup> All the threats to the order of elite, military, masculinity embodied in the image of the homosexual and the single woman were projected onto the image of the urban, Semitic Jew. Jews in European cities were associated with sexual perversity, sexual criminality, and effeminacy.<sup>6</sup>

“Nineteenth century European nationalism, as argued by George L. Mosse was connected to constructions of a virile hetero-normative masculinity, whereas the male Jew was stigmatized as ‘effeminate’, ‘hysteric’, ‘oriental’ and ‘perverse.’”<sup>7</sup> Racial theory projected a geographical otherness onto the image. Jews came to be seen as a subversive presence in a state ideally defined by racial purity.

### 3. *Sardanapallus*<sup>8</sup>

Before the finds from the Assyrian capital cities called his legend into question, Sardanapallus loomed large as the paradigmatic 19<sup>th</sup>-century specter of Oriental male sexual degeneracy. The classical tradition of Sardanapallus as effeminate began with Ctesias of Cnidus, a doctor in court of Artaxerxes II (404–359 BCE). He was the source for the Greek historian, Diodorus Siculus. Sardanapallus was effeminate in two senses of the term. First, he was womanly in appearance and behavior and second, he was sexually profligate.<sup>9</sup>

“Sardanapallus, ...last king of the Assyrians, outdid all his predecessors in luxury and sluggishness ...he lived the life of a woman, and spending his days in the company of his concubines and spinning purple garments and working the softest of wool, he had assumed the feminine garb and so covered his face and indeed his entire body with whitening cosmetics and the other unguents used by courtesans, that he rendered it more delicate than that of any luxury-loving woman. He also took care to make even his voice to be like a woman’s, and at his carousals not only to indulge regularly in those drinks and viands which could offer the greatest pleasure, but also to pursue the delights of love with men as well as women; for he practiced sexual indulgence of both kinds without restraint, showing not the least concern for the disgrace attending such conduct.”<sup>10</sup>

Justin, the last classical author to contribute to the legend, reports an account of Sardanapallus’ death and the end of the Assyrian empire. Before the city fell, the king made a funeral pyre with his concubines, eunuchs and all his treasures, and threw himself on it.

“The last Syrian ruler was Sardanapallus, a man, but more degenerate than a woman. His own governor of the Medes, who was called Arbactus, sought an audience with him, a privilege hitherto

5. Rowe 2017.

6. Gilman 1994.

7. Mosse as quoted in Brunotte, Ludewig and Stähler 2015: 14.

8. Rollinger 2017.

9. See below 5.2. for Halperin’s 2005 discussion of this secondary usage.

10. Diodorus Siculus, *Bib. hist.* 2.23 (Oldfather, LCL).

granted to no one. When, after a great deal of soliciting, Arbactus finally succeeded in gaining admission, he found Sardanapallus surrounded by troops of whores. He was spinning purple wool with a distaff and, dressed like a woman (though he was more effeminate in his appearance and more wanton in his glances than any woman) apportioning tasks of wool to the young girls of the household. On seeing this, Arbactus was incensed that so many warriors were subject to such a 'woman' and that men who bore swords and armour served someone who worked with wool. He went to his comrades and told them what he had seen, adding that he could not take order from someone who preferred to be a woman rather than a man. Thus a conspiracy was formed and hostilities commenced against Sardanapallus. On hearing of this, Sardanapallus reacted not like a man about to defend his kingdom, but as women do when fearful for their lives. First he looked for a place to hide, but soon proceeded to battle with a small and disorderly force. Defeated, he fell back on his palace, where he built and lit a funeral pyre and then flung himself and his riches into the flames—in this action alone behaving like a man. The man responsible for his death, Arbactus, the former governor of Media, was made king after him. Arbactus transferred the empire from the Assyrians to the Medes.” (Justinus, Book 1:3)<sup>11</sup>

In 1862 George Rawlinson, Oxford historian and brother of Sir Henry Rawlinson, first published *The Seven Great Monarchies of Ancient Eastern World*, which became the standard history.<sup>12</sup> He tried to reconcile the shared Semitic characteristics of the Jews and the Assyrians depicted on the palace reliefs. According to Rawlinson the Assyrians had facial features common to the Semitic race, but their bodies were different. He concluded that the Assyrians of the newly excavated sources had more in common with European valorized military masculinity than they did with the Semitic Jew, and this led him to question the historicity of Sardanapallus as he was portrayed in the classical sources derived from Ctesias:

“... the striking resemblance to the Jewish physiognomy which is presented by the sculptured effigies of the Assyrians... While in face the Assyrians appear to have borne a most close resemblance to the Jews, in shape and make they are perhaps more nearly represented by their descendants, the Chaldaeans of Kurdistan.

While the Oriental Jew has a sparer form and weak muscular development, the Assyrian ... is robust, broad-shouldered, and large-limbed. Nowhere have we seen a race represented to us monumentally of a stronger more muscular type than the ancient Assyrian. The great, brawny limbs are too large for beauty; but they indicate a physical power which we may well believe to have belonged to this nation.”<sup>13</sup>

“According to the notions which the Greeks derived from Ctesias, and passed on to the Romans, and through them to the Moderns generally, the greatest defect in the Assyrian character—the besetting sin of their leading men—was luxurious living and sensuality. This account, intrinsically suspicious,

11. Justin 1994: 16. Opinions on the dates that he lived vary between 144–395 CE.; Rollinger 2011: 316.

12. Rawlinson 2002 [1885].

13. Rawlinson 2002 [1885]: 153.



is now directly contradicted by the authentic records we possess of the warlike character and manly pursuits of so many kings.”<sup>14</sup>

He points to the earlier and quite different depiction of Sardanapalus in Herodotus and Aristophanes:

“The character of Asshur-bani-pal stands really in the strongest contrast to the description—be it a portrait, or be it a mere sketch from fancy—which Ctesias gives of his Sardanapalus. Asshur-bani-pal was beyond a doubt one of Assyria’s greatest kings. He subdued Egypt and Susiana; he held quiet possession of the kingdom of Babylon; he carried his arms deep into Armenia; he led his troops across the Taurus, and subdued the barbarous tribes of Asia minor. When he was not engaged in important wars, he chiefly occupied himself in the chase of the lion, and in the construction and ornamentation of temples and palaces. His glory was well known to the Greeks. He was no doubt one of the ‘two kings called Sardanapalus’ celebrated by Hellanicus. He must have been ‘the war like Sardanapalus’ of Callisthenes; Herodotus spoke of his great wealth; and Aristophanes used his name as a by-word for magnificence.”<sup>15</sup>

#### 4. Assyriology

In *Assyria in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Western Scholarship*, Eckart Frahm traces the history of scholarly discourse about the Assyrians, beginning in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century before the excavations started producing evidence of Assyrian historicity.<sup>16</sup> When the palace reliefs and monumental sculptures were crated and shipped to London and Paris and put on display at the Louvre and the British Museum, they sparked public interest. The Assyrians were first introduced to the West through the empire-building exploits of their kings. Following the decipherment of cuneiform, the authority to represent the Assyrians passed to early Assyriologists who had the expertise to read and translate the documentary evidence. The royal annals were the first texts to be translated, and together with colossal sculptures they conveyed the confident imperial military masculinity that was the ideal of the time. Depictions of the gruesome violence inflicted on conquered people quelled public enthusiasm.

A major shift in the perception of the Assyrians occurred when George Smith read his translation of the flood story to the Society for Biblical Archaeology on December 3, 1872. In the wake of the media fire-storm his presentation created, Assyriologists started translating and publishing texts that related to broader aspects of Assyrian culture. While the sexual passages from the Epic of Gilgamesh were known to early Assyriologists, they were not part of this process. They were introduced to other fields of scholarship and entered the broader cultural conversation through a strange and roundabout route.

Between 1884–1891, German Assyriologist Paul Haupt copied and published all the known cuneiform texts of the Epic of Gilgamesh, including the passage describing the seduction of Enkidu by

14. Rawlinson 2002 [1885]: 157.

15. Rawlinson 2002 [1885]: 489.

16. Frahm 2007.

the prostitute Šamḫat, which was shown to him by Bruno Meissner in 1890.<sup>17</sup> In 1891 Alfred Jeremias used Haupt's copies and published a translation of the epic—the first (*Izdubar-Nimrod: eine altbabylonische Heldensage, nach den Keilschriftfragmenten dargestellt*).<sup>18</sup> His treatment of the seduction scene which was intended for an eager readership is a circumspect summary rather than a translation.<sup>19</sup> His notes refer to Haupt's copies and provide trained scholars everything they could need to identify, place, and translate the passage:

“Es folgt eine Scene, die mit epischer Breite in urnaiver Weise die Verführung des Eabani schildert und mit den Worten schließt: 6 Tage und 7 Nächte näherte sich Eabani der Uḫat der Geliebten. Nachdem er sich gesättigt hatte an ihrem *lalû*, wandte er sein Antlitz auf sein Vieh hin es erblickten ihn den Eabani, lagernd die Gazellen das Vieh des Feldes wandte sich weg von ihm.”<sup>20</sup>

Shortly after Jeremias published his translation the proper readings of the *dramatis personae* were established (Gilgameš, Enkidu, and Šamḫat replaced Izdubar, Eabanni, and Uchat). According to the modern edition by Andrew George, when he reaches the ocean at the end of the world Gilgamesh is frightful to look at: his face is sunken and burnt by frost and sun.<sup>21</sup> His body is overgrown with matted hair (*iktasû malû pagaršû*).<sup>22</sup> In fact, he looked like Enkidu. On the return trip Ut-napištim tells the ferryman to take Gilgamesh to a bathing place where he can wash and cast off the filthy skins that he is wearing so that he is clean and dressed like a king before he returns to Uruk.<sup>23</sup> The description of Izdubar (Gilgamesh) when he arrives at the end of the world and before he leaves leads Jeremias to conclude that Izdubar was suffering from leprosy and was cleansed of it before he returns to Uruk. Jeremias begins at the end of the epic and then reads back to determine the source of his affliction. Izdubar's illness was the result of Ištar's curse. Izdubar enraged the goddess first, when he refused her proposal of marriage and then again when he and Eabanni (Enkidu) killed the bull of heaven and threw its penis in her face.<sup>24</sup>

## 5. Syphilography

### 5.1. J. K. Proksch — Scholar-Zero

Jeremias' speculation about Gilgamesh's leprosy triggered the interest of Viennese dermatologist and Syphilographer, J. K. Proksch. In his article, “Die Syphilis bei den alten Babyloniern und Assyriern: Eine historische Skizze,” published in the May 1, 1891 edition of *Monatshefte für praktische*

17. Haupt 1884.

18. Jeremias 1891.

19. Ziolkowski 2011: 16.

20. Jeremias 1891: 17–18.

21. George 2003: tablet X, lines 5–9, pp. 678–679. See also George 2018.

22. Jeremias' translation: 39 “mit Beulen(?) bedeck” was later interpreted as “pustules” by Syphilographers.

23. George 2003: tablet XI, lines 250–260, pp. 718–721; Jeremias 1891: 17–18. The OB Pennsylvania tablet (George, 2003, OB II: 176–177 iii 106) preserves an inverse parallel sequence (cf. George 2018). Before Enkidu is introduced to Uruk and human civilization, his body hair is shaved, and he puts on a garment.

24. Jeremias 1891: 38–39.

*Dermatologie*, he surmises that the “painful and revolting” disease Izdubar (Gilgamesh) suffered from was not leprosy, as Jeremias thought, but syphilis.<sup>25</sup> In its initial stages, leprosy looks like syphilis and syphilis was the plague of that time. Beginning with the description of Izdubar’s appearance at the end of the epic, Proksch follows the sequence of Jeremias’ argument transforming leprosy into syphilis. Proksch was most likely “scholar-zero.” His work was the means by which knowledge of the sexual passages in Gilgamesh were disseminated in two directions: to an American and a French Syphilographer, on one hand, and to Austrian Sexologists, on the other (see below, 5.2.).

Although Eabanni’s symptoms aren’t described, Proksch believes that Eabanni’s disease was contracted as a result of “der sechstägigen Schwegerei” with his beloved Ukhat, the hierodule (a temple prostitute in service to Ištar).<sup>26</sup> There are two sources of syphilis according to Proksch. The first is the result of divine curse and second is sexual excess. Proksch was the first of the Syphilographers to refer to “Ukhat-disease” or “caress of the Uchat.”

### 5.2. Frédéric Buret and A.H. Ohmann-Dumesnil

In 1890 Frédéric Buret published *La syphilis aujourd’hui et chez les anciens*, the first volume of his study, *La syphilis à travers les ages*. American, A. H. Ohmann-Dumesnil, M.D., Professor of Dermatology and Syphilography at the St. Louis College of Physicians and Surgeons, took on the task of translating Buret. Before he sent his translation back to Buret, he read Proksch’s article and decided to add a summary in a two-page sub-chapter, “Syphilis among Ancient Assyrians and Babylonians.”<sup>27</sup>

When Buret received Ohmann-Dumesnil’s translation in December of 1891 he was surprised to find the sub-chapter. While he had been aware of the Nineveh tablets, he said the tablets quoted by Proksch were unknown to him. Believing the material was too important to leave out of his study, he expanded on Ohmann-Dumesnil’s work and included his analysis of the texts in an appendix to *Le “gros mal” du moyen-age et la syphilis actuelle* published in 1894.<sup>28</sup> He tellingly titled the appendix: “UKHAT: La syphilis à Ninive et à Babylone chez les Anciens Assyro-Chaldéens, 700 ANS AV. J.C.”

Buret noted that Proksch cited Alfred Jeremias and Rudolf Zehnpfund as his sources, but pointed out that French Assyriologist M. Joachim Ménant was dispatched by the French government to study the BM tablets and published two reports in 1863 and 1880 that predated the publications Proksch cites.<sup>29</sup> He suggested that it was possible that Ménant, who had a deeper knowledge of Nineveh tablets and was also French, might be the source, but was disappointed to find no mention of the texts treated by Proksch. It may or may not be a coincidence that the sex omen tablets of *šumma ālu* were first published in 1893, 1894, and 1910 by French Assyriologists.<sup>30</sup>

Ohmann-Dumesnil’s last translation of Buret 1894 (translation published 1895), which includes a summary of both Buret’s appendix and his own initial sub-chapter, reads as follows:

25. Proksch 1891.

26. I am grateful to Daniel Schwemer for pointing out that *Schwelgerei* “indulgence” is used here as a euphemism that indicates oriental wantonness (private communication).

27. Ohmann-Dumesnil 1891: 81–82.

28. Buret 1894: xxiii–xxvi.

29. Ménant 1862–1863.

30. Boissier 1893: 63; Boissier 1894: 85–94; Virolleaud 1910.

“Izdubar was attacked by a terrible, painful disease (by leprosy, according to another interpreter). He wandered about until he reached the infernal region, where he was given a ‘magic food’ for his disease. This either had no effect or it was merely preliminary, for Izdubar complained that the shadow of death lay on his genitals. Sit-napiôtim, the god of the infernal regions, took him to Arad-Ea, the ferryman, and bade him take the hero to the fountain of life, saying; ‘The man whom thou hast taken has his body covered with *pustules*; *scales* have altered the fairness of his body. Take him, Arad-Ea, to the cleansing-place where he can wash his pustules clean with snow, and take off his *skins*; the sea will carry them off: his body will appear well. The *coverings of his head will be renewed*, as also *the covering of his shameful parts*; by the time he returns to his country there will be no folds; all will be new.’ Then follows, without interruption: ‘Arad-Ea then conducted him to the cleansing-place, washed his pustules in water like snow; he cast off his skins; the sea carried them off; his body appeared healthy. He renewed his head-coverings; the sheath which clothed his shameful parts was new when he reached his native land.’ The covering which invested his pudenda ‘shall show no folds’ and ‘must be new,’ cannot be understood as meaning anything else than that the covering over or about his genitals must not become unclean through pathological secretions and become corroded or fold-like; it must be made new; *i.e.*, clean.”<sup>31</sup>

Eabani’s illness is more problematic. He was the first to throw the penis in goddess’s face and is chosen to die. His symptoms aren’t described and Syphilographers report on only what the sources state which leaves room for reticence and circumlocution.

The silence of the text allows for the possibility that Eabanni contracted syphilis from Ukhat and gave it to Izdubar before their tangle with Ištar to pass without comment.

“Eabani evidently had syphilis, for Izdubar says that he may not die like him. And Eabani had spent six days and seven nights dallying with the *lalû* of his beloved, Uchat. Among the ancient Orientals venereal diseases were the result either of exciting divine wrath or of sexual debauchery. The name of the hierodulus—Uchat—points very plainly to the Uchet disease,—the *uhedu* or *uhetu*; that is, syphilis of the ancient Egyptians.”<sup>32</sup>

### 5.3. 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Syphilography

#### 5.3.1. *The Cultural Context: The Prostitute and the Sexually Promiscuous Single Woman*

Syphilographers Proksch, Buret, and Ohmann-Dumesnil were writing during a time when fear of syphilis and its association with prostitution produced cultural and moral panic and against a background of misogynistic anxiety about women’s emerging independence and sexuality.<sup>33</sup>

31. Ohmann-Dumesnil 1895: 81–82.

32. Ohmann-Dumesnil 1891: 82.

33. Abrams 1988.

“Through the nineteenth century, the prostitute epitomized the overlap between the disciplines of sexual and criminal science, understood both as scientific disciplines and as a means of social discipline. She was the subject of repeated regimes of inspection and regulation in successive idioms of nineteenth-century morality and science... In much of continental Europe... prostitutes were subject to highly interventionist systems of police and sanitary registration and inspection. A limited legality for their trade was bought at the price of official surveillance and segregation from the ‘normal’ woman and regime of sexuality.”<sup>34</sup>

A particular source of fear was “the hidden prostitute” who operated outside the system of hygienic regulation which registered prostitutes and restricted them to a designated district or a specific domicile. The “hidden prostitute” could appear to be a normal, respectable woman. Because she couldn’t be identifiable by appearance, any single woman was under suspicion—she could be a free-lance prostitute who had come to the city to ply her trade or satisfy her lust.<sup>35</sup>

### 5.3.2. *Syphilography as an Academic Discipline*

At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century syphilography was a scientific discipline and Proksch one of its leading figures. In 1891 when Proksch published his study, the isolation of the bacterium *treponema pallidum*, the causative agent of syphilis, was still 14 years away, but Proksch believed that scientific medicine would solve the mystery and lead to a treatment. The field of syphilography and the monumental histories of the disease produced by Syphilographers were based on the principles of German historicism. In both the human and natural world, determining the history of the object of investigation was the key to understanding it. The methodology was based on objective analysis of primary sources. According to the tenets of historicism the search for evidence of syphilis in cultures of the past would provide clues to the source of the disease and lead to the possibility of managing it.<sup>36</sup>

The Syphilographers read the epic for sexual content and extract and discuss the key passages. They cite the work of early Assyriologists and use the first treatments of the epic as a basis for their analyses. The relation between syphilis and prostitution in the culture of the time is implicit in their interest in the topic, but the Syphilographers never make the connection explicit. In addition, they are careful not to push their analyses beyond what they think the sources allow.<sup>37</sup> The scholarly rigor with which they undertake a forensic analysis of primary sources provides a striking contrast to the facile way the material was treated by early sexologists.<sup>38</sup>

34. Caplan 1998: 101.

35. Greenway 1998: 28–29. For a discussion of both the Western regulation of prostitution and the East imagined as a locale of unbridled female sexuality see Levine 2003.

36. Stein 2016: 8.

37. I would like to thank Daniel Schwemer calling my attention to the Syphilographers’ academic rigor (private communication).

38. Gilgamesh has neither leprosy or syphilis. He appears the way he does because of his arduous journey to the end of the world and because he is maddened by grief. If there were syphilis in ancient Mesopotamia, these sources are not evidence. For two different 20<sup>th</sup>-century approaches to the history of syphilis contrast the paleopathology of Crosby (1969) with Stein (2016) who understands the disease as a socially constructed phenomenon.

Syphilography no longer exists as a distinct academic discipline and there is no evidence for the existence of syphilis in ancient world to be found in the Epic of Gilgamesh. Nevertheless, the connection between Gilgamesh and syphilis is more than an odd piece of historical miscellany. Early Sexologists saw the ancient sources as an irresistible foil for social commentary and the practice of drawing comparisons between ancient and modern sexual cultures continued well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## 6. *Clinical Sexology*

### 6.1. *Male Psychopathology: The Invert, Effeminate, Third-sex*

The new field of sexology, the scientific study of sex, was the inevitable product of the scientific optimism and cultural pessimism of the time. In 1976, Michel Foucault famously argued that the exploding 19<sup>th</sup>-century discourse on sexology produced a fundamental shift in the way sexual desire and practice was conceived, surveilled, regulated, and inscribed on the minds and bodies of individuals. When the first sexologists began to study sexual behavior, they saw it through a perspective of gender and transformed the inflexible binarisms of the 19<sup>th</sup> century into empirical categories that became available for clinical study and scientific investigation. Central to the emerging field was the concept of disease and treatment.

The first of 12 subsequent editions of Austro-German psychiatrist and sexologist Richard von Krafft-Ebing's pioneering study *Psychopathia sexualis, mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der conträren Sexualempfindung. Eine klinisch-forensische Studie* appeared in 1886.<sup>39</sup> *Psychopathia Sexualis* was characteristic of the period's impetus to compile, catalogue, and classify knowledge. Instead of collecting samples and specimens, Krafft-Ebing questioned institutionalized psychiatric patients and acquired a collection of case-studies from which he established a typology of sexual pathology. He differentiated between sexual perversion—pathological behavior which was innate and should be treated clinically, and sexual perversity—behavior that could be considered vice or even criminal. The work was conceived as a reference tool to help physicians and jurists distinguish the fine line between the two.

The medicalization of sexuality co-opted the mechanism of church confessional. In answering Krafft-Ebing's questions, patients began to see themselves as sexual subjects with an incipient sexual identity. "The hesitantly speaking perverts of Krafft-Ebing's medico-forensic pages, confessing their most intimate secrets to the new sexual experts, have walked out of the clinical text and on to the stage of history, living proof of sexual diversity."<sup>40</sup> The defining concepts and typologies of early sexologists were derived from 19<sup>th</sup>-century gender stereotypes and ideology, and as such are no longer in use. However, terms such as sadism, masochism, coprophilous, necrophilia, and fetishism are still with us and remain in our sexual vocabulary.

The notion of inversion, or inversion of sexual instinct, was a broad (now antiquated) category defined by gender transgression. The reversal of gender norms—effeminacy in men and mannishness in women—was manifest in physical appearance, comportment, and dress. Inversion was primarily an outwardly visible morphology, and frequently included sexual desire and behavior that violated what

39. Krafft-Ebing 1886 (subsequently enlarged and revised 12 times).

40. Weeks 2017: 84.

were considered gender appropriate positions. “Passives” or “pathics” were men who took the woman’s position in sexual intercourse and were penetrated by other men. Discernable effeminacy was the definitional factor. A man could be designated an invert without having sex.

The distinction between perversion and perversity is significant—perversity could be hidden. On the other side of this conceptual universe were men who appeared conventionally masculine, took the male role, and penetrated other men. Such behavior could be attributed to an excess of desire and considered perverse, but as it didn’t violate gender norms it was, therefore, essentially normal.<sup>41</sup>

David Halperin points out that the term “effeminacy” has long had a secondary usage referring to a surfeit of either homosexual or heterosexual sexual desire. The term applied to men who indulged their sexual appetites to the point of excess, gave themselves over to the pursuit of pleasure, and preferred the company of women. Halperin refers to Romeo’s speech in Act 3, Scene 1 of Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*.<sup>42</sup>

“O sweet Juliet  
Thy beauty hath made me effeminate  
And in my temper softened valor’s steel!”

According to Halperin:

“Rigidly polarized definitions of masculine and feminine, along with hyperbolic nature of gender stereotyping, enable the slightest suggest of gender deviance to be quickly inflated and transformed into an accusation of complete and total gender treason. From *liking* women to wanting to be *like* women is, according to the phobic logic of this masculinist ideology, only a small step.”<sup>43</sup>

This conception of male effeminacy stood in contrast to an ideal masculinity embodied in military ethos—men who could control their appetites, practice austerity, demonstrate their prowess in arenas of male power. Male effeminacy represented a threat to a military construction of masculinity that defended the state and supported the creation of 19<sup>th</sup>-century empires. The Assyrian king, Sardanapallus, the military failure who lost his empire, embodies effeminacy in both its forms: gender inversion and sexual excess.

Finally, third-sex/third-gender (*das dritte Geschlecht*) is the term for a trans-gender condition generated by the logic of the 19<sup>th</sup> century’s polarized sex and gender categories. The desire for other men could be constant or intermittent. The term was first used in 1862 by Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, the reforming pioneer of homosexual rights movement in Germany when he described himself as a female soul confined in a male body.<sup>44</sup> He coined the term, *Urnings* (Urnings) to describe a being that was neither male or female, but was rather a third sexual entity. He further compared a person that appeared outwardly

41. Halperin 2007: 114.

42. As quoted by Halperin 2007: 112.

43. Halperin 2007: 111.

44. Kennedy 1980.

masculine but inwardly feminine to an assimilated Jew who only performed “Germanness” or “Frenchness.”<sup>45</sup>

The figurative manifestations of the fears and anxieties of elite masculinity—the sexually voracious prostitute, the effeminate invert, and the Oriental Jew had covert, undetectable, and all the more fearful counterparts—the prostitute who appeared to be a respectable woman, the sexually perverse man who was gender conforming in outer appearance, and the assimilated Jew (emphasis mine). These beings haunted the masculine imaginary and prowled the streets of the city. They couldn’t be restricted to a specific locale, confined to an asylum, or made visible through racial science. They were emasculating forces who posed an internal threat to the stability of the state and an external threat to control of empire. They would also haunt the reception of texts related to the sexual ancient Near East for the next 100 years.

## 6.2. Scientia Sexualis: Sexologists as Social Commentators

The understanding that forms of psychosexual pathology were innate and had a biological basis made the connection between sexology and eugenics an implicit and inevitable vehicle for racial theories. Eugenics held the promise of discovering the scientific basis of racial stereotypes and, even more sinister, the possibility of revealing race when there were no outwardly visible markers.

Foucault’s 1976<sup>46</sup> defining description of the power and reach of *scientia sexualis* remains unparalleled:

“...elle se posait en instance souveraine des impératifs d’hygiène, ramassant les vieilles peurs du mal vénérien avec les thèmes nouveaux de l’asepsie, les grands mythes évolutionnistes avec les institutions récentes de la santé publique ; elle prétendait assurer la vigueur physique et la propreté morale du corps social; elle promettait d’éliminer les titulaires de tares, les dégénérés et les populations abâtardies. Au nom d’une urgence biologique et historique, elle justifiait les racismes d’Etat, alors imminents. Elle les fondait en «vérité »”<sup>47</sup>

In 1892 Krafft-Ebing added a chapter, “Fragmente einer Psychologie des Sexuallebens” to the 7<sup>th</sup> edition of *Psychopathia Sexualis* which included for the first time references to Babylon and, more significantly, Nineveh.<sup>48</sup> He refers to histories of ancient cities to support his contention, but the references are presented without analysis, as a convenient shorthand for scientific and historical grounding. It is reasonable to speculate that Viennese physician and Syphilographer J. K. Proksch was the

45. Tobin 2015: 87.

46. Foucault 1976: 33.

47. *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction*. Translated by R. Hurley (See Foucault 1978 [1976]: 58): “...it set itself up as the supreme authority in matters of hygienic necessity, taking up the old fears of venereal affliction and combining them with the new themes of asepsis, and the great evolutionist myths with the recent institutions of public health; it claimed to ensure the physical vigor and the moral cleanliness of the social body; it promised to eliminate defective individuals, degenerate and bastardized populations. In the name of a biological and historical urgency, it justified the racism of the state, which at the time were on the horizon. It grounded them in ‘truth’.”

48. Krafft-Ebing 1892.



source, as two years before Proksch published his 1891 article on syphilis in Babylon and Assyria, Krafft-Ebing had moved from Graz to become chairman of the Department of Psychiatry at University of Vienna.<sup>49</sup>

The sexual ancient Near East as a documented, historical locale first appears in sexological discourse in Vienna at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The cultural conceptions about sex, gender, and Anti-Semitism were folded together and then projected back in time.

## 7. Geschlecht und Charakter

In 1903, 23 year-old Viennese philosopher Otto Weininger published *Geschlecht und Charakter*, a revision of his doctoral thesis.<sup>50</sup> A few months later he converted to Protestantism and shot himself. Weininger is younger than Proksch, Krafft-Ebing, and Freud, but he is a product of the same fin-de-siècle Viennese intellectual milieu. His work is, also, an extreme representation of the troubled masculinity and the paradoxes of the time and his own situation within it.

Weininger is open to revealing his personal investment in the subject of his research and he is willing to follow the implications of his original premises as far as his thinking will take him. *Geschlecht und Charakter* is a complex work of compelling ambiguity that continues to inspire a great deal of interest and research.<sup>51</sup> Weininger doesn't refer to the cuneiform texts or to ancient Near East as an historical locale, as Proksch and Krafft-Ebing do. However, in no other work are the beings that figured prominently in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century cultural imaginary and then in portrayals of the sexual Near East so vividly depicted. The man who practices sexual austerity, the effeminate man who doesn't, and the sexually desiring woman are central to Weininger's discussion.

In the preface he stated that his goal was "to trace all the contrasts between Man and Woman back to a single principle" and to produce what might be called a total philosophical system. He uses the logic of his original premise to generate his entire system. His philosophical construct has a logical flaw—no system can validate itself using the conceptual structure that generated it. The logical flaw at the core of his work has lethal consequences when he arrives at his conclusions at the end of it.

Although it is less obvious, the same logical flaw is at the heart of the discussions of the sexual Near East that followed, including my own. Weininger's fully developed philosophical system is the best way of explaining the consequences of closed interpretive system and the need for a theoretical standpoint outside it. *Geschlecht und Charakter* is the creation of sustained intellectual stamina. Although it is idiosyncratic, it provides a portrait of 19<sup>th</sup>-century cultural concepts and modes of thought that might otherwise only be glimpsed in snippets. Therefore, what follows is an attempt to explain the aspects of Weininger's thought that are significant for the argument to come.

His system is divided into two parts. The First or Preparatory Part is "biological-psychological." It establishes the foundation for the more speculative, "logical-philosophical" argument in the Second or Principal Part. In the first part he laid out the logic that governs his entire construct. His system is based

49. Hauser 1992: 39.

50. Weininger 1903.

51. For a discussion of Weininger's work and influence, see Janik 1985; Greenway 1998; Lutz 2003.

on Male[M] and Female[W] that were ideal types not actual men and women. His conception of the ideal Male was derived from Kant's categorical imperative. Man stands in relation to the universe as a rational, conscious, moral self.

He saw the relation of the sexes as one of logical contrariety. "Contrariety is the mode of opposition between two propositions with the same subject and predicate which deny not only one another but even less extended formulations of each other."<sup>52</sup> Weininger went on to argue that Woman is the negation of everything that Man affirms. Man is rational, while woman is irrational. Therefore, Man's ability for self-realization and intellectual expression of genius stands in opposition to Woman, an instinctual being, motivated by a desire for sexual pairing. "A female genius, then, is a contradiction in terms, for we saw that genius was nothing but an intensified, fully developed, higher, universally conscious kind of masculinity."<sup>53</sup>

In the first part Weininger formulated a theory of bi-sexuality to account for an array of intermediate sexualities in actual individuals that Ulrichs' construction of third sex couldn't accommodate. According to Weininger, individuals were fundamentally bi-sexual and had a range of elements of the other sex within them. Gradations and the attractions between the sexes could be worked out according to a logico-mathematical formula. A man whose constitution is  $\frac{3}{4}$  M and  $\frac{1}{4}$  W will find his sexual complement in a woman that is  $\frac{3}{4}$  W and  $\frac{1}{4}$  M.<sup>54</sup> A man who is unable to resist the pull of a woman's sexuality loses his higher self and the possibility of expressing his genius and further, by using the woman as nothing more than a sexual object, he destroys her. Weininger concluded that the only way for a man to live freely and fully is to break the connection that binds men to women and eschew sexuality. "For what is otherwise called love belongs in the realm of the sows. There is only one love: it is the love for Beatrice, the adoration of the Madonna. For coitus, the Babylonian whore is there."<sup>55</sup>

Projection is a significant element of Weininger's argument in both sections of his work. "Woman is nothing but man's expression and projection of his own sexuality. Every man creates himself a woman, in which he "embodies himself and his own guilt."<sup>56</sup> Weininger knows his words might be seen as misogynistic, but he hopes careful readers will see his true point. Emancipation cannot be achieved by a movement, but an individual woman can achieve a free, rational masculine, self if she can overcome the woman inside herself. He says, "the greatest, the only, enemy of the emancipation of women is Woman."<sup>57</sup>

Homosexuality is a special case of the same law. Weininger is particularly concerned with homosexuals that appear to be gender-conforming: "A homosexual is half Man and half Woman. 'Sexual inverts' almost always practice their kind of sexuality solely among themselves and—sexual attraction being reciprocal—those who do not seek the same form of satisfaction are rarely found in their circles; and this is also the powerful factor that always causes homosexuals to recognize each other instantly."<sup>58</sup>

52. Simmons 1961: 149.

53. Weininger 2005 [1903]: 155. Translation into English by Ladislaus Lob.

54. Greenway 1998: 29.

55. See Luft 2003: 76, for the author's translation of Weininger 1903.

56. Weininger 2005 [1903]: 300.

57. Weininger 2005 [1903]: 65.

58. Weininger 2005 [1903]: 37.

In the Second or Principal Part he expanded his focus to larger cultural issues. He began with biological sex and gender stereotypes, and then expanded to include gender ideology and stratification, as well as intersections of race, class, and nation. He uses the same logic of contrariety that he laid out in the first part to incorporate ideas about behavior, ethics, culture, and religion into his original system. His conception of Man and Woman, Aryan and Jew, are worked into an all-encompassing philosophical construct that is as compelling as it is repelling.

In addition, his philosophical analysis turns into a search for personal moral perfection:

“Logic and ethics are fundamentally one and the same thing—duty to oneself. They celebrate their union in the supreme value of truth, which is confronted on one side by error and on the other by the lie: truth itself, however, is only one. Any ethics is only possible in accordance with the laws of logic, and any logic is at the same time an ethical law. Man’s duty and task is not solely virtue, but also insight, not solely holiness, but also wisdom: only the two together provide the foundation for perfection.”<sup>59</sup>

In the chapter on Judaism he stressed that what he meant by “Judaism” is a tendency of the mind, a platonic ideal, and not an actual people, race, or creed. He used the same logic to contrast Judaism and Aryanism that he used to contrast Man and Woman. Thus, Aryanism is the affirmation of everything that Judaism denies. In this argument his concept of projection is more fully developed. He said that we hate in others what we don’t want to be, but know that we are in part. An Aryan who expresses hardline antisemitism does so because he hates the Jew within himself. “This explains why the most rabid antisemites are found among the Jews. For only the completely Jewish Jews, like the totally Aryan Aryans, have no antisemitic disposition whatsoever.” In a note to this passage Weininger acknowledges his Jewish origin.<sup>60</sup> Just as individuals (both man and woman) are able to renounce the Woman element of their character, and Man can overcome the element Woman inside himself, Aryan and Jew can overcome their predisposition to Judaism.

In his conclusion he defines fin-de-siècle malaise as a Jewish problem.

“Our age is not only the most Jewish, but also the most effeminate of all ages; an age in which art only provides a sudarium for its moods and which has derived the artistic urge in humans from the games played by animals; an age of the most credulous anarchism, an age without any appreciation of the state and law, an age of species ethic, an age of the shallowest of all imaginable interpretations of history (historical materialism), an age of capitalism and marxism, an age for which history, life, science, everything, has become nothing but economics and technology; an age that has declared genius to be a form of madness, but which no longer has one great artist or one great philosopher, an age that is most devoid of originality, but which chases most frantically after originality; an age that has replaced the idea of virginity with the cult of the demivierge. This age also has the distinction of being the first to have not only affirmed and worshipped sexual intercourse, but to have practically

59. Weininger 2005 [1903]:131.

60. Weininger 2005 [1903]: 266–267.

made it a duty, not as a way of achieving oblivion, as the Romans or Greeks did in their bacchanals, but in order to find itself and to give its own dreariness a meaning.”<sup>61</sup>

As he extends argument in pursuit of a total, explanatory philosophy the worst misogynistic and anti-Semitic stereotypes of the period flood into his narrative. He says Jews are like women because they have curly hair and are interested in portable goods.

At the end he concludes:

“Humankind once more has a choice between Judaism and Christianity, between business and culture, between Man and Woman, between the species and the personality, between unworthiness and value, between the earthly and the higher life, between nothingness and the deity. Mankind has the choice to make. These are the two poles: there is no third realm.”<sup>62</sup>

A few months after the volume was published, Weininger, an assimilated Jew, converted to Protestantism and killed himself. His reasons, of course, can never be known, but his commitment to the fatal logic of the system he created had to be a factor. As his thinking expands he evokes the image of Christ: “Christ was the individual who overcame the strongest negation, Judaism, within himself, and who thus created the strongest affirmation, Christianity, as the most extreme opposite of Judaism.”<sup>63</sup> He creates a system of fatal and unquestionable perfection and as he follows his original premises to their extreme his conclusions unexpectedly come to the opposite of what he intended. His commitment to the ethical logic of his narrative leaves only one possible denouement—a leap into transcendence. In a perfect example of enantiodromic reversal—self-annihilation becomes a necessary act of self-affirmation.

Enantiodromic reversals engulf two dimensional thinkers of any ill who are invested in a conceptual structure deemed flawless and then pursues it to the extreme. *The Invented Reality, How Do We Know What We Think We Know? Contributions to Constructivism*, edited by Paul Watzlawick, is a collection of essays that explore the traps that await scholars committed to their interpretive system, ideologues committed to a political system, fundamentalists committed to a belief system, or narcissists committed to an ideal self. Any contradiction becomes a threat to the integrity of the entire structure.

“The stereotypical characteristics of the reality that emerges as a result of the conviction that the final, true explanation of the world has been found. In its claim to perfection, any such utopian construct plunges into the paradox of self reflexivity; no system can prove its own truth from within itself.”<sup>64</sup>

“The process of entrapment consists, first, in being taken in being taking in (1) by certain uses of language that have the appearance, but only that, of being meaningful; and (2) by certain modes of reasoning that have the appearance, but only that, of being self-evidently correct; second, in being

61. Weininger 2005 [1903]: 290–291.

62. Weininger 2005 [1903]: 293.

63. Weininger 2005 [1903]: 289.

64. Watzlawick 1984: 172.

locked in as a result of the psychological act, or process, of accepting these appearances being ‘really so.’ Somehow, by a process that may be quite complex, they become so thoroughly woven into the very fabric of what we take to be our web of reality that it no longer seems possible to adopt [a standpoint] from which the question of their correctness may be entertained seriously as a ‘mere’ hypothesis. What were, originally, assumptions have now become given and the idea of calling them into question is no longer intelligible.”<sup>65</sup>

As Weininger says:

“It is clear that if even only a single very feminine being were inwardly asexual or stood in true relationship to the idea of moral self-worth, everything that was said about women would have to lose its general validity as a psychic characterization of her sex, and thereby the whole position of the book would be invalidated at a stroke.”<sup>66</sup>

### 8. *The Ghost of Sardanapallus*

In 1892 Krafft-Ebing added a chapter, *Fragmente einer Psychologie des Sexuallebens*, to the 7<sup>th</sup> edition of *Psychopathia Sexualis*. In this chapter he turns from clinical psychiatrist to social commentator and widens his discursive net to weigh in on the social ills. This is a pivotal passage. It reflects and is firmly located in the cultural imaginary of the time. It was also beginning of an ongoing scholarly conversation that was passed from Sexologists in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, to social commentators in the 1930s, and to Assyriologists after World War II.

“Episoden des sittlichen Niedergangs im Leben der Völker fallen jeweils zusammen mit Zeiten der Verweichlichung, der Ueppigkeit und des Luxus. Diese Erscheinungen sind nur denkbar mit gesteigerter Inanspruchnahme des Nervensystems, das für das Plus an Bedürfnissen aufkommen muss. Im Gefolge überhandnehmender Nervosität erscheint eine Steigerung der Sinnlichkeit, und indem sie zu Ausschweifungen der Massen des Volkes führt, untergräbt sie die Grundpfeiler der Gesellschaft, die Sittlichkeit und Reinheit des Familienlebens. Sind durch Ausschweifung, Ehebruch, Luxus jene unterwühlt, dann ist der Zerfall des Staatslebens, der materielle moralische Ruin eines solchen unvermeidlich. Warnende Beispiele in dieser Hinsicht sind der römische Entwicklung de Sexuallebens. Staat, Griechenland, Frankreich unter Louis XIV und XV. In solchen Zeiten des staatlichen Verfalls traten vielfach geradezu monströse Verirrungen des sexuellen Trieblebens auf, die jedoch zum Teil auf psycho- oder wenigstens neuro-pathologische Zustände in der Bevölkerung sich zurückführen lassen. Dass die Grosstädte Brutstätten der Nervosität und entarteten Sinnlichkeit sind,

65. Stolzenberg 1984: 269.

66. Lutz 2003: 79 (= Weininger 1903), author’s translation.

ergibt sich aus der Geschichte von Babylon, Ninive, Rom, gleichwie aus den Mysterien des modernen grossstädtischen Lebens.”<sup>67</sup>

Like other Sexologists of the period, Krafft-Ebing gave voice to the idea of the modern city as a source of effeminacy, degenerate sensuality, and indulgence in luxury. Further, he stated that the psychopathological or neuro-pathological condition of individuals applied not just to the city, but more pointedly to the state. “Exaggerated tension of the nervous system stimulates sensuality and leads the individual as well as the masses to sexual excess... The material and moral ruin of the community is readily brought about by debauchery, adultery, and luxury.”<sup>68</sup> While Krafft-Ebing is not as explicit as Weininger, it is hard not to see the idea of Jewish effeminacy, the age-old image of Sardanapallus, and the beings that haunted the period at work in his text. While Babylon is evoked as a geographical fantasy of feminine sexual other, Assyria is represented as a male invert—an internal threat to the masculine state.

The sexual passages from Gilgamesh and the sex omens from *šumma ālu* formed the core of a small data-set that scholars and commentators have returned to again and again. Each reading refers implicitly or directly to what went before and appears at the time to be a significant advance. This time bound nature of each new reception only emerges in retrospect and not one commentator has escaped the sexual culture of their historical present.

By the 20<sup>th</sup> century Sardanapallus had only historical interest and scholars had ceased to refer to Jews in explicitly racist terms. However, as the texts were passed down through time hand over hand, each commentator refers to what was said previously and, in turn, provides a foundation for the next, not one of them turns to reflect on the premise of their judgment. They only provide the latest link in a chain that stretches back to the 19<sup>th</sup>-century and unwittingly open a conduit by which the beings that animated the 19<sup>th</sup> century imagination are reanimated with every successive iteration. Weininger’s approach to the process of projection remains applicable. As each scholar has in turn used the sexual ancient Near East to define what that sexual culture of their moment is not, without realizing it they end up projecting onto an ancient geography the fears and the longings of their own period, and then, more than likely, their own.

67. Krafft-Ebing 1893 [1892]: 7.

*Psychopathia Sexualis, with especial reference to the contrary sexual instinct: a medico-legal study*, Translated from the 7<sup>th</sup> rev. and enl. German ed. by Charles Gilbert Chaddock (see Krafft-Ebing 1893 [1892]: 7):

“Periods of moral decadence in the life of the people are always contemporaneous with times of effeminacy, sensuality, and luxury. These conditions can only be conceived as occurring with increased demands upon the nervous system, which must meet these requirements. As a result of increase of nervousness, there is increase of sensuality, and, since this leads to excesses among the masses, it undermines the foundation of society,—the morality and purity of family life. When this is destroyed by excesses, unfaithfulness, and luxury then the destruction of the state is inevitably compassed in material, moral, and political ruin. Warning examples of this character are presented by Rome, Greece, and France under Louis XIV and Louis XV. In such time of political and moral destruction monstrous perversions of the sexual life were frequent, which, however, may in part be referred to psychopathological or, at least, neuro-pathological conditions existing in the people.

It is shown by the history of Babylon, Nineveh, Rome, and also by the ‘mysteries’ of life in modern Capitals, that large cities are the breeding-places of nervousness and degenerate sexuality.”

68. Krafft-Ebing 1892: 6.

Frahm’s pertinent and poignant warning about avoiding essentialism resonates even more powerfully to characterizations of sexuality in the ancient Near East. Scholars who deal with sexual subjects are more susceptible to essentialism:

“What a modern scholar can learn from an investigation of the history of his discipline is a critical awareness of the contingency of his own intellectual approach. The Assyriologist who looks back at the scholarship of his predecessors may realize that he is probably well advised to show a certain degree of skepticism with regard to the overly essentialist statements about ancient Assyria.”<sup>69</sup>

### 9. *Sexologists in the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century*

Krafft-Ebing was the first sexologist to refer to the newly discovered and translated texts, but other sexologists including Iwan Bloch, Havelock Ellis, and Sigmund Freud followed. Iwan Bloch, a German psychiatrist, dermatologist, and colleague of reforming sexologist, Magnus Hirschfeld, proposed the science of *Sexuellenwissenschaft* and is, therefore, considered the true founder of the field of sexology. In *Das Sexualleben unserer Zeit* 1907 (*Sexual Life of Our Times*, 1908) he attributed sexual perversity to the excitations (vibrations) of modern urban life. “For Bloch, the inner strength that was essential if sexual excess was to be avoided required a sense of rootedness and restfulness. A properly functioning soul would keep sexuality under control.”<sup>70</sup> He took issue with Krafft-Ebing’s contention that sexual pathology could be innate. He also argued that Ulrichs’ theory of a female soul in male body had no foundation, and that not only had Krafft-Ebing accepted the theory uncritically, he might have falsified the evidence.<sup>71</sup> If the logic that connected illicit sexuality to an inner biology could not be sustained, then the connection between sexuality and race should be questioned. Bloch felt that the impact that race and nationality had on “sensuality” (*Sinnlichkeit*) was far from clear:

“If it is thought in Aryan-Europe that the Semite is especially sensual, the opinion may be based on prejudice rather than on factually established race distinctions. Among the Jews, at least, unnatural vice is of conspicuously rare occurrence.”<sup>72</sup>

In order to more fully understand abnormal sexuality, he expanded his research and found that sexual degeneracy was not a new, *fin-de-siècle* malady, but could be found in all races of the world and in all times:

“Ähnliche Verhältnisse wie für Südeuropa treffen für den gesamten Orient zu, der von jeher eine Pflanzstätte geschlechtlicher Ausschweifungen gewesen ist.

69. Frahm 2007: 91.

70. Bloch as quoted in Mosse 1985: 33.

71. Bloch 1933: 19, translated by K. Wallis, “Intended for Circulation among Mature Educated People only”.

72. Bloch 1933: 39.

Nicht bloss die Ausbreitung des Islam, durch dessen Lehren ein „mächtiger sinnlicher Zug geht“ (G. Fritsch) trägt Schuld daran, sondern schon dem vorislamitischen Altertum galt der Orient, insbesondere Phönizien, Babylon, Persien, als die ursprüngliche Heimat und schlimmste Brutstätte der widernatürlichen Unzucht jeder Art (Päderastie, Cunnilingus πορνιχίς u.s.w.).<sup>73</sup>

Havelock Ellis, a reforming British sexologist, brought continental sexology to Great Britain. His portrayal of Babylon focuses on the rights of women and reflects the suffragette movement and sublimated fear of feminine sexuality.

“If we consider the status of woman in the great empires of antiquity we find on the whole that in their early stage, the stage of growth, as well as in their final stage, the stage of fruition, women tend to occupy a favorable position, while in their middle stage, usually the stage of predominating military organization on a patriarchal basis, women occupy a less favorable position. This cyclic movement seems to be almost a natural law of the development of great social groups. It was apparently well marked in the very stable and orderly growth of Babylonia. In the earliest times a Babylonian woman had complete independence and equal rights with her brothers and her husband; later (as shown by the code of Hamurabi) a woman’s rights, though not her duties, were more circumscribed; in the still later Neo-Babylonian periods, she again acquired equal rights with her husband.”<sup>74</sup>

Sigmund Freud began to publish his libido theories between 1905–1915. In 1905 he published *Drei Abhandlungen für Sexualtheorie* (*Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*). He begins the first essay, (*Die sexuellen Abirrungen*) by referring to the contributions made by Bloch and writes that climate and race contribute to inversion:

“a) Man muß Wert darauf legen, daß die Inversion eine häufige Erscheinung, fast eine mit wichtigen Funktionen betraute Institution bei den alten Völkern auf der Höhe ihrer Kultur war; b) man findet sie ungemein verbreitet bei vielen wilden und primitiven Völkern, während man den Begriff der Degeneration auf die hohe Zivilisation zu beschränken gewohnt ist (J. Bloch). Selbst unter den zivilisierten Völkern Europas haben Klima und Rasse auf die Verbreitung und die Beurteilung der Inversion den mächtigsten Einfluß (Footnote 8).

(Footnote 8) In der Auffassung der Inversion sind die pathologischen Gesichtspunkte von anthropologischen abgelöst worden. Diese Wandlung bleibt das Verdienst von I. Bloch (1902–3),

73. Bloch 1902: 26–27.

*Anthropological Studies in the Strange Sexual Practices of All Races in All Ages*. Translated by K. Wallis (see Bloch 1933: 32): “...The Orient ... from time immemorial has been a hot-house of sexual excess.

Long before Mohamet the Orient—especially Phoenicia, Babylon, and Persia was regarded as the home and distribution-center of unnatural vice of every sort (pederasty, cunnilingus = phoinikizein.”

74. Ellis 1929: 393.



welcher Autor auch die Tatsache der Inversion bei den alten Kulturvölkern nachdrücklich zur Geltung gebracht hat.”<sup>75</sup>

## 10. *Sexual Liberalism in the 1930s*<sup>76</sup>

### 10.1. *Freud*

With the academic acknowledgements behind him, he immediately departs from the sexology of the past and begins presenting the theories that would transform the cultural landscape of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. His sexual theory was located within his larger theories of the dynamic unconscious. In the 1930s, as a result of Freudian theory, the study of sexuality assumed a new importance in intellectual discourse. Narrow interest in sexual pathology gave way to a new interest in sexual normalcy.

### 10.2. *Joseph McCabe*

A now-forgotten, defrocked Roman Catholic priest from Great Britain, Joseph McCabe was a prolific writer during the liberal decade that preceded World War II. A voluble “freethinker,” he issued numerous pamphlets on all aspects of life that had been occluded by Christian dogma, including sexual mores. McCabe’s 1926 pamphlet *Morals in Ancient Babylon* actually represents a surprisingly sophisticated attempt to put the newly translated materials from the ancient Near East into a larger theory of sexual morality:

“The reader will now perceive the full irony of the statement that is constantly being made from pulpits that we ‘are returning to the morals of ancient Babylon’! Any attempt in any modern civilization to enforce even an approach to the Babylonian law would result in rebellion. Every variety of sexual offense, which is either not punished at all or only visited with a few months’ imprisonment in any Christian civilization, was in ancient Babylon punished with death. I must, in fact, defend Babylon, not against looseness in sex-matters, but against an apparently just charge of savage puritanism. These old laws were, as one gathers from clause 129, probably not generally enforced in

75. Freud 1905, available online at: <http://gutenberg.spiegel.de/buch/drei-abhandlungen-zur-sexualtheorie-910/2> [accessed June 2018]. Freud 2010 [1905]: 16.

*Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*. Translated by J. Strachey (see Freud 1962 [1905]: 5):

“(a) Account must be taken of the fact that inversion was a frequent phenomenon—one might almost say an institution charged with important functions—among the people of antiquity at the height of their civilization.

(b) It is remarkably widespread among savage and primitive races, whereas the concept of degeneracy is usually restricted to states of high civilization (cf. Bloch); and, even amongst the civilized peoples of Europe, climate and race exercise the most powerful influence on the prevalence of inversion and upon the attitude adopted towards it. (Footnote 2)

(Footnote 2.) The pathological approach to the study of inversion has been displaced by the anthropological. The merit for bringing about this change is due to Bloch (1902–3), who has also laid stress on the occurrence of inversion among the civilizations of antiquity.”

76. Many sources from this period were lost in 1933 when Nazis staged a public book burning which included the entire library of Magnus Hirschfeld’s Institut für Sexualwissenschaft in Berlin.

all their rigor. But they are an eloquent testimony to the Babylonians stern view of sexual irregularities.”<sup>77</sup>

In his *The Phallic Ancient Civilizations and the Cult of Love: Survey of the Civilized Area in which Sex Ethic was Unknown*, he takes pains to refute the popular assumption that the ancient Near East was “effeminate, effete, and lewd...” “Except in matters of sex,” he says, “phallic peoples (i.e. those that glorify sex) held just as strongly to their ethics as we do to ours even in their religion.” Babylon, he concludes, was phallic, but ethical, with Assyria just a bit more ethical than Babylon.<sup>78</sup>

### 11. *Modern Assyriologists: 1950s to the Sexual Revolution*

In the wake of the 1948 Kinsey report and the trend toward sexual liberation that followed World War II, both popular culture and scholarship reflected a longing to break free from conventional restraints. Other cultures were romanticized; they were seen to have a healthier approach to sexuality—one that was free from the crippling effects of western cultural repression. The portrayal of Mesopotamian sexual attitudes accordingly underwent an alteration. Although it seems unfair to separate their general characterizations from meticulous textual analysis, Erich Ebeling, A. Kirk Grayson, and Jean Bottéro, like Jeremias a century earlier, confuse explicit language with actual sexual freedom. They write about the Mesopotamians, however, as though they were participants in the “Summer of Love.”<sup>79</sup> According to W. G. Lambert, “Odd allusions in literary texts allow a lurid picture to be painted of streets and gardens abounding with mating couples.”<sup>80</sup>

In 1973, A. Kirk Grayson published a translation of the 38 sex omens on the first section of tablet 104 of the omen compendium *šumma ālu*.<sup>81</sup> His translations were meant for a general audience and he gave the following summary:

“By this time the reader should be impressed with the absence of sexual inhibitions on the part of ancient Mesopotamians. Sex was merely part of a normal healthy life. Certain types of sexual behaviour were considered anti-social, of course (such as adultery) but apart from these few strictures both man and god enjoyed love-making to the full. What a contrast this is to our modern society, in which much of the material translated here, although known to specialists for decades, is presented to the general public for the first time!”<sup>82</sup>

77. McCabe 1926: 6.

78. McCabe 1930: 1–10.

79. Ebeling 1957–1971: 391–393; Bottéro 1980.

80. Lambert 1958: 195.

81. The omen compendium *šumma ālu* preserves two tablets of sex omens. Tablet 103 has 32 omens, all of which record acts of intercourse between a man who is the active subject and a woman who is the passive object. Tablet 104 is divided into two sections. The first section, which contains omen 38, details a wide assortment of sexual acts. After a dividing line there is a sequence of omens that deal with divorce and marital abuse.

82. Grayson and Redford 1973: 152.

## 12. *First Wave Feminism*

As Grayson said, tablet 104 had been known and read in the field since the early days of Assyriology, but very little found its way into print.<sup>83</sup> When I began working on the text in 1978 I brought a point of view that was different. I was dealing with the same material and writing in reaction to Grayson and the post-war male perspective. Where Grayson saw uninhibited sexual enjoyment in the depicted acts, I saw sexual constraint. Whenever a woman is depicted as an active sexual participant rather than a passive sexual object the meaning of the omen is invariably negative. On the other hand when a man deployed his sexuality for non-sexual gain the omen was positive. It is hard to remember a time when the meaning of the following omen wouldn't be patently clear, but that was the case in 1978: "If a man, a woman mounts him, she will take his virility for an entire year."<sup>84</sup> Nevertheless, my readings without much reflection simply mirrored the gender politics of the times, and in that respect were no different from the long line of scholars that preceded me.

## 13. *Interpretation, Theory, and Methodology*

### 13.1. *Interpretation without an External Standpoint: Reading as a Woman is not Feminist Theory*

In 1979 I gave a presentation in the Netherlands on the sex omens of tablet 104, the same text Grayson had translated. The presentation was thematic interpretation of the text as a whole. It was subsequently translated into Dutch by Geerd Haajer and published in *Phoenix*.<sup>85</sup> In my presentation I came to the following conclusion:

"...the same aspects of sexuality considered dangerous in Tablet 104 are seen as equally dangerous in the Epic of Gilgamesh. If time permitted an examination of other First Millennium texts that deal with sexual behavior, as well as other aspects of Tablet 104, could be shown to reveal the same pattern. Sexual excess is debilitating, a sexually aggressive woman represents surrender of power, and most significantly of all, we see that, ideally, sexual drive can be harnessed and directed away from simple indulgence and gratification towards endeavors that lead to high achievement."<sup>86</sup>

83. Viroilleaud 1910: 168–172; 214–220. At the Pontifical Institute it was reportedly read in Latin.

84. DIŠ NA MUNUS *ir-kab-šuz* MUNUS.BI UR.BI *i-leq-qe2* ITU.1.KAM<sub>2</sub> DINGIR NU TUK-ši (Gadd 1926: pl. 44, line 17. [= CT 39 44:17].

85. Guinan 1979.

86. English translation, by the author, of Guinan 1979: 81.

"Samenvattend kunnen we stellen, dat dezelfde aspecten van sexualiteit, die tablet 104 als gevaarlijk beschouwd worden, eveneens als gevaarlijk gezien in het Gilgamesh-epos. Gebrek aan ruimte noopt mij het hier bij deze voorbeelden te laten, maar ook andere teksten uit het eerste millennium v.C. geven bij nadere bestudering een beeld dat sterke gelijkenis vertoont met het hierboven geschetste. Buitensporigheid op sexueel gebied werkt verzwakkend, een sexueel aggressieve vrouw staat voor verlies van macht en, het belangrijkste van alles, sexuele drift kan in het ideale geval beteugeld worden; zo kunnen simpel genot en bevrediging omgezet worden in hoge prestaties."

It is unsettling to see echoes of Weininger emerge in my text like a ghostly apparition. My response was only the latest in a chain of responses. It demonstrates the value of theoretical perspective and, more specifically, the perils of ignoring it. Perhaps it is an example of what Freud called “the return of the repressed.”

Every interpretation is governed by an external paradigm whether the interpreter is aware of it or not, and no interpretation takes place outside of it. It doesn’t matter how adroit the readings or if they appear to be a significant advance over what went before. Interpretations that are presented as standing on their own without an external mode assessment end up frozen in the interpreter’s historical present.

In 1980 I ran aground when I tried to situate my readings outside of the interpretive frame that was the basis of my presentation. Anthropologist Clifford Geertz could not have made the problem any clearer, but the solution eluded me. In his famous essay *Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture*, Geertz discusses the relationship between interpretation and theory. Of interpretation he says:

“The besetting sin of interpretative approaches to anything—literature, dreams, symptoms, or culture—is that they tend resist, or be permitted to resist, conceptual modes of assessment. You grasp the interpretation or you do not, you see the point or you do not, you accept it or you do not. Imprisoned in the immediacy of its own detail it is presented as self validating.”<sup>87</sup>

### 13.2. *Theory and Methodology*

The theoretical currents in 1980 did not align in my favor. The understanding of what constituted a text was undergoing seismic shifts. Structuralism had laid bare the essentialist core of new criticism. Mesopotamian omen texts are ideally suited to a structuralist reading, but by that time structuralism had been declared dead. Poststructuralist theorists decentered the text. Following Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, signs and signification were seen in terms of a language system—an individual sign only acquired meaning in relation to its difference from another sign. On the other hand, Clifford Geertz’ interpretive anthropology took the non-linguistic world as a text. The text was elsewhere or everything was a text.

The trap I fell into is one that is particular, first to the sex omen texts, to a lesser degree, to omen texts derived from human behavior, but it is also waiting for anyone who works on serialized Mesopotamian omen literature. An Akkadian omen text collects related omens, organizes them by topical groups, and designates each omen to be either auspicious or inauspicious. The topical groups and the binary structure of divination generates its own putative methodology. When individual and small groups of omens are contrasted and compared, systematic patterns of positive and negative meaning emerge. Omens which may initially elude interpretation become meaningful when incorporated into an expanding semantic structure. The sex omens make connections between a man’s overt sexual behavior and what happens to him in the future. This is an inherent relationship that resonates for a modern reader and, as a result, it is possible to see connections between the sign recorded in the protasis of an omen and the

87. Geertz 2000 [1973]: 7.

meaning recorded in the apodosis and resolve the connections into larger systematic patterns. This gives the sex omen texts an unusual semantic density.

When one works from the text outward, and then turns around to interpret the results, the argument that results has an uncomfortable circularity that can't be accounted for as a hermeneutical circle. No wonder I had problems. Retrofitting a theory to fit the methodology that generated the interpretations is, as Clifford Geertz says, "shooting the fence and drawing a bull's eye around the hole."

I have returned to these texts again and again. The mistakes I made during my first encounter with the texts contrast with what I learned looking back from a perspective of many years, and illustrate the points I wish to make about the relationship between theory and text, between interpreter and the frame that governs the interpretations, the place and misplacement of methodology, and how to situate the analyses of texts in evolving theories of gender and sexuality. I initially fell into every possible trap—interpretive, methodological, and theoretical.

This second *Conference on Gender Theory and Methodology* held in Barcelona Feb 2–3 2017 shows that theory, although not totally accepted, has become at least part of the Assyriological conversation. This was far from the case when I first began on the sex omen texts. Theory is the lens through which we look at our sources. Depending on the theory we choose certain aspects of our sources will come into the foreground and others will recede. Methodology, as distinguished from theory, is the way what is seen through a theoretical lens is configured for analysis. Methodological tools are derived from and are specific to a theoretical framework.

With respect to my reading of the text, the configuration of a man who can master his desires, a man who can't, and a sexually aggressive woman, is hardly new in the history of sexualities, nor am I claiming that my readings had no validity. It is the most salient and most obviously binary textual perspective. The text presented other difficulties—I struggled to resolve the paradox of omens derived from apparently voluntary behavior. In the end it was Freudian theory that showed me the way out of my problems.<sup>88</sup>

Today my understanding of the relationship between textual interpretation and theory is derived from Medievalist Paul Strohm, *Theory and the Premodern Text* (2000). Strohm's pragmatic approach, which he calls "practical theory," centers the text as an object of investigation and speaks to an important aspect of the work of Assyriology. The following quotes from Strohm's introduction speak for themselves:

"What I have in mind here is voluntary 'impure' theory: project oriented, aimed at explaining the text rather than its own vindication, unisistent about its own status as a total explanatory system."<sup>89</sup>

"Refusing an easy assimilation to the text's self-representations, theory justifies itself, and even some of the difficulties it occasionally presents, by offering a standpoint for appraisal grounded somewhere outside that range of possibilities afforded by the text's internal or authorized commentary. Theory thus enjoys a role that need not be understood as one of minimization or reduction, but rather augmentation. Its promise, that is, involves supplementing the text, enriching its meaning by unearthing its tacit knowledge and its implicit or canceled opinions. Thus, my persistent attraction to

88. Guinan 1990.

89. Strohm 2000: xi.

Freud, and the bold entry he affords into the issue of what the text “represses,” the possibility that the text possesses an unconscious, comprised by what it repressed or declined to say. .... theory is any standpoint from which we might challenge a text’s self-understanding.”

“Theory for its own sake is that it runs the risk of estrangement from the text it seeks to illuminate. Most crucially, though, the initial decision to centralize the text as the object of analysis exerts its own form of control over the theories I use and the ways in which I use them. The text as the center of analysis ultimately escapes or exceeds any single critical system that is aimed at it.”<sup>90</sup>

Since 1979 I have looked at the texts through a variety of different theoretical perspectives: Freudian theory, feminist theory, theory of the body, theory of sexual scripting, queer theory, some more successfully than others. Strohm’s approach to the textual unconscious remains the most valuable. New theory can reveal new terrains of meaning in known and well-known sources. While theories are also a product of a cultural moment, conscious theory offers a frame for assessment that is external to and broader than the interpreter and the object of interpretation. It provides categories and a vocabulary that can be passed to other interpreters and used to analyze the same or different texts in ways that cannot be anticipated, but most importantly, no theory is ever or should be presumed to be complete.<sup>91</sup>

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90. Strohm 2000: xii–xiv.

91. “Walking Fire: Symbolization, Action, and Lollard Burnings” (Strohm 2000: 20–32) is an analysis of the first Lollard burning in 1401 and the twenty year preamble that lead to it. He uses the historical event as the basis of for a theoretical study of the relationship between hate speech and action—the moment when hypothetical or imagined action crosses the line into actual violence. “...that event,” he says, “raises issues of the most urgent present importance.” His essay is included in Strohm 2000, but he says it was written in the year of Yitzhak Rabin’s assassination [1995]. This note was written November 6, 2018, eleven days after the massacre in a Pittsburgh synagogue and during a year when President Trump’s drum-beat of hate filled tirades and thinly veiled anti-Semitic invectives have engulfed American social space.

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## “Only in Dress?” Methodological Concerns Regarding Non-Binary Gender

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Among the textual sources from the cuneiform cultures of the ancient Near East, evidence can be found of social groups whose gender identity seems to have fallen outside of a female-male binary, though their identity, profession, social status, sexuality, and religious role have all been hotly debated.<sup>2</sup> The most important point of agreement among scholars today is that these groups were closely associated with the cult of the goddess Inana (Sumerian) or Ishtar (Akkadian)—a goddess whose paradoxical character and complex personality are, however, themselves contentious issues.<sup>3</sup>

One of the most striking aspects of gender in cuneiform cultures is the very number of different terms apparently denoting non-binary identities. These include but are not limited to *kur-ĝara* / *kurgarrû*, *assinnu*, *saĝ-ursaĝ*, *gala* / *kalû*, *pilipili* and *kulu’u*.<sup>4</sup> However, this list quickly pales in comparison with the abundance of words that have been used to describe one or more of these groups in contemporary scholarship: “homosexual,” “cross dresser,” “bisexuals,” “transvestites,” “hermaphrodite,” “eunuch,” “male cult prostitute,” “effeminate,” “catamite,” “berdache,” “corybants,” “man-woman,” “castrated choirboy,” “impotent creatures,” “erotic specialists,” “sexually abnormal creature,” “a sexless, probably self-castrated, being”—and so on.<sup>5</sup>

Aside from their occasionally disparaging tone, it is worth noting that these modern terms cut across the various ancient groups. Each new term is most often applied to all the ancient categories, as there is a

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2. Taking just a few examples from the last ten years, see Gabbay 2008; Assante 2009; Zsolnay 2013; Nissinen and Svärd 2018; and Peled 2017.

3. See e.g. Harris 1991 and Bahrani 2001, ch. 7.

4. It is debated whether the *saĝ-ursaĝ*’s were the Sumerian equivalent of the Akkadian *assinnu*’s. In this article, the two are provisionally treated as separate categories.

5. See, respectively, Gabbay 2008: 50, *ibid.*, Assante 2009: 44, Harris 1991: 276, *ibid.*, *ibid.*, *CDA s.v. assinnu*, George 2006: 175, *ibid.*, Sasson 1994: 301, Fales and Postgate 1992: 24, Parpola 1997: *civ*, Dalley 2000: 161, Parpola 1997: *xcvi*, Roscoe 1996: 213, Sladek 1974: 89, and Parpola 1997: *xcii*.

marked tendency to gloss over the differences between them. Consider the following statement by Andrew George, commenting on a king being referred to as a *kulu'u*: “The insult becomes sharper when one considers that a *kulu'u*, if he was like an *assinnu*, took the female role in homosexual intercourse.”<sup>6</sup> Apart from the view of the “female” role in homosexual intercourse as naturally insulting, which George seems not to question, the statement shows how a perceived sameness between the ancient terms can be used to stretch the evidence from one to the other.

This same tendency towards seamless equations applies equally well to the modern terms. That a *gala* can generally be regarded as “a eunuch, an impotent man, a homosexual, or a cross dresser,”<sup>7</sup> reveals a frame of thought in which these identities are seen as somehow the same. For example, Gwendolyn Leick states that “[o]ne factor which speaks in favour of the social integration of asexuals, homosexuals, etc. is the very range of terminology to describe them.”<sup>8</sup> But that range is clearly not present in Leick’s own argument. The list “asexuals, homosexuals, etc.” is rendered bizarre both by its juxtaposition and by its abruptness: exactly what propinquity is there between asexuals and homosexuals? and what other identities does this “etc.” hide? The repeated slippage in modern scholarship between homosexuality and transgender, effeminacy and impotence, non-normative sexuality and castration shows an alarming lack of concern for different non-cisgendered, non-heterosexual identities, even as these are exactly what is being investigated.

Given such a mess of contradictory interpretations, it seems that there is no clear sense in the scholarship of how this group of ancient identities is to be approached, as the answers to what the ancient terms might denote proceed in the most different directions possible. Crucially, behind this proliferation of modern “translations” lies the search for a single truth beneath the ancient terms. Despite their differences of opinion, scholars have generally been united in their quest to uncover a single sexual identity that may account for what *assinnu*’s, *kurgarrû*’s and *kulu'u*’s “really” were. But despite the insistence of this search for the true identity marked by the ancient terms, it has produced no clear answers, only a multitude of incompatible proposals.

### 1. *Male Sex and Ambiguous Gender*

I would like to suggest that part of this confusion arises from an unshakeable assumption, across most of the secondary literature, of a binary division between sex and gender. Of course, a distinction between cultural gender and biological sex is not in itself an unwarranted assumption, and may indeed constitute a useful methodological precaution in many cases. But in the context of ancient Near Eastern non-binary identities, the dichotomy has been applied to the textual evidence *in such a way* that it has blurred some crucial distinctions and covered over some important nuances. The underlying assumption that whatever non-binary behavior is evinced by ancient individuals is nothing but a cultural surface beneath which hides a “true”, knowable, biological, *male* sex, has distorted the readings of the ancient

6. George 2006: 176.

7. Gabbay 2008: 50. See e.g. Gelb 1975: 74 (emphasis added): “The sphere of possibilities for the meaning of *gala* can be narrowed down to pederast, homosexual, transvestite, eunuch, or the like. There is a clear connection of *course* between the first three terms.”

8. Leick 1994: 161.

texts in a number of ways. Consider, for example, the following statements about Ishtar’s followers (all emphases added):

“it seems nevertheless unmistakable that the sex of the *kurgarrû*’s and *assinnu*’s has indeed been changed, *at least on the surface*”,

“Some scholars speculate that it was *simply* a matter of cross-dressing, but some claim that the devotees were *actually* castrated”,

“The exact way of transforming masculinity into femininity is not known, and it is debated whether it was *simply* a matter of a transvestite *role-play* or whether the new gender status was enforced also physically”,

“male to female, if *only* in dress.”<sup>9</sup>

In each quote, biological sex is treated as an unchanging essence and cultural gender as a mere surface. Sex is reality, gender is appearance, and accordingly any movement across genders is repeatedly reduced to a “simply,” an “only,” a temporary “role-play”. It is, in the end, of no consequence, because what really matters is the underlying biological reality. This division serves both to obfuscate the effects of gender transitivity, and to set it apart from an ahistorical sex that is supposedly stable and non-negotiable.

Exactly because it is reduced to a superficial “simply,” gender transitivity often seems to be denied in advance. For example, when Daniel Fleming discusses “the *assinnu*, a man with ambiguous gender identity,”<sup>10</sup> one is led to wonder—just how ambiguous? After all, Fleming seems to have no trouble categorizing the *assinnu* as a man, at the very moment that he is calling gender into question. Likewise Uri Gabbay writes that “[h]is physical features and gender identity have been widely discussed in Assyriological literature”,<sup>11</sup> but how can that discussion truly be said to take place, if the matter has always been decided in advance by the grammar?

I am of course aware that the words *assinnu*, *kurgarrû*, and *kulu’u* are masculine in Akkadian, though it should be noted that the feminine form *assinnatu* is also attested,<sup>12</sup> and that in Sumerian words are marked not as masculine and feminine but as person and non-person. Either way, this is not the issue. Contemporary English offers possibilities that Akkadian does not, and vice versa. If one considers *assinnu*’s to be transgender, third gender, or gender ambiguous, one should use the appropriate pronouns in the language one employs. A scholar might well make an informed decision to follow the Akkadian texts and use masculine pronouns, but the crux of the matter is the complete lack of justification of that decision, automatizing the gender that is being investigated and thereby preemptively disallowing any actual discussion.<sup>13</sup>

9. Respectively, Assante 2009: 45; Teppo 2008: 86; Nissinen 1998: 31; Huffmon 2004: 244.

10. Fleming 2004: 75.

11. Gabbay 2008: 49, emphasis added.

12. See *Malku* I 135.

13. Furthermore, the contemporary situation offers a warning against relying too heavily on grammar for our assumptions about gender. In his summary of theoretical approaches to gender, for example, Ilan Peled (2017) refers throughout to the gender theorist Raewyn Connell with male pronouns, despite the fact that she is a transgender woman. If this sort of transphobic

Even aside from pronouns, it is a question of which genders are assumed in advance to be “real” and which genders are always regarded as “social”. The key point of gender constructivism is that *all* gender is to be regarded as constructed, and that transgender and third gender are not somehow “more constructed” than binary genders. Yet, some gender identities are made to bear the weight of constructivism more than others. For example, commenting on Simo Parpola’s view of certain Assyrian prophets as transgender, Jonathan Stökl concludes that “[w]hile that interpretation remains a remote possibility, the evidence is not strong enough to support it and in view of that, it is better not to impose Western conceptions of gender on to the data. Issār-lā-taššīyaṭ is, therefore, a male prophet of Issār of Arbela.”<sup>14</sup> While I agree with Stökl’s conclusion regarding this specific prophet, I find it problematic to imply that maleness itself is not also subject to Western conceptions, only transgender is.

Stökl thereby reintroduces a distinctly Western division between the cultural variability of transgender and the cross-cultural stability of the male sex, exactly as he criticizes the imposition of Western categories. Yet the male gender is not a uniform, ahistorical category, it is always constructed and subdivided differently in different cultural contexts. Consider for example the argument proposed by Joan Goodnick Westenholz and Ilona Zsolnay that in Sumerian culture there was no generic category “male human”, since maleness was always qualified according to other social parameters.<sup>15</sup> Instead of a universal unmarked maleness, one finds a set of gendered social constructions of class and age: male servant, male elite, male youth, male elder, and so on. As this example shows, maleness is every bit as socially constructed and as subject to “Western conceptions” as transgender is.

Against the automated distinction between male sex and ambiguous gender, which reduces all gender transitivity to surface ripples on the bedrock of biology, I would claim that the distinction is neither theoretically tenable, methodologically justified, nor philologically practical.

On the theoretical side, one might consider the arguments of Judith Butler. While Butler has often been labelled a constructivist, her argument in *Gender Trouble* is better understood as the deconstruction of a dichotomy that would counterpose biological sex and cultural gender.<sup>16</sup> Neither sex nor gender as such are constructions, according to Butler, rather the sex-gender divide itself is. Butler argues that on the one hand, gender is just as material as sex is, and on the other, that we cannot access biology outside of a cultural frame. The way we view our bodies is throughout filtered by discursive norms and historically specific conceptions. As cultural beings, we do not have access to a pre-cultural sex, for gender and sex are always bound up with one another.

But the issue here is not only, and not even primarily, a theoretical one. It is also fundamentally a practical problem, a methodological issue. The evidence at our disposal, meaning the cuneiform texts and the artistic representations with which we study gender, reveal nothing about biology. They may, if properly read, inform us about cultural norms, prevailing perceptions, and the ideology of gender, but not

misrepresentation skews our discourse even today, why should we then base our interpretations of the identity of *assinnu*’s, for example, on the fact that they are referred to with male pronouns? What solidity of fact do we expect to find in ancient grammar, if its modern counterpart misleads us so?

14. Stökl 2009: 98.

15. Westenholz and Zsolnay 2017.

16. Butler 1990.

about the so-called reality that is supposed to lurk behind gender. Until philologists can show otherwise, there remains no methodologically sound way to progress from historical figurations of gender to the supposed reality of sex.

We should not underestimate the extent to which our knowledge of historical reality is philological in nature. Or, differently put, we should not allow ourselves to believe that, if we are forced to rely on textual evidence as our only source for reconstructing ancient reality, then the textual evidence will of necessity accurately represent that reality. That is simply not the case. Miguel Civil made the same point almost forty years ago, arguing for a recognition of what he termed the “limits of textual information”—a limit to what we can allow ourselves to deduce from textual evidence.<sup>17</sup> We should not forget that the relation between language and reality is not one of straightforward transposition from things to words, because the social norms built into language mean that texts necessarily present us with a *cultural* reality. A similar point is made by Nils Heeßel in connection with the translation of Babylonian medical texts.<sup>18</sup> Heeßel shows that translating ancient terms referring to bodily conditions with modern biological classifications risks severing the connection of the ancient term with the sets of connotations, moral valuations and background beliefs that undergirded the ancient understanding of the body. In place of simple equations between ancient and modern medical categories, Heeßel advocates for an attentiveness to the cultural schemes that rendered the ancient terminology meaningful in the first place.

Simply put, we do not have any kind of access to a pre-cultural body. Theoretical, methodological, and philological concerns conjoined bar us from assuming that, with nothing but cultural sources to go on, we may speak confidently of non-cultural bodies. Apart from anything else, maintaining that gender is “simply a surface” while sex is “actual reality” misconstrues the kind of reality we actually have at our disposal. Whether the *assinnu*’s, for example, were biologically men, women, transgender, hermaphrodites, or eunuchs, is a question we cannot answer with the evidence at hand. Ann Guinan’s contribution to this volume is a timely reminder that, even if a recourse from textual to biological reality were possible, one could not expect to necessarily find, beneath the ambiguities of cultural terms, a stable, univocal and binary biological state. Guinan points to the gamut of possible biological complexities that render questions such as “What sex were the *kulu’u*’s really?” even more difficult to answer than was already the case.

My question is then whether we can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the gender dynamics at play in cuneiform cultures by moving away from this binary of sex and gender, and away from the hunt for an underlying “truth” that the binary engenders. In what remains of this chapter, I will argue that the gender performance of Ishtar’s followers was far more than “mere role-play”.

## 2. *The Reversibility of Cultural Signs*

Take, for example, the parade sequence described in *Iddin-Dagan A*, which mentions a group of people walking before Inana who are dressed on their right side with men’s clothing and on their left side

17. Civil 1980.

18. Heeßel 2010: 177–182.

with women's clothing.<sup>19</sup> Commenting on this passage, Julia Assante notes that “[i]t is unlikely that half-transgendered participants in public ceremonies mark an underlying biological hermaphroditism.”<sup>20</sup> One sees here again the division between biology as truth and gender as mere appearance. Either these participants are “half-transgendered” in the sense that one side of their body is dressed according to their true, underlying sex and the other is not, or else they are hermaphrodites, with both sides being dressed according to their “true” sex.

But taking a different view of gender, there is no true and false side. The effect of this “gender performance” does not lie in one side of the body presented as other than what it truly is, but in the doubt that both sides produce as to what is appearance and what is reality. There is no way of determining which is which—not for us today, and not for the ancient audience of the parade. It brings us in doubt, and that is the key effect of this performance. We are made to understand the reversibility of gendered signs such as “male” and “female” clothing. The swapping of these cultural markers reveals the extent to which we rely on straightforward correspondences between body and dress when assigning genders to individuals, but there is no inherent stability to be found in these cultural markers. They can be effortlessly reversed. Rather than searching for a biological truth beneath the performance, we should accept the doubt it engenders as a core statement about how gender is constructed.

Another instance of this dynamic is the contrast between weapons and weaving instruments, the most frequently cited examples of gender signs in cuneiform cultures. Traditionally, they are understood as highly stable signifiers: men carry weapons and women spindles. In birth incantations, for example, baby boys are presented with axes and baby girls with pins and spindles.<sup>21</sup> So because *kurgarrû*'s and *assinnu*'s are referred to as carriers of both spindles and weapons, scholars have argued that they were therefore hermaphrodites, the duality of cultural symbols supposedly representing a duality of biological sex.<sup>22</sup>

However, once again the matter is not so straightforward, for as all cultural symbols, signifiers like the spindle are fundamentally reversible. If weapons signify maleness, for example, then maleness will be understood as residing in the cultural sign and not in the male body, and maleness can therefore be separated from that body. As a result, the construction of gender through cultural symbols will inevitably open up for the possibility of those symbols being subverted. For example, in *Ishme-Dagan K*, Inana is given the ability

“to turn a man into a woman and a woman into a man,  
to change one into the other (š u b a l a b a - A K ),  
to dress young women in clothes for men on their right side,  
to dress young men in clothes for women on their left side,  
to put spindles into<sup>?</sup> the hands (b a l a š u - b a<sup>?</sup>) of [men...],  
and to give weapons to women.”<sup>23</sup>

19. L. 60–63. Reisman 1973: 187. On this text, see also Römer 1965: 128–208.

20. Assante 2009: 46.

21. E.g. Stol 2000: 63.

22. E.g. Henshaw 1994: 301.

23. L. 21–23 and edge. Römer 1988: 32.



Far from being evidence of the true sex of the persons thus changed by Inana’s will, the text points to the symbolic nature of gender itself. If spindles consistently connote femininity, these lines reveal that this connotation is all that there is to gender: spindles may be separated from women and put into the hands of men, upsetting any easy equation between body and sign. In other words, cultural signs of gender tell us nothing about their wielders’ “true” sex except the ease with which the signs may be reversed.

But we may go further. Note also that the word for spindle is the same as the word for changing genders: *bala*. In both cases, the word refers to a spinning movement, the reversal of genders and the twisting of the thread. As such, the spindle becomes a sign of the female at the very moment that it is involved in a swapping of genders, and it is difficult to take one *bala* as distinct from the other in this passage. Otherwise a relatively stable signifier of femininity, the spindle is here identified with the very reversal of gender signifiers; in short, it is made to refer to its own subversion.

In an article on Mesopotamian masculinity, Jerrold Cooper cites an example from *Enki and the World Order* where Enki tells Inana that she has the power to transform male warriors into women and to put spindles into their hands. The passage, according to Cooper, points to a straightforward, cross-cultural identification of weapons with masculinity and spindles with femininity: “The similarity of distinct basic gender roles in the vast majority of known cultures must to a large extent be determined by biological universals: (...) men are, on average, somewhat larger and more muscular than women, giving them significant advantages in wielding weapons for the hunt and war.”<sup>24</sup> Cooper’s statement may well be statistically correct, but as an interpretation of the evidence he cites, it is wildly misleading. If the example from *Enki and the World Order* tells us anything, it is that cultural signs such as spindles are not tied to a specific biology, but may be effortlessly swapped to call into doubt existing constructions of gender. The supposed stability of biological universals is a poor explanation for the mobility of ancient gender signifiers, and Cooper therefore ends up claiming more or less the opposite of the evidence he is interpreting: while he points to biological inevitability, *Enki and the World Order* points to the radical possibility that Inana may at any time reverse the genders of her subjects.

Accordingly, when we encounter the spindle and the weapon as cultural symbols of gender in a different setting, we must be alert to the fundamental reversibility of those symbols. While they are generally employed as unambiguous signs of masculinity or femininity, any simple equation of “biological universals” with cultural signs will in turn allow for those signs to be subverted and separated from the biological body they were supposed to identify.

### 3. *At the Threshold*

But what then? Where does that leave those wishing to study non-binary gender in ancient cultures? If we have no access to pre-cultural bodies, and if the cultural symbols we do have at our disposal are so unpredictably reversible, what can we do, methodologically, to study the ancient evidence in systematic ways? Deconstruction is all well and good, but what can we actually say about ancient identities such as those of *assinnu*’s, *kurgarrû*’s or *kulu’u*’s?

24. Cooper 2017: 113.

The answer must lie, at least in part, in the study of culturally conditioned patterns, that is, consistently recurring associations in our texts between a given gendered identity and a set of cultural images, figurative positions, and social roles. This is, in a nutshell, the study of discourse, relying on the notion that cultural practices are shaped by a ‘historical *a priori*’: underlying, historically changing regularities that determine what is culturally meaningful at any given time.<sup>25</sup> In the context of gender Thomas Laqueur, for example, has demonstrated a discursive shift in European culture from sex being viewed as a difference in degree to it being viewed as a difference in kind.<sup>26</sup> Crucially, Laqueur’s analysis shows that this pattern is not only evident from texts dealing directly with gender, but that the same conceptual structure pervades notions of physiology, psychology, and legal codifications of the relations between genders. In a similar vein, I would argue that there is a consistent association in cuneiform texts between Ishtar’s followers and a position at the threshold—both literal thresholds and figurative borders between binaries. This association recurs across genres and periods, and besides shaping how the gender of these individuals is portrayed, it also applies to their social status, ritual role, and cultural significance.

The most famous association of gala’s, kur-ĝara’s, *assinnu*’s, and *kulu’u*’s with thresholds is the story of their goddess’ descent to the Netherworld. Known in both a Sumerian version and two slightly different Akkadian translations, the story tells of Inana’s failed attempt at a coup of the Netherworld, which is ruled by her sister Ereshkigal.<sup>27</sup> When Inana becomes trapped in Ereshkigal’s realm, the god Enki decides to rescue her. In the Sumerian version he creates a kur-ĝara and a gala, in one Akkadian version a *kulu’u* named As-namir, and in the other an *assinnu* named Asushu-namir. In all versions their mission is to enter the Netherworld unhindered. In the Sumerian version, Enki instructs them to “fly past the door like flies, slip past the door pivot like ghosts”, while in the Akkadian he exclaims: “Let the seven gates of the Netherworld be open before you!”<sup>28</sup> They are thus able to slip past the gates, rescue the goddess and bring her back from the dead. When Ereshkigal discovers that she has been tricked, she curses the *assinnu* Asushu-namir. Because this does not happen in the original Sumerian version, it may reflect a fall in the social status of *assinnu*’s during the intervening centuries, but either way, the content of the curse is crucial: Asushu-namir is cursed specifically to stand in the shade of a wall and sleep on thresholds.<sup>29</sup>

The tale of Ishtar’s descent provides an etiological account for her followers, who are here twice associated with thresholds. But the tale associates them also with a liminal position in a broader sense: they are placed at the metaphorical threshold between life and death, causing as they do the return of Inana from the Netherworld. In their everyday reality, they were also associated with the same transformative potential, though in a more prosaic sense. *Kurgarrû*’s, *assinnu*’s, and *kulu’u*’s appear in ritual texts as agents that reverse ill fortune. One example concerns a lunar eclipse, generally considered a calamitous portent for the ruling king. One text divides the apotropaic rituals against the eclipse into apposite months, and should it take place in the month Ayyaru, the king is to look at a *kurgarrû* who will then bless the king, and so “the evil will pass.” Likewise for the month Addaru, the king will “touch the

25. Foucault 1969.

26. Laqueur 1990.

27. See respectively Sladek 1974 and Borger 1979, chapter 8.

28. L. 228–89 and 94, respectively.

29. L. 106–107.

head of an *assinnu*, and he will slay his enemy, his land will abide by his word.”<sup>30</sup> The *assinnu*’s and the *kurgarrû*’s are thus associated with a powerful inversion of omens. Their very presence, their being touched and seen, ensures the reversal of a bad fate.<sup>31</sup>

Similarly, a ritual addressed to Ishtar and Dumuzi involves an *assinnu* sitting by the patient to be healed and singing so-called *inhu*-songs. Then the patient recites an incantation to Ishtar, saying: “May your *assinnu* stand by me, may s/he take away my sickness, may the illness that has seized me leave by the window!” The *assinnu* leaves the house by the door with the scale and some cakes employed in the ritual.<sup>32</sup> The focus on the liminal zones of the window and the door, and on an *assinnu* carrying something away, indicate the ritual potential of their association with symbolic thresholds. To be positioned at an intersection between opposites implies the ability to manipulate that intersection, to turn sickness into health. Likewise, in a ritual intended to increase the profits of a tavern, Ishtar is invited to enter the tavern with the words: “Come, enter our house! With you, may the sweet one who sleeps with you enter, your seducer and your *kulu’u*!”<sup>33</sup> Once again a *kulu’u* is shown standing on a threshold, reversing fates.

In sum, the followers of Ishtar are repeatedly associated with a literal or metaphorical threshold between cultural binaries: inside and outside, life and death, omen and release, sickness and health, profit and poverty. Time and again they occupy a middle position where they manipulate a distinction between opposites.

One such binary blurred by the *assinnu*’s and *kurgarrû*’s is that between battle and play. The roles they played in rituals often poignantly juxtapose combat and games. For example, in a cultic commentary the *kurgarrû*’s are referred to as those “who play battlefield,” and likewise in the so-called “Love Lyrics” a *kurgarrû* sings the song “Battle is my game, warfare is my game,” whereupon an *assinnu* “goes down to battle and [performs] a whirling dance.”<sup>34</sup> Mortal seriousness and lighthearted games are here folded into one another, and the ritual performance of *assinnu*’s and *kurgarrû*’s plays with the resulting suspense, balancing on the knife’s edge that separates dance from danger. Likewise, the aforementioned *Iddin-Dagan A* describes a festive parade that mingles sword and daggers with skipping ropes and colourful rags, and the splattering of blood with the resounding of drums.<sup>35</sup> This mixture of music and martiality, of violence and games celebrates the blurring of categorical differences.

The most important binary these ritual practitioners traverse is that between humanity and divinity. Associated as they are with the goddess Ishtar, their role is to mediate between humans and gods. In *Iddin-Dagan A*, for example, the *saĝ-ursaĝ*’s are described as having “the skin of divinity on their bodies,”<sup>36</sup> and Stefan Maul concludes that a *kurgarrû* “in einem Ritual mythische Wesen verkörpern konnte”, and that “zwischen Mythos und der babylonischen Alltagswirklichkeit sind der *assinnu* und die

30. L. 10 and r. 14. Koch 2001: 76–77.

31. See Maul 1992.

32. L. 19, 36, and 50–51. Farber 1977: 64–69.

33. L. 28–29. Panayotov 2013: 294–295.

34. Respectively, l. 29’, Livingstone 1989: 94, and l. iii 12–17, Lambert 1975: 104–105. For the song “Battle is my game,” see also Menzel 1981: 82, l. 9’-10’.

35. L. 35–79. Reisman 1973: 187–188.

36. L. 49.

anderen soeben genannten Gestalten das Bindeglied.”<sup>37</sup> As physical embodiments of abstract divinity, they were thus a concrete presence of the divine within the human sphere.

#### 4. *Whose Maleness Ishtar Turned Female*

That the recurrent association between Ishtar’s followers and transitions across opposites also shaped the gender identity of *assinnu*’s and *kurgarrû*’s is evident from a line in the *Epic of Erra*, where they are called those “whose maleness Ishtar turned fe[male] for the awe of the people; carriers of swords, carriers of razors, scalpels, and blades, who break [taboos?] to Ishtar’s delight!”<sup>38</sup> The gender of *kurgarrû*’s and *assinnu*’s is here described not as either male or female, as such, but as residing in the very transition between the two. The two groups are not identified through either category in itself, but through their position at the threshold, that is, through their association with the reversal of categories.

That reversal is unstable—it works to create uncertainty. Ishtar turns maleness female for the awe of the people, and that awe is precisely the result of uncertainty. The *kurgarrû*’s and *assinnu*’s are an embodiment of the goddess’ ability to change people as she wishes, and anyone could be next: the line relies on a synecdoche progressing from *kurgarrû*’s and *assinnu*’s to “the people” in general, from those who have been changed to those who might be changed, by establishing the possibility and thus the unpredictability of gender transitivity. It is by Ishtar’s mercy alone that the genders female and male are even allowed to exist as separable entities, and gender thus emerges as a structural difference staving off a constant threat of categorical collapse.

At the same time, just as maleness is turned female, the *kurgarrû*’s and *assinnu*’s become carriers of swords and knives, which are traditionally male gender symbols. There is then also a displacement of the expected gender signifiers in this line, a purposeful mismatch between the two things attributed to them: swords and femininity. This mismatch reminds us once more that we cannot take the significance of cultural signs at face value, and that the signifiers of gender remain ever caught up in an unpredictable play of reversals.

With such considerations in mind, it becomes untenable to claim that this passage from *Erra* reveals a specific biological state of one kind or the other beneath the cultural signifiers. If one were to claim that, for example, this line shows the *kurgarrû*’s to have been hermaphrodites, one would quickly be faced with a dilemma, for we simply have no methodologically sound way of assessing whether such a claim is correct or not. What we can do, however, is to show that the statement of the ancient text makes sense within a specific discursive framework that repeatedly associates the identity of *assinnu*’s and *kurgarrû*’s with transformations and with the reversal of expected gender signifiers. That is the kind of analysis our material allows us.<sup>39</sup>

37. Maul 1992: 162.

38. L. IV 56–58. Cagni 1969: 110.

39. Peled (2014: 288–290) has claimed that the ambiguity of the passage may be “solved” by taking the first clause (the gender reversal) to refer only to *assinnu*’s, and the second clause (the carrying of weapons) to refer only to *kurgarrû*’s. This would yield a straightforward contrast between effeminate *assinnu*’s and warrior-like *kurgarrû*’s. However, the interpretation is untenable. Peled highlights several supposed parallels to this construction in the *Epic of Erra*, but none of them are truly similar in structure to the one proposed for this passage. The parallels all have the chiasmic structure A (noun) a (predicate) >< b

In conclusion, if we wish to systematically study non-binary gender and gender ambiguity in the ancient world, we must look to the ways in which gender is shaped by its discursive context, and track regular patterns across cultural products of various kinds—not search in vain for the truth that gender supposedly hides. This alternative approach has the significant methodological advantage of relying, not on leaps from literary tropes to biology, but on the evidence actually at hand, which is cultural in nature. However, the approach is only possible if we give up on the quest for a single, simple reality beneath the ancient identities, and instead study those identities on their own terms.

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(predicate) B (noun), or the like, but the proposed reading of the line would yield the structure A (noun) B (noun) >< b (predicate) a (predicate), which to my knowledge has no parallels either in the *Epic of Erra* or in any other Akkadian sentence. Once more, the search for a simple, unambiguous gender identity founders on the complexity of literary signifiers. There is no way around it: we must accept the cultural complexity of gender.

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# Identifying Gender Ambiguity in Texts and Artifacts

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## 0. Introduction

Identifying gender ambiguity in historical settings—that is, gender markers among past human societies—can be an elusive endeavor for the modern scholar. Only rarely is it possible to trace aspects of gender ambiguity in ancient texts as well as in archaeological artifacts. This, however, is exactly my aim in this paper. Building upon my past research on hegemonic—and especially, non-hegemonic—masculine identities in the ancient Near East,<sup>2</sup> the case study discussed here involves the male cult attendants of Inanna/Ištar, the Mesopotamian goddess of sexuality and war.

Two of the most interesting male members of Ištar’s cult were the *assinnu* and the *kurgarrû*. Their gender image or identity has been the source of much debate in scholarly discourse in recent years. The traditional view regarded both of them to have been effeminate, or somehow not entirely masculine. Recently, however, an entirely different view has emerged, according to which these cult attendants actually possessed a masculine gender identity. Jacobsen was among the first to regard the *kurgarrû* as a “cult warrior”,<sup>3</sup> a term extended by some also to represent the *assinnu*.<sup>4</sup> My own assessment, as recently published, combines the two previous hypotheses. I argue that while the *assinnu*’s gender identity was—to use Connell’s terminology—non-hegemonic masculine, the *kurgarrû*’s gender identity was as masculine as that of the standard hegemonic male in Mesopotamia.<sup>5</sup> I have suggested that these two men

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Abbreviations used in this article follow *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*, volume U/W (2010): vii–xxix.

2. Peled 2016a.

3. Jacobsen 1987: 117 n. 11.

4. See among others Assante 2009 and Zsolnay 2013.

5. For the theory of hegemonic masculinity see Connell 1987, 1995 and Connell and Messerschmidt 2005. For the application of the theory in ancient Near Eastern contexts see Peled 2016a.

represented the complete gender identity spectrum of their patron goddess, Ištar: (hegemonic-)masculine and feminine(-like, non-hegemonic masculine).<sup>6</sup>

### 1. *The Textual Evidence*

One of the most common features of the *kurgarrû* was his use of two weapons as part of his cultic performance: the *patru* (Sumerian *gíri*) and *patarru* (Sumerian *badara*), the exact nature of which have never been fully established. Some scholars assumed that these were cutting weapons, while others suggested that these were hitting instruments akin to clubs or maces.<sup>7</sup> Some scholars interpreted the fact that the *kurgarrû* used cutting weapons as alluding to self-castration or self-emasculaton he performed throughout his cultic rites, drawing upon the not-compelling and unwarranted comparison to the first-millennium Anatolian *galli*, the priests of Attis and Cybele.<sup>8</sup> Other scholars have assumed that the *kurgarrû* was a “cultic warrior”, a view with which I indeed concur. I argue that the *kurgarrû*’s weapons—whether cutting, hitting or otherwise inflicting pain in any way found entertaining by Ištar—were emblems of masculinity, expressing phallic connotations and stereotypical masculine militarism and vigor. These qualities can be seen in the *kurgarrû*’s engagement in mock-battles, as in a commentary on a ceremony that was performed during the New Year’s festivals:<sup>9</sup>

[<sup>1ú</sup>]kur-gar-ra<sup>meš</sup> ša tu-šá-ri i-ma-li-lu mî-il-hu i-m[al-lu-hu]  
 “The *kurgarrû*s that play war, per[form] milhu.”

However, viewing the *assinnu* in a similar light seems to be unjustified, and these two functionaries should be differentiated, in spite of the fact that they frequently cooperated in their cultic performance. The evidence for the *assinnu* as a non-hegemonic male can briefly be summarized as follows:<sup>10</sup>

A logographic synonymic term for the phonetically-written *assinnu* was <sup>1ú</sup>ur-munus, literally “man-woman”, probably to be understood as “a man of a woman-type”, or simply, “a womanly man.”

One omen from the *šumma ālu* series portrayed him as being sexually penetrated,<sup>11</sup> while another omen may have portrayed him as lacking penetrative sexuality.<sup>12</sup>

In the *Erra Epic* it was said that Ištar has changed the *assinnus* “from masculinity to femininity.”<sup>13</sup>

6. Peled 2014.

7. See Peled 2016a: 67 n. 182 for discussion and previous literature.

8. See among others Groneberg 1986: 39, Lambert 1992: 148, 150–151, Maul 1992: 164, Leick 1994: 159, Parpola 1995: 391 n. 36, 1997: XXXIV, XCVI n. 138, Lapinkivi 2004: 163–165 and 2010: 73, 78.

9. K 3476=CT 15.44:28’; see Livingstone 1989: 94.

10. For a detailed discussion of the gender image of the *assinnu*—as well as of the *kurgarrû*’s—see Peled 2016a: 155–202.

11. *šumma ālu* tablet 104, CT 39.44:32; see discussions in Guinan 1997: 469–471 and Peled 2016a: 194–196.

12. *šumma ālu* tablet 104, CT 39.44:15; see discussions in Guinan 1997: 478–479 n. 38, Peled 2016a: 192–194 and most recently Peled 2017.

13. *Erra Epic* tablet 4, ll. 55–56; see discussion in Peled 2014: 288–296.

Ereškigal's curse of the *assinnu* in the Neo-Assyrian version of *Ištar's Descent to the Netherworld* included several verses that were identical to those of Enkidu's curse of the harlot in the story of Gilgameš.<sup>14</sup>

Also in Gilgameš, a pun might have related the *assinnu* to *haššinnu*, “axe”, an object that Gilgameš had sex with in a dream.<sup>15</sup>

The *assinnu* was equated in lexical lists with the Akkadian term *sinišānu*, “woman-like”, and with a male cult attendant known as *pilpilû*; the latter was said to have been “changed”—or that his “head was changed”—by Inanna/Ištar in several literary texts.<sup>16</sup>

The *assinnu* appears once in a feminine form (*as-sin-na-tu<sub>4</sub>*) in the Neo-Assyrian synonym list *malku=šarru* together with several terms for female cult attendants.<sup>17</sup>

While none of these individual points is explicit, when considered collectively they clearly suggest that the gender identity of the *assinnu* deviated from hegemonic masculinity in Mesopotamia.

Why, therefore, would anyone assume that the *assinnu* was as masculine as the *kurgarrû*? One of the key reasons for viewing the *assinnu* as a “cultic warrior”—akin to the *kurgarrû*—is a group of several first-millennium textual descriptions of cultic ceremonies in which *assinnus* and *kurgarrûs* performed mock-battles, uttering the phrase “my play is battle!” (*mēlulī qablu*). For example, in one Neo-Assyrian cultic text we find the following:<sup>18</sup>

<sup>14</sup>kur-gar-ra<sup>meš</sup> mi-lu-li<i>-i> qab-lu-ú i-za-mu-ru <sup>14</sup>ur-munus<sup>meš</sup> ia-ru-ru-tú ú-sah-hu-ru mi-il-hu i-ma-al-lu-hu

“The *kurgarrûs* sing (the recitation<sup>?</sup>): “My play is battle”. The *assinnus* reply: “yarurûtu!” (and) perform *milhu*.”

Attention should be paid here to the enigmatic phrase *milhu imalluhu*, “perform *milhu*”, attested here in the same context as the phrase “my play is battle”. Scholars usually translated *milhu imalluhu* in this text as “tear themselves up”, assuming the meaning “to tear apart/out” for the Akkadian verb *malāhu*.<sup>19</sup> In the present context, however, this translation makes no sense. Even worse, it has strengthened the unfounded assumptions concerning the performance of acts of self-castration or self-emasculatation by the *kurgarrûs*, who were viewed as “tearing themselves up”, that is, performing self-inflicted wounds using their typical weapons, which, by the way, were not even mentioned in these contexts. Further, these problematic conjectures must also include the *assinnus*, who also “perform *milhu*”—but were never documented in any text with relation to any weapons.

The solution to this problem lies in the fact that the verb *malāhu* has a rather wide range of semantic implications, the most prominent of which is simply “to remove”.<sup>20</sup> Hence, rather than strangely “tear

14. See Tigay 1982: 170–173.

15. See Kilmer 1982: 128.

16. For *assinnu* and *sinišānu* see Peled 2016a: 156; for *assinnu* and *pilpilû* see Peled 2013 and 2016a: 160–161.

17. *malku = šarru* tablet 1, l. 135; see discussion in Peled 2016a: 156–159.

18. K 3438a + K 9912 obv. 9'–11' // K 9923:15–16; see Menzel 1981: T 82 // 83.

19. CAD M/1: 152–153, s.v. “*malāhu*”.

20. CAD M/1: 152–153, s.v. “*malāhu*”.

themselves up”, the *assinnus* and the *kurgarrûs* that *perform milhu* probably removed something from themselves. I suggest, as explained below, that these were their clothes.

We encounter more detailed descriptions in a text from the first-millennium “Love Lyrics” group:<sup>21</sup>

ká-gal è-ma ana tar-ša hur-sag-kalam-ma <sup>lú</sup>kur-gar-ra ina kin-ši-šú ik-kam-mi-iš-ma te-nin-di  
sum-di in-hi in-na-hu ... ù me-li-li qab-lu me-[li-li] mē dug<sub>4</sub>-ga-ma <sup>lú</sup>ur-munus ana qab-lu ur-  
rad

“He will leave the city-gate, and opposite the *Hursagkalamma* temple, the *kurgarrû* will kneel on his knees and recite prayers and *perform inhu* ... And he will utter (the recitation): “My play is battle, [my] p[lay] is warfare”, and an *assinnu* will go down to battle.”

In this passage a *kurgarrû* is described as uttering “My play is battle, [my] p[lay] is warfare!”—probably the title of a cultic recitation—following which an *assinnu* “goes down to battle” (*ana qablu urrad*). However, in all battles there are winners as well as losers. Therefore, the mock-battles performed by the *assinnus* and the *kurgarrûs* may well have represented, yet again, the two opposing aspects of Ištar, exemplified by the masculine *kurgarrû* subduing the effeminate or non-masculine *assinnu*. Though this hypothesis is attractive in that it can potentially sort out a long-standing crux, up until now it remained conjectural. Now, however, I would like to offer new possible evidence that strengthens this theory. Since this suggested evidence belongs to the realm of archaeological artifacts, it still remains open for speculation and different interpretations. I nonetheless believe in its validity.

Let us move on to the patroness of it all: the goddess Inanna/Ištar. We encounter the phrase “my play is battle” in the hymn *Lady of Largest Heart* (in-nin šà gur<sub>4</sub>-ra) attributed to Enheduanna, daughter of Sargon of Akkad. This fact may be significant, because in the hymn the phrase is ascribed to Inanna:<sup>22</sup>

e-ne-di-bi šen-šen mē húb sar ak-dè  
“Her game is to run/speed fighting and battle.”

Such phrases are repeated in later texts, for example in Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions referring to Ištar and her patronage of war. It seems only logical, therefore, that the earthly manifestations of this goddess—the *kurgarrû* and the *assinnu*—also pronounced the phrase “my game is battle” during their cultic performance, or that this phrase formed the title of one of the songs or recitations the *assinnu* and *kurgarrû* uttered during their ceremonies. And obviously, the fact that Inanna/Ištar was the patron goddess of war and aggressiveness also explains why the procedures conducted by her male cult attendants included the dramatic performance of mock-battles. We should mention in this regard a much-quoted passage from the *Erra Epic*:<sup>23</sup>

21. BM 41005 rev. iii 12–13, 16–17; see Lambert 1975: 104.

22. in-nin šà gur<sub>4</sub>-ra l. 20; see Sjöberg 1975: 180.

23. *Erra Epic* tablet 4, l. 58; see discussion in Peled 2016a: 81–82.

šá ana ul-lu-uš kab-ta-at <sup>d</sup>Inanna i-tak-ka-lu 'a' -[sak-ka]

“(The *kurgarrûs* and *assinnus*) who, for delighting the mind of Ištar, do regularly f[orbidden things...]”

The unspecified “f[orbidden things]” performed by the *assinnus* and the *kurgarrûs* in order to delight the mind of Ištar may have alluded exactly to these mock-battles, even though more exotic interpretations were suggested in the past, for example by the present author.<sup>24</sup> And though the phrase “f[orbidden things]” is almost entirely reconstructed, this reconstruction seems highly probable.<sup>25</sup>

## 2. The Artistic Evidence

I have recently suggested that because in certain periods in Mesopotamian history beardlessness was uncharacteristic of ideal masculinity, iconographic representations of beardless men signified them as either eunuchs or non-hegemonic cult attendants. And since there is no concrete textual evidence for the existence of eunuchs in Mesopotamia prior to the Middle Assyrian period, I have tentatively assigned Old Babylonian depictions of beardless cult attendants on terracotta plaques as belonging to the cult attendant known as *gala* in Sumerian or *kalû* in Akkadian.<sup>26</sup> There is, however, another potential candidate for these depictions of beardless male cult attendants: the *assinnu*. If beardlessness was indeed related to non-hegemonic masculinity, then the *assinnu* may well have exhibited it. A distinction between the *gala/kalû* and the *assinnu* might be found in their nakedness: while there is no reason why the *gala/kalû* will be depicted naked, it can be speculated that the *assinnu* could exhibit nudity because his cultic performance—under the auspices of Ištar—was related to sexuality.<sup>27</sup> A case in point might be the depiction of a handmade terracotta figurine from a private house in the scribal quarter of Ur III / Early OB Nippur of a nude beardless male who seems to be standing in a fighting position. I tentatively suggest that this may be the representation of a naked *assinnu* ready to perform a mock-battle with a *kurgarrû*.<sup>28</sup>

24. Peled 2014: 296 and 2016a: 82.

25. Only a few terms can accompany the verb *akālu* in creating idiomatic phrases as in the passage here discussed; see CAD A/1: 255–256, s.v. “*akālu* 7a–f”. None of the alternative phrases makes better sense than *itakkalu asakka* in the present context.

26. Peled 2016b.

27. On occasions male nudity (or at least exposed genitalia) in ancient Near Eastern art was unequivocally related to sexuality, as in the lead inlays from the palace of Tukulti-Ninurta I, the Old Hittite vase from Inandik, and several third-millennium / Old Babylonian terracotta plaques depicting men having sex with female companions a tergo, the latter usually drinking beer during the act. Most of these contexts (though probably not the previously-mentioned lead inlays) combine male nudity (and/or pronounced genitalia), sexuality and cultic setting.

28. 2N 800 (IM 55868); see McCown, Haines and Hansen 1967: pl. 130 no. 7.



Fig. 1. 2N 800 (IM 55868), see McCown, Haines and Hansen 1967: pl. 130 no. 7.

As to the *kurgarrû*, as explained above, the textual evidence demonstrates that his gender identity showed correspondence with Mesopotamian hegemonic masculinity. I therefore speculate that the *kurgarrû*'s artistic representations—if ever existed—showed all the necessary elements of a hegemonic male cult attendant: He should have been bearded, depicted in a worshiping posture, and if his active sexuality was to be emphasized we might expect nudity and displayed genitalia. We can eliminate representations of male deities or demons, as signified by wearing horned crowns. Lastly, he must have been depicted holding two weapons. Hence, if the *kurgarrû* was ever depicted on artistic media, we should be looking for the following features: human, male, naked, bearded, holding two weapons, and standing in a worshiping posture. A representative example is an Old Babylonian terracotta plaque found in the excavations of Ur.<sup>29</sup>



Fig. 2. U1782, see Woolley and Mallowan 1976: pl. 71 no. 71.

29. U1782; see Woolley and Mallowan 1976: pl. 71 no. 71.

We have now reached a point where we can speculate as to how the *assinnu* and the *kurgarrû* might have looked when depicted through Old Babylonian figurines and terracotta plaques. However, one piece in the jigsaw-puzzle is still missing: the mock-battles. We know of many terracotta plaques with representations that were interpreted by modern scholars of art history as showing athletes engaged in wrestling. One such Old Babylonian plaque from Ur is of special importance to our discussion. It portrays two naked men wrestling. According to the excavators, one man was bearded, while his opponent was beardless.<sup>30</sup>



Fig. 3. U16972, see Woolley and Mallowan 1976: pl. 84 no. 182.

My hypothesis is that this is a representation of a bearded *kurgarrû* and a beardless *assinnu* engaged in a mock-battle as part of their worship of Ištar. The fight symbolized Ištar’s patronage of warfare, and in its aftermath the masculine *kurgarrû* won and subdued the non-masculine *assinnu*. Their nakedness might allude to sexuality, the other aspect of Ištar, but it must be stressed that there is no evidence—whether textual or iconographic—that sexual intercourse of any kind was ever part of the performance of these two fine gentlemen.

Here we return to the phrase *milhu imalluhu*, “perform *milhu*”, which I have interpreted as portraying the *assinnus* and the *kurgarrûs* as removing something from themselves. I speculate that the items to be removed are the attire wore by these cult attendants. Thus, *milhu imalluhu* is to be understood as “remove their clothes”, a moment before they “play war” or “go to battle”, that is, perform their mock-battles nude.

30. U16972; see Woolley and Mallowan 1976: pl. 84 no. 182.

### 3. Conclusions

To conclude, I suggest that certain Mesopotamian male cult attendants whose gender identity was ambiguous were recorded not only in texts, but also in physical objects. These objects shed light on the background of these cult attendants' performance under the aegis of their patron goddess, Ištar. The special characteristics and the mock-battles conducted by the *assinnus* and the *kurgarrûs* are alluded to in texts, and were possibly immortalized on plaques and as figurines. I can only hope that future finds—whether textual or iconographic, preferably both—will confirm this hypothesis. For the time being, it remains food for thought.

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## Acting on an Unwilling Partner: Gender and Sensory Phenomena in Old Akkadian and Old Babylonian Love Incantations

Anne-Caroline Rendu Loisel<sup>1</sup>

“His lips are oil and harpsong (...). (So) the love charms have spoken to her, then driven her to ecstasy”

This sentence is quoted from a well-known Old Akkadian love incantation (ca. 2340–2200 BC). The woman is convinced to love the man, thanks to this sensory description of his bodily attractiveness. She cannot resist and has no other choice than abandoning herself, losing her mind and reason. The modalities of action involved in this incantation depend on sensory phenomena that will physically affect the woman.

Bodily perception constitutes an active dimension with which a society gives sense to, translates, and interprets its surrounding environments. It goes far beyond the individual experience. To quote Yael Avrahami (2012: 51) in her study of the senses in the Bible, “The body is where self and culture are embodied.” For more than twenty years, anthropology has invited scholars to consider a society through the human body and its sensory dynamic: perception and related concepts may vary from one culture to another, deeply rooted in a system of customs, values and representations, where the sensory phenomena are all intertwined. And I hereby refer to the seminal works of David Howes and Constance Classen (2014), Paul Stoller (1989), and David Lebreton (2006). In the field of historical research, the French historian Lucien Febvre in 1941 already suggested the importance of the subject.<sup>2</sup> But probably the most famous historian of the senses remains Alain Corbin, who has pioneered new directions in the social and cultural history of the recent past. In the last few decades, the topic has been widely explored by historians of antiquity and archaeologists. In *Archaeology of the Senses* (2014), Yannis Hamilakis shows how, despite its intensely physical engagement with the material traces of the past, archaeology has mostly neglected multi-sensory experience. Using Bronze Age Crete as a case study, Hamilakis highlights how sensorial memory can help us rethink questions ranging from the production of ancestral heritage, to large-scale social change, and the cultural significance of monuments.

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2. Febvre 1941.

In the ancient Near Eastern studies, the topic is not new anymore. Elena Cassin in 1968 already suggested the importance of the topic, when she explored the visual world of the divine luminosity, this “splendeur divine” emanating from the bodies of gods and goddesses.<sup>3</sup> She also pointed out that humans are sensory entities living in a luminous and noisy environment, in a world in motion. Indirectly, she also illustrated the multi-sensory aspects of the bodily experience. Sensations mingle and interact with one another to produce a unified experience of the world. A multi-sensory approach to history is crucial in order to fully understand the significance of concepts, metaphors, objects, and practices within a community, as the anthropologist Joël Candau (2013) has shown in his works.<sup>4</sup> Since Elena Cassin, many works of Assyriologists and archaeologists of the ancient Near East have been devoted to the subject of the senses in Mesopotamia, focusing especially on one of the senses. Historians of ancient Near Eastern medicine have highlighted how changes in the functioning of the senses can be symptomatic of illness.<sup>5</sup> The representation of the senses in ancient Near Eastern languages, literature, and art have also been studied; for example, Irene Winter (2000) showed the importance of sight as it can induce an aesthetic and religious experience.<sup>6</sup>

The sensory-scape of the ritual scene constitutes a fruitful field of research as the anthropologist Catherine Bell has shown:<sup>7</sup> music of instruments and songs, sweet-smelling fragrances of incense, light of flames, brilliance of metals, colors of precious stones, etc. All these sensory phenomena participate in the construction of communication between communities of different natures, such as the meeting of human and divine in rituals. The sensory properties of substances and objects manipulated during the ritual procedure also shape the identity of all the individuals involved, whether they are women, men, gods or goddesses.

In this paper, my aim is to investigate how sensory phenomena participate in the gendered interactions and behaviors in ritual procedures. I will show that sensations may be conceived as a mode of action in incantation contexts, especially in Akkadian love incantations from the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> and the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC. Are specific sensory effects solicited to arouse or act on someone’s feelings? Do sensations participate in the gendered interaction between women and men?

After presenting the multi-sensory dimension of the magical actions involved in the love charms I quoted at the beginning, I will investigate the sensory construction of love in the rhetoric and literary discourses of Old Babylonian incantations and prayers. A new edition of these texts has been recently published by Nathan Wasserman, in his study of love literature of the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC (2016).<sup>8</sup> The sensory effects of substances and objects undoubtedly help the sex partner to consent to a sensorial utopia, even if it is not what he/she wanted in first place.

3. Cassin 1968.

4. Candau and Wathelet 2013: 213–239.

5. Fincke 2000; Scurlock and Andersen 2006: 184–207, among others.

6. Winter 2000: 22–43.

7. Bell 1997.

8. Wasserman 2016.

1. *The Old Akkadian Love Charm*

This text belongs to the very rare category of Old Akkadian incantations. It was published for the first time by Ignace J. Gelb in 1970 as MAD V 8. It was studied many times,<sup>9</sup> but the main works on it are those of J. and A. Westenholz (1977), B. Groneberg (2001), B. Foster in his anthology of Akkadian Literature, *Before the Muses* (1993 and 2005), and recently by N. Wasserman (2016, n°22). The tablet comes from Tell Ingharra, the western part of the old city of Kiš, but its precise archaeological context remains obscure.<sup>10</sup> Epigraphical and philological criteria invited J. and A. Westenholz to consider it as an Old Akkadian incantation, and suggested a late Sargonic date.<sup>11</sup> Here I follow the translation of Nathan Wassermann (2016: 243):

“Enki loves the love charm.  
 The love-charm, Ištar’s son, [si]tting in [her?/his? ]lap,  
 Turning here through the sap of the incense-tree.  
 You, Oh two beautiful maiden, are blooming!  
 To the garden you come down, indeed come down to the garden!  
 you have drunk the sap of the incense-tree (*ru’ti kanaktim*).  
 I have seized now your (f.) drooling mouth (lit. “mouth of sap”),  
 I have seized your (f.) shining (*burrumāti*) eyes  
 I have seized you (f.) urinating vulva.  
 I leaped to the garden of Sîn,  
 I cut the poplar-tree for her day.  
 Encircle (f.) me between the boxwood trees, as the shepherd encircles the flock,  
 As the goat (encircles) its kid, the sheep its lamb, the mare its foal!  
 His arms are adorned:  
 Oil and (the sound of) harp – his lips.  
 A cup of oil in his hands, a cup of cedar fragrance on his shoulders.  
 The love-charms have persuaded her, driven her to ecstasy –  
 Now I have seized your (f.) lustful mouth (lit. “mouth of sexual attraction”)  
 I conjure you (f.) by the name of Ištar and Išhara:  
 ‘Until his neck and your (f.) neck are not entwined – you (f.) shall not find peace!’”

The main purpose of these love charms is to help a man to win a woman’s favor by magical means. It begins (l. 1–3) with a mythological description of the love charms, a “concrete” and tangible entity sitting on the lap of the goddess of love Ištar. Mentioning the god Ea at the very beginning of the incantation links the tablet to the magical realm of the god. Then (l. 4–8), the suitor explains that he has

9. MAD V, 7–12; Westenholz and Westenholz 1977; Groneberg 2001: 97–113; Foster 2005: 66–68, CDLI number: P285640. For the complete bibliography, see Wasserman 2016: n° 22.

10. Westenholz and Westenholz 1977: 198.

11. See Westenholz and Westenholz 1977: 199.

been attracted by the sweet-smelling sap of an incense-tree, which has been drunk (*patāqu*)<sup>12</sup> by two young and attractive girls. One may find here the common literary topic of the “garden,” evoking love and sexual desire, such as in later literary Akkadian texts. (l. 9–11) Crying to the woman of his desire, he asserts that he has power over her. The woman is symbolically represented by her sexual parts: her wet mouth, her shiny and multicolored eyes, and her wet vulva. (l. 12–17) With natural metaphors, the suitor describes his approach while the woman is looking for him. Then (l. 18–22), the suitor is not talking, but the love charms themselves. They describe his new body, which now will be sensorily attractive to the woman who ignored it in the first place. The incantation ends (l. 23–27) with the suitor who swears that the woman will never find rest until she satisfies her sexual desire with him.

This incantation is interesting in many points, but especially so when we examine the sensory phenomena involved in this forced interaction between the woman and the man. The love charms act on the woman’s mind by modifying her sensory experience of the lover. Her bodily experience will change, as if love were first and foremost a sensory issue between female and male.

## 2. *Is Love a Sensory Matter? Gender and Sensation in Old Babylonian Incantations and Prayers*

Although the following texts are quite more recent than the first one I have presented, as they all belong to the Old Babylonian Period, they share the same sensory approach to love and magical seduction. My first example will be an Old Babylonian incantation (ca. 2000–1595 BC),<sup>13</sup> based also on the magical action of love charms.

“Love Charm, love charm!  
 His two horns are gold, / her tail is of pure lapis-lazuli  
 Placed in the heart of Ištar.  
 I called her, but she did not turn to me,  
 I whistled (*hazû*) at her,<sup>14</sup> but she did not look at me  
 If she is a “consecrated”, may her lover fall,  
 If she has been taken, may her accuser fall.  
 (May this) marriageable girl, a young lady of good family,  
 Fall at my call (*ana rigmīya*), at my call (*ana rigmi<sup>2</sup> šagimmīya*).  
 May the dough fall from her hands,  
 May the young man fall who is at her side.  
 Don’t lock your house against me,  
 Don’t even look at the latchstring in your hand!  
 Look at me as if I were (your) tether  
 Lick me (*lu’ikīni*) as if I were (your) calf!

12. For this interpretation, see Wassermann 2016: 245.

13. YOS XI 87; see again Wasserman 2016: n°26 for the Akkadian text and the bibliography.

14. I follow here a suggestion of A. Cavigneaux (and also B. Foster), by reading the passage as *a-ah!-zu-ši-i-ma ú!(PA)-ul i-pa-al-sa-a[m]*. See Cavigneaux 1996 and 1998. N. Wasserman follows the suggestion of Westenholz and Westenholz (1977: 207, n.13) and reads *a-mur-[MA?!]-ši-i-ma* “I gazed at her.”

Why did you wrap your head with my love like a headband?  
Tie it around your waist, like a belt  
like oil..." (fragmentary lines)

The text begins with the description of the love charms. Such as in the Old Akkadian text, it is described as a concrete entity, and here precisely is symbolically associated with the scorpion's fertilization, as Antoine Cavigneaux has shown.<sup>15</sup> The change in gendered pronoun suffixes (her/his) suggested to Foster and others that the love charms were both male and female. Its physical characteristics are suggested by precious, colorful and shiny materials: gold and lapis-lazuli. Similarly, the love charm *er'imu* is also a concrete object worn as a crown, as shown in the Old Babylonian hymn of Ištar by Ammi-Ditana (17<sup>th</sup> century BC): "On her features, laughter bursts to bloom. She is resplendent, *irimu* set on her head."<sup>16</sup> Love charms are jewels attracting the gaze of the partner, as powerful as the awe-inspiring radiance *melammu*. In YOS XI it is a visual experience, whereas in the Old Akkadian incantation, it can also be an olfactory experience. It goes far beyond simply making its possessor irresistibly attractive to the opposite sex. The Old Akkadian text shows its dynamic character: it can talk, and thanks to the powerful sensory metaphors, it can modify the state of consciousness of the woman. The love charms can be considered as having *agency*, following the definition of Alfred Gell.<sup>17</sup> Cognitive religious theories and anthropology highlight the sensory dimension of agency. An agent must be heard or seen, and act on its own intention.<sup>18</sup> Some of the commenters have compared the love charm *er'imu* to the Greek Eros. In both incantations, the love charms help the suitor to act remotely on the female body. Her reason will be altered thanks to the modification of the sensory parameters, which leads to a new physical experience of the surrounding environment. The love charms may have been physically and tangibly present in the ritual scene, with the use of a specific object or substance with particular sensory property.

Here, the Old Babylonian incantation focuses on all the signals the suitor has sent in vain to the woman. The man insists on the sonorous effects created: he cried (*šasû*), even whistled (*hazû*), expecting a visual reply. The man tried to attract her gaze using his voice, which is so powerful that she must stop her domestic tasks. The end of the incantation focuses on the man's feelings; he cannot resist to the woman's attraction, and cannot take his eyes off of her face.

Other contemporary Sumerian and Akkadian incantations may also be of great interest. A long tablet from Isin was found in a vase buried in a wall and was first published by Wilcke (1985). The sentences seem to be pronounced by a woman who wishes to attract her sex partner:

"With dog slaver, thirst<sup>2</sup>, hunger<sup>2</sup> / Slap in the face, rolling eye, / I have hit you on the head / I have driven you out of your mind (*tēmu*)! / Set your thinking to my thinking, / Set your reason to my reason! / I hold you fast, as Ištar held Dumuzi, / As liquor binds him who drinks it / I have bound you

15. This idea is not followed by Nathan Wasserman: for him, the main imagery of the text is bovine (Wassermann 2016: 253).

16. *simtišša ihannima šihātum / šarhat i-ri-mu ramû rēšūšša* (AO 4479, l.10–11 = Thureau-Dangin 1925).

17. Gell 1998, in particular chapter VII.

18. This idea was also suggested by Justin Barrett in the Hypersensitive Agency Detection Device; see Barrett 2000: 29–34; Tremlin 2006: 76.

with my hairy mouth<sup>19</sup> / with my vagina full of wetness / with my mouth full of saliva / with my vagina full of wetness / May no rival come to you ! Dog is crouching, pig is crouching, you too keep crouching on my thighs!”

What is found on the green fish, may it melt in oil, and this will be smeared.

“Look at me, be joyful as a harp, / May your heart glow as with liquor / keep bursting forth like the sun upon me / Keep renewing yourself for me like the moon / ... may your love ever be new”<sup>20</sup>

The last statements of the woman involve the same process as in the Old Akkadian incantation: due to the recitation of the incantation, looking at the suitor will induce a bodily modification of the beloved, which will be manifest through sensory phenomena and a new emotional state. His happiness will be perceived by the others thanks to positive sensations: he will be as melodious as a musical instrument and shiny as the sunlight. By reciting the incantation, the woman seeks to exercise a complete power over the man, who—as was the case in the Old Akkadian incantation—loses his mind and his capacity to think. He is completely devoted to his sensory experiences, as if he were under the influence of alcohol.

### 3. Sensory Effects on Gendered Ritual Interaction: Utopia, Dystopia

In the Old Akkadian incantation I presented at the beginning of this paper, the woman is said to have “multicolored eyes” (*burramāti*), a description that, by referring directly to the goddess of love Ištar, gives her power over the man. In the Old Babylonian Hymn dedicated by the king Ammi-Ditana from Babylon at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century BC, the qualities of the goddess Ištar are described. Among them is a description of her eyes: “Her eyes are multicolored and iridescent.”<sup>21</sup> This sentence followed the description of the goddess as an attractive and seductive deity. This attractiveness is expressed by allusion to her clothes, her jewelry and her make-up: the Akkadian term *mēqû* is specific for make-up applied on the eyes: “She is the (goddess) of joy clothed in loveliness, adorned with (sexual) attractiveness, beauty (lit. ‘cosmetics’) and appeal.”<sup>22</sup> Her general characteristics, linked to her divine powers, are connected to the accessories—here her make-up—she is wearing. Then, the hymn goes on with the description of her face: her lips are as sweet as honey, and her eyes are brilliant:

“In her lips she is sweetness (*duššupu*), vitality her mouth, while on her features laughter bursts to bloom. She is resplendent, the love-charms set on her head. Fair her features, multicolored (*bitrumu*) and brilliant her eyes (*šit’āru*)”<sup>23</sup>

One may notice this multi-sensorial description of the goddess of love. The effects are directed toward the other who will feel it: the poet arouses gustatory sensation with the sweetness of her lips

19. The hairy mouth refers here to the female sexual organ (Wasserman 2016: 259).

20. For the last edition of the text, see Wasserman 2016: n°27.

21. *bi-it-ra-a-ma ināša šit’ara* (AO 4479, 1.12 = Thureau-Dangin 1925).

22. *šāt mēlušim ru’āman labšat za’nat inbī mīqīam u kuzbam* (AO 4479, 1.6–8 = Thureau-Dangin 1925).

23. [*ša*]-*ap-ti-in du-uš-šu-pa-at ba-la-tu2-um pi2-i-ša / si-im-ti-iš-ša ihannima šihatum / šar-ha-at i-ri-mu ra-mu-u2 re-šu-uš-ša / ba-ni-wa-a ši-im-ta(w)a-ša bi-it-ra-a-ma i-na-ša ši-ut-a-ra* (AO 4479, 1.9–12 = Thureau-Dangin 1925).



(*duššupu* said of beer and wine); and acoustical effects are suggested with the laugh. Frequently translated as “multicolored”, the Akkadian term derived from *burrumu* has a wide semantic field and can be applied to a textile (evoking in that way both colors and tactile properties), or an impression in the clay. It suggests something that is speckled, hatched. With *burrumu*, it is more than a simple variety of colors; it is associated with the concrete and physical properties of the eyes. Associated with *šit’āru* “to be iridescent”—only said of the eyes or the face (but less frequently for the latter)—*burrumu* illustrates here the brilliance and iridescence of her eyes (probably thanks to her make-up) that makes her so attractive. No one can resist her gaze. But the Old Akkadian incantation insists on the fact that, even with this attractive power, the woman has been caught by the power of the incantation.

In l. 4–8, a transfer of sensory property seems to be implied from the young women to the male suitor. In a logic of transfer and a gendered exchange of value, the two maidens could be Inana and Išhara mentioned at the end of the incantation. First swallowed by the young ladies, the sweet-smelling sap will be bodily integrated by the male suitor. But the true recipient is the woman, who at the end of the incantation, cannot resist the cedar oil emanating from the shoulders of the man. The fact that it is the young ladies who bring the incense is a way also to make the women present in the ritual as suggested by Foster. Thanks to tactile and olfactory experiences, the suitor can magically act on her (l. 9–11). For Cunningham, following Leick,<sup>24</sup> the sap may be used as a ritual substance in the procedure. Its fragrance and its moist texture suggest the liquids of the female body: her saliva, her tears (making her eyes brilliant), and the humidity coming from her vagina. But *kanaktu* goes far beyond liquid and suggests an olfactory effect. According to the *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary*, the tree has not been precisely identified but it must designate a tree growing in mountains whose exudation (*ru’tu*) and wood produce a specific odor.

In l. 25–29, Cunningham identifies a ritual transfer of positive attribute—that is attractiveness—to recipient—here the rejected suitor. The sensory phenomena are solicited to arouse desire in the sex partner. The recited formula by the love charms acts in a synesthetic way as it suggests visual, gustatory, melodious, scented and tactile experiences: the body parts of the suitor are associated with fruits, oils; his voice is as sweet as a musical instrument; his arms, hands and shoulders are as if a sweet-smelling balm has been applied. The state of consciousness of the woman is being altered, modified by these sensory descriptions.<sup>25</sup> She loses her mind and reason, and cannot resist this physical attraction. All of her body is solicited by the love-charm, in a plenitude, that is close to a mystical ecstasy, a “sensorial utopia” as the anthropologist Jean-Pierre Albert has shown.<sup>26</sup> This state of mind should be an everlasting one that nothing could diminish. This may be indicated by the use of metaphors of the moon and the day or the sun that we find in the Old Akkadian and Old Babylonian incantations. On the other hand, the man seems

24. Leick 1994: 196. *ru-u’4-ti ka3-na-ak-tim / ti-ib-ta2-at-qa2 / a-hu-uz6 pa2-ki ša ru-GA-tim / a-hu-uz6 bu-ra-ma-ti / e-ni-ki / a-hu-uz6 ur4-ki / ša ši-na-tim* “The sap of the incense-tree / you gathered. I have seized your mouth, (the place) of saliva / I have seized your multicolored / eyes / I have seized your pudenda / (the place) of urine.”

25. Here I am in contradiction with Cunningham’s interpretation who sees it as a modification of the suitor’s appearance itself: “a ritual in which the attributes described were envisaged as being transferred to the suitor in order to make him more attractive to the woman” (Cunningham 1997: 59).

26. Albert 2018.

to be prisoner of his own sensory utopic experience, as he cannot share it with his beloved. The sensory effects have to be felt in mutual interaction with another, so that a communication may be established.

To induce this impossible state of sensory utopia in the beloved woman, the suitor has at his disposal several tools: first, the magical power of words on which the efficacy of the recitation of the incantation is based—I hereby refer to the well-known works of Malinowski and Tambiah.<sup>27</sup> Second, he may use the physical properties of substances, which produce sensory effects; in the proper time and space of the ritual, they may acquire various powers, to which the body and the mind of the woman would not be able to resist. The ritual legitimates and enhances the effectiveness of the sensory phenomena. Finally—it is something barely mentioned in our texts, but this may be worthy of note when we look at the general corpus of the Akkadian literature: some substances may be used because they induce a modification of the state of consciousness, inducing a complete suppression of intentionality. The drug in our love context is alcohol, or the sap of the incense tree that has been swallowed by the two maidens. The one who drank can't resist to the attraction of his/her sex partner.<sup>28</sup>

#### 4. Conclusion

Looking back to our example, in magical contexts it seems that women and men have at their disposal the same range of sensory effects to act on the mind of the desired other through his/her bodily perception. Sensory phenomena participate in the gendered interaction and attraction between female and male. Eroticism cannot be limited to a visual or tactile experience. It implies the body in totality. The sensory experience does not rely on a single sense, but on a multi-sensory atmosphere. The love charms and the ritual procedures that involve the use of substances of various properties seek to create a new sensory experience felt by the beloved, a new physical state that correlates to a new state of consciousness—even if this implies a lack of reason.

With these Akkadian incantations, I wonder if we may go a bit further. We may find here a new example of the way an individual—whether she/he is female or male—is playing with the sensory codes of her/his own community. This fact may express Pierre Bourdieu's *habitus*, which is much more than a simple conditioning. The *habitus* helps individuals to find new solutions, creating then new practices for his/her new situation. The sensory experience is then particularly productive in ritual context. The individual uses his/her own embodied sensory data to communicate, and acts on the lover who is the true recipient of this new sensory grammar.

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27. Malinowski 1935: 235; Tambiah 1968: 175–208; Austin 1970.

28. Rendu Loisel 2018. For the uses of substances in ancient Near Eastern rituals, see for example the works of Diana Stein (Stein 2017: 507–533).

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## 1.2. Elite Women



## *In Taberna Quando Sumus* On Taverns, *Nadītum* Women, and the *Gagûm* in Old Babylonian Sippar

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### 1. Introduction

A most interesting, as yet still intriguing, paragraph of the Code of Hammurabi (hereafter CH) is § 110 which informs us that if a *nadītum* (and/or) *ugbaptum* woman who does not reside in the *gagûm* should open a tavern or enter a tavern for beer, she shall be burned. This paragraph has been interpreted in various ways. Lafont (1999: 451–458) believes it to be an offense relating to prostitution. *Nadītum* and other priestesses were expected to lead chaste lives and were therefore prohibited to enter taverns, which were places of ill repute, associated with prostitution. Maul (1992) agrees that the prohibition is based on issues of purity, but believes this purity to be ritual rather than moral. Roth (1999), however, takes the view that this paragraph deals with economic relationships, rather than sex or prostitution, and considers that it regulates the independence and economic power of a particular group of women. Van Wyk (2015) agrees with the economic interpretation, but believes it concerns tax evasion, which explains in her view the severe punishment.

It is all the more remarkable that all attestations of taverns in the economic and legal texts from Old Babylonian Sippar (*ca.* 2000–1595 BCE)<sup>2</sup> can be linked to *nadītum* women. This is, at first view, in flat contradiction to the paragraph in question and therefore requires an explanation.

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2. The Old Babylonian period roughly corresponds to the first half of the second millennium BCE. Ten kings ruled during the Old Babylonian Dynasty: Sumu-la-el (Sle; 1880–1845), Sabium (Sa; 1844–1831), Apil-Sin (AS; 1830–1813), Sin-muballit (Sm; 1812–1793), Hammurabi (Ha; 1792–1750), Samsu-iluna (Si; 1749–1712), Abi-ešuḫ (Ae; 1711–1684), Ammi-ditana (Ad; 1683–1647), Ammi-ṣaduqa (Aṣ; 1646–1626) and Samsu-ditana (Sd; 1625–1595). The lengths of reigns given here, are taken from Van De Mieroop (2016: 352) and follow the Middle Chronology. Before Sippar was placed under Babylonian rule by Sumu-la-el, local rulers, such as Ilumma-ila, Hammī-sura, Immerum and Buntaḫtun-ila, are known to have ruled Sippar. No lengths of reigns are known of these local rulers (see Charpin 2004: 91–94).

In what follows, I shall confront CH § 110 with the evidence from the documentary texts from Old Babylonian Sippar in order to shed some new light on the relation between taverns, *nadītum* women, and the *gagûm*.

## 2. Paragraph 110 of the Code of Hammurabi

### 2.1. Text and Translation

The text, with variants between parentheses, goes as follows:<sup>3</sup>

*šumma nadītum (u) ugbabtum ša ina gagîm la wašbat bīt sībim iptete  
u lu (ulu) ana šikarim ana bīt sībim iterub awiltam (nadītam) šuāti iqallūši*

The translation is not without difficulties, for it depends on how one interprets terms such as *lukur* (*nadītum*), *nin.dingir* or *ereš.dingir* (*ugbabtum*), *gá.gi4.a* (*gagûm*) and *é.kurun.na* (*bīt sībim*). In the absence of adequate modern equivalents for *nadītum*, *ugbabtum* and *gagûm*,<sup>4</sup> I prefer to use the Akkadian terms. *é.kurun.na* (= *é.kaš.din.na*, *bīt sībim* or *bīt sābîm/sābītum* in Akkadian) means literally ‘house of (the) beer(-seller)’<sup>5</sup>, but is generally translated as ‘tavern’,<sup>6</sup> which I will follow.

However, there are some more *caveats* to bear in mind when interpreting this paragraph, as Roth (1999: 448–449) already noted. First, the question arises how many actors are involved: one, two or three? For one can translate *šumma nadītum (u) ugbabtum ša ina gagîm lā wašbat* in three different ways: (1) if a *nadītum*, who is an *ugbabtum* not residing in the *gagûm* (one actor), (2) if a *nadītum* or an *ugbabtum*, not residing in the *gagûm* (two actors), and (3) if a *nadītum*, an *ugbabtum*, (or) any (other) woman not residing in the *gagûm* (three actors).

According to Stol (2000: 457–458), the titles of *lukur* and *nin/ereš.dingir* were partly interchangeable in the Old Babylonian period. He suggests that *nin.dingir* or *ereš.dingir* is to be read only *ugbabtum* in Nippur, whereas in Sippar it is to be read *nadītum*. The fact that at the end of the paragraph one variant of the CH mentions *lukur* (instead of *awiltam*) referring to the actor(s) at the beginning, seems to corroborate this. The same seems to go for the titles of *lukur* (*nadītum*) and *nu.bar* (*kulmašītum*) in Old Babylonian Sippar.<sup>7</sup> Might this imply that *lukur* (*nadītum*) was used as a collective term for various sorts or ranks of priestesses at the time? Was *nin/ereš.dingir* added as a kind of

3. CH xxv 36–44: *šum-ma lukur (ù) nin/ereš.dingir ša i-na gá.gi4.a la wa-aš-ba-at é.kurun.na ip-te-te ù lu (ú-lu) a-na kaš a-na é.kurun.na i-te-ru-ub a-wi-il-tam* (*lukur*) *šu-a-ti i-qal-lu-ú-ši* (See Roth 1995: 101 and 1999: 445).

4. *Nadītum* is still often translated as ‘nun’ and *gagûm* as ‘cloister’ (see Stol 2016 *passim*). It goes without saying that these interpretations are anachronistic and therefore not appropriate. See De Graef 2018 and *forthcoming*.

5. See CAD S *sub* *sābû* (*sēbû*, *sēpû*, *šībû*, *sābi`u*, fem. *sābītu*): innkeeper, beer merchant, and *sību* beer (lex).

6. See CAD S *sub* *sābû* in *bīt sābî* (*bīt sēbî*, *bīt sābīti*) (*é lú.(kaš.)din.na/nam*) tavern, and *sību* in *bīt sībi* (*é kaš.din.na*) tavern. A *bīt sībim/sābîm/sābītum* is generally considered to have been a place where one could not only purchase beer but also congregate and consume beer (see Allred 2009, Lion 2013: 393 and Langlois 2016: 113).

7. See CT 47 23 (Ha 14) where Tarbi-Annunītum is specified as *nu.bar* on the tablet but as *ᶜnadītu* on the case. See Barberon (2012: 140–141) for the fusion of the titles *kulmašītum* and *nadītum* of Marduk from Ammi-ditana onwards.



synonym of *lukur* in the CH, to make sure that all variations used in Hammurabi's empire at the time were covered, as Stol (2000: 465) already suggested?

Roth (1999: 449) notes that the third option may be seen as an inclusive construction, proceeding from the most restrictive category (*nadītum*) to the least (any temple woman not residing in the *gagûm*). However, this interpretation presupposes that whereas all *nadītum* women were by definition 'cloistered', *ugbabtum* women could be and all other priestesses were not, which, as I shall argue further on, does not make much sense.<sup>8</sup>

I agree with Roth (1999: 449) that the phrase *ša ina gagûm lā wašbat* should be taken as key, in appositional construction with *lukur (u) nin/ereš.dingir*, which I would interpret as synonyms: if a *nadītum* / *ugbabtum* who does not reside in the *gagûm*.

Second, it is by far not clear what is meant with *bīt sībim petûm* in Akkadian (literally 'to open a tavern'). As Roth (1999: 454–455) noted, in many European languages 'to open' might mean 'to render a physically confined space accessible to certain persons with the intent of selling merchandise'. It is, however, not at all certain that this is also the case for Akkadian.<sup>9</sup> It might refer to being an innkeeper or beer seller, but also to opening (the door of) a tavern (as a client, as a bar girl, or inciting passengers / clients to enter). As Roth (1999: 453) already noted, the coordinating particle *u lu (ulu)* seems to separate the activity described as *bīt sībim petûm* from the following activity of *ana šikarim ina bīt sībim erēbum* (literally 'to enter a tavern for beer')—she *either* opened *or* entered—which makes the interpretation of 'opening the door (as a client)' less plausible, as it is basically the same as 'entering'.

Last but not least, the purpose of entering the tavern—for beer (*ana šikarim*)—remains ambiguous: did she enter to buy beer, to drink beer or to sell beer?

In view of all difficulties mentioned, I think it is safe to translate § 110 as follows:

“Should a *nadītum* and/or *ugbabtum* woman who does not reside in the *gagûm* open a tavern or enter a tavern for beer, this woman shall be burnt.”

## 2.2. Various Interpretations: Sex, Magic, or Money?

Throughout the years, various interpretations of and hypotheses about CH § 110 have been suggested.

Traditionally it has been interpreted as an offense relating to illicit sexual behaviour or even prostitution: *nadītum* and other priestesses were expected to lead chaste lives and were therefore prohibited to enter taverns, which were places of ill repute, associated with prostitution.<sup>10</sup>

8. Without taking into account possible presuppositions concerning *nadītum* and/or *ugbabtum* women being 'cloistered' or not, the third option could also imply that *nadītum* and/or *ugbabtum* women by definition did not reside in the *gagûm*: 'if a *nadītum*, or an *ugbabtum*, or any other woman not residing in the *gagûm*', which, obviously, does not make much sense either.

9. *CAD P sub* *petû* mentions tentatively 'to start business(?)' referring to one standard Babylonian extispicy, see also *CAD M1 sub* *maḥīru 2c3*. Otherwise, there are no attestations of *petûm* in that specific sense known to me.

10. See, among others, Driver and Miles 1954: 205sq., Jeyes 1983, Lerner 1986: 242, Henshaw 1994: 194, Harris 1999: 225, van Wyk 2015: 120 and Stol 2016: *passim*. For other followers and examples of the traditional view, see the overview by van Wyk (2015: 112–115).

Lafont (1999: 451–458) compares CH § 110 to the sanction enacted in Lev XXI 9 against a priest's daughter engaged in prostitution.<sup>11</sup> The prescribed punishments in both texts are identical—the offender is to be burned—a similarity that, according to Lafont, corroborates the approximation of the two laws with regard to the offense. She therefore concludes that, whereas prostitution is explicitly expressed in Lev XXI 9, it is implied in § 110 of the CH.

Maul (1992: 390–396) believes the ban on the *nadītum* and/or *ugbābtum* women entering a tavern to be of a magical nature. This hypothesis is based on first-millennium rituals of exorcism showing that the threshold of taverns and their beer fermentation jars were loaded with supernatural powers, at the contact of which the patient could deposit his impurity. Therefore, entering a tavern could contaminate these women who had to preserve a state of ritual purity. This hypothesis is followed by Assante (1998: 67–68), who stresses the fact that the prohibition is based on issues of ritual, rather than moral, purity.

Roth (1999: 445–447) takes the view that this paragraph deals with economic relationships, rather than prostitution. This hypothesis is based on the context of the paragraph and its inclusion in a sequence of paragraphs (§§ cc–126) dealing with economic relationships. This sequence starts with laws concerning international commerce (§§ cc–103) and local trading (§§ 104–107), continues with laws concerning the female innkeeper and the tavern (§§ 108–111), and ends with laws regulating relationships between two individuals engaged in a matter of economic trust (§§ 112–126). The venue evolves from international to local, to the tavern and the private house, and the individuals involved are merchants and trading agents, women involved in the tavern, and finally men engaging with their peers.<sup>12</sup>

Roth (1999: 453–458) argues that after having regulated the business ventures of traders and male money lenders, the CH briefly touches upon the typical female variant, being tavern keeping, and while this was under consideration, a note was added concerning the *nadītum* and/or *ugbābtum* women. As such, she considers § 110 to prohibit *nadītum* and/or *ugbābtum* women not residing in the *gagûm* from establishing their own place of business, a tavern, and from engaging in the related creditor business, lending beer and barley at interest. Being independent economic actors—unmarried, childless, and rich—they were not allowed to go into the tavern-keeping business as this was considered unfair competition with female innkeepers—married poor women with children—as well as (male) merchants.

Van Wyk (2015: 110–111) goes along with the hypothesis of an economic regulation but believes it concerns the offence of tax evasion, tavern keeping and money-lending being difficult to regulate for the state.

Although I am inclined to follow Roth in her interpretation that the paragraph deals with economy rather than chastity, given its context within the CH, none of the hypotheses is completely satisfactory in my view.

The traditional interpretation seems to be the least probable. As Roth (1999: 456 fn. 29) rightly noted, the offense punished in Lev XXI 9 is not prostitution in itself but the fact that the daughter of a

11. Lev XXI 9: וְכִּי תִּזְנֶה בַּת כֹּהֵן מִן הַבָּתּוּלִים לְזָנוּת אֶת-אָבִיהָ הִיא מִחַלְלֵת בָּאֵשׁ תִּשְׂרָף ( *ûbat 'iš kōhēn kī tēhēl liznôt 'et-'ābîhā hî' mēhalelet bā'ēš tîsārēk* ) 'When the daughter of a priest defiles herself through harlotry, it is her father whom she defiles; she shall be put to the fire (translation by NJPS).

12. For CH §§ cc–126, see Roth 1995: 99–105.

priest shames her father by engaging in prostitution, which is rather a case of filial impiety. Therefore, the comparison between CH § 110 and Lev XXI 9 does not hold true.

Its greatest weakness, however, lies in the association of the taboo on child-bearing of the *nadītum* and other priestesses with a not-documented ‘vow of chastity’, which clearly is a projection of a Judeo-Christian conception on a Mesopotamian institution.

Maul’s (1992) hypothesis is based solely on first-millennium sources on rituals. As yet, no Old Babylonian sources give evidence of the possible danger of beer jars in taverns contaminating the ritual purity of *nadītum* and/or *ugbabtum* women. On the contrary, beer and possibly the tavern seem to have played a role in the inauguration and cultic role of *nadītum* women, as I will argue further on.

The economic hypothesis, proposed by Roth (1999), makes sense within the context of the preceding and succeeding paragraphs. For female innkeepers (*munus.kurun.na* or *sābītum*) and priestesses—including, but not only, *lukur* or *nadītum* and/or *nin/ereš.dingir* or *ugbabtum* women—were indeed the female variants of businessmen and male money lenders. Roth (1999: 453–458) concludes that the priestesses were not allowed to go into the tavern-keeping and money-lending business as this was considered unfair competition with female innkeepers. Female innkeepers were indeed known for lending out beer and barley, as is shown by the Edicts of Ammiditana and Ammišaduqa.<sup>13</sup> However, the Old Babylonian day-to-day economic and legal texts seem to draw a different picture: none of the female creditors attested in the Old Babylonian loan documents from Sippar can be identified as *sābītum* whereas 91 % of them can be identified with certainty as *nadītum*’s of Šamaš.

Van Wyk (2015: 134–138) believes that whereas the ‘cloistered’ *nadītum* women who served as creditors did so as representatives of the Ebabbar temple, a business regulated by the state after the so-called ‘secularisation’ under Hammurabi,<sup>14</sup> like the business of the *sābītum* (and the *sābūm*) which was subject to palatial taxation,<sup>15</sup> the ‘not cloistered’ *nadītum* women acted as independent women whose business was not regulated by the state and therefore endangered the state’s welfare. The fact that ‘not cloistered’ *nadītum* women actually evaded paying taxes explains, in her opinion, the rather severe punishment of death by burning, which only occurs rarely, and, seems to be rather extravagant in the case of unfair competition, which is certainly true.

However, there is no reason whatsoever to assume that the *nadītum* women who are to be associated with the *gagūm*—none of these women were actually ‘cloistered’ or secluded as I will argue further on—acted on behalf of the Ebabbar temple. On the contrary, whereas temple loans certainly existed, they were always given by one or more deities or an individual and a deity.<sup>16</sup> This is certainly not the case with the *nadītum*’s of Šamaš, who acted as creditors in their own right. If the economic transactions performed by

13. Edict of X [Ammiditana] § G = Edict of Ammišaduqa § 17: *munus.lú.kurun.na ša kaš ù še-am i-qi-pu mi-im-ma ša i-qi-pu ú-ul ú-ša-ad-da-an* ‘A female innkeeper who lent out beer or barley cannot recover what she lent out’ (within the context of the annulation of debts after a *mīšarum*). See Kraus 1984: 160–161 and 178–179, Lion 2013: 395 and Langlois 2016: 116, who mentions an Old Babylonian letter, *AbB* 7 53, in which Aḫušina informs Mattaki that the farmer in charge of her fields, gave the barley he was supposed to pay her as rent to his merchant and his female innkeeper instead, implying he must have been indebted to both.

14. See Harris 1961.

15. See Goetze 1965, Charpin 2005a, Lion 2013: 395–394 and Langlois 2016: 116–117.

16. See Charpin 2005b and Charpin 2017: 64–69 et 215–218 with references.

*nadītum*'s of Šamaš were on behalf of the Ebabbar temple, this would imply that the fields they leased out were actually temple lands. This is not the case, as is shown by the donation and inheritance documents in which fields are donated or bequeathed to *nadītum*'s by their fathers or by other *nadītum*'s, and sales contracts in which *nadītum*'s purchased fields. *Nadītum*'s of Šamaš were primarily keepers of their family estate, beside which some of them also developed a personal estate.<sup>17</sup>

The extent to which the kings from Ḥammurabi onward exercised control over the temples, or the 'secularisation' as it was called by Harris (1961), which is indeed apparent from the seal legends, is a very complex and still little understood issue.<sup>18</sup> Royal control over the temples and their income certainly increased after Ḥammurabi, as is shown by the imposition of different taxes on certain professions, such as brewers, innkeepers, merchants, and high ranked temple personnel, such as the chief dirge singer of Annunītum.<sup>19</sup> There are, however, no indications whatsoever that *nadītum*'s, nor other priestesses, whether they were or were not associated with the *gagûm*, were obliged to pay taxes.

The severity of the punishment remains a problem which is hard to explain and which I will come back to later on, but let us first consider another problem, viz. the difference between residing or not residing in the *gagûm*.

### 2.3. To Reside or Not to Reside in the Gagûm

It is highly remarkable that the ban of opening a tavern or entering it for beer is imposed only on those *nadītum* and/or *ugbābtum* women who do not reside in the *gagûm*. If the reason for the ban were moral and/or ritual purity, one would expect all *nadītum* and/or *ugbābtum* women—whether they resided in the *gagûm* or not—to be prohibited to do so.

Lafont (1999: 451–453) argues that the seclusion or, as she renders it, 'cloistering', of the *nadītum* or *ugbābtum* women made it impossible to commit the offense of misconduct linked to taverns—be it prostitution, illicit sexual behaviour or just sex—which explains, according to her, why the CH only mentions those who are not secluded/cloistered. As such, she argues that it only concerns women who have left the secluded life for financial reasons, contrary to the *nadītum* women who were impoverished and lived at the expenses of the state. To corroborate this argument, she refers to the letter by Samsuiluna, published by Janssen (1991).

First, the assumption that the (majority of) *nadītum* women—or at least the *nadītum*'s of Šamaš in Sippar—were actually 'cloistered' and were not allowed to exit this cloister compound is superseded and wrong. There is no proof whatsoever that *nadītum*, or other women for that matter, in Sippar, nor in other cities, were 'cloistered' or secluded.<sup>20</sup>

17. See De Graef 2016 and 2018.

18. See Charpin 2005: 27–30.

19. See Stol 2004: 757–776, Tanret 2004: 261–262, and Tanret 2017: 15–16.

20. See my forthcoming monograph *A Room of her Own? The Origin, Meaning and Functioning of the Gagûm in Old Babylonian Sippar*.

Second, the letter of Samsu-iluna, published by Janssen (1991), proves that as a rule *nadītum* women could only enter the *gagūm* if their fathers or brothers supported them or wrote them a tablet that would assure them of the necessary support—a paternal gift or inheritance document.<sup>21</sup>

This is corroborated by CH §§ 178–181 that regulate situations in which fathers did or did not write their *nadītum* (and other) daughters tablets concerning their dowries. If a father wrote his *ugbaptum*, *nadītum*, or *sekretum* daughter a tablet concerning her dowry in which she is not granted full authority to bequeath her estate to whom she pleases, she will enjoy the usufruct of her estate until she dies after which her brothers will inherit her estate. If she is granted full authority to bequeath her estate to whom she pleases, she may give her estate to whomever she pleases and her brothers will have no rights to her estate (§§ 178–179).<sup>22</sup>

If a father did not write his daughter a tablet concerning her dowry, various options are given. If it concerns a *lukur* ṽ *gá*<sup>2</sup>/*é*<sup>2</sup>.*gi*<sub>4</sub>.*a* or *sekretum* daughter, she gets a share of the paternal estate comparable in value to that of one heir in usufruct that will go to her brothers after her death (§ 180).<sup>23</sup> If it concerns a *nadītum*, *qadištum*, or *kulmašītum* daughter, she gets a one-third share of the paternal estate in usufruct that will go to her brothers after her death (§ 181).<sup>24</sup> If it concerns a *nadītum* of Marduk, she gets a one-third share of the paternal estate, does not have to perform service obligations and may give her estate to whomever she pleases (§ 182).<sup>25</sup>

The sign after *lukur* in § 180 is unfortunately broken. Roth (1998: 118) reads *lukur gá.gi*<sub>4</sub>.*a* or *nadīt gagīm* ‘*nadītum* of the *gagūm*’ whereas Stol (1979 and 2000: 465) reads *é.gi*<sub>4</sub>.*a* or *kallatum*, which he considers to be a different kind of priestess. In my view, Roth’s interpretation *lukur gá.gi*<sub>4</sub>.*a* or *nadīt gagīm*—which she translates as ‘a cloistered *nadītum*’—does not make much sense, for this would imply that there were three kinds of *lukur*, viz. the ‘normal’ one (*lukur*), the one of the *gagūm* (*lukur gá.gi*<sub>4</sub>.*a*) and the one of Marduk of Babylon (*lukur* <sup>d</sup>AMAR.UTU *ša ká.dingir.ra*<sup>ki</sup>). This interpretation goes back to the generally accepted dichotomy between the ‘cloistered’ *nadītum*’s of Šamaš in Sippar-Jahrūrūm vs. the ‘not cloistered’ *nadītum*’s of Marduk, but as I will argue further on, various cities had their own *gagūm* and it seems very probable that wherever there were *nadītum*’s (or other priestesses), they functioned within a *gagūm* organisation or institution.

21. *lukur* <sup>d</sup>utu *la su-ud-du-ud a-na gá.gi*<sub>4</sub>.*a* *la šu-ru-ub-ša aq-bi* ù *lukur* <sup>d</sup>utu *ša a-bu-ša* ù *a-ḥu-ša la ú-ši-du-ši tu-pa-am la iš-tu-ru-šim-ma i-na gá.gi*<sub>4</sub>.*a* *wa-aš-ba-at a-ba-ša* ù *a-ḥa-ša e-se-ra-am-ma tu-pa-am ša-ṭa-ra-am-ma a-na gá.gi*<sub>4</sub>.*a* *šu-ru-ub-ša aq-bi* (Di 1668: 16–23 = Di 1771: 3’–10’ = Di 0976: 17–23 = *AbB* 7 111: 12’–16’, see Janssen 1991: 5–6) ‘Should a *nadītum* of Šamaš not be provided for, I ordered not to let her enter the *gagūm*. As for a *nadītum* of Šamaš whose father or brother did not equip her with provisions and did not write her a tablet, but who is already residing in the *gagūm*, I ordered to put pressure on her father or brother to write a tablet and then to let her enter the *gagūm*.’ (my translation).

22. See Roth 1995: 117. Barberon (2010: 147) notes that as far as the *nadītum*’s of Marduk are concerned, these regulations seem indeed to have been in place, although once married, her (adoptive) children would inherit her estate. As far as the *nadītum*’s of Šamaš from Sippar are concerned, these regulations were effective, as is shown by donation and inheritance documents in which it is explicitly stated that she may give her inheritance to whom she pleases (*ašar eliša ṭabu aplussa inaddin*) and others that mention a fideicommissary, in most cases one of her brothers, to whom her estate must go after her death. On some occasions, she is free to choose to which brother she bequeaths her estate. See De Graef 2016 and 2018.

23. See Roth 1995: 118.

24. See Roth 1995: 118.

25. See Roth 1995: 118.

Moreover, as mentioned above, the titles of these priestesses—*nin/ereš.dingir*, *lukur*, *nu.bar*—were often interchangeable, and in the light of the proposition that *lukur* might have been used as a collective term in certain contexts, there is in my opinion only one logical way to interpret these three paragraphs, for their aim is to regulate what happened if a father did not write his priestess daughter a tablet concerning her dowry. If this happened to a *nadītum* of Marduk, she has a right to one-third of the paternal estate and full authority to bequeath her share to whomever she pleases (§ 182). In other words, *nadītum*'s of Marduk were clearly highest in rank and were granted a high degree of independence—although one might be inclined to put this somewhat in perspective considering the fact that if they were married their estate went to their children, as Barberon (2012: 147) noted. Lower in rank were *nadītum*'s who belonged to the *qadištum* or *kulmašītum* rank, as they only had a right to the usufruct of one-third of the paternal estate, which went to her brothers after her death (§ 181). Even lower in rank were *nadītum*'s who belonged to the *kallatum* or *sekretum* rank, as they only had a right to the usufruct of a share of the paternal estate comparable in value to that of one heir (§ 180).

In other words, even if the father of a *nadītum* or other priestess did not write her a tablet concerning her dowry, she still had rights to (the usufruct of) a share of the paternal estate which would allow her to provide for herself. Apparently, the economic crisis that started under Samsu-iluna's reign and had its peak under Abi-ešuh's hit some urban elite families rather hard so that they were no longer able to support their *nadītum* daughters after which the state had to provide for them. The fact that Samsu-iluna took action against this by means of an official letter at the end of his reign<sup>26</sup> proves that it must have been a fairly new and exceptional situation, obviously due to the economic recession. It is therefore highly improbable that the state had to provide for *nadītum* women due to impoverishment during Ḫammurabi's economically very prosperous reign. There is, moreover, abundant evidence that *nadītum* women associated with the *gagûm*, as they owned property there and/or concluded business deals in the gate of the *gagûm*, were rather well-to-do, not to say very rich, both during Ḫammurabi's reign and that of his successors.<sup>27</sup>

More importantly though, Lafont's argument refers to the specific situation of the *nadītum*'s of Šamaš and the *gagûm* in Sippar-Jaḫrūrūm—or, at least, her interpretation of that situation. There is, however, no reason to assume that CH § 110 refers to a specific kind of *nadītum* women in a specific city—and even if that were the case, it is more likely to have been the *nadītum* women of Marduk in Babylon than those of Šamaš in Sippar.

Although by far the most attested and renowned one, the *gá.gi4.a* or *gagûm* in Sippar-Jaḫrūrūm was certainly not the only one: other cities, such as Kiš, Dilbat, Iščali, Damrum, Puš and Nippur also had their *gá.gi4.a* or *gagûm*.<sup>28</sup> It seems therefore very probable that CH § 110 refers to any *nadītum* and/or

26. Based on the officials mentioned in the letter, Janssen (1991: 11) was able to date it at the end of Samsu-iluna's reign.

27. Whereas Janssen (1991: 12–13) concluded that the *gagûm* must have been abandoned at the end of Samsu-iluna's reign or shortly after, new text material has proven this not to be the case, as shown by Richardson (2010).

28. For the *gá.gi4.a* of Kiš and the *lukur* and *nin.dingir* of Zababa, see Harris 1963: 122 and Barberon 2012: 51–58; for the *gá.gi4.a* of Iščali, see Harris 1963: 122; for the *ki.lukur.ra* (literally 'place of the *nadītum* women) and the *lukur* and *nin.dingir* of Ninurta in Nippur, see Barberon 2012: 89–93; the mention of *lukur* of Nanna and *ugula nin.dingir.meš* (overseer of the *ugbābtum* women) in the texts of Damrum, and of *ugula lukur* (overseer of the *nadītum* women) in the texts

*ugbaltum* woman not residing in her local *gá.gi<sub>4</sub>.a*, which is corroborated by the fact that the authors of the CH added *nin/ereš.dingir* as a kind of synonym of *lukur* to make sure that all variations used in the empire were covered.

If we assume that there was a *gá.gi<sub>4</sub>.a* or *gagŭm* in every city where *nadītum* and/or *ugbaltum* (and/or other) priestesses dedicated to the city deity lived—which in that case must have been all major (Northern) Babylonian cities, probably even including the capital Babylon—the claim that it was some kind of restricted area (‘cloister’) in which the *nadītum* women were obliged to live because they were not allowed to marry is untenable. For, this would imply that all *nadītum* and/or *ugbaltum* (and/or other) priestesses were unmarried and secluded. This was not the case: at least some *nadītum* women were allowed to marry, as is shown by CH §§ 144–146, all three starting with ‘if a man marries a *nadītum* woman ...’.<sup>29</sup> Although the CH does not mention this explicitly, it is generally believed that these paragraphs concern only the *nadītum* women of Marduk from Babylon.<sup>30</sup> *Nadītum* women of Marduk were indeed allowed to marry, as is shown by some marriage contracts.<sup>31</sup> It is, however, by no means certain that only *nadītum* women of Marduk were allowed to marry.<sup>32</sup> There are very few documents relating to marriage preserved,<sup>33</sup> resulting in an incomplete and unbalanced picture. According to Greengus (1969), the documents relating to marriages that are preserved all depict abnormal situations, since marriage was an oral agreement in the normal course of events. Lion (2015: 18–19) argues that bigamous marriages, in case the bride, being a *nadītum* (or other) priestess, was not allowed to bear children, must have been such cases in which a document had to be written, as the rights and duties of both wives had to be stated.

Barberon (2012: 108) gives a very interesting overview of all priestesses attested in the Old Babylonian kingdom, focussing on the following three characteristics: (1) not secluded women, who were allowed to marry, (2) secluded women, who were not allowed to marry, and (3) women with supervisory staff (‘personnel encadrant’).

In my opinion, the presence of personnel implies that these women functioned in an institutional context of a *gá.gi<sub>4</sub>.a* or *ki.lukur.ra*. As such, all *nadītum* women, be it of Šamaš in Sippar, of Zababa in Kiš, of Ninurta in Nippur, of Nanna in Damrum or of Uraš in Dilbat, seem to have functioned within the institutional context of their *gá.gi<sub>4</sub>.a* or *ki.lukur.ra*. The only exception seems to have been the *nadītum* women of Marduk, who are attested throughout the kingdom: in Babylon, Damrum, Dilbat, Kiš,

from Dilbat, seems to imply that both cities had a similar institution and/or area, see Barberon 2012: 46–51; for the *gá.gi<sub>4</sub>.a* of Puš, see BM 96977: 25b: *gá.gi<sub>4</sub>.a pu-uš<sup>ki</sup>*.

29. *Šumma awīlum lukur ihuzma* ..., see Roth 1995: 108–109.

30. Only § 182 explicitly mentions the *nadītum* of Marduk (see Roth 1995: 118), but Barberon (2012: 146–148) considers §§ 137, 144–147 and 179 to concern the *nadītum* women of Marduk of Babylon. See also and most recently Gadotti 2016: 71–72.

31. See Barberon 2012: 224–226 and Lion 2015.

32. In the recently published Old Babylonian Texts from Nippur held in the Hilprecht Collection Jena by Goddeeris (2016), a woman is attested, viz. Narāmtum daughter of Lu-Nanna, who was a *lukur* of Lugalaba and was married to Iddin-Enlil (see Goddeeris 2016 nrs 6, 15, 18 and 24). This means that, apart from the *nadītum*’s of Ninurta, there were also *nadītum*’s of other deities in Nippur, such as Lugalaba, who were allowed to marry.

33. According to Lion (2015: 18–19) ca. 130 documents, which account for 0,4% of all Old Babylonian documents from private archives published up to now.

Lagaba, Sippar, Šupur-Šubula, Isin, Nippur and ‘Usiyeh. Being the only *nadītum* women generally considered to have been allowed to marry, this led almost automatically to the dichotomy between married women on the one hand and women functioning within the institutional context of a *gá.gi<sub>4</sub>.a*—‘secluded women’—on the other. However, the *kulmašītum* and *ugbabtum* women of Annunītum in Sippar-Amnānum were allowed to marry and had supervisory staff,<sup>34</sup> implying they functioned within an institutional context notwithstanding the fact they were married. The same seems to go for the *qadištum* women of Adad, who were allowed to marry according to the sources from Sippar and Ur,<sup>35</sup> and had supervisory staff according to a text from Babylon.<sup>36</sup> The fact that the house in which the documents from the *qadištum* Ḫumṭi-Adad were excavated in Sippar-Jahrūrūm, might have been located within the boundaries of the *gagūm* (see *infra*) corroborates this. It seems therefore appropriate to dissociate, at least in some cases, the permission or prohibition to marry from (not) residing in the *gagūm*.

If we assume that CH § 110 refers to a general situation, to *nadītum* and/or *ugbabtum* women not residing in their local *gá.gi<sub>4</sub>.a*, this cannot refer to them not being ‘cloistered’ and therefore free to go in the city (vs. other ‘cloistered’ women not free to go in the city). In other words, the meaning of *ina gá.gi<sub>4</sub>.a (lā) wašābum* ‘(not) to reside in the *gagūm*’ is in dire need of reconsideration.

Before going deeper into that, let us have a look at what the day-to-day economic and legal texts from Old Babylonian Sippar tell us about taverns and *nadītum*’s.

### 3. Real Life Calling!

#### 3.1. Taverns and Nadītum Women

Taverns are only rarely attested in the economic and legal texts from Old Babylonian Sippar. A *bīt sībim* is attested in six to eight texts,<sup>37</sup> dated from the reign of Sabium to that of Ḫammurabi. Seven of these texts belong to the same dossier and refer therefore to the same *bīt sībim*, the ownership of which can be followed over three generations of one family. As for the other text, it is not clear to what dossier/archive it belonged, nor when it can be dated, as no personal names are mentioned in it.

publication	Museum nr.	date	genre	tavern	
BE 6/1 13	CBM 1244	Sa	sale	é <i>sí-bi-im</i>	neighbour of property sold
( — )	Si.767+Si.804+Si.764	Sm ( <i>pre</i> 17-18)	?	é <i>sí-bi-im</i> ?	? )
SFS 10	Si.10	Sm (17-18)	paternal gift	é <i>sí-bi-im</i>	part of paternal gift
SFS 77	Si.77+Si.789	Sm (17-18)	inheritance?	é <i>sí-bi-im</i>	part of inheritance?
SFS 89	Si.89	sd	?	é <i>sí-bi-im</i>	mentioned in list

34. See Barberon 2012: 68–73.

35. See Barberon 2012: 78–81 and 95.

36. See Barberon 2012: 44.

37. Based on Ellis’ (1997: 60–61) conclusion that Si.77+Si.789, Si.89, Si.763+Si.70 and Si.767+Si.804+Si.764 are (near) duplicates of Si.10, I assume that the *bīt sībim* is mentioned in all texts. It is, however, not verifiable for two texts, viz. Si.763+Si.70 and Si.767+Si.804+Si.764, as they are not published. They are therefore included in Table 1, but in parentheses.



(SFS 70	Si.763+Si.70	sd	inheritance?	é sí-bi-im ?	part of inheritance?)
SFS 100	Si.100	post Sm 17-18	inheritance	mu-ta-at é sí-bi-im	part of inheritance
CT 4 18b	BM 78382	sd	administrative	é sí-bi-im	initiation of a nadītu

Table 1. Overview of attestations of *bīt sībim* in Old Babylonian documentary texts from Sippar.

### 3.1.1. *The Tavern on Main Street in Sippar-Jahrūrum*

This tavern on Main Street in Sippar-Jahrūrum is attested in five to seven texts,<sup>38</sup> six of which belong to a dossier of at least seven different texts that were excavated by Scheil in 1894 in Sippar-Jahrūrum and are now kept in Istanbul. Two of them have been fully published by Scheil (1902): Si.10 (handcopy, transliteration, translation and photograph<sup>39</sup>) and Si.100 (handcopy, transliteration and translation<sup>40</sup>). Three of them have been partly published by Scheil (1902): Si.70, Si. 77 and Si.89 (incomplete transliterations<sup>41</sup>). Ellis (1997) studied these tablets in Istanbul and was able to join various fragments and make some corrections to the transliterations published earlier by Scheil. Unfortunately, she never published the texts in full. It goes without saying that the collation and full publication of these tablets and fragments is badly needed. One tablet from the collection of the University of Pennsylvania, *BE* 6/1 13, can be added to this dossier.

The first attestation of the tavern on Main Street dates from the reign of Sabium (1844–1831 BCE): *BE* 6/1 13 is a sales document in which a 78 m<sup>2</sup> house in Sippar-Jahrūrum is purchased by Bettatum, *nadītum* of Šamaš, daughter of Lu-Ninšubur, from Ilšu-bani, Adad-iddinam and Nabi-ilīšu, sons of Awilumma. This house is described as being located next to the Sîn-tilla[...] -street and next to the shop belonging to the sons of Awilumma. Its front borders Main Street and its rear borders the tavern belonging to the sons of Awilumma and two shops the exits of which give out onto Main Street.<sup>42</sup> During the reign of Sabium, the tavern as well as three shops, which all seem to give out on Main Street, are in the possession of the sons of Awilumma: Ilšu-bani, Adad-iddinam and Nabi-ilīšu.

This tavern and adjacent shops, among many other immovable and movables, is later on bequeathed by Ilšu-bani, son of Awilumma, to his daughter Šāt-Aja who is a *nadītum* of Šamaš. The transfer of this tavern and all other immovable and movables seems to have been recorded in no less than five documents, four of them mentioning witnesses, implying they were official and legitimate documents. None of them seems to show traces of annulment.

38. See the preceding footnote.

39. Scheil 1902: 98–102 and Pl. III.

40. Scheil 1902: 119–120.

41. Scheil 1902: 112, 114–115, and 118.

42. *BE* 6/1 13: (1) 2 sar 10 gín é.dù.´a´ (2) *i-na* ud.kib.nun<sup>ki</sup>-´edin´.[na] (3) *da sú-qi-im ša* <sup>d</sup>EN.ZU-tillat-[...] (4) *ù da é ma-ḫi-ri-im* (5) *ša dingir-šu-ba-ni ù šeš.a.ni* (6) *dumu.me a-wi-lum-ma* (7) *sag.bi ri-bi-tum* (8) *wa-ar-ka-sú-ma é sí-bi-im* (9) *ša dumu.me a-wi-lum-ma* (10) 2 [é] *ma-ḫi-ra-tum* (11) *mu-[šú]-ši-na a-na ri-bi-tim uš-ší.*

Si.10 is a paternal gift<sup>43</sup>, whereas Si.77+Si.789 and Si.763+Si.70 might have been inheritance documents.<sup>44</sup> All five of these tablets seem to list more or less the same movables and immovables donated or bequeathed by Ilšu-bani, son of Awilumma, to his daughter Šāt-Aja who is a *nadītum* of Šamaš. Ellis (1997: 60–61) considers Si.77+Si.789, Si.89, Si.763+Si.70 and Si.767+Si.804+Si.764 to be duplicates or near duplicates of Si.10, as they contain more or less the same information. She stresses, however, that they were not identical and not written at the same time. The relation between these near duplicates is not clear.

Tanret (2010: 101) was able to date Si.10 and Si.77+Si.789 between Sm 17 and 18 (1796–1795 BCE) based on the mention of the sanga's of Šamaš as first two witnesses. According to Ellis (1997: 60 n. 16), Si.89 also has witnesses, but she gives no more information as to the identification of the two first witnesses.

The dowry/share that Šāt-Aja receives from her father in Sm 17–18 is rather substantial. It includes five fields, the total surface of which was 7.0.0 iku or 45,36 ha, 40 sar or 1140 m<sup>2</sup> of uncultivated land, one orchard or field including a tower, one large house, a tavern and shops located on Main Street in Sippar-Jahrūrum, adjacent to the house of Ibbi-Sîn and the house of Šešdugga,<sup>45</sup> 5 kg of silver and 10 kg of copper, some wooden items, oxen, cows and sheep, millstones, and 20 slaves.

Later on, probably during Ḥammurabi's reign, Šāt-Aja bequeaths half of the tavern to her niece and adoptive daughter, Tabni-Ningal, as is shown by Si.100, a document describing the inheritance that Tabni-Ningal received from her adoptive mother and aunt Šāt-Aja and her father Šamaš-tillassu.<sup>46</sup>

43. Si.10: Rev (38) *mi-im-ma an-ni-im* <sup>1</sup>dingir-šu-ba-ni a-bu-ša (39) a-na ša-at-<sup>d</sup>[a-a] <sup>1</sup>lukur <sup>d</sup>utu (?) dumu.munus'-<sup>1</sup>šu' id-di-in 'all this, Ilšu-bani, her father, to Šāt-Aja, *nadītum* of Šamaš, his daughter, he gave'. Scheil (1902: 101) read line 39 as a-na ta-rim-ku(?) [...] dumu.munus-šu id-di-in. The handcopy and photograph (Scheil 1902: 100 and Pl. III) show that it should be read a-na ša-at-<sup>d</sup>[a-a] <sup>1</sup>lukur <sup>d</sup>utu (?) dumu.munus'-<sup>1</sup>šu' id-di-in.

44. Si.77+Si.789: Rev (2') [...] ap-lu-ut a-[...] (3') [mala ... (?)] i-šu-ú [ù irassù (?)] (4') [...] ša-at-<sup>d</sup>a-a <sup>1</sup>lukur <sup>d</sup>utu dumu.munus.ni 'inheritance/heir [... as much as ... (?)] has [and shall acquire (?)] Šāt-Aja, *nadītum* of Šamaš, his daughter'. See Scheil 1902: 115 and Ellis 1997: 60 n. 16. According to Ellis (1997: 60 n. 16), Si.70+Si.763 is the top right corner of a large tablet, starting with the description of the real estate, followed by the silver, slaves, animals, and precious objects—in a slightly different order and less detailed than Si.10—ending with the mention that the enumerated goods are the share (*zittum*) of Šāt-Aja. The reverse is damaged but mostly blank, which might imply that there were no witnesses listed. Scheil (1902: 112) only transliterated the names of the female slaves.

It is not clear what genre of text Si.89 is, but the presence of witnesses, as Ellis (1997: 60 n. 16) noted, implies it was an official and legally valid document. According to Ellis (1997: 60–61 n. 16), Si.767+Si.804+Si.764 is the centre part of a tablet starting in the middle of the real estate description, followed by the precious objects, slaves, and animals, ending with an oath, a legal clause and witnesses. This tablet can be dated before Si.10 and Si.77+Si.789 on the basis of the first two witnesses, viz. the first and second sanga of Šamaš, who are still Šalim-pāliḫšu and Warad-Sîn in Si.767+Si.804+Si.764 but Šalim-pāliḫšu and Annum-pī-Aja in Si.10 and Si.77+Si.789. Annum-pī-Aja succeeded his father Warad-Sîn during Sîn-muballit's reign, and is attested from Sm 17 onwards, see Tanret 2010: 35–55.

45. Si.10: (19) é sí-bi-im ù é ma-ḫi-ra-tim (20) ša i-na ri-bi-tim ša ud.kib.nun<sup>ki</sup>-edin (21) <sup>1</sup>da' é i-bi-<sup>d</sup>EN.ZU ù da é šeš.dùg.ga, cf. Si.77+Si.789: (18) é sí-bi-im ù é ma-ḫi-ra-tim (19) ša i-na ri-bi-tim ša ud.kib.nun<sup>ki</sup>-edin (20) da é i-bi-<sup>d</sup>EN.ZU ù da é šeš.dùg.ga (lining reconstructed according to Ellis 1997: 60 n. 16) cf. Si.89 (10) [é] sí-bi-im ù é ma-ḫi-ra-tim (11) ša i-na ri-bi-tim ša ud.kib.nun<sup>ki</sup>-edin. For ud.kib.nun<sup>ki</sup>-edin or 'Sippar-of-the-Steppe' = Sippar-Jahrūrum, see Charpin 1988.

46. Lacking an oath, witnesses, and a date, Si.100 must have been a draft. The official and legally valid document has not been preserved.

One field and one orchard are described as ‘purchases of Šamaš-tillassu’ (*šīmāt Šamaš-tillassu*), her father.<sup>47</sup> Two fields, (a part of) an orchard (or field) with tower, a large house, half of a tavern and one shop originate from the dowry/share of Šāt-Aja, her aunt and adoptive mother. Apart from the immovables, Tabni-Ningal also received slaves, silver, sheep, and oxen. Šāt-Aja’s dowry also contained slaves, animals, and precious objects, but one might ask whether the slaves, let alone the animals, that Šāt-Aja received were still alive when Tabni-Ningal was given her inheritance, especially as the date of Si.100 is lost.

There is also mention of ‘a house of the *gagûm* that Šāt-Aja divided equally (with one or more women)’.<sup>48</sup> Šāt-Aja’s paternal gift (Si.10) did not mention a house in the *gagûm*. Likewise, the duplicates Si.77+Si.789 and Si.89 do not seem to mention a house in the *gagûm*—at least if that would have been mentioned after the large house, tavern, and shops, as is the case in Tabni-Ningal’s inheritance. Ellis (1997: 63) notes that ‘half of a house in the *gagûm*’ is mentioned in Si.767+Si.804+Si.764. However, a few lines below, she states that this ‘half of a house in the *gagûm*’ is mentioned in Si.763+Si.70: 2’. Unfortunately, neither Si.767+Si.804+Si.764 nor Si.763+Si.70 are published. Si.100: 11–12 explicitly states that Šāt-Aja divided the house with one or more other women (*izūzā*), which means that if she inherited it from her father, she must have had at least one sister (or female relative). As yet, there are, apart from her niece Tabni-Ningal, no female relatives of Šāt-Aja attested, only male ones (cf. fig. 1). Moreover, none of the other immovables that Šāt-Aja inherited from her father are said to have been divided between two or more women. Is it possible that Šāt-Aja’s share of the house of the *gagûm* originated from elsewhere?

In the latter half of Ḫammurabi’s reign, Šāt-Aja was appointed heiress (*rēdit warkatīša*) of another *nadītum* of Šamaš, Amat-Šamaš, daughter of Iddin-Illabrat,<sup>49</sup> from whom she inherited a built house in the *gagûm*. The text does not mention that the house had been divided, and the surface area of the house, which could have been an indication, is unfortunately broken. However, two of the four neighbouring

47. Šamaš-tillassu son of Ilšu-bani is attested in four other texts. He is first witness in *CT* 4 48a/*MHET* II 181 (Ḫa 15), recording the sale of a built house and waste land by his brother, Nanna-mansum, to Erešti-Aja, *nadītum* of Šamaš, daughter of Sîn-tajjar, and in Anbar and Stol 1991 nr 12 (Ḫa), recording the sale of an uncultivated plot in the orchard of Šamaš by Rīš-Šamaš son of Naram-ilīšu to Sîn-tajjar son of Akšaja. In *CT* 47 71 (Ae 10?), recording the sale of a 2,74-ha field in the irrigation district of Buša by Ipiq-Annuītum son of Sîn-šamuḫ to Nakartum *nadītum* of Šamaš, daughter of Palē-Šamaš, Šamaš-tillassu is mentioned as neighbour, owning a field that borders the field sold at one side and at its rear. It is, however, highly improbable that Šamaš-tillassu was still alive in Ae 10, as he must have been well over 80 by then. In other words, he is mentioned in this text as “ghost neighbour” (see Tanret 1999 for this phenomenon and see Horsnell 1999: 251 for the identification of the year name as Ae t = Ae 10?). The same goes for *MHET* II 482 (Ad 4) in which the same field is sold by Šamaš-nāšir son of Palē-Šamaš, the brother of the buyer in *CT* 47 71, who must have inherited it from his sister, to Bēlessunu, *nadītum* of Šamaš, daughter of Sîn-aḫam-iddinam, and in which Šamaš-tillassu is mentioned as neighbour at one side and at the rear. It is impossible that Šamaš-tillassu was still alive in Ad 4, as he must have been well over 100 by then.

48. Si.100: (11) é [ga]-gi-im ša ša-at-<sup>d</sup>a-a (12) mi-[it]-ḫa-ri-iš i-zu-za.

49. *MHET* II 318: (1) [ibila géme-<sup>d</sup>utu] ‘lukur’ <sup>d</sup>utu (2) [dumu.munus] i-din-<sup>d</sup>nin.šubur (3) [ša]-at-<sup>d</sup>a-a lukur <sup>d</sup>utu (4) [dumu].munus dingir-šu-ba-ni (5) [re]-di-it wa-ar-ka-ti-ša (Concerning the inheritance of Amat-Šamaš, *nadītum* of Šamaš, daughter of Iddin-Illabrat, Šāt-Aja, *nadītum* of Šamaš, daughter of Ilšu-bani, is her heiress). This text can be dated between Ḫa 30 and 37 on the basis of the presence of the second sanga of Šamaš Sîn-bani as second witness (See Tanret 2010: 259–260).

areas are described as *birītum*.<sup>50</sup> According to CAD, *birītum* can refer to a terrain, alley or balk between houses, fields and orchards, or to a territory or property held in common by neighbours.<sup>51</sup> Is it possible that Amat-Šamaš possessed a house in the *gagûm* that she divided in three equal parts among Šāt-Aja, Ina-libbi-eršet and Taddin-Nunu, who conveniently already owned a neighbouring (part of a) house? The majority of the properties located in the *gagûm* were transferred by means of the so-called *rēdit warkatīša* contracts, or in other words, were transferred from one *nadītum* to another. Both were engaged in an educational relationship—the elder *nadītum* introducing her apprentice into the *nadītum*-ship—and were often, but not always, related, biologically and/or by adoption. As a result, the apprentice *nadītum* was appointed heiress to her tutor *nadītum* and had to provide for her during her old age. Some *nadītum*'s are known to have been appointed heiress to several/more than one tutor *nadītum*'s.<sup>52</sup> It seems therefore not impossible that Amat-Šamaš would have had three apprentice *nadītum*'s to each of whom she would have bequeathed one-third of her house in the *gagûm*. Unfortunately, there are no other *rēdit warkatīša* or other documents that corroborate this theory, which remains therefore hypothetical.

Tabni-Ningal's inheritance (Si.100)		Origin of the property
immovables		
		PURCHASES OF ŠAMAŠ-TILLASSU
3	0.2.0 iku a.šà <i>i-ta ħi-ri-tim</i> a 4,32 ha field adjacent to the canal	(no matching sales documents known)
5	1.0.0 iku <sup>g</sup> iš <sup>6</sup> <i>kiri</i> <sub>6</sub> a 4,48 ha orchard	
		ŠĀT-AJA'S DOWRY/SHARE (FROM HER FATHER)
1	3.0.0 <sup>r</sup> iku <sup>r</sup> a.šà <i>i-na ká uru</i> <sup>ki</sup> a 19,44 ha field (located) in (the irrigation district) Bāb Ālim	Si.10: 6 / Si.77+Si.789: 5 3.0.0 iku a.šà <sup>1</sup> <i>i-na ká uru</i> <sup>ki</sup> <i>i-ta</i> <sup>d</sup> EN.ZU- <i>ak</i> - <sup>r</sup> x <sup>r</sup> a 19,44 ha field (located) in (the irrigation district) Bāb Ālim, adjacent to (the field of) Sîn-ak-[...]
2	1.0.0 iku a.šà <i>te-ep-ti-tum</i> a 6,48 ha field newly opened for cultivation	Si.10: 10 / Si.77+Si.789 7–8: 1.0.0 iku a.šà <i>te-ep-ti-tum i-ta a-tap-pu-um ù i-ta iš-me</i> - <sup>d</sup> iškur a 6,48 ha field newly opened for cultivation; adjacent to the small irrigation canal and adjacent to (the field of) Išme-Adad
6-7	0.0.4 iku <sup>g</sup> iš <sup>6</sup> <i>kiri</i> <sub>6</sub> <i>ù an.za.gàr i-na</i> <sup>r</sup>	Si.10: 13–17:

50. MHET II 318: (6) [...] sar é.dù.a *i-na ga-gi-im* (7) [da] é *i-na-šà-ir-ši-it* (8) <sup>r</sup>dumu<sup>r</sup>.munus <sup>d</sup>AMAR.UTU-*na-šir bi-ri-tum* (9) *ù da é* <sup>r</sup>ta<sup>r</sup>-[*ad-di-in-nu*]-<sup>r</sup>nu<sup>r</sup> *dumu.munus sin-ga-mil* (10) sag.bi é [*ta-ad-di-in-nu*]-*nu* *dumu.munus sin-ga-mil* (11) *bi-ri-tum* (12) sag.bi [...] <sup>r</sup>x<sup>r</sup> (13) <sup>l</sup>g<sup>e</sup>me-*be-el-tim*<sup>r</sup> [*dumu.munus ...-ri-me-ni* ([...] m<sup>2</sup> of a built house in the *gagûm*, adjacent to the house of Ina-libbi-eršet, daughter of Marduk-nāšir, which was held in common (?) (*birītum*), and adjacent to the house of Taddin-Nunu, daughter of Sîn-gamil, its front is the house of Taddin-Nunu, daughter of Sîn-gamil, which was held in common (?) (*birītum*), its rear is [... of] Amat-bēltim, daughter of [...]remēni).

51. Cf. CAD B *sub* birītu.

52. See De Graef 2018 and *forthcoming*.

	<p>ud.kib.nun<sup>ki</sup> a 1,44 ha orchard including tower in Sippar</p>	<p><sup>giš</sup>kiri<sub>6</sub> <i>ma-la ma-šú-ú</i> ù an.za.gâr <i>ša kaskal</i> ud.kib.nun<sup>ki</sup> sag.bi.1.kam <sup>id</sup>ud.kib.ṛnun<sup>ki</sup>- <i>tum</i> sag.bi.2.kam <i>ab-di-<sup>d</sup>id i-ta ab-di-<sup>d</sup>id ù i-ta</i> <i>dingir-<sup>ṛ</sup>šu-[i-bi]-<sup>ṛ</sup>šu</i> <i>i-ta <sup>d</sup>utu-ra-bi ù i-ta bur-bur-</i> <i>nu-um</i> an orchard, as large as it is, and tower belonging to the Sippar Road, its front is the Euphrates, its rear is (the orchard of) Abdi-Nārum, adjacent to (the orchard of) Abdi-Nārum and adjacent to (the orchard of) Ilšu-ibbīšu and adjacent to (the orchard of) Burnurnum<sup>53</sup></p>
<p>9-10</p>	<p>é ṛgu.laṛ <i>mu-ta-at</i> é <i>sí-bi-im</i> 1 ṛéṛ <i>ma-ḥi-ri-im</i> a large house, half of a tavern (and) one shop</p>	<p>Si.10: 18-21 / Si.77+Si.789: 17-20 / Si.89: 9–11 é.dù.a gu.la <i>ma-la ma-šú-ú</i> é <i>sí-bi-im</i> ù é <i>ma-ḥi-ra-tim</i> <i>ša i-na ri-bi-tim</i> <i>ša</i> ud.kib.nun<sup>ki</sup>-edin da é <i>i-bi-<sup>d</sup>EN.ZU</i> ù da é šeš.dùg.ga a large built house, as large as it is a tavern and shops that are located in Main Street in Sippar-Jahrūrūm, adjacent to the house of Ibbi-Sîn and adjacent to the house of Šešduga</p>
		<p>ŠĀT-AJA'S INHERITANCE (FROM AMAT-ŠAMAŠ) ?</p>
<p>11-12</p>	<p>é [ga]-<i>gi-im</i> <i>ša</i> <i>ša-at-<sup>d</sup>a-a mi-[it]-ḥa-ri-iš i-zu-za</i> a house of the <i>gagûm</i> that Šāt-Aja divided equally</p>	<p>MHET II 318: 6–13 [...] sar é.dù.a <i>i-na ga-gi-im</i> [da] é <i>i-na-šà-ir-ši-it</i> ṛdumuṛ.munus <sup>d</sup>AMAR.UTU-<i>na-šir bi-ri-tum</i> ù da é ṛtaṛ-[<i>ad-di-in-nu</i>]-ṛnuṛ <i>dumu.munus sin-ga-</i> <i>mil</i> sag.bi é [<i>ta-ad-di-in-nu</i>]-<i>nu</i> <i>dumu.munus sin-</i> <i>ga-mil bi-ṛri</i>-[<i>tum</i>] sag.bi [...] ṛxṛ <sup>1</sup>géme-<i>be-el-</i> <i>ṛtim</i>ṛ [<i>dumu.munus ...</i>]-<i>ri-me-ni</i> [...] m<sup>2</sup> of a built house in the <i>gagûm</i>, adjacent to the house of Ina-libbi-eršet, daughter of Marduk-nāšir, <i>birītum</i>, and adjacent to the house of Taddin-Nunu, daughter of Sîn-gamil, its front is the house of Taddin-Nunu, daughter of Sîn-gamil <i>birītum</i>, its rear is [...] of Amat-bēltim, daughter of [...]remēni</p>

53. Note that this plot is described in Si.77+Si.789 and Si.89 not as an orchard and tower, but as a 2,16 ha field and tower: Si.77+Si.789: (13) 0.1.0 iku a.šà ù an.za.gâr *i-na kaskal* ud.kib.nun<sup>ki</sup> (14) sag.bi.1.kam <sup>id</sup>ud.kib.nun<sup>ki</sup> sag.bi.2.kam *ab-di-<sup>d</sup>id* (15) *i-ta ab-di-<sup>d</sup>id-ma ù i-ta* dingir-*šu-i-bi-šu* (16) *i-ta <sup>d</sup>utu-ra-bi ù i-ta bur-bur-nu-um*, and Si.89: (3') [0.1.0] iku a.šà ù an.za.gâr (4') sag.bi <sup>id</sup>ud.kib.nun<sup>ki</sup> (5') sag.bi.2.kam *ab-di-<sup>d</sup>id* (6') *i-ta ab-di-<sup>d</sup>id ù i-ta* dingir-*šu-i-bi-šu* (7') *i-ta <sup>d</sup>utu-ra-bi ù i-ta bur-bur-nu-um*.

If this plot was indeed 2,16 ha when Šāt-Aja inherited it from her father, she only bequeathed one-third of it (1,44 ha) to her niece. It is not known to whom the remaining two-thirds went. It is possible that she sold two-thirds of this plot earlier.

movables		
16	20 ir.meš ù ʾ20ʾ gémeʾ. [meš] 20 male slaves and 20ʾ female slaves	Si.10: 26-37 / Si.89: 19'-31' / Si.763+Si.70: 10 male slaves and 10 female slaves <sup>54</sup>
17	5 ma.na <<še>> kù.babbar ʾkaskalʾ [...] 2,5 kg of silver ...	Si.10: 22 / Si.77+Si.789: 21: 10 ma.na kù.babbar 5 kg of silver
18	30 u <sub>8</sub> .udu.níta.ḫi.a 30 sheep	Si.10:24b: 1 šu-ši u <sub>5</sub> ʾ.udu.níta.ḫi.a 60 sheep
19	4 gu <sub>4</sub> .ḫi.a 4 oxen	Si.10: 24a: 6 gu <sub>4</sub> .ḫi.a apin 10 áb.ḫi.a 6 plough oxen and 10 cows

Table 2. Schematic overview of Tabni-Ningal's inheritance and the origin of her properties.

If the share of the house of the *gagûm* that Šāt-Aja bequeathed to her niece is indeed the one she inherited from Amat-Šamaš, Si.100 must be dated *post* Ța 30–37, which is not improbable at all, as Šāt-Aja was still active as a buyer of plots in Ța 39 and in Si, as is shown by *MHET* II 922, a register recording sales of houses, mentioning the purchase of 72 m<sup>2</sup> of a built house including three wooden doors by Šāt-Aja from the sons of Bēlšunu,<sup>55</sup> and *MHET* II 345, a sales document of an uncultivated plot in Gaminānum, sold by the children of Qurrudum to Šāt-Aja.<sup>56</sup>

But even if this were not the case, it is most important to note that both Šāt-Aja and her niece Tabni-Ningal owned (part of) a tavern and (part of) a house in the *gagûm*. In other words, they were *nadītum*

54. Si.10: 26-37: 1 ir Ana-Šamaš-taklāku 1 ir Šamaš-muballīḫ 1 ir Šin-nāšir 1 ir ʾŠamaš-gamil 1 ir Nūr-bēli 1 ir Egigē 1 ir Ili-bani 1 ir Luštamar 1 ir Wēdum 1 ir Watar-pī-Šamaš 1 géme Naplisi-bēlti 1 géme Abi-dūri 1 géme Bēli-dūri 1 géme Naramtum 1 géme Bēlessunu 1 géme Erištum 1 géme Um̄mi-waqrat 1 géme Ištār-um̄mi 1 géme Țāb-wirapšu 1 géme Țištatum, cf. Si.89: 19'-31': 1 sag Wēdum 1 sag ir Watar-pī-Šamaš 1 géme Naplisi-bēlti 1 géme Abi-dūri 1 géme Naramtum 1 géme Bēlessunu 1 géme Erištum 1 géme Um̄mi-waqrat 1 géme Ištār-um̄mi 1 géme Țāb-wirapšu, cf. Si.763+Si.70 = Scheil 1902: 112: *Bau-rabiat, Šin-nāšir, Abum-ilum, Naramtum, Bēli-dūri, Muštala-bēlti*.

55. *MHET* II 922 (date lost): (9') 2 sar é.dù.a 3 ʾi<sup>18</sup>ig.ḫi.a (10') da é a-na-ʾutu-ták-la-ku ù é ʾbe-el-šu-nu (11') sag.bi.1.kam sila sag.bi.2.kam.ma é na-x-tum (12') ša ki ʾutu-i-na-ma-tim ʾšu-nu-ma-dingir ʾar-du-[um] (13') dumu.meš be-el-šu-nu (14') ù be-el-ta-ni um-mi-šu-nu (15') ʾša-at-ʾa-a lukur ʾutu dumu.munus dingir-šu-ba-ni i-ʾša-mu (16') itu še.kin.kud ud.22.kam (17') mu kilib gú.du<sub>8</sub>.a.bi (72 m<sup>2</sup> built house including three wooden doors, adjacent to the house of Ana-Šamaš-taklāku and the house of Bēlšunu, its front (is) the street, its rear (is) the house of Na-x-tum, which from Šamaš-ina-mātim, Šunuma-ilum (and) Ardum, sons of Bēlšunu, and Bēltani, their mother, Šāt-Aja, *nadītum* of Šamaš, daughter of Ilišu-bani, bought in the 12th month, on the 21st day, Ța 37).

56. *MHET* II 345 (Si): (1) [...] é.ʾkislāḫ (2) [...] *ga-mi-na-nu-um*<sup>ki</sup> (3) [...] 4 (+x) kùš *i-ta* dumu-ki dumu ir-ʾdEN.ZU (4) [...] ʾi-ta dumu me qur-ru-du-um (5) [sag].bi 1 1/2 ninda sila.dagal (6) ʾsag.bi.2.kam 1 1/2 ninda dumu.meš qur-ru-du-um-ma (7) ʾki ʾša-nu-pa-tum lukur ʾutu ʾḫu-mi-ma-nu? (8) ʾna-ka-rum ʾza-i-du-um ù ʾNI [...] (9) dumu.meš qur-ru-du-um (10) ʾša-at-ʾa-a lukur ʾutu (11) dumu.munus dingir-šu-ba-ni (12) *i-na* ʾḫar kù.babbar-ša in.ši.ʾin.šām [...] m<sup>2</sup>] of uncultivated plot [in] Gaminānum, 2+x m adjacent to (the plot of) Mār-eṣētīm, son of Warad-Šin, [and ...] adjacent to (the plot of) the children of Qurrudum, its front (is/borders) 9 m to the broad street, its rear (is/borders) 9 m to (the plot of) the children of Qurrudum, from Šanupatum, *nadītum* of Šamaš, Țumimanu, Nakkarum, Za'idum and [...], children of Qurrudum, Šāt-Aja, *nadītum* of Šamaš, daughter of Ilišu-bani, with her ring silver bought).

women who resided in the *gagûm*—or at least were associated with the *gagûm*—and were owners of a tavern. This implies all the more that Lafont’s (1999: 451–453) theory that *nadītum*-women who were residing in the *gagûm*—or, as she would render it, were ‘cloistered’—were incapable of committing the offense of misconduct linked to taverns does not hold true.

Šāt-Aja gave a substantial part (about half) of her dowry to her niece and adoptive daughter Tabni-Ningal. The title of Tabni-Ningal is not mentioned and she is not attested otherwise, but given the size of her inheritance, she must have been a *nadītum* or similar priestess, especially as her brother Sîn-iddinam is appointed as fideicommissary.<sup>57</sup>

Unfortunately, it is not known to whom she bequeathed the other half of her dowry—including the other half of the tavern on Main Street—and/or other properties she might have acquired during her life. It is possible that these went to one or more of her brothers, although her paternal gift (Si.10), nor its near duplicates, mention a fideicommissary.

We can thus conclude that the tavern on Main Street in Sippar-Jahrûrum was first in possession of the sons of Awilumma, Ilšu-bani, Adad-iddinam and Nabi-ilīšu, after which it must have fallen somehow to Ilšu-bani, probably the eldest son, who then bequeathed it to his daughter Šāt-Aja—a *nadītum* of Šamaš residing in the *gagûm*—who on her turn bequeathed half of the tavern to her niece and adopted daughter Tabni-Ningal—no doubt also a *nadītum* or similar priestess, and also residing in the *gagûm*—whose fideicommissary was her brother Sîn-iddinam. It is not known to whom the other half of the tavern went.

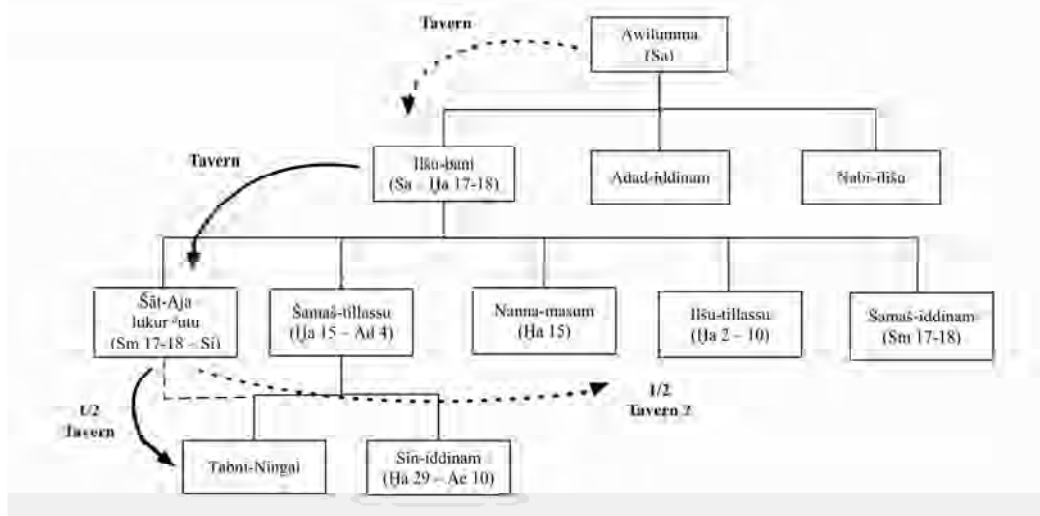


Fig 1. Genealogy of Awilumma family and transfer of the tavern within the family.

57. Sîn-iddinam, son of Šamaš-tillassu (on four occasions his name is written Šamaš-tillati) is attested in 14 texts: in *BE* 6/1 28 (Ja 29), *CT* 48 62 (Ja 40), *CT* 8 35a (Ja 40), *CT* 48 11 (Ja 42), *CT* 8 46 (Si 2), *MHET* II 425 (Si 13), *CT* 47 63 (Si 14), *OLA* 21 17 (Si 25), and *OLA* 21 74 (date lost) as witness, in *MHET* II 451 (Si 30), *MHET* II 623 (*pre Ae* 10), *CT* 2 (Ae 10), and *MHET* II 609 (*sd*) as neighbour, and in *BE* 6/2 84 (Si 15) as lessor. None of these texts are related to him being fideicommissary of his sister Tabni-Ningal.

3.1.2. *The Enigmatic Tavern*

CT 4 18b is an undated administrative text, listing various amounts of beer, barley, flour, and oil. The text is rather enigmatic. Some parts are written in the first person singular and plural, and some numbers seem to have been overwritten.<sup>58</sup>

The text is subdivided into nine sections by lines, but it is not clear whether the various amounts are actually related to each other or are simply written on the same tablet as they were disbursed within a certain period. On the reverse, underneath a blank space, an amount of silver is mentioned, viz. 3 gín 10 še or 25,4 gr of silver. One might expect to find the total of expenditures at that place. However, the sum of all expenditures, 495 še, does not match the amount given at the end, which is 550 še.

	CT 4 18b		exped. (in še)
1-2	<i>u<sub>4</sub>-um qá-am ša<sup>d</sup>utu a-na qá-ti-ša aš-ku-nu</i>	The day I put the thread of Šamaš into her hand	
3-5	0.0.2.0 kaš <i>i-na é sí-bi-im</i>	20 litres of beer in the tavern	20
4	1 uzu.úr 20 še kù.bi ud.20.kam	one hind leg worth 1 gr of silver on the 20 <sup>th</sup> day	20
5-7	<i>i-na ki-ir-ri-im ša-pa-ki-im</i> 0.0.5.0 kaš 0.0.2.0 zíd.da 10 še kù.bi <sup>1</sup> 0.0.0.1 sìla ì.giš 20 še kù.bi	at the occasion of the serving of drinks 50 litres of beer, 20 litres of flour worth ½ gr of silver 1 litre of oil worth 1 gr of silver	50 10 20
8-10	<i>u<sub>4</sub>-um ta-ri-ša</i> 0.0.2.0 kaš °20° še kù.bi 0.0.0.1 sìla ì.giš 20 še kù.bi	the day of leading her away / bringing her along 20 litres of beer worth 1 gr of silver 1 litre of oil worth 1 gr of silver	20 20
11	0.0.0.4 sìla ninda 10 še kù.bi	4 litres of bread worth ½ gr of silver	10
12-13	1 2/3 gín 15 še kù.babbar <i>ša te-er-ḫa-ti-ša</i>	14,58 gr of silver of her bridal payment	315
14-15	0.0.1.0 kaš 10 še kù.bi <i>u<sub>4</sub>-um ni-it-ra-a-ši</i>	10 litres of beer worth ½ gr of silver the day we led her away / brought her along	10
16	3 gín °10° še kù.babbar [= 550 še]	25,4 gr of silver	495

Table 3. Schematic overview of CT 4 18b  
(transliteration and translation, numbers between °° are written over earlier numbers).

58. According to the handcopy, ‘20’ on line 9 is written over a vertical, and ‘10’ on line 16 is written over what seems to have been a fraction, possibly 2/3.



According to Harris (1964: 114–116) these were expenditures by the *gagûm* related to the initiation of a girl as a *nadītum*. The “putting of the thread of Šamas into the hand of a woman/girl” (*qâm ša Šamaš ana qātīša šakānum*), although not attested otherwise, seems indeed to refer to some kind of ritual, as does the mention of the 20<sup>th</sup> day on line 4, which might refer to the monthly festival of Šamaš.<sup>59</sup> The mention of “a woman/girl being led away and/or brought along”<sup>60</sup> and her bridal payment (*terḫatīša*) refers to a woman/girl being given in marriage, which according to Harris (*ibid.*) is to be understood in this context as a girl who is given in marriage to the god Šamaš upon her entering the *gagûm*. If all sections of this text are related and Harris’ interpretation is correct, we cannot but conclude that a tavern was in some way involved in the initiation of a girl as a *nadītum*.

As Harris (1964: 116) already noted, the piece of meat and the amounts of beer, flour, and oil remind us of the pieces of meat and amounts of beer, flour, and/or oil that are often requested in lease contracts involving *nadītum* women from the lessee(s), on top of the agreed lease price, for festivals of Šamaš, referred to as *piqittum* oblations.<sup>61</sup> The exact meaning and function of these *piqittum* oblations is as yet not clear and needs more research. However, as it is not the subject of this paper, I shall not go further into it here.

### 3.1.3. Taverns and Inns: *bīt sībim* vs. *aštammum*

One lease contract and one letter from Old Babylonian Sippar refer to one (or more) *aštammum*(’s). Like *bīt sībim*, *aštammum*—a loanword from Sumerian (é).èš.dam—is generally translated as ‘tavern’. Harris (1999: 224, n. 26) does not consider *bīt sībim* and *aštammum* to have been one and the same place, but she observes a certain overlap in their functions: both provided beer, but whereas the *aštammum* could also provide overnight lodging for travellers, this was probably not the case for the *bīt sībim*. For convenience sake, I will translate *bīt sībim* as tavern and *aštammum* as inn, bearing in mind that in all probability in neither case the flag covers the cargo.

In literary sources, both *bīt sībim* and *aštammum* have a rather bad reputation, not only providing beer, but also as places for entertainment and meeting prostitutes, not rarely linked to the cult of Ištar.<sup>62</sup> Allred (2008) calls up associations to the female ale-sellers in early modern England, being widows or unmarried women, poor women desperate for work, whose clientele were poor, and who were associated with unscrupulous business practices and prostitution. Langlois (2016: 119) nuances this bad reputation,

59. According to Harris (1975: 200), this might have been a monthly festival for Šamaš when the regular (*šattukkum*) offering for Šamaš was delivered. See also Cohen (1993: 275) who mentions a festival for Šamaš, at least in some areas of Mesopotamia, the 18th and 20th day of each month.

60. The same verb, *tarûm*, is used twice: *ûm tarīša* (l. 8) and *ûm nitrâši* (l. 15). Harris (1964: 115) translates *ûm tarīša* as ‘the day of leading her away’ and *ûm nitrâši* ‘the day we brought her here’. *CAD T sub tarû A 1.c* interprets *ûm nitrâši* as the day the bride was fetched from her father’s household.

61. See *CAD P sub piqittu 1.b*). Harris (1963: 149–150) mentions three records of receipts of *piqittum* oblations, viz. *VS 9*, 171, 172 and 174. All three mention deliveries (?) from the (house of the) female tavern keeper: *VS 9 171: 15’*: 1 *sà-bi-tum*, 172: 25: 1 *sà-bi-tum*, and 174: 1.: 0.0.2.0 0.01.0 1 *uzu ša é sà-bi-tim ‘x’* [...]. However, as *Sābītum* is also used as a personal name for women, it is not certain whether a tavern keeper or a woman called *Sābītum* is referred to here.

62. See, among others, Harris 1999, Silver 2006, Allred 2008 and 2009, and Langlois 2016: 117–119. Assante (1998: 65–72) argues that there is no evidence whatsoever for prostitution—sacred or not—in taverns. See Silver (2006) for another opinion.

referring to a Mari text, in which it is stated that witnesses, among whom were men of a certain status, gathered at a tavern to write a tablet.<sup>63</sup>

Whatever its reputation may have been in literature, both *bīt sībim* (cf. supra) and *aštammum*'s were owned by *nadītum* women in Old Babylonian Sippar. Two texts refer to one or more inn(s). One inn is said to have been leased from one *nadītum* woman by another woman. The other inns are said to have been located next to the temple.

publication	Museum nr.	date	genre	tavern	
MHET II 752	BM 81243	Sm 6 – Ța 32	lease	<sup>é</sup> <i>áš-ta-ma-am</i>	leased by Iltani from Țuššutum
MHET I 89	IM 80161	Ad–Aš	letter	<i>aš-ta-ma-tum</i>	complaints about the inns

Table 4. Overview of attestations of *aštammum* in Old Babylonian documentary texts from Sippar.

### 3.1.3.1. The Inn of Țuššutum

MHET II 752<sup>64</sup> is a lease contract in which Iltani, daughter of Šallurum, leases an *aštammum* from Țuššutum, daughter of Sîn-putram, for one year. Țuššutum, daughter of Sîn-putram, is a well-known *nadītum* of Šamaš, who is attested in 13 other texts, dated from Sm 6 to Ța 32 (1807–1761 BCE).<sup>65</sup> Most of the texts are lease contracts in which she leases out fields. The texts show that she owned at least ca. 20 ha of land in various irrigation districts.<sup>66</sup>

In six lease contracts it is stipulated that the lessee had to pay the rent in the gate of the *gagûm*, implying that Țuššutum resided in—or can at least be associated with—the *gagûm*. However, in five texts it is stipulated that the lessee had to pay the rent *ina pī aptim*, literally ‘in the window opening’. This phrase has long been interpreted as evidence that the *nadītum* women lived a completely secluded life: the lessees had to pay at the lattice since the *nadītum* women were not to be seen by anyone from the outside. Harris (1964: 130–130), following Landsberger, already believed this interpretation to be wrong, and considered the *ina pī aptim* phrase as a mere variant of the usual ‘in the gate of the *gagûm*’ phrase.

63. FM 5 3 (= Charpin and Ziegler 2003: 250–252): 40–42: lú.meš *an-nu-tum i-na [bi-it] sa-bi-tim [a-na ša-tà-ar] tu-pí-im [an-ni-im iz-zi-zu]* ‘These men [remained] in [the t]avern [for the inscription of this] tablet’ (translation from Langlois 2016: 119). Note, that the oath taken by the parties and witnessed by the witnesses took place in the temple before Itur-Mer and Annunītum (FM 5 3: 11–12: [i]-na é AN [ma-ħa]-ar <sup>4</sup>i-túr-me-er [ù] an-nu-ni-tim), which might imply this *bīt sībim* was located near the temple.

64. MHET II 752: (1) <sup>é</sup>*áš-ta-ma-am* (2) ki ĥu-šu-tum (3) dumu munus sin-pu-ut-ra-am (4) [i]l-ta-ni (5) [dumu.munus] ša-lu-rum (6) a-na mu.1.kam (7) [a]-na ki-iš-ri (8) [ù]-še-ší (9) [...] kù.babbar (10) [...] ki-iš-ri é (11) [...] x é <sup>4</sup>utu [...] (12) [...] i. lā.e itu na-[ab-ri] (13) [ud].1.kam i-ru-ub (14) itu ma-mi-tim (15) i-ga-mar-ma ú-ší (16) igi be-el-ta-ni (17) dam?/nin? <sup>4</sup>utu x x / x (18) igi dingir-ma-nu-uš-ši (19) [...] x MI x x (20) igi i-lí-x (21) [...] x x x-<sup>4</sup>iškur ‘Iltani, daughter of Šallurum, leased a tavern from Țuššutum, daughter of Sîn-putram, for one year. The rent of the house is [...] sheqel of silver. She must pay [in?] the Temple of Šamaš. She may enter the 1st day of the month Nabrum and must leave when the month Mamītum ends. Witnesses.’ See also Kalla 2000: 151.

65. In seven texts, she is attested with her title of *nadītum* of Šamaš (lukur <sup>4</sup>utu), in six without, see Table 5.

66. Paḥuṣum, Taškun-Ištar, and Našurēš, all to be located within the territory of Sippar-Amnānum, between the Euphrates and the Irnina (see Tanret 1998: 71).

Interesting though is the interpretation ‘to pay in the house of the recipient’ given in *CDA*.<sup>67</sup> If this interpretation is correct, the lessors had to pay the rent in the house of Ҳuššutum.<sup>68</sup>

publ.	museum nr.	date	genre		role	title	place of payment
<i>MHET</i> II 113	BM 82400	Sm 06	lease	0.1.4 iku field in Paḫuṣum	lessor	x	gate of the <i>gagûm</i>
<i>CT</i> 47 10/a	BM 17070+	Sm 08	lease	0.1.3 iku field on the banks of the Euphrates	lessor	x	gate of the <i>gagûm</i>
<i>BDHP</i> 004	BM 80610	Sm 13	lease	0.2.2 iku field in Taškun-Ištar	lessor	x	gate of the <i>gagûm</i>
<i>MHET</i> II 160	BM 17390	Ҳa 11	lease	1.0.0 iku field in Paḫuṣum	lessor	x	<i>ina pī aptim</i>
<i>BDHP</i> 012	BM 82273	Ҳa 13	lease	1.0.0 iku field in Paḫuṣum	lessor	x	<i>ina pī aptim</i>
<i>MHET</i> II 187	BM 82242	Ҳa 16	lease	0.0.3 iku field in Našurēš	lessor	x	gate of the <i>gagûm</i>
<i>MHET</i> II 610	BM 17380	Ҳa 20/06/-	lease	1.0.0 iku field in Paḫuṣum	lessor	—	gate of the <i>gagûm</i>
<i>CT</i> 33 48b	BM 81017	Ҳa 32/02/21	lease	1.0.0 iku field in Paḫuṣum	lessor	—	<i>ina pī aptim</i>
<i>MHET</i> II 249	BM 82063	Ha 32/12/05	lease	0.0.4 iku 66 sar field in ša <sup>q</sup> nin.kar.ra.ak	lessor	—	<i>ina pī aptim</i>
<i>CT</i> 8 35b	BM 92644+	Ҳa	sale	female slave and one-year old ox	buyer	x	n/a
<i>BDHP</i> 006	BM 80718	lost	lease	0.2.2 iku field in Taškun-Ištar	lessor	—	gate of the <i>gagûm</i>
<i>MHET</i> II 824	BM 82494+	lost	lease	field in Paḫuṣum	lessor	—	—
<i>CT</i> 33 45b	BM 80728	sd	lease	n/a	witness 5/6	—	n/a

Table 5. Overview of attestations of Ҳuššutum, *nadītum* of Šamaš, daughter of Sîn-putram.

67. See *CDA sub aptu(m) OB ina pī a. nadānum, madādum*.

68. The inheritance and donation documents show that *nadītum*'s of Šamaš often own more than one house: one located in the *gagûm* and one elsewhere (see De Graef *forthcoming*). However, as no documents concerning an inheritance or donation to Ҳuššutum have been preserved, it is not known whether she owned a house, how many houses she owned, or where they were located.

Iltani, daughter of Šallurum is not attested otherwise. However, considering her name, we can assume that she was also a *nadītum* (or other) priestess. The reason why one would lease an inn for one year—other than business—is not clear to me.

### 3.1.3.2. *The Inns near the Temple*

*MHET* I 89 is a letter from the archive of the Chief Dirge Singer Ur-Utu in which the writer reassures his lord on a matter about which the latter wrote him earlier. Apparently, the addressee was worried that his house had been raided. The writer answers in a defensive way and reassures his lord that he had not been negligent and looked into the matter of his house. He reports that the inns next to the temple had indeed raided his house, that 150 litres of barley and 11 litres of oil had been taken away, but that all of his (other) possessions were intact.<sup>69</sup>

According to Janssen (forthcoming), close relatives used the form of address *ana bēlīja* ‘to my lord’ and she considers this letter to be written by Kubburum, Ur-Utu’s brother. It is, however, not clear whether the letter is addressed to Kubburum’s brother, Ur-Utu, or to their father, Inana-mansum. After Inana-mansum passed away, dissension arose between Ur-Utu and his brothers concerning the division of the inheritance (see Janssen 1992). Within this context, Ur-Utu’s brothers, including Kubburum, opened the sealed house in Sippar-Jahrūrūm—which was not divided in order to be let—and they took oil, clothes and cauldrons worth 5 kg of silver, and later on, opened the house again and stripped it bare.<sup>70</sup> If the addressee of *MHET* I 89 was Ur-Utu, it might be seen in the light of the brothers having ransacked the house and Kubburum trying to get away with it in some way by accusing the inns, but it might as well be related to an earlier (or other) situation altogether.

Whatever the case may have been, of particular interest to us is the passage *aštammātumma ša da é ašbā* (*MHET* I 89: 10), which is translated by Van Lerberghe and Voet (1991: 133) as ‘the taverns lying next to the temple’. As Van Lerberghe and Voet (1991: 134) already noted, *aštammātum* being the subject of *ašbā* is a bit problematic, as the subject of the verb *wašābum* is normally a living being. However, they consider that the active role the inns played in provoking the injustice may explain the use

69. *MHET* I 89: (5) *aš-šum ša ta-aš-pu-ra-am um-ma at-ta-ma* (6) *ṭe<sub>4</sub>-em é-ia ša bu-uz-zu-ḥu ú-ul ta-aš-pu-ra-[am]* (7) *ni-di a-ḥi-im ú-ul ar-ši* (8) *ar-ka-at é-ṭi-ka ap-ru-ús* (9) *ú-sa-an-ni-iq-ṣa* (10) *aš-ta-ma-tum-ma ša da é aš-ba* (11) *bi-it-<<ti>>-ka ú-ba-az-zi-ḥa* (12) *ú-sa-an-ni-iq-ma* (13) 0.2.3.0 *še ù 0.0.1.1 sila ì.giš ta-bi-il* (14) *mi-im-mu-ka ka-lu-ma ša-li-im* ‘Concerning the matter which you wrote to me about as follows: “You did not send me a message concerning my house(hold) that has been unjustly treated”, I have not been negligent. I took the matter of your house(hold) in hand and I checked (it). “The taverns lying next to the temple have treated your house(hold) unjustly”. I checked (it.) 150 litres of barley and 11 litres of oil have been taken away, (but) all your possessions are prosperous.’ (translation by Van Lerberghe and Voet 1991: 133).

70. Di 1194: (22) *iš-tu ḥa.la iz-zu-zu-ma mu.1.kam il-li-ku* (23) *ṣaḥ-ḥu-ia šu-nu é ša ud.kib.nun<sup>ki</sup>-ia-aḥ-ru-rum ku-nu-uk-ki-ia* (24) *ip-tu-ma 4.0.0.0 gur ì.giš<sup>úg</sup> guz.za.ḥi.a túg.ḥi.a* (25) *túg<sup>úg</sup> bar.si.ḥi.a ur<sup>u</sup>dušen.ḥi.a mi-im-ma ši-ki-in qá-ti* (26) *ša 10 ma.na kù.babbar ú-ub-ba-ṣu it-ba-ṣu-ma* ‘A year after they had shared the inheritance, these brothers of mine opened the house in Sippar-Jahrūrūm, sealed with my seal, and they took away 1200 litres of oil, ceremonial clothes, clothes, turbans, copper cauldrons, all that was entrusted, worth 10 minas of silver.’ and (31) *ù ki-ma iš-tu i-na pí-ḥa-tim ú-ni-iš-šu-ni-in-ni* (32) *é šu-a-ti i-tu-ru ip-tu-[ma]* (33) *a-di ši-il-li<sup>d</sup> inana a-di giš<sup>x</sup>.ḥi.a* (34) *a-di<sup>na</sup> nāga.ḥi.a ú-ul i-zi-bu il-qú-ú-ma* (35) *a-na é ṣdingir-šu-ib-ni sanga<sup>d</sup> utu ṣu<sup>u</sup>-te-ri-bu* ‘Then, after they had relieved me from my responsibility, they opened this house again, and as far as the pins of Inana, the wooden ... and even the mortars, they did not leave but they took and brought (them) into the house of Ilšu-ibni, sanga of Šamaš’. See Janssen 1992: esp. 22–26.

of *wašābum*. The problem can easily be solved though, if we interpret *aštammātum* as ‘female innkeepers’ (used here without the determinative *munus*).<sup>71</sup> Another problem is the interpretation of *é* as ‘temple’. Although *é* ‘house’ could indeed be used for ‘temple’,<sup>72</sup> we would expect to see the name of the temple (e.g. *é.babbar*) or deity (e.g. *é<sup>d</sup>utu*), especially as this letter concerns the house(hold) of the addressee, as a result of which the word ‘house’ is used regularly, which could cause confusion.<sup>73</sup> It seems therefore possible that *aštammātumma ša da é ašbā* should actually be translated as ‘the female innkeepers who were living next to the house’, referring to Inana-mansum’s house in Sippar-Jaḥrūrūm that was raided. As such, the neighbours, who were female innkeepers, would have raided the house, or at least that is what Kubburum wanted the addressee to believe.

This does not mean that there were no taverns or inns near the temple. As mentioned earlier, a text from Mari seems to imply that a *bīt sābītum* was located near the temple of Itur-Mer and Annunītum. Moreover, if Inana-mansum’s house in Sippar-Jaḥrūrūm was located next to an inn, this might as well have been in the vicinity of a temple, Inana-mansum being a gala priest in Sippar-Jaḥrūrūm at the time.

From the preceding we can conclude that *nadītum* women owned taverns and inns in Sippar-Jaḥrūrūm during the Old Babylonian period, and as far as our very limited documentation goes, they were the only ones to do so. Interestingly, all of these women resided in or can otherwise be associated with the *gagûm*. In other words, when CH § 110 stipulated that ‘a *nadītum* and/or *ugbābtum* woman who does **not** reside in the *gagûm* is not allowed to open a tavern or enter a tavern for beer’, this is not because those residing in the *gagûm*—being ‘cloistered’—were not able to do so anyhow, but because only those not residing in the *gagûm* were prohibited to do so. *Nadītum* and/or *ugbābtum* women who resided in the *gagûm* were clearly allowed to open and enter a tavern as the documentary texts show—for it would have been quite difficult to own or lease a tavern but not have been able to open or enter it.

As noted above, the meaning of *ina gá.gi<sub>4</sub>.a (lā) wašābum* ‘(not) to reside in the *gagûm*’ should be reconsidered, as CH § 110 does not refer to the specific situation of the *gagûm* in Sippar-Jaḥrūrūm but to all *nadītum* and/or *ugbābtum* women (not) residing in their (local) *gagûm*. However, before going deeper into that, we should consider briefly the second point made by Roth (1999), viz. the fact that these priestesses were not allowed to go into the money lending business, as this was considered unfair competition with female innkeepers. As mentioned above, the day-to-day economic texts again seem to draw a different picture, as none of the female creditors attested in the Old Babylonian loan documents from Sippar can be identified as *sābītum* whereas the majority of them can be identified with certainty as *nadītum*’s of Šamaš.

### 3.2. *Nadītum Women as Money Lenders*

As shown in De Graef 2016 and 2018, women were active in the economy of Old Babylonian Sippar. They were a very significant minority in sale and lease transactions, in particular during the reigns

71. See CAD A<sub>2</sub> sub *aštammu a) sal áš-tam-mu ina nidni* (camels were given) to the tavern keeper as a gift Streck Asb. 76 ix 50, also *ibid.* 134 viii 20, 376 ii 3.

72. See CAD B sub *bītu c)* c’.

73. MHET I 89: 6: *é-ia*, 8: *é-ti-ka*, 10: *é*, 11: *bi-ti-<<ti>>-ka*, 20: *é*, and 41: *é*: on all occasions translated by Van Lerberghe and Voet (1991: 133–134) as ‘house(hold)’ except for line 11 where they translate ‘temple’.

of Ḥammurabi and Samsu-iluna, when their activity nearly equals that of men. Their involvement in loan transactions was rather small—less than 13% of all participants in loan contracts can be identified as female—in comparison to their activity in sale and lease transactions, in which, on average, one-third was female. However, when women were involved, they were mostly creditors.

The overall majority of the female creditors (91%) can be identified with certainty as *nadītum*'s of Šamaš, which is not surprising at all, as we are dealing with texts from Old Babylonian Sippar. Some of them can be linked to the *gagûm*—some of the loans had to be repaid in the gate of the *gagûm*, some of the loans mention the extra payment of *piqittum* obligations due by the debtor, and some of these creditors are known from other texts in which they can be linked to the *gagûm*—but this certainly is not the case for all of them.

Although the overall majority, not only *nadītum* women of Šamaš, but also other priestesses, acted as creditors, as is shown by the loans issued by Ḥumṭi-Adad, aka Ḥumṭija, daughter of Ili-kīma-abīja, who was a *qadištum* (nu.gig), and whose loan tablets have been found in a private house—(in part?) in a jar—located north-east of the Ebabbar in Sippar-Jaḥrūrūm.<sup>74</sup> None of the texts in which Ḥumṭi-Adad is attested refers to the *gagûm*. However, Al-Rawi and Dalley (2000: 15–16) consider it very likely that the house in which the tablets of the Ili-kīma-abīja family archive were found, including the tablets of the *qadištum* daughter Ḥumṭi-Adad, was located within the *gagûm*.<sup>75</sup> Very interesting in this respect is Al-Rawi and Dalley's (*ibid.*) remark that these tablets confirm that these priestesses—at least on some occasions—operated within their family unit, as not only Ḥumṭi-Adad's tablets, but also those of her brother and father were found together, implying the private house was a family dwelling, in which parents with their children (and possible spouses) lived together. Again, this speaks against the *gagûm* being some sort of 'cloister' where women would have lived in a secluded or monastic environment.

One is inclined to consider the available information as confirming the fact that indeed only *nadītum* (and other) priestesses who resided in or can be linked to the *gagûm* were active in the money lending business. Prudence is in order, however, as it concerns loan documents, which were only temporarily valid, and although by far the most commonly preserved records from the Old Babylonian period, only the unredeemed loans seem to have been preserved,<sup>76</sup> resulting in an incomplete and unbalanced picture of creditors—which might also explain why none of the creditors can be identified as *sābītum*. Besides, as already noted, it is as yet impossible to link all creditors with certainty to the *gagûm*.

74. See Al-Rawi and Dalley 2000, Charpin 2001, Charpin 2005c: 154–157, Barberon 2009: 279–281, and Barberon 2012: 78. Al-Rawi and Dalley (2005: 5) state that 'Some or all these tablets with seal impressions were found in a jar.' Note, however, that in their catalogue, only one tablet (nr. 38) is said to have been found in 'level III house 11 room 2 in a broken jar'. According to Charpin (2001 and 2005c: 154–157), the group of (at least) 20 loan contracts of Ḥumṭi-Adad and her brother Tarīb-ilīšu, the majority of which is to be dated in Si 6 and 7, were annulled by Samsu-iluna's second royal edict, proclaimed in the 3rd month of his 8th year of reign, which explains their preservation. Van Koppen (2003/4: 382) believes it rather to have been an interruption of archives caused by a natural or military calamity, given the fact that not only loan contracts but also numerous title deeds have been found. He notes, moreover, that the Iraqi archaeologists found traces of fire in the U 106 neighbourhood, where Ḥumṭi-Adad's house was located, and in which all tablets excavated can be dated prior to Si 8.

75. Note, however, that according to Al-Rawi the excavated areas were not situated within the *gagûm* but close to it (see Al-Rawi and Dalley 2000: 15 fn. 62). It is not clear to me how to interpret this statement, as the exact location of the *gagûm* within Sippar-Jaḥrūrūm is unknown.

76. See Charpin 2000.

It is, moreover, questionable whether the money lending business as attested in these loan contracts is to be related to the tavern keeping business at all. After all, CH § 110 only mentions opening a tavern and entering a tavern for beer.

Nevertheless, it is clear that the phrase *ina gá.gi<sub>4</sub>.a lā wašābum* ‘not residing in the *gagûm*’ occupies a key position in CH § 110, not because the women residing in the *gagûm* were not allowed to exit the compound, as a result of which they were physically not able to come even near a tavern, but because ‘residing in the *gagûm*’ and ‘not residing in the *gagûm*’ were two different things altogether: two different situations or positions in which *nadītum* and/or *ugbabtum* (and other) priestesses could be, or two different statuses—social, economic, religious—they could have. Given the severe punishment that awaited *nadītum* and/or *ugbabtum* women not residing in the *gagûm* who opened a tavern or entered a tavern for beer, viz. death by burning, the difference must have been of quite some importance.

#### 4. *Gâgum Incorporated?*<sup>77</sup>

As mentioned above, various cities, viz. Sippar, Kiš, Dilbat, Iščali, Damrum, Puš, Nippur, and no doubt other major (Northern) Babylonian cities, had a *gá.gi<sub>4</sub>.a* (*gagûm*) or similar institution/area. Up to now, only the sources from Sippar are numerous enough to give us some information—however marginal sometimes—on what a *gagûm* might have been. The sources from Sippar show that a *gagûm* was both an institution and a physical location. Herein, the *gagûm* shows similarities with the *kārum*, which was the harbour district or city quarter destined for traders (physical location) but also functioned as a trading association or community of merchants including officials and personnel (institution). Moreover, various cities had their own *kārum*, just like they had their own *gagûm*.

##### 4.1. *Gagûm as Institution*

Various offices linked to the *nadītum* women, the *gagûm*, or both, show that the *gagûm* functioned as an institution, in close relationship with or as part of the Ebabbar temple. Most of these offices are only known from the witness lists in which they appear—in a particular order based on importance and seniority—and the legends of their seal impressions.<sup>78</sup> The most frequent attested offices are the ‘overseer of the *nadītum* women’ (*ugula lukur.(meš)*) and the keeper of the gate of the *gagûm* (*ì.du<sub>8</sub> (ša) (ká) gá.gi<sub>4</sub>.a<sup>(ki)</sup>/gagûm<sup>(ki)</sup>* or *ša ká/bāb gá.gi<sub>4</sub>.a<sup>(ki)</sup>/gagûm<sup>(ki)</sup>*). Both offices were held by members of the same family over the course of a few generations. Less attested offices are the ‘overseer of the keepers of the gate of the *gagûm*’ (*ugula ì.du<sub>8</sub> ká gá.gi<sub>4</sub>.a*), the ‘scribe of the *nadītum* women’ (*dub.sar ša lukur.meš*), the ‘judge of the *nadītum* women of the *gagûm*’ (*dì.kud lukur<sup>d</sup>utu ša gagûm*), the ‘tenant of the *gagûm* institution’ (*ensí ša é gá.gi<sub>4</sub>.a*), the ‘overseer of the *gagûm* institution’ (*ugula (é) (ša) gá.gi<sub>4</sub>.a* or *šāpir gagûm*), the ‘chief of the workforce of the *gagûm*’ (*gal erín ša gá.gi<sub>4</sub>.a*), and the ‘messenger of the *gagûm* institution’ (*rá.gaba ša é gagûm*). Whereas the office of ‘overseer of the

77. In what follows, a preliminary summary of what is studied in detail in my forthcoming monograph *A Room of her Own? The Origin, Meaning and Functioning of the Gagûm in Old Babylonian Sippar* is given.

78. See Tanret and Suurmeijer 2011.

*nadītum* women' was held by both women and men, at least until Ḫammurabi's reign, all other offices seem to have been held only by men.

#### 4.2. *Gagûm as Physical Location*

Various spellings are attested in the Old Babylonian Sippar texts, among which Sumerian *ga/gá.gi/gi<sub>4</sub>.a*, Akkadian *ga-gu-um* and mixed *ga.gi<sub>4</sub>-im*. On some occasions, it is followed by the determinative <sup>KI</sup> for toponyms. The various spellings, with or without <sup>KI</sup>, seem to have been used interchangeably, even in the same text by the same scribe.

Apart from the occasional use of the determinative <sup>KI</sup> for toponyms, the existence of houses and plots in the *gagûm* and the existence of the gate of the *gagûm* show that *gagûm* was referred to as an area within the city.

##### 4.2.1. *Houses and Plots in the Gagûm*

As yet, there are more than 60 attestations of house plots of which it is explicitly stated that they were located in the *gagûm*. Most houses are referred to as *é.dù.a* (built house) or simply *é* (house); on a few occasions there is a mention of an unbuilt plot (*(é).ki.gál*) and a storehouse (*gá.nun.na*). The surface area of most of the houses is very small. For more than a quarter of the houses and plots (27,4%), the surface area is not given, is broken, or is simply written *mala mašû* ('as large as it is'). 42% of the plots are smaller than 1 sar (36 m<sup>2</sup>), 17,7% is smaller than 2 sar (72 m<sup>2</sup>). Only 11,3% of the plots have what we would consider normal well-to-do private house surfaces, going from 2 to 4 ½ sar (72-162 m<sup>2</sup>). One text mentions a gigantic plot of 18 sar (648 m<sup>2</sup>) located in the *gagûm*.<sup>79</sup> The fact that most of these houses were very small contributed to the theory that the *gagûm* was a cloister with a monastic architecture. This, however, makes no sense, for various reasons. At least two streets (*silá*) and one main street (*silá.dagal.la*) are attested as neighbours of the houses in the *gagûm*, implying it concerns a city quarter with a normal urban pattern of houses and streets, and no cloister compound with rooms. Moreover, the texts show that the houses located in the *gagûm* were private property, which would not have been the case if it were a cloister compound. Nevertheless, more than half of them cannot be considered actual and permanent residences of *nadītum* women—or other persons for that matter—as they were far too small. An explanation of these often extremely small surface areas might be found in the genres of the texts. More than ¾ of the texts are inheritance related: bequests, father-to-daughter donations, family estate divisions, so called *rēdit warkatīša* contracts in which a *nadītum* woman appoints another, probably an apprentice *nadītum* woman as her heiress in exchange for sustenance during old age, and litigations following donations or inheritances. This means that, especially in the case of the extremely small plots, these might be parts of houses. As such, the houses themselves must have been much larger, but were theoretically divided in small parts owned by various heirs or recipients. In other words, the houses were co-owned by various relatives. Two cases may illustrate this:

79. *MHET* II 200 (Ḫa 18 or 24): (1-2) 18 ṽ sar ṽ é.dù.[a] *i-na ga-gi-im*. The SAR sign is broken, but collation showed that it was certainly SAR.



According to *BDHP* 24 (Sm),<sup>80</sup> Amat-Šamaš, daughter of Supapum, donated a 1/3 sar (12 m<sup>2</sup>) plot in the *gagûm*, adjacent to the house of Muḥadītum and adjacent to the house of the daughter of Sîn-erībam, to Lamassi, daughter of Puzur-Akšak whom she adopted as her daughter, which probably implied that Amat-Šamaš, daughter of Supapum, took on Lamassi, daughter of Puzur-Akšak, as an apprentice, introducing her to the *nadītum*-ship. According to *CT* 2 47 (sd),<sup>81</sup> two brothers, Nidnuša and Šamaš-apili, sons of Iddinūnim, raised a claim against the daughter of Sîn-erībam concerning a 1/3 sar (12 m<sup>2</sup>) plot in the *gagûm* adjacent to the house of Lamassi, which Amat-Šamaš daughter of Supapum gave to her, adopting her as her daughter. From these two texts we can conclude that Amat-Šamaš, daughter of Supapum, adopted at least two girls, viz. Lamassi, daughter of Puzur-Akšak and the daughter of Sîn-erībam, and owned at least a 2/3 sar (24 m<sup>2</sup>) plot in the *gagûm* which she divided amongst her pupil *nadītum*'s. One might speculate that Muḥadītum was her third adoptive daughter to whom she donated the adjacent 1/3 sar plot. This is unfortunately not recorded and thus cannot be proven.

Another interesting text, published by Kalla (2014), is BM 85289, a preliminary study describing the division of the paternal estate of Abdi-araḥ, consisting of about 200 ha of land, 2 ha of orchard, three houses and four buildings, amongst which a 5 1/2 sar (198 m<sup>2</sup>) house in the *gagûm*. The text is unfortunately fragmentary, but it is nonetheless clear that the estate is divided between four parties: (1) the children of the eldest, already deceased son Abdi-Zababa, who receive 1 1/2 sar (54 m<sup>2</sup>) of the house in the *gagûm*, (2) the second son, whose name is broken, who also receives 1 1/2 sar (54 m<sup>2</sup>) of the house in the *gagûm*, (3) the third son, Muḥadum, who also receives 1 1/2 sar (54 m<sup>2</sup>) of the house in the *gagûm*, and (4) the youngest son, Marduk-mušallim, who receives only 1 sar (36 m<sup>2</sup>) of the house in the *gagûm*. This text clearly proves that a normally sized private house in the *gagûm* was at least theoretically divided in 4 shares, or in this particular case, that the house was co-owned by at least 5 relatives: three brothers and 2 or more nephews.

In other words, the argument that the houses in the *gagûm* were too small to actually live in is no longer always valid. The question remains, however, who resided in the houses located in the *gagûm*. Especially since, as is shown by the last text, not only women but also men co-owned *gagûm* houses. Indeed, based on the parties as well as neighbours in the texts mentioning houses located in the *gagûm*, ca. 80% of the shares of the houses seem to have been owned by women vs. ca. 20% by men. At least 1/3 of these women also owned shares of other houses located in Sippar-Jahrūrum, Sippar-Amnānum or Ḫalḫalla—in most cases these are of the same size or a little bit larger than the *gagûm* plot. It seems thus

80. *BDHP* 24: (1) dub 1/3 sar é.dù.a (2) *i-na ga-gi-im* (3) *da é mu-ḫa-di-tum* (4) *ù da é dumu.munus* <sup>4</sup>EN.ZU-*e-ri-ba-am* (5) <sup>1</sup>géme-<sup>4</sup>utu *dumu.munus su-pa-pu-um* (6) *a-na* <sup>1</sup>la-ma-sí (7) *dumu.munus pù-zurs-úḫ*<sup>ki</sup> (8) *ma-ar-ti-ša i-di-in* ‘Tablet: 12 m<sup>2</sup> of a built house in the *gagûm*, adjacent to the house of Muḥadītum and adjacent to the house of the daughter of Sîn-erībam, Amat-Šamaš, daughter of Supapum, to Lamassi, daughter of Puzur-Akšak, her daughter, (she) gave’.

81. *CT* 2 47: (1) *a-na* 1/3 sar é.dù.a *ša ga-gi-im* (2) *ša da é la-ma-sí* (3) <sup>1</sup>be-el-tum-<ki>-*ma-a-bi bu-še-’e’ ú-ni-a-tim* (4) *ša géme-<sup>4</sup>utu dumu.munus su-pa-pu-um* (5) *a-na* *dumu.munus sin-e-ri-ba-am* (6) *dumu.munus.a.ni id-di-nu* (7) <sup>1</sup>ni-id-nu-ša *ù* <sup>4</sup>utu-*a-pí-li* (8) *dumu.munus* (sic!) *id-di-nu-nim* (9) *a-na* *dumu.munus sin-e-ri-ba-am* (10) *ir-gu-mu-ú-ma um-ma šu-nu-ú-ma* ‘Concerning 12 m<sup>2</sup> of a built house of the *gagûm*, which is adjacent to the house of Lamassi, Bēltum-kīma-abi, goods (and) household utensils, which Amat-Šamaš, daughter of Supapum, to the daughter of Sîn-erībam, her daughter, gave, Nidnuša and Šamaš-apili, sons (!) of Iddinūnim, against the daughter of Sîn-erībam, raised a claim, and spoke as follows’.

that the division of houses is merely theoretical and does not inform us much on the actual residents of the houses.

#### 4.2.2. *The Gate of the Gagûm*

The existence of a gate of the *gagûm*, and particularly the fact that the economic transactions in which *nadītum* women participated were concluded at this gate, led to the assumption that it was prohibited for *nadītum* women to exit the *gagûm*, a walled area within the city. Again, this does not make much sense, in my opinion.

The gate of the *gagûm* is indeed mentioned in more than 180 legal and economic texts involving *nadītum* women. In the overall majority (90%) it concerns leases of fields in which it is stipulated that on the day of the harvest, the agreed lease price is to be paid by the lessee in the gate of the *gagûm*. The other cases are rentals of slave women and loans stipulating that the payment of the rental price or repayment of the loan is to be done at the gate of the *gagûm*.

However, not all economic transactions in which *nadītum* women participated were concluded at this gate. On the contrary, only in 40% of the texts in which a *nadītum* woman is lessor, the lessee had to pay the agreed lease price at the *gagûm* gate; in other cases, no specific place to pay the lease price was indicated. In one text, *PBS 8/2 206*,<sup>82</sup> the lessee had to pay the lease price to the lessor being a *nadītum* woman named Lamassum at another gate, viz. the *Simmilātum* gate. It is not known where this gate was located,<sup>83</sup> but it clearly shows this *nadītum* woman was allowed to exit the *gagûm* area. Moreover, on one occasion, the lease price was to be paid by a male lessee to a male lessor (Šumum-libši son of Pirḫi-ilīšu) at the gate of the *gagûm*, implying men could also use this gate to conclude economic transactions.<sup>84</sup>

It is, in other words, clear that the *gagûm* gate was pre-eminently a place of economic activity linked to the outside: the yields of the fields had to be brought there. This is not surprising at all, since gates had many functions, among them ritual, legal, and economic: oaths were taken, verdicts pronounced, cases

82. *PBS 8/2 206* (Ḫa 4): (1) 1.0.0 iku a.šà [i]-na' zu-li-ḫi (2) i-ta a.šà [...] na-bi-<sup>d</sup>en.líl (3) 0.1.0 iku a.šà 'i'-ta na-ra-am-tum (4) ki la-ma-súm 'lukur' <sup>d</sup>utu (5) dumu.munus <sup>d</sup><i>-šum-ba-ni (6) 'inim-<sup>d</sup>šeš.ki-ì.gi (7) dumu dingir-šu-i-bi-šu (8) a-na gú.un ú-še-ší (9) 22.0.0.0 še gur gú.un a.šà (10) i-na ká sí-mi-la'-tim (11) ì.ág.e 'a 6,48 ha field in Zuliḫi, adjacent to the field [...] Nabi-Enlil, (and) a 2,16 ha field adjacent to (the field of) Narāmtum, Inim-Nanna-igi, son of Išū-ibbīšu, took on lease from Lamassum, *nadītum* of Šamaš, daughter of Išum-bani; he shall pay 6600 litres of barley, the lease price of the field, in the Simmilātum gate'.

83. *Simmilātum* being the plural of *simmiltum* 'stairway leading up a city wall' (see *CAD S sub simmiltu* 1.d), it is possible that it refers to a city gate in the vicinity of which were stairways leading up the city wall.

84. *MHET II 546* (Aš 16): (1) [...] 'iku' a.šà ab.'sín' (2) a.gār su-ḫa-a (3) 'i'-ta a.šà ḫa-an-ba-tum lukur <sup>d</sup>utu <<dumu.munus 'ib'-ni-[...]>> (4) dumu.munus ib-ni-<sup>d</sup>sag.kud (5) ù i-ta a.šà X-ṭa-pí-il (6) sag.bi.1.kam <sup>id</sup>gu-na-nu (7) sag.bi.2.kam a.šà <sup>d</sup>lamma-tillat-sú (8) a.šà šu-mu-um-li-ib-ši (9) dumu pir-ḫi-ì-lí-šu (10) ki šu-mu-um-li-ib-ši (11) be-el a.šà-'im' (12) 'ip-qú-an-nu-ni-tum di.kud (13) dumu ib-ni-<sup>d</sup>utu (14) a.šà a-na er-re-šu-<tim> a-na gú.un (15) a-na mu.1.kam ú-še-ší (16) ud.buru<sub>14</sub>.šè (17) 1.0.0 iku.1.e 8.0.0.0 še gur <sup>gis</sup>bán <sup>d</sup>utu (18) i-na ká gá.gi<sub>4</sub>.a (19) ì.ág.e 'a [...] ha furrowed field (located in the) irrigation district of Suḫaja, adjacent to the field of Ḫanbātum, *nadītum* of Šamaš, daughter of Ibni-Sagkud and adjacent to the field of X-ṭapil, its front (is) the Gunanu watercourse, its rear (is) the field of Lamma-tillassu; (it is the) field of Šumum-libši, son of Pirḫi-ilīšu, from Šumum-libši, owner of the field, Ipqu-Annunītum, judge, son of Ibni-Šamaš, took the field on lease for one year to cultivate it; at harvest time, he shall pay 2400 litres of barley per 6,48 ha of land, measured in the wooden bán-measure of Šamaš, in the gate of the *gagûm*'.

settled, and payments made in city gates.<sup>85</sup> It seems therefore much more plausible that the *gagûm* gate was one of the city gates of Sippar, which derived its name from the *gagûm* area it gave access to. For the *gagûm* was indeed (at least in part) walled, as is shown by year names of Immerum (*pre*-1868 BCE),<sup>86</sup> Hammurabi (1792–1750 BCE)<sup>87</sup> and Ammi-ditana (1683–1647 BCE),<sup>88</sup> who claim to have built or rebuilt it. This idea is strengthened by the fact that in one of his royal inscriptions, Hammurabi claims to have piled up a dike in the irrigation districts, built the wall of the *gagûm* upon it, dug the canal Aja-ḥegal there, and poured abundant water in it in order to increase the amount of food.<sup>89</sup> If Hammurabi built the *gagûm* wall on a dike—a feature that must have separated the city from the outside as one can hardly imagine a dike within the city itself—this must have been a part of the city wall, which derived its name from the *gagûm* area adjoining to it. The fact that the *gagûm* was located near the city wall of Sippar, in which was a gate giving access to the area, is indeed very plausible if the *gagûm* was located in the vicinity of the Ebabbar temple complex, which was itself located close to the western city wall of Sippar. The Aja-ḥegal canal may have been located west, northwest or north of the city, as the traces of ancient levees on the map show (see Fig. 2).

85. See May 2014.

86. Immerum is one of the local kings who ruled in Sippar before the city was integrated within the Babylonian kingdom under Sumu-la-el (1880–1845 BCE). It is not certain when exactly Sippar was integrated within the Babylonian kingdom. According to Charpin (2004: 93), this happened around Sumu-la-el's 13<sup>th</sup> regnal year as the earliest text from Sippar bearing a Babylonian year name, *MHET* II 19, is dated in Sle 13 (1868 BCE). De Boer (2014: 245–246) does not consider the year name of *MHET* II 19 to be evidence of Sumu-la-el's definitive rule over Sippar and proposes Sle 24 or 28 as *termini ante quem* for his control of Sippar, Sle 24 (1857 BCE) being the year he proclaimed a *mīšarum* or Sle 28 (1853 BCE) being the year he built Sippar's wall. Four year names of Immerum are known. For the year name mentioning the wall of the *gagûm*, see *BDHP* 37: ll. 23-24: mu ša bād *ga-gi-im im-me-ru-um i-pu-šu* 'the year Immerum built the wall of the *gagûm*'.

87. Ḥa 4: mu bād (gal) gá.gi<sub>4</sub>.a<sup>(ki)</sup> (gibil) mu.un.dù.a 'the year he built the (great) wall of the (new) *gagûm*', see Horsnell 1999: 109–110.

88. Ad 18: mu *am-mi-di-ta-na* lugal.e du<sub>11</sub>.ga gu.la <sup>d</sup>utu lugal.a.ni.ta gá.gi.a tūr dagal.la <sup>d</sup>utu.ke<sub>4</sub> bād maḥ.a.ni šī.in.ga.an.dù.a 'the year Ammi-ditana the king, at the great command of Šamaš, his king, built the high wall of the *gagûm*, the broad court of Šamaš', see Horsnell 1999: 293–294.

89. *RIME* 4.3.6.1: (1) ḥa<sup>2</sup>-[am]-<sup>2</sup>mu<sup>2</sup>-ra<sup>2</sup>-bi<sup>2</sup> (2) ḥugal<sup>2</sup> [kala.ga] (3) ḥugal<sup>2</sup> [ká.dingir.ra<sup>ki</sup>] (4) u<sub>4</sub> <sup>d</sup>utu lugal.mu (5) x x x a (6) x x x x ni (7) x ud x x x (8) dagal.e.dè (9) ḥinim<sup>2</sup> in.<sup>2</sup>du<sub>11</sub>.ga.a<sup>2</sup> (10) ḥgiš<sup>2</sup> in.tuk.ni.me.en (11) gù.ḥú<sub>1</sub> ma.an.dé (12) ḥá<sup>2</sup>.bi ḥu.mu.da.an.ág (13) u<sub>4</sub>.ba (14) ḥšà<sup>2</sup>.gál diri.dè (15) a.gà<sub>r</sub> a.gà<sub>r</sub>.ra (16) e ḥu.mu.si.ga (17) úgu.ba (18) bād gá.gi<sub>4</sub>.a (19) ḥu.mu.dù (20) šà.ba (21) <sup>i7d</sup>a-a-ḥé.gál (22) ḥu.mu.ba.al (23) a.nam.ḥé (24) ḥé.bí.dé 'I, Hammurabi, mighty king, king of Babylon, when the god Šamaš, my lord, ... I, being the one who heeds the word which he has spoken, spoke to me joyously (and) laid a commission on me to widen ... at that time, in order to increase (the amount of) food, I piled up a dike in the irrigation districts, built the wall of the *gagûm* upon it, dug there the canal Aja-ḥegal and poured abundant water in it'.

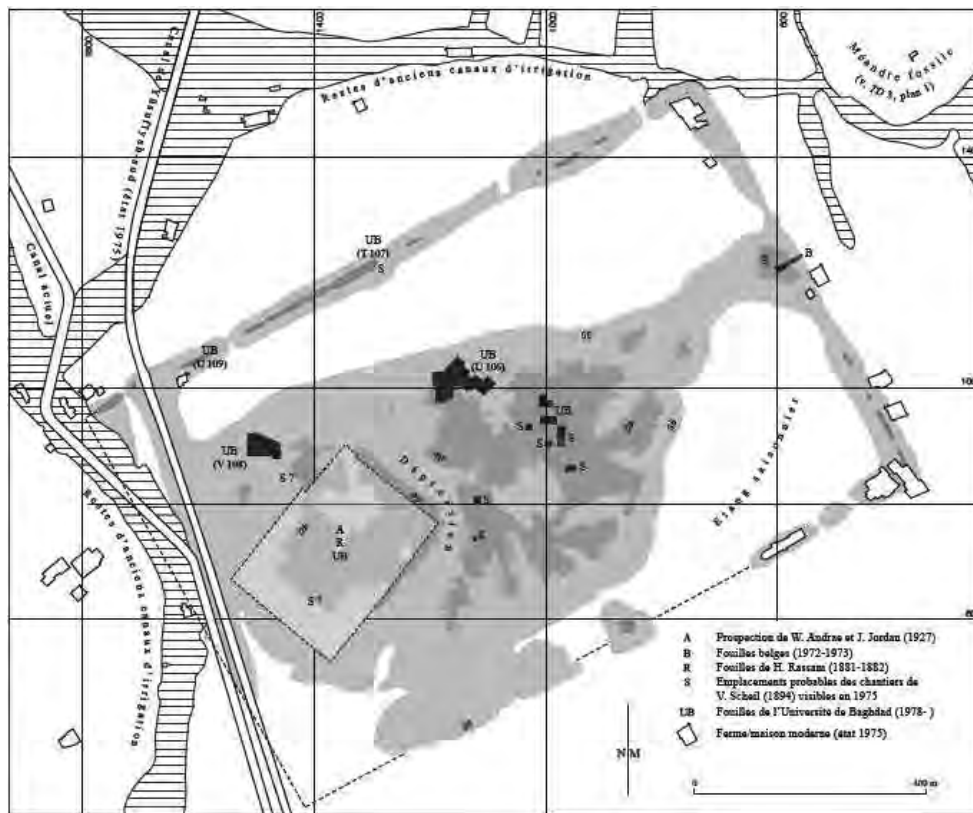


Fig 2. Map of Sippar-Jahrūrum (Abu Ḥabbah) taken from Gasche and Tanret (2011: 539), with the Ebabbar temple complex located near the western city wall (rectangular area marked with dotted lines).

#### 4.2.3. Entering and Residing in the Gagûm

Two verbs are often used with regard to the *gagûm*, viz. *erēbum* ‘to enter’, and *wašābum* ‘to reside’. It is generally believed that a girl entered the *gagûm* on reaching nubility, or in other words, that families belonging to the urban elite of Old Babylonian society ordained their daughters to become *nadītum* women when they were still young girls—which makes sense given the fact that they were not allowed to bear children. The question is, however, whether the ordination of these young girls—their ‘entering the *gagûm*’—implied their living apart from their families in a secluded area. Harris (1964: 109–144) quoted in this regard *PBS 8/2 183* (Si 7), which she believes to be an administrative text dealing with the expenses incurred by the *gagûm* on the entering of a girl as a *nadītum* into the *gagûm*, and which mentions expenses incurred on the ‘the day the girl entered’ (*ūm šuḫārtum īrubam*). Harris (*ibid.*) believed this text to deal with the expenses incurred by the *gagûm* upon the entering of Awat-Aja, daughter of Warad-Erra. However, as Harris (*ibid.*) already noted herself, the same Awat-Aja is already attested as *nadītum* of Šamaš 28 years before, viz. in *VS 9 144/5* (Ḥa 24), recording the division of the inheritance of her father Warad-Erra. Harris (*ibid.*) concluded hence that she became a *nadītum* at a very early age but did not actually enter the *gagûm* until years later. It is clear, however, that the ‘young girl’

(*ṣuḫārtum*) referred to in *PBS 8/2 183* cannot have been Awat-Aja, who must have been at least 30 at the time. A re-interpretation of *PBS 8/2 183* is therefore necessary.

First of all, it seems that the obverse and reverse of the tablet have been switched.<sup>90</sup> The text records the expenses made during the month *sebūt šattim*—literally meaning ‘seventh of the year’ which was the first month of the autumn in the Sippar calendar before the ‘unification’ of the calendar under Samsuiluna.<sup>91</sup> The total of expenses mentioned at the end of the text, 4 2/3 gín 15 še or 39,48 grams of silver, is described as ‘the betrothal gift which was taken for Awat-Aja and Mār-eršetim, children of Warad-Erra’ (*biblu ša ana Awat-Aja u Mār-eršetim mārū Warad-Erra illeqū*). The betrothal gift, more than half of which consisted of vessels, bowls, fish, flour, beer, and various pieces of ox and sheep meat offered on several days, cannot have been for Awat-Aja herself, who was already *nadītum* for a long time. In all probability, it was for the (unfortunately unnamed) daughter of Mār-eršetim, who was ordained *nadītum* of Šamaš, following her aunt Awat-Aja, who initiated her into the *nadītum*-ship—and possibly even adopted her. This would explain why Awat-Aja and Mār-eršetim, acting as the girl’s parents, are mentioned as ‘recipients’ of the betrothal gift. On the day the girl entered, both Mār-eršetim, her father, and Awat-Aja, her aunt, received 1 sheqel (8,33 grams) of silver, apart from flour, *kallu* bowls, *kabtukkū* vessels and cut-off pieces of wood from the palm tree, worth ¼ sheqel (2,07 grams) of silver, which was brought into the *gagūm* for Awat-Aja, and flour, *kallu* bowls and *kabtukkū* vessels, worth 20 še (1 gram) of silver, for Mār-eršetim.<sup>92</sup> The fact that offerings are brought into the *gagūm* for Awat-Aja implies that she resided in or at least functioned within the *gagūm*. It is not clear whether the offerings for Mār-eršetim were given to him personally or were also brought into the *gagūm*. The text does not mention by whom the expenses were incurred. Harris (*ibid.*) believed the *gagūm* incurred the expenses. This, however, is unlikely, as the text explicitly states that a part of the offerings is brought into the *gagūm*, implying they came from outside of the *gagūm*. The fact that Awat-Aja receives 1 sheqel of silver of two rings (*ša 2 unqātim*) calls to mind the so-called ‘ring-silver’<sup>93</sup> *nadītum* women had at their disposal. This

90. It is clear that the scribe started to write on the obverse of the tablet, continued on the lower edge, reverse and upper edge but did not have enough space to finish and continued writing on the top of the obverse, which he marked by drawing a line—and continued even then on the left edge. For a full re-interpretation, collation and translation of *PBS 8/2 183*, see my forthcoming *A Room of her Own? The Origin, Meaning and Functioning of the Gagūm in Old Babylonian Sippar*.

91. See Cohen 1993: 269–270.

92. *PBS 8/2 183*: Rev (24) ud-um šu-ḫa-ar-tum i-ru-ba-am (25) 1 gín kù.babbar né-bé-ḫu-um (26) a-na dumu-er-še-tim dumu ir-<sup>d</sup>ir.ra / a-bi-ša (27) 1 gín kù.babbar ša 2 un-qá-tim (28) a-na inim-<sup>d</sup>a-a dumu.munus ir-<sup>d</sup>ir.ra (29) ‘1 bán’ zíd.sag 5 ‘sila’ zíd.še 4 <sup>du</sup>gka-al-lu-u (30) ‘3’ <sup>du</sup>gka-ap-tu-ku-ú (31) ‘x’ gú ni-ik-su-um ša gišimmar (32) ša a-na ga-gi-im i-ru-bu (33) igi.4.gál <kù.babbar>-šu-nu (34) ša a-na inim-<sup>d</sup>a-a dumu.munus ir-<sup>d</sup>ir.ra i-ru-bu (35) 1 bán zíd.sag 5 sila zíd.še 4 <sup>du</sup>gka-al-lu (36) 1 <sup>du</sup>gka-ap-tu-ku-ú ša a-na dumu-ki dumu ir-<sup>d</sup>ir.ra (37) 20 še kù.babbar-šu-nu ‘The day the girl entered: 1 sheqel of silver as compensation for Mār-eršetim, son of Warad-Erra, her father, 1 sheqel of silver of 2 rings for Awat-Aja, daughter of Warad-Erra, 10 litres of flour of high quality, 5 litres of barley flour, 4 *kallu* bowls, 3 *kabtukkū* vessels (and) x kg of cut-off pieces of wood of the palm tree, that entered in the *gagūm*, their worth being ¼ sheqel of silver, that entered for Awat-Aja, daughter of Warad-Erra, 10 litres of flour of high quality, 5 litres of barley flour, 4 *kallu* bowls and 1 *kabtukkū* vessel that (is?/entered?) for Mār-eršetim, son of Warad-Erra, their worth being 20 še of silver’.

93. In sales documents usually indicated as *ina ḫar kù.babbar-ša* or *ina šawiriša* (see *CAD S sub semeru 2a2*), but in *TCL I 147* (Ae. ‘h’) *ina unqātiša*.

‘ring-silver’ was part of the family estate *nadītum* women received in order to keep and manage, and was supposed to stay in the family.<sup>94</sup>

It seems thus that the expenses incurred for the ordination of the girl as *nadītum* came from the family estate, which since the death of Warad-Erra in *Ha* 24 (*VS* 9 144/5), must have been held in common by Mār-eršētim and his brothers Budūm and Išū-tillassu. It is remarkable that the girl who ‘entered’ the *gagûm* is not mentioned by name, which might imply that she was very young indeed.<sup>95</sup> It is therefore questionable whether such young girls were supposed to actually live in a secluded area, apart from their families. A more logical explanation would be that by ‘entering the *gagûm*’ a girl would become officially a member of the community of *nadītum* women. As such, ‘entering the *gagûm*’ does not only refer to the physical location—although it seems logical that the initiation ritual took place in the *gagûm*—but also to the institution the girl joined.

After having ‘entered’ the *gagûm*, one was officially ‘residing’ (*wašābum*) in the *gagûm*. As shown earlier, it is hard to know who the actual inhabitants of the *gagûm* city quarter were. As this quarter was also inhabited by (a minority of) men—who cannot be identified as personnel belonging to the *gagûm* institution—one might wonder whether ‘residing in the *gagûm*’ could also refer to both the physical location and the institution, viz. inhabiting the *gagûm* city quarter on the one hand, and being a resident (or ‘member’<sup>96</sup>) of the *gagûm* institution, on the other. It seems, moreover, that, at least for the male inhabitants, being a member of the institution was not a requirement to be allowed to inhabit the city quarter. One might therefore wonder whether all *nadītum* women who were residents in the *gagûm* institution were obliged to inhabit the city quarter—although it must have been convenient for them to live nearby, either permanently or temporarily, in order to perform their duties during the festivals for which they had to provide the *piqittum* oblations.

CH § 110 shows that being a resident of the *gagûm* was of importance if a *nadītum* woman wanted to engage in certain economic activities, viz. opening a tavern and engaging in the related creditor business. The same is seen in the letter of Samu-iluna, published by Janssen (1991), in which the king ordained that a *nadītum* woman of Šamaš who was residing in the *gagûm*, could not be held responsible for any debts or *ilkum* duties of her father’s house.<sup>97</sup> It seems, in other words, that being a resident of the *gagûm* offered

94. See De Graef 2018.

95. This is corroborated by the dossier of Narāmtum, lukur of Lugalaba, daughter of Lu-Nanna, who is given her share of the family estate in *Rīm-Sîn* 4 (1819 BCE) and passes her share on to her adoptive son Ur-Pabilsaġa and her granddaughter Narubtum, 73 years later in *Si* 4 (1746 BCE), implying she must have been very young when she was ordained *nadītum* of Lugalaba (see Goddeeris 2016 nrs 15 and 18).

96. See in this regard *CAD* A<sub>2</sub> *sub* ašābu 1d2 ‘to sit down to exercise a function, to be present in an official capacity, to sit in council’.

97. lukur <sup>d</sup>utu ša a-bu-ša à a-ġu-ša ú-še-du-ši tuṣ-pa-am iš-tú-ru-ši i-na gá.gi.a wa-aš-ba-at a-na ġu-bu-li à il-ki-ša é a-bi-ša à aġ-ġi-ša ú-ul [...] a-bu-ša à aġ-ġu-ša [...] i-li-ik-šū-nu [...] à [...] dam.gār.meš ša lukur <sup>d</sup>utu a-na ġu-bu-li à il-ki-ša é a-bi-ša à aġ-ġi-ša i-ša-ab-ba-tú-ši a-wi-lum šu-ú ia-a-bu ša <sup>d</sup>utu (Di 1668: 43–55 = Di 0976: 9’–15’ = *AbB* 7 111: 11’–12’, see Janssen 1991: 7–8) ‘A *nadītum* woman of Šamaš, whose father or brothers equipped her with provisions and wrote her a tablet, and who resides in the *gagûm*, cannot [be held responsible] for the debts and the *ilkum* duties of the house of her father and/or her brothers. Her father and/or her brothers [must perform] their *ilkum* duties and [...]. Merchants who should seize a *nadītum* woman of Šamaš for the debts and the *ilkum* duties of the house of her father and/or her brothers, such a man will be the enemy of Šamaš’ (my translation).

both privileges and protection in economic matters. Was one of the key functions of the *gagûm* institution of economic nature? The fact that the *gagûm* had its own wooden bán-measure, which was 5% larger than the wooden bán-measure of Šamaš,<sup>98</sup> seems to corroborate this. Can we therefore speak of ‘*gagûm* incorporated’ whose residents enjoyed certain rights non-residents did not have?

As mentioned earlier, the punishment mentioned in CH § 110, death by burning, is rather severe, and remains difficult to explain. The severity of the penalty as well as the connotation of burning with purifying, had led in the past to the assumption that the crime involved illicit sexual behaviour. Roth (1999: 459-461), however, believes the offense to have been of an economic nature, viz. competing with the female tavern keeper and threatening the market share of the merchant. She notes that the offenses which warrant dramatic public executions in the CH, although being rather diverse, involve often an element of secrecy or intention to violate a social trust. This, however, seems not to have been the case in CH § 110, as opening a tavern or entering it for beer can hardly be done in secrecy nor can it be considered a violation of a social trust.

The confrontation of CH § 110 with the evidence from the documentary texts from Old Babylonian Sippar showed that being or not being resident of the *gagûm* was a key factor in being allowed to engage in the tavern keeping business. It seems therefore that the offense was indeed of an economic nature: *nadītum* women, who were economically independent actors, were only allowed to engage in the tavern keeping business if they acted within the framework of the *gagûm*. This, of course, only makes sense if the tavern keeping business (and/or the related money lending business) was in some way connected to the *gagûm*. As mentioned earlier, the tavern seems to have been involved in the initiation of a girl as a *nadītum* woman. As such, it might be interpreted as a kind of protectionist policy, prohibiting ‘outsiders’, i.e. non-residents of the *gagûm*, from engaging in the tavern keeping business.

The severe punishment remains difficult to explain, but as Roth (1999: 460) already mentioned, a very high percentage of the dramatic executions mentioned in the CH explicitly target women. Moreover, the offenses described in the paragraphs concerning the female tavern keeper preceding § 110 are equally punishable by death: a female tavern keeper who should refuse to accept barley for the price of beer but only accepts silver measured by the large weight, thereby reducing the value of beer in relation to that of barley, shall be thrown into the water (§ 108) and a female tavern keeper who should not report criminals who conspire in her tavern to the authorities, shall be killed (§ 109).<sup>99</sup> The first case also concerns an offense of an economic nature, viz. devaluating beer, which was considered a capital offense, demanding a dramatic public execution.

98. CT 47 80: (8'a) <sup>gi</sup>šbán gá.gi.a (9') ša i-na l gur.e 0.0.1.5 sìla še (10') e-lì <sup>gi</sup>šbán <sup>d</sup>utu ir-bu-ú ‘the wooden bán-measure of the *gagûm* which was per 300 litres 15 litres larger than the wooden bán-measure of Šamaš’.

99. See Roth 1995: 101.

## 5. Conclusions

By confronting CH § 110 with the evidence from the documentary texts from Old Babylonian Sippar, the following preliminary conclusions can be drawn on the relation between taverns, *nadītum* women and the *gagûm*.

CH § 110 can no longer be interpreted within the context of the dichotomy between the *nadītum* women of Šamaš in Sippar-Jaḥrūrūm, who were not allowed to marry and therefore ‘cloistered’, on the one hand, and the *nadītum* women of Marduk from Babylon, who were allowed to marry and free to go and act, on the other. For, not only Sippar-Jaḥrūrūm, but various cities, such as Kiš, Dilbat, Išçali, Damrum, Puš and Nippur, had their own *gagûm* within the institutional context of which local *nadītum* (and other) women functioned. In other words, CH § 110 refers to a general situation, to *nadītum* (and other) women not residing in their local *gagûm*, and not exclusively to the *nadītum* women of Šamaš in Sippar-Jaḥrūrūm.

As shown by the documentary texts, *nadītum* women residing in or otherwise associated to the *gagûm* owned taverns and inns in Sippar-Jaḥrūrūm during the Old Babylonian period. Consequently, when CH § 110 stipulated that ‘a *nadītum* and/or *ugbabtum* woman who does not reside in the *gagûm* is not allowed to open a tavern or enter a tavern for beer’, this is not because those residing in the *gagûm* were not able to do so anyhow because they were ‘cloistered’, but quite the reverse, because only those residing in the *gagûm* were allowed to do so.

The Old Babylonian documentary texts from Sippar show that the *gagûm* was both an institution and a physical location (city quarter), and as such, resembles the *kārum*, which was a harbour district as well as a trading association. It is therefore possible that ‘residing in the *gagûm*’ had a double meaning, viz. inhabiting the *gagûm* city quarter when referring to the *gagûm* as a physical location, and being a resident of the *gagûm* when referring to being a member of the institution. It seems that being a member of the institution was not a requirement to be allowed to inhabit the city quarter, as also men, not belonging to the *gagûm* personnel, are known to have inhabited the *gagûm* city quarter. It is therefore questionable whether all *nadītum* women who were residents in the *gagûm* institution were obliged to inhabit the city quarter—although it must have been convenient for them to live nearby, either permanently or temporarily.

CH § 110 as well as the letter by Samsu-iluna seem to indicate that being a resident of the *gagûm* offered both privileges and protection in economic matters: *gagûm* members were allowed to engage in the tavern keeping business and were protected from any claim due to debts incurred by their families. It seems that *nadītum* women, who were economically independent actors, were only allowed to engage in the tavern keeping business if they acted within the framework of the *gagûm*, implying a connection between both. As such, it might have been a kind of protectionist policy, prohibiting ‘outsiders’ or non *gagûm* members, from engaging in the tavern keeping business.

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### 7. Abbreviations

- BE 6/1 = Ranke, H. (1906) *Babylonian Legal and Business Documents from the Time of the First Dynasty of Babylon Chiefly from Sippar*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania.
- BE 6/2 = Poebel, A. (1909) *Legal and Business Documents from the Time of the First Dynasty of Babylon, Chiefly from Nippur*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania.
- CAD = Roth, M. T. (editor-in-charge) (1956–2010) *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*. Chicago: The Oriental Institute.
- CDA = Black, J. A., George, A. & Postgate, J. N. (2000) *A Concise Dictionary of Akkadian*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag.
- CT 4 = Pinches, T. G. (1898) *Cuneiform Texts from Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum, Part IV*. London: British Museum.
- CT 8 = Pinches, T. G. (1899) *Cuneiform Texts from Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum, Part VIII*. London: British Museum.
- CT 47 = Figulla, H. N. (1967) *Cuneiform Texts from Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum, Part XLVII, Old Babylonian Nadītu Records*. London: British Museum.

- CT 48 = Finkelstein, J. J. (1968) *Cuneiform Texts from the Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum. Old Babylonian Legal Documents*. London: British Museum.
- MHET I = Van Lerberghe, K. & Voet, G. (1991) *The Ur-Utu Archive: Part I*. Ghent: University of Ghent.
- MHET II = Dekiere, L. (1994–8) *Old Babylonian Real Estate Documents from Sippar in the British Museum, parts 1-6*. Ghent: University of Ghent.
- OLA 21 = Van Lerberghe, K. (1986) *Old Babylonian Legal and Administrative Texts from Philadelphia*. Leuven: Peeters.
- PBS 8/2 = Chiera, E. (1922) *Old Babylonian Contracts*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania.
- RIME 4 = Frayne, D. R. (1990) *Old Babylonian Period (2003-1595 BC)*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- SFS = Scheil, V. (1902) *Une saison de fouilles à Sippar*. Le Caire: Institut français d'archéologie orientale du Caire.
- VS 9 = Ungnad, A. (1909) *Altbabylonische Privaturkunden*. Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung.
- VS 29 = Klengel, H. and Klengel-Brandt, E. (2002) *Spätaltbabylonische Tontafeln*. Mainz-am-Rhein: P. von Zabern.



# Remarkable Women from Tikunani. The Role of Women in Palatial Administration

Josué J. Justel<sup>1</sup>

## 1. *Introduction*

Nowadays, works on women and their historical dimension cover almost all topics. The subjects that are most productive and most attractive for the public include those relating to women in spheres of power: queens, princesses, priestesses, etc. The list of titles in that regard, in respect of the topic in the Ancient Near East, is immense.<sup>2</sup> More recently, attention has been focused on, for example, women who appear to manage public affairs; the best known case is that of the *šakintū* (sg. *šakintu*), from Neo-Assyrian sources (see § 6). Unfortunately, such research cannot be carried out for all the eras and areas of the Ancient Near East; the sources are greatly varied, and sometimes the role of women in the public (administrative) sector is almost non-existent, or the textual sources do not provide sufficient data. Fortunately, on other occasions, we are able to identify some of those women, who, it would seem, held a specific post in the administration of the kingdom or city.

## 2. *Texts from Tigonānum/Tikunani*

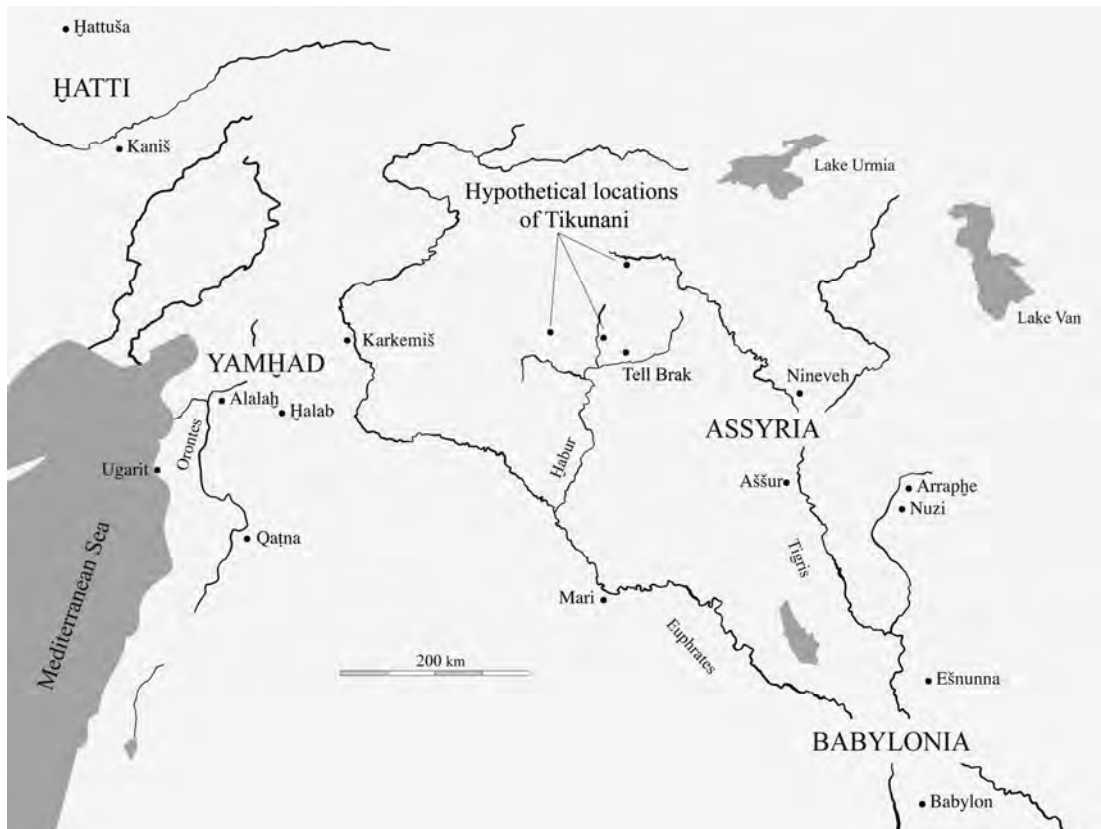
This contribution focuses on the written sources of Tigonānum, *i.e.* Tikunani, the capital city of a small Hurrian kingdom of the same name. This requires some explanation, as it is not a well-known site.<sup>3</sup>

1. University of Alcalá, Spain; josue.justel@uah.es. This paper has been written thanks to a Ramón y Cajal contract, granted by the Spanish Ministry of Economic Affairs and Competitiveness (MINECO); and is the result of the research project “The Kingdom of Tikunani in Upper Mesopotamia: history, administration and society according to the unpublished archives of king Tunip-Teššup (ca. 1620 BC)” (ref. HAR2015-63716-P), funded by the MINECO and by FEDER. I thank S. Budin and M. Cifarelli for revising the English expression and for their insightful and valuable suggestions; of course, any mistakes remain my sole responsibility. Abbreviations follow the *Reallexikon der Assyriologie und Vorderasiatischen Archäologie* (Berlin/Leipzig).

2. For example, see the titles mentioned in Marsman 2003: 326–389, as well as the recent Budin and MacIntosh Turfa 2016, in general.

3. What follows is just a brief abstract; more details will be provided in future publications.

The cuneiform tablets of Tikunani were found in illegal excavations, presumably during the late 1980s. The exact place where the clandestine excavators found the tablets is not known. Some previous works stated that that place would be the area around present-day Diyarbakir or Bismil, where the borders of Iraq, Turkey, and Syria meet; however, recent research point the region of the Upper Ḥabūr river as the probable region of provenance.<sup>4</sup> The kingdom of Tikunani, mentioned by its older name of Tigunānum, was known in texts from Mari (18<sup>th</sup> century BC).<sup>5</sup> However, original texts from the illicit dig remain unknown.



In 1996, M. Salvini published four texts, presumably originating from Tikunani, and kept in a private collection;<sup>6</sup> in addition, he established that there were many more unpublished documents,<sup>7</sup> but up to now only six administrative texts that supposedly originate from that archive have been published.<sup>8</sup> The texts

4. See especially Pongratz-Leisten 2015: 72, George *et al.* 2017: 97–100.
5. Groneberg 1980: 236, Charpin and Ziegler 2003: 240.
6. Salvini 1996.
7. Salvini 1996: 7 n. 4, 1998: 305, 2000: 56.
8. One by Wilhelm and Akdoğan 2010, and five as CUSAS 34 59–63.



excavated in Tikunani changed hands, possibly on several occasions, and they have been conserved in private collections. At the beginning of the 1990s, the late Prof. W. G. Lambert (1926–2011) of the University of Birmingham examined about 450 cuneiform texts from Tikunani, kept in a private collection in London and that were later sold at auction at Christie's. Lambert copied some of those cuneiform texts, transliterated them, and even made some comments, but he did not distribute the results, which were carefully noted in his work notebooks. When Lambert died, the academic executor of his estate, Prof. A. R. George (School of Oriental and African Studies, London), worked partially on the content of those notebooks, and published twenty divinatory texts (his line of research at the time).<sup>9</sup> Meanwhile, there remain unpublished over 400 cuneiform texts from Tikunani; known only through Lambert's notebooks, since the current location of the originals is unknown, and according to George, "[the original texts] are not believed to be currently under study".<sup>10</sup> Some time ago, George provided some scholars with several of Lambert's transcriptions to assess the potential of the Tikunani texts. On that basis, an international project was set up (2016–2018) with researchers from Spain, Germany, and Austria, who have begun to work on those sources. That work is the basis of what I shall now relate.

Through Lambert's transcriptions (abbreviated *WGL Folios*), we know that the Tikunani texts are made up of more than 20 letters, some 360 administrative texts, about 40 legal texts, 20 divinatory texts, a broken royal inscription, and a number of fragmentary school texts. In addition, the notes speak of a text drafted in Hurrian, as well as of a complete rectangular prism written on eight columns (both already published by Salvini in 1996).

Those texts were certainly looted from the palace of the capital Tikunani during the reign of a monarch called Tunip-Teššup, who appears to have lived around 1600 BC. That detail is important, because the nature of the texts is wholly public. All that they contained pertained to the state: correspondence between kings, records of people, of animals administered by the palace, of tribute from surrounding cities, etc. It is especially in those administrative records that women appear. In most cases, they are nameless women who have been handed over in transactions that are sometimes unclear, or to whom something has been given.<sup>11</sup> On other occasions, we know the names of those women, although there is not an exact indication of the remit of the administrative text.<sup>12</sup> At other times, we do know the function, since we are given an indication of whether (or not) they received a certain amount of wool or other products.<sup>13</sup> However, there are more explicit texts that set out, on an individual basis, what properties were received by a series of women. The most notable case is that of the woman called Ennana.

9. George 2013: 285–319.

10. George 2013: 285.

11. *E.g.* *WGL Folios* 7661 ("list of women and men slaves from named cities"), 7930, etc. *Cf.* the exemplary case of Alalah VII in Zeeb 2001.

12. *E.g.* *WGL Folios* 7862, 7863, etc.

13. *E.g.* *WGL Folios* 7653 ("barley rations not taken"), 7659 (see below).

### 3. The Case of Ennana

There are 18 Tikunani administrative texts that mention a woman called Ennana.<sup>14</sup> According to the numbering provided by Lambert, those texts are:

Text	WGL numbering	WGL Folios
<b>1</b>	36	7645
<b>2</b>	79	7688
<b>3</b>	80	7689
<b>4</b>	81	7690
<b>5</b>	82	7691
<b>6</b>	83	7692
<b>7</b>	84	7693
<b>8</b>	85	7694
<b>9</b>	86	7695
<b>10</b>	148	7757
<b>11</b>	196	7814
<b>12</b>	219	7889
<b>13</b>	220	7890
<b>14</b>	222	7892
<b>15</b>	225	7895
<b>16</b>	353	8034–8035
<b>17</b>	354	8036–8037
<b>18</b>	—	8148–8151

Except for no. 18, the other texts are fairly similar: an indication is given of an amount of wool, its destination or provenance, and finally that Ennana took it. One example is no. 5:<sup>15</sup>

Obv.

- 10 MA-NA SÍG  
 2 a-na 2 TÚG ZI-GA  
 1½ MA-NA SÍG  
 4 a-na TÚG <sup>d</sup>EN.ZU šar-ri  
 10 MA-NA SÍG  
 6 a-na 10 GÚ-È-A  
 ZI-GA

14. The personal name Ennana is not Hurrian (*i.e.* *Enna=Na(ya)*) but Akkadian, from the verb *enēnu*, “to grant a favor”; see this use in other personal names in *AHw* 217a, *CAD* E 164b. *CDA* 74a refers to the term *ennānum*, “supplication, petition”, attested in Old Assyrian sources (cf. also *AHw* 219b, “Freundlichkeit”). Note that such a name, with this same spelling, is attested in *MAD* 1 4: 8 (Old Akkadian period).

15. I have preferred not to include the transcription of the remaining seventeen texts, since it would surpass the intention of the paper. Instead, I provide the reader with transliterations and translations of several, key texts.

Rev.  
8     <sup>lf</sup>*en-na-na*  
       *il-qè*

<sup>1-2</sup>Ten minas of wool for two ...<sup>16</sup> garments.

<sup>3-4</sup>1½ minas of wool for the garment of Sîn, of first-class.

<sup>5-7</sup>10 minas of wool for ten cloaks ...

<sup>8-9</sup>Ennana has taken.

In the first 17 texts, not everything detailed is always given to Ennana. Sometimes the text states that some portion of the items was taken by other people, although no indication is given concerning who they were; it is only that the verb form is given in the plural (no. 4, no. 8). For its part, no. 14 does not explicitly indicate that Ennana took the goods, but her name appears just before the dating.

Text no. 18 is certainly exceptional. It constitutes a long summary or memorandum, prepared when at least three previous tablets were copied. The text is divided into three differentiated parts: a list of wool received by Ennana (ll. 1–36), a list of wool received by another woman called Karḫa (§ 3, ll. 37–46), and a list of wool handed over to the city of Uttupena (ll. 47–56). The end includes a mention of what was taken to another city with a partial name (ll. 57–58), as well as a total sum and the dating using the eponymal system (ll. 59–60). It is clear that, as with the usual archival practice in the ancient Near East, the system was as follows: the palace kept a record of what was handed over to each person, those details being kept together. At the end of the period (probably one year), the total amounts were tallied; that was done by adding up what was handed over to each person, in order. The calculation contained in no. 18 largely exceeds, and does not tally with, the other texts, nos. 1–17. From that, it must be deduced that those missing records have not been found, or that they were discarded in due course. That system is certainly the one that we also find in the tally made of the ‘*abirū*’ who appear in the famous Prism of Tunip-Teššup;<sup>17</sup> portions of that same tally, in the same order, appear in unpublished texts.<sup>18</sup>

The texts do not provide any additional details regarding Ennana. In almost all of them she appears as <sup>lf</sup>Ennana, *i.e.* with both masculine and feminine determinatives.<sup>19</sup> In only two cases (no. 1: 4, no. 7: 8) does Ennana appear only with the masculine determinative, and in another two (no. 11: 7, no. 14: 9) only with the feminine determinative. In these cases, the rest of the text was very similar to the others, *i.e.* we are certainly dealing with the same person. The use of (only) masculine determinatives before women’s

16. The sequence ZI-GA equates to the Akkadian *tebû/tebû* (*MesZL* p. 279–280), “sich erheben, Erhebung”, etc. (see *AHw* 1343b, *CAD* T 321), as well as to *šîtu* (*MesZL* p. 280), “exit, expenditure” (*AHw* 1106–1107, *CAD* Š 219–221). However, it would seem that the Tikunani administrative texts refer to a type of garment or cloak; for that reason, Lambert also leaves it untranslated (*WGL Folios* 8150–8151). In that regard, see the term *TÚG zigû* from the Old Babylonian and Middle-Babylonian periods, “ein Tuch?” (*AHw* 1525b, but *cf.* *CAD* Z 109a); and the term attested in Mari *zakûm*, translated by Durand (2009: 137–138) as “éttoffe qui a une finition brillante”.

17. Salvini 1996.

18. See Justel 2018.

19. As is the case with other texts, *e.g.* no. 18: 37, concerning the woman called Karḫa; and with various references to the woman called Azzu, and others (*e.g.* *WGL Folio* 7699).

names is not strange in Old Babylonian sources,<sup>20</sup> but it is indeed strange in the texts from northern Mesopotamia from that period. For the case of Middle Babylonian sources and those of Nuzi, it has been recently proposed that such a use of determinatives was reserved for women of some prominence in society.<sup>21</sup> For their own part, it appears that the Tikunani texts (at least literary and divinatory texts) made frequent use of the feminine determinative, because it appears preceding even generic feminine names.<sup>22</sup>

What did Ennana do with those materials? Data exist in the texts to indicate that she would have taken on the task of preparing the wool that she received and transformed it into finished products: dresses, shirts, and other items of which the significance sometimes escapes us. Two texts (no. 7: 7, no. 18: 1) indicate that Ennana took the wool “for making (things)” (*ana epēši*), a usual expression in Tikunani administrative texts. In that regard, a key issue is: Was she the person who made the finished products, or could it be that she ran a workshop? That question does not have a clear answer. However, it is important to highlight the fact that the amount of wool she handled was immense: according to text no. 18: 36, in a single accounting year, Ennana appears to have received “eleven talents (and) four minas of wool”. Other texts suggest that other women might have handled those amounts; for example, according to no. 18: 46, in that same accounting year, Karḥa received “twenty talents (and) forty-four minas of wool”. In that regard, we must look at other texts, such as *WGL Folio 7659*, which Lambert transcribed, apparently incompletely. It says:

<sup>r</sup>tup-pī [SÍG  
 2 5 MA-NA <sup>f</sup>tù-[  
     5 MA-NA <sup>f</sup>a-kà-ap-ni  
 4 5 MIN <sup>f</sup>mu-šu-un-na  
 ...  
 End 2 GÚ-UN 34 MA-NA SÍG<sup>2</sup> a-na TÚG  
     e-pè-ši [x]-ki

<sup>1</sup>[Tablet] (recording) [the wool ...].

<sup>2</sup>Five minas: Tu[...].

<sup>3</sup>Five minas: Akapni.

<sup>4</sup>Five minas: Mušunna.

...

End<sup>r</sup>Two talents (and) thirty-four minas of wool for making garments ...

It can be seen that each woman—maybe the weavers—received five minas of wool. Although we lack context, that amount is, in any case, far removed from the amounts received by women like Ennana. For that reason, we should probably suppose that Ennana and other women (see § 3) ran large workshops and oversaw production, which would have come under the ægis of the palace.

20. See implicitly Brinkman 2007: 1.

21. Brinkman 2007, Abrahams 2011; for the case of Babylonian sources from the first millennium, see Wunsch 2006.

22. George 2013: 108a.

4. *Other Women in Tikunani*

Although Ennana is the woman for whom we have the most information, the Tikunani sources refer to other women of some importance. Mention has already been made of the large amount of wool handled by Karḥa, who appears in text no. 18. Just one other text mentions that woman: *WGL Folios* 8058–8059:

Obv.

3 TUG 5 MA-NA A-TA-AN  
2 KI-LA-BI  
3 TUG US 6 MA-NA A-TA-AN<sup>23</sup>  
4 KI-LÁ-BI

Rev.

*a-na* <sup>f</sup>*kàr-ḥa*  
6 *na-dì-in*

<sup>1-2</sup>Three garments, the weight five minas each.

<sup>3-4</sup>Three second-class garments, the weight six minas each.

<sup>5-6</sup>They have been given to Karḥa.

Another woman who appears on several occasions in the sources is Azzu.<sup>24</sup> Those documents have a structure similar to those concerning Ennana. For example, *WGL Folio* 7719 says: “One ... garment, the weight two minas, in charge of Azzu.”<sup>25</sup> However, the most revealing text is *WGL Folio* 7699, a brief memorandum. It states that Azzu received various amounts of wool to make (*epēšī*) finished textile products. That text also refers to two other women who are not present in other administrative texts, and who were also given materials to process. Azzu’s name and the names of the other two women (<sup>f</sup>*nu-pur-e-li* and <sup>f</sup>*na-šī<sup>2</sup>-ru<sup>2</sup>-ni*) are all preceded by masculine and feminine determinatives.

Finally, there are references to other named women who may also have handled properties owned by the palace administration. One of them is <sup>f</sup>*mu-balma*, of whom a brief text has been conserved which

23. A-TA-AN instead of the usual TA-A-AN = TA-ÀM. This sequence seems to have been usual in Tikunani. In fact, transposition of signs is well attested in peripheral Akkadian, *e.g.* in Nuzi (see already Berkooz 1937: 22); this very same chain is to be found, for example, in AASOR 16 55: 35, HSS 5 79: 29, HSS 19 144: 17, JEN 441: 10, etc. However, in other Tikunani documents the sequence was correctly written, *e.g.* *WGL Folio* 7643: 2.

24. The occurrences are *WGL Folios* 7699, 7719, 7720, 7723. She also appears in *WGL Folio* 7653, “barley rations not taken” (Lambert’s label), but the characteristics of the text are clearly different from the rest.

25. <sup>1</sup>I TÚG-ŠÀ-XX <sup>2</sup>MA-NA A-TA-AN <sup>3</sup>KI-LÁ-BI <sup>4</sup>*i-na* ŠU <sup>f</sup>*az-zu*. TÚG-ŠÀ-XX appears several times in the Tikunani administrative corpus. Lambert always designed the two, similar signs, but they do not correspond to what is expected, either the sequence GA-DÙ or the sign GADA (at least present in *WGL Folio* 7907: 4), to render TÚG-ŠÀ-GA-DÙ or TÚG-ŠÀ-GADA = *šakattû*, “a kind of garment.” Note that this term is attested also in peripheral Akkadian, as in Alalakh, Mari, Boghazköy, Nuzi and Amarna (see *AHw* 1139, *CAD* Š/1 158–159).

states that she was given wool to make finished goods (*WGL Folio 7785*). Another woman is <sup>f</sup>*na-šu-un-pí*, to whom the palace gave a certain amount of silver, although we do not know why (*WGL Folio 7709*). In addition, there is the case of another woman, who only appears in the administrative text *WGL Folio 7894*:

Obv.  
 12 TÚG *nu-ša-bu*  
 2 *a-na xx-šu*<sup>26</sup>  
   <sup>f</sup>*a-tá<sup>2</sup>-ma<sup>2</sup>-mu-gal/wa<sup>2</sup>*  
 4 LUGAL *tu-ni-ip-te-eš-šu-up*  
   *a-na URU nu-ú-uš-na-i.KI*

Rev.  
 6 *i-di-in*

<sup>1-3</sup>Twelve cushions in charge<sup>2</sup> of ...

<sup>4-6</sup>The king Tunip-Teššup has given to the city of Nūšnai<sup>27</sup>.

Based on that text, it is clear that the woman worked in some capacity for the royal administration, as appears to have been the case with the other women referred to in this work.

### 5. Women in Administration, Taken from Other Archives

The key question is: when should we consider that the women act as part of the palace administration? It has been shown that, at least in the various cases cited above, and specifically in the case of Ennana, this appears to be the case. Let us look at other examples: based on geographical and cultural proximity, I shall first show three specific cases: those taken from Hittite archives, from Nuzi, and from Alalaḫ.

That topic in the Hittite sources was the subject of a recent contribution. Here M. Vigo indicates:

“The analysis of the corpus of administrative Hittite texts, even if somewhat fragmentary and scarcely exhaustive, highlights a prominent role of women of power, linked to the royal family, in different aspects of the Hittite administration (diplomatic affairs, households commitments, management of incoming goods, record keeping practices, etc.).”<sup>28</sup>

26. It is probable that *a-na qa-ti-šu* should be understood here, as in other cases within the corpus of Ennana.

27. Lambert noted *nu-ú-ta<sup>2</sup>-na-i*, but a city spelled *nu-ú-uš-na-i* is present in other unpublished texts from Tikunani (e.g. *WGL Folio 7952*: 4, LUGAL URU *nu-ú-uš-na-i.KI*), even in other texts from the Ennana corpus, e.g. no. 14: 7 and no. 18: 47.

28. Vigo 2016: 333–334.

What is most relevant is what Vigo calls “implicit agency”, women who carry out administrative tasks.<sup>29</sup> Many of them worked for the palace in textile production, but their specific tasks are unknown to us. For example, two important texts give the amount of textiles allocated to the woman called Anni. Vigo even indicates:

“Due to the very fragmentary state of preservation of the tablets, it is impossible to ascertain whether Anni takes charge of the finished products to be stored somewhere, or simply takes the bundles of wool in order to process them. At any rate, it is quite clear that women are involved in the palace administration at different levels.”<sup>30</sup>

As regards Nuzi, the palace precinct was found to contain records on the woman called Tulpun-Naya. The complete study of that archive was recently carried out.<sup>31</sup> Above all, legal documents of various types have been conserved. We do not know why that documentation was kept in the palace. It has been suggested, with reservations, that the palace may have confiscated their property, including their family archive.<sup>32</sup> That possibility is difficult to prove; perhaps Tulpun-Naya was related to important palace administrators, and the fact that her name occurs several times only preceded by masculine determinatives may indicate that she was an important person (§ 3, and *cf.* below).

With respect to Alalah, the case of the woman called Zazē is well known to us.<sup>33</sup> Several administrative tablets indicate that Zazē was in charge of a group of carpenters who may have made furniture, and that her business was operated from within the palace. Zazē was an important person, and she was linked to the administration in some way. In fact, there are other important figures who kept (part of) their private archives in the palace. In that regard, Von Dassow indicates:

“Although other explanations for the presence of family archives within government buildings are conceivable, an explanation predicated on assuming that the people and their activities occupied the same space as their documents accords best with the limited information available from the contents of the archives at issue, the prosopography of those individuals attested outside their own documents (e.g., as witnesses to other documents drawn up before the king), and the fact that each archive was found in a distinct location.”<sup>34</sup>

Thus, it is fairly plausible that those women, whose record of activities was kept at the palace, were involved in some way with the palace administration.<sup>35</sup>

A separate case is that of the *šakintū* (sg. *šakintu*) from the Neo-Assyrian sources, which I raise because they have been covered exhaustively in recent times.<sup>36</sup> That figure was the queen’s right hand,

29. Vigo 2016: 340–343.

30. Vigo 2016: 342.

31. Abrahams and Lion 2012; *cf.* the comments by Jas 2000: 218–219.

32. Abrahams and Lion 2012: 49, following Charpin 2010: 14 for the case of Mari; see *contra* Von Dassow 2005: 50 n. 91.

33. See especially Von Dassow 2005: 24, 47, Von Dassow 2008: 147–148, 321.

34. Von Dassow 2005: 47a.

35. *Cf.* also Von Dassow 2010: 44–45.

and is mentioned in over 50 texts. Those women were present in many royal palaces; they had considerable administrative resources and a large number of subordinates. Throughout Neo-Assyrian history, *šakintū* are recorded as employees in a total of 23 different administrations, especially the capitals of Assur, Kalḫu, and Nineveh. In fact, in Kalḫu and in Nineveh alike, the post of *šakintu* is attested in a number of different palaces. In addition, the administration of many provincial cities were headed by a *šakintu*. Thus, it is clear that the *šakintū* were not only active close to the queen; they were also present in those cities in which the queen had a certain financial interest.<sup>37</sup>

## 6. Conclusions

The unpublished Tikunani texts, as set out in Lambert's notes, show the kingdom's palace documentation during the reign of the king Tunip-Teššup. A sizeable part of the *ca.* 450 cuneiform texts is administrative in nature. Those administrative sources include some texts that show women receiving a series of products, generally wool, for subsequent processing into fabrics, clothing, and other textile products. Sometimes, the women who receive those goods appear just once in the Tikunani sources; at other times, they appear more than once. As shown above, a woman named Ennana appears in 18 different texts. In essence, Ennana received wool that she then had to transform into finished products of very different types.

Given the nature of the administrative sources, we do not know much about those women. It is even difficult to assess their activities, because we do not know the dating of the texts, where the texts were found, etc. The key point is to determine if the women's activity must be understood as being in the public or private context. In other words, it is a matter of knowing if the palace assigned products to those women, who, as people in charge of their own workshops, processed the products and sold them back to the palace; or if the women were in charge of palace workshops, thus making them officials or civil servants of some type. The latter possibility is the more probable for several reasons:

- a) The texts available to use are undoubtedly from the palace archives. As has been indicated, additional explanations can be offered for that location, but the most probable is that the workshops and the women carried out their work in the palace or in connected outbuildings.
- b) The allocated amounts of raw materials, *i.e.* wool, is sometimes extremely high; in particular, see no. 18. For that reason, it is practically impossible that women like Ennana were able to process all that work, alone, within a reasonable amount of time.
- c) The parallels in the Hittite archives and other Hurrian ones (as is the case with Tikunani) show that, in effect, there were women to whom those tasks were allocated, and not just as regards textile products (which is the most usual case), but also manufacturing wood.

For all the foregoing, it appears that those women carried out their activities, at least partly, in a managerial capacity for the palace. The parallels presented above (§ 5) show that sometimes they may

36. The main work on the subject is currently Svärd 2015.

37. Svärd 2015: 91–105; see an abstract in Svärd 2016: 131–132.



have been important women. The most representative case is that of the *šakintū*. It is obvious that those women administrators were high-ranking state-level civil servants, far removed from the scant sphere of influence that would have been exerted, in principle, by the women of Tikunani, Alalah, or Nuzi. However, it is also true that in any case, all the women mentioned were part of the civil service of the kingdom, which was centralized in the palace. We do not know if Ennana, the best known of those women civil servants in Tikunani, may have had links to the royal family or with other high-society circles, as has sometimes been suggested for the Hittite women administrators or for Tulpun-Naya in Nuzi.

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# “You Had None of a Woman’s Compassion”: Princess Iltani from her Archive Uncovered at Tell al-Rimah (18<sup>th</sup> Century BCE)

Anne-Isabelle Langlois<sup>1</sup>

Among the tablets discovered *in situ* at Tell al-Rimah in northern Iraq, about two hundred belonged to a woman named Iltani. This personal archive stands in stark contrast to the majority of cuneiform texts which are dispersed among various museums without an archaeological context—depriving them of irreplaceable contextual data. This is the reason why Iltani’s archive is worthy of interest and quite unique in the cuneiform documentation available so far. These texts were the basis of my PhD dissertation, which is now published,<sup>2</sup> and they are a great source for many perspectives on Mesopotamian history (economic, social, institutional, political, religious) and especially on the life of women in 2<sup>nd</sup>-millennium BCE Mesopotamia and their place in Mesopotamian society.

The present contribution starts with a quick presentation of Iltani’s archive (§ 1), and continues with her family (§ 2) and her activities, domestic and economic as well as religious and political (§ 3). In the end, it focuses on her interpersonal relationships and what we can learn about her power and her character (§ 4).

## 1. *Iltani’s Archive*

Iltani’s archive was uncovered by an English archaeological mission between 1964 and 1971 at Tell al-Rimah, in the Sindjar region, situated at about sixty kilometers west of Mossul (Fig. 1).<sup>3</sup> This site is ancient Qaṭṭara.<sup>4</sup>

1. French CNRS team (Unité Mixte de Recherche) 7192 (digitorient.com); recipient of a scholarship from the Gerda Henkel Stiftung (www.gerda-henkel-stiftung.de); anne-isabelle.langlois@mlanglois.com.

2. Langlois 2017.

3. For a detailed presentation of the region, a summary of the excavations and the Old Babylonian structures and finds, see Langlois 2017: 11–39 (chap. 1). The map, here named Fig. 1, was published op. cit., p. 12.

4. For this identification, as well as all the toponyms cited in this paper, see Ziegler and Langlois 2016. The collations of some tablets have removed any final arguments from those who have contested this identification; for more details about the disputed identification of Tell al-Rimah’s ancient name, see Langlois 2017: 29–31 (§ I.3.).

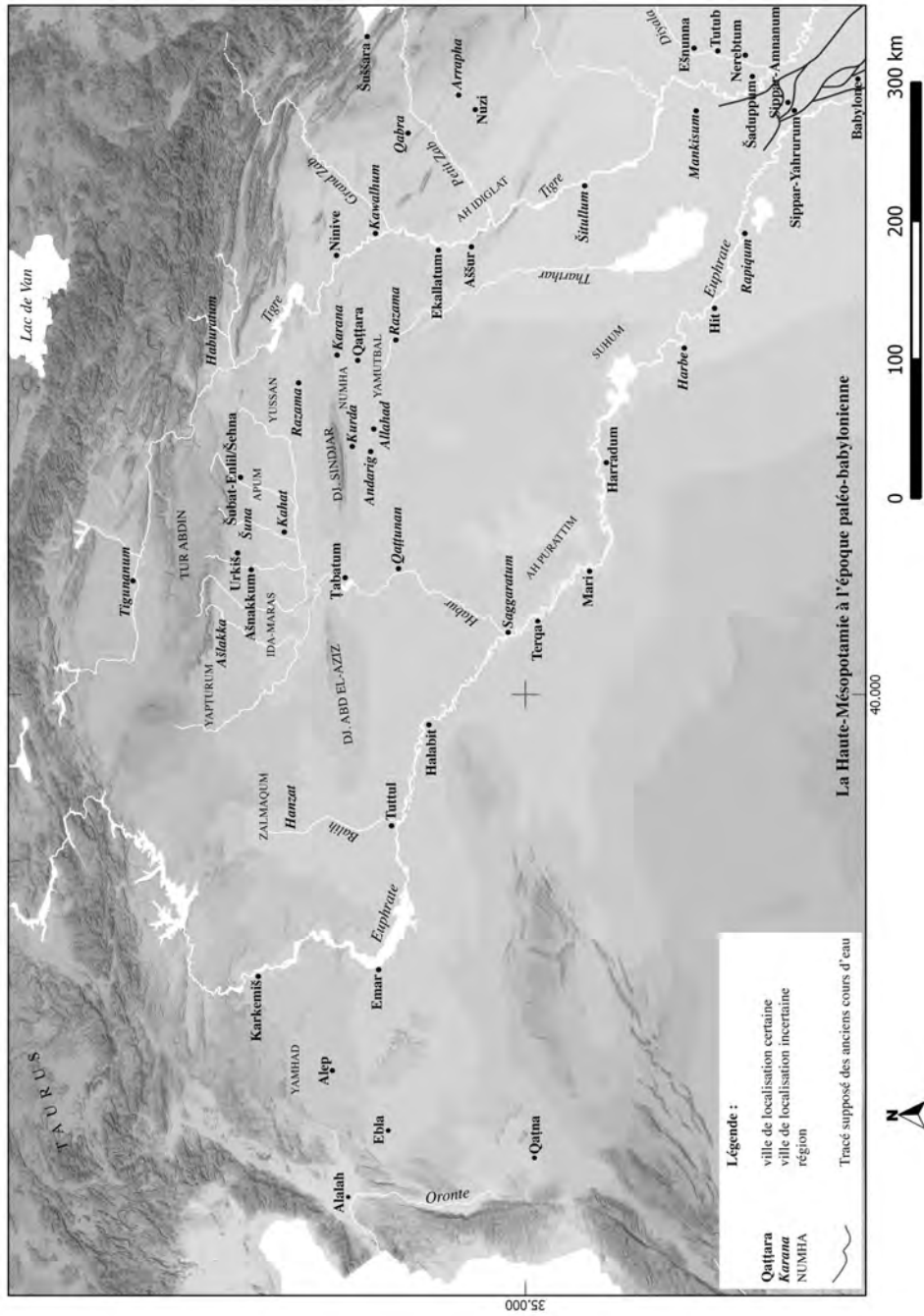


Fig. 1. Upper Mesopotamia during the Old Babylonian Period, in Langlois 2017: 12.

Iltani’s archive consists of 151 letters, sent by about thirty people, and 53 economic texts, uncovered in area C (Fig. 2),<sup>5</sup> in the ancient palace of Hadnu-rabi, the former king of Qattara.<sup>6</sup>



Fig. 2. Excavation areas at Tell al-Rimah, in Postgate et al. 1997: 17.

5. This figure, found in Langlois 2017: 14, is extracted from Postgate et al. 1997: 17.

6. On the palace, its structure and different interpretations, as well as maps taking into account the localisation of the tablets inside the palace, see Langlois 2017: 15–22 (§ I.2).

These texts were first edited by S. Dalley in 1976 in a collective book publishing the Old Babylonian tablets from the site.<sup>7</sup> But the extensive progress in the field of Assyriology since this publication has called for a new study. The epigraphic cuneiform documentation from the ancient Near East dating from the Old Babylonian period (2004–1595 BCE ca.)<sup>8</sup> now published has nearly doubled since the first publication of Iltani’s archive: indeed, more than 33.000 Old Babylonian texts are known so far. Our understanding of Mesopotamian civilization, its language, and its history has significantly improved in the past four decades.

Photographs of Iltani’s tablets, which are kept in the Baghdad Museum, were necessary. I was able to go to Baghdad, mid-November 2011, and to photograph the tablets of the corpus. With these new photographs at hand, I was able to study Iltani’s letters and economic texts afresh and give a new edition, now available in the second volume of my publication<sup>9</sup> as well as online, on ARCHIBAB’s website.<sup>10</sup>

Thanks to the improved knowledge of the chronological systems used in cuneiform documentation,<sup>11</sup> it is now possible to set the economic texts of Iltani’s archive into chronological order.<sup>12</sup> The texts from Iltani’s archive are dated according to the eponym dating system, which means that every year was associated with a high ranking official by giving his name (eponym) to the year. Most of these texts are dated by the eponym Šabrum which corresponds to the year 38–39 of Hammurabi of Babylon.<sup>13</sup>

## 2. *Iltani’s Family*

Iltani’s seal impression (Fig. 3), found on six texts and two fragments of envelopes, gives us information about her father and her husband: Iltani, daughter of Samu-Addu, wife of Haqba-Hammu.<sup>14</sup> In the patriarchal style of ancient Mesopotamian society, in which women were typically defined in reference to a man—be it her husband, father, brother or uncle—Iltani occupied a privileged place: she was a princess, daughter of Samu-Addu and sister of Asqur-Addu, probably both kings of Karana. She married Haqba-Hammu, a diviner.<sup>15</sup> Because of his eminent position in Karana’s kingdom, he lived most

7. Dalley *et al.* 1976. For the diverse reviews of this book, see Langlois 2017: 1–2 (§ 0.1.).

8. In this contribution, the Middle Chronology is used.

9. Langlois 2017, volume 2: 41–204 (chap. 2).

10. [www.archibab.fr](http://www.archibab.fr). To find texts from Tell al-Rimah, search by “Text(s)”, “by publications” and then enter OBTR in the field “published in the collection of texts or a volume of the series with the abbreviation”.

11. See Barjamovic *et al.* 2012.

12. See Langlois 2017: 31–37 (§ I.4.).

13. The other eponyms dating economic texts are a little earlier: Attaya corresponds to the year 34/35 of Hammurabi (HR) of Babylon; Aya, to HR 35/36; Azzubiya, to HR 36/37; and Kurkutanu, to HR 37/38.

14. Her seal is inscribed <sup>munus</sup>*il-ta-ni*, DUMU.MUNUS *sa-mu-d*ŠKUR, DAM *aq-ba-ha-mu*; see Langlois 2017: 46. Getting a seal was a sign of independence and authority, but not all princesses had one and some complained about it, as Šimatum, for example, daughter of Zimri-Lim, king of Mari (see ARM 10 95).

15. This case is similar to that of Yamama, sister of Zimri-Lim, king of Mari, who married Asqudum, a diviner; see Charpin 1985. The documentation uncovered at Tell Hariri is copious and data-rich and has helped to increase our knowledge about Old Babylonian Mesopotamia.

of the time in the capital, close to the king, whereas Iltani stayed in Qaṭṭara, an ancient capital of the kingdom not too far from Karana (for the two cities, see Fig. 1).<sup>16</sup>

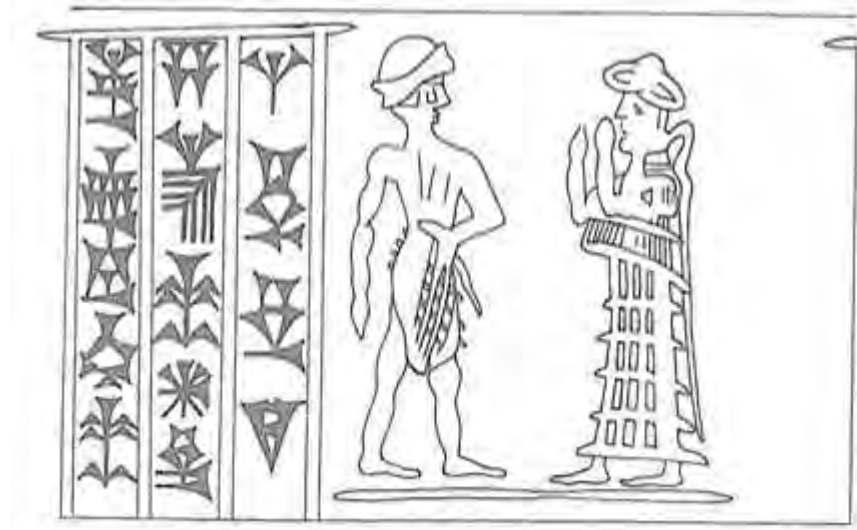


Fig. 3. Iltani's seal impression. From Dalley et al. 1976: pl. 109 seal 13.

Through her correspondence, we understand that she had two brothers besides Asqur-Addu, namely Napsuna-Addu, who was possibly the governor of the city of Šarbat,<sup>17</sup> and Imgur-Šamaš. She also had two sisters, Amat-Šamaš, a *nadītum*-nun at Sippar, and Lamassani, possibly a nun at Aššur.

It is difficult to establish family links, but it appears that Iltani may have given birth to three sons and one daughter with Haqba-Hammu, namely Igmil-Sin, Re'um-ili, Sin-remeni and the girl Belessunu. Additionally, it seems likely that Haqba-Hammu had a second wife named Yataraya. She stayed at Karana, managing Haqba-Hammu's household there.<sup>18</sup>

All these data enable us to make a partial and hypothetical family tree (Fig. 4).

16. For Iltani, her history and her family, see Langlois 2017: 41–170 (chap. 2). Haqba-Hammu was not only a diviner but also the second in command in Karana's kingdom; on him, see Langlois 2017: 65–88.

17. This toponym, located in the Sindjar region, is not yet identified with a site; see Ziegler and Langlois 2016: 318–319.

18. For Iltani and Haqba-Hammu's partial and hypothetical family tree, see Langlois 2017: 47. On Yataraya, see Langlois 2017: 71–74 (§ II.3.4.).

## Iltani's partial and hypothetical family tree

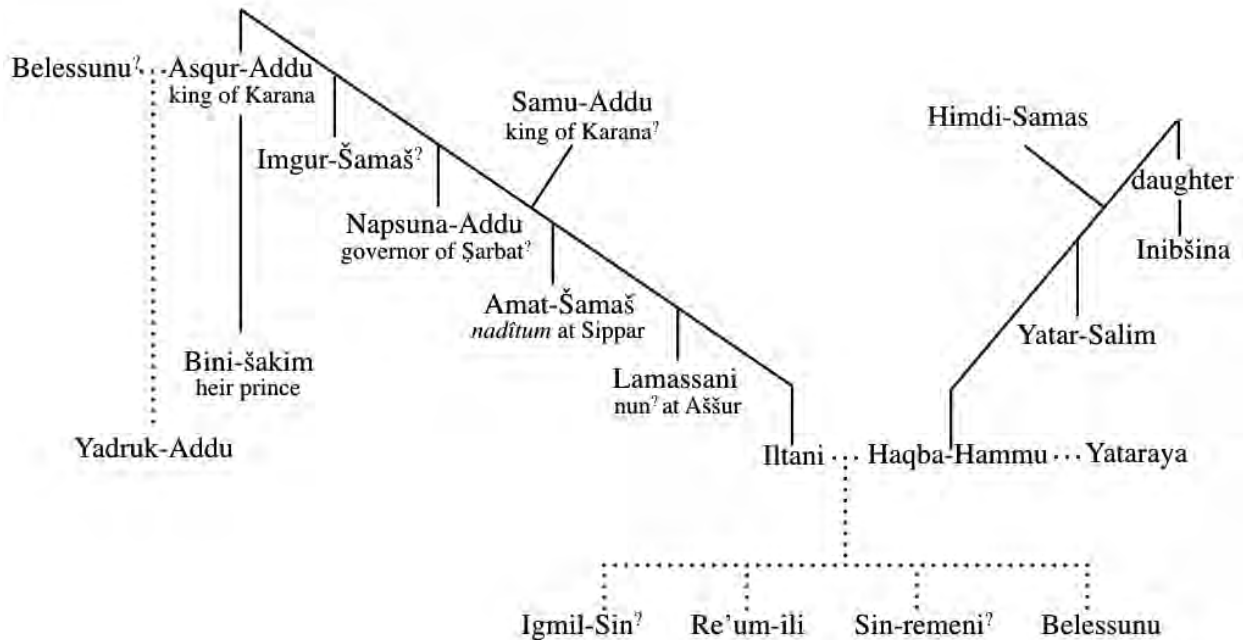


Fig. 4.

3. *Iltani's Activities*

Most of Iltani's correspondence is related to the management of her estate.<sup>19</sup> As a “good wife” according to Mesopotamian ideals at that time, she managed her household and the main women's activity—textile production.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore Iltani seems to have possessed lands close to Qaṭṭara, in Badrum and Yašibatum.<sup>21</sup>

19. For an extended study of Iltani's activities and daily life, see Langlois 2017: 171–268 (chap. 3).

20. Much literature has been published on this topic, all periods combined. A recent one is Droß-Krüpe and Nosch 2016.

21. For these toponyms without precise localisation, see Ziegler and Langlois 2016. For an overview on agriculture, see Reculeau 2008. He is, in addition, publishing a new book on the topic (Reculeau 2018).



Iltani’s household is partially known from rations lists which document five different groups of people.<sup>22</sup> The first group is called “the palace” in the texts and thus refers to the palatial population, formed by 24 women, among whom were four mothers who received rations for their children.<sup>23</sup> The second group consisted of weavers, formed by 15 women, and among whom two were mothers. The third group consisted of nine male fullers, of whom one received a ration for his spouse. The fourth is formed by five random workers including a donkey-driver and millers. The fifth and last group is formed by occasional beneficiaries—ad hoc employees.

In addition to these workers, others are documented by the letters of Iltani’s archive. Iltani had other persons at her disposal, such as a brewer (OBTR 176), a shepherd (OBTR 145), a scribe (OBTR 123), troops (OBTR 94) and men who served as escort (OBTR 44–46). Many letters from her archive deal with the organization of this work-force.

Iltani was involved in textile production.<sup>24</sup> Several of the letters exchanged with her correspondents mention raw materials, like wool, textiles to be produced or sent, as well as skilled workers. She had at her disposal many weavers and fullers, as mentioned above. Nuhmatanum is one of them, not only documented by the rations lists, but also by a letter sent by Haqba-Hammu in which he requested the worker (OBTR 75):

(4-10) “There is need of Nuhmatanum, the textile worker. They should quickly lead [this man] to me! I shall myself give you back someone else in exchange.”

Another correspondent of Iltani, Šiptanum, from whom we have only one letter (OBTR 154), mentioned some women who seemed specialized in a certain knotting technique, as implies the etymology of their qualifier, *kâširtum*. Actually, the case of Iltani and her husband who occupied an ancient palace and managed a domain is similar to another one known by the documentation of Mari, which is very important for the Old Babylonian period: Asqudum, the diviner, and Yamama, Zimri-Lim’s sister did the same in the “small oriental palace” of Mari.<sup>25</sup>

The textile produced by Iltani and her household was primarily for personal, family, and domestic use. The surplus was probably not sold (there is no documentation in Iltani’s archive for this kind of transaction) but was offered as gifts to honor people, as in OBTR 82 in which Haqba-Hammu said to Iltani:

(4-16) “The king of Širwun has come. The way from Qarana(?) that he took went well. But there is no fabric to offer. Now, quickly send me fabrics, of first and second quality, that are at your disposal to offer!”

22. For these documents and their analysis, see Langlois 2017: 206–216 (§ III.2.1.).

23. Whether this group lived or worked in/at the palace is not specified in our documentation.

24. For an extended presentation of Iltani’s involvement in textile production as well as the possibility of the existence of another atelier in Karana, see Langlois 2017: 193–200 (§ III.1.2.).

25. For the management of Asqudum and Yamama’s household, see Charpin 1985: 453–462. For the management of the palace as well as provincial palaces, see Ziegler 1999: 5–20. Another comparison can be made with the palace of Ašnakkum, see Lacambre and Millet Albà 2008: 211–285.

It was also aimed to supply troops. For example, Haqba-Hammu asked Iltani (OBTR 60):

(4-18) “I wrote you for the fabrics and the straps but you did not send them. About the troops that must go to Babylon, they requested the fabrics and straps that are with you. Either you did not send them, or you did not give them to your textile worker. Now, if you can send fabrics and straps, send (them)! If not, inform me about the situation!”

What is more surprising is the fact that Iltani appears less involved in political and religious matters than some women of the royal family of Mari who are better known through the abundant documentation uncovered at Tell Hariri, such as Šibtu.<sup>26</sup> In truth, the political role of Iltani is mainly perceptible by references to an unnamed king and a “patron” contained in the letters of her archive. Determining who was anonymously referred to by these titles, LUGAL (= “king”) on the one hand and LÚ (= “man”) on the other, was like a real police investigation. In my opinion, the majority of the nameless references to the king referred to Asqur-Addu, Iltani’s brother, king of the kingdom of Karana. After his loss (we do not know exactly how or when it happened, but Asqur-Addu disappeared at least at the beginning of the Eponym Azzubiya), Hammurabi of Babylon was the one anonymously referred to as “the king”. When Asqur-Addu was the nameless LUGAL, Haqba-Hammu was probably the nameless LÚ mentioned in the letters. After the loss of Asqur-Addu and the rule of Hammurabi over the region, Mut-hadqim, a high ranking officer of the king of Babylon, was probably the nameless LÚ mentioned in the letters of Iltani’s archive.<sup>27</sup> The references to these nameless, high ranking individuals mainly concern news of their trips or the goods they needed.

Likewise, the texts only allow us to outline Iltani’s religious role. She organized some festivals (OBTR 58 and 123) and poured some libations as is mentioned by Haqba-Hammu in OBTR 79:

(4-5) “The ice (house) of Qaṭṭara should be unsealed, so that the goddess, you, and Belassunu could drink from it as needed!”<sup>28</sup>

She offered some sacrifices to the Moon-god Sin as well as to different manifestations of the goddess Ištar, as is shown by OBTR 200 a small administrative text listing the sacrifices.<sup>29</sup> Iltani obviously worshiped these two deities and she probably also inherited a family devotion to the Storm-god Addu and his female consort Geštinana, as is shown by the divinities invoked in the blessing expressed in the first part of letters.<sup>30</sup>

26. Šibtu was one of the spouses of Zimri-Lim, king of Mari, deeply involved in political and religious matters; see Durand 2000: 304–305, 314, 329.

27. For a detailed overview of the information about Mut-hadqim contained in the cuneiform documentation from Qaṭṭara and Mari, see Langlois 2017: 92–96. For the mystery of the nameless LUGAL and LÚ and the development of the arguments, see Langlois 2017: 96–106.

28. Sasson 2015: 267.

29. For religious aspects documented by Iltani’s archive, see Langlois 2017: 255–268 (§ III.5).

30. For the letters and their form, see Sallaberger 1999. See also Langlois 2017 vol. 2: 1–40 (chap. 1).

#### 4. *Relationships and Power—Towards a Portrait of Iltani*

The information contained in this archive, discovered *in situ*, enables us to know some of Iltani’s circles and their interactions. But the allusive character of correspondence neither provides us with all the details we would like for a better understanding of the background of some situations or to ascertain the implications of some interactions, nor does it enable us to assess the truth among assumptions. In addition, the documentation available today is incomplete: it is the result of excavations led in modern times along with the sorting made in ancient times.<sup>31</sup> However, is it possible to know something about Iltani’s personality and power through the study of her relationships documented in her correspondence? This topic cannot be detailed in-depth here, but some aspect of her character can be highlighted as well as questioned.

##### 4.1. *Powerful and Bold*

The definition and the study of a person’s authority are complex. Obviously there are the hierarchical power relations, inherent in the society’s structures. But one’s power is not limited to a vertical application of authority. As S. Svård has shown, the difficulties related to a semantic definition of power, the multiplicity of power expressions, and the adequacy of the use the concept of heterarchy for Assyriology.<sup>32</sup> People are in the position of simultaneously being subject to and exercising power. Heterarchical power relations can be perceived in the Old Babylonian documentation through relations of reciprocal authority, negotiations, oppositions and persuasions. Thus we have to try to pinpoint Iltani’s incontestable capacities for action as well as her limits throughout her correspondence.

##### 4.1.1. *Capacities for Action*

##### 4.1.1.1. *Vertical Application*

As already stated, Iltani occupied a privileged position. In Qaṭṭara, she had a true capacity for action.<sup>33</sup> It seems that she had her own land, a textile workshop, and a workforce, as well as access to alimentary and material resources. She received many gifts from different correspondents, sometimes characterized by their origin in order to emphasize their value, like trees from Mari, nuts from Qabra and meat from Kaniš (OBTR 33, sent by her brother Napsuna-Addu, possible governor of Šarbat).

Her authority is first perceptible in the fact that she gave orders and instructions to several people. For example, Kizzurum<sup>34</sup> wrote to Iltani (OBTR 111):

31. For a reflection about the notion of archive and its constitution, see Charpin 2008: 120–129.

32. See Svård 2015, especially § 1.3. Semantics of “Power”, pp. 15–19, as well as the chapters 5. Heterarchy, pp. 147–159, and 6. Heterarchical Power of Palace Women, pp. 161–169.

33. For this concept, see Svård 2007: 381–420.

34. Eight letters addressed to Iltani from Kizzurum were found at Tell al-Rimah. Kizzurum is also mentioned in some letters from other individuals and he declared himself “servant of Haqba-Hammu” in his seal’s inscription. From the study of Iltani’s archive, Kizzurum seems to have fulfilled the role of Haqba-Hammu’s administrator in Karana. For more details, see Langlois 2017: 141–143.

(5-11) “The king’s coming where you are is imminent. Instruct the officials in order that they get organized!”

Iltani had the authority to give orders to male officials and to get them organized for the king’s visit—as described above, the identification of this nameless king is not easy.

Iltani was the one with authority to seal the tablet consisting of the amount of textile workers’ account, as Kizzurum wrote to her (OBTR 107):

(5-16) “I have given to my mistress the tablet containing the activities of the taylor as soon as I reckoned them. Now may my mistress seal this tablet with her seal and have the carrier bring it to me (=Karana) along with the taylor.”

She also was the one with the authority to have a blacksmith take an oath, as Napsuna-Addu, her brother, mentioned in one of his letters (OBTR 25):

(6-17) “About the blacksmith’s female servant who dwells where you are, why is Num[h]a<sup>35</sup> [claim]ing (her)? Put in his (= the blacksmith) mouth an [oa]th by your lord and no one should claim this woman until Haqba-Hammu comes and resolves the case!”

Moreover, a servant became very efficient when he realized that his behavior would be related to Iltani (OBTR 163):

(5-12) “As soon as I wrote to my mistress, my mistress’s servant was afraid and gathered people to the threshing floor and in two days we finished winnowing everything on the threshing floor.”

#### 4.1.1.2. *Horizontal Application*

In addition to evidence of Iltani’s direct capacities of action, power, and authority, complex and tangled relational aspects of reciprocal authority, contradiction, and persuasion are perceptible throughout Iltani’s correspondence. Thus one Yarkib-Addu<sup>36</sup> tried to negotiate the release of his sisters with Iltani in his only one letter found in the archive (OBTR 136):

(4-25) “Previously Mut-hadqim had written to me: ‘Of course, take your sisters in Šubat-Enlil!’<sup>37</sup> Now, Mut-hadqim my brother gave you these women. Mut-hadqim is my brother and you are my sister, these women (thus) are your sisters. If a merchant leads these women, will you not release them for

35. For this toponym, see Ziegler and Langlois 2016.

36. Only one letter from Yarkib-Addu was found at Tell al-Rimah and he is not mentioned by other correspondents. It is thus very hard to get a precise idea of his link with Iltani and their relationship; see Langlois 2017: 166. For the case described in this letter, see Langlois 2017: 242.

37. For this toponym and the following, Yamutbal, see Ziegler and Langlois 2016.

Yamutbal’s sake? Now, I have just sent you one mina of silver for your dress-in. Let these women go, do not keep them!”

Involved in the movement of people, Iltani’s capacity to direct and manage is mentioned by her correspondents who often asked her to take action, even sometimes for their own interests. We have already seen the example of Kizzurum asking Iltani to instruct the officials for the unnamed king’s arrival (OBTR 111, above).

One example is significant: Mut-hadqim, a general of Hammurabi of Babylon, who had authority in the region and had sent people from Karana to harvest Iltani’s fields (OBTR 97), wrote to her in order to obtain oxen from Haqba-Hammu (OBTR 99):

<sup>(10-14)</sup> “Set out my case to Haqba-Hammu, remind (him) to send (them) fast to me!”

A powerful man like Mut-hadqim, head of Babylonian troops, full of authority in the region, who could have directly written to Haqba-Hammu needed Iltani’s help to get from her husband what he wanted. This example shows Iltani’s influence and her persuasiveness. Iltani’s position, close to Haqba-Hammu, made her a good resource for Mut-hadqim and shows her power other than vertical.<sup>38</sup>

And vice versa, Iltani could be used to convince Mut-hadqim. This is shown in one letter related to Belessunu’s “case of separation”. It seems that this woman was unhappy with her husband and thus wanted to live with her in-laws in the city of Andarig, far away from her husband.<sup>39</sup> Azzu<sup>40</sup> explained to Iltani her incapacity to take action in Belessunu’s case and implied that Iltani had to (OBTR 143):

<sup>(12-17)</sup> “You, where you are, you are close, I am far away and I cannot write to Mut-hadqi(m). This woman really wants to go to Andarig.”<sup>41</sup>

Unfortunately the few letters linked to this case do not provide all the details required to have a full understanding of the situation and the exact relationships existing between all the individuals involved. But this passage of Azzu’s letter clearly shows that Iltani was able to take action with Mut-hadqim, Hammurabi’s high rank official, for Belessunu’s sake and produces an example of Iltani’s heterarchical power relations.

Two other senders had recourse to Iltani in order to have access to the king himself. Amat-Šamaš, Iltani’s sister, asked her to intercede with the unnamed king in order to obtain new slaves (OBTR 134):

38. For the spouses who intercede with their husbands, see Charpin 2017: 238–254, especially 252 (§ 3.2.).

39. For more details, see Langlois 2017: 251–253 (§ III.4.2.3.1.).

40. Two letters addressed to Iltani from Azzu were found at Tell al-Rimah. She is also mentioned in three administrative texts. She seems to have been someone important, enjoying a high status at least equivalent to that of Iltani. For more details, see Langlois 2017: 124.

41. See also Sasson 2015: 328.

(27-33) “Yet the slaves that my father has given me are now old. I am just now sending to the king half a mina of silver; continue to support me and have him send me recently captured slaves who are reliable.”<sup>42</sup>

And Igmil-Sin, a possible son of Iltani, encouraged his mother to speak to the king in order to obtain what he wanted (OBTR 132):

(14-27) “Before the king goes to the High Land, speak to him in these terms: ‘Why until now is my lord keeping Mut-hadqim’s servant? If my lord does not want a matrimonial alliance with Mut-hadqim, he should return Mut-hadqim’s servant. Otherwise (= if he wants a matrimonial alliance), his servant will swear: The woman (= the future spouse), according to your order, will come back here (= where I am). The [m]an that you want to send [back] should go to his lord in Babylon!’”

And many other people asked Iltani to act with others, thus showing her capacity for negotiation, persuasion, and authority. For example, Amat-Šamaš, Iltani’s sister, asked her to take action in order to get back her servants (OBTR 133):

(21-23) “Now I am continuously writing for the(ir) return ; intervene on my behalf to have these servants returned!”

#### 4.1.2. *A Limited Authority*

As stated above, Iltani played an economic role with the production of goods and their exchange, benefited from a high rank in society, and had a hierarchical ascendancy over many people as well as heterarchical interactions. But, as expected, her power was not unlimited and her authority could not be exercised over everybody.

In a letter mentioned above, Iltani had the authority to have a blacksmith take an oath (OBTR 25). But the one who would, at the end, close the case was Haqba-Hammu.

Some letters of Haqba-Hammu dealing with sanctions or threats seem to constitute an indication of some limits of Iltani’s authority. For example, Haqba-Hammu had to press Dadu-rabi to let troops to Iltani because he regularly claimed them (OBTR 94):

(11-17) “But you continuously come back and claim these men. Now, listening to my present tablet, let these men go without claiming (them)! Be aware of the punishment I will give you (next) time!”

Haqba-Hammu punished someone who had misbehaved towards Iltani (OBTR 90):

(11-12) “I imposed (a fine of) two minas of silver on him (i.e. Uri-Addu)”.

42. Sasson 2015: 314.

We do not know the precise nature of the affront to Iltani but this letter indirectly attests the existence of some opposition to Haqba-Hammu’s spouse.

Moreover she also encountered some difficulties in getting some people to harvest her fields, as will be seen below (OBTR 156).

#### 4.1.3. *Possessing Great Strength of Character*

Iltani seems to have possessed great strength of character: obstinate, she resisted her husband’s will and she kept goods and people belonging to others. According to one of Napsuna-Addu’s letters (Iltani’s brother), he sent silver to Haqba-Hammu, but Iltani did not immediately have him sent the goods purchased (OBTR 56):

<sup>(5-11)</sup> “I have sent to Haqba-Hammu [x] minas of silver for a purchase. He probably had (it) sent to you. Is this the case? Send me the purchase you know!”

In another of his letters, a reported speech of Iltani could possibly be a denial of retention of goods (OBTR 51):

<sup>(9-16)</sup> “About what you wrote to me saying: ‘Why would I not send you all I prepared?’ Send me yourself all that you prepared!”

Others illustrate the same tendency for people. Riš-Addu<sup>43</sup> asked for the return of his servants (OBTR 118):

<sup>(13-23)</sup> “They told me that my servants reside in your service. In these conditions, do me a favor and strive to send me back my servants! Mut-hadqim and Amat-Šamaš should know it and rejoice! Or, send me two female servants in exchange!”

Iltani also kept people belonging to Imgur-Šamaš, who was perhaps her brother, and Haqba-Hammu had to write to her (OBTR 76):

<sup>(4-7)</sup> “Napsuna-Addu keeps writing to me about Imgur-Šamaš’ people. Release these people!”

Iltani even kept people belonging to Haqba-Hammu, her own husband, and he had to insist, writing to her several times about it (OBTR 83):

<sup>(4-12)</sup> “Aya-yahar, the spouse of Nur-Šamaš the fattener who has moved to Bunineyu, did I not write to you for her return? Why did you keep this woman? Now, send this woman to me!”

43. Only two letters from Riš-Addu found at Tell al-Rimah document this man. He seems to have had an equivalent status to that of Iltani; see Langlois 2017: 154–156.

Actually it seems that Iltani was not used to immediately obeying her husband, and many letters from him call her to order. Haqba-Hammu had to insist several times to Iltani, as is shown for example by OBTR 60, mentioned above, and the textiles requested.

One letter is particularly interesting in this regard, in my opinion. Addressed to Haqba-Hammu by Iltani, it quotes his words (OBTR 158):

<sup>(5-28)</sup> “My lord (i.e. Haqba-Hammu) wrote this to me about releasing Tazabru’s oxen, sheep and donkeys: ‘(If) you do not release the oxen, sheep and donkeys, I will cut you into 12 pieces!’ (This is) what my lord wrote to me. Why would my lord threaten (write) to end my life? Yesterday, I told my lord: ‘It is his shepherd who previously has kept his oxen and sheep. He’s grazing it in Yašibatum (i.e. where Iltani had lands)’, this is what I told my lord. My lord now should write to have his oxen and sheep taken (out) from Yašibatum. If I had taken anything among the oxen and sheep, my lord should impose punishment on me! Would I, without my lord’s permission, lay hand to take anything? Why would my lord threaten to end my life?’”<sup>44</sup>

This letter shows that Iltani had sufficient skill in presenting the facts and defending herself. The quotation mentioning the fate that Iltani would incur if she did not release the cattle seems exaggerated. However, this letter, informed by the other cases of retention documented in Iltani’s archive, shows that Iltani’s ability to keep what did not belong to her seemed to tire her husband.<sup>45</sup>

Iltani seems to have been so bold that she tried to exercise her authority over people out of her reach. Her request for workers to harvest her fields, expressed to two dignitaries of Karana’s kingdom, Nanna-batanum and Inib-Šamaš<sup>46</sup>, failed, as she related to her husband (OBTR 156):

<sup>(5-21)</sup> “The field(s) of the palace and the servants of my lord were assigned for the harvest, but mine, the fields in Badrum and Yašibatum were not assigned. I wrote to Nanna-batanum and Inib-Šamaš and they (replied): ‘Write to the king!’ My lord knows the work-force for the harvest I have. Every year it really decreases. May my lord write so that my field may be assigned to the harvest! Do not let the donkeys devour (my) field!”

Nanna-batanum and Inib-Šamaš, advising Iltani to write to the king, politely refused her request or at least tried to stall for time. Iltani wrote the story to her husband in order to have him taking action for her sake and have him exercising his authority over people who were out of her reach but not out of his.

44. Sasson 2015: 325, n. 93.

45. The reason why OBTR 158 was not sent to Haqba-Hammu but kept in Iltani’s archive is not established with absolute certainty; see Langlois 2017, volume 2: 37–38, § I.4.3.5.

46. Only one letter from Nanna-batanum to Iltani was found at Tell al-Rimah. He seems to have been a dignitary of Karana’s kingdom; see Langlois 2017: 148. Inib-Šamaš is only documented by his seal impressions and by two mentions of his name in Iltani’s archive. He declared himself “servant of Haqba-Hammu” in his seal inscription; see Langlois 2017: 139.



In summary, the notion of power, so difficult to define, is not limited to possibilities of action resulting from a hierarchically higher status or from sources of wealth. Thus Iltani, however rich and highly placed she was, sometimes had to request someone else’s help, like Mut-hadqim or her husband, as already seen. Regardless, however limited her direct authority seems to have been, her capacity for action, negotiation, and persuasion within her circle made her a good resource for people, thus increasing her power. Moreover, Iltani possessed great strength of character that allowed her to keep doing what she wanted.

#### 4.2. *Slanderer?*

Many letters from Iltani’s archive give evidence of conflicts.<sup>47</sup> Many of these are due to calumny<sup>48</sup>, and it seems that Iltani had a tendency to lose her temper and to promulgate gossip and slander. Yataraya, possibly Haqba-Hammu’s second wife, reproached Iltani for telling slanders (OBTR 126). Sometimes this was even against her own family: according to the letter Uri-Addu sent to Iltani (OBTR 115), she defamed Imgur-Šamaš, who was probably her brother, to Haqba-Hammu about his servants:

(5-20) “Imgur-Šamaš came here and complained emphatically: ‘Iltani slandered me to Haqba-Hammu, as the servants are constantly neglecting (their work).’ Instead of protecting your brother, you yourself started slandering him and gave him a bad reputation. Now, speak with Haqba-Hammu in order to give him his (i.e. Imgur-Šamaš) servants”.<sup>49</sup>

One of her correspondents reassured her but also ordered her to hold her tongue (OBTR 131):

(14-23) “You don’t have to worry about anything! I instructed Igmil-Sin (= maybe a son of Iltani) about your concerns as well as mine before his coming. He will go up to my lord’s son and he will do all that he can to appease you. Be quiet until he comes! Let no unpleasant word to anyone get out of your mouth!”

#### 4.3. *A Strong Woman under Pressure to Conform to a Certain Role*

As stated, Iltani had power and a strong character. However some complaints from her correspondents show that they tried to put pressure on her in order to make her conform to the role they expected. They thus depicted her as someone insensitive to social expectations and people, as well as someone fragile who needed paternalism.

##### 4.3.1. *Insensitive to Social Rules and People?*

Diverse recriminations are expressed by Iltani’s entourage, especially her sisters Lamassani and Amat-Šamaš, showing that Iltani did not act according to what people or society expected.<sup>50</sup> Through

47. For diverse relational matters, see Langlois 2017: 243–255 (§ III.4.).

48. For calumny in Old Babylonian letters from Mari, see Sasson 2012: 525–542.

49. See Langlois 2017: 249–250 (§ III.4.2.1.2.).

50. For Amat-Šamaš and her correspondence with Iltani, see Langlois 2017: 119–121. For Lamassani, see Langlois 2017: 144–145.

their letters, they portray Iltani as someone careless towards her family. According to them, she did not send enough letters and news, as is shown by Lamassani (OBTR 120):

<sup>(3-5)</sup> “I am well. The caravan comes regularly but you never sent me news of you.”

As well as Amat-Šamaš (OBTR 133):

<sup>(23-25)</sup> “Since I sent you my servant, you never sent me news of you.”

These recriminations are probably exaggerations or expressions of self-pity in order to obtain more correspondence. At that time, receiving letters was not only a source of information but also a mark of honor. Writing to someone hierarchically superior was a duty and the asymmetrical character of the exchange (that is to say the perceived lack of answers) is illustrated in the whole Old Babylonian correspondence<sup>51</sup>.

Moreover, Iltani did not send gifts as her correspondents expected. The exchange of gifts or goods is well attested by the Old Babylonian documentation, especially between royal courts.<sup>52</sup> But this practice of gift—counter-gift was not limited to the higher sphere of society.<sup>53</sup> It expressed the desire to maintain good relations. Like the necessity of correspondence, the importance of gift exchange at that time explains that the lack of it could offer grounds for complaint.<sup>54</sup> Again, Lamassani complained to Iltani (OBTR 120):

<sup>(17-22)</sup> “Sin-remeni, your son, is always travelling and you never sent me a gift; you did not honor me in the house I am inhabiting.”

And Iltani’s sister was not the only one blaming her on this account. Riš-Addu also did (OBTR 119):

<sup>(9-21)</sup> “(While) you were dwelling in Ešnunna, you never remembered to send me a gift, you did not encourage me. Now you are dwelling in Karana and there is no one, among all my brothers, to whom you have not sent a gift. When (will you do it) for me? Not even once, not once did you remember my name and encourage me.”

51. For more details, see Charpin 2007 and Charpin 2013. In Iltani’s archive, her sisters are not the only ones who complained about the lack of correspondence or answer. Belessunu (OBTR 141) and Napsuna-Addu (OBTR 30 and 49) also complained as well as Iltani herself to Napsuna-Addu according to her reported speech (OBTR 28). For more details, see Langlois 2017: 243–244.

52. See Lerouxel 2002.

53. See Durand 1997: 75–81.

54. In addition to the insult caused by the lack of gift, another one could be produced by the incorrect estimate concerning the value of the gift to be offered; see Sasson 2012.

Among Iltani’s correspondence, there is another interesting example of pressure imposed on her that deals with the reactions and behavior a man expected from a woman. Yasitna-abum<sup>55</sup> blamed Iltani for not keeping her promises (OBTR 150):

(8-12) “In Andarig, you have entrusted me with keeping birds not yet caught, (telling) me: ‘Learn the art of a scribe, and I myself will make of you a propertied notable’. You made me trust in such promises.”

And later:

(17-20) “You have not kept in mind that you once entrusted me and had plans for me. You had none of a woman’s compassion for me.”<sup>56</sup>

Thus it is remarkable that people expected some compassion from women... and the way Yasitna-abum wrote it, it seems that they did not expect the same from men.

It is not possible to assess the reality of these reproaches recorded in Iltani’s archive. They could be simple exaggerations or misunderstandings of some situations. However they seem to be strategies from Iltani’s entourage to achieve its ends and to put pressure on her.

#### 4.3.2. *People Trying to Demean Her?*

At first sight, if one does not pay attention, Iltani might have come across as fragile and easily worried through the letters found in her archive: several of her correspondents wrote to her that she should not be constantly troubled. Napsuna-Addu, her brother, seems to intend to reassure her and reduce her pain in one of his letters (OBTR 20):

(15-23) “A crazy mind spoke to you and you paid attention to his words. Right now, may the god impose on (him) a “darken word”<sup>57</sup>! He spoke to you without knowing anything. Don’t pay attention to a crazy mind’s word!”

Nanna-mansum<sup>58</sup>, another of her correspondents, finished one of his letters (OBTR 147) saying:

(18-28) “Don’t worry! As long as I have not advised you, I shall not go elsewhere. Until the day I reach you, don’t speak to anybody! Let your decision be made! Don’t be constantly worried!”

55. Three letters sent by Yasitna-abum were found at Tell al-Rimah, but only two of them were addressed to Iltani. Yasitna-abum was a scribe and one of his letters, OBTR 150, is a famous long petition showing the extent of his competence; see Langlois 2017: 167.

56. This letter was studied by B. Foster (1993: 98–102) and recently translated by J. Sasson (2015: 37–38).

57. For the philological discussion about this akkadian word (*tašlimtum*), see Langlois 2017, vol. 2: 44.

58. Nanna-mansum sent three letters to Iltani that were found during the excavations of Tell al-Rimah. He was an important man and, even though his title and function are not known, he may have been a Babylonian official; see Langlois 2017: 149–150.

Likewise, Haqba-Hammu seems to reassure his spouse (OBTR 62):

<sup>(4-14)</sup> “Since matters got better, why do you want to evacuate? The servants should not go! And I gave the same order to Yataraya. Don’t worry, before five days I shall come to you.”

Haqba-Hammu seems to have been protective with her. He assigned goods to her, like barley, pigs, malt, and bread seized in Yašibatūm according to OBTR 95, and he defended her interests many times: for example, he imposed a fine to Uri-Addu (two minas of silver, see OBTR 95) or called Dadu-rabi to order according to OBTR 94, as seen above.

It is hard to perceive the personality traits of people documented in cuneiform texts. If someone only sees these passages, he could reasonably think about a possible predisposition to worry in Iltani’s personality or an anxiety due to a specific situation, like political troubles. The allusive character of the correspondence does not enable us to assess the truth among assumptions. Actually, if we look at the entire Old Babylonian correspondence, we find more cases of senders reassuring the addressees, whatever their sex. It rather seems to be a rhetorical element used in order to demean and to infantilize the correspondent, as is shown by the correspondence of Yasmah-Addu from Mari.<sup>59</sup>

## 5. Conclusion

To conclude, the discovery *in situ* of Iltani’s archive was an important find. The corpus is extraordinarily rich in information that gives us a better knowledge of Iltani herself as well as her entourage. Iltani’s character cannot be known for sure, and her traits as depicted in her correspondence only give a partial view of her complex personality. She seems to have been bold, obstinate, and opportunistic, and she definitely exercised some power.

The study of Iltani’s archive and her entourage also helps us to clarify some aspects of their life and of the history of the kingdom in which they lived. But even more interesting is the description of the daily life of a high ranking woman from Upper Mesopotamia during the Old Babylonian period, which helps to improve our understanding of the place of women in that society.

## 6. Bibliography

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59. See, for example, the correspondence between Išme-Dagan and his brother Yasmah-Addu found in the Mari archives like A.2728, ARM 4 25 and 68, or ARM 1 135. For Išme-Dagan’s correspondence, see the book to be published by N. Ziegler.

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# Female Scholars in Mesopotamia?

Natalie Naomi May<sup>1</sup>

## 1. Introduction

The scribal system was the primary vehicle for transmitting and preserving knowledge in one of mankind's longest-living traditions of learning—Mesopotamian cuneiform scholarship. Writing and copying literary and scientific compositions was part of education in scribal schools. Modern research distinguishes different levels of scribes. The most learned and experienced of them are defined as scholars. They created literary, religious, and historical works, serialized texts, and other cuneiform compositions, generally described in Assyriology as scholarly or even literary. But neither Sumerian, nor Akkadian has a word equivalent to modern “scientist.” The word for a scribe, *dub-sar/ṭupšarru*, designates a scribe of any professional level including the highest of them—scholars. For instance, the greatest Neo-Assyrian scholar Nabû-zuqup-kēnu, called himself almost only with a modest title “scribe.”<sup>2</sup> Scholars of the highest qualification were referred to with the term *ummânu*, “the expert.” Thus chief scribes of the kings bore the title *ummânu*. But the same word could also stand for highly qualified artisans, who were not necessarily literate.

A number of ancient disciplines of highest scribal expertise, *ummânûtu*, are known starting with the Old Babylonian period at least.<sup>3</sup> These are *bārû*, the haruspex, *āšîpu*, the exorcist, *kalû*, the lamentation priest, and *asû*, the physician. The first three were also temple personnel, the so called *ērib bīti*, allowed to enter temple cellas. In the seventh-century Assyria they appear in the lists of court scholars together with a new category—an astronomer/astrologer, *ṭupšar Enūma Anu Enlil*.<sup>4</sup> The education of Mesopotamian scholars encompassed studying a much wider spectrum of compositions than a basic

1. natamay@zedat.fu-berlin.de. Berlin. The abbreviations used in this article are those employed by the *Reallexikon der Assyriologie*. AUAM is the signature of the Andrew University Archaeological Museum and E the signature of the Otago Museum in Dunedin, New Zealand.

2. May 2018a: 110–112.

3. *Kalû* exists already in the Old Akkadian. Sumerian attestations are, of course, even earlier.

4. E.g., SAA 7 1, see also SAA 10: XIII–XIV.

curriculum.<sup>5</sup> For obtaining the skills of a scholar a much higher level of proficiency in cuneiform was necessary than for training a scribe, whose duty would be processing economic records. We can add a mathematician and probably an architect<sup>6</sup> to the list of professions that demanded advanced literacy, numeracy, and the highest level of scribal art. The top level of scribal lore was classified as a secret knowledge of experts and protected by secrecy colophons.<sup>7</sup> It was conceived as created together with the creation of humankind.<sup>8</sup>

The Sumerian deity of scribes, the goddess Nisaba, is female. The first author known to us by name is the princess and priestess Enheduanna, daughter of Sargon of Agade. Female literacy and numeracy in Mesopotamia, especially in the early periods, is well known, and the existence of female scribes in most periods of Mesopotamian history is beyond any doubt.<sup>9</sup> Eleanor Robson concluded concerning the scribal education of women: “female scribes learned the standard student exercises, administered large households, and assisted in the maintenance of numerate justice.”<sup>10</sup>

## 2. Female Scholars

But were there scholars among literate women? The present study investigates the attestations for female scholarship in Mesopotamia and explores the diachronic changes in this evidence.

Brigitte Lion and Eleanor Robson have identified four texts from the Old Babylonian period with colophons stating that they were written by women. These four texts correlate with the four levels of the scribal education: a syllabary from year 14 of Samsuiluna (1735 BCE), which aimed at basic training in writing signs; two lexical lists of various complexity; and, finally, a literary composition *The Song of the Hoe*, the copying of which required the highest level of not just scribal but scholarly training.<sup>11</sup> School texts found in the houses of *nadītus* led to the conclusion that this category of Old Babylonian women was literate;<sup>12</sup> moreover one can assume that they got some training according to standards of scribal schools. Among all the colophons left to us by Mesopotamian scribes only these four Old Babylonian

5. On scribal education, see, e.g., Veldhuis 2014: 204–225, 425–429 and passim, Gesche 2001, particularly pp. 213–219 for the education of scholars.

6. May 2018b. Note that in the first-millennium Babylonia, architects are on the second place (after the scribes themselves) as descendants of scribes, which points out that a builder was a learned profession. This is based on the numbers in Dandamaev 1983: 237, which might have changed due to the recent publications. Despite the very high level of development of mathematics in Mesopotamia and numerous cuneiform mathematical texts there was no world for a mathematician. For the advanced studies of law, see, e.g., Gesche 2001: 217–218, but a “lawyer” was also not categorized in Mesopotamia as a scholarly profession.

7. For means of protecting specialized corpora of professional texts, see Lenzi 2008: 140–215 (with pp. 186–204 on the *Geheimwissen* colophons in particular) and Stevens 2013.

8. Cavigneaux and Jaques 2010.

9. There are a number of studies dedicated to female scribes and authors. E.g., Harris 1990, Lion 2001, 2009, Lion and Robson 2005; Meier 1991; Pearce 1995: 2266; Robson 2007; Stol 2016: 367–371; Westenholz 2006, 1989: 548–549, and Dalley 1984: 110 for Mari, Charpin 2010: 63–64. But note the absence of female scribes in the Neo- and Late Babylonian periods (see below, fn. 70).

10. Robson 2007: 247.

11. Lion and Robson 2005. For Proto á = A, see also Harris 1990: 9.

12. Charpin 2010: 63, with n. 29 on p. 257–258, Wilcke 2000: 32.



texts testify that they were written by women. Not a single first-millennium colophon points to a scholarly text written or copied by a female.

### 2.1. *Female Diviners, Exorcists, Wailers?*

Two of the aforementioned Akkadian terms for scholars have feminine forms. These are *āšiptu*, literally “woman exorcist,” and *bārītu*, “female diviner.” For both of these professions the female form is attested only once as applied to a mortal woman and not to goddesses. These single attestations stand out in their loneliness against the background of the copious evidence for male representatives of the professions of an exorcist and diviner. The only example for a female exorcist comes from an incantation incorporated into the first-millennium anti-witchcraft ritual *Maqlû*. There the *āšiptu* is listed together with female sorceresses of various types, but also with female cultic personnel.<sup>13</sup> *Āšiptu* here, together with the other terms in the list, is simply an epithet for a witch who possesses supernatural powers, like the ability to seize “the mouth of the gods,” to bind “the knees of the goddesses,” and to hurt humans. Thus, her evil impact must be neutralized.

Contrarily, female *bāriātu* are mentioned together with *šā’ilātu*, female diviners of the other kind, in an Old Assyrian document. These Old Assyrian she-diviners are asked, alongside the female dream interpreters,<sup>14</sup> to interpret a dream.<sup>15</sup> Significantly, the inquiry comes from a woman as well. The male *šā’ilu*, the oneiromancer, is usually attested beside a male *bārû* and seems to be, according to CAD, “a popular rather than a professional diviner.”<sup>16</sup> However, for a male *šā’ilu* CAD suggests a concrete professional specialization “dream interpreter, necromancer.”<sup>17</sup> In my eyes it is not the degree of “professionalism” but the relation to the written tradition and the kind of specialisation that matters here. Neither a male *šā’ilu* nor a female *šā’iltu* are known as authors or copyists of any divinatory text. It might be because in order to perform a divination the *bārû* was to examine the intestines of a sacrificial animal. Thus from the earliest periods he was closely connected with the temple,<sup>18</sup> which was a stronghold of the Mesopotamian scholarly tradition.

*Kalû*, Sumerian gala, the lamentation priest, who often performed a female role, was a profession with “unique gender identity.”<sup>19</sup> The Sumerian *kalû*’s laments are written in Emesal. Although Emesal was a “women’s language,”<sup>20</sup> the sex of *kalû*-priests was doubtlessly male. Female mourners, ama-gal, are known from Ur III texts, where they are closely associated with the male gala/*kalû*.<sup>21</sup> A document

13. *Kaššāptu nērtānītu elēnītu naršimdatu āšiptu eššebūtu mušlahḫatu agugiltu qadištu nadītu ištarītu kulmašītu*, “Witch, murderess, denouncer, *naršimdatu*, exorcist, ecstatic, snake charmer, *agugiltu*, *qadištu*-votary, *nadītu*-woman, Ištar-votary, *kulmašītu*-votary” (*Maqlû* III 39–44 = AMD 10: 87–88, 242, 307).

14. Harris 1990: 12.

15. *annakam šā’ilātīm bārī’ātīm u eṭemmē nušālma*, “we are inquiring here of women dream interpreters, women diviners, and the spirits of the dead” (TCL 4 5: 5).

16. See CAD Š I 110b and Harris 1990: 13.

17. CAD Š I 110b–112a.

18. See May 2017 with further literature.

19. Gabbay 2008: 4–56.

20. A. Löhnert (2008: 423) suggested to define Emesal as a sociolect. But G. Rubio (2009, especially p. 32) has shown that it is actually a genrelect. For the interpretation of Emesal as a “thin language,” see Michalowski 2004: 23.

21. As are also three more female cultic professions: ama-ér-ra, da-m-ab-ba, and um-ma (idem: 2011: 68, 70).

from Garšana<sup>22</sup> testifies that *ér* (= *takribtum*) laments were performed by gala lamentation priests together with ama-gal female mourners.<sup>23</sup> Twice the Old Babylonian literary compositions are defined as *amirakutum*: firstly, they are designated as *ama-ér-ra-ku-tim ša DINGIR.MAḤ*, i.e., Bēlet-ilī, in the colophon of the tablet-basket label,<sup>24</sup> and secondly, the unpublished hymn to Mama/Bēlet-ilī is called in the catch-line of its colophon *a-mi-ra-ku-tum*.<sup>25</sup> Their headings demonstrate the relationship of these compositions to *ama'errû*. But the Akkadian word *ama'errû*, “female mourner,” “wailing woman,” derived from the Sumerian *ama-ér-ra* is extremely rare and only known from lexical lists. Furthermore, there is nothing that points to the female authorship of the aforementioned laments or hymn.<sup>26</sup>

## 2.2. Female Physicians

Nonetheless, one of the scholarly professions was mastered by women starting with its very first occurrence in the Early Dynastic period (ca. 2500 BCE). This is the profession of a physician. We do not know the Akkadian word for it. In both Akkadian and Sumerian texts it is written ideographically as a-zu munus or munus a-zu, where a-zu is “physician” and munus a “female” determinative. Again, the main Mesopotamian healing deities were always female.<sup>27</sup> These are the Sumerian goddesses Nintiguda, Ninkarrak and Ninisina, who by the second millennium merge into one goddess—Gula.<sup>28</sup> Gula was one of the most important deities of the pantheon. Gula, *azugallatu*, “the great physician,” was also a female sage, *apkallatu*.<sup>29</sup> In the Gula Hymn by Bulliṣa-rabi, among her other wisdom qualities she is assigned with the professions of an exorcist, *āšiptu*, and a diviner, *bārītu*.<sup>30</sup>

Probably the first mortal female physician, whose sex is suggested by her possibly female name, appears after the priest of Gula in a list of witnesses on a field-sales deed from Šuruppak dated to the Fara period.<sup>31</sup> A female physician Du-bil-da-mu a-zu munus from a place called Ada is attested twice in a text from Ebla.<sup>32</sup> Her name and title are found in a long account of persons who receive textiles.

Best documented is the female physician Ubartum. Almost fifty texts from the Ur III period contain her name, but she is designated as a physician in only seven of them. However, all these are economic

22. CUSAS 3 1035.

23. Gabbay 2011: 71.

24. Shaffer 1993: 209; BM 85563: 10–12 mentions 37(!) landscape tablets of this genre.

25. Groneberg 2003: 56, 59.

26. CAD AII 1a.

27. Two sons of Gula/Ninkarrak, Damu and Ninazu, are to the best of my knowledge the only Mesopotamian male healing gods. Despite his name, the healing functions of Ninazu are overshadowed by his functions as the city god of Enegi and Ešnunna. He is primarily a chthonic deity, who in the medical texts is found only in the incantations against a snake bite. The cults of both brothers disappear after the Old Babylonian period.

28. On the syncretism of the healing goddesses see, e.g., in Asher-Greve and Westenholz 2013: 82–86.

29. The term *apkallatu* and its main masculine form *apkallu* is applied respectively to Gula and to males exclusively (Harris 1990: 4). Gula is called *apkallat ilāni*, “the wise (woman) of the gods” in STT 73:2 3 (Reiner 1960: 32), and *apkallat barāt muššipat kalama*, “a wise (woman), a diviner (woman), an exorcist (woman) of all” in K. 232: 29 (Mullo-Weir 1929: 17).

30. Lambert 1967: 128, line 183 of The Gula Hymn of Bulliṣa-rabi. R. Harris (1990: 3, n. 1) stresses that in this very composition “the traditional roles of women” as a daughter, daughter-in-law, spouse and housekeeper “are best summed.”

31. See Krecher 1973: 196 no. 1 v 9–10. The element *nin* in this early period does not necessarily indicate a female and a-zu appears, as is the way of this period, without a determinative. A female witness is unusual. Cf. Kleinermann 2011: 179, n. 16.

32. ARET 1, no. 1 rev. v 3–4; x 12–13.

documents that cover a sixteen-year period. We do not have at our disposal any text written by Ubartum herself. Ubartum belonged to a very prominent Garšana family. Both of her brothers also bore the title “physician.” Moreover, one of them was a general and the governor of Garšana, married to a princess, daughter of Šulgi.<sup>33</sup> Thus, the doctor in the Ur III period was an honourable profession and even statesmen could hold it. It has been suggested that Ubartum was actually a gynaecologist but no evidence points to this.<sup>34</sup>

There are several attestations for female physicians in the Old Babylonian period: a female physician is mentioned in a grain distribution list on the 21st of the month Simānu of year 51 of Rīm-Sîn,<sup>35</sup> *munus a-zu* appears as entry 705 in the Old Babylonian lexical list *lú* from Nippur,<sup>36</sup> a female doctor is attested in two letters found at Mari.<sup>37</sup>

Interesting in this context is an Old Babylonian birth incantation known in four copies:<sup>38</sup> one bilingual (AUAM 73.3094) and the remaining three Sumerian. One of the latter is dated to the 35th year of Ammi-ditana (1648 BCE,<sup>39</sup> BM 97093) and the other to the year 7 of Samsuiluna (1742 BCE, MLC 1207). In three of the four copies of this incantation, Sumerian is distinctly remarkable by its orthography. To one extent or another these three copies are all written in syllabic Sumerian and in fact present a phonetic transcription that, by and large, ignores conventional Sumerian orthography. Sumerian logograms designating the roots and grammatical elements are rendered phonetically and only the pronunciation of the words of the language, which by the time of the composition of this text was no longer spoken, is transmitted. In E 47.190 and AUAM 73.3094 the determinatives are written only with the divine names.<sup>40</sup> It is clear that the purpose of phonetic writing was to help a performer pronouncing an orally recited incantation. Most of the texts, for which the same phenomenon of syllabic Sumerian is attested, are compositions written in Emesal.<sup>41</sup> This served the purpose of oral recitation by lamentation priests.<sup>42</sup> The overwhelming majority of the Old Babylonian syllabic texts written in Emegir, the main dialect of Sumerian, come either from provinces, or from the areas where Sumerian was never a spoken language, or even from the lands where even Akkadian was foreign.<sup>43</sup> Some of them also belong to the

33. Kleinermann 2011: 179–180.

34. Eadem: 179, with n. 18.

35. AO 8493: 27, published as TCL 10 107 and edited in Jean 1931: no. 114, with the reading *munus a-zu*? marked as questionable. A collation by the present author proved that an Old Babylonian variant of the sign ZU appears on this tablet and thus the reading *munus a-zu* is certain.

36. Edited by J. Taylor: <http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/dcclt/corpus> (visited on 16.09.2017).

37. ARM 10 18: 3; ARM 10 72:14–15; Dalley 1984: 110, Harris 1990: 11.

38. Those are BM 97093 (unpublished); E 47.190 (Farber 1984); MLC 1207 (van Dijk 1975); AUAM 73.3094 (Cohen 1976). Few lines in Akkadian and the colophon, which dates this text to the reign of Ammiditana, are preserved on the reverse of BM 97093. E 47.190 rev. 6', 8', contains rubrics in Akkadian (Farber 1984: 314).

39. According to the middle chronology.

40. On the one hand, this can be the evidence that the word *dingir* was in fact pronounced, but on the other it can be just a matter of reverence.

41. Kercher 1967, especially pp. 25–28.

42. Delnero 2015.

43. Krecher 1967: 28–30. The known locations include Šaduppûm, Mari, Assur, and Ḫuzîrîna, but also Susa, Ugarit, and Hatušša. Very few texts come from Girsu (Tello) and Sippar, and only one from Kiš and one from Nippur.

repertory of lamentation priests. Paul Delnero has shown that syllabic rendering in case of lamentations was by no means caused by the scribe's ignorance, but only by the necessities of oral performance.<sup>44</sup> I suggest that this was primarily the need to memorize the text of the birth incantation in order to recite or sing it, which was realized by its orthographic writing in the three copies. However, given that we know of the existence of female doctors in the Old Babylonian period and before, and that this is an obstetrical text, it is tempting to suggest that it was probably written by and/or for a female physician, who was literate and had to know to chant an incantation as a part of the her medical treatment.

### 2.3. Female Herbalists

Another female profession was closely associated with medicine.<sup>45</sup> It is *muraqqītu*, ideographically written as <sup>m</sup>ī.RÁ.RÁ, literally meaning “the one who mixes the oils.” Notably, two translations were suggested for this word in the same issue of *Archiv für Orientforschungen*. Ernst Weidner believed it is an “Apotheker.”<sup>46</sup> However, Benno Landsberger in the same volume stresses that “‘Parfümeur’ (nicht ‘Apotheker’)”<sup>47</sup> is the meaning of *muraqqû*. His opinion naturally is expressed in the Chicago Assyrian Dictionary which translates this word as a “perfume maker.” Wolfram von Soden, however, kept the neutral “Salbenmischerin” for *muraqqītu*, though his Akkadisches Handwörterbuch translates *muraqqû*, the masculine form of the term for the same profession, as “Parfümeur.”<sup>48</sup> The Akkadian word *muraqqû* is of Assyrian origin and is attested already in an Old Assyrian letter.<sup>49</sup> The use of the term continues into the Middle Assyrian and Neo-Assyrian dialects. Under Assyrian influence the traditional Babylonian *raqqû* is replaced by the Assyrian *muraqqītu*. In the Old Akkadian and Old Babylonian periods, including Mari, *raqqû*<sup>50</sup> designates the same profession as the Assyrian *muraqqû* in Neo-Babylonian texts. For the latter the ideogram Ì.RÁ.RÁ literally meaning “oils mixer” is used, but for *raqqû* also ŠIM.SAR/MÚ is found.<sup>51</sup> The latter can be interpreted as a “herbalist.”<sup>52</sup> The feminine form of the word is not attested in Akkadian at all in any period, but the Early Dynastic texts from Šuruppak dealing with the allocation of barley have dam šim-mú, which apparently means she-herbalist; moreover in Lagash of the Early Dynastic III

44. Delnero 2015: 115.

45. Herbs were widely used in Mesopotamia by exorcists, whose primary function was healing, and by physicians. Furthermore, in *A Dog for Nintinuga*, a literary composition unearthed in a scribal school at Nippur, šim-mú, the herbalist, appears among the epithets of this healing goddess after a-zu, the physician (a-zu sag-ge šim-mú tur5-ra-ta, physician, herbalist of the sick” (UM 29-16-139+ rev. iii 28, see <http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=c.5.7.2#> accessed on 23.02.2018).

46. Weidner 1935–1936: 17.

47. Landsberger 1935–1936: 150.

48. CAD M II 218a and AHW 675b s.v. *muraqqītu* and *muraqqiu* / *muraqqû* respectively.

49. KAV 194: 9.

50. For Mari, see Cousin 2016: 513–514 with further references. For *bīt raqqīm*, see Joannès 1993: 262. For the Old Babylonian Larsa—Middeke-Conlin 2014: 15. R. Middeke-Conlin (2014) analysed the evidence for the production of aromatics in Larsa of the Old Babylonian period. H. Brunke and W. Sallaberger (2010) discuss perfume recipes of the Ur III period and the evidence for the use of perfumes, (ibid.: 53) in the Old Sumerian period.

51. Lexical sections in CAD M II 218 s.v. *muraqqû* and R174 s.v. *raqqû* respectively and Canonical lú = ša (MSL XII: 137, ll. 257, 259). For the Old Babylonian Larsa, see Middeke-Conlin 2014: 15–16, who translates *raqqû* as “perfumer,” but discusses the ambiguity of the term.

52. Cf. Middeke-Conlin 2014: 16.

period aromatic oils, their acquisition, production, and distribution, were associated with the household of the ruler's wife (é-mí) which was also the household of the healing goddess Bau (é-ba-ba<sub>6</sub>).<sup>53</sup> Contrarily to *raqqû*, Assyrian *muraqqîtu* was a predominantly female profession. Apart from lexical lists, masculine *muraqqû* is only attested three times, while for women this profession is widely represented both in Middle and Neo-Assyrian texts. The “oil mixer” might encompass both professions, that of a perfume maker and of an apothecary. Moreover, there is a substantial overlapping between perfume recipes and medical recipes, written by physicians and exorcists.<sup>54</sup> I suggest to interpret *muraqqû/muraqqîtu* as a “herbalist,” which reflects well the functions of this profession, its relationship to Mesopotamian medicine and place in healing practices.<sup>55</sup>

The majority of the Middle Assyrian textual evidence for perfume makers comes from the archive of the Middle Assyrian high official Bābu-aḥa-iddina. His household was a centre of perfume production apparently for the needs of the palace.<sup>56</sup> Here we find also the term *rab muraqqiāte*, “the head of the female oil mixers.”

In the Neo-Assyrian period the profession of an oil mixer still exists and is connected to the palace as well. Thus a *muraqqîtu* together with her two maids appears in the list of female personnel.<sup>57</sup> In the Neo-Babylonian period, six *muraqqêtu* are mentioned in a list of oil distribution dated to the 13th year of Nebuchadnezzar II together with the exiled Judean king Jehoiachin, his five sons, and other exiled Judeans. The herbalists, *muraqqêtu*, are listed in two other oil distribution texts among various exiles that received goods at the royal court.<sup>58</sup>

The only instances where female perfume mixers are mentioned in scholarly texts derive from the Middle Assyrian period. These are two colophons of perfume recipes. The better preserved of the two dates to the fifth regnal year of Tukulti-Ninurta I (conventionally 1240 BCE) and reads as follows (KAR 220 = VAT 10165 = N 1 [34]):<sup>59</sup>

Rev. col. iv

8' r̄tār<sup>17</sup>-qī<sup>71</sup>-tu ša 2 BĀN ḫ<sup>meš</sup> giš<sup>GI</sup> e-li-e DÙG.GA šá UGU LUGAL

9' i-r̄na<sup>1</sup> pi-i<sup>mí</sup> Tap-pu-ti-d<sup>NIN</sup>-É.GAL-lim<sup>mí(SAL)</sup> mu-raq(SAL)-qi-te<sup>60</sup> na-ás-ḥa

53. For the editions of the Šuruppak texts, see Pomponio and Visicato 1994: no. 6 rev. iii 10–11 (p. 60) and no. 10 i 5–7 (p. 71); the discussion of the meaning of šim-sar/mú, *ibid.*: 62, n. 15; for the ED III Lagash texts, see Selz 1989: 528–531 (Nik 300–301) and DP 222 (CDLI no. P220872). For the é-mí and é-ba-ba<sub>6</sub> as the same institution, see Maekawa 1973–1974: 81–81, 140. It is worth noting, however, that in TSA 6 the fragrances for production of aromatic oils are supplied by the household of the ruler(!) to his servant. I am most grateful to Professor G. Selz for providing me this information.

54. Ebeling 1950.

55. Cf. Dalley 1984: 122, for the use of plants by Mesopotamian healers of both sex. See also Charpin 2017: 52–59, who pointed out that the name of the temple of Gula at Larsa was é-ú-nam-ti-l<sub>1</sub>-la, “the house of the herb of life;” see also his observation on p. 53 with the reference to RIME 11: 1–4.

56. Jakob 2003: 476–486.

57. SAA 7 24 rev. 8–9.

58. Babylon 28122 I 9, ii 11 and Babylon 28186 = VAT 16378: 5, Babylon 28232: 6. See Weidner 1939: 924–928, and pls. I-II, IV, V; Jursa 2010: 72.

59. Jakob 2003: 482–483. For the archival context of this text, see Pedersén 1986: 18, 21 (N 1 [34]).

60. Such writing of *muraqqîtu* points to a sign play by the scribe.

10' <sup>iti</sup> *Mu-ḥur*–DINGIR<sup>meš</sup> UD 20<sup>kám</sup> *li-mu* <sup>m</sup>Šu-nu–*qar-du* GAL KAŠ.LUL

8' *Oil preparation for 2 sūt of pure (and) fine cane oil for the king.*

9' *Excerpted according to the mouth of Tappūti-bēlat-ekalli, the female oil mixer;*

10' *month Muḥur-ilāni, the 20th day; the eponymate of Šunu-qardū, the chief cupbearer.*

The expression *i-na pi-i*, “according to the mouth” in this colophon is commonly interpreted in favour of a scribe writing down the recipe dictated by Tappūti-bēlat-ekalli.<sup>61</sup> This might be correct, but it should be stressed that the phrase (*ana*) *pī ummāni*<sup>62</sup>/*apkalle*<sup>63</sup> in the colophons does not necessarily designate that the text was dictated by a headmaster. To the contrary, both K. 4023 and KAR 177 relate the creation of the original of the copied text to the antediluvian sages, who by no means could dictate its content to the copyist. K. 4023: 22 even states that these were the sages “from before the flood.” Much more often the term *pī tuppī* designates that the tablet was copied from another tablet, most often from an ancient original.<sup>64</sup> Clearly the use of this expression in KAR 220: 9' indicates the process of keeping and transmitting scholarly tradition. It is worth noting that the anonymous scribe did not put his name on the colophon of KAR 220.

Only a part of a single but long line of the colophon of another perfume recipe, VAT 9659, is preserved (rev. 31).<sup>65</sup> It also contains a reference to a female herbalist: [...]-*ni-nu*<sup>?</sup> *mu-ra-qi-te na-ās-ḥa-TA*<sup>?</sup>. The last word must be normalised as the feminine stative *nashat*,<sup>66</sup> which is the only attestation of this form for this verb. It can refer to the female scribe of this tablet and in this case must be translated as: “...(of) PN, the female perfume-maker, (she) excerpted.” The alternative is that *nashat* refers to [*tuppu*], “tablet,”

61. Although note that Hunger (1968: 11, 33) translates it as “Auf Befehl... ”

62. So BE 8 133: 9 and UM 1/2, 106 rev. 30. The latter does not provide the scribe’s name and even states that the scribe did not see the original. That may imply that the headmaster dictated the text reading it from the tablet. In NBS 7832: 37 the same formula is partly preserved as well (Goetze 1950: 74). See Hunger 1968: 8 for a short discussion, where he points to the expression *ša pī ummāni šaṭir* as sometimes written at the bottom of the tablets of the series *Enūma Anu Enlil*. For presumably oral scholarly explanations and examinations(?), similarly described in the colophons and incipits of commentaries, see Frahm 2011: 51–56. However, N. Veldhuis stresses that “What that means for the practice of composing or utilizing such texts remains a matter of speculation” (Veldhuis 2014: 403). Further, for the oral tradition as a source of commentaries, see Frahm 2011: 86–87.

63. Thus the colophon of the medical text K. 4023: 22 (Lambert 1957: 8). M. Lambert compared it to the colophon of KAR 177 iv 25, where he restored *a[p<sup>?</sup>-kal<sup>?</sup>-li<sup>?</sup>]*. However, A. Livingstone, who treated this text most recently reads *u[m-ma-n-n]i* there (CUSAS 25: 179).

64. Cf. Hunger 1968: 171, s.v. *pū*.

65. The complete height of this tablet was ca. 25 cm, the width—ca. 17 cm. The surviving length of the colophon line is ca. 6.5 cm—slightly more than one third of its original length.

The tablet has a typical Middle Assyrian appearance: red core, white slip, which is almost completely worn on the obverse, and “firing holes.” Its maximal preserved thickness is ca. 4.5 cm. Each of the tablet’s sides contained a single column. 10.7 cm of the height on the reverse are left uninscribed, except for the single line of the colophon below the ruling.

66. TA stands for *-at*. This is a mirror writing (Deller 1962: 192; Cohen and Llop: 109) or an “überhängender Vokal.” I would like to express my gratitude to J. Llop for discussing this phenomenon of the Middle Assyrian texts with me.

which is by and large feminine in Middle Assyrian, but it is noticeably rarely feminine in colophons.<sup>67</sup> The writing of *muraqqītu* in VAT 9659 rev. 31 is not as elaborated as it is in KAR 220: 9'. It is neither preceded by a female determinative, nor contains any sign plays. The signs of VAT 9659 are quite large—4.5–5 mm as opposed to 2.5–3 mm in KAR 220. But nonetheless, if the former interpretation is correct, this is the only known Middle Assyrian scholarly text written by a woman. If so, this text, which is the recipe of an herbal ointment, was excerpted by a female herbalist. Then it is also the latest cuneiform scholarly text known to be written by a woman.<sup>68</sup> Remarkably, both “perfume recipes,” KAR 220 and VAT 9659, derive from the library of the Aššur temple.

### 3. Conclusion

To sum up, in the early periods our knowledge about women mastering scholarly professions is obscured by the commonly lacking determinatives designating the gender of professionals. In the first millennium, when these determinatives were regularly written, we do not have any evidence for female scholars either in Assyria or in Babylonia. Evidence for female scholarship disappears on the backdrop of a visible rise in longing to protect textual corpora serving increasingly growing scholarly specialisation.<sup>69</sup> But it should be stressed that in the first-millennium high ranking women also are much less visible than in the early periods and the absence of female scholars might result from the decline of social status of women towards the end of Mesopotamian history.<sup>70</sup> This is correct also for the divine realm. Thus, in the first millennium male Nabû is found as the divinity of scribal art much more frequently than female Nisaba. Nonetheless, it cannot be assumed that female scholars did not exist in the third and second millennia. Contrarily, female doctors certainly existed. The evidence assembled by Lion and Robson about the curriculum texts copied by women in the Old Babylonian period challenges the assumption of Rivka Harris that there is no evidence that girls ever attended schools.<sup>71</sup> But except for these four instances all the evidence of women in scholarly professions in Mesopotamia is limited to female physicians and herbalists. It has been often suggested that the female physicians served other women, like *nadītus*<sup>72</sup> or *šakintus*,<sup>73</sup> or even “functioned to curtail access of male non-kin to women of the harem.”<sup>74</sup> Harris also assumed that in Mesopotamia female physician functioned as “modern gynaecologist,

67. Cf. *šaṭrat* in KAR 16 rev. 30' and KAR 15 rev. 16' edited in Wagensohn 2008: 284, which might imply feminine for *tuppu* in these MA colophons. However, KAR 16 rev. 29' has masculine *tup-pi ša-ṭa-ri*. Hunger 1968: nos. 158, 291, 296, 328, 470 and 498 have clearly masculine *tuppu* versus a single OB attestation of feminine in no. 15.

68. Cf. transliteration and translation in Ebeling 1950: 41–46: for his handcopy, see plates 6–8. For the archival context, see Pedersén 1985: 37, 39; (M2 [21]). For the active stative, see Huenehergard 1987: 228–229.

69. See Borger 1957–1971, Lenzi 2008: 170–225, Stevens 2013.

70. R. Harris (1990: 8) pointed out that in all the bulk of the first millennium Babylonian texts there is not a single mention of a female scribe either. Her assumption goes back to the work of Dandamaev. But recently C. Wunsch confirmed to me that she has never run into a Neo- or Late Babylonian female scribe. Thus Harris' observation is still correct.

71. Harris 1990:15.

72. E.g., Stol 2016: 595.

73. Svärd 2015: 91–105.

74. Dalley 1984: 122, Harris 1990: 11 about female physician at Mari (ARM 10 72: 14–15).

obstetrician, paediatrician”.<sup>75</sup> Marten Stol states, following Nele Ziegler, that female doctors “Undoubtedly ... were occupied solely with the care of women, and as such can be considered the world’s first recorded gynaecologists.”<sup>76</sup> It might well be that for female doctors the first priority was the care of women, although in many early and traditional societies healers acting as “general practitioners” are female.<sup>77</sup> But there are no indications that the expertise of a female Mesopotamian physician was ever limited to the female or infant body.<sup>78</sup> Moreover, contrarily to Stol’s statement, there is not a single textual record testifying that female physicians specialized in gynaecology or that gynaecology was a medical specialisation of women only. More important is that the evidence for female scholarship in general and for female doctors in particular is incomparably scarcer than the evidence about male scholarship. Unlike male scholarship the female one was not institutionalized, since even male physicians are not attested holding prebends and positions in temples<sup>79</sup> as did the representatives of the other three traditional scholarly professions. Finally, in the third–beginning of the second-millennium female practitioners are called “doctors,” similarly to male physicians, but starting with the middle of the second millennium on their role is limited to that of a herbalist at best. Moreover, the aforementioned passage in the anti-witchcraft ritual, where the female “exorcist” *āšiptu* is listed among sorcerers, clearly brands her as a witch, similar to what happened in the Middle Ages.<sup>80</sup> Growing institutionalisation of scholarship toward the end of Mesopotamian history led to complete expulsion of women from this realm, at least on the level of temple officialdom and textual record.

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75. Harris 1990: 12.

76. Stol 2016: 371 writes about the aforementioned Mari female physicians and referres to Ziegler 1999: 29. E. Robson (2008: 473) points to the almost complete absence of information concerning medical treatment of royal women in the correspondence of the Neo-Assyrian kings: “We should probably thus infer ... women’s domain of healing and midwifery in the royal palace, whose practitioners did not report to the king—or at least did not do so through correspondence in cuneiform.”

77. Cf. Green 1989 on the Middle Ages with further references to broader literature.

78. Cf. Green 1989, where she brilliantly rebukes such approach to mediaeval female caretakers and demonstrates that neither “women’s health was women’s business,” nor that female practitioners’ knowledge was limited to women’s and children’s diseases.

79. For the possibility that at least in Assyria male physicians could be priests of the healing goddess Bābu, see May 2017 and May 2018c. For an *asû* associated with the temple of Gula at Nippur in the Kassite period, see Sassmannshausen (2001: 73 with n. 1173 and further literature). Other evidence for the priests of Gula as healers comes from the Neo-Babylonian copy (818 BCE) of a literary composition, a comic tale originally no later than the Kassite period (George 1993: 65). There the priest of Gula at Isin, the main cultic centre of this healing goddess, cures a patient who has been bitten by a dog (IM 78552: 5, *ibid.*: 66–67). A. George is confident that this priest was an *asû* (*ibid.*: 72).

80. *Maqlû* III 39–44, fn. 13, cf. Green 1989: 449–452.



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## Amorite Ladies at the Neo-Assyrian Court: Building up an Image, Deconstructing an Image, Transmitting an Image

Frances Pinnock<sup>1</sup>

The physical and ideological construction of the Assyrian empire was undoubtedly an unprecedented achievement in Mesopotamian history, a complex and multi-faceted operation, including a wide and capillary administrative organization.<sup>2</sup> Most of all the elaboration of a new image of the empire was needed: mind maps had to change radically, shifting from the identification with one's own town, enclosed and protected by its town walls, to the reception of the idea of a supra-regional, multi-ethnic and multi-cultural empire, whose limits were marked—not in a permanent, but rather in an extensible or contractable way according to need—by the royal stele with the sovereign's name and/or image. These changes marked an epochal change with respect to the traditional Mesopotamian concept of the town as a place of order *vs* what was outside the town and was the place of chaos. In the traditional ideology, the border between order and chaos was clearly marked by the town walls, which were celebrated in written documents as an impassable mountain. In the new ideology, the border was less defined and more mobile, and it was marked only by royal stele, which had sometimes to be moved, in order to adapt to new borders.<sup>3</sup>

Here, I would like to deal with an aspect of this new image of the empire, in which—in my opinion—foreign women of the Assyrian court played a role. I do not think that their presence and—as I

1. Sapienza University of Rome.

2. See Liverani 2011: 683, 709.

3. Pinnock 2013: 159; Liverani 2017: 87–94. This might create a kind of contrast between the wished-for immobility of the border between order and chaos, and the mobility of the border created by conquests, which had necessarily to be mobile and to adapt to the capacity of the sovereign to enlarge his empire: Liverani 2017: 46–47. Apparently, enlarging the borders and fixing the borders by means of stele was one of the king's prerogatives, but at least on one occasion, Queen Sammu-ramat was mentioned with Adad-Nirari III in a boundary stele, and it was stated that she had taken part in the military campaign too: Melville 2014: 228–229. The new concepts certainly also led to differentiated and complex relations between centre and periphery; about the psychological concept of this opposition see Liverani 2001: 17–18, who refers to the Late Bronze Age, when perhaps these ideas started to change.

will try to prove—their visibility should be considered in terms of ethnicity, about which I basically agree with what has been recently maintained by F. M. Fales: “All those who held some form of public office in Assyria in the 7<sup>th</sup> century were ‘Assyrians’ from the viewpoint of ethnicity”.<sup>4</sup> And yet, “Assyrianization” was certainly the end of a long, perhaps difficult, process, in which the leading power—the Assyrians—were not necessarily the dominant actor.<sup>5</sup> The presence and visibility of foreigners and the presence and visibility of foreign artefacts were certainly used by the central Assyrian power to show the extent of their conquests; at the same time, this presence, and the eventual influence they had on the Assyrian culture, contributed to the creation of an empire which was naturally multi-cultural and supra-national.<sup>6</sup>

In the past, I dealt with some aspects of the presence of Syrian women in the Assyrian world,<sup>7</sup> and I reached the conclusion that they did not play a secondary role in building up the empire’s image, and that some aspects of the women’s greater visibility might descend from the relations between the Assyrian empire and the Aramaean principalities of northern Syria, relations of great complexity based on military conquests, political predominance, and reciprocal cultural fascination.<sup>8</sup> While there is general consensus on the coercive power of the Assyrian central power in assimilating foreigners and in making them Assyrians, I think there is a possibility that on some occasions they could negotiate, letting some “alien” aspects appear, and that also this kind of negotiation was functional to their ideology, as a means to clearly show, on one hand, the extent of their dominion and to dialogue, on the other hand, with their neighbourhoods.<sup>9</sup>

My analysis is based on three elements of evidence. In the first place, since Hammurabi’s reign in Mesopotamia, female figures virtually disappear from the public representation of kingship,<sup>10</sup> whereas in the Assyrian period, there are several women’s images, with different placement and meaning, more

4. Fales 2015a: 724; 2015b: 204.

5. Fales 2015b: 183, 204; Lanfranchi 1997. Working on this topic, I found the considerations by Stein 2010, in particular on p. 30, quite useful. In order to consider the construction of identity in a complex society, as Assyrian society certainly was, it is paramount to understand, in the first place, whether self-definition was considered functional to the general image of the empire; in the second place, which level of self-definition was allowed to individuals; in the third place, whether there was a difference in the need for, and capacity of self-definition in the different levels of Assyrian society.

6. See, in this regard, the interesting considerations by Feldman 2014: 7, 92–93, 95, 108. See also the passage from the representation of the North Syrian landscape in stone reliefs as a background for Assyrian military deeds and the reproduction of that same landscape in Assyrian gardens: Thomason 2001.

7. Pinnock 2001–2003; 2007–2008; Pinnock 2018.

8. There is an interesting proposal by Liverani (2017: 71–73), who maintains that the presence of handicraft products made in foreign palace workshops, and of women of royal descent, also coming from foreign countries, might descend from a wish to collect the best from foreign countries: in Liverani’s opinion this is clear in the stress placed on the mention of the rich dowries the foreign ladies brought with them to the Assyrian court. If this were true, we might expect these ladies to be always visible and recognizable with their peculiarities of attire and ornaments.

9. The literature on this topic is extensive and concerns artistic traditions, as well as social and political matters. See recently, concerning the elaboration of historical relief, which is one of the most striking innovations of Assyrian art: Harmansah 2007: 72, 81, 87, 89–90; Aro 2009: 11–12, 15–16. See also Radner 2009 about the presence of foreign scholars at the Assyrian court.

10. Pinnock 2006: 30–31.

problematic as regards statuary, varied in the representations on stone or metal relief, and certainly royal on some characteristic seals.<sup>11</sup> Some of these images are very significant, like the representation of Queen Naqi'a with a king on a bronze plaque (Fig. 1),<sup>12</sup> or the stele of Libbali-sharrat in the *Stelenreihen* of Ashur (Fig. 2), which is the only stele with an image.<sup>13</sup>



Fig. 1: Bronze relief depicting queen Naqi'a (after Pinnock 2006: fig. 1.40).



Fig. 2: Queen's stele (probably Ashur-sharrat) from the *Stelenreihen* in Assur (after Pinnock 2014: fig. 4).

In the second place, concerning the representation of women in reliefs, they are usually captives, whose ethnicity cannot be inferred from clothing: in fact, even the woman identified with Shamshi, queen of the Arabs, wears a plain smooth dress (Fig. 3),<sup>14</sup> with the veil covering her head, and she carries a situla, like all the female prisoners. The only important exceptions are the Egyptian women, characterized by their negroid features,<sup>15</sup> and the Syrian women, for whom three different iconographies are employed: the most usual one, with plain smooth clothes, but with long hair falling on their shoulders or a dress raised in the front as shown in the bronze revetments of Ashurnasirpal II's Balawat gates (Fig. 4),<sup>16</sup> and a smooth cloak and a high *polos* covered by the veil as shown in Sennacherib's reliefs (Fig. 5).<sup>17</sup>

11. Pinnock 2006: 32–33 for statuary, 38–41 for reliefs, 49–50 for glyptic.

12. Parrot, Nougayrol 1956; Reade 1987.

13. Pinnock 2014a: 509–511; Svärd 2015a: 76.

14. Matthiae 1996: Pl. 4.6, London, British Museum, WA.118901 from the Central Palace of Nimrud.

15. Pinnock 2001–2003: 128–137. Matthiae 1997: Pl. 9.11 from the North Palace of Nineveh, London, British Museum, WA124928.

16. Pinnock 2006: Fig. 1.36.

17. Pinnock 2006: Fig. 1.35.

In these reliefs, the characterization of Egyptian women seems to aim at stressing their exoticism, by means of the faithful-to-reality representation of the contemporary Pharaonic court.<sup>18</sup> Likewise, in the representation of Syrian women, the reality of their appearance may be identified, but it seems less generic and reproduces different kinds of attires and hair-dresses which belong to a tradition dating back to the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC, and which are also repeated in the precious decorated pieces of furniture, brought to the Assyrian courts as booty or tribute.



Fig. 3

Figure 3: Detail of the slab WA. 118901, from Tiglathpileser III's Central Palace in Nimrud, possibly depicting Shamshi, queen of the Arabs (after Pinnock 2006: fig. 1.38).



Fig. 4

Figure 4: Detail of bronze decoration from Balawat (after Pinnock 2006: fig. 1.36).

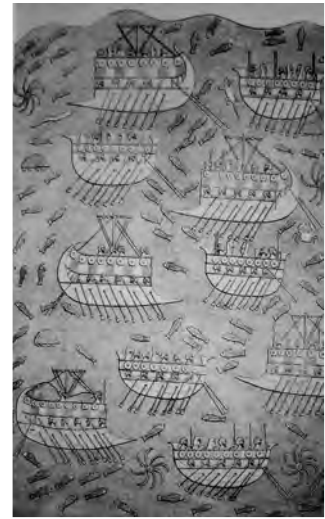


Fig. 5

Figure 5: Drawing of a slab from Sennacherib's North Palace at Nineveh, depicting Phoenician women in boats (after Pinnock 2006: fig. 1.35).

The third element, which I dealt with recently, is the presence of the tombs of some Assyrian queen under the floors of the North-West palace at Nimrud.<sup>19</sup> In my analysis I proposed that, for the size of the stone sarcophagi, as compared to the width of doors and stairs, it was evident that those rooms were meant to be funerary vaults, as the sarcophagi had to be placed inside them before the completion of the overlying structures, and thus, in my opinion, the tombs had been an integral part of the original plan of that part of the palace. In my reconstruction, the *bitānu* of the North-West Palace of Nimrud with the four reception rooms, the underground tombs marked on the surface by small structures, probably related to some form of funerary cult,<sup>20</sup> the underground treasury,<sup>21</sup> the presence of the body of a sacrificed gazelle

18. In fact, Egypt, during the turbulent phase of the Third Intermediate Period, was largely dominated by Nubians, ending with the 25<sup>th</sup> Dynasty (747–664 BC): Taylor 2000: 345–354.

19. Pinnock 2007–2008.

20. Oates and Oates 2004: 78–90.



under the floor of Corridor P,<sup>22</sup> the carved decoration, mainly including the subjects which A. Moortgat defined *überirdischen*,<sup>23</sup> with figures of winged geniuses and of the king engaged in ritual or ceremonial acts,<sup>24</sup> should be a relevant part of the palace, with important ceremonial and administrative functions. In M. A. Ataç's words: "these so-called state-apartments were meant as spaces of display and contemplation, likely enhanced by ritual and ceremony as well".<sup>25</sup> In my reconstruction, the tombs were a part of the original plan, and from the beginning they were meant for women; as a consequence, the possibility that palace ladies were among the protagonists of the official acts taking place in the *bitānu*, must not be ruled out.

The first tombs were singled out and excavated by Mallowan in 1951,<sup>26</sup> below Room DD, a small chamber in the East wing of the complex, whereas the most relevant discoveries were made in 1988 and 1989, by an Iraqi expedition led by Muzahim Mahmoud Hussein: he found three underground vaults, some of which contained multiple burials in stone or bronze sarcophagi.<sup>27</sup> Two of the buried queens had Aramaean names—Yaba and Atalia.<sup>28</sup> All the ladies buried under the North-West Palace had a very rich funerary furniture, including objects of certain Assyrian production—bracelets, anklets and bowls of gold (Fig. 6),<sup>29</sup> but also objects of certain Syrian production—probably some of the rock crystal pieces,<sup>30</sup> a beautiful gold band with ornamental stones (Fig. 7),<sup>31</sup> and, probably, also an elaborate diadem with grapes, pomegranates and four-winged genii (Fig. 8).<sup>32</sup> Other objects, like a wonderful jug with the handle perpendicular to the spout, have a different provenance, probably from the Anatolian or Syrian coast, or from Cyprus (Fig. 9).<sup>33</sup>

21. Oates and Oates 2004: 66–67, fig. 38.

22. Oates and Oates 2004: 61; another ritual deposit of animal bones was located under the floor of Room HH: Ibidem: 62–63 fig. 34.

23. Moortgat 1967: 135.

24. Matthiae 1996: 10–11.

25. Ataç 2010: 123. Ataç's reconstruction is very interesting and I largely share his conclusions. What I am trying to do here is to find the women's place in the palace. Traditionally, the sector of the North-West Palace pivoting on Court Y, is called the *bitānu*, a term identifying this part as "private apartments", which does not mean that they were not devoted also to ceremonial functions, as Ataç very well points out in his analysis.

26. Mallowan 1966: 114–116.

27. For a general presentation of the discoveries see Damerji 1999 and, recently, Hussein 2016.

28. Fadhil 1990; Kamil 1998: 17. The presence of the name Atalia led to her identification, and as a consequence also Yaba, as Judaeen princesses (Dalley 2008) a hypothesis rejected by Postgate 2008: 178. Another palace lady's name, Hama, was identified later on: Spurrier 2017: 154–163.

29. Curtis *et al.*, eds., 2008: Pl. IV.

30. Curtis *et al.*, eds., 2008: 118, fig. 14-u.

31. Curtis *et al.*, eds., 2008: Pl. Ia.

32. Curtis *et al.*, eds., 2008: Pl. V.

33. Curtis *et al.*, eds., 2008: 115–117, Pl. VII; Cellarino *et al.* 2016; Cellarino, ed., 2016. For the jug I recently proposed an Urartian provenance: Pinnock forthcoming.



Fig. 6

Fig. 6: Pair of bracelets from Tomb II, Nimrud (after Pinnock 2006: fig. 8.16).

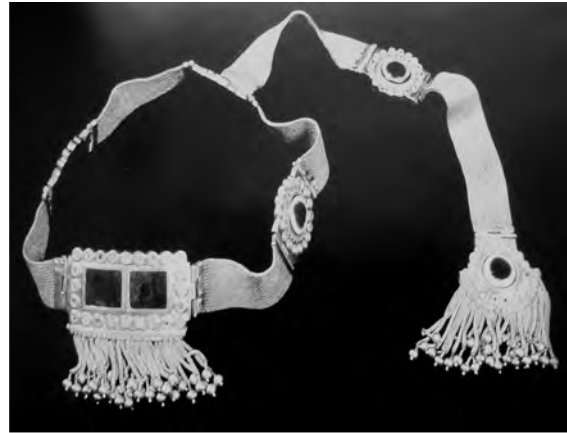


Fig. 7

Fig. 7: Diadem of gold and decorative stones, from Tomb II, Nimrud (after Pinnock 2006: fig. 8.24).

Generally speaking, these objects are all proof of the extension of the Assyrian empire, and they have usually been interpreted as such: they could have reached Nimrud as part of war booties, of tributes, or in the dowries of women.<sup>34</sup> Yet, they might belong in a larger picture which may now be reconstructed, in the light of our wider knowledge of the cultures of pre-classical Syria.



Fig. 8

Fig. 8: Gold crown, from Coffin 2, Tomb III, Nimrud (after Pinnock 2006: fig. 8.13).



Fig. 9

Fig. 9: Gold ewer, from Coffin 2, Tomb III (after Pinnock 2006: fig. 8.08).

34. Liverani 2017: 71–73; Pinnock 2001–2003: 133–135.

Concerning the underground burials of kings, they are a consolidated custom in Mesopotamia known since at least the Old Babylonian period, and it is well known that the Assyrian kings considered the palace of Ashur the “palace of repose, the eternal abode”,<sup>35</sup> as is archaeologically demonstrated by the finding of the hypogea with the violated sarcophagi below the palace.<sup>36</sup> In Syria, this tradition dates back to the mature Early Syrian period, with the tomb built under the Royal Palace G of Ebla,<sup>37</sup> around 2300 BC and with the contemporary tombs of Tell Bi’a/Tuttul.<sup>38</sup> In this region moreover, we can identify a rare yet constant presence of female burials under the floors of palaces: at Tell Kashkashouk in northern Syria,<sup>39</sup> in the mature Early Syrian period—the tomb of a girl with more than 6,000 beads of lapis lazuli, carnelian and other precious materials; at Ebla, in the archaic Old Syrian period—a girl with a rich funerary furniture from the Royal Necropolis under the Western Palace; at Qatna, in the Middle Syrian re-employment of the large hypogea below the Royal Palace—a woman placed in the same sarcophagus as a man, probably her husband;<sup>40</sup> at Guzana/Tell Halaf, in the Neo-Syrian period, the probable presence of female burials is hinted at by the statues placed in the burial area, following a custom which may also date back to Early Syrian Ebla, based on textual evidence.

The use of Aramaean names led to the proposal of connections with Babylonia or with the Israelite world,<sup>41</sup> whereas I believe that it is the region of the Aramaean principalities of Syria which provided most of the ideas we may identify as “other” in the Assyrian representation of the empire. As already maintained, the position and visibility of women in Syrian courts was a long established tradition, and most likely a very specific characteristic of those milieus, since the mature Early Syrian period.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, in Assyrian courts women coming from Syria or of Syrian descent were physically present, perhaps also in some number,<sup>43</sup> and these women were also frequently represented, for instance in the pieces of furniture and in other precious fittings coming from Syria as booty or tribute. The peculiarities of their hair-dresses and attires were reproduced in the reliefs, like the elegant clothes shorter in the front, found in the bronze reliefs from Balawat and in several ivory inlay panels from Nimrud.<sup>44</sup> The climax of this representation of ecumenical alterity is reached in Ashurbanipal’s Garden Scene, where a victory is celebrated in a private quarter, in the presence of the queen.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, the location allows the use of a

35. Luckenbill 1927: 194, nos. 469–470.

36. Haller 1954: 173–180, Tombs II (Shamshi-Adad V), III (Ashur-bel-kala) and V (Ashurnasirpal II).

37. Matthiae 1997.

38. Strommenger, Kohlmeyer 2000: 8–15, Pls. 10–13.

39. Bounni 1988: 373–374, fig. 11.

40. Al-Maqdissi *et al.* 2003: 201.

41. These arguments referred mainly to Naqi’a: see, recently Macgregor 2012: 106–107 for a review of these proposals, which she disagrees with, in my opinion quite rightly.

42. Pinnock 2008; 2014b.

43. Novotny 2001: 178–180, 183; Parpola 2012: 618.

44. Macgregor 2012: 47, fig. 6, 50 fig. 9, 53, fig. 11.

45. For recent considerations about the setting of the scene and its interpretation see Nadali 2015: 167–171; Ornan 2002: 474, for a proposal of a probable Syrian influence on this representation of the royal couple; Feldman 2014: 100–104.

lavishly decorated piece of furniture, of Syrian production, which was certainly not in use in throne rooms, namely the “bed”, where the king lies in an unprecedented attitude.<sup>46</sup>

In my opinion, in the complex construction of the Assyrian empire, beyond verbal propaganda, the Aramaean principalities of northern Syria played a very important role, particularly in the re-definition of territorial borders: geographically close to Assyria, and of paramount importance for the sustenance of an empire of which they were an integral part, albeit with differences and variations, their most evident characteristics, like the palace furniture and the great female visibility, might have looked quite suitable for their strong alterity, for the deconstruction of the past image enclosed in the town, and for the construction of the new image, enlarging to the supra-regional and multi-cultural empire.

Apparently, this reconstruction might be in contrast to the picture usually proposed for the Aramaean principalities, as politically nearly irrelevant, and culturally little characterized entities. In reality, it is clear that those principalities were the heir to a very ancient and flourishing culture, whose first, yet already well developed elaborations, date from the mature Early Syrian period, and had new levels of very high elaboration in the archaic and mature Old Syrian periods.<sup>47</sup> From this point of view, the developments of the Middle Syrian period look like a natural derivation, in a completely different political phase, from what had been created in the Early and Old Syrian periods, leading to the “international” expressions of the Late Syrian period in the Iron Age.

In a still different situation, in the first centuries of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC, there was a strong reprise, also with original interpretations, of the ancient image of power. The royal statuary, placed, according to tradition, in funerary contexts or near the gates, takes as its model the statuary in the severe style elaborated by the Eblaic workshops of the archaic Old Syrian period. The production of fittings with ivory decorations directly descends—for the typology of the objects and the decorative motifs—from the great tradition of wood and bone working, whose first manifestations date from the mature Early Syrian period. Lastly, the relief cycles of the Aramaean citadels, on one hand, use iconographies whose history usually dates from the Old Syrian period—and sometimes even from the Early Syrian period—the recent discovery of a fragmentary carved slab in Hadad’s temple at Aleppo, probably dating from the Old Syrian period, led K. Kohlmeyer to propose that the tradition of carved orthostats might date back from that period, around 1800/1750 or 1700 BC<sup>48</sup>. On the other hand, their location in open spaces along the ceremonial routes of the citadels outside the palaces, might be a reminder of the processional rituals described in the Eblaic Rituals of Kingship of the Early Syrian period, during which the royal couple left the town, heading to temples and royal mausoleums in the territory belonging to Ebla.<sup>49</sup>

This hypothesis may be further supported by other elements of evidence concerning the male royal image, examined in the past by P. Matthiae. In the reliefs of the Throne Room B of the North-West Palace of Nimrud, depicting a group with two nearly mirrored royal figures, on both sides of a “sacred

46. Dentzer 1982: 58–60, 63.

47. Pinnock 2015.

48. Kohlmeyer 2016: 304–305.

49. Pinnock 2016a; 2016b.

tree”, Matthiae identified a typical Egyptian iconography of kingship, the so-called *sm' t3wy* elaborated during the XII<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, in order to represent the Pharaoh as king of the Upper and Lower Egypt.<sup>50</sup> It is certainly possible that this symbol was adopted directly from an Egyptian prototype, and yet it is also true that the motif of the imperfect duplication of the royal figure was adopted and re-elaborated by the Syrian palace workshops from at least the Old Syrian period, and in Syria it witnessed constant favour, until the most recent realizations of the Neo-Syrian period, when symmetry became stronger, and yet there is always a detail to mark the two figures as different.

The duel between man and lion is even more important because it is a creation of the Eblaic workshops of the mature Early Syrian period, where apparently there is no sure winner, and man and animal seem to be entwined in a mortal embrace (Fig. 10). Also in this instance, it is possible to follow the motif along the whole span of the history of Syria, until the latest attestations in the Nimrud ivories, and, with quite similar characteristics, in Cyprus (Fig. 11).<sup>51</sup> In this last, slightly modified, version, with the two protagonists more separated from each other, the motif is adopted first in the Assyrian royal seals (Fig. 12), and then in Ashurbanipal’s hunt scenes. Moreover, recently M. A. Ataç acutely pointed out that this group is the only one in which the man touches the animal’s body, precisely following the ancient Syrian model.<sup>52</sup>



Fig. 10



Fig. 11

Fig. 10: Wooden inlay, depicting a man and a lion fighting, from the Royal Palace G, Ebla, ca. 2300 BC (copyright Missione Archeologica Italiana in Siria).

Fig. 11: Fragment of terra cotta cuirass, from Kazaphani, Cyprus, ca. 6<sup>th</sup> century BC (after Pinnock 2015: 125, fig. 9).

50. Matthiae 2013: 652–655; on the same line, also Ataç 2010: 116.

51. Pinnock 2015: 111–114.

52. Ataç 2010: 58.



Fig. 12: Bulla with the impression of Sargon II's royal seal, from Nineveh, British Museum WA Sm 2276 (after Matthiae 2013: Pl. 222f).

Summing up, in my opinion, when Ashurnasirpal II created his complex programme of visual representation of power, he deliberately included within it clearly identifiable elements of the Syrian culture, and in particular of the Syrian ideology of kingship. In the different formulations of the sovereigns after him, who only partially adopted the subjects of his figurative programme, the Syrian element was always quite visible: they kept the tradition to bury court ladies under the Nimrud palace, three of whom bore Aramaean names; court ladies kept a physical visibility, in different occasions of public life. Among these ladies, certainly Naqi'a has a special place,<sup>53</sup> and I would like to stress that, in the moment when she became warranter for the succession to the throne, she used her Akkadian name, Zakutu,<sup>54</sup> quite likely because she was well aware that the alterity of her Aramaean name was not suitable in a basic act for the persistence of Assyrian rule.<sup>55</sup>

It has been maintained that Assyrian court ladies were mere instruments in the king's hands,<sup>56</sup> but, in the light of their imagery,<sup>57</sup> and of the textual evidence, I would rather consider them as aware partners in the complex construction of an empire.

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53. On this important Assyrian queen see the thorough study by Melville 1999.

54. Svärd 2015b: 160.

55. The same opinion is expressed in Macgregor 2012: 98.

56. See e.g. Ornan 2002: 477.

57. It is not possible to elaborate here on the adoption of the mural crown, which is also a new and important feature of the Assyrian queens' attire, as palace ladies were never depicted previously wearing something on their heads, with the exception of turbans in the Early Dynastic period, and veils in the Ur III period. For this ornament, too, a foreign origin was proposed: Ornan 2002: 475–476; Macgregor 2012: 90 and now Pinnock 2018. I consider the mural crown to be a very strong symbolic ornament and by no means a symbol of submission.

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### 1.3. Material Culture



## Jar Handles, Nudity, and the Female

Stephanie Lynn Budin<sup>1</sup>

### 1. Introduction

One of the most prevalent images from the ancient world is the so-called Nude Female. This image refers to a fully or mostly frontal female, often adorned with jewelry, standing, either wholly unclothed or wearing apparel that does not hide the body and its sexual attributes of breasts and vulva. The legs are consistently shown together, and the arms may be shown hanging down the body, holding the breasts, clasped beneath the breasts, indicating the breasts and genitalia, or out to the sides, holding animal or floral motifs. Such images have come to light from India to Iberia, in media ranging from terracotta to gold to glass (Figs. 1-5).



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5

Fig. 1. Middle Bronze Age terracotta Nude Female figurine from Ebla, Syria, Aleppo Museum TM.92.P.875+TM.94.P.530.

Fig. 2. Gold Qudšu pendant from Ugarit, Syria, Louve Museum AO 14.714.

Fig. 3. Middle Kingdom Type 1 Potency Figurine, Brooklyn Museum, 44.226.

Fig. 4. Late Cypriot Bird Face figurine, British Museum A 15.

Fig. 5. Anasyrma figurine from Kato Symi Viannou, Crete, Herakleion Museum.

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Almost inevitably, these images of nude females are understood to be either “Earth Mother Fertility Goddesses” (or some manner of fertility charm), concubines for the dead (especially in Egypt and Cyprus), or sacred prostitutes (just to annoy me personally).<sup>2</sup> The unclad female body is inevitably reduced to its sexuality, and ideally, a sexuality reserved for the use and benefit of males.

By contrast, I contend that, like depictions of men, the image of the Nude Female *must* be understood within its own cultural context. What a gold foil Nude Female from Ugarit means is distinct from a faience Nude Female from Deir el-Medina, or a terracotta Nude Female from Paphos, or Dreros on Crete. In this paper I take as a case study what I believe to be the earliest (known) example of the Nude Female continuum—anthropomorphic jar handles from Early Dynastic Kiš in northern Sumer. As I argue, rather than a fertility charm or mother goddess, these icons served as ethnic markers for the recently conquered residents of the Diyala region, with eventual possible links to the iconography of the erotic war goddess Inana.

## 2. A Fresh Start

Determining *when* the Nude Female first came into being is a tricky matter. Unclad human females appear in the art historical repertoire from as early as the Paleolithic, appearing both *safitig* and *svelte*, alongside male humans, anthropomorphs of indistinct gender, and a host of animals in varying media.<sup>3</sup> In the Near East specifically, naked<sup>4</sup> female figurines showing variations in pose and decoration typify early communities from Neolithic Jarmo<sup>5</sup> in the Zagros foothills to the Halaf-period examples from southern Anatolia and northern Syria.<sup>6</sup> Production of the nude female (lower case) extends back as far as humans have been making art.

The distinctive Nude Female, however, with her frontal posture, straight legs, and limited repertoire of arm positions, appears to emerge in a very particular time and place in Mesopotamian history. As noted by George Dales in his 1960 University of Pennsylvania dissertation *Mesopotamian and Related Female Figurines: Their Chronology, Diffusion, and Cultural Functions*, unclad female figurines in terracotta appear in the repertoire of the Early Dynastic I (EDI, 2900–2700 BCE) Diyala region, with several

2. Asher-Greve and Sweeney 2006: 151.

3. Assante 2006: 183–191; Bahn and Vertut 1988: 138–140; Sandars 1985: 173–194.

4. Copious ink has been spilt concerning the distinction between the words “nude” and “naked.” For Sir Kenneth Clarke (1953: 3), to be naked is to be stripped of power and dignity, whereas to be nude is to be beautiful and thus empowered: “To be naked is to be deprived of our clothes, and the word implies some of the embarrassment most of us feel in that condition. The word “nude,” on the other hand, carries, in educated usage, no uncomfortable overtone. The vague image it projects is not of a huddled and defenseless body, but of a balance, prosperous, and confident body: the body re-formed.” By contrast, for John Berger (1972: 54) Nakedness is a natural state of being, whereas to be nude is to be a work of art: “To be naked is to be oneself. To be nude is to be seen naked by others and yet not recognized for oneself. A naked body has to be seen as an object in order to become a nude... Nakedness reveals itself. Nudity is placed on display.” In contrast to both of these authors, I agree with Larissa Bonfante, that “naked” and “nude” simply derive from the Germanic and Romanic roots of the English language and are thus synonyms (Bonfante 1989: *passim*). As is typical in English, the Romanic word is deemed more proper or prestigious than the Germanic, thus the on-going denigration (unwarranted) of the word “naked” in art historical discourse.

5. Dales 1960: 164–169.

6. Belcher 2016: *passim*.

examples coming specifically from Tell Agrab, Tell Asmar, and Khafadje.<sup>7</sup> However, by the Early Dynastic II period (2700–2600 BCE), the production of female figurines seems to stop (at least archaeologists have had little success in finding any).<sup>8</sup> For Roger Moorey, this eclipse of female iconography went hand-in-hand with the rise of urbanization of Mesopotamian society, and with it the rise of specifically male elites (and masculine elitism).

“The culmination of these trends in Sumer in the early third millennium was a major change in the repertory of humanoid terracottas. For the first time females passed into eclipse and males emerged as a distinct element, sometimes in close association with models of wheeled vehicles and traction animals. Such miniatures reflect the emergence in the real world of new male *élites* in the pristine city-states of the region. As anthropologists have pointed out, the forces of early state formation in general marginalize female roles so, in this, Sumer was no exception.... This is a particularly clear case of terracottas encoding and mediating socio-political change.”<sup>9</sup>

### 3. *Kiš*

One of the most important new urban centers was the site of Early Dynastic *Kiš* in the Diyala region, due east of Babylon and approximately 80 km. south of modern Baghdad. Perhaps it is ironic, then, that when the city fell to the southern metropolis of Uruk at the end of ED IIIa, it was in *Kiš* where the new, and now continuous, Nude Female iconography re-emerged in the Near East. The site was excavated by the Joint Oxford-Field Museum Expedition (JOFME) from 1923 to 1933. However, proper excavation reports were hampered by the deaths of both dig leaders within a decade of excavation completion, and thus the initial full study of the materials only occurred in 1976 through the efforts of Roger Moorey.<sup>10</sup>

The ancient site of *Kiš* covered some 24 km.<sup>2</sup> divided into eastern and western sectors by the Euphrates River. Of its 40 constituent tells, JOFME excavated 17 in its decade of campaigns.<sup>11</sup> The eastern section of the city was comprised of Mounds D and E—the Ingharra complex, while the western section—Mounds Z, T, and X = Uhaimir—was dominated by the city’s (post-ED) ziggurat. The Ingharra sector preserved a Neo-Babylonian temple complex some 130 m.<sup>2</sup> with walls preserved to a height of over 4 meters. Beneath this temple were the remains of an Early Dynastic plano-convex brick platform serving as the foundation for two third-millennium ziggurats, along with “an elite cemetery with wealthy burial assemblages” dating to EDII.<sup>12</sup> The several burials in this early Ingharra cemetery are notable for their multiple human skeletons and, even more so, their wheeled vehicles drawn by either equids or bovines—“chariots” or “carts” in the excavation reports. Above this EDIIIa cemetery was a second round of less wealthy but still relatively elite burials dating to the EDIIIb period.

7. Dales 1960: 28–32.

8. *Ibid.*: 32. “No clay figures are securely dated to the Early Dynastic II period in Mesopotamia.”

9. Moorey 2005: 20.

10. Moorey 1978: *passim*.

11. Torres-Rouff *et al.* 2012: 196.

12. Pestle *et al.* 2005: 4–5.

South of the Ingharra cemetery is Mound A, which revealed a destroyed palace over which was a level containing domestic units and a cemetery—the “A Cemetery”—containing some 154 graves dating to the EDIIIb–Akkadian periods and the remains of approximately 162 men, women, and children.<sup>13</sup> This A Cemetery extended northwards and nearly formed a continuum with the later burials of the Ingharra complex.

A combination of textual data with archaeological evidence from the JOFME excavations reveals that Kiš was a dominant city in the Early Dynastic IIIa period (2600–2500 BCE), with the administrative center probably located in the so-called “Palace A” located under the later A Cemetery, and the/a religious center of the city in the ziggurat located under Tell Ingharra. According to the textual tradition, Kiš reached political apogee under the rule of King Ur-Zababa, as preserved in the Sumerian King List. Then, according to Sargonic inscriptions, Ur-Zababa’s rule ended in a catastrophe that left the city destroyed and partially, although not completely, abandoned.<sup>14</sup> This catastrophe was the conquest of the region by King Lugalzagesi of the southern Mesopotamian city of Uruk. Palace A was destroyed, as was the ziggurat.

Later, according to the written tradition, Kiš was “rescued” (“reconquered”?) by Sargon of Akkad, who claimed to have been the cup-bearer of King Ur-Zababa, and thus a legitimate bearer of Kišite authority. It was he who first added the title “King of Kiš” to the formal royal titulary of Mesopotamian emperors. This textual evidence appears to support the archaeological data: Moorey has suggested that the house-with-intramural-burials level over the former Palace A was created within one generation of the destruction of the latter.<sup>15</sup> Those living within the houses and burying their dead amongst them appear to have formed an active memory link with the power and prestige of their city in the previous generation. However, the destruction stratigraphy suggests that Kiš fell to Uruk at the turn of EDIIIa to EDIIIb (2500 BCE), a tad early for an Akkadian king who died c. 2285. It might be best to argue that the city fell c. 2500, and that a later king readjusted the chronology to suit his personal political ends.

Regardless, what is important here is that there is a strong link between those buried in the A Cemetery and the later cemetery of Ingharra and the glory days of yore.

### 3.1. *The A Cemetery and “Goddess” Handles*

It is in the context of the cemeteries, Ingharra and Cemetery A, that a new style of nude female iconography first re-emerges in Mesopotamia, appearing on the remarkable if humble medium of terracotta jar handles.

13. Torres-Rouff *et al.* 2012: 198; Moorey 1970: 89.

14. Pestle *et al.* 2014: 68, with references.

15. Moorey 1970: 104.





Fig. 6



Fig. 7

Fig. 6. Type A Jar from Kiš, Chicago, Field Museum 156212. Photograph from <http://www.waa.ox.ac.uk/XDB/tours/mesopotamia16.asp>.

Fig. 7. Anthropomorphic Jar Handle from Kiš, Ashmolean Museum AN1925.230.

The jar type (minus the anthropomorphic decoration on the handles) in question first appears in the Diyala region in the EDI period at the Archaic Shrine IV of the Abu Temple at Tell Asmar.<sup>16</sup> Dubbed upright-handle jars or jugs, they are mostly symmetrical containers, ranging in height from 10–39.4 cm., notable for a single, upright, initially flat tab of clay attached originally near the shoulder of the vessel and eventually migrating up the body to near the neck. It is only in later examples that the “handles” approach the neck rim, thus truly acquiring that designation. The earliest examples of these tabs were decorated with geometric motifs, such as incised criss-crosses, zig-zags, and herringbone patterns, as well as molded nubs upon the surface.

In ED IIIb (2500–2340 BCE) the handles acquire anthropomorphic characteristics (Figs. 6-7).<sup>17</sup> Specifically, they acquire Nude Female iconography, whereby the anthropomorphs in question are consistently female and *en face*, with the more developed versions also showing the breasts, pubic triangles, and even the jewelry of the Nude Female in more developed versions. The anthropomorphism of the handles ranges in detail and, of course, quality. At its simplest, the handle might present just a nose. Slightly more elaborate versions show a nose and, based on their placement and comparison with more detailed examples, breasts. These anthropomorphizing elements might be accompanied by geometric motifs, such as incised pinnate motifs or a criss-cross over the “body.” In several examples, this criss-cross appears between the breasts. Far more common are faces, typified by a molded nose with molded eyes (often with pupils), although almost never a mouth. Rather than a mouth, several examples have a crescent shaped incision or molding indicative of what is probably a necklace. A few examples have brows above the eyes. A final detail on some examples is a pubic triangle incised under the breasts and

16. Moon 1981: 48.

17. Moon 1981: 49; Moorey 1970: 97.

filled in with a stippling pattern. However, it must be noted that the jars themselves, with or without anthropomorphic handles, were often decorated with incised triangles along the jar shoulder. As such, a kind of “pubic triangle” was already present directly beneath the anthropomorphizing handles, and thus might, in some cases, be understood as part of the full handle image. Other handles present no pudenda, but are instead covered with incised lines that may depict clothing. Nevertheless, such “clothed” handles still have breasts.

The handles, then, are not merely anthropomorphic, but gynomorphic—consistently female, per the breasts and pubic triangles. None ever has a phallic bulge, and what appeared to Moorey as beards<sup>18</sup> were instead the necklaces noted above (which appear on examples with breasts). The consistently feminine sex of the handles thus earned them designations such as “granny handles,” “Mother Goddess Handles,” and most commonly “goddess’ handles.”

When discovered in undisturbed contexts, as at Kiš, these jars—both those with Nude Female tabs and those with the earlier geometric decorations—always appear in graves, and thus might be understood as funerary in nature. They often appear side-by-side with another common pottery type—the so-called “fruit-stand.” It thus seems likely that the combination was used to make offerings of liquid (jar) and foodstuffs (stands) to the dead. Unfortunately, the early excavation of the sites where these vessels appear—the 1920s—precluded any attempts to perform residue analysis on the contents of the jars, and thus we do not know if they contained water, beer, or even grain, as suggested by Moorey.<sup>19</sup> However, the handles showed changes in profile over time. Originally flat and solid, by the time the anthropomorphic tendencies were appearing the handles could also be made more spout-like, some even having an open, if small, connection to the jar interior.<sup>20</sup> It would seem, then, that notions of liquidity or pourability were emphasized at this phase.

It is important to highlight that the *female* jug handles in question are very specifically associated with Kiš. Although they have been unearthed in several sites in the Diyala regions, such as Abu Salabikh, Tell Asmar, and Khafadjeh, they are found in the greatest quantities in Kiš. The A Cemetery brought to light no fewer than 83 examples, mostly from intact burials where the female handles were still attached to the jars. According to the excavation reports of Watelin and Langdon in the late 1920s, even the contemporary burials at Ingharra inevitably revealed “goddess handle” jugs and fruit stands, “[t]he necessary equipment of the dead seems to consist of a dish of offerings... and a vase with a false handle bearing a bust of the mother goddess.”<sup>21</sup>

By contrast, Abu Salabikh revealed only a dozen examples—6 intact jars with “goddess” handles, and 6 independent handles. Khafadjeh brought to light one jar with handle and 5 independent handles, while Tell Asmar had 5 independent goddess handles, with no jars discovered. To repeat: What prevails at both latter sites are individual *handles*.<sup>22</sup> While this might be the result of breakage, enough upright handle jars with geometric (i.e. non-anthropomorphic) designs were found intact to suggest that the excess ratio of anthropomorphic handles to pots might derive from more than mere chance. The weight of

18. Postgate and Moorey 1976: 163.

19. Moorey 2005: 26.

20. McKay 1925: 21–22.

21. XK IV: 50.

22. Whelan 1978: 82–83.

the archaeological evidence thus suggests that the anthropomorphic “goddess” handles evolved in Kiš where they were used in a funerary context, and that the iconography spread out in such a way that surrounding sites saw meaning in the female form *even when disassociated from the jars*.

### 3.2. Context

To understand the meaning of these earliest Nude Female images, then, we must understand what they meant in ED IIIb Kiš. As noted above, the “goddess” handles emerged *after* a period of political brilliance in Kiš, and *during* a period of evanescence. They came to light consistently in funerary contexts, and thus at least part of their meaning appears to relate to death. The intact jars from the A Cemetery typically appear side-by-side with offering tables,<sup>23</sup> and thus seem to relate originally to offerings for the dead. Additionally, the close connections between the cemeteries that produced the handles (A and Ingharra) and the earlier so-called Palace A and ziggurat indicate that the handles emerged in a period of harkening back to the very past that had diminished the use of female iconography for the previous 200 years. Thus, meaning might be sought in both religious and political/civic milieu.

#### 3.2.1. Chronology

A few important details must be kept in mind when considering the archaeological context of the “goddess” handles and their jars. As noted above, they have come to light in both Cemetery A and the Ingharra cemetery (although Morrey does note that the latter cemetery produced more handles than jars<sup>24</sup>). They span in date the full Early Dynastic IIIb period and into the early Akkadian period. At Mound A141 graves containing up to 162 people are dated to ED IIIb, while nine graves (A2, A6, A14, A38, A52, A92, A102, A104, and A106) are dated to the Akkadian period. Of these latter, A2, A14, A52, and A104 contained “goddess”-handle jugs.<sup>25</sup> Thus, they were in use from after the fall of the city into the Akkadian period.

#### 3.2.2. Class

The graves at Ingharra were distinctively upper-class per the burial goods, such that Moorey suggested that it was an elite burial ground for those who could claim some connection with the defunct ziggurat and the city’s religious life.<sup>26</sup> By contrast, the graves in Cemetery A ranged in economic status from those with merely one or two pieces of pottery as grave goods to those with very costly funerary assemblages, such as the woman (sex confirmed osteologically) buried in B23, who was dispatched to the afterlife with two metal bowls, a silver disk, two pigment shells, three cylinder seals, a metal adze, a spindle whorl, a metal knife, and five pottery vessels, including a goddess-handle jug.<sup>27</sup> The goddess handles spanned all classes at Kiš.

23. Moorey 1970: 98.

24. Moorey 1970: 97.

25. Pestle et al. 2014: 75.

26. Moorey 1978: 71. “It may well be that late in Early Dynastic IIIb and in the Early Akkadian period social distinction carried with it the right to be buried in close proximity to the religious buildings on Ingharra.”

27. Torres-Rouf et al. 2012: 208.

### 3.2.3. Age

Goddess-handle jugs came to light in graves belonging to both adults and sub-adults, including infants (sub-adults typically receiving diminutive versions of the jars—c. 10 cm. in height). The icon spanned all age groups.

### 3.2.4. Sex

The early date of the excavations precluded the sexing of skeletons, a matter now being rectified by William Pestle. Nevertheless, the Kiš graves were at least gendered according to grave goods, and nude female-handle jars appeared with both masculine and feminine burials at both sites.<sup>28</sup> This is especially significant because research by Pestle and colleagues has indicated that:

“While no statistically significant biological differences were found between the females from the A ‘Cemetery’ and members of either sex from Ingharra, the males from the A ‘Cemetery’ were found to be significantly distinct from each of the other groups. In other words, while the males and females from Ingharra and the females from the A ‘Cemetery’ were all drawn from the same breeding population, it would appear that the males from the A ‘Cemetery’ were different.”<sup>29</sup>

Thus, the nude female-handle jugs not only span time, class, age, and gender/sex, but also what may be ethnic identity: “Outsider” males from Cemetery A were buried with them, too. What, then, did the handles mean?

Let us focus on the context of Kiš specifically. As noted, the jug with its female handle spans the full gamut of Kišite identity, from old to young, female to male, elite to poor, native to foreigner. Significantly, the icon appears only after the fall of the city (with its previous, concomitant dearth of female iconography during its period of political ascendancy), in a region that is typified by its living and dead residents’ desire to connect with, and thus perhaps identify with (?) the section of the city that embodied Kiš’s initial glory days. In such a context, *it appears most likely that the female handles became a marker of Kišite identity* (emphasis mine) relating to memories of the city in its apogee. For the indigenous residents of Kiš, the nude female became a signifier of “home” and a means of expressing ethnic identity. For those foreign males in Cemetery A, use of such a symbol may have helped in the process of adopting a new ethnic<sup>30</sup> identity, of becoming “Kišite.” Outside of Kiš, at the neighboring

28. Moorey 1970: Appendix I.

29. Pestle *et al.* 2014: 77–78.

30. In this use of the word/concept “ethnic” I follow the work of Jonathan Hall, who identifies ethnicity not as a biological “race” but rather “a cultural construct, perpetually renewed and renegotiated through discourse and social praxis.” (Hall 2000/1997: 19) The most common means of creating such shared identity is through the creation and mutual acceptance of a (probably contrived) “collective name; a common myth of descent; a shared history; a distinctive shared culture; an association with a specific territory; and a sense of communal solidarity.” (*Ibid.*: 25) Ethnicity, then, is flexible and self-determined through the manipulation of ideas and objects. Although it is impossible as of yet to know about a collective name, common myth of descent, or the sense of history, the commonalities of the grave goods, and especially the jar handles, do seem to argue for the distinctive shared culture and probable sense of communal identity within the shared, and increasingly expanding, specific territory.

cities of Khafadjeh and Abu Salabikh *inter alia*, where the handles appear to function as independent images in their own right, the use of such images may have contributed to a sense of “Diyala” identity in the face of southern Urukian and/or northern Akkadian infiltrations. Much as with the regularized and systematized religious icons of Medieval Europe, then, “[t]he authority these images thereby acquire make them capable of symbolizing a collective and idealized identity as a bond for the entire polity. Thus images also serve to create a ‘collective identity.’<sup>31</sup>

#### 4. Iconography

The question remains, though: What are the origins of the icon in the first place, how did it become a symbol of a fallen city? It is likely that the initial anthropomorphizing of the handles might be attributed to nothing more than a gestalt effect, the human brain’s tendency to see faces. This would account for the initial evolution of anthropomorphic handles from the earlier geometric designs, designs which continued in use long after the arrival of their anthropomorphic daughters.

##### 4.1. Female

More significant to this enquiry is why those faces, once so conceived, were consistently female. It must be remembered that the female handles appear after a 200-year lacuna in nude female iconography in the Near East. Although the last appearance of such imagery was in the Diyala region, the time span involved makes it difficult to suggest that the iconography remained within living memory.

Without burdening the argument with any initial attempt to identify this female, two not-mutually-exclusive tendencies might elucidate the feminine identification. This first is a general tendency in the ancient (and modern?) world to associate vessels, and especially those that contain liquids, with the female. For example, such tendencies are visible in New Kingdom Egypt in the so-called *Gravidenflasche* and *Muttermilchkrüglein*. The former are small vessels ranging in height from 9–20 cm. made of travertine, clay, ivory, or alabaster in the form of a nude female with a swollen abdomen, either standing or with knees pulled to the torso, with pendulous breasts and arms on the stomach. The standing examples are understood to be pregnant, while those in the more crouching pose may be parturient.<sup>32</sup> These *Gravidenflasche* contained oils and unguents of use to pregnant women, such as to avoid stretch marks.<sup>33</sup> The *Muttermilchkrüglein* ranged in height from 10–17 cm. and appeared in materials similar to the *Gravidenflasche*. They depicted clothed females holding a child, and contained mother’s milk to be used in medicinal recipes (Fig. 8).<sup>34</sup>

31. Asher-Greve and Westenholtz 2013: 155–156.

32. Brunner and Traut 1970b: *passim*.

33. Toivari and Viitala 2001: 171–172; Janssen and Janssen 1990: 3.

34. Brunner and Traut 1970a: *passim*.



Fig. 8. New Kingdom Flask, Brooklyn Museum 61.9. Photograph from <https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/3704>.

In Prepalatial Crete, eight sites of ritual activity (Pyrgos, Trapeza Cave, Myrtos, Phournou Koriphi, Koumasa, Malia, Mochlos, and Archanes Phourni) brought to light eleven female vessel figurines, ranging in date from Early Minoan I to Middle Minoan IA.<sup>35</sup> Some of these vessels show a female (per breasts and even pudenda) who herself holds a pouring vessel, as the examples from Myrtos and Trapeza Cave. Other vessels have the female with pierced breasts, such that the liquid within might be poured out of her nipples, suggesting to Alan Peatfield that the liquid in question may have been milk.<sup>36</sup>



Fig. 9. “Goddess of Myrtos”, Archaeological Museum of Aghios Nikolaos MAN AE 7719.

35. Peatfield 1995: 223.

36. Peatfield 1995: 223.



Fig. 10. Late 6<sup>th</sup>–early 5<sup>th</sup>-century Bichrome Red Ware jug with female anthropomorphic figure. Cesnola Collection, Metropolitan Museum of Art, # 74.51.563. Photograph from Karageorghis 2000, pg. 104, #168.

Moving forward in time, female pouring vessels typified the Cypro-Archaic I–II periods in Cyprus (750–450 BCE). Earlier versions of such jugs were topped with a female head in front of the jug handle, while the spout was a part of the woman’s “body” including the breasts. Later versions revealed a diminutive female opposite the jug handle, herself holding a miniature jug which could serve as the actual pouring spout for the vessel (Fig. 10).<sup>37</sup> In early Etruria, water-carrying vessels decorated with geometric motifs might also feature breasts. Such vessels were used to contain the cremated remains of the dead, as was the case for this example from Vulci (Fig. 11).<sup>38</sup>



Fig. 11. Etruscan biconical, impasto funerary urn with breasts from Vulci, Italy, 9<sup>th</sup> century. Museo di Villa Giulia, Rome. Photograph from Pugliese Carratelli 1986, pg. 542, #442.

37. The standard work on these is Vandenaabeele 1998.

38. My heartfelt thanks to Jean MacIntosh Turfa for this reference!

The funerary context of this final example leads to the second possible reason why the Kiš jar handles were conceived of as female. Ethnomusicological evidence indicates that, cross-culturally, it is women who serve as ritual lamenters at funerals. This broad statement is supported in early Mesopotamia specifically by documents that refer to female lamenters in pre-Sargonic Lagash and throughout the Diyala region.<sup>39</sup> Early Sargonic texts refer to SAL.BALAG.DI/*šarihtu*, who appear to be professional lament singers with sufficient autonomy to serve as witnesses on legal documents.<sup>40</sup> A “Woman Lamenters’ Organization” is strongly suggested by reference to an É.MUNUS.BALAG.DI—House of the female lamenters.<sup>41</sup> Considering the funerary context of the upright handle jars in question, it is eminently reasonable that the female identification of the images on the jars derive from an association with/identification as female lamenters.

#### 4.2. *Nude*

The female gender of the jar handle might be explained by the cross-cultural association between women and liquid containers and woman and funerary rites. What this does not explain is why some of the handles appear to be nude, displaying as they do female genitalia.<sup>42</sup> This stands both for those detailed handles that have the pudenda on the handle itself, and those earlier examples where the “pubic triangle” decorated the shoulder of the jug. In short, why are some of the handles deliberately eroticized (revealing sexual characteristics beyond the need to establish biological sex), seeing as the female sex of the objects might be established by breasts alone?<sup>43</sup>

This appearance of deliberate nudity has, of course, over the years led to notions of “Mother Goddesses” and fertility charms. I suspect it was only the presence of these items in women’s and children’s graves that held at bay the notion of “Concubines of the Dead.” However, the idea of a revitalizing Mother/fertility goddess runs contrary to the Mesopotamian *Weltanschauung* regarding death. Unlike Egypt, where rejuvenation after death is an increasingly universalizing ideal, the Mesopotamians understood that they went to “The Land of No Return.”<sup>44</sup> There is no concept of reincarnation in the Mesopotamian world view, even though offerings might be made to the shades of the dead for their existence in the underworld.<sup>45</sup> The female images in question do not appear to pertain to the resurrection of the dead, even while they pertain to the realm of the dead.

39. Cooper 2006: 43.

40. Steinkeller 1982: 367–368.

41. Cooper 2006: 43; Steinkeller 1982: 368.

42. I get the feeling if professional lamenters performed in the nude, we’d probably have heard about it.

43. In this I disagree with Julia Asher-Greve, who has argued that the nudity of the handles served only to indicate their female sex, with no erotic connotations. “The so-called ‘goddess handles’... are not nude, but ‘abstract’ images semiotically marked as ‘female’ (pubic triangle and breasts on rectangular surfaces).” Asher-Greve and Sweeney 2006: 150, n. 52. Whether or not the nude female body in Mesopotamia is *inevitably* sexualized/eroticized in all contexts, per Bahrani (2001: 47), remains to be seen.

44. Potts 1997: 226, with references.

45. Potts 1997: 226–227.



I believe it likely that the jar handles may have come to represent an early, crude depiction of Inana. The arguments are highly tentative, I admit, but such an identification would account for the nudity, the association with Kiš, and the funerary context.

From an iconographic standpoint, the fully frontal, nude depiction of the female gracing the handles conforms to what we know about goddesses' iconography, and especially Inana's iconography, in the third millennium.<sup>46</sup> It can, of course, be argued that the frontal nature of the females derives from their evolution from the rectangular and symmetrical geometric handles. However, as noted by Asher-Greve, such frontality in the divine iconography of the ED period was reserved exclusively for major female deities.<sup>47</sup> As such, the frontality of the handles, although the result of an alternate evolution, would be seen to conform to Inana's proper iconography at the time in question.<sup>48</sup>

The nudity itself may relate back to Inana as a goddess of sexuality (among other things). As an innately erotic goddess, both a clothed and a nude portrayal would be appropriate for her. In the Sumerian hymns, the goddess in her bridal form (opposite bridegroom Dumuzi), extols her vulva as well as her breasts, and thus emphasis on these physical elements in the iconography would not be wholly out of place for this goddess:

“See now, my breasts stand out; see now, hair has grown on my vulva, signifying (?) my progress to the embrace of a man. Let us be very glad! Dance, dance! O Bau, let us be very glad about my vulva! Dance, dance! Later on it will delight him, it will delight him!”  
A balbale of Inana.<sup>49</sup>

Additionally, as the goddess of war, the criss-cross over the chest might be indicative of Inana's war baldric.

The extent to which nudity was used in the depiction of goddesses in the Early Dynastic period is highly ambiguous given our current data. Those goddesses identified by name or title in monumental artworks—Inana, Nanše, Baba, and Ningal<sup>50</sup>—are depicted clothed, and with horned miters to indicate their divinity. Even the Early Dynastic glyptic art shows only horned goddesses in full garb.<sup>51</sup> Concerning the lack of horns, though, one must also recall that the use of horned miters was relatively new in Mesopotamian iconography in the third millennium, only first beginning to appear in the ED II period.<sup>52</sup> Additionally, the less elite medium and context of the terracotta handles, as well as their crude rendering, may account for the lack of horns as a sign of divinity. By contrast, a roughly contemporary (EDIIIb) bronze and silver figurine from the “Ur Treasure” discovered at Mari depicts a fully frontal nude female who *does* wear a horned miter, indicating that iconographically identifiable goddesses could be rendered nude (Fig. 12). However, as noted by Eva Andrea Braun-Holzinger, “die Kupferstatuette aus dem

46. Asher-Greve and Westenholz 2013: 163–209; Asher-Greve 2006: *passim*.

47. Asher-Greve 2006: 13.

48. Along with a few other goddesses, notably Ninhursag.

49. ETCSL t. 4.08.03, ll. 42–49, adapted.

50. Asher-Greve 2006: 33.

51. Asher-Greve and Westenholz 2013: 383.

52. Asher-Greve and Westenholz 2013: 163.

Hortfund aus dem Palastheiligtum ist bisher die einzige plastische Figur der frühdynastischen Zeit mit Hörnen.”<sup>53</sup>



Fig. 12

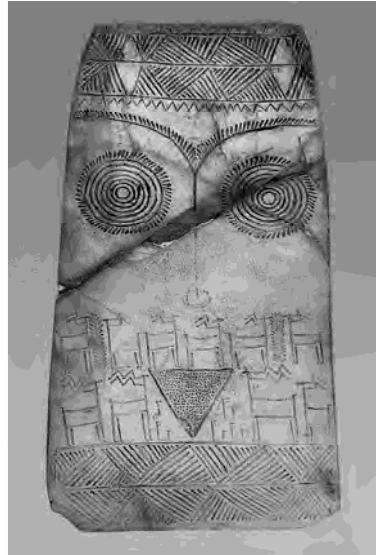


Fig. 13

Fig. 12. Bronze figurine from the Treasure of Ur, Mari. National Museum, Damascus, Syria, #2366. Photograph from Aruz (ed.) 2003, pg. 142, #82.

Fig. 13. Alabaster Plaque from the Temple of Ninhursag, Mari. Museum of Deir ez-Zor, Syria, #19088. Photograph from Aruz (ed.) 2003, pg. 163, #106.

Perhaps, then, we should not be overly strict in demanding horns as signs of divinity in all media from this period. Finally, concerning nudity and divinity, an engraved alabaster stele from the Temple of Ninhursag in Mari, dating to c. 3000–2900, reveals qualities quite similar to the jar handles in question (Fig. 13).<sup>54</sup> A rectangular base reveals a schematic face with oversized eyes and brows and a central, tiny nose. Beneath the nose are two rows of horned animals above and on either side of a stippled pubic triangle. The size of the pubic triangle and its relative spacing from the “eyes” thus gives the eyes a secondary (primary?) appearance as breasts. If not a goddess *per se*, the slab does associate nudity—and specifically breasts and pudenda—with goddess iconography (per its divine location). Nudity, then, was not incompatible with divine representation in the third millennium.

Although we have less textual documentation for the cities of northern Mesopotamia (including the Diyala region) than we do for the southern cities such as Uruk,<sup>55</sup> it appears likely that Inana was a city deity of Kiš before the campaigns of Lugalzagezi of Uruk, and was most certainly so after the retaking of the city by Sargon of Akkad.<sup>56</sup> Clinging to a city goddess in the face of conquest could have functioned as

53. Braun-Holzinger 2013: 15.

54. Asher-Greve and Westenholz 2013: 138–139; Aruz 2003: 163.

55. Asher-Greve and Westenholz 2013: 40.

56. *Ibid*: 21 and 27.

a form of group solidarity and holding on to the past. Depicting the goddess as nude may have helped to distinguish a native, northern, Kišite version of the goddess from her manifestation in Uruk, where Inana was also city goddess, though portrayed clothed (the Warka Vase is a notable example). **IF** the residents of Kiš did preserve some memory of nude female iconography in their region from the earlier Early Dynastic days, the portrayal of *any* nude female could serve as an ethnic marker, and thus a way to distinguish one's own goddess from that of a southern enemy. In being buried with the symbol of Kiš's goddess, foreign males (from Uruk? from Akkad?) solidified their identity with their adopted city.

The possible use of nude Inana iconography in a funerary context in a defeated city may likewise pertain to Inana's relationship with death. Her presence in the grave in the context of a vessel for liquids (*pace* Moorey) may relate to her role in the myth of *Inana's Descent*. In this narrative, Inana is stripped nude and is "killed" by her sister Ereškigal, turned into a slab of rotten meat hanging on the wall. With the help of Uncle Enki, she is revived with "waters of life" by the GALA / *assinu* and *kulû*, and thus is able to make a return journey to land of the living.

164-172. "After she had crouched down and had her clothes removed, they were carried away. Then she made her sister Ereškigala rise from her throne, and instead she sat on her throne. The Anuna, the seven judges, rendered their decision against her. They looked at her—it was the look of death. They spoke to her—it was the speech of anger. They shouted at her—it was the shout of heavy guilt. The afflicted woman was turned into a corpse. And the corpse was hung on a hook..."

217-225. "Father Enki answered Ninšubur: 'What has my daughter done? She has me worried. What has Inana done? She has me worried. What has the mistress of all the lands done? She has me worried. What has the mistress of heaven done? She has me worried.' Thus Father Enki helped her in this matter. He removed some dirt from the tip of his fingernail and created the kur-ġara. He removed some dirt from the tip of his other fingernail and created the gala-tura. To the kur-ġara he gave the life-giving plant. To the gala-tura he gave the life-giving water..."

273-281. "They were offered a river with its water—they did not accept it. They were offered a field with its grain—they did not accept it. They said to her: 'Give us the corpse hanging on the hook.' Holy Ereškigala answered the gala-tura and the kur-ġara: 'The corpse is that of your queen.' They said to her: 'Whether it is that of our king or that of our queen, give it to us.' They were given the corpse hanging on the hook. One of them sprinkled on it the life-giving plant and the other the life-giving water. And thus Inana arose."<sup>57</sup>

In contrast to notions of rebirth and fertility in the afterlife, a reference to Inana in a funerary context, especially in symbolic association with offered liquids, may instead refer to the goddess's resuscitation in the Underworld, curing her from her "meat-hook" status. The presence of a schematic/symbolic Inana on the jug may call to mind notions of the "Waters of Life" which, while not bringing the dead back to life,

57. Translation from ETCSL <http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=t.1.4.1#>.

would allow the body to emerge from corpse status to sentient entity in the “World of No Return.”<sup>58</sup> The nudity of the handles might not merely reference Inana’s innate eroticism, but could also call to mind her naked state when at the mercy of the Goddess of Death Ereškigal.

I think it likely that the meaning the nude female handles came to have for the Kišites proceeded from the religious to the civic. After an initial gestalt effect of the human brain caused the geometric handles to become increasingly anthropomorphic, female associations with vessels, liquids, and death determined their gender. With increasing nudity came connections with a northern Inana, one who escaped death, and, not insignificantly, one who could be contrasted with her own southern, Urukian identity. This specifically Kišite Inana (or, possibly, similar goddess who syncretized with Inana) then became a marker of Kišite ethnic identity, and perhaps a symbol of resistance to the sovereignty of Uruk.

### 5. *Out from Kiš*

The later history of the nude female jug handles appears to confirm this hypothesis. Concerning ethnic identity, from Kiš the symbol spread outwards to other regions in the Diyala, appearing as jugs or, far more frequently, detached handles with apparently their own, independent meaning in sites such as Abu Salabikh, Khafadjeh, and Tell Asmar. The region that had made use of nude female iconography in the ED I period once again came to adopt the image at that precise moment in time when the Mesopotamian north (embodied in the person of Sargon of Akkad) faced off against the Mesopotamian south (particularly Uruk). In appropriating the warrior goddess in a style particular to the north but not the south, the Diyala made claim to the divinity.

From here, the image of the nude female jug handle could serve as an ethnic identifier throughout Mesopotamia, wherever residents of the Diyala spread. Thus, I believe it likely that such ethnic identity was the meaning of the most highly evolved nude female jug handle, found in Personal Grave 895 at Ur (object# 10747, now in the British Museum) (Fig. 14). This item was discovered in an intact tomb of an individual who already stood out for the presence of a unique series of buttons on her/his apparel (30 flattened, diamond shaped steatite beads, about 6 1/2 cm long, on a string with two double conoid carnelian beads, themselves associated with the Indus Valley).<sup>59</sup> The handle, found behind the tomb resident’s head, had no accompanying jar; the handle was included for its own value/symbolic significance (once again, the grave was fully intact; the absence of a jar does equal absence). As noted by Woolley:

“[A]s it does preserve a complete figure it might have been considered by its owner an object of some value and so have been deposited in the grave. It is the only instance in the whole cemetery of a definitely religious figurine being placed with the dead. Dr. Legrain... pointed out that the figurine in question is broken off from the rim of a vase to which it had formed a handle, and that it belongs to the series of ‘granny’ vases found at Kish...; that type of case seems to be a local type peculiar to Kish

58. For the record, the Waters of Life did not permit Inanna herself to return from the abode of Ereškigal; that was a separate negotiation involving the sacrifice of Inana’s husband.

59. My thanks to Aubrey Baadsgaard for information on this jewelry.

and it has no real parallel at Ur..., so that this isolated and fragmentary instance may well have been an imported example and therefore would possess a certain value even though it was broken."<sup>60</sup>



Fig. 14. Front and back. Anthropomorphic Handle from Private Grave 895, Ur, British Museum, #10747. Photographs from <http://ur.iaas.upenn.edu/subject/10543/>.

The Ur handle is a clear transitional piece between the schematic jug handles of Kiš and the Diyala region and the three-dimensional figurines that begin to emerge in metal, ivory, and terracotta in the late ED IIIb and Akkadian periods. Although originally attached to a clay vessel (at both foot *and* head levels: in contrast to the upright handles of the Diyala), the handle shows more detailed rendering and greater depth of sculpture. The head is arrow-shaped rather than squared off, and it is the first known example of a Nude Female with piercings for earrings. Also presaging things to come are the arms, which show the distinctive positioning of one arm (with fully rendered hand and fingers!) under the breast, the other indicating the pubis, shown with vulva and pubic hair. Once detached from the jar, this image becomes the standard form of the Nude Female for the rest of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium and beyond.

It is likely that this handle, broken and repaired in life before being placed with the dead, served as a marker of ethnic identity for the occupant of PG 895. She or he may have originally come from the Diyala region, although without the preserved bones further speculation is difficult. In addition to this handle, one other possible marker of northern affiliation came to light from Ur. Jar U. 10183 (now in the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology) was found in PG 778. The handle has a geometric, not anthropomorphic, decoration, although there are two bumps at the top reminiscent of eyes/breasts. The remaining decoration is an elaborate criss-cross over the body of the handle. These two items from Ur—handle 10747 and jar 10183—are the only examples of such Kišite

60. Woolley 1934: 162.

ethnic markers in southern Mesopotamia, and, with the nude female handle from PG 895, jar U.10183 may have been a personal marker of northern identity.<sup>61</sup>

As stated above, handle 10747 from Ur is a somewhat transitional piece, linking the crude jar handles from the Diyala with a more three-dimensionally developed Nude Female figurines tradition that endures well into the Iron Age. If we might accept the identity of these earliest Nude Females as representations of Inana, this might explain their growing popularity during the Akkadian period (2340–2112 BCE). Sargon of Akkad, “liberator” of Kiš and heir to the city’s regal authority, was himself strongly attached to Inana (Akkadian Ištar), and justified his right to rule on the grounds that A:) Ištar loved him; and B:) he was a continuator of the sovereignty of Kiš (having been cup-bearer for Ur-Zababa). It is no wonder, then, that the Nude Female image becomes a common motif in Mesopotamian art starting quite specifically in the Akkadian period (2340–2112 BCE).

## 6. Conclusion

Rather than a charm for fertility or a symbol of maternity or prostitution, the Nude Female who graced the handles of funerary jars in ancient Kiš and, later, surrounding territories was a *political* symbol. She was a marker of ethnic identity and unity, binding together the various classes, ages, and sexes of Kiš, defiant against the encroachment of foreign powers. The jar handles’ femininity can be understood as the result of cross-cultural tendencies to associate females with containers, liquids, and the care of the dead. Over time, the anthropomorphism and feminization of the handles may have led them to be seen as simple manifestations of the goddess Inana, an erotic warrior goddess who recovered from death. The female body, even naked, might have a multitude of meanings. The Female and her body is not merely an object of male desire, but a multivalent symbol relevant to the political ideology of city-states.

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61. My thanks to William Hafford of the University of Pennsylvania Museum for assistance with the objects from Ur.

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# Gender, Religion, and Power in Ancient Mesopotamia: Some Methodological Considerations on Inanna/Ištar

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This article raises some theoretical and methodological considerations stemming from my doctoral research into the relationship between the cult of the goddess Inanna/Ištar and the organisation of political power during the third millennium BC.<sup>2</sup> The paper is divided into three sections. First, I will frame the methodological issues surrounding gendered approaches to the study of goddesses and their role in ancient Mesopotamian society and political structure, focusing on the figure of the goddess Inanna/Ištar. Then, I will discuss a theoretical framework of analysis that takes as its point of departure Judith Butler's work on power, gender, and identity, as well as its intersection with approaches to materiality and pragmatism in archaeology. This will help build a contextual methodology that fits the idiosyncrasies of an interdisciplinary project encompassing archaeological, textual, and art historical data. Finally, to put these considerations into practice, I will offer some preliminary observations about the interpretation of the nature and identity of the goddess Inanna/Ištar at the site of Mari during the 3<sup>rd</sup> and early 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC.

## 1. Introduction

Goddesses have been a problem for gender archaeology, rather than a starting point.<sup>3</sup> The intellectual heritage of 19<sup>th</sup>-century scholarship into the evolution of religion cast a long shadow over feminist inquiry into the connection between theology and gender ideology in the ancient Near East, with many scholars

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2. Given the controversy surrounding the identity and syncretisation of the goddess(es) identified as Inanna and Ishtar, I have chosen to refer to the phenomenon of temples, votive objects and royal inscriptions associated with the divine entity identified with the written form <sup>d</sup>MUŠ<sub>3</sub> and its variants under the overarching concept of Inanna/Ištar. This is not to imply that I understand Inanna/Ištar as a discrete entity, or that the process of syncretisation was complete by this point in time. The aim of this notation is simply to serve as a denominator of a modern conceptual entity that has generated much confusion, and which I proceed to investigate genealogically, much in the way that Judith Butler offered a feminist genealogy of the category of women.

3. Nelson 2011: 195. Gender archaeology *sensu* Conkey and Gero 1997.

choosing to shy away from this topic as a result of the bad press accrued by the so-called ‘goddess cult’ and the concept of an imagined matriarchal primeval society.<sup>4</sup> A differential approach to theory also seems to exist between studies on prehistoric and historical periods, whereby the latter do not engage as often with a growing body of theory on the materiality of religion and ritual that is itself more fully developed for the prehistoric periods.<sup>5</sup> In many instances, the sex and gender of the category ‘goddess,’ like that of (implicitly cisgender) ‘woman,’ remains unproblematised despite acknowledging the influence of third wave feminism(s), with some effort directed towards ‘queering’ aspects of identity formation and certain mythological figures.

## 2. *Inanna/Ištar and the Gender Controversy*

The goddess Inanna/Ištar has been the object of a large portion of gender-focused studies. The contouring of alternative, competing as well as complementary, sexualities on her body, and the exaltation of the concept of ‘liminality’ associated with her role(s) should now appear familiar to many scholars. Without aiming to be exhaustive, Brigitte Groneberg’s “hermaphroditos” and Rikvah Harris’s “paradox” both focus on the goddess’ bi-polarity, which is implicitly understood as masculine and feminine traits.<sup>6</sup> The polarization of Inanna/Ištar’s sex and gender into masculine and feminine stems from a few lines in literary texts, her identification with the morning and evening star—which sometimes appear to at least have a grammatical gender, and the interpretation of some gendered expressions.<sup>7</sup> All of this textual evidence is scattered over more than two millennia of written tradition. Meanwhile, the visual representation of the goddess appears consistently anthropomorphised in the shape of a human female body, yet the implications and genealogy of her representation have not been explored in detail.

On the basis of Judith Butler’s argument that sex and gender are constructed realities,<sup>8</sup> it is not enough to explore third genders and liminality, or to polarize interpretations into feminine and masculine features. The construction of heterosexuality itself as a structure of power must be addressed. Zainab Bahrani has offered a counterargument to both Groneberg’s and Harris’s positions, in which she twists Thorkild Jacobsen’s “truly all woman” catch-all phrase into a feminist reading in which Ištar stands as the “essence of femininity” and “the Other” against which “Mesopotamian masculine identity defined itself and Mesopotamian patriarchal culture delineated its boundaries.”<sup>9</sup> Despite the problematic of reconstructing the notion of ‘otherness’ in the past, Bahrani’s view may seem to offer an interesting

4. For a critique of Marija Gimbutas’s work on fertility cults in the Near East, see Hackett 1989 and Meskell 1995.

5. For example, the interdisciplinary approaches to spirituality and religious ritual in the emergence of complex societies at Çatalhöyük collected in Hodder 2010. Recent approaches to the archaeology of religion and ritual include those published in Kyriakides 2007; Insoll 2011; and Laneri 2015 for the Near East specifically. Asher-Greve and Westenholz (2013) describe the processes of transformation of goddesses from the 3rd to the 1st millennium BC; however, as the authors themselves acknowledge, their assessment is based largely on textual and some visual sources.

6. Groneberg 1986 and Harris 1990/91.

7. For a review of this evidence, see Heimpel 1982 and Selz 2000.

8. Butler 1990.

9. Jacobsen 1976: 143; Bahrani 2000.

reading that explains the patriarchal structure of Mesopotamian society, but fails to provide a *genealogy* of this binary construction and the structuration of power relations it implies. By contrast, in a rather complementary contribution, Joan Goodnick Westenholz explored the construction of masculine power through its pairing with the figure of the goddess under the Early Dynastic rubric “king by love of Inanna.”<sup>10</sup> Westenholz traces the use of the words ‘spouse’ and ‘love’ as metaphors that helped bring the king closer with the gods, both ideologically and psychologically. Her approach highlights the historically contingent nature of the image of the goddess, employing discourse analysis of royal inscriptions from the period in question, as well as later comparanda. However, the author does not engage with the archaeological evidence from this period, or explore the development of the visual composition of the image of the goddess.

With regard to the archaeological evidence of the earliest Mesopotamian temples (Late Uruk and Early Dynastic), initial interpretations were overwhelmingly influenced by the textual evidence, especially by later scribal traditions on pantheons and royal inscriptions, as well as the assumption of a conservative architectural and religious tradition. From Walter Andrae’s work in Aššur, where he was motivated to find the temple of Ištar based on a famous royal inscription of king Tiglath-Pileser I (1114–1076 BC),<sup>11</sup> the excavation of temples in ancient Mesopotamia has been characterised by undue focus on establishing evolutionary architectural typologies, at the expense of stratigraphic analysis. Such a focus has limited studies on how the performance of ritual and the shifting patterns in the organisation of space contributed towards shaping structures of power and signification, and their legitimation. Whilst this situation has been redressed, and there is an increasing number of studies on the internal as well as urban organisation of temples and the structuration of social power,<sup>12</sup> such analysis of the material in connection with Inanna/Ištar is still needed, despite the noted relationship between the office of kingship and the goddess.

Finally, the site of Uruk is often cited to substantiate claims of an uninterrupted, and to a certain extent unchanged, cult of the goddess going back to the late 4<sup>th</sup> millennium BC. However, the published literature on the subject should be employed with caution. Despite the potentially indexical relationship between the cuneiform sign MUŠ<sub>3</sub> used to spell the name of Inanna/Ištar (𐎶𐎵 = 𐎶MUŠ<sub>3</sub>) and the “reed bundle” typical from Late Uruk/Jemdet Nasr pictorial scenes such as on the Warka Vase (Figs 1-2),<sup>13</sup> and the relative significance of the latter as a symbol in visual representations from this period, its correlation with the cult of Inanna/Ištar at Uruk is far from clear, both archaeologically and textually. First, the archaeological context of the *Sammelfund*, which the Warka Vase is part of, is not clear, as it was unearthed beneath the Ur-Namma ziggurat in a disturbed context.<sup>14</sup> The identification of the figure

10. Westenholz 2000.

11. As discussed by Bär in his reanalysis of Andrae’s excavations, especially the Ištar temple in Aššur (Bär 2003).

12. For example, Meijer (2002) on the Sin Temple at Khafajah, Tricoli (2014) on Old Babylonian neighbourhood shrines, and especially Dolce (2008) on the religious topography of Ebla, which touches on the figure of Ištar.

13. See also Englund 1998: figs. 20 and 31.

14. Strommenger 1980.

wearing the plain gown is far from clear, usually ranging between the goddess herself and a priestess.<sup>15</sup> Neither is fully convincing, in my opinion. Regarding the texts, the association has mainly been championed by Krystyna Szarzyńska, whose suspect readings of proto-cuneiform texts seem to get repeated in the literature without further scrutiny.<sup>16</sup> However, Bob Englund has cast serious doubts over her work on the textual sources from this period that cannot be dismissed.<sup>17</sup> Englund exercises caution when identifying temple households and deities in the textual evidence from these periods,<sup>18</sup> and reminds us that “the classical Sumerian pantheon as it emerged in the ED IIIa god lists is nowhere to be found in proto-cuneiform texts, so that discussions of archaic cults remain highly speculative.”<sup>19</sup> I take heed of his views on this point, especially given the lack of data from other sites to compare, including Zabala —the main contender to the seat of worship of Inanna during this period.<sup>20</sup> The changes observed in the archaeological record between the Late Uruk and Early Dynastic periods also advise caution when assuming the continuity of traditions.<sup>21</sup>



Fig. 1

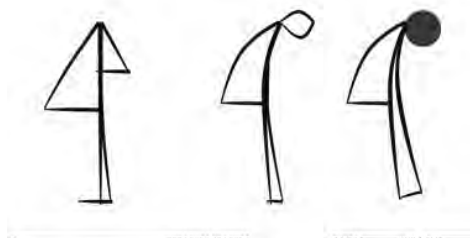


Fig. 2

Fig. 1. Detail of the top register of the Warka Vase, showing the female individual usually identified as Inanna or a priestess, and the “reed bundles” behind her (after Strommenger 1962: fig. 20).

Fig. 2. Proto-cuneiform line drawings of the sign MUŠ<sub>3</sub>, a showing its evolution from Uruk IV (right and centre) to Uruk III (left) periods (courtesy of CDLI).

15. Suter 2014.

16. Szarzyńska 2000 and references therein. Those accepting her views include Selz (2000), Westenholz (2000), or Steinkeller (2017: 27f.).

17. Englund 2004.

18. Englund 2006: 14.

19. Englund 2011.

20. As perhaps suggested by contemporary glyptic evidence from the archaic City Seals (Matthews 1993) and an Uruk III list of geographic names, in which it is spelled AB<sub>a</sub>.MUŠ<sub>3a</sub> (Molina 2017: 170).

21. See Nissen 2013.

The role of Inanna/Ištar has thus been discussed as both emancipatory and subjugating for women. Oftentimes, the literature and visual representations associated with her are taken as evidence for the relative status and sexual freedom that women would have enjoyed in ancient Mesopotamia.<sup>22</sup> Her gender is constructed in parallel to that of women, yet differentiated from them in her capacity as goddess. This is usually based on the analysis of textual evidence, and sometimes material from a range of periods and geographic locations is brought into consideration, giving way to a multiplicity of roles and attributes that appear to contour the gender of the deity as “truly all woman” or “a paradox.”<sup>23</sup> Whilst the influence of feminist approaches on the interpretation of her gender, role, and status is evident in the range of topics and the approaches taken by the studies discussed above, there are two elements that have perhaps not received as much attention: a) a genealogical inquiry into the processes through which her gender was constructed, and b) a more active engagement with materiality as intrinsic to a theory of gender performativity. To paraphrase Margaret Conkey when she stated that archaeology needs to be regendered by questioning the notions of gender which have been applied,<sup>24</sup> my approach seeks to regender the notions of gender that have been applied to the divine world, inquiring into how the categories of ‘goddess’ and ‘god’ and the relations between them—and humans—have arisen and changed over time.

### 3. *Theorising Gendered Relations between Humans and Deities*

The framework of analysis that I have designed in the course of my doctoral research into the context of the cult of Inanna/Ištar in Early Mesopotamia is here published as Fig. 3. This is a working model that has been developed through engaging with both theory and the data from the case studies that form the bulk of my research. Through the study of specific case studies, it is possible to formulate a theoretical model that explicates the processes through which the identity, the *perception* of the deity is constructed. The framework is founded upon three theoretical and methodological elements:

- Judith Butler’s theory of performativity and her “political genealogy of gender ontologies”<sup>25</sup>
- Charles Sanders Peirce’s Theory of Sign (semiotics), as adapted to anthropological and archaeological inquiry<sup>26</sup>
- Social Constructivist Grounded Theory.<sup>27</sup>

22. For example, in Groneberg 2008, or Pryke 2017. The assumption that the world of deities reflects the roles of humans in society is referred to as “the mirror image theory,” which Asher-Greve and Westenholz warn against (2013: 27f.).

23. The concept of ‘contour’ in Butler’s theory refers to the performance of ‘gender norms’ that regulate and control the materialisation of ‘sexed bodies’, so that they train, shape, and form the very contours of a person’s body (Butler 1993: 17, 54). What I suggest here is that the amalgam of evidence, seen through the modern lens of ‘gender’, appears to ‘fix’ or ‘contour’ the body of the goddess so that it feels unchanging or even primordial.

24. Conkey 2008: 49.

25. Butler 1990, 1993.

26. Parmentier 1994; Preucel 2006.

27. Charmaz 2014.

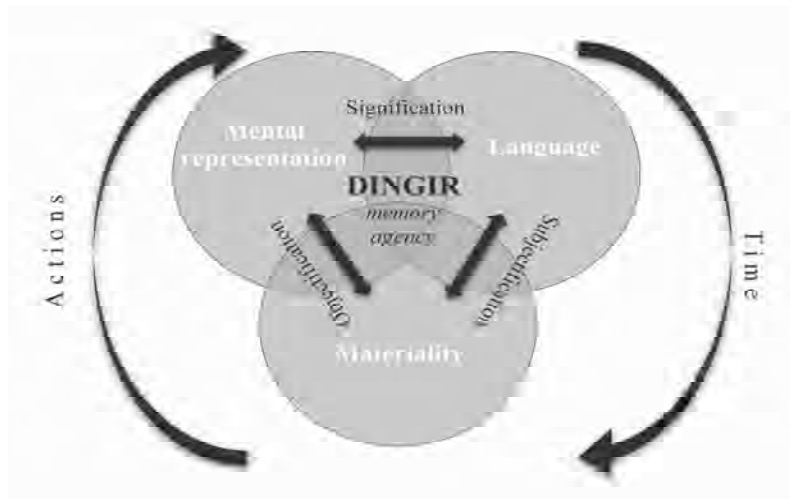


Fig. 3. A working framework of the genealogical construction of a deity.

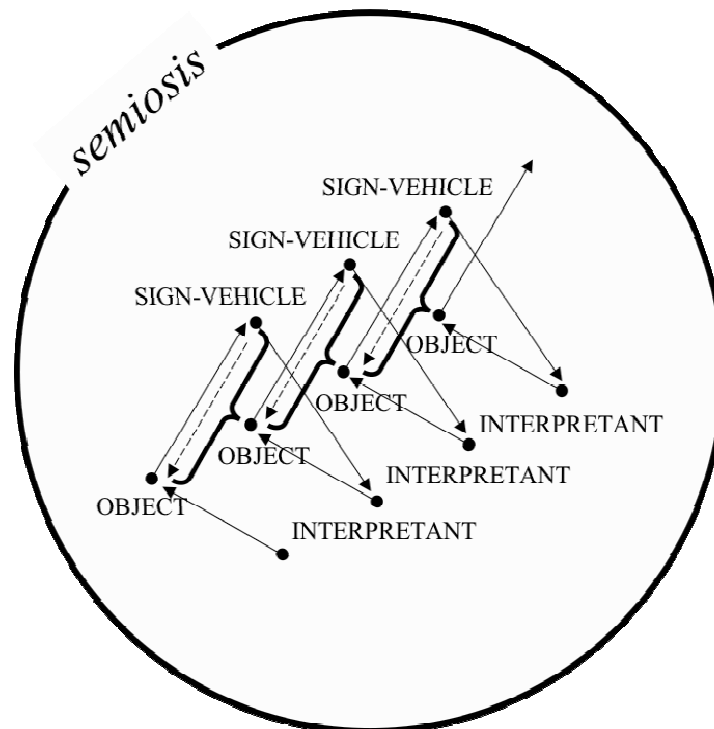


Fig. 4. Peirce's chain of signification in the process of semiosis (adapted from Parmentier 1994: 10; Preucel and Bauer 2001: 90; and Atkin 2013).

Judith Butler's 'political genealogy of gender ontologies' refers to Michel Foucault's genealogical analysis, which, as Gutting explains, aims to "show that a given system of thought was the result of BMO 10 (2018) 199-221 (ISBN: 978-84-9168-073-4)  
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contingent turns of history, not the outcome of rationally inevitable trends”<sup>28</sup> through the painstaking analysis of details and the accumulation of source material—his ‘archaeology’ as historiographical methodology.

The framework presented in Fig. 3 revolves around the conceptualization of divinity in ancient Mesopotamia (the sign “DINGIR”), which here refers to the “congealed” appearance of substance, the identity of the deity, that is produced through the repeated stylization of the body as repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame. This is formulated on Judith Butler’s definition of the performativity of gender.<sup>29</sup> The repetition of (ritual) acts produces the sense of *memory* which appears as tradition, even though each act is never quite the same. This aspect introduces the potential for change, which Butler explains as subversive acts. More generally, the potential for change is reflected in Peirce’s chain of signification (Fig. 4), which observes two infinite series, one back towards the Object and another forward towards the Interpretant.<sup>30</sup> Thus, each act is intrinsically determined by the “political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained”<sup>31</sup> yet ever shifting through the choice of repetition. The sensory experience of signs produces the *agency* of the deity through a range of sign-vehicles, because signs (in the Peircean sense) are active agents of communication that form chains of signification.<sup>32</sup> The outside arrows exemplify the regulatory repetition of these *actions* over *time*, through which the sign (“DINGIR”) is congealed to appear substantial, e.g. in the case of our modern definition of Inanna/Ištar as goddess of femininity, sexuality and warfare. The intersection of the three aspects of ‘mental representation’, ‘language’, and ‘materiality’ surrounding the central region illustrate Robert Preucel’s interpretation of Peirce’s Theory of Signs. Preucel explains that “[a] more productive approach [to causality] is to consider social relationships as mediated by things in a triadic relation where people, things, and words in various combinations can all function as signs, objects, and interpretants depending upon the semiotic context.”<sup>33</sup> The semiotic context can frame triadic processes of ‘objectification’, ‘signification’ and ‘subjectification’ through which the Interpretant is produced.<sup>34</sup>

To clarify the terms discussed in Fig. 4, the Interpretant is the sign created by the observer of the Object-Sign-Vehicle relation in Peirce’s theory, and thus the mental image. The “Sign-Vehicle” is the sign as signifying element, i.e. “those elements most crucial to its functioning as a signifier.”<sup>35</sup> Peirce is not always clear in his use of these terms. The sign (e.g. “DINGIR”) does not exist as an entity, it is contained in the relational sequence.

28. Gutting 2014.

29. Butler 1990: 45.

30. Parmentier 1994: 10.

31. Butler 1990: 4.

32. Preucel and Bauer 2001: 91.

33. Preucel 2006: 257.

34. Preucel and Bauer 2001: 91.

35. Atkin 2013.

A convergence of feminist and pragmatist approaches proves useful, in my opinion, since both share many fundamental aspects. Even though Butler did not draw directly from Peirce's work, the synchronicity between performativity and triadic relations cannot be overlooked. For Peirce, symbols grow, and "there is no ultimate object which could be represented in some symbol and not itself a representation, but there is no ultimate interpretant."<sup>36</sup> As such, his theory focuses on *acts* and processes instead of entities and static relationships. It has the appeal that it can be applied to both 'things' and 'words', and the social practices that constitute the *enactive* regimes that regulate them.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, it is preferable to Saussure's approach because it "allows us to acknowledge how meaning varies in social practice."<sup>38</sup>

Finally, social constructivist grounded theory frames the above within a reflexive methodology. At a glance, grounded theory consists of "systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories from the data themselves."<sup>39</sup> Social constructivist grounded theory recognises the role of the researcher in the co-construction of theories and thus incorporates *reflexivity* as a tool. It also points out the impossibility of apprehending data *a priori* without understanding the circumstances in which they are co-constructed. Thus, like Peirce, it highlights the role that as researchers we play in co-constructing the very ideas we seek to explain, and advocates an approach that re-engages data in order to reconceptualise in with the help of explicit analytical frameworks.

Thus, the framework proposed focuses on actions and processes through the theoretical lens of performativity, aiming to delineate their context carefully in order to identify the *conditions* under which specific actions, intentions, and processes emerge or are muted. I look for ways to interpret these data, paying attention to specific words, images, and spaces that seem to acquire particular meaning. In order to illustrate how this framework operates in practice, I will now briefly review the archaeological, textual, and art historical evidence for the cult of Inanna/Ištar at Mari, tracing its genealogical construction.<sup>40</sup>

#### 4. *Inanna/Ištar and the Social 'Body Politic' in Mari: Preliminary Remarks*

The site of Mari has contributed significant material employed in the reconstruction of the figure and cult of Inanna/Ištar in the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC. The current interpretation of the political and archaeological history of the city situates Mari as a relatively independent, but probably multicultural trading settlement which enjoyed some political power at the regional level during the late Early Dynastic and Old Babylonian periods.<sup>41</sup> It appears that opposed to a purely territorial concept of the state, commercial power and political prestige were at least as important in the political organisation at the regional level of

36. Parmentier 1994: 10.

37. Preucel 2006: 257.

38. Preucel and Bauer 2001: 92.

39. Charmaz 2014: 1.

40. A more detailed analysis of the material will appear in my doctoral thesis.

41. Margueron 2014.



Early Mesopotamia,<sup>42</sup> and that an asymmetrical relationship between the north and the south has been exaggerated.<sup>43</sup> Within the highly volatile political landscape of the Early Dynastic IIIa-b period (= Early Jezirah III), temple construction and the establishment of genealogical ties—as evidenced by the royal inscriptions—appear to have played significant roles in the shaping of political rule leading towards the construction of the Akkadian Empire. In this context, the geographical dimensions of deities from votive inscriptions and administrative texts gain relevance. In the following sections, I trace the shifts in the urban religious landscape of Mari and map them alongside the textual and visual evidence.

### 5. *The Early Dynastic – Akkadian Levels*

According to the final reports, the evidence from the archaeological levels dating to the Early Dynastic III and proto-Akkadian periods suggested that Inanna/Ištar was worshipped at three separate temples under several ‘avatars’, which were identified as: Ištar, Ninni-zaza, and Ištarat.<sup>44</sup> However, there are many issues with the method of excavation and the results published were predicated on existing ideas of the deity based on Walter Andrae’s theories that require a careful reanalysis of the material.<sup>45</sup> The circular reasoning between architecture and text is evident in Andrae’s identification of the temple in Aššur as the oldest Mesopotamian temple on the basis of his architectural typology (he was an architect after all) and the assumption of the continuity of cult in ancient Mesopotamia.<sup>46</sup> Andrae’s pioneering work would greatly influence Parrot’s approach at Mari some twenty years later, especially with regards to the identification of the “Ištar Temple” and the description of her cult. Subsequent work on the textual sources from Mari has offered different options of *who* was worshipped in these temples, including several attempts to establish a binary opposition between two of the temples as the ‘female’ and ‘male’ aspects of the goddess.<sup>47</sup> The assumption that there existed a male/female dichotomy underpins these interpretations, which often cite Szarzyńska’s work to support the claim. The underlying paradox is that while approaches to texts assume the material context of cult as a static given, approaches to the architectural and material remains also assume knowledge of the deity’s identity as a given. Instead, moving away from the assumptions of the continuity of cult and the existence of a male/female split gender, let us review the textual evidence in context alongside the archaeological evidence.

The table below summarises the textual evidence for (seemingly) female deities in the three temples, which is contrasted with administrative documents dating to the same period. Looking at the evidence, the existence of a split-gendered Inanna/Ištar at Mari—whether seen as the morning and evening star or as the warlike aspect of the goddess—does not seem the most straightforward explanation for the different spellings found in the votive inscriptions and administrative texts. For example, in his study of the Mari

42. See Ristvet 2015: 36f. on the territorial expression of sovereignty before cartography at Ebla.

43. McMahon 2012.

44. Parrot 1956, 1967.

45. Andrae based his search for and interpretation of the Ištar temple at Aššur on both existing Assyrian royal inscriptions and the German scholarly tradition of classical architecture. See Bär 2003.

46. Andrae 1977: 72f.

47. Heimpel 1982; Lambert 1985; Archi 1993; Marchesi and Marchetti 2011: 185, cat. 12 fn. 7.

pantheon, Lambert points out the regional variety of deities associated with Ištar in northern Mesopotamian cities compared to southern ones in post-Akkadian sources; however, he then chooses to focus on a purely gendered division for the evidence from the Early Dynastic period.<sup>48</sup> Instead, I would argue that various Early Dynastic “Ištar” deities that appear in the texts and votive inscriptions are linked with geographic locations.<sup>49</sup> This explanation is both simpler and in line with the evidence from later periods. As such, the various deities described under the umbrella of ‘MUŠ<sub>3</sub>’ appear to contain a geographic denotation, although the qualitative difference with those denoted by ‘NIN’ is not clear.<sup>50</sup> It is also not clear how the deity INANNA.NITA should be interpreted, but my suggestion is that the masculine determinant is simply used to identify a deity analogous in function to the other geographic variants, whatever that exact function might be. Significantly, such flexibility in the use of the written symbol <sup>d</sup>MUŠ<sub>3</sub> could be interpreted to signal that sex/gender itself was not the most important attribute during this period, other than as a helpful way to distinguish between different locales.<sup>51</sup>

The geographic variants appear to be reflected in the spatial configuration of the temples during this period and fits well with the overall consensus that Mari was founded as a trading centre along the Euphrates, not as a ‘Sumerian colony,’ but a loosely independent polity which would have enjoyed a diverse population and a well-planned urban layout that included a central administrative/palatial centre and clusters of buildings showing evidence of ritual activity (figure 5).<sup>52</sup> Although there was a ‘sacred space’ within the palace, the majority of temples were located outside its perimeter, thus not necessarily controlled by its administration and/or political rule of the settlement. It is important to stress the idiosyncrasy of the layout and internal organisation of these buildings; they suggest great variability in the conceptualisation of space, ritual installations, and votive objects. Focusing on the latter, the temple of Ištar-šarbat received the highest number of private dedicatory sculpture from high-status men in the royal court. This is evidenced by twenty-five inscribed male statues found in its cella.<sup>53</sup> The temple of Baššurat had fewer votive objects, from merchants, while the temple of INANNA.NITA had a larger number of high-status female votive statues, but the only three inscribed statues belonged to high-status men, including king Yišqīmari.<sup>54</sup>

Together with the votive statuary, the presence of a significant amount of steatite vessels in the intercultural style and the ivory inlays depicting scenes of prisoners and high-status “dignitaries,” the

48. Lambert 1985: 533 and 537.

49. Charpin 1987: 92–93.

50. General consensus agrees the name ‘Inanna’ derives from ‘Nin-anna’, or ‘Lady of Heaven,’ but her name is never written with the Sumerogram ‘NIN’ (= ‘Lady’), at least in Early Dynastic sources. However, conceptual overlaps with unrelated Akkadian forms such as *I-nin* might explain the confusion and/or syncretism. Selz (2000) discusses the challenges surrounding the relationship between these and other forms in further detail.

51. An analogous example is <sup>d</sup>UTU.NITA (“male” Šamaš) in a text from Ebla, used to identify the southern sungod (Archi 1993: 73).

52. Margueron 2014: 14f.

53. Parrot 1967.

54. Cluzan 2014.

evidence from the INANNA.NITA temple suggests a highly politicised and probably short-lived period of male influence on this temple shortly before the destruction of Mari at the hands of the Akkadian kings, which could be linked with Mari's increased power in the regional playfield.<sup>55</sup> One of the most striking features of the temple is the amount of stone used during the construction phase before its destruction. The dressed walls of the cella and paving of the space outside it signal a wealthy patronage during this phase, which must have coincided with the reign of Yišqīmari, although not necessarily his work.<sup>56</sup>

I would suggest that in view of the clear geographic dimension and distribution of these deities, the location of the INANNA.NITA temple on the edge of the city, and the lack of administrative texts mentioning this specific deity (although this may be the result of bias in the evidence), that this temple gained the favour of a particular ruling elite for a period of time, for reasons that are unclear and may remain that way. What is more important perhaps is to observe the dynamics between the palace and the temples, and how they seem to enact and co-construct diverse yet typically Mari-like social realities (ethnic, status, gender, individuality) through the consecution of ritual acts that included the dedication of votive objects. Such practices reflect Lauren Ristvet's point that "ritual was one of the main techniques that individuals used to create political communities and establish a framework for belonging."<sup>57</sup> The increased male influence reflected in the statuary associated with the temples discussed is here suggested as a marker for the construction of male political power in an antithetical relationship with the image and identity of deities linked to the concept of "dMUŠ<sub>3</sub>". The changes in regional politics that succeeded the fall of Mari under the Akkadian Empire would affect the constructed religious urban landscape of the city, especially these three temples.

55. On the steatite vessels, see Butterlin 2014. Barbara Coutraud (2014) links the militaristic ivory inlays from the temple with those found in the palace and the temple of Ištar-šarbat. On Mari's political role, see Archi and Biga 2003.

56. Parrot 1957: 29f. However, a reconsideration of the stratigraphic sequence and architecture of this level is awaited (Margueron 2007). For the position of Yišqīmari in political history see Marchesi and Marchetti 2011: 137f.

57. Ristvet 2015: 2.

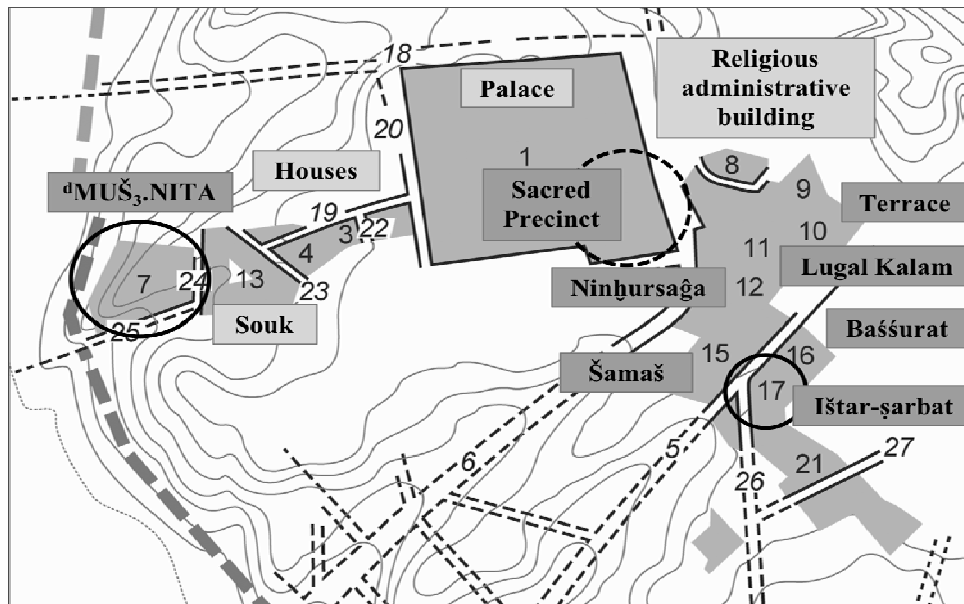


Fig. 5. Plan of City II showing cultic areas dedicated to Inanna/Ištar (the dotted line marks possible area), as well as other religious and secular areas (adapted from Margueron 2014: 30, fig. 49).

Archaeological Context	Type of Object	Deity Mentioned	Identification	Reference
Temple of INANNA.NITA (= "Ištar")	Statuary	<sup>d</sup> MUŠ <sub>3</sub> ×NITA <sup>d</sup> MUŠ <sub>3</sub> .UŠ	Male Ištar (?)	Cluzan and Lecompte 2014.
Temple of Ištar šarbat (= "Ninni-zaza")	Statuary	<sup>d</sup> MUŠ <sub>3</sub> .ZA.ZA <sup>d</sup> MUŠ <sub>3</sub> ×ZA+ZA <sup>d</sup> MUŠ <sub>3</sub> ×ZA	Ištar (of) šarbat (Lecompte and Colonna d'Istria forth., cited in Lecompte 2014: 134, fn. 12)	Over 20 inscribed statues. See Gelb and Kienast 1990 for text editions.
	Statuary	<i>BE-li-SU<sub>3</sub></i>	Unspecified male deity; not originally from Mari (?)	Marchesi and Marchetti 2011: 181–184 cat. 11a.
	Statuary	<sup>d</sup> MUŠ <sub>3</sub> -GIŠ.TIR	Ištar of the forest(?) (Gelb and Kienast read <i>šarbat</i> )	Gelb and Kienast 1990: 6–7 MP 4.
	Statuary	<sup>d</sup> NIN.da <sup>2</sup> -ra-[x]	Lady of...	Gelb and Kienast 1990: 21–22 MP 29.
Temple of Baššurat (= "Ištarat")	Stone vessel	<sup>d</sup> I <sub>7</sub> <sup>d</sup> Ba-sur <sub>x</sub> -ra-at	God of the river ordeal Baššurat (Goddess of the flowing waters?)	Krebernik 1984; Gelb and Kienast 1990: 10–11 MP 10.
	Stone plaque	<sup>d</sup> Ba-sur <sub>x</sub> -ra-at	Baššurat	Krebernik 1984; Gelb and Kienast 1990: 23 MP 33.
Private Collection	Clay jar	<sup>d</sup> NIN.ZI wa-ra-ne <sup>ki</sup>	NIN.ZI of Warane	Gelb and Kienast 1990: 8–9 MP 7.
G Sector, Area of	Administrative	<sup>d</sup> MUŠ <sub>3</sub>	Ištar (Inanna?)	Cavigneaux 2014:

North Temple 1 (TN1)	Tablet	<sup>d</sup> MUŠ <sub>3</sub> ×ZA.ZA <sup>d</sup> NIN-na-gar <sub>3</sub> <sup>d</sup> MUŠ <sub>3</sub> ×ZA.ZA <sup>d</sup> NIN-TUL <sub>8</sub> (LAGAB×TIL) <sup>d</sup> NIN-KUR <sup>d</sup> NIN-KAR	Ištar (of) šarbat Bēlet-Nagar Ištar (of) šarbat Bēlet-bīrī  Ninkarak	307 no. 28 (TH07-T9).
Residential area West of the “temple de Dagan présargonique”	Administrative tablet	<sup>d</sup> inanna-šar <sub>x</sub> (SUM)-bat <i>aš-tar<sub>2</sub> pa-ba-ka<sup>ki</sup></i> <i>aš-tar<sub>2</sub> iš ur<sub>3</sub>: gu<sub>4</sub>: ma<sub>2</sub></i> <i>aš-tar<sub>2</sub> kur ab-ba</i>	Ištar (of) šarbat Ištar (of) pabaka Ištar (of? for?) boats(?) Ištar (of) the country of the father/elder(?)	Charpin 1987: 74 no. 9 (T.67).
	Administrative tablet	<sup>d</sup> nin-kur <sup>d</sup> inanna-šar <sub>x</sub> (SUM)-bat	Ištar (of) šarbat	Charpin 1987: 73, no. 8 (T.66).
Presargonic Palace PI	Administrative tablet	<sup>d</sup> nin-x-ha-da-num <sub>2</sub> <sup>d</sup> nin-n[a]-ga[r <sub>3</sub> <sup>ki</sup> ] <sup>i</sup>	Bēlet-Hadanum(?) Bēlet-Nagar	Charpin 1987: 79, no. 20 (M.5390- 5391).

Table. List of votive inscriptions and female deities in administrative texts from Mari, ca. mid-3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC. All names of deities from the inscriptions found in the three temples are compiled here, including male deities and an unprovenanced jar. For the administrative texts, only the deities identified as female from representative texts are compiled here for comparative purposes.

### 6. The Late 3<sup>rd</sup> and Early 2<sup>nd</sup>-Millennium BC Levels

Moving into the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC, Mari’s urban organisation has both changed and maintained certain elements. The most significant changes are the disappearance of all three temples from the previous period (Fig. 6). It appears that the deities associated with Inanna/Ištar have been incorporated into the realm of the palace, where they appear prominently in the spatial organization of the building (Fig. 7). A chapel with wall paintings that probably dates to the Ur III period shows libations to the moon god Sîn and Inanna/Ištar’s astral manifestation. The chapel presides over the central space through which people would pass into the sacred precinct as well as through to the inner courtyard (Fig. 8). Another wall mural featuring a warlike Inanna/Ištar as the appointer of the king stands at the doorway to the throneroom in the inner courtyard (Fig. 9), where the statue of the goddess of the flowing waters was also found, perhaps associated with the earlier Baššurat.<sup>58</sup> The statue of a previous ruler (Ištup-ilum) placed on a podium in the throneroom materially establishes the genealogy of the king within the spatial organisation of the palace, and situates him closer to a supernatural realm. Regarding state administrative texts of the Old Babylonian period, they reveal both intrasite and regional variation, naming Ištar, Ištar of the palace, Ištar of Bišra or Ištar of Dīr, but also Bēlet-ekallim, Bēlet-ḥiṣāri, or Bēlet-Akkadī.<sup>59</sup> The particular case of Eštar Irradan (deity probably worshipped at Ekallatum, home of Samsī-Addu) at Mari has recently been studied by Elizabeth Knott, who proposes that “localized Ištar goddesses like Eštar

58. Lecompte and Colonna d’Istria forth.

59. Both Lambert (1985: 533) and Dossin (1950: 48f.) regard all as “avatars” or “hypostases” of Ištar. The difference between the syllabic *eš<sub>4</sub>-tar<sub>2</sub>* and logographic NIN is not explained.

Irradan were often invoked to construct and amplify social and political ties across space.”<sup>60</sup> Whilst regional variations appear in the textual sources, there is no archaeological evidence so far for separate temples or shrines dedicated to any Inanna/Ištar figure outside the palace.

Finally, the women’s quarters in the palace are not directly associated with the spaces where the goddess appears more prominently. However, it is difficult to assess exactly whether there is any correlation, negative or positive, between the goddess and the roles and status of contemporary women, given the idiosyncrasies of the visual arts and textual evidence. If anything, women seem to feature more often and more diversely in the 3<sup>rd</sup>-millennium BC visual material, such as in the votive statuettes found in the temples. Adelheid Otto has pointed out, however, that this fact may not signify a change in the status of women *per se*, but may have had more to do with a shift from representation of individuals to group scenes.<sup>61</sup> Therefore, while the implications of such a shift remain to be understood more fully, the present evidence does not suggest a specific correlation between the gender of the deity and that of women in contemporary society. If anything, the construction of the gender of the deity is more closely associated with the construction of the identity of the king, but not the idea of ‘masculinity’ as a monolithic dimension of identity, and not necessarily the concept ‘woman’ or ‘feminine’.

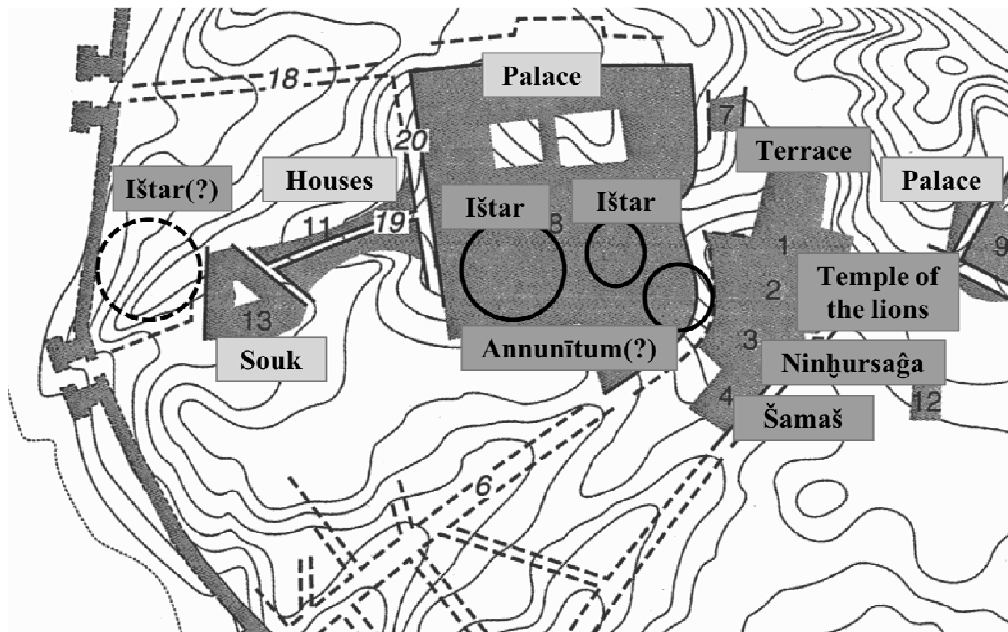


Fig. 6. Plan of City III showing cultic areas dedicated to Inanna/Ištar (the dotted line marks unclear areas), as well as other religious and secular areas (adapted from Margueron 2014: 31, fig. 58).

60. Knott 2017: 55.

61. Otto 2016: 143.

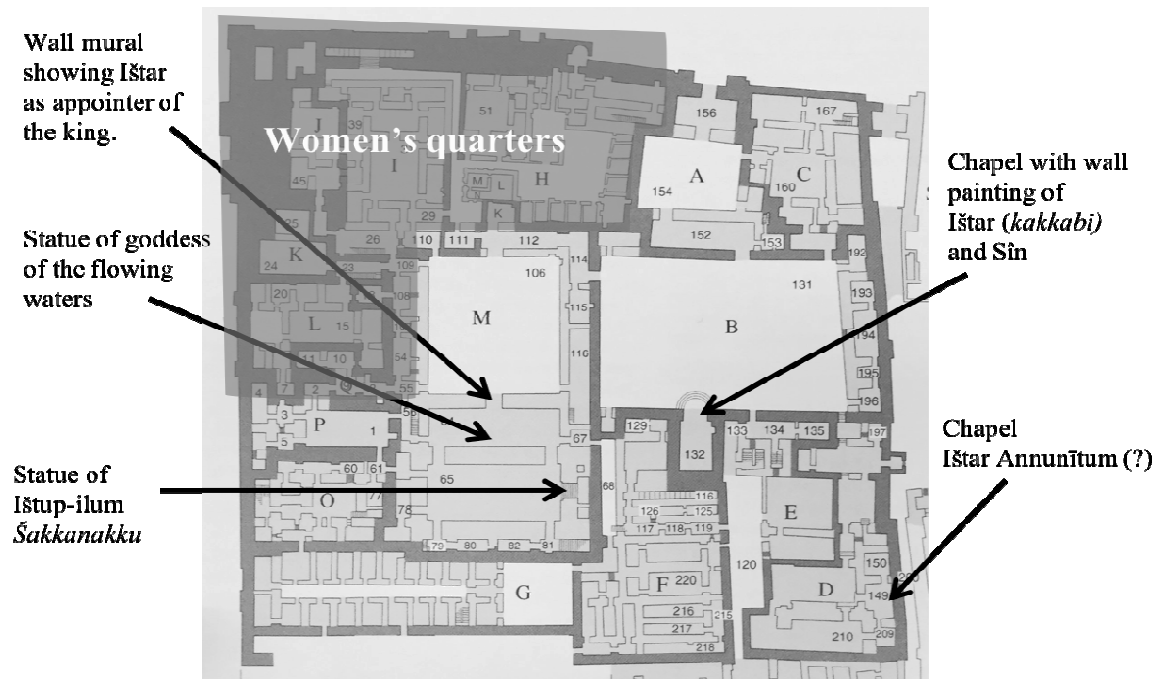


Fig. 7. Plan of the Great Royal Palace of City III (adapted from Margueron 2014: 114, fig. 114).

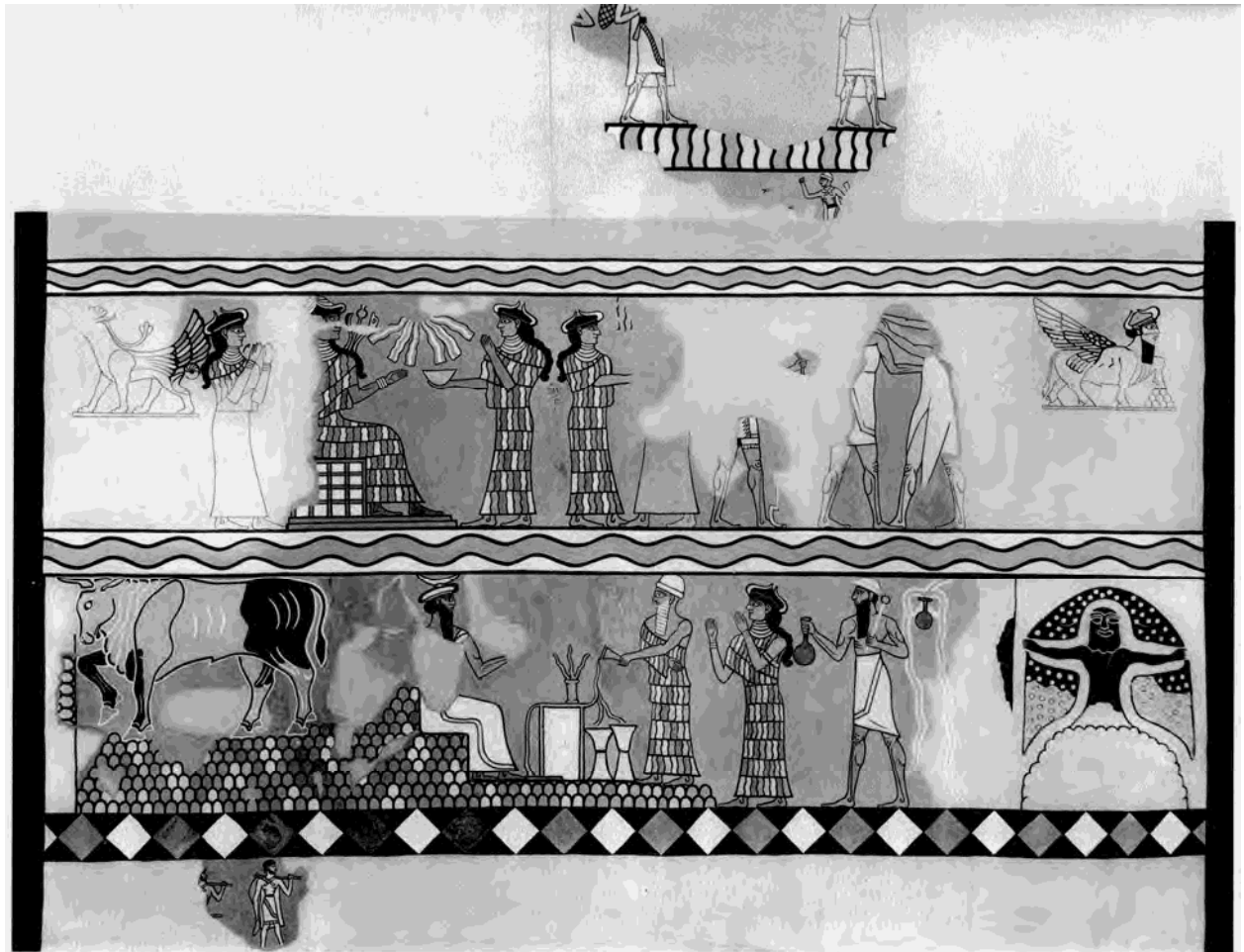


Fig. 8. Painting in the palace chapel (after Margueron 2014: 149, fig. 168).



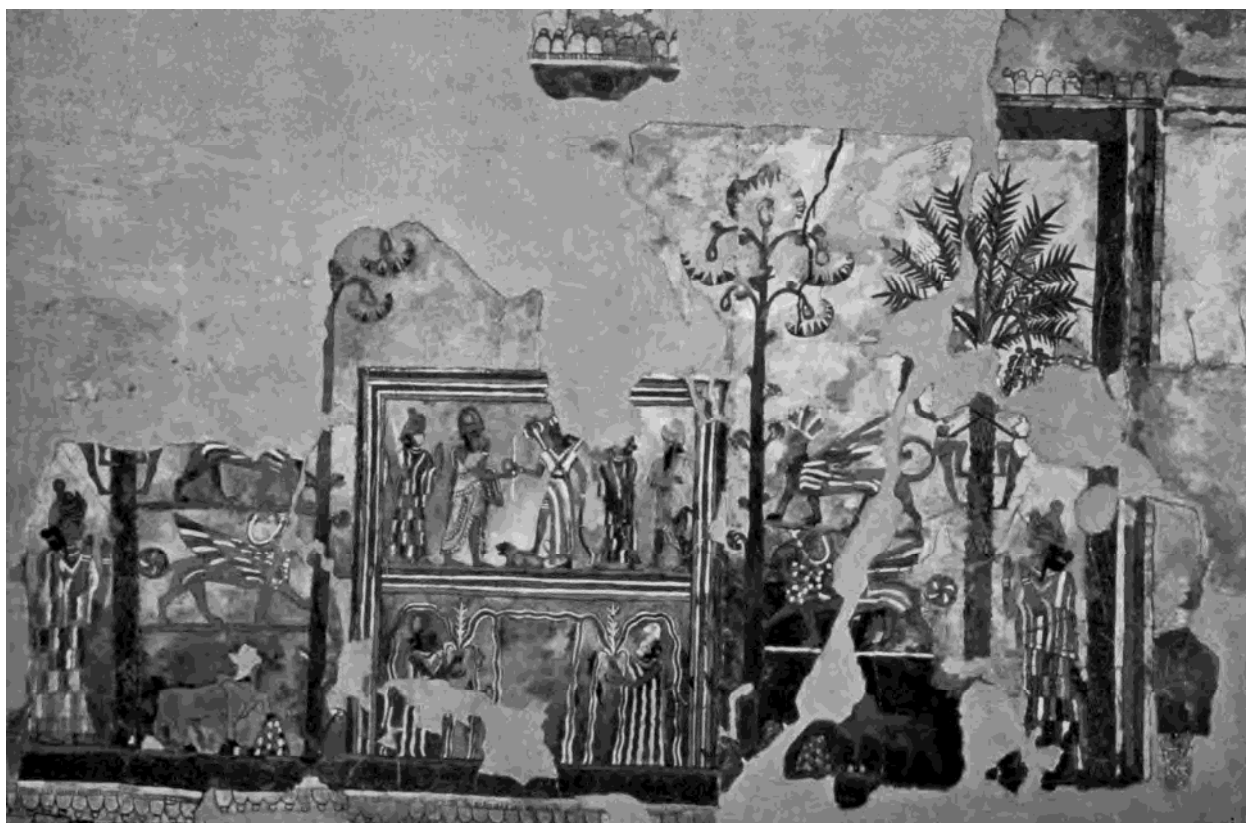


Fig. 9. Painting of the Investiture in Court M of the Great Royal Palace of City III (after Margueron 2014: 153, fig. 174).

### 7. *Gender Trouble in Ancient Mesopotamia*

The evidence from Mari suggests that the cult of Inanna/Ištar had indeed become the prerogative of the king by the Old Babylonian period. The enactively constructed—that is, through action or performance rather than language—gendered representation of the deity mirrors the multiplicity of her roles as the dynastic appointer and ruler of the land, protector of the city, and astral body. These and other aspects are joined together to give a sense of substance to the gender of Inanna/Ištar as a result of underlying sociopolitical processes in the region of Mari, which saw the city transform from a regional trade centre into an independent polity at times, incorporated into the realm of the Akkadian empire, briefly under the influence of the political rise of Ur at the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC, and finally brought together under the Amorite dynasty before its demise at the hands of Hammurabi's army. A similar shift has also been noted at Ebla. Rita Dolce has discussed the syncretisation of Ishtar from earlier local forms Ashtar/Eshtar and Ishkhara, and which included the assimilation of the most important

prerogatives of the Early Syrian god Kura, patron of the city.<sup>62</sup> The evidence seems to suggest a more complex regional scenario in the third quarter of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC, followed by strong processes of syncretism that would have catalysed the creation of a more homogenous idea of the goddess from a range of local patron deities from competing as well as collaborating polities.<sup>63</sup> Interestingly, Ištar could assimilate elements from male deities, which points towards a political or ideological explanation for the assimilation, rather than the simple agglutination of female deities with similar characteristics under one name. These observations suggest that in focusing mainly on the sexuality of the goddess and her astral aspect, the politically charged processes that clearly played an important part in contouring her gendered body may have been overlooked.

Another way to look at the evidence is to shift the focus onto how ‘things’ contribute to the formation of contexts. As Ian Hodder has pointed out, “materials are unruly and difficult to manage.”<sup>64</sup> From a pragmatic perspective of reality, one could argue that the perdurance of material culture both anchors and transforms the conceptualisation of the deity within the historical context of the city. As the urban fabric of the city changed, so did its people adapt the expressions and practices around the physical structures around them, sometimes rendering them obsolete, other times aggrandizing or monumentalizing them.<sup>65</sup> To expand on the findings from Mari to the wider Mesopotamian region, perhaps the shift in temple architecture from pillared, self-standing structures at the dawn of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC towards a more integrated, secluded ‘household’ layout signalled processes of incorporation as well as severance of the relationship between ‘domestic’ and ‘sacred’ spaces. The articulation of everyday practices around the domestic realm such as washing, feeding, cleaning, or dressing into ritualised activities imbued with religious meaning, together with the changes to the public spaces of worship, reflect changes in the social logic that governed these practices. Perhaps these changes were linked with shifts in social organisation such as the advent of kingship, which is also reflected in the nascent rhetoric of royal inscriptions.<sup>66</sup> In fact, Early Dynastic royal inscriptions were routinely attached to both the founding of temples—through foundation deposits—and the activities inside them—through inscribed bowls, statues and other objects. These practices seem to point towards a connection between the social production of religious thought and praxis that is both material and language-based, and which took place in the negotiation of private and public, sacred and domestic spaces.

Returning to the theoretical model shown in figure 1, the relationship between the three-dimensionality of votive statues and the shift towards two-dimensional representation in the palace murals evidence the plasticity of mental representation and the processes of objectification, signification and

62. Dolce 2008, esp. 162f.

63. On the broad trends of syncretism and fusion of deities towards the end of the 3rd millennium BC, see Asher-Greve and Westenholz 2013: 64ff.

64. Hodder 2016: 1.

65. For example, as Meskell (2005) argues for ancient Egypt.

66. On the relationship between changes in social order that require changes in social logic and the tools to do so, see Flannery and Marcus 2012: 208f. For Mesopotamia, this aspect is most successfully explored by Lauren Ristvet (2015), as mentioned earlier.

subjectification of the deity, which are played in a fluid material reality. The *memory* of the material world is continuously signified, adding and subtracting meaning in the processes through which the identity and *agency* of goddesses is (re)produced, and which include processes of syncretism, fusion, fission and mutation.<sup>67</sup> The continuous engagement with the material world, the spaces and objects and images, give the goddesses the *appearance* of substance. Perhaps, the indexes of power and status associated with gender such as clothing, gesture, or headdress were negotiated through the plasticity of the stylised realities enacted through the visual medium of votive statuary in the temples. Rather than being *representations* of reality, they played an active role in the shaping of identity and the co-construction of human-divine agency. Discussing sculptural images of rulers, Irene Winter pointed out that animation with regard to an image can only be enacted through the consecution of rituals because “they give the image its life—and its power.”<sup>68</sup> What happens when the image itself reproduces the action of the ritual? In the wall paintings from the Old Babylonian period, do the scenes of libation and the appointment of the king themselves *act* as the ritual, (re)produced for eternity, rather than simply *represent* one point in time? Zainab Bahrani has explored the performative qualities of self-referential works such as the Warka Vase and the Altar of Tukulti-Ninurta.<sup>69</sup> Her approach focuses more strongly on the semiotic relationship between text and image, rather than on the agency of the works themselves in the process of semiosis, i.e. the process of production and interpretation of meaning. I suggest the objects and images would have functioned as agents in the shaping of identity, in particular here as mediated through the relationship(s) between the human and divine realms. The model suggested here shows potential towards exploring these issues further.

In this discussion, I have pointed towards a different interpretation of the nature and identity of Inanna/Ištar that moves away from a focus on her gender and sexuality towards a *genealogical* examination of the discursive body of the deity in the context of the construction of power and the social “body politic”. This is, of course, a limited study and further analysis of the data, as well as the incorporation of more case studies, is required in order to refine the preliminary observations discussed here.

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67. Asher-Greve and Westenholz 2013: 29f.

68. Winter 2010: 186.

69. Bahrani 2002 and Bahrani 2003: chapter 7.

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# The Nude at the Entrance. Contextualizing Male and Female Nudity in Early Mesopotamian Art

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## 1. *Introduction*

The back entrance of the main university building of my *alma mater*, the Ludwig-Maximilians-University at Munich, prominently features two columns crowned by bronze sculptures: To the left, a man victoriously standing on a dragon, and to the right, a woman lifting a piece of cloth on her back (Fig. 1). If we notice them at all, they do not irritate or surprise us, since we recognize them as relics of a particular art-historical period that regularly depicted nude or half-dressed men and women in representative architectural facades all over Europe. This was the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries CE, the time of Neo-classicism with its strong intellectual desire to refer back to the perceived “purity” of the arts of ancient Rome and Athens, and with ideal bodies figuring prominently in its canon of widely accepted forms. With this canon in place, 19<sup>th</sup>-century artists and architects could insert nude bodies freely as decorative elements in various artistic media and contexts ranging from entry-ways and windows to paintings and everyday-objects like furniture or even cutlery. Based on classical allegories and mythological figures such as the Graces, Truth, the Nymphs or the Atlantes, they were supposedly taken over from the ancients but actually reflected contemporary sentiments and aesthetic preferences. Their physicality, posture and attributes left no doubt about prevalent gender stereotypes: Male figures displayed physical strength and readiness for battle, females gracefulness and youthful beauty. While female nudes outnumber their male counterparts as Neo-classical decorative elements, the opposite is true

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for Classical Greek and Roman sculpture with its preeminent interest in the perfected male body, and depictions of women usually appearing fully dressed.<sup>2</sup>



Fig. 1. Bronze statues flanking the entrance of the Ludwig-Maximilians-University main building at Amalienstrasse (built 1906–1909 AD; photos: author).

In this paper, I suggest that we witness a similar phenomenon in late third and early second-millennium BCE Mesopotamia with muscular male and graceful female nudes assuming predominantly decorative functions as architectural elements, that were also depicted in the miniature arts (glyptics, terracotta plaques). At first sight, this seems like a recourse or continuation of ancient Near Eastern art-historical ‘classics’ from Early Dynastic and Akkadian. But closer inspection reveals different kinds of iconicity which no longer reference naked human or hybrid beings but canonized versions of nude figures, most probably replications of existing sculpture. My point is, that while nude male bodies indeed had a strong record in the artistic production from the late fourth millennium throughout the third millennium, female nudity did not. Thus, the enormous amount and wide circulation of nude females in late third and early second-millennium Mesopotamian artworks, first on terracotta plaques and then on cylinder seals, cannot be treated as the prolongation of a universal and continuous preoccupation with this

2. “Classically inspired” contemporary architectural compounds even enforce this unequal ratio between male and female nudes: A shopping mall built in 1998 at Manchester boasts on its façades more than one hundred naked women—and only one bare-chested man (<http://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/whats-on/shopping/trafford-centre-naked-statues-sculptures-13065330>, last accessed 01.11.2017). A contemporaneous artistic exploration into the theme of male/female naked bodies flanking an entrance is Marina Abramović’s and Ulay’s performance “Imponderabilia” (1977; <http://www.newmedia-art.org/cgi-bin/show-oeu.asp?ID=ML002604&lg=GBR>, last accessed 01.11.2017).

motif in the image production of Mesopotamia and its neighbouring regions since Neolithic times, but as a new development that necessitates explanation.<sup>3</sup>

Reasons may be sought in changes of image-related norms and gender regimes, but also in the specific cultural practices that caused the very artefacts to exist. Following recent approaches in the fields of visual culture studies and “Bildwissenschaften”, images neither mimic reality nor visualize a somewhat detached mental sphere.<sup>4</sup> Instead, they are prone to quickly react to subtle ideological changes, translating and materializing culturally significant norms, habitual activities and body techniques into new pictorial schemes and thus into just another layer of cultural semantics.<sup>5</sup>

Since Clark’s 1956 and J. Berger’s 1977 seminal contributions, a terminological distinction between “naked” and “nude” has become crucial in art-historical discourse. It is also relevant to this paper where I use “naked” to refer to depictions of undressed humans in actual practice (e.g. sexual intercourse, wrestling, purification or libation service in cultic settings), and “nude” when the depicted is transformed into an aesthetic object (e.g. in frontal pose as entrance figure) characterized by idealization and iconic use.<sup>6</sup>

Unlike Classical and Neoclassical Europe, early Mesopotamian imagery was almost exclusively embedded in religious contexts and symbolism.<sup>7</sup> Following the works of C. Bynum, D. Pezzoli-Olgiati, J. Berger and many others, we can no longer assume that religious experience and “ways of seeing” are identical for all gender identities.<sup>8</sup> Discussing the changing nature of visual artefacts becomes thus a

3. See for instance F. Wiggermann’s first lines of his article “Nackte Göttin (Naked Goddess). A. Philologisch” in *Reallexikon der Assyriologie* which evoke such an uninterrupted visual history in the ancient Near East: “The Mesopotamian naked woman and goddess stand at the end of a long line of varying images that starts in the paleolithic, and winds over the whole of Eurasia.” (Wiggermann 1998: 46). Equally, Z. Bahrani’s (2001) important discussion of female/male nudity in Mesopotamian art, remains surprisingly vague, at times even ahistorical. Ironically, to illustrate her point that the naked “breast-feeding mother survived throughout the art of Mesopotamia, and was particularly common during the late third and second millennia BC” (Bahrani 2001: 81), she refers to an Old Babylonian terracotta plaque with a dressed, breast-feeding woman, and to a clearly Neo-Babylonian plaque from Nippur, which Legrain (1930: IV 38) erroneously dated to the “time of Gudea”, and Bahrani to the 17th century BCE. I know of no terracotta plaque depicting a naked, breast-feeding woman attributable to the late third/early second millennium BCE, the motif being completely confined to the first millennium BCE. For a rather nuanced diachronic overview of the archaeological evidence on “nackte Göttinnen” see Uehlinger 1998.

4. See for instance the influential contributions to these fields by W.J.T. Mitchell, H. Belting and others in Rimmele et al. 2016.

5. For a similar, constructivist perspective on Greek and Roman art see the classic introduction by T. Hölscher 2000, in particular pp. 151–153.

6. Similarly, Asher-Greve and Sweeney (2006: 119) differentiate into “naked”, referring to “unclothed bodies depicted in circumstances where nakedness reflects actual practice”, and “nude” for “depictions which are intended as symbolic ‘transcendent forms’”. For a short summary of this crucial differentiation see Berger (1977: 53, in reference to Clark 1956): “to be naked is simply to be without clothes, whereas the nude is a form of art” and “always conventionalized”.

7. With its ultimate reason for existence being to “facilitate the relationship with transcendence and provide a vision of order for our world” (Knauss and Pezzoli-Olgiati 2015: 2).

8. See for example Bynum 1991, Pezzoli-Olgiati 2016, Knauss and Pezzoli-Olgiati 2015, and Berger’s classic from 1977.

venture into the complex interplay between religion, gender and visibility,<sup>9</sup> and, most importantly and at the time most accessible through the archaeological evidence, into changing religious practice.

Qualitative analysis, highlighting differences in the material, iconographic and stylistic rendering of male/female images, can be one way to better grasp these shifts that often elude us in textual sources.<sup>10</sup>

Quantitative analysis, comparing ratios between men/women appearing dressed/undressed in different artistic media (sculpture, glyptic, terracottas) in a diachronic perspective, can be another. This paper will focus on the latter, moving the discussion away from issues of iconographic identification (goddess or prostitute?) and symbolic interpretation (the ideal or universal nude female as symbol of fertility, power, protection etc.) towards an investigation into shifting cultural practices and functions of figurative artefacts in particular periods and settings. It is a first venture into the changing materiality and iconicity of early Mesopotamian artworks with a focus on terracotta objects that I will continue elsewhere.<sup>11</sup>

## 2. *Male Nudity in Early Mesopotamian Art*

Male nudity is a common sight in the visual record of the third millennium.<sup>12</sup> Starting with rows of naked men carrying foodstuffs and other kind of offerings towards a temple building in Late Uruk times (c. 3200–3000/2900 BCE) (Fig. 2a), it continued with naked males depicted as cult servants libating before deities/cult statues from Early Dynastic to Ur III times (Fig. 2b).<sup>13</sup> At the same time, naked gods, heroes and bull-men engaged in mythologically inspired combat scenes frequently populate Early Dynastic (ca. 2900–2340 BCE) and Akkadian (c. 2340–2200) glyptics (Fig. 3a) with their most prominent “icons of masculinity”: a naked, muscular breast and a long, wavy beard.<sup>14</sup> Male genitalia, on the other hand, were never treated with particular interest and often obscured.

9. Religion being defined as an intermedial system of symbols ordering and shaping the relationships with entities from a transcendent world (cf. Pezzoli-Olgiate 2016: 7).

10. See Roßberger 2018. Biggs (1998) contrasted the near absence of nudity in texts (the rare mentions referring to forced nakedness as form of punishment and disgrace) with its popularity in the visual arts (seemingly associated with positive values like strength or beauty).

11. A comprehensive study on changing patterns of artistic materiality and ways of rendering the human form in clay, is currently underway. This work is made possible through a postdoctoral position at the LMU Graduate School “Distant Worlds” in Munich.

12. Cf. the discussion in Asher-Greve and Sweeney 2006: 121–122, 129–130, 132–136 and Asher-Greve 1997; for a very brief appraisal see Seidl 1998: 66–68.

13. See for instance Orthmann 1975: Taf. 69.

14. J. Asher-Greve (2006: 443–444) and C. Suter (2012a) used iconographic as well as textual evidence to prove this point.

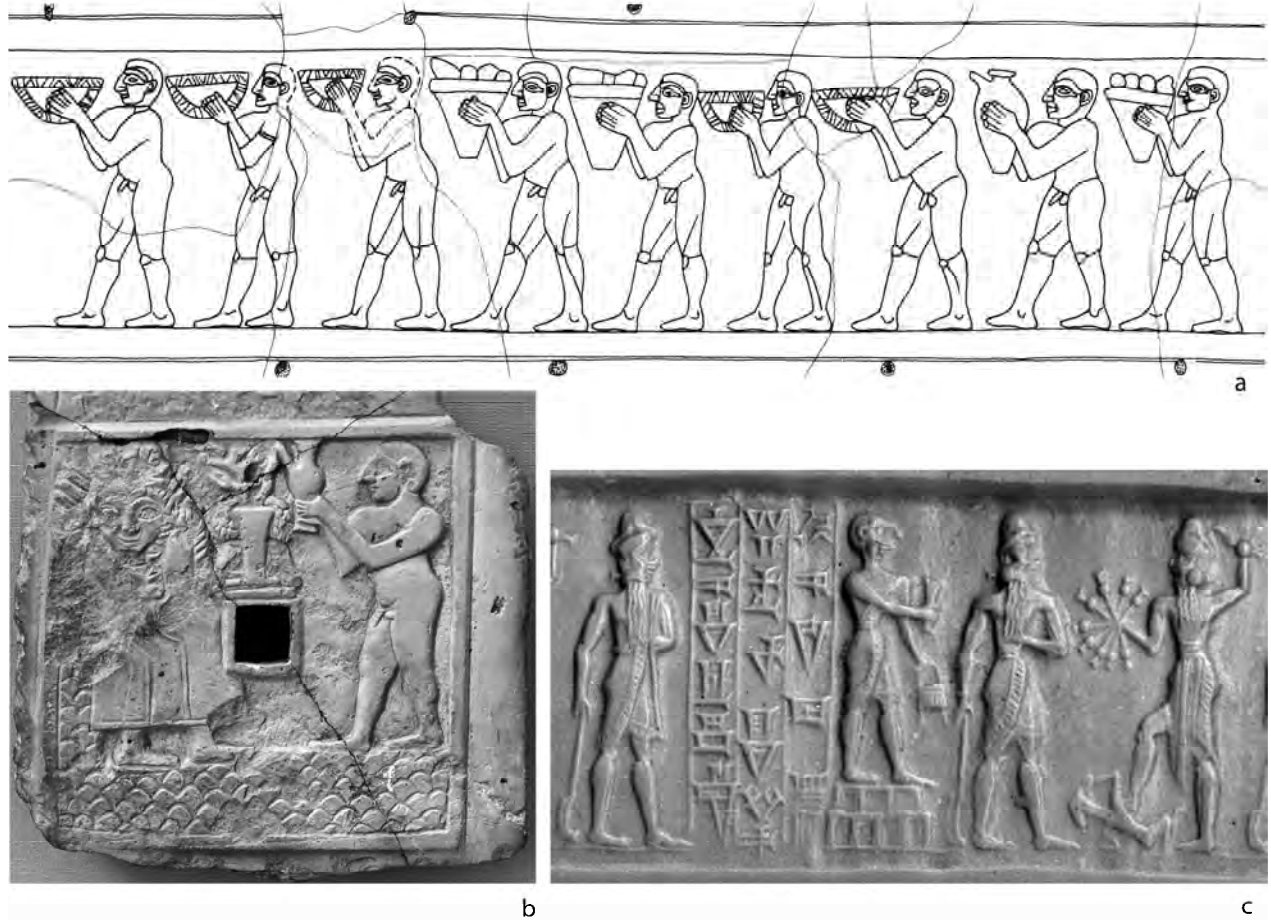


Fig. 2a, b, c. Male naked cult servants a) bringing food offerings towards a temple on a stone vessel from Uruk (Late Uruk period; after Lindemeyer and Martin 1993: pl. 25), b) libating in front of a deity/cult statue on a stone votive plaque from Tello (Early Dynastic III; Louvre AO 276, photo: wikimedia commons), and c) standing semi-naked on a pedestal with bucket and “sprinkler” on an Old Babylonian cylinder seal (BM 89011; photo: scan of roll-out owned by the LMU Munich Institute of Near Eastern Archeology).

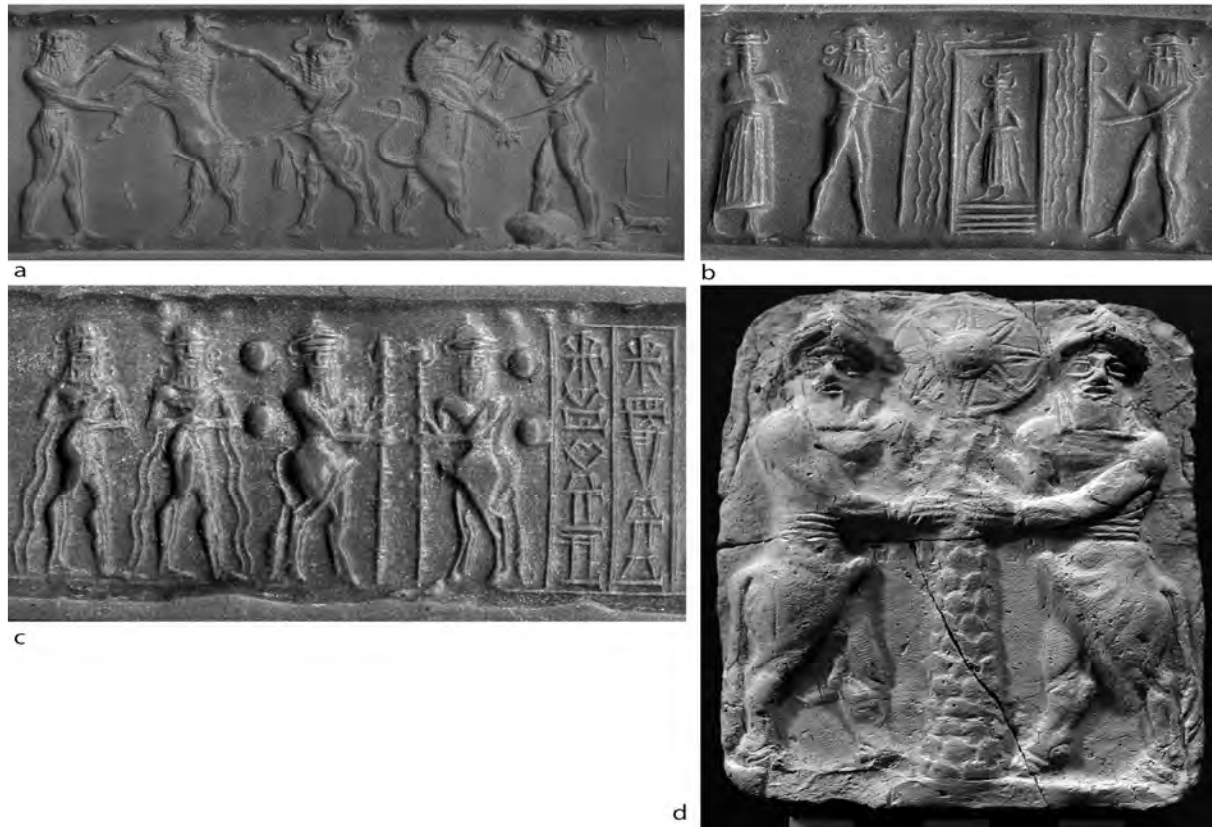


Fig. 3a, b, c, d. Six-curl'd heroes and bull-men on Akkadian cylinder seals: a) engaged in combat (BM 89111), and as observant attendants b) holding overflowing vases and divine standards (BM 89157), or the gate posts of a divine abode/sanctuary (BM 89771, all seal photos: scans of roll-outs owned by the LMU Munich Institute of Near Eastern Archeology); d) the same motif on a terracotta plaque from the early Old Babylonian Diyala region (OIM A9337; photo: author, courtesy of the Oriental Institute Museum of the University of Chicago).

The few surviving stone sculptures of undressed men from the Early Dynastic period were essentially temple furniture, in particular vessel stands as indicated by the holes in their heads or supports (Fig. 4a).<sup>15</sup> The same is true for bronze versions, all of them balancing vessels or containers on their heads or having fixtures for those (Fig. 4b).<sup>16</sup> The famous Akkadian bronze pedestal with Naramsin's inscription from Bassetki features a naked hero supporting the gate-pole of a temple—a motif well known

15. Frankfort 1943: pls. 33, 91, 95; Orthmann 1975: Taf. 16. There is only one single statue of a nude man from the so-called Nintu-Temple, level IV, at Khafajeh which obviously did not serve such a purpose (Frankfort 1943: pl. 17): Its peculiar posture with bent knees and its uncommon hairstyle set it apart from ordinary worshipping statuettes ("Beterstatuetten"), making it more likely to represent a performer/dancer than an average "Sumerian man".

16. See also Frankfort 1943: pls. 54–57, 95; Orthmann 1975: Taf. 39a, 40b.

from late Akkadian seals.<sup>17</sup> It shifts the naked, animal-wrestling hero (Fig. 3a) into an observant temple attendant kneeling or standing in a nude pose at the gate-posts of a sacred abode (Fig. 3b), holding a divine standard or an overflowing vase to provide water within sacred space (Fig. 3c). In my view, this development ingeniously combined the pictorial tradition of naked male cult servants approaching temples and deities (Figs. 2a–c),<sup>18</sup> with the motif of the heroic combatant (Figs. 3a).<sup>19</sup> His hybrid counterpart, the bull-man (Fig. 3a, c–d), underwent the same conceptual and pictorial changes slightly later and became during Isin-Larsa and Old Babylonian times (c. 2000–1600 BCE) even more popular in his role as temple guard than the six-curled hero (Fig. 3d). Besides the bull-man’s equally muscular chest and beard, his masculine sexuality is further stressed by his erect penis, in contrast to his fully anthropomorphic consort, possibly because of the animal nature of the lower half of this body.



Fig. 4a, b, c. a) Kneeling stone figurine with vessel from Tell Agrab (Early Dynastic I; Ag. 35:657), b) bronze figurines with fixtures from Khafajeh (Frankfort 1939: pl. 98), and c) group of bronze figurines from Tell Agrab (h. 9.6cm/11.8cm/9.6cm; Frankfort 194 drawing 3: pl. 56).

Both photos courtesy of the Oriental Institute Museum of the University of Chicago.

17. Boehmer 1965: 32. The identification of the naked, six-curled hero with the divine *lahmu* was convincingly suggested by Wiggermann (1981/1982: 95–99) but contested by others, especially for third-millennium depictions. For a concise summary of the discussion see Rohn 2011: 17, fn. 135.

18. In Early Dynastic and Akkadian relief sculpture, a single, nude servant typically pours libations from spouted jars directly in front of a deity (e.g. Boese 1971: nos. 18, 21, 31, 34; Orthmann 1975: Taf. 101); he is still present in Ur III elite sculpture (Ur-Nammu stele; Orthmann 1975, Taf. 116 b; see Fig. 2b in this paper). From the early second millennium onwards, the “cult priest” was no longer depicted totally nude but wearing a short, thin garment and holding a bucket and a wedge-shaped object “sprinkler” (Collon 1986: 33–35; see Fig. 2c in this paper).

19. On the iconographic development of bull-man and six-curled hero see the detailed discussion by Braun-Holzinger (1999: 160–166).

Moving to different kinds of visual media, we notice the surprising rarity of anthropomorphic terracotta figurines in Early Dynastic times (Fig. 5a).<sup>20</sup> If they do exist, they express a general disregard for body proportions with mostly sexless cylindrical lower bodies allowing them to stand upright.<sup>21</sup> Their arm stumps might be abbreviations of the typically bent elbows of contemporary worshipper statuettes. Only towards the end of the Akkadian period did clay figurine production increase in popularity and homogeneity. Gendered identity was now more prominently expressed through rounded breasts, necklaces and uplifted hair for females, and beards, brimmed caps, and a stick in the hand for males,—a trend that continued well into Ur III (c. 2100–2000 BCE) and Isin-Larsa times (c. 2000–1800 BCE) (Figs. 5b–c).<sup>22</sup> The lower body, on the other hand, remained gender-neutral for most Akkadian and for later male figurines.



Fig. 5a, b, c. Anthropomorphic terracotta figurines from Tell Asmar dating to a) the Early Dynastic I period (h. 5.4cm; Abu Temple Archaic Shrine III; As. 34.113), and b) early Isin-Larsa levels (h. 12.4 cm; As. 30.57a; both photos: courtesy of the Oriental Institute Museum of the University of Chicago); c) Isin-Larsa period figurine from Isin (IB-1914; photo: LMU Isin archive).

With the advent of mould-pressed terracotta plaques in the late third-millennium (Ur III period), images of prominently masculine “hunters” with naked chest and legs from the knees downwards (Fig. 6a) appeared and evolved into the famous “figure with a mace” (Fig. 6b), an adoption of Naramsin’s proto-type that was transformed from a ruler’s portrait into an iconic figure with short kilt, muscular upper body and long beard (see discussion below). It became particularly common in Old Babylonian

20. For an overview see Moorey 2004: 53–55, 58–60.

21. When gender attribution is possible, there seems to be a preeminence of male figurines. See for instance the 47 figurines excavated at the Early Dynastic IIIB Ash-Tip deposit at Abu Salabikh (McAdam 1993: 84–85, figs. 3.2–3.7).

22. For examples of such figures from the Diyala region see Frankfort et al. 1940, figs. 114–118; for other South-Mesopotamian sites see for instance Barrelet 1968: pls. VI–VII.



glyptic. Complete male nudity, on the other hand, continued in the repertoire of Isin-Larsa/Old Babylonian terracotta plaques only for the mythological characters of the six-curved hero and the bull-man (see discussion above, Fig. 4d), as well as in the form of a dancing “dwarf” with grotesque features, and in scenes of sexual intercourse.<sup>23</sup>

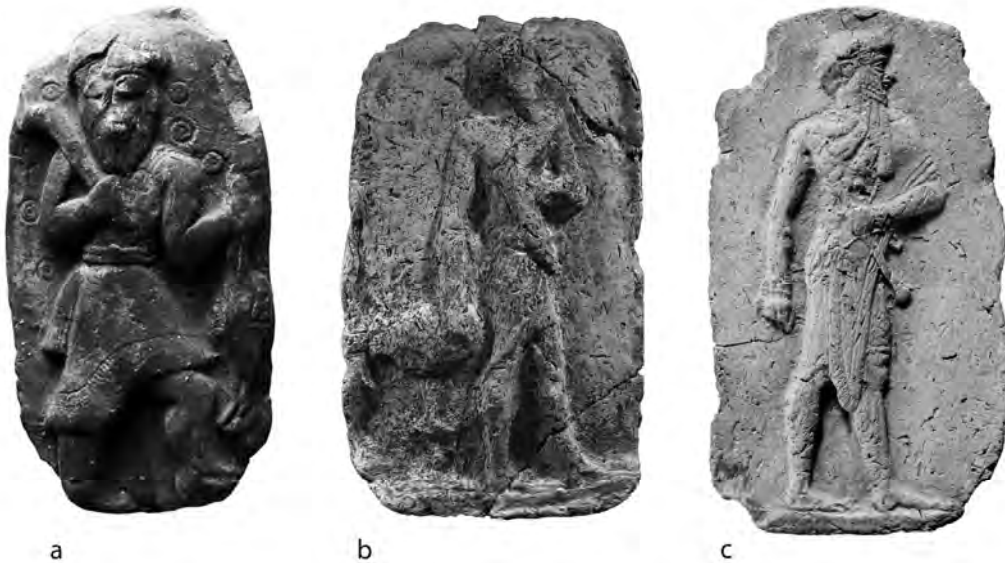


Fig. 6a, b, c. Terracotta plaques with semi-naked male figures dating to the late third and early second millennium BCE: a) “Hunter” from Ur-III levels at Tell Asmar (As. 32:525), b) “hunter”, purchased but probably from Isin-Larsa levels at Iščali (OIM A9336, photo: author, courtesy of the Oriental Institute Museum of the University of Chicago), and c) royal “figure with a mace” (Metropolitan Museum New York 32.39.2, photo: public domain).

### 3. *Female Nudity in Early Mesopotamian Art*

Female nakedness/nudity had a very different status in late fourth and third-millennium artistic production.<sup>24</sup> Even though the Early Dynastic period has been called the “Golden Age of Women” (J. Asher-Greve) due to the high number of women depicted in all forms of visual arts (statuettes, glyptics, stone plaques), only a handful of them were undressed, with all surviving examples being small and made

23. For scenes of sexual intercourse see Assante 2002: figs. 1–12. I do not agree with Assante’s interpretation of all Old Babylonian visual erotica as “aspects of Inanna” that “reflect the quotidian life of the non-elite” (Assante 2002: 30), and of Inanna as “tremendously dynamic agent of protection and beneficence for the Old Babylonian household” (Assante 2002: 47). Nevertheless, her initial functional attribution of terracotta plaques to protect doorways and more generally “liminal space” (Assante 2002: 28–29), supports the argument of this paper.

24. For an overview see Asher-Greve and Sweeney 2006: 126–128, 136–139; for more detail Asher-Greve 1985: 38–43, 130–137.

of precious materials like alabaster, copper, silver, or ivory.<sup>25</sup> Thus, their circulation was very limited and the nude female body clearly not a common sight. There is only one female example of the anthropomorphic temple furniture/materialized cult servant described above, which was found together with two male counterparts in an Early Dynastic I temple context at Tell Agrab (Fig. 4c).<sup>26</sup>

The move from infrequent depictions of female nakedness, e.g. in rare scenes of sexual intercourse,<sup>27</sup> into a popular, stereotypic pose occurred only during the last two centuries of the third millennium, and is well documented by terracotta figurines and plaques from the Diyala region and Southern Mesopotamian sites (Fig. 7a, b).<sup>28</sup> The frontally displayed, schematized but still naturalistic body with a strong emphasis on sexual organs and exaggerated female proportions was sometimes modelled into plank-like figurines, and sometimes in the round. The enlarged and incised pubic triangle, as well as elaborate jewellery consisting of necklaces, crossed chest bands and multiple girdles, must have primarily referred to sexual allure, as we know from contemporary “love lyrics” that it was exactly these features that made the female body most sexually attractive.<sup>29</sup> As mentioned above, the introduction of mould-pressed terracotta plaques coincides with the move towards sexualization of female figurines (Fig. 7).<sup>30</sup> It led to a standardization and more naturalistic rendering in general, and of the female body in particular (Fig. 7c). In this, the once exaggerated sexual organs became quickly reduced into a very “youthful” appearance with small breasts, slim waist and no pubic hair. The number of plaques increased steadily over the decades, starting to outnumber hand-modelled figurines in the early second millennium (Isin-Larsa period). While plaques depicting nude women are numerous at most sites of this period, they do not entirely dominate the archaeological record and are thus only one motif among many.

Mythological or divine figures, such as winged nude females with horned headdresses, on the other hand, remain highly exceptional. In addition, women occur naked in erotic scenes, and occasionally as musicians/dancers. Unlike on first-millennium terracotta plaques, breast-feeding women were generally depicted fully dressed.

25. See Asher-Greve 1985: 130–131, cat. 674–678, pl. XXXII (with singular examples from Assur, Mari, Khafajeh, Tell Agrab and Susa), as well as a painted jar Tell Agrab and one pin-head with two nude females from Tello (ibid.: 136–137, cat. 714, 711; pieces acquired from the art market not included here). In addition, there are occasional depictions of sexual intercourse with both partners naked (Asher-Greve 1985: cat. 692–710).

This very limited number of examples for female nudity is disproportionately often depicted in summary works on Mesopotamian arts and culture, creating a (skewed) impression of the high popularity of female nudity in third-millennium Mesopotamia.

26. Frankfort 1943: pls. 55–57. Interestingly, this figurine already raises one hand towards the breast in a gesture that later, in Akkadian times, characterizes most figurines, male and female.

27. For glyptic examples see Asher-Greve 1985: 132–135.

28. Moorey 2003: 28–34; for examples see Frankfort 1943: figs. 110–113; Barrelet 1968: pls. IX, LXIX–LXX. I exclude the later Early Dynastic “goddess-handle jars” with their abstracted depictions of female sexual organs (see for example Moon 1982: 40–56) from the discussion.

29. Cf. Bahrani 2001: 87–88.

30. On the introduction of plaques see Barrelet 1968; Roßberger in press.

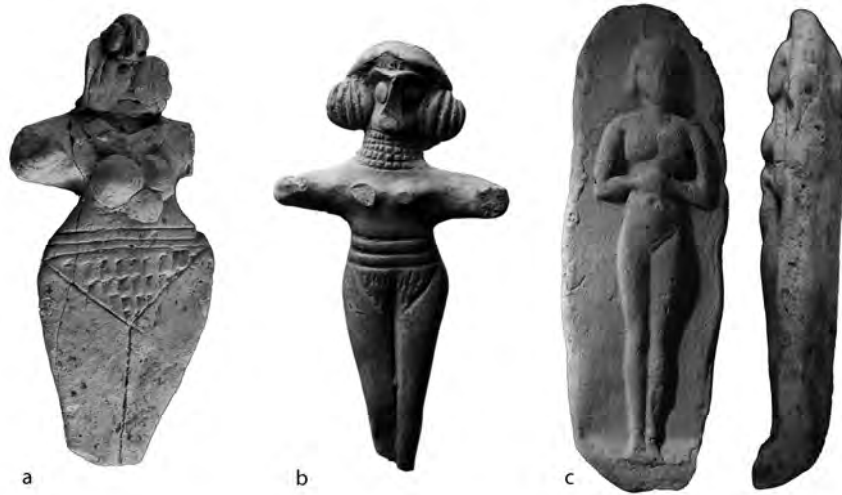


Fig. 7a, b, c. Female figurines from Ur-III to Isin-Larsa levels at a) Isin (IB-0285; photo: LMU Isin archive), and b) Tell Asmar (As. 33.598; photo: courtesy of the Oriental Institute Museum of the University of Chicago); c) terracotta plaque from Tell Asmar (As. 35:32; photo: courtesy of the Oriental Institute Museum of the University of Chicago).

In glyptic art, the nude female appeared only in the late 19<sup>th</sup> c. on seal impressions dating to the reign of Apil-Sin (1830–1813) and continued into the early Kassite period (c. 1600–1400 BCE) (Fig. 8).<sup>31</sup> The motif was most popular from around 1825 to 1750 BCE.

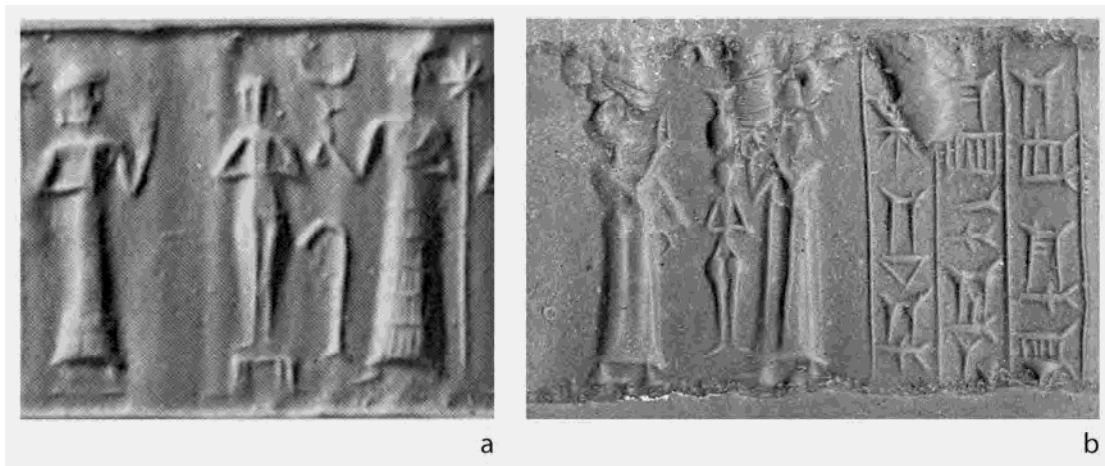


Fig. 8a, b. Depictions of the nude female between worshipper and deity a) on an Old Babylonian (BM 132867; Collon 1986: no. 305), b) and an early Kassite cylinder seal (BM 89849; photo: scan of a roll-out owned by the LMU Munich Institute of Near Eastern Archeology).

31. Blocher 1987; Uehlinger 1998: 59.

#### 4. *Visual Framing of Male/Female Nudity in Early Mesopotamia*

In order to understand the cultural placement of nakedness/nudity in third-millennium art, we have to recall how far removed it is from depictions of ordinary men and women, including kings and queens, as well as from deities.<sup>32</sup> Nakedness had no place in the iconography of Early Dynastic and Akkadian worshipper statues (“*Beterstatuetten*”), dedicated and set up as substitutes for individuals in temples,<sup>33</sup> nor in the popular depictions of feasting elites (banquet scenes) in relief art and glyptic.<sup>34</sup> In these images, physiological differences between men and women were reduced to a minimum, making socio-cultural features such as dress and hair the primary visual markers of gender identity. The visual importance of physiological and social gender markers increased only towards the end of the Akkadian period, particularly in the realm of terracotta figurine production, but also noticeably in seal imagery.

When we look at the overall visual framing of these artefacts, we notice that the main pictorial preoccupations, the main themes of visual symbolic coding, similarly shifted during the periods in question: From “*Beterstatuetten*” presenting individuals in temples and two-dimensional artworks (glyptics or reliefs) depicting feasting elites and mythologically inspired heroic combats during Early Dynastic and Akkadian times, towards presentation scenes as overarching trope for all kinds of pictorial production during Ur III and Old Babylonian periods. While presentation scenes had already appeared in Akkadian glyptic,<sup>35</sup> at that time they were not as standardized and pervasive as they would be in later periods. Only then did presentation scenes follow a fixed “mental iconography” for this most important moment when personal access was given to the responsible deity or king.<sup>36</sup>

Male, naked combatants and servants were active protagonists in earlier seals and relief art, but became mere embellishments for the key presentation scene later. Thus, their pictorial status changed from principal participants into subsidiary elements whose appearance was strictly bound to a canon of forms derived from earlier works. This canon of accompanying figures also included the popular half-dressed “king/figure with a mace” (in German “*Gottkönig als Krieger*” according to A. Moortgat’s terminology), and a semi-nude (flimsy skirt only) “priest”, both regularly set upon pedestals to underline their status as pictures in a picture.<sup>37</sup> While the (dressed) “suppliant goddess” was the most common female accompanying figure from Ur III times onwards, the frontally depicted nude female appeared only

32. With Naramsin’s famous stele and stone mould as notable exceptions. For the special approach of this ruler in using his attractive body for visual propaganda see Winter 1986. Winter was surely right arguing that king Naramsin’s barely concealed muscular body was modelled after the nude hero and suitably moved the self-divinized ruler closer to the mythological sphere (cf. Asher-Greve 1985: 442–444). For an overview on early Mesopotamian kings and queens see Suter 2012b.

33. See Braun-Holzinger 1977.

34. See Selz 1983.

35. Rohn 2011: 65–85.

36. See Mettinger (1995: 20) on the term “mental iconography”, and F. Hartenstein (2008: 53–57) elaborating on the centrality of the audience situation (“*Audienzszenerie*”) in ancient Near Eastern visual sources and the Old Testament.

37. E. Porada had already suggested that the uniform “kings with a mace” all copied a prototype set up in relief, wall-painting or sculpture in a well-known temple context. D. Collon suggested further that this postulated prototype might have been set up at Ur (for full discussion see Collon 1986: 100–104; similarly, Wiggermann 1987: 27). The so-called “priest” usually wears a short skirt or wrap-over dress leaving the upper body and larger part of the legs naked (see Collon 1986: 33–35).

in the mature Old Babylonian period. Unlike her male counterparts, she had no age-old tradition, except in the realm of terracotta figurines and plaques that had been circulating in Southern Mesopotamia for about two centuries when she was introduced into seal imagery. Just like the “king/figure with a mace” and the “priest”, her feet were frequently placed on top of a pedestal (cf. Fig. 8), a feature also depicted on many Old Babylonian terracotta plaques. Innovation, by necessity, requires more explanation than perseverance. I suggest that actual material presence, public visibility, and a renewed cultural function led to the flourishing of the motif towards the end of the third millennium and to its ultimate addition to the “official” canon of Old Babylonian visual culture during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century BCE.

### 5. *The Female Nude at the Entrance*

In recent years, F. Wiggermann’s identification of the nude female in Old Babylonian art with *bāštu(m)*, the personification of an Akkadian term and concept meaning “dignity; shame” and further understood by Wiggermann as “Lebenskraft” or “personal happiness”, has become widely accepted.<sup>38</sup> If we follow Wiggermann, she was part of an often-cited triad that also included the protective deities *lamassu(m)* and *šēdu(m)*, identified as “suppliant goddess” and the “figure with the mace” respectively.<sup>39</sup> J. Asher-Greve contested that view, pairing the nude female instead with the nude, six-curved hero, and as symbol for “ideal femininity”.<sup>40</sup> Be that as it may, neither Wiggermann nor Asher-Greve take the different visual histories of male/female nudes into account. The sudden and unprecedented frequency of the terracotta females and their later integration into the glyptic repertoire suggest the advance and growing popularity of a new or modified cultural practice that made their presence necessary.

U. Steinert’s detailed analysis of the semantic field for the Akkadian word *bāštum* elucidated the most important aspects of the concept inherent to personhood, especially during Old Babylonian times: *bāštum* is the physical charisma, the public image and attractiveness of a person—both male and female.<sup>41</sup> It stands for an intact, uncorrupted body and beyond that for social integrity. From the Ur III period onwards *bāštum* became a common component of female personal names. Letters refer to it as a prerequisite for reliable, loyal relations between (business) partners and their social standing.<sup>42</sup> But the term was also used to describe the outer appearance of palaces and temples; additionally, rituals called “for Entering the Palace” used an “oil of attractiveness” (*šaman bālti*) to bestow a person with the *bāštum* needed to make him enter and being heard.<sup>43</sup>

Consequently, the nude female was not just vaguely protective of the household.<sup>44</sup> Rather, the concrete need for *baštum* in successful personal encounters with superiors and gods (a situation

38. Wiggermann 1998: 46–47; for general acceptance see for instance J. Assante 2006. For a comprehensive treatment of the term and the surrounding debate see now Steinert 2012: 405–510, and pp. 437–443 in particular on the question of *bāštu* as personification and protective spirit.

39. Wiggermann 1987: 28–29; 1998: 46.

40. Asher-Greve and Sweeney 2012: 139.

41. Steinert 2012: 501.

42. See Steinert 2012: 427–428 in particular.

43. Steinert 2012: 432.

44. Cf. Assante’s (2002) interpretation among others.

permanently revoked on cylinder seals) but also in everyday life when entering private residences, may have caused the proliferation of its material form: the nude female terracotta.<sup>45</sup> This suggestion corresponds well with the most frequent find-spots of these images in areas outside and around temples and residential buildings.<sup>46</sup>

Eventually, in the course of the Old Babylonian period, the motif was taken over by the royal elite and incorporated into “official” use, including cylinder seal iconography where the nude female usually stands in minituarized form between worshipper and deity. We can exemplify this textually by reference to the hymns of king Rim-Sin of Larsa (1758–1822), centering around the act of him entering the sacred precinct of the god Nanna/Sîn at Ur. Hymn D stresses the crucial importance of the male (*udug*) and female (*lama*) protective spirits (of undefined appearance) set up as images (*alan*) at a city’s or a temple’s gate.<sup>47</sup> Another example, Hymn F, describes an important inner gateway of the Nanna-sanctuary as a “woman filled with sex-appeal” and “ripe like a fruit”, followed by the mention of *lama*-statues and *udug-protective spirits*.<sup>48</sup> Like the other gate-keeping figures mentioned in Rim-Sin’s hymns and well-known as temple-guardians from third-millennium texts (bulls, lions, eagles; *lama/lamassum* and *udug/šēdum*),<sup>49</sup> we should understand this description as not simply a metaphor but as literal, referring to the image of a voluptuous nude female set up at this place, similar to the nude women on our terracotta plaques, or to the almost life-sized terracotta statues whose remains were found along the ramp leading to the temple entrance area at Isin.<sup>50</sup> More explicitly, two “naked” (Sumerian *bar-sù-ga*, Akkadian *me-ri-i lamassum*-statues respectively were set up at Babylonian temples according to Ammi-ditana’s 29<sup>th</sup> and Samsu-ditana’s 9<sup>th</sup> year formulas (= 1655 and 1616 BCE).<sup>51</sup> Ammi-saduqa’s 7<sup>th</sup> year-formula (= 1639 BCE) mentions “various protective deities, having an awesome look” for the Ebabbar and Šamaš’s consort Aya in particular.<sup>52</sup> As such, they most likely adorned the temple gates or inner entrances, starting to “pray for the life of the king”, as Ammi-ditana’s year-formula indicates, already at these important points of access. Importantly, these were the images most visible for the urban population in daily life but also during festivals in the temple’s courtyard. It was exactly this visual placement and function of nude females that was taken over in Middle, Late Bronze Syrian and Iron Age Levantine architectural models

45. For a similar conclusion following a much broader discussion see Assante 2006: 202.

46. Unfortunately, we lack reliable distributional patterns for most plaques excavated in Southern Mesopotamia during the early 20th century. But where mentions of findspots are made, they seem to confirm this pattern. For Iščali see Roßberger 2017, for Assur Schmitt 2012: 123–124.

47. For transliteration and translation see 2.6.9.4, 1.8.

48. Following D. Charpin (1986: 289; UET VI 105, 28–31) and the English translation in ETCSL t.2.6.9.6: “Within the temple is the gateway of the great august sanctuary: it is a fine woman (*mí-zi*) with abundant charms whose head is nobly raised high, whose attraction (*ḥi-li-sù-sù*) radiates as if with the maturity of fruit (*gurun-gin<sub>7</sub> sig<sub>7</sub>-ga*), with abundant charms, lovable, but imposing in splendour like the mountains (*ḥur-sag-gin<sub>7</sub> me-lám-ma*).”

49. For transliteration and translation see ECTSL 2.6.9.4.

50. Hrouda 1977: 39–46.

51. See <https://cdli.ucla.edu/tools/yearnames/HTML/T12K9.htm> and <https://cdli.ucla.edu/tools/yearnames/HTML/T12K11.htm> (last accessed on 01.11.2017).

52. I follow the translation given at <https://cdli.ucla.edu/tools/yearnames/HTML/T12K10.htm> (last accessed on 01.11.2017).

(“shrines”), whose facades, windows and doorways were regularly adorned by nude women standing on small pedestals attached to the walls (Fig. 9).<sup>53</sup>

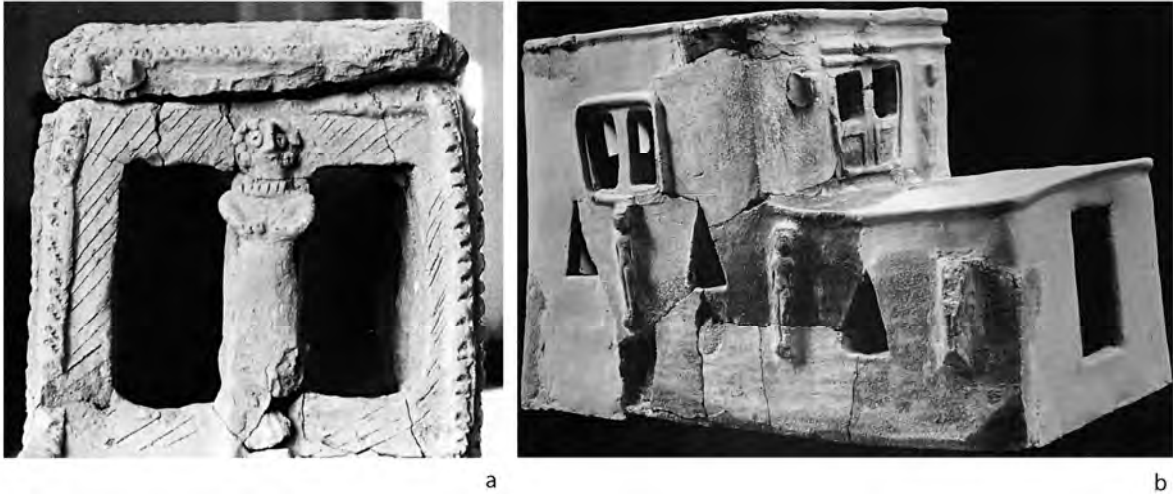


Fig. 9a, b. Middle and Late Bronze Age architectural terracotta models from Syria with applied (nude) females flanking windows from a) Tell Rumeilah (Muller 2002: fig. 122i), and b) Emar (Muller 2002: 64f).

Similar to 19<sup>th</sup>-century CE Neo-classical doorways and the Munich University entrance at Amalienstraße, the nude female was an “invented tradition” (Hobsbawm) that became a visual counterpart to the traditionalizing royal “figure with a mace” on the one hand, and to the age-old architectural guardian figures, the nude hero and the bull-man, on the other. Nevertheless, her function was more comprehensive, assuming a crucial role in the context of audiences with superiors and divine entities. Only the image-like and ideal character of her depiction made its widespread distribution possible in a time when images of dressed and undressed women alike had become almost extinct.

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53. See the discussion in Moorey (2003: 42) and Muller 2002.

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## 1.4. Onomastics



# Onomastics and Gender Identity in First-Millennium BCE Babylonia<sup>1</sup>

Laura Cousin<sup>2</sup> and Yoko Watai<sup>3</sup>

## 1. Introduction

Neo-Babylonian documents<sup>4</sup> provide us with a vast corpus of women's names, which are mentioned in socio-economic texts published in various prosopographical studies. However, we do not have a Neo-Babylonian *Who's Who*, nor a systematic study concerning feminine names of the Neo-Babylonian period.

There are however numerous studies of Akkadian onomastics. The works of Stamm (1939) and Edzard (1998) are important general studies of Akkadian personal names. For names in the second millennium BCE we can refer to the numerous studies of Amorite onomastics, such as those by Durand (notably 1997, 2013a) and most recently Streck (2000), as well as studies on Emar in the Late Bronze Age (Pruzsinsky 2003)<sup>5</sup> and on the Kassite period (Hölscher 1996). The documentation from Mari is an interesting source of study on female names, notably including a study by Nakata (1995) on women's theophoric names, and that by Millet-Albà (2000) on the animal elements in women's names.

For names in the first millennium BCE, the study of onomastics began with Tallqvist (1905) and continues more recently with Baker (2002), Nielsen (2011, 2015), and Monerie (2016). Studies on Neo-Babylonian women's names are an active field of research, particularly with Wunsch (2006), who studied

1. Yoko Watai and Laura Cousin thank very much the editors of these proceedings for their useful and interesting remarks. Laura Cousin warmly thanks Baptiste Fiette, Denis Boudier and Gaëlle Coqueugnot for their kind help during the writing of this article. Watai is responsible for the second section and Cousin is responsible for the third section. Both are responsible for the introduction and the conclusion. Abbreviations used in the present study follow the Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative (CDLI; abbreviations are listed at [http://cdli.ox.ac.uk/wiki/abbreviations\\_for\\_assyriology](http://cdli.ox.ac.uk/wiki/abbreviations_for_assyriology)).

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4. By "Neo-Babylonian texts" we mean texts drafted from the seventh century BCE to the fifth century BCE, including those of Achaemenid Babylonia.

5. On women's status in Emar, see Durand 2013b.

metronymic ancestor names, and Hackl (2013), who examined the names and naming patterns of female slaves.

We recently published a paper concerning women’s personal names from the Neo-Babylonian period (Cousin and Watai 2016). In this study, we addressed three points: first, we classified Akkadian female names based on their structure and their meaning and argued that there are different tendencies and preferences depending on social status with regard to name-giving. Second, we discussed theophoric elements, showing that the ancient pantheon remained an important influence on name-giving. Third, we surveyed non-Babylonian female names.

The aim of this paper is to investigate how onomastics allow for the construction of a “gender identity.” First, with regard to nominal names, especially of those named after animals, plants, and precious items, we examine if there is a “feminine particularity” concerning the choice of elements in these names. Second, we shall discuss names that are apparently gender-neutral and ambiguous.

## 2. “Feminine” Elements of Female Onomastics

Generally, there are a few differences between male and female names. On the one hand, a verb or an adjective included in women’s names is given a feminine form. This is so even in the case of theophoric names, where the form of the verb or the adjective corresponds not to the gender of the deity invoked in the name, but to the sex of the name-bearer.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, with regard to nominal names composed of a single element, the same noun can be used for both male and female names, but with the feminine form for the latter: for example, *Ubārtu* (“foreigner”) is used for the female name and *Ubār* for the male. Further examples can be cited, such as *Amat-DN* for the female name and *Arad-DN* for the male, and *Ahāssunu* for the female and *Aḥuṣunu* for the male. We can apply these two criteria to distinguish between the names of women and men.

Can we find other elements, such as the choice of nouns, verbs, or adjectives, and their significance which influenced the naming of girls and boys? For example, in Japan, flower-related words, such as “flower,” “cherry blossom,” “peach,” and “lily,” are often used as personal names primarily for girls. Such names are unusual for boys. From this example, it is possible that in Babylonian society, female names occasionally stemmed from objects that were associated with women primarily. We discuss here what was considered “feminine” by the Babylonians.

### 2.1. Animal Names

Several women were called after animal names; for example, we find eighteen women named “Ms. Mongoose,” three “Ms. Monkey,” and four “Ms. Locust.” In total, we find 21 names made from animals (out of about 483 female Akkadian names), which were given to 76 women in our corpus of first-millennium BCE Babylonia.

6. Edzard 1998: 108.

According to A. Millet-Albà, in the texts of 2<sup>nd</sup>-millennium Mari, animal names used for women mostly pertained to domestic animals.<sup>7</sup> However, this does not apply to the Neo-Babylonian data. We find fewer domestic animals featuring as names of females: two women with the name Immertu “ewe,” two women called Kalbatu “dog,” two called Šahitu “pig,” one Gadaya, derived from *gadû* “young goat,” and one Arḥaya derived from *arḥu* “calf.” The rest, and the majority—68 persons—were named after wild animals.<sup>8</sup> In fact, three animals most frequently chosen to name females were the mongoose, an animal called Bazītu, and the mouse, which were all wild animals.

### 2.1.1. *Mongoose*

Eighteen women were called “Mongoose” (Šikkû or Šikkuttu). It is worth pointing out that no men had this name: the name “mongoose” is exclusively characteristic of women. However, why was the mongoose used to name only women? Technically, the term *šikkû* is innately feminine, with an additional feminine form, Šikkuttu. This should explain why there is not masculine form of the term. Hence, the name Šikkû could be used only for girl’s names.

It is also possible that an “image” given to the animal reflects the choice of the name. The mongoose is a wild little animal, living close to humans, like the mouse.<sup>9</sup> It seems quite natural that a small and familiar animal is chosen as a hypocoristic name for women, while the mouse, an animal similar to the mongoose, is used as a name for both genders. At the same time, it is worth noting that 16 out of 18 persons with the name “mongoose” were slaves. It is possible that the animal’s toughness or quick movement, which perhaps produced an image of a “hard worker,” were related to the naming of the slave girls.

### 2.1.2. *Bazītu*

The second name given to women is Bazītu. However, its origin is unclear. The term *bazītu* is considered a “foreign animal” in the *CAD B*, while the *AHW* translates it as “meerkat.” The *bazītu*-animal is well known and mentioned as a tribute brought from Egypt in a single inscription of Shalmaneser III (Black Obelisk).<sup>10</sup> On the relief, it is described as having the shape of a monkey. The artists seemed to think that it was some kind of monkey, although we cannot completely trust their imagination. The reading of *ba-zi-a-ti* in the inscription is not confirmed; the *CAD B* (p.185) mentions the possibility that it

7. Millet-Albà 2000: 477: “Au contraire de ce qu’on pourrait croire a priori, le gros du répertoire des noms d’animaux est formé par des animaux domestiques, c’est-à-dire des animaux très proches de l’homme.”

8. Regarding the repertoire of Neo-Babylonian animal names, refer to Cousin and Watai 2016: 11–12 (Table 5).

9. Several Sumerian proverbs mention the mongoose: for example, “If bread is left over, the mongoose eats it. If I have bread left over, a stranger consumes it” (Alster 1997, 1.9); “A mouse fell down from the roofs. A mongoose approached it. ‘What! Where did you hurt yourself?’ ‘You, don’t come near. In what way are you comparable to me?’” (Alster 1997, *UET* 6/2 238). We can assume that mongooses were animals that lived fairly close to humans, and that they were closely related to mice. We thank Dr. Kazuya Akimoto, researcher of ante-Aesopian fables (Japan), for indicating the reference.

10. According to the translation of Grayson (1996: 150): “I received tribute from Egypt: two humped camels, a water buffalo (lit. ‘a river ox’), a *rhinoceros*, an antelope, female elephants, female monkeys, (and) apes.” He considered that *bazītu* could be a female monkey.

should be emended to read *pá-gi(!)-a-ti* “monkeys,” and the *CAD* U (p. 204) and P (p. 18) also consider that *ba-zi-a-ti* is an error of *ba-gi-a-ti*, and the former translates the term as “apes.”

However, the personal name Bazītu is clearly written as *ba-zi-tu*. Here, a question arises: Is it certain that the name Bazītu originated from the animal mentioned in the inscription of Shalmaneser III? We cannot resolve this question. If Bazītu was really an animal brought from Egypt, or if it was recognized as such in the Babylonian society, Babylonians may have chosen the name for its rarity. The same can be said of Uqūpatu (or Iqūpata) “monkey.”

Like Šikkû, this name is given only to females, probably because the word presents the feminine form. We find 12 persons with this name, half of whom are slaves and the other half are free-status women.

### 2.1.3. *Mouse*

The third name is “mouse,” Ḫabaširtu (or Ḫabašīru, with the masculine form), classified in the category of “animals that could have inspired tenderness and compassion.”<sup>11</sup> The name Mūrānātu “puppy,” for example, could also be included in this category. Both of these animals were also frequently used for men. We can say that the mouse was an animal with a “neutral” image, adapted for both boys and girls. Seven women out of eight with the name of “mouse” were slaves.

### 2.1.4. *Other Animals*

As we have seen above, small animals, “les animaux non domestiqués, mais qui ne sont pas des fauves” according to the description of A. Millet-Albà,<sup>12</sup> were generally chosen to name girls, especially animals like the mongoose, some kinds of monkeys, and the mouse. We also find girls named after the dormouse (Arrabatu), the puppy, and the wildcat (Mūrāšītu). These names may have been chosen for women because Babylonian name-givers considered these animals cute and clever. Some other women were named after domestic animals, such as the ewe, the dog, the pig, the young goat, and the calf (see 2.1). The choice of naming women after them is very understandable. However, it is not easy to imagine why some name-givers chose the turtle (Šelepūtu), the crab (Alluttu) and insects, like the locust (Kalabuttu), the grasshopper (Šašīru) and Caterpillar (Akiltu) for naming babies.

Sumerian literary texts on women might give us a hint for interpreting the name Šelepūtu “turtle.” J. Matuszak showed two such passages in her presentation at the Second Workshop of Gender, Methodology and the Ancient Near East, describing women with a: “wide chest like a turtle” and “foot like a turtle.”<sup>13</sup> In addition, we find a comparison of a tall woman with a turtle in the second section of the so-called “*aluzinnu*-text,” which is a mock self-praising hymn of Ištar (K.4334 o ii).<sup>14</sup> These descriptions give rise to the possibility that the name Šelepūtu could represent a physical characteristic. Concerning the selection of insects’ names, it may have been related to their fecundity. It is worth mentioning that we

11. Millet-Albà 2000: 478.

12. Millet-Albà 2000: 478.

13. See Matuszak’s article “Assessing Misogyny in Sumerian Disputations and Diatribes” published in these proceedings.

14. “Among the very short ones, among the very tall ones / Among (all) women, there is none like me. / I resemble an elephant in my limbs. A hyena in my face / I am tall in stature, like a turtle — I cannot be crushed!” (Jiménez 2017: 102). We thank J. Matuszak for pointing out the reference to us.



do not find women named after animals “qui pourraient avoir été choisis parce qu’ils symbolisent la force, le pouvoir ou l’astuce,”<sup>15</sup> such as the lion, the wolf and the falcon, with the exception being only a Ms. Fox (Šēlibūtu), in our corpus.

### 2.1.5. Comparison with Male Names

A quick examination of the masculine prosopography suggests that Šikkû and Bazītu were not used as male personal names; we found the male name Šikkûa, but this was mentioned as an ancestor’s name (*Dar.* 201: 16).

Animals frequently appearing as male names are mouse (Ḫabašīru), dog (Kalbaya),<sup>16</sup> puppy, (Mūrānu), wildcat (Murašû), fox (Šellibi), monkey (Iqūpu or Uqūpu), and “march bird (?)” (Niqūdu). Of these animals, the mouse was frequently used as a girl’s name, as we have seen above. All the other animal names, except Niqūdu, were used in their feminine form for female names, but the usage was comparatively rare. These animals were probably preferred for naming boys rather than for girls.

A majority of animal names were therefore used for both male and female names, but we see a difference among the animals preferred for female names and those for male names. The mongoose and the animal known as Bāzītu were probably used only for women’s names.

### 2.2. Plant Names

Plant names, mainly fruits and aromatic plants, were used as female names: “fruit” (Inbaya, Inbiya), “juniper” (Burāšû), “hemp” (Qunnabatu), “grape cluster” (Išunnu, Išunnatu), “pomegranate” (Lūrindu), etc. Among males, by contrast, we find few plant names; thus far, Allānu “oak” and Nargiya, which probably originated from *nargu* “(cedar) cone,” have been found. Fruits and aromatic plants may be associated with women because of their sweet taste and smell. Pomegranates were loved by the goddess Inana, and were used in love incantations (šā.zi.ga). In addition, fruits, especially grapes and pomegranates, may have evoked fertility and richness of life. Thus, we can say that fruits and aromatics are “feminine” names.

### 2.3. Other

Qudāšû and Inšabtu, meaning “ring” or “earring,” were popular for female names, but no evidence has been found linking them to male names. Precious and beautiful accessories were associated with wealth and feminine beauty.

Another popular female name was Nūptāya, meaning “gift.” The term *nūptu* means a gift that the tenant of a land or a house paid to the owner, in addition to the rent. The name Nūptāya seems to be an abbreviation of Nūptu-DN. Except for one example, Nūptu-Bēl (mentioned in text VAS 3 193: 5, drafted in the second year of Darius II), which is male, this name is exclusively feminine.

Other names denoting a “gift,” such as Nidintu and Širiktu, are also seen. Nidintu was used as both a male and a female name, and Širiktu, which indicated, in the Neo-Babylonian period, property given to the wife by the husband, was chosen only for men.

15. Millet-Albà 2000: 477.

16. However, *kalbu* “dog” is used for a hypocoristic name Kalbaya. This name could be an abbreviation of Kalbu-DN.

### 3. *Neutral and Ambiguous Names*

#### 3.1. *Neutral Names*

Prosopographical studies highlight the existence of names that we propose to consider as “neutral”, i.e. they can be borne by either men or women. According to linguistic studies, this kind of name is described as epicene. The term is derived from the Latin *epicoenus*, which itself derived from ancient Greek, *ἐπίκοινος*, which both mean “to have in common”. At present, we consider that epicene names show an identical spelling, whether they refer to a man or to a woman. Epicene names are consequently homophones, and, in first-millennium Babylonia, homography is added to this feature. Therefore, they are not precisely gendered, as the following examples show:

- Silim-Ba’u (“Grace of Ba’u”) or Silim-Ištar (“Grace of Ištar”) are very frequent for men, but also for women.<sup>17</sup>
- Ša-pî-kalbi (“From the dog’s mouth”, more commonly translated as “Foundling”) is attributed to men and women.<sup>18</sup>
- Mannu-idassu-idē (“Who knows his/her real value?”) can be particularly given to male and female slaves.<sup>19</sup>

Other types of names, hypocoristics or diminutives, are evenly used by men and women:

- Esagilaya or Saggilaya, referring of course to the Esagil temple of Babylon, devoted to the god Marduk.<sup>20</sup>
- Ana-bitišu, or more precisely DN-ana-bitišu (“O DN, show up for his house”),<sup>21</sup> Ana-ilišu/DN-ana-ališu (“O DN, show up for his town”)<sup>22</sup> or Ana-nurišu/Lūši-ana-nūr-DN (“Should I get out from DN’s light”).<sup>23</sup>

In these cases, the gendered determinatives (<sup>l</sup>PN for a man; and <sup>f</sup>PN for a woman), or the general context of the text, allow one to specify the individual’s gender.

#### 3.2. *Theophoric Names Applied to Men and Women*

If some names can be interpreted as neutral names applying to both sexes, in many cases, personal names are composed with gendered elements, especially with gendered theophoric elements (Tab. 1). In the same way as the verbs and their conjugations, they also help to define the names as feminine or

17. See texts *VS* 4, 46 and *Camb.* 365.

18. Hackl et al. 2014: letter 133 for a feminine example, and letter 185 for a masculine one.

19. Wunsch 2003: text 15.

20. The text *Nbn.* 153 presents a masculine example. Moreover, we found a feminine example in Baker 2004, where the wife of Iddin-Nabû, the chief of the Nappāḫu (“Smith”) family, is often nicknamed Saggilaya, while her complete name is Ina-Esagil-ramât (“She Lives in the Esagil Temple”).

21. *Nbn.* 374, *Cyr.* 287, *Dar.* 379.

22. *Nbn.* 635.

23. *Nbn.* 198.

masculine.<sup>24</sup> After studying the different prosopographies at our disposal, it has become obvious that, in Babylonia, some divine names were applied strictly to men. These theophoric elements are Adad, Anu, Bēl, Ea, Enlil, Marduk, Nabû, Nergal, Ninurta, Sîn, Šamaš and Uraš.<sup>25</sup> The major and more powerful masculine divinities of first-millennium Babylonia were thus mainly used to name men.<sup>26</sup>

If masculine divinities were only used to compose masculine names, some feminine divinities seem to have been used mainly for women. They were minor goddesses, even consorts of great gods, or goddesses related to fertility, two qualities devoted to women:

- Aya, Šamaš' consort.<sup>27</sup>
- Kurunnam, the goddess of beer.<sup>28</sup>
- Mammitu, the goddess of destinies.<sup>29</sup>
- Mullissu, Enlil's consort. It should be noted that Mullissu is written <sup>d</sup>NIN.LÍL, this specific pronunciation goes back to the Neo-Assyrian period.<sup>30</sup>
- Šarpanitu, Marduk's consort.

However, some feminine theophoric elements are used for both men and women:

- Annunitu, a form of Ištar and the divinity of Sippar-Annunitum.<sup>31</sup>
- Bānītu, another form of Ištar.<sup>32</sup>
- Ba'u and Gula, the healing goddesses.
- Bēlet, referring to the consort of Bēl/Marduk.<sup>33</sup>
- Ištar, often written Issar or Innin.
- Nanaya, goddess of love.
- Ningal, Sîn's consort.<sup>34</sup>
- Tašmetu, Nabû's consort.<sup>35</sup>

24. See chapter 2. For a general study on the composition of the names, see recently Cousin and Watai 2016.

25. Concerning Uraš, a proposition by P.-A. Beaulieu (1989: 96) to read the name of one of the women from the Egibi family, Itti-Marduk-balātu's sister (the chief of the third generation), Uraš-šiptu-damqāte, must be corrected in Tašmetu-damqat, relating to Nabû's divine spouse, much used in the first millennium BCE.

26. As shown by Millet-Albà 2002/03, the situation was quite different in the Old-Babylonian period: after studying the archives of Mari, Chagar Bazar, Terqa and Tuttul, the author remarks that among the theophoric elements used to form feminine names, 17 refer to gods (notably Dagan, Šamaš, Ayya/Ea) and 31 to goddesses (Eštar, Išhara, Kakka).

27. Aya-qarrat in *Dar*. 43; Aya-damqat and Aya-ḥipat in Bongenaar 1997: 447 and 465, who both belong to the Šangū-Šamaš family; Aya-bēl-ušrī and Aya-bullīṭini in Wunsch 2003: text 38.

28. Kurunnum-tabni in Wunsch 2003: text 10 and in *VS* 5, 76.

29. Mammitu-ilat in Wunsch 2003: text 5, and Mammitu-silim in text 44.

30. Itti-Mullissu-īnāya, a slave in Waerzeggers 2014: 155; Amat-Mullissu in Wunsch 2003: texts 148 and 149; and Šar-Mullissu-ṭāb, a slave in Waerzeggers 2010: text 192.

31. Arad-Annunitum occupied the position of *gugallu* in Waerzeggers 2014: 353. *Gugallu* is traditionally translated as "canal inspector" (*CAD* G, p. 121b), but this does not fully reflect his professional duties. F. Joannès (2002: 588–589) prefers the translation of "irrigator", working at local level.

32. Ardi-Bānītu in *Nbk*. 452; Amēl-Bānītu, Arad-Bānītu, Mannu-kī-Bānītu in Pearce and Wunsch 2014: 37, 64 and texts 26 and 71. One should note that during the Neo-Assyrian period, the name of Salmanazar V's queen was Banitu. However, it is not a hypocoristic form of Bānītu, but it rather means "Belle" or "Beauty" (see Parpola 2012: 621).

33. Bēlet-ereš and Bēlet-ušallim in Pearce and Wunsch 2014: text 45. See also Wunsch 2000: texts 44, 45 and 46.

34. Ningal-ilī from the Baliḥu family in Bongenaar 1997: 467.

Theophoric elements referring to the major goddesses' names in the Neo-Babylonian period, as Ištar, Nanaya, or the medicine goddesses Gula and Ba'u, are thus used for men and women.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, Ištar (as well as her other aspects Annunitu and Bānītu) is of course considered the goddess of passionate love, but she is also a warrior deity who can embody a masculine character. Finally, among these goddesses, we find several consorts of major masculine deities of the Babylonian pantheon (Marduk/Bēl, Nabû, Sîn). Ba'u and Ištar (often written Innin) are used in two of Nebuchadnezzar II's daughters' names, Ba'u-asītu and Innin-ētirat. The first princess probably lived in the city of Uruk with her sister Kaššaya, according to six texts of the Yale Babylonian Collection.<sup>37</sup> For Innin-ētirat, the situation seems to be more complex: she appears in a document drafted in Babylon (a manumission of a royal slave), but that does not rule out the possibility she lived in Uruk with her two sisters.<sup>38</sup>

Table 1: Summary table of the divine names applied to men and women.

Divinity's name (alphabetical order)	Strictly applied to men	Strictly applied to women	Applied to both
Adad	x		
Annunitu			X
Anu	x		
Aya		x	
Bānītu			X
Ba'u			X
Bēl	x		
Bēlet			x
Ea	x		
Enlil	x		
Gula			x
Ištar			x
Kurunnam		x	
Mammitu		x	
Marduk	x		
Mullissu		x	
Nabû	x		
Nanaya			x
Nergal	x		
Ningal			x
Ninurta	x		
Sîn	x		
Šarpanitu		x	
Šamaš	x		

35. Many men named Arad-Tašmetu are attested in Borsippa, as shown by Waerzeggers 2010: 21, 283 and 538, with three prebendaries of the Ezida temple bearing that name.

36. See Cousin and Watai 2016: 17–22.

37. Beaulieu 1998.

38. MacGinnis 1993.

Tašmetu			x
Uraš	x		

### 3.3. Ambiguous Names

If the study of some personal names allows preliminary conclusions about gender identity in Babylonia, a few other names seem atypical in view of the data previously gathered. Moreover, these names cannot be considered scribes' mistakes, considering the context of the documents in which they appear.

If determinatives allow us to identify proper names in association with men and women, they sometimes can be ambiguous, as shown by two recent studies. The first one by J. A. Brinkman focuses on the Middle-Babylonian period. He highlights a distinct phenomenon: the use of double determinatives, like <sup>l</sup>PN.<sup>39</sup> This was previously interpreted as a scribe's mistake, but the fact that twenty-five examples of this phenomenon have been found poses questions. J. A. Brinkman's study tends to show that these are neither errors, nor a questioning about the character's gender. In fact, it works as a marker for metronymic names, applying to the particular status of women acting as heads of families.<sup>40</sup> The other study, by Ph. Abrahami, focuses on double determinatives in Nuzi. It shows that double determinatives are devoted to women, on whom was conferred the status of *pater familias*.<sup>41</sup> For first-millennium BCE Babylonia, none of these double determinatives has ever been identified. Moving aside from this subject, a remarkable case arises: a person called <sup>l</sup>Iqišaya (VS 5, 100), hypocoristic of Iqiš-DN ("DN has granted"), is the only occurrence of this name with a feminine determinative, despite it being always devoted to men.

Lastly, some divine names with Marduk and Šarpanitu present some exceptions. At least two women bear a name with the theophoric element Marduk, and two men with the theophoric element Šarpanitu:

- <sup>l</sup>Ardi-Šarpanitu, close to Ardi-Erua.<sup>42</sup>
- <sup>l</sup>Marduk-ēṭirat (a land owner in the text *Cyr.* 331).
- <sup>l</sup>Marduk-uballit.<sup>43</sup>

In Amorite times, *nadītum*-nuns in Dilbat and Sippar were already called Šât-Marduk or Geme-Asalluḫi.<sup>44</sup> Asalluḫi was the god of Kuara, whose personality and characteristics were later absorbed by the god Marduk of Babylon. Kuara is a small village, not far from the city of Eridu, and the god Asalluḫi was originally the son of Ea and his consort Damkina, before Marduk became the "first-born" of the

39. About the topic of the double determinatives, see also the work of J. J. Justel in these proceedings.

40. Brinkman 2007.

41. Abrahami 2011.

42. *Nbk.* 76 and 106, both witnesses. Erua is an archaic form of the theophoric name Šarpanitu, and refers to the very first function of the goddess: to be a spawner.

43. Joannès 1982: text 104. She received a ration from a temple.

44. Barberon 2012: 49.

divine couple. By this syncretism, Marduk merges with Asalluḫi as the god of exorcism, divination, and magic.<sup>45</sup>

Ambiguous names are present during the Neo-Assyrian period, with, for example, <sup>1</sup>Aḫi-Nanaya and <sup>f</sup>Amat-Bēl.<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, several men bear names built with the theophoric Mullissu, which cannot be considered as ambiguous, but rather shows the importance of the goddess Mullissu in Neo-Assyrian times.<sup>47</sup>

Certainly, not many names of this kind have been identified. It is, however, interesting to remark that the two deities associated with atypical names in Babylonia are Marduk and his spouse Šarpanitu. This recalls the preeminent role and place of Marduk. First a minor god of Babylon and an agrarian divinity recognized by his hoe, he reached the top of the Babylonian pantheon, as the *Enūma Eliš* myth narrates. So we can wonder if we may be facing a new evolution of Marduk's status, which would also affect his divine spouse.

#### 4. Conclusion

First, we found some differences in the preference and tendency to select elements comprising male and female names. Fruits, aromatic plants, and accessories could be considered as “feminine,” reflecting images of feminine beauty. Concerning animal names, the cuteness of small animals was very likely a reason for naming women after them. Among these animals, the mongoose and an animal called Bazītu were used most frequently and exclusively to name women. We may attribute one reason for their “femininity” to the fact that the terms *šikkû* “mongoose” and *bazītu* are grammatically feminine.

Second, there are also gender distinctions through the theophoric elements used to create personal names. It turns out that masculine divine names are apparently reserved only for men, even the minor ones like Bunene, Nusku, or Zababa. On the contrary, some feminine theophoric elements are applied to both men and women, mainly those referring to major goddesses of the Babylonian pantheon.

Nevertheless, there are indeed some neutral names, called epicenes, used for men and women. This kind of name is characterized by homophony and homography; thus, only masculine and feminine determinatives indicate if they are referring to a man or a woman.

Ambiguous names remain an open question, and it would be interesting to find out if the small number of names with Marduk devoted to women denotes a real ambiguity, or if it is the result of the hazard of excavations.

We have not considered here the circumstances of name-giving, even who named babies.<sup>48</sup> J.-M. Durand indicates that most women bore primary names, probably those they received at birth.<sup>49</sup> I. Nakata

45. Lambert 2011: 76.

46. See the *PNAE*, 1/I.

47. See the *PNAE*, 2/II.

48. It is sometimes possible to determine why a precise personal name is given to a baby in the second millennium BCE. For instance, in the Mari documentation, a baby girl is named Tagīd-nawūm (“The Steppe beloved”), a political and auspicious name (Durand 1984: 127–133, 2000: 431 and 2013a: 56).

supposed, on the poor showing of thanks-giving female names from Mari: “when a baby girl was born, it was often left to the mother or female members of her kin to give a name to the baby girl and that the choice of name type and deity therefore reflected the tradition of the women and their prime concerns over the safe delivery of a baby and her welfare in future rather than for acquiring progeny for the continuation of the family.”<sup>50</sup> Indeed, thanks-giving names are very few from the Neo-Babylonian evidence.<sup>51</sup> It is reasonable to suppose that there were particular conditions or traditions, hopes, and expectations in naming girls, and that these determined the differences in the choice of words or theophoric elements in the names for both genders.

Many questions still remain about the conditions of name-giving, which can be examined in future studies.

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49. Durand 2013a: 54–55. However, we have some examples referring to personal names connected with functions and to cases of rednomination in the second millennium, like those of the *tārītum*-nurses in Zimrī-Līm’s palace (Ziegler 1999: 109), and of the “naophoric” names borne by *nadītum*-nuns (Barberon 2012: 122). In the topic on the onomastics of function, the name Amat-sakkanim, probably the feminine form of *ir₃ ekallim* is seen (Durand 2000: 159). We can also note the name of the first spouse of Zimrī-Līm, Dām-ḥurāši, “Blood of Gold” (Ziegler 1999: 52–54 and Durand 2000: 295–304), and that of the princess Tarīš-Ḥaṭṭum, “The Scepter rejoiced” (Durand 2000: 341–342). In the Neo-Babylonian period, EN.NIGALDI.NANNA, daughter of Nabonidus, is a well-known case of the rednomination in the political context (Cousin 2016: 394).

50. Nakata 1995: 243.

51. Cousin and Watai 2016: 14.

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## 1.5. Sumerian Literature



# Assessing Misogyny in Sumerian Disputations and Diatribes

Jana Matuszak<sup>1</sup>

The aim of the present paper is to discuss whether the Sumerian literary disputations between, and the diatribes against, women can be considered misogynistic. The existence of “[m]isogynist themes in Sumerian literary texts” was first proposed by M. Civil in 1966 and again at the 47<sup>th</sup> Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale in Helsinki 2001, although his paper sadly was never published.<sup>2</sup> In order to arrive at a balanced reappraisal of the question of misogyny, I have taken a fundamentally comparative approach. I will first present examples of content and style of the literary texts whose misogyny is open to debate (section 2), and then compare them to similar texts about men (section 3) in order to evaluate similarities and differences. Furthermore, the didactic background of the compositions, as well as questions of authorship and audience, will be included in the discussion.

## 1. *Corpus*

Since all the compositions within the corpus of Sumerian didactic and moralising literature from the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BCE, which were dedicated to the definition of the ideal woman (and thus—as will become apparent in section 2—are suspect of being potentially misogynistic) are hitherto unpublished, a brief introduction is in order. Two of the texts are disputations between women, given the modern titles *Two Women A* (henceforth *2WA*) and *Two Women B* (henceforth *2WB*), and two are monologues spoken by men, in which they verbally attack a woman: the so-called diatribes *Ka ħulu-a* and MS 2865. While the dialogues were naturally composed in Emesal (a sociolect reserved for female speakers and certain priests), the diatribes were written in Emegir (Standard Sumerian).

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2. Cf. Civil/Biggs' (1966: 7) assessment of what happens to be a manuscript of the *Early Dynastic Proverb Collection 1* (for which now see Alster 1991–1992): “Ce petit texte [...] nous montre que la tradition misogyne, qui trouvera sa plus complète expression dans le dialogue V [i.e. *2WB*], [...] a une longue histoire dans la littérature sumérienne.” Title and abstract of Civil's above-quoted RAI paper are cited in Parpola/Whiting (2002: 659).

*2WB*, with over 60 manuscripts from various Old Babylonian sites, has been edited comprehensively in the present author's PhD dissertation (Matuszak 2017). *2WA* will form the subject of a separate publication by the present author, but a preliminary score transliteration as well as notes on the reconstruction of the text and hand-drawn copies of the unpublished manuscripts, which stem exclusively from Old Babylonian Nippur, are presented in the appendix to Matuszak (2017). The title is given in inverted commas, as *2WA* is but an umbrella term for six unconnected text segments that might have belonged to different disputations between women. The diatribe *Ka ħulu-a* has been edited in the present author's MA thesis (Matuszak 2012), which is currently being revised for publication. An edition of the second diatribe, MS 2865, will be published in Matuszak/Volk (forthcoming). While *Ka ħulu-a* is attested on several Old Babylonian manuscripts from different cities, no duplicate of the roughly contemporaneous MS 2865 has been identified so far.<sup>3</sup>

## 2. Content

Despite stylistic and structural differences, the disputations between, and the diatribes against, women share one important similarity: the definition of the ideal woman is achieved *ex negativo*, i.e. by listing all shortcomings and crimes a woman could possibly be responsible for, and never by showcasing their exemplary virtues. In order to provide an impression of content and style, I have chosen a few quotations that illustrate the various aspects of womanhood addressed in the texts—namely 1) character traits, 2) social status, 3) skills and responsibilities, as well as 4) physical appearance and health.<sup>4</sup>

### 2.1. Character Traits

Among the most highly prized virtues were modesty and moderation, which can be deduced from the fact that the female protagonists of our corpus were repeatedly reproached for their lack thereof. In *2WB*, for instance, we learn that one of the women (the anonymous Mrs. A) “knows no limit,”<sup>5</sup> which admittedly is open to a relatively wide range of interpretations, while others are accused of gluttony and, in particular, drunkenness: one of the ladies in *2WA* is reported to be “drunk on beer”<sup>6</sup> and the addressee of the diatribe *Ka ħulu-a* is denounced as “drinking beer like water.”<sup>7</sup>

Furthermore, the women are also not as obedient and humble as they should be, but rather behave arrogantly. Thus *Ka ħulu-a* laments, for example: “The *slanderos/headstrong* maid does not please the heart of her master, she is insolent towards her mistress.”<sup>8</sup> In short: the women caricatured in these texts

3. For further information on these texts, see Matuszak (2016: 228–231).

4. A more detailed discussion can be found in Matuszak (2017), chapter 7. Matuszak (2016) elaborates on domestic work, roughly corresponding to sections 2.2 and 2.3 of the present paper.

5. *2WB* 66: ki-še-er nu-tuku.

6. *2WA* D. 10' : kaš si<sub>3</sub>-si<sub>3</sub>.

7. *Ka ħulu-a* 36 (quoted after A<sub>X</sub> = Ashm 1922-0169 [OECT 1, 14] ii 14): kaš naĝ a-gen<sub>7</sub>.

8. *Ka ħulu-a* 26 (quoted after A<sub>X</sub> ii 4 and D<sub>X</sub> = MS 2714 obv. 11–12): geme<sub>2</sub> bar-saĝ-a ša<sub>3</sub> lugal-a-ni-ir nu-du<sub>10</sub> / ša<sub>3</sub> kur<sub>4</sub>-kur<sub>4</sub> nin-a-ni-ir.

are utterly shameless—hence the judgement Mrs. A passes on her rival Ninkuzu (Emesal Gašankuzu): “She knows no shame!”<sup>9</sup>

What’s worse, they are false and deceitful, and occasionally even truly criminal. In *2WB*, for instance, the two rivals accuse each other of being a “liar,”<sup>10</sup> a “traitor,”<sup>11</sup> and even a “murderer.”<sup>12</sup> While the last in particular could be considered a capital crime, it seems likely that we are dealing with rhetorical exaggerations designed to inspire both shock and amusement in the audience. One of the most common crime allegations in *2WB*, however, is theft. Thus, Mrs. A is described as an almost parasitical household member, as she is accused of being the “robber of her own house.”<sup>13</sup> This possibly has to be read in the light of the famous model court case IM 28051, where ‘theft’ is described as one of the hallmarks of the licentious wife.<sup>14</sup> To substantiate her claim, and perhaps to dispel the suspicion of rhetorical exaggeration, Ninkuzu then asserts that Mrs. A has been caught red handed: “She’s eating stolen pigs: she’s holding a stolen piglet in her hand!”<sup>15</sup>

Finally, the protagonists of our corpus are found lacking in diligence, as can be deduced from the abundance of accusations attacking laziness and carelessness: In *2WB*, for instance, Ninkuzu slanders her rival by alleging that “her hands can’t keep up with work: the moment she’s entered she’s already leaving again, and (the result) is of poor quality.”<sup>16</sup> Mrs. A in return retorts that Ninkuzu is “only eating and sleeping,”<sup>17</sup> and—when not, then—idly “roaming the city, roaming the harbour, entering all houses.”<sup>18</sup> While the mention of the harbour here seems to insinuate promiscuity<sup>19</sup> and thus, in the case of a married woman, adultery—potentially another capital crime—the latter is an accusation of meddlingness and curiosity, another frequently chided misdemeanour often going hand in hand with laziness.

## 2.2. Social Status

Despite the general encouragement of diligence, the texts draw a clear distinction between respectable and unrespectable work, that is, between the (technical) skills a woman was expected to master to perfection, and the lowly work thought to be degrading for free women. Since base, repetitive, and physically exhausting work was often performed by slave girls, it came to be synonymous with low

9. *2WB* 30: teš<sub>2</sub> nu-tuku.

10. *2WB* 5 *et passim*: lu<sub>2</sub>-tu-mu (/lu<sub>2</sub>-IM, mu-lu-tu-mu).

11. *2WB* 106: ga-ab-du<sub>11</sub>.

12. *2WB* 106: ga-ba-gaz.

13. *2WB* 23: mu-zuḥ e<sub>2</sub>-a-na. mu-zuḥ is interpreted as the Emesal form of nu-zuḥ / (lu<sub>2</sub>-) ni<sub>2</sub>-zuḥ / lu<sub>2</sub>-zuḥ(-a) “thief.”

14. See Neumann (2004: 87f.).

15. *2WB* 34: šaḥ<sub>2</sub> zuḥ-a gu<sub>7</sub>-gu<sub>7</sub> šaḥ<sub>2</sub>ze<sub>2</sub>-eḥ tur zuḥ-a šu-ni-še<sub>3</sub> la<sub>2</sub>-a.

16. *2WB* 68: kiḡ<sub>2</sub>-e šu nu-mu-un-da-sa<sub>2</sub> ku<sub>4</sub>-ku<sub>4</sub> e<sub>3</sub>-de<sub>3</sub> (a-)ab-la<sub>2</sub>.

17. *2WB* 136: gu<sub>7</sub>-gu<sub>7</sub> nu<sub>2</sub>-nu<sub>2</sub>.

18. *2WB* 16: uru<sub>2</sub> niḡen<sub>2</sub> kar niḡen<sub>2</sub> e<sub>2</sub>-e<sub>2</sub>-a ku<sub>4</sub>-ku<sub>4</sub>.

19. While this is not the place to review the discussion revolving around the term kar-ke<sub>4</sub>/ḥarimtu, it is clear from *2WB* 152 *et passim* that kar-ke<sub>4</sub> is employed as a swearword (‘whore!’) and alleges extra-marital sex, since the woman so called is repudiated by her husband on the grounds of adultery accusations. Moreover, it is noteworthy that men are also frequently accused of idly roaming about (see section 3.1.1), but the harbour (kar) is never mentioned in this context.

social status. Thus, the two rivals in *2WB* scorn each other as “slave girl of the (entire) city quarter”<sup>20</sup> and “offspring of paupers.”<sup>21</sup> In a similar vein, they sneer disdainfully at each other for “constantly pressing oil, perpetually roasting barley, incessantly baking deceptively big breads”<sup>22</sup> and “grinding flour non-stop.”<sup>23</sup> On the grammatical level, the monotony of the arduous tasks is aptly expressed through reduplicated (sur-sur, du<sub>8</sub>-du<sub>8</sub>), tripled (sa-sa-sa) or sometimes even quadruplicated (ar<sub>3</sub>-ar<sub>3</sub>-ar<sub>3</sub>-ar<sub>3</sub>-ra) verbal bases—no doubt also for comic effect.

### 2.3. *Skills and Responsibilities*

By contrast, tasks that required experience and certain technical skills were highly valued and indeed expected from the female head of the household. They encompassed 1) the management of the household, 2) care for the family, 3) textile work, as well as 4) the sexual satisfaction of the husband, and childbirth.

#### 2.3.1. *Management of the Household*

Several lines in *2WB* stress that it was the matron’s responsibility to run the household. One reproach reads: “She didn’t establish the women’s quarters, she didn’t manage the household properly.”<sup>24</sup> Other lines make it clear that she was not allowed to incur financial loss: “Don’t you say ‘it is there!’, (even though in reality) you’re incurring losses?”<sup>25</sup> A resourceful housewife was hence expected to administer, if not augment (at least part of) the family property—which also stands in stark contrast to the allegations of ‘theft’ within their own households quoted above.

#### 2.3.2. *Care for the Family*

As laconically stated in the *Instructions of Šuruppak*, “A married man is well equipped; (but) an unmarried man sleeps in a haystack.”<sup>26</sup> A wife was equated with care and comfort—a good wife, that is. The protagonists of *2WB*, on the contrary, fail at providing even the basic needs of their families. For instance, instead of cooking herself, Ninkuzu is portrayed as “always buying beer (and) bringing ready-made food,”<sup>27</sup> i.e. as profiting from other people’s labour instead of putting her own hands to work. Furthermore, she does not supply clothes: “Your husband has no clothes to wear; you yourself are wearing rags. / Your butt sticks out from them!”<sup>28</sup> which—apart from negligence—of course also insinuates poverty.

20. *2WB* 13: gi<sub>4</sub>-in dag-ge<sub>4</sub>-a.

21. *2WB* 45: mu uku<sub>2</sub>-re-ne.

22. *2WB* 44: u<sub>5</sub>-mu sur-sur še sa-sa-sa inda<sub>3</sub> gu-lu-a du<sub>8</sub>-du<sub>8</sub>. gu-lu-a as ‘past participle’ of /gul/ instead of the usual adjective gal “big” indicates that these breads have been “made big,” which could insinuate that they have been made to look bigger (or more substantial) than they actually were, hence the translation “deceptively big.” Perhaps they were simply inflated with air.

23. *2WB* 61: zi<sub>3</sub> ar<sub>3</sub>-ar<sub>3</sub>-ar<sub>3</sub>-ra.

24. *2WB* 41: ame<sub>2</sub> nu-mu-un-ge-en e<sub>2</sub> a-ra<sub>2</sub>-še<sub>3</sub> nu-mu-ġar.

25. *2WB* 50: i-bi<sub>2</sub>-za nu-ġa<sub>2</sub>-ġa<sub>2</sub> al-ġal<sub>2</sub> nu-ub-be<sub>2</sub>-en.

26. *Instr.Šur.* 185f.; translation Alster (2005: 88).

27. *2WB* 54: kaš sa<sub>10</sub>-sa<sub>10</sub> aġ<sub>2</sub>-šeġ<sub>6</sub>-ġa<sub>2</sub> tum<sub>3</sub>-de<sub>3</sub>.

28. *2WB* 51f: dam-zu tu<sub>9</sub> nu-um-mu<sub>4</sub> ze<sub>4</sub>-e<sup>tu<sub>9</sub></sup>aġ<sub>2</sub>-dara<sub>2</sub> mu<sub>4</sub>-mu<sub>4</sub> / gu-du-zu am<sub>3</sub>-ta-la<sub>2</sub>.



### 2.3.3. Textile Work

However, it emerges from other lines in *2WB* specifically that textile work ranked among the most esteemed female skills. Compare, for instance, the following accusation against Mrs. A: “... she is not fit for womanhood: she cannot pluck wool, she cannot operate a spindle.”<sup>29</sup> There are also other texts, which attest to the fact that textile work was regarded as the essence of womanhood. In the Sumerian myth *Enki and the World Order*, for instance, the god Enki is reported to set up the (first) loom, thereby “greatly perfecting the task of womanhood,”<sup>30</sup> while from the *Sumerian Laws Handbook of Forms* we learn that “the assigned work quota of ‘womanhood’” was “20 shekels of wool.”<sup>31</sup>

### 2.3.4. Sex and Childbirth

Finally, wives were expected to satisfy their husbands in bed and to bear children, although sex was by no means reduced to its procreative function. On the contrary, giving men pleasure plays a prominent role, as can be understood from the following quotation, for example: “No man who sleeps with her takes pleasure in her (too) small vulva.”<sup>32</sup> Childbirth, however, plays an important role in *2WB*, since Ninkuzu is portrayed as infertile. For example, Mrs. A jeers gleefully: “Her (ever so) pure womb is ‘finished’—(it means) financial loss for her house,”<sup>33</sup> linking offspring to wealth. In her last speech, Mrs. A takes up the topic once more, in order to beat her rival decisively: “(Too) small vulva, (but) extremely long pubic hair! Thick genitals; person (with) a blocked, sick womb!”<sup>34</sup> These taunts then prompt Ninkuzu to ridicule Mrs. A as a “mother who is giving birth on a daily basis,”<sup>35</sup> although the absurd exaggeration probably betrays nothing but the speaker’s jealousy.

### 2.4. Physical Appearance and Health

Lastly (and unsurprisingly) women were also expected to be both pretty and healthy. As physical appearance represents one of the main topics of the diatribe MS 2865, the following quotes will be taken from there. The unfortunate addressee is not only ridiculed as having a “short (literally: square) figure, ... (and) growing an opulent moustache,”<sup>36</sup> she is also reported to have the “wide chest of a turtle, who like a fish has no [limb]s,”<sup>37</sup> the exact connotations of which (flat breast? fat body with crippled limbs?) remain obscure. Finally—and most unflatteringly—the speaker exclaims: “These feet are turtle feet!”<sup>38</sup> While these insults might all appear quite ingenuous at first glance, at least turtle feet seem to have been a

29. *2WB* 66f.: na-aĝ<sub>2</sub>-munus-e la-ba-DI(sa<sub>2</sub>)/du<sub>7</sub> / siki nu-mu-un-da-peš<sub>6</sub>-e ĝ<sup>eš</sup>bala nu-mu-un-da-nu-nu.

30. See Benito (1969: 107. 133).

31. SLHF vii ll. 34–36: 1/3 ma-na siki eš<sub>2</sub>-gar<sub>3</sub> nam-munus al<sup>?</sup>-x ħe<sub>2</sub>-e; translation after Roth (1997: 53).

32. *Ka ħulu-a* 17 (quoted after Ax i 17): galla<sub>4</sub><sup>1a</sup> tur-tur-ra lu<sub>2</sub> nu<sub>2</sub> da-a-ni la-ba-an-ħu<sub>1</sub><sub>2</sub>-l[e]. Note that “small vulva” here and in *2WB* 148 could also refer to virginity or infertility, which could carry the association of being unmarried or unfit for marriage respectively.

33. *2WB* 48: ša<sub>3</sub>-ku<sub>3</sub> til i-bi<sub>2</sub>-za e<sub>2</sub>-a-na.

34. *2WB* 148f.: galla<sub>4</sub><sup>1a</sup> tur siki galla<sub>4</sub><sup>1a</sup> gid<sub>2</sub>-gid<sub>2</sub> / pe-zi<sub>2</sub>-ir ĤAR lu<sub>2</sub> ša<sub>3</sub> la<sub>2</sub> pa<sub>4</sub>-ħal-la.

35. *2WB* 154: ama gan u<sub>4</sub>-š<sub>u</sub><sub>2</sub>-‘uš<sup>?</sup>-a.

36. MS 2865 obv. 8: alan lugud<sub>2</sub>-da ... siki tun<sub>3</sub>-na mu<sub>2</sub>-mu<sub>2</sub>-‘da<sup>?</sup>.

37. MS 2865 obv. 10: gaba daĝal-‘la<sup>?</sup> niĝ<sub>2</sub>-bun<sub>2</sub>-na ku<sub>6</sub><sup>o</sup>-gen<sub>7</sub> ‘a<sub>2</sub><sup>?</sup>-[š<sub>u</sub><sup>?</sup>-ĝi]ri<sub>3</sub><sup>?</sup> nu-tuku-a.

38. MS 2865 obv. 12: ĝiri<sub>3</sub>-bi ĝiri<sub>3</sub> ba-al-ge<sub>4</sub>.

relatively well-known deformation, as they occur several times in omen collections, and people who are suffering from them are described as “someone whose toes are ‘cut off’ and who does not have toe joints.”<sup>39</sup> Overall, the taunts concerning physical features tend to expose bodily defects more than beauty flaws, which lends support to the hypothesis that the texts presented here aim at defining a *fully functioning* housewife.

### 2.5. Summary

In summing up, two observations need to be emphasised. First, only complete compliance with all aspects mentioned above made a woman worthy of the title, as can be seen from the recurring rhetorical question  $u_3 ze_4-e munus-me-en$  “And you, you are a woman?!” *vel sim.*<sup>40</sup> Since the defeated contestants of the disputations (and, *mutatis mutandis*, the addressees of the diatribes) fail at every aspect of womanhood, the answer to this question can only be “No!” By not being a humble, diligent, competent, caring, pretty, and healthy girl from a good family, the résumé about Ninkuzu and her equally inferior counterpart in 2WA is shattering: they are the “unworthiest of (all) women,”<sup>41</sup> and thus a disgrace to womanhood.

Second, it is striking that the typically female tasks and responsibilities outlined in 2WB in particular coincide with those of a wife, while a virtuous character and an attractive physique round off the picture. The disputations hence demonstrate clearly that the notion of the ‘ideal woman’—for the authors at least—was practically synonymous with the ‘ideal wife.’ Indeed, comparison of the texts defining the ‘ideal wife’ with those defining the ‘ideal scribe’ in the next section will show that all these text were probably composed by the male teachers of the Sumerian school (Edubba’a) for their predominantly male students. Considering the fact that the ‘ideal woman’ was almost exclusively defined *ex negativo*—i.e. by gross insults—and that the very notion of the ‘ideal woman’ was clearly a male construct presented to a male audience, the question arises:

### 3. Can the Texts be Classified as Misogynistic?

I will address the question both with regard to content and conception of the works.

39. See Böck (2000: 286f.). The morphoscopic literature of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BCE, of which *Alamdimmû* is a prime example, does not only describe physical features, but also draws conclusions about the character and/or fate of the afflicted. One can therefore assume that the bodily deficits mentioned in our texts were also associated with character traits, or good or bad fates. Furthermore, the association of ugly women with turtles is found both in the parody on self-praise hymns of Ishtar (K.4334 obv. ii 16': *lāna kī raqqi šēhāku ul ammaraq-ma* “I am tall in stature, like a turtle—I cannot be crushed,” translation after Jiménez 2017: 102, see *ibid.* for further literature) and personal names, for which see the contribution by Cousin/Watai in the present volume. The *locus classicus* for misogynistic comparisons of women with various animals is of course Semonides’ “animal” poem (see Lloyd-Jones 1975).

40. This quote comes from the Sippar version of 2WB (ll. 102 and 120). A more common variant is  $u_3 ze_4-e ša_3 nu-nus-e-ne-me-en$  “and you, you are one of the women?!” in 2WB 55, 60, 83, 102 and 120.

41. 2WB 143 and 2WA E.I 5: *nu-ga nu-nus-e-ne*.

### 3.1. *With Regard to Content*

In order to evaluate the content (and style) of the texts dealing with *ex negativo* definitions of the ideal woman vis-à-vis their potential misogyny, it is instructive to look at the contemporary Sumerian disputations between schoolboys and the diatribes against men. Of the three school disputations, only *Dialogue 1* has been edited recently (Johnson and Geller 2015). While *Dialogue 3* has been edited partially by Römer (1988); comprehensive editions of both *Dialogue 2* and *Dialogue 3* are being prepared by M. Ceccarelli (Geneva), from whose score transliterations I profited. *Diatribes B* and *C* have been edited by Sjöberg (1972); *Diatribes A* is still unpublished.

As a matter of fact, we find in these roughly the same insults and reproaches, and the texts are certainly as impolite. They only differ from the compositions concerned with women in the areas of (in)competence. Thus, scribes were accused of being too stupid to write or recite Sumerian, of having ugly handwriting and being slow at math, and musicians of being incapable of playing their instruments or singing *a dab* and *tigi* songs, while women—as we have seen—were said to fail at textile production and management of the household, etc.<sup>42</sup> But apart from taunts targeted at professional failure, the insults are largely the same, and some are even attested verbatim in both texts concerning women and men, as some of the following examples illustrate.

#### 3.1.1. *Character Traits*

Just as the women in section 2.1, men were routinely accused of a lack of modesty and moderation. They also do not know their limit,<sup>43</sup> and likewise over-indulge in food and drink, with unpleasant consequences: “Once he’s drunk (too much) beer, he slanders. Once he’s eaten (too much) food, he doesn’t speak right.”<sup>44</sup> After all, just like women, men have no shame.<sup>45</sup>

Laziness likewise constitutes an often-voiced reproach. Compare, for instance, these quotes from *Dialogue 1*: “You flee from work (and) stand about babbling on the market square”<sup>46</sup> and: “He went and wasted time; and the work is of poor quality.”<sup>47</sup> Laziness is also sometimes connected to curiosity: “Roaming about, wandering about in the streets. Stretching the neck into everyone’s houses, he knows what’s going on in these houses.”<sup>48</sup> It brings to mind a similar passage from *2WB*: “Always standing

42. Due to the indicated differences, I will abstain from a comparison between male and female skills and responsibilities—not least because the image of the ideal scribe has already been studied by others, such as, for instance, Sjöberg (1975) and Volk (2000).

43. Compare, for instance, *D2* 60 (quoted after UN<sub>A</sub> = A 24192 obv. ii 13): *ki-še-er nu-e-tuku* “You knew no limit!” with *2WB* 66: *ki-še-er nu-tuku*.

44. *D2* 116f. (quoted after NA<sub>1</sub> = HS 1606 [TMH NF 3, 42] ii 32’ f): *kaš un-naĝ eme sig al-gu<sub>7</sub>-gu<sub>7</sub> / inda<sub>3</sub> un-gu<sub>7</sub> si sa<sub>2</sub>-bi nu-ub-be<sub>2</sub>*. Compare *2WB* 136: *gu<sub>7</sub>-gu<sub>7</sub> nu<sub>2</sub>-nu<sub>2</sub>*, *2WA* D. 10’: *kaš si<sub>3</sub>-si<sub>3</sub>* or *Ka ħulu-a* 36: *kaš naĝ a-gen<sub>7</sub>*.

45. *Diatribes B* 6: *teš<sub>2</sub> nu-tuku*; *D1* 121: *teš<sub>2</sub> TUKU.TUKU nu-zu*; *D2* 102a (quoted after NGG = N 1049+3370 obv. 8’): *teš<sub>2</sub> nu-[tuku]*; *D2* 147 (quoted after U<sub>F</sub> = UET 6/2, 153 obv. 3): *teš<sub>2</sub>! la-ba-e-tuku* and *D2* 176 (quoted after U<sub>F</sub> rev. 16): *teš<sub>2</sub> la-ba-du<sub>12</sub>-du<sub>12</sub>*. Compare *2WB* 30 and 72 (*teš<sub>2</sub> nu-tuku*), as well as MS 2865 rev. 8 (*teš<sub>2</sub> nu-tuku-e*).

46. *D1* 97: *kiĝ<sub>2</sub>-ta ba-saĥ<sub>6</sub> šaka(n)ka(KI.LAM)<sup>ka</sup> mu<sub>7</sub>?-mu<sub>7</sub>? ba-gub-be<sub>2</sub>-en*.

47. *D1* 92: *al-ĝen al-zal kiĝ<sub>2</sub>-e ba(-an)-la<sub>2</sub>*. Compare *2WB* 68: *kiĝ<sub>2</sub>-e šu nu-mu-un-da-sa<sub>2</sub> ku<sub>4</sub>-ku<sub>4</sub> e<sub>3</sub>-de<sub>3</sub> (a-)ab-la<sub>2</sub>*.

48. *D2* 86f. (quoted after UN<sub>A</sub> obv. ii 40–42): *šu dag-dag-ge e-sir<sub>2</sub>-ra NIĜIN<sub>2</sub>.NIĜIN<sub>2</sub> / e<sub>2</sub> lu<sub>2</sub>-u<sub>3</sub>-ne-ka gu<sub>2</sub> gid<sub>2</sub>-gid<sub>2</sub>-i / e<sub>2</sub>-e a-ra<sub>2</sub>-bi in-zu*.

about in the alleys, always wandering about in the streets, always sitting about on the thresholds of the people. In the houses of the people you have found out what's going on."<sup>49</sup>

Moreover, men are also accused of falseness and criminality, and we encounter very familiar *topoi*. For instance, men—just as Mrs. A in *2WB*<sup>50</sup>—are reported to steal (among other things) pigs: In *Dialogue 1*, the 'Bureaucrat' accuses the 'Professor' of "burgling houses, stealing pigs,"<sup>51</sup> and in *Dialogue 2* one confronts the other, claiming: "Your brothers are pig thieves!"<sup>52</sup> Since theft of food is generally more frequently attested than that of valuables, these allegations could also insinuate poverty and hunger that needs immediate satisfaction (see sections 2.2 and 3.1.2). As regards falseness, the metaphorical description of the opponent as a "slippery slope (i.e., a deceitful person), whom respectable people don't (want to) know (or: who doesn't know respectable people)" in *Dialogue 1* and *Diatribes B* is also found with minor differences in *2WB* (and only rarely elsewhere),<sup>53</sup> while the allegation of "changing the mouth, turning the eyes, person of evil!" is attested in exactly the same words in *Dialogue 2* and *2WB*.<sup>54</sup>

### 3.1.2. Social Status

While thus generally the same vices are impugned in women and men alike, poverty and low social status are also equally ridiculed in all disputations and diatribes. In *Dialogue 2*, for instance, one of the protagonists is scorned as "wearing nothing but rags,"<sup>55</sup> "pauper"<sup>56</sup> and "servant of (free) citizens,"<sup>57</sup> which is highly reminiscent of the slurs we encountered in *2WB*.<sup>58</sup> Even worse, protagonists of both *Dialogue 1* and *2WB* are said to be "tearing out (their) hair because of lice, dying of starvation."<sup>59</sup>

### 3.1.3. Physical Appearance and Health

As regards body dysfunctions, *Dialogue 1* contains a parallel to the allegations of infertility in *2WB*: The 'Professor' is ridiculed as impotent, having a "flaccid penis, blocked butt, (and) a single testicle hanging down."<sup>60</sup> While there are countless other slurs aimed at ugliness and bodily deficits, even the less than flattering comparisons with turtles and fish, which we encountered in MS 2865, find a parallel in

49. *2WB* 110–112: sila-a gub-gub e-sir<sub>2</sub>-ra NIĠIN<sub>2</sub>.NIĠIN<sub>2</sub> / i-dib-mu-lu-ne-ka TUŠ-TUŠ-u<sub>3</sub> / e<sub>2</sub> mu-lu-ne-ka ġalga ba-e-zu.

50. *2WB* 34: ša<sup>h</sup>a<sup>2</sup>-zuḥ-a gu<sub>7</sub>-gu<sub>7</sub> šaḥa<sup>2</sup>ze<sub>2</sub>-eḥ tur zuḥ-a šu-ni-še<sub>3</sub> la<sub>2</sub>-a.

51. *DI* 108: e<sub>2</sub> buru<sub>3</sub>-buru<sub>3</sub> šaḥa<sup>2</sup> zuḥ-zuḥ.

52. *D2* 172 (quoted after N<sub>A1</sub> obv. iii 16'): ses-zu-ne šaḥa<sup>2</sup> zuḥ-zuḥ.

53. *DI* 124 // *Diatribes B* 7: ki-ma-an-zi<sub>2</sub>-ir lu<sub>2</sub> kal-la nu-zu. Compare *2WB* 31a (N<sub>7</sub>, N<sub>9</sub>): ki-ma-an-zi<sub>2</sub>-ir lu<sub>2</sub> kal-la nu-te "Slippery slope, whom respectable people don't approach (or: who doesn't approach respectable people)", which is closer to the version in *DI* 124 // *Diatribes B* 7 and therefore perhaps influenced by it.

54. *D2* 159a (quoted after U<sub>X</sub> = UET 6/3, 635 obv. 4): KA kur<sub>2</sub> igi bala lu<sub>2</sub> niġ<sub>2</sub>-erim<sub>2</sub>-ma; compare *2WB* 104: KA kur<sub>2</sub> igi bala lu<sub>2</sub> aġ<sub>2</sub>-erim<sub>2</sub>-ma. The fact that in *D2* line 159a is only added in two manuscripts from Ur, whereas in *2WB* line 104 is a regular part of the text, could suggest a quote from *2WB*.

55. *D2* 76 (quoted after UN<sub>A</sub> obv. ii 29): <sup>tu</sup>9 niġ<sub>2</sub>-dara<sub>2</sub> mu<sub>4</sub>-<sup>mu</sup>4.

56. *D2* 77 (quoted after UN<sub>A</sub> obv. ii 30): uku<sub>2</sub>.

57. *D2* 78 (quoted after UN<sub>A</sub> obv. 31): urdu<sub>2</sub> lu<sub>2</sub>-u<sub>3</sub>-ne.

58. Compare *2WB* 13: gi<sub>4</sub>-in dag-ge<sub>4</sub>-a, *2WB* 45: mu uku<sub>2</sub>-re-ne and *2WB* 51: ze<sub>4</sub>-e <sup>tu</sup>9 aġ<sub>2</sub>-dara<sub>2</sub> mu<sub>4</sub>-mu<sub>4</sub>.

59. *2WB* 123: eḥi-ta zi<sub>2</sub>[-zi<sub>2</sub>?] <sup>ša</sup>3-ġar-ta uš<sub>2</sub>. *DI* 56 adds "Show-off!" at the beginning of the line, highlighting the discrepancy between bravado and bitter reality: lu<sub>2</sub>-tumu eḥi-ta zi<sub>2</sub> ša<sup>3</sup>-ġar-ta uš<sub>2</sub>.

60. *DI* 11: ġeš<sub>3</sub> per gu-du keše<sub>2</sub> šeri AS tu-lu.

*Dialogue 2*: one contestant is ridiculed as a “fish from the sea, (whose) head is narrower than himself (i.e., the rest of his body)”<sup>61</sup>—perhaps once an idiomatic expression pointing out that the addressee’s head was tiny in proportion to his body, which might or might not have had a symbolic meaning as well.

### 3.1.4. Summary and Discussion

The résumé is thus very similar to that of the texts concerned with women: the (presumable) losers of the disputations are the “unworthiest of the singers”<sup>62</sup> or the “unworthiest of the scribes”<sup>63</sup> respectively, and it is doubtful if they can rightfully be called a man (or indeed: a human being), as we again find several variations of the ironic rhetorical question “And you, you are a man?!”<sup>64</sup> to which, of course, the answer equally is “No!”

However, the disputations between schoolboys demonstrate clearly that the ultimate goal was to define not necessarily the ideal man, but the professional profile of a competent—and thus ideal—scribe (and/or musician). It is due to the restricted and elitist world view of the authors, most likely schoolmasters and thus members of the intellectual elite themselves, that we hear of no other (typically male) occupations but those for which academic education was a prerequisite. Since disputations between human protagonists first and foremost seem to define (highly select) professional profiles, this apparently also applies to the debates between women: in parallel to the Edubba’a graduate as the only profession befitting a man, the housewife is construed as *the* female profession *par excellence*. While moral and physical flawlessness also counted towards professional excellence, the diatribes, on the other hand, generally focused less on expertise but on character traits, beauty, and health.

The disputations hence propagate a strict division between ‘ideal male’ and ‘ideal female’ occupations. In fact, the notions of ‘ideal man’ and ‘ideal Edubba’a graduate’ or ‘ideal woman’ and ‘ideal (house)wife’ are so inseparable that doubts about the respective opponent’s professional abilities find expression in rhetorical questions of the sort “And you, you are a man?!” or “And you, you are a woman?!” Instead of presenting and contrasting different occupations and life designs, the disputations reduce potential diversity to two harsh options within a single given profession: success or failure. But not only professional success is at stake here. Indeed, the very phrasing of the rhetorical questions suggests that failure at gendered activities results in exclusion from the respective ‘sex category,’ as described by West and Zimmerman (1987: 136):<sup>65</sup>

“If sex category is omnirelevant (or even approaches being so), then a person engaged in virtually any activity may be held accountable for performance of that activity as a *woman* or a *man*. [...] Accordingly, virtually any activity can be assessed as to its womanly or manly nature. And note, to

61. *D2 68* (quoted after UN<sub>A</sub> obv. i 21): ‘gir a-ab-ba saĝ ni<sub>2</sub>’-ba šal-šal. Compare MS 2865 obv. 10: gaba daĝal-‘la’ niĝ<sub>2</sub>-bun<sub>2</sub>-na ku<sub>6</sub>°-gen<sub>7</sub> ‘a<sub>2</sub>’-[š<sub>u</sub>°-ĝi]ri<sub>3</sub>’ nu-tuku-a.

62. *D2 4* (quoted after N<sub>AA</sub> = 3N-T 406 obv. i 4): nu-tum<sub>2</sub> nar-e-ne.

63. *D3 26*; see Römer (1988: 237) II. A 26 and read: lu<sub>2</sub>-tumu(1M) nu-ub-tum<sub>2</sub> dub-sar-e-n[e...]. Compare 2*WB* 143 // 2*WA* E.I 5: nu-ga munus-e-ne.

64. Compare, for instance, *D2 75* (quoted after UN<sub>A</sub> obv. ii 28): u<sub>3</sub> ze<sub>4</sub>-e lu<sub>2</sub>-lu<sub>7</sub>-me-en and u<sub>3</sub> ze<sub>4</sub>-e munus-me-en.

65. I would like to thank S. Svärd for discussing these matters with me.

“do” gender is not always to live up to normative conceptions of femininity or masculinity; it is to engage in behavior *at the risk of gender assessment*.”<sup>66</sup>

While the disputations clearly served to reinforce gender roles and define appropriate gender activities, the above-mentioned rhetorical questions in particular also hold a key to the problem of misogyny. Apart from the very fact that the disputations between women aim at indirectly defining the *ideal* woman, which, as one might argue, all but necessitates some appreciation of the female, the rhetorical questions make it clear that the protagonists are compared to a fundamentally positive model of femininity: it is not the woman *per se* who is being insulted, chided and ridiculed, but only the one who fails to live up to the ideal. More or less the same, as a matter of fact, applies to the apprentice scribes, and nobody would have ever argued that the vicious insults employed in the disputations between schoolboys resulted from contempt for scribes.

Indeed, the striking similarity of the above-presented texts in terms of content and style could speak against classifying the disputations between, and the diatribes against, women as misogynistic—mainly, because the *ex negativo* technique served as a didactic (and humoristic) ploy in texts about men and women alike. Hence, complete failure of the addressee of a diatribe and at least one protagonist of a disputation constituted a *didactic necessity* for the texts in order to achieve their goal of indirectly defining ideal women or men: they were composed in the hope that students laugh about the fools, thereby distance themselves from them, and refrain from repeating their ridiculous and outrageous mistakes. In other words, (most of) the caricaturised characters were deliberately designed to deter, which informs the peculiar content and style of these ultimately didactic, moralising compositions.

Regardless of the doubtful success of this pedagogic practice of presenting mainly negative examples, this dismissive stance is thus characteristic of the entire corpus of disputations and diatribes. It does not, however, apply to Sumerian literature as a whole. Therefore, it should at least be noted in passing that the so-called wisdom or advice literature also contains praise of women, especially mothers. This shows that male authors were aware of the positive aspects of womanhood, as this quote from the *Instructions of Šuruppak* demonstrates:<sup>67</sup>

“Don’t speak arrogant words to your mother! It will result in hatred against you.

The words of (or: against) your mother (and) the words of (or: against) your god, don’t take them into (your) mouth!

A mother is (like) Utu, who gives birth to the people.”

Moreover, with *Ludiġira’s Message to his Mother* (see most recently Gadotti 2011) and the *Elegy on the Death of Nawirtum* (Kramer 1960) there exist two Sumerian literary texts which are entirely devoted to extolling the virtues of Ludiġira’s mother and wife respectively, apparently two exemplary women. Although it must be admitted that explicit praise of women is comparatively rare in Sumerian and

66. Italics by West and Zimmerman.

67. *Instr.Šur.* 265–267; see Alster (2005: 98f.).

Akkadian ‘wisdom literature,’ genuinely misogynist content, as can be found in certain Greek or medieval Christian writings, for instance, does not seem to exist.<sup>68</sup>

### 3.2. *With Regard to Conceptual Criteria*

When it comes to the ideology behind the relevant works, however, the situation is more complex. First of all, the question of authorship and audience needs to be addressed. Indeed, it is highly probable that all texts presented in this paper—including the Emesal dialogues—were authored by men, who were members of, or associated with, the Edubba’a. The striking similarities between the texts about women and those concerning men suggest similar authors. Since the setting as well as the ‘*Sitz im Leben*’ of the school disputations is clearly the school, and since the disputations between women were probably modelled on them, the masters of the Edubba’a are likely authors for all of them. Furthermore, the idealised image of the scribal school propagated by Edubba’a compositions and school disputations does not include women, and evidence for female students is rare.<sup>69</sup> Therefore, the conclusion that male authors wrote moralising texts about women for a predominantly male audience (schoolboys) is almost inevitable. The texts hence represent an inherently male view on what constituted the ideal woman, and it needs to be stressed once again that the ideal woman was defined as an ideal (house)wife, i.e., solely with regard to her potential husband. Women, being excluded from scribal circles, simply did not and could not take part in the scholarly discourse on ideal femininity: the ideal woman (as well as the ideal Edubba’a graduate) was exclusively defined by a male scribal elite.

This might also explain why there are two known diatribes spoken by men against women, but not a single case of a woman insulting a man, and it is very unlikely that such a text ever existed. The power imbalance between men, who were able to voice—or rather write down—their contempt for *both* their peers *and* various women, and women, who can only quarrel among themselves (in the disputations) and be subjected to verbal abuse by men (in the diatribes), is thus apparent. To this should be added a certain lopsidedness in the representation of male and female characters. It is striking that within the corpus of Sumerian didactic and moralising compositions proper (by which I here mean disputations between human contestants, diatribes, and Edubba’a compositions), there is next to no positive statement about women,<sup>70</sup> whereas positive statements about men (both in the form of praise and self-praise) are, for instance, attested in *Dialogues 2* and *3* as well as in *Edubba’a B* (see Sjöberg 1973) and *Edubba’a C* (unpublished; see ETCSL 5.1.3). While ideal women are thus exclusively defined *ex negativo*, the definition of ideal scribes is generally achieved through a more balanced presentation of exemplary role models and ridiculous fools, who do the exact opposite of the expected ideal.

The exclusively male authorship of the compositions presented here also needs to be taken into consideration when discussing whether—as proposed by Gadotti (2011)—Sumerian literature reflects

68. One might, for instance, think of Hesiod’s portrayal of woman as the fundamental evil and man’s worst nuisance in *Theogony* 570-612 (see West 1966) or Semonides’ “animal” poem (see above 2.4). For misogynistic themes in Medieval Latin monastic literature, see Schmidt (1991: 215 *et passim*). The examples could of course be multiplied.

69. See Lion/Robson (2005). For the discrepancy between literary glorification of the Edubba’a and the comparatively modest reality, see Peterson (2015: 93f.) with previous literature. See also May, this volume.

70. The only exceptions are two short passages in *Dialogue 2* (ll. 138ff. and 178ff.), in which the respective speaker praises his mother and sisters for their prudent and reliable management of the household.

exactly the role of women in ancient Near Eastern society. While the analysis of the entire Sumerian literary corpus relevant to the question<sup>71</sup> goes beyond the scope of this paper, the likelihood of male author- and readership might limit her thesis not insignificantly. At the same time, it must be admitted that the discourse among the male scribal elite is (and probably will be) the only one available to the modern scholar, while the plurality of orally expressed opinions, which surely existed, is lost forever. However, it would be anachronistic to apply modern ideas about gender equality to a traditional patriarchal society. Hence, as unfair as the perceived imbalance might seem to the modern reader, it does not necessarily justify the label ‘misogyny.’

As a matter of fact, I know of only one case that could be interpreted as an example of misogynistic motives at work: the OB editions of the *Early Dynastic Proverb Collection 1* (*EDPC 1*; see Alster 1991–1992). While in the ED original from ca. 2600 BCE only a few entries explicitly focus on women, two bilingual manuscripts (UM 29-15-174, see Civil/Biggs 1966: 5-7, and BT 9, see Klein 2003) dating from ca. 1800 BCE add Akkadian translations which turn every insult that is gender-unspecific in the Sumerian original into an insult specifically directed against a woman. This seemingly unwarranted but conscious choice of female grammatical forms is probably connected to the composition of the diatribe *Ka ħulu-a*, which extensively cites entries from *EDPC 1*. But even so, the exercise of finding rare Akkadian female forms for 800 year old and often poorly understood Sumerian terms might have other reasons than *purely* misogynistic ones. In this regard, it would be worthwhile to analyse systematically the OB proverbs and related compositions (such as the *Instructions of Šuruppak*) for gender stereotypes and a potential misogynistic undercurrent in order to better evaluate the OB reception of *EDPC 1*.

### 3.3. Conclusion

The final verdict is thus twofold. On the one hand, it can safely be established that the disputations between, and the diatribes against, women were clearly not intended to discredit womanhood entirely, but rather attest to a fundamentally positive image of dutiful and competent wives and mothers. *Tangible* reflexes of misogyny in Sumerian literature prove to be hard to find. However, that does not exclude the existence of misogynistic tendencies among the male scribal elite. While they might occasionally surface in the form of lopsided depictions of female and male characters or a general under-representation of exemplary women, they are difficult to prove in concrete terms.

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71. See Gadotti (2011: 204).



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# Narrating about Men, Narrating about Women in Akkadian Literature

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## 1. Introduction

Thinking about human characters in Akkadian literary texts, one automatically envisions men as the protagonists of these tales. They are male heroes who are on a quest, like the famous Gilgameš, king of Uruk, who searched for eternal life; or Etana, who tried to find the herb of birth-giving. Or we think of heroes who strive to fulfill a very special task, like Atram-ḥasīs, who had to build an ark to survive a flood. In the context of gender studies, the question arises: Where are the females in Akkadian narratives? Searching for females from a gender perspective does not just mean finding these women in the texts, but studying the contexts in which one encounters female and male characters within a particular narration.<sup>2</sup> What kind of males and females were considered worth being the subject of literature? How were these characters presented? What differences can be detected in Akkadian portrayals of men in contrast to women? How were gender identities constructed, and what are the male and the female spaces in Akkadian narrations?<sup>3</sup> Of course, there are the well-known characters like Šamḥat and Siduri in the *Epic of Gilgameš*, but what kind of characters are these women? What other human females can be found in Akkadian literature? Is it possible to observe a difference in the literary treatment of women compared to men?

Akkadian narrative texts are, next to Sumerian, among the oldest literary compositions that have come down to us. The oldest of these literary texts in the Akkadian language date as early as the second half of the third millennium BCE. A first flourishing of literature in Akkadian can be observed in Old Babylonian times, in the first half of the second millennium, and a great variety of new narrative texts in this language were created until the end of the Neo-Assyrian period in 612 BCE. Amongst them are

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2. In recent years a number of articles on the topic of women in Sumerian and Akkadian literary texts have been published, see i.a. Harris 2000, Gadotti 2011 and 2014, and Nemet-Nejat 2014.

3. As V. and A. Nünning (2004: 22) have stressed, narrating can appear as performative act that itself creates gender identities.

creations as famous as the *Gilgameš Epic*, a text with a long history, which found its final version in Neo-Assyrian times, or the *Epic of Creation (Enuma Eliš)*, written in the second half of the second-millennium BCE. A large number of texts were found in the famous library of Assurbanipal in Nineveh, as well as in places such as Assur, Babylon, Uruk, and Sippar. Many other cities in Mesopotamia, as well as outside the Mesopotamian heartland in modern Syria, Iran, Anatolia and Egypt, have been sources of literary compositions written in Akkadian on clay tablets.<sup>4</sup>

We do not know if those who created the texts were men or women, nor do we know who read, told and retold the stories. Thus it is impossible to search for the “female voice” as is done with modern literature, where the name and identity of an author is usually known. It is also important to note that in Akkadian narrative texts we find different male and female characters among deities as well as among humans. Here I want to concentrate on the world of human beings, especially since one can observe that for powerful goddesses like Ištar or Ereškigal there are rules of behavior that differ from the rules observed by humans.

For Akkadian narrative texts the same is true as can be said for Sumerian literature—the main characters of a narration are usually deities or male heroes, typically kings. But one also encounters other humans, men as well as women, who interact with the main character. These men and women can be named or unnamed in the story, and they can appear active or rather passive. This article concentrates mainly on females, and for a better survey the female characters in Akkadian literary texts were divided into two groups: those who are unnamed, but play an active role in the story; and those who are not only active characters, but who also are mentioned by their own name.<sup>5</sup>

There are some mythological texts telling the story of a male hero who has to fulfill a special duty, undertake a quest, or go on an adventure, who talks to the gods and ultimately succeeds in his struggle. At the side of this male hero one would expect the presence of a wife, but this female companion remains silently in the background, unnamed and passive.

A good example of this is the wife of the hero Etana in the *Etana Epic*.<sup>6</sup> This tale tells us—next to a fairy tale-like story of eagle and snake—how Etana, king of the city of Kiš and the very first king after the gods have sent kingship from heaven, dealt with a problem that many kings after him will also have to face: he was in need of a son and heir and could not get one. One has to assume that Etana was married and thus had a wife and potential mother of a son at hand, because he never bothers to search for a wife. No distinction is made between whether he had daughters or if he was childless: only the missing son and heir is the focus of Etana’s concern in this tale. The king’s longing for a son is understandable, but one suspects that his wife felt equal pressure to become the mother of a boy. It is Etana, the male hero, who speaks with the gods; who ventures on a trip to heaven, riding on the back of an eagle; and who tries to find the Plant of Birth. Unfortunately, the end of the text is lost and one does not know if Etana finally succeeded in his attempt to get a son and heir. It is possible that at some point in the now lost parts of the story his wife was mentioned, but this is not very likely because the literary treatment of Etana in this

4. For a general introduction into Akkadian literature see Reiner 1978, Bottéro 1995 and Foster 2005 and 2007.

5. For all quoted literary texts, recent translations into English can be found in Foster 2005. See also the translations of Mesopotamian myths in Dalley 1989.

6. For an edition see Kinnier Wilson 1985 and Haul 2000.

story is quite typical: the male hero is presented as an active and daring character who leaves his home on his quest, and is even able to talk to the gods. The subject of the Etana-tale is this quest of the male hero: his adventures, and his bravery. The sadness and concern of his wife who stays at home, unable to bear a son for her husband, her feelings and emotions, these are not the concern of this kind of Akkadian heroic literature.

A similar situation can be observed in the Old Babylonian version of the well-known flood story.<sup>7</sup> The male hero Atram-ḫasīs is presented in the same fashion as Etana. He talks to the gods, especially to Enki, god of wisdom. It is Enki who advises him to build a ship in order to survive the flood. He is active in building this ship and in arranging everything that is necessary to survive the disaster. As in the story of Etana, one has to assume that there was also a wife. Certainly there is reference to his family, whom Atram-ḫasīs brought aboard.<sup>8</sup> And as the survival of mankind would have been difficult without women also surviving the flood, there must have been women in the ark. Yet the Old Babylonian version of this story does not mention a wife, daughter, or daughter-in-law; it focuses on the male hero and his quest. At the side of this male hero one has to infer the presence of a wife, but this female companion remains unnamed, passive and silent in the background.

## 2. *Suffering Masses — Female and Male*

In other mythological texts we do find females; often these women are unnamed but they are explicitly mentioned in the text and even described as acting characters. In the Old Babylonian *Atram-ḫasīs* myth as well as in the *Song or Erra*, a text from the first millennium BCE, one finds unnamed men and women who are equally described as victims of disaster. Both texts describe catastrophic conditions for the people of Babylonia, who suffer from famine in the myth of *Atram-ḫasīs* and civil war in the *Song of Erra*. As a result of these catastrophic conditions, families disintegrate: mothers no longer care for their daughters, daughters don't care for their mothers, and fathers and sons cease to care for each. In the *Atram-ḫasīs* myth it is mainly the lack of mutual care between females (the consequence of five years of famine) that is highlighted. Mothers or daughters are sold into slavery without concern for each other. In the sixth year of famine, the situation becomes so bad that cannibalism occurs and sons and daughters are eaten by their relatives. Interestingly, fathers are not mentioned in this passage of *Atram-ḫasīs*.

“When the fifth year came,  
 a daughter would eye her mother coming in  
 a mother would not even open her door to the daughter,  
 a daughter would watch the scale (at the sale of) her mother,  
 a mother would watch the scale (at the sale of) her daughter.  
 When the sixth year came

7. See the edition of Lambert and Millard 1969, the annotated bibliography Shehata 2001, and the new text edited by George 2009: 16–25. The myth of *Atram-ḫasīs* is handed down to us in different versions from various epochs of Mesopotamian history, The Old Babylonian version was created in the first half of the second millennium BCE.

8. *Atram-ḫasīs*, Old Babylonian version tablet III, col. ii, 42, Lambert and Millard (1969: 92–93).

they served up a daughter for meal  
served up a son for meal.”<sup>9</sup>

The *Song of Erra*<sup>10</sup> describes, in equal measure, a situation of unrest, war, and the disintegration of the established social order. Here we see the natural feeling that should exist between parents and their children falling apart.

“A son will not ask for the health of his father, nor the father of his son.  
A mother will happily plot harm for her daughter.”<sup>11</sup>

“I shall change the minds of people so that the father will not listen to the son  
the daughter will speak words of rejection to the mother.”<sup>12</sup>

Both texts describe a situation of great misery that leads to the disintegration of families and ultimately to death. These parts of the texts do not deal with a brilliant (male) hero, who receives advice from his personal god and is finally able to fulfill a special task or resolve a difficult situation. Instead, the texts describe ordinary men and women who suffer and struggle to survive. In such a life-threatening situation in both the *Atram-ḫasīs* myth and the *Song of Erra*, men and women are mentioned equally and equally depicted as anonymous victims of divine rage. They are undifferentiated human beings without individual personalities. Consequently, there is no direct speech recorded for these men or women.

In their depiction at the beginning of the *Epic of Gilgameš*, the women of Uruk are equally nameless. However they are active, not helpless. Gilgameš, king of Uruk, harasses the young men and women of his city alike, as is stated in the following two lines:

“He has wrongfully vexed the young men of Uruk, Gilgameš lets no son go free to his father,  
...  
Gilgameš lets no girl go free to her bride-groom, the warrior’s daughter, the young man’s bride.”<sup>13</sup>

Here again, men and women are equally victimized, in this case not by the wrath of a god but by the king of Uruk, who does not yet know how to behave as a good king. These young inhabitants of Uruk are initially described in the same manner as the victims of famine and civil war were in the myth of *Atram-ḫasīs* and the *Song of Erra*. Then, the women of Uruk do not stay passive any longer; they take initiative and complain about their king, and the gods and goddesses listen to them:

“The warrior’s daughter, the [young man’s bride]  
the goddesses were listening to their complaint.”<sup>14</sup>

9. *Atram-ḫasīs*, Late Assyrian recension tablet I col. vi, 7–12, Lambert and Millard (1969: 112–115).

10. See the edition of Cagni 1969.

11. *Song of Erra* tablet II pericope C, 33–34.

12. *Song of Erra* tablet III pericope B1, 9–10.

13. See the edition of George 2003. Standard version of the *Epic of Gilgameš*, tablet I, 67–68, 72.

Finally, Anu, highest god in the pantheon, commands that the problem is to be solved and calls the goddess Aruru to create Enkidu, a companion for Gilgameš. Thus at the beginning of the *Epic of Gilgameš*, one finds a group of unnamed suffering men and women. But, in contrast to the myth of Atram-ḥasīs, it is not an individual hero who solves the problem; here it is the group of women who speak directly to the gods, like a hero, and thus get the problem solved. It is interesting to observe that the narrator does not present a male personage to talk to the gods, nor one individual woman who takes the place of the male hero, but a group of anonymous females who contact the gods and thus help all the inhabitants of their city.

### 3. Active Women—Married and Single

A different situation in the portrayal of a woman can be found in the flood story of tablet XI of the *Epic of Gilgameš* in the first-millennium BCE version. In this story within the main narrative of the epic, Ūta-napišti tells Gilgameš about the flood and how he survived it. This tale of Ūta-napišti is very similar to the Old Babylonian version as it is known from the *Atram-ḥasīs* myth.<sup>15</sup> Again, one finds the male hero, named, active, talking to the gods, receiving divine advice and instructions for how to survive the disastrous flood. Ūta-napišti describes his struggle. He also mentions the workmen who helped to build his ship. Finally, he tells Gilgameš how he brought his family on board. His wife is not mentioned explicitly in this first part of the story; as in the Old Babylonian version of the flood-story, the female partner of the hero is only implicitly mentioned as part of his family. However, this situation changes after the flood. Having detected the surviving humans, Enlil, who had initiated the extinction of mankind because their noise prevented the king of the gods from sleeping, becomes angry. However Ea, god of wisdom, who made Ūta-napišti build the ark, convinces him that the survival of some humans is actually rather favorable for the gods. Ultimately, Enlil blesses Ūta-napišti and his wife; he asks them both to kneel in front of him and then he declares that both should become immortal like the gods.<sup>16</sup> These past events are told by Ūta-napišti who speaks of his wife without even once giving her name. In his report of past events she remains passive, parallel to her role in the Old Babylonian version of this tale. But the situation will be different during Gilgameš' visit to the immortal couple's home.

Gilgameš had come to see Ūta-napišti and his wife because of his personal quest for immortality. As a kind of test for immortality, Ūta-napišti asks him to stay awake for six days and seven nights—Gilgameš immediately falls asleep and thus fails the test. In this dangerous situation the wife of Ūta-napišti becomes active and speaks in favor of Gilgameš, asking her husband to let Gilgameš awaken and go home. To make Gilgameš realize how long he actually has slept, Ūta-napišti asks his wife to bake one loaf of bread every day so that Gilgameš will see how decayed each loaf is, and thus deduce how long he has slept.<sup>17</sup> Here one can see Ūta-napišti and his wife in the traditional assignment of roles: the couple

14. Standard version of the *Epic of Gilgameš*, tablet I, 77–78.

15. The main male character of the flood-story, the Noah of the Bible is called Ūta-napišti in the version of the first millennium BCE and Atram-ḥasīs in the Old Babylonian version that is about thousand years older.

16. Standard version of the *Epic of Gilgameš*, tablet XI, 199–204.

17. Standard version of the *Epic of Gilgameš*, tablet XI, 209–230.

talks to each other, Ūta-napišti listens to his wife, but it is the husband who tells the wife what to do, and she performs the ordered household-work like baking bread.

In the end of the episode of Gilgameš' visit to the island of Ūta-napišti it is the wife again who speaks in favor of Gilgameš. Because she does not want him to leave the island empty handed, she asks her husband for something he can give to Gilgameš. Ūta-napišti submits to his wife's plea and gives Gilgameš the gift of advice. He tells him how to obtain a plant that has the power to make old men young again. Gilgameš succeeds in finding this plant but cannot make use of it; he loses it to a snake.<sup>18</sup>

How can the roles of Ūta-napišti and his wife be summarized? Ūta-napišti himself fits perfectly into the role of the male hero: he is named, interacts with the gods, and succeeds in the difficult task of surviving the flood with his family. His wife is his nameless companion, the female at his side, who is nevertheless individually blessed by the supreme god Enlil. She thus shares her husband's prominent position. In the story about the visit of Gilgameš her activities are the narrative topic. She speaks and acts in favor of the guest, enabling him to return home safely, thus fulfilling the duties of a good host to Gilgameš and a good wife to Ūta-napišti.

Reading this famous part of the *Epic of Gilgameš* one might wonder why the wife of Ūta-napišti, although a strong and important character in the whole tale, remains nameless. One possible answer might be that she is treated in this narrative in the same manner as married women were treated in Mesopotamian economic documents and lists of witnesses, where women are often not mentioned by name but identified via the husband, simply called "wife of xy". This is different from the anonymous suffering group of males and females in the *Song of Erra*, the myth of *Atram-ḫasīs*, and the beginning of the *Epic of Gilgameš*. The wife of Ūta-napišti is presented as an individual being and she is characterized as an outstanding wife by her deeds and behavior. Enlil talked to her in the same way he did to her husband; she also gained immortality; she interacts and speaks with her husband; she cares for her visitor as a good host should. In this respect, her individual name is of no importance because she is clearly identified as the "wife of Ūta-napišti". Therefore, for a Mesopotamian audience, the individual name of this female character did not add any further information and thus had no significance to the story.

This leads to the last group of women in Akkadian narratives: women who not only speak and act individually but who are also named. Here we have to look at the two best known and most prominent female characters in the *Epic of Gilgameš*, Šamḫat and Siduri. Šamḫat is the prostitute who, in the beginning of the epic makes love to Enkidu, feeds him bread and beer, and thus converts the former animal-like creature into a civilized human being who later becomes the close friend of Gilgameš.<sup>19</sup> It seems weird, at first glance, that a woman like Šamḫat is given (the honor of) an individual name in the epic. However her name corresponds to her profession as it literally means "luscious one". That is, she does not bear an ordinary female name, as one would expect for any wife or daughter, but a name revealing her profession. In the reality of Mesopotamian society, a prostitute belonged to a lower social stratum,<sup>20</sup> and one might not expect such a person to be presented as an individual in connection with one

18. Standard version of the *Epic of Gilgameš*, tablet XI, 273–307.

19. Standard version of the *Epic of Gilgameš*, tablet I, 188–200.

20. On prostitution in Mesopotamia see Lambert 1992, Roth 2006, and Cooper 2016. Asante 1998 argued that the Akkadian term *ḫarimtu* does not designate a prostitute as a term of profession but a woman who is not under the authority of a male relative, a father or husband, and who is thus free in her own decisions and actions, i.e. *ḫarimtu* designates a social status



of the most famous kings and heroes, Gilgameš, King of Uruk. But Šamḥat causes Enkidu to become a real human being and consequently the beloved friend of Gilgameš. That is, she acts as a benefactor to Gilgameš, who had missed having a friend and equal.

Initially it was a hunter who first saw Enkidu and told his father about the wild man roaming at the waterhole with the wild animals. The father tells him to bring Šamḥat to Enkidu. The hunter goes to Uruk and tells Gilgameš about the wild man, and Gilgameš also advises him to take Šamḥat to this wild man.<sup>21</sup> Neither the hunter nor his father are named, but the prostitute Šamḥat is. And although she acts in the beginning like an obedient servant following the orders of Gilgameš the king, she later acts independently, talking to Enkidu and providing explanations. Šamḥat not only acts as a prostitute, making love to Enkidu, she also speaks like a wise woman. She reveals her knowledge of a dream that Gilgameš had had to Enkidu, as well as the dream's interpretation given to Gilgameš by his mother Ninsun.<sup>22</sup> Here Šamḥat has the function of a messenger bringing news from the king of Uruk to his future close friend, Enkidu. As Harris has shown in her article on women in the *Epic of Gilgameš*, Šamḥat fulfills a twofold role; she is the prostitute who also acts like a mother to Enkidu, and she teaches him how to be fully human. Thus in total she fulfills several roles: prostitute, mother, and wise woman.<sup>23</sup> As a prostitute she stands outside of the traditional household, and this enables her to leave the space of her home and walk to the steppe, the space of the wild man Enkidu, a fact that sets her apart from the wife of a man who has to stay close to her house. This ability to leave the traditional female space also makes Šamḥat a special character, beyond the traditional role of a model Mesopotamian woman.<sup>24</sup>

The other important named woman in the *Epic of Gilgameš* is the tavern keeper, Siduri.<sup>25</sup> She lives at the shores of the lake Gilgameš must cross to reach the island of Ūta-napišti and his wife, and she helps Gilgameš to find the wise Ūta-napišti. As a tavern keeper, Siduri also belongs to the lower classes of Mesopotamian society, but like Šamḥat she is presented as helper and advisor to the hero.<sup>26</sup> Interestingly, she is veiled like a respected wife in Assyrian society, but obviously she lives alone in her tavern. Maybe the veil is a sign of her positive relation to Gilgameš, who trusts her and tells her the story of his adventures with Enkidu in the cedar forest, and of his grief caused by Enkidu's death. Finally, Siduri advises Gilgameš on how to prepare for a successful passage across the lake.

and not a profession. The social status of a *ḥarimtu* cannot be seen as static during the long time of Mesopotamian history and has not been the same in the different regions of Mesopotamia and Syria. But this does not mean that prostitution did not exist in Mesopotamia. For the frequently negative attitude towards women who sold their body see Cooper (2016: 13–14 §§ 2–3).

21. Abusch 2015: 144–165.

22. Standard version of the *Epic of Gilgameš*, tablet I, 246–298.

23. Harris 2000: 122–123. Harris also notes that it is the two low status women Šamḥat and Siduri who bear personal names in contrast to the rather high-ranking wife of Ūta-napišti who remains unnamed.

24. On family structures in Mesopotamian societies see Wilcke 1985, Groneberg 2000 and Stol 2016.

25. The encounter of Gilgameš and Siduri is described at the beginning of tablet X of the standard version of the *Epic of Gilgameš*. The problems of the interpretation of her name is discussed by Lambert 1982: 208 and George 2003: 148–149. According to Lambert a goddess Šiduri was connected to the goddess Ištar in Middle Babylonian times. According to *Šurpu* II, 173 this goddess was connected with the field of wisdom and this connects her, as George has shown, with Siduri's role as advisor to Gilgameš.

26. On female tavern-keepers and the marginal nature of taverns see Langlois 2016, on Siduri particularly pp. 117–118.

Thus, there seem to be two reasons for naming a female character in Akkadian narrations. One reason is the importance of their function in relation to the main hero. Šamḥat and Siduri both fulfill important tasks to help Gilgameš: Šamḥat helps Enkidu to become a real human being, enabling him to become the close friend and companion to Gilgameš; Siduri enables Gilgameš to find Ūta-napišti, thus gaining the wisdom to finally become a good king for his city, Uruk. The second reason for giving a name to an individual female in the narration seems to be a distinct feature to demonstrate whether an active female character is integrated into a family—if she is the wife of someone, for example the wife of Ūta-napišti—or if she stands outside such a family and can act as an independent personality. In this case, she is identified by her own name, as we see with Šamḥat and Siduri. This does not, of course, automatically imply a negative attitude towards these named women, as demonstrated by both Šamḥat and Siduri, who do great favors for Gilgameš and Enkidu and are not characterized as inferior human beings.

Anonymity also occurs with male characters, if they are either not important enough to be named, or if the description of their function alone is sufficient to characterize them within the plot, as with the hunter and his father.

#### 4. A Humorous Way to Play with Name-Giving

One more text shall be quoted to show that the Mesopotamians sometimes played in a humorous way when giving names to characters in a story. In a short tale that in modern secondary literature is named *Why Do You Curse Me*, one hears about a man from Nippur who goes to a doctor in Isin to be treated for a dog bite.<sup>27</sup> After the successful treatment, he invites the doctor from Isin to come to Nippur and drink a beer with him. He tells the doctor where he can find a certain woman who will direct him to the house of his former patient. In this story the names of the two main characters from Nippur, the patient and the woman, are not simply mentioned as those of the acting characters, but the names are styled as for official documents—with patronyms added. The reader, or the audience, learns not only the individual's name but also the filiation, in this case the names of two other important relatives. The patient is defined via his brother and his uncle and is called “Ninurta-sagentarbi-zae-men, brother of Ninurta-mizideš-kiaḡani, nephew of Enlil-Nibru-kibi-gi”. The name of the woman, whom the guest should ask the directions of, includes the names of her father and her father in law; she is called “Nin-lugal-abzu, daughter of Ki'aḡa-Enbilulu, daughter-in-law of Nišu-ana-Ea-takla”<sup>28</sup>—and all this for an ordinary gardening woman! The humor of this tale is not only found in the exaggerated name of the heroine but also in the fact that this woman answers every question in Sumerian, followed by a translation into Akkadian, because the doctor, visiting from the city of Isin does not understand Sumerian. Here one might assume that the author played with the expectations of the audience concerning the presentation of a female character in this tale, who is presented and behaves like an educated scribe even though she is merely a gardener, sitting at a corner of the street, selling her produce.

27. George 1993.

28. George (1993: 63–65) has stressed that the text has to be placed into the milieu of school and education, and these names can also be found in bilingual lists of personal names.

## 5. Summary

One can observe in Akkadian narrative texts different ways of representing male and female characters. Men as well as women can be presented as an anonymous group of suffering people, struggling to survive in disaster, not acting individually, not talking as individuals. But Akkadian narratives can also show men and women as individual, independent personalities, acting and interacting with other characters and even deities in the story, speaking and making their own decisions. This is true for the usually male hero of a narrative like Gilgameš, Etana, Ūta-napišti, and others. This is also true for women like Siduri and Šamḥat, who act independently and who are not specified as the daughters or wives of a man. These women, who do not fit into the traditional structure of a Babylonian or Assyrian family, can act almost as independently as a male hero. A woman like the wife of Ūta-napišti, by contrast, is presented, on the one hand, with characteristics similar to those of a major male character: she is specially blessed by a supreme deity, the deity talks directly to her, she interacts and talks to her husband, and she makes suggestions that her husband follows. On the other hand in all her actions she remains within the framework of a traditional wife. It is probably no coincidence that she remains unnamed; she is sufficiently characterized as the wife of Ūta-napišti, just as countless women in Mesopotamian economic documents remain unnamed and were simply referred to “wife of somebody”.

Of all the women mentioned here, only Šamḥat is able to leave the sphere of her household and approach the “wild man” Enkidu outside in the wilderness. Siduri stays within her sphere of the tavern, and the married women stay close to their husbands and their homes (in literature, the house can also be seen as a female space) while the major male characters, the heroes, can leave the house and go on quests and adventures in foreign lands. In Akkadian literary texts, how women occupy space, and whether they are given names, is a reflection of traditional roles within Mesopotamian societies. However, even a good and honored wife, supporting her husband in the traditional manner, can be presented as extraordinary and considered worthy to be the topic of literature in special circumstances, as in the case of the wise Ūta-napišti and his wife. The ordinary work of men and women, fieldwork and housework, were not topics for literature at all, and certainly not as important as the actions of a male hero, who had to leave the sphere of his house to fulfill his task.

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## 2. Egyptology





# Kinship and Gender in Dialogue: Approaching Relatedness in Ancient Egypt

Leire Olabarria<sup>1</sup>

## 1. Introduction

A few years ago I was invited to give a seminar dealing with my doctoral research. My work focuses on kinship and marriage in ancient Egyptian sources from the First Intermediate Period to the Middle Kingdom (roughly 2150 to 1650 BCE), with a special interest in the way social relationships were perpetuated and commemorated in the monumental record. One of the organisers of that seminar encouraged graduate students to attend because I was going to talk about gender. I distinctly remember feeling offended when I found out because, I thought, how could anyone mix together gender and kinship?

As a trained anthropologist, I had been almost unwittingly programmed to reject gender as something that I simply should not engage with, proudly defending the uniqueness of kinship studies instead. This is not a subjective observation, as the conspicuous lack of communication between kinship and gender studies has been noted before. In her introduction to kinship first published in the 1990s—now in its 5th edition—Linda Stone states that “Kinship is an old, established specialization in anthropology, noted more for its difficult jargon and tortuous diagrams than for the light it sheds on gender.”<sup>2</sup> This mutual dismissal seems all the more striking when the overlapping aims of these disciplines are taken into account, especially from an intersectional perspective. The traditional opposition between kinship and gender is possibly rooted in historical reasons related to the development of these disciplines. Since the 1970s they both have evolved in parallel lines that very rarely converge, but I argue that a dialogue between kinship and gender could yield productive results in the study of both contemporary and ancient societies.

1. Faculty of Oriental Studies and The Queen’s College (University of Oxford). Contact email: leire.olabarria@orinst.ox.ac.uk. I am grateful to Agnès Garcia-Ventura for encouraging me to give this paper at the Second Workshop on Gender, Methodology and the Ancient Near East in Barcelona, and to the editors of the volume for their insightful comments and suggestions on a first draft of the paper.

2. See Stone 2006: 1.

In the first half of this paper I present a brief account of the origins of the division between kinship and gender studies. I argue that the gap may be bridged when gender and kinship are both analysed as performative processes. Such an articulation is attempted from the theoretical perspective of new kinship studies, using the work of Janet Carsten and her notion of relatedness as an analytical category. In the second half, I apply this approach to ancient Egypt through a careful reexamination of the sources. The case study that I present here addresses the ways gender and kinship inform each other when it comes to assessing patterns of inclusion into a social group. Structural biases are not addressed by means of the addition of new case studies to an already sizeable collection, but rather by rethinking the entire interpretive framework. This article proposes a model that attempts to challenge those biases from a theoretically informed perspective.

## *2. Gender within Kinship within Gender*

Kinship is considered an essential part of anthropology to the extent that many claim that the discipline of anthropology itself was born with the study of kinship.<sup>3</sup> In the words of Robin Fox, “kinship is to anthropology what logic is to philosophy or the nude is to art; it is the basic discipline of the subject.”<sup>4</sup> Some of the earliest accounts of anthropological fieldwork deal with interpersonal relationships, trying to reconstruct indigenous genealogies into “pedigrees.”<sup>5</sup>

The study of kinship as a bounded aspect of social structure started in the 19th century with scholars interested in comparative law and jurisprudence, such as J. J. Bachofen, H. Maine, J. F. McLennan or L. H. Morgan.<sup>6</sup> Their attention to how kinship operated was based on their explorations of issues of inheritance and succession within contemporary legal systems, and their inquiries were cast into the evolutionary framework that was popular at the turn of the century. The postulated sequence of social development generally involved a stage of primal promiscuity followed by matriarchy before culminating in patriarchy as a symbol of civilisation. The role of gender in evolutionary reconstructions of early kinship—particularly the notion of a “primitive matriarchy”—lies beyond the scope of this paper,<sup>7</sup> but its impact on the understanding of ancient kinship is still tangible today.

One of the main reasons why kinship remained a principal focus of anthropological enquiry may have been that it was regarded as an analytical gateway to political supremacy. Kinship was interpreted as an organisational principle in stateless societies, shaping the functioning of politico-economic structures in the absence of governmental frameworks. In a historical climate still marked by colonialism, such

3. See Strathern and Stewart 2011: 3–4. Carsten (2014: 207–208) notes how researchers in the first three quarters of the 20th century were expected to engage with kinship as a central part of their ethnographic work in order to gain institutional and academic respect in the field.

4. See Fox 1983: 10.

5. Rivers (1910) is the creator of the genealogical method, which is based on a standardised questionnaire to be administered to the locals; the information obtained from the replies to those questions is cast into a diagram. This confinement of indigenous idioms of relatedness into a mode of visual representation that is essentially Western poses problems of interpretation that lead to an oversimplification of kinship systems, as noted by Bouquet (1996).

6. See Fox 1983: 16–20.

7. For a summary, see Carsten 2014: 209–212.

investigations into indigenous political structures strived to find the optimal manner of control and domination, to which kinship was regarded as the key.

Although tainted by the colonial enterprise, the early to mid-20th century is traditionally regarded as the classical period for the study of kinship. At that time, names such as A. R. Radcliffe-Brown,<sup>8</sup> B. Malinowski,<sup>9</sup> E. E. Evans-Pritchard,<sup>10</sup> and later C. Lévi-Strauss<sup>11</sup> resonate within the discipline. These authors' functionalist and structuralist concerns moulded—and to an extent still shape—the way kinship was understood. The former focused on descent as an organisational parameter in group formation, while the latter had a keen interest in marriage, alliance, and exchange as a basis to social analysis.

Even though these models seem diametrically opposed, they were rooted in idealisation and abstraction. In fact, they have both been criticised for being ahistorical, highly normative, and centred on the role of men.<sup>12</sup> Thus, these models led to the growing use of complicated formulae and diagrams that took their quest for abstraction to a whole new level. The supposedly self-explanatory figures were sometimes so difficult to unravel to outsiders that kinship became increasingly isolated as a discipline.

At this point the popularity of kinship started to fade; the discipline was accused of being too concerned with constructing abstruse generalisations instead of acknowledging the flexibility of lived experience. Many of the criticisms came from within kinship, and it was probably David Schneider's devastating revision that delivered the *coup de grace* to kinship studies as they had been known.<sup>13</sup>

In his earlier work, Schneider analysed the symbols on which American kinship was constructed, reaching the conclusion that blood was one of the main expressions of kinship in that culture.<sup>14</sup> Building on this criticism, he later denounced that most anthropological work on kinship to that date had been based on the premise that the notion of blood was universal, thus transposing Western ideas artificially to other cultures.<sup>15</sup> For those reasons, he rejected the validity of kinship studies with the following words: "Kinship is like totemism, matriarchy, and the 'matrilineal complex.' It is a non-subject. It exists in the minds of the anthropologists, but not in the cultures they study."<sup>16</sup>

The rise of gender studies in the 1970s was clearly influenced by the culturalist critique prevalent at the time, of which the work of Schneider is just one possible illustration. With its emphasis on understanding the symbols upon which culture is constructed, gender theory came as a breath of fresh air into the scene of social studies. This development was seen by many scholars as an opportunity to depart from conventional socio-cultural classifications, abandon complicated diagrams, and start deconstructing

8. E.g. Radcliffe-Brown 1933.

9. E.g. Malinowski 2014.

10. E.g. Evans-Pritchard 1969.

11. E.g. Lévi-Strauss 1969.

12. See Carsten 2014: 217. The focus on men as political actors denotes a bias on the interpretation of political practices. In particular, it shows a blatant disregard of what many scholars referred to as the "private sphere" to which women were allegedly relegated. New kinship studies, as I discuss below, reject this dualism as culturally constructed.

13. E.g. Schneider 1968, 1972 and 1984.

14. Schneider (1968) determined that the main symbols of American kinship were biogenetic substance, represented by blood, and code of conduct, materialised in the legal framework of family law. On the application of the notion of substance as an analytical category to ancient Egypt, see Olabarria 2018a: 92–93.

15. He referred to this fallacious premise as the "doctrine of genealogical unit of mankind"; see Schneider 1984: 119–120.

16. See Schneider 1972: 51. I find it particularly striking that two of the three "non-subjects" that he mentions are recurring topics in the field of gender studies.

traditional analytical categories. In this context kinship was progressively pushed into the background, while many of the topics that were previously the almost exclusive domain of this discipline—e.g. marriage, household, procreation—started to be taken over by gender studies.<sup>17</sup>

This divorce of gender and kinship originated from a response to an excessive interest in normativity, but unfortunately it caused an enduring fragmentation between the two disciplines. A survey of bibliographies of some key works in both fields shows that the only authors that are cited cross-disciplinarily are Judith Butler<sup>18</sup> and Marilyn Strathern.<sup>19</sup> Otherwise, a blatant lack of integration seems to be the rule.

After Schneider's description of kinship as a "non-subject," many thought that kinship studies would die out.<sup>20</sup> On the contrary, having been subjected to his severe critique forced kinship to recalibrate its position as a scholarly field and to reassess some of its methods. As a result, anthropology of kinship is now experiencing a revival on two fronts. First, it is opening up new avenues of research and proposing innovative interpretative frameworks based on a piercing questioning of conventional analytical categories. Second, the proliferation of new reproductive technologies has prompted kinship to redefine what it means to be related and to propose a more nuanced articulation of biology and culture.<sup>21</sup> This remodelling of procreation impinges on the construction of gender, showing how both notions are completely intertwined. All these reconfigurations have contributed to making kinship much more diversified a discipline. In the next section I present one of these recent trends, exploring how it intersects gender theory.

### 3. *New Kinship Studies and the Notion of Relatedness*

One of the most promising approaches arising from Schneider's critique is the trend often labelled "new kinship studies," whose main proponent is Janet Carsten.<sup>22</sup> Upon being questioned about what is really new about this model, she replied:

"New kinship studies are actually quite like old kinship studies. But I think what's really important is that kinship is not a kind of abstract and technical subject or it doesn't have to be like that. It's really about people's everyday lives and the way they think about the relations that matter most to them."<sup>23</sup>

17. Other theoretical models based on postcolonial studies or Marxist critiques also played an important role in the displacement of traditional kinship. However, gender studies seems to have taken most of the blame, possibly because of the centrality of the issue of "debiologisation" of gender, which directly affects conventional assumptions about procreation and, hence, kinship. See e.g. Collier and Yanagisako 1987.

18. E.g. Butler 1993 and 2014.

19. E.g. Strathern 1988.

20. See Godelier 2011: 21–22.

21. For a summary of the impact of new reproductive technologies on kinship, see Stone 2006: 277–302.

22. Janet Carsten is Professor of Social and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Edinburgh and fellow of the British Academy (<http://www.britac.ac.uk/user/1268>).

23. This interview of Janet Carsten and its transcript are available online on Edmonds and Warburton 2016.

New kinship studies investigate aspects that were previously neglected by anthropology—for instance gender, personhood, or domesticity, incorporating them into an analysis that sees kinship as culturally constructed and context-bounded.

The methodological premises of new kinship studies are firmly based on ethnographic practice, which serves as a powerful reminder of the pervasiveness of kinship. Carsten did fieldwork in a fishermen's village on the island of Langkawi (Malaysia) hoping to study the status of Malay women. She was initially indifferent to kinship, which she regarded as a technical discipline without any bearing on her ideas about women. However, she quickly realised that kinship was deeply embedded in everyday life and that it was important to understand what “being kin” meant to the people of Langkawi in order to grasp the nuances of their social structure.<sup>24</sup>

Carsten's observations of life during her fieldwork led her to propose that in that local culture kinship is grounded on commensality—particularly the repeated sharing of rice—within a domestic space. Rejecting an approach to kinship exclusively based on biological ties, she proposes the flexible notion of “relatedness,”<sup>25</sup> an encompassing category that acknowledges that kinship is culturally constructed. Numerous authors have adhered to Carsten's ideas, which she expanded and elaborated in her later work. The introductory chapter to a volume she edited, *Cultures of Relatedness*, doubles as a kind of “manifesto” of new kinship studies, as it outlines its main premises.<sup>26</sup> In addition, her book *After Kinship* constitutes the most detailed synthesis of her ideas.<sup>27</sup>

This model investigates kinship as a cultural symbol, diluting many conventional categories of analysis. In this sense, Schneider's culturalist critique that identified blood as a symbol was an essential point of departure. New kinship studies reject the generalisation of dichotomies such as biology/culture or private/public. Thus, elements that were traditionally consigned to the private sphere, like gender or personhood, are now brought to the forefront on equal footing to land ownership or succession rights. With new kinship studies the focus has shifted from kinship as a tool to access the political domain to the construction of relations among people as an issue in its own right.

Another strong influence is the work of anthropologist Clifford Geertz, who proposed that the analysis of culture is an interpretative endeavour in search of meaning.<sup>28</sup> Symbols always need to be explained in their own terms and within their particular context. Thus, new kinship studies are anti-universalist, advocating firmly against a reification of any cultural construct, be it kinship or gender. The use of the term relatedness should be framed within this militant anti-universalism, and it acts as a reminder that there exist different ways of being related, of which kinship as it is conventionally understood is only one.

24. See Carsten 2014: 222, and Edmonds and Warburton 2016.

25. See Carsten 1995: 1997.

26. Carsten 2000.

27. Carsten 2004. Given her rejection of formalism and normativity, it should come as no surprise that her book does not include any kinship diagrams. This absence, however, has been qualified as “striking” by Déchaux (2008: 236, note 67), who goes on to note that “many new kinship study authors are women.” Whether he means to attribute the lack of diagrams—and, by extension, the lack of abstract thought—to the gender of the authors is not entirely clear, but the comment is undoubtedly inopportune.

28. See Geertz 1973b: 5.

Last but not least, new kinship studies show a clear preference for a processual understanding of kinship. In this context, relatedness is meant to be created through practice, so that it cannot be defined in essentialist terms. This processual character of relatedness is eloquently emphasised by Carsten: “it is in the gradual accumulation of everyday experiences through living together over time—in both the ritual and non-ritual moments—that kinship acquires its particular power.”<sup>29</sup> That is, for this theoretical model kinship is no longer the realm of “the given”, but also the realm of “the made.”<sup>30</sup> The conceptualisation of relatedness as a performative process is reminiscent of Judith Butler’s ideas on gender.<sup>31</sup> Relatedness, as gender, is something that one does rather than exclusively something that one is; in this sense, performativity highlights the fluidity of categories, previously seen as fixed. Butler and other feminist thinkers have long argued for the enacted nature of gender categories. For Butler, gender is performativity understood as the iteration of a norm or set of norms, and new kinship studies describe relatedness in comparable terms.

At this point it is obvious that kinship and gender are inextricably linked. Kinship pertains to the way people create differences or similarities between themselves and others, and those between men and women are a fundamental aspect of this scenario. Even though this relationship is not always made explicit, much recent work on kinship is influenced by culturalist appraisals and the feminist venture of deconstruction of patriarchal analytical categories.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, gender is an important element that raises questions about power dynamics and social control. The articulation of reproduction, fertility, and conceptions of the body has traditionally been regarded as the main area of interaction of gender and kinship as discussed above in relation to new reproductive technologies, but other issues, such as the conception of domestic space or inclusion patterns in a kin group may also be considered under this light. When one goes looking for the gendered perspective, one will encounter kinship, and sometimes it is precisely from kinship that one needs to explain what that gendered perspective means.

#### 4. *On Marriage and Group Formation*

New kinship studies provide a fascinating theoretical framework but are undeniably difficult to apply to ancient societies. In a context where participant observation is not possible, one may wonder what alternative methodologies may be viable for incorporating a model based on immersive fieldwork into our analysis. I propose that we can integrate it by construing with awareness and questioning conventional understandings or translations that may be based on those interpretative biases that we attempt to escape. In this sense, lexicographical work may be an ideal avenue to contribute to the creation of discourses centred on relatedness within our fields.

The case study that I explore in this paper is an expression I came across during my study of ancient Egyptian kinship terminology. I was interested in teasing out the meanings and usage of a variety of terms

29. See Carsten 2013: 248.

30. New kinship studies have been criticised for rejecting biology in their definition of relatedness, but they actually propose an articulation of biology and culture.

31. E.g. see Butler 2014. Her work is clearly influenced by other thinkers of the so-called performative turn, such as Bourdieu (1977: 79–86) and his notion of habitus.

32. See Carsten 2014: 228.

that have been translated as “family” by different authors.<sup>33</sup> One of them was the word *pr*, often translated as house or household, but in some instances referring to a type of kin group.<sup>34</sup> In order to attain a nuanced view of the term I looked at different compound expressions where it features. One of them, *‘k r pr*, may be translated literally as “to enter a house”, but it is quite consistently rendered as “to get married.”<sup>35</sup>

In ancient Egyptian social practice marrying, having children, and being able to support one’s family are recorded as normative concerns of the ideal self-made man.<sup>36</sup> These can all be regarded as gendered expectations in many cultures, but they are prone to being analysed from the perspectives of group formation, alliance, and descent, which are traditionally ascribed to kinship. This is a further example of the interweaving of gender and kinship, which are more productively assessed jointly.

There are not many attestations of an unequivocal usage of *‘k r pr* as “to get married.” In fact, a few of the ones considered explicit have actually been reconstructed.<sup>37</sup> One of the most eloquent examples is attested on lines 2–4 of Papyrus Cairo 65739:<sup>38</sup>

*ddt.n ‘nh nt niwt irit-nfr [...] iw=i hpr r hms.kw m p3y=f pr iw=i hr b3k hr kt[...] hr nwyw p3y=i d3iw hr-ir m rnpt-sp 15 hr 7 rnpt n ‘k ir.n=i r p3 pr n m-r sp3t s3[-mwt] iw šwty r’i3 hr spr r-r=i*

“Said by the citizeness Iritnefer: [I am the wife of the overseer of the district, Samut] and I came to dwell in his house, and I worked [...] and provided my cloths. And in regnal year 15, seven years after I had married the overseer of the district Sa[mut], the merchant Reia approached me.”

The proposed reconstruction of the term “wife” is possibly governed by the conventional understanding of *‘k r pr* as “to get married”, as well as the allusion to cloth.<sup>39</sup> However, other interpretations should not be ruled out. From this fragment it is known that this “entering of the house” can be done by a woman, possibly suggesting that the woman moves to the residence of her husband.

Another example is found in a letter in the 20th dynasty Papyrus EA 10244 at the British Museum, also known as Papyrus Anastasi V.<sup>40</sup> In lines 13.2–14.6 the text reads: *tw=i rh[.kw]-st tw=i ‘k.kw r p3y=st pr ‘n*, “I know her; I have entered her house already.” The context of this passage refers to some

33. There are more than twelve terms in ancient Egyptian primary sources that have been translated simplistically as “family”; see Olabarria forthcoming, chapter 3.

34. See Olabarria 2018b: 62–64.

35. See Erman and Grapow 1926 [= Wb 1, 231.3–5]. Pestman 1961: 10, note 2. Toivari-Viitala (2001: 74–75) recognises the ambiguity of this expression and states that its translation is problematic. This expression is known to me only from New Kingdom sources, and most of the examples on this paper are from the 19th or 20th dynasties.

36. This is attested in didactic literature, which outlines the way of life and social expectations associated with the elite; see Parkinson 2002: 235–241 and Wilfong 2010: 166–167. See also references to the *Teaching of Ptahhotep* below, especially in Hagen 2012: 30–41.

37. This is the case of Papyrus Turin 2021 with Geneva D.409, see Černý and Peet 1927.

38. See Gardiner 1935.

39. Cloth is known to have been an important part of the deed of endowment, which has been interpreted by some authors as a kind of marriage contract; see Johnson 1994. Although this comparison may not be appropriate, these documents serve as a reminder of the importance of cloth in ancient Egyptian economy.

40. See Caminos 1954: 241–242.

economic transactions during which a woman seems to have been acting as a proxy in order to recover some small cattle belonging to the writer of the letter. There is no further information to demonstrate whether she and the writer are married, although he insists that he is acquainted with her, possibly to endorse his having chosen her to represent his interests in this context. In contrast with the previous example, here it is a man who does the “entering” into the house of a woman, something that is also attested in other examples, such as the aforementioned Papyrus Turin 2021 with Geneva D.409.

Alternative renderings of *ḳ r pr* can also be postulated. For example, Papyrus Ashmolean Museum 1945.96 has been interpreted as the account of the negotiation of a marriage rather than an actual marital arrangement.<sup>41</sup> The text describes how a man enters the house of a woman presumably to be able to discuss his marriage and eventually take the daughter of this woman as his wife. Lines 20–21 of the recto read: *iw ḥry-iḥw p3-diw ḳ r p3y=i pr iw=f irt t3-imm-niwt t3y=w sn ʕ m ḥmwt iw ink-sw iw p3y=i sn šri*, “and the stable-master Padiu entered my house and he made Taimennau, their eldest sister, a wife, he being related to me, he being my younger brother.”

Furthermore, there is sufficient evidence to confirm that the expression *ḳ r pr* can also refer to sexual intercourse outside the framework of a legally binding marriage. In a well-known 19th dynasty letter, a man complains about how his deceased wife comes back to haunt him despite his having behaved in a considerate manner towards her both in life and after her death. In a direct address to his deceased wife in Papyrus Leiden I.371, line 20, he says: *bw-pw=t gmt(=i) ḥr irt ṯḥr im=t m šḥr n ḥwti ḥr ḳ r ky pr*, “you did not find me cheating on you in the manner of a field-worker entering into another house.”<sup>42</sup> Another example of this interpretation can be found in Ostrakon Gardiner 197,<sup>43</sup> which records many of the misdeeds of Paneb,<sup>44</sup> thus implying that it was indeed regarded as a transgression. Although this may seem to cover two diametrically opposed renderings, it makes sense in the context of ancient Egyptian civilisation, where there is no evidence for a formal celebration of marriage, which was probably marked just by cohabitation and reproduction.

I propose that approaching the expression *ḳ r pr* from the encompassing idea of relatedness may show that other understandings are conceivable. Here I am not attempting to find a single possible rendering, since this would disregard the variability of contexts in which it occurs. Instead, I focus on the necessity of reading with awareness in order to question traditional frameworks of interpretation.

The *Teaching of Ptahhotep* is a didactic text, that is, essentially a literary composition that describes the virtues that are expected of a member of the high elite. The narrative is set in the Old Kingdom, but the main manuscript for the text, Papyrus Prisse, has been dated to the Middle Kingdom on palaeographic grounds.<sup>45</sup> The text was popular, and hence several copies of some of its passages exist. Papyrus EA 10409 at the British Museum is a New Kingdom version of the text, and the following phrase is found on line 5,6: *ir mr=k sw3ḥ ḥnms m-ḥnw pr ḳ=k r=f m s3 m sn m ḥnms r-pw m bw-nb wnn=k im s33 m tkn m*

41. See Gardiner 1941; Toivari-Viitala 2001: 75, note 451.

42. See Gardiner and Sethe 1928: pl. viii.

43. This ostrakon is now Ashmolean Museum 0197. See transcription in Kitchen 1975 [= KRI iv, 159].

44. Paneb was a chief workman in Deir el Medina against whom a number of charges were made in order to make the case that he did not deserve his position. The lengthiest account of his crimes is recorded in Papyrus Salt 124, kept at the British Museum; see Černý 1929.

45. The idea of this Middle Kingdom manuscript being a copy of an older text has been refuted by, among others, Fredrik Hagen (2012: 129–131).



*hmwt*, “if you want to perpetuate a friendship inside a house to which you enter as a son, as a brother, or as friend, in any place where you may be, beware of approaching the women!” Interpreting this passage as “if you want to perpetuate a friendship when you get married as a son...” misses the mark, as it does not fit in with the rest of the translation. The phrase could be understood literally as “to pay a visit”, meaning that one should not approach a woman in a house he is visiting as a guest. A fragment from another didactic text, the *Teaching of Ani*, supports that this one-dimensional translation may be plausible. A copy of the latter text on Papyrus Boulaq 4 says on lines 16.9–16.10 of the recto: *imi=k ʿk r pr ky r-sʿk=f tr=k*, “don’t enter into the house of another until he admits you respectfully.”<sup>46</sup>

Besides this, *ʿk r pr* could also be indicative of a different type of relationship that could entail inclusion into a group. Entering into one’s house may thus refer to being included into a kin group, effectively changing its composition. This fits nicely with the notion of a flexible household into which both men and women could enter at certain points. This understanding is not opposed to the conventional rendering of “to get married”, but the focus of this action is now being placed on the group instead of on an individual or on the couple. A marriage could be seen as a community affair, since it could have an impact on the household as a whole. For this reason, by taking the entire group as a unit of analysis it is possible to bring the performative element of relatedness to the forefront: groups are not fixed entities rooted on descent, but deeply affected by social practice.

The basic form of social organisation in ancient Egypt relied on extended family groups, as demonstrated not just through the extensive terminology but also through memorialisation and display.<sup>47</sup> How relatedness was also constructed through performative practice is to a certain extent traceable through monumental display; for example, performing invocation rituals for a deceased member of the family creates relatedness in a way that is fluid and malleable.<sup>48</sup>

Indeed, some groups in ancient Egypt are said to have been acquired over one’s lifetime, whereas others pre-existed the individual, who could have access to them at different points in his or her life. This seems to have been the case of the group featured in the *ʿk r pr* expression, which boasted a dynamic composition built around a preceding grouping. In the anthropological literature this marks a difference between ego-centred and ancestor-centred groups, all of which were present in the ancient Egyptian social fabric.<sup>49</sup> In this way, an expression that has been used to assess the status of women in ancient Egypt can also shed some light on social structure and group formation.

With this case study we may see how gender, kinship, and other dynamics of authority and power are interlocked in the construction of the social sphere. Authors influenced by third wave feminism acknowledge that gender identities cannot be separated from other power differentials such as ethnicity, class, status, and sexuality.<sup>50</sup> It is striking how often kinship goes unmentioned among these categories. Although it is undoubtedly included in the “illimitable et cetera” which Judith Butler noted,<sup>51</sup> and which

46. See Quack 1994: 5–8 and 155–156.

47. See Olabarria 2012 and Olabarria 2019, chapter 4.

48. See Olabarria 2018a: 98–104.

49. For further evidence for the identification of the *pr* as an ancestor-centred group, see Olabarria 2018b: 64–67.

50. Intersectionality is primarily associated with third wave feminism, although the distinction between different waves—and particularly between the second and the third—is not clear-cut. See Evans 2015, esp. 411–412.

51. See Butler 2014: 182–183. She discusses how the illimitable character of that et cetera indicates that, even when as many social markers as possible are mentioned, an all-encompassing, definitive description of a situated subject will never be

Lynn Meskell incorporated into the title of a book,<sup>52</sup> kinship deserves to be explicitly cited as an essential power differential in any analysis of identity. In this context, kinship needs to regain its role as a productive way of studying relationships among people. Marilyn Strathern claims that gender is a relational quality, so it is expressed and constructed through relationship.<sup>53</sup> Kinship should be understood in comparable relational terms.

### 5. *Final Remarks*

In this paper I explore how kinship theory can complement and enhance approaches derived from gender studies in order to attain a more nuanced understanding of past societies. A relational and non-essentialist approach as the one advocated by new kinship studies shows that neither kinship nor gender are categories in themselves. They need to be assessed within their own socio-cultural context, and they cannot be isolated from other social markers.<sup>54</sup> The brief case study that I present illustrates how a relatedness-based approach could help us reintroduce a relational and dynamic aspect into our study of ancient social practices.

Clifford Geertz, who provided intellectual inspiration to new kinship studies, famously employed the analogy of an onion to explain the idea of culture: one may start peeling off layers to get to the core of the matter, eventually realising that the onion is made up of those layers.<sup>55</sup> The same metaphor could be used for the culturally constructed notion of relatedness as well, with gender and kinship being two of the layers that form the onion of lived experience. I would nowadays be happy to be introduced again as someone who speaks about gender, because gender and kinship both inform each other to construct the notion of relatedness.

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plausible. In a similar vein, she notes that the use of commas to juxtapose those power differentials as in "gender, sexuality, race, class" may be due to the fact that their relationships are not clear; see Butler 1993: 123.

52. See Meskell 1999: 103–106.

53. See Strathern 1988: 59–60.

54. See Carsten 2004: 82.

55. Geertz (1973a: 37) does not explicitly mention an onion, but just a "stratigraphic conception" of relations that are peeled off. The idea that this refers to an onion, while plausible, has been proposed by his readership.

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# Reassessing Models in Gender and Domestic Space in New Kingdom Workmen's Villages

Thais Rocha da Silva<sup>1</sup>

## 1. *Introduction*

This paper is part of a larger investigation from my doctoral research about domestic space and gender relations in the workmen's villages of Deir el-Medina and Amarna. Here I address two interconnected aspects, which have framed most of the previous scholarship in the subject. First, I challenge the single-house unity as an analytical framework for these villages, taking into account recent inputs from Household Archaeology. Second, I argue for deconstructing binary formulations of gender projected onto dwellings. On this topic, Lynn Meskell and Aikaterini Koltsida have conducted two major analyses about gender and houses at the workmen's villages of Deir el-Medina and Amarna. Meskell was the first to challenge the idea that the entire house was a female domain, having incorporated theoretical approaches from Gender Studies and Household Archaeology. Koltsida, instead of looking at gender being determined by space, suggested activities areas would be a better framework to see how gender was negotiated in the villages.

Both Meskell's and Koltsida's works are mostly grounded on the ideal description of a house provided by Bernard Bruyère for Deir el-Medina and they represent so far the most influential, albeit improvable, studies on the topic. They have questioned—and tried to answer—how gender can be plotted (if at all) within houses in these special purpose settlements. However, they have drawn on evidence that has not been treated as cautiously as it ought to have been. In addition, both scholars grounded their investigations in the single-house unity model and in an overly strict perception of engendered space,

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based on a binary definition of inside (female) and outside (male). To avoid such premises, I suggest that houses from these workmen's villages should not be taken as individual and disarticulated units, but integrated into the larger context of the village and its surroundings.

## 2. *Setting the Problem: Gender and Houses*

In the archaeological discourse, topics related to daily life have often been engendered<sup>2</sup> and, in this respect, women were linked to the house. In defining the domestic sphere, women became the key subject to explain that experience.<sup>3</sup> This approach has unfortunately reduced the house to a 'feminine' space and is based on an understood engendered division of labour: the *inside* (i.e. female space/domestic activities) and the *outside* (i.e. male space/'professional' activities) world.<sup>4</sup> This amounts to restricting women's everyday experience to the domestic sphere and to almost annihilating the presence of men from it. Although studies about women and houses can overlap, they are not necessarily strictly correlated.

Special-purpose settlements, which only represent a single type of ancient Egyptian domestic architecture, nevertheless constitute good case-studies for examining domestic spatial distribution and its lived experience, for they offer a still accessible and wide range of material to study how the Egyptian population lived.<sup>5</sup> Such settlements were established by the state specifically to house the workforce engaged with royal building projects; even though they would probably resemble in some aspects other more organic small communities, they undoubtedly showed some specificities due to their highly-planned layout. Three major sites, dated from the Middle Kingdom (c. 1700–1640 BCE) and the New Kingdom (c. 1539–1075 BCE),<sup>6</sup> fall within this category: Lahun, Amarna, and Deir el-Medina. The workmen's villages of Deir el-Medina and Amarna, the sites under discussion in this paper, were constrained by specific and very similar features of architecture and installations, acknowledged by Egyptologists as "exceptional contexts". The general layout of the villages, delineated by an enclosure wall, is quite rational; it consists of series of alleys dividing the living area into "quarters", all occupied by houses of roughly the same size and shaped on the same model. Unfortunately, the archaeological context within these settlements is not entirely secure, especially for Deir el-Medina. Not only was the site disturbed after its abandonment, but it was also excavated quickly—and not thoroughly—in the 1930s. Even though the workmen's village at Amarna, whose parts have been systematically excavated by Barry Kemp,<sup>7</sup> has benefited from a less turbulent history—it was abandoned and never reoccupied—it does not reflect a "Pompeii Premise". In this respect, later analyses, such as Meskell's and Koltsida's, are based on not-totally reliable documentation, as recent excavations in Deir el-Medina have revealed.<sup>8</sup>

2. Hendon (1996 and 2006), Allison (1999) and Nelson (2006) offer a large panorama on how dwellings have been engendered in archaeology.

3. See for example the discussion in Yanagisako 1979 and Strathern 2016.

4. See Hendon (1996, 2004 and 2006), Allison (1999) and Beaudry (2015) for an overview on gender and household archaeology.

5. See for example McDowell 1999; Szpakowska 2008.

6. Chronology in ancient Egypt is disputed. For this paper, the dates are based on Baines and Malek (2000).

7. Kemp 1979a, 1979b, 1984, 1985, 1986, 1987a, 1987b and 2012.

8. Gobeil and Salmas (personal conversation).

### 3. *Establishing a Model for Deir el-Medina: Bernard Bruyère*

The settlement of Deir el-Medina, occupied during almost the entire New Kingdom (c. 1539–1075 BCE), is located at the edges of the desert, far from the river. The village, nestled in a *wadi* (a dry riverbed), is of a more or less rectangular plan, imposed by the constraint of space, and circumscribed within an enclosure wall which formed a functional demarcation related to the living area<sup>9</sup> and served at the same time as protection against flash-floods. The village, as it stands now, covers a surface of 5600 m<sup>2</sup>, the result of several stages of construction.<sup>10</sup> It is indeed traditionally assumed that it was founded under the reign of Tuthmosis I (c. 1493–? BCE), then expanded under Tuthmosis III (c. 1479–1425 BCE) and at the beginning of the Ramesside period.<sup>11</sup> Several small expansion phases, some of which occurred outside the enclosed village itself, are also attested for the Ramesside period (c. 1292–1075 BCE). The village comprises in its final/current state (Late Ramesside) 68 houses. As Deir el-Medina had a long occupation, the extended life-cycle of houses shows altered architectural layouts. Houses underwent several modifications over time either by the state (division of houses to accommodate the increasing workforce) or by individuals. The latter indeed refurbished dwellings for better accommodation, by, for example, opening niches or reusing old tombs to increase storage space; changing the position of a staircase leading to the roof; and changing the location of ovens, doors, and windows. That being so, house alterations did not happen at once and the reason why individuals made such changes is not fully accessible in the archaeological record.

The village was excavated in 1934–1935 by Bernard Bruyère, the leading figure of the archaeology at Deir el-Medina. For the purpose of the excavation and publication, he divided the village into zones and attributed specific numbers to houses. Despite his awareness of the differences existing between houses, Bruyère nevertheless offered a description for a typical house at Deir el-Medina, drawing on features that, according to him, might have occurred in every house, even though traces of them are not visible everywhere.

9. Salmas 2018.

10. For the history of occupation of Deir el-Medina see Valbelle 1985.

11. The community of Deir el-Medina had moved to Amarna in 1350 BCE, during the reign of Akhenaten, having returned after the king died, followed by the abandonment of the entire Amarna region. For the debate on this see Häggman 2002. It is assumed the population stayed in Amarna for approximately 16 years. Originally called the Eastern Village by Peet and Wooley, Amarna workmen's village was first excavated in 1921 and 1922, and later between 1979 and 1986, uncovering 72 houses distributed in parallel streets and very similar to those at Deir el-Medina.

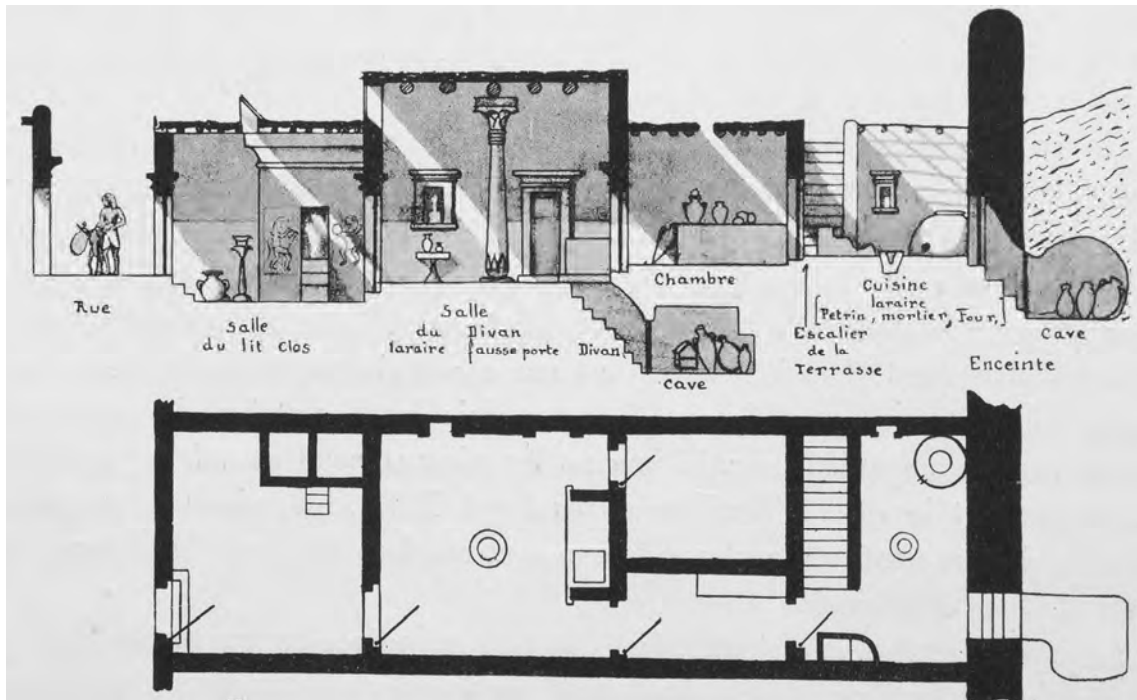


Fig. 1. Reconstruction of a Deir el-Medina house (Bruyère 1939: 50, fig. 15).

According to Bruyère’s idealised description, houses at Deir el-Medina were tripartite, comprising a first and second room, and a rear area divided into several smaller rooms (or cubicles). Houses at Amarna are more or less shaped on a similar layout. At Deir el-Medina, the first rooms, which measure approximately 8 to 24 m<sup>2</sup>, are directly open to the street; the ground level of the room is a bit lower than the street level, and a row of three to five steps<sup>12</sup> leads to the internal area. This room sometimes<sup>13</sup> comprises a brick structure named by Bruyère “lit-clos” after a specific piece of furniture from Brittany; this elevated structure deemed as cultic by Bruyère is usually located against one wall of the room.<sup>14</sup> Polychrome decorative elements, either painted onto the walls of the room (usually white washed), or placed onto the elevated structure, were surveyed by Bruyère; unfortunately, almost all of them have now disappeared. They mainly included the figure of the god Bes, a protective deity, but also women in different activities, such as dancing, breastfeeding, or at their toilette.<sup>15</sup> The situation at the workmen’s village in Amarna is slightly different, even though structures similar to the “lits-clos” and similar

12. Bruyère 1934–1935.

13. Only 29 “lits-clos” (out of the 68 houses) have been preserved. However, according to C. Gobeil, current director of the French archaeological mission at Deir el-Medina, every house might have possessed this feature.

14. Bruyère 1934–1935: 56–57.

15. Bruyère 1934–1935: 257, 259, 276 and 286.



decorative features have been found.<sup>16</sup> At Amarna however, the first room of the houses consisted of an open court, as it can be seen, for instance, in house Gate Street 8.<sup>17</sup>

The second room in Deir el-Medina houses was the largest (usually with a column supporting the roof), measuring between 14 to 26 m<sup>2</sup>, and had an elevated floor level from the first room. This room also presented (cultic) decoration on the walls (false-doors for instance in house SO 5), cultic installations (niches) and a fixed structure called a “divan” by Bruyère, made of bricks (rarely of stone), which was compared to a bench (*mastaba* in Arabic). This room could have also been a storage area. In the workmen’s village at Amarna, these rooms resemble those at Deir el-Medina, showing cultic structures (domestic shrines), but including protective and “feminine” motifs such as those found in the first rooms at Deir el-Medina.<sup>18</sup>

The following rooms in Deir el-Medina’s houses were smaller, approximately 3 to 6 m<sup>2</sup>: apart from the “kitchen”, where installations and artefact assemblages associated with food preparation were found, the function(s) of these rooms remain(s) unclear. Often, a staircase leading to the roof was located in the rear part of the houses.

Bruyère’s description of the houses, focused mainly on their internal layout and architectural features, created an ideal model (Fig. 1), but such a model does not exactly exist in the reality of the field. Rather, Bruyère’s model is an attempt to encapsulate all possibilities of space arrangement. Nevertheless, this description (or *the* model) is the one used to investigate housing in Deir el-Medina’s village, and all the subsequent analyses on domestic space and daily life derive from it as a main reference, even though scholars recognise differences between houses, as did Bruyère for that matter.<sup>19</sup>

Bruyère did not engender houses and space. In his reports and diaries, he focused on an architectural model of the houses, not a social one. The scholarship which followed Bruyère’s writings seems to have over-interpreted the sources and his model, developing a social model for houses privileging function and space use, normally associated with decorations, architectural features, and object assemblage.<sup>20</sup>

#### 4. Engendering Bruyère’s Model: Lynn Meskell

Through an innovative approach, Lynn Meskell has tentatively offered another interpretative model for Deir el-Medina’s houses; yet, she still bases her analysis on Bruyère’s ideal description, despite her strong criticisms against it.<sup>21</sup> Her aim was to understand how rooms in Deir el-Medina had been conceptualised, based on architectural features and decorative elements; she was not interested in the functions of space in isolation. According to her view, the internal space of a house at the site has to be read as follows (Table 1).

16. For instance, in house Long Wall Street 10. Peet and Wooley 1923: 84–85, see also Kemp 1979 for discussion.

17. Kemp 1987a.

18. For example Meskell 1998 and Koltsida 2006, 2007a and 2007b.

19. To name a few: McDowell 1999; Meskell 1998, 1999, 2002 and 2005; Koltsida 2007a and 2007b; Weiss 2015.

20. See for example Friedman 1994, Lesko 2008 and Ritner 2008.

21. Meskell 2002.

Room 1	Room 2	Other rooms
Ritual fixtures	Ritual fixtures	Ovens, cooking area
Cultic objects	Cultic objects	No cultic objects
Female imagery	Male imagery	No imagery
Birthing imagery	Ancestor Busts	Undecorated
Lit-clos	Divan	Processing implements
Female space	Male space	Servile space

Table 1. Definitions of domestic spaces at Deir el-Medina according to Meskell (2002: 125).

Meskell tried to challenge the idea that the entire house was a female domain, as it has been argued by feminist archaeologists,<sup>22</sup> by showing a gender distribution within Deir el-Medina’s houses. By highlighting (and interpreting) the association of certain fixed structures with specific decorative elements, she has argued that the first room of Deir el-Medina’s houses would have been a female-oriented space, the second room a male-oriented space, and the other small rooms, including the kitchen, a servile and/or female-oriented space.

According to her view, the *lit-clos* (or the elevated cultic structure), located in the first room, has to be identified either as a bed for birth or sexual intercourse, or as an altar devoted to the protection of feminine fecundity.<sup>23</sup> In any case, its decoration as well as the decoration of the walls of the first room, are related to what Meskell interprets as “female topics”, including, for instance, a woman breast-feeding (house SE1), a nude female musician (house SE8), and some Bes figures (houses C5, SO6, NE13, SE8 and SE9), the god being the protector of events pertaining exclusively to women’s lives. From this evidence, she concludes that the first room of Deir el-Medina’s houses is a female-oriented space.<sup>24</sup> As for the second room, Meskell’s argument is based on the existence within the space of a *divan* and some cultic structures, which are related to the self-presentation process of the (male) owner of the house.

22. See for example Nelson 1997 and 2006; Hays-Gilpin and Whitley 1998; Gilchrist 1999; Sørensen 2000.

23. Meskell 1998 and 2002: 111–116.

24. See Meskell 2002: 110–116. Kemp (1979: 53) has suggested this is a space for commemoration, whereas Koltsida, (2001, 2006, 2007a and 2007b), following Meskell in her conceptual approach, suggests that the function(s) of a room do(es) not necessarily merge with its definition(s).

Meskeil points out ethnographic parallels in other areas of Egypt and the Middle East in which similar structures were emphasised, especially during the reception of guests.<sup>25</sup> As such, the second room of Deir el-Medina's houses, a stage for the head of the household, would necessarily have been a male-oriented space.<sup>26</sup> In this arrangement, Meskeil concludes the first two rooms reflect an elite perspective, and in the rear part of the house with lower status females or servants.<sup>27</sup>

Meskeil's analysis maps a pre-determined binary model of gender onto Bruyère's idealised house model, in which each room has its own *motif*, definition, and its *own gender*. In that model, rooms are conceptualised based on gendered definitions of space. However, the model proposed by Meskeil is far from accurate. First, because she tries to accommodate the unreliable archaeological evidence found in Bruyère's reports within her preconceived model.<sup>28</sup> Second, as Elizabeth Lang argued, if either men or women had control or domain of a certain area of the house, this would make available space even more constrained, as given space for individual dwellings were already limited. Meskeil's major flaw is that she does not differentiate the conceptualisation of a space (a vision) and its function(s) (a use).

### 5. *Deconstructing the Doll House*

In her criticism of Meskeil's approach to the workmen's villages, Koltsida has engaged more systematically with the evidence by using more types of evidence, including architectural features, decoration, and artefact assemblages, using the more reliable dataset from the workmen's village of Amarna, as well as the material sources from Deir el-Medina. Indeed, the archaeological evidence from the workmen's village of Amarna, considered a "twin" site of Deir el-Medina and better excavated,<sup>29</sup> is often used to guide investigations about Deir el-Medina and cover some gaps within the sources. Such association indeed brings mutual benefits for the investigation of houses in both workmen's villages. By using this complementary approach, Koltsida looked at the architectural features of villages' houses, associated with object distribution, examining features as shape and size of the rooms, staircases, and doorways, to infer their significance on a symbolic, psychological, but also practical level.<sup>30</sup> One of her aims was to establish both the idea that underlies the conception of a room and its use, by pinpointing activity areas within houses, and ultimately to understand possible human responses towards space.<sup>31</sup>

Similar to Meskeil, Koltsida also incorporated theoretical frameworks based on Household and Gender Archaeology to deconstruct associations like women-domestic-private and men-outside-public. Koltsida did not use gender (or more accurately sex) as a primary category to understand and frame

25. See for example the work of Lane (2003 [1836] 23–28).

26. Despite Bruyère's reports mention that less than 50% of the houses have elevated-cultic structures within a rigid space distribution, recent archaeological work conducted in Deir el-Medina seems to attest all houses have them.

27. Meskeil 1998 and 2002; Koltsida 2007).

28. See for example Sweeney (2006) reviewing Meskeil (2002) where she presents a long and detailed list of inaccuracies in Meskeil's analyses.

29. Of the 72 houses from the Amarna village, 44 were excavated and houses Long Wall Street 6, Gate Street 8 and 9, West Street 2/3, have provided more recent and accurate results. See Kemp 1987a.

30. Koltsida 2007a: 2.

31. Koltsida 2007a: 3.

domestic space, nor did she exclude it, but instead prioritised the activities enacted in a certain space, then looked at who performed those actions. In doing so, gender would “emerge” in the way people relate to each other and to the space around them. Without rejecting the idea that rooms could have been *conceptualised* according to gender differentiation, Koltsida also suggested that *practically* rooms were multifunctional, challenging the idea that spaces were allocated on the basis of gender.<sup>32</sup> She argued that each room could be used either by men and/or women at different times, according to the activity performed in that space, assuming there was a dynamic of circulation in the villages. If that is true, one could argue that a theoretically gendered space could also be a practically multi-gendered space, when used for different purposes.

To examine activity areas seems to be a good strategy to plot gender within spaces, and more specifically within houses, but also to think of the domestic sphere beyond this too-strict gender delineation and to get a broader idea of lived experience. Nevertheless, such a strategy has its own limitations, especially regarding the disturbed nature of the dataset. Overall, assumptions about activities enacted within spaces need to be examined with caution: any assemblage of moveable objects (pottery, furniture, etc.) does not necessarily attest to room use or function, especially in the case of abandoned settlements, like the workmen’s villages of Deir el-Medina and Amarna. Moveable objects could just have been randomly left behind<sup>33</sup> or they could come from anywhere in the houses.

Furthermore, it is problematic to consider these houses as isolated unities. Even though Koltsida has offered an alternative to Meskell’s approach, she also focused on individual houses. Taking Pfälzner’s recent definition on activity areas as “locations where one or a set of single or repetitive activities can be traced”,<sup>34</sup> such traces can be (partially) determined through permanent fixtures like mortars, grinding emplacements, fireplaces, ovens, bed niches, and storage containers for example, but still with limitations.<sup>35</sup> In the case of the workmen’s villages, these emplacements are not necessarily limited to single houses. At the workmen’s village of Amarna, for example, it has been demonstrated that cooking facilities were sometimes shared in different house groupings<sup>36</sup> and most likely in open spaces.<sup>37</sup> Kate Spence, who has recently re-examined the issue of interpreting domestic spaces, has pointed out that architectural features still play a major role in understanding how space was conceptualised.<sup>38</sup> For Spence, domestic space was not ordered based on functions or activities, but rather on the social relations of the head of the household with different members of the household and external guests. She argued that most domestic tasks took place in open areas (courtyards or outbuildings) in the larger houses in Amarna and when exterior space was not available; as it is the case for small houses in the workmen’s village, activities would move to inside the dwellings, to the rooms with more ventilation and light. Thus,

32. See Lang 2017: 176–178.

33. Moeller 2016: 347.

34. Pfälzner 2015: 33.

35. Pfälzner (2015) discusses some modern methodologies from micro-archaeology that enable archaeologists to identify activities performed within a determined space.

36. Shaw 1992 and Samuel 1999. A similar investigation for a specific house grouping at Deir el-Medina has been undertaken by A.-C. Salmas (personal communication).

37. See for example Koltsida 2007a: 16–40; Kemp and Vogelsang-Eastwood 2001; Spence 2015: 91.

38. Spence 2015.

patterning of activity areas might be more associated with limitations of space rather than the conceptual structure of the house.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, it cannot be argued that the relationship between space and gender is grounded in inherent functions of any particular rooms in small houses.

A promising alternative strategy might instead be to expand the scope of analyses, leaving behind the idea of house as a separate and isolated unit and integrating the village within this analysis, as recently demonstrated by Anne-Claire Salmas, on different terms and limits though, in the investigation of houses in Deir el-Medina.<sup>40</sup> In examining the houses of Sennedjem and his sons, she has noticed dwellings were thought as small clusters within the village, grouped by family ties.

In Amarna, Anna Hodgkinson's recent work on industrial activities in royal cities, using spatial analysis, has detected patterns of artefact distribution associated with domestic buildings, both large and small and family-operated.<sup>41</sup> The smaller houses clustered together to form a functional unit,<sup>42</sup> showing a large and diverse quantity of objects. Further to Ian Shaw's work,<sup>43</sup> she proved by taking larger areas and neighbourhoods of houses, or groups of house-units, we have a better picture of the socio-economics and the activities in general of this area than with the analysis of individual houses. Her methodology proved successful in detecting craftwork in clusters of houses, showing houses were interconnected and did not operate individually.

In taking the village as the main framework for domestic experience, following recent and successful research, I hope to enlarge the spatial range in which different activities were enacted, not limited to houses, but creating a more dynamic model in an attempt to understand how the workmen experienced their own territory inside and outside the walled villages, along with those involved in the functioning of the community.<sup>44</sup>

## 6. Conclusion

Investigations about gender and domestic space in ancient Egypt, mostly based on the evidence of Deir el-Medina and Amarna, have so far been limited to individual houses. This is problematic in many ways. First, because it neglects the complex space arrangement of these villages and their way of functioning, especially regarding communal areas. Second, because it reinforces, from a theoretical point of view, the fact that the domestic sphere is mostly seen as a "woman" related topic and confined to the interior of houses.

Koltsida and Meskell have offered analyses focused on two distinct aspects of houses: conceptualisation and function. If on one side, Meskell proved women were not exclusively part of the domestic sphere, she failed in engendering different rooms based on her assumptions about decorative elements and architectural features. On the other hand, Koltsida, in contesting Meskell, suggested that rooms were multifunctional, and based on that, possibly multi-gender. She argued that in looking at the

39. Spence 2015: 93.

40. Salmas (personal communication).

41. Hodgkinson 2014: 9–10.

42. See also Shaw 1988: 46ff. in Hodgkinson 2014.

43. Shaw 1988 and 1992.

44. Salmas 2018.

activities within a space, rather than using gender as a concept to explain these areas, it is possible to understand how domestic space was effectively perceived. The approach of multifunction rooms becomes less justifiable when we re-evaluate object assemblage against patterns of compromise in architecture. Gender cannot be assigned onto object assemblage determining activity areas in the workmen's villages.

Based on recent developments of household archaeology for ancient Egyptian houses, these two approaches have proven limited, mainly because they still presume the house is *in itself*, isolated and disarticulated from the rest of the village. That being said, future research needs to integrate a broader perception of space and the collective experience within special purpose settlements, offering different contours to what domestic space might have signified and operated. A different perception of the domestic space grounded in the village, not in single houses, might offer a more nuanced and complex understanding of gender. It is not about engendered spaces, objects, or activities. Despite the limitations of our evidence, gender needs also to be revisited and hopefully will remain open to investigation, not relegated to houses, nor limited as attributes or identities, but as argued by Strathern,<sup>45</sup> as a paradigm for thinking about social relationships, questioning categories and relations.

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45. Strathern 2016, especially the editor's introduction.

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### 3. Ancient Israel & Biblical Studies



## “Women Are Like Cattle.” Some Remarks on Early Jewish Judicial Vocabulary on Women and Nature

Federico Dal Bo<sup>1</sup>

In the present chapter, I shall analyse the origin, semantics, and theological-political relevance of a Talmudic idea that postulates similarity between women and cattle. As I show, the Talmud never actually says: “Women are like cattle.” Nevertheless, this juxtaposition is implied in a number of Talmudic passages and is usually employed with a number of different purposes—ritual, juridical, and cultural. None of these are strictly independent from each other. On the contrary, they all concur in expressing some fundamental patterns of gender relationships in the Talmud. With respect to this, the implicit assumption that “women are like cattle” provides a sort of “flexible taxonomy” rather than a metaphysically founded “ontology.” Therefore, when used in a non-literal sense, the term “cattle” exhibits a rich semantics that I shall try to reconstruct with a short selection of passages from the rabbinic literature. In particular, I try to show that the function of this statement—“Women are like cattle”—has gradually evolved from designating a simple ritual precaution to providing a legal exemption, and finally to assessing a sort of cultural (and physical) distinction between men and women.

### *1. Gender Studies in Early Rabbinic Literature*

Women’s and Gender Studies have only recently had an academically serious impact on Jewish Studies.<sup>2</sup> Scholars predominantly focusing on early rabbinic and Talmudic literature have raised gender-relevant issues with respect to sexuality, women’s lives, and other such topics.<sup>3</sup> In the present context, the Talmudic juxtaposition of women to cattle will be treated as a specific metaphor, whose rationale reflects

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2. Greinman 1999.

3. Hauptman 1998; Boyarin 1999; Fornrobert 2000; Hauptman 2005; Ilan 2008; Valler 2009; Or 2010; Marx 2013; Dal Bo 2013; and Ilan 2017.

an “all-pervasive body politics.”<sup>4</sup> I shall try to demonstrate that this metaphor originally has a juridical function, but it conveys a number of ethnic and gender presuppositions that cannot be neglected while reading these texts.

Early Jewish juridical vocabulary is well articulated in particular examples of early Rabbinic literature: the legal commentaries on Scripture (*midrashey halakhah*), the Sifra (an early commentary on the Book of Leviticus), the Sifre (an early commentary on the Books of Numbers and Deuteronomy) and especially the Mishnah (the most authoritative Hebrew law book). All these texts—that broadly belong to the so-called “Early Rabbinic Literature”—elaborate on a series of principles provided in the Hebrew Bible. They usually offer a clear perspective on sexuality and, by implication, gender relationships. Gender issues are frequently associated with a specific treatment of sexuality, which is usually evaluated positively with respect to the order of Creation. As this evaluation has to conform to “heteronormativity” because of specific legal, cultic, and cultural presuppositions, it offers several regulations of human sexual behavior with respect to specific religious expectations.<sup>5</sup> “Heteronormativity” here designates not only the socially established requirements to which every individual has to conform vis-à-vis sexuality but also the belief system that underlies “institutionalized heterosexuality.”<sup>6</sup> This complex implies that a gender hierarchy is then embedded in heteronormativity, as socially established roles are treated as reflecting the divine will of Creation. The fundamental assumption is that “heterosexuality” includes not only sexual intercourse between a married, heterosexual couple, and also the social institution that allows such intercourse to be legitimate—marriage. Moreover, heteronormativity is understood as the only correct criterion for determining both a just sexual life and a socially acceptable hierarchy between males and females. The complex of sexual taboos emerging from Biblical heteronormativity was well received by Rabbinic literature and can be tabulated as follows:

HETERONORMATIVITY	TABOOS
Jewish Marriage	Intercourse during menstruation ( <i>niddah</i> )
	Incest
	Intermarriage with non-Jews
	Prostitution
Heterosexuality	Homosexuality
Vaginal Intercourse	Oral Sex
	Anal Sex

Accordingly, sexuality is seen to have a social dimension that must be “normed” from the outside—from external legislative corpora. These include many, historically diverse texts from Rabbinic literature: some early Rabbinic commentaries on Scripture (*midrashim*), a commentary on the legal portions from the Book of Exodus (Mekhilta), a commentary on the Book of Leviticus (Sifra), a Rabbinic commentaries

4. Burrell and Hearn 1989: 13.

5. For a brief treatment of sexuality in the Second Temple period, see: Dal Bo 2018 (forthcoming). For an investigation of sexuality in early Christianity, see the prominent, recently published Foucault 2018.

6. I take this expression from Ingraham 2006: 307.

on the legal portions from the Books of Numbers and Deuteronomy (Sifre), the Hebrew rulebook called Mishnah, and its Aramaic commentary Gemara—whose Palestinian and Babylonian versions respectively originated the Palestinian Talmud (also called: the Talmud from the Land of Israel) and the Babylonian Talmud.<sup>7</sup> More specifically, the Talmud formally consists of the union of these two texts: the early 3<sup>rd</sup>-century Hebrew Mishnah and the later Aramaic Gemara (“completion”)—the latter existing both in a Palestinian (4<sup>th</sup> century) and Babylonian version (6<sup>th</sup> century). The Talmud consists then in the union of Mishnah and Gemara in a single textual corpus. In broader sense, the Gemara also designates a local commentary on the Mishnah.

Early Hebrew juridical and non-juridical texts chronologically belong to the Second Temple literature—traditionally covering the period from the edification of the second Temple of Jerusalem in 515 BCE to its destruction in 70 CE—but usually lack the specific traits of the coeval pseudo-epigraphical and apocalyptic texts, especially the latter’s interest in mythical and cosmological rationales for sexual conduct. On the contrary, this early Rabbinic literature developed specific tractates in juridical terms and refrained from narratives that were inserted later in the Talmud—both in the Babylonian Talmud and, to a lesser extent, in the Talmud of the Land of Israel. Most of the Rabbinic discussions on sexuality were formalized in a set of rules that would necessarily expand the original Biblical horizon, sharing Qumran’s concern to provide clarifications and specifications of Biblical rulings, such as purity laws and especially the norms concerning sexuality. These clarifications predominantly exhibit a legal-judicial nature in both language and content.<sup>8</sup> Biblical rulings are usually discussed either explicitly (in the early Hebrew commentaries on the Bible) or rather implicitly (in the Mishnah) but usually involve a detailed engagement with Biblical phraseology. An exhaustive treatment of sexuality is to be found, for instance, in a series of texts, grouped in one collection on women—called Order *Nashim* (“Women”)—including rules on levirate marriage (*Yebamot*), marriage contract (*Ketubot*), women’s vows (*Nedarim*), women’s naziriteship (*Nazir*), women suspected of adultery (*Sotah*), divorce (*Gittin*), and betrothal (*Kiddushin*). Each of these texts offers a highly detailed account of the way the authors understood women’s lives.

The range of sexual issues examined in early Rabbinic literature usually overlaps with the pertinent Biblical prescriptions. Early Rabbinic literature covers almost all the cases discussed in the Hebrew Bible, due to the implicit adhesion to it: Biblical heteronormative principles are described as God-given rulings and are usually used to contrast every divergent expression of sexuality. As a result, sexual behaviors that might endanger the male-female binary distinction as well as a number of other related collateral issues are stigmatized and rejected. This is particularly clear when reading famous passages from Scripture that unequivocally condemn, for instance, homosexuality, while contrasting it with heterosexuality:

“You shall not lie with a *man* as you lie with a woman; it is an abomination” (Lev 18:22).

Early Rabbinic literature is somewhat tolerant with respect to specific Biblical institutions—such as polygamy—and also treats the issue of having intercourse with a menstruating woman more moderately,

7. For a general introduction to Rabbinic literature, see the reference work Stemberger 1996.

8. Scholarship on the legal nature of the Talmud and its language is immensely large and cannot be treated here. For a modern, philosophical introduction to the topic, see: Borowitz 2006 and Dolgopolski 2009.

as far as it is stigmatized but not as severely as, say, a case of incest. Most of the core legislation to be found in the Book of Leviticus, for instance, is devoted to limiting and punishing incest.<sup>9</sup> Overall, sexuality is treated positively within the created order. It is, however, restricted to specific places and times in ways that generally conform to Biblical rulings, without exhibiting the type of radicalism manifested, for example, in Qumran literature. Early Rabbinic literature also agrees with most Biblical injunctions on human sexuality and specifically manifests a strong interest in legally elaborating on specific cases, mostly by commenting on lacking or implicit aspects of biblical legislations. See for instance, the case of father-daughter incest, the conflation of same-sex relations among males and pederasty, largely treated in the Book of Leviticus (Lev 18–20), with the notable exception of the treatment of same-sex relations among females that is only implied, according to Rabbinic hermeneutical principles.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, these Rabbinic corpora exhibit some conceptual imprecision, especially since they tend not to distinguish between “person” and “act.” Different from the modern system of ranking offences in terms of their gravity with respect of the value of an individual, ancient legal corpora tend to offer an “ideological reading of legal infringement, failing to distinguish between social prominence and the moral nature of the offence itself. Consequently, they address the same kind of punishment both for an incest case and for intercourse during menstruation.”<sup>11</sup> It is also necessary to show that such an imprecise perception supports, if not encourages, a particular vision of sexuality and gender. Since the Rabbis assume that incest and intercourse during menstruation have to be punished in the same way, then intercourse during menstruation is implicitly equivalent, in gravity and social stigmatization, to incest. The act of equating intercourse during menstruation with incest obviously sustains a repressive vision of sexuality.<sup>12</sup>

On the other hand, polygyny was apparently not widespread in practice but accepted in theory. This is particularly evident from the non-stigmatized use of cases of polygyny in Rabbinic literature and the later reception of the famous ban exclusively in those lands where the spiritual leadership of the 10<sup>th</sup>-century Ashkenazi master Rabbi Gershom was later recognized.<sup>13</sup> The practice of polygyny in Jewish society at the time of the early Rabbinic literature makes a strong distinction between what is considered sexually “immoral” for the husband and the wife. As long as polygamy and concubinage were deemed legitimate, a man was legally permitted to form connections with other women without legally injuring any of his wives. Conversely, a connection that a woman formed with any men other than her husband was always considered an offense to the latter’s rights and falls under the definition of adultery. This is particularly clear when examining the Biblical legislation against adultery:

“If a man commits adultery with another man’s wife—with the wife of his neighbor—the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death” (Lev 20:10).

9. Scholarship on the topic is immense. See for instance: Carmichael 1997.

10. For a detailed treatment of this topic, see: Dal Bo 2013: 183–184.

11. See: Dal Bo 2013: 37.

12. Ilan 2006: 100–101 and Dal Bo 2013: 117.

13. On the treatment of polygyny, see again Dal Bo 2013: 117–119. On the reception of Rabbi Gershom’s ban of polygyny, see for instance the recent Witte 2015: 60.



The allusion to “another man” is not only semantically redundant, as a “wife” obviously has to be married to somebody else, but especially qualifies who has really been offended in the present case. This obviously is the husband—whose “patrimonial” rights have been infringed upon. Conversely, Scripture tolerates a sexual transgression of a married man with a socially lesser woman—a young maidservant who is betrothed to none—exactly because this will be qualified as a “transgression” rather than a socially relevant crime.<sup>14</sup> This imbalance—ideologically depending on the social role of the woman involved in the adultery case—helps to construct a gender-based hierarchy within heteronormativity, reflecting again the inability of distinguishing between “person” and “act,” as anticipated.

## 2. *The Juridical Category of “Cattle”*

In addressing some statements in which women are compared to cattle, one will immediately note there is no sentence actually stating that “women are like cattle” in Rabbinic literature. Yet this comparison is as consistent as it is subtle.

The Rabbis usually rely on a hierarchical value-scale, contrasting angels with humans as well as humans with beasts. A famous passage from the Talmud states these contrasts in plain terms:

“Our rabbis taught: [...] Six things were said of humans: In three [they are] like ministering angels and in three like beasts. Three like ministering angels: They have a mind, like ministering angels, and they walk upright, like ministering angels, and speak in the holy tongue, like ministering angels. Three like beasts: They eat and drink, like beasts, they multiply, like beasts, and they produce bodily refuse like beasts” (bHag 16a).<sup>15</sup>

The rationale of this famous passage is self-evident: humans are like angels in their spiritual faculties and humans are like beasts in their anatomy and biology. This famous passage allows us to draw a hierarchical chart that posits angels at the top, humans in the middle, and beasts at the bottom. Although this hierarchy seems almost self-evident and unproblematic, it actually hides a number of gender and theological-political issues.

This requires a look at a second famous passage from the Mishnah that specifies who can be excluded from the obligation of pilgrimage.<sup>16</sup> These individuals are pitilessly listed as follows:

“The deaf, the imbecile, the minor, an individual of uncertain sex (*tumtum*), an androgyne, and women and slaves that have not been manumitted, and the amputated and the blind, and the sick and the elderly” (bHag 1:1)<sup>17</sup>

14. Dal Bo 2013: 412–413.

15. I follow the translation from Ilan 2017: 12.

16. I am freely elaborating from Ilan 2017: 13–15.

17. I follow the translation from Ilan 2017: 13.

The list opens tractate *Hagigah* but clearly establishes a socially, sexually, and ethnically embedded hierarchy. The counterpoint of these detailed exclusions obviously is an individual who is neither deaf, imbecile, minor, of uncertain sex, androgyne, female, slave, amputee, blind, sick, or elderly. In few words: a healthy male Jewish individual is the best candidate to leave on pilgrimage. Although this list might have expressed practical purposes—such as exempting less fortunate individuals from this ritual duty—recent scholarship has shown that the immanent function of this list is to provide a discriminatory lineage of the people of Israel. In particular, “this list makes the (even Jewish) woman that much closer to a beast than the regular male Jew, even one of impaired birth, even a proselyte, even a manumitted slave.”<sup>18</sup>

These Talmudic passages thus imply that the category of “human,” especially with respect to its juridical relevance, refers exclusively to a Jew: mostly to a male Jewish individual and, to a lesser extent, to a female Jewish individual. This ethnic and gender discrimination is based on a theological presupposition: given that angels speak the Holy Tongue, only Jews can spiritually be assimilated to them because it is unlikely that Gentiles would be doing so. Interestingly enough, an obvious argument—also Jewish women speak Hebrew—has no impact on the assumption that there is a specific, almost epistemological hierarchy between men and women.

In this context, it should be emphasized that it is unclear whether this hierarchy is actually meant to be derogatory or, better put, whether its intention is in principle to humiliate women in favor of men. Modern sensibility suggests that every instance of hierarchy is by implication derogatory regarding those who have less power or impaired. Yet the lack of this sensibility in pieces of legislation so distant in time from the present context should be judged carefully. These texts are ambiguous and usually frustrate our sense for equality without really implying inequality, as far as this statement might sound paradoxical. This complex, convoluted treatment of gender and power in Rabbinic literature can be clarified by examining the case of women and Gentiles. Indeed, we face contradicting assumptions. On the one hand, Talmudic literature usually ascribes to women the same intellectual abilities of men. On the other hand, derogatory assumptions are usually introduced because of women’s allegedly fragile emotive nature, without implying, strictly speaking, that they would be intellectually inferior to men. One should recall the case of Beruriah—who probably is the most famous female character in the Talmud. The probably literary nature of this character does not disqualify the importance of her figure, since Beruriah is both a rare, if not unique female scholar and a wife who is married to the prominent Rabbi Meir: she excelled in her study but was humiliated by her husband, who wanted to prove her voluble nature and caused her to be seduced by a student of his. Humiliated by this event, she killed herself. This story well proves how the Rabbis acknowledged both her unparalleled brightness and her sexually seducible nature.<sup>19</sup>

More complex is the issue whether Gentiles are considered intellectually inferior to Jews. Some passages from Talmudic literature explicitly compare Gentile to “donkeys,” for two simultaneous reasons: their inability to partake of the requirements of Jewish Law and their intellectual inability to do so.<sup>20</sup>

18. Ilan 2017: 13.

19. I have treated this famous Talmudic figure and its gender implication in Dal Bo 2017.

20. For brevity’s sake I cannot treat here the assumption that Gentiles are like donkeys, as maintained for instance in bBK 49a. This assumption is usually sustained by a particular reading of Gen 22 and specifically of the expression “with the donkey”

Despite its theological evidence, this hierarchy has a specific juridical function: designating primary and secondary legal subjects with respect to Jewish Law. It is then unsurprising that other passages from early Rabbinic literature suggest a more subtle distinction between “Jews,” arguing that Jewish priests are superior to Jewish Levites, who are superior to Israelites, who are superior to groups of illegitimate Jewish children, who are superior to proselytes, who are superior to slaves, etc. While combining these assumptions, and referring to the aforementioned Talmudic passages, it is possible to tabulate this ethnic and gender hierarchy as follows:<sup>21</sup>

Angels

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		Priests
		Levites
		Israelites
		Illegitimate children
Humans	Jews	Proselytes
		Manumitted Slaves
		Women
		Hebrew/ Canaanite Slaves

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Gentiles

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Cattle

This chart clearly illustrates the ethnic and gender implications of the angel-human-beast hierarchy established by Rabbinic literature. While heavily relying on ritual presuppositions, Rabbinic literature puts Jewish priests at the top and Gentiles at the bottom, due to their proportionally decreasing commitment to Jewish Law.<sup>22</sup> Whereas Jewish priests are expected to observe all the requirements of Jewish Law, Gentiles are mostly exempted from doing so, while animals are obviously exempted entirely. With respect to this, this ethnic and gender hierarchy also has the function of describing different grades of juridical obligations: Jewish Law is fully mandatory for Jews, partially mandatory to Gentiles, not mandatory at all to beasts. Accordingly, the category of “beast” also serves the function of describing a

(*‘im ha-hamor*) (Gen 22:5) that is vocalized as “people of the donkey” (*‘am ha-hamor*) and then expanded into “people similar to a donkey” (*‘am domeh le-hamor*) in Rabbinic literature.

21. For a similar tabulation, see: Dal Bo 2013: 201 then elaborated further in Ilan 2017: 15. The present version of the chart is considerably simplified.

22. See again Ilan 2017: 13–15.

full exemption from a juridical obligation. Nevertheless, the use of this category in a juridical context is never pure or ideologically neutral. On the contrary, it involves a number of ethnic and gender implications. One may use the category of “cattle” as a metaphor to designate someone exempted from juridical obligation. Yet the category itself clearly involves a number of derogatory assumptions, since humans are degraded to animals.

While treating this ethnic and gender hierarchy with respect to women, Tal Ilan has recently drawn attention to a passage from Tractate *Hullin* (on slaughter of animals for sacrifice and consumption) that explicitly juxtaposes humans—especially women—to beasts. The passage—that apparently shows the Rabbis’ lack of expertise in zoology—clearly states that this juxtaposition is educational:<sup>23</sup>

“And if you say: I learn this for humans and this teaches us with regard to beasts, [I say:] one does not deduce from beasts with regard to humans, because the beast has no birth canal, and one does not deduce from human with regard to beast, because the former has a unique face” (bHul 68a).<sup>24</sup>

This passage clearly states that humans and animals share common anatomical traits but also significant differences. For instance, if a beast does not have a birth canal but women do, one should raise the question how one can extrapolate from a beast to a woman. The argument is not zoological but juridical. It implies that the category of “beast” can be used to describe someone’s commitment with Jewish Law, as anticipated. Yet the Rabbis are not only concerned with the practical use of this category in a juridical context but also with the implications that this kind of hierarchy conveys. While recalling the previous list exempting specific individuals from the duty of pilgrimage, it appears that the Rabbis clearly agree with the implications that a male Jewish individual shall be regarded as ethnically, juridically, and theologically superior to Gentiles as well as with the implication that Jewish males are then superior to Jewish females. This gender hierarchy resonates with the assumption that males and females eminently interact in ways that are well reflected in “heteronormativity”—intended again as a form of institutionalized sexuality and therefore as a paradigm for any relationship between different genders. This implication is obviously contextual with heteronormativity that posits a clear difference in Jewish males’ and Jewish females’ obligations.

Statements such as the one examined in the present paper—“women are like cattle”—are often used in early Jewish literature with a specific juridical purpose: establishing a hierarchical classification among potential juridical subjects based on some natural presuppositions. My main assumption is that such statements have a specific epistemological genesis: nature is not considered to be a separate realm with respect to the human one—rather to be in continuity with it. Because of this, human juridical categories can trespass into the natural ones and vice versa—creating a tight conceptual complex.<sup>25</sup>

If one intends to provide a possible genesis for this statement—“women are like cattle”—one might assume that “cattle” serves as a real juridical category especially when put into continuity with the other six fundamental classes in early Jewish juridical vocabulary, as mentioned above. This human-animal

23. Ilan 2017: 17.

24. I follow the translation from Ilan 2017: 16.

25. Dal Bo 2013: 152–153.

mixed classification shall then explain/rationalize decreasing obligation with respect to the Jewish Law—rather than as a derogatory system. Accordingly, the Jewish Law manifests its strongest mandatory force with respect to a number of subjects: Jewish male individuals (who are obliged to fulfill every commandment in Scripture); Jewish female individuals (who are exempted from some specific time-bound commandments in Scripture); Jewish children (who are virtually exempted from most of the commandments in Scripture); Gentiles (who are exempted from most of the ethnically specific commandments in Scripture); and finally cattle (which is not a legal subject as such). As it is evident, “cattle” here represents a sort of circumlocution for “nature” and designates the natural realm that is fundamentally exempted from obeying the Jewish Law. For now, we shall maintain the assumption that this hierarchy actually exhibits a neutral character and we shall neglect its more problematic aspect: that is, that this hierarchy somehow induces a subtle discrimination against minor legal subjects, such as women, children, slaves, and Gentiles. I intend to show how the juxtaposition of women to “cattle” is used in both a juridical and a ritual context with a specific juridical purpose: exempting women from some Jewish-specific commandments. This kind of exclusion is eminently of juridical nature and is not necessarily derogative. The assimilation of “women” to “cattle”—that is to “nature”—shall rather be seen as a search for “neutrality.”

In other terms, “women” should occasionally be considered as a neutral category, in this very sense: they pertain neither the category of those Jewish individuals who are commended a specific *mitzvah* nor the category of those Jewish individuals who are *temporarily* exempted from a specific commandment under specific conditions of uncleanness—during a menstrual period, for instance. Because they are somehow temporarily “non-Jewish,” women might occasionally be considered “neutral” in the etymological sense of the expression: “neither / nor” with respect to the aforementioned Jewish categories. Therefore, they are designated as “cattle”—or strictly belonging to “nature.” In other terms, Jewish women are exempted from specific commandments, in particular occasions, to the extent that they are fictionally treated not only as non-Jewish individuals but, even more radically, as “beasts,” in the sense that they are fully exempted from commandments; therefore, they, like cattle, are not legal subjects in that instance.

### 3. *The Application of “Cattle” as a Juridically Neutral Category*

The following small portion from a longer discussion is about the obligations of a pregnant woman who may or may not follow specific dietary prescriptions due to her condition. The text pertinent to us is extracted from a very long and complex discussion that we cannot examine in detail here for brevity’s sake. The discussion takes place in tractate *Keritot* about the dietary prescriptions of a pregnant woman.<sup>26</sup> It employs a number of pre-Talmudic sources in order to answer the question about the amount of food to be consumed within a given period of time, in which two different meals may be considered a single meal. After reporting the discussion between several Rabbis about what “a whole portion” (mKer 3:3) is, the discussion moves towards a related issue: what makes food and drinks unclean. Specifically, the question is treated in detail while examining the case of a lactating woman who feeds her baby. The

26. For a comprehensive analysis of this passage, see: Dal Bo 2013: 336–346.

question that arises is the following: if she is unclean—due to a number of reasons such as touching a dead body or while menstruating—at the same time she is lactating, is her baby clean or not? The text runs as follows:

“It is taught: [They] permit a [woman] who touched an unclean dead [person] to nurse her son and her son is clean. How is he clean? Since he sucks milk, he should be unclean from the milk. And [should you] say that he was not rendered fit [to receive uncleanness by contact with liquid], he is made fit [to receive uncleanness] from an unclean drop [of milk] on the nipple. Rav Nahman said [in name of] Rabbah bar Abbuha [who] said: He sucked in a single pull, so no unclean drop was formed on the nipple. Rava said: [I have] two answers to the issue: One, that we see that the mouth of the boy is full of milk. And more, the place of milk is a spring. Indeed [it is taught]: The milk of a woman renders unclean whether [it was drawn] willingly or unwillingly, [whereas the milk of a] beast does not render unclean unless [it was drawn] unwillingly does not [the expression] unwillingly [mean] that [the baby] does not enjoy it? And it is taught: “[The milk of a woman] renders unclean” (mMakh 6:8). Rather, Rava said: The meaning for [the expression]: Her son is clean, is that it is doubtful whether he sucked a [standard] amount and it is doubtful whether he did not suck [it]. And if you wish to say that [her son] sucked [a standard amount], it is [still] doubtful whether he sucked [the standard amount] in [the time prescribed for] eating a whole portion, or whether he sucked more [than the standard amount] in [the time prescribed for] eating a whole portion. And as to Rava, [the expression]: The place for milk is a spring, and does not need to be made fit [to receive uncleanness by contact with liquid](...) The place of milk of a woman is not a spring. If so, this mishnah is difficult. Has not Rava said: [Milk of a woman] renders unclean whether [it was drawn] willingly or unwillingly? Do you assume that [Rava] said that [the expression] unwillingly means that [the son] does not enjoy it? No. What does [the expression] unwillingly [mean]? [Rava] said that [it means] that the mind of the baby is on the milk but [Rava] said: Because he does not enjoy it, he is clean.” (bKer 13a).

The introduction of gender-relevant issues in this Gemara functions to explain the rhetorical arrangement of the discussion. The cases of a pregnant and a lactating woman are introduced in order to object to a Rabbi’s position regarding the consumption of a whole portion.

On the one hand, the Rabbis admit that a pregnant woman is allowed to eat as much as she wants. With respect to the issue at hand, this means that she is allowed to eat less or more than a whole portion and in either case she is permitted to make herself clean. The reason why a pregnant woman is not subject to the rules pertaining to a whole portion is because of “the seriousness [of her condition]” (*sakanah*). The female body is assimilated to a “vessel” with the Aramaic term *gewiyyah* (“corpse”) with which the present Gemara designates a woman’s body. This term, probably derives from *gaw* (גו, “the inner”) and is notably different from the juridical Hebrew term *guf* (גוף), which denotes both a “body” and a “legal entity.” It rather designates a body from a strictly material point of view, as a corporeal existence, either as a material body or even as a corpse.<sup>27</sup>

27. See again: Dal Bo 2013: 342.

On the other hand, while treating the case of a lactating woman, the Rabbis compare her either to a beast, for a non-conclusive opinion, or to a spring, for a conclusive opinion. In the present case, we shall treat only the comparison of a woman to “cattle,” as anticipated.

#### 4. *Gender Observations*

The most notable gendered observation pertains to the comparison made between a woman and a beast. The text distinguishes between this formal juxtaposition, and the actual status of the two: “The milk of a woman renders unclean whether [it was drawn] willingly or unwillingly, [whereas the milk of a] beast does not render unclean unless [it was drawn] unwillingly” (bKer 13a).

Yet the comparison is formally justified as it presupposes a (formal) reduction of a woman to other mammals. This “abstract” evaluation of a “woman” as a “mammal” is consistent with the comparison of a woman’s nipple to an (artificial or natural) source. In both cases, the body of a woman is subject to a rigid juridical system and is formally reduced to its functionality of providing milk. Thus, she can be compared both to a mammal which lactates, and to a spring, as source of fluids. Both these interpretations are founded on the general assumption that the body of a woman is not a unique entity that requires a special, distinct treatment and can therefore be compared to other entities. This hermeneutical principle is not gender-discriminatory as such, since it can also be applied to the body of a man. The act of comparing the human body to animals and artificial entities corresponds to a necessity of explaining inexplicable bodily functions. Although the *practical* function of lactating, for instance, is a truism—providing a baby with the necessary nourishment—its *biological* function or mechanism is absolutely inexplicable, at least to the intellectual class of the Rabbinic elite in ancient Babylon. This inability of describing the intrinsic nature of bodily functions would posit an epistemological difficulty to the ancient Jewish mind that tried to offer a comprehensive catalogue of beings in the world, possibly reflecting the inherent laws of purity. The necessity of bypassing this epistemological impasse would probably justify the Rabbis’ frequent use of metaphors from the animal and natural world, probably under the assumption that their respective functions were better-known. The ideological orientation of these explanations is also revealed from the circumstance that the Rabbis much more frequently refer to the female than to the male body. Whereas the female body represents the “other” if not “otherness” in general, the male body can be described in mythical and theological terms as “image of God” (Gen 1:26) and therefore is not such a mystery, after all.

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# Death at the Hand of a Woman: Hospitality and Gender in the Hebrew Bible

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## 1. Introduction

In this article, I argue that in the Hebrew Bible hospitality is a social practice that is reserved for men. The right way to do it is illustrated by Rebecca (Genesis 24), Rachel (Genesis 29) and Zipporah and her sisters (Exodus 2). They all leave the invitation itself to their male relatives. The horrific example of the opposite is Jael (Judges 4), who leaves her tent to invite Sisera inside, where she offers him a drink of milk and an unexpected death. Sisera himself is to blame for his unhappy ending. He should never have gone to Jael's tent in the first place. Nor should he have accepted an invitation offered to him by a woman.

I first became aware of this issue when reading articles in the *Biblical Theology Bulletin* from the early 1990s by V.H. Matthews and T.R. Hobbs on hospitality in the Bible in general. To summarize their discussion very briefly, Matthews claimed that hospitality was a male prerogative in the Hebrew Bible whereas Hobbs disagreed, arguing that since hospitality belongs in the domestic sphere, which is also the feminine sphere, women are also allowed to offer hospitality in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>2</sup>

As mentioned above, I agree with Matthews on this issue, but since neither Matthews nor Hobbs investigate hospitality and gender in the Hebrew Bible in any detail, I have taken the opportunity to look into this a little further. Due to limited space, I cannot evaluate every example of women offering hospitality in the Hebrew Bible, but have selected a few illustrative examples.<sup>3</sup> My starting point is the story about Jael and Sisera, which was also the starting point for the difference of opinion between Matthews and Hobbs. First, however, I shall give a brief introduction to hospitality in the Hebrew Bible

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2. See Matthews 1991: 15–16 and Hobbs 1993: 94. In another article, written roughly a decade later, Hobbs seems to have changed his mind on this issue and agrees with Matthews that only male heads of household are allowed to offer hospitality (2001: 11).

3. I have written on gender, domestic space and hospitality in the Hebrew Bible in previous articles: for an earlier discussion of gender and domestic space, see Gudme 2014a, for a discussion of gender, hospitality and violence, see Gudme 2014b, and for an earlier (and longer) version of the argument that I present in this article, see Gudme 2015 (in Danish).

in general. Then I will look at examples of the right way for women to handle hospitality in the Hebrew Bible, and finally, I shall present a few exceptions to the rule that hospitality is a male prerogative.

## 2. Hospitality in the Hebrew Bible

There is no explicit rule of hospitality in the Hebrew Bible, but it seems that there is an obligation or at least an ideal to offer visitors rest, food and protection.<sup>4</sup> This ideal is well-illustrated by the stories of Abraham and Lot, who both receive divine visitors in Genesis 18 and 19.<sup>5</sup>

In Genesis 18:1-15, three men, who are in fact the god, Yahweh, accompanied by two divine messengers or angels, visit Abraham in Mamre. When Abraham sees the visitors, he runs out to meet them (*q-r-*, קרא), he prostrates himself in front of them and asks them not to pass by (*'b-r*, עבר) his home, but to stay and rest, to wash their feet and to eat. As soon as the visitors accept his invitation, Abraham sends his wife, Sarah, off to bake bread of fine flour while he himself dashes off to the cattle herd to order a servant to quickly prepare a fine and tender calf. Abraham serves the food and he stands next to the three men as they eat. Abraham's guests dine on veal, bread, curds and milk.<sup>6</sup> The meal is a veritable feast, it demonstrates both wealth and generosity, and it adds to the portrayal of Abraham as an impeccable host.<sup>7</sup>

There are several parallels between hospitality and another crucial social practice in the Hebrew Bible, namely gift-giving.<sup>8</sup> Like gift-giving, hospitality and the ensuing cohabitation and commensality create bonds between a host and his visitors and provide an opportunity to transform a stranger and possible threat into a friend and ally.<sup>9</sup> It is always right to offer hospitality, but in accordance with the rules of gift-giving, accepting hospitality will cause the guest to be indebted to his host. Therefore, offers of hospitality are often veiled in expressions of supplication and servility so as not to shame the guest, and hospitality is customarily refused before it is accepted.<sup>10</sup> There is a good example of the former in Genesis 18, where Abraham repeatedly refers to himself as the servant (*'ebed*, עבד) of the guests that have come to his home and describes the meal that he offers them as "a little bread" (*pat lehem*, פת־לחם) although it is in fact nothing less than a feast.

In Genesis 19 we have an example of polite refusal. Lot encounters two men who have come to Sodom, and as the reader knows but Lot does not, they are the two divine messengers that visited Abraham in the previous chapter. When Lot sees the men, he gets up to meet them (*q-r-*, קרא) and prostrates himself before them just like Abraham did. Lot also calls himself their servant (*'ebed*, עבד) and

4. It is difficult to determine if the ideal of hospitality that we encounter in the Hebrew Bible matches historical social practices in Palestine in the 1st Millennium BCE. It is possible that this is the case, but it is difficult to either prove or disprove. We can say, however, that these stories express the authors' attitudes to and ideals of hospitality.

5. For general introductions to hospitality in the Hebrew Bible, see de Vaux 1961: 10; Matthews 1991; Hobbs 2001 and Southwood 2016: 72–74.

6. For a discussion of biblical Hebrew terms for dairy products, see Borowski 1998: 52–56 and MacDonald 2008: 35–36.

7. A less lavish alternative would have been to slaughter a kid or a lamb rather than a calf, see Borowski 1998: 77–78 and Shafer-Elliott 2013: 145.

8. Stansell 1999; Bolin 2004; Gudme 2013: 21–29.

9. Pitt-Rivers 1977: 95–97.

10. Pitt-Rivers 1977: 107–110; Liverani 2004: 169.

he invites them to turn into (*s-û-r*, סור) his house, to spend the night (*l-î-n*, ליל) there and to wash their feet as they pause on their journey. At first, they refuse his hospitality and reply that they will spend the night in the square, but Lot urges them to accept the invitation and eventually they do.

So far in Genesis 18 and 19 we have seen Abraham and Lot acting as exemplary hosts and both narratives are examples of successful hospitality, where both hosts and guests live up to their culturally determined roles and the responsibilities that these roles entail. In the remainder of the story, in Genesis 19:4-11, hospitality is put to the test when the narrative takes a dramatic turn. In the middle of the night, Lot and his household are woken up by the men of Sodom, who demand that he sends his guest out so that they can have sex with them. In this crisis, Lot rises to the challenge and demonstrates that he is indeed the perfect host by offering his two young daughters to the mob outside in exchange for the two men who have come under “the shelter of his roof” and therefore are entitled to his protection. The men of Sodom angrily refuse Lot’s offer and they threaten him and try to break the door. At this point, the two angels spring into action. They strike the men outside with blindness so that they cannot find the door, and thanks to this divine intervention Lot and his household and his guests make it safely through the night. In this way, the story of Lot’s guests in Sodom is an illustration of how the perfect host, who is willing to sacrifice even his own daughters for the safety of his guests, is rewarded for his hospitality. In Genesis 19, two strangers are transformed first into sacred guests and then into allies and protectors through Lot’s invitation and determination to live up to the rules of hospitality.<sup>11</sup>

The narrative in Genesis 19 demonstrates that just like gift-giving, hospitality entails a risk. Initially of course there is the risk of being snubbed, of having your offer of hospitality refused and to lose face because of this, but more importantly there is the risk of bringing a stranger into your home. If the transaction is successful, if this social ritual works, then all parties gain something. The guest receives protection and accommodation, the host gets honour and prestige and the two of them may even be able to form a lasting relationship or alliance. This is probably why so many hospitality accounts end in marriage. I shall return to this below. But if hospitality fails, if it goes wrong, it leaves both the host and the guest very vulnerable—vulnerable to violence, theft and betrayal. Furthermore, by admitting a strange and possibly predatory male into his household, the host exposes himself and his women to suspicions of illegitimate sex and thus to a massive loss of honour.<sup>12</sup> Like gift-giving, hospitality is a high-risk high-gain kind of social interaction.

### 3. *The Problem: Jael and Sisera in Judges 4*

The story about Jael and Sisera in Judges 4 is a puzzling story for several reasons. It is a story about an Israelite victory over the Canaanite king Jabin and his commander, Sisera. But built into this story there is also the account of the failure of Barak, the commander of Israel, to live up to his responsibility. When Barak is called up by Yahweh and ordered by Deborah the Judge to lead the Israelites against Sisera, he refuses to go into battle alone although Yahweh has promised him victory. Barak will only go to battle if Deborah goes with him. Deborah accepts, but she warns him that this course will not bring him

11. See Gudme 2014b with references for a more detailed analysis of Genesis 19.

12. Matthews 1991; Gudme 2014a: 64–65.

glory, because now Yahweh will let Sisera die at the hands of a woman. The obvious woman in this case would have been Deborah herself, but it is Jael, a foreigner and if not exactly an ally then certainly not an enemy of the Canaanites who is to bring about Sisera's death. Thus, we have several plots battling for our attention in Judges 4: There is the overarching theme of gender-roles and especially how the characters in the narrative fail to live up to theirs. Barak, the commander, insists on being led by a woman, and therefore a woman has to become a killer.<sup>13</sup> There is also the simpler plot of making Deborah's prediction come true, and then of course there is the well-known plot of assistance for Israel coming from the most unlikely and unexpected of places—such as from foreigners or women, or as in the case of Jael both.<sup>14</sup>

There is an additional plot in Judges 4 that has to do with hospitality, and more specifically with repeated violations of the rules of hospitality. First, when Sisera comes to the dwelling of Heber the Kenite to seek refuge, he goes straight to the tent that belongs to Heber's woman, Jael, and not to Heber's tent. This is the first transgression. By seeking out Jael specifically, Sisera offends her and he exposes both of them to suspicions of inappropriate behaviour and adultery. Jael, on her part, should never have responded to the appearance of a stranger as she does. She actively offers hospitality, and the scene is described in terms that are very similar to the language used in the masculine hospitality scenes in Genesis 18 and 19. Jael leaves her tent to go out to meet (*q-r-*, קרא) Sisera just like Abraham and Lot go out to meet their visitors in Genesis 18 and 19. And she encourages Sisera to “turn aside” (*s-û-r*, סור), using the same term as Lot uses when he invites his guests in Genesis 19:2. Jael then follows Sisera into her tent. She covers him with a blanket, he asks her for some water and she gives him milk and tucks him in. As soon as Sisera is asleep, Jael grabs a tent peg and a hammer and drives the tent peg into Sisera's temple with such force that it goes straight through his head and into the ground (Judges 4:21).<sup>15</sup> When the Israelite commander, Barak, shows up at Jael's tent a little later, she presents him with his dead enemy. In this way, as the narrator neatly sums up his story, “God let Jabin king of the Canaanites succumb to the Israelites” (v. 23, my translation). Sisera's murder is the final violation of hospitality. Once inside Jael's tent, in spite of the inappropriateness of the arrangement, Sisera is a guest and should be able to count on his host's protection. Unlike Lot in Genesis 19, who goes to extremes to secure the safety of his guests, Jael the hostess abuses the seeming safety of an invitation in order to accomplish murder.<sup>16</sup>

In the poetic account of the story of Jael and Sisera in Judges 5, Jael is praised as “the most blessed among women (*tēbōrāk minnāšūm*, תברך מנשים)” (v. 24). There is no doubt that she is perceived as a heroine. Nevertheless, Jael's actions in Judges 4 are difficult to comprehend. Jael is not a member of the people of Israel and her house seems to be on good terms with both the Israelites and the Canaanites. Therefore, it comes as a surprise for the reader when she suddenly turns against Sisera and kills him without hesitation. V.H. Matthews and D.C. Benjamin suggest that Sisera seeks out Jael's tent because he

13. For good discussions of this topic, see Duran 2006: 17–37 and Kalmanofsky 2017: 47–67.

14. Assis 2004.

15. The narrative in Judges 4 is full of allusions to motherhood and nurturing and to seduction and sex. For discussions of these, see Fewell and Gunn 1990, Duran 2006: 17–37 and Gur-Klein 2013: 39–41.

16. One of the puzzling things about hospitality in the Hebrew Bible is the question of when it is appropriate or at least acceptable to breach the rules of hospitality and to use an invitation as a cover-up for violence. Jael in Judges 4 is one example of this, Absalom's invitation to his sheep-shearing feast in 2 Samuel 13 is another. For a similar reflection on the violence towards the end of *The Odyssey*, see Pitt-Rivers 1977.

intends to rape her.<sup>17</sup> If this were the case, Jael's actions could be interpreted as self-defense. In Judges 5:28-30, Sisera's mother wonders why her son is gone for so long, but her ladies calm her and reassure her that her son and his men have most likely been detained because they are dividing up the spoils of war, which they describe as "a womb (*raḥam*, רחם) or two" for each man (v. 30). This comment illustrates that a roaming army could endanger the local women and that war and rape often goes hand in hand, but there is nothing in the text in Judges 4 or 5 to indicate that Sisera comes to Jael's tent to rape her. He has fled the battle on foot, he is not a victor seeking to claim his spoils. Indeed, if Jael fears Sisera it makes no sense that she comes out to greet him and even tells him to have no fear.<sup>18</sup>

Neither Jael nor Sisera abide by the rules of hospitality in Judges 4.<sup>19</sup> Obviously, these breaches of the code of hospitality are not the sole reason why Sisera ends up with a tent peg through his temple, the other plots are important as well, but the hospitality plot is at least part of the explanation: if you are foolish enough or rude enough to seek and accept hospitality from a woman, then you only have yourself to blame if you end up with your head nailed to the ground.<sup>20</sup>

#### 4. *The Right Way: Rebecca, Rachel and Zipporah and her Sisters*

I find it illustrative to contrast the *wrong* way of doing hospitality with what appears to be the right way according to the Hebrew Bible. The longest and most detailed example of this is the story of Rebecca in Genesis 24. Again, this story has several plots: there is the overarching plot of finding a woman for Isaac, there is the sub-plot of identifying the right woman with the help of Yahweh, as asked for in Abraham's servant's prayer in verse 14, and there is a hospitality-plot as well—for how should a good girl react when approached by a stranger asking for hospitality? And Rebecca certainly is a good girl, she belongs to a good family, she is very beautiful (*tōbat mar'eh mē'ōd*, תבת מראה מאד) and she is a virgin (*bēṭūlāh*, בתולה). And Abraham's servant meets her at the only socially acceptable place for young ladies to meet strangers, namely at the well.<sup>21</sup>

Rebecca acts with propriety. When Abraham's servant rushes to the well to meet her (*q-r-*, קרא) and asks her who her father is and if there is room in his house for them to spend the night (*l-î-n*, לין), she runs back to the house to give them the news of the stranger, and then her brother, Laban, goes to the well to actually extend an invitation and ask the servant to come to their house. A similar pattern appears in the

17. Matthews and Benjamin 1992: 294.

18. Cf. Duran 2006: 20–21 and contra Matthews and Benjamin 1992: 294, who read Jael's invitation to 'turn aside' (*s-û-r*, סור) as an encouragement to turn away from his plans to rape her. In light of the similarities with Lot's invitation in Genesis 19:2, I find it more likely that Jael is inviting Sisera into her tent.

19. According to Matthews, the author of Judges 4 stages these repeated violations of hospitality to justify Sisera's murder (1991: 15–16). I agree with Mathhews that the narrative in Judges 4 almost reads as an exploration of how not to practise hospitality, but I struggle to see how Jael's actions can be justified by reference to the rules of hospitality when she herself repeatedly breaks these rules.

20. Another interesting example of a woman who offers hospitality in the Hebrew Bible is Abigail in 1 Samuel 25 (see Gudme 2015: 38–41). Abigail is forced to offer hospitality to David, because her foolish husband, Nabal, does not do it himself. In this story, an invitation offered by a woman brings death not to her guest, but to her husband, the neglectful host. Both Southwood (2016: 72–74) and Marsman (2016: 425–427) mention Abigail as an example of hospitality in the Hebrew Bible, but they do not discuss aspects of gender and hospitality in these texts.

21. Seifert 1997; Ghantous and Edelman 2014: 185.

story of Jacob and Rachel's first meeting in Genesis 29. They meet at the well, where Rachel has brought her sheep to drink. Jacob helps her to roll the stone away from the well and to water her sheep and then she runs back to her house and tells Laban, who is now the father in the story, and Laban then goes to the well and invites Jacob to stay with them.

In Exodus 2, the account of Moses' first meeting with Zipporah deviates slightly from this pattern. Moses sits by the well and from there he sees some shepherds who try to prevent Zipporah and her sisters from watering their sheep. Moses comes to their aid, and because of his help they come home earlier than usual. Their father, Reuel, asks them why this is so and only then do they tell him about the Egyptian who helped them against the shepherds. Reuel reprimands the girls for having abandoned the stranger at the well and tells them to invite him for dinner: "Where is he? Why have you left ('-z-b, עזב) him behind? Invite him (q-r-, קרא) and let him have a meal! (wēyō'kal lāhem, ויאכל להם)" (v. 20).

In this way, Exodus 2 does not entirely break with the pattern that it is a man that has to offer hospitality, but at the same time the transaction is not entirely successful. The offer of hospitality should clearly have been given earlier. However, it is not absolutely clear from the text if the seven sisters are actually sent back to the well straight away to invite Moses to the house, nor is it clear if Reuel actually thinks that they should have extended an invitation to him themselves as soon as he had helped them. In light of the two stories in Genesis 24 and 29, I find it most likely that he is reprimanding them for not telling him about the gallant stranger at once so that Reuel himself could have offered him hospitality. In this way, the daughters of the priest of Midjan may be portrayed as less well-mannered than Rebecca and Rachel.

Here, I would like to devote some attention to the aspect of reciprocity in these stories.<sup>22</sup> In each case, hospitality is offered not as a 'free gift', but in return for something else.<sup>23</sup> In this way, these three narratives differ from Genesis 18 and 19, where the cycle of reciprocity is initiated by the hosts, Abraham and Lot, and not by the guests. By this, I do not mean to imply that hospitality as a social practice is or can be without self-interest, rather the contrary, but merely to stress that it can be initiated by either party. In Exodus 2, Moses helps Zipporah and her sisters when they are threatened by the shepherds and as a reward he is offered hospitality. In Genesis 29, Jacob also renders service to Rachel by helping her to lift the stone off the well. In Genesis 24, Abraham's servant gives Rebecca precious jewelry before he broaches the topic of hospitality. And the effect of these gifts is obvious. When Laban sees the gifts that his sister is wearing, he rushes off to invite the man to his home. In all three cases, the offer of hospitality is part of a longer chain of reciprocal exchange that consists of hospitality in return for gifts or services, sometimes followed by service in return for hospitality, and they all culminate in marriage.<sup>24</sup>

With regard to women and hospitality specifically, I think that these three examples show us that the correct way for a woman to deal with the appearance of a deserving stranger is to report back to a high standing male of her household, such as her father or brother, and to leave the actual invitation to him, because that is his right.

22. For an interesting discussion of hospitality and reciprocity, see Pitt-Rivers 1977: 99–107.

23. For a discussion of the ideal of the free gift and its relationship to reciprocity, see Gudme 2013: 21–29.

24. For a discussion of hospitality and marriage, see Glassner 1989.

### 5. *The Exceptions: Rahab, Lady Wisdom and Lady Folly*

Finally, I would like to point out some exceptions to the rule that women should refrain from offering hospitality according to the Hebrew Bible.

The first exception is Rahab in the Book of Joshua 2. Rahab is a Canaanite prostitute (*zônāh*, זונה), who lives in Jericho. She helps two Israelite spies who have come to her house, she offers them hospitality and she hides them from the King of Jericho's men. In exchange for her help, Rahab asks the spies that she and her family be spared when the city falls and that they may live among the people of Israel. In this narrative, we have a plot that is similar to the one in Judges 4, namely that help for Israel comes from an unexpected place.<sup>25</sup> Again the helper is a woman and a foreigner. The overarching plot of course is to conquer Jericho in a spectacular way, but a part of this is that Rahab, a woman, offers hospitality to the two Israelite spies and nothing bad comes of this—in fact, rather the opposite.

I think the reason for this is that Rahab is a prostitute and therefore she has a liminal status in society.<sup>26</sup> She is, in fact, her 'own woman' and the house in which she lives is her own house as it is pointed out both in verses 1 and 3. That Rahab is the head of her household becomes very clear in the conversation between the two spies and Rahab after she has saved them from the King of Jericho's men (vv. 9-21). In return for their rescue, Rahab asks the spies to spare the lives of her family, and she specifies these as her father and mother and brothers and sisters and all who belong to them (vv. 12-13). Although Rahab uses the patriarchal term father's house (*bēyt 'āb*, בית אב), to describe the family unit it seems clear that she is not under the jurisdiction of any man. In order to save her extended family, she must gather all of them in her own house. As a *zônāh* Rahab belongs to no man and therefore she defers to no man in matters of hospitality.<sup>27</sup>

Hobbs argues that the story of Rahab does not qualify as an example of traditional hospitality in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>28</sup> There is no formal invitation, the guests simply show up on Rahab's doorstep, there is no mention of a meal, nor is there the customary offer of a footbath which we recognize from the iconic descriptions of hospitality in Genesis 18 and 19. The two spies may have come to Rahab's house as customers.<sup>29</sup> In verse 1 it says that they "slept" (*š-k-b*, שכב) in Rahab's house instead of the slightly more neutral "spent the night" (*l-î-n*, ליל), which is what is used in e.g. Genesis 19:2. If this is the case, Rahab's house may have been an inn or a brothel (or both) and this, according to Hobbs, disrupts the pattern of hospitality.<sup>30</sup> Of course Hobbs is right, several of the traditional components are lacking from the story of Rahab and the Israelite spies, however, even if Rahab's relationship with the two spies begins as that of a

25. Hawk 1992; Assis 2004.

26. Cf. Bird 1999.

27. For other examples of financially independent women in the ancient Near East, see Stol 2016: 363-387.

28. Hobbs 2001: 23.

29. Cf. Hawk 1992: 90-91, Bird 1999: 106 and Gudme 2014a: 74; contra Assis 2004: 83.

30. Hobbs 2001: 23, footnote 68. There are other examples of stories in the Hebrew Bible that seem to be about hospitality but do not quite fit the mould of Genesis 18 and 19: e.g. Elijah and the widow of Sarepta in 1 Kings 17 and Elisha and the wealthy woman of Shunem in 2 Kings 4 (cf. the discussion in Hobbs 2001: 23-25). Particularly relevant to the topic of this paper is Queen Esther in the Book of Esther, who hosts several feasts (Duran 2006: 65-84). I wonder if special rules apply to Esther, because she is an extraordinary woman, a queen, and therefore almost comparable to Wisdom personified in Proverbs 8-9 (see below).

madam or an innkeeper and her customers, Rahab quickly goes far beyond the call of duty and jeopardizes her own safety and that of her family when she hides the two spies from the King of Jericho's men. Rahab offers protection to two strangers who have come into her home and regardless of whether they came to her as customers or guests, Rahab's gift of shelter and protection initiates a chain of reciprocal exchange that results in Rahab and her family being welcomed as resident aliens and special friends of the people of Israel (Joshua 6:25). Therefore, I would argue that we should count Rahab's story as an example of hospitality in the Hebrew Bible, albeit an unconventional one.<sup>31</sup>

My final example is the well-known female personifications in Proverbs 9, Lady Wisdom (*hokmôt*, חכמות) and Lady Folly (*'ēšet kēsîlût*, אֵשֶׁת כְּסִילוּת). In this text, the theme of hospitality is obvious as it is applied in parable form to illustrate the fate of the wise and the foolish respectively: the wise man accepts Lady Wisdom's invitation to enter her house and to sit at her table and dine on meat dishes (literally "slaughtering", *ṭibhāh*, טַבַּחָה, v. 2) and well-mixed wine. The fool on the other hand goes to Lady Folly's meager meal of "stolen water" and "counterfeit bread" (literally "hidden/covered", *sētārîm*, סֵתָרִים, v. 17). In a way, Lady Folly and her literary 'sister' the Strange Woman are examples of the rule that one should not even consider accepting an invitation from a woman.<sup>32</sup> As the text repeatedly warns us, to enter these women's homes is to walk straight into the depths of the underworld. The Strange Woman's house leads to death (Proverbs 2:18 and 7:27) and to accept an invitation to dine with Lady Folly is to sit at Death's table (9:18). Lady Wisdom, on the other hand, may be the only acceptable exception to the rule. It has often been noted that Lady Wisdom's behavior in Proverbs 8-9 falls rather short of what one would expect from a proper wife in the Hebrew Bible. She runs around outside her house and shouts at strangers passing by. Strictly speaking, her behavior is no better than that of the Strange Woman and Lady Folly and doubtless that is part of her appeal, but if one should ever accept an invitation from a woman it seems that this woman should be Wisdom personified.

## 6. Conclusion

In conclusion, I think there is sufficient evidence in the Hebrew Bible to conclude that the right to offer hospitality is a privilege that is reserved for men. If women encounter a deserving stranger, the right way to act is to notify a male relative who can then extend an invitation. The wrong way to do it is exemplified by the very dramatic account of Jael and Sisera in Judges 4, and by the Strange Woman and Lady Folly in Proverbs. The exception is Rahab the prostitute, who defers to no man and therefore is free to invite whom she will. This means that the hegemonic masculine ideal in the Hebrew Bible includes the right to offer hospitality and the right to enter into reciprocal relationships by means of hospitality.<sup>33</sup>

So why are women excluded from offering hospitality in these texts? Is it simply a matter of protecting male privilege in a patriarchal societal structure? I think there are two main interrelated reasons for this custom: First, it has to do with the sexual purity of the women of the household and thus with the

31. Another example of an independent woman offering hospitality in the Hebrew Bible is the necromancer from Tekoa in 1 Samuel 28. In many ways, her case is very similar to Rahab's: she is also a professional woman, Saul seeks her out because of her profession, but she goes beyond the call of duty when she slaughters a calf and prepares a meal for him.

32. For a discussion of the identity of the strange woman in proverbs, see Estes 2010.

33. Wilson 2015: 43–44.



honour of the household and its patriarch as a whole. Because hospitality is such a risky transaction that exposes the women of the household to potentially threatening and predatory outsider-males, hospitality as a social mechanism has to be closely controlled by the male head of the household. The second reason has to do with reciprocity. Since women are frequently among the objects that are exchanged in cycles of reciprocity where hospitality plays a part, it shouldn't be surprising that they are prevented from acting as subjects as well.

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## “The Disposable Wife” as Property in the Hebrew Bible

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The Hebrew Bible, a corpus of writings copied and revised for up to 500-700 years prior to its canonization, is characterized (according to feminist scholars) by its “phallogocentric nature...in which female characters have been silenced by their male creators.”<sup>2</sup> These writings were part of a larger enterprise to consolidate the identities, cult, and ethnicities of Judaeen communities in the post-exilic and Second Temple periods. In view of the idealized memories preserved, scholars of biblical and rabbinic literature employ speech-act theory to highlight the “illocutionary force,” of the biblical language, especially in its depiction of gendered roles.<sup>3</sup> In this context the biblical accounts do not reflect any specific historical realities of women,<sup>4</sup> even though evidence of their position elsewhere in archaeological records is minimal.<sup>5</sup> What is clear, however, is that wives and daughters in ancient Near Eastern societies were subordinate to the male authorities in their households, where “the theme of ‘male dominance’ is almost a universally attested fact.”<sup>6</sup> Consequently the lives of women were restricted to a much greater

1. Translations from the Hebrew Bible are from *JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh: The Traditional Hebrew Text and the New JPS Translation* (Second Edition. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1999).

2. Bach 1999: xvi. Tal Ilan’s (2006) more precise account of the silencing of Jewish women in the Hellenistic and Roman periods is richly informative of this process.

3. Cheryl Anderson (2004: 6–7) and Michael Satlow (1996: 273–274) respectively.

4. Notably where the earliest accounts of Judaeen women, from the Aramaic Papyri at Elephantine, indicate their significantly greater rights. See “Mibtahiah and Her Husbands: A Family of Note During the Reign of Artaxerxes I,” in Méléze-Modrejewski (1996: 26–35), Azzoni (2013: 3–13), and Tamber-Rosenau (2016: 491–510).

5. Katz 2006: 84, Meyers 2012: 171–179.

6. Malul 2002 :349. Likewise, Sophie Démaire-Lafont (2011: 110–111) explains: “Speaking about women on the basis of legal texts leads us ultimately to speak primarily about men. Female subjects always appear in relation to a man, whether father, brother, master, or husband. This is also true for the royal families. Hence, we could consider women ‘eternal minors’ subjected to masculine power and at times treated like exchangeable objects, especially in the marital context.” See further Brenner-Idan 1994, repr. 2015: 132–133 and Marsman 2003: 701–738.

degree than that of men, where “husbands had exclusive financial, sexual, and legal jurisdiction over their wives and fathers over their daughters.”<sup>7</sup>

The purpose of this paper is to explore the status of the freeborn daughter and wife, in view of this sexual jurisdiction, to address the question: “Why then do Israelite texts speak of wives and husbands’ relationship to wives in a way that implied to some scholars that wives were property, particularly in cases where sexuality is concerned?”<sup>8</sup> This response will examine the biblical conceptions of property, in order to provide a fresh engagement with those texts which do indicate that a daughter was “explicitly *sexual* property acquired from the father’s sexual expenditure and his own family bloodline, not by economic transaction.”<sup>9</sup>

### 1. *Property and Legal Ownership*

In its most basic sense, property “refers to anything that may be possessed or become the subject of ownership.”<sup>10</sup> This was understood also in biblical tradition, where “property is defined as an object or entity which a person owns, legally possesses or over which he/she has the power of disposal.”<sup>11</sup> Such entitlement, however loosely enforced, was recognised by the main sources (and/or scribal schools), responsible for the early versions of the Hebrew Bible, whose treatment of the daughter and wife, in both law and narrative, preserves all the constituent elements for the administration of property rights:

“Property is the institution through which a society assigns rights in resources. One function of social organizations—and in particular of governments—is to administer these rights: to define the right in question, assign it to a holder or holders of title, and enforce the right against others. These functions were just as important in ancient times as they are today. It is not surprising, therefore, that the biblical texts deal extensively with issues of property.”<sup>12</sup>

These criteria were integrated deeply in the often repetitive, and sometimes conflicting, biblical laws. Their emphasis on the appropriate demarcation of land, via injunctions prohibiting the removal of

7. Bidmead 2014: 404. This *status quo* is not precluded by the fact that limitations on a son, who was below the age of maturity, and an adult male slave similarly existed.

8. Lemos 2015: 236, also as 2017: 77. In this discussion, however, the differentials between concubines, secondary, or slave wives, will not affect the main contours of the argument; although see further Pressler (1993, 1998: 147–172), Westbrook (1998: 214–238), Jackson (2007: 39–52), Kriger (2011), and Jacobus (2013: 55–75).

9. Rashkow 2003: 254. This is separately demonstrated by Eve Levavi Feinstein’s (2014: 159) extensive study of the language of ritual pollution, in which she concludes “Males pollute, and females are polluted. This idea dervies the notion that women are the sexual property of men.” See also Laffey 1990: 158–160.

10. Parisi 2010: 383.

11. Dearman’s definition (1988: 1) was applied exclusively to the eighth century prophets, including Amos, Hosea, First Isaiah, and Micah. In an alternative definition from the discipline of evolutionary biology, Wilson and Daly (1992: 289) additionally observe that is only men, but not women, who have regularly asserted entitlement claims with respect to their spouses. (cited in Jacobs 2014 repr. 2015: 3, 4, 221–225).

12. Miller 2015: 175. This conforms to definitions from contemporary legal jurisprudence, cited in Lemos 2015: 228–230.

boundary stones, together with the myriad of provisions regulating inheritance and succession, reflected the acute need “to define the right in question, assign it to a holder or holders of title, and enforce the right against others,”<sup>13</sup> on behalf of the adult, Israelite, male. Legitimate property acquisition was crucial for a nation of escaped slaves, who, by their own account, had dispossessed the indigenous inhabitants of their land, where “in order to impose a theoretical framework on the political reality of the conquest of Canaan, the narrator adopted the paradigm of property law, and for that purpose reduced a political unit, the nation, to the level of the unit that was more properly associated with property law—the family.”<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, the background of the biblical scribes centred on the patrilineal principle, where genealogy and lineage, together with material inheritance, were passed along the male line. In this context the writings of the biblical scribes were grounded in the patrilineal principle, so that genealogy and lineage, together with legitimate inheritance and succession, are passed along the male line.<sup>15</sup> For this reason the sexual fidelity of a man’s wife was fundamental to ensure rightful paternity and, thereby, the succession of his legitimate male heirs.

## 2. *Female Sexuality and Patriarchal Restraints*

Such ideals were inculcated also in the symbolism of creation metaphors, where the relationship between the body and the natural world informed the ancient perceptions of human origins.<sup>16</sup> Symbolically the creation of the mankind was rooted in the relationship between human and agricultural fertility, which drew on the figure of a (male) farmer, planting a seed in the ground, evoking man’s insemination of his seed into the body a woman:<sup>17</sup> this image was recalled in the Hebrew designation of female as נקבה, and was derived from the verb נקב, meaning “to pierce, or bore through.”<sup>18</sup> In line with associations of horticultural fertilization the representation of the female body, likened to a fallow field ripe for planting, was essentially passive, where also her sexual availability was concomitantly restricted.<sup>19</sup> These restrictions become apparent in light of the laws of rape and seduction, which clarify “the right in question,” namely a husband’s right of exclusive sexual access to his wife, and similarly a father’s right to control the sexual access to his daughter. Hence the “holder or holders of title,” (i.e. a

13. As Miller 2015: 175.

14. Westbrook 1991: 23.

15. Hendel, Kronfeld and Pardes 2010: 82. See also Hiers 1993–1994: 121–155.

16. As Simkins 2014: 40, but also in relation to cognitive behavioural theory, where George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1999) argue that the mind is hard-wired (or “embodied,”) to such a degree that our perceptions draw instinctively on the physicality of our bodies, and the environments they inhabit (Jacobs 2014, repr. 2015: 2).

17. As highlighted by the synonymous use of זרע meaning “seed,” which is used both in the sense of “semen” and “offspring,” in the Hebrew Bible and the Dead Sea Scrolls. This did not preclude the use of other ecological euphemisms for sexual intercourse, and where “the flowing of water makes much sense when one recalls the widespread idea of the gods inseminating the earth by their semen = rain, see e.g. Isa. 45:8, Hos. 14:6,” (Malul 2002: 122), where the symbolism was evoked in the Akkadian *mû*, meaning both “water,” and “semen.” (Black, George and Postgate 2000: 213).

18. Brown, Driver and Briggs (2000: 666); see also Brenner 1997: 12.

19. “Therefore, just as a farmer marks off soil into a field and guards it against outside intrusion, an honorable man would cover and protect his wife (and daughters, and sisters by extension), and thereby bring order to her fecundity and safeguard the legitimacy of his paternity.” Simkins 2014: 51.

husband or father), could “enforce the right against others,” via recourse to these laws, where inappropriate sexual access to an unmarried daughter, infringed only her father’s legal rights, unlike that of married woman, whose sexual promiscuity (or violation) infringed only that of her husband.<sup>20</sup> These requirements provide substantial support for the claim that a father’s authority was both absolute and unconditional,<sup>21</sup> where the biblical laws perpetuate such control over his daughters.<sup>22</sup>

This is readily apparent in the requirement for the compensation of a father, whose daughter had been raped, and where her assault was represented exclusively as an infringement of his property rights in Exodus 22: 15–16 and Deuteronomy 22: 28–29.<sup>23</sup> These did not prohibit sexual assaults upon women, but rather provided the acceptable penalties for such acts (be they forced, or by means of seduction) with no further restraint of the rapist. Harold Washington maintains that in these sources the woman’s body is treated like a fungible object, i.e. an item that is replaceable by money, or objects of equivalent value, and concludes: “To treat a woman’s bodily integrity as if it were a sort of exchangeable commodity erases here as a legal subject. An asset, moreover, is properly fungible when the possessor herself receives compensation in exchange for it. Here, however, it is not the woman but her father who receives the payment.”<sup>24</sup> This was also the case in relation to Leviticus 19: 29, which states “Do not degrade your daughter and make her into a harlot, lest the land fall into harlotry and the land be filled with depravity.” Here an awareness that men were known to prostitute their own daughters, is fully apparent. In his analysis of this law, Joseph Fleishman concludes that the injunction addressed general prostitution and extramarital sex, rather than cultic prostitution associated with Canaanite rites, “because prostitution and its consequences constituted a threat to the very existence of Israelite society.”<sup>25</sup> Not only is a daughter’s lack of choice and personhood demonstrated by these provisions, but also her complete (bodily) subjugation to the authority of her father.<sup>26</sup>

### 3. *Acquisition and the Language of Possession*

In this context there was a significant range of expressions employed to identify the acquisition of property, albeit that there was no “proper word” for marriage in the Hebrew Bible,<sup>27</sup> since the rite was

20. Since she was “not as an autonomous subject whose rights, (i.e., the right to refuse a sexual advance) must be protected, but as an object within the domain of her husband, whose prior claims—namely to sexual exclusivity—must be respected.” Kawashima 2011: 2.

21. Stiebert 2013: 19.

22. Fleishman 2011: 3.

23. See Pressler 2001: 102–112 and Jackson 2006: 382.

24. Washington 1996: 211; also Exum 1995: 248–271, Berlin 2009: 95–112 and Koller 2010: 276–296.

25. Fleishman 2011: 171. His detailed analysis includes evidence of such actions in B/E 6/2, 4, from the reign of Rim-Sin of Larsa (1822–1763BCE); BE 14,40, dated to 1312 BCE; records from Nuzi including AASOR 16.23 (adoption contract), AASOR 16.51 (royal proclamation), HSS5,11 (division of property) and SMN 1670 (paternal transfer of daughter to temple as prostitute). Here Fleishman’s preference for extolling the Pentateuch’s superior moral values over and above their ancient Near Eastern precursors, is understandably avoided in light of this law. See further Jacobs 2016: 159–161.

26. As Kawashima 2011: 1–22.

27. Jackson 2006: 381.

only weakly institutionalized in its laws.<sup>28</sup> Nor are records of any marriage contracts preserved in this corpus, although the brief mention of divorce documents, does suggest that marriage papers also existed.<sup>29</sup> Thus the general term for tangible, moveable, objects is indicated by the form רכש, meaning “to collect or gather property, and was used to denote substantial wealth.”<sup>30</sup> Both in nominal and verbal forms this was applied exclusively to the ownership of moveable possessions, livestock, or booty, but never to chattel, debt-slaves, children or wives, as clarified in Appendix 5:1. In terms of human possessions, however, it is only the “chattel slave,”<sup>31</sup> who qualified as full legal property, rather than any free-born family members, i.e. wives, children, or siblings, even though a Hebrew man, his wife, and children, could be sold as debt slaves.<sup>32</sup> Chattel slaves are commonly identified as foreign nationals acquired by purchase, as suggested by the accounts in Genesis 37:28, 39:1, Leviticus 25:44, Psalms 105:16-18, or potentially also as war captives.<sup>33</sup> Accordingly no Hebrew daughter, either before or after her marriage, would have the same status as a chattel slave, even if she was subsequently sold as a debt-slave to another man. This is a significant distinction, albeit one where the overlap between the authority of a father, *vis-à-vis*, the rights of her husband, was never entirely clear-cut, as Raymond Westbrook explained:

“The husband is sometimes called his wife’s ‘master’ (Akk. *bēlu*; Heb. *’adon*), a term that can refer to legal ownership but is looser than ‘owner’ in modern law.<sup>34</sup> If in dire financial straits, a husband was entitled to pledge his wife or sell her into slavery. It is true that she did not cease to be his wife, as she would have ceased to be his property. Still, these powers demonstrate that, to some extent, the authority of a husband and the rights of an owner overlapped. Ancient jurisprudence recognised their commonality and at the same time, set limits by the exclusive nature of marriage as a status with its own special rules.”<sup>35</sup>

In addition, all the terminological Hebrew variants, which are indicative of a marital relationship, reinforce the representation of the father and husband as the (active) subjects who assert control of their (passive) daughters and wives, as shall now be identified.

28. Since “biblical law is interested in sex, not marriage—and prohibited sex at that.” (Jackson 2010: 340), but also because “marriage, like inheritance, is a ‘social’ rather than ‘legal’ institution.” (Jackson 2007: 50).

29. Ebeling (2010: 85) notes Deuteronomy 24:1, Isaiah 50:1, and Jeremiah 3:8 here.

30. As Brown, Driver, Briggs (2000: 94) to include “great wealth,” ברכש גדול in Genesis 15:14; similarly 31:18, 46:6, Ezra 8:21, 10:3, Daniel 11:28 (with ברכוש רב “much baggage,” in Daniel 11:13); see also 2 Chronicles 31:3, 32:29.

31. Magdalene and Wunsch 2011: 117.

32. As in the case of a male Hebrew debt slave (עבד עברי) in Exodus 21:2). See 1 Kings 9:22, with sources in Appendix 5:2, and discussions in Chirichigno 1993, Westbrook 1995, Wright 1997: 125–142, Jackson 2006: 79–119, and Magdalene and Wunsch 2011: 117–118.

33. Implied by Deuteronomy 21:10–14 (as Jacobs 2012: 237–257 and Reeder 2017: 313–336).

34. Although the occurrence of אדון, as “husband,” is rare, as in Judges 19:23:

she collapsed at the entrance of the man’s house  
where her husband was

ותפל פתח בית האיש  
אשר אדוניה

35. Westbrook 2003: 47.

### 3.1. *Acquisition of Wife: With בעל as “Master” or “Owner”*

First, there is the nominal form בעל, meaning “master” or “owner,” as in האיש בעל הבית “the owner of the house,” which designates a woman’s husband,<sup>36</sup> rather than her biological, or adoptive, father, and is indicative of legal ownership.<sup>37</sup> In its (masc.singular) construct form, with the third person feminine singular pronominal suffix, בעלה literally “her master,” is translated as “husband.”<sup>38</sup> In its verbal forms, ובעלתה, “and possess her,” appears in Deuteronomy 21:13 in the third person, masculine singular, *qal* perfect, and with the first person (masculine singular) in Jeremiah 31:32; with third person (singular and plural) imperfect forms in Isaiah 62:5.<sup>39</sup> Here the rights of a husband are predicated in the ownership, or possession, of his wife:

Genesis 20:3

“You are to die

because of the woman that you have taken,  
for she is a married woman.”

הנך מת  
על האשה אשר לקחת  
והוא בעלת בעל

Exodus 21:3

if he had a wife

אם בעל אשה

Exodus 21:22

as the woman’s husband may exact from him

כאשר ישית עליו בעל האשה

Leviticus 21:4

kinsman by marriage

בעל בעמיו

Deuteronomy 21:13

after that you may come to her  
and possess her, and she shall be your wife.

ואחר כן תבוא אליה  
ובעלתה והיתה לך לאשה

Deuteronomy 22:22

another man’s wife

אשה בעלת בעל

Deuteronomy 24:1

[When] a man takes a wife and possesses her.

כי יקח איש אשה ובעלה

Deuteronomy 24:4

The first husband

בעלה הראשון

Isaiah 62:5

36. Malul (2002: 239) suggests “to control, own, be a master, a husband.” See additionally Hugenberger 1994: 309 and Malul 2005: 158-159.

37. Exodus 22:7 identifies the בעל הבית as “owner of the house,” Exodus 21:28 ובעל השור “owner of the ox,” Exodus 21:34 בעל הבור “owner of the pit,” etc.

38. In 2 Samuel 11:26, Proverbs 31:11, 31:23, 31:28; with the third person feminine plural suffixes בעליהן (“their husbands”) in Esther 1:17 and in 1:20, with the preposition: וכל הנשים יתנו יקר לבעליהן: “and all wives will treat their husbands with respect.”

39. Joel 1:8 additionally provides על בעל נעוריה “for the husband of her youth,” and Proverbs 30:23 witnesses the *niphal*, third person, feminine singular, imperfect:

A loathsome woman who gets married;  
A slave-girl who supplants her mistress.

תחת שנואה כי תבעל  
ושפחה כי תירש גברתה



As a youth espouses a maiden	כי יבעל בחור בתולה יבעלוך
Your sons shall espouse you	יבעלוך בניך
And as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride,	ומשוש חתן על כלה
So will your God rejoice over you.	ישיש עליך אלהיך
Jeremiah 3:14	
Since I have espoused you, I will take you.	אנכי בעלתי בכם ולקחתי אתכם
Jeremiah. 31:32	
It will not be like the covenant	לא כברית
I made with their fathers,	אשר כרתי את אבותם
when I took them by the hand	ביום החזיקי בידם
to lead them out of the land of Egypt,	להוציאם מארץ מצרים
a covenant which they broke	אשר המה הפרו את בריתי
though I espoused them.	ואנכי בעלתי בם

### 3.2. Acquisition of Wife: With נתן “give” and לקח “take”

Second, the acquisition of a woman as a wife, rather than slave, was indicated by “the reciprocal juridical expressions ‘give a wife’ (*natan l’iššah*) and ‘take a wife’ (*laqaḥ l’iššah*), corresponding to the Babylonian *martam ana aššutim nadanu* and *aššatam aḥazu* respectively. This language clearly defines the woman as an object, rather than independent subject or agent within the marriage agreement.”<sup>40</sup> The Hebrew equivalents of these transactions are explicit in the following sources:

“I will give my daughter (in marriage),” and variants thereof: ונתתי לו את בתי		
Genesis 34:8	Please give her to him in marriage.	תנו נא אתה לו לאשה
Genesis 34:12	Ask of me a bride-price ever so high as well as gifts and I will pay what you tell me; only give me the maiden for a wife.	הרבו עלי מאד מהר ומתן ואתנה כאשר תאמרו אלי ותנו לי את הנער לאשה
Genesis 38:14	For she saw that Shelah was grown up, yet she had not been given to him as wife.	כי ראתה כי גדל שלה והוא לא נתנה לו לאשה
Exodus 22:16	If her father refuses to give her to him he must still weigh out silver in accordance with the bride-price for virgins.	אם מאן ימאן אביה לתתה לו כסף ישקל כמהר הבתולת ויאמר כלב
Judges 1:12, <sup>41</sup>	And Caleb announced I will give my daughter Achsah in marriage to the man who attacks and captures Kiriath-sepher	ונתתי לו את עכסה בתי לאשה אשר יכה את קרית ספר ולכדה
Judges 1:13	His younger kinsman, Othniel the Kenizzite, captured it	וילכדה עתניאל בן קנו אחי כלב הקטן ממנו

40. Levine 1997–2001: 90; see also Démaire-Lafont 2011: 115.

41. With parallels in Joshua 15:16-18.

	and Caleb gave him his daughter Achsah in marriage.	ויתן לו את עכסה בתו לאשה
Judges 1:14	When she came [to him], she induced him to ask her father for some property	ויהי בבואה ותסיתהו לשאול מאת אביה השדה ותצנח מעל החמור
Judges 1:15	She dismounted from her donkey, and Caleb asked her, "What is the matter She replied, "Give me a present, <sup>42</sup> for you have given me away as Negeb-land."	ויאמר לה כלב מה לך ותאמר לו הבה לי ברכה כי ארץ הנגב נתתני
2 Kings 14:9	Give your daughter to my son in marriage.	תנה את בתך לבני לאשה
Ezra 9:12	Now then, do not give your daughters in marriage to their sons, or let your daughters marry their sons. <sup>43</sup>	ועתה על תתנו בנותיכם לבניהם ובנותיכם על תשאו לבניהם
Nehemiah 10:31 negates this form with "we will not give our daughters in marriage to the people of the land," and similarly Nehemiah 13:25.		
"He took [for] himself a wife." <sup>44</sup> לקח לו לאשה		
Genesis 11:29	Abram and Nahor took to themselves wives	ויקח אברם ונחור להם נשים
Genesis 12:19	Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' so that I took her as my wife?	למה אמרת אחתי הוא ואקח אתה לי לאשה
Genesis 24:67	And he took Rebekah as his wife.	ויקח את רבקה ותהי לו לאשה
Genesis 34:4	"Get me this girl as a wife."	קח לי את הילדה הזאת לאשה
Exodus 6:20	Amram took his father's sister Jochebed to wife.	ויקח עמרם את יוכבד דדתו לו לאשה
Exodus 6:25	And Aaron's son Eleazar took to wife one of Putiel's daughters	ואלעזר בן אהרן לקח לו מבנות פוטיאל לו לאשה
Deut 24:4	Then the first husband who divorced her shall not take her to wife again.	לא יוכל בעלה הראשון אשר שלחה לשוב לקחתה להיות לו לאשה אחרי
Hosea 3:2	Get yourself a wife of whoredom.	קח לך אשת זנונים
Nehemiah 7:63	.....who had married a daughter of Barzillai the Gilleadite, and had taken their name. <sup>45</sup>	אשר לקח מבנות ברזלי הגלדי ויקרא על שמם

42. Where the regular translation of ברכה would be "blessing," rather than present.

43. It is tempting to suggest a formal distinction between the above two terms, although given the fluid, and often informal nature, of marriage, this would be misleading.

44. For an overview of the full semantic range of this verb "from which one may infer the kind of relationships that are believed to underlie the institution of marriage in biblical times," see Meir Malul 2002: 156–158, 206 (156). Tracy Lemos (2015: 235) adds that: "This language, while treating women as legal objects, is *not* commercial language in any sense."

45. In this translation the Hebrew "who has taken" has been replaced with the English "had married."

Further variations appear in Genesis 20:3, 24:48, 25:20, 28:6, 28:9, 31:50, Exodus 21:10, Leviticus 20:14, 20:17, 20:21, 21:14, Numbers 12:1 (twice), Deuteronomy 21:11, 22:14, 23:1, 24:3, 24:5, 25:5, 25:7, 25:8. Judges 14:3, 14:8, 15:6, 1 Samuel 25:39, 25:43, 2 Samuel 12:9, 1 Kings 7:8, Ezekiel 16:61, Ezra 2:61, 1 Chronicles 4:18 and 7:15. As Deuteronomy 24:4 (above), negation appears also in Genesis 24:3 (“you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites”), Genesis 28:1, Leviticus 18:17 and Deuteronomy 7:3.

### 3.3. Acquisition of Wife: With קנה “to acquire”

Third, where the verb קנה, meaning “to acquire,” was also employed by the biblical scribes, and as “the primary usage of *qānā* is concrete, and economic, and remains so through the period of spoken Hebrew as a contract from Murabba’at proves (Mur 20:23). The verb *qānā* refers to the acquisition of chattels or real estate and therefore functions as an antonym of →מכר *mākar* ‘sell’.”<sup>46</sup> Its use covered the purchase of land, fields, and vineyards,<sup>47</sup> livestock,<sup>48</sup> material objects,<sup>49</sup> and chattel slaves,<sup>50</sup> in addition to claims of divine ownership,<sup>51</sup> where its designation of the acquisition of a wife is restricted to the book of Ruth:

	“I have acquired/ purchased a wife for myself.” <sup>52</sup> קניתי לי לאשה	
Ruth 4:5	Boaz continued, “When you acquire the property from Naomi and from Ruth the Moabite, you must also acquire the wife of the deceased.”	ויאמר בעז ביום קנותך השדה מיד נעמי ומאת רות המואביה
Ruth 4:9	“You are witnesses today that I am acquiring from Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech and all that belonged to Chilion and Mahlon.”	[קניתה]אשת המת קניתי עדים אתם היום כי קניתי את כל אשר לאלימלך ואת כל אשר לכליון ומחלון מיד נעמי
Ruth 4:10	“I am also acquiring Ruth the Moabite, the wife of Mahlon, as my wife.”	וגם את רות המואביה אשת מחלון קניתי לי לאשה

In this context it is also clear the use of קנה meaning “to acquire a wife,” was neither uniform nor standardized, prior to its designation of marriage by purchase in early rabbinic Judaism,<sup>53</sup> and where מהר

46. Lipiński 2004: 59.

47. Although the participle מקנה כסף “purchase price” was used both for land (Genesis 23:18, 20) and chattel slaves in Genesis 17:12–13, 23, 27, Exodus 12:44, Leviticus 25:16–51.

48. Where the participle מקנה *miqneh* denoted livestock exclusively (Lipiński 2004: 64).

49. Including timber, stone, a loin cloth, jugs, as well as unspecified possessions (Lipiński 2004: 59).

50. i.e. “a person who is a priest’s property by purchase,” as Leviticus 22:11a.

51. Here “the relatively late acceptance of ‘El, owner of the earth,’ by the cult of Yahweh is of great theological interest,” where Lipiński (2004: 62–3) identifies the reception of the term in Genesis 14:19, 22, Judith 13:18, and 1QapGen 22:16–21), in light of Western Semitic inscriptions.

52. On the legal significance of this verb, see Halivni Weiss 1964: 224–228 and Graetz 2000: 175–186.

53. In response to the issues raised by Tracy Lemos (2015: 235), the fact that the account in Ruth 4:1–10 does not meet the requirements indicated in Genesis 38 or Deuteronomy 25:5–10 does not invalidate meaning of the Hebrew language in this exemplar, given that the narratives in the Hebrew Bible rarely conform precisely to the dictats of its laws. Here it may be more

ימהרנה previously translated as the “bride-price,” or “bridewealth,”<sup>54</sup> functions as a constituent element of Israelite marriage rites.<sup>55</sup> Finally, there is the variant, להשיב נשים, which might equally imply “by dwelling with” foreign women in this instance:

Nehemiah 13:37	.....breaking faith with our God by marrying foreign women.	להשיב נשים נכריות
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Before concluding this analysis of the biblical language of acquisition, it is suggested that the representation of a woman’s body as the property of her husband, and/or father is evident in one further legal context: In the decalogue, where the Israelites are instructed: “You shall not covet your neighbour’s house; you shall not covet your neighbour’s wife, or his male or female slave, or his ox or his ass, or anything that is your neighbour’s.”<sup>56</sup> In this instance the association of the Israelite wife is on par with the female slave, ox, and ass, as but one item of property belonging to a male neighbour. This does not affect her personal status as a free-born wife, but it does reinforce the patriarchal conception of her personhood as an object of her husband’s property. Nor is it possible to suggest that this was an exceptional association, or an editorial error, given the fact that this wording is identical in both versions of the decalogue.

#### 4 “The Disposable Wife” and Other Narratives

It is also clear that these prerogatives were by no means limited to the genre of law. In terms of biblical narrative, while “there is, in fact, no biblical text that speaks of a man selling his wife, nor of transferring ‘ownership’ of her to another man,”<sup>57</sup> there are accounts in which a husband provides other men with immediate sexual access to his wife, without formally divorcing her. Not forgetting those informative tales of fathers who transferred their married daughters to other men.

Thus in the plot-line of the “disposable wife” narratives,<sup>58</sup> it is the sexual availability (and desirability) of the matriarchs which enables the patriarchs to masquerade their wives as their sisters—in Genesis 12:10–20 (Abram / Sarai / Pharaoh), 20:1–14 (Abraham / Sarah / Abimelekh, King of Gerar) and 26:2–11 (Isaac / Rebekah / Abimelekh). These wife-sister narratives are presented as variations on a theme, or derivatives of one original plot, i.e. “a thrice-told tale,”<sup>59</sup> in which the patriarchs display no

realistic to admit that a diverse range of enforceable rules was available in any single area of law. See Jacobs 2014 repr. 2015: 14–15, as suggested first by Démare-Lafont 1994: 115–118.

54. Where the term “bride-price” “fell out of favour in anthropological circles decades ago.” Lemos 2010: 3

55. Lemos 2010: 40.

56. Exodus 20:14, as Deuteronomy 5:21 (MT 5:19).

57. Lemos 2015: 235.

58. David J. A. Clines (1994: 70) was the first scholar to claim that Sarai was both disposable and expendable in relation to the fulfillment of the divine promises to Abram, in Genesis 12:10–20; Tikva Frymer-Kensky (2002: 93–98), later published her treatment, titled “The Disposable Wife.” See more recently Brett 2012: 49–59.

59. Pederson 1973: 43; or as Joosten (2010: 375) describes Genesis 12:10–20, as “a text with a false bottom.”

sense of reluctance at surrendering their wives’ honour, let alone exposing them to sexual relations with other men. That this was not exemplary behaviour for any ancestral hero, let alone the patriarchal ancestor *par excellence*, can be seen by the reception of these accounts in the early Second Temple period. Here Genesis Apocryphon provides a first person account of how Abraham is advised in a dream to carry out this subterfuge: a suggestion that would be indicative of divine inspiration to audiences in the Second Temple period.<sup>60</sup> This extra, but highly significant, detail conveniently eliminates all implications of immorality or cowardice.<sup>61</sup> Nor would there be any need to question Isaac’s motives, where the assumption would be that he was, similarly, inspired. And even if not: his actions could be justified as being modelled on those of his exemplary father.

Such prerogatives rise to the fore again, first in the Judges 15:1–2, where Samson, returning to Timna in order to visit his Philistine wife, was told: “I was sure,” said her father, “that you had taken a dislike to her, so I gave her to your wedding companion.” Paternal authority is, again, apparent in the historiographical account of 2 Samuel 3:13–15: “David sent messengers to Ish-bosheth, son of Saul, to say, “Give me my wife Michal, to whom I paid the bride-price of one hundred Philistine foreskins.” So Ish-bosheth sent and had her taken away from [her] husband, Paltiel the son of Laish. But her husband went with her, weeping as he went, and followed her as far as Bahurim.” Here it is not Michal’s husband (Paltiel the son of Laish) who is giving his own wife away, but her brother Ish-boshet, on behalf of their father Saul. Yet both narratives speak volumes not only about a daughter’s status, rights, and choices (or lack of), but where the authority of a husband can be subsumed to that of his father-in-law, notably (in the case of 2 Samuel 3:13-15) when that father-in-law was his king.<sup>62</sup> The underlying assumptions conveyed by these narratives confirm the view that while neither a daughter or wife constituted chattel property, she remained a transferrable asset that a father, or husband, could unilaterally gift, or sell, precisely as Ilona Rashow concluded:

“On the one hand, daughters are property belonging exclusively to the father,<sup>63</sup> like Laban’s daughters, Leah and Rachel, they are bartered for economic profit. And as the Genesis narrative of Jacob’s daughter Dinah makes clear, rape is not considered a violation of the daughter so much as a theft of property from her father that necessitates compensation to him. On the other hand, although the daughter is clearly regarded as legal property inside the family, she is not a commodity to be bartered in the same way as an ox or an ass. She is explicitly *sexual* property acquired from her father’s sexual expenditure and his own family bloodline, not by economic transaction.”<sup>64</sup>

60. 1 QAP Gen ar Column XX lines 1–21. See also Weinfeld’s (2005: 195–199) fascinating discussion.

61. See Hindy Najman’s (2010: 140–153) account of the ideological need for such “whitewashing.”

62. See further Neimann 2015: 237–247.

63. Footnoted at this juncture, Rashkow explains “since it is the father who controls the exchange of women, the woman most practically available to be exchanged is not the mother, who sexually belongs to the father, nor the sister, who comes under the bestowal rights of her own father, but the daughter.” Rashkow 2003: 254, n. 10.

64. Rashkow 2003: 254.

So in response to the question: “Why then do Israelite texts speak of wives and husbands’ relationship to wives in a way that implied to some scholars that wives were property, particularly in cases where sexuality is concerned?”<sup>65</sup> It is because the diverse writings that constitute the Hebrew Bible, present them as such: From the patriarchal narratives, the Covenant and Deuteronomic legal collections, both decalogues attributed to the Priestly scribes, together with the books of Joshua, Judges and the historiographies that narrate the events surrounding Saul and David. And while more nuanced hierarchical approaches are certainly the way forward, these cannot negate the meaning of Hebrew sources themselves. From the designation of a husband as בעל, “master” or “owner,” to the “give” and “take” of a daughter in marriage, alongside the acquisition of a concubine,<sup>66</sup> it is clear that the body of a daughter (as that of a wife), was considered a disposable asset, albeit one that could not be sold as chattel. In this context all constituent elements of property ownership were fully integrated in the laws and narratives of the biblical scribes, including the desire “to define the right in question, assign it to a holder or holders of title, and enforce the right against others.”<sup>67</sup> As such a daughter and wife belonged conventionally to her father, or husband, who remained at liberty to gift, sell, or even prostitute, her.<sup>68</sup> This is not invalidated by the fact that neither a free-born daughter or wife had the same legal status as that of a chattel slave. Nor would this *status quo* preclude a daughter or wife’s future sale as a debt slave—in the same way that a free-born son, brother, or husband could, likewise, be sold.

65. Lemos 2015: 236, and as 2017: 77.

66. Listed in Appendix 5: 3.

67. Miller 2015: 175.

68. This is irrespective of whether Leviticus 19:29 was operative, since it is reasonable to assume that the writing and preservation of this law was intended for audiences who were aware that young women could be prostituted by their fathers.

5. Appendix I רכש “To Collect or Gather Property”

5.1. רכש As Unspecified Property

Genesis 13:6

so that the land could not support them staying together  
for their possessions were so great

ולא נשא אתם הארץ לשבת יחדו  
כי היה רכושם רב

Ezra 1:4 itemizes “silver, gold, goods and livestock.” See also Genesis 14:11, 12, 36:7, Ezra 1:6, 8:21, 10:8, and also 2 Chronicles 21:14.

5.2. רכש As Property, which Excluded all Human Possessions, incl. Chattel and Debt Slaves

Genesis 12:5	Abram took his wife Sarai and his brother’s son Lot, and all the wealth that they had amassed, and the persons that they had acquired in Haran.	ואת כל רכושם אשר רכשו ואת הנפש אשר עשו בחרן
Genesis 14:16	He brought back all the possessions; he also brought back his kinsman Lot and his possessions, and the women and the rest of the people.	וישב את כל הרכש וגם את לוט אחיו ורכשו השיב וגם את הנשים ואת העם
Genesis 14:21	Then the king of Sodom said to Abram, “Give me the persons, and take the possessions for yourself.”	ויאמר מלך סדם אל אברם תן לי הנפש והרכש קח לך
Numbers 16:32	And the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up with their households, all Korah’s people, and all their possessions.	ותפתח הארץ את פיה ותבלע אתם ואת בתיהם ואת כל האדם אשר לקרה ואת כל הרכוש
2 Chronicles 21:14	Therefore, the LORD will inflict a great blow upon your people, your sons, and your wives, and all your possessions.	הנה יהוה נגף מגפה גדולה בעמך ובבניך ובנשיך ובכל רכושך
2 Chronicles 21:17	They marched against Judah breached its defences, and carried off all the property that was found in the king’s palace, as well as his sons and his wives.	ויעלו ביהודה ויבקעוה וישבו את כל הרכוש הנמצא לבית המלך וגם בניו ונשיו

5.3. Appendix 2: Sale and Purchase of Hebrews as Debt Slaves

מכר / קנה Sale or Acquisition by Purchase:

Exodus 21:2	When you acquire a Hebrew slave	כי תקנה עבד עברי
Exodus 21:4	If his master gave him a wife and she has borne him children, the wife and her children shall belong to the master.	אם אדניו יתן לו אשה וילדה לו בנים או בנות האשה וילדיה תהיה לאדניה

Deuteronomy 15:12	If a fellow Hebrew, man or woman is sold to you.	כי ימכר לך אחיך העברי או העבריה
Joel 4:3	And they bartered a boy for a whore And sold a girl for wine, which they drank.	ויתנו הילד בזונה והילדה מכרו בין וישתו
Nehemiah 5:5	Now our flesh is as good as the flesh of our brothers, and our children are as good as theirs; yet here we are subjecting our sons and daughters slavery some of our daughters are already subjected and we are powerless. <sup>69</sup>	והנה אנחנו כבשים את בנינו ואת בנותינו לעבדים ויש מבנותינו נכבשות ואין לאל ידנו
Nehemiah 5:8	We have done our best to buy back our Jewish brothers who were sold to the nations; will you now sell your brothers so that they may be sold [back] to us.	אנחנו קנינו את אחינו היהודים הנמכרים לגוים כדי בנו וגם אתם תמכרו את אחיכם ונמכרו לנו

#### 5.4. Appendix 3: Acquisition of Concubine

Genesis 16:3	So Sarai, Abram's wife, took her Egyptian maid, Hagar ..... and gave her to her husband Abram as concubine. <sup>70</sup>	ותקח שרי אשת אברם את הגר המצרית שפחתה ותתן אתה לאברם אישה לו ..... לאשה
Genesis 30:4	So she gave him her maid Bilhah as concubine, and Jacob cohabited with her.	ותתן לו את בלהה שפחתה לאשה ויבא אליה יעקב
Genesis 30:9	She took her maid Zilpa and gave her to Jacob as concubine.	ותקח את זלפה שפחתה ותתן אתה ליעקב לאשה
Judges 19:24	Look, here is my virgin daughter and his concubine. Let me bring them out to you. Have your pleasure of them, do what you like with them	הנה בתי הבתולה ופילגשהו אוציאה נא אותם וענו אותם ועשו להם הטוב בעיניכם

69. Although Tracy Lemos (2015: 235) notes, "However, Neh 5:5 speaks of the selling of sons as well as daughters, and so the question of whether or not daughters could be sold seems to be related more to whether children were considered property than whether or not women were property." Yet here the above sources clarify that all individual Hebrews (men, women, and children), could be sold as debt slaves, if the need arose. The point about Nehemiah 5:5 is that in the event of sudden hardship it is the daughters who appear to be get sold first, before the sons.

70. This translation of אשה as "concubine," (as also that of Genesis 30:4) is not reflected in the Hebrew, which would be פילגש, as in Judges 19:24, 25. See also Genesis 22:24, 25:6, 35:22, 36:12, 2 Samuel 3:7, 5:13, 15:16, 16:21, 22, 19:6, 20:13, 21:11, I Kings 11:3 and Esther 2:14.





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## Women in the Hebrew Bible: Real or Literary Characters? The Case of Some Matriarchs in Genesis

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Some of the matriarchs of the Bible, such as Sarah, Rebecca, Leah and Rachel, may represent real characters; but they are, at the same time, literary creations. Taking this as my starting point, in this paper I aim to analyse what is real in the description of their stories and actions, and what can be attributed to the imagination of the Exilic authors, who would not necessarily have been aware of the cultural context of their ancestors. To do so, I will explore certain aspects of these matriarchs as portrayed in the Bible, taking into account their cultural context and considering a variety of sources, namely the Biblical text itself and a selection of cuneiform texts found mainly at Mari and at other sites in western Mesopotamia. Via this comparison, I hope to show that the authors, presumably Judean priests in Babylon, used and managed the information they had for a theological-historical purpose—the explanation of the presence of the elite of Judah in Babylon—using a combination of literary and “historically plausible” elements to build up their narrative. In fact, it is the possibility of comparing the two kinds of documentation that enables us to distinguish between potentially real features and literary ones.

With this goal in mind, in this article I will concentrate on three characters. First, I consider Sarah’s and Abraham’s treatment of Hagar. Second, I focus on Rachel, and show she faced a situation similar to that of Rebecca. Third, I deal with Rebecca, analysing the portrayal of her choice of a heir for her husband, Isaac.

### 1. *The Hypothesis*

The story of Hagar and Sarah and the story of Rachel, who hides the *terafim* she has stolen from her father, Laban, both seem plausible—if not historically accurate, then at least they correspond to what

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Jean-Marie Durand calls *réalités amorites*<sup>2</sup> in the context of the ancient Near East. As with most of the tales that tell the story of ancient Israel before the division of the kingdoms, it is absolutely impossible to propose even an approximate date for these stories; the events may have taken place in the third millennium BC, or in the second, or in the first. The construction of the stories themselves seems also impossible to date. Scholars must take into account all the existing literature that describes these “Biblical traditions” and the corresponding “Amorite realities”, which arise from the comparison of certain Biblical stories with cuneiform texts—above all the ones found at the site of the Tell Hariri, the ancient city of Mari, in present-day Syria.

## 2. Sarah

All the Biblical stories that we will refer to are well known. Given the Bible’s status as a dogmatic text, over the centuries (and even millennia) none of them were questioned until relatively recently. That is to say, until some two hundred years ago, it was assumed that all the stories of the Bible were historical. In fact, even 150 years ago, the Bible was the only known text that spoke of the ancient Near East.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, the ignorance of the history of the area was not due solely to Judeo-Christian dogma, but also to the lack of any other texts that described the events. This panorama changed radically in the middle of the nineteenth century, with the excavation of texts and monuments that would shed light on the different cultures that developed in Semitic Asia and in ancient Egypt.<sup>4</sup>

Sarah, wife of Abraham, is barren and cannot have children.<sup>5</sup> She obtains a slave woman for her husband so that, through her, the couple can have a child. This slave is Hagar, who bears Abraham an heir, Ismael. The Bible tells us that, over time, and proud of having borne Abraham a son, Hagar loses respect for Sarah. In response, with Abraham’s approval, Sarah sends Hagar and her son away into the desert. But Yahweh takes pity on them and saves them. The story of Hagar’s pride and her expulsion into the desert with Ismael is told twice in the Bible, once before Sarah gave birth to Isaac and once afterwards.

Interpreted literally inside our Judeo-Christian and Western culture, this story is very hard to account for. In spite of the evident injustice, both in the field of more orthodox Judaism and Christianity, scholars have tried to justify Sarah’s and Abraham’s treatment of Hagar, and they have found it hard to do so. The

2. See Durand 1998: 3–39.

3. We should mention here Flavius Josephus (37–ca. 100 CE), who describes the history of the war of Judah against Rome, in *The Jewish War*, in which he had a leading role. But nothing of what he explains concerning the history of ancient Israel, *Antiquities of the Jews*, has to be taken into consideration, provided that he repeats what is written in the Bible. In the *Antiquities of the Jews*, he outlines Jewish history beginning with the creation, as passed down through Jewish historical tradition. Another historian, prior to Josephus, is Herodotus (ca. 484–ca. 425 BCE), but his commentaries concern the Jews of his own time. The commentaries of Maneto (ca. IVth–IIIrd century BCE), referred to by Josephus, concerning the origins of the Jews, are completely false.

4. These discoveries suddenly brought to light groups such as the Hittites, Hurrians, Urartians, Kassites, Elamites, and others, most of them completely unknown until then—giving perhaps not a richer vision of the ancient Near East but certainly a more diverse one. Vid., for example Kuhrt 1995: 118ff., 225ff., 283ff., 332ff., 365ff.; Liverani 1988, especially pp. 427ff., 481ff., 602ff.; Van De Mieroop 2004: 141ff., 197ff.;

5. In Gen 16 and ff.



earliest attempts were made by the Rabbinic commentators of the Bible, who justified the acts of Sarah and Abraham because of the idolatry of Ismael, the firstborn of Abraham with Hagar, the slave-girl.<sup>6</sup> Later, in the XIXth and XXth century, literary commentaries of the Bible couldn't understand the acts of Sara elsewhere and Abraham towards Hagar, in the light of modern, and western, humanism. In this field of literature, especially in XXth century, many writers suggest that Sarah's and Abraham's behaviour is highly reprehensible, see, for example, the novels of Margaret Laurence, *The Stone Angel*, Toni Morrison, *Song of Solomon*, Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*; or the nonfiction book by Charlotte Gordon, *The Woman Who Named God: Abraham's Dilemma and the Birth of Three Faiths*. But already in the XIXth Century, a more sympathetic portrayal of Hagar became prominent, especially in America, see for example Nathaniel Parker Willis, *Hagar in the Wilderness*, or Augusta Moore, *Hagar's Farewell*.

In the XIXth and XXth century, the discovery and decipherment of cuneiform texts help explain the story within its own context. The customary legal framework offered couples who could not have children (or more precisely women who could not have children) a number of possible courses of action to obtain the desired descendant, in order to pass on their inheritance and, above all, in order to have someone to care for them in their old age and perform the funeral rituals needed to guarantee their survival in the underworld. There were two ways to do this. First, they might adopt, or second the husband might beget a son with a secondary wife or a slave; the child of this union would, for legal purposes, be the child of the married couple.<sup>7</sup>

### 3. Rachel

Rachel stole the *teraphim* of her father Laban, and hid them, lying to both her father and her husband. The *teraphim* were the family gods (*ilaba*) and, by taking possession of them, Rachel wanted to ensure that her son would be the heir of his father, Jacob, and that it would be stated in Jacob's will that Joseph will receive two shares of the inheritance, while ten of his brothers would receive only one. Joseph's position above his brothers is clear when he receives the blessing of his father Jacob in Genesis 49:25–26:<sup>8</sup>

“25 *Even* by the God of thy father, who shall help thee; and by the Almighty, who shall bless thee with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lieth under, blessings of the breast, and of the womb:

6. Vid. *Bereshit Rabbah*, 53:11; *Targum Neofiti* (*TgN Gn* 21,9); *Tosefta Sotah* (*tSot* 5,12; *tSot* 6,6); *Targum Pseudo Jonatan* (*TgPsJ Gn* 21,10–13).

7. See the abundant documentation on adoptions and marriages with slaves to provide children to sterile couples both in the cuneiform documentation and in the Bible, in Westbrook 1988. Vid. also Justel 2014: 27ff., 226ff. Apart from the story of Sarah, Hagar and Abraham, there are more examples of slaves that produce children for a patriarch in the history of Jacob and his 12 children. Jacob's two spouses, Leah and Rachel, at some time in their lives were sterile, and provide Jacob with their slaves, Bilha and Zilpa, so that they might bear him children in Genesis 30:3–12. See Justel 2012: 191–207.

8. The translation of the Bible used in this article is that of the Official King James Bible online, <https://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/>.

26 The blessings of thy father have prevailed above the blessings of my progenitors unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills: they shall be on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of him that was separate from his brethren.”

Earlier, in chapter 48, Jacob blessed the two sons of Joseph—Ephraim and Manasseh, and so it is assumed that each one of them received the inheritance as if each one were a tribe of Israel. Thus, Joseph received two parts of his father’s inheritance, which is the heir’s prerogative. The same distribution is also made later of the territory of Canaan when it was conquered by the Israelites. Ephraim and Manasseh each received one part of the land, that is two parts of Jacob’s inheritance.<sup>9</sup> As is well known, Levi did not receive a specific territory, but his descendants, who would form the priestly caste, would own cities in the territory of their brothers.

There are many features that indicate that this story could be based on real events. While there is no way to know if this story is historical, certain features are historically plausible. The cuneiform texts tell us that families possessed deities of their own (probably deceased ancestors) which acted as guardians.<sup>10</sup> The person in charge of guaranteeing their worship of these divine figurines was the head of the family, usually the child designated as heir by his or her parents. The *teraphim*, the Biblical word used to designate these guardian deities of the family, has a very clear parallelism with the *rpum* which appear in Ugaritic texts. There is a ritual-myth in Ugarit in which the *rpum*, *Rapaūma / Rephaim* and the *mlkm* (kings) appear in the canonical list of the pantheon of Ugarit. The *Rephaim* are deified heroes, and among these *Rephaim* are the *mlkm*, the deceased and deified kings of Ugarit—both the real and the mythical kings. The deity *Šapšu* is presented as the patron of these gods, since she visits the world of the dead every day when she sets in the west, and during the time she takes to return to the east where she rises again. These *Rephaim*, which are not the kings of Ugarit, would be the hero *Danilu* and his son *Aqhatu*. Besides *Yahipānu* and *Ṭamaqu*, attendants to the god *Ilu*. And it seems that the patron of *Rephaim* would be Ba‘alu, but Ba‘alu is not a *Rephai*—the term refers only to deceased humans who have become gods.<sup>11</sup>

Another important sign that the story is a late creation is the false etymology of the name of Jacob. Etymologies, more or less real, are common in many stories in Genesis. It is said that Jacob’s name comes from the root *‘qb* “heel”, when, in fact, the name comes from a root *‘qb*, but with the meaning of “protection”; this is common in the form of western Semitic onomastics which we find in the cuneiform sources.<sup>12</sup>

9. See Numbers 32: 33–41 and Numbers 34: 16–23.

10. They were even deified, see Alberz and Schmitt 2012: §5.4.3.1. p. 350, following the thesis proposed by K. van der Toorn in 1996. Cf. also the so-called god *Ilaba*, that is in origin the dead ancestors, deified, “The god (or gods) of the ancestors”, vid. Durand 2008 : 185 “*Il-aba* («Dieu-du-Père», écrit généralement de façon traditionnelle *il-a-ba4*) qui est une figure du «dieu des Ancêtres», incarnation du culte familial”, p. 304 “dieu familial («de la maison du père»), p. 646, *Il-aba* (var. *Ilab*) “Dieu de la famille”.

11. See *Keilschrifttexte aus Ugarit (KTU)* 1.20–22.

12. See, for example, the Palaeo-Babylonian onomastics of the archive of Mari, especially the slightly dated onomastic list in *ARM* 16, 1979, where proper names with this root are abundant.

These and other stories, while not historical as such, include accurate contextual details. In contrast, other stories of the patriarchal account, in my opinion, seem to be “created” for a particular purpose in a particular situation. Some of them are highly literary, or even purely literary. Many stories in this patriarchal account attempt to offer etiological explanations for certain known traditions. This is the case, for instance, of the etiological account that tries to explain the relationship between Israel and Edom, and why Edom is not part of the pact with Yahweh.<sup>13</sup> However, some of these etiological stories do not correspond to the “réalités Amorites” mentioned by J.-M. Durand, of which we find parallels in the Mari documentation; in fact, there seems to be little doubt that some of these stories are literary fiction.

It is not my intention to discuss all the passages that might reflect this idea, nor have I carried out a thorough search of these passages. Rather I would like to refer to one story in the book of Genesis, in the patriarchal account. This is the story of Isaac denying his blessing to Esau, his first-born, because he has already given it to Jacob, Esau’s brother. What is especially interesting in this episode is the role played by Rebecca, the mother of both sons.

#### 4. *Rebecca*

Rebecca is the wife of Isaac, who is also her cousin. They are parents of two male twins, Esau and Jacob, who were already fighting in their mother’s womb; at the time of their birth, they fought to try to be the first to see the light. The story goes as follows:

Gen 25:22–26

“22 And the children struggled together within her; and she said, *If it be so, why am I thus?* And she went to enquire of the LORD.

23 And the LORD said unto her, Two nations *are* in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and *the one* people shall be stronger than *the other* people; and the elder shall serve the younger.

24 And when her days to be delivered were fulfilled, behold, *there were* twins in her womb.

25 And the first came out red, all over like a hairy garment; and they called his name Esau.

26 And after that came his brother out, and his hand took hold on Esau's heel; and his name was called Jacob: and Isaac *was* threescore years old when she bare them.”

As adults, Esau, the first-born twin, angered both his parents and Yahweh by marrying foreign women. One day, Esau returned hungry from hunting and saw that his brother Jacob was eating a plate of

13. There are quite a number of etiological explanations or accounts in the Bible, especially in the patriarchal narratives, which serve to explain traditions or situations whose origin is unknown. An example, also “literaturized”, explains the origin of polygamy, or the story of the first man to practise it. Lamech, a descendant of Cain, appears in chapter 4 of Genesis, when the genealogy of Cain is given. This is the first time that polygamy appears in the Bible; it is said that Lamech had two wives, and the text gives us the name of the children they bore him. This short episode ends with a well-known claim: Lamech, who like Cain has killed a man, says that if his ancestor had to be avenged seven times, if someone killed him, he would have to be avenged seventy times. The story serves to introduce polygamy very early in the history of humanity. Like virtually all the stories in the first ten chapters of Genesis, this episode was most probably conceived in Babylon after the exile of Judah.

lentils. Esau asked him to give him some; Jacob said that he would if, in return, Esau granted him the right to be their father's heir. Esau, without really thinking what he was saying, made this promise and ate the lentils. Some time later, when Isaac felt the moment of death approaching, he called Esau to prepare him to receive his paternal blessing. Rebecca heard this and devised a plan to allow her favourite son, Jacob, to receive the blessing from Isaac.

Gen 27:1–45

“1 And it came to pass, that when Isaac was old, and his eyes were dim, so that he could not see, he called Esau his eldest son, and said unto him, My son: and he said unto him, Behold, *here am I*.

2 And he said, Behold now, I am old, I know not the day of my death:

3 Now therefore take, I pray thee, thy weapons, thy quiver and thy bow, and go out to the field, and take me *some* venison;

4 And make me savoury meat, such as I love, and bring *it* to me, that I may eat; that my soul may bless thee before I die.

5 And Rebekah heard when Isaac spake to Esau his son. And Esau went to the field to hunt *for* venison, *and* to bring *it*.

6 And Rebekah spake unto Jacob her son, saying, Behold, I heard thy father speak unto Esau thy brother, saying,

7 Bring me venison, and make me savoury meat, that I may eat, and bless thee before the LORD before my death.

8 Now therefore, my son, obey my voice according to that which I command thee.

9 Go now to the flock, and fetch me from thence two good kids of the goats; and I will make them savoury meat for thy father, such as he loveth:

10 And thou shalt bring *it* to thy father, that he may eat, and that he may bless thee before his death.

11 And Jacob said to Rebekah his mother, Behold, Esau my brother *is* a hairy man, and I *am* a smooth man:

12 My father peradventure will feel me, and I shall seem to him as a deceiver; and I shall bring a curse upon me, and not a blessing.

13 And his mother said unto him, Upon me *be* thy curse, my son: only obey my voice, and go fetch me *them*.

14 And he went, and fetched, and brought *them* to his mother: and his mother made savoury meat, such as his father loved.

15 And Rebekah took goodly raiment of her eldest son Esau, which *were* with her in the house, and put them upon Jacob her younger son:

16 And she put the skins of the kids of the goats upon his hands, and upon the smooth of his neck:

17 And she gave the savoury meat and the bread, which she had prepared, into the hand of her son Jacob.

18 And he came unto his father, and said, My father: and he said, Here *am I*; who *art* thou, my son?

19 And Jacob said unto his father, I *am* Esau thy firstborn; I have done according as thou badest me: arise, I pray thee, sit and eat of my venison, that thy soul may bless me.

20 And Isaac said unto his son, How *is it* that thou hast found *it* so quickly, my son? And he said, Because the LORD thy God brought *it* to me.

21 And Isaac said unto Jacob, Come near, I pray thee, that I may feel thee, my son, whether thou *be* my very son Esau or not.

22 And Jacob went near unto Isaac his father; and he felt him, and said, The voice *is* Jacob's voice, but the hands *are* the hands of Esau.

23 And he discerned him not, because his hands were hairy, as his brother Esau's hands: so he blessed him.

24 And he said, *Art* thou my very son Esau? And he said, I *am*.

25 And he said, Bring *it* near to me, and I will eat of my son's venison, that my soul may bless thee. And he brought *it* near to him, and he did eat: and he brought him wine, and he drank.

26 And his father Isaac said unto him, Come near now, and kiss me, my son.

27 And he came near, and kissed him: and he smelled the smell of his raiment, and blessed him, and said, See, the smell of my son *is* as the smell of a field which the LORD hath blessed:

28 Therefore God give thee of the dew of heaven, and the fatness of the earth, and plenty of corn and wine:

29 Let people serve thee, and nations bow down to thee: be lord over thy brethren, and let thy mother's sons bow down to thee: cursed *be* every one that curseth thee, and blessed *be* he that blesseth thee.

30 And it came to pass, as soon as Isaac had made an end of blessing Jacob, and Jacob was yet scarce gone out from the presence of Isaac his father, that Esau his brother came in from his hunting.

31 And he also had made savoury meat, and brought it unto his father, and said unto his father, Let my father arise, and eat of his son's venison, that thy soul may bless me.

32 And Isaac his father said unto him, Who *art* thou? And he said, I *am* thy son, thy firstborn Esau.

33 And Isaac trembled very exceedingly, and said, Who? where *is* he that hath taken venison, and brought *it* me, and I have eaten of all before thou camest, and have blessed him? yea, *and* he shall be blessed.

34 And when Esau heard the words of his father, he cried with a great and exceeding bitter cry, and said unto his father, Bless me, *even* me also, O my father.

35 And he said, Thy brother came with subtlety, and hath taken away thy blessing.

36 And he said, Is not he rightly named Jacob? for he hath supplanted me these two times: he took away my birthright; and, behold, now he hath taken away my blessing. And he said, Hast thou not reserved a blessing for me?  
Etc.”

It is interesting to see how the cuneiform texts describe inheritance practices. In the legal texts the heir is designated by his parents and is normally the first-born. The possessions of the mother are usually

distributed equally among all the children. But the father's possessions are not divided equally: the daughters receive their share of the paternal inheritance at the moment they receive the dowry (if they receive one); the sons all receive a part of the inheritance of the father, except for the son who has been designated heir, who receives twice as much as each of his brothers.

The cuneiform texts make several things clear: it is the parents, or the father, who must choose the heir (*bukru*) from among the sons, that is the son who will receive twice the normal inheritance. The heir may be any one of the sons, although it is usually the first-born. The parents may disinherit their children if there are sound reasons for doing so. The son appointed heir (*aplu*) also receives the *teraphim* (*ilaba*), the family's divine guardians. In general, the firstborn is the main heir of his father, and he receives a double share of the inheritance, but we see in the Bible that in general it is not the firstborn who is the heir of many patriarchs.<sup>14</sup> And the same could be said of the Mesopotamian customary law, for, in the Laws of Hammurabi, the *aplum* doesn't seem to be necessarily the firstborn.<sup>15</sup>

In the Bible, on the other hand, in the story of Isaac, Esau and Jacob the choice of the heir takes on an almost supernatural dimension, and the father's wish is overruled by the sacralizing effect of the utterance of the word. The impression is that the story has several elements, and that not all of them have a grounding in historically plausible events. Nor do all the elements appear to be old, or to form part of the "réalités Amorites".

An analysis of the most important elements and the protagonists of the story identifies some common, perhaps even universal, features in the folklore of our cultural environment. As a character, the Biblical patriarch Isaac appears to be at the mercy of his family members, particularly when compared to more forceful patriarchs like Abraham, Jacob, or even Lot. The only thing that he has in common with the majority of the patriarchs is a wife with a strong personality and capacity for leadership. Many other episodes of the story of Isaac and Rebecca are highly literary, see for example the meeting of Rebecca and Eliezer, the servant of Abraham that is seeking for a wife for his master's son, at the verge of a pit. In the Bible we find the same motive in the meeting between Moses and Sipporah. Both episodes finish with the marriage of the young people, Rebecca and Isaac, in Genesis 24, and Sipporah and Moses in Exodus 2:15–22.

In the story of Isaac, the central role of Rebecca is perhaps the most important feature, along with Isaac's passivity. However, this is not the feature that suggests the story is pure fiction. On the contrary, as I just noted, Rebecca's role and character recall the spouses of most of the patriarchs, such as Sarah, Leah and Rachel —proud women who were well aware of their importance and that of their lineage. What makes me think that this episode is literature is the story of Esau's sale of the *bakhratum*, the status as heir, to Jacob, and the role played by Rebecca in the episode: the role of the evil woman, the bad mother, the manipulator ... the witch.

As I have suggested, according to the cuneiform documentation, the heir is the son chosen by the father (or the parents), and is usually, but not necessarily, the first-born. Therefore, Esau is not

14. See, in the patriarchal narrative, the cases of Isaac and Ismael; Jacob and Esau; and Joseph and Reuben, as explained above.

15. Vid. Roth 1995: 113–114, §170. But Stol 2004: 708ff, assumes that the firstborn is the main heir. Vid also Durand 2013: 2.4 p. 54 "la notion de «fils aîné» semble en fait le choix ultime du père, non le constat d'un ordre naturel".

automatically his father's heir. The Biblical history even suggests that Esau is not worthy of being his father's heir because he has married foreign women, against the wishes of his parents. In a way, this behaviour already suggests that what Rebecca and Jacob will do is justified—justified even by Yahweh.

In light of the cuneiform documentation, especially, but also in the light of recent theories that date the writing of the Bible to the Exile in Babylon around the sixth century BC, the earliest text of the Hebrew Bible was possibly written at the end of the seventh century, around 620 B.C., on the occasion of the so-called Josias reform. The majority of the texts would be written in the Exile in Babylon, and maybe some proto-texts would be fixed as early as the eighth century B.C.<sup>16</sup>

I believe that the passage in which Esau sells his father Isaac's inheritance to his brother Jacob, with Rebecca organizing everything behind the scenes, is a literary creation. The story has all the elements of a fairy tale—clichéd characters in the form of a wicked witch and a helpless sick old man who is her victim. The other victim of manipulation and deception, Esau, is young and strong, but he allows himself to be robbed without the slightest protestation. Esau and Isaac are the good men, the victims who are deceived. Interestingly, their personalities are barely developed at all; they are one-dimensional characters. Jacob, the beneficiary, is also young (and cunning) but in the episode of the sale of the *bakhratum*, he is also an instrument in the hands of his mother, Rebecca, who is the story's absolute protagonist. Rebecca presents many of the characteristics of a stock character of a fairy tale: she is an old woman, merciless, manipulative, stubborn and mendacious, and with her lies she obtains a benefit for her favourite son. Isaac and Esau, the good men, are easy to manipulate and show no initiative. Jacob is astute like his mother Rebecca, but is also manipulated by her. The narrator introduces us to Rebecca in such a way that the reader (or listener) of the story automatically understands that she is to blame for everything—and that even Jacob, the great beneficiary of the scheme, is just putty in her hands, and is therefore innocent as well.

## 5. Conclusion

In this paper I aimed to confirm, through the analysis of several case studies, two hypotheses which were the starting points for my research. First, Sarah's actions seem to be better grounded in social reality than Rebecca's, which are basically shaped as literary fiction. Second, Rachel's narrative shares traits with the stories of Sarah and Rebecca, presenting a balance between historically plausible events and literary features.

Even though literary fiction is an ingredient not present with the same proportion in all the stories here taken into consideration, it seems clear that they all take as starting points stereotyped tropes that employ standard characters of fairy tales recognizable in our cultural environment. Thus, we find, for

16. Vid. Römer 2014: 18–19 “Il est possible que les premières traditions du Pentateuque (Jacob, Moïse, et plus tard Abraham) aient été mises par écrit aux alentours du VIII<sup>e</sup> siècle avant notre ère”. A critic of the traditional theory of the four Documents of the Pentateuch, that dates the redaction of the earliest texts of the Hebrew Bible (Jahwist Document) in the IX<sup>th</sup> Century, can be found in de Pury and Römer 2002: 9–80.

instance, the old and ill (even blind) father as the easy victim of cunning and evil characters, including their own wives. The sons, too, conform to stereotypes. In the story of Rebecca, for instance, the two sons compete constantly with each other, already fighting in their mother's womb. Nonetheless, these brothers (like their father) are victims of the main character, Rebecca, portrayed as astute and wicked. At first glance, only Esau appears to be a loser (he loses the inheritance) and Jacob a winner (he wins the inheritance). However, a closer look allows us to recognize Jacob as a loser as well, as he has to flee from the family and he loses, consequently, father, brother and mother.

We also find in these stories the character of the old woman playing the role of a witch, the most evil and astute of female characters. Rebecca exemplifies this character, as she is portrayed as old and as wicked or, at least, as someone who is performing an evil action that causes harm to some innocent, such as the father, old and blind, and Esau, the victim of the deceit who is stripped of the inheritance. As happens in fairy tales, too, the witch is punished at the end of the story. In this case the punishment is losing her sons, both the one harmed and the one favored by the fraud. Rebecca is not going to see any of them anymore. However, despite the similarities to the traditional evil and astute women of fairy tales, the character of Rebecca has two features that distinguish her. First, Rebecca is not an independent woman. Second, even if she has no scruples to perform the infamous act, she receives no direct benefit from it, as the benefit is for her favourite son.

Finally, the stories here discussed not only contain characters borrowed in one way or another from fairy tales, but they are also coherent stories in the main framework of the patriarchal history, where Yahweh chooses those following the laws imposed by him. These laws, compiled in the Deuteronomy, were applied in the time of the Babylonian exile or immediately after. In the construction of these stories, the creators drew upon their own experiences and cultural background, and existing tales in surrounding cultures, including neighbors such as Babylonian and Indo-Iranian peoples, and those more distant, like Egyptians. All in all, it is clear that the narrators were well acquainted with the psychology of their audience; their readers or listeners had no difficulty in identifying each of the characters or in understanding the moral of the story.

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## A World of Possibilities: Jerusalem's Women in the Iron Age (1000–586 BCE)

Beth Alpert Nakhai<sup>1</sup>

The study of women in Iron II Israel (1000–586 BCE) is one that has developed more slowly than might be expected.<sup>2</sup> The rich textual material in the Hebrew Bible, and the hundreds of Iron Age sites that have been excavated in modern-day Israel and the Palestinian Authority, together provide ample—if not comprehensive—resources for reconstructing women's lives.<sup>3</sup> However, it is only in the past three or four decades that scholars have focused their attention on Israelite women.<sup>4</sup>

This is not to say that in the past, (overwhelmingly male) scholars have not reflected on biblical women, but rather that their (infrequent) reflections have often been garbed in the biases inherent in their own eras and personal views. As such, most of their publications have supported their personal visions of life, which require situating women within an (inaccurately reconstructed) biblical patriarchy that serves to justify male supremacy. At the same time, they have looked to women in the Bible as paradigms of model behavior—or as exemplars of deplorable behavior—that is, as providing support for their own views of women and of life.<sup>5</sup>

Change in the modern era began with a series of publications in the 1970s and beyond; grounded in biblical studies, they scrutinized traditional scholarship into the Hebrew Bible and New Testament and examined each book from historical, text critical, and contemporary perspectives.<sup>6</sup> Most relevant for this

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3. Nakhai forthcoming.

4. Nakhai 2005, 2007, 2018.

5. For discussion, see *inter alia* Bird 1974; Fontaine 1997; Milne 1997: 48–55.

6. For early examples of women's scholarship on women, see Cady Stanton 1895; Aguilar 1889; see also, *inter alia*, Christ and Plaskow 1979; Bird 1997; Brenner and Fontaine 1997; for an overview, see Marsman 2003: 1–31.

discussion is Phyllis Trible's 1973 "Eve and Adam: Genesis 2–3 Reread," which examined the roles of Eve and Adam in the Garden of Eden (Gen 2:4b–3:24) and offered a revolutionary new way of thinking about ancient women. According to Trible, "...the Yahwist [the tenth–ninth-century BCE author(s) of this Genesis narrative: BAN] account moves to its climax, not its decline, in the creation of woman. She is not an afterthought; she is the culmination."<sup>7</sup> A decade and a half later, Trible's call to arms yielded its first (archaeological) fruits. Carol Meyers' 1988 *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* was the first to integrate the Bible and archaeological data with the goal of reconstructing women's lives.<sup>8</sup> It is significant that Meyers and others have focused their reconstructions of women's lives on the rural sector and on women's contributions to Israel's subsistence economy. This can, perhaps, be attributed to the fact that the story of Eve and Adam provided the narrative structure upon which both Trible and Meyers based their analyses.<sup>9</sup> This story begins in an idyllic garden but the outcomes of Eve's brave quest for knowledge are that humans must be clothed and food must be grown, and that the earth from which livestock graze and food grows will forever be cursed. In this way, agriculture and the production of food and clothing became the foundations for research into archaeological explorations of women's lives in Iron Age Israel.

Other factors have also contributed to the focus on women and the subsistence economy. First, of course, are our sources of information, the Hebrew Bible and archaeology. The Hebrew Bible, in profound ways, reflects Israel's agrarian and pastoralist foundations. The richness of the natural world and the dependence of Israel's people upon it are intrinsic to biblical prose (e.g. Deut 8:7–10) and poetry (e.g. Ps 128), to law (e.g. Deut 24:19–22, 26:1–4), and even to love (e.g. Song 7:1–9). The Book of Ruth is paradigmatic. It is through Ruth's experience at the harvest that the customs and mores of Israelite society are laid bare.<sup>10</sup> Thus, women and agriculture are irrevocably bound together in a story that is among the Bible's best known and most beloved, a story that illuminates the ancestral roots of Israel's founding king, David.

Archaeologists have excavated some 200 Israelite and Judaeen four-room houses, as the archetypal Iron Age house is known.<sup>11</sup> This quintessential dwelling was not only the home in which families ate, slept, and raised their children, but also the workplace in which food was prepared and textiles produced, the storage place for food products and occasionally animals, and the setting for religious rituals. Women were household residents, workers, and managers, and for all these tasks—and more—they were lauded (e.g., Proverbs 31:10–31). This means that most commonly, scholars have situated Israelite women within four-room houses, focusing on domestic tasks and by extension, on the labor that provided the agricultural and pastoral products essential for their work. For such reconstructions, the archaeological

7. Trible 1973: 251–52.

8. Meyers 1988; rev. 2013.

9. Most recently, see Meyers 2014.

10. Boaz, a male head of household, major landowner and kin to the widowed Naomi, fulfills his familial responsibility by caring for Ruth, Naomi's widowed daughter in-law. He does so by ensuring that Israelite laws designed to protect the poor and marginalized, the widowed, the kin group, and the foreigner, are enforced, during the busy harvest season. For contemporary reflections on the Book of Ruth, see Kates and Twersky Reimer, eds. 1994.

11. Shiloh 1970; Bunimovitz and Faust 2003; Faust 2012: 213–229.

record is replete with pottery, grinding and pounding tools, cooking installations, and implements for spinning and weaving.<sup>12</sup>

Additionally, photographic archives and ethnographic studies of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Palestinian women have been used to reconstruct ancient women's lives. Not by chance, these photos commonly show women engaged in domestic tasks. Although these tasks were not, of course, the totality of women's lives, images of women working in the fields, grinding grain, baking bread, and transporting water are quite common. This is because photographers often posed women in ways that depicted what they, the photographers, believed biblical woman would have looked like, doing the tasks that they imagined they would have done.<sup>13</sup>

Another factor relevant to the focus on women as agricultural workers and domestic producers has been, I would suggest, the modern feminist desire to show that Israelite women were physically and spiritually strong—the very people upon whom Israelite families depended for their survival. I wonder about the extent to which this scholarly effort to cast women as the backbone of their households and communities is a reaction to the mid-twentieth-century view of women as “homemakers” (a term loaded with connotations of passivity and frivolity) rather than as active partners essential to their families' well-being.

What all this has meant for scholarship on Israelite and Judaeen women is that until now, the focus has been on village life and the rural subsistence economy. The intention of this discussion, however, is to shift the focus to the urban setting, that is, to Jerusalem, Israel's capital, its largest and most complex city. Canaanite Jerusalem had been small, but it maintained an international presence. It was cursed by the Egyptians in the Middle Bronze II Execration Texts, while letters from its fourteenth-century king, Abdi-Heba, were found in the Amarna archives.<sup>14</sup> Canaanite control of Jerusalem continued throughout the Iron I. According to the Bible, Jerusalem was acquired from the Jebusites by Israel's second king, David, with the purpose of making it Israel's capital city (2 Sam 5:1–10); this event occurred at the beginning of the Iron II, c. 1000 BCE. Jerusalem did not develop in a traditional way; rather, the people who lived there, at least initially, were people who moved there to engage in governance and to provide goods and services for those government officials. After the death of David's son Solomon, civil war split Israel in two (c. 925 BCE). A new nation, which retained the name Israel, with a new capital city, (eventually) Samaria, was established in the north, while Jerusalem remained the capital of the small southern nation of Judah (1 Kings 12). Throughout the rest of the Iron II, until the Babylonians destroyed it in 586 BCE, Jerusalem served as Judah's capital.<sup>15</sup>

12. *Inter alia*, Meyers 2007; Baadsgaard 2008; Cassuto 2008; Ebeling and Homan 2008; Ebeling 2010; Harding 2010; Panitz-Cohen 2011; Yasur-Landau, Ebeling and Mazow, eds., 2011; Dever 2012: 142–205; Shafer-Elliott 2013; Ebeling and Rogel 2015.

13. Ebeling 2016; Nakhai 2018; G. Eric and Edith Matson Photograph Collection <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/matpc/>; Palestine Exploration Fund <https://www.flickr.com/photos/palestineexplorationfund/with/5226286805/>; Harvard College Library [http://hcl.harvard.edu/libraries/finearts/collections/semitic\\_photo.cfm](http://hcl.harvard.edu/libraries/finearts/collections/semitic_photo.cfm).

14. Maier 2011: 175–182; Reich 2011: 284–290.

15. Throughout the Iron Age, Israelite and Judaeen cities grew at the expense of smaller settlements, as villagers moved to the cities to take advantage of the many opportunities that they afforded (Faust 1999: 245).

Before considering what this meant for women living in Jerusalem, this discussion must include both backstory and caveats. Jerusalem of the Iron Age was small—a hilltop, eventually two hilltops and the hillsides and valleys between. The mountainous ridge of the Judean Hills upon which Jerusalem sits is quite rocky and builders dealt with this by removing earlier structures in order to construct on bedrock. Thus, Israelites stripped the hilltop of much of its Canaanite architecture—and later residents of the city did the same to the structures of the Israelites. Since then, the area in which the Iron Age city stood has been almost continuously occupied and it remains so today. In consequence, neither are there ample remains for excavation, nor is what remains easily accessible to excavators.

The matter of dating similarly bedevils the discussion of Iron Age Jerusalem. Extensive biblical texts, especially those in First–Second Kings, deal with Jerusalem from its founding through its centuries as the capital of Israel and Judah, but controversies about chronology create complications. Particularly relevant is the question of whether passages describing Jerusalem’s founding by David and its development during the reign of his son Solomon are best synchronized with events of the tenth or ninth centuries.<sup>16</sup> This is not the venue for settling these problems; the discussion here follows what has become (after heated discussion) the consensus, that is, that the archaeological data situate the founding of Jerusalem early in the tenth century BCE.<sup>17</sup>

At that time, construction began on Jerusalem’s Southeastern Hill.<sup>18</sup> The lowest hill in the area, it was selected because of its proximity to Jerusalem’s water source, the Gihon Spring in the Kidron Valley. As early as the Middle Bronze Age, guard towers and a wall protected the Siloam Pool, filled by water from the Gihon, while a conduit channeled water to irrigate nearby fields. In addition, the Southeastern Hill guarded the nearby north-south highway.<sup>19</sup>

The Hebrew Bible attributes the construction of Israel’s national sanctuary, the Bet YHWH (House of YHWH; First or Solomonic Temple), on Mt. Moriah, just to the north, to Solomon (1 Kgs 5:1–8:66). Of this structure, nothing remains.<sup>20</sup> The royal palace was situated between the Temple and the City of

16. Irrefutable archaeological evidence for David and his dynasty is found in the ninth-century Tel Dan inscription (A. Mazar 2010: 30).

17. With, *inter alia*, Cahill 2003, 2004; A. Mazar 2010; see also Dever 2001: 124–157; for the low chronology, which places Jerusalem’s rise as a prominent capital city in the first half of the ninth century or later, see Finkelstein 2003, 2011; Ussishkin 2003a, 2003b; Na’aman 2007; Bieberstein 2017: 42–59; for discussion, see Kletter 2004 and esp. p. 45.

18. For recent, comprehensive bibliographies of excavations in Jerusalem, see Galor and Bloedhorn 2013: 293–325; Bieberstein 2017: 135–174.

The archaeological data upon which this brief reconstruction is based derives from site reports and synthetic articles that focus on the archaeology of Jerusalem. They include Kenyon 1967, 1974; Broshi 1974; Yadin 1975; Avigad 1983; Ben Dov 1985, 1995; E. Mazar and B. Mazar 1989; Ariel, ed. 1990, 2000a, 2000b; Ariel and de Groot, eds. 1992, 1996, 2000; Franken and Steiner 1990; Eshel and Prag, eds. 1995; Shanks 1995: 11–103, 2016a, 2016b; Ariel and de Groot 2000; Geva, ed. 2000a, 2000b; Steiner 2001, 2003; Cahill 2003, 2004; Finkelstein 2003, 2011; Geva 2003a, 2003b, 2006, 2014; Lehman 2003; Ussishkin 2003a, 2003b, 2009; Reich and Shukron 2004; Faust 2005, 2014; A. Mazar 2006, 2010; E. Mazar 2006; 2015a, 2015b; Finkelstein *et al.* 2007; Na’aman 2007; Barkay 2009; Reich 2011; de Groot and Bernick-Greenberg 2012a, 2012b; Dever 2012; Galor and Bloedhorn 2013; Ben-Ami 2014; Moyal and Faust 2015; Barkay and Dvira 2016; Bieberstein 2017. Note, as well, the multivolume *New Studies in the Archaeology of Jerusalem and Its Region* ([http://archaeology.tau.ac.il/?page\\_id=4837](http://archaeology.tau.ac.il/?page_id=4837)); and *New Studies on Jerusalem* (<http://lisa.biu.ac.il/en/node/1545>); volumes in both series contain relevant information.

19. Cahill 2003: 21–54; Bieberstein 2017: 24–41.

20. Ussishkin 2009 and references therein.

David throughout the Iron II. It is evidenced by some foundation walls, toppled ashlar masonry, a proto-Aeolic capital, and more than a hundred eighth-century bullae.<sup>21</sup> Solomon also initiated construction of a double wall that surrounded the hilltop city. A zone of elite houses and workshops for metalsmithing and weaving ran along the steep hillside. These include the House of Ahiel, the Bullae House, the Ashlar House, and the Burnt Room House. Farther east, outside the city wall, non-elites resided in a zone of simple houses. Secure and plentiful water for Jerusalem's residents and for their fields was accessed and protected by the system that had been in place since the MBA, so that houses in Jerusalem did not require cisterns.<sup>22</sup> Throughout the tenth to mid-eighth centuries, Jerusalem's population was maybe 2000, in an area of some 40 acres (16 ha.).<sup>23</sup>

Major changes occurred in the last third of the eighth century. In response to repeated Neo-Assyrian assaults on the northern nation of Israel, and to Sargon II's capture of Samaria in 721 BCE, many Israelites fled south to Jerusalem while hinterland Judaeans, also fearful of the Neo-Assyrians, likewise fled to the capital city. A new neighborhood known as the Mishneh was constructed on the Northwestern Hill, to the west of the Temple, and the city wall was extended to encompass this new neighborhood. Archaeological evidence suggests that those who moved into the Mishneh were members of the elite, people with sufficient means to resettle in Judah's capital city. Settlement also spread across the western slope of the Southeastern Hill, while the simple houses east of the city, situated outside the fortification walls, were abandoned.<sup>24</sup> The water system was substantially altered, as King Hezekiah's new tunnel made water from the Siloam Pool accessible from inside the walled city (2 Kgs 20:20).<sup>25</sup> Jerusalem's population increased to perhaps 8,000 people. Together, these many changes added about 100 acres (40 ha.) to the city.<sup>26</sup> A century later, though, the population dropped to approximately 6,000.<sup>27</sup> Ultimately, as a result of attacks early in the sixth century by the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar, Jerusalem and much of Judah were destroyed (2 Kgs 25:1–21).

A few words about Jerusalem's subsistence economy provide some additional background. Located at the eastern edge of the Mediterranean zone, Jerusalem receives rain from November through April, while the rest of the year tends to be dry. Even as the mountains close to Jerusalem are not hospitable to cultivation, farmers in the Iron Age raised grain crops, primarily wheat, in the Soreq and Repha'im Valleys, south and west of the city. In addition, vegetables, olives, grapes, and other fruit were raised locally, including in the Kings' Garden at the southern end of the City of David (2 Kgs 21:18, 26; 25:4). Sheep and goats grazed on the hills east of the city. Gradually, Iron Age Jerusalem came to be surrounded by villages and farmsteads, which supported its large population. Commodities for the palace were

21. E. Mazar 2015a, 2015b.

22. Kenyon 1967, 1976; Shiloh 1984; Franken and Steiner 1990; Ariel and de Groot, eds. 1992, 1996; Ariel, ed. 2000a; Ariel and de Groot 2000; Geva, ed. 2000b; Steiner 2001; Cahill 2003: 54–72; Geva 2003a, 2003b, 2006, 2014; Na'aman 2007; de Groot and Bernick-Greenberg 2012a, 2012b; Bieberstein 2017: 42–84.

23. For Jerusalem's population, see Geva 2006, 2014; Mazar 2010: 34; Shanks 2016a.

24. Broshi 1974; Avigad 1980: 23–60, 1983: 54–55; Faust 2005; Geva 2003b, 2006.

25. Ariel and de Groot 2000: 164–167; Faust 2000; Reich and Shukron 2004; Bieberstein 2017: 71–78; and references therein.

26. By way of comparison, Lachish, which was Judah's second largest city, was some 7 ha. (Moyal and Faust 2015).

27. For Jerusalem's population, see Geva 2006, 2014; Mazar 2010: 34; Shanks 2016a.

obtained from royal estates near the city. Moza, to the west, provided grain and livestock and Ramat Rahel, to the south, provided wine.<sup>28</sup> Other foodstuffs, local and foreign, were also available to Jerusalem's elite, who had access to meat through "leftovers" from the Temple's sacrificial system, and to fish procured from Egypt.<sup>29</sup>

With the broad outline of Jerusalem's complex history and its subsistence economy now established, attention turns to the women who lived in Iron II Jerusalem. This discussion is, in some ways, speculative. Women left little trace in the Hebrew Bible, a composite text containing myriad documents that are in almost all instances both androcentric and elitist. Neither were women kings, nor priests, nor builders, nor warriors, which is to say that other than within the domestic context, their impact on the built environment is difficult to discern. Despite these disclaimers, though, it is feasible to consider the multiple responsibilities that women undertook and the roles that they fulfilled in Iron II Jerusalem. Recourse to the archaeological record and to the biblical material offers numerous insights and raises many intriguing possibilities.

Members of the royal house were Jerusalem's most elite residents. Generally, royal wives were political acquisitions, brought into the palace to solidify foreign treaties and domestic relationships, and to facilitate land acquisitions (e.g., 1 Kgs 9:16; 2 Kgs 8:16–18, 14:8–10; Ps 45). The Jerusalem court scribes, whose records are partially preserved in First and Second Kings, identify eighteen women as mothers of kings; these queen mothers (Hebrew *gevirah*) were the kings' most significant partners, whose sons succeeded their royal husbands to the throne (see Table 1 at the end of this article).<sup>30</sup> Evidence suggests that the queen mothers undertook responsibilities in both the royal household and in the Temple. Bathsheba, for example, facilitated her son Solomon's accession to the throne (1 Kgs 1:11–31) while Maacah is said to have commissioned a statue of Asherah that stood in the Temple for many years (1 Kgs 15:13).<sup>31</sup>

The prophet Jeremiah, who was well connected to the royal palace in the late-seventh–early-sixth centuries, described an unnamed king and his queen mother in their bejeweled crowns (13:18). Royal wives and daughters, and other members of Jerusalem's elite, were clothed in finery, wore perfumes and cosmetics, and donned expensive jewelry (2 Sam 1:24, 13:18–19; Isa 3:16–23; 2 Kgs 9:30, 20:13; Jer 4:30, 6:20; Ezek 16:10–13; Ps 45:14). Their diets were superior to those of Jerusalem's working class, and they ate while seated on "grand couches" with tables set before them (Ezek 23:41).<sup>32</sup>

Given the monarchical predilection for multiple wives and concubines, royal families were complex and, at least as the Bible describes them, dysfunctional. Most amply detailed is that of King David. His first wife, Michal, was herself a royal, a daughter of his predecessor, Israel's first king, Saul (1 Sam

28. For young women (*na'arot*) working in the fields, see Ruth 2:8, 22–23. For women working in vineyards, see Jer 31:5.

29. Shanks 1995: 76–77, 2016b: 39; Cahill 2003; Lehmann 2003: 146–147; Reich 2011; Gadot 2015; Moyal and Faust 2015; Sapir-Hen, Gadot and Finkelstein 2016.

30. While Jeroboam's mother, Zeruah, is identified in 1 Kgs 11:26 and is therefore included in Table 1, she did not function as a *gevirah*, as she played no part in her son's accession to the throne. Dates on Table 1 are taken from Coogan 2016: 428–433.

31. For queen mothers, see Ben-Barak 1991; Schearing 1992; Ackerman 1993; Solvang 2003. For women's power in contemporary Neo-Assyrian palaces, see Solvang 2003: 51–57; Svärd 2014.

32. The preference for elite products even extended to the choice of olive oil, which was used in more than 85% of the (tested) lamps within the city, despite its expense (Nadar *et al.* 2017).



18:27); David claimed Saul's wives to signal his ascent to the throne (2 Sam 12: 7–8). Michal was one of seven wives David had before he moved to Jerusalem (2 Sam 3:2–5).<sup>33</sup> He acquired additional wives and concubines once he moved to the capital (2 Sam 3:2–5, 16:22, 19:5; 1 Kgs 1:1–4). Even as the term concubine might suggest a role that lacks agency and authority, this was not always the case, as ten concubines were assigned by David to guard his palace while he was engaged in battle (2 Sam 20:3). The story of David and one of his wives, Bathsheba, situates the palace in an elevated location, from which a king could look down onto other people's roofs (2 Sam 11–12). This description is substantiated by archaeological evidence, which indicates that from the elevated vantage of the royal quarter, one could see rooftops in the residential neighborhood on Jerusalem's eastern slope.<sup>34</sup> That David was able to commandeer this married woman, rape her, then make her first a widow and next his wife, speaks to the powerlessness of women in the face of royal authority.

Not only commoners, but even royal women could be subjected to victimization. Of David's many children, only one daughter is known (2 Sam 5:13–14, 13:1). The story of Tamar and her half-brother Amnon places this unmarried young woman in the palace, while David's adult sons resided in homes nearby. Tamar was able to leave the palace and move about the city on her own but for her, the consequences of such action were devastating, for Amnon raped her in his house (2 Sam 13). In the next generation, two of Solomon's daughters are described as married to governmental officials who were administrators of Solomon's royal corvée; Taphath was married to Ben-abinadab and Basemath to Ahimaaz (1 Kgs 4:11, 15).<sup>35</sup>

Some among the royal women did wield power, and one became a ruler in her own right. Athaliah, daughter King Omri of Israel (2 Kgs 8:26), was married to King Joram of Judah (2 Kgs 8:16–24). After Joram's death, her son Ahaziah ruled for a single year (2 Kgs 8:25–29; 9:27–29). At his death, Athaliah seized the throne, purged potential rivals, and ruled for seven years before being executed (2 Kgs 11:1–20). A second royal woman also played a critical role in this drama as Jehosheba, the late Ahaziah's sister, rescued his son Joash; once Athaliah was dead, Joash gained the throne (2 Kgs 11:2–12:1).

Solomon is said to have built a separate palace in Jerusalem for one foreign wife (1 Kgs 3:1, 7:8, 9:24) and temples for three others (1 Kgs 11:6). They are only four of the thousand wives and concubines that the Bible accords him (1 Kgs 11:1–3). While this number cannot be taken seriously, it does remind us that while some members of the palace entourage, women and men alike, resided in the palace, including the Queens' Quarters (*penimah*; 2 Kgs 7:11–12; Ps 45:14–15),<sup>36</sup> many other people—queens and concubines and their children, high priests and other priests, military leaders, scribes serving the military, the Royal Court and the Temple, courtiers, prophets, business leaders, diplomats, eunuchs serving the military and the Royal Court, tax agents and corvée administrators, and more—would have resided nearby, in Jerusalem's elite quarters. Still others, including palace attendants and palace guards, military personnel, temple, kitchen and stable staff, cleaners and launderers, perfumers, cooks and bakers, textile workers, jewelry makers, metalsmiths, potters, farmers, shepherds, servants, slaves, and prostitutes,

33. Two of these seven wives, Ahinoam and Abigail, were among the many Israelite men, women, and children who had been captured by the Amalekites. David rescued them when he defeated this enemy (1 Sam 30:1–20).

34. Ariel and de Groot 2000; Cahill 2004: 22; A. Mazar 2006: 267, 2010: 46; E. Mazar 2006, 2015a, 2015b.

35. For more on the women in Solomon's life, see Schearing 1997; Solvang 2003: 51–70.

36. Malamat 1995; for the royal "harem," see Schearing 1992: 584–585.

would have resided in more humble quarters, both within the city and outside its walls. Even as women were engaged in a number of these occupations, they were, as well, embedded, within Jerusalem's multiple familial and professional networks. These "daughters of Jerusalem" (*binot yerushalayim*) were essential to the great enterprise of Israel's capital city and the Song of Songs evokes them with joy (Song 1:5, 2:7, 3:5, 10, 5:8, 16, 8:4; see also Ps 45:14–16; Lam 2:10).

Among the most prestigious of non-royal women would have been a woman who was interred in a late-seventh century burial cave. In the inscription over the entry to the tomb, her title, *amah*, was carved alongside that of her husband Shebna, royal steward or "chief minister for the state" ('*ašer 'al habayyit*) for King Hezekiah (Isa 22:15–19). While the term *amah* is commonly understood to have referred to a female servant, that servant might, in some instances, have outranked a primary wife. Here, the mention of this woman in the inscription and her inclusion in Shebna's tomb suggests that she, like Shebna, held a position of some authority in Jerusalem.<sup>37</sup>

Women were among the perfumers for the royalty (1 Sam 8:13); perhaps some were members of Jerusalem's guild of perfumers (Neh 3:8). Small unguent jars found in several houses underscore the popularity of perfume and cosmetics among the elite (2 Kgs 9:30, 20:13; Jer 4:30; Ezek 23:41).

Women also spun, wove, and sewed. They would have fabricated the curtains and tapestries used in both the palace and the Temple, as well as the garments that clothed the royalty, the royal entourage, and the priestly community (Exod 28). Song of Songs indicates that Solomon's mother fabricated the crown that he wore on his wedding day (3:11). Two ateliers for commercial textile production have been discovered, as has evidence for the domestic production of clothing.

Women were palace cooks and bakers (1 Sam 8:13). Even royalty was not exempt from this responsibility, as Tamar, David's daughter, was forced to cook for her brother Amnon. Even as the cooking was a ploy by Amnon to get Tamar into his room, the narrative makes it clear that Tamar knew how prepare dough and cook cakes (2 Sam 13:6–10). Women would also have cooked and baked on the Street of Bakers (Jer 37:21) and at the Tower of Ovens near one of the city gates (Neh 3:11). Of course, like all women in the Iron Age, they would have cooked and baked for their own families, as well.<sup>38</sup>

Some women in Jerusalem seem to have engaged in manual labor, including construction (Neh 3:12). While much has been made of the hydrological, engineering, and construction know-how that ensured Jerusalemites' access to water, what has not been discussed is how that water was transported from its central collection points to those venues in which it was actually used. The Bible, however, makes it clear that women were engaged in the collection, transportation, and storage of water (Gen 24:10–20; Ex 2:16–17; 1 Sam 9:11; for men, see Gen 29:9–10). Ethnographic comparanda from this region and internationally indicate that women were—and remain—essential workers in this crucial process.<sup>39</sup>

37. The inscription reads, in full: "This is ... [the tomb of Shebna] ...iah, the royal steward. There is no silver or gold here, only ... [his bones] ... and the bones of his *amah* with him. Cursed be the man who opens this" (Avigad 1953; see also Avigad 1987b: 203; Shanks 1995: 99–103). For a late-sixth century Judaean seal that reads "belonging to Shelomith *amah* of Elnathan the governor," see Avigad 1987b: 206, fns. 35–36.

38. For women's roles and responsibilities in food production and preparation, see Meyers 2007, 2013: 125–32.

39. Lest anyone underestimate the physical strength and endurance necessary for this daily chore, the jars that the girls on the left and right in this photograph are carrying weigh c. 12 lbs. (5.4 kg) **empty** (pers. exp.). Matson Photograph Collection from

Little is known about women's literacy in Israel and Judah, especially in comparison to what is known about the Mesopotamian world, in which some women were educated, served as scribes, worked for the royal family and particularly the queen's household, and more.<sup>40</sup> Even so, some evidence is available. Just as mothers taught their children (e.g., Prov 1:8, 6:20), queen mothers were credited as teachers of kings (Prov 31:1–9). In Proverbs, Wisdom was personified as a woman (see, especially, Proverbs 9); like Solomon's mother, Wisdom crowned her son with a glorious diadem (Prov 4:9). In two instances, a wise woman (*isha hakhamah*) is described as instructing kings and their officers; in both instances, her sage advice is credited with saving innocent lives (2 Sam 14, 20).<sup>41</sup> Women also served the monarchy as messengers, transmitting information crucial to royal victory (2 Sam 17:17).<sup>42</sup> Even as these incidents took place outside Jerusalem, they offer insights into women's actions within the royal capital and they underscore the respect that accrued to women renowned for their skills and knowledge.

Other evidence indicates that some women in Jerusalem were literate. The Book of Nehemiah, for example, mentions a female scribe named Sophereth who may have been a member of a scribal guild in post-Exilic Jerusalem (Neh 7:57). Bullae, seals, and seal impressions from Jerusalem that bear women's names suggest that some women were not only literate, but also that they were engaged in and/or were responsible for legal and economic transactions. These scribal artifacts highlight women's roles in business, including the ownership of commodities and control over their exchange. At least fifteen bullae, seals, and seal impressions found in various locations bear women's names, including those of several royal women mentioned in the Hebrew Bible (2 Kgs 14:2, 21:19), and one of a woman who owned or ran an estate producing wine or oil. Among the hundred bullae found in a dump containing remnants of the palace's administrative center was one with a woman's name.<sup>43</sup> Proverbs 31 describes a woman who not only ran her own complex household, but also managed provisions, acquired estates, and produced and sold cloth. While Jerusalem is not identified as the setting for this proverb, it seems clear that women bearing such responsibilities were hardly anomalous.

Women, obviously, bore children, and this made them vulnerable to health problems and to early death. Mortuary statistics reveal that in the Iron Age, the average man lived until age forty while the average woman survived only until thirty.<sup>44</sup> This ten-year discrepancy is explained by the dangers that the reproductive process—pregnancy, miscarriage, stillbirth, childbirth, post-parturition complications, and difficulties with lactation—presented to women. In addition, a third of children died by age three, and half by age eighteen. Skilled midwives did what they could to facilitate successful deliveries (Gen 35:16–20, 38:27–30; Ex 1:15–22). So, too, according to the Temple priest and prophet Ezekiel, did a guild of female

the Library of Congress: "Cana of Galilee young girls with water jars on head coming from spring;" <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/mpc2010004448/PP/>.

40. Lion 2011.

41. Camp 1981; Meier 1991: 542.

42. Meier 1991: 545–546.

43. Avigad 1987a, 1987b; Horn and McCarter 1999: 165; Kloner and Davis 2000; Reich and Sass 2006; Ben-Ami 2014; Shanks 2016b: 38.

44. Nakhai 2008: 258. The analysis of at least 43 skeletons found in a burial cave on the west side of Jerusalem, on the slope of Mt. Zion, which also contained a seal with the inscription "(belonging) to Ḥami'ahel, daughter of Menaḥem," reveals similar mortuary statistics. The maximum age for males was sixty; for females, fifty (Kloner and Davis 2000: 110).

prophets in Jerusalem (Ezek 13:17–23).<sup>45</sup> Wet nurses cared for babies whose mothers were unable to nurse them (Ex 2:5–10), while nannies cared for the children of the elite (Gen 35:8; Num 11:12; 2 Sam 4:4; 2 Kgs 11:2–3). To ensure safe childbirth and the wellbeing of their babies, women took additional measures. They resorted to magico-medical rituals and incantations, and wore apotropaic beads and amulets. Judaeans pillar figurines, hundreds of which were found in Jerusalem, may not have been used exclusively by women, but without any question, women needed the protection of the Divine a great deal more than did men.<sup>46</sup>

Women's roles as religious practitioners in Jerusalem would have been varied (Nakhai 2007). Women are known to have been among the prophets of Jerusalem. Huldah, for example, was consulted by the late seventh-century King Josiah, even though the king might have consulted the (seemingly) better-known (male) prophet, Jeremiah (2 Kgs 22:14–20). Several decades later, the Jerusalemite prophet Ezekiel railed against “the daughters of your people who prophesy” (Ezek 13:17–23); a century and more later, Noadiah prophesied in Jerusalem (Neh 6:14). Women (or at least queen mothers) could consult their own prophets (whether male-only or male-and-female is unclear) and their sons could consult those prophets, as well (2 Kgs 3:13).

In the Temple, women offered sacrifices (Lev 4, 5, 10:12–15, 23); they also cooked the sacrificial meals.<sup>47</sup> They served as singers and musicians (Ps 68:25–26; Neh 7:66–67). They performed tasks at the entry to the Temple (Ex 38:8; 1 Sam 2:22). They also performed tasks as sacred workers (*qedeshah*: Gen 38:21; Deut 23:18; Hos 4:14); what, specifically, these tasks comprised is uncertain, despite the common translation of *qedeshah* as “cultic prostitute.”<sup>48</sup> In addition to Yahweh, some women (and some men) worshipped other deities, primarily Asherah. Maacah, King Asa's mother, was credited with commissioning a statue of Asherah that stood within the Temple (1 Kgs 15:13) and after it was destroyed, women wove garments for its replacement (2 Kgs 23:7). In addition, they baked cakes that were used in domestic rituals honoring the Queen of Heaven, in which all members of the family participated (Jer 7:18; 44:18–19). They also mourned Tammuz at the north gate to the Temple (Ezek 8:14).<sup>49</sup> Some daughters of Temple priests ate food donated to the Temple (Lev 10:12–15, 22:10–13; Num 18:11–19), married priests and laymen alike, and lived in their fathers' houses when unmarried, widowed or divorced (Lev 22:12–13).

Elsewhere in Jerusalem (and throughout the land), women sang, danced, and played drums in religious ceremonies.<sup>50</sup> They led victory celebrations with songs of joy (Ex 15:20–21; 1 Sam 18:6–7; Jer 31:4), and they led funerary processions and marked times of defeat with lamentations (2 Sam 1:24; Jer 9:16–19; Ezek 32:16; 2 Chron 35:25; for women teaching dirges to their daughters, see Jer 9:19). The

45. Ackerman 2015: 15–20.

46. Nakhai 2014a, 2014b: 1983–1985, 2015. For further discussion of Judaeans pillar figurines, see Kletter 1996; Darby 2014.

47. Bird 1987: 406.

48. The masc. pl., *qedeshim* (1 Kgs 14:24, 15:12; 2 Kgs 23:7), might also include women (Bird 1987: 406–408). For discussion, see Nyberg (2008: 314), who understands the *qedeshah* to have been in some instances a “common” (not cultic) prostitute and in other instances, someone who is “set apart” (not consecrated). For more extensive analysis, see Budin 2008.

49. Ackerman 2003: 455–459, 2006, 2012: 261–267.

50. See Burgh 2006: 84–105; Meyers 1991, 2013: 176.

archaeological record is replete with ritual objects used for domestic worship throughout Jerusalem. These objects, including cult stands, figurines, small stone altars, and more, were found in homes, cult corners, caves, and tombs.<sup>51</sup>

The effects of warfare in Jerusalem were devastating, not only at the time of its final destruction but intermittently from Jerusalem's first years as Israel's capital. David acquired Jerusalem through conquest (2 Sam 5:6–9); at that time, he was already known for killing the women as well as the men whom he conquered (1 Sam 27:9–11). After that, how often and in what ways was Jerusalem attacked? Table 2 (see at the end of this article) shows sieges and attacks, instances in which the Temple and palace treasuries were confiscated or looted, instances in which heavy taxes were imposed upon the city, and times at which the entire nation was at war.<sup>52</sup> Yerushalayim, “City of Peace,” was indeed not that. Rather, in the approximately 400 years during which Jerusalem was the capital of Israel and then Judah, a great many were spent in conflict.

Women, although not on the front lines of battle, had much to fear from war. The injury or death of fathers, husbands, and sons was, of course, consequential. Widows without married sons might remain with their husbands' families (Gen 38:6–10; Deut 25:5–10) or return to their natal homes (Gen 38:11; Lev 22:13; Ruth 1:8–9), but in wartime there are myriad reasons for which that might not have been possible. In addition, women were vulnerable as victims of wartime violence. Murder, rape, kidnapping, deportation, and slavery were some of the horrors that befell female victims of war.<sup>53</sup> The Bible is replete with wartime references to pregnant women killed (2 Kgs 8:12, 15:16), women raped (Deut 28:30; Isa 13:16; Jer 13:22; Ezek 23:9–10; Zech 14:2; Lam 5:11), women and their children taken as “spoils” of war (Num 14:1–4; Judg 5:29–30; 1 Sam 30:1–20; 2 Sam 12:11; 1 Kgs 20:1–10; 2 Kgs 15:29, 17:6, 24:14–15, 25:11; Jer 38:20–23, 41:10, 43:4–7; Ezek 23:9–10; Joel 4:1–3), and children murdered in front of their parents (Isa 13:15–16). Imagery substantiating some of these claims is found on Neo-Assyrian wall reliefs and carvings, including those of Ashurnasirpal II in his palace at Nimrud, Shalmaneser II on the palace gates at Balawat, and Sennacherib and Assurbanipal in their palace at Nineveh.<sup>54</sup>

In times of siege and the famine that accompanied it, young children were the first to die. The Bible mentions parents eating their (presumably dead) children (Deut 28:49–57; Ezek 5:5–10 [which also mentions children eating their parents]). It also mentions the sacrifice of children in times of war (2 Kgs 16:3, 17:17, 21:6). While couched in language suggesting that such sacrifices were designed to mollify foreign deities, the reality was that in cities under siege, children—and especially girls—were considered

51. For general references, see citations in fn. 18. For Jerusalem, see *inter alia* Eshel and Prag, eds. 1995; Cahill 2004; Geva 2009; Ben Shlomo and Darby 2014. For domestic religion, see Nakhai 2011, 2014a, 2015.

52. Dates on Table 2 are taken from Coogan 2016: 428–433.

53. When at war, Israelites were themselves permitted to bring captured women, whether Israelite or foreign, into their own households (Deut 20:10–14, 21:10–14; Num 31:13–18, 25–27; Judg 21:20–23). For the effects of warfare on women in the ancient Near East, see Day 2016; Gaca 2016.

54. Parpola and Watanabe, eds. 1988: 47, fig. 13; British Museum (BM 124927 “Rape of Arab woman [reign of Assurbanipal, North Palace, Nineveh]”); see also Cifarelli 1998; Younger 2003; Zorn 2014; Cohen *et al.* 2015. Sennacherib's relief depicting the 701 BCE capture of the Judaeen city of Lachish, in his North Palace, includes images of Judaeen women and children, as well as men, undergoing deportation (British Museum: BM 124906, 124907; Ussishkin 1982: 99–111, pl. 80, 85, 86).

expendable and thus were the first to be deprived of food.<sup>55</sup> Jerusalem was besieged more than once; as Jerusalemites knew all too well, Samaria in Israel and Lachish in Judah underwent the same nightmare experience and neither survived.<sup>56</sup> The impact of siege upon children and their families was incalculable. Grief, of course, would have been a constant. So, too, would have been the cost to families and society caused by the loss of their young, who soon enough would have become contributing members of their families. The death of girls was especially grievous, considering their irreplaceable role in human reproduction and the many risks they incurred throughout pregnancy, childbirth, and the post-parturition period; their loss would particularly challenge the demographics of social recovery.

To conclude, this broad overview is, of course, hampered by the limitations of androcentric and elitist textual evidence and the paucity of material culture remains. Even so, speculative as it may be, it serves as a first look at the women of Jerusalem in the Iron Age. They were a mixed group—elites and workers—the royalty and upper class, and those who worked to support them. Still, despite differences in social status, in economic standing, in professional responsibilities, and in personal agency, women in Jerusalem would have shared in the opportunities that life in the capital city offered—just as they were united by its many dangers.

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55. Nakhai 2008.

56. For a Neo-Assyrian image of a Judaeian family forced from Lachish after Sennacherib’s siege of 701 BCE, see British Museum: BM 124906, 124907; Ussishkin 1982: figs. 85, 86 (Southwest Palace at Nineveh).

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**Table 1: QUEEN MOTHERS**

QUEEN MOTHER	FATHER'S NAME	CITY &/OR COUNTRY OF ORIGIN	HUSBAND'S NAME	DATES OF HUSBAND'S REIGN	SON'S NAME	BIBLICAL REFERENCE
<b>UNITED MONARCHY</b>						
Bathsheba	Eliam		David	1005–965	Solomon	1 Kgs 1:11–31; 2 Sam 11:1–12:24
Naamah		Ammon	Solomon	968–928	Rehoboam	1 Kgs 14:21, 31
<b>DIVIDED MONARCHY: JUDAH</b>						
Maacah	Abishalom		Rehoboam	911–908	Abijam	1 Kgs 15:2
Maacah	Abishalom		Rehoboam	911–908	Asa	1 Kgs 15:10
Azuba	Shilhi		Asa	908–867	Jehoshaphat	1 Kgs 22:41–42
Athaliah	Omri	Samaria (Israel)	Joram/Jehoram	851–843	Ahaziah	2 Kgs 8:25–26
Zibiah		Beersheba (Judah)	Ahaziah	843–842	Jehoash/Joash	2 Kgs 12:1–2
Jehoaddan		Jerusalem (Judah)	Jehoash/Joash	836–798	Amaziah	2 Kgs 14:1–2
Jecoliah		Jerusalem (Judah)	Amaziah	798–769	Azariah/Uzziah	2 Kgs 15:1–2
Jerusha	Zakok		Azariah/Uzziah	785–733	Jotham	2 Kgs 15:32–33
Abi/Abijah	Zechariah		Ahaz	745–727	Hezekiah	2 Kgs 18:1–2
Hephzibah			Hezekiah	727–698	Manasseh	2 Kgs 21:1
Meshullemeth	Haruz	Jotbah (Judah)	Manasseh	698–642	Amon	2 Kgs 21:19
Jedidah	Adariah	Bozkath (Judah)	Amon	641–640	Josiah	2 Kgs 22:1
Hamutal	Jeremiah	Libnah (Judah)	Josiah	640–609	Jehoahaz	2 Kgs 23:31
Zebudah	Pekaiah	Rumah (Judah)	Jehoahaz	609	Jehoiakim	2 Kgs 23:36
Nehushta	Elnatan	Jerusalem (Judah)	Jehoiakim	609–598	Johoiakin	2 Kgs 24:8
Hamutal	Jeremiah	Libnah (Judah)	Josiah	597–586	Zedekiah	2 Kgs 24:18
<b>DIVIDED MONARCHY: ISRAEL</b>						
Zeruah			Nebat (not a king)		Jeroboam	1 Kgs 11:26
Jezebel	Ethbaal	Tyre	Ahab	871–852	Joram/Jehoram	2 Kgs 3:1, 9:22

**Table 2: JERUSALEM & JUDAH UNDER MILITARY THREAT &/OR ATTACK**

<b>KING OF JUDAH</b>	<b>REIGN</b>	<b>NAME OF ADVERSARY</b>	<b>ORIGIN OF ADVERSARY</b>	<b>IMPACT ON JERUSALEM &amp; JUDAH</b>	<b>BIBLICAL REFERENCE</b>	<b>ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE</b>
Rehoboam	928-911	Jeroboam	Israel	Israel, under Jeroboam, breaks from Judah; continuing civil war	1 Kgs 12:1-24	
		Shishak	Egypt	Marched against Jerusalem; looted Temple & Palace treasures	1 Kgs 14:25-26	Sites other than Jerusalem
Abijam	911-908	Jeroboam	Israel	Civil war continued throughout his reign	1 Kgs 15:6	
Asa	908-867	Baasha	Israel	Ongoing war between Judah & Israel; Asa gave Temple & Palace treasures to Ben-Adad of Aram-Damascus, to buy protection from Israel	1 Kgs 15:16-22	
Jehoshaphat	870-846	Meshah	Moab	Judah joined Jehoram of Israel in battle vs. Moab	2 Kgs 1:1, 3:4-27	Moab Stele/Mesha Stone
Joram/Jehoram	851-843	Edomites	Edom	Rebelled against Judah	2 Kgs 8:16-20	
		Shalmaneser III	Assyria	Assyrian victory over Jehu of Israel places Assyria on Judah's border		Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III (c. 825)
Ahaziah	843-842	Jehu	Israel	Ahaziah killed by Jehu at Megiddo	2 Kgs 9:27-28	
Athaliah	842-836	Davidic dynasty in Jerusalem	Jerusalem Palace	Carried out coup against Davidic dynasty in Jerusalem Palace	2 Kgs 11:1	
		Priest Jehoiada	Jerusalem Palace	Athaliah killed in Palace coup; her son Jehoash placed on throne	2 Kgs 11:4-16	
Jehoash	836-798	Hazael	Aram Damascus	Hazael marched against Jerusalem; Jehoash gave Temple & Palace treasures to Hazael; Hazael turned back	2 Kgs 12:18-19	
		Royal courtiers	Jerusalem Palace	Assassinated king; Judaeans then killed courtiers	2 Kgs 12:20-22; 14:5	
Amaziah	798-769	Edomites	Edom	Judah fought & defeated Edomites	2 Kgs 14:7	
		Jehoash	Israel	Israel defeated Judah at Beth Shemesh & captured Amaziah; Israel breached Jerusalem city wall, looted Temple & Palace treasures, & took hostages to Samaria	2 Kgs 14:8-15	
		Opponents in Jerusalem	Jerusalem Palace (?)	Amaziah fled to Lachish & was assassinated there	2 Kgs 14:17-20	

Ahaz	745–715	Rezin & Pekah	Aram Damascus & Israel	Sieged Jerusalem	2 Kgs 16:5	
		Rezin	Aram Damascus	Captured Elath from Judah	2 Kgs 16:5	
		Tiglath-pileser III	Assyria	Ahaz submitted to Tiglath-pileser III; gave him Temple & Palace treasures	2 Kgs 16:7–9	
		Shalmaneser V / Sargon II	Assyria	Assyrians sieged & destroyed Israel/Samaria; Israelites deported; Samaria became Assyrian vassal on Judah's northern border	2 Kgs 17:1–6	Sites in Israel
Hezekiah	727–687	Philistines	Philistia	Hezekiah overran Philistia as far as Gaza	2 Kgs 18:8	
		Sennacherib	Assyria	Sennacherib destroyed cities and towns of Judah; sieged Jerusalem	2 Kgs 18:13–19:37	Sites in Judah
Manasseh	698–642		Assyria	Judah a vassal to Assyria	2 Kgs 21:1–17	
			Assyria	Manasseh taken captive to Assyria; later returned to Jerusalem & fortified city	2 Chron 33:10–14	
Amon	641–640	Royal courtiers	Jerusalem Palace	Amon assassinated by his courtiers; then Judaeans killed the assassins	2 Kgs 21:23–24	
Josiah	620–609	Necho II	Egypt	Killed by Egyptians at Megiddo	2 Kgs 23:29–30	
Jehoahaz	609	Necho II	Egypt	Captured by Egyptians & died in Egypt; Egypt assessed huge tribute on Judah	2 Kgs 23:33–34	
Jehoiakim	608–598	Necho II	Egypt	Placed on throne by Necho II; paid tribute to Egypt by taxing all Judaeans	2 Kgs 23:34–35	
	605	Necho II vs. Nebuchadnezzar	Egypt vs. Babylon	Babylon defeated Egypt at Battle of Carchemish	cf. 2 Kgs 24:7	
Jehoiakim		Nebuchadnezzar	Babylon	Judah became vassal of Babylon but rebelled; Babylon invaded Judah	2 Kgs 24:1–2	
Jehoiakim	597	Nebuchadnezzar	Babylon	Babylon invaded Judah & conquered Jerusalem; Palace & Temple treasures looted; king & upper class deported to Babylon	2 Kgs 24:8–16	Jerusalem & sites in Judah
Zedekiah	597–586	Nebuchadnezzar	Babylon	Judah was vassal of Babylon but rebelled; Jerusalem sieged & destroyed; king & royal court killed; people deported to Babylon	2 Kgs 24:17–25:21	Jerusalem & sites in Judah





Ann K. Guinan (bottom, right) accompanied by contributors to the volume and other colleagues during her 70<sup>th</sup> birthday at the University of Barcelona, in February 2017.

This collection of 23 essays, presented in three sections, aims to discuss women's studies as well as methodological and theoretical approaches to gender within the broad framework of ancient Near Eastern studies. The first section, comprising most of the contributions, is devoted to Assyriology and ancient Near Eastern archaeology. The second and third sections are devoted to Egyptology and to ancient Israel and biblical studies respectively, neighbouring fields of research included in the volume to enrich the debate and facilitate academic exchange. Altogether these essays offer a variety of sources and perspectives, from the textual to the archaeological, from bodies and sexuality to onomastics, to name just a few, making this a useful resource for all those interested in the study of women and gender in the past.



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